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FRIDAY 26 MARCH 2021, 7pm

National Concert Hall

GINASTERA Variaciones concertantes, Op. 23

FARRENC Symphony No. 3 in G minor, Op. 36

RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra

Jaime Martín conductor

Presented by **Paul Herriott**, RTÉ lyric fm

This performance is dedicated to the memory of Tom Briggs, Principal Third Horn, 1962 - 2005, who passed away on Thursday 25 March 2021. May he rest in peace.



RTÉ lyric fm

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PROGRAMME NOTES

ALBERTO GINASTERA 1916-1983

Variaciones concertantes, Op. 23

- i. *Tema per violoncello ed arpa*
- ii. *Interludio per corde*
- iii. *Variazione giacosa per Flauto*
- iv. *Variazione in modo di scherzo per Clarinetto*
- v. *Variazione Drammatica per Viola*
- vi. *Variazione canonica per Oboe e Fagotto*
- vii. *Variazione ritmica per Tromba e Trombone*
- viii. *Variazione in modo di Moto perpetuo per Violino*
- ix. *Variazione pastorale per Corno*
- x. *Interludio per Fati*
- xi. *Ripresa dal tema per Contrabasso*
- xii. *Variazione finale in modo di Rondo per orchestra*

Born in Buenos Aires in 1916, Alberto Ginastera's development as a composer reflected the widening social, political and cultural perspectives of his native Argentina and wider afield in Latin America in the middle and later years of the last century.

A onetime student of Aaron Copland, widely acknowledged as the father of modern American classical music, Ginastera proved to be no less an influential figure in his own homeland. Throughout his career, his music deftly integrated traditional Argentinean folk idioms and instruments with the contemporary compositional techniques that reached the southern American continent from its near, northern neighbour, the United States, and Europe.

His music can be divided into three stylistic periods, the *Variaciones concertantes* of 1953 falling in the middle of the second, so-called 'Subjective Nationalism' phase, which lasted for a decade from 1948.

Despite his commitment to Argentina's cultural traditions, Ginastera's embracing of 'foreign' musical styles saw him censured by the Fascist-leaning government of Juan Perón. Forced to resign his position as director of the National University of La Plata, he took refuge in composing film scores, welcoming a commission from the Buenos Aires-based Asociación de Amigos de la Música to compose the *Variaciones concertantes*. Its first performance was conducted by Igor Markevitch.

Ginastera described the work as 'concerto-like', adding 'instead of employing folkloric materials, an Argentine atmosphere is obtained by the use of original melodies and rhythms... whose expressive tension has a pronounced Argentine accent'.

Cast in 12, through-played movements, it roots itself in five anchored pitches that appear in various guises throughout to lend a sense of both connectivity and continuity to the free-flowing material.

Two 'interludes' – the first for strings, heard immediately after the opening expressive theme for cello and harp; the second, for winds, as a sort of gear change towards the end – frame seven central sections, each giving prominence to individual or paired instruments, some with purely decorative intentions, others more actively re-fashioning the opening principal theme into a new melody.

The first variation proper is a bustling, scampering showpiece for flute that makes much of its *giacosa* ('merry, playful') marking. The second is an animated scherzo foregrounding the clarinet and underpinned by a borrowed but characteristic Ginastera signature: the jousting *malambo*, an energetic dance favoured by the iconic *gaucho* horsemen of Latin America.

A haunting threnody for viola, reminiscent of Ottorino Respighi, follows in the work's most extended sequence, its pensive mood seeping into the following forlorn exchange between oboe and bassoon that soon evaporates into momentary silence.

Out of which erupts a fiery, fleeting outburst from trumpet, trombone and slicing strings, another passage energised by its appropriation of the *malambo*. It is answered by a violinistic flurry which swiftly moves from agitation to mounting excitement before the last of the seven central variations finds horns coating the original theme in plaintive, pastoral hues.

A sweet-sour, wind-led Interlude leads to a reprise of the main theme, now melancholically voiced by harp-accompanied double bass, before a sprightly, extended final variation engages the full orchestra in one, last virtuosic flourish that takes the *malambo* to new, ecstatic symphonic heights.

Programme note Michael Quinn © RTÉ

LOUISE FARRENC 1804-1875

Symphony No. 3 in G minor

- i. *Adagio - Allegro*
- ii. *Adagio cantabile*
- iii. *Scherzo: Vivace*
- iv. *Finale: Allegro*

Relegated until recently to the footnotes of histories of 19th-century music, Louise Farrenc's rediscovery over the past two decades has revealed not just one of the finest female composers of the period, but one of the finest in any era. Her music carries itself with a crafted, cultivated quality that earned praise from her peers, Berlioz and Schumann, to whom she was favourably compared alongside Mendelssohn.

Born in Paris to a well-connected artistic family – her father and brother (Jacques-Edme and Auguste Dumont) were admired sculptors – she showed early promise as a pianist. Enough to merit lessons with luminaries such as Ignaz Moscheles, Johann Nepomuk Hummel and Anton Reicha

(himself currently being rediscovered as a composer of scintillating piano pieces).

Aged 15, she enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire in 1819 to study piano with Reicha, although composition lessons, then the exclusive preserve of men at the prestigious academy, were denied her. Over the next two decades she established herself as a formidable concert pianist, her prowess leading to her appointment to the Conservatoire as its first female professor of piano in 1842. Remaining in the post for 30 years, she became one of Europe's most respected keyboard teachers.

It's worth noting in passing two things: her husband, Aristide Farrenc, was a promising flute player later became one of France's leading music publishers; and, more significantly, Farrenc herself was a lifelong agitator for gender equality on the concert platform and in academia, eventually winning a hard, long-fought battle for parity of payment with her male colleagues.

She wrote the first of her three symphonies in the year she took up her teaching position, the second three years later in 1845 and the third, after a two-year gap during which she added to her substantial output of chamber music, in 1847.

Farrenc's symphonies flew in the face of convention, boldly asserting themselves into an historically male-dominated arena. As if that wasn't enough of a hill to climb, her commitment to instrumental and orchestral music was distinctly at odds with the then current craze in France for all things operatic. That it took its references from Germany was another indication of her individuality in the face of prevailing fashions.

Her Third Symphony, her last orchestral work, is the product of a composer secure and confident enough in her own abilities to step away from the Classical inheritance that marked her previous essays in the form. Cast in four movements, the first begins with a brittle, tentative *Adagio* theme

in woodwinds supported by expressive strings that quickly whip up a driving *Allegro*. It moves forward with elemental force before fragmenting into a series of brief, characterful dialogues between individual instruments and orchestral sections en masse before concluding in a mighty flourish worthy of Beethoven (a glancing reminder, perhaps, of her piano teacher's intimate association with the great man).

The elegant *Adagio cantabile* second movement opens with a beautiful clarinet theme of plaintive but entrancing, sylvan lyricism that is punctuated by soft timpani and underpinned by cosseting horns, woodwinds and strings.

The ensuing Scherzo carries itself with all the fleet, Mendelssohnian vitality and grace implied by its *Vivace* marking; a veritable ballet of harmonic richness with diaphanous, pirouetting woodwinds, swirling strings and lithely muscular horns and percussion.

The *Allegro* Finale finds a way of seamlessly blending Mendelssohn, Schumann and Beethoven while asserting its own lyrical identity. After a forceful unison opening, it boasts what deserves to be one of the 19th century's most memorable symphonic tunes. Its vigorous robustness drives the orchestra into a beautifully articulated reverie in which spryly animated instrumental sections strive to outdo each other before concluding in a feverish, diabolical whirlwind of activity capped by a thrilling final flourish to match any by Farrenc's better remembered male peers.

Programme note Michael Quinn © RTÉ