TCHAIKOVSKY'S FIFTH

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, AT 7 PM
FRIDAY & SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13 & 14, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*
GARRICK OHLSSON, *piano*

ADOLPHUS HAILSTORK
An American Port of Call* - *10 minutes

SAMUEL BARBER
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 38 - *26 minutes*
I. Allegro appassionato
II. Canzone
III. Allegro molto

Garrick Ohlsson, piano

– INTERMISSION –

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY
Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64 - *44 minutes*
I. Andante – Allegro con anima
II. Andante cantabile con alcuna licenza
III. Valse: Allegro moderato
IV. Finale: Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace

This concert will run 1 hour and 55 minutes, including a 20-minute intermission.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Maestro Guerrero and the Nashville Symphony present composers whose search for a voice is bound up with issues of cultural identity. We begin with two American masters whose music manifests a sensibility rooted in what Adolphus Hailstork calls "the singing line." Hailstork offers musical reflections on urban life and energy in *An American Port of Call*. Samuel Barber grafted his warmly lyrical voice to the tradition of Russian piano style in his only concerto for that instrument, winning one of the greatest victories of his career. Russian music itself is the focus of the second half of the program. Tchaikovsky sought to balance influences from the European mainstream with distinctively Russian impulses. With his epic Fifth Symphony, he created a masterpiece that has become one of the models of the genre.

ADOLPHUS HAILSTORK

An American Port of Call

Born on April 17, 1941,
in Rochester, N.Y.

Currently resides in
Virginia Beach, VA

Composed:
1984

Estimated length:
10 minutes

First performance:
1985, by the
Virginia Symphony Orchestra

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

"The line to me is a new Americanism, harking back to the early '40s based on folk patterns of the African American," Adolphus Hailstork observed in a 2003 interview by Bill Banfield surveying 40 important African-American composers. As a boy growing up in Albany, Hailstork first played the violin, and he also studied piano and organ, but the voice more than anything else provided him with the urge to express himself through music, thanks to his involvement in the cathedral choir. "My fundamental approach to music is lyrical, because I came up as a singer," he points out. "The vocal line, the singing line, is absolutely fundamental to my artistry."

In the 1960s, Hailstork's studies took him to Howard University, the Manhattan School of Music (with David Diamond), and a summer with the legendary Nadia Boulanger in France (who decades before had also mentored a young Samuel Barber, as well as several generations of American composers). After service in the U.S. Army in Germany, he completed his doctorate degree at Michigan State University. Hailstork has devoted many years to teaching and in 2000 began his tenure as Professor and Eminent Scholar at the Old Dominion University School of Music.

Hailstork's musical language, which is warmly lyrical, tonal, pulsing with energy, and often driven by narrative, reflects what he has described as "a double cultural experience, that of my standard European-oriented education and that of my ethnic heritage." His oeuvre encompasses a rich range of genres, from songs and piano pieces to chamber pieces, choral music, tone poems, symphonies and other orchestral works. He has also written operas exploring American poets (*Paul Laurence Dunbar: Common Ground*), black cowboys in the Wild West (*Joshua's Boots*), and the Underground Railroad hero John Parker (*Rise for Freedom*).

Recalling to Banfield that he was taught nothing about African-American composers during his own education, Hailstork observed that "we need to create our own repertoire, and after we've created our sonatas, tone poems, symphonies and whatever else we may invent….we would have created a black canon…. You see, we were left out of the American school of composition…in the '20s… or the '40s of Copland. Now it's time to make our own impact and to add to the American repertoire, and that should include us."

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Possibly Hailstork's best-known orchestral score, *An American Port of Call* resulted from a commission in the mid-1980s from the Virginia Symphony Orchestra to write an independent concert overture. While he relies on a conventional classical form that presents contrasting ideas, considers them from varying angles, and reintroduces them with fresh vigor, Hailstork brings a distinctive personality and energy to his material.

The immediate point of departure was his inspiration observing "the great port of Norfolk, Virginia, where I live." Hailstork's vibrant orchestration and well-judged contrasts convey his vision of "the strident (and occasionally tender and even mysterious) energy of a busy American port city." An American Port of Call takes its place with other enthralling American orchestral landscapes that blend an open-hearted, optimistic depiction of modern life with touches of poetic reminiscence.

An American Port of Call *is scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 3 percussionists, piano and strings.*

SAMUEL BARBER

Piano Concerto, Op. 38

Born on March 9, 1910, in West Chester, Pennsylvania

Died on January 23, 1981, in New York City

Composed:
1959-1962

Estimated length:
26 minutes

First performance:
September 24, 1962, at the new Lincoln Center in New York, with John Browning as the soloist and Erich Leinsdorf conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra

First Nashville Symphony performance:
January 20 & 21, 1964, with music director Willis Page and soloist John Browning

Like Hailstork, Samuel Barber was guided by a profoundly lyrical sensibility enhanced by meticulous craftsmanship. While he remained out of step with the modernist revolution that swept across the classical music world, Barber succeeded in earning a position among the most admired and performed living composers in the West during his lifetime. His status among American composers was in several respects comparable to that of Aaron Copland.

In retrospect, what some observers criticized as Barber's overly "conservative" outlook turned out to herald a dramatic reassessment of musical values from the past. This reassessment crystalized after Barber's death with the emergence of the "neo-Romantic" movement, which continues to unfold among composers open to an eclectic spectrum of influences.

Barber's Piano Concerto dates from the very height of his career, and its spectacular reception further boosted his eminence. In

1963, the year after its premiere, the new work garnered Barber his second Pulitzer Prize in Music (the first had been for his opera *Vanessa*). To date, only three other composers have won more than one Pulitzer for music.

The catalyst for the Piano Concerto was a commission to mark the 100th anniversary of Barber's publisher, G. Schirmer, which was founded in the U.S. in 1861 by a German-born immigrant. As its prize composer at the time, Barber was given the honor of the commission. The premiere was also a much-noted occasion because it took place during the opening month of the newly built Lincoln Center concert hall (now known as Geffen Hall). It must have been a moment to savor amid overshadowing Cold War fears — less than a month later, the Cuban Missile Crisis caused the world to shudder. Ironically, another Lincoln Center commission — Barber's grand opera *Antony and Cleopatra*, which he wrote for the opening of the new Metropolitan Opera House four years later — turned into a crushing fiasco that largely derailed his career.

The Piano Concerto is Barber's third and final fully solo orchestral concerto, following his still popular Violin Concerto (1939) and unfairly neglected Cello Concerto (1945). Before receiving the commission, he already had it in mind to write a piece for the American virtuoso John Browning (1933-2003). Barber had first encountered Browning, a fellow student of Rosina Lhévinne, along with his peer Van Cliburn, in a performance of music by Rachmaninoff, traces of whose piano concerto style are apparent in this score.

Thanks to Lhévinne — who also numbers among the teachers of this evening's soloist, Garrick Ohlsson — Browning was shaped by the aesthetic of the Old Russian School of piano playing. As a result, Barber consciously set out to customize the solo part to the Russian School, which was also exemplified by Vladimir Horowitz, who had premiered the composer's exceedingly difficult Piano Sonata in 1950. Browning became a prodigious champion of the Piano Concerto over the decades and performed the Nashville premiere less than two years after its world premiere in New York; he also made two acclaimed recordings of the work.

"I write what I feel. I'm not a self-conscious composer," Barber recalled much later. Still, he faced some blocks in completing the Piano Concerto. Horowitz (according to Browning) suggested revising some unreasonably demanding passages in the finale, the movement that gave Barber the most trouble. Personal grief over the death of his sister delayed concentration on this capstone. So did obligations as a cultural ambassador — Barber was invited to the Soviet Union to attend a meeting there. As a result, he completed the finale only two weeks before the premiere date. Browning's triumph is all the more remarkable in view of the solo part's extreme hurdles.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Barber wrote his Piano Concerto largely with the great late-Romantic models in mind (think Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff), but he touches on a more daringly "up-to-date" harmonic language and spikier rhythmic patterns as well, with clear influences from Prokofiev, especially in the last movement. Impulses from American jazz are additionally present. As biographer Barbara B. Heyman observes, Barber combined such traits with "a typically American directness and simplicity."

The first movement — lasting as long as the other two combined — opens with the pianist giving a call to attention in a solo passage. This presents three basic musical ideas, including two important rhythmic motifs. We're already a bit in before the orchestra intervenes with the actual main theme. Barber has both the orchestra and piano continually develop

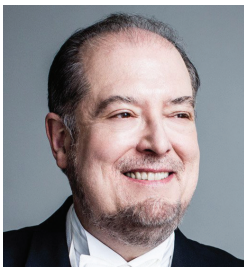
these ideas — in dialogue, in solo moments for the ensemble (with the oboe presenting a second, songlike theme), and in intricate solo cadenzas for the piano. At first, Barber wrote a subdued ending, but he allowed the conductor Erich Leinsdorf to talk him into replacing it with a more standard dramatic declaration.

Along with its brilliant pianism, the Concerto shows off Barber's exceptional lyrical gifts, most notably in the slow movement. Titled Canzone, it reworks an earlier piece for flute and piano that he had composed for one of his lovers, the German flutist Manfred Ibel, to whom Barber dedicated the Piano Concerto. The piano figurations, in dialogue with muted strings, are especially beguiling here.

The rousing character of the finale makes it hard to imagine that Barber had encountered any sort of creative block at this point. Its jagged, pounding rhythmic contour (in 5/8 meter) recalls both jazz syncopation and the aggressive character of Prokofiev's Seventh Piano Sonata from 1942. Barber sends his themes crashing, tempest-tossed, over a repeating gesture in the bass. Contrasting moments for solo clarinet and flutes, trombones and harp promise relief, but the powerful repetitive figure keeps coming back.

In addition to solo piano, the Concerto is scored for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, antique cymbals, tam-tam, tom-tom (low), triangle, xylophone, whip, harp and strings.

ABOUT THE SOLOIST



GARRICK OHLSSON

piano

Since his triumph as winner of the 1970 Chopin International Piano Competition, pianist Garrick Ohlsson has established himself worldwide as a musician of magisterial interpretive and technical prowess. Although long regarded as one of the world's leading exponents of the music of Frédéric Chopin, Ohlsson commands an enormous repertoire, which ranges over the entire piano literature. A student of the late Claudio Arrau, he has come to be noted for his masterly performances of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, as well as the Romantic repertoire. To date he has at his command more than 80 concertos, ranging from Haydn and Mozart to works of the 21st century, many commissioned for him.

This season Ohlsson launches an ambitious project spread over two seasons exploring the complete solo piano works of Brahms in four different programs. The cycle will be heard in New York, San Francisco and Montréal, with individual programs in London, Warsaw and cities across North America. In concerto repertoire ranging from Beethoven to Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Barber and Busoni, he will return to the New York Philharmonic; The Cleveland Orchestra; and the Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Houston and Seattle symphonies. He will conclude the season in Indianapolis with all the Rachmaninoff concerti programmed in one weekend.

An avid chamber musician, Ohlsson has collaborated with the Cleveland, Emerson and Tokyo string quartets, and in the spring he will tour with the Takacs Quartet and the Boston Chamber Players to Istanbul, Berlin, Munich, Warsaw, Luxembourg and Prague. Together with violinist Jorja Fleezanis and cellist Michael Grebanier, he is a founding member of the San Francisco-based FOG Trio. Passionate about singing and singers, Ohlsson has appeared in recital with such legendary artists as Magda Olivero, Jessye Norman and Ewa Podles.

Ohlsson can be heard on the Arabesque, RCA Victor Red Seal, Angel, BMG, Delos, Hänssler, Nonesuch, Telarc, Hyperion and Virgin Classics labels. His 10-disc set of the complete Beethoven Sonatas, for Bridge Records, has garnered critical acclaim, including a GRAMMY® for Vol. 3. Most recently on Hyperion are Scriabin's *Complete Poèmes*, Smetana's Czech Dances, and études by Debussy, Bartok and Prokofiev. The latest CDs in his ongoing association with Bridge Records are the Complete Scriabin Sonatas; Close Connections, a recital of 20th-century pieces; and two CDs of works by Liszt.

A native of White Plains, N.Y., Ohlsson began his piano studies at age 8 at the Westchester Conservatory of Music; at 13, he entered The Juilliard School in New York City. His musical development has been influenced by a succession of distinguished teachers, most notably Claudio Arrau, Olga Barabini, Tom Lishman, Sascha Gorodnitzki, Rosina Lhévinne and Irma Wolpe. He was awarded the Avery Fisher Prize in 1994 and received the 1998 University Musical Society Distinguished Artist Award in Ann Arbor. He is also the 2014 recipient of the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance from the Northwestern University Bienen School of Music.

Ohlsson is a Steinway Artist and makes his home in San Francisco.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

Born on May 7, 1840,
in Votkinsk, Russia

Died on November 6, 1893,
in Saint Petersburg, Russia

Composed:
May-August
1888

Estimated length:
44 minutes

First performance:
November 17, 1888, in
St. Petersburg, with the
composer conducting

First Nashville Symphony performance:
December 12, 1950,
with Music Director
William Strickland

As with the two American composers on the first half of this program, Tchaikovsky's search for a voice was bound up with issues of cultural identity — of finding the right balance between influences from the dominant European mainstream and, in his distinctly Russian context, staking out a cultural space independent of the traditions of German art music and its forms.

The genre of the symphony in particular remained deeply associated with Austro-German norms and so was of little interest to the more radical composers like Modest Mussorgsky who sought an authentic Russian voice within uniquely Russian cultural traditions. Tchaikovsky managed to address this issue by fusing his training in Western models with a sensibility for Russian folk music. "Tchaikovsky displays the rapprochement of Russian individuality with this proudest of Western genres," the biographer Roland John Wiley writes of his approach to the symphony.

The Russian composer's first three symphonies teem with charms of their own, but with the epic scale of his Fourth Symphony (1878), he achieved a giant leap forward — in terms of technique and personal expression alike. For his Fourth, Tchaikovsky supplied an elaborate program detailing the "content" of each movement that focused on the idea of Fate, as symbolized by the fanfare that blazes at the outset. For the benefit of his patroness Nadezhda von Meck, he wrote that this musical idea represents "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 most programmatic of all his symphonies, the unnumbered *Manfred* Symphony followed next, in 1885. The work was based on Lord Byron's poetic drama about the tragic fate of its doomed hero, who wanders alone among the Alps like the Flying Dutchman, desperate to end the suffering that is his life.

While sometimes approached as yet another example of Tchaikovsky's preoccupation with the power of "Fate," the Fifth Symphony is a unique achievement that, like its two predecessors, stands apart on its own terms. Each of these symphonies sets off on an entirely different journey, establishing a vastly different soundscape in the process. Contrast the opening measures of the Fifth Symphony, for example, which

intone one instance of a "Fate" motif, with the Judgment Day summons from the horns that launches the Fourth. The Fifth presents a slow, brooding introduction of tentative melancholy and is utterly unlike that frightening outburst, with its echo of Beethoven's Fifth (itself widely regarded as an expression of the struggle with fate).

To better understand Tchaikovsky's own Fifth Symphony, it's worth recalling another statement he made about his Fourth — in this case, to his 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 composed his Fifth Symphony at great speed, between May and August 1888. It occupies something of a middle ground between his earlier confessional approach and his later impulse to be secretive. He supplied a minimal description in his working notebook, suggesting that the opening motto represents "complete resignation before Fate." As for the Sixth Symphony (*Pathétique*), the composer gave this famous response to queries about its programmatic meaning: "Let them guess." The "Fate" motto in the Fifth recurs at significant moments throughout the work, echoing a structural ploy that has its origins in the Romantic experiments of Hector Berlioz in his *Symphonie fantastique* and in Franz Liszt's tone poems.

The sound world of the Fifth Symphony is one of maximal contrasts and theatrical climaxes, along with vibrant instrumental coloring. It relies on Tchaikovsky's mature craftsmanship in his use of the orchestra. So much so, that it's easy to set aside all programmatic considerations and experience this music as a study in instrumental textures, proportions and rhythms. Subdued palettes, moments of balletic grace and violent outbursts alternate throughout the score.

"The sound world of the Fifth Symphony is one of maximal contrasts and theatrical climaxes, along with vibrant instrumental coloring, and it relies on Tchaikovsky's mature craftsmanship in his use of the orchestra."

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The slow introduction has a clear kinship with the main theme of the Allegro con anima first movement, which is shaped as a lilting dotted rhythm and is first entrusted to clarinets and bassoons. A close listening reveals that the introductory music shares some features with this theme. After laying out a profusion of ideas, Tchaikovsky ends the first section with a thrilling climax that restores focus.

This exuberant outburst is like a prematurely optimistic protest against the resignation with which the movement opened — a ploy Tchaikovsky will introduce again in the Fifth's closing measures. Just as we seem poised for a fully orchestrated restatement of the theme in the coda, the volume dims and the texture darkens into a kind of anticlimax, as if to indicate a hopeless circle being traced back to the brooding depths where we began. This is an unexpected exit. It in turn foreshadows the even more radical anticlimax of despair in the *Pathétique* Symphony.

The Andante begins with another variation on the deep melancholy of the opening. Tunesmiths from the 1930s crafted a popular

hit out of this melody, which suggests a gently amorous nocturne. A counter-theme, first presented as a call-and-response by oboe and horn, almost imperceptibly enters into the picture as well. About halfway through, the fate theme stealthily returns, only to erupt with full power in the brass. It later returns with brutal violence. The lyrical music becomes fragmented, unable to recapture its original serene glow.

In the third movement, instead of a scherzo proper, Tchaikovsky explores a dreamy sensibility, spinning it out in the manner of one of his characteristic waltzes. This music introduces a disarming naïveté that looks ahead to Mahler's symphonic universe. In comparison with the length of the other three movements, the Valse's brevity underscores the fleeting nature of this respite — a wistful reprieve. We are nearly lulled to the point of not noticing the understated appearance of the fate theme as it steals in near the very end. Against the plucked strings' waltz, it appears in low, dark colors.

The finale mirrors the same overall structure as the first movement, with a slow introduction leading to the main movement, but here the anticlimactic ending is reversed by a triumphant breakthrough. In the introduction, the fate theme is pronounced with majestic, major-key bravado. With some help from the timpani, this segues into an Allegro vivace of breathtaking energy in which the fate theme periodically emerges. Finally, after a notorious "false" stop several minutes before the end, the music courses ahead in a rush of frenzied, joyful abandon.

This seems to replay the trusted minor-to-major paradigm of struggle leading to spiritual enlightenment — the paradigm established by Beethoven in his Fifth Symphony, which moves from C minor to an overwhelmingly affirmative C major. But has unequivocal victory *really* been achieved? In the very last measures, Tchaikovsky even revives the main theme of the first movement, also now steel-plated harmonically in E major, and adds a pompous rhetorical flourish, as if to underscore "The End."

There's at least a hint of irony, of protesting too much — perhaps foreshadowing Shostakovich's strategy in his own Fifth Symphony. Tchaikovsky, in any case, voiced his doubts about the effectiveness of this ending. In his next, and final, symphony, he would reverse its apparent optimism with music of inescapable doom.

The Fifth Symphony is scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.

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