

Santa Rosa Symphony – Large print program notes

2022-2023 Season

Francesco Lecce-Chong, Music Director & Conductor

Jazz Greats & Tchaikovsky

November 5, 6 & 7, 2022

Program notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

George Gershwin

Promenade (Walking the Dog) for Orchestra

Composer: born September 26, 1898, Brooklyn, NY; died July 11, 1937, Hollywood, CA

Work composed: 1937, as part of the score for the film *Shall We Dance*.

World premiere: 1937

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, glockenspiel, suspended cymbal, triangle, vibraphone, woodblock, and strings

Estimated duration: 3 minutes

About The Music

George Gershwin achieved a great deal in his too-short life (he died of a brain tumor at the age of 38). In addition to his many Broadway musicals, written in collaboration with his brother Ira, and his groundbreaking orchestral works, Gershwin also composed a handful of scores for Hollywood films. After his death, additional films such as the 1945 biopic *Rhapsody in Blue* and the 1951 MGM adaptation of *An American in Paris* also show-cased Gershwin's music.

The 1937 film *Shall We Dance* is the best known of Gershwin's film scores and includes the Academy Award-nominated song, "They Can't Take That Away From Me." The movie features Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in one of their timeless dance fantasies. The excerpt on tonight's program has become a stand-alone work with a variety of arrangements' this version for orchestra was first published in 1960. The music corresponds to a scene in which Fred Astaire "borrows" a dog so he can walk it along the deck of a luxury liner as a pretext for meeting Ginger Rogers, who is also walking a dog.

Wynton Marsalis

Concerto in D for Violin and Orchestra

Composer: born October 18, 1961, New Orleans, LA

Work composed: 2015, for violinist Nicola Benedetti

World premiere: Benedetti performed the solo part with conductor James Gaffigan and the London Symphony Orchestra on November 6, 2015, in Barbican Hall, London.

Instrumentation: solo violin, 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings

Estimated duration: 44 minutes

About The Music

Wynton Marsalis is an internationally acclaimed musician, composer/bandleader, educator, and a leading advocate of American culture. Born into a famous New Orleans family of musicians and educators, Marsalis began playing trumpet at age six. In his teens, Marsalis studied at Tanglewood and Juilliard and toured with acclaimed bandleader Art Blakey and

his Jazz Messengers. In 1983, at age 22, Marsalis became the first and only musician to win Grammy awards in classical and jazz categories in the same year. He repeated his wins in both categories the following year.

As a composer, Marsalis has created and performed an expansive range of music across multiple genres: quartets, big bands, chamber music ensembles, symphony orchestras, and has created music for tap to ballet dancers, all the while expanding the vocabulary for jazz and classical music. In 1997, Marsalis' oratorio *Blood on the Fields* became the first jazz composition to win the Pulitzer Prize in Music. Since 1996, Marsalis has served as the director of Jazz at Lincoln Center. In this role, as in his many and varied other activities, Marsalis has become the foremost ambassador for jazz and American music in the United States.

Marsalis composes his solo works for specific performers, rather than instruments. His 2015 Violin Concerto was written for Scottish violinist Nicola Benedetti. Marsalis writes, "It takes inspiration from her life as a traveling performer and educator

who enlightens and delights communities all over the world with the magic of virtuosity... Nicky asked me to 'invite a diverse world of people into the experience of this piece'... Finding and nurturing common musical ground between differing arts and musical styles has been a lifetime fascination of mine... It may seem simple enough, but bringing different perspectives together is never easy. The shared vocabulary between the jazz orchestra and the modern orchestra sits largely in the areas of texture and instrumental technique. Form, improvisation, harmony, and methods of thematic development are very different. The biggest challenges are how to orchestrate the nuance and virtuosity in jazz and blues for an ensemble not versed in those styles (a technical issue); and how to create a consistent groove without a rhythm section (a musical/philosophical issue).

Marsalis explored historical cultural and musical connections between Benedetti's Scottish roots and his own as an African-American bluesman from New Orleans. "I looked for real-life examples in the history of jazz–symphonic collaborations and to the environment and experience that connect Nicky and me. I

considered aspects of her Scottish ancestry, the great Afro-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass' love of legendary Scottish poet Robert Burns, my love and inextinguishable respect for Scottish baritone saxophonist Joe Temperley (and his gleeful recitation of pungent limericks), and the luminous but obscure achievements of Afro-American keyed bugler Francis Johnson, father of the American cornet tradition and one of the first published American composers...who was also a fine fiddler. These sources led me to reconnect with the Anglo-Celtic roots of Afro-American music.”

Each of the four movements is an aspect of a musical journey, as the violinist takes us to an eclectic range of places and soundscapes. “Rhapsody is a complex dream that becomes a nightmare, progresses into peacefulness and dissolves into ancestral memory,” Marsalis writes. “Rondo Burlesque is a syncopated, New Orleans jazz, calliope, circus clown, African gumbo, Mardi Gras party in odd meters. Blues is the progression of flirtation, courtship, intimacy, sermonizing, final loss, and abject loneliness that is out there to claim us all. Hootenanny is a raucous, stomping and whimsical barnyard

throw-down. She excites us with all types of virtuosic chicanery and gets us intoxicated with revelry and then... goes on down the Good King's highway to other places yet to be seen or even foretold. As in the blues and jazz tradition, our journey ends with the jubilation and uplift of an optimistic conclusion."

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Opus 74,

Pathétique

COMPOSER: born May 7, 1840, Kamsko-Votinsk, Viatka province, Russia; died November 6, 1893, St. Petersburg

WORK COMPOSED: 1893; dedicated to Tchaikovsky's nephew Vladimir "Bob" Davidov

WORLD PREMIERE: Tchaikovsky conducted the first performance on October 28, 1893, at the Hall of the Nobles in St. Petersburg.

INSTRUMENTATION: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo) 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2

trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam, and strings.

ESTIMATED DURATION: 44 minutes

About The Music

“I love it as I have never loved any one of my musical offspring before.” – Tchaikovsky on his Sixth Symphony

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony continues to spark debate more than 130 years after its composition. In a letter to his nephew Vladimir Davidov, Tchaikovsky wrote, “Last December I had the idea of writing a program symphony, but to a program that should remain an enigma to everyone but myself... I certainly regard it as quite the best – and certainly the ‘most sincere’ – of all my work.” Although Tchaikovsky declined to articulate the specifics of the program he attached to this symphony – “Let them guess at it!” he wrote to Davidov – many scholars and critics agree that this passionate, highly emotional music is a declaration of forbidden love; specifically, that of Tchaikovsky for Davidov.

Tchaikovsky's title for the symphony supports this idea. According to scholar Alexander Poznansky, Tchaikovsky's title, 'Pateticheskaya simfoniya' (Патетическая симфония), is "roughly equivalent to the title that Beethoven gave to his Sonata in F minor, Op. 57—'Apassionata.' The passionate overtones of the Russian title are not adequately conveyed in its better-known French equivalent – 'Symphonie pathétique,' with its connotations of suffering and sorrow." Biographer John Warrack agrees: "The Russian word ... carries more feeling of 'passionate' or 'emotional' in it than the English 'pathetic,' and perhaps an overtone, which has largely vanished from our world... of 'suffering.'

As a closeted homosexual man living in a homophobic society, Tchaikovsky was well-acquainted with suffering. He also battled crippling bouts of depression throughout his life, which were exacerbated by relentless societal pressures to keep his sexuality secret. Some years earlier, in 1877, Tchaikovsky encountered Antonina Ivanova Milyukova, a former Conservatory student obsessed with her one-time professor. She sent Tchaikovsky several impassioned letters, which

alarmed the composer; eventually, Milyukova threatened to kill herself if Tchaikovsky did not return her affection. This untenable situation, combined with Tchaikovsky's tortured feelings about his sexual orientation and his desire to silence gossip about it, led to a hasty, ill-advised union. Tchaikovsky fled from Milyukova a month after the wedding (their marriage officially ended after three months, although they were never divorced). Tchaikovsky subsequently suffered a nervous breakdown and was unable to work for the next three years.

The Sixth Symphony's *Adagio-Allegro ma non-troppo* begins with a forbidding bassoon solo sounding the primary theme. After the slow *Adagio*, the strings burst in with an agitated restatement of the bassoon solo, followed by a contrasting theme of melancholy nostalgia. The movement descends into chaos as the themes are developed, ripped apart, and jumbled in a tempest of sound. A solemn brass chorale with pizzicato string accompaniment draws the movement to a close. In the *Allegro con grazia*, the strings present a graceful waltz in the unusual meter 5/4. Although the overall mood of this movement is lighter than that of the first, Tchaikovsky infuses the music

with a strong sense of sadness and hints of romantic despair. The vigorous march of the Allegro molto vivace offsets the melancholy of the first two movements. This powerful, vigorous music boldly proclaims itself with insouciant swagger. Anguished cries from the strings begin the Adagio lamentoso-Andante. This music succumbs to its own beautifully crafted fatalism, laden with pain and lamentation. The strings are interrupted by a blast from the brasses, after which the strings continue on their mournful way to a subdued conclusion, in which there is no hint of a happy ending.

Despite Tchaikovsky's status as the preeminent Russian composer of his time, the premiere of the Sixth Symphony, which he conducted, was not an instant success. In a letter to his publisher, Tchaikovsky wrote, "It is very strange about this symphony. It was not exactly a failure, but it was received with some hesitation." Symphonies that end quietly often leave audiences puzzled or unsettled (Brahms' Third has the same problem). After the second performance, which took place just days after Tchaikovsky's death, the Sixth received an overwhelmingly positive ovation. The unconventional ending

became, in the ears of audiences and critics, indelibly associated with the composer's death – as if Tchaikovsky had written his own demise. There is no documentary evidence to support this idea, but the romance of a composer writing his own musical epitaph has proved durable, if inaccurate. The Sixth Symphony soon came to be regarded as a symphonic masterpiece and remains Tchaikovsky's most popular symphony.

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Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years, and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR's "Performance Today," (now heard on American Public Media).

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