Minnesota Orchestra
Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Adam Neiman, piano

Thursday, January 11, 2018, 11 am | Orchestra Hall

With these concerts we gratefully recognize Kathy and Allen Lenzmeier for their generous contribution to the Minnesota Orchestra’s Investing in Inspiration campaign.

All works by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 3 in D major, Opus 29
   Introduzione ed allegro – Moderato assai (Tempo marcia funebre)
   Alla tedesca: Allegro moderato e semplice
   Andante: elegiaco
   Scherzo: Allegro vivo
   Finale: Allegro con fuoco (Tempo di Polacca)

Concerto No. 3 in E-flat major for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 75
   [in one movement]
   Adam Neiman, piano

INTERMISSION

Suite from Swan Lake, Opus 20
   Introduction (Overture)
   Scene
   Waltz (Corps de ballet)
   Scene
   Dance of the Swans
   Pas d’Action (Odette and the Prince)
   Mazurka
   Final Scene

The January 11 Minnesota Orchestra concert will be recorded for a future broadcast on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5FM in the Twin Cities.
The Third Symphony by Tchaikovsky is an oddity among the composer's collection, straying from many of the structures expected of a symphonic work. It contains a German waltz, carries the Polish nickname, but is especially Russian in character. It is the composer's only symphony based in a major key, yet it begins with a funeral march. Tchaikovsky even ventured away from routine by adding a fifth movement to the standard four-movement form.

Tchaikovsky's one-movement Piano Concerto No. 3 offers moments of chamber-like intimacy as well as grand theatrics, with a glittering cadenza at its core.

In the fairy tale on which the worldwide audience favorite Swan Lake is based, Prince Siegfried triumphs over an evil sorcerer, rescuing his beloved Odette and other maidens who had been transformed into swans. Music Director Osmo Vänskä has selected a suite for today's performance that includes the famous Waltz marking the Prince’s birthday celebration, the delicate Dance of the Swans and the fiery Mazurka, among other evocative movements.
Tchaikovsky Marathon: Hardly failures
At first glance, this program might seem to offer a collection of Tchaikovsky’s misfires. It opens with his least-familiar symphony, continues with a piano concerto he assembled from an abandoned symphony, and concludes with a ballet score that brought down on the poor composer the most painful failure he ever endured professionally. Though these three works were not immediate triumphs for Tchaikovsky, they clearly flow from the pen of a master, and are most worthy of listening.

It may seem incomprehensible that Tchaikovsky’s music for Swan Lake could have been attacked for its complexity or derided for being “too Wagnerian,” yet it was. Today it ranks as one of his most popular ballets (and in recent years, crossed paths with cinema through its central focus in the film Black Swan). The Third may be the least-played of Tchaikovsky’s symphonies, but it offers distinct pleasures of its own: it is Tchaikovsky’s only symphony in a major key, and one senses its kinship with ballet throughout. Tchaikovsky composed a symphony in 1892, but abandoned it. Rather than burning his manuscript, though, he converted the symphony’s first movement into a piano concerto. This concerto is rarely played, so enjoy this performance—Tchaikovsky himself never heard it.

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

Symphony No. 3 in D major, Opus 19
Premiered: November 19, 1875

Following the Moscow Conservatory’s spring term in 1875, Tchaikovsky spent a relaxed summer visiting friends and relatives in Russia and the Ukraine. That summer he began his Third Symphony, but he was in no hurry. To friends he wrote that he was “working in a leisurely way…I don’t sit for hours at a time, but walk a great deal.” Nevertheless, the 35-year-old composer had the symphony complete by August 12, and Nikolai Rubinstein led the premiere in Moscow at a concert of the Russian Music Society on November 19. The work had a reasonable success, aimed for the kind of shimmering rush that Mendelssohn achieved in his scherzos, and he succeeds admirably in this movement, built on whirling, skittering textures. The music itself is virtually athematic; Tchaikovsky’s contemporary César Cui noted that this movement is “interesting only as sound, almost without musical content.”

The Third is the most unusual of Tchaikovsky’s six numbered symphonies—it is the only one in a major key and the only one with five movements—yet it remains the least familiar of that cycle. The standard criticism is that the Third demonstrates Tchaikovsky’s problems with symphonic form: development tends to ramble, the movements do not depend on contrast and organic growth, and there seems little relation between the five movements. Yet the cheerful Third Symphony has virtues that will continue to please audiences for years to come: its three central movements are extremely attractive, the symphony offers some of Tchaikovsky’s most infectious melodies, and the music—at many points reminiscent of Tchaikovsky’s ballet scores—is brightly-colored and energetic.

The music: charming inner movements and an energetic finale

Introduzione ed allegro–moderato assai (tempo marcia funebre). The symphony may nominally be in D major, but it begins in D minor with a slow introduction that Tchaikovsky specifies should be “In the tempo of a funeral march.” This music hardly sounds funereal, however, and it gradually accelerates to the sturdy Allegro brillante main idea, now firmly in D major. The second theme—a falling lyric melody for oboe marked molto espressivo—is especially effective. Tchaikovsky develops both of these at length and drives the movement to a full-throated conclusion.

Allegro vivace. This “elegy” returns to D minor as flutes sing the delicate main opening; consolation comes in the second section, a warm and flowing idea for strings that Tchaikovsky specifies should be molto espressivo.

Scherzo: allegro vivo. The fourth movement is the true scherzo, and it has occasioned much comment. Tchaikovsky was apparently aiming for the kind of shimmering rush that Mendelssohn achieved in his scherzos, and he succeeds admirably in this movement, built on whirling, skittering textures. The music itself is virtually athematic; Tchaikovsky’s contemporary César Cui noted that this movement is “interesting only as sound, almost without musical content.”

Finale: allegro con fuoco (tempo di Polacca). The energetic finale bursts to life as the full orchestra shouts out the spirited opening. A firm woodwind choir brings the second section, but the opening theme will dominate this movement. Perhaps anxious to show off his developing symphonic technique, Tchaikovsky anchors the development on fugal treatments of the opening theme. The
Transforming a symphonic movement into a concerto movement of Tchaikovsky's major works.

**a note on the title**

Tchaikovsky's Third Symphony has for many years been tagged with a completely spurious nickname: *Polish.* Tchaikovsky marked the last movement “tempo di Polacco,” but this music bears no relation to Polish themes or rhythms. That marking, though, did inspire the English conductor Sir August Manns to “discover” an elaborate program for this music, which he felt depicted “Poland mourning in her oppression and rejoicing in her regeneration.” This interpretation, which came six years after Tchaikovsky's death and inspired the nickname, is nonsense, and the subtitle *Polish* should be forgotten.

**Concerto No. 3 in E-flat major for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 75**

Premiered: January 19, 1895

Throughout his life Tchaikovsky worried that he had dried up as a composer. After his Fourth Symphony of 1877, he fell into a long creative trough and did not write his Fifth Symphony until 11 years had passed. In May 1892 he moved to a new house in Klin, outside of Moscow, and there he tried to write another symphony. Almost immediately he ran into trouble, noting in a letter to a friend: “I have begun to compose a symphony but it doesn’t go as smoothly as I might wish. I’m afraid that this is the beginning of the end, i.e., that is that I’ve written myself out.” Tchaikovsky pressed on with the symphony across all of 1892, and by December he had it sketched and partially orchestrated. But at that point the despondent composer gave up: he said that the “impression it creates is far from flattering” and decided to destroy it.

**transforming the music**

But Tchaikovsky did not destroy the manuscript for the symphony. Instead, he concluded that while it might not be successful as a symphony, it could be converted into music for solo piano and orchestra, and he re-cast its opening movement as his one-movement Piano Concerto No. 3. Tchaikovsky died suddenly in November 1893 without ever having heard this work. Its premiere did not take place until January 19, 1895, when Sergei Taneyev was the soloist in St. Petersburg, and since then the Third Piano Concerto has remained one of the least-familiar of Tchaikovsky's major works.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings

Transforming a symphonic movement into a concerto movement brings particular challenges. In a symphonic movement, the emphasis is on the development of the musical argument, while a concerto movement is conceived from the beginning to spotlight a soloist’s virtuosity. To insert a piano soloist into the first movement of what had been intended as a symphony, Tchaikovsky had to re-write a number of orchestral passages for solo piano, sometimes changing the register and the rhythm of the music to suit the piano. And to compensate for the absence of a high-profile part for the soloist, Tchaikovsky composed a massive and very difficult cadenza. The result may be a hybrid, but the Third Piano Concerto contains some very appealing music and deserves to be heard more often.

**lone movement, with a brilliant cadenza**

The piano enters almost unobtrusively as part of the orchestra’s opening exposition, but Tchaikovsky soon gives it a soloistic profile, with much of the writing in brilliant octaves. The *espressivo* second subject had been scored for clarinet in the symphony, but now Tchaikovsky transforms this into a lovely passage for solo piano. The movement builds to what in a symphonic movement would be the start of the recapitulation, and here—as if to compensate for a lack of high-profile solo writing—Tchaikovsky supplies his soloist with a lengthy, brilliant, and episodic cadenza based on themes introduced earlier. The orchestra rejoins the pianist, and this one-movement concerto races to its conclusion along a *Vivacissimo* coda.

**Suite from Swan Lake, Opus 20 (Suite amalgamated by Osmo Vänskä)**

Premiered: March 4, 1877

Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* is such a favorite of audiences around the world that it comes as a surprise to learn that the ballet was an abject failure at its premiere. Tchaikovsky, then a young composition teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, had been commissioned by the Imperial Theater to write music for a production of this new ballet at the Bolshoi, and he worked on the score from August 1875 until April 1876. The first performance, on March 4, 1877, was a disaster: it had poor scenery, costumes, and dancing, and—worst of all—it had a conductor so alarmed by Tchaikovsky’s striking music that he cut large sections of it, substituting “safe” music by other composers in their place.

The reviews were scathing, one critic declaring: “I must say that I have never seen a poorer presentation on the stage of the Bolshoi Theatre. The costumes, decor and machines did not hide in the least the emptiness of the dances.” The same critic conceded that
the music showed "the hand of the true master," but that did Tchaikovsky little good: he never heard the music again and died believing that it would always be a failure. To the contrary: a revival in January 1895—14 months after the composer's death—launched Swan Lake on its way to the acclaim it enjoys today.

**a story of eternal charm**

Swan Lake tells a story of eternal charm: Prince Siegfried discovers a flock of beautiful white swans on the lake in a forest. Their queen Odette tells him that they are all maidens who have been transformed by the evil sorcerer Von Rothbart. Though deceived by Von Rothbart and his daughter Odile (the black swan) during the climactic ball in Act III, Siegfried eventually triumphs over the sorcerer and is united with Odette.

Because Tchaikovsky never arranged the music from Swan Lake into orchestral suites, conductors are free to make their own selections. For today's performance, Music Director Osmo Vänskä has assembled a suite of eight excerpts, drawn from all four acts of the ballet and performed in chronological order.

The rarely-heard **Introduction** is the anticipatory music heard just before the curtain comes up, and this is followed by two excerpts from Act I. The **Scene**, full of excitement and expectancy, introduces Prince Siegfried and his friends drinking wine before a beautiful setting: in the distance are a castle and a bridge across a stream. The famous **Waltz** is danced as part of the celebration of Prince Siegfried's birthday.

Next come three excerpts from Act II. The **Scene** that opens this act, with its plangent and wistful oboe solo, has become some of the most characteristic music of this ballet, and it sets the complex mood here perfectly. This is followed by the **Dance of the Swans**, during which Siegfried and his fellow hunters discover the swans on the forest lake. The **Pas d'action**, for Odette and the Prince, begins with a long harp, followed by a deservedly-famous duet for solo violin and harp.

Act III brings the ball in the Great Hall of Siegfried's castle; it is during this ball that Von Rothbart tricks Siegfried into choosing his daughter Odile over Odette, triggering the events of the final act, when Siegfried finally swears his devotion to Odette and the evil Von Rothbart is vanquished and dies. Tchaikovsky had a particular flair for national dances, and this concert offers the energetic **Mazurka**, a dance from Poland. This suite concludes with music from the very end of Act IV. In this **Final Scene** the prince enters and the ballet comes to its grand conclusion.

**Instrumentation**: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, castanets, tambourine, tamtam, triangle, glockenspiel, harp and strings

Program notes by Eric Bromberger.