Olympics, and was a semi-finalist in the 2010 Stradivarius International Violin Competition.

ABOUT TODAY’S PROGRAM

Gilad Cohen on Dragon Mother

I

In fall 2011, I began discussions with Michael Pratt and soprano Martha Elliott about a new piece for the Princeton University Orchestra. I suggested that instead of relying on an existing text or story that we join forces with lyricist Sean Patterson to create something entirely from scratch. Sean and I had collaborated at the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop in NYC earlier that year and I knew that he would bring to the table his masterful mix of wit, earnestness, and humor. During an initial brainstorming session we settled upon the figure of an over-protective mother. Given that the piece’s composer is Israeli and the performer a self-described Jewish mother, this was perhaps not such a surprising outcome.

I spent the past summer in Jerusalem, bunging out “dragonic” grooves on an upright piano at my mom’s house, frightening my nieces in the process. Sean and I exchanged drafts over email while Martha and I, as singers and composers often do, argued about keys. The collaboration continued face-to-face upon my return to Princeton this fall. The last notes were written, appropriately enough, in the hot, flaming light of a candle as hurricane Sandy swept across the region.

One question I faced was how to write something fresh for a twenty-first-century orchestra. With a text that mentions horns, wings, and flames, I decided I could not have sixty musicians sitting statically on the stage. Instead, the orchestra participates in a theatrical manner, complementing the singer’s performance and magnifying and reflecting upon the narrator’s inner world.

Some thoughts from lyricist Sean Patterson:

Dragon Mother is one woman’s experience of motherhood, an experience that is literally and figuratively transformative. At the beginning of the piece, we find the woman in the later years of her life, tricked by the future into looking at her past. She recalls the birth of her daughter and the very specific changes it brought to her life. As the daughter grows, the mother grows, becoming her daughter’s protector, companion, punisher, and avenger. But when the daughter finally asserts her independence, the mother is left alone, and we are back at the beginning of the piece. The mother must choose to redefine herself in an uncertain future or once again turn back to the double-edged comfort and pain of the past.

A n accomplished horn player, Richard Strauss’ father was over sixty years old when his son completed his first concerto for the instrument. Given the piece’s virtuosic demands, the elder Strauss decided it was wise to attempt a public performance himself. The piece still stands as a satisfying homage to the instrument, from the opening hunting call motto, to the lyrical passages of the second movement, to the rousing rondo of the finale.

I f Strauss’s concerto conforms closely to the traditional movement structure of the concerto, Béla Bartók’s second violin concerto applies subtle pressure to the form. The piece was written originally for Zoltán Székely, the first violinist of the Hungarian String Quartet, to whom Bartók had initially suggested a theme-and-variations format. When Székely urged him to preserve the more traditional three movement concerto format, Bartók complied, but in a cunning compromise, theme and variation structures recur throughout the piece, albeit in an artfully concealed manner.

C omposed during the same period that Bartók was at work on his second violin concerto, Aaron Copland’s El Salón México was one of the composer’s first big successes. A musical response to a visit to Mexico, it was particularly informed by his visits to a popular dance hall in Mexico City. The piece is exemplary of Copland’s self-proclaimed gift in his early career to achieve “imposed simplicity” in his music, that is, a type of composition that audiences can readily engage with and respond to. Only a year after its premiere in 1937, the piece had been performed by over twenty orchestras in the U.S. and abroad, and to this day is a popular showpiece for ensembles all over the world.

GILAD COHEN
Lyrics Sean PATTERSON

RICHARD STRAUSS
Horn Concerto No. 1 in E-flat Major, Op. 11
Allegro
Andante
Allegro

Ruth Ochs, Conductor
Max Jacobson ‘13, Horn

INTERMISSION

BELA BARTOK
Violin Concerto No. 2
Allegro non troppo
Andante tranquillo
Allegro molto

AARON COPLAND
El Salón México

*Winners of 2012 Concerto Competition
*World Premiere
I. THE END

Now I am alone
In the twilight of my years.
My heart is not yet stone,
I still cry crystal tears.
But I'm not what I once was.
That's what time does.

I had glory days
In the splendor of the sun.
My heart burned with a blaze
For victories I'd won.
But those days are long gone.
Time marches on.

And so I
Think of the dawn
When my daughter came to be.
I swore from that day on
The world would go through me
To get to her.
That's how things were.
And time is spinning me
Back to the beginning.
And time is spinning me
Back to the beginning.
And time is spinning me
Back to the beginning.

II. BECOMING A DRAGON

When she was newly born,
I had quite a surprise.
I felt a little horn,
Grew here above my eyes.
It was never there before,
But there it was, I tell no lies.
I grew a horn.
To protect her.

When she was three weeks older,
The most amazing thing:
Right here behind my shoulder,
I grew a little wing.
All leathery and gold,
With a spiky little sting
I grew a wing.
To protect her.

Before she came into my life,
I was a carefree girl.
The future that I faced was mine alone.
I charged in without a knife,
And danced a silly whirl.
Careening madly towards the great unknown.
But the thought that anyone could harm her
Turned my skin into a scaly serpent armor.
My eyes became all-seeing.
My teeth turned sharper, whiter,
And every heartbeat of my being
Thundered, "FIGHTER!"

When she was just a year,
I went to call her name,
To save her from some threat.
And my breath shot out as flame.
All sulphurous and hot,
I reacted, out it came.
I breathed fire
To protect her.

Before she came into my life,
I was a carefree girl.
The future that I faced was mine alone.
I charged in without a knife,
And danced a silly whirl.
Careening madly towards the great unknown.
But the thought that anyone could harm her
Turned my skin into a scaly serpent armor.
My eyes became all-seeing.
My teeth turned sharper, whiter,
And every heartbeat of my being
Thundered, "FIGHTER!"

I grew a horn. Then another.
And a wing. Then another.
A scaly skin. A fire within.
A scaly skin. A fire within.

And I became a Dragon Mother.
Dragon Mother! Dragon Mother!
Dragon Mother! Dragon Mother!

III. DEFIANCE

And I soared! I soared!
The world was my domain,
And everywhere my daughter went,
I'd freely fly.
I roared! I roared!
To emphasize my reign,
And every second that she spent,
Well, so did I!

And life went on this merry way,
Until one day,
She had gone a little farther
Than she'd ever gone before.
She would move a little faster
And she'd grow a little bolder,
She'd cultivate disaster,
With a wink over her shoulder.
With a wink over her shoulder,
With a wink over her shoulder,
She would taunt me.

Still I soared! I soared!
I'll show her who's in charge!
No matter what she tried to do,
I was right there!
I roared! I roared!
My voice was fierce and large!
No matter what she put me through,
I'd rant and swear!

So life went on this bumpy way.
And dawn by day.
She would get a little older,
Which would shake me to the core.
She would scramble faster, faster.
As her heart was turning colder.
Young love was now her master.
And each boy would make her bolder.
She embraced each new disaster,
With her arm around his shoulder.
With her arm around his shoulder,
With her arm around his shoulder.
With her arm around his shoulder.

Until one night, she returned,
Sorrow in her eyes, looking grim.
She broke down in sobs, and I burned,
The only sound that she uttered was
"Him."

He?
I WILL DESTROY HIM!

I soared, I soared!
I'd find that wretched soul.
No matter what pathetic hole,
He crawled into!
I roared, I roared!
And spat fire black as coal.
I'd find that bloody bastard troll,
And claw him through!

But she said, "Mother. No.
Mother, just let it go.
I'll fight my own war now.
I don't need you anymore now.
Except maybe for listening."

My wings disappeared.
My horns receded.
What good is a dragon,
When a dragon's not needed?

And she went off on her own...

IV. THE BEGINNING

And now I am alone
In the twilight of my years.
And I am not what I once was.
That's what time does.

I spent glory days
In devotion to my prize.
They vanished in a blaze.
A flash before my eyes.
You blink and they're gone.
Time marches on.

And now I
Look toward the dawn
Full of wonder and of fear.
The journey I am on
Begins again right here.
A new beginning.

And I may not have my horns.
And I may not have my wings.
But I gave the world my daughter.
And that's worth a million things.
So I throw my arms out wide
And hold my head up higher.
For I know down deep inside:
If I want to,
I can still
Breathe fire.
ABOUT THE PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ORCHESTRA

The Princeton University Orchestra began with a group of professional musicians from the New York Symphony and Philharmonic Societies who performed a series of concerts at Alexander Hall in 1896, the first on February 13. In the ensuing century, the orchestra has come to be an almost exclusively student organization; some 90-100 undergraduate and graduate musicians representing a broad spectrum of academic departments come together for concerts in Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall. Participation in the orchestra is voluntary and extracurricular; students commit many hours to rehearsal above and beyond the time required for academic course work.

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

During the 2017-2018 season, the Princeton University Orchestra celebrated 36 years of leadership by its conductor Michael Pratt—a relationship that has resulted in the ensemble's reputation as one of the finest university orchestras in the United States. Over the years, the Orchestra and Pratt have performed a remarkable variety of the orchestral literature, from J. S. Bach's orchestral suites, to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, to Wagner's Tristan und Isolde. He has led the orchestra on many European tours, leading performances in London, Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Madrid.

As Director of the Princeton University Opera Theater, Pratt has conducted opera from Mozart to Ravel, and in the past decade has focused on the early Baroque operas of Monteverdi and Cavalli. One of the chief architects of Princeton's Certificate Program in Musical Performance, Pratt has served as its director for over twenty years, and is co-director of the Princeton Opera Ensemble and Richardson Chamber Players. Pratt was educated at the Eastman School of Music and Tanglewood, and his teachers have included Gunther Schuller, Gustav Meier, Leonard Bernstein and Otto Werret Mueller. He also holds the posts of Music Director of the Delaware Valley Philharmonic and Principal Conductor of American Repertory Ballet. He has also conducted the orchestras of Boston, Atlanta, Buffalo, Detroit, Indianapolis, and Odessa, Ukraine.

Israeli composer Gilad Cohen is an active composer, performer, and conductor in concert music, rock, and music for theater. He is a graduate of the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance and The Mannes College of Music and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Composition at Princeton University. His current projects include a quintet for electric guitar and strings for Nadav Lev, a violin concerto for Ilan Zamir (winner of the 2011 International Tchaikovsky Competition), and, coincidental with tonight's concerts, serving as music director for Princeton University's production of Cole Porter's Kiss Me Kate (December 6-8). Gilad plays piano, bass, and clarinet, and his rock band Double Space's debut album Windings has received rave reviews.

Martha Elliott has performed a wide range of repertoire, including contemporary music, opera, chamber music, and baroque music with period instruments. She has toured with the new music ensemble Continuum, performing in New York, South America, Europe, Asia, and throughout the U.S. She has worked with over 50 composers on new works, including John Cage, Edward T. Cone, and Milton Babbitt, and received critical acclaim for her performances of Pieter Louwari, as well as the role of Miranda in the world premiere of Peter Westergard's opera The Tempest. She has been a member of the performance faculty at Princeton University since 1985, teaching voice lessons, master classes, and performance courses. Her book Singing in Style: A Guide to Vocal Performance Practice was published by Yale University Press in 2006 and is currently available in paperback. She lives in Skillman, NJ with her husband Michael Pratt, and her daughter Emily lives in Philadelphia.

Max Jacobson (Class of 13) grew up in New Jersey and studies chemical and biological engineering and quantitative biology. He has studied with Amy Entelmann, Javier Gandara, Michelle Baker, and Julie Landman and is currently a student of Denise Tryon of the Philadelphia Orchestra. He performs with the New Jersey State Ballet Company, the August Symphony Orchestra, and the Livingston Symphony Orchestra and serves as the brass coach and mentor for the New Jersey Intergenerational Orchestra. He is active in the Princeton University chamber music and performs regularly with a horn trio, woodwind quintet, quartet, and a Klezmer ensemble.

Guest conductor Ruth Ochs has conducted at Princeton University since 2002. As music director of the Princeton University Symphony, she has led its growth from a chamber orchestra into a full-size symphony orchestra. She frequently assists with the Princeton University Orchestra, including as guest conductor of the orchestra in the fall of 2011. Passionate about raising the bar for collegiate, community, and youth orchestras, she works with several local ensembles, including the Westminster Community Orchestra and the Princeton, Charter School/ Westminter Conservatory Youth Orchestra. She holds degrees in music and conducting from Harvard University and the University of Texas at Austin.

Sean Patterson holds an MFA in Musical Theatre Writing from the Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, and an MFA in Creative Writing (Playwriting) from the University of New Orleans. He has written book and lyrics for the musicals Juliet & Billet, The Money Box, The Poet Cracker, The Imaginary Millimetres, The Meatball, and The Donut Dream. A native of New Orleans, Sean has taught at the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, University of New Orleans, and Tulane University, and currently lives in Brooklyn with his dog, and cat.

Caitlin Wood (Class of 2015) is a chemical and biological engineering major from Vancouver, Canada. Currently a student of Lisa Shiboto at Princeton, she began studying piano and violin at the age of four. She made her solo orchestral debut at age eight with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and has performed throughout Canada, the U.S., Italy, and Germany in orchestral programs and solo recitals. She served as the associate concertmaster of the Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra for its performance at the Closing Ceremonies of the 2010 Winter