



NAXOS

TCHAIKOVSKY

Piano Concerto No. 2 Concert Fantasia



Eldar Nebolsin, Piano
New Zealand Symphony Orchestra
Michael Stern

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G major, Op. 44 · Concert Fantasia in G major, Op. 56

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky retains his position as the most popular of all Russian composers. His music offers obvious superficial charms in its winning melodies and vivid orchestral colours. At the same time his achievement is deeper than this, offering an early synthesis between the Russian and the cosmopolitan.

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 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.

It was during a stay at his sister's estate at Kamenka in October 1879 that Tchaikovsky started work on his *Piano Concerto No. 2 in G major, Op. 44*, thus staving off the boredom that he had begun to suffer. He continued the concerto in Paris and in Rome in the spring of 1880, returning to Kamenka to complete the orchestration. He dedicated the concerto to Nikolay Rubinstein, whose initial harsh criticism of his *Piano Concerto No. 1* he had not forgotten, although that concerto was now a part of Rubinstein's concert repertoire. He now hoped that Nikolay Rubinstein would give the first performance, although criticism from him was inevitable, a suggestion that the piano part was episodic and not given enough prominence over the orchestra, a judgement that was duly reported by Tchaikovsky in a letter to Nadezhda von Meck. After the sudden death of Rubinstein in Paris in March 1881, he decided to give the piano part to Taneyev, who gave the first Russian performance in Moscow in

May 1882 under Anton Rubinstein. In fact the concerto had already been heard in New York in November 1881, with the pianist Madeleine Schiller, under Theodore Thomas. Taneyev expressed reservations about the piano writing and other elements in the concerto, although he had expressed earlier satisfaction. Tchaikovsky himself made some cuts for performances of the concerto with the young pianist Vasily Sapelinov in 1888 in St Petersburg, Prague and Moscow. Further changes were proposed by the pianist Alexandre Ziloti, a former pupil of Tchaikovsky at the Moscow Conservatory and now a friend of the composer. Tchaikovsky rejected Ziloti's suggestions, although these found their way into the new edition of the work that had been under preparation and was published after Tchaikovsky's death.

The first movement of the new concerto might at first seem, as Nikolay Rubinstein had suggested, episodic. Taneyev thought it too long, only one of his complaints about the work. The solid first subject is stated by the orchestra and then taken up by the solo piano. After a solo cadenza the change to the key of E flat major for the second subject is unexpected. A sudden pause marks the end of the exposition, followed by a forceful orchestral statement of the second subject in C major. The long development section includes two further cadenzas before the orchestra returns with the first subject in recapitulation, the second subject returning in B flat major, before a shift to the relative G minor and a final passage in the tonic key. The unusual feature of the second movement lies in its considerable use of a solo violin and a solo cello. There is contrast in a central section and cadenzas for violin and then for cello are followed by the return of the principal theme, offered by the solo violin, accompanied by plucked strings and by the syncopated chords of the solo piano. A short piano cadenza leads to the closing section, where, in the present recording, there occurs one of the few short cuts allowed by the composer. The final *Allegro con fuoco*, as

succinct as the first movement is extended, allows the soloist to burst in with the first subject, to which a second theme in E minor offers the first contrast. A third theme is introduced and this is to provide a link to the recapitulation, with the return of the main theme. The second and third themes return in D minor and F major respectively, and the movement ends with the expected panache.

Tchaikovsky's *Concert Fantasia*, Op. 56, for piano and orchestra was first performed in Moscow in March 1885 with Taneyev as soloist and was heard in St Petersburg the following spring with the same pianist. It had been partly inspired by the playing of the pianist and composer Eugen d'Albert, who had given concerts in Moscow the previous winter.

The first movement, in sonata rather than rondo form, starts with a very Russian theme announced by three flutes. A second theme in B minor is introduced by a solo flute, and a third related theme appears in the expected D major. The development is replaced by an extended piano cadenza, followed by a recapitulation. The second of the two movements, *Contrastes*, at the beginning marked *Andante cantabile*, derives from rejected sketches of Tchaikovsky's *Suite No. 3*. The piano alone opens with a melancholy G minor theme, soon to be joined by a solo cello. A second theme, marked *Più tranquillo*, is proposed by the strings, with an ostinato horn accompaniment, leading to the return of the first theme. The violas take up the ostinato, accompanying a new and contrasted theme, *Molto vivace* then *Vivacissimo*. There is a sudden return to the first theme, entrusted now to the horn, but this is interrupted by a burst of activity that equally abruptly gives way to the *tranquillo* theme and then to a brilliant closing section, with reminiscences of the opening of the work.

Keith Anderson

Eldar Nebolsin



Photo: Kirill Bashkirov

A former student of the renowned Russian pianist and teacher Dmitri Bashkirov, Eldar Nebolsin currently records for the Naxos label. His début album, Rachmaninov's *Preludes, Opp. 23 and 32* (8.570327), earned high praise from *Classics Today*, while his second album released the following year, both Liszt *Piano Concertos* and *Totentanz* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Vasily Petrenko (8.570517), earned top place on the Naxos Bestsellers' Digital Platform for six consecutive months. He followed this with Ernő Dohnányi's *Variations on a Nursery Theme* (8.572303), with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and JoAnn Falletta released in May 2010, Chopin's complete works for piano and orchestra with the Warsaw Philharmonic and Antoni Wit (8.572335 and 36) released in August 2010, followed by a solo album of works by Schubert (8.572459) released in the summer of 2011, and the *Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2* by Fernando Lopes-Graça (8.572817) in 2013. Earlier recordings include two albums for Decca. Eldar Nebolsin enjoys a busy international career as a soloist, recitalist and chamber-music player, appearing with conductors, orchestras and colleagues of international distinction. During the 2009/2010 season he enjoyed the honour of being Artist in Residence for Musis Sacrum in Arnhem following his successful début with the Gelders Orkest and Nikolay Alexeев in 2008. In 2005 he was unanimously awarded the Sviatoslav Richter Prize in the First International Piano Competition in Moscow, where he was also honoured with the special award for The Best Classical Concerto Performance. Eldar Nebolsin has lived in Spain since 1991 and currently holds a place on the faculty of the International Institute of Chamber Music in Madrid, teaching alongside Ralf Gothoni, and is regularly invited to give

master-classes both in piano solo repertoire and chamber music. He is Professor of Piano at the Hanns Eisler Music Hochschule in Berlin.

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

Photo: Matt Grace



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Michael Stern

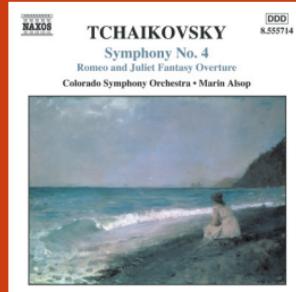


Photo: Todd Rosenberg

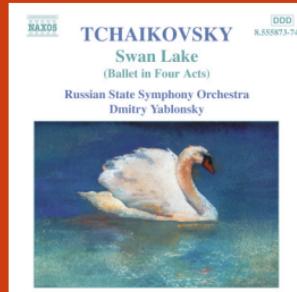
Michael Stern is the Music Director of the Kansas City Symphony and the Founding Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the IRIS Orchestra in Germantown, Tennessee. Stern and Kansas City have been hailed for their remarkable artistic ascent, original programming, organizational and audience growth and development since his tenure began and have entered a new era in their new home Helzberg Hall at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. Stern and the IRIS Orchestra are widely praised for the virtuosity of their playing and the depth and variety of programming, with a special emphasis on American contemporary music. Past positions have included chief conductor of the Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra, Permanent

Guest Conductor of the Orchestre National de Lyon, and Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestre National de Lille. In North America, Michael Stern has conducted many orchestras including those of New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Boston, Montreal, and Toronto as well as several orchestras throughout Europe and Asia. He received his music degree from The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and is a 1981 graduate of Harvard University, where he earned a degree in American history.

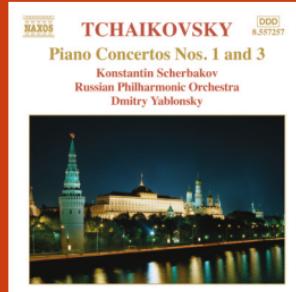
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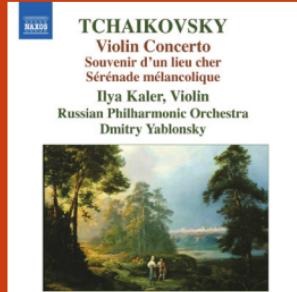
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Tchaikovsky has long maintained his position as among the most popular of all composers, his unequalled gift for melody and colourful orchestration given added depth through a rich Russian soulfulness. The *Second Piano Concerto* has always lived under the shadow of the famous *First* but, played here in the composer's original version, is full of life-enhancing character and emotion. Both this and the *Concert Fantasia* also contain beautiful chamber-music sections allowing unique interaction between soloist and orchestra.

Pyotr Il'yich
TCHAIKOVSKY
 (1840-1893)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G major, Op. 44 **42:46**

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|----------------------|-------|
| ① Allegro brillante | 20:38 |
| ② Andante non troppo | 14:41 |
| ③ Allegro con fuoco | 7:27 |

Concert Fantasia in G major, Op. 56 **29:35**

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| ④ Quasi Rondo: Andante mosso | 15:57 |
| ⑤ Contrastes: Andante cantabile – Molto vivace | 13:38 |

Eldar Nebolsin, Piano
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Recorded at the Michael Fowler Centre, Wellington, New Zealand,
 from 10th to 12th November, 2014

Producer and editor: Wayne Laird • Engineer: Paul McGlashan
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Playing Time
 72:20



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