



GUERRERO CONDUCTS *Ravel*



CLASSICAL SERIES

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, APRIL 27 & 28, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

JASON VIEAUX, *guitar*

MAURICE RAVEL

Le Tombeau de Couperin

- Prélude
- Forlane
- Menuet
- Rigaudon

JONATHAN LESHNOFF

Concerto for Guitar

- Maestoso, Allegro
- ⌋ : Hod, Adagio
- Finale, lively

Jason Vieaux, guitar

Commissioned by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra; co-commissioned by the Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias, the Nashville Symphony and the Reno Philharmonic.

– INTERMISSION –

ALBERTO GINASTERA

Variaciones Concertantes, Op. 23

MAURICE RAVEL

Rapsodie espagnole

- Prélude a la nuit
- Malagueña
- Habañera
- Feria

This concert will run approximately two hours, including a 20-minute intermission.

Jonathan Leshnoff's Guitar Concerto will be recorded live for future worldwide release.

Please keep noise to a minimum to ensure the highest-quality recording.

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This weekend's orchestra performances underwritten in part by Mr. Russell W. Bates & Mr. Oguz E. Bates

TONIGHT'S CONCERT

AT A GLANCE



MAURICE RAVEL

Le Tombeau de Couperin

- Ravel began this piece in 1914 as a piano suite paying tribute to French Baroque composer François Couperin. His time in the military as an ambulance driver during World War I transformed the work into a memorial for his fallen comrades on the battlefield. The orchestral version, which includes four of the original six movements, premiered in 1920.
- The orchestral suite includes a prelude, as well as three movements named for historic Italian and French dances: *Forlane*, *Menuet* and *Rigaudon*.



JONATHAN LESHNOFF

Concerto for Guitar

- Baltimore-based composer Leshnoff has enjoyed a collaborative relationship with conductor Marin Alsop and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, which commissioned this piece from him — even though he'd never had experience writing for the guitar.
- Because of the guitar's acoustical qualities — which can easily be overwhelmed by the sound of an orchestra — the composer had to think carefully about how to write for the ensemble. "I let the orchestra reflect and be subordinate," he explains, "almost in the sense of listening to what the guitar is doing and mirroring this back — like a reflecting pool."
- To be recorded live, this work will complete a forthcoming Nashville Symphony recording of Leshnoff's music on Naxos.



ALBERTO GINASTERA

Variaciones Concertantes, Op. 23

- Born in Argentina, Ginastera was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and traveled to America shortly before writing this piece. Commissioned by the Asociación Amigos de la Música in Buenos Aires, *Variaciones concertantes* premiered in 1953 after Ginastera's brief and politically tumultuous return to his home country.
- Influenced by the Argentine gaucho (cowboy) tradition, the work spotlights individual instruments, including flute, clarinet, viola, oboe and bassoon, throughout the 11 variations on the original theme.



MAURICE RAVEL

Rapsodie espagnole

- Strongly inspired by his Basque mother, French composer Ravel showed particular skill in writing Spanish-flavored music, even though he had yet to visit Spain at the time of this piece's composition. *Rapsodie espagnole* premiered in 1908.
- This four-movement suite opens with a repeated four-note line and transitions into the dance *Malagueña*. The *Habanera* recalls music from Bizet's *Carmen*, while the closing *Feria* ("Festival") movement is driven by lively castanets.

— Corinne Fombelle & Thomas May



MAURICE RAVEL

Born on March 7, 1875, in Ciboure, France; died on December 28, 1937, in Paris

Composed: 1914-17; orchestrated in 1919

First performance: February 28, 1920, by the Padeloup Orchestra in Paris

First Nashville Symphony performance: November 29 & 30, 1971, with music director Thor Johnson

Estimated length: 16 minutes

Le Tombeau de Couperin

In *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Ravel redirected his fascination with the past as represented by childhood experience — think *Mother Goose Suite* — into a consideration of French musical identity from the past. This work began as a solo piano tribute to the French Baroque, specifically modeled on the keyboard music of François Couperin (1668-1733). The composer intended for his tribute to extend to the entire Couperin dynasty of composers and, by extension, to “18th-century French music in general.”

Ravel began composition in 1914, but the outbreak of World War I interrupted, bringing unforeseen significance to the project. The middle-aged composer enlisted and served as an ambulance driver; he witnessed the nightmarish reality of the combat close-up. His military discharge in 1917 followed the death of his

mother, which plunged Ravel into a depression. He nevertheless found the will to complete *Le Tombeau* as a six-movement keyboard suite. In 1919 he chose four movements to orchestrate, along with adjusting many other details. This version, which has also been choreographed as a ballet, is the one usually heard in the concert hall, though subsequent composers have continued the chain of “homage” by trying their hand at orchestrating the two movements Ravel left out.

In the context of the Great War, Ravel expanded the concept of a “tombeau” — a literary and musical practice of homage — into a vehicle to express cultural patriotism and, eventually, to commemorate those who had died in the conflict. Ravel dedicated each movement to a friend he had lost (or, in *Rigaudon*, to a pair of brothers killed on the same day early in the War).

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The charmingly tailored phrases and exquisite woodwind scoring of the *Prélude* hardly suggest the somber music typically associated with a war memorial. On a subtler level, Ravel seems to underscore the link with the past and to reclaim its treasures in the terms of his contemporary language, as if to suggest that art and order can endure the destruction of war. Thus the intersection of Baroque rhythm with modern harmony, texture and color in the *Forlane* (a sprightly dance type in 6/8) is characteristic of Ravel’s invention.

Poignancy — and a touching hint, familiar from Mozart, of shadows falling — does emerge in

the lovely solo oboe writing of the *Menuet*, as well as in its minor-mode trio and the reflective coda after the reprise. So, too, is this mood evident in the musings at the center of the *Rigaudon*, which refers to a duple-meter folk dance from southern France that was coopted by the court. But this most assertive movement of *Le Tombeau* ends with proclamations from the trumpet, in bright C major.

Le Tombeau de Couperin is scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, trumpet, harp and strings.

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JONATHAN LESHNOFF

Born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on September 8, 1973; currently resides in Baltimore

Composed: 2011-12

First performance: January 2014, with Manuel Barrueco as the soloist and Marin Alsop conducting the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

First Nashville Symphony performance:

These are the first Nashville Symphony performances.

Estimated length: 16 minutes

Concerto for Guitar

Commissioned by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra; co-commissioned by the Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias, the Nashville Symphony and the Reno Philharmonic.

Through their accessible melodies, structural complexity and weighty themes, Jonathan Leshnoff's compositions have won international acclaim. Commissioned by Carnegie Hall as well as the Nashville, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Baltimore and Kansas City symphony orchestras, his pieces have been performed by more than 50 orchestras worldwide. In addition to guitarist Manuel Barrueco, Leshnoff has written for violinist Gil Shaham, clarinetist Ricardo Morales and soprano Jessica Rivera. His catalog of more than 60 works encompasses four symphonies, 12 concertos, four string quartets and three oratorios. Leshnoff, a native of New Jersey now based in Baltimore, is a professor of music at Towson University.

Beyond the Nashville premiere of his Symphony No. 4 last month, Leshnoff's current season is especially active with new commissions and performances of his music. February saw the premiere of a new festive concert opener by Leshnoff named *Rogue Sparks*, commissioned by Oregon's Rogue Valley Symphony for its 50th anniversary. In March, the United States Marine Band premiered the symphonic band arrangement of his popular orchestral opener, *Starburst*. To close out the season in late May, the Dallas Symphony will premiere his Violin Concerto No. 2, featuring soloist Alexander Kerr and Maestro Jaap van Zweden on his last concert there as music director.

The impetus for such a remarkably prolific career began quite early. Leshnoff recalls starting to compose around age 6 or 7: "I would say it wasn't so much that I found music as that music found me. My essential aesthetic has always been that I have to communicate and take people on a journey. It's very important to me. Where listeners decide to go, what they do with the music they hear, is of course going to be based on their own lives and what is inside them. If my music doesn't

provide that conduit, then it's been a failure."

Leshnoff believes the symphony, concerto and string quartet have endured "because they are time-tested forms that have shown they work. But I believe in pouring fresh wine into these flasks. I'm not comfortable doing the same thing over, but try to shed new light so there's something fresh: in harmony and expression and also in the architectural form."

The Guitar Concerto was spawned from Leshnoff's relationship with the Baltimore Symphony under Marin Alsop, who premiered his orchestral piece *Starburst* in 2010. Yet for all his experience as a concerto composer, Leshnoff recalls being surprised when he was commissioned to write one for guitar. "I never could have predicted I'd take on that challenge," says the composer. "I don't play the guitar myself, and it's notoriously difficult, almost impossible, to write for the instrument unless you play it. Fortunately, Manuel Barrueco [the Concerto's dedicatee] also lives in Baltimore and was incredibly generous in advising me. He had to sit with me and go through every measure painstakingly."

Leshnoff immersed himself in studying the literature, above all the concertos of Heitor Villa-Lobos and the *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Joaquín Rodrigo, probably the best-known example of a guitar concerto. The reason there are relatively few concertos for the instrument, Leshnoff suggests, has to do both with the peculiarities of guitar tuning and the guitar's inherently soft acoustical nature, which is easily drowned out by an orchestra.

"Every instrument has a few blackout zones where it won't be heard with an orchestra playing alongside it, but with the guitar you have to be incredibly careful across the whole range," explains the composer. "If you look at the Rodrigo concerto, you see that he cuts the orchestra

down to a minimum when the soloist is playing.” Leshnoff worked out a way to discretely amplify Barrueco’s playing while also devising sonorities from the orchestra to ideally complement the guitar’s sound whenever the soloist plays.

In addition to inviting audiences to have a meaningful experience with his music, Leshnoff indicates that there is a level of spiritual reflection

in the Guitar Concerto. This is evident above all in the second of its three movements, which relies on a metaphorical connection between the music and a concept from Jewish thought symbolized by the Hebrew letter Vav (ו). “These Hebrew letters are coming more often in what I do,” says Leshnoff. “It is very important to the work, and to me.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Guitar Concerto opens with an arresting idea (an ascent and a gradual descent) that recurs later in the movement, as well as at the end of the second and third movements, providing a sense of coherence throughout the work. Leshnoff describes the opening movement as the most overtly “formal” in terms of the concerto model. “What is the point of the orchestra in a concerto, what should it be doing?” asks the composer. “I let the orchestra reflect and be subordinate, almost in the sense of listening to what the guitar is doing and mirroring this back — like a reflecting pool.”

For the second movement, ו, the orchestra is reduced to violins, harp and percussion. In Jewish thought, this letter is associated with the Hebrew word *hod*, which carries suggestions of humility and appreciation. Leshnoff explains the musical connection: “In a deeper sense, a state of humility means I’m taking my essence and I’m quashing it, subjugating it to the fact that I acknowledge you. So humility — which in Hebrew is related to the

word for ‘thanks’ — suggests there is something greater than one’s personal perspective. In terms of the music in the second movement, a guitar by nature is a very soft and gentle instrument. The only way to allow it to speak is to have the orchestra minimize itself so that the guitar’s natural essence bubbles up to the top.”

The finale counterbalances this intensely beautiful, meditative music with a dramatically contrasting attitude imbued with a Spanish flavor, playing off one of the guitar’s many cultural associations. “As I was composing it,” Leshnoff says, “I listened to the music and followed wherever it was taking me. It’s meant to suggest a spirit of fun and dance.”

In addition to solo guitar, the Concerto is scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 2 percussionists, harp and strings.



ALBERTO GINASTERA

Born on April 11, 1916, in Buenos Aires, Argentina; died on June 25, 1983, in Geneva, Switzerland

Composed: 1953

First performance: June 2, 1953, in Buenos Aires, with Igor Markevich conducting the Asociación de la Música Orchestra

First Nashville Symphony performance:

These are the first Nashville Symphony performances.

Estimated length: 24 minutes

Variaciones Concertantes, Op. 23

Born a little over a century ago of Italian and Catalan heritage, the Argentine Alberto Ginastera became one of the defining figures of Latin American concert music. His breakthrough ballet *Estancia*, which set out to capture the atmosphere of “Argentine country life,” triumphed in the composer’s native Buenos Aires in 1943 and put Ginastera on the map, although the full ballet itself wouldn’t be performed until 1952 — the year before he composed *Variaciones Concertantes*.

In retrospect, Ginastera proposed a division of his musical career into three periods: the first two involved different approaches his innovative synthesis of national Argentine and folkloric elements, while the third (from the late 1950s until his death in Switzerland in 1983) incorporated newer developments from European modernism, a period he characterized as “Neo-Expressionism.” *Variaciones Concertantes* dates from the second of these periods, which he labeled “Subjective

Nationalism,” in which Ginastera found more indirect ways to mine Argentine sources.

Variaciones Concertantes is a particularly attractive example of Ginastera’s imaginative exploration of an authentically Argentine sensibility without relying on actual folkloric quotes — a fusion of the timelessness of a national

style with something more modern and self-aware. The composer himself remarked on the “subjective Argentine character” of this set of variations, writing that “instead of using folkloristic material, I try to achieve an Argentine atmosphere through the employment of my own thematic and rhythmic elements.”

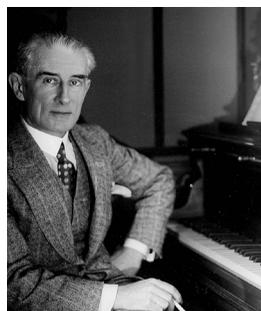
WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

A solo cello in its high register initially presents the expansive theme against a haunting accompaniment of guitar-like arpeggios on the harp. This latter gesture is associated with the gaucho tradition — the Argentine equivalent of the cowboy — which was a recurring symbol in Ginastera’s work. The composer writes of his overall method: “Some variations belong to the decorative, ornamental or elaborative type, others are written in the contemporary manner of metamorphosis, which consists of taking elements of the main theme and evolving from it new material.”

Variaciones Concertantes also has the flavor of a concerto for orchestra in that each of the ensuing 14 variations spotlights a different solo

instrument or group of instruments, associating a different type of music with each, such as scherzo for the clarinet and pastoral for the horn. After an interlude for strings, the variations focus in succession on flute, clarinet, viola, oboe and bassoon, trumpet and trombone, violin and horn, followed by an interlude for winds and a reprise of the theme, this time scored for solo bass and harp. Ginastera concludes the piece with a variation for the full orchestra alluding to an exuberantly extroverted dance type associated with the gaucho.

Variaciones Concertantes is scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), oboe, 2 clarinets, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet, trombone, timpani, harp and strings.



MAURICE RAVEL

Composed: 1907

First performance: March 15, 1908, in Paris, with Édouard Colonne conducting

First Nashville Symphony performance: January 27 & 28, 1989, with guest conductor Michael Barrett

Estimated length: 16 minutes

Rapsodie espagnole

Maurice Ravel possessed an uncanny gift for conjuring the physical exuberance of dance, which he channeled into several works with Spanish themes. And he could do so with a meticulous perfectionism. Both gifts — his fascination with things Spanish and his disciplined technique — neatly mirror Ravel’s parentage. His Basque mother spent many years in Spain and imbued her son with a lifelong enthusiasm for Spanish culture, which went well beyond his best-known work, the ballet piece *Boléro*.

His father, of Swiss origin, was a musically inclined mechanical engineer who was involved with the development of the automobile and even invented circus contraptions. It’s not hard to

imagine Ravel’s relentless perfectionism stemming from his father’s rigor. But rather than a case of “passion versus reason,” Ravel’s heritage is simply part of an intriguing mixture of traits. This is, after all, a man whose love of toys and gadgets, fashion, Siamese cats and Edgar Allan Poe all shared a claim on his imagination.

Rapsodie espagnole comes from a pivotal year for the young Ravel. In 1907 he undertook both his first opera (*L’heure espagnole*) and, with the *Rapsodie*, his first orchestral work — both, not coincidentally, treating Spanish themes. Ravel worked from an initial sketch for piano four-hands. (The third piece in the set, the *Habanera*, had actually been written in 1895 for two pianos

and earned the admiration of Debussy.) Yet Rapsodie's expertly managed parade of orchestral colors makes it sound as if Ravel had been writing for large ensemble for years already.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening, *Prelude to the Night*, almost seems to prefigure the Minimalists in its hypnotic repetition of a descending four-note pattern. The piece evokes the mystery of night undiluted by light pollution, as eyes adjust to shifting shadows. Ravel seems to know exactly how to use the instruments as characters: a pair of clarinets and then of bassoons weave spell-like cadenzas with an ambiguous, bitonal flavor Stravinsky may well have borrowed soon after for his ballet *Petrushka*. *Malaguena*, the name of the second piece, refers to folk music of southern Spain, a kind of fandango or flamenco. Ravel quickly builds from the quiet opening to a dizzying collage of sound pictures, from bright jangling to yearning strings, before a doleful English horn solo cools things down and signals the return of the *Prelude* theme.

In the *Habanera*, Ravel characteristically seems to step back from the primal dance rhythm, holding it up for reflection. His choice of colors is especially unusual and surprising; listen to how, toward the end, he accents the rhythm at the high end of the orchestral spectrum. The concluding *Feria* (for "festival day"), the longest piece of the set, is a tour de force of blended colors and charged rhythmic energy. Its cheerfully spinning music seems to stop just short of frenzied mania before a languorous middle section interrupts. Daylight, we thought, had dispelled the shadows for good, yet the night theme holds sway once more. But soon Ravel revels uncompromisingly in his music of celebration, letting it swallow the night theme and finally exploding with an impressive shower of orchestral fireworks for a dazzling finish that stops just short of total chaos.

Rapsodie espagnole is scored for 2 flutes, 2 piccolos, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, sarrusophone (usually played by contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, 2 harps, 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.



JASON VIEAUX
GUITAR

“Among the elite of today’s classical guitarists,” according to *Gramophone*, Jason Vieaux is a guitarist who goes beyond the classical. His most recent solo album, *Play*, won the 2015 GRAMMY® Award for Best Classical Instrumental Solo. Recent highlights include performances at Caramoor Festival as Artist-in-Residence, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Buenos Aires’ Teatro Colón, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, New York’s 92Y, Ravinia Festival and many other distinguished series.

A first-rate chamber musician and programmer, Vieaux frequently collaborates with artists including the Escher Quartet, harpist Yolanda Kondonassis and accordion/bandoneón virtuoso Julien Labro. He has performed as soloist with more than 100 orchestras, and his passion for new music has fostered premieres by Avner Dorman, Dan Visconti, Vivian Fung, José Luis Merlin and others. He has upcoming releases on Azica, BIS and Naxos, and his recent recordings include *Infusion* (Azica) with Julien Labro; *Ginastera’s Guitar Sonata*, which is featured on *Ginastera: One Hundred* (Oberlin Music), produced by Yolanda Kondonassis; and *Together* (Azica), a duo album with Kondonassis.

In 2012, the Jason Vieaux School of Classical Guitar was launched with ArtistWorks Inc., an interface that provides one-on-one online study with Vieaux for guitar students around the world. In 2011, he co-founded the guitar department at the Curtis Institute of Music, and in 2015 he was invited to inaugurate the guitar program at the Eastern Music Festival. Vieaux has taught at the Cleveland Institute of Music since 1997, heading the guitar department since 2001. He has received a Naumburg Foundation top prize, a Cleveland Institute of Music Distinguished Alumni Award, GFA International Guitar Competition First Prize and a Salon di Virtuosi Career Grant.

The first classical musician to be featured on NPR’s “Tiny Desk” series, Vieaux plays a 2013 Gernot Wagner guitar with Augustine strings.