

Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> Birthday! Our Sesquicentennial! What better way to celebrate it than with music? And what better way to honour 150 years of innovative Canadian musical achievement than by creating still more music that reflects the diversity of Canada's musical past, present and future. Thus two works on tonight's program—the *Sesquie* by Tobin Stokes and the *Trumpet Concerto* by John Estacio—are the result of co-commissions, collaboratively sponsored by the Government of Canada and by music organizations across the nation including the Kamloops Symphony. And along with the new, two established works to celebrate the shared cultural heritage that over time has helped shape our Canadian musical identity: one French, by Ravel, one English, by Elgar.

### **Tobin Stokes (1966—) *Sesquie* (2017)**

And just what is a “Sesquie?” We are all about to find out. But this we know already—it is a short work, only about two minutes long, one of many commissioned for orchestras across the country. This Sesquie by Canadian composer Tobin Stokes, titled *Just Keep Paddling*, receives its premiere with the KSO tonight. The work's genesis, its content, as well as its title are all typically Canadian.

According to Stokes the piece is “a fun, upbeat trip on Canada's rivers, lakes, and ocean coastlines,” that celebrates Canada's long love affair with waterborne travel, from paddle boarding to whitewater kayaking, to the birchbark and cedar canoe voyages of yesteryear. At the beginning we hear the water rippling as the canoe is plunked into the water, and from there we hear a “simple theme that (Tobin says) takes us on an adventure.” The theme came to Stokes as he himself was paddling across Victoria's inner harbor with its marine hazards such as ferries and floatplanes. So, he says, we may hear in the music “some of the whimsy, folly, and fear” he has experienced there.

### **John Estacio (1966—) *Trumpet Concerto* (2017)**

John Estacio, prolific Canadian composer of orchestral works, opera and chamber music, was commissioned by nineteen Canadian orchestras, including the Kamloops Symphony, to write a concerto for trumpet as part of Canada's sesquicentennial celebrations. Tonight is its premiere in BC.

Like most concertos of the last 250 years this work is in three movements, the first of which Estacio calls “Triton's Trumpet.” His reference to the Greek mythical figure of Triton, sea god Poseidon's son, who with his conch shell trumpet could both agitate and calm the seas, alerts us to the range of dynamics that may lie ahead. The movement begins quietly enough with a lyrical and expansive cadenza for the trumpet over sustained tremulous strings. An undercurrent of disturbance in the lower brass hints that this tranquility might be disrupted, but Triton's mellifluous trumpet artistry maintains calm.

Gradually, though, the discord lurking in the orchestra's depths emerges unrestrained, building in a wave of sound that almost overpowers the soloist. However, like Triton the trumpet soloist again restores the calm, and the tranquil music returns, albeit in an uneasy setting. The opening themes are developed with solos for the clarinets, and then the trumpet takes over with a version of the opening cadenza. Now, once more, ominous elements overcome the tranquil mood and abruptly thrust the soloist into a more fervent tempo, building to a climactic swirl of chaotic incivility that threatens to overtake the trumpet entirely. This opening movement comprises about half of the concerto's length.

The second movement, *Ballad*, features extended lyrical phrases for the solo trumpet. The strings introduce a primary melody, one that feels somewhat unsettled and ungrounded. A solemn sounding chorale declaimed by the winds follows, and this chorale transforms to become the driving force behind the movement's regal sounding climax.

After the foreboding nature of the first two movements, the third movement, *Rondo*, acts as a spirited balm. It is written in a brisk 6/8 meter, and begins with a quixotic melody that, in characteristic rondo fashion, returns several times throughout the movement that is a mercurial kaleidoscope of energy, colour and fanfare.

### **Maurice Ravel (1875—1937) *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1919)**

The origin of this work for orchestra was a suite for solo piano Ravel wrote during World War 1 and completed when sick and demobilised in 1917. Though 39 and in frail health, Ravel enlisted and experienced the horrors of the war firsthand as an ambulance driver, losing several close friends. It is a remarkable testament, to his artistry that he could produce a work of such calm and propriety in the midst of such tormented circumstances.

The original piano suite contained six movements, but in 1919 Ravel orchestrated four of them to make this suite. The piano version shows elegance and flexibility of style one would expect from a pianist of Ravel's inventiveness. But he was also a brilliant orchestrator so his orchestration captures and enriches all the breadth, variety and subtlety of the piano version.

A "tombeau" is a tomb but also a memorial, and in this short work Ravel is memorializing or paying homage in a number of important ways. By writing a suite of French dances for piano (then orchestra), he acknowledges the achievement of the keyboard composers of the French baroque, especially François Couperin (1668-1733). But more important is that his work honours the historical continuity of the distinctness of the French tradition in music that contributed to his own strength of style. Ravel does not set out to imitate Couperin or replace his own musical idiom with one from an earlier century, but to show how those earlier qualities of clarity and musical decorum persist even into the present. By blending the rhythmic and melodic inflections and forms of Couperin's time with his own

“modernist” harmonic and rhythmic instincts, Ravel affirms how the past of French music continues to shape its present.

By the time Ravel completed the work in 1917, it had also become a homage to comrades fallen in combat. Each of the *Tombeau*'s movements carries a dedication: the Prelude, a fluid and bustling rush of triplets, to Lieutenant Jacques Charlot, with a lyrical and virtuosic opening solo on the oboe. Then the Forlane, dedicated to Lieutenant Gabriel Deluc, a French version of an Italian dance, rich in harmony with a variety of textures of sound in the strings and woodwind, but tinged with melancholy. The Menuet, peaceful and unassuming to start, but eventually unfolding into something more foreboding and mournful, he dedicated to Jean Dreyfus. Last the Rigaudon, named for an ancient Provençal dance, opens with a sprightly figure punctuated by the brilliant trumpet, that recurs almost compulsively until interrupted by more reflective passages for oboe and flute, only to return enthusiastically toward the end. This Ravel dedicated to brothers Pierre and Pascal Gaudin.

### **Edward Elgar (1857—1934) *Variations on an Original Theme (Enigma)* (op.36)**

For many music lovers Elgar is the quintessential English composer and this set of orchestral character portraits of his friends his most characteristic work. Certainly these *Enigma Variations* (1899) represented a turning point in Elgar's career, advancing his stature from that of a provincial composer of salon pieces and religious/historical choral works to that of a serious composer with a growing European reputation. In this work Elgar has found his full musical voice.

The theme that is the musical germ of the work is announced at the start in the strings and then woodwind and horns, and shifts between major and minor tonalities. The first variation depicts Elgar's wife, beginning quietly but growing to a quite passionate climax in the middle. Next, lively violins and woodwind with the theme in the cello and basses depict the artistry of pianist Hew Stewart-Powell. Variation 3 presents Richard Townshend with the solo oboe prominent. WMB who follows is William Baker “country squire, gentleman and scholar” with the orchestra suitably exuberant. Variation 5 is Richard Arnold, son of poet Matthew Arnold, his serious side evoked by low violins, his more playful side perhaps by the woodwind. Ysobel in variation 6 was a young amateur viola player, so the violas collectively and, briefly in solo, are featured. Architect Arthur Troyte Griffith was a somewhat clumsy piano player, so in variation 7 the timpani have a role—does he slam down the keyboard lid at the end?

In contrasting mood, clarinets gently lead the way into variation 8, a portrait of Elgar's gracious friend, Winifred Norbury. The sustained violin note that carries us from this variation to number 9, Nimrod, creates a moment of magical transition leading us into the emotional heart of the work. A.J Jaeger was Elgar's publisher, loyal supporter and close friend, and this, the longest of the variations, is powerful testimony to their important

relationship. Another contrast follows in variation 10. Dorabella was the youthful and lively Dora Penny portrayed in part by the interplay of woodwind and violins. Dora spoke with a stammer which some see reflected in the music. GRS of variation 11 is George Sinclair, organist of Hereford Cathedral, but Elgar explained that the first five bars of music describe Sinclair's bulldog, Dan, who (you will hear) tumbles down a bank into the River Wye at the start, swims quickly upstream to shore, and lands with a delighted bark. The solo cello that opens and closes variation 12 acknowledges Basil Nevinson, an amateur cello player whose generosity and achievements Elgar greatly admired. The three asterisks after "Romanza \*\*\* " in variation 13 have been a source of speculation. Elgar explains that it refers to someone away on a sea voyage at the time, and the use of wooden sticks instead of felt on the timpani (to simulate the noise of ship's engines), as well as the clarinet quotation from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* support this idea. The generally wistful tone of the music only adds to the mystery. Last, the E.D.U. of variation 14 is Elgar himself—not his initials, but when pronounced "Edoo" revealing his wife's name for him. Elgar's use of the full resources of the orchestra reveal a confidence and assurance in this characterization of himself, but the return of both the Nimrod theme and that of his wife reassert the continuing significance of those figures in his life.