

Diego Ceretta
conductor

in collaboration with the Accademia Chigiana of Siena

Keiko Devaux
Fractured Landscapes – first Italian performance

Alfredo Casella
Serenade for small orchestra, op. 46 bis

Pëtr Il'ič Čajkovski
Symphony No. 4 Op. 36

'You always have to take risks when composing,' says **Keiko Devaux**, a Canadian composer born in 1982, whose piece the ORT is premiering in Italy. For her - who also studied with Salvatore Sciarrino at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena - arousing emotions is not taboo, as it has long been among the composers of the second half of the 20th century. They aim at the clarity of their writing, they do not hide their vulnerability, they tend to develop gestures and musical experiences so that the audience remains suspended, floating, in the time and space of listening.

In the programme entrusted to our principal conductor **Diego Ceretta**, Devaux's new page is placed next to two compositions that could not be more different: **Alfredo Casella's** *Serenata op. 46 bis* for string orchestra, an absolute rarity, and **Pëtr Il'ič Čajkovski's** *Fourth Symphony*, a cornerstone of the late Romantic symphonic repertoire adored by the audience. A flood of emotions, written by Čajkovski between 1876 and 1878, one of the darkest periods of the composer's existence who, in an attempt to redeem himself from homosexuality, had made the ill-advised decision to marry a pupil.

A marriage that lasted only a few hours.

The author illustrates the hidden meaning of the symphony in this way. Pessimistic. For it depicts Fate, "the inexorable force that prevents our hopes of happiness from coming true; that lies in wait, jealously, to prevent our well-being and peace from becoming full and cloudless: a force that, like the sword of Damocles, hangs perpetually over our heads and continually poisons our souls".

Diego Ceretta – bio

Diego Ceretta, born in 1996, graduated in violin with top marks at the Conservatorio Verdi in Milan and graduated in Orchestra Conducting with distinction under the guidance of Daniele Agiman. In 2016, he made his debut with the Orchestra Filarmonica Italiana and later at Carnegie Hall in New York. In 2020 he was the only Italian finalist at the 'Cantelli' Conducting Competition in Novara. He worked as assistant to Daniele Gatti at the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome for the world premiere of Giorgio Battistelli's opera Julius Caesar. Ceretta has conducted prestigious orchestras, including the Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, the Filarmonica Toscanini, the Krakow Philharmonic and the Orchestra Sinfonica Rossini in Pesaro. In 2023, he was appointed Principal Conductor of the ORT. He has also made his debut at major festivals, such as the Rossini Opera Festival and the Wexford Festival Opera, conducting operas such as La Sonnambula, Il Matrimonio Segreto and L'Elisir d'amore. His engagements include concerts with the ORT, international tours and the debut of The Barber of Seville at the Opéra de Lille and Britten's War Requiem at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino.

Keiko Devaux – bio

A Canadian composer, she is based in Montreal, where she develops a personal musical language that intertwines instrumental writing and electroacoustic aesthetics.

In her work, she often begins with acoustic sounds that she digitally manipulates and then transcribes into a score—a process that allows her to merge the classical timbral world with gestures and structures inspired by electronic music. Her compositions seek clarity and expressive intensity, with a focus on the listening experience and emotional resonance, on natural phenomena of self-organization, and on the layering of contrasting elements.

Her works have been performed in Canada, Europe, the United States, and Israel by leading ensembles such as Quatuor Molinari, Quartetto Prometeo, Talea Ensemble, and the Israel Contemporary Players. She has received numerous awards, including the 2022 Juno Award, the Prix Opus, and the Azrieli Commission. She studied at the Université de Montréal and with Salvatore Sciarrino at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena.

Accademia Chigiana of Siena

Founded in Siena in 1932 by Count Guido Chigi Saracini, the Accademia Musicale Chigiana is one of Italy's most prestigious institutions for advanced musical training. Even before its official founding, thanks to the Count's support, the Chigiana was a cultural hub, hosting events like the 1928 ISCM Festival. In 1939, the Academy launched the Settimane Musicali Senesi, dedicated to rediscovering early Italian repertoire and promoting contemporary music. It has trained renowned chamber groups such as the Quintetto Chigiano and Quartetto Italiano.

Since 1958, the Chigiana Foundation has supported its activities, including advanced courses, a library, rare instruments, and an art collection. Recently, it launched the Film Scoring Intensive Program with top Hollywood professionals.

The Chigiana continues to blend tradition and innovation in the heart of Tuscany.

Keiko Devaux

/ Castlegar, Canada 1982

Fractured Landscapes

duration: about 10 minutes - Author's Notes

Fractured Landscapes continues my series of works dedicated to exploring the human impact on the planet's climate, ecosystems, and the behavior of living organisms. I am particularly interested in investigating the resilience and adaptive capacity of nature and its creatures in the face of these changes.

From the shifting migratory routes of birds, which adapt to avoid barriers created by light pollution, to whales that alter the pitch of their calls to be heard above the noise of maritime traffic, these rapid adaptations reveal just how dynamic and responsive our world truly is.

In Fractured Landscapes, I turn my attention to the urban landscape, examining how it intersects with the natural world—creating tensions, but also possibilities for coexistence. In this work, I observe “between the cracks” significant examples of how nature adapts to these environments and, in some cases, even evolves toward more complex and unexpected ecosystems. Certain plant species, for instance, have demonstrated rapid adaptation to urban settings by developing larger, heavier seeds that tend to fall closer to the parent plant and disperse locally, thereby increasing their chances of taking root.

Throughout the piece, we move between natural and urban landscapes, marked by subtle transitions between free, unmeasured harmonies and more traditional, dense, and static structures. Over time, the urban environment takes up more space, gradually upsetting the balance between the two worlds. The melodic and rhythmic motifs, which move throughout the orchestral space, represent the seeds of nature and their dispersal behaviors: at first, they float freely and lightly from one end of the orchestra to the other, falling slowly and gently. But as the urban landscape advances, these movements become increasingly localized within the ensemble.

With this work, I wanted to explore a different image of lush nature—one that grows within the urban landscape: plants that cluster and thrive vertically, adapting to tighter spaces and challenging the constraints imposed by the built environment.

Alfredo Casella

/ Torino 1883 / Roma 1947

Serenade for small orchestra, op. 46 bis

duration: about 22 minutes

After the end of the First World War, the landscape of European music opened up to two opposing directions, both emerging as reactions to the restless atmosphere of those years. On one hand, there was the dismantling of traditional musical language and the creation of a new system—twelve-tone technique—as pioneered by Arnold Schoenberg. On the other hand, there was a rediscovery—and thus a reappraisal (though not necessarily in a nostalgic sense)—of the music of past masters.

This latter path represented the other side of the twentieth century: less iconoclastic and avant-garde, but certainly no less significant, even if some strands of music historiography still regard it today with a somewhat condescending indifference.

Thus, Ottorino Respighi re-orchestrated lute pieces from the 16th and 17th centuries in his three suites of *Ancient Airs and Dances* (1917, 1923, 1931), while Igor Stravinsky, in his own way, looked back—though through a sort of distorting mirror—at works by Pergolesi and other 18th-century composers for his ballet *Pulcinella* (1920).

It was within this new classicism that Alfredo Casella found his artistic path. A European-minded composer open to innovation, Casella is still a figure deserving of deeper study: born in Turin, trained in Paris, closely connected with figures like Debussy and Ravel, a passionate advocate for Mahler's music, and a great supporter of Stravinsky, but also someone who, with equal conviction, worked to promote Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* in Italy.

One of the stops on the concert tour he organized even reached Florence, on April 1st, 1924. It is known that among the audience that evening was none other than Giacomo Puccini, sitting with the *Pierrot Lunaire* score spread open across his knees, his curious eyes following the pages intently.

Casella fully embraced the neoclassical path with his *11 Pezzi Infantili* (11 Children's Pieces) for piano in 1920, continuing along this trajectory with the brilliant divertimento for piano and orchestra *Scarlattiana* in 1926. The following year saw the composition of the *Serenata op. 46*, a short piece written for a chamber quintet, which Casella composed without particular expectations in order to enter a competition held by the Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia. By pure chance, as he later recounted in his autobiographical book *Segreti della giara* (*Secrets of the Jar*), he discovered the following year—while flipping through a newspaper—that the *Serenata* had won first prize, tied with Béla Bartók's *String Quartet No. 3*. Casella shared with Bartók the substantial prize money of \$10,000—an impressive amount for the time.

In 1930, Casella arranged a version of the work for chamber orchestra, reducing the original six movements to five, under the title *Serenata op. 46bis*. "Even today," he would write in *Segreti della giara*, "I consider that work to be one of my most successful creations. It is music that is very easy to listen to, but on the contrary, was very difficult to write—and I could never have created it without my past of hard experiences and a constant torment in pursuit of perfection."

Joyful yet not without shadows, sharp and lucid, the *Serenata* draws in its title from a form of light entertainment music that was very common in the 18th century. As in the classical *serenata*, its character is shaped by a sequence of short movements, beginning with a March: it opens with a lively, clearly marked tempo, driven by the strings' staccatos and animated by the playful interjections of the winds—imbued with a swaggering, humorous spirit (which would later inspire Nino Rota). Echoes of Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* are clearly present in this movement, in the incessant chirping of the woodwinds and, especially, in the brazen, boisterous role given to the trumpet.

The Notturmo begins on a dramatically different note, with a poignant and solemn cello melody emerging. However, a second section gradually opens into a sweeter, calmer expressiveness: over a rocking rhythm, the trumpet gently introduces a melody evoking the distant memory of a folk song—simple and touching, not without nostalgia.

Next comes a Gavotte, a typical French dance which Casella presents here in its original fast tempo, making it even more dynamic and agile through the bustling interplay of the wind solos—further proof that these 20th-century "revivals" were far from simple imitations.

The Cavatina, scored for strings alone, does not refer to the operatic song form typical of the 19th century, but instead looks to the movement of the same name in Beethoven's *String Quartet op. 130*. A delicate, cantabile melody unfolds—one of Casella's most beautiful—played out slowly and with a fragile sound world, almost like a string quartet in texture. "Adagio molto sentimentale," writes Casella in the score, but he adds: "ma senza parodia" ("but without parody"), as if to dispel any doubts about the sincerity and emotion of this deeply moving music.

The Finale brings the *Serenata* to a close in an atmosphere of exuberant vitality. A rhythm emerges from the woodwinds, growing increasingly excited, and soon boldly taken up by the trumpet: it reveals itself to be that of a rousing tarantella. Amid this growing energy, there is space for short solo flourishes, all governed by Casella with exquisite instrumental logic—a dynamic yet finely crafted orchestral writing, ending the piece with a sharp, striking gesture.

Pëtr Il'ič Čajkovskij

/ Votkinsk 1840 / San Pietroburgo 1893

Symphony No.4 Op.36

duration: about 46 minutes

In just a few months, between the end of 1876 and the beginning of 1877, Fate knocked twice at the door of Pëtr Il'ič Čajkovskij.

Both times, it was wearing women's clothing. The first woman to enter the scene, in the last months of '76, was Nadezhda von Meck, a 46-year-old widow of a Baltic industrialist who had made his fortune by building the first railways in Russia. Together they had eleven children; a twelfth was the result of an extramarital affair the lady had with her husband's secretary, who died suddenly of a heart attack as soon as the betrayal was discovered. Having thus become the absolute mistress of her life and incredibly wealthy, Nadezhda began to devote part of her fortune to music, a passion she had nurtured since her youth. It was the young violinist Josif Kotek who introduced her to Tchaikovsky, just as the Russian composer was trying to suppress his homosexual inclination. This struggle would lead to the Fourth Symphony. The relationship between Čajkovskij and von Meck was purely epistolary (over thirteen years, they exchanged about twelve thousand letters), as it was oddly agreed from the start that they would never meet face to face: they managed to adhere to this resolution even when they happened to cross paths on the street, at the theater, or when, during vacations in Florence, they intentionally stayed in two adjacent villas on the Viale dei Colli. To relieve her correspondent of any financial concerns, the lady provided him with a substantial annual stipend, which she began paying him while he was writing the Fourth Symphony; the score was dedicated to her, under the inscription "To my best friend" (in the masculine form).

Meanwhile, Fate had pushed the second woman into the scene, Antonina Miljukova. Her entrance was also announced by a letter: the 26-year-old signatory poured out her overwhelming, long-kept secret love for the 11-years-older composer. They had met at the Moscow Conservatory, but Čajkovskij did not remember her. However, after initially setting the letter aside, the conviction that this declaration of love was a clear sign from Fate prompted him to marry the peculiar young woman who, according to the composer, had in her heart and mind nothing but "absolute emptiness." The marriage took place on July 18, 1877. "As soon as the ceremony was over," the composer confessed to von Meck, "when I found myself alone with my wife and realized that from that moment our fate would be to live together, inseparable, I felt no friendship for her, but rather realized that I actually detested her in the truest sense of the word." A few days later, having clarified to his wife that their marriage would be a "white marriage," Čajkovskij began suffering from panic attacks that led him to attempt suicide by throwing himself into the frozen Moskva River. In October, his brother Anatolij decided to get him away from the situation by organizing a long trip to Europe. In San Remo, on January 7, 1878, the Fourth Symphony was completed. The marriage ended with a consensual separation.

This is the biographical context in which Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36, was born, which Čajkovskij considered the best composition he had created up until then and which he referred to as "our Symphony" when speaking to Nadezhda. Four movements, though the last three are somewhat unbalanced compared to the first, which lasts almost as long as the other three combined. The opening page, which reflects the author's psychological struggles, is also the most elaborate in structure and the most intense in its expressive quality. It is a torment that wants to present itself to listeners vaguely and obscurely, but later, Čajkovskij would lay it out in black and white for Nadezhda's exclusive understanding. Fate dominates the first movement, he tells her, the force "that prevents the leap toward happiness, that vigilantly ensures that well-being and peace are never perfect and without clouds, that hovers above our heads like a sword of Damocles and inexorably and constantly poisons our soul. It is an invincible force, no one can dominate it. The only thing to do is resign oneself to an unending sadness." This is the essence of the first movement, introduced and marked at crucial points by the powerful motif of Fate (*Andante sostenuto*): a mournful martial fanfare of brass capable of casting its relentless, recurring shadow over the two main themes of the page, an intoxicating waltz stated by the strings that struggles in a kind of rhythmic neurosis (*Moderato con anima*) and a delicate chirping of

playful woodwinds (*Moderato assai*, almost *Andante*). Both emblems of gentleness, kindness, delicacy, and brightness. Yet all unable to last more than a moment.

The second movement, *Andantino* in the manner of a *canzonetta*, has a simple ABA structure, with the section A theme, deeply Russian in character, squeezing the heart. The third, *Scherzo*, is truly a *scherzo* and, due to its lively *pizzicatos*, it wouldn't be surprising to learn that it was originally conceived as a number for a ballet. For the final movement (*Allegro con fuoco*, during which a then-popular song, "In the field stood the little birch," is quoted), Čajkovski devises an optimistic ending in a major key. Only he cannot truly believe in the happy ending he has imposed. For, despite the cheerful mask he has put on, halfway through the piece, the motif of Fate reappears. And the triumphant clangs that seal the symphony are not enough to make us believe that the difficulties of life have been resolved. The conventions of the symphonic genre, which demand a cheerful resolution, force us to set aside the challenges, just for a moment. It will only be in the Sixth Symphony, his last with its unusual slow ending, that Čajkovski will find the courage to face the dreaded Fate head-on. And, of course, he will succumb.

Orchestra della Toscana – bio

Founded in Florence in 1980, at the initiative of the Regione Toscana, the Province and the Municipality of Florence, ORT is considered one of the best orchestras in Italy

In 1983, under the artistic direction of **Luciano Berio**, it became Istituzione Concertistica Orchestrale by recognition of the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment. The average number of musicians is 44, who are also divided into agile chamber ensembles. The Orchestra is based in Florence in the historic Teatro Verdi, where it presents its season of concerts, then distributed throughout Tuscany, Italy and abroad. It is today led by the artistic direction of **Daniele Spini** and the principal conductor **Diego Ceretta**. Its artistic history is marked by the presence of and collaboration with illustrious musicians such as Salvatore Accardo, Martha Argerich, Rudolf Barshai, Yuri Bashmet, Franco Battiato, Stefano Bollani, Frans Brüggen, James Conlon, Myung-Whun Chung, Tan Dun, Richard Galliano, Gianandrea Gavazzeni, Gianluigi Gelmetti, Daniel Harding, Eliahu Inbal, Yo-Yo Ma, Butch Morris, Emmanuel Pahud, Daniele Rustioni, Ryūichi Sakamoto and Uto Ughi. The ORT is distinguished by the excellence of its musicians and is a versatile interpreter of a wide repertoire, from Baroque to Classicism, from Romanticism to the historical 20th century, with a particular focus on contemporary music, which has led it to participate in important international festivals. Its concerts are broadcast by Rai Radio Tre and Rete Toscana Classica; it records for Emi, Ricordi, Agorà, VDM Records, Sony Classical, Warner Music Italia, NovAntiqua Records and Dynamic.

The “Verdi” of Florence - bio

It is the largest “Italian-style” theatre in Tuscany (at the time of its construction it was among the seven largest in Italy). Throughout the years, it has kept its main characteristics intact, namely that of being a large popular theatre in the centre of the city, open to all genres of entertainment. Founded as the Pagliano Theatre on the remains of the fourteenth-century *Carcere delle Stinche*, it was inaugurated on September 10th, 1854 with Verdi’s opera *Rigoletto* or, as it was called at the time, *Il Viscardello*. Its creation is the result of the desire of a former baritone pharmacist Girolamo Pagliano who wanted a performance space designed for the people. In 1901, after being named after Luigi Cherubini, it took the name of Teatro Verdi. Its story begins with the great season of melodrama of the late nineteenth century and its charismatic protagonists and continues with the turmoil of the futurist avant-garde movement. From the new operetta genre of the 1920s, we come to the post-war period with jazz and the revue all the way up to the new actors who inaugurated the rebirth of comedy in its many forms. In the 1970s and 1980s, *Teatro Verdi* became a prestigious stage for the most sophisticated pop and rock music and for unconventional drama. Since January 1998 it has been owned by the ORT Foundation, home to rehearsals and concerts of the Orchestra della Toscana. Since then, the *Verdi* has welcomed classical music with great conductors and world-famous musicians and has reached the present day, following a course that has never been interrupted and that links the history of the theatre to the history of Florence. Thanks to the theatrical companies Antico Teatro Pagliano, which runs the theatrical season, and PRG which organises pop and rock music events, the *Verdi* still offers an extremely varied programme in terms of quality, genres, and number of events scheduled.

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