



Gustav Meier  
Music Director  
61st Season  
2nd Subscription Concert  
Klein Memorial Auditorium  
Saturday, November 4, 2006  
8:00 p.m.

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Gustav Meier, Conductor

BELLINI	Overture to I Capuletti e I Montecchi
BERLIOZ	Romeo et Juliette, op. 17 - Part 2 - Scene1 <i>Romeo alone</i> <i>Great Festivities at the Capulets</i>
TCHAIKOVSKY	Romeo and Juliet

#### INTERMISSION

KABALEVSKY	Four Scenes from Romeo and Juliet
BERNSTEIN	Symphonic Dances from West Side Story

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## PROGRAM NOTES

There are 70 entries from Shakespeare's ca. 1596 play, *Romeo and Juliet*, in Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations", the last being its final couplet:

For never was a story of more woe  
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."

These "star-crossed lovers" (Shakespeare's words), while still teenagers, are caught in the web of their family's hatred for each other with Juliet being especially under the control of her autocratic father who intends to marry her against her will (the traditional restriction of women). Their self-inflicted deaths under this impossible situation - which a friendly Friar tried to defuse by giving Juliet a temporary sleeping potion - along with the great poetry with which they tell their tale have made it "the greatest love-story in the literature of the world" Munro: London Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's version in which contrasts between youth and age, adolescence and maturity, order and disobedience, nobility and coarseness and the like heighten the drama into something more than its original 1476 version by the Italian Masuccio Salernitano and subsequent rewritings by French and Italian authors offered. The Englishman, Arthur Brooke, translated it into a poem in 1562 which became Shakespeare's immediate source. Although earlier and later scenarios exist and are reflected in the five works played this evening, Shakespeare's remains the best known the world over.

Bellini's opera, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, concentrates on the feud between the families with more action and less lyrical reflection, the librettist Romani stressing "the simple narration of a pitiful tale". There is no secret marriage as in the Shakespearean drama, but Romeo and Juliet are already in love. In the last scene she awakens before Romeo dies but after he has taken the poison. When it kills him, she dies of grief while the Capuleti and Montecchi present along with the Friar, Lorenzo, blame her "ruthless and pitiless" father for their deaths. In the Berlioz *Symphonie Dramatique* Romeo is in love with Juliet before the Ball - (in the Bellini there is no Ball). She also awakens before Romeo dies - which was then an 18th century change to the Shakespearean play as the famous actor David Garrick performed it. There follows a monumental scene of Reconciliation with Friar Laurence's revelation of the secret marriage he performed and his stern order that the families stop their hostilities. Tchaikovsky's *Fantasy-Overture* takes three elements of the story; (1) Friar Laurence's priestly, reconciling presence, (2) the clashing swords of the warring families and (3) the love of Romeo and Juliet and develops them without reference to specific events. Kabalevsky's 1956 Suite is drawn from incidental music to be played at an actual performance of the play. West

Side Story is a faithful transference of all aspects of the drama to New York in the late 1950's when street gangs were forming.

"No such tragedy of love couched largely in lyrical terms had yet been seen in the theatre," Munro wrote of Shakespeare's late-16th century play and Bernstein called his mid-20th century *West Side Story* "my tragic musical comedy, whatever that is." The conditions that made a horrible outcome likely, instead of the happy one that should have been, made a dark side to the music of each of tonight's works inevitable. Yet it also demanded equal time for describing the dawning love of *Romeo and Juliet*. Only the burst of spontaneity that characterized the Romantic Era in its desire for subjective expression by any means and demand for license by creators could handle these requirements. All tonight's composers lived either in the early years of this period (Bellini and Berlioz helped found it), its heyday (Tchaikovsky) or the extension of its by then splintered traditions into the 20th century (Kabalevsky and Bernstein). Its a measure of the story's universality that it could absorb the conventions of Italian opera (Bellini), symphonic writing with a French twist (Berlioz), Russian hyperbole (Tchaikovsky and, to a lesser extent, Kabalevsky), and the nervous rhythms of the American ghetto (Bernstein) - and still make its point that love is a positive force, but circumstances can thwart it. 127 years separates Bellini's opera from Bernstein's musical, 354 the original appearance of the story from music's first major attempt to put its own spin on it and now, after 536 years, all these versions are still extant and heard.

### OVERTURE to I CAPULETI E I MONTECCHI Vincenzo Bellini (1801 - 1835)

Italy has always prized vocal music in which melody predominates; accompaniments in general could be simpler and forms more set. Instrumental complexities and epic structures were more of a German achievement. Italian use of the term *bel canto*, "fine singing," goes back to 1630, but was applied especially to the time of Bellini whose "long, long, long melodies" were admired by Verdi. Based on early Italian novellas, Romani's libretto for *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* owes little to Shakespeare. The Capuleti are Guelphs supported by the Pope and the Montecchi, Ghibellines, loyal to the Holy Roman Emperor. The Overture begins with an ominous tympani roll, sternly punctuated by brass accents and followed by rushing strings. Its agitation sets the stage for Scene 1 where at dawn the Capulets are gathering to plan their revenge for the slaying of their leader's son in battle by Romeo, heir of the Montecchi lands. There is little of Bellini's long, breathed line here, but it is

worth noting that Chopin's nocturnes for piano owe their long cantilenas to its influence. Instead the mood is urgent. When Berlioz heard this opera in Italy after winning the Paris Conservatory's Prix de Rome on his third attempt, thereby earning the right to two years study there, he was repelled by its "lost opportunities and the shoddy traditions of the Italian operatic stage." But these same traditions meant beautiful singing and that is present.

### **ROMEO ET JULIETTE - Part 2, Scene 1** **Hector Berlioz (1803 - 1869)**

Performances of Shakespeare's plays in Paris in 1827 by an English company acted as catalysts to the imagination of French Romantics. Their wish for the artistic freedom of time and place in Shakespeare's works was a rallying point for them, brought up as they had been on the classical unities of Racine and Corneille. In addition, Berlioz was transfixed by the Irish actress, Harriet Smithson, who played Shakespeare's more vulnerable heroines, Juliet, Ophelia and Desdemona for the company. "Unable, or Romantically unwilling, to distinguish art and life, he became obsessed with the idea of marrying her," as Warrack has written. A complication for them both, their marriage was not compatible, her acting career eventually ended and ill health wore her down.

Recognizing Berlioz' talent, the virtuoso violinist, Paganini, gave him 20,000 francs with the admonition that he carry on the mantle of Beethoven who was no longer living. The result was the Romeo et Juliette Symphonie Dramatique which, while it has extensive parts for chorus and soloists, leaves the most impassioned music for orchestra alone. "The very sublimity of this love makes its depiction so dangerous for the musician that he had to give his imagination a latitude that the precise sense of the sung words would not have provided," Berlioz wrote, "resorting instead to instrumental language, which is richer, more varied, less precise, and by its very indefiniteness incomparably more powerful in such a case."

In the first of the two excerpts played tonight, Romeo is alone, sad that he and Juliet cannot be together. Its quiet opening famously projects this mood in a way that Wagner heard and absorbed in the process of writing Tristan und Isolde 20 years later. Gradually sounds of the Ball at the Capulets are heard until this "Great Festivities" scene takes over.

### **ROMEO AND JULIET**

#### **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893)**

The 1869 fantasy overture Romeo and Juliet is the first of Tchaikovsky's great works, although it went through two revisions, the last in 1880. "The crushing of love by a hostile fate," as John Warrack writes, was an obsessive subject for the composer and here he found a story fit for his obsession.

When such a condition existed, he was always able to construct a taut work with a sense of inevitability to every phrase. Whether it be the Friar's gravity; the jagged brass accents or the rushing strings; the total, trusting sensuous sweep of the love theme; the measured tympani strokes near the end (also a feature of the Bernstein Dances) or the "fruitless oblivion" of the quiet death-like chords, - there are no loose ends.

### **FOUR SCENES from ROMEO AND JULIET** **Dimitri Kabalevsky (1904 - 1987)**

The career of Kabalevsky in Communist Russia might be characterized as a don't-rock-the-boat, at-least-not-too-much effort. "Uncomplicated, direct, forceful, always aurally agreeable, always strongly identified with his country and people," as David Ewen wrote, "his music makes an immediate appeal to listeners." His many collections of pieces for students are classics used the world over.

The four scenes from Romeo and Juliet played tonight are in this mold. They are titled (1) Enmity and Love, (2) Lyrical Dance, (3) Romeo and Juliet and (4) Death and Reconciliation. The stern theme of the opening returns in the last section.

### **SYMPHONIC DANCES from** **WEST SIDE STORY**

#### **Leonard Bernstein (1918 - 1980)**

The team of Laurents (book), Robbins (choreographer), Sondheim (lyricist) and Bernstein (music) wrote West Side Story in the 1950's. Present at its first tryout performance in Washington D. C., Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, a President Roosevelt appointee, said to Bernstein, "the history of America is now changed." It was the time of civil agitation which resulted in improvements and opportunities for minorities, a process still going on.

Dance was a significant part of the scenario of the work and Bernstein made the Symphonic dances in effect a telling of the story through its ballet music. Ballads such as Somewhere to the rumble between the rival gangs at which Tony (Romeo) is killed and Maria (Juliet) is left to mourn are all here. Recognized as a work of art when first performed, West Side Story is a classic.

Genius can reduce the essence of an idea or a passion to a few notes. The love theme from Tchaikovsky's Fantasy Overture, heard tonight, is one example. So would have been the love theme from the Scène d'amour of the Symphonie Dramatique of Berlioz and also the song Tonight from West Side Story. A fourth could have been found in Prokofieff's ballet, Romeo and Juliet - such moments are rare, but the Romeo and Juliet story has inspired more than its share!

-Burton Hatheway