

# PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW  
NOTES

Paul Lewis, *piano*

Friday, December 3 – 7:30 PM

*Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center*

## PROGRAM

### *Songs without Words* [Sel.]

**Felix Mendelssohn**

*Born: February 3, 1809, Hamburg, Germany*

*Died: November 4, 1847, Leipzig, Germany*

*Composed: 1829-1830*

*Duration: 12 minutes*

Felix Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*, or *Songs without Words*, provide an essential snapshot of Romanticism. They are, first and foremost, a paean to the sovereignty of melody. They also reference, in an abstract way, the Romantic generation's preoccupation with poetry, as reflected in the *lieder* of Schubert, Schumann, and others: Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words* succeed in capturing the clarity and expressivity of sung texts, but they do so relying solely on musical character, without the aid of poetry. Indeed, Robert Schumann surmised that Mendelssohn originally composed them as songs with words and then withdrew the texts. Todd continues: "The new genre, which blurred the lines between the song and the character piece, later enjoyed great success and became synonymous with Mendelssohnism."

### **Sonata in A Major, K. 331**

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

*Born: January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria*

*Died: December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria*

*Composed: 1783*

*Duration: 20 minutes*

This sonata is the second of three now established as likely to have been composed in 1783, perhaps during the period Mozart and his wife Constanze spent in Salzburg in the summer months of that year. This was the occasion on which the composer introduced his new bride to his father Leopold. Mozart clearly intended this trio to form a group, numbering them from one to three. The present sonata has gained particular fame for its last movement, the "Rondo alla turca." That movement took its inspiration from the popularity of quasi-Turkish music in Vienna, a fashionable form already

exploited by Mozart in his German singspiel, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (The Abduction from the Harem).

### **Five Preludes, Op. 74**

**Alexander Scriabin**

*Born: January 6, 1872, Moscow, Russia*

*Died: April 14, 1915, Moscow, Russia*

*Composed: 1914*

*Duration: 7 minutes*

Tonal ghosts haunt the Preludes, warped into tortured shapes and fused into a desperate, at times near-hysterical (and ultimately unfulfilled) yearning for resolution of some kind—harmonic, textural, thematic or otherwise. Witness the minute-and-a-half Op.74, No.2, whose skeletal F sharp minor continually lunges up in an effort to achieve the C major with which Scriabin in his later years became obsessed—first melodically, by that same A-C gesture that the trumpets blast out triumphantly in the *Poem of Ecstasy*, and then by tritone chord-relation-only to eventually plummet weakly back down to the horror that corporeal life seems to have become.

### ***Pictures at an Exhibition* [Suite]**

**Modest Mussorgsky**

*Born: March 21, 1839, Karevo, Russia*

*Died: March 28, 1881, Saint Petersburg, Russia*

*Composed: 1874*

*Duration: 33 minutes*

Victor Hartmann, a Russian painter and architect, was one of Mussorgsky's close friends. When Hartmann died in 1873 at the age of 41, the composer was crushed. He wrote to the art critic Vladimir Stasov, paraphrasing Shakespeare: "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, and the Hartmanns perish?" In 1874, the Russian Academy of Arts organized an exhibition of Hartmann's work. Mussorgsky attended the show, where he saw the varied images that became the basis for *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Later that year, Mussorgsky began work on *Pictures*, a musical impression of 10 of Hartmann's paintings, plus five "promenades", for piano, and finished the work later that month.