

## Zhang Conducts Tchaikovsky

### ONE-MINUTE NOTES

**Tchaikovsky: Suite from *Sleeping Beauty*.** No one wrote better romantic ballet music than Tchaikovsky. His tuneful suite includes a dramatic orchestral fanfare, an unforgettable waltz and a glorious harp cadenza.

**Danielpour: *Carnival of the Ancients for Piano and Orchestra*.** Written with pianist Sara Daneshpour's musicianship and technique in mind and inspired by classic Persian tales, Richard Danielpour has written music of mystery and drama, fusing Persian-flavored sonorities with his unique modernism.

**Haydn: *Sinfonia concertante*.** This multiple concerto is contemporary with Haydn's first "London" symphonies. Watch the chamber-music-like interaction among the four soloists.

**Tchaikovsky: *Francesca da Rimini*.** Tchaikovsky's tone poem transforms Dante's passionate tale into music. We voyage through the terrifying circles of hell, encounter the doomed heroine and experience her torment in full and thrilling orchestral color.

### **TCHAIKOVSKY: Suite from *The Sleeping Beauty*, Op. 66a**

#### **PYOTR ILICH TCHAIKOVSKY**

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

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

**Composed:** December 1888 to September 1889

**World Premiere:** January 1890 at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg.

**NJSO Premiere:** 1972–73 season; Henry Lewis conducted.

**Duration:** 21 minutes

Few ballets are more beloved than Tchaikovsky's three masterpieces: *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. These scores are chock full of delightful miniatures, brilliantly orchestrated. They are so rich in melodies that the fertility of Tchaikovsky's imagination boggles the mind. Ironically, in his own day, he was not acknowledged to be the ballet composer *par excellence*. Russian dancers objected to his music as being overly complicated. They even called it obscure and, that most damnable of sins, undanceable!

Were such accusations ignorant? Perhaps, but an understanding of ballet's importance in Russian artistic culture is helpful in placing them in perspective. Russian ballet emerged in the 18th century, just as other Western European arts found their way to Moscow and St. Petersburg. When the first Russian school of ballet was established, the director was French. France, which has a strong ballet tradition, continued to exert a powerful influence on Russian dance.

In 1847, the French ballet master Marius Petipa (1818–1910) arrived in St. Petersburg as *premier danseur*. He was soon promoted and, by 1869, he led the Russian Imperial Ballet. Petipa was the dominant figure in Russian ballet for the balance of the 19th century, bringing Russian dancers up to world-class standards. He choreographed almost 50 ballets, including several that have remained in the permanent repertoire. Petipa developed his own type of ballet, in which music was subservient to the needs of the choreographer. Thus an assertive score with its own distinct personality did not find immediate friends among the dancers, who expected the music to conform to the balletmaster's decisions.

*Sleeping Beauty* is the most important representative of the Petipa-style ballet; indeed, it is the quintessential romantic ballet. It is also arguably Tchaikovsky's most successful theater piece. While accommodating Petipa's exacting choreographic instructions, the music stands admirably on its own

merits. Stravinsky called this score “the convincing example of Tchaikovsky's great creative power.”

Tchaikovsky’s orchestra is unusually large for a ballet. It is in keeping with the large dimensions of the scenario, which consists of a Prologue and three acts. *Sleeping Beauty* has a total of 29 numbers, some of which subdivide into as many as six separate variations. (In ballet, “variation” refers to a solo dance; they are different from their musical cousin of the same name.)

Xian Zhang has selected four of the suite’s five numbers for these performances. The Introduction opens with brilliance and drama, depicting the evil Carabosse, who embodies the darker, threatening aspects of the tale. Carabosse’s music gives way to the Lilac Fairy’s lovely theme, which dominates the balance of this first movement.

“Panorama” is from Act II, when the Lilac Fairy has guided Prince Désiré through the enchanted forest to the castle where Princess Aurora has been sleeping for 100 years. Pulsing woodwinds provide gentle forward momentum, while the elegant string theme assures us the journey will be smooth and successful.

Next we hear the famous “Valse.” Tchaikovsky was the undisputed Russian master of the orchestral waltz, and this one—arguably the most beloved theme from this marvelous score—is one of his finest.

Zhang concludes with the famous “Rose Adagio,” whose music frames the presentation of a rose by four of Aurora’s suitors, on the occasion of her coming of age at 20. The movement features an important role for harp, including a substantial introductory cadenza.

Prior to Tchaikovsky’s ballets, orchestral cadenzas for harp were not idiomatic for the instrument. He marked the parts *ad libitum*, freeing the harpist to play the part in a manner that worked best for the instrument. Following the cadenza, Tchaikovsky introduces another glorious romantic theme, demonstrating once again his genius for writing a great melody. He uses full orchestra to magnificent effect, building to a grand and satisfying close.

*Instrumentation: woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, English horn, four horns, two cornets, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, glockenspiel, harp and strings.*

## **DANIELPOUR: *Carnival of the Ancients* for Piano and Orchestra**

### **RICHARD DANIELPOUR**

**Born:** January 26, 1956, in New York, New York

**Composed:** January–May 2016

**World Premiere:** These are the world-premiere performances.

**Duration:** 21 minutes

Richard Danielpour has enjoyed a long and productive relationship with the NJSO, including the premieres of his *Kaddish* for Violin and Orchestra in 2012 and Clarinet Concerto in 2014. This weekend's premiere is a piano concerto for the American pianist Sara Daneshpour, who, like Danielpour, is of Persian descent.

Danielpour enjoys an international reputation as one of America's most prominent living composers. His music is characterized by immediate emotional appeal and a strong social conscience. He is keenly interested in literature and has collaborated with Maya Angelou and Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison. His vocal and choral works embrace a wide variety of other texts ranging from Biblical to Dylan Thomas and Rainer Maria Rilke. This new concerto was inspired by Persian literature.

He holds degrees from New England Conservatory and The Juilliard School, and he currently serves on the faculties of UCLA and Philadelphia's Curtis Institute. He has received multiple awards and fellowships and is much in demand as a composer-in-residence. He has graciously provided the following introduction to *Carnival of the Ancients*:

The piece is really a series of “Persian Miniatures.” The first three movements reflect images and stories from the *Shahnameh*, or Book of Kings, an ancient Persian book of fables. The last movement, “The Poets’ Invention,” is an image of my own invention in which the spirits of the great Persian poets Rumi, Hafez and Khoyam dance the dance of whirling dervishes in paradise.

I wanted to write this for Sara Daneshpour, who was able to obtain the commission. Coupled with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra’s keen sense of bringing gifted young artists into the world, and I decided to try out my matchmaking skills once again ... with the NJSO’s extraordinary new conductor Xian Zhang, I believe this collaboration may just well be a match made in heaven!

Danielpour’s writing for piano is varied and colorful, using arpeggios, octaves and complex chords that sometimes approach the density of Messiaen. Piano interacts with orchestra more in the Brahmsian fashion, that is, not so much virtuosity for its own sake. Rather, the soloist is an integral, albeit prominent, part of the orchestral texture, instead of constantly being in the sonic foreground. The orchestral parts are also captivating, demonstrating Danielpour’s extraordinary facility in writing for large ensemble.

He is an expert at establishing moods, allowing our imaginations to run free with the stimulus of his four movement titles: “Simurgh,” “Rostam Fights the Dragon,” “Sohrad and Rostam” and “The Poets’ Celebration.” In *Shahnameh*, Simurgh is a mythical bird that carries an infant boy to her nest on a high mountain; he has been abandoned by his warrior father, who fears an evil curse. Years later, the father seeks and finds his son. When the youth leaves Simurgh to rejoin his people, she plucks a magic feather and gives it to him for protection. If he needs help and strokes it, she will appear.

Several *Shahnameh* myths involve Rostam, a hero who must undergo seven trials in order to rescue King Kavus from demons. The third trial involves a fearsome dragon that emerges from the forest while Rostam sleeps. His faithful horse, Rakhsh, awakens him several times, but each time the dragon becomes invisible. Eventually there is enough light for Rostam to perceive his peril, and he slays the

dragon.

The tale of Rostam and Sohrad is one of the most tragic in *Shahnameh*. Sohrad is Rostam's son by the Princess Tahmina. Rostam knew that Tahmina was carrying his child but did not know the baby's gender. When they parted, he had given her tokens, one for a girl, the other for a boy, to give to the child after it was grown. Sohrad and Rostam encounter each other in a battle between their two kingdoms, each unaware of other's identity. Only after Rostam has dealt Sohrad a fatal blow does he recognize the token he had given Tahmina for his son. Too late, he realizes the truth.

"The Poets' Celebration" is a legend of Danielpour's imagining, addressed in his composer's note and below [see sidebar]. One might think of *Carnival of the Ancients* as a modern-day analogue to Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, with piano in the storyteller role.

#### **IN THE COMPOSER'S WORDS: INSIGHTS FROM RICHARD DANIELPOUR**

*Carnival of the Ancients* is actually my Fifth Piano Concerto; I did not give this work a number, or suggest its chronological order, because I felt that this was so different from the other concertos in that it was very strongly connected to extramusical ideas, namely stories from the *Shahnameh*, or Book of Kings. The *Shahnameh* is the Persian equivalent of Homer's *Iliad*; its stories are metaphors for life. My idea for this work was to compose a set of Persian miniatures, or stories that are about stories. The last movement is an image of my own invention which places the great Persian poets Rumi, Hafez and Khayam in paradise together... (my idea of the Paradise of Persian poets is anything but docile and still!).

I wrote *Carnival of the Ancients* for the gifted young pianist Sara Daneshpour and for the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, with the generosity and assistance of Nader Naini.

Because Sara Daneshpour is of Persian descent, I felt that this theme/idea would resonate within her as the piece is expressly written for her. The work was composed between the months of February and May 2016, and was completed just before the beginning of June of that year. The

work is approximately 21 minutes in length and scored for a slightly pared-down full orchestra, with piano solo.

The writing of this work coincided with a great deal of activity in my life. While composing it, I was also working on *Four Miniatures* for the Dover Quartet, and preparing a text and libretto for an 80-minute oratorio that would occupy me for more than a year. That work, *The Passion of Yeshua*, is a Passion Oratorio, in Hebrew and English, for chorus, five soloists and orchestra. It takes the passion narrative of Jesus' last 12 hours and brings it back to its Jewish origins. It was commissioned by the Oregon Bach Festival, the SDG Foundation and the Buffalo Philharmonic, and will be premiered by the Oregon Bach Festival in July 2018, with JoAnn Falletta conducting. Maestra Falletta will bring the work back to her orchestra at the Buffalo Philharmonic, where it will be recorded in April 2019, in live performances for Naxos. A third performance will take place in December 2018 at UCLA, in a partially staged version by Peter Kazaras.

UCLA has also figured prominently in my life in the last few years. Between the fall of 2014 and the spring of 2017, I was a visiting professor at the Herb Alpert School of Music at UCLA. In April 2017, the university offered me a tenured full professorship. After living in New York for more than half of my life, my wife, Kathleen, and I have recently relocated to Los Angeles.

– Richard Danielpour

*Instrumentation: two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, three horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani, an extensive percussion battery (glockenspiel, crotales, two chimes, vibraphone, marimba, xylophone, wood block, guiro, slapstick, snare drum, triangle, two sets of tom toms, tam tam, two bass drums, cymbals, nipple gongs, Almglocken, two water gongs), harp, strings and solo piano.*

## **HAYDN: *Sinfonia concertante* for Oboe, Bassoon, Violin, Violoncello and Orchestra, Hob. I:105**

### **FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN**

**Born:** March 31, 1732, in Rohrau, Austria

**Died:** May 31, 1809, in Vienna, Austria

**Composed:** February–early March 1792

**World Premiere:** March 7, 1792, in London

**NJSO Premiere:** 1970–71 season. Frank Scocozza, Fred Slatkin, Malcolm Smith and Lauren Goldstein were the soloists; Henry Lewis conducted.

**Duration:** 22 minutes

When we think of Haydn's orchestral music, the first thing that comes to mind is his 104 symphonies. They are not only the foundation of the modern symphonic repertoire but also a comprehensive overview of his entire development as a composer. The concerto as a genre seems to have interested him less. There are far fewer of them. With a couple of exceptions, his compositions for soloist and orchestra are of greater historical than musical importance.

The *Sinfonia concertante*, Haydn's sole work for four soloists and orchestra, arose from circumstances during the composer's first journey to London. In February and March 1792, Haydn's former student Ignaz Pleyel created a sensation with a new work for multiple soloists at London's Professional Concert series. Haydn's sponsor, the violinist and impresario Johann Peter Salomon, had a rival series. Not to be outdone, Salomon apparently urged Haydn to compose one as well.

According to Haydn's biographer H.C. Robbins Landon, the autograph (labeled simply *Concertante*) indicates that Haydn wrote it at great speed and probably under stressful circumstances. On March 2, 1792, presumably racing to finish the new composition, Haydn wrote to his friend Marianne von Genzinger in Vienna. His letter reflects both anxiety and the toll that the intense pace of work was taking:

[Pleyel] arrived here with a lot of new compositions, but they had been composed long ago; he therefore promised to present a new work every evening. As soon as I saw this ... I announced publicly that I would likewise produce 12 different new pieces. In order to keep my word, and to support poor Salomon, I must be the victim and work the whole time. But I really do feel it. My eyes suffer the most, and I have many sleepless nights, though with God's help I shall overcome it all.

The unusual quartet of stars presumably reflects the strengths of players in Salomon's orchestra. The violin part, of course, would have been played by Salomon himself; numerous other concertmaster solos in the 12 "London" Symphonies were also intended for him. Only the other three soloists' surnames have come down to us through contemporary press reports: the oboist Mr. Harrington, the bassoonist Mr. Holmes and the cellist Mr. Menel.

The music is a delightful synthesis of chamber music and symphony. Haydn writes wonderfully for his four soloists, giving each one several moments in the spotlight in each movement. The violin is first among equals, having a slight edge in virtuosity, presumably the composer's salute to Salomon. This dominance is most evident in the finale, where the solo violin has three brief recitatives that interrupt the proceedings.

Appealing and memorable themes abound. The elegant Andante features pizzicato string accompaniment to the quartet of soloists. Haydn is at his most playful in the finale, with stops and starts that will keep you guessing right to the end.

*Instrumentation: flute; oboes, bassoons and horns in pairs; timpani; strings; solo oboe; solo bassoon; solo violin and solo cello.*

## **TCHAIKOVSKY: *Francesca da Rimini*, Op. 32**

**PYOTR ILYCH TCHAIKOVSKY**

**Composed:** October–November 1876

**World Premiere:** February 25/March 9, 1877, in Moscow

**NJSO Premiere:** 1944–45 season; Frieder Weissmann conducted.

**Duration:** 22 minutes

In Canto V of Dante's *Inferno*, Francesca da Rimini relates her tragic story from the depths of hell. Trapped by her aristocratic father into a loveless marriage with the cruel hunchback Rimini, she fell in love with his handsome younger brother, Paolo. Upon discovering them in a passionate embrace, Rimini drew his knife on his brother. Francesca hurled herself between them and the dagger struck her first. Her husband then turned on Paolo, killing him as well.

Tchaikovsky began reading Dante during the summer of 1876. He was traveling from the south of France, where he had enjoyed a holiday with his brother Modest, to Bayreuth, where he attended a full performance of Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. Modest had suggested a number of new topics for an opera, including Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Othello* and Dante's *Francesca*. Tchaikovsky was attracted to the powerful subject matter of the Italian poet, with its theme of illicit love. But his librettist, Constantine Zvantsev, was quite insistent that the proposed opera adhere to Wagner's theories. Tchaikovsky was inimical to Wagner's principles ("With the last chords of *Götterdämmerung* I felt as though I'd been released from captivity," he wrote to Modest), and could not continue with the opera project on Zvantsev's terms.

The idea of love entwined with sin appealed to him. Francesca's famous story from part I of the *Divine Comedy* had caught his imagination. He began composing a symphonic fantasia based on Dante's tale. In his score, Tchaikovsky quoted 22 lines from the poem. They function as a program for the piece.

*Francesca* comprises three principal sections. A lengthy introduction depicts the entrance to hell.

Tchaikovsky's extensive use of tritones emphasizes the netherworld setting. (The tritone, or “diabolus in musica”—“the devil in music”—is the principal component of the diminished seventh chord. The interval’s ominous and sinister character has historically been associated with evil. In 19th-century music, composers frequently employed diminished seventh chords to establish impending doom, unease, danger and similarly ominous states.) Shrieks of angry brass and woodwinds warn of the menacing horrors of the devil’s realm. The ensuing *Allegro vivo* corresponds to Dante’s second circle of hell. Here is the area to which those who were slaves of passion are consigned. Their torment is a never-ending raging storm in the infernal darkness. This is where Dante encounters Francesca, who emerges out of Tchaikovsky’s musical tempest.

A gentle clarinet solo provides the transition to the second principal section, *Andante cantabile*. Here we leave the realm of specific musical illustration and move to the psychological. Musicologist David Brown calls Francesca's theme “one of the broadest, most widely-ranging, most magnificent melodic statements Tchaikovsky had ever conceived.” Her character is central to the music, rather than details of her story. This section is lyrical and exquisite, eliciting from Tchaikovsky some gorgeous orchestral writing, particularly for woodwinds and harp. At the climax, we understand that Francesca’s nature encompasses passion as well as gentleness and tenderness.

A muted brass fanfare leads to a return of the violent storm that opened *Francesca*. Reusing music from his opening section, Tchaikovsky emphasizes his heroine’s fate. The relentless repeated chords that close *Francesca* leave little doubt that the tempest will rage in eternity.

When music critic Sergei Taneyev, the dedicatee of *Francesca*, reported to Tchaikovsky that César Cui had detected the influence of Wagner's *Ring* in the new score, Tchaikovsky responded: “The remark that I wrote under the influence of the *Nibelungen* is *very correct*. I myself felt this while I was at work. If I’m not mistaken, it’s especially noticeable in the introduction. Isn’t it odd that I should have submitted to the influence of a work of art that in general is extremely antipathetic to me?”

Others thought they perceived the influence of Liszt, who had his own attractions both to Dante and to

the realm of the infernal. Ultimately, however, the treatment of the orchestra in the outer storm sections and the rich character painting of the heroine in the central part mark *Francesca da Rimini* as Tchaikovsky's own.

*Instrumentation: woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, English horn, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam and strings.*