

Season 2015/2016

Friday, April 22 2016
Ilija M. Kolarac Foundation, 8pm

Series: ***For Beginners***

Conductor: **Vladimir Kulenović**
Soloist: **Barry Douglas**, piano

Program:

Ludwig van Beethoven
Prometheus: Overture

Duration: approx. 5 minutes

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Concert Fantasia for piano and orchestra, Op. 56 in G major

Quasi rondo: Andante mosso
Contrastes

Duration: approx. 34 minutes

Richard Strauss
Ein Heldenleben, tone poem for orchestra, Op. 40

Allegro moderato
Andante con motto

Duration: approx. 40 minutes

Concertmaster and solo violin: **Miroslav Pavlović**

Ludwig van Beethoven's (1770-1827) first theatre music composition was the ballet ***The Creatures of Prometheus*** Op. 43, written in 1800-01. His only complete ballet, it was premiered at the Vienna Burgtheater on 28 March 1801. Although it was first staged as *The Men of Prometheus*, Beethoven inscribed *The Creatures of Prometheus* on the manuscript, the title under which the piece is known nowadays. Beethoven's ballet music is lighter and more palatable than the works he wrote for concert halls. In this piece the composer explores instrumental colours and orchestration effects that would have never found way into his symphonies or serious dramatic overtures. The composer later used the motifs in the last movement of *The Creatures of Prometheus* as the basis for the fourth movement of his *Eroica* symphony and the *Eroica Variation* for piano.

This ballet music is nowadays a regular part of many international orchestras' repertoires, and the overture is also often performed separately.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's (1840-1893) ***Concert Fantasia*** was written in 1884 and, along with three piano concertos, it completes the composer's body of works for piano and orchestra. The piece was premiered in 1885 in Moscow, with Sergei Taneyev as soloist and Max Erdmannsdörfer conducting. *The Concert Fantasia* received many performances in the first 20 years of its existence, but then completely disappeared from the repertoire. Towards the end of the 20th century, it underwent a revival and returned to the repertoire of a certain number of pianists.

Tchaikovsky had voiced his dislike for the sound of piano and orchestra while writing his Second Piano Concerto, in which he almost entirely isolated the soloist from the orchestra. This practice is repeated in the middle section of the *Fantasia's* first movement, written for piano solo. This section plays the role of the cadenza, which brings in completely new thematic material instead of recapitulating the existing.

The atypical two-movement structure of the piece is interesting material for a formal analysis. The opening movement, titled *Quasi rondo*, includes formal elements of a rondo only at the beginning and the end of the movement, while other structural elements are more suggestive of a sonata form. That is why musicologists argue that *Quasi sonata* would have been a more appropriate title for the piece. It is hard to believe that Tchaikovsky disliked the *Contrastes* – the second movement of the *Concert Fantasia*, so he even offered an alternative for it. Formally, it comprises two main themes: the slow melodic theme and the quicker, dance-like theme. They are presented as a contrast, but not only as the first and second theme of a sonata form – as the music moves forward they are often introduced concurrently and alternately. The first theme is, actually, a cadenza for piano solo, which is succeeded by the quick second theme, leading into the final section without a break. These very extensive sections take the place of slow movement and quick finale, typical of a conventional concerto.

Tchaikovsky's biographer and music writer David Brown has argued that the *Concert Fantasia's* crippling weakness is its lack of a unique, strong musical and conceptional idea, although its structure suffices to show that Tchaikovsky was concerned to fashion something more than a mere showpiece to gratify a virtuoso pianist or inflame a lionizing audience. Despite its shortcomings, the *Concert Fantasia* has emotional and melodic qualities and a structural freshness that deserves a place in the

concert repertoire. This is the first time it is included in the programme of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra.

Richard Strauss' (1864-1949) output of works greatly enriched the genre of tone poems. The single-movement programmatic compositions, formally combining a sonata form and sonata cycle, as well as other formal patterns, were inspired by works of Shakespeare, Nietzsche, and Cervantes. After achieving successes with the tone poems *Don Juan*, *Death and Transfiguration*, *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Don Quixote*, Strauss composed an unusual piece – ***Ein Heldenleben*** (1898). Instead of a historical or poetical figure, Strauss put himself at the centre of the story, calling himself a *hero*. The critics disapproved of this act of egotism, but the composer offered justification quoting the heroic nature of his music – an over-scaled orchestra, flashy sound and thematic material, rather than his personal character, which he considered far from heroic. The piece was dedicated to Willem Mengelberg and the Concertgebouw Orchestra, and premiered by the Frankfurter Museumsorchester, with the composer conducting.

The six movements of this composition have latent titles – *The Hero*, *The Hero's Adversaries*, *The Hero's Companion*, *The Hero at Battle*, *The Hero's Works of Piece* and *The Hero's Retirement from this World and Consummation*. Through a refined treatment of leitmotifs, initially employed by Wagner, the composer introduces us to the hero and leads us forward where, besides his own theme, we can hear quotations of the theme from the beginning of Beethoven's *Eroica*. The hero's adversaries are critics, spearheaded by Eduard Hanslick, to whom Strauss dedicated a separate motif. We need to stress here that Strauss was among the very few composers of that time who received exceptionally positive reviews for his music. The solo violin part (one of the most difficult in musical literature) represents the hero's companion – Strauss' wife. Instead of an overly soft lyrical melody that was expected, Strauss made a complex portrait of a person of equally complex character, in which different dispositions alternate in quick succession. Several motifs take turns, and then the cadenza is dominated by the hero's motif. Trumpet fanfares offstage, and then repeated onstage, announce the hero's battle, formally inaugurating the exposition. In the presentation of the multitude of themes, there is the sound of the solo violin, as a woman waiting for the hero to return from the battle. At the end of the section, the hero's theme is dominant over the critics' theme. The hero's victory is marked with a new section – quotations from Strauss' earlier works: *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, *Macbeth*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Don Juan* and *Don Quixote*, as well as from other minor works. The final section brings reminiscence of the previous motifs, with the appearance of new ones, which are dominated by pastoral atmosphere. The finale belongs to new thematic material – Pauline Strauss' love theme in the solo violin part, with discrete orchestral accompaniment.

Asja Radonjić