



# PROKOFIEV'S ROMEO & JULIET

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, JANUARY 10 & 11, AT 8 PM

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12, AT 2 PM

## NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

JOANN FALLETTA, *conductor*

YULIANNA AVDEEVA, *piano*

### MAURICE RAVEL

*La Valse* - **12 minutes**

### FRANZ LISZT

*Concerto No. 1 in E-flat Major for Piano and Orchestra* - **19 minutes**

Allegro maestoso

Quasi adagio - Allegretto vivace

Allegro marziale animato

**Yulianna Avdeeva, piano**

- **INTERMISSION** -

### SERGEI PROKOFIEV

*Suite from Romeo and Juliet, Op. 64bis, Op.64ter* - **38 minutes**

The Montagues and Capulets

Young Girl Juliet

Dance

Friar Laurence

Masks

Romeo and Juliet Before Parting

The Death of Tybalt

Dance of Antilles Girls

Romeo at the Grave of Juliet

*This concert will last one hour and 50 minutes,  
including a 20-minute intermission.*

*This concert will be recorded live for future broadcast.*

*Please keep noise to a minimum to ensure the highest-quality recording.*

## PROGRAM SUMMARY

“At the close of World War I, Maurice Ravel recorded...the violent death of the 19th-century world,” cultural historian Carl Schorske writes of *La Valse*. “The waltz, the symbol of gay Vienna, became in the composer’s hands a frantic *danse macabre*.” Although Ravel himself denied any reference to a “dance of death” or a symbolic depiction of a civilization’s demise, *La Valse* is one of his most fascinating and daring scores.

Ravel’s initial dramatic idea for the ballet version of *La Valse* was to set it in 1855. This was the very year in which Franz Liszt, an archetypal Romantic, presented his First Piano Concerto. Liszt came to fame as a prodigy virtuoso who stirred up a wave of hysterical adulation, coined *Lisztomania*, with his feats at the keyboard. But his First Piano Concerto goes beyond such grandstand performances and turns the genre into a synthesis of the virtuoso concerto with the organically unified symphony.

Like Liszt, Sergei Prokofiev remade his image. The former bad boy of music, who escaped to the West in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, decided to return to his homeland, just as Stalin was cracking down on fellow composers like Shostakovich. Prokofiev believed he had developed a new style more accessible to the common people – a style he called the “New Simplicity.” It was through such works as his ballet score *Romeo and Juliet* that he perfected this new approach, with results that continue to cast a spell over audiences today.

## MAURICE RAVEL

### *La Valse*

Born on March 7, 1875,  
in Ciboure, France

Died on December 28, 1937,  
in Paris

**Composed:**  
1919-20

**Estimated  
length:**  
12 minutes



#### **First performance:**

December 12, 1920, in Paris, with  
Camille Chevillard conducting  
the Lamoureux Orchestra

#### **First Nashville Symphony performance:**

February 18, 1958, with music  
director Guy Taylor

**A**fter World War I, Serge Diaghilev commissioned Maurice Ravel to write another ballet for his company in Paris — having previously collaborated with the French composer for *Daphnis et Chloé*. Ravel returned to a piece he had started at least more than a decade before, in which he intended to pay tribute to the Viennese waltz of the 19th century.

After Ravel completed the orchestral score in 1920 — having also prepared a two-piano

version that was, appropriately, premiered in Vienna — Diaghilev turned it down on the grounds that it was more “the portrait of a ballet” than an actual ballet. For that reason, the full orchestral score was first heard as part of a concert, though Ravel later collaborated with another choreographer, Ida Rubinstein, who produced both *La Valse* and *Boléro* as ballets.

The biographer Arbie Orenstein observes that “the motif of death recurs insistently in

[Ravel's] oeuvre." The composer described *La Valse* as "a sort of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz, mingled with...the impression of a fantastic, fatal whirling."

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

In *La Valse*, Ravel radically reimagines the associations conjured by the waltz. The profound cataclysm of World War I had imbued the popular dance with an unexpected, haunting resonance. Even if the widespread interpretation of this music as a metaphor for the breakdown of faith in European civilization was not his intention, contemporary composer George Benjamin argues that the score's "one-movement design plots the birth, decay and destruction of a musical genre."

Ravel envisioned this music to accompany the originally intended ballet, whose scenario he described as follows: "Swirling clouds afford glimpses, through rifts, of waltzing couples. The clouds scatter little by little; one can distinguish an immense hall with a whirling crowd. The scene grows progressively brighter. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth at the

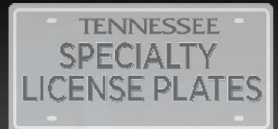
fortissimo. An imperial court, about 1855."

Ravel exploits the most refined technical means in his treatment of harmony, rhythmic accents, dynamics, timbres and even allusions to the musical past to weave what he described as a choreographic poem for orchestra. Opening with the mysterious, indeterminate sound of muted double basses, the piece also calls to mind the suddenly varying perspectives of cinema. Strains of various waltzes shift in and out of focus.

Midway through, an apparent quotation of the rhythmic motto of the Scherzo from Beethoven's Ninth intrudes with primal force. What we might have expected as a recapitulation filters all that has gone before through a strange new lens, and the circling momentum of the waltz collapses in violent entropy.

*Ravel's score calls for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (triangle, tambourine, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum, castanets, tam-tam, glockenspiel, crotales), 2 harps and strings.*

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# FRANZ LISZT

## Concerto No. 1 in E-flat Major for Piano and Orchestra

Born on October 22, 1811,  
in Raiding, Hungary

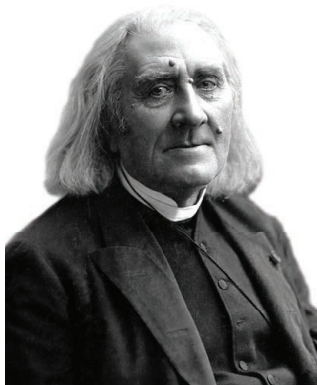
Died on July 31, 1886,  
in Bayreuth, Germany

### Composed:

1830-1853;  
revised 1855-56

### Estimated length:

19 minutes



### First performance:

February 17, 1855, with Liszt as  
the soloist and Hector Berlioz  
conducting the Weimar Court  
Orchestra

### First Nashville Symphony performance:

March 5, 1957, with soloist  
Eugene List and music director  
Guy Taylor

The search for extreme experience that transcends the ordinary is a cornerstone of Romanticism. With his astounding virtuosity and his declaration that the piano represented “the microcosm of music,” Franz Liszt embodied this worldview. His feats whipped up a frenzied, hysterical response from audiences — famously coined “Lisztomania” by the poet Heinrich Heine. Over a century later, the director Ken Russell borrowed the term to title his 1975 film starring The Who’s Roger Daltrey as the amorous musical hero.

Capable of transforming his instrument into a veritable orchestra and playing whole programs from memory, Liszt even titled one series of fiercely difficult piano pieces *Transcendental Études*. And the influence of his pianism spread far and wide. Take Ravel: though he is often characterized as quintessentially French, several of his piano works show inspiration from Liszt, the Hungarian purveyor (along with his son-in-law Richard Wagner) of the so-called “New German School.”

Ironically, it was not until Liszt had retired from his career as a touring virtuoso soloist that his two concertos for the instrument took final shape. These works are vintage products of the years when Liszt determined to focus on his mission as a composer and a guru to a

new generation of composers. Thus the long revision process before he felt ready to unveil the First Piano Concerto, whose first inspiration dates back to 1830, when he was 19. By 1834, Liszt had finished a preliminary version, but he remained unsatisfied and never performed it, opting in 1839 to begin a wholesale rewrite, which proceeded in fits and starts alongside his numerous other projects for another decade and a half. He was by then also working on his Second Piano Concerto as well as many other pieces for solo piano and orchestra, such as the marvelous *Totentanz*, inspired by the “dance of death” depicted on a medieval Italian fresco. A little over three decades ago, archives revealed remnants of a third piano concerto that Liszt never completed.

The long gestation of the First Piano Concerto helps explain the disparate identities embedded in this work. Liszt the virtuoso superhero coexists with the avant-garde composer striving to evolve novel compositional techniques. While he was working on the final form of this concerto, Liszt developed further his more radical concept of the orchestral symphonic poem. Wagner declared that purely orchestral music was a dead end and that the path of the future demanded a breakdown of established genres and artistic disciplines to create a new, text-based synthesis of music



and drama. Even though he was an advocate of Wagner's music, Liszt pursued his own vision of the "music of the future" in these wordless symphonic poems.

Using his idea of what he called "thematic transformation," Liszt evolved a forward-looking technique for his instrumental works. The transformation in question goes far beyond the conventional process of theme and variations. It involves the subtle reworking and development of a small set of thematic ideas to generate the musical substance of a work. The very character of the theme itself can be heard to change as it is presented in varying contexts.

Such thematic transformation has some kinship with the "idée fixe" or obsessive (musical) idea that Berlioz developed in his *Symphonie fantastique*. It was actually Berlioz who conducted the world premiere of the First Piano Concerto, as part of a Berlioz Festival that Liszt had organized in Weimar, where he was serving as the court's music director. The year of the premiere, 1855, is, incidentally, the same year Ravel imagined as the setting for his original scenario for *La Valse*.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**T**hough it lacks the kinds of programmatic associations with an outside literary text or work of art that are an essential feature of symphonic poems, the First Piano Concerto shares with them the concern for organic unity. Thus, like Liszt's great Piano Sonata in B minor from the early 1850s, the Concerto contains multiple movements that are interconnected and played as a single vast movement, with only brief pauses to separate them. Viewed independently, the Concerto's four movements suggest the outline of a symphony: an opening *Allegro maestoso*, a slow movement, a Scherzo and a finale. Liszt's writing throughout does not stint on virtuoso demands. But such displays are integrated within the innovative design — *concerto symphonique* was one of his preferred

terms for this type of piece, implying a synthesis of concerto and symphony.

The concept of thematic transformation drives the entire work. Liszt introduces the main thematic idea in rawest form right at the start: an imperious seven-note motto stated by the string body, followed by a curt two-note response from the woodwinds. Liszt — or, more likely, his champion Hans von Bülow — jokingly fit words to this motto mocking the composer's critics: *Das versteht ihr alle nicht, haha!* ("Not a single one of you gets it, haha!")

It is fascinating to trace Liszt's transformations — in timbre, mood, interaction and so on — of this tight chromatic motto. From its first entrance, the pianist intensifies it into a dazzling mini-cadenza, for example, which then takes shape as a melancholy duet with solo clarinet, another major protagonist in this work. The slow movement is closer in spirit to Italian bel canto singing. (If your ear conjures Chopin during this movement, recall that this form of opera was an abiding inspiration to him as well.) In the Scherzo section, Liszt's use of the triangle stirred controversy — not just from conservative critics, but even from Wagner, who complained to Liszt's daughter (and, later, Wagner's wife) Cosima about its "vulgarity."

Music from preceding sections is continually rethreaded into the fabric, with the spirited finale providing a summation. In its final pages, Liszt supplies a coda of assertive, even manic energy — as if wrapping up an ordinary virtuoso concerto rather than the unusual vision to which we have just been made witnesses.

*In addition to solo piano, the First Concerto is scored for 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, cymbals, triangle and strings.*

# SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Suite from *Romeo and Juliet*

Born on April 23, 1891, in  
Sontsovska, Ukraine (part of the  
Russian Empire at the time)

Died on March 5, 1953,  
in Moscow

## Composed:

1935

(complete ballet)

## Estimated length:

38 minutes



## First performance:

The complete ballet was first performed on December 30, 1938, in Brno (part of what was then Czechoslovakia). The first two Concert Suites were premiered before the ballet: November 24, 1936, in Moscow (Suite No. 1) and April 15, 1937, in Leningrad (Suite No. 2).

## First Nashville Symphony performance:

October 12-14, 1978, with music director Michael Charry

**S**ergei Prokofiev emerged as one of the icons of early 20th-century Modernism. He cultivated this image while living a life of voluntary exile from his Russian homeland in the 1920s, first trying (without much success) to conquer the United States and then moving around Paris and other parts of Western Europe. But after nearly two decades abroad in the West, Prokofiev longed to return to Russia, which of course was a vastly different place under Stalin's control.

Soviet authorities sweetened the allure for the nomadic composer by ensuring special privileges, such as a roomy Moscow apartment and permission to keep his beloved blue Ford as private property. The ballet *Romeo and Juliet* originated during this period and was an undertaking of enormous importance, since it would mark Prokofiev's first major work specifically intended for the Soviet stage. And so in 1936 a "prodigal son" came back to the socialist paradise. But in January of that year, *Pravda's* notorious attack on the young Dmitri Shostakovich signaled an ominous change. His offense? Daring to write "Formalist" music (in other words, in a style deemed insufficiently accessible). The official reprimand foreshadowed a long-lasting era of harshly repressive cultural politics which discouraged innovation.

On his own, Prokofiev had begun to turn

away from his former avant-garde stance in favor of what he called a "new simplicity." By this he meant a stylistic direction that avoided novelty for the sake of novelty but, at the same time, was not merely a return to "old-fashioned" forms and ideas. The ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, which Prokofiev composed in the white heat of inspiration during the summer of 1935, brims with the newfound lyricism and directness of this "new simplicity" and remains one of Prokofiev's best-loved achievements.

For the scenario, he collaborated with the adventurous director Sergei Radlov, who had introduced important avant-garde works in the years just after the Bolshevik Revolution (including *The Love for Three Oranges*, Prokofiev's operatic mating of *commedia dell'arte* with Surrealism). Together, they tailored Shakespeare's play into a ballet of 52 mostly brief scenes. The biographer Harlow Robinson notes that this fleetingly episodic, "montage-like dramatic structure" likely was inspired by Prokofiev's recent forays into film music.

The original Prokofiev/Radlov scenario, however, devised a "happy ending" simply by altering the timing of Romeo's return in the tomb scene — possibly a politically cautious bow to the doctrine of "Socialist Realism," with its insistence on conveying an optimistic, upbeat tone. But Prokofiev came to realize

that his music contradicted this false happy ending — how could the strains of “Romeo at the Tomb of Juliet” do otherwise? — and Shakespeare’s tragic conclusion was restored.

As it turned out, internal developments *did* interfere with the reception of *Romeo and Juliet*. In the tense aftermath of the Shostakovich affair, the Bolshoi Theater broke its contract to produce the premiere. The dancers complained about the difficulties of negotiating Prokofiev’s complex meters. What later earned recognition as a great classic of the Soviet era and of the last century in general was thus initially staged *outside* the Soviet Union — in Brno (in what was then Czechoslovakia), in 1938. This was an abridged version in just one act, and Prokofiev was not allowed to attend. But it proved to be a great triumph.

Meanwhile, Prokofiev fashioned two orchestral suites so he could present his music to the Russian public in the concert hall. He also prepared a piano suite called *Ten Pieces for Piano*. The belated Soviet premiere of the ballet occurred on January 11, 1940, at the Kirov Theater in Leningrad and actually won the composer a Stalin Prize. Prokofiev introduced a third suite in 1946 as well. The complete ballet score itself runs close to three hours in duration.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**M**any conductors have responded to the challenge of representing the essence of *Romeo and Juliet* by devising their own arrangements, mixing and matching excerpts from the three suites. For this performance, guest conductor JoAnn Falletta has selected nine numbers from Suites 1 and 2.

The darkly ominous “Montagues and Capulets” (Suite 2, No. 1) centers on the prideful strutting of the “Dance of the Knights” from the first act; perhaps the score’s most famous number, this piece sets up the violent context in which this young love so improbably, and yet so inevitably, blossoms. Prokofiev

deftly portrays the innocence of Juliet, while the tenderness shared between her and Romeo never falters into cheap sentimentality. The music of the ball where they meet evokes Prokofiev’s neoclassical vein.

The more consciously “populist” style Prokofiev adopts does not prevent him from introducing harsh dissonances or surprising tonal shifts. He cleverly contrasts his portrayal of the humble, trustworthy Friar Laurence — the kindhearted Franciscan who hopes to make lasting peace by joining the two in marriage — with the decorous passion of the lovers. The score’s most incandescent lyricism is reserved for the lengthy balcony scene, as the winds chirp like a celestial clock for the lovers who want time to stand still. After Mercutio is fatally wounded in his duel with Tybalt, Romeo fatefully seeks to avenge him and slays Tybalt in a scene of blood-curdling, violent emotion that anticipates aspects of *West Side Story*. The so-called “Dance of the Antilles Girls” — Juliet’s servants — refers to a passage that is not found in Shakespeare but somehow made its way into the Russian treatment.

At the conclusion of this Suite, we discover Romeo at Juliet’s tomb. Here Prokofiev takes advantage of music’s unique capacity to summon memories in an instant, bringing out the inconsolable sadness of the encounter. Unlike the ironic poses of his earlier experimental years, the composer remains directly invested in the feelings being evoked onstage — and in the primacy of that experience, made present through his economical use of leitmotifs and richly satisfying orchestration.

*The Romeo and Juliet Suite is scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, cornet, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, celesta and strings.*

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

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS



**JO ANN  
FALLETTA**  
conductor

**G**RAMMY®-winning conductor JoAnn

Falletta serves as music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, principal guest conductor of the Brevard Music Center and artistic adviser of the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra.

Falletta has guest-conducted more than 100 orchestras in North America and many of the most prominent orchestras in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa. In 2019/20 she guest-conducts orchestras in Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Mexico, Brazil and across the U.S.

Upon her appointment as music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, Falletta became the first woman to lead a major American ensemble. Celebrating her 20th anniversary this season, she has been credited with bringing the Philharmonic to an unprecedented level of national and international prominence. The orchestra has become one of the leading recording orchestras for Naxos and returned twice to Carnegie Hall.

With a discography of more than 115 titles, Falletta is a leading recording artist for Naxos. In 2019, she won her first individual GRAMMY® Award, as conductor of the London Symphony, in the category of Best Classical Compendium for *Spiritualist*, her fifth world premiere recording of music of Kenneth Fuchs. Her Naxos recording of John Corigliano's *Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan* received two GRAMMY® Awards in 2008.

Falletta is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has served by presidential appointment as a member of the National Council on the Arts during the Bush and Obama administrations. In March 2019, she was named *Performance Today's* 2019 Classical Woman of the Year.



**YULIANNA  
AVDEEVA**  
piano

**Y**ulianna Avdeeva gained international

recognition when she won First Prize in the Chopin Competition in 2010. Her artistic integrity is rapidly ensuring her a place among the most distinctive artists of her generation. Following her Los Angeles Philharmonic debut with Gustavo Dudamel in May 2019, she ventures on a dynamic 2019/20 season that includes debuts with Orchestra Philharmonique de Radio France under the baton of Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and Marin Alsop, and a return to Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under Sir Mark Elder's direction. Further highlights include collaborations with SWR Symphonieorchester, Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne, Dresden Philharmonic and Sinfonie Orchester Basel.

A regular performer throughout the Asia-Pacific region, Avdeeva makes her debut with BBC Scottish Symphony and Thomas Dausgaard, joining them for the inaugural BBC Proms Japan in 2019. Most recently, she debuted with Sydney and Melbourne symphony orchestras and worked with New Japan Philharmonic and NHK Symphony Orchestra, as well as with Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and Bamberger Symphoniker, on tours of Japan. Recent highlights have included Avdeeva's debuts at the Salzburg Festival, Alte Oper Frankfurt, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Boulez Saal and Lucerne Festival.

Avdeeva's Chopin performances have drawn particular praise, marking her as one of the composer's foremost interpreters who brings out the strength as well as the refinement of his music. In addition to her Chopin prize, Avdeeva has won honors at the Bremen Piano Contest, the Concours de Genève and the Arthur Rubinstein Competition.