philharmonia orchestra

SignumClassics

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

SIGCD133

SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS

SCHUBERT

SYMPHONY No.9

SIGCD219

SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS

MAHLER

SYMPHONY No.4

www.signumrecords.com

www.philharmonia.co.uk

Available through record stores and at www.signumrecords.com For more information call +44 (0) 20 8997 4000

signum CLASSICS

Charles Mackerras

SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS

TCHAIKOVSKY

SYMPHONY No. 6

philharmonia orchestra

TCHAIKOVSKY
SYMPHONY NO.6

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No.6 in B minor, Op.74, 'Pathétique'

1	I.	Adagio – Allegro non troppo	18.43
2	II.	Allegro con grazia	8.03
3	III.	Allegro molto vivace	8.28
4	IV.	Finale: Adagio lamentoso	10.58

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

5		**Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream, Op.21**	11.45
		Total timings	57.57

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS conductor

www.signumrecords.com

Tchaikovsky: Symphony No.6 in B minor, Op.74, 'Pathétique'
Mendelssohn: Overture to a Midsummer Night's Dream, Op.21

Like his Russian compatriot, Dmitri Shostakovich, a fug of mystery often surrounds the life and music of Pyotr Tchaikovsky – a mix of fact and myth which, while absorbing, tends to mist the music in hearsay, speculation, economy of truth and even possible fabrication. In Shostakovich's case it is the eternally confusing question as to the extent to which he was playing the Soviet Union's upper echelons and apparatchiks – or being played by them. In Tchaikovsky's case, it is the manner in which he led his life and the circumstances of his death which have led to fevered debate. While Shostakovich was periodically celebrated and excoriated by Stalin and his successors, Tchaikovsky was eventually rehabilitated from being a decadent product of Tsarist Russia into a 'standard-bearer of human progress' by the Soviet authorities – an about turn brought on by little more than his extreme popularity in the USSR as well as in the rest of the world.

Tchaikovsky's immense musical achievement was no less initially undermined by the West during the early Twentieth Century. He died not long before the recording industry was beginning to bring classical music to the masses, and the profundity of his music, as well as the luridly fascinating nature of the legends associated with him, helped the industry in no small way. Surrounding music with a narrative is a sure-fire way to bring it to the market – outside associations helping to give context and explanation to music which might otherwise not find an

immediate connection with the listener. Tchaikovsky's final symphony has been affected by both the positive and negative aspects of such a narrative approach.

Born in the small town of Votkinsk, near the Ural Mountains, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's father was a mining engineer and the boy Pyotr was proficient in languages and music from an early age, amassing a good many compositions in his early teenage years. His parents' initial indulgence of his musical abilities gave way to the normal realities of the age and so the 10-year-old was enrolled in the Imperial School of Jurisprudence in Saint Petersburg, a superior institution which specialised in law and more specifically provided a relatively fast track into the civil service. The death of his mother a few years later, from cholera, was a devastating loss to the young teenager, indeed decades later he could write to his benefactor: "Every moment of that appalling day is as vivid to me as though it were yesterday". Graduating in 1859, Tchaikovsky took up a position in the Ministry of Justice, but by late 1862 his musical leanings led him to enrol in Anton Rubinstein's newly-minted Saint Petersburg Conservatoire, where he flourished prior to joining the staff of Rubinstein's brother Nikolay's Moscow Conservatoire. Ten years of teaching and composing were abruptly called to a halt in 1878 when the already highly regarded composer was given a monthly stipend of 1500 francs through the generous patronage of a wealthy widow, Nadezhda von Meck.

Von Meck, aside from bearing him 18 children, encouraged her husband Karl to maximise his considerable engineering abilities and on his death she duly inherited major railway networks, extensive estates and sizeable bank accounts. Famously, she met Tchaikovsky only once, and even then by happenstance – both parties keeping their distance, and fleeing before long without apparently exchanging a word. Such an apparently odd arrangement was rather more likely by design, stemming from her reclusive nature and wilfulness rather than any more fanciful or romantic notions that have been proposed. Reputedly a fine pianist in her youth, she appears to have been devoted to music, employing Debussy to travel with her family, teach her children and accompany her in four-hand works for piano, among other musical duties. She even gave succour to the ailing virtuoso violinist and composer Wieniawski, when in his last months. Her correspondence with Tchaikovsky began in 1876, when she requested some violin and piano arrangements from the composer of his own works, writing to him: "... I ask you to believe this literally, that with your music I live more lightly and more pleasantly". Thus ensued an extraordinary relationship which gave solace, succour and no little fantasy to both parties, in over 1000 existing letters written over 14 years. They begin just prior to Tchaikovsky's short-lived and utterly disastrous marriage and end abruptly in 1890 when von Meck seems to have had serious financial issues. The correspondence provides a fascinating insight into Tchaikovsky's daily life and thoughts on everything from love, marriage and religion to thoughts on his fellow Russian composers and indeed forays into his own compositional processes.

By the time von Meck's allowance had ceased Tchaikovsky was already an internationally famous composer and earning more than enough money to provide for a comfortable life-style. He had also started work on a sixth symphony, a final work to cap his career as a composer and to be dedicated to the Tsar. But, as the composer himself wrote to his nephew 'Bob' Davydov in 1893:

> You know I destroyed a symphony I had been composing and just partly orchestrated in the autumn ... While on my travels I had the idea for another symphony, this time with a programme, but with a programme that will be an enigma to all – let them guess. The symphony will be entitled A Programme Symphony (No. 6) ... The programme itself will be suffused with subjectivity, and not infrequently during my travels, while composing it in my head, I wept a great deal. Upon my return I sat down to write the sketches, and the work went so furiously and quickly that in less than four days the first

> movement was completely ready, and the remaining movements already clearly outlined in my head. The third movement is already half-done. The form of this symphony will have much that is new, and by the way, the finale will not be a noisy allegro, but on the contrary, a long drawn-out adagio. You can't imagine what bliss I feel, being convinced that my time is not yet passed, and I can still work.

This substitute Sixth Symphony, the one we now know as the **'Pathétique', Op.74** was written in January and February 1893 and orchestrated that summer. It also contained a substitute dedication – the Tsar being replaced by 'Bob' Davydov, with whom the composer had apparently become infatuated some years previously. The idea of a secret programme and the fact that Tchaikovsky died a little over a week after the symphony's first performance on 28 October 1893, possibly of cholera, is the point at which all sorts of dubious revelations, half-truths and conspiracy theories take their cue. Was an affair with a teenage scion of the Imperial family discovered and Tchaikovsky offered the choice of 'Siberia or Suicide' by the Tsar himself? Was he tried by a secret court of his old colleagues from the Imperial School of Jurisprudence in order that the honour of the school be preserved? Did his brother Modest urge him to drink the un-boiled, choleric Saint Petersburg water to save the family's reputation or were sexual practices with male prostitutes to blame? Did he even die of cholera, given the strictures in place during cholera epidemics at the time and the treatment of Tchaikovsky's body after death? All of these questions are still routinely squabbled over by experts around the globe.

The fact that the symphony was clearly intended as a valedictory piece by Tchaikovsky does not necessarily make it his requiem or the harbinger of his death any more than a number of elegiac works he composed previously might. In fact, it is clear from his letters of 1893 that he was more often than not in a relatively happy state of mind, writing to friends and colleagues that this symphony was his finest work and of his pride in having composed such a piece. The debate over the symphony and his death rages on and on, and will most likely never find a satisfactory conclusion. R.J. Wiley's summation of the situation among the yet disagreeing commentators bears a health warning of its own that remains relevant today:

> The polemics over his death have reached an impasse ... Rumour attached to the famous dies hard: Paganini's pact with the devil, Salieri's poison. As for illness, problems of evidence offer little hope of satisfactory resolution: the state of diagnosis; the confusion of witnesses; disregard of long-term effects of smoking and alcohol. We do not know how Tchaikovsky died. We may never find out ...

In contrast to Tchaikovsky's rather troubled childhood, Felix Mendelssohn appears to have cruised through his early years, by virtue of a wealthy and cultured upbringing, parents who were happy for their son to pursue a musical career and, of course, immense natural talent which led him to meet many of the most illustrious composers of the day while still in his teenage years. The **Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream, Op.21** was composed in 1826 by the 17-year-old Felix, inspired by family readings of the Shakespeare play in the translation by his distant relation, August Schlegel one of the progenitors of the German Romantic movement and pre-eminent translator of Shakespeare into the German language. Originally conceived as a piano duet, the fully orchestrated version received its first public performance in Stettin in 1827. The Overture is a brilliant little summation of the play, replete with mysterious opening, the evocation of scurrying fairies, the Duke's hunting horn and the long brays accompanying Bottom's transformation into an ass. The consequent incidental music, written almost 16 years later, includes one of the most oft-played and recognisable pieces in the whole of the classical repertoire – the Wedding March.

photograph © Clive Barda

BIOGRAPHIES

SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS (1925 – 2010)

Sir Charles can rightly be called a legendary figure. His career spanned an extraordinary six decades of achievement. He made his conducting debut with Sadler's Wells Opera (now English National Opera) in 1948 and went on to enjoy a lifelong association with the company.

He was First Conductor of the Hamburg Opera (1966–69) and Musical Director of both Sadler's Wells (1970–77) and Welsh National Opera (1987–92). From 1982–85 Sir Charles was Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra: he conducted the Orchestra in the opening concert of the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House in 1973, in which Birgit Nilsson sang in the all-Wagner programme. Sir Charles was Conductor Laureate of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Conductor Emeritus of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Conductor Laureate of the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra, Conductor Emeritus of the Welsh National Opera and Principal Guest Conductor Emeritus of the San Francisco Opera. A specialist in Czech repertory, Sir Charles was Principal Guest Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra from 1997–2003, following his life-long association with both the Orchestra and many aspects of Czech musical life.

He was a regular guest with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra with whom he made his Salzburg Festival debut in 1988 conducting *Le Nozze di Figaro*. He made his debut with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 2004. In addition to his many appearances with the San Francisco Opera, he had a long association with the Metropolitan Opera, New York.

In Europe he conducted regularly in the opera houses of Paris, Berlin, Prague and in his native Australia at the Sydney Opera House. Sir Charles made his operatic debut with the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in 1964, where he subsequently conducted 34 operas, including *Un Ballo in Maschera* which celebrated his 50th anniversary and 80th birthday in 2005. 2002 marked Sir Charles's 50th year with the Edinburgh Festival, in which he conducted Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*, Handel's *Jeptha* and Mozart's *Gran Partita*. At the 2006 Edinburgh Festival he memorably conducted the complete Beethoven symphonies. In 2008, he was named Honorary President of the Edinburgh International Festival Society.

His lifelong association with Czech music produced many milestones, including the British premières of Janáček's *Kát'a Kabanová* (1951), *The Makropulos Case* (1964) and *From the House of the Dead* (1965), and his career defining Janáček discography with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. His vast discography reflects his pioneering interest in performance practice with the symphonies of Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms.

In his final season he conducted his beloved Scottish Chamber and Philharmonia Orchestras in Edinburgh and London and he returned to three of his favourite opera houses: English National Opera for *The Turn of the Screw,* which he had last conducted in London in 1956 at the Scala Theatre sharing the baton with Britten; the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden for *The Cunning Little Vixen*; and Glyndebourne Festival Opera for *Così fan tutte* where on 12 June 2010 he conducted his final public performance.

Sir Charles received a CBE in 1974 and was knighted in 1979. He was honoured with the Medal of Merit from the Czech Republic in 1996, made a Companion of the Order of Australia in 1997 and made a Companion of Honour in the 2003 Queen's Birthday Honours. In May 2005 he was presented with the Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal and in November 2005 was the first recipient of the Queen's Medal for Music.

philharmonia orchestra

The Philharmonia Orchestra is one of the world's great orchestras. Acknowledged as the UK's foremost musical pioneer, with an extraordinary recording legacy, the Philharmonia leads the field for its quality of playing, and for its innovative approach to audience development, residencies, music education and the use of new technologies in reaching a global audience. Together with its relationships with the world's most sought-after artists, most importantly its Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Philharmonia Orchestra is at the heart of British musical life.

Today, the Philharmonia has the greatest claim of any orchestra to be the UK's National Orchestra. It is committed to presenting the same quality, live music-making in venues throughout the country as it brings to London and the great concert halls of the world.

In 2010/11 the Orchestra is performing more than 150 concerts, as well as presenting chamber performances by the Soloists of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and recording scores for films, CDs and computer games. For 15 years now the Orchestra's work has been underpinned by its much admired UK and International Residency Programme, which began in 1995 with the launch of its residencies at the Bedford Corn Exchange and London's Southbank Centre. During 2010/11 the Orchestra not only performs more than 40 concerts at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, but also celebrates its 14th year as Resident Orchestra of De Montfort Hall in Leicester and its 10th year as Orchestra in Partnership at The Anvil in Basingstoke. The Orchestra's extensive touring schedule this season also includes performances in more than 30 of the finest international concert halls in Europe, China and Japan, with conductors including

Esa-Pekka Salonen, Christoph von Dohnányi, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Lorin Maazel.

During its first six decades, the Philharmonia Orchestra has collaborated with most of the great classical artists of the 20th century. Conductors associated with the Orchestra include Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Toscanini, Cantelli, Karajan and Giulini. Otto Klemperer was the first of many outstanding Principal Conductors, and other great names have included Lorin Maazel (Associate Principal Conductor), Riccardo Muti (Principal Conductor and Music Director), Giuseppe Sinopoli (Music Director) and Sir Charles Mackerras (Principal Guest Conductor). As well as Esa-Pekka Salonen, current titled conductors are Christoph von Dohnányi (Honorary Conductor for Life), Kurt Sanderling (Conductor Emeritus) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (Conductor Laureate).

The Philharmonia Orchestra continues to pride itself on its long-term collaborations with the finest musicians of our day, supporting new as well as established artists. This policy extends into the Orchestra itself, where many of the players have solo or chamber music careers alongside their work with the Orchestra. The Philharmonia's Martin Musical Scholarship Fund has for many years supported talented musicians at the start of their careers, including an Orchestral Award, which allows two young players every year to gain performing experience within the Orchestra. The Orchestra is also recognised for its innovative programming policy, at the heart of which is a commitment to performing and commissioning new works by leading composers, among them both the outgoing Artistic Director of its Music of Today series, Julian Anderson, and his successor from 2011/12, Unsuk Chin. Since 1945 the Philharmonia Orchestra has commissioned more than 100 new works from composers including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Mark-Anthony Turnage and James MacMillan.

Throughout its history, the Philharmonia Orchestra has been committed to finding new ways to bring its top quality live performances to audiences worldwide, and to using new technologies to achieve this. Many millions of people since 1945 have enjoyed their first experience of classical music through a Philharmonia recording, and in 2011 audiences can engage with the Orchestra through webcasts, podcasts, downloads, computer games and film scores as well as through its unique interactive music education website, The Sound Exchange (www.philharmonia.co.uk/thesoundexchange). More than 3,500 people a month download free monthly Philharmonia video podcasts, which include artist interviews

and features on repertoire and projects; these films have also been watched by more than 750,000 people on YouTube. In May 2010 the Orchestra's digital 'virtual Philharmonia Orchestra' project, RE-RITE, won both the RPS Audience Development and Creative Communication Awards, and after appearances in London and Leicester tours to Lisbon and Dortmund in 2011.

Recording and broadcasting both continue to play a significant part in the Orchestra's activities, notably through its partnership with Signum Records, releasing new live recordings of Philharmonia performances with its key conductors. Since 2003 the Philharmonia has enjoyed a major partnership with Classic FM, as The Classic FM Orchestra on Tour, as well as continuing to broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS

The relationship between Sir Charles Mackerras and the Philharmonia Orchestra began 56 years ago on 21 June 1955 with a recording of his own arrangement of Verdi's ballet, *The Lady and the Fool*, at Abbey Road Studios. In his own words, "thereafter I seem to have been constantly recording with the Philharmonia", winning numerous awards over the years, most recently for their recording of Humperdinck's opera *Hänsel und Gretel*.

But the longevity of the relationship was only one dimension of the deep bond between the Philharmonia and Sir Charles. Every performance with Sir Charles was a red letter day for the Philharmonia. A musician's musician, he was loved by the Orchestra for his honest musicality, and for the pure, infectious pleasure that he brought to his music-making. He was a pioneer in his approach with a profound understanding of the 21st century orchestra, in a way that led to authoritative and revelatory interpretations of core repertoire. Being part of a Mackerras performance – whether as a musician or audience member – was an inspiration; his understanding of the repertoire and the sense of its style created definitive performances of repertoire from the 18th to the 20th centuries. His glorious performances of Mozart will always be with us. Fortunately for us his acclaimed performances of Dvořák's Symphonies Nos. 7 & 8, Mahler's Symphony No. 4 and Schubert's Symphony No. 9 were captured in live recordings with the Philharmonia Orchestra, alongside this extraordinary performance of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, which took place in the Royal Festival Hall on 8 February 2009.

In the words of Alistair Mackie, Principal Trumpet and Chairman of the Philharmonia Orchestra, "Sir Charles had a very special place in the heart of every musician in the Philharmonia Orchestra. I can think of no other conductor with his unique blend of passion, integrity, and musicianship. He was completely lacking in pomposity or self regard: for him, the joy was all in the music making and in making and communicating that music. Performing with him felt like an entirely shared experience, and a wholly joyous one. His work lives on through his magnificent recordings, such as this recording of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, and we continue to draw inspiration from his wonderful musical legacy."

David Whelton
Philharmonia Orchestra Managing Director

Recorded live at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, London, 8 February 2009

Producer: Misha Donat
Engineer: Jonathan Stokes, Classic Sound Ltd
Photographs: Richard Haughton
Design: Richard Slaney (for the Philharmonia Orchestra) and Andrew Giles

www.signumrecords.com **www.philharmonia.co.uk**

SignumClassics, Signum Records Ltd., Suite 14, 21 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middx UB6 7JD, UK. **+44 (0) 20 8997 4000** E-mail: **info@signumrecords.com**