

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony

Friday, November 24 – 7:30 pm

Saturday, November 25 – 8 pm

Alexander Prior, conductor

Robert Uchida, violin

Afterthoughts, Friday post-performance in the Main Lobby with Alexander Prior & Robert Uchida

Symphony Prelude, Saturday 7 pm in the Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with D.T. Baker

NIELSEN

An Imaginary Journey to the Faroe Islands – Rhapsodic Overture (10')*

The Calm Sea / The Land on Arrival / Dancing and Singing / Farewell / Calm at Sea

WAGNER

Götterdämmerung: Siegfried's Rhine Journey (arr. Humperdinck) (10')*

BERG

Violin Concerto (26')*

Andante – Allegro

Allegro – Adagio

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op.64 (46')*

Andante – Allegro con anima

Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza – Moderato con anima

Valse: Allegro moderato

Finale: Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

An Imaginary Journey to the Faroe Islands – Rhapsodic Overture

Carl Nielsen

(b. Nørre-Lyndelse, 1865 / d. Copenhagen, 1931)

First performed: November 27, 1927 in Copenhagen

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

The Faroe Islands are an archipelago between the Norwegian Sea and the North Atlantic, about halfway between Norway and Iceland, 320 kilometres north-northwest of Scotland. The islands are an autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark, and in 1927, the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen hosted a gala for a visiting delegation from the islands. To mark the event, Denmark's most celebrated composer, Carl Nielsen, was asked to write music for it. "It's just an occasional work, an example of workmanship if you like," Nielsen said in a newspaper interview before the gala, "but I have personally been happy working with it and I think it has come to sound very good."

Nielsen quotes several Faroese folk melodies in the work which, true to its name, *An Imaginary Journey to the Faroe Islands*, begins as an impression of a sea voyage. "I am no great lover of program music, but this time I think that the occasion called for a program for the journey," Nielsen explained. The work is in five contiguous sections, which Nielsen states as The Calm Sea, The Land on Arrival, Dancing and Singing, Farewell, Calm at Sea. It was one of Nielsen's final compositions.

Götterdämmerung: Siegfried's Rhine Journey (arr. Humperdinck)

Richard Wagner

(b. Leipzig, 1813 / d. Venice, 1883)

Opera first performed: August 17, 1876 in Bayreuth

Last ESO performance of this excerpt: January 2008

Götterdämmerung (The Twilight of the Gods) is the final opera in Richard Wagner's monumental cycle of four music dramas known as *The Ring of the Niebelung*. As it begins, the opera's protagonist, Siegfried, is preparing to leave his love, the valkyrie Brünnhilde, to set out on heroic exploits. She gives him her horse Grane, and he boards a raft, which takes him down the Rhine to his destiny. The stirring and suitably heroic music for Siegfried's Rhine Journey became a favourite excerpt in the concert hall, and was given a beginning and conclusion suitable for such a performance by one of the many composers for whom Wagner was a major influence. Engelbert Humperdinck, a Wagner acolyte best known for his opera *Hansel und Gretel*, prepared this concert-hall arrangement.

Violin Concerto

Alban Berg

(b. Vienna, 1885 / d. Vienna, 1935)

First performed: April 19, 1936 in Barcelona

Last ESO performance: March 2000

In September, conductor Alexander Prior led the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra in a performance of *Harmonielehre*, a work by John Adams named after the vast compositional treatise/textbook by the founder of Twelve-Tone, or Serial music, Arnold Schoenberg. In it, Adams sought to reconcile the philosophies of traditional diatonic music with Schoenberg's revolutionary concept of Serial Music. With his only *Violin Concerto*, composer Alban Berg sought to reconcile the two musics themselves.

Berg, along with Anton Webern, was the most famous of Schoenberg's disciples. His *Violin Concerto*, the last major work he completed before he died, uses elements of more familiar major/minor-key musical thought alongside Schoenberg's tone-row method. Violinist Louis Krasner commissioned the work, and Berg interrupted work on his influential opera *Lulu* to complete it – ultimately leaving the opera unfinished. In fact, it was the tragic death of 18-year-old Manon Gropius (the daughter of Gustav Mahler's widow Alma from her second marriage) that caused Berg to set the opera aside and concentrate on completing the concerto, which he dedicated "to the memory of an angel."

The work is in two main sections, each of which is subdivided in two sections. There are references to the music of Bach in the work, and to the famous motif "B-A-C-H" (with "B" being the German notation for B-flat, and "H" the notation for B) that Bach himself as well as other composers used. The work premiered at a music festival four months after Berg died. Krasner was the soloist, and Webern was supposed to have been the conductor – stories have it as either illness or sadness at the death of his colleague that Webern was not there. At any rate, at 11 pm the day before the premiere, another conductor present at the festival, Hermann Scherchen, was pressed into service. The concerto has become Berg's most often-performed orchestral work.

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op.64

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

(b. Kamsko-Votinsk, 1840 / d. St. Petersburg, 1893)

First performed: November 17, 1888 in St. Petersburg

Last ESO performance: April 2013

By 1888, Tchaikovsky had moved into his house at Klin, which would be home until the end of his life. Things were more settled for him now than they had been during the composition of his *Fourth Symphony*. In that work, Tchaikovsky's prevailing theme was of "cruel fate." In his letters written while he was composing *Symphony No. 5*, he speaks more of "providence" – a subtle change, perhaps, but to the perpetually overcast Tchaikovsky, an improvement.

The "providence" theme with which the symphony opens is a sombre, deliberate theme, marked by descending scales, but ending on a rising phrase of optimism. This leads to the body of the movement, an *Allegro con anima* which defies piecemeal interpretation. Indeed, aside from his stated idea of

providence, Tchaikovsky left precious few clues as to any subtext the work may contain. He did, however, suggest that the second movement is a love song. It does have the outline and mood of the *pas d'action* between Aurora and the Prince from his ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*, which he composed at about the same time. The horn is the first instrument to present the beautiful main theme, which is interrupted by brief storms intermittently.

The third movement is a waltz, though a delicate and sad one, with falling phrases and a sense of wistfulness. Contrast is provided by a unique, off-kilter solo for the bassoon, as well as a brief reappearance of the “providence” theme. The final movement, in sonata form, has a strong, chordal theme as its first main subject; the second is a much more flowing melody for the woodwinds. Once again, the “providence” idea emerges strongly, and it is this theme which is garbed in grand orchestral clothes for the finale. At first, Tchaikovsky was one of the harshest critics of his *Fifth Symphony* after its first performances – audiences seemed to take to it right away – but he, too, did eventually come around to it.

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