

Chapel Hill Philharmonia

Donald L. Oehler, Music Director

7:30 p.m. Sunday, May 3, 2015

Hill Hall – University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Fanfare for Jerry Hulka

Garth Molyneux

Chapel Hill Philharmonia Horns

Overture from *Egmont*, Op. 84

Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 11

Frédéric Chopin

Allegro maestoso

Jane Zhao, piano

Intermission

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Pathétique

Adagio – Allegro non troppo

Allegro con grazia

Allegro molto vivace

Finale: Adagio lamentoso – Andante

Please join us for a reception in the rotunda after the concert

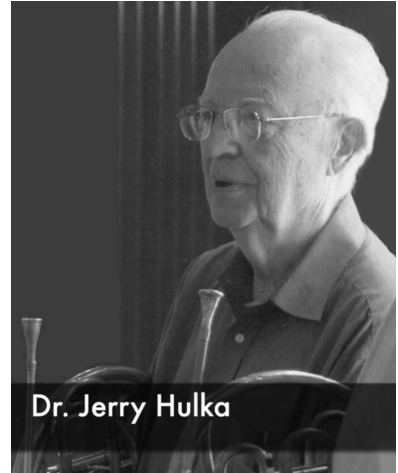
Kindly remember to turn off mobile devices

Pathétique

The Romantic era idealized heroes. The works on tonight's Chapel Hill Philharmonia program comprise three distinct takes on heroism—the martyrdom of a leader to the cause of freedom, the creativity of an artist in the face of an incurable illness, and the passionate suffering of an individual descending into silence.

Fanfare for Jerry Hulka

Jaroslav Hulka, M.D., passed away on November 24, 2014, at age 84. A founding member of the CHP and long time principal French horn player, Jerry also served the orchestra as a board member and president. He is survived by his wife Barbara Sorenson Hulka, a UNC-Chapel Hill professor emerita and former CHP concertmaster. The couple met as undergraduates when both were section principals in the Harvard/Radcliffe Orchestra. The Hulkas have donated generously to the CHP and to classical music programs at UNC-Chapel Hill and throughout the Triangle. In his "day job" Jerry was a well-respected academic and obstetrics/gynecology specialist, recognized as a wise physician, mentor, and innovator. He invented one of the first laparoscopically placed fallopian tube ligation devices, the Hulka Clip, and pioneered many other modern surgical techniques in gynecology. Our performance of the Overture from *Egmont*, a work in which four horns play a major role, is dedicated to Jerry's memory. Our concert opens with a fanfare composed in his honor by horn section member Garth Molyneux.



Egmont Overture

Two leading figures in German culture, the composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) and the writer, statesman and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), shared the ideal of liberty. Goethe's play *Egmont*, published in 1788, the year before the French Revolution, epitomized the nationalist and democratic fervor sweeping Europe. More than two decades later the continent's political landscape had altered drastically with the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte and his transition from republican to self-proclaimed emperor. At the hands of his French artillery, Vienna, Beethoven's home, suffered repeated bombardment. In the midst of this conflict, the city's Burgtheater revived Goethe's play. The author always had intended that musical episodes should illuminate the play, culminating in a "Symphony of Victory," but efforts to craft appropriate incidental music had proved unsatisfactory. The Burgtheater's management placed the challenge in front of Beethoven for the 1810 staging. He responded with nine pieces including an extended overture, a tone poem that encapsulates the key elements of Goethe's story. The playwright saw a performance of *Egmont* with this music in 1814 and declared, "Beethoven has followed my intentions with admirable genius."

The protagonist of Goethe's drama, set in Brussels, is Count Lamoral van Egmont, an actual historical figure from the 16th century Netherlands (including what is now Belgium). Like Beethoven, Egmont was of Flemish descent, a link that helps explain the composer's enthusiasm for this project. The Count resisted Spanish occupation of his

homeland and the persecution of Protestants by the Inquisition. Goethe's plot follows the actual history, with some embellishment. A brutal Spanish Governor-General, the Duke of Alva, imprisons Egmont, and the infamous 'Blood Council' orders him beheaded. The hero's lover Klärchen (Goethe's romantic creation) pleads for his life and seeks to mobilize the cautious Dutch burghers with a passion that brings to mind Joan of Arc: "Come! I will march in your midst! — As a waving banner, though weaponless, leads on a gallant army of warriors, so shall my spirit hover, like a flame, over your ranks, while love and courage shall unite the dispersed and wavering multitude into a terrible host." She fails and expires, but her heroism reinforces Egmont's own. As an apparition of Klärchen bathes him in light, Egmont declaims, "And now, from this dungeon I shall go forth, to meet a glorious death; I die for freedom, for whose cause I have lived and fought, and for whom I now offer myself up a sorrowing sacrifice." Per Goethe's instructions, the Victory Symphony follows the hero's last words. The audience knows that Egmont's martyrdom will ignite a people's rebellion that finally overthrows the Spanish tyranny over the Netherlands—a coded reference to the Viennese opposition to French occupation.

The sweep of Beethoven's music follows Goethe's story. Jed Gaylin (Johns Hopkins University) describes it admirably well, and notes strong ties to the composer's Fifth Symphony, completed in 1808. "The *Egmont* Overture has one of the most dramatic openings in all music. Somber block chords wash over the listener like waves of grief, proceeding like a fractured hymn in the aftermath of a great tragedy. These huge chords are answered by pitiful cries from the woodwinds, as though pairs of hands, first one, then another, and then others are reaching up for some small sense of hope....Beethoven...has summed up the people's despair: 'Count Egmont has been executed, and we know not what to do.' But the people do carry on, and they do hold the torch. The music gains momentum as their struggle gains strength and hope. Now we hear echoes of the fifth symphony's similar struggle toward triumph. As in the symphony's scherzo, the overture's horns blast in indignation. After a brief moment of reflection, the overture's coda refers unmistakably to the symphony's. As Egmont's memory energized the Dutch, brass-led triumph is winning the day in this music."

Chopin Piano Concerto No. 1

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) revolutionized piano performance and composition for that instrument. New York Times music critic Anthony Tomassini considers him "the most original genius of the 19th century." Born in Zelazowa Wola, a small village near Warsaw, Chopin virtually taught himself to play his chosen instrument and began to compose by age six. As a teenager he studied for three years at the Warsaw Conservatory and began to concertize in Europe's major music capitals, playing his own music almost exclusively. In 1832 he settled in Paris and never returned to Poland. Six years later he began a love affair with the novelist Amantine-Lucile-Aurore Dupin, better known as George Sand. They remained together until a falling out two years before Chopin's death.

Cold, wet weather during a holiday in Majorca in the winter of 1838, described in a travelogue by Sand, exacerbated a lung disease from which Chopin already had suffered for many years. Although his condition historically was diagnosed as consumption (tuberculosis), several modern physicians concur that he more likely suffered from the debilitating genetic disease cystic fibrosis. While his contemporary and admirer Ferenc (Franz) Liszt commanded audiences with power, richness of tone, and the dynamic modernity of his compositions, Chopin confined himself to more classical models, and his playing was all about nuance. As chronic illness robbed him of the strength needed to fill a concert hall with sound, he found his natural venue in the salons of Paris, playing for small, erudite gatherings. Accounts of Chopin's pianism emphasize extraordinary fluidity, subtle gradations of touch, color and volume, and a unique use of rubato, that is, expressive fluctuations of tempo.

Both of Chopin's piano concertos are early works, dating to 1830. He first performed the Piano Concerto No. 1 in

E minor at his final concert in Warsaw, before departing to Vienna to seek renown as a touring soloist. Chopin's models were the concertos of Johann Nepomuk Hummel, a linking figure between the classical period of Wolfgang Mozart, with whom Hummel studied as a child, and the romantic era. This evening Jane Zhao performs the First Concerto's opening movement. It begins with an unusually long orchestral introduction containing two contrasting themes in E minor and E major, respectively. The piano enters forcefully and reprises the themes, then develops them with dramatic keyboard figuration. Chicago Symphony program annotator Phillip Huscher observes that, while the orchestra plays an important role as "master of ceremonies," essentially Chopin's "concerto is a monologue; it has little of the chamber-music intimacy between solo and ensemble that characterizes Mozart's works or the heroic dialogue between forces in Beethoven's....[T]he piano commands center stage. In passage after passage, Chopin writes music for it that is brilliant, virtuosic, and richly ornamented, yet never trivial."



Our soloist in the Chopin Piano Concerto No. 1, native North Carolinian Jane Zhao, age 16, is the winner of the Chapel Hill Philharmonia's annual Student Concerto Competition. Jane began formal study at the age of 8 with Florence Ko. She has won numerous competitions and scholarships across the state, most recently placing first in the Fayetteville Symphony's Harlan Duenow Young Artist Concerto Competition. She also won second place in the Winston-Salem Symphony Peter Perret Youth Talent Search. Jane is home-schooled in Cary, where she volunteers for child care and piano accompaniment at her church. Her personal interests include speech/debate, cooking/baking, and photography.

Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6

"Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma," wrote Winston Churchill. The same words fit the Symphony No. 6 in B minor of the most popular composer in Russian history, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893). It was premiered under his own baton just nine days before his shocking death, apparently from cholera contracted after drinking a glass of unboiled water during an epidemic. Initially, Tchaikovsky planned to call the work a "Program Symphony," but he abandoned the notion because he did not intend ever to reveal the underlying story. He then accepted the title "*Pathétique*" (in French; "*Patititčeskaja*" in Russian) suggested by his brother Modest. Accurately translated, the word connotes "impassioned suffering," rather than pitifulness or pitiability, which would suggest a contemptible weakness. To whose suffering, and even death, might this refer? What was the program the composer refused to disclose? Why did he dedicate the work to his nephew Vladimir "Bob" Davydov, for whom he had sexual as well as familial feelings? Was the symphony, in fact, an elaborate suicide note, and Tchaikovsky's death caused by self-inflicted poison rather than a recklessly careless act?

Sexual orientation was a longstanding issue for Tchaikovsky. In 1877 he married Antonina Miliukova, a deranged former student, most likely to cover up his homosexuality. Within days he panicked, attempted (or faked) suicide by throwing himself into a river, and then escaped to Switzerland with Modest. Antonina was quietly paid off.

Although such stories had been acknowledged in some circles for many decades, the composer was "officially" outed in the 1981 edition of the respected *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. David Brown's article on the composer repeated a sensational claim by émigré Russian musicologist Alexandra Orlova that Tchaikovsky's swallowing of contaminated water in October 1893 was faked to cover up suicide by arsenic poisoning. He was ordered to kill himself, she said, by a "court of honor" of former classmates and colleagues from the College of



Law and his three-year posting as a civil servant in the Czar's Ministry of Justice. (It was only after this that Tchaikovsky had entered the Saint Petersburg Conservatory in 1862 to study music.) His "crime," according to Orlova, was an overly public affair with a young nobleman, the nephew of a politically important Duke. Suicide was offered as a way for Tchaikovsky to avoid punishment under Russia's draconian anti-homosexuality laws, and to protect the reputation of the College of Law. In this scenario the *Pathétique* Symphony would be a final lament for the composer's own fate. In a 1999 book Timothy Jackson described the work as "a despairing homoerotic narrative."

When Tchaikovsky began the *Pathétique* in 1893 at age 53, he had hit a creative wall. A Symphony on "Life" failed to come together, and he feared a future restricted to "potboilers" such as the *Nutcracker* (1892). Somehow, he rediscovered his creative voice. "Without exaggeration," Tchaikovsky wrote, "I have put my whole soul into this work." He assessed the symphony as "the best thing I ever composed or ever shall compose."

The work begins with a bassoon solo emerging from rumbling lower strings. The strangely nervous theme develops, then gives way to a hauntingly beautiful melody—"an utterly personal transformation of one of his favorite pieces, Don José's Flower Aria in *Carmen*. He wants it played 'tenderly, very songfully, and elastically.'" (music writer Michael Steinberg) A tempestuous development section gives way to a quotation in the trombones of a section of the Russian Orthodox Mass for the Dead, for which the words are: "And may his soul rest with the souls of all the saints." The 'great melody' returns, then fades away into a brass chorale over plucked strings.

If Vienna's Johann Strauss II was the Waltz King, Tchaikovsky was a prince. The second movement is an unusual waltz in five beats. "How does this fit into the symphony's program?" asks Steinberg. "Probably not at all, except insofar as it contributes another sort of tristful climate. This atmosphere, however, vanishes with the arrival of the next movement, a brilliant scherzo, full of strange flashes and thunders, that unveils itself as a fiery march."

From Beethoven's *Eroica* (1803) and Fifth Symphony up to Tchaikovsky's own Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, composers seemed compelled to pose the challenges of fate, then conclude with rousing messages of triumph. The Finale of the *Pathétique* approaches the human condition differently. The tempo returns to that of the opening, here marked *Adagio lamentoso*—very slowly, in a mournful, grieving manner. Steinberg hears in "the snarling of stopped horns and a single, soft stroke on the tam-tam...the tokens of disaster, the harbingers of defeat." Sound descends in pitch and volume. As the low strings conclude the work, "the music, over a dying pulse, sinks back into that dark region where it had begun and moves beyond our hearing." As at the end of *Hamlet*, "the rest is silence."

More detailed elucidation of Tchaikovsky's program remains problematic. Most now find little evidence that the *Pathétique* foreshadows a suicide to hide Tchaikovsky's gay loves. As with the unknown master counter-theme of Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, composed five years later, music scholars continue to propose many answers. A book published last year by Marina Ritzarev of Bar-Ilan University in Israel, for example, builds an intriguing case "in support of the hypothesis that the image that...served as the source of inspiration for Tchaikovsky's masterpiece was that of Jesus Christ, his life and death, transformed into a general imagery of the *Passion*." Wherever Tchaikovsky actually found his stimulus, he opened up the post-Romantic symphonic world of the next century explored by Gustav Mahler, Jan Sibelius, Dmitri Shostakovich, Leonard Bernstein and beyond.