

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

SYMPHONY NO. **5** IN E MINOR, OP.64
FRANCESCA DA RIMINI, OP.32



RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
Mikhail Pletnev

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
Symphony No.5 in E minor, Op.64 (1888)

1	Andante – Allegro con anima	14.48
2	Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza	13.55
3	Valse : Allegro moderato	5.43
4	Finale : Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace	12.22
5	Francesca da Rimini, Op.32 (1876) Fantasy for orchestra after Dante	24.30

Russian National Orchestra

Conducted by **Mikhail Pletnev**

Concert-master: Alexei Bruni

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, (6/2010)

Total playing-time: 71.41

Biographien auf Deutsch und Französisch

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Conflict suppression

Following the completion of the Fourth's subtle psychography, eleven years would pass before Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky would return to the composition of a 'purely' symphonic work – the Fifth Symphony (the composer considered his mighty *Manfred* Symphony dating from 1885 as his only explicitly programmatic symphony). And, despite having just returned from a spectacularly received European concert tour, he commenced the project in a state of complete exhaustion, self-doubt and uncertainty. From his new country residence in Klin, he wrote in the spring of 1888: *"I frequently have doubts about my own abilities and wonder if it is not time to stop, and if my creativity has not been stretched to the limit."* His comments in a letter to his benefactor, Nadeshda von Meck, in June, are similar; he fears that *"the well may be dry."* However, once he has for the first time made mention of the new Fifth Symphony, inspiration appears to return surprisingly quickly: in a matter of less than eight weeks, Tchaikovsky can report to von Meck that the work has been completed. In all, he had required only four weeks to sketch the work and three to orchestrate it; he conducted its world premiere on 5 November 1888 in St Petersburg.

As with the Fourth, fate also determines the discourse of the Fifth, here, however, more as a poetic idea or predominating common thread than as a concretely formulated programme for the listener. Tchaikovsky himself regarded the symphonic medium as *"the most lyrical of all musical forms,"* endowed with *"incomparably richer expressive means and a finer language for rendering the movements of the soul [than poetry itself]."* In creating the work's lyrical tapestry, Tchaikovsky's draws on his enormous powers of melodic invention (Stravinsky would later go so far as to call him a *"creator of melody"*). In this sense, the Fifth is anything but a programmatic symphony, but rather an entirely autonomous, absolute work of instrumental composition.

The symphony opens with a slow introduction, with the 'fate theme' in the bottom register of the clarinets. The downward theme shows, as the composer wrote in a notebook, *"a complete and utter surrender to Fate, or to what is effectively the same thing: the imponderable will of Providence."* Even more crucial to the further course of the work than this 'semantic' consideration, however, is the fact that the motto-like fate theme plays a decisive, albeit in each case individualised, role in each movement, such that the andante introduction functions, through to the symphony's conclusion, like a motivic link. The Allegro of the first movement is characterised by a dotted, restless principal theme, once again introduced by a clarinet (doubled by a bassoon), before it is intensified by the strings and a cantabile secondary theme arises in the violins. Classical thematic development, in particular that of the initial motif of the principal theme, dominates the development section. Following

the 'rulebook' recapitulation and the coda, the movement fades out in pianissimo. - The slow movement, a tripartite Andante cantabile characterised by an emphasis on the lyrical and a preoccupation with melody as such, is one of the movements that have occasioned severe criticism of Tchaikovsky amongst German-language commentators. It prompted Theodor W. Adorno, who compared it with the music used to accompany silent films and even characterised it as kitsch, to accuse Tchaikovsky of emotional overstatement. Also with regard to the movement, German-speaking critics often failed to differentiate between art and biography, eliciting the following emphatic defence from Tchaikovsky: *"The life of an artist is a double one, consisting both of a life like everyone else's and one of an artistic nature. [...] Anyone who thinks that, in the moment of an emotion, the creative artist is capable of expressing what he feels in his art, is mistaken."* Before the backdrop of the seeming idyll of the impassioned horn melody accompanied by the oboe's counter-voice, in the middle section, the fate theme 'barges in' twice with primordial power. - The third movement is a tuneful waltz in A major, which already presages the ballet, *Sleeping Beauty*, whose composition Tchaikovsky commenced immediately following his completion of the Fifth. It is imbued with an elegant, albeit fragmented, French ambiance, into which the fate theme, in the clarinets and bassoons, once again masochistically storms close to the movement's conclusion. - The finale opens with a slow introduction (analogous to that of the first movement), in which the fate theme, now for the first time in the major mode, is announced assertively and in an almost hymnal guise. Together with the march-like principal theme of the movement, it determines the formal sequence of events in it. Tchaikovsky introduces ever new variants of these themes, at times shrouding his material in the minor or illuminating it in the major, at times intensifying the tempo. At the end of the recapitulation, the fate theme takes an unexpected turn to the minor. The discourse progresses toward a general pause. The work's motto then once again appears, with finality, in the strings, before the glare of the brass, and the first movement's principal theme as well, are added. This centrifugal, blaring, hollowly jubilant, indeed noisy and downright garish conclusion has been a perennial object of controversy in the literature, where it has been hotly discussed. Within this context, Russologue Sigrid Neef offers the following stimulating thesis: *"[...] this is an extremely violent sort of jubilation – an 'outside' is placed over an 'inside' and conventionality triumphs. No resolution to the stated conflicts has been attained, but rather, only their suppression. As in Tchaikovsky's life, so also in his art."*

In addition to his six symphonies and the *Manfred* Symphony, Tchaikovsky was also the creator of several magnificent tone poems. In composing programmatic works, his aim was not the elaboration of a literary programme or the detailed representation of plot, but rather, it

was the psyches of the figures of a literary work, their character development or, often, the emotional dead ends and upheavals into which they navigated or were drawn, that fascinated him. As reading material on his journey to the world premiere of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* in 1876, Tchaikovsky took with him Dante's *Divine Comedy*. One of the work's episodes must have made a particularly deep impression upon him, namely that concerning the unhappy and ill-fated love of Francesca da Polenta for her brother-in-law, a story which ends with the violent death of the lovers. The tone poem in three parts, *Francesca da Rimini*, was composed in Moscow 1876 and premiered in that city on 25 February 1877 under the baton of Nikolai Rubinstein. Whilst a type of motto theme pervades throughout the tone poem, its outer portions are devoted to a musical evocation of the agonies of hellfire. In particular the work's beginning is extremely radical, glaring, and dissonant in character. Here, continual repetition of the piece's highly chromatic material conveys the unending tortures of Hell. The following middle portion tells of the love between Francesca and her brother-in-law, Paolo. Love themes intoned by clarinet and strings form the basis of the lyrical narrative, which is brought to an abrupt end by the arrival of Francesca's husband, announced by horn calls. The pair's doom is sealed. In the third and closing portion, the music falls back into the infernal torments of the first, before it is the turn of the percussion to underscore the eternal atonement of the damned with brutal ferocity.

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 premiere 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.

