Symphony plans a blast of a concert

July Fourth music-and-fireworks show promises to be an all-American celebration

By Paul Hyde
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With its thrilling music and cannon blasts, Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture" has become a much-anticipated fixture on Independence Day orchestral concerts throughout the nation.

Never mind that the piece actually celebrates Russian victory over the French.

The American melting pot has a genius for co-opting the traditions of other nations. Performances of the "1812" have become one such beloved tradition.

No surprise, the overture will be prominently featured in the Greenville Symphony Orchestra's 2012 Independence Day concert Wednesday at Charter Amphitheatre in Simpsonville's Heritage Park.

The open-air concert, which celebrates its fifth year at Charter Amphitheatre, concludes with a dazzling fireworks display.

Tchaikovsky actually is the only non-American composer on the program, which includes works by Richard Rodgers, Leonard Bernstein, George Gershwin, John Philip Sousa and several others.

GSO music director Edvard Tchivzhel has chosen pieces that range from film music to Broadway melodies and traditional tunes such as "Charleston" and "Turkey in the Straw."

"It's All-American," Tchivzhel says. "All of these styles belong to traditional American culture."

Even the inclusion of the "1812 Overture" makes sense, Tchivzhel says.

"It's great music and it can be applied to any picture of victory," he says. "It's a celebration of heroism and the fight for independence and freedom. That makes this piece very appropriate for our Independence Day."

Performing out of doors brings unique challenges for the orchestra, Tchivzhel says.

Rain is always a concern, but so is heavy wind, which can make music take flight.

"Sometimes I have to use one hand to keep my score in place while I conduct with my other hand," Tchivzhel says.

Don't be surprised also if you see some orchestral members putting in earplugs toward the end of the "1812," as the cannons are about to fire.

"These cannons are real and we have about 12 of them," Tchivzhel says. "We're very close to them. We have to make sure our eardrums are not broken."

Other works to be performed include Bernstein's Overture to "Candide" and selections from the composer's musical "West Side Story."

Film composer Williams' "Raiders March" from "Raiders of the Lost Ark" will be featured as well as a medley from Rodgers' "Oklahoma" and Gershwin's Overture to "Girl Crazy."

The orchestra also will pay tribute to the U.S. armed forces in the "Armed Forces Salute," welcoming veterans and those currently serving to stand up and be recognized while the themes are playing.

The gates open at 5:30 p.m. with activities for children. Patrons are invited to bring lawn chairs, blankets, picnics and non-alcoholic beverages.

The concert stars at 8 p.m. and the fireworks erupt at about 10 p.m.

What part of the concert does Tchivzhel enjoy the most?

"I enjoy the whole thing," he says. "I never play something we don't like. It's music which is very much beloved. It's a very special day and special celebration."

The annual concert is particularly meaningful for Tchivzhel, who defected from the former Soviet Union 21 years ago, later becoming an American citizen.

"For me, I'm not only celebrating the birthday of the nation but I'm celebrating my own independence from the oppressive regime of the Soviet Union," Tchivzhel says.

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YOU CAN GO

What: 2012 Independence Day at Charter Amphitheatre
When: 8 p.m. Wednesday; gates open at 5:30 p.m. and there'll be activities for children available
Where: Charter Amphitheatre, located in Simpsonville's Heritage Park (directions available at www.charteramphitheatre.com)
Tickets: $5 in advance for lawn seats; $10 for lawn seats on July 4; VIP tables are available for $300 for a table of six. Individuals can purchase VIP tickets for $75 (adults) and $30 (children); (VIP tickets include buffet dinner, drinks and VIP parking)
Information: www.ticketmaster.com or 1-800-745-3000; tickets may also be purchased at the Bi-Lo Center ticket office; tickets will be available at Charter Amphitheatre on Monday-Wednesday



The Greenville Symphony Orchestra performs at Heritage Park in Simpsonville on July Fourth. STAFF/FILE