

# *Pasadena Community Orchestra*

Bethany Pflueger, Conductor

[www.pcomusic.org](http://www.pcomusic.org)



**Friday, November 10, 2023, 8:00 pm**

**First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena**

## **Program**

Procession of the Nobles.....Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)

Intermezzo and Barcarolle from Tales of Hoffman.....Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)

Suite No. 4, “Scènes Pittoresques” .....Jules Massenet (1842-1912)

    Marche

    Air de Ballet

    Angelus

    Fête Bohême

## **Intermission**

Intermezzo from Cavalleria Rusticana.....Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945)

The Firebird Suite, 1919 version .....Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

    Introduction

    L’oiseau de feu et sa danse

    Variation de l’oiseau de feu

    Ronde des princesses

    Danse infernale de roi Katschei

    Berceuse

    Finale

## PERSONNEL

### CONDUCTOR

Bethany Pflueger

### VIOLIN I

Hong-Yi Hon\*

Ilana Amos

Alex Birkhold

Curtis Horton

Deanna Kitamura

Kristen Lee

Frank Mori

Corinne Newbegin

David Ruest

Joy Sinclair

Mary Yang

Jane Yu

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Reiko Goto

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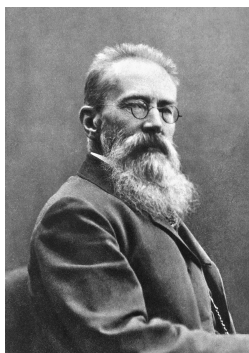
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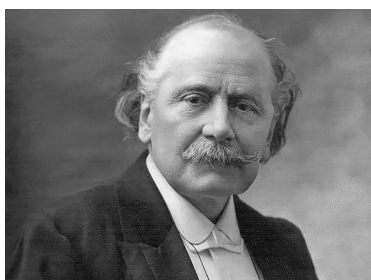
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## PROGRAM NOTES – PCO CONCERT, NOVEMBER 10, 2023



**Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov** was a Russian composer, one of several in the late 1800s who created a distinctly national style of classical music. He is renowned as a master of orchestration, and best known today for his symphonic suite *Scheherazade* and the insanely virtuosic miniature, *Flight of the Bumblebee*. He became a renowned teacher at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory, all the while maintaining an active position in the Russian navy. He wrote several operas, and although not performed much today, orchestral highlights are frequently heard on the concert stage. *Procession of the Nobles* is an extract from his opera *Mlada*, a story of Russian legend of evil spirits, and set in an imaginary kingdom. In the opera, the music accompanies first a festival of tradespeople and then a march with rousing brass to accompany the arrival of the nobles. It's a great example of Rimsky-Korsakov's mastery of colorful orchestration.

*Tales of Hoffman* is an 'opera fantastique' by **Jacques Offenbach**, a French composer, cellist and impresario of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote almost 100 operettas, and influenced later composers such as Arthur Sullivan and Johann Strauss, Jr. He was famous all over Europe, and the United States, and briefly lived in England during a time of intense French nationalism when his German birth made him suspect. *Hoffman* is a tale of the supernatural, love, disguises, and intrigue, set in a Venetian palace. The *Intermezzo* and *Barcarolle* are orchestral interludes between acts in the opera. A barcarolle is originally a gondolier's song, and in this music we hear the rocking rhythm of travel along a narrow canal in Venice.



Like Offenbach, **Jules Massenet** was a French composer of the later 1800s, and like him, is best known for his operas. He studied at the Paris Conservatoire, was awarded the Prix de Rome, and eventually became a professor there. Many music lovers will recognize his gorgeous *Méditation* for violin and orchestra from his opera *Thais*. His over forty stage works were popular in their day, but musical tastes overtook him, and by the time of his passing in 1912, his music was considered old-fashioned.

*Scènes Pittoresques* is Massenet's fourth orchestral suite from a series of seven; each one depicts a scene in a different landscape. It opens with a march, followed by an Air de Ballet featuring a prominent cello solo. The tolling of Angelus bell (part of Catholic liturgy) is represented by the French horn, and the suite ends with a wild Bohemian festival.

Like Offenbach and Massenet, **Pietro Mascagni** was well-known for his operas. While he wrote fifteen in all, his first, *Cavalleria Rusticana* was a sensational hit, ushering in the verismo ("realistic") movement in Italian opera. It was premiered in Rome in 1890, and was soon performed all over Italy; the 26-year old became an opera rock star virtually overnight. Because it so overshadowed his other compositions, Mascagni has the somewhat underserved reputation as a one-hit wonder. It is frequently performed on the same program as another short opera, *Pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo.



Set in Sicily, *Cavalleria Rusticana* (rustic chivalry) is far from chivalrous, instead depicting a tangled story of love and revenge. The soaring *Intermezzo* is an orchestral interlude played while a town square lies quiet after villagers have entered the church, and is a contemplation of the events of the story so far.



**Igor Stravinsky** is one of the icons of 20<sup>th</sup> century classical music. He studied in St Petersburg, under Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, the first composer on tonight's program. His teacher's influence of Russian orchestral style and orchestration can be heard especially in his early works. Stravinsky made his mark with three great early ballets, commissioned by the Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev, for his Ballets Russe for performance in Paris.

*The Firebird* (1910) was so successful that Stravinsky quickly had commissions for more ballets, resulting in *Petrushka* (1911), and *The Rite of Spring* (1913). The famous near-riot at the premiere of the *Rite* brought him international fame. Parisian audiences were deeply divided between conservative styles and the modernists': Stravinsky's scores and Diaghilev's choreography.

All three early ballets have become staples of the classical repertoire, overcoming any resistance from early 20<sup>th</sup> century audiences to the modernist musical world that Stravinsky introduced. These were written in a style influenced by Russian folk music and folklore from his homeland. Besides Diaghilev, another influence was the rock star of the Ballets Russe, Michel Fokine, who was tired of the deep traditions in classical ballet (like *Swan Lake*). Between them, they created a revolution in music and dance through these three great ballets.

*The Firebird* is sometimes performed as a ballet, but in a concert setting we usually hear one of the suites drawn from the ballet music. Stravinsky features leitmotifs (themes) to distinguish the mortals and supernatural beings in this fairy tale, and brings complicated rhythms rarely seen until that time. In this story, Prince Ivan has chased the magical Firebird in the garden of the immortal king Koschei, capturing one of her enchanted feathers. Thirteen princesses enter the garden and Ivan falls in love with one of them, performing a short dance. Angered, Koschei turns Ivan to stone, but not before he summons the Firebird with the feather and she makes Koschei and the princesses do an 'Infernal Dance' before they all fall asleep from exhaustion (*Berceuse*). Ivan steals then destroys the egg that contains the Koschei's soul, killing him and freeing the king's subjects. In the Finale, there is great rejoicing in newfound freedom.

*The Firebird* takes the audience through a kaleidoscope of sound worlds, from serene, to agitated, to violent, to a lullaby, and finally to triumph. Stravinsky uses a large orchestra to highlight all these musical effects. Deservedly, this is one of the most beloved works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Program notes by Stephen Unwin, PCO Board member

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