

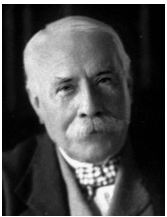
# notes

April 18/19

APRIL IN PARIS

By Dr. Richard E. Rodda

**30 SECOND NOTES:** Edward Elgar composed *Polonia* in 1915 for a concert to benefit Polish civilian and military victims of World War I and incorporates several of the country's national songs. Elgar's *Cello Concerto*, written soon after the war ended, is imbued with the inevitable sense of loss and grief resulting from every such conflict. *Clair de Lune*, inspired by a poem of the Impressionist Paul Verlaine, evokes the sensuous 18th-century paintings of Jean-Antoine Watteau. Jacques Offenbach was born in Germany but gained fame as the most successful operetta composer in 19th-century Paris. The ballet *Gaité Parisienne* draws on infectious music. 🎵



## EDWARD ELGAR

**Born June 2, 1857 in  
Broadheath, England;  
died February 23, 1934 in  
Worcester.**

### POLONIA, OP. 76

- First performed on July 6, 1915 at Queen's Hall in London, conducted by the composer.
- These concerts mark the first performances of this piece by the Des Moines Symphony.

*(Duration: ca. 15 minutes)*

Much of Poland's history has been shaped by its powerful and aggressive neighbors — Prussia, Austria and Russia. By the close of the 18th century, those three dynasties had taken control of huge swaths of Polish territory that adjoined their own lands to insure that the Poles would not pose any political or military threat. Insurrections against the foreign rule broke out during the 19th century (Frédéric Chopin fled

one in Warsaw in 1830 and never returned home), but did not succeed. The country was still partitioned when World War I erupted in 1914, so Poles were conscripted into the Russian, Austrian and German armies and forced to fight their own countrymen; some 450,000 of them died in the conflict.

To support Poland and its people during the war, several prominent expatriates formed the Polish Victims Relief Committee, with chapters in France, Great Britain, Switzerland and the United States. Among the founders and leading campaigners for the Committee was Ignacy Jan Paderewski, who had established an international reputation as a pianist but had tired of the rigors of a virtuoso's life and become active in politics. (Among those he lobbied was United States President William Howard Taft, who agreed to head the American chapter of the Committee. When Poland became independent as a result of the war, Paderewski served briefly as its Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, representing the country at the Peace

Conference in Paris.) In England, the Committee's work was led by Polish composer and conductor Emil Młynarski, who became the founding Music Director of the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra in 1901 and spent the years of World War I leading the Scottish Symphony Orchestra in Glasgow. In April 1915, Młynarski commissioned Edward Elgar to write a piece for a concert in July to aid the Polish Victims' Relief Fund that the Committee was organizing for Queen's Hall in London, and even suggested some national themes that he might incorporate into it. Elgar, who had composed an orchestral work titled *Carillon* the year before in support of "gallant little Belgium," quickly agreed to the request.

Elgar included three traditional Polish songs in his *Polonia*, as well as quotations from Chopin's *Nocturne in G Minor*, Op. 37, No. 1 and Paderewski's *Fantasie Polonaise for Piano & Orchestra*, Op. 19, which was also being performed at the benefit concert. (Elgar wrote a personal letter to Paderewski asking his approval to use the theme: "In the middle section, I have brought in a theme of Chopin & with it a theme of your own from the *Polish Fantasia*, linking the two greatest names in Polish music." The score was dedicated to Paderewski.) The work's first theme, presented by the bassoons, is the march-like *Warszawianka* (*Śmiało podnieśmy sztandar nasz w górę* — "Bravely let us raise our flag"), a song that Józef Pławiński was inspired to write by the uprising against the Russians in Warsaw in 1905. Following Elgar's own broad, noble melody, the cellos introduce *Z dymem pożarów* ("Our voices ring out to You, O Lord, With the smoke of fires and the dust of fraternal blood") by Józef Nikorowicz, a dignified chorale written following the Austrian Army's bloody suppression of the Cracow Uprising of 1846. After a development of the martial *Warszawianka*, the borrowed themes from Paderewski's *Fantasie*

*Polonaise* (full orchestra) and Chopin's *G Minor Nocturne* (solo violin) are introduced. Further development of several of the work's themes leads to a return of the chorale melody before *Polonia* concludes triumphantly with the country's national anthem, composed by Józef Wybicki: *Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła* — "Poland is not yet lost, So long as we still shall live."

**The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, triangle, tambourine, bass drum, cymbals, two harps, organ and the usual strings consisting of first violins, second violins, violas, violoncellos and double basses.**

## EDWARD ELGAR

### CELLO CONCERTO IN E MINOR, OP. 85

- First performed on October 27, 1919 in London, conducted by the composer with Felix Salmond as soloist.
- The first and only previous performance by the Des Moines Symphony was on November 20 & 21, 1982 with Yuri Krasnapolsky conducting and Leonard Rose as soloist.  
(Duration: ca. 30 minutes)

It seemed that Elgar's world was crumbling in 1918. The four years of World War I had left him, as so many others, weary and numb from the crush of events. Many of his friends of German ancestry were put through a bad time in England during those years; others whom he knew were killed or maimed in action. The traditional foundations of the British political system were skewed by the rise of socialism directly after the war, and Elgar saw his beloved Edwardian world drawing to a close. (He resembles that titan

among *fin-de-siècle* musicians, Gustav Mahler, in his mourning of a passing age.) His music seemed anachronistic in an era of polychords and dodecaphony, a remnant of stuffy conservatism, and his 70th birthday concert in Queen's Hall attracted only half a house. The health of his wife, his chief helpmate, inspiration and critic, began to fail, and with her passing in 1920, Elgar virtually stopped composing. The *Cello Concerto*, written just before his wife's death, is Elgar's last major work, and seems both to summarize his disillusion over the calamities of World War I and to presage the unhappiness of his last years.

The *Concerto's* four movements only suggest traditional models in their epigrammatic concentration. The first is a ternary structure (A–B–A), commencing after an opening recitative. It is linked directly to following *Allegro molto*. It takes several tries before the movement is able to maintain its forward motion, but when it does, it proves to be a skittering, *moto perpetuo* display piece. The almost-motionless *Adagio* returns to the introspection of the opening movement. The finale, like the opening, is prefaced by a solo recitative. The rest of the movement's form is based on the Classical rondo, and makes a valiant attempt at the "hail-and-well-met" vigor of Elgar's earlier march music. Like the *scherzando* second movement, however, it seems more a recollection of past abilities than a display of remaining powers. Toward the end, the stillness of the third movement creeps over the music, and the soloist indulges in an extended soliloquy. Brief bits of earlier movements are remembered before a final recall of the fast rondo music closes this thoughtful *Concerto*.

**The score calls for piccolo, pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba,**

**timpani and the usual strings.**



## CLAUDE DEBUSSY

**Born August 2, 1862 in St. Germain-en-Laye, near Paris; died March 25, 1918 in Paris.**

### **“CLAIR DE LUNE” (“MOONLIGHT”) FROM SUITE BERGAMASQUE**

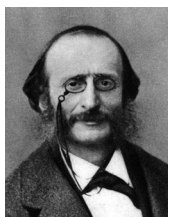
Arranged (1939) by Lucien Cailliet (1891-1985)

- The first performance is unknown.
  - First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on March 16, 1947 with Frank Noyes conducting. Two subsequent performances occurred, most recently on May 7, 1962 with Frank Noyes conducting.
- (Duration: ca. 5 minutes)

During his early years, Debussy turned to the refined style of Couperin and Rameau for inspiration in his instrumental music, and several of his works from that time are modeled on the Baroque dance suite, including the *Suite Bergamasque* for solo piano. The composition's title derives from the generic term for the dances of the district of Bergamo, in northern Italy, which found many realizations in the instrumental music of the 17th and 18th centuries. The rustic inhabitants of Bergamo were said to have been the model for the character of Harlequin, the buffoon of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, which became the most popular theatrical genre in France during the time of Couperin and Rameau. Several of Watteau's best-known paintings take the *commedia dell'arte* as their subject. The poet Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) evoked the

bittersweet, pastel world of Watteau and the *commedia dell'arte* with his atmospheric, evanescent verses, which Debussy began setting as early as 1880. In 1882, he wrapped the words of Verlaine's *Clair de Lune* ("Moonlight") with music, and made another setting of it a decade later as the third song of his first series of *Fêtes galantes: With the calm moonlight, sad and lovely,/that sets the birds in the trees to dreaming,/and the fountains to sobbing in ecstasy,/the great fountains, svelte among the marbles*. Debussy best captured the nocturnal essence of Verlaine's poem not in his two vocal settings, however, but in the well-known (and musically unrelated) *Clair de Lune* that serves as the third movement of his *Suite Bergamasque*, composed in 1890 and revised for publication in 1905.

**The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, harp and the usual strings.**



## JACQUES OFFENBACH

**Born June 20, 1819 in**

**Cologne;**

**died October 5, 1880 in**

**Paris.**

### MUSIC FROM *GAÎTÉ PARISIENNE*

Arranged as a ballet by Manuel Rosenthal (1904-2003) in 1938

- The first performance of the ballet was on April 5, 1938 at the Théâtre de Monte Carlo by the Ballet Russe, conducted by Manuel Rosenthal.
- The first and only previous performance by the Des Moines Symphony was on March 4 & 5,

1995 with Joseph Giunta conducting.

*(Duration: ca. 20 minutes)*

In 1937, the famed Russian-American impresario Sol Hurok became associated with Léonide Massine and René Blum in reorganizing the Ballet Russe of Monte Carlo, a descendent of Diaghilev's sensational Paris troupe. In planning the repertory, they decided that one number must be gay and lighthearted, with a score bubbling with melody and *joie de vivre*. After first considering the music of Johann Strauss, they settled on the operettas of Jacques Offenbach as the perfect source for their new ballet; *Gaîté Parisienne* seemed an appropriate title. Manuel Rosenthal, the noted French composer and conductor, was entrusted with supervising the music, in collaboration with Jacques Brindejont-Offenbach. The preparations for *Gaîté Parisienne* proceeded while the Ballet Russe was on tour in America, as Hurok recounted: "Massine, Rosenthal, two pianists and a flock of copyists established themselves in a large room at the Copley Plaza in Boston, and assembled from the Boston Public Library and the Harvard Library all the extant scores of the Offenbach operettas. There the ballet was blocked out, and the basic musical material selected from the wealth of sparkling melody. Everyone adjourned to Paris. Comte Étienne de Beaumont, who was responsible for the ballet's scenario, also designed the sets and costumes, and the music was given into the hands of Rosenthal, who, with enormous taste and skill, put the score together and orchestrated it." The premiere, at the Théâtre de Monte Carlo on April 5, 1938, was a glittering success.

Hurok provided the following summary of the ballet's slight plot: "*Gaîté Parisienne* is the romantic dream of a glamorous night in Paris. The setting is a highly fashionable, but not very proper, restaurant of the Second Empire, whose

customers, while not being the best of citizens, are marvelous company. Their lives revolve around *amours*, brief but intense; their day begins at nine in the evening and ends only at dawn, when the last waltz is danced and the last champagne glass is emptied.”

The hit number of *Gaîté Parisienne* was the *Can-Can*, the lubricious dance that took Europe and America by storm in the 1860s. Upon his visit to Paris in 1867, Mark Twain left a word-picture of the *Can-Can*, which also captures the mood of the ballet: “The idea is to dance as wildly, as noisily, as furiously as you can, expose yourself as much as possible, if you are a woman, and kick as high as you can — no matter which sex you belong to. The *Can-Can* is

a whirl of shouts, laughter, furious music, a bewildering chaos of darting and interminable forms, stormy jerking and snatching of gay dresses, bobbing heads, flying arms, lightning flashes of white-stockinged calves and dainty slippers in the air, and then the grand final rush, riot, terrific hubbub and wild stampede.”

**The score calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, ymbals, snare drum, tenor drum, glockenspiel, xylophone, tambourine, triangle, woodblock, harp, piano and the usual strings.**