

## GRANT PARK MUSIC FESTIVAL

**Carlos Kalmar** Artistic Director and Principal Conductor

**Christopher Bell** Chorus Director



Friday, June 23, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, June 24, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.

Harris Theater

# MENDELSSOHN MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

**Grant Park Orchestra**

**Carlos Kalmar**, conductor

**Carl Maria von Weber**

*Overture to Oberon*

**Ralph Vaughan Williams**

*Serenade to Music*

**Felix Mendelssohn**

Incidental Music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Overture

Scherzo

Wedding March

INTERMISSION

**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

*Hamlet Fantasy Overture after Shakespeare*

**Dmitri Shostakovich**

Suite from the Incidental Music to the Film *Hamlet*

Introduction

Ball at the Palace

The Ghost

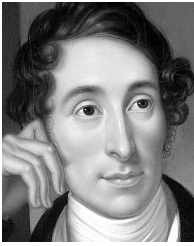
In the Garden

Scene of the Poisoning

The Arrival and Scene of the Players

Ophelia

The Due and Death of Hamlet



## CARL MARIA VON WEBER (1786 - 1826)

### OVERTURE TO OBERON, J.306 (1825)

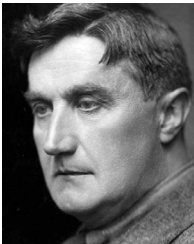
**Scored for:** two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four French horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings

**Performance time:** 9 minutes

**First Grant Park Orchestra performance:** July 12, 1935;  
Ebba Sundstrom, conductor

*Oberon* was the last opera Carl Maria von Weber would ever write.

The composer, who had become world-famous with his 1821 opera *Der Freischütz*, would succumb to tuberculosis shortly after conducting twelve sold-out performances of *Oberon* in London. Though the opera is in English, the libretto is based on the German poem *Oberon* by Christoph Martin Wieland, which is itself based on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the medieval French romance *Huon de Bordeaux*. The opera centers on Oberon, the Elfin King, who has quarreled with his fairy partner, Titania. To reconcile with her, he must find two lovers who are constant to each other no matter what. Puck scours the world to find Sir Huon, a knight from Bordeaux, and Reiza, the daughter of the Caliph of Baghdad. The couple remain steadfast despite the many trials and tribulations they face throughout the opera. The overture opens with the call of Oberon's magic horn, which summons the chorus of fairies in the flutes. A march theme then introduces our chivalric hero. The overture continues by quoting arias from the opera, interspersed with calls from the magic horn, before galloping to a triumphant flourish.



## RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872 - 1958)

### SERENADE TO MUSIC (ORCHESTRAL VERSION) (1938)

**Scored for:** two flutes including piccolo, two oboes including English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four French horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings

**Performance time:** 11 minutes

**First Grant Park Orchestra performance:** July 15, 1949;  
Nikolai Malko, conductor

Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote *Serenade to Music* to mark a special occasion: the golden jubilee of Sir Henry Wood's conducting career. Wood was a prominent English conductor best known for his involvement in the annual Proms concerts in London. The gala held at the Royal Albert Hall on October 5, 1938, was a monumental event, bringing together members from the three big London orchestras, three choral societies, and internationally acclaimed soloists. Vaughan Williams originally scored *Serenade to Music* for sixteen solo singers and orchestra. The soloists sing together in lush harmony but have their own solo lines as well, which Vaughan Williams tailor-made to fit each of the original sixteen singers' voices. To this day, their initials can be found next to their respective solos in the score. The text comes from Act V, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. In the scene, Lorenzo and Jessica are at Belmont waiting for Portia's return from Venice. The lovers sit on a grassy bank and gaze up at the stars while music plays. Lorenzo declares that anyone not moved by music deserves life's cruelties and says, "Let no such man be trusted."



## FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809 - 1847)

### INCIDENTAL MUSIC TO *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, OP. 21 (1827-1843)

**Scored for:** two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two French horns, three trumpets, tuba, timpani, and strings

**Performance time:** 22 minutes

**First Grant Park Orchestra performance:** July 13, 1935;  
Henry Weber, conductor

Felix Mendelssohn grew up in a house where the intellectual and cultural luminaries of the time were frequent guests. Both he and his sister Fanny were remarkably talented musicians. When they weren't practicing, studying, or performing, they were devouring whatever literature they could get their hands on. Shakespeare was a particular favorite, and Felix and his siblings would often act out his plays. When a new German translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* entered the household library in 1826, the seventeen-year-old Felix recognized the play's musical potential.

In July 1826, Mendelssohn set to work on a concert overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which he finished in August. The overture, alongside his Octet, helped to catapult the teenage composer's career.

Four serene chords in the upper winds set the scene of a dark forest inhabited by spirits. A constant bubbling of quiet staccato notes in the strings evokes the tiny feet of scurrying fairies before the full orchestra introduces the noble lovers' theme. Bottom's braying is unmistakable after the stomping chords of the low strings and brass. The overture ends where it began, with the chords of enchantment.

Seventeen years later, Mendelssohn had the chance to pick up where the overture left off. The King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, had taken a liking to Mendelssohn and commissioned him to write incidental music for numerous plays at his royal palace in Potsdam, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in October 1843. Using the overture as a jumping-off point, Mendelssohn expands upon the ingenious motifs he wrote as a teenager to create incidental music for the rest of the play. (*Read more at [gpmf.org](http://gpmf.org)*)



## PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840 - 1893)

### *HAMLET*; FANTASY OVERTURE AFTER SHAKESPEARE, OP. 67, TH 53 (1888)

**Scored for:** three flutes including piccolo, three oboes including English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four French horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings

**Performance time:** 18 minutes

**First Grant Park Orchestra performance:** July 10, 1963;  
Thomas Scherman, conductor

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky had been toying with writing a piece based on *Hamlet* as early as 1876 when his brother Modest suggested the play as subject matter. "*Hamlet* is very much to my taste," the composer replied, "but it's devilishly difficult." Nevertheless, Tchaikovsky periodically returned to *Hamlet*, abandoning several sketches over the years. But opportunity came knocking in 1888 when the French actor Lucien Guitry broached Tchaikovsky about writing incidental music for *Hamlet*. Guitry was staging Act III of the play

and needed an overture and entr'acte. The production never materialized, but Tchaikovsky was already absorbed in the project and continued to work on it of his own volition.

Though Tchaikovsky does not explicitly illustrate characters or events, he gives us all the tools we need for our imaginations to fill in the rest. The overture begins in a brooding F minor, setting the scene of the dark Elsinore castle. After the stroke of midnight in the muted horns, the ominous gong announces the appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father. The plaintive oboe melody is often ascribed to Hamlet's love, Ophelia. The march theme might then represent Fortinbras, who assumes the Danish throne after Hamlet's death. These themes meld and shapeshift, but Hamlet's rage is a consistent presence until his eventual demise.



## **DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH** (1906 - 1975)

### **HAMLET (GAMLET): FILM SUITE, OP. 116A (1964)**

**Scored for:** two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four French horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, harpsichord, strings

**Performance time:** 28 minutes

### **First Grant Park Orchestra performance**

The 1932 production of *Hamlet* for which Dmitri Shostakovich wrote incidental music ended up being one of the biggest scandals in Soviet theater history. The controversial production was devised by avant-garde director and set designer Nikolai Akimov. He believed that modern audiences didn't need another traditional staging of Shakespeare's famous tragedy, which he claimed was no longer relevant to their lives. Instead, he turned the play completely upside down, transforming it from a tragedy into a darkly absurd farce.

As you can imagine, this cynical take on *Hamlet* sharply divided critical opinion, and the production soon closed. What critics generally agreed on, however, was that Shostakovich's brilliantly bilious music was far too skillful and rich for the context, highlighting the production's shortcomings.

Shostakovich had a knack for composing for the stage and screen. As a teenager, he helped his family make ends meet by accompanying silent films on the piano at movie palaces in St. Petersburg. He learned how music could express psychological and emotional undertones such that the score was not just an accessory but could help tell the story. He wrote his first film score at age 23 for the 1929 silent film *New Babylon*. He spent much of his early career composing for film and theater, experimenting and pushing the boundaries of the genre as he honed his compositional voice.

Shostakovich revisited the Danish Prince periodically throughout his career, partnering with director Grigori Kozintsev for a more traditional staging of *Hamlet* in 1954. Instead of using the incidental music written for the 1932 production (which would have been totally incongruous), Shostakovich reused the music he had written for a 1941 production of *King Lear*, adding a few extra movements. Shostakovich and Kozintsev would later collaborate on a 1964 film version of *Hamlet*, for which Shostakovich wrote a new and equally brilliant score. ([Read more at gpmf.org](http://Read more at gpmf.org))

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