Thursday, October 11, 8pm  |  THE BERANEK CONCERT
Friday, October 12, 1:30pm  |  THE POLLY AND DAN PIERCE CONCERT
Saturday, October 13, 8pm  |  HANNU LINTU conducting

STRAVINSKY  SYMPHONIES OF WIND INSTRUMENTS

TCHAIKOVSKY  SERENADE IN C FOR STRINGS, OPUS 48
(performed without conductor)

Pezzo in forma di Sonatina: Andante non troppo—Allegro moderato
Valse: Moderato, tempo di valse
Elegia: Larghetto elegiaco
Finale, Tema Russo: Andante—Allegro con spirito

{ INTERMISSION }

BARTÓK  CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA
Andante non troppo—Allegro vivace
“Gioco delle coppie”: Allegretto scherzando
Elegia: Andante, non troppo
Intermezzo interrotto: Allegretto
Finale: Presto

BANK OF AMERICA AND TAKEDA PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY LIMITED ARE PROUD TO SPONSOR THE BSO’S 2018-19 SEASON.

The evening concerts will end about 9:50, the afternoon concert about 3:20.

Concertmaster Malcolm Lowe performs on a Stradivarius violin, known as the “Lafont,” generously donated to the Boston Symphony Orchestra by the O’Block Family.

First associate concertmaster Tamara Smirnova performs on a 1754 J.B. Guadagnini violin, the “ex-Zazofsky,” and James Cooke performs on a 1778 Nicolò Gagliano violin, both generously donated to the orchestra by Michael L. Nieland, M.D., in loving memory of Mischa Nieland, a member of the cello section from 1943 to 1988.

Steinway & Sons Pianos, selected exclusively for Symphony Hall.

The BSO’s Steinway & Sons pianos were purchased through a generous gift from Gabriella and Leo Beranek.

The program books for the Friday series are given in loving memory of Mrs. Hugh Bancroft by her daughters, the late Mrs. A. Werk Cook and the late Mrs. William C. Cox.

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In consideration of the performers and those around you, please turn off all electronic equipment during the performance, including tablets, cellular phones, pagers, watch alarms, messaging devices of any kind, anything that emits an audible signal, and anything that glows. Thank you for your cooperation.

Please note that the use of audio or video recording devices, or taking pictures of the artists—whether photographs or videos—is prohibited during concerts.

The Program in Brief...

This first program of the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s 2018-19 season spotlights different timbral components of the orchestra: woodwinds and brass in Stravinsky’s Symphonies of Wind Instruments; strings in Tchaikovsky’s Serenade, and those groups plus a big percussion section for Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra—perhaps the BSO’s most famous premiere, first played by the orchestra under Serge Koussevitzky’s direction in 1944.

Koussevitzky, albeit with a different ensemble, also gave the first performance of Igor Stravinsky’s Symphonies of Wind Instruments, leading its world premiere in London in 1921. This eight-minute piece, which the composer called an “austere ritual,” was worlds away from his blockbuster ballets of ten years earlier, The Firebird, Petrushka, and The Rite of Spring. In addition to its distinctive harmonic and timbral colors, Symphonies of Wind Instruments is characterized by a compositional technique that juxtaposes music of very different qualities, not unlike the superimposition of visual objects in Cubist painting. Its restraint anticipated the neoclassical style that dominated Stravinsky’s work of the 1920s and ’30s.
Much more familiar to most concertgoers is Tchaikovsky’s charming Serenade for Strings, which he composed in 1880 at about the same time as his ostentatiously dramatic and nationalist 1812 Overture. Although he expressed ambivalence about the bombastic, nationalistic 1812, he was uncharacteristically pleased with the Serenade, writing, “This is a piece from the heart and so, I venture to say, it does not lack artistic worth.” The piece is rich in melody and mood. Its second-movement waltz features one of his most famous tunes, and the high-spirited finale is based on a Russian traditional song.

The final piece on the program is Bartók’s tour-de-force of orchestral virtuosity, his Concerto for Orchestra. One of the composer’s last pieces, it was commissioned by BSO music director Serge Koussevitzky in 1943. Bartók had left Hungary for the United States at the end of 1940, but was suffering from leukemia and had also found a tepid reception as a performer. He wrote later that the new commission had effectively offered him a new lease on life. The Concerto for Orchestra marked Bartók’s first real success with a broad audience and has since become a staple of the orchestral repertoire. The piece is imbued with the melodic contours, harmonies, and rhythms of his country’s indigenous music, which he studied intensively throughout his career. The program note Bartók wrote for the premiere describes the piece as outlining “a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third, to the life-assertion of the last”; it also tells us that the title of the piece reflects his intention “to treat the single instruments or instrumental groups in a concertant or soloistic manner.”

Robert Kirzinger/Marc Mandel

Igor Stravinsky

“Symphonies of Wind Instruments”

IGOR FEDOROVICH STRAVINSKY was born at Oranienbaum, Russia, on the Gulf of Finland, on June 17, 1882, and died in New York on April 6, 1971. He wrote “Symphonies of Wind Instruments” primarily in the second half of 1920, in part for a December 1920 edition of the periodical “La Revue musicale” memorializing Claude Debussy, to whom Stravinsky dedicated the work. Serge Koussevitzky conducted the first performance on June 10, 1921, at Queen’s Hall, London. Stravinsky revised the piece (as he did many others) during the second half of the 1940s; it is the 1947 version that we hear at these concerts. Stravinsky led a group of film studio musicians in a private first performance the following evening.

THE 1947 SCORE OF “SYMPHONIES OF WIND INSTRUMENTS” calls for three flutes, two oboes and English horn, three clarinets, three bassoons (third doubling contrabassoon), four horns, three trumpets in B-flat, three trombones, and tuba. Duration is about eight minutes.

I did not, and indeed I could not, count on any immediate success for this work. It is devoid of all the elements which infallibly appeal to the ordinary listener and to which he is accustomed. It would be futile to look in it for any passionate impulse or dynamic brilliance. It is an austere ritual which is unfolded in terms of short litanies between different groups of homogeneous instruments.

Igor Stravinsky, An Autobiography (1936)

Stravinsky wrote these comments about his Symphonies of Wind Instruments at a distance of some fifteen years, with his recollection colored by its actual reception. The circumstance of its premiere illustrates the challenges: Serge Koussevitzky, who had left the Soviet Union at the time of the Revolution, settled in Paris, and there, in spring 1921, eager to promote his own prowess as a conductor of Russian music, had just initiated his Concerts Koussevitzky series. For his concert of June 10, 1921, at Queen’s Hall, London, he programmed brilliantly orchestrated works by Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninoff, Glazunov, and Scriabin, along with Stravinsky’s Symphonies, scored for a mere twenty-four winds—an ensemble a third the size of that called for by Rimsky’s Golden Cockerel dances, which preceded Stravinsky’s “austere ritual” on the program. Needless to say Stravinsky’s piece was eclipsed; conductor and composer later blamed each other for its tepid reception. Koussevitzky began his twenty-five-year tenure as conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra three years later, but, not surprisingly, he never conducted Symphonies of Wind Instruments with the BSO, despite his becoming one of Stravinsky’s most devoted proponents. He led American or world premiers of many of the composer’s later works, and also invited Stravinsky to conduct the orchestra on several occasions.

Although one could argue that Symphonies of Wind Instruments and its Apollonian restraint belonged to Stravinsky’s neoclassical period, it might more usefully be viewed as an endpoint for the stripped-down style he had been honing since the early 1910s. In part due to economies necessary during World War I, the composer’s orchestral excesses (as he was later to consider them) in the three big Paris ballets (Firebird, Petrushka, and The Rite of Spring) gave way to the leaner pieces of the middle and late years of the decade, most notably the “burlesque” theater works Renard, L’Histoire du soldat, and Les Noces, with their nuanced considerations of timbre. (Stravinsky
had been strongly influenced by Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*, about which he wrote in his 1935 autobiography, “I did not feel the slightest enthusiasm about the aesthetics of the work.... But on the other hand, I consider that the merits of the instrumentation are beyond dispute.” His tiny 1914 song cycle *Pribouatki*, though on a much smaller scale than *Pierrot*, seems to be a direct reaction to Schoenberg’s piece.) It was the quasi-Baroque pastiche ballet *Pulcinella*, premiered a year earlier than *Symphonies*, that had really kicked off the new phase, leading to such indisputably neoclassical works as the Piano Concerto, with its roots in Bach, and the Handelian *Oedipus Rex*.

Stravinsky’s protégé Robert Craft tells us that preliminary sketches for the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* first appeared in summer 1919, the impetus being an invitation to submit a short piece to a new periodical *La Revue musicale* for an issue entitled “*Tombeau de Claude Debussy.*” Debussy had died in 1918, and several colleagues were invited to write pieces in his memory. The somber chorale that ends *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, the first section of the work that Stravinsky completed, was published in the December 31, 1920, supplement to the magazine along with pieces by Ravel, Malipiero, Satie, and others.

As can be heard in the piece’s jump-cuts, *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* was for Stravinsky a process of assembly similar to his work with blocks of preexisting music in *Pulcinella*. This time, though, the music is all Stravinsky’s. The technique of moving without transition from music of one character, texture, and tempo to another, like a cinematic edit, is present as early as *Petrushka*, but here we have no story line to facilitate the shift for the audience. (There are important analogs in this approach to the superimposed planes of Cubist painting, then in its heyday.) The music’s three basic characters are the Debussy chorale, foreshadowed briefly in snatches throughout the piece; supple, *Rite of Spring*-like duoets in flute and clarinet, and march-like, rhythmically assertive chords (shades of *L’Histoire du soldat*).

In the late 1940s after coming to the United States, Stravinsky revised many of his early works with an eye to protecting U.S. copyrights for his music, particularly that which was originally published in Russia. (*Symphonies of Wind Instruments* had never been published in its original form anyway, although Arthur Lourié’s piano transcription appeared in the late 1920s.) Stravinsky began the revision of *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* in 1945, completing it in 1947. The revisions consist primarily of simplified instrumentation and some adjustments of rhythm and meter, including breaking longer irregular measures into shorter ones (for example, the opening 5/8 measure becomes two measures, 2/8 and 3/8).

Robert Kirzinger

Composer/annotator ROBERT KIRZINGER is Associate Director of Program Publications of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Serenade in C for Strings, Opus 48

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY was born at Kamsko-Votkinsk, Vyatka Province, Russia, on May 7, 1840, and died in St. Petersburg on November 6, 1893. He composed his Serenade for Strings at Kamenka, in Ukraine, between September 21 and November 4, 1880. The first performance was given by the Russian Musical Society on October 30, 1881, in St. Petersburg, with Eduard Napravnik conducting.

THE SCORE OF TCHAIKOVSKY’S SERENADE calls for the usual orchestral strings: first and second violins, violas, cellos, and double basses.

During the autumn of 1880, while staying at his sister’s estate in the Ukrainian countryside, Tchaikovsky produced two of his most popular, enduring—and dissimilar—orchestral works. In the composer’s large oeuvre it is difficult to find two pieces less alike than the elegant, cozy Serenade for Strings and the enormous, bombastic, and overtly nationalistic 1812 Festival Overture. Where the carefully crafted and “private” Serenade is suffused in the warm glow of Mozartian neoclassicism, the relentlessly “public” overture (described by Tchaikovsky’s biographer David Brown as a “thematic ragbag”) shudders and bangs and crashes, threatening to fall apart at the seams as it celebrates the 70th anniversary of the Russian victory over Napoleon.

No one was more aware of the vast distance separating the two works than the composer himself. In a letter to his mysterious longtime patron Nadezhda von Meck, he confessed: “The overture will be very loud and noisy, but I wrote it with no warm feeling of love, and therefore there will probably be no artistic merits in it.... I composed the serenade from inner conviction. It is a heartfelt piece and so, I dare to think, is not lacking in real qualities.”

When, amidst the peaceful surroundings of the village of Kamenka, a favorite retreat, Tchaikovsky began writing what eventually became the Serenade, he was thinking in terms of a symphony or a string quartet. A few weeks later, he was referring to it as a suite for string orchestra. But by the time the piece was completed, Tchaikovsky had settled on the label “serenade.” Originally, the term was used to refer to a vocal or instrumental work for a soloist performing in the evening. (Often, the performer was a love-struck admirer pouring out his passion beneath a lady’s
window.) In the 18th century, the serenade developed into an instrumental form for ensembles of various sizes and compositions. Mozart, probably the most successful and best-known practitioner of the form, produced numerous serenades for orchestra and for wind ensembles.

Tchaikovsky’s fondness for Mozart had already been made evident in several of his earlier works, including the Variations on a Rococo Theme for cello and orchestra. In the music of his 18th-century predecessor, Tchaikovsky saw an idealized vision of a perfect and harmonious age infinitely superior to his own debased and vulgar era. This romanticized yearning for a lost age of classical beauty and symmetry, perhaps intensified by the homosexual composer’s frustrating search for romantic and emotional fulfillment in a society hostile to his inclinations, may help to account for the charming, nostalgic escapism of the Serenade for Strings. Until the very end of his career, Tchaikovsky repeatedly returned to the 18th century for solace, even in his tragic late opera The Queen of Spades, with its inserted Mozartian pastoral interlude.

And yet the Serenade does not lack for abundant Russian local color. In the zestful finale (with the subtitle “Tema russo”), Tchaikovsky uses two Russian folk songs that he had already arranged in an 1869 collection: “A kak po lugu” (“And so across the meadow”) in the introduction and “Pod yabloyu zelyonoyu” (“Under the green apple-tree”) as the first subject. This movement is also the most elaborately developed, unfolding in conventional sonata form. In contrast, the opening movement, bearing the title “Pezzo in forma di sonatina” (“A little piece in the form of a sonatina”), presents its two subjects in exposition and then repeats them virtually unchanged in recapitulation. The solemn, stately introduction to the first movement also returns just before the end of the finale, deftly interwoven with the folksong theme, providing not only a satisfying sense of closure and unity, but a fusion of the classical and national styles found in many of Tchaikovsky’s finest scores. In between these two more substantial movements come a seductive waltz that one critic described as “characteristic of Johann Strauss with additional French grace,” and a warmly lyrical Elegy (marked “Larghetto elegiaco”) built around ascending scale fragments in E major. Underpinning the entire piece is a strong feeling of dance movement and rhythm, not surprising considering that Tchaikovsky had composed his ballet Swan Lake just a few years earlier.

In incorporating the Russian material in his Serenade, Tchaikovsky consciously adopted a different approach from that employed by the more “ethnographic” members of the St. Petersburg group known as “The Mighty Handful.” He believed that “national” material had to be fully integrated into a classical stylistic and structural context, as he wrote to the Moscow composer and pedagogue Sergei Taneyev:

I value very highly the wealth of material which the slovenly and suffering people [Taneyev’s words] produce, but we...who use this material will always elaborate it in forms borrowed from Europe—for, born Russians, we are at the same time even far more Europeans, and we have so resolutely and deeply fostered and assimilated their forms that to tear ourselves from them we would have to strain and do violence to ourselves, and from such straining and violence nothing artistic could come.

Audiences as well as Tchaikovsky’s colleagues were unanimous in their praise of the Serenade. Even the hard-to-please Anton Rubinstein, founder of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, told the publisher Jurgenson that it was “Tchaikovsky’s best thing.” More recently, the Serenade served as the basis of the first “American” ballet created by Russian-American choreographer George Balanchine. Called “Serenade,” it was performed for the first time in New York in 1935. Later, this “dance in the light of the moon” (Balanchine’s words) became a popular signature piece for Balanchine’s New York City Ballet. The music, wrote Balanchine, “contains many stories. It is many things to many listeners, and many things to many people who see the ballet.”

Harlow Robinson

HARLOW ROBINSON is an author, lecturer, and Matthews Distinguished University Professor Emeritus of History at Northeastern University. The author of “Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography” and “Russians in Hollywood, Hollywood’s Russians,” he is a frequent annotator and lecturer for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Lincoln Center, Metropolitan Opera Guild, and Aspen Music Festival.

Béla Bartók
Concerto for Orchestra

BÉLA BARTÓK was born in Nagyszentmiklós, Transylvania (then part of Hungary but now absorbed into Romania), on March 25, 1881, and died in New York on September 26, 1945. The Concerto for Orchestra was commissioned in the spring of 1943 by Serge Koussevitzky through the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in memory of his wife Natalie Koussevitzky, who had died in 1942. Bartók composed the work between August 15 and October 8, 1943. Koussevitzky led the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the first performances on December 1 and 2, 1944, repeating the work in Boston on the 29th and 30th and then giving the first New York performances on January 10 and 13, 1945, at Carnegie Hall. At some point Bartók revised the ending, extending the original by some fifteen measures to create the version that is typically heard today.
THE SCORE OF THE CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA calls for three flutes (third doubling piccolo), three oboes (third doubling English horn), three clarinets (third doubling bass clarinet), three bassoons (third doubling contrabassoon), four horns, three trumpets (a fourth trumpet line is marked ad lib.), three trombones, tuba, timpani, side drum, bass drum, tam-tam, cymbals, triangle, two harps, and strings.

So well loved is Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra in all parts of the world that it is hard now to imagine the hostility that greeted his music in the period between the wars, and the horror his music inspired both in concert audiences and in critics who should have known better. Many of his works are severely uncompromising, it is true, and the staying power of modernism had not yet been accepted. But the flow of time that slowly conditioned audiences (even critics) to Bartók’s supposed “difficulty” had a simultaneous effect on Bartók himself. In his last works he had mellowed to an extraordinary degree, with the result that the Concerto for Orchestra, one of the last pieces he completed, is now a staple part of concert programs, beloved by audiences and virtuoso orchestras alike.

Bartók found the process of compromise exceedingly difficult to come to terms with. The story of his exile in America during the war and his death in poverty and distress in a New York hospital in 1945 is one of the saddest chronicles in music. He was so sensitive and so deeply attached to his native Hungary that to be uprooted from home, and for such gruesome reasons, had a catastrophic effect on his spirit. It is a miracle that he wrote anything at all in those years, let alone works as profoundly appealing as the Sixth Quartet and the Piano Concerto No. 3. He wrote, of course, in response to commissions, and desperately needed the money they offered. Without Serge Koussevitzky, long-term music director of the Boston Symphony and a champion of new music of every kind, and without his Hungarian friend, the violinist Joseph Szigeti, to spur him on, Bartók might never have undertaken so large a work as the Concerto for Orchestra. What is certain is that once committed to it, and despite every discouragement, Bartók put everything he had into the piece, applying that meticulously critical ear and the exalted craft of a very experienced composer.

Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra gave the first performances of this great 20th-century masterpiece in Symphony Hall on December 1 and 2, 1944, repeating it in Boston on December 29 and 30 (the performance on the 30th was broadcast) and following that with the New York premiere in January 1945. The work was slightly revised by Bartók before publication; two alternative endings appear in the published score. The work was designed for a large virtuoso orchestra of the highest class, hence its title, and the instruments are often mercilessly exposed. It also requires ensemble playing of great precision and a sense of color and vitality of which Bartók was a master.

The first movement is conventional (like a Beethoven symphony) in offering a slow introduction leading into a vigorous Allegro. The bare fourths that make up most of the melodic intervals at the start retain their importance throughout the work. The Allegro, reached by an exhilarating acceleration, is very compact, with contrast from a gentler oboe theme circling on two adjacent notes and an explosive fugato for the brass in the middle, the subject of which prominently features the interval of a fourth, like an awkwardly stretched stride.

The second movement, “Game of Pairs,” isolates wind pairs in turn, each with its own interval. The two bassoons are in sixths, the two oboes in thirds, the two clarinets in sevenths, the two flutes in fifths, and the two trumpets, muted, in seconds. A brass chorale intervenes, while the side drum maintains the old rhythm, and the pairs return, each now supported and decorated by extra help. There are now three bassoons, for example, not two; two clarinets assist the two oboes, two flutes assist the two clarinets. The pattern is simple but very affecting, and at the end a serene dominant seventh permits each pair to come to rest on its “own” interval.

The Elegia takes us into Bartók’s private world, with memories of his favorite “night music.” Shimmers from the harp, flutters from the flute and clarinet, a background of softly rolling timpani—these create an atmosphere of mystery and expectation. Even so, the entry of the full orchestra in the central section is brutal and all too earthbound, recalling a theme heard in the first movement’s introduction. It takes a long time to restore the magical atmosphere with which the Elegia began, but serenity eventually returns, fading into the night with some soft piping from the piccolo and a few discreet notes from the timpani.

The “Interrupted Intermezzo” starts with a wistful folk-like melody on the oboe, and then offers a broader, haunting theme, first on the violas, richly supported by the harps, and the folksy tune returns. The interruption is an appalling piece of grotesquerie, with a quotation from Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony served up in cap and bells. Laughter and mockery are plain to all, and the return to Bartók’s noble theme carries something of the painful nostalgia with which he longed for his distant roots.

The finale is a spontaneous burst of energy, presented with all the blatant extroversion conveyed by the horns’ opening call. The first break in the scampering texture delivers up a little fugue on the horn-call theme, started by the second bassoon, and rapidly inverted. A folk tune breaks in on the oboe and the scampering resumes. The real fugue fills a complex stretch of the movement, equivalent perhaps to a development, and its subject returns as a resplendent brass statement at the end, while wind and strings rush from end to end of their range in a stampede of
breathless brilliance.

Like Shostakovich, Bartók was an artist for whom suffering became a permanent feature of reality. Both composers had to find ways to escape—or at least to seem to escape—from the oppression of misfortune and pain. Both wrote music of noisy high spirits, and in each case we have to read the irony in the music even while we catch the infectious vitality of that brilliant orchestral display. Bartók may have lampooned Shostakovich in his fourth movement, but he probably never understood the complex disguises that Shostakovich had to assume in order to survive under a regime that was as intolerant of high artistry as the Hungary from which Bartók was himself forced to flee. No music has so many layers of meaning as this, which is why we can return to it again and again with pleasure and satisfaction.

Hugh Macdonald
HUGH MACDONALD was for many years Avis Blewett Professor of Music at Washington University in St. Louis. A frequent guest annotator for the BSO, he has written extensively on music from Mozart to Shostakovich, including biographies of Berlioz, Bizet, and Scriabin, and recently completed a book on the operas of Saint-Saëns.

To Read and Hear More...

Stephen Walsh, who wrote the Stravinsky article in the 2001 Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, is also author of a two-volume Stravinsky biography: Stravinsky—A Creative Spring: Russia and France, 1882-1934 and Stravinsky—The Second Exile: France and America, 1934-1971 (Norton). The 1980 Grove entry was by Eric Walter White, author of the crucial reference volume Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works (University of California). Other useful books include Stravinsky and his World, a collection of essays and documents edited by Tamara Levitz (Princeton University Press); The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky, edited by Jonathan Cross, which includes a variety of essays on the composer’s life and works (Cambridge University Press); Michael Oliver’s Igor Stravinsky in the wonderfully illustrated series “20th-Century Composers” (Phaidon paperback), and Francis Routh’s Stravinsky in the “Master Musicians” series (Littlefield paperback). If you can find a used copy, Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents by Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft offers a fascinating overview of the composer’s life (Simon and Schuster). Craft, who worked closely with Stravinsky for many years, has also written and compiled numerous other books on the composer.

Stravinsky recorded the Symphonies of Wind Instruments in 1951 with the Northwest German Radio Symphony Orchestra (Sony Classical in several multi-disc Stravinsky boxes, or as a download from various services). Other options include Pierre Boulez’s with the Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon) or his earlier recording with the New York Philharmonic (Sony), Edo de Waart’s with the Netherlands Wind Ensemble (Philips), Simon Rattle’s with the Nash Ensemble (Chandos), and Stravinsky amanuensis Robert Craft’s with the Columbia Symphony Orchestra (Sony), members of the Philharmonia Orchestra (Koch International), and his own 20th Century Classics Ensemble (Naxos).

David Brown’s Tchaikovsky, in four volumes, is the major biography of the composer (Norton); the Serenade for Strings is discussed in the third volume, “The Years of Wandering, 1878-1885” (Norton). Brown is also the author of Tchaikovsky: The Man and his Music, an excellent single volume (512 pages) on the composer’s life and works geared toward the general reader (Pegasus Books), and of Tchaikovsky Remembered, published in 1994 to mark the centenary of the composer’s death (Amadeus Press). Though out of print, John Warrack’s Tchaikovsky is worth seeking both for its text and for its wealth of illustrations (Scribners). Also useful are Alexandra Orlova’s Tchaikovsky: A Self-Portrait (translated by R.M. Davison), an “autobiographical narrative” based on surviving documentation (Oxford), and David Brown’s chapter “Russia Before the Revolution” in A Guide to the Symphony, edited by Robert Layton (Oxford paperback). Valuable if you can find it is The Diaries of Tchaikovsky, translated and edited by Wladimir Lakond (Norton, out of print).

The Boston Symphony Orchestra recorded Tchaikovsky’s Serenade for Strings with Charles Munch in 1957 and before that with Serge Koussevitzky in 1949 (both for RCA). Other recordings (listed alphabetically by conductor) include Leonard Bernstein’s with the New York Philharmonic (Sony), Semyon Bychkov’s with the Berlin Philharmonic (Philips), Christoph Eschenbach’s with the Philadelphia Orchestra (Ondine), Herbert von Karajan’s with the Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon), Sir Neville Marriner’s with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields (Decca), and Seiji Ozawa’s with the Saito Kinen Orchestra (Philips).

Paul Griffiths’s Bartók in the Master Musicians series (Dent paperback) is a useful supplement to Halsey Stevens’s The Life and Music of Béla Bartók, which has long been the standard biography of the composer (Oxford paperback). Béla Bartók by Kenneth Chalmers is a volume in the lavishly illustrated series “20th-Century Composers” (Phaidon paperback). Three relatively recent books offer wide-ranging consideration of Bartók’s life, music, critical reception, and milieu: Bartók and his World, edited by Peter Laki (Princeton University Press); The Bartók Companion, edited by Malcolm Gillies (Amadeus paperback), and David E. Schneider’s Bartók, Hungary,
and the Renewal of a Tradition: Case Studies in the Intersection of Modernity and Nationality (University of California Press). Agatha Fassett’s personal account of the composer’s last years has been reprinted as The Naked Face of Genius: Béla Bartók’s American Years (Dover paperback). Béla Bartók: His Life in Pictures and Documents by Ferenc Bónis is a fascinating compendium well worth seeking from secondhand book dealers (Corvino).

The Boston Symphony Orchestra recorded the Concerto for Orchestra with Erich Leinsdorf in 1962 (RCA), with Rafael Kubelik in 1973 (Deutsche Grammophon), and live with Seiji Ozawa in 1994 (Philips, with Bartók’s original ending). In addition, the premiere broadcast of December 30, 1944, with Serge Koussevitzky and the BSO (also with the original ending) was included in the BSO’s twelve-disc box set “Symphony Hall Centennial Celebration: From the Broadcast Archives, 1943-2000” (available in the Symphony Shop). Other recordings include Marin Alsop’s with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (Naxos), Herbert Blomstedt’s with the San Francisco Symphony (Decca), Pierre Boulez’s with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon), Adám Fischer’s with the Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra (Nimbus), Iván Fischer’s with the Budapest Festival Orchestra (Hungaroton), James Levine’s with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon), Fritz Reiner’s also with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (RCA), and Sir Georg Solti’s likewise with the Chicago Symphony (Decca).

Marc Mandel

Guest Artist
Hannu Lintu

Hannu Lintu makes his Boston Symphony Orchestra debut with this week’s concerts. The 2018-19 season marks Mr. Lintu’s sixth year as chief conductor of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Guest conducting highlights of the current season include return engagements with the Baltimore, St. Louis, and Cincinnati symphony orchestras and the New Japan Philharmonic, as well as with the Singapore Symphony and the NDR Elbphilharmonie, following highly successful debuts with those two ensembles in 2017. In addition to his BSO debut this season, he also makes his debut with the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra. Other recent engagements have taken him to the Tokyo Metropolitan, National, Dallas, and Detroit symphony orchestras, to Ottawa’s National Arts Centre Orchestra, and to the Orchestre de Paris for his recent debut with that ensemble. A regular in the pit, Mr. Lintu works frequently with the Finnish National Opera and Ballet; he will return in March 2019 to conduct Berg’s Wozzeck. In 2018 he returned to the Savonlinna Opera Festival for four performances of Verdi’s Otello. Hannu Lintu has made recordings for Ondine, BIS, Naxos, Avie, and Hyperion. He studied cello and piano at the Sibelius Academy, where he studied conducting with Jorma Panula, and participated in master classes with Myung-Whun Chung at the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena, Italy, taking first prize at the Nordic Conducting Competition in Bergen in 1994.