

McCARTER THEATRE CENTER

William W. Lockwood, Jr.
SPECIAL PROGRAMMING DIRECTOR

Michael S. Rosenberg
MANAGING DIRECTOR

presents

NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF UKRAINE

VOLODYMYR SIRENKO,
Artistic Director and Chief Conductor

OLGA KERN, piano

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 21
in the Matthews Theatre

There will be a 20-minute intermission.

The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment of any kind during performances is strictly prohibited.

McCarter's 2019-2020 Music Series
sponsored by the **Edward T. Cone Foundation**



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THE PROGRAM

Polonaise from *Eugene Onegin*, Op. 24

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky

Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat Minor, Op. 23

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky

Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso –
Allegro con spirito
Andantino semplice – Prestissimo
Allegro con fuoco

Olga Kern, piano

— INTERMISSION —

Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74 ("Pathétique")

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky

Adagio – Allegro non troppo
Allegro con grazia
Allegro molto vivace
Finale: Adagio lamentoso

Program subject to change

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

By Aaron Grad

Polonaise from *Eugene Onegin*, Op. 24 (1879)

PYOTR IL'YICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Born May 7, 1840 in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia

Died November 6, 1893 in Saint Petersburg, Russia

Tchaikovsky began working on the opera *Eugene Onegin* in 1877, during the build-up to his disastrous marriage to a former student. Struggling with his concealed homosexuality, and needing the inheritance that his bride would bring into their union, Tchaikovsky went through with the sham wedding, but he soon made the suicidal gesture of wading into the frigid Moscow River, followed by a nervous breakdown and two weeks spent unconscious in Saint Petersburg. Within two months they agreed to a permanent separation.

Eugene Onegin, based on Pushkin's popular novel in verse, bears an uncanny resemblance to Tchaikovsky's personal life, in which the worldly title character inflicts suffering on a young woman

who professed her love in a letter (just as Tchaikovsky's bride did). The loose, episodic structure of the story allowed Tchaikovsky ample room to elaborate the characters and dwell in festive scenes, like the ball from the third act where this Polonaise appeared.

Taking its rhythmic template from a Polish folk dance, the Polonaise became one of the stylized dances that caught on among French and German composers in the Baroque era. Its distinguishing characteristics were a particular triplet meter and a processional quality, which Tchaikovsky's example emphasizes by heralding its arrival with a bright fanfare and continuing the brass-heavy rhythms under the galloping main theme from the strings.

Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat Minor, Op. 23 (1874-75)

PYOTR IL'YICH TCHAIKOVSKY

The piano concerto that Tchaikovsky composed during the winter of 1874-75 was his first work for soloist and orchestra. He was not a virtuoso pianist himself, so

he arranged to show the score to Nikolai Rubinstein, the leading conductor and pianist in Moscow and a fellow faculty member at the Moscow Conservatory.

Years later, Tchaikovsky summarized Rubinstein's blunt feedback in a letter: "My concerto, it turned out, was worthless and unplayable."

Tchaikovsky wasn't always the most self-confident composer, but this time he stood his ground, vowing to "publish the work exactly as it stands." To secure a first performance, Tchaikovsky went outside Rubinstein's circle and solicited the famous German conductor and pianist Hans von Bülow, who loved the work and asked for a set of parts that he could take with him on tour. Thus it came to pass that this landmark Russian concerto first reached the public in Boston, in October of 1875.

Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto begins with an audacious introduction, heralded by a four-note horn theme. The piano soloist enters with a majestic series of

chords, but that grand gesture actually turns out to be a form of accompaniment to support a soaring melody from the violins. The notable (and sometimes baffling) aspect of this work is that this priceless introductory material never returns. Instead, the fast body of the movement strikes up a melody that Tchaikovsky once heard sung by a blind Ukrainian beggar.

The middle movement continues the charming incongruities. It begins with a graceful flute solo over pizzicato accompaniment, flowing at a relaxed tempo marked *Andantino semplice*. Flecks of off-key harmonies prepare the antics of the manic contrasting section, speeding by at a breakneck *Prestissimo* pace and quoting a popular French song. The finale also references outside music, with the bouncy main theme adapted from a Ukrainian folksong.

Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74 ("Pathétique") (1893)

PYOTR IL'YICH TCHAIKOVSKY

In 1892, Tchaikovsky endeavored to write a "grand symphony" and nearly completed one in the key of E-flat before scrapping it that December and redirecting some material to the Third Piano Concerto. He then started fresh in February 1893 with what became the Symphony No. 6 in B Minor. Addressing his nephew,

Tchaikovsky explained that "the form of this symphony will have much that is new, and by the way, the finale will not be a noisy allegro, but on the contrary, a long drawn-out adagio."

Tchaikovsky died just nine days after he conducted the premiere of his Sixth

Symphony. In that interval, he wrote to his friend and publisher Petr Jurgensen that the symphony "produced some bewilderment" among the audience, and he thought it would help to add the subtitle "Pathétique," suggested by his brother Modest. That French word—the same descriptor Beethoven applied to his Eighth Piano Sonata—suggests music of deep feeling and pathos, without the stinging connotations of the English word "pathetic." The second performance, staged weeks later at a memorial service, garnered a very different response. In the wake of the composer's abrupt and mysterious death at the age of 53, listeners began to project onto the music a tragic personal narrative rife with suicidal overtones, associations that linger to this day.

The Sixth Symphony begins ominously, with a slow introduction featuring bassoon and low strings. Their rising and falling motive morphs into the main theme of the fast body of the movement, and later, with the motive's contours flipped to fall first and then rise to a state of equilibrium, it elongates into the contrasting theme, providing an island of repose within this unsettled movement.

The *Allegro con grazia* second movement features the irregular time signature of 5/4 (five quarter-notes per measure). This "limping waltz" flows with surprising smoothness and grace considering the irregular meter, attesting to Tchaikovsky's

special knack for dance music that served him so well in his ballets and operas.

The third movement spins through a dizzy introduction to reach a jolly march tune that starts in the clarinets, setting a course that culminates in a bombastic conclusion. Had this marked the end of the symphony, it would have put it in a class with Tchaikovsky's Fourth and Fifth, which both progressed from fateful minor keys to valedictory major keys along the lines of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. But the Sixth Symphony charts a very different path, reaching its emotional crest in a slow and mournful finale. The first poignant chords re-establish the brooding mood from the symphony's initial introduction, making that link explicit by returning to a texture of bassoon and strings. The melody attempts a long climb into a more optimistic resolution in D major, only to snap back into B minor, and then the low brass instruments intone a mournful knell. One last gasp of the descending melody follows, fading to a whisper from the cellos and basses. It's no wonder that audiences have clung to the idea that Tchaikovsky was foreshadowing his death with this symphony, since he couldn't have written a more impactful swansong.

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Direct from Kiev, Ukraine

THE NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF UKRAINE

Volodymyr Sirenko, Artistic Director & Chief Conductor
Theodore Kuchar, Conductor Laureate

Formed by the Council of Ministers of Ukraine in November of 1918, the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine is considered to be one of the finest symphony orchestras in Eastern Europe. Its first conductor was Oleksander Horilyj. Natan Rachlin was the Artistic Director of the Orchestra from 1937 until 1962. Stefan Turchak, Volodymyr Kozhuchar, Fedir Hlushchenko, Igor Blazhkov and Theodore Kuchar consequently conducted the Orchestra as its Principal Conductors. Other conductors who worked with the NSOU include Leopold Stokowski, Igor Markevitch, Kurt Sanderling, Evgeny Mravinsky, Kiril Kondrashin, Evgeny Svetlanov, and Gennady Rozhdestvensky. Soloists who performed with the NSOU include Artur Rubinstein, Yehudi Menuhin, Isaac Stern, David Oistrakh, Sviatoslav Richter, Mstislav Rostropovich, Emil Gilels, Leonid Kogan, Gidon Kremer, Oleh Krysa, Monserrat Caballe, Jose Carreras, and Juan Diego Flores.

The NSOU was entrusted with the premier performances of the works of the following composers: Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich, Aram Khachaturian, Boris

Lyatoshynsky, Valentyn Silvestrov, Myroslav Skoryk, and Evgen Stankovych.

The Orchestra has gained international recognition over a remarkably short period of time. After an appearance in Moscow, Dmitri Shostakovich commented: "This orchestra has as distinguished a group of performers as one would be likely to find anywhere. The ensemble of the orchestra is of the highest level. In addition, the various soloists and instrumental groups within the Orchestra play exceptionally and complement each other beautifully – as would the greatest of the world's symphony orchestras."

Since 1993, the NSOU has released more than 100 sound recordings which include both Ukrainian and international repertoires. Most of these recordings have received the highest international acclaim. In 1994, the Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC) rated NSOU's recording of Boris Lyatoshynsky's Symphonies No. 2 and No. 3 as "The Best Recording of the Year." The CD of Silvestrov's "Requiem for Larissa" was nominated for a Grammy

Award in 2005. The CD of Bloch and Lees' Violin Concertos was nominated for a Grammy Award four years later.

The NSOU has performed in successful concert tours throughout Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Belarus, China, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, England, Hong Kong, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Arab Emirates.

"... A program rich with energy and unusually adventurous placed the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine in a highly

favourable light when it gave its only Sydney concert during its Australian tour on Friday. This is an orchestra with many virtues. Its strings can conjure up a vibrant songfulness; the woodwinds have a fruity, penetrating ripeness; the brass could endanger the walls of Jericho; the percussion might wake the dead..."

–*The Sydney Morning Herald*

Since April of 1999, Volodymyr Sirenko has been the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the NSOU. Since June of 2006, Alexander Hornostai has been its Managing Director and Producer.

BIOS

VOLODYMYR SIRENKO

Volodymyr Sirenko was born in the Poltava region of Ukraine. Through his conducting success, he has been compared by the international press to other brilliant conductors.

His conducting debut took place at the Kyiv Philharmonic Hall in 1983 with works by Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Boulez. In 1989 Sirenko graduated from the Kyiv Conservatoire where he studied conducting under Prof. Allin Vlasenko. In 1990, he was a finalist at the International Conducting Competition in Prague. A year later, he was appointed as Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Ukrainian Radio Symphony Orchestra, a position which he held until 1999. During this period he

made over 300 recordings that are kept in the funds of the Ukrainian Radio and include Mozart Symphonies Nos. 38 and 41, Beethoven Symphony No. 9, Brahms A German Requiem, Rachmaninov Bells, Dvořák Symphonies Nos. 7 and 9.

Sirenko is the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine since 1999. Highlights among hundreds of programmes that he has performed with the orchestra since then were cycles Gustav Mahler Complete Symphonies, Bach all four Passions and Mass in B Minor, and Lyatoshynsky Complete Symphonies.

He recorded over 50 compact discs and the CD of Silvestrov's *Requiem for Larissa* was

nominated for a Grammy Award in 2005. He premiered many works by Ukrainian composers including Silvestrov's Symphonies No. 7 and 8, Stankovych's Symphony No. 6.

Sirenko has toured Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. He has worked with many international orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Moscow and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, Sinfonia Warsovia, NOSPR (Kato-wice), the Svetlanov Symphony Orchestra, the Bratislava Radio Symphony, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, the National Philharmonic of Russia, the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

Sirenko has appeared in numerous concert halls around the world, including Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Brucknerhaus (Linz), Barbican Hall and Cadogan Hall (London), Theatre des Champs-Elysees and Opera Comique (Paris), Seoul Art Center, Palau de la Musica in Valencia and Centro Manuel de Falla in Granada, Filharmonia Narodowa (Warsaw), the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory and the Great Hall of St. Petersburg Philharmonia, the Roy Thomson Hall (Toronto), the Tokyo City Opera and the Osaka Symphony Hall.

Volodymyr Sirenko is a People's Artist of Ukraine and laureate of the Taras Shevchenko National Prize, Ukraine's most prestigious award. He is Professor of the opera and symphonic conducting at the National Music Academy of Ukraine.

OLGA KERN

Russian-American pianist Olga Kern is now recognized as one of her generation's great pianists. She jumpstarted her U.S. career with her historic Gold Medal win at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in Fort Worth, Texas as the first woman to do so in more than thirty years.

First prize winner of the Rachmaninoff International Piano Competition at seventeen, Ms. Kern is a laureate of many international competitions. In 2016 she served as Jury Chairman of both the Seventh Cliburn International Amateur Piano Competition and the first Olga Kern International Piano Competition, where she also holds the title of Artistic Director. Ms. Kern frequently gives masterclasses and since September 2017 has served on the piano faculty of the prestigious Manhattan School of Music. Additionally, Ms. Kern has been chosen as the Virginia Arts Festival's new Connie & Marc Jacobson Director of Chamber Music, beginning with the 2019 season.

For the 2019-20 season, Kern will perform with the Allentown Symphony, Grand Rapids Symphony, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Colorado Symphony, Toledo Symphony Orchestra, New Mexico Philharmonic, Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie, Orquesta de Sao Paulo, and the New West Symphony, as well as appearing on United States Tour with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine. She is also the guest soloist at the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center for Leonard Slatkin's 75th Birthday Celebration. She will appear in recitals in Orford,

Sunriver, Fort Worth (Cliburn), Carmel, San Francisco, Sicily, and Calvia. This October and November, Olga Kern will be hosting her Second Olga Kern International Piano Competition. This season, she will also be a part of the jury at the

following piano competitions: Sydney International Piano Competition, Gurwitz International Piano Competition, Gershwin Piano Competition, Schumann Prize Competition, and the Scriabin International Competition.

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Olga Kern is a Steinway Artist
Olga Kern records exclusively for Harmonia Mundi
Olga Kern's dresses are designed by Alex Teih
www.columbia-artists.com

McCarter
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MUSIC

2019
2020
Highlights

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13

THE TALLIS SCHOLARS

Peter Phillips, director

*Reflections: A Program for the
Holiday Season*

Co-presented with The Princeton Singers



THE TALLIS SCHOLARS

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25

THE MIKADO

with the New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players
and Orchestra



THE MIKADO

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31

PRINCETON POPS: THE BIG TIME

Book by Douglas Carter Beane

Music and lyrics by Douglas J. Cohen

*Broadway stars and musicians of the
Princeton Symphony Orchestra will
perform a concert reading of a
new musical comedy.*



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12

YUJA WANG, piano



YUJA WANG

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14

CLAIRE CHASE, flute

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16

RUSSIAN RENAISSANCE



RUSSIAN RENAISSANCE

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