

PROGRAM NOTES – April 23, 2011
by Jonathan Rabben

Elena Roussanova Lucas – Tatarian Dances

Elena Roussanova Lucas (b.1974) is a native of Moscow who currently teaches music theory and composition at the Berklee College of Music and Boston University. She was a child prodigy, starting her music education at age three in a School for "Wunderkind" in Moscow. Her prolific writing encompasses many diverse styles, including music for orchestras, wind ensembles, chamber ensembles, and solo pieces, as well as Broadway and popular style songs. She is also an accomplished concert pianist, having won nationwide piano competitions in her native Russia. She has performed in Russia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the United States.

The *Tatarian Dances*, published in 2003, honor the Tatar people, whose ancestors settled in antiquity in what is now Russia. Their homeland today is the Republic of Tatarstan, a part of the Russian Federation located about 500 miles east of Moscow and extending eastward to the Ural Mountains. Tatar folk music is fresh, lively, and melodious, all of which are amply expressed in this four-movement suite that celebrates the many traditions of the Tatar holidays.

Staged in four movements, this charming suite of characteristic *Tatarian Dances* begins with the spirited *Sabantui-Spring Dance*. Sabantui, a traditional springtime folk festival of Tatarstan that marks the end of planting the fields, has been celebrated in Tatarstan and another Russian republic, Bashkortostan, for centuries. The name Sabantui is translated from the Tatar and Bashkir languages as "a celebration of the plough."

A lovely musical depiction is the focus of the second movement, *Sarman River*. It is characterized by swelling and rippling melodic lines that suggest a river flowing peacefully. The third and fourth movements, *Harvest Dance* and *Wedding Dance*, are played without a break, yet the contrasting styles offer a diverse variety of textures expressing joyous harvest and wedding themes. The composer dedicated this lovely set of dances to her mother, Lidia Roussanova, who resides in Moscow.

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco – Concertino for Harp

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895, Florence, Italy – 1968, Beverly Hills, CA) was a prolific Italian composer of the twentieth century, with hundreds of works to his credit. Although his opus numbers go only to 210, he also wrote many unnumbered compositions, including three operas and more than 300 solo songs. Castelnuovo-Tedesco emigrated to the United States in 1939, narrowly escaping the rising tide of anti-Semitism spreading throughout Europe before World War II. He settled in Beverly Hills, CA, where he composed extensively for the film industry, writing music for over 200 movies.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco is best known for his more than 100 works for guitar, for which he is known as one of the foremost composers for that instrument. His music, for the most part, is traditional and restrained in style, genial and tuneful, and harmonically inventive, while almost always remaining resolutely tonal.

This vast collection of music includes a lesser-known jewel, the *Concertino for Harp*, Op. 93, composed in 1937, which we enjoy in this concert. The work is scored for harp solo, string quartet, two clarinets, and bass clarinet, and is in three movements: *Moderato (quasi passacaglia)*, *Andante quasi recitativo*, and *Ritmo di Malaguena*.

The passacaglia originated in the early 17th century, and by the 19th century the word came to mean a series of variations over an *ostinato* pattern, usually of a serious character. In the first movement we hear a recurring progression by the solo harp and other instruments in 7/4 meter, a distinctly 20th century attribute that adds a modern sound to an old musical form.

The *Andante quasi recitativo* features a delicate interplay between the solo harp and accompanying instruments in the style of an accompanied vocal recitative. Throughout these two movements we hear a Spanish influence in the music, which can be traced to the composer's relationship with Andre Segovia, who influenced Castelnuovo-Tedesco's concentration on music for the guitar.

The final *Ritmo di Malaguena* wraps up this delightful composition with the lively sounds of the Spanish *Malaguena*. Malagueña is the feminine form of the Spanish language adjective *malagueño/ malagueña*, pertaining to Malaga, a Spanish port city. With this music the composer reminds us of the passion expressed in the music of Spain.

A. Paul Johnson – Symphony No. 1 ("The Romantic")

A. Paul Johnson (b.1955) is a Florida-based composer, conductor, writer, and director, and has appeared as guest artist for regional theaters and music organizations throughout the United States. In 2004, he was semi-finalist in The Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra's Fresh Ink—Florida Composer's competition, and he has twice been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for his compositions. His work has been performed extensively in the U.S. and abroad, including a performance by the Carson City Symphony of his *Pegasus* in October 2005.

Johnson has composed four symphonies, the first of which ("The Romantic") we hear tonight. This is a three-movement work composed in 1995. The Symphony received its premiere by the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra for their "Fresh Ink 2000" Festival, and earned the composer his second Individual Artist Fellowship from the Florida Arts Council.

The Symphony begins with a leisurely and sonorous *Andante dolcissimo*, and then moves into highly energetic themes featuring frequent changes in meter and tonality. The movement concludes with a return to a more leisurely and sonorous tone reminiscent of the beginning.

Johnson explains that, for the second and third movements, he borrowed two major themes from other works. The waltz theme in the second movement, *Valse Triste*, came from his incidental music to Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, and the final *Allegro ma non troppo* borrows heavily from his Romantic Overture, which was commissioned for the 50th anniversary of the Indianapolis Philharmonic in 1992. In Mr. Johnson's words, "so much was similar that I have taken the overture from my catalogue and let this finale stand in its place."

Camille Saint-Saëns – Morceau de Concert for Harp and Orchestra

Charles-Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921) was a French late-Romantic composer, organist, conductor, and pianist, known especially for *The Carnival of the Animals*, *Danse macabre*, *Samson and Delilah*, *Piano Concerto No. 2*, *Havanaise*, *Introduction and Rondo capriccioso*, *Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor*, and his *Symphony No. 3 (Organ Symphony)*.

Saint-Saëns was a child prodigy, having started piano lessons at age two. At about that time, he was found to have perfect pitch. He also started composing at a very early age, writing his first piece (for piano) in 1839 and having his first public concert appearance at age five.

Saint-Saëns' early start and his long life provided him with time to write more than 300 compositions. He wrote many dramatic works, including thirteen operas and four symphonic poems, of which *Samson et Dalila* and the symphonic poem *Danse macabre* are among his most famous. He was the first major composer to write music specifically for the cinema, for Henri Lavedan's film *The Assassination of the Duke of Guise* (Op. 128, 1908).

Included among Saint-Saëns' many concerto-type works for a solo instrument and orchestra is the *Morceau de Concert* for harp and orchestra, Op. 154, composed in 1918. This piece is of the nature of a small-scale four-movement concerto, yet the four distinct sections are performed without interruption. The composition begins with a lively chordal melody *allegro non troppo* played by the solo harp and answered by the orchestra, which is then developed into a brisk *animato* section. A lovely *andante sostenuto* section ensues, featuring a delicate interplay of solo harp and orchestral passages reminiscent of Beethoven's work. The *Molto allegro* section opens with a virtuoso introduction by the solo harp and develops into the final *Allegro non troppo* reprise of the opening theme, this time introduced vigorously by the orchestra and leading into a *Molto allegro* coda that wraps up the entire piece.