

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

David Ludwig: *NightVision*

Now the Dean at The Juilliard School, David Ludwig is also one of America's most distinguished living composers. *NightVision*, which the New Jersey Symphony premiered here at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in 2001, was his breakout orchestral work. This seven-minute piece is a tightly woven musical canvas painted with multiple colors. With a prominent *concertato* role for the concertmaster and brief cameo solos for several wind instruments, the texture is often transparent; however, when Ludwig deploys the full ensemble, his sonorities reach Straussian proportions and recall the rich post-romantic cinematic scores from Hollywood's golden age. Ultimately his eclectic musical language is entirely personal.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor, K. 491

Mozart's stormy, passionate C-Minor Concerto must have startled his Viennese audience. The dark subtext coursing through this music prompts us to wonder what feelings of despair the composer harbored. Classicist he certainly was, but this concerto pushes the envelope persuasively close to the brink of romanticism. It dates from 1786, a remarkably prolific year in which he had also composed the lovely A-Major Concerto, K. 488. The C-Minor Concerto is bleaker in mood. It also employs the largest orchestra Mozart had written for up to that point, calling for both oboes and clarinets. The finale, a march with six variations and a coda, is an inexorable and compelling journey.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64

Tchaikovsky is deservedly celebrated for his symphonies, concertos, and ballet scores. His Symphony No. 5 in E minor is one of his beloved masterpieces. Its first movement opens with a slow march that gains passion and momentum as it unfolds to an *Allegro con anima*. The unforgettable *Andante cantabile* horn solo will touch your heart – and its meltingly lovely melody will linger in your mind's ear long after this performance ends. Tchaikovsky's waltz reminds us that he was a great ballet composer, while his triumphant finale brings

satisfying closure to this powerful work.

David Ludwig: *NightVision*

David Ludwig

Born: December 1, 1974, in Doylestown, Pennsylvania

Composed: 2001; revised in 2002

World Premiere: 2001 at New Jersey Performing Arts Center; Lawrence Leighton Smith led the New Jersey Symphony.

Duration: 7 minutes

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, three horns, two trumpets, two trombones, vibraphone, harp and strings

David Ludwig has good genes; his family is what is popularly known as musical royalty. His uncle was the American pianist Peter Serkin. His grandfather was the Hungarian-born pianist Rudolf Serkin (1903-1991), and his great-grandfather the violinist, conductor, and composer Adolf Busch (1891-1952). After completing degrees at Oberlin College and the Manhattan School of Music, Ludwig earned a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania. He pursued additional post-graduate study at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music with Richard Danielpour, Jennifer Higdon, Ned Rorem and at New York's Juilliard School with John Corigliano.

Ludwig is the recipient of multiple honors, including fellowships at the Yaddo and MacDowell artist colonies, a Theodore Presser Foundation Career Grant, and awards from New Music USA, the American Composers Forum, American Music Center, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Ludwig formerly served on the composition faculty at Curtis. He is now Dean of The Juilliard School.

NightVision is a tightly woven musical canvas painted with multiple colors. It opens in a quasi-minimalist repeated upward figure Ludwig layers between strings and vibraphone. His second idea is slower, a Copland-esque melodic figure that recurs in various forms for the balance of the piece. With a prominent *concertato* role for the concertmaster and brief cameo solos for several wind instruments, the texture is often transparent; however, when Ludwig deploys the full ensemble, his sonorities reach Straussian proportions and recall the rich post-romantic cinematic scores from Hollywood's golden age. Ultimately his eclectic musical language is entirely personal.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor, K. 491

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: March 1786

World Premiere: April 3, 1786 at Vienna's Burgtheater; Mozart conducted from the piano.

Duration: 31 minutes

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

Most music lovers know that the keys of G minor and D minor have special significance in Mozart's music, calling forth works of epic tragedy that plumb the innermost depths of the composer's soul. In fact, *any* work in minor mode was unusual in the late eighteenth century. Mozart's compositions in darker keys have attracted more attention not only because they contain music of such extraordinarily high quality, but also because he himself was highly sensitive to nuances of tonality. No key was chosen lightly for any of his works, and there are decided similarities in the character of many works sharing key signature and mode.

Among the Mozart compositions in C minor, a series dating from the 1780s stands out. The first of them is the Serenade No. 12 for Winds, K. 388 (1782). The following year he wrote a Fugue for Two Pianos (1783, K. 426). Then in short order followed the C-minor Piano Sonata and Fantasy (K. 457 and K. 475, 1784 and 1785, respectively). Also composed in 1785 was the Masonic Funeral Music, K. 478. The piano concerto we hear this evening was completed in March 1786. Mozart's arrangement of the C-minor Wind Serenade, K. 388 for String Quintet dates from 1787 (K. 406). And the formidable Adagio and Fugue in C Minor dates from 1788.

What common thread unites this series beyond the key in which they are written? Musicologist H.C. Robbins Landon has suggested that all of them are manifestations of depression, and that Mozart may have been acutely depressed in spring 1786 at the time he completed the C-minor Piano Concerto. Certainly K. 491 is a work of epic grandeur and symphonic scale. Mozart employs his largest concerto orchestra in this piece; it is the sole piano concerto calling for both oboes and clarinets.

Both this concerto and the well-loved Concerto No. 20 in D Minor, K. 466, anticipate the stormy emotional intensity we associate with Beethoven. If the C-minor concerto does not seethe with the unbridled romantic abandon of K. 466, it joins that work by peering ahead into the nineteenth century. The primary difference is perhaps method: in this later work, Mozart applies his technique with more restraint and subtlety. Indeed, a more illustrative comparison among the piano concerti may be with the transparent Concerto No. 23 in A, K. 488, completed only three weeks prior to the C-minor work in March 1786. Mozart's intense expressivity and exquisitely balanced dialogue between soloist and orchestra are mirrored in these two works of strongly divergent temperament.

In his monograph *A Companion to Mozart's Piano Concertos*, Arthur Hutchings calls K. 491's opening *Allegro* Mozart's greatest concerto movement. An expansive orchestral exposition establishes dignity, grandeur and drama that are sustained throughout the work. Mozart distributes his thematic material liberally among the orchestra, with masterful interplay between instrumental ensemble and soloist. That stated, one of the performance problems this concerto presents is that the manuscript is one of Mozart's sketchiest. The soloist must fill in some passages that Mozart indicated in a kind of musical shorthand; there are places for embellished entrances (called *Eingänge*) in all three movements. For these performances, Mr. Borrow has written his own cadenza.

In its pristine simplicity, the E-flat *Larghetto* is one of the most perfect creations in all of Mozart's music; a couple of years later, he emulated it closely in the lovely slow movement (also in E-flat) to the B-flat Piano Sonata, K. 570. Here, given the rich color resources of the orchestra, he turns a simple A-B-A-C-A form into a sophisticated amalgam of rondo, woodwind serenade, and variation. Each of the contrasting episodes (the first in C minor, the second in A-flat) is stated first by the woodwinds, then varied by the soloist.

With the *Allegretto*, Mozart produced his last essay in variation form in a concerto. Among his piano concerti, only this and K. 453 in G conclude with variations, but the structure in K. 491 is more complex and lends greater weight to the finale, giving it a sense of importance that rivals that of the first movement. Simply stated, the movement consists of a theme, six variations and a substantial coda. But variations two through six are double variations (like the first movement of the popular A-major piano sonata K. 331), in which the second half of each section introduces a different variation treatment.

In the C-Minor Concerto, Mozart sustains interest by making the first variation almost exclusively a pianistic endeavor; whereas in the last he switches the meter to 6/8 and adds a brilliant coda. Brilliance does not necessarily mean the clouds lift, however. While the D minor concerto culminates in a sunny conclusion in D major, the C minor sustains its tragic mood by ending in minor mode.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

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

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

Composed: May-August 1888

World Premiere: November 17, 1888 in St. Petersburg; Tchaikovsky conducted.

Duration: 44 minutes

Instrumentation: three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and strings

If Beethoven and Brahms were intellectual symphonists, Tchaikovsky favored the emotional side of the genre. As is the case with most generalizations, there are plenty of gray areas once one begins to elaborate such statements. Tchaikovsky certainly understood the principles of musical form and development he had learned during his conservatory training. In fact, he favored those ideals more than most of his Russian contemporaries. Many of them were caught up in a more specifically Russian nationalism, seeking to separate themselves from western musical models and embrace folk music and Russian orthodox church melodies into their art music. Even though Tchaikovsky was more classically oriented, he was still an intensely emotional man who regarded music ultimately as a lyrical medium. More to the point, he believed that the symphony was the most lyrical vessel in which to express musical ideas. For him, the symphony was a prism through which the innermost reaches of the human soul could be refracted.

The inherent conflict between these two approaches to the symphony—left brain/right brain, if you will—is at the heart of both the success and the flaws in Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. There have always been critics of the formal shortcomings in his music, particularly his grasp of first movement sonata form. Yet this work has earned its enormous popularity because of an emotional immediacy in the music that reaches the listener on a very personal level. Is there any symphony more immediately moving and ingratiating than this one? From its opening measures, where the clarinet declaims a lugubrious Russian march tune, Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony grips and retains our emotional involvement. Nowhere is Tchaikovsky less subtle, and nowhere is he more effective. The lovely horn melody that dominates the famous slow movement is one of the triumphs of the symphonic literature: memorable and eminently singable, it stays with us for weeks after a hearing of this symphony.

And the waltz—a bow to Berlioz's similar ploy in his *Symphonie fantastique*, also replacing the scherzo—is graceful and alluring, ever a reminder that Tchaikovsky was the greatest ballet composer of the nineteenth century. His reliance on dance rhythms in this symphony, particularly waltzes and marches, contributes to its cyclic unity and emphasizes his innate gift as a composer for the ballet stage.

Tchaikovsky began work on his Fifth Symphony shortly after taking occupancy of his new country house at Frolovskoye, near Klin. He moved there in April 1888, and at first was entranced by gardening and the natural beauty of his surroundings. By midsummer, however, the urge to compose had returned. He commenced work on the E-minor symphony, his first in over a decade, and was orchestrating by August. The premiere performances took place that autumn in St. Petersburg. Their failure depressed Tchaikovsky, whose opinion of his own new compositions tended to vacillate wildly with public and critical opinion. He was much encouraged by Johannes Brahms's kind words the following spring in Hamburg, when the new symphony was first heard in Germany on tour. In a letter to his brother Modest from Hamburg in March 1889, he wrote:

Brahms stayed an extra day to hear my symphony and was very kind. We had lunch together after the rehearsal and quite a few drinks. He is very sympathetic and I like his honesty and open-mindedness. Neither he nor the players liked the Finale, which I also think rather horrible.

But two weeks later, from Hanover, this harsh self-criticism had passed, and he was able to write:

The Fifth Symphony was beautifully played and I have started to love it again—I was beginning to develop an exaggerated negative opinion about it.

Like its predecessor, the stormy Fourth Symphony, the Fifth focuses on mankind's futile struggle with destiny. This is, however, a more spiritual work than the F-minor symphony; specifically it deals with man's spiritual helplessness and inadequacy. These thoughts are most evident in the finale, which opens with great solemnity. But the entire symphony is filled with operatic crescendos and dramatic, sudden shifts in tempo, all of which bespeak a soul in torment, searching for its own catharsis.

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