



NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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LACOMBE & GLUZMAN

A recurring theme through the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra's new season is music by composers who were also conductors. Music Director Jacques Lacombe devotes the first half of this weekend's program to that concept. The two works in question—Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict* Overture and Bernstein's *Serenade for Violin and Orchestra*—are further unified in that literature inspired both pieces. The program closes with Tchaikovsky's powerful, turbulent Fourth Symphony—a hugely popular work that needs little introduction.

BERLIOZ: *Beatrice and Benedict* Overture

Hector Berlioz

Born: December 11, 1803, in La-Côte-Saint-André, Isère, France

Died: March 8, 1869, in Paris, France

Composed: 1860–62

Premiered: August 9, 1862, in Baden-Baden, Germany

First NJSO performance: 1982–83 season; Thomas Michalak conducted.

Duration: 8 minutes

We open with the *Beatrice and Benedict* Overture by Hector Berlioz, who struggled through much of his career to achieve success on the operatic stage. Although *Beatrice and Benedict* is known to relatively few opera buffs, it contains some of Berlioz's most effervescent music. "Berlioz was one of the first truly modern composer/conductors," observes Lacombe. "He wrote about conducting, as well as about orchestration. He was tremendously influential on late 19th- and early 20th-century composers. I almost think of him as the father of the modern orchestra."

Berlioz based the opera on Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, writing his own French libretto. It was one of Berlioz's last works, and the last major composition to be premiered during his lifetime. "The overture is fresh and youthful, despite the fact that it is so late [in his

life],” observes Lacombe. “There is a lightness in the orchestration that has a very modern flavor.” Berlioz captures the witty repartee of Shakespeare’s delightful comedy. He brings to this overture the sparkle and excitement we associate with his earlier works, tempered by the wisdom of age and the accomplished hand of an orchestral master.

Instrumentation: piccolo, flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, cornet, three trombones, timpani and strings.

BERNSTEIN: Serenade for Violin and Orchestra (after Plato’s *Symposium*)

Leonard Bernstein

Born: August 25, 1918, in Lawrence, Massachusetts

Died: October 14, 1990, in New York, New York

Composed: between autumn 1953 and summer 1954

Premiered: September 12, 1954, in Venice. Isaac Stern was the soloist; the composer conducted the Israel Philharmonic.

First NJSO performance: 1999-2000 season; Marco Parisotto conducted soloist Daniel Heifetz.

Duration: 31 minutes

Leonard Bernstein is inarguably one of the greatest and most prominent composer/conductors of the 20th century. His *Serenade for Violin and Orchestra* uses Plato’s *Symposium* for its springboard, taking quite a different approach to literature than Berlioz’s work. Each movement of Bernstein’s piece is named for one of the speakers in Plato’s dialogue. “Bernstein remains an icon of 20th-century musicians,” Lacombe points out. “He drew on so many different sources for his music. Here he was inspired by ancient literature. Plato’s discourse addresses the meaning of life and love. Bernstein’s music is both exploration and celebration of the meaning of love and art in our lives.”

The composer considered this to be one of his best pieces, and critics have praised the *Serenade* for its unity, coherence, and musical logic. The slow movement (IV – *Agathon*) contains some of the loveliest, most emotionally pregnant music Bernstein ever composed. The finale is a superb fusion of jazz elements with traditional folk dance rhythms—as well as virtuosic writing for percussion. Interestingly, Bernstein’s unusual orchestration omits winds and brass.

Our soloist is the brilliant Israeli violinist Vadim Gluzman, who is a great NJSO favorite. “I worked with Vadim two seasons ago on the Tchaikovsky concerto,” says Lacombe. “It’s so easy

for us to make music together. We are very much in tune; there is a strong artistic communication.”

Instrumentation: harp, percussion (snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, chimes, triangle, Chinese blocks, tambourine, xylophone and glockenspiel), strings and solo violin.

TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36

Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky

Born: May 7, 1840, in Votkinsk, Russia

Died: November 6, 1893, in St. Petersburg, Russia

Composed: 1876–78

Premiered: February 22, 1878, in Moscow. Nikolai Rubinstein conducted.

First NJSO performance: 1932-33 season; Rene Pollain conducted.

Duration: 44 minutes

Following intermission, Lacombe and the NJSO turn to Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, known as the “Fate” symphony. “The program thus makes an interesting journey; we go from comedy via philosophy to tragedy,” the music director observes. Though Tchaikovsky was not inspired by a specific literary tragedy, he outlined a program for this powerful symphony that addresses struggle and internal turmoil.

Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony is inextricably entwined with the emotional havoc in his life during the year 1877. That was the year he began his remarkable correspondence with Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, the wealthy patron who was to provide both emotional sustenance (via her letters) and financial security to the composer for more than a decade. 1877 was also the year that Antonina Milyukova, a former student of Tchaikovsky’s, wrote to him with declarations of love and threats of suicide, inexplicably prompting him to propose to her, marry her and leave her within a matter of months. Desperate for emotional stability and wrestling with the torment of his homosexuality, Tchaikovsky sought refuge in the country, in his correspondence and in composing.

Though the Fourth Symphony was begun before the abortive marriage, its history cannot be separated from the anguish of those few unfortunate summer months. More and more, Tchaikovsky turned to von Meck for spiritual guidance, as confidant and as muse. The F minor symphony was the first work he dedicated to her, and he called it “*our* symphony” in his letters

to her.

The “fate” motive—the powerful brass fanfare at the start—recurs as a musical unifier. An elegant oboe solo dominates the slow movement, and the scherzo features several section solos: first plucked strings, followed by a woodwind choir and then all brass.

Over the course of four movements, we experience a gradual progression to a more favorable state of mind. By the time we reach the finale, Tchaikovsky has transformed his message into a blaze of optimism. The turbulent symphony resolves on a note of triumph that surely reflects the composer’s renewed sense of focus and hope for the future. Every moment of the journey is a pleasure.

Instrumentation: woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbals, bass drum and strings.