

## Program Notes

Nutcracker Suite No. 1, Op. 71a (1892).....Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

*I grew up in a quiet spot and was saturated from earliest childhood with the wonderful beauty of Russian popular song. I am therefore passionately devoted to every expression of the Russian spirit. In short, I am a Russian through and through!*

~~ Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

On March 19, 1892, Tchaikovsky led a concert of his music at the Imperial Russian Musical Society. The hit of the evening was a suite he had fashioned from his score for *The Nutcracker* ballet, made up of the overture, the *March of the Children* from the first act and the characteristic dances from the second. In the years since, this Suited from *The Nutcracker* has probably introduced more people to a serious interest in concert music than any other orchestral piece ever written.

*Casse-Noisett* (Nutcracker), Tchaikovsky's third and last ballet, had its première in St. Petersburg during December of 1892, almost three years after its very successful predecessor, *The Sleeping Beauty*. Based on an Alexander Dumas Adaptation of a story by E.T.A. Hoffman, the scenario did not move Tchaikovsky quite as much as his two earlier romantic fairytales. This in spite of the nocturnal coming-to-life of toys, including the nutcracker, which is the young Clara's most cherished present at her Christmas party, defeats an army of mice, and, transformed into a handsome prince, carries her off through the snows to the Kingdom of Sweets. To his closest friends, Tchaikovsky confessed doubts about the worth of his score. Nevertheless, its best parts, assembled in the orchestral suite, immediately won all hearts of the audience—several movements in fact had to be encored at the *Suite's* Russian and English premières.

The lightly scored *Miniature Overture* evokes a world of fantasy. The *March*, with its fanfares, brings the guest to Clara's Christmas party. The *Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy*, The Queen of the Kingdom of Sweets, is notable for Tchaikovsky's use of the very recently invented instrument, the celesta. The ensuing *Russian Dance*, *Arab Dance*, and *Chinese Dance* are part of the final divertissement with which Clara and her Prince are entertained. The *Dance of the Mirlitons*, takes its name from a French reed pipe played, and often made, by children. The concluding *Waltz of the Flowers* is a fine example of Tchaikovsky's skill in the compositional style of the waltz.

Russian Christmas Music (1944)..... Alfred Reed

*My family on my father's side, as nearly as I've been able to trace them back, was largely middle class accountants, merchants and some lawyers. My mother's side was largely working class, as far as I know, there were no musicians, dancers, entertainers, or actors on that side of the family either. So, I guess I'm one of those strange collections of genes all falling in the right direction.*

~~Alfred Reed

Alfred Reed was born on Manhattan Island in New York City on January 25, 1921. His formal music training began at the age of 10, when he studied the trumpet. As a teenager, his interests shifted from performing to arranging and composition. In 1938, he started working in the Radio Workshop in New York as a staff composer/arranger and assistant conductor. With the onset of World War II, he enlisted and was assigned to the 529th Army Air Corps Band. During his three and a half years of service, he produced nearly 100 compositions and arrangements for band. After his discharge, Reed enrolled at the Juilliard School of Music and studied composition with Vittorio Giannini. In 1953, he enrolled at Baylor University, serving as conductor of the Symphony Orchestra while he earned the Bachelor of Music degree (1955). A year later, he received his Master of Music degree. His interest in the development of educational music led him to serve as executive editor of Hansen Publishing from 1955 to 1966. He left that position to become a professor of music at the University of Miami, where he served until his retirement in 1993. He continued to compose and make appearances as guest conductor in many nations until his death on September 15, 2005

Reed was a twenty-three year old staff arranger for the 529th Army Air Corps Band when he was called upon to create what has become a masterpiece of the wind literature. It was in 1944, when optimism was running high with the successful invasion of France and Belgium by the Allied forces. A holiday band concert was planned by the city of Denver to further promote Russian-American unity with premiers of new works from both countries. Roy Harris was placed in charge and planned the second movement of his *Sixth Symphony* (the *Abraham Lincoln Symphony*) to be the American work. The Russian work was to have been Prokofiev's *March, Op. 99*, but Harris discovered that it had already been performed in the United States (by Reed's own ensemble). With just sixteen days until the concert, Harris assigned Reed, already working for Harris as an aid, to compose a new Russian work for the concert. Scouring the Corp's music library, Reed found an authentic 16th-century Russian Christmas song, *Carol of the Little Russian Children* to use for an introductory theme. Drawing on his investigations of Eastern Orthodox liturgical music for other thematic ideas, he completed the score of *Russian Christmas Music* in eleven days; copyists took another two days to prepare parts for rehearsal. The music was first performed on December 12, 1944, on a nationwide NBC broadcast. A concert performance was given in Denver two days later.

The liturgical music of the Eastern Orthodox Church is entirely vocal, admitting no instrumental music into the services. Reed has captured the sonorities, rhythmic inflections, clarity, and flowing phrases of the human voice in his composition. Although the work is in the form of a single movement, four distinct sections can be recognized. The opening *Carol* sets a restrained and gentle mood. The chant from the trombones and trumpets climaxes into the *Antiphonal Chant* carried by the woodwinds. The rhythm picks up for the *Village Song*, which is presented in two bar phrases that rise and fall with the liturgy. The church bells herald the final *Cathedral Chorus* that builds in a steady crescendo, pausing for a soft and sonorous chorale, before continuing with the introduction of additional instruments until all of the colors and intensity of the celebration fill the hall.

~~Notes by Dr. Stephen Crawford  
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