

INDEPENDENCE SINFONIA WINTER CONCERT - MARCH 2, 2025

PROGRAM NOTES

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Variations on a Rococo Theme* in A Major, Op. 33

Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* is one of his most elegant and virtuosic works, showcasing his admiration for the grace and refinement of 18th-century music.

Although written for orchestra and solo cello, today's performance is a unique arrangement of the cello solo part for saxophone by Valentin Kovalev.

Composed in 1876 and dedicated to the German cellist Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, the piece blends Tchaikovsky's Romantic sensibilities with a classical aesthetic inspired by composers like Mozart, whom Tchaikovsky revered. This fusion creates a work that is both technically demanding and deeply expressive, making it a cornerstone of the cello repertoire.

Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) composed the *Rococo Variations* during a period of significant artistic development. He was deeply influenced by his studies of Mozart and the classical ideals of clarity and balance. The work reflects his desire to create music that pays homage to the past while embracing the expressive potential of the Romantic era.

However, the original score underwent revisions by Fitzenhagen, who altered the order of the variations and made other changes to suit his preferences. While these edits remain the most commonly performed version, the original manuscript has gained attention for its different narrative flow.

Structure and Themes:

The *Rococo Variations* are not a traditional concerto but rather a set of variations preceded by a lyrical introduction. Tchaikovsky creates a seamless blend of a classical theme and Romantic virtuosity, emphasizing the cello's expressive and technical capabilities.

Introduction: The work opens with a brief orchestral introduction, setting a light and graceful tone. The cello enters with an elegant and noble melody that serves as the Rococo-style theme. Its simplicity and clarity evoke the spirit of the 18th century.

Theme and Variations: Following the theme, Tchaikovsky presents seven variations, each exploring different aspects of the cello's character:

Variation I: Subtle ornamentation begins to enrich the theme, with the soloist introducing more intricate lines.

Variation II: A playful and animated variation, showcasing the soloist's agility and sparkling runs.

Variation III: A lyrical variation with soaring, heartfelt lines that highlight the soloist's singing quality.

Variation IV: A dramatic and intense passage, marked by rapid scales and virtuosic flourishes.

Variation V: A serene and introspective variation with delicate phrasing.

Variation VI: A dazzling and energetic section that pushes the technical boundaries of the instrument.

Variation VII: The final variation brings a triumphant resolution, culminating in a brilliant and spirited coda.

The *Rococo Variations* exemplify Tchaikovsky's ability to blend technical brilliance with heartfelt emotion. Its lighthearted charm and virtuosity stand in contrast to the intense drama of his larger symphonic works, revealing a more delicate and refined side of his artistry. For audiences and performers alike, the piece remains a celebration of elegance, beauty, and the expressive power of the cello.

As a concert showcase, the *Rococo Variations* continues to captivate with its timeless appeal and the balance of classical grace with Romantic passion.

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, bassoon, two horns, strings and solo cello (saxophone)