

FIREBIRD, WINGER & WATTS



CLASSICAL SERIES

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, AT 7 PM | FRIDAY & SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15 & 16, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*
ANDRÉ WATTS, *piano*

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune
[Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun]

EDWARD MACDOWELL

**Concerto No. 2 in D minor for Piano
and Orchestra, Op. 23**

- I. Larghetto calmato
- II. Presto giocoso
- III. Largo - Molto allegro

INTERMISSION

KIP WINGER

Conversations with Nijinsky

- Chaconne de feu
- Waltz Solitaire
- Souvenir Noir
- L'Immortal

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Suite from *The Firebird* (1919 revision)

- I. Introduction and Dance of the Firebird
- II. Dance of the Princesses
- III. Infernal Dance of King Kastchei
- IV. Berceuse
- V. Finale

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TONIGHT'S CONCERT

AT A GLANCE



CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun

- Inspired by French writer Stéphane Mallarmé's 1876 poem, Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun* is a single-movement piece in which Debussy evokes the source material through lush woodwind colors. The iconic flute theme gently sets the scene for an impressionistic musical tableau of a faun playing the panpipes in the woods. The metric ambiguity of the piece, along with sparing use of brass and percussion, adds to the distinctive feel.
- The composer's musical interpretation pleased Mallarmé, who praised the work, saying, "The music prolongs the emotion of the poem and fixes the scene more vividly than colors could have done."



EDWARD MACDOWELL

Piano Concerto No. 2

- American composer MacDowell spent the early part of his training and career in Europe, which can be heard in his compositional style. He attended the Paris Conservatoire, overlapping with Debussy's studies there, and premiered his first concerto with the help of Franz Liszt. He eventually settled in New York City, finding inspiration there and in his New Hampshire summer home, which later became an artists' colony.
- MacDowell is perhaps best known for his Piano Concerto No. 2. The first two movements are shuffled from the traditional order, beginning with a strong slow movement followed by a livelier, virtuosic second. The finale brings back themes from the first movement and ends powerfully.



C.F. KIP WINGER

Conversations with Nijinsky

- Nashville's own C.F. Kip Winger is a member of the late '80s/early '90s rock band Winger — and an accomplished classical musician and composer. His GRAMMY®-nominated *Conversations with Nijinsky* reached the top of the Billboard Classical Chart. Though best known for his work as a rock musician, including a stint as bass player for Alice Cooper, Winger has spent the past two decades exploring his interest in classical music and has studied with several notable composers, including Blair School of Music professor Michael Kurek.
- The Nijinsky referenced in the work's title is the celebrated choreographer who collaborated with both Stravinsky and Debussy, choreographing the latter's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. While working on the piece, Winger read about Nijinsky and saw the piece as the "unseen dances of Nijinsky — had he not gone insane."



IGOR STRAVINSKY

The Firebird Suite

- Originally a ballet commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev of the Ballets Russes in 1910, *The Firebird* was Stravinsky's breakthrough piece and catapulted him to stardom.
- Inspired by a Russian folktale, the plot of the ballet follows Prince Ivan's defeat of the evil Kastchei, who has imprisoned 13 princesses. A magical creature, the Firebird, aids Ivan in overcoming Kastchei and freeing the princesses through enchanted feathers and spellbinding dances.
- After the work's successful premiere in Paris, Diaghilev continued to commission works from Stravinsky, including *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*. While the composer's compositional style evolved, these ballets showcase his characteristic use of driving rhythm, folk music and chromaticism.



CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Born on August 22, 1862, in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France; died on March 25, 1918, in Paris

Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun

Composed: 1894

First performance: December 22, 1894, in Paris, with Gustave Doret conducting

First Nashville Symphony performance: December 6, 1955, at War Memorial Auditorium with Music Director Guy Taylor

Estimated length: 10 minutes

On the eve of the 100th anniversary of his death, Claude Debussy retains the power to enchant with his musical innovations, which have not lost their freshness despite being absorbed and assimilated by an enormous variety of later composers. This is a quality he shares with Stravinsky — not surprisingly, the two mutually influenced one another.

Debussy's first important work for orchestra, *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* is often cited as the point of origin of his revolutionary thinking, and just as often it's associated with the Impressionist style from the visual arts. Debussy disliked that analogy, however, preferring to point to the literary source behind this piece: Stéphane Mallarmé's Symbolist poem from 1876, *L'Après-midi d'un faune* ("The Afternoon of a Faun"). The poem is a dramatic monologue whose ancient pastoral setting is the backdrop for the erotic fantasies entertained by a faun (a mythic rural deity who is half-man, half-goat) as he recalls his attempts to seduce beautiful nymphs. The faun evokes the seductive spell of music by playing his reed pipes. Debussy initially envisioned an orchestral triptych based on the poem but completed only the first part (which is why he gave it the otherwise puzzling qualifier "Prelude").

With *Faun*, Debussy leaves behind the Romantic world of emotional subjectivity and enters a nebulous, twilight sphere that resounds with harmonic and rhythmic ambiguities. This emerges from the opening bars in the gauzily chromatic flute solo (a reference to the faun's iconic piping), which oscillates between a C-sharp and a G below — an interval known as the tritone. This harmonic outline upsets the conventional patterns of major or minor and thus casts its tantalizingly ambiguous spell on ears accustomed to predictably defined harmonies.

Debussy abandons the principle of conventional thematic development as well, but he does use thematic and harmonic recall throughout the piece for his own expressive ends. *Faun* thus veers away from the narrative structure of Romantic tone poems, offering a self-contained meditation on Mallarmé's ode to sex and art. The composer's musical process is closer to the hazy logic of dreams. The score's breath-like gestures and exquisite instrumental coloring hint at the borderline state between dreaming and consciousness. Debussy's precision and nuance of gesture convey the ebb and flow of lust and longing — and opened the door to a new century of musical experimentation.

It's understandable that this music, and its source poem by Mallarmé, held great allure for the dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky. Nijinsky was a star of the Ballets Russes, the expat company that impresario Sergei Diaghilev formed in 1909 in Paris, where it served as an experimental lab for composers, dancers and other theater and visual artists. Eager to expand his work as a dancer to include choreography, in 1912 Nijinsky turned to Debussy's score to create a pioneering early modern ballet. The following year he would change history by doing the same with *The Rite of Spring*. In fact, the oft-stated claim that *Rite* triggered a riot at its premiere has to do much more with Nijinsky's radical choreographic concept than with Stravinsky's score. (We'll also encounter Nijinsky later in the program, in C.F. Kip Winger's imaginative new work.)

Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun is scored for 3 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 crotales ("antique cymbals"), 2 harps and strings.



EDWARD ALEXANDER MACDOWELL

Born on December 18, 1860, in New York City; died on January 23, 1908, in New York City

Piano Concerto No. 2 in D minor, Op. 23

Composed: 1885

First performance: March 5, 1889, in New York, with the composer as soloist and Theodore Thomas conducting the New York Philharmonic

First Nashville Symphony performance:

November 23, 1948, with Music Director William Strickland

Estimated length: 27 minutes

Nowadays, within the classical music world, the name “MacDowell” is likely to conjure an image of the idyllic artists’ colony in New Hampshire. When the colony was founded in 1907 by pianist Marian MacDowell, her husband (who would die prematurely the following year) was internationally renowned, one of the first celebrity composers from the United States. Edward MacDowell was chosen to represent music as one of the very first members of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (established in 1904) and was commemorated with a postage stamp in 1940. But by the mid-20th century his reputation went on a rapid decline, and his music came to be dismissed as an example of hopelessly outdated Romanticism. Still, important figures continued to champion MacDowell, who, as the composer and critic Virgil Thomson put it, “left to American composers an example of clear thought and objective workmanship that has been an inspiration to us all.”

Like so many other well-off 19th-century Americans in the visual arts and music, MacDowell went abroad to learn European tradition. As a teenager, he studied at the Paris Conservatory — where Debussy was a fellow student — and then moved on to Germany to continue his training with a former pupil of

Mendelssohn and Schumann. MacDowell came to the attention of Franz Liszt, who helped him launch his career as a composer, and wrote his two piano concertos while still living in Germany; eventually, though, he resettled in Boston and made the rounds as a concert pianist to earn income. He had several notable triumphs performing his Second Concerto, including at the 1889 Paris Exposition. MacDowell later moved back to New York, where he founded the Music Department at Columbia University, influencing a new generation before academic politics forced him to depart.

MacDowell had a special gift for the miniature — his eloquent solo landscape pieces are still treasured by piano students — but the Second Piano Concerto, clearly rooted in the Central European tradition, greatly impressed contemporaries and actually shared the bill with the New York premiere of Tchaikovsky’s Fifth Symphony when MacDowell gave the first performance in New York’s Chickering Hall. Dating from his early period, the Second Concerto is MacDowell’s only large-scale work to have kept a toehold in the repertoire: Van Cliburn chose it as the vehicle for his professional debut at the age of 18, and André Watts has remained one of its most eloquent champions.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Second Piano Concerto, written by the 20-something MacDowell shortly after his marriage, is an ambitious work, generally recognized to be of similar vintage to the virtuoso Romantic concertos of Liszt, Tchaikovsky and Grieg. Its form is, however, somewhat unusual, beginning with a slowish movement (*Larghetto calmato*), while the second is a very brief Scherzo (*Presto giocoso*) and the third has a slow, brooding introduction before segueing into a waltz-spirited, major-key finale.

MacDowell calls for unrelenting virtuosity from the soloist (perhaps a little too much virtuosity is a recurrent critique), beginning with one of several cadenzas after the solemn orchestral introduction. A fragrant breeze of F-major melody offers calm contrast to the theatricality of the main D-minor material. The first movement swells and crests in various powerful cadenzas, ending

in near inaudibility. For the whirling second movement, MacDowell drew on material he had sketched for piano duo after seeing the famous actress Ellen Terry perform the heroine Beatrice in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*.

MacDowell also proves to be an effective orchestrator in this Concerto: notice the reshaping of material from the first movement by the brass in the finale. He finds new ways in the last movement to bedazzle with the pianist's virtuosity, as the soloist's scintillating gestures brush aside all intimations of tragedy from the first movement to bring the concerto to its animated conclusion.

Along with solo piano, the Second Piano Concerto is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; 4 horns; 2 trumpets; 3 trombones; timpani; and strings.



CHARLES F. KIP WINGER

Born on June 21, 1961, in Denver, Colorado; currently resides in Nashville

Conversations with Nijinsky

Composed: 2012-13

First performance: March 16, 2016, by the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra

First Nashville Symphony performance: These concerts mark the first performances by the Nashville Symphony.

Estimated length: 25 minutes

Many music lovers know Kip Winger as a bass guitarist and songwriter who collaborated with Alice Cooper and other legends before forming his own band, Winger. But the classical music world was also a passion early on for Winger, who grew up in a family of jazz musicians. "I studied dance and was in a ballet company when I was a kid," he recalls. "I always wanted to compose but got sidetracked into a rock band." Over the past decade, he has returned to that earlier dream of composition for orchestra,

receiving commissions from the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra (*Ghosts*) and the Sun River Music Festival (*Windrunner* for classical guitar and orchestra and *A Parting Grace*).

The San Francisco Ballet commission led to a collaboration with the choreographer Christopher Wheeldon, for whom Winger came up with the idea of a new dance work inspired by the figure of Vaslav Nijinsky. Although that project has not yet materialized as a ballet, the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra's recording of Winger's score was nominated for this year's GRAMMY® Awards in the category of Best Contemporary Classical Composition.

"At first I was writing a piece with no name, but around that time I had also become deeply immersed in reading a lot of books about Nijinsky," Winger recalls. "About halfway through the piece, I realized I was in a sense conversing with this great artist from the past and imagining what might have happened if his career had not been short due to illness. He suffered from schizophrenia. Nowadays you could have probably treated him with prescription meds. I wondered, what would he have danced to? So the piece became the accompaniment to these unseen dances of Nijinsky.

"Particularly when I read Nijinsky's *Diaries*, I felt both disoriented and inspired. The *Diaries* reminded me that creating art can feel like a dangerous, psychologically unstable enterprise: long stretches of nonsensical meandering may be followed by small moments of searing lucidity. My reading inspired me to imagine all the ways Nijinsky would have fulfilled his artistic expression through dance, had he not had his illness."

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Conversations with Nijinsky is in four movements, each of which represents a different mood or aspect of Nijinsky. Regarding his own musical vocabulary, Winger refers to these inspirational models: Arthur Honegger (*Third Symphony*), Lili Boulanger (*Vieille prière bouddhique*), Paul Hindemith (*The Four Temperaments*), John Adams (*Short Ride in a Fast Machine*) and Henryk Górecki (*Third Symphony*).

“Another angle is that I come from the rock world,” Winger adds, “And so I’m always trying to find ways to make the orchestra have a lot of power. So the piece starts the way a rock band would start, with a bold, urgent introduction, and then turns to what could be considered a rock ‘n’ roll riff in the cellos and basses.”

This first movement (“Chaconne de feu”) imagines Nijinsky “jumping out from the curtain into this blazing solo of a dance” and is “harmonized with 20th-century dissonance.” The second movement (“Waltz Solitaire”) is a solo dance “rooted in 3/4 time but whose harmonies are disturbing and make you feel on edge — as if conversing with the crazier side of Nijinsky.”

A movement of deep introspection follows (“Souvenir Noir”), depicting Nijinsky “in his darkest moments, but then lifted into the light.” The low notes of the double bass introduction become transformed in the orchestra’s upper voices “to build a crescendo of enlightenment.”

As a finale (“L’Immortal”), Winger wanted his homage to culminate in a summation of “what Nijinsky represented for me.” The vibraphone has a major role here, while Winger’s harmonic language is a variation on the “exotic” scale Stravinsky used in works like *The Firebird*.

Winger’s score kindled a friendship with the dancer’s daughter, Dame Tamara Nijinsky. “Kip Winger has captured my father’s heart and soul,” she writes. “Many have been inspired by Nijinsky in words and dance, but no one, until now, in music. Nijinsky was inspired by music he heard, and now Kip Winger reminds us of Nijinsky’s genius with his work.”

Conversations with Nijinsky is scored for 3 flutes, 3rd doubling on piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, 2 percussionists, piano and strings.



IGOR STRAVINSKY

Born on June 17, 1882, in Oranienbaum, Russia; died on April 6, 1971, in New York City

Composed: 1909-10; revised in 1919 to create this concert suite

First performance: June 25, 1910, in Paris, as part of the Ballets Russes season (complete ballet)

First Nashville Symphony performance: April 8 & 9, 1968, with guest conductor Michael Semantizky

Estimated length: 20 minutes

Even though there exists an enormous amount of documentation detailing Stravinsky’s long life — correspondence, interviews, film clips, memoirs by the composer and his associates — this is a figure whose identity steadfastly resists the kind of psychological or even straightforward cultural-historical analysis routinely applied to so many other artists. As the author Paul Griffiths puts it, Stravinsky “is more like a character in a Nabokov novel than one from Tolstoy: a little unreal, a little constructed.”

The Firebird is the work that gave young Igor his breakthrough to international success in 1910. Sergei Diaghilev, whom we encountered earlier in this program in connection with Nijinsky and the Ballets Russes, took quite a risk by commissioning a 20-something unknown to score a large-scale

ballet for his Paris-based company. In fact, Stravinsky wasn’t his first choice for *The Firebird* but turned out to be a reliable backup. Diaghilev’s shows capitalized on the Parisian craze for all things Russian, and the enthusiastic reception to the new ballet won international fame for Stravinsky, who till that point had merely been one of numerous “promising” Russian composers.

Stravinsky would later become very controlling about all aspects of his collaborative efforts, but in this case he was given a ready-made scenario to work with. Based on a stylized version of Russian folklore, *The Firebird* recounts the powerful menace and downfall of an ogre-like figure of evil, the Immortal Kastchei, through the intervention of a beautiful rare bird — the enchanting character of the title. Diaghilev would not allow Nijinsky

to perform the role but assigned it to a ballerina who, as Nijinsky later would recall, fell out with the impresario; so the role was created by Tamara Karsavina, wearing a fabulous costume designed by Léon Bakst to signify the Firebird's miraculous qualities. Kastchei holds a number of young princesses captive in his magic garden; any knights who attempt their rescue are turned to stone. Prince Ivan is the hero who will break this spell and destroy Kastchei, by using the aid of the Firebird.

The Firebird's score blends the orchestral wizardry Stravinsky had learned as a student of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov with the vitality

of Russian folk music to yield a spellbinding atmosphere that also tells a compelling story. The composer remained particularly fond of *The Firebird* and returned to it on various occasions to craft three different concert versions that he often conducted. This was also a smart move on account of copyright laws, because it opened up additional sources of income for one of his most beloved works. The Suite from 1919 uses less than half of the original ballet score and also simplifies some of the originally lavish orchestration Diaghilev had permitted Stravinsky to use for the original ballet.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The *Firebird's* musical language juxtaposes gestures to illustrate the “exotic” and supernatural dimension with the sing-song simplicity of folk song to represent the humans. The supernatural material is based on the non-Western scale to which Kip Winger's *Conversations with Nijinsky* makes reference (the perfectly symmetrical “octatonic” scale, in which whole and half-steps alternate across an octave).

The Suite opens with a spooky conjuring, low in the strings, of Kastchei's magical garden, which is based on illusion. Here Prince Ivan encounters the Firebird, which is depicted with opulent colors and radiant trills. A peaceful pastoral section is the backdrop for Prince Ivan to catch sight of the captive princesses as they perform a ritual folk dance. Naturally, he falls in love with the one destined to be his bride.

To protect Ivan, the Firebird casts a spell over Kastchei and his menacing aides. Whipped into motion by Stravinsky's frenetic rhythms, they are compelled to dance themselves to exhaustion in a savage “Infernal Dance” (foreshadowing the

violence of *The Rite of Spring* to come three years later). Their spasms subside, while a serene lullaby (“Berceuse”) lulls the hypnotized Kastchei to sleep, its lazy tune first given by the bassoon.

Ivan is instructed to destroy a giant egg containing Kastchei's soul, and his power vanishes. A solo horn, intoning a brightly hopeful folk tune, announces the arrival of sunlight. Together with Ivan and his betrothed, the rescued captives celebrate with music that swells and rings out in glorious triumph.

The Firebird Suite of 1919 is scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano/celesta and strings.

— Thomas May, the Nashville Symphony's program annotator, is a writer and translator who covers classical and contemporary music. He blogs at memeteria.com.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



ANDRÉ WATTS PIANO

André Watts burst upon the music world at age 16, when Leonard Bernstein

chose him to make his debut with the New York Philharmonic on one of the orchestra's Young People's Concerts, broadcast nationwide on CBS-TV. Only two weeks later, Bernstein asked him to substitute at the last minute for the ailing Glenn Gould in performances of Liszt's E-flat

Concerto with the New York Philharmonic, thus launching his career in storybook fashion. More than half a century later, André Watts remains one of America's most distinguished and celebrated performing artists.

A perennial favorite with orchestras throughout the U.S., Watts is also a regular guest at the major summer music festivals. Recent and upcoming engagements include appearances with the Philadelphia Orchestra in Philadelphia and on tour, the New York and Los Angeles philharmonics, the Minnesota Orchestra, and the St. Louis, Atlanta, Detroit, Cincinnati, Dallas, Houston, Baltimore, Indianapolis and Nashville symphonies, among others. In celebration of the Liszt bicentennial in 2011, Watts played all-Liszt recitals throughout the U.S., while recent international engagements have included concerto and recital appearances in Japan, Hong Kong, Germany and Spain. In the fall of 2017, he tours with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra with performances at the University of Nebraska, Purdue University and the Norton Center in Danville, K.Y., as well as at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and Carnegie Hall.

Watts has had a long and frequent association with television, having appeared on numerous programs produced by PBS, the BBC and the Arts and Entertainment Network, performing with the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, among others. His 1976 New York recital for *Live From Lincoln Center* was the first full-length recital broadcast in the history of television, while his performance at the 38th Casals Festival in Puerto Rico was nominated for an Emmy Award in the category of Outstanding Individual Achievement in Cultural Programming. Watts' most recent television appearances are with the Philadelphia Orchestra on the occasion of the orchestra's 100th Anniversary Gala and a performance of the Brahms Concerto No. 2 with the Seattle Symphony for PBS.

Watts' extensive discography includes recordings of works by Gershwin, Chopin, Liszt and Tchaikovsky for CBS Masterworks; recital CDs of works by Beethoven, Schubert, Liszt and Chopin for Angel/EMI; and recordings featuring the concertos of Liszt, MacDowell, Tchaikovsky and Saint-Saëns on the Telarc label. He is also included in the *Great Pianists of the 20th Century* series for Philips. In May 2016, Sony Classical released André Watts — *The Complete Columbia Album Collection*, which features all of the concerto and solo recordings Watts has made for Columbia Masterworks. The 12-CD set includes his legendary recordings of concertos by Rachmaninoff, Brahms, Chopin, Tchaikovsky and Liszt with conductors Leonard Bernstein, Seiji Ozawa, Erich Leinsdorf and Thomas Schippers, and solo works by Liszt, Beethoven, Schubert, Debussy, Chopin and Gershwin.

A much-honored artist who has played before royalty in Europe and heads of government all over the world, Watts received a 2011 National Medal of Arts, given by the president of the United States to individuals deserving of special recognition for their outstanding contributions to the excellence, growth, support and availability of the arts in the U.S. In June 2006, he was inducted into the Hollywood Bowl of Fame to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his debut (with the Philadelphia Orchestra at age 10), and he is also the recipient of the 1988 Avery Fisher Prize. At age 26 Watts was the youngest person ever to receive an Honorary Doctorate from Yale University, and he has since received numerous honors from schools including the University of Pennsylvania, Brandeis University, The Juilliard School of Music and his alma mater, the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University.

Watts was appointed to the Jack I. and Dora B. Hamlin Endowed Chair in Music at the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University in May 2004, and in 2017 he was named a Distinguished Professor, the highest academic rank the university bestows upon its faculty.

Watts received a 2011 National Medal of Arts, given by the president of the United States to individuals deserving of special recognition for their outstanding contributions to the excellence, growth, support and availability of the arts in the U.S.