Minnesota Orchestra
Osmo Vänskä, conductor
James Ehnes, violin

Saturday, January 13, 2018, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Sunday, January 14, 2018, 2 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

Marche Slave, Opus 31  ca. 10’

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 35  ca. 34’
   Allegro moderato
   Canzonetta: Andante
   Finale: Allegro vivacissimo
   [There is no pause before the final movement.]
   James Ehnes, violin

INTERMISSION  ca. 20’

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Opus 74, Pathétique  ca. 45’
   Adagio – Allegro non troppo
   Allegro con grazia
   Allegro molto vivace
   Finale: Adagio lamentoso

NightCap  Tchaikovsky’s Piano Trio
   Post-concert performance by Peter McGuire, Anthony Ross and Timothy Lovelace
   Saturday, January 13, 10:30 pm, Target Atrium; separate ticket required

OH+  Concert Preview with Akiko Fujimoto and James Ehnes
   Saturday, January 13, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium
   Sunday, January 14, 1:15 pm, Target Atrium

The January 13 Minnesota Orchestra concert will be broadcast live on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
Tchaikovsky: Marche Slave; Violin Concerto; Symphony No. 6, Pathétique

Marche Slave, constructed using motives from high-spirited Serbian folksongs and the Russian national anthem, was a resounding success at its premiere in 1867 and rapidly became a cherished symbol of Slavonic patriotism.

Tchaikovsky's dazzling Violin Concerto, once called “unplayable,” is now the vehicle of great virtuosos. It is noted equally for bravura passagework and the pure romantic realism for which the composer is known, with soulful melodies yielding to folk-like dance tunes and rhythms in the exhilarating Finale.

Darkly, tenderly, beautifully, Tchaikovsky's Sixth and final symphony communicates a mood of deep suffering. Brilliant touches include a waltz in 5/4 time, a dramatic scherzo and a lamenting melody that sinks away to silence.
Tchaikovsky Marathon: Slavic heritage

Like so many Russian composers, Tchaikovsky was proud of his Slavic heritage. "I love passionately the Russian character in all its expression," he said, a sentiment that would be echoed by The Mighty Five—Cui, Balakirev, Borodin, Mussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov—and by many other Russian composers. This program begins with two works, both written when Tchaikovsky was in his thirties, that make that passion clear. His Marche Slave (Slavic March) had a frankly political purpose: Tchaikovsky was enlisted to aid the effort to get the Russian government to intervene militarily to protect their Serbian cousins. The Violin Concerto had no such purpose, but this music—in a purely classical form—is infused with a Russian character all its own, as a hostile critic was quick to point out. Eduard Hanslick, doyen of the Viennese musical establishment, recoiled before the concerto's "Russian-ness." Today we value it precisely for that distinct character.

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 35

Premiered: December 4, 1881

Tchaikovsky wrote his Violin Concerto in Switzerland during the spring of 1878, sketching it in 11 days and completing the scoring in two weeks. Without asking permission, he dedicated it to the famous Russian violinist Leopold Auer, concertmaster of the Imperial Orchestra. Tchaikovsky promptly ran into a bad surprise. Auer refused to perform the concerto, reportedly calling it "unplayable." The concerto had to wait three years before Adolph Brodsky gave the premiere in Vienna on December 4, 1881.

an infamous review

That premiere was the occasion of one of the most infamous reviews in the history of music. Eduard Hanslick savaged the concerto, saying that it "brings to us for the first time the horrid idea that there may be music that stinks to the ear." He went on: "The violin is no longer played. It is yanked about. It is torn asunder. It is beaten black and blue…The Adagio, with its tender national melody, almost conciliates, almost wins us. But it breaks off abruptly to make way for a Finale that puts us in the midst of the brutal and wretched jollity of a Russian kermess. We see wild and vulgar faces, we hear curses, we smell bad brandy."

Hanslick's review has become one of the best examples of critical Wretched Excess: the insensitive destruction of a work that would go on to become one of the best-loved concertos in the repertory. But for all his blindness, Hanslick did recognize one important feature of this music—its "Russian-ness." Tchaikovsky freely—and proudly—admitted his inspiration in this concerto: "My melodies and harmonies of folk-song character come from the fact that I grew up in the country, and in my earliest childhood was impressed by the indescribable beauty of the characteristic features of Russian folk music; also from this, that I love passionately the Russian character in all its expression; in short, I am a Russian in the fullest meaning of the word."

Marche Slave, Opus 31

Premiered: November 17, 1876

In the summer of 1876 Tchaikovsky's friend Nikolai Rubinstein asked the composer for an orchestral work to be performed at a concert to benefit Serbian victims of Turkish aggression. Part of the motive for this concert was to help generate pro-Slavonic sentiment in Russia, so that the larger nation would enter the war on the side of the Serbs.

dark beginning to triumphant close

Tchaikovsky completed the score to his Marche Slave on October 7, 1876, and the premiere took place at the benefit concert six weeks later, on November 17. The title needs to be understood carefully. It does not mean "Slave March," but rather "Slavic March." In this piece Tchaikovsky set out to underline the bond between the Russians and the Serbs by using musical materials from their common Slavic heritage.

Musically, Marche Slave proceeds from a dark beginning to a triumphant close, doubtless an optimistic look ahead to the victory of the Serbian cause. Tchaikovsky marks the beginning...
the music: drama and Russian spirit

*allegro moderato.* The orchestra’s introduction makes a gracious opening to the concerto, and the solo violin quickly enters with a flourish and settles into the lyric opening theme, which had been prefigured in the orchestra’s introduction. A second theme is equally melodic—Tchaikovsky marks it *con moltespressione*—but the development of these themes places extraordinary demands on the soloist, who must solve complicated problems with string-crossings, multiple-stops, and harmonics. Tchaikovsky himself wrote the brilliant cadenza, which makes a gentle return to the movement’s opening theme; a full recapitulation leads to the dramatic close.

canzonetta: andante; finale: allegro vivacissimo. Tchaikovsky marks the second movement *Canzonetta* (Little Song) and mutes solo violin and orchestral strings throughout this movement. It leads without pause to the explosive opening of the finale, marked *Allegro vivacissimo,* a rondo built on two themes of distinctly Russian heritage. These are the themes that reminded Hanslick of a drunken Russian brawl, but to more sympathetic ears they evoke a fiery, exciting Russian spirit. The very ending, with the violin soaring brilliantly above the hurtling orchestra, is one of the most exciting moments in this—or in any—violin concerto.

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

**Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Opus 74, Pathétique**

Premiered: October 28, 1893

Tchaikovsky began a new symphony in February 1893. It grew out of a note he had written to himself the previous year: “The ultimate essence of the plan of the symphony is LIFE. First movement—all impulsive passion, confidence, thirst for activity. Must be short. (Finale DEATH—result of collapse.) Second movement love; third disappointments; fourth ends dying away (also short).”

This note was the seed for Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony, though the plan would be considerably modified in the course of composition. To his nephew Tchaikovsky wrote, “I had an idea for a new symphony, this time with a program—but a program of a kind that will remain an enigma to all. Let them guess it who can...This program is permeated with subjective feeling...While composing it in my mind, I wept frequently.”

Clearly, the new symphony was important to its creator, and he wished to take measure of its emotional significance with a suitable nickname. His brother Modest suggested *Pathétique,* and the composer agreed immediately. The term *pathétique* is difficult to translate into English—Tchaikovsky understood it to mean “emotional” or “passionate.” Yet the “meaning” of this symphony remains elusive.

**the music: beginning and ending in darkness**

*adagio–allegro non troppo.* The *Pathétique* begins in darkness. Solo bassoon sings the somber opening melody, and this smoothly evolves into the movement’s main subject at the *Allegro non troppo.* The second episode is a heartfelt falling melody for strings that Tchaikovsky marks “tenderly, singing, expansive.” The exposition trails off into silence, but out of that silence the orchestra explodes, and the tumultuous development centers on the opening theme. The climax comes on two huge smashes of sound—the first like a crack of thunder, the second exhausted and falling away—and a noble brass chorale draws this movement to its consoling close.

*allegro con grazia.* The second movement is a waltz, but instead of writing it in the waltz meter of 3/4, Tchaikovsky casts this one in 5/4. Despite the sour critic who claimed that this waltz could be danced only by someone with three feet, this is graceful music.

*allegro molto vivace.* This music, one of Tchaikovsky’s most exciting movements, is both scherzo and march. It opens with skittering triplets, and solo oboe quickly sounds the sharp-edged march tune. This movement is beautifully controlled: Tchaikovsky gradually builds these simple materials into a powerful march that drives to a smashing close. It is a close that inevitably brings a burst of applause, but the true ending is still to come.

**finale: adagio lento.** The symphony concludes with a grieving slow movement that Tchaikovsky significantly marks *Adagio lento.* It rises to an agitated climax, then slowly slips back into the blackness from which the symphony began.

Tchaikovsky led the premiere on October 28, 1893, before a St. Petersburg audience that could make little sense of so unexpected an ending. Nine days later Tchaikovsky was dead at the age of 53. At a second performance of this symphony 12 days after his death, the audience was overwhelmed by music that had left them mystified earlier, and the proximity of Tchaikovsky’s death to the premiere of this dark music gave rise to all kinds of interpretations of its meaning. Tchaikovsky himself gave no indication beyond his cryptic comment: “Let them guess it who can.”

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tamtam and strings

Program notes by Eric Bromberger.