

Alexander TCHAIKOVSKY

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

SYMPHONY NO. 7, OP. 139, 'QUARANTINE SYMPHONY'

SYMPHONY NO. 3, OP. 75

Siberian Symphony Orchestra
Dmitry Vasiliev

FIRST RECORDINGS

ALEXANDER TCHAIKOVSKY: ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

by Jonathan Powell

Alexander Tchaikovsky is recognised in Russia as one of the country's outstanding composers and most prominent public musical figures. He is also regarded as an inheritor of the traditions laid down by the nation's greats of the past. He was born in Moscow, on 19 February 1946, into a musical family: his father, Vladimir, was a trained pianist and for many years the director of the Stanislavsky-Nemirovich Danchenko Musical Theatre, while his uncle, Boris (1925–96), was a pupil of Shostakovich and one of the most successful composers of the later Soviet era. Tchaikovsky recalls that during his early years,

my uncle was very influential. We lived together in a communal apartment and until the fifth grade we were very close. His composer colleagues, some of whom later became famous, visited him, and observing them I came really to like his circle of friends. In addition, I liked the fact that composers do not have to practise the piano for several hours every day, and that as people they are freer than performers. Then, when we moved into our own apartment, my father and I would attend his [Boris'] premières. But at that point I had no plans for a career as a composer. It all happened quite by accident and, I would say, quite late: I was 21 years old, and I was studying as a pianist, and my hand hurt. I had been rigorously preparing for a competition in Paris. I played hard pieces for five or six hours a day, without thinking about the consequences. And during this month and a half, while I could not play, I wrote several romances. There was absolutely nothing else to do, and for some reason I wanted to [compose]. This is how it all started. And during this month and a half, while I could not play, I wrote several romances.¹

¹ From an interview accessed at <https://muzkarta.info/novost/aleksandr-chaykovsky-kompozitor-kak-akter-on>.

He received an elite musical education, studying the piano with Heinrich Neuhaus at the Central Music School in Moscow, and, after transferring to the Conservatoire (to which the former is attached), he continued piano studies with Neuhaus' pupil Lev Naumov, and entered the composition class of Tikhon Khrennikov. His student colleagues included the pianists Valery Afanasiev and Dmitry Alexeyev, and the composer Dmitry Smirnov. After graduation in 1972, he continued his studies as a graduate with Khrennikov. In 1976 he started teaching composition at the Conservatoire (being made professor in 1993, and head of department in 1997). Also in 1976, he became a member of the Composers' Union (of which Khrennikov had been General Secretary since 1948), later (from 1985 to 1991) being its secretary for youth work. In this latter capacity, he founded and is the artistic director of the festival 'Youth Academies of Russia', and is involved with numerous competitions for young composers with both national and international outreach (such as the one attached to his friend Yuri Bashmet's Winter Festival of Arts in Sochi).

Tchaikovsky regards his First Cello Concerto (1975) as his first major work. It was very well received, and entered the repertoire of many cellists, even though that composer was still a graduate student. In 1977, the then 31-year old composer was the subject of a six-page portrait article (complete with music examples) in the organ of the Composers' Union, *Sovetskaya muzika*; the Cello Concerto is discussed in some detail in this article. More recently, Tchaikovsky served as rector of the St Petersburg Conservatoire (2005–8). As befitting a composer who is also a significant public figure (he is, moreover, artistic director of the Moscow State Academic Philharmonic Society and Honorary Chairman of the Council of the Union of Composers of Russia, and was advisor to the Mariinsky Theatre), he has received state recognition in both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, with awards including Honoured Artist of the RSFSR (1988), People's Artist of Russia (2005), Order of Friendship for many years of creative activity (2016) and the Government Prize for his opera *The Legend of the City of Yelets, Tamerlane and the Virgin Mary* (2017), all reflecting recognition of not only his achievements as a composer, but also his broad and multifaceted contribution to Russian culture. In 2019 the world premiere of Tchaikovsky's opera *Yermak* took place

at the Krasnoyarsk Opera and Ballet Theatre, receiving a twenty-minute ovation, and all subsequent performances were sold out. Noted performers of Tchaikovsky's works include Yuri Bashmet, Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Fedoseyev.

Although theatrical works occupy a prominent place in Tchaikovsky's *œuvre* (he has written fourteen operas and three ballets, as well as musicals and operettas), his seven symphonies and a series of instrumental concertos demonstrate his continued fascination with the possibilities of traditional musical forms. The critic Yelena Istratova writes that

those familiar with the work of Alexander Tchaikovsky cannot help but be amazed at the amazing diversity of genres and figurative-emotional style of his works. The embodiment of large-scale musical ideas in expansive traditional formats (operas, ballets, symphonies, concertos) is combined with subtle exploration of psychological states in chamber music. Lyricism and vivid melodic expression betray him as a Romantic, while the sparkling and at times impudent laughter that punctuates his comic, grotesquely parodic compositions, reveals a living person with a wonderful sense of humour, capable of perceiving life in all its diversity. For his part, Tchaikovsky maintains that 'a composer is like an actor, he is an actor. He must be able to create different characters, convey different human emotions: sadness, and sarcasm, and laughter, and tragedy, and lyricism. If he cannot portray any of these feelings, then he is like an actor stuck in one role.'²

Most of Tchaikovsky's symphonies possess some kind of programmatic element: the First, of 1885, is entitled *The Master and Margarita*, the second, completed in 1894, *Vodoley* ('Aquarius'). The Third had a particularly long gestation period – the composer thinks seven years, with long pauses – and was finished in 1902. It was written mostly in St Petersburg and it received its premiere with the Conservatoire orchestra under the then young Aleksandr Sladkovsky. The Symphony was later played in Moscow, Omsk, elsewhere in Russia, and in Ukraine (probably fewer than ten times in total, the composer recalls). 'In this symphony', the composer wrote in an e-mail to this author,

² From an unmarked article she was kind enough to send me.

I used some material from my sketches for a projected ballet based on *The Devils* by Dostoyevsky. I'd started to write this for the Mariinsky Theatre, but the project folded. But I think it's possible to discern the general character of the book in the music. For the finale I took leave of the Dostoyevskian themes and created new material.³

The Third Symphony is scored for a large orchestra (including quadruple woodwind, six horns and a multitude of percussion), and is in three movements, but with only one break (between the first two). The first movement (marked *Allegro*, ♩ = 126) begins [3] with the alternation of two pitches, heard from vibraphone (played *tremolando*), and violas (in *legato* semiquavers). A slow melody emerges, as violins and cellos interact with bell sounds (from harp, celesta, etc.), soon to be joined by an ominous chorale in the brass (2:14). An unexpected resolution onto C major (2:46) is underscored by throbbing timpani, but the colours soon darken, with the long melodic line being at last heard in the first violins (3:54). A new, angular theme is heard at 4:34 again on the violins, at the beginning of a brief section marked *Meno mosso*. Another brief section, characterised by a massive contrast in dynamics and marked *Andante* (5:12), precedes a return to the opening material (in the woodwind, later joined impressively by xylophone), this time punctuated by long chords in the lower strings and bassoons (6:04). This dialogue intensifies until the diabolic *Presto* at 6:57. This section is in turn roughly interrupted at 7:20, the pace subsiding, *ostinati* being dispersed around different sections of the orchestra, occasionally taking on a playful character, before settling in E minor at 9:17. A series of soaring brass entries lead to a *Più mosso* section at 10:25. A dotted-rhythm figure – first heard in the strings at 11:14 – brings a new degree of intensity and dynamism which abates (at 11:47) as quickly as it arose, the long theme now heard in the violas. A passage of some voluptuousness ensues (starting at 12:19) as the instrumental palette is widened, the sound ever growing, reaching a peak around 14:10. By 14:59 equilibrium has been restored, and the apparent peace of the opening reappears. A series of slow chords brings the movement to its conclusion.

³ E-mail dated 18 November 2020.

The second movement (initially marked *Allegro molto*, $\text{♩} = 152$) [4] is essentially a sequence of waltzes: it is the section of the work that betrays its balletic origins most obviously. Its grotesquely infernal opening is dense, but the textures and material are soon pared down to single ticking pitches. A nostalgic melody appears briefly at 1:44 in the upper strings, and then a transitional section leads to a *Meno mosso, tranquillo* at 2:59. A second, this time plaintive, melody appears at 3:20. The textures are sparse, sounding almost empty after the intense opening of the movement. A solo violin at 4:50 introduces a new theme, characterised by falling thirds. It is then taken up and elaborated by the *tutti* strings, though now accompanied by brass in a parodic manner. The solo violin returns just before the dance grinds almost to a halt at 7:00 (marked *Meno mosso, a la Adagio* [sic]). The initial tempo is then re-established, first heard as a distant rumble at 7:45. Tumultuous arch-shaped melodies in the brass soon compete with athletic figures in the strings and outbursts in the woodwind, and the whole orchestra is quickly brought into play, the dance assuming demonic fury. *Tutti* chords, punctuated by terse silences, mark the end of the movement.

The third movement [5] follows without a break. Marked *Andante* ($\text{♩} = 70$) its assertive opening soon gives way to pensive, introverted material. This pattern of contrast is then repeated. A more stable section (starting at 2:02) follows, with a melody in the violins occupying an increasingly wide tessitura. The texture suddenly dissipates at 3:27 at the outset of a new section marked *poco più mosso, misterioso* ($\text{♩} = 86$), with low string *pizzicati* underscoring solemn, almost Brucknerian long lines in the horns and woodwind. What sounds like a reminiscence of the waltz melodies of the previous movement appears in the violins at 4:24, the xylophone and upper woodwind providing a contrasting episode. Violas and cellos enter at 5:31 with a pulsating *legato* figure, but at 6:00 this waltz is abandoned in favour of an *Andante* in $\frac{4}{4}$ time. A melody in the violins is answered by woodwind above a susurrating accompaniment in the harps. The melody rises until it reaches a tragic *Maestoso* at 8:02, then recedes until 9:16, where periodic *ostinati* recall the opening of the Symphony. Two waves accumulate and break before the return of the ominous chords heard at the beginning of the movement (10:36). An *adagio*, starting at 10:56, gradually reveals itself to be the introduction to a waltz,

this time more Romantic in nature than its predecessors, even possessing cinematic qualities with its quick-fire changes of mood and instrumentation. The high spirits of the concluding moments of the waltz seem to spill over into violence at the very end, leaving an ambiguous impression.

It's perhaps a cliché that composers of symphonies attach special significance to reaching their ninth. Alexander Tchaikovsky, however, attributed a mystical meaning to the sixth

because of my brilliant namesake, Pyotr Ilyich. I was reminded that his Sixth Symphony was his last during the cholera epidemic. And now we are experiencing something similar, so it is better to jump over this line and write the next work. So I started working on the Seventh Symphony and wrote it pretty quickly.⁴

He had finished the work by the end of May 2020 and, almost as a presentiment of the impossibility of performances by large orchestras, chose a small ensemble, consisting only of strings, percussion and piano.

I foolishly called the symphony 'Quarantine' and I think the virus then took revenge on me for this, and I got caught: I fell ill with Covid. Nevertheless, I managed to send the score to several conductors, including Dmitry Vasiliev in Omsk, since he regularly performs my music. Dmitry answered, and said he liked the symphony and that he was adding it to the programme of the opening concert of the 2020–21 season, scheduled for 13 September.⁵

In the event, doctors forbade Tchaikovsky to fly to Siberia for the premiere as his body had not yet fully recovered from Covid – and getting there by train would have taken too long. The composer feels that the content of the symphony is related to the pandemic, as its existence was impossible for him to ignore at the time of composition: 'the first movement is stormy, dynamic, and the second is a big *Adagio*, pleas for salvation and hope.'⁶ The toccata style of much of the first movement is contrasted by the expressive

⁴ From an interview in the journal *Muzikaĭnaya zhizn'*, accessible at <https://muzlifemagazine.ru/aleksandr-chaykovskiy-virus-mne-otoms/>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

cantilena of the second, which culminates in a fugue, a form long associated with themes of enlightenment and recovery.

Compared to the expansive Third Symphony, the Seventh is concentrated and laconic. Although the percussion is used sparingly throughout, and the piano makes an entry only at the very end of the work, the string-writing is often densely conceived and the players are frequently split into as many as eight parts. The work begins 1 slowly, with a plaintive melody in the first violins, its falling motif followed by a sustained note punctuated by dense chords from the rest of the players. A second tempo (*più vivo*) is established at 1:16, with thrusting motoric material underpinning a melody which, like the initial one, periodically comes to rest on sustained pitches. At 1:33 some listeners might discern a nod to *The Rite of Spring*, with insistent repeated chords providing a backdrop for syncopated interjections. This material is then combined first with that which immediately preceded it and, finally, with the falling motif heard at the beginning of the movement (at 2:21). At 2:44 a mysterious chorale, played by the violins in harmonics, is heard before the music comes to a sudden halt. A revisiting of the opening material (starting at 3:14) leads to a further combination (at the faster tempo) of the initial motif with the repeated chords. A gallop (spiced up with castanets) which would not be out of place in a Shostakovich symphony ensues at 4:40, the melody travelling ever higher until an abrupt pause in proceedings leads to a *meno mosso* (at 5:22). This section starts sombrely but gradually builds in energy until the end of the movement, latterly possessing a wild dance-like fury.

The *Adagio* which follows inevitably calls to mind those in Mahler's last two symphonies – and the way in which a largely diatonic, hymn-like melody is underpinned by wide-ranging chromatic harmonies is a direct point of comparison. A long peroration on the initial theme precedes its return at 3:34. It is followed (at 4:36) by the establishment of a periodic rocking ostinato (in $\frac{6}{8}$) in the violas, on a single note, then combined with a fragment of melody (and sweeps of chimes) that recalls the opening of the Symphony, but now the mood is conciliatory. A more expansive modal lyrical section follows (5:45), with the ostinato being taken over by the cellos, until being reduced to a sustained note as the intertwined melodies rise into the ether and descend back to earth (at 7:55).

A reduction of the initial falling motif is heard in the lower strings, before serving as the beginning of the subject of the concluding fugue.

Jonathan Powell is a pianist, composer and writer on music. He was awarded a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge for his thesis After Scriabin: Six Composers and the Development of Russian Music. He continues to write about music, usually for his own recordings. His concert engagements have taken him around the globe. His recording of Sorabji's Sequentia cyclica was awarded the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritiken in 2020; Igor Levit invited him to perform the work in the 2021 edition of the Heidelberger Frühling.

Dmitry Vasiliev, the artistic director and principal conductor of the Siberian Symphony Orchestra, was born in 1972 in the city of Bolshoi Kamen in the Russian Far East. He graduated from the Rostov State Conservatoire and then took a postgraduate course under the guidance of Alexander Skulsky at the Nizhny Novgorod State Conservatoire. He also participated in master-classes given by Alexander Vedernikov and Vladimir Ziva in Moscow.

He has since been active all over Russia. In 1997, at the age of 24, he set up the Tambov Symphony Orchestra in Tambov, south of Moscow, which he led as artistic director and chief conductor until 2005. While in Tambov he was artistic director of the International Rachmaninov Festival, the Tambov Musicians' Festival and the Musical Province Festival. In 2003 he was awarded a diploma in the Fourth International Prokofiev Competition in St Petersburg. In 2003–5 he held the position of guest chief conductor of the Sochi Symphony Orchestra.

Since 2005 he has been principal conductor of the Siberian Symphony Orchestra in Omsk, where as of 2008 he has been an artistic director of the biennale New Music Festival. In June



2009 he took the Siberian Symphony Orchestra to Moscow to participate in the Fourth Festival of World Symphony Orchestras. Since then the SSO under his direction has toured many times to Moscow (the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall), St Petersburg (the Mariinsky Theatre) and other cities of Russia, Austria, Italy and China.

In Moscow he has conducted the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia, the 'Evgeny Svetlanov' State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia, the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra and the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra; among the orchestras he has conducted elsewhere in Russia are the St Petersburg State Capella, the Nizhny Novgorod Philharmonic, Rostov Philharmonic, Ulyanovsk Philharmonic, Voronezh Philharmonic, Caucasus Mineral Waters Philharmonic, Belgorod Philharmonic, Petrozavodsk Philharmonic, Tomsk Philharmonic, Khabarovsk Philharmonic and many others. Internationally, he has appeared in France, Italy, Poland, Israel (with the Israel Symphony Orchestra) and South Korea.

The soloists with whom he has appeared include the cellist Mischa Maisky, the pianists Boris Berezovsky, Marc-André Hamelin, Freddy Kempf, Denis Matsuev, Nikolai Petrov, Daniil Trifonov and Eliso Virsaladze, the violinists Pierre Amoyal, Sayaka Shoji and Vadim Repin, the trumpeter Sergey Nakariakov and the soprano Hibla Gerzmava.

Among the world premieres Dmitry Vasiliev has to his credit are works by Mikhail Bronner, Sofia Gubaidulina, Ilya Heifets, Alemdar Karamanov, Ephraim Podgaitis, Tolib Shakhidiy, Andrey Tikhomirov and Mieczysław Weinberg, as well as Russian premieres of music by John Adams, Woldemar Bargiel, John Corigliano, Karl Jenkins, Christopher Rouse, Charles Villiers Stanford, Alexander Tchaikovsky, Eduard Tubin, Benjamin Yusupov and others.

The labels with which he has recorded include Toccata Classics, Antes Edition and ArtBeat Music. In Sinfini magazine Norman Lebrecht made the Vasiliev/SSO recording of Weinberg's Symphony No. 21 and *Polish Tunes* (Toccata Classics TOCC 0193) his Album of the Week, writing that 'The Siberian Symphony Orchestra, conductor Dmitry Vasiliev, play as if their lives depend on it and the sound in the Omsk Philharmonic Hall is immaculate'.

www.conductorvasiliev.com

The Siberian Symphony Orchestra (SSO) is one of the largest of Russian orchestras. It was founded in 1966 at the instigation of the conductor Simon Cogan, who remained at its head for more than ten years. From the beginning it attracted talented graduates from the Leningrad, Novosibirsk and Ural Conservatoires, each institution with a well-earned reputation for producing dynamic and highly professional musicians. For many years the Siberian Symphony Orchestra (which is known domestically as the Omsk Philharmonic) toured the cities of the former Soviet Union, giving concerts in Moscow and Leningrad, Krasnoyarsk and Chita in central and eastern Russia, the cities along the Volga, Riga in Latvia, Kiev in Ukraine, Minsk in Belarus and Almaty in Kazakhstan. From 1975 the Orchestra participated in the contemporary-music festivals organised by the Union of Composers of the USSR, performing music by Khachaturian, Khrennikov, Shchedrin and other prominent composers.

From 1978 the Siberian Symphony Orchestra was headed by the conductor Viktor Tietz, under whose leadership it reached artistic maturity and developed a wide repertoire, winning first prize at the All-Russian Competition of Symphony Orchestras in 1984. From 1992 to 2004 the chief conductor of the Orchestra was Evgeny Shestakov. Since 1994 the Siberian Symphony Orchestra has regularly travelled abroad on tour, and in 1996 it was awarded the title of 'Academic' – an honour in Russia.

Over the years the Orchestra has also worked with such distinguished conductors as Veronika Dudarova, Karl Eliasberg, Arnold Katz, Aram Khachaturian, Fuat Mansurov, Nathan Rachlin and Abram Stasevich. The soloists with whom the SSO has worked include the pianists Dmitri Bashkirov, Lazar Berman, Peter Donohoe, Denis Matsuev, Mikhail Pletnev, Grigory Sokolov and Eliso Virsaladze, the violinists Pierre Amoyal, Viktor Pikayzen and Viktor Tretyakov, the cellists Natalia Gutman, Mstislav Rostropovich and Daniil Shafran and the singers Dmitry Hvorostovsky and Alexander Vedernikov.

Since 2005 the principal conductor of the Orchestra has been Dmitry Vasiliev. Under his direction the repertoire of the SSO has become even wider and now includes not only the classics but also contemporary music, jazz, rock, musicals, film soundtracks and so on, and participates in a wide number of innovative projects, from festivals of contemporary classical music to the World and European ballroom dancing championships. In 2009 the SSO took part in the Fourth Festival of World Symphony Orchestras held in the Hall of Columns in Moscow; and in April 2010 it became a member of the Forum of the Symphony Orchestras of Russia in Yekaterinburg. In recent years the Orchestra has also toured in Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Ukraine and the USA.



The last decade has been a period of growth and flowering of the SSO. Its huge repertoire ranges from the symphonic classics to works by composers of the 21st century. The composition of the orchestra is in line with European standards, boasting more than 100 experienced, highly professional musicians. The discography of the SSO includes the four symphonies of the Danish composer Victor Bendix on Danacord and the Orchestral Suites Nos. 1 and 2 by Vissarion Shebalin (rocc 0136), the first of its now nine recordings for Toccata Classics (all conducted by Dmitry Vasiliev), which was followed by albums of music by Woldemar Bargiel (his Symphony

in C major and the overtures *Prometheus*, *Overture to a Tragedy* and *Medea* on TOCC 0277), two of the music of Mieczysław Weinberg (*Polish Tunes* and *Symphony No. 21* on TOCC 0193, and *Six Ballet Scenes* and *Symphony No. 22* on TOCC 0313) and Philip Spratley (*Cargoes*, *A Helpston Fantasia* and *Third Symphony* on TOCC 0194). The 400th recording in the Toccata Classics catalogue (TOCC 0500) was made by the SSO under Dmitry Vasiliev: the First Symphony and symphonic poem *Vaterland* by the Austrian late-Romantic Julius Bittner, a release which met with universal enthusiasm around the world (one customer review commenting that 'Dmitry Vasiliev and the Siberian Symphony Orchestra do Bittner's music credit [...] they seem to capture the essence of the style in these performances'). Most recently Toccata Classics issued recordings of Shebalin's *Orchestral Suites* Nos. 3 and 4 and his *Ballet Suite* (TOCC 0164) and Steve Elcock's Fifth Symphony, accompanied by two shorter works (TOCC 0455).

The Siberian Symphony Orchestra on Toccata Classics



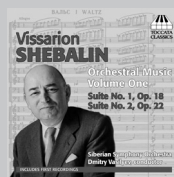
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ALEXANDER TCHAIKOVSKY Orchestral Music, Volume One

Symphony No. 7, Op. 139, *Quarantine Symphony*, for strings, percussion and piano (2020)

20:03

1 I *Andante – Allegro molto*

7:06

2 II *Adagio*

12:57

Symphony No. 3, Op. 75 (1995–2002)

40:06

3 I *Allegro*

16:03

4 II *Allegro molto*

9:30

5 III *Andante*

14:33

Siberian Symphony Orchestra

TT 60:12

Andrey Lopatin, violin 4

Dmitry Vasiliev, conductor

FIRST RECORDINGS

LIVE PERFORMANCES