

CONCERT GUIDE

Virtual Record Release Party — Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4 and Jonathan Leshnoff Double Concerto for Clarinet and Bassoon May 15, 2020

Manfred Honeck, conductor / Michael Rusinek, Principal Clarinet / Nancy Goeres, Principal Bassoon



MANFRED HONECK'S PROGRAM NOTES FOR TCHAIKOVSKY SYMPHONY NO. 4 AND JONATHAN LESHNOFF DOUBLE CONCERTO FOR CLARINET AND BASSOON



I'm so excited for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra to bring out this new CD. It's my first recording of Tchaikovsky 4 and it's very special to pair it with Jonathan Leshnoff's Double Concerto.

When I started in Pittsburgh 2008, the orchestra had not made so many recent recordings of the core repertoire, so we started then with Strauss, and Bruckner and Beethoven. But I didn't want us only to bring out the CDs. We wanted to say something—to bring out the special details in a score.

There is a wonderful chamber music feeling to Jonathan's writing. He builds the Concerto almost like a crescendo, from the tender first movement, to the light and quick miniature of the second movement, to the motoric third movement. He is not searching for effects, but, rather, lets the music speak for itself. We're so delighted to present the world premiere and to bring our interpretation of it.

Tchaikovsky's fourth is one of the most beautiful symphonies. He said of it that there was not one note that he didn't feel deeply. When you have these fantastic musicians—what a great orchestra we have—for me, as a conductor, you can bring out the details and the emotions. There's depression, fate, dreamy and dramatic moments. You have every emotion in this symphony, and it's so important to capture and characterize these emotions even sharper than usual. Not just a Tchaikovsky 4 Symphony, but a version with new surprises and details.

With our exceptional partners at Soundmirror and Reference Recordings, who seemed to move mountains to complete this CD this spring, this new release captures the special sound of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra that we hope that you will enjoy, especially during these very difficult times.





Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra recordings are made possible by generous grants from BNY Mellon, Hansen Foundation, and Cheryl and Jim Redmond.

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The recording's listening session on June 7, 2019 with Mark Donahue, Balance Engineer; Manfred Honeck, Music Director; and Dirk Sobotka, Recording Producer.



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PROGRAM

VIRTUAL RECORD RELEASE PARTY — TCHAIKOVŠKY SYMPHONY NO. 4
AND JONATHAN LESHNOFF DOUBLE CONCERTO FOR CLARINET AND BASSOON
FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2020 AT 8:00 P.M.

Manfred Honeck, conductor Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Michael Rusinek, clarinet Nancy Goeres, bassoon

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Opus 36

I. Andante sostenuto – Moderato con anima

II. Andantino in modo di canzona

III. Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato (Allegro)

IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco

Jonathan Leshnoff

Double Concerto for Clarinet and Bassoon

I. Slow

II. Waltz

III. Fast

Mr. Rusinek Ms. Goeres

Commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Recorded Live May 6-8, 2016, Heinz Hall Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Opus 36

Recorded Live June 6-9, 2019, Heinz Hall **Jonathan Leshnoff**

Double Concerto for Clarinet and Bassoon

World Premiere. Commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Special thanks to Judah Gudelsky, Eileen Williams and The Greenwich Village Orchestra for co-commissioning this work.

ABOUT THE RECORDING TEAM

This release is the tenth in the highly acclaimed Pittsburgh Live! series of multi-channel hybrid SACD releases on the FRESH! imprint from Reference Recordings. This series has received GRAMMY Nominations in 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020. The orchestra's recording of Shostakovich's Symphony No.5 /Barber Adagio for Strings won the 2018 GRAMMY Awards for Best Orchestral Performance and Best Engineered Classical Album.

The entire Pittsburgh Live! series is recorded and mastered by the team at Soundmirror, whose outstanding orchestral, solo, opera and chamber recordings have received more than 100 GRAMMY nominations and awards. For over 40 years, Soundmirror has recorded for every major classical record label, including Reference Recordings.

Soundmirror, Boston: \

Recording Producer: Dirk Sobotka Balance Engineer: Mark Donahue

Editing: Dirk Sobotka

Mixing and Mastering: Mark Donahue

Reference Recordings was founded in 1976 in San Francisco, has won multiple GRAMMY awards and has a catalog that includes numerous American and international orchestras, ensembles and choruses. FRESH! is part of Reference Recordings' mission to encourage unique and fine artists, and to give them a strong platform for promotion and sales nationally and internationally.

ABOUT THE MUSIC



The Fourth Symphony, composed between December 1876 and January 1878 is strongly autobiographical and provides a clear look into Tchaikovsky's mental and emotional state at the time. This Symphony is about darkness and suffering, but also hope and light. At once, it is on the edge of despair—depressed, hopeless, broken, melancholic and gloomy, but there is also an incredible counterpoint—courageous, self-confident, joyful, optimistic, wild and blissful. Perhaps this great contrast has something to do with Tchaikovsky's own life and destiny, as this Symphony is the first of the three so-called fate symphonies which culminate in the

"Pathétique." Here, Tchaikovsky writes deeply from his soul, painting his various emotional states in the music, at once depressed, but also highly euphoric. In this light, his music seems to provide a certain stability in his life.

It is therefore not surprising that Tchaikovsky gave the first of his three fate symphonies a program. Shortly after the premiere of "her" symphony. Nadezhda von Meck asked Tchaikovsky to explain the program to her, famously done in his reply of 1 March 1878. But similar to Gustav Mahler, who wrote a program for his First Symphony and later withdrew it, Tchaikovsky never included the program in the score as it was not intended for the public. It is also not a literary program and does not tell a story or plot, though it does shed light on Tchaikovsky's emotional world during the composition.

Tchaikovsky himself also spoke of the program to Sergei Taneyev, his student, fellow composer and trusted musician friend, writing:

"As to your remark that my symphony is programmatic, then I am in complete agreement. [...] I should not wish symphonic works to flow from my pen that express nothing, and which consist of empty playing with chords, rhythms and modulations. [...] But the programme is such that it is impossible to formulate in words. [...] But is this not what a symphony, that is, the most lyrical of all musical forms, ought to be? Ought it not to express everything for which there are no words, but which gushes forth from the soul and cries out to be expressed? [...] In essence my symphony is an imitation of Beethoven's Fifth, that is, I was imitating not his musical thoughts, but the fundamental idea. [...] Furthermore, I'll add that there is not a note in this symphony (that is, in mine) which I did not feel deeply, and which did not serve as an echo of sincere impulses within my soul."

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Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Opus 36 (1877-1878)

The Fourth Symphony was a product of the most crucial and turbulent time of Tchaikovsky's lift—1877, when he met two women who forced him to evaluate himself as he never had before. The first was the sensitive, music-loving widow of a wealthy Russian railroad baron, Nadezhda von Meck, who became not only the financial backer who allowed him to quit his irksome teaching job at the Moscow Conservatory to devote himself entirely to composition, but also the sympathetic sounding-board for reports on the whole range of his activities—emotional, musical, personal. Though they never met, her place in Tchaikovsky's life was enormous and beneficial.

The second woman to enter Tchaikovsky's life in 1877 was Antonina Miliukov, an unnoticed student in one of his large lecture classes at the Conservatory who had worked herself into a passion over her professor. Tchaikovsky paid her no special attention, and had quite forgotten her when he received an ardent love letter professing her flaming and unquenchable desire to meet him. Tchaikovsky (age 37), who should have burned the thing, answered the letter of the 28-year-old Antonina in a polite, cool fashion, but did not include an outright rejection of her advances. He had been considering marriage for almost a year in the hope that it would give him both the stable home life he had not enjoyed in the twenty years since his mother died, as well as to help dispel the all-too-true rumors of his homosexuality. He believed he might achieve both those goals with Antonina. He could not see the situation clearly enough to realize that what he hoped for was impossible—a pure, platonic marriage without its physical and emotional realities. Further letters from Antonina implored Tchaikovsky to meet her, and threatened suicide out of desperation if he refused. What a welter of emotions must have gripped his heart when, just a few weeks later, he proposed marriage to her! Inevitably, the marriage crumbled within days of the wedding amid Tchaikovsky's searing self-deprecation.

It was during May and June that Tchaikovsky sketched the Fourth Symphony, finishing the first three movements before Antonina began her siege. The finale was completed by the time he proposed. Because of this chronology, the program of the Symphony was not a direct result of his marital disaster. All that—the July wedding, the mere eighteen days of bitter conjugal farce, the two separations—postdated the actual composition of the Symphony by a few months. What Tchaikovsky found in his relationship with this woman (who by 1877 already showed signs of approaching the door of the mental ward in which, still legally married to him, she died in 1917) was a confirmation of his belief in the inexorable workings of Fate in human destiny.

After the premiere, Tchaikovsky explained to Mme. von Meck the emotional content of the Fourth Symphony: "The introduction [blaring brasses heard immediately in a motto theme that recurs throughout the Symphony] is the kernel of the whole Symphony. This is Fate, which hinders one in the pursuit of happiness. There is nothing to do but to submit and vainly



complain [the melancholy, syncopated shadow-waltz of the main theme, heard in the strings]. Would it not be better to turn away from reality and lull one's self in dreams? [The second theme is begun by the clarinet.] But no—these are but dreams: roughly we are awakened by Fate. [The blaring brass fanfare over a wave of timpani begins the development section.] Thus we see that life is only an everlasting alternation of somber reality and fugitive dreams of happiness. The second movement shows another phase of sadness. How sad it is that so much has already been and gone! And yet it is a pleasure to think of the early years. It is sad, yet sweet, to lose one's self in the past. In the third movement are capricious arabesques, vague figures which slip into the imagination when one has taken wine and is slightly intoxicated. Military music is heard in the distance. As to the finale, if you find no pleasure in yourself, go to the people. The picture of a folk holiday. [The finale employs the folk song A Birch Stood in the Meadow.] Hardly have we had time to forget ourselves in the happiness of others when indefatigable Fate reminds us once more of its presence. Yet there still is happiness, simple, naive happiness. Rejoice in the happiness of others—and you can still live."

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Jonathan Leshnoff

Distinguished by *The New York Times* as "a leader of contemporary American lyricism," composer Jonathan Leshnoff is renowned for his music's striking harmonies, structural complexity, and powerful themes. The Baltimore-based composer's works have been performed by more than 65 orchestras worldwide in hundreds of orchestral concerts. He has received commissions from Carnegie Hall, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the symphony orchestras of Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Kansas City, Nashville, and Pittsburgh. Leshnoff's compositions have also been performed by classical music's most celebrated artists, including Gil Shaham, Johannes Moser, Joyce Yang and, Manuel Barrueco.

Leshnoff has been ranked among the most performed living composers by American orchestras in recent seasons, and upcoming seasons are comparably active with musical activity and collaborations. Highlights for the 2018-2019 season include the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's premiere of Leshnoff's Concerto for Clarinet and Bassoon, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's premiere of Leshnoff's Suite for Cello, Strings, and Timpani featuring the eminent cellist Johannes Moser, and the start of a multi-year residency with the Fairfax Symphony. Orchestras from the Knoxville Symphony to the Colorado Springs Philharmonic also perform works from Leshnoff's robust *ouevre*.

Leshnoff's discography includes five albums to date, with four on the Naxos American Classics label. In May 2019, Naxos released an all-Leshnoff recording featuring the Nashville Symphony performing his popular concert opener *Starburst*, his Guitar Concerto with Jason Vieaux, and his recently premiered Symphony No. 4, "Heichalos" featuring the Violins of Hope. Among



Manfred Honeck, Music Director, with Michael Rusinek, Principal Clarinet, Nancy Goeres, Principal Bassoon, and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra performing the world premiere of the Leshnoff Double Concerto for Clarinet and Bassoon, June 6, 2019.

his earlier featured recordings on the Naxos American Classics label are his Violin Concerto No. 1 with Charles Wetherbee and the Baltimore Chamber Orchestra, selected among Naxos' Top 40 CDs the year of its release; and his Symphony No. 1, conducted by Michael Stern with the IRIS Chamber Orchestra along with Leshnoff's chamber music. An all-Leshnoff recording of the Atlanta Symphony performing Leshnoff's Symphony No. 2 and *Zohar* oratorio was released in November 2016. In December 2017, the recent band arrangement of Leshnoff's Clarinet Concerto was featured with Philadelphia Orchestra principal Ricardo Morales in a recording with the United States Marine Band.

Celebrated by Fanfare magazine as "the real thing," Leshnoff's music has been lauded by Strings Magazine as "distinct from anything else that's out there" and by The Baltimore Sun as "remarkably assured, cohesively constructed and radiantly lyrical." Leshnoff's catalog is vast, including several symphonies and oratorios in addition to numerous concerti, solo, and chamber works. Leshnoff is a Professor of Music at Towson University.

Jonathan Leshnoff

Double Concerto for Clarinet and Bassoon (2018)

When writing a concerto, I have to write with the soloists front and center in my mind. This contrasts with symphonic works where I speak directly through the orchestra without any intermediary. The concerto, however, is about the soloists and I must funnel musical ideas through the solo instruments' capacities and idiosyncrasies. This dilemma is compounded in a double concerto where my job is not only to communicate through one instrument, but also to consider how the two instruments combine and interact. After much study and consideration, I discovered that there were some magical combinations that the clarinet and bassoon can make with each other. I found that the bassoon can be very plaintive and resonant in its higher register, and that mixing that sound with the timbre of the clarinet yields some remarkable qualities. I also explored the extremes in register of both instruments.

The concerto is in three movements. The first is slow and contemplative and explores the sweetness of the bassoon's higher register. The concerto opens with placid strings and the bassoon playing a high melancholy theme before the clarinet enters and expands the sonic horizon. The brief second movement is a jocular waltz with exciting rhythms. The third movement is fast and pulsing, characterized by both instruments passing off a motive with surprising accents in the rapid tempo. After a lyrical theme is presented by each soloist, the concerto closes triumphantly with virtuosic runs.

This concerto, written in 2018, was commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and cocommissioned by the Greenwich Village Orchestra, Judah Gudelsky and Erleen Williams.

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Jonathan Leshnoff, composer; Michael Rusinek, Principal Clarinet; Nancy Goeres, Principal Bassoon; and Manfred Honeck, Music Director, backstage after the world premiere of Leshnoff's Double Concerto for Clarinet and Bassoon, June 6, 2019.



The artistic, engineering and production team at the listening session, June 7, 2019. Back row:
Andrés Franco, Resident Conductor (Associate Conductor at that time), and Earl Lee, Associate
Conductor. Front row: Dirk Sobotka, Recording Producer; Manfred Honeck, Music Director;
Mark Donahue, Balance Engineer.





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