



St. Louis Symphony  
Orchestra

stéphane denève : music director

19:20  
140th season

Stéphane Denève, conductor  
Karen Gomyo, violin

Friday, October 18, 2019 at 8:00 PM  
Saturday, October 19, 2019, at 8:00 PM  
Sunday, October 20, 2019, at 3:00 PM

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**POULENC**

(1899–1963)

*Les biches* Suite (1948)

Rondeau  
Adagietto  
Rag-Mazurka  
Andantino  
Final

**PROKOFIEV**

(1891–1953)

Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, op. 19 (1917)

Andantino  
Scherzo: Vivacissimo  
Moderato

Karen Gomyo, violin

INTERMISSION

**RACHMANINOFF**

(1873–1943)

*Symphonic Dances*, op. 45 (1940)

Non allegro  
Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)  
Lento assai; Allegro vivace

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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The 2019/2020 Classical Series is presented by **The Steward Family Foundation** and **World Wide Technology**.

Karen Gomyo is the **Carolyn and Jay Henges Guest Artist**.

The concert of Friday, October 18, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from **Mr. and Mrs. James L. Nouss, Jr.**

The concert of Saturday, October 19, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from **Mr. and Mrs. Walter J. Galvin**.

Pre-Concert Conversations are sponsored by **Washington University Physicians**.

# PROGRAM NOTES

BY TIM MUNRO

## *Stéphane Denève on this program*

*Les biches* is performed rarely. Poulenc expresses the spiritual ecstasy you can receive in a concert hall, and yet the music can also have a warmth, a kind of a light.

*Les biches* has something to do with Mozart. There is a saying: “Humor is the politeness of despair.” In Mozart, you have music in a major key, which appears very light, but there is such sadness and melancholy behind it. Poulenc has this elegance—he was a dandy who would never complain—but you get hints of an internal despair. I programmed it to show that depth and lightness can go together. *Les biches* was influenced by American jazz, which Rachmaninoff loved. While in America, he bought LPs for his daughter and went to jazz clubs.

It is appropriate that we program *Symphonic Dances* in the weeks after Mahler’s “Resurrection” Symphony. Because *Symphonic Dances* is Rachmaninoff’s own “Resurrection” Symphony—the musical summation of a life.

For instance, at the end of the first movement Rachmaninoff makes peace with the failure of his First Symphony. He thought he’d destroyed the parts of this symphony, so when he quotes his symphony, it is his secret.

*Symphonic Dances* is redeeming—it’s a piece of hope. The ending is an *Alleluia*, a triumph over death. It was his last work, and maybe, because he composed this piece, he felt he could die.



## FRANCIS POULENC

**Born** January 7, 1899, Paris, France

**Died** January 30, 1963, Paris, France

### *Les biches* Suite

The idea was simple. It would be a ballet with no story, “simply dances and songs,” according to Poulenc. But behind this innocent curtain, *Les biches* would hide truths, unutterable truths. “One can either see nothing,” Poulenc wrote, “or imagine the worst.”

The title holds a key: *Les biches* literally means “does” (female deer), and the phrase also refers to a group of women (“sweethearts” or “darlings”). But, more importantly, it had a specific meaning to an underground community of Poulenc’s Paris: *Les biches* were people with uncommon, or “deviant,” sexual desires.

Poulenc’s star was rising. Still in his 20s, he was on the tip of tongues, writing with a unique voice that embraced jazz, vaudeville, the Catholic mass, and the music of the 17th and 18th centuries. All music was welcome, all could go in the melting pot.

Yet Poulenc hid. As a gay man in post–World War I France, he masked the truth of his sexuality. A work like *Les biches* allowed him to hint at topics and relationships otherwise taboo in polite society: the game of sexual courtship, gender fluidity, same-sex partnerships.

Is *Les biches* a celebration or rejection of conventional courtship? A celebration or a rejection of libertine urges? A nostalgia for lost youth? Or a view of the role that women must play in society?

Poulenc’s music for *Les biches* doesn’t hint at such shadows and complexities. It is an innocent curtain of “dances and songs,” delighting in simplicity, full of “triads, simple harmonies, and uncluttered melody.”

The ballet was a hit. Its scenario was written by the fashion designer Germaine Bongard, and the ballet’s outward elegance and stylish design made it very modish in Paris’s most chic circles. As one writer put it at the time: “*Les riches* love *Les biches*.”

### Listening guide

**Characters:** *The Hostess* is dressed for a party, complete with pearl necklace and cigarette holder. (This role was originally danced by Nijinska, the choreographer of *Les biches*.)

**Three Male Athletes**, dressed in absurd work-out clothes, assume over-the-top body-builder poses. **The Girl in Blue**, a figure of ambiguous gender, wears blue velvet. **The Grey Girls**, two young women, are a lesbian couple.

**Overture.** A closed curtain shows women cavorting with deer and horses. The curtain rises on a stylized white drawing room, “with just one piece of furniture, an immense blue sofa,” Bongard writes in the scenario. “It is a warm summer afternoon and three young men are enjoying the company of sixteen lovely women. Their play is innocent in appearance only.”

**Rondeau.** Twelve women, in pink dresses and ostrich-feathered hats, dance in lines and circles. Brass and wind players lead a perky dance that alternates between impishness and romantic fantasy.

**Adagietto.** The Girl in Blue dances a solo. Entering “on her toes,” writes Jean Cocteau (who was at the ballet’s premiere), “in an excessively short jacket, with her long legs, and her right hand raised to her cheek as if in military salute, my heart beats faster, or stops beating altogether.” Poulenc’s passionate score is inspired by Tchaikovsky’s music for *Sleeping Beauty*.

**Rag-Mazurka.** The Hostess performs a solo dance with complex movements of the feet. This character has “the chic of the casino and the brothel,” according to an early review. The Athletes enter, parading in front of the Hostess, who flirts with them. Poulenc draws his wind-dominated music from a Chopin Polonaise, tinting it with the colors of French-ified jazz.

**Andantino.** The Girl in Blue and an Athlete dance together. They end in a passionate embrace. The influence of Stravinsky’s tangy take on 18th century dance music is evident here.

**Final.** A hectic dance features all of the dancers on-stage in various couplings. Poulenc draws on music from Mozart’s *Prague Symphony*.

**First ballet performance:** January 6, 1924 in Monte Carlo, Monaco, by the Ballets Russes, choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska

**SLSO premiere:** October 18, 2019, Stéphane Denève conducting

**Scoring:** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, field drum, glockenspiel, snare drum, suspended cymbal, tambourine, tenor drum, triangle), harp, celesta, strings

**Performance time:** Approximately 16 minutes

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## SERGEI PROKOFIEV

**Born** April 23, 1891, Sontsivka, Ukraine

**Died** March 5, 1953, Moscow, Russia

### Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, op. 19

In 1917, centuries of Tsarist control of Russia ended. The impact on Russian society, on Russian artists, was immense. The revolutionary Bolsheviks promised artistic freedom; the reality would be quite different.

At the time, Prokofiev was a young musical rebel. But he wanted nothing to do with the Revolution: born in the previous century, into a different society, this new world was strange, alien. His mind fled to simpler, musical world. To the world of this Violin Concerto.

The first movement of the concerto is marked *sognando* (“dreamily”). It shimmers, hovering like a mirage. Prokofiev titled a contemporary work *Visions fugitives* (“fleeting visions” or “escapist visions”), and echoes of this title lie in the dreamy visions of the concerto’s opening.

The second movement captures sounds from a different time. Prokofiev was drawn to the music of Haydn; their music shares a surface sheen, a quirky individuality, a wicked grin. Here, lightness presides: the solo violin buzzes around flutes on tippie-toes, yawning horns, chattering oboes. It is “like when you open a window for the first time in springtime,” wrote pianist Sviatoslav Richter. “Lively sounds find their way inside.”

Concertos often end with dazzle, but not this one. Prokofiev’s third movement sings a poignant, slow song of longing.

The concerto’s premiere was planned for 1918, then canceled when Prokofiev abruptly left Russia. He sailed to America, his heart heavy, his faith in his country shaken. The Violin Concerto sailed with him, traveling from country to country, waiting a further five years to receive its world premiere performance in Paris.

In its final moments, the music rises to the heights. Violinist David Oistrakh, a violinist later synonymous with Prokofiev’s works, said this music was “like a landscape bathed in sunlight.”

**First performance:** October 18, 1923, Paris, France, Serge Koussevitzky conducting the Paris Opera with Marcel Darrieux as soloist

**SLSO premiere:** January 25, 1945, Vladimir Golschman conducting with Joseph Szigeti as soloist

**Most recent SLSO performance:** November 5, 2016, Han-Na Chang conducting with Jan Mráček as soloist

**Scoring:** 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, tambourine), harp, strings, solo violin

**Performance time:** Approximately 22 minutes



## SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

**Born** April 1, 1873, Semyonovo, Russia

**Died** March 28, 1943, Beverly Hills, California

### *Symphonic Dances*, op. 45

#### Exile

Rachmaninoff spent much of his life in exile. Like Prokofiev, he left Russia in the confusion and disorder of the Revolution. He kept in close contact with friends and colleagues, and always imagined he would return to his homeland.

But soon he was blacklisted: Rachmaninoff was now a foreigner; worse, a Westerner. By 1940, the year he wrote *Symphonic Dances*, all doubt was removed: Rachmaninoff would never see his native Russia again.

"Losing my country, I lost myself also," wrote Rachmaninoff. "I left behind me my desire to compose." Between 1918 and his death in 1943, he would write just six original works. *Symphonic Dances* would be his last original composition.

The gaunt, taciturn man knew it, too. "That was probably my last flicker."

#### Creation

Rachmaninoff wrote *Symphonic Dances* at the height of his fame. His busy career as a pianist and conductor was taking him across the U.S., and he had recently been given a hero's welcome at Carnegie Hall.

Rachmaninoff wrote *Symphonic Dances* during a relaxing summer on his large beachfront estate in New Jersey. Artistic production is sometimes painted as a stormy beast, but Rachmaninoff kept tight, disciplined hours: After coffee, compose. 10:00 to noon, practice piano. Noon to 1:00, compose. Eat lunch and rest. 3:00-10:00, compose.

Yet he still felt this music deeply. The composer Richard Rodney Bennett, who assisted Rachmaninoff with the work's saxophone part, described Rachmaninoff in the heat of inspiration: "[He] sang, whistled, stomped, rolled his chords, and otherwise conducted himself not as one would expect of so great and impeccable a virtuoso..."

#### Memories

"To the exile whose musical roots, traditions, and background have been annihilated," wrote Rachmaninoff, "there remains no solace apart from the unbroken and unbreakable silence of his memories."

*Symphonic Dances* is a musical photo album filled with Rachmaninoff's memories. References to music from across his career dot its pages, most presented in joyful contexts, as if we leaf through this album with a gentle smile.

The tragic motto from his First Symphony, an abject failure at its premiere, appears in a bright major key. A melody from the Vespers, a work for a cappella choir, sings in praise of God: "[Jesus] has restored to life those who had fallen from

it! Alleluia.” Even the melody known as the *Dies Irae* (the Latin mass of the dead) blazes with major-key, brass-led hope.

### The music

Rachmaninoff is not a composer often associated with dance. His music rarely swings and tilts and grooves. Why would this aging, physically awkward composer, who never wrote a ballet score, cap his career with a set of orchestral dances?

*Symphonic Dances* is less a collection of dances, more a collection of mood pieces that lean towards darkness, lean toward night. Rachmaninoff originally gave the three movements titles: “Noon,” “Twilight,” “Midnight.”

“**Noon**” conjures a shadowy daytime. Rachmaninoff’s ambiguous tempo marking is telling: *non allegro* (depending on your translation, “not cheerful” or “not fast”). After tentative steps the orchestra finds its feet, staggering into a light that is more brutal than dazzling. Warmth seeps into the movement’s central section.

“**Twilight**” brings a strange liminal world. This waltz is far from the velvety world of Strauss and family. Rachmaninoff struggled with depression for much of his life, and was drawn to the darkness. Solo instruments whirl in the fog. Nothing is certain; danger seems around every corner.

“**Midnight**” brings nerves. Strings jitter, winds shudder, bells chime. The music is occasionally jolted towards brightness, and a central section glows with warmth. According to Stéphane Denève, “the ending is an Alleluia, a triumph over death.”

### The final word

“What is music?” wrote Rachmaninoff. “It is a peaceful moonlit night; it is the ruling of living leaves; it is the distant evening bell; it is that which is board of the heart and pierces the heart; it is love!”

“The sister of music is poetry, but its mother is a heavy heart!”

**First performance:** January 3, 1941, Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra

**SLSO premiere:** April 5, 1968, Abram Stasevich conducting

**Most recent SLSO performance:** October 23, 2016, Cristian Măcelaru conducting

**Scoring:** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, chimes, cymbals, glockenspiel, snare drum, tam tam, tambourin, triangle, xylophone), harp, piano, strings

**Performance time:** Approximately 35 minutes

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## STÉPHANE DENEVE

SLSO Music Director

Stéphane Denève is 13th Music Director for the 140-year-old St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, beginning his tenure in the 2019/2020 season. He also serves as Music Director of the Brussels Philharmonic, Principal Guest Conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra, and Director of the Centre for Future Orchestral Repertoire (CffOR).

Recognized internationally for the exceptional quality of his performances and programming, Denève regularly appears at major concert venues with the world's greatest orchestras and soloists. He has a special affinity for the music of his native France and is a passionate advocate for music of the 21st century. A gifted communicator and educator, he is committed to inspiring the next generation of musicians and listeners, and has worked regularly with young people in the programs such as those of the Tanglewood Music Center, New World Symphony, the Colburn School, and the Music Academy of the West.

He is a frequent guest with leading orchestras such as the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, The Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Toronto Symphony, Orchestre National de France, Vienna Symphony, DSO Berlin and NHK Symphony. Last season, he led a major U.S. tour with the Brussels Philharmonic.

In the field of opera, Denève has led productions at the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne Festival, La Scala, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Saito Kinen Festival, Gran Teatro de Liceu, Netherlands Opera, La Monnaie, Deutsche Oper Am Rhein, and at the Opéra National de Paris.

As a recording artist, he has won critical acclaim for his recordings of the works of Poulenc, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel, Franck and Honegger. He is a triple winner of the Diapason d'Or of the Year, has been shortlisted for Gramophone's Artist of the Year Award, and has won the prize for symphonic music at the International Classical Music Awards. His most recent releases include *Lost Horizon*, a two-disc set of music by Guillaume Connesson with the Brussels Philharmonic, saxophonist Timothy McAllister, and violinist Renaud Capuçon on Deutsche Grammophon; Honegger's *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra on its label; and *Cinema* with violinist Renaud Capuçon and the Brussels Philharmonic on Erato/Warner Classics featuring some of the most memorable melodies from the silver screen.

For further information, please visit [slo.org/deneve](https://slo.org/deneve).



## KAREN GOMYO

Carolyn and Jay Henges Guest Artist

Born in Tokyo and beginning her musical career in Montréal and New York, violinist Karen Gomyo has recently made Berlin her home. A musician of the highest caliber, the *Chicago Tribune* praised her as “a first-rate artist of real musical command, vitality, brilliance and intensity”.

Gomyo's 2019/20 season features European debuts with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin with Cristian Măcelaru, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande with Jonathan Nott, Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken/Kaiserslautern with Pietari Inkenen, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra with Gergely Madaras and Dresdner Philharmoniker with Roderick Cox, as well as returns to Bamberg Symphoniker and Polish National Radio Symphony, among others. Other recent European appearances include the Philharmonia Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Symphonique de Radio France, WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, Danish National Symphony, and the March 2019 opening of the Dubai Proms with the BBC Symphony and Ben Gernon. Further ahead, Gomyo will make her debut at the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra with Semyon Bychkov.

Already well established in North America, Gomyo performs regularly with the orchestras of Detroit, San Francisco, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toronto, Montréal, Washington D.C., and Philadelphia, among others.

Further afield, her popularity in Australasia continued over the last few seasons as she toured with the New Zealand Symphony, appeared with West Australian Symphony Orchestra in Perth, the Tasmanian Symphony, and in recital at the Sydney Opera House. This season sees Gomyo return to the Melbourne and Sydney Symphony Orchestras.

Strongly committed to contemporary works, Gomyo gave the North American premiere of Matthias Pintscher's Concerto No. 2 *Mar'eh*, with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington under the baton of the composer. In May 2018 she performed the world premiere of Samuel Adams' new Chamber Concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Esa-Pekka Salonen to great critical acclaim. The work was written specifically for Gomyo and commissioned by the CSO's “Music Now” series for their 20th anniversary.

Gomyo has had the pleasure of working with such conductors as Sir Andrew Davis, Cristian Măcelaru, David Robertson, David Zinman, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Hannu Lintu, Jaap van Zweden, Jakub Hrůša, James Gaffigan, Karina Canellakis,

Leonard Slatkin, Louis Langrée, Mark Wigglesworth, Mirga Gražinyte-Tyla, Neeme Järvi, Pinchas Zukerman, Thomas Dausgaard, Thomas Søndergård, Vasily Petrenko, and Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

A passionate chamber musician, Gomyo has enjoyed a fruitful collaboration with guitarist Ismo Eskelinen, which culminates in the release of a recording of works by Paganini and his contemporaries scheduled for the end of 2019 on BIS Records. Gomyo has also collaborated with Kathryn Stott, Leif Ove Andsnes, James Ehnes, Antoine Tamestit, Lawrence Power, Christian Poltéra, Alisa Weilerstein, and the late Heinrich Schiff. She appears regularly at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark and has also joined Jeremy Denk at his Milton Court/Barbican residency in London. Future chamber plans include a new piano trio with pianist Olli Mustonen and cellist Julian Steckel.

Gomyo participated as violinist, host, and narrator in a documentary film produced by NHK Japan about Antonio Stradivarius called *The Mysteries of the Supreme Violin*, which was broadcast worldwide on NHK WORLD. She is also a champion of the nuevo tango music of Astor Piazzolla, with plans in development for a diverse program with the San Francisco Symphony. Gomyo regularly collaborates with Piazzolla's longtime pianist and tango legend Pablo Ziegler, as well as, more recently, with bandoneon player and composer JP Jofre.

Gomyo plays on the "Aurora" Stradivarius violin of 1703 that was bought for her exclusive use by a private sponsor.



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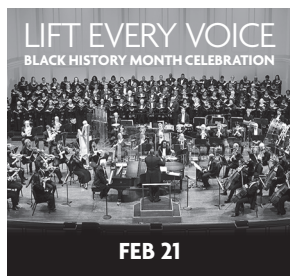
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