

Thursday, December 12, 2019 at 7:30 PM
Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY SINFONIA

Ruth Ochs, *Conductor*

Elijah Shina '22, *Assistant Conductor*

PROGRAM

Three Short Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 8

Allegro Moderato

Lento, Sonoro

Presto

Montagu James '22

(b. 2000)

World Premiere

Piano Concerto in F-sharp Minor, Op. 20

Allegro

Andante

Allegro moderato

Alexander Scriabin

(1871-1915)

Sergio Martins De Iudicibus '20, *Piano*

~ INTERMISSION ~

“Intermezzo” from *Manon Lescaut*

Giacomo Puccini

(1858-1924)

Elijah Shina '22, *Conductor*

Cockaigne (In London Town) Overture, Op. 40

Sir Edward Elgar

(1857-1934)

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY SINFONIA

Violin 1

Angela Yang, *concertmaster*
Rebekah Adams
Abe Chien
Kevin Feng
Jingwen Guo
Montagu James
Alexander Menegas
Cody Mui
Elizabeth Rouget
Hannah Smalley
Alessandra Yan
Diego Zamalloa-Chion

Violin 2

Donovan Cassidy-Nolan,
principal
Michaela Hennebury,
co-principal
Leila Abou-Jaoude
Lauren Anllo
Kaila Avent
Mary Cate Hyde
Maryam Ibrahim
Anita Pan
Alex Guara
Michael Lenzi
Rishwanth Raghu
Warren Yuan
Geoffrey Zheng

Viola

Watson Jia, *principal*
Caoimhe Boyle
Angelina Lumour-Mensah
Madison Manning
Divya Raghunathan
Lennart Beringer

Cello

Nati Arbelaez Solano, *principal*
Miguel Caranti
Anthony D'Arienzo
Bridget Denzer
Camille Heubner
Sarah Hirschfield
Meredith Hooper
Chirag Kumar
Sean-Wyn Ng
Angela Park
Jayson Wu
Diane Yang

Bass

Bliss Michelson
Cliff Wilson

Flute/Piccolo

Emma Guare
Jessica Ho
Josh Kolenbrander
Annette Lee

Oboe/English Horn

Riesa Cassano
Darren Chiu
Kenar Vyas
Katya Williams

Clarinet

Molly Cutler
Fiona Logan-Sankey
Natalie Miller
Allison Yang
Jason Hong
Thomas Massoni

Bassoon

Michelle Wang
Erik Kruus

Contrabassoon

Greg Rewoldt

Horn

Jacob Beyer
Ned Furlong
Matthew Fuller
Elizabeth Keim

Trumpet

Ayo Oguntola
Donovan Pearce
James Porter
Christian Venturella

Trombone

Justin Coon
Thomas Honzt
Jack Isaac
Trisha Madhavan
Temitope Oshinowo

Tuba

Nathaniel Hontz

Percussion

Emily Dale
Monique Legaspi
Luca Morante
Barak Nehoran
Eve Rosenthal
Alex Valtchanov

Harp

Julia Ilhardt

Assistant Conductors

Montagu James
Elijah Shina

Sectional Support

Shinya Blattmann

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

MONTAGU JAMES '22

Three Short Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 8

Three Short Pieces for Orchestra, Op.8, are a set of contrasting pieces scored for large orchestra. Lasting around 10 minutes in total, each piece has a different approach to similar thematic material. Motifs from each piece reappear, albeit in a modified form, in each of the other pieces. The first piece, serving as an introduction for the other two pieces, incorporates a continuous percussion part consisting of wood blocks and bongo drums. The second piece starts with sonorous, repeated long notes in the strings, before the woodwinds trade melodic material amongst each other. The energetic final piece, marked Presto, emphasizes rhythm. Throughout the piece, the meter repeatedly shifts between different polyrhythms with strings, brass, and winds all playing contrasting patterns. When the piece seems as if it is about to reach its apex, the music suddenly dies down. In this calm coda, a muted version of the themes from the first two pieces reappear before the orchestra gradually builds up again to a fortissimo conclusion. The language of these pieces is certainly tonal, albeit with a few references to modernist works such as the atonal composer Alban Berg's similarly titled Three Pieces for Orchestra (1915), which also features a march-like final section with a prominent snare drum part. Other elements of these pieces evoke Bartok's orchestration, Bruckner's brass chorales, and Shostakovich's use of percussion.

Note by Montagu James, ©2019

ALEXANDER Scriabin

Piano Concerto in F-sharp Minor, Op. 20

In thinking about Scriabin's Piano Concerto, it seems almost inevitable to wonder why the piece seldom makes its way to pianists' repertoire. Several speculations offer but unsatisfying reasons for its oblivion; some claim that F-sharp Minor—and its parallel major key—make for an uncomfortable playing experience for both pianist and orchestra. Though the sight of six sharps or a sea of double sharps might indeed make the musician lust for a delightfully cleaner Mozart concerto in such agreeable keys as C Major or D Minor, the canon has not ignored Rachmaninoff's first piano concerto—written also in F-sharp Minor—and neither has it forgotten about Scriabin's sonata, preludes, and mazurkas that share the same “bright blue” key. Others believe that the technical challenges of the piano part fail to yield as impressive a texture as other Russian concerti

of the same period; and yet, if its lack of virtuosity were to blame, then how could one explain the brilliant runs that abound in the third movement or the constant leaps of the left hand? However appealing these reasons might initially appear to be, the truth remains that Scriabin's concerto, inspired in part by Chopin's lyricism, is a hidden jewel of unquestionable poetry: a piece by a young composer who honored the romanticism of his formation and yet who did not fear the arrival of the 20th century.

Initial reception of the piece was—perhaps at best—tepid. Praised in Western Europe, it fell victim to harsh criticism by Scriabin's peers and mentors in Russia. Glazunov believed that the composer had at last "lost his mind," while Rachmaninoff vehemently stated that he "never had a mind to lose." The score's initial errors in notation famously irritated Rimsky-Korsakov, to whom Scriabin sent a misaddressed letter in which he ostensibly disregarded the former's opinion. Needless to say, Rimsky-Korsakov did not correct the manuscript, leaving the task to a copyist hired by Belyaev, the composer's publisher (and, later, to contemporary pianist Mikhail Pletnev, who performs a significantly altered and at times simplified version of the score). Despite this series of unfortunate exchanges and despite Scriabin's carelessness, Rachmaninoff nonetheless took it upon himself to perform the very piece on tour in several countries after his peer's precocious death. How odd for a pianist to perform the work of a composer toward whom he seemed anything but appreciative!

To compare this concerto to Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* would perhaps be as much of an anachronism as a scholarly faux pas, but listeners would not have trouble identifying the protagonist Gustav von Aschenbach's internalized turmoil within the piece's introspective affect and deeply intimate emotional delivery. Perhaps then, setting ourselves, at least in spirit, upon a Venetian gondola, surrounded by water, we could at last understand Scriabin's synesthetic interpretation of F-sharp as, I reiterate, the "bright blue" key. Wandering as if by fate through an otherwise foreign island and deeply engulfed in the sirocco, we, as the piece begins, find ourselves tangled in an endless chain of suspensions which exposes nothing but our inexorable feeling of longing, unable to resolve if not by the pain of accented chords which—wholly unlike the preceding lyrical line—make way to a new theme and eventually to a scherzo, the syncopations of which remind us—despite this new section's major key—of our fundamentally unsatisfied lust, force which pervades through the second movement: a theme and variations in which the piano, lost in its ornamentation and then in its outbursts or its funeral march, never finds or plays this theme in its literal form. Noticing, however, a young boy's smile, we—much like Gustav von Aschenbach—hurry off with this "fatal gift," entirely "overwhelmed,"

and hear, time and time again, “impossible [and] absurd” runs and flights up and down the keyboard, leading, finally, to the unison of orchestra and soloist.

Note by Sergio Martins De Iudicibus, ©2019

GIACOMO PUCCINI

“Intermezzo” from *Manon Lescaut*

Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut*, based on Abbé Prévost’s 1731 story of the same name, follows the titular young girl, who has drawn attention from two suitors. The Intermezzo, essentially a prelude to Act III, occurs as Manon is imprisoned for theft. It opens with string soli, developing into a captivating theatrical movement with great drama. The following melody is an urgent, yet restrained, crescendo of emotion that concludes with a release as passionate as the lovers Prévost created. The Intermezzo concludes with final outbursts of emotion pouring out over the last subtle breath of Manon’s memories of happier times.

Note by Elijah Shina, ©2019

SIR EDWARD ELGAR

Cockaigne (In London Town) Overture, Op. 40

Sir Edward Elgar’s path to musical success demanded perseverance. Born outside of Worcester in 1857, his father tuned pianos and kept a music shop. The young Elgar had access to instruments, materials, and a healthy regard for art, but he lived removed from optimum training opportunities; for the rest of his life, Elgar struggled with the modesty of his background in a society that pinned so much on station and social class. His unique path took him from work as a church musician and music teacher to playing violin in, and then conducting, a genuinely wide variety of amateur ensembles. Study abroad—Elgar hoped to study in Leipzig, as did most aspiring composers—was beyond the family’s resources, and Elgar taught himself as a composer. His marriage to the daughter of a British officer provided stability and support, despite her relatives’ protests of his lower station. Alice Elgar’s unfaltering belief in her husband’s future bolstered his confidence, as she helped him through debilitating mood swings. In the 1890s, opportunities to compose for English choral festivals established Elgar’s compositional stature. By the turn of the century, a series of successful works secured his fame. His *Enigma Variations* (1899) creatively extended the variation principle to a series of musical portraits of his

inner circle of friends. The large-scale oratorio *Dream of Gerontius* (1900) is based on the poem of the British priest and cardinal John Henry Newman that follows a soul from its deathbed to Purgatory. The work suffered from a poor first performance and bias against its Roman Catholic ideology, but it became Elgar's choral masterpiece. In 1901, success with the *Cockaigne (In London Town)* Overture and the first two of his Pomp and Circumstance Marches followed. Finally, the provincial, Roman Catholic, largely self-taught Elgar arrived at the top of the English musical establishment.

In much of his orchestral music, Elgar used traditional musical forms, filling them with fresh material, and innovative juxtapositions of harmony and melodic fragments. The *Cockaigne (In London Town)* Overture follows the outline of a sonata form and unfolds, as its subtitle suggests, as a cheeky symphonic journey through a lively cityscape. The meaning of Elgar's title "Cockaigne" is somewhat ambiguous—whether the medieval notion of the "Land of Cokaygne" or the more recent land of Cockneys—yet London is the stage, where various personalities and ideologies metaphorically bustle about. The music opens with a theme evoking London, and it briefly halts just six beats in, before the score pushes forward to a full-orchestra statement. Elgar's trademark marking, "*nobilmente*," defines the character of the next prominent theme, which commentators often label as the "citizen" theme, as an embodiment of the individual in the modern metropolis. A short scene with a romantic pair, and then a cockney-flavored theme, function as short episodes before the development, where two different march sections emerge. The militaristic and imperial attitude of the era carries the music into the return, where—out of order—the themes overlay and bounce off of each other with amplified energy and sparkle. The final measures of the work are dominated by exuberant timpani strokes, muscling to a halt that which in reality would never rest. While social conflict and disparity seem to lie just beneath the surface of this music, Elgar's orchestral jocularly dispels some of modernity's dark shadows. The orchestral stage unites unique voices and perspectives, at least for a lively and fulfilling evening.

Note by Ruth Ochs, ©2019

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

The **Princeton University Sinfonia** is a full symphony orchestra that unites eager, music-loving students to explore symphonic repertory from the Baroque to the very newest compositions. Its members are undergraduate and graduate student musicians with diverse academic interests and backgrounds, who join their talents for the pleasure of making music together and for others. Having grown from a small chamber orchestra to its current size, the orchestra has expanded the scope of its musical mission on campus, as well. The orchestra now performs regularly with faculty soloists, and pursues a creative variety of works composed by undergraduate composers. In 2014, several members of the Sinfonia began an outreach initiative with the Community House After School Academy (CHASA) at Princeton University's Pace Center for Civic Engagement. Each spring the orchestra sponsors a concerto competition for its own members, and the winners perform with the orchestra in May of each year.

Ruth Ochs has been conducting at Princeton University since 2002. Soon after beginning graduate studies in the Department of Music at Princeton, she became director of the Princeton University Sinfonia and steered its growth from a chamber orchestra into a full-size symphonic orchestra performing repertory from the Baroque to the most recent. The orchestra regularly features student soloists and premieres new compositions by Princeton University undergraduate composers. She also serves as Associate Conductor of the Princeton University Orchestra, and has led the ensemble in a variety of performances. Off the podium, her work in the classroom and as a pre-concert speaker puts into action her belief that performers and audiences alike benefit from closer understanding of a musical composition's biography and design.

Passionate about raising the bar among community and youth musicians, Dr. Ochs also shares her time with local musical initiatives in central New Jersey. She is now in her thirteenth season as conductor and music director of the Westminster Community Orchestra, with whom she leads successful opera gala performances, collaborates with partner ensembles from the Westminster Conservatory of Music, and masterminds a popular series of children's and holiday concerts.

Music study has taken Dr. Ochs beyond her upbringing on an apple orchard in Vermont, and she holds degrees in music, orchestral conducting, and music history, from Harvard University, the University of Texas at Austin, and Princeton University, respectively. As a Fulbright Scholar, she studied musicology at Humboldt Universität in Berlin, Germany,

and, as a student of the Polish language, she studied at the Uniwersytet Jagielloński in Kraków, Poland. For many summers, she studied conducting at the Pierre Monteux School in Hancock, Maine, where she worked closely with Michael Jinbo. In 2008 she was chosen to be as the School's first conducting associate. In 2015 she served as clinician for the Texas Private School Music Educators Association All-State Orchestra. She is currently a lecturer in the Princeton University Department of Music and lives in Lawrenceville, NJ. When not conducting or teaching, she enjoys tending her garden, and trains at New Jersey Tae Kwon Do & Kicking Boxing Academy in West Windsor, NJ, where she currently holds the rank of senior brown belt.

Elijah Shina was born and raised in Louisville, KY. He was principal percussionist of the Youth Performing Arts School and the Louisville Youth Orchestra. He has participated in several music festivals, including the Chosen Vale Summer Percussion Seminar, where he participated in masterclasses and concerts under the guidance of Colin Currie and Doug Perkins, among others. Elijah is a sophomore student in the Mathematics Department planning to pursue the Certificate in Music Performance. He is a currently a conducting student of Dr. Ruth Ochs.

Sergio Martins De Iudicibus, proud alumnus of Phillips Academy Andover and the New England Conservatory Preparatory School, studies piano under Francine Kay, harpsichord under Wendy Young, and collaborative piano under Ron Cappon. Product of a Luso-Italian immigrant family and a Brazilian upbringing, he studies French and Italian at Princeton University; his junior independent work focused on films by Michelangelo Antonioni and novels by Marguerite Duras, while his thesis will be a post-Jungian analysis of contemporary Italian movies about the counterculture movement of the 1960s. His love for Scriabin began as a child when he fortuitously found an abandoned Naxos recording of the concerto in his grandparents' library; this performance marks his third year studying the score, under the guidance of Dr. Kay, as well as pianists Boris Berman and Antonio Artese. He could not be more honored to collaborate with conductor Ruth Ochs, to have been embraced by Sinfonia, and to have his mother among us in the audience today.