

# RUSSIAN MASTERS



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FRIDAY & SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2 & 3, AT 8 PM

## NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

VICTOR YAMPOLSKY, *conductor*

BEHZOD ABDURAIMOV, *piano*

**MODEST MUSSORGSKY /  
ORCH. BY NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**  
*Dawn on Moscow River from Khovanshchina*

**PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY**  
**Concerto No. 1 in B-Flat Minor for  
Piano and Orchestra, Op. 23**

*Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso*

*Andantino semplice*

*Allegro con fuoco*

*Behzod Abduraimov, piano*

– INTERMISSION –

**DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH**  
**Symphony No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 65**

*Adagio – Allegro non troppo*

*Allegretto*

*Allegro non troppo*

*Largo*

*Allegretto*

*This concert will last 2 hours and 20 minutes,  
including a 20 minute intermission.*

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# TONIGHT'S CONCERT | AT A GLANCE



## MODEST MUSSORGSKY

Dawn on Moscow River from *Khovanshchina*



- *Khovanshchina* translates from the Russian as “Khovansky intrigue.” The title refers to the historical Prince Ivan Khovansky, who allegedly orchestrated a coup in the 1680s in an effort to bring his family to power. Reflective of the tumultuous state of affairs in Russia at the time it was written, Mussorgsky’s opera relates the story of the power struggle that took place two centuries earlier, in the years leading up to the rule of Peter the Great.
- Mussorgsky spent eight years developing this work, leaving it unfinished before his death in 1881. Later, both Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Dmitri Shostakovich would each make their own revisions to the work.
- This particular excerpt is the Rimsky-Korsakov’s orchestrated adaption of the opera’s scene-setting prelude. The music uses a folk melody to evoke the dawning day over the Moscow River.



## PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

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

- Though one of Tchaikovsky’s strongest supporters, conductor and pianist Nikolai Rubinstein was highly critical of this concerto when the composer gave him a private preview. Rubinstein said the concerto was “so badly written as to be beyond rescue,” before suggesting that it might be saved with massive rewrites.
- Despite his own tendencies toward self-criticism, Tchaikovsky stood firm in the face of Rubinstein’s critique, insisting, “I shall not alter a single note; I shall publish the work exactly as it stands!”
- Conductor and pianist Hans von Bülow believed Tchaikovsky’s score overflowed with originality, and he would become the concerto’s champion, performing the solo part at the world premiere in Boston in 1875. Rubinstein later recanted his critique and would go on to conduct the Moscow premiere.
- The concerto, which features one of the most famous openings in the classical repertoire, also incorporates elements of Ukrainian folk music, which Tchaikovsky employs in both the first movement and the concerto’s fiery finale.



## DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 8 in C Minor Op. 65

- Composed in 1943, the Eighth is the second of Shostakovich’s “war” symphonies. Though the music is marked by tragedy and dramatic conflict, the composer called it an “optimistic, life-affirming work,” suggesting that it followed the darkness-to-light paradigm of the victory symphony. He described its arc this way: “Life is beautiful. All that is dark and gloomy will rot away and vanish, and the beautiful will triumph.”
- Knowing that Soviet authorities had chastised Shostakovich in the 1930s for failing to meet their artistic and social standards, it’s fair to assume that the composer worked hard to position the Eighth in a light that would meet their approval. Even so, the darkness inherent in the work led authorities to single it out five years later, denouncing Shostakovich for his “pessimism” and “individualism.”
- The Eighth is the first Shostakovich symphony designed in more than four movements, and the work’s proportions are unusual, with the enormous first movement comprising nearly half of the entire piece.

## MODEST MUSSORGSKY



Born on March 21, 1839, in Karevo, Russia; died on March 28, 1881, in St. Petersburg

**Composed:** 1873-74

**First performance:** February 21, 1886, is the date of the posthumous world premiere of the opera *Khovanshchina*, in St. Petersburg

**First Nashville Symphony performance:**

These concerts mark the orchestra's first performance of the full work. The Nashville Symphony performed the prelude on October 23-25, 1980 with music director Michael Charry.

**Estimated length:** 5 minutes

### Dawn on Moscow River from *Khovanshchina*

**B**orn into a land-owning family but destitute by the time he died prematurely from the effects of alcoholism, Modest Mussorgsky came of age during a tumultuous era. Russian identity itself — socially, politically and culturally — was undergoing a crisis and in search of new answers. The reforms Tsar Alexander II set in motion in the 1860s (emancipation of the serfs chief among them) brought questions of Russia's destiny into sharp focus. The role that Russian artists should play likewise became a hotly debated issue.

So, too, did the question of what constitutes authentic Russian art. Mussorgsky belonged to a group of composers based in St. Petersburg who were determined to liberate that identity from both conventional Western models and the academicism of professional conservatory training. But even among his pioneering colleagues, Mussorgsky stands out as a remarkably innovative figure. As the idealized posturing of Romanticism became increasingly inadequate, Mussorgsky aimed for a kind of realism akin to that cultivated by such contemporaries in Russian literature as Ivan Turgenev and Fyodor Dostoevsky: one unafraid to shy away from the darker, uglier aspects of life.

In the wake of the festivities marking Peter the Great's bicentennial in 1872, Vladimir Stasov, a friend and mentor of Mussorgsky's, suggested the topic for an opera about the struggle between Old and New Russia. The title *Khovanshchina* derives from the historical Prince Ivan Khovansky, one of the main players during another period of instability in the 1680s, when various factions struggled among themselves before Peter the Great gained full power as Tsar. The phrase "Khovansky Intrigue" (in this context, *shchina* means an "intrigue" or

"affair") refers to the coup Khovansky allegedly plots to bring his own family to the throne. Parallel to the secular power struggles it depicts, the opera weaves in the story of the new regime's persecution of the Old Believers, a radical sect that had broken with the state-supported Orthodox Church over recent reforms. Both Khovansky and these schismatics symbolize "old" Russia.

### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**M**ussorgsky compiled his own libretto for *Khovanshchina* from diverse sources, but despite working on this "national music drama" from 1872 to 1880, he left it tantalizingly incomplete before his death in 1881. His colleague and onetime roommate Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov orchestrated the short-score manuscript Mussorgsky had written, but also severely edited the mass of material, composing his own ending to the fragmentary final scene. Dmitri Shostakovich later prepared a version that sought to adhere more closely to Mussorgsky's authentic voice (for example, by not smoothing over his unusual harmonic choices).

We hear Rimsky's orchestration of the music that serves as the opera's scene-setting prelude. Here, Mussorgsky uses a folk melody, gently varying it to evoke the dawning promise of the day over the Moscow River.

*Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestration calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; 4 horns; timpani; percussion; harp; and strings.*



## PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Born on May 7, 1840, in Votkinsk, Russia; died on November 6, 1893, in St. Petersburg

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

**Composed:** 1874-75; revised in 1879

**First performance:** October 25, 1875, in Boston, with Hans von Bülow as soloist

**First Nashville Symphony performance:** October 26, 1954, at War Memorial Auditorium with music director Guy Taylor

**Estimated length:** 32 minutes

It was one thing to have Eduard Hanslick, a formidable music critic of the era, denounce Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (1878) as a piece that forces us "to see a host of gross and savage faces, hear crude curses, and smell the booze." But imagine the young composer's sense of betrayal when one of his strongest champions to date pronounced the working draft of his First Piano Concerto "so badly written as to be beyond rescue." Such was the verdict of the conductor and pianist Nikolai Rubinstein, a respected musician who had led the premiere of the *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy-Overture and other works by the emerging composer.

Christmas Eve of 1874 was not a happy one for Tchaikovsky. He had arranged to give a private run-through of his ambitious new piano concerto, then still in progress. While he had been winning advocates, the composer needed a decisive success with a major new work. Since he wasn't a professional pianist, he hoped to solicit technical advice from Rubinstein, a celebrated keyboard performer. Tchaikovsky even fancied that Rubinstein might give his piece an extra seal of approval by premiering it himself.

As Tchaikovsky recounted years later: "I played the first movement. Not a single word, not a single comment! If you knew how stupid and intolerable the situation of a man is who cooks and sets a meal before a friend, a meal the friend then proceeds

to eat — in silence!... I summoned all my patience and played through to the end. Still silence. I stood up and asked, 'Well?'"

Rubinstein then explained why he had some issues with the new piece, to put it mildly. From the gist of it, Tchaikovsky notes, "An independent witness in the room might have concluded that I was a maniac, an untalented, senseless hack who had come to submit his rubbish to an eminent musician." Rubinstein tried to soften the blow by suggesting that the Concerto might work with massive rewrites, to which Tchaikovsky erupted, "*I shall not alter a single note; I shall publish the work exactly as it stands!*"

In fact, Tchaikovsky, who was his own harshest critic, *did* later publish a revised version, though with only minor tweaks. But in the meantime, the brilliant conductor and pianist Hans von Bülow (a famous supporter of both Brahms and Wagner) became the concerto's champion. Unlike Rubinstein, Bülow believed that Tchaikovsky's score overflowed with original ideas that were expressed in a clear and mature form. He played the solo part at the world premiere in Boston, at a safe remove from Moscow, with a pickup orchestra of mostly Harvard music students (as the Boston Symphony had yet to be founded).

It comes as no surprise, then, that Tchaikovsky — echoing Beethoven's famous "un-dedication" of the *Eroica* Symphony to Napoleon — vehemently rubbed Rubinstein's name off the title page, replacing it with Bülow's. Although he wasn't present for the world premiere in Boston, Tchaikovsky soon heard of its triumph. Further vindication arrived when Rubinstein later recanted his critique and conducted the Moscow premiere in December 1875. In the years that followed, the Concerto became so popular in America that on his own tour there, Tchaikovsky conducted it for Carnegie Hall's inaugural concert in 1891.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening is one of the most famous moments in Tchaikovsky's repertoire — in all orchestral music, in fact. A simple, four-note motif from the horns sets the scene for a dramatic and passionate melody that then unfolds in the strings. With its hammer-chord gestures, this curtain raiser stirs up a sense of excitement and grandeur. But enjoy it while you can: the tune only returns once in this

lengthy introduction and is then gone for good.

Brass chords form a bridge into the main movement proper, the duration of which is longer than the other two combined. Tchaikovsky speeds up the tempo and sends the soloist skittering across the keyboard in an agitated rhythm while also returning us to the piece's gloomy home key of B-flat minor, a contrast to the velvety sound of D-flat major that he used for the short-lived Grand Tune in the introduction.

In contrast to the latter's cameo appearance, Tchaikovsky gets considerably more mileage out of the pensive theme first played by the clarinet. This happens to be one of several imports from folk music — in this case, a Ukrainian tune Tchaikovsky claims he had heard whistled by blind beggars at the market fair. The richly episodic first movement mixes quieter musings with brashly dramatic outbursts. Tchaikovsky demands finger-stretching virtuosity — from delicate, gracious figurations to thunderous double-octaves — to cover his far-ranging emotional spectrum. All of these aspects come into play in an extra-long cadenza that resembles a play within a play.

The Andantino — a slightly quicker tempo than the more leisurely Andante marking — combines the serene respite characteristic of a lyrical slow movement with aspects of a scherzo. Tchaikovsky orchestrates with chamber-like intimacy, particularly for the piano's duets with flute and other solo instruments, providing a striking contrast to the epic sprawl of the first movement. The scherzo parts, which play with a French folk song as their musical material, intrude surrealistically, almost suggesting a parody of a waltz.

More folk music — again Ukrainian in overall character— fuels the fiery finale, with its intriguingly accented main theme that seems tailor-made for the keyboard. Something of the jittery attitude from the opening movement finds its way into this music, while a contrasting second theme is tenderly songful. At the finale's climax, this theme gets the same neon-light treatment we recall from the concerto's big, bold opening, before Tchaikovsky speeds things up for a final, manic thunderclap of head-spinning virtuosity.

*In addition to solo piano, the Concerto is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; 4 horns; 2 trumpets; 3 trombones, timpani; and strings.*



## DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born on September 25, 1906, in Saint Petersburg, Russia; died on August 9, 1975, in Moscow

Symphony No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 65

**Composed:** 1943

**First performance:** November 4, 1943, in Moscow, with Yevgeny Mravinsky conducting

**First Nashville Symphony performance:**

These concerts mark the first performances by the Nashville Symphony.

**Estimated length:** 61 minutes

The taint of “decadence,” as determined by Stalin’s thought police, was a seriously grave matter for Soviet composers. Notoriously, Shostakovich had already been chastised for this “error” in the mid-1930s, and postwar reactions to his Symphony No. 8 would revive the charge. When he composed this music in 1943, however, Shostakovich was able to proceed in a spirit of relative autonomy, despite the grim context of his homeland’s desperate struggle for survival following Hitler’s invasion. This was thanks to the success, two years earlier, of his Symphony No. 7, which was dedicated to his besieged native city of Leningrad and had given an enormous boost to his status. Its reception in the West was also a major cultural event, with the composer even being featured on the cover of *TIME* magazine.

In the meantime, Shostakovich took up a new position at the Moscow Conservatory, and he composed much of the Eighth during the summer at a retreat north of the city managed by the state-sponsored Composers’ Union (a former country estate-turned-collective farm, which bore the Orwellian name “House of Rest and Creativity”). It would have been easy enough for Shostakovich to reinforce his approved status by retreading the same ground, yet he courageously decided to follow a different direction for the second of his “war symphonies.”

*The fuller and more complex picture suggested by Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony is that of a Requiem, not only for the immeasurable suffering of the war years, but for the victims of Stalin's purges as well. The work's challenges to convention caused it to be singled out when Shostakovich was denounced in 1948 for the sins of "pessimism" and "individualism."*

In his first official announcement of the just-completed Eighth in September 1943, the composer cast its "philosophical conception" in terms meant to echo the prevailing platitudes of socialist realism. Influenced by the "joyful news" of the Red Army's recent victories, he wrote, he wanted to look ahead "into the postwar era" and had composed an essentially "optimistic, life-affirming work." Despite the "tragic and dramatic inner conflicts" expressed by the music, Shostakovich implied that the Eighth obeyed the familiar darkness-to-light paradigm of the victory symphony and could be "summed up" as follows: "Life is beautiful. All that is dark and gloomy will rot away and vanish, and the beautiful will triumph."

Indeed, like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in the same key, the Eighth begins in the minor and finds its way to a C-major conclusion. Yet Shostakovich delineates the "dark and gloomy" at great length and in many guises — including some of his most crushingly nihilistic music — while the sense of ultimate "triumph" is at best subdued.

The fuller and more complex picture suggested by the Eighth is that of a Requiem, not only for the immeasurable suffering of the war years, but for the victims of Stalin's purges as well. It's unlikely that Party apparatchiks would have been any more attuned to hidden subversive meanings here than they were to those in the Seventh, which arguably incorporates several similar Requiem-like gestures. The Eighth's challenges to convention sufficed to have the work singled out when Shostakovich (along with Prokofiev) was denounced in 1948 for the sins of "pessimism" and overcomplicated "individualism."

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

This is the first Shostakovich symphony designed in more than four movements. The work's proportions are also unusual: the gigantic

but largely funereal first movement is close to half the length of the entire piece, only to be echoed by a brief second movement that presents a distorted, parodistic view of the first. The final three movements range widely in character, but are all seamlessly interlinked in a way that ironically alludes to the "spillover" effect of the Scherzo and finale in Beethoven's Fifth.

At the very opening, Shostakovich invokes his own Fifth Symphony — the alleged "response to justified criticism" that put him back in the good graces of the State following his first denunciation. Strings play a darkly solemn introductory passage, with the first three notes containing the unifying motto of the entire symphony. This musical cell is reversed, compressed, stretched and multiplied, saturating all the other movements as well. Violins sing out both the main themes that follow, which are underscored by halting, cortège-like accompaniments.

As Shostakovich develops this material, a wave of brutal violence overtakes the tragic atmosphere, and the combination of gradual crescendo, thickening textures and increase in tempo is terrifyingly effective. A new, rapid march breaks out, leading to a deafening recapitulation whose apocalyptic militarism calls to mind a parallel passage in the finale of Mahler's Second Symphony. Yet there is no "resurrection"; the music collapses into a forlorn solo for English horn, and the movement quietly subsides, anticipating the end of the work. A signature of this score is the dichotomy between orchestral mass and Shostakovich's extensive soloistic coloring: he juxtaposes the epic scale with long, lonely close-ups throughout.

The musical idiom of the march dominates much of the Eighth. In a cruel satire of the funereal opening movement, the second movement (starting with that three-note motto) struts forward, a savage *Dies irae*. Its attitude of relentless monomania is even further exaggerated in the furiously mechanistic

perpetual motion of the third movement, intercut by shrieks from the woodwinds, with a middle section of “heroic” music highlighting solo trumpet and snare drum.

The shrieks are filled out by the orchestra to segue into the Largo, a moving passacaglia based on a nine-bar theme that is continually repeated in the bass. Shostakovich inflects its spirit of haunted mourning with remarkable orchestrations, including a quartet of flutter-tonguing flutes. Clarinets gently glide a shadowy G-sharp minor into C major for a finale based on a surprisingly insouciant ritornello theme given by bassoons. Its

“pastoral” air, however, is invaded once again by the violence of the first movement in a massive climax that Shostakovich then proceeds to sweep away, not in “triumph,” but in tame, even whimsical feints — shards of fragile beauty amid the ruins.

*The score calls for a large orchestra of 4 flutes (3rd and 4th doubling piccolos), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.*

—Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony’s program annotator.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS



**VICTOR  
YAMPOLSKY**  
conductor

An esteemed teacher, conductor and violinist, Victor Yampolsky was born in the Soviet Union in 1942 and is the son of the great pianist Vladimir Yampolsky. He studied violin with the legendary David Oistrakh at the Moscow Conservatory and conducting with Maestro Nicolai Rabinovich at the Leningrad Conservatory, and he was a member of the Moscow Philharmonic as both violinist and assistant conductor, under the direction of renowned Maestro Kirill Kondrashin.

Yampolsky immigrated to the United States in 1973, after a recommendation from conductor Zubin Mehta led to an audition for Leonard Bernstein, who offered him a scholarship at the Berkshire Music Center in Tanglewood, Massachusetts. Two weeks later, Yampolsky accepted a position in the violin section of the Boston Symphony, and he was later appointed the orchestra’s principal second violinist.

Yampolsky has conducted more than 80 professional and student orchestras throughout the world, including repeat engagements with

orchestras in the United States, Canada, Europe, South Africa and Asia. He has served as principal conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra in Johannesburg, South Africa, and music director of the Omaha Symphony. In 2002, he led the latter ensemble in its debut recording, *Take Flight*, and one year later led the world premiere of Philip Glass’ Second Piano Concerto, which received an award from the Nebraska Arts Council.

A dedicated educator, Yampolsky has been invited to give conducting master classes throughout the world. He has taught at the State Conservatory of St. Petersburg, Stellenbosch Conservatory, the Cape Philharmonic Youth Orchestra in Cape Town, Emory University, and the Universities of Akron, Victoria and Nevada. Other highlights include serving as a panel member of the American Symphony Orchestra League (now the League of American Orchestras) Conductors’ Continuum Committee and as a juror for the Prokofiev International Conducting Competition in St. Petersburg, Russia, as well as the Conductors Guild and CODA associations.

Yampolsky has been awarded honorary doctorates from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Doane College in Crete, Nebraska, and he has recorded for Pyramid and Kiwi-Pacific Records.





## BEHZOD ABDURAIMOV

piano

**D**escribed by *The Times* as “master of all he surveys,” and with *The Washington Post* noting to “keep your ear on this one,” Behzod Abduraimov

continues to receive international praise for his captivating performances. Recent seasons have seen him appearing with leading orchestras around the globe, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Czech Philharmonic, Orchestre National de Lyon, NHK Symphony and Leipzig Gewandhaus, among others. He has also worked with a variety of prestigious conductors, including Valery Gergiev, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Manfred Honeck, Vasily Petrenko, James Gaffigan, Jakub Hrusa, Thomas Dausgaard and Vladimir Jurowski.

In recital, Abduraimov has been one of the featured artists for the Junge Wilde series at the Konzerthaus Dortmund, and he has appeared at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and the Verbier Festival and La Roque d’Anthéron. Recent North American performance highlights include a recital appearance at the Stern Auditorium following his successful 2015 debut at

Carnegie Hall, as well as appearances at the Cliburn Concerts, Carolina Performing Arts, the Vancouver Recital series and the Aspen Music Festival. He has performed with Houston and Pittsburgh symphonies, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and Minnesota Orchestra, among others.

In 2017, Abduraimov toured Asia for performances with Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, National Centre for the Performing Arts Orchestra, Beijing Symphony Orchestra and Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, and he also traveled to Australia for a recital tour.

Abduraimov is an award-winning recording artist, with his debut recital album winning both the Choc de Classica and the Diapason Découverte. In 2014, he released his first concerto disc on Decca Classics, which features Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 3 and Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI under Juraj Valčuha.

Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1990, Abduraimov began playing piano at age 5 as a pupil of Tamara Popovich at Uspensky State Central Lyceum in Tashkent. He is an alumnus of Park University’s International Center for Music, where he studied with Stanislav Ioudenitch, and now serves as the ICM’s artist-in-residence.