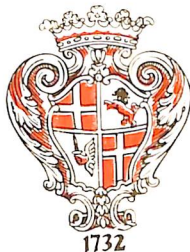

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The Manoel Theatre

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The Manoel Theatre Orchestra

conducted by

Brian Schembri

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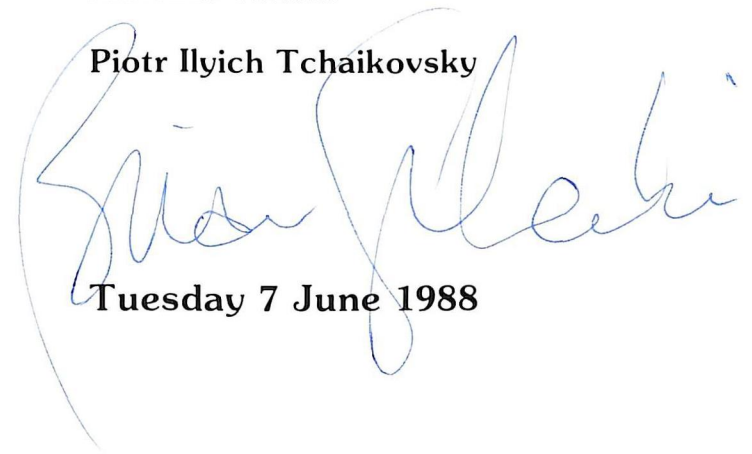
Orchestral Concert

of works by

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Antonio Vivaldi

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky



Tuesday 7 June 1988

PROGRAMME

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756-1791)

Symphony No. 38 in D major, K. 504, "Prague"

Adagio — Allegro

Andante

Finale — Presto

With the "Prague" Symphony and the still more popular last three symphonies that followed Mozart achieved complete mastery of the symphonic form. Although the work was not expressly written for Prague, it was first performed and loudly applauded there in January 1787, during the first of two brilliant concerts at which he roused the audience to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. After the performance of the symphony he sat down to the piano and improvised for fully half an hour, finishing by extemporising variations on Figaro's "*Non più andrai*" which completed his triumph.

He had been drawn to the Bohemian capital by the overwhelming success which the opera "*Le Nozze di Figaro*" was enjoying there. His first letter from the city gives a vivid picture of what he found there: "*the one subject of conversation here is - Figaro; nothing is played, sung or whistled but - Figaro; nobody goes to any opera but - Figaro; everlastingly Figaro!*" This success led to the commission for "*Don Giovanni*", and if it is hard to escape the ghosts of Figaro and Susanna in the Prague Symphony, it is still harder to miss the premonitions of the demonic grandeur that is so characteristic of *Don Giovanni*.

The symphony is in the three movements, thus lacking the minuet which usually provided a smiling, courtly contrast. It has indeed often been called the *Symphony without a minuet*, and although many commentators think this nickname superfluous or misleading, Alfred Einstein holds that it is "more appropriate than those who have used it realize, for the work is not a return to the Italian symphony type, but rather a full-scale Viennese symphony, which happens to lack a minuet simply because it says everything it has to say in three movements".

I. The **first** movement opens with a slow and powerful introduction using a figure Mozart afterwards used for the stone guest's heavy footsteps in the finale of *Don Giovanni*. Much else in this introduction resembles the music associated with the avenging statue: the eloquent tension, the conflicts that lie behind the apparent assurance, the pride in utterance. The transition to the **allegro** brings with it a brightening of effect, but an almost feverish grandeur

continues to be felt, with strong contrasts of *fortissimi* and *pianissimi*. The main theme presses forward nervously and nothing can dispel the general anxiety. Even the consoling second theme is soon transposed into the prevalent gloomy mood. The two themes, though different, form a wonderful unity, and, very significantly, only the first theme is developed. This development has long been admired as one of the greatest, most serious and most aggressive sections in all Mozart's works.

II. The **andante** is not a mere intermezzo between two animated movements, but a splendid composition that embodies the most complete combination of a singing quality and polyphonic character. It is, of course, a splendid outpouring of exquisite melodies, one after another. But if Mozart the melodist is to the fore here, Mozart the superb contrapuntist is certainly at work perfectly *interlacing* the melodic strains with exceptional skill. ("There is a relation", Einstein observes, "between this movement and the aria *Dalla sua pace* which Mozart wrote as an interpolation for Don Ottavio to sing at the Viennese performance of *Don Giovanni*. The only difference is that what the text prevents from coming to full realization in an aria may flow forth without hindrance in a symphonic movement.")

III. The **finale's** hectic activity is in harmony with the restless nature of the whole symphony. It is dominated by the breathless little figure with which Susanna bundles Cherubino out of the window in Act Two of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and it is far removed from the usual gaiety of a last movement. Fever is marked by flashes of the flute and oboe which are answered each time by the thunder of the full orchestra, until a torrential rain of triumphant sounds ends the symphony. It is a very short movement rushing to its end with hardly a moment for a change of subject: the second theme is so impotent in the face of the persistent agitation of the whole movement, that it remains merely a short contrasted episode hardly discernible within a joyless world. The whole finale, to quote Einstein once more, "is one of those rare D major movements of Mozart's, which despite all their appearance of cheerfulness, and despite their genuine perfection and feeling of completeness, leave a wound in the soul: beauty is wedded to death." — It was only five years after the completion of this symphony that Mozart died!

"The wonder of the Prague Symphony is that in spite of the variety of the visions it may suggest to the hearer, it is a perfect whole. Every structural part and every thematic feature is exquisitely proportioned. No separate incident is allowed to engage attention independently of the scheme in which it is assigned its function."
(Eric Blom)

Antonio Vivaldi

(c1678-1741)

Concerto No. 8 in A minor “con due violini obbligati”, from L’Estro Armonico Op. 3 (RV 522)

Allegro

Largo

Allegro

Soloists: Mario Bisazza, Stephen Zammit

Shortly after 1930 two enormous collections of music were added to the National Library of Turin. They include a large quantity of manuscripts apparently written by Antonio Vivaldi, which probably made up his personal musical reserve upon which he drew as performer, conductor and composer.

These manuscripts considerably amplified Vivaldi’s already known works by adding several hundred concertos, secular cantatas, some twenty operas and a large quantity of sacred music, stylistically varied and diverse, motets, sonatas, trios, etc.

Moreover, since 1965 Peter Ryom has been at work on his monumental catalogue of Vivaldi’s works (**RV**) and he carried on research not only in Venice and Turin, but in those cities Vivaldi had visited to supervise productions of his works, such as Rome, Florence, Verona, Ancona, Ferrara, Prague Vienna, Warsaw, Amsterdam, among others.

All this music, of which chiefly the instrumental works and a couple of operas have been published, performed and recorded, naturally contributed to the Vivaldi renaissance which has been going on during the last thirty years or so, and, more important still, has allowed musicologists to study the composer’s style in great detail. Vivaldi is no longer regarded as the composer of just four concerti grossi known as *The Four Seasons* and hardly anything else that is worth listening to, and music lovers the world over today realize how cruel and absurd was the oft-repeated jibe that the Venetian red-haired priest composed the same concerto five hundred times over!

L’Estro Armonico, a set of twelve concertos, was published in Amsterdam in c.1712. Prior to it, Vivaldi’s only printed works had been two sets of sonatas, twelve trios and twelve solos, all stemming from his activities as violin teacher at the Conservatorio dell’Ospedale della Pietà — one of four orphanages in Venice that offered musical training to young girls. Vivaldi directed concerts on Sundays and feast-days which very soon acquired a reputation for excellence. But it was the publication of **L’Estro Armonico** that made Vivaldi’s reputation in Europe. (Of the ten keyboard transcriptions that Bach made from Vivaldi’s concertos, six are taken from this collection.)

It is very difficult to translate the title. “*Estro*”, in this case, is not *inspiration*, nor is it *whim*, and much less *fancy* or *caprice*, though it is a mixture

of all these. The “*duende*” of Spain’s Andalusia goes nearest perhaps!

The collection was not put together chronologically, but is a complex arrangement designed to impress by the concertos’ variety, both of style and scoring. There are four groups of concertos, each including a solo group for four violins, two violins and a single violin, and they are pairwise arranged by keys with each concerto in the major being followed by one in the minor, with the exception of the final pair, where this system is reversed in order to end the entire set in the major. This seems to have been a typically Italian arrangement.

Individual concertos hardly need any written guide, but the magnificent opening ritornello, with all the parts elaborated so well, of the concerto being played tonight might be singled out for particular attention, together with the subdued yet eloquent continuo part of the lyrical slow movement.

I n t e r v a l (15 minutes)

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

(1840-1893)

Symphony No 4 in F minor, Op. 36

Andante sostenuto — Moderato con anima

Andantino in modo di canzona

Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato (Allegro)

Finale: Allegro con fuoco

Towards the end of 1876 Tchaikovsky started his extraordinary relationship with Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, the widow of a railway magnate. It was to last thirteen years, and thanks to the generous annual gift of six thousand roubles the composer received from his wealthy patroness, he could abandon the teaching he abhorred and concentrate on composition. By mutual agreement they were never to meet, and this made correspondence their only means of contact. Thanks to this arrangement we have several letters in which the composer describes and discusses his works, among them the fourth symphony which is referred to by both Tchaikovsky and Madame von Meck as “our symphony”.

“I am engulfed by it”, the composer told her in one of his letters. “Never before has an orchestral composition cost me so much labour, but then, I have never loved a work so much... I think this symphony is something out of the ordinary, the best thing I have written up to the present. I am very happy that it is yours, and that on hearing it you will realize that in writing every bar I thought of you. If it had not been for you, how would it ever have been finished?”

When Madame von Meck asked for a detailed account of the symphony, Tchaikovsky obliged. He sent her a very detailed letter, which surely provides

better than anything else an introduction to the work and a commentary on each of the four movements of the symphony.

“You ask if the symphony has a definite programme. I usually answer such a question in the negative. It is indeed a difficult question to answer. How can one describe those vague feelings that pass through one’s mind during the composition of an instrumental work that has no definite subject? It is a purely lyrical process, a musical confession of the soul that, filled with the experiences of a life-time, pours itself out through sound, just as the lyric poet expresses himself in verse. The only difference is that music is an infinitely more subtle and powerful means of expressing the thousand moods of the soul. Usually, the seed of a musical notion germinates suddenly and quite unexpectedly. If the seed falls upon fertile ground, if there is the inclination to work, it takes root with incredible speed and strength, it sends up its stalk, puts forth its leaves and finally blossoms... I cannot hope to express in words the boundless sense of happiness that fills me when a new idea is conceived and begins to take shape: I forget everything, and behave like a madman, trembling and quivering, with scarcely time to sketch down my ideas before others pursue them in my brain. Sometimes, in the midst of this magic process, a bell rings, a servant enters, or a clock strikes, reminding me of business to which I must attend. These interruptions are inexpressibly trying, for sometimes the inspiration takes flight and has to be sought again, often in vain. Then one has to call in cold reason and technical resources to continue the work. Perhaps such moments are responsible, in the works of the great masters, for those passages where the organic coherence fails, and where the threads seem to be stuck together or patched artificially. This is, of course, unavoidable, for if the mood of an artist’s soul, which we call inspiration, were to continue uninterrupted, he could not survive, a single day. The strings would snap and the instrument would break into a thousand pieces.

“Our symphony has a programme definite enough to be described, but to you alone can I tell the meaning of the whole work and its separate parts.

“I. The **introduction** is the germ of the entire symphony, and everything else depends upon it. The main idea, first in the trumpets and then in the horns, is suggestive of the idea of ‘Fate’, that tragic power that prevents the realization of our yearning for happiness, that jealousy prevents our happiness from becoming complete and cloudless. It is the sword of Damocles hanging over the head. It is unconquerable, inescapable. Nothing remains but to submit.

“The main theme of the **allegro** describes the feeling of despair, and hopelessness becomes stronger and sharper. Would it not be better to turn from reality and seek refuge in fantasy?

“The second group of themes, introduced by delicate runs on the woodwind and a light melody for the strings, expresses this dream world. The main theme is pushed into the background and gradually the soul is surrounded with dreams and all unhappiness is forgotten. Oh, joy! A sweet vision appears! A

radiant human form blissfully beckons to us. Here is joy and gladness!

“But no! It was but a dream, and the harsh theme of ‘Fate’ arouses us. Thus our life is but a continual alternation between grim reality and delicious fantasy in which we clutch at happiness. There is no haven. You are tossed hither and thither by the waves until the sea eventually drowns you in its depths. That is roughly the programme of the first movement.

“II. The **second** movement portrays another phase of suffering: the melancholy that comes in the evening when we sit alone, exhausted by our work. We try to read, but the book slips from our hands. Memories crowd into our thoughts, and sadly we think of the days that are past, those sweet days of youth that are gone for ever. We regret the past, but are too weary to begin life anew... it is easier to remain idle and to look back... to think of the joyful hours when one’s young blood ran hot, and when life fulfilled one’s desires. We also think of hard times, of irreparable losses, but they seem so very far away. It is bitter, but at the same time sweet, to sink back into the past.

“III. No definite feelings are expressed by the **third** movement. It consists more of a succession of capricious arabesques, elusive figures that flit across the mind when one has drunk wine and begun to feel exuberant. The mood is neither gay nor sad. The mind is blank, and free rein has been given to the imagination, which conjures up strange and wonderful designs. Suddenly comes the recollection of a drunken peasant, and one hears a song of the streets... then, in the distance, a military band passes. These are incoherent, evanescent pictures, such as float across the mind when one is falling asleep: they are strange and wild, lacking all sense of reality.

“IV. **Fourth** movement: if you feel no joy within you, look round and seek it in others. Go to the people. Observe that they know how to be merry and abandon themselves to joy. A public festival is depicted in this movement, and no sooner do you forget yourself and become engrossed in the merry-making than ‘Fate’ reappears to bring you back to yourself. The others do not trouble about your sorrow: they do not even notice it. How gay they are! How fortunate they are to be ruled by such simple emotions!... See that the simple joys still exist... and enter into them, and you will still live happily.”



BRIAN SCHEMBRI started studying piano under his father Carmelo Schembri. In 1976 he was the youngest ever to obtain the LRSM. A scholarship awarded through the Malta-USSR Friendship and Cultural Society enabled him to continue his studies in the USSR.

He studied conducting under Prof. R. Kofman and piano under Prof. A Snegiriov at the Kiev State Conservatoire from 1978 to 1984. Having graduated with an MA (Mus.), he followed an advanced postgraduate course in conducting under Prof. G. Rozhdestvenskij and piano under Prof. S. Dorenskij at the Moscow State Conservatoire.

He has conducted concerts with the Kiev Opera Studio Symphony Orchestra, the Ukrainian S.S.R. Philharmonic State Symphony Orchestra, the Kiev Conservatoire Symphony Orchestra, and the

Orchestra of the Wloclawek Music Society in Poland.

He has worked with the Kiev Opera Studio in 1983-1984 participating in operatic productions and conducting performances of opera.

In 1984 he was chosen from among the final year students to participate as a conductor during the Festival "Kiev Symphonic Evenings".

In 1985 he was chorus master at the Manoel Theatre. Since 1987 he has been Musical Director of the Choral Society.

The last time he appeared in Malta as a conductor was in a highly acclaimed concert at University Assembly Hall in 1985.

Only a few days ago he was given the Malta Cultural Award (Phoenicia Trophy) for his services to music.

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