

NAXOS

TCHAIKOVSKY

Dances and Overtures

The Queen of Spades • The Maid of Orleans
Mazeppa • The Enchantress

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine
Theodore Kuchar



Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Dances and Overtures

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 for the few 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.

Tchaikovsky wrote some twelve operas, from *The Voyevoda*, completed in 1868 and subsequently destroyed by the composer, to the final *Iolanta*, staged in St Petersburg in 1892. Two of his operas have found an established place in international repertoire, *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*. The second of these, with a libretto by the composer and his brother Modest, based on Pushkin, was first staged in St Petersburg in 1890. The plot traces the gradual decline of Hermann into madness and suicide, as he seeks from the old Countess, whose death he causes, the secret of the three

cards that must win, the third card, the Ace, replaced, as he gambles, by the Queen of Spades, in which he sees the face of the dead Countess. The short *Prelude* with which the work opens includes themes associated with Fate, with Hermann's love for Lisa, granddaughter of the Countess, and the three cards.

The symphonic poem *Fatum*, *Op. 77*, was written late in 1868 and first performed in Moscow the following February in a Russian Music Society concert. Nikolay Rubinstein had suggested a more obviously explanatory title, but the lines used, from Konstantin Batyushkov, did little to enlighten the audience. Tchaikovsky was at first very pleased with the piece. He had made use of a free form, its two introductory passages followed by an A flat major section that won praise from an otherwise critical Herman Laroche and even from Balakirev, before establishing C minor as the prevailing tonality. These materials are modified and explored, before the return of the opening. Balakirev conducted *Fatum* in St Petersburg, and was not sparing in his criticism of the work, while César Cui, a fellow-member of the Mighty Handful, could only find praise for the orchestration. Tchaikovsky destroyed the score the following year and it was only re-assembled after his death.

Tchaikovsky's first opera *The Voyevoda* was given an ill-prepared staging in Moscow in 1869, receiving five performances, after which it was withdrawn, and later destroyed by the composer, who drew from it material for later works. Much of it has since been reconstructed from the surviving orchestral parts. Based on an extended play by Ostrovsky, the opera contains Russian themes, proclaiming its national identity in the *Overture*.

The Maid of Orleans, based on Schiller and other sources, was first staged in St Petersburg in 1881, and marks Tchaikovsky's attempt to vie with the contemporary opera of Western Europe. The *Entr'acte*, between the first two acts, echoes Joan of Arc's hymn from the first act, leading to the court of Charles VII, where the French King is entertained by gypsies, and

then by dwarfs and clowns, to be rewarded extravagantly, although the treasury is empty.

Tchaikovsky's only comic opera, *Cherevichki* (The Slippers), based on a story by Gogol, was first given the title *Vakula the Smith* and so staged in 1876. It was revised in 1885, under the present title, and staged first in Moscow in 1887. Sometimes known as *Les caprices d'Oxane* and described as a comic-fantastic opera, it deals with the village activities of the Devil and the witch Solokha, and the coquetry of Oxana, who demands that her lover Vakula bring her the boots of the Tsaritsa. The Russian and Cossack dances form part of the third scene of the third act, where the chief minister is entertained by dancers, before the Devil returns to fly back with Vakula to the village.

Mounted at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg in 1887, *The Enchantress*, with a libretto written for Tchaikovsky by Ippolit Shpazhinsky, failed to grip the public. The plot largely revolves around the widow Nastasya, known as Kuma, hostess of an inn, where she charms Prince Nikita, in spite of the court Malvolio Mamirov, exciting the jealousy of the Princess. Their son Yury plans to elope with Kuma, but she is poisoned by the Princess, aided by a wizard, who makes an opportune appearance, while the Prince kills his son, his rival in love, before going out of his mind. *The Introduction* leads to an opening scene of celebration at Kuma's inn, and she later offers the Prince the entertainment of a tumblers' dance.

Based on a poem by Pushkin, the opera *Mazeppa* was first staged in Moscow in 1884 and centres on the activities of the Ukrainian hetman of the title, entertained by a *Gopak* in the house of Kochubey, a cossack judge, later put to death by Mazeppa after his attempt to reveal to the Tsar the latter's plans for secession from Russia.

The Oprichnik was first seen in St Petersburg in 1874, its title indicating the calling of the hero Andrey Morozhov, who becomes a mercenary in the service of the Tsar in an attempt to find justice for his mother and himself against his oppressor Prince Zhemchuzniy, with

whose daughter Natalya he is in love, although she is promised to another. The machinations of Andrey's enemies lead to his breaking his vows of renunciation as an *oprichnik* and his execution, after his supposed

release from his oath and the celebration, with dances, of his wedding to Natalya.

Keith Anderson

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine

Established in 1937, the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, formerly known as the Ukrainian State Symphony Orchestra, is recognised as one of the most accomplished symphonic ensembles of the former Soviet Union. The orchestra's change of status was declared by President Leonid Kuchma in mid-1994, reaffirming its reputation as Ukraine's premier orchestra. The orchestra's first chief conductor was Nathan Rachlin, who conducted the world première of Shostakovich's *Eleventh Symphony*, and who remained in this position for the next 25 years, until 1962. His successors as music directors have included Stephan Turchak, Feodor Glushchenko and Igor Blazhkov. In 1994 the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine appointed Theodore Kuchar as the orchestra's Artistic Director and Principal Conductor. In 2000, Kuchar was awarded the title Conductor Laureate for Life and Volodymyr Sirenko was appointed the orchestra's Principal Conductor. During the past five decades, the orchestra has worked under a number of the last century's most recognised conductors including Kirill Kondrashin, Igor Markevitch, Evgeny Mravinsky, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Kurt Sanderling, Leopold Stokowski and Evgeny Svetlanov. Distinguished soloists who have collaborated with the orchestra include Emil Gilels, Leonid Kogan, Yehudi Menuhin, David Oistrakh, Sviatoslav Richter, Mstislav Rostropovich, Artur Rubinstein and Isaac Stern. The orchestra has held a special relationship with distinguished composers including Aram Khachaturian, Sergey Prokofiev and Dmitry Shostakovich, each having collaborated with the orchestra on a number of occasions as either conductor or soloist in their own compositions. Naxos and Marco Polo recordings include the complete symphonies of Prokofiev, Kalinnikov, Martinu and Boris Lyatoshynsky, orchestral works of Shostakovich, Shchedrin, Tchaikovsky and Glazunov; and for the Naxos American Classics Series, major orchestral works by Walter Piston, Roy Harris, Paul Creston, George Antheil, Leonard Bernstein and Benjamin Lees.

Theodore Kuchar

Theodore Kuchar is one of the most prolifically recorded conductors of the past decade, having recorded over eighty compact discs for the Naxos and Marco Polo labels. He served as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine in a contract spanning 1992-2000; upon completion of that agreement, he was awarded the title of Conductor Laureate for Life. Since 1990, he has served as Artistic Director of the Australian Festival of Chamber Music, an annual event regarded as the pre-eminent chamber music festival of the Southern Hemisphere. He presently serves as Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Fresno Philharmonic Orchestra, Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra, and Reno Chamber Orchestra, and Resident Conductor of Kent/Blossom Music Festival, the educational institution established by the late George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra. Recent guest conducting engagements have taken him to major musical centres including Amsterdam, Berlin, Chicago, Cleveland, Helsinki, Hong Kong, London, Madrid, Prague and Sydney. Soloists with whom Kuchar has collaborated include Mstislav Rostropovich, Itzhak Perlman, Yo-Yo Ma, Sarah Chang, James Galway and Lynn Harrell, among many others.



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Playing Time
67:36

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This recording of Tchaikovsky orchestral rarities includes the early, reconstructed symphonic poem, *Fatum*, which incorporates the 'fate motifs' of the last three symphonies with something of the ebb and flow of a Liszt rhapsody. The overtures and dances are from operas less often heard in international repertoire than the established *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*. They range from the very Russian sounding *Overture to The Voyevoda*, Tchaikovsky's first opera, to the Cossack-inspired *Gopak* from *Mazeppa*.

Pyotr Il'yich
TCHAIKOVSKY
(1840-1893)

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| 1 | The Queen of Spades: Overture | 3:58 |
| 2 | Fatum - Symphonic Poem, Op.77 | 15:58 |
| 3 | The Voyevoda: Overture | 9:21 |
| 4 | The Maid of Orleans: Entr'acte between Acts I and II | 3:22 |
| 5 | The Maid of Orleans: Danse des Bohémiens (Act II) | 3:44 |
| 6 | The Maid of Orleans: Danse des Polichinelles et des Histrions (Act II) | 4:21 |
| 7 | Cherevichki (The Slippers): Danse russe (Act III) | 3:52 |
| 8 | Cherevichki (The Slippers): Danse des Cosaques (Act III) | 3:26 |
| 9 | The Enchantress: Introduction | 5:31 |
| 10 | The Enchantress: Danse des Histrions (Act I) | 3:56 |
| 11 | Mazeppa: Gopak (Act I) | 4:21 |
| 12 | The Oprichnik: Danses (Act IV) | 5:47 |

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine • Theodore Kuchar

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