# Minnesota Orchestra

**Osmo Vänskä**, conductor

**Stephen Hough**, piano

| | |
|---|---|
| Thursday, October 1, 2009, 7:30 pm | Benedicta Arts Center, College of Saint Benedict |
| Friday, October 2, 2009, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall |
| Saturday, October 3, 2009, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Richard Wagner** | *Siegfried Idyll* | ca. 17' |
| **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky** | Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 23<br>Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso<br>Andantino semplice<br>Allegro con fuoco<br>*Stephen Hough, piano* | ca. 33' |
| I N T E R M I S S I O N | | ca. 20' |
| **Béla Bartók** | *The Miraculous Mandarin,* Opus 19 | ca. 30' |

Violinist Kyu-Young Kim serves as guest concertmaster for these performances.

thank you

Thursday's concert is supported by **St. Cloud Hospital**.

With the Friday and Saturday concerts, we recognize the support of **The Dorsey & Whitney Foundation**.

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live Friday evenings on stations of **Minnesota Public Radio**. The concerts are also featured in **American Public Media**'s national programs, ***SymphonyCast*** and ***Performance Today***. Regional broadcasts are supported by the Minnesota Orchestra; **Patterson, Thuente, Skaar and Christensen, P.A.**; **UBS**; and **DTS Digital Entertainment**.

music up close

Concert Preview:
Russian Masters II
with Courtney Lewis

10/1 at 6:45 pm
Benedicta Arts Center Instrument Rehearsal Hall

10/2 at 7 pm
10/3 at 7 pm
Orchestra Hall Auditorium

**Osmo Vänskä**, conductor

Profile appears on page 16.

**Stephen Hough**, piano

Profile appears on page 29.

## one-minute notes

### Wagner: *Siegfried Idyll*

The *Siegfried Idyll*, one of Wagner's few purely instrumental works, is lovely, warm and melodic music. Conceived as a love token from the composer to his wife Cosima, it was premiered as a surprise to her on Christmas morning, with the musicians performing on the staircase to her bedroom.

### Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No. 1

Like Beethoven, who angrily removed Napoleon's name from his *Eroica* Symphony, Tchaikovsky furiously scratched out the name of the intended dedicatee of this famous concerto—and it became an instant success in the hands of the man he then honored with the dedication, the great conductor-pianist Hans von Bülow. It begins with high drama, retreats to a place of calm and rushes toward its close in a mood of white-hot energy.

### Bartók: *The Miraculous Mandarin*

This brilliant work was inspired by a lurid tale of deception and seduction—which Bartók viewed as a moral tale, with good winning over evil. Unsettling music describes three thugs, the girl they force to pose as a temptress, the suitors they reject and their ultimate victim, an otherworldly figure whose demise is reflected in violent, percussive chords.

## Richard Wagner

**Born:** May 22, 1813, Leipzig
**Died:** February 13, 1883, Venice

### *Siegfried Idyll*

An understanding of Wagner's lovely *Siegfried Idyll* requires some knowledge of the details of that composer's irregular personal life. In 1864, at the age of 51, Wagner began an affair with 27-year-old Cosima von Bülow, daughter of Franz Liszt and wife of pianist-conductor Hans von Bülow. Wagner and Cosima's daughter Isolde was born the following April, on the same day von Bülow conducted the first rehearsal of *Tristan und Isolde*. All concerned agreed to keep details of the situation a secret, and the infant's birth certificate listed von Bülow as the father, Wagner as the godfather. Cosima bore Wagner two more children, a daughter Eva in 1867 and a son Siegfried in 1869, and moved in with him in 1868. Finally, in 1870—after a six-year relationship and three children—the couple was married.

That fall, Cosima became aware that Wagner was working on a project he would not describe to her, and for good reason: it was to be one of the best surprises in the history of music. On Christmas morning, Cosima, asleep with 18-month-old Siegfried, awoke to the sound of music. Her husband had secretly composed and rehearsed a piece for small orchestra, and now that orchestra, arranged on the staircase leading to Cosima's bedroom, gave this music its most unusual premiere.

This music was not just a token of love and a Christmas present, but also a birthday present: Cosima had turned 33 a few weeks earlier. She treasured this music, which is full of private meanings for the couple. It is based on themes from Wagner's (at that time still unperformed) opera *Siegfried*, but it also uses a child's cradle song and other themes with personal meaning for Wagner and Cosima. Their private title for the piece was *Tribschen Idyll*: they were living at Tribschen on Lake Lucerne in Switzerland at the time, and Cosima felt that the music was an embodiment of their life and love in these years. When in 1878, pressed for cash, Wagner had the music published under the now-familiar title *Siegfried Idyll*, Cosima confessed in her diary: "My secret treasure is becoming common property; may the joy it will give mankind be commensurate with the sacrifice I am making."

As good love music should be, the *Siegfried Idyll* is gentle, warm, and melodic. Listeners familiar with the opera *Siegfried* will recognize some of the themes, all associated with the young hero Siegfried: his horn call, the bird call from the *Forest Murmurs* sequence, and others. Wagner also quotes, in the oboe near the beginning, the old cradle song "Sleep, Little Child, Sleep." At its premiere, this music was performed on Cosima's staircase by an orchestra of 15 players, though the double bass was around a corner and could not see Wagner conduct.

**Instrumentation:**
flute, oboe, 2 clarinets, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet and strings

### at the same time...

**Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto premieres in 1875, the year:**

- The *New York Daily Telegraph* publishes *Professor Tigwissel's Burglar Alarm*, the first newspaper comic strip
- Steamship captain Matthew Webb becomes the first person to swim the English Channel
- St. Louis athlete Charles Waite introduces a new piece of protective gear—the baseball glove

**In 1926, when Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin* is first performed:**

- Hirohito begins his 63-year reign as Emperor of Japan
- Massachusetts physicist Robert Goddard launches the world's first liquid-fueled rocket
- The famed Route 66 is established, connecting Los Angeles and Chicago

"I am not like other people. I must have brilliance and beauty and light. The world owes me what I need."

– Wagner

## Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

**Born:** May 7, 1840, Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia
**Died:** November 6, 1893, St. Petersburg

### Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 23

Tchaikovsky drafted this most famous of piano concertos in November and December 1874, when he was a young professor at the Moscow Conservatory. Only modestly talented as a pianist and insecure about his handling of larger forms, the composer sought the advice of Nicholas Rubinstein, who was head of the Conservatory and the man to whom he intended to dedicate the concerto. Rubinstein listened in silence as Tchaikovsky played the new work through, and then, as Tchaikovsky later wrote:

> There burst from Rubinstein's mouth a mighty torrent of words. He spoke quietly at first, then he waxed hot, and finally he resembled Zeus hurling thunderbolts. It seems that my concerto was utterly worthless, absolutely unplayable. Certain passages were so commonplace and awkward they could not be improved, and the piece as a whole was bad, trivial, vulgar. I had stolen this from somebody and that from somebody else, so that only two or three pages were good for anything and all the rest should be wiped out or radically rewritten.

### the un-dedication

Stung (and furious), Tchaikovsky refused to change a note, erased the dedication to Rubinstein, and instead dedicated the concerto to an individual who also figured prominently in the story of the first work on this program: the German pianist-conductor Hans von Bülow, who had championed Tchaikovsky's music. Bülow promptly took the concerto on a tour of the United States, and it was in Boston on October 25, 1875, that Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 was heard for the first time.

It was a huge success on that occasion, and Bülow played it repeatedly in this country to rhapsodic reviews. A critic in Boston, taking note of that success, described the concerto as an "extremely difficult, strange, wild, ultra-modern Russian Concerto." Back in Russia the composer read the press clippings and was beside himself with happiness: "Think what healthy appetites these Americans must have! Each time Bülow was obliged to repeat the whole finale of my concerto! Nothing like that happens in our country."

It only remains to be said that Rubinstein eventually saw the error of his early condemnation and became one of the concerto's great champions. It should also be noted that in 1889—perhaps more aware of Rubinstein's criticisms than he cared to admit—Tchaikovsky did in fact take the concerto through a major revision, and it is in this form that we know it today.

### a high-drama beginning

**allegro non troppo e molto maestoso.** The concerto has one of the most dramatic beginnings in all the literature, ringing with horn fanfares and cannonades of huge piano chords, followed by one of Tchaikovsky's Great Tunes, in which that horn fanfare is transformed into a flowing melody for strings. This opening has become extremely famous, but this introductory section has many quirks. It is in the "wrong" key (D-flat major), and—however striking it may be—it never returns in any form: Tchaikovsky simply abandons all this tremendous material when he gets to the main section of the movement.

This "real" beginning, marked *Allegro con spirito*, is finally in the correct key of B-flat minor, and the piano's skittering main subject is reportedly based on a tune Tchaikovsky heard a blind beggar whistle at a fair in

> "You have preferred to devote your life and the treasures of your mind to one who is my superior. Far from blaming you, I approve your action from every point of view and admit you are perfectly right."
>
> – Hans von Bülow, the pianist who premiered Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, in a letter to his former wife Cosima after her marriage to Wagner

Ukraine. To his patroness, Madame von Meck, Tchaikovsky wrote: "It is curious that in [Ukraine] every blind beggar sings exactly the same tune with the same refrain. I have used part of this refrain in my pianoforte concerto." The expected secondary material quickly appears—a chorale-like theme for winds and a surging, climbing figure for strings—though Tchaikovsky evades expectations by including multiple cadenzas for the soloist in this movement. The piano writing is of the greatest difficulty (much of it in great hammered octaves), and the movement drives to a dramatic close.

**andantino semplice.** The second movement is aptly named, for this truly is simple music in the best sense of that term. Over pizzicato chords, solo flute sings the gentle main theme, an island of calm after the searing first movement. A scherzo-like central episode marked *Prestissimo* leads to the return of the opening material and a quiet close.

**allegro con fuoco.** The finale, *Allegro con fuoco*, is also well named, for here is music full of fire. It is a rondo based on the piano's nervous, dancing main theme, and while calmer episodes break into this furious rush, the principal impression this music makes is of white-hot energy. The "strange, wild, ultra-modern Russian Concerto" rushes to a knock-out close that is just as impressive to audiences today as it was to those first listeners in Boston in 1875.

**Instrumentation:**
solo piano with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

## Béla Bartók

**Born:** March 25, 1881, Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary
**Died:** September 26, 1945, New York City

### *The Miraculous Mandarin*, Opus 19

No other work looms quite as large in Bartók's career as *The Miraculous Mandarin*, and none of his other works caused him so much trouble. From the time he encountered Melchior Lengyel's story in January 1917, Bartók worked on this music for nearly ten years—the most time he spent on a single work—before it was produced on the stage.

### the premiere: a scandal

Yet that premiere in Cologne in November 1926 was a catastrophe. The audience jeered, the press was savage, the Catholic Church protested, and Konrad Adenauer, then mayor of Cologne, called the conductor into his office, ripped into him for programing "such a dirty piece" and blocked any further performances. Efforts to produce *The Miraculous Mandarin* in Budapest in 1931, to commemorate Bartók's 50th birthday, ran into such opposition that they had to be canceled.

The reasons for such furious opposition are obvious. *The Miraculous Mandarin* tells a story that would offend audiences even today, when almost anything is acceptable on stage. The composer left a concise summary:

> Three apaches force a beautiful girl to lure men into their den so that they can rob them. The first [victim] is a poor youth, the second is not better off, but the third, however, is a wealthy Chinese. He is a good catch, and the girl entertains him by dancing. The Mandarin's desire is aroused, he is inflamed with passion, but the girl shrinks from him in horror. The apaches attack him, rob him, smother him in a quilt, stab him with a sword—but their violence is of no avail. They cannot cope with the Mandarin who continues to look at the girl with love and longing in his eyes. Finally feminine instinct helps, and the girl satisfies the Mandarin's desire; only then does he collapse and die.

### a "moral" tale, hard-edged music

This tale could not be more squalid or explicit, and so Bartók's reactions to it catch us by surprise. He called it "marvelously beautiful," and on another occasion exclaimed "how beautiful the story is." Beneath the lurid surface, Bartók saw it as a moral tale, an allegory of the collision of good and evil and of the ultimate triumph of good.

The evil is clear. The three thugs—always portrayed by noisy, abrasive music—represent modern urban society. They are money-mad and violent, and they have corrupted the girl (innocence) to do their bidding. Into this setting comes something otherworldly, powerful and incomprehensible: the Mandarin. (It was not so crucial that he be Chinese as that he be different—in one of

Lengyel's early versions this figure was a deformed dwarf.) The Mandarin represents an unstoppable life force beyond the understanding of the thugs. Only the girl comes to understand, and she redeems the Mandarin and herself through passion.

*The Miraculous Mandarin* is usually classified as a ballet, but Bartók insisted that it was not. In a letter to his publisher, he complained: "I see that [Universal Edition] is advertising *Mandarin* as a ballet. I have to observe that this work is less a ballet than a pantomime, since only two dances actually occur in it." And later he wrote: "The piece must not be turned into a ballet-show; it is intended as a pantomime, after all." For Bartók, the emphasis was on action rather than on dance, and his music depicts that action with raw power.

Some have heard the influence of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* here, others the music of Schoenberg (which Bartók had discovered after World War I), but *The Miraculous Mandarin* actually sounds like Bartók in every measure: brilliant, hard-edged, rhythmic, powerful. It has been observed that a stage performance needs no choreographer, since every action, every gesture, is clear from the music.

## "an awful clamour"

*The Miraculous Mandarin* is usually heard in the popular orchestral suite Bartók drew from it, but this concert offers the rare opportunity to hear the complete work.

From the first instant, Bartók's music is unsettling. Second violins swirl up and down over a "wrong" interval (octave plus a half-step), and the din of the industrialized urban setting arrives in a blast of auto-horns.

Bartók was very proud of this beginning and described it in a letter to his wife: "an awful clamour, clatter, stampeding and blowing of horns: I lead the highly respectable listener from the crowded streets of a metropolis into an apaches' den." Each of the girl's seductive poses in the window, depicted by clarinets, nets a prospective client. Bartók's original scenario quoted above reverses the sequence of the first two johns: the first is a shabby rake who enters to the sound of trombone glissandos and then is graphically thrown down the stairs by the thugs. The second lure brings a reticent young man (solo oboe), and the girl dances shyly for him before he too is found to be penniless and cast down the stairs.

The Mandarin, responding to the third lure, makes a magnificent entrance: the orchestra "shivers" in terror as the lower brass stamp out an "oriental-sounding" theme and the acid chords that mark his arrival in the room. A moment of stunned silent follows. Terrified, the girl begins to dance for him, and her waltz gradually becomes more animated. When the Mandarin tries to embrace her, she flees in terror, and he chases her around the room. This music, the most violent in *The Miraculous Mandarin*, is a furious fugue. (Bartók brought his orchestral suite to a close here, some ten minutes before the end of the complete pantomime.)

The music may have been brutal to this point, but it becomes even more frightening in the closing sequence. Great percussive chords ring out as the thugs attempt to smother the Mandarin. They cover him with pillows and sit on those pillows, but his head pops free and he stares raptly at the girl. Next, to a pounding 6/8 meter, they take up a rusty sword and run him through three times. The Mandarin totters, but still he tries to get to the girl. Accompanied by the sound of deep rolling glissandos from timpani and lower strings, they hang him from the lamp hook in the ceiling. Now, in the eeriest moment in the ballet, the Mandarin's body glows with a "greenish-blue light." The girl orders him cut down, and again he leaps at her. As the music rises in intensity, she takes him in her arms, and—in Bartók's words—the "Mandarin's longing is now stilled." His wounds bleed, and he dies in front of the girl and the thugs. The curtain comes down as dark string chords whisper into silence.

No wonder *The Miraculous Mandarin* touched off a riot in Cologne in 1926. Bartók may have believed that the girl redeemed the Mandarin and herself through the physical act of love, but this dark tale ends in desolation: the girl, trapped in her squalid setting, is left standing over the Mandarin's lifeless body as the curtain comes down.

**Instrumentation:**
3 flutes (2nd and 3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (2nd doubling E-flat clarinet, 3rd doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns (2nd and 4th doubling Wagnertuben), 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, large snare drum, soprano snare drum, tam-tam, triangle, xylophone, piano, celesta, organ and strings

*Program notes by* ***Eric Bromberger****.*