SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY
2025–2026
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Francesco Lecce-Chong, Music Director
Resident Orchestra, Green Music Center

ABOUT THE MUSIC

SHAKESPEARE IN MUSIC

May 2, 3, 4, 2026

SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR

Incidental Music from *Othello*

COMPOSER: Born August 15, 1875, Holborn, London, England; died September 1, 1912, Croydon, London, England
WORK COMPOSED: 1909
WORLD PREMIERE: Not documented
INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes, 1 piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, triangle, and strings
ESTIMATED DURATION: 13 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor grew up in a musical family and he learned the violin from his grandfather, Benjamin Holmans. After realizing his grandson's extraordinary ability, he paid for him to have violin lessons. The family arranged for the 15-year-old Samuel to study at the Royal College of Music. Coleridge-Taylor changed his focus from violin to composition and studied under Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, whose other students included Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Frank Bridge, and Arthur Bliss. After completing his degree, Coleridge-Taylor conducted the orchestra at the Croydon Conservatory and was appointed a professor at the Crystal Palace School of Music.

The *Othello* Suite was commissioned as incidental music for the 1912 Herbert Beerbohm Tree production of Shakespeare's *Othello* at His Majesty's Theatre in London. Incidental music is used in plays and films as background to create a mood or enhance the action. Each of the five movements contains strong, contrasting themes, which must have made a vivid impression when accompanying Shakespeare's *Othello*. Highlights heard in this performance include the lively, exuberant Dance; The Willow Song, a beautifully melancholic melody that epitomizes the tragedy of Othello; and the joyous Military March, which seems to signal a great victory. The complete work also includes the playful Children's Intermezzo and the somber, regal Funeral March.

Coleridge-Taylor's life was tragically short—he died at just 37—but his music stands confidently alongside that of his contemporaries and richly deserves more frequent performance.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Concerto No. 20 in D minor for Piano and Orchestra, K. 466

COMPOSER: Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria; died December 1791, Vienna, Austria
WORK COMPOSED: 1785
WORLD PREMIERE: February 11, 1785 in Vienna, Austria at Mehlgrube Concert Hall with Mozart as conductor and soloist.
INSTRUMENTATION: flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings, and solo piano
ESTIMATED DURATION: 25 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

While the concerto had long been a concert staple by Mozart's time, it was the late-eighteenth-century piano that allowed the genre to reach its fullest expressive potential, its sonority finally able to stand as an equal partner to the orchestra. Mozart's key innovation—beyond his musical genius—was to elevate the orchestra from mere accompaniment to co-protagonist, while also clarifying the formal succession of the first movement. More importantly, the piano concerto became his most personal medium: these works spring directly from his deepest feelings. He wrote most of them for himself, often out of financial necessity, and with legendary ease—sometimes performing the premiere without a written solo part, the orchestral ink barely dry.

This concerto is one of only two that are in minor keys and was composed in 1785 during a remarkable period during which he wrote eleven piano concertos in two years! This work is a dark and wondrous one, and is surely among those compositions that later inspired commentators to speak of Mozart's "romanticism." Labels are tricky, but it's clear that the work's chiaroscuro nature plays a significant role in that perception.

The first movement, as usual, is a meaty one. The syncopated, pulsing strings set a mood right out of Italian opera, setting the stage for the solo part as a melancholy rumination that even in the second idea still seems a bit somber. After the piano cadenza, the movement just fades away. The following slow movement is a "romanza" where musical beauty and lyricism is encountered at the fullness of the composer's powers. The dominating mood and idea are interrupted twice for the necessary contrast: the first is couched in the same lyrical tone as the main idea. But after a return of the latter, the second contrasting section is a heavyweight diversion of menacing, tumultuous thoughts far removed from the world of tranquility of the beginning.

The last movement opens vigorously, with a "rocketing" rising arpeggio as the identifier, and its constant return guides us through this serious, driving affair. To be sure, there are some contrasting lighter moments, but they don't detain us long in this catapulting, serious drive to the end. The last statement of the main idea punches right into the piano cadenza. And then… a happy little tune surprisingly quickly takes us to the finish line, banishing all of the "storm and stress" through which Mozart has taken us. After all is said and done, it's easy to see why Beethoven admired and performed this composition.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Hamlet (Fantasy Overture) in F minor, Opus 67

COMPOSER: Born May 7, 1840, Votkinsk, Russia; died November 6, 1893, Saint Petersburg, Russia
WORK COMPOSED: June to October 1888
WORLD PREMIERE: Premiered on November 17, 1888 in Saint Petersburg conducted by Tchaikovsky.
INSTRUMENTATION: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 cornets, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, tam-tam, cymbals, bass drum, and strings
ESTIMATED DURATION: 18 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The symphonic poem was perfectly suited to the Romantic era, embodying the faith that orchestral music could be as dramatic as opera. As Hugh Macdonald observes, while Tchaikovsky turned to Dante and Byron for inspiration, his three Shakespearean tone poems most completely reveal the "vivid impact" the plays had on the composer. *Hamlet* (1888) was the last of these, following *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest*.

Though Tchaikovsky's brother Modest suggested the subject in 1876, the composer initially hesitated. Herbert Glass notes that while Tchaikovsky initially envisioned a three-part structure, the music only took shape in 1888 when actor Lucien Guitry requested incidental music for a St. Petersburg production. Even when the production was canceled, Tchaikovsky finished the overture, perhaps because, as Glass suggests, it was "natural than this woeful Russian gravitating toward the melancholy Dane."

The music focuses on character rather than plot. Leon Botstein points out that Hamlet presented a "psychologically and philosophically daunting challenge," resulting in a work that evokes the "distress and despair with which Tchaikovsky himself identified." The *Lento lugubre* opening features a stern motive often interpreted as a "fate" theme. This tension builds until midnight is struck by muted horns, signaling the Ghost's appearance.

Macdonald describes Ophelia's theme as a "gracious outline in a lovely melody for the oboe (albeit of a Russian tint)," while a march theme introduces Fortinbras. Botstein notes that while the work mirrors sonata form, it lacks a formal development; instead, the themes surge toward a final death march. Dedicated to Edvard Grieg, the score remains, as Macdonald concludes, a portrayal of "tension and conflict… never portrayed with such force."

Program notes compiled from writings by Hugh Macdonald, Herbert Glass, and Leon Botstein.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Romeo and Juliet (Fantasy Overture) in B minor

COMPOSER: Born May 7, 1840, Votkinsk, Russia; died November 6, 1893, Saint Petersburg, Russia
WORK COMPOSED: October 7 to November 27, 1869
WORLD PREMIERE: March 16, 1870. Nicolai Rubinstein conducted in Moscow. Tchaikovsky revised it twice; the 1880 version is standard.
INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, bass tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, harp, and strings
ESTIMATED DURATION: 21 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Tchaikovsky is representative of many of the significant composers of the nineteenth century Romantic composers who were fascinated with the timeless art of Shakespeare. It is a major trait of Romanticism as an intellectual movement to have plumbed the depths of Shakespeare's work for archetypes of the human condition. Tchaikovsky's concert overture, *Romeo and Juliet*, is typical of the many compositions of the times that drew inspiration from the playwright. Composed just as Tchaikovsky turned twenty-nine years old, it's a relatively early work. Almost all of the orchestral music that has established his durable popularity was yet to come. But *Romeo and Juliet* did not take that place without a somewhat checkered history.

Three versions of it evolved with the première (1870) unsuccessful owing to numerous technical and conceptual problems. Tchaikovsky made extensive changes, most of which are in the final version. Finally, about ten years later, the composer made a few more changes, and that is the version we all hear, today. All throughout the initial composition of *Romeo and Juliet* Tchaikovsky was guided in great detail by Mily Balakirev, the informal leader of the famed group of Russian nationalistic composers known as the "mighty handful," the others being Cui, Borodin, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov.

The "Friar Laurence" introduction is a solemn evocation of the church through skillful writing for low woodwinds that masterfully imitates a small reed organ. Little by little Tchaikovsky draws the ominous mood out and eventually, the main theme explodes as the Capulets and the Montagues battle. After a bit of teasing, the familiar "love theme" is heard, colored poignantly by the English horn. Tchaikovsky then builds the conflict with a vengeful return to the battle, replete with palpable swordplay from the percussion section. But love triumphs—if only for a bit—and the theme of the lovers soars out in the quintessential orchestration so familiar from a thousand cultural uses: lush strings and "heart-throbbing" horns. Conflict resumes, this time with sinister bits of Friar Laurence's theme, and finally the death of the star-crossed lovers is clear. The timpani taps out a dirge as an epilogue, with an intimation of the pair's transfiguration in the rest of the orchestra. Dramatic orchestral hammer-strokes seal their fate and conclude the tragedy.