



JOYCE YANG PLAYS GRIEG

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, AT 7 PM
FRIDAY & SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25 & 26, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*
JOYCE YANG, *piano*

MODEST MUSSORGSKY *11 minutes*
| ARR. RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
Night on Bald Mountain

EDVARD GRIEG *30 minutes*
Piano Concerto in A Minor
I. Allegro molto moderato
II. Adagio
III. Allegro moderato molto e marcato
Joyce Yang, *piano*

INTERMISSION *20 minutes*

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH *45 minutes*
Symphony No. 5 in D Minor
I. Moderato
II. Allegretto
III. Largo
IV. Allegro non troppo

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AT A GLANCE

An era of vastly sweeping change in science, technology, and industry, the 19th century awakened a new awareness of cultural and ethnic identities previously suppressed or subordinated in favor of status quo power structures. Modest Mussorgsky belonged to a group of composers intent on developing an authentically Russian music style distinct from dominance by Western classical models. With *Night on Bald Mountain*, his chilling depiction of a witches' sabbath, Mussorgsky galvanized the elements of a potent, raw, and original musical language.

The Norwegian Edvard Grieg is another 19th-century composer who shares the reputation of cultivating a “national” musical style not yet part of the canon. It is interesting to note that Grieg’s ancestors migrated to Norway from Scotland, and the composer himself spent formative years abroad – studying at conservatory in Germany – before he achieved renown. His sole Piano Concerto, among Grieg’s best-loved works, contains allusions to Norwegian folk music, yet the piece as a whole is deeply indebted to the German Romantic model of Robert Schumann.

Mussorgsky would scarcely have recognized the radically transformed cultural landscape of the early Soviet Union where Dmitri Shostakovich came of age. Even the name of the city where Mussorgsky worked and where Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony premiered had changed from St. Petersburg to Leningrad. Recently denounced by the Communist Party for writing in a “decadent” style, Shostakovich staked his future on the success of his Fifth Symphony, which was widely understood as his response to the attack from Stalin’s regime. The result embraces both dark lyricism and a mordantly sarcastic edge and has become an icon of the 20th-century symphonic repertoire.

MODEST MUSSORGSKY

Night on Bald Mountain

Born on March 21, 1839
in Karevo, Russia

Died on March 26, 1881
in St. Petersburg

Composed:

1867; arranged
for orchestra by
Nikolai Rimsky-
Korsakov in 1886

Estimated length:

11 minutes



First performance:

October 15, 1886, in St. Petersburg
in the arrangement for orchestra
by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

First Nashville Symphony performance:

January 17, 1966, conducted
by Willis Page at War
Memorial Auditorium.

Modest Mussorgsky belonged to a small group of composers based in St. Petersburg in the third quarter of the 19th century who made it their mission to establish an authentic brand of Russian art music. A key criterion of that authenticity involved independence from conventional Western models and from the academicism they associated with professional conservatory training. But even among his pioneering colleagues, Mussorgsky (an exact contemporary of Tchaikovsky) stands out as a remarkably innovative figure. While figures like Ivan Turgenev and Fyodor Dostoevsky were transforming literature, he aimed for a similar kind of realism in music.

Mostly self-taught, Mussorgsky developed a rough-hewn, idiosyncratic musical language capable of evoking the macabre and the grandiose alike. *Night on Bald Mountain* was a pivotal work in his evolution, even though Mussorgsky never actually heard it performed in his lifetime. This orchestral tone poem was completed on June 23, 1867 — St. John’s Eve (aka Midsummer’s Eve), the very date glorified by this “musical picture” (Mussorgsky’s term). The full title is sometimes given as *St. John’s Night on the Bare Mountain* — “bald” and “bare” are alternate translations of the Russian word depicting a treeless mountain.

Mussorgsky’s colleague and one-time roommate Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov had started out as the youngest of the St. Petersburg-based circle of composers but himself went on to become an influential conservatory professor and even mentored Igor Stravinsky. After Mussorgsky’s premature death from alcoholism in 1881, Rimsky-Korsakov devoted himself to editing the chaotic heap of manuscripts left behind and even completed several projects that had been abandoned.

In preparing the instrumentation for what has become the best-known version of *Night on Bald Mountain*, Rimsky-Korsakov overlooked Mussorgsky’s own orchestration from 1867. He drew instead on what he called “the author’s best and coherent material” from various stages. One source was a later, unorchestrated opera score in which Mussorgsky had recycled this music to depict a young peasant having a nightmare of a Witches’ Sabbath.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The story that inspired Mussorgsky involves a Witches’ Sabbath said to take place every Midsummer’s Eve on a mountain top shorn of trees, complete with a guest appearance by

Satan himself and an orgiastic Black Mass. Mussorgsky writes that the scenario is a “folk fantasy,” and details this order of events: “(1) assembly of the witches, their chatter and gossip; (2) procession of Satan; (3) vile glorification of Satan; and (4) the Sabbath” and describes his music as “hot and disorderly.”

Night, famously used in the animated Disney film *Fantasia*, is immediately enjoyable as a hurly-burly of spine-tingling effects. As the orgy reaches a savage climax, church bells

begin to toll in the distance: the arrival of dawn restores order. Mussorgsky added this peaceful conclusion (not part of the original 1867 tone poem) for the dream sequence in his operatic reworking, and the new ending chases away the ominous spirits.

Scored for 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings

EDVARD GRIEG

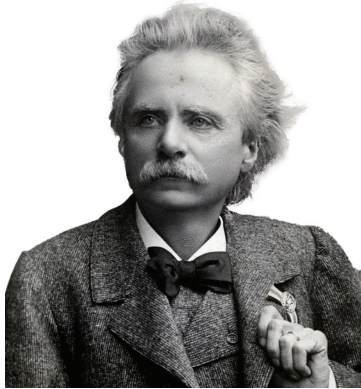
Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16

Born on June 15, 1843, in Bergen, Norway [then part of Sweden]

Died on September 4, 1907, in Bergen

Composed:
1868-69

Estimated length:
30 minutes



First performance:

April 3, 1869, in Copenhagen, with Edmund Neupert as the soloist and Holger Simon Paulli conducting

First Nashville Symphony performance:

October 21, 1952, conducted by Guy Taylor at War Memorial Auditorium.

Edvard Grieg achieved international fame as the authentic “voice” of Norway. But this Piano Concerto, the work that initially put him on the map as an emerging composer, reveals the inspiration that this descendant of a Scottish emigrant to Norway absorbed from his period of study in Germany. The Piano Concerto in A minor actually stands apart from the oeuvre of an artist who specialized in miniatures. It is his only completed example of the genre, though Grieg did contemplate and begin sketches for a later piano concerto in the early 1880s, subsequently abandoning that project.

In the late 1850s, Grieg’s parents had arranged to send the budding composer to the Leipzig Conservatory, which was then a recent institution, having only been founded

by Felix Mendelssohn in 1843 (the year of Grieg’s birth). His classmates there included Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert & Sullivan fame), and Grieg was mentored by Mendelssohn’s friend Ernst Ferdinand Wenzel, although the rigid rules of German conservatory training turned out to be unsuitable for his temperament. Still, Grieg accumulated formative experiences during his Leipzig period: an especially enduring one was the opportunity to hear Clara Wieck Schumann perform her late husband Robert Schumann’s Piano Concerto in A minor.

After a short stint back in Norway (not yet an independent country but then under the rule of Sweden and Denmark), Grieg moved to Copenhagen for a few years. He was still only in his mid-20s, in 1868, when

he determined to make his contribution to the concerto literature, creating a work that would become one of the best-loved examples in the repertoire. As it happened, the young composer-pianist himself was not even able to appear as the soloist for the world premiere because of other commitments, so that role was played by fellow Norwegian Edmund Neupert when the work was introduced in Copenhagen in April 1869.

The obvious model for his Piano Concerto was the Schumann Piano Concerto that had so impressed the young artist as a student in Leipzig. But Grieg's Concerto is by no means a merely derivative work: it achieves something new and distinctive in its expression.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Grieg even chose the same A minor home key as Schumann in his concerto. He looked to the latter's work as a prototype in terms of structure as well, above all for the opening gestures: a chord from the full orchestra immediately yields to a striking call-to-attention from the soloist; this in turn is answered by the woodwinds, which then introduce the first theme proper. He even follows Schumann's pattern in that first statement from the piano,

with a cascade of descending chords. But the *differences* are significant, too. Grieg starts off with thundering timpani, and the piano's falling chords trace a pattern (A-G#-E) rooted in Norwegian folk music. A spectacular cadenza at the end rounds out the first movement to highly satisfying effect.

The Adagio second movement is a miracle of touching simplicity. It leads without break into the finale, in which Grieg symphonically adapts a high-energy Norwegian dance type (*halling*) associated with wedding celebrations.

Grieg's Concerto flows with such fresh invention and delight that Franz Liszt — playing the work by sight — proclaimed his admiration and went on to give advice on the orchestration (details that would preoccupy Grieg for the rest of his life in an ongoing series of multiple revisions). The piece has gone on to inspire the piano concertos of many successors. Among the most acclaimed of those touched by this music, Tchaikovsky declared his delight in Grieg's “inimitable and rich musical imagery.”

Scored for 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings, in addition to solo piano



DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47

Born on September 25, 1906, in Saint Petersburg, Russia

Died on August 9, 1975, in Moscow

Composed:
1937

Estimated length:
45 minutes



First performance:

November 21, 1937, in Leningrad, with Evgeny Mravinsky conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic.

First Nashville Symphony performance:

November 28, 1960, conducted by Page Willis at War Memorial Auditorium.

On January 28, 1936, the Soviet Communist Party newspaper *Pravda* published an attack on Dmitri Shostakovich and his wildly successful opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. Stalin had decided to attend the long-running production but left before the final act began. For reasons that remain a matter of debate, the dictator took offense — or perhaps he just wanted to use Shostakovich to further tighten his control over artistic expression (much as Hitler did to the West through “degenerate art” exhibitions).

Ominously headed “Chaos Instead of Music,” the hit piece meant an immediate fall from grace for the young Shostakovich. He was at least fortunate not to suffer the fate of many fellow artists who were “disappeared” or sent to the gulag. But this disaster made the pressure of deciding what to do next nearly unbearable.

Shostakovich had come of age during a period of creative ferment that encouraged experimentation following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. His First Symphony catapulted him to international fame and launched his career when he was still a teenager. But the innovations developed by abstract painters like Kasimir Malevich or the pioneers of the new art of cinema soon began to face resistance.

As a result of the *Pravda* denunciation, the stakes were enormously high when Shostakovich was ready to reveal his next major public work, the Fifth Symphony. He began composing it in April 1937 and completed the score in an astounding three months. The public immediately cheered the work, followed by the critics (always more circumspect as they tested the waters to determine how their verdict would play out in the Kremlin).

Yet even instant success and official approval were not enough to safeguard Shostakovich’s position. Throughout the rest of his career, he would continue to face the arbitrariness of official cultural policing and even endured another humiliating public denunciation in 1948.

In the face of all this pressure, Shostakovich might easily have submerged his identity in the faceless style of “Socialist Realism” that was favored by the Communist Party. But what he composed embraces both dark lyricism and a mordantly sarcastic edge.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Fifth starts out with highly charged phrases in the strings, passed back and forth in a call-and-response manner. Jagged, quasi-

Baroque rhythms intensify the starkness of this soundscape. (Morrissey sampled this music in his song “The Teachers Are Afraid of the Pupils.”) Immediately following, the violins sing a plaintive, widely-arching melody. Shostakovich uses his large orchestra to shape powerful, Mahler-like marches. He also gives us touchingly fragile moments to savor, such as the dialogue between flute and horn in the coda (which has been identified as an ironic quotation of Carmen’s phrase “l’Amour” from her signature *Habañera* in Bizet’s opera).

Shostakovich was a master of biting sarcasm in music. This attitude dominates the brief, wild Scherzo. The movement opens in the lower depths, at times echoing the parallel movement from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. Its brevity conveys something like a very nervous comic relief, though the frenzy here hardly allows for relaxation. The music even teeters close to a mad waltz, on the brink of sanity — a foretaste of what is to come in the finale.

The expansive Largo turns inward, using a more reduced orchestral palette; the lone flute’s solo, for example, is voiced as if from atop a mountain. The finale poses the great riddle of the Fifth Symphony. On the surface, it seems to confirm a tradition Beethoven had established with his Fifth of a journey out of darkness into victorious light. Shostakovich’s chest-pounding fanfares and insistent timpani and bass drum seem to shout out the “happy ending” required by Socialist Realism. Or is it all ironic — a forced march to a hollow victory? Whatever Shostakovich had in mind, his gamble paid off and restored his standing — for the time being.

Scored for 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets and E-flat clarinet, 2 bassoons and contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, 2 harps, piano, celesta and strings

— Thomas May is the program annotator for the Nashville Symphony.

