

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2014-2015 Subscription Series

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MANFRED HONECK, CONDUCTOR

PIOTR ILYICH
TCHAIKOVSKY

Suite from *Swan Lake*, Opus 20
Dance with Goblets
Scene
Entrance and Waltz of the Special Guests
Scene
Pas de deux
Waltz
Pas de six
Neapolitan Dance
Hungarian Dance: Csárdás
Dance of the Swans
Spanish Dance
Finale

Intermission

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Suite from *Romeo and Juliet*, Opus 64
The Duke's Command
Dance of the Knights
Juliet's Room
The Young Girl Juliet
Dance
The Street Awakens
Morning Dance
The Duel: Tybalt and Mercutio Fight
The Death of Mercutio
Romeo Decides to Avenge Mercutio
Act II Finale
Aubade (Morning Serenade)
The Duke's Command
Juliet's Funeral
The Death of Juliet

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Born 7 May 1840 in Votkinsk, Russia; died 6 November 1893 in St. Petersburg.

Suite from *Swan Lake*, Opus 20 (1875-1876)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Moscow, 4 March 1877; Bolshoi Theater; Stepan Ryabov, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 6 March 1903; Carnegie Music Hall; Victor Herbert, conductor

INSTRUMENTATION: woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

During the years after Tchaikovsky took up his faculty position at the Moscow Conservatory in 1866, he fell in with a group of young men who unblushingly called themselves the Artistic Circle of Moscow, an informal tavern society whose members met regularly to impress each other with their theories of art and their capacity for alcohol. Among the Artistic Circle were Vladimir Begichev, stage manager of the Bolshoi Ballet, and Vasily Geltser, one of that company's finest dancers. Early in 1875, they conceived a new ballet for which their companion, Piotr Tchaikovsky, then the author of two symphonies, the tone poem *Romeo and Juliet* and a brand new Piano Concerto, would provide the music. Tchaikovsky liked the idea. He was drawn to the stage throughout his life, and had already undertaken four operas (though the first two, *The Voyevoda* and *Undine*, he largely destroyed except for some fragments plundered for later works, including the proposed ballet) and, in 1870, a ballet on the story of Cinderella, of which nothing more is known than it never got beyond a few discarded sketches. During a summer vacation in 1871 at the home in Kamenka of his sister, Alexandra, he even created a family ballet for her children. ("He invented the steps and the pirouettes, and he danced them himself, showing the performers what he required of them," wrote Alexandra's son, Yuri. "At such moments Uncle Piotr, red in the face, wet with perspiration as he sang the tune, presented a pretty amusing sight.") Though the music and scenario of this parlor-room production have not survived, it is likely that some of its action and music were incorporated into the 1875 ballet. Begichev, on behalf of the directors of the Imperial Theaters of Moscow, offered Tchaikovsky 800 rubles to write the music; the libretto, based on German legend and Russian supernatural tales, was devised by Begichev, Geltser and the composer; and the title for the new work was borrowed from the children's summer ballet — *Swan Lake*. Tchaikovsky agreed to start the score as soon as he finished his Third Symphony during the summer break from his Conservatory classes.

Little is known about the composition of *Swan Lake*, though Tchaikovsky admitted to Rimsky-Korsakov that he did it "partly for the sake of the money, which I need, and partly because I wanted to try myself in this kind of music." Tchaikovsky began the music in August 1875, and his brother Modeste recorded in his biography of Piotr that the first two acts were sketched in a fortnight. The rest of the score came more slowly, however, hampered by Tchaikovsky's classroom duties, and was not completed until the following April. Almost a full year passed before *Swan Lake* was staged. The choreography for the premiere (on March 4, 1877 at the Moscow Bolshoi Theater), a benefit for the ballerina Pelageya Karpakova, who took the role of Odette, was created by the company's dance master, Julius Reisinger, "whose limitations as a choreographer seem to have been almost boundless," according to Tchaikovsky's biographer David Brown. Stepan Ryabov, whom Modeste criticized as a "semi-amateur" and incapable of grasping the symphonic nature of his brother's score, was assigned to prepare the orchestra. Well-worn sets and costumes from other Bolshoi ballet and opera productions were pressed into service for the premiere. Though essentially a fine company, the Bolshoi dancers were apparently uninspired by Tchaikovsky's music, some of which they considered "undanceable," and could not overcome a decided indifference in the performance. Given the threadbare decor, the routine orchestral playing and the unimaginative choreography (Edwin Evans said the premiere was "more or less pitchforked onto the stage"), it is small wonder that *Swan Lake* made little impression on the first-night audience and critics, who were also put off by such a bold, symphonic score after years of listening

to the feather-weight, tinkly ballet music of Pugni, Minkus, Drigo and Gerber. Substitutions had already been made in the score for the premiere (Karpakova wanted to show her fans some of their familiar favorites), and further changes continued to be allowed until hardly more than half of Tchaikovsky's original music remained. *Swan Lake* stayed in the Bolshoi repertory until the costumes fell apart in 1883, and, except for a staging in Prague of Act II in 1888, when Tchaikovsky met Dvořák, the ballet was not seen again during its composer's lifetime.

Mixed with the grief following Tchaikovsky's death in 1893 was a strong curiosity about his less familiar works. Ivan Vsevolozhsky, director of St. Petersburg's Maryinsky Theater, and the choreographer Marius Petipa, who had collaborated with Tchaikovsky in creating the successful *Sleeping Beauty* and *Nutcracker* ballets, determined to revive the full, original version of *Swan Lake*. They gave Act II alone as part of a memorial concert in St. Petersburg on February 29, 1894, and staged the full ballet on January 27th of the following year. The lovingly prepared production created a sensation, and *Swan Lake* has ever since been one of the most popular of all evening-length ballets.

Act I of *Swan Lake* is a festival celebrating the coming of age of Prince Siegfried the following day, when he must choose a bride. Attracted by a flight of swans over the castle, Siegfried and his friends form a hunting party and leave the festivity. At the beginning of Act II, Siegfried arrives at the lake to see the swans, led by Odette, the Swan Queen, glide across the surface. Just as Siegfried is about to unleash his crossbow, Odette appears to him not in avian form but as a beautiful princess. She tells him that she and the other swan-maidens live under a curse by the evil magician Rothbart that lets them take human shape just from midnight to dawn. The spell can be broken, she says, only by one who promises to love her and no other. Though Rothbart vows to undo them both, Siegfried promises his love to Odette. Act III is again set in the castle. Amid the birthday celebration, Rothbart, in disguise, suddenly enters with his daughter, Odile, who appears to Siegfried in the exact image of Odette. Odette, hovering at the window, tries to warn Siegfried of the deception, but to no avail. Siegfried asks for Odile's hand in marriage. Rothbart and Odile exult in their vile triumph. Siegfried realizes he has been trapped. Odette seems doomed. In Act IV, Odette returns to the lake, prepared to kill herself. The other maidens urge her to wait for the Prince. He appears and again vows his love to her, but she knows that Rothbart's power can only be broken by death. She throws herself from the parapet of a lakeside fortress. Siegfried, his life meaningless without her, follows. Rothbart's enchantment is destroyed by the power of love. At the final curtain, Odette and Siegfried are seen sailing off together on a beautiful, celestial ship, united forever.

The Dance with Goblets is a brilliant polonaise accompanying a toast at the festivities in Act I. The *Scene* that opens Act II is based on the haunting oboe theme associated throughout the ballet with the swans. *Entrance and Waltz of the Special Guests* announces the arrival of the celebrants at Siegfried's birthday party in Act III. Rothbart and Odile appear at the Act III party to the ominous strains of a *Scene* set to a troubled version of the swan theme. The *Pas de Deux* is a virtuoso number performed to an elaborate violin solo at the Prince's party in Act I. The brilliant *Waltz* is danced by the corps de ballet during the festivities in Act I. *Pas de six* in Act III offers opportunities for several solo dances. The *Neapolitan Dance* and *Hungarian Dance (Csárdás)* are among the nationality dances featured during the party scene in Act III. The first section of *The Dance of the Swans* from Act II is performed by the avian maidens to an idyllic waltz melody. There follow a quasi-Oriental number given mainly by the woodwinds to accompany the dance of four baby swans and a closing section for Odette and the Prince. The *Spanish Dance* is part of Siegfried's birthday celebration in Act III. The *Finale to Act IV* provides the ballet's musical and dramatic denouement.

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Born 23 April 1891 in Sontzovka, Russia; died 5 March 1953 in Moscow.

Suite from *Romeo and Juliet* (1935)

PREMIERE OF BALLET: Brno, Czechoslovakia, December 1938; Mahen Theater
PSO PREMIERE: 28 February; Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two mandolins, harp, piano, celesta, strings.

When Prokofiev returned to Russia in 1933 after his long sojourn in the West, he had already acquired a reputation as a composer of ballet. His first balletic effort had been the volcanic *Ala and Lolly* written for Diaghilev in Paris in 1914, whose music is better known in its concert form as the *Scythian Suite*. Though Diaghilev did not like the piece and refused to stage it, he remained convinced of Prokofiev's talent and commissioned *Chout* ("The Buffoon") from him in 1921 and produced it with his Ballet Russe. *Le Pas d'acier* ("The Steel Step") followed in 1927 and *The Prodigal Son* in 1928, the last new ballet Diaghilev produced before his death the following year. *Sur le Borysthène* ("On the Dnieper") was staged, unsuccessfully, by the Paris Opéra in 1932. The last two of these works showed a move away from the spiky musical language of Prokofiev's earlier years toward a simpler, more lyrical style, and the Kirov Theater in Leningrad took them as evidence in 1934 that he should be commissioned to compose a full-length, three-act ballet on one of the theater's classic stories of romance — Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Prokofiev was immediately taken with the Leningrad Kirov's proposal for a *Romeo and Juliet* ballet, and he spent much time during the spring of 1935 with the company's stage director, Sergei Radlov, working out a detailed scenario. Enough of the music was composed during the summer at Prokofiev's secluded house in Polenovo, near Tarusa, that he could write to a friend in late July, "Juliet is already tripping through the third act." For reasons never made clear (had the outspoken Prokofiev tread on some sensitive political toe?), the Kirov withdrew its offer to produce the ballet, and a contract with the Moscow Bolshoi was arranged instead. A tryout of the music was given in the Beethoven Hall of the Bolshoi Theater in October, but failed to ignite enthusiasm for its balletic potential. "Undanceable," declared some. V.V. Konin, in a dispatch to the *Musical Courier*, criticized "the awkward incongruity between the realistic idiom of the musical language, which successfully characterizes the individualism of the Shakespearean images, and the blind submission to the worst traditions of the old form." This last comment referred to the "happy ending" of the original scenario, in which Romeo and Juliet survive to join in the finale. ("Dead people don't dance," reasoned Prokofiev.) Whatever its motive, the Bolshoi broke its contract to stage the ballet, so Prokofiev turned to the expedient of extracting music from the complete score for concert performance. Two orchestral suites were assembled and heard in Russia and the United States before the complete ballet was premiered, in Brno, Czechoslovakia in December 1938, a production in which the composer took no part. A third orchestral suite dates from 1944.

At about the time of the Brno performance, Prokofiev met the choreographer Leonid Lavrovsky. Lavrovsky, building on the reputation the *Romeo and Juliet* music had acquired in its concert performances, finally convinced the Leningrad Kirov to stage the work. The production was carefully prepared, with choreography by Lavrovsky, designs by Piotr Williams, and with Galina Ulanova and Konstantin Sergeyev in the title roles. A satisfactory way was found to restore the tragic close of the original play. Prokofiev composed some new music for this and other scenes, and re-orchestrated several episodes so that they were more clearly audible to the dancers. At a celebratory supper party following the successful opening of *Romeo and Juliet*, delayed for a half-decade in its Russian premiere, Ulanova ended her toast with a bit of fractured Shakespeare: "Never was a story of more woe/Than this of Prokofiev's music for *Romeo*." *Romeo and Juliet* triumphed in its lavish production in 1946 at the Moscow Bolshoi, and has since become one of the most popular of all full-length ballets.

The Duke's Command promises to send into exile for life whoever aggravates the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets. The *Dance of the Knights* is heard when Juliet meets Romeo. In *Juliet's Room*, she remembers her encounters with Romeo and determines to imbibe the fateful potion that she hopes will allow her lover to rescue her upon her supposed death. *The Young Girl Juliet* characterizes the several moods of the heroine, not yet fourteen years old. *Dance* is an episode from the scene of the folk festival in Act II. *The Street Awakens* depicts early morning on the city's streets at the beginning of Act I. The bright *Morning Dance* follows. *The Duel* is based on music accompanying the fight between Tybalt and Mercutio. When the conflict results in the *Death of Mercutio*, *Romeo Decides to Avenge Mercutio*. Grandly tragic then fills the *Act II Finale*. The *Aubade* (*Morning Serenade*) occurs after Juliet has drunk the potion and fallen asleep. The ballet's epilogue includes *Juliet's Funeral*, which captures Romeo's grief at her supposed death, and the poignant music accompanying *The Death of Juliet*.

