

Belgrade Philharmonic
Season 2021/22
We Have Really Missed You

Friday, May 13, 2022

Howard Griffiths
Narek Haknazarian, violin

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
The Tempest, fantasy-overture, Op. 18

Duration: around 24 minutes

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Variations on a Rococo Theme for violoncello and orchestra, Op. 33

Moderato assai quasi Andante - Thema: Moderato semplice

Var. I: Tempo della Thema

Var. II: Tempo della Thema

Var. III: Andante sostenuto

Var. IV: Andante grazioso

Var. V: Allegro moderato

Var. VI: Andante

Var. VII e Coda: Allegro vivo

Duration: around 18 minutes

Antonín Dvořák
Symphony No. 7

Allegro maestoso

Poco adagio

Scherzo: Vivace

Finale: Allegro

Duration: around 35 minutes

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) turned to Shakespeare's plays on several occasions, giving them new life through music. After the success of the *Romeo and Juliet* fantasy-overture in 1873, he created the symphonic fantasia *The Tempest*, based on Shakespeare's romantic drama of the same name with elements of fiction. The work premiered that same year, conducted by Nikolai Rubinstein. Using the technique of tonal painting, Tchaikovsky transferred the elements of the drama into his score, at the beginning of which he wrote a short summary: *The sea. The wizard Prospero orders the servant Ariel to create a tempest from which Ferdinand is saved. An enchanted island. The first shy signs of love between Ferdinand and Miranda, Prospero's daughter. Ariel. The couple is overwhelmed with love. Prospero regains his powers and leaves the island. The sea.*

The only concert piece he ever wrote, Tchaikovsky dedicated to the cello, *Variations on a Roco Theme, Op. 33*, written in 1877. The musical language was inspired by the composer's great model, V. A. Mozart, and represents a kind of homage to Classicism, which Tchaikovsky appreciated greatly. The thematic material originated from Russian folk tradition and brings seven variations of one theme - Tchaikovsky's original melody, written in the style of Classicism and with direct associations to Mozart's music. In his work, the composer was assisted by Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, a German cellist and professor at the Moscow Conservatory. In addition to making interventions in the solo section, Fitzenhagen also influenced the reduction of the number of variations from 8 to 7, which are performed continually without pausing, except for a short break before the last variation. The version performed almost exclusively today is Fitzenhagen's, while Tchaikovsky's original recording is played only by certain cellists as a rarity. One such cellist is Narek Hakhnazaryan.

The principle of variation revived the theme by changing the tempo, rhythm, character, and tonality and inspired charm and grace in the work. The variations are connected by a short ritornello - a passage, which is delivered mainly by the wind instruments. The character of ballet music, which the composer has already dealt with in his ballet *Swan Lake*, is present in the third and sixth variations, while the dramatic peak of the work reaches the last, most virtuosic variation, which has the role of a coda.

In the spirit of empowering national movements, which had begun to develop throughout Europe in the second half of the 19th century, the Czechs gradually strengthened their desire to free themselves from Austro-Hungarian influence. From a young age, **Antonín Dvořák** (1841-1904) was introduced to the Viennese music scene and was supported by the musical trend led by Johannes Brahms and the famous critic and esthetician Eduard Hanslick. Their help resulted in Dvořák winning the Austrian state award and making contacts that paved the way for the young composer. Fascinated by Czech folk music, he had an exceptional opportunity to present it to the world. Brahms' publisher Simrock published the *Moravian Duets* and *Slavic Dances*, which resulted in conducting and composing engagements in Berlin, London, and the United States. In 1884, the London Philharmonic Society appointed Dvořák as an honorary member and commissioned a new symphony, and his premiere performance with the Royal Philharmonic was conducted by the author at St. James's Hall in London in 1885.

Dvořák's *Seventh Symphony* was a turning point in the composer's oeuvre. It is a departure from its bright and optimistic predecessors (Fifth and Sixth symphonies), and the dark character was not exclusively the influence of Brahms' Third Symphony, which Dvořák considered the most important part of the new age, but also the death of his mother and the anxiety it caused for him. The four-part classic formal pattern has not been violated this time either. The first movement, in the form of a sonata, applies the developmental procedure, already through the exposition of thematic materials. The deeply poignant second movement is a reflection of the slow movement of Brahms' mentioned symphony. The combination of variation and sonata form is best seen in the conflict between the choral beginning and the varied musical ideas. The *scherzo* is a substantial dance movement with liveliness and strength of orchestral sound and a lyrical, pastoral trio in the function of a gentle interlude. The finale, as the emotional focus of the sonata cycle, is characterized by a wealth of harmonies in a pessimistic sequence, culminating in sadness and disappointment.

Asja Radonjić, M. Sc.