1795

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No.1

MUSIC
Haydn
"London"
Symphony

ART
Goya
Self-portrait in the Studio

LITERATURE
Marquis de Sade
Philosophy in the Boudoir

HISTORY
The end of the Mogul dynasty in India.

1878

Tchaikovsky

Symphony No.4

MUSIC
Brahms
Violin Concerto
in D major

ART
Cassatt
In the Loge

LITERATURE
Tolstoy
Anna Karenina

HISTORY
The Congress of Berlin establishes the political boundaries of modern Europe.

2006

Mazzoli

These Worlds in Us

MUSIC
Tan Dun
The First Emperor

ART
Kapoor
Cloud Gate

LITERATURE
Eggers
What Is the What

HISTORY
The word “planet” is redefined, demoting Pluto to "dwarf planet".

TCHAIKOVSKY'S FOURTH

In the hands of a master, music has the magical capability to draw not only beautiful sounds from an artful assembly of woods, strings and metal, but vision as well. All three of the composers on tonight's program are visionaries of the highest order, compelling the listener to do more than just listen. These works provide moments of introspection and even catharsis, rare in today's world of 24-hour new cycles, and serve as opportunities to affirm a connection to some of our deepest emotions.

Beethoven's First Concerto was one of a number of works that he wrote specifically for himself. This adds an element of personality and immediacy that jumps out even in this relatively early work. A man of complex emotions, we find Beethoven embracing all of what makes him unique in this concerto. From his robust sense of humor to a deep sense of dignity, to a highly developed sense of poise and subtlety, this is one of Beethoven's grandest achievements.

It was Beethoven, in fact that inspired Tchaikovsky to write his Fourth Symphony. It is an "imitation of the basic idea of Beethoven's Fifth," he wrote. The essence of both masterpieces center around the concept of fate, which Tchaikovsky described as "the fatal power that hinders one in the pursuit of happiness…which jealously provides that peace and comfort do not prevail…a might that swings, like the sword of Damocles, constantly overhead." And while Tchaikovsky was enduring a particularly dark period in his own personal life while writing this symphony, he ultimately succeeds in finding hope and even euphoria, as he eventually unleashes the vast creativity of the orchestra itself. "If you cannot discover the reasons for happiness in yourself, look to others," he wrote. "Life is bearable after all." In doing so, he created a work that is as cathartic for contemporary listeners as it was for the composer himself.

Catharsis was also at play when Missy Mazzoli sat down to write her first large-scale work for orchestra, *These Worlds In Us*. In her own words, "This piece is dedicated to my father, who was a soldier during the Vietnam War. In talking to him it occurred to me that, as we grow older, we accumulate worlds of intense memory within us, and that grief is often not far from joy. I like the idea that music can reflect painful and blissful sentiments in a single note or gesture."

TCHAIKOVSKY'S FOURTH

Amica Rush Hour: Friday, March 13, 2026
TACO Classical: Saturday, March 14, 2026

These Worlds In Us

MISSY MAZZOLI *(1980-)*

This is a RI Philharmonic Orchestra premiere. This piece is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, percussion and strings.

Missy Mazzoli, a composer with bona fide New England roots, has been called "a post-millennial Mozart." Among the most innovative and successful composers of her generation, she began her music studies with Charles Fussell and John Harbison at Boston University, and then went on to Yale, where she further developed her craft with Aaron Jay Kernis and David Lang. Her works, often integrating acoustic and electronic instruments to create startling soundscapes, have been performed by major artists and ensembles around the globe.

Her first large-scale orchestral piece, *These Worlds In Us*, was written for the Yale Philharmonia, and won her the ASCAP Young Composers Award. She takes the title from the poem *The Lost Pilot* by James Tate, a first-person reflection on the death of the poet's father in World War II. Mazzoli's own father, to whom the piece is dedicated, was a soldier in the Vietnam War, and it was through conversations with him that she began to reflect on the worlds of intense memory we accumulate within us as we grow older, and how grief is often not far from joy.

Continuing in the composer's own words:

> I like the idea that music can reflect painful and blissful sentiments in a single note or gesture, and I sought to create a sound palette that I hope is at once completely new and strangely familiar to the listener.
>
> The theme of this work, a mournful line first played by the violins, collapses into glissandos almost immediately after it appears, giving the impression that the piece has been submerged under water or played on a turntable that is grinding to a halt. The melodicas (mouth organs) played by the percussionists in the opening and final gestures mimic the wheeze of a broken accordion, lending a particular vulnerability to the bookends of the work. The rhythmic structures and cyclical nature of the piece are inspired by the unique tension and logic of Balinese music, and the march-like figures in the percussion bring to mind the militaristic inspiration for the work as well as the relentless energy of electronica drumbeats.

Piano Concerto No.1 in C major, op.15

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN *(1770-1824)*

Last performed May 10, 2014 with Larry Rachleff conducting and soloist Alon Goldstein. In addition to a solo piano, this piece is scored for flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

Beethoven Piano Concerto in C major was the first of his piano concertos to be published, but the third to be written. He had written two others while he was in

his teens. But it is here, at the mature age of 25, that Beethoven begins to display his trademark original touches of color, drama, rhythmic intrigue, and unusual shifts of key.

Compared to other concerti of the time, this is a long work (precisely how long depends on the cadenza), but it boasts such a rich mix of poise and humor that one barely notices the time passing. Mozart had long been Beethoven's idol, the young musician having heard and performed many of Mozart's works while still living in his native city of Bonn and playing viola in the Court Orchestra of neighboring Cologne. And there are unmistakable signs of Mozart's influence here. But Beethoven was spreading his wings, and strove for something bolder and more expansive than his model. Offbeat accents were one way of distinguishing himself from his idol, but even stronger evidence of this boldness lies in his penchant for slyly shifting to remote keys, and the way in which he revels in exploring the darker subtext of even the most cheerful of melodies.

All of this is in evidence during the lengthy orchestral opening of the concerto, with its contrast of marches and lyrical melodies. When the soloist finally enters, Beethoven soon draws us into a dramatic and mysterious development section that sets the stage for a breathless cadenza (which Beethoven himself most likely improvised at its premiere performance).

The second movement, *Largo*, is set in the unexpected and remote key of A-flat major, and begins with a lovely eight-measure song played by the soloist with only the gentlest of accompaniment from the strings. The winds then take over, creating a restrained backdrop that allows the principal clarinet ample opportunity to shine. While the overall structure of the movement is a simple ABA, one gets the sense, not that beautiful melodies are simply repeating, but that a story is unfolding.

The finale, a seven-section *Rondo*, is a high-spirited affair. Each time we hear it, the rondo theme is delivered at high voltage by the piano, then repeated, forte, by the whole orchestra. Listen for woodwind fanfares, delightful harmonic shifts and changes in orchestration, and thoughtful uses of the minor mode until the soloist launches into a tantalizingly brief cadenza. At the last appearance of the rondo theme, the piano gradually becomes quieter and slower, departing almost unnoticed, spinning new improvisations on the theme as it goes. The oboes then say a sad farewell before the whole orchestra closes the movement with a sudden, short blaze of color.

Symphony No.4 in F minor, op.36

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY *(1840-1893)*

Last performed January 19, 2018 with Ken-David Masur conducting. This piece is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings..

> "I adore terribly this child of mine; it is one of only a few works with which I have not experienced disappointment…this is my best symphonic work."
>
> -Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Between 1877–1878, while writing his Fourth Symphony, Tchaikovsky wrote in his Diary: "There is no doubt that for some months I was insane, and only now, when I am completely recovered, have I learned to relate objectively to everything which I did during my brief insanity. That man, who in May took it into his head to marry Antonina Ivanovna, who during June wrote a whole opera as though nothing had happened, who

in July married, who in September fled from his wife, who in November railed at Rome and so on [including an attempted suicide] –that man wasn't I, but another Pyotr Ilyich."

But it was the mysterious figure of Nadezda von Meck, widow of a railway magnate, that helped pull the composer out of his darkest hours and start writing again. Providing both much-needed financial and emotional support, with the understanding that the two would never meet in person, von Meck was the one bright spot in the terrible year of 1877. He acknowledged her support by dedicating the Fourth Symphony to her, calling her only "my best friend" to ensure her privacy, and noted, "I thought of you in every bar."

Of the first movement, Tchaikovsky wrote "The introduction… is the kernel, the quintessence, the chief thought of the whole symphony. This is Fate, the fatal power that hinders one in the pursuit of happiness from gaining the goal, which jealously provides that peace and comfort do not prevail, that the sky is not free from clouds—a might that swings, like the sword of Damocles, constantly over the head that poisons the soul. There is nothing to do but to submit and vainly to complain." Heady words, but easy to hear as horn and bassoon fanfares herald a recurring motif that circles ominously throughout the movement. Listen for unabashed reliance on the brass for a sense of rampant anxiety, a trippy waltz for solo clarinet, and some particularly deft timpani writing.

By the second movement, in Tchaikovsky's words, "life has you tired out. Many things flit through the memory…there were happy moments when young blood pulsed warm and life was gratifying. There were also moments of grief and of irreparable loss. It is all-remote in the past. It is both sad and somehow sweet to lose oneself in the past. And yet, we are weary of existence." Oboe takes the lead here, with the support of pizzicato strings, in painting a picture of such melancholy that it seems to hang like a cloud in the air.

The third movement is full of music one might hear "after one has begun to drink a little wine, and is beginning to experience the first phase of intoxication" (a condition Tchaikovsky himself knew well). Listen for a lively Russian dance and quixotic oboe duet, as the gaiety rolls on, almost incoherently. To hear Tchaikovsky tell it, "The imagination is completely free and for some reason has begun to paint curious pictures…disconcerted images pass through our heads as we begin to fall asleep."

In the finale, we are exhorted to "Go among the people. See how they understand how to be happy…If you cannot discover the reasons for happiness in yourself, look at others. Upbraid yourself and do not say that the entire world is sad… Take happiness from the joys of others. Life is bearable after all." In this virtuosic showcase for the orchestra, listen for a musical quote from the charming Russian folksong "In the Fields There Stands a Birch Tree", an exuberant and majestic march, a persistent return of the Fate motif (lest we forget it is always there), and a frenetic race to a crashing – and cathartic - conclusion.