

Season 2015-2016

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Thursday, February 18, at 8:00

Friday, February 19, at 2:00

Saturday, February 20, at 8:00

Michael Tilson Thomas Conductor

Ives "Decoration Day," from *A Symphony: New England Holidays*

Brahms Serenade No. 2 in A major, Op. 16

I. Allegro moderato

II. Scherzo: Vivace

III. Adagio non troppo

IV. Quasi menuetto

V. Rondo: Allegro

Intermission

Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 2 in C minor, Op. 17 ("Little Russian")

I. Andante sostenuto—Allegro vivo

II. Andantino marziale, quasi moderato

III. Scherzo and Trio: Allegro molto vivace

IV. Finale: Moderato assai—Allegro—Presto

This program runs approximately 1 hour, 45 minutes.

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Michael Tilson Thomas is music director of the San Francisco Symphony, founder and artistic director of the New World Symphony, and principal guest conductor of the London Symphony. He made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 1971 and returns to lead the ensemble in March 2017. Born in Los Angeles, he is the third generation of his family to follow an artistic career. He began his formal studies at USC where he studied piano and conducting and composition. At 19 he was named music director of the Young Musicians Foundation Debut Orchestra. During this same period he was pianist and conductor for Gregor Piatigorsky and Jascha Heifetz. In 1969, after winning the Koussevitzky Prize at Tanglewood, Mr. Tilson Thomas was appointed assistant conductor of the Boston Symphony, later becoming principal guest conductor until 1974. He was music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic (1971-79), principal guest conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic (1981-85), and principal conductor of the London Symphony (1987-95). A noted composer, his works have been premiered by such artists as Thomas Hampson and Renée Fleming, and by the Pacific Music Festival Orchestra and the San Francisco Symphony. As a Carnegie Hall Perspectives Artist (2003-05) he had an evening devoted to his compositions.

Mr. Tilson Thomas's discography of more than 120 recordings includes works by Bach, Beethoven, Mahler, Stravinsky, Ives, Ruggles, Reich, Cage, Gershwin, John Adams, and Elvis Costello. His TV work includes a BBC series with the London Symphony, the New York Philharmonic's Young People's Concerts, and many productions on PBS' *Great Performances*. Mr. Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony have produced *Keeping Score*, which includes a television series, web sites, radio programs, and programs in schools.

Mr. Tilson Thomas is a Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France, was *Musical America's* Musician of the Year and Conductor of the Year, and was *Gramophone* magazine's Artist of the Year. He has been profiled on CBS' *60 Minutes* and ABC's *Nightline*. He has won numerous Grammy awards for his recordings. In 2008 he received the Peabody Award for his radio series for SFS Media, *The MTT Files*. In 2010 President Obama awarded him with the National Medal of Arts, the highest award given to artists by the United States Government.

“Decoration Day,” from *A Symphony: New England Holidays*

Charles Ives

Born in Danbury, Connecticut, October 20, 1874

Died in New York, May 19, 1954

In addition to the iconoclastic tendencies he inherited from his father—the Danbury bandmaster and “tinkerer” who, among other things, invented a number of new and unusual musical instruments—Charles Ives had a strong sentimental streak, which expressed itself in works with heady reminiscences of his middle-class boyhood in Danbury, Connecticut. In nearly every one of his mature compositions, he managed to interweave a whole whimsical array of pre-existing hymn tunes, folk melodies, parlor songs, and military quicksteps. This is notably the case in the four orchestral pieces written between 1904 and 1912 and later grouped together as *A Symphony: New England Holidays*. Each of these individual works—“Washington’s Birthday,” “Decoration Day,” “The Fourth of July,” and “Thanksgiving and/or Forefather’s Day”—is redolent of the composer’s childhood associations surrounding an important patriotic celebration. “Recollections of a boy’s holidays in a Connecticut country town,” as he has noted in the score. “These movements may be played as separate pieces. These pieces may be lumped together as a symphony.” Though the set received an integral performance already during the composer’s lifetime (just weeks before his death in 1954), today they are frequently performed individually.

Ives worked on “Decoration Day” at Saranac Lake in the summer of 1912, having begun it as a piece for violin and piano but changing his mind and orchestrating it in early 1913 for inclusion in the “symphony”—the first three movements of which were already complete by this time. It was given a reading in New York in May 1920, during which the music reportedly collapsed at several points, “leaving one little violinist in the back row as the only one playing,” as Ives wrote, “all the others having dropped by the wayside.” A decade later, in 1931, “Decoration Day” received a more successful performance in Cuba, with Amadeo Roldán conducting the Havana Philharmonic.

Decoration Day, the commemoration of Civil War dead that was later replaced by Memorial Day, held an especially nostalgic significance for Ives. During his youth it was marked by all manner of festivities, as he describes eloquently in a note at the end of the printed score—which one could almost use as a guide for listening:

In the early morning the garden and woods about the village are the meeting places of those who, with tender memories and devoted hands, gather the flowers for the day’s memorial. During the forenoon, as the people join each other on the green, there is felt ... a fervency and intensity. ...

After the town hall is filled with the spring’s harvest of lilacs, daisies, and peonies, the parade is slowly formed on Main Street. First come the three marshals on plough horses (going sideways); then the warden and burgesses (in carriages!!), the village cornet band, the G.A.R. two by two, and the militia (Company G), while the volunteer first brigade, drawing the decorated hose-cart with its jangling bells, brings up the rear—the inevitable swarm of small boys following. The march to Wooster Cemetery is a thing a boy never forgets. The roll of muffled drums and “Adeste fideles” answer for the dirge. ...

After the last grave is decorated, “Taps” sounds out through the pines and hickories, while a last hymn is sung. Then the ranks are formed again, and we all march back to town to a Yankee stimulant—Reeve’s inspiring (“Second Regiment”)—though to many a soldier the somber thoughts of the day underlie the tunes of the band. The march stops, and in the silence the shadow of the early morning flower-song rises over the town, and the sunset behind West Mountain breathes its benediction upon the day.

In addition to the tunes mentioned by Ives (“Adeste fideles,” “Second Regiment Quickstep”) one also discern strains of Lowell Mason’s “Bethany” (“Nearer, My God, to Thee”) sounding below “Taps.” What is remarkable in this array of orchestral ingenuity is the sense of wholeness and integration that is achieved through it all, despite a disparity of musical sources and the diffracted sense of structure.

—Paul J. Horsley

Ives composed “Decoration Day” from 1912 to 1913.

Eugene Ormandy conducted the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the piece in a presentation of the whole A Symphony: New England Holidays in October 1974; most recently on subscription concerts, David Zinman led “Decoration Day” in March 1998.

Ormandy led the Orchestra in a recording of the work in 1974 for RCA.

Ives’s score calls for piccolo (marked “optional”), two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet (optional), two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets (and an optional third), three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, chimes, cymbals, snare drum, suspended cymbals), and strings.

Performance time is approximately nine minutes.

Serenade No. 2

Johannes Brahms

Born in Hamburg, May 7, 1833

Died in Vienna, April 3, 1897

While Schumann, Mendelssohn, and other early Romantics struggled with the legacy of Beethoven's symphonies, Brahms, a generation younger, faced somewhat different challenges and enjoyed new opportunities. One of his greatest challenges was unintentionally created by Schumann, whom the 20-year-old Brahms first met in 1853. The older composer's mental health had been declining for some time and the next year he attempted suicide by throwing himself in the Rhine River. He would live in a sanatorium for the remaining two-and-a-half years of his life. He only saw his wife, Clara, once, a few days before he died, although Brahms visited regularly.

“New Paths” But before these sad events, Robert and Clara took the young composer into their home and hearts. Robert, who had been a brilliant and powerful music critic years before, came out of journalistic retirement and submitted a brief review, his last, to the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, the prominent periodical he had helped start nearly 20 years earlier.

Schumann's article, *Neue Bahnen* (New Paths), hailed Brahms as the musical messiah the world had been awaiting since Beethoven's death. It was a dream review, especially from the pen of one of the leading critics and composers of the era, but also one that created expectations that put severe pressure on the 20-year-old Brahms. Schumann in fact based his praise on relatively few works, mainly ones for piano. The piano sonatas already were “like disguised symphonies,” Schumann wrote, and gave hope for greater things to come. Although not the only reason, the pressure was surely a contributing factor in Brahms not completing his First Symphony until the age of 43, when it was immediately welcomed as “Beethoven's Tenth.” But there were many false starts along the way.

Disguised Symphonies Brahms's path to writing a symphony worthy of Beethoven's heritage was littered with musical materials that he diverted to other projects, as well as to what might be considered other “symphonies in disguise.” The mighty orchestral opening of his Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor was at one time intended for a symphony, as were parts of *A German Requiem* and other compositions. The closest Brahms got in his 20s to composing an actual symphony are two orchestral serenades that were performed and published in 1860. The First Serenade in D major, Op. 11, for a time even bore the title “Symphony-Serenade.”

Brahms wrote the serenades during the years when he was splitting his time between Hamburg and the Court of Lippe-Detmold, where he taught piano, gave concerts, composed, and served as a choral conductor. The First Serenade was originally written as a chamber work for eight or nine wind and string instruments, partly in the tradition of similar instrumental combinations by Beethoven, Schubert, Spohr, Hummel, and others. Allegedly at Clara's suggestion, Brahms expanded this four-movement chamber work (now lost) to a six-movement composition for large orchestra. While working on the piece he began the five-movement Second Serenade in A major, Op. 16, we hear today, a work scored for a smaller ensemble lacking trumpets, timpani, and, more unusually, violins. (The piccolo, however, is used to delightful effect in the final movement.)

Seeking Clara's Suggestions As Brahms did throughout his life—but especially in these earlier years—he sent the work-in-progress to Clara for her candid opinion (she gave no other kind). It was she, in fact, who complained that even one of Mozart's greatest serenades lacked variety in its instrumental color. This may have posed a challenge that Brahms's unusual instrumentation and interaction of wind, brass, and lower strings were meant to address. Although he dispatched the opening movement to Clara in late 1858, she had to wait, notwithstanding repeated requests, for the next three movements to arrive on her 39th birthday in September of the next year. Brahms asked if the slow movement was “worth all the trouble I have taken with it.”

Within a week he got his answer. Clara wrote, “What shall I say about the Adagio? ... I cannot find the words to express the joy it has given me and yet you want me to write at length! It is difficult for me to analyze what I feel; it impels me to something which gives me pleasure, as though I were to gaze at each filament of a wondrous flower. It is most beautiful! ... The whole movement has a spiritual atmosphere; it might almost be an *Eleison* [from a Mass]. Dear Johannes, you must know that I feel it better than express it in words. The Menuett has great charm (a trifle Haydnish), and the oboe in the Trio is delightful. ... The first movement gave me the same pleasure all over again; one or two things perhaps do not please me in it but they are quite minor details in a beautiful whole.” Brahms conducted the first performance in Hamburg on February 10, 1860, about three weeks before the premiere of the orchestral version of the First Serenade. A few months later he crafted a four-hand piano arrangement. As he did so, the intensely self-critical composer commented, “I have seldom written music with greater delight. It seemed to sound so beautiful that I was overjoyed.”

—Christopher H. Gibbs

Brahms composed the Second Serenade from 1858 to 1859 and revised it in 1875.

The first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the work were with Fritz Reiner in January 1932. The complete work has been programmed only three times on subscription since: in December 1979 and March 1985, both with William Smith, and in January/February 2003, with Wolfgang Sawallisch. Eugene Ormandy programmed the work twice, in December 1938 and March 1953, but omitted the fourth movement.

The Philadelphia Orchestra recorded the work in 1955 with Ormandy for CBS.

Brahms's score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, and strings (minus violins).

The Serenade runs approximately 30 minutes in performance.

Symphony No. 2 (“Little Russian”)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, May 7, 1840

Died in St. Petersburg, November 6, 1893

Russian music at the end of the 19th century tended to follow two largely divergent streams of compositional practice. “The Five,” as they were known in the West—Mily Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, César Cui, Modest Musorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov—favored a raw, untutored nationalism that focused on Russian native folksong, culture, and history. The other stream of composers, including Tchaikovsky and Sergei Taneyev, were instructed in the traditions of German Romanticism, and were often critical of the rough-hewn music of their nationalistic colleagues. (Tchaikovsky once described Musorgsky’s work as “the lowest, commonest parody of music; it may go to the devil for all I care.”)

But while there was much to divide these two schools of thought, they both agreed with the aim of fostering a distinctly Russian music. Tchaikovsky wrote, “As regards the Russian element in general in my music (i.e., the instances of melody and harmony originating in folksong), I grew up in the backwoods, saturating myself from earliest childhood with the inexplicable beauty of the characteristic traits of Russian folksong.” As Richard Rodda has noted, the difference between Tchaikovsky and “The Five” was, then, not one of source materials, but a difference in procedure. While the nationalists were happy to use Russian themes in free fantasias and other unstructured or programmatic genres, Tchaikovsky preferred the traditional, cosmopolitan forms of the symphony, opera, and ballet.

Self-Doubt and Yet a Success Tchaikovsky’s First Symphony had emerged only after a difficult gestation—self-doubt brought the composer to the brink of nervous collapse—and although he felt he ought to try and master symphonic form, he was never fully comfortable with it throughout his career. He was especially concerned with “symmetry of form” in his second attempt at a symphony. But Tchaikovsky never imagined that the Second Symphony, a work about which he was so unsure himself, would be a popular favorite. Written during the summer of 1872, it blends the composer’s fascination for Russian melody with the clear formal structure of the classical symphony, and stands alone among all of the composer’s symphonies in that it is entirely free from the morbid and dark sentiments that so easily plagued him. After a particularly busy season in Moscow, Tchaikovsky had gone to visit his sister, Alexandra, in the Ukrainian village of Kamenka, and was inspired by the peasant music he heard there. He included three native songs from the region in the Symphony. Some years later, Nicholas Kashkin (Tchaikovsky’s teacher and friend) dubbed the Second Symphony the “Little Russian,” not because the work itself is diminutive but because the area of the Ukraine from which the melodies originate was known in Tsarist times as “Little Russia.”

Tchaikovsky played the finale on the piano at a party given by Rimsky-Korsakov in January 1873, and was encouraged by the response: Rimsky-Korsakov was enchanted by its originality and appeal. At the Moscow premiere on February 7, 1873, conducted by Nikolai Rubinstein (head of the Moscow Conservatory where Tchaikovsky taught harmony), the audience responded so enthusiastically that the Russian Musical Society changed its planned programs in order to schedule a repeat performance later that spring.

Despite the positive reaction, the composer was still dissatisfied with portions of the work as a whole, and revised much of it during the late 1870s before it was published. Most of the revisions were in the first and third movements, though the finale was also shortened significantly. The new, revised form was premiered in 1881. Only Tchaikovsky's friend Taneyev persisted in claiming the first version was superior.

A Closer Look Tchaikovsky's struggle to unite folksong with symphonic form was always going to be difficult. By its very nature, folksong is largely self-contained. It requires little musical explication, and so does not lend itself to development as much as a symphonically-conceived theme might. This is clear in the first movement (**Andante sostenuto—Allegro vivo**), where the folk melody appears at the beginning and end. The horn solo in the slow introduction, which returns at the movement's conclusion, is based on the song "Down by Mother Volga." In between these quotations, Tchaikovsky writes a standard sonata-allegro form, with a vigorous first theme that recalls the dramatic sweep of some of his ballets, and a contrasting lyrical second theme heard first in the clarinets. The development section unites these two themes with that of the slow introduction.

Tchaikovsky based the second movement (**Andante marziale, quasi moderato**) on a "Bridal March" he had originally written for his unsuccessful 1869 opera *Undine*. Here the martial character, rather than the romance of a wedding, is emphasized. The central section of this movement borrows the melody of "Spin, O My Spinner," one of many Russian folksongs that Tchaikovsky arranged for piano duet and published in the late 1860s.

The frenetic **Scherzo** is more like Tchaikovsky's ballet music than any other in this Symphony. It frames a similarly blithe trio section that breaks, unusually, into duple meter for an extended passage. The **Finale** is a set of variations on a Ukrainian melody, "The Crane," that the composer overheard while visiting his sister in Kamenka. As in the first movement, the finale begins with a slow introduction that presents the quoted folk melody. The variations do not develop this theme significantly, but rather fragment it and recontextualize it in different keys and scoring. Gradually it gathers momentum, whirling into a dance of rhythmic energy, with a **Presto** coda in bright C major. Even Cui, Tchaikovsky's lifelong antagonist and member of "The Five," regarded this finale as "magnificent."

—Luke Howard

Tchaikovsky composed his Second Symphony in 1872 and revised it from 1879 to 1880.

Igor Stravinsky was the conductor for the first Philadelphia Orchestra performance of the Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 2, on December 26, 1953; William Smith took over the next two performances (in Philadelphia and New York), as Stravinsky fell ill, but he recovered sufficiently to return for the final three concerts (in Philadelphia, Washington, and Baltimore). The most recent appearance of the work on Orchestra subscription concerts was in December 2011, with Yannick Nézet-Séguin on the podium.

Tchaikovsky's Second Symphony was recorded by the Philadelphians in 1976 for RCA, with Eugene Ormandy conducting.

Tchaikovsky scored the Symphony for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam), and strings.

Performance time is approximately 30 minutes.

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