

Program Page

HOUGH FAMILY FOUNDATION MASTERWORKS

Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6

Earl Lee, *Conductor*
Stella Chen, *Violin*

Friday, Jan 19, 2024, Straz Center - Ferguson Hall at 8:00 pm
Saturday, Jan 20, 2024, Mahaffey Theater at 8:00 pm

Valentin Silvestrov
(b. 1937)
Arr. Eduard Resatch

Samuel Barber
(1910-1981)

Peter I. Tchaikovsky
(1872-1958)

Prayer for Ukraine (arr. for Chamber Orchestra)

Concerto for Violin & Orchestra, Op.14 🎵

I. Allegro
II. Andante
III. Presto in moto perpetuo
Stella Chen, *violin*

Intermission

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74 (Pathétique)

I. Adagio – Allegro non troppo
II. Allegro con grazia
III. Allegro molto vivace
IV. Finale: Adagio lamentoso

🎵 Concerto for Violin and Orchestra by Samuel Barber is presented from G. Schirmer, Inc. and Associated Music Publishers, copyright owners.

*Mystery piece rental by European Music Distributors, Corp.

**With gratitude, TFO dedicates Friday's concert to generous patron,
donor and Board Director Gayle Bertelstein.**

Media Partner

Tampa Bay Times
tampabay.com

Please scan for today's program. Also find
program notes, artist bios, videos and more.
Or visit FloridaOrchestra.org



Sponsored in part by the State of Florida through the Department of State,
Florida Arts and Culture, and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.

 **PNC BANK** Official bank of The Florida Orchestra



Valentin Silvestrov (1937-)
Prayer for Ukraine (arr. Resatch)

Duration: ca. 6 minutes

Valentin Silvestrov composed his *Prayer for Ukraine* nearly a decade ago, but it takes on new life as a voice of solidarity since the Russian invasion of his homeland in early 2022.

Originally written as a choral piece in 2014, the prayer was a musical response to the Euromaidan protests against now-former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich and his Russia-aligned economic policies. The public outcry led to an impending impeachment, and Yanukovich fled Ukraine, just as Russia began its invasion of Crimea.

The Florida Orchestra offers an updated version of the prayer, not for a cappella choir but an arrangement for chamber orchestra. The six-minute work unfolds like a series of sighs, the flow tonal and modest, without complex development. Regardless of the transcription, it pays homage to something larger than the conflict between Russian and Ukraine.

“It reflects the wider human condition,” says Music Director Michael Francis. “How you choose to hear it is up to you, the listener, to decide.”

Silvestrov was born in 1937 in Kyiv and today resides in Berlin. Initially an avant-garde composer, his earlier work was considered degenerate and offensive by Soviet censors who forced artists to abide by the restrictions of Stalin’s socialist realism.

Although the dictator died in 1953, Silvestrov continued to suffer under the administrations of Khrushchev and Brezhnev. In 1970, the Ukrainian Union of Composers expelled him for three years, but he turned inward, and found new forms of expression outside the circle of government criticism.

But the *Prayer for Ukraine* is a blend of both the political and artistic, and as a symbol of solidarity it continues to gain traction in performances worldwide. It no longer reflects on any specific war, Silvestrov said in an interview with the *New York Times*: “It’s very obvious that this is not a problem of Ukraine and Russia. It’s a problem of civilization.”

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)
Violin Concerto, Op. 14

Duration: ca. 22 minutes

The Pennsylvania-born composer Samuel Barber enjoyed a lifetime of fame for his *Adagio for Strings*, which after 87 years remains among the most performed pieces of classical music in the United States.

But Barber, who died in 1981, regretted how this cloying work overshadowed everything else he wrote. “When will they play something other than my *Adagio*?” he once lamented about the plethora of performances everywhere he looked.

If Barber were alive today and visiting the Tampa Bay area, he would be pleased to see his *Violin Concerto* on The Florida Orchestra’s bill – its second since 1999 – with guest soloist Stella Chen. He also may wonder why it gets so little play among orchestras, as its three movements are thoroughly modern but served in digestible nuggets, without excess and very much in the neo-Romantic vein.

The opening allegro in G major is so lush and full of melodic allure it could stand on its own as a concert piece, and the central andante is a soft lament in E major that seems to float on air, transported by oboe and clarinet solos. The lyricism of these two movements unfolds with almost no displays of virtuosity, which Barber saved for last.

The finale takes us on a wilder ride at breakneck speed. In fact, Iso Briselli, a violinist to whom Barber dedicated the concerto, declared the last movement unplayable, but was proven wrong by a student violinist at the Curtis Institute who performed it for the composer. It launches in a pyrotechnic flash – an A minor presto in perpetual motion – the violin bursting with triplet semiquavers, and the movement resolves in less than four minutes.

Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No. 6, Op. 74, Pathétique

Duration: ca. 45 minutes

Tchaikovsky was never a man to hide his emotions, either in music or in words, and was blunt in describing the sweat equity behind his final creation: "Without exaggeration, I have put my entire soul into this symphony. I have never felt such self-satisfaction, such pride, such happiness, as in the consciousness that I am really the creator of this beautiful work."

Less than 10 days after its premiere in October 1893, Tchaikovsky died, allegedly having drunk a glass of un-boiled water during a cholera outbreak in St. Petersburg (Russia, not Florida). The *Pathétique* – his symphony of suffering, of pathos – would become his requiem, a last will and testament of a composer whose music comes so directly from the heart.

Tchaikovsky's brand of expression speaks of vulnerability, personal pain, sentiment and sensitivity. Along with a supreme technique and gift for melody and orchestral color, his emotionalism is a powerful tonic that fuels the concertos, ballet scores, tone poems and last three symphonies – all central to the orchestral repertoire.

But his final work remains popular for another reason: Its resilience. It stands up to most any interpretation, to any choice of tempo, to any exaggeration. No wonder it's among the most recorded of all symphonies; no two performances are alike, and the best are nothing less than gut-wrenching. After a performance with the New York Philharmonic, conductor Leonard Bernstein stepped off the podium, white faced and drained, and said, "I have been on the brink."

The first movement opens from the depths, the strings barely audible as a mournful bassoon rises from below. More and more instruments slowly join the dirge, adding color as the pace quickens, hints of a main theme, then unleashes a tempest. After a brief struggle, Tchaikovsky lets loose one of his most ardent melodies. It doesn't last. An outburst by the brass begins a descent into chaos, followed by a brief return to song, then quiet.

The second movement, a waltz with five beats per measure, takes the place where a slow movement would normally reside. An exhilarating scherzo follows, a triumphant march where the woodwinds, and the clarinet in particular, exploit the music's colors to the fullest. Don't be surprised to hear applause from the audience after the rousing finish.

The work concludes, famously, with a lament – a long decrescendo, making it the first major symphony to end in a slow movement. Listeners will hear a quote from the opening section and two arresting climaxes. But the mood is one of profound despair, and as the music winds to a close, it grows weaker and more solemn, the trombones and tuba finally running short of breath, then the bassoon, before the last notes of the orchestra fade into darkness. All light – and life – has disappeared.

"You really feel this is his last piece, a farewell to the world," said TFO Music Director Michael Francis. "There's a very clear narrative throughout. It's an extraordinary work of drama and pain on a level of honesty we haven't heard before. ... It's an individual testament to what he was feeling at the time."

Program notes by Kurt Loft, a freelance writer and former music critic for the Tampa Tribune.