

Concerts of Thursday, January 15, at 8:00p, and Saturday, January 17, 2015, at 7:30p.

Marin Alsop, Conductor

Julian Rachlin, violin

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Second Essay for Orchestra, Opus 17 (1942)

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Concerto No. 2 for Violin and Orchestra in G minor, Opus 63 (1935)

I. Allegro moderato

II. Andante assai

III. Allegro, ben marcato

Julian Rachlin, violin

Intermission

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

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

I. Adagio; Allegro non troppo

II. Allegro con grazia

III. Allegro molto vivace

IV. Finale. Adagio lamentoso

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Second Essay for Orchestra, Opus 17 (1942)

Samuel Barber was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on March 9, 1910, and died in New York on January 23, 1981. The first performance of *Second Essay for Orchestra* took place at Carnegie Hall in New York on April 16, 1942, with Bruno Walter conducting the New York Philharmonic. *The Second Essay for Orchestra* is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, suspended cymbal, side drum, tam-tam and strings. Approximate performance time is ten minutes.

First ASO Classical Subscription Performances: January 22, 23 and 24, 1981, Calvin Simmons, Conductor.

Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: April 2, 3 and 4, 2009, Robert Spano, Conductor.

ASO Recording: Yoel Levi, Conductor (Telarc CD-80250)

In the late 1930s, Samuel Barber emerged as one of America's most talented and promising young composers. In the spring of 1938, both the New York Philharmonic and Cleveland Orchestra included Barber's *The School for Scandal, Overture* (1933) as part of New York concerts. On November 5 in New York, the legendary Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini conducted the NBC Symphony Orchestra in a nationwide broadcast of the world premieres of Barber's *Adagio for Strings* (1938), and *First Essay for Orchestra* (1937).

In 1939, Barber accepted a commission to write what would become one of his most beloved concert works, the Violin Concerto (1940). Barber's sketchbook reveals that in addition to the Violin Concerto, he was working on a *Second Essay for Orchestra*. Barber completed the *Second Essay* on March 15, 1942. By then, the United States was involved in the Second World War. Barber was keenly aware that he might be called into military service at any moment. He wrote to a friend: "I have been composing very hard, and my music has been going so well that it seems incongruous for times such as these. But I've taken the attitude that it is better to continue one's job *tutta forza* until one's draft board decides otherwise." (Barber received his draft notice on September 16, 1942.)

The day after completing his *Second Essay for Orchestra*, Barber shared the score with conductor Bruno Walter, who was interested in featuring American works in his concerts with the New York Philharmonic. Walter and the New York Philharmonic performed the world premiere of Barber's *Second Essay for Orchestra* at New York's

Carnegie Hall on April 16, 1942. A month later, Eugene Ormandy conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra in the *Second Essay*. The *Second Essay* soon received further performances by several prominent orchestras, further solidifying Barber's reputation in the United States and indeed, throughout the world.

Musical Analysis

The *Second Essay's* arresting opening measures feature the flute, and then the bass clarinet, introducing a wide-ranging *dolce, espressivo* theme over hushed accompaniment by the bass drum (*Andante, un poco mosso*). The melody is soon developed by other winds and finally, the strings, as the music builds to a radiant climax. The violas sing the second principal theme (*Con moto*), related to the first, and developed in energetic fashion by the orchestra. A *sforzando* chord by the entire ensemble heralds a vibrant fugue, based upon a puckish theme (again related to the first) and launched by the clarinet (*Molto allegro ed energico*). The fugue reaches a hushed, mysterious resolution. The *Second Essay* concludes with a majestic chorale transformation of music from the work's opening section (*Più tranquillo, ma sempre muovendo*).

Concerto No. 2 for Violin and Orchestra in G minor, Opus 63 (1935)

Sergei Prokofiev was born in Sontsovka, Russia, on April 23, 1891, and died in Moscow, Russia, on March 5, 1953. The first performance of the Violin Concerto No. 2 took place in Madrid, Spain, on December 1, 1935, with Robert Soëtans as soloist and Enrique Arbos conducting the Madrid Symphony Orchestra. In addition to the solo violin, the Concerto is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two trumpets, two horns, triangle, suspended cymbal, castanets, snare drum, bass drum, triangle and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty-seven minutes.

First ASO Classical Subscription Performances: February 5, 6 and 7, 1976, Viktor Tretyakov, Violin, Michael Palmer, Conductor.

Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: January 8, 9 and 10, 2004, Cecylia Arzewski, Violin, Robert Spano, Conductor.

Following years of self-imposed exile, Sergei Prokofiev returned to his native Russia in 1933. In 1935, while at work on his ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*, Prokofiev received a commission for a Second Violin Concerto (the First was completed in 1917).

As Prokofiev recalled in his autobiography:

In 1935 a group of admirers of the French violinist (Robert) Soëtans asked me to write a *violin concerto* for him, giving him exclusive rights to perform it for one year. I readily agreed since I had been intending to write something for the violin at that time and had accumulated some

material. As in the case of the preceding concertos, I began by searching for an original title for the piece, such as “concert sonata for violin and orchestra,” but finally returned to the simplest solution: Concerto No. 2. Nevertheless, I wanted it to be altogether different from No. 1 both as to music and style.

The variety of places in which that Concerto was written is a reflection of the nomadic concert-tour existence I led at that time: the principal theme of the first movement was written in Paris, the first theme of the second movement in Voronezh, the orchestration I completed in Baku, while the first performance was given in Madrid, in December 1935 (with Robert Soëtans as soloist and Enrique Arbos conducting the Madrid Symphony Orchestra).

After the 1935 premiere, Prokofiev’s “nomadic” existence continued throughout the winter, as he and Soëtans toured for concerts in Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.

Despite Prokofiev’s apparent desire that his Second Violin Concerto stand in sharp contrast to the First, most commentators have noted the similarly elegant and lyric nature of the two works. Perhaps the beautiful and highly accessible Second Concerto served as a point of departure not from its 1917 predecessor, but from other, more controversial works. As Prokofiev once exclaimed in a moment of great frustration: “Why does everyone speak of me as a composer that can only write in a satirical or sarcastic vein, or as an *enfant terrible* that plays around with dissonances? I have already abandoned this approach!”

Regardless of Prokofiev’s stated intent in composing the Second Violin Concerto, what emerged is a work of enduring charm and grace that demands the highest level of technical mastery from the soloist. Both of Prokofiev’s Violin Concertos remain among the most popular 20th-century works in their genre, for audiences and performers alike.

Musical Analysis

I. *Allegro moderato*—The opening movement begins with the violinist’s solo introduction of the melancholy initial theme. The soloist also presents the second principal theme, an extended yearning and lyrical motif, comprising a series of descending figures. A lengthy development section offers a number of contrasting episodes in which the lyricism of the work’s opening alternates with moments of agitation and energy. The cellos and basses softly reprise the initial motif. The violinist’s hushed, *dolce* restatement of the second theme is even more restrained and poignant than in its original appearance. A staggered reprise of the initial theme by the orchestra and soloist leads to a rather terse conclusion.

II. *Andante assai*—Clarinets and pizzicato strings introduce an ascending figure that serves as the accompaniment to the soloist's introduction of the tender, lyrical central theme. Restatements of the melody alternate with contrasting sections of varying moods and colors. At movement's close, conventional roles are reversed, as the soloist offers the pizzicato accompaniment to the winds' and cellos' final statement of the principal melody.

III. *Allegro, ben marcato*—The finale, a rondo in the style of a rustic peasant dance, stands in sharp contrast to the refinement of the preceding two movements. Angular rhythms and melodic contours, as well as prominent use of percussion (particularly the bass drum), reinforce the brusque nature of the final movement. The finale is also the most overtly virtuosic of the three, especially as the movement draws to its climactic *tumultuoso* resolution.

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

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 "Pathétique" Symphony took place in St. Petersburg on October 28, 1893, with the composer conducting. The "Pathétique" Symphony is scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tam tam and strings. Approximate performance time is forty-seven minutes.

First ASO Classical Subscription Performance: April 25, 1948, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.

Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: September 24, 26 and 27, 2009, Robert Spano, Conductor.

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky conducted the world premiere of his Sixth and final Symphony, the "Pathétique," in St. Petersburg on October 28, 1893. Nine days later, Tchaikovsky was dead at the age of 53. For years, the accepted explanation of Tchaikovsky's demise, first advanced by his brother, Modest, was that the composer died as a result of the cholera epidemic then plaguing Russia.

In the past few decades, however, evidence has surfaced that Tchaikovsky may well have committed suicide, perhaps in order to avoid the public revelation of an illicit relationship. In the fourth and final volume of his superb Tchaikovsky biography (W.W. Norton and Co., NY, 1991), David Brown argues, in extensive and cogent detail, the case for this suicide theory.

Throughout his life, Tchaikovsky frequently suffered from depression, and, on at least one prior occasion, attempted to kill himself. And the prevailing theory among current scholars is that Tchaikovsky's death was indeed the result of suicide, in all likelihood, by arsenic poisoning.

“I frequently wept”

A consensus on this volatile issue is unlikely. Nevertheless, it is difficult to listen to Tchaikovsky’s final Symphony and not sense the composer’s premonition of his own demise. As Tchaikovsky confided to his nephew, Vladimir Davıdov, to whom he dedicated the “Pathétique” Symphony:

Whilst I was on my travels I had an idea for another symphony, a programme symphony this time; but the programme will be left as an enigma—let people guess it for themselves. This programme is so intensely personal that as I was mentally composing it on my travels I frequently wept copiously.

Tchaikovsky originally sketched his “Pathétique” Symphony between February 16 and April 5, 1893. While on a conducting tour in London that May, Tchaikovsky wrote to Davıdov: “I’m not only suffering from a melancholy for which there is no word (there’s a place in my new symphony for where I think it is well expressed), but from a hatred of strange people, and some undefined fear—and the devil knows what else besides...”

In August, Tchaikovsky completed the orchestration of his Sixth Symphony. Shortly thereafter, the Grand Duke Konstantin suggested that Tchaikovsky compose a *Requiem*, based upon verses by the Russian poet, Alexey Apukhtin. Tchaikovsky replied: “I am in some difficulty because of the fact that my last symphony, that I have just written and is down for performance...is imbued with a spirit very close to that which infuses the *Requiem*.”

It should also be noted that between the two World Wars, the following sketch by Tchaikovsky was discovered among his papers:

The ultimate essence of the plan of the Symphony is LIFE. First part—all impulsive passion, confidence, thirst for activity. Must be short.
(Finale—DEATH—result of collapse.)

Second part love; third disappointments, fourth ends dying away (also short).

Whatever program Tchaikovsky intended for the Sixth Symphony, he chose a unique road for its musical journey. Tchaikovsky’s Fourth and Fifth Symphonies—both depictions of struggles with fate—conclude with rousing, triumphant finales. However, Tchaikovsky informed Davıdov that, in the “Pathétique”: “Formally there will be much that is new in this symphony, and incidentally the Finale won’t be a loud Allegro but, on the contrary, a very slow-moving Adagio.”

“I take more pride in it than in any other of my works”

Tchaikovsky realized his departure from symphonic convention might well hinder the work's acceptance. As he admitted to Davidov: "I shall consider it the usual (thing) and unsurprising if this symphony is torn to pieces or is little appreciated; it won't be the first time (this has happened)."

Indeed, the premiere of Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" (a nickname suggested by the composer's brother, Modest) was far from a triumph. The critics and audience—no doubt bewildered by the work's frequently morbid tone and unconventional structure—offered a lukewarm reception. Still, Tchaikovsky maintained faith in his new Symphony, and informed his publisher: "It's not that it displeased, but it produced some bewilderment. As far as I'm concerned, I take more pride in it than in any other of my works."

Tchaikovsky did not live to see the vindication of his final Symphony. As previously noted, Tchaikovsky died on November 6, 1893, nine days after the work's premiere. The composer's funeral was held in St. Petersburg's Kazan Cathedral, the first time such an honor had been bestowed upon non-royalty. The normal capacity of the Cathedral was 6,000. However, 60,000 people applied for permission to attend the ceremony. 8,000 crowded into the Cathedral for the service. The funeral procession ultimately made its way to Alexander Nevsky Cemetery. Among the observers was Czar Alexander III, who was reported to have said: "We have many dukes and barons, but only one Tchaikovsky."

In time, Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" has become recognized as the composer's symphonic masterpiece, a fitting summation of the life and career of Russia's most beloved composer. It is a work of extraordinary power, a Symphony that presents a stunning array of emotions, cast in a bold, revolutionary format. For his part, Tchaikovsky left no doubt as to his affection for the "Pathétique." As he wrote to Davidov: "I definitely consider it the best, and, in particular, *the most sincere* of all my works. I love it as I have never loved any of my other musical offspring."

Musical Analysis

I. *Adagio; Allegro non troppo*—The "Pathétique" Symphony opens with a pensive, slow introduction (*Adagio*), featuring a solo bassoon quietly intoning a motif soon incorporated by other members of the orchestra. The motif emerges as the restless, initial theme of the principal *Allegro non troppo*, introduced by the violins. The tension builds to a climax, as brass fanfares punctuate the central theme. The mood gradually calms, leading to an *Andante* section and the strings' presentation of the flowing, second theme. After a passionate restatement of that theme, there is an extended *diminuendo*, with a descending passage launched by the solo clarinet, fading to near silence.

An orchestral thunderclap shatters the fragile repose, as the apocalyptic development section (*Allegro vivo*) begins. The tempest momentarily subsides, and the brass gravely

intones a quotation from the Orthodox Requiem: “With thy saints, O Christ, give peace to the soul of thy servant.” The development builds to yet another shattering climax, with fearsome interjections by the lower brass. Finally, the storm concludes, leading to a truncated recapitulation that focuses upon the beautiful second theme. A repetition of the clarinet solo leads to the closing measures, a chorale for brass and winds, accompanied by pizzicato strings.

II. *Allegro con grazia*—Instead of the traditional slow-tempo movement, Tchaikovsky substitutes a leisurely dance. The music is in the character of a waltz. But the composer further departs from convention by casting the movement not in 3/4, but in 5/4. This curious metric deviation imparts an air of unease—even, perhaps, of disorientation. The cellos introduce the second movement’s principal melody. The flute and strings present the central section’s melancholy theme. The movement concludes with a varied reprise of the opening “waltz,” and a brief coda that offers echoes of the central section.

III. *Allegro molto vivace*—The third movement is a vigorous march. Over a scurrying figure, initially played by the strings, the oboes offer hints of the march tune. The jaunty march is finally introduced in complete form by the clarinets. The march returns throughout, constantly gathering momentum. Violent crashes of the bass drum and cymbals reinforce two massive *fff* presentations of the central march. A stunning coda brings the march to a robust conclusion.

IV. *Finale. Adagio lamentoso*—Of all the innovations Tchaikovsky explores in his “Pathétique” Symphony, it must have been the contrast between the preceding march and the finale that most disturbed the audience attending the premiere. After the thunderous closing bars of the third movement subside, the strings initiate the finale’s mournful, opening theme. The horns announce the violins’ presentation of a descending melody. The melody, in D Major, is nonetheless, tinged with sorrow. The melody gains ever-increasing urgency, culminating in a furious descending passage, capped by a *fff* explosion. A repetition of the opening theme leads to the ultimate struggle, but the sound of the tam tam (gong) confirms the tragic resolution. The final measures, suggesting the beat of a failing heart, slowly resolve to silence.