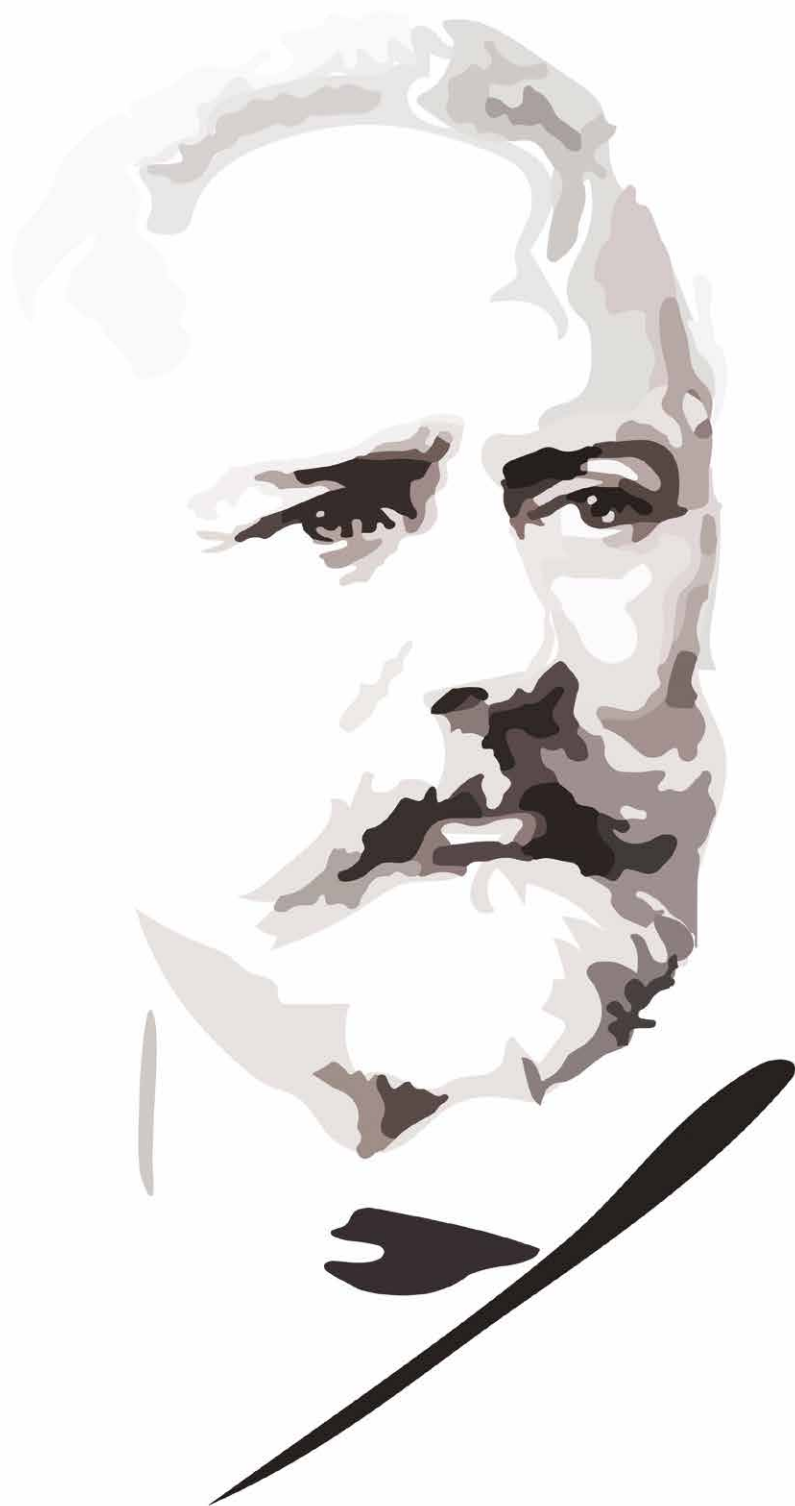




ORCHID CLASSICS



TCHAIKOVSKY
Serenade for Strings
Souvenir De Florence

The Russian Virtuosi of Europe
Yuri Zhislin

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

Serenade for Strings, Op.48 (1880)

1	I. Pezzo in forma di sonatina	9:43
2	II. Valse	3:40
3	III. Elegie	8:59
4	IV. Finale	7:53

Souvenir de Florence, Op.70 (1892)

5	I. Allegro con spirito	10:55
6	II. Adagio cantabile e con moto	10:22
7	III. Allegro moderato	6:34
8	IV. Allegro vivace	7:21

Total **65:29**

The Russian Virtuosi of Europe

Yuri Zhislin

Chamber orchestras have played a huge role in my life since I was a young kid. My stepfather, a fine viola player, joined the legendary Moscow Virtuosi in the mid 80's, and I quickly became their "fils de Regiment", literally growing up alongside the orchestra, spending hours at their rehearsals, going to their concerts and touring with them during my school holidays.

Ever since moving to London many years later, I had wanted to form a chamber ensemble that would allow me to recreate the great times I enjoyed back in Russia. Luckily, I soon found myself surrounded by brilliant young and very enthusiastic string players, many of whom, like myself, had spent their early years in Russia and its neighbouring countries, later continuing their education in leading conservatories throughout Western Europe. Convincing them to play together was not a hard job and before too long we were rehearsing and having a great time. Since our debut concert in Wigmore Hall in 2004, we have enjoyed many concerts and tours in Europe, Russia and South America.

I could not think of a better composer than Tchaikovsky and two of his most beloved works – Souvenir de Florence, which I had adapted for a string orchestra (it was originally written for a string sextet) and Serenade for Strings – to be included in our debut CD.

What you hear on this album is the result of a collaboration between great friends united by their passion and love of making music together, culminating in two days of hard and exciting work alongside a fantastic recording team led by John Fraser. I do hope that this recording paves the way to many more to come and that you will enjoy listening to it as much as we loved making it.

Yuri Zhislin

'All my life I have been much troubled by my inability to grasp and manipulate form in music ... What I write has always a mountain of padding: an experienced eye can detect the thread in my seams and I can do nothing about it'.

This self-critical attitude on Tchaikovsky's part would seem to reveal more about the man than about his music. Easily discouraged by the opinions of his fellow musicians, Tchaikovsky was beleaguered by a maelstrom of emotions when it came to appraising his own compositions. In particular, his preoccupation with form was central to Tchaikovsky's writing of the Serenade for Strings, Op.48, in 1880. The work was composed to pay homage to Mozart's serenades, which possess a clarity of structure and style that Tchaikovsky admired enormously.

Yet for all his tendency towards excoriating self-doubt, the resultant Serenade pleased the composer. He wrote to his patroness Mme von Meck: '... the Serenade ... I wrote from inner compulsion. This is a piece from the heart', and, later, 'I am violently in love with this work and cannot wait for it to be played'. Fortunately, the premiere lived up to Tchaikovsky's excited anticipation: the work was immediately successful and was praised by Anton Rubinstein, among others.

It was principally the first movement of the Serenade that Tchaikovsky

intended as his tribute to Mozart. The movement begins with a noble slow introduction, preceding an *Allegro* cast in sonata form – the *sonatina* of the title. There follows a delightful *Valse*, a dance-form in which Tchaikovsky specialised and which he made his own; there are no Strausses overshadowing his style. The contemplative, autumnal quality of the *Elegie* spills over into the opening bars of the finale, 'Tema Russo', which uses Russian folk music, a Volga 'hauling song', as its basis. The movement gains momentum with a second Russian folk song, a lively dance, followed by a lyrical theme of Tchaikovsky's own invention. Thematic material from the opening movement is deftly incorporated, creating a sense of over-arching unity and bringing the work to its close.

Tchaikovsky first visited Florence in 1874, writing to his brother Modest that the city deeply impressed him. The composer would visit Florence another six times, trips which inspired a tribute in the form of his Op.70 String Sextet, 'Souvenir de Florence', heard on this recording in an arrangement for string orchestra.

The composition of this work would also fulfil an obligation: the St Petersburg Chamber Music Society had commissioned a work from Tchaikovsky for their 1889-1890 season. Tchaikovsky struggled, as chamber music did not sit easily within his comfort zone, and the work took half a decade to complete. According to his diary, he hesitantly

began work on the piece in 1887, but made little progress. With the deadline fast approaching, Tchaikovsky visited Florence in 1890, but focussed his energies on his opera, *The Queen of Spades*, instead.

Having finished the opera and returned home, Tchaikovsky hurriedly penned the *Souvenir de Florence* in under a month. However, just before the premiere, a public rehearsal of the work revealed several awkward passages which Tchaikovsky decided had to be re-written. Whereas the bulk of the piece had been completed in only a few weeks, the momentum was now lost again, and Tchaikovsky put off the revisions until early 1892. At last, the premiere was given during the winter of 1892 for the St Petersburg Chamber Music Society – two years after the intended performance of the original commission.

Tchaikovsky's struggle when writing the 'Souvenir de Florence' was not mere procrastination, nor even a greater devotion to other projects. Much of the difficulty lay with the six-part texture. Tchaikovsky wrote that composing a sextet proved 'incredibly hard work', explaining to Modest that the difficulty was 'not a lack of ideas, but the complexity of the form. There must be six independent yet compatible voices.' Balancing music for two violin parts, two viola parts and two cello parts is a notoriously delicate task, and this is why the work is so often heard in the arrangement for string ensemble heard on this disc.

Despite its title, the work is not obviously Italianate, but is closer in quality to the chamber works of Brahms. The first movement contrasts a dramatic first subject in D minor with a more lyrical secondary theme in A. The slow movement – the most Italianate of the four – is remarkable for its wonderful *forte* chordal introduction, in which the string ensemble resembles the sonority of an organ. This is followed by breezy melodies, beginning in the violins, to pizzicato accompaniment in the lower instruments. The central section, in D minor, features triplet figures played with the tip of the bow. It is this slow movement which is in many ways Tchaikovsky's most successful solution to the difficulties of writing in six parts: rich chords, which relish the homogeneous nature of a string ensemble rather than trying to escape it, and a lightening of the potentially overbearing accompaniment with the use of pizzicato.

The third movement juxtaposes a sober, Brahmsian principal theme, passed from violas, then violins, to cellos, with a lighter, rather skittish Trio section in A major. The sonata-rondo finale basks in the sunshine of Florence with its dancing, folk-like melody, which recurs and is treated contrapuntally during the development section, before concluding in the bright key of D major.

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THE RUSSIAN VIRTUOSI OF EUROPE

Formed by the 1993 BBC Radio Two Young Musician Yuri Zhislin, the orchestra brings together some of the finest European musicians brought up in the best traditions of the Russian Instrumental School.

The Virtuosi regularly perform at London's LSO St Luke's, Cadogan Hall and Kings Place, Salle Gaveau in Paris, International House of Music in Moscow, Mikhailovsky Palace in St Petersburg, Kats Auditorium in Novosibirsk, as well as at major venues in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago de Chile in South America.

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The members of the ensemble are recognised solo and chamber musicians, teachers at major music conservatoires and principals of Europe's leading chamber and symphony orchestras.

The Virtuosi are delighted to have their debut recording released on Orchid Classics.

For further information please visit www.thervoe.com



First Violins

Yuri Zhislin

Natalia Lomeiko

Evgenia Ryabinina

Shlomi Dobrinsky

Dunja Lavrova

Second Violins

Eva Bindere

Evgenia Epshtein

Igor Pikayzen

Elena Fikhtengolts

Calin Andrei

Violas

Sofia Lebed

Grigori Aronovich

David Abramian

Evgenia Vynogradska

Cellos

Alexei Sarkissov

Denis Severin (*Serenade only*)

Kristina Blaumane (*Souvenir only*)

Pierre Doumenge

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Recorded at All Saints' Church, East Finchley, London,
on 8th and 10th January 2015

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