

# Program Notes

By April L. Racana

Sunday, October 18 The 870th Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)

## Cello Concerto in B minor, op. 104

- I. **Allegro** (ca. 16 min)
- II. **Adagio ma non troppo** (ca. 11 min)
- III. **Finale. Allegro moderato** (ca. 13 min)

“Why on earth didn’t I know that one could write a cello concerto like this? Had I known, I would have written one long ago.” This was Brahms’ reaction upon hearing Dvořák’s Second Cello Concerto. Both composers apparently struggled with how to feature the instrument with orchestra over the years, Brahms seemingly settling on his *Double Concerto*. Dvořák having previously explored the genre in his earlier years had determined it extremely difficult, if not impossible, stating: “The cello is a beautiful instrument, but its place is in the orchestra and in chamber music. As a solo instrument it isn’t much good... I have written a cello concerto, but am sorry... that I did so, and I never intend to write another one.” This first attempt at writing a cello concerto remained undiscovered for many years, and when it surfaced in 1925, all that existed was the solo part and a sketch for piano accompaniment.

It wasn’t until his sojourn to New York in the 1890’s that Dvořák would reconsider his position on the matter. As director of the National Conservatory of Music from 1892-1895, Dvořák not only had teaching duties, but also had the opportunity to compose (it was during this time his *New World Symphony* was written) and perform a number of his

works. He also had the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues there, one of whom, Victor Herbert, was also a composer as well as a cellist. It was upon hearing Herbert’s Second Cello Concerto that apparently inspired Dvořák to change his mind about the difficulties of composing in the genre.

For years a renowned European cellist had been urging Dvořák to write a cello concerto for him, and finally in 1895 Wihan’s request was granted. Dvořák had decided to return to his homeland, partly due to financial difficulties at the conservatory and partly because he was homesick. He had also gotten word that his sister-in-law, Josefina Kaunitzová had become seriously ill as well. Many years earlier, Dvořák had fallen in love with her and asked her to marry him. She declined and married another, while Dvořák instead married her younger sister. But apparently his feelings of affection remained as he paid tribute to her when he composed this *Cello Concerto in B minor*.

Writing the majority of the work before he left New York (1894-95), Dvořák would ultimately complete the piece after returning to his home country. The concerto is written in three movements: *Allegro*, *Adagio ma non troppo*, and *Allegro moderato*. The second movement is where Dvořák makes his first tribute to Josefina. After a quiet opening section by the woodwinds, which are later joined by the soloist in reminiscences of his

Slavonic homeland, the full orchestra suddenly interrupts with loud chords in a minor key, as if to grab our attention for what is to come next: the melody from “Leave Me Alone”, which had been one of Josefina’s favorite from Dvořák’s *Four Songs*, op. 82.

The last movement makes one final tribute to Josefina, (apparently added after Dvořák returned home, and learned that she had died) where near the end

we hear the tune for “Leave Me Alone” once more, the cello playing one final emotional farewell – to Josefina and perhaps to his New World – before a triumphant finish welcomes him back to his homeland.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes (2nd doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, strings

## Piotr Ilych Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) Symphony No. 5 in E minor, op. 64

- I. **Andante - Allegro con anima** (ca. 16 min)
- II. **Andante cantabile con alcuna licenza** (ca. 14 min)
- III. **Valse. Allegro moderato** (ca. 6 min)
- IV. **Finale. Andante maestoso - Allegro vivace** (ca. 14 min)

In May of 1888, Tchaikovsky wrote to his brother Modeste: “To speak frankly, I feel as yet no impulse for creative work. What does this mean? Have I written myself out? No ideas, no inclination! Still, I am hoping to collect, little by little, material for a symphony.” It had been three years since the composer had written a major work for orchestra, and the previous one, the *‘Manfred’ Symphony* (1885), had not been successfully received. Prior to this, it had been ten years since his previous orchestral attempt, the *Violin Concerto* (1878).

All of this reinforced Tchaikovsky’s usual musical self-doubts, yet somehow he persevered, in spite of the emotional and physical constraints on him – his health continuing to plague him with difficulties even though he was not yet fifty. By late August his psyche seemed to have nearly turned around when he completed his Fifth Symphony: “I have not blundered;

it has turned out well.” However, the premiere in November in St. Petersburg received a rather lukewarm reception and rekindled the composer’s hesitations in his abilities. He even wrote in a letter to his patron Madame von Meck:

“After...performances of my new symphony I have come to the conclusion that it is a failure. There is something repellent, something superfluous, patchy, and insincere, which the public instinctively realizes.... The consciousness of this brings me a sharp twinge of self-dissatisfaction.... Last night I looked through our symphony (no. 4). What a difference! How immeasurably superior it is! It is very, very sad!”

In Hamburg, near the beginning of the following year, however, a repeat performance (apparently one of much higher quality) was received with great praise, not only by the audience and critics, but even Brahms himself attended the performance and gave Tchaikovsky a nod of approval. Once again his own persistence had paid off it seems, in spite of his deep insecurities.

This, the Fifth Symphony ultimately

came to be described as one of a trilogy, linked inexorably with the Fourth and Sixth Symphonies not only because all three were written in succession during the years between 1878 and 1893, but most of all because of the composer's near obsession with a 'Fate' theme that became a common unifying force in each of these works. It was an emotional time of turmoil in Tchaikovsky's life as he struggled to come to terms with personal issues in his life; his death coming only shortly after the last of these three 'fateful' works was premiered.

Unlike the Fourth Symphony, Tchaikovsky did not leave a specific set of program notes for his fifth symphony. But after his death, some notes were found among his sketches, which gave an indication regarding his ideas for the 'Fate' theme for this work:

"Introduction. Complete resignation before Fate, or, which is the same,

before the inscrutable predestination of Providence. Allegro (I) Murmurs, doubts, lamentations, reproaches against XXX. (II) Shall I throw myself into the embraces of Faith?"

This fate theme can be heard in each of the four movements, opening in the first movement quietly in the clarinets and closing with a triumphal march in the last movement. Similar in many ways to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Tchaikovsky represented the journey from struggle in its minor mode, to the ultimate victory march in major intonations. This symbolic overcoming of the difficulties Fate presents, is shouted from the rooftops as it were between the trumpets and horns to close this triumphant journey.

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (3rd doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, strings

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【訂正】2015年9月定期演奏会プログラム ヴェルディ：歌劇『運命の力』序曲の楽曲解説(p12左段4行目)に下記のとおり訂正がございます。

誤：サンクトペテルブルクのマリインスキー劇場からの委嘱 → 正：ロシア帝室上演委員会からの委嘱