

**West Valley Symphony**  
***Lyrical Transformations***  
**Guest Conductor *Janna Hymes***  
**November 10, 2024**  
**Program Notes**

**George Enescu** was one of the most astonishing musical prodigies of all time. He was born in 1881 in the Romanian village of Liveni, which later renamed itself as *George Enescu* in honor of the famous musician. He entered the Vienna Conservatory as the youngest student ever at age seven. Graduating when he was twelve, he then moved to Paris for further studies. The multi-talented Enescu was a violinist of international stature, but was equally at home playing concertos for piano as well as conducting and composing. His conducting debut in America was in 1923 with the Philadelphia Orchestra and was so popular that he was asked to be Toscanini's replacement with the New York Philharmonic, which he declined. He lived in Paris and Romania, but after World War II permanently settled in Paris where he died in 1955.

Enescu produced several works based on indigenous tunes from Romania and yet in their skillful rhythmic and harmonic techniques, he made them his own. Whether or not he wrote in a folk vein, Enescu was always a composer of impeccable taste and a first-rate technician. Sadly, most of his music has fallen out of fashion and is known mostly to record collectors. His most celebrated works, and the only ones still in the active orchestral repertoire, are the two Romanian Rhapsodies. They were first performed in Paris in 1908 and conducted by the great cellist, Pablo Casals. The rhapsodies were instantly successful and established Enescu as the major musical voice from Romania.

**Claude Debussy's** musical life was changed forever from several experiences in 1888-89. That was the year he first encountered the music of Richard Wagner and the Russian Nationlists such as Mussorgsky and Borodin. This music was a shock to his system and set him on the path to being Debussy the composer we know better from works like *La Mer* or *Prelude to the Afternoon of Faun*. The *Petite Suite* was written just before this ear-opening year and is still "pre-Debussy" Debussy. Originally the *Petite Suite* was a work for piano four-hands. Debussy started writing the work in 1888 at the request of his publisher, Jacques Durand, who asked the composer to write a piece that would be playable by skilled amateurs. Debussy and Durand gave the first performance of the suite on February 2, 1889. It's four movements were *En Bateau* (Sailing), *Cortege*, *Menuet*, and *Ballet*.

The popularity of the suite led Durand to request a version for orchestra. That task was handed over to Debussy's friend Henri Büsser who scored it for a small orchestra. Nowadays the suite is much better known in its orchestral version than the piano original.

The numbering of **Robert Schumann's** Symphony No. 2 is misleading; it was actually his third of his four symphonies. It was begun in December 1845 and finished the following year. The first performance took place at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1846, with Mendelssohn conducting. The symphony was written at a time

when the composer was suffering from severe pain and discomfort which would lead to his mental and physical collapse a decade later. His work on writing the symphony served as an antidote to his suffering.

In a letter to G. Otten, musical director in Hamburg, in 1849, Schumann wrote “I wrote the Symphony in December 1845, when I was still ailing; it seems to me as if one could not help hearing it in the music. It was only in the last movement that I began to feel better. But otherwise, as I said, it reminds me of a dark time.”

In a later letter he was more specific: “I sketched it when I was still in a state of physical suffering; nay, I say it was, so to speak, the resistance of the spirit which exercised as a visible influence here, and through which I sought to contend with my bodily state. The first movement is full of this struggle and is very capricious and refractory.” He also writes of his “melancholy bassoon” in the Adagio.

The symphony as played today is not in the form that it was presented in 1846. Schumann was not initially satisfied with the work, and extensively revised it, particularly as regards the orchestration, a skill that Schumann always struggled with.

The Second Symphony is dedicated to Oscar I, King of Sweden and Norway.

~Marty Haub