

Program Notes
Written by Bill Hemminger

CONCERTINO CUSQUEÑO
GABRIELA LENA FRANK

American pianist and composer Gabriela Lena Frank was born in 1972. When her father—of Lithuanian and Jewish parentage— was serving in Peru as a volunteer for the Peace Corps, he met the Peruvian woman (herself of Chinese heritage) who was to become her mother. Thus Frank comes to her eclectic, cross-cultural approach to musical composition quite naturally. She earned a Doctorate in Music Composition in 2001; her teachers include some of the most well-known names in musical composition today. She has written a number of pieces for orchestra, including the *Concertino Cusqueño* on this program, as well as works for singers and an opera, *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego*. She has had works commissioned and performed by ensembles such as Kronos Quartet, the Fort Worth Symphony, the Indianapolis Symphony, and the Aspen Music Festival. After winning a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship in 2009 she opened a school for fledgling composers, the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music.

The *Concertino Cusqueño* was written in 2012 and begins with a musical quotation from Benjamin Britten, one of Frank's favorite composers. The score then enriches the influence of Europe and western music as it incorporates a religious tune from Cusco (adjective form *cusqueño*), original capital of the Inca Empire and gateway to the spectacular ruins of Machu Picchu. Throughout its 12-minute exotic musical life, the Concertino combines folkloric lyricism with neo-classical formality.

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2
SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Sergei Rachmaninoff, 1873-1943, was a Russian pianist and composer, known best for his piano concertos, the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* (also for piano and orchestra), innumerable solo piano works, and choral works such as the *All-Night Vigil*. Rachmaninoff was arguably the last great figure in Russian Romantic music and one of the greatest piano virtuosos ever. His music has had tremendous, lasting effect on many levels of western culture; themes from the Piano Concerto #2 have found their way into Frank Sinatra's 1945 hit *Full Moon and Empty Arms* as well as Eric Carmen's *All By Myself* of 1975. Apparently, ripping off melodies from famous composers has not long constituted the theft of intellectual property that it does today.

Deserted by his destitute father at an early age, Rachmaninoff was taken in by a cousin who was a concert pianist and conductor and who recognized and encouraged Sergei's musical talent. Rachmaninoff graduated from the Moscow Conservatory at 19 and embarked on a career as composer and pianist.

Of a rather melancholic disposition (Rachmaninoff had both Slavic and artistic genes after all), Rachmaninoff reacted with horror and hostility to political events in Russia in his lifetime. Just after the 1905 rebellion, he and his family left for Dresden, Germany, returning to Russia some years later. After the 1917 Revolution, however, he left his homeland definitively, living for a time in Switzerland and then settling in California. Interestingly, the Piano Concerto No. 2—widely acclaimed at its premiere—helped Rachmaninoff come out of a severe depression and extended period of writer’s block. The concerto is dedicated to Nicolai Dahl, a hypnotherapist whom Rachmaninoff consulted as he developed courage to persist and complete the concerto.

The concerto begins with solo piano intoning enormous, unsettling chords before the orchestra enters and the pianist rushes across the keyboard in stormy accompanying runs. The orchestra introduces the first, impetuous theme in the composition’s tonic key of C minor; later, the piano offers up the longingly lyrical second theme in the relative major key of E flat. The movement ends as pianist and ensemble race to the final three conclusive chords. The following Adagio is pure gold: the piano provides flowing accompaniment for the solo flute whose cantabile line is taken up and developed by the clarinet. A second section is heard; its climax is reached in a piano cadenza. The movement ends, as it began, with the plaintive sounds of the piano playing meditatively alone. The final movement, *Allegro scherzando*, lives up to its tempo indication: initially dynamic and lively, the movement relaxes to make way for the second, Sinatra-famous melody, heard first in the orchestra, then beautifully rendered for the piano. The movement ends triumphantly in the tonic major.

SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN D MAJOR JEAN SIBELIUS

Jean Sibelius, 1865-1957, was a Finnish composer and violinist of the early-modern period. He is widely recognized as his country’s greatest composer and is credited with having helped Finland develop a national cultural identity. Independence for the country finally came in 1917, when the Russians gave up their management of the neighboring nation-state, which had previously been part of Sweden. Not surprisingly, Sibelius grew up speaking Swedish and did not learn his “native” language until adulthood though he considered himself a Finn. After abandoning law studies, he focused on his true interests, playing violin and composing music. Though he wrote little music in his later years, he left behind a significant body of work—seven symphonies, a violin concerto, the tone poem “Finlandia,” several orchestral suites, one of which includes the enchantingly brooding “Swan of Tuonela.” Musically, Sibelius was retrospective and conservative; his music differs greatly from the works of contemporaries Schoenberg, Bartók, or Stravinsky, for example.

The Symphony No. 2 in D major was completed in 1902 (later revisions of the symphony date from 1915 and 1919). Like Mendelssohn and so many other artists, Sibelius benefited from an extended stay in sunny Italy, where he began work on this, in so many ways the most luminous of his symphonies. The premiere of the symphony took place in Helsinki to thunderous applause and acclaim. Many listeners claimed that the symphony—with its powerful, unrelenting finale that ends exultantly in the tonic key of D major—might become an anthem in the Finnish fight for self-determination. Sibelius insisted, however, that the work was not at all programmatic, only symphonic.