Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Kyle Orth, piano

Friday, January 5, 2018, 8 pm | 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

Capriccio italien, Opus 45

Concerto No. 2 in G major for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 44
   Allegro brillante e molto vivace
   Andante non troppo
   Allegro con fuoco
   Kyle Orth, piano

INTERMISSION

ca. 20’

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Opus 36
   Andante sostenuto – Moderato con anima
   Andantino in modo canzona
   Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato
   Finale: Allegro con fuoco

ca. 44’

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
Kyle Orth, piano

Pianist Kyle Orth, who makes his Minnesota Orchestra debut in tonight's performance, was the Grand Prize winner of the Friends of the Minnesota Orchestra Young Artist Competition in 2016. Since making his solo debut at age 15, he has appeared with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Israel Symphony Orchestra, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfónica de Oaxaca (Mexico), Dallas Chamber Symphony, Missouri Symphony Orchestra and Springfield Symphony Orchestra, among others. He has won many additional awards including first place in the Dallas International Piano Competition, Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) Yamaha Senior Piano Competition, Lennox International Young Artist’s Competition, Midland-Odessa National Young Artist Competition and Hellam Young Artists Competition. He has presented solo recitals in Cabo San Lucas and Oaxaca, Mexico, and at the MFA Boston, Dallas Museum of Art, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and Meadows Museum. As an advocate for promoting music education in public schools, he was invited to perform on numerous occasions for the Van Cliburn Foundation’s Musical Awakenings® Program. More: kyleorth.com.

Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Profile appears on page 6.

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Tchaikovsky: Capriccio italien; Piano Concerto No. 2; Symphony No. 4

A delightful ode to Rome, Capriccio italien opens with a striking military bugle call and continues with episodes based on Italian songs, both lyrical and lively, before the work closes with a sizzling tarantella dance.

A thundering march launches the Second Piano Concerto, which initially segregates soloist and orchestra. The middle movement offers a surprise—the hint of a triple concerto with violin and cello—while the finale has the spirit of a high-stepping country dance.

Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony, like Beethoven’s Fifth, presents a Fate motif at the outset. This is an adventurous work carrying us through lyrical episodes as well as high drama on the way to the exuberant conclusion.
Tchaikovsky Marathon: Tchaikovsky and Italy

All three pieces on this program have a connection to Italy, and all three were at least partially composed there. The connection with Capriccio italien is clear: the music was inspired by Tchaikovsky’s visit to Rome in 1880. He fell in love with that great city and incorporated some of its music into the Capriccio. The other two works come from a less happy moment in Tchaikovsky’s life, the aftermath of his disastrous marriage, when the stunned composer left Moscow and fled to Western Europe. He did some of the work on the Second Piano Concerto in Rome and completed the Fourth Symphony in San Remo, on the shores of the Mediterranean. Italy is much less an “influence” on these two works than on the Capriccio, but the fact that Tchaikovsky—at a moment of great personal distress—would choose to live and work in Italy may tell us all we need to know about his feelings for that country.

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

Capriccio italien, Opus 45
Premiered: December 18, 1880

Tchaikovsky spent the winter of 1880 in Rome, and he fell in love with that city. It was carnival season, and life blazed around him: crowds, dancers, fireworks, music, the smell of food—all these were part of his impressions of the Eternal City, and suddenly Tchaikovsky felt like writing music. He turned the tunes he heard around him to good use and began writing Capriccio italien soon after his arrival. To his patroness Nadezhda von Meck back in Russia, he explained his method: “I am working on a sketch of an ‘Italian Fantasia’ based on folk songs. Thanks to the charming themes, some of which I have heard in the streets, the work will be effective.”

brilliant Italian episodes

The term “capriccio” has no formal musical meaning. It is more a suggestion of atmosphere, indicating something unexpected (the “caprice”) or—more often—something spicy and animated. It is in the latter sense that Tchaikovsky intends the title. Formal structures were never his strong point, and he makes his “Italian Caprice” out of a series of sections in different meters and keys. The resulting structure is episodic, but few have complained—

this music, based on the tunes Tchaikovsky heard around him on the streets of Rome, is just too much fun.

Capriccio italien opens with a striking military bugle call. Tchaikovsky’s lodgings in Rome were at the Hotel Constanzi, next to the barracks of the Royal Italian Cuirassiers, and he woke to this summons every morning. A series of episodes based on Italian tunes follows. Throughout, Tchaikovsky’s keen orchestral sense is always in evidence: this music is brilliantly orchestrated, and Capriccio italien just plain sounds good. Tchaikovsky rounds matters off with a tarantella, a blazing Italian dance in 6/8.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, glockenspiel, harp and strings

Concerto No. 2 in G major for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 44
Premiered: November 12, 1881

Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto had caused a serious rift between Tchaikovsky and one of his closest friends, the pianist Nikolai Rubinstein (as detailed on page 20). Both wanted to mend fences, and the composer decided to do this by writing a new concerto, tailored to Rubinstein’s fabulous abilities as a pianist. The compositional process spanned a variety of locales: Tchaikovsky began the concerto in October 1879 at his family’s summer estate in Ukraine, then brought the manuscript with him for further work in Paris and Rome, and then back to Russia, where he completed the concerto in March 1880.

the music: grand, intimate and virtuosic

allegro brillante e molto vivace. The Second Piano Concerto gets off to an impressive start on the grand stride of the orchestra’s opening statement, with the pianist quickly picking this up as a huge choral melody. Tchaikovsky offers some quick interplay between soloist and orchestra before an expectant tremolo from the strings sets the stage for the second subject. This falls into two parts: solo clarinet and horn share what might be called an opening phrase, and the piano responds with the tune-like second half. Tchaikovsky develops these over a huge span, and along the way there are two separate cadenzas for the soloist.

andante non troppo. The atmosphere changes completely in this movement, which is—for long periods—simply chamber music. Piano alone announces the principal idea, but is soon joined by solo violin and solo cello, making this movement essentially a concerto for piano trio.
Program Notes

allegro con fuoco. The concluding movement has a rondo-like structure based on two completely different ideas. Tchaikovsky gives the pianist a truly virtuoso part, and the themes are so appealing and the music so energetic that they sweep everything before them as the concerto thunders to its close.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Opus 36
Premiered: February 22, 1878

The Fourth Symphony dates from the most tumultuous period in Tchaikovsky's difficult life. In July 1877, Tchaikovsky married one of his students at the Moscow Conservatory, Antonina Ivanovna Milyukova. The marriage was an instant disaster. Tchaikovsky abandoned his bride, tried to return, but retreated again. He fled to Western Europe, finding relief in the quiet of Clarens in Switzerland and San Remo in Italy. It was in San Remo—on the sunny shores of the Mediterranean and far from the chaos of his life in Moscow—that he completed the Fourth Symphony in January 1878.

The Fourth Symphony has all of Tchaikovsky's considerable virtues—great melodies, primary colors, and soaring climaxes—in this case fused with a superheated emotional content. Tchaikovsky said that the model for his Fourth Symphony had been Beethoven's Fifth, specifically in the way both symphonies are structured around a recurring motif, though perhaps also in the sense that the two symphonies begin in emotional turmoil and eventually win their way to release and triumph in the finale.

the music: a duel with fate
andante sostenuto—moderato con anima. The symphony opens with a powerful brass fanfare, which Tchaikovsky described as “Fate, the inexorable power that hampers our search for happiness. This power hangs over our heads like the sword of Damocles, leaving us no option but to submit.” The principal subject of this movement, however, is a dark, stumbling waltz in 9/8 introduced by the violins. Like inescapable fate, the opening motto-theme returns at key points in this dramatic music, and it finally drives the movement to a furious close.

andantino in modo canzona. The two middle movements bring much-needed relief. The Andantino, in ternary-form, opens with a plaintive oboe solo and features a more animated middle section. Tchaikovsky described it: “Here is the melancholy feeling that overcomes us when we sit weary and alone at the end of the day. The book we pick up slips from our fingers, and a procession of memories passes in review...”

scherzo: pizzicato ostinato. The scherzo has deservedly become one of Tchaikovsky's most popular movements. It is a tour de force for strings, which play pizzicato throughout, with crisp interjections first from the woodwinds and then from brass. The composer noted: “Here are only the capricious arabesques and indeterminate shapes that come into one's mind with a little wine...”

finale: allegro con fuoco. Out of the quiet close of the third movement, the finale explodes to life. The composer described this movement as “the picture of a folk holiday” and said, “If you find no pleasure in yourself, look about you. Go to the people. See how they can enjoy life and give themselves up entirely to festivity.” Marked Allegro con fuoco, this movement simply alternates its volcanic opening sequence with a gentle tune that is actually the Russian folk tune “In the field there stood a birch tree.”

Given the catastrophic events of his life during this music's composition, Tchaikovsky may well have come to feel that Fate was inescapable, and the reappearance of the opening motto amid the high spirits of the finale represents the climax—musically and emotionally—of the entire symphony. This spectre duly acknowledged, Tchaikovsky rips the symphony to a close guaranteed to set every heart in the hall racing at the same incandescent pace as his music.

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

Program notes by Eric Bromberger.

The Minnesota Orchestra first performed Tchaikovsky's Capriccio italiano on November 7, 1905, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, with founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer conducting. The Capriccio was the fifth Tchaikovsky work ever performed by the Orchestra; the first, in December 1903, was the famous Waltz from The Sleeping Beauty.

The Orchestra introduced Tchaikovsky's Second Piano Concerto to its repertoire on March 27, 1914, again at the Minneapolis Auditorium with Oberhoffer conducting; the soloist was Yolanda Mero, a Hungarian-American pianist, impresario and philanthropist. In the following half-century, the Orchestra performed the concerto just once, in 1950.

Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 was first heard by Orchestra audiences on November 1, 1907, also at the Minneapolis Auditorium with Oberhoffer conducting. Last year, a video clip of Associate Conductor Roderick Cox leading the Orchestra in the symphony's finale spread widely on social media, and has been viewed on Facebook more than 3 million times.