NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY
XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique'

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Louise Farrenc Overture No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 23

The French romantic composer Louise Farrenc (1804–75) had a distinguished career as pianist, composer, professor and scholar. Best known for her chamber music, she only wrote five pieces for orchestra, comprising two overtures and three symphonies. Her attractive Overture No. 1 consists of a slow introduction in a major mode followed by a lively allegro in sonata form that is reminiscent of both Carl Maria von Weber and Felix Mendelssohn. The distinguished French composer and critic Hector Berlioz singled out Farrenc's two overtures for high praise.

Juan Pablo Jofre Double Concerto for Violin and Bandoneon, No. 1

Argentinian-born Juan Pablo Jofre has been based in New York City since the early 2000s. Beginning on drums and guitar, he mastered multiple other instruments during his formal musical training in San Juan, Argentina. After hearing recordings of the legendary composer, bandoneonist and band leader Astor Piazzolla, Jofre became enchanted with the sound and range of the bandoneon. A relative of the concertina (or button accordion), the instrument is central to Argentinian tango. Violinist Michael Guttman commissioned Jofre's Double Concerto after performing several times with Jofre. In this unprecedented combination, Jofre merges classical form and the framework of orchestra with the rhythms of Argentinian tango and milonga. Concertmaster Eric Wyrick observes, "JP captures the seductive mystery of the [tango] genre with ease, expertise and virtuosity."

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74, "Pathétique"

Tchaikovsky composed his Sixth Symphony, subtitled "Pathétique," in 1893, the final year of his life. He conducted the premiere of the symphony in St. Petersburg only eight days prior to his sudden death, reportedly from cholera. That circumstance added greatly to the renown of the "Pathétique" Symphony. Almost everything about this work is valedictory, as if the composer knew his life was over. He opens and

closes his symphony with elegiac tragedy. The first movement introduction and ensuing Allegro are versions of the same tune. The finale is an extended slow movement. Even the graceful waltz (in 5/4 time) and a valiant march fail to mitigate the shadows of this magnificent work. It is a fitting, if sad, conclusion to a tormented life.

Louise Farrenc: Overture No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 23

Louise Farrenc
Born: May 31, 1804, in Paris, France
Died: September 15, 1875, in Paris, France
Composed: 1834
World Premiere: Undocumented
New Jersey Symphony Premiere: These performances are the New Jersey Symphony premiere.
Duration: 8 minutes
Instrumentation: woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.

If asked to name female composers from the Romantic era, music lovers might be able to come up with Clara Schumann or Fanny Mendelssohn. France's Louise Farrenc arguably surpassed them both in prominence during the 19th century.

Farrenc came from a distinguished family of royal artists, including several female painters. Her brother was the sculptor Auguste Dumont. Louise evidenced prodigious musical talent from childhood. By her early teens, she was already a keyboard virtuoso who had flourished as a student of Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Nepomuk Hummel. A budding composer, she matriculated at the Paris Conservatoire at age 15 to study composition with Anton Reicha, a contemporary and respected friend of Beethoven.

She married the flutist and music publisher Aristide Farrenc in 1821. He published most of her compositions and eventually steered her toward the rediscovery and publication of early keyboard music. She served as a piano professor at the Paris Conservatoire from 1842 to 1873, the only woman to hold such a prestigious position.

Farrenc is best known today for her chamber music and solo piano works. Her orchestral compositions are

few: two overtures (both from 1834) and three symphonies between 1841 and 1847. During her lifetime, her music was widely performed in France and elsewhere in Europe. Hector Berlioz—one of France's most influential music critics in the 1830s—singled out her overtures for high praise.

The First Overture opens with a slow introduction in E major before proceeding to a vigorous Allegro in E minor. It is a concert overture—that is, a free-standing symphonic movement not associated with a stage work or any extramusical idea. Farrenc's music is firmly grounded in classical forms and clearly influenced by both Mendelssohn and Beethoven. Her musical language is consistent with early romanticism in Europe. Listeners who know the overtures of Carl Maria von Weber will note her secure control of form and imaginative use of woodwinds, strings and especially timpani.

Farrenc shows a secure command of sonata form, and her handling of the orchestral ensemble is admirable. Her development section is reminiscent of some Italian opera overtures; early Verdi comes to mind. The harmonic journey is far-flung and convincing, with a pedal point in the timpani heralding the recapitulation. The overture returns to E major for a resounding close.

All five of Farrenc's orchestral works remained unpublished until the late 20th century. As this attractive overture attests, her compositions are well worth discovery and performance.

Juan Pablo Jofre: Double Concerto for Violin and Bandoneon

Juan Pablo Jofre
Born: June 22, 1983, in San Juan, Argentina
Composed: 2016 and 2017
World Premiere: January 14, 2017, in New York City. The soloists were the composer and violinist Michael Guttman with the Manhattan Chamber Players.
New Jersey Symphony Premiere: These performances are the New Jersey Symphony premiere.
Duration: 21 minutes
Instrumentation: piano, timpani, guïro (a hollow gourd with ridges that are scraped), triangle, bass drum, solo violin, solo bandoneon and strings.

Since the 1930s, the bandoneon has been central to Argentinian tango's characteristic sound. Though sometimes misidentified as an accordion, bandoneon is a closer relative of the concertina (or button accordion), a bellows-blown free reed instrument with buttons on both sides. The instrument originated in Germany in the 1840s. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, bandoneon became standard in popular

orchestras of Uruguay and Argentina. Brazilian orchestras favored the accordion. Although tango's original instruments were guitar, violin, clarinet and flute, the bandoneon has developed a strong association with the genre. Argentina's celebrated 20th-century composer Astor Piazzolla was a major factor in that process, combining elements of tango, jazz and the classical tradition in his original compositions, which were dubbed nuevo tango.

Juan Pablo Jofre is an heir to that tradition. Like Piazzolla, he has achieved both instrumental mastery as a bandoneon virtuoso and acclaim as a composer. Jofre undertook study of guitar and percussion at age 14. He attended the Escuela de Música de la Universidad de San Juan, where he expanded his instrumental interests to vibraphone, bassoon, piano, double bass and voice. Most importantly, he added composition to his curriculum and, after becoming acquainted with the music of Piazzolla, focused on bandoneon. Jofre's mentors and teachers included the celebrated bandoneonist Daniel Binelli and Julio Pane, who had played bandoneon in the Astor Piazzolla Sextet. Jofre's career took off in the early 2000s. He has toured extensively in Spain and the Americas, participating in tango festivals and performing music from Bach to Piazzolla. He has been based in New York City since 2003.

Violinist Michael Guttman commissioned the double concerto from Jofre in 2016 after the two had performed together several times, and the work is dedicated to Guttman. The commission was a challenge. No prior concerto for this combination of instruments existed. Violin and bandoneon seemed worlds apart in character and tradition.

Jofre responded with a work that fuses Western classical tradition with his Argentinian nuevo tango heritage. He cites Bach, Bartók, Stravinsky and Piazzolla as major compositional influences. His imaginative and skillful approach to the interaction between the two soloists and the orchestra reflects those diverse influences. Jofre challenges the conventional approach to violin, writing for it in a percussive manner (and occasionally using the violin itself as a percussion instrument).

The concerto is laid out in three movements that approximate the time-honored order of fast-slow-fast; however, Jofre takes liberties within that broad framework. He opens with a ruminative Introduction that is an ad lib cadenza for the two soloists. Cadenzas for both instruments are sprinkled liberally throughout the concerto. This initial one leads to a tango-inspired allegro with the orchestra. Imitation between the two soloists and within the orchestra reflect Jofre's interest in counterpoint. There are also some tricky unison passages that both highlight the different timbres of violin and bandoneon and celebrate their kinship through the shared musical material.

The central Adagio opens with a bandoneon solo, presently joined by violin in a duet. The movement's "big tune" is reminiscent of Rachmaninoff with some whole tone scales added in. Warm, intimate, with elements of a chorale, the Adagio was written in remembrance of a close friend who had died. The quiet section at the end is reverent, almost church-like.

Jofre's finale is a milonga, a variety of tango that is generally faster paced. The movement opens with a dissonant, angular violin cadenza that morphs into a duet for the two soloists. When the orchestra joins them, metric switches imply the greater flexibility of leg and body movement associated with the milonga.

Guttman and Jofre recorded the double concerto in 2018 with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. At the time, Orpheus Artistic Director and New Jersey Symphony Concertmaster Eric Wyrick observed, "JP captures the seductive mystery of the [tango] genre with ease, expertise and virtuosity." Jofre's double concerto fuses symphonic scope and tango flair, and it broadens our sonic universe with the odd-couple pairing of violin and bandoneon.

Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74, "Pathétique"

Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky
Born: May 7, 1840, in Votkinsk, Viatka District, Russia
Died: November 6, 1893, in St. Petersburg, Russia
Duration: 46 minutes
Composed: February to August 1893
World Premiere: October 28, 1893, in St. Petersburg. The composer conducted.
New Jersey Symphony Premiere: 1930–31 season. Rene Pollain conducted.
Instrumentation: three flutes (third doubling piccolo); oboes, clarinets and bassoons in pairs; four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.

Autobiographical confessional or philosophical meditation?
In his thought-provoking 1991 biography, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, Alexander Poznansky outlined two schools of thought concerning Tchaikovsky's sixth and last symphony: "The first seeks to interpret the work in a narrow autobiographical sense, often reducing its meaning to an artistic expression of the homoerotic torment allegedly suffered by the composer. The other takes a reverse approach, often seeing in the symphony so broad a meditation on the issues of life and death that the entire notion of a 'program' becomes meaningless."

Poznansky subscribes to neither view, finding greater significance in Tchaikovsky's dedication of the "Pathétique" to his nephew Vladimir Davydov, known as Bob. Poznansky believes that the subject of the symphony is the composer's suppressed passion for the boy. To Bob he confided in a letter the tantalizing riddle that his new symphony with "such a program that will remain a mystery to everyone -- let them guess." With the symphony, Tchaikovsky gave vent to "an irresistible desire to retell in music the story of his life and his soul and to dedicate it to Bob so that his beloved nephew might be able to share and appreciate all that he himself had gone through."

Sudden death and the scent of scandal
Tchaikovsky composed the "Pathétique" in 1893, the final year of his life. He conducted the premiere of the symphony in St. Petersburg only eight days prior to his sudden death, reportedly from cholera [see sidebar].

That circumstance added greatly to the renown of the "Pathétique" Symphony. Its immediate posthumous influence was magnified by Tchaikovsky's widespread popularity during his lifetime and by the scent of scandal surrounding rumors that his sudden death had been a suicide.

Audiences and musicians have always loved this work. All the characteristics that we value most highly in his music are present in the "Pathétique": splendid, imaginative orchestration; drama; memorable, delicious themes; superb development and sweeping emotive power. If Poznansky's theory is valid, we may think of this work as an analogue to Richard Strauss' massive autobiographical tone poem, *Ein Heldenleben.*

Unlike some of Tchaikovsky's earlier orchestral works, there is no superfluous rhetoric to mar the symphony's equilibrium. An earlier Tchaikovsky biographer, Edward Garden, has noted: "In the terse exposition and succinct development section [of the first movement] Tchaikovsky demonstrates that he has learnt how to cut and to prune, and to include only what is essential to the structure."

New concept: An Adagio finale

Tchaikovsky's letters reveal his awareness that the overall form of his new symphony would be unusual. He was particularly taken by the notion of an Adagio finale. It cannot be entirely accidental that Gustav Mahler, who knew and admired Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin*, also chose to break with tradition barely two years later and conclude his own monumental Third Symphony with an Adagio finale.

Emotionally the Sixth Symphony is taut throughout. Some relief is provided by the second movement Valse, but its deceptive 5/4 meter disturbs the balance even here. (The unusual meter is a distinctly Russian touch; 5/4 time is fairly common in Russian folk music.) The third movement merges scherzo with march. Tchaikovsky's elfin opening has little chance against the forceful militance of the secondary idea.

In French, pathétique means touching the emotions, full of pathos, rather than the "pathetic" of the direct English cognate. Tchaikovsky's heartrending Adagio is the sound of a tortured soul. From its opening, anguished string chorale, we hear a composer who is inconsolable, mired in sorrow and despair. In the final analysis, the "Pathétique" is a deeply moving work, reaching a level of tragedy in its slow finale that places it among the most profound musical utterances.

MYSTERIOUS AND CONTROVERSIAL DEATH

The most ironic death in the history of Russian/Soviet music has to be the simultaneous passing of Sergei Prokofiev and Joseph Stalin on March 5, 1953.

The most controversial is more likely Tchaikovsky's, in November 1893, supposedly from cholera after drinking tainted water—or was it?

Four doctors treated Tchaikovsky: the brothers Vasily and Lev Bertenson, and two of Lev Bertenson's assistants. As court physician to the Czar, Lev Bertenson had prestige, clout and a wealthy clientele—but little experience with cholera, a disease generally associated with the lower classes.

The controversy surrounding Tchaikovsky's final illness arises in part from the contradictory reports of his brother Modest and the physician Vasily Bertenson. Some of the discrepancies pertained to symptoms, others to timing. Tchaikovsky was internationally famous, one of Russia's most distinguished personages. Rumors swirled about the circumstances of his illness and death, including hints of scandal and suicide.

In the late 1970s, the Soviet musicologist and biographer Alexandra Orlova set forth the theory that Tchaikovsky had been accused of inappropriate advances toward the nephew of a Russian count. The boy's uncle wrote a letter to the czar, accusing Tchaikovsky. Because homosexuality was a criminal offense under czarist law, the composer would have been subject to grave consequences, including exile to Siberia and forfeiture of property and rights.

The situation was doubly perilous because Tchaikovsky was a graduate—albeit three decades earlier—of St. Petersburg's School of Jurisprudence. The czar's expected reaction to the accusatory letter risked disgrace to the school as well as to the composer. Orlova asserted that Tchaikovsky's former classmates convened an impromptu court of honor and decreed that Tchaikovsky must take his own life in order to preserve the dignity of the institution.

Not surprisingly, this scenario is controversial. Its proponents include the distinguished British Tchaikovsky scholar and biographer David Brown; its challengers are led by the Russian-born biographer Alexander Poznansky. We may never know precisely what happened, but the story suggests a shattering subtext to the Sixth Symphony: a coded message of despair and desolation from the hand of a man who led a tortured life. It is food for thought when auditing the "Pathétique," an undeniably personal work.

IN THE COMPOSER'S WORDS

Tchaikovsky's letters from 1893 are filled with comments about his progress on the Sixth Symphony. He sketched the work in the spring, then orchestrated during the summer. In February, he wrote to his brother Anatoly:

I want to tell you about the excellent state of mind I'm in so far as my works are concerned. . . .Now on my journey, the idea of a new symphony came to me. . . . the programme of this symphony is completely saturated with myself and quite often during my journey I cried profusely. Having returned I have settled down to write the sketches and the work is going so intensely, so fast, that the first movement was ready in less than four days and the others have taken shape in my head. Half of the third movement is also done. There will still be much that is new in the form of this work. . . . you cannot imagine my feelings of bliss now that I am convinced that the time has not gone forever, and that I can still work.

By late July 1893 he was even more deeply embedded in the symphony. This time he wrote to his other brother, Modest:

> I have now dived deep into my symphony. The further I get with the instrumentation the more difficult it becomes. Twenty years ago I used to go full speed ahead and it came out very well. Now I have become cowardly and unsure of myself. For instance, today I sat the whole day over two pages – nothing went as I wanted it to. All the same, work is progressing and I would never have done as much anywhere else but at home.

Eventually, Tchaikovsky would feel that he had poured out his entire soul in the Sixth Symphony. In one of his last letters, right after the premiere, he declared his pride in this work, declaring it his very best. “I am prouder of this Symphony than of any other of my compositions,” he wrote to his publisher in mid-October. Within a week he was dead.