Masterworks 6 Tchaikovsky's 5th
Fort Wayne Philharmonic

PROGRAM NOTES

Huapango
José Pablo Moncayo
(b. 1912, Guadalajara, Mexico; d. 1958, Mexico City)

Mexican conductor Maximiano Valdés opens his colorful, mostly off-the-beaten-track program with *Huapango*, a work that is deeply popular in Mexico, but too seldom heard in this country. Its composer, José Pablo Moncayo, was one of the leaders of the 20th-century Nationalist movement in Mexican music during which Mexican composers concentrated on creating a classical repertoire rooted in their own exhilarating folk music. After training at the National Conservatory in Mexico City, he was taken under the wing of Carlos Chávez, who exploited Moncayo's multiple talents as a composer, pianist, percussionist, and conductor.

In 1941, Chávez commissioned Moncayo to write a piece for the newly formed Symphony Orchestra of Mexico that would be based on the popular music of the Veracruz area on the Gulf of Mexico in the country's southeast. In response, Moncayo decided to concentrate on the hypnotically rhythmic dance of the region called the *huapango*. This was a couple dance performed on a wooden platform with vigorous heel-stamping beating out the characteristic *huapango* rhythm. Premiered in August 1941 under Chávez's baton, *Huapango* was an immediate hit and today remains Moncayo's most popular piece.

Moncayo chose three *huapango* songs to develop in his dance fantasia: "Siqui-Siri," "Balajú," and "El Gavilán." After a propulsive introduction building the intensity of the *huapango* rhythm, we hear the first song in the trumpet. Flutes and oboes introduce the second song a few minutes later. Moncayo uses "El Gavilán," sung by solo flute and solo oboe, to create a lyrical oasis of calm in the middle of the dancing fervor, then builds to an orgiastic conclusion.

Crouching Tiger Concerto for Cello and Chamber Orchestra
Tan Dun
(b. 1957, Si Mao Village, Hunan, China)

The surprise hit of the 2000–01 film season was Chinese-American director Ang Lee's mesmerizing martial arts/romantic epic *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* set in a legendary China of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). Filmed in stunning locations throughout the country, it was in Lee's words "a kind of dream of China, a China that probably never existed, except in my boyhood fantasies in Taiwan."

Chinese martial arts movies enjoyed only a cult following at that time in the West, so Lee strove to make *Crouching Tiger* something that would appeal to Western audiences by adding a bittersweet element of unspoken love between the male and female protagonists: the monk-like warrior Li Mu Bai and his equally gifted friend Yu Shu Lien as they struggle to win back Li's all-powerful sword, the Green Destiny. Lee also transformed the martial arts sequences into moments of dazzling balletic beauty — who can forget the duel on top of swaying bamboo trees or the frantic nocturnal battles on Beijing's roof tops! Shot in Mandarin Chinese, *Crouching Tiger* won the 2000 Academy Award for Best Foreign Movie, along with an Oscar for Best Film Score for its composer Tan Dun.

For nearly three decades now, Tan Dun has been inventively cross-pollinating Eastern traditional music and Western classical music and in the process revitalizing both sonic worlds. Born in a rural village in China's Hunan province, Tan (that is his last name) studied traditional Hunanese folk music as a child, but then was caught up by the Cultural Revolution and sent off to an agricultural commune, where he planted rice for two years. As an escape from this backbreaking work, he began collecting folk songs from his fellow workers and leading musical celebrations, creating the scores from anything his neighbors might have at hand, folk instruments to cooking pots.

In 1978, liberated from the commune, Tan was one of thirty students, chosen from thousands, to be admitted to the composition department of the newly reopened Beijing Central Conservatory. Within a few years, he had become China's most revolutionary, but also most popular composer. Subsequently, he was accepted as a doctoral student at New York's Columbia University. Though he is now based primarily in the U.S., he regularly returns to reconnect with his Chinese roots.

The score Tan wrote for *Crouching Tiger* combined Western concert instruments with traditional Chinese instruments and featured cellist Yo-Yo Ma contributing some of the most beautiful and poignant moments throughout. So it's not surprising that immediately following the film, Tan decided to compose a full cello concerto for Ma, drawing on music from the film and again utilizing an exotic blend of orchestral instruments from the East and the West. Premiered on September 28, 2000 in London with the composer conducting, the *Crouching Tiger Concerto* has gone on to be a popular success, with many cellists vying to play it.

The Concerto is written in six movements, some linked together by cello cadenzas; each movement has a title referencing the film (video excerpts accompanied the Concerto's first performances). Bearing the film's title, the **first movement** opens with the cellist alone, and he will dominate with his soulful melancholy — frequently employing Chinese wailing glissandos to intensify emotion — as he sings of the ill-fated love between Li and Lu Shu. The **second movement, "Through the Bamboo Forest,"** is inspired by the extraordinary scene in which Li and the young woman Jen duel atop swaying bamboo trees. Opened by alto flute, it soon showcases the large percussion section describing the frantic struggle of the two warriors as they leap from branch to branch.

Movement three, "Silk Road: Encounters" comes from a flashback scene in which Jen travels with her family through the Gobi Desert, where they are attacked by bandits. The epic traveling theme we heard in the first movement soars as it is menaced by the attacking percussion. This is followed by **"Eternal Vow,"** a quieter movement for the cello with subtle percussion accompaniment that expresses the sacred vows Li has taken as a virtually monastic warrior.

Accompanied by high flutes, the cello owns **"To the South,"** a beautiful heartfelt song of the love of Li and Lu Shu, which is the film's signature theme. This is followed by a major cadenza for the soloist, using both virtuoso Western cello techniques and Chinese ones invented for its cello-like *erhu*. The **final movement, "Farewell,"** unites the pizzicato-playing soloist and all the strings with the percussion to evoke the final fatal battle between Li and his nemesis Jade Fox. Then the cello leads the full ensemble in a noble elegy on the love theme as Li, dying in Lu Shu's arms, confesses his deep love for her and she responds in kind. Singing alone, the cello sheds the final tears for them.

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, op. 64
Piotr Ilych Tchaikovsky
(b. 1840, Votkinsk, Russia; d. 1893, St. Petersburg, Russia)

More than a decade elapsed between the composition of Tchaikovsky's Fourth and Fifth symphonies. The composer who sat down in May 1888 to create his Fifth had grown enormously in fame and confidence during this period. In 1877, he was still recovering from his disastrous marriage and suicide attempt; in 1888, he was world famous and had just returned to Russia from a highly successful European tour. Czar Alexander III had recently granted him a handsome life pension.

And yet Tchaikovsky was still plagued by doubts about his creativity and the morbid nervousness that was the dark side of his genius. In 1887, he had rushed to the bedside of a dying friend, Nikolai Kodratyev, and for a month was tormented nearly as much as the poor victim. To his benefactress, Nadezda von Meck, he wrote despairingly: "Can it be that we are all so afraid when we die?" And as he began his new symphony, he added: "I am dreadfully anxious to prove not only to others but also to myself, that I am not yet *played out* as a composer."

Far from being played out, Tchaikovsky found that inspiration flowed in abundance, and by the end of August, the Fifth Symphony was completed. The composer led the premiere in St. Petersburg on November 17, 1888; both the audience and the orchestra gave him a prolonged ovation. Yet even then, he continued to have doubts about the work, particularly about its finale, which some critics had disliked. Leaping to extremes, he pronounced the work "a failure"; for listeners then and now, however, it was an unqualified success.

Like the Fourth, the Fifth Symphony has a motto theme that appears in all movements and is also associated with the concept of fate. Here fate begins as a menacing force, threatening the composer's happiness, but is ultimately transformed into a major-mode song of triumph. We hear it immediately, played in the minor by two clarinets in their deepest register, in the **first movement's** slow introduction. Then the tempo accelerates, and a duo of clarinet and bassoon introduce the rhythmically intricate first theme, a halting march. The contrasting second theme, sung by violins, is a tender syncopated

melody in Tchaikovsky's best lyric vein that taps wells of passion as it builds to a vigorous climax.

After a short, intense development based mostly on the first theme, the solo bassoon ushers in the recapitulation. The movement's lengthy coda is fascinating. Beginning with a sped-up, frenzied treatment of the halting-march theme, it descends into the orchestral basement for a surprisingly quiet ending, veiled in deepest black.

The *Andante cantabile* **second movement** is one of the most beautiful Tchaikovsky ever wrote, and the ardor and yearning of its two main themes seem to link it with romantic love. In another letter to Mme von Meck, he wrote: "I disagree with you absolutely that music cannot fully express the feelings of love. On the contrary — only music can do so. You say that words are needed. No, words are not enough, and where they are powerless, comes full-armed a more eloquent language — music." The horn soloist opens with the great yearning principal theme. Soon violins pour out the passionate second theme: an upward-aspiring melody reminiscent of the music Tchaikovsky created for his balletic *pas de deux*. A lighter middle section, featuring exotically decorated woodwind motives, is suddenly smashed by the trumpets loudly proclaiming the fate motto. The violins try to recover by singing the principal melody. But again fate rudely intervenes, this time in the trombones, and the movement is crushed.

The waltzing **third movement** also belongs to Tchaikovsky's beloved world of ballet. He wrote that the main theme was inspired by a tune sung by a street urchin in Florence, but that street song probably lacked the smoothly flowing sophistication we find here. By contrast, the middle trio section is nervous, agitated music based on brusque string scales. The fate motto makes a discreet appearance toward the end in the clarinets, but causes little disruption.

Fate is vanquished in the **finale** as the movement opens with a majestic statement low in the strings and now in E Major, rather than minor. The *Allegro vivace* main section returns to the minor with an off-the-beat principal theme that seethes with aggressive energy — Tchaikovsky mastering his fears with a vengeance! A huge coda brings the fate theme back again — and again! — in majestically slow E Major and, upon accelerating to *Presto*, reprises the first movement's halting-march theme, now blazing away in brass splendor. Here

Tchaikovsky perhaps overplays his triumph, but audiences happily succumb to his joy.