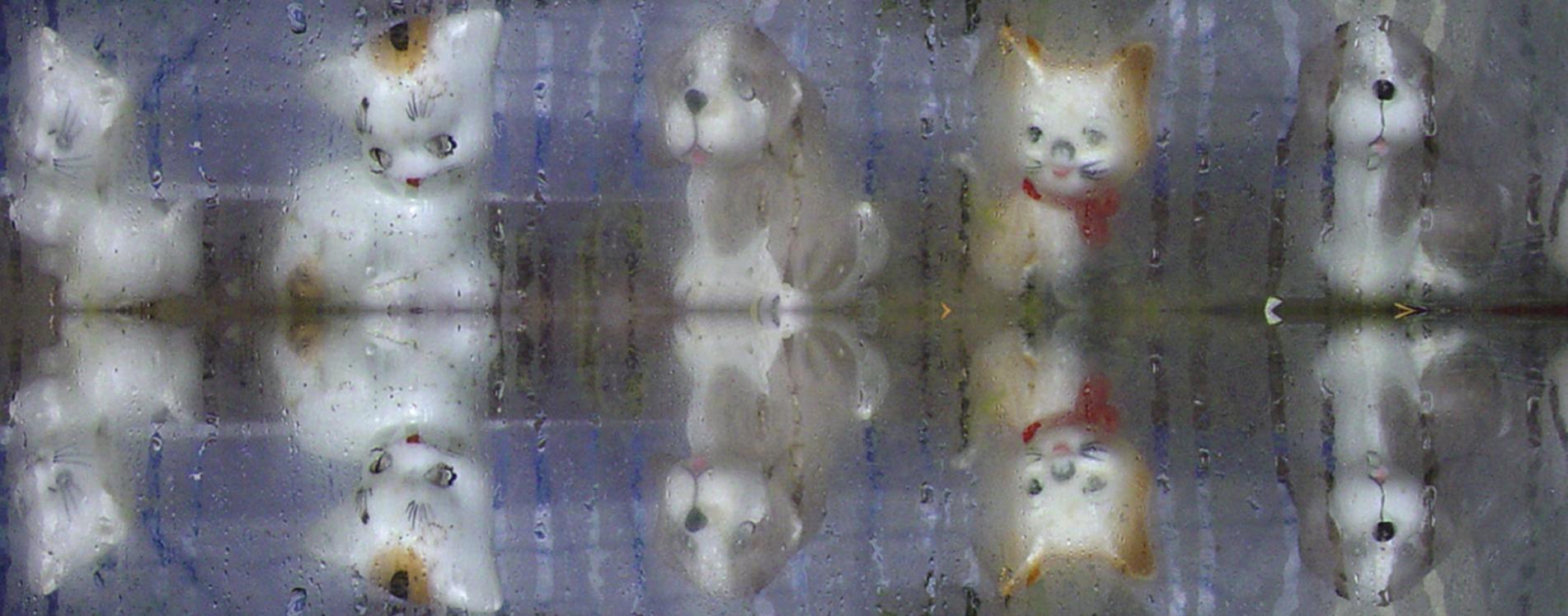


Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN C MINOR, OP.17



RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
Mikhail Pletnev



Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No. 2 in C Minor Op. 17 (1872, revised 1879/80) "Little Russian"

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | Andante sostenuto-Allegro vivo | 10. 56 |
| 2 | Andantino marziale, quasi moderato | 6. 20 |
| 3 | Scherzo – Allegro molto vivace | 5. 12 |
| 4 | Finale – Moderato assai-Allegro vivo | 9. 19 |

Symphony No. 2 in C Minor (Original First Movement)

- | | | |
|------|----------------------------------|--------|
| 1872 | | |
| 5 | Andante sostenuto-Allegro comodo | 16. 04 |

Russian National Orchestra

conducted by **Mikhail Pletnev**

Concertmaster: **Alexei Bruni**

Total playing time: 48. 12

Executive Producers: Rick Walker & Job Maarse
Recording Producer: Job Maarse
Balance Engineer: Erdo Groot
Recording Engineer - Editor: Roger de Schot
Recording Venue: DZZ Studio 5, Moscow (April 2011)

A Little Russian wolf in symphonic sheep's clothing

Following the long and rocky road to the First Symphony, on which, due to his teaching duties at the Moscow Conservatory, Tchaikovsky had been forced to work at night, the Second Symphony was composed mainly in the summer of 1872, hot on the heels of his second opera, *The Oprichnik*. At this time, Tchaikovsky was once again taking a holiday on the country estate of his sister Aleksandra, located near the Ukrainian town of Kamianka, in the Kiev Governorate. Numerous anecdotes report Tchaikovsky's touching assertion that he was not the true creator of the work, but rather, that it actually had been composed by one Pyotr Gerasimovich, one of the older servants in the household of his sister and her husband, Lev Davydov, for it was Pyotr Gerasimovich who had sung the folksong, *The Crane*, to him, which provided the basis for the work's finale. Regardless of the story's veracity, there is no other work in Tchaikovsky's symphonic oeuvre that contains such a wealth of authentic folksong themes beside freely composed folksong-like creations. The work's unofficial title, *Little Russian Symphony*, is indeed attributable to the fact that so many Ukrainian folksongs are employed in it, 'Little Russia' having been the standard term for the central and northern portions of today's Ukraine in Tsarist times.

In contrast to his relationship with the First Symphony, Tchaikovsky was to all appearances initially extremely enthusiastic about his new score, writing, "By virtue of its fully developed form, I find this inspired work to be the best of all my compositions." Nevertheless, doubts about it soon arose in his mind, which could not be changed even by the great and lasting success which resulted from the work's premier in Moscow on the 26th of January 1873. Seven years later, Tchaikovsky undertook a full revision of the symphony whilst on holiday in Rome, noting at the time: "My God, what a difficult, noisy, incoherent piece!" The first movement was subjected to a comprehensive rewrite and even given a new set of themes (in the present recording, both versions of the movement can be heard); the scherzo was reorchestrated and the finale drastically shortened. Only after completion of the work's new version, was its composer satisfied with the symphony: "With my hand on my heart, I can now say that this is a well-made symphony." Importantly, the *Small Russian* was not only a success with the public, but also very well-received by the members of the anti-academic group of composers around Mily Balakirev, 'The Five,' the self-proclaimed 'Novators' who championed a genuine Russian music, free of all western theoretical and academic influences. And Balakirev and Co. not only welcomed the work's authentic folksongs but also viewed the Second's emphasis on variation techniques, as opposed to the principle of development typi-

cal of strict western symphonic writing, in a very positive light. However, for all of its authentic folk elements, and the resulting degree of looseness it clearly displays, the Second Symphony nevertheless functions in complete accordance with traditional artistic principles, and one could even call it a Little Russian wolf in symphonic sheep's clothing. The first movement, for example, is in sonata form; the Andantino marziale exhibits a tripartite song form; the scherzo is, in perfect formal correctness, accompanied by a trio; and the finale combines sonata form with an overlay of variation technique. Reference is repeatedly made in the literature to the work's close relationship to a model from the repertoire of high classicism: Beethoven's *Eroica*, and, in their compositional parameters, Movements 2 through 4 in particular do indeed display a strong connection to the Beethovenian model.

Rather than the usual two themes, for this symphony's initial movement, Tchaikovsky employs three, each individually receiving full compositional treatment. The Allegro vivo is preceded by an extended Andante sostenuto introduction, in which the first horn intones the folksong, *Down by Mother Volga*. From this elegiac start, the rhythmically taught first theme, played by the strings in the major mode, leads into the Allegro vivo. The Volga theme reappears episodically in the development, and following a fully orthodox recapitulation, the coda returns the discourse to the elegiac horn song of the movement's beginning. The march used for the three-part Andantino marziale was originally composed by Tchaikovsky as a wedding march for the opera, *Undine*, whose score he destroyed following its rejection in 1873. In the middle section, the folksong *Spin, my spinner* is heard. The connection with Beethoven's Third? – according to Csampai, it lies in the "impression in the mind's eye of the listener of a mass of people marching past him." In the scherzo movement, whose bucolic trio in 2/8-metre is based on a Ukrainian folk-melody, the listener's attention is particularly drawn, on the one hand, to the movement's harmonic progressions, and on the other, to its constant mechanistic propulsion in quavers, reminiscent of those in Beethoven's scherzo. The great finale, as well, with its succession variations on the folksong, *The Crane*, 'packaged' within the structure of sonata form, is clearly reminiscent of the *Eroica*. Initially, the theme is intoned in its pure form, in the style of a mighty chorale. There follow chains of variations on a wild dance motif, with a whole-tone scale in the bass as fundament. Abrupt modulations – with mediant progressions far ahead of their time – envelop the stamping dance motif, that constantly undergoes subtle variation, despite three interruptions by a lyrical theme. As the coda, announced by a cymbal

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clash, rushes bombastically onward, the dance motif is led to its triumphant final apotheosis.

Russian National Orchestra

The Russian National Orchestra has been in demand throughout the music world ever since its 1990 Moscow premiere. Of the orchestra's 1996 debut at the BBC Proms in London, the Evening Standard wrote, "They played with such captivating beauty that the audience gave an involuntary sigh of pleasure." More recently, they were described as "a living symbol of the best in Russian art" (*Miami Herald*) and "as close to perfect as one could hope for" (*Trinity Mirror*).

The first Russian orchestra to perform at the Vatican and in Israel, the RNO maintains an active international tour schedule, appearing in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Guest artists performing with the RNO on tour include conductors Vladimir Jurowski, Nicola Luisotti, Antonio Pappano, Alan Gilbert, Carlo Ponti and Patrick Summers, and soloists Martha Argerich, Yefim Bronfman, Lang Lang, Pinchas Zukerman, Sir James Galway, Joshua Bell, Itzhak Perlman, Steven Isserlis, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Simone Kermes and Renée Fleming, among many others. Popular with radio audiences worldwide, RNO concerts are regularly aired by National Public Radio in the United States and by the European Broadcasting Union.

Gramophone magazine called the first RNO CD (1991) "an awe-inspiring experience; should human beings be able to play like this?" and listed it as the best recording of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* in history. Since then, the orchestra has made more than 60 recordings for Deutsche Grammophon and PentaTone Classics, distinguishing the RNO as the only Russian ensemble with long-standing relationships with these prestigious labels, as well as additional discs with many other record companies. Conductors represented in the RNO discography include Founder and Music Director Mikhail Pletnev, Principal Guest Conductor Vladimir Jurowski, Kent Nagano, Alexander Vedernikov and Paavo Berglund.

The RNO's recording of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* and Beintus's *Wolf Tracks*, conducted by Kent Nagano and narrated by Sophia Loren, Bill Clinton and Mikhail Gorbachev, received a 2004 Grammy Award, making the RNO the first Russian orchestra to win the recording industry's highest honor. A Spanish language version narrated by Antonio Banderas was released in 2007, following a Russian version narrated by actors Oleg Tabakov and Sergei Bezrukov, with Mandarin and other editions to follow.

The orchestra's Shostakovich cycle on PentaTone Classics is widely acclaimed as "the most exciting cycle of the Shostakovich symphonies to be put down on disc, and easily the best recorded." (*SACD.net*)

A regular visitor to the Schleswig-Holstein, Gstaad and Rheingau festivals, the RNO is also the founding orchestra of Napa Valley Festival del Sole, Festival of the Arts BOCA in Florida, and the Singapore Sun Festival, and resident orchestra for multiple seasons of the Tuscan Sun Festival in Cortona, Italy. The RNO will launch its own annual festival in 2009, which will be held at Moscow's Bolshoi Theater.

The RNO is unique among the principal Russian ensembles as a private institution funded with the support of individuals, corporations and foundations in Russia and throughout the world. In recognition of both its artistry and path-breaking structure, the Russian Federation recently awarded the RNO the first ever grant to a non-government orchestra.

Mikhail Pletnev

Mikhail Pletnev was born in Archangel in 1957. After his studies at the Central Special Music School, he entered the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory in 1974, where he studied with Jakob Flier and Lev Vlasenko. Aged only 21, Pletnev was the Gold Medal and First Prize winner of the 1978 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition in Moscow. This prize earned him early international recognition. He has since appeared as soloist with the major orchestras under conductors such as Bernard Haitink, Riccardo Chailly, Valery Gergiev, Zubin Mehta, Kent Nagano, Kurt Sanderling, Christian Thielemann and Herbert Blomstedt.

In 1990, following the collapse of the Soviet system, Mikhail Pletnev was able to realize his dream of forming an orchestra independent of the government – the Russian National Orchestra. Under his artistic leadership, the RNO has become known as one of the world's leading orchestras. Although his conducting career is primarily focused on the RNO, he also makes appearances as a guest-conductor with such prestigious orchestras as the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Berliner Sinfonieorchester and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. In September 1999, Pletnev was appointed the RNO's Conductor Laureate and his collaboration with the orchestra has continued in many of its recordings and concerts. In February 2003, he conducted the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra at the Berliner Konzerthaus for the official opening of the Russian Year of Culture in the presence of Chancellor Schroeder and President Putin. This concert was televised throughout the whole European Union.

Mikhail Pletnev's recordings and live performances as a pianist have

proved him an outstanding interpreter of an extensive repertoire. His album of Scarlatti's Keyboard Sonatas (EMI-Virgin Classics) received a Gramophone Award in 1996. *BBC Music Magazine* called this recording "piano playing at its greatest... this performance alone would be enough to secure Pletnev a place among the greatest pianists ever known." Together with his performance of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 2 and *The Seasons*, his unrivalled transcriptions for piano of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* Suite and *Sleeping Beauty* were selected for the 1998 anthology "Great Pianists of the 20th Century" (Philips Classics). Pletnev's recording of the Third Piano Concertos by both Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev (Deutsche Grammophon) with the RNO and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich received a 2004 Grammy Award nomination. Two major events in which Mikhail Pletnev performed with Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra include the 1997 New Year's Eve Concert and the Europa Konzert 2000, both of which were televised and broadcast world-wide from the Philharmonie in Berlin.

As a composer, Pletnev's works include the *Classical* Symphony, Quintet for Piano and Strings, *Triptych* for Symphony Orchestra, *Fantasy on Kazakh Themes* for Violin and Orchestra, and *Capriccio* for Piano and Orchestra. In December 1998, the world première of his Concerto for Viola and Orchestra took place in Moscow, with Yuri Bashmet as soloist.

His stature in Russia was formally recognized in 1995, when he was awarded the First State Prize of the Russian Federation by President Yeltsin. In 2002, he again received this honour from President Putin

