

ANTON RUBINSTEIN

DON QUIXOTE

IVAN IV

STATE SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA OF RUSSIA
IGOR GOLOVCHIN,
CONDUCTOR



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DON QUIXOTE

MUSICAL PICTURE AFTER CERVANTES, OP. 87 (27:32)

IVAN IV

MUSICAL PICTURE AFTER L. A. MEY, OP. 79 (23:53)

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ANTON
RUBINSTEIN
(1829–1894)

1. Don Quixote, Musical Picture after Cervantes, Op. 87 (27:32)
2. Ivan IV, Musical Picture after L. A. Mey, Op. 79 (23:53)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 51:25

State Symphony Orchestra of Russia
Igor Golovchin, conductor

Recording Engineer: *Vladimir Koptsov*

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Editor: *Natalia Meerzon*

Recorded in December 1993 in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

In the autumn of 1869, Anton Rubinstein completed the score of yet another of his musical character pictures for symphony orchestra: *Don Quixote*, op. 87. As with *Ivan IV*, his first impulse was to write an opera on this subject. However, in turning to Cervantes' character, as well as to the legendary figure of the first Russian tsar, Rubinstein was not so much interested in this or that musical genre or type; he was simply intrigued by the idea of portraying various human characters in music.

The idea to tackle *Don Quixote* first occurred to Rubinstein in 1868 after his meeting with Turgenev, who proposed a new interpretation of Cervantes' immortal story. He strongly opposed the term "quixotism" where it appeared to be synonymous with buffoonery, ridiculousness and absurdity. He himself treated *Don Quixote* as an ideal of self-sacrifice, but viewed in comedic context.

Rubinstein's *Don* is outlined and developed according to Turgenev's conception. The plan of this symphonic suite includes the following episodes: Quixote's fascination with books about knights and dreams of heroic deeds (for the sake of idealistic love for a woman) on behalf of the unfortunate; his fight with the "crowd of

oppressors," which in fact turns out to be a flock of sheep; his declaration of love and the peasants' derision; deliverance of condemned convicts whom he considers to be unjustly convicted; and Quixote's death. The selection of these episodes clearly demonstrates the composer's artistic concept: he eliminates from his program all that symbolizes the Don's more senseless actions (for example, his battle with the windmills), concentrating instead on only the episodes which emphasize self-sacrifice, all be it from a comic perspective. This approach constitutes the basic difference between Rubinstein's semi-serious humoresque and Richard Strauss' more jocular work that came 27 years later.

The music abounds with interesting, novel and original aspects. Even in the first pages of the score, we get a sharp psychological portrait of the character. The three diverse themes are brought into contrast, even though they follow one another without transition or link. The first is a peculiar combination of heroic elements and more prosaic elements, which gives the music a slightly humorous aspect. The second theme conveys *Don Quixote's* ponderings about the destitute and unfortunate and his dream of helping them through his heroic

deeds. The third theme, cast in a romantic vein, characterizes Don Quixote's passionate striving for noble idealism; it plays an exceptionally important role in the symphonic picture.

No single overtly humorous theme is heard. The comic mood is achieved by a subtle comparison of the diverse thematic materials as they follow each other, or as they are heard in combination. It is characterized, apart from the presentation of the three themes at the very beginning, by a very telling confrontation of the "wandering" theme with the heroic war cry of the "knight of the rueful countenance." Another daring comic device is the simultaneous presentation of the "idealism" theme with deliberately banal waltz motifs – with the divided orchestra playing in different time signatures. Since the composer's primary aim was to depict Don Quixote's essential humanity, his specific whereabouts and surroundings are depicted rather sparsely. In one "scene," Rubinstein uses a genuine Spanish folk dance melody, but in another he resorts to a more original styling (in the song of the village girls).

The thematic material is enhanced, as in *Ivan IV*, by skillful development and elaboration. By presenting the

themes in various modes (and their different stages) – also with varied harmonic schemes and rhythmic variants – Rubinstein imparts to them certain psychological nuances. As also in *Ivan IV*, the entire texture of the composition lies in its thematic variants. Sometimes the composer makes use of the main theme's elements so as to impart a special meaning to descriptive episodes. Thus, a slight variant of the "destitute and desolate" theme becomes the perfect basis for the brief "march of the convicts;" the same compositional device allowed the composer to express the attitude of his character to what he saw in front of him.

Many of Rubinstein's contemporaries gave Don Quixote high praise, while pointing out its compositional drawbacks. Tchaikovsky, upon hearing the orchestral rehearsal, wrote: "Very interesting, and perfect in places." A few months later, in a letter to Balakirev, he said: "I find this piece very interesting and well done, although its episodic nature is somewhat reminiscent of ballet pantomime music."

As early as the mid-1860s Rubinstein developed a fascination for the legendary figure of Tsar Ivan IV ("the Terrible") and his era. In 1866, the composer began

working on a new opera, *The Oprichniki* (the “oprichina” was Russia’s first repressive institution, set up under Ivan IV for the express purpose of brutalizing and controlling the nobility), based on the libretto written for him by P. Kalashnikov. Having finished the overture and the initial chorus, Rubinstein, not quite satisfied with the libretto, turned to V. Sollogub and asked his opinion about the libretto and his potential suggestions for altering it. Sollogub rejected the libretto categorically, pointing out its dramatic and literary drawbacks and, among others, the erroneous characteristics it attributed to Ivan IV: “The way he is depicted, he appears to be no more than a hangman, lacking the slightest trace of the legendary grandeur he should be credited with, even amid the awful horror he was responsible for.” Based on that opinion, Rubinstein ceased his work on the opera. Yet the personality of this first Russian Tsar – severe, overpowering, energetic, cruel, and recklessly persistent in achieving a goal he set for himself – continued to hold the composer’s interest. In 1869 he renewed work on the project, producing a musical character piece based on his own material from his incomplete *Oprichniki*.

Unlike *Don Quixote*, this composition has no dis-

cernible program. This was by intentional design, since *Ivan IV* is a psychological portrait rather than a chain of events portrayed in music. In this multi-faceted portrait of Ivan, Rubinstein’s music employs a wide range of troubled, dramatically intense and tragic colors, moods and effects. In the introductory theme, he is depicted as being stern and adamant, though still very human, with an air of grief-stricken thoughtfulness. In the lyrical *fugato* section, he comes across as troubled, even as he demonstrates his power and energy; in the beginning of the *Allegro non troppo* section, his generous and altruistic side comes through. In the broad, Russian-sounding secondary theme, the full glamor and grandeur of his tsar’s status is heard in an adaptation of the classic Russian choral theme of glorified praise (presented by the “church choir” of four cellos with double bass). This comes even as Ivan wears the humble garb of a monk and the “people” cry out in despair, recounting his terrifying atrocities (chromatic passages of thirds against a repeating F in the strings). The heterogeneous character of this music is, upon closer analysis, harmonically and structurally interrelated. For example, the alarming motifs of the *Allegro* emerge from the lyrical theme of the *fugato*; the people’s cry of despair is developed out of the chromatic voices that

accompany the elaboration of the “praise” theme.

Rubinstein treats the characteristic thematic material of his symphonic picture with great artistic freedom and skill, presenting it in various modes and tonalities, as well as both diatonic and chromatic contexts. In bringing the themes together, revealing them simultaneously, then varying them while extracting separate motives for further development, Rubinstein achieves a tremendous sense of dramatic strength and integrity. The music of this composition, unlike many of Rubinstein’s other works, is thematically all-pervasive. The nature of the thematic material was the decisive factor in determining the free form of this picture (though it still incorporates certain features of the sonata *allegro* form). Perhaps one of the reasons this composition stopped filling concert halls is its rather bleak orchestration.

Ivan IV was heard for the first time on November 14, 1869 with Balakirev conducting. Rubinstein was not present at the concert, being out of town at the time. But it was again performed in St. Petersburg under his baton the following month. The piece stimulated great interest among Rubinstein’s contemporaries. For example, Borodin wrote that “to my surprise, the music is good; you simply can’t recognize it is Rubinstein. Nothing Mendelssohnian; nothing like what he wrote before.” Others maintained that it was the best composition Rubinstein had written thus far; and that it marked a new and much more interesting period in his creative development.

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Translation: Marina Ter-Mikaelian; edited by Lindsay Koob

ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

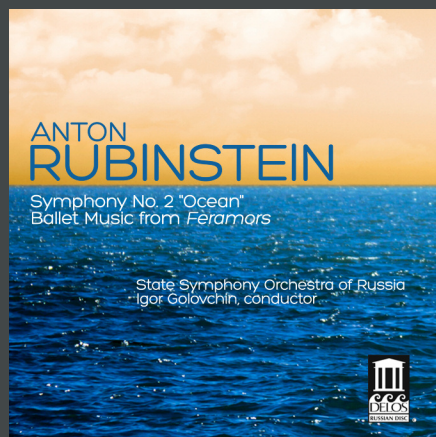
Conductor **Igor Golovchin** was born in Moscow in 1956. Having displayed a remarkable gift for music very early, he was admitted to the Central Specialized (Gnessin) Music School at the age of six. In 1975, at the age of 19, he was admitted to the Moscow Conservatory. His examination board (including renowned musicians Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Boris Khaikin, Kiril Kondrashin and Leo Ginsburg), in view of his talent and high marks, granted him the right to choose the musician with whom he wished to study there — the first time in the conservatory's history that a student had been honored with such a privilege. He chose Kondrashin, who — until his departure to the Netherlands — was young Igor's teacher for nearly four years. He continued his studies with Yuri Simonov, the Bolshoi Theatre's chief conductor, under whose guidance he began his study of opera scores.

At 25, Igor became chief conductor of the Irkutsk Symphony Orchestra. In 1982, he was a prizewinner at the

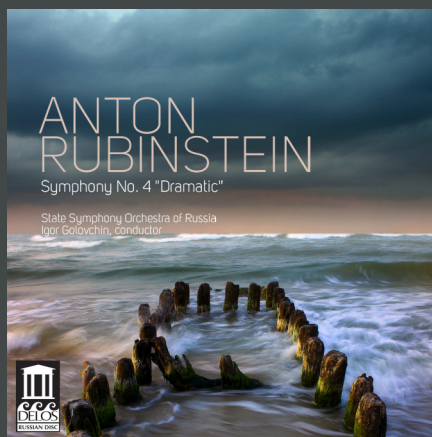
Herbert von Karajan Conductors' competition, and won first prize at the National Conductors' Competition in Moscow the following year. In 1988, he was invited to conduct the USSR State Symphony Orchestra (now the Russian SSO) for the first time; there he met Maestro Evgeni Svetlanov, with whom he worked extensively.

With that ensemble, Golovchin has toured widely to great acclaim — to include engagements in France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Italy and Japan. He has led productions of many well-known operas in Russia's finest theatres. His discography — mostly with the RSSO — includes recordings of Rubinstein, Glière, Stravinsky, Rachmaninoff and Sibelius for Russian Disc, now part of the Delos-Russian Disc series. He has also recorded for Naxos the complete symphonies of Balakirev and Scriabin, as well as orchestral music by other Russian masters like Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov, Kabalevsky and Medtner, among others.

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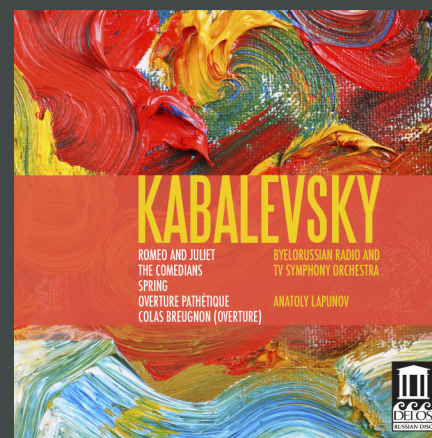
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