

**Johannes Debus conducts
the Royal Conservatory Orchestra**

Friday, April 20, 2018 at 8:00pm

Prelude Recital at 6:45pm

Pre-concert Talk at 7:15pm

This is the 822nd concert in Koerner Hall

Johannes Debus, conductor

La Fiammata

Linda Ruan and Charissa Vandikas, piano duo

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

PROGRAM

Hector Berlioz: "Romeo Alone – Festivities at the Capulets" from *Roméo et Juliette*, op. 17

Francis Poulenc: Concerto in D Minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra, FP 61

- I. Allegro ma non troppo
- II. Larghetto
- III. Finale: Allegro molto

INTERMISSION

Hector Berlioz: "Love Scene" from *Roméo et Juliette*, op. 17

Leonard Bernstein: "Symphonic Dances" from *West Side Story*

- Prologue*
- Somewhere*
- Scherzo*
- Mambo*
- Cha-Cha*
- Meeting Scene*
- 'Cool' Fugue*
- Rumble*
- Finale*

Hector Berlioz

Born in La Côte-Saint-André, Isère, France, December 11, 1803; died in Paris, France, March 8, 1869

"Romeo Alone – Festivities at the Capulets" and "Love Scene" from *Roméo et Juliette*, op. 17 (1839)

"Beethoven being dead, only Berlioz can make him live again." With these words, plus 20,000 francs, in 1838, the great violinist Paganini made it possible for French composer Hector Berlioz to start work on the third symphony,

which had long been percolating in his creative mind. Paganini had never performed and only belatedly recognised the startling originality of *Harold en Italie*, the four-movement symphony with viola that he had commissioned four years earlier, hoping to display his virtuosity on his Stradivarius viola. In it, Berlioz envisages the viola as bystander, observing rather than instigating the action. Now, in his third symphony, the *symphonie dramatique Roméo et Juliette*, Berlioz carefully encloses its central symphonic orchestral movements with a vocal prologue and finale. Overall, the work's motivation is fundamentally dramatic, with both Shakespeare and Beethoven as inspiration, together with the Irish actress Harriet Smithson whom he had seen play Juliet in Paris in 1827. Having fallen hopelessly in love and then out of love with her, his resulting 90-minute work fuses elements of choral symphony and opera into a grand, *expressive* dramatic symphony, well beyond the conventions of a traditional symphony. Berlioz's aims were lofty, and his intentions, as a Romantic writing music in what he referred to as an *expressive* genre of instrumental music, was to carry the listener beyond what one experiences in the theatre: "Here a new world is opened up to view, one is raised into a higher ideal region, one senses that the sublime life dreamed of by poets is becoming a reality." On a practical level, given the infrequent opportunities that Berlioz had to mount performances of *Roméo et Juliette*, he often selected excerpts from the score, including the two to be performed today. In "Romeo Alone – Festivities at the Capulets," Romeo wanders aimlessly, musing in melancholy mood in front of the Capulets's palace, before the ball. It is a scene taken from the Garrick version of Shakespeare presented in Paris, where Romeo is already in love with Juliet. After a distant glimpse of the Capulet festivities, a radiant oboe theme declares Romeo's love. It will recur, boldly declaimed, at the height of the Capulet festivities and, once again, with quiet resolve, as the festivities come to a blazing end.

The "Love Scene" is the slow movement of Berlioz's Dramatic Symphony and, without doubt, one of his greatest and most eloquent inspirations. Here, Berlioz persuasively confirms his own assertion that instrumental language is "richer, more diverse, more flexible and, by its very indefiniteness infinitely more powerful" than vocal word setting. Horn and cellos together deliver Romeo's recitative, while flute and cor anglais speak of Juliet's anxiety. Fragments from both themes are woven into a musical tone poem that recreates the physical turbulence, despairing uncertainty and presence of the danger that both lovers face from their warring families.

Francis Poulenc

Born in Paris, France, January 7, 1899; died there, January 30, 1963

Concerto in D Minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra, FP 61 (1931-2)

"May I propose that you accept for this work a sum of 20,000 francs, 5,000 more for the performance which would take place this winter or next spring at my salon in Paris. I will be so pleased to add your name to those of Stravinsky, Fauré, Falla, and Satie who have written for 'my collection' the most beautiful pages, as you know."

With these words and the request that French composer Francis Poulenc write the concerto for *three* pianos: one solo and two secondary, the Princess Edmond de Polignac brought Poulenc's concerto into being. Born Winaretta Singer, the Princess was heir to the Singer sewing machine fortune and was one of Poulenc's many contacts among Parisian society. Poulenc and his long-time friend Jacques Février gave the premiere which stole the show at a music festival in Venice in September 1932.

Not unusually, Poulenc weaves many influences into this, the third of five keyboard concertos in his catalogue. With its crackling opening chords, Ravel's G Major Concerto, introduced to Paris a few months before Poulenc began composition, springs to mind. The two pianos (which Poulenc seems to have in mind from the outset, rather than the requested three) then immediately begin a toccata-like dialogue. There is a hint of the pentatonic scale of a gamelan in the first few bars; Poulenc will soon introduce further imitations of the Balinese gamelan he heard in Paris at the Colonial Exhibition of 1931, particularly in the first movement coda. In-between, as the tempo quickens, short snatches of themes play out with unbridled exuberance. Faux-Baroque basslines and chattering ostinatos fill out the texture of a three-part structure that only loosely resembles traditional sonata form. The concerto's magpie-like appropriation of ideas and styles brings a mercurial quality. Keeping one foot in a disreputable Parisian nightclub, the other in the church next door, Poulenc's pianistic party-piece mirrors his split personality. "That is how I like music: taking my models everywhere, from what pleases me," he once said. It is as though a form of musical attention deficit disorder stimulates Poulenc into offering a commentary on the music around him – whether Balinese gamelan, echoes of Stravinsky, or the Baroque. In this concerto, parody becomes a form of homage.

The delicate and transparent slow movement is a declared homage to Mozart, where Poulenc combines the melodic line of “the composer I prefer to all other musicians” with the knowing irreverence of the music hall. The movement is again a ternary structure. The finale, on the other hand, combines rondo with fantasia in the abundance of its themes and the rapid-fire juxtaposition Poulenc makes of them. The two pianists play almost continually throughout the concerto. The virtuoso challenge Poulenc poses lies in maintaining tight ensemble work both piano-to-piano and together with orchestra, rather than in the fireworks of a conventional cadenza. Pleased with his concerto, Poulenc wrote with a combination of perception and irony to Belgian musicologist Paul Collaer, a few weeks after its premiere: “You will see for yourself what an enormous step forward it is from my previous work and that I am really entering my great period.”

Leonard Bernstein

Born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, August 25, 1918; died in New York, New York, October 14, 1990

“Symphonic Dances” from *West Side Story* (1957/61)

In 1961, with the musical *West Side Story* already his biggest hit and a film version in the works, Bernstein quickly crafted a suite from the dance sequences of the show, a mid-20th century take on the Romeo and Juliet story. With help from Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal, the music was re-ordered to add musical, rather than theatrical, logic. The “Symphonic Dances” from *West Side Story* were premiered February 13, 1961, just as the New York Philharmonic announced a 17-year extension to its composer’s contract as its first American-born music director. In the attention-grabbing Prologue, an undercurrent of unease and tension between the American Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks is immediately apparent. Few harmonies are resolved; the interval of a tritone (an augmented fourth) maintains a state of restlessness as the score becomes increasingly dissonant. The gritty urban reality of the opening gives way to a dream sequence (“Somewhere”), offering an idealised vision of hope for the future. *Scherzo* continues the dream, presenting the possibility of escape from the harsh realities of the city. *Mambo* explodes this dream and brings us face-to-face with the rival gangs, exuding aggressive machismo at a dance in the school gym. The gentle *Cha-Cha* continues the dancing, now recalling the first meeting of the two principal characters, Tony and Maria. *Cool Fugue* builds on the interval of the tritone as the music becomes increasingly ominous and threatening – and the ground rules for the fight are laid out, before the gangs face off. In a vicious fight (*Rumble*), Maria’s brother is killed by Tony. The finale reflects on Maria’s anguish as the body is carried away by both gangs and Bernstein’s music eloquently dreams of a place of peace. - Program notes © 2018 Keith Horner

Johannes Debus

Conductor

Johannes Debus has been Music Director of the Canadian Opera Company (COC) since 2009, having been appointed immediately following his debut. The 2017-18 season includes debuts with the Seattle, Oregon, and Kansas City Symphonies, and the Bilbao Orkestra Sinfonikoa. He returns to The Metropolitan Opera conducting *The Tales of Hoffmann*, the Bregenz Festival conducting the Austrian premiere of Goldschmidt’s *Beatrice Cenci*, and the San Diego Symphony. As Music Director of the COC, he conducts *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and Stravinsky’s *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables*. Highlights of the 2016-17 season included debuts with the Metropolitan Opera conducting *Salome*, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and his Australian debut with the Tasmanian and West Australian Symphonies.

He conducts regularly at the Bayerische Staatsoper Munich, Staatsoper unter den Linden Berlin, and Frankfurt Opera, and has appeared in new productions at English National Opera and Opéra National de Lyon. He made his debut at the BBC Proms with Britten’s *Sinfonia* in 2014, and conducted a new production of *The Tales of Hoffmann* at the 2015 Bregenz Festival.

As guest conductor, he has appeared at several international festivals such as the Biennale di Venezia, Bregenz, and Schwetzingen festivals, Festival d’Automne in Paris, Lincoln Center Festival, Ruhrtriennale, Suntory Summer Festival, and Spoleto Festival. Debus enjoys an ongoing relationship with The Royal Conservatory of Music.

At home in both contemporary music and the core repertoire, he has conducted a wide range of world premieres and works of the 20th and 21st centuries, notably Salvatore Sciarrino’s *Macbeth* and Luciano Berio’s *Un re in ascolto*.

La Fiammata

Piano duo

As the Grand Prix Winners of the Canadian Music Competition 2017, La Fiammata piano duo made its orchestral debut with Orchestre de la Francophonie under the baton of Nicolas Ellis. Consisting of pianists Charissa Vandikas and Linda Ruan, the duo was formed in 2015 in Toronto, where they are both full scholarship students at The Royal Conservatory of Music's Glenn Gould School, receiving the Janet and Bill L'Heureux Scholarship and the Colleen Sexsmith Piano Scholarship respectively. Both pianists have been featured on *CBC's* list of "30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30" as soloists on separate occasions. Since then, La Fiammata has achieved great success as a duo, winning the Glenn Gould School Chamber Music Competition in 2016 as well as the Glenn Gould School Concerto Competition in 2017. They were also named the RBC Stockey Young Artists at the Festival of the Sound in 2016. Highlights of their current season include appearances at the CMC Ambassador Concert, as well as the Canadian Opera Company's Noon Hour Concert Series. La Fiammata is extremely honoured to have been named the Youth Ambassadors for the 60th anniversary of the Canadian Music Competition in the Toronto Chapter. The duo is currently studying under the tutelage of James Anagnoson of the world-renowned Anagnoson & Kinton duo.

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

Joaquin Valdepeñas, Resident Conductor

The Royal Conservatory Orchestra (RCO), part of the Temerty Orchestral Program, is widely regarded as an outstanding ensemble and one of the best training orchestras in North America. The Conservatory's orchestral students gain critical performance experience in the acoustically renowned Koerner Hall, as well as invaluable musical insights by being led by such distinguished conductors as Gábor Takács-Nagy, Tania Miller, Ihnatowycz Chair in Piano Leon Fleisher, and Johannes Debus this season; past guest conductors have included Sir Roger Norrington, Peter Oundjian, Mario Bernardi, Richard Bradshaw, Ivars Taurins, Julian Kuerti, Nathan Brock, Uri Mayer, Lior Shambadal, Bramwell Tovey, and Tito Muñoz. The RCO ensures that instrumental students in the Performance Diploma Program and the Artist Diploma Program of The Glenn Gould School graduate with extensive orchestral performance experience. Additionally, at least two winners of The Glenn Gould School Concerto Competition have the opportunity to appear each year as soloists with the RCO. Graduates of the RCO have joined the ranks of the greatest orchestras in the world, including the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the BBC Orchestra, the Quebec Symphony Orchestra, the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic, Tafelmusik, the Hallé Orchestra of Manchester, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and Leipzig Gewandhaus. The RCO has been invited to perform at the Isabel Bader Performing Arts Centre in Kingston this season, has been heard on *CBC Radio*, and toured China during the 2004-05 season.