NAXOS

TCHAIKOVSKY

DDD

8.555714

Symphony No. 4

Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture

Colorado Symphony Orchestra • Marin Alsop

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No. 4 • Romeo and Juliet: Fantasy Overture

Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk in 1840, the second son of a mining engineer, Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky had his early education, in music as in everything else, at home, under the care of his mother and of a beloved governess. From the age of ten he was a pupil at the School of Jurisprudence in St Petersburg, completing his studies there in 1859, to take employment in the Ministry of Justice. During these years he developed his abilities as a musician and it must have seemed probable that, like his near contemporaries Mussorgsky, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, he would keep music as a secondary occupation, while following his official career.

For Tchaikovsky matters turned out differently. The foundation of the new Conservatory of Music in St Petersburg under Anton Rubinstein enabled him to study there as a full-time student from 1863. In 1865 he moved to Moscow as a member of the staff of the new Conservatory established there by Anton Rubinstein's brother Nikolay. For over ten years he continued in Moscow, before financial assistance from a rich widow, Nadezhda von Meck, enabled him to leave the Conservatory and devote himself entirely to composition. The same period in his life brought an unfortunate marriage to a self-proclaimed admirer of his work, a woman who showed early signs of mental instability and could only add further to Tchaikovsky's own problems of character and inclination. His homosexuality caused obvious difficulties, while his morbid sensitivity and diffidence, coupled with physical revulsion for the woman he had married, led to a severe nervous breakdown.

Separation from his wife, which was immediate, still left practical and personal problems to be solved. Tchaikovsky's relationship with Nadezhda von Meck, however, provided not only the money that at first was necessary for his career, but also the understanding and support of a woman who, so far from making physical demands of him, never even met him face to face. This curiously remote liaison and patronage only came to an end in 1890, when, on the false plea of bankruptcy, she discontinued an allowance that was no longer of importance and a correspondence on which he had come to depend.

Tchaikovsky's sudden death in St Petersburg in 1893 gave rise, as sudden deaths will, to contemporary speculation and has provoked further posthumous rumours. It has been suggested that he committed suicide as the result of pressure from a court of honour of former students of the School of Jurisprudence, when an allegedly erotic liaison with a young nobleman seemed likely to cause an open scandal even in court circles. Officially his death was attributed to cholera, contracted after drinking undistilled water. Whether the victim of cholera, of his own carelessness or reckless despair, or of death deliberately courted, Tchaikovsky was widely mourned.

The story of the tragic lovers Romeo and Juliet hardly needs repetition. Tchaikovsky, in his fantasy overture of 1869, revised in 1870 at the suggestion of Balakirev, and finally once more in 1880, makes no attempt to follow the events as they occur in Shakespeare's play. The final version of the work was dedicated to Balakirev, at whose instigation the task had first been undertaken. There is the solemnity of Friar Laurence, whose well-intentioned intervention is the indirect cause of the tragedy, a turbulent principal theme suggesting the traditional enmity of the houses of Montague and Capulet, and a sensuous melody expressing the love of Romeo and Juliet. The overture is in tripartite sonata form, the exposition, with its principal thematic material, followed by a central development and a final recapitulation, in which, after the conflict of the themes of hatred and love, comes death.

It has been suggested that the *Romeo and Juliet* overture had to some extent reflected Tchaikovsky's feelings for the fifteen-year-old Eduard Zak, the cousin

of a student of his at the Conservatory, who subsequently, in 1873, committed suicide. Whatever the truth of this, the fourth of Tchaikovsky's six symphonies was written during a time of the greatest personal difficulty. Completed in early January, 1878, it had its first performance in Moscow six weeks later. In May and early June the previous year Tchaikovsky had finished the sketches of the whole work. It was early in May that he had responded to a letter from Antonina Milyukova, who had studied briefly at the Conservatory and now avowed her love for him, threatening suicide if he refused her. Influenced perhaps by Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, the subject of a new opera he now had in mind, he proposed to her. On 18th July he married: by 7th August he had left for his brother-in-law's estate at Kamenka to escape from a wife to whom he had taken an invincible aversion. By the end of September, after attempted suicide, his marriage was at an end, and in October he left Russia to find relief in travel. Even in these extraordinary circumstances work on the symphony continued, and its first performance was given in Moscow under the direction of Nikolay Rubinstein and attended by Nadezhda von Meck, to whom it was dedicated, but in the composer's absence.

In a letter to Mme von Meck Tchaikovsky suggested, with various reservations about the difficulty of expressing musical thoughts in words, a programme for the symphony. The seed of the whole work lay in the opening theme, representing Fate, a threatening sword of Damocles, an invincible force to which one can only resign oneself and languish in vain, shown in the melody based on the descending scale that follows the ominous introduction. As despair grows, he suggests that there may be refuge in daydreams, represented by the clarinet melody that forms the second subject, immediately followed by the bright human image of joy. Reality and Fate intervene to shatter the illusion. Life is a continuing alternation of harsh reality and dreams of happiness. In the second movement Tchaikovsky sees the sad weariness of evening, in which past happiness and past trouble may be remembered, a sense of bitter sweetness, reflected in the opening oboe melody that returns in the first violins after a contrasted central section. The *Scherzo*, with its plucked strings, suggests fleeting images that hurry past in one's imagination after a glass or two of wine, peasants drinking, a street song, and then a distant band of soldiers passing, very Russian scoring for woodwind and then for brass, before the plucked strings resume their rapid progress and the images recur. The last movement proposes an answer to depression in the company of others and in the enjoyment of the common people. The ebullient first theme is contrasted with a secondary melody, a Russian folk-song. One's mood begins to change, but Fate brings a reminder of reality. Yet melancholy can disappear in the happiness of others. He adds that the symphony is an echo of his own feelings of the previous winter, however inadequate his verbal expression of them.

Keith Anderson

Colorado Symphony Orchestra

The Colorado Symphony Orchestra is the leading symphony orchestra in the state, embracing a tradition of musical excellence, and presenting a wide variety of symphonic performances from classical repertoire to innovative new forms. The orchestra aspires to play a key rôle in making Denver and the Rocky Mountain Region an exciting place to live, work and raise families. Each season, approximately 325,000 attend the Colorado Symphony's concerts, including its Masterworks Series, SuperPops Series, Holiday Concert Series, cultural Convergence and Free City Concerts. The Colorado Symphony Association, established in 1989 as the successor to the Denver Symphony, boasts an eighty-year legacy of symphonic music in Colorado. The Symphony is Colorado's only resident orchestra, composed of professional musicians employed to play symphonic music on a full-time basis. Musicians actively participate in the management of the organization through significant participation on the Association's Board of Trustees, as well as on all governing committees. Under the leadership of music director Marin Alsop, the Colorado Symphony Orchestra has developed a unique sound and become one of the finest ensembles in the country, gaining recognition on both the regional and national levels. Through a partnership with Colorado Public Radio, many of the orchestra's performances are broadcast to a statewide audience. Reaching an even more expansive audience, four of the orchestra's programmes are broadcast nationally on National Public Radio's *Performance Today and SymphonyCast*. In addition to the orchestra's radio partnerships, the Colorado Symphony has also been active in recording new music for major record companies.

Marin Alsop

Currently Music Director of the Colorado Symphony, the Cabrillo Festival of contemporary music in California and of the Concordia Orchestra in New York, Marin Alsop studied at Yale University, taking a Master's Degree from the Juilliard School. In 1989 she won the Koussevitzky Conducting Prize at Tanglewood Music Center, where she was a pupil of Leonard Bernstein, Seiji Ozawa and Gustav Meier. She has enjoyed an active and successful career as a conductor, with engagements that have included appearances with major orchestras throughout the United States, in Australia and in Europe. Marin Alsop is an important champion of American music and Concordia, an ensemble of fifty players that she founded in 1984, is representative of this work in its combination of classical repertory with American jazz and contemporary music. She has recorded both with Concordia and with her String Fever band, which she founded and leads, as an enthusiastic jazz violinist. Marin Alsop made a notable contribution to the 1998/1999 "Inventing America" season in London, conducting one-act operas by Bernstein, Barber and Gershwin with the City of London Sinfonia, and subsequently works by Reich and Zappa. This has been followed by a further significant series of engagements with major European orchestras, bringing appearances with the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic and Orchestre de Paris, among others. Special chamber orchestra projects have led to her appointment as Principal Guest Conductor of the City of London Sinfonia, and a similar project in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra, with guest appearances with leading orchestras in Germany, Finland, France, Holland, the United Kingdom and Australia. Since 1999 she has served as principal guest conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, with which she has undertaken a Samuel Barber cycle for Naxos and in 2001 was appointed Principal Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

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TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphony No. 4

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"Marin Alsop is a shooting star in the firmament of international conductors" (*Penguin Guide 2002*). This magnificent reading of Tchaikovsky's immensely popular *Symphony No. 4*, along with the perennial *Fantasy Overture* from *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Marin Alsop conducts her 'home' orchestra, the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, marks both the start of the Naxos American Symphony Orchestras series, with the aim of presenting American orchestras to the world in standard repertoire, and the début of the Colorado Symphony Orchestra on Naxos.

Pyotr Il'yich

TCHAIKOVSKY

(1840-1893)

1	Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture (1880 version)	19:50
	Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36 (1877)	**44:05**
2	Andante sostenuto: Moderato con anima	19:25
3	Andantino in modo di canzona	10:29
4	Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato: Allegro	5:33
5	Finale: Allegro con fuoco	8:38

Colorado Symphony Orchestra
Marin Alsop

Track 1 recorded on September 11th, 2000; tracks 2-5 recorded live in concert, September 8th-10th, 2000 at Boettcher Hall, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Denver, Colorado, USA
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(Brodski Museum, St Petersburg, Russia / Bridgeman Art Library)

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Playing Time
63:56

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