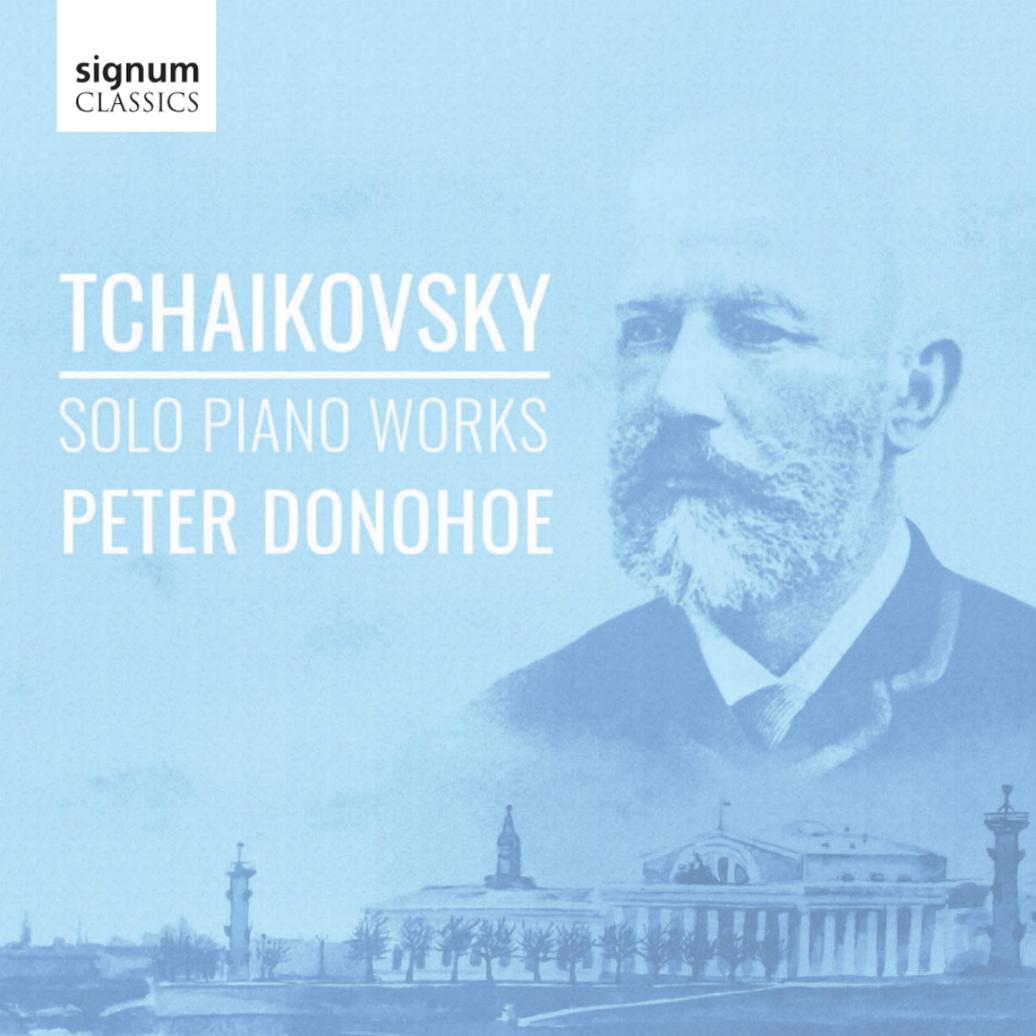


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CLASSICS

TCHAIKOVSKY

SOLO PIANO WORKS

PETER DONOHOE



TCHAIKOVSKY

SOLO PIANO WORKS

CD1

Two Pieces Op. 1

- | | |
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| [1] Scherzo à la Russe in Bb Major Op. 1 No. 1 | [6.24] |
| [2] Impromptu in E-Flat Minor, Op. 1 No. 2 | [6.08] |

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| [3] Capriccio in G-Flat Major , Op. 8 | [5.25] |
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Six Pieces on a Single Theme, Op. 21

- | | |
|---|--------|
| [4] I. Prelude. Allegro moderato | [2.03] |
| [5] II. Fugue in 4 voices. Andante | [3.06] |
| [6] III. Impromptu. Allegro molto | [1.53] |
| [7] IV. Funeral March. Moderato.
Tempo di Marcia | [5.42] |
| [8] V. Mazurka. Allegro moderato | [4.11] |
| [9] VI. Scherzo. Allegro vivace | [4.50] |

CD2

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| [1] Aveu Passionné , Op. Posth. | [3.01] |
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Sonata No. 2 in G Major, Op. 37

- | | |
|---|---------|
| [2] I. Moderato e risoluto | [11.56] |
| [3] II. Andante non troppo quasi Moderato | [8.50] |
| [4] III. Scherzo. Allegro giocoso | [3.20] |
| [5] IV. Finale. Allegro vivace | [6.55] |

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|--------------------------------------|--------|
| [6] Humoresque , Op. 10 No. 2 | [2.48] |
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|---------------------------|--------|
| [7] Dumka , Op. 59 | [8.20] |
|---------------------------|--------|

Total timings:	[84.56]
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Tchaikovsky's contemporaries tell us that he was good enough to become a concert pianist, if he had chosen to follow that path. But he preferred to focus on composition, and rarely performed in public concerts. His interest in the piano is mainly to be found in his many pieces for the instrument, and since most of these were suitable for amateurs with solid skills, they sold well and played an important role in building up his fame. Writing for concert soloists was a more difficult task, and even Tchaikovsky's most sympathetic critic, Hermann Laroche, while praising the melodic beauty of the piano music, suspected that the composer could not manage without "the varied and luxuriant colours of the modern orchestra and the great expanse of symphonic form; only there ... does he feel at home, but where his palette is more restricted, he sounds relatively impoverished". To be fair, this was written in 1873, before Tchaikovsky finally turned his hand to the composition of more ambitious piano works.

Tchaikovsky had the greatest respect for the music of Robert Schumann, whose influence on his piano music is obvious. Alongside his Russian colleagues, Tchaikovsky prized Schumann for his innovative spirit, but also

for his ardent expression of emotion, which led him to avoid superficial virtuosity. Schumann's piano music was often very challenging to play, but it was personal and intimate even so: the difficulties emerged from the spirit of the piece, and not from any external desire to impress the ladies (a charge levelled at Liszt, rather uncharitably). Tchaikovsky adhered closely to Schumann's intimate approach outside the occasional showy flourish.

But this is not to say that Tchaikovsky's piano music was derivative, since he developed his own unmistakable style, with boundless melodic invention and a clarity of textural layers that bring to mind his orchestral sonorities. There are, if you listen closely, "woodwind" passages (as in one of the episodes in the final rondo of the G-major Sonata) or climaxes of roaring brass (as in the first movement of the same work). Konstantin Igumnov, a passionate advocate of Tchaikovsky's piano (music, and one of the first to record the Sonata), claimed that the piano pieces do not "play themselves", and do not offer sonorities of self-evident beauty, in the manner of Chopin or Liszt: pianists need to discover how to convey them effectively, as they must do with Beethoven,

PETER DONOHOE

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or indeed, with Schumann. As Igumnov put it, “Tchaikovsky’s piano music is difficult to perform, but not impossible”.

Peter Donohoe disagrees, insisting that all music requires performers to find the right approach, so he does not see Tchaikovsky as any kind of exception. He writes:

“It is inexplicable to me that Tchaikovsky’s solo piano music should remain so infrequently performed, containing as it does all of the composer’s characteristic harmony, his wonderful melodic gift, his capacity for majestic gesture, magically beautiful moments, immense sadness, and passages of extreme excitement. His piano writing is often orchestral in texture, but also demonstrates the direct but very diverse pianistic influences of Liszt and Schumann, and incorporates in an almost naive way folk-style dance rhythms and melodies from Russia. This treasure trove is immensely rewarding to play, whether it be a small-scale salon piece such as the Humoresque Op. 10 No 2, or large in scale, such as is the gigantic Grand Sonata in G Major.”

Two Pieces Op. 1 Scherzo à la Russe in Bb Major, Op. 1 No. 1 (1867)

Here Tchaikovsky used a folk tune that he himself had recorded while vacationing on a Ukrainian estate (as often happens in such cases, no one has been able to pinpoint the original song). The inspiration for a “Russian scherzo” comes from Glinka’s highly influential orchestral fantasy *Kamarinskaya*, which subjects a tiny scrap of folk melody to endless variation with great energy and ingenuity. Tchaikovsky’s Russian style is not at all purist: it never intends to imitate folk music or set it in a museum frame, but instead is full of spooky chromaticism and a sweet lyrical sensibility that was often frowned upon by his peers. His little folk tune is only the beginning of an exciting journey full of twists and turns before the glorious virtuosic coda. The piece was premiered by Nikolai Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky’s mentor and friend, and composer decided it was good enough to be published as his “Opus 1”.

Impromptu in E-Flat Minor, Op. 1 No. 2 (1864)

The Impromptu was only paired with the Scherzo by accident. The publisher Jurgenson discovered it written next to the Scherzo in Tchaikovsky’s manuscript and saw no problem in printing both. Tchaikovsky discovered the mistake too late, and was not at all pleased, since he saw the Impromptu as a student piece. But listeners may well thank Jurgenson for preserving this fascinating piece, which presents a typical Romantic contrast between the turbulent reality consuming the protagonist (in the tarantella-style outer sections) and a beautiful dream – a serene Italianate melody with harp-like accompaniment, before harsh reality returns. The design prefigures Tchaikovsky’s great symphonic fantasia *Francesca da Rimini*.

Capriccio in G-Flat Major, Op. 8 (1870)

The Capriccio presents a similar Romantic contrast, now between the bustling life of the outside world and the quiet intimacy of the inner life. The intricate orchestral textures of the outer sections whimsically displace the beats, in the manner of Schumann. The middle section is a sweet melody, a dreamy recollection of a waltz once heard at a ball,

perhaps, which would be quite at home in a Tchaikovsky ballet. The piece was dedicated to Karl Klindworth, a student of Liszt’s, a friend of Wagner’s, and also Tchaikovsky’s colleague at the Moscow Conservatoire.

Six Pieces on a Single Theme, Op. 21 (1873)

Tchaikovsky dedicated these six pieces to his former composition professor Anton Rubinstein, who was also an internationally renowned pianist, hoping that Rubinstein would soon include them in his vast repertoire. Frustratingly, Rubinstein left them untouched for ten years, until he finally brought them before the public in 1883. Tchaikovsky, consoled, said that “they could not be played better than this”. Several of the pieces became staple items in Rubinstein’s repertoire for his tours abroad.

It is clear that Tchaikovsky wished to impress his former teacher with his compositional sophistication, choosing as his vehicle a deft demonstration of his ability to use the same theme six times in pieces of such different character that only the most attentive listeners will discern the common thread. Tchaikovsky knew that one of Rubinstein’s concert favourites, Schumann’s *Carnaval*, took the same approach

to its thematic material. In the Prelude and the Fugue, the theme hints at its roots in Russian folk song, but also shows that it can ably support the earnest contrapuntal treatment in the manner of Bach. The Impromptu is the most overtly Schumannesque, ever capricious and submerging the theme inside its fleet figuration.

The Funeral March does its best to conceal any semblance of a walking pulse so that it can convey a more personal grief. Its middle section is a passionate outburst that culminates in a quotation of the Dies Irae chant from the Catholic requiem mass, which had become a much-used symbol of death in the hands of Romantic composers. The Mazurka takes off from where the Funeral March had stopped, inheriting some gloom, but eventually brightens up. The final Scherzo is built around Tchaikovsky's favourite device of alternating between two and three beats (6/8 and 3/4), and hovers between pure playfulness and the desire for a lyrical utterance, which has a chance to break through in the more placid middle section.

Aveu Passionné, Op. Posth. (1891?), publ. 1949

After a disappointing premiere of his symphonic ballad *Vovyevoda* in 1891, Tchaikovsky destroyed the score (although it was later reconstructed), but he based this piano piece on some of the music from the abandoned work. While the piano version is entitled “a passionate avowal (of love)”, the music of *Vovyevoda* at this point actually represents a bitter reproach. The story behind *Vovyevoda*, which comes from a ballad by the great Polish poet Mickiewicz, was known to Tchaikovsky through Pushkin's translation, and in this scene, a young lover is bitterly reproaching his beloved for having married an older man for his money. *Aveu* inherits the cello register of the *Vovyevoda* theme, and its dark and brooding atmosphere.

Sonata No. 2 in G Major, Op. 37 (1878)

“I was at Nikolai Rubinstein's, where he asked me to listen to him play my sonata. He played it *superbly*... I was simply astounded by the artistry and energy he summoned to play this rather dry and complicated piece”. These words of Tchaikovsky's show that he was uncertain about the quality of this sonata, but Rubinstein's

performance managed to allay his fears. It is accepted today as the pinnacle of Tchaikovsky's music for solo piano, and is written on a truly symphonic scale, rivalling some of Tchaikovsky's symphonies in richness and intensity.

Tchaikovsky began writing the Sonata on the shores of Lake Geneva in the spring of 1878, after abandoning his wife and fleeing Russia. He completed it over the following months while staying on his sister's Ukrainian country estate, still away from society. Like the Fourth Symphony which preceded it, the Sonata represents a protagonist through its lyrical music, contrasted to the hostile clamour of the world outside. The brilliant march-like theme that opens and closes the first movement has an air of forced triumph, and Tchaikovsky underlines his ironic intent by introducing the *Dies irae* motif, at first lyrically. The tragic meaning of the movement is revealed in the shattering central climax.

The second movement is an expression of grief, introverted and tongue-tied, conveyed through a melody that is fixated on two notes, unable to take flight. The Scherzo third movement is highly attractive in itself with its capricious rhythms and agile figurations, but on the

large scale, it is an escapist flight from the serious questions posed in the previous movements. The finale rushes past with a kaleidoscopic sequence of themes, each one following breathlessly upon the other. One theme stands out as a powerful lyrical utterance, and the listener can imagine it worked up into a triumphant apotheosis at the close, but Tchaikovsky rejects this move in favour of a more ambiguous ending. The meaning of the movement can be found in the composer's own comments on the Finale of his Fourth Symphony: “If you cannot find happiness within yourself, look to others. Get out and mingle. Look at the good time they are having, simply by surrendering themselves to joy. Life is bearable after all”.

Humoresque, Op. 10 No. 2 (1872)

One wonders if this piece stirred in Stravinsky's memory as he was writing his ballet *Petrushka*: a plaintive, angular motif is set alongside a joyful and simple-hearted dance of the sort played on the accordion by street musicians in every Russian city – the aristocratic Tchaikovsky had a keen ear for street music. Here, he draws much humour from the two repeated notes in a middle voice.

The contrasting middle section is loosely based on a French folk song “La fille aux oranges”, which Tchaikovsky heard in Nice just before he started to write the piece.

Dumka, Op. 59 (1886)

This piece was written to a commission from the Parisian music publisher Félix Macker, who evidently sought a substantial virtuosic piece. The title “Dumka” (meaning “thought” or “rumination”) points to an Eastern-European genre of improvised song with instrumental accompaniment, which Tchaikovsky had most likely encountered in Ukraine. Switching between slow and fast folk-inspired music, the Dumka is a cousin of Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies, and Tchaikovsky originally gave the piece the working title of “rhapsody”. But there is more to the design: it is a rustic scene with a hint of dramatic action, possibly even with a tragic outcome, as in many a Romantic ballade. The doleful improvisatory beginning is like a preamble to the telling of a legend. The fast section suggests a folk dance, which quickly turns raucous. The merriment is interrupted by a lyrical variation on the same material – as if the spotlight falls on a new character. The dance then resumes, but only

to be swept away by a dramatic wave that leads to the climax. The return of the doleful theme brings the narrative frame to a close.

Notes by Professor Marina Frolova-Walker FBA

PETER DONOHOE

Peter Donohoe was born in Manchester in 1953. He studied at Chetham’s School of Music for seven years, graduated in music at Leeds University, and went on to study at the Royal Northern College of Music with Derek Wyndham and then in Paris with Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod. He is acclaimed as one of the foremost pianists of our time, for his musicianship, stylistic versatility and commanding technique.

In recent seasons Donohoe has appeared with Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic and Concert Orchestra, Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, St Petersburg Philharmonia, RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Belarusian State Symphony Orchestra, and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. He has undertaken a UK tour with the Russian State Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as giving concerts in many South American and European countries, China, Hong Kong,

South Korea, Russia, and USA. Other past and future engagements include performances of all three MacMillian piano concertos with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra; a ‘marathon’ recital of Scriabin’s complete piano sonatas at Milton Court; an all-Mozart series at Perth Concert Hall; concertos with the Moscow State Philharmonic Orchestra, St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra at Royal Festival Hall; and a residency at the Buxton International Festival.

Donohoe is also in high demand as a jury member for international competitions. He has recently served on the juries at the International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow (2011 and 2015), Busoni International Competition in Bolzano, Italy (2012), Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels (2016), Georges Enescu Competition in Bucharest (2016), Hong Kong International Piano Competition (2016), Harbin Competition (2017 and 2018), Artur Rubenstein Piano Master Competition (2017), Lev Vlassenko Piano Competition and Festival (2017), Alaska International e-Competition (2018), Concours de Geneve Competition (2018) and Ricardo Viñes International Competition in Lleida, Spain, along with many national competitions both within the UK and abroad.



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Donohoe’s recent releases include two volumes of Mozart Piano Sonatas with SOMM Records. Disc 1 was BBC Music Magazine’s ‘Recording of the Month’ in April 2019; and disc 2 has received high praise from Gramophone Magazine, Classical Ear and Musical Opinion. Other recent discs include Stravinsky: Music for Solo

Piano and Piano and Orchestra with the Hong Kong Philharmonic (SOMM); a new recording of Shostakovich's Piano Concertos and Sonatas with the Orchestra of the Swan, and a disc of Shostakovich's 24 Preludes and Fugues (both Signum Records), which was described as 'thoughtful and poignant' by The Guardian; a disc of Scriabin Piano Sonatas (SOMM) which was called 'magnificent' by the Sunday Times; a recording of Witold Maliszewski's Piano Concerto in B flat minor with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra conducted by Martin Yates (Dutton Vocalion); and three discs of Prokofiev piano sonatas for SOMM, the third of which was released at the end of April 2016. The first Prokofiev disc was described by Gramophone as 'devastatingly effective', declaring Donohoe to be 'in his element', and a review in Classical Notes identified Donohoe's 'remarkably sensitive approach to even the most virtuosic of repertoire'. His second Prokofiev disc was given 5 stars by BBC Music Magazine, and the third disc was highly praised by The Times, Birmingham Post, and Jessica Duchon. Other recordings include Cyril Scott's *Piano Concerto* with the BBC Concert Orchestra and Martin Yates (Dutton Vocalion), and Malcolm Arnold's *Fantasy on a Theme*

of *John Field* with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Martin Yates (also Dutton), for which BBC Music Magazine described him as an 'excellent soloist', and Gramophone stated that it 'compelled from start to finish'.

Donohoe has performed with all the major London orchestras, as well as orchestras from across the world: the Royal Concertgebouw, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Munich Philharmonic, Swedish Radio, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Vienna Symphony and Czech Philharmonic Orchestras. He has also played with the Berliner Philharmoniker in Sir Simon Rattle's opening concerts as Music Director. He made his twenty-second appearance at the BBC Proms in 2012 and has appeared at many other festivals including six consecutive visits to the Edinburgh Festival, La Roque d'Anthéron in France, and at the Ruhr and Schleswig Holstein Festivals in Germany. In the United States, his appearances have included the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Detroit Symphony Orchestras. Peter Donohoe also performs numerous recitals internationally and continues working with his long-standing duo partner Martin Roscoe, as well as more recent

collaborations with artists such as Raphael Wallfisch, Elizabeth Watts and Noriko Ogawa.

Donohoe has worked with many of the world's greatest conductors: Christoph Eschenbach, Neeme Jarvi, Lorin Maazel, Kurt Masur, Andrew Davis and Yevgeny Svetlanov. More recently he has appeared as soloist with the next generation

of excellent conductors: Gustavo Dudamel, Robin Ticciati and Daniel Harding.

Peter Donohoe is an honorary doctor of music at seven UK universities, and was awarded a CBE for services to classical music in the 2010 New Year's Honours List.

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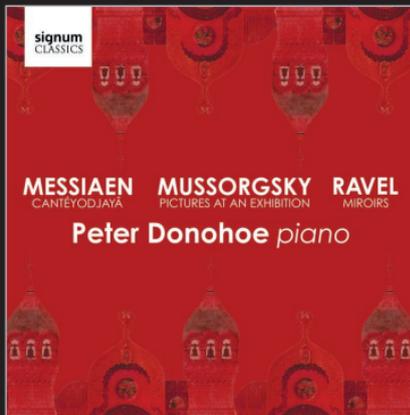
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