

**Alexander Borodin (1833-87)** was the illegitimate son of a Georgian nobleman and a married woman, whom Borodin always referred to as his "aunt." As a boy he studied piano, flute, and cello, but in college he studied chemistry and became a physician and chemist and eventually a full professor at Medico-Surgical Academy. When he was almost thirty, he joined a group of mostly non-professional musicians that included César Cui, Modeste Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and his composition teacher, Mily Balakirev. Known as the Mighty Five or Moguchaya Kuchka, these mostly part-time musicians tried to faithfully incorporate authentic Russian folk tunes and characteristics in their music. Borodin composed only during times of illness and on vacations but still completed several important works, including a couple symphonies and string quartets, the opera *Prince Igor*, and tonight's *In The Steppes of Central Asia*. In this symphonic poem, Borodin alternates and expands two themes, primarily by changing their orchestration. Above a sustained high pitch in the violins, a Russian folk song is heard at the beginning in a clarinet solo that is imitated by the horn; at the end it appears in a solo flute. The second theme is an "Asiatic" theme played by the exotic-sounding English horn. Repetitive *pizzicato* octaves for strings suggest a procession of plodding camels. Borodin explains his music: "In the silence of the monotonous steppes of Central Asia is heard the unfamiliar sound of a peaceful Russian song. From the distance we hear the approach of horses and camels and the bizarre and melancholy notes of an oriental melody. A caravan approaches, escorted by Russian soldiers, and continues safely on its way through the immense desert. It disappears slowly. The notes of the Russian and Asiatic melodies join in a common harmony, which dies away as the caravan disappears in the distance."

### DID YOU KNOW?

Sixty-seven years after his death, Alexander Borodin was given a posthumous Tony Award (1954) because his music was the basis of much of the Broadway show *Kismet*, including the popular songs "And This is My Beloved" and "Stranger in Paradise."

Probably best known for the "Ritual Fire Dance" from the ballet *El Amor Brujo (The Bewitched Love)*, **Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)** was one of the most important Spanish composers in the early twentieth century. He received his earliest musical instruction from his mother and went on to study piano and composition at Madrid Conservatory while helping to support his parents and sister by giving piano lessons. After his move to Paris (1907-1914), he was inspired by the impressionistic sounds of Debussy, so although his music depicts scenes of Spain, it also exhibits French influence. As the title *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* suggests, this is atmospheric music with the promise of Spanish flair. It is not a "concerto," first, because the composer did not use that title, and second, because the music is informed by freedom of expression rather than by traditional formal concerto structure. De Falla described this work as "evocations in sound," and initially he planned to compose four of these "nocturnes" for solo piano. World War I caused him to return to Spain where he finished just the one work for piano with orchestra in three movements, each with a descriptive subtitle. "At the Generalife" (a 14th c. "architect's garden" at an Andalusian Palace) has a quiet orchestral introduction before the soloist enters at a faster tempo. Contrasting themes and a hint of the climactic moment in Debussy's *La Mer* create an exciting palette. "Distant Dance" includes a jaunty tune in the woodwinds and an improvisatory piano part that imitates flamenco

guitar riffs. This second movement segues without pause into "In the Gardens of the Sierra de Cordoba." As in the previous movements, the third movement does not quote actual Spanish folk songs but captures the essence of Andalusian melodies, full of sinuous turns. *Nights* ends in quiet reflection. In 1919 de Falla achieved recognition for his ballet *El Sombrero de Tres Picos (The Three-Cornered Hat)*, produced by Russian ballet impresario Diaghilev, with sets and costumes designed by Pablo Picasso. De Falla spent much of his last twenty years working on a cantata, *La Atlántida*, which was incomplete when he died. In 1939 he moved to Argentina because of his disenchantment with the Franco regime, and he died there at age seventy.

Turkish pianist and composer **Fazil Say** was born in Ankara in 1970. He studied piano with Mithat Fenmen, who had been a student of the legendary Alfred Cortot in Paris. Fenmen's encouragement to improvise daily nurtured the young musician's creativity. As a composer, Say has completed four symphonies, two oratorios, and several concertos, and his works have been commissioned by organizations including the Salzburger Festspiele, the Dresdner Philharmonie, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and the BBC. As a soloist, Say covers music by Bach, Beethoven, Mussorgsky, Gershwin, Chopin, among others, on his recordings, and he has also released a CD of his own solo piano works entitled *Say Plays Say*. The pianist won the Young Concert Artists International Competition in New York in 1994, the same year he wrote the "Silk Road" **Piano Concerto, Op. 4** for piano and chamber orchestra. It is not a concerto in the traditional sense with the presentation and development of themes, customary forms, and separate movements; rather there are segments within which repetitions of chords and passages appear in varying rhythm groups, generally

syncopated. One receives the impression of an unfolding improvisation based on various scenes, such as a chase sequence—a soundtrack of episodes for your imagination to color. “Silk Road” casts an exotic atmosphere with the first notes on the gong. The piano enters almost immediately with a repetitive, undulating left hand ostinato (repeated pattern) and a series of trills in the right hand. A succession of Eastern-sounding, stepwise notes weave back and forth, often while the piano plays dense, syncopated chords. Parts of the innards of the piano are “prepared” with a foreign object à la John Cage, resulting in a slapping bass sound. At times, the pianist reaches inside to tamp the strings with one hand while playing the keyboard with the other. Elsewhere the pianist plucks the strings themselves, producing a sound similar to a mandolin or dulcimer. Throughout, the piano is used as a percussion instrument rather than a melodic string instrument. Even the string instruments become percussive when the sounding boards are tapped by ten fingers that normally hold a bow or depress the strings. The concerto fades away with a repeated pedal point in the bass register of the piano and a sustained low pitch in the double basses.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Fazil Say’s 2007 Violin Concerto is subtitled “1001 Nights in a Harem.” (Cue discussion of *Scheherazade*.)

**Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)** began his career as a naval officer and traveled to the US, Asia, and the Far East, all of which influenced his musical imagination. He was only seventeen when he connected with Mily Balakirev (see notes on Borodin and The Russian Five above) and, upon resettling in Russia, he determined to be a composer. It was during the time he spent completing

his colleague Borodin’s opera *Prince Igor* in 1887 that Rimsky-Korsakov became interested in composing a musical depiction of the tale of ***Scheherazade***. He brought his ideas to fruition the following year and conducted the work’s premiere in St. Petersburg in October 1888. The composer provided the following program. “The Sultan Schariar, convinced that all women are false and faithless, vowed to put to death each of his wives after the first nuptial night. But the Sultana Scheherazade saved her life by entertaining her lord with fascinating tales, told seriatim, for a thousand and one nights. The Sultan, consumed with curiosity, postponed from day to day the execution of his wife, and finally repudiated his bloody vow entirely.”

Rimsky-Korsakov is known for his colorful orchestration. At the beginning of **“The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship,”** a declamatory bass represents the chauvinistic Sultan, and Scheherazade appears as an exotic, sinuous violin solo. Undulating lower strings suggest the movement of the ship on the water while the violins provide the narrative. Solo passages abound. In **“The Kalender Prince,”** introduced by Scheherazade’s theme, the bassoon plays a winding melody that is soon imitated by the oboe. An agitated middle section for strings is interrupted by dialogue between trombone and muted trumpets. Again, solos (clarinet, bassoon, flute, horn, violin) provide an imaginative contrast to the tutti orchestral sections. Dotted rhythms inform the violins’ lilting theme in **“The Young Prince and the Young Princess.”** Surprisingly a snare drum provides the background for a light-hearted melody that is tossed back and forth between woodwinds and strings. Scheherazade’s theme is restated by solo violin before the return of the opening melody. As one might expect from the fourth movement’s subtitle, there is much drama in **Festival at Baghdad. The Sea. The Ship Breaks against a Cliff Sur-**

**mounted by a Bronze Horseman.** Moods and tempos alternate drastically (a passage of rapidly changing notes in the violins may remind you of the composer’s popular “Flight of the Bumblebee.”) Earlier themes dash in and out, and the voices of both the Sultan and Scheherazade return. Rimsky-Korsakov’s instrumentation vividly depicts the ship pounding against the rocks (cymbal crashes) as the ocean waves surge angrily and the wind howls (swirling strings); however, the tempests, both internal and external, subside with a satisfyingly peaceful conclusion to the story.

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Polish-American pianist **Adam Golka** (born 1987) first performed all of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas when he was 18 years-old, and he considers the 32 masterpieces to have been his saving grace during the Covid crisis. "The reason I can't stay away from Beethoven is that he put himself through absolute hell in an attempt to marry the rawest expressions of his subconscious to the unattainable ideals of his mind. No other composer before or since has been willing to explore this internal warfare as deeply as he did, and I constantly feel that I'll somehow redeem myself by surrendering to the fight which is at the core of performing his works."

In 2020-2021, Adam Golka performed the eleven-hour cycle of Beethoven's Sonatas five times in its entirety, three times for socially distanced audiences at the Bach Festival Society of Winter Park (Florida), once at the Archway Gallery in Houston, and also a live-streamed cycle at the Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue (NYC), with a growing live audience as the year-long series proceeded. Adam's performances were complemented by 32 short films he created, known as 32@32 (available on YouTube), documenting his preparation for climbing the Everest of the piano literature, and featuring an amalgam of distinguished guests, from astrophysicists to Alfred Brendel. First Hand Records in London has released his

"Beethoven Piano Sonatas Vol. 1" in 2020, recorded at the Tippet Rise Art Center in Montana. "Adam Golka plays [Sonatas op. 10] with a certain brio, fiery, very free. After all, Beethoven dares in them fantasies, embellishments, cadenzas that the pianist seizes with a sense of improvisation, variations of mood, which never make you forget the simple beauty of his touch, the obviousness of his speech." *Artamag* (France)

As public events in the United States re-opened, Adam was engaged by the Buffalo Philharmonic and Asheville Symphonies to film concertos by Bach, Mozart, Clara Schumann, Saint-Saëns, Brahms, Rachmaninoff, and Shostakovich for online release. He has also recorded a recital for the Chelsea Music Festival at High Line Nine, and he performed for live audiences at Chamber Music Sedona, as well as a series of recitals with cellist Jonathan Swensen, including the Morgan Library in NYC.

In 2021-2022, Adam plays Beethoven's Emperor with the California Symphony and he tours with a recital featuring Beethoven's Les Adieux, Liszt's Sonata, Grażyna Bacewicz's Piano Sonata No. 2, as well as etudes by Nicolai Kapustin and his own Relevant Etude (2021), including stops at the PianoTexas International Festival, Minnesota Beethoven Festival, and Brattleboro Music Center. He also joins violinist Itamar Zorman for recitals at Wigmore Hall in London and the Israel Conservatory in Tel-Aviv, pianist Yannick Rafalimanana for a two-piano recital at Kammermusik-Verein Halberstadt (Germany), and he will also enjoy a two-week residency at the Krzyżowa-Music Festival (Poland).

Adam Golka is deeply indebted to his two main teachers, José Feghali, with whom he studied at Texas Christian University, and Leon Fleisher, with whom he worked as part of the Artist Diploma program at the Peabody Conservatory. Since finishing his for-

mal studies, Adam has continued to develop his artistry through private mentorship from his favorite artists: Alfred Brendel, Richard Goode, Murray Perahia, Ferenc Rados, and András Schiff, who invited Adam to give recitals at the Klavier-Festival Ruhr and Tonhalle Zürich for the "Sir András Schiff Selects" concert series.

As a concerto soloist, he has appeared with dozens of orchestras, including the BBC Scottish Symphony, NACO (Ottawa), Warsaw Philharmonic, Shanghai Philharmonic, as well as the San Francisco, Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, New Jersey, and San Diego symphonies. Adam has enjoyed collaborations with conductors such as Donald Runnicles, Pinchas Zukerman, Mark Wigglesworth, Joseph Swensen, and he has made countless concerto appearances with his brother, conductor Tomasz Golka. Adam gave his Carnegie Stern Auditorium début in 2010 with the New York Youth Symphony and his New York recital début at Alice Tully Hall, presented by the Musicians Emergency Fund.

Adam's professional life began when he was awarded the first prize and audience prize at the 2nd China Shanghai International Piano Competition. In 2009, he won the Max I. Allen Fellowship from American Pianists Association. As a pedagogue, he acted as Artist-in-Residence for six school years at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. Adam has recorded works by Beethoven, Schumann, and Brahms for First Hand Records and he has premiered works composed for him by Richard Danielpour, Michael Brown, and Jarosław Gołębiewski.