

## **Serenade! (in Legacy Hall)**

**February 12, 2022**

### **Serenade for Strings in G minor**

Vasily Kalinnikov (1866-1901)

Composed in 1891.

Vasily Kalinnikov was a Russian-born composer and bassoonist. He drew much of his musical inspiration from Russian folk songs, imbuing his works with themes and rhythms derived from these tunes. He attended the Moscow Conservatory and the Moscow Philharmonic Society School. He was in contact with fellow Russian composer, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, who was instrumental in his career. In 1892, Tchaikovsky recommended him for his positions at both the Maly Theatre and the Opera in Moscow. Sadly, not long after, he contracted tuberculosis and left his posts to move to a warmer climate in Crimea. It was at a tuberculosis ward in Yalta where he befriended two other patients, well-known Russian writers Maxim Gorky and Anton Chekov. He passed away from tuberculosis two days prior to his 35th birthday, in 1901.

The *Serenade for Strings in G Minor* is a short and charming lyrical work. The opening begins with a beautiful introduction in the cellos as they call back and forth to the plucky pizzicato in the accompanying strings. This theme then expands into a singing melodic passage as it grows into an ostinato or continually repeating passage. Overlapping lyrical phrases are echoed throughout the orchestra, showcasing Kalinnikov's skill in imitation. The string sound and color produced by the composition are rich and dramatic. The work concludes with a final statement of the theme ending this time in a gloriously surprising, and almost whispered G major chord.

### **Serenade for Strings in E-flat Major, Op. 6**

Josef Suk (1874-1935)

Premiered on February 25, 1895, at the Prague Conservatory.

Josef Suk was a talented Czech composer and violinist. He was born in 1874 and by the age of eleven he entered the Prague Conservatory to study the violin. Suk was a student of Dvorák's and became his favorite pupil, and later son-in-law. During the summer of 1892, one year after graduating from the Conservatory, Dvorák instructed Suk to compose something "...lively for a change." He noticed many of his compositions up to that point were in the minor key and gloomy in character. So Suk obliged him and, at the age of eighteen, composed his *Serenade in E-Flat Major, Op. 6*; a substantial but cheerful piece. The work was favorably received and within one year of its premiere, it was published by Simrock under the recommendation of Johannes Brahms.

The *Serenade* is composed of four movements. The first movement, *Andante con moto*, is charming and lyrical. Different from a typical opening *Allegro*, the *Andante* immediately sets the tone of this poised movement, with inspiration from Brahms in the falling triads. The second movement follows with a bright and cheerful *Allegro*. This showcases a folk-like country dance marked with hemiola passages (two groups of three beats changed into three groups of two beats), almost as a nod to his mentor Dvorák. Movement three, *Adagio*, is slow with great intensity, creating a feeling of reflection. The movement takes on moments of heart-breaking and gentle tenderness with very limited statements of intense passion. You can feel this lightness in the music especially when the main theme returns in the high and muted violins. The mood drastically changes at once as we enter the final movement, *Allegro giocoso*. This jocular finale is filled with energy and positivity. The bustling accompaniment is punchy and continues the movement bounding forward. The movement ends in a musical frenzy as Suk leaves us with a dramatic yet uplifting finale.

## **Serenade! (in Legacy Hall)**

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### **Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48**

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Premiered in a private performance at the Moscow Conservatory on December 3, 1880. It was given its first public performance in St. Petersburg on October 30, 1881.

Pyotr Tchaikovsky composed his *Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48* during the fall of 1880. The piece is an imitation of one of his idols, Mozart. The *Serenade* imitates Mozart's classical sonatina form. While the title and structure are taken from the older classical style, he fills it with his own more modern ideas.

The first movement, *Pezzo in forma di sonatina*, begins with a slow and beautiful introduction. The introduction is scored for the whole orchestra and provides a robust opening to the piece. The first theme follows with flowing, moving lines in both the upper and lower string voices. The second theme continues this perpetual musical motion with passages climbing and cascading in the various voices. The constantly running lines weave their way back to the first theme in true classical form. Tchaikovsky bookends the movement cleverly, however, with a restatement of the powerful opening chorale.

The second movement, *Valse*, is a gracious waltz and updates this dance movement, typically a *Minuet*, to a more contemporary form. It is reminiscent of one of his own balletic dances. This waltz is deceptively complex with several and sudden harmonic shifts. The lightness and agility of the waltz is a major contrast to the robust opening movement and the movement to come.

The third movement, *Elegie*, showcases the emotional and lyrical music typical of Tchaikovsky's compositions. It opens with a tender, choral-like passage. The ascending line continues to broaden and elaborate as it rises. The melancholic melodies tug at the heartstrings as they float above light accompaniment, arpeggiated pizzicato in the lower strings. The end of the movement fades away as the strings play the final, ghostly chords.

The final movement, *Finale*, begins with muted string voices. The slow and subdued opening is based on a Russian folk tune. This introduction is starkly different from the remainder of the movement. Following the introduction, a rollicking and fast-paced dance tune takes place, based on another Russian folk tune. This virtuosic section continues to spin out challenging the orchestra with a strenuous workout. The movement continues to build and pick up momentum, getting faster and faster, until Tchaikovsky approaches a final surprise to the listener. As the piece wants to end, Tchaikovsky shows his dramatic abilities and brings back the chorale passage from the beginning of the first movement. This final stately quotation ties the whole piece together. Out of the stunning statement of the chorale, Tchaikovsky tricks us once more and slips back into the fast Russian dance tune once more, and pushes forward to the end of the piece.