

RODION SHCHEDRIN

Composer
(MOSCOW, 1932)

NAUGHTY LIMERICKS, CONCERTO FOR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Composed: 1963

Premiered: September 1963 in Warsaw, conducted by Gennady Rozhdestvensky

Duration: ca. 10 minutes

Scoring: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, four trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano and strings

Overview

Rodion Shchedrin, one of the handful of Russian composers of the generation after Shostakovich whose music has made an impact in the West, was born in Moscow on December 16, 1932. His father, a well-known musical theorist and writer on music, encouraged Rodion's musical interests with piano lessons, but the boy's formal training was interrupted by the German invasion in 1941. Shchedrin resumed his musical education in 1948 at the Choir School in Moscow, where he began to compose, and he entered the Moscow Conservatory three years later to study piano with Yacob Flier and composition with Yuri Shaporin. By the time he graduated in 1955, Shchedrin had established a distinctive idiom with a string quartet, a piano quintet and the Piano Concerto No. 1, which incorporate the styles of both folk music from various Russian regions (which he studied on the field trips required by the Conservatory curriculum) and the simple urban street song known as the *chastushka*. The First Piano Concerto attracted sufficient attention that he was named to represent the U.S.S.R. at the Fifth World Festival of Democratic Youth in Prague in 1954. The following year he composed *The Humpbacked Horse*, which became widely popular in its original form as a ballet, as well as in two orchestral suites and a film version. Shchedrin subsequently wrote about current trends in his country's music in official publications, received many awards (most notably the Lenin Prize in 1984), was made a People's Artist of the U.S.S.R. in 1981, and visited the United States on cultural exchange programs in 1964, 1968 and 1986. He taught at the Moscow Conservatory from 1965 to 1969. He has since worked as a free-lance composer, and now divides his time between Moscow and Munich. From 1973 to 1990, Shchedrin was Chairman of the Composers' Union of the Russian Federation; in 1990, he became Honorary Chairman of the organization. His many distinctions include: USSR State Prize (1972); State Prize of Russia (1992); Dmitri Shostakovich Prize (Russia, 1993); Crystal Award (Switzerland, 1995); membership in the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts (1976), Academy of Fine Arts of the German Democratic Republic (1983) and International Music Council (1985); Honorary Professorships at the conservatories of Moscow (1997), St. Petersburg (2005) and Beijing (2008); Composer of the Year with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (2002); Russian Federation State Order (2002); Russian State Order 2nd Class (2007); and a 2011 Grammy nomination for his opera *The Enchanted Wanderer* as "Best Classical Contemporary Composition."

What To Listen For

The Russian *chastushka* is a short, simple song for one, two or more singers with rhymed texts on an apparently limitless number of topics. Shchedrin explained, “In a *chastushka* there is always humor, irony and a sharp satire of the status quo, its defenders and the ‘leaders of the people.’ Even such powerful or dreaded names as Marx, Lenin and Stalin have been ridiculed in *chastushki*. Everything that occurs in the life of the people, from events of historic importance to the most intimate sensations, finds its way into *chastushki* at once, on the same day or — through extemporizing — at the very moment. [*Chastushka*’ is derived from the adjective *chastiy*: ‘quick.’] Brevity is the chief characteristic of the *chastushka*. Its specifically musical traits are a four-square and symmetric structure, a deliberately primitive melody of limited scope, driving syncopated rhythm, improvisation, numerous repetitions involving variation (chiefly shifting the strong and weak beats), and — which is a must — a *sense of humor* pervading both the words and music.”

Shchedrin used *chastushki* in his Piano Concerto No. 1 (1954), the ballet *The Hump-Backed Horse* (1956), the First Symphony (1958) and the opera *Not Love Alone* (1961), and made them the basis of the flamboyantly virtuosic “concerto for orchestra” that he composed in 1963, whose title — *Ozorniye Chastushki* — has been rendered in English as both *Mischievous Folk Ditties* and, more frequently, *Naughty Limericks*. “Unfortunately, the word *chastushka* is associated in the minds of many musicians with simple tunes of eight bars, suggesting nothing but boredom,” Shchedrin wrote. “I think, however, that this modest and unassuming form may be likened to a door opening, as in an old fairy-tale, upon a world of most varied and inexhaustible musical riches. In *Naughty Limericks*, conceived as a virtuosic orchestral work, I treat only the comic and dance *chastushka* tunes. The concertante style and virtuosic effects are, to my mind, inherent in this type of *chastushka*.”

JAMES NEWTON HOWARD

Composer
(Los Angeles, 1951)

VIOLIN CONCERTO

Composed: 2014

*Premiered: March 12, 2014 in Costa Mesa, California, conducted by Carl St. Clair
with James Ehnes as soloist*

Duration: ca. 25 minutes

*Scoring: piccolo, two flutes, alto flute, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons,
contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp,
piano, celesta and strings*

Overview

Anyone who has seen *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, any of the *Hunger Games* films, *Pretty Woman*, *Nightcrawler*, *Maleficent*, *The Bourne Legacy*, *Blood Diamond*, *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *King Kong*, *The Dark Knight*, *Wyatt Earp*, *The Prince of Tides* or any of the more than 150 feature films he has scored know the music of James Newton Howard. Howard was perfectly prepared for the range of his soundtracks — from thriller, action and western to

romance, comedy and fantasy — by his upbringing, education and experience.

James Newton Howard was born in Los Angeles in 1951 into a musical family — his grandmother was a violinist with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in the 1940s — and started piano lessons when he was four. He attended high school at the rigorous Thacher School in Ojai and began his professional training at The Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara as a piano student of Leon Fleisher. He then went to USC for advance study but dropped out after a few weeks because he “wanted to do other things than practice the piano.” For the next few years, Howard played in a rock band and worked as a session musician with such top-notch entertainers as Diana Ross, Ringo Starr, Harry Nilsson, Rod Stewart and Olivia Newton-John before joining Elton John’s band in 1975, with whom he started arranging, composing and recording. He scored his first film in 1985 — the comedy *Head Office* — and over the next decade established himself as one of Hollywood’s most versatile and prolific composers. He received his first Oscar nomination for *Defiance* in 2008, and has gone on to earn seven more Academy Award nods (*The Prince of Tides*, *The Fugitive*, *Junior*, *One Fine Day*, *My Best Friend’s Wedding*, *The Village*, *Michael Clayton*), an Emmy (*Gideon’s Crossing*), a Grammy (*The Dark Knight*, with Hans Zimmer), three World Soundtrack Awards (*I Am Legend*, *Michael Clayton*, *Charlie Wilson’s War*), ASCAP’s Henry Mancini Award and a Lifetime Achievement Award from BMI. In 2016, James Newton Howard became Artistic Director of the Henry Mancini Institute at the University of Miami.

What To Listen For

Howard composed his first concert work, *I Would Plant a Tree*, in 2008 for the Pacific Symphony in Costa Mesa, California, and the success of that piece led to a commission from the orchestra five years later for a violin concerto for them to premiere with James Ehnes; that performance took place on March 12, 2014 at Segerstrom Hall, conducted by Carl St. Clair. “When I was offered a commission in 2013 to compose a violin concerto for James Ehnes and the Pacific Symphony,” Howard recalled, “I was at once thrilled, excited, expectant and ultimately terrified. So much so that for the longest time I couldn’t refer to the work as a concerto, but rather as my ‘violin piece.’”

“I wrote most of the concerto in January and February of 2014 during a much-needed break from my film scoring commitments. I had hoped very much to have a narrative or concept in place, but alas, no such profound idea ever surfaced. Instead what emerged is a melody-driven romantic work steeped in traditional structures but with a vocabulary that feels authentic.

“The Concerto begins with the violin hesitantly exploring an emerging melodic line. The orchestra feels weightless. The violin seeks to reveal the theme until the orchestra, as if frustrated with the indecision of the soloist, takes control and confidently affirms the theme. The first of two cadenzas in the concerto appears about seven minutes in.

“For me, the centerpiece of the concerto is the second movement. The first six notes of the clarinet in the movement (marked *Andante Semplice*) are played moderately slowly and simply — it is a child’s melody, sung over and over, by Cole Carsan St. Clair, the son of Susan and [Pacific Symphony Music Director] Carl St. Clair, who died in 1999 at the age of eighteen

months. Elegiac in places, the movement is intended as a celebration of Cole's enduring life force and spirit, ending in a six-part round as a group of children might sing. I'm honored to dedicate this movement to the memory of Cole Carsan St. Clair.

"The stillness at the end of the second movement is broken by the energetic ascending violin solo that begins the third movement. I had come across a poetry collection by Charles Bukowski called *The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills*. That line resonated with me and was the inspiration for the third movement."

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Composer

(Votkinsk, Russia, 1840 — St. Petersburg, 1893)

SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN F MINOR, OP. 36

Composed: 1877-1878

Premiered: February 22, 1878 in Moscow, conducted by Nikolai Rubinstein

Duration: ca. 445 minutes

Scoring: pairs of woodwinds plus piccolo, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings

Overview

The Fourth Symphony was a product of the most crucial and turbulent time of Tchaikovsky's life — 1877, when he met two women who forced him to evaluate himself as he never had before. The first was the sensitive, music-loving widow of a wealthy Russian railroad baron, Nadezhda von Meck. Mme. von Meck had been enthralled by Tchaikovsky's music, and she first contacted him at the end of 1876 to commission a work. She paid him extravagantly, and soon an almost constant stream of notes and letters passed between them: hers contained money and effusive praise; his, thanks and an increasingly greater revelation of his thoughts and feelings. She became not only the financial backer who allowed him to quit his irksome teaching job at the Moscow Conservatory to devote himself to composition, but also the sympathetic sounding-board for reports on the whole range of his activities — emotional, musical, personal. Though they never met, her place in Tchaikovsky's life was enormous and beneficial.

The second woman to enter Tchaikovsky's life in 1877 was Antonina Miliukov, an unnoticed student in one of his large lecture classes at the Conservatory who had worked herself into a passion over her young professor. Tchaikovsky paid her no special attention, and he had quite forgotten her when he received an ardent love letter professing her flaming and unquenchable desire to meet him. Tchaikovsky (age 37), who should have burned the thing, answered the letter of the 28-year-old Antonina in a polite, cool fashion, but did not include an outright rejection of her advances. He had been considering marriage for almost a year in the hope that it would give him both the stable home life that he had not enjoyed in the twenty years since his mother died, as well as to help dispel the all-too-true rumors of his homosexuality. He believed he might achieve both these goals with Antonina. He could not see the situation clearly enough to realize that what he hoped for was impossible — a pure, platonic marriage without its physical and

emotional realities. Further letters from Antonina implored Tchaikovsky to meet her, and threatened suicide out of desperation if he refused. What a welter of emotions must have gripped his heart when, just a few weeks later, he proposed marriage to her! Inevitably, the marriage crumbled within days of the wedding amid Tchaikovsky's searing self-deprecation.

It was during May and June that Tchaikovsky sketched the Fourth Symphony, finishing the first three movements before Antonina began her siege. The finale was completed by the time he proposed. Because of this chronology, the program of the Symphony was not a direct result of his marital disaster. All that — the July wedding, the mere eighteen days of bitter conjugal farce, the two separations — postdated the actual composition of the Symphony by a few months, though the orchestration took place during the painful time from September to January when the composer was seeking respite in a half dozen European cities from St. Petersburg to San Remo. What Tchaikovsky found in his relationship with this woman (who by 1877 already showed signs of approaching the door of the mental ward in which, still legally married to him, she died in 1917) was a confirmation of his belief in the inexorable workings of Fate in human destiny. He later wrote to Mme. von Meck, "We cannot escape our Fate, and there was something fatalistic about my meeting with this girl." The relationships with the two women of 1877, Mme. von Meck and Antonina, occupy important places in the composition of this Symphony: one made it possible, the other made it inevitable, but the vision and its fulfillment were Tchaikovsky's alone.

What To Listen For

After the premiere, Tchaikovsky wrote to Mme. von Meck, with great trepidation, explaining the emotional content of the Fourth Symphony:

"The introduction [blaring brasses heard immediately in a motto theme that recurs several times throughout the Symphony] is the kernel, the chief thought of the whole Symphony. This is Fate, the fatal power that hinders one in the pursuit of happiness from gaining the goal, which jealously provides that peace and comfort do not prevail, that the sky is not free from clouds — a might that swings, like the sword of Damocles, constantly over the head, that poisons continuously the soul. This might is overpowering and invincible. There is nothing to do but to submit and vainly complain [the melancholy, syncopated shadow-waltz of the main theme, heard in the strings]. The feeling of desperation and loneliness grows stronger and stronger. Would it not be better to turn away from reality and lull one's self in dreams? [The second theme is begun by the clarinet, with trailing sighs from the rest of the woodwinds.] Deeper and deeper the soul is sunk in dreams. All that was dark and joyless is forgotten....

"No — these are but dreams: roughly we are awakened by Fate. [The blaring brass fanfare over a wave of timpani begins the development section.] Thus we see that life is only an everlasting alternation of somber reality and fugitive dreams of happiness. Something like this is the program of the first movement.

"The second movement shows another phase of sadness. How sad it is that so much has already *been* and *gone*! And yet it is a pleasure to think of the early years. One mourns the past and has neither the courage nor the will to begin a new life. One is rather tired of life. One would fain

rest awhile, recalling happy hours when young blood pulsed warm through our veins and life brought satisfaction. We remember irreparable loss. But these things are far away. It is sad, yet sweet, to lose one's self in the past.

“There is no determined feeling, no exact expression in the third movement. Here are capricious arabesques, vague figures which slip into the imagination when one has taken wine and is slightly intoxicated. Suddenly there rushes into the imagination the picture of a drunken peasant and a gutter song. Military music is heard passing in the distance. There are disconnected pictures which come and go in the brain of the sleeper. They have nothing to do with reality; they are unintelligible, bizarre.

“As to the finale, 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. The picture of a folk holiday. [The finale employs the folk song *A Birch Stood in the Meadow*, presented simply by the woodwinds after the noisy flourish of the opening.] Hardly have we had time to forget ourselves in the happiness of others when indefatigable Fate reminds us once more of its presence. The other children of men are not concerned with us. How merry and glad they all are. All their feelings are so inconsequential, so simple. And do you still say that all the world is immersed in sorrow? There still *is* happiness, simple, naive happiness. Rejoice in the happiness of others — and you can still live.

“There is not a single line in this Symphony that I have not felt in my whole being and that has not been a true echo of the soul.”

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