

TCHAIKOVSKY

Potpourri

Potpourri on Themes from the Opera *Voyevoda*
Theme with Variations in A minor • Allegro in F minor

Lance Coburn, Piano



Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)
Piano Works

1	Theme with Variations in A minor, TH 121, ČW 96 (c. 1864, ed. Shishov) 14:45 Theme: Andante semplice Variation I: Andante Variation II: Un poco più mosso Variation III: Allegro scherzando Variation IV: Allegro con fuoco – Adagio Variation V: Allegro moderato Variation VI: Andantino Variation VII: Presto Variation VIII: Adagio Variation IX: Allegro	
2	Little-Russian Kazachok, TH 174, ČW 407 (1867) 6:05 Alexander Dargomyzhsky (1813–1869): Kazachok (1864) (arr. Tchaikovsky)	
3	Allegro in F minor, TH 203, ČW 336 (completed by K. Kalinenko, 1980) (1863/64, ed. Iordan) 11:33	
4	Potpourri on Themes from the Opera <i>Voyevoda</i>, TH 128, ČW 342 (1868, ed. Shishov) 14:06	
5	The Russian Volunteer Fleet March in C, TH 140, ČW 149 (1878, ed. Drozdov) 3:51	
6	Military March in B flat major, TH 150, ČW 52 (1893, ed. Drozdov) 3:44	
7	Coronation March (Festival March) in D major, TH 50, ČW 47 (1883, ed. Langston) 6:04	
8	Aveu passionné in E minor, TH 148, ČW 185 (c. 1891, ed. Drozdov) 3:33	
9	Perpetuum mobile (Weber), TH 181, ČW 411 (1871) Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826): Piano Sonata No. 1 in C, Op. 24, J.138 – IV. Rondo, 'Perpetuum Mobile': Presto (1812) (arr. Tchaikovsky) 5:07	

Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk in 1840, the second son of a mining engineer, Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky had his early education, in music as in everything else, at home, under the care of his mother and of a beloved governess. From the age of ten he was a pupil at the School of Jurisprudence in St Petersburg, completing his studies there in 1859, to take employment in the Ministry of Justice. During these years he developed his abilities as a musician and it must have seemed probable that, like his near contemporaries Mussorgsky, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, he would keep music as a secondary occupation, while following his official career.

For Tchaikovsky matters turned out differently. The foundation of the new Conservatory of Music in St Petersburg under Anton Rubinstein enabled him to study there as a full-time student from 1863. In 1865 he moved to Moscow as a member of the staff of the new Conservatory established there by Anton Rubinstein's brother Nikolay. For over ten years he continued in Moscow, before financial assistance from a rich widow, Nadezhda von Meck, enabled him to leave the Conservatory and devote himself entirely to composition. The same period in his life had brought an unfortunate marriage to a self-proclaimed admirer of his work, a woman who showed early signs of mental instability and could only

add further to Tchaikovsky's own problems of character and inclination. His homosexuality was a torment to him, while his morbid sensitivity and diffidence, coupled with physical revulsion for the woman he had married, led allegedly to a severe nervous breakdown.

Separation from his wife, which was immediate, still left practical and personal problems to be solved. Tchaikovsky's relationship with Nadezhda von Meck, however, provided not only the money that at first was necessary for his career, but also the understanding and support of a woman who, so far from making physical demands of him, never even met him face to face. This curiously remote liaison and patronage only came to an end when, in 1890, perhaps under financial pressure from her children, she discontinued an allowance that was no longer of importance and a correspondence on which he had come to depend.

Tchaikovsky's sudden death in St Petersburg in 1893 gave rise to contemporary speculation and has provoked further posthumous rumours. It has been suggested that he committed suicide as the result of an impending homosexual scandal. Officially, however, his death was attributed to cholera, contracted after drinking un-distilled water. Whether the victim of cholera, of his own carelessness or reckless

despair, or of death deliberately courted, Tchaikovsky was widely mourned.

Throughout his life Tchaikovsky wrote music for the piano, largely serving an amateur market. His earliest surviving piano piece, however, is a waltz, written for the family governess, Anastasia Petrovna, in 1854. Compositions follow from Tchaikovsky's first years at the Conservatory. These include an unfinished *Allegro in F minor*, later re-used in the *Scherzo, Op. 2, No. 2*, the second piece in his *Souvenir de Hapsal*. The *Allegro* is here recorded in a version completed in 1980 by K. Kalinenko, expanded as a sonata first movement, which may have been the composer's original intention.

From the same period of Conservatory study comes the *Theme with Variations in A minor*, its theme, marked *Andante semplice* is followed by nine short variations. The first of these explores the triplets of the theme, followed by a variation with semiquaver figuration, a *scherzando* and an *Allegro con fuoco* of great complexity that soon changes to an E major *Adagio*, making use of the lower range of the piano. The sturdy Russian fifth variation leads to a wistful *Andantino* and a *Presto* in 6/8. The eighth variation, an *Adagio*, makes evocative use of remoter keys, to be followed by a brilliant final *Allegro*.

In 1867, now established at the Conservatory in Moscow, Tchaikovsky turned his hand to various transcriptions, including his piano version of Dargomyzhsky's orchestral fantasia on a Ukrainian Cossack Dance, *Little-Russian Kazachok*, a piece dominated, after its varied introduction, by the rapid Cossack rhythms of a traditional dance.

The first of Tchaikovsky's operas was *Voyevoda* ('The Provincial Governor'), based on Ostrovsky's comedy *Son na Volge* ('A Volga Dream'), written in 1867–1868. Its libretto was originally the work of Ostrovsky and the composer, until Ostrovsky withdrew from the enterprise, leaving Tchaikovsky to reduce the opera from four to three acts, removing the most lively and interesting elements and characters, if we are to accept Tchaikovsky's brother Modest's judgement. Bearing in mind Tchaikovsky's relative lack of experience, it is not surprising that the new opera was a failure. The plot of Ostrovsky's play was far too diffuse to serve as the basis of an opera, and the necessary abridgement of the work made the plot uneventful. The opera was staged at the Bolshoi Theatre in 1869 and given five performances before it was withdrawn. Tchaikovsky finally destroyed it, having made use

of elements from the score in his ballet *Swan Lake* and in the opera *Oprichnik* in the early 1870s. His *Potpourri* of themes from the opera was written in 1868 under the pseudonym H. Cramer.

The drama is set in the mid-17th century in a town on the Volga. The *Potpourri* starts with the main theme of the *Overture*, followed by a chorus of maidens. Tchaikovsky's medley does not take the themes in their order of appearance in the opera, instead going forward immediately to the second act aria of Bastryukov, lover of Praskovya, daughter of a rich merchant, Dyuzhoy, who intends her to marry Shaligin, the *Voyevoda*, whose theme is also heard. Her nurse Nedviga disapproves, while her sister Mariya is impatient for her own marriage and sings a tale of a girl, imprisoned in a tower, but united with her lover, while her parents and guards sleep, a ballad recalled in a later part of the *Potpourri*. The various complications of the plot are resolved by a *deus ex machina* in the person of a new *Voyevoda*, who appears in the nick of time, ensuring a happy ending. The *Potpourri* ends with the nurse Nedviga's song from the first act and the second act dance of the maidens.

Tchaikovsky's *The Russian Volunteer Fleet March in C* was published in 1878 under the pseudonym P. Sinopo, an allusive name supplied by his publisher Jurgenson, who had asked for the piece. Patriotic in intention, with any proceeds from its sale to be given to a fund for new battleships, the *March* reflected popular Russian feelings at a time of war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, the latter heading a coalition of Balkan territories historically ruled by Turkey. The *March* ends with a direct reference to the Russian national anthem.

If 1878 had brought Tchaikovsky personal problems in the aftermath of his unfortunate marriage, 1893, the year of his *Military March in B flat major* and of his sudden death, was in other respects a year of triumph, with honorary degrees and success abroad and the completion of his *Sixth Symphony*. The *March*, with its E flat trio section, was written for his cousin, Andrey Petrovich Tchaikovsky, commander of the 98th Yurensky Infantry Regiment.

While Tchaikovsky left the march of 1893 to be orchestrated by the regimental bandmaster, as his resources might dictate, the *Coronation March in D major* of 1883 (also known as *Festival March*), commissioned for the coronation of Alexander III, was orchestrated by the composer, whose

piano version also survives. Tchaikovsky described the march as noisy but bad, but it suited well enough the official occasion for which it was commissioned, duly leading to a final allusion to the national anthem.

Tchaikovsky had been deeply affected by the break in relations with Nadezhda von Meck in 1890 and showed something of his frequent diffidence in fears that his powers as a composer were diminishing. His symphonic ballad, *The Voyevoda*, Op. 78, was written at this time, based on Pushkin's translation of a poem by Adam Mickiewicz, a tale that ends with the death of the Voyevoda, deceived by his young wife. Doubts had been expressed about the subject, but the first performance in October 1891 was welcomed by the audience. Tchaikovsky, however, was dissatisfied and after the performance destroyed the full score. It was thanks

to Alexander Ziloti, soloist in Grieg's *Piano Concerto* at the concert, that the orchestral parts were retrieved, allowing the work to be reconstructed. The *Aveu passionné in E minor*, a love song from *The Voyevoda*, in a version for solo piano, survives in a transcription by the composer, suggesting its possible origin in a song.

Tchaikovsky transcribed the *Perpetuum mobile*, the *Rondo-Finale* of Weber's *Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 24*, in 1871, shifting the perpetual motion from the right to the left hand and adding a right-hand part. Tchaikovsky held Weber in the highest esteem, with particular admiration for the opera *Der Freischütz*. His transcription of Weber's *Perpetuum mobile* provides an opportunity for brilliant virtuoso display.

Keith Anderson

Lance Coburn

Lance Coburn has established himself as a charismatic performer with exceptional facility. He won First Prize at the Tomassoni International Piano Competition in Cologne in 2001 and has performed as a soloist with the major Australian orchestras including the Sydney Symphony, as well as many international symphony orchestras including the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and the WDR Rundfunkorchester Köln. Coburn graduated from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music with the school's highest honours. He furthered his studies at the Moscow Conservatory and the Royal Irish Academy of Music. During his studies, Coburn was the recipient of numerous first prizes, including the inaugural Lev Vlassenko Piano Competition, the Australian Young Performers' Award, the David Paul Landa Scholarship and the Hephzibah Menuhin Scholarship. Coburn regularly plays with Ireland's leading chamber musicians and has performed at many notable festivals in ensembles and as a soloist. He is a piano lecturer at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin.

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Many thanks ...

to my sound engineers Darby and Roy Carroll. Thanks also to Feena Lynch, piano technician and to Deborah Kelleher, director of the Royal Irish Academy of Music, for generously providing access to the recording space in The Katherine Brennan Hall of the RIAM. Thank you, John Clarke, for finding the Kalinenko edition of the *Allegro in F minor*. Last but by no means least, thank you Pam and Ken for your constant and unwavering support.

Award-winning pianist Lance Coburn has been schooled in and inspired by the Russian pianistic tradition, and sees this ‘potpourri’ of rarities as something akin to a snapshot of Tchaikovsky’s more famous works. Ranging from wistful sentiment to fiery complexity, the *Theme with Variations* comes from Tchaikovsky’s period of studies at the St Petersburg Conservatory, while the transcriptions include a medley of themes rescued from the early opera *Voyevoda*, the emotionally charged *Aveu passionné*, and a *Coronation March* that the composer described as ‘noisy but bad’.

**Pyotr Il’yich
TCHAIKOVSKY**
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A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

Lance Coburn, Piano

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Playing Time
69:14



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