

MUSICALLY SPEAKING: STÉPHANE DENÈVE ON SHAKESPEARE AT THE SYMPHONY
GUEST COLUMN FOR VAIL DAILY
7.9.15

It is always a joy to be with the great Philadelphia Orchestra in the inspiring mountains of Vail, Colorado. We love to bring the best of what Philadelphia has to offer – a truly remarkable sound – and unique, engaging concert experiences.

The Philadelphia Sound is a very real thing. You notice it the moment you hear and feel it: the rich power of the strings, the vibrant virtuosity of the winds and brass, and the orchestra's ability to play as one unified body. I can attempt to describe it with words, but it truly takes a poet to do it justice. Someone like Shakespeare, perhaps?

The Philadelphia Orchestra presents concerts of all kinds in Philadelphia. Not only do we perform the great classics of the repertoire, but our musical diet includes everything from opera to Broadway to film music. We love to collaborate with talented artists of all styles and present concerts that integrate different art forms—dance, theater, film, and even aerial art. We've enjoyed bringing you many of these experiences in recent years: Cirque de la Symphonie and Fantasia for example. For our upcoming Shakespeare program, on Friday July 17, we're honored to join with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival to bring you a very special experience.

Shakespeare has inspired countless composers. We could program an entire year of concerts just around this idea! For our concert here in Vail we have selected works about love (and the joy and bickering, silliness and sadness that accompanies it.) You will hear some of the most famous works of classical music ever written: Tchaikovsky's soaring *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy-Overture and music from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* including the iconic Wedding March. But you'll also hear lesser known works by William Walton based on *As You Like It* and Hector Berlioz who draws on the play *Much Ado About Nothing*.

William Walton, one of England's most notable symphonic composers, also wrote several film scores for Shakespearean tales. He has a genius way of capturing the atmosphere of Shakespeare time, with a contemporary flair. Berlioz also had a great interest in Shakespeare, perhaps driven by his infatuation with an actress Harriet Smithson, whom he went on to marry. She first caught his eye while she was performing the roles of Ophelia and Juliet in Paris productions. He also went on to write his own concert work based on *Romeo and Juliet*. Tchaikovsky similarly wrote many works based on Shakespeare beyond just *Romeo and Juliet* including *The Tempest* and *Hamlet*. It is Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* that perhaps most literally portrays Shakespeare's words. His incidental music marries text with vivid depictions of these impish and delightful characters.

Alongside these well-known and lesser-known gems, you will also get to hear the famous words of William Shakespeare. Excerpts selected by Carmen Khan, Artistic Director of the Philadelphia Shakespeare Theatre, feature many of Shakespeare's most beloved characters. The concert will be introduced by Jaques, who will proclaim that "All the world's a stage..." You will hear Beatrice and

Benedict hurl petty insults at each other. Romeo will profess his love to Juliet in the famous balcony scene. And the star-crossed lovers of *Midsummer Night's Dream* will try to find their way to happiness.

The joining of these timeless words with timeless music will make for an experience you won't forget. I hope that you never quite hear the words of Shakespeare the same way again. Likewise, I hope that you listen to Tchaikovsky or Mendelssohn differently in the future, understanding more deeply where their inspiration lies. Music is a universal language. Like Shakespeare, if you don't catch every word or every note, we hope that you are transported and share this evening with someone you love.

For tickets to "Shakespeare at the Symphony" on Friday, July 17, visit bravovail.org or call 877.812.5700.

About Stéphane Denève:

Stéphane Denève is principal guest conductor of The Philadelphia. He has appeared as guest conductor numerous times since making his debut in 2007. He has led more programs than any other guest conductor during that time period, in repertoire that has spanned more than 70 works, ranging from Classical through the contemporary including presentations with dance, film, and cirque performers.

About Bravo! Vail:

About Bravo! Vail: Hailed as one of the Top 10 "Can't Miss" Classical Musical Festivals in the US by NPR (npr.com), Bravo! Vail is the only Festival in North America to host three world-renowned symphony orchestras in a single season. Bravo! Vail celebrates its 2015 season July 1 through August 6. For tickets visit bravovail.org.