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SHOSTAKOVICH
Symphony No. 5

TCHAIKOVSKY
Romeo & Juliet
Fantasy-Overture

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1905-1975)
Symphony No. 5, in D minor, Op. 47
G. Schirmer Inc. (ASCAP)

- 1 I. Moderato [17:57]
- 2 II. Allegretto [5:02]
- 3 III. Largo [14:29]
- 4 IV. Allegro non troppo [9:23]

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)
5 **Romeo & Juliet** [19:20]
Fantasy-Overture after Shakespeare

SACD-60561

Lorin Maazel
The Cleveland
Orchestra

Total Playing Time [66:28]

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50kHz Master Transfer To DSD
Direct Stream Digital

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Shostakovich

Born in St. Petersburg on September 25, 1906 to a father of engineering bent and a mother skilled as a pianist, Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich entered the Petersburg Conservatory at thirteen, studying the piano and composition with Nikolayev and Glazunov and made quick progress despite illness and want. The premature death of his father, together with the social and economic woe bred by the Revolution, made life grim for the young man, who was kept clothed and fed partly by his mother's work as a typist and partly by his own job playing the piano at a movie house. "Old, drafty, and smelly," writes one of Shostakovich's biographers, Victor I. Seroff, [the theater] "had not seen fresh paint or a scrubbing brush for years." Down front below the screen, the youth would sit for hours, "his back soaked with perspiration, his nearsighted eyes in their hornrimmed glasses peering upwards to follow the story, his fingers pounding away on the raucous upright . . ." Late at night he would trudge home exhausted and, in a thin coat and summer cap, all but frozen.

It was in this adversity that Shostakovich began to write his First Symphony. Completing it in 1925 at nineteen, it brought him renown at home and abroad, and it is still played and admired today. His second and third symphonies, however, were not successful. The fourth was stillborn. Then came the Symphony No. 5, Op. 47.

The work comprises four movements: *Moderato*, *Allegretto*, *Largo*, and *Allegro non troppo*. To call it eclectic in forms lifted from Mozart, harmonies borrowed from Prokofiev, orchestrations recalling Tchaikovsky, rhythms reminiscent of Stravinsky, and melodies echoing Mahler is not to complain, for there is nothing wrong with eclecticism when one remembers that the greatest borrower of all was Bach. It is just factual that in the years before Stalin consolidated his power, when Soviet culture was still free enough to welcome such modernists as Berg, Bartók, and Hindemith, the young Shostakovich had felt the variegated stimulus of the then avant garde, and to these influences eagerly responded. His response before 1928 or so, when an implacable regime began to demand a more proletarian art, took form in the first symphonies and in his satiric opera *The Nose*. These works, though synthesized from the styles of others brought forth ideas entirely his own.

Between the Fourth Symphony of 1935-36, withdrawn before its premiere, and the Fifth Symphony of 1937, Shostakovich turned from the expansive to the disciplined, from the unrestrained to the compact. Though still eclectic, his forms and melodies tended to be more concise than before, hence more eloquent, and their directness drew the public's and the government's applause.

Returned to favor in 1937, he was appointed to teach composition at the conservatory in Leningrad, where four years later he finished the Seventh Symphony. After going to Moscow he wrote the Eighth Symphony (1943), the Piano Trio (1944), and the first Violin Concerto (1947-48) before yet another fall from grace.

Once more, according to the famous Decree on Music by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Shostakovich erred by having held to "anti-people" practices. His music was for the few, not for the many, therefore antithetic to Communist ideals. His music was too technically refined, too intricate for easy comprehension by the masses, devoid of discernible message, and corrupt in its "formalist perversions, anti-democratic tendencies which are alien to the Soviet people and their artistic tastes" and in its "atonalism, dissonance, and disharmony . . . rejection of melody . . . chaotic and neuropathic discords . . ."

The composer acquiesced in the indictment, producing in 1949 an oratorio (*Song of the Forests*) and in 1953 a cantata (*The Sun is Shining Over Our Homeland*) that were monuments to banality and that won raves from *Pravda*. But he was devising at the same time such scores as the Fourth and Fifth String Quartets and Twenty-four Preludes and Fugues for Piano – works of real artistry that abound in the forbidden abstractions. Similarly, his Tenth Symphony (1953), Thirteenth Symphony (1962), and Fourteenth Symphony (1969) seemed untouched by official opinion.

All of which has perplexed many a thoughtful listener. No less a critic than Richard Anthony Leonard could not decide whether the Shostakovich unevenness of quality "should be blamed on weaknesses of the composer's own armour or on the peculiar social conditions which have surrounded him" Other writers have contended themselves with citing the Fifth Symphony as evidence that Shostakovich did some of his best work while bending to the will of his masters. The observation is of course true as far as it goes.

The deeper truth, however, harks back to our thought of the elemental, a reminder that music transfixes and transcends purposes and emotions, thus leaving us to ponder the imponderable with the rainy night and crackling fire as aids to contemplation.

Romeo & Juliet

Mily Balakirev is almost better known for other men's music than for his own. A talented but largely self-taught composer devoted to the creation of a genuine Russian style (as opposed to the imported Germanisms being taught in Russian conservatories), he gathered around him other amateur composers who had followed diverse professional careers — army officers (Moussorgsky and Cui), a naval officer (Rimsky-Korsakov), and a chemist (Borodin) — and directed their efforts at composition. This group was dubbed by the critic Vladimir Stasov *moguchaya kuchka*, the "mighty handful" (often incorrectly translated as "The Five"). Balakirev was their catalyst, stimulating and browbeating them to new creation. And not the least of posterity's debts to Balakirev is the earliest masterpiece of Tchaikovsky, *Romeo and Juliet*.

Actually Tchaikovsky was an unlikely composer to fall into Balakirev's orbit, since his thorough conservatory training gave him a much more professional finish than the others had — and made him somewhat suspect in their eyes. But his great talent was undeniable, and Balakirev was eager to win the younger man to his cause, while Tchaikovsky, for his part, was equally concerned to be accepted by the *kuchka*. Early in 1869 Balakirev conducted the first St. Petersburg performance of Tchaikovsky's unsuccessful symphonic poem *Fate* (which the composer later destroyed). That summer Balakirev, who loved nothing more than telling other composers what to write, suggested *Romeo and Juliet* as an appropriate subject for a symphonic poem. When he did so, he may or may not have known that Tchaikovsky had just emerged from an episode of disappointed love for a Belgian soprano named Désirée Artôt, the only woman in his entire life who ever seemed to have aroused sexual feelings in him. She had appeared in Russia for the first time in the spring of 1868 with a touring Italian company, and Tchaikovsky was at once smitten with her charm and acting

ability. By early autumn he had not only struck up an acquaintance with her but had postponed the production of his own opera *The Voyevoda* so as to have more free time to devote to Désirée. When she sang Auber's opera-comique *Le Domino noir* for her benefit performance, he wrote recitatives and choruses to embellish the original score. By December they had gotten to the point of discussing marriage but without setting a date. Still, in early January 1869, after Désirée had gone off on tour with the opera company, Tchaikovsky was concerned enough to write his father for advice, though the problem he discussed in his letter was whether he should run the risk of being "his wife's husband," largely putting aside his own career to be an accommodating cipher following a much-applauded prima donna from one engagement to another. The composer's father could sense the young man's misgivings but did not realize their real cause, his homosexuality, which made such torment of the marriage he actually entered into some years later that he even attempted suicide. Papa Tchaikovsky assured his son that love would conquer all difficulties; yet he suggested not rushing headlong into anything.

As things stood, Tchaikovsky was to meet Désirée near Paris that summer, at the end of her tour, and make future plans. But she saved him the trouble by suddenly marrying a Spanish baritone a few weeks later. The news was gleefully broken to Tchaikovsky by one of the friends who had tried most emphatically to prevent the match, Nikolai Rubinstein. As another friend recalled, "Tchaikovsky didn't say a word. He simply went white and walked out." But he recovered sufficiently from this blow to his self-esteem to write his brother Modest an amused letter describing the outcome. Still, his admiration for Artôt the artist remained fervent. When he went to hear her sing in Gounod's *Faust* late in 1869, he kept his opera glasses trained on her whenever she was on stage—but they failed to conceal the tears running down his cheeks throughout her performance.

So Balakirev's suggestion of a *Romeo and Juliet* composition that summer fell on fertile ground; but for some reason Tchaikovsky had difficulty making a start. On October 7 he wrote to Balakirev, "I didn't want to write to you until I had sketched at least something of the overture. But just imagine, I'm completely played out, and not even one tolerable musical idea comes into my head." Balakirev wasted no time in responding with a lengthy letter of advice in the form of a summary of how he had gone about composing a Shakespearean overture on *King Lear*, laying out a ground plan and finding appropriate thematic ideas. He followed this up with another letter in which he even suggested a key scheme. All of this advice, gratuitous though it was, apparently helped Tchaikovsky break through the block that constricted his imagination. By November 9 he confided that the greater part of the work was finished, adding that "a large portion of what you advised me to do has been carried out as you instructed. In the first place, the scheme is yours: the introduction depicting the friar, the struggle (Allegro) and love (second subject). Secondly the modulations are yours: the introduction in E, the allegro in B minor, and the second subject in D flat." He included four principal musical themes in his letter and awaited Balakirev's criticism in some suspense. The response was enthusiastic, though with reservations (Balakirev considered the introduction, supposed to depict Friar Laurence, to be quite the wrong music).

Following the first performance on March 16, 1870, and further consideration of Balakirev's comments, Tchaikovsky realized that his points were, by and large, well taken, though he was right in considering *Romeo and Juliet* his best work to date. He spent the months of July and August rewriting the introductory passages in a different key with new themes and recasting the entire development and the climactic statement of the "love theme." Balakirev still quibbled about the very end, but Tchaikovsky had had enough of rewrites by this time and let the piece be published. In 1880, however, he returned to it one more time and reworked the final bars, resulting at last in the version we know today. It was completed on September 10, achieved its first performance in Berlin the following year, and has remained an orchestral staple worldwide ever since.

No doubt a fair part of this success is due to Balakirev, since, even though Tchaikovsky actually invented all the musical material, his mentor clearly played a major role in working out the formal structure of the piece and in badgering him to keep making improvements. The choice of three basic dramatic elements—the young lovers, their feuding families, and the sympathetic friar—allowed for music of great color and variety which could be arranged in a coherent form that is also dramatically cogent: the music of the lovers is constantly overwhelmed by the sounds of conflict, just as Shakespeare's protagonists meet their doom through the endless conflict of the rival factions. And though the score certainly does not attempt to follow the plot of the play in any respect, the central moods, captured with splendid romantic passion, remain intact.

The soft opening, with its quiet tread of clarinets and bassoons, hints at liturgical music (and, by extension, Friar Laurence) without ever actually quoting an ecclesiastical melody. This second thought of Tchaikovsky's—a product of the 1870 revision—functions perfectly both as introduction here and in developmental interplay with the other themes later on. Gradually it grows more forceful, foreboding. A single chord, echoed between strings and woodwinds, faster and faster, suddenly explodes into the violent principal theme of the feuding families, with its nervous punctuations and forceful syncopations in the home key of B minor. Hints of fugal imitation and passages tossed back and forth between winds and strings lead to a full-scale return of the “fight” music, which now begins harmonic movement to its most closely related key of D major, were we can expect to hear a new idea. Here Tchaikovsky took Balakirev's advice about putting the new theme in the distant key of D-flat—but the wonderful surprise here is Tchaikovsky's own: approaching the new section as if it were going to be a rather cut-and-dried modulation to the “normal” key and then, at the very last moment, sinking down one half-step, with melting effect, just as the theme begins. At first we hear only a phrase of the “love theme,” justly one of Tchaikovsky's most famous lyric inspirations, before the muted strings take over with a lush hovering figure that slowly builds to a climax when flute and oboe rush up the scale to present a full statement of the soaring and drooping love theme. All of this section remained unchanged through Tchaikovsky's several revisions of the score.

But as the love music dies away in lingering afterthoughts, the development recalls the feud, with the Friar Laurence theme vigorously contrasted. This section was newly conceived and written in 1870, after the first performance, to much stronger effect than the original version. The “hovering” theme from the exposition recurs in passages of tension-filled waiting, and the conflict between the other motives builds to the powerful restatement. Throughout this new development Tchaikovsky carefully withholds the soaring love theme, saving it for the climactic statement in the recapitulation, where for the first time the entire orchestra plays it full force. This, too, was the product of the 1870 revision, with the rhythmic motive of the feud gradually infiltrating the extended close of the love music and overwhelming it again. The wonderfully expressive ending, as it stands today, with total collapse and a poignant recollection of the dead lovers, came only in 1880. Thus it took Tchaikovsky a bit more than a decade to bring his fantasy-overture to its present form (though in the meantime he had composed his second, third, and fourth symphonies, the ballet *Swan Lake*, and the opera *Eugene Onegin*), but the final changes, even though they were relatively slight, established the work that remains among his most satisfying in formal organization and expressive power. With good reason Tchaikovsky dedicated the score to Balakirev, whose kindly tyranny had opened the path to its composition.

— Steven Ledbetter

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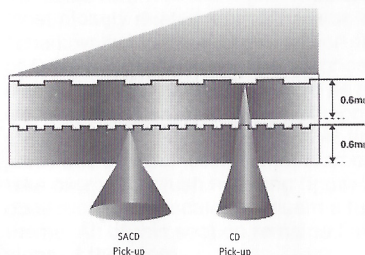
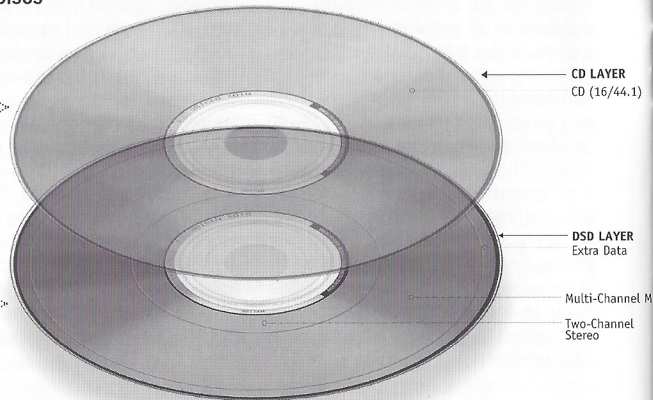
SUPER AUDIO COMPACT DISCS

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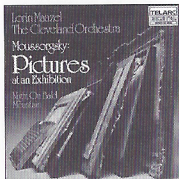
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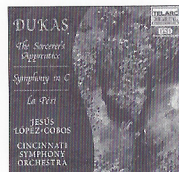
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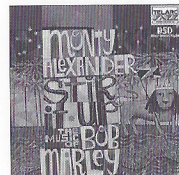
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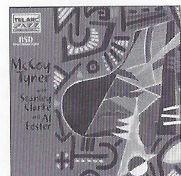
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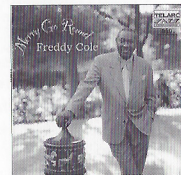
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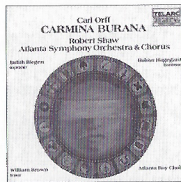
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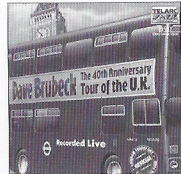
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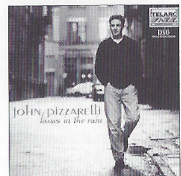
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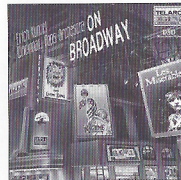


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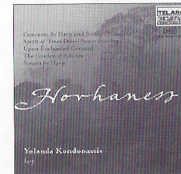
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Technical Information

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Microphones: Schoeps Colette Series

Digital Recording Processor: Soundstream

Console: Neotek

Monitor Speakers: ADS Model 1530 (bi-amplified), ADS Model C2000 Crossover

Power Amplifiers: Threshold Model 4000

Interconnecting Cables: Audio Technica

Soundstream to DSD Conversion: dCS 972 Sample Rate Converter with custom software

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Romeo & Juliet

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For detailed information about the historic Soundstream recordings, and the new SACD mastering, please see booklet.

Total Playing Time [66:28]



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