

## Trifonov Is Back!

### ONE-MINUTE NOTES

#### **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** *Capriccio italien*, Op. 45

Tchaikovsky was well-to-do and traveled extensively throughout Europe. He was particularly fond of sunny Italy, and he channeled that affection into an orchestral valentine with *Capriccio italien*. Tchaikovsky originally conceived of this as an Italian suite on folk melodies; he modeled his piece on the Spanish fantasias of his older countryman Mikhail Glinka. Three principal themes follow the opening fanfare. When the themes repeat, the background music changes. Unashamedly melodic and fun, this charmer does not intend to do much beyond entertain. Nor does it need to. For 15 minutes, Tchaikovsky transports us to Rome at Carnival time. What's not to like?

#### **Mason Bates** Piano Concerto

Now 45, Mason Bates has emerged as a major figure among American composers. He has often explored the synthesis of electronic and acoustic music; however, his new piano concerto for Daniil Trifonov is an all-acoustic work that celebrates the Russian pianist's virtuosity and style. The three movements take us on a time-travel adventure, opening with Renaissance flavor that suggests lutes and the percussion of early music. The second movement immerses us in Romantic angst, as the soloist struggles in artistic (and musical) isolation. The finale fast forwards to jazz and minimalism, filtered through Bates' individual voice.

#### **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy-Overture

Shakespeare's famous tragedy was the inspiration for Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*. Tchaikovsky called this work "fantasy-overture." 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, in various guises, 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 also symbolizes the enmity between the two feuding families

and the lovers' futile plight. The orchestration is economical and brilliant, with cymbal crashes employed to great effect in rhythmically exciting passages. Tchaikovsky's greatest achievement in *Romeo and Juliet*, however, is the love theme. It consists of two segments, one for Romeo and one for Juliet, beautifully intertwined and full of longing. This is the melody that will linger in your mind's ear after this concert.

### **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** Suite from *Swan Lake*, Op. 20a

In 1958, the English critic and composer Humphrey Searle wrote: "Tchaikovsky may be justly described as the ballet composer par excellence. He had an extraordinary gift for catching the exact atmosphere needed in a particular dance, and his almost unfailing gift of melody and his feeling for orchestral colour ensured that he would be able to convey this feeling to the audience." The Suite from *Swan Lake* we hear this weekend excerpts the most beloved numbers from that ballet. These include two of Tchaikovsky's exquisite orchestral waltzes, which epitomize the magical spirit of this fairy tale. Other highlights in the suite are the famous oboe solo with shimmering string accompaniment as well as one of the national dances in the Act III ball: the sparkling Danse espagnole. Only the rare listener can resist occasional swaying and foot-tapping to the captivating music of this suite.

### **Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky: *Capriccio italien*, Op.45**

#### **Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky**

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

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

**Composed:** 1880

**World Premiere:** 18 December 1880 in Moscow. Nikolai Rubinstein conducted

**New Jersey Symphony Premiere:** 1962–63 season. Kenneth Schermerhorn conducted.

**Duration:** 15 minutes

**Instrumentation:** three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two cornets, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, tambourine, cymbals, bass drum, chimes, harp and strings.

Why did a Russian composer write an Italian *capriccio*?

Tchaikovsky was in many ways the most cosmopolitan and westernized of the 19th-century Russian

composers. His *Capriccio italien*, composed in 1880, is one reflection of his extensive travels. In letters to his family, he revealed that the themes had come partly from published Italian collections and partly from his own recollections of melodies heard on the streets of Italy. Rather than connecting these ideas in a series of unrelated episodes in the style of an Italian operatic overture, however, he intertwined them, binding disparate musical ideas together into a dense orchestral fabric. The technique is decidedly Russian.

### **Russian predecessors**

With this work, Tchaikovsky made his contribution to a series of pieces composed by Russians but imbued with a strong Latin flavor. Considering how bitter the Russian winters are, it is hardly surprising that Russian composers should be attracted to the warmth of music from balmy climates. Tchaikovsky's most important precedent was the Spanish-style compositions of Mikhail Glinka (1804–57), the father of Russian music. These include the famous *Capriccio brillante on the Jota Aragonesa* (1845, also known as *First Spanish Overture*). Tchaikovsky's younger contemporary Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov followed with his *Capriccio espagnol* (1887), and a subgenre was born.

Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio* opens with a dramatic fanfare. Adapted from a bugle call that the composer heard in a Roman cavalry barracks near his lodgings, the fanfare ushers in a solemn march. Before long, Italian sunshine breaks through these clouds, and the work evolves into one of the most joyous that Tchaikovsky ever wrote.

### **Rome at Carnival time**

*Capriccio italien* is a brilliant showpiece for orchestra, depicting Rome at carnival time. Tchaikovsky uses the percussion section with great flair to establish a carnivalesque atmosphere. We hear the crowd and sense its mounting expectation; we feel the hubbub of merrymaking. As evening draws nigh, the quality of illumination alters from dusk to torchlight, and the streets throng with people ready to party. *Capriccio italien* is Tchaikovsky's valentine to the Eternal City. Nearly a century and a half later, it is still flowers, candy and perfume all rolled into one.

## **Mason Bates: Piano Concerto**

### **Mason Bates**

**Born:** January 23, 1977, in Richmond, Virginia

**Composed:** 2021

**World Premiere:** January 14, 2022, in Philadelphia. Daniil Trifonov was the soloist; Yannick Nézet-Seguin conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra

**New Jersey Symphony Premiere:** These performances are the New Jersey Symphony premiere.

**Duration:** 25 minutes

**Instrumentation:** piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, Renaissance drum (large hand drum), four triangles from medium to very high, high and low tam tams, glockenspiel, medium and high suspended cymbals, bongo, flexible switches, snare drum, crotales, finger cymbals, vibraphone, woody clicks (plastic sticks on wood), bass drum, harp, solo piano and strings.

Mason Bates is having a busy year. The San Diego Symphony commissioned *Soundcheck in C Major* for the inauguration of its new Rady Shell last August. In November, Yo-Yo Ma introduced Bates's *Hymn for the Future* for cello, electronica and piano at the new Bowes Center in San Francisco. The orchestras of Chicago, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Dallas and the National Symphony co-commissioned his *Philharmonia Fantastique: The Making of the Orchestra*, a multimedia concerto and animated film that will begin streaming this year. Just last month, the Austin Opera presented Bates's *The (R)Evolution of Steve Jobs*. Other February performances of his music took place in South Carolina, Arizona and Illinois.

Arguably his highest profile premiere this year was Daniil Trifonov's performance of Bates' Piano Concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra in January. The piece was co-commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony. Bates composed it during the COVID-19 lockdown, immersing himself in Trifonov's recordings in order to familiarize himself with the soloist's technique and interpretive approach.

The concerto's three movements are something of an exercise in time travel, as Bates explains in his composer's note:

The work evolves through three distinct stylistic sound worlds. The opening movement has an almost Renaissance transparency, pairing the soloist's progressively more ornamented four-part chorale with strumming pizzicato and reedy winds. After an invention-like cadenza for the soloist, the brass enter with much fanfare as the pianist reaches the lowest, most sonorous depths of the instrument.

The middle movement lurches a hundred years ahead, with the Romantically depressed soloist brooding apart from the orchestra. Radiant textures from each instrumental family attempt to lift the soloist's spirits. It is only when the orchestra comes together in a lustrous tutti that it succeeds, and at this moment the soloist and orchestra finally play together.

Another fast-forward brings us to the more contemporary jazz-minimalist finale, alight with mercurial humor and lopsided grooves. The accumulation of quicksilver textures explodes in fanfares, with the opening chorale tune reappearing dramatically, and all musical elements spinning together in the Concerto's final minute.

This concerto is something of an anomaly for Bates, who has often used electronica in his music; the piano concerto is acoustic. The focus is clearly on the soloist and orchestra, with abundant punctuation from a large percussion complement. Bates takes full advantage of Daniil Trifonov's artistry, with cadenzas in all three movements. Introspective sections plumb Trifonov's sensitivity to phrasing and dynamic nuances. Dazzling passage work and thunderous chordal segments demand power and keen rhythmic sense, as well as facility. It is an exciting ride.

Mason Bates grew up in Richmond, where he attended St. Christopher's School, also participating in the Brevard Music Center's summer program. He attended Columbia University and The Juilliard School, earning a BA in English literature and an MM in composition. His principal teachers were John Corigliano, David Del Tredici and Samuel Adler. Bates subsequently earned a doctorate in Composition at UC-Berkeley, working with Edmund Campion. Bates has explored the synthesis of electronic and acoustic music in his works. He has an ongoing relationship with the San Francisco Symphony and has served as composer-in-residence to the Chicago Symphony and the Kennedy Center. He is also the recipient of multiple awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Rome Prize, and his recorded music has been nominated twice for Grammy awards.

## **Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky: *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy-Overture**

### **Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky**

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

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

**Composed:** October–November 1869, revised 1870 and 1880.

**World Premiere:** March 16, 1870, in Moscow.

**New Jersey Symphony Premiere:** Summer 1971. Henry Lewis conducted.

**Duration:** 19 minutes

**Instrumentation:** two flutes plus piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets in A, English horn, two bassoons, four horns two trumpets, two tenor trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, harp and strings.

In the late 1860s, Mily Balakirev (1837–1910) was a powerful figure in Russian music. With his most important students—César Cui, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin and Modest Mussorgsky—he founded the modern Russian nationalist school of composition known as the “Russian Five.” Balakirev's impact resounded far beyond that immediate circle of disciples, however. Tchaikovsky fell under Balakirev's influence in 1867. By 1869, the two men were spending a considerable amount of time together and exchanged 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. He represented the musical anti-establishment. Tchaikovsky had been schooled in Western music and favored traditional forms. Inevitably the older, more experienced Balakirev imprinted his musical ideas and forceful personality on Tchaikovsky, who was entering his first maturity (he was still in his late 20s) and was highly impressionable in any case. At Balakirev's suggestion,

Tchaikovsky began work in October 1869 on an overture based on Shakespeare's tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*. As his absorption in the project increased, he gathered momentum, and the first version was complete by the end of November.

Eager for his friend and mentor's approval, Tchaikovsky sent Balakirev the score. The older man accepted the dedication, writing to Tchaikovsky with praise for the love theme and declaring that the overture was his best work to date. Balakirev tempered his praise with criticism regarding form and thematic content elsewhere in the piece. Following the first performance in Moscow in March 1870, Tchaikovsky withdrew *Romeo and Juliet* and revised it substantially that summer. It was published in May 1871 by the Berlin firm of Bote & Bock. Nearly 10 years later, Tchaikovsky returned to *Romeo and Juliet*, this time altering the coda. That third version is the one we hear at these performances.

Tchaikovsky called this work "fantasy-overture." The title is significant and 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. As Michael Hoffman has observed: "*Romeo* is not a piece of story-telling, but a series of impressions that recall the tragedy of the star-crossed lovers. . . . It is a monument somewhere outside space, in a style austere and faintly Gothic."

Tchaikovsky originally intended to set Shakespeare's play as an opera. That project never came to fruition. But with this fantasy-overture, he achieved his first mature masterpiece.

Love, death and fate all figure prominently in *Romeo and Juliet*. All three concepts were to preoccupy Tchaikovsky for the remainder of his life and recurred with regularity in his music. In the overture-fantasy, each has its musical manifestation and is clearly developed, in various guises, within the framework of a sonata form movement. He treats these ideas in the broadest possible fashion. For example, the sword theme is not limited to the fighting among Mercutio, Romeo and Tybalt, but 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, who had criticized his lack of restraint in scoring earlier works. In rhythmically charged passages, he employs cymbal crashes to great effect.

Tchaikovsky's greatest achievement in *Romeo and Juliet* is the love theme. The most memorable melody in the work, it 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.

## **Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky: Suite from *Swan Lake***

**Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky**

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

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

**Composed:** 1875–76

**World Premiere:** March 4, 1877, at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre

New Jersey Symphony Premiere: 1934–35 season. Rene Pollain conducted.

**Duration:** 21 minutes

**Instrumentation:** piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two cornets, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum and strings.

To the general public, Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* is his most beloved ballet, because of its ubiquity during the holiday season. In naming a favorite, connoisseurs of ballet are more likely to argue for *Sleeping Beauty* or *Swan Lake*. Composed in 1875 on commission for the Bolshoi Ballet at St. Petersburg's Imperial Theatre, *Swan Lake* is the more impressive accomplishment, because it was Tchaikovsky's first attempt at ballet. Today we recognize him as perhaps the greatest genius for dance of the entire 19th century. Incredibly, the work was a colossal flop at its 1876 premiere, plagued by poor staging, a second rank choreographer and a conductor who could not grasp the complexity of Tchaikovsky's masterly score. Accustomed to banal scores altogether subservient to their needs, the dancers complained that *Swan Lake*'s music was undanceable.

Not until two years after Tchaikovsky's death did the work receive a production worthy of its glorious score, with classic choreography by Marius Petipa. Since then, *Swan Lake* has remained a bulwark of the permanent repertoire, and its appealing and melodic score has enjoyed frequent performances in the concert hall. The Suite we hear this weekend excerpts the most beloved numbers. These include two of Tchaikovsky's exquisite orchestral waltzes, which epitomize the magical spirit of this fairy tale. Other highlights in the suite are the famous oboe solo with shimmering string accompaniment, as well as one of the national dances in the Act III ball: the sparkling *Danse espagnole*. Only the rare listener can resist occasional swaying and foot-tapping to the captivating music of this suite.

#### A TROUBLED HISTORY FOR A GREAT MASTERPIECE

Who is to say why *Swan Lake* failed at its premiere? It likely was not fault of the scenario. Both authors knew Russian ballet well and had good theatrical sense. The composer's friend Vladimir Petrovich Begichev was intendant of the Moscow Imperial Theatres when the ballet was first produced. Begichev's co-author Vasily Geltser was a dancer and régisseur (essentially the stage manager) of the Moscow Imperial Ballet. The subject matter, with its themes of doomed love, deception, transformation and redemption, was fashionable. And many of the critics were captivated by Tchaikovsky's melodic invention and graceful score.

Yet the first performance, at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre on March 4, 1877, fell flat. The culprit was almost certainly substandard choreography by Julius Reisinger. Within three years, Reisinger's successor Joseph Hansen had rearranged the dancing for a revival. He overhauled the ballet a second time in 1882. Despite a paltry four performances, the ballet somehow remained in the repertory. Eventually Hansen took a

bowdlerized version to London as ballet master of the Alhambra Theatre. Another choreographer would rescue *Swan Lake* from comparative oblivion.

Marius Petipa's new choreography for *Swan Lake* was the eventual key to the ballet's immortality. He staged a new version in the Russian imperial capital of St Petersburg at the Maryinsky Theatre in 1893, after Tchaikovsky's death. *Swan Lake* became one of the first Russian masterpieces to be seen widely outside the Czarist empire. Its subsequent champions and interpreters included the legendary ballerina Anna Pavlova, the choreographer Mikhail Fokine and the impresario Sergei Diaghilev.

Still later, Rudolf Nureyev choreographed *Swan Lake* and was a celebrated interpreter of Prince Siegfried. His performances with Dame Margot Fonteyn as Odette/Odile were legendary.

### **SWAN LAKE, THE BALLET**

Tchaikovsky's beloved ballet is a magical tale involving anthropomorphic switches between swans and humans, an evil magician, mistaken identity, a handsome hero who is duped and an ending that is both tragic and triumphant. What rich material for Russia's most romantic 19th-century composer!

The hero is Prince Siegfried, who is hunting wild swans near his royal castle. He watches as Odette, the queen of the swans, transforms into a beautiful young woman. She reveals that she is captive to the spell of the evil magician von Rothbart. Only the pledge of eternal fidelity from a man who loves her can release her from von Rothbart's spell. Siegfried pledges his eternal love.

The following evening, Siegfried is host to a ball at his castle. (This is the ballet's Act III.) Von Rothbart escorts his daughter Odile, who looks so much like Odette that Siegfried is deceived. He proposes and is accepted. Unwittingly, he has broken his oath to Odette. Father and bride-to-be disappear.

Siegfried hastens to the lake, learning the truth. He and his beloved Odette defy the evil von Rothbart and plunge into the lake. Their suicide, an act of faith, love, and defiance, breaks the evil spell—but the lovers share their joy only in the eternity that death brings.