

Christopher Wilkins Explicates Concert 2 “Sweet Sorrow”

Playing in an orchestra intelligently is the best school for democracy.

Daniel Barenboim Conductor and Co-Founder of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, made up of young Arab and Israeli musicians to promote mutual understanding

Boston Landmarks Orchestra: a tradition of Music and Reconciliation

The Boston Landmarks Orchestra was founded by a man who thought of orchestral music as an instrument for social betterment. Charles Ansbacher worked his entire professional life to guide musicians toward a purpose beyond just giving concerts. He looked for people who needed music’s healing power most, and then dreamt up ways to bring it to them. Over the years, he performed in many countries undergoing political transition, including Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Macedonia, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. He was the first American ever to lead the Vietnamese National Symphony Orchestra.

Through the generosity of the [Free for All Concert Fund](#)—founded in 2010 by Charles Ansbacher and Ambassador Swanee Hunt to support Charles’ vision—the Landmarks Orchestra has performed numerous concerts in conjunction with the Charles Ansbacher Reconciliation Award. The award has honored leading musicians around the world who have helped bring about social change through music. Recipients have included Dr. José Antonio Abreu, Founder of [El Sistema](#) in Venezuela; Maestro Armand Diangienda, Founder of the [Kinshasa Symphony](#) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Dr. Ahmad Sarmast, Founder of the [Afghanistan National Institute of Music](#) (ANIM), whose evacuation to Qatar and then to Portugal in 2021 was [reported](#) worldwide. After coming to Boston and appearing with the orchestra, Dr. Sarmast invited me to teach at ANIM, leading to my [month-long stay in Kabul](#) in 2014.

Around the world, examples abound of orchestras formed to champion change or promote intercultural respect. The [Sphinx Organization](#) in the US, and [Chineke!](#) in the UK are devoted to elevating music and artists of color. There are [orchestras representing LGBTQ+](#) communities; [musicians who are differently abled](#); [musicians living with mental illness](#), and [performers who suffer from substance dependence](#). In 1999, Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said founded the [West-Eastern Divan Orchestra](#)—with musicians from Israel, Palestine, and Arab nations—to stimulate intercultural dialogue through music. Barenboim speaks eloquently about his orchestra: “The Divan [Orchestra]... has very flatteringly been described as a project for peace. It isn't. It's not going to bring peace... The Divan was conceived as a project against ignorance... a platform where the two sides can disagree and not resort to knives... You can't make peace with an orchestra, but [you] can... awaken the curiosity of each individual to listen to the narrative of the other.”

Ukrainian Pins

Handmade wooden pins representing the Ukrainian flag, with a bright red heart in the center, are available for sale at the Boston Landmarks Orchestra’s tent.

They were made by students at the International School in Prague as a way to raise funds for Ukrainian refugee families living in the Czech Republic. 100% of the proceeds from the sale of the pins will go to an organization called Amity. Amity's support to refugee families includes housing, school placements, assistance with resumes and job applications, and access to health care and community services.

Tonight's Program

Giving expression to conflict may have been **Giuseppe Verdi's** greatest gift as a dramatist. Verdian plots often pit the oppressed against their oppressors, romantic love against patriotic sacrifice, individual freedom against civic duty, and democratic ideals against the corrupting influence of political power. ***Nabucco* (1841)**—based on the biblical books of 2 Kings, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Daniel—portrays the Jewish people, first in Jerusalem as they suffer the destruction of the Temple of Solomon, then in exile under the despotic Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar II. The political conflicts are—as always with Verdi—mirrored in the plot's romantic entanglements.

The *Nabucco* Overture begins with trombones—traditionally associated with sacred music—intoning a solemn hymn expressing the faith of the Hebrews. A cry of protest erupts in the full orchestra, and soon forces of resistance gather in music sounding like preparations for a battle. It is in a minor key, organized around a five-note motive that reappears throughout the overture, always driven by the snare drum. The trombone hymn returns briefly, breaking off mid-phrase to make way for a new theme introduced by oboe and clarinet. This most famous of all opera melodies—the Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves—expresses both the love and the longing of the Jewish people for their homeland. It is doubtful that Verdi intended his inspired tune as a rallying cry for the cause of Italian independence, but over time it became exactly that. Twenty years before Garibaldi's volunteers marched northward out of Sicily to set the stage for a new Italian nation, Verdi had already written the unofficial anthem of the *Risorgimento*, the political and military campaign to liberate and unite Italy.

Racial reconciliation in the United States took a positive turn in the 1930s, when three outstanding symphonies by Black Americans earned wide acclaim, after receiving performances by some of America's most prestigious orchestras. Howard Hanson and the Rochester Philharmonic premiered William Grant Still's Symphony No. 1 "Afro-American" in 1930; **Florence Price's** First Symphony won the admiration of conductor Frederick Stock, who performed it with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1932. And William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony* took the East Coast by storm in 1934, in performances by Leopold Stokowski and the famed Philadelphia Orchestra. The Landmarks Orchestra will give the presumed Boston premiere of Dawson's one and only symphony on [Wednesday August 24](#). (Maestro Mark Churchill and [Symphony Pro Musica](#) gave the Massachusetts premiere earlier this past season.)

Florence Price was a standout in the 1906 graduating class of the New England Conservatory. She thrived as a pianist, organist, and composer under the tutelage of NEC President George Chadwick. After returning to her native Little Rock, AR, she elected to leave the Jim Crow South altogether, settling in Chicago, where she lived for the rest of her life. There she earned money by composing jingles for the radio, and by playing organ for silent movies. She was especially active in promoting concert music in the Black community, including important work on behalf of the local chapter of [The National Association of Negro Musicians](#).

But it was the success of her Symphony in E minor that put her on the map. The Chicago Symphony's premiere marked the first time any American orchestra had performed a symphony by a Black woman. Despite her considerable early success, her name and catalogue were almost completely forgotten after her death in 1953, until a large trove of scores was found in 2009 in Price's former summer home in St. Anne, IL, south of Chicago. Since then, her four symphonies, numerous shorter works for orchestra, songs, and piano pieces have been widely performed. She is, in a sense, the composer of the moment.

Her First Symphony won the top prize in the orchestra category of the Wanamaker competition in 1932, and another of her symphonic works, *Ethiopia's Shadow in America*, placed as runner-up. The terms "Ethiopian" or "Ethiope" were often used at the time to denote a person of African descent generally. Her title page explains that the music portrays the emergence of African American life in the New World. It draws on two sources mainly: folk music she learned as a girl growing up in Little Rock; and Negro spirituals, that bedrock of Black American musical expression, and American expression in general. The piece is in three movements, which are connected without pause.

Describing the opening movement, Price writes: *The Arrival of the Negro in America when first brought here as a slave*. It begins with a tune fragment played by solo clarinet, accompanied by three trombones. The melody has the character of a spiritual—bringing to mind the final cadence of "Go Down Moses," for example—but it is typical of her writing that she captures the essence of folksong without actually quoting any. There is foreboding in the silence that follows; the full orchestra answers in an impassioned song of pain, grief, or separation. A short interlude in the strings leads to an elaboration of the song of grief. A solo trumpet clears the air, and the *Allegretto* begins, the main section of the first movement. Woodblock and snare drum—struck with brushes rather than drum sticks—set a groove. Plucked strings introduce a new idea, before the motion slips into a joyful, shimmying dance for the violins. Both these melodies recur at the end of the third movement.

The lyrical second movement bears the heading, *His Resignation and Faith*, referring to the "protagonist" of the first movement. Solo violin and cello announce the beautiful melody that makes up the whole of the second movement. Like "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," this melody is pentatonic—based on a five-note scale characteristic of many African-influenced melodies—rather than the seven-note scale typical of Western classical music. The tune also helps demonstrate why Price's music has suddenly become so popular now that it is readily available: she had a natural gift for melody.

The third and final movement—*His Adaptation: A fusion of his native and acquired impulses*—has a kinship with the music of Scott Joplin. It is a juba, a Price favorite. She knew the juba dance well from her childhood. Many of her works include juba-inspired movements, including all four of her symphonies. Toward the end, trombones briefly interrupt the merriment by recalling the plucked string motive from the first movement, this time in slow motion. The full orchestra responds with a variant of the first movement's shimmying dance. All is not joy in the New World, however. The song of grief returns—perhaps a reference to the “shadow” of the title—as the work barrels toward its final cadence, a series of seven stark and powerful unisons for full orchestra.

Ukrainian composer **Borys Lyatoshynsky**—who died in Kyiv in 1968 at the age of 73—wrote five symphonies. They all convey extra-musical ideas, and have sometimes been described as “philosophical dramas.” They are all Ukrainian, through and through. “A composer who does not read the heart of his nation has less than no value,” he wrote. “I always felt myself to be a national composer, proving this not through words, but deeds.”

Lyatoshynsky's **Symphony No. 3 “Peace Shall Defeat War”** is his most often performed symphony. The musical drama that plays out in the work is the composer's response to the grievous suffering endured by the Ukrainian people during World War II. The symphony was composed in 1951, the same year Shostakovich wrote his Tenth. There are parallels to other Shostakovich symphonies as well: the Fifth, because, like the whole of Shostakovich's symphony, Lyatoshynsky's revised version responded to censorship by the Communist authorities who required an ending of “optimism and triumph for the people”; the Seventh, because the work is an artist's explicit reaction to the devastating effects of war in his country; and the Thirteenth, “Babi Yar,” whose first movement is a setting of Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem bewailing the murder of over 100,000 people of different backgrounds in a ravine within the city limits of Kyiv, in a series of atrocities committed during the two-year Nazi occupation of that city.

There are musical symbols at work in the Third. They represent the psychological agonies of war, rather than literal depictions of bullets, opposing armies, or exploding bombs. The symphony's four movements move from darkness to light, pain to joy, and conflict to peace, along a labyrinthine path. Brutality alternates with consolation, despair with solace, gloom with optimism. Three principal motives evolve over and over again, like characters undergoing transformation in a novel.

The complete symphony is forty-five minutes long. The Landmarks Orchestra contemplated performing the entire work tonight, but the family nature of our concerts dictated discretion. My hope is that many of you will be fascinated by the piece, and will seek out a full performance on CD or your favorite streaming service. I recommend the [Bournemouth Symphony performance under Kirill Karabits](#), whose father studied under Lyatoshynsky, and whose mother is the leading Ukrainian authority on the composer.

The symphony opens with a motto, something that cannot be evaded, permeating the entire work: four notes in the horns in no discernible key, followed by a rising line in the

lowest instruments of the orchestra. This ominous figure leads to a cataclysmic crash in timpani and cymbals, with follow-up hammering in the trumpets. Together these short phrases make up the first of three principal ideas of the symphony. The English horn then begins a brooding melody, which constitutes the second main idea of the symphony. It offers a human response to the unrest we have just experienced.

The music of the opening returns, but the composer now harmonizes the four horn notes and presents them across different sections of the orchestra. A faster section marked *Allegro impetuoso* incites turbulence, and builds to a return of the second theme, the motive of human response, now in a reinforced orchestration. The mood softens, and a chant-like melody begins in low flutes, bassoons and contrabassoon. This is the third principal melodic idea of the symphony. Writer and historian Andrew Burn asserts that the highly charged music of the opening and this chant-like theme “are used symbolically to represent ‘war’ and ‘peace’ respectively.” An extended series of clashes between these principal ideas leads to a settling down of energy at the movement’s close, in utter exhaustion perhaps. But the ‘war’ theme holds to the end, and the composer will require the symphony’s three concluding movements to fulfill the promise of his title: “Peace Shall Defeat War.”

Jean Sibelius’ *Finlandia* was written for a covert political demonstration in Helsinki in 1899. Performed as the final work in a series of short tableaux on Finnish history, it was originally called *Finland Awakes*. That title proved not-covert-enough for the Czarist Russian government exerting its harsh hold over Finland, so Sibelius changed the title several times over the course of the year: *Happy Feelings at the Awakening of Finnish Spring*; then, *A Scandinavian Choral March*; and then, strangely, *Nocturne*—before settling on *Finlandia*. But his Finnish compatriots knew what it was about. If the great tune in the middle sounded to them like an anthem—nationalist and proud—that’s because it was meant to.

While *Finlandia* does not carry the stamp of Sibelius’ mature style, the music is still unmistakably his. The massive chords of the opening—signaling the groaning weight of oppression—have a reductive quality typical of Sibelius’ later music. Emotionally charged lines lead to inert moments with no real action at all—another tendency of his later style. In fact, the musical ideas in *Finlandia* flow with such illogic that it is hard to explain why the music seems so coherent. This too was a key aspect of Sibelius’ later compositions: he became increasingly curious about questions of musical form, and less and less interested in providing answers.

David Amram is one of the most eclectically gifted musicians America has ever produced. He is a composer, arranger, conductor, and performer on an astonishing range of instruments from many of the world’s musical traditions. David is an accomplished jazz musician; he has composed the scores for over a dozen films, including *Splendor in the Grass* and *The Manchurian Candidate*. He has collaborated with a range of classical, folk, pop, and country stars; composed twenty-five scores for productions of Shakespeare in the Park directed by Joseph Papp; and is mentioned prominently on a children’s album by [Raffi](#).

Amram's **Symphony: *Songs of the Soul (Shiray Neshama)*** is a musical reconciliation of disparate and mostly unrelated traditions, and a perfect example of David's affinity for diverse styles of music, the more varied the better. "This time I wanted to do a piece that reflected the polycultural nature of the Jewish people as a nomadic people," Amram writes. The material is drawn from a variety of Jewish folk sources: Palestinian, Persian, Syrian, North African, Yemeni, Indian, and Central Asian. In the work, Amram explores "synergies among otherwise disparate musical traditions and styles," observes Neil W. Levin, Artistic Director of the Milken Archive of Jewish Music. Levin describes the symphony's finale:

The third movement, Freilekh—Dance of Joy, is truly polycultural, fusing eastern European klezmer inflections with a Yemenite sacred tune and a Sephardi secular song, all under a Yiddish title denoting a typical high-spirited dance. The Yemenite tune here is a traditional version for the kabbalistic liturgical text of the preliminary service on the eve of the Sabbath (kabbalat shabbat—welcoming the Sabbath)—l'kha dodi (come, my beloved [Sabbath bride]). This tune was brought to Israel by Yemenites who were airlifted from Yemen in 1948 in a rescue operation known as marvad haksamim (magic carpet). Amram learned it from Sephardi singer-guitarist Avram Pengas, who was born in Greece but grew up in Israel in the Yemenite community. The two met in New York, where they played together in a Near Eastern trio periodically over twenty years. This tune was one of the many upon which they improvised during those sessions. The Sephardi melody is a Ladino folksong, Morena Me Llanan, which Amram learned from the Armenian oud player George Mgrdichian, with whom he also played for many years. The movement is in the form of a rondo, at whose conclusion all the themes from the previous movements return as a type of recapitulation.

Like the Lyatoshynsky Third, **Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*** is built from three principal musical ideas: a dirge representing the wise but imprudent Friar Laurence; clashing music for the warring Montagues and Capulets; and the soaring love theme. The composer called the work an Overture-Fantasy. It is both. As a fantasy, it is a freely composed response to Shakespeare's drama. As an overture, it adheres to the traditional form of an opera overture of Tchaikovsky's day.

The traditional organization dictated sonata form, with three main sections: Exposition (presenting two or more contrasting themes); Development (extending, truncating, or altering those themes in dynamic ways); and Recapitulation (returning to the music of the Exposition, but with changes suiting the composer's dramatic purpose). In this case, there is also an Introduction and a Coda.

Two contrasting ideas form the slow Introduction, one low, one high. Clarinets and bassoons begin with a tragic hymn. This is the ecclesiastical-sounding music of Friar Laurence, who advised the lovers—not always sensibly—and who unwittingly sealed their fate. Tchaikovsky then creates a short transition by building two string chords, proceeding from lower to upper strings to form the first, then moving in the opposite direction to create the other. The second type of music suggests a world from which something beautiful might come. Flutes and clarinets—accompanied by high cellos—rise higher and higher, arriving at a sublime chord supported by upsweeping arpeggios from the harp.

But the flute and clarinet line contains within it Tchaikovsky's famous "motive of the cross." According to his method, you can form a cross motive by positioning four pitches in a steady ascent—on music paper you could draw a straight line, sloping upward, through the center of each of the four notes. Then exchange the positions of the second and third notes. Now, the second note lies above the original line, and the third note below it; drawing a line between these two notes forms a cross with the first line. Tchaikovsky used his "motive of the cross" in crucial ways in his Sixth Symphony. He also explicitly associated it in his music with the crucifix. Here, it is surely an allusion to the "star-cross'd lovers."

Plucked strings lead to a repetition of all this music again, reorchestrated and one half-step lower. Higher would be more typical; lower seems ominous. After the harp chords sound for the second time, Tchaikovsky fashions a gradual transition to the main, faster section of the overture, the Exposition. He creates a new mood out of old material; grief turns to anger (the opening scene of Shakespeare's play comes to mind) as woodwinds and strings face off, and the fighting music begins.

This is the beginning of the Exposition, the main body of the piece, music of the warring factions. It is marked *Allegro giusto*, meaning "fast, in strict time." Agitated bodies, the clash of swords, violence, assaults from one group against another—it is highly visual music. Eventually, Tchaikovsky uses a short three-note fragment of the fighting music and, by gradually bringing it lower and softer, creates a fitting transition to the love theme. The harmony sideslips again a half-step lower, and into another world.

Of this second subject, Mily Balakirev—Tchaikovsky's older colleague and advisor—guessed its meaning immediately: "I imagine you are lying nude in your bath and that Artôt-Padilla herself is washing your tummy with a hot lather of scented soap." Whether Tchaikovsky's brief infatuation with the Belgian soprano—his only known physical passion for a member of the opposite sex—had any causal effect on the intoxicating nature of this theme, we don't know. But without a doubt, it is music of a sensual nature: a start-and-stop melody filled with aching long intervals; throbbing heartbeats in plucked basses and horns; and tender caresses in the rocking motion of the strings. The second statement of the theme is extended—over and over again—by repeating surges, familiar from so many charged moments in Tchaikovsky's stage works.

After settling into a state of repose—this is the "parting is such sweet sorrow" moment—Tchaikovsky quietly reintroduces the sounds of battle, as if in the distance at first. Horns, then woodwinds, give out the Friar Laurence theme. The agitation escalates, fragments of the battle music fly about like shrapnel, and, with explosions coming from every side, *fortissimo* trumpets sounding the Friar Laurence theme do their best to overcome the fighting that has broken out in the rest of the orchestra. The friar is unsuccessful: the music of the warring factions returns in force, and we arrive at the Recapitulation, an exact restatement of the opening *Allegro giusto* music.

For the second statement of the love theme, Tchaikovsky pours it on. Full strings in triple octaves turn an eight-bar love song into a thirty-bar torrent of passion, with pounding urgings from the woodwinds. Building to his coda, Tchaikovsky displays unanticipated

sleight of hand by gathering together all three principal themes in a knot of tension: Friar Laurence struggles to be heard over the incessant fighting, while Romeo and Juliet sing their love in the few pauses that open up amidst the brawling.

The Romeo and Juliet love theme spins about as if in a centrifuge, then falls defeated into the “motive of the cross” in the cellos and basses. All is silent; the conflict is over. We’ve reached the coda, or epilogue: musical life after death. Timpani and tuba begin a great dirge; it is a transfiguration of the love theme. Woodwinds convert the former caressing motives into the hymn of a celestial choir. The timpani roars, and Tchaikovsky transforms the clashing rhythms of the Montagues and Capulets into noble pillars of faith. We imagine the closing speech of Prince Escalus of Verona:

*A glooming peace this morning with it brings;
The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head.
Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things;
Some shall be pardon'd, and some punished.
For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.*