

Tchaikovsky & Dvořák

Saturday, November 16 – 8 pm

Michael Stern, conductor

Bella Hristova, violin

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

CLYNE

This Midnight Hour

(12')*

TCHAIKOVSKY

Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.35

(35')*

Allegro moderato

Canzonetta: Andante

Finale: Allegro vivacissimo

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

DVOŘÁK

Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op.70

(36')*

Allegro maestoso

Poco adagio

Scherzo: Vivace

Finale: Allegro

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

For a program note on **Dvořák's Symphony No. 7**, please see page _.

This Midnight Hour

Anna Clyne

(b. London, 1980)

First performed: November 13, 2015 in Paris

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

program note by the composer:

The opening to *This Midnight Hour* is inspired by the character and power of the lower strings of L'Orchestre national d'Île de France. From here, it draws inspiration from two poems. Whilst it is not intended to depict a specific narrative, my intention is that it will evoke a visual journey for the listener.

iLa musica;
-mujer desnuda,
corriendo loca por la noche pura! -
—Juan Ramón Jiménez

Harmonie du soir

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Le violon frémit comme un coeur qu'on afflige;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.

Le violon frémit comme un coeur qu'on afflige,
Un coeur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.

Un coeur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige!
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige...
Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor! —Charles Baudelaire

Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.35

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

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

First performed: December 4, 1881 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: May 2017

Tchaikovsky began working on his only violin concerto as a way of getting over one of the darkest chapters of his life: his marriage. In a place and time where homosexuality was a crime, Tchaikovsky deluded himself into thinking he could somehow make his marriage work. But he eventually fled the relationship in October, 1877, and went on an extended trip to Switzerland, Italy and Austria. It was during this trip that much of the concerto was written. The work was intended to be premiered by and dedicated to the celebrated soloist Leopold Auer, but he refused, deeming the work Tchaikovsky produced “unplayable.”

Instead, Adolf Brodsky performed the work for the first time. Initial reaction ranged from cool to downright hostile. There is a (in)famous critique by Eduard Hanslick, who wrote, “The violin is no longer played. It is yanked about. It is torn asunder. It is beaten black and blue,” which seemed to bode ill for the work. But soon, even Auer had taken up the piece, and it is now regarded as one of the pinnacles of the violin repertoire.

An orchestral crescendo and a brief passage for the solo instrument precede the first theme of the opening movement, presented by the violinist. After this material is developed, the soloist also introduces the second theme. By contrast, this theme is a long, extremely difficult passage for solo violin alone. The orchestra joins in for a coda full of verve and flash. Don’t be fooled by the dramatic, drawn-out ending of this movement, which lasts close to 20 minutes. The work is not done, so don’t leave just yet.

The second movement is a Canzonetta, and was in fact the second slow movement Tchaikovsky wrote for this concerto (he scrapped the original). The woodwinds begin it, but again the soloist states the principal first theme – a dreamy, melancholy air. A second subject is introduced, and the first theme returns at the movement’s conclusion.

With virtually no pause, the final movement suddenly bursts upon us. Its two principal themes are reminiscent of Russian gypsy melodies and passion. This section is full of excitement, with an invigorating layer of tension bubbling just beneath the surface.

Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op.70

Antonín Dvořák

(b. Nelahozeves, 1841 / d. Prague, 1904)

First performed: April 22, 1885 in London

Last ESO performance: March 2008

Two main sparks lit Antonín Dvořák’s inspiration for composing his *Seventh Symphony*. The first was the wildly enthusiastic reception accorded his *Stabat mater* when it was presented in England in 1883, prompting invitations extended to Dvořák to return there. It was for a visit after being made an

honorary member of the Philharmonic Society of London that Dvořák wished to have a new symphony ready for the occasion.

The other spark was ignited when Dvořák first heard the *Symphony in F Major* (No. 3), composed by his friend and mentor Johannes Brahms. It left a powerful effect on Dvořák, as well as giving him an artistic standard to aim for. "Everywhere I go," he wrote his friend Antonín Rus, "I think of nothing else but my work, which must be such as to shake the world, and with God's help it will be so."

It seems to have worked. The symphony was received rapturously at its premiere, and is still regarded by many as Dvořák's finest symphony. Its D minor home key lends it an air of serious purpose, beautiful as the music is. There is an elusive mysteriousness to the opening: restless and searching until the orchestral forces coalesce into a rolling main theme which, having finally announced itself, withdraws to make way for the more bucolic second theme, heard first in the woodwinds. The Development cleverly intertwines the two ideas, although the movement's climax brings back the broader main theme. The coda echoes the uncertain yearning of the opening – quiet and expectant.

The slow movement begins organically from this hushed conclusion. Woodwinds, again, take the lead in music that flows unhurried and across a varied landscape. Dvořák actually revised this movement following its London premiere, cutting a substantial number of bars until its proportions aligned with the work as a whole. "Not a superfluous note," he assured his publisher.

The Scherzo brims with Dvořák's Bohemian nature – the main song has the rhythmic elements of a Slavonic dance – more town than country, perhaps. By contrast, the Trio section – also ushered in on the woodwinds – has more of the woods and meadows in its swirling colours. The final movement begins, as the opening movement does, in an air of mystery, out of which emerges a ceremonial theme, punctured by timpani and fraught with turbulence. A counter-subject seems to emerge out of material from this opening, altering the mood and rhythm. Its alliance to the main theme allows for a clever counterpoint as the Development continues, and the conclusion is, if not radiantly happy or joyous, strong and resolute.

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