



# Grant Park Music Festival

Seventy-fifth Season

Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus

Carlos Kalmar, *Principal Conductor*

Christopher Bell, *Chorus Director*

**Fourteenth Program:** Khachaturian's *Spartacus*

**Friday, July 17, 2009 at 6:30 p.m.**

Jay Pritzker Pavilion

GRANT PARK ORCHESTRA

Kirill Karabits, *Conductor*

Karen Gomyo, *Violin*

SILVESTROV

*Serenade of Parting* for String Orchestra

Adagio — Moderato

SHOSTAKOVICH

Violin Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 99

Nocturne: Moderato

Scherzo: Allegro — Poco più mosso — Allegro —

Poco più mosso

Passacaglia: Andante — Cadenza —

Burlesque: Allegro con brio

KAREN GOMYO

KHACHATURIAN

Suite from *Spartacus*

Introduction and Dance of the Nymphs

Introduction, Adagio of Aegina and Harmodius

Variations of Aegina and Bacchanalia

Scene and Dance with Crotalums

Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia

Dance of the Gaditanian Maidens and Victory of Spartacus

This concert is generously sponsored by ComEd.



At the start of 2009/10, **KIRILL KARABITS** will become Principal Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. His first official appearance in this new role will be at the BBC Proms in August 2009. As a guest conductor, Karabits made his North American debut with the Houston Symphony in March 2009, and this season conducts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in the two opening concerts of their Hollywood Bowl season, as well as appearing at the Grant Park and Aspen Festivals. Future dates in the United States include concerts with the Minnesota, Washington and Indianapolis Symphonies and a re-invitation to the Houston Symphony in the 2010/11 season. In Europe, recent highlights have included his debuts with Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI Turin and SWR-Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden/Freiburg. Next season he will debut with the Basel Symphony, Iceland Symphony, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Danish National Symphony and Tokyo Symphony. He will also return to the Philharmonia Orchestra for concerts in May 2010, and will appear at the Kissinger Sommer Festival with Bamberger Symphoniker. As an opera conductor, productions this season have included Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* with Opéra National du Rhin, Tchaikovsky's *Pique Dame*, and *Idomeneo* with Opéra National de Lorraine. Last season saw debuts with the Geneva Opera (Janacek's *The Adventures of Mr Broucek*) and Glyndebourne Festival Opera (*Eugene Onegin*). He will make his Opéra National de Lyon debut with Shostakovich's *Moskva, Cherevushki* in December 2009, and in autumn 2010 he will debut with the English National Opera with a production of *Don Giovanni*.

Recipient of a 2008 Avery Fisher Career Grant, Canadian violinist **KAREN GOMYO** was first recognized when she won the 1997 Young Concert Artists International Auditions. Ms. Gomyo's extensive solo appearances include the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Houston Symphony, Toronto Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Dallas Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra of Washington D.C., Cincinnati Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Vancouver Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony, Oregon Symphony, Florida Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, Louisiana Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the New Jersey Symphony. On Memorial Day this year she performed Vaughn-Williams' *The Lark Ascending* with David Robertson and the New York Philharmonic at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and last September she had the honor of being asked to perform a solo Bach movement at the First Symposium for the Victims of Terrorism held at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York. Born in Tokyo in 1982, Ms. Gomyo moved to Montreal in 1984. She began to play in public soon after her first violin lessons at the age of five. After playing for the noted teacher Dorothy DeLay, she was invited to study at The Juilliard School. Ms. Gomyo continued her studies at Indiana University, working with Mauricio Fuks, and graduated in May 2007 from the studio of Donald Weilerstein at the New England Conservatory of Music. Ms. Gomyo plays the rare "Ex Foulis" Stradivarius of 1703 that was bought for her exclusive use by a private sponsor.





## **SERENADE OF PARTING FOR STRING ORCHESTRA (2003)**

### **Valentin Silvestrov (born in 1937)**

*The Serenade of Parting is scored for strings. The performance time is six minutes. This is the first performance of the work by the Grant Park Orchestra.*

“It seems to me that music is song in spite of everything, even when it is unable to sing in a literal sense. Not a philosophy, not a system of beliefs, but the song of the world about itself, and at the same time a musical testament to existence.” With these visionary words, Valentin Silvestrov — “one of the greatest composers of our time,” according to both the late Russian composer Alfred Schnittke and his esteemed Estonian colleague Arvo Pärt — distilled his belief in the inter-relatedness of music’s lyrical thread and our sense of our own time-bound lives. Silvestrov, born in Kiev, Ukraine in 1937, did not develop an interest in music until he was a teenager. He took some evening courses at a music school in Kiev from 1955 to 1958, when he was training to become a civil engineer, and he was influenced deeply enough by them that he changed his career path and entered the Kiev Conservatory to study composition with the highly respected Boris Lyatoshinsky. Silvestrov taught privately for a half-dozen years after graduating from the school in 1964, but he has since lived in Kiev as a free-lance composer.

Early in his career, Silvestrov took advantage of the cultural thaw that swept the Soviet Union following the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 by composing works in decidedly modernistic idioms. Those compositions were little heard at home, but he did have a number of performances in Russia and the West (to which he was not then allowed to travel), and in 1967 he won a prize from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress. Silvestrov’s avant-gardism earned him little favor in Kiev, however, and in 1974 he was threatened with expulsion from the Composers’ Union for defying the government bureaucracy’s established norms. Rather than renounce his modernist style, he withdrew for an extended period of reflection on the nature and intent of his work, and during the next three years he created *Silent Songs*, a two-hour cycle of 24 songs intended (at least at first) for private performance that are lyrical, reflective and intimately quiet throughout. His compositions since — symphonies, tone poems, concerted works, chamber music, piano sonatas, cantatas and songs — have become “impregnated with a slow expressive confidence and exhibit greatly prolonged melodic lines in a post romantic climate that is often reminiscent of Gustav Mahler,” according to Frans C. Lemaire, the Belgian musicologist who has specialized in the contemporary music of Eastern Europe. Many of Silvestrov’s works are contemplative responses to earlier music, sometimes in style, mood or sonority but not infrequently in actual quotation. “I do not write new music,” he said. “My music is a response to and an echo of what already exists.” Silvestrov’s distinctive music has earned him not only an international reputation through recordings, performances and residencies at festivals in London, Berlin, Austria, Denmark, Finland and Holland but also belated recognition at home — in 1995, he won the Shevchenko State Prize from the government of Ukraine.

Silvestrov composed his *Serenade of Parting* in 2003 in memory of the Ukrainian composer and conductor Ivan Fedorovich Karabits (1945-2002), a long-time friend and supporter (and father of conductor Kirill Karabits). The work comprises two continuous parts: the first, introductory in nature, is based on a series of hesitant, descending scale fragments, patterns long used in music to express sorrow; the second is a slow, quiet shadow-waltz, sweet, sad, peaceful, hovering poignantly between memory and awareness.



## VIOLIN CONCERTO NO. 1 IN A MINOR, OP. 99 (1948)

### Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

*Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto is scored for piccolo, two flutes, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta and string. The performance time is 39 minutes. This is the work's first performance by the Grant Park Orchestra.*

In 1948, Shostakovich, Prokofiev and many other important Soviet composers were condemned for threatening the political and emotional stability of the nation with their “formalistic” music. Through Andrei Zhdanov, head of the Soviet Composers’ Union and the official mouthpiece for the government, it was made known that any experimental or modern or abstract or difficult music was no longer acceptable for consumption by the Russian peoples. Only simplistic music glorifying the state, the land and the people would be performed. In other words, symphonies, operas, chamber music — anything involving too concentrated an intellectual effort or critical thought — were out; movie music, folk song settings and patriotic cantatas were in.

Shostakovich saw the iron figure of Joseph Stalin behind the purge of 1948, as he was convinced it had been for an earlier one in 1936. After the 1936 debacle, Shostakovich responded with the Fifth Symphony, and kept composing through the years of World War II, even becoming an international figure representing the courage of the Russian people with the lightning success of his Seventh Symphony (“Leningrad”) in 1941. The 1948 censure was, however, almost more than Shostakovich could bear. He determined that he would go along with the Party prerogative for pap, and withhold all of his substantial works until the time when they would be given a fair hearing — when Stalin was dead. About the only music that Shostakovich made public between 1948 and 1953 was that for films, most of which had to do with episodes in Soviet history (*The Fall of Berlin*, *The Memorable Year 1919*), and some jingoistic vocal works (*The Sun Shines Over Our Motherland*). The only significant works he released during that half-decade were the *24 Preludes and Fugues* for Piano, Op. 34. The other works of that time — the First Violin Concerto, the *Songs on Jewish Folk Poetry*, the Fourth and Fifth String Quartets — were all withheld until later years. The Violin Concerto, composed for David Oistrakh in 1947-1948 as Op. 77, was not heard in public until 1955, when it was re-numbered as Op. 99.

In his purported memoirs, *Testimony*, Shostakovich revealed the inspiration behind the First Violin Concerto: “Jewish folk music has made a most powerful impression on me. I never tire of delighting in it; it’s multifaceted, it can appear to be happy while it is tragic. It’s almost always laughter through tears... [But] this is not purely a musical issue, this is also a moral issue. The Jews became the most persecuted and defenseless people of Europe [during World War II]. It was a return to the Middle Ages. Jews became a symbol for me. All of man’s defenselessness was concentrated in them. After the war, I tried to convey that feeling in my music. Despite all the Jews who perished in the camps, all I heard people saying was, ‘They went to Tashkent to fight.’ And if they saw a Jew with military decorations, they called after him, ‘Hey, where did you buy the medals?’ That’s when I wrote the Violin Concerto, the *Jewish* cycle, and the Fourth Quartet.” After he premiered the work, David Oistrakh, who helped in the preparation of the score and was probably privy to the composer’s thoughts, wrote, “In the Violin Concerto, as in many other of Shostakovich’s works, I am attracted by the amazing seriousness and profundity of the idea, the truly symphonic thinking. There is nothing accidental in the score of the Concerto, nothing that is used for its outward effect and is not supported by the inner logic, by the development of the material. Behind Shostakovich’s symphonic thinking you can always sense the profoundest meditation on life, on the fate of mankind.”

Shostakovich likened the First Violin Concerto to “a symphony for solo violin and orchestra,” and, with its four-movement structure, gravity of expression and fully developed musical argument, it bears little resemblance to the traditional virtuoso concerto. A personal touch is woven into the fabric of the music by the recurring notes of Shostakovich’s musical signature: D–E–flat–C–B, a motive that also occurs in the Tenth Symphony and the Eighth Quartet. (The note D represents

Shostakovich's initial. In German transliteration, the composer's name begins "Sch": S [less] in German notation equals E-flat, C is C, and H equals B-natural.)

The brooding opening movement, titled *Nocturne*, is an extended, accompanied soliloquy for the violin that grows continuously from the plaintive melody presented at the beginning by the low strings. The movement, without clear structural divisions, takes the shape of a huge arch, quiet at beginning and end, intense in its central portion. The second movement, a raucous *Scherzo* whose theme resembles that of the comparable movement in the Tenth Symphony, provides the utmost contrast to the introspective music of the preceding *Nocturne*. The expressive heart of the Concerto lies in its third movement, the darkly hued and deeply emotional *Passacaglia*. The passacaglia is an ancient musical form, serious in expression, built on a short invariable melody to which are added elaborating lines on each repetition. The Soviet musicologist and critic Vasily Kukharsky wrote of this music, "In the *Passacaglia*, there is philosophic meditation, there is sorrow and sad lyricism, and there is courage.... It may be said that Shostakovich has never achieved such magnificent simplicity, such an inspiration of melodic thinking." A massive cadenza for the soloist, almost a separate movement in itself, links the pensive end of the third movement to the surging energy of the finale, a brilliant, whirling *Burlesca* that recalls in its closing pages themes from earlier movements.



### SUITE FROM SPARTACUS (1954)

#### Aram Khachaturian (1903-1978)

*The Suite from Spartacus is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta, piano and strings. The performance time is 35 minutes. This is the first performance of the Suite by the Grant Park Orchestra.*

Aram Khachaturian was one of the leading composers of the Soviet Union and the most celebrated musician of his native state of Armenia. When he arrived in Moscow in 1921 from his home town of Tbilisi, he had virtually no formal training in music, but his talent was soon recognized, and he was admitted to the academy of Mikhail Gnessin, a student of Rimsky-Korsakov. Khachaturian's first published works date from 1926; three years later he entered the Moscow Conservatory. His international reputation was established with the success of the Piano Concerto in 1936, composed at the same time that he became active in the newly founded Union of Soviet Composers, of which he was elected Deputy Chairman of the Moscow branch in 1937 and Deputy President of the National Organizing Committee two years later. In 1939, he returned to live for six months in Armenia, where he immersed himself in the folk music of his boyhood home in preparation for composing the ballet *Happiness*. Boris Schwarz noted that the composer's synthesis of vernacular and cultivated musical styles in that work "represents the fulfillment of a basic Soviet arts policy: the interpenetration of regional folklorism and the great Russian tradition." Khachaturian's composer colleague Dmitri Kabalevsky wrote, "The especially attractive features of Khachaturian's music are in its roots in national folk fountainheads. The captivating rhythmic diversity of dances of the peoples of Transcaucasia and the inspired improvisations of the *asbugs* [Armenia's native bards] — such are the sources from which have sprung the composer's creative endeavors. From the interlocking of these two principles there grew Khachaturian's symphonism — vivid and dynamic, with keen contrasts, now enchanting in their mellow lyricism, now stirring in their tension and drama." Khachaturian remained a proud and supportive Armenian throughout his life, serving in 1958 as the state's delegate to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. "My whole life, everything that I have created, belongs to the Armenian people," he once said.

*Spartacus* is Khachaturian's most sweeping ballet and one of his greatest creations. The scenario by Nikolai Volkov, who also provided the libretto for Prokofiev's *Cinderella*, was based on an episode from ancient Roman history which occurred in 74-71 B.C. and was recorded by both Plutarch and Appian. In the story, the Thracian warrior Spartacus, captured and enslaved by the Roman legions, is trained as a gladiator. His wife, Phrygia, is bought in the slave market by the Roman general Crassus and Crassus' mistress, Aegina, and pressed into their service. Spartacus, though victorious

in the gruesome games in which he is forced to participate, rebels at their senseless brutality and persuades his fellow gladiators to overpower their guards and flee. Spartacus becomes head of a rebel force of escaped gladiators and fugitive slaves, which successfully invades the villa of Crassus during a sumptuous feast and frees Phrygia. Spartacus contrives a bold plan to attack the Roman army, but Harmodius, a friend turned traitor by the allurements of the seductive Aegina, reveals his secret to Crassus. The uprising is put down, Spartacus is killed in the battle, and the recaptured slaves are crucified. Though Spartacus died in the rebellion, his quest led to a significant amelioration in the situation of the classes whose champion he had become.

Volkov proposed the idea for a ballet on the subject of Spartacus to Khachaturian as early as 1938, and two years later the project was announced by the Soviet press. Despite almost annual statements that he was about to start composing the score, Khachaturian did not undertake the piece until the summer of 1950, noting on the first page of the manuscript that he was “beginning with a feeling of great excitement.” Work on *Spartacus* proceeded slowly, however, and the score was not completed until February 1954. More than two years then passed before the premiere was finally given at the Kirov in Leningrad on December 27, 1956 in a production choreographed by Leonid Yakobson. Though Khachaturian’s music was generally praised (it won the Lenin Prize in 1958), Yakobson’s choreography drew much criticism for abandoning the cherished patternings of classical Russian ballet in favor of a more graphic portrayal of the characters and drama, and *Spartacus* passed through a subsequent 1958 staging at the Moscow Bolshoi with choreography by Igor Moiseyev before reaching its definitive form with a second Bolshoi production, in 1968, in a version by Yuri Grigorovich. Khachaturian revised his score for each of the later productions.

While preparing the ballet, Khachaturian toured the appropriate ruins in Italy, but quickly dismissed the idea of making a modern recreation of that civilization’s music in *Spartacus*: “We know nothing of the music of ancient Rome,” he reasoned. The score was written instead in the brilliant orchestral style imbued with the spirit and melodic richness of his native Armenia that Khachaturian had polished so successfully in such earlier works as the three symphonies, *Gayne*, *Masquerade* and the concertos for piano and violin. “I wanted the score to express clearly the drama of the plot,” he said. His further words on the ideological basis of the ballet had a particular relevance to political climate in which it was composed: “I believe that the theme of Spartacus and the slave uprising in ancient Rome has great importance and appeal today. I thought of *Spartacus* as a monumental fresco describing the mighty avalanche of the antique rebellion of the slaves on behalf of human rights.... The era of Spartacus was an important one in the history of mankind. Today, when most of the world’s oppressed people are waging an intense struggle for national liberation and independence, the immortal image of Spartacus has acquired particular significance. When I composed the score of the ballet and tried to capture the atmosphere of ancient Rome in order to bring to life the images of the remote past, I never ceased to feel the spiritual affinity of Spartacus to our own time.”

*Introduction and Dance of the Nymphs* provides a graceful number for the start of Aegina’s voluptuous feast in Act II. In *Introduction, Adagio of Aegina and Harmodius*, the seductress tempts Spartacus’ friend to betray the rebels’ cause. The *Variations of Aegina and Bacchanalia*, the Roman god of wine and revelry, and the *Scene and Dance with Crotalums* take place during the opulent banquet scene at the villa of General Crassus, before the feast is interrupted by the rebellious gladiators. The *Scene*, a part of the evening’s entertainment, begins slowly, but rises in its central section to a frenzied climax accompanied by *crotalums*, small, cymbal-like metal clappers, held, like castanets, in one hand, a type of instrument known to have been used in ancient Roman orchestras. The passionate *Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia* (often referred to as the “Love Theme from *Spartacus*”), whose melodic style is said to be reminiscent of Armenian laments, accompanies the reunion of the hero and his wife after her rescue from Crassus’ house. The *Dance of the Gaditanian Maidens and Victory of Spartacus* consists of a swaying dance of vaguely exotic character that builds powerfully until culminating in the fanfare-like theme associated with Spartacus.

©2009 Dr. Richard E. Rodda