

# Program Notes

for kids

William Tell  
Saturday, November 11, 2017  
8:00 p.m.  
Michigan Theater

**Shostakovich**      *Symphony No. 15*

*Intermission*

**Dvořák**            *Violin Concerto No. 1*

**Rossini**            *Overture to William Tell*



**Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra**  
*Music in the Key of A<sup>2</sup>*

# Symphony No. 15

by Dmitri Shostakovich

## About the Music

### What kind of piece is this?

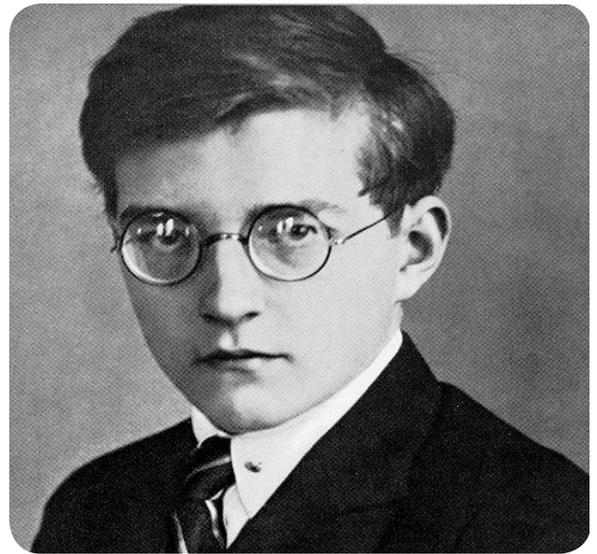
This piece is a *symphony*, which is a long piece of music that typically contains four *movements*, or sections. These movements often vary in style, and they each have their own unique characteristics. Some may be upbeat and lively, while others may be slower and more song-like.

### When was it written?

Shostakovich wrote this symphony in a little over a month, during the summer of 1971. It was first performed in January 1972 under the direction of Dmitri's son, Maxim Shostakovich.

### What is it about?

This piece, unlike many of Shostakovich's other symphonies, supposedly has no storyline. However, many people consider this symphony to be very autobiographical: meaning it tells the story of Dmitri's life. Throughout the piece, Shostakovich quotes other composers' works, as well as some of his own earlier pieces. The first movement, which was originally subtitled "Toyshop" has childlike qualities of playfulness, although at times it is also very dark. The middle movements show emotions such as anger, frustration, and mocking – feelings that were present in much of Dmitri's life. The last movement may express the composer's thoughts on his final years and coming death.



No, that's not Harry Potter. It's Dmitri Shostakovich!

### Listen for...

Why do you think Shostakovich originally named the first movement "Toyshop?" What sounds do you hear that make it sound playful? Listen for the strings playing *pizzicato*, which means they are plucking the strings with their fingers instead of using their bows.

## About the Composer

**Dmitri Shostakovich** | Born September 25, 1906 in St. Petersburg, Russia | Died August 9, 1975 in Moscow, Russia

### Family & Career

Dmitri Shostakovich was a child prodigy pianist and composer. When he began piano lessons at age 9 with his mother, he took to it immediately, playing things by ear after hearing them only once. He entered a music conservatory when he was 13, and wrote his first symphony as a graduation piece at age 19. He was married four times (twice to his first wife) and had two children: Galina and Maxim. Maxim became a pianist and composer.

### Fun Facts

Shostakovich was a perfectionist in his personal life as much as in his musical life. According to his daughter, he was "obsessed with cleanliness." He synchronized the clocks in his apartment, and he regularly sent letters to himself to test the postal service.

### Music

Shostakovich lived in Soviet Russia, where the government kept a tight watch on intellectuals and artists and only allowed those who supported the government to succeed. His life was a constant struggle between his own creativity and having to please the Soviet state, led by Joseph Stalin. Shostakovich frequently suffered at the hand of the government: his works were banned, he received bad reviews of his music in

the official government newspaper, he was forced to give public apologies for his works, he lost his job at the Music Conservatory, and he had to write music in praise of Stalin. Fearful of rejection (which could mean arrest, imprisonment, or even death), he wrote a lot of music that he immediately threw away or hid in his desk drawer. Despite all this, Shostakovich wrote quite a lot of music in varying styles: 15 symphonies, 15 string quartets, 6 concertos, 3 operas, and film music, among many other pieces.

# Violin Concerto No. 1

by Antonin Dvořák

## About the Music

### What kind of piece is this?

This is a *concerto*, which is a piece of music written for a solo instrument to be accompanied by an orchestra. In this case, the violin player is the soloist, so she stands at the front of the stage and plays the most important part. In a concerto, the soloist and the orchestra can interact in different ways: the soloist can play alone, the orchestra could play alone, the orchestra could play something to support the soloist, or the soloist could join in like a member of the orchestra. Concertos typically have three movements that appear in this order: fast, slow, fast.

### When was it written?

Dvořák completed the piece in 1879, however he made big changes to it in 1880 and 1882. It was first performed in Prague in October of 1883, with Dvořák conducting.

### What is it about?

Dvořák was inspired to write this concerto after meeting violinist Joseph Joachim. However, there were many things that Joachim didn't approve of in the piece, so he never performed it in public, even after Dvořák revised it. Since then, though, it has become a very important piece of music, and nearly every famous violinist has performed it.



### Listen for...

Many times, the solo violinist is required to play *double stops*, or two notes at the same time. This is a technique only string and keyboard instruments can do.

### Fun Facts

Dvořák was so popular during his lifetime in England and America that Dvořák souvenirs were sold in shops: Dvořák ties, Dvořák walking sticks, Dvořák trading cards. None of these items were endorsed by the composer and he didn't receive any profits from their sale.

## About the Composer

**Antonín Dvořák** | Born September 8, 1841 in Nelahozeves, Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic) | Died May 1, 1904 in Prague, Bohemia

### Career

Dvořák was very interested in the music, culture and folklore of his homeland. His first successful composition, the *Slavonic Dances*, was based on the folk music of Bohemia. In 1892, he came to the United States to direct the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. His goal while in the U.S. was to discover "American music," just as he had done with the music of his own country. He wrote newspaper articles in New York in which he suggested that African-American and Native American music should be the basis for a new style of American classical music. Dvořák's most popular piece is his *New World Symphony*, which he wrote while in America, and which was premiered by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1893.



Lake Lucerne in Switzerland, where the play “*Wilhelm Tell*” took place.

### Listen for...

The Storm! How can you tell a storm is about to come? (Listen for the violins and violas to come in with fast notes after the cello solo). What is happening in the climax of the storm? Listen for two different groups of instruments having a conversation: What are they saying? What is their role in portraying the storm? How do you know when the storm is over?

# Overture to William Tell

by Gioachino Rossini

## About the Music

### When was it written?

Rossini started composing the opera *William Tell* in 1824. He completed it four years later, and it was premiered on August 3, 1829 in Paris, France.

### What kind of piece is this?

This piece was written to be the *Overture* – or the opening instrumental movement – of an opera. The start of an overture would signal to the audience that it was time to quiet down and find their seats, as the performance was about to begin. It would also preview some of the important musical themes that would be sung in later parts of the opera.

### What is it about?

The opera *William Tell* by Rossini is based on Friedrich Schiller’s play, *Wilhelm Tell*. It takes place in Switzerland, on Lake Lucerne. The Overture – as is common with most overtures – gives a brief introduction to what will take place during the opera. It does this through four short sections: Prelude (Dawn); Storm; *Ranz des Vaches* (Call to the Dairy Cows); and Finale (March of the Swiss Soldiers).



Gioachino Rossini or “Maestro Crescendo,” as his friends would call him.

## About the Composer

**Gioachino Rossini** | Born February 29, 1792 in Pesaro, Italy | Died November 13, 1868 in Paris, France

### Family & Career

Rossini was born to a musical family; his father was a horn player and his mother was a singer. By the age of six, Rossini was playing triangle in his father’s musical group. He began to study cello when he was 14 and had his first opera performed when he was only 18. When he was 30 years old, Rossini met Beethoven. The old, deaf composer told him to never write anything but comic opera because he was so good at it.