Daphnis et Chloé Suite No. 2

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes (2nd doubles piccolo), alto flute, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, Eb clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, snare drum, military drum, tambourine, castanets, jeu de timbres à clavier, 2 harps, celesta, strings

Duration: 18 minutes in three movements.

THE COMPOSER – MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937) – Ravel had already begun to shift his focus to theatrical endeavors when the famed Impresario Serge Diaghilev commissioned him to compose Daphnis et Chloé for the Ballet Russes in 1909. Ravel also met Igor Stravinsky during this period and the two became quite close, sharing ideas about composition and collaborating on orchestrations for Diaghilev while their individual projects for the Ballet Russes percolated.

THE HISTORY – It took Ravel three years to complete Daphnis et Chloé and the 1912 premiere had a few things working against it. Not the least of which was the difference of conception between composer and choreographer (Fokine) that haunted the entire creative process and probably had a lot to do with the longish timeline. The premiere was also under-rehearsed and likely frustrated by the unavoidable comparisons to the shocking Debussy/Nijinsky Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun from less than two weeks before and the Stravinsky/Fokine Petrushka from exactly a year before. Among peers of this sort, only a fully committed and perfectly prepared product could have any hope of reward. With the world-altering premiere of The Rite of Spring just a year hence at that point, Ravel’s piece seemed destined to be remembered somewhat mildly by history. Though not successful as a full-scale ballet, the lushly evocative music from Daphnis et Chloé was truly among the finest orchestral writing of Ravel’s career and the piece lives on in the concert hall today thanks to the pair of suites he extracted from the score in 1913. Suite No. 2 includes the final three numbers from the ballet in which the protagonists are re-united at daybreak. In appreciation of Pan, whose actions made the meeting possible, the couple pantomimes a story of the god and his beloved nymph Syrinx. Before long the celebration reaches a climax and a general Bacchanalian dance ensues.

THE WORLD – Charlie Chaplin began his motion picture career in 1913. Also that year, Arthur Wynne invented the crossword puzzle, Ludwig III was crowned as the last king of Bavaria and Japan’s last Shogun died in retirement at the age of 75.

THE CONNECTION – Daphnis et Chloé Suite No. 2 was last performed by CCSO back in 1999.