

program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

***Romeo and Juliet*, Fantasy-Overture (1869)**

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY ■ 1840-1893

Romeo and Juliet was written when Tchaikovsky was 29. It was his first masterpiece. For a decade, he had been involved with the intense financial, personal and artistic struggles that mark the maturing years of most creative figures. Advice and guidance often flowed his way during that time, and one who dispensed it freely to anyone who would listen was Mili Balakirev, one of the group of amateur composers known in English as “The Five” (and in Russian as “The Mighty Handful”) who sought to create a nationalistic music specifically Russian in style. In May 1869, Balakirev suggested to Tchaikovsky that Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* would be an appropriate subject for a musical composition, and he even offered the young composer a detailed program and an outline for the form of the piece. Tchaikovsky took the advice to heart, and he consulted closely with Balakirev during the composition of the work. Though his help came close to meddling, Balakirev’s influence seems to have had a strong positive effect on the finished composition.

Tchaikovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet* is in a carefully constructed sonata form, with introduction and coda. The slow opening section, in chorale style, depicts Friar Lawrence. The exposition begins with a vigorous theme depicting the conflict between the Montagues and the Capulets. The rising intensity of the

theme suggests the fury and confusion of a fight. The love theme (used here as a contrasting second theme) represents Romeo’s passion; a tender, sighing phrase for muted violins suggests Juliet’s response. A stormy development section denotes the continuing feud and Friar Lawrence’s pleas for peace. The crest of the fight ushers in the recapitulation, in which the thematic material from the exposition is considerably compressed. The tempo slows, the mood darkens, and the coda emerges with a sense of impending doom. A funereal drum beats out the cadence of the lovers’ fatal pact. The closing woodwind chords evoke visions of the flight to celestial regions.

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26 (1865-1866)

MAX BRUCH ■ 1838-1920

German composer, conductor and teacher Max Bruch, widely known and respected in his day, received his earliest music instruction from his mother, a noted singer and pianist. He began composing at eleven, and by fourteen had produced a symphony and a string quartet, the latter garnering a prize that allowed him to study with Reinecke and Hiller in Cologne. Bruch held various posts as a choral and orchestral conductor in Cologne, Coblenz, Sondershausen, Berlin, Liverpool and Breslau, and in 1883, he visited America to conduct concerts of his own compositions. From 1890 to 1910, he taught composition at the Berlin Academy and received numerous awards for his work, including

an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University.

The G minor Concerto, a work of lyrical beauty and emotional sincerity, opens with a dialogue between soloist and orchestra followed by a wide-ranging subject played by the violin. A contrasting theme reaches into the highest register of the violin. A stormy section for orchestra recalls the opening dialogue, which softens to lead directly into the *Adagio*, based on three important themes, all languorous and sweet, shared by soloist and orchestra. The finale begins with hints of the upcoming theme before the soloist proclaims the vibrant melody itself. A broad melody, played first by the orchestra alone before being taken over by the soloist, serves as the second theme. A brief development, based on the dance-like first theme, leads to the recapitulation. The coda recalls again the first theme to bring the work to a rousing close.

Selections from the Incidental Music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Opp. 21 and 61 (1826, 1842)

FELIX MENDELSSOHN ■ 1809-1847

Mendelssohn was enamored during his teenage years with reading the works of Shakespeare, who, next to the arch-Romantic Jean-Paul, was his favorite writer. Shakespeare's plays had been appearing in excellent German translations by Ludwig Tieck and August Schlegel (father Abraham's brother-in-law) since the turn of the century, and young Mendelssohn particularly enjoyed the wondrous fantasy world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The play inspired the already accomplished budding composer, and in the summer of 1826 he wrote an

overture to the play. On November 19th, Felix played the original piano duet version of the score with his sister, Fanny, on one of the family's frequent Sunday musicales in their Berlin mansion, and a private orchestral performance followed before the end of the year. In February, the work was first played publicly in Stettin. It immediately garnered a success that has never waned.

By 1842, Mendelssohn was the most famous musician in Europe and in demand everywhere. He was director of the superb Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig, a regular visitor to England, and Kapellmeister to King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia in Berlin. For Mendelssohn's Berlin duties, Friedrich required incidental music for several new productions at the Royal Theater, including Sophocles' *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, Racine's *Athalie* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This last would, of course, include the celebrated Overture Mendelssohn had written when he was seventeen, exactly half his age in 1842. He composed the twelve additional numbers of the incidental music the following spring, creating a perfect match for the inspiration and style of the Overture. The premiere of the new production in November was a triumph.

The Overture is the greatest piece of orchestral music ever composed by one so young, including Mozart and Schubert. Woven into its sonata form are thematic representations of the woodland sprites, the shimmering light through forest leaves, the sweet sighs of the lovers, even the "ee-ah" braying of that memorable Rustic, Bottom, when he is turned into an ass. In matters of formal construction, orchestral color and artistic polish, this Overture is, quite simply, a masterpiece.

The *Scherzo*, the Entr'acte to Act II, is the music that, in the words of Sir George Grove, "brought the fairies into the orchestra and fixed them there." Its winsome grace and incandescent sonorities defined in large part the idea of delicacy in orchestral music.

The *March of the Fairies* accompanies the appearance of the mischievous woodland sprites in Act II, Scene 1.

The *Song with Chorus* ("You spotted snakes ... Philomel, with melody") is sung by the fairies in Act II, Scene 2 to protect the sleeping Titania from the evils of the enchanted wood.

A bumptious country dance accompanies the Entry of the Rustics.

The *Nocturne* evokes the magic slumber of the lovers in the moonlit forest in Act III, Scene 2 through the burnished sonorities of horns and bassoons.

The majestic *Wedding March*, the Entr'acte to Act V, accompanies the festive triple wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, Demetrius and Helena, and Lysander and Hermia.

After Bottom and the Rustics perform their riotous *Pyramus and Thisbe* in Act V, they exit to the *Dance of the Rustics*.

The *Finale*, based on themes from the Overture, is the background to the last lines of the play, some spoken over the musical accompaniment, some sung by a soprano soloist and a chorus of fairies to accompany dancing. Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* closes as it began, with the bewitching woodwind chords that seem to distill the very essence of Shakespeare's enchanted wood.

Inserted into the score are several *melodramas*, spoken lines accompanied by or interrupting the music.

SONG WITH CHORUS

You spotted snakes with double tongue,
Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen;
Newts and blind-worms, do no wrong,
Come not near our fairy queen.

Philomel, with melody
Sing in our sweet lullaby;
Lulla, lulla, lullaby:
Never harm,
Nor spell nor charm,
Come our lovely lady nigh;
So, good night, with lullaby.

Weaving spiders, come not here;
Hence, you long-legged spinners, hence!
Beetles black, approach not near;
Worm nor snail, do no offence.
Philomel, with melody ...

Hence, away! now all is well:
One aloof stand sentinel.

FINALE

(Chorus) Through the house give glim-
mering light,
By the dead and drowsy fire:
Every elf and fairy sprite
Hop as light as bird from brier;
And this ditty, after me,
Sing, and dance it trippingly.

(Solo) First, rehearse your song by rote,
To each word a warbling note:
Hand in hand, with fairy grace,
Will we sing, and bless this place.

(Chorus) Through the house...

(Spoken) Now, until the break of day,
Through this house each fairy stray.
With this field-dew consecrate,
Every fairy take his gait;
And each several chamber bless,

Through this palace, with sweet peace;
And the owner of it blest
Ever shall in safety rest.
(Sung) Trip away; make no stay;
Meet me all by break of day.

(Spoken) If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend:
If you pardon, we will mend:
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearned luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long;
Else the Puck a liar call:
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.

ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

MARCH 16 AND 17, 2019
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

DIANE M. WITTRY MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Romeo and Juliet, Fantasy-Overture PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26 MAX BRUCH

Prelude: Allegro moderato —

Adagio

Finale: Allegro energico

Violin Soloist: Timothy Chooi, Schadt Competition Winner

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Selections from the Incidental Music to FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Opp. 21 and 61

Overture

Scherzo

Melodrama: "Over hill, over dale" — March of the Fairies

Melodrama: "Come now, a roundel" —

Song with Chorus: "You spotted snakes"

Entry of the Rustics

Nocturne

Melodrama: "Be, as thou was wont to be"

Wedding March

Dance of the Rustics

Melodrama: "Now the hungry lion roars"

Finale: "Through this House"

Soprano Soloists: XXXXXXXXXX & XXXXXXXXXX

Women's Chorus

Director: