

Thursday Evening, December 7, 2017, at 8:00
Conductor's Notes Q&A with Leon Botstein at 7:00



A M E R I C A N
S Y M P H O N Y
O R C H E S T R A

presents

Triumph of Art

Leon Botstein, *Conductor*

GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ **Music for Strings, Trumpets, and Percussion**

Allegro
Adagio
Vivace

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ **Symphony No. 6 ("Fantaisies symphoniques")**

Lento—Allegro
Poco allegro
Lento

Intermission

GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ **Concerto No. 7 for Violin and Orchestra**

Tempo mutabile
Largo
Allegro
ALENA BAEVA, *Violin*

ALFRED SCHNITKE **Symphony No. 5 (Concerto Grosso No. 4)**

Allegro
Allegretto
Lento—Allegro
Lento

This evening's concert will run approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes including one 20-minute intermission.

American Symphony Orchestra welcomes the many organizations who participate in our Community Access Program, which provides free and low-cost tickets to underserved groups in New York's five boroughs. For information on how you can support this program, please call (212) 868-9276.

Alice Tully Hall

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From the Music Director

Music, Autocracy, and Exile

by Leon Botstein

What makes music so compelling as a means of human expression? Why were composers and audiences in the 20th century still drawn to the symphony and the concerto, musical forms that require neither words nor images and that occupy an extended duration of time? Why did composers seek to prove wrong Richard Wagner's prediction that the traditions of instrumental music—music thinking pursued autonomously on its own terms—were incompatible with the presumed progress of history? The answers to these recurrent and familiar questions inevitably touch on how music is capable of escaping the limits of language, particularly with regard to the expression of human emotions and the evocation of human experience.

The circumstances of a composer's life readily offer clues to understanding the unique character and appeal of vehicles of musical communication independent of linguistic and pictorial narration. The factors that influence the choices that composers make are not always psychological and personal, strictly speaking; interior struggles that lend themselves readily to confessional narratives in music of the sort are audible in several of Gustav Mahler's symphonies, or descriptive "realistic" musical evocations in symphonic form (consider Richard Strauss' *Alpine Symphony*, for example). Tonight's concert highlights the significance of the political conditions under which composers lived. Politics framed the role, cultural significance, and limits faced by composers. And politics inevitably triggered a spectrum of psychological responses.

Two of the composers on this program worked within the post-World War II Soviet-dominated space. The communist regimes in post-World War II Europe privileged the practice and pursuit of classical music. During this time frame, composers behind the Iron Curtain were important personages, and prestigious and celebrated figures in a manner unfamiliar to their counterparts in the "free world." Grażyna Bacewicz was perhaps Poland's finest post-war compositional talent after Witold Lutoslawski, but she is far less known. Indeed, her music has been largely overlooked in the West. Whatever reputation she developed remains tied to the fact that she started out as a performer. By all accounts she was a fantastic violinist. Her career as a performer, however, was cut short by injuries sustained in an automobile accident. I was introduced to her music by my teacher Roman Totenberg, the great Polish Jewish violinist and pedagogue. He, like Bacewicz, studied with Carl Flesch, and was also his assistant. He knew that my parents were Polish speaking Jews who, like him, immigrated to the United States, albeit a decade and a half later, after World War II. This shared biographical connection to Poland led him to surmise that her music for the violin, including the concertos, would appeal to me.

That Bacewicz's music is not celebrated is an egregious oversight. Her output was extensive: seven concertos for violin as well as several for other instruments, four symphonies (part of a varied orchestral output), dramatic works, incidental music, choral music, and chamber music, including quartets. The list is rich and varied. Like so many composers of her generation, she studied with Nadia Boulanger. She was the recipient of awards in both Europe and the United States. She is credited as the woman who opened the way in Poland for other female composers, and during her

lifetime commanded the respect of her colleagues and the public. Why she remains overlooked is inexplicable.

Bacewicz was in no obvious way a dissident. But she made ample use of the relative freedom of and sympathy towards aesthetic modernism in Communist Poland. Musical inspiration, as in her case, was able to flourish in a condition of un-freedom precisely because of the fact that music was a communicative medium whose precise meaning could not be decoded and translated into language or images. Therefore instrumental concert music, as opposed to prose and painting, suffered less at the hands of Communist ideologues and censors.

The second composer on today's program to come of age under Soviet rule was Alfred Schnittke. More than Bacewicz, he rebelled openly against the strictures of ideological control over art maintained by the state. He was an innovator whose career, particularly in the late 1970s and 1980s, was stifled by the authorities. He finally emigrated out of the Soviet Union, already debilitated by a stroke, in 1990, eight years before his death. He happened to be in New York in the 1990s when the ASO performed his *Faust Cantata*. One of the most memorable phone conversations I have had was when he called to discuss a possible change to the ending of the work and suggest a few dramatic flourishes in the choreography of the music, particularly the entrance of the lead role from the back of the hall.

The political context of Bohuslav Martinů was defined by his fate as an exile. Martinů, through the craftsmanship and variety of his output, earned the status as the heir to the remarkable 19th-century legacy of Czech music. Martinů was the finest Czech composer after Janáček. In

scale and scope, Martinů was the 20th century's equivalent of Dvořák. And he was also an ardent patriot.

But he was destined to live outside of his homeland. He experienced the principled necessity of exile, much like his contemporaries, the conductor Rafael Kubelík and the pianist Rudolf Firkušný, a close friend. First came the German annexation and invasion in the late 1930s. Then came the era of communist control of Czechoslovakia after World War II. Exile in the United States was not a particularly happy experience for Martinů. His music from the war years, and the 1950s during the Cold War, reveals the composer's predicament. Martinů experienced bouts of depression; the struggle with political displacement deepened them. But it was in exile that Martinů, who died in 1959 in Switzerland, turned his attention to the orchestra as a medium, particularly the symphonic form. He struggled against the comparatively marginal status he had in America, both as a composer and a foreigner, despite considerable efforts to help him. In response he produced a series of large-scale works that have, over time, earned him his rightful place as one of the finest symphonists of the 20th century. The orchestra, and therefore instrumental music as a major public experience, one with more of a cultural and political impact, became the vehicle through which the isolation of exile, nostalgia, and a sense of homelessness could be contended with.

The works on today's program by these three composers illuminate the extent to which instrumental music in the grand tradition flourished as a medium of communication with the public in a manner adequate to the circumstances of tyranny, autocracy, and displacement that prevailed during the mid-20th century.

The Program

by Peter Laki

GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ

Born February 5, 1909, in Łódź, Poland

Died January 17, 1969, in Warsaw, Poland

Music for Strings, Trumpets, and Percussion

Composed in 1958

Premiered in 1959 at the Warsaw Autumn Festival

Performance Time: Approximately 19 minutes

Instruments for this performance: 5 trumpets, timpani, percussion (snare drum, xylophone), 1 celeste, 18 violins, 6 violas, 6 cellos, and 5 double basses

Upon hearing the words *Music for Strings...and Percussion* in the title of a composition, one immediately thinks of Bartók's masterpiece from the year 1936, where the missing word in the title is completed by "celeste." In 1958 Grażyna Bacewicz, a celebrated composer and violinist, presented her own *Music for Strings*, which calls for no fewer than five trumpets in addition to the strings and percussion, although Bartók's celeste was also retained as part of the percussion section.

Stylistically, Bacewicz owes little or nothing to Bartók, although her music, too, is full of rhythmic vitality and builds upon the contrasts between "wild" ostinatos and lyrical, melodic moments. Traces of neo-classicism may be found in the use of *concerto grosso*-like juxtapositions of solo instruments and larger groups, but Bacewicz avoids associations with earlier music and follows an essentially modernistic path.

The three-movement composition opens with a complex texture of agitated sixteenth-note figures in the strings, against which the five trumpets enter with their striking and pungent harmonies. Soon the ensemble

breaks up into groups of soloists, introducing a second idea consisting of constant syncopations. A scherzo-like third idea gives rise to a new development followed by the recapitulation of the previous two themes, in reverse order. A brief, fanfare-like coda ends the movement.

The slow central movement begins with an eerie ostinato figure against which a solo viola and a solo double bass sing a mysterious duet that gradually draws in the entire string section. A solo cello suddenly cuts through the multi-layered string texture, and then the muted trumpets add their voices to the mix. A moment of emotional upsurge suddenly morphs into its opposite: a section with mysterious trills and isolated celeste attacks, a kind of "night music" to end this unique *Adagio*.

The concluding *Vivace* bursts with energy and brings back some motivic elements from the first movement, investing them with a new sense of excitement. This vibrant and wholly unpredictable music includes some ferocious drum solos, a brief solo for string quartet with two cellos, and a dash to the surprise ending.

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ

Born December 8, 1890, in Polička, Czechoslovakia

Died August 28, 1959, in Liestal, Switzerland

Symphony No. 6 (“Fantaisies symphoniques”)

Composed in 1951–53

Premiered on January 7, 1955, in Boston, Massachusetts, with the Boston Symphony Orchestra

Performance Time: Approximately 28 minutes

Instruments for this performance: 3 flutes, 1 piccolo, 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons, 4 French horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, snare drum, tambourine, tam-tam, crash cymbals, triangle), 18 violins, 6 violas, 6 cellos, and 5 double basses

Bohuslav Martinů said about his “Fantaisies symphoniques,” also known as his Sixth Symphony: “[It is] a work without form. And yet something holds it together, I don’t know what, but it has a single line, and I have expressed something in it.” While the composer never explained that “something,” it is clear that there was a very personal impulse behind the symphony, and that the creative process was a bit of a mystery even to the creator.

A single principal motif runs through the entire piece—a simple musical idea of four notes (F—G-flat—E—F). These two half-steps, separated by a half-step, are first introduced by an unaccompanied solo cello right after the initial “murmurs.” (The motif actually derives from the opening of Dvořák’s Requiem.) The movement culminates in an unusual passage for solo violin and percussion which leads to the return of the “American” theme and the murmuring introduction.

Commentators have described the second movement as a “scherzo” of sorts, no

doubt because of its high energy and the unpredictable thematic changes. The insistence on short motivic units, repeated almost without variation, recalls Leoš Janáček, the most important Czech composer from the generation before Martinů.

Most of the third and last movement is a meditation on the Dvořák-Requiem motto, with the tense atmosphere temporarily brightened by a lyrical clarinet melody, but the brief idyll is disrupted by a new dramatic buildup. Another melody with “American” syncopations leads to the climax, after which a final recall of the motto and a soft chorale bring the symphony to its conclusion.

All six of Martinů’s symphonies date from the composer’s 12-year sojourn in the United States (1941–53), although No. 6 was actually finished in Paris, where the composer had lived before the war and where he now returned. Except for another seven-month period spent in New York in 1955–56, he remained in Europe—France, Italy, and Switzerland—until his death in 1959.

GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ

Violin Concerto No. 7

Composed in 1965

Premiered on January 13, 1966, at the Grande Salle de Palais de Beaux-Arts, Brussels, with Augustín León Ara and the Belgian Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Daniel Sternfeld

Performance Time: Approximately 20 minutes

Instruments for this performance: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 French horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, bongos, wood blocks, whip, suspended cymbal, tam-tam, xylophone, glockenspiel, vibraphone), 2 harps, 1 celeste, 18 violins, 6 violas, 6 cellos, 5 double basses, and solo violin

Bacewicz was trained as a virtuoso violinist, which explains the large number of works for violin, and strings in general, in her catalog. In particular there are not many composers in the 20th century who wrote as many as seven violin concertos; and Bacewicz herself played the premieres of the first four. (A serious car accident in 1954 put an end to her active performing career.)

In the 1960s the so-called "Polish school" was one of the most exciting phenomena on the international new-music scene. The contemporary music festival Warsaw Autumn, founded in 1956, quickly established itself as one of the foremost events of its kind in the world, unique in bringing the latest in Western avant-garde music behind the Iron Curtain. New Polish music, works like Krzysztof Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960) and Witold Lutosławski's *Venetian Games* (1961), conquered the world, using the most innovative musical techniques without ever renouncing expressivity.

Bacewicz, who had come from an essentially neo-classical compositional background,

explored avant-garde tendencies together with her younger contemporaries, and in her last violin concerto she filled out the traditional three-movement concerto form with an utterly new sound world emphasizing violinistic effects such as slow glissandos passing through many approximately notated intermediate pitches, and often placing the bow *sul tasto* (on the fingerboard) or *sul ponticello* (near the bridge). In the orchestra the harps, the celeste, and the percussion play particularly important roles, and even the string section is sometimes treated "like percussion," as the composer instructed. Yet the solo part is not without its lyrical, melodic moments, especially in the central slow movement, an atmospheric *Largo*, where the soaring lines of the violin blend with the mysterious "night noises" of the orchestra. The outer movements likewise include a multiplicity of musical characters, as indicated by the unusual tempo instruction of the first movement (*Tempo mutabile*), or by the alternation, in the *Allegro* finale, of playful figurations and more relaxed, introspective episodes.

ALFRED SCHNITTKE

Born November 24, 1934 in Engels, Russia (Soviet Union)

Died August 3, 1998, in Hamburg, Germany

Symphony No. 5 (Concerto Grosso No. 4)

Composed in 1988

Premiered on November 10, 1988, with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra conducted by Riccardo Chailly

Performance Time: Approximately 37 minutes

Instruments for this performance: 3 flutes, 1 piccolo, 3 oboes, 1 English horn, 3 clarinets, 1 E-flat clarinet, 1 Bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, 1 contrabassoon, 4 French horns, 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, percussion (tambourine, chimes, triangle, crotales, flexatone, tam-tam, whip, bongos, crash cymbals, suspended cymbal, bass drum, xylophone, vibraphone, marimba, glockenspiel), 2 harps, 1 celeste, 1 piano, 1 harpsichord, 24 violins, 12 violas, 10 cellos, and 9 double basses

Alfred Schnittke was one of the few composers for whom the traditional genres of symphony and concerto grosso had always retained their relevance. Between 1972 and 1994 Schnittke composed nine symphonies and six concerti grossi, for a total of 14 works since the present composition was counted twice: it is *both* a concerto grosso (No. 4) and a symphony (No. 5). In fact, the four-movement work begins as a concerto grosso and morphs into a symphony, merging the two genres into a single, monumental orchestral statement.

The work begins with a rather simple and straightforward trumpet tune, but it is immediately distorted by the dissonant second voice supplied by the second trumpet. This tune functions as a Baroque ritornello of sorts; it is also heard as played by the *concertino* or small group, in this case, a violin, an oboe, and a harpsichord.

The second movement is based on the second movement Mahler planned for his Piano Quartet in A minor but never finished. This quartet was written in 1876 when the composer was sixteen. Since its first publication in 1973, the completed first movement has established itself in

the repertoire, but the second movement, from which only a short fragment exists, has been known only from the appendix of the first edition. It was upon this fragment that Schnittke built his movement, presenting Mahler's melody in a wide variety of instrumental guises, adding some rather dissonant counterpoint. At the very end we hear the music as Mahler wrote it, in the original piano quartet scoring.

The third movement is also "Mahlerian," although it contains no actual quotations. But it uses echoes of funeral marches and chorales like many of Mahler's symphonies. The main theme of the movement, surprisingly, is identical to the jolly little tune with which the first movement opened—only in extreme slow motion and in the lowest register. Out of this material Schnittke constructed a movement full of high drama, followed without a pause by the fourth movement, an extended, slow epilogue, in which we hear the first movement's little ditty made to sound positively tragic.

Peter Laki is visiting associate professor of music at the Bard College Conservatory of Music.

Meet the Artists



RIC KALLAHER

Leon Botstein,
Conductor

Leon Botstein has been music director and principal conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra since 1992. He is also music director of The Orchestra Now, an innovative training orchestra composed of top musicians from around the world. He is co-artistic director of Bard SummerScape and the Bard Music Festival, which take place at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College. He has been president of Bard College since 1975. He is also conductor laureate of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, where he served as music director from 2003–11. In 2018 he will assume artistic directorship of the Graffeneg Academy in Austria.

Mr. Botstein is also active as a guest conductor whose recent appearances include the Mariinsky Orchestra in St. Petersburg, Russia, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He has made numerous recordings with the London Symphony (including a Grammy-nominated recording of Popov's First Symphony), the London Philharmonic, NDR-Hamburg, and the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. Many of his live performances with the American Symphony Orchestra are available online. His recording with the ASO of Paul Hindemith's *The Long Christmas Dinner* was named one of the top recordings of 2015 by several publications, and his recent recording of Gershwin piano music with the Royal Philharmonic was hailed by *The Guardian* and called "something special...in a crowded field" by *Musicweb International*. Forthcoming from Hyperion in fall of 2018 is a

CD of music by Ferdinand Ries with The Orchestra Now.

Mr. Botstein is the author of numerous articles and books, including *The Compleat Brahms* (Norton), *Jefferson's Children* (Doubleday), *Judentum und Modernität* (Böhlau), and *Von Beethoven zu Berg* (Zsolnay). He is also the editor of *The Musical Quarterly*. For his contributions to music he has received the award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and Harvard University's prestigious Centennial Award, as well as the Cross of Honor, First Class from the government of Austria. Other recent awards include the Bruckner Society's Julio Kilenyi Medal of Honor for his interpretations of that composer's music, and the Leonard Bernstein Award for the Elevation of Music in Society. In 2011 he was inducted into the American Philosophical Society.



VLADIMIR SHIROKOV

Alena Baeva,
Violin

With an already vast and rapidly expanding repertoire, including more than 40 violin concertos, Alena Baeva is a champion of lesser known works. Her extensive discography reflects the breadth of her repertoire, with recordings of Bruch and Shostakovich (Pentatone Classics), Szymanowski (DUX), Debussy, Poulenc, and Prokofiev (SIMC).

Ms. Baeva enjoys a particularly strong profile in Russia, working regularly with the Mariinsky Orchestra, MusicaÆterna, the State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia "Evgeny Svetlanov" (GASO), and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, among others. Elsewhere she works regularly with top orchestras and ensembles,

such as the Israel Camerata, Luxembourg Philharmonic, Nordic Symphony Orchestra, Strasbourg Philharmonique, Stuttgart Philharmonic, and Tokyo Symphony Orchestra. Her international festival appearances include Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany), Baltic Sea Festival (Sweden), International Chopin Festival (Poland), Festival Internacional de Musica de Espinho (Portugal), La Folle Journée (France), and the White Nights of St. Petersburg Festival of the Mariinsky Theatre (Russia).

Recent and future concerto highlights include Staatskapelle Weimar (R. Strauss), Düsseldorf Symphony (Tchaikovsky), Freiburg Philharmonic (Bartók No. 2), South Netherlands Philharmonic (Szymanowski No. 1), Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire (Shostakovich No. 1), Orchestre National de Lille (Prokofiev No. 2), and London Philharmonic Orchestra (R. Strauss).

American Symphony Orchestra

Now in its 56th season, the American Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1962 by Leopold Stokowski, with a mission of making orchestral music accessible and affordable for everyone. Music Director Leon Botstein expanded that mission

when he joined the ASO in 1992, creating thematic concerts that explore music from the perspective of the visual arts, literature, religion, and history, and reviving rarely performed works that audiences would otherwise never have a chance to hear performed live.

The orchestra's Vanguard Series consists of multiple concerts annually at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. ASO has also performed at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College in Bard's SummerScape Festival and the Bard Music Festival. The orchestra has made several tours of Asia and Europe, and has performed in countless benefits for organizations including the Jerusalem Foundation and PBS.

Many of the world's most accomplished soloists have performed with the ASO, including Yo-Yo Ma, Deborah Voigt, and Sarah Chang. The orchestra has released several recordings on the Telarc, New World, Bridge, Koch, and Vanguard labels, and many live performances are also available for digital download. In many cases, these are the only existing recordings of some of the rare works that have been rediscovered in ASO performances.

American Symphony Orchestra

Leon Botstein, *Conductor*

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ASO's 2017–18 Vanguard Series

Sunday, January 28, 2018

at Carnegie Hall, Stern Auditorium/Perelman Stage

Hollow Victory: Jews in Soviet Russia after the World War

Leon Botstein, *Conductor*

Mikhail Svetlov, *Bass*

Aaron Blake, *Tenor*

Marc Heller, *Tenor*

Jennifer Roderer, *Mezzo-soprano*

members of the **Bard Festival Chorale**

Despite the brutal suppression of Jewish culture in the late 1940s under Stalin, Jewish composers sustained a vibrant and active musical culture, as these grippingly beautiful works reveal. Expression cannot be silenced, especially when friends like Shostakovich have the courage to help.

Mieczysław Weinberg – *Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes*

Mieczysław Weinberg – *Symphony No. 5*

Veniamin Fleischmann/Dmitri Shostakovich – *Rothschild's Violin*

Thursday, March 1, 2018

at Carnegie Hall, Stern Auditorium/Perelman Stage

Intolerance

Leon Botstein, *Conductor*

Daniel Weeks, *Tenor*

Serena Benedetti, *Soprano*

Hai-Ting Chinn, *Mezzo-soprano*

Matthew Worth, *Baritone*

Carsten Wittmoser, *Bass-baritone*

Bard Festival Chorale

In post-Fascist Italy, Luigi Nono attempted to reverse the darkness of Mussolini and rescue art from being the handmaiden of the state. His one-act opera *Intolleranza* speaks out against dictatorship. It follows a migrant worker travelling home as he gets caught up in a political protest, is tortured in prison, and escapes to fight for a world without war.

Luigi Nono – *Intolleranza*