Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Friday, January 30, 2015, 8 pm
Saturday, January 31, 2015, 8 pm
Orchestra Hall

Shakespeare Winterfest: Star-Crossed Lovers

We are deeply grateful for significant support of these concerts by
an Impresario funder who wishes to remain anonymous.

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Romeo and Juliet, Fantasy-Overture
ca. 21'

Leonard Bernstein
Symphonic Dances from West Side Story
Prologue
“Somewhere”
Scherzo
Mambo
Cha-Cha
Meeting Scene
“Cool” Fugue
Rumble
Finale
ca. 23'

INTERMISSION
ca. 20'

Sergei Prokofiev
Selections from Romeo and Juliet, Ballet Music, Opus 64
Introduction
The Duke’s Decree
The Young Girl Juliet
Masks
The Knights’ Dance
The People Make Merry
The Duel: Tybalt and Mercutio Fight
Romeo Resolves to Avenge Mercutio’s Death
Tybalt’s Funeral Cortège
Juliet’s Bedroom
Juliet’s Funeral and Death of Romeo
The Death of Juliet
ca. 37'

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
Tchaikovsky: Romeo and Juliet, Fantasy-Overture
Drawing inspiration from Shakespeare’s tragic romance, Tchaikovsky introduces Romeo’s friar with a chorale tune and depicts the feuding families with darker music. Finally, a soaring melody portrays the young lovers.

Bernstein: Symphonic Dances from West Side Story
In Bernstein’s timeless work, unforgettable tunes and powerful dances—including a thrilling, syncopated Mambo—bring to life the heart-breaking story of young lovers and rival street gangs.

Prokofiev: Selections from Romeo and Juliet
These Romeo and Juliet selections from Prokofiev’s ballet summon vivid images, from a masked ball to a violent duel to a blissful wedding night. The somber closing music reflects the star-crossed lovers’ tragic end.

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Born: May 7, 1840, Votkinsk, Russia
Died: November 6, 1893, St. Petersburg

Romeo and Juliet, Fantasy-Overture
The fateful story of Shakespeare’s star-crossed lovers has attracted a range of composers, from Bellini to Berlioz, from Gounod to Prokofiev. Perhaps it was inevitable that so dramatic a story should appeal to the young Tchaikovsky, struggling to find his way as a composer. In the summer of 1869, shortly after Tchaikovsky’s First Symphony had been savaged by critics, composer Mily Balakirev suggested that Shakespeare’s play might make a fitting subject for an orchestral work. Balakirev sketched an outline for the piece and even contributed part of a theme. Intrigued, Tchaikovsky set to work on October 7 of that year and had the score in first draft by November 27. It would (eventually) be his first real success.

Romeo and Juliet, painting by Ford Madox Brown, 1870, the year Tchaikovsky’s Romeo and Juliet premiered.
the friar, the families, the lovers

Tchaikovsky based his work on three separate themes, each meant to portray one of the forces in the play. The chorale-like opening passage suggests the pivotal figure of Friar Laurence, alone in his cell. At the Allegro giusto, the music leaps ahead with a dark and thrusting idea that reflects the violent struggles between the Montague and Capulet families. And this in turn gives way to the most famous part of this composition, the soaring love music of the young Romeo and Juliet themselves. Tchaikovsky tries to treat this music symphonically rather than letting it simply become tone-painting. The themes develop in a sonata form-like structure: they alternate, collide, contrast, and finally drive to the great cataclysm of the end, a shattering climax. Then the music falls back to remember the lovers one last time and ends dramatically.

While the themes may represent specific characters, listeners should be careful not to search for too literal a depiction of the events of Shakespeare’s play. Rather, Romeo and Juliet should be understood as abstract music-drama, inspired by Shakespeare’s tale but not bound by the need for exact musical depiction. This may explain Tchaikovsky’s curious choice of subtitle: he called this an “Overture-Fantasy after Shakespeare.”

The first performance, in Moscow on March 16, 1870, was not a great success. Under Balakirev’s guidance Tchaikovsky revised the work several times before he reached a final version in 1880; this may explain why it is one of his few works without an opus number. While early audiences may not have reacted positively, Romeo and Juliet soon became a popular favorite, so much so that when Tchaikovsky made a tour of the United States in 1891 to conduct his own music, he included Romeo and Juliet on every program.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, harp and strings

Leonard Bernstein
Born: August 25, 1918, Lawrence, Massachusetts
Died: October 14, 1990, New York City

Symphonic Dances from West Side Story

Creating West Side Story, one of the most popular musicals ever, presented multiple challenges. It involved adapting Romeo and Juliet to a contemporary New York setting: the warring Montague and Capulet families were transformed into the rival street gangs, the Sharks and the Jets, while Romeo and Juliet became Tony and Maria. Shakespeare’s tragedy also had a conclusion seldom experienced in a Broadway musical. Yet following its premiere in Washington, D.C., on August 19, 1957, it became a huge success, and it probably ranks as Bernstein’s most memorable score. Dance was central to the original conception of the work, and Jerome Robbins served both as choreographer and director; some members of the cast were chosen more for their abilities as dancers than as singers.

Several years after the premiere, Bernstein made an orchestral suite of dances from the musical, and the
Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story* were first performed by Lukas Foss and the New York Philharmonic on February 13, 1961. The dances follow the action of *West Side Story* and incorporate bits of the songs.

A brashly energetic *Prologue* (which requires finger-snapping from the orchestra) leads to a section based on the song “Somewhere,” which envisions a more peaceful world. A *Scherzo* leads to *Mambo*, set at the high school dance attended by both the Sharks and the Jets. In the *Cha-Cha* (which quotes the song “Maria”), Tony and Maria dance together; their *Meeting Scene* is depicted by a quartet of muted violins. Tensions rise in the eerie, twisting “*Cool* Fugue,” and *Rumble* accompanies the fight in which the rival gang leaders Bernardo and Riff are killed. A flute cadenza prefaces the *Finale*, which incorporates Maria’s “I Have a Love,” and—after so much vitality and violence—the Symphonic Dances come to a subdued close.

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, E-flat clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, alto saxophone, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, bongos, chimes, congas, cowbell, cymbals, gong, guiro, maracas, bells, police whistle, tenor drum, tambourine, timbales, triangle, vibraphone, woodblocks, xylophone, piano, celeste, harp and strings.

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**Sergei Prokofiev**

**Born:** April 23, 1891, Sontsovka  
**Died:** March 5, 1953, Moscow

**Selections from *Romeo and Juliet***

Prokofiev completed the massive score by the end of the summer of 1935, but the project came to seem nearly as star-crossed as Shakespeare’s young lovers. The Kirov Ballet backed out, and the Bolshoi Theatre of Moscow took over the project. Prokofiev’s first plan had been to give the story a happy ending in which Romeo would rescue Juliet before her suicide—because, as he explained, “living people can dance, the dying cannot.” Fortunately, this idea was scrapped, but when the Bolshoi finally saw Prokofiev’s score, they called it “undanceable” and refused to produce it.

While *Romeo and Juliet* languished in limbo, Prokofiev transformed excerpts from the ballet’s 52 numbers into a series of orchestral suites. The first two suites were premiered in 1936 and 1937—thus much of the music from the ballet was familiar to audiences long before it was produced on the stage. The third suite was compiled in 1946.

**a tale of woe?**

The premiere of the ballet itself took place not in Russia but in Brno in 1938. Preparations for the first Russian performance brought more trouble, including a fight between Prokofiev and the choreographer, disputes with the dancers and a threatened walk-out by the orchestra. When the Russian premiere finally took place in Leningrad on January 11, 1940, it was a triumph for all involved. Still, ballerina Galina Ulanova, who danced the part of Juliet, touched on the ballet’s difficult birth when she paraphrased the play’s final lines in her toast to the composer after the opening performance:

*Never was a tale of greater woe,  
Than Prokofiev’s music to Romeo.*

The movements in Prokofiev’s orchestral suites from *Romeo and Juliet* are not in chronological sequence: he created the suites by arranging movements in sequences he felt would be effective in the concert hall. Conductors frequently assemble their own selection of movements from these suites, as Osmo Vänskä has done for these performances.

**music tender and dramatic**

The music selected for this concert opens with two movements from Suite II and then presents two from Suite I. *Montagues and the Capulets* begins with Prokofiev piling dissonance upon dissonance, after which the music forges ahead brutally on the swagger of the rival families. *Dance* is a sequence from a carnival the young lovers attend. The witty *Masks* depicts a scene in which Mercutio and Benvolio talk Romeo into crashing the ball at the Capulets’. *Romeo and Juliet* accompanies the balcony scene; soaring love music alternates with ominous interludes marked *inquieto.*

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, tenor saxophone, 6 horns, 3 trumpets, cornet, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, 2 harps, piano, celeste and strings.

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Program notes by Eric Bromberger.

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**Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story***

A brashly energetic *Prologue* (which requires finger-snapping from the orchestra) leads to a section based on the song “Somewhere,” which envisions a more peaceful world. A *Scherzo* leads to *Mambo*, set at the high school dance attended by both the Sharks and the Jets. In the *Cha-Cha* (which quotes the song “Maria”), Tony and Maria dance together; their *Meeting Scene* is depicted by a quartet of muted violins. Tensions rise in the eerie, twisting “*Cool* Fugue,” and *Rumble* accompanies the fight in which the rival gang leaders Bernardo and Riff are killed. A flute cadenza prefaces the *Finale*, which incorporates Maria’s “I Have a Love,” and—after so much vitality and violence—the Symphonic Dances come to a subdued close.

**Sergei Prokofiev**

**Born:** April 23, 1891, Sontsovka  
**Died:** March 5, 1953, Moscow

**Selections from *Romeo and Juliet***

ate in 1934 the Kirov Theater in Leningrad approached Sergei Prokofiev with the proposal that they collaborate on a ballet based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Prokofiev completed the massive score by the end of the summer of 1935, but the project came to seem nearly as star-crossed as Shakespeare’s young lovers. The Kirov Ballet backed out, and the Bolshoi Theatre of Moscow took over the project. Prokofiev’s first plan had been to give the story a happy ending in which Romeo would rescue Juliet before her suicide—because, as he explained, “living people can dance, the dying cannot.” Fortunately, this idea was scrapped, but when the Bolshoi