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May 4-5, 2013

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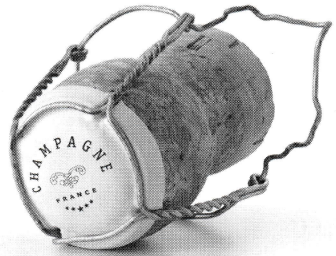
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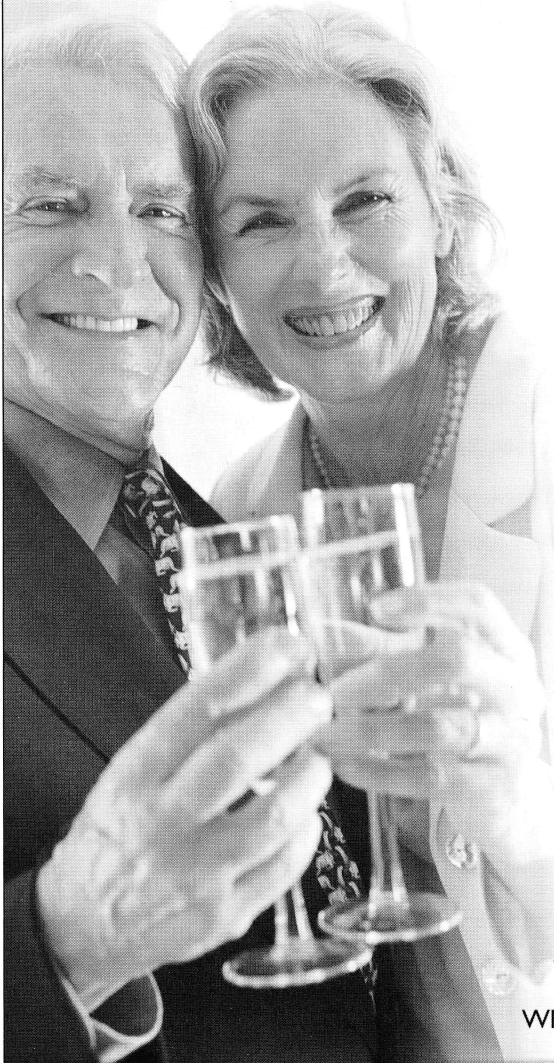


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OLD WORLDS / NEW WORLD

Saturday, May 4, 2013, 7:30pm | Sunday, May 5, 2013, 2:00pm
Mandeville Auditorium, UCSD

Steven Schick conducting

CHOU WEN-CHUNG

Landscapes

Under the Cliff in the Bay
The Sorrow of Partings
One Streak of Dying Light

STRAUSS

Horn Concerto No. 2 in E-flat Major

Allegro
Andante con moto
Rondo

Nicolee Kuester, horn

INTERMISSION

VARÈSE

Amériques

Horn Concerto No. 2 and Amériques by arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

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Rooted in San Diego for over 50 years, the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus enriches our lives through affordable concerts of ground-breaking, traditional and contemporary classical music.

FROM THE CONDUCTOR



Today's concert is based on two seemingly innocent meetings that had great impact on the people involved. Actually, there are three meetings, if you count the one that involved me.

In 1909 Edgard Varèse was a young composer, unknown and nearly without professional prospects. He had just finished his studies in Paris, and just as young composers do, even to this day, he moved to Berlin to begin a professional career.

There he found an unlikely ally in Richard Strauss, whom he met by accident on the street. Strauss, one of the world's most well-known and influential composers, befriended the young Varèse and agreed to serve as a reference. A few doors were opened, but eventually Varèse decided that the Old World had little to offer to him. According to legend, on the eve of World War I, he burned all of his youthful scores and moved to New York for a fresh start.

He made a grand entry into the music scene in New York by conducting the bombastic and unabashedly romantic Berlioz *Requiem*. What a scene it must have been: Varèse, father-to-be of the American musical avant-garde, conducting a quintessential piece of the old guard just as European culture, and indeed Europe itself, was fixed firmly in the cross-hairs of advancing armies!

Fast-forward nearly a half century: Varèse is the famous (and perhaps infamous) composer of some of the 20th century's most inspired, powerful, and important music. One day he is at home and the young Chinese composer, Chou Wen-chung, phones to ask for composition lessons. Mr. Chou has just emigrated from China, and seeks a new life in America. He visits the famous man in his home on Sullivan Street in Greenwich Village and offers a recent score as proof of his *bona fides*.

Here let me fast forward again. Mr. Chou became Varèse's student, then his assistant for many years, a close friend, and the executor to the Varèse musical estate. Now he himself lives in the former Varèse apartment. I am pleased to say that Wen-chung and I are friends — good friends if I flatter myself. I visited him and his wife Yi-an last fall and told him about our plans to play his work, *Landscapes*, in this set of concerts. The weather was threatening that evening and we decided to order food in. The three of us were sitting in the Chou's downstairs sitting room when Wen-chung asked me if I'd like to hear the story of his first meeting with Varèse. This was a chance to hear firsthand about one of the most fabled encounters in 20th century art! Yes. Please!

Wen-chung started, "Well, Varèse was sitting there at the piano." He gestured to a now empty place along the wall. "I was sitting where you are. He stared at my score for a half hour without speaking, then said gruffly to come back next week for a lesson." Then Mr. Chou paused for a long moment in recollection and said, "You know, Steve, the piece I showed him that day was the one you're going to play in San Diego." There was a silence and then an enormous clap of thunder!

This concert memorializes those two meetings. The characters involved are represented by pieces of music. Varèse, torn between the embrace of Strauss and his future in New York, is cast as *Amériques*, the first piece that he composed after moving to the New World. Audiences in his day heard little more than an onslaught of noise. Today I challenge you to hear the fading embers of the 19th century. Listen for the voice of Debussy in the languid alto flute solo at the opening, or to the vestiges of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre* in the strongly rhythmic ensemble moments (practically the only moment in all of Varèse where one hears him imitating another composer!). The role of Strauss is played by his second concerto for horn, performed wonderfully here by our Young Artist Competition winner and La Jolla Symphony member, Nicolee Kuester. While Varèse was facing the future head-on, Strauss was riding out the chaos of World War II in relative serenity where he soothed himself in a bath of nostalgia, writing music that was more classical and restrained than any he had composed in the 19th century. And, of course, the part of Chou Wen-chung is played by his *Landscapes*, the piece in which Varèse first saw Chou's original and sophisticated musical voice.

It may not be hard to tell from my words that this is a very personal concert for me. I can say with no exaggeration that without Varèse I would not be a musician today. His *Amériques*, *Déserts*, and most

importantly *Ionisation*, written in 1931 for thirteen percussionists, were my guiding lights as a student. On my first trip to New York City my only real goal was to see Varèse's house. So I walked from my friends' apartment on the Upper West Side down a hundred city blocks to stand outside the door on Sullivan Street, just as Wen-chung had once done, and marveled at what had taken place in that house. Before leaving for New York I had worried that the city would be too big for me; too foreign, too noisy. But as I walked, I realized I had heard it all before: I already knew the noises of New York in the sirens and clangs of *Amériques*; in the multi-ethnic, multi-rhythmic melting pot of *Ionisation*, and in the forbidding and lonely vistas of *Déserts*, where the only limits to imagination are those we place on ourselves. I realized then that Varèse's music is about that sound—beguiling, earsplitting, incantatory, whispered, life-affirming sound. Sound—simultaneously the concrete material of the musician's art and living matter with dreams of its own.

As I return to Varèse for this performance I am dazzled all over again. But in the noisy prescience of this music the most astonishing thing, as Henry Miller noted in his essay, "With Edgar Varèse in the Gobi Desert," is that "after you listen to it you are silenced."

This concert is dedicated in friendship and gratitude to Chou Wen-chung on the occasion of his 90th birthday. ■

STEVEN SCHICK conductor

For more than 30 years Steven Schick has championed contemporary music as a percussionist and teacher by commissioning and premiering more than 100 new works. Schick is a professor of music at the University of California, San Diego and in 2008 was awarded the title of Distinguished Professor by the UCSD Academic Senate.

Schick was one of the original members and percussionist of the Bang on a Can All-Stars of New York City (1992-2002). He has served as artistic director of the Centre International de Percussion de Genève in Geneva, Switzerland, and as consulting artist in percussion at the Manhattan School of Music. Schick is founder and artistic director of the acclaimed percussion group, red fish blue fish, a UCSD ensemble composed of his graduate percussion students that performs regularly throughout San Diego and has

toured internationally. He also is founding artistic director (June 2009) of "Roots & Rhizomes"—an annual international course for percussionists hosted by the Banff Center for the Arts in Canada.

As a percussion soloist, Schick has appeared in Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, The Royal Albert Hall (London), Centre Pompidou (Paris), The Sydney Opera House and Disney Hall among many other national and international venues.

Schick is a frequent guest conductor with the International Contemporary Ensemble (Chicago and New York City), and in 2011 he was appointed artistic director and conductor of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Schick has been music director and conductor of the La Jolla Symphony & Chorus since 2007.

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PROGRAM NOTES

by Eric Bromberger

LANDSCAPES

CHOU WEN-CHUNG

Born June 29, 1923, Yantai, Shandong, China



Chou Wen-chung fell in love with music as a boy, but his family insisted that he study engineering as a profession—they knew that such skills would be in demand when China set out to rebuild itself after the devastation of the Japanese occupation. Chou came to the United States in 1946 with a

scholarship to study architecture at Yale, but his passion for music proved too strong, and he instead enrolled at the New England Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Nicholas Slonimsky. He was soon introduced to Edgard Varèse, and that fierce (and gentle) figure quickly took the timid young man under his wing and became his teacher and mentor. In the process, the two became lifelong friends, and Chou would eventually serve as Varèse's literary executor.

In his own art, Chou has worked toward an ideal fusion of Eastern and Western music. Like Bartók, who set out to internalize Eastern European folk music to the point where that idiom became part of his own musical language, Chou has tried to internalize the techniques of Asian music and Western art music. He began work on *Landscapes*, which he describes as his Opus 1 (though it has no official number), in 1948, just as he was coming to know Varèse, and the older composer oversaw its composition. First performed by Leopold Stokowski and the San Francisco Symphony on November 19, 1953, *Landscapes* has become Chou's best-known composition. This is a very concise piece of music—its three movements span a total of only eight minutes. Chou based each movement on a traditional Chinese melody, and each of these is in turn based on a Chinese poem. A note in the score points out that "The poems are linked to the landscapes in much the same manner as poems are affixed to paintings in Chinese graphic art. Although these poems were set to the melodies (or, more correctly, *melodic patterns*) in fairly recent times, the patterns themselves originated centuries earlier."

The composer published an introductory note in the score of *Landscapes* that is worth quoting in full:

In this work I have tried to convey through sound the emotional qualities of Chinese landscape painting and to achieve this end with the same economy of means. The characteristic successions of transparent intervals used in Chinese music are freely embroidered with opulent dissonances serving as the palette from which the composer paints in orchestral

sonority, timbre, texture and dynamics. The changing mood and the emotional content of the work are thus projected by means of a tonal brushwork extending over the entire orchestral spectrum. In this as well as in my other works to date, I am influenced by the philosophy that governs every Chinese artist, whether he be poet or painter; namely, affinity to nature in conception, allusiveness in expression, and terseness in realization.

Chou Wen-chung

The texts of the three Chinese poems, as translated by the composer:

I.

Old fisherman, with a fishing rod,
Under the cliff, in the bay,
Sailing a small boat freely here and there;
Dots of sea gulls afar over the light waves,
Expanse of rusting reeds chilly under the bright sky;
Sing a song aloud with the sun setting low;
All of a sudden, the waves rock in golden light;
Looking up—the moon has climbed over the eastern hill.

Cheng Hsieh (1693-1765)

II.

My carriage has barely paused,
 yet he is already beyond the plains,
In no time, far away at the edge of the sky.
Pleasant dreams tonight—where can they be found?
Instead, only the sound of the temple bell,
 the midnight rain, the ravens' cry at the break of dawn.
Too grieved to face the fallen petals floating in the wind,
Too frightened to see the evening sunlight reflect in the clouds;
The sorrow of parting—I tell it to the lute.
Broken heart left at the river—into whose courtyard has it been blown?
Dreams are coming, the candle is flickering, pillows awry.

Ting P'eng (c. 1661)

III.

Green, green the grass west of the pavilion,
The clouds low, the cries of the wild geese faint,
Two lines of sparse willows,
One streak of dying light,
Hundreds of homing ravens dotting the sky.

Liu Chi (1311-1375)

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Liu Chi (1311-1375)

HORN CONCERTO NO. 2 IN E-FLAT MAJOR

RICHARD STRAUSS

Born June 11, 1864, Munich

Died September 8, 1949,

Garmisch-Partenkirchen



Richard Strauss was 75 years old when World War II began, and he chose to remain in his native Germany throughout the war. As a composer, he was almost forgotten at this time: he had made his reputation with his tone

poems and early operas, and then the world of music had seemed to pass him by—a music appreciation text written just before the war actually had to remind its readers that Strauss “is still very much alive.”

He was more than just alive. In his late seventies, Strauss—in frail health and increasingly agonized by the destruction caused by the war—entered into a remarkable Indian

Summer of creativity. He completed his final opera, *Capriccio*, in 1941, and it was premiered in October 1942. The following month, he wrote to thank one of the singers in that production and he told her: “I have just completed a little horn concerto, the third movement of which—a 6/8 Rondo—has turned out particularly well.”

There may have been specific reasons why the aging Strauss chose to write a horn concerto at age 78. Strauss had written his *First Horn Concerto* nearly sixty years earlier, in 1883, composing it specifically for his father. Franz Josef Strauss had been one of the finest horn-players in the world, serving for over forty years as the solo horn of the Munich Court Opera Orchestra. It may well have been that his son Richard, his world darkening around him, turned nostalgically to a form that he identified with his father and with a happier time. There is no trace of the war in the *Second Horn Concerto*—in fact, the open and relaxed character of this music is completely free of the darkness gathering around Strauss’ world.

Strauss scores the *Second Concerto* for a solo horn in E-flat major accompanied by what is essentially Mozart’s orchestra: pairs of



NICOLEE KUESTER horn

A member of the La Jolla Symphony since 2010, horn player Nicolee Kuester has performed with the San Diego Symphony, Orchestra Nova, the Canton Symphony, and UC San Diego’s new music ensemble Palimpsest. Internationally, she toured with Pierre Boulez and the Ensemble Intercontemporain in performances of Boulez’s *Pli Selon Pli*, and more recently premiered Dmitri Dudin’s opera *La Emperatriz de la Mentira* with the Orquesta de Baja California on their tour of northern and central Mexico. Kuester has attended music festivals in Lucerne, Switzerland; Santa Barbara, California; Sarasota, Florida; and Washington, D.C.

A wholehearted advocate for new music and inter-media exploration, Ms. Kuester collaborates with a wide range of musicians, composers, and artists to create new works. She is a co-founder of the improv duo HUDSON with bassist Adam Goodwin, and recently worked with puppeteer Kelly Dancer and composer Kurt Isaacson to write and perform a spoken opera based on the life of the 19th century feral boy Kaspar Hauser.

Ms. Kuester received her BM from the Oberlin Conservatory, where she studied with Roland Pandolfi. She completed her MA in Contemporary Music Performance last spring at UC San Diego, and is continuing her studies there as a candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts, studying with Anthony Burr. In 2011, she was a first-place winner, instrumental, in the LJS&C Young Artists Competition.

woodwinds, trumpets, and horns, plus timpani and strings. The opening *Allegro* begins with the soloist alone: the octave leap and flourish establish not only the virtuoso character of this music but also its essentially lyric nature. That opening statement spins off a series of subordinate ideas that will figure importantly in this sonata-form movement. Rather than driving to a brilliant ending, however, this movement grows quiet, and—on memories of the opening horn flourish—the music proceeds directly into the central slow movement, marked *Andante con moto*. Woodwinds announce the main idea of this movement, which recalls memories of *Der Rosenkavalier*, before the horn slips in almost unnoticed and gradually assumes its solo role.

Strauss was quite right to feel that the concluding rondo had turned out “particularly well.” The movement bursts to life in a cascade of bright horn sound, and off it goes, racing athletically along its 6/8 meter. Strauss asks for some real virtuoso playing here, not only from the solo horn but also from the orchestra (particularly the violins). The exciting ending is scored in quite unusual ways. In the closing pages, Strauss writes brilliant parts for the

orchestra’s horns so that the soloist is joined by his orchestral colleagues in a great sweep of brassy sound. Even more unusual is the writing for timpani. This concerto lasts about twenty minutes, and the timpanist does not play until the final 45 seconds. But at the end, Strauss brings all his forces—solo horn, orchestral horns, timpanist, and the rest of the orchestra—together in the exuberant rush to the close.

It is hard to believe that vital, sizzling music is the work of a 78-year-old composer. ■

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AMÉRIQUES

EDGARD VARÈSE

Born December 22, 1883, Le Villars, Burgundy

Died November 6, 1965, New York City



Varèse came to the United States in 1915 at age 31, having been invalidated out of the French army during World War I because of pneumonia. Varèse was a visionary, a composer who heard new sounds in his head and then searched—often unsuccessfully—for the instruments and musical means to make those sounds heard. Though his training was French (he studied with D'Indy, Roussel, and Widor), it was his arrival in America that opened new vistas—musical, mental, philosophical—for the young composer, and one of his first compositions in the New World was *Amériques*. Varèse said that the title *Amériques* was “symbolic of discoveries—new worlds on earth, in the sky or in the minds of men.” More specifically, it was life in New York City that awakened his sense of a new state of being:

I was still under the spell of my first impressions of New York, not only New York seen but more especially heard...As I worked in my Westside apartment...I could hear all the river sounds—the lonely foghorns, the shrill peremptory whistle—the whole wonderful river symphony which moved me more than anything ever had before. Besides, as a boy, the mere word ‘America’ meant all discoveries, all adventures. It meant the unknown...new worlds on this planet, in outer space, and in the minds of man.

Let it seem, however, that *Amériques* is simply a tone poem inspired by the sights and sounds of New York City, Varèse pointed out that the title might just as easily have been *The Himalayas*: he was thinking of some mystical, magical landscape, an unknown land outside the scope of daily existence.

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As Varèse grew older, he refined his tonal palette. Like Stravinsky, he did not especially like the sound of strings or vibrato, preferring the percussive sonority of struck instruments and the sound of wind instruments. Eventually he gave up writing for traditional instruments altogether and devoted himself to electronic music, but when he wrote *Amériques* between 1918 and 1922, he was still conceiving music in terms of the conventional symphony orchestra. *Amériques* is scored for a gigantic orchestra, one that includes eight horns, six trumpets, five trombones, two harps, and nine percussionists, who play a total of 27 different instruments. Among these are such unusual instruments as the lion's roar and a siren. Varèse said that he wanted a deep siren, like those he heard on New York City fire trucks—he believed that a wailing siren was a characteristically “urban” sound.

The combined sonic impact of this huge orchestra can be overpowering, but it starts in deceptive calm. A solo alto flute sounds a gentle idea that will return throughout, and gradually Varèse introduces the rest of his material. There is a great deal of it: a fanfare-like outburst for full orchestra, a softly-swirling motif for trumpets and trombones (“in the distance,” Varèse marks it), a suddenly-quick and complex flourish for the woodwinds, and many more. Varèse does not write in traditional forms, and listeners should not expect these ideas to “develop.” Rather, they recur in a series of episodes, often in great blocks of sound. The dynamic range of *Amériques* is huge, leaping from the barely-audible to moments of ear-splitting intensity: clearly the fantastic new world evoked by that title meant many different things to its creator. Along the way, listeners will hear an occasional whiff of *Le sacre du printemps* (only five years old when Varèse began work on *Amériques*), but will more likely be struck by the extraordinary writing for percussion, almost a world unto itself, full of strange new sounds and rhythms. At the end of this 24-minute score, the music rises to a great climax (marked *Immensamente crescendo*), and the full orchestra stamps out the thunderous final chords, marked quadruple *forte*.

A NOTE ON EDITIONS: Leopold Stokowski led the premiere of *Amériques* with the Philadelphia Orchestra on April 9, 1926, to the

outrage of critics. Varèse was unyielding in the face of that reaction, swearing that he would not change one note, but for the following year he did revise *Amériques* for its second preparation, which took place in France in 1929. The next performance did not take place until 1966, the year after Varèse's death, so he never heard it again. In 1973 Varèse's colleague Chou Wen-chung prepared a new edition of the revised version. More recently, scholars have gone back and recreated the original edition, the one premiered by Stokowski, which called for an even vaster orchestra. At this concert, the La Jolla Symphony performs Varèse's revised version of 1927. ■

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Mohammad Sedarat

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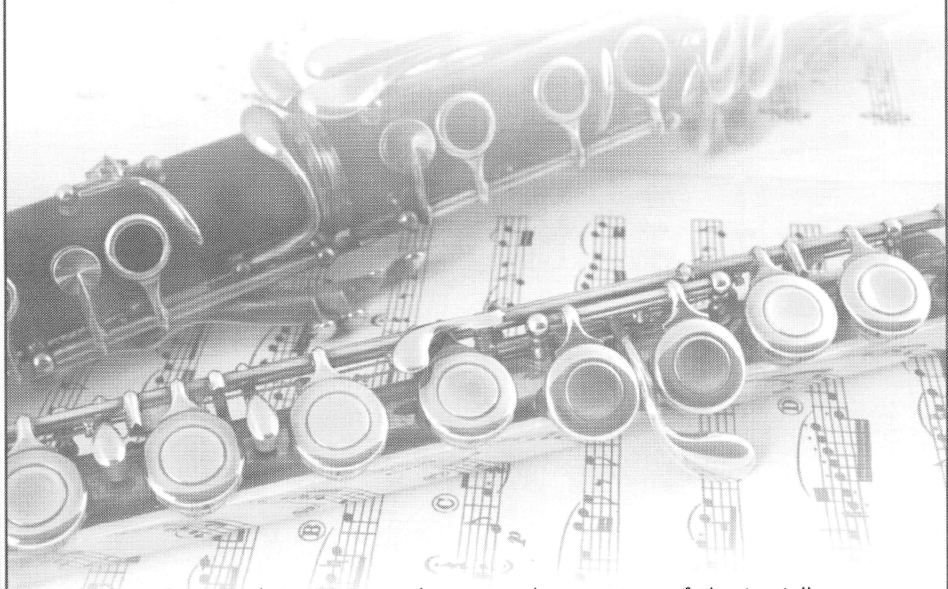
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