

AARON COPLAND (1900–1990)

FANFARE FOR THE COMMON MAN

Composed: 1941

Premiered: Cincinnati, 1942

The *Fanfare for the Common Man* was commissioned by conductor Eugene Goossens as one of eighteen fanfares by American composers to be played through the 1942 season of the Cincinnati Orchestra. Copland told Goossens early on that his fanfare was to be called *Fanfare for the Four Freedoms*, referencing President Roosevelt's famous speech, so Goossens was understandably surprised to be faced with the Common Man on the title page of the final score. Surprised, but also very impressed. Goossens wrote:

"It deserves a special occasion for its performance. If it is agreeable to you, we will premiere it 12 March 1943 at income tax time".

Copland shot back: "I'm all for honoring the common man at income tax time."

Copland's fanfare is the only one of the original eighteen to have survived the war, and has come to be a mainstay of American patriotic and motivational music. Interestingly, Copland, like his lifelong friend Benjamin Britten, was a lifelong committed Socialist with little sympathy for many of the causes that came to be associated with his music. But, just as he conjured up the West of Billy the Kid from an apartment in Brooklyn, he was able to compose music that reached across all ideologies; the music is not just for *the* Common Man, but *all* Common Men. This is not a trivial piece, written for one occasion and then discarded—far from it; Copland was well aware of its quality, and used it as the basis for the monumental finale of his Third Symphony, one of the key works of all American music.

JENNIFER HIGDON (born 1962)

PERCUSSION CONCERTO

Composed: 2005

Premiered: Philadelphia, 2005

In an age when most composers are fortunate to hear a work twice (or even once), performances of Jennifer Higdon's works run into the hundreds; she is one of the most popular composers of her generation. The Percussion Concerto is no exception, having

received over fifty performances since it was first played by its dedicatee, Colin Currie, in 2005.

Some may remember the barnstorming, thinking-man's-street-repairs noises of the numerous percussion concerti of the high *avant-garde* era—the 60s and 70s, when performers like Stomu Yamash'ta thrashed audiences into submission at decibel levels barely below the pain threshold. Those days are gone. Takemitsu's ineffably delicate *From Me Flows What You Call Time* opened the gate to an immensely varied, nuanced spectrum of percussion sounds; Jennifer Higdon's work goes even further in its delicate sound-world—not without its dynamic peaks, certainly, but within a musical landscape whose tonal landmarks are not merely familiar, but welcoming.

The familiar instruments of the percussion battery are joined by some less usual instruments—brake drums, the Chinese opera gong, wood blocks—with some instruments being played in less conventional ways, such as the use of a bow to produce sustained sounds from the metallic instruments. Also important is the soloist's relationship with the percussion section of the orchestra: the traditional soloist-orchestra dichotomy of the traditional concerto becomes a mingling of collegial sounds. To many, the very concept of a percussion concerto sounds confrontational; this work is anything but.

The composer herself has described the work thus:

The work begins with the sound of the marimba. I wanted the opening to be exquisitely quiet and serene, with the focus on the soloist. Then the percussion section enters, mimicking the gestures of the soloist. Only after this dialogue is established does the orchestra enter. There is significant interplay between the soloist and the orchestra with a fairly beefy accompaniment in the orchestral part, but at various times the music comes back down to the sound of the soloist and the percussion section playing together, without orchestra. Eventually, the music moves through a slow lyrical section, which requires simultaneous bowing and mallet playing by the soloist, and then a return to the fast section, where a cadenza ensues with both the soloist and the percussion section. A dramatic close to the cadenza leads back to the orchestra's opening material and the eventual conclusion of the work.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

SYMPHONY No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

Composed: 1888

Premiered: St. Petersburg, Russia, 1888

1. **Andante—Allegro con Anima**
2. **Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza—Moderato con Anima—Andante mosso—Allegro non troppo—Tempo I**
3. **Valse: Allegro moderato**
4. **Finale: Andante maestoso—Allegro vivace—Molto Vivace—Moderato assai e molto maestoso—Presto**

Tchaikovsky's own opinion of this mighty work was, to begin with—well, a little half-hearted. Just before completing it, he wrote to his patron, the astonishingly patient Nadezhda von Meck (who weathered many similar self-pitying tantrums from her *protégé*): “Thank God, it is no worse than my previous symphonies.” After one of the work's early performances, under his own fumbling baton, he wailed: “There is something so repellent about such excess, insincerity and artificiality.” It was only after the first German performance, conducted by someone who (unlike Tchaikovsky) was not physically afraid of the orchestra, that he finally admitted: “The Fifth Symphony was performed magnificently; I have started to love it. My earlier judgment was undeservedly harsh.”

Indeed it was. Madame von Meck adored the work from the outset, and was very distressed by the composer's hysterical rejection of his own music—though this was nothing compared with the blazing hostility to both Tchaikovsky and his music that came from Nadezhda's French live-in genius, the young Claude Debussy. Visitors to her home were known to knock at the back door to avoid being savaged by the bearded maniac at the piano; the fact that Tchaikovsky and Nadezhda never physically met is at least partly down to this. Madame von Meck saw herself as running a Parisian *salon des arts*, but it's fair to say that most of her friends saw it as something more like the Addams Family.

So, what was Pyotr Ilyich's problem? The answer, as is searingly obvious to anyone who listens to this magnificent music, has nothing to do with the music itself, and all to do with what the composer thought it represented. An early note in the margin of one of the work's sketches reads:

“*Program*: 1st movement of symphony. Introduction: Total submission before fate, or, what is the same thing, the inscrutable designs of Providence. *Allegro*. 1) Murmurs, doubts, laments, reproaches against. [name fiercely crossed out]. II) Shall I cast myself into the embrace of *faith*???. A wonderful program, if only it can be fulfilled.”

Much scholarship has been expended in trying to identify the person whose name has been entirely defaced here; the only thing that is entirely certain is that it will have been a man. Like Camille Saint-Saëns and Benjamin Britten, Tchaikovsky derived much of his artistic energy from a very ambivalent, and occasionally downright hostile, relationship with his own sexuality. In Tchaikovsky's case, it led eventually to his suicide; the widely-believed story that he died of cholera (let alone the preposterous *suicide-by-cholera* of Ken Russell's movie *The Music Lovers*) has long been discredited. Rimsky-Korsakov told Stravinsky that if Tchaikovsky died of cholera, there would not have been a composer left standing in Moscow afterwards, as they all attended the open-casket funeral and all kissed him goodbye).

The previous Fourth Symphony had begun with a famous "fate" figure that makes an imposing comeback at the end, bringing the work round in a closed cycle that did much to cover the structural joins in the work, as Tchaikovsky was well aware. Beginning to write the Fifth, he considered making a recurring figure refer directly to the object of desire, very much in the manner of the *idée fixe* of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. Wisely, he abandoned the explicit programmatic idea very early in the work's composition, but kept the cyclic structure, this time making the recurring *motif* a feature throughout the whole symphony.

The *motif* makes its first, very somber appearance in the clarinets at the opening of the Symphony, before morphing into a slow (funeral?) march. This is then subjected to a great deal of emotional torment as the more conventional sonata elements try their best to subdue it. However, in a strange and very unlikely anticipation of Shostakovich's *Leningrad* Symphony, the march ultimately dominates the music (or does it?), fading away to nothing at the end of the movement. But, as in the Shostakovich, we are unsure whether the enemy has triumphed—or simply moved on to its next victim. The work will ultimately describe an arc from E minor to E major, very much like Beethoven's Fifth, one of the work's models, but there is no question of major-key daylight piercing the gloom at this point.

The second movement begins in the same slough of despond. The strings sigh in despair until the appearance of a gloriously-crafted melody from the French horn. This theme has the melancholy distinction of being the acknowledged original for John Denver's *Annie's Song*; Mr. Denver's fans' ears are not deceiving them. A group of wind solos intertwine and argue with the horn melody until the *motif* reappears in an exceptionally bad mood to complain about the arguing. This, in turn, catalyzes the horn melody into something not at all unlike a happy, even excited version; that major-key resolution may be possible after all.

The third movement shows the great debt of this work to Berlioz and his *Symphonie Fantastique*. This is a ball scene, evoked by a slightly mangled waltz, whose *hemiola* rhythms would threaten injury to anyone rash enough to try actually dancing to it (though perhaps not as badly as the corresponding movement of the Sixth Symphony, which is a waltz with a *beat missing* in every other measure). After a slightly disturbing, happy-but-

not-really fast section, the *motif* makes its not-especially-welcome appearance, just as in Berlioz's waltz nightmare. Tchaikovsky makes it not so much disappear as dissolve, slowly peeling off its pitches until only the rhythm remains—an astonishingly modern procedure. As Stravinsky observed, Tchaikovsky the Modernist is not such an absurd idea after all.

The Finale begins with the *motif* looming over the listener like the Sorcerer over his Mickey Mouse apprentice, all power and grandeur, until the massed forces of Sonata Form make their play. The *motif* is used almost as a matrix through which the other musical elements are pulled, itself falling apart into tiny fragments in the process; this was the “artifice” which troubled Tchaikovsky until he learned to love his own craftsmanship. The very odd, almost *Petrushka*-like version of the *motif* that appears before the final peroration shows just how modern Tchaikovsky's thought had become, almost in spite of himself.

Eventually, the *motif* emerges in full-blown major-key, Witch Is Dead form. Fate—if that is what it was—has been defeated. Until the next time—the *Pathétique*.