



Program Notes

for kids

Romeo & Juliet
Saturday, October 8, 2016
8:00 p.m.
Michigan Theater

Brahms Tragic Overture
Haydn Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 84

Intermission

Prokofiev Romeo & Juliet

Tragic Overture

by Johannes Brahms

What kind of piece is this?

This piece is a *concert overture*, similar to the overture of an opera. An *opera overture* is the opening instrumental movement that signals to the audience that the performance is about to begin. Similarly, a *concert overture* is a short and lively introduction to an instrumental concert.

When was it written?

Brahms wrote this piece in the summer of 1880 while on vacation.

What is it about?

Brahms was a quiet and sad person, and really wanted to compose a piece about a tragedy. With no particular tragedy in mind, he created this overture as a contrast to his much happier *Academic Festival Overture*, which he completed in the same summer. When describing the two overtures to a friend, Brahms said “One of them weeps, the other laughs.”

About the Composer

Johannes Brahms | Born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany | Died April 3, 1897 in Vienna, Austria

Family & Career

Brahms' father, Johann Jakob Brahms, was a *bierfiedler*: literally, a “beer fiddler” who played in small bands at bars. The young Brahms inherited his father's love of music but wanted to study piano rather than becoming a bierfiedler. But his father still capitalized on his son's talents by hiring him out to play dancing music on piano at bars.

Brahms eventually escaped the life of a bar musician and went on to study composition.

Music

Brahms' music isn't overly emotional like that of his colleagues, Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner. The stylistic feud that broke out between the more rational, old-fashioned composers (Brahms and Robert Schumann) and the more emotional ones (Liszt and Wagner) was called The War of the Romantics. The “War” got so bad at one point that, after Brahms performed one of his piano concertos, the audience sat in silence, refusing to clap in order show that they liked Liszt more. Brahms is now regarded as one of the “three Bs,” three of the greatest composers of classical music: Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.



Brahms at the Piano

Fun Facts

Brahms never really grew up. He didn't care much about how he looked, he left his clothes lying all over the floor of his house, he loved merry-go-rounds and circus sideshows, and he continued playing with his childhood toys until he was almost 30 years old. And his voice apparently sounded like a little boy's until well into his 20s.

Brahms loved children. He would often be seen with a whole parade of kids following him since he was known to give out candy.

Sinfonia Concertante, op 84

by Franz Josphe Haydn

What kind of piece is this?

A *Sinfonia Concertante* is a type of a *concerto*: a piece of music written for a solo instrument with an orchestra. In the case of a *Sinfonia Concertante*, the soloist is actually a group of musicians who sit at the front of the orchestra and play the most important parts. The soloists in this piece are the violinist, celloist, oboist, and bassoonist. In a concerto, the soloist and orchestra can interact in different ways: the soloists could play alone, the orchestra could play alone, the orchestra could play something to support the soloists, or the soloist could join in like a member of the orchestra. Concertos usually have three movements.

When was it written?

Haydn composed this piece in London in 1792. Haydn's friend noticed that similar works by rival composers were quite popular so he asked Haydn to compose this piece.

Fun Facts

Franz Joseph Haydn's nickname was "Papa Haydn." The title originated from how he took care of his orchestra musicians who frequently got in trouble in the court of Prince Esterhazy.

The "Papa" Haydn nickname also comes from his reputation as the "Father of the Symphony" and the "Father of the String Quartet." Though he didn't invent these genres, he is known for perfecting them.

About the Composer

Franz Joseph Haydn | Born March 31, 1732 in Rohrau, Austria | Died May 31, 1809 in Vienna, Austria

Family & Career

Franz Joseph Haydn (pronounced *HIDE-in*) was born into a pretty average family. His father was a wheel repairman, his mother was a cook before marriage, and neither had any particular musical skills or interests. However, like many composers, Haydn showed musical gifts from a young age. He had a beautiful voice, and at 8 years old was recruited to sing in the choir of St. Stephen's Cathedral, Austria's most important church. Later in life he

went on to be the musical director for Prince Esterhazy, an extremely important and influential nobleman.

Haydn married Maria Anna Keller in 1760. The couple had no children.

Music

After leaving St. Stephen's Cathedral, Haydn took on odd musical jobs and taught himself composition. He slowly made his way up in the world, and eventually took composition lessons and a job as the musical director for Prince Esterhazy's court. Haydn composed operas, symphonies, and chamber music.

Haydn had a big influence on classical music and its composers. His most successful student was Ludwig van Beethoven. Haydn also perfected the most fundamental genres of classical music, such as the symphony and the string quartet. During his lifetime he composed an extraordinary amount of music: 473 total works, including 108 symphonies and 68 string quartets.

Joke

Why could no one find Beethoven's music teacher?

Because he was Haydn!

Romeo and Juliet

by *Sergei Prokofiev*

What kind of piece is this?

This is a *suite*: a set of short instrumental or orchestral pieces performed on a concert. *Romeo and Juliet* is a series of sections taken from Prokofiev's ballet of the same name.

When was it written?

Prokofiev composed *Romeo and Juliet* in 1935 for the Leningrad Theatre of Opera and Ballet.

What is it about?

Prokofiev originally wrote this piece for a ballet based on William Shakespeare's famous play *Romeo and Juliet*. The play follows the romance between Romeo and Juliet and their feuding families, the Montagues and the Capulets. Set in Verona, Italy, the two star-crossed lovers meet by chance at a ball where they fall in love. The two decide to secretly marry the next day. After a series of fights and events, Romeo is exiled from Verona, and Juliet's family tries to make her marry her cousin, Paris. To avoid this, Juliet fakes her own death by drinking a potion that will put her into a deep, death-like sleep for one day. When her family finds her "dead", they put her in the family tomb. Romeo, hearing of her death, breaks into her tomb, drinks poison, and dies next to her. When Juliet wakes up next to a dead Romeo, she decides to stab herself with his dagger. The two families find Romeo and Juliet in the tomb, their deaths leading to the families' reconciliation.

About the Composer

Sergei Prokofiev | Born April 23, 1891 in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine | Died March 5, 1953 in Moscow, Russia

Family & Career

Prokofiev was born into a musical family. His mother, Maria, was devoted to music and for two months of every year would travel to Moscow or St. Petersburg to study piano. Prokofiev's first composition at age 5 was an "Indian Gallop" for piano that his mother wrote down for him. He entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory as a high schooler, making him much younger than the other students. Prokofiev annoyed his classmates by keeping statistics on the errors they all made.

Prokofiev was stranded abroad during World War I. He traveled the world giving concerts and recitals, and while in America, Prokofiev met the singer Lina Llubera. The two married and had two sons, Svyatoslav and Oleg.



Juliet's balcony in Verona, Italy.

Listen for...

Tenor saxophone solos throughout the piece. You barely ever see a saxophone in the orchestra.

Fun Facts

Prokofiev was an amazing chess player. In 1914 he defeated future world champion José Raúl Capablanca, something that very few world-class professional chess players ever did. Prokofiev later defeated fellow composer Maurice Ravel.