

London Philharmonic Orchestra

TCHAIKOVSKY SYMPHONY NO. 2 'LITTLE RUSSIAN' SYMPHONY NO. 3 'POLISH'

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI *conductor*
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA



PYOTR ILYCH TCHAIKOVSKY

SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN C MINOR, OP. 17, 'LITTLE RUSSIAN'

Andante sostenuto – Allegro vivo
Andantino marziale, quasi moderato
Scherzo: Allegro molto vivace
Finale: Moderato assai

Composers often blow hot and cold about their own music, but few have been subject to such extreme mood – and valuation – swings as Tchaikovsky. The Second Symphony is a case in point. At first his pride in his achievement was immense, clearly boosted by the judgements of trusted friends like Nikolay Kondratyev. 'This work of genius (as Kondratyev calls my symphony) is close to completion ... I think it's my best composition as regards perfection of form – a quality for which I have not always been conspicuous.' The positive feedback kept coming. When Tchaikovsky played the finale of the new symphony to his Russian nationalist colleagues – the so-called 'Mighty Handful' – at the house of Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov in November 1872, he was thrilled by their reaction: 'The whole company nearly tore me to pieces with rapture – and Madame Rimsky-Korsakov begged me in tears to let her arrange it for piano duet.'

But as so often with Tchaikovsky, the picture soon changed rapidly. When the publisher

Bessel prevaricated about printing the score, Tchaikovsky began to see this as a blessing in disguise. Seven years later he set to work on a major revision. The original first movement now made him shudder with horror: 'My God, how difficult and noisy and disconnected and obscure it was!' Indeed the whole Symphony was 'unlucky' – Tchaikovsky seems to have forgotten that the first public performance in 1873 was so successful that the Symphony had to be repeated two months later! Soon he was threatening to burn the first version, and doing his best to suppress the printed parts.

Listening to the familiar revised version, the first-time listener may find Tchaikovsky's radical change of heart baffling. Could the original really be that bad? Granted the work isn't quite as 'perfect' formally as he originally thought. Certainly the finales of his later symphonies are more subtly constructed. But the work is so generously tuneful, so imaginatively scored, and so full of what is obviously mature Tchaikovsky that it's hard to identify any cause for shame on his part – however exaggerated. Perhaps the real problem is that by the time he came to revise the Second Symphony, Tchaikovsky had turned his back decisively on the nationalism of the Mighty Handful. His musicianship, he realised, was altogether more cosmopolitan

than theirs. Could it be that the original version of the Symphony was simply tainted by association?

Whatever the cause, we must be grateful that Tchaikovsky deemed the Symphony worth saving. The very first notes make it clear we are in for something special. From an emphatic full-orchestral chord a hushed horn solo emerges, intoning a soulful theme – the first of three ideas in this work based on Ukrainian folksongs. (In Tchaikovsky's time the Ukraine was known as 'Little Russia', hence the Symphony's nickname.) This builds to a powerful and dramatic *Allegro vivo*. But just when it seems that memories of that atmospheric slow introduction are forgotten, the horn cuts in again with its folk-inspired melody, its final phrase echoed by a lugubrious 'dying' low bassoon – a typically Tchaikovskian touch.

Instead of the usual slow movement, Tchaikovsky brings contrast with a sweetly innocent march movement, its outer sections taken from his rejected opera *Undine* (one of those scores which, alas, Tchaikovsky did manage to destroy). At its heart a solo clarinet introduces another Ukrainian folk-based tune, with a deliciously light accompaniment on two flutes. The following *Scherzo* raises the

Symphony to new imaginative heights: the colours scintillate, the rhythms dance with remarkable freedom and flexibility – from this movement alone you could probably guess that Tchaikovsky was also a great ballet composer. The *Finale* is dominated by the Symphony's third Ukrainian folk-based tune (presented by the full orchestra in the brief slow introduction). As craftsmanship it may be a lot less refined than the *Scherzo*, but it can be tremendous bracing fun in performance – conjuring up the smell of vodka, the twang of balalaikas and the creaking of leather boots. There is one darker moment: rasping low woodwind, bass brass and an ominous *fortissimo* stroke on a gong. But the exhilarating *Presto* coda soon dismisses such thoughts, and the Symphony ends in wild elation.

SYMPHONY NO. 3 IN D, OP. 29, 'POLISH'

Introduzione e Allegro: Moderato assai
(Tempo di marcia funebre)

Alla tedesca: Allegro moderato e semplice
Andante elegiaco

Scherzo: Allegro vivo

Finale: Allegro con fuoco (Tempo di polacca)

In August 1875 Tchaikovsky wrote to the composer Sergey Taneyev that he had 'written a symphony. It is in D major and consists of five movements'. This seemingly bald statement actually identifies two important features that set Tchaikovsky's Third Symphony apart from its fellows. Generally speaking, Tchaikovsky preferred the darker minor mode for his big symphonic utterances; and even in this, the brightest of his symphonies, he feels the need to temper that brightness by setting the middle three movements, plus the first movement's slow introduction, in minor keys. And the five-movement structure is equally unique: the 'extra' movement is the *Alla tedesca* – a lilting symphonic waltz, whose declared 'German' (*tedesca*) style makes nonsense of the Symphony's still-frequently used nickname, 'Polish'. That name has nothing to do with Tchaikovsky: it seems to have been invented by the conductor August Manns for one of his popular Crystal Palace concerts. True, the

Finale is largely based on the rhythm of the 'polonaise' or 'polacca' – a dance strongly associated with Poland at the time, and much favoured by Tchaikovsky. Otherwise it is hard to identify anything specific to that nation in the Third Symphony.

A possibly more relevant fact is that Tchaikovsky conceived the Symphony around the time he was working on his ballet *Swan Lake*. The balletic character of the *Alla tedesca* is clear from the start, and while the central *Andante elegiaco* is more funereal in character, the mysterious string *tremolos* near the end of the movement strongly recall Tchaikovsky's dramatic use of the same device in *Swan Lake*. And the airborne *Scherzo* that follows is far less remarkable for its 'symphonic' development of motifs than for its brilliant use of orchestral colour. Particularly striking are the washes of string sound at the heart of the movement Tchaikovsky creates by having the players move their bows rapidly forwards and backwards across their strings. This too is reminiscent of some of the magical orchestral effects in the ballet score.

Surrounding these three gentle but flavoursome movements are two bracing, extrovert *Allegros*. The first movement's

confident, distinctly Russian-inflected main theme is all the more outstanding on its first appearance for the way it seems to cast off the gloom of the slower introduction – as though Tchaikovsky, having led us to expect something sombre, suddenly breaks out into a cheery ‘fooled you!’ The first movement’s exhilarating momentum is sustained magnificently, with the final build-up particularly well engineered.

On the whole critics have been less kind to the *Finale*; and it is true that there is something slightly academic about the fugue at the centre of the movement (led off by clarinets and second violins). But the themes are catchy enough, and the conclusion is suitably roof-raising without outstaying its welcome. The mature mastery of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth symphonies is only just around the corner.

Programme notes © Stephen Johnson

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI *conductor*

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One of today's most sought-after conductors, acclaimed worldwide for his incisive musicianship and adventurous artistic commitment, Vladimir Jurowski was born in Moscow

in 1972. In 1990 he relocated with his family to Germany.

In 2017 Vladimir Jurowski took up the position of Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and also celebrated ten years as Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. 2021 will see him take up the position of Music Director of the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich. In addition he holds the titles of Principal Artist of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Artistic Director of the Russian State Academic Symphony Orchestra, and Artistic Director of the George Enescu International Festival, Bucharest. He has previously held the positions of First Kapellmeister of the Komische Oper Berlin, Principal Guest Conductor of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Principal Guest Conductor of the Russian National Orchestra and Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

Vladimir Jurowski appears regularly at festivals including the BBC Proms, the Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the George Enescu Festival of Bucharest, Musikfest Berlin, and the Dresden, Schleswig Holstein and the Rostropovich Festivals. In 2017 he made an acclaimed Salzburg Festival debut.

He collaborates with many of the world's leading orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Cleveland and Philadelphia Orchestras, New York Philharmonic, Chicago and Boston Symphonies, the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic Orchestras.

A committed operatic conductor, Jurowski has conducted at the Metropolitan Opera New York, the Opera National de Paris, Teatro alla Scala Milan, the Bolshoi Theatre, the State Academic Symphony of Russia, the Semperoper Dresden, the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, the Komische Oper Berlin and the Bayerische Staatsoper.

Jurowski's discography includes CD and DVDs with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, the Russian National Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world's finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra's performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trail-blazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world's greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. Vladimir Jurowski was appointed the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor in March 2003, and became Principal Conductor in September 2007.

The Orchestra is based at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992, giving around 30 concerts a season. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for over 50 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski. lpo.org.uk



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PYOTR ILYCH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–93)

32:41 Symphony No. 2 in C minor, Op. 17, 'Little Russian'

- 01 10:38 Andante sostenuto – Allegro vivo
- 02 06:26 Andantino marziale, quasi moderato
- 03 05:15 Scherzo: Allegro molto vivace
- 04 10:19 Finale: Moderato assai

44:22 Symphony No. 3 in D, Op. 29, 'Polish'

- 05 13:54 Introduzione e Allegro: Moderato assai (Tempo di marcia funebre)
- 06 06:04 Alla tedesca: Allegro moderato e semplice
- 07 08:57 Andante elegiaco
- 08 05:59 Scherzo: Allegro vivo
- 09 09:19 Finale: Allegro con fuoco (Tempo di polacca)

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI *conductor*
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Pieter Schoeman *leader*

Recorded live at Southbank Centre's ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, London