

**NAXOS**

DDD

# TCHAIKOVSKY

## **Nutcracker • Swan Lake**

**Der Nussknacker • Casse-noisette**

**Der Schwanensee • Lac des cygnes**

**Slovak Philharmonic**

**Michael Halasz**



**1987 Recording**

**Playing Time: 56'25''**

## Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893)

### Swan Lake The Nutcracker

The music of Tchaikovsky, in spite of the reservations of contemporaries at home and abroad, must seem to us both essentially Russian and essentially and firmly in the West European tradition. In Vienna the critic Eduard Hanslick was able to complain of the "trivial Cossack cheer" of the finale of the Violin Concerto, but in Russia Tchaikovsky never went far enough to please the self-appointed leader of musical nationalists, Balakirev. While by no means a miniaturist, he nevertheless excelled in his mastery of the smaller forms necessary in ballet, writing music that displayed his remarkable gifts of melody and skill in orchestration.

Tchaikovsky was born in 1840, the son of a chief inspector of mines in Government service in Votkinsk and educated at first at home by a beloved governess and later at the St. Petersburg School of Jurisprudence, in preparation for a career in the Ministry of Justice. This he was to abandon in 1863, when he entered the newly established St. Petersburg Conservatory, the first of its kind in Russia. Three years later he joined the staff of the new Conservatory in Moscow, directed by Nikolay Rubinstein, brother of the composer and pianist Anton Rubinstein, who had founded its counterpart in St. Petersburg.

Tchaikovsky, abnormally sensitive and diffident, and tormented by his own homosexuality that seemed to isolate him from the society of the time, had already made a considerable impression as a composer, when an unwise, face-saving marriage in 1877 brought complete nervous collapse and immediate separation from his new wife. In 1878 he was able to resign from the Conservatory, thanks to the assistance of a rich widow, Nadezhda von Meck, whom he was never to meet but who offered him both financial and moral support. After the St. Petersburg performance of his Sixth Symphony, Tchaikovsky died, it is thought by his own hand, compelled to this step by a court of honour of his fellows from the School of Jurisprudence, after threats of exposure and scandal resulting from a liaison with a young nobleman. His death was widely mourned both in Russia and abroad, where his music had won considerable favour.

Tchaikovsky's compositions include three full-length ballets, *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. The first of these had its early origin in a home entertainment devised for the children of his sister Sasha, who had settled at Kamenka in the Ukraine. The adult ballet was completed in 1876 in response to a commission from the Imperial Theatre Directorate in Moscow and was first performed at the Bolshoi Theatre there in March, 1876, with choreography by the Austrian, Wenzel Reisinger. The work was unfavourably received, its music seeming unusually substantial for the occasion, and the production inept. The ballet was to win success after the composer's death, when it was mounted at the Maryinsky in St. Petersburg in 1895, with choreography by Ivanov and Marius Petipa. The score served to re-establish the importance of music in ballet, after years in which it had been generally neglected in favour of the activity on stage.

The libretto of *Swan Lake* is based on an old German fairy-story, printed in the collection by Johann Karl August Musaeus, at the height of Romantic interest in matters of this kind. Princess Odette has been changed into a white swan by the wicked magician Rotbart. Prince Siegfried meets Odette in human form by the lake and swears to marry her, but Rotbart attempts to frustrate this planned breaking of his spell by substituting his own daughter, Odile, in the form of a black swan, for Odette. Rotbart is nearly successful in his malicious design, but is defeated in the end by the power of love, as Siegfried and Odette are united, although in some versions of the ballet the pair are united not in life but in death in a storm conjured up by Rotbart.

The ballet opens with a celebration of Siegfried's coming of age, a time at which he should choose a bride. The appearance of a flight of swans suggested the idea of a swan-hunt, on which the Prince and his friends set out. In the second act Siegfried, separated from his companions, meets Odette, who explains to him her sad fate, incurring the immediate wrath of Rotbart. Siegfried invites her to a ball at the castle, the scene of the third act. There Siegfried is to choose a bride and is deceived by the appearance of Rotbart and his daughter Odile, in the guise of Odette. He pledges his faith to Odile, a clap of thunder is heard and Rotbart and Odile disappear in triumph, while Siegfried falls senseless to the ground. In the final act, by the lake, Odette reproaches Siegfried and warns him of her coming death, but Siegfried defies Rotbart and the lovers are united.

The present recording includes the famous music for the swans, bewitched by Rotbart, dances from the Ball at the Palace of Siegfried in Act III, with Hungarian, Spanish and Neapolitan diversions, and the final scene.

Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Sleeping Beauty* was first performed in St. Petersburg in 1890, damned with the faintest of praise by the Tsar, who remarked that it was "very nice". The composer himself was much less satisfied with his final score, for *The Nutcracker*, proposed by Marius Petipa and the Imperial Theatre Directorate in 1891 and first performed at the Maryinsky in December, 1892, again to a cool reception. The music itself, however, had already proved popular enough in a suite arranged by Tchaikovsky for a concert earlier in the year.

The story of the ballet is drawn from E. T. A. Hoffmann's tale, *Der Nussknacker und der Mäuserkönig*. Set in the eighteenth century, initially in the house of the President of one of the German states of the period, the ballet opens with a children's Christmas party, at which Drosselmeyer, a slightly sinister adult, brings presents, a doll for Clara, the daughter of the house, and a toy soldier for Franz, her brother. When the children are told not to open their presents, Drosselmeyer quietens them by giving the two a pair of nutcrackers, promptly broken by Franz, who tries to caack the biggest nut he can find.

At night Clara creeps down to see her broken Nutcracker, and is alarmed at the open warfare that breaks out between the Mouse-king and his army and the Gingerbread soldiers by the Christmas tree. With a well-aimed shoe, she routs the enemy, and is invited by the Nutcracker, now transformed into a handsome prince, to visit the Kingdom of Sweets, an opportunity for welcome by the Snow-king and Snow-queen and a series of character dances, including the famous Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, with its then novel use of the celesta, and dances celebrating Spanish chocolate, Arabian coffee, China tea, the Russian trepak, and the old woman who lived in a shoe.

Included on the present recording are the Overture, the March of the children, as they play, and some of the dances of the Second Act divertissement, where we meet the Sugar Plum Fairy, the Russian Trepak, and other items of the entertainment offered to Clara and her Prince by the Snow-king and Snow-queen.

## The Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra

The Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, established as a professional orchestra in Bratislava (formerly Pressburg) in 1949, has won itself a considerable reputation during its relatively short existence.

Slovakia, which, with Bohemia and Moravia, became the Republic of Czechoslovakia in 1918, was the source of a great deal of music during the years of the Habsburg Empire. This musically fertile region had been influenced by Viennese, Hungarian and Bohemian music and it is these influences that have given the Slovak Philharmonic, one of Europe's finest orchestras, its unique character. On its many international tours, and at festivals throughout Europe, the orchestra has been praised for its great musicality and has been compared by enthusiastic critics with such world-class orchestras as the Vienna Philharmonic.

The orchestra benefitted considerably from the work of its distinguished conductors. These included Vaclav Talich (1949 – 1952), Ludovit Rajter and Ladislav Slovak. The Czech conductor Libor Pesek was appointed resident conductor in 1981, and the present Principal Conductor is the Slovak musician Bystrík Rezucha. Zdenek Kosler has also had a long and distinguished association with the orchestra and has conducted many of its most successful recordings, among them the complete symphonies of Dvorak.

During the years of its professional existence the Slovak Philharmonic has worked under the direction of many of the most distinguished conductors from abroad, from Eugene Goossens and Malcolm Sargent to Claudio Abbado, Antal Dorati and Riccardo Muti.

The orchestra has undertaken many tours abroad, for example to Germany and Japan, and has made a large number of recordings for the Czech Opus label, for Supraphon, for Hungaroton and, in recent years, for the Marco Polo label.

These recordings have brought the orchestra a growing international reputation and praise from the critics of leading international publications.

## Michael Halasz

Born in Hungary in 1938, Michael Halasz began his professional career as principal bassoonist in the Philharmonia Hungarica, a position he occupied for eight years, before studying conducting in Essen. His first engagement as a conductor was at the Munich Gaertnerplatz Theatre, where, from 1972 to 1975, he directed all operetta productions. In 1975 he moved to Frankfurt as principal Kapellmeister under Christoph von Dohnanyi, working with the most distinguished singers and conducting the most important works of the operatic repertoire. Engagements as a guest-conductor followed, and in 1977 Dohnanyi took him to the Staatsoper in Hamburg as principal Kapellmeister.

In 1978 Michael Halasz was appointed General Musical Director at the opera house in Hagen, and there further developed his experience of the repertoire, while undertaking guest engagements, which included television appearances as conductor in English and German versions of the Gerard Hoffnung Music Festival, as well as work with the Philharmonia Hungarica, the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, the Berlin Symphony Orchestra and the Hilversum Radio Orchestra.

For Hong Kong Records Michael Halasz has directed the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra in works by Richard Strauss, Anton Rubinstein, Miaskovsky and Tchaikovsky.





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TCHAIKOVSKY

**Nutcracker**

Der Nussknacker • Casse-noisette

**Swan Lake\***

Der Schwanensee • Lac des cygnes

Josef Bogacz, Violin\*

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra

Michael Halasz, Conductor

DDD

 Playing  
 Time:  
 56'25"

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**Nutcracker**

- |          |                     |        |
|----------|---------------------|--------|
| <b>1</b> | Ouverture           | (3:22) |
| <b>2</b> | Marche              | (2:21) |
| <b>3</b> | Danse de la fee     | (1:46) |
| <b>4</b> | Danse russe         | (1:11) |
| <b>5</b> | Danse arabe         | (2:53) |
| <b>6</b> | Danse chinoise      | (1:11) |
| <b>7</b> | Danse des mirlitons | (2:22) |
| <b>8</b> | Valse des fleurs    | (6:41) |

**Swan Lake**

- |           |                           |        |
|-----------|---------------------------|--------|
| <b>9</b>  | Scene                     | (2:35) |
| <b>10</b> | Valse                     | (5:48) |
| <b>11</b> | Cygnets: Allegro          | (1:28) |
| <b>12</b> | Andante                   | (6:40) |
| <b>13</b> | Tempo de valse            | (1:29) |
| <b>14</b> | Danse des couples         | (3:56) |
| <b>15</b> | Danse hongroise (Czardas) | (3:02) |
| <b>16</b> | Danse espagnole           | (2:09) |
| <b>17</b> | Danse napolitaine         | (2:09) |
| <b>18</b> | Scene finale              | (5:22) |

Recorded at the Concert Hall of the  
 Slovak Philharmonic from 20th to  
 25th June, 1987.

Producer: Günter Appenheimer  
 Music Notes: Keith Anderson

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