

## Penderecki Comes to Nashville

SCHERMERHORN SYMPHONY CENTER

LAURA TURNER CONCERT HALL

January 21, 2010, at 7 p.m.

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Nashville Symphony

Krzysztof Penderecki, *conductor*

Barry Douglas, *piano*

Roger Wiesmeyer, *English horn*

KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI

Adagietto from *Paradise Lost*

Roger Wiesmeyer, *English horn*

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 54

Largo

Allegro

Presto

intermission

KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra "Resurrection"

Barry Douglas, *piano*

### KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI

Born on November 23, 1933, in Dębica, Poland; currently lives in Krakow.

"I also have my *Iliad* and my *Odyssey*," Krzysztof Penderecki observed in a speech in 1993. He was referring to a famous quote by Goethe, which claims that the artist's life replicates the full Homeric paradigm: A youthful, heroic struggle à la *Iliad* is followed by a "homecoming" in later age, resembling Odysseus' desire to return home. "For me, Troy was the avant-garde, the era of youthful rebellion and faith in the possibility of changing the way of the world through art," the composer continues. But once he'd experienced this phase, "I realized that there was more of destruction than of building anew" in the avant-garde approach. He became the "Trojan horse" of the avant-garde, turning back toward the inspiration he found in tradition.

In its larger arc, Penderecki's lengthy and extraordinarily productive career can be viewed as an ongoing search for a synthesis of these contradictory tendencies in contemporary music. "The conscious use of tradition," he writes, "became an opportunity for overcoming [the] dissonance between the artist and the audience."

When Penderecki emerged in Europe's postwar avant-garde scene, he was already independently minded, determined to pursue a path of his own rather than adhere to a movement. As with so many of his generation, the early experience of Nazi occupation followed by Soviet-imposed Communism intensified the desire to develop a powerful new musical language. The first professional musician in his family (his father was a music-loving lawyer), Penderecki became especially fond of the violin — a harbinger of his first experimental compositions using string ensembles — and studied composition at the Krakow Academy of Music.

Soon after graduating, Penderecki anonymously entered three separate compositions into a national competition for young composers, winning top prizes in each category. The reward was a lengthy tour of Italy in 1959, the first trip abroad in this highly peripatetic composer's career. Indeed, the freedom to travel went along with a relatively greater degree of artistic autonomy for composers in Communist Poland in the 1960s compared with other Soviet bloc countries. Penderecki visited festivals in Western Europe and, in 1967, made his first trip to the United States; he served as a professor at Yale in the 1970s. More than a dozen of his major compositions have received their premieres in this country — including the Piano Concerto we hear at the end of our program.

At 76, Penderecki not only continues to compose but maintains a vigorous schedule traveling all over the world to conduct. He began this parallel phase of his career in earnest in 1972, first to conduct his own compositions and eventually as an interpreter of the symphonic repertory. Composers to whom he feels especially attracted are Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Bruckner and Sibelius.

His restless curiosity is hardly limited to the realm of music. A voracious reader, Penderecki is well-versed in philosophy and classical antiquity and even keeps a section of science fiction in his library. He's an aficionado of theater and the visual arts and also devotes a great deal of time to his passion for botany. At his home outside Krakow, he has constructed an impressive arboretum with a collection now numbering more than 1,500 species.

### **From avant-garde upstart to contemporary master**

Penderecki first became recognized for experiments in extreme texture, bordering on “noise,” with such pieces as *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960) — originally titled “8'37”, as a sort of homage to John Cage (an influential figure at the time on several figures of the Polish avant-garde). Penderecki's use of extended techniques, thick tone clusters and sliding microtones evoked a terrifying sonic spectrum from an orchestra of 52 strings. Even in his most radical avant-garde period — between 1959 and 1960, when Penderecki says there was an attempt “to erase the past” — the music makes a direct and powerful emotional impact.

But Penderecki soon found he had reached the limit of what he could do with short-form pieces and began to steer away from the avant-garde. A major turning point came with the *St. Luke Passion* of 1966, which secured his position as a world-renowned composer. Penderecki found a way to incorporate his textural experimentalism within a work of large-scale architecture that simultaneously drew on musical tradition and reintroduced familiar harmonies. It was also a provocative gesture in the face of the atheism not only promoted by Communist ideology but also in vogue among many of the avant-garde. Penderecki has said that writing the score for the *St. Luke Passion* brought him back to his Catholic faith.

Succeeding works of sacred music have continued to explore this dimension. These include *Utrenja*, a recent recording of which has been nominated for this year's GRAMMY® Awards, and the *Polish Requiem*, commissioned by Lech Wałęsa and the Solidarity movement.

Indeed, theological questions come to bear on Penderecki's first two operas. *The Devils of Loudun* (1969) turns Aldous Huxley's account of a 17th-century outbreak of fanatical persecution into an allegorical, Passion-like story. *Paradise Lost* (1978) adapts Milton's epic masterpiece for the stage. The latter also represents the composer's continued gravitation toward a recuperation of the musical past. As biographer Wolfram Schwingler phrases it, with humorous oversimplification, “the clustermonger turned into a tunesmith.” Penderecki has continued to seek a synthesis with the legacy of the Western tradition — though in unpredictable ways — in a series of orchestral and chamber works, including numerous concertos and eight symphonies (he plans, like several of his forbears, not to tempt fate by venturing beyond a Ninth Symphony, which he has already planned). Later this season — in honor of Chopin's bicentennial — will bring a new lieder cycle to texts from the time of Chopin.

“I am tempted by both the *sacrum* and the *profanum*, God and the devil, the sublime and its violation,” writes Penderecki, explaining the paradoxes of his life’s work. When asked where he senses that music is heading, he favors the image of the labyrinth (he has constructed two of them in his arboretum). Penderecki describes the tendency of music history to “turn unexpectedly in another direction,” rather than follow a predictable line. “My music, too, meanders and zigzags as in a labyrinth, going different ways and sometimes coming back.”

### **Adagietto from *Paradise Lost***

Penderecki composed the Adagietto in early 1979 for a new production of his opera *Paradise Lost*. The first performance was given on April 8, 1979, with the composer conducting the NHK Symphony Orchestra in a concert to inaugurate the 21st Osaka International Festival. In 2006/07, Penderecki revised the score to create this version scored for solo English horn and strings. This is the Nashville Symphony’s first performance of the work.

estimated length: 5 minutes

The Adagietto offers an appealing example of the “neo-Romantic” tendencies in Penderecki’s post-avant-garde music. This exquisite though brief piece was actually intended as an instrumental interlude for the three-hour, 42-scene *Paradise Lost*, which was commissioned by Lyric Opera of Chicago in the mid-1970s. After the opera’s premiere in November 1978, while a new production in German was being prepared, he decided to interpolate the Adagietto after a scene in the second act, where Eve has taken the apple, and before a love duet between Adam and Eve. But the composer didn’t finish the score in time for the staging, so it was premiered as a separate piece and has since become one of his most-performed concert works.

An obsessive reviser, Penderecki pared down his original scoring in this version, motivated by a newfound taste for clarity that has also inspired a turn toward chamber music. Only 60 measures long, the Adagietto traces an indelibly melancholy mood within its simple ABA arc. Penderecki replaces the French horns of the original with an English horn solo (conjuring shades of Sibelius). The half-tone, chromatic side-steps of the main melody suggest the elegiac moment when Eden has paled. The tempo speeds up for the middle section, with an agitated crescendo and climax that then recedes to the original melody, eventually fixed in an inescapably tragic but fading C minor.

### **DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH**

Born on September 25, 1906, in Saint Petersburg, Russia; died on August 9, 1975, in Moscow

### **Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 54**

Shostakovich composed the Symphony No. 6 in 1939. On November 21 of that year, Yevgeny Mravinsky conducted the Leningrad Philharmonic in the premiere. The first American performance came a year later, with Leopold Stokowski conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra, who first recorded the work. This is the Nashville Symphony’s first performance.

*The score calls for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, snare drum, triangle, tambourine, cymbals, tam-tam, xylophone, celesta, harp and strings*

estimated length: 30 minutes

Dmitri Shostakovich came of age during a heady period of artistic experimentation in the early years of the Soviet Union, following the 1917 Revolution. He was only a teenage student when his First Symphony — one of the most astonishing symphonic debuts in music history — catapulted him to international fame and launched his career. Creative ferment was in the air, from such artists as the abstract painter Kasimir Malevich to the anti-naturalist, avant-garde theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold, who gave Shostakovich a temporary gig as music director of his company. There was, as well, the excitement of the new art of cinema. But that sense of freedom proved illusory.

While Shostakovich was composing the Sixth Symphony in 1939, Meyerhold — whose theater had been shut down a year before — was arrested by Stalin's thought police and "disappeared." The composer himself had come perilously close to a similar fate. At the beginning of 1936, his wildly successful new opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, triggered a serious attack by the official Communist newspaper *Pravda* after Stalin attended a performance and found the opera offensive. The *Pravda* editorial condemned Shostakovich for writing "decadently" modernist music, holding him up as a negative example — much like the "degenerate artists" exhibited by the Nazis a year later. So the stakes were enormous — a matter of survival, literally — when Shostakovich was ready to reveal his next major public work, the Fifth Symphony, written within just three months in 1937. Its triumphant premiere was ratified by official approval, and the Fifth remains among the most popular of 20th-century symphonies.

Throughout the rest of his career, however, the composer would endure the changing whims of Soviet cultural policy. Shostakovich and his fellow artists knew that the mere act of self-expression was always fraught with potential danger. The "restoration" achieved by the Fifth might have temporarily eased the pressure, but Shostakovich had to decide what direction to follow next.

As a result, a hiatus followed, during which Shostakovich considered various prospects for stage works. But nothing came of these. In fact, the *Pravda* attack effectively thwarted one of the most promising operatic careers of the era. This is one of the reasons why he channeled his creative energy into the genre of the symphony. For Penderecki, who got to know him while conducting in the Soviet Union in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Shostakovich became "one of the most important symphonists after Mahler."

Another genre in which Shostakovich left a comparable legacy is that of the string quartet. In 1938 he composed the First String Quartet; a few months later, he announced that his next symphony was under way and that it would be a grandiose work for orchestra, soloists and chorus, setting texts in homage to Lenin.

But the compact Sixth Symphony that actually emerged the following year changed tack drastically. The Lenin idea had vanished (though Shostakovich did eventually write an official panegyric to Lenin with the purely instrumental Twelfth Symphony, which is generally considered the weakest of the cycle). Instead, the Sixth presents a puzzling tragicomic dualism, framed within a convention-defying three-movement format that is provocative in its own way. Its premiere — exactly two years after that of the Fifth, in the same concert hall — was programmed as part of a 10-day Soviet music festival and was, with the public at least, a success. But the work received a mostly lukewarm reception by the critics, who were instead wowed by the premiere of Prokofiev's rousing *Alexander Nevsky* and a reprise of Shostakovich's own Fifth during the festival.

Probably in an effort to preempt the pundits, Shostakovich referred to the Sixth's "intended moods of 'spring, joy, youth, lyricism'" as contrasting with the "moments of tragedy and tension" that he said characterized the Fifth. But when you actually experience the Sixth, it's easy to tell that he was deliberately glossing over its enigmatic qualities. True, on the surface the symphony traces a comforting arc from gloom to exuberant joy. But the work's proportions seem to suggest a different story. The opening Largo is more than twice as long as the movements that follow. More importantly, it carries the emotional weight of the piece:

That the remaining movements progressively accelerate only adds to their manic, surreal character, which can hardly dispel what preceded them.

An early American edition of the score misleadingly claims that Shostakovich simply “omitted” the traditional Allegro opening movement. The vast Largo that begins the work, however, not only constitutes a dramatic “establishing shot” but also encompasses powerful contrasts within its span. If anything, it seems to begin where the weightier, most forlorn aspects of the Fifth Symphony had left off — as if that work were a giant upbeat to the crushing despair. The movement unfolds in two large sections, which are then repeated, but in a varied and tightly condensed form.

The emotional language here makes much reference — overt and implicit — to Mahler, hardly in vogue at the time but deeply admired by Shostakovich. You can hear this in the unwavering, wide-stretched desolation of the first theme, in the persistent trills that unnervingly animate the soundscape — and, of course, in the implied funeral march of the second section, beginning with the English horn solo. Shostakovich uses his large orchestral resources to greatly contrasting effect. A screeching climax is countered by otherworldly shards from woodwind solos, while the counterpoint at times proceeds with ghostly transparency. Scant moments of consolation toward the end yield to immutable grief.

The next two movements pretend to forget what has gone before. Penderecki observes that Shostakovich was a master of the scherzo, which inspired especially virtuosic writing for the orchestra. The Allegro — also constructed in two alternating sections that repeat — trades in colorful contrasts of metrical pulse and instrumental texture. It encompasses both playful innocence and almost brutally heavy-handed exhortations to rejoice. The Presto then arrives as a hyper-scherzo to conclude the symphony. Framed as a dizzying, rondo-like dance — it seems, at moments, to teeter on the edge of sanity — the music mocks a number of past styles, even including a sinister wink at the triumphant finale of the Fifth. Shostakovich, playing a kind of Soviet Offenbach, turns the giddiness up several notches in the madcap, circus-like coda.

## **KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI**

### **Concerto for Piano “Resurrection”**

Penderecki composed his Concerto for Piano between June 2001 and March 2002 on a commission in honor of Marie-Josée Kravis. Emanuel Ax was the soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch, in the world premiere at Carnegie Hall on May 9, 2002. In 2007, Penderecki prepared a revised edition of the score, which was performed on December 7 of that year, with Barry Douglas as soloist and the composer conducting the Cincinnati Symphony. This is the Nashville Symphony’s first performance.

*In addition to solo piano, the score calls for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling E-flat clarinet), bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 5 horns, 6 trumpets (3 positioned in the audience), 1 flugelhorn, 4 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle tree, bell tree, tam-tam, cymbals, suspended cymbals, church bells, temple bells, tom-tom, tambourine, tenor drum, bass drum, ratchet, glockenspiel, xylophone, marimba, tubular bells, harp, celesta and strings. In addition, the performance requires the use of a pre-recorded CD containing the sound of ringing bells.*

estimated length: 38 minutes

The concerto form, like that of the symphony, has attracted Penderecki for much of his career. Indeed, one of the epiphanies he experienced in his return to traditional long-form genres was to realize the enduring power of structures such as the sonata form. The composer compares the durability of classical form to the

realm of architecture, where elements invented by the ancient Greeks, for example, have been reused in new contexts throughout the ages.

It was Penderecki's First Violin Concerto, written for Isaac Stern in the mid-1970s, that marked a pivotal shift toward musical rhetoric used by late-Romantic composers. Concertante works figure abundantly in his catalogue — particularly for strings and woodwinds — but Penderecki for many years felt intimidated by the prospect of attempting a piano concerto. “Especially here, with the piano,” he says, “it seems everything has already been done. I love the examples of Rachmaninoff, Bartók, Shostakovich — the little concerto for piano and trumpet is one of his best pieces. But in my own writing I had been more interested in string instruments and the human voice.”

When Penderecki finally decided to attempt his own piano concerto, he had in mind a work of modest dimensions, lighthearted in character, to be called a Capriccio. However, the catastrophe of 9/11 intervened while he was in the middle of composing it, and Penderecki was moved to a radical change of tack. On that horrible September day, he wrote a chorale-melody, which he introduced as a crucial structural device. Moreover, the concerto expanded into a bigger work of a much darker nature, its “capriccio” elements now menacing, but with a breakthrough enabled by the chorale. Penderecki later revised the final section to balance out its proportions with the rest of the concerto.

Like his First Violin Concerto, the Piano Concerto unfolds as a single vast movement. The opening idea — a briskly anxious motif deep in the strings that pivots on a half-step, ominous as a shark fin — tightly unifies the composition, but there is also enormous diversity of mood and texture. Penderecki weaves numerous episodes within the concerto's span, including cadenza asides, slow-movement-like meditations (the first of these introduced by solo English horn), tensely energetic regroupings, and the ringing tintinnabulation of the final peroration.

After each phase of development, the abruptly rhythmic opening motif returns with a fateful charge. Penderecki builds the concerto as a dialectic between its wrenching finality and the new, transcendent element represented by the chorale, which is first announced by celesta and shimmering violas, with tracery from harp and piano. Yet, as in the sweeping last movement of Mahler's Second Symphony (also named “Resurrection” and featuring a recurrent chorale texture), the first appearance of this material is only suggestive, soon to be swept away by a section of raging turmoil. The chorale returns in different instrumental groupings before it is at last given in fuller dress. Meanwhile, as the concerto progresses, its various turns and “zigzags” reveal what amounts to a résumé of the composer's own past, with variations on the central motivic material that recap aspects of his earlier work, including the avant-garde years.

With the coda — and its hints of Mussorgsky — Penderecki brings the full significance of the chorale home. He explains that he gave the chorale — and hence the concerto itself — the name of “Resurrection” since he intended the music to suggest a kind of victory over death. “I didn't want to write a requiem for the victims of 9/11 but wanted instead to give a sense of hope.”

— *Thomas May is the program annotator for the Nashville Symphony and writes regularly about music and theater. His books include Decoding Wagner and The John Adams Reader.*

## ARTIST BIOS

KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI, *conductor*

Born in Dębica, Poland, in 1933, Krzysztof Penderecki is one of the most esteemed and widely discussed composers of our time. The development of his compositional style has reflected the evolution of new music from the avant-garde of the 1960s up to the present day, through which time he has preserved his own distinctive voice.

Like other leading composers of our century, Penderecki has also built an international reputation as a conductor. In Europe he has conducted the Berlin Philharmonic as well as orchestras in France, England, Italy,

Austria, Sweden and Switzerland, and his American appearances have included performances with the Chicago Symphony, the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra, among others. The 2009/10 season includes residencies at the University of Toronto and Yale University, culminating in a performance at Carnegie Hall. He currently serves as artistic director of Sinfonia Varsovia (Warsaw Sinfonia).

After finishing his studies at the Krakow High School of Music, Penderecki immediately began his rise to prominence, winning all three prizes at the 1959 contest of the Polish Composers' Association. In early works such as *Emanations*, *Strophes* and, most notably, *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*, he put himself at the forefront of the avant-garde, combining a highly experimental and expressionistic use of sound with a radical humanistic message.

His most recent works include several notable choral pieces: *Seven Gates of Jerusalem*, premiered in Jerusalem in January 1997 as part of celebrations marking the city's 3,000-year anniversary; *Hymn to St. Danill*, premiered in October 1997 to mark the 850th anniversary of the founding of Moscow; and *Credo*, premiered at the 1998 Oregon Bach Festival. *Credo* was recorded for Hänssler Classics by the Oregon Bach Festival Orchestra and Choir and was presented with the 1999 Echo-Klassik Preis of the Deutsche Phonoakademie. Penderecki's Resurrection Piano Concerto — his first major work for piano and orchestra — was premiered at New York's Carnegie Hall and Philadelphia's Kimmel Center in May 2002. It was commissioned by the Carnegie Hall Corporation and written especially for Emanuel Ax and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

BARRY DOUGLAS, *piano*

Hailed as “a supremely talented and genuine artist,” Barry Douglas is one of the most versatile and brilliant pianists of today. He is active as an orchestral soloist, recitalist, chamber musician, conductor and festival director, and his artistry has been acclaimed by critics and audiences worldwide.

Highlights of his 2009/10 season include return engagements with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Vancouver Symphony and debuts as performer and conductor with the Moscow State Philharmonic. In the United States, he will appear with the Atlanta, Alabama and Columbus Symphonies, among others.

Best known for his performances of the large-scale Romantic works, including Brahms, Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky, Douglas is also a champion of 20th- and 21st-century composers such as Reger, Britten, Corigliano and Penderecki. Works premiered by Douglas include Penderecki's Resurrection Piano Concerto, which he first performed in Warsaw in 2002 at the behest of the composer; five years later, he debuted Penderecki's revised score for the work with the Cincinnati Orchestra. In 2009, he performed with the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra in honor of Penderecki's 75th birthday.

Prior to winning the Gold Medal in the Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition — where he had the distinction of being the only non-Russian since Van Cliburn in 1958 to have won the award outright — Douglas was awarded the Bronze Medal at the Van Cliburn Competition in Texas in 1985 and the top prize in the Santander Paloma O'Shea Competition in Spain. He is also the recipient of an Emmy Award. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Music, where he is Prince Consort Professor of Piano, and has received honorary doctorates from Queens University in Belfast, the National University of Ireland in Maynooth outside Dublin, and the University of Wyoming.

A native of Ireland, Barry Douglas is music director and founder of the chamber orchestra Camerata Ireland, which brings the most outstanding Irish musicians together from all over the world to celebrate Ireland and to provide a showcase for exceptionally talented young Irish musicians. He makes his home in Paris, France, and Lurgan, Ireland, where he lives with his wife and three children. For more information, visit [www.barry-douglas.com](http://www.barry-douglas.com).

ROGER WIESMEYER, *English horn*

A Nashville native, Roger Wiesmeyer began playing piano at age 4 and oboe at age 10. Nashville Symphony principal oboist Bobby Taylor was his first teacher at the Blair School of Music, where he studied from 1975-82. Upon graduation from Hillsboro High School, he studied at the Curtis Institute of Music with John de Lancie and Richard Woodhams.

Wiesmeyer played oboe in the Pittsburgh, San Francisco and Honolulu symphonies before returning to Nashville to play English horn in the fall of 2001. In addition to playing in the orchestra, he teaches pre-college oboe at Blair, is a charter member of the chamber group ALIAS, and presents an annual Mozart birthday benefit concert at Edgehill United Methodist Church.

He is the proud new owner of a 105-year-old Steinway baby grand and a recent convert to the joys of gardening.