

# Program 4 Notes

by Jon Kochavi

## *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (1892-1894)

The *Prelude*, with its subdued passion and shimmering beauty, can be called the first genuine orchestral example of impressionism, and it came at a time when audiences were hungry for just such an innovation. Concert-goers took to the understated, sensuous work immediately (the full house at the premiere demanded that it be played again as an encore), and Debussy soon became a kind of musical savior for many French music lovers who saw in Debussy an antidote to the massive excesses of Wagner, whose Ring cycle had premiered just 16 years earlier.



**Claude Debussy**  
(1862-1918)

The *Prelude* is a musical representation of Stéphane Mallarmé's poem, which relates the dreamlike visions of a faun on an intoxicating summer day. Debussy's *Prelude* is not programmatic in the strict sense: he aims to evoke the mood of the poem, not the specific events in it.

Mallarmé was at the center of a group of artists, poets, and musicians, including Debussy, who met at his apartment in Paris on Tuesday evenings. Debussy derived great artistic and intellectual stimulation from these weekly conversations, and almost certainly consulted Mallarmé on the setting his poem. Debussy invited him to the premiere of the work. The hovering, expressive melody of the flute that opens the *Prelude* is marvelously evocative. Perhaps the most

lasting influence of the *Prelude* is its liberation of the music from the traditional concept of form. The flute of the Faun brought new breath to the art of music; what was overthrown was not so much the art of development, as the very concept of form itself. . . . the reservoir of youth in that score defies depletion and exhaustion. ♪

## *Lincoln Portrait* (1942)

Copland composed his inspirational *Lincoln Portrait* at the request of Andre Kostelanetz and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Copland wrote of his ideas and motivation for his composition:



**Aaron Copland**  
(1900-1990)

No composer could possibly hope to match in musical terms the stature of so eminent a figure as that of Lincoln... But secretly I was hoping to avoid the difficulty by doing a portrait in which the sitter himself might speak.

With the voice of Lincoln to help me I was ready to risk the impossible . . . . I worked with musical materials of my own, with the exception of two songs of the period: the famous *Camptown Races* and a ballad that was first published in 1840 under the title of *The Pesky Serpent*.

In the opening section I wanted to suggest something of the mysterious sense of fatality that surrounds Lincoln's personality. Also, near the end of that section, something of his gentleness and simplicity of spirit. The quick middle section briefly sketches the background of the times he lived in. This emerges into the concluding section where my sole purpose was to draw a simple but impressive frame about the words of Lincoln himself. ♪

## *Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64* (1888)

**Andante – Allegro con anima**  
**Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza**  
**Valse (Allegro moderato)**  
**Finale (Andante maestoso)**



**Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky**  
(1840-1893)

When Tchaikovsky began work on his Fifth Symphony in 1888, it had been over ten years since the completion of his Fourth. While the Fourth had emerged out of personal crisis

(Tchaikovsky's disastrous sham marriage and his subsequent mental collapse), the Fifth came at a time of professional challenge for the composer. Ostensibly at the height of his career, Tchaikovsky had fears that his creative inspiration was drying up.

After the initial performances, though, his insecurities were fed by some negative reviews (despite an enthusiastic audience reception). He declared the symphony "a failure . . . repellent, superfluous, patchy, and insincere," rekindling his growing fears of his eroding skills. However, his monumental Sixth Symphony lay ahead of him, and the passionate response of concert-going public of the past 120 years has reduced the initial harsh reviews of the Fifth to amusing historical sidebars.

Although not the most complex opening symphonic movement in Tchaikovsky's output, the first movement is arguably the richest in theme and melody. Tchaikovsky skirts the line between march and dance with his material here. Keep the opening clarinet melody (which Tchaikovsky considered to represent "complete resignation before Fate") in your ear; it is a kind of "motto" theme that will return in a much different guise later in the symphony.

The beautifully lyrical second movement is marked "con alcuna licenza" or "with some license" indicating a certain freedom in tempo may be exercised to better shape the sustained melodies, the first being introduced by a solo horn.

Right from the start, Tchaikovsky lets us know that the third movement won't be an ordinary waltz. Rather than emphasizing the first of the three beats of each measure as is typical in the waltz, the accompaniment drops out on these beats. Later, a bassoon melody comes in that syncopates and completely undermines the three-beat feel altogether.

The Finale immediately picks up on the hint and gives us a completely recast version of the motto theme, now in a majestic major key. The dramatic, bold gestures that pervade this movement culminate in a final triumphant, full-voiced return of this transformed march theme, a rousing conclusion to Tchaikovsky's moving work. ♪



**Hoyt Smith,**  
narrator

Hoyt Smith, Bay Area 102.1 KDFC radio personality, is tonight's guest narrator of Copland's compelling *Lincoln Portrait*. This most popular radio host daily airs his

program from 6:30am through the noon hour. It seems he is so well-loved that for the past two years the San Francisco Magazine readers' poll has named him "Best DJ".

We also are most pleased to note that each year Hoyt Smith delights hundreds of youngsters at our own Marin Symphony Family Concerts, in programs designed especially for them, with his ever-animated commentary on the sights and sounds of our musicians in performance on stage.

For more about Hoyt, go to our website [marinsymphony.org](http://marinsymphony.org)