

# Romantic Favourites

Ulster Orchestra  
Vernon Handley

collect

<b>Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Fantasy Overture: Romeo and Juliet</b>	<b>20:15</b>
<b>Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)</b>		
<b>2</b>	<b>Carnival Overture</b>	<b>9:47</b>
<b>Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)</b>		
	<b>Peer Gynt Suite No. 1, Op. 46</b>	<b>14:30</b>
<b>3</b>	I Morning Mood	4:11
<b>4</b>	II Åse's Death	4:07
<b>5</b>	III Anitra's Dance	3:45
<b>6</b>	IV In the Hall of the Mountain King	2:19

<b>Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)</b>		
	<b>Variations on a Theme by Haydn (St Antoni Chorale), Op. 56a</b>	<b>18:56</b>
<b>7</b>	Chorale St Antoni – Andante	1:54
<b>8</b>	I Poco più animato	1:16
<b>9</b>	II Più vivace	1:03
<b>10</b>	III Con moto	1:51
<b>11</b>	IV Andante con moto	2:03
<b>12</b>	V Vivace	0:52
<b>13</b>	VI Vivace	1:16
<b>14</b>	VII Grazioso	2:43
<b>15</b>	VIII Presto non troppo	1:19
<b>16</b>	Finale – Andante	3:35
	<b>TT</b>	<b>62:47</b>

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**Richard Howarth** leader  
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## Romantic Favourites

In the early nineteenth century Romanticism became the guiding force of Western European culture. In the fields of literature, painting and music, ideas of expressing Man's passions and his relationships with the natural world soon swept away the eighteenth-century, Classical preoccupation with his intellect. In the field of music, this meant subjecting the abstract forms of the eighteenth century, such as the symphony and the sonata, to pictorial and extra-musical influences. But, although the emotional and linguistic content of works changed, their formal designs were more often than not developments of their Classical antecedents.

Tchaikovsky's **Fantasy Overture: Romeo and Juliet**, originally composed in 1869 at the suggestion of Balakirev, and substantially revised in 1880, is a good example of this combination of Romantic expression with Classical form. Rather than use the freer, nineteenth-century invention of the Symphonic Poem to depict Shakespeare's tragedy scene by scene, he chose, as in his similar works based on *The Tempest* (1873) and *Hamlet* (1888), to use the concept of the concert overture (one which is an entity in itself and not attached to an opera or other work) and extract the basic

elements of the drama, expressing them in the form of a symphonic first movement, the most inherently dramatic of musical structures. Thus the basic elements of sonata form depict various thematic threads in the play: for example, the opening hymn-like passage represents Friar Laurence; the vigorous 'first subject' conveys the strife between the feuding Montagues and Capulets, and the lyrical 'second subject' group poignantly portrays the tragic, 'star-crossed lovers'.

Dvořák's **Carnival Overture** is less obviously programmatic than Tchaikovsky's work, but it reflects another typically nineteenth-century preoccupation – nationalism: artistic and political movements associated with the identity of whole peoples, often living under foreign rule. Bohemia was no exception to this, having for many years been under Hungarian or German domination. Together with his elder compatriot Smetana, Dvořák forged a distinctive, specifically Czech musical language, largely based on the characteristics of the songs and dances of the common people. The *Carnival Overture* (its original designation, *Bohemian Carnival*, points to its nationalist character) was one of a set of three overtures Dvořák composed in

1891 under the typically Romantic title of *Nature, Life and Love* – the others were *In Nature's Realm* and (no doubt influenced by the example of Tchaikovsky's Shakespearean concert overtures) *Othello*.

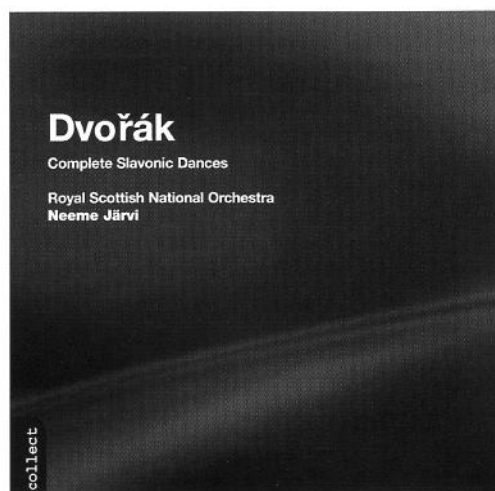
Grieg was another composer much associated with his country's search for a cultural identity. In 1874 he was approached by Norway's greatest playwright, Henrik Ibsen, to provide incidental music for the first staging of his great 'dramatic poem' *Peer Gynt*, which depicts the eventful exploits of a hero of Norwegian legend. Grieg composed well over an hour of music – orchestral interludes, solo vocal and choral passages and dramatic melodramas for spoken voice over musical accompaniment. The first performance in 1876 instantly made him a national figure and the success of the music led him to extract a pair of suites of its most popular pieces. The first, published in 1888, is made up of four movements: 'Morning Mood' (actually depicting an African dawn in the play, rather than the Nordic scene it perhaps suggests); 'Åse's Death' (a simply constructed, yet remarkably effective meditation upon the

death of Peer's mother); 'Anitra's Dance' (from a scene in a Bedouin encampment) and 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' (depicting Peer's escape from the Norwegian trolls).

By contrast with most of his contemporaries, Brahms wrote no programmatic music (unless one includes his songs), instead deciding to keep to the abstract forms of the eighteenth century, though nevertheless infusing them with a highly expressive musical language. His set of *Variations on a Theme by Haydn (St Antoni Choral)* shows this adherence to formal Classicism. He came across the Choral theme in 1870 at a time when it was thought to be by Haydn (an assertion now disproved), and three years later composed a set of eight variations on it, simultaneously for piano duet and for orchestra. In the 'eighteenth-century' manner, Brahms keeps to the theme's metrical and harmonic framework throughout each of the variations, rather than following the more 'nineteenth-century' practice of free fantasy on aspects of the theme.

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(*St Antoni Chorale*), Op. 56a 18:56

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