

**WEST VALLEY SYMPHONY**  
**The Barbarian Artist**  
**Daniel Wiley, Guest Conductor**  
**February 16, 2025**  
**Program Notes**

**Petite Suite de Concert by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor**

**Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912)** was a composer whose extraordinary talent overcame societal barriers, earning him a prominent place in Edwardian England’s musical life. Born in London to a Sierra Leonean father and an English mother, Coleridge-Taylor studied at the Royal College of Music and quickly rose to prominence with works like the *Hiawatha Trilogy*. His music is celebrated for its melodic charm and vibrant orchestration, reflecting a remarkable ability to balance sophistication with accessibility.

Composed in 1911, *Petite Suite de Concert* is a delightful four-movement suite that exemplifies Coleridge-Taylor’s gift for storytelling and character. The suite begins with *La Caprice de Nanette*, a buoyant and playful movement filled with sparkling orchestration and graceful themes. The lively rhythms evoke the image of an elegant dance or carefree frolic, immediately drawing listeners into a world of joy and charm.

In contrast, the second movement, *Demande et Réponse* (“Question and Answer”), presents a more introspective and lyrical tone. Its gentle interplay of melodies suggests a heartfelt exchange, perhaps between lovers or close companions. This thoughtful dialogue provides a striking contrast to the exuberance of the opening movement.

The third movement, *Un Sonnet d’Amour*, serves as the centerpiece of the suite. Its lush harmonies and sweeping melodies evoke the depth and longing of a timeless love story. Romantic and poignant, this reflective section invites listeners into an intimate, poetic world that reveals Coleridge-Taylor’s skill in capturing deep emotion.

The suite concludes with *Tarantelle Frolique*, a thrilling and virtuosic finale inspired by the energetic tarantella dance. Rapid rhythms and lively themes infuse this movement with infectious energy, bringing the work to a celebratory close. The suite’s balance of elegance, emotional depth, and spirited charm has ensured its enduring appeal, cementing Coleridge-Taylor’s legacy as one of Britain’s most gifted composers.

**Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)** is celebrated as one of the giants of the orchestral repertoire, known best for his ability to write memorable melodies. Born in the small industrial town of Votkinsk, Russia, he showed an early affinity for music but initially followed a different path, training in law and serving as a civil servant before pursuing his true passion, composition. Despite facing personal struggles, including societal pressures regarding his sexuality and battles with self-doubt, Tchaikovsky channeled his inner turmoil into creating music of unparalleled poignancy and power. His legacy continues to captivate and inspire listeners worldwide, reaffirming his status as one of history’s greatest musical storytellers.

The *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture*, composed in 1869 and revised multiple times, is one of Tchaikovsky's most iconic works. Inspired by Shakespeare's tragedy, the piece adopts a symphonic poem structure to tell the story of the star-crossed lovers. The overture begins with a solemn, hymn-like theme representing Friar Laurence, whose wisdom and guidance frame the tale. This transitions into a fiery depiction of the feud between the Montagues and Capulets, its clashing rhythms and bold orchestration vividly portraying their animosity.

At the heart of the overture lies the love theme, a soaring and tender melody that encapsulates the passion and tragedy of Romeo and Juliet's relationship. This theme, among Tchaikovsky's most famous, evolves throughout the piece, reflecting the lovers' emotional journey. Initially full of yearning and hope, the theme reappears in the coda as a mournful elegy, underscoring the story's devastating conclusion.

Tchaikovsky's orchestration imbues the work with vivid contrasts, blending grandeur with intimacy. The overture captures the full spectrum of emotions—love, conflict, joy, and loss—making it one of the most beloved and frequently performed pieces of Romantic orchestral music.

### **Symphony No. 5 in D Minor, Op. 47 by Dmitri Shostakovich**

**Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)** was one of the most influential composers of the 20th century, navigating the complexities of artistic expression under the Soviet regime. Born in St. Petersburg, Shostakovich achieved early fame but faced significant challenges after his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was denounced in 1936. His music often reflects the tension between personal expression and political compliance, making it rich with layered meanings.

Composed in 1937, *Symphony No. 5* marked a turning point in Shostakovich's career. Subtitled "A Soviet Artist's Reply to Just Criticism," the work outwardly aligns with the ideals of Socialist Realism, yet its emotional depth suggests far more. The symphony begins with a brooding first movement, characterized by sweeping melodies and dramatic contrasts. This opening movement introduces themes of tension and introspection, setting the stage for the symphony's emotional journey.

The second movement provides a sardonic scherzo, filled with playful rhythms and exaggerated gestures. Beneath its light-hearted surface lies a subtle sense of unease, a hallmark of Shostakovich's use of irony. This movement contrasts sharply with the third movement, a deeply moving largo. The symphony's emotional core, the largo features elegiac string lines and sparse orchestration, creating a haunting atmosphere that evokes profound sorrow and introspection. Many interpret this movement as a lament for the countless lives lost under Stalin's oppressive regime.

The finale bursts forth with a triumphant theme, often interpreted as a celebration of Soviet ideals. However, its relentless repetition and overwhelming intensity have sparked debate. Some view the conclusion as a hollow triumph, reflecting the composer's inner conflict and the oppressive circumstances under which he worked. This duality—outward triumph masking inner turmoil—lies at the heart of Shostakovich's genius, making the Fifth Symphony a profound and multifaceted masterpiece. Its ability to resonate with listeners across time and cultures has ensured its place as one of the most significant works in the symphonic repertoire.