

Creative Capitals 2018: Liner notes, disc 8.

The sixteenth edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE* visits seven of Western music's most flourishing *Creative Capitals*—London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Leipzig, Berlin, Budapest, and Vienna. Each disc explores the music that has emanated from these cultural epicenters, comprising an astonishingly diverse repertoire spanning some three hundred years that together largely forms the canon of Western music. Many of history's greatest composers have helped to define the spirit of these flagship cities through their music, and in this edition of recordings, Music@Menlo celebrates the many artistic triumphs that have emerged from the fertile ground of these *Creative Capitals*.

The final disc of the 2018 edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE* begins with the unfinished Octet by Mily Balakirev, the leader of the Russian vanguard of composers in St. Petersburg known as the Mighty Handful. Following Anton Arensky's passionately romantic Opus 35 Cello Quartet, the disc concludes with the hyper-Expressionist *Verklärte Nacht*—a programmatic work of immense beauty that preceded the twelve-note and serialist techniques established by the iconoclast Arnold Schoenberg, who sought to “ensure the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years” with his compositional developments.

1 Octet for Winds, Strings, and Piano, op. 3 (1855–1856)
MILY BALAKIREV (1837–1910)

DEMARRE MCGILL, *flute*; STEPHEN TAYLOR, *oboe*; KEVIN RIVARD, *horn*; AARON BOYD, *violin*; MATTHEW LIPMAN, *viola*; DAVID REQUIRO, *cello*; SCOTT PINGEL, *bass*; MICHAEL BROWN, *piano*

2–4 Quartet no. 2 in a minor for Violin, Viola, and Two Cellos, op. 35 (1894)

ANTON ARENSKY (1861–1906)

Moderato

Variations on a Theme of Tchaikovsky: Moderato

Andante sostenuto – Allegro moderato

ARNAUD SUSSMANN, *violin*; PAUL NEUBAUER, *viola*; DAVID REQUIRO, DAVID FINCKEL, *cellos*

5 Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night) for String Sextet, op. 4 (1899)

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG (1874–1951)

ARNAUD SUSSMANN, KRISTIN LEE, *violins*;
RICHARD O'NEILL, MATTHEW LIPMAN, *violins*;
DAVID REQUIRO, NICHOLAS CANELLAKIS, *cellos*

Liner notes by Patrick Castillo © 2018

MILY BALAKIREV (1837–1910)

Octet for Winds, Strings, and Piano, op. 3 (1855–1856)

As a child, Mily Balakirev demonstrated promising musical aptitude and enjoyed the support of Aleksandr Ulibishev [pronounced Uluh- BYSHev], the most prominent musical figure and patron in his native city of Nizhny Novgorod. Ulibishev, the author of books on Mozart and Beethoven, introduced the young Balakirev to music by those composers as well as by Chopin and Mikhail Glinka. In 1855, Balakirev traveled to St. Petersburg, where Ulibishev introduced him to Glinka himself. Glinka became a consequential mentor to the eighteen-year-old pianist and composer. That year also saw numerous important concert appearances for Balakirev. In February, he performed in St. Petersburg as the soloist in the first movement of a projected piano concerto; later that spring, also in St. Petersburg, he gave a concert of his own solo piano and chamber compositions. (Balakirev's early successes as a pianist culminated in 1858 with a performance of Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto* for the tsar.)

Balakirev's rise to prominence among St. Petersburg's musical elite continued. In 1856, he met the composer César Cui, the influential critics Alexander Serov and Vladimir Stasov, and other important figures. Glinka's death the following year was a personal blow, but an emerging generation of musicians meanwhile coalesced around Balakirev. The talented amateurs Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Aleksandr Borodin gravitated towards him as a mentor figure. This set of composers (along with Cui), led by Balakirev and known as the Mighty Handful, would represent a dominant force in Russian musical life over the latter half of the nineteenth century (see above).

Balakirev's Octet for Winds, Strings, and Piano, op. 3, dates from this consequential period in the composer's rise to prominence. Scored for flute, oboe, horn, violin, viola, cello, bass, and piano, the Octet was apparently projected to be a large-scale, multimovement work, but only the first movement (performed in this concert) and fragments of a scherzo survive. It also marks one of his sole chamber works. (Relative to their academically oriented contemporaries, Balakirev and his set created little chamber music. Opera, orchestral music, and songs provided more apt vehicles for their nationalist concerns; chamber music was mainly the purview of Tchaikovsky, Taneyev, and others.) The work may be a revision of an earlier septet for flute, clarinet, string quartet, and piano, now lost. Aside from this Octet, Balakirev's chamber music comprises only an unfinished string quartet and the Romance for Cello and Piano, which was completed by Sergei Lyapunov.

The Octet begins with a dramatic, declamatory statement. The work's varied instrumentation as well as Balakirev's incisive handling of voices inject this inclement music with cinematic color. The plaintive second theme, introduced by the piano, may be based on a Russian folk song. The clouds gradually part as the theme proceeds, and the exposition ends on a sunny note. The development section begins hesitantly: a single horn note hangs suspended above quiet string pizzicati and halting piano fragments. This soon erupts into a full-throated development of the exposition's thematic materials. Following a standard recapitulation, the Octet ends with a brief but powerful coda.

ANTON ARENSKY (1861–1906)

Quartet no. 2 in a minor for Violin, Viola, and Two Cellos, op. 35
(1894)

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of a set of nationalist composers seeking to follow Glinka's example, working towards the development of a distinctly Russian school of music. These composers, led by Mily Balakirev (see below), were primarily self-taught and drew from Russian folk song and other sources for musical material. A review of a concert in 1867 featuring music by Glinka, Balakirev, and others proclaimed, "May God grant that [the audience]...may forever preserve the memory of how much poetry, feeling, talent, and ability is possessed by the small but already mighty handful of Russian musicians." Balakirev and his disciples—Aleksandr Borodin, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov—thereafter became known as the Mighty Handful (or, more simply, the Five). Russian music during this period was catalyzed by a dialectic between the Mighty Handful's nationalist autodidacticism and a yen for Western professionalization, led by the brothers Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein. Anton Rubinstein, one of his generation's foremost pianists as well as a noted composer and conductor, founded the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1862, where Tchaikovsky became his prized pupil; Nikolai founded the Moscow Conservatory four years later and recruited the newly graduated Tchaikovsky to serve on the faculty. Despite their divergent philosophies, the nationalist camp nevertheless interfaced with the conservatories. Rimsky-Korsakov later taught at St. Petersburg, where his students included Anton Arensky—the inheritor, therefore, of both his teacher's nationalist soul and the Rubinsteins' technical standards.

Arensky graduated in 1882 with a gold medal and was immediately appointed professor of harmony and counterpoint at the Moscow Conservatory, where his students included Rachmaninov, Scriabin, and Reinhold Glière; his relocation to Moscow moreover brought him into the social and professional circles of Tchaikovsky and Sergei Taneyev. Arensky's output reflects a broad range of influences, both classically Western and traditionally Russian. His Piano Concerto betrays a fascination with Chopin, and the Piano Trio no. 1 in d minor, op. 32, audibly nods to the d minor Trio of Mendelssohn. Elsewhere in his catalogue, as in the Quartet in a minor for Violin, Viola, and Two Cellos, op. 35, elements of Russian folk song and liturgical music emerge. Arensky composed the quartet in 1894 *in memoriam* Tchaikovsky, who had died the previous year. As befitting a work mourning the loss of a beloved mentor figure, the quartet exudes a deeply felt melancholy, nostalgia, and, at its end, exultation, in celebration of a national hero.

The quartet moreover reflects, in subtle and sophisticated fashion, Arensky's particular Russianness. The work's opening theme is based on Russian Orthodox chant: it is homophonic and *parlando* (that is, as if approximating speech), and its peculiar instrumentation lends the music a dark solemnity. The *Moderato* steadily builds from this intrinsically Russian foundation to a rhapsodic polyphonic texture. Near the movement's end, each instrument plays double-stops, creating the illusion of a string octet. The quartet's second movement pays most explicit homage to Tchaikovsky: it is a set of variations on Tchaikovsky's "Legend," from his *Songs for Children*, op. 54.

The melody, simple yet richly evocative, could be a Russian folk tune. Here, Arensky honors Tchaikovsky—specifically, his gift as a melodist—via seven reverent variations. Each features the main theme, often disguised and reharmonized in strikingly ingenious ways, a testament to Arensky's rigorous technical training.

A delicate coda returns to the opening theme, played first in shimmering harmonics. A specter of the first movement reappears, and fragments of Tchaikovsky's theme are recalled before the movement ends with stark pizzicati. The finale begins with a deeply voiced chant, taken from a Russian Orthodox funeral mass. After the movement's prayerful opening, Arensky constructs a fugue—that most cerebral of Western musical forms—based on a Russian folk melody, "Slava," emblematic here of the composer's (and the quartet's honoree's) heritage. (Beethoven quotes the same melody in his Quartet in e minor, op. 59, no. 2, in honor of the Russian Count Razumovsky, who commissioned the work.) This festive tune was commonly heard at the coronation of the tsar—an association surely not lost on Arensky while commemorating his musical idol.

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG (1874–1951)

Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night) for String Sextet, op. 4
(1899)

Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night), Schoenberg's tone poem for string sextet, represents the earliest masterpiece by the iconoclastic composer who, arguably more than any other post-Romantic figure, altered the course of Western music. His infamous boast that he had "made a discovery which [would] ensure the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years" might have been prematurely confident, but his development of the twelve-note method and serialism certainly upended the Classical tradition, giving rise to a spirit of experimentation that would indeed fuel the art over the subsequent century. While revealing a composer still under the spell of Brahms and Wagner, *Verklärte Nacht*, composed over just three weeks in 1899, likewise illustrates a hyper-Expressionist impulse that would naturally point the composer towards his Second String Quartet (1908), whose last movement, printed without a key signature, made Schoenberg the first composer to completely abandon the tonal system.

Verklärte Nacht, while still hewing to a conventional tonal framework (it begins in d minor and ends in D major), is a work of lush chromaticism, at times seemingly untethered to any harmonic center. The piece is a programmatic work, based on an 1896 poem by Richard Dehmel. The poem tells the story of a woman, pregnant by a stranger, who falls deeply in love with another man. She reproaches herself and tells her lover of the earlier liaison; the man accepts the child as his own. Schoenberg's score charts the poem's narrative. Two people are walking through a bare, cold wood; the moon keeps pace with them and draws their gaze. The moon moves along above tall oak trees, there is no wisp of cloud to obscure the radiance to which the black, jagged tips reach up. The work begins *sehr langsam* (very slowly), with violas and cellos quietly descending over an impassive pedal D. As the violins enter, the music blooms to an ardent forte. The pace quickens; the first viola presents a disquieted second theme over restive tremolandi in the cellos.

The first cello, in its plaintive tenor register, and first violin drive a third musical idea, a poignant legato melody, played *mit Dämpfer* (with mutes). This music becomes increasingly agitated before exploding in a radiant fortissimo E major chord. A woman's voice speaks: "I am carrying a child, and not by you. I am walking here with you in a state of sin. I have offended grievously against myself. I despaired of happiness, and yet I still felt a grievous longing for life's fullness, for a mother's joys and duties; and so I sinned, and so I yielded, shuddering, my sex to the embrace of a stranger, and even thought myself blessed. Now life has taken its revenge, and I have met you, met you."

As the woman begins her confession, the music turns tender and sentimentally lyrical. The opening section's fraught orchestration yields to a clearer, melody-driven texture. Yet just as quickly, an irrepressible anxiety bubbles to the surface: each line takes thorny chromatic twists and turns, and the tempo becomes *drängend, etwas unruhiger* (urgent, somewhat restless). A steely low E in the second cello, played tremolando, halts the scene; the upper strings add atmospheric effects as the first violin—presumably the anguished woman—utters a wild, *leidenschaftlich* (wild, passionate) cry. Her confession ends despondently. "She walks on, stumbling. She looks up; the moon keeps pace. Her dark gaze drowns in light." The work's opening music is recalled as the two continue on their way, the morose descending lines now *schwer betont* (heavily stressed).

A delicate flourish in the first violin is followed by a series of ethereal chords, impossibly quiet (*pianissississimo*). The music turns, unexpectedly, to magnanimous D major, as the man speaks: "Do not let the child you have conceived be a burden on your soul. Look, how brightly the universe shines! Splendor falls

on everything around, you are voyaging with me on a cold sea, but there is the glow of an inner warmth from you in me, from me in you. That warmth will transfigure the stranger's child, and you bear it me, begot by me. You have transfused me with splendor, you have made a child of me." The first cello issues a warm, generous melody. Earlier material, previously cast in foreboding shadow, is transfigured into an amorous scene. "He puts an arm about her strong hips. Their breath embraces in the air. Two people walk on through the high, bright night." Dehmel wrote to Schoenberg thirteen years after *Verklärte Nacht* was premiered: "Yesterday evening I heard your *Verklärte Nacht*, and I should consider it a sin of omission if I failed to say a word of thanks to you for your wonderful sextet. I had intended to follow the motives of my text in your composition; but I soon forgot to do so, I was so enthralled by the music."

Recorded July 21 and August 4, 2018, The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton. Recording producer and engineer: Da-Hong Seetoo. Steinway grand pianos provided courtesy of Pro-Piano. Cover art: *Castrum Doloris*, by Gonzalo Fonseca. Photos by Geoff Sheil. Booklet design by Nick Stone. CD production: Jerome Bunke, Digital Force, New York. Production manager: Nathan Paer. Music@Menlo 2018 was made possible by a leadership grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Additional support provided by Koret Foundation Funds, U.S. Trust, and the many individuals and organizations that share the festival's vision. American Public Media was the official radio and new-media broadcast partner of Music@Menlo 2018. © 2018 Music@Menlo LIVE. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized Duplication Is a Violation of Applicable Laws. Printed and Manufactured in the U.S.A. www.musicatmenlo.org



DEMARRE MCGILL, *flute*; STEPHEN TAYLOR, *oboe*; KEVIN RIVARD, *horn*; AARON BOYD, *violin*; MATTHEW LIPMAN, *viola*; DAVID REQUIRO, *cello*; SCOTT PINGEL, *bass*; MICHAEL BROWN, *piano*