

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FOURTH SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Zell Music Director

Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus

Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

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Thursday, March 5, 2015, at 8:00

Friday, March 6, 2015, at 1:30

Saturday, March 7, 2015, at 8:00

Riccardo Muti Conductor

Stephanie Jeong Violin

Kenneth Olsen Cello

Jonathan Biss Piano

Ligeti

Lontano for Orchestra

Beethoven

Concerto in C Major for Piano, Violin, and Cello, Op. 56 (*Triple*)

Allegro

Largo—

Rondo alla polacca

STEPHANIE JEONG

KENNETH OLSEN

JONATHAN BISS

INTERMISSION

Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 17 (*Little Russian*)

Andante sostenuto—Allegro vivo

Andantino marziale, quasi moderato

Scherzo: Allegro molto vivace

Finale: Moderato assai

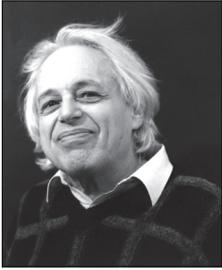
These performances are generously sponsored by the Randy and Melvin Berlin Family Fund for the Canon.

This program is partially supported by grants from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

György Ligeti

Born May 28, 1923, Dicsöszenmárton, Transylvania.
Died June 12, 2006, Vienna, Austria.

Lontano for Orchestra



Like Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, which has never completely recovered from its starring role in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, György Ligeti's music first came to widespread attention with the 1968 Stanley Kubrick film. By then,

Ligeti had fled his native Hungary and had become one of the pioneers of the international avant-garde. He had grown up sheltered from the advances in contemporary European music and was anxious to try different things. (In 1952, he set to music a Hungarian poem in which the narrator travels the world, wondering if he "will ever have another home apart from the sky.") After graduating from the Academy of Music in Budapest in 1949, Ligeti taught harmony, counterpoint, and analysis there for six years (and had several of his compositions published), waiting for a chance to break away.

In 1956, he escaped occupied Hungary and moved to Vienna. (He had risked his life once before, during the bombing of Budapest, when he hid in an attic rather than find shelter underground so that he could listen to radio broadcasts of new music from West Germany.) In Vienna, he met Karlheinz Stockhausen, one of the leaders of the avant-garde, and new worlds

of music opened up before him. He went to Darmstadt for the legendary summer courses in composition and worked for a time at the electronic studios of the West German Radio in Cologne. This was his opportunity to start over as a composer and to leave behind the outdated, nationalistic music and folk-song arrangements of his Budapest years—"prehistoric Ligeti," as he would eventually call it.

In the sixties, Ligeti became a great explorer of the sonic landscape, and he created several of the most striking scores of the modern age, including the landmark *Atmosphères* of 1961 (a title he had intended to give to an electronic work left unfinished), part of which ended up in Kubrick's soundtrack, and *Lontano*, composed six years later, a work which, as Ligeti said, opens and closes "a window on long-submerged dream worlds of childhood." The title, *Lontano* (Distant), then, reflects not only Ligeti's evocation of time past, but a musical landscape of many layers receding into the distance, which "shimmer through each other, superimpose themselves, and produce an imaginary perspective through multiple refraction and reflection." It is a work of dazzling effect, and one that reveals itself gradually—"as though [the listener] were stepping from brilliant sunlight into a dark room and becoming aware little by little of the colors and contours." ■

COMPOSED

1967

FIRST PERFORMANCE

October 22, 1967; Donaueschingen, Germany

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

February 7, 8 & 9, 1974, Orchestra Hall.
Christoph von Dohnányi conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

February 8 & 10, 2007, Orchestra Hall.
David Zinman conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

four flutes, two piccolos and alto flute,
four oboes and english horn, four
clarinets, bass clarinet and contrabass
clarinet, three bassoons and contra-
bassoon, four horns, three trumpets,
three trombones, tuba, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

13 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany.

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria.

Concerto in C Major for Piano, Violin, and Cello, Op. 56 (*Triple*)



On August 26, 1804, Beethoven wrote to his publisher, Breitkopf & Härtel, offering “my oratorio; a *new grand symphony*; a concertante for violin, violoncello, and pianoforte with full orchestra; three new sonatas for pianoforte

solo . . . The title of the symphony is really *Bonaparte*.”

What an astonishing output Beethoven lumped together—the prodigious harvest of just one season, from the end of 1803 into the first weeks of the following summer—and it’s hard for us today to believe that Breitkopf didn’t jump at it. The symphony is, of course, the one we now call *Eroica*, at Beethoven’s insistence, and the story of how Napoleon won an empire but lost a symphony is as famous as the music itself.

We know a great deal about the symphony. But the history of the “concertante” for three soloists and orchestra—the work we have come to call the *Triple* Concerto for sheer convenience—is sketchy. From the start it has been overshadowed, not just by the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* sonatas or the *Eroica* Symphony, with which it is contemporary,

but by Beethoven’s other concertos—the three for piano that precede it and the two for piano and one for violin that follow.

There is little doubt that the man behind the *Triple* Concerto was the archduke Rudolph, who began studying piano with Beethoven in 1803. Rudolph was just a teenager and only moderately talented, but he had money and a title (he was the son of Emperor Leopold II), both of which would prove useful to Beethoven in time. He became a good and loyal friend, one of the few Beethoven could always count on during his stormy career. Rudolph was a respectable pianist, although he was never much of a composer, a pity since he was the only composition student Beethoven ever took on. His name will live as long as Beethoven’s music is played: he is the archduke of the *Archduke* Trio and the hero of the *Lebewohl* (Farewell) Piano Sonata; the Fourth and Fifth piano concertos are dedicated to him.

This concerto was the first musical product of their friendship, and Rudolph apparently played the piano solo at the first performance. We know virtually nothing of that event, including the date. And we don’t know why Beethoven chose to write a concerto for this unprecedented solo trio, unless that was Rudolph’s suggestion as well. The idea of a concerto for more than one soloist was extremely popular in the late eighteenth century (the most famous is Mozart’s *Sinfonia concertante* for violin and viola), but

COMPOSED

1803–1804

FIRST PERFORMANCE

May 1808; Vienna, Austria

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

January 12 & 13, 1900, Auditorium Theatre. Leopold Godowsky, Emil Baré, and Bruno Steindel as soloists, Theodore Thomas conducting

July 26, 1957, Ravinia Festival. Beaux Arts Trio (Menahem Pressler, Daniel Guilet, and Bernard Greenhouse) as soloists, Georg Solti conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

July 7, 2007, Ravinia Festival. Beaux Arts Trio (Menahem Pressler, Daniel Hope, and Antonio Meneses) as soloists, James Conlon conducting

June 7 & 8, 2012, Orchestra Hall. Stefan Jackiw, Pavel Gomziakov, and Kristian Bezuidenhout as soloists, Trevor Pinnock conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

solo violin, cello, and piano; one flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

35 minutes

Beethoven's idea of using the common piano trio as his solo ensemble was something of a novelty.

The work was viewed as an oddity and was rarely performed during the composer's lifetime—Beethoven never played it, even though he often championed his other concertos from the keyboard. Like the *Choral Fantasy* (for piano solo, chorus, and orchestra), it is an unconventional hybrid that requires unusual performing forces. Long ago, Donald Tovey suggested that if we didn't know that Beethoven had



**Rudolph von Habsburg,
Beethoven's student
and friend**

written this concerto, we wouldn't be so hard on it. The more perfect examples of the composer's fourth and fifth piano concertos or the Violin Concerto encourage our criticism. But Tovey points out that those pieces could never have been written without the *Triple Concerto*. It is, in his words, a "study" for

these other more important and successful works. It is not an isolated experiment—a dead end—but a stepping stone to greater things.

The *Triple Concerto* raises problems that would have defeated a lesser composer. There is, first of all, the peculiar challenge of writing for not one solo instrument but for three, each a virtuoso in its own right. And although Beethoven had often written for the combination of piano, violin, and cello—his op. 1 is a set of piano trios—he had never before contemplated how to integrate that ensemble with an orchestra. Beethoven finds a way to treat his soloists both as a trio and as individuals, although, for reasons that may never be clear, it is the cello that continually takes the lead.

With the *Eroica* Symphony, Beethoven broke ground for a first movement of unprecedented scale. Two efforts of 1804, the *Waldstein* Sonata and this concerto, carry that spaciousness into

the realm of the piano sonata and the concerto. The first movement of the *Triple Concerto* is long, although this is due not only to the expanding musical universe, but to problems inherent in writing for three soloists: Beethoven often states a theme twice, once for piano alone, and then again for violin and cello playing as a pair, doubling the dimensions of entire passages.

Tovey believed that "the true solution of an art problem is often first achieved on the largest possible scale." And here, in his largest first movement to date, Beethoven makes real headway with the problem that had plagued each of his three previous concertos—how to conceive the opening orchestral exposition so that it presents the important material but saves the heart of the drama for the second exposition, which introduces the soloist. There are also other advances. (If it were not for the extraordinary opening measures of the concertos that follow—the Fourth Piano Concerto, with its unaccompanied piano solo; the *Emperor*, with its heroic cadenza; and the Violin Concerto, with its solo timpani—the beginning of the *Triple Concerto* would appear in all the music history books.) Beethoven begins quietly, with the cellos and basses of the orchestra—who seem to be trying out the theme—and then gradually works up to a full-voice statement of his big C major tune. It is a dramatic touch, and a disarmingly low-key beginning for a piece of such obvious grandeur.

As in the *Waldstein* Sonata, Beethoven follows substance with brevity. The slow movement has barely spread out its generous cello melody, to which the violin and piano add their own thoughts, before the cello leads the music directly into the genial polonaise that launches the finale. The proportions are unexpected and shift from slow movement into finale so quickly that the dance is well under way before we can get our bearings. After a few leisurely swings around the polonaise tune, the violin suddenly takes off running—allegro and in 2/4 rather than the prevailing 3/4—sweeping everyone along to a brilliant conclusion. The slightest suggestion of a cadenza for the solo trio and a return to the original tempo surface just before the final cadences. ■

Piotr Tchaikovsky

Born May 7, 1840, Votkinsk, Russia.

Died November 6, 1893, Saint Petersburg, Russia.

Symphony No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 17 (*Little Russian*)



“He is the most Russian composer of us all,” Igor Stravinsky said in 1924, when a reporter asked him what he thought of Tchaikovsky. Tchaikovsky’s music was part of Stravinsky’s upbringing. But it was the earlier works that

Stravinsky loved—the scores that were steeped in the sounds and styles of Russian tradition, not the later, more cosmopolitan pieces. “Tchaikovsky’s music, which does not appear specifically Russian to everybody, is often more profoundly Russian than music which has long since been awarded the facile label of Muscovite picturesqueness,” he wrote in a letter to the choreographer and impresario Sergei Diaghilev. “This music is quite as Russian as Pushkin’s verse or Glinka’s song.” It was Tchaikovsky’s Second and Third symphonies that Stravinsky often conducted during his career, instead of the more familiar late ones (after he settled in Los Angeles in 1940, he led the little-known Symphony no. 2 at the Hollywood Bowl, normally a haven of popular symphonic classics). This was the music he was most attached to—the music he felt reflected the true Tchaikovsky.

Tchaikovsky’s Second Symphony, long known as the *Little Russian*, is arguably the most Russian of all his symphonies,

not only because it comes from early in his career, before his language grew more European in outlook, but also because it is the one most thoroughly saturated by Russian musical folklore. Tchaikovsky takes much of his most prominent melodic material from three folk songs from Ukraine, frequently known as “Little Russia” at the time. (It was the critic Nikolai Kashkin who gave this symphony its *Little Russian* nickname shortly after the composer’s death.)

No other work by Tchaikovsky found such favor with the Kuchka—the “handful” of composers who met regularly in Saint Petersburg to foster their devotion to a distinctly Russian musical art: Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Alexander Borodin. Tchaikovsky’s relationship with the members of the Russian Five, as they became known, was always cautious and complicated, but with his Second Symphony he found that his objectives perfectly dovetailed with theirs. “I played the finale at a soiree at Rimsky-Korsakov’s,” Tchaikovsky wrote of his Christmastime visit to Saint Petersburg in 1872. “The entire company almost tore me to pieces in their enthusiasm—and Madame Rimsky-Korsakov begged me in tears to let her arrange it for piano duet.” Tchaikovsky had finished work on the symphony only weeks earlier. “I think this is my best work with respect to perfection of form, a quality in which I have not shined before,” he wrote to his brother Modest that November.

COMPOSED

1872–73, revised 1879–80

FIRST PERFORMANCE

First version: February 7, 1873;
Moscow, Russia

Revised version: February 12, 1881;
Saint Petersburg, Russia

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

February 14 & 15, 1902, Auditorium
Theatre. Theodore Thomas conducting

June 26, 1965, Ravinia Festival. André
Previn conducting

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES

July 19, 1973, Ravinia Festival. Sergiu
Comissiona conducting

February 3, 4 & 5, 1983, Orchestra Hall.
Claudio Abbado conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two
clarinets, two bassoons, four horns,
two trumpets, three trombones, tuba,
timpani, percussion, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

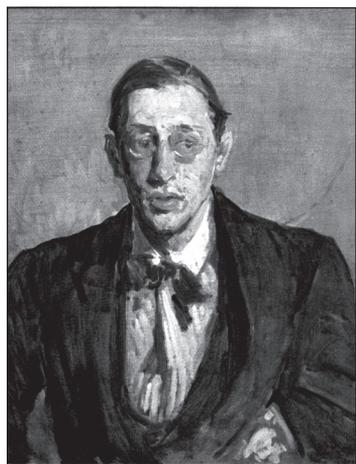
32 minutes

CSO RECORDING

1984. Claudio Abbado conducting. CBS

Tchaikovsky's Second Symphony was a great public success at its Moscow premiere in February 1873. Tchaikovsky wrote to his father that he was called to the stage several times. Plans were underway, he said, for a second performance to be given in Moscow that spring. He also could not resist boasting that he had received a sizeable honorarium and that a collection was under way to present him with a gift at the next performance. When the symphony was repeated in April, Tchaikovsky was crowned with a laurel wreath and given a silver cup. In the meantime, the symphony was successfully introduced in Saint Petersburg as well. And it was played yet again in Moscow at the end of the season.

"To tell the truth," Tchaikovsky wrote after the premiere, "I'm not completely satisfied with the first three movements, but "The Crane" itself [the finale, named after the Ukrainian folk tune] hasn't come out so badly." Seven years later,



Igor Stravinsky

second movement; altered the third; and shortened and reorchestrated the finale. When he was done, he destroyed the original. (It was reconstructed after his death from the orchestral parts, but has rarely been performed.)

The opening movement we know today—by far the most radically reworked of the four movements—is essentially a new piece, and the product of a more mature and seasoned composer (in the meantime, Tchaikovsky had written *Swan Lake*, the First Piano

Concerto, *Eugene Onegin*, the Violin Concerto, and both a third and fourth symphony). It is considerably shorter (368 measures instead of 486); Tchaikovsky himself used the word compression to describe his working process, which went so smoothly that he wrote to Nadezhda von Meck, his new patroness, that he had redone half the movement by lunchtime the very first day. The slow introduction, with its solo horn playing the folk-song melody, "Down by Mother Volga," and the coda, based on the same tune and leading the movement to an unexpectedly quiet ending, are nearly all that remain unaltered from Tchaikovsky's original manuscript.

The second movement offers a new home for the wedding march from act 3 of his ill-fated, unpublished opera *Undine*. It is not a true slow movement, in the traditional sense of that designation, but a character piece of unexpected lightness and grace. The middle section quotes another Ukrainian folk tune. Tchaikovsky's own theme, like so many of his, is both simple and memorable. "The fact is that he was a creator of *melody*, which is an extremely rare and precious gift," Stravinsky wrote.

The scherzo is one of Tchaikovsky's most delightful inventions, harmonically bold and rhythmically driven, yet inventive and playful at every turn. The spunky trio, with its folksy character, jumps from the prevailing three beats in each measure to two. The coda conflates elements of both scherzo and trio.

The grand opening of Tchaikovsky's finale anticipates the majestic Promenade and Great Gate of Kiev in Mussorgsky's *Pictures from an Exhibition* by two years. The entire movement is dominated by the folk song "The Crane," which is suggested in the big chords of the introduction and then races through the ensuing Allegro like wildfire. After the premiere, Tchaikovsky claimed that *his* version of the tune—not quite the standard textbook melody—was the one he learned from Piotr Gerasimovich, the aging butler at Kamenka, his sister's family estate, who persisted in humming the song in his ear as he worked on the finale. ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.