Santa Rosa Symphony

Thank you for attending today's performance

Tchaikovsky & Prokofiev

November 9, 10 & 11, 2024

Weill Hall, Green Music Center

Francesco Lecce-Chong, conductor

Jon Kimura Parker, piano

2024-2025 Classical Concert Series underwritten by

Anderman Family Foundation

Running time is approximately 120 minutes with intermission

Today’s Program

VALERIE COLEMAN

“Seven O’Clock Shout” for Orchestra

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 23

INTERMISSION

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Symphony from “Romeo and Juliet”

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PROGRAM NOTES

VALERIE COLEMAN

"Seven O'Clock Shout" for Orchestra

COMPOSER: born 1970, Louisville, KY

WORK COMPOSED: Commissioned by and dedicated to the Philadelphia Orchestra and Maestro Yannick Nézet-Séguin

WORLD PREMIERE: Yannick Nézet-Séguin led the Philadelphia Orchestra in a virtual performance on July 6, 2020.

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, 2 flutes, oboe, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, tuba, timpani, bass drum, claves, cowbell, crash cymbals, marimba, suspended cymbal, vibraphone, whistle, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 5.5 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Valerie Coleman is an iconic artist who continues to pave her own unique path as a composer, Grammy-nominated flutist, and entrepreneur. Highlighted as one of the "Top 35 Women Composers" by "The Washington Post," she was named Performance Today's 2020 "Classical Woman of the Year," an

honor bestowed to an individual who has made a significant contribution to classical music as a performer, composer, or educator. More recently, Coleman has focused on composition; her music has garnered numerous awards, commissions, and other honors.

In the spring of 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown, the Philadelphia Orchestra commissioned Coleman to write a work for their gala concert, which would be presented and performed virtually. Coleman’s relationship with the Philadelphia Orchestra dates back to 2019 when she composed “UMOJA: Anthem of Unity” for them. In the years since its premiere, “UMOJA” has become one of Coleman’s most frequently performed works.

When Coleman accepted the new commission, she was given only two weeks to complete it. Fortunately, Coleman’s prior familiarity with the orchestra and its individual players provided unique insights that shaped her composition. “The Philadelphia Orchestra to me is not just a large ensemble, but it also [has] the intimacy and ESP of a chamber ensemble,” she explains. “They are a big ensemble that moves nimbly, with such a beautiful sound that is

uniquely warm and Philadelphian." As she worked on "Seven O'Clock Shout," Coleman kept that sound in mind.

"Seven O'Clock Shout is an anthem inspired by the tireless frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the heartwarming ritual of evening serenades that brings people together amidst isolation to celebrate life and the sacrifices of heroes. The work begins with a distant and solitary solo between two trumpets in fanfare fashion to commemorate the isolation forced upon humankind and the need to reach out to one another. The fanfare blossoms into a lushly dense landscape of nature, symbolizing both the caregiving acts of nurses and doctors as they try to save lives while nature is transforming and healing herself during a time of self-isolation.

"It was suggested that a short work for a debut by multi-track recording could account for the ensemble performing together as if they were in the same room. One of the devices used to address this is the usage of Ostinato, which is a rhythmic motif that repeats itself to generate forward motion and, in this case, groove. The ostinato patterns here are laid down by the bass section, allowing the English horn and strings to float over it, gradually

building up to that moment at 7pm, when cheers, claps, clangings of pots and pans, and shouts ring through the air of cities around the world! The trumpets drive an infectious rhythm, layered with a traditional “son” clave rhythm, while solo trombone boldly rings out an anthem within a traditional African call and response style [son is a style of music that emerged in late 19th-century Cuba]. The entire orchestra ‘shouts’ back in response, and the entire ensemble rallies into an anthem that embodies the struggles and triumph of humanity. The work ends in a proud anthem moment where we all come together with grateful hearts to acknowledge that we have survived yet another day.”

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 23

COMPOSER: born May 7, 1840, Kamsko-Votinsk, Viatka province, Russia; died November 6, 1893, St. Petersburg

WORK COMPOSED: Tchaikovsky began composing his first piano concerto in November 1874 and finished it in February 1875. He revised it in the summer of 1879 and again in December 1888; this final revision is the one usually performed. Tchaikovsky originally dedicated the concerto to his mentor Nicolai Rubenstein,

but after Rubenstein rejected the work as unplayable, Tchaikovsky removed his mentor's name from the manuscript and dedicated it to pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow.

WORLD PREMIERE: Hans von Bülow premiered the concerto at Boston's Music Hall on October 25, 1875.

INSTRUMENTATION: solo piano, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings.

ESTIMATED DURATION: 33 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The first measures of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 have assumed an identity all their own, distinct from the remainder of the work. Many people recognize the four-note descending horn theme and the iconic crashing chords of the pianist's first entrance without knowing the work as a whole. (Interestingly, this signature introduction to the Piano Concerto No. 1 is just that, an introduction; after approximately 100 measures it disappears and never returns.) These opening bars have also become part of popular culture, as the theme to Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre radio programs; in the 1971 cult film "Harold and Maude;" as a favorite of Liberace's; and in a Monty Python sketch.

Although the rest of the concerto is compelling, that was not the initial opinion of Tchaikovsky's friend and mentor, Nikolai Rubenstein. Rubenstein, the director of the Moscow Conservatory, had previously premiered many of Tchaikovsky's works, including "Romeo and Juliet." Tchaikovsky considered Rubenstein "the greatest pianist in Moscow," and wanted Rubenstein's help regarding the technical aspects of the solo piano part. In a letter to his patron Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky described his now-infamous meeting with Rubenstein on Christmas Eve, 1874: "I played the first movement. Not a single word, not a single comment!" After Tchaikovsky finished, as he explained to Mme. von Meck, "A torrent poured from Nikolai Gregorievich's mouth … My concerto, it turned out, was worthless and unplayable – passages so fragmented, so clumsy, so badly written as to be beyond rescue – the music itself was bad, vulgar – only two or three pages were worth preserving – the rest must be thrown out or completely rewritten."

It is true that this concerto is awkwardly constructed in places with some abrupt musical transitions. The writing for the soloist is often exceedingly difficult because Tchaikovsky was not a pianist and

did not possess a player's familiarity with the instrument. However, Rubenstein's excessively negative reaction is nonetheless puzzling.

After the majestic introduction, which anticipates the harmonic language of the following movements, the Andante non troppo continues with a theme Tchaikovsky borrowed from a Ukrainian folk song. Woodwinds introduce a gentler second theme, later echoed by the piano. The movement ends with a huge cadenza featuring a display of virtuoso solo fireworks.

In the Andantino semplice, Tchaikovsky also features a borrowed melody, "Il faut s'amuser, danser et rire" (You must enjoy yourself by dancing and laughing) from the French cabaret. Tchaikovsky likely meant this tune as a wistful tribute to the soprano Désirée Artôt with whom he had been in love a few years previously. (In another musical compliment, Tchaikovsky used the letters of her name as the opening notes of a melody from the first movement).

The galloping theme of the Allegro con fuoco, another Ukrainian folk song, suggests a troika of horses racing over the steppes. A

rhapsodic string melody recalls the lush texture of the introduction. The two melodies alternate and overlap, dancing toward a monumental coda.

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Symphony from “Romeo and Juliet”

COMPOSER: born April 23, 1891, Sontsovka, Bakhmutsk region, Yekaterinoslav district, Ukraine; died March 5, 1953, Moscow

WORK COMPOSED: “Romeo and Juliet” was originally commissioned by the Kirov Ballet in 1934; Prokofiev completed it for the Moscow Ballet in 1935-6.

WORLD PREMIERE: The first suite premiered in Moscow on November 24, 1936, and the second had its first performance in Leningrad on April 15, 1937.

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, tenor saxophone, 4 horns, cornet, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bamboo wind chimes, bass drum, bells, cymbals, maracas, snare drum, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, celeste, piano, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 35 minutes

Sergei Prokofiev's score for a ballet featuring Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers is some of the most evocative music associated with the story of "Romeo and Juliet." The story of Prokofiev's efforts to complete the task was equally fraught, and his resulting music caused great controversy. Originally commissioned by the Kirov Ballet in 1934, Prokofiev's score was ultimately rejected by the Kirov's artistic director as "undanceable."

Problems began with Prokofiev's original storyline, which dared to feature a happy ending in which Romeo finds Juliet alive. Prokofiev justified this shocking reversal with the practical explanation that dead characters cannot dance, but pressure from critics and ballet administrators, as well as the observation that Prokofiev's music was essentially tragic in nature, eventually persuaded the composer to retain Shakespeare's ending. Prokofiev's orchestration also caused problems for the dancers, who complained that they were unable to hear it from the stage. Although Prokofiev grumbled to the dancers, "You want drums, not music," he eventually complied with their request for a larger sound.

Because Prokofiev had such trouble getting the ballet "Romeo and Juliet produced," he decided to arrange orchestral suites of music, each containing seven movements. Suites Nos. 1 and 2 were arranged in 1936; Prokofiev created a third ten years later. In 1938, Prokofiev conducted two of the suites while touring Europe and the United States. As orchestral pieces, Prokofiev's music was well received; one New York critic stated, "Prokofiev has written music for the masses and at the same time has attained extraordinary nobility."

Of his music, Prokofiev said, "I have taken special pains to achieve a simplicity which will, I hope, reach the hearts of all listeners." Tonight's selections, chosen by Maestro Lecce-Chong, drawn from Suites 1 and 2, reflect the story's narrative arc. The episodic nature of the music effectively captures the essence of both characters and plot: the Ballroom Dance section introduces the lovers to one another; the splendid pomp of the minuet sounds as guests arrive at the Capulets' masked ball, and is followed by playful marching music as the masked dancers mill about. The brassy foreboding of The Montagues and Capulets expresses the deep-rooted enmity of the two families.

Prokofiev captures the tender intimacy of the young lovers on the balcony; this mood abruptly shatters amid the frantic chaos of the moments leading to Tybalt's violent death. In the final section, the strings' heartbreaking intensity and echoes of ominous brasses, periodically interrupted by fragments of the balcony love theme, accompany the grieving Romeo to Juliet's grave.

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Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years, and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR's "Performance Today," (now heard on American Public Media).

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