



# KABALEVSKY

Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2

Colas Breugnon Overture • Pathétique Overture

Malmö Symphony Orchestra  
Darrell Ang

## Dmitry Kabalevsky (1904–1987)

### Colas Breugnon – Overture • Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2 • Pathétique Overture

An equivocal figure in Russian music of the Soviet era, Dmitry Borisovich Kabalevsky was born in St Petersburg on 30 December 1904. Having studied at the Moscow Conservatory with Nikolay Myaskovsky and Alexander Goldenweiser, graduating in composition (1929) then piano (1930), he was appointed senior lecturer there in 1932 before being made a full professor seven years later. Riding out the ideological ferment of the 1920s as member not only of the progressive Association of Soviet Musicians but also the conservative Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians, he found his mature style in two works that achieved international success – the *Second Symphony* (1934) and the opera *Colas Breugnon* (1938).

Although his suite *The Comedians* (1940) found lasting popularity while his work in theatre and cinema gained official approval so that he was one of the few notable Soviet composers uncensored by the notorious Zhdanov Decree of 1948, Kabalevsky was unable to maintain comparable success in his music of the 1950s and 1960s. His later operas failed to hold the stage, and though certain of his piano works have remained at the periphery of the modern repertoire, his greatest successes were the *Cello Sonata* (1962) and *Second Cello Concerto* (1964); their brooding and introspective demeanour essentially at odds with the role of the dutiful citizen to which Kabalevsky aspired as a Soviet artist, and which led him to criticise younger colleagues who chose to pursue more experimental paths in the 1960s and 1970s.

Kabalevsky's most durable achievement came in the field of music education – notably the development in his later years of a music programme for schools which, together with his extensive piano and choral output for children and young people, offers striking similarities with the didactic activities of otherwise different contemporaries as Zoltán Kodály and Carl Orff. This may have been an intentional shift of priorities on Kabalevsky's behalf as, apart from a *Fourth Piano Concerto* and some elegiac song-cycles, he completed only a very few original

compositions over the decade before his death in Moscow on 14 February 1987.

The first of Kabalevsky's six operas, *Colas Breugnon* is based on the satiric novel by Romain Rolland and was first staged at Leningrad in 1938. The *Overture*, which soon became a party-piece for Western orchestras, is in a line stretching from Mozart's *Figaro* to Bernstein's *Candide*. It leavens its brusque neo-Classicism with aspects of Russian folk music to exhilarating effect.

From its uproarious start, the piece proceeds at a hectic pace – its capricious and syncopated main theme, on woodwind then strings – acting as a refrain (in what actually is a deft eliding of sonata and rondo forms) which duly makes way for a brazen parade-like idea followed by a more soulful and sustained theme. Not that the initial high jinx can be kept at bay for long, however, as the music powers towards a surprisingly subdued and speculative coda (initially on lower woodwind) that only belatedly builds in a crescendo to the hurtling final payoff.

Soon after giving the premiere of his *First Piano Concerto* (Naxos 8.557683), Kabalevsky began his *First Symphony*, premiered in Moscow on 9 November 1932. It was inscribed to the 15th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and may well have taken its cue from Shostakovich's *Second Symphony* (8.572708) of five years earlier, though the Kabalevsky feels closer aesthetically to Myaskovsky in its emotional rhetoric. Its two movements can be taken as illustrating progress from oppression to liberation in time-honoured Soviet manner.

The first movement begins with a pensive theme on bassoons then clarinets over undulating strings which gradually builds in intensity towards a brief climax. Horns continue the sombre discourse, growing in agitation on strings and brass towards a febrile climax; after which, the music unfolds more impulsively across the orchestra until it reaches a culmination where the initial theme is forcefully restated. From here it moves into a fateful processional, goaded on by pounding timpani, before subsiding into those sombre depths from which it had emerged.

With minimal pause, the second movement fairly bursts into life with an impassioned theme on trumpets then lower brass. At length this makes way for a ruminative theme, initially on cor anglais before being continued by lower strings – tension once again building stealthily towards a headlong climax in which the opening theme is heard across the whole orchestra. From here both main ideas are recalled as the underlying mood becomes more defiant, with the final pages affording no let-up on the way to a triumphal while all too brutal peroration.

By contrast, the *Second Symphony* is an abstract work in all essentials. Premiered in Moscow on 25 December 1934, with Albert Coates directing the Moscow Philharmonic, it was later championed in the West by conductors such as Arturo Toscanini (who gave the American premiere in New York on 8 November 1942) and Malcolm Sargent. Economical in both form and duration, it also evinces a sure sense of drama and lyricism such as Prokofiev was making central to his music when he resettled in the Soviet Union at much the same time.

Favouring an ironically off-hand manner, the first movement sets off with a vaunting theme that soon finds contrast with a plaintive melody on clarinet then upper strings. In what proves to be a regular while not inflexible sonata design, the ensuing development draws intensively on aspects of both themes as it unfolds with unceasing animation towards a powerful climax then into a modified reprise. This affords no relaxation as both themes are further varied, the plaintive idea given no room to expand prior to a coda which surges to a no-nonsense ending.

The second movement commences with a wistful theme shared between woodwind before it is taken up by strings and reveals a more dramatic dimension. From here the theme continues on upper woodwind and strings, before being subtly varied in an episode for woodwind over

pizzicato strings that duly leads into the sustained central climax. This subsides, whence the previous episode is resumed by solo trumpet, pizzicato strings dying away to a resumption of the opening theme which now brings about the subdued though audibly regretful conclusion.

The third movement begins in pointed contrast with its capricious theme for solo woodwind over pulsating strings (owing not a little to the corresponding movement from Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*). What unfolds as a tensile rondo includes subsidiary ideas which are offshoots of this main theme, not least one whose forced jollity hints at sardonic elements not far beneath the surface. That jollity, however, was always destined to have the final word – as the music heads into an energetic restatement of the main theme then on to the decisive closing chords.

Kabalevsky wrote few works for the concert hall in later years, one such being the *Pathétique Overture* of 1960. Lacking the spontaneity of his earlier orchestral works, its ability to pack a fair degree of incident into its brief duration is a reminder of Kabalevsky's professionalism.

The swirling opening bars lead into an expressive if agitated theme for woodwind that is duly continued by strings then brass. Strings soon expound the second theme, eloquent and ardent in equal measure, before the earlier idea is resumed largely as before. Although there is little actual development, these themes are amenable to a degree of variation simply through being restated in varied orchestral garb, as the music surges onward towards a final statement of the initial theme: all that is needed to see this terse yet highly effective piece through to its close.

Richard Whitehouse

## Malmö Symphony Orchestra



Founded in 1925, the Malmö Symphony Orchestra (MSO) is one of the leading major orchestras in Sweden. Performing the full breadth of the symphonic repertoire, the MSO collaborates with prominent international conductors and soloists, including its current chief conductor Marc Soustrot. Since 2015 the MSO has resided in Malmö Live Concert Hall, a truly state-of-the-art facility known for its world-class acoustics. The MSO has won critical acclaim for its numerous recordings with leading record labels, including first prizes in competitions such as the Cannes Classical Award and the Diapason d'Or. Their recording of Franz Berwald's symphonies, under the direction of Sixten Ehrling, was nominated for a *Gramophone* Award. Their recordings of Franz Schmidt's symphonies with former chief conductor Vassily Sinaisky have been praised by *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine*. Together with chief conductor Marc Soustrot, the orchestra has made extensive efforts to record all of Camille Saint-Saëns' orchestral works and continues to cultivate its growing reputation via international tours. [www.malmolive.se/mso](http://www.malmolive.se/mso)

## Darrell Ang



Darrell Ang has been the artistic director and chief conductor of China's Sichuan Symphony since December 2016. He regularly conducts the Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the 'Giuseppe Verdi' Symphony Orchestra, Milan, the Munich Radio Orchestra, the NHK Symphony Orchestra, the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra, the Singapore Symphony and the Mariinsky Orchestra in St Petersburg. His first disc for Naxos was nominated for a GRAMMY® Award in 2016 (Zhou Long/Chen Yi *Symphony 'Humen 1839'*, 8.570611). Ang studied conducting in St Petersburg and at Yale. He took all three top awards at the 50th Besançon International Young Conductors' Competition, leading to the music directorship of the Orchestre Symphonique de Bretagne (2012–15) and – as recipient of the Allianz Cultural Foundation Young Conductors' Award – was invited to take on residencies with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philharmonia Orchestra, where he was mentored by Lorin Maazel and Esa-Pekka Salonen. [www.darrellang.net](http://www.darrellang.net)

Dmitry Kabalevsky found his mature style and achieved international success with his first opera *Colas Breugnon*, the overture of which was soon picked up as an orchestral showpiece in the West. The *Second Symphony* was likewise championed by conductors such as Arturo Toscanini, its bittersweet sense of drama and lyricism comparable with Prokofiev. Dedicated to the 15th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, the *First Symphony* illustrates progress from oppression to liberation, while the later *Pathétique Overture* is a rousing and highly effective reminder of Kabalevsky's skill in orchestration.

Dmitry  
**KABALEVSKY**  
(1904–1987)

- |   |   |              |
|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | <b>Colas Breugnon, Op. 24 – Overture (1938)</b>       | <b>4:51</b>  |
|   | <b>Symphony No. 1 in C sharp minor, Op. 18 (1932)</b> | <b>18:49</b> |
| 2 | <b>I. Andante molto sostenuto</b>                     | <b>8:21</b>  |
| 3 | <b>II. Allegro molto agitato</b>                      | <b>10:28</b> |
|   | <b>Symphony No. 2 in C minor, Op. 19 (1934)</b>       | <b>23:14</b> |
| 4 | <b>I. Allegro quasi presto</b>                        | <b>7:32</b>  |
| 5 | <b>II. Andante non troppo</b>                         | <b>8:57</b>  |
| 6 | <b>III. Prestissimo scherzando</b>                    | <b>6:37</b>  |
| 7 | <b>Pathétique Overture, Op. 64 (1960)</b>             | <b>4:14</b>  |

**Malmö Symphony Orchestra**  
**Darrell Ang**

Recorded: 21–24 August 2017 at Malmö Live, Malmö, Sweden

Producer, engineer and editor: Sean Lewis

Booklet notes: Richard Whitehouse

Publishers: Les Editions du Chant du Monde 1 7, State Music Publishers, Moscow 2–6

Cover: *Rylov Sunset* (1917) by Arkady Rylov (1870–1939)