

¡Olé!

The music of Spain & Cuba

September 21 & 22, 2019 – Saenger Theatre



SPECK SPEAKS

Nights in the Gardens of Spain

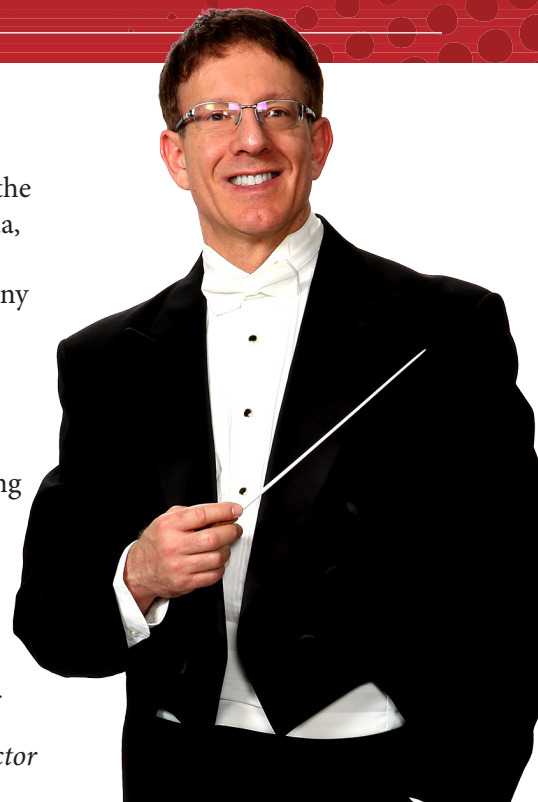
Can music have a smell? You be the judge.

The French writer Alexandre Dumas was one of thousands of people inspired by the jasmine-scented gardens surrounding the summer palace at the Alhambra, in Granada, Spain. “Nowhere,” he wrote, “were so many orange trees, so many roses, so many jasmines gathered in so small a place. ... Nowhere will you see so many springs, so many leaping waterfalls, so many rushing torrents.”

Manuel de Falla excelled at depicting all of these evocative qualities in the first movement of his masterwork for piano solo and orchestra, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*. Although he hated to be pinned down by explicit verbal descriptions of his music, he clearly shared Dumas’ delight in the sensory overload of these gardens. Using the piano as a brilliant color in his orchestral palate, rather than simply as a virtuoso instrument, he managed to evoke both the gentle waft of a scent-laden breeze and surprising bursts of water from the garden’s many fountains.

Perhaps rivaled only by Debussy’s *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, de Falla’s *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* seems to activate the sense of smell like no other music in the world. From my point of view, Falla’s masterpiece is one of the most fragrant works of music ever composed.

– Scott Speck, MSO Music Director



PROGRAM NOTES

Cuban Overture

George Gershwin

BORN: Brooklyn, New York, USA / September 26, 1898

DIED: Hollywood, California, USA / July 11, 1937

Gershwin visited Cuba in 1932. A non-stop round of parties was always accompanied by Latin bands, with their exotic melodies, rhythms and home-grown percussion instruments. Fascinated by what he heard, he decided to create a musical impression of it. He took some of the instruments home to study, then composed this festive and sultry orchestral souvenir of his trip.

This piece is scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

Piano Concerto in G Major

Maurice Ravel

BORN: Ciboure, France / March 7, 1875

DIED: Paris, France / December 28, 1937

Ravel’s two piano concertos were his final major works. Even though he composed them during the same period, 1929-1931, they are quite different from each other. The Concerto in G Major for two hands is bright and breezy; the Concerto for the Left Hand in D Major is a more sombre affair. One thing they share is the influence of jazz, which Ravel heard for the first time during a concert tour of North America in 1928.

This is how he described the G Major: “It is a concerto in the truest sense of the word, written very much in the same spirit as those of Mozart and Saint-Saëns. The music of a concerto, in my opinion, should be light-hearted and brilliant, and not aim at profundity or at dramatic effects. Too many classical concertos were composed not so much

‘for’ as ‘against’ the piano.” The first performance took place in Paris on January 14, 1932, with Ravel conducting the Lamoureux Orchestra and Marguerite Long as soloist.

This piece is scored for solo piano, 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, trumpet, trombone, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

Nights in the Gardens of Spain

Manuel de Falla

BORN: Cádiz, Spain / November 23, 1876

DIED: Alta Gracia, Argentina / November 14, 1946

Falla’s original intention for *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* was to write a set of three nocturnes for solo piano, but he developed it into a work for piano and orchestra instead. It is not a traditional concerto, but an orchestral work where the keyboard takes the role of principal advocate of the music’s shimmering Impressionist colors.

The title of the opening section, In the Generalife, refers to a garden in the Alhambra, the lavish palace in Granada where the Moorish caliphs spent the summer. A Dance Is Heard in the Distance, the second movement, brings a brace of animated rhythms, suggestive of an evening festival. This spirit continues, without pause, into the finale, In the Gardens of the Mountains of Córdoba. The music gradually winds down, fading gently and nostalgically into the night.

This piece is scored for solo piano, 3 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta and strings.

Capriccio Espagnol, Op. 34

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

BORN: Tikhvin, Russia / March 18, 1844

DIED: Lyubensk, Russia / June 21, 1908

Rimsky-Korsakov was the most technically skilled (if not the most emotionally profound) of “The Mighty Handful,” a group of five young Russian composers who used their country’s folk music as the inspiration for their compositions. His interest in folk music extended beyond the borders of Russia. In 1886, using a collection of authentic Spanish melodies, he made sketches for a virtuoso work for violin and orchestra. Later, he decided to turn them into a showcase for the entire orchestra instead.

He conducted the premiere of *Capriccio Espagnol* (Spanish Capriccio) himself, in October 1887, with the orchestra of the Russian Opera House, St. Petersburg. Confirming the high opinion the players themselves had displayed at rehearsals, the new piece’s reception was overwhelming, leading to an immediate encore. In gratitude, Rimsky-Korsakov dedicated it to every musician in the orchestra.

The five sections are played as a continuous whole. After the vibrant opening Alborada (Morning Song), horns introduce the plaintive theme that Rimsky used for a set of variations, ranging from gentle to highly emotional. The Alborada returns in slightly different scoring. A brass fanfare ushers in a series of virtuoso solos for various section leaders, then the violins launch a fiery Gypsy Song. After a buildup in volume, trombones give out the theme of the final section, Asturian Fandango. The Alborada returns once again in the midst of the whirlwind coda.

This piece is scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

– Program Notes by Don Anderson © 2019