

PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PROGRAM NOTES FOR IUP CONCERT

APRIL 20, 2015; 8:00 P.M.

FISHER AUDITORIUM, IUP PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA, PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Suite from *Rusalka*, Opus 114 (1900; suite arranged 2014-2015)

Concept by Manfred Honeck

Arranged by Tomáš Ille (b. 1971)

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Born 8 September 1841 in Nelahozeves, Czechoslovakia; died 1 May 1904 in Prague.

PREMIERE OF OPERA: Prague, March 31, 1901; National Theater; Karel Kovařovic, conductor
THESE PERFORMANCES MARK THE WORLD PREMIERE OF THE SUITE

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 25 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings

Dvořák composed operas throughout his career, from 1870 (*Alfred*) to 1903 (*Armida*), but his success with most of them was limited, in part because of faulty librettos or his own miscalculations (when *King and Charcoal Burner* of 1871 proved unperformable by the available forces in Prague, he completely re-wrote the score to the same libretto), in part because their Czech texts were not easily accessible to either audiences or artists outside his homeland. (The Czech-proud composer maintained, "I consider opera to be the most suitable medium for the nation.") He fared better with *The Jacobin* (1898), set in the Bohemian countryside, and *The Devil and Kate* (1899), a fairy tale-based comedy, and finally created his operatic masterpiece in 1900 with *Rusalka*. The libretto, by the 31-year-old poet and playwright Jaroslav Kvapil (who became a director and dramaturg at Prague's National Theater later that year), was based mainly on the 1811 novella *Undine* by the German Romantic writer Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, with additional elements borrowed from Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* and the folk tales of Karel Jaromir Erben (1811-1870), on which Dvořák had based four orchestral tone poems in 1896-1897. The poignant story as well as the fantasy and natural worlds of *Rusalka* appealed strongly to Dvořák and he completed the score in just seven months. The work was premiered at the National Theater on March 31, 1901 under the direction of Karel Kovařovic, newly appointed music director at the house, and it triumphed. It had to be performed fifteen more times that season to meet demand and quickly came to be regarded as a masterwork of Czech opera equaled only by Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*. A few weeks after the first performance, Gustav Mahler, then Music Director of the Vienna Court Opera, requested a copy of the score and expressed an interest in performing *Rusalka*, but settling terms proved to be elusive and it was not staged in that city until 1910, six years after

Dvořák's death. The first American performance was given in Chicago in 1935; *Rusalka* did not reach the Met until 1993.

Dvořák's opera tells the story of the water sprite Rusalka, who falls in love with a human Prince and enlists the aid of a witch to transform herself into a beautiful woman, in return for which she must give up the power of speech and accept that she will be accursed forever if her love fails. The Prince returns Rusalka's affection and asks her to marry him, but he soon finds his fiancée silent and unresponsive, and instead is enticed by a scheming Princess visiting his court. Rusalka is changed back into a sprite. When the Princess betrays her suitor, however, the Prince returns to Rusalka in her lake, kisses her, and dies in her arms.

Rusalka is exceptionally rich in melody and orchestral color and is especially amenable to the present treatment as a symphonic suite as conceived by Manfred Honeck and arranged by Czech composer and guitarist Tomáš Ille (b. 1971). Ille, a graduate of the Prague Conservatory and Academy of Music, has written for concert, film, theater and educational activities, and had his compositions and arrangements performed by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic, Czech Nonet, Pilsen Philharmonic and other leading soloists and ensembles.

The Suite is woven from many of the score's musical highlights and provides a précis of its action. It begins with the song three Wood Nymphs sing (*Hou, hou, hou*) in a forest glade at the edge of a lake in the opera's opening scene. This is followed by the Prince's Act I aria, in which he is transfixed by Rusalka after she has been transformed into a human (*Divine vision, sweetest being, are you a real woman or something from a fairy tale?*). Next is Rusalka's rapturous *Song to the Moon* from earlier in Act I, when she appeals to the moon to carry her love to the Prince on its beams (*Tell him, please, silvery moon in the sky, that I am hugging him firmly, that he should for at least a while remember me in his dreams*). After an orchestral interlude in which the heart-broken Rusalka sees her Prince turn his affections to the visiting Princess, the wise old Water Goblin, Rusalka's father, reminds her of his earlier warnings about assuming human form and the entanglements of love (*You will come back worn out by life, with a curse hanging over your head*). A choral scene set at a ball in the Prince's castle follows (*White blossoms along the road ... Do not tarry, young lad, hasten to your beloved*). The witch, Ježibaba, a figure both humorous and threatening, describes the potion she uses in Act I to turn Rusalka from a water sprite into a golden-tressed maiden (*Abracadabra! A drop of dragon's blood, ten drops of bile, the warm heart of a bird, still beating*). At the end of Act II, when Rusalka fears she has lost the love of her Prince, she sings a poignant lament (*Another has ensnared him with her beauty, with her fierce human beauty. He no longer wants to know me, his simple Rusalka*). In the opera's touching final act, Rusalka returns to her lake (*I am neither dead nor alive, neither a woman nor a nymph, I am condemned to roam this earth as a phantom*) before the Prince, unable to overcome his love for her, rushes in and begs for her kiss to restore peace to his soul. After they embrace and kiss passionately, he dies in her arms. "*For your love, for your beauty,*" Rusalka prays, "*for your inconstant human passion, for everything which condemned me to my fate, may God have mercy on your human soul.*"

Selections from the Suite from *Swan Lake*, Opus 20 (1875-1876)

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Born 7 May 1840 in Votkinsk, Russia; died 6 November 1893 in St. Petersburg.

PREMIERE OF WORK: Moscow, 4 March 1877; Bolshoi Theater; Stepan Ryabov, conductor
PSO PREMIERE: 6 March 1903; Carnegie Music Hall; Victor Herbert, conductor
INSTRUMENTATION: woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.
SELECTION TO BE PERFORMED: Dance with Goblets, Scene, Waltz, Hungarian Dance: Csárdás, Spanish Dance, Finale

During the years after Tchaikovsky took up his faculty position at the Moscow Conservatory in 1866, he fell in with a group of young men who unblushingly called themselves the Artistic Circle of Moscow, an informal tavern society whose members met regularly to impress each other with their theories of art and their capacity for alcohol. Among the Artistic Circle were Vladimir Begichev, stage manager of the Bolshoi Ballet, and Vasily Geltser, one of that company's finest dancers. Early in 1875, they conceived a new ballet for which their companion, Piotr Tchaikovsky, then the author of two symphonies, the tone poem *Romeo and Juliet* and a brand new Piano Concerto, would provide the music. Tchaikovsky liked the idea. He was drawn to the stage throughout his life, and had already undertaken four operas (though the first two, *The Voyevoda* and *Undine*, he largely destroyed except for some fragments plundered for later works, including the proposed ballet) and, in 1870, a ballet on the story of Cinderella, of which nothing more is known than it never got beyond a few discarded sketches. During a summer vacation in 1871 at the home in Kamenka of his sister, Alexandra, he even created a family ballet for her children. ("He invented the steps and the pirouettes, and he danced them himself, showing the performers what he required of them," wrote Alexandra's son, Yuri. "At such moments Uncle Piotr, red in the face, wet with perspiration as he sang the tune, presented a pretty amusing sight.") Though the music and scenario of this parlor-room production have not survived, it is likely that some of its action and music were incorporated into the 1875 ballet. Begichev, on behalf of the directors of the Imperial Theaters of Moscow, offered Tchaikovsky 800 rubles to write the music; the libretto, based on German legend and Russian supernatural tales, was devised by Begichev, Geltser and the composer; and the title for the new work was borrowed from the children's summer ballet — *Swan Lake*. Tchaikovsky agreed to start the score as soon as he finished his Third Symphony during the summer break from his Conservatory classes.

Little is known about the composition of *Swan Lake*, though Tchaikovsky admitted to Rimsky-Korsakov that he did it "partly for the sake of the money, which I need, and partly because I wanted to try myself in this kind of music." Tchaikovsky began the music in August 1875, and his brother Modeste recorded in his biography of Piotr that the first two acts were sketched in a fortnight. The rest of the score came more slowly, however, hampered by Tchaikovsky's classroom duties, and was not completed until the following April. Almost a full year passed before *Swan Lake* was staged. The choreography for the premiere (on March 4, 1877 at the Moscow Bolshoi Theater), a benefit for the ballerina Pelageya Karpakova, who took the role of Odette, was created by the company's dance master, Julius Reisinger, "whose limitations as a choreographer seem to have been almost boundless," according to Tchaikovsky's biographer David Brown. Stepan Ryabov, whom Modeste criticized as a "semi-amateur" and incapable of grasping the symphonic nature of his brother's score, was assigned to prepare the orchestra. Well-worn sets and costumes from other Bolshoi ballet and opera productions were pressed into service for the premiere. Though essentially a fine company, the Bolshoi dancers were apparently uninspired by Tchaikovsky's music, some of which they

considered “undanceable,” and could not overcome a decided indifference in the performance. Given the threadbare decor, the routine orchestral playing and the unimaginative choreography (Edwin Evans said the premiere was “more or less pitchforked onto the stage”), it is small wonder that *Swan Lake* made little impression on the first-night audience and critics, who were also put off by such a bold, symphonic score after years of listening to the feather-weight, tinkly ballet music of Pagni, Minkus, Drigo and Gerber. Substitutions had already been made in the score for the premiere (Karpakova wanted to show her fans some of their familiar favorites), and further changes continued to be allowed until hardly more than half of Tchaikovsky’s original music remained. *Swan Lake* stayed in the Bolshoi repertory until the costumes fell apart in 1883, and, except for a staging in Prague of Act II in 1888, when Tchaikovsky met Dvořák, the ballet was not seen again during its composer’s lifetime.

Mixed with the grief following Tchaikovsky’s death in 1893 was a strong curiosity about his less familiar works. Ivan Vsevolozhsky, director of St. Petersburg’s Maryinsky Theater, and the choreographer Marius Petipa, who had collaborated with Tchaikovsky in creating the successful *Sleeping Beauty* and *Nutcracker* ballets, determined to revive the full, original version of *Swan Lake*. They gave Act II alone as part of a memorial concert in St. Petersburg on February 29, 1894, and staged the full ballet on January 27th of the following year. The lovingly prepared production created a sensation, and *Swan Lake* has ever since been one of the most popular of all evening-length ballets.

Act I of *Swan Lake* is a festival celebrating the coming of age of Prince Siegfried the following day, when he must choose a bride. Attracted by a flight of swans over the castle, Siegfried and his friends form a hunting party and leave the festivity. At the beginning of Act II, Siegfried arrives at the lake to see the swans, led by Odette, the Swan Queen, glide across the surface. Just as Siegfried is about to unleash his crossbow, Odette appears to him not in avian form but as a beautiful princess. She tells him that she and the other swan-maidens live under a curse by the evil magician Rothbart that lets them take human shape just from midnight to dawn. The spell can be broken, she says, only by one who promises to love her and no other. Though Rothbart vows to undo them both, Siegfried promises his love to Odette. Act III is again set in the castle. Amid the birthday celebration, Rothbart, in disguise, suddenly enters with his daughter, Odile, who appears to Siegfried in the exact image of Odette. Odette, hovering at the window, tries to warn Siegfried of the deception, but to no avail. Siegfried asks for Odile’s hand in marriage. Rothbart and Odile exult in their vile triumph. Siegfried realizes he has been trapped. Odette seems doomed. In Act IV, Odette returns to the lake, prepared to kill herself. The other maidens urge her to wait for the Prince. He appears and again vows his love to her, but she knows that Rothbart’s power can only be broken by death. She throws herself from the parapet of a lakeside fortress. Siegfried, his life meaningless without her, follows. Rothbart’s enchantment is destroyed by the power of love. At the final curtain, Odette and Siegfried are seen sailing off together on a beautiful, celestial ship, united forever.

The Dance with Goblets is a brilliant polonaise accompanying a toast at the festivities in Act I. The *Scene* that opens Act II is based on the haunting oboe theme associated throughout the ballet with the swans. The brilliant *Waltz* is danced by the *corps de ballet* during the festivities in Act I. The *Hungarian Dance (Csárdás)* are among the nationality dances featured during the party scene in Act III. The *Spanish Dance* is part of Siegfried’s birthday celebration in Act III. The *Finale to Act IV* provides the ballet’s musical and dramatic denouement.

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Opus 74, “Pathétique” (1893)

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Born 7 May 1840 in Votkinsk, Russia; died 6 November 1893 in St. Petersburg.

PREMIERE OF WORK: St. Petersburg, 28 October 1893; Hall of the Nobility; Orchestra of the Imperial Russian Music Society; Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 17 November 1899; Carnegie Music Hall; Victor Herbert, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 47 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo and three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, gong, bass drum, cymbals and strings

Tchaikovsky died in 1893, at the age of only 53. His death was long attributed to the accidental drinking of a glass of unboiled water during a cholera outbreak, but that theory has been questioned in recent years with the alternate explanation that he was forced to take his own life because of a homosexual liaison with the underage son of a noble family. Though the manner of Tchaikovsky's death is incidental to the place of his Sixth Symphony in music history, the fact of it is not.

Tchaikovsky conducted his B minor Symphony for the first time only a week before his death. It was given a cool reception by musicians and public, and his frustration was multiplied when discussion of the work was avoided by the guests at a dinner party following the concert on October 28, 1893. Three days later, however, his mood seemed brighter and he told a friend that he was not yet ready to be snatched off by death, “that snubbed-nose horror. I feel that I shall live a long time.” He was wrong. He died on November 6th, and a sense of overwhelming grief and loss was felt by music lovers in Russia and abroad as the news of his passing spread. Memorial concerts were planned. One of the first was in St. Petersburg on November 18th, only twelve days after he died. Eduard Napravnik conducted the Sixth Symphony on that occasion, and it was a resounding success. The “Pathétique” was wafted by the winds of sorrow across the musical world, and became — and remains — one of the most popular symphonies ever written, the quintessential expression of tragedy in music.

The Symphony opens with a slow introduction dominated by the sepulchral intonation of the bassoon, whose melody, in a faster tempo, becomes the impetuous first theme of the exposition. The tension subsides into silence before the yearning second theme appears, “like a recollection of happiness in time of pain,” according to Edward Downes. The tempestuous development section is launched by a mighty blast from the full orchestra. The recapitulation is more condensed, vibrantly scored and intense in emotion than the exposition. Tchaikovsky referred to the second movement as a scherzo, though its 5/4 meter gives it more the feeling of a waltz with a limp. The third movement is a boisterous march. A profound emptiness pervades the Symphony's closing movement, which maintains its slow tempo and mood of despair throughout.