

Symphony plans to take a walk on the dark side

By Paul Hyde

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Witches, demons, ghouls and other supernatural forces have been around since time immemorial, hovering in the shadowy corners of our imagination, threatening to pounce.



Who can resist a chilling story of darkness and evil?

Certainly not classical music composers. Many composers have found ample inspiration in the

Tchivzhel

macabre.

In keeping with Halloween, the Greenville Symphony Orchestra this weekend presents "The Mephisto," its latest Masterworks concert featuring five works inspired by tales of suspense and horror — and a little humor.

Included in the two performances, Saturday and next Sunday, is Mussorgsky's popular "Night on Bald Mountain" and other works by Tchaikovsky, Richard Strauss, Franz Liszt and Malcolm Arnold.

"We hope to give everyone a very enjoyable Halloween," says Edvard Tchivzhel, the Greenville Symphony's conductor and music director. "This will be a very exciting program of five great composers."

Tchivzhel has often wanted to perform a Halloween-themed concert but the Peace Center dates were rarely available, until now.

He notes that dark and supernatural

themes often inspired vivid and dramatic music, particularly by 19th-century Romantic composers.

There's Tchaikovsky's "Francesca da Rimini," for instance, a instrumental work about a visit to hell, based on Dante's "Inferno."

Tchaikovsky produced some of his most poignant but also hair-raising music for this work about a woman and her lover who are condemned to hell for adultery.

"This is very powerful music," Tchivzhel says.

The works will require a 90-piece orchestra this weekend.

Like "Francesca da Rimini," which is included in the GSO concerts, all of the works are tone poems — instrumental pieces that relate a story.

Mussorgsky's "Night on Bald Mountain," familiar as an episode in the classic movie "Fantasia," depicts a witches' Sabbath.

Malcolm Arnold's "Tam O'Shanter," inspired by Robert Burns' poem, is about a drunkard who encounters not only witches but the Devil himself.

The macabre has been a part of the human experience for a very long time, whether reflected in popular forms — such as Halloween celebrations or horror films — or through classical music and 19th century Gothic literature.

The Halloween-themed works fea-

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tured by the Greenville Symphony this weekend share several similarities with Gothic literature, including an emphasis on darkness, the supernatural and disruption of the social order.



Manganelli

Gothic music and literature express our dread of chaos, says Kimberly Manganelli, an assistant professor of English at Clemson University. Gothic literary works include such classic novels as Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" and Bram Stoker's "Dracula."

"Gothic literature embodies our secret fears of what might happen if the anchors that hold society together are removed," Manganelli says. "Those anchors include the church, marriage and the legal system."

Gothic music and literature — and the supernatural elements of Halloween — are not only frightening but tantalizing, Manganelli says. We fear but also long for some supernatural fantasies, such as the promise of immortality in the "Twilight" series of vampire-themed books and movies.

"We fear that kind of disorder and disruption, but these movies allow us also to live out the pleasurable possibilities — for instance, if you could be a

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What: The Greenville Symphony Orchestra's Halloween-themed concerts, "The Mephisto"

When: 8 p.m. Saturday; 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 30

Where: Peace Center Concert Hall

Tickets: \$15-\$49

Information: 864-467-3000 or www.peacecenter.org

vampire and live forever," Manganelli says.

It's no surprise that Gothic music and literature take place in a dark, gloomy atmosphere.

"Darkness becomes a space for chaos and transgression when you can no longer see physical boundaries," says Manganelli, who specializes in 19th century British and American literature, and has a particular interest in Gothic literature.

Witches, demons and spirits were with us long before 19th-century Gothic literature, Manganelli says.

Supernatural literary themes and ideas extend back to Shakespeare, medieval literature, the Bible, folk tales and Homer.

But the Gothic is not dead. With movies such as the "Twilight" series, for example, ghosts of the Gothic remain very much alive today.

"We're still fascinated by all of these things," Manganelli says.

At Saturday's GSO performance, the 20th anniversary of Tchivzhel's defection from the Soviet Union will be publicly recognized. A reception will follow the concert.

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