Minnesota Orchestra
Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Inon Barnatan, piano
Minnesota Dance Theatre, Lise Houlton, artistic director

Sunday, December 31, 2017, 8:30 pm | Orchestra Hall
Monday, January 1, 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

Symphony No. 1 in G minor, Opus 13, Winter Dreams
  Allegro tranquillo
  Adagio cantabile ma non tanto
  Scherzo: Allegro scherzando giocoso
  Finale: Andante lugubre – Allegro moderato – Allegro maestoso
  Minnesota Dance Theatre

INTERMISSION

ca. 20’

Serenade in C major for Strings, Opus 48
  Pezzo in forma di sonatina: Andante non troppo – Allegro moderato
  Walzer: Moderato – Tempo di valse
  Elégie: Larghetto elegiaco
  Finale (Tema Russo): Andante – Allegro con spirito

Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 23
  Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso
  Andantino semplice
  Allegro con fuoco
  Inon Barnatan, piano

ca. 33’

The December 31 concert is followed by a New Year’s Eve party and countdown in the lobby.

Minnesota Orchestra’s New Year’s Day matinee concert will be broadcast live on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
Artists

**Inon Barnatan, piano**

Inon Barnatan was last heard with the Minnesota Orchestra in May 2016, when he performed Rachmaninoff’s First Piano Concerto. He recently completed his third and final season as the inaugural Artist-in-Association of the New York Philharmonic. He received Lincoln Center’s Martin E. Segal Award in 2015 and the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2009. Barnatan’s passion for contemporary music has led him to commission and perform many works by living composers, including premieres of works by Thomas Adès, Sebastian Currier, Avner Dorman, Matthias Pintscher, Alasdair Nicolson, Andrew Norman and others. His newest album is a live recording of Messiaen’s 90-minute masterpiece *Des canyons aux étoiles* (From the Canyons to the Stars), with an ensemble conducted by Alan Gilbert at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. Barnatan is currently in the process of recording the complete cycle of Beethoven piano concertos with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields.

More: [inonbarnatan.com](http://inonbarnatan.com).

**Minnesota Dance Theatre**

**Lise Houlton, artistic director**

The Minnesota Dance Theatre and School has been a leader in performing, teaching and celebrating the art of dance for more than five decades. Since its founding in 1962 by choreographer, teacher and producer Loyce Houlton, it has collaborated with the Minnesota Orchestra more than 250 times. Now under the direction of Lise Houlton, a former member of the American Ballet Theatre and Stuttgart Ballet, the Minnesota Dance Theatre and School fosters talent in the Twin Cities by providing a comprehensive classical and contemporary training curriculum.

More: [mndance.org](http://mndance.org).

Jeremy Bensussan
Katelyn Boche
Kaitlyn Deyo
Sam Feipel
Maia Nguyen
Gates Northrup
Solana Temple
Zachary Tuazon
Isabelle Tudor

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**one-minute notes**

**Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 1, Winter Dreams; Serenade for Strings; Piano Concerto No. 1**

Tchaikovsky’s First Symphony, nicknamed *Winter Dreams*, begins with harmonies that evoke the crispness of a fresh winter’s snow; the work grows with a fiery energy that burns brilliant until the final note.

Tchaikovsky’s Serenade for Strings is the composer’s nod back to Mozart and his music of the same genre. Throughout the serenade’s four movements, the strings sparkle and dance, are graceful yet animated, relaxed but incredibly beautiful. The first chorale theme makes a remarkable return at the very end of the work.

Like Beethoven, who angrily removed Napoleon’s name from his *Eroica* Symphony, Tchaikovsky furiously scratched out the name Nikolai Rubinstein, the intended dedicatee of his famous First Piano Concerto—and it became an instant success in the hands of the man he then honored with the dedication, Hans von Bülow. It begins with high drama, retreats to a place of calm and rushes toward its close in a mood of white-hot energy.
Some composers achieve success effortlessly. Others struggle for years. Tchaikovsky was in the latter camp. He made his first attempt at composition at age 4, but his apprenticeship was long and difficult. Compounding the problem was Tchaikovsky's sensitivity to criticism, both from others and from continual self-doubt. Yet even as a young composer he produced some radiant scores, and this concert offers two pieces that had to overcome much opposition. The First Piano Concerto provoked the most destructive criticism the composer ever faced. But it also revealed a tough confidence beneath his perpetual self-doubt: Tchaikovsky refused to make any changes, and the concerto went on to become one of his best-loved works.

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**Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

**Born:** May 7, 1840, Votkinsk, Russia  
**Died:** November 6, 1893, St. Petersburg, Russia

**Symphony No. 1 in G minor, Opus 13, Winter Dreams**  
**Premiered:** February 15, 1868

In December 1865, Tchaikovsky graduated from the St. Petersburg Conservatory and took the only steady job he ever had. The Rubinstein brothers—composer Nikolai and pianist Anton—invited him to join the faculty of the Moscow Conservatory, and Tchaikovsky moved to Moscow in January 1866 to become a professor of harmony. Nikolai led a successful performance in March 1866 of Tchaikovsky's Overture in F major, and the brothers encouraged him to take on the most imposing of orchestral forms, the symphony. It was a daunting prospect for a young composer still uncertain about his abilities, and the composition of what would become his first symphony proved harrowing.

**Stress, then success**

Tchaikovsky made a first draft between March and August 1866, but when he showed his manuscript to Anton, the reaction was so caustic that Tchaikovsky went back and completely rewrote it. In fact, the stress was so great that Tchaikovsky came near to collapse—he was doubtless relieved when his doctors ordered him to put the work aside for awhile and collect his faculties. He had the score done by December 22, but the symphony had to wait a year for its premiere. It was worth the wait: that performance, which took place in Moscow on February 15, 1868, was a great success.

Tchaikovsky's First Symphony has not really held a place in the repertory, but this music—youthful, melodic, and far from the tortured intensity of some of Tchaikovsky's later scores—has pleasures of its own. It also has a curious nickname, one for which Tchaikovsky himself was partially responsible. This is not programmatic music, as Tchaikovsky was intent on mastering the symphony on its own terms. He did, however, give the first two movements subtitles, and the one he gave the first movement (“Dreams on a wintry road”) has been transformed into a general nickname for the symphony: Winter Dreams (sometimes rendered as Winter Daydreams). That is an evocative title, but it may not make for an ideal entry into this music, which at moments is full of a fire and excitement far removed from our usual sense of winter.

**The music: wintry inspiration and a folksong finale**

**Allegro tranquilo.** Certainly no one would on his or her own guess that the first movement should be subtitled “Dreams on a wintry road,” and listeners should take this at most as a suggestion of general atmosphere. This sonata-form movement gets off to a wonderful start: over rustling strings, solo flute and bassoon in octaves outline the main theme, and Tchaikovsky quickly spins a rhythmic sub-theme from this. Solo clarinet has the second subject, and these two theme-groups develop at some length.

**Adagio cantabile ma non tanto.** Tchaikovsky's subtitle for the second movement, “Land of gloom, land of mist,” is misleading, for this lovely music is so appealing that it has occasionally been performed by itself. Once again, it is based on two theme-groups, which Tchaikovsky simply alternates across the span of the movement. Muted strings make for a lush beginning, and solo oboe introduces what at first seems a melancholy second subject, but the cellos quickly pick this up and make it dance.

**Scherzo: Allegro scherzando giocoso.** Neither of the final two movements has a subtitle; perhaps at this point Tchaikovsky had abandoned the wintry inspiration. His performance marking for the Scherzo is worth noting: he wants this movement not just scherzando (jesting) but also giocoso (happy). Its energetic main idea tumbles and cascades along the 3/8 meter. The trio section has been called the first of Tchaikovsky's great orchestral waltzes. He preserves the 3/8 meter of the scherzo, and this waltz dances energetically.

**Finale: Andante lugubre—Allegro moderato—Allegro maestoso.** The finale begins with a slow introduction based on the old Russian folk tune “The Garden Bloomed,” and which he specifies should be lugubre (gloomy). But sunlight shines through at the Allegro...
moderato, and Tchaikovsky deftly transforms the folk tune of the slow introduction into the spirited second subject. Tchaikovsky's First Symphony is rarely performed today, but he remembered it fondly. Late in his relatively brief life, he described it as “better than many of my other more mature works.”

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

Serenade in C major for Strings, Opus 48
Premiered: December 3, 1880 (private performance); October 30, 1881 (public performance)

In the fall of 1880, Tchaikovsky set to work simultaneously on two very different pieces. One was the Serenade for Strings; the other was the 1812 Overture. The composer loved the first of these, but had no use for the second.

To his benefactress, Madame Nadezhda von Meck, he wrote: “I have written two long works very rapidly: the festival overture and a Serenade in four movements for string orchestra. The overture will be very noisy. I wrote it without much warmth or enthusiasm; and therefore it has no great artistic value. The Serenade on the contrary, I wrote from an inward impulse: I felt it; and I venture to hope that this work is not without artistic qualities.”

In a way, the two pieces are opposites, for the Serenade—lyric, open, relaxed—is everything the bombastic 1812 Overture is not, and it comes as no surprise that Tchaikovsky had such fondness for this music.

the music: Tchaikovsky at his friendliest

pezzo in forma di sonatina: andante non troppo–allegro moderato. Tchaikovsky intended this work’s opening movement as an homage to one of his favorite composers: Mozart. Although Tchaikovsky called the composition a serenade and specifically set the first movement in sonatina form—both of which suggest an absence of rigorous formal development—this music is nevertheless beautifully unified. The powerful descending introduction quickly gives way to the Allegro moderato, based on two subjects: a broadly-swung melody for full orchestra and a sparkling theme for violins. Tchaikovsky brings back the introductory theme to close out the movement.

walzer: moderato–tempo di valse. Waltzes were a specialty of Tchaikovsky, and this movement is one of his finest. It gets off to a graceful start, grows more animated as it proceeds, then falls away to wink out on two pizzicato strokes.

élégie: largetto elegiac. The third movement, titled Elegie, begins with a quiet melody that soon grows in intensity and beauty. The mood here never becomes tragic—the Serenade remains, for the most part, in major keys—but the depth of feeling with which this Larghetto elegiaco unfolds makes it the emotional center of the entire work.

finale (tema Russo): andante–allegro con spirito. The finale has a wonderful beginning. Very quietly the violins play a melody based on a Russian folk tune, reputedly an old hauling song from the Volga River, and suddenly the main theme bursts out and the movement takes wing. The Allegro con spirito theme is closely related to the introduction of the first movement, and at the end Tchaikovsky deftly combines these two themes to bring one of his friendliest compositions to an exciting close.

Instrumentation: strings alone

Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat Minor, Opus 23
Premiered: October 25, 1875

Tchaikovsky drafted this most famous of piano concertos in November and December 1874, when he was a young professor at the Moscow Conservatory. Only modestly talented as a pianist and insecure about his handling of larger forms, Tchaikovsky sought the advice of Nikolai Rubinstein, head of the Conservatory and the man to whom he intended to dedicate the concerto. Rubinstein listened in silence as Tchaikovsky played the new work through, and then, as the composer later recounted:

“There burst from Rubinstein’s mouth a mighty torrent of words. He spoke quietly at first, then he waxed hot, and finally he resembled Zeus hurling thunderbolts. It seems that my concerto was utterly worthless, absolutely unplayable. Certain passages were so commonplace and awkward they could not be improved, and the piece as a whole was bad, trivial, vulgar. I had stolen this from somebody and that from somebody else, so that only two or three pages were good for anything and all the rest should be wiped out or radically rewritten.”

a triumphant premiere

Stung (and furious), Tchaikovsky refused to change a note, erased the dedication to Rubinstein, and instead dedicated the concerto to the German pianist-conductor Hans von Bülow, who had championed his music. Bülow promptly took the concerto on a tour of the United States, and it was in Boston on October 25, 1875, that Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto was heard for the first time.
It was a huge success on that occasion, and Bülow played it repeatedly in this country to rhapsodic reviews. A critic in Boston, taking note of that success, described the concerto as an “extremely difficult, strange, wild, ultra-modern Russian Concerto,” but back in Russia the composer read the press clippings and was beside himself with happiness: “Think what healthy appetites these Americans must have! Each time Bülow was obliged to repeat the whole finale of my concerto! Nothing like that happens in our country.” Rubinstein eventually saw the error of his initial condemnation and became one of the concerto’s great champions. (It should be noted, though, that in 1889—perhaps more aware of Rubinstein’s criticisms than he cared to admit—Tchaikovsky did in fact take the concerto through a major revision, and it is in this form that we know it today).

The concerto has one of the most dramatic beginnings in all the literature, ringing with horn fanfares and cannonades of huge piano chords, followed by one of Tchaikovsky’s Great Tunes, in which that horn fanfare is transformed into a flowing melody for strings. This opening has become extremely famous, but this introductory section has many quirks. It is in the “wrong” key (D-flat major), and—however striking it may be—it never returns in any form: Tchaikovsky simply abandons all this tremendous material when he gets to the main section of the movement.

This “real” beginning, marked Allegro con spirito, is finally in the correct key of B-flat minor, and the piano’s skittering main subject is reportedly based on a tune Tchaikovsky heard a blind beggar whistle at a fair in the Ukraine. The expected secondary material quickly appears—a chorale-like theme for winds and a surging, climbing figure for strings—though Tchaikovsky evades expectations by including multiple cadenzas for the soloist in this movement. The piano writing is of the greatest difficulty (much of it in great hammered octaves), and the movement drives to a dramatic close.

Andantino semplice. The Andantino semplice is aptly named, for this truly is simple music in the best sense of that term: over pizzicato chords, solo flute sings the gentle main theme, an island of calm after the searing first movement. A scherzo-like central episode marked Prestissimo leads to the return of the opening material and a quiet close.

Allegro con fuoco. The finale is also well named, for here is music full of fire. It is a rondo based on the piano’s nervous, dancing main theme, and while calmer episodes break into this furious rush, the principal impression this music makes is of white-hot energy, and this “strange, wild, ultra-modern Russian Concerto” rushes to a knock-out close that is just as impressive to audiences today as it was to that first Boston audience in 1875.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

Program notes by Eric Bromberger.

The Minnesota Orchestra’s first performance of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 1, Winter Dreams, took place on November 4, 1920, at the St. Paul Auditorium Theater, with founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer on the conductor’s podium. Until this week’s performances, Oberhoffer had been the only one of the Orchestra’s ten music directors to conduct the ensemble in this symphony.

Tchaikovsky’s Serenade for Strings received its first Orchestra performance on December 15, 1935, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium, under the baton of Eugene Ormandy. Sarah Hicks led the ensemble’s most recent performance of the work in September 2007. Hicks, now the principal conductor of Live at Orchestra Hall, leads two performances this month with singer-songwriter-pianist Ben Folds.

Orchestra audiences first heard Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto on November 29, 1907, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, with Emil Oberhoffer conducting and pianist Teresa Carreno as soloist. Oberhoffer programmed the concerto 12 times during his tenure as music director, collaborating with 11 different soloists. One soloist of note was Australian-born composer Percy Grainger, who performed the piece with the Orchestra in February 1920 on a program that also featured three of his compositions.