NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
NJSO
XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

BY LAURIE SHULMAN, ©2018

Winter Festival: Music Speaks

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ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 22

A feast for the ears: this concerto is bold in conception, gorgeous in instrumental color (the slow movement is its own three-course meal) and ingenious in form. The finale contains a startling, delightful diversion that almost constitutes a second slow movement. Mozart, it seems, is never done with surprises.

Tchaikovsky: *Manfred* Symphony

Tchaikovsky based his *Manfred* Symphony on a poetic drama by George Gordon, Lord Byron. Written between the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, *Manfred* represents Tchaikovsky's mature symphonic style. Manfred's lugubrious theme recurs like an *idée fixe* throughout the work. Tchaikovsky was emulating Berlioz. The programmatic content makes this work a multi-movement symphonic poem.

MOZART: Piano Concerto No. 22 in E-flat Major, K. 482

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born: January 7, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: December 1785

World Premiere: December 23, 1785, in Vienna

NJSO Premiere: 1989–90 season. Christopher O'Riley was the soloist; Michael Pratt conducted.

Duration: 34 minutes

> *Meanwhile to two letters of mine I have had only one reply from your brother, dated December 28th [1785], in which he said that he gave without much preparation three subscription concerts to 120 subscribers, that he composed for this purpose a new piano concerto in E-flat, in which (a rather unusual occurrence!), he had to repeat the Andante.*

Leopold Mozart passed on this news from Wolfgang to his daughter Nannerl early in January 1786. Although exasperated that his son was not always an exacting correspondent, Leopold was clearly very proud of Wolfgang's success and awaited news of recently composed works with eagerness. Hearing this concerto today, it is no surprise that the first Viennese audience encored the slow movement. Mozart's magnificent Andante forms the concerto's emotional core: music on a par with his finest wind serenades.

But it is tough to single out only one of the rich movements in K. 482. This was the first concerto in which Mozart opted for the sweeter clarinets rather than the customary oboes. From the opening fanfare and ensuing response of descending wind chords, Mozart establishes the woodwinds as the principal expressive force of the work. They mesh convincingly with the soloist, and yet they seem to be soloists themselves, so absorbing are their passages in all three movements.

Mozart is profligate with his themes in this splendid concerto. So many entrancing, elegant melodies enter the first movement's orchestral exposition that by the time solo piano enters, its theme has half a dozen tuneful competitors. The Andante is unusual in form, borrowing elements of variations, sonata, and rondo. The piano part is essentially variations on the dark C-minor theme. Two episodes for winds, in E-flat major and C major, relieve the tension. In the second episode, flute and bassoon share an intimate duet that hints at some of *The Magic Flute*'s wonderful moments. Mozart's coda is exquisite, at once delicate and ominous, straining to mitigate the lamentation of the minor mode, but ultimately capitulating to the darker implications of 18th-century chromaticism.

Because of its lilting 6/8 meter, the Allegro finale has often been compared to a "hunting" rondo. Trumpets and timpani echo the military flavor of the first movement. Midway through, Mozart sets aside these brighter instruments, interjecting yet another miniature woodwind serenade featuring clarinets and bassoons, in a section marked Andante cantabile. Only in one other concerto—the so-called "Jeunehomme" concerto of 1777, also in E flat—did he interpolate such a section. With this temporary shift, Mozart both recalls the poignant tragedy of the slow movement and raises the finale to a higher expressive plane.

Because Mozart composed K. 482 for his own use, no written-out cadenzas survive; he improvised them in performance. For these performances, Emanuel Ax plays his own cadenzas.

Instrumentation: flute, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings and solo piano.

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Manfred* Symphony, Op. 58

PYOTR ILICH TCHAIKOVSKY

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

Died: November 6, 1893, in St. Petersburg, Russia

Composed: April–October 1885

World Premiere: March 23, 1886, in Moscow

NJSO Premiere: 1979–80 season. Thomas Michalak conducted.

Duration: 57 minutes

The dark tale of Manfred, the subject of Byron's 1817 poetic drama, is the type of material that inspired great romantic music. Tortured by memories of his incestuous love for his sister, Astarte, Manfred lives in despair as an outcast in an Alpine castle. During a visit to the underworld, he sees a vision of his sister. Even then, he is incapable of repentance. Demons summon him to eternal damnation. Manfred defies them and denies them his soul. They vanish, but then he dies.

Robert Schumann was drawn to Byron's *Manfred* because of the strong resemblance to Goethe's *Faust*. He composed incidental music to the drama in 1848. Nearly four decades later, Mily Balakirev wrote to Tchaikovsky suggesting *Manfred* as the subject for an orchestral work, outlining key sequences, form and other musical details. The most important of these was an *idée fixe*, a recurring musical thread coursing through all four movements and uniting the musico-literary elements of the program. (Balakirev had previously played an important role in the genesis of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* in 1869. Communication between the two composers lapsed after Balakirev suffered a nervous breakdown in the 1870s; they resumed their correspondence in 1881.)

Tchaikovsky knew Schumann's *Manfred* score and hesitated. His wariness grew with the knowledge that Balakirev, having rejected the idea as unsuitable to his own style, had proposed the entire project to Hector Berlioz during the winter of 1867–68, when the great French composer paid his final visit to Russia. Balakirev had believed that the hallucinatory and supernatural elements of Byron's drama were a natural for the composer of the *Symphonie fantastique*. Berlioz had died within a year, however, and the concept of a *Manfred* symphony lay fallow for 15 years.

Tchaikovsky's program appeared as a preface in the score:

I. Manfred wanders in the Alps. Weary of the fatal questions of existence, tormented by hopeless longings and the memory of past crimes, he suffers cruel spiritual pangs. He has plunged into the occult sciences and commands the mighty powers of darkness, but neither they nor anything in *this* world can give him the *forgetfulness* to which alone he vainly aspires. The memory of his lost love, Astarte, gnaws at his heart and there is neither limit nor end to his despair.

II. The Alpine fairy appears before Manfred in the rainbow from the spray of a waterfall.

III. A picture of the bare, simple, free life of the mountain folk.

IV. The subterranean palace of Arimanes. Infernal orgy. Appearance of Manfred in the middle of the bacchanal. Evocation and appearance of the shade of Astarte. He is pardoned. Manfred's death.

It is a tossup which parallel is stronger: literary to Goethe's *Faust,* or musical to Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. Certainly both cast longer shadows than does Balakirev's suggested format. For all the older man's manipulative suggestions, Tchaikovsky embraced the concept and composed his *Manfred* for intensely personal reasons. He had his own forbidden love to live with: not incest, but homosexuality.

The eminent Tchaikovsky scholar David Brown has written of *Manfred*: "The form is free; the slabs of dark, sometimes tempestuous music of the opening section projects Manfred himself, the slower Andante portraying Astarte in some of the most tender, most beautiful music Tchaikovsky ever wrote. Images of the suffering woman were one of the most important recurring features in Tchaikovsky's work, especially after his marriage, and the appalling violence of Manfred's emotional response to Astarte's appearance no doubt carries something of Tchaikovsky's agony at his own sense of sexual guilt."

Tchaikovsky apparently felt a strong kinship to Manfred's plight. Perhaps that is why he chose to portray the story through four independent, related movements, rather than one extended piece. He called *Manfred* a symphony. Essentially it is an oversized tone poem: like *Romeo and Juliet, Francesca da Rimini* or *The Voyevode*, but extended into four movements.

After Tchaikovsky completed his Fourth Symphony in 1878, he had a symphonic drought of nearly seven years. Some lighter orchestral pieces flowed from his pen, most notably the *Capriccio Italien*, *1812* Overture, the Serenade for Strings and his first three orchestral suites. Yet a major utterance—a symphony—eluded him until *Manfred*. With this work, he broke through that episode of writer's block. Tchaikovsky grew to dislike the last three movements; he was often critical of his own compositions. He remained exceedingly proud of the first movement, however, which remains one of the most striking self-portraits in music.

Instrumentation: three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets in A, bass

clarinet, three bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, chimes, triangle, two harps, organ and strings.

IN THE COMPOSER'S WORDS

Tchaikovsky's letters are filled with commentary about Manfred*, the symphony's genesis, his shifting attitude toward the topic and the resulting composition. A sampling follows.*

For the present, [your program] leaves me completely cold, and if the heart and imagination are not warmed, it's scarcely worth setting about composing … [I might] squeeze out of myself a whole series of more or less interesting episodes, in which you'd meet conventionally gloomy music to reproduce Manfred's hopeless disillusionment, and a lot of effective instrumental flashes in the Alpine fairy scherzo, and sunrise in the violins' high register and Manfred's death with pianissimo trombones. I would be able to furnish these episodes with harmonic curiosities and piquancies. … I might even receive praise for the fruits of my labors, but such composing in no way attracts me.

(November 1882, to Mily Balakirev)

I am immersed in a big new symphonic work. … I began back in April to make *sketches* for my long planned program symphony on the theme of Byron's *Manfred*. I have now got so carried away with this work that the opera is probably going to have to be put to one side for a long time. This symphony will need an enormous amount of concentration and effort because it is a very serious and complex task.

(Summer 1883, to Nadejhda von Meck)

I have carried out your wish. *Manfred* is finished. … It was very hard work—but also very pleasant, especially, when, having begun with some effort, I got carried away. Of course, I cannot predict whether this symphony will please you or not, but *believe* me, never in my life have I tried so hard and become so weary from my work. The symphony is written in four movements and in accordance with your program. But I ask your forgiveness: I have not been able to keep to the keys

and modulations you indicated, even though I wanted to.

(September 1883, to Balakirev)

I will give you my impressions from hearing *Manfred* at rehearsals. In actual performance there can be no doubt that the first movement is the best. The Scherzo was played at a very quick tempo and I was not disappointed. … The Andante doesn't sound bad. The Finale gains a *lot* in performance; from the *audience'*s point of view it is the most successful movement. … My own view is that it is my best orchestral work, but that its difficulty, its impracticality and its complexity will condemn it to *failure and neglect*.

(March 1886, to Balakirev)

So far as *Manfred* is concerned, I can say, with no pretense at being modest, that I find the work disgusting and loathe it heartily, *with the sole exception of the first movement.* However, I intend in the near future to destroy the other three movements entirely.

(October 1888, to Grand Duke Konstantin Romanov)

Thankfully, he did not destroy those movements, and *Manfred* has taken its place as one of Tchaikovsky's finest scores of the 1880s.