

April 24, 2021

TCHAIKOVSKY

Spectacular

Tchaikovsky Spectacular

Saturday, April 24, 2021 • 7:30PM

Peoria Civic Center Theater

Peoria Symphony Orchestra
George Stelluto • conductor
James Giles • piano

Swan Lake Fantasy, Op. 20

Le lac au clair de lune
Danse Espagnole
Danse Neapolitan
Valse

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in B-Flat Minor, Op. 23

Allegro non troppo – Allegro con spirit
Andante semplice – Prestissimo
Allegro con fuoco

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

James Giles • piano

INTERMISSION

Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Overture 1812, Op. 49

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky



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This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.



James Giles • Piano

James Giles regularly delights audiences in important musical centers around the world. Known for his probing and charismatic performances, Giles's interests range from Beethoven to Bernstein, and from Romantic staples of the repertoire to new music written specifically for him. The 2019–2020 season featured a tour of Denmark and recitals in Toronto, Paris, Naples, Budapest, and Manchester, England. Recent U.S. dates included recitals in Atlanta, Dallas, Tampa, Des Moines, Bloomington, IN, and Chicago.

In an eclectic repertoire encompassing the solo and chamber music literatures, Giles is equally at home in the standard repertoire as in the music of our time. He has commissioned and premiered works by William Bolcom, Stephen Hough, Lowell Liebermann, Ned Rorem, Augusta Read Thomas, and Earl Wild. Most of these new works are featured on Giles's Albany Records release entitled *American Virtuoso*. His recording of solo works by Schumann and Prokofiev is available on England's Master Musicians label. He recorded John Harbison's Horn Trio with the Chicago Chamber Musicians and recently released a recording with the St. Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic.

His Paris recital at the Salle Cortot was hailed as "a true revelation, due equally to the pianist's artistry as to his choice of program." After a recital at the Sibelius Academy, the critic for Helsinki's main newspaper wrote that "Giles is a technically polished, elegant pianist." And a London critic called his Wigmore Hall recital "one of the most sheerly inspired piano recitals I can remember hearing for

some time," adding that "with a riveting intelligence given to everything he played, it was the kind of recital you never really forget."

He has performed with New York's Jupiter Symphony (Alkan and Czerny); the London Soloists Chamber Orchestra in Queen Elizabeth Hall (Mozart and Beethoven); the Kharkiv Philharmonic in Ukraine (Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff); and with the Opera Orchestra of New York in Alice Tully Hall (Chopin). After his Tully Hall solo recital debut, critic Harris Goldsmith wrote: "Giles has a truly distinctive interpretive persona. This was beautiful pianism – direct and unmannered." Other tours have included concerts in the Shanghai International Piano Festival; St. Petersburg's White Nights New Music Festival, Warsaw's Chopin Academy of Music; Chicago's Dame Myra Hess Series, Salt Lake City's Assembly Hall Concert Series, and in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Musikhalle in Hamburg, and the Purcell Room at London's South Bank Centre. He has given live recitals over the public radio stations of New York, Boston, Chicago, and Indianapolis. As a chamber musician he has collaborated with members of the National and Chicago Symphonies and with members of the Escher, Pacifica, Cassatt, Chicago, Ying, Chester, St. Lawrence, Essex, Lincoln, and Miami Quartets, as well as singers Aprile Millo and Anthony Dean Griffey.

A native of North Carolina, Dr. Giles studied with Byron Janis at the Manhattan School of Music, Jerome Lowenthal at the Juilliard School, Nelita True at the Eastman School of Music, and Robert Shannon at Oberlin College. He received early career assistance from the Clarisse B.

Peoria Symphony Orchestra

April 24, 2021

Violin 1

Marcia Henry Liebenow, concertmaster
Courtney Silver, assistant concertmaster
Margaret FioRito
Katie Cousins
Michelle Wynton
Jo Marie Sison
Fiona Brickey
Miguel Aguirre
Danielle Simandl
Elliot Lee

Violin 2

Guest principal
The Frederick Family Endowment
Leslie Koons
Rosemary Ardner
Peter Wessler
Hyo-Jung Chun
Faith Burdick
Molly Wilson
Additional players to be invited.

Viola

Katherine Lewis, principal
Sharon and John Amdall Endowment
Istvan Szabo, assistant principal
Rebecca Boelzner
Mary Heinemann
Allison Montgomery
Lowell Koons
Jason Warner

Cello

Adriana Ransom, principal
Parker Endowment in memory of H. H. Block
Kathleen Long, assistant principal
Emily Munn-Wood
Calvin Armstrong

Francisco Malespin
Brian Gaona
Cora Swenson Lee

Bass

Austin Vawter, principal
Peoria Symphony Guild and Friends
Endowment in memory of Norbert Cieslewicz
Patrick Aubyrn, assistant principal
Garold Fowler
Kristina Lee
Brett Lewis

Flute

Justina Chu, guest principal
Augusta Foundation Endowment in the
name of E. C. Heidrich
Denise Cooksey

Piccolo

Kimberly Tegg

Oboe

Alex Liedtke, principal
Mrs. Thomas Foster Endowment
Emily Hart

English Horn

Player to be invited.

Clarinet

Roger Garrett, principal
Eric Ginsberg

Bassoon

Michael Dicker, principal
Terry Maher

Horn

Amy Krueger, principal
Mrs. Trenchard French Endowment
David Snyder, assistant principal
Dawn Clark
Renee Vogen
Melanie Kjellsen

Trumpet

Sarah Carrillo, principal
David Nakazono
William Booher
Scott MacQuarrie

Trombone

Mark Babbitt, principal
Stephen Parsons
Chris Darwell

Tuba

Terry Solomonson, principal

Timpani

David Collier, principal
Eugene and Donna Sweeney Endowment

Percussion

Peggy Bonner, principal
Endowment in the memory of Jane and
William Reid and Carolyn Reid Sisney
Kevin Nichols
Ben Stiers
Additional players to be invited.

Harp

Nichole Young, principal

Please see our website for full orchestra listing.

Kampel Foundation and was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Italy with the legendary pianist Lazar Berman.

The pianist was the recipient of a fellowship grant and the Christel Award from the American Pianists Association. He won first prizes at the New Orleans International Piano Competition, the Joanna Hodges International Piano Competition, and the Music Teachers National Association Competition. As a student he was awarded the prestigious William Petschek Scholarship at the Juilliard School and the Arthur Dann Award at the Oberlin College Conservatory.

Also a sought-after teacher, Dr. Giles is coordinator of the piano

program and director of music performance graduate studies at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music, and during the summers is director of the piano program at the Amalfi Coast Music Festival. He gives master classes and lectures at schools nationwide, including Juilliard, Manhattan, Eastman, Oberlin, Indiana, Yale, and the New England Conservatory. His classes internationally have occurred throughout China as well as at Seoul National University, the Royal Danish Academy of Music (Copenhagen), the Sibelius Academy (Helsinki), the Chopin Academy (Warsaw), the Royal Northern College of Music (Manchester) and the Royal College of Music (London).

Maestro's Message

Only a handful of composers warrant a program devoted exclusively to their music. Tchaikovsky is one of them. From ballets to symphonies to tone poems and concerti, almost every devotee of art music has a favorite Tchaikovsky work, and usually several. Though some eschew him as too emotional and *heart-on-the-sleeve*, from a conductor's perspective I cannot understand this view. Tchaikovsky's music possesses not only emotional poignance, but also sophisticated and subtle psycho-dramatic pacing. His holistic use of detail to bring depth and meaning to the entirety is unrivaled. I used Tchaikovsky's *Fourth Symphony* to teach my young orchestra students at Juilliard about this concept: *If you look at a landscape through the lens of a camera, you can see the big picture. As you bring that picture into focus, details emerge that fill it in with supporting beauty.* Sometimes this big picture is multi-dimensional with physical, psychological, and cultural layers. Tchaikovsky is a master at blending them together. He has an innate ability to depict a physical scene while expressing the emotion and psychology of the situation, making the two components inseparable. For example: the moonlit pathos and shimmering beauty of the opening of *Swan Lake*, the physical and emotional desperation of the sword fight in *Romeo and Juliet*, and the resolve and depth of the Russian people fighting Napoleon in the *1812 Overture*. Even in his non-programmatic works, like the *First Piano Concerto* and his symphonies, Tchaikovsky creates sophisticated, empathetic scenes in the mind and heart of each listener, allowing them to identify, even unconsciously, with his music. And yet, don't forget, he's always telling his own story as well. —G. Stelluto

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Written by J. Michael Allsen, edited by Mae Gilliland Wright © 2020

Our season ends with a program devoted to the music of Tchaikovsky, arguably the greatest of all Russian romantics. We begin with evocative music from one of his beloved ballet scores, *Swan Lake*. Piano soloist James Giles then joins the Peoria Symphony Orchestra for Tchaikovsky's powerful first piano concerto. Two great programmatic orchestral overtures round off the program. His grandly romantic *Romeo and Juliet* is almost certainly the most famous of all musical adaptations of Shakespeare's tale of star-crossed lovers. We end with *1812*, a grand patriotic celebration that is enjoyably more than a little "over the top!"

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) *Swan Lake Fantasy, Op. 20*

Tchaikovsky composed the ballet Swan Lake in 1875-76. The first performance was at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow, on March 4, 1877. The excerpts heard here were published after Tchaikovsky's death. Duration 15:00



Background

Tchaikovsky's three fairy-tale ballets remain staples of the repertoire, for both ballet companies and orchestras: *Swan Lake* (1876), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1889), and *The Nutcracker* (1892). Though the story of *Swan Lake* seems to have originated in a German collection of folk tales, the Russians have also claimed the story for their own.

**WHAT BEGINS AS A
QUIET OBOE SOLO
QUICKLY GROWS INTO A
PASSIONATE ROMANTIC
PASSAGE FOR THE FULL
ORCHESTRA.**

Just who transformed it into a ballet scenario is unclear, but at some point, in 1875, Tchaikovsky was commissioned by the Bolshoi Ballet to write the score. *Swan Lake* was his first attempt at writing a full ballet, and though his music was wonderful, the 1877 production was a dismal failure. Among the factors contributing to this flop was the fact that the ballerina in the lead role of Odette was pulled from the production at the last minute due to scandal—she had apparently accepted several pieces of jewelry from a wealthy suitor, only to pawn them for cash and marry another dancer! But the production as a whole was doomed by its lackluster choreography. One of Tchaikovsky's friends wrote: "Costume, stage scenery, and machinery did nothing to conceal the complete emptiness of the dancing. For the balletomane there was barely more than five minutes pleasure in the dancing... but the music lover had better luck." There were several more unsuccessful productions over the next few years, and Tchaikovsky always intended to revise the score, but died before he could return to the project. *Swan Lake* was finally revived at a memorial program for Tchaikovsky in 1895, in a version revised by choreographers Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov. It remains more or less standard today. This revised version, which retained Tchaikovsky's music intact, was a complete success, and *Swan Lake* has never fallen from the repertoire—there have been thousands of productions since then. It also played a central role in the rather disturbing film *The Black Swan*, and there have been countless reinterpretations... including a tongue-in-cheek all-male version by Les Ballets Tocado de Monte Carlo—check it out on YouTube!

Swan Lake tells the story of Prince Siegfried who, as heir to the kingdom, must name his bride at a ball held on his birthday. Unwilling to marry except for love, he takes off in pursuit of a flock of swans. Just as he is about to shoot one of the birds, he realizes that she is in fact a woman who has been transformed into a white swan—the princess Odette, who was enchanted by the evil magician von Rothbart. Siegfried falls hopelessly in love and threatens to kill the magician, only to be stopped by Odette, who knows that if von Rothbart dies before the spell is broken, she will remain a swan forever. Siegfried returns to the ball dejected. The prince's parents introduce a series of prospective brides, each of whom dances to music from her native land. Suddenly, he finds the magician's daughter Odile, disguised as Odette, though as a black swan. He dances with Odile, and declares to the court that he will marry her, just a moment before the real Odette arrives and Siegfried realizes he has been duped. Odette, horrified, flees. Siegfried returns to the lake to find Odette and declares his love. In the end the lovers must drown themselves to break the spell—united only in death.

What You'll Hear

The four excerpts heard here begin with the opening *Scene (Le lac au clair de lune)*. This music accompanies Odette and her retinue of swans—all

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of them, of course, enchanted princesses—as they glide across the surface of Swan Lake. What begins as a quiet oboe solo quickly grows into a passionate romantic passage for the full orchestra. The next two movements are from the national dances of the princesses hoping to catch Siegfried's attention at the ball in Act III. The wild *Spanish Dance* is driven throughout by castanets and tambourine. The Italian princess gets a *Neapolitan Dance*, with a virtuoso trumpet solo that evokes joyful street music in Naples. The *Waltz* comes from Act II, and was originally intended for a large ensemble of peasants who danced in honor of the prince at his ball. Tchaikovsky introduces a series of lyrical lilting themes, including a fine trumpet solo, before this dance ends in an energetic coda.

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in B-flat Minor, Op. 23

This work was written in late 1874. The first performance was on October 25, 1875 in Boston, with Hans von Bülow as piano soloist. Duration 32:00

Background

The early history of this concerto gave no clue of its eventual popularity. When Tchaikovsky finished it in December 1874, he asked Nicolai Rubinstein to listen to a performance. Tchaikovsky considered Rubinstein to be the “best pianist in Moscow” and planned to dedicate the new concerto to him, so he quite naturally sought Rubinstein's criticism. On Christmas Eve, he met Rubinstein at the Moscow Conservatory and played through the entire concerto, which had not yet been orchestrated, while Rubinstein sat in stony silence. In a letter to his patron, Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky described how, immediately after the final chord, Rubinstein launched into a scathing attack on the concerto, calling it “worthless,” “unplayable,” and “vulgar.” Deeply insulted, Tchaikovsky stormed out of the room. Rubinstein followed and attempted to conciliate the composer by offering to perform the concerto—if Tchaikovsky would only revise it according to his suggestions. Tchaikovsky answered, “I will not alter a single note! I will publish the work exactly as it is!”

While we only have Tchaikovsky's emotional version of this incident, it is hardly surprising that he decided to dedicate the concerto to someone other than Rubinstein. When he sent a score for the German pianist-conductor Hans von Bülow, Bülow replied enthusiastically, “The ideas are so original, the form is so mature, ripe, distinguished in style...” Bülow performed the work for the first time while on tour in Boston. There is an interesting historical footnote to this first performance: When Bülow sent a telegram to Tchaikovsky telling him of the ecstatic response to the concerto's premiere, it was apparently the first cable ever sent between Boston and Moscow.

What You'll Hear

The opening movement begins with a vast introduction (*Allegro non troppo*), opening with the familiar four-note horn motive. The solo part takes control almost immediately with crashing chords, expanding upon this theme. The body of the movement (*Allegro con spirito*) begins with a nervous syncopated tune that, according to legend, Tchaikovsky heard from a blind Ukrainian beggar. Clarinet and woodwinds introduce a more lyrical second idea. The development culminates in a first enormous cadenza, and an abbreviated recapitulation leads to an even larger virtuoso moment.

Though they are dwarfed by the huge opening, the second and third movements are just as innovative. The second movement manages to combine a traditional slow movement form with a lighter scherzo. The main theme of the outer panels (*Andante semplice*) is a popular French tune *Il faut s'amuser, danser et rire* (“You must enjoy yourself by dancing and laughing”). This was apparently a favorite of Tchaikovsky's, but it may also have been a melancholy tribute to Désirée Artôt, a soprano who had broken his heart a few years earlier. The central section (*Prestissimo*) has fleeting scherzo-style that is brought to a sudden conclusion by a bark from the brass and brief cadenza. The finale (*Allegro con fuoco*) is a kind of rhythmic showpiece with constantly shifting and combined meters. A fiery main theme alternates with widely contrasting material, but the whole movement dances, until a cadenza and broadening of the tempo lead to a brilliant coda.

Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy

Tchaikovsky composed this work in 1869, and revised it extensively in 1870 and 1880. The first performance took place in Moscow in March 1870. Duration 21:00

Background

The works of Shakespeare were the basis for dozens of Romantic operas and large instrumental pieces that have survived in today's concert repertoire, the most popular of which is probably Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*. The idea of a large orchestral work based on Shakespeare's most famous drama and suggestions about the work's form came from Tchaikovsky's contemporary Mily Balikirev. Tchaikovsky was just beginning his career in the 1860s, and Balikirev was the leader of an influential group of Russian nationalist composers known as the “Mighty Five.” In 1868, he dedicated an overture titled *Fate* to Balikirev. While *Fate* was a complete flop (Tchaikovsky later destroyed the score), it was the beginning of a close friendship. Balikirev encouraged him to take *Romeo and Juliet* as a subject, even suggesting the programmatic structure of the overture. The subject of a tragic love affair may in fact have been on Tchaikovsky's mind at the



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time. He had been infatuated with a soprano named Désirée Artôt, who had just married someone else, and his brother later suggested that the overture grew out of unresolved feelings for Vladimir Gerard, a friend from several years earlier. Tchaikovsky was typically insecure during the overture's composition, writing at one point: "I'm beginning to fear that my muse has flown off." Balikirev reviewed the work at every stage in its composition, and after some initial criticism, wrote of his enthusiastic approval: "I am impatient to receive the entire score so that I may get a just impression of your clever overture, which is—so far—your best work. That you have dedicated it to me gives me the greatest pleasure." The first performance in 1870 was unsuccessful, and Tchaikovsky revised the work, incorporating several of Balikirev's suggestions. He revised it once more a decade later—the version that is familiar today—in particular reworking the dramatic ending.

What You'll Hear

Though *Romeo and Juliet* has a conventional sonata form, Tchaikovsky clearly intended it to be understood in programmatic terms. The solemn theme of the introduction represents Friar Lawrence, whose good-hearted efforts at matchmaking are swept away by the feud between the Montagues and Capulets. The introduction becomes gradually more intense until it finally explodes into the first main theme, an agitated figure that vividly recalls the bloody vendetta between the families of the two lovers. The sweeping second theme, first hinted at by the English horn, represents the lovers themselves and their passion. (This melody has, of course become a virtual musical cliché for romantic love: picture two lovers running towards one another—in slow motion—across a field of flowers!) These two themes are placed in opposition throughout the overture, with occasional mediation by the "Friar Lawrence" theme, mediation that will be to no avail—the lovers are destined to die a tragic death. In the coda, there is a funeral benediction by Friar Lawrence and a last dirgelike version of the love theme, before the overture comes to an abrupt and strident ending.

Overture 1812, Op. 49

Tchaikovsky composed his 1812 Overture in October and November of 1880. It was first played in Moscow on August 20, 1882. Duration 15:00

Background

1812, by far Tchaikovsky's most popular piece, commemorates one of the bloodier episodes in the Napoleonic Wars. On September 7, 1812, the right wing of Napoleon's immense army—which had invaded Russia without significant resistance—met a large Russian army at Borodino, south of Moscow. This was one of the largest battles of the early 19th century, with over 250,000 combatants, and the total number of casualties was ghastly—estimated at over 70,000. While Borodino was nominally a victory for the French, it marked the beginning of the end for Napoleon. The Russians retreated beyond Moscow, and when the French entered the Russian capital, they found the city deserted, partly burned, and stripped of supplies. Napoleon had no choice but to order a retreat in advance of the fearsome Russian winter. Between October and December, the French army retreated from Russia in what became a death march—constantly attacked by the Russians, starving, and freezing. Nearly 400,000 French soldiers died and another 100,000 were captured. The reigning Tsar, Alexander I, commissioned a magnificent new cathedral in Moscow in thanksgiving.

In 1880 Tchaikovsky's friend Nicolai Rubinstein (who had by then mended his friendship with Tchaikovsky after the incident with the piano concerto) gave him a commission for a grand festival overture. This was to be a multipurpose piece, celebrating the 25th anniversary of Tsar Alexander II, the impending completion of

1812 REMAINS TCHAIKOVSKY'S MOST OFTEN-PERFORMED WORK. THOUGH SPECIFICALLY A RUSSIAN PATRIOTIC PIECE, IT HAS BEEN CO-OPTED AS A PIECE OF AMERICAN MUSIC AS WELL—IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A FOURTH OF JULY CONCERT WITHOUT IT!

Alexander I's Cathedral of Christ the Savior, and the planned opening of a great exposition in Moscow. Tchaikovsky finished the work in fairly short order in about six weeks, and as originally planned, *1812* was to have been a true extravaganza, designed to be performed in Moscow's central square: with large choirs singing all of the various anthems and chants, a huge additional brass band, cannons (to be coordinated with a newly-invented electrical system), and coordinated pealing by all of Moscow's church bells during the finale. This gargantuan version was never staged: Alexander II was assassinated in March 1881, and eventually *1812* was premiered with a standard orchestra at the opening of the Arts and Industry Exposition in Moscow in August 1882.

For his part, Tchaikovsky was fairly ambivalent about *1812*, complaining constantly about the piece in his letters as he was writing it. Shortly after finishing the score, he wrote to his confidant Nadezhda von Meck: "The Overture will be very loud and noisy—but I wrote it without any warm and loving feelings, and consequently it will probably be lacking in artistic merit." When it was finally performed it was wildly received, and Tchaikovsky certainly was happy to pocket the commission fee and other money he made from *1812*, by far the most profitable piece he ever wrote. Tchaikovsky conducted it wherever he went on tour, including a performance for the dedication of Carnegie Hall in New York in 1891. It remains his most performed work, and though it is a specifically Russian patriotic piece, it has been coopted as a piece of American music as well—it's hard to imagine a Fourth of July orchestral concert without *1812*!

What You'll Hear

Tchaikovsky's score is a parade of musical quotations that would have been familiar to all of his listeners in 1882. In the opening (standing in for the originally-planned chorus), a sextet of cellos and violas intones the Orthodox chant *God Save Thy People*. A series of Russian folk songs represent the suffering of the Russians during Napoleon's invasion, before a Russian quickstep march and a furious string passage begin the Battle of Borodino: the French anthem *La Marseillaise* is confronted by cannon shots and eventually a Russian song, *U vorot, vorot (At the Gate)*. The battle resumes again and the French are forced to retreat before a fusillade of cannon shots. The finale is pure bombast, as the brass thunder out the hymn *God Save the Tsar* and the bells peal. ♦