



## VSO: Russia Rocks!

**Date and Venue** 5 December @ 8:00 pm | The Orpheum, Vancouver

**Reviewer** Olivia Bevan

For their *Russia Rocks!* evening, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra honoured Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky and Sergey Prokofiev. Tchaikovsky's repertoire includes such instantly recognizable works as *Swan Lake*, the *Nutcracker* and the *1812 Overture*. Prokofiev was considered the greatest musician of his time, despite often being a bit of a rebel with his original compositions.

The first piece, a *Festive Overture*, by Shostakovich was a great starter piece. The audience was instantly captured by the energetic, jovial passages and Christmas felt only moments away as we found ourselves caught with the orchestra's festive frenzy.

The second piece, Prokofiev's *Lt. Kije Suite*, Op 60: *Troika*, continued the theme and kept the string instruments very busy—one minute swiftly plucking, the next driving their bows in fast runs. The piccolo also played its part, heightening the Christmassy feel with sharp, precise interjections.

Julie Albers, accomplished cellist, sat centre-stage for the third and final piece of this first half: Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, Op. 33. Without the need for sheet music she laid bare the intimacy and power of Tchaikovsky. It was beautiful to watch the way she became absorbed with the music; her body gracefully dancing with the cello through all its light, heartfelt, delicate movements. The rest of the orchestra seemed only an accompaniment, as if they were the music and she the dancer. It may not have been a typical composition of Tchaikovsky's but it was both elegant and charming and a joy to listen to.

As the interval subsided, the youthful conductor, Evan Mitchell, led the Orchestra through a world premiere by Jared Miller's 2010 *Traffic Jam*, a fun, lively piece inspired by the soundscape of Vancouver as it undergoes preparations for the 2010 Olympics.

Julie Albers took her place for her second piece: Tchaikovsky's *Pezzo Capriccioso* for cello and orchestra, Op. 62. With astounding deftness and swift hand movements she shone during this elegant piece, despite a slight cello malfunction. After a small pause handled with both humour and professionalism, the orchestra recommenced and the applause was all the more rapturous for it.

Prokofiev's *Love for Three Oranges: Suite*, Op. 33bis followed. Originally premiered in Chicago in 1921, this slightly madcap piece was brought alive by the VSO. Playful strings and brass created an almost good versus evil scenario, but the bassoons and flutes stole the show with beautiful, lingering passages that exuded imagery and emotion. Well-placed percussion tones added to the cartoonish nature of this piece and the harps interjected with fairy-tale feeling.

The final piece, *Sleeping Beauty*, Op. 66: *Suite* by Tchaikovsky allowed us to enjoy the full dimension of Tchaikovsky's intensity, power, and energy. Beautiful harps, rolling timpani and crashing symbols added story-like character to this regal piece while the rest of the orchestra added body and grandeur. Even the young boy sat next to me who had, until now, remained motionless through most of the night, bobbed his head still slightly to the waltzing rhythm.

Tonight's repertoires exquisitely demonstrated both composers' versatility and ability to capture, absorb and entertain their audience, and so too the ability of the VSO.