

TCHAI- KOVSKY GRIEG

PIANO CONCERTOS

Stewart Goodyear

Czech National Symphony
Stanislav Bogunia



STEINWAY & SONS

**TCHAI-
KOVSKY
GRIEG**

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Tchaikovsky: Concerto for Piano No. 1 in B-flat minor, Op. 23

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| 1 | I. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso — Allegro con spirito | 19:28 |
| 2 | II. Andantino semplice — Prestissimo — Tempo I | 6:46 |
| 3 | III. Allegro con fuoco | 6:40 |

Grieg: Concerto for Piano in A minor, Op. 16

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| 4 | I. Allegro molto moderato | 12:17 |
| 5 | II. Adagio | 6:53 |
| 6 | III. Allegro moderato molto e marcato — Quasi Presto — Andante maestoso | 10:00 |

Playing Time: 62:04

Tchaikovsky's **First Piano Concerto** was introduced to me by way of a compilation album of classical music's greatest hits. I was already familiar with the composer's complete symphonies, and knew how to distinguish between the different major and minor keys. The only segment of the Piano Concerto on this compilation album was the introductory theme. It was not in the key of B-flat minor, but its relative D-flat major. It drove me crazy. I wondered whether there was a typo in the album cover! To make matters worse, the track ended in F major, the dominant of B-flat minor. I had to hear the entire concerto—because of this befuddling first impression.

The story of Tchaikovsky presenting his first concerto to Nikolai Rubinstein—who was initially against the work before becoming its champion—is legendary. In light of convention, I can see why a purist such as Rubinstein was at first appalled by this masterpiece. It breaks every tradition there is when writing a first concerto. Tchaikovsky's First is not paying respect to any tradition but his own; it is steeped in the soil where Tchaikovsky was born. There are quotations of folk songs as well as operatic and balletic gestures. The form is strict, but the feeling is rhapsodic. Harmonies are on a world tour, but they always come back home.

Hearing the concerto in its entirety, the first surprise is the exposition: from the soaring introductory theme comes a brooding yet jerky first theme in the exposition. The second theme's harmonies are dissonant and unresolved until it gracefully rests on the key of A-flat major. When the first movement comes to an end, it does so on a whirlwind of emotions. There is humor and drama, rage and comfort, arias and symphonies, and innovation galore.

A sigh of relief comes at the opening of the second movement. From such a tug-of-war between rhapsodic gestures and symphonic organization comes a movement that is almost pastoral. The flute pierces the strumming strings, presenting a theme very moving in its simplicity. The piano and woodwinds share a give-and-take with melodies, and the entire atmosphere is not one of

grandeur but of intimacy. From a scene involving the entire cast of an opera, we are now witnessing an intimate scene between lovers.

The sharp first note of the third movement makes us jump: the timpani stroke is like a kick in the pants, and, in fact, the entire movement is inspired by kicks—a spicy-cocktail aural kick; a thrill-ride emotional kick; and pianistic kick that feels like a high-octane run.

My introduction to Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor was through the operetta *Song of Norway*, which features adaptations of Grieg's music. Before I heard the concerto, I was already familiar with Grieg's incidental music to *Peer Gynt*. I would play "Morning Mood" and "In the Hall of the Mountain King" over and over until I wore both tracks out. My grandparents, who had a cottage in Ontario on the Trent River near to Brighton, owned LPs of many Broadway musicals, and somehow, out of all the musicals, *Song of Norway* caught my attention. The last track on the record was a condensed version of the concerto, and, much like the teaser track of Tchaikovsky's concerto on the greatest-hits album, it only heightened my longing to hear the complete work.

Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor is also steeped in the soil where the composer came from, but, unlike the Tchaikovsky, Grieg harmonically and structurally holds with convention. The first movement is clean in establishing the first theme, second theme, development and recapitulation. The second theme is in its relative C major, and there is a traditional sense of solo and tutti.

The magic in this Sonata-Allegro introductory handshake to the uninitiated is what Grieg does to convention. He leaves it alone, but completely enchants the listener with his own voice. The themes are Nordic through and through, and the movement is coated with individuality in the pianism of the solo part and the handling of the orchestra. The cadenza of this movement is powerful in its directness.

Then the surprise happens. The second movement is in D-flat major, a completely outside key in the A-minor world. The first moment of the second movement feels like a cool spring morning. The rhythm of the theme is a Sarabande, but when the pianist comes in, it is a folk declamation.

The third movement comes directly from the second, and we are plunged headfirst into the jumping rhythms of the Halling, a Norwegian folk dance. Just as Tchaikovsky kicks the listeners out of their seat to dance, Grieg demands likewise. The pianist rips across the keyboard, leading the orchestra in the dance; the orchestra responds accordingly, taking up the mantle. A second theme with the flute and piano gives us a moment of song, before we are back to the Halling. When the second theme returns and closes the concerto, it is almost as if the listener is compelled to sing along in chorus. It is not surprising that Franz Liszt, after sight-reading Grieg's concerto, was inspired to belt out the closing bars.

It was April of 2013 when I decided to take the plunge and record both concertos that have been a part of my music-loving life since thirty-two years ago. My sudden urge to record them was so strong that I decided not to wait for the opportunity, but to create it. Three months later, in the beautiful city of Prague, Maestro Stanislav Bogunia and the wondrous and versatile Czech National Symphony Orchestra joined me to record the Tchaikovksy First Concerto and the Grieg Concerto.

We had one rehearsal for the two concerti, and the gods seemed to be smiling: I have an expression that when the collaboration feels so right, I say "we are dancing." This was a unique dance partnership where all of us were the leaders and followers. It was music making at its most delightful and intense. When the recording session began, I was on fire emotionally. The atmosphere in the recording studio was "do or die," "take the plunge without fear," and "dance."

—*Stewart Goodyear*

STEWART GOODYEAR

Proclaimed a “a phenomenon” by the *Los Angeles Times* and “one of the best pianists of his generation” by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Stewart Goodyear is an accomplished young pianist as a concerto soloist, chamber musician, recitalist and composer.

Mr. Goodyear has performed with major orchestras of the world, including Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Bournemouth Symphony, Montreal Symphony, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Dallas Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and NHK Symphony Orchestra.

Mr. Goodyear began his training at The Royal Conservatory in Toronto, received his bachelor’s degree from Curtis Institute of Music, and completed his master’s at The Juilliard School. Known as an improviser and composer, he has been commissioned by orchestras and chamber music organizations, and performs his own solo works. In the 2012 and 2013 seasons, Mr. Goodyear performed all 32 Beethoven Piano Sonatas in one day at Koerner Hall, McCarter Theatre, and Mondavi Center. His recording of the complete Beethoven sonatas has received critical acclaim and a Juno nomination for Best Classical Solo Recording. In June and July 2014, he will perform the complete sonatas in four three-hour programs at Bargemusic in Brooklyn, NY.

Highlights for the 2014 –15 season include two concerts at Festival de Lanaudiere in Joliette, Quebec, recitals in Chicago, Montreal, and Toronto, performances with the Kosei Wind Ensemble in Tokyo, Japan, and a duo-piano collaboration with Emanuel Ax in Toronto at Roy Thompson Hall.

Stewart Goodyear is a Steinway Artist.



Recorded July 16–17, 2013 at CNSO Studio No. 1, Prague

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Engineer: Stanislav Baroch

Assistant Engineer: Vojtech Komarek

Executive Producers: Eric Feidner, Jon Feidner

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Design: Oberlander Group

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Piano Technician: Marcel Pindel



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