The Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra Presents

Federico Cortese | Music Director

2016-2017 Season

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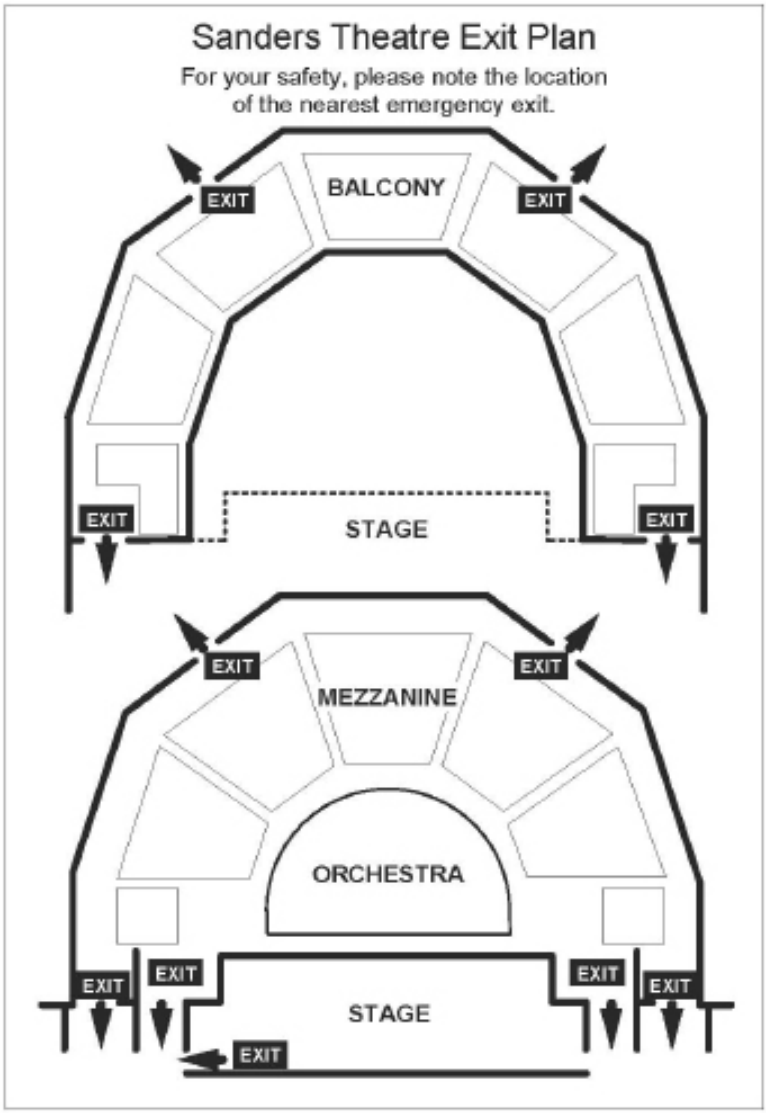

HISTORY OF THE HRO

The Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra (HRO) is the oldest symphony orchestra in the United States. It traces its history back to the night of March 6, 1808, when Joseph Eaton (class of 1810) and five other Harvard men formed the Pierian Sodality, taking its name from the Pierian Springs, where Greek immortals drank and found musical inspiration. (In contrast, the oldest professional orchestra – the New York Philharmonic – was founded only in 1842.)

In its early years, the Sodality was a student club not only for playing music, but also for consuming brandy and cigars, as well as the "serenading of young ladies." In the 1830s, the Faculty of Harvard College publicly admonished the Sodality for a whole night serenading away from Cambridge. Administration censure was so great that in 1832 the Pierian Sodality was reduced to one man. Gradually, however, other members were elected, and the Sodality played on. According to a June 29, 1840 entry in the Sodality's record book, the group's late-night music-making antics earned them fame that "did wax exceedingly great, and did reach all the places round about Cambridge."

Two decades later, the performing career of the Pierians began. In 1860, shortly after Harvard President James Walker made Harvard the first institution to add music as a regular subject of study in the curriculum, the Pierian Sodality was given permission to "hire a hall and give a public concert, on condition that no tickets be sold." They began to give regular concerts, and even rehearsed to prepare for them.

Therefore, by the turn of the century, the Pierian Sodality could justly refer to itself as the Harvard University Orchestra. It had developed into a serious musical organization and become the largest college orchestra in America. The late thirties saw joint concerts with the Radcliffe Orchestra and in 1942, the Pierians suggested that the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra be formed. Since the Sodality's membership was depleted during the years of World War II, and since the Radcliffe Orchestra lacked certain instruments, both groups benefitted from the merger. Thus the men and women of Harvard and Radcliffe united in their music-making efforts, and the HRO as it is today was born.

The orchestra was conducted by students until 1926, when the first professional conductor was hired by orchestra members. Most conductors remained for only a few years (with the exception of Malcolm Holmes, conductor from 1933-50), until on a recommendation from Leonard Bernstein, Dr. James Yannatos became conductor in 1964 and served as the music director for 45 years. Under his baton, HRO developed into a high-quality orchestra, and toured all over the country and the world. Following Dr. Yannatos' retirement, Federico Cortese was appointed music director of HRO in 2009. He has continued its tradition of musical excellence, of performing with other Harvard musical organizations, such as the Holden Choirs, and of performance tours.

It is now over one century ago that HRO deemed itself ready for its first out-of-state tour. Beginning with a successful tour through New York State in 1908, HRO's travels have featured such highlights such as performing at Washington DC's National Theatre for First Ladies Mrs. Warren Harding and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge, gracing the stage of Carnegie Hall and, in 1978, placing third in the Fifth Annual International Festival of Student Orchestras. Since the 1980s, HRO has taken tours to the Soviet Union, Asia and Europe, Italy, Brazil, Canada, , Cuba, Israel, Jordan and most recently in 2015, the Philippines and South Korea.

Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra

209th Season, 2016-2017

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Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra

209th Season, 2016-2017

FEDERICO CORTESE, Conductor, Music Director
ADRIAN SLYWOTZKY, Teaching Fellow
MARK MILLER, Teahing Fellow

Saturday, April 15, 2017, 8:00 pm
Sanders Theatre, Harvard University

PROGRAM

George Gershwin (1898-1937)
An American in Paris (1928)

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)
The Miraculous Mandarin, Op. 19, Sz. 73 (BB 82) (1926)

INTERMISSION

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Symphony No. 4 in B-flat Major, Op. 60 (1807)
I. *Adagio – Allegro vivace*
II. *Adagio*
III. *Allegro vivace*
IV. *Allegro ma non troppo*

NOTES ON THE MUSIC

Gershwin, *An American in Paris* (1928)

At the age of thirty in 1928, George Gershwin wrote *An American in Paris*, symphonic poem, or "rhapsodic ballet" as he liked to call it, infused with jazz and inspired by his impressions of the in-vigorating sights and sounds of the city. In his original program notes for the first performance of the piece at Carnegie Hall by the New York Philharmonic, he wrote: "My purpose here is to por-tray the impression of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city and listens to various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere."

The piece is lighthearted and brimming with the humor and sparkling quality of the popular show music that Gershwin was writing in New York City at the time. Gershwin began his musical career earning $15 a week as a "song plugger," a pianist who worked in music shops sampling sheet music for customers. The street where he worked in Manhattan was famously nicknamed "Tin Pan Alley," and was a hub for enterprising music publishers and songwriters. He soon branched out to writing songs for musical theatre and vaudeville with his brother Ira Gershwin, and his music quickly became synonymous with the Jazz Age. In the mid-1920s he decided to take a break from Broadway with a trip to Paris, where he sought to study composition with Maurice Ravel, a composer whose work he greatly admired. Ravel told Gershwin he could not teach him, but they struck up a warm and long-lasting friendship, and he sent a letter recommending him to Nadia Boulanger, a famous music teacher of the likes of Aaron Copland and Philip Glass. After hearing some of his compositions, she also refused to teach him, afraid that too rigorous classical training would quash his extraordinary natural gift. She is famously said to have told him, "Why be a second-rate Ravel when you are already a first-rate Gershwin?" Nevertheless, the influence of the time Gershwin spent with French composers shows in *An American in Paris*, with its impression-ist effects that strive to imitates light, color, and atmosphere. By seeking mentorship in Paris, Gershwin was trying to get into the circles of the more "serious" classical music traditions of Eu-rope, and writing *An American in Paris* as a symphonic tone poem was a part of this attempt. The piece was extremely well-received by the audience at the premiere, but some critics turned up their noses and doubted its place on a serious classical music stage. Gershwin wrote in response, "It's not a Beethoven Symphony, you know... It's a humorous piece, nothing solemn about it. It's not intended to draw tears. If it pleases symphony audiences as a light, jolly piece, a series of

impressions musically expressed, it succeeds."

The piece is written in a broad ABA format—it begins with fresh urban energy, punctuated by the honking of real taxicab horns. The opening rhythm mimics a brisk walk with a little skip in the step, and quick percussive sixteenths create the mechanical sound effects of transportation and in-terrupt sweeping balletic melodies. This cheerful first section is interrupted by a mellow blues-inspired interlude, where, Gershwin wrote in his program, "Our American friend, perhaps after strolling into a café and having a few drinks, has suddenly succumbed to a spasm of homesick-ness." The exuberance slowly returns with encounters with the distinctive dotted quarter rhythms of the Charleston dance, and elements of "Le Maxixe," a tango that was popular in Paris at the turn of the century. And so the homesick American leaves the café, having "drowned his spell of blues," and finds joy again in the City of Lights.

- Faith Pak '19

NOTES ON THE MUSIC

Bartók, The Miraculous Mandarin (1926)

The ballet suite of The Miaculous Mandarin by Béla Bartók is a conception of the grotesque often only broached in quality by other contemporary works of its time, such as Stravinsky's enrapturing Rite of Spring or Alban Berg's opera Lulu. Enthralled in an individuality of its own, the piece rends at the formal ideas that make music sound pleasant, or comforting, instead embracing and reveling in its own tenacious harshness. The piece was originally orchestrated to accompany the full ballet, following a story published by Menyhért Lengyel in a Hungarian literature magazine in 1917. Slightly abbreviated, the orchestral suite maintains the integrity of what amounts to a thrilling and gripping synopsis, and provides our best example of Bartók's unfailing ability to innovate and shatter his medium, only to brilliantly build it back up into a monstrosity of his own creation.

The difference between understanding the purpose of the charming, provocative cadenza-lie clarinet moments as directly analogous to the seductive young girl used to bring unfortunate passerby into the lair of the thieves does not help reconcile the glaring disorder and cacophony of the score; yet knowing that Bartók's passion for the plot should help the listener feel the gravity of what is every bit intended to be a slaughtering of the sense by the savagery brought out from every last instrument he utilizes.

As Bartók describes it:

"*Just listen to how beautiful the story is. Three thugs force a beautiful young girl to seduce men and lure them into their den, where they will be robbed. The first turns out to be poor, the second likewise, but the third is a Chinese, a good catch, as it turns out. The girl entertains him with her dance. The Mandarin's desire is aroused. His love flares up, but the girl recoils from him. The thugs attack the Mandarin, rob him, smother him with pillows, stab him with a sword, all in vain, because the Mandarin continues watching the girl with eyes full of yearning... the girl complies with the Mandarin's wish, whereupon he drops dead.*"

General thematic parts of Bartók's compositions, such as stylistic nods to the Magyar musical style and language that surround the Piano Concerto No. 3 and the Concerto for Orchestra, or efforts to evince Hungarian culture in Bluebeard's Castle, are left behind in a series of shattering moments and tense undertones that make up The Miraculous Mandarin, which is widely agreed to be Bartók's most unbridled work. As the trombones rip apart the subtle yet drawn out augmented suspensions and tense dissonances that form brief climaxes throughout the piece, one can hear the betrayal of the

thieves upon the passerby. Just as well, the lull of the harps and surmounting tension toward the end of the piece bring the further beatings and wounding of the Mandarin to a fevered pitch, which fails to resolve in the death of the Mandarin that exists just beyond the cut Bartók made for the ballet suite.

Further reading into the score, the listener is at once assaulted by sounds of the nameless city space the licentiousness of the plot occurs in, with Bartók's purposed driving rhythms giving the audience a pained exposure to the bleak, crazed background of the plot to come. This then follows with the introduction of the luring young girl, whose victim the first poor man is riven as he fails to deliver what the thieves wish for. Reduplicated in a similar manner, yet intensified, the score then traces past a second large climax and the aforementioned Mandarin is brought to the fore.

The brutal subjection of the first two victims and the young girl in The Miraculous Mandarin, as well as the unhinged and deranged lust of the Mandarin as he too falls into the trap, culminates in the supernatural survival and sustenance of his body as he satisfies the unknowable passion their trick has put upon him; a story line that embodies within itself a stunning and quintessentially Bartók exasperation of madness. When superimposed over the harmony of composers just a few generations before, it may be difficult to hear music in what was an incredibly innovative piece of its time. But The Miraculous Mandarin is an impossibility in itself, and addresses Bela Bartok in a way that no other piece of his does, drawing the grotesqueness of the contorted plot into a fine, synthesized absurdity that languishes in its own neurotic beauty.

- Topher Colby '19

NOTES ON THE MUSIC

Beethoven, Symphony No. 4 (1806)

Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60, was described by Robert Schumann as "a slender Grecian maiden between two Norse giants," and fittingly so—while its immediate predecessor and successor are the historic "Eroica" and the immortal Fifth, both titanic in scale and epic in scope, this symphony, by contrast, is a spark of lighthearted and good-humored joy, sandwiched between and eclipsed by its two heavyweight neighbors.

The Fourth Symphony was composed during the summer of 1806, interrupting Beethoven's work on his Fifth Symphony. Despite his ever-worsening deafness, 1806 was a remarkably productive year for Beethoven, seeing the completion of his Fourth Piano Concerto, the three "Razumovsky" string quartets, and his Violin Concerto, all cornerstones of the classical repertoire and similarly genial works. At this time, Beethoven was nearing the peak of his heroic "middle period," spanning from about 1802 until 1815 and during which most of his greatest works were composed.

True to Schumann's epithet, this symphony is scored for the leanest forces of all of Beethoven's nine symphonies, boasting only one flute among its ranks instead of the usual two. Whereas the Third and Fifth Symphonies saw Beethoven looking far into the horizon and pushing the boundaries of symphonic expression, the Fourth Symphony is a return to tradition, classical in its essence despite its unmistakably Beethovenian disposition. But even while honoring precedent, Beethoven defies it, giving the woodwinds and the horns a much more prominent role than was typical for classical symphonies

The first movement opens with an ominous *Adagio* in the "wrong" key of B-flat minor (instead of the expected B-flat major). The texture is sparse, and the music is reluctant to move, creating an otherworldly spaciousness much like the complete stillness of the night shortly before the crack of dawn. But eventually, day breaks, and an explosion of light catapults the music into the jovial and optimistic *Allegro vivace*, rich with angular syncopations and full of abrupt, humorous contrasts, both between loud and soft and between sprightly motifs and lyrical melodies.

The slow movement, in the subdominant key of E-flat major, is simultaneously expansive and rhythmic, full of lush melodies but never straying far from the drumbeat-like regularity of the accompaniment. The music is by turns pastoral and turbulent, with reflective solos by the woodwinds, wavelike swaying figures by the strings, and a tempestuous plunge into darkness by the entire orchestra at the center of the

movement. The staccato arpeggios in the coda are especially notable for their birdlike sound, and the timpani alone takes on the violins' opening motif, actualizing the continuing impression of drumbeat, before the movement draws to an emphatic close.

With the heavily syncopated scherzo, the music returns to its ecstatic nature and to its home key of B-flat major. From his very first symphony, Beethoven had been using the scherzo (or minuet) movements as grounds for experimentation, and this scherzo is no exception. In fact, it marks the first time that Beethoven expands the typical ABA form of a symphonic scherzo into an ABABA structure, effectively doubling the size of the movement. Beethoven is, however, mindful of his utilization of time, and the final A section is abbreviated.

The *perpetuo moto* finale fully summarizes the carefree jocularity that defines this symphony. The first violins begin softly with an idea but, distracted, leave off mid-phrase, forcing the second violins and violas to pick up the slack. This idea is then tossed among the instruments in a similar fashion for the rest of the movement. With a relentless rhythmic drive and rapid, propelling figures, the movement runs as a well-oiled machine, albeit one prone to sudden bursts of energy. For all its exuberance, however, the music eventually runs out of steam within arm's-length of its destination, grinding to a halt, seemingly too tired to continue. But it quickly becomes clear that this exhaustion is a mere ruse, and the music revives itself, ending with brilliant vigor.

- Michael Cheng '19

FEDERICO CORTESE

Conductor, Music Director

From the moment of his debut in September 1998, stepping in at short notice to conduct Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in place of an ailing Seji Ozawa, Federico Cortese's work as Assistant Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra was widely praised. Serving in that position from 1998-2003, Mr. Cortese led the BSO several times in Symphony Hall and at Tanglewood. His conducting of Puccini's Madama Butterfly at Symphony Hall was particularly heralded. Additionally, he has served as Music Director of the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras since 1999 and is currently Music Director of the New England String Ensemble and Associate Conductor of the Asian Youth Orchestra. Other appointments have included Music Coordinator (in lieu of Music Director) and Associate Conductor of the Spoleto Festival in Italy, Assistant Conductor to Daniele Gatti at the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, and Assistant Conductor to Robert Spano at the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

Mr. Cortese has conducted operatic and symphonic engagements throughout the United States, Australia, and Europe. Recent engagements in the US include, among many others, conducting the Dallas and Atlanta Symphony Orchestras, San Antonio and New World Symphonies, and the Louisville Orchestra; as well as many operatic productions including Mozart's Don Giovanni with the Boston Lyric Opera, Puccini's La boheme with Opera Theater of Saint Louis and at the Yale Opera program, and Andre Previn's A Streetcar Named Desire with the Washington National Opera. In Europe, his opera experience includes conducting productions of Verdi's Il trovatore in Parma, Italy as part of the Verdi Centennial Festival; Mozart's Die Entfuhrung aus dem Serail at the Spoleto Festival in Italy; Niccolo Piccinni's La bella verita at the Teatro Comunale, Firenze, with the Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino; and a new production of Mozart's Cosi fan tutte with the Finnish National Opera in Helsinki. Recent successes include guest conducting Britain's Opera North, BBC-Scottish Symphony, Slovenian Philharmonic, Oslo and Zagreb Philharmonics, and Gottingen Symphony Orchestra, to name just a few.

In Australia, he has conducted the Sydney and Tasmanian Symphonies; Australian Youth, West Australia Symphony, and Queensland Orchestras; and a production of Madama Butterfly for Opera Australia in Melbourne.

Mr. Cortese studied composition and conducting at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia in Rome and at the Hochschule fur Musik in Vienna. In addition, he has been a conducting fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center. In 2009, he was appointed Senior Lecturer in the Harvard music department. In addition to music, Mr. Cortese studied literature, humanities, and law, earning a law degree from La Sapienza University in Rome.

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NaYoung Yang '18 and Henry Shreffler '18

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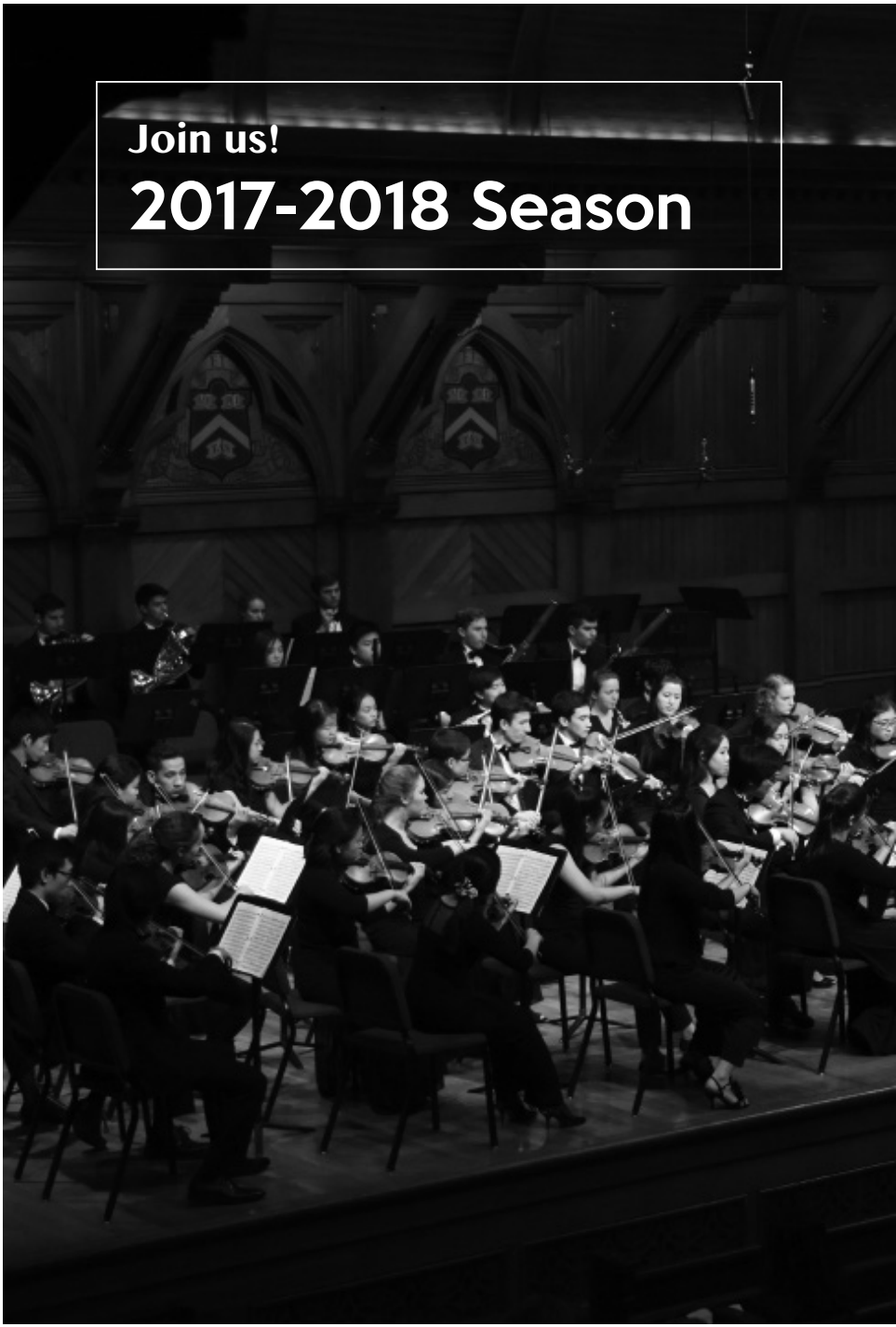
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