

Concerts of Thursday, March 7, and Saturday, March 9, 2018, at 8:00p

Henrik Nánási, Conductor

David Coucheron, violin

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967)

Dances of Galánta (1933)

Julius Conus (1869-1942)

Concerto in E minor for Violin and Orchestra (1898)

I. *Allegro molto; Andante espressivo*

II. *Adagio*

III. *Cadenza; Allegro subito*

David Coucheron, violin

Intermission

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Opus 36 (1878)

I. *Andante sostenuto—Moderato con anima—Moderato assai, quasi Andante—Allegro vivo*

II. *Andantino in modo di canzona*

III. *Scherzo. Pizzicato ostinato—Allegro*

IV. *Finale. Allegro con fuoco*

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Dances of Galánta (1933)

Zoltán Kodály was born in Kecskemét, Hungary, on December 16, 1882, and died in Budapest, Hungary, on March 6, 1967. The first performance of *Dances of Galánta* took place in Budapest on October 23, 1933, with Ernő Dohnányi conducting the Budapest Philharmonic Society Orchestra. The *Dances of Galánta* are scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, snare drum, triangle, orchestral bells, and strings. Approximate performance time is fifteen minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances: May 2-4, 1985, Yoel Levi, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: May 26-28, 2009, Gilbert Varga, Conductor.

Recording: Yoel Levi, Conductor (Telarc CD-80413)

Composer Zoltán Kodály maintained a lifelong affection for the folk music of his native Hungary. In 1905, while still in his 20s, Kodály began the first of many journeys throughout the Hungarian countryside. On several of these trips, Kodály was joined by his friend and fellow Hungarian composer, Béla Bartók (1881-1945). Kodály and Bartók used manuscript paper and a phonograph recorder to document thousands of Hungarian folk melodies. Kodály and Bartók felt these melodies were important not only in the context of ethnomusicology, but as the basis for concert works as well.

A fine example of Kodály's blending of Hungarian folk melodies into the fabric of a classical work may be found in his *Dances of Galánta*. Kodály composed the orchestral work in response to a commission by the Budapest Philharmonic Society Orchestra, as part of the celebration of its 80th anniversary. The premiere took place in Budapest on October 23, 1933, led by the eminent Hungarian composer and pianist, Ernő Dohnányi.

In a preface to the score of his *Dances of Galánta*, Kodály provided the following background information:

Galánta is a small Hungarian market-town known to travelers from Vienna and Budapest. The composer passed there seven years of his childhood. There existed at that time a famous Gypsy-band which has disappeared in the meantime. Their music was the first "orchestral sonority" which came to the ear of the child. The forebears of these gypsies were already known more than (a) hundred years ago. About 1800, some books of Hungarian dances were published in Vienna, one of which contained music "after

several gypsies from Galánta.” They have preserved the old Hungarian tradition. In order to continue it the composer took his principal subjects from these ancient editions.

The *Dances of Galánta* are based upon the *verbunkos*, a dance used in the 18th century to recruit soldiers for the Hungarian military. The *verbunkos* contrasts slow and fast sections, and also contains virtuoso elements (Bartók used the *verbunkos* as the basis for the opening movement of *Contrasts*, his 1938 work for clarinet, violin, and piano). The *Dances of Galánta* open with a slow-tempo introduction (*Lento*), in which a terse motif, introduced by the cellos, alternates with swirling string figures. A solo cadenza for the clarinet resolves to its introduction of a leisurely dance (*Andante maestoso*). The flutes, over pizzicato strings, launch a sprightlier dance (*Allegretto moderato*) that becomes increasingly passionate. The oboe initiates a contrasting, delicate section (*Allegro con moto, grazioso*). Two quick-tempo dances (*Allegro* and *Allegro vivace*) resolve to a measure of silence. A brief interlude (*Andante maestoso*) yields to the brilliant closing bars (*Allegro molto vivace*).

Concerto in E minor for Violin and Orchestra (1898)

Julius Conus was born in Moscow, Russia, on February 1, 1869, and died in Melenki, Vladimir Oblast, Russia, on January 3, 1942. The first performance of the Violin Concerto took place in Moscow in 1898, with the composer as soloist. In addition to the solo violin, the Concerto is scored three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings. Approximate performance time is nineteen minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances: October 21-23, 1993, Cecylia Arzewski, Violin, Darryl One, Conductor.

Julius Conus was a member of a prominent Russian musical family that had emigrated from France in the early 19th century. Conus studied at the Moscow Conservatory, where he was awarded the Gold Medal upon graduation. Conus also taught at that institution. Conus, a friend of Tchaikovsky, assisted the elder Russian composer in the preparation of the string bowings for the “Pathétique” Symphony (1893). Conus was a member of Paris Opera Orchestra and, thanks to the recommendation of Tchaikovsky, also served as concertmaster of the New York Symphony Orchestra.

Julius Conus dedicated the Violin Concerto to his teacher, Jean Hrimaly. Conus was the soloist in the work’s 1898 premiere, which took place in Moscow. Such legendary violinists as Jascha Heifetz and Itzhak Perlman have helped to assure the Conus Violin Concerto’s continued presence in the repertoire. It is a presence more than justified by the work’s captivating melodies and numerous episodes of daredevil virtuoso display.

The Concerto is in three principal sections, played without pause. The first opens with a dramatic orchestral introduction (*Allegro molto*) leading to the entrance of the soloist, with a *Recitativo* section that serves as a brief prelude to the flowing, principal melody (*Andante espressivo*). The tender *Adagio* section also has moments of thrilling passagework. An extended *Cadenza* precedes the Concerto's whirlwind final bars (*Allegro subito*).

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Opus 36 (1878)

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, on May 7, 1840, and died in St. Petersburg, Russia, on November 6, 1893. The first performance of the Symphony No. 4 took place in Moscow on February 22, 1878, with Nikolai Rubinstein conducting. The Symphony No. 4 is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, bass drum, cymbals, and strings. Approximate performance time is forty-five minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances: January 30, 1949, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: March 9-11, 2017, Michael Stern, Conductor.

“This is Fate”

“This is Fate, that inexorable force that prevents our aspirations to happiness from reaching their goal...” That is how Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky described the implacable opening bars of his Fourth Symphony. Tchaikovsky composed this great work during one of the most turbulent periods in his life, a time when the power of Fate must have been paramount in his mind.

Tchaikovsky completed the Symphony on January 7, 1878. On July 18 of the previous year, Tchaikovsky wed Antonina Milyukova. Five days before the wedding, Tchaikovsky wrote to his benefactress, Nadezhda von Meck:

My decision was supported by the fact that the sole dream of my 82-year-old father and all my relatives is that I should marry...In a day or two my marriage with her will take place. What will happen after that I do not know...If I am marrying without love, it is because circumstances conspired to make it impossible for me to do otherwise.

After the wedding, Tchaikovsky lapsed into a profound depression, and later attempted suicide. Finally, on October 6—less than three months after his marriage—Tchaikovsky left his wife forever, rushing to St. Petersburg to meet his brother, Anatoly. Tchaikovsky suffered a nervous breakdown, and doctors stated that a resumption of the marital relationship was out of the question. Tchaikovsky, under doctor's orders, journeyed to Switzerland for recuperation.

The Tchaikovsky Fourth: In the Composer's Own Words

The premiere of the Fourth Symphony took place in Moscow on February 22, 1878, under Nikolai Rubinstein's direction. Tchaikovsky dedicated the Symphony to von Meck, whom the composer described as "my best friend." And, in a letter to von Meck, Tchaikovsky divulged the meaning of his Fourth Symphony (all of Tchaikovsky's comments are indented, below):

There *is* a programme in our symphony, that's to say it is possible to put into words what it is trying to express. I can and I would like to indicate the meaning of the separate parts and of the whole, but to you and to you alone. Naturally I can only do this in broad terms.

I. *Andante sostenuto—Moderato con anima—Moderato assai, quasi Andante—Allegro vivo—*

The introduction is the *germ* of the whole symphony, unarguably the main idea. This is Fate, that inexorable force that prevents our aspirations to happiness from reaching their goal, that jealously ensures our well-being and peace are not unclouded, that hangs over our heads like the sword of Damocles, that with steadfast persistence poisons our souls. It is invincible, you will never master it. One can only resign oneself to fruitless sorrow.

Tchaikovsky depicts the inexorable power of Fate with stunning brass and wind fanfares. It is one of the most arresting and dramatic openings in all of the symphonic literature.

The joyless, hopeless feeling becomes more powerful and fierce. Would it not be better to turn away from reality and submerge oneself in dreams?

Oh joy! There is at least a sweet and tender dream appearing! A bright and gracious human form flits by and lures us on somewhere.

How lovely! And how remote the obsessive first allegro theme now sounds! The dreams have gradually taken full possession of the soul. All that was gloomy and joyless is forgotten. Here it is, here is happiness! No! They were dreams and *Fate* rouses us from them.

So life is a constant alternation between grim reality and evanescent visions and dreams of happiness...There is no haven. Sail upon that ocean until it seizes you and engulfs you in its depths. That is roughly the program of the first movement.

II. *Andantino in modo di canzona—*

The second movement of the symphony expresses another phase of depression: that melancholy feeling that comes on in the evening, when you are sitting on your own, tired with work, and you take up a book but it falls out of your hands. Memories come flooding in. It is sad that so much *has been and gone*; it is pleasant to recollect one's youth. One regrets the passing of time yet there is no wish to begin life anew. Life wears one out. It is pleasant to rest and reflect. There are so many memories! There have been happy moments when young blood coursed through the veins and life was good. There have also been difficult times, irreplaceable losses. But now that is all somewhere in the past. There is a sweet sadness in burying oneself in the past.

III. *Scherzo. Pizzicato ostinato—Allegro—*

In an 1877 letter, Tchaikovsky informed von Meck:

There is a new instrumental effect in the Scherzo of which I have high hopes. First the strings play on their own, pizzicato all the time; the woodwinds come in the Trio, and also play on their own; their place is taken by a brass group, yet again on their own; at the end of the Scherzo all three groups exchange brief little phrases. I think that this should make an interesting effect of sounds.

And, in the 1878 letter that contains the program of the Fourth Symphony, the composer explained:

The third movement does not express any precise feelings. These are whimsical arabesques, the elusive images that flash across one's imagination when one has had a little wine to drink and is in the first stage of intoxication. One's spirits are not happy, but neither are they sad. One does not think about anything: one gives free reign to one's imagination that, for some reason, sets about painting strange pictures. Amongst them one recalls a picture of some roistering peasants and a street song. Then somewhere in the distance a military parade goes by. There is no connection between these images that are like those which flash through your mind as you are going to sleep. They have nothing to do with reality: they are strange, wild, and incoherent.

IV. *Finale. Allegro con fuoco—*

The fourth movement. If you find no cause for joy in yourself, look to others. Go amongst the common people and see now they know how to enjoy themselves, abandoning themselves completely to feelings of joy. Picture of a peasant celebration on a holiday. But scarcely have you managed to forget yourself and be distracted by

the sight of other people's pleasures than inexorable *Fate* appears once more and reminds you of its existence.

Tchaikovsky portrays the "peasant celebration" by quoting a popular Russian folk song, "The Little Birch Tree," sung by the winds after the *Finale*'s brief, raucous introduction. Later, the celebration is interrupted by the return of the "Fate" motif that launched the Symphony's first movement.

Tchaikovsky continues:

But you are no concern of anyone else. They do not even turn round, they do not glance at you, and they have not noticed that you are lonely and sad. Oh! What fun it is for them! They are so lucky that all their feelings are simple and direct. Blame yourself and do not say that all the world is sad. There are simple but potent pleasures. Enjoy other people's happiness. One can live despite everything.

Tchaikovsky concluded his explanation of his Fourth Symphony by stating to Nadezhda von Meck:

That, my dear friend, is all I can say by way of explaining the symphony. Of course, it is neither clear nor complete. But it is in the nature of instrumental music that it is not amenable to detailed analysis. As (German poet Heinrich) Heine observed: "Where words end, music begins."