

TCHAIKOVSKY'S FOURTH

WITH THE NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

CLASSICAL SERIES

THURSDAY, APRIL 11, AT 7 PM | FRIDAY & SATURDAY, APRIL 12 & 13, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

CHRISTOPHER ROUSE

Supplica

CHRISTOPHER ROUSE

Concerto for Orchestra

— INTERMISSION —

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36

Andante sostenuto

Andantino in modo di canzona

Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato

Finale: Allegro con fuoco

CONCERT PARTNERS

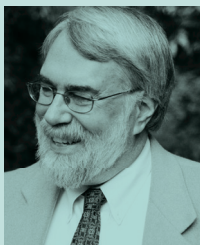


This concert is being recorded live for a forthcoming release on Naxos.

To ensure the highest-quality recording, please keep noise to a minimum.

This concert will last 2 hours, including a 20-minute intermission.

TONIGHT'S CONCERT | AT A GLANCE



CHRISTOPHER ROUSE *Supplica*



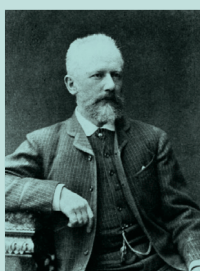
- One of the most frequently performed living American composers, Christopher Rouse has played a substantial role in the revitalization of contemporary orchestral music. He first came to prominence in 1981 with *The Infernal Machine*, which was written for the University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra while he was on the institution's faculty.
- Like *The Infernal Machine*, *Supplica* is a single-movement work. The title is the Italian word for "entreaty" or "supplication," and the music conveys the intensity of a prayerful plea. Rouse has noted that the piece has a strong connection to his Fourth Symphony — which he completed shortly after *Supplica* — but has held back on sharing thoughts about its meaning or personal significance.
- The pared down sound world of *Supplica*, which features only horns, brass, harp and strings, is a departure from the expansive color palette Rouse usually draws on for his works.



CHRISTOPHER ROUSE *Concerto for Orchestra*



- Rouse has made a name for himself as a composer of concertos, having written orchestral showcases for violin, flute, cello, percussion, piano, guitar, oboe, trumpet, organ and, most recently, bassoon. His Trombone Concerto, which was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic to mark the ensemble's 150th anniversary, also commemorates the death of Leonard Bernstein and received the 1993 Pulitzer Prize in Music.
- The Concerto for Orchestra presents the orchestra musicians themselves as soloists rather than a single guest artist, as is frequently the case. According to the composer, "each is given passages requiring everything from singing lyricism to challenging virtuosity, and this work is essentially 'about' allowing each player a chance to shine."
- Rouse chose to move away from the three-movement design of the traditional concerto for this piece, which is divided into "connected halves," with the first half featuring five shorter sections of alternating tempos and the second half comprised of a fast section and a slow section.
- The result is a wonderfully colorful, thrilling and dramatic sequence of contrast and juxtaposition. Rouse's intention is "to draw the listener in more and more as the work progresse[s], with the final allegro building to a frenzied, almost hysterical, climax."

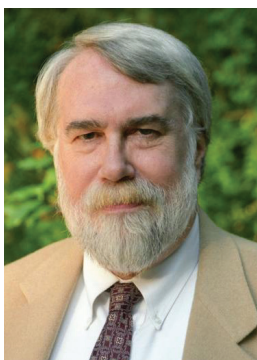


PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY *Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36*



- This was the first large-scale work Tchaikovsky completed after being taken under the wing of Nadezhda von Meck, a wealthy widow who provided him with financial, intellectual and moral support. During this same period, Tchaikovsky married one of his former students in attempt to satisfy social appearances and deflect attention from his same-sex liaisons.
- The concept of an ominous, inescapable "Fate" plays a central role in the score, much as it does in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, as the composer himself noted. "This program is such that it cannot be formulated in words," he wrote to fellow composer Sergei Taneyev. "Should not [a symphony] express everything for which there are no words, but which the soul wishes to express, and which requires to be expressed?"
- The work opens with a dramatic, emotionally complex opening movement, followed by two dreamlike interludes in the ensuing two movements. The finale rushes in with an exuberant outburst, closing this epic work in a spirit of unbridled optimism.

CHRISTOPHER ROUSE



Born on February 15, 1949,
in Baltimore, Maryland,
where he currently resides

Composed: 2013

First performance:

April 4, 2014, with Juraj Valcuha conducting
the Pittsburgh Symphony

First Nashville Symphony performance:

These are the orchestra's first performances.

Estimated length: 14 minutes

Supplica

Christopher Rouse has played a major role in revitalizing orchestral music for the contemporary context. His vivid approach to the concerto and symphony, combined with a mastery of orchestration, has resulted in a substantial body of works that show staying power — as demonstrated by Rouse's status as one of the most frequently performed living American composers.

A number of compelling single-movement orchestral works also figure in this composer's catalog. One early such composition, *The Infernal Machine*, helped put Rouse on the map when he was an emerging composer. He wrote it for the University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra in 1981, while he was on that institution's composition faculty, and received the League of Composers/ISCM prize in recognition of the piece.

Supplica originated as a commission from the Pittsburgh and Pacific symphony orchestras. Rouse completed it a few months after his Fourth Symphony, an enigmatic score about which he has offered little in the way of description, simply observing that, "while I did have a particular meaning in mind when composing [this work], I prefer to keep it to myself." *Supplica* may offer a clue, insofar as Rouse notes it bears "a strong relationship to my Fourth Symphony," though he goes on to write that "it certainly is not a 'completion of' nor 'afterthought to' the symphony. It is also not some sort of 'antipode' to this same symphony. Perhaps it might best be described as a 'companion piece.'"

The composer felt an "inner compulsion to write" both works, as he states, yet he is reluctant to disclose whatever personal significance *Supplica* holds for him. "This certainly does not mean that either piece is intended to be 'impersonal,'"

he explains, "rather that what I hope will be heard as both an intimate and an impassioned communication in sound must mean to each listener what it will, without further intercession or guidance from the me."

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Even on first encounter, it's difficult not to be drawn into the intimacy and passion of this music, which unfolds somewhat like the slow movement from a lost Bruckner or Mahler symphony. The sound world here is pared down to include only horns, brass, harp and strings, which makes an especially notable difference for listeners accustomed to other scores by this wizard of the orchestra, who usually draws on the kind of expansive palette we will hear in *Concerto for Orchestra*. Rouse's title is the Italian word for "entreaty" or "supplication," and the music indeed conveys the intense concentration and directed emotion of a prayerful plea.

The opening string and harp sonorities evoke an air of mystery, but one concerning a matter of vital importance. Rouse elicits wonderful shades on the dark end of the spectrum with his mournful harmonies. A shift happens near the center as the strings give vent to an aggressive outburst, tinged with dissonance and joined by full-throttle brass. But the protest fades out, only to build with slow deliberation. The string outburst recurs, as if the music has been stopped in its tracks by some unyielding force. *Supplica* ends in a state of elegiac resignation, with a long, drawn-out chord — clearly the endpoint of this meditative encounter and yet inconclusive, unresolved.

Supplica is scored for 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, harp and strings.



CHRISTOPHER ROUSE

Born on February 15, 1949,
in Baltimore, Maryland,
where he currently resides

Composed: 2008

First performance: August 1, 2008, with
Marin Alsop conducting the Cabrillo Festival
Orchestra in Santa Cruz, California.

First Nashville Symphony performance:
These are the orchestra's first performances.

Estimated length: 23 minutes

Concerto for Orchestra

Christopher Rouse grew up in his native Baltimore during the musical golden age of the '60s, when rock 'n' roll was blossoming into a kind of Renaissance phase. Traditional orchestral music, in contrast, was considered a dead end by many composers embarking on a career. Rouse made his name by turning that perception around, filling concert halls with the sounds of contemporary music that audiences wanted to hear. After earning degrees at Oberlin College and Cornell University (under the Czech-born Karel Husa), he studied privately with the maverick composer George Crumb, an inventor of uniquely beguiling soundscapes. Rouse has since gone on to become a prominent educator himself. Since 1997 he has taught composition at Juilliard, mentoring such highly successful composers as Nico Muhly and Kevin Puts.

Rouse has built up his hefty catalog through an almost continual stream of commissions and prestigious residencies. Starting with a long association with his hometown Baltimore Symphony, these have included periods as composer-in-residence at Tanglewood, the Pacific Music Festival, the Aspen Music Festival and, between 2012 and 2015, the New York Philharmonic.

Two decades before that, a commission from the New York Philharmonic precipitated a major turning point in Rouse's career. He composed his Trombone Concerto in 1991 to mark the ensemble's 150th anniversary the following season. That work, which additionally commemorates the death of the Philharmonic's former music director, Leonard Bernstein, received the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 1993.

Starting with his Violin Concerto of 1991, Rouse has written concertos for a gamut of prominent soloists, including flute, cello, percussion, piano,

guitar, oboe, trumpet, organ and, most recently, bassoon. The Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music commissioned Rouse to write his Concerto for Orchestra, which premiered in 2008, near the end of Marin Alsop's 20-year tenure as music director. He dedicated the score to Alsop in honor of the Cabrillo Festival's co-directors, Ellen Primack and Tom Fredericks.

The Concerto for Orchestra approaches the genre from a perspective that differs somewhat from that of Rouse's solo concertos. A collective concerto might sound like an oxymoron because we've been exposed so often to the Romantic legacy of the concerto as the Individual (superhuman soloist) versus Society (the orchestra). Béla Bartók's great Concerto for Orchestra of 1943 opened the door to new ways of thinking about the concerto for later 20th-century composers and beyond — an antidote to this paradigm. Bartók combined his original language with a model that looks back further into the past: to the legacy of the Baroque "concerto grosso," which juxtaposes smaller groupings of instruments against the larger ensemble.

Rouse has frequently addressed his own relationship with the classical tradition as a theme of his music, coming to terms with his sense of what it means to be a successor to the great composers of the past. His Fifth Symphony (recorded two seasons ago by Giancarlo Guerrero and the Nashville Symphony, and to be featured on a forthcoming release with the two works being performed this evening) specifically and forcefully confronts the weighty omnipresence of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, for example. In the Concerto for Orchestra, Rouse in a sense grapples with the paradigm of the concerto genre itself and what it means today.

Rouse has frequently addressed his own relationship with the classical tradition as a theme of his music, coming to terms with his sense of what it means to be a successor to the great composers of the past.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

You might think of this music as a “hyper-concerto” in that the orchestra musicians themselves become the soloists in lieu of a single soloist who steps to the fore and becomes the center of attention. Rouse writes that “each is given passages requiring everything from singing lyricism to challenging virtuosity, and this work is essentially ‘about’ allowing each player a chance to shine.” The virtuosity required is intense, but the whole is much more than the sum of many solo excellences: it is the indefinable, symphonic synergy of the full orchestra.

Many concertos stick to the three-movement design of two fast-ish movements on the outside framing a slower, more song-like middle movement. It’s a template that has proved effective for more than three centuries and seems difficult to improve upon, like a 12-bar blues.

But in this piece, Rouse notes that he wanted move away from that standard and use a different kind of formal construction. The work is divided into “connected halves (the term being used loosely),” he explains. The first half is cast in five relatively short sections of alternating tempos (fast, slow, fast, slow, fast). The fast subparts involve the same musical material and continue to develop it, but the slow ones introduce different material. (The classical form of the rondo, with its contrasting “episodes” between recurrences of the main tune, is somewhat analogous.) For the Concerto’s second half, Rouse envisaged just two sections (slow and fast), where each is “meant to represent a sort of ‘full blossoming’ of the related ideas from their counterparts earlier on.”

The result is a wonderfully colorful and dramatic sequence of contrast and juxtaposition that mingles the principles of the soloist concerto as shared across the ensemble, virtuosity, orchestral lyricism and progressive symphonic development of ideas — all held in a thrilling balance. According

to Rouse, his hope is “to draw the listener in more and more as the work progresse[s], with the final allegro building to a frenzied, almost hysterical, climax.”

The Concerto for Orchestra is scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet (doubling piccolo clarinet), 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 4 percussionists, harp and strings.



PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

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

Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36

Composed: 1876-78

First performance:

February 22, 1878, in Moscow, with Nikolai Rubinstein conducting the Moscow Conservatory Orchestra

First Nashville Symphony performance:

November 25, 1947, at War Memorial Auditorium with Music Director William Strickland

Estimated length: 44 minutes

In remarks about his Fourth Symphony and his desire not to divulge “private meanings,” Christopher Rouse cited the example of Tchaikovsky’s sixth and last symphony (known as the “Pathétique”). “Asked whether listeners would devise the programmatic meaning of [that symphony], Tchaikovsky famously replied, ‘Let them guess.’ ” But in the case of his own Fourth Symphony, the Russian composer made a point to walk through the music using highly descriptive and emotional language for the benefit

The Fourth Symphony was Tchaikovsky's first large-scale work after being taken under the wing of Nadezhda von Meck, a widowed friend and patroness who for years provided the composer with financial, intellectual and moral support for his work.

of Nadezhda von Meck, the friend and patroness to whom he dedicated the score.

Because of that, the Fourth Symphony has come coated with a heavy layer of extra-musical associations since its creation. At the end of 1876, Tchaikovsky was introduced to Meck, a wealthy widow who employed a former student (and likely lover) of the composer, the violinist Iosif Kotek. For years she provided Tchaikovsky with financial, intellectual and moral support for his work. Meck is often portrayed as a positive female counterpart, from the composer's perspective, to the ill-fated young woman (also a former student) whom Tchaikovsky married in 1877 in an unhappy effort to satisfy social appearances and deflect attention from his same-sex liaisons.

The Fourth Symphony was his first large-scale work after being taken under Meck's wing. Tchaikovsky responded to her curiosity about the music that was consuming him with a detailed explication of the role of "Fate," represented at the outset by the fanfare motto of horns and brass. This, he wrote, is "the decisive force that prevents our hopes of happiness from being realized, which watches jealously to see that our bliss and peace are not complete and unclouded..." The idea of a darkly ominous, inescapable "Fate" — as a character in the drama, as well as a musical presence — returns with obsessive frequency in the last three of Tchaikovsky's numbered symphonies and in the underrated Manfred Symphony.

At the same time, Tchaikovsky's various musical images for "Fate" are notably varied and different. Both his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies open with motifs routinely described as representations of some kind of destiny, and these come back onto the scene at significant moments, enhancing the sense of unity in each work. In the Fifth, the motif is quietly brooding and circular, while it peals out like a blazing announcement of Judgment Day at the start of the

Fourth. The point here is that, while concepts like "Fate" and "happiness" can help us find our way in complex musical structures — and the Fourth is a real epic — we shouldn't let them limit what we experience as we listen. Nor should we try to translate such warm-blooded music into a one-size-fits-all scenario or biographical commentary.

As Tchaikovsky wrote in a letter to fellow composer Sergei Taneyev: "This program is such that it cannot be formulated in words. Should not [a symphony] express everything for which there are no words, but which the soul wishes to express, and which requires to be expressed?" Tchaikovsky goes on to suggest a parallel musical program, which is that the Fourth "rests on a foundation that is nearly the same" as that of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony — a work widely regarded as an expression of the struggle with fate.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Of the work's four movements, the first is the most complex in design. Following the opening unison blast from horns and trumpets (for the sake of shorthand, the "Fate" motto), the main theme steals in on the strings with unexpected stealth. It wheels in a dotted rhythm that Tchaikovsky exploits masterfully, at times taking on the guise of a ghostly waltz. In place of German-style development of pithy motifs, Tchaikovsky turns to the looser, almost "cinematic" processes of association familiar from the tone poem to maximize a sense of dramatic conflict. In this way, he juxtaposes various thematic ideas, even if the movement as a whole articulates the skeleton of classical sonata form: exposition — development — recapitulation. The introductory "Fate" motto recurs as a structural cue for these basic components.

We've been through an exhaustive emotional journey already by the close of the first movement.

Tchaikovsky therefore treats us to a pair of dreamlike interludes in the ensuing two movements, but each is distinct in character. The Andantino's main melody, first played by the oboe, is notable for the melodic invention Tchaikovsky sustains using nothing but eighth notes, while his woodwind counterpoints are reminiscent of the nuanced orchestration of the first movement. Unison strings introduce an archaic atmosphere flavored by memories of Old Russia. The Scherzo is a tour-de-force that exploits the acoustic possibilities of the string band playing pizzicato. Meanwhile, Tchaikovsky incorporates colorful contrasts using balletic blocks of chirping woodwinds and staccato brass chords.

And then the finale crashes on the scene with an exuberant outburst — a new awakening? Tchaikovsky has already, if surreptitiously, prepared us for this surprise. The music billows

in a pattern of descending scales, foreshadowed in the Scherzo. The simplicity of the folk tune on which the finale is based makes it highly versatile. Tchaikovsky embroiders it with festive, thrillingly high-speed scales and cymbal crashes, but also flashes of angst to darken the picture. For the first time since the end of the opening movement, the “Fate” motto comes back at full force. Only this time, the orchestra simply sets it aside, almost as a non sequitur, and carries on to the finish in a spirit of unbridled optimism.

Tchaikovsky scores the Symphony No. 4 for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbals, bass drum and strings.

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

