

## **A chat with Paul Chou about Nov. 19's "The Devil Made Me Do It" program**

Paul Chou has a date with the devil when he plays and leads a fiery program with the Pennsylvania Sinfonia Orchestra at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 19 at First Presbyterian Church, 3231 W. Tilghman St., Allentown.

Paul, Sinfonia's music director, recently sat down and set aside his smoldering baton and violin bow to talk about "The Devil Made Me Do It" program, which features Luigi Boccherini's Symphony "*La Casa Del Diavolo*," Giuseppe Tartini's fiendishly challenging *Violin Sonata in G minor*, known popularly as the "*Devil's Trill Sonata*," and, cooling things down, Franz Schubert's *Symphony No. 5*.

**Whenever the devil shows up in classical music, there's going to be some trouble. What inspired you to choose this program?**

It is always fascinating to me to understand what inspires a composer to write music. Motivation to compose might come from a personal experience, political upheaval, a commission, a patron's request, inspiration from another composer, unconscious stimulus, or a particular subject matter. In this particular program, the devil certainly takes center stage as Tartini was inspired by a dream he had about Lucifer; Boccherini took inspiration from the final scene of the ballet *Don Juan* depicting his descent into hell, and one of the melodies in the Schubert 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony was recycled from a quartet he had written for an opera *Des Teufels Luschloss* (The Devil's Pleasure Palace). In addition, inspiration from other composers also figures into this program as Schubert's Fifth Symphony clearly reflects the influence and style of Mozart, and Boccherini's *La Casa del Diavolo* pays homage to Gluck, the composer who set the Gaspare Angiolini's *Don Juan* to music. Lastly, it is also striking how Mozart's final scene in his rendition of the same Spanish legend (*Don Giovanni*) is similar in drama to the last movement of the Boccherini Symphony.

**According to a popular legend, the devil paid a visit to Tartini in his dreams when he composed the "Devil's Trill Sonata" and demonstrated his other-worldly violin skills to the composer. Will that be on your mind as you step out to perform this technically difficult work? Is this a work for mortals?**

I am only comforted by the fact that Tartini never felt that he captured the full essence of what the devil played for him in his dream, and that apparently what Tartini heard was even more difficult than what he could capture after that fitful night of sleep. I remain hopeful that nearly 60 years of violin playing will support me in this endeavor.

**When was the last time you performed this piece? How have your approach to it and your interpretation evolved?**

I have known of this composition since I was in elementary school and was always intrigued by it. I last performed this piece about ten years ago, and found the orchestration very compelling,

allowing for greater expression and varying textures. My approach and interpretation have not evolved too dramatically, with the exception of some changes in dynamic contrasts and creative rubato sections in the cadenza. I promise an interpretation that will certainly be full of drama and lots of notes!

**The Boccherini symphony is not widely known. Can you describe it and share a little about how you discovered it?**

The Spanish legend of Don Juan has been featured in many literary and musical works. Moliere, Lord Byron, Mozart, and Strauss among others have portrayed him in their own varied and creative ways. It was interesting to me that while Boccherini's *La Casa del Diavolo* is one of the most popular symphonies of Boccherini, it appears that it is still relatively infrequently performed in contemporary times. As such, I thought it made a perfect opener connecting several themes in this program packaged in some dynamic and creative instrumental writing.

**You probably had many options and ideas on how to cool down this program. What led you to Schubert's *Symphony No. 5*?**

With the brief reference to the Devil's Pleasure Palace, how could I not include the *Symphony No. 5* by Schubert! That said, however, I think that the "palate cleansing" effects of this "Mozart-inspired" symphony will close out our performance with singing Schubertian melodies he is known for, graceful interchanges between the winds and strings, colorful treatment of major and minor modes, and a finale that brings youthful exuberance to a satisfying conclusion.

**If you had just one chance to deliver a sales pitch – (See? The devil is already lurking in the shadows...) – to entice people to come and experience this concert, what would you say?**

Join us and let your imagine loose with Sinfonia on November 19 at 7:30 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church of Allentown. We offer to connect you to a world of music that will surely entertain you and bring much pleasure to your weekend as you escape your daily routines.

Here are some questions for you to ponder:

- How many trills did Tartini write for the violin in this 20-minute sonata, arranged for soloist and string orchestra?
- What interval of notes was actually outlawed by the Catholic Church in the 17th century because it was felt only "pleasant intervals should be used to praise God?"
- What symphony of Mozart's has been affiliated with the *Symphony No. 5* of Schubert?

Come to the pre-concert lecture to find out the answers to these questions and others!

Want to hear more from Paul? Join him for a pre-concert talk at 6:30 p.m. in the church sanctuary.