

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

SYMPHONY NO. **3** IN D MAJOR, OP.29
CORONATION MARCH



RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
Mikhail Pletnev



Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No. 3 in D Major Op. 29 (1875)

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| 1 Introduzione e Allegro – Moderato assai
(Tempo di marcia funebre)-Allegro brillante | 13. 58 |
| 2 Alla tedesca – Allegro moderato e semplice | 6. 25 |
| 3 Andante – Andante elegiac | 10. 55 |
| 4 Scherzo – Allegro vivo | 5. 45 |
| 5 Finale – Allegro con fuoco (tempo di Polacca)-Presto | 8. 55 |

6 Coronation March (1883)	5. 46
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Russian National Orchestra

conducted by Mikhail Pletnev

Concertmaster: Alexei Bruni

Executive Producers: Rick Walker & Job Maarse

Recording Producer: Job Maarse

Balance Engineer: Erdo Groot

Recording Engineer: Roger de Schot

Recording Venue: DZZ Studio 5, Moscow (April 2011)

Total playing time: 52.07

“A step forward”

Nowadays, Tchaikovsky's first three symphonies seldom appear on the concert programmes, whereas his symphonies four to six – in other words, the symphonies generally recognized as masterpieces – are regularly included. And thus the three early symphonies share a fate that none of them have necessarily earned. After all, each in its own individual way is a worthwhile symphony: the composer certainly did not consider them to be preliminary works, a type of precursor to the later symphonies. From 1866 to 1878, Tchaikovsky taught harmony at the Moscow Conservatoire and during this period, he composed – among other works – his first three symphonies, namely in 1866, 1872, and 1875. And for Tchaikovsky, the journey leading to the symphony was not an easy one: on the contrary, he trod a painful path before tapping into this high-end genre. This is proven, on the one hand, by the amount of time and energy he put into the creation of his symphonies, which was characterized by serious doubts about their quality; or, on the other hand, by the fundamental reworking of his second symphony, despite the success of its première. However, Tchaikovsky had a much easier time with his Symphony No. 3 in D. He wrote it at roughly the same time as his ballet *Swan Lake* and his famous Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat minor, completing his symphony in just a few weeks during the summer of 1875. The première took place in Moscow on November 7, 1875, under the baton of Nikolai Rubinstein (who had offered him the above-mentioned position at the conservatoire and had launched almost all of his protégé's orchestral works, up to the Symphony No. 4). Audiences and critics alike received the work favourably; and Tchaikovsky himself discovered “a step forward” in his third symphony. Indeed, the work occupies a special position in his symphonic oeuvre: after the rather distinctive references to folklore, thank to the folk-song quotations in the first two symphonies, there is an aesthetic and structural shift toward western models in his third.

Thus, the Symphony No. 3 is the only symphony by Tchaikovsky written in a major key and laid out in five movements (as is Robert Schumann's *Rhenish* Symphony, with which it is often compared). The composer has been accused of writing more an impersonal type of suite than a serious symphony. And indeed, here Tchaikovsky – with the exception of the gloomy funeral march introduction by the strings – strikes few painful, depressive or simply melancholy tones, which were characteristic of his last three symphonies. Rather, he designed three stylized dance movements, to each of which he assigned a trio: the second movement is a *Ländler* (= an Austrian/Bavarian folk dance), yet despite its superscription of “alla tedesca”, the dark C-minor key is

more reminiscent of the Russian character. In the fourth movement Tchaikovsky conjures up a fairy-like Scherzo (in 2/4 time), which is at times evocative of Mendelssohn. And the finale, with its “Tempo di polacca” (to which the work owes its unofficial title of *Polish*, following a performance in London under Sir August Manns), is a spirited rondo in which the polonaise leads the entire work to a tumultuous conclusion. Both this final movement and the first movement include contrapuntal techniques, as if Tchaikovsky was attempting to provide the “suite” with greater symphonic weight.

In particular, in the development of the first movement, the main themes are elaborated according to the rules in a manner reminiscent of Beethoven. However, the central movement of the symphony is the Andante elegiac, which already contains late-romantic moods of expression, as in an extremely intimate *Romanze*. Time and again, musicological studies have emphasized its similarity to corresponding movements in Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (“Scène aux champs”) and Beethoven's *Pastorale* (“Szene am Bach” = scene by the brook). Incidentally, both latter symphonies also consist of five movements. Here, the musicologists claim, Tchaikovsky has put to music a Russian country scene.

Tchaikovsky was often accused of going after primarily superficial effects in his works, of always following different fads. Now, for once, in his *Festival Coronation March* in D, this accusation is certainly justified. Tchaikovsky composed this five-minute march in 1883 to celebrate the coronation of Tsar Alexander III, who had also commissioned the work. It was first performed in Moscow on May 23, 1883, under the baton of Sergei Taneyev. Respectfully and symbolically, here Tchaikovsky includes many quotes from the Russian national anthem “God save the Tsar”: he also includes quotes from the Danish royal anthem – a reference to the native country of the Empress, Princess Dagmar of Denmark. Tchaikovsky himself did not speak of his coronation march with great pride; rather, he regarded it as “noisy, but weak”. Nevertheless, he did prove one thing in particular in this piece: he had a gut feeling for effect, pomp and splendour. Notwithstanding, this has tended to be interpreted – especially in Germany – as a compositional weakness. And October 28, 2011 proved that the work still has a right to exist, especially in a tradition-oriented country such as Russia. That day, the Bolshoi Theatre was reopened as a cultural centre in Russia, following years of renovation, with a state ceremony. And the music that concluded the occasion was – the *Coronation March*.

Franz Steiger

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

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Russian National Orchestra



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 première 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

