

Russian Songs and Arias

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky retains his position as the most popular of all Russian composers. Born in 1840, he 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, going on to take employment in the Ministry of Justice. During these years he developed his abilities as a musician and 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 and immediate separation, events that could only add further to his problems of character and inclination. His homosexuality was a torment to him, and he remained subject to morbid sensitivity and diffidence. He nevertheless enjoyed considerable success as a composer both in Russia and abroad. His sudden death in St Petersburg in 1893 gave rise to contemporary speculation and to various posthumous rumours. 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. He 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, *Kabi znala ya* (Had I known) ㉔, 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. *Ya li v pole da ne travushka bila?* (Was I not a blade of grass in the field?) ㉕, the seventh song, takes a version of Shevchenko's 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.

In the opera house only two of Tchaikovsky's operas are in regular international repertoire, *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*, both based on Pushkin. The second of these, first staged at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg in 1890, has a libretto devised by the composer and his brother Modest. It is, in essence, a horror story, in the manner of Edgar Allan Poe, a tale of monomania, leading to murder and suicide. It is spring and in a square in the Summer Garden, where children play and nursemaids take care of their charges, two officers discuss the strange behaviour of Hermann, who watches them gambling but never plays. Hermann has fallen in love with a girl whose name, even, he does not know, but she is Lisa, betrothed to Yeletsky and granddaughter of the old Countess who, as a young woman in Paris, had been saved from gambling losses by the revelation of the winning three cards, to be used to restore her fortunes, provided she never played again. It is said that the Countess, who has revealed the secret twice, will die by the hand of the third person, who will force the secret from her. In the second scene Lisa, at the country house of the Countess, has mixed feelings about Yeletsky, expressed in her aria *Otkuda eti slyozhi* (Why do you flow, my tears?) ㉖, her musings interrupted by the appearance of Hermann, below. He seeks her forgiveness, interrupted by the voice of the Countess telling Lisa to go to bed. This turns Hermann's thoughts again to the story of the three cards. This obsession leads Hermann to cause the death of the Countess, when he enters her bedroom, threatening her with a revolver.

At his barracks Hermann, now conscience-stricken, receives a note from Lisa, offering forgiveness and

Dmitry Yablonsky



including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, collaborating with leading soloists. He is also Principal Guest Conductor of the New Russia State Symphony Orchestra. Dmitry Yablonsky has made more than seventy recordings, many of them prize-winning, as conductor and cellist for Naxos, Erato-Warner, Chandos, Belair Music, Sonora, and Connoisseur Society. He has organized international festivals, including the Wandering Stars Festival, which takes place in different countries each year. He is Co-Artistic Director of Qabala Music Festival in Azerbaijan. In 2009 he became an academican of the Independent Academy of Aesthetics and Liberal Arts in Moscow, and also professor of cello at the Baku Academy of Music.

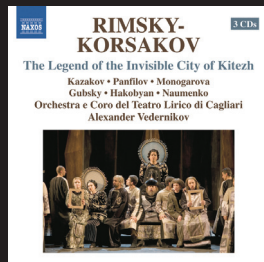
Dmitry Yablonsky was born in Moscow into a musical family. His mother is the distinguished pianist Oxana Yablonskaya, and his father Albert Zaionz has for thirty years been principal oboist in the Moscow Radio Orchestra. Dmitry began playing the cello when he was five and was immediately accepted by the Central Music School for gifted children. When he was nine he made his orchestral debut as cellist and conductor with Haydn's *Cello Concerto in C major*. In Russia he studied with Stefan Kalianov, Rostropovich's assistant, and Isaak Buravsky, for many years solo cello of the Bolshoy Theatre Orchestra. Before immigrating to the United States he performed on many occasions in Moscow and many cities of the former Soviet Union. He was finally able, in 1977, to obtain a visa that allowed him and his mother to move to New York, where he became a pupil of Lorne Munroe at The Juilliard School of Music. In 1979, at the age of sixteen, he participated in the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont, the youngest to do so that summer. In 1980 he met Aldo Parisot, distinguished cellist and professor at Yale University, where he spent four years, at the same time furthering his interest in conducting. After graduating from Yale, he spent two years in the artist diploma programme at The Juilliard School with Zara Nelsova. Dmitry Yablonsky made his debut as a conductor in Italy at the age of 26, when he stepped in to replace another conductor at the last minute. As a cellist he has played in major concert halls throughout the world, and in chamber music has collaborated with distinguished colleagues. For four years he has been Principal Guest Conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra and has conducted many other orchestras,

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Filled with beauty, passion and drama, these Russian songs and arias go straight to the heart of the nation's 19th century musical soul. Rachmaninov's popular *Vocalise* is part of a line which includes songs of love and sadness such as Tchaikovsky's *Op. 47*, two of which are included here, while yearning melodies, high drama and vivid orchestral colour are to be found in the operas of all three featured composers. Montserrat Caballé has described soprano Dinara Alieva's rare talent as 'the gift of Heaven'.

RUSSIAN SONGS AND ARIAS

**Sergey Vasil'yevich
Rachmaninov (1873-1943):**

1 **Vocaliz (Vocalise), Op. 34, No. 14** 7:07

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-93):

2 **The Queen of Spades:
Otkuda eti slyozhi (Why do you flow,
my tears?) (Act 1, Scene 2)** 4:22

**Nikolay Andreyevich
Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908):**

3 **The Tsar's Bride:
V Novgorode (In Novgorod) (Act 2)** 6:07

4 **The Tsar's Bride: Ivan Sergeich
(Ivan Sergeevich) (Act 4)** 5:37

Rachmaninov:

5 **Ne poy krasavitsa (Do not sing
to me, my beauty), Op. 4, No. 4
(orch. Ruben Stepanyan)** 4:24

6 **Francesca da Rimini: O, ne rĭday,
moy Paolo, ne nado (Oh, do not weep,
my Paolo) (Scene 2)** 2:45

Tchaikovsky:

7 **The Queen of Spades: Uzh polnoch'
blizitsya... Akh, istomilas' ya (Midnight
is near... I am tired) (Act 3, Scene 2)** 4:54

8 **Kabi znala ya (Had I known), Op. 47,
No. 1 (orch. Odysseus Dimitriadi)** 5:53

9 **Ya li v pole da ne travushka bila?
(Was I not a blade of grass in the field?),
Op. 47, No. 7** 6:27

10 **Eugene Onegin: Letter Scene:
Puskay pogibnu ya (Even if it means
I perish) (Act 1, Scene 2)** 12:27

Dinara Alieva, Soprano

New Russia State Symphony Orchestra • Dmitry Yablonsky

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