WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW PARALLEL EVENTS

1888

Tchaikovsky
Symphony No.5 in E minor



MUSIC
Inauguration of the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, becoming one of the most important concert halls in the world.



ART
J. W. Waterhouse
The Lady of Shalott



LITERATURE
Arthur Conan Doyle
A Study in Scarlet
(The first Sherlock Holmes detective novel)



HISTORY
The National Geographic Society is founded in Washington, D.C.

1986

Joan Tower
Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman



MUSIC
The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio, holds its first induction ceremony.



ART
Opening of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.



LITERATURE
Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian playwright and poet, is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, making him the first African laureate.



HISTORY
The worst nuclear disaster in human history takes place at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union (now part of Ukraine).

2007

John Corigliano
Conjurer



MUSIC
Sofia Gubaidulina
In Tempus Praesens



ART
David Hockney
Bigger Trees Near Warter



LITERATURE
Jeff Kinney
Diary of a Wimpy Kid



HISTORY
The original iPhone is launched by Apple.

TCHAIKOVSKY'S FIFTH

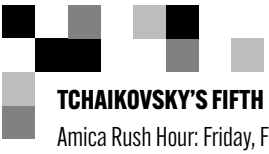
Tonight's program reflects the incredible work of four uncommon women in four distinct roles: a conductor, a performer, a composer, and a benefactor.

The first, of course, is RI Phil Music Director Ruth Reinhardt. Her uncommon skills as an orchestra leader, artistic visionary, and champion of quality music education are now well-known in Rhode Island. This unusual and exciting program has her stamp all over it.

The second is our soloist, Vivi Vassileva. Acclaimed for her virtuosic technique and use of instruments from global traditions and recycled materials, she sees music as something more than an art form. It is as basic as language itself. "Music is communication," she says. "It's not something that I do alone for hours in the practice room… the driving force behind the motivation has to be that it's a language that is spoken."

The third is the composer, Joan Tower. As an artist who thinks in gestures—bold, physical, almost choreographic movements of sound - she is capable of both brute force and delicate nuance. She also has the rare capacity to treat and trust the orchestra as a living organism. Written to honor "women who take risks and who are adventurous," and using the same brass and percussion forces as Aaron Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman* is doubly striking when one considers that brass and percussion, traditionally, are the two orchestral sections least likely to feature female players.

The fourth is the bold but curious art patron Nadezhda von Meck. It was her belief in Tchaikovsky that gave him the freedom and confidence to write such masterworks as his Fifth Symphony - a profound musical journey from anguish to elation. Possessing a deep knowledge of music, literature, history, and philosophy, she provided the Russian composer with a crucial relationship of mutual respect, intellectual equality, and emotional intimacy - a stunning feat considering the fact that they never even met!



TCHAIKOVSKY'S FIFTH
Amica Rush Hour: Friday, February 12, 2027
TACO Classical: Saturday, February 13, 2027

Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman
JOAN TOWER (1938-)
Last performed October 16, 2021 with Bramwell Tovey conducting. This piece is scored for four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and percussion.

American composer Joan Tower is, in every sense, an "uncommon woman." Coming of age as a female composer in the mid-twentieth century, she overcame entrenched assumptions about who could be a composer and what that role could encompass.

Although her catalog includes many large-scale and substantial works, Tower is perhaps best known for the six brief pieces collected under the deliberately ironic title *Fanfares for the Uncommon Woman*. Four are written for brass ensemble, sometimes with percussion, and two for full orchestra. Composed between 1986 and 2016, the set is dedicated to "women who take risks and are adventurous."

The first of these—the work you will hear tonight—is dedicated to conductor Marin Alsop, who recorded it with the Colorado Symphony in 1997. Like the Copland fanfare evoked by its title, Tower's piece opens with a thunderous percussion burst, then quickly takes its own path. Trumpet figures flutter at a brisk pace while the low brass suggest the tread of an ancient Roman army. These gestures give way to densely layered harmonies, and the driving rhythms eventually collapse into thick, dissonant clusters. As the texture swells, overlapping fanfare figures race forward with mounting intensity. A brief return of the opening trumpet "twitters" flashes by just before the work's explosive close.

Conjurer

JOHN CORIGLIANO (1938-)

This is a RI Philharmonic Orchestra premiere. In addition to solo percussion, this piece is scored for four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba and strings.

Notes by the composer:

> When asked to compose a percussion concerto, my only reaction was horror.
>
> All I could see were problems. While I love using a percussion battery in my orchestral writing, the very thing that makes it the perfect accent to other orchestral sonorities makes it unsatisfactory when it takes the spotlight in a concerto.
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> For starters, a percussionist plays dozens of instruments. Again, this is wonderful if the aim is to color an orchestral texture: but if he (or she) is the main focus, it is terrible. The aural identity of the player is lost amid the myriad bangs, crashes, and splashes of the percussion arsenal. Only the visual element of one person playing all these instruments ties them together.
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> In addition, most of the instruments have no pitch at all (or very little), and don't sustain a sound (like a violin or trumpet).
>
> As a result, most percussion concerti I have heard sound like orchestral pieces with an extra-large percussion section. The melodic interest always rests with the orchestra, while the percussion plays accompanying figures around it.
>
> I thought of all of this as I sat down to discuss my writing a percussion concerto. Obviously, I had more than mixed views about this project, but something about the challenge fascinated me, too.
>
> Many of my works begin this way. I pose a problem and write a piece as the solution. In this case, the problem is the following: How do I write a concerto for a solo percussionist playing many different instruments in which the soloist is always clearly the soloist (even with your eyes closed), and how do I write a concerto in which there are real

melodies -and those melodies are introduced by the percussionist, not the orchestra?

The concerto is divided into three movements, each starting with a solo cadenza.

I) WOOD

The pitched wood instruments are the xylophone and marimba. To supplement this, I constructed a "keyboard" of unpitched wooden instruments (wood block, claves, log drum, etc.) ranging from high to low and placed it in front of the marimba. The soloist could play pitched notes on the marimba and then strike unpitched notes on the wooden keyboard.

The initial cadenza starts with unpitched notes, but gradually pitched notes enter and various motives are revealed as well as ideas based upon the interval of a fifth. This interval will run through the entire concerto as a unifying force. After a climactic run, the orchestra enters, developing the 5th interval into a rather puckish theme. Soloist and orchestra develop the material, build to a climactic xylophone solo, and finally return to the opening theme.

II) METAL

The cadenza is for chimes (tubular bells) accompanied by tam-tams and suspended cymbals. It is loud and clangorous, with the motivic 5ths clashing together. The movement itself, however, is soft and long lined. The melody that will end the movement is introduced in the low register of the vibraphone, and the movement develops to a dynamic climax where the chimes return, and then subsides to a soft texture in the lower strings as the struck/bowed vibraphone plays its melody.

III) SKIN

The skin cadenza features a "talking drum" accompanied by a kick drum. The talking drum is played with the hands and can change pitch as its sides are squeezed. Strings connect the top and bottom skins and squeezing stretches them tighter - and raises the pitch. It provides a lively conversation with a kick drum: a very dry small bass drum played with a foot pedal and almost exclusively used as part of a jazz drum set. This cadenza starts slowly but builds to a loud and rhythmic climax.

The movement then begins with the soloist and orchestra playing a savage rhythmic figure that accelerates to a blinding speed. A central section brings back the 5ths against a pedal timpanum that is played with the hands in a "talking drum" style. The accelerando returns and leads to a wild and improvised cadenza using all the drums and a virtuoso finish.

Once it was complete, it occurred to me that the piece's cadenza-into-movement form characterizes the soloist as a kind of sorcerer. The effect in performance is that the soloist doesn't so much as introduce material as conjure it, as if by magic, from the three disparate choirs: materials which the orchestra then shares and develops; hence, the title *Conjurer*.

- John Corigliano

Symphony No.5 in E minor, op.64, TH 29

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

Last performed March 31, 2019 with Bramwell Tovey conducting. This piece is scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

Never mind that, in 1892, a grumpy a critic for the *Boston Evening Transcript* decided that Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony sounded like "a horde of demons struggling in a torrent of brandy, the music growing drunker and drunker." Time has judged the work quite differently. Today it holds a secure place among the most beloved pieces in the orchestral repertoire.

As Tchaikovsky was coming of age, there was a heated debate among Russian composers about the direction their art should take: should they pursue a uniquely Slavic approach, emphasizing folk tales and melodies, or should they embrace the Western European classical tradition? Tchaikovsky's answer was a definitive "Yes." His music draws on each approach, balancing tonal clarity with ambiguity inside classical forms to create a powerful emotional arc.

But choosing one's own artistic path is rarely easy. Tchaikovsky struggled throughout his life with profound self-doubt, often intensified by public opinion. Soon after the premiere of the Fifth Symphony, he wrote to his patron and confidante Nadezhda von Meck that its "excess, insincerity and artificiality" repelled him. Yet only a few months later, after a warmly received performance in Hamburg, he reconsidered. Audiences, for their part, have never wavered since.

Although Tchaikovsky supplied no formal program—that is, no accompanying story or tableau—the symphony clearly reflects an individual's struggle with Fate, moving from hope and despair toward eventual triumph.

The first movement begins with what is often called the "Fate theme": three repeated clarinet notes, set against a shadowy string backdrop. Soon the tempo quickens into an almost galloping pulse as the music shakes off its opening gloom. New themes unfold with increasing sweep and energy before the galloping idea returns, until the final notes of the movement shiver with an allusion, once again, to Fate.

The second movement opens with elegiac chords and an achingly lyrical (and eminently singable) horn solo, soon joined by the oboe in a brief duet. The music moves between sorrow and hope until, near the close, a recognizable echo of the Fate theme returns.

The third movement is a graceful, rhapsodic waltz that begins in the strings and is answered by the winds. After a lively scherzo-like episode and a return to the opening material, Fate reappears in low, ominous tones—this time disguised within the dance.

The finale opens with the Fate theme transformed into a triumphant march. That victory is short-lived, however, as the music plunges back into a stormy minor-key struggle. Only after an intense clash of themes does the triumph return for good, crowned by a brief but unmistakably joyful coda.

In time, Tchaikovsky made peace with the symphony. After conducting the Fifth on a successful European tour in 1889, he wrote to his brother Modest, "The nicest thing is that the symphony has ceased to seem ugly to me; I have grown fond of it again."