SEASON FINALE

GIL SHAHAM WEEKEND

THE SANTA BARBARA SYMPHONY
Nir Kabaretti, Music & Artistic Director

SATURDAY at 7:30pm | The Granada
Nir Kabaretti, conductor Gil Shaham, violin
TCHAIKOVSKY • DVOŘÁK

SUNDAY at 3:00pm | The Granada
Nir Kabaretti, conductor Gil Shaham, violin Adele Anthony, violin
BACH • AVNER DORMAN • DVOŘÁK

PROGRAM NOTES

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35 (1878)
by Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, 1840 – St. Petersburg, 1893)

I. Allegro moderato–Moderato assai
II. Canzonetta: Andante
III. Finale: Allegro vivacissimo

There is certainly no shortage of great masterpieces that met with negative criticism at their premiere, yet few have fared worse than Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto. This may sound surprising, since this work—now one of the most popular of all concertos—has none of the revolutionary spirit of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, Wagner's Ring cycle, or Beethoven's Eroica, to name just three works that generated heated controversies around the time of their premieres. The fact remains that the great violinist and teacher, Leopold Auer, for whom the concerto was written, rejected it (to his credit, he later changed his mind). And the Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick, a friend of Brahms and a fierce opponent of Wagner, uttered the immortal phrase after the 1881 premiere that the concerto "stank to the ear." The composer never forgot Hanslick's vicious words to the end of his days. It is not easy to account for these harsh reactions today, but one suspects that the critics objected to the very same features of the work that are so admired today, namely that, in an era dominated by German-speaking composers, Tchaikovsky managed to write a violin concerto that was entirely free from German influences. (It was also the first major violin concerto ever written by a Russian.)

The concerto was composed in the spring of 1878. In order to recover from the recent trauma of his ill-fated and short-lived marriage to Antonina Milyukova, Tchaikovsky retreated to the Swiss village of Clarens, on the shores of Lake Geneva, accompanied by his brother Modest, and a 22-year-old violinist named Iosif Kotek, who assisted him in matters of violin technique. The composition progressed so effortlessly that the whole concerto was written in only three weeks, with an extra week taken up by the orchestration. During this time, Tchaikovsky wrote not only the three concerto movements that we know, but a fourth one as well: the initial second movement, "Méditation," was rejected at an early run-through and replaced with the present "Canzonetta," written in a single day. Due to Auer's initial unfavorable reaction, no violinist accepted the work for performance for three years, until the young Adolf Brodsky, a Russian-born virtuoso living in Vienna, chose it for his debut with the Vienna Philharmonic.

(Continued)

SEASON FINALE

GIL SHAHAM WEEKEND

THE SANTA BARBARA SYMPHONY
Nir Kabaretti, Music & Artistic Director

SATURDAY at 7:30pm | The Granada
Nir Kabaretti, conductor Gil Shaham, violin
TCHAIKOVSKY • DVOŘÁK

SUNDAY at 3:00pm | The Granada
Nir Kabaretti, conductor Gil Shaham, violin Adele Anthony, violin
BACH • AVNER DORMAN • DVOŘÁK

PROGRAM NOTES

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35 (1878)
by Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, 1840 – St. Petersburg, 1893)

(Continued)

One of the things that makes this concerto so great is the ease with which Tchaikovsky moves from one mood to the next: lyrical and dramatic, robustly folk-like and tenderly sentimental moments follow one another without the slightest incongruity. Another remarkable feature is the combination of virtuosity with emotional depth: although the technical difficulties of the solo part are tremendous, every note also expresses something far beyond virtuosic fireworks. All in all, it is one of the greatest violin concertos ever written, and no critic after Hanslick has ever challenged its status again or smelled anything unpleasant in the work!

SEASON FINALE

GIL SHAHAM WEEKEND

THE SANTA BARBARA SYMPHONY
Nir Kabaretti, Music & Artistic Director

SATURDAY at 7:30pm | The Granada
Nir Kabaretti, conductor Gil Shaham, violin
TCHAIKOVSKY • DVOŘÁK

SUNDAY at 3:00pm | The Granada
Nir Kabaretti, conductor Gil Shaham, violin Adele Anthony, violin
BACH • AVNER DORMAN • DVOŘÁK

PROGRAM NOTES

Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88 (1889)
by Antonín Dvořák
(Nelahozeves, Bohemia, 1841 - Prague, 1904)

I. Allegro con brio
II. Adagio
III. Allegretto grazioso -- Molto Vivace
IV. Allegro ma non troppo

"Gentlemen, in Bohemia the trumpets never call to battle—they always call to the dance!"
(Czech conductor Rafael Kubelik during a rehearsal of the trumpet fanfare opening the last movement of Dvořák's Eighth Symphony.)

Something remarkable happened in the history of music during the 19th century: composers of symphonic music increasingly turned away from happy or cheerful feelings in favor of dramatic or even tragic ones. Instead of the light and unclouded tone found in many major works by Haydn or Mozart, Romantic composers predominantly used darker colors. Lightness was gradually pushed to the periphery of classical music and relegated to new popular genres, such as operetta, while large-scale symphonic works increasingly emphasized high passion and brooding melancholy.

There were two great exceptions to this general trend: Mendelssohn in the first half of the century, and Dvořák in the second half. Both had the unusual gift of writing radiantly happy music in an era where such an approach was often taken for either conservatism or naïveté. It was neither: it was merely a sign of a different artistic personality.

If we compare Dvořák's Eighth Symphony (1889) to some of the great symphonic works written around the same time, the difference will become readily apparent. Just the year before, in 1888, Tchaikovsky completed his Fifth (E minor), in which he was grappling with grave questions about Fate and human life. The same year, César Franck introduced his Symphony in D minor, whose complex emotional journey leads from self-doubt to eventual triumph. Johannes Brahms finished his fourth and last symphony (E minor) in 1885 with a magnificent passacaglia that infused that Baroque variation form with genuine Romantic passion. (Brahms's "sunny" Second Symphony from 1877 is the exception that confirms the rule.)

(Continued)

SATURDAY at 7:30pm | The Granada
Nir Kabaretti, conductor Gil Shaham, violin
TCHAIKOVSKY • DVOŘÁK

SUNDAY at 3:00pm | The Granada
Nir Kabaretti, conductor Gil Shaham, violin Adele Anthony, violin
BACH • AVNER DORMAN • DVOŘÁK

PROGRAM NOTES

Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88 (1889)
by Antonín Dvořák
(Nelahozeves, Bohemia, 1841 - Prague, 1904)

(Continued)

Dvořák's cheerfully optimistic Eighth opens with an expressive melody in G minor that prepares the entrance of another theme, a playful idea in G major first given to the solo flute. A dynamic sonata exposition soon gets underway. Dvořák "overshoots the mark" as he bypasses the expected secondary key, D major, in favor of a more remote but even brighter-sounding B major. The development section works up quite a storm, but the storm subsides when the playful main theme returns, now played by the English horn instead of the flute (two octaves lower than before). The recapitulation ends with a short but very energetic coda.

The second movement ("Adagio") begins with a simple string melody in darker tonal regions (E-flat major/C minor) that soon reaches a bright C major where it remains. The main theme spawns various episodes, in turn lyrical and passionate. After a powerful climax, the movement ends in a tender pianissimo.

The third movement ("Allegretto grazioso") is neither a minuet nor a scherzo but an "intermezzo" like the third movements of Brahms's First and Second Symphonies. Its first tune is a sweet and languid waltz; its second, functioning as a "trio," sounds more like a Bohemian folk dance. After the return of the waltz, Dvořák surprises us with a very fast ("Molto vivace") Coda, in which commentators have recognized a theme from one of Dvořák's earlier operas. But this Coda consists of the same notes as the lilting "trio" melody, only in a faster tempo, with stronger accents, and in duple instead of triple meter. In the third movement of his Second Symphony, Brahms transformed his "trio" theme in the same way.

(Continued)

PROGRAM NOTES

Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88 (1889)
by Antonín Dvořák
(Nelahozeves, Bohemia, 1841 - Prague, 1904)

(Continued)

A resounding trumpet fanfare announces the fourth movement ("Allegro ma non troppo"), a complex theme-and-variations with a central episode that sounds at first like contrasting material but is derived from the main theme. Dvořák's handling of form is indebted to Beethoven and Brahms, but he filled out the form with melodies of an unmistakably Czech flavor. The variations vary widely in character: some are slower and some are faster in tempo, some are soft (such as the virtuosic one for solo flute), and some are noisy; most are in the major mode, though the central one, reminiscent of a village band, is in the minor. The ending seems to be a long time coming, with an almost interminable series of closing figures. When the last chord finally arrives, it still sounds delightfully abrupt due to its unusual metric placement.

Notes by Peter Laki