Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Saturday, **May 16, 2009**, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

John Davison (1930-1999). Symphony No. 1 for small orchestra, Movement 2, Andantino (1957-58). Queens College Orchestra, Joel Mandelbaum. Archival. Tr 1. 8:30
Joel Mandelbaum (b.1932). *Sinfonia Concertante*, Movement 1 (1962). Queens College Orchestra, Tito Muñoz. Archival. Tr 2. 10:37
Aleksandr Grechaninov (1864-1956). Symphony No. 1 in B min, op. 6 (1895). Slovak State Philharmonic, Kosice, Johannes Wildner. Marco Polo 8.223163. Tr 1-4. 33:29

It's friends and first symphonies on this *Discoveries*. Joel Mandelbaum conducts the music of his friend John Davison, then his own. Next we'll hear the first symphony of Aleksandr Grechaninov, the premiere of which was conducted by *his* friend Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

Davison was born to American parents in Istanbul, the family returning to the States shortly after his birth. He studied at Haverford College, Harvard, and Eastman, counting among his teachers Randall Thompson, Walter Piston, Bernard Rogers, Alan Hovhaness, and Howard Hanson, who conducted the premiere of Davison's Symphony. This symphony is full of charms, and all his music is unfailingly optimistic. As he wrote about his *Arthur's Return*, which recalls the mythical longing for Britain's once and future king: "Heaven on earth may seem remote, but poets and musicians can dream."

Joel Mandelbaum and Davison met as undergraduates, and the two remained friends after establishing teaching careers: Davison at Haverford, and Mandelbaum at Queens College of the City University of New York. The *Sinfonia Concertante* features oboe, horn, violin, and cello as soloists, but they are woven into the fabric of the orchestra. Preparing for a concert of the Queens College Orchestra brought Mandelbaum to the Fleisher Collection in the Free Library, where he looked through the scores of his late friend John Davison. The students at Queens College bring a fresh commitment to the performances of both these works.

Grechaninov died the year before Davison started work on his Symphony; the Russian had composed his own first Symphony six decades earlier. Those years span countries, cultures, continents, and governments. At the 1895 premiere Grechaninov was already well on his way to success. The Czar guaranteed his income for life, but the Revolution ended the pension, along with the Czar. Grechaninov eventually left—for Paris in 1925, then for America in 1939, subsequently becoming a U.S. citizen.

He has been called the last of the Russian Romantics, but folk influences figure strongly in his output as well as a tremendous amount of church music for both Orthodox and Roman rites. His music, and his life, seemed always to be in transition, between Romantic and modern, folk and classical, religious and operatic, old world and new. As he states in his autobiography *My Life*: "I am not one of those fortunate people whose path of life is strewn with roses." He died at 91, and his resting place symbolizes the tension surrounding his career. Just a few twists down the road from the roller coasters, safari, and *Looney Tunes* Talent Show of New Jersey's Great Adventure amusement park, in a small Russian Orthodox cemetery, Aleksandr Tikhonovich Grechaninov is a silent witness to other worlds.