



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
PRESENTS**

**‘PARIS: FANTASY & DISCOVERY’
THE 2009 WINTER FESTIVAL**

WEEK II (JAN. 16–18): ‘MAJESTY & MISCHIEF’

**MAESTRO JÄRVI CONDUCTS *THE SORCERER’S APPRENTICE*,
SOPRANO PAMELA ARMSTRONG SINGS RAVEL
PLUS FAURÉ’S *PAVANE* AND FRANCK’S SYMPHONY IN D MINOR**

**FRI., JAN. 16 AND SAT., JAN. 17 IN NEWARK
SUN., JAN. 18 IN NEW BRUNSWICK**

Newark, NJ—The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra continues its exploration of French music in the second week of its 2009 Winter Festival, **Paris: Fantasy & Discovery**. Maestro Neeme Järvi conducts a program of favorites and hidden gems from the *Belle Époque*, the era lasting from 1870 to the First World War. The *Belle Époque* was a time of peace, technological advancement and cultural innovation throughout Europe; in France, it saw a great flowering of musical creativity, exemplified by the four composers represented on this program: Dukas, Fauré, Ravel and Franck. Dukas’s *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* (1897)—forever associated with Walt Disney’s *Fantasia* and a certain mouse—opens the evening, followed by Fauré’s jewel-like *Pavane*. American soprano Pamela Armstrong is luminous in Ravel’s exotic orchestral song cycle *Shéhérazade* (not to be confused with Rimsky-Korsakov’s work of the same name), and Franck’s stately Symphony in D Minor closes the program.

Performances will take place on Friday, January 16, and Saturday, January 17, (8 p.m.) at NJPAC in Newark and Sunday, January 18, (3 p.m.) at the State Theater in New Brunswick. Tickets range in

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price from \$20 to \$82 and are available for purchase by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or online at www.njsymphony.org.

“PARIS: FANTASY & DISCOVERY,” WEEK 2—MAJESTY & MISCHIEF

About The Music

Paul Dukas was a perfectionist. Although he wrote a fair amount of music, he destroyed many of his pieces out of dissatisfaction; scarcely more than a dozen works survive. Luckily for us, he spared his symphonic scherzo *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* (1897), known to generations through a memorable sequence in Walt Disney’s *Fantasia* involving Mickey Mouse, a disobedient broom and many, many buckets of water.

While most of *Fantasia*’s animated scenarios originated with the film’s creators—dancing hippos, anyone?—Disney’s version of *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* adheres closely to Dukas’s own conception of the piece, which in turn has its origins in a poem by Goethe. In his master’s absence, the apprentice comes up with an ingenious way to spare himself the arduous task of hauling buckets of water into the workshop: he casts a spell that causes a broom to fetch the water for him.

Unfortunately, he is unable to remember the formula that will stop the broom, and the workshop soon begins to flood. Panicked, the apprentice hacks the broom in two, whereupon each half becomes a new broom fetching buckets of water. Luckily, the master returns in time to incant the correct spell and rescue his workshop from watery destruction.

From the mysterious, hushed chords that open this 12-minute work, Dukas displays his mastery of orchestration. He mines the comic, faintly sinister sound of the solo bassoon as it introduces the obsessive motif that propels this unforgettable piece. That motif erupts in unstable three-measure phrases, mirroring the apprentice’s sense of unease and rising panic. We hear the relentless tread of the brooms, the cresting torrents of water. While every minute of *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* is packed with ingenious orchestral effects, Dukas never indulges in them simply for their own sake: each one serves to bring Goethe’s tale vividly to life. When the piece was premiered in May 1897, it was an instant success.

Gabriel Fauré’s charming six-minute *Pavane* (1887) epitomizes certain traits that may strike the listener as quintessentially French: elegance, a restrained melancholy, a formality that betrays deeper emotions.

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Pavane takes its title from the slow processional Spanish court dance of the same name. Over a steady pulse of pizzicato strings, a modest yet haunting flute melody unfurls, and is taken up by various sections of the ensemble in turn. A contrasting ‘B’ section, interrupting the procession with stentorian chords and a cascading figure in the strings, provides a measure of dramatic tension before the main theme returns to bid a series of farewells.

Like a good pop tunesmith, Fauré soon realized that he had created a potential hit, and was keen to market it. Hoping to curry favor with a wealthy poet and dilettante named Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fézensac, the cousin of one of his patrons, he created a version of the piece that included a choral setting of one of the count’s poems. While the choral *Pavane* is still performed, the original instrumental version, as played on this program by the NJSO, is ultimately more persuasive in its tender simplicity. Fauré was not the only one to intuit the potential of his composition: having passed into the public domain, it has had numerous arrangements, formed the basis of several pop songs and become a soundtrack staple, turning up in the final episode of “Sex and the City.”

French creative artists of the *Belle Époque* were fascinated by the exotic. Paul Gauguin studied Japanese prints and sailed to Tahiti. Debussy was captivated by Javanese gamelan music, which he heard during the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris. And the young **Maurice Ravel** was so entranced by Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Sheherazade* that he set out to write an opera of his own on the tale. Aside from an overture completed in 1898, nothing came of the project. There matters stood until 1903, when Ravel’s friend Léon Leclère, who published verse using the Wagnerian pseudonym Tristan Klingsor, completed a collection titled *Shéhérazade* after the Rimsky-Korsakov work. Ravel devoured the anthology, and he set three of the poems, *Asie*, *La Flûte Enchantée* and *L’indifférent*, in an orchestral song cycle.

Ravel’s *Shéhérazade* is both ravishing and strange. Its opening measures set the scene with muted tremolo strings and a modal English horn theme that rises languorously from the orchestra like incense. “Asia, Asia, Asia/marvelous old land of nursery tales/where fantasy sleeps like an empress/in her forest filled with mystery,” sings the soprano, and we are instantly transported to the fantastic continent of the poet’s imagination. “Oriental” signifiers abound—pentatonic chords moving in parallel, delicate triangle and cymbal pings, discreet arpeggios from the harp—yet we never hear them as clichés. Ravel’s subtlety of technique matches the fertility of his imagination; he deftly layers countermelodies and contrasting orchestral textures that seem inevitable even as they defy expectation. The effect is that of an iridescent brocade that reveals different colors as it catches the light.

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The second and third songs are more compact and intimate. *La flûte enchantée* features its eponymous instrument in an obligato role, sending out tendrils of melody that wrap around the soprano’s caressing vocal line. *L’indifférent* offers another sinuous melody, set against a velvety backdrop: an undulating rhythm in the strings, burnished woodwind chords. Like all three of these songs, it is sung from Shéhérazade’s point of view; its theme is the attraction of the unattainable. Ravel’s setting is masterful, exploiting not only the text’s erotic imagery, but the dusky sonorities of the language itself.

Not all French composers of the period were preoccupied with experiments in orchestral color. **César Franck’s Symphony in D Minor** (1888) is closer in sound to the Germanic style of the time, shunning coloristic effects in order to focus on thematic development. Influenced by Wagner and Liszt, Franck favored a chromaticism that enabled him to modulate gracefully to distant keys. In fact, his pupils at the Paris Conservatory—a distinguished group that included d’Indy, Chausson and Duparc—reported that his most frequent admonition was to “modulate, modulate.”

Yet its cyclical approach, in which each movement makes reference to the four-bar theme that opens the piece, places it in the tradition of French works such as Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) and Saint-Saëns’s more recent Symphony No. 3 “Organ” (1886). The symphony’s unusual three-movement design also represented a decisive departure from Germanic four-movement design—though the middle-movement Allegretto does contain an episode reminiscent of the “missing” scherzo.

The dual nature of this symphony—French and Germanic—caused it to receive a rocky reception when it was first performed in 1889 at the Conservatory. The issue was as much political as artistic: France was in the grip of anti-German sentiment, engendered by the Franco-Prussian war. Nationalists like Saint-Saëns lined up against Franck’s symphony, while younger composers like d’Indy supported it. Outside of France, however, the situation was considerably less fraught, and within several years of its completion, the Symphony in D Minor was programmed across Europe and the U.S., receiving its American premiere in Boston in 1899. Ultimately, the work was highly influential, helping to revitalize the dormant French symphony. What strikes the contemporary listener most are Franck’s attractive and engaging themes, most notably the lovely melody played by the English horn above harp and strings in the central Allegretto, and the joyous, Lisztian tune that Franck uses to close the piece—inverting the contours and somber mood of his opening theme, and going out in a D-Major blaze of glory.

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About the Artists

American soprano **PAMELA ARMSTRONG** has been praised for performances with many of the world’s leading operatic theaters, including the Metropolitan Opera, Opéra National de Paris, Hamburg State Opera, Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux, Théâtre du Capitole, Teatro Regio Torino, Houston Grand Opera and New York City Opera. She has been widely acclaimed for an impressively broad repertoire spanning from the title role of Handel’s *Alcina* to Donna Anna in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* to Violetta in *La traviata*, as well as Madga in *La rondine*, the title role in Richard Strauss’s *Arabella*, the Countess in *Capriccio* and Tatyana in Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*. Armstrong first attracted attention for her performances in the title role of Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Tauride* and soon thereafter began her professional career at the Stadtstheater Giessen, where she sang a variety of roles. During her time in Giessen, *Opern Welt* praised her as “the most promising artist of the year.” In 1996, she made her New York City Opera debut as Mimi in *La bohème*. Past engagements include appearances with the Tulsa and Michigan Operas and at the Aspen Festival. Armstrong completed her musical studies at the Manhattan School of Music, studying with Cynthia Hoffmann.

The 2008–09 season marks **NEEME JÄRVI**’s final season as Music Director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, a tenure highlighted by acclaimed performances that have delighted critics and audiences alike. His engaging presence and masterful conducting have earned him the highest honors throughout the world. Järvi continues to champion new artists and has brought some of the brightest new stars in classical music to New Jersey’s concert halls while presenting great artists with established reputations.

Born in Tallinn, Estonia, and an American citizen since 1987, Järvi has conducted many of the world’s most prominent orchestras. He is Chief Conductor of The Hague Residentie Orchestra in the Netherlands, Music Director Emeritus of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Principal Conductor Emeritus of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra (National Orchestra of Sweden), Conductor Laureate of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and First Principal Guest Conductor of the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra. He has led performances of the Berlin Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic, Zürich Tonhalle and BBC Symphony Orchestras, the Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the major orchestras of Scandinavia and the symphony orchestras of Sydney and Melbourne in Australia. In the United States, he has appeared with the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Boston Symphony and Philadelphia Orchestra. His operatic engagements have included the Metropolitan Opera, the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, the Opéra de Paris (Bastille) and the San Francisco Opera.

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra is comprised of some of the country’s finest musicians, led by Music Director Neeme Järvi. Artistic excellence, innovative programming and community engagement are hallmarks of its mission. To best serve the people of New Jersey, the Orchestra brings its programs to eight different venues and all 21 counties throughout the state. Education and outreach programs enrich the listening experience for children and adults alike. The New Jersey Symphony Broadcast Series airs regionally and on the Internet by 96.3FM WQXR (New York) and is a syndicated program carried throughout North America by WFMT (Chicago). Continental Airlines is the official airline of the NJSO.

For more information about the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, visit www.njsymphony.org or e-mail information@njsymphony.org. Tickets to performances are available for purchase online or by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476).

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