

**Tchaikovsky & Bernstein**

**Sunday, January 19 – 2 pm**

**Alexander Prior**, conductor

**Cosette Justo Valdés**, conductor

**Alice Lee**, violin (2017 Shean Competition Laureate)

**Rafael Hoekman**, cello

Sunday Prelude, 1:15 pm Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with D.T. Baker

Sunday Encore, post-performance Main Lobby with Alexander Prior, Cosette Justo Valdés, Alice Lee & Rafael Hoekman

**LIZÉE**

**Zeiss After Dark**

(2')\*

**HANSON**

***Merry Mount: Suite***

(18')\*

Overture

Children's Dance

Love Duet

Prelude to Act II and Maypole Dances

**PROKOFIEV**

***Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op.63***

(27')\*

Allegro moderato

Andante assai

Allegro, ben marcato

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

**TCHAIKOVSKY**

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

(8')\*

**TCHAIKOVSKY**

***Pezzo capriccioso in B minor, Op.62***

(7')\*

**BERNSTEIN**

***West Side Story: Symphonic Dances***

(22')\*

program subject to change

\*indicates approximate performance duration

### ***Zeiss After Dark***

**Nicole Lizée**

(b. Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan, 1973)

First performed: February 23, 2017 in Ottawa

Last ESO performance: September 2018

Nicole Lizée received her Masters of Music from Montréal's McGill University in 2001. Her eclectic oeuvre is informed by her fascination with everything from orchestras to karaoke tapes. She has composed for unusual instrumental combinations which have included, among other oddities, the Atari 2600 game console, and she is fascinated by the glitches made by outmoded and well-worn technology. She was awarded the 2017 SOCAN Jan V. Matejcek Award, as well as the 2013 Canada Council Jules Léger Prize.

Of her work *Zeiss After Dark*, the composer writes:

Stanley Kubrick and cinematographer John Alcott filmed the unprecedented "candlelight scene" in *Barry Lyndon* using 3-wick candles as the only light source. The resulting scene was unlike any other in cinema history for its look - gauzy and akin to a moving oil painting. The creativity and technical ingenuity required to capture this decidedly organic effect was considerable. Cameras with custom mounted Zeiss lenses designed for NASA were Kubrick's solution to an almost insurmountable problem of light.

In writing this piece I imaged a sonic equivalent - a musical work that brings sound into focus through techniques that emulate the conditions involved in ultra lowlight - glow, flicker, bokeh - reimagined for orchestra.

### ***Merry Mount Suite***

**Howard Hanson**

(b. Wahoo, Nebraska, 1896 / d. Rochester, New York, 1981)

First (concert) performance of the opera: May 20, 1933 in Ann Arbor, Michigan

First staged performance: February 10, 1934 in New York

This is the ESO premiere of the suite

Howard Hanson is the quintessential American composer that practically no one outside the United States has heard of. A mid 20 century composer contemporary with Copland and Barber, Hanson was director of the Eastman School of Music for 40 years, and was active as a conductor as well as a prolific

composer. Like many American composers with a strong nationalist streak, Hanson wanted to write a quintessential American opera, and many thought he had succeeded with *Merry Mount*, first performed at The Met in New York. Yet it has not been able to hold the stage, despite its many strong attributes, including Hanson's exceptional orchestral score.

The story of the tragic opera is based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story *The Maypole of Merry Mount*, a tale of the conflict in the early days of white settlement in America between the Puritans and the more hedonistic Cavalier colonists. Hanson himself extracted the instrumental works used for the suite, which begins with the opera's overture, its modal harmonies depicting the Puritan hymn style. The Children's Dance accompanies part of the dancing 'round the Maypole of Hawthorne's title, while the Love Duet is ironically titled, depicting as it does the illicit and improper lust that the Puritan pastor has for Marigold Sandys, a woman who appears to be the incarnation of his salacious dreams. The final movement includes a Maypole dance based on the morris dances of English custom, which the Cavaliers enact to the horror of the Puritans.

### ***Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op.63***

**Sergei Prokofiev**

(b. Sontsovka, 1891 / d. Moscow, 1953)

First performed: December 1, 1935 in Madrid

Last ESO performance: Symphony Under the Sky 2010

Prokofiev only wrote two violin concertos, and they are as different from each other as they could possibly be and still have come from the same hand. His first was written in 1917, when he was 26, and still the brash *enfant terrible* who embraced the "age of steel" modernism of the day. He was anxious to make his mark on the world, but after attempting to establish himself, first in Europe and then in the United States, he returned, chastened, to his home – which was now the Soviet Union.

So to earn his living safely and in comfort, Prokofiev the rebel became much more of a conformist, and the biting edge of the first concerto became broadly-conceived, sweeping themes in the second. The demands on the soloist, however, are extraordinary. Prokofiev's friend, the fine Belgian violinist Robert Soetens, premiered the work in December 1935.

The first movement is built around two large themes, quite Russian in flavour. The orchestral accompaniment to the soloist in the lyrical second movement is unique, almost as if the solo violin is singing to a bare, guitar-like backdrop. The flaring, at times violently-tinged third movement is a vigorous Russian dance, putting the soloist through some dashing paces before the finish.

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

**Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

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

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

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

Last ESO performance: March 2019

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.

### ***Pezzo capriccioso*, Op.62**

**Tchaikovsky** (see above)

First performed: November 25, 1889 in Moscow

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

For all that it is titled *Pezzo capriccioso* (“capricious piece”), Tchaikovsky’s brief work for cello and orchestra is a rather serious, though lovely, work. But it is introspective with good reason. In the late spring of 1887, Tchaikovsky spent time with his friend Nikolai Kondratiev, who was dying of syphilis. Naturally, it was an emotionally draining time for the composer, who took a few days of much-needed rest in Paris. While there, he sketched out this work for his friend, the cellist Anatoly Brandukov.

Somberly cast in B minor, the work alternates an intense song, which takes up the bulk of the piece, with rapid, high-string passages for the cello. Tchaikovsky sought Brandukov’s assistance with some of the cello parts, and the work was first performed with piano accompaniment on February 28, 1888,

despite its original creation as an orchestral work. That version would not be heard until nearly two years later.

### ***West Side Story: Symphonic Dances***

**Leonard Bernstein**

(b. Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1918 / d. New York, 1990)

First performed: The Broadway musical premiered on September 2, 1957 in New York

The Symphonic Dances were first performed February 13, 1961 in New York

The ESO last performed the work three days ago in the Robbins Lighter Classics series

*West Side Story* was a watershed in American musical theatre. Written originally for the Broadway stage, it re-cast the story of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to the ghetto streets of New York, the warring families replaced by rival gangs. It offered an opportunity for a talented young composer/lyricist to get a major credit as lyricist for the show – Stephen Sondheim. And it showed that a legitimate classical composer could write effectively and aptly for the Broadway stage – Leonard Bernstein. The Broadway show, which opened in 1957, was a hit, and won six Tonys. The 1961 film won ten Oscars. Not a single Tony, or Oscar, went to Bernstein or Sondheim.

The same year the movie came out, Bernstein fashioned a work for the concert stage from the music – though it would not be heard for another three years. However, **Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*** is no mere “greatest hits” pastiche. Bernstein wanted to create something from the music that would stand alone as a fully integrated, cohesive piece that would work even outside of the context of the musical. So while there are many tunes one might know from the classic score, there is a cohesion and energy unique to this piece, which ends with the whispered theme from “Somewhere.”

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