



19TH CENTURY RUSSIAN CELLO MUSIC

Arensky • Davïdov • K. Liadov
Rimsky-Korsakov • Tchaikovsky

Dmitrii Khrychev, Cello
Olga Solovieva, Piano



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Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

Variations on a Rococo Theme in A major, Op. 33
(original version for cello and piano)

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky was very fond of the sound and timbre of the cello – everyone knows the famous and stunningly beautiful solo cello parts of his operas, ballets and symphonic works. The composer also wrote a few pieces for cello. One of the most famous such works is *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, written in the winter of 1876–77 and dedicated to his friend Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, a cellist and a professor at the Moscow Conservatoire. Fitzenhagen was the first performer of the piece when it premiered in Moscow in 1877 accompanied by the orchestra of the Imperial Russian Musical Society under the baton of Nikolai Rubinstein. Fitzenhagen was fond of the *Variations* and included the piece into his own concert performances. Fitzenhagen made substantial edits to the score: he changed the cello part to achieve more concert-worthy virtuosity, altered the sequence of the variations, removed the last, eighth variation, and rewrote the finale. It is Fitzenhagen's version that was published during Tchaikovsky's time, first as an arrangement for cello and piano, and later for cello and orchestra. Until the mid-20th century only Fitzenhagen's edition of the *Variations* was performed. Tchaikovsky's original version gives us an appreciation of the thought and depth behind the original piece, even though it may be not as 'showy' as Fitzenhagen's. The proof can be found in this recording – a performance of the author's version for cello and piano. This piano score used by Tchaikovsky to write his orchestral score of the *Variations* – the version for cello and piano authorised by Tchaikovsky was first published in 1973. The title *Variations on a Rococo Theme* refers the listener to the style of the 18th century, highlighting the light and gracious character of the music, its clarity in harmony and bright outlook. At the same time the somewhat Mozartian character of the main theme lends itself surprisingly well to the Russian melodiousness.

Karl Yul'evich Davidov (1838–1889)

Fantasy on Russian Songs, Op. 7

Karl Yul'evich Davidov (sometimes spelt as 'Davidoff' or 'Davydov') was one of the top cellists of the 19th century. Tchaikovsky called him 'the tsar of all cellists'. In 1858, the year Davidov graduated with distinction with a degree in Physics and Mathematics from the Moscow University, he was already an excellent cellist, a good piano player and also a composer. The interest in the latter brought Davidov to the Leipzig Conservatoire, which at the time was considered the top music school in Europe. While still a student of musical composition and theory, Davidov was discovered at one of the musical salons as a cellist extraordinaire. From that moment on, Davidov performed at the biggest concert halls in Leipzig and other German cities. A short time later he was offered the position of first cello at one of the leading European orchestras of the time – the Gewandhaus Orchestra. In 1860 he started his professor's tenure at the Leipzig Conservatoire. From the time of the foundation of the first Russian Conservatoire in St Petersburg, Davidov was among its professors, and he later served as its director from 1876 until 1887. The name of Karl Davidov is connected to the period when the Russian school of cello playing blossomed during the second half of the 19th century, when Russian cellists gained recognition both in Russia and abroad. Davidov also established himself as an illustrious composer – he wrote numerous pieces for cello, and several concertos for cello and orchestra – greatly enriching the cello repertoire.

While in Leipzig, Davidov missed Russia. This is reflected in his works of the time, as he wrote several pieces relating to his memories of his Motherland, including *Fantasy on Russian Songs*. The *Fantasy* is based on several songs popular at the time: the drawing songs *Ne Shey Ty Mnje*, *Matushka*, *Krasny Sarafan* ('Mother, Don't Make a Red Sarafan for Me'); *Vspomni*, *Vspomni*, *Moy Lyubeznyj* ('Remember My Darling'), and

the fast dance song *Vyidu L' Ya Na Rechen'ku* ('I Am Going Out to the River'). The *Fantasy* is very interesting both as a musical composition and as a display of the cello's scope as an instrument – from the melodious and lyrical sound to its virtuosic technicality.

Konstantin Nikolayevich Liadov (1820–1871)

Fantasy on Gipsy Songs

Konstantin Nikolayevich Liadov was the father of the famous Russian composer Anatoly Konstantinovich Liadov. In the mid-19th century he was a prominent figure in the musical scene, being the chief conductor of the Imperial Russian Opera, and the first conductor of the Mariinsky Theatre since the date of its ceremonial opening on 2 October 1860. He was the conductor for the first performances of numerous works by Russian composers, as well as for Russian premieres of foreign works. Konstantin Liadov was also a composer, whose works enjoyed high popularity at the time.

It is rather unfortunate that a significant part of Konstantin Liadov's catalogue is now lost; too few of them were in fact published. There is only a manuscript of the *Fantasy on Gipsy Songs*; until recently, the piece was virtually unknown. It is impossible to accurately date the piece, but there is information that it was performed on the 22 March 1857. The piece was dedicated to an amateur musician, Prince Vassilij Vassilievich Meschersky.

Fantasy as a genre of composition was quite popular in the first half of the 19th century. The fantasies by Russian composers of the time were mainly based on Russian folk themes. But Konstantin Liadov wrote a piece on gipsy songs which reflected the popular tastes of the time: Russian society was quite taken with gipsy songs, known for their bright, emotive sound. However, for Russian composers beginning with Glinka, it was especially important to relay Russian cultural traditions. That is why in Liadov's *Fantasy* one can hear the tunes of Russian folk and dance songs, and melodies of the romances heard in the big cities.

Anton Stepanovich Arensky (1861–1906)

Two Pieces, Op. 12

Four Pieces, Op. 56

From the late 19th to the early 20th century, Anton Stepanovich Arensky was a very popular Russian composer. While still a student at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, where he was in Rimsky-Korsakov's class of musical theory and composition, he proved to possess an extraordinary talent. Upon graduating with a gold medal of honour, the musician was offered a teaching position at the Moscow Conservatoire. His Moscow tenure was not very long, however, lasting a little over ten years, and Arensky returned to St Petersburg as the director of the Imperial Kapella, taking over from Mily Balakirev. The job did not allow Arensky to fully pursue his interest in composing; after six years of his directorship, Arensky resigned in order to fully devote himself to music.

The cello held a special place in Arensky's heart: his father, a medical doctor, was an amateur cellist, and his mother was a good pianist. It is likely that Arensky grew up listening to his parents' cello and piano duets. This familiar combination of timbres must have held his attention as he later wrote two works for cello and piano.

Two Pieces for cello and piano, dedicated to Karl Davidov, was written in the 1880s, during the period when Arensky taught at the Moscow Conservatoire. These are two short, graceful miniatures: the poetic *Petite ballade* and the fast, virtuosic *Danse capricieuse*. The other work, *Four Pieces* for cello and piano, dedicated to cellist Anatoly Brandukov, was published in 1901, the year of the composer's resignation from the Russian Imperial Kapella. These pieces appear as sketches or snapshots, each of them conveying a particular mood, or emotional state – such composition was common in musical Romanticism. One can also envision a range of images here: the *Orientale* reflects on the popular oriental theme so loved by many Russian composers, the *Romance* is a true embodiment of the lyricism, *Chanson triste* reminds one of a poetic ballad, and the opus concludes with the fast and brilliantly virtuosic *Humoresque*.

Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)
Serenade, Op. 37 (version for cello and piano)

The first half of the 1890s was a complex and trying time in the life and creative work of Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov. One trouble followed another, and he found himself in no particular mood to compose, thus taking to orchestrating and editing his own pieces and the works of Mussorgsky and Borodin. He read a lot, and wrote articles on music and musical aesthetics. In May 1893, having administered all the exams at the Conservatoire and at the Kapella, Rimsky-Korsakov left for Yalta, in Crimea, to join his wife and his gravely ill daughter Masha. His daughter's health was extremely poor, thus the Rimsky-Korsakovs did not know how long

they would stay in Crimea, however the composer ended up renting a piano for a short period of time. During that period he wrote the *Serenade* for cello and piano. The choice of instruments was not by chance: the composer's son Andrey played cello, and during the previous year from time to time the composer accompanied him on piano. Later Rimsky-Korsakov arranged the *Serenade* for cello and orchestra.

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Dmitrii Khrychev



Dmitrii Khrychev is a prominent chamber and orchestral musician and soloist. Born in Leningrad (now St Petersburg) in 1973 into a family of engineers, he started learning the cello at the age of seven, continuing his training at the Rimsky-Korsakov College of Music and the Rimsky-Korsakov St Petersburg State Conservatory. In 1995 he formed the Nevsky String Quartet, with whom he was a prizewinner in seven international musical competitions, including the Dmitri Shostakovich International String Quartet Competition, and played until 2012. From 2006 to 2009 he performed as principal cellist and soloist with the Philharmonia of Nations Orchestra under Justus Frantz. He has been the cellist in the St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra since 2009 (with artistic director and chief conductor Yuri Temirkanov) and principal cellist since 2011. Khrychev has performed as a soloist under Yuri Temirkanov, Nikolay Alekseev, Krzysztof Penderecki and Leo Kremer, among others. As a chamber musician Khrychev played with many leading St Petersburg musicians. Khrychev has collaborated with many Russian composers including Sergey Slonimsky, Boris Tischenko, Yuri Falik, Yuri Kozulin and Leonid Rezetdinov, giving several world premieres. From 2007 to 2013 Khrychev taught at the Rimsky-Korsakov College of Music and the Rimsky-Korsakov St Petersburg State Conservatory. Khrychev's discography includes cello concertos by Mieczysław Weinberg and Reinhold Glière on the Northern Flowers label and albums with the Nevsky String Quartet on the Northern Flowers and Capstone Records labels.

Olga Solovieva

Pianist Olga Solovieva was born in Moscow, graduated from the Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, and took a postgraduate course as an assistant to Leonid Blok. Since 2004 she has been a professor at the Gnessin State Musical College, and has given masterclasses in Ireland and Belgium. Solovieva was a prizewinner of the 1999 Taneyev Competition of Chamber Ensembles, a finalist of the 2000 XX Chamber Music Competition in Trapani, Italy, a 2010 Boris Tchaikovsky Society Award Winner, and was awarded the Best Accompanist Prize at the XII International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow. She has performed in Russia and abroad, and collaborated with renowned musicians and ensembles including the Vanbrugh Quartet, the Vilnius String Quartet, Christopher Marwood, Roel Dieltiens, Alexander Rudin, Haik Kazazyan, Fanny Clamagirand, Julian Bliss and Sergey Kostylev, among others. Her discography includes the complete piano music of Anatoly Liadov for the Northern Flowers record label, and recordings for Grand Piano (GP716), Toccata Classics and Albany Records. For Naxos she has recorded music by Sergey Taneyev (8.557804), and Boris Tchaikovsky (8.557727, 8.573207, and the International Classical Music Awards 2019-nominated 8.573783).

www.olga-solovieva.ru

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for his long-term research of the Liadovs dynasty, and for providing the copy
of his great-grandfather's manuscript of *Fantasy on Gipsy Songs*.

All recordings made with a cello kindly provided by contemporary Russian master Roman Naumov,
and with a Steinway Grand Piano.



Olga Solovieva and Dmitrii Khrychev

Photo: Igor Prokhorov

Cello music flourished in Russia in the 19th century. Tchaikovsky was central to this profusion of composition, writing the celebrated *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, music of Mozartian charm, heard here in the composer's version for cello and piano. Karl Davidov, who Tchaikovsky called 'the tsar of all cellists', contributed a melodious, lyrically inventive and virtuosic *Fantasy on Russian Songs*. Arensky's graceful character sketches and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Serenade* are suffused with Romanticism, while the lusty *Fantasy on Gipsy Songs* by Konstantin Liadov (father of the more famous Anatoly) is the earliest of these pieces and the least known.



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- Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)**
1 Variations on a Rococo Theme in A major, Op. 33
 (original version for cello and piano) (1876–77)* **18:43**
- Karl Yul'evich Davidov (1838–1889)**
2 Fantasy on Russian Songs, Op. 7 (1860)* 12:44
- Konstantin Nikolayevich Liadov (1820–1871)**
3 Fantasy on Gipsy Songs (c. 1857)* 8:17
- Anton Stepanovich Arensky (1861–1906)**
Two Pieces, Op. 12 (c. 1887) 6:48
- 4 No. 1. Petite ballade 2:40**
5 No. 2. Danse capricieuse 4:04
- Four Pieces, Op. 56 (c. 1901) 13:13**
- 6 No. 1. Orientale 2:42**
7 No. 2. Romance 4:23
8 No. 3. Chanson triste 2:51
9 No. 4. Humoresque 3:03
- Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)**
10 Serenade, Op. 37 (version for cello and piano) (1893)* 4:00

Dmitrii Khrychev, Cello • Olga Solovieva, Piano

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