

**Beethoven & Tchaikovsky**

**Thursday, March 21 – 7:30 pm**

**Rune Bergmann**, conductor

**Stéphane Tétrault**, cello

**MENDELSSOHN**

*The Fair Melusina Overture, Op.32*

(9')\*

**TCHAIKOVSKY**

*Andante cantabile, Op.11*

(27')\*

**TCHAIKOVSKY**

*Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op.33*

(19')\*

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

**BEETHOVEN**

*Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op.36*

(32')\*

Adagio molto – Allegro molto

Larghetto

Scherzo

Allegro molto

program subject to change

\*indicates approximate performance duration

***The Fair Melusina Overture, Op.32***

**Felix Mendelssohn**

(b. Hamburg, 1809 / d. Leipzig, 1847)

First performed: 1834

Last ESO performance: November 2013

Like several subjects of European folklore, Melusina was a watersprite who fell in love with a mortal man (much like Dvořák's Rusalka). Condemned for one day a week to transform into an aquatic being, Melusina begs her love to leave her alone on that one day. Naturally, he cannot, and discovering the

truth dooms her to death. Drawn to the myth's idea, Felix Mendelssohn attended an opera based on the subject by a musical footnote of a composer, Constantin Kreutzer. Irked that the opera's sub-standard overture was encored, Mendelssohn determined to write a better one. The result, to be heard tonight, is not one of his best-known orchestral scores, but remained a personal favourite of the composer and his circle.

Rather than follow a narrative arc, Mendelssohn's *The Fair Melusina* depicts the moods and landscapes of the Melusina legend. In fact, its depiction of the bubbling stream from which the nymph emerges was colourful enough that Wagner – who famously derided Mendelssohn, no doubt due to his Jewish heritage – adapted it as the music for the Rhinemaidens in his Ring Cycle. It is the first theme heard in the overture, gently rising on the woodwinds out of rippling strings. Soon after, the violins present the urgent, proud theme of Melusina's lover, the count who could not resist discovering the tragic truth. A third idea (a love theme, perhaps) is also introduced, and the three musical threads build to a passionate climax, and a tender, dénouement that brings us back to the springs from which Melusina, and the overture, arrived.

### ***Andante cantabile, Op.11***

**Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

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

First performed in string quartet version: March 28, 1871 in Moscow

First performed in cello and orchestra version: February 1888 in Paris

Last ESO performance: January 2011

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky should have spent more of his time leaning out of windows. More than one of his pieces seem to have "origin stories" connected to him hearing a tune being played outside a window. The famous fanfare which opens his Capriccio italien is one example. Another is the tender and beautiful tune that has made his *Andante cantabile* so popular.

In early 1871, Tchaikovsky's friend Nicholas Rubinstein provided the composer with the opportunity to present a concert entirely consisting of Tchaikovsky's works. However, Rubinstein told his friend that funds were limited to the extent that a large orchestra was not available – so perhaps Tchaikovsky should program smaller works, including chamber pieces.

For whatever reason, this suggestion caused Tchaikovsky's mind to wander back two summers before that, in the village of Kamenka, where his sister lived and where Tchaikovsky frequently visited. Tchaikovsky heard a peasant singing a folk song, "Sidel Vanya," which Tchaikovsky liked well enough to notate. He had actually tried incorporating the tune into his ill-fated opera *Undine*, but instead, it ended up as the haunting and memorable melody of the second movement of a string quartet, published as Op.11, which premiered at the Rubinstein-funded concert.

Tchaikovsky's setting of the song has proved so popular that performances of his String Quartet, Op.11 far outnumber either of his other two string quartets, and Tchaikovsky himself re-arranged the movement for cello and string orchestra. It is this favourite arrangement we will hear this evening.

***Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op.33*** (arr. Fitzenhagen)

**Tchaikovsky** (see above)

First performed: November 30, 1877 in Moscow

Last ESO performance: April 2017

This is the ESO premiere of the Fitzenhagen arrangement

It was no surprise that Tchaikovsky, ever one to bear his soul in his music, should have been consumed with writing his *Fourth Symphony* during the turbulent time of his life at the beginning of 1877. He was very depressed, and his feelings of being oppressed by Fate are everywhere in the turbulent score of the *Fourth*. What is surprising is that at this same time, he composed a work of grace and conviviality, almost an homage to his musical hero, Mozart. Dedicated to his friend and fellow professor at the Moscow Conservatory Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, the *Variations on a Rococo Theme* is Tchaikovsky's only concertante work for cello.

The "rococo" was a French 18th-century artistic movement, so it was contemporaneous with Mozart, who lived from 1756 to 1791. The theme of the seven variations Tchaikovsky composed is an original one by the composer, but written in a rococo style. The orchestra is also one that Mozart would have recognized – the work is scored for pairs of woodwinds and horns, plus strings. After a brief orchestral introduction, the cello soloist presents the theme. The variations which follow exploit the full compass of the cello's register, and together, "they proved to be one of his brightest and most care-free major compositions," writes James Harding, "there is no trace of pique or disappointment from beginning to end."

***Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op.36***

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

(b. Bonn, 1770 / d. Vienna, 1827)

First performance: April 5, 1803 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: January 2010

*"Dear Beethoven! You are going to Vienna in fulfillment of a wish that has long been frustrated. Mozart's genius is still in mourning and weeps for the death of its pupil. It found a refuge with the inexhaustible Haydn but no occupation; through him it wishes to form a union with another. With the help of unceasing diligence you will receive the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn."*

Count Waldstein, November 1792

With the *Second Symphony*, begun as early as 1800 and premiered in 1803, Beethoven took several giant strides toward making the symphony the form for which he would set the new standard. Yet this was also a time of great personal strife for Beethoven. The buzzing in his ears he had been suffering with for years was now clearly becoming deafness. In 1802, in a letter addressed to his brothers Carl and Johann but which begins with the words “O ihr Menschen” (“Oh, you people”), Beethoven poured out his despair, his suffering, and his belief that his only salvation lay in his art. Known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, it is a powerful and moving document.

Yet the symphony he produced in this most dark of personal times is one with broad strokes of affirmation and humour. The slow introduction in the first movement bears the stamp of Haydn, but the woodwind colours are quite Beethovenian. The Allegro which follows begins, in the words of scholar Irving Kolodin, “hardly with a theme, certainly not a tune; it is more akin to a nuclear cell of energy with which much can and will be done.”

The second movement is marked *Larghetto* – a tempo indication Beethoven used rarely, for particularly lovely airs. This one has the stamp of Mozart in its melodic grace, but again, the colours and increasingly chromatic harmonies that mark Beethoven’s mature sound palette bubble up not infrequently in this beautiful, graceful passage.

Much is made of the third movement, as here, Beethoven finally dispenses with any pretense of a Haydn-esque Menuet movement, and for the first time, Beethoven uses the word *Scherzo*, literally the Italian for “joke.” Its bizarre and sudden shifts in dynamic, in tempo, in orchestral textures, are a declamatory announcement that the Beethoven symphony as a genre has arrived. That feeling spreads into the final movement, where rich sonorities stand alongside rough and tumble humour. There are elements here that we will find in other Beethoven symphonies to come. The youthful Beethoven of the works of Bonn is now prepared to take the place for which Count Waldstein and all the others knew he was destined all those years ago.

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