

**PROGRAM NOTES**  
**JANUARY CONCERT**  
**Dr. Marcia Fountain**

**Camille Saint-Saëns**

Born Oct. 9, 1835, Paris, France

Died Dec. 16, 1921, Algiers, Algeria

***Concerto for Cello and Orchestra No. 1 in A minor, op. 33***

Saint-Saëns wrote this concerto shortly after he had founded the National Music Society to promote works of French composers. It is the first of two concertos he wrote for cello, but it is the only one which is played with frequency today. The work was written in 1872 and premiered January 19, 1873, by the Paris Conservatory Orchestra with its principal cellist, August Tolbecque, as soloist. Interestingly, Tolbecque was also an instrument maker and repairer who published books on ancient instruments and instrument building.

The *Concerto in A minor* is one of the really basic staples of cello literature. Though at first considered difficult, it rapidly acquired an important place in all cellists' repertoires, including the great Pablo Casals. A French cellist, Joseph Salmon, recalled hearing Casals play it in 1899, some 25 years after its composition, saying it was "unbelievable! . . . Like listening to the work for the first time. . . Casals made it sound *easy*. We cellists were dumbfounded." It is exceptionally well-written for the instrument, full of the elegance and refinement so characteristic of Saint-Saëns, the balance between the cellist and the orchestra is well handled, and the cello soloist is given ample opportunity for both lyric display and dramatic fireworks. It is a single continuous work, but with the traditional three movements implied within the larger single movement structure.

As Donald Francis Tovey said: "Here, for once, is a violoncello concerto in which the solo instrument displays every register throughout its compass without the slightest difficulty in penetrating the orchestral accompaniment. All the adroitness of Saint-Saëns is shown herein, and also in the compact form of the work."

**Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky**

Born May 7, 1840, Votinsk, District of Viatka, Russia

Died November 6, 1893, St. Petersburg, Russia

**Variations on a Rococo Theme, op. 33**

Tchaikovsky wrote his *Variations on a Rococo Theme* in 1876, apparently on a commission from the cellist Wilhelm Fitzenhagen. The work was premiered on November 30, 1877 in Moscow with Fitzenhagen as the soloist and Nicolai Rubinstein conducting. The title refers to the 18<sup>th</sup> century flavor of the melody that forms the basis of the variations. Tchaikovsky was attracted by music of this time, particularly that of Mozart. But in truth, the work exhibits little of the 18<sup>th</sup> century beyond the theme itself and the lightness of the orchestration. Even the little codetta of the theme is already clearly Tchaikovsky.

The relationship between a soloist and a composer working on the composition and performance of a new concerto is always interesting. The cellist Fitzenhagen advised Tchaikovsky extensively on the cello part; in the autograph manuscript much of the cello part is actually in Fitzenhagen's handwriting. As the work was being readied for publication, Fitzenhagen also revised the ordering of the variations, having assured the publisher that he had license for these revisions from Tchaikovsky himself. One instance of these revisions is the adagio variation -- Tchaikovsky had originally put it as the third one, but Fitzenhagen felt its impact was so great that it belonged near the end. Tchaikovsky complained to a friend about the revisions: "That idiot Fitzenhagen's been here. Look what he's done to my piece – he's altered everything!" But apparently he couldn't be bothered to put things back the way he wanted them, saying to the same friend: "The devil take it! Let it stand as it is!" In the 1950s, during preparation of a complete edition of Tchaikovsky's works, the Scientific Research Institute for Criminal Investigation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Russia analyzed the manuscript containing Fitzenhagen's corrections, overwritten notes, and even changes glued in over the original version of Tchaikovsky. This report and various early manuscripts and published versions became the basis of a new edition attempting to reproduce Tchaikovsky's original intentions.

Fitzenhagen performed the Variations many times. After one of these performances in Germany, he wrote Tchaikovsky: "I caused a sensation with your variations. The audience liked the piece so much that they called me back onto the stage three times and applauded wildly after the andante variation. Liszt told me, 'Yes, this is real music at last!'"

**Antonin Dvořák**

Born September 8, 1841 Nelahozeves, Czech Republic

Died May 1, 1904 Prague, Czech Republic

***Symphony No. 7 in D minor, op. 70***

Though Dvořák's *New World Symphony* is his best-known today, many music historians consider the *Symphony No. 7* to be his masterpiece. It was written for the London Philharmonic, which commissioned it and premiered it in 1885 with the composer as conductor. Dvorak had visited London once and enjoyed the visit. "As soon as I appeared, I received a tempestuous welcome from the audience of 12,000. These ovations increasing, I had to bow my thanks again and again, the orchestra and choir applauding with no less fervor. I am convinced that England offers me a new and certainly happier future, and one which I hope may benefit our entire Czech art. The English are a fine people, enthusiastic about music, and it is well known that they remain loyal to those whose art they have enjoyed. God grant that it may be so with me." The importance of this performance was also underlined in a letter to a friend: "I am occupied at present with my new symphony (for London), and wherever I go I think of nothing but my new work, which must be capable of stirring the world, and may God grant that it will!"

Probably because his visit to England was intended to enhance his international reputation, this is one of Dvořák's least "Czech" works. He was reaching out for recognition as more than just a Czech nationalist. One very obvious influence on the symphony is the style of Johannes Brahms; Dvořák had just heard Brahms' Third Symphony and been profoundly moved by it.

The *Seventh Symphony* is traditional in form. The predominant mood of the opening fast movement is restlessness. The second, slow movement is a succession of beautiful melodies that show one of Dvořák's greatest strengths. The Scherzo is the only movement that shows something of Dvořák's Czech nationalism. The last movement triumphantly resolves the underlying conflicts of the first three.