

PROGRAM NOTES

Mazeppa (Tone Poem No. 6)

Franz Liszt

BORN OCTOBER 22, 1811, RAIDAING, HUNGARY
DIED JULY 31, 1886, BAYREUTH, GERMANY

Franz Liszt conducted the ducal orchestra of Weimar in the first performance of this tone poem on April 16, 1854. The work is scored for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, three bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and other percussion, and strings. (Duration: 17 minutes).



Liszt's first programmatic works were piano compositions, a genre to which he generally restricted himself during the early part of his career. But in the late 1840s, having gained some practical knowledge of orchestral matters in his post as conductor of the court orchestra in Weimar, he turned at last to orchestral writing. Between 1848 and 1857, he

composed no fewer than a dozen symphonic poems, or "tone poems," a musical genre that Liszt, for all practical purposes, established. All of these works were composed to programs derived from Romantic writers. Liszt's favorite author for this purpose was Victor Hugo, whose dramatic recounting of the story of Mazeppa inspired the sixth of Liszt's symphonic poems.

Mazeppa, according to legend, was a young Polish nobleman in the seventeenth century that became illicitly involved with the wife of a powerful count. The husband, upon discovering the affair, had Mazeppa tied naked to the back of a wild horse, which was driven into the Ukrainian wilderness. Exposed to the elements, Mazeppa would have perished were he not saved by Cossacks, a group of horsemen. They took in the stranger, who, in time, rose among them, becoming their chief and leading them into battle against Peter the Great.

Although Liszt completed his symphonic poem in 1854, the idea of basing a composition on Hugo's verses had been with him for some time. In 1840,

he published a revision of the fourth of his Transcendental Études under the title *Mazeppa*, and it is this music, with some additional changes, that forms the basis for this orchestral piece.

The work begins with a frightening orchestral shriek that sets in motion the music of *Mazeppa's* harsh ride. Against its *perpetuo mobile* figures, the trombones present a robust theme associated with the title character. This theme is restated several times by different instrumental groups as the pace and drama increase. But with ominous timpani strokes, the music, like *Mazeppa's* horse, finally collapses. The hero's fate seems uncertain until a series of trumpet fanfares soon signal the approach of his Cossack rescuers. They arrive to strains of a march that Liszt adapted from his *Arbeiterchor* ("Worker's Chorus"), composed in 1848. This music is expanded triumphantly to signify *Mazeppa's* resurrection as the Cossack leader, completing the metamorphosis summarized in the final line of Hugo's poem: "He runs, he flies, he falls, and stands as King!"

The DSO last performed Liszt's *Mazeppa* at Meadow Brook Music Festival on July 7, 1973, with Sixten Ehrling conducting.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING:

THE L'ORCHESTRE DE LA SUISSE ROMANDE
CONDUCTED BY NEEME JÄRVI (CHANDOS 9360).

Piano Concerto No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 82


Franz Xaver Scharwenka

BORN JANUARY 6, 1850, SAMTER, POLAND
DIED DECEMBER 8, 1924, BERLIN, GERMANY

The first performance of Franz Xaver Scharwenka's Piano Concerto No. 4 took place on October 31, 1908, in Berlin.

Martha Siebold was the soloist, and the composer conducted the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. The work is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and other percussion, strings and solo piano. (Duration: 40 minutes).





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During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, Scharwenka was renowned as one of the world's great pianists. This reputation was well deserved. Scharwenka was a virtuoso in the heroic tradition of Liszt and Busoni (both of whom, it happens, greatly admired his musicianship). His formidable command of the keyboard allowed him to execute challenging passagework and produce an exceptionally rich sonority at the piano, but he was also known for the fine singing tone he could draw from the instrument. Scharwenka enjoyed a stellar career as a concert artist, performing throughout Europe, the United States and Canada.

Scharwenka produced a substantial body of music that won the admiration of such discerning judges as Liszt, Tchaikovsky and Mahler. Although he wrote a symphony, a three-act opera and a variety of chamber music, Scharwenka's most successful compositions feature the piano. Chief among those works is his Fourth Piano Concerto, composed in 1908. The concerto fits the heroic Romantic mold, expansive in both its gestures and its form. Scharwenka augments the usual concerto

design of three movements, after the example of Brahms's Second Piano Concerto, which also unfolds in four movements. The opening, marked "Allegro patetico," juxtaposes a turbulent initial theme with a second subject conveying the sort of warmly expressive lyricism that Rachmaninoff would make his signature. Scharwenka's development of these ideas entails a good deal of keyboard virtuosity, but he also makes room for a quiet interlude midway through the movement, in which the soloist, playing alone, seems to indulge in gentle reverie.

The second movement, like the first, opens with a dramatic orchestral statement. Quickly, however, the tone turns light and carefree. There is a charming gingerbread quality to the texture of the ensuing music, with trills, triangle accents and glittering keyboard figuration. Later, Scharwenka permits the soloist another lyrical meditation. The third movement brings a lament of almost operatic character. A transition passage built on a reminiscence of the dramatic theme that opened the concerto leads without pause to the finale. There, Scharwenka adopts the rhythms

of the tarantella, evoking that frenetic Italian dance in a brilliant display of keyboard virtuosity.

This concerto was Scharwenka's last major composition, and a vintage expression of the musical ideals of the late Romantic period. No doubt it was the unabashed Romanticism of this and Scharwenka's other works that prevented them from holding a place in the concert repertory. A new era in the arts, that of modernism, was already dawning when Scharwenka wrote this concerto, and the innovations of Debussy, Stravinsky and other composers quickly made its Romantic ethos seem old-fashioned and irrelevant. But musical fashions have not stopped evolving, and now, at the dawn of a new century, Romantic expression is once again in vogue.

These performances mark the DSO debut of Scharwenka's Piano Concerto No. 4.

■ **RECOMMENDED RECORDING:**
STEPHEN HOUGH WITH THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CONDUCTED BY LAWRENCE FOSTER (HYPERION CDA66790).

Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67 Ludwig van Beethoven

BORN DECEMBER 15/16, 1770, BONN, GERMANY
DIED MARCH 26, 1827, VIENNA, AUSTRIA

The first performance of Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 took place in Vienna on December 22, 1808, at a lengthy concert devoted entirely to Beethoven's music. The composer, who had organized the event, conducted. The symphony is scored for pairs of flutes (one doubling piccolo), oboes, clarinets, bassoons (one doubling on contrabassoon), horns and trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and the usual string choir. (Duration: 31 minutes).



Beethoven began working on the Fifth Symphony in 1802, but it underwent a long gestation and did not reach completion until the spring of 1808. Significantly, the celebrated four-note motive that opens the work was present in the earliest sketches. This motive, the figure Beethoven associated with "fate," dominates the first movement;

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