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THE THIRD AGE

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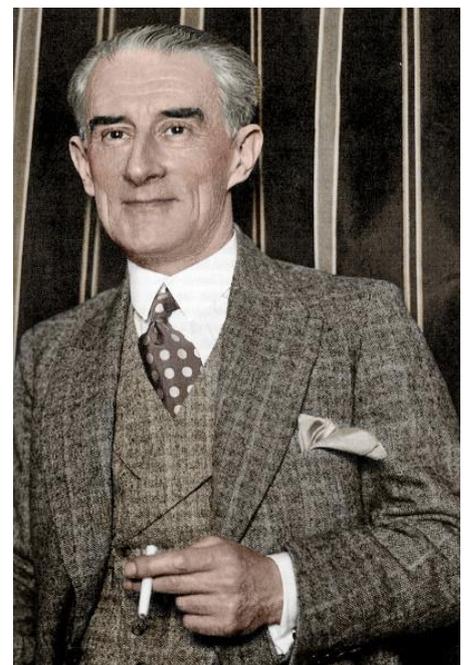


*Programme Notes*

*12<sup>th</sup> June, 2020*



*Tchaikovsky*



*Ravel*

**BTWVN**  
**2020**

## *About Today's Music Selections*

*A smaller number of scheduled performances this month by the MSO, but sufficient for a couple of our Music Appreciation sessions. Only three works this time round, but this will allow us to hear them in their entirety. There is one variation, though: only one Beethoven work was listed for performance by the MSO this month – the 6<sup>th</sup> Symphony. Therefore to keep to our plan of at least one Beethoven work per session I have turned to the MSO's "Keep the Music Going" concerts for this time of isolation and to a performance of one of Beethoven's string quartets which four of the orchestra performed and posted on YouTube last month. This will round out today's presentation. The 6<sup>th</sup> symphony will be for a couple of weeks' time.*

*But of more interest than the works themselves are the artists involved in the performances. With the exception of some members of the Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie, all are relatively young, which is a good look for the future of music presentation.*



*Ukrainian born Anna Fedorova is one of the world's premier young pianists. A superstar among the next-generation of classical pianists, her performances have captivated fans, critics and the music world. Born in 1990 into a family of musicians in Kiev, Fedorova began to study piano at the age of five. Since then, her extensive concert career has taken her to the most prestigious music halls of Europe, North and South America, and Asia.*

*Among them are more than a dozen times at the Grote Zaal of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw, The Palacio de Bellas Artes and Sala Nezahualcoyotl in Mexico City, the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, The Great Hall of the Tonhalle in Zurich, the Warsaw Filharmonia, the Warsaw Opera Theatre, the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan, and many others. In our music selection she plays Tchaikovsky's 1<sup>st</sup> Piano Concerto.*



*The Karajan Musical Academy is the new (2017) name for the Orchestra Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic. The change of name is a tribute to the contribution of Herbert von Karajan, with whom the long success story of the Academy is inextricably linked. Karajan founded the Academy, the first institution of its kind in Germany, in 1972, out of concern about the next generation of musicians for the Berlin Philharmonic.*

*The Academy trains highly talented young musicians from all over the world. Their teachers are primarily the concertmasters and section leaders of the Berlin Philharmonic. As a rule, the students find positions with renowned orchestras after graduating from the Academy, the majority even in coveted solo chairs. Approximately one-third of the current members of the Berlin Philharmonic are former students of the Karajan Academy.*

*Their performance for our pleasure is Ravel's "Le Tombeau de Couperin."*

*Pictured below from left to right are MSO members Philippa West (2<sup>nd</sup> Violinist) Kathryn Taylor (1<sup>st</sup> Violinist), Merewyn Bramble (Violist) and Zoe Wallace (Cellist).*

*They come together as the string quartet "Quartz" to present the Beethoven String Quartet.*



“Tchaikovsky’s famous Piano Concerto No.1 – troublesome from the start”. So said a media release by the MSO on 22 July, 2015. This is the headline and text of the article:

### “Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No.1 and the Great Christmas Eve Massacre”.

“In August, Macedonian virtuoso Simon Trpčeski performs Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No.1, with the MSO conducted by Vasily Petrenko (NOTE: This article was written in July 2015). Although this fabled piece is now part of the repertoire of most pianists, the concerto was once – even before its premiere – considered almost unplayable.



Poor Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky. He was such a brilliant composer that sometimes he was too good for his soloists. Take the chequered history of his Violin Concerto. In 1878, a year before its intended world premiere, its chosen performer Leopold Auer returned the published score to the composer, deeming it “unplayable”. This rejection blighted Tchaikovsky no end; he described the effect as “casting this unfortunate child of my imagination

into the limbo of the hopelessly forgotten”.

Luckily, for Tchaikovsky and audiences everywhere, the concerto soon enough became a great success. But there had already been a precedent for what could be called soloist-stage-fright.

Four years before this debacle, Tchaikovsky experienced severe teething problems with his Piano Concerto No.1. He had asked the pianist Nikolai Rubinstein to give the premiere performance. Indeed, on Christmas Eve, 1874, the composer invited Rubinstein and a few friends to a run-though of the work. As Tchaikovsky recounted three years later (the wounds persisted) in a letter to his patron, Nadezhda von Meck, the silence after the first movement was only the beginning:

“Not a single word, not a single remark! ... R’s eloquent silence was of the greatest significance. He seemed to be saying: ‘My friend, how can I speak of detail when the whole thing is antipathetic?’ I fortified myself with patience and played through to the end. Still silence. I stood up and asked, “Well?” Then a torrent poured from Nikolay Grigoryevich’s (Rubenstein’s middle name) mouth, gentle at first, then more and more growing into the sound of a Jupiter Tonans. (meaning ‘like thunder’).



Nikolai Rubenstein

It turned out that my concerto was worthless and unplayable; passages were so fragmented, so clumsy, so badly written that they were beyond rescue; the work itself was bad, vulgar; in places I had stolen from other composers; only two or three pages were worth preserving; the rest must be thrown away or completely rewritten.

I was not only astounded but outraged by the whole scene. ... I need and shall always need friendly criticism, but there was nothing resembling friendly criticism. It was indiscriminate, determined censure, delivered in such a way as to wound me to the quick. I left the room without a word and went upstairs. ... Presently R. enjoined me, he repeated that my concerto was impossible, pointed out many places where it would have to be completely revised, and said that if within a limited time I reworked the concerto according to his demands, then he would do me the honour of playing my thing at his concert. 'I shall not alter a single note,' I answered, "I shall publish the work exactly as it is!". This I did.



Hans von Bülow

Hardly surprisingly, after what was popularly termed "the Christmas Eve massacre", the concerto's 1875 Moscow premiere was abandoned. Luckily, Tchaikovsky had befriended the great German conductor and pianist, Hans von Bülow, who was as positive about the concerto as Rubinstein was negative. Its premiere, with Bülow as soloist, was given in February 1875 in Boston, Massachusetts, as part of Bülow's American tour. Even then, the work was hardly treated justly. Under a conductor called B.J.Lang, a scratch orchestra of freelance musicians scraped and blurted and banged its way through the work; only Bülow's formidable playing saved the day and the piece. It was treated as a sensation.

This did not prevent the composer from going against his word not to change a single note. In fact, he revised the concerto in 1886 and, in greater detail, in 1889 — the version that is most often performed these days. Well before then, peace was soon restored between Tchaikovsky and Nikolai Rubinstein, who conducted the Moscow premiere in October 1875. Rubinstein also took the concerto into his piano repertoire. A happy ending, therefore, for all concerned".

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**"Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso"** is the tempo Tchaikovsky gives to the opening movement of his by now famous 1st piano concerto. According to Wikipedia, "allegro" means "joyful". In music, an instruction of "allegro ma non troppo" means to play "fast, but not overly so". Without the "ma", it means "Not So Fast!", an interjection meaning "slow down" or "think before you act". "e molto maestoso" translates as: "and very stately and majestic".

The opening *Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso* is certainly that — joyful, while, at the same time, measured and majestic. After an introductory flourish dominated by the brass, a series of inevitable chords from the piano ride a passionate melody in the orchestra. Before this first theme has completely run out of steam, snatches of the second steal in, foreshadowing its imminent appearance in a uniquely structured double exposition. The stormy development builds to two shattering climaxes, first for the piano, punctuated by the orchestra, and then for the orchestra, with a searing figure for the strings taken up by the piano with thundering bravura. The movement closes with great assurance and authority, with dazzling passagework for the soloist giving melodic shape to a series of resolute chords played by the orchestra.

The central movement is unique in that a meltingly beautiful *Andantino semplice* (which translates as “simple moderate tempo” or ‘about walking pace’) – just what one would expect of a slow movement – gives way to a finger-twisting *Prestissimo* (meaning ‘play as fast as possible’) of the fleetest kind. The melody of this section comes from a French song, “*Il faut s’amuser, danser, et rire,*” (which translated means : “One must have fun, dance and laugh”) that was a favourite of Tchaikovsky’s one-time fiancée, the soprano Désirée Artôt.

The finale, marked *Allegro con fuoco* – “fast with fire” – opens with a flamboyant Ukrainian tune which dissolves into a soaring second theme, played first by the violins, then by the soloist. Tchaikovsky pulls out all the stops for the Concerto’s coda, with the orchestra playing the second theme for all it’s worth before everyone launches into the dazzling closing pages.



Listen now to the concerto as performed by Anna Federova accompanied by the NordwestDeutsches Philharmonie (North West German Philharmonic; AKA: NWD-Philharmoniker) conducted by Yves Abel in a concert at The Royal Concertgebouw, Amsterdam on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2108. The concert was part of the NPO Radio 4-series ‘The Sunday Morning Concert’, at which the above picture was taken.

The YouTube link is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNfpMRSCFPE&t=1511s>

## **Maurice Ravel – Le Tombeau de Couperin**

Considered too small and delicate for military service, Maurice Ravel realized that he could serve his country by writing music. But when his brother Edouard enlisted at the start of World War I, Ravel didn't want to sit on the sidelines. At the age of thirty-nine, he managed to get accepted as a nurse's aide, leaving behind a number of unfinished scores and his seventy-four-year-old mother.

Music was still on his mind, however. In October 1914, his first month on the job, he wrote to his former pupil, Roland-Manuel, about two new piano pieces he was planning, including a French suite—“No, it isn't what you think: la Marseillaise will not be in it, but it will have a forlane and a gigue; no tango, however.”



Ravel in a French Army uniform, circa 1916.

He is wearing a tin hat and an enormous fur coat, required because the cabs of the trucks were open to the elements and any stray ordnance.

That was the beginning of *Le tombeau de Couperin*. In March 1915, Ravel became a truck driver for the 13th Artillery Regiment. (He named the truck *Adélaïde* and signed his letters *Chauffeur Ravel*.) It was a dangerous, exhausting, and stressful assignment, and his health suffered.

At least for a while, music took a back seat to the more pressing concerns of life and death. Early in 1917, his mother died; it was a terrible blow, which contributed even further to his physical and mental decline, and he was discharged from the army a few months later. While recuperating at his godmother's country house, Ravel returned to writing music.

For Ravel, the year 1917 being marked by his dearly beloved mother's death and that of many of his friends who had lost their lives on the battlegrounds of World War I, the suite he finished in that same year can altogether be considered as a work in reverence for them.

Its title *Tombeau* (tomb) had already been used by the Baroque composer F. Couperin for his funeral music. True to the spirit of that ancient music honouring the dead, the composer furthermore adheres consciously to the musical forms and practices of the clavecinist era. (“Clavecin” is the French name for harpsichord).

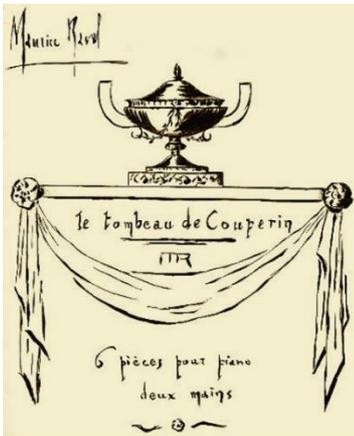
*NOTE: François Couperin (1668- 1733) was a member of a musical dynasty, unique in France and only surpassed in the history of music by the Bach family. It is said that Couperin's music influenced Bach's.*

*A succession of Couperins held the post of organist at the church of Saint-Gervais in Paris for 173 years (1653-1826). François succeeded his uncle and father as organist of the Paris church when he was 18. He enjoyed royal patronage under Louis XIV and in 1693 was appointed royal organist and, belatedly, royal harpsichordist.*

*As a keyboard player and composer Couperin was pre-eminent in France at the height of his career. His compositions for the harpsichord occupy a very important position in French music. He died in Paris in 1733.*



François Couperin



What had begun as a six part piano suite to celebrate the age of François Couperin found its final publication with each movement dedicated to one of his friends killed in action. The front page of the manuscript (designed by Ravel) featured a draped funeral urn. The title *Tombeau* (meaning tomb) also references a French musical term from the seventeenth century which meant “memorial.” Traditionally, a *tombeau* as a tribute work referred only to one person.

Due to its classical, rather sonatina-like character, and each movement dedicated to a friend who had died in combat, the

*Tombeau* does not radiate an atmosphere of mourning – despite it being committed to the memory of the deceased – but a light if cool serenity. The movements are:

- **Prélude** –dedicated to Jacques Charlot.

Jacques Charlot was a godson and cousin of Claude Debussy's music publisher Jacques Durand and was a friend of Maurice Ravel. He served as a lieutenant in the French army and was killed on March 3, 1915.

- **Fugue** – dedicated to Jean Cruppi.

Jean-Louis Cruppi was the son of Jean Cruppi a French politician of the Third Republic and his wife, Louise Crémieux, a musician who supported the career of Maurice Ravel. Ravel previously dedicated his *L'heure espagnole* to Madame Crémieux.

- **Forlane** – dedicated to Gabriel Deluc.

Gabriel Deluc was a Basque painter who joined the French army at the beginning of the war as a nurse. In 1915, he joined the combat troops and was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant in June 1916 . He made many drawings in the trenches and during the offensives. Deluc was killed during a reconnaissance mission at Souain September 15, 1916.



Gabriel Deluc – self-portrait

- **Rigaudon** – dedicated to Pierre & Pascal Gaudin

Pierre and Pascal Gaudin were the brothers of Marie Gaudin and her sister Jane Courteault with whom Ravel maintained close contact throughout his life. On the outbreak of war, the two brothers immediately joined the army, and both were enrolled in the 49th infantry regiment. They were killed by the same shell on the first day of their arrival at the front, November 12, 1914, at Oulches.

- **Menuet** – dedicated to Jean Dreyfus.

Jean Dreyfus was the stepson of Madame Fernand Dreyfus, with whom Ravel was very close. He wrote some of his most personal letters to her about his wartime experiences –there are 55 surviving letters to Madame Dreyfus written during Ravel's time at the front between March and October 1916. After Ravel's demobilization and the death of his mother, he recuperated at the Dreyfus family home at Lyons-la-Forêt near Rouen.

- *Toccata* – dedicated to Joseph de Marliave.

Joseph de Marliave was a French musicologist known for his work on Beethoven's string quartets. Marilave was a captain in the French army and was killed in the first weeks of the war.



Despite being written while Ravel witnessed the horrors of war and endured the death of his mother, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* has been considered a light-hearted, reflective work rather than a sombre one. Ravel agreed, observing, "The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence."

Acknowledgement: American pianists.org.

The performance we listen to is by members of the Karajan Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Heras-Casado. The YouTube link to their recording is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3141qCEDaGA&t=1023s>

## Beethoven – String Quartet in E minor Opus 59 No.2 –“Razumovski”.



Andrey Kirillovich Razumovsky

Count (later Prince) Andrey Kirillovich Razumovsky was the fun-loving Russian ambassador in the Vienna of Beethoven's time, as well as great patron of the arts who commissioned three String Quartets, known today as the Razumovsky Quartets, Opus 59. In two of the three String Quartets numbers one and two) Beethoven incorporated Russian themes to please his patron.

There's a sobering story in the life of this once illustrious man. Razumovsky spent a vast amount of money – all from his own pocket – on building a sumptuous new embassy outside the city wall on a rise overlooking the Danube.

On New Year's Eve 1814 he held a glittering ball there with Tsar Alexander as guest of honour.



Razumovsky's Palace cum Embassy

This was to celebrate the successful conclusion of the Congress of Vienna – for which the then Count Razumovsky was elevated to Prince – following the allies' defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig. Beethoven, who was certainly invited, did not attend.

To accommodate all the guests, Razumovsky had had a temporary extension built onto the palace, heated from the main building by a flue.

Some time in the early hours of the morning – after all the guests had left – a fire started in the flue. It rapidly spread to the main house.

Razumovsky joined the efforts to stop the flames spreading. But little could be done. Many rooms in the palace were destroyed, along with the many classical and neo-classical sculptures Razumovsky had collected.

In fighting the fire Razumovsky's sight was damaged. More significantly his spirit was broken. He was found in the dim light of dawn wandering among the ruins of his once-splendid palace. He continued to live in Vienna – in seclusion. His descendants live there today. His palace still stands, its once magnificent gardens overgrown and its grandeur faded. In the late 1990's it was the headquarters of the International Oceanographic Institute, which was about to put it up for sale.



The Razumovsky Palace in 2002

Little was left of Razumovsky's fortune and political influence. His glittering social and musical life was gone. He dismissed his beloved string quartet from his household, but with some generosity and affection provided pensions for its members. He continued to live in Vienna in modest seclusion until his death in 1836.

The world might have forgotten Razumovsky, had his name not been immortalized in the title of Beethoven's wonderful opus 59 quartets. The lesson of Razumovsky's life is that power and wealth are easily lost, but great music lives forever and the world remembers the people who make it possible.

There's also a story about the quartets themselves: Around 1806, Beethoven sought advice on violin fingering from the Italian violinist Felix Radicati in connection with these three great string quartets of his middle period, the so-called "Razumovsky" Quartets, Opus 59.

Radicati impertinently asked whether Beethoven really considered these pieces to be music, to which he airily replied, "Oh, they are not for you, but for a later age!"

And Beethoven was right. His music was for a later age in ways he could scarcely have imagined.

He would not have anticipated, for example, that English cricket captain Mike Brearley would whistle the opening cello theme of the first of those very quartets, when walking on to face Australian fast bowlers in 1981. (this is not the one we are to hear today – ours is the second).

**But, to the music.**



Salon – Palais Razumovsky

Imagine the scene: the guests at Count Razumovsky's new Viennese palace, after a sumptuous meal, pause on the terrace to look down over the Danube and spires of Vienna; they adjourn to an elaborate concert hall to listen to these brand new works. But the opening music of Opus 59 No 2 is hardly an aid to digestion: two loud chords followed by a bar's silence. A few bars of breathless, mysterious music and another silence. It was like nothing they had heard before. The complicated rhythms and dialogue between the

different parts must have perplexed anyone encountering them for the first time.

They also suspected that the music was inappropriate – that it did not behave as classical chamber music should. A sweet melody has only just got going when it peters out to be replaced by an aggressive rhythm. Very loud passages end abruptly and are superseded by cheeky, quiet music that seems to bear no relation to the previous music. The last bars of the movement feature wrong-sounding notes righted only by emphatic final chords.

An almost unique feature of the Op 59 no 2 quartet among Beethoven's major works is that all the movements have the same keynote, in this case E. The E major slow movement is one of Beethoven's finest. In contrast to the nervousness of the first movement, all is serene in this *molto adagio* that is to be played with 'lots of feeling'.



Beethoven circa 1804

Its unhurried theme is soon given a pulse by a persistent dotted heart-beat derived from the dotted figure in the third bar. It briefly hardens into a double dotted figure before giving way to sublimely soaring triplets.

The third movement is unusual in that Beethoven calls for a triple-decker rather than the usual two-slice sandwich. The start of the *Minore* is a permutation of the E minor arpeggio of the first movement's opening bars. The *Maggiore* Trio is based, as a concession to Razumovsky, on a Russian theme: *Glory to the Sun* had appeared in a collection put together by the polymath Nikolay Lvov and Ivan Prach. The tune was later used by Moussorgsky in *Boris Godunov* and also by Rachmaninov.

The last movement transforms the heart-beat of the slow movement into a boisterous canter. It starts in C major and flirts for 50-odd bars with a move into its nominal key of E minor before finally landing on it - a piquant addition to the large helping of E that the quartet presents us with. The canter turns into a gallop just before the end of this good humoured movement.

Listen now to members of the MSO - the "Quartz" quartet - as they perform this work. You can find their recording on YouTube by following the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQ6TH-6htUk&t=1239s>



Acclaimed Melbourne string quartet "Quartz" unites violinists Kathryn Taylor and Philippa West, violist Merewyn Bramble and cellist Zoe Wallace