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Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2017
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Suite from *Pulcinella*

Igor Stravinsky

Born 17 June, 1882 in Oranienbaum, Russia

Died 6 April, 1971 in New York City

Approximate duration 24 minutes

From skeptic to advocate

When Serge Diaghilev, the legendary impresario of the Ballets russes, suggested in 1919 that Stravinsky turn his attention to music by little-known 18th-century masters with the idea of orchestrating some movements as a ballet score, the composer reacted with initial skepticism. Diaghilev proposed music of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736). Stravinsky knew little of Pergolesi's work beyond the *Stabat Mater* and the opera *La serva padrona*, neither of which interested him.

Then he riffled through the obscure manuscripts Diaghilev had obtained from Italian libraries. Captivated by the music's simplicity and melodious charm, Stravinsky reconsidered Diaghilev's proposal. Ultimately the entire project proved too seductive to resist. Diaghilev offered him a kind of package deal: Pablo Picasso would do the sets, and Leonid Massine the choreography. Stravinsky later wrote that his "discovery of the past was the epiphany through which the whole of [his] late work became possible."

Neoclassicism: a new phase rooted in tradition

One often hears the term "neoclassical" applied to Stravinsky. *Pulcinella*, the ballet score he composed in response to Diaghilev's commission, earned that sobriquet for him. It was the first work in which he consciously turned to the rhythms, melodies and textures of an earlier era. Musically, the greatest difficulty in explaining *Pulcinella* is not in the metamorphosis of *rococo* music into a 20th-century score, but the fact that music attributed to Pergolesi turned out not to be by Pergolesi at all! Musical scholars have ascribed nearly all the fragments to Pergolesi's contemporaries, proving their attribution to Pergolesi to be spurious. Nevertheless, Pergolesi's name remains closely associated with Stravinsky's score.

Making old music sound fresh: the Stravinsky touch

Stravinsky left the melodic lines of the 18th-century pieces intact. By the addition of his own music in bridge passages, he succeeded in breaking up the predictability of the original. His personal imprint is both harmonic and rhythmic: the gentle dissonance created by pedal points, and clever adaptations of the dance meters with unexpected repetitions and startling sonorities. Despite the reduced orchestra, the scoring is brilliant and varied.

Two years after the première of the ballet in Paris in May 1920, Stravinsky created a concert version of the Suite in eight movements, for the same reduced chamber orchestra forces as the original. In 1947 he made modest revisions to the Suite, largely consisting of metronome

markings and one movement title change. Maestro van Zweden and the Dallas Symphony perform the later version, published in 1949.

The score calls for two flutes (second doubling piccolo); two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, one trumpet, one trombone, solo string quartet, and strings.

Concerto in F Major for Bassoon and Strings, S.63 /WoO 23

Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837)

Hummel is best known for his popular trumpet concerto and an oddly-scored Septet for flute, oboe, horn, viola, cello, double bass, and piano. Though little of his other music is familiar, he composed extensively in every genre except symphony and wrote superbly for piano. He is an underrated composer. Even the Hummel scholar Joel Sachs damns with faint praise: “Hummel’s music reached the highest level accessible to one who lacks ultimate musical genius.”

Yet especially for piano music, Johann Nepomuk Hummel was the most important link between Mozart and Chopin. He was one of Beethoven’s most successful and distinguished contemporaries. As a child, he studied fortepiano and composition with Mozart, living with Wolfgang and Constanze in Vienna intermittently between 1785 and 1788. At Mozart’s urging, Hummel’s father—a conductor and director of a music school in Pressburg--arranged for the boy to tour Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, England and Scotland. By the time he returned to

Vienna in 1792, Hummel was an international celebrity who had already published his first compositions.

In Vienna, he studied briefly with Albrechtsberger (Beethoven's counterpoint instructor) and Salieri. He also took some organ lessons with Haydn after Haydn's return from London. When Haydn retired in 1804, Hummel succeeded him as Kapellmeister to Prince Nikolaus Esterházy II. In that capacity he composed a large amount of sacred music. Later in his career, he held court appointments in Stuttgart and Weimar, taking three months' leave most years to concertize. Hummel's legacy as a teacher was distinguished. His piano pupils included several of the nineteenth century's great virtuosi, among them Adolf Henselt, Sigismond Thalberg, Ferdinand Hiller and, briefly, Felix Mendelssohn.

The Bassoon Concerto is believed to date either from 1805, or from the period 1811 to 1816, when Hummel resided in Vienna. The undated manuscript was discovered in the 1950s in the archives of the British Museum.

The piece is heavily dependent on the late classical Mozartean model, with a standard three-movement structure. Hummel's opening Allegro moderato is in concerto-sonata form, with a full orchestral exposition before the soloist enters. Phrasing is foursquare and balanced, demonstrating a full mastery of the high classic idiom. He takes advantage of the bassoon's wide range and flexibility, incorporating both wide leaps and rapid runs in 16th notes in the solo part.

Like many of Mozart's slow movements, the central Romanza in B-flat Major is indebted to Italian opera. The elegantly ornamented solo line provides ample opportunity for the bassoonist to shape delicate phrases and long melodic lines. Mr. Oakes plays a cadenza of his own devising, freely based on the Romanza's melodic material and other themes borrowed from Hummel's choral works.

The concerto concludes with a perky, dance-like *Rondó*, which returns to the home key of F Major. A central episode in B-flat Major marked *Meno mosso-Pesante* relates the finale to the folk tradition. Sly false returns of the rondo tune reveal Hummel's sense of humor.

The score calls for two oboes, two horns, solo bassoon, and strings.

Symphony No. 4 in F-minor, Op. 36

Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky

Born 7 May, 1840 in Votkinsk, Viatka district, Russia

Died 6 November, 1893 in St. Petersburg, Russia

Approximate duration 44 minutes

Tchaikovsky was the quintessential neurotic. Some of his contemporaries condemned him for his psychological instability and turbulent personal life. Yet his transference of neurosis into music is precisely the quality that makes him one of the most popular composers in the concert hall. We love his music because it makes no bones about being emotional, forthright,

direct, over-the-top, what have you. Something in his melodies and orchestration and expressivity reaches deep within our souls.

Somehow, we are not offended by this intrusion because it remains a private communication, processed through our individual listening experience. Perhaps we feel superior, because most of us are not plagued with the myriad problems that tortured this complicated man. Perhaps we feel grateful for being spared his emotional trauma. Most likely, something abstract in his suffering comes through, in ways that let us know he understands the crises each of us experiences and resolves from day to day and month to month.

The fact is that Tchaikovsky did lead a tumultuous life that was chock full of exciting, sometimes cataclysmic events. The Fourth Symphony is a prime example, not only dating from a chaotic time of emotional havoc, but also mirroring his struggle with that havoc. By the symphony's conclusion, we have a sense that, at least temporarily, he has bested adverse circumstances, finding acceptance, resolution, and even triumph. The journey is not a peaceful one, nor is it boring.

Tchaikovsky's musical travels in this symphony are directly linked to the momentous events of 1877. That was the year he began his remarkable correspondence with Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, the wealthy patron who was to provide both emotional sustenance (via her letters) and financial security to the composer for more than a decade. 1877 was also the year that Antonina Milyukova, a former student of Tchaikovsky's, wrote to him with declarations

of love and threats of suicide, inexplicably prompting him to propose to her, marry her, and leave her within a matter of months. Desperate for emotional stability and wrestling with the torment of his homosexuality, Tchaikovsky sought refuge in travel, correspondence, and composition.

Though sketches for the Fourth Symphony were substantially complete before the abortive marriage, its history cannot be separated from the anguish of those few unfortunate summer months. More and more, Tchaikovsky turned to Mme. von Meck for spiritual guidance, as confidant, as muse. The F-minor symphony was the first work he dedicated to her, and he called it "our symphony" in their correspondence.

In one of his letters to von Meck, he sketched a programme, identifying the symphony's opening fanfare as "Fate . . . the sword of Damocles that hangs over our head." His metaphor has led to this work sometimes being called the 'Fate' Symphony. The second theme group he called "dream world. . . escape from reality." How appallingly real all this must have seemed to him upon realizing the magnitude of the mistake he had made in marrying Antonina!

After the opening fanfare (which recurs at key moments later in the first movement and again in the finale), Tchaikovsky settles into a tortured, rhythmically complex waltz that serves as a contrast and foil to the dramatic 'Fate' fanfare. He described this theme as "feelings of depression and hopelessness." Dotted rhythms give it a sense of hesitation and tripping, as if the dancers are uncomfortable on the ballroom floor and preoccupied with weighty matters. The composer entrusts this theme to the strings.

When he introduces the second theme in A-flat minor, the woodwinds move to the foreground. This melody he called “dream world . . . escape from reality.” Led by the clarinet in an ascending scale figure, it echoes the dotted rhythms of the waltz. The third theme group, following in B major, also belongs initially to the woodwinds, with accompaniment from timpani and violins. (Tchaikovsky’s characteristic orchestral technique of assigning blocks of musical material to entire sections within the orchestra emerges with even greater definition in the scherzo.)

As the first movement proceeds, we hear unexpected tonalities introduced, such as the recapitulation of the waltz theme in D minor rather than the home key of F minor. The first movement is long and complicated. The eventual re-emergence of the ‘Fate’ motif adds to its shattering rhetorical impact.

After such a powerful opening movement, a major shift in atmosphere is essential. Tchaikovsky accommodates with a plaintive oboe solo in the *Andantino in modo di canzone*, supported initially by pizzicato strings. He wrote to Mme von Meck:

The symphony’s second movement expresses another phase of depression. This is that melancholy feeling which comes in the evening when, weary from your labour, you are sitting alone, you take a book--but it falls from your hand. There comes a whole host of memories. It is both sad that so much is now *past and gone*, yet pleasant to recall your youth. You both regret

the past, yet do not wish to begin your life again. . . . It's both sad, yet somehow sweet to immerse yourself in the past.

Eventually the celli, solo bassoon, and violins have a turn at the elegant oboe theme as well.

In many ways the most successful and individual movement is the scherzo, which features the orchestra section by section: first the entire string complement in a virtuoso pizzicato display, then woodwinds in lyric contrast, then boisterous brass. According to Tchaikovsky, the scherzo expressed no definite feeling, but in the context of the two movements it follows, it heralds a shift to a positive mood. After each orchestral section has its turn, the three groups are skillfully interwoven to conclude the movement in anticipation of the brilliant finale.

An orchestral exclamation point ushers in the finale, enhanced by triangle, cymbals and bass drum. If we weren't persuaded about the clouds dissipating in the scherzo, Tchaikovsky leaves no doubt now. He plunges us headlong into a village festival, but still emphasizes the isolation of the individual. Here is part of his own description:

The fourth movement. If within yourself you find no reasons for joy, look at others. Go among the people. Observe how they can enjoy themselves, surrendering themselves wholeheartedly to joyful feelings. A picture of festive merriment of the people. Hardly have you managed to forget yourself and to be carried away by the spectacle of others' joys, than irrepressible *fate* again appears and reminds you of yourself.

That, of course, provides Tchaikovsky with a programmatic reason to re-introduce the opening fanfare from the first movement. In fact, the finale recalls significant elements from all three preceding movements, as well as adapting a Russian folk song. Tchaikovsky definitely shakes off lethargy in his fiery, exciting conclusion, but his preoccupation with fate and its effect on human destiny is the message that lingers in the powerful Fourth Symphony.

The score calls for woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, bass tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbals, bass drum and strings.