



Portrait of Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, c. 1876

BEST OF TCHAIKOVSKY

CONCERT PROGRAM

Laura Pettigrew

Dòchas: Sesquie for Canada's 150th

(TSO PREMIÈRE/TSO CO-COMMISSION; Dec 5 only)

Andrew Ager

The Talk of the Town: Sesquie for Canada's 150th

(TSO PREMIÈRE/TSO CO-COMMISSION; Dec 6 only)

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky

Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture

Variations on a Rocooco Theme, Op. 33
(original version)

Intermission

Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64

I. Andante – Allegro con anima

II. Andante cantabile con alcuna licenza

III. Valse: Allegro moderato

IV. Finale: Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace

Please note that these Canada Mosaic performances are being recorded for online release at TSO.CA/CanadaMosaic.

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

8:00pm

Wednesday, December 6, 2017

8:00pm

Thursday, December 7, 2017

8:00pm

Keri-Lynn Wilson

conductor

Joseph Johnson

cello

Joseph Johnson's December 6 appearance is generously supported by the **Holdbest Foundation**.

THE DETAILS

For program notes to Laura Pettigrew's *Dòchas: Sesquie for Canada's 150th* and Andrew Ager's *The Talk of the Town: Sesquie for Canada's 150th*, please turn to pages 6 and 7, respectively, of the *Sesquies Canada Mosaic* program.

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky

Born: Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, May 7, 1840

Died: St. Petersburg, Russia, Nov 6, 1893

21
min

Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture

Composed: 1st version, 1869; 2nd version, 1870; 3rd version, 1880

The appeal of William Shakespeare's plays transcends every consideration of time and place. Three of them have inspired the greatest number of settings: *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet are star-crossed lovers living in Verona, Italy, offspring of two families whose blood feud dooms the couple's love to a tragic end.

The most popular among the numerous settings of their poignant story remains Tchaikovsky's Fantasy-Overture. In addition to its own high musical and dramatic values, its success springs

from bypassing the thorny problem of setting Shakespeare's words. Instead, Tchaikovsky succeeded in capturing every important facet of the play's spirit: its turbulence, its romance, and its pathos.

It was composer Mily Balakirev, mentor to many Russian artists, not just his fellow members of the folk-based St. Petersburg school, who suggested the play to Tchaikovsky for musical treatment. Tchaikovsky created the first version in a fever of inspiration in 1869. Balakirev's sharp criticisms led him to revise it twice; it reached its final form in 1880. All three versions are available on recording. It is fascinating to follow Tchaikovsky's progress toward the lean, carefully structured and emotionally powerful concluding edition.

Romeo and Juliet opens with a solemn chorale theme characterizing the lovers' friend, Friar Laurence. The Fantasy-Overture proper contrasts two themes. The first is a nervous, often violent subject depicting the conflict between the rival families (the clash of cymbals could well represent duelling swords). The second is the passionate, soaring love theme for Romeo and Juliet, truly one of Tchaikovsky's most inspired lyrical creations. The stark final climax is followed first by a sombre funeral march, then by a radiant, nostalgic apotheosis of the love theme. This coda has no equivalent in Shakespeare, but it does give the music a satisfying sense of transfiguration.

Program note by Don Anderson

UNDER THE INFLUENCE



Mily Balakirev involved himself quite heavily in the early stages of Tchaikovsky's creation of *Romeo and Juliet*, suggesting musical

themes and providing guidelines on harmonic development and orchestration to the 29-year-old composer. Tchaikovsky appeared to be willing to accept the advice; in a letter to Balakirev about the progress of the Fantasy-Overture, he wrote: "The layout is yours. The introduction portraying the friar, the fight—*Allegro*, and love—the second subject; and secondly, the modulations are yours: also the introduction in E, the *Allegro* in B-flat minor, and the second subject in D-flat."

18
min

Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op. 33 (original version)

Composed: 1876

Tchaikovsky adored the courtly music of the 18th century, in particular the elegant rococo style of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791). “I not only like Mozart, I idolize him,” he wrote.

He paid homage in several ways, most directly through *Mozartiana* (1887), an orchestral suite transcribed from the earlier composer’s piano and choral pieces. Another means was the creation of works that reflect and stylize Mozart’s musical world. Among this latter group are the luxurious *Serenade for Strings* (1880), and this charming set of variations for cello and small orchestra.

He created it, presumably on commission, for Wilhelm Fitzenhagen (1848–1890). This German-born cellist, a faculty colleague at the Imperial Conservatory in Moscow, had participated in the premières of Tchaikovsky’s three string quartets.

The composer gratefully accepted the cellist’s advice on modifications to the solo part. But

Fitzenhagen’s contributions did not end there. In the autumn of 1877, Tchaikovsky fled from Russia to recover from his disastrous marriage. During his prolonged absence, Fitzenhagen took it upon himself to “improve” the variations. He shuffled the order, eliminated completely the eighth (and most difficult) of them, and replaced it with the original variation No. 4.

At first, Tchaikovsky appears to have held ambivalent feelings towards Fitzenhagen’s revisions. These changed to deep bitterness as the full score approached publication in 1889 (though the fact that Fitzenhagen’s performances of his edition won considerable acclaim may have mollified to some degree Tchaikovsky’s understandable displeasure). Nevertheless, apparently weary of the affair and having received news that Fitzenhagen was dying, one of his pupils reported that he cried out, “The devil take it! Let it stand as it is!” In recent years, some cellists have returned to the original version, and it is the one you will hear at this concert.

The brief introduction establishes both the gentle, refined mood and the transparency of the chamber orchestra scoring. The soloist introduces the relaxed and winsome theme—and rarely gets a breather after doing so. The theme is an original Tchaikovsky creation that author Paul Serotsky has described as a “drawing room march”. The variations rarely stray far from it, transmuting it into, among other things, a sorrowful lament (variation No. 3), and a nostalgic waltz (variation No. 6).

Program note by Don Anderson

TCHAIKOVSKY’S ORIGINAL

The composer’s original set of variations follows this format:

Introduction – Theme: Moderato semplice

Var. I: Tempo della Thema

Var. II: Tempo della Thema

Var. III: Andante

Var. IV: Allegro vivo

Var. V: Andante grazioso

Var. VI: Allegro moderato

Var. VII: Andante sostenuto

Var. VIII e Coda: Allegro moderato con anima

THE DETAILS

47
min

Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64

Composed: 1888

Tchaikovsky saw himself as the victim of a cold, heartless fate. In Symphony No. 4 (1878), he used a recurring theme, a harsh brass fanfare, to represent this concept. Ten years passed before he composed his next symphony. The international successes that his music had won in the interim placed him in a more positive frame of mind. The idea of fate still dogged him, but according to a sketch of the programmatic content of the Fifth Symphony, fate had evolved into providence, a less hostile governor of life.

He got down to the symphony in earnest on May 31, 1888. Despite his eagerness, it cost him long and intensive labour. Working simultaneously on a long-gestating subject—a fantasy-overture inspired by Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*—intensified the delay further still. It finally laid complete on August 26. When he played a piano reduction for his Moscow friends a month later, it won unanimous approval from them.

FOR “A KINDLY OLD MAN”

Tchaikovsky was introduced to Theodor Avé-Lallemant (1806–1890), a German musician and music teacher, in January 1888, when Tchaikovsky was in Hamburg to conduct a concert of his own music. They had a “very lengthy and interesting conversation” in which Avé-Lallemant tried to persuade Tchaikovsky to emigrate to Germany. Although the composer demurred, they parted “as great friends,” and Tchaikovsky later dedicated his Fifth Symphony to Avé-Lallemant.

Tchaikovsky conducted the Fifth Symphony’s first two performances in St. Petersburg himself, then another in Prague shortly thereafter. Audiences loved it, but the press reacted with hostility. The critical barbs devastated him, but a further performance in Hamburg firmly erased his pessimistic feelings.

Once again, he constructed a symphony upon a recurring melody representative of his current philosophical outlook. Reflecting his lightening in attitude, the new “providence” theme is less intimidating than its counterpart in Symphony No. 4. It undergoes a gradual, increasingly positive transformation as well. He introduces it quietly in the clarinets. The opening movement contrasts restlessness with yearning.

A passionate love-idyll follows. Its raptures are twice interrupted by the “providence” theme, the second time with particularly devastating impact. Next comes a typically elegant Tchaikovsky waltz. He based it on a popular song he heard being sung by a boy in the street during a visit to Florence, Italy. The sole blemish on its courtly surface comes in a brief, almost casual appearance of “providence”, just before the end.

“Providence” appears fully transformed in the slow introduction to the Finale, where it is heard in a major key for the first time. After much folk-flavoured rambunctiousness in the Finale itself, “providence” stands radiantly transfigured into a sturdy processional, before a whirlwind coda brings the symphony home.

Program note by Don Anderson

THE ARTISTS



Keri-Lynn Wilson conductor

Keri-Lynn Wilson made her TSO début in October 1997.

Keri-Lynn Wilson is a guest conductor of leading international opera companies and orchestras. This season, Ms. Wilson conducts the season-opening new production of Verdi's *Aida* at the English National Opera in London, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at the Bayerische Staatsoper München, *Rusalka* in Prague, and a new production of Bizet's *Carmen* in Warsaw, as well as orchestral concerts, including with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and the Hungarian National Orchestra. Recently, Ms. Wilson conducted at the Bolshoi Opera (*Don Carlo*), the Bayerischer Rundfunk Orchestra (*Roméo et Juliette*), NDR Orchestra (*Rigoletto*), and Opéra de Montréal (*Otello*), and in Valencia (*L'elisir d'amore*) and Bilbao (*Don Giovanni*). She also made her début with the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto (*Tosca*).

A native of Winnipeg, Canada, Ms. Wilson studied the flute, piano, and violin. At The Juilliard School in New York, she was a student of renowned flutist Julius Baker and made her début at Carnegie Hall at the age of 21. Upon graduation, she was the Associate Conductor at the Dallas Symphony Orchestra until 1998, when she launched her international career as a guest conductor.



Joseph Johnson cello

TSO Principal Cello Joseph Johnson joined the TSO in 2010.

Joseph Johnson has been heard throughout the world as a soloist, chamber musician, and educator. His festival appearances include performances in all classical genres at the American festivals of Santa Fe, Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society, Bard, Cactus Pear, Grand Teton, and Music in the Vineyards, as well as the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan, and the Virtuosi Festival in Brazil. Principal cellist of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra since the 2010/11 season, Mr. Johnson also serves as principal cellist of the Santa Fe Opera. Currently, he is Assistant Professor of Cello at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music.

Joseph Johnson was previously principal cellist of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and prior to this position, he was a member of the Minnesota Orchestra cello section for eleven years. He was a founding member of the Prospect Park Players and the Minneapolis Quartet, the latter of which was honoured with The McKnight Foundation Award in 2005. A graduate of the Eastman School of Music, Joseph Johnson earned a master's degree from Northwestern University. Mr. Johnson performs on a magnificent Paolo Castello cello, crafted in 1780, in Genoa.