Minnesota Orchestra

Dima Slobodeniouk, conductor
Johannes Moser, cello

Friday, March 1, 2019, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, March 2, 2019, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Sergei Prokofiev

Suite from The Love for Three Oranges, Opus 33a
The Ridiculous People
The Magician Celio and Fata Morgana Play Cards
March
Scherzo
The Prince and the Princess
Flight

c. 15'

Witold Lutosławski

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra
Johannes Moser, cello

c. 23'

INTERMISSION

c. 20'

Sergei Prokofiev

Symphony No. 7 in C-sharp minor, Opus 131
Moderato
Allegretto
Andante espressivo
Vivace

c. 31'

OH+

Censorship in the Arts panel with Garrett McQueen
Friday, March 1, 7 pm, Target Atrium
Saturday, March 2, 7 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
artists

Dima Slobodeniouk, conductor

Moscow-born conductor Dima Slobodeniouk, who makes his Minnesota Orchestra debut in these performances, has been music director of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia in Spain since 2013. He also currently holds the positions of principal conductor of the Lahti Symphony Orchestra and artistic director of the Sibelius Festival. Linking his native Russian roots with the cultural influence of his later homeland Finland, he draws on the powerful musical heritage of these two countries. He regularly works with orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and the Chicago, Houston and Baltimore symphony orchestras. He recently made his debut with the

Johannes Moser, cello

German-Canadian cellist Johannes Moser has performed with many of the world's leading orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, BBC Philharmonic at the

one-minute notes

Prokofiev: Suite from The Love for Three Oranges

Prokofiev's comic opera bewildered its first audiences, but its music found new life in this witty suite, which is characterized by acerbic harmonies, droll tunes, rhythmic angularity and satirical twists.

Lutosławski: Cello Concerto

In this highly dramatic concerto, the cello soloist is pitted against the orchestra from start to finish, asked to navigate a series of confrontations and interruptions from individual instrument groups as well as the full orchestra. Though the journey is rocky, the soloist is triumphant in the end.

Prokofiev: Symphony No. 7

Prokofiev's final symphony evokes a sense of simplicity, highlighted by optimistic melodies and brimming with energy.
1918, 27-year-old Sergei Prokofiev set out eastward across Russia en route to America via Vladivostok and Yokohama. That fall his concert tour landed him in Chicago, where he was commissioned to write a new opera, The Love for Three Oranges.

The opera’s plot, derived from a story by the 18th-century Italian satirist Carlo Gozzi, is just as zany as the title—“merrily lunatic,” in the words of historian Donald Grout. Comedy, fairy tale and satire all combine in the story of a melancholy young Prince who is fated to die unless he can somehow be made to laugh. All kinds of outlandish tricks are attempted, but nothing works until, in the best manner of fairy tales, the one character who is conspiring to ensure the Prince’s death, the evil Fata Morgana, inadvertently trips and falls in a ridiculous heap during her entry to the palace. The Prince is cured, but Fata curses him by declaring he must now find and fall in love with three magic oranges. After a series of bizarre adventures, he finds them. Inside each is a princess: all three are dying of thirst, but one of them is revived with a bucket of water and—no surprise to opera aficionados—falls in love with the Prince!

“The theatrical aspect of the opera interested me tremendously,” wrote Prokofiev. “The way in which the action developed on three distinct planes—the fairy tale characters, the creatures from the underworld, and the comic characters belonging to the theater itself—was absolutely novel.” In fact, though, something quite similar had been done in Mozart’s The Magic Flute, an opera Prokofiev certainly must have known, as well as in two he had probably not yet encountered: Richard Strauss’ Ariadne auf Naxos and Die Frau ohne Schatten.

Prokofiev himself conducted the first performance—a qualified success—on December 30, 1921. He wrote: “The Chicago audience was both proud and bewildered. Proud of having first produced a ‘modern opera,’ and bewildered by the unusual music and by the fact that this enterprise should have cost some $250,000, as was reported in the newspapers. One person said: ‘Those oranges were the most expensive in the world.’”

The opera’s New York debut was less fruitful, and Three Oranges went into hiding until it was revived in 1949 by the City Center Opera Company in New York. In 1923, however, Prokofiev prepared the six-movement suite heard in these concerts, which was premiered in Paris on November 29, 1925. The music is full of the acerbic harmonies, droll tunes, rhythmic angularity, grotesque sounds and satirical twists characteristic of Prokofiev’s early style.

**The music: an imaginative suite**

The suite opens with The Ridiculous People, depicting one of the oddball groups who in the opera serve as an onstage audience. They attempt to make the Prince laugh; they also argue, comment on and even try to interfere with the story. The second movement brings a card game between the sorceress Fata Morgana and the magician Celio, with power hanging in the balance. The sorceress wins.

Next comes the well-known March, to which the court jester Truffaldino enters with the morose Prince. (Some listeners may recognize it as the theme music to an old radio show, The FBI in Peace and War.) During the Scherzo, scurrying strings suggest the fleet progress of the Prince and Truffaldino in search of the three oranges.

The Prince and the Princess embodies the tenderly romantic love duet, with the vocal lines given over to instruments in the orchestra. This music occurs just after the prince liberates the third dehydrated princess from her orange tomb. Finally, The Flight portrays the chaotic shuffling about as Fata Morgana and her minions attempt to escape retribution.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, tambourine, tamtam, triangle, xylophone, glockenspiel, 2 harps and strings

Program note by Eric Bromberger.
The title page of the score may say Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, but this is in no sense a traditional concerto, for it pits the solo cello against the orchestra in unusual ways. The concert seems unmistakably to be a musical drama: after a solo introduction, the soloist becomes a protagonist who confronts adversaries and finally triumphs over them to achieve a sort of independence at the end. Lutosławski’s model may have been Strauss’ Don Quixote, in which a solo cellist makes a very similar musical journey, and in rehearsals Lutosławski seemed to endorse such a scenario. Despite the withering tribulations the cello faces in this music, Lutosławski reassured his soloist: “But, Slava, you will triumph in the end!”

Such a scenario seems clear enough, and listeners can easily follow it over the concerto’s 22-minute span. But some years later, when an interviewer suggested this “plot-line” to Lutosławski, the composer erupted, claiming that this was not what he intended at all and objecting to the “galloping imagination” of anyone who understood his concerto this way—he wanted it understood as an abstract piece of music. And certainly it is a very convincing piece of music. The writing for cello is brilliant, the soloist and orchestra interact in dramatic ways, and we come out of the concerto with the sense of having taken a complex and satisfying musical journey. Keeping in mind what the composer has said about this music, listeners are free to approach—and to understand—it in any way they choose.

**The music: a concerto in four sections**

The concerto is in four sections that are performed without pause. The first section, about four minutes long, belongs entirely to the solo cello. It opens with a sequence of repeated Ds from the cello, played piano and repeated as often as the cellist would like (a certain number of elements in this concerto are left to chance). But what is most striking about this sequence of repeated notes is Lutosławski’s marking: he wants them played indifferente, and these repeated Ds will recur at different moments throughout the concerto. This opening section seems to introduce the solo cello as a particular character, and in a few moments the Ds give way to a more animated passage marked un poco buffo ma con eleganza.

The relaxed ruminations of this opening are violently interrupted at the start of the second section, in which trumpets stab into the cello’s music like a pack of banshees, shouldering the soloist aside. The cellist regroups and attempts to respond, but the orchestra will interrupt the soloist with three more of these confrontations.

The third section is marked Cantilena, and now the cello sings a long and melancholy song, accompanied by eerie whispers from the strings. This section might seem to bring relief, but that promise is soon violated by another strident outburst from the orchestra. The cello, its part marked fortissimo and furoso, responds to this intrusion but continues to be harried by the abrasive orchestra.

The concerto reaches its climax in the fourth section, where the conflict between soloist and orchestra reaches its highest pitch. The orchestra appears to prevail when it hammers out eleven fierce attacks and settles on a strident chord marked dolente: “grieving” (in rehearsals, Rostropovich said of this spot: “It is my death”). But the cello emerges from this catastrophe and asserts itself one final time, climbing ever higher in its register until the concerto concludes as the cello stamps out a series of repeated high A’s marked tutta forza. We have come far from the indifferente repeated Ds of the beginning, and if this journey does not end in peace, as does Strauss’ Don Quixote, it does conclude with its soloist—whether as protagonist or simply as cellist—triumphant.

**Instrumentation:** solo cello with orchestra comprising 3 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes, 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, tambourine, tamtam, tom-toms, whip, wood block, xylophone, glockenspiel, vibraphone, harp, piano, celesta and strings.

(End of Program Notes)

**Program note by Eric Bromberger.**
Premiered: October 11, 1952

Prokofiev composed his seventh—and final—symphony in 1951-52. This was not a good time for the composer. He had fallen and suffered a concussion from which he never really recovered, and now, at the too-young age of 60, he was so frail that he could work for barely an hour each day. Moreover, he was working under repressive conditions. Three years earlier, Stalin’s ideological watchdog Andrei Zhdanov convened the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers, specifically to bring Russian composers into ideological conformity. Prokofiev and others were attacked for writing “confused, neuropathological combinations which transform music into cacophony,” music that “delves too much on the dark and fearful aspects of reality.” In the aftermath, Prokofiev was reduced to writing politically-correct scores, such as a symphonic poem composed for the opening of the Volga Dam canal and the oratorio On Guard for Peace.

Prokofiev’s Seventh Symphony has come in for a hard time from Western critics, who see it as a product of the composer’s “tired” final years, a sign of his “capitulation” to Soviet demands for music for the masses. It is true that—coming after Prokofiev’s heroic Fifth Symphony and anguished Sixth—the Seventh can seem gentle and understated. It was commissioned by the Children’s Division of Moscow Radio, and Prokofiev himself described it as “a simple symphony, for young listeners.” Yet after the first run-through at rehearsal, he appeared to have doubts, worrying: “Isn’t the music rather too simple?” Some of the difficulty lies in the title “Symphony,” a term that seems to imply a substantial and dramatic work. Perhaps calling the music a symphonic suite would have occasioned less criticism.

Prokofiev was well enough that his doctors let him attend the premiere of his Seventh Symphony in Moscow on October 11, 1952, but that would prove his final public appearance—he passed away five months later. (In a bitter irony, Stalin died on the same day.)

**the music: a simple symphony**

*moderato.* The Seventh Symphony bursts to life on a soaring theme that conveys a wonderful sense of space. The second subject is a broad melody that rises out of the low strings and winds, and Prokofiev closes out the exposition with a piquant little tune for oboe and flute enlivened by the accompaniment of bells and harp. This movement is in sonata form, but without the conflict and resolution that mark most symphonic opening movements. Even Prokofiev’s tempo indication for this movement—*Moderato* rather than the expected *Allegro*—suggests a relaxation of mood, and the music closes with quiet reminiscences of the opening theme.

*allegretto; andante espressivo.* The second movement is a waltz, but this is one of those wonderful Prokofiev waltzes that never quite settles into the rhythms we expect. He marks the beginning *Allegretto,* but this quickly accelerates into an *Allegro* as the music begins to dance; two trio sections break the progress of this waltz. The third movement, *Andante espressivo,* is based on a theme Prokofiev had originally written in 1936.

*vivace.* The concluding *Vivace* is the expected good-natured finale. Full of energy, it does feel as if it had been conceived for children. Throughout, one is reminded of a youth festival or a circus or a sleigh ride—some lighthearted occasion brimming with happy energy. But the very end brings surprises. Prokofiev recalls themes from earlier movements, and the music slows to a quiet conclusion with the unusual marking *pensiero:* “thoughtful.”

At the first rehearsal of this symphony, some of those in the audience convinced Prokofiev that the symphony needed a “happy” ending, so he wrote a 26-measure addition—essentially a quick variant of the movement’s main theme—to bring the symphony to its close. Mstislav Rostropovich is reported to have said that Prokofiev hoped the more abrupt conclusion would eventually be the accepted one, but at the premiere—and in virtually all subsequent performances—it is the “happy” ending that brings Prokofiev’s Seventh Symphony to its sunny conclusion, and at the first performance the audience demanded that the finale be repeated.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, wood block, xylophone, glockenspiel, harp, piano and strings

**Program note by Eric Bromberger.**

Prior to this week, the Minnesota Orchestra performed Lutosławski’s *Cello Concerto* on only one program, on January 13 and 14, 1972, with Stanislaw Skrowaczewski conducting; the soloist was the man for whom the concerto was written. Mstislav Rostropovich, just 15 months after he premiered the work in London. Even more time has passed since the Orchestra’s last performance of Prokofiev’s *Seventh Symphony:* Antal Dorati programmed the work several times during the Orchestra’s 1953-54 season.