Candlelight Concert Society Presents

MAXIM LANDO, piano

Saturday, September 26, 2020, 7:30pm
Broadcast Virtually

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

The Seasons, op. 37a
January: At the Fireside
February: Carnival
March: Song of the Lark
April: Snowdrop
May: Starlit Nights
June: Barcarolle
July: Song of the Reaper
August: Harvest
September: The Hunt
October: Autumn Song
November Troika
December: Christmas

NIKOLAI KAPUSTIN (1937-2020)

Eight Concert Études, op 40
Prelude
Reverie
Toccatina
Remembrance
Railery
Pastorale
Intermezzo
Finale
Program Notes

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
THE SEASONS, OP. 37a

In 1875, the editor of the Saint Petersburg music magazine *Nouvellist*, Nikolay Matveyevich Bernard, commissioned Tchaikovsky to write twelve short piano pieces, one for each month of the year. The commission came just as Tchaikovsky was enjoying the resounding success of the Boston premiere of his *First Piano Concerto* (while simultaneously resenting its lukewarm reception in St. Petersburg). Bernard’s plan was to publish the pieces in each of the monthly editions of the magazine throughout 1876. Bernard chose the subtitles and epigraphs for the pieces with an eye to the experiences and emotions that were typical of each month in Russian culture. It might surprise us Americans, used as we are to a free press, that Bernard was obliged to submit all this material to the imperial censor before publishing it in his magazine.

Most of the pieces are in simple ABA song form and at first glance appear to be salon pieces, as one would expect in a monthly publication for amateurs. On closer examination, however, Tchaikovsky’s mastery of melody, symbol, and mood reveals itself as well as his sensitivity to the texts.

The following indented material comprises the subtitles and the poetic epigraphs that Bernard supplies. The subtitles alternate with a continuation of the program notes.

January: *Au coin du feu* (By the Hearth)
A little corner of peaceful bliss,
the night dressed in twilight;
the little fire is dying in the fireplace,
and the candle has burned out.
(Alexander Pushkin)

Tchaikovsky’s gift for handling melodies and motifs is on display in this gentle reverie. The second theme of the A section is almost the inversion of the first theme. The B section is a brief interlude of arpeggios, and when the A section returns, it has an extended ending that repeats one phrase in ever shorter versions, evoking the sputtering of a candle as it burns out.

February: *Carnaval* (The Carnival)
At the lively Mardi gras
soon a large feast will overflow.
(Pyotr Vyazemsky)

The feasting that precedes Lent in the church calendar is taken very seriously in Russia. Parties abound, and hosts are determined to outdo each other in the lavishness of their meals and the generosity of their wine stewards. As a result, the singing and dancing that takes place at their parties is always vigorous. Tchaikovsky captures this vitality through rapidly moving chords and arpeggios along with sudden changes from loud to soft.

March: *Chant de l'alouette* (Song of the Lark)
The field shimmering with flowers,
the stars swirling in the heavens,
the song of the lark
fills the blue abyss.
(Apollon Maykov)

The melody Tchaikovsky creates for this piece imitates not only the trilling of the lark through its ornamentation but also the swooping of the bird in flight through its recurring six-note motif, which alternately rises and falls.

April: *Perce-neige* (Snowdrop)
The blue, pure snowdrop — flower,
and near it the last snowdrops.
The last tears over past griefs,
and first dreams of another happiness.
(A. Maykov)

Tchaikovsky uses a quiet but restless waltz to express the ambivalence of the passage from grief into happiness that is embodied in the melting of the last snows and the appearance of the first spring flowers.

May: *Les nuits de mai* (May Nights)
What a night! What bliss all about!
I thank my native north country!
From the kingdom of ice, from the
kingdom of snowstorms and snow,
how fresh and clean May flies in!
(Afanasy Fet)

In St. Petersburg, one of only a few large cities at its far-north latitude (59.94°), May is most welcome, with its longer hours of daylight and clear, starlit nights. The quiet chords of the A section in this piece embody the quiet of those nights, while the composer’s joy at the changes May brings can be heard in the rapid arpeggios that accompany the melody in the B section.

June: *Barcarolle* (Barcarole)
Let us go to the shore;
there the waves will kiss our feet.
With mysterious sadness
the stars will shine down on us.
(Aleksey Pleshcheyev)

Originating in Venice, the barcarole (from barc, or small boat) began as a song sung by gondoliers, inspired by the lapping of small waves against the sides of their
boats. For the poet, the small waves on the shore of a lake or an inlet and the stars above bring sadness, and it is on this emotion that Tchaikovsky dwells in the A section. The B section introduces larger waves and a more positive moment, but it is very brief, and the returning A section takes us right back to that mysterious, but oh, so beautiful sadness.

July: Chant du faucheur (Reaper's Song)
Move the shoulders,
shake the arms!
And the noon wind
breathes in the face!
(Aleksey Koltsov)

The bold opening chords of July testify that the shoulders of the field worker are indeed broad and strong, and the strong off-beats of the second theme call to mind a peasant dance. Again Tchaikovsky uses a non-melodic motif (the rapid sixteenths that accompany the first theme as it returns) to allude to something in the text (the noon wind).

August: La moisson (The Harvest)
The harvest has grown,
people in families cutting the tall rye
down to the root!
Put together the hay stacks,
music screeching all night from the
hauling carts.
(A. Koltsov)

It is hard to imagine that there could ever be any screeching in Tchaikovsky's music, and here he chooses to move beyond the direct meaning of the words in the epigraph to express the joy of the harvest in rapidly moving and syncopated music. The B section provides a quiet but still joyful contrast, a lyrical recital of a single motif that moves throughout the range of the piano. As the A section returns, the listeners can enjoy once again its triumphant final cadence.

September: La chasse (The Hunt)
It is time! The horns are sounding!
The hunters in their hunting dress
are mounted on their horses;
in early dawn the borzois are jumping.
(Pushkin, Graf Nulin)

Even if one had not seen the epigraph for September, one would surely think of hunting horns as one hears the archetypical repeated notes and open fifth and fourth harmonies that make up the A section of this piece. The B section features a rising chromatic motif and leaping octaves, as Tchaikovsky responds to the images in the subsequent lines of the poem. Borzois are large, elegant hunting hounds, once known as Russian wolfhounds.

October: Chant d'automne (Autumn Song)
Autumn, our poor garden is all falling down,
the yellowed leaves are flying in the wind.
(Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy)

Frequently given to bouts of melancholy, Tchaikovsky finds that he has this in common with Tolstoy as both writer and composer reflect upon the signs of decay that appear in nature in October. He unwinds a long-breathed melody in which the first two phrases quite literally droop like leaves about to fall from a tree. The poignancy of the piece is enhanced by the introduction of a dialog between two voices in contrasting ranges (soprano and tenor). The voices imitate one another, sometimes interrupting as they rush to reiterate and intensify what the other has just sung. In the touching conclusion, the tenor breathes the last sigh.

November: Troïka (On the Troika)

In your loneliness do not look at the road,
and do not rush out after the troika.
Suppress at once and forever
the fear of longing in your heart.
(Nikolay Nekrasov)

A somewhat more uplifting passage opens November, the piece dedicated to the month in which early snow (in the days before global warming) enabled Russians to take a ride on one of their favorite forms of transportation: a sleigh drawn by three horses (troika). The B section seems to be inspired by the slippery motion of the sleigh and the exhilaration of the ride. But in both the A and B sections, there is a second theme that introduces a more sober mood, even as the poet speaks of a condition of loneliness that would keep him from taking part in such pleasures.

December: Noël (Christmas)

Once upon a Christmas night
the girls were telling fortunes:
taking their slippers off their feet
and throwing them out of the gate.
(Vasily Zhukovsky)

Christmas is another holiday that is celebrated with serious enthusiasm in Russia. The observation of the holiday in the Russian Orthodox tradition begins with a long (40-day) fast that takes up the whole month of December, and Christmas festivities are not supposed to begin until January 1st, when Father Frost comes bringing gifts. Christ's birth is not celebrated until January 7. The poet refers to old Slavic winter solstice
traditions of fortune telling and throwing out girls’ slippers (to be found and returned, hopefully, by a suitor). These would, of course, have occurred in December. Over time, winter solstice observations have blurred with Christmas traditions in Russia, even as they have in the West, where Yule logs, Christmas trees, and festivals of lights have blended with creches and midnight masses. In this tentative waltz, with its frequent hesitations, one can hear Tchaikovsky anticipating the joys of December with bated breath.

Notes by Stephen Ackert

Nikolai Kapustin (1937-2020)
EIGHT CONCERT ÉTUDES, OP. 40

Born in Horlivka, Ukraine (then Ukrainian SSR) in 1937, Russian pianist and composer Nikolai Kapustin composed his first piano sonata at age thirteen, even before he had begun formal piano studies. From 1956 to 1961, he studied with Alexander Goldenweiser at the Moscow Conservatory. Concurrent with his classical studies, he developed a career in jazz, performing with a quintet and in two of the big bands active in Moscow at the time. Many of his compositions fuse classical piano techniques and jazz idioms. Before 2000, Kapustin’s music was known only to jazz musicians within the former Soviet Union, but since the beginning of the new millennium his works have become known throughout the world. American pianist Steven Osborne led the way with a CD of Kapustin’s works in 2000, and Canadian pianist Marc-André Hamelin followed suit in 2004 with a two-volume CD of Kapustin etudes.

In writing about his music, Kapustin made it clear that he wasn’t interested in improvisation, since all of his “improvisations” were actually written out, which, in his opinion, made them better. He thought of himself as a classical composer working in a jazz idiom rather than as a jazz musician. Even though his music is modeled on Baroque forms, it often sounds like jazz improvisation. Listeners familiar with Baroque dance suites will immediately recognize, as they look at the selected movements of Kapustin’s Eight Concert Études, op. 40, the pattern of short pieces with contrasting tempi and textures, juxtaposed in a group of five or six. As the model dictates, Etude no. 1 is a prelude.

Shortly before his death in July of this year, Kapustin placed the following post on Facebook: “Sometimes, looking back at the decades of my life, I wish I could rewrite my past and make it perfect, like the music I compose….but no, our life is like jazz improvisation. It should always be spontaneous, always in the moment, and always free.”

Notes by Stephen Ackert
Tonight’s Artist

MAXIM LANDO, piano

17-year-old American pianist Maxim Lando was awarded the prestigious 2020 Gilmore Young Artist Award and was also recently named Musical America’s New Artist of the Month. He first received international attention in 2017, appearing on the piano bench alongside Lang Lang to perform the parts intended for Mr. Lang’s injured left hand at Carnegie Hall’s Gala Opening Night. Chick Corea joined them for an unprecedented three-pianist version of Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue” with the Philadelphia Orchestra led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin. The collaboration was chronicled in The New York Times.

Mr. Lando has performed with major orchestras of the world including symphonies of Pittsburgh, Toronto, Vancouver and Hawaii, Russia’s Mariinsky Theater Orchestra, St. Petersburg Symphony, Russian National Orchestra, Bolshoi Symphony, Moscow Philharmonic, Kazakh State Philharmonic, Israel Philharmonic, and China’s NCPA Orchestra. Highlights of this past season include a tour of the Beethoven Triple Concerto with Daniel Hope, Lynn Harrell, and the Zurich Chamber Orchestra; chamber music with Pinchas Zukerman and Friends in Germany; and performances of Chausson Concerto for Violin and Piano with Daniel Hope and the New Century Chamber Orchestra. Mr. Lando will perform later this season with the Neubrandenburger Philharmonie, Aspen Chamber Symphony, Memphis Symphony Orchestra, Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra, Edmonton Symphony, and the Lansing, Fort Smith, and Wheeling Symphonies.

Mr. Lando was invited to play at the grand opening of Steinway and Sons in Beijing, and has also performed at the National Center for Performing Arts in Beijing, Symphony Hall in Shenzhen, Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris, Samos Young Artist Festival in Greece, Rising Stars Munich, Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players in New York City, Ravinia Festival, Aspen Music Festival, Jay Pritzker Pavilion at Chicago’s Millennium Park, and the GRAMMY Salute to Classical Music at Carnegie Hall. This season he will perform eight concerts at the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern festival in Germany and will make his debut at the Alfred Krupp Hall of the Essen Philharmonic in Germany.

As the only American to have been awarded the Gold Prize at the International Television Contest “Nutcracker” for Young Musicians in Moscow, Mr. Lando has received continuous support from the Musical Olympus Foundation over the past several years and is invited often to perform in Russia’s most prestigious halls.

Dedicated to making classical music accessible to his own generation, Maxim Lando has been featured on CNN’s Best of Quest, NPR’s From The Top, BBC Radio 4, Bavarian Radio, Russia’s TV Kultura, and WQXR. A proponent of Sing For Hope’s mission, he served as a last-minute replacement for Lea Salonga at its 2017 Gala.

Maxim Lando is the 2019 Artemisia Laureate, an Artemisia Akademie Fellow at Yale University alumnus, and winner of the Gold Medal at the 2017 Berlin International Music Competition. He is a proud alumnus of the Lang Lang International Music Foundation and has been a student of Hung-Kuan Chen and Tema Blackstone at Juilliard Pre-College since the age of 11.

Mr. Lando won First Prize and four special prizes at the 2018 Young Concert Artists International Auditions. He opened the 2019-20 Young Concert Artists Series with recital debuts in the Peter Marino Concert at Carnegie Hall’s Zankel Hall, and at the Kennedy Center’s Terrace Theater. His debut program included Liszt’s complete Transcendental Etudes and according to NY Times critic Anthony Tommasini “…he already has what it takes to dispatch it brilliantly.”