June 18, 2017, at 3pm
Burgers, Beers & B-Flat Minor

Andrew Litton, conductor

Conrad Tao, piano

CARL MARIA VON WEBER (1786–1826)
Overture to *Euryanthe*

PYOTR ILICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)
Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 23

I. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso – Allegro con spirito
II. Andantino semplice – Allegro vivace assai
III. Allegro con fuoco

Mr. Tao

Intermission

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)
Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95 ("From the New World")

I. Adagio – Allegro molto
II. Largo
III. Scherzo. Molto vivace
IV. Allegro con fuoco

This season is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

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Program Notes - CONCERT V

Overture to *Euryanthe*

CARL MARIA VON WEBER
Born 19 November, 1786 in Eutin, near Lübeck, Germany
Died 5 June, 1826 in London

- Despite its origins in opera, this overture feels like an exuberant symphonic first movement
- Weber's libretto is about a French medieval princess
- Think romantic and over-the-top
- All three principal themes are associated with Euryanthe and her beloved

Carl Maria von Weber is the Rossini of German opera in one major respect: the listening public is familiar primarily with his operatic overtures. Except for the opera buffs, most of us have limited acquaintance with any of Rossini's or Weber's music beyond the overtures. Only one of Weber's operas, *Der Freischütz* (1821), is revived with any frequency; however, his opera overtures are great favorites in the concert hall.

What delightful curtain raisers these orchestral movements are!—and what an enrichment to the symphonic literature. Their names may look foreign: *Oberon*, *Abu Hassan*, *Preciosa*, and *Euryanthe*, in addition to his masterpiece *Der Freischütz*. The music is infinitely more familiar. Weber's vibrant rhythmic patterns, glorious melodies, and splendid musical energy fuse superbly in his overtures.

Euryanthe was composed in 1822 and 1823, and received its first performance in Vienna in 1824. Weber called it *Grosse heroisch-romantisch Oper*: a large heroic-romantic opera, and so it is. Based on a 13th century French romance about Euryanthe, Princess of Savoy, the opera was saddled with a leaden libretto by Helmine von Chezy that compromised its dramatic credibility and prevented it from claiming a permanent niche in the repertoire. The music, however, is glorious, and nowhere more so than in the sparkling overture.

As was his custom, Weber composed the overture after completing the balance of the opera. *Euryanthe*'s overture departs from Weber's custom in that no slow introduction precedes the vigorous allegro. In its use of themes specifically linked with characters, *Euryanthe* looks forward to Wagner's *Lohengrin* (1850) and Schumann's *Genoveva* (also 1850); both were consciously modelled on this opera. The overture is dominated by themes associated with the heroine and her love interest (Adolar, Count of Nevers). Weber skillfully combined a modified sonata-allegro form with a capsule summary of the opera. Regardless of how we hear it, Weber composed this movement with the intent of inviting his theatre audience into the music drama that would follow. The fact that his exuberant arpeggios and ascending melodic flourishes have so much rhetorical impact independent of the opera attests to Weber's inherent genius.

Weber scored the overture for woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.

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

PYOTR ILICH TCHAIKOVSKY
Born 7 May, 1840 in Votkinsk, Viatka district, Russia
Died 6 November, 1893 in St. Petersburg, Russia

- Enjoy those big, booming chords at the beginning. They're a famous opening—but they never return
- Tchaikovsky uses Russian and Ukrainian folk songs in the first and last movements
- A French folk tune provides material for the slow movement
- The finale is a fierce Cossack warrior dance

The Tchaikovsky First Piano Concerto is a perennial audience favorite: one of those unforgettable works—like the Beethoven Fifth Symphony—whose opening gambit is immediately recognizable even to the non-music lover. Musical scholar Joseph Kerman, in a wonderful book called *Concerto Conversations*, calls it 'the best known of all concerto incipits,' and describes it thus:

> The piano chords that crash in after four bars may or may not constitute what is usually thought of as a texture, but they certainly introduce a marvelous sonority. One gets to the point where those invincible ringing chords block out, if they do not drown out, the great tune in the strings. In a stroke, Tchaikovsky has given the piano an edge it will never lose throughout the whole of this relatively contentious composition.

That very argumentative quality is at the heart of what a concerto is about: the fundamental conflict between a lone instrument and the large orchestral ensemble. Ironically, those majestic keyboard chords that Kerman mentions are actually in D-flat, the relative major, although the concerto is nominally in B-flat minor. In fact, the odd opening in minor mode never recurs.

At the most basic level, Tchaikovsky was a man of the theatre—and of theatrical instincts. He understood how to maximize the inherent drama of piano plus orchestra. He was not, however, a top-tier pianist, and that gap in his musical expertise led to a lack of self-confidence when composing for keyboard. His letters to his family and his patroness, Nadejhda von Meck, reflect his hesitation about writing a virtuoso work for an instrument he did not play well himself. Late in 1874, he consulted the Russian pianist Nikolai Rubinstein about the new piano concerto he had just completed. Rubinstein's initial reaction was scathing. His harsh criticism included accusing Tchaikovsky of writing unplayable music and stealing others' ideas.

Tchaikovsky was both incensed and deeply wounded. Three years after the fact, he was still smarting, writing to von Meck:

> An independent witness of this scene must have concluded that I was a talentless maniac, a scribbler with no notion of composing, who had ventured to lay his rubbish before a famous man…I was not only astounded, but deeply mortified, by the whole scene.

His immediate reaction was to erase Rubinstein's name from the dedication and substitute that of the German pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow. Bülow played the premiere of the B-flat minor concerto in October 1875 while on tour in the United States. In this country, the reaction was quite the reverse of Rubinstein's summary judgment. Bülow reported that he was often cheered on to repeat the entire last movement. Shortly after his return to Europe, Tchaikovsky's concerto was introduced to Russian audiences. Rubinstein recanted his initial judgment, and went on to become one of its most celebrated interpreters.

Program Notes - CONCERT V

That rough birthing process is an unlikely prologue to one of the greatest success stories in the history of music. This piece has captured and retained the popular imagination as have few others. We think of Russia as a place that is dark, gray, and grim, with no sunlight in winter. But anyone who has visited Moscow is struck by the bright, almost festive exterior of Saint Basil's Cathedral. The architects employed an exuberant color palette that is over-the-top for a religious edifice, even in Russia.

The B-flat minor Concerto, invites a similarly broad palette of color from the performer. Tchaikovsky invites the pianist to show what he or she can come up with interpretively, sometimes with an almost improvisatory quality. A great deal of what happens in the Tchaikovsky Concerto occurs on the stage, with the immediacy and excitement of having an audience present.

From the commanding chords that mark the soloist's entrance to the ferocious Cossack dance that closes the work, Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto seduces our ears with warmth, powerful emotions, lyricism and a wealth of persuasive melodies. The familiar themes that anchor the outer movements have origins in Ukrainian folksong, making the concerto a legitimate contender as a nationalist work. The lovely slow movement, on the other hand, draws on French song material, and includes a scherzo-like middle section in elfin contrast and sharp relief to the flamboyant gestures of the opening movement. Tchaikovsky's biographer Edward Garden has written:

> The superbly lyrical and gloriously beautiful slow movement—with its amusingly frivolous scurrying central section based on the French *chansonette* "*Il faut s'amuser, danser et rire*"—acts as a crown to the whole work, or, to put it more appropriately, as an apex to the arch whose bases are the extrovert D-flat major themes.

While the first movement may be disproportionately long in comparison to the two that follow, the concerto as a whole is hugely successful. Tchaikovsky combines drama and sentiment with dazzling technique to produce a showpiece that is a classic of its kind.

The score calls for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, solo piano and strings.

Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95 ("From the New World")

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
Born 8 September, 1841 in Mühlhausen, Bohemia
Died 1 May, 1904 in Prague, Czechoslovakia

- Tradition holds that Dvořák adapted many of his themes from folk songs and spirituals he heard in America
- A once-upon-a-time opening in the slow movement ushers in the beloved English horn solo we know as "Going Home"
- Listen for syncopations and catchy dance rhythms. The Czechs love to dance!

Misunderstood masterpiece

> *"In spite of the fact that I have moved about in the great world of music, I shall remain what I have always been—a simple Czech musician."*

These words of Dvořák are uncannily apt when considering the familiar, beloved and misunderstood "New World" Symphony. Sketched and written between December 1892 and May 1893 when Dvořák had come to New York to head the new American Conservatory, the piece was ridiculed at its premiere because of its alleged incorporation of American Indian tunes. The critics did acknowledge the symphony's individuality and its unique amalgam of Czech and American elements. In fact, Dvořák never intended to directly appropriate American Negro or Indian folk song. Some years later, in 1900, he wrote to his former student Oscar Nedbal declaring of the "New World" Symphony: "I have only composed in the spirit of such American national melodies."

Connections to indigenous American music

Since his first visit to the United States, Dvořák had been intensely curious about the native music of the American Indian tribes. Late in 1892, through a scholarship student at the American Conservatory, Dvořák became acquainted with America's Negro spirituals as well. The young man, Henry Thacker Burleigh, played timpani and double bass in the Conservatory orchestra, and eventually became the orchestra's librarian and Dvořák's copyist. Their interaction bore rich fruit. Innumerable critics have commented on the strong echoes of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" in the first movement of the "New World" Symphony and of "Deep River" later in the work. In fact, as Dvořák's biographer Gervase Hughes has pointed out:

> Folk-tunes often tended (one could put it no higher than that) to be based on a pentatonic scale—C, D, E, G, A (or the equivalent)—indigenous to Bohemia, Somerset, the Hebrides, Ireland and the Appalachians; furthermore the old 'plantation songs' of the 'deep south' of North America sometimes held rhythmic inflexions similar to those of Slav folk music. Dvořák had the pleasant sagacity to capitalize on these coincidences.

The result is a symphony with extraordinary and spontaneous emotional appeal. If the "New World" has its formal lapses, it amply compensates for them with rhythmic punch and a wealth of memorable, sing-able melodies that have made this symphony his most popular work.

The most famous movement is, of course, the delicious Largo, which opens with a startling series of coloristic modulations from distant keys: E Major to D flat Major. The immortal "Going Home" melody is said to have been inspired by Dvořák's consideration of Longfellow's *Hiawatha* as a potential opera subject. He was drawn to the legend; nothing came of that project, but his mind was clearly churning with ideas stimulated by his exposure to Negro and American Indian musical culture. His English horn solo has become one of the best known melodies in all of classical music.

Structurally, the first movement is the strongest; its rhythmic profile manifests itself in one form or another in all of the succeeding movements. Dvořák wrote a true scherzo for this symphony rather than the Czech *furiant* he favored in so many other large instrumental works. And in his finale, he incorporates quotations from each of the preceding movements to cyclically unify the symphony.

The score calls for pairs of flutes, clarinets, clarinets and bassoons; four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.

Andrew Litton, conductor

Andrew Litton, Music Director of the New York City Ballet holds several additional posts. He is Artistic Director of Minnesota Orchestra's Sommerfest, Principal Guest Conductor of the Colorado Symphony, Conductor Laureate of Britain's Bournemouth Symphony and Music Director Laureate of Norway's Bergen Philharmonic, where he recently concluded a 12-year tenure as music director. Mr. Litton also led the Dallas Symphony as Music Director from 1994 to 2006. Each season, he guest conducts, leading orchestras and opera companies around the globe and adds to his discography of almost 130 recordings, which have garnered Grammy Awards, France's Diapason d'Or and other honors.

Mr. Litton concluded his Music Director tenure in Bergen in grand style earlier last year, leading a gala concert that celebrated the orchestra's 250th Anniversary. Under his leadership, the Bergen Philharmonic gained international recognition through touring, including debuts at London's BBC Proms and Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, as well as appearances at Vienna's Musikverein, the Philharmonie in Berlin and Carnegie Hall in New York. His work in Bergen brought many tributes, including a knighthood in the Norwegian Royal Order of Merit.

Andrew Litton has conducted major opera companies around the world, including the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera Covent Garden and Deutsche Oper Berlin. In Bergen, he was key to founding the Bergen National Opera, which he has led in critically acclaimed, sold-out performances of *Tosca*, *Carmen*, *The Flying Dutchman* and *La Bohème*.

Litton began his New York City Ballet appointment last year conducting performances of *The Nutcracker* and subsequently opened the company's winter season with a special performance of ballets he selected. In June, he conducted the company on tour at the Chatelet in Paris. Mr. Litton's work in ballet began while he was still a Juilliard student, performing as on-stage pianist for Rudolf Nureyev, Natalia Makarova, and Cynthia Gregory.

Highlights of his 2016-17 performances besides his regular appearances with the Bergen Philharmonic, the Minnesota Orchestra and the Colorado Symphony, include return engagements with the Netherlands Philharmonic at the Concertgebouw, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and the Symphony Orchestras of Melbourne, Singapore, and Bournemouth.

An accomplished pianist, Andrew Litton often conducts from the keyboard and performs chamber music with colleagues. He is an acknowledged expert on George Gershwin and has performed and recorded Gershwin widely as both pianist and conductor. After leading the Covent Garden debut of *Porgy and Bess*, he arranged his own concert suite of that work, which is now performed around the world. In 2014 he released his first solo piano album, *A Tribute to Oscar Peterson*, a testament to his passion for jazz, particularly the music of Oscar Peterson.

A graduate of New York's Fieldston School, Andrew Litton earned degrees from The Juilliard School in piano and conducting. He served as assistant conductor at La Scala and at the National Symphony under Rostropovich. Among his numerous awards are Yale's Sanford Medal, the Elgar Society Medal and an honorary doctorate from the University of Bournemouth.

Conrad Tao, piano

Conrad Tao has appeared worldwide as a pianist and composer, and has been hailed as a musician of "probing intellect and open-hearted vision" by *The New York Times,* a "thoughtful and mature composer" by NPR, and "ferociously talented" by *Time Out New York*. In 2011, the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars and the Department of Education named Mr. Tao a Presidential Scholar in the Arts, and the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts awarded him a YoungArts gold medal in music. Later that year, Mr. Tao was named a Gilmore Young Artist, an honor awarded every two years highlighting the most promising American pianists of the new generation. In 2012, he was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Conrad Tao's 2016-17 season began with the world premiere of David Lang's new opera *the loser* at Brooklyn Academy of Music in September, where he joined baritone Rod Gilfry atop elevated suspended platforms performing to a mezzanine-seating-only audience. From there, Mr. Tao oversaw the premiere of a new orchestral work, *I got a wiggle that I just can't shake*, commissioned by the Pacific Symphony. This season, he also premieres a new piano concerto commissioned by the Atlantic Classical Orchestra; debuts the second work of his commissioned by Jaap van Zweden and the Hong Kong Philharmonic; and performs with the Giuseppe Verdi Orchestra in Milan, the Nashville Symphony, the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa, the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México, the Staatskapelle Halle, the Tucson Symphony, and the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, among others. His recitals and chamber performances include appearances at the Aspen Music Festival, Cliburn Concerts, the Gulbenkian in Lisbon, the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, and the Washington Performing Arts Society and include music by Frederic Rzewski, Julia Wolfe, Charles Ives, Mozart, a new commissioned work by John Supko, and others.

In June of 2013, Mr. Tao kicked off the inaugural UNPLAY Festival at the powerHouse Arena in Brooklyn, which he curated and produced. The festival, designated a "critics' pick" by *Time Out New York* and hailed by *The New York Times* for its "clever organization" and "endlessly engaging" performances, featured Conrad Tao with guest artists performing a wide variety of new works. Across three nights encompassing electroacoustic music, performance art, youth ensembles, and much more, UNPLAY explored the fleeting ephemera of the Internet, the possibility of a 21st-century canon, and music's role in social activism and critique. That month, Mr. Tao, a Warner Classics recording artist, also released *Voyages*, his first full-length recording for the label, declared a "spiky debut" by *The New Yorker's* Alex Ross. His next album, *Pictures*, which includes works by David Lang, Toru Takemitsu, Elliott Carter, and Mr. Tao himself alongside Mussorgsky's familiar and beloved *Pictures at an Exhibition*, was hailed by *The New York Times* as "a fascinating album [by] a thoughtful artist and dynamic performer… played with enormous imagination, color and command."

"Tao's playing was almost startling in its clarity of sound and purpose… His talent is almost beyond belief"

– Ottawa Citizen

Conrad Tao's career as composer has garnered eight consecutive ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Awards and the Carlos Surinach Prize from BMI. In the 2013-14 season, while serving as the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's artist-in-residence, Mr. Tao premiered his orchestral composition, *The world is very different now*. Commissioned in observance of the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the work was described by *The New York Times* as "shapely and powerful." Most recently, the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia commissioned a new work for piano, orchestra, and electronics, *An Adjustment*, which received its premiere in September 2015 with Mr. Tao at the piano. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* declared the piece abundant in "compositional magic," a "most imaginative [integration of] spiritual post-Romanticism and '90s club music."

Conrad Tao was born in Urbana, Illinois, in 1994. He has studied piano with Emilio del Rosario in Chicago and Yoheved Kaplinsky in New York, and composition with Christopher Theofanidis.