

ROMEO AND JULIET

William Shakespeare is arguably the most influential author in western music history. Hundreds of compositions have their roots in Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies and histories, including songs, tone poems, incidental music, symphonies, film scores and operas. None of his works has inspired more music than *Romeo and Juliet*. Consider, for example, the operas based on the play. In addition to Bellini's *The Capulets and the Montagues* and Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*, there are lesser-known operas—not to mention Bernstein's *West Side Story*. This weekend's program explores three different approaches to the tale of the star-crossed lovers, complemented by a romantic violin concerto.

“The Walk to the Paradise Garden” from *A Village Romeo and Juliet*

Frederick Delius

Born January 29, 1862 in Bradford, England

Died June 10, 1934 in Grez-sur-Loing, France

A one-man melting pot

Frederick Delius' parents were German, he spent crucial formative years in the United States, was encouraged by the Norwegian composers Edvard Grieg and Christian Sinding and lived most of his adult life in France. Yet he is one of the most quintessential composers of the rich renaissance that English music underwent in the last century, somehow distilling the rich panoply of British expression through his colorful musical scores.

His opera *A Village Romeo and Juliet* (1907) is based on a story in Gottfried Keller's *People of Seldwyla*. The tale concerns a feud between Swiss farming families about a parcel of land

adjoining both their properties, and the love affair between a young man and woman from each family. “The Walk to the Paradise Garden” is an instrumental interlude that concludes the fifth of the opera’s six scenes. The Paradise Garden of the title is a run-down tavern by the river whose beer garden has become overgrown from neglect. The lovers flee to it after being jeered at a local fair, seeking a private place to express their love.

The ‘English impressionist’: Delius in a nutshell

Delius was not by nature a symphonic composer; he was temperamentally ill suited to the concept of thematic development. Intuition and instinct play a greater role in his music than intellect. This lush and evocative excerpt, a musical distillation of the opera, has come to be regarded as one of the most celebrated English tone poems.

“The Walk to the Paradise Garden” is scored for three flutes (third doubling piccolo), three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, three trumpets, three trombones, bass tuba, two harps, xylophone, bells, gong, timpani and strings. Timing: approximately 8 minutes.

Concerto in E Minor for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 64

Felix Mendelssohn

Born February 3, 1809 in Hamburg, Germany

Died November 4, 1847 in Leipzig, Germany

“The heart’s jewel”

At his 75th birthday party in 1906, the eminent violinist Joseph Joachim declared:

The Germans have four violin concertos. The greatest, the one that makes the fewest concessions, is Beethoven’s. The one by Brahms comes close to Beethoven’s in its seriousness. Max Bruch wrote the richest and most enchanting of the four. But the dearest of them all, the heart’s jewel, is Mendelssohn’s.

Both the public and the violinists love this work. It has withstood the tests of time and frequent

performances, holding its firm place in the repertoire even when Mendelssohn's other music has been out of favor.

A triumph of melodies and idiomatic violin writing

He wrote the concerto for his friend Ferdinand David, who played the premiere in March 1845. Their surviving correspondence attests that Mendelssohn relied heavily on David's advice. That was a wise decision—the concerto is both splendidly violinistic and a melodic triumph. He plunges his soloist directly into the fray in the opening measures, abandoning the usual orchestral introduction. Another break from tradition is the unusual placement of the cadenza at the end of the development section, instead of just before the end of the first movement.

A single bassoon note connects the first movement to the *Andante*, defusing the agitation and drama of the opening. Emotionally this rapid transition demands a great deal from both soloist and orchestra. As a unifying device it is the essence of simplicity, and it works. No less satisfying are the latter two movements, seamlessly bound by a glorious transitional passage that eases us into the joyous finale. Before we have even noticed that we have changed key, tempo and mood, the exuberance of the finale sweeps us up into a maelstrom of irrepressible energy—one of Mendelssohn's greatest strokes of genius.

Mendelssohn's score calls for woodwinds in pairs, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, solo violin and strings. Timing: approximately 27 minutes.

Love Scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, Op. 17

Hector Berlioz

Born December 11, 1803 in La-Côte-Saint-André, Isère, France

Died March 8, 1869 in Paris, France

Hector Berlioz was an original thinker and an iconoclast. In his dramatic symphony *Romeo and Juliet*, he adapted aspects of both vocal and instrumental genres. The result is neither opera nor traditional symphony, but gloriously romantic music that embodies the 19th century's reverence

for Shakespeare's great tragedy.

Berlioz had been thinking about a musical setting of *Romeo and Juliet* since 1827. He spent most of 1839 composing the work. In its original guise, it took about three hours to perform. For practical reasons, some of its orchestral segments have found a wider audience as excerpts in concert performance. The Love Scene is the most famous. It is situated as the third movement of seven, occurring after the section entitled "Romeo Alone" and before the marvelous "Queen Mab Scherzo."

The Love Scene is passionate and lyrical; he thought it some of his best work, and he considered its subject matter to be the most heartfelt expression of intense human emotion. He let the music speak for itself, foregoing the vocal forces employed elsewhere in his dramatic symphony. The greatest moments in Shakespeare's drama, he believed, could succeed without words. As the composer wrote in his foreword to the score:

The very sublimity of this love makes its depiction so dangerous for the musician that he had to give his imagination a latitude that the positive sense of the sung words would not have given him, resorting instead to instrumental language, which is richer, more varied, less precise, and by its very indefiniteness, incomparably more powerful.

Berlioz scored the Love Scene for two flutes, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, four horns, four bassoons and strings. Timing: approximately 14 minutes.

***Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture**

Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky

Born May 7, 1840 in Votkinsk, Viatka District, Russia

Died November 6, 1893 in St. Petersburg, Russia

Unlikely Friendship

In the late 1860s, Mily Balakirev (1837–1910) was a powerful figure in Russian music.

Tchaikovsky fell under his influence in 1867, and by 1869, the two men were spending a

considerable amount of time together and exchanging a lively correspondence.

Theirs was an unlikely friendship. Balakirev was a difficult and troubled man, inherently suspicious of anyone having formal conservatory training in music. Tchaikovsky had been schooled in western music and favored traditional forms. Inevitably, the more experienced Balakirev imprinted his musical ideas and forceful personality on Tchaikovsky. At Balakirev's suggestion, Tchaikovsky began work in October 1869 on an overture based on Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

Balakirev wrote to Tchaikovsky with praise for the love theme, declaring that the overture was his best work to date. Following the first performance in Moscow in March 1870, Tchaikovsky withdrew *Romeo and Juliet* and revised it substantially. Nearly 10 years later, Tchaikovsky returned to *Romeo and Juliet*, this time altering the coda to create the one we hear at these performances.

A Unique Musical Form

Tchaikovsky called this work "fantasy-overture." The title is significant, and it distinguishes *Romeo and Juliet* from the Lisztian tone poems that were so prevalent at the time. His approach to Shakespeare's play is conceptual, rather than a musical attempt to depict the play scene by scene.

Love, death and fate all figure prominently in *Romeo and Juliet*. Each manifests itself in Tchaikovsky's music and is clearly developed within the framework of sonata form. He treats his themes in the broadest possible fashion; for example, the sword theme is not limited to the fighting among Mercutio, Romeo and Tybalt, but it also symbolizes the enmity between the two feuding families and the lovers' futile plight. Tchaikovsky's orchestration is economical and brilliant—undoubtedly the positive influence of Balakirev—with cymbal crashes employed to great effect in rhythmically exciting passages.

The Love Theme

The most memorable melody in the work, the love theme actually consists of two segments, one for Romeo and one for Juliet, beautifully intertwined and full of longing. In the 1880 version, Tchaikovsky reworked the coda to reemphasize the love music through recapitulation and further development. By means of the triumphant ending, he provided the lovers (and, by extension, us) with spiritual catharsis and redemption, making eminently clear where lay his personal sympathies. United together eternally in death, Romeo and Juliet decidedly have the advantage over those left behind to contend with the vagaries of fate.

The score calls for two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, harp and strings.

Timing: approximately 20 minutes.