

2025 Festival Orchestra Notes by Fran Rosenthal

Tchaikovsky & Time For Three | Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Antonín Dvořák, Czech; 1841–1904, *Carnival Overture* in A Major, Op. 92, 1891



My program notes for Dvořák's *Carnival Overture* could simply be one word: *exuberant!* Hear it, and you may agree. But here are a few notes to help you enjoy the work even more.

The work is in sonata form, with a pastoral interlude inserted into the structure. Originally, the piece was the second overture in a set of three. Dvořák conducted the triptych at his farewell concert in Prague before he left for the United States in 1892. He also conducted the full set at a concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City in 1894. Brahms and Dvořák's publisher decided to publish the work as three separate overtures.

The original three-part work was semi-programmatic: the first part giving impressions of nature, and the third, *Othello*, indeed sounding tragic. The overture you will hear is described by the composer as "a lonely, contemplative wanderer reaching, at twilight, a city where a carnival is in full sway. On every side is heard the clangor of instruments mingled with the shouts of joy and unrestrained hilarity of people giving vent to their feelings in songs and dance tunes."

The overture opens with a rousing swirl of orchestral brilliance. This first theme is most surely born out of the spirit of Slavic dances. Then listen to the violins sing the second theme, while the woodwinds supply counter-voices. It is here that the insertion of a lyrical section occurs—luminous beauty. Is this the wanderer pausing to reflect on his life's journey? Dvořák brings back the theme from his first overture in the original triptych, and those of you who know his glorious *Requiem* will recognize this theme from that work.

The development brings back the high spirits of the first theme. Dvořák does not repeat the second theme in his recapitulation; instead, he intensifies the syncopated rhythm of the first passages and finishes with a flashy, rapid *coda* (do you remember that *coda* is the Italian word for "tail"?). The entire ensemble races to an amazing conclusion. Brass, percussion, cymbals, and the seldom-heard sound of a tambourine combine to end the joyous *Carnival Overture*.

Mason Bates, 1977–, American, *Silicon Hymnal*, 2024

This is the premiere performance of the work written for the famed group Time for Three. They will perform the work with the AZ Musicfest Orchestra.

From Mason Bates' Website



The magical intersection between music and technology is a central tenet of Mason Bates' work, from his GRAMMY-winning opera *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* to his work as a composer, DJ, and curator. During his term as the first composer-in-residence at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, he presented a diverse array of artists through his KC Jukebox, using immersive production and stagecraft. His works and curation are imaginatively transforming the way classical music is both created and experienced. Championed by legendary conductors, from

Riccardo Muti to Marin Alsop, his symphonic music is the first to receive widespread acceptance for its unique integration of electronic sounds. He was named the second most-performed composer of his generation in a recent survey of American music.

Mason Bates' Notes Concerning *Silicon Hymnal*

Silicon Hymnal

- I. Hypnotica
- II. Phat Reel
- III. Air for Three
- IV. Abide with Me
- V. Finale

"The *Silicon Hymnal* is a book of songs with a heart of electronica. Created for the uniquely gifted Time for Three, whose members can play (and sing) in any style, this triple concerto unfolds in progressively more expansive movements.

Hypnotica mixes meditative textures between soloists, orchestra, and electronica, drifting in and out of focus in a dreamlike manner. The ensuing *Phat Reel* combines a heavy beat ('phat' in hip-hop parlance) with a reimagined fiddle 'reel'—a jaunty folk tune of Scottish origins—in a lopsided dance that swaps violin for mandolin. *Air for Three* floats a double bass melody over airy violin textures and jazz harmonies.

The work takes a deep dive in *Abide with Me*, an atmospheric recasting of the 19th-century

hymn known for its plaintive calls for guidance amidst the darkness of 'eventide.' At the most vulnerable moment in the movement, the soloists are called to sing the hymn itself. All thematic elements return in the barnburner *Finale*, making boisterous cameos over an engine of perpetual motion. Analogue and digital figuration swirl together in an exuberant close."

=====

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Russian, 1840-1893, Symphony No. 5, in E minor, Op. 64



Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 is a personal journey from despair and the forces of fate to joy and triumph over sorrow and tragedy. Most of you know of the composer's troubled life, and his works reflect his neurotic, often self-deprecating views of his music. Important to understanding Tchaikovsky's musical sensitivity is his view concerning his Russian musical heritage, his early formal training, and his exposure to European freedom of expression. Certainly, he acknowledged and cherished the Russian musical flavor and folk idiom, but his musical persona was founded in emotional expression, not nationalism.

In this Symphony, the primary theme is repeated in all four movements, thus it is in cyclical form (a form in which a theme or musical idea recurs in multiple sections or movements). This adds to the emotional expression and unifies the work. There is certainly a programmatic element essential to the work—not written as a text, but noted initially by Tchaikovsky when he was mulling over the outline of the piece. His note read, "Intr (introduction) Complete resignation before fate." The repeated fate theme, created in E minor, morphs throughout the movements, finally emerging in E Major.

Here is a walk-through of the whole Symphony:

- The **Andante** introduction immediately hints at the fate theme to come. This music is given to solo woodwinds and strings. Pursuant to the composer's remarks noted above, he described it as "grumbling, doubt, complaints, reproaches..." for this movement. The tempo now becomes **Allegro**. The theme is heard in its entirety. The second theme is certainly a Russian or Slavic folk melody. The exposition continues with many new thematic passages. When the development section comes, there is still more new material to be heard. The texture darkens, and the final measures return to the opening "mumbles" of the introduction.

- The second movement, **Andante cantabile** (It. slow, singing), is most likely known to you in some way. Should I spoil it for you, or let you hear it without semi-erudite analysis? Returning to my way of finding one-word descriptions, for this section, I choose *luscious* (though you will probably say “romantic”). The impassioned solo horn passage continues to move me and often brings me to tears. Strangely, it has been said that the melody comes from a song sung by a street vendor selling pork! This first appearance of the main theme is followed by other woodwind solos and strings. Sudden bursts of anger arise as the brass rage. There are impassioned outbursts of the main theme, and memories of the horn theme come and go. There is a pause, and then the thematic materials are quietly woven into an intricate tapestry, leading to a huge climax. No, not the final notes—there is a quiet drop-off that follows for the strings and woodwinds.

Note: The theme has been used in many movies and songs. *Moon Love* by Harry James, Sinatra, and John Denver’s *Annie’s Song* are two of the most famous songs that quote the horn theme.

- The **Waltz** that follows in the third movement is Tchaikovsky in his “Ballet Mode.” Think: *Waltz of the Flowers* from *The Nutcracker* and the waltzes in *Sleeping Beauty*. Hear the lovely, lilting dance and light sound of the violins. Tchaikovsky used the timbres (remember, timbre is the particular sound an instrument produces) of his chosen instruments brilliantly to convey the lighter mood in this movement.
- The **Finale** is in three sections. It is transformative. It follows the structure of the First Movement, immediately opening with the Fate theme. This time, it is heard in a march-like manner, proceeding to wander between sections of the orchestra, building to a furious passage. The instruments have an eager conversation, briefly playing all the now-recognizable motifs from the thematic materials, until it all dies out. Note the pauses between passages. The final section’s tempo is marked **Allegro vivace** (fast, lively). It is emphatically triumphant. After another pause, the Symphony rises to a resounding close, expressing life without despair and welcoming joy.



Arizona Musicfest

Arizona Musicfest would like to thank Fran Rosenthal for her thorough, entertaining, and thoughtful notes that add depth and perspective to the great music you'll hear during our Festival Orchestra week.