

Season Premiere

October 10 – 11, 2009

Bohuslav Martinů
(1890-1959)

Overture, H.345 (1953)

Rebecca Clarke
(1886-1979)

Sonata for Viola and Orchestra (1919)

I. Impetuoso: Allegro ma non troppo

II. Vivace

III. Adagio – Allegro

Catherine Hanson, viola

INTERMISSION

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)

Suite No. 1 in D Minor, op. 43 (1878-79)

I. Introduzione e Fuga: Andante sostenuto –
Moderato e con anima

II. Divertimento: Allegro moderato

III. Intermezzo: Andantino semplice

IV. Marche miniature: Moderato con moto

V. Scherzo: Allegro con moto

VI. Gavotte: Allegro

There are so many who jealously keep their secrets, for fear of losing them. But the mind of Martinů is so inventive that he does not care. Besides, is not the proclaiming of a secret the surest means of keeping it? —Pierre Octave Ferroud

After Janáček, **Bohuslav Martinů** (1890-1959) is the leading Czech composer of the 20th century, but (like Milhaud and Villa-Lobos) his reputation was tarnished because he composed at amazing speed and almost never revised his scores, creating a substantial number of masterpieces plagued by their less eloquent counterparts.

Martinů was born in the small town of Polička in the Bohemian-Moravian highlands, from which Smetana and Mahler also came. His family lived in tiny room at the top of a church tower, where his father, a cobbler, earned money by watching for fires in the town below. (Martinů carried a postcard of the view from the tower for the rest of his life.) Young Bohuslav learned the violin, starting composing at 10 years old, and, thanks to donations from friends in Polička, was sent to the conservatory in Prague, where he was not a very successful student. It wasn't until he was playing the violin regularly in the Czech Philharmonic that his education really began. In 1923, he won a small grant from the ministry of education to travel to Paris. He intended to stay for a few months, but remained for over seventeen years.

In Paris, Martinů studied with Roussel, was stunned by jazz and the music of Stravinsky, and started composing rapidly. In 1940, soon after the premier of his magnificent *Double Concerto*, Martinů was blacklisted by the Nazis and fled to America. Unlike many composers who fled to the United States, Martinů never felt comfortable in America, but health problems and the rise of the communism in 1948 prevented him from returning home.

Martinů's **Overture, H.345** is a lesser known later masterpiece—his only composition of 1953, with the possible exception of some final touches made to Sixth Symphony. Though a concert overture, it nonetheless strays into one of Martinů's favorite forms—the concerto grosso—with a seven-member concertino featuring flute, oboe, two violins, viola, and two cellos.

What the wise-acres would have said, had a "woman-composer" and one of your personal friends in Pittsfield won the prize, I do not dare to contemplate, but I am sure that suspicions of a "frame-up" between you and the judges would have been endless, and that we might have had a great deal of other trouble besides. —Frederick Stock, former Chicago Symphony conductor and one of the judges of the 1919 Berkshire Festival of Chamber Music competition, in which Clarke's Viola Sonata tied Ernest Bloch's Suite for Viola and Piano, in a letter to Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge

Born and raised in England, with a German mother and an American father, **Rebecca Clarke** (1886-1979) spent much of her adulthood in the United States and claimed both English and American nationality. Her late-Victorian childhood and her father's cruelty are described in her memoir written in 1969-73, but it is also clear that her family was artistically inclined and her musical studies were encouraged. Clarke enrolled at the Royal Academy of Music in 1903, where she studied violin. She was abruptly withdrawn in 1905 when her harmony teacher, Percy Miles, proposed marriage. In 1907, she began a composition course at the Royal Conservatory of Music, where she was Stanford's first female student. She was unable to finish her studies, as her father suddenly banished her from the family home.

To support herself, Clarke embarked on an active performing career as a violist, and in 1912 she became one of the first female musicians in a fully professional (and formerly male) ensemble,

the Queen's Hall orchestra. In 1916 she began a U.S. residency that included extensive travel, concertizing and visits with her two brothers. She performed extensively in Hawaii in 1918-1919 and on a round-the-world tour of the British colonies in 1923.

Clarke achieved fame as a composer with her Viola Sonata (1919) and Piano Trio (1921), both runners up in competitions that were part of the Berkshire (Mass.) Festival of Chamber Music, sponsored by the American patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge.

Clarke settled in London in 1924, performing as a soloist and ensemble musician. The quantity of her compositional output decreased in the late 1920s and 30s, possibly because of the discouragement she faced as a composer.

With the onset of World War II, Clarke found herself in the United States, where she lived alternately with her two brothers and their families. She returned to composing, but her productivity ended when she accepted a position as a nanny in 1942. In the early 1940s Clarke became reacquainted with James Friskin, a member of the piano department at the Juilliard School, whom she had first known as a student at the RCM; the couple married in 1944. Her last compositions include *God Made a Tree* (1954), an arrangement of her song *Down by the Salley Garden*, and revisions of earlier scores.

Clarke's most famous composition, the Sonata for Viola and Piano, was orchestrated in 2006 by composer Ruth Lomon, in conjunction with the Rebecca Clarke Society, to become the **Sonata for Viola and Orchestra (1919)**. The Sonata has a remarkable origin: Composed for the Berkshire (Mass.) Festival of Chamber Music, the Sonata was submitted anonymously, which was a requirement for the competition. Clarke had met Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, patron of the competition, and Coolidge had encouraged her to enter. Seventy-three compositions were submitted. The six judges deadlocked between two works: Clarke's Sonata and Ernest Bloch's Suite for Viola and Piano. Coolidge herself had to break the tie, choosing the Bloch. When it was revealed that the Sonata was composed by a woman, the judges were flabbergasted. Had Coolidge chosen Clarke's Sonata, she might also have been accused of favoritism.

Because of its opportunities for soul expansion, music has ever attracted the strong, free sons of the earth. The most profound truths, the most blasphemous things, the most terrible ideas, may be incorporated within the walls of a symphony, and the police be none the wiser. Supposing that some Russian professional supervisor of artistic anarchy really knew what arrant doctrines Tchaikovsky preached! It is its freedom from the meddling hand of the censor that makes of music a playground for great brave souls. —James Gibbons Huneker.

If any one composer can be said to encapsulate the essence of Russianness, it is Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), and yet he was the one major composer of 19th century Russia who cannot be bound to the Russian nationalist school. Tchaikovsky paid heavily for his determination to be true to himself above all else; few major artists have ever suffered the sort of critical savaging that was meted out to him, which seems in striking contrast to his welcome role in today's concert halls.

Tchaikovsky was born in the provincial town of Votkinsk, where his father was a mining engineer. His formal tuition began at home, and included piano and music theory lessons. In 1848, the family moved to St. Petersburg, and in 1850 Pyotr was sent to a boarding school in the city. After extensive law studies, he found employment at the Ministry of Justice. At 22, he left law and entered the city music conservatory to study with Anton Rubinstein, a composer and stupendous pianist. In 1866, he went to Moscow, where Rubinstein's brother Nikolai appointed Tchaikovsky

professor of harmony at the conservatory. He was temporarily swept up in the wave of nationalism, particularly after meeting Rimsky-Korsakov, but soon returned to his cosmopolitan instincts.

1877 was the most crucial year in Tchaikovsky's life. He met Nadezhda von Meck, a wealthy widow who, impressed by some of his early music, now commissioned him to produce some violin and piano arrangements of his more recent works. The relationship would last fourteen years and bring many commissions, though they never actually met. Tchaikovsky also met Antonina Milyukova, who in May 1877 started sending Tchaikovsky infatuated love letters in which she threatened to take her life unless he responded. Initially cautious, Tchaikovsky eventually saw his unstable admirer as a solution to his private homosexuality. Within seven weeks of meeting her, and unbeknown to most of his family, the two were married. The marriage was (not surprisingly) a disaster, with the couple separating in a few weeks and Tchaikovsky sinking into an overwhelming depression.

By the 1880s, Tchaikovsky's music was being played as far away as the United States. After a period of isolation and prolific composition, Tchaikovsky moved to Moscow to take up a second successful career as a conductor. (On an incredibly successful visit to the United States in 1891, Tchaikovsky conducted the opening night at what was to become Carnegie Hall.)

The circumstances of Tchaikovsky's death remain controversial to this day. The official version was that he had died from cholera after drinking unboiled water, but in the 1970s a Russian scholar produced a new account of Tchaikovsky's last days that established suicide as the cause of death. Shortly before his death, Tchaikovsky had been caught in flagrante with a nephew of a high-ranking official. Tchaikovsky's law-school colleagues, determined to avert a scandal that would reflect badly on them, summoned Tchaikovsky before a "court of honor" on October 31 and ordered him to commit suicide. Two days later, he took arsenic.

Whereas composers like Brahms used the orchestral suite as a form to prepare for writing symphonies, Tchaikovsky saw the suite as a welcome respite from the rigors of symphonic form. "I want to compose a suite so that I may have a good rest from symphonic music," he wrote to his brother Modest in 1878. Thus, Tchaikovsky's **Suite No. 1 in D Minor, op. 43** was composed between his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies and is a remarkably mature work. The piece began its life with five movements, but Tchaikovsky realized that all the movements were in duple time, so he added the divertimento in triple meter. Despite breaking from sonata-allegro form, he opens with a powerful introduction and fugue—hardly a "vacation" from symphonic composition—but settles more into his element in the succeeding movements. The divertimento follows, feeling rather like a waltz and giving way to the intermezzo, which was originally entitled "Echo du bal" and has a graceful Slavic character. The "March Miniature" is the most famous movement of the suite, originally entitled "March of the Lilliputians." The scherzo was actually composed first and was the inspiration for the rest of the suite, while the final gavotte ends the suite in a decidedly upbeat fashion, laying the groundwork for Prokofiev's gavotte in his Classical Symphony.