Thursday, November 8, 8pm | THE CARMINE A. AND BETH V. MARTIGNETTI CONCERT
Friday, November 9, 1:30pm | THE WALTER PISTON SOCIETY CONCERT
Saturday, November 10, 8pm | THE CASTY FAMILY CONCERT
Tuesday, November 13, 8pm

ANDRIS NELSONS conducting

ANDRIS DZENİTIS “MĀRA” FOR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA (2018)
(AMERICAN PREMIERE; CO-COMMISSIONED BY THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, ANDRIS
NELSONS, MUSIC DIRECTOR, THROUGH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE NEW WORKS FUND ESTABLISHED BY THE
MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL, A STATE AGENCY)
(PERFORMED TO MARK THE CENTENNIAL OF LATVIAN INDEPENDENCE)

SHOSTAKOVICH SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN F MINOR, OPUS 10
Allegretto
Allegro
Lento
Allegro molto

Please note that these performances of Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 1 are being recorded for future release as part of Andris Nelsons and the BSO’s complete Shostakovich symphony cycle on Deutsche Grammophon. Your cooperation in keeping noise in Symphony Hall at a minimum is sincerely appreciated.

[INTERMISSION]

TCHAIKOVSKY “THE NUTCRACKER,” OPUS 71: ACT II
Scene: The Kingdom of Sweets
Scene: Clara and the Prince
Divertissement
Chocolate (Spanish Dance)
Coffee (Arabian Dance)
Tea (Chinese Dance)
Trepak
Dance of the Reed Flutes
The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe and her Children
Waltz of the Flowers
Pas de deux
Dance of the Prince and the Sugar-Plum Fairy
Variation I: Tarantella
Variation II: Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy
Coda
Final Waltz and Apotheosis

FRIDAY AFTERNOON’S PERFORMANCE OF SHOSTAKOVICH’S SYMPHONY NO. 1 IS SUPPORTED BY A GIFT FROM NANCY
HERNDON.
SATURDAY EVENING’S PERFORMANCE OF SHOSTAKOVICH’S SYMPHONY NO. 1 IS SUPPORTED BY A GIFT FROM LLOYD
AXELROD, M.D.

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ARE PROUD TO SPONSOR THE BSO’S 2018-19 SEASON.
FRIDAY-AFTERNOON CONCERT SERIES SPONSORED BY THE BROOKE FAMILY
The evening concerts will end about 10:10, the afternoon concert about 3:40.
Concertmaster Malcolm Lowe performs on a Stradivarius violin, known as the “Lafont,” generously donated to the
Boston Symphony Orchestra by the O’Block Family.
First associate concertmaster Tamara Smirnova performs on a 1754 J.B. Guadagnini violin, the “ex-Zazofsky,” and
James Cooke performs on a 1778 Nicolò Gagliano violin, both generously donated to the orchestra by Michael L.
Nieland, M.D., in loving memory of Mischa Nieland, a member of the cello section from 1943 to 1988.
Steinway & Sons Pianos, selected exclusively for Symphony Hall.
The BSO’s Steinway & Sons pianos were purchased through a generous gift from Gabriella and Leo Beranek.
The program books for the Friday series are given in loving memory of Mrs. Hugh Bancroft by her daughters, the late Mrs. A. Werk Cook and the late Mrs. William C. Cox.
Special thanks to Fairmont Copley Plaza, Delta Air Lines, and Commonwealth Worldwide Executive Transportation.
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In consideration of the performers and those around you, please turn off all electronic equipment during the performance, including tablets, cellular phones, pagers, watch alarms, messaging devices of any kind, anything that emits an audible signal, and anything that glows. Thank you for your cooperation.
Please note that the use of audio or video recording devices, or taking pictures of the artists—whether photographs or videos—is prohibited during concerts.

A Message from Andris Nelsons
Very Dear Friends
As we begin our fifth season of making music together, I could not be happier about the sense of family that continues to deepen the connections between the BSO, our devoted audience, and myself. This shared musical journey is so meaningful to all of us, and so important for bringing our entire community together, including not just our devoted subscribers, but so many new concertgoers we’re pleased to welcome to Symphony Hall.
The 2018-19 season has so much to look forward to, for example, Shostakovich’s first and last symphonies as part of our recording project with Deutsche Grammophon, concert performances of Puccini’s beautiful one-act opera Suor Angelica, Bruckner’s unfinished Symphony No. 9 as part of our ongoing exploration of his symphonies, all-Beethoven and all-Strauss programs, Bach’s Christmas Oratorio for our second “Leipzig Week in Boston,” and several commissioned works. These include the world premiere of Sebastian Currier’s Aether for violin and orchestra, co-commissioned by the BSO and Gewandhausorchester Leipzig as part of our BSO/GHO Alliance, and the American premieres of two other BSO commissions, Mark-Anthony Turnage’s Remembrances and Latvian composer Andris Dzenitis’ Māra. Latvian composer Maija Einfelde’s Lux aeterna this month and Dzenitis’ Māra in November are being performed to mark the 100th anniversary of Latvian independence.
We are also very happy to have three members of our BSO family conduct subscription programs in 2018-19—Associate Conductor Ken-David Masur in October, Artistic Partner Thomas Adès in March, and Youth and Family Concerts Conductor Thomas Wilkins also in March—and to working with so many wonderful guest artists in what promises to be such an exciting season.
Thank you as always for your great devotion and support, and for being here tonight. We look forward to seeing you at many more concerts this season.
With warm wishes,
Andris Nelsons

The Program in Brief...
The composer Andris Dzenitis, born the same year, 1978, as his Latvian compatriot Andris Nelsons, wrote his new orchestral score Māra on commission for the BSO and the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig. In part commissioned to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Latvian independence, the work was premiered in Leipzig under Andris Nelsons’ direction. These are its first American performances. The single-movement piece is an exploration of Latvian identity through the symbolism of the region’s mythology; “Māra” is, according to the composer, the embodiment of the physical world and the “patroness of the visible, audible, tangible world.” Protean energy, intricate instrumental gestures, and rich, detailed orchestral colors characterize Dzenitis’ piece.
The remainder of the program offers works from late and early (very early!) in their respective composers’ careers. Following intermission, Andris Nelsons leads the complete second act of Tchaikovsky’s perennially popular ballet The Nutcracker. Tchaikovsky himself, however, was never aware of its popularity, since his three great ballets—Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, and The Nutcracker, the latter completed just the year before his death—met only failure or limited success during his lifetime. In the ballet’s scenario, a young girl, Clara, saves the life of a Nutcracker given to her as a Christmas gift, whereupon the Nutcracker is transformed into a handsome prince who takes her on a journey to his magical, confection-themed kingdom. Act I of the ballet is devoted to the story proper, whereas Act II concerns itself with the visit to the Prince’s kingdom and inventively varied musical depictions of its inhabitants—making it perfect for performance in the concert hall, and offering some of Tchaikovsky’s most familiar and best-loved music.
At the center of the program is Dmitri Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 1, written by the teenaged composer as a
Music, the Ultimate Renewable Energy
by Gerald Elias

Former BSO violinist Gerald Elias, who continues to perform with the orchestra at Tanglewood and on tour, reflects on the BSO’s September 2018 tour to London, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, Lucerne, Paris, and Amsterdam.

There’s ample occasion for reflection amidst the classic “hurry up and wait” mode of international concert tours. Not onstage, of course, when it’s essential to remain focused on the task at hand, but certainly while in transit from one concert hall to the next. On the recent nineteen-day BSO tour to Europe there was one long train trip of 355 miles, plus no fewer than twenty bus rides for another 547, and six plane flights totaling 8,455 more. Not to mention waiting in airports and train stations for another twenty hours, more or less. All in all, plenty of time for mulling.

On one such excursion a window seat on the upper level of our bus from Hamburg to Berlin provided an ideal observation point to view the rolling farmland of central Germany. What better setting than such bucolic monotony to allow one’s mind to wander mindlessly? It lulled one into the sense that all was right with the world. Yet we know very well that behind the tranquil façade, we live in a turbulent world. A changing climate is wreaking havoc on every continent, and the threat of terrorism—the result of geopolitical instability—is a constant, dark presence. What is our role? I wondered. What is the role of music and musicians in all this turmoil?

Flanking the road, in the agriculturally unworkable strip of land between freeway and field, mile after mile of recently installed solar panel arrays caught my attention. Farther off, battalions of monumental windmills, so imposing they would have given Don Quixote pause, dotted the horizon. All this new technology to create renewable energy gave me a starting point to wonder how many gallons of fuel we’d consumed on all those trains, planes, and buses rumbling under our feet. From there, my imagination took flight, thinking about what potential untapped sources of energy humanity has not yet considered. Over the millennia, we’ve tried tallow, beeswax, olive oil, coal, wood, whales, gas, fossil fuel oil, and nuclear combustion.

And let us not forget the energy produced by human muscles. A case in point: During our stay in Paris, the sunny Sunday morning of September 16 had a festive atmosphere, the day having been declared car-free in the central city as part of that city’s commitment to the 2016 international climate change agreement that bears its name. As a result, the Champs-Élysées, usually congested with bumper-to-bumper traffic, was a pedestrian mall. Instead of engines revving and horns honking, all you heard was the cordial buzz of people talking! The only “motorized” vehicles were human-powered bicycles and scooters.

What progress we’ve made in the quest for efficient energy! Mozart might have penned the last notes of his Requiem under the dim rays of an oil lamp, the big technological breakthrough from candles. Beethoven, tucked away in the cellar of his brother’s house when Vienna was bombarded by Napoleon, might have had a gas lamp at his disposal to enable him to compose the *Eroica* Symphony. In Brahms’s last years, when he recorded the Hungarian Dance in G minor on a wax cylinder, he might have marveled at an incandescent light bulb hanging over his piano keyboard. 20th- and 21st-century composers have had it easy being able to see what they were writing.

Now, given the urgency of reckoning with climate change, we’ve seen the rapid development of safely renewable sources of energy: solar, wind, and geothermal. But as our fuel-efficient bus hummed along the autobahn, it dawned on me that up to this very day, there has been a powerful source of renewable energy that has been providing light and warmth without interruption for all these centuries, but which has gone almost unrecognized: *Music!* Scientifically, we’re told the energy in sound waves is far weaker than other forms of energy. But when you consider the effect of the complex jumble of the sound waves we call music on the human psyche, from the individual level all the way up to the societal, it’s hard to imagine an energy source more powerful, more

Music!

Robert Kirzinger (Dzeniūtis)/Marc Mandel
transformation, and more sustaining. That power becomes even more acute when performing in a Stradivari of a concert hall. In a sense, the more perfect the acoustics, the more “fuel efficient” the music, providing the listener literally more bang for the buck. That’s one reason it was such a pleasure to perform in three of the world’s four greatest concert halls on the tour: Berlin’s Philharmonie, Vienna’s Musikverein, and Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw. (The fourth, if you’re wondering, is where you’re sitting right now.) The experience of playing— and listening to—a great orchestra led by a great conductor performing great music in a great concert hall is transformative, and the energy from that experience, stored in the listener’s mental batteries, radiates outward in all directions.

“In all directions” refers to time as well as space. When musicians walk onstage for a concert on an international tour, they not only represent our orchestra and the music, they become de facto ambassadors of our city and country. It’s quite a bit different from a business person going to an international conference, because orchestras have such a public face, seen and heard every night by thousands of different people representing all walks of life. While on tour, the musicians’ diplomatic role often extends outward from the concert hall. Musicians have friends in other countries, meet with colleagues in other orchestras, or give master classes at conservatories from city to city. The energy of musical connections is passed from generation to generation to every corner of the earth.

For all that these international tours have to commend them—the art and architecture, the music, the culture, the history, the food, the gardens, the museums, even the shopping—for me the most important thing is the one-on-one, the connections we make with people and not just places. That—and playing great music—is the most valuable export we can provide in our roles as international representatives.

I’d bet many of my colleagues would agree that, as musicians, if there is anything more gratifying and fulfilling than playing Beethoven in the Concertgebouw it’s seeing former students thrive and succeed. Why? When you consider the years of intensive, often grueling lessons that are part and parcel of helping students achieve their musical aspirations; of being part parent, part counselor, sometimes part therapist to your student; helping them find suitable instruments to play on, summer programs to participate in, scholarships to audition for, colleges to apply to, observing them wend their way through life—it’s almost like seeing your own child grow up. When the orchestra was in Lucerne, I had that very opportunity to witness the fruits of my labors as a teacher, of passing the torch to my students.

One of my former Utah students, Celeste Carruth, currently living in Geneva, whom I had seen only once since she went off to college about ten years ago, visited me in Lucerne for a splendidly productive lesson of Mozart, Brahms, and Prokofiev. But the other half of Celeste’s story is the reason she’s in Geneva: after earning her Ph.D. in physics at Berkeley, she’s doing antihydrogen research at the CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research particle accelerator. (Don’t ask me to explain what antihydrogen is, but it must be quite a powerful source of energy because NASA estimates it costs $92 trillion to produce a gram of the stuff.) See what practicing your scales can do?

Back to Paris. As I strolled along the sunny Champs-Élysées, soaking up the car-free celebratory atmosphere, I was suddenly confronted by the dark shadow of our troubled times. A block from the Arc de Triomphe, a phalanx of police appeared out of nowhere. They quickly cordoned off a wide perimeter around the George V café, politely but firmly ordering pedestrians to detour around the block. I later learned that there had been a bomb scare or threat—I’m not sure which—that fortunately turned out to be a false alarm.

How will we deal with today’s challenges? The two main works of the Boston Symphony tour were the Mahler Symphony No. 3, which ends in joy and triumph, and the Shostakovich Symphony No. 4, which ends in fear and despair. In a way, that dichotomy is a reflection of Paris on September 16 and, more broadly, the world we currently live in. It’s up to all of us to determine which ending we want to hear. Humanity will be able to draw upon music as a vital source of renewable energy as long as there are musicians to transform black dots written on a piece of paper into the sound waves of music. As the Boston Symphony Orchestra once again demonstrated, music is a source of energy that can light up the world.

GERALD ELIAS, formerly a BSO violinist and associate concertmaster of the Utah Symphony, continues to perform with the BSO at Tanglewood and on tour. Music director since 2004 of the Vivaldi by Candlelight chamber orchestra series in Salt Lake City and author of the six-part Daniel Jacobus mystery series (including two audio books), he recently completed his first nonfiction work, “Symphonies & Scorpions,” which relives via stories and photos the BSO’s history-making 1979 concert tour to China and its return in 2014. An expanded version of a BSO essay from last season, “War & Peace. And Music,” was recently awarded first prize in creative nonfiction by the Utah Division of Arts and Museums.

Andris Dzenitis
“Māra,” for symphony orchestra (2018)
ANDRIS DZENĪTIS was born in Riga, Latvia, on January 23, 1978, and now divides his time between Riga and
rural northeast Latvia. His “Māra” was commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Gewandhausorchester Leipzig at the request of Andris Nelsons, to whom the score is dedicated, to celebrate the historic partnership between the two orchestras initiated in early 2018. The world and country premieres of the piece also anticipate the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Latvia in November 2018. Andris Nelsons and the Gewandhausorchester gave the first performance of “Māra” on October 4, 2018, in Leipzig, immediately thereafter taking the piece on tour to Frankfurt, London, Stockholm, Riga and Liepaja in Latvia, and Mannheim and Dortmund, Germany. These are the American premiere performances, and the first by the BSO of any music by Andris Dzenitis.

THE SCORE OF “MĀRA” calls for three flutes (third doubling piccolo), three oboes, three clarinets (third doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, two trombones and bass trombone, tuba, percussion (four players: I. timpani, tam-tam, wind chimes, tambourine; II. crotales, glockenspiel, marimba, tam-tam; III. bass drum, suspended cymbals, temple blocks, whip, tom-toms, tambourine, tubular bells, vibraphone, crotales; IV. snare drum, glockenspiel, vibraphone, bass drum, whip, temple blocks, suspended cymbals), harp, and strings. “Māra” is about eighteen minutes long.

Performed to mark the 100th anniversary of Latvian independence and composed at the request of Andris Dzenitis’s compatriot Andris Nelsons, Māra is a conscientious, detailed musical response to what it means to be Latvian. Māra is one of two Latvian works being performed here this fall to mark this important milestone in Latvia’s history. (The other was Maija Einfelde’s Lux aeterna, performed here last month by the Tanglewood Festival Chorus with James Burton conducting.)

Latvians (sometimes called Letts) have a unique language and can readily trace their cultural identity back some five millennia. Through the strength of the language and through ethnic traditions, they have been able to maintain cultural cohesiveness through centuries of political domination by various other powers, including Sweden and Poland. The region was under Russian rule from 1795 until 1917, when the chaos created by the Bolshevik Revolution triggered Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all to declare independence. Latvia became a political football for Germany and the Soviet Union during World War II, and was made a Soviet Republic in 1944, regaining its independence in 1991 following the fall of the Soviet Union. In 2004 Latvia joined both NATO and the European Union. Lutheranism and its music have blended with Russian orthodox church music to influence the country’s indigenous choral traditions, and its music education system is on par with any in Europe. The national conservatory in Riga, established in 1919, is named for its founder, Jāzeps Vītols (1863-1948), a composer and one of the country’s most important musical figures.

Among Andris Dzenitis’s earliest memories are those of his sister playing violin, which he says he can remember “from the moment of my birth.” He began his formal musical training as a pianist from an early age and soon began to study the rudiments of composing. His most important early teacher was Pe`teris Vasks (b.1946), a world-renowned figure in contemporary music, with whom he studied at the Emils Dārziš Music School, the preparatory school for the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. In his university years he studied with Kurt Schwertsik at the Vienna University of Music and Theatre, with Pe`teris Plakidis at the Latvian Academy, and with Osvaldas Balakauskas at the Lithuanian Academy of Music, where he received his master’s degree. He has also participated in master classes with such composers as Magnus Lindberg, Bent Sørensen, and Pär Lindgren. Dzenitis has himself taught at several Latvian schools, as well as doing such other work as program administration for Latvian Radio and writing about music for journals and newspapers.

Dzenitis’s music has been performed worldwide at such events as the International Society of Contemporary Music World Music Days in Hong Kong and the Venice Biennale, both in 2007, at the Baltic Breezes Over Malaysia festival in 1996 (when he was still a teenager), and at festivals including Warsaw Autumn, GogolFest in the Ukraine, and various others throughout Europe. In addition to the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, performers have included the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Belgian National Symphony Orchestra, German Radio Philharmonic Saarbrücken–Kaiserslautern, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble Modern, Orquesta Filarmónica de Gran Canaria, the Latvian Radio Choir, and many others. Māra is the first of his orchestral works to be performed in the U.S.

Dzenitis is a prolific composer; prior to Māra are some two dozen orchestral pieces, including concertos for cello, clarinet, piano, horn, and saxophone plus a number of purely symphonic works. His chamber music catalog is equally expansive, encompassing solo works, three string quartets, and several large chamber-ensemble pieces, such as his Latvian Cookbook, composed for the important Germany-based group Ensemble Modern. Although not himself a trained singer, he has—being Latvian and in the midst of its ubiquitous choral tradition—written many works for chorus and for solo voice, among them two operas: the chamber opera Books of Silence, based on a text by Oscar Milosz, and the full-scale two-act opera Dauka, which was premiered to open the Latvian National Opera season in September 2012. Dauka is one of several Dzenitis works to be nominated for Latvia’s highest musical
honor, the Great Music Prize, which he won twice, for his chorus and orchestra piece *Fides.Spes.Caritas* and for his saxophone concerto *E(GO)*.

In parallel with his classical training, Dzenātis has also endeavored to explore other genres of music, including pop, jazz, and “non-commercial” electronic music—which is to say, not dance music. His Woodpecker Project, which originally involved electronics with instruments and voice, was a way of re-entering the performance realm. This is something that composers who don’t perform as part of their careers are frequently compelled to do, to experience the tactility of sound and alleviate the isolation and abstraction of writing notes on a page (whether paper or electronic). Recently Dzenātis has planned a new version of the project with only “live” musicians—guitars, saxophones, electronic keyboards, percussion. Another important aspect of his career has been his work in film, most recently the feature films *Exiled* (2015), directed by Davis Simanis, Jr., and Aik Karapetian’s psychological thriller *Firstborn* (2017).

Apart from his *Latvian Cookbook*, which “expressed...the topic of Latvian identity through recipes,” Dzenātis’s *Māra* is his most thoroughgoing musical exploration of being Latvian, as is fitting for a work written in part to celebrate the centenary of the Republic. As the composer details in his own note on the piece (see page 36), he based its content on ancient Latvian mythology, incorporating musical “translations” (not in every case a straightforward proposal) of rune-like graphic symbols (see page 37). The energy and mystery of these ideas and their musical manifestation has something in common with the modernist-archaic power of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, especially in *Māra*’s unique harmonic language and the detailed intricacy of Dzenātis’s orchestral writing. *Māra* is musically “about” gestures, complex sonic objects presented almost like episodes in an architectural frieze retelling some epic event. The first of these is a burst of sound preceding a sustained, fading, and subtly colored harmony. The basic event occurs several times, evolving and growing in intensity, invigorated by percussion patterns and changes in instrumentation. This gives way to a passage characterized by woodwinds repeating pitches in stuttering rhythms. A perpetual motion pattern appearing first in strings, then shared among the three flutes, is overwhelmed by a surge of fragmented orchestral melody. Upper strings instigate a pulsed ostinato, over which several other layers of activity occur at various speeds—slow melodic figures in brass and lower strings, flickering scales in high woodwinds. This grows to a sustained, shining climax, which subsides and rebuilds to a surge of sound. A long coda begins as a detailed mosaic, flashes of winds or percussion over sustained string harmonies. From this emerges a clarinet solo, first standard B-flat, then B-flat bass clarinet, in a remarkable closing soliloquy that eventually bursts like a bubble.

Robert Kirzinger
Composer/annotator ROBERT KIRZINGER is the BSO’s Associate Director of Program Publications.

Andris Dzenātis on “Māra”
The olden times of the Latvian folk in the centuries prior to the advent of Christianity are fraught with mystery. No written records of the archaic Latvian folk wisdom survive, but the holy ritual sites, their position, signs, and symbols speak and tell stories without words. We learn about the ancient daily life, annual customs, history, cosmology, philosophy, and sacred rituals from the verbal tradition: folk songs, proverbs, legends, and fairy-tales surviving since ancient times to the modern day. Latvian jewelry, belts, clothing, crockery, everyday objects, even the façades and roofs of houses are often decorated with the signs of the guardians, protectors, helpers pertaining to different aspects of life, embodiments of the features that a person wants to foster or overcome over the path of life. The triad is central to the archaic Latvian mythology: the highest, immaterial power, the God, and two of its manifestations in the worldly realm—Laima, who is in charge of a person’s fate and thread of life, and Māra, the patroness of the entire physical, visible, audible, tangible world, and at the same time its embodiment. Māra manifests in different ways. We encounter her in every step we take, whenever we see, hear, smell, touch, or feel. She is in charge of birth and death, of the matter and substance of the world, space, both the tangible and the evanescent. Air and water. Dewy meadows and mold. A mystery. The energy that comes into being and leads to its own destruction. The beginning and the end.

In the composition I reflect on the manifestations of Māra both in a sacral and mythological, and in a graphic sense: by tracing different meanders and line segments characteristic of Māra symbolic signs in the facture and sounds, sometimes practically visible in the score, just like the signs that have adorned the Latvian daily life since ancient times. I want to use sound to let the power of Latvian mythological signs reach every corner no matter where the piece will be performed. This is the musical encoding of my personal understanding of what it means to be Latvian. The work is dedicated to my coeval, the great conductor Andris Nelsons, and it is commissioned by the Leipzig Gewandhausorchester and Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Andris Dzenātis
What Shostakovich's modest description fails to convey, however, is the symphony's sheer theatrical bravado, its impetuosity and eclecticism. Around the time of the premiere, Shostakovich wrote the following description of the symphony, stressing its work, he tossed off the fin...Several months went by before he was in "the right mood," but once he got down to should be, although perhaps it would be better to call it a symphony...fellow pianist Lev Oborin, "In general I am satisfied with the symphony. Not bad. A symphony like...set to work in the autumn of 1924. By mid...in Leningrad. It isn't surprising, then, that Shostakovich began...two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, tromba contralta, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, chimes, piano, and strings. (The tromba contralta has been described as a "valved trombone in trumpet form...sounding an octave below the natural trumpet in F...devised and first introduced by Rimsky-Korsakov.") The pianist in these performances is Vytas Baksys.

Few teenagers write symphonies. Even fewer write symphonies that immediately enter the standard repertoire. But that's what Dmitri Shostakovich did, at the tender age of nineteen. The triumphant Leningrad premiere of his manic, daring Symphony No. 1 on May 12, 1926, established him as a major new talent, nothing less than the great white hope of Soviet music—then in its infancy. After deafening waves of applause from the packed hall, the orchestra repeated the second movement as an encore. The Communist Party newspaper Leningrad Pravda called the symphony “a joyful surprise,” and the conductor Malko (Shostakovich’s conducting professor at Leningrad Conservatory) wrote in his diary: “I feel as though we have started a new page in the history of symphonic music.” When composer Alban Berg heard the first Viennese performance soon afterwards, he wrote Shostakovich a fan letter: “Dear Mr. Shostakovich, hearing your symphony gave me immense delight. It was amazing, especially the first movement! It sounded quite splendid, and I offer you my sincerest congratulations. Yours, Berg.” For Shostakovich, a sickly pianist who had initially been denied admission to the composition course at the Conservatory, the symphony’s unprecedented success came as a godsend. It restored his confidence, and gave him and his struggling family hope for the future in what were very difficult times following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the death of Shostakovich’s father. “My symphony went splendidly yesterday,” he wrote to a friend, continuing: 

You could feel the contact between the author, conductor, orchestra, and audience. The audience applauded a lot, and I took five bows. There was a real spirit of elan. So now my head is just spinning; from the symphony, and from the performance (Malko conducted magnificently), and the success, and from all of it together. It was fantastic. Words cannot express just how fantastic.

Shostakovich considered the premiere of the First Symphony such a watershed moment in his personal and creative life that every year afterward until his death, he celebrated May 12 with close friends as a “personal holiday.” By the time he started writing the First Symphony, Shostakovich had not produced much that foreshadowed his ability to create such a mature and sophisticated work: a few piano pieces, a piano trio, and three pieces for orchestra, two of them scherzos. His lifelong fondness for galops and scherzos developed early, perhaps stimulated by his work providing piano accompaniment for silent movies—full of antic chase scenes—at the Piccadilly Theater in Leningrad. It isn’t surprising, then, that Shostakovich began with the bubbly second movement scherzo when he set to work in the autumn of 1924. By mid-December he had completed the first three movements, writing to his fellow pianist Lev Oborin, “In general I am satisfied with the symphony. Not bad. A symphony like a symphony should be, although perhaps it would be better to call it a symphony-grotesque.” The final movement gave Shostakovich the most trouble. Several months went by before he was in “the right mood,” but once he got down to work, he tossed off the finale, by turns rousing and tragic, in a week in late April. Around the time of the premiere, Shostakovich wrote the following description of the symphony, stressing its impetuosity and eclecticism.

The first movement begins with a short introduction, then transitions into the main theme, in the character of a humorous march; then follows the second theme in waltz form. The music of the introduction reappears at the end. Composed in sonata form, the second movement (scherzo) has two themes: 1) a main one, impetuous and highly rhythmic and 2) a secondary, contrasting one over a continuous accompaniment of tremolo strings. The third movement (Andante) develops a three-part structure based on two contrasting themes (a lyrical and contemplative one, and a solemn, funereal one). The fourth movement follows without pause. A slow introduction leads into the impetuous, fast main theme. The second theme is calm and transparent. Constructed on a slow version of the main theme, the conclusion unfolds in lucid instrumentation.

What Shostakovich’s modest description fails to convey, however, is the symphony’s sheer theatrical bravado, its
high jinks, wit, and arresting mood changes. Juggling different genres (galop, waltz, funeral march, brass fanfares, folk song, puppet show) with disarming ease, this youthful, ebullient work startles by its ability to retain formal and thematic unity amidst such a wealth of disparate materials.

The first movement opens with a jocular phrase played by muted solo trumpet, then answered by solo bassoon; together they sound like the prelude to a puppet show and bear a strong resemblance to moments from Stravinsky’s ballet Petrushka. This figure returns at strategic moments throughout the movement, as if calling us back to attention. The main theme that follows, a march, propels us into a world of fantastic satire, set in the tonic key of F minor. For the second theme in the sonata-form structure, Shostakovich offers a languid, delicate waltz, a ballerina dancing on a music box. At the climax of the development section, the two themes merge to create an unexpected sonic impression of threatening force. Here Shostakovich already displays the amazing gift for transforming thematic material that would become one of the most notable features of his later symphonies.

In the fast second movement, Shostakovich again contrasts two equally brilliant themes: a frantic, grotesque galop and a folksy, stately lullaby. In the galop, the piano makes a dramatic entrance, tossing off cascading scales that evoke the world of the circus or dance hall. After the two themes unite in ecstatic counterpoint, the movement ends with a short final section (codetta) that contains another eccentric surprise. The piano strikes three hammer-like chords in A minor, the two themes return for a curtain call, and the snare drum quietly ends the show.

Some critics see the influence of Alexander Scriabin in the meditative, lyrical third movement, so different in character from the symphony’s other three. But here, too, the composer’s sense of drama, his shrewd use of solo passages (from the strings, especially), and repetition of key motifs cast a powerful spell, by turns intimate and public. Introduced by the plaintive oboe, the main theme, tragic and pathetic, yields to a funeral march that some writers (without clear proof) have claimed was intended as a tribute to the death of Vladimir Ilych Lenin in 1924. In the Lento’s final measures, the snare drum rumbles quietly—and then rises to full volume in the opening measures of the finale, which follows without a break. By turns tempestuous and contemplative, the last movement unfolds as a titanic struggle between the forces of darkness (motifs of fate in the timpani, soulful passages for solo cello) and light (trumpet calls, the piano’s bright voice). An obsessively repeated three-note motif, first ascending and then descending, fluctuates and transforms itself, rising from doubt into the triumphant conclusion, where F minor finally yields (after a stubborn struggle) to F major in a decisive affirmation of optimism and faith in the future—of both the composer and his turbulent world. Shostakovich dedicated his Symphony No. 1 to his Moscow composer friend Mikhail Vladimirovich Kvadri (1897-1929). But soon after Josef Stalin gained supreme power in the USSR in 1928, Kvadri was arrested and executed for unspecified political “crimes.” Most subsequent Soviet printings of the score removed the dedication to this “enemy of the people”—a harbinger of things to come.

Harlow Robinson

HARLOW ROBINSON is an author, lecturer, and Matthews Distinguished University Professor Emeritus of History at Northeastern University. The author of “Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography” and “Russians in Hollywood, Hollywood’s Russians,” he is a frequent annotator and lecturer for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Lincoln Center, Metropolitan Opera Guild, and Aspen Music Festival.

THE AMERICAN PREMIERE OF SHOSTAKOVICH’S SYMPHONY NO. 1 took place in Philadelphia on November 2, 1928, with Leopold Stokowski conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. THE FIRST BSO PERFORMANCES OF SHOSTAKOVICH’S SYMPHONY NO. 1 were led by Richard Burgin in Cambridge, then Boston, in November 1935, subsequent BSO performances being led by Burgin, Nikolai Malko (who had conducted the 1926 premiere in Leningrad, and led it here in January 1940), Serge Koussevitzky, Burgin, Erich Leinsdorf, Karel Ancerl, Sergiu Comissiona, Kurt Masur, Catherine Comet, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, Masur again (November/December 2003), and Ingo Metzmacher (July 11, 2004).
Tchaikovsky’s works are among the imperishable classics of the ballet repertory. In his own lifetime, though, his success as a ballet composer was distinctly limited, though this did not dissuade him from trying again. At the time Tchaikovsky began writing for the dance, the term “ballet music” was often used in a pejorative sense, since most composers of ballet music officially connected to ballet companies were virtually required to be musical nonentities, churning out yards of tinkly, rhythmic, square, undistinguished stuff for the dancing masters to decorate with movement. Composers who attempted to do something more substantial in their ballet scores—like Delibes in Sylvia—were criticized for being “too symphonic.” Tchaikovsky loved the ballet music of Delibes (1836-1891), finding it a strong encouragement to his own ballets, in which he created a full-scale dance-drama combining solos, ensembles, dramatic (danced) narrative, and set pieces such as characteristic dances, all in a cohesive structure. As a result, every one of his major ballets—Swan Lake (1875-76), Sleeping Beauty (1888-89), and The Nutcracker (1891-92)—was either an outright failure or, at best, a limited success in its first production. He did not live to see even the beginnings of their worldwide success.

Tchaikovsky himself regarded The Nutcracker as less significant than his two earlier ballets, largely because the scenario foisted on him lacked the kind of consistent dramatic story line he preferred. The basic plot came from E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose sometimes macabre tales could be expected to provide exactly the proper grist for Tchaikovsky’s mill. But in the scenario proposed by the choreographer Petipa, the plot was drastically simplified, confining the real story (with its “symphonic” music) to Act I. From a theatrical point of view, Act II is anticlimactic—though it is just the opposite in a concert performance, where the attention is on the music alone. The first act, set in a German home on Christmas Eve, is a charming fantasy of a Christmas present—a toy nutcracker—that comes to life and leads the other toys in battle against the Mouse King and his army. When Clara, to whom the Nutcracker has been given, saves the Nutcracker’s life in the climactic battle by throwing her slipper at the Mouse King and killing him, the grotesque Nutcracker turns into a handsome prince and takes Clara on a journey to his magical kingdom, “Confiturenbourg” (what we might call the Big Rock Candy Mountain!).

The Nutcracker Suite (minus the overture) was premiered at the head of the evening’s program. Tchaikovsky wrote to his brother Anatoly, “The staging of both [opera and ballet] was splendid, but that of the ballet even too splendid—one’s eyes grew tired of this luxuriance.” The critics were divided. The St. Petersburg Gazette declared, “A more tedious work was never seen.” But the St. Petersburg News-Sheet proclaimed, “Concerning the music...it is hard to say which number is best, for everything from beginning to end is beautiful, melodious, original, and individual.”

The present performances include all of Act II, i.e., most of the music familiar as the “Nutcracker Suite” (minus the overture) plus the numbers normally heard only in the theater. The curtain rises to show the palace of The Kingdom of Sweets (No. 10, Scene, Andante). A lulling 6/8 theme decorated by swirling harps and later by flute and clarinet scales hints at the elegance of the palace. Soon the Sugar-Plum Fairy appears to welcome the travelers to the delights of her kingdom. Tchaikovsky, while on a visit to Paris, had heard a recently invented keyboard instrument called the “celesta” (for its “heavenly” sound); he knew that it was exactly what he wanted to characterize the delicate otherworldliness of the fairy, and had an instrument secretly shipped to him in Russia, so he might be the first composer to use the new effect. The audience was surely enchanted when the Sugar-Plum Fairy appeared with her suite, accompanied by the shimmering sound of celesta, two harps, and upper strings in harmonics. This music is unthinkable today without the sound of the celesta, but when Tchaikovsky published the score, he allowed for optional substitution of piano, since the newly developed instrument might not be available in some theaters. But he also added an admonition: “The artist who performs this part must be a good pianist.”

No. 11 (Scene, Andante con moto) depicts the reception of the travelers. Clara and the Prince are welcomed by the Fairy, the prince’s sister. Celesta and harp combine with fluttertongued flutes (another new technique; Tchaikovsky added a footnote to the score to explain how the flutists were to produce the effect) and a sinuous clarinet. In a faster tempo (Moderato), twelve pages lead Clara and the Prince forward to tell their tale. In an Allegro agitato (developed...
from themes first heard in Act I), the Prince mimes the story of his fight with the Mouse King and reveals how Clara saved his life. In stately grandeur the court hails Clara for her bravery (full orchestra). At a sign from the Fairy (oboes and clarinets, then horns and trombones added) a festive table is prepared, and the guests are entertained with a divertissement.

No. 12, the Divertissement, is built up of a series of short and very diverse characteristic dances representing particular goodies from the Kingdom of Sweets or episodes from familiar fairy tales. Petipa’s scenario not only described the character of each dance, but also its length and meter. Tchaikovsky followed his prescriptions quite closely, finding the discipline a stimulation to his powers of invention, which he feared were on the wane.

First comes No. 12a, “Chocolate,” a Spanish dance featuring a difficult trumpet solo and the sound of castanets. For No. 12b, “Coffee,” an Arabian dance, Tchaikovsky borrowed a Georgian folk lullaby from a collection of Ippolitov-Ivanov and arranged it in a brilliantly simple but evocative way with a drone ostinato in violas and cellos and just a hint of tambourine. “Tea” is represented by a Chinese dance (No. 12c) with brilliantly skirling flute and piccolo over staccato bassoons and plucked strings. It is cut short suddenly, making way for the vigorous Russian dance, “Trepak” (No. 12d), based on a traditional Russian melodic formula (the same figure appears in the finale of his Violin Concerto) that grows in energy and drive to its Prestissimo conclusion. No. 12e, the “Dance of the Mirlitons” (reed pipes), is gently pastoral rather than the “Tempo di polacca” that Petipa requested; the emphasis on woodwinds (especially flutes) in the outer sections is balanced by the brass interlude in the middle. “The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe and her Children” (No. 12f) is derived from a traditional French fairy tale; Tchaikovsky quotes old French tunes probably learned from his much-loved French governess and found in a collection of French children’s songs in the composer’s library. The tune heard at the outset (oboes, clarinets, and bassoons) is “Que t'as de belles filles, Girofle, girofla!” A contrasting 6/8 tune is “Cadet Rouselle.” This is followed by a return to “Que t'as de belles filles” worked up in a faster tempo to bring the Divertissement to an end.

The next number, the Waltz of the Flowers (No. 13), is among the greatest of all symphonic waltzes, and a thorough contradiction to Tchaikovsky’s fears of failing inventive powers. Its evocative opening presents a hint of melody taken up by the horns as the first tune of the waltz proper. And though it passes in an instant, what a magical touch the diminished-seventh harmony on the fourth note of the tune is, coming unexpectedly after a straightforward melodic arpeggio of the D major triad. An answering melody is divided between strings on the one hand, flutes and clarinets on the other. Still more tunes follow, varying in range, instrumentation, and phrasing, so that the waltz seems to build and build with its characteristic “lift” to the final coda.

Balletomanes expect a pas de deux between the principal male and female dancer. From the plot of The Nutcracker, we would expect such a dance to take place between Clara and the Prince. But the original Clara was only twelve years old and scarcely ready for such a demanding dance, so the duet (No. 14, Pas de deux) was given instead to the Prince and the Sugar-Plum Fairy. Soon after the original production, though, when the part of Clara began to be taken by more mature dancers, the opening section—built on a descending scale melody in the cello that builds to a surprisingly passionate climax—was given to her. Variation I is a vigorous tarantella for the male dancer. Variation II is for the female dancer, who must be the Sugar-Plum Fairy regardless of whether Clara dances the beginning of this number: it is this movement that more than any other established the celesta as an instrument in the orchestra and still represents its most familiar use. The delicacy of the celesta’s sound perfectly matches the sweetness of this personification of the Kingdom of Sweets. The pas de deux closes with a lively coda, after which the entire Court joins in a final tribute to Clara (No. 15, Final Waltz and Apotheosis), which efficiently and expertly recycles themes from the opening of Act II in newly rich scoring.

Steven Ledbetter

STEVEN LEDBETTER was program annotator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1979 to 1998.

THE FIRST BOSTON SYMPHONY PERFORMANCE OF MUSIC FROM “THE NUTCRACKER” was of the “Nutcracker” Suite, in a Pension Fund concert led by Max Fiedler on December 13, 1908, followed by subscription performances of the suite on December 24 and 26, after which he led the suite on numerous occasions both in and out of town between March 1909 and April 1912. Later BSO performances of the suite, or excerpts therefrom, were led by Ernst Schmidt, Pierre Monteux, Richard Burgin, Michael Press, Serge Koussevitzky, Danny Kaye, and Eugene Ormandy. Seiji Ozawa led BSO performances of the complete score in December 1990 (at which time it was also recorded for Deutsche Grammophon), and then a single performance in December 1996, followed the next night by one in Washington, D.C. The entire Act II has been played by the orchestra under Carl St. Clair (substituting for Gennady Rozhdestvensky in August 1986 at Tanglewood); Ozawa (at Carnegie Hall in December 1996, in a private concert for the permanent Japanese Mission to the United Nations in 1986), and Robert Spano (at Tanglewood in August 2004, in that summer’s Serge and Olga Koussevitzky Memorial Concert).

To Read and Hear More...
Andris Dzenitis’s own website, dzenitis.webs.com, is the most useful and current source of information about the composer and his work. A number of SoundCloud and YouTube links on his site offer a chance to hear a range of Dzenitis’s pieces for various ensembles. The Musica Baltica website (musicabalitica.com), a clearinghouse for information about Latvian composers, includes much the same information. Māra has not yet been recorded for release, but several Dzenitis works are available via download or on CD. The 2015 album “E(GO),” is named for his saxophone concerto and features five of the composer’s works, including three with orchestra (Skani). Ensemble Modern with conductor Peter Eötvös recorded his Latvian Cookbook (Ensemble Modern Medien). His works have also appeared on several different releases by the Latvian Radio Choir (on the choir’s own label) and Latvian Radio Chamber Singers (Latvian Music Information Centre).

Robert Kirzinger


Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 1 is being recorded live during these concerts for future release on Deutsche Grammophon as part of the ongoing Andris Nelsons/BSO Shostakovich symphony cycle on that label. A September 1964 BSO broadcast under Erich Leinsdorf was included in the BSO’s twelve-disc box set, “Symphony Hall Centennial Celebration: From the Broadcast Archives, 1943-2000” (available from the bso.org Media Center or at the Symphony Shop). Other currently available recordings include Leonard Bernstein’s with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon), Valery Gergiev’s live with the Mariinsky Orchestra (Mariinsky), Bernard Haitink’s with the London Philharmonic (Decca), Mariiss Jansons’s with the Berlin Philharmonic (Warner Classics), Vladimir Jurowski’s with the Russian National Orchestra (Pentatone), Vasily Petrenko’s with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic (Naxos), and that of the composer’s son, Maxim Shostakovich, with the Prague Symphony Orchestra (Supraphon).

David Brown’s Tchaikovsky, in four volumes, is the major biography of the composer (Norton); The Nutcracker is discussed in the fourth volume, “The Final Years, 1885-1893.” Brown is also the author of Tchaikovsky: The Man and his Music, an excellent single volume (512 pages) on the composer’s life and works geared toward the general reader (Pegasus Books), and of Tchaikovsky Remembered, published in 1994 to mark the centenary of the composer’s death (Amadeus Press). Though out of print, John Warrack’s Tchaikovsky is worth seeking both for its text and for its wealth of illustrations (Scribners). Also useful are Alexandra Orlova’s Tchaikovsky: A Self-Portrait (translated by R.M. Davison), an “autobiographical narrative” based on surviving documentation (Oxford), and David Brown’s chapter “Russia Before the Revolution” in A Guide to the Symphony, edited by Robert Layton (Oxford paperback). Valuable if you can find it is The Diaries of Tchaikovsky, translated and edited by Vladmir Lakond (Norton, out of print).

Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony Orchestra recorded the complete score of The Nutcracker in 1990 (Deutsche Grammophon). Other complete recordings include Antal Doráti’s with the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam (Philips), Charles Dutoit’s with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra (Decca), Valery Gergiev’s with the Mariinsky Orchestra (Mariinsky), André Previn’s with the London Symphony Orchestra (Warner Classics), and Simon Rattle’s with the Berlin Philharmonic (Warner Classics). There are of course a great many recordings of the popular Nutcracker Suite. Tchaikovsky’s “Waltz of the Flowers” was recorded in one of the BSO’s very first recording sessions, in October 1917 with Karl Muck conducting, but was only released for the first time on the 1995 BSO
Classics CD “The First Recordings of the Boston Symphony Orchestra,” along with Muck’s other recordings from those sessions and Koussevitzky’s from his first BSO sessions in November 1928.

Marc Mandel

Andris Nelsons

The 2018-19 season is Andris Nelsons’ fifth as the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s Ray and Maria Stata Music Director. Named Musical America’s 2018 Artist of the Year, Mr. Nelsons will lead fourteen of the BSO’s twenty-six subscription programs in 2018-19, ranging from orchestral works by Haydn, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, and Copland to concerto collaborations with acclaimed soloists, as well as world and American premieres of pieces newly commissioned by the BSO from Thomas Adès, Sebastian Currier, Andris Dzenītis, and Mark-Anthony Turnage; the continuation of his complete Shostakovich symphony cycle with the orchestra, and concert performances of Puccini’s one-act opera Suor Angelica. In summer 2015, following his first season as music director, Andris Nelsons’ contract with the BSO was extended through the 2021-22 season. In November 2017, he and the orchestra toured Japan together for the first time. In February 2018, he became Gewandhauskapellmeister of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, in which capacity he brings both orchestras together for a unique multidimensional alliance. Immediately following the 2018 Tanglewood season, Maestro Nelsons and the BSO made their third European tour together, playing concerts in London, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, Lucerne, Paris, and Amsterdam. Their first European tour, following the 2015 Tanglewood season, took them to major European capitals and the Lucerne, Salzburg, and Grafenegg festivals; the second, in May 2016, took them to eight cities in Germany, Austria, and Luxembourg.

The fifteenth music director in the history of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Andris Nelsons made his BSO debut at Carnegie Hall in March 2011, his Tanglewood debut in July 2012, and his BSO subscription series debut in January 2013. His recordings with the BSO, all made live in concert at Symphony Hall, include the complete Brahms symphonies on BSO Classics; Grammy-winning recordings on Deutsche Grammophon of Shostakovich’s symphonies 5, 8, 9, and 10, the initial releases in a complete Shostakovich symphony cycle for that label; and a new two-disc set pairing Shostakovich’s symphonies 4 and 11, The Year 1905. Under an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon, Andris Nelsons is also recording the complete Bruckner symphonies with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and the complete Beethoven symphonies with the Vienna Philharmonic.

The 2018-19 season is Maestro Nelsons’ final season as artist-in-residence at the Konzerthaus Dortmund and marks his first season as artist-in-residence at Hamburg’s Elbphilharmonie. In addition, he continues his regular collaborations with the Vienna Philharmonic and Berlin Philharmonic. Throughout his career, he has also established regular collaborations with Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and has been a regular guest at the Bayreuth Festival and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Born in Riga in 1978 into a family of musicians, Andris Nelsons began his career as a trumpeter in the Latvian National Opera Orchestra before studying conducting. He was music director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra from 2008 to 2015, principal conductor of the Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie in Herford, Germany, from 2006 to 2009, and music director of Latvian National Opera from 2003 to 2007.