A rich, humane legacy: the music of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

As Julian Barnes so elegantly demonstrated in his novel *Flaubert's Parrot*, you can provide a number of selective, conflicting biographies around a great creative artist's life, and any one of them will be true. By those standards, one could counter Harold C. Schonberg's thumbnail sketch of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky as 'a nervous, hypochondriacal, unhappy man – unhappy at home, unhappy away from home', with a portrait of the composer as an older man: confident, healthy, a keen traveller, a generous spirit who had come to terms with his demons even if they occasionally popped up to haunt him, and a lover of the Russian landscape who was very much at peace with the natural beauty of the country surroundings he had chosen as his dwelling.

Neither image is, of course, the whole story, and it is only slowly that the public is learning, thanks to a wider retrospective on Tchaikovsky's genius in the round, to balance the tabloidised first portrait with the less sensationalised second. Perhaps it was his friend, the critic Herman Laroche, who summed up most eloquently shortly after the premiere of his most comprehensive good-and-evil score, *Sleeping Beauty*:

> An elegist by nature, inclined to melancholy, and even a certain despair, he has shown in those kinds of composition officially labelled 'serious' a seriousness of another kind, a seriousness of thought, a frequent sadness and melancholy, not infrequently a nagging feeling of spiritual pain, and this, if one may so express it, *minor [key]* part of his being … has

> been more grasped and understood. But alongside this there is another Tchaikovsky: nice, happy, brimming with health, inclined to humour.

So there are two lines in his music. One runs from the doom-laden 1864 overture to Alexander Ostrovsky's *The Storm*, a tale of persecution-mania better known to us through Janácek's operatic incarnation of its heroine Katya Kabanova, to the 'Pathétique' Symphony and the very last song of 1893, 'Again, as before, alone'. The other takes us from the early miniatures and nationalist flourishing to the exquisite delight of *The Nutcracker* in 1891 and the 18 piano pieces of the final year.

There is also the necessary counterbalance that so many Romantic masters found healing: the refuge of Mozart's genius. As a child raised in Votkinsk, 600 miles east of Moscow, but regularly taken to see operas in St Petersburg, where he was soon to settle, Tchaikovsky found that *Don Giovanni* 'was the first music to have a really shattering effect on me'. In fact it was the prettier side of this multifarious masterpiece which he initially encountered – Zerlina's 'Batti, batti' and 'Vedrai, carino' mechanically reproduced on the home orchestrion, a kind of portable organ which also played Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini. But Mozart was the one he loved, and it was to the brighter side of Mozart's spirit that he later paid homage in so many works which turned out to be neo-Classical *avant la lettre*.

Even this is to limit the sheer encyclopaedic breadth of Tchaikovsky's composing genius. He wrote in every medium conceivable at the time, and if not every opus can possibly be at his highest level of inspiration,

there are masterpieces in each genre: opera, song, symphonic music, occasion-pieces (which includes the '1812 Overture' – much-maligned, but does what it says on the tin), chamber works and choral settings of the Russian Orthodox service, which it was then regarded as pioneering to even attempt to promote.

His first fully fledged steps in composition contradict one perceived dichotomy: between his association with the Germanically motivated founder-brothers of Russia's two academic institutions – the St Petersburg Conservatoire founded by Anton Rubinstein in 1862, and its Moscow counterpart instigated four years later by sibling Nikolai – and the antagonistic nationalists or 'free school' of Russian music under Mily Balakirev. It was as if Tchaikovsky, one of the first Russian musicans to gain a formal education at the St Petersburg institution once he had decided he was not cut out to be the civil servant of his initial training, was destined forever to have 'westerniser' branded on his forehead while the members of the circle gathered around Balakirev and known as the 'mighty little heap' (*moguchaya kuchka*) – Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, Borodin and Cesar Cui – remained the torchbearers of the Slavic tradition.

Tchaikovsky himself eloquently tried to clear up the journalistic black and white in this perception as late as 1892, when Rimsky-Korsakov remained the only supposed 'competition', along with a younger generation which included Glazunov and Lyadov:

> According to the accepted view of the Russian musical public, I belong to that party which is hostile to the Russian composer whom I love and admire more than any other, Rimsky-Korsakov. He is the finest ornament of the

> ‘New Russian School’, but I belong to the old, retrograde school. Why? Rimsky-Korsakov has been subject to the influences of his time to a greater or lesser extent, and so have I … In short, despite all the differences of our musical natures, we are, it would seem, travelling along the same road; and, for my part, I am proud to have such a companion on the journey. And yet I am supposed to belong to the party which is opposed to Rimsky-Korsakov. There is a strange misunderstanding here which has had, and still has, regrettable consequences … it accentuates the extremes at both ends and ultimately it compromises us, the musicians, in the eyes of future generations.

By the time he wrote that, Tchaikovsky was pursuing his own path. But in the 1860s and early 1870s, he was proud to be associated with the ‘nationalists’. Most famously, he played through the finale of his Second Symphony, based on a Ukrainian folk song, ‘The Crane’ at a soirée chez Rimsky-Korsakov, ‘and the assembled company nearly tore me to shreds in their rapture’. Little wonder: the variation technique as applied to a simple traditional melody dated back to *Kamarinskaya*, a seminal piece by the founding father of a Russian tradition, Mikhail Glinka, which Tchaikovsky feted in the immortal remark that all Russian music was in it ‘just as the oak is in the acorn’.

Folk themes, or the composer’s own version of them, are as abundant in Tchaikovsky’s early music as they are in Mussorgsky. The Rubinsteins were none too supportive of the First Symphony, which caused Tchaikovsky so much stress and nearly led to a breakdown as he burned the candles at both ends to finish it in 1866; but the composer’s judgement in 1883 that ‘it has more substance and is better than many of my other mature works’ is reasonably sound. The young Prokofiev, almost the same age when he came to know

the work as Tchaikovsky was when he composed it, exclaimed in his diary for January 1916 'what a delight the first movement is!'.

Perhaps the second is even more original. Despite the folk song that is interestingly treated in the finale, it's the spirit of Russia we hear in the Adagio cantabile, Tchaikovsky's first great melody, which is truly remarkable. This is endless song, launched by oboe with flute arabesques and reaching its climax in full-throated unison from the four horns, which embraces the familiar melancholy contours of the folk tradition. And although the first total masterpiece, the fantasy overture *Romeo and Juliet*, contained nothing Russian about it in its first version of 1869, it was thanks to the guidance of Balakirev himself that Friar Laurence's opening music changed from a placid benediction to a Russian orthodox hymn (though Liszt's chorales also seem to have been a model).

Nationalism is also strong in the first opera Tchaikovsky tried to destroy, *The Voyevoda*, based like *The Storm* on Ostrovsky, and in his second, *The Oprichnik* (1870–72), about the iron guard set up by Ivan the Terrible. The Ukrainian enchantment he knew so well from idyllic summers on his sister's and brother-in-law's country estate at Kamenka found its way into the fairytale drawn from Russian fantasist Nikolai Gogol's *Christmas Eve*, *Vakula the Smith*; with heartfelt arias for its simple blacksmith hero and capricious heroine, it still makes rewarding inroads into the repertoire of more adventurous companies. The magic is

there, too, in Tchaikovsky's incidental music for Ostrovsky's *The Snow Maiden*, a subject which he considered turning into an opera; Rimsky-Korsakov famously got there first.

The supernatural strain which was to keep Tchaikovsky company for the rest of his life reaches its first high water mark in the ballet *Swan Lake* (1875–6), whose bird-maiden is descended, in one theme especially, from the water-nymph in his discarded opera *Undine* (the famous Pas d'action with its great violin and cello solos originally featured there as a duet for soprano and tenor). What possessed Tchaikovsky to lavish so much attention on a full-length ballet? The only predecessor of quality he would have known at the time of composition was Adam's *Giselle*, a pale shadow of the robust drama he was working on, though when he discovered Delibes's *Sylvia*, he remarked that had he known it earlier, he would not have written *Swan Lake*.

What gives the musical narrative its extraordinary charge, quite apart from the string of distinguished variations and especially the cornucopia of waltzes, is the doomed love of the heroine Odette and Prince Sigmund. Such literary images of Tchaikovsky's own frustrated feelings had already found their outlet in the poignant violas-and-cor-anglais love theme of *Romeo and Juliet*, and were about to flourish again in the tempest-tossed tone poem *Francesca da Rimini* – a work which, the composer admitted, showed the

influence of his visit to Bayreuth to write about the first performances of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in spite of his antipathy to Wagner's subject matter.

Though Tchaikovsky was not a frustrated homosexual – he hardly needed to repress his sex drive given the fairly high profile of what we would now call the 'gay scene' in Russian artistic circles – the sense of unquenchable yearning in so many of his greatest themes can partly be explained in an elliptical conversation with the woman who became his patroness in the late 1870s, Nadezhda von Meck. When she asked him if he had known 'non-Platonic love', his answer was 'yes and no'. He clarified eloquently:

> If we put the question in a different way and ask whether I have known complete happiness in love, then the answer is *No, no and no again*. In any case the question is answered in my music. If you were to ask me whether I understand the full force, the immeasurable power of this feeling, I would answer *Yes, yes and yes again* and I would say yet again that my repeated efforts to express in music the torments and, at the same time, the bliss of love have themselves been efforts lovingly made.

Art and life became precipitously intertwined in 1877, the crisis year of Tchaikovsky's life. It was then that the homosexuality to which he had many times given free rein became a torment to him, and he told his similarly oriented brother Modest that 'we must fight our natures to the best of our ability'. His solution was to seek a wife. The unfortunate candidate was a former conservatory student, Antonina Milyukova.

She had written him a love letter which he initially rejected, but as he began work on an opera based on Pushkin's novel in verse *Eugene Onegin*, he became so involved in the lovable heroine Tatyana's candid confession of love and the hero Onegin's fateful rejection of it that he determined to behave otherwise.

The result was great music: the Letter Scene in which Tatyana pours out her feelings to the dandy Onegin contains yet another of Tchaikovsky's most poignant melodies, introduced by oboe and horn before the voice takes it up. This is the composer identifying with his heroine, as he does shortly afterwards with the hero who declares – far from coldly, as has often been claimed – that he can only love Tatyana as a brother. It would have been wiser if Tchaikovsky had done the same with Antonina. But in July 1877 he married her, fled from her shortly after the honeymoon and tried to commit suicide by submerging himself in the freezing waters of the Moskva River, which only served to improve his health. The already unbalanced Antonina, who was to spend the rest of her life in mental institutions, blankly accepted a separation, and in order to avert a scandal Tchaikovsky left immediately for southern Europe.

Autobiography had not yet run its course: the Fourth Symphony, begun in 1877, needed to be orchestrated in Italy, and it was from there that Tchaikovsky outlined for von Meck a programme of '*Our* symphony', noting that 'for the first time in my life I have had to recast my musical ideas and musical images in words and phrases'. Doubt has been shed on whether the money-dependent composer was as honest to the wealthy woman he never spoke to as he always was in epistolary form to his brothers, but he hardly seems

to have been falsifying the record in describing the fierce horn and bassoon fanfares as 'Fate, that inexorable force which prevents our aspirations to happiness from reaching their goal, which jealously ensures that our well-being and peace are not complete and unclouded, which hangs over our head like the sword of Damocles'. Clearly there's some kind of battle, too, between 'grim reality' and 'evanescent visions and dreams of happiness'.

Yet despite the return of the 'Fate' motif at the heart of the peasant rejoicings in the finale, the Fourth Symphony is not as straightforward as it seems; nor is it, as Tchaikovsky's brilliantly gifted protégé Sergei Taneyev thought, 'a symphonic poem to which three other movements have been fortuitously attached to form a symphony'. The 'ballet music' that Taneyev so objected to in a symphony, which Tchaikovsky so vigorously defended, can indeed be detected behind the first movement: the fanfare is in polonaise rhythm, the main idea is a limping 9/8 waltz and the 'evanescent visions' take the form of a mazurka. In terms of the more far-flung contrasts which throw up the dazzlingly original orchestration of the scherzo – pizzicato strings, rustic woodwind and distant military band – this is something towards which Tchaikovsky had already been aiming in the five-movement Third Symphony.

Here far-flung contrast is the essence of the covertly extraordinary first movement, linking together a funeral march, court ceremonials straight out of the 'royal' acts of Swan Lake, a plaintive oboe melody which sounds like another portrait of Odette, and a high-kicking folk dance. Once away from Russia in 1878, and having completed the Fourth Symphony, Tchaikovsky told von Meck that he needed 'a good rest

from symphonic music' – and this is where one of the most original and underrated periods of his creativity begins. He composed, in reasonably close succession, three orchestral suites in which the only rule seems to have been an inversion of the one expressed by Lewis Carroll's Duchess in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: Tchaikovsky's motto is 'take care of the sounds, and the sense will take care of itself'.

This means that anything goes with anything else, and fresh sonorities abound: take for instance the Lilliputian march of the First Suite, anticipating the weightless high sonorities of *The Nutcracker*'s miniature overture, or the two chords shared by four accordions in the Scherzo burlesque of the Second Suite.

The apogee is reached in the Third Suite. Its unusually poignant opening Elegy was written under stressful circumstances; autobiography threatened to rear its head again as Tchaikovsky's private diary reveals his infatuation with his 13-year-old nephew Bob Davydov and his attempts to master the demons of desire ('Bob will drive me out of my mind with his unspeakable fascination'). That may account for the bittersweet quality of this movement (which replaced a movement called 'Contrasts'). But aristocratic restraint keeps the final Theme and Variations on course, a seeming prophecy of the triumphant 1885 premiere, Tchaikovsky's greatest public success to date. His variations progress cannily from neo-Classicism to character pieces, Russian genre numbers and ballet music, culminating in a grand Polonaise fit to lay at the feet of an already well-disposed Alexander III. How far Tchaikovsky had come, in less than a decade,

from the polonaise rhythms of an implacable fate in the Fourth Symphony. This was a work that was the true herald of the 'imperial style' that younger Russians as unlikely as Stravinsky and Diaghilev were to find so appealing.

Experiments in form are also a part of the Concert Fantasy, which is exactly contemporary with the Third Suite. Only the colossal demands of the piano role and the quirky balance between soloist and orchestra can account for its lack of popularity compared with the still innovative First Concerto, and even the Second, which is making something of a comeback – albeit not always with the full roles apportioned to solo violin and cello in the extraordinary slow movement. In its first movement, the Concert Fantasy cordons off its orchestra from the pianist, who executes a huge central cadenza of great emotional power (Prokofiev probably took note in his even more monumental Second Piano Concerto). In terms of the suites, though, Tchaikovsky now turned course and made the first a sequence of arrangements of Mozart – piano pieces in the first, second and final movements, the celebrated 'Ave verum corpus' in Liszt's transcription in the third.

It was time for Tchaikovsky to give his love of his hero free musical rein. The Mozart vein had never been far from Tchaikovsky's thinking since the three string quartets composed in fairly close succession in the 1870s. Although the celebrated Andante cantabile of the first, which reduced the cantankerous Tolstoy to tears when he heard it, fuses a Ukrainian folk song with Haydnesque turns of phrase, and the slow

movements of the two successors touch on the more subjective vein of pathos in Tchaikovsky's music, the elegance is very much Tchaikovsky-Mozart. As it is, too, in the glorious Serenade for Strings and the Variations on a Rococo Theme, although the way that Tchaikovsky veers into a more Romantic 19th-century vein may have given Stravinsky the cue for his chameleonic neo-Classicism, which he claimed to have invented with the Pergolesi-based ballet *Pulcinella*. Prokofiev pooh-pooed that by pointing out that he got there first with the 'Classical' Symphony in 1917; but Tchaikovsky was already way ahead of both of them.

No doubt it was the Mozart streak that persuaded Tchaikovsky to move the action of Pushkin's masterly little horror story *The Queen of Spades*, or *Pique Dame*, back from 1825 to the time of Catherine the Great when he came to set it as an opera in 1890, and to indulge his penchant for Mozartian pastiche in the Act 2 intermezzo-ballet of the faithful shepherdess. But this was also part of the lavish ethos of the imperial theatres in the late 19th century. Tchaikovsky's attitude to opera had, in any case, changed since he first entrusted the 'lyrical scenes' of *Eugene Onegin* to students from the Moscow Conservatoire.

Quite apart from the fact that *Onegin* was relaunched in grandiose splendour under the extravagant eye of the new intendant Ivan Vsevolzhsky, the operas composed after it all cater to various degrees for a more conventional public spectacle. As Tchaikovsky wrote at the time of *Mazeppa*'s premiere in 1884 – the rare brutality of its Cossack theme (the work is based on another Pushkin subject, his narrative poem *Poltava*) is

reflected in some of the composer's blackest, most sadistic music – he now found opera to be 'a lower form of art than either symphonic or chamber music … opera has the advantage of making it possible to influence the musical sensitivities of the *masses*, whereas the symphonic composer deals with a small and select public'.

This accounts for the Meyerbeerian ceremonial processions and static ensembles of *The Maid of Orleans* (1878–9), the crowd scenes of *Mazeppa* and the melodrama of *The Sorceress* (1885–7). Yet in each case there was a key scene which appealed to Tchaikovsky personally: in *The Maid of Orleans*, it was the scene where Joan of Arc is burned at the stake, which made him 'wail horribly' when he read about it; in *Mazeppa*, the May-September relationship of greybeard Mazeppa and the young Maria; and in *The Sorceress* the scene where Kuma – the 'loose woman with a beautiful soul' – and Prince Yuri fall in love. All three situations stimulated fine music, though many may argue that *The Sorceress*'s most memorable theme occurs in another duet, between mother and son.

Yet none was as remarkable as the key to *Pique Dame*, the scene in the elliptical short story in which anti-hero Hermann, desperate to gain the mysterious secret of three cards which will bring him gambling success, visits the enigmatic, ancient Countess, who knows it, in her bedchamber and frightens her to death. As Tchaikovsky worked on it in Florence in 1890, he wrote that he 'experienced such a sense of fear, dread and shock that the audience is bound to feel the same, at least to some degree'. With its unerring sense of

pace and shadowy atmosphere, this is the scene that points the way forward in music-theatre, as Janácek noted in praising Tchaikovsky's 'music of horror' in 1896.

The bedchamber scene has its direct correspondence in another work for the theatre which is more closely connected with *Pique Dame* than might seem to be the case at a glance. Tchaikovsky's most opulent ballet, *Sleeping Beauty*, was premiered at the Mariinsky just under a year before the opera and it is perhaps his most rounded master-score; Stravinsky certainly thought so when he had to orchestrate a couple of lost numbers for Diaghilev's labour-of-love revival in 1921. One of several numbers which is rarely heard to its full advantage in any choreography is the 'symphonic entr'acte' in which Tchaikovsky depicts Aurora's sleep with exactly 100 bars of high string tremolo – the counterpart to the nagging viola ostinato in *Pique Dame* – while the themes of the good lilac fairy and the evil Carabosse fight it out in shadowplay. This is minimalist genius pure and simple – and yet only 40 or so 'years' of Aurora's sleep are usually played in the ballet theatre.

As in *Pique Dame*, too, the imperial theatre brief for opulence gave Tchaikovsky a chance to revisit the past: Vsevolozhsky wanted the Perrault fairy tale to evoke the court of Louis XIV before speeding forward to the 18th-century entourage of Aurora's rescuer, Prince Desire. That meant a Sarabande for the reawakened old-timers as well as minuets and gavottes for the hunting party in Act 2. These are often cut; so, perhaps because the dancers have difficulty with it, is the minute-long variation for the Sapphire Fairy in

the metre of 5/4, apparently to represent a pentagram; so much for the idea that the lopsided waltz in the 'Pathétique' Symphony was Tchaikovsky's first use of that metre. And among the extraordinarily well-characterised fairy tale characters who come to the Act Three wedding, one lives in hope of seeing Hop-o-my-Thumb and his brothers escaping the ogre. Shostakovich especially admired this for the way in which 'the theme is broken up and scattered among various instruments at wide intervals of the register'.

No such cuts usually disfigure the more concentrated world of *The Nutcracker*, composed two years after *Sleeping Beauty*. We get a sense here of Tchaikovsky maybe running lower in the melodic stakes, but more than compensating with a new-found gift for haunting figures and minimalist ideas. There's a careful symmetry, too: the portions of the rising scale which see the Christmas tree transformed in the party-room of a well-ordered German household and the walls melting away to take Nutcracker-saving Clara on her journey in Act One are counterbalanced by the descending major and minor scales of the great Pas de deux in Act Two. This genius for extracting real magic from simple ingredients did not go unnoticed by Benjamin Britten. And the selective, brilliant orchestral refinements of both ballets surely paved the way for the Stravinsky of *Petrushka*.

Despite this underestimated futurism in Tchaikovsky's approach to instrumental colour, his essential operatic outlook remained conservative, as we find in the succession of strong set-pieces that grace *Iolanta*, the one-act opera which was premiered in an 1892 double-bill with *The Nutcracker*. Just imagine if

Tchaikovsky had died then rather than – equally fortuitously – a year later; the radiant happy ending which celebrates the light to which the blind princess of the title is restored would then be seen as the true finale to a life fluctuating between sun and shadow. In any case it is a joyous, even a naive coda to a distinguished line of operas.

As it turns out, of course, the myth of a doomed composer and a tragic symphony is bound to prevail. Yet the fact is that as Tchaikovsky worked on his Sixth Symphony, dubbed the 'Pathétique' by his brother Modest, in the early part of 1893, he was in a 'happy frame of mind' about this 'Programme' Symphony, as he told its dedicatee, adored Bob Davydov:

> The programme is so intensely personal that as I was mentally composing it on my travels I frequently wept copiously. When I got back I settled to the sketches and I worked with such fervour and speed that in less than four days I had completely finished the first movement … How glorious it is to realise that my time is not yet over and that I can still work.

After the interlude with the orchestral suites, the symphonic picture had become fiercely autobiographical again. There can be no doubt that Tchaikovsky saw himself in Byron's Manfred, haunted by an illicit, incestuous love, and that in 1885 he poured all the resources of an orchestration influenced by Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* into the *Manfred Symphony*'s first movement. The Fifth Symphony, soon to become a

vehicle for his new-found confidence as a conductor, marries a certain Germanic school of symphonic thinking to a programme which sees fate more benignly as providence, capable of change from ill to good (as the motto theme eventually is in the triumphant finale). But in the Sixth the outcome was to be unequivocally pessimistic: 'the finale, incidentally, will not be a noisy Allegro', he told Bob, 'but on the contrary, a very unhurried Adagio'. A lamenting one, too, he might have added, its descending patterns taken directly from the tragic Introduction to *Swan Lake* and its conclusion a death, life ebbing away on pulsing double basses in the same darkness which begins the symphony. This was a unique cue which other symphonists, chiefly Gustav Mahler, would adopt. Yet as in Mahler all human life is here, too, and the March-Scherzo need not be falsely euphoric in the right conducting hands.

Tchaikovsky conducted the premiere in St Petersburg on 28 October 1893. Nine days later he was dead. How senseless, how untimely, is all we can say. He had found a measure of contentment in his life, though Modest questioned whether the writing-out of all his sufferings in the Sixth Symphony had put only a temporary stop to his periodic depressions. Tchaikovsky was certainly more settled: his Manfred-like wanderings abroad came to an end when he made several homes in the Russian countryside he adored, finding his last haven in a handsome dacha north of Moscow in Klin. It is now one of the most beautifully preserved and presented house-museums anywhere in the world. The help he had received throughout the years of struggle he would frequently give back to young composers and charitable causes. The conductor Alexander Mackenzie, who met him when he travelled to Cambridge to receive an honorary doctorate in

June 1893, wrote how 'his unaffected modesty, kindly manner and real gratitude for any trifling service rendered contributed to the favourable impression made by a lovable man.'

How is it, then, that such a lovable man should become embroiled in speculations of a much darker nature? Despite assertions to the contrary, the truth about his end is simply not known, and never will be. In a painstaking postscript to her excellent assembly of writings by Tchaikovsky about himself, Russian curator Alexandra Orlova discredited the widely accepted theory that the composer had simply died of cholera after drinking a glass of unboiled water (she was not the first; Rimsky-Korsakov questioned the kissing of the dead composer's face in his catafalque). She raised the comment of Tolstoy about his great fellow-artist's end – 'sudden and simple, natural and unnatural' – before contradicting the cholera theory on the advice of two experts in tropical diseases. Then she produced a not unimpressive array of witnesses testifying to the theory that a court of honour was convened by Tchaikovsky's fellow former students at the School of Jurisprudence, following the outraged plaint to the Tsar by one Count Stenbock-Fermor that the composer had been paying 'unnatural' attentions to his nephew. The decree: suicide by poisoning. Others have suggested that Tchaikovsky drank the unboiled water in a game of Russian roulette, which is a rather romanticised view of his attitude to Fate.

Whatever the case, there is no indication that during that year, or indeed at any point after 1877, did Tchaikovsky think of suicide. The myth of the 'Pathétique' as a prophecy of doom is as alluring, and as false, as the legend that Mozart knew he was writing his own Requiem. What had certainly lowered

Tchaikovsky's spirits that summer were the deaths of several close friends, commemorated in the symphony's quotation from the Russian Orthodox funeral service. True, his very last song was a despairing one, too, but the piano pieces of 1893, though essentially salon numbers written in many cases for pianists of limited abilities, show all the usual grace and charm.

It is impossible to predict what kind of boundaries Tchaikovsky would have broken had he lived longer. Might he have taken the art of the symphony to even greater heights and depths after the 'Pathétique'? Despite the well-made symphonic specimens of Alexander Glazunov there were no towering successors in the Russian repertoire, with the possible exception of the lugubrious First Symphony by the young man in whom Tchaikovsky saw such promise, Sergei Rachmaninov. Might Tchaikovsky have gone on to tackle *King Lear*, as Verdi had once thought of doing? His *Hamlet* music suggests he would have been capable. It is tempting to hazard a guess that Tchaikovsky, had he been granted an old age, might have turned his back on the 'Pathétique' vein and created more of the 'gentle, happy music' Laroche loved so much. Speculation is useless, perhaps, when his rounded, humane legacy, embracing every sphere, is so rich and when so much more of it remains to be properly appreciated.

Symphony No.1 Op.13 'Winter Dreams'

If Tchaikovsky had chosen a godfather for his first symphony, the selection likely would have fallen upon Nicolai Rubinstein. The great Russian pianist, conductor and pedagogue was Tchaikovsky's first employer in the musical field; it was Rubinstein who offered the 25-year-old former law clerk a position as a professor of harmony at the Moscow Conservatory. Gratified that one so prominent would have faith in one so little known, Tchaikovsky accepted the offer and in January, 1866, moved from St. Petersburg to Moscow to begin teaching.

It was a difficult transition. Tchaikovsky felt himself ill-prepared for the assignment, and was unnerved by Rubinstein's domineering personality. Yet a man unconvinced of his own skills often puts forth his best effort when a more confident man drives him onward, and such was the case with Tchaikovsky. Not only did he settle into the obligations of teaching. He also began composing works grander and more ambitious than any he had previously attempted. His First Symphony, begun early in this same year, was undertaken at Rubinstein's specific urging. The mental strain of writing the piece brought Tchaikovsky to the verge of a nervous breakdown, and harsh criticisms of colleagues led him to doubt the excellence of his effort. His crippling uncertainty delayed the score's completion until November, but once the symphony was finally finished, Tchaikovsky dedicated it to Rubinstein.

Although the young composer had produced a standard four-movement symphony, early audiences might have been unaware of the fact, for over a year passed before the composition was heard in its entirety. In December 1866, Rubinstein conducted a premiere that comprised only the third movement scherzo. Two months later, the second and third movements were heard, but it was not until February 3, 1868 that the entire work was performed. The piece was well-received at that time, but Tchaikovsky, setting a pattern that he would follow with many later works, decided that the audience was mistaken, that the symphony was not particularly well-crafted and that it needed further work. He set about revising the score and did not allow its publication until 1875. But through all those years and even afterward, Tchaikovsky retained a measure of fondness for the piece, describing it as 'a sin of my sweet youth'. He once observed, 'although it is immature in many respects, it is essentially better and richer in content than many other, more mature works.'

Tchaikovsky's First Symphony carries the subtitle 'Winter Dreams', a theme carried onward by its first two movements, which the composer labelled 'Dreams of a Winter Journey' and 'Land of Desolation, Land of Mists'. Yet there is nothing cold-hearted about the work. Those seeking the 'misty desolation' of a winter on the steppes will not find it here, for of all Tchaikovsky's symphonies, this one bears the aura of optimism. Listen particularly to the exuberance of the final movement: if this is a Russian winter, then it must be a winter carnival, with boisterous crowds skating and laughing as the sunshine sparkles on the snow.

Ouverture Solennelle '1812' Op.49

In 1880 Tchaikovsky was asked to write a festival piece commemorating the Battle of Borodino, the burning of Moscow and Napoleon's retreat from the self-sacrificed city. The occasion was the consecration of the Cathedral of the Savior, and the new work was to be performed in the Cathedral Square, with cannon firing in the final section signifying the Russian triumph. At about the same time, Nicolas Rubinstein offered Tchaikovsky a commission for a similar work to be performed at the Moscow Exhibition of Art and Industry. Apparently Tchaikovsky felt he was not a composer of 'festival pieces' and could not be persuaded in time for the Cathedral ceremony. He did accept a definite commission for the Exhibition, for he wrote to Mme. Von Meck on October 22, 1880, to advise that he was composing a 'big, solemn overture for the Exhibition… very showy and noisy, but it will have no artistic merit because I wrote it without warmth and without love.' In any event, the consecration of the Cathedral passed without the music, which was performed at the Exhibition on August 20, 1882.

Symphony No.2 Op.17 'Little Russian'

Tchaikovsky's Second Symphony was premiered in 1873 by Rubinstein, who also undertook the first performances of the First, Third and Fourth Symphonies, and other important Tchaikovsky compositions from these early years. The symphony is, in part, a nod to popular trends of the day, trends that encouraged the use of indigenous folk music in serious concert works. This tendency is particularly notable in

compositions by the Hungarian Franz Liszt, the Norwegian Edvard Grieg and the Bohemian Antonín Dvorák. Tchaikovsky's countrymen Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov were also drawn to folk music, and he himself was not immune. Curiously, though, the songs quoted in this symphony are not strictly Russian in origin; they are Ukrainian songs, featured at three moments in the work: the introduction to the first movement, the main theme of the second movement, and the introduction to the final movement. This would not be Tchaikovsky's only musical visit to Ukraine. The First Piano Concerto, which would be his next major composition, also includes a Ukrainian theme. Because Russians of Tchaikovsky's time referred to Ukraine as 'Little Russia', the Second Symphony has since become known as the 'Little Russian' Symphony, a nickname not chosen by the composer himself.

Francesca da Rimini Op.32

Francesca da Rimini, written at the height of the composer's orchestral mastery in 1876, is the most powerfully dramatic of Tchaikovsky's symphonic poems. The score is prefaced by a quotation from the Fifth Canto of Dante's *Inferno*. This describes the punishment of those who succumbed to sensual desires in their earthly lives, and whose fate was to be tormented in Stygian darkness, buffeted by violent, tempestuous winds. never to find peace. Among those so tortured was Francesca da Rimini, who comes forward to tell her story. As with the heroine of his early masterpiece, *Romeo and Juliet*, and with Tatiana in his opera, Eugene Onegin, Tchaikovsky identified completely with Francesca, and he portrays her with one of his loveliest melodies. But first he sets the scene, and in the introductory Andante lugubre creates an

ominously powerful sense of foreboding. Then in the Allegro which follows, with shrieking woodwinds, pungent brass and whirling strings, he achieves a formidable evocation of the tempestuous *Inferno*. Finally the gales subside and Francesca is introduced alluringly with a limpid clarinet solo. Her melody is restated in different orchestral guises as she tells of her love for Paolo, and later Tchaikovsky introduces another theme, of gentle ecstasy, played by the cor anglais against warmly romantic harp roulades. But the illicit lovers are discovered by Francesca's husband and there is a great polyphonic climax in the strings, with the bass adding to the emotional turmoil, before the vividly depicted moment of their murder.

Francesca steps back and disappears into the *Inferno*, and Tchaikovsky's dramatic reprise of the setting of her eternal punishment leads to a searing final climax, when the sense of an irreversibly tragic destiny is hammered out in violent dischords, with great clashes on the orchestral tam-tam adding to the sense of utter despair.

Symphony No.3 Op.29 'Polish'

The premiere of Tchaikovsky's Third Symphony took place in 1875, a year that had not begun well for the composer. After months of effort, he completed his First Piano Concerto and played it for Rubinstein, who, contrary to his usual effusive support, found nothing kind to say. It was the first major conflict between mentor and protegé, and Tchaikovsky was deeply hurt by Rubinstein's cold words. He spent summer

vacation licking his wounds at the Kamenka estate belonging to his sister and her husband. There, he found the spirit to compose again, and in less than two months, wrote a symphony from start to finish. This was the first of his symphonies to entirely meet his own approval, the first that he did not judge to need extensive revision. Rubinstein, too, thought highly of the new score. Forgetting his cruel reception of the piano concerto, he agreed to give the new symphony its premiere and conducted the work in Moscow that fall.

This symphony carries the nickname 'Polish'. The name was not chosen by Tchaikovsky himself, but rather by the English conductor Sir August Manns, who led the work in a London performance. Manns was inspired in his choice of labels by the Polish dance rhythms of the final movement, but in fact, those rhythms are not to be found elsewhere in the work. One might just as well have called the symphony 'German' for its *alla tedesca* second movement, or 'Russian' for the composition's various other themes. Rather than imagining that the Third Symphony speaks of this or that nationality, a listener would be better served to view the piece as representative only of Tchaikovsky himself and of the way in which he was able to synthesize the finest elements of a wealth of styles so as to produce a voice that was uniquely his own.

Hamlet – Fantasy Overture

Shakespeare's present reputation as one of the greatest authors ever dates from the early days of Romanticism. Before that he didn't fit into the aesthetic principles of Classicism. Romanticism, in a sense an

anti-Classical movement, adored his work for the unpredictability of his characters, the non-schematic approach to form, the impossibility of knowing a person completely and the difficulty for man to make and defend decisions. Shakespeare's Hamlet was the archetypical romantic persona and consequently brought to life in many art forms. When Tchaikovsky outlined the piece (1888–1891), he also explained that he was inspired by the character Fortinbras in the play. Three years later he wrote some incidental music for a performance of the play in Paris. Afterwards he revised his *Hamlet* Overture and included material from the incidental music. Maybe the mix of an older form with new added elements explains the difficulty contemporaries had in explaining the structure of this music.

Emanuel Overbeeke

Symphony No.4 Op.36

Nearly every major composer has endured a watermark year in which personal crises affected the future development of his music. For Beethoven, that year was 1802, when encroaching deafness drove him to the verge of suicide. For Wagner, it was 1848 when the Dresden Revolution forced him to rethink his political convictions. For Tchaikovsky, the year of turmoil was 1877. Though his greatest masterworks still lay in the future, the composer had already proven his mettle with three symphonies, several operas, the Rococo Variations and the ballet *Swan Lake*. He was also benefiting from the recent acquisition of a patron, Madame Nadezhda von Meck, whose financial support had allowed him to concentrate more fully upon composition. All of those aspects were positive influences upon Tchaikovsky's life; the crisis lay in a sudden

and very ill-considered marriage. A former student of the composer's had become deeply infatuated with him, and swore that, if he did not marry her, she would take her life. Concerned for the girl's well-being, Tchaikovsky agreed to the marriage, even though taking a woman into his home was the last thing his own inclinations would have led him to do. They married in the summer. His nervous breakdown came in the fall, at which point his doctors recommended that he never see the young woman again. Soon, the composer and his brother Anatoly had left Russia for Switzerland in hope of finding solace for poor Peter's battered spirit.

As so often happened, Tchaikovsky sought consolation in composition, plunging back into his sketches for the opera *Eugene Onegin*, and beginning the orchestration of his new symphony, the fourth of what would ultimately be six works in the genre. By late in the year, he was able to give an optimistic report to Madame von Meck, writing, 'Never yet has any of my orchestral works cost me so much labor, but I've never yet felt such love for any of my things … Perhaps I'm mistaken, but it seems to me that this Symphony is better than anything I've done so far.' Such enthusiasm was rather unusual for the composer, who more often expressed a loathing for his works, but here, it seems, he knew that he had exceeded even his own demanding standards. He completed the new symphony on Christmas Day, by the Russian calendar, in 1877 (January 7, 1878 by the Western calendar). The piece bore a dedication 'to my best friend', a reference to Madame von Meck, who agreed to accept the honor only on the grounds of anonymity.

The Fourth Symphony premiered in Moscow that same winter with the composer's mentor Nikolay Rubinstein conducting. A few months later, a colleague of Tchaikovsky's, the composer Sergei Taneyev, criticized the piece for being programmatic, that is, for having a plot. Tchaikovsky defended his creation, declaring, 'I don't see why you consider this a defect. On the contrary, I should be sorry if symphonies that mean nothing should flow from my pen, consisting solely of a progression of harmonies, rhythms and modulations … As a matter of fact, the work is patterned after Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, not as to musical content but as to the basic idea.'

Tchaikovsky's statement begs a question as to what this 'basic idea' might be. After all, the answer to that question would not only help us to interpret the Russian master's creation; it would also shed light on what Tchaikovsky saw as the central concept of the Beethoven piece. Fortunately, Tchaikovsky provides us with an answer in a letter to Madame von Meck in which he outlined what he viewed as the program for his Fourth Symphony. According to the composer himself, the ominous opening theme for horns and bassoons represents fate hanging over one's head like a sword. This all-consuming gloom devours the few, brief glimpses of happiness, appearing mostly in the form of waltz themes. The second movement, Tchaikovsky asserted, expresses the melancholy felt at the end of a weary day. Then, in the third movement, he imagined what he called 'fleeting images that pass through the imagination when one has begun to drink a little wine'. The fourth movement holds Tchaikovsky's prescription for happiness. Here's how he described it: 'If you cannot find reasons for happiness in yourself, look at others. Get out among the people … Oh, how gay they are! … Life is bearable after all.' And so, to summarize Tchaikovsky's view, this is a symphony

that brings us from gloom to melancholy to slow recovery to life-affirming energy. It is a progression from darkness to light, a progression that we can sense in Tchaikovsky's Fourth as well as in Beethoven's Fifth.

Marche slave

The *Marche slave* (1876) is one of Tchaikovsky's few musical comments on actual events. After Montenegro and Serbia declared war on Turkey because of the Turkish atrocities against Christians, a wave of religiously inspired nationalism went through Russia, Serbia's ally. Tchaikovsky responded to this climate by writing a march which includes three Serbian folk melodies plus the national Russian anthem. The composer didn't like the piece but didn't say why. Maybe because he was not a fan of pomp and circumstance in bombastic form and he preferred to present existing melodies in a much more stylised form. The audience at the premiere on 17 November 1876 in Moscow had a totally different view. The piece was a tremendous success, the march had to be encored and many in the hall wept .
Emanuel Overbeeke

Symphony No.5 Op.64

If Tchaikovsky's talent had been no better than his own assessment of himself, his music would have turned to dust a century ago, dismissed as the mediocre scribblings of a man with nothing to say, for such was his usual view of his own creations. Surviving letters and diaries attest that he rarely had faith in his own

abilities. The composer's own words prove to modern observers his personal conviction that his finished compositions were worthless and future ones might never come to life. In the spring of 1888, Tchaikovsky wrote to his brother about a seemingly insurmountable dry spell. 'Have I written myself out?' he laments. 'No ideas, no inclination?' Even months later, once he had spent his summer vacation at work on a new symphony, he remained despondent, proclaiming to his patron, Madame Nadezhda von Meck, 'There is something repellent about it … This symphony will never please the public.' But Tchaikovsky was wrong. That symphony, that 'repellent' work, was his Fifth Symphony, today one of his most-performed compositions, an epic expression of musical energy and anxiety.

This was, for Tchaikovsky, his second consecutive symphony to be based on a central, programmatic theme, a theme that in both cases he imagined as representing Fate. Why the composer found the concept of Fate to be worthy of repeated musical exposition is a question best left to psychologists; musicologists content themselves with a study of how Tchaikovsky, having resolved for whatever reason to explore Fate, goes about that exploration. In his Fourth Symphony, he chose a brass-and-bassoon motto of frightening intensity, like the sudden appearance of a formidable foe. By contrast, his Fifth Symphony is more evocative of the distant rumble of a funeral march, as the clarinets intone a low and somber theme. As the symphony progresses, the theme returns in various guises, sometimes wistful, at other times imposing, but the general motion is toward an increasing mood of optimism, until, in the finale, Tchaikovsky transforms his Fate theme into a triumphal march. This, one feels, is how life truly should be: Fate yielding to mankind's yearning for a happy ending.

Capriccio italien Op.45 (1880)

A virtuoso showpiece in the *pot-pourri* style of Glinka, anticipating the picture-postcard Italy of Richard Strauss and Respighi. 'I believe a good fortune may be predicted,' Tchaikovsky wrote. 'It will be effective, thanks to the delightful [folk] tunes which I have succeeded in assembling partly from anthologies, partly through my own ears on the streets'. Reportedly the opening fanfare was based on a trumpet call from the barracks next to the hotel in Rome where Tchaikovsky was staying. Critics have judged the piece harshly, but its popularity has never waned – a rousing arsenal of tricks and orchestral effects gleamingly polished.

Symphony No.6 'Pathétique'

Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony is forever associated with the tragedy of his sudden death. In the last year of his life, 1893, the composer began work on a new symphony. Sketches dated from as early as February, but progress was slow. Concert tours to France and England and the awarding of a doctorate of music from Cambridge cut into the time available for composition. Thus, though Tchaikovsky could compose quickly when the muse was with him, it was not until the end of August that he was able to complete the Sixth Symphony. Its premiere, with the composer himself on the podium, was given in St. Petersburg two months later, on October 28. The work seemed unusually somber, particularly in its finale that, both in tempo and dynamics, fades into nothingness. Tchaikovsky's brother Modest suggested at the time that the work ought

to be called by the French word ‘pathétique’, meaning melancholy, and Tchaikovsky supposedly agreed, but if Modest or anyone else bothered to ask the reason behind the symphony’s gloomy mood, Tchaikovsky’s answer is lost to time. His only remembered comment about the new piece is, ‘Without exaggeration, I have put my whole soul into this work.’

Nine days later, on November 6, the composer was dead. His family blamed cholera, but physician’s statements were contradictory and friends were skeptical. Cholera, they insisted, was a poor man’s disease, almost unheard of amongst the upper classes. Surely Tchaikovsky would have known how to prevent exposure. In addition, as the composer’s friend and colleague Rimsky-Korsakov commented in his own memoirs, cholera would have precluded the open-casket ceremony that actually occurred. Why, Rimsky asks, were mourners allowed to kiss the departed goodbye? On that question, Tchaikovsky’s family remained determinedly silent.

At the time, the mystery remained unresolved. However, evidence that came to light in 1978 suggests that Tchaikovsky spent his last months distraught over a barely concealed scandal in his personal life. The homosexuality that he had fought throughout adulthood to conceal was about to become public knowledge. Did he commit suicide in the hope that ending his life would also silence the rumors? It is entirely possible, for deep depressions were common to him. Furthermore, he had attempted suicide at least once before. Perhaps this was another attempt that was also meant to fail, but instead tragically succeeded.

Musicologists with psychological leanings have tried to associate the possibility of suicide with the fact of the somber symphony. They see parallels between the composer's increasing despair and the symphony's fading conclusion. Certainly, other composers have written minor key symphonies without taking their own lives, but the usual expectation was that a symphony, even one in a minor key, would end with energy, if not with optimism. Yet Tchaikovsky's final symphonic statement slowly dissipates into ever-deepening gloom. It is, some suggest, the musical voice of suicidal depression. However, such an analysis ignores an historical fact. Tchaikovsky began work on the piece nearly a year before its premiere, long before the rumors started. At that time, he wrote to his nephew that the new symphony would conclude with what he called 'an adagio of considerable dimensions', which is certainly the manner in which the work ultimately concludes. If this composition is evidence of a troubled mind, then that mood had persisted for many months. What is more likely is that the symphony was simply the ultimate expression of Tchaikovsky's life-long obsession with dark emotions.

The Storm

The Storm (1864) is one of Tchaikovsky's first orchestral efforts. Although later generations tended not to give it the recognition accorded to the mature, last three symphonies, this early work already reveals many aspects of the fully matured musician. First, the desire to give the piece a programmatic content, if not programmatic character. The form is determined by the content – in fact Tchaikovsky reproached Brahms for restricting the drama of life into the confines of sonata form. In this case the inspiration came from

Ostrovsky's novella *Kat'ya Kabanova*, which also inspired Leos Janácek. When a man leaves for business reasons, his wife succumbs to her passion for another man. When her husband returns, a storm breaks out with fatal consequences. Secondly, in terms of musical style Tchaikovsky is heavily influenced by Berlioz, especially as far as instrumentation is concerned. And finally his love for French elegance, charm and ballet, even when it is disguised by drama.

Emanuel Overbeeke

Manfred – Symphony in four scenes after Byron Op.58 (1885)

Dedicated to Balakirev and premiered in Moscow by Max Erdmannsdörfer at a Russian Musical Society concert in memory of Nikolai Rubinstein, 11/23 March 1886, *Manfred* was Tchaikovsky's programme epic. The spirit, if not always incident, of Byron's Faustian poem of 1816–17 inspired it. Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* and *Harold in Italy*, Liszt's *Faust* and *Dante*, cyclic motto and *idée fixe*, influenced it. The notion of such a work, to the point of mapping out a dramatic, key and orchestration plan, was Balakirev's; he got the idea from the critic Vladimir Stasov around 1867–68, fired by Berlioz's second visit to Russia. Tchaikovsky wasn't enthusiastic. 'A design to imitate Berlioz […] at the moment it leaves me absolutely cold, and when imagination and the heart are unwarmed, it is hardly worth trying to compose. To please you I could, to use your expression, exert myself to screw out a whole series of more or less interesting episodes, including conventionally gloomy music to indicate Manfred's hopeless disillusionment, lots of

effective spangles of instrumentation for the "Alpine fairy" scherzo, high violins for sunrise, pianissimo trombones for Manfred's death. I would be able to furnish these episodes with harmonic curiosities and piquances, and then send them out into the world under the high-flowing title Manfred: Symphonie d'aprés, etc. I might even receive praise for the fruits of my labours, but such writing doesn't attract me in the least' (12/24 November 1882). Once committed, he was in two minds about the result. 'I may be wrong but it seems to me to be the best of my compositions' (1885). 'This production is abomidable. With the exception of the first movement, I deeply loathe it' (1888).

Each movement is prefaced by a scenario.

I. B minor/D major 'Manfred wanders in the Alps. Tormented by the fatal anguish of doubt, torn by remorse and despair, his soul is the prey of sufferings without name. Neither the occult sciences, whose mysteries he has fathomed, and by means of which the powers of darkness are subject to his will, nor anything in the world can bring to him the forgetfulness which alone he covets. The memory of the beautiful Astarte [Milton's 'queen of heaven, with crescent horns'], who he has loved and lost, gnaws at his heart [second subject, change of tempo and metre]. Nothing can lift the curse which lies heavily on Manfred's soul, and which unceasingly and without truce delivers him to the tortures of the most grievious despair.'

II. B minor/D major 'The Fairy [Byron's Witch] of the Alps appears to Manfred under the rainbow of the mountain torrent' (Act II/ii).

III. G major ‘Pastorale. The simple, free and peaceful life of the mountaineers.’
IV. B minor/Astarte’s phantom: D flat major/Requiem: C major–B major ‘The subterranean palace of Arimanes [the Zoroastrian demon-spirit ‘who walks the clouds and waters”, Act II/iv, enemy of light and good’]. Manfred appears in the midst of a bacchanale [not in Byron]. Invocation of the phantom of Astarte. She predicts the end of his earthly misery. Manfred’s death [‘Old man! ’tis not so difficult to die’].’ For the closing pathétique pages, Tchaikovsky specifies a harmonium (not organ).

Romeo and Juliet – Fantasy Overture after Shakespeare

Mily Balakirev, besides being a remarkable composer in his own right, was one of the most important figures in Russian music in terms of his influence on his fellow composers. During the summer of 1869 Balakirev suggested to Tchaikovsky that he compose a concert piece on *Romeo and Juliet* and by November Tchaikovsky completed it. The piece was performed the following March under Nicholas Rubinstein’s direction and made a depressingly poor impression in Moscow. A revised version was presented in 1870 but fared no better abroad. Finally, in 1880, with the Fourth Symphony successfully making its way through the world Tchaikovsky returned to Romeo and Juliet and prepared the version we know today, which he designated not simply ‘Overture’, as he had the two earlier versions, but ‘Fantasy

Overture'. This time there was no question of the work's success, and when Tchaikovsky undertook conducting tours in Europe and America he was virtually compelled to include Romeo and Juliet on every program.

Hamlet – Incidental Music Op.67a for soloists and orchestra, excerpts (1891)

This score was written in two weeks for a French-language benefit production of Shakespeare's five-act tragedy at the Mikhailovski Theatre, Petersburg 9/21 February 1891. Undertaken at the request of, and as a favour to, Tchaikovsky's friend Lucien Guitry (in the title role for would be his last appearance on the Russian stage), the music re-cycled certain old material, including the Hamlet overture-fantasia (Overture), the alla tedesca second movement of the Third Symphony (CD8, track 5), Kupava's Lament from The Snow Maiden (7) and the 1884 'Samarin' Elegy for strings (9). Tchaikovsky had long been drawn to the story, his brother Modest having proposed it to him in 1876. 'Hamlet is very much to my taste, but it's devilishly difficult'. Despite being 'well received', the incidental music seems nevertheless to have been a chore. 'Hamlet is coming along. But it is such unpleasant work'. Gauk's performance cuts three of the sixteen numbers: (8) III/ii Fanfares 1 ('Sound a flourish'), 2 ('The dumb show enters'), Melodrama (Poison Scene enactment); (11) IV/v Ophelia's Second Scene ('And will he not come again?'); (12) V Entr'acte (Churchyard).

Overture (Hamlet Op 67, abbreviated); 1 Act I/i Melodrama (Elsinore. A platform before the Castle. Enter Ghost); 2 I/iv Fanfare ('A Flourish of Trumpets'); 3 I/iv Melodrama (Enter Ghost. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark: 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!'); 4 I/v Melodrama (The Castle. Another part of the fortifications. Enter Ghost and Hamlet. 'I am thy father's spirit,/Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,/And for the day confin'd to fast in fires,/Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature/Are burnt and purg'd away'); 5 Act II Entracte, prelude to Scene i (A room in the house of Polonius [Lord Chamberlain]. Enter Ophelia [daugher to Polonius]); 6 II/ii Fanfare (A room in the Castle. Flourish. Enter King and Queen, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, [Attendants]); 7 Act III Entracte, prelude to Scene i (Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern [two courtiers], and Lords); 9 Act IV Entr-acte, prelude to Scene i (Enter King and Queen, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern); 10 IV/v Ophelia's 'Mad Scene' [soprano] ('He is dead and gone, lady,/He is dead and gone;/At his head a grass-green turf,/At his heels a stone'); 13 Act V/i Gravedigger's [Clown's] Song [baritone] (Elsinore. A churchyard. 'In youth when I did love, did love,/Methought it was very sweet;/To contract, O, the time for, ah, my behove,/O, methought there was nothing meet.); 14 V/i Funeral March (Enter [priests with 'the fair' Ophelia's] coffin, King, Queen, Laertes [son to Polonius], with Lords attendant); 15 V/ii Fanfare (A hall in the Castle. 'Drum; trumpets sound'); 16 V/ii Final March ('Let four captains/Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage;/For he was likely, had he been put on,/To have prov'd most royally; and for his passage/The soldiers' music and the rites of war/Speak loudly for him').

Fatum – Fantasia Op.77 (1868)

'I'm currently writing something symphonic, entitled Fatum [Fate]'. 'An orchestral fantasia'. 'This is, I think, the best thing I have written to date – at least, so others say (a significant success)'. Premiered by Nikolai Rubinstein, Moscow 15/27 February 1869, prefaced at the eleventh hour by a spurious epigraph from Konstantin Batiushkov concerning Man born and living and dying a slave, the music, a discourse of ideas outside symphony and sonata, proved a failure. Balakirev, the dedicatee, was notably critical (he got a better deal with *Romeo and Juliet*). Belyayev's 1896 first edition, labelled 'symphonic poem', was reconstructed from the original parts, Tchaikovsky having destroyed the manuscript in the 1870s.

'Tchaikovsky, [Gauk] believed, should never be played in a sentimental manner, that the greatest betrayal would be to treat him as a dilettante, sophisticated, effeminate musician when his music was valiant, tragic and heroic: 'Tchaikovsky is an innovator, not a westernising aesthete', he would say.
~ Evgeny Svetlanov, Le Monde de la Musique, January 1996 ~

The Snow Maiden

The Russian playwright Alexander Ostrovsky, born in Moscow in 1823, is generally considered the most important figure in the Russian theatrical tradition between Gogol and Chekhov.. He studied Law at University but was forced to give up the course after a disagreement with one of the Professors, and started his career as a legal clerk, a job which gave him insights into the social interaction of the Russian merchant class and civil service; these he made use of in his first comedies. Later he turned to more serious drama, for example the tragedy *Groza* (1859) portraying the predicament of the young wife of a despotic merchant. Though some of his works were initially banned by the authorities, he prospered under the more liberal reign of Alexander II and enjoyed the patronage of Alexander III. In addition to his literary work he became an important administrator of the Russian stage. He became the director of the famous Maly Theatre in Moscow; interested in music, he also founded the Society of Russian Dramatic Art and Opera Composers.

Ostrovsky's *Snegoruchka – Vesennyaya Skazka* (The Snow Maiden – a Spring Fairy Tale), to give it its full title, stands rather apart from his more realistic works. The Maly Theatre was closed for renovation in early 1873 and its dramatic troupe had to work at the neighbouring Bolshoi Theatre, which housed the opera and ballet companies. The Bolshoi management put it to Ostrovsky that he should create a spectacle involving all three arts – acting, dancing and music. *The Snow Maiden* was the result, and in it he drew upon a wide range of Russian folk-tales to create a sparkling mythic synthesis. For the first production, which took place on 11 May 1873, an important score of incidental music was commissioned from the 32-year-old

Tchaikovsky, who was still in the process of establishing his reputation as a composer. Although he was teaching 27 hours a week at the Moscow Conservatoire, it took him just three weeks to write the music, which he composed as soon as he received each fresh batch of text from Ostrovsky, completing it in early April.

In the event it turned out to be Tchaikovsky's contribution, more than Ostrovsky's, which impressed the play's first audiences. The gorgeous production was mounted at a cost of 15,000 roubles, but was judged to be rather static, without much dramatic action. *The Snow Maiden* had four performances in the spring season of 1873, and four more in the winter season of 1873–4. After one further performance, however, it disappeared from the repertoire, probably because of the expense of using all three performing companies. Tchaikovsky's friend and mentor Nikolai Rubinstein, who admired the score, conducted it in concert, and it has occasionally been revived without Ostrovsky's play.

Tchaikovsky himself had great affection for this music. For some years after the production he planned to expand the incidental music into an opera, and he was highly incensed when he found that Rimsky-Korsakov had written an opera of his own on Ostrovsky's play. He wrote to his brother Modest '… it's as though they've taken from me by force something that is innately mine and dear to me, and are presenting it to the public in bright new clothes. It makes me want to weep!' Much later, in 1891, he would re-use some of the music of *The Snow Maiden* in his incidental music to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

The story of *The Snow Maiden*, which has some similarities to that of Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid', deals with the opposition of eternal forces of nature and involves the interactions of mythological characters (Frost, Spring, the Wood-Sprite), real people (Kupava, Mizgir, Brussila), and those in-between beings who are half-mythical, half-real (the Snow Maiden, Lel the Shepherd, and Tsar Berendey). The Snow Maiden can only live if her heart remains cold, unwarmed by love. But wishing to experience a life like other girls, she enters the world of human beings and innocently ruins a wedding when the bridegroom sees her and falls in love with her. Accused by the bride, of seducing her intended husband, the Snow Maiden is brought before the Tsar, Berendey, for judgement, and she decrees that she must marry the man – with whom she has meantime fallen in love. But love's warmth has made her vulnerable to the rays of the Sun God, and when exposed to them she melts away to nothing.

Tchaikovsky composed a large quantity of music to accompany Ostrovsky's play. Much of it is vocal and choral, including songs for Lel and the peasant Brusilo, and a monologue for Frost. The choral contributions include such attractive inspirations as the chorus of shivering birds, the chorus of flowers, and the choral carnival procession, a picture of Russian peasant life. All the dances are attractive and in fact give a hint of the great ballet composer Tchaikovsky would soon become. In composing this score for a play based on Russian fairytale, Tchaikovsky made more lavish use of Russian folksongs than in any previous work there are about a dozen of them, which he placed in colourful settings. The Introduction, however, is borrowed from his earlier, unsuccessful opera *Undine*, which also provided the material for Lel's first song.

In a letter of 1879 to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky wrote that *The Snow Maiden* was 'one of my favourite offspring. Spring is a wonderful time; I was in good spirits, as I always am at the approach of summer and three months of freedom. I think this music is imbued with the joys of spring that I was experiencing at the time'.

Orchestral Suite No.1 in D minor Op.43 (1878–9)

'A Suite in the style of Lachner', who published seven (1861–81), composed in Russia and Italy. Inscribed cryptically to *** – Tchaikovsky's patroness in absentia Nadezhda von Meck – it dates from the period of *The Maid of Orleans* and the premieres of *Eugene Onegin* and the *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*. Nikolai Rubinstein directed the first performance in Moscow, 8/20 December 1879. 'On Saturday, the Suite was played with great success,' reported Tchaikovsky's publisher, Pyotr Jurgenson. 'The [fugal] first movement did not arouse any particular enthusiasm on the part of the audience. The second [B flat major – written last, in August 1879] was liked. The Andante pleased very much, and the March [A major – which Tchaikovsky had wanted to discard on grounds of 'doubtful merit'] drew applause which wouldn't stop until it was repeated. The Scherzo [B flat major] was very well received. But by the time the Gavotte was played, interest flagged and the one thought in the mind of the audience was to leave as soon as possible. Rubinstein complained of the tremendous difficulties presented to the orchestra.'

'Rooted primarily in the decorative world of the ballet divertissement [incidental scores, too, The Snow Maiden for instance] not concerned with major expressive issues' (David Brown), the D minor Suite is finer than many commentators would lead us to believe, particularly in the hands of a committed champion like Gauk (or, later, Svetlanov). Typically, its orchestration, including triangle and glockenspiel, transforms simple ideas and cadences into an atmospheric carnival of costumes and 'lighting' angles.

Orchestral Suite No.2 in C Op.53 'Suite caractéristique' (1883)

Dedicated to Tchaikovsky's sister-in-law, Praskovya (who lived until 1956), this was first heard under Erdmannsdörfer in Moscow, 4/16 February 1884. Tchaikovsky himself directed the Petersburg premiere, 5/17 March 1887. To von Meck he generalised the genre: 'for some time [the suite form has] been particularly attractive to me because of the freedom it affords the composer not to be inhibited by any traditions, by conventional methods and established rules' (16/28 April 1884). Of the four examples he put together, the first three glow in vibrant images, eternal phrases (did Tchaikovsky ever write a bad tune?), and intricately detailed orchestral glamour/surprise.

Orbiting the note E (pivotally linking the keys of the five moments), No.2, as Tchaikovsky himself realised, impresses chiefly for its third and fourth movements, both originally longer: 'I am almost certain that the Scherzo (with the accordions [four of the diatonic button variety: an extraordinary folk timbre])

and the Andante (Child's Dreams) will please' (to his younger brother Modest, 26 September/8 October 1883). Writing of the E major Scherzo, a thrilling chase, cinematically prescient, Brown suggests it 'crosses into the musical territory of the Russian supernatural'. Of the A minor Andante, that it 'contains both the most conventional and the most original music in the whole suite […] Even within the enchanted music of *Sleeping Beauty*, which it clearly presages, there is rarely quite the same disquieting sense of shapes indefinable and forces unknown.' The 'Little Russian' finale, 'Wild Dance in the style of Dargomizhsky', pays homage to Dargomizshky's *Kazatchok* fantasia (which Tchaikovsky had arranged for piano around 1868.

Orchestral Suite No.3 in G Op.55

Besides his symphonies and symphonic poems Tchaikovsky wrote four orchestral suites. They show, more than the works mentioned above, the extent to which the dance rhythm is the basis for his orchestral music. In all the four movements of the Third Suite (1884) this basis is always refined, but never obscured by a strong need for charm and elegance. Although the four movements have titles intended to clarify their own character, the mood on the surface in one movement is an undercurrent in another. The 'Elegy' is full of major-key moments and the 'Valse romantique' is, like a Schubertian waltz, always two coins of the same medal. In the Scherzo the dance rhythm always competes with the desire for refinement. No wonder Stravinsky admired Tchaikovsky's art of orchestration. The finale was not meant as ballet music, but

Tchaikovsky's intention to let the music glitter and scintillate makes the listener wonder why this music is not more often heard.

Emanuel Overbeeke

Suite No.4 in G Op.61 'Mozartiana' (1887)

'Mozart I love as a musical Christ […] Mozart was a being so angelical and childlike in his purity, his music is so full of unattainably divine beauty, that if there is someone you can mention in the same breath as Christ, then it is he. […] Mozart is the highest, the culminating point which beauty has reached in the sphere of music […] In Mozart I love everything because we love everything in a person whom we truly love' (Diary, 20 September/2 October 1886). The 'Mozartiana' suite adapts four short Mozart originals (according to Tchaikovsky 'minutely enhanced and harmonically modified'), using a comparatively modest orchestra but including cymbals, glockenspiel and harp. 'For around an hour each day I'm occupied with orchestrating piano pieces by Mozart, which by the end of the summer I should have turned into a suite of novel character (the old given contemporary treatment)' (24 June/6 July 1887). Tchaikovsky directed the first performance in Moscow, at a Russian Musical Society concert on 14/26 November 1887.

I. Gigue: Gigue K574 (Leipzig, 16 May 1789), G major. II. Menuetto: Minuet K355 (Vienna, ?1786–87), D major. Trio section by Maximilian Stadler (1748–1833). III. Pregheira: Ave verum corpus K618 (Baden, 17

June 1791), from Liszt's organ transcription (Evocation à la Chapelle Sixtine, c. 1862), B flat major. IV. Thème et variations: Unser dummer Pöbel meint, after Gluck (1714–87) K455 (Vienna, 25 August 1784), G major.

Tchaikovsky the ballet composer

According to his brother Modest, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, much drawn to ballet in his youth, was fond of imitating the dancers and could do so proficiently. As late as 1875, when Camille Saint-Saëns was making his Moscow debut as composer, pianist and conductor, the two men were reportedly to be found larking about on the stage of the conservatoire performing a little 'Galatea and Pygmalion' ballet together with Nikolay Rubinstein at the piano. However the mature composer would have been surprised to find himself held up as a key figure in the history of classical dance. (Closer to our own time, Sergey Sergeyevich Prokofiev likewise preferred to think of himself as a purveyor of opera, notwithstanding Serge Diaghilev's outspoken views and his own successes with full-length ballets in the Tchaikovsky tradition.)

It is hardly surprising that early spectators of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* (1875–76), accustomed to the subservient scores of Cesare Pugni (1802-1870) and Ludwig Minkus (1826–1917), should have felt puzzled by its symphonic proportions and depth of feeling. Only two orchestral rehearsals and a poor production scarcely helped. Even *The Sleeping Beauty* (1888–89), one of Tchaikovsky's great masterpieces, staged with

the resources of the Imperial Ballet in St Petersburg, enjoyed only a *succès d'estime* during his lifetime. His last work in the form, the two-act *Nutcracker* (1891–92), secured its popular reputation through the pre-release of a suite showcasing its glittering themes.

Tchaikovsky's balletic significance became much more obvious after his death, part of a process that saw the form perfected and renewed by such practitioners as the French-born choreographer Marius Petipa (1818–1910) and the Russian Mikhail Fokine (1880–1942). *The Sleeping Beauty* was commissioned by Ivan Vsevolozhsky (1835–1909), then Director of the Imperial Theatres, who had abolished the post of staff ballet composer with a view to engaging musicians of greater distinction. The scenario and designs were prepared by Vsevolozhsky while Petipa mapped out the sequence of dances. Without subverting traditional imperatives of clarity, harmony, symmetry and order, the bold invention and perfect alignment of music and choreography had the capacity to affect audiences in a new way. Tchaikovsky's three mature ballets were chiefly responsible for this generic transformation, for all that he once described *Swan Lake* as 'poor stuff compared with [Delibes's] *Sylvia*.'

Public acclaim notwithstanding, many academic commentators have found Tchaikovsky an uncomfortable figure whose symphonic music could be stigmatized as 'balletic' as if that epithet in some way invalidated it. With the effortless extension of a single melodic line held to be in some way suspect – although Tchaikovsky's tunes can run the gamut from elegance and charm to uninhibited eroticism and passion – it

proved easy to overlook the incredible craftsmanship of the ballets, their mastery of form, harmony, momentum and orchestration. Tchaikovsky is rarely given credit for the discipline and professionalism of his creative life. Whatever the propensity within to violent agitation, he delivered on time and was quite prepared to submit to the exacting and precise demands of his collaborators. The expressive certainty of his invention has allowed more recent choreographers to experiment with stance and movement, often radically, confident that a firm musical narrative is permanently encoded in the notes.

In the summer of 1871 Tchaikovsky had arranged a family entertainment based on the tale of *Swan Lake*, but the impulse to take up the subject as a full-length ballet came from Vladimir Begichev (1828–1891), the theatre director whose stepson was a pupil of the composer. Julius Wenzel Reisinger choreographed the first production unveiled at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre on [20 February] / 4 March 1877. Tchaikovsky, who had hoped that his initial attempt at ballet music would be enthusiastically received, died in 1893 believing it to be a failure. It was not until 1895 that Petipa and Lev Ivanov (1834-1901) created the masterpiece which for many ballet enthusiasts has made their names synonymous with *Swan Lake*. With Modest's approval, the score was partly reworked by Riccardo Drigo (1846-1930).

The story in brief: Prince Siegfried is expected to choose a bride from among the guests at the forthcoming ball. He and his companions embark on a hunt for a flock of swans which they soon discover to be beautiful maidens bewitched by the evil magician, Rothbart, and who revert to human form between

midnight and dawn. The Prince falls in love with Odette, the Swan Queen, and invites her to the ball intending to maker her his wife. At the ball many seek the Prince's hand, performing a series of national dances (bringing a divertissement element structurally into the drama), but the Prince is faithful to Odette. The magician has appeared, accompanying his daughter Odile, transformed into a twin of Odette. A single ballerina usually takes both parts, making it among the most challenging, as well as the most sought after, roles in the entire classical repertory. Siegfried declares that he will marry her, discovering too late that Rothbart has tricked him. He rushes to the forest and proves (variously, according to the whims of the production team) his fidelity to Odette as the waters rise to engulf the lovers. The swans may be freed from the spell but the music, having achieving a B major climax signifying the triumph of the swan theme over malign Fate, ends equivocally with an ambiguous open B. In some presentations, the spirits of the lovers are seen soaring heavenwards together, a subtler resolution than the happy ending grafted on in 1895. Ansermet's long-esteemed recording is based on the Drigo edition.

Traditionally the setting is literal and representational. Siegfried celebrates his birthday in the palace garden, he discovers Odette at a forest-ringed lake, and columns, drapes and chandeliers adorn the ballroom. However more radical interpretations are possible in which Siegfried, like Tchaikovsky himself perhaps, is stifled in his aristocratic cocoon and seeks solace in the real, wilder world. Erick Bruhn's *Swan Lake* for the National Ballet of Canada (1966) recasts the evil sorcerer as a female figure implying that our hero is the victim of an Oedipus complex. *Illusions – Like Swan Lake*, which John Neumeier choreographed for

Hamburg Ballet in 1976, weaves the narrative into the history of King Ludwig of Bavaria who had his own obsession with swans. For Adventures in Motion Pictures in 1995 Matthew Bourne created a revisionist *Swan Lake* in which the decorative and vulnerable *corps de ballet* is replaced by aggressive, potentially violent males, their feral freedom irresistible to a prince chafing against constraints.

The Sleeping Beauty was adapted from Charles Perrault's well-known fairy story, *La Belle au bois dormant* (1697). Tchaikovsky took special pains over the orchestration, achieving an unprecedented precision of effect, assisted by his recent experiences as a conductor. The story goes that at the gala rehearsal before the Maryinsky première which took place on [3 January] / 15 January 1890, the grandeur and novelty of the conception left Tsar Alexander III bemused. He summoned up only a lukewarm 'Very nice!' when the composer was called to the royal box. 'His majesty treated me with distant hauteur' noted the composer in his diary.

The ballet's prologue depicting the christening of the baby Princess Aurora contains a variation for each of the six fairies come to bestow gifts upon the infant. In the midst of the excitement the wicked fairy, Carabosse, casts a spell over Aurora, promising that she will prick her finger and die. Intervening to save her, the Lilac Fairy (originally played by Petipa's daughter, Marie) mitigates the curse from death to sleep. Many years later the royal family is celebrating Aurora's birthday. The choreographic highpoint is the Adagio maestoso or 'Rose' Adagio which she dances with her princely suitors, the steps revealing her growing confidence. Since her christening the King has attempted to ban all sharp objects from the kingdom

but when a disguised Carabosse presents Aurora with a spindle, sometimes a bouquet of flowers or a beautiful tapestry with embedded needle, she pricks her finger and she and the court fall deeply asleep.

One hundred years later in a dark forest a Prince is hunting with his friends. The Lilac Fairy conjures up an irresistible apparition of Aurora and he instantly falls in love. Led to the castle to rescue her and put an end to the evil Carabosse, one kiss and the spell is broken. Princess Aurora and her entire family awaken from their slumber and the couple's wedding is celebrated in Act 3 with a divertissement involving a cornucopia of fairytale characters including Puss in Boots, Cinderella, the Bluebird, Little Red Riding Hood and Tom Thumb. In the grand pas de deux Aurora is presented musically and choreographically as a woman in full bloom, rejoicing in true love. Initially performed abroad in abbreviated form, Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes brought the first full-length *Sleeping Beauty* to the UK in 1921. The countless stagings since have tended to remain close to the Russian original rather than imparting layers of psychological meaning.

After Tchaikovsky's qualified success with *The Sleeping Beauty*, in February 1891 he was invited to compose the music for a new ballet. The scenario was based on Alexandre Dumas *père*'s adaptation of a story by the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Nussknacker und Mausekönig*. From the outset, *The Nutcracker* had its critics, none more trenchant than the composer himself. He wrote to his beloved nephew, Vladimir (Bob) Davydov on 7 July: '…I finished the sketches of the ballet yesterday. You will remember that I boasted to you when you were here that I could finish the ballet in five days, but I have

scarcely finished it in a fortnight. No, the old man is breaking up … he loses bit by bit the capacity to do anything at all. The ballet is infinitely worse than *Sleeping Beauty* – so much is certain … If I arrive at the conclusion that I can no longer furnish my musical table with anything but warmed up fare, I will give up composing altogether.'

At its St. Petersburg première on [6 December] 18 December 1892 *The Nutcracker* formed half of a double bill with the darker operatic component, *Iolanta*, generally thought superior. Posterity has reversed this judgement. It is true that hardly any story survives in the ballet's voyage from the (mimed) semi-reality of an idealized family Christmas to the land of eternal sweetmeats (and nothing but virtuoso dancing). Yet the score itself is brilliantly alive with no hint of time-serving tinsel. Tchaikovsky's exploitation of his unmatched gift for melody was never more audacious.

The miniature overture opening the work sets the fairy mood by employing only the orchestra's upper registers. The first act is divided into two scenes. It is Christmas Eve and little Clara is playing with her toys. At midnight they come to life. Led by the Nutcracker, her special present, they overwhelm some marauding mice, after which he is transformed into a Prince. Clara and her Prince travel through a snowy landscape where they are greeted by waltzing snowflakes. Ivanov's original choreography, in which the dancers evoked the movements of windswept snow, was much admired by the cognoscenti who climbed up to the cheaper seats in order to appreciate the patterns created.

In Act 2 the Sugar Plum Fairy and the people of the Land of Sweets proffer a lavish gala of character dances. There follows a magnificent pas de deux for the Prince and the Sugar Plum Fairy, the latter's own variation realising the composer's desire to showcase the celesta, a new instrument he had heard in Paris. Its unique timbre is here famously complemented by little downward swoops from the bass clarinet. Elsewhere Tchaikovsky incorporates several children's instruments including a rattle, pop-gun, toy trumpet and miniature drum. After the festivities Clara wakes up under the Christmas tree, the Nutcracker toy in her arms, although, in some versions she rides off with her Nutcracker Prince as if the dream has happened in reality q.v. Hoffmann's original story.

Radical modern interpretations include Mark Morris's *The Hard Nut* (1991), set in the Swinging Sixties but faithful to the original score, and Donald Byrd's *Harlem Nutcracker* (1996), danced to Duke Ellington's jazz adaptation and set in an African-American household where Clara, the little girl, has become clan matriarch. That Tchaikovsky's invention should present such riches to plunder, given the slight, somewhat incongruous scenario with which he had to work, says much about the nature of his genius.

Piano Concerto No.1 in B flat minor Op.23 (1874–75, third edition 1888–89)

Underlined by overt folksong references (Ukranian in the outer movements, French in the D flat middle one) and covert Schumannesque cipher identities, this 'battle charger' endures as a blazing, impassioned witness

to an emotion of race and individual born as much out of Slavic 'ancient voices' as Romantic dream. It was the first concerto to be performed at Carnegie Hall, by the German Liszt pupil Adèle aus der Ohe under the composer's direction on 9 May 1891.

Ates Orga

Piano Concerto No.3 in E flat Op.75/79

In May of 1892 Tchaikovsky began sketches for a symphony in E flat major – it would have been his sixth – but hints of trouble appeared. He wrote to a friend, '… it doesn't go as smoothly as I might wish'. By October he finished the rough sketch of this symphony, and the orchestration remained to be completed. By December he found he was not satisfied with it as symphonic material and decided to scrap it. After second thoughts he realized the material was too good to discard and therefore (after setting this aside for a while to write his 'Pathétique' Symphony) rewrote the first movement for piano and orchestra. It is this single movement which is known as the Piano Concerto No.3 in E flat Op75. It is dedicated to Louis Diémer (1843–1919), the French pianist who popularized Tchaikovsky's music in France. The first performance of this third concerto took place in St Petersburg in January 1895. The score was first published by Jurgenson in 1894.

The noted English critic, Eric Blom, once wondered, 'Why this concerto should never be performed passes comprehension.' Only occasional performances are heard nowadays, although this single movement has

been successfully utilized since 1956 in the New York City Ballet Company's production, Allegro Brillante, choreographed by George Balanchine.

Of the two remaining (discarded) movements of the proposed symphony, Tchaikovsky left these in short score. Serge Taneiev (1856–1915), the great Russian pianist-composer-teacher, took up the task of orchestrating (and reconstructing where necessary) these two movements, based on Tchaikovsky's piano scores and rough manuscript drafts. These two movements are entitled Andante and Finale Op.79. They were first performed in St Petersburg in February 1896. The score was first published by Belaieff in 1897 and was later reprinted in the Collected Works of Tchaikovsky Vol. 62 (Moscow, 1948).

Taneiev was the ideal man to complete Op.79: at the Moscow Conservatory he studied piano with Nicholas Rubinstein and composition with Tchaikovsky; he played the solo part in the first Moscow performances of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto in B flat minor; he became one of the chief exponents of Tchaikovsky's music; and he developed a great friendship with the composer. In fact, Tchaikovsky encouraged Taneiev's severe criticism of his music. Taneiev scores the Andante and Finale in characteristic Tchaikovsian manner – woodwind, horns and strings in the Andante; and full orchestra in the Finale with drum and cymbals added in accord with enhancing its martial character. The arranger also furnishes many variant readings of piano passages. The piano makes an arresting entrance stating the main theme of the first movement (4/4, Allegro brillante) in double octaves. A lyrical second subject (G major cantabile ed espressivo) and a hopping,

dance-like subsidiary theme (Allegro molto vivace) and contrast. The long solo cadenza is based mostly on a three-note pattern repeated in many modulations. The material of the coda (Vicacissimo) is a slight transformation of the main theme, building in increasingly higher pitches. In the Andante movement (3/4, B flat major), the orchestra commences the main theme simply, which is then restated by the piano. A lush cello solo ins introduced (G flat major, Più mosso). After a short cadenza, the first theme recurs in an overlapping dialogue between soloist and cello. The short finale movement (4/4, Allegro maestoso) ranges through E flat, G and C with fiery interlocking chords and octaves, rapid scalar passages and strong orchestral punctuation. About 30 years ago the Russian composer, Semyon Bogatyryev, restudied all these scores. He reconstructed them and reorchestrated sections. He also added a fourth movement by orchestrating a piano scherzo from Tchaikovsky's Op.72, and entitled the whole thing Symphony No.7. Although the three movements presented here were performed (by Taneiev) before the turn of the century as noted above, to date we have located no record of performance of all three movements played in succession and thus forming a logical, complete three-movement concerto.

Donald Garvelmann

Concert Fantasy for piano and orchestra Op.56

The famous work in B flat minor known universally as 'the' Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto (Op.23) is almost certainly the most popular concerto ever placed before the public. Since that is so, since it bears designation

'No.1', and since Tchaikovsky is one of the most beloved of all composers, it is surprising, to say the least, that the public which has so adored that work for over a hundred years has not shown more curiosity about Tchaikovsky's other works for piano and orchestra. Curiously, the Second and Third Concertos, while they have never become concert favourites, have become quite familiar to balletomanes, for George Balanchine choreographed both of them with notable success – No.2 (Op.44) in 1941 as Ballet Imperial and the one-movement No.3 (Op.75) 15 years later as Allegro Brillante.

The three concertos were not Tchaikovsky's only works for piano and orchestra. In 1884, after completing the Suite No.3 for orchestra (which Balachine also choreographed), he produced the single-movement Concert Fantasy Op.56, which is still less known than any of the concertos. It is interesting, perhaps, to note that this concerted work which is not a concerto was composed just prior to the huge programme symphony *Manfred*, which Tchaikovsky did title a symphony but did not include among those he enumerated as such (chronologically, *Manfred* and all four of the suites fall between the Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5); this may indicate he was casting about for new forms – or simply that he decided these works did not meet the formal requirements for being called, respectively, Concerto and Symphony.

The history of the Concert Fantasy has a curious parallel with those of the First Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto in the matter of its dedication. The Piano Concerto, as is well known, was originally dedicated to Nicholas Rubinstein, whose abusively hostile reaction to the work led Tchaikovsky to change

the dedication, inscribing it to Hans von Bülow, who premiered the work in Boston. When Leopold Auer, to whom the Violin Concerto was originally dedicated, protested that it was too difficult, Adolf Brodsky won himself a place in musical history – and the rededication of the Concerto – by introducing it in Vienna. The Concert Fantasy was also published with a dedication different from the one originally intended by Tchaikovsky. Both the original and final dedicatees were women, and their own biographies reveal three striking similarities: both were celebrated performers, both were professors at the St Petersburg Conservatory, and both were married to famous virtuosi whom they divorced after a dozen years or so.

Anna Nikolayevna Essipova (1851–1914), for whom Tchaikovsky actually composed the Fantasy, toured Europe and America with great success; she was a pupil of Leschetizky, whom she married in 1880 and divorced in 1892. She joined the Conservatory faculty in 1893, the year of Tchaikovsky's death, and taught there for nearly twenty years, numbering Sergei Prokofiev and Alexander Borovsky among her pupils. When that lady found the Concert Fantasy not to her taste. Tchaikovsky found another who was eager to take it up: Sophie Menter (1846–1918), daughter of a celebrated German cellist, pupil of Tausig, protégée of Liszt, and from 1872 to 1886 wife of the cello virtuoso David Popper. She was in Russia as a professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory from 1883 to 1887, and gave the first performance of the Concert Fantasy in Moscow on 6 March 1885. Tchaikovsky's regard for her is shown further in his having orchestrated her own *Hungarian Gypsy Airs* for piano and orchestra, which she performed under his direction in Odessa on 4 February 1893.

The Concert Fantasy is in two movements, the first of which is labelled Quasi rondo – though it really doesn't come close to being a rondo. It is gracefully constructed, if hardly profound, and offers a rare example of Tchaikovsky's attempting the manner of Liszt, in the form of a section for solo piano both too long and too elaborate to be described as a cadenza. The second movement, headed 'Contrasts', opens with a slow theme played by the soloist (with an attractive counterpoint by a solo cello), which is forthwith 'contrasted' with an effective but conventional molto vivace section which brings the unusual work to a satisfying conclusion.

Richard Freed

Violin Concerto · Shorter Violin Works (Tretiakov)

A disc of Tchaikovsky miniatures leads to one of Tretiakov's specialities, the evergreen Violin Concerto – one of the great masterpieces of the repertoire composed in the short space of just one month for Leopold Auer (teacher of Heifetz). This is a fine example of both composer and soloist revelling in the rich Romantic melodies pitted against a sumptuous orchestral accompaniment.

Tchaikovsky's music for cello and orchestra

This consists of two original compositions, the Variations on a Rococo Theme and the *Pezzo Capriccioso*. Several other pieces that are rather frequently played and that appear on this recording are actually

transcriptions, made by Tchaikovsky himself, of the Nocturne from Op.19 and the Andante from his First String Quartet.

The Variations on a Rococo Theme were written during the winter of 1876–1877. Tchaikovsky had already written two concertante works, the First Piano Concerto and the *Sérénade mélancolique* for violin. The Variations are dedicated to the German virtuoso, Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, who gave their first performance in Moscow on 18 November 1877 under the direction of Nikolai Rubinstein. But this 'Fitzenhagen version', the only one that was published and performed until the publication of the original version in the 20th century, subjected the score to a reshuffling that completely upset the initial order of the variations. The rights and wrongs of this interference have been hotly disputed, one argument being that in the original version the cadenza comes after the second variation, in other words, much too early in the cycle. The attitude Tchaikovsky adopted towards Fitzenhagen's initiative was more passive than consenting. It is the original version that is to be heard on this recording. The orchestra in the Variations corresponds to the small formation of the 18th century: two parts for each of the woodwinds and horns and strings. The theme, hinted at in the short introduction, is stated in full by the soloist. It is followed by eight variations, alternately virtuosic and lyrical, most of them in dialogue with the timbres of the woodwinds, while the function of the strings is essentially limited to that of an accompaniment. The variations form a link between two periods, the gallant 18th century which Tchaikovsky so admired, and the romantic, virtuosic 19th century. After Fitzenhagen, the remainder of Tchaikovsky's production for the cello is associated with

the name of another cellist, Anatoly Brandukov, one of the most eminent of the Russian school. It was for him that in the second half of the 1880s Tchaikovsky made the transcription of the Nocturne from the six piano pieces, Op.19 (1873) and the Andante cantabile from the First String Quartet, based on a Russian folk-song that brought tears to the eyes of Leo Tolstoy. Two melodic pieces, one of them quietly elegiac, the other of a more expansive and noble lyricism, both of them exploiting the singing qualities of the instrument.

The *Pezzo Capriccioso* dates from the same period as the two transcriptions. It was composed in August 1887 under distressing circumstances during a stay in Aachen where Tchaikovsky had gone to bed-side of his gravely ill friend, Nikolai Kondratyev. The piece was clearly composed as a distraction. 'It is all my inspiration has produced during the whole of this summer,' he admitted in a letter of 30 August 1887 to his publisher Jurgenson. It was first played in Paris by Tchaikovsky and Brandukov in a version for piano and cello on 28 February 1888. The *Pezzo Capriccioso* opens with an Andante con moto introduction whose tone of ardent mournfulness soon makes way for the more playful, animated principal subject. The middle section is particularly spectacular and perilous, with a headlong charge of staccato demisemiquavers. A succession of trills leads back to the initial theme. The coda contains a few references to the virtuosic figures.

Some of the most beautiful pages in Tchaikovsky's ballets are those for solo violin or cello. The Andante cantabile in the second act of *The Sleeping Beauty* (No.15 in the ballet) unfurls a superb cantilena while the

Lilac Fairy grants Prince Désiré a glimpse of the vision of Princess Aurore in a blending of reverie, love and hope.

The Serenade for Strings was written in September–October 1880. At first Tchaikovsky hesitated between a symphony and a quintet. Opting for a string orchestra, his thinking was that of a symphonist, as is borne out by the inscription on the manuscript: 'The larger the number of strings, the more it will correspond to the composer's wish.' The Serenade was first heard at a private concert in the Moscow Conservatory on 21 November 1880. In the same way as the Variations on a Rococo Theme it demonstrates the need felt by a romantic composer to regenerate himself by a return to the classical sources. But even more than that, it constitutes a synthesis of the fundamental aspects of Tchaikovsky's art. The Pezzo in forma di Sonatina begins with a solemn introduction before slipping into a Mozartian lightness and transparency. The Valse is a moment of perfect musical felicity. It is followed by an Elegie, which alternates between a contemplative, almost religious gravity and moments of more relaxed lyricism. And the Finale, used on two folksongs, celebrates his return to his native soil. Classical, dance-like, elegiac, nationalistic – summarized in four words, this is the musical portrait of Tchaikovsky.

Translated by Derek Yeld

Liturgy of St John Chrysostom

'I attend Mass frequently. The liturgy of St John Chrysostom is one of the most exalted works of art. Anyone following the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox service attentively trying to comprehend the meaning of each ceremony will be stirred to the very depth of his being. I am also very fond of evening prayers. There is nothing like entering an ancient church on a Saturday, standing in the semi-darkness with the scent of incense wafting through the air, lost in deep contemplation to find an answer to those perennial questions: wherefore, when, whither and why? Startled out of my pensive mood by the singing of the choir, I abandon myself entirely to the glowing fervour of this enthralling music when the Holy Door opens and the tune "Praise ye the Lord" rings out. This is one of the greatest pleasures in my life.' Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky wrote these lines to his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck, a woman he never met. He continued: 'As you can see, I am still bound to the Church by strong ties, but on the other hand I have long ceased to believe in the dogma … This constant inner struggle would be enough to drive me out of my mind were it not for music, that great comforter, the most exquisite gift Heaven has bestowed on a mankind living in darkness … Music is a loyal friend, a source of strength and solace, something worth living for.'

Tchaikovsky, the Russian composer who gave the world fate-laden symphonies, ballets and ten operas, accepted a commission in 1878 from his friend and publisher, Petr Ivanovich Jurgenson, to provide a setting for the liturgy of St John Chrysostom, which became his Op.41. But who was the originator of that liturgy?

St John, Patriarch of Constantinople (344–407 A.D.), was a man of great eloquence, which earned him the nickname Chrysostom (golden-mouthed), translated literally into Russian as *zlatoust*. Before assuming his high office, this Doctor of the Church was a monk and bishop in Antioch, where he became acquainted with the form of liturgical chant that he subsequently took to Constantinople and that was to remain closely associated with his name well into the 14th century. The liturgy of St John Chrysostom was the direct counterpart of Gregorian chant in the Western Church, which also harked back to the early Christian period, but continued to be elaborated and generalized until the age of Palestrina. Before St John reformed the rite, the Orthodox Church employed the more 'opulent' liturgy which St Basil (329–379 A.D., known as 'The Great') had introduced and which is now used only occasionally (e.g. during Lent).

In a more narrow sense, the liturgy of St John Chrysostom is the Orthodox equivalent of the Eucharist office in the West. It has always been celebrated in Church Slavonic, the lingua franca of the Eastern Churches. In practice, the first part of the liturgy, the Proskomide (consecration of bread and wine) takes place at the altar before the beginning of the service while the second part, which is open to the faithful, involves an extensive chanted dialogue between the priest and the body of believers, interrupted by troparions (hymns) and litanies, songs of praise and verses from the Psalter. The high point of the ceremony is the administration of the Eucharistic gifts.

Tchaikovsky gave the following account of the premiere at the Moscow Conservatory: 'The choir was in excellent form, and I witnessed one of the happiest moments of my career as an artist … A decision has

been made to repeat the Liturgy in a public concert.' The first public performance took place in Moscow in December 1880, but met with a mixed response. In marked contrast to the plaudits of the music critics, Bishop Ambrosius wrote in a letter to the periodical *Rus* that Church music was out of place in a concert hall and did not lend itself to applause, but admitted that the music had intrinsic value: 'Fortunately, the liturgy has found its way into the hands of a gifted composer … After all, the task might have been entrusted to a musician of lesser standing. Perhaps we must now brace ourselves for a Holy Mass by some Rosenthal or Rosenblum, which will be then be greeted with boos and catcalls.'

Apart from its unmistakably anti-Semitic overtones, the Bishop's comment made it clear that the Orthodox Church was not prepared to budge an inch from its time-honoured traditions even though Tchaikovsky had made a deliberate effort to create a kind of musical iconostasis (the icon-decorated screen separating the sanctuary from the nave) and give musical expression to the aura of timeless spirituality emanating from the icons. This explains why he adopted a very cautious approach to some authentic melodies, making only the most sparing use of the expressive resources at his command. So it must have been all the more painful for him to learn that the Church withheld its consent because of the place chosen for performance. This notwithstanding, he responded favourably when the new Tsar, Alexander III (crowned in 1883) suggested that he write further Church music. He proceeded to compose three Cherubical Hymns (1884), a Hymn to the Apostles of the Slavs, St Cyril and St Methodius, and Six Ecclesiastical Songs (1885). All the while, he was keenly aware of his responsibility to provide a new musical garb for the ancient rite without any loss of

reverence or piety. ‘This is a challenging, but difficult task. The main point is to preserve these old chants in their original form. Should I succeed in coping with this difficult job, I could pride myself on having been the first to help restore the original character and style of our Church music.’

The Vespers (agrypnia, vigilia) is an ancient Christian evening service, the earliest evidence of which dates as far back as the 4th century; it was the Spanish pilgrim Egeria who described for the first time a solemn night service in the Temple at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. According to the Jerusalem Typikon, established since the 14th century onwards and presently acting in the Orthodox Churches, the Vigil serves as a link between the Holy Evening Service and the Solemn Morning Service. It is observed on the eve of great Gods’, Theotokian and Saints’ holidays as an expression of reverence. In our modern times night-long vigils are served in all monastery centres of the Orthodox East – in Russia, in the Balkans, on Mount Athos, where the mysticism of the Orthodox liturgical service stands out with a particular power of its own. Starting a little after sunset and ending at sunrise, the continuous service possesses a complex symbolism which unites all the aspects of the evening, midnight, and morning services.

The evening service contains episodes from the Old Testament, presenting pictures of world history, revealing the image of the coming Messiah and His kingdom, and narrating of God’s endless love, shown to people through the gift of the Redemption. The midnight service reminds man of death, of the hour when the dead will be resurrected, of Christ’s second coming. The morning service is an act of thanksgiving to God for having preserved us through the night. It extends a prayer to Him to transfigure our hearts with his

creative breath and to lead us to the eternal light of Christ who won over death through His resurrection. Basic symbols of the vigil are the light signifying the glory of God and the incense – symbol of the Holy Spirit, transferring God's mercy and sweetness.

Secular Choral Works: Neglected Tchaikovsky?

In the field of choral music Tchaikovsky is known above all as the first Russian composer to have composed cycles of the Liturgy and the Vespers. But as a composer who mastered every musical genre of the time, he also left a considerable output of secular choral music, a genre that had been curiously neglected by professional Russian composers and which Sergei Taneyev, a pupil of Tchaikovsky's was to raise to a peak of perfection in the succeeding decades. Tchaikovsky's secular choral works were written for various types of choir, male, female, and mixed (in which order they figure on this recording), sometimes with one or more soloists, usually a cappella, but in some cases with piano accompaniment. Several of the works to be heard here were originally written for a solo voice or for a vocal duet, but Tchaikovsky himself realised that they worked better as choruses. This is the case in *Autumn*, *Child's Song* and *A Legend*, taken from the 16 Children's Songs Op.54 (1881), and in *Dawn*, a duo for soprano and mezzo, and *Night*, a vocal quartet with piano.

Evening, dated 1881, was written at the request of Karl Albrecht for a volume of choruses for male voices. It is a three-part choral fugato (two tenors and a bass), filled with nobility and peace. The anonymous text

might be by the composer himself. *Autumn* and *Child's Song*, both of which introduce a tenor solo, are in marked contrast to each other: a misty autumnal poem of lethargic melancholy and a comical, playful little ditty.

It was to a poem by Grand Duke Konstantin Romanov that Tchaikovsky wrote the four-part chorus *Blessed is he who smiles* in 1887, the same year as the Six Songs Op.63 to words by the same poet. 'K.R.', as he signed his collections of verse, was the most talented and cultivated member of the Imperial family and Tchaikovsky was on particularly cordial terms with him. The poem in question is of a rather naive and banal philosophical-moral cast and its musical setting is of an appropriately serene ingenuousness.

Why does the merry voice grow silent? (Pushkin) forms a little triptych with the female chorus *Much too soon in the season* and the mixed chorus *It is not the cuckoo*. The three choruses were written in 1891 in response to a commission from the singer Ivan Melnikov (who created the role of Boris Godunov) for his vocal ensemble class. The first is vigorously optimistic with a more meditative middle episode. The second (Tzyganov) is an elegy that grows progressively more animated and ends on a fortissimo chorale. The third (Tzyganov) could belong to the type of urban folk song much used by many Russian composers, great and small, during the 19th century. The Old French Air is a melody of melancholy and timeless charm which, after having been one of the piano pieces in the Children's Album (1878), passed into the opera The Maid of Orléans (1879), where it became a minstrel's song. This is the version heard here.

Dawn is one of the six vocal duets with piano Op.46 written in 1880. As has been mentioned above, it may be performed just as effectively by two soloists as by a two-part women's choir. Short vocal phrases are interspersed with psalmodies recited on one note. It's essentially contemplative character is that of a pastoral.

The relatively large scale *Nature and Love* was composed in 1870 for Bertha Walseck's singing class at the Moscow Conservatory. It is a trio for soprano, mezzo and contralto, three-part female chorus and piano. Tchaikovsky himself wrote the somewhat exalted and sentimental words of this pantheistic credo. The form is that of two alternating Andantes and Allegros, with the choir entering in the latter. The music, in keeping with the text, radiates unclouded happiness.

Before Sleep is one of the youthful works Tchaikovsky composed in 1863–64 during his student years at the Conservatory. It is a kind of peaceful, meditative nocturne comparable to a canticle. It exists in two versions: a cappella and with orchestra.

In *The golden cloud had slept*, the famous poem by Lermontov (*The Rock*) here takes the form of a meditation, once again imprinted with a religious cast, although this is not what the poem is about. The writing, very simple and vertical, is that of a chorale. It is dated 5 July 1887.

The *Greeting to Anton Rubinstein* is a piece written especially for the 50th anniversary of Rubinstein's musical career, celebrated on 18 November 1889. There are passages in which the choral parts are doubled to as many as seven, which effectively enhances the brilliance of the panegyric.

Both the words and the music of *The Nightingale*, without a doubt Tchaikovsky's finest achievement in choral music, were written in 1889. It is magnificent reconstruction of a folk song scrupulously observing all of its musical properties: the solo singer introducing the chorus, the modal and melodic turns, the fullness and the density in the treatment of the vocal parts, here, too, as many as seven real parts.
The vocal quartet with piano accompaniment, *Night*, written in March 1893, is Tchaikovsky's final tribute to Mozart, whom he had always idolised. It is an arrangement of the middle section of Mozart's Fantasy in C minor for piano. The words, written by Tchaikovsky himself, are once again serenely contemplative and this time are clearly determined by the original music. It is a composition that belongs in the same category as the Prayer (*Ave, verum corpus*) of the 'Mozartiana' Suite.

The next two choruses have a religious connotation. The Hymn to St Cyril and St Methodius is a harmonisation of an old Slav melody; the words, originally in Czech, were translated into Russian by the composer. The chorus is a tribute to the two saintly brothers, masters of the Slavonic language in the 9th century, and was written in 1887 on the occasion of the millennium of the death of St Methodius.
A Legend ('The infant Jesus had a garden') belongs to the cycle of Children's Songs Op.54 already

mentioned. Tchaikovsky's choral arrangement became extremely popular as a 'spiritual song' and was absorbed into the repertoire of the sacred folk songs so widespread in Russia.

And finally, this programme concludes with a little choral divertissement in the form of the Neapolitan Air whose tune was derived from *Swan Lake*. It is a later adaptation for chorus without words that is sung here, in the manner of an encore.

Translated by Derek Yeld

Piano Trio in A minor Op.50 'In Memory of a Great Artist' (1881–82)

To Vasily Yastrebtsev, writing in 1899, Tchaikovsky was a man of his time. 'When Mussorgsky and Dargomizhsky were forging an extreme naturalism and a genre that was not always artistic – when Borodin was submerging himself in a prehistoric epoch … when Rimsky-Korsakov has been drawn into his own personal, clearly individual, pagan, fairy-tale … and when Cui … flies off into a Scotland that is alien to us – Tchaikovsky has been filled totally with the spirit of his age, and with all the highly strung fervour of his deeply sensitive and impressionable nature […] has "depicted us ourselves alone", with our unresolved doubts, our sorrow and our joys.'

Complete String Quartets

Apart from youthful essays Tchaikovsky wrote little chamber music: three string quartets, a piano trio, three pieces for violin and piano, and the string sextet *Souvenir de Florence* (for two violins, two violas and two cellos). The three string quartets: in D Op.11 (1872), in F Op.22 (1876) and in E flat minor Op.30 (1876) – all published before he was 40 – were preceded by a quartet in B flat, of which only the first movement survives (it is placed last on this CD1 of this set). Tchaikovsky wrote it in 1865 and it was performed for the first time on 12 November that year, towards the end of his studies at the Conservatoire in St Petersburg, by four of his fellow students. The main body of the piece, in sonata form and marked Allegro con moto, has, as its first subject (begun by the viola), an engaging folk tune that he had heard sung by the gardeners at Kamenka, the home of his brother-in-law Lev Davïdov and sister Sasha, near Kiev in the Ukraine. (He had hoped to collect Ukrainian folk songs, while staying at Kamenka, for future use in his own compositions, but was disappointed by those he heard, finding them artificial and inferior to White Russian melodies; this was one of the few he used, in the quartet movement and again in the *Scherzo à la russe* for piano Op.1 No.1, composed in 1867). There is a rather nervous second subject in C, begun by eight repeated notes on the first violin; both themes are used in the substantial development section, and in the recapitulation the second subject reappears in C *sharp*! The movement is framed by a solemn, chorale-like Adagio misterioso in 3/4; in its preludial role it ends with cadential flourishes on all four instruments in turn (second violin, viola, first violin, cello); in its postludial role these are replaced by a hushed reminiscence of the folk tune on the cello and, briefly, the first violin.

The first of Tchaikovsky's quartets that has survived complete (it is not known whether the isolated first movement in B flat ever had its other three, or if these were subsequently lost or discarded), in D, was written, very quickly, early in 1871, for a benefit concert devoted entirely to his own compositions that he put on in Moscow on 28 March that year. The artists who took part in it included Nikolay Rubinstein and the contralto Elizaveta Lavroskaya; and the novelist Ivan Turgenev (and the work's dedicatee, the botanist Sergey Rachinsky) were in the audience.

The high point of the occasion was, however, the performance of the quartet: the first important work of its kind by a Russian composer. It was given by the Russian Music Society's Quartet, whose leader, the Czech violinist Ferdinand Laub, and cellist, the German Wilhelm Fitzenhagen (for whom Tchaikovsky was to write his *Variations on a Rococo Theme* for cello and orchestra in 1877) had been the composer's colleagues on the professorial staff of the Moscow Conservatoire since its foundation in 1866.

Both of the first movement's main themes are enlivened by rhythmic irregularities: the first (underpinned by tonic and dominant pedals) by syncopations, the second (in A and the more 'melodic' of the two) by the insertion of a bar in 12/8 into the movement's basic 9/8 metre; and both are discussed in the busy (and, it must be said, rather repetitive) development. Apart from an elaborated return of the first subject the recapitulation is remarkably exact, except for its coda in quicker tempo. As Tchaikovsky's biographer David Brown perceptively puts it: 'Much of the movement's richness comes from the abundant contrapuntal

decoration of fundamentally simple harmonies, with Tchaikovsky amply exploiting that facility he had always shown for devising fertile counterpoints of running semiquavers.' The slow movement in B flat is better known in its transcription for string orchestra. It is based on another folk tune Tchaikovsky had heard in Kamenka, sung by a carpenter ('Upon the divan Vanya sat/and filled a glass with rum;/before he'd poured out half a tot/he ordered Katenka to come.') and had included in his *Fifty Russian Folksongs* arranged for piano duet (1868–9). Introduced *con sordini* and with its 2/4 metre twice broken by a bar in 3/4, it is alternated with a subsidiary theme of his own, in D flat and with a pizzicato accompaniment. When Tolstoy heard the Andante cantabile five years later he was moved to tears; presumably he was unaware of the banality of the words.

Both the Scherzo (in D minor and with only its second section repeated) and the Trio (in B flat and with no repeats) are strongly rhythmic and syncopated; the latter has a wavering cello ostinato for much of the time. In the reprise of the Scherzo the concluding bars are to be played with a gradual diminuendo. The predominantly jocular, breezy spirit of the sonata-form finale, whose main theme is almost as remarkable for its silences as for the notes that they separate, is set off by an expansive second subject (in the distant key of B flat). The development is based entirely on the first subject, with persistent running semiquavers; to compensate for this the recapitulation begins with the fortissimo statement of this theme, with the first violin and viola in close canon (as in bar 51 of the exposition): the second subject reappears in D and on the cello. The movement ends with an emphatic coda.

Tchaikovsky began work on the Quartet in F early in 1874 and finished it on 30 January. As he wrote to his brother Modest: 'None of my pieces has ever flowed out of me so easily and simply; I wrote it almost in one sitting.' It was performed for the first time a fortnight later, by the R.M.S. Quartet at a musical soirée in the house of the conductor Nikolay Rubinstein in Moscow. It appears that Rubinstein himself was not present, but his elder brother, Anton, the pianist, was, and having listened to the quartet with evident displeasure declared with characteristic discourtesy that it was not true chamber music at all and that he could not understand it (although the four players and other members of the audience were obviously delighted with it). Nevertheless it seems probable that Tchaikovsky made some adjustments before the second performance, which was given in public on 22 March – with universal approval. The score was dedicated to Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich.

The first movement begins with a chromatic and impassioned slow introduction featuring two cadenza-like flourishes for the first violin. The winding first subject, introduced straightaway by the first violin, is also chromatic and rather melancholy in character, but the compact second subject (in G), approached by way of a bustling and syncopated transition, is suggestive of a robust Russian folk tune; its subsequent treatment offers the first of many instances in the quartet of a positively orchestral style of writing for the four instruments. The development makes use of both themes and is followed by a recapitulation that is regular but for the fact that it begins with the fifth bar of the first subject, and by a substantial coda that is really an extension of the development. The Scherzo, in D flat, is in a metre of 6/8, 6/8, 9/8, which produces an

attractively lopsided 7/4 rhythm that is characteristic of many Russian folk tunes; it encloses a waltz-like Trio in A. There are no formal repeats in either section of the movement, but the reprise of the Scherzo is extended with a coda.

The slow movement, in F minor, is in ternary form, with an expressive introductory passage preceding the presentation of the main theme, in which the interval of a failing fourth is a prominent feature. There is a very active and syncopated middle section beginning in E major, with further use of quasi-orchestral effects, followed by a reprise which begins with a shortened version of the introduction, an enriched and elaborated treatment of the 'fourths' theme, and a powerful coda which includes a retrospective glance at the music of the central episode. The finale is a rondo based on a vigorous refrain with a persistent dactylic rhythm, and with a broad subsidiary theme in D flat which, like the one in the last movement of the contemporary Piano Concerto in B flat minor, returns triumphantly (and in the 'home' major key) in the final pages of the movement. There are two main episodes, the first in parallel semiquavers, and the second beginning in the style of a rather angular fugue.

The third and last quartet was begun during a brief stay in Paris in January 1876, where he was profoundly moved by a performance of Bizet's *Carmen* at the Opéra Comique. The quartet was completed within a month or so, and was first performed at a soirée given by the pianist Nikolay Rubinstein on 14 March. The audience was enthusiastic but Tchaikovsky was less certain of its quality. 'I think I have rather written

myself out,' he said to his brother Modest, 'I am beginning to repeat myself and cannot conceive anything new. Have I really sung my swan song, and have nowhere further to go? It is terribly sad. However, I shall endeavour to write nothing for a while but try to regain my strength.' Two weeks later, on 28 March, the quartet was performed at the Moscow Conservatoire in honour of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich and two more public performances were given within less than a week. Tchaikovsky dedicated the quartet to the memory of his friend, the Czech violinist Ferdinand Laub (1832–1875), who had led the first performances of his first two quartets, in 1872 and 1874.

The first movement begins with a substantial slow introduction (Andante sostenuto), solemn and elegiac in mood, and clearly meant as an affectionate tribute to the quartet's dedicatee. It prefaces an even more substantial Allegro moderato with two distinct subjects and a coda in 6/8 and marked (like the introduction) Andante sostenuto; it has aptly been described as a huge *valse triste*. The second movement is a lively scherzo in B flat major, which provides brief but welcome relief between the weighty first movement and the grief-laden Andante in E flat minor, with its telling use of discreet pizzicato; there is a brief but powerful episode in B major, marked con dolore. The vigorous finale is marked risoluto, as though Tchaikovsky has realised that he had expressed enough grief and should end his funeral tribute and crown it with a positive note, as a salute to a fine musician.

The string sextet *Souvenir de Florence* was begun on 13 June 1890 (a week after the completion of Tchaikovsky's first full-length opera, *The Queen of Spades*) and sketches for it were finished on 30 June; its

title refers to the composer's stay in Florence between 30 January and 7 April the same year, during which most of the work on the opera was done, and the sextet does not reflect the nature of the music, which can hardly be described as Italianate. On 12 July he wrote to Nadezhda von Meck, the wealthy and generous Russian patroness whom he never actually met: 'Scarcely was the opera finished before I took up a new work, the sketch of which is already completed. I hope you will be pleased to hear that I have composed a sextet for strings. I know your love of chamber music, and I am glad you will be able to hear my sextet; that will not necessitate your going to a concert as you can easily arrange a performance of it at home. I hope the work will please you; I wrote it with the greatest enthusiasm and without the least exertion.'

To his brother Modest, however, he wrote: 'I am writing under unusual strain, I am embarrassed not by any lack of ideas, but by the novelty of the form. I need six independent and at the same time similar voices. This is incredibly difficult. Haydn could never conquer this difficulty and never composed any but quartet chamber music.' Tchaikovsky's misgivings were echoed by the small audience (which included Glazunov and Liadov) present at a private performance of the sextet in St Petersburg in November, and it was as a result of this that he made some revisions before having the score published in 1892 – though he does not appear to have hit on the most satisfactory way of performing the *Souvenir de Florence*; with a string orchestra.

The sextet was dedicated to the St Petersburg Chamber Music Society and first performed, in its revised form, at one of their concerts, on 7 December 1892. The first movement (in D minor) has a vigorous,

swinging first subject, and a sustained, lyrical second subject that makes a feature of contrasting triple and duple metre; there is an ingenious development section based mostly on the first subject and its offshoots, leading to a dramatically prepared recapitulation, and the movement ends with a coda in quicker tempo. The Adagio cantabile (in D major) is in ternary form, its opening and closing sections featuring an eloquent theme presented by the first violin and first cello in dialogue against a pizzicato triplet accompaniment, framed (but in the varied reprise only concluded) by a solemn chordal passage. There is a colourful middle section in D minor, much more orchestral than chamber-musical in conception, based entirely on quick repeated-note triplets played at the point of the bow. The third movement (in A minor) is a sort of intermezzo, consisting of different settings of its main idea: an emphatic tune of marked Russian flavour. The brilliant, showy finale, which begins in D minor but changes to D major about two-thirds of the way through, is also based on a theme that owes much more to Russia than Tuscany and proves to be aptly suited for contrapuntal treatment.

Between 1863 and 1864 Tchaikovsky wrote a handful of short pieces for various small instrumental combinations and all are melodious and attractive. This recording features an Allegretto moderato in D for string trio, and three pieces: an Allegretto in E, an Allegro vivace in B flat, and an Andante molto in G, for string quartet.

Complete Solo Piano Music

Unlikely as it may seem, there had been no large-scale, comprehensive recorded collection of Tchaikovsky's piano music until the appearance in 1970 of Michael Ponti's first three-disc Vox album (digitally remastered for CD on VoxBox CD3X 3025). That included complete performances all of the relatively early works (Opp. 1,2,4, 5 , 7 , 9 , 10, 19, and 21), plus –from the composer's middle period – the Op.37 sonata, the Op.40 collection of 12 pieces, and the Op.59 *Dumka*. Yet, even as extensive a program as this (one including several pieces never before recorded and many recorded for the first time in stereo) covered barely half of the Tchaikovskian piano-solo repertory.

The present volume of Ponti performances not only complements the first volume but completes his task of recording this repertory in its entirety. Besides the once very popular *Album for the Young* and *The Seasons* series and the less familiar musical portraits of six fair ladies of Op.51, this set represents the fascinatingly contrasted earliest and last Tchaikovskian compositions for piano: the student Sonata in C sharp minor (bearing a high opus number only because it was published posthumously) and the inexplicably neglected eighteen pieces of Op.72 that were written a bare half-year before Tchaikovsky's untimely death. And although there are only five works with opus numbers, plus five miniatures without such designations, the present recording includes – if one counts the individual pieces in the collections – no fewer than sixty-one to be added to the forty-five in the first volume – for a grand total of 106.

Why has such a substantial contribution to the keyboard literature remained so little known and appreciated (apart of course from the half-dozen 'hit' pieces ironically most often heard in transcriptions)? There are several plausible answers: the near extinction of the amateur pianists for whom so many of Tchaikovsky's (and his contemporaries') salon pieces were primarily intended … the scarcity of representative individual recordings resulting from the going-out-of-print of so many fine 78-rpm and mono-LP exemplars … the mid-twentieth century taste-revulsion against the Romanticism dominant for so many previous years … the generally low evaluation of Tchaikovsky's piano music, a supposedly authoritative depreciation that – just or unjustly – has damned most of it to institutional, at least, neglect…

The first answer is unquestionably a valid one. The second surely represents more of a consequence than a cause. The third has been powerfully valid for several decades, but it is now becoming far less influential; indeed there seems to be at least the beginnings of a complete taste reversal and a revival of a vogue for Romanticism both in music and elsewhere. The fourth answer also may have been valid for some years, but the chances are good that it carries little weight with most of today's younger listeners insistent on the right to make up their own minds and form their own judgments. Whatever their eventual verdict, they must surely relish the present opportunity of hearing, for the first time, all Tchaikovsky's piano music speaks as it can more eloquently than any surrogate, however 'expert' – for itself.

Since the published scores are likely to be unknown to most present-day music-lovers, and because it is difficult for listeners who are not musicians to differentiate clearly a considerable number of short pieces

heard in immediate succession, the present annotator has endeavored to provide as much detailed factual information as possible – dates, key and time signatures, tempo and performance specifications, etc. I have appended a chronology intended to ease the task of placing each piano work (listed in bold face type) in its proper relation to Tchaikovsky's compositions in other media and to the principal events in the composer's all too-short life.

The Seasons Op.37a

There seems to be no rational explanation for using 'The Seasons' as a title for a series of twelve pieces captioned separately by the names of the months; nor is there any reason (except publishing confusion) for assigning Op.37a (or Op.37 bis) to this collection after Op.37 already had been attached to the Piano Sonata in G. But instead of trying to clear up these mysteries, Tchaikovskian commentators have been more often fascinated with the probably not entirely apochryphal anecdote of its compositional circumstances. The work was commissioned for serial publication in the St. Petersburg musical magazine *Nuvellist* during 1876. Tchaikovsky wrote the first piece in December of 1875, but, fearing that he might forget the later monthly deadlines, took the precaution of instructing his servant to remind him. So, just before each due-date, the servant would dutifully warn: 'Pytor Ilyich, it's about time to send something off to St. Petersburg', and, no less dutifully, Tchaikovsky would drop whatever else he was working on to dash off a short piano piece that would be more-or-less appropriate in character for the month in which it was to be published.

Slight enough as most of the *morceaux* may be, they not only serve their purpose admirably but they include a couple of those charismatic inspirations that somehow achieve and hold world-wide popularity. And like those other Tchaikovskian hits (*Song Without Words* Op.2 No. 3; *Romanze* Op. 4; *Humoresque* Op.10 No.3; and *Chanson triste* Op.40 No.2), the present June and November pieces – and, for that matter, others in *The Seasons* series too – are far more often heard in transcriptions than in their original form.

The January piece, subtitled *By the Hearth*, in A, *Moderato semplice*, *ma espressivo*, 3/4, is characterized by a wistfully feminine Erst section, a graceful if languishing middle section (*Meno mosso with Ieggierissimo arpeggios*), and, after the repetition of Part I, a morendo coda with reminiscences of both themes. For February there is a dashing *Carnival*, in D, *Allegro giusto*, 2/4, with some mood changes but no loss of vigor in the plunging *Istesso tempo* middle section. For March there is a quiet, delicately rhapsodic *Song of the Lark*, in G minor, *Andantino espressivo*, 2/4, later *un pochettino piú mosso* – a hauntingly evocative miniature tone-poem only two printed pages in length. And for April there is a brisk but lyrical *Snow-Drop* (or *Lily of the Valley*), in B-flat, *Allegretto con moto e un poco rubato*, 6/8, with a graceful, more improvisatory middle section, *Con grazia e poco meno animato*.

Summer begins with May, a tenderly expressive *Starlight Nights*, in G, *Andantino*, 9/8, opening with rolled chords. The middle section is a markedly contrasting, rather Schumannesque *Allegro giocoso*, 2/4; but the

calm *Andante* returns cantabile and the piece closes quietly, ppp. June is one of Tchaikovsky's happiest inspirations, a *Barcarolle* in G minor, *Andante cantabile*, common time, with an enchantingly lovely melody over a rocking accompaniment. The middle section in the major mode, *Poco piú mosso*, works up to a rolled-chord climax before the G minor theme returns and the piece ends *morendo* with repeated rolled tonic chords. For July there is a folkish *Song of the Reapers*, in E-flat, with a decisive main theme, *Allegro moderato con moto*, common time; a brisker, staccato middle section and a return to Tempo I, now with accompanying and decorative triplets. And for August there is a zestfully vivacious *Harvest Song*, in B minor, *Allegro vivace*, 6/8, with an effectively contrasting, tenderly songful middle section.

Autumn begins with September's *Hunting Song*, in G, *Allegro non troppo*, common time, featuring double-dotted fanfares and triplet hunting calls. The middle section eases off a bit, but is still brisk and staccato; and the reprise of Part I winds up with great energy and gusto. Next is October's *Autumn Song*, in D minor, appropriately nostalgic with a main theme marked *Andante doloroso e mollo cantabile*, common time. Its gently rhapsodic right-hand soliloquy is carried on without marked change of mood through what is more an interlude or variation than a true middle section; then a left-hand recitative leads back to Tempo I and eventually to a ppp ending.

Like the June *Barcarole*, the November *Troika* en *traineaux* has achieved world-wide popularity, if more in transcription than as a piano solo. It is in the key of E, *Allegro moderato*, common time, with a wayward

yet irresistibly catchy main theme, and an even snappier middle section, *Grazioso*, which has been variously interpreted as depicting jingling sleigh-bells or a Russian peasant dance. The return of Part I is followed by a coda with dying echoes of the main theme under more florid right-hand decorations (the three-horse sleigh vanishes in distant snow-flurries?). Finally, the year-end December piece, *Christmas*, begins with a fleetly flowing, very Tchaikovskian waltz in A-flat, *Tempo di Valse*, 3/4, with an easier but still very graceful middle section in E that features a cute little four-note turn figure. A tiny cadenza leads back to Tempo I, and reminiscences of the main theme continue into the coda, appearing for the last time in left-hand octaves just before the quiet ending.

Six Pieces Op.51

According to some accounts, the six pieces of Op. 51 were written at Kamenka in August 1882 in response to a request by Jürgenson, Tchaikovsky's principal publisher, who wanted more piano solos for his catalog (there had been no new ones since 1878). But it's significant that earlier, in February, Tchaikovsky had futilely requested Jürgenson's permission To accept a 600-ruble commission - from the editor of the Nuvellist who had commissioned *The Seasons* – for six more short pieces. It was perhaps to calm Tchaikovsky's annoyance over the loss of those tempting 600 rubles that Jürgenson himself asked for six pieces. But what he offered for them seems to have escaped the notice of the biographers. More to the point: three of the Op.51 pieces are waltzes and all of them are dedicated to women, of whom only one is likely to be generally familiar by name: Mme. Vera Rimsky-Korsakov, not the composer's wife but

Tchaikovsky's niece, née Davidov, who married a relative of Rimsky-Korsakov the composer. Op.51 No.1 is a waywardly rippling, quite bravura *Valse de salon*, in A flat, *Allegro*, 3/4, with a hesitant, chordal, more episodic middle section and a quasi-cadenza leading to the return of Tempo 1. No.2 is a piquantly rhythmed *Polka peu dansante*, in B minor, *Allegro moderato*, 2/4, with a quieto middle section featuring a songful alto melody that is quite emotional. After the repetition of the A section, the B section's broken-chord accompaniment reappears, but now under a different alto melody, in the coda. No.3 is a fanciful *Menuetto scherzoso*, in E flat, *Moderato assai*, 3/4, with a chromatic and intricate quasi-improvisatory main section, and a brief middle-section with right-hand phrase-bits followed by little left-hand runs, later with more florid right-hand responses.

No.4, the *Natha Valse*, in F sharp minor/A major, *Moderato*, 3/4, is so gentle, hesitant, and ultra-feminine that it surely must be a tone-portrait of Natha Plesskaya to whom it is dedicated. The middle section is a more skittish and vivacious *Animato glimpse* of Natha in a livelier mood. Probably No. 5, a richly songful yet also very gracefully feminine *Romance*, in F, similarly portrays Tchaikovsky's niece, Vera Rimsky-Korsakov, who was to die tragically young only a few years later. Its quintessentially romantic main section, *Andante cantabile*, common time, is followed by an effectively contrasting *Molto piú mosso* with a more florid, sometimes syncopated righthand melody featuring a distinctive five-note turn phrase, and after a *stringendo* climax a quasicadenza recitative leads back to Tempo I. (Not surprisingly, this *Romance* has been fitted out with German words and was once popular, in Europe at least, as a song.) No. 6 concludes

Op. 52 with its third waltz, a *Valse sentimentale*, in A-flat, *Tempo di Valse*, 3/4, which begins with a smoothly rippling Chopinesque flow, *con espressione e dolcezza*, that gives way to a *Tranquillo* middle section (with a briefly more pressing, *piú presto*, middle section of its own). After the repetition of Part I, an ad *libitum cadenza* prefaces the last few ritenuto bars. This piece, too, has frequently been transcribed, most successfully perhaps for violin and piano.

Album for the Young Op.39

The model for Tchaikovsky's *Album for the Young* probably was the Op.68 *Album für die Jugend* (1848) of Schumann rather than the latter's more famous Op.15 *Kinderszenen* (1838), since this collection compromises a considerable number of very short pieces (although far fewer than Schumann's) that are intended to be played by – rather than to – youngsters. This Op.39 collection was planned early in 1878 during a visit to Florence, completed a few months later at the Kamenka estate of his sister and brother-in-law, the Davidovs, and dedicated to their son 'Bobyk'. This was a period of great creative activity on Tchaikovsky's part: the batch of new manuscripts he sent to Jürgenson in August of 1878 included, beside Op.39, the Op.37 sonata, Op.40 set of piano pieces, Op.41 *St. John Liturgy*, Op.38 set of songs, and Op.42 set of violin pieces. (In addition, the Op.37a *Seasons* series had been completed in April.) Tchaikovsky valued his children's pieces at only ten rubles each as contrasted with the twentyfive rubles each he asked for the longer pieces in Op.40. Only two of tile Op.39 pieces run well over a minute in duration, and most of them around only half-a-minute; in print, nine of them require two pages, most of the rest only a page or less. More signficantly, only one of them (the rhapsodic No.22) makes any special

technical demands on its players and even these are relatively slight, while nearly all the others are digitally, at least, quite easy. The collection begins appropriately with a tenderly earnest *Morning Prayer* in G, *Lento*, 4/4. Nos. 2 and 3 are livetier, respectively a crisp *Winter Morning* scene, in B minor, *Andante*, 2/4, and a briskly cantering *Little Horseman*, in D, *Vivo*, 3/8, staccatissinm the mood shifts back and forth again in Nos. 4 and 5: first in a tender apostrophe to *Mama*, in C, *Andante espressivo*, 3/4 (with *legatissimo* left-hand accompaniment and frequent melodic doubling), then to a prancing *March of the Wooden Soldiers*, in D, *Tempo di marcia*, 2/4.

Nos. 6 and 7 bring tragedy in microcosm: first in the pathos of *The Sick Doll*, in G minor, *Lento*, 2/4, then in the ceremonial gravity of *Dolly's Funeral*, in C minor, *Grave*, 2/4. But life goes on, even in the nursery; No. 8, a piquantly rhythmed, catchily tuneful *Waltz,* in E flat, *Vivace*, 3/4, prefaces a zestful arrival of *The New Doll* (No. 9), in B flat, *Andantino*, 3/8. Then, No.10 is a toe-tickling *Mazurka*, in D minor, *Tempo di Mazurka*, 3/4, No.11 is a simple *Russian Folksong*, in F, *Comodo*, 3/2 (2/4), only 10 bars in length (used earlier in Tchaikovsky's piano duet arrangements of fifty Russian folksongs of 1868–9); and No.12 is a *Peasant's Song* in B flat, *Andantino con molto sentimento*, 2/4. This last bears the German note: '*Der Bauer spielt Jarmonika*', which is incomprehensible if one expects to hear the imitation of a mouthharmonica (a semantic trap into which even the great Grove's Dictionary carelessly stumbles). What is meant is a *Ziehharmonika, i.e.* a concertina with what Edwin Evans cites as the 'monotonous alternation of two chords, characteristic of that arch-enemy of Russian folk-music, the accordion'.

Nos. 13 through 18 are dominated by folksong influences and dance rhythms. No.13 is *Folk Song (Russian Dance*), in D, *Comodo*, 2/4, which will sound familiar to everyone who knows Glinka's more elaborate use of the same tune in his *Kamarinskaya*. No. 14 is a delectably piquant and irresistibly toe-tickling *Polka*, in B flat, *Allegretto*, 2/4; and No. 15 is nearly as sprightly, an *Italian Ditty*, in D, *Vivo*, 3/8 (6/8), with a *sempre staccato* oom-pah-pah left-hand accompaninient. This tour continues with No.16's calm, antique-colored *Old French Melody*, in G minor, *Andantino*, 2/4; No.17's amusing, quasi-yodeling *German Song*, in E flat, *Tranquillo*, 3/4; and No.18's bouncy, high-spirited *Neapolitan Dance Tune*, in E flat, *Comodo*, later *Piú mosso*, 2/4. This last is sure to be identified by balletomanes as a simplified version of the First two sections with cornet solo, of the Neapolitan Dance in Act IV of *Swan Lake,* written some three years earlier.

Next, No.19 proves to be perhaps the most remarkable of all the twenty-four pieces: a *Nursery Tale* (or *Old Nurse's Song*), in C*, Con moto*, 2/4 – a light but vivid evocation of some kind of dramatic events that powerfully remind us of Tchiaikovsky's exceptional gift for 'theatrical' music-making. No.20, however, and despite its vigor, portrays a scarcely very menacing *Witch* (or *Baba-Yaga*), in E minor, *Vivace*, 6/8. No.21, *Sweet Dreams*, in C, *Andante*, 3/4, is the longest and most hauntingly melodic of the entire set; while No.22, *Song of the Lark*, in G, *Lentamente,* 3/4, provides the most (at least relatively) bravura writing in its floridly rhapsodic right-hand anbesques and grace notes. The penultimate No.23, *The Organ Grinder* (or *Hurdy-Gurdy Man*), in G *Moderato*, 3/4, is especially interesting for its use of the popular Venetian tune that made such an impression on the composer when he first heard it on his 1877 visit to Venice that he

wrote it down and later sent a copy to Mme. Von Meck, telling her how pleased he had been with the 'pretty voice' and 'innate rhythmic sense' of the street-singer who, accompanied by his little daughter, used to appear every evening outside the composer's hotel. This is the same tune he also used in the 'interruption' section of *Rêverie interrompue*, Op.40, No.12. Finally, the Op.39 collection concludes (appropriately balancing its devotional beginning) with No.24's gravely chanting *ln Church*, in E minor, *Largo*, 2/4 – a piece particularly notable for the deep-bell tolling effect of the pedal-point low E throughout the last 21 of the 52 bars overall.

Sonata in C sharp minor Op.80 (Posthumous)

For many years Tchaikovsky was credited with only one piano sonata, that in G, Op.37, of 1878, since his first attempt remained obscure even after Jürgenson published it as Op.80 in 1900. Some of the experts think it never should have been published at all, but most of them agree that it – considered as no more than a student work – is of considerable interest for the flashes of promise it shows, along with obvious signs of technical immaturity. The MS is dated 1865, Tchaikovsky's last year as a student, and it was completed before he graduated from and left the St. Petersburg Conservatory to take up a post as teacher in the Moscow Conservatory. Thus it predates any of his other surviving solo piano music except for the F minor *Scherzo*, also of 1865, which was later revised and published as No.2 in Op.2.

The sonata begins *Allegro con fuoco* in common time with a first theme featuring a *marcata* five-times-repeated chord motive, the emphatic nature of which is somewhat weakened by a couple of more tentative *Andante* bars before the work picks up momentum in a ballade-like flow. The second theme, arching over a pedal-point B for its first four bars, provides effectively lyrical ('Brahmsian', according to Dickinson) contrast even though its later embellishments are not particularly imaginative. However, there are more imaginative touches, along with considerable repetition, in the development and recapitulation sections, which are followed by a ten-bar *Andante* coda with thematic reminiscences.

The slow movement is a calm *Andante* in A, 3/4, mildly Schumannesque in character, but somewhat tentative and naive both in the *semplice* theme itself and its four mostly brighter but rather pretentiously climaxed variations.

The following scherzo, back in the tonic C sharp minor, *Allegro vivo,* 3/8, is much more distinctive with an ingeniously contrived, zestfully snappy nervously rhythmed main theme that the composer himself evidently relished, for he made use of it again for his first symphony, begun the next year, completed in 1868, and later published as Op 13. The sonata's gracefully swaying, soon more floridly arabesqued, trio is not the same as that in the symphony however. Then, after the repetition of the restless first section, there is an epilogue (*Quasi adagio, Adagio, Presto, Adagio*) that prepares the way for the *Allegro vivo, alla-breve* finale with a rather tumultuous but forceful First theme and a more romantic, sonorously chordal second

(correctly if paradoxically marked *Tranquillo ma energic*). 'The development and recapitulation are indefatigably vigorous and the sonata ends rousingly in the major mode, but – curiously – in the tonic key's enharmonic equivalent, D flat.

Pieces Op.72

In April/May of 1893, the last year of the composer's life, Tchaikovsky wrote (or in some cases perhaps revised earlier sketches) what is over all his most substantial work for piano solo, Op.72. Most of its eighteen pieces are relatively short (four of them decidely so) and only two (Nos. 7 and 10) run as long as five minutes or more. The familiar ternary, or A–B–A, form (favored in so many of Tchaikovsky's, and other composers', shorter compositions) predominates, of course, but there is more marked variety in mood and style than in earlier collections. Most strikingly, each of these pieces is distinguished not only by polished craftsmanship but also by the magisterial assurance of the craftsman himself. One significant tribute to the varied appeal of these pieces: each of three leading commentators selects a different one for his highest praise: No.18 is the 'most satisfactory' for Dickinson; for Evans many are 'gems' but No.2 is an 'inspiration'; and for Weinstock No.5 'is perhaps the best of all [Tchaikovsky's] compositions for solo piano'. The composer's American biographer also notes in some of the 'discarded fragments' from the *Pathhtique* Symphony, which had been sketched earlier in the year although it was not to be orchestrated until August. Each of the eighteen pieces is dedicated to a friend, men as well as women, but again the

names are likely to be unfamiliar to presentday American music-lovers except for the conductor-propagandist for so many of Tchaikovsky's orchestral works, Vasily llich Safonov, and for two pianistic giants, Alexander Siloti and Vasily Sapelnikov.

Op.72 No.1 is an *Impromptu*, in F minor, *Allegro Moderato e giocoso*, 3/4, with a skittishly bouncing and running right-hand part above an accompaniment marked *sempre staccato in la mano sinistra*. The music-box *poco meno* middle-section is easier and more melodious; and the repetitlon of Part I works up un *poco accelerando* and *piú allegro* before the last appearance of the main theme and a quiet ending.

No.2 is a gently atmospheric *Berceuse*, in A flat, *Andante mosso*, common time, with a rocking accompaniment figure that may remind some listeners of a similar one in Borodin's orchestral tone poem *In the Steppes of Central Asia* (1880). The middle section is so brief as to be more than an interlude before the main theme returns, for a time in flowing triplets, with the ostinato left-hand accompaniment figure persisting until just before the *pppp* ending.

No.3 is more vivacious than its title, *Tender Reproaches,* might suggest. It is in C sharp minor, *Allegro non tanto ed agitato*, 2/4, that broadens *poco meno animato* to an *allargando* climax followed by running passages before both the first and second themes return and the piece ends with quiet reminiscences of the second theme's dotted-rhythm motive.

No.4 is more frankly bravura *Danse caractéristique*, in D, *Allegro giusto* (*sempre staccatissimo*), 2/4, with several *quasi-glissando* run-passages. The middle section is marked *Pochissimo meno allegro* with a right-hand melody in octaves that works up *stringendo* before the return to Tempo I and a dashing *martellato* conclusion.

No.5 changes the mood abruptly to the serenity of a *Méditation,* in F sharp minor, *Andante mosso*, 9/8, (dedicated to Safonov), with a *cantabile* melody that gives way to a more animated middle section that is worked up somewhat pretentiously before the first theme returns, now more floridly elaborated.

No.6 is a brusquely rhythmed *Mazurka pour danser*, in B flat, *Tempo di Mazurka*, 3/4, with a quite brief middle section that features an oddly original melody in the tenor register.

No.7, one of the two longest pieces in the set, is a 'grandly striding' *Concert Polonaise*, in E flat, *Tempo di polacca*, 3/4. Its *molto brilliante* main theme is a rambunctious one, but the easier, tuneful middle section has a more delicately articulated poloniase rhythm, and the repetition of Part I is worked up with considerable virtuosity to a breathless *Presto – Prestissimo* conclusion.

No.8 shifts the mood back again to a calm *Dialogue,* in B, *Allegro Moderato*, 3/4, with nostalgic *quasi parlando* melodic bits in the right-hand and grave left-hand response. The middle section begins *Un poco*

sostenuto (*dolce espressivo*), but soon works up to a *Poco sostenuto* (*appassionato e un poco rubato*) before the return of the quiet opening dialogue and a *ritenuto molto* ending.

No.9 is a tribute to one of the composer's idols: *Un poco di Schumann*, in D-flat, *Moderato mosso*, 2/4 – a sprightly little piece, if only mildly Schumannesque in character, with less a true middle section than an interlude featuring an insistent five-note motive for a few bars before the return to Tempo I.

The last half of Op.72 begins with the second of its two longest and most virtuosic pieces: No.10 (dedicated to Alexander Siloti), the *Scherzo-Fantasie*, in E flat minor, *Vivace asssai,* 12/8. Its sparkling if somewhat insistent A section is followed by an effectively contrasting, easier B section notable for an odd *ostinato* figure rumbling in the bass under florid right-hand arabesques. The repetition of A works up in bravura fashion and there are reminiscences of B before the end.

No.11 reverts to the shittish femininity of most of the Op.51 dances in a rippling *Valse bluette,* in E flat, *Tempo di Valse*, 3/4. The middle section begins a bit languishingly but soon becomes more florid in its turn, working up to a little cadenza just before the return to Tempo No.12 is titled *L'Espiégle*, a French equivalent of the German *Eulenspiegel,* i.e., a rogue or jokester, like the one to be made famous only a few years later by Richard Strauss in his 1895 tone poem *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*. Tchaikovsky's musical portrayal (in E*, Allegro moderato, con grazia, in modo di Scherzo*, common time) seems to be more

one of an impish youngster, with the sparkling runs and passage-work of the first section giving way briefly to a more hesitant *Poco piu tranquillo*, before the return of the high-jinks and a gay rush to the end.

No.13 is another short piece, *Echo rustique*, in E flat, *Allegro non troppo*, 2/4, in which, after a dotted-rhythm prelude, glittering *quasi campanelli* or music-box passages in a high register alternate with a bluffly straightforward folkish tune – a fascinating contrast that Dickinson finds akin to that of Debussy's well-known prelude *Minstrels*, written seventeen years later.

From anticipating Debussy, Tchaikovsky turns immediately to echoing Liszt. For No.14, the *Chant élégiaque*, in D flat, *Adagio* (*cantando quanto possible*), common time, strongly reminds one of the earlier composer's fanious (or notorious) *Liebestraum*, No.3, in A flat, of c.1850. The hauntingly romantic main theme gives way for a time to a more animated, questing *Piú mosso, moderato assai (dolcissimo)* middle section with soprano/tenor responsive phrases. The more ripplingly elaborated return of the main theme includes a *quasi cadenza* before the piece's *pppp* ending.

No.15, like No.9, is a tribute to one of the composer's pianistic idols: *Un poco di Chopin,* in C sharp minor, *Tempo di Mazurka*, 3/8. It's a sprightly, elastic piece, if neither markedly Polish nor Chopinesque, with a crisp first section followed by a more floridly running middle section marked to be repeated (as indeed it is by recording pianist Ponti) before the return to Tempo I.

No.16 is a fascinating *Valse á cinq temps* (i.e. Five-Beat Waltz), in B minor, *Vivace*, 5/8, with no true middle section although there is a brief interlude of *leggiero* left-hand/right-hand chord alternations before the main theme returns. But the piece is so catchily appealing as a whole that it must be ranked – despite its smaller scale – with the more famous Tchaikovskian utilization of quintuple meter in the second movement of his sixth symphony, which had been sketched out only a month or so. before this piece was composed.

No.17 also may be somewhat reminiscent of that symphony, but it is the somberness of the *Pathétique* that colors this evocation of the *Distant Past*, in E flat, *Modemto assai, quasi andante*, common time The grave opening soliloquy (*cantabile con noblezza e intimo sentimento*) is succeeded for a time by a mildly agitated *Piú mosso* middle section, but this soon relaxes and leads back via a recitative to Tempo I.

No.18 is a *Scéne dansante* (*Invitation au Trépak*), in C dedicated to the piano virtuoso Sapelnikov), which begins, *Allegro non tanto*, 2/4, with firmly declamatory phrases alternating with faster passages leading to the Trépak itself, *Allegro vivacissimo* – a characteristically Russian dance that is worked up with dazzling éclat to provide an appropriately brilliant conclusion both to the Op.72 collection and to Michael Ponti's collection of Tchaikovsky's complete piano works.

R.D. Darrell

Eugene Onegin

The moderate success of the premiere of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, performed for the first time in March 1879 by students of the Moscow Conservatory, did not deter its conductor, Nicolai Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky's pupil Sergei Taneyev or the influential critic Hermann Laroche from predicting the work's considerable future significance in opera repertoire worldwide. This prognosis was later confirmed at its performance in St. Petersburg in 1884 and still remains valid today, even though the piece is not actually an opera in the accepted 19th-century sense: with the subtitle 'lyrical scenes', Tchaikovsky indicates the work's elegiac mood from the very beginning, a mood which dispenses with overt drama. He commented on this in a letter to Taneyev (1878): 'I couldn't care less about how it works on the stage […] I couldn't care less about special effects […] I don't need Czars and Czarinas, revolutions, battles, marches – to be brief, anything which is considered Grand Opéra. I was looking for an intimate and yet shocking drama – based on conflicts which I myself have experienced or witnessed, which are able to move me profoundly.' For these reasons, Tchaikovsky concentrated less on the political plot motivations in the opera's literary model, the eponymous verse novel by Alexander Pushkin, and was more concerned to set the nuances of the characters' emotional world to music. Thus the melancholy proceeding from the drama's tragic events becomes thoroughly personal: parallels between Tatyana, the protagonist of the opera, and Tchaikovsky's admirer Antonia, to whom he was married for only a few unhappy months, also between Eugene Onegin, who (at least to begin with) shows so little interest in a 'bourgeois' (marriage) relationship,

and Tchaikovsky himself, are clamorously apparent. However, it was not just the associations with Tchaikovsky's personal life which made the subject matter close to the composer's heart; the constellation of contrasting and conflicting characters described here also gave him the opportunity to develop his 'musical personality' (Tchaikovsky): his wide-ranging cantilenas constitute a melodic richness in which elegiac sorrow alternates with dreaminess. The creative power of the orchestral writing, characteristic of Tchaikovsky, illustrates the inner psychology of the events, as is the case with Tatyana's leitmotif, a descending lament already to be found in the orchestral prelude, and which then returns many times in the course of the work. The choruses of farmers and maidservants in the first and third scenes as well as folkloristic songs and dances lend stylised Russian national colour – by contrast, the balls of noble Russian society feature waltz, mazurka and polonaise with which Tchaikovsky-contrary to the efforts of the supporters of Russian national music – professes his adherence to western (musical) tradition and convention. It is no surprise, in conclusion, that this opera by the composer of *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* was also a triumphant success in its adaptation as a ballet.

Stephanie Schroedter

Translation: Deborah Holmes

Synopsis

Act I

Eugene Onegin is set in Russia in the early years of the 19th century. The beginning of the opera, set on Lady Larina's manorial lands, opens with an exchange of reminiscences between Larina and her nurse Filipyevna of the former's happy girlhood. Farmers present Larina with a harvest wreath and break into a merry folksong. Olga, Larina's younger daughter, likes nothing better than to join in the festivities, whereas her sister Tatyana remains aloof from the action, engrossed in a sentimental novel. Lensky, a neighbouring squire, Olga's swain, arrives with his friend Onegin. The coolness of Onegin's blasé attitude impresses Tatyana deeply, she hangs on his every word as he recounts anecdotes of his earlier life. Later in her bedroom, Tatyana cannot sleep; to her, the new arrival is like a hero from one of her novels. She makes a passionate confession of her feelings to Filipyevna and in a state of high excitement writes Onegin a letter telling him all. The next day, the pair meet in the garden. Onegin explains to her in a formal and haughty manner that although he found her confession moving, he is unable to love her and is not the type of man to marry. Tatyana is disappointed and deeply insulted.

Act II

The next act opens with a ball held by Larina on her estate to celebrate Tatyana's name day. Onegin dances with Tatyana, which causes much speculation among the other guests. Annoyed that he allowed Lensky to

talk him in to attending the ball, Onegin begins to flirt with Olga. Olga's ready response worsens the situation by putting Lensky out of sorts. Triquet, an elderly neighbour, has written a short verse in Tatyana's honour; the quarrel between Lensky and Onegin comes to a head as Olga chooses Onegin as her partner for the cotillon, to punish Lensky for his jealousy. Lensky challenges his friend to a duel. As the day breaks, Lensky waits pensively for Onegin. Both parties ultimately appreciate the nonsensical nature of the duel as they face each other as enemies, however neither takes the first step towards reconciliation. Onegin shoots first and kills his friend.

Act III

The third act takes place years later in on elegant St. Petersburg salon. After a long absence Tatyana, now married to Prince Gremin, meets Onegin again by chance. The Prince enthuses over his married bliss to Onegin and introduces him to Tatyana, who greets Onegin coldly and immediately dismisses him. Onegin is suddenly struck with the realisation of his repressed love for Tatyana and wants see her again. Tatyana awaits Onegin's visit at home but rejects his passionate pleas that she should come away with him, citing his previous heartless behaviour as a reason. Had he not rejected her, she would not have married Gremin. In a moment of weakness, Tatyana confesses her undiminished love to Onegin but also informs him of her intention to remain true to her husband. Onegin is thus forced to relinquish his hopes and rushes from the house in despair.

Melodies and colours from the land of the Czars: Tchaikovsky's opera Oprichnik

Considering that *Voevoda* (taken from Ostrovskij's *A dream on the Volga*), staged in Moscow in 1869, was rejected after a few performances by Tchaikovsky himself and that his following attempt, *Undina* (from the novel by La Motte Fouqué), was left in a fragmentary state, *Oprichnik* ought to be considered the Russian composer's first, real, convincing step of his theatrical career. Moreover, before destroying the score of *Voevoda* (which was reconstructed from the orchestral parts after the composer's death), Tchaikovsky took some passages from it and re-used them for his *Oprichnik*, composed between the summer of 1870 and the 1st of April 1872, and first staged at the Mariinskij theatre in St. Petersburg on the 12th (24th) April 1874.

Fourteen performances during the course of two seasons and generally positive appraisal in the music world close to the composer bear witness to this work's success, for which also the conductor Eduard Napravnik is to be credited, from 1869 permanent conductor at the Mariinskij's. Of the same age as Tchaikovsky and a friend of his, he put his experience at the composer's disposal from the early stages, suggesting modifications and corrections to the orchestral and vocal parts, some cuts, and many changes in the choice of the cast; and, naturally, he conducted as befitted him the first performances in the spring of 1874. At that time Tchaikovsky was mainly known for *Romeo and Juliet* (1869), the overture-fantasia that had spread his fame throughout the Russian music world. A young teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, he kept good relations both with the academic societies of Anton and Nicola Rubinπtein (under whose wings his *First*

Symphony had been born, not yet published), and with the Group of Five, devoted to the rediscovery of the Russian national roots and lead by Balakirev (to whom he had dedicated the symphonic poem *Fatum* in 1868). The would-be contrast between a 'westernised' Tchaikovsky and the 'Russian national' Group of Five – which is at best superficial – was totally inexistent at the time of *Oprichnik*, when Tchaikovsky was still fully in agreement with some of the Group's positions: the unconditional worship of Glinka, the gathering of popular melodies, regarded as 'sacred relics', the full immersion in Russian historic and popular subject-matters; three elements which, blended with others, are at the core of *Oprichnik*. The libretto of this opera was written by Tchaikovsky himself, who took it from the homonymous drama by Ivanovich Lazechnikov rejected by the censors in the 1840s but republished in 1867 and staged in the Alexandrinski theatre of St. Petersburg and in the Malyj of Moscow. In *Oprichnik*, more than the predictable plot, it is the atmosphere which counts, an atmosphere laden with the admiration and fear inspired by the Czar Ivan the Terrible and his praetorian guard, the *oprichnika*. This corps, under the Czar's direct orders, was formed in 1565 and dissolved after seven years of intimidations and atrocities, leaving, in the literary tradition, an image of unrestrained youth, given to revelries and bloody deeds: sometimes described as a gang of bandits, sometimes as a monastic community devoted do the Czar.

Oprichnik, as we already mentioned, pleased many people. Not its author though, who, after working at it with enthusiasm, when he saw the first rehearsals found it 'without action, without style and inspiration' and despite its numerous performances in Moscow, Odessa and Kiev (where it was received triumphantly),

delayed as far as possible its publication. It is not easy to understand the motives of such a drastic view, which today, really, cannot be endorsed. Wanting to use in his new work many passages from *Voevoda*, in his libretto Tchaikovsky took quite a few liberties with respect to the drama. The result is a work consisting more of situations, of dramatic circumstances than of well-rounded characters. There is one character, actually, which could have provided a strong core: that of Andrej. The son of a boyard, reduced to poverty by a wicked prince who killed his father, he wants to join the corps of the oprichniks so that he can revenge himself on the prince and marry his daughter, with whom he is in love; the youth, however, feels also a strong bond with his mother, who seeks revenge too but, as the one-time noble wife of a boyard, is opposed to the oprichniks, the new militiamen who are coarse and godless. Andrej, torn as he is between his filial duty and his loyalty to the oprichniks, could have been a neat, Schiller-like character. But neat, Schiller-like characters were not for Tchaikovsky, who gave Andrej a pale role and focussed more on the atmosphere of loneliness and submission hovering around the female characters, Natal'ja and, in particular, Andrej's mother, Morozova, who is entrusted with the highest passages of the opera.

Most of the first act's music is taken from *Voevoda*: the duet of Zemchuznyj and Mit'kov; the episode of Natal'ja with her nurse and friends; the duet of Andrej and Basmanov. In the first case the union between pre-existing music and new text produces a curious yet interesting incongruence: the music flows away light and witty, and the two characters would appear like two old rascals talking of their escapades, except that one is giving his own daughter away to the other for profit; Verdi would have commented: 'we are out of

tone'. This discrepancy, however, has an interesting aspect: while savouring the music in itself, with its masterly features, and bubbly and pleasant atmosphere, we discover Tchaikovsky's modern temperament, his 20th-century disposition of lucid contriver, which Stravinskij had perceptively guessed. The other passages taken from *Voevoda* show no such inconsistencies; in the following number, with the chorus of girls and the entrance of Natal'ja, we plunge into a genuine Russian music tableau; the desolate touch of the 'little duck song', the duckling that strives in vain to fly off the sea, calls to mind a comment of Alberto Savinio (written, actually, for Stravinskij's *Sacre*): 'such melancholy, such resignation, such horizontality make of Russian music an endless and aimless wandering'. Natal'ja is a sentimental girl, a little scatter-brain, she cannot compare with the Tat'jana of *Onegin*, who develops from a romantic girl into an experienced (and disenchanted) woman.

In a rather mechanical, juxtaposed way, Natal'ja's rural tableau is immediately followed by a passage of soaring lyricism; after Andrej and Basmanov leave the garden where they have been made to turn up rather artificially, Natal'ja, thinking she has heard some voices, comes back on stage; as she notes the loneliness of the place, a theme emerges in the orchestra ('largamente, con passione'), then picked up by the voice, in which a loan from Meyerbeer has been recognised, the last act love duet from *Les Huguenots* ('Tu l'a dit: oui, tu m'aime!'). But the lyrical power that dominates the episode has something also of Verdi, calling to mind, for example, *Un ballo in maschera* ('Ebben sì, t'amo', in the second act duet), a work which Tchaikovsky knew well and esteemed. Lyricism of this kind would of course provide the raw material for

the 'letter scene' of *Evgenij Onegin*, whereas here it appears even a little out of place; *Onegin* comes to mind also right after, when Natal'ja, weary after her passionate outburst, sits down absorbed in her thoughts while her friends return singing the previous chorus: her character is, in fact, engulfed by the collective emotion, heedless of individual situations, just like in the scene of the chorus of girls picking blackberries after Tat'jana's bitter disappointment.

The instrumental passage introducing the second act, a bravura piece rich in harmonic nuances, is not by Tchaikovsky but by his friend and pupil Vladimir Cilovskij, the younger brother of that Kostantin who would collaborate to the writing of *Onegin*'s libretto. The practice of sharing the responsibility of a composition with friends and colleagues was a characteristic of Balakirev's group, and this entr'acte is another tangible sign that the Tchaikovsky of the 1870s was indeed supportive of their poetics.
The second act features the entrance of the most successful character – perhaps the only real character – of the opera: Morozova. The scent of Russian musical themes and of orthodox liturgy which this woman carries with her isolate her into her ancient nobility of widow; tightly connected to this atmosphere, which is expressed through a wide-ranging lyrical declamato, is her motherly pride, which embraces feelings of (ill-concealed) resignation, revenge, fear that God might not forgive her hatred and punish her through her son Andrej, the object of her overprotective love. Morozova's first aria, at the opening of the act, and then the duet with her son immediately reveal her authority and shades: the bassoon theme introducing the duet is enough to brand her with the feeling of sadness that oppresses her and of her foreboding worries.

The fragility of Andrej's character is the pivot of the long second act finale, taken entirely by the scene of the oath, a Grand Opéra scene that is clearly inspired by Meyerbeer's *Huguenots* (Gerald Abraham went as far as defining *Oprichnik* 'Meyerbeer translated into Russian'). Basmanov introduces Andrej to the assembled praetorian guards, but the boy cannot make himself pronounce the ritual oath; choruses come in impetuous succession, the oprichniks surround him stretching their blades above his head ('Are you ready to swear?') and warn him that the oath is totally binding and will sever any other bond, be it with family or friends, and that whoever breaks it is punished with death; a pressing 'swear, swear, Andrej Morozov!' echoes all around the poor Andrej, who no longer feels so determined and begins to weep. Finally, realising there is no other way out, he utters the fatal words; a chorus in praise of the Czar ends this finale, which is more impressive than convincing.

The third act opens with an intense and restless chorus of people who invoke the protective help of the Czar; but even more remarkable is the following chorus, the brief but unforgettable one of the boys who insult Morozova in the street: the darting melodies of the wood instruments, the simple incisiveness of the boys' voices, calling to mind the rascals who rob the Innocent in *Boris*, the chorus of people who chase them away, create a realistic tableau of unforgettable vigour. Re-enters Morozova, with her power to spread her emotions around: this time it is Natal'ja that benefits by it. The girl has run away from home and rushes into the arms of Morozova, her beloved Andrej's mother. Though Morozova loves her like a daughter, she invites her to return to her father, causing the girl's beautifully lyrical reaction: she is set in her

decision to face real life, away from the suffocating terem. Their duet is admirable for the use of solo instruments which, emerging from the orchestra, create a feeling of imminent drama. Emotions do not ooze, Tchaikovsky keeps cool and firmly holds the reins of the composition; yet the result is one of great effectiveness in portraying Natal'ja's ripening in preparation of her highest moment, when she faces the prince her father ('Father! I am here before you and before the Lord'), who has come to retrieve her: the slight syncopation of the strings, the clarinet supporting the voice, the melody that is one with the accents of the words, all points to the fact that we are entering the kingdom of psychological introspection, in which Tchaikovsky was a master. Rising against her father, the girl attains her musical character, anticipating what Tat'jana would fully develop in *Onegin*.

The prince, however, is not to be persuaded and orders his servants to seize his daughter; at this point of utmost tension the opera turns to the so-called 'pièce à sauvetage', typical of the French musical theatre after Cherubini's *Lodoïska*: it is a passage of adventurous music, with "the saviours" bursting onto the scene forwarded by explicit offstage shouts of 'make way'. Andrej and Basmanov rush in with the oprichniks and free the girl; the youths are overjoyed but Morozova, shocked at the sight of her son wearing the praetorian uniform, curses him in front of everyone. The curse sets the 'doubt ensemble' moving, another characteristic feature of French opera: everyone is bewildered at the point things have come to and each expresses his/her thoughts on a long harmonic D pedal. Tchaikovsky here shows all his writing skills and pays a devout tribute to Glinka, recalling the ensemble that follows the abduction of Ljudmila.

The fourth act opens with the marriage of Andrej and Natal'ja, featuring the last passages of the opera inspired by folklore. Andrej's farewell to the oprichniks clearly echoes the theme of the 'duckling song' at the beginning of the opera: once again material from *Voevoda* is employed, notably the farewell of Bastrikov from the first act finale. From his symphonic poem *Fatum* Tchaikovsky took, instead, the beautiful lyrical theme which comes in the middle of Andrej and Natal'ja's only love duet ('My light, my life'): in it the French-like charm of the theme, close to Gounod, blends in with the countermelody of the clarinet which, using its dark and gloomy register, lets foresee the precariousness of the newlyweds' happiness. After this, the opera rushes to its tragic conclusion: among coups-de-scène and cruelties, Andrej is made to fall into a trap and Morozova is forced to witness the beheading of her son, cursed yet loved dearly. Broken-hearted, she falls dead to the ground while, offstage, a sombrely triumphant chorus of oprichniks sings in praise of the Czar. It is a peak of evilness, of exaggerated violence; Tchaikovsky would turn away from it in his later masterpieces: *Evgenij Onegin* and the *Queen of Spades* will have neither good nor evil characters; at most it will be life itself to be evil, and destiny, preventing people from enjoying the good things of this world, which a youthful false hope had thought easily accessible.

Translated by Daniela Pilarz

Synopsis

Act I

Prince Zemchuznyj's garden, at nightfall.

Zemchuznyj, the boyard, receives the visit of Molchan Mit'kov, who has come to ask for the hand of his beautiful daughter Natal'ja. The prince accepts, in spite of the suitor's age, but warns him: the girl won't have any dowry.

Enter Natal'ja, accompanied by a procession of handmaids and by Zachar'evna, the nurse. The young princess is listless and bored of the monotonous life she leads in the terem, the high rooms of the noble residence assigned to the women; displeased with the song intoned by her friends, she suggests another, melancholy song, telling the story of a girl died of grief because she was forced to marry an old man. Then, at the nurse's reproaches, she asks her to tell them a love story. Playfully, the girls run off, scattering among the bushes.

Andrej Morozov, his friend Basmanov and a group of Oprichniks (Ivan the Terrible's praetorian guards) arrive. Andrej has come to see his beloved Natal'ja, who is secretly engaged to him, and Basmanov and the guards want to help him fulfil his dream. Left alone with Basmanov, the young man reveals to his friend that he thinks of joining the Oprichnks to obtain by the Czar justice for the wrongs he suffered in the past.

Zemchuznyj, in fact, killed his father and pillaged his family's properties, reducing them to poverty. Basmanov exhorts him not to waste any time and go to his mother in order to get her blessing for the enlistment. Before Andrej leaves, he gives him some money to help him out. Natal'ja, hidden behind the bushes, has overheard their dialogue; distressed, she invokes her beloved, while her nurse and handmaids try to entertain her with some dances.

Act II

First tableau

A farmer's hut.

Princess Morozova, Andrej's mother, sadly recollects the wrongs she suffered from the wicked Zemchuznyj. But she is willing to accept her sad lot, bearing her suffering in silence and forgetting the proud life she led as the wife of the wealthy Prince Morozov, so long as God will protect her son. Enter Andrej, who exhorts her to forget the past and gives her a purse full of money, a sign that things have taken a turn for the best; it is a gift from Basmanov, the Czar's favourite. Morozova is horrified at the sight of the money and warns her son against getting close to Basmanov, for – she says – the terrible sovereign's seneschal is made of the same stuff as the Czar. Andrej reassures her and reveals that the money had been entrusted to the seneschal by his father when they were comrades-in-arms. The princess desperately tries to dissuade him again, but all she can do is beg him not to stain his father's honour and give him her blessing.

Second tableau

The Czar's quarters in the town of Aleksandrovskij.

Around a sumptuously laid table the Oprichniks are singing the Czar's praises when prince Vjaz'minskij comes to interrupt their revelry, lest they disturb the sovereign's rest. Basmanov announces that the Czar has accepted Andrej Morozov's request to enter the Praetorian corps. Vjaz'minskij is furious: he can't accept the son of his fierce enemy to become one of them. Basmanov tries to quench his anger by reminding him that a father's faults should not be on a son's head and that they cannot disobey a royal order; then he leaves to fetch Morozov, while Vjaz'minskij secretly hopes for revenge. In front of the Praetorians, Andrej must take the oath: he must swear to be loyal to the Czar, attend no other duty than the service of his sovereign, forget his blood-ties and his love. The young man proclaims that he is ready, but when Vjaz'minskij reminds him of the terrible punishment that would befall him in case of treachery, he hesitates at the thought of leaving his beloved and denying his mother and father. He has no choice, however: either he joins the Praetorians or he won't have any chance to redeem the wrongs his family suffered. To back out now, moreover, would mean death: urged by Basmanov, Andrej swears.

Act III

A square in Moscow.

The people of Moscow give vent to their despair for having lost the Czar's loving guidance: the sovereign, in fact, has moved away from the city. Morozova, suffering from loneliness and fearing for her son's

destiny, decides to go and pray in the nearby church; as she walks towards it, a group of boys insult her – while people chase them away, Natal'ja arrives at a run and throws herself into her arms. The girl has fled from her father's home, where she was kept like a captive awaiting the forced wedding, and is looking for her help and protection. The woman warns her: it is useless and dangerous to struggle against her powerful, wealthy and determined father. But Natal'ja is prepared to die: life without Andrej would be meaningless. Enter Zemchuznyj, accompanied by his retinue. The girl throws herself at her father's feet, begging for mercy, but at the mention of Andrej's name he reacts harshly and even Morozova's attempts to make him change his mind are all in vain. While Natal'ja is being seized by Zemchuznyj's servants, Basmanov and Andrej arrive with some Praetorians. Morozova immediately realises that her son has joined the Oprichniks. Aware that he is in danger, Basmanov wants to drag Andrej away, but he refuses to go and tries to explain to his mother that he has become a Praetorian for a noble purpose, to gain money and avenge his father. All in vain: Morozova curses her son and falls to the ground, crushed by grief. Basmanov convinces Andrej that the only way he can regain his mother's blessing is to ask the Czar to release him from the oath. So they gallop away towards the royal palace, hoping for the Czar's mercy.

Act IV

The Czar's quarters in the town of Aleksandrovskij.

Natal'ja and Andrej's wedding banquet is under way. Morozov is happy because his request to be released from the oath has been granted and he was able to marry his Natal'ja, rescuing her from Zemchuznyj's

clutches. But it grieves him to know that he must leave the Praetorians, his friends, for he would have wanted to serve his sovereign loyally; then he reaffirms his devotion to the Czar and proclaims that he is ready to defend him always and everywhere. Basmanov reminds him that till the end of the banquet, till midnight, he is still an Oprichnik, owing total obedience to the Czar. Andrej drinks light-heartedly to the Czar's health, but Natal'ja is troubled, she has an unpleasant presentiment and is impatiently awaiting the end of the party. Suddenly a very upset Basmanov arrives and warns Andrej that he is in great danger because of his senseless behaviour. The young man, however, does not seem conscious of the risks he is running. Enter Prince Vjaz'minskij, who announces that the Czar wants to see Andrej's beautiful bride. At first Morozov is proud of such a request, but when he learns that Natal'ja must go alone, he refuses to let her leave without him. The Oprichniks remind him that he must obey or he will infringe the oath that binds him till midnight, while Basmanov tries to convince him that this is nothing but an innocent prank; Vjaz'minskij secretly rejoices, feeling that his revenge is near. Natal'ja and Andrej stand firm in their decision: they prefer to face death than obey. While the girl falls unconscious and is dragged away by the Praetorians, Andrej is arrested and taken to the scaffold, where he is executed under the eyes of Morozova, forced by the wicked Vjaz'minskij to witness her son's death. The opera ends with the woman falling heart-broken to the ground, while the Oprichniks sing the Czar's praises.

Cherevichki

Cherevichki (The Little Shoes) is the eighth complete opera by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, a composer who devoted a great deal of attention to opera, and, probably, more time than to any other musical genre (including symphonies and ballets). Yet among all his operas only two enjoy any degree of popularity outside Russia: *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*. Tchaikovsky composed theatrical works throughout his short and tormented musical career. His first opera, *The Voyevoda*, was written in 1867/68 when he was twenty-eight years old; his last, *Yolanta*k, was staged at the Marynsky Theatre in St Petersburg on 18th December 1892, about a year before the composer's death. *Cherevichki*, however, cannot be considered a wholly original opera; it is a revision of another opera which Tchaikovsky wrote some ten years earlier, *Vakula the Smith*, first staged at the Marynsky Theatre in St Petersburg on 24th May 1876, received with indifference by the public of the capital city.

Vakula the Smith is based on a libretto by Y.P. Polonsky originally written for Alexander Nikolayevich Serov, who died in 1871 without completing his projected opera. The libretto in turn is based on one of Nicolai Gogol's most famous short stories, *Christmas Eve*, which was to provide the inspiration for Rimsky-Korsakov's opera of the same name almost twenty years later. The Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna originally commissioned Serov to write the opera. Pavlovna was a well-known patron of the arts in St Petersburg and an admirer of Serov; the composer's death convinced her to arrange a competition to set the

libretto to music in Serov's memory. When the Grand Duchess herself died in 1873, the Russian Music Society took up the organisation of the competition and set the first of August 1875 as the closing date for the presentation of the scores and a public performance at the Imperial Opera in St Petersburg as the prize for the winner.

We do not know for what reasons Tchaikovsky decided to take part in the competition. We know, however, that he was convinced that the closing date was the first of January 1875. In June 1874 Tchaikovsky set to work with such mounting enthusiasm that he finished the first draft of the entire opera in about six weeks; three weeks later he completed the orchestration. At that point the composer finally realised that he had been working towards an incorrect closing date. Convinced of the quality of the opera and certain that it would be accepted by the Imperial Opera, even without winning the competition, Tchaikovsky tried in vain to withdraw his candidature from the competition. Then, prey to his customary lack of self-confidence, he tried to use some rather irregular tricks to make sure that the score he had sent, which according to the conditions of the competition was to be anonymous, would be easily recognised as his. The competition was held and Tchaikovsky, as predicted, won it on his own merits.

At its first performance *Vakula the Smith* was received, as we have seen, with a certain coolness. The opera was staged again in the following three seasons, but never won the public's favour. Convinced that his opera was basically sound, Tchaikovsky took up the score again in 1885, cut some pieces, added others and

simplified several scenes in order to make them more theatrical. The opera, in its new version with its new title *Cherevichki*, was given its first performance at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow on 31st January 1887, directed by the composer himself. Once again, however, the audience's reaction was cold, and the opera was never staged again in Russia or abroad. Yet Tchaikovsky still thought *Cherevichki* one of his best compositions for the theatre. In 1890 he wrote: 'I have no reserve in seeing *Cherevichki* as part of opera repertoire in future, and in musical terms consider it my finest work'. His confidence in the opera's musical quality was undoubtedly just and reasonable but *Cherevichki* was never to realise his hope and become part of opera repertoire.

The plot of the opera offers a strange mixture of folk and fable elements: Vakula the smith, a spirited young man, has painted a caricature of the devil on the door of the village church. The devil decides to take his revenge: working with Vakula's mother, the witch Solocha, he steals a quarter of the moon on the night of Christmas Eve in order to cause a snowstorm that will prevent Vakula from courting his beloved Oksana, daughter of âub. Oksana will give her love to Vakula in exchange for the Czarina's shoes. The devil offers Vakula a pact: the shoes for his soul. Vakula, however, outsmarts the devil and obliges him to take him to the Czarina. At the palace, the Prince, delighted with the victory that the Russian army has won over its enemy, gives Vakula the shoes without any diabolical intervention. When he returns to the village with the shoes, Vakula at last can marry his beloved Oksana.

On this subject with all its various moods – popular, realistic and grotesque – and its fantasy elements drawn from the rich heritage of Russian legend, Tchaikovsky wrote music which many critics of his time felt had not succeeded in capturing the thousand facets of Gogol's story. As Aldo Nicastro so rightly notes, in his decisive work on the Tchaikovsky opera, Tchaikovsky lacks that 'biting desire for laughter' which animates Gogol's story. Cesar Cui, one of Tchaikovsky's adversaries in the 'Mighty Handful', noticed immediately – correctly though not without a certain amount of malignity – that 'apart from the Devil and Solocha the others do nothing other than complain'. Tchaikovsky's propensity for the elegiac, the melancholy and the sentimental is again clear in *Cherevichki*, but the composer had his trump cards to play too, and he played them with matchless skill and acumen. All the folk elements suggested by the story, its popular dances (the *Polonaise* in the third act especially) and the Christmas carols are underlined and highlighted by Tchaikovsky with a taste for colour and a tender, spontaneous manner that have led many a critic to talk about a declared tribute to the father of Russian national opera, Glinka: not, of course, the Glinka of *A life for the Czar*, but the Glinka of the more fairy-tale country story of *Ruslan and Ludmilla*. Then, in the third act, when the action moves to the apartments of the Czarina, Tchaikovsky is quite at ease in his evocation of a lost world of elegance and delicacy that he loves so dearly. All the scenes in which lyricism prevails are magnificent, like for example Vakula's monologue in Act III, in which the young man, despairing over Oksana's indifference, bemoans his unhappy lot.

Tchaikovsky's attitude to the comic and the fantastic, on the other hand, has won various judgements; though he did not have that 'biting desire for laughter' he did underline gracefully if not forcefully a

number of comic situations in the opera. Delightful examples of this are found in all the scenes between the devil and Solocha, and the characterisation of the various characters, even the minor roles, is consistently masterly. Though we might not fully agree with the definition of 'formidable comic gift' that the *Viking Opera Guide,* perhaps unduly optimistically, attributes to the composer in this opera, we agree totally with the British editor when he states at the end of his article on the opera: 'Vakula the Smith/Cherevichki is unique among Tchaikovsky's operas – the most heart-warming, the most unclouded, and still the most sadly neglected'.

Danilo Prefumo

Translation by Timothy Alan Shaw

Synopsis

Act I

Solocha, an attractive woman who would like to look younger than her years, confesses to the moon that she would like to have fun and spend a carefree Christmas Night. The inhabitants of Dikan'ka do not consider her a normal person: they all think that she is a witch and is capable of doing magic and casting spells. Bes has his eyes on Solocha and pays court to her: he wants to take revenge on her son, the smith Vakula, who in church dared to paint such a ridiculous picture of him that all the other devils in hell laughed and mocked him. On Christmas Night Vakula will go to see his girlfriend Oksana, while her father,

the Cossack Cub, has been invited to the deacon's house in the village. Bes lays his plan: he will kidnap the moon and whip up a snowstorm so that Cub will be forced to go back home. Old Cub will keep the irreverent Vakula away from his beautiful daughter and so the smith will be punished for his misdeed.

In the dark night icy winds blow unleashing a terrible snowstorm. âub and his friend Panas are forced to seek shelter at an inn. When the storm eases, the old man sets off for home again, now quite drunk.

In her little house, Oksana is waiting for her fiancé in her best dress. She has prepared sweets and wine for the group of youngsters who will pass under her windows singing the *koljadki*, the traditional Ukrainian Christmas carols, but she is in a bad mood. She feels abandoned and thinks that no one will ever marry her. When Vakula arrives, Oksana treats him unkindly, reminding him that his mother is a witch and that Cub will soon marry her. Vakula is thunderstruck by her words.

Meanwhile the old Cossack, covered in snow and completely drunk, has made his way back home. He knocks at the door, but Vakula, in a rage, does not recognise him and refuses to let him in, sending him away in a rough manner. Oksana is offended by the way her boyfriend has dared to treat her father and punishes him by exciting his jealousy, telling him that she loves another boy. When the young man leaves crestfallen, Oksana regrets having been so impulsive. She can only think about Vakula and not even the merry band of festive youths can cheer her up and help her forget her remorse.

Act II

Solocha and Bes dance the *gopak* together, but then somebody knocks at the door. It is Pan Golova, the elder of the village, who is also in love with Solocha. Bes just manages to hide in a sack before the man comes in and starts talking to Solocha. Another knock: Golova has to hide in another sack, and another awkward suitor appears, the schoolmaster who tries in vain to seduce Solocha. There is one last sack left for him when âub enters and is received most affectionately by the beautiful witch. Finally Vakula comes back home and Solocha can find no better solution than to get old âub to hide in the same sack as the schoolmaster. The woman then suggests that her son should go and sleep in his workshop. Vakula tries to drag the sacks away; he has to struggle to carry the heavy load out of the house and thinks that his unhappy love has sapped his strength.

The youngsters are singing *koljadki* in the snow-covered road. Oksana joins them and seeing an unhappy Vakula amongst them decides to humiliate him again by recounting what has just happened to her father. Wishing to tease the boy, Oksana now sings the praises of the shoes worn by one of the girls, Odarka. Oksana sighs, saying that no one ever gives her such lovely presents. To win her back Vakula now promises to bring her an even more precious pair of shoes, the Czarina's shoes. Oksana is flattered but keeps on tormenting the smith; laughing, she promises to marry him if he brings her the Czarina's shoes. Vakula moves off, leaving all of the sacks but one which he has on his shoulder. The young singers think the heavy sacks are full of food collected with the *koljadki* and are surprised to see Golova, âub and the schoolmaster come out of them.

Acts III–IV

Vakula is desperate now, thinking that he has been abandoned for ever by Oksana, and decides to commit suicide. Suddenly, in the icy night, Bes leaps out of the sack and jumps onto his back: he tells Vakula that he will have his beloved girl if he gives the devil his soul in exchange. The smith is craftier still: pretending to sign the dreadful pact with his blood, he grabs the devil by his tail and jumps onto his back, deaf to Bes's pleas to let him go. Now it is Vakula's turn to ask for something very important: he wants the Czarina's shoes, and to get them Bes will have to fly him to the sumptuous palace in St Petersburg. The tricked demon and crafty smith enter the magnificent palace. Vakula joins the Cossacks of Zaporoz'e who have defeated their enemy and are about to be received by the Czarina. When it is their turn to be introduced the Cossacks are received in a grand hall where a dancing feast is being held. Vakula makes his request and the Prince, charmed by his simplicity, delights Vakula by giving him the shoes he asks for. The young man gets back onto the devil's back and returns to his village.

The sun is shining in the little square in Dikan'ka but darkness reigns in the spirits of Solocha and Oksana who are now desperate since nothing has been heard of Vakula for days. When the smith returns at last everybody rejoices. The young man wants to make up for his mistakes: he begs the pardon of âub who is touched and willing now to give Vakula his daughter's hand. Vakula has the shoes to give Oksana but modestly she refuses them, happy to have found her beloved again. The whole village now celebrates the happy couple.

The Maid of Orleans – Synopsis

Act I

A rural square

Joan – a peasant girl – is urged by her father to marry so that she will have a protector in times of war. She refuses and refers to instructions from heaven. Her angry father calls them instructions straight from hell. The warring factions approach the village. Joan admonishes the despairing villages to show courgage and to trust in God. Then she hears angelic voices, telling her to renounce marital love, take up the sword, liberate France and to crown the King.

Act II

Royal encampment near Chinon

Charles is downcast and desperate. His last liegeman, Dunois, endeavours to persuade him to combat the enemy but he fails in this and leaves him. The archbishop announces that God is on Charles' side: Joan has worked a miracle before the gates of Orleans and has beaten back the enemy. Dunois returns. After having been blessed by the archbishop, Joan is welcomed by Charles, the populance cheers and Joan calls on the blessed Virgin to assist in the liberation of France.

Act III

Scene 1

A battlefield

Joan defies instructions from heaven to kill the traitor Lionel. Struck by his good looks and his youth she spares his life. Lionel falls in love with Joan and returns to the service of France. Joan is perturbed by her disobedience to heaven's command.

Scene 2

A square before Reims cathedral

Charles is crowned King. The crowd is jubilant. Joan's father, Thibaut, accuses his daughter of having liberated France with the aid of the devil. Everyone is horrified and urges Joan to justify herself. She refuses to reply. Dunois sides with her. Instead of an answer a clap of thunder is heard. Heaven itself seems to speak out against Joan. Everyone except Lionel leaves her. She curses him and flees. Lionel follows her.

Act IV

Scene 1

A forest

Joan tries to overcome her passion for Lionel. The populance turns away from her. Lionel finds Joan and

they confess their love for each other. English soldiers kill Lionel and seize Joan.

Scene 2

A square in Rouen

Joan is tied to the stake. Cheering and expressions of sympathy from the crowd. The pyre is lit. Joan hears angelic voices and thus her pangs of conscience are finally assuaged.

Iolanta

Nowadays *Iolanta* is quite unknown. It is rarely performed and hardly recorded, especially outside Russia. At the premiere however, in December 1892 in St Petersburg, as part of a double-bill with the premiere of *The Nutcracker*, it was highly successful and often repeated over the following years, while *The Nutcracker*, today very popular, received its first western performance only after almost two decades. This difference in reception exemplifies the change in perception of Tchaikovsky's music in general. During his lifetime and shortly afterwards he was most famous for his short, often unpretentious and uncomplicated compositions, mainly composed or arranged for a group of musicians at home. Although *Iolanta* is an opera lasting about 100 minutes, it consists of short pieces that could easily be seen as independent compositions. The opera is a drama, not a tragedy: in fact it has a happy ending with triumphant music. And although the composer was very sophisticated and refined in his dealing with motifs and instrumentation, even without these

aspects the opera contains music which strongly resembles Tchaikovsky's songs and piano compositions whose form is often conventional. The moral of the opera (love is a healing force) certainly strikes a chord. And as ever Tchaikovsky is unsurpassed in his portrayal of human emotions, especially those of young people.

Emanuel Overbeeke

Pique Dame

Pique Dame is one of Tchaikovsky's six operas and one of the two (beside *Evgeny Onegin*) that have kept their place in the western repertoire. It has all the hallmarks of a classical opera and the inevitable victory of fate, combined with a Russian flavour both in libretto and music. In order to emphasise this fate, the composer changed the original text by Pushkin and removed the more happy episodes. Tchaikovsky was obsessed by fate and love, a combination with problematic consequences. Like Hermann in the opera, the composer believed the ideal beloved only exists in the imagination and reality is cruel. Consequently the escape from reality into a dream world is a regular phenomenon in Tchaikovsky's music.

Although his reputation during his life in Russia was mainly due to these aspects, other aspects may explain his fame in the West. The opera is both a collection of separate items plus an ongoing drama, mainly because Tchaikovsky let motifs return in later movements. Harmony and instrumentation are decisive

factors in the development of the drama. In these respects Tchaikovsky was heavily influenced by Wagner, whose *Ring des Nibelungen* he attended at its premiere in Bayreuth in 1876.

Tchaikovsky was quite confident about his work. After accepting his brother's libretto based on Pushkin in accordance with the composer's wishes, he finished the music within 44 days in March 1890 and the premiere in December 1890 in St Petersburg was an enormous success, so great that the composer even feared he would be unable to repeat this feat. Fortunately for us he was wrong.
Emanuel Overbeeke

Charodeika

Despite the triumphs of orchestral and chamber music that graced Tchaikovsky's creative career, he was irresistibly drawn to writing for the stage, where he applied his talents with great felicity to no less than nine operas. Thus, it is something of a puzzle that Tchaikovsky's operatic masterpieces have not received the attention they deserve, a fact only partially explained by the early pre-eminence of his symphonies and by the notorious problems of mounting unfamiliar operas to please a reluctant public.

The Sorceress (or *The Enchantress* as *Charodeika* is sometimes called) is the seventh of Tchaikovsky's operas, coming after *Mazeppa* and before *The Queen* of *Spades*. The composer worked on it through the

years 1885 to 1887 and conducted the first performance at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, November 1, 1887. During this time he had been living in seclusion at a country house in Maidanovo where his long walks through woods and flowery retreats added to a feeling of contentment. Just as an earlier sojourn in Italy had interested him in Italian style, so was his residence at Maidanovo the occasion for this step in the direction of purely dramatic and national opera. Upon the theme of *The Sorceress* Tchaikovsky projected a vigorous and forthright musical conception.

Although the libretto of Shpazhinsky has the fairy-tale quality of an ancient chronicle of love and intrigue, Tchaikovsky found in it a universal theme. He had long desired to express in music the meaning of the famous concluding words from Goethe's *Faust*; 'Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan' ('The ever-womanly draws us on'). The plot of *The Sorceress* was well suited to demonstrate musically the irresistible witchery of woman's beauty. From the very first, the spell of feminine enchantment is manifest in the lilting chorus of Kuma's maidens, and around the appealing figure of Kuma, whose only magic is her personal charm, the musical characterizations of the opera move irretrievably to a fateful denouement.

Synopsis

Nastasia, usually called 'Kuma', is entertaining visitors at her resort in a wooded spot where the Oka River flows into the Volga, not far from Nizhni Novgorod in the latter part of the 15th century. Among the guests are citizens of the town, enjoying drink and dice, and a wandering monk, Paisi, who scorns the merriment

and warns of trouble: the townspeople have become aroused over reports of revelry at Kuma's place and will induce the regent, Prince Nikita, to close it down. Paisi is ignored as a hunting party comes down the river, lead by Yuri, the Prince's son. Yuri is greeted heartily by all except Kuma, who in her agitation does not invite him to stop. Soon the crowd of visitors is thrown into dread and confusion as Prince Nikita himself, is seen coming with the old secretary Mamyrov. Kuma subdues the disorder and calmly prepares to face her royal guest. Mamyrov at once begins his accusations and urges the Prince to wipe out this nest of lewd speech, indecent songs and dancing. Kuma quietly answers the charges, and graciously offers the Prince a goblet of wine. Impressed by her courage and charmed by her beauty, the Prince tosses his golden ring into the drained goblet as a sign of approval and joins in the merriment, even ordering the sour old Mamyrov to dance with the mummers.

The Princess has heard of this first visit, and of the Prince's later visits, to Kuma's resort. Darkly suspicious of her husband, the Princess asks Mamyrov, an eager bearer of tales, to find out what takes place there, for she has vowed to destroy Kuma. The young Prince Yuri, finding his mother in emotional distress, senses that something is gravely wrong, but she affects gaiety and will tell him nothing. With the Prince, however the Princess is not so reticent. She indignantly accuses him of his visits to Kuma and swears she will have the enchantress put away. The Prince angrily declares he will force his wife to stop this talk about Kuma. Outside the garden fence a crowd riots in indignation over the robbery and injustices by the Prince's retainers. Young Prince Yuri, whom they like and respect, confronts the mob and they disperse.

Paisi, the wandering monk, returns from a mission on which Mamyrov has sent him and whispers that the Prince has gone to see Kuma. The Princess in a frenzy declares that she will go herself to break their embraces. Yuri is so moved by his mother's anguish and humiliation that he sets out at once to kill Kuma. The Prince, meanwhile, arriving at Kuma's house does not have the reception imagined by the Princess. Kuma firmly rejects his advances, even though he pleads his passionate love for her. Piqued and jealous, he demands to know who her beloved is. Kuma will not yield, and seizing the bread knife threatens to kill herself. The Prince departs. When Kuma is alone, she sings of her love for young Prince Yuri, whom she has never met face to face. Two friends of Kuma rush in with the news that Yuri is coming to kill Kuma, but she refuses protection and they leave. Soon Yuri and his companion Zhuran burst into the room. Kuma quietly greets them without fear, and Yuri, taken aback, drops his dagger. He then dismisses Zhuran and asks to know just what transpired between Kuma and the Prince. Kuma swears that she is guiltless, that she repulsed the Prince even with the threat of killing herself. Kuma then confesses that she deeply loves Yuri himself, and Yuri, touched by her tenderness and sincerity finds that he has fallen in love with Kuma.

Yuri has made preparations to take Kuma out of the country and marry her. He waits for her to meet him in a dark glen on the banks of the Oka, a lonely spot near a cave where the magician Kudma lives. Meanwhile Paisi, the monk, and the Princess, disguised as a pilgrim come in the darkness to Kudma's cave and obtain from him a potion to destroy Kuma. When the boat bringing Kuma lands at the bank, the Princess is the first to see her, and pretending friendship gives her the poison in a drink of water. Yuri,

appearing over the hill rushes eagerly to Kuma in raptures of joy. Then the poison begins to take effect. As Kuma dies, Yuri sees the Princess standing at the entrance of the cave. To the horrified Yuri she admits having poisoned Kuma 'to wash away my family shame'. When the distraught Yuri is not looking, the Princess orders Kuma's body to be dropped into the river. The Prince arrives in a boat and encounters his son Yuri. whom he accuses of abducting Kuma, pointing to her belongings on the ground as proof. 'For the last time', he demands, 'give up Kuma to me'. Yuri accuses the Prince himself of being the killer of Kuma. In his fury the Prince stabs Yuri. As thunder and lightning envelop the scene, the Prince bewails his tragic crime.

Mazeppa

Tchaikovsky always thought of himself as a composer of operas. He worked hard at his chosen field, producing in his 54 years eight full-length works, all in the mainstream of the Russian opera style. With his opera-writing countrymen, he shared a love of Pushkin, whose epic poem, *Poltava,* furnished the plot for *Mazeppa*. Unlike the refined, courtly atmospheres of *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen* of *Spades, Mazeppa* is a blood-thirsty tale of crazy love, abduction, political persecution, execution, and vengeful murder. Mazeppa was composed during one of the perennial low-points in the composer's life. Worry about the failure of his previous operas, *The Maid of Orleans* and *Eugene Onegin,* to remain in the repertory and nervousness about the favoured treatment of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snow Maiden* at the hands of theatre

directors preyed on Tchaikovsky's mind. To his patron, Mme. von Meck, he wrote, 'Never has any important work given me such trouble as this opera. Perhaps it is the decadence of my powers – or have I become even more severe in self-judgement? Even the scoring of the work, an activity in which he usually took pleasure, proceeded 'at a snail's pace'.

Yet the Tsar's recent 3000 ruble patronage and a ready-made libretto written by Viktor Burenin in 1881 for the Director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory – who hadn't the time to work on it – were certainly not unwelcome. In another letter, Tchaikovsky eagerly wrote of his work on the overture: 'The introduction, depicting Mazeppa and his famous mad gallop, will be wonderful!'

Work on the opera began in Summer of 1882 and constituted the composer's chief activity – and concern – until his return to St. Petersburg from the country in December. His annual trip to Europe cheered him up somewhat, and the opera was finally completed in May of 1883. Jurgenson, his publisher, offered 1000 rubles for the work, to which Tchaikovsky, always hard-up, countered: '*Mazeppa* contains hundreds of songs, a whole symphonic tableau, and another symphonic number which is not without merit. If consistency is to be respected, *Mazeppa* should bring me at least ten times as much as ten songs…' The good news was that Moscow and St. Petersburg were both vying for the opportunity to stage the work.

Mazeppa was first performed at the Bolshoi Theater on 15 February, 1884 and then repeated four days later at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg. At both performances, the work was brilliantly staged but

marred by the uneven vocal and acting abilities of the cast. Still, audiences responded warmly and the critical notices, in Moscow at least, were kind. Brother Modest hid the truth about the critical roasting the opera got in St. Petersburg; when he finally learned the truth, Tchaikovsky wrote to thank him: 'You did well, the truth might have killed me.'

Synopsis

Act I

Scene 1

The garden of Kochubey, a rich Cossack. His daughter Maria leaves her girlfriends, who are telling fortunes, to sing of her love for the family's elderly guest, Mazeppa. Andrey, a young Cossack who has loved Maria since childhood, enters and declares his love for her. Kochubey enters, accompanied by his wife and Mazeppa. Against a background of singing and dancing, Mazeppa asks for Maria's hand and is refused; he is too old, and in any case, he is her godfather Maria confesses her love for Mazeppa, claiming she loves him more than she does her own parents. He and his retainers carry her off.

Scene 2

After the flight of Maria and Mazeppa, the Kochubey family and Andrey are both saddened and enraged.

The wife, Lyubov, desires revenge, and Andrey eagerly volunteers to report Mazeppa's intrigues with the Swedes to the Tsar.

Act II

Scene 1

The dungeon of Belotserkovsky Castle, in which Kochubey is kept prisoner, victim of Mazeppa's charges, before Andrey could work his own revenge. One of Mazeppa's henchmen demands Kochubey's treasure; refused, Orlik calls for a torturer.

Scene 2

Orlik reports on Kochubey's lack of compliance to Mazeppa, who orders the Cossack's execution. Maria appears, knowing nothing of her father's fate. In the ensuing love scene, Mazeppa details his plan to create a separate Ukrainian state with himself as head. After he leaves, Maria's mother enters and reveals the truth about Kochubey, whom they both resolve to save.

Scene 3

The populace is gathered around the place of execution. A drunken Cossack's dance is the prelude to the execution of Kochubey, whom the women are unable to save in time.

Act III

After a symphonic sketch, 'The Battle of Poltava', the curtain rises on the deserted garden of the Kochubey's. Andrey, in pursuit of the Swedes, pauses in the garden. Mazeppa and Orlik appear on horseback. Andrey reproaches them but is shot by Mazeppa. Maria, who has lost her reason, wanders in and, seeing Andrey's body, refuses to leave with Mazeppa. He abandons her with no remorse, leaving her to sing a lullaby to her dead and rejected lover.

Songs: Volume 1

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky retains his position as the most popular of all Russian composers. His music offers obvious charms in its winning melodies and vivid orchestral colours. At the same time his achievement is deeper than this, however tempting it may be to despise what so many people enjoy.

Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk in 1840, the second son of a mining engineer, Tchaikovsky had his early education, in music as in everything else, at home, under the care of his mother and of a beloved governess. From the age of ten he was a pupil at the School of Jurisprudence in St Petersburg, completing his studies there in 1859, to take employment in the Ministry of Justice. During these years he developed his abilities as a musician and it must have seemed probable that, like his near contemporaries Mussorgsky, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, he would keep music as a secondary occupation, while following his official career.

For Tchaikovsky matters turned out differently. The foundation of the new Conservatory of Music in St Petersburg under Anton Rubinstein enabled him to study there as a full-time student from 1863. In 1865 he moved to Moscow as a member of the staff of the new Conservatory – established there by Anton Rubinstein's brother Nikolay. For over ten years he continued in Moscow, before financial assistance from a rich widow, Nadezhda von Meck, enabled him to leave the Conservatory and devote himself entirely to composition. The same period in his life brought an unfortunate marriage to a self-proclaimed admirer of his work, a woman who showed early signs of mental instability and could only add further to Tchaikovsky's own problems of character and inclination. His homosexuality was a torment to him, while his morbid sensitivity and diffidence, coupled with physical revulsion for the woman he had married, led to a severe nervous breakdown.

Separation from his wife, which was immediate, still left practical and personal problems to be solved. Tchaikovsky's relationship with Nadezhda von Meck, however, provided not only the money that at first was necessary for his career, but also the understanding and support of a woman who, so far from making physical demands of him, never even met him face to face. This curiously remote liaison and patronage only came to an end in 1890 when, on the false plea of bankruptcy, she discontinued an allowance that was no longer of importance and a correspondence on which he had come to depend.

Tchaikovsky's sudden death in St Petersburg in 1893 gave rise to contemporary speculation and has given rise to further posthumous rumours. It has been suggested that he committed suicide as the result of

pressure from a court of honour of former students of the School of Jurisprudence, when an allegedly erotic liaison with a young nobleman seemed likely to cause an open scandal even in court circles. Officially his death was attributed to cholera, contracted after drinking undistilled water. Whether the victim of cholera, of his own carelessness or reckless despair or of death deliberately courted, Tchaikovsky was widely mourned.

During the course of his life Tchaikovsky wrote a hundred or so songs, the first before his entry to the Conservatory and the last in 1893, the year of his death. [CD 51, track 1] *Pesnya Zemfirï* (Zemphira's Song), a setting of dramatic words from Pushkin's poem *The Gypsies*, retains elements of dramatic dialogue, as Zemphira rejects her stern old husband in favour of her lover. The Italian *Mezza notte* (Midnight) [2], was written in the same period, during the years between 1855 and 1860. This song, gently lilting as a girl sings of night as a time of love, was published in St Petersburg in 1865.

Zabït tak skoro (To forget so soon) [3], was written in 1870 and first performed in the following year at a concert in Moscow devoted to Tchaikovsky's work. The singer on this occasion was the contralto Elizaveta Lavrovskaya. The words of the song, a poignant reminiscenc of past love, were by Tchaikovsky's near contemporary and class-mate at the School of Jurisprudence, Alexey Nikolayevich Apukhtin.

The Six Romances, Opus 16, of 1872 start with a setting of words by Apollon Nikolayevich Maykov from his cycle of New Greek Songs. This lullaby, *Kolïbelnaya pesnya* [4], was arranged for piano in 1873. It is

dedicated to Nadezhda Rimsky-Korsakov and is followed by [5] *Pogodi* (Wait), dedicated to her husband. The words by Nikolay Perfilyevich Grekov urge patience, as life moves on.

The setting of *Unosi moyo serdtse* (Carry my heart away) [6], appeared in the periodical *Nouvelliste* in October 1873. The text is by Afanasy Afanasyevich Fet, a leading Russian lyric poet of the century whom Tchaikovsky eventually met in 1891, and deals with a mysterious and ethereal love.

The six songs that form Opus 25 were written between the autumn of 1874 and early 1875. The second of the set, *Kak nad goryacheyu zoloy* (As when upon hot ashes) [7], takes words by Fyodor Ivanovich Tyutchev, a former diplomat and Pan-Slavist who had recently died.

1875 brought a further set of six songs, Opus 27, continuing to serve a satisfactory market for works of this kind. These were dedicated to Elizaveta Lavrovskaya. The third of the group, *Ne otkhodi ot menya* (Do not leave me) [8], is a setting of words by Fet from his cycle *Melodies*. Tchaikovsky's Opus 28, with six more songs, was published in 1875. The fourth of these, *On tak menya lyubil* (He loved me so much) [9], sets a translation of a poem by Girardin, translated by Apukhtin. It is dedicated to Ekaterina Massini. Tchaikovsky wrote the seven songs of Opus 47 in the summer of 1880 at his sister's house at Kamenka and at Brailov, the Ukraine estate of Nadezhda von Meck. He dedicated them to the soprano Alexandra Panayeva, on whom his brother Anatoly had unsuccessfully set his heart. The first song, *Kabï znala ya* (If I

had known) [10], sets a poem by Alexey Konstantinovich Tolstoy and tells of the girl whose lover rides by to the hunt and how she might have awaited him in the evening, by the well. It is followed by [11] *Gornimi tikho letala dusha nebesami* (A soul floated gently up to Heaven) by the same poet. Here a soul, released from the body, longs for the earth again, the song's inspiration, it seems, the duet between Christ and Mary Magdalene in Massenet's sacred drama *Marie-Magdeleine*. The third, *Na zemlyu sumrak pal* (Darkness has fallen over the Earth) [12], takes N. Berg's version of words by Mickiewicz, a sad meditation that has much to say in its prelude and postlude. *Den li tsarit?* (Whether in the realm of day), Opus 47, No.6 [13], a poem by Apukhtin, expresses the single-mindedness of one in love, her thoughts centred on her lover. *Ya li v pole da ne travushka bïla?* (Was I not a blade of grass?) [14], the seventh song, takes a version of Shevchenkos Ukrainian song by Ivan Zakharovich Surikov and treats it in a very Russian manner. The words express the sad despair of a young girl, married off by her parents to an old man for whom she has no love.

The last three songs included here are taken from the Twelve Romances, Opus 60, published in 1886. The sixth of the set, *Nochi bezumnïye* (Wild nights) [15], with words by Apukhtin, is in a sombre G minor and reflects the weariness of one sleepless through love. It is followed by *Pesni tsïganki* (Gypsy's song) [16], with words by Yakov Petrovich Polonsky, the librettist of the opera *Vakula the Smith*. Here there is the necessary element of exoticism in the music. Opus 60 ends with a setting of Alexey Nikolayevich Pleshcheyev's Nam *zvezdï kotkiye siyali* (Gentle stars shone for us) [17]. Pleshcheyev's verses had provided much of the substance of Tchaikovsky's Children's Songs of 1883. Here the text offers a poignant memory of the past and young love.

Songs: Volume 2

Russia's contribution to European song during the second half of the 19th century and the early years of the twentieth is of considerable importance and interest. With little or no tradition of their own, apart from a very distinctive folk-song literature, Russian composers inevitably turned to other Continental models – to Germany in particular, and to Italy – but quickly evolved a national school that may be said to have produced some of their country's finest music. The greatest Russian song composer of the 19th century is, without doubt, Mussorgsky, closely followed by Balakirev and Borodin, but close behind them comes Tchaikovsky, whose qualities as a lyricist are understandably overshadowed by his stature as an opera composer (just as his many pieces for solo piano are by his concertos).

Between 1869 and 1893 Tchaikovsky composed just over a hundred songs, most of them published in sets of six and settings of words by second-rate Russian poets. A change from the pervading drawing-room sentiment is offered by the group of sixteen *Children's Songs*, Op.54, which were composed between 1881 and 1883. Like the Schumannesque *Children's Album*, Op.39 for piano of 1878, the collection reflects his spontaneous love of children; he had none of his own, of course, since his disastrous marriage of 1877 was never consummated and lasted barely three months, but his nephews, nieces and their offspring gave him great joy.

The words of all but two of the *Children's Songs* are by Alexey Nikolayevich Pleshcheyev (1825–1893), a minor poet whom Tchaikovsky had known since he first went to Moscow in 1866, and two of whose lyrics he used for the Romances composed in 1869 (Op.6 No.2) and 1872–3 (Op.16 No.4). In January 1881 he had made a setting of Konstantin Sergeyevich Axakov's *A Little Children's Song*, and it was apparently the appearance of this some weeks later in the monthly periodical Recreation for Children that prompted Pleshcheyev to send Tchaikovsky a copy of his anthology for children *The Snowdrop*, inscribed 'as a mark of affection and gratitude for his beautiful music to my poor words'. On 5th November 1881 Tchaikovsky wrote to his brother Modest: 'I have set about composing children's songs and am writing one regularly every day … this is very light and pleasant labour, for as my text I am taking Pleshcheyev's *The Snowdrop*, where there are many delightful things.' On 15th November he sent fifteen songs to his publisher Jurgenson, saying 'If you like, you can add *A Little Children's Song* to it' – which Jurgenson did.

Most of the songs last less than three minutes, and nearly all of them are technically undemanding; Nos. 6, 14 and 16 are strophic. Children naturally feature prominently, most touchingly in *A Legend* (No.5), where the Christ-child is crowned with thorns by children who have picked all the roses in his garden (the theme, based on a well-known carol, was used in 1894, the year after Tchaikovsky's death, by Arensky as the basis for a set of variations for string quartet and for string orchestra). No.1 is a dialogue between a small boy and his grandmother (each in a different key); *On the River-bank* (No.6) is about a fisherman's anxious family; *A Winter's Evening* (No.7) depicts a mother telling her children a story and playing the piano for

them to dance; and No.10 is a lullaby. Animals feature in *The Little Bird* (No.2), in which God's bird intercedes with the Almighty on behalf of the poor ploughman; in *My Little Garden* (No.4), with its buzzing bees; in the hilarious *The Cuckoo* (No. 8); and in *The Swallow* (No.15, to words by Ivan Zakharovich Surikov). Seasons are referred to in Nos. 3, 9 and 13 (Spring), 14 (Autumn), and 7 and 12 (Winter); and flowers and gardens in Nos. 4, 5, 11 and 13. *A Little Children's Song* (No.16), a delightful piece of nonsense verse, which started the whole process, appears as a gentle epilogue.

In August 1892 an amateur versifier, Danil Maximovich Rathaus (1868–1937) sent Tchaikovsky six of his poems, and having immediately sketched the voice-part of the first verse of *We Sat Together* and part of *The Sun Has Set*, Tchaikovsky promised to set the whole group. He did not begin work in earnest on them until 5th May 1893, however, finishing them on the 17th. The cycle (if that is not too grand a word) was Tchaikovsky's last completed work; he dedicated it to Nikolay Figner, the tenor who had created the part of Herman in *The Queen of Spades* in 1890. In the words of Tchaikovsky's biographer David Brown, 'Rathaus offered simply schemed verses, descriptions based on stock imagery but prettily picturesque, and feelings uncomplicated and familiar. Sentimentality reigned supreme and pointed a clear expressive path through verse which never encumbered the music.' In the slow-moving *We Sat Together* (No.1) a couple sit sadly by a river, unable to resolve their unhappiness by talking; in the closing bars the voice and the piano quote one of Tchaikovsky's familiar 'Fate' motifs. Similarly, the melancholy descending phrases in *Night* (No.2) recall the closing bars of his Symphony No.6. A livelier musical note is struck in *This Moonlit Night*

(No.3), but although the song expresses a declaration of love it is tinged with sadness and resignation. In *The Sun Has Set* (No.4) the mood is one of unclouded rapture, matched by a lilting accompaniment, but unrest returns in *On Gloomy Days* (No.5), with its memories of happier times underpinned by the agitated piano part; and the peace achieved in *Once More, As Before* (No.6) is that of resignation and solitude.
Robin Golding

Songs: Volume 3

The earliest of Tchaikovsky's songs to be heard here is *Moy geniy, moy angel* (My genius, my angel), a setting of a poem *To Ophelia* by the lyric poet Afanasy Fet, composed in 1857 or 1858. The song is of interest as evidence of the composer's early abilities, before his formal study at the Conservatory.

The six songs that make up the Six Romances, Opus 6, were written between 27th November and 29th December 1869. The first of the set, *Ne ver, moy drug* (Do not believe, my friend), with words by Alexey Konstantinovich Tolstoy, is dedicated to Alexandra Menshikova, who had created the part of Mariya in Tchaikovsky's opera *The Voyevoda* in February 1869. The song is one of dramatic intensity. The second song, *Ni slova, o drug moy* (Not a word, O my friend) sets a translation by Alexey Pleshcheyev of a poem by the radical Austrian writer Moritz Hartmann. It is dedicated to Tchaikovsky's first Moscow friend, Nikolay Kashkin, who also taught at the Conservatory there, and with its short phrases, conveys an even greater feeling of drama. *I bol'no, i sladko* (Both painfully and sweetly), the third of the set, uses a text by

Evdokiya Rostopchina in an operatic setting. The fourth song is not included here and the fifth, *Otchevo?* (Why?) sets a translation by Lev Alexandrovich Mey of Heine's poem *Warum denn sind die Rosen so blass?* (Why then are the roses so pale?), its questioning short phrases leading to a final climax. It is dedicated to Tchaikovsky's close friend, the architect Ivan Klimenko. The group ends with a setting of Mey's version of Goethe's *Mignon* song, *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt* (Only he who knows longing) from Wilhelm Meister, in the Russian translation *Net kolko tot, kto znal*, familiar in English as *None but the lonely heart* and the best known abroad of all Tchaikovsky's songs.

From the Six Romances, Opus 28, of 1875 comes a setting of Lev Mey's *Zachem?* (Why did I dream of you?), the third of a set written for the publisher Jorgenson. The sixth song, *Strashnaya minuta* (The fearful minute), with words by the composer himself, is a foretaste of operatic success to come.

Pimpinella, Opus 38, No.6, written in 1878, a Florentine song, is an arrangement of a song Tchaikovsky had heard in Florence from a street-singer, Vittorio, by whom he was completely captivated. Various changes were made to the original song, as he had first transcribed it, a version preserved in a letter to Nadezhda von Meck. He dedicated it to his brother Anatoly, who had done much to shelter his brother from the effects of his marital separation and had earlier accompanied him abroad to avoid the immediate consequences. They had briefly visited Florence together and heard the eleven-year-old Vittorio, the apparent reason for Tchaikovsky's return to the city.

From the Seven Romances, Opus 47, of 1880 comes the fourth song, *Usni, pechalnïy drug* (Sleep, poor friend), with words by Alexey Tolstoy and dedicated, with the others of the set, to the singer Alexandra Panayeva. As a lullaby it is disturbing in its melancholy.

Four songs are included from the Six Romances, Opus 57 of 1884, put together during a visit to Paris. The second of these, *Na nivï zhyoltïye* (On the golden cornfields), with words by Alexey Tolstoy and dedicated to the singer Bogomir Korsov, the original Mazeppa in Tchaikovsky's opera of that name. The following song, *Ne sprashivay* (Do not ask), a Russian version by Alexander Strugovshchikov of Goethe's *Mignon* song *Heiss mich nicht reden* from Wilhelm Meister, is dedicated to Emiliya Pavlovskaya, the first Mariya in the same opera, and is a more dramatic treatment of the mysterious gypsy waif than other composers had imagined. *Usni* (Sleep) and *Smert* (Death), with words by the young symbolist poet Dmitry Merezhkovsky and dedicated to Vera Butakova, who had once shown partiality to the composer, and to the singer Dmitry Usatov, who had created the role of Andrey in Mazeppa. The set ends with Pleshcheyev's *Lish tï odin* (Only you alone), leading to a final climax of intensity.

The Six Romances, Opus 63, of 1887 are all settings of verses by the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich, to whom they are dedicated. *Ya snachala tebya ne lyubila* (I did not love you at first) is relatively conventional in its strophic setting; *Rastvoril ya okno* (I opened the window) makes similar use of melodies relying heavily on the scale; *Ya vam ne nravlyus* (I do not please you) has poignant short phrases, leading to

the melancholy final warning and moving postlude; *Pervoye svidaniye* (The first meeting) provides a lively and lilting contrast; *Uzli gasli v komnatakh ogni* (The fires in the rooms were already out) has the lovers sitting alone in the darkening room, and the group ends with *Serenade*, a song with a gentle lilt to it.
Keith Anderson

Songs: Volume 4

The earliest of Tchaikovsky's songs to be heard here is *O, spoy zhe tu pesnyu* (Oh, sing that song) [CD 54, 15], a setting of a poem by Aleksey Pleshcheyev, based on a poem by the once fashionable early 19th-century English poet Felicia Hemans, remembered now principally as the author of *Casabianca* ('The boy stood on the burning deck'). It is the fourth of Six Romances, Op.16, published in March 1873. Tchaikovsky's opera *The Oprichnik* had been accepted by the Imperial Theatre, to which it had been submitted in December 1872, and the same month had brought approval of his Second Symphony 'The Little Russian' by Rimsky-Korsakov and his friends in St Petersburg. The song, dedicated to Tchaikovsky's Conservatory friend Nikolay Hubert, asks a mother to sing again the song she used to sing, a sad song the meaning of which the mother has now come to understand. Tak chto zhe? (So what can I say?) [13], the fifth of the set, has words by Tchaikovsky and was dedicated to Nikolay Rubinstein. The singer declares that the angelic image of the beloved is with him day and night, the secret of this love concealed from the cruel ridicule of the beloved; the singer begs the beloved to kill him, but to love him. *Glazki vesni golubiye*

(The eyes of spring are blue) [12] takes a translation by Mikhail Mikhailov of a poem by Heine, 'Die blauen Frühlingsaugen', from the latter's *Neuer Frühling*. The violets, the eyes of spring, appear in the grass and are picked for the poet's beloved. Nightingales sing, telling of the poet's secret dreams, so that the whole grove learns the writer's secret love. This song was written in 1873 as a supplement for the January 1874 issue of the periodical, the *Nouvelliste*.

The Oprichnik was staged in St Petersburg in April 1874. Tchaikovsky had been working on his First Piano Concerto, dismayed at Nikolay Rubinstein's immediate and strongly stated disapproval. By early 1875, however, Tchaikovsky had completed the orchestration of the work and turned to the composition of a series of songs, in response to requests from his publishers. The first set of these was published in 1875 as Six Romances, Op. 25. The opening song of the set, *Primiren'ye* (Reconciliation) [16] was dedicated to Aleksandra Krutikova, who had sung the part of Boyarina Morozova in *The Oprichnik*. The text is by Nikolay Shcherbina and bids the heart sleep and not try to awaken what is past; to try to forget in winter the roses picked in spring, and not to try to bring back what has gone, an elegiac reflection on the irretrievable past. *Pesn' Min'oni* (Mignon's Song) [22], the third of the set, is a translation by Fyodor Tyutchev of 'Kennst du das Land', from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, a text familiar from settings by various other composers, from Schubert to Wolf. It will be recalled that Tchaikovsky had already won considerable success with his 1869 setting of Lev Mey's version of *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt*, the Harper's Song from *Wilhelm Meister*, known in English as 'None but the lonely heart', published as Op.6, No.6, a song with

which it cannot easily stand comparison. It was dedicated to Maria Kamenskaya, a young singer who had already bravely performed 'None but the lonely heart' at a St Petersburg Conservatory concert. *Kanareyka* (Canary) [11], the fourth song, sets an orientalist poem by Lev Mey. It is dedicated to another singer from *The Oprichnik*, Wilhelmina Raab, who sang the part of Natalia. In the song, matched by an attempted oriental element in the setting, the sultan's wife asks her caged canary whether its life is better singing to her or flying in freedom to the West. The canary replies, telling her that he is homesick, and that she cannot understand that a song has a sister, which is freedom. The sixth and last of the set is *Kak naladili: Durak* (They said: You fool, do not go) [1], a song in a very much more Russian idiom. The verse by Lev Mey is in the words of a drunkard, told to bow down to the river depths and drink water, which he thinks might distract him from the lure of vodka, a procedure that is more likely to end in his drowning.

Khotel bi v edinoye slovo (For one simple word) [10] is one of two songs provided for Nikolay Bernard's *Nouvelliste*, where it was issued as a supplement to the September 1875 issue. The text, by Lev Mey, is a translation of Heine's 'Ich wollt', meine Schmerzen ergössen / Sich all' in ein einziges Wort' (I would pour out my sorrows all in a single word, and let the wind carry them away). The second song for the Nouvelliste was *Ne dolgo nam guiyat* (No time to take a walk) [2], with words by Nikolay Grekov, translator of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Here the lovers have only a short time to walk together, in the implied transience of life and happiness.

Two other sets of songs were completed and sent to publishers in 1875. From the Six Romances, Op.27, comes the fourth of the group, *Vecher* (Evening) [18], a setting of words by the Ukrainian Taras Shevchenko, translated by Lev Mey, in which he recalls the women returning to the village from the fields in the evening, to be welcomed by their families at the evening meal, before the children are put to bed, while the young women and the nightingale are still heard. The idyllic picture is depicted in the music, with the humming of insects in the first stanza and the song of the nightingale. The songs of Op.27 were dedicated to the contralto Yelizaveta Andreyevna Lavrovskaya.

The Six Romances, Op.38, were written after the disaster of Tchaikovsky's marriage, his escape abroad and return in 1878 to stay at Nadezhda von Meck's estate in the Ukraine, in its owner's absence. The second of the set, *To bilo rannayu vesnoy* (It was in early spring) [19] takes a poem by Aleksey Tolstoy, a text among those suggested by Madame von Meck. The Russian poem is based on Goethe's Mailied and describes the early spring, with the beloved standing in front of the poet, smiling, an answer to the poet's love, now recalled in joy and sorrow. In the third song, *Sred' shumnovo bala* (Amid the din of the ball) [20], a poem also by Tolstoy, the poet catches sight at a ball of the one he will love, admiring her voice, her figure, her look and her laughter, and recalling these alone at night, imagining that now he is in love. The Op.38 Romances were dedicated to Tchaikovsky's brother Anatoly, who had been of considerable support during the difficulties of the past year.

From the Seven Romances, Op.47, of 1880 comes the fifth song, *Blagoslavlyayu vas, lesa* (I bless you, woods) [17], the words taken from an extended poem by Aleksey Tolstoy on the solemn pilgrim journey of St John Damascene.

The remaining songs are all taken from the Twelve Romances, Op.60, published in 1886, and dedicated to the Empress Maria Fyodorovna. The first song, *Vcherashnyaya noch'* (Last night) [3], with words by Aleksey Khomyakov, echoes in its text the idyllic scenery that Tchaikovsky now enjoyed in his country house at Maidonov. The second song, *Ya tebe nichevo ne skazhu* (I don't tell you anything) [4], a setting of words by Aleksey Fet, has the poet keeping his feelings to himself, a love beyond words. The third, *O, esli b snali vi* (Oh, if only you knew) [14] takes words by Aleksey Pleshcheyev, a translation of Sully Prudomme's *Prière*, dwelling on love that cannot be expressed in the writer's loneliness. The fourth, *Solovey* (Nightingale) [8], is a setting of a version by Pushkin of a Serbian folk-song in which the singer has three sorrows: too early a marriage, a weary horse, and the loss of his beloved, now only to seek a grave. The fifth song, *Prostiye slova* (Simple Words) [9], with words by the composer, praises the beloved, that he can only express in simple words. *Prosti* (Excuse me) [5], the eighth of the set, with words by Nikolay Nekrasov, seeks forgiveness for fears of jealousy and a revival of the memory of early love. It is followed by *Noch'* (Night) [7], praise of the beauty of the night by Yakov Polonsky, and *Za oknom v teni melkayet* (In the shadow outside the window) [6] by the same poet, has the lover, outside, calling to his beloved to join

him. The eleventh song, *Podvig* (The exploit) [21] is a second setting of words by Aleksey Khomyakov, calling for heroism in battle and in love, in prayer and in life.

Keith Anderson

Songs: Volume 5

The earliest of Tchaikovksy's songs to be heard here is *Poymi khot' raz* (Hear at least once) [18], a setting of a poem by Afanasy Fet, based on Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* (To the Distant Beloved). It is the third of Six Romances, Op.16, published in March 1873. Tchaikovsky's opera *The Oprichnik* had been accepted by the Imperial Theatre, to which it had been submitted in December 1872, and the same month had brought approval of his Second Symphony, 'The Little Russian' by Rimsky-Korsakov and his friends in St Petersburg. The song *Novogrecheskaya pesnya*, Op.16, No.6 (New Greek Song) [10], dedicated to Tchaikovsky's Moscow Conservatory friend, the cellist Konstantin Albrecht, is a translation by Apollon Maykov of a Greek folk-song. Marked Moderato lugubre, it begins with the familiar notes of the Dies irae, from the Latin Requiem Mass, a fitting element in a song about the souls of the dead.

Ya s neyu nikogda ne govoril, Op.25, No.5, (I never spoke to her) [19] is one of Six Romances that Tchaikovsky handed to his publisher in 1875, after he had completed his orchestration of his First Piano Concerto, to which Nikolay Rubinstein had proved so disappointingly hostile. Like three others in this

group of songs, it was dedicated to one of the singers in *The Oprichnik*, successfully staged in April 1874, the baritone Ivan Melnikov. The words, taken from a longer poem by Lev Mey, suggest a youthful love song.

The Six Romances, Op.27, published in 1875, are all dedicated to the contralto Yelizaveta Lavrovskaya. The first song, *Na son gryadushchiy* (Before sleep) [20], a prayer at bed-time, has words by Nikolay Ogaryov, a political idealist, first set by Tchaikovsky for unaccompanied chorus during his days as a student at the St Petersburg Conservatory. The second song, *Smorti: von oblako* (Look: there is a silver cloud) [21] is a setting of words by Nikolay Grekov. The first verse compares the passing cloud and the brightness of the sky to the beauty of the beloved, with a second verse that brings a sadder aspect, as rain clouds gather. The fifth of the set, *Ali mat' menya rozhala* (Had my mother borne me) [22] has words by Lev Mey, based on a translation from the Polish ballad by Teofil Lenartowicz. A girl laments the departure of her lover for the wars, leaving her only in sorrow at his absence. The last song, *Moya balnovitsa* (My mischief) [11], also has words translated from Polish by Lev Mey. The original poem is by Adam Mickiewicz and is set by Tchaikovsky in the tempo of a mazurka. It praises the beauty and vivacity of the beloved, longing for her kisses.

The Six Romances, Op. 28, date from the same period, the songs now dedicated to singers who were to take part in the Moscow premiere of *The Oprichnik*. The first of the set, *Net, nikogda ne nazovu* (I will

never name her) [1], has a text by Nikolay Grekov based on a poem by Alfred de Musset, *Chanson de Fortunio*, from the latter's play *Le chandelier*. The lover declares that he will not name his beloved or do anything against her wishes, hiding his own feelings. It is dedicated to Anton Nikolayev. The second song, *Korol'ki* (A String of Corals) [23], takes a translation by Lev Mey of a ballad by the Polish writer Wladyslaw Syrokomla. Dedicated to the tenor Aleksandr Dodonov, the song tells of a man who rides away with the Cossacks, takes part in the capture of a town and seizes a string of coral beads to take back to his beloved Hannah; on his victorious return, however, he finds Hannah dead, and leaves the beads on a holy icon. The fifth song, *Ni otziva, ni slova, ni priveta* (No reply, no word, no greeting) [9], dedicated to the baritone Bogomir Korsov, is a setting of words by Aleksey Apukhtin, with the lover left without any answer, his past love now seemingly forgotten.

The Six Romances, Op.38, were written after the disaster of T chaikovsky's marriage, his escape abroad and return in 1878 to stay at Nadezhda von Meck's estate in the Ukraine. The first of the set, *Serenada Don Zhuana* (Don Juan's Serenade) [24], a text among those suggested by Madame von Meck, is taken from Aleksey Tolstoy's play on the subject of Don Juan, and echoes the well-known mock serenade in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, here calling on Nisetta, a woman of the town, to appear on her balcony. The fourth song, *O, esli b ti mogla* (Oh, if you could) [8], another poem by Tolstoy, calls on the beloved to forget her troubles and recapture their former happiness. The fifth song, *Lyubov' metvetsa* (Love of a dead man) [12], with words by Lermontov, is in the voice of a dead man, who even from the grave still feels love

and jealousy. It is based on a French original. The Op.38 Romances were dedicated to Tchaikovsky's brother Anatoly, who had been of considerable support during the difficulties of the past year.

In 1886 Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich Romanov, a grandson of Tsar Nikolay I and a young man of wide cultural interests, had a small volume of his poems privately printed, for presentation to his friends. He had known Tchaikovsky since 1880 and held him in high respect, sending him a copy of the poems, of which Tchaikovsky set a group of six as Six Romances, Op.63, published in 1887. Two other settings remain as sketches dating from the same period, *Tebya ya videla vo sne* (You were in my dream) [13] and *O net! Za krasotu ti ne lyubi menya* (Oh no! Do not love me for my beauty) [14].

In Berlin in 1888, during a concert tour in which he introduced his own work to audiences outside Russia, Tchaikovsky met again the mezzo-soprano Désirée Artôt, whom he had twenty years before thought of marrying. It was for her that he set a group of six French poems, to be published, in Russian translation, as Opus 65. The first, *Serenada* (Serenade) [2], takes a poem by Edouard Turquéty, *Où vas-tu, souffle d'aurore*. The second song sets Paul Collin's *Déception*, translated as *Razocharovanie* (Disillusionment) [3]. Here the lover visits again the woods where once he had been happy. This is followed by Collin's *Serenada* (Serenade) [4] in which the lover finds his beloved in nature. *Puskay zima* (Let the winter) [5] translates Collin's *Qu' importe que l'hiver éteigne les clartés*, in which the poet knows where to find light and beauty, in spite of the season. *Slyozi* (Tears) [6], setting a poem by Augustine Malvine Blanchecotte, bids the lover's

tears not to fall and to let him die. The group ends with *Charovnitsa* (Enchantress) [7], a translation of Collin's *Rondel*, praise of the beloved's power of conquest.

It was with some reluctance that Tchaikovsky, in 1891, turned his attention towards fulfilling an undertaking he had made to Lucien Guitry to provide incidental music for a staging in St Petersburg of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, to be given in French translation. For this purpose he adapted some earlier compositions, raiding, in particular, his *Hamlet* fantasy overture of 1888. Among the seventeen pieces Tchaikovsky set two songs for Ophelia and one for the gravedigger.

The first song [15] is from Ophelia's first mad scene, after her father's death, 'Where is the one who loved me so much? How will I recognise him? / His face will be covered with the hat of a pilgrim', and the second [16] when she returns, observed now by her brother Laertes, 'He lay with his face exposed. / We cried, and lowered him into the grave'. The first of the two seems to draw on English folk-song. The third song [17] is from the graveyard scene, where the gravedigger sings, 'I was a nice chap, chasing girls as much as I could, / And my days and nights were jolly', an episode of comic relief before the final tragedy.
Keith Anderson

LEV OBORIN (1907–1974)

Principal teachers: Yelena Gnessina, Konstantin Igumnov

Prizes: 1927 Chopin Competition, 1st

'Oborin's reputation at the first Soviet laureate remain firm, whatever shining stars appeared on the pianistic horizon […] a superlative Russian man and musician' (Dmitri Paperno). He studied originally with one of the three founding sisters of the elite Gnessin Institute, a former pupil of Ferruccio Busoni when he was teaching in Moscow (1890). He then went to Igumnov at the Conservatory (1921–26, graduating with Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata), attending Miaskovsky's and Catoire's composition classes (having already worked with Grechaninov). After his win in the 1927 Chopin Competition (when Gregory Ginzburg took fourth place), he joined the piano faculty of the Moscow Conservatory in 1928. Awarded a professorship in 1935 and a chair in 1948, he stayed at the Conservatory until his death, counting Ashkenazy as his most famous pupil (despite an apparent lack of 'personal rapport'). Along with his colleagues he also oversaw a quota of foreign exchange students.

The highlights of Oborin's career included the premiere of Khachaturian's Piano Concerto (12 July 1936), a lifelong partnership with David Oistrakh and Sviatoslav Knushevitzky (from the early 1940s), and his

British and American débuts in 1958 (with Mussorgsky's *Pictures*) and 1963 (Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto). For his 60th birthday concert in 1967, weak heart and alcoholism notwithstanding, he offered three of his favourite concertos: the second concertos by Chopin and Rachmaninoff and the third by Prokofiev. As a solo, concerto and chamber player of refined finish, Oborin was a regular visitor to the studio, as much at home in romantic miniatures and classical masterworks as Soviet epics. He was the first Soviet to record Rachmaninoff's Second and Third Concertos (conducted by Alexander Gauk in 1947 and Ivanov in 1949).

Paperno speaks of him as a man who 'conducted himself simply and with proper pride. He was accessible and benevolent […] Thanks to his special status and authority, Oborin, like Gilels, could stand apart from all the intrigues and squabbles. Even during the period of "ideological campaigns' I never saw them at any meeting. He would never take part in anybody else's persecution, and at that gloomy time one could hardly condemn such a position of non-interference'. 'In art nothing is worse than fossilized dogma,' remarked Oborin himself. 'Life itself changes, and so does music – and together with it technique and aesthetic norms and criteria also change.'

EMIL GILELS (1916–85)

Principal teachers: Yakov Tkach, Berta Reingbald, Heinrich Neuhaus

Prizes: 1933 All-Union Competition, Moscow, 1st; 1936 Vienna Competition, 2nd; 1938 Ysaÿe Competition, Brussels, 1st; 1973 Robert Schumann Prize

'If I could be born a second time, I would do the same again – but better.' Half Lithuanian (his father was an accountant from Vilnius), 'devoured by music', Emil Gilels personified the unapproachable, Jovian-toned, Russian super-pianist: Straight back, stout chest, edge-of-the-stool seat, legs angled precisely to the pedals, faded sandy hair brushed severely back, tails arranged sweepingly and Jewish eyes staring expressionlessly from a broad Odessa face; his hands positioned quietly, firm, bony fingers doing just the necessary. He was a Soviet *grand seigneur* with the stage-walk of a general. The artist within – the man of sculpted climaxes and husky poetry, of chords and melodies shaped by life-experience – sent a different message: mortal, understanding, communicative, 'bleeding with inner expression'.

He made slips, and had his memory lapses, but at full throttle, his playing defined might and passion, the instrument powered into a jangling, roaring, heroic titan while still capable of lyric gear and the most rarefied of dynamics and pedallings. Gilels was a pianist of unique sound-print, rooted, through Russia's teaching lines, in a tradition reaching back to Chopin and Clementi.

In a striking epitaph from November 2003, Valery Afanassiev turns to Beckett: 'Not one person in a hundred knows how to be silent and listen, no, nor even to conceive what such a thing means. Yes, only then can you detect, beyond the fatuous clamour, the silence of which the universe is made'. 'Silence,' Afanassiev continues (the English is his), 'is out of our reach because we have forgotten how to listen to it. As if brushing it aside, we fill in the pauses that turn up here and there. Silence withdraws into itself,

punishing us for our nonchalant scorn […] Like nobody else, Emil Grigorievich knew how to worship and handle silence. Even his way of speaking testified to this knowledge, for he often interrupted his speech to let the people around him meditate on what had been said and also listen to silence.

'Not only did he speak musically but music literally spoke through his voice, his manners, his thoughts, it never forsook him, not for an instant – a beautiful example of requited love. Even in his jokes one could hear music – something akin to the technique *perlé* which was one of his numerous fortes […] I once asked Emil Grigorievich how to play trills. He said they should be played slowly: even in trills one should be able to hear silence, its serene, unruffled presence. Garrulous trills are obnoxious.

'The way Emil Grigorievich practised the instrument also reveals his intimate bond with silence. In contrast to Richter, who repeated the same passage over and over again, he never made his neighbours wonder 'Will he ever drop with exhaustion?' […] He taught me to hear not only music but also life itself; or rather, he taught me to hear music in life […] Several times a year, Emil Grigorievich asked [his son-in-law, Peter] to depose flowers on the tombs of the composers buried at the Novodevichye Cemetery in Moscow. I know several people who, upon arriving in a city they have never visited, rush towards the nearest cemetery: they are tomb collectors. But those who can hear cemeteries, their silence and music, are few and far between.'

Gilels gave his public debut in Odessa in May 1929, with a recital programme including Beethoven's *Pathétique*. His great competition wins of the 30s attracted the notice of Stalin – and spotlit the kind of

music he was to make his own. Not Mussorgsky's *Pictures* (he left that to Richter and Yudina) but epic warhorses such as Brahms's *Handel* and *Paganini* Variations, and the Liszt-Busoni *Figaro* Fantasy (which he learnt in 40 days and recorded in 1935). To go and win before the 28-strong jury of the 1938 Ysaÿe Competition (in which Michelangeli was placed seventh) was to take on the world. The peerage of the age was there to judge: Sir Arthur Bliss, Jean-Claude Casadesus, Samuil Feinberg, Ignaz Friedman, Walter Gieseking, Raoul Koczalski, Vladimir Orloff, Arthur Rubinstein, Olga Samaroff-Stokowski, Emil von Sauer and Carlo Zecchi. Only Hofmann and Rachmaninoff (who considered Gilels his 'disciple in piano art') were absent.

Gilels's repertoire embraced more than 400 works, from the Baroque to the moderns (during the Second World War he played Stravinsky's *Petrushka* transcription in Leningrad, and premiered Prokofiev's Eighth Sonata in Moscow). He appeared in the USA in 1955, and in the UK four years later. Both were politically charged Cold War tours. At the end of the American visit he taped the Tchaikovsky B flat minor with Reiner in Chicago, an account of visceral theatre, leonine attack and flying fingers, plunging deep into the keyboard: 33 minutes of history in the shops within a month. In his youth, despite wonderfully tender cantos, Gilels had the reputation of an athletic speed-merchant. 'When I played it felt like a gust of fresh air.' Later his passion gave way to pathos, most clearly apparent from his handling of Brahms's Second Concerto – 45 minutes with Reiner (1958), 52 with Jochum (1972).

Lending weight to the Western conception of him as a 'socialist symbol', the political decorations were many: Stalin Prize (1946), People's Artist of the USSR (1954), Order of Lenin (1961, 1966), Lenin Prize (1962). In 1958 he chaired the first International Tchaikovsky Competition (won by Van Cliburn), likewise the next three, presiding over a jury including Bliss, Kabalevsky, Neuhaus, Oborin, Richter, Serebryakov and Zecchi. He taught at the Moscow Conservatory from 1938 until his death, accepting a professorship in 1959. 'Gilels […] loudly and imperiously proclaims "Yes!" to life. His voice is clear to anyone [… his art] helps us to live' (Neuhaus).

SVIATOSLAV RICHTER (1915–1997)

'An exceptional phenomenon of the 20th century'

~ Rosina Lhévinne ~

'Sviatoslav Richter looms as a lofty peak where live music merges with its history. No.matter how often you tell yourself that he is our contemporary, that you can see and hear him – you fail to realise it, because for decades he has been occupying a place of honour along such men as Chopin, Paganini, Liszt, Rachmaninov and Chaliapin […]. For nearly half a century this man – outwardly self-contained and seemingly inaccessible – has been the centre of Moscow's musical life as performer, sponsor of festivals, the first to notice and assist talented young musicians and artists, a connoisseur of literature, theatre and cinema, a collector of paintings, a familiar figure at art exhibitions, and himself a painter and stage director [Britten's

The Turn of the Screw and *Albert Herring*, 1983]' (Alfred Schnittke, *Music in the USSR*, July 1985).
On his own testimony, Richter 'was born a dual national in a country that didn't admit to such things'. His pianist-composer father (a 'commoner'), though born in the Ukraine, then Little Russia, was 'a German, not just because of his family origins but as a result of his education'. His mother (from the landowning classes) was Russian, but of mixed Polish, German, Swedish (Jenny Lind reputedly) and Tartar ancestry.

With an early passion for the visual image, writing plays and composing opera, Richter grew up in Zhitomir (Himmler's wartime Ukrainian headquarters) and Odessa. Largely self-taught until going to Heinrich Neuhaus at the Moscow Conservatory (1937-39), his early experience was principally as an accompanist and *répétiteur*: 'it was opera [not the piano] that provided me with the essentials of my education'. Including the first performance of Prokofiev's Sixth Sonata, his official recital début, in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, 26 November 1940 (at one of Neuhaus's own concerts, preceded by a run-through, 14 October), presented his credentials.

Richter lost his father as part of Stalin's *Russlanddeutsche* reprisals, shot on the orders of Beria in June 1941; he played to soldiers on the Eastern Front; and made his first broadcast (on 31 January 1944). His mother Anna (whom, though lack of contact, he'd presumed dead) re-married in 1943 – to his later disgust, one Sergei Kondratiev, a man of 'inane chatter', adept at name-changing (he became a 'Richter') and 'skin-saving', who had been a pupil of Sergei Taneyev, and bored the young Richter off composition.

Leaving Odessa and making it to West Germany, the pair settled near Stuttgart. Slava and his mother were eventually re-united in Flushing, Long Island, during the autumn of 1960, unhappily he says, followed by a last meeting in Schwäbisch Gmünd in August 1961. 'Please do not write about this week with sentiment – for there is none', he reportedly told Paul Moor at the time.

Following first prize at the 1945 All-Union Competition in Moscow (shared with Viktor Merzhanov), Richter's profile grew – despite his ethnic 'impurity', his lack of party membership, and his professed disregard for politics. In 1949 he was awarded a Stalin Prize, and, with David Oistrakh, Maya Plisetskaya and others, played at Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations in the Kremlin. The following year he played for the Party Central Committee and at a concert marking the 80th anniversary of Lenin's birth. In March 1953 he took part in Stalin's funeral, together with Tatiana Nikolayeva, Oistrakh, and the conductors Alexander Gauk and Alexander Melik-Pashayev. A Lenin Prize and People's Artist of the USSR recognition (for 'outstanding services rendered to Russian art and for his skill in execution') followed in 1961. For all the recognition and accolades, life in post-war Moscow wasn't easy. Monsaingeon quotes a a plea from Richter to Marshal Voroshilov, 18 November 1950: 'I need a two-room flat [with two grand pianos] where I can practise for between 12 and 14 hours a day, including the hours of darkness, without disturbing anyone […] No.other musician with such a busy concert schedule is in a situation like mine'. Two years passed before anything was done.

Richter's early tours abroad were confined behind the Iron Curtain (beginning with Czechoslovakia in 1950). That changed in 1960 when, following the advance guard of Gilels, Oistrakh, Rostropovich and Ashkenazy, and preceded by the reputation of a choice if limited LP discography, the West discovered him. Firstly in Finland, playing Beethoven, then North America (October/December, including five recitals in eleven days at Carnegie Hall, Brahms's Second Concerto with Leinsdorf, Ormandy and Munch, and Tchaikovsky's First under Bernstein.

London's turn came the following summer. 'In Richter the Soviet school of pianists has produced a first-class artist of vivid, unique individuality, whose art is entirely in a class by itself,' wrote I.M. Yampolsky in *Gramophone*, June 1960. 'His performances are distinguished by spontaneity, sparkling vivacity, élan, lyric sensitivity and manly tenderness. He possesses the secret of "magic" rhythm […] based on volitional inhibition […] similar to an "arrested but living breath".' There were three Royal Festival Hall recitals and two nights of Chopin, Dvorák and Liszt with Kondrashin and the LSO at the Albert Hall. Bootleg tapes duly circulated, and pirated Italian vinyls if you could find them. Attending those KGB-shadowed Cold War concerts, heavyweight minders (euphemistically called 'secretaries') in the wings, watching a large man, ill at ease, oscillating self-critically between the choice of Steinway and Bechstein grands parked onstage, one felt in the presence of an extraordinary unfolding of 20th-century history.

Richter's affair with Europe, and Japan (first tour, September–October 1970), endured – unlike that with the United States, which he grew to 'loathe' and where he never returned after 1970. Together with

Rostropovich he visited Britten and Pears at the 1964 Aldeburgh Festival, returning the next year to partner Fischer-Dieskau (in Brahms's *Die schöne Magelone*). In 1964 he master-minded the Grange de Meslay Festival, near Tours in France; and in 1981 the 'December Nights' Festival at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts – a provocative alloy of music, painting, poetry and drama. 'When he conceives [an] idea […] his fiery temperament surmounts all and every obstacle in his way' (Schnittke). Audiences grew used to his unpredictability, last-minute cancellations, whimsical spur-of-the-moment decisions, and 'white' programming (promoters sold out on his name rather than what he might or mightn't play).

'My repertory runs to around 80 different programmes, not counting chamber works.' As Bruno Monsaingeon revealed in his invaluable documentary profile of 1998, Richter's own records testified to an 'insatiable appetite'. 'In the course of a career lasting 55 years he gave more than 27,000 peformances at around 3,600 concerts in a thousand different places [851 of them in Moscow].' 833 works. 600 songs. He played Shostakovich more than anyone else. Uncomfortable in the studio but happier with 'live' recording, he recorded nearly 50 composers, including Bartók, Berg, Gershwin, Stravinsky and Webern. His discography of studio, radio and 'live' performances [compiled by Paul Geffen, June 2004; revised by Ates Tanin, June 2010] was staggering.

The elasticity of his 'long, supple and powerful hands' (his teacher, Heinrich Neuhaus) drew wide attention. He had a span of a twelfth, and could play five-note chords of G–Bb–Eb–G–Bb, F–Ab–B–D–Ab (according to Mark Zilberquit, *Russia's Great Modern Pianists*: Moscow, 1982/Neptune, 1983).

Hyperbole surrounded Richter. 'His singular ability to grasp the whole and at the same time miss none of the smallest details of a composition suggests a comparison with an eagle who from his great height can see as far as the horizon and yet single out the tiniest detail of the landscape. We have before us an imposing mountain range, but against it we can see the lark, taking wing into the sky' (the ever-adoring Neuhaus). 'The enormity of his talent staggers and enraptures' (Shostakovich). 'How many are [Richter's] peers, in the whole history of piano playing? Although I may appear unduly selective, only two names come to mind: Franz Liszt and Ferruccio Busoni. The first was born in 1811; the second in 1866, fifty-one years later. And Richter was born in 1915, forty-nine years after Busoni' (Piero Rattalino). 'Richter is a kind of biofield in which one feels absolutely different. His influence is never experienced as an overwhelming power, but rather as some guiding force' (Andrei Gavrilov).

With Richter, poetic sensibilities came first. Never the brash, extrovert virtuoso, he was a master craftsman daily perfecting notes and phrases, honing colours and textures, regardless of the modesty or majesty of the canvas before him. Of one London concert of shorter pieces by Beethoven, Chopin and Debussy, Joan Chissell reported in *The Times*: 'The whole recital was a miracle of understatement. Never did Mr Richter attempt to win the crowds by storming high heaven. He played as limpidly and simply as if he were with a handful of intimates in his own studio. But such was the delicacy and subtlety of his art that the merest swell from a *pianissimo* to a *piano* signified more than many a rival's *fortissimo fuoco*' (26 September 1977).

From the beginning Richter went his own way. His insistence on repeats when asked for ('if I hear a performer fail to repeat I begin to have fears that he does not really love the music that he plays'), and his advocacy of Schubert (famously the G major and B flat Sonatas) were trail-blazing and influential. Unlike Horowitz or Rubinstein, he preferred solitude to company, rural barns and churches to metropolis salons, the dressing-room to the green-room, by the end 'living the life of a hermit' (Monsaingeon), playing from the score in darkened halls, no more than a dimmed lamp left of the music-stand yellowing the gloom to reveal a feeble, ogreish figure in tails. His final appearances were in Bremen, on 28 March 1995 (in public), a programme of late Haydn sonatas and two-piano Reger with Andreas Lucewicz; and Lübeck 48 hours later (in private).

The only person permitted to share his life was the soprano Nina Dorliak (1908–98), an 'obstinate' Russian 'nationalist' of Franco-German origin – 'wonderful […] extraordinarily pretty, a real princess'. Occupying two tiny rooms in a communal flat, they first collaborated in 1945 (on Prokofiev's Akhmatova song cycle Op.27, encouraged by Rozhdestvensky's father, Nikolai Anosov), and the following year they made broadcasts of Schubert *Lieder* (26 October 1946). Companion, 'sister', mother-substitute, 'wife' in all but name or deed, it was she who shielded his privacy – and contrived a front for his sexuality (as much as her own) at a time when it was generally criminalised. In a note to Stravinsky, on 3 February 1963 following a Royal Festival Hall recital the previous afternoon, Nicolas Nabokov let slip nothing Richter's inner circle had not long been aware of. 'We are writing to you from a concert by Sviatoslav Richter, who is playing

Bach and Schubert [*Wanderer* Fantasy] brilliantly. He is a flaming fag'. Yet who among his listeners would ever have suspected the 'Svetlana' *alter ego*? Or even been bothered?

'In a sense I play for myself,' he remarked to *The Times* in 1961, 'but more than that I try to play for the composer – indeed, really to concentrate entirely on doing that. It's not true to say that I'm unaware of an audience; but […] if I'm over-aware […] then my concentration on realising a composer's intentions lapses and I don't give of my best.'
'There are two things I hate: analysis and power.'

EVGENY KISSIN

Evgeny Kissin was born in Moscow in October 1971 and began to play by ear and improvise on the piano at the age of two. At six years old, he entered a special school for gifted children, the Moscow Gnessin School of Music, where he was a student of Anna Pavlovna Kantor, who has remained his only teacher. At the age of ten, he made his concerto debut playing Mozart's Piano Concerto K466 and gave his first solo recital in Moscow one year later. He came to international attention in March 1984 when, at the age of twelve, he performed Chopin's Piano Concertos 1 and 2 in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory with the Moscow State Philharmonic under Dmitri Kitaenko. This concert was recorded live by Melodia,

and a two-LP album was released the following year. During the next two years, several Kissin performances in Moscow were recorded live.

Kissin's first appearances outside Russia were in Eastern Europe in 1985, followed a year later by his first tour of Japan and in 1987 his West European debut at the Berlin Festival. In 1988 he toured Europe with the Moscow Virtuosi and Vladimir Spivakov and made his London debut with the London Symphony Orchestra under Valery Gergiev. That December he performed with Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic in a New Year's concert which was broadcast internationally, with the performance repeated the following year at the Salzburg Easter Festival.

Kissin made his first appearance at the BBC Promenade Concerts in London in 1990 and later that year made his North American debut, performing both Chopin piano concertos with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta. The following week he opened Carnegie Hall's Centennial season with a spectacular debut recital.

Musical awards and tributes from around the world have been showered upon Kissin. In 1987 he received the Crystal Prize of the Osaka Symphony Hall for the best performance of 1986 (his Japanese debut). In 1991 he received the Musician of the Year Prize from the Chigiana Academy of Music in Siena, Italy. He was special guest at the 1992 Grammy Awards Ceremony, broadcast live to an audience estimated at over

one billion, and in 1995 he became Musical America's youngest Instrumentalist of the Year. In 1997 Kissin received the prestigious Triumph Award for his outstanding contribution to Russia's culture, one of the highest cultural honours to be awarded in the Russian Republic, of which he was again the youngest ever awardee. He was the first musician to be invited to give a solo recital at the BBC Promenade Concerts (1997), and in the 2000 season he was the first concerto soloist to be invited to play in the Proms opening concert. In May 2001 Kissin was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Music by the Manhattan School of Music.

Kissin's musicality, the depth and poetic quality of his interpretations, and his extraordinary virtuosity have placed him at the forefront of the world's new generation of young pianists. He is in demand the world over, and has appeared with many great conductors, including Abbado, Ashkenazy, Barenboim, Dohnányi, Guilini, Levine, Maazel, Ozawa, Svetlanov and Temirkanov, as well as with all the world's major orchestras. He makes regular tours to the US, Japan and throughout Europe.

His recordings have received numerous awards and accolades, including the Edison Klassiek in The Netherlands and the Diapason d'Or and the Grand Prix de la Nouvelle Académie du Disque in France, as well as awards from music magazines throughout the world.

Piano Concerto No.1 in B flat minor Op 23* (1874/75, rev. 1889/90)

'It's hard,' George Balanchine famously remarked, 'for people to make the necessary effort to understand Tchaikovsky. […] Pianists like [the] First Piano Concerto. But the attitude is "We've played it, and fine, that's enough". No one holds on to that music.' Few Russians have not laid claim to the piece. In the 1930s and '40s it was Horowitz. Within memory it was Richter and Gilels. Between them they saw to the Slavonic signature of the music, thundering and caressing its message through chain-mailed Tsarist virtuosity and tank-plated Soviet pianism, the mood and temper of the steppe largely prevailing whenever a glitzy indiscretion suggested itself or a foreign voice intruded. Richter, who programmed the work over 50 times, played it originally at a student gathering in 1940, accompanied by Goldenweiser on second piano; then in the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory in December 1941. He claimed it technically to be 'perhaps the most difficult work in the repertory, together with Dvorák's'. Of his three commercial recordings, Anãerl and the Czech Philarmonic in the Rudolfinum (May 1954) paved the way for the renowned Leningrad account under Mravinsky (24 July 1958). Least convincing, in his own opinion and that of many critics, was the Vienna re-make taped with a 'pig-headed' Karajan (his words) in the Musikvereinsaal in September 1962. The late-60s version featured here benefits from a conductor, Kondrashin, whose musicianship, advice and skill, plus understanding of the Tchaikovsky manner, Richter especially cherished.

DAVID OISTRAKH

Perhaps the greatest of all the 'Russian' violinists of the 20th century, happy in all aspects of the repertoire, David Fyodorovich Oistrakh was born, of Jewish parents, in the southern Ukrainian city of Odessa on 30th

September 1908. Initially known as David Kolker, he took the name of his stepfather, an amateur violinist himself who also owned a basement shop in the town. Oistrakh's mother, Isabella Stepanovka, was also a musician, singing at the state Opera House where she often took her young son to hear the orchestra as a special treat.

At the age of five, young David was presented with a one eighth size violin and began studying both violin and viola seriously with the local teacher, Piotr Stolyarsky amongst whose other pupils was the great Nathan Milstein, with whom the young beginner was to share his first concert appearance in 1914, when Milstein graduated from the Conservatoire. In 1923, Oistrakh himself entered the Odessa Conservatoire where he studied until 1926 – here he played the Bach A minor Concerto and gave his first public solo recital. His 1926 graduation concert consisted of Bach's Chaconne, Tartini's Devil's Trill Sonata, Rubinstein's Viola Sonata and Prokofiev's D major Concerto. By 1927, he was playing Glazunov's violin concerto in Kiev and Odessa with the composer conducting – a concert which gave him an invitation to play in Leningrad with the Philharmonic Orchestra under Nikolai Malko the following year.

In the same year, Oistrakh decided to move to Moscow where he gave his first recital and met his future wife Tamara Rotareva, a pianist, who he was to marry a year later. In 1931, their only child Igor was born, a son who was to follow in his father's footsteps and would be heard later playing violin with his father in works

such as the Bach Double Concerto. From 1934 onwards he received a position teaching at the Moscow Conservatoire where he was made Professor in 1939. He soon found international fame by winning several national and international competitions including the 1935 Soviet Union competition. Disappointment came when he gained only second prize, after the sixteen year old prodigy Ginette Neveu, at the Wieniawksi competition in Warsaw of the same year, but in 1937 he received first prize again at the Eugene Ysaye competition in Brussels. During the period he also began a lengthy friendship and partnership with the great Lev Oborin, as well as coming under the influence of Jacques Thibaud. The war years saw him active in the Soviet Union premiering the new concertos of Miaskovsky and Khatchaturian as well as the two sonatas of his friend Prokofiev and winning the Stalin Prize in 1942. The final years of the war saw the blossoming of a friendship with Shostakovich which would lead to the two violin concertos and the sonata, all of which were to be premiered by and become firmly associated with Oistrakh in the following years. As well as these major events, Oistrakh spent much time during the war years, playing for soldiers and factory workers under intensely difficult conditions.

The end of the war allowed Oistrakh to travel abroad to countries in the Soviet block and even to the West. His first foreign engagement was to appear at the newly founded 'Prague Spring' Festival where he met with enormous success. In 1951 he appeared at the 'Maggio Musicale' Festival in Florence, in 1952 he was in East Germany for the Beethoven celebrations, France in 1953, Britain in 1954 and eventually in 1955 he was allowed to tour the United States. By 1959, he was beginning to establish a second career as a conductor and in 1960 he

was awarded the coveted Lenin Prize. His Moscow conducting debut followed in 1962 and by 1967 he had established a duo with the celebrated Soviet pianist Sviatoslav Richter.

1968 saw wide celebrations for the violinist's sixtieth birthday which included a celebratory performance in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory of the Tchaikovsky concerto, one of his favourite works, under the baton of Gennady Rozhdestvensky. Oistrakh was now seen as a companion to the great violinists of his time such as the Romanian Enescu and the British Menuhin. But by now, Oistrakh had already begun to suffer from the heart condition which would eventually kill him; he had suffered a heart attack as early as 1964. He continued to work at a furious pace and had already become one of the principal cultural ambassadors for the Soviet Union to the West in live concerts and recordings. Oistrakh was to die of another heart attack, far away from home in Amsterdam, after conducting a cycle of Brahms with the Concertgebouw Orchestra.

Oistrakh's playing is notable for its sweetness, evenness of tone and its power, together with a lack of over-showiness and any aspects of coarseness and self-indulgence. He was a performer of wide tastes and enormous capabilities ranging from the works of Bach to the great twentieth century masterpieces of Shostakovich, Sibelius and Hindemith as well as revelling in the Romantic lyricism of Tchaikovsky and Bruch. As well as all this and giving premieres of notable works still associated with him and whose initial successes are due to him, he was a fine conductor, a superb chamber music player and a great teacher. It is inevitable

that some of his later performances do not have quite the magic of those given at his peak but he remains the Soviet Union and perhaps the world's great violinist and teacher of the mid twentieth century.

Probably the most often played of Russian violin concertos is that of Tchaikovsky – a particular favourite of Oistrakh's and the choice for his sixtieth birthday concert. This is high Romantic lyricism, drama and a heart on sleeve emotion. With elements of drama in the lengthy opening Allegro, a serene Canzonetta slow movement and a vital dance movement finale, this is Oistrakh at his best.
Dr. David Doughty

LEONID KOGAN

The history of musical performance on the Soviet Union of the twentieth century reads as a roll call of the great soloists and performers. Virtuosi of the piano included Richter and Gilels, there was the great cellist 'Slava' Rostropovich and the state could boast great violinists such as Oistrakh, Tretyakov and Leonid Kogan. Official musical policy, of course, gave the major role as musical ambassador of the violin to Oistrakh and thus Kogan's own talents were often less well known – that he should die at a relatively early age has also meant that many of his performances have remained rather less known than they should be. Here is a magnificent performer who was able to vary the aspects of his instrument in a sound less rich and meditative than Oistrakh's but with astonishing technique and a self-effacing attitude when performing on stage.

Leonid Borisovich Kogan was born, the son of two photographers, in the Ukrainian city of Dneprpetrovsk in November 1924. His family was by no means a musical one but the young boy received violin lessons at his local school and soon developed a passion for the instrument, progressing to taking private lessons eventually from Philip Yampolsky. The family soon moved to Moscow where the young Leonid continued his studies and was soon spotted by Jacques Thibaud who was to recognise the young boy's talent. Before long Kogan was enrolled and studying first at the Central Music School and then from 1943 at the Moscow Conservatory.

Kogan's first major breakthrough occurred when he won the first prize at the Queen Elizabeth Competition in Brussels in 1951 playing a Paganini concerto, some ten years after his official Moscow debut in 1941 where he had played the Brahms Concerto. Tours outside the Soviet Union soon followed and he appeared in both Paris and London in 1955 to be followed later with performances in the Americas. By 1963, Kogan had been appointed a distinguished Professor at the Moscow Conservatoire and became an associate of Rostropovich and Gilels (whose sister he married), playing chamber works together. Kogan's repertoire was not a huge one but included important works ranging from the early works of Vivaldi and Bach across the broad spectrum of the nineteenth century Romantics to the contemporary concertos of Alban Berg, Khatchaturian and Shostakovich.

By 1976, Kogan had become a member of the judging panel of the same Queen Elizabeth Competition in Brussels where he had found success in 1951 and in the early eighties he was invited to teach in Italy. In his home country he had been made an 'honoured artist' in 1955 as well as a 'people's artist' in 1964, followed by a Lenin prize in 1965. Of his children, his son was also a violinist whereas his daughter became a pianist. Kogan died whilst on

tour, in a train at the age of fifty eight in 1982. Kogan remained always something of a secondary figure to David Oistrakh and never received the accolades of the technically superior Western studio recordings that Oistrakh had but his legacy is one well worth further exploration.

Tchaikovsky's evergreen violin concerto – one of the great masterpieces of the repertoire – was composed in the short space of just one month for Leopold Auer (teacher of Heifetz). This is a fine example of both composer and soloist revelling in the rich Romantic melodies pitted against a sumptuous orchestral accompaniment.
Dr. David Doughty

EVGENY MRAVINSKY

'Is it possible to live without music? It does not appear to be among man's primary needs. But to go without it is to forgo happiness. I put my faith in the transcendental power of music. One day, immersed in music, I was stirred to the very depths of my being. It was like a stroke of lightning or a thunderclap. Art must affect people in this way, for if it doesn't, it isn't art. To sear art and music into the minds of the people – audiences and performers – that is my principal concern, my ultimate aim.'

Born into a legal and musical family, Mravinsky (1903–1988) studied at the Leningrad Conservatory – composition with Vladimir Shcherbachov, formerly a pupil of Liadov and Steinberg as well as one-time pianist of the Diaghilev company (1924–30); and conducting with Alexander Pauk and Nikolai Malko (graduating 1931). His first job was as assistant conductor of the Leningrad Academic Opera and Ballet

Theatre (now the Kirov), 1932–38. In September 1938, on winning the first All-Union Conductors' Competition in Moscow, he was appointed chief conductor of the elite, super-salaried Leningrad Philharmonic – a post he held for the rest of his life. He was made a People's Artist of the USSR in 1954.

Russian aristocrat, Soviet culture-lord, poet, man of Leningrad, Mravinsky wielded enormous power, shaping his band into an extraordinary precision machine glorying in all departments, from silken strings to snarling brass – 'the best orchestra in Russia' (Temirkanov). For his annual performances of the Fifth Symphonies of Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich - turning up for rehearsals ahead of the orchestra, knowing the scores from memory yet still wanting to double-check details, demanding unquestioning discipline from his players – ten days of preparation was nothing unusual.

To Western ears in the Cold War years, his view of Tchaikovsky came as a revelation. Not so much because of its lack of sentimentality or exaggeration as its cleansing of tempo, phrasing, orchestral balance, and subsidiary voicings, and its refusal to hyper-dramatise. Yet it was by no means without emotional commitment, as his 1960 stereo recordings of the last three symphonies show. Under Mravinsky, David Fanning reminds, you hear 'the Leningrad Philharmonic play [Tchaikovsky] like a wild stallion, only just held in check by the willpower of its master. Every smallest movement is placed with fierce pride; at any moment it may break into such a frenzied gallop that you hardly know whether to feel exhilarated or terrified'. Decades earlier, in 1905, Rachmaninov had pointed the way. 'Before he conducted [the Fifth Symphony] we knew it only in the version of Nikisch and his imitators […] his pathetic slowing of the tempo

became the law for performing Tchaikovsky […] Suddenly, under Rachmaninov, all this imitative tradition fell away from the composition and we heard it as if for the first time; especially astonishing was the cataclysmic impetuosity of the finale, an antithesis to the pathos of Nikisch that had always harmed this movement' (Medtner, 1933). Purging Tchaikovsky, peeling back the wallpaper, letting out the polyphony - the touch of genius Mravinsky made his trademark.

Ensuring one of the great artistic partnerships of the Soviet era, his admiration for Shostakovich ran deep – despite waning in later years following his refusal to premiere *Babi-Yar* in 1962. DS dedicated to Mravinsky the third and mightiest of his 'war' symphonies, the Eighth. Years later when, in the composer's presence, he introduced it to London in September 1960, his orchestra 106 strong, he showed us what it took for a performance to 'sear' mind and body. When the music whispered, the world stood dark and frozen as the steppe. When it climaxed you felt assaulted by the physical ferocity, the tortured, dissonant screaming of the sound. It was like being impaled through your seat: you felt emotionally affronted, you wanted to escape but couldn't. When the going got fast you risked burning by the naked, high-voltage electricity of it all.

Two footnotes. The 50-year longevity of Mravinsky's Leningrad tenure, from Stalin to Gorbachev, compared only with those of Ansermet (Suisse Romande), Kajanus (Helsinki), Mengelberg (Concertgebouw) and Ormandy (Philadelphia). And he made no studio recordings after 1961 (Shostakovich's Twelfth Symphony), permitting only concerts to be taped.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

'I have always written, and always shall write with feeling and sincerity, never troubling myself as to what the public would think of my work. At the moment of composing, when I am aglow with emotion, it flashes across my mind that all who will hear my music will experience some reflection of what I am feeling myself' (Tchaikovsky).

'Our great and beloved […] Tchaikovsky's music […] is often more profoundly Russian than music which has long since been awarded the facile label of Muscovite picturesqueness. This music is quite as Russian as Pushkin's verse or Glinka's song. Whilst not specifically cultivating in his art the "soul of the Russian peasant" [Mighty Handful-style], Tchaikovsky drew unconsciously from the true, popular sources of our race' (Stravinsky).

Symphony No.5 in E minor Op.64 (May–August 1888).

Towering among the orchestral landmarks of 19th-century Slavonic Romanticism, the Fifth grew out of a period of acute depression and self-doubt. To his brother Tchaikovsky wrote of his 'dulled wit'; to his benefactress Nadezhda von Meck he wondered if his imagination had dried up. On completing the sketches, he worried that they didn't 'seem to have the old lightness and constant flow of material. As I remember it, I used not to be so exhausted at the end of a day; now I am so tired each night that I am not even able to read.' The first performance, in St Petersburg in November 1888, was critically hammered, Tchaikovsky's enemies finding him 'exhausted and and played out,' the work 'without character, routine stuff', banally orchestrated.

Further performances 'convinced' him that the new symphony was indeed 'unsuccessful. There is something repellant about it, a certain patchiness, insincerity and artifice. All this the public instinctively recognises.' Concerts the following year persuaded him that things were perhaps not so bad after all ('I have fallen in love with it again'). The Fifth is about Fate – *fatum alla russe* – represented by a recurrent motto theme in the minor, heard on clarinets at the outset. This motto returns, reharmonised, at the tutti climax of the slow movement; at the end of the waltz (clarinets/bassoons, transformed, *alla* Liszt, from common time to triple); and in the flanking paragaphs of the finale, transmoded into the major, heavy brass commanding the closing perorations in epic, resplendant chorus. Comprising an introduction, exposition (several subject groups), development, reprise and coda, the first and last movements fall into essentially similar structures. Celebrated for its dreaming horn solo, the D major *Andante* takes lyricism and beauty of sound to new heights of intensity, while the A major *Valse* with its artful, decorative orchestration reminds as much of graceful ballet as the symphonic dances and ballroom scenes of the Hapsburg masters and Berlioz. Mravinsky performed the Fifth more than any other work in his repertory – 113 times with the Leningrad Philharmonic over a fifty-year period between 1932 and 1982 (Kenzo Amoh & Frank Forman, *Legacy of Evgeny Mravinsky*, rev June 1999).

Sleeping Beauty Op.66: Act III Pas de deux – Adagio (1888–89)

Tchaikovsky wasn't the first composer to turn to Charles Perrault's late-17th-century fairy story of good and evil but his lyric-symphonic-leitmotif ballet, produced at , January 1890, choreographed by Petipa, is the

classic setting. Act III, The Wedding of Prince Desiré and Princess Aurora. The Esplanade of King Florestan's Palace. Preceding the closing Sarabande and Finale-Apotheosis, Aurora and Desiré's *Pas de deux* (No 28) divides into five sections: Entrée; Adagio; Desiré; Aurora; Coda. *Sleeping Beauty* was the first ballet Mravinsky saw, as a child of six.

Capriccio italien Op.45 (1880)

A virtuoso showpiece in the *pot-pourri* style of Glinka, anticipating the picture-postcard Italy of Richard Strauss and Respighi. 'I believe a good fortune may be predicted,' Tchaikovsky wrote. 'It will be effective, thanks to the delightful [folk] tunes which I have succeeded in assembling partly from anthologies, partly through my own ears on the streets'. Reportedly the opening fanfare was based on a trumpet call from the barracks next to the hotel in Rome where Tchaikovsky was staying. Critics have judged the piece harshly, but its popularity has never waned – a rousing arsenal of tricks and orchestral effects gleamingly polished.

Serenade for Strings in C major Op.48 (1880)

Dating from between *Eugene Onegin* and the *Manfred* Symphony, the Serenade comprises a sonata-design first movement preceded by a French overture-style introduction; a graceful G major Valse; a balletic, modally-tinged *Élégie;* and a Russian-dance finale climaxing in an imposing panoply of C major sound.

The Nutcracker: Three Dances (1891–2)

Tchaikovsky's last ballet, emphasising the genre as 'a prettiment rather than an interpretation of life', was based on an adaptation of *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* by E.T.A. Hoffmann. Mravinsky's extracts, drawn in reverse order from the Suite Tchaikovsky compiled before the premiere (St Petersburg, December 1892), come from the Divertissement within the third *tableau* comprising Act II: Dance of the Mirlitons (Reed Pipes); Chinese Dance; Arabian Dance.

Francesca da Rimini – symphonic fantasy for orchestra Op.32 (1876)

Francesca da Rimini (1255–1285) was an elder contemporary of Dante who in his *Divine Comedy* (*Inferno*, Canto V) portrayed her in the Second Circle of Hell – where those consumed by carnal pleasure are punished, tossed to and fro by a violent storm, without hope of redemption. She tells how she committed adultery with the handsome Paolo, brother of her lame and deformed husband Giovanni Malatesta, and how, caught by surprise, both were murdered. Tchaikovsky's response to the story (offered to him originally as an opera libretto) produced the finest and most intensely beautiful and climaxed of his tone poems, premiered in Moscow in early 1877 under Nikolai Rubinstein, five days after the first performance of *Swan Lake*. Powerfully machined, the score is divided into several descriptive and emotional sections: slow introduction; an *allegro* depicting the winds of Hell; a central *andante* focussing on the love of Francesca and Paolo ('There is no greater sorrow than to remember happy times in misery'); abbreviated *allegro*; coda, restlessly confronting E minor and C major.