

Quincy Symphony Orchestra
Feb 12, 2017
Shakespeare's Vision

Today's program embodies both themes of our concert season, *Passions & Reveries*. It is impossible to imagine a more passionate story than the love tragedy created by William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet, an impulse for dreamy thoughts, "reveries," is found both in the romantic, nationalistic thoughts of Dvorák's Slavonic Dance as well as in the dreams of accomplishment that our three young soloists have achieved.

Slavonic Dance, Op. 46 No. 1

Antonín Dvorák
(1841-1904)

International fame came to Dvorák in the wake of the success of his eight "Slavonic Dances," composed for piano in 1878. So many copies were immediately bought that his publisher, Simrock, asked him to create an orchestration of them. The incorporation of a nationalistic, folk idiom in concert music had become popular in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. Brahms, Dvorák's older contemporary, had had recent success with his Hungarian Dances, and so, Dvorák decided to adapt his own Czeck (Slavonic, Moravian) heritage in this intentionally popular style. While he did not use real folk melodies (as Brahms had done), the folk element is captured in the rhythms that characterize traditional folk dances. Op. 46, No. 1 in C Major is a *furiant* (a Bohemian dance). We hear an announcing chord, followed by regular phrases in a triple meter. This structure is complicated, however, by the conflicting accents that disrupt the listener's perception of a duple frame superimposed on a triple, active dance. The memorable melodies are Dvorák's own. These dances remain among the most frequently performed of his compositions.

Violin Concerto No. 3 in G Major, K. 216
1. Allegro

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

During the 1770s, when he was only entering his twenties, Mozart composed a series of five violin concertos. They remain among the most delightful violin works even after being challenged in the repertory by the many, more "virtuosic" works of the 19th and 20th centuries. However, as one evaluates the three-hundred-year history of violin concerto repertory, Mozart's contributions remain among the most engaging, both in structure and in challenge to the performer.

In the first movement of K. 216, we hear an intimate dialogue between soloist and orchestra. First, one states a musical idea, then the other responds. This is especially evident in the middle of the movement when the violin has several calls that are responded to by the winds of the orchestra. The traditional opportunity for a cadenza is present in this movement, and we will experience our soloist alone focusing on music-making without the rest of the orchestra.

Clarinet Concerto No. 1 in F Minor
1. Allegro moderato

Carl Maria von Weber
(1786-1826)

In 1811, young Weber worked with his friend, Heinrich Baermann, in Darmstadt to write a solo work for the clarinet, his Clarinet Concertino. Its great success resulted in a royal request for him to write two more clarinet concertos, the first of which we hear today. Its formal structure is characteristic of the early 19th century: three movements, the first being the most formal and traditional in structure. However, the use of clarinet as the significant soloist was only preceded by Mozart's clarinet concerto some 20 years earlier. So, the display of technical ability, combined with melodious arabesques in the solo part was Weber's contribution to the clarinet repertory. The agility demanded of the soloist offered a display of virtuosity that pleased contemporary audiences. This first movement provides ample opportunity for our soloist both to sing

wonderfully expressive melodies as well as to execute fast scale passages and arpeggios, characteristics of a virtuosity admired by audiences then and now.

Passions and Reveries

Shakespeare's love story *Romeo and Juliet*, has inspired many composers, artists, and film-makers. The way they interpreted the story varied considerably. Berlioz, for example, created a multi-movement work he called a symphony. However, by that time he had already challenged the definition of symphony with his *Symphonie fantastique* which we will hear on the last concert of our season. Other orchestral creations include today's Tchaikovsky's "Fantasie-Overture" *Romeo and Juliet* which is an orchestral genre developed in the 19th century essentially to be a non-symphony. More than 25 operas include Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette*. Prokofiev's ballet relies on the listener to know the story, then to experience the dancers' motions without words.

from *Romeo and Juliet, Suite 2, Op. 64*

Sergei Prokofiev
(1891-1953)

The Montagues and Capulets

The Young Juliet

Friar Laurence

Dance

Dance of the Maids from the Antilles

Romeo at Juliet's Grave

Following a promising early career during the First World War, Prokofiev left Russia in 1918 after the Bolshevik Revolution. His early ballet compositions allied him with the famous dance communities of the Russian Empire. And his exile to the United States and France in the 1920s provided performance opportunities for many of his earlier works as well as those composed away from his home country.

When he ultimately resettled in Russia during the mid-1930s, his status was compromised because his compositions didn't conform to an official Soviet expectation of soviet composers' musical styles. Yet, his international fame shielded him from the kind of official criticism that was aimed at Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtensk District*. With the help of Russian dramaturge Piotrovsky, Prokofiev conceived a ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*, based on Shakespeare's drama. He expressed a difficulty with the story: "living people can dance, the dying cannot." Thus, the original version had a happy ending! Eventually, his revisions reinstated the tragic ending.

The ballet was completed in 1935, yet its premiere in Moscow didn't occur until 1940. Prokofiev did, however, create three orchestral suites from portions of the ballet score. We are hearing six of the seven movements from the second suite, arranged in 1936. One experiences his remarkable ability to compose musical images that both suggest story lines and stimulate the physical exertions that ballet dancers employ in their mute portrayal of the characters. Dreamy, slow passages contrast with lively, impulsive sections. The emotionally complex portrayal of the young Juliet is especially keen, contrasting the giddiness of a flighty young girl with her developing romantic emotions.

Marimba Concerto No. 1, Op. 12

Ney Rosauro
(born 1952)

3. Dança (Dance)

4. Despedida (Farewell)

The repertory of music for solo marimba (and other keyboard percussions instruments) is quite recent. (No Mozart, no Beethoven, no Brahms, no Stravinsky, no Rorem, no whatever.) Yet the instrument has an appeal that transcends its folk-ethno origins. Among the champions of the marimba is Ney Rosauro, a marimba performer and composer of considerable acclaim in the past several years. Rosauro was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; his concerto's movements are given Portuguese titles: Saudação (Greeting), Lamento, Dança, and Despedida (Farewell).

The two movements we hear today contain characteristic Brazilian rhythms that emphasize accented syncopation. A string orchestra supports the virtuosic antics of the soloist, sometimes with simple background chords, sometimes participating in the melodic interplay. It is especially enjoyable to watch the athleticism required of the soloist in order to find all the right notes!

Romeo and Juliet (Fantasie-Overture)

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)

Early in his career, Tchaikovsky was sensitive of, yet receptive to, criticism. His early conservatory training was not well thought of by some nationalistic Russian musicians who were eager to be different from the French/German/Italian musical predominance that had evolved in Europe during the 18th and early-19th centuries. Yet, Mili Balakirev (one of the Russian nationalistic "Five") was impressed by Tchaikovsky's talent. Balakirev's suggestion that Tchaikovsky write a composition using Romeo and Juliet as a subject proved encouraging and helpful. A first version (of three) was not well received; but with Balakirev's continuing critical comments and support, after a decade Tchaikovsky produced what we hear today.

The work is ostensibly in sonata form (a pattern followed in a traditional symphony first movement). It is introduced by a slow, somber introduction and closes with a potent, loud conclusion. In between, we do find the sonata structure--exposition, development, recapitulation. But the work is informed by musical themes that evoke three main ideas from the drama: 1) Friar Laurence's ultimate intermediation, 2) the fight between the Montague and Capulet families, and 3) most familiar, the forbidden love between Romeo, a Montague, and Juliet, a Capulet.

The introduction includes a chorale-like melody that introduces Friar Laurence, the kind soul who blesses and brings Romeo and Juliet together. This melody returns, transformed according to the dramatic situations. The exposition is rhythmically active, with cymbals evoking the street clash between the young men of the Montagues and Capulets. The two sides of the fight are represented by the strings and winds in close alternation. A second, contrasting section (the most familiar tune) emerges as the music quiets and slows. It represents the love between Romeo (English horn and low strings) and Juliet (flutes). Their night-time tryst can be imagined in the shimmering string passages between the various statements of the love theme.

Development and recapitulation combine the fight music and its contrast with the love and Friar themes. The many, juxtaposed sections offer a musical collage of the misunderstandings that eventually results in the pair committing suicide one by one. The epilogue is a statement about the unfortunate tragedy of the situation, the sad end of two young people because of family enmity. A slow, dirge like coda represents the ultimate tragedy; a woodwind chorale is the homage to the lovers. To end, the full orchestra forcefully punctuates the regrettable tragedy.