

Program Notes

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Impromptu in F Minor, D. 935, No. 1

The word 'Impromptu' means an instrumental piece with the character of improvisation. Impromptu as an independent musical genre, mainly pieces for solo piano, spread in the 19th century during the formation of a romantic style in music, in connection with the special importance attached to improvisation and the directness of lyrical expression in the aesthetics of this trend. Schubert composed the four impromptus of D. 935 in December of 1827, during the last years of his life. Schubert's last years were very compelling and convincing. The most important feature of Schubert's style for this period is lyricism, which is the very essence of Schubert's creative nature. The range of lyrical themes in his piano work is extremely wide. Nevertheless, the motives of grief and tragic despair, concentrated in his late works, cannot overshadow the enormous power of life affirmation.

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 23

Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52

The name "Ballad" came to music from folk poetry and fiction. It means a plot work of an epic-narrative warehouse, saturated with dramatic episodes, with an unexpected fatal outcome. In music, the Ballad first appeared as a vocal genre. Schubert is rightfully considered its founder. Chopin was also the creator of the piano Ballad. Romantic content, drama of collisions (acute situations, striking contrasts, tragic outcomes), lyrical richness (subjective and emotional coloring of events, coming from the "storyteller") and genre diversity (lyrics, epic, drama, fantasy, pictorial art) - all these features the Ballads could not fail to attract the composer. In 19th century Polish literature, the Ballad was associated with patriotic, revolutionary sentiments. Such are the Ballads of Nemtsevich, Mitskevich, consonant with the content of Chopin's work. There are a number of versions, according to which the plots of Chopin's Ballads are connected with quite definite Ballads by Adam Mickiewicz.

The first Ballad appeared in 1831, tragic for Poland. The first major work in which Chopin, in the aspect of the heroic and tragic, illuminates the fate of his country and people. It is no coincidence that contemporaries called the Ballad, "Polish". The dramatic and effective concept of the Ballad prompted an appeal to the sonata form, which retains its general outlines and sections. The dramatic concept of the work is found in the transitions from lyricism to heroism and tragedy, from epic narration to active dramatic "action". At the same time, the heroic and tragic beginnings are rooted in the lyrical-epic themes themselves and are revealed in an acutely conflicting development process. In the continuous process of musical development, the poetic concept of the Ballad is revealed: A long chain of narrative unfolds in a strict sequence, originating in bright lyrical images - as a memory of a beautiful past - and ending in a tragic catastrophe in the present.

The 4th Ballad was written at the transition to the late stage of Chopin's work. There is no doubt that this work is meaningfully complex, combining romantic experience with philosophical depth. The Ballad in f-minor is all permeated with the poetry of nature, echoes of the forest, water and rural life, images of the pastoral. For the last period of Chopin's work, it is characteristic that his music arouses such premonitions. There is no longer the iron structural logic of the works of the 30s. Romantic emotionality begins to prevail, and the beginnings of a cult of sensations appear. The end of the Ballad with its excessive chromaticisms, passionate, almost recitative uplift and a whole avalanche of scales and plagal plays, rolling down into the bass and booming loudly before the final cadence, is like an inexorable, gloomy afterword, full of suffering and tragedy.

Program Notes

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

Selections from *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 39

No. 5 in E-flat Minor - Appassionato

No. 9 in D Major - Allegro moderato. Tempo di marcia

Cycle of Nine Etudes-Pictures for Piano, Op. 39 turned out to be the last work of Rachmaninoff, created in Russia before leaving abroad and the resulting long creative pause. Many of the pieces in this cycle belong to the most outstanding examples of Rachmaninoff's piano work. The character of this last Rachmaninoff's work of the pre-revolutionary years was undoubtedly influenced by the thickening stormy atmosphere of that time. Light, dreamy lyricism and soft, elegiac sadness are completely absent in the cycle; harsh gloomy moods, courageous energy and composure, uplifted, alarming pathos prevail.

The rebellious passion of tone, stormy protesting pathos is imbued with the fifth etude es-moll. In his uplifted expression, reaching a fiery ecstasy, there is something akin to Scriabin's dis-moll etude, although the ratio of various figurative spheres and the general plan of development in Rachmaninoff has a different character. Dramatic pathos and heroism are combined in this sketch of him with the features of heartfelt lyricism. Extremely expressive is the contrast between the "passionate" first theme, which from the very beginning sounds powerful and defiant, and the light poetic image that appears in the middle section. The same lyrical theme reappears in the coda after a formidable buildup, leading to a reprise that is dynamized in terms of presentation. The sketch ends quietly, peacefully. But the listener is left with the impression that this is only a temporary calm before new worries and storms.

The cycle ends with a lush, brilliant-sounding etude D-dur, written in a wide fresco style. As in some other etudes-paintings of this cycle (for example, in the seventh, c-moll), the music here reaches a truly symphonic scale. The composer described this etude as an oriental march. However, this definition, as well as its other program characteristics, does not fully disclose the essence of the author's intention. The variegated alternation of bizarre, sometimes scary-colored images allows one to imagine a picture similar to the one drawn by V. V. Stasov in the Glinka March of Chernomor: "one on delicate toy things, another on musical monsters ..." Individual turns of an oriental character are also heard in the music of Rachmaninoff's etude (for example, a move for an increased second in the main theme with its whimsical rhythm and saturation of harmonies with chromaticisms). But in general, its oriental flavor is very conditional. Many passages sound completely Russian.

Powerful beats of full-sounding chord complexes in the opening measures and then further, when approaching the middle episode and in the etude's coda, resemble a festive chime of bells. All this merges into one, juicy in colors, monumental picture of a solemn folk procession.

Program Notes

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

Piano Trio in A Minor, Op. 50 “À la mémoire d’un grand artiste”

I. Pezzo elegiaco. Moderato assai - Allegro giusto

II. Tema con variazioni: Andante con moto - Variazioni finale e coda

The piano trio “In Memory of a Great Artist,” created for the death of Nikolai Rubinstein, who died untimely in 1881, possesses a genuine symphonic scale. In terms of the breadth of design, imaginative richness, and dramatic intensity of music, it belongs to the composer’s highest achievements in the field of instrumental chamber music. Tchaikovsky had no inclination for this type of ensemble at all. When Von Meck asked why he did not compose a trio, he answered in a letter dated October 27, 1880: “The fact is that, due to the construction of my acoustic apparatus, I absolutely cannot stand the combination of a piano with a violin or solo cello. These sonorities seem to me to be mutually repelling from each other.” But in order to perpetuate the memory of a remarkable pianist such as Rubinstein, it was necessary to have a composition with a developed and varied piano part. It can be assumed that this is what prompted Tchaikovsky to turn to the form of the piano trio, which was generally unsympathetic to him. The fears expressed by the composer turned out to be unfounded: The trio is masterfully written, and each member of the ensemble is assigned an independent role, with the undoubted dominance, however, of the piano.

In terms of content, the trio is not just a mourning elegy: It presents life in its various facets, in a change of grief and joy, sadness and triumph. The structure of the work as a whole is original: It consists of the first movement in sonata form, which the composer titled Pezzo Elegiaco (Elegiac Piece), and themes with twelve variations, the last variation being developed to the size of an independent part that forms the final of the cycle.