

Toronto Symphony Orchestra

Sir Andrew Davis, Interim Artistic Director

Wednesday, November 28, 2018 at 8:00pm

Thursday, November 29, 2018 at 8:00pm

Friday, November 30, 2018 at 7:30pm

Sunday, December 2, 2018 at 3:00pm

Earl Lee, conductor

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Polonaise from *Eugene Onegin*

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Suite from *The Nutcracker*

I. Miniature Overture

II. Characteristic Dances:

March

Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy

Russian Dance

Arabian Dance

Chinese Dance

Dance of the Reed Flutes

III. Waltz of the Flowers

Intermission

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36

I. Andante sostenuto

II. Andantino in modo di canzona

III. Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato

IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco

As a courtesy to musicians, guest artists, and fellow concertgoers, please put your phone away and on silent during the performance.

ABOUT THE WORKS

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky **Polonaise from *Eugene Onegin***

4
min

Born: Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, May 7, 1840
Died: St. Petersburg, Russia, November 6, 1893
Composed: 1877–1878

The stately polonaise was surely one of Poland's most widespread cultural exports throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Originating as a sung folk dance with simple rhythms and melodies, it was taken up by the Polish nobility in the 17th century, then popularized throughout much of Europe in the 18th, evolving into a more sophisticated instrumental dance for grand society events. Composers including Bach, Couperin, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and, of course, Chopin, supplied examples of its increasingly elaborate development as an attractive instrumental dance form. It had special currency in Russia, where a choral polonaise was used as an anthem in the later 18th century.

Tchaikovsky's interest in this French-named Polish product, then, was hardly unique. However, he did seem to have had polonaises on the brain, so to speak, in the latter part of 1877. That summer, he had two large-scale works on his desk—his Fourth Symphony and an opera—and he put polonaises into both.

While Tchaikovsky-as-symphonist is well represented on this program, the brief and splendid polonaise from his 1878 opera, *Eugene Onegin*, is a transplant to the symphonic repertoire, exhibiting the composer's twin preoccupations with the stage genres of the opera and the ballet.

As such, it encapsulates a rich array of dramatic allusions. Act 3 of Tchaikovsky's best-known opera opens with this polonaise, at the height of a scintillating fancy-dress ball, which the world-weary Onegin attends on his return from a long sojourn abroad. The celebrated beauty he meets there, the Princess Gremina, turns out to be none other than Tatyana, whose impulsive declaration of young love he had coolly spurned years before. A classic yet moving dramatic reversal plays out in his recognition of his passion for her, and her refusal, despite the confession of love Onegin compels from her, to leave her husband. Beneath the grandeur and panache of this polonaise, in its operatic context, lies the irony and poignancy of this scene, wherein the magnificence of the dance—once a simpler form itself—so elegantly encapsulates the distance between the naïve girl Tatyana and the sophisticated society woman she has become.

Program note by Sherry Lee

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Suite from *The Nutcracker*

22
min

Composed: 1891–1892

Tchaikovsky's highly developed gifts in rhythm, melody, musical drama, and colourful orchestration made him a natural ballet composer. *Swan Lake* (1877), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), and *The Nutcracker* (1892) form the summit of 19th-century theatrical dance music.

He composed *The Nutcracker* in tandem with his final opera, *Iolanta*. They were commissioned as a double bill by Ivan Vsevolozhsky, director of the Imperial Theatres in St. Petersburg, who had previously commissioned *The Sleeping Beauty*. Tchaikovsky began work on *The Nutcracker* in March 1891. He completed the sketches in July, after his journey to New York to take part in the opening ceremonies of Carnegie Hall. He orchestrated first those selections that he had already decided to include in this concert suite, which made its highly successful début in March 1892 for the St. Petersburg branch of the Russian Musical Society, nine months before the complete ballet and *Iolanta* received their dual premières. The opera/ballet double bill was not a success, however. It was performed just 11 times, to ever-dwindling audiences, after which *The Nutcracker* was not produced again in Russia until 1919.

The original scenario was based on Alexandre Dumas the elder's version of the 1816 short story "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" by the celebrated German author E.T.A. Hoffmann.

At first, Tchaikovsky felt indifferent toward it, but he warmed to it as he worked on the score. The choreography was created by the celebrated master Marius Petipa, who had fulfilled the same function with *The Sleeping Beauty*.

The music of the 85-minute ballet, as encapsulated in this 22-minute suite, is enlivened by a memorable chain of melodies, and displays the strokes of a master orchestral colourist's brush. The suite starts with a miniaturized overture, followed by the March from Act One, which serves as a transition to Act Two's enchanted kingdom of sweets. This is where the Nutcracker Prince has brought his young friend, Clara, and where his courtiers entertain the couple with a delightful chain of dances (albeit not in the same sequence as in the ballet), commencing with the "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy", from the ballet's four-part *Pas de deux*, which features the shimmering sounds of the recently invented French keyboard instrument, the celesta. This is followed by three of the ballet's four brief, nationalistic Characteristic Dances: Russian, Arabian, and Chinese. The suite's middle section then concludes with the "Dance of the Reed Flutes". The elegant "Waltz of the Flowers", among Tchaikovsky's most widely recognized and rearranged melodies, brings the suite to a shimmering close.

Program note by Don Anderson

ABOUT THE WORKS

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36

44
min

Composed: 1876–1878

Though in “low spirits” when he began his Fourth Symphony, late in 1876, Tchaikovsky had drafted the whole work by the end of May 1877. But the orchestration was interrupted by his marriage, in July, to a young student—partly motivated by his fear that exposure of his homosexuality would shame his family and friends. The marriage, never consummated, was a disaster, and Tchaikovsky suffered an emotional collapse. He fled to Western Europe, where he gradually recovered, and, in December, in Italy, he completed the symphony, which he considered a seminal work in his artistic development. The première in Moscow, on February 10, 1878, was only moderately successful, but a performance that November in St. Petersburg was a triumph.

As Tchaikovsky admitted, the Fourth Symphony is autobiographical: turbulent but finally triumphant, it reflects his recent tribulations as well as his eventual recovery. The principal idea of the symphony, he said, is the implacability of Fate, a force that “poisons the soul” by impeding the individual’s quest for peace and fulfillment. Fate is conjured up at once in the “Fate motto”, a portentous fanfare that opens the work.

The first movement departs fundamentally from Classical models, and marks an advance in Tchaikovsky’s symphonic technique.

It unfolds as a sweeping, powerfully expressive musical drama with its own idiosyncratic logic and an overwhelming cumulative effect. Its main themes, moreover, have profound social, moral, and biographical implications. The Fate fanfare has the profile of a polonaise, a stately, ceremonial dance associated, in Russia, with the nobility, while subsequent themes are like a waltz, a “lower” form of dance associated with common people. Through the interplay between these two dance types in the first movement, Tchaikovsky creates a musical metaphor for the submission of human feelings and aspirations to the inevitability of Fate.

Tchaikovsky described the last three movements as “very simple” by comparison. The *Andantino*, he noted, is at once melancholy and sweet. In the novel *Scherzo*, a series of “capricious arabesques,” three instrumental choirs (strings, woodwinds, and brass) are introduced in turn and then wittily combined. The episodic and optimistic *Finale*, which features variations on a popular Russian song, “A Birch Tree Rustled in the Field”, was for Tchaikovsky a celebration of community (the song ultimately wins out over the “Fate motto”). “Life is still possible,” he wrote of this movement—and such was the lesson he took from this difficult period of his life.

Program note by Kevin Bazzana

THE ARTISTS



Earl Lee **conductor**

Earl Lee made his TSO début in January 2015.

A newly appointed Associate Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and former RBC Resident Conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Earl Lee is a renowned Korean-Canadian performer whose passion for music is reflected in his diverse career as both a conductor and a cellist, appearing on major concert hall stages across the globe. Highlights from the 2018/19 season include: leading the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, returning engagements with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and début performances with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

Lee has degrees in cello performance from the Curtis Institute of Music and The Juilliard School, and began his conducting studies in 2010 with Ignat Solzhenitsyn, receiving his master's degree in 2013 from the Manhattan School of Music with George Manahan. He then pursued postgraduate studies in conducting at the New England Conservatory with Hugh Wolff, prior to his tenure with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. In 2013, he was one of two performers to receive the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Scholarship, chosen by renowned conductor Kurt Masur to travel to Leipzig and study the music and life of Felix Mendelssohn. That same year, he was awarded the Ansbacher Fellowship by the American Austrian Foundation and members of the Vienna Philharmonic, and spent six weeks at the Salzburg Festival in Austria. In 2018, he was the recipient of the 50th Anniversary Heinz Unger Award from the Ontario Arts Council.

Earl Lee's musical philosophy is centred around the power of emotional connections. Every aspect of his concerts—from programming to performance—is fine-tuned to connect with both musicians and audiences on a personal level. He also works to spread these connections beyond the concert hall and to the community at large, mentoring young musicians as former Artistic Director & Conductor for the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra (of which he is an alumnus), and incoming Music Director for the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra.

As a cellist, Lee toured with the acclaimed duo of Gary Burton and Chick Corea as a guest member of the Harlem String Quartet in 2012, performing in notable venues including Symphony Hall in Boston, Maison symphonique de Montréal, and the iconic Blue Note jazz club in New York City.

Lee has performed at prestigious summer festivals such as the Marlboro Music Festival, Music from Angel Fire, Caramoor Rising Stars, and Ravinia's Steans Institute. He is currently a member of a conductorless chamber ensemble, the East Coast Chamber Orchestra (ECCO).