

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN G MINOR, OP.13
SLAVONIC MARCH, OP.31



RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
Mikhail Pletnev

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893)

Symphony No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 13 (1866, revised 1874)

“Winter Daydreams”

- 1 Daydreams on a winter journey – Allegro tranquillo
13. 19
- 2 Land of desolation, land of mists – Adagio cantabile ma
non tanto 11. 43
- 3 Scherzo – Allegro scherzando giocoso
7. 23
- 4 Finale – Andante lugubre - Allegro moderato - Allegro
maestoso –
Andante lugubre - Allegro vivo
13. 14
- 5 **Marche Slave (Slavonic March), Op. 31** (1876)
9.15

Russian National Orchestra

Conducted by: **Mikhail Pletnev**

Concert-master: Alexei Bruni

Total playing-time: 55. 21

Recording Venue : DZZ Studio 5, Moscow (4/2011)

Executive producers : Rick Walker & Job Maarse
Recording producer : Job Maarse
Balance engineer : Erdo Groot
Recording engineer : Roger de Schot
Editing : Rob Faber

A difficult birth

The genre of the symphony played a major role throughout the creative life of Pyotr Tchaikovsky. He composed his first symphony at the age of 26, and his sixth and last symphony – the *Pathétique* – in 1893, the year in which he died. Whereas his three last symphonies have remained an integral part of the concert repertoire, performances of his first three symphonies are still quite rare. Unfairly so, as they are unique individual works, artistic expressions of a high quality. Tchaikovsky defined the symphony as “the most lyrical of musical forms. After all, is it not meant to express that for which there are no words, but which forces itself out of the soul, impatiently waiting to be uttered?”. With these words, Tchaikovsky makes us aware of the special nature of his symphonies. Primarily, they provided him with a musical outlet for the elaboration of his emotions, his mental and spiritual processes. Probably the greatest error as far as the reception of Tchaikovsky’s symphonies is concerned, is that the subjectivity of his symphonic sound world, the sweet mellifluousness of one melody or another confused and irritated the judgment of the academics to the same degree in which these musical characteristics met, by contrast, with euphoric approval from a wide-ranging audience. After all, especially in German-speaking countries, his music was unjustly stamped as follows: “Beware! Sensitive, sloppy sentiment!”. But Tchaikovsky absolutely did not want to get involved in an academic game with empty notes. And rightly so.

One certainly cannot accuse Tchaikovsky of having taken an easy path in life. After all, the law graduate gave up his tenured position in the civil service in order to fully focus on music. Clear proof of a motivated person, prepared to work hard to attain his desired goal in life, without any ifs and buts – even if the journey may turn out to be a very rocky one. And thus from 1863, Tchaikovsky took classes in the subjects of composition, orchestration, harmony and counterpoint at the newly founded St. Petersburg Conservatoire from such famous teachers as Rubinstein and Zarembo. In early 1866, after successfully graduating from the Conservatoire and moving to Moscow, Tchaikovsky began work on his Symphony No. 1 in G minor. The genesis of this work is a typical example of the irregular conditions under which a composer was forced to work in the 1860’s. As a professor at the Moscow Conservatoire, he had no time to compose during the day, so he simply worked throughout the night – like a man possessed. But he did not make much progress in his creative work. The symphony caused him sleepless nights, and not only in the literal sense! He was paralyzed by doubts concerning the quality of his work; and neither was his teacher Rubinstein – who had encouraged him to work

on a symphony – sparing in his criticism. As a consequence of all these internal and external “barriers”, he carried out a fundamental revision of the work. On February 11, 1867, just the two middle movements were performed in St. Petersburg, meeting with a rather moderate response. This was followed by a further revision, after which the work – now in its complete form – was received enthusiastically by the audience in February 1868 – however, this did not prevent Tchaikovsky from carrying out yet another revision of the work in 1874.

The title *Winter Dreams* does not refer to programme music; rather, it is meant to provide an intellectual and emotional framework for the moods and ideas of the composer. These are revealed in the titles of the first two movements: “Reveries on a winter journey” and “Land of emptiness, land of fog”. The poetically tinted first movement follows the sonata form in its structure. In its repetition of motifs, the main theme – introduced above a soft tremolo in the violins – demonstrates typically Russian characteristics, as does also the lyrical second subject. Extensive intensifications and dynamic climaxes define the development. The movement ends with the main theme in its original form. The second, subtly orchestrated movement is determined by a wide-ranging oboe melody in C minor, in a typically Russian spirit. The Scherzo, reminiscent of Schumann and Mendelssohn, originates from a composition written by Tchaikovsky while still a student: his Piano Sonata in C sharp minor. The composer incorporates a waltz in the trio that, inserted as a reminiscence, completes the movement. In the finale, Tchaikovsky makes use of a Russian folk song, which he develops in the slow introduction. It reappears in a slightly modified form and in the major key as the second theme of the Allegro, where it is confronted with the powerful first theme. The movement contains elaborate musical detailing. In its polyphonic episodes – the *fugati* – it testifies to the diligent studies carried out by the composer. Throughout his life, Tchaikovsky considered the work to be one of his favourite and most important compositions. In 1883, after the première of the second version of the symphony, he made the following remark: “I have great affection for this symphony, and deeply regret that it has to lead such a tragic life.”

Tchaikovsky wrote his *Slavonic March*, Op. 31 in autumn 1876: as it were, parallel to the orchestration of his fantasy overture *Francesca da Rimini*. He wrote the piece in a haze of patriotic fever caused by the brief but bloody Serbian-Ottoman War (1876-78). That is why the highly programmatic work was originally entitled the *Serbo-Russian March*. The première of the march – which had been composed for a concert held by the Slavonic Charity for the benefit of wounded soldiers – took place

on November 5, 1876. Both themes of the first part are, not surprisingly, formed by Serbian folk songs; this is how Tchaikovsky describes the oppression of the Serbs by the Ottomans. In the second part, the Russian volunteers rush to the aid of the Serbs. In the coda, the Serbian main theme is combined with the erstwhile Russian national anthem ("God save the Tsar"), in order to evoke the unity of the Slavic people, and to prophesy their triumph over the enemy.

Franz Steiger

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

Russian National Orchestra

The Russian National Orchestra has been in demand throughout the music world ever since its 1990 Moscow premiere. Of the orchestra's 1996 debut at the BBC Proms in London, the Evening Standard wrote, "They played with such captivating beauty that the audience gave an involuntary sigh of pleasure". More recently, they were described as "a living symbol of the best in Russian art" (*Miami Herald*) and "as close to perfect as one could hope for" (*Trinity Mirror*).

The first Russian orchestra to perform at the Vatican and in Israel, the RNO maintains an active international tour schedule, appearing in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Guest artists performing with the RNO on tour include conductors Vladimir Jurowski, Nicola Luisotti, Antonio Pappano, Alan Gilbert, Carlo Ponti and Patrick Summers, and soloists Martha Argerich, Yefim Bronfman, Lang Lang, Pinchas Zukerman, Sir James Galway, Joshua Bell, Itzhak Perlman, Steven Isserlis, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Simone Kermes and Renée Fleming, among many others. Popular with radio audiences worldwide, RNO concerts are regularly aired by National Public Radio in the United States and by the European Broadcasting Union.

Gramophone magazine called the first RNO CD (1991) "an awe-inspiring experience; should human beings be able to play like this?" and listed it as the best recording of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* in history. Since then, the orchestra has made more than 60 recordings for Deutsche Grammophon and PentaTone Classics, distinguishing the RNO as the only Russian ensemble with long-standing relationships with these prestigious labels, as well as additional discs with many other record companies. Conductors represented in the RNO discography include Founder and Music Director Mikhail Pletnev, Principal Guest Conductor Vladimir Jurowski, Kent Nagano, Alexander Vedernikov and Paavo Berglund.

The RNO's recording of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* and Beintus's *Wolf Tracks*, conducted by Kent Nagano and narrated by Sophia Loren, Bill Clinton and Mikhail Gorbachev, received a 2004 Grammy Award,

making the RNO the first Russian orchestra to win the recording industry's highest honor. A Spanish language version narrated by Antonio Banderas was released in 2007, following a Russian version narrated by actors Oleg Tabakov and Sergei Bezrukov, with Mandarin and other editions to follow.

The orchestra's Shostakovich cycle on PentaTone Classics is widely acclaimed as "the most exciting cycle of the Shostakovich symphonies to be put down on disc, and easily the best recorded". (*SACD.net*)

A regular visitor to the Schleswig-Holstein, Gstaad and Rheingau festivals, the RNO is also the founding orchestra of Napa Valley Festival del Sole, Festival of the Arts BOCA in Florida, and the Singapore Sun Festival, and resident orchestra for multiple seasons of the Tuscan Sun Festival in Cortona, Italy. The RNO will launch its own annual festival in 2009, which will be held at Moscow's Bolshoi Theater.

The RNO is unique among the principal Russian ensembles as a private institution funded with the support of individuals, corporations and foundations in Russia and throughout the world. In recognition of both its artistry and path-breaking structure, the Russian Federation recently awarded the RNO the first ever grant to a non-government orchestra.



Mikhail Pletnev

Mikhail Pletnev was born in Archangel in 1957. After his studies at the Central Special Music School, he entered the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory in 1974, where he studied with Jakob Flier and Lev Vlasenko. Aged only 21, Pletnev was the Gold Medal and First Prize winner of the 1978 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition in Moscow. This prize earned him early international recognition. He has since appeared as soloist with the major orchestras under conductors such as Bernard Haitink, Riccardo Chailly, Valery Gergiev, Zubin Mehta, Kent Nagano, Kurt Sanderling, Christian Thielemann and Herbert Blomstedt.

In 1990, following the collapse of the Soviet system, Mikhail Pletnev was able to realize his dream of forming an orchestra independent of the government – the Russian National Orchestra. Under his artistic leadership, the RNO has become known as one of the world's leading orchestras. Although his conducting career is primarily focused on the RNO, he also makes appearances as a guest-conductor with such prestigious orchestras as the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Berliner Sinfonieorchester and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. In September 1999, Pletnev was appointed the RNO's Conductor Laureate and his collaboration with the orchestra has continued in many of its recordings and concerts. In February 2003, he conducted the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra at the Berliner Konzerthaus for the official opening of the Russian Year of Culture in the presence of Chancellor Schroeder and President Putin. This concert was televised throughout the whole European Union.

Mikhail Pletnev's recordings and live performances as a pianist have proved him an outstanding interpreter of an extensive repertoire. His album of Scarlatti's Keyboard Sonatas (EMI-Virgin Classics) received a Gramophone Award in 1996. *BBC Music Magazine* called this recording "piano playing at its greatest... this performance alone would be enough to secure Pletnev a place among the greatest pianists ever known". Together with his performance of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 2 and *The Seasons*, his unrivalled transcriptions for piano of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* Suite and *Sleeping Beauty* were selected for the 1998 anthology "Great Pianists of the 20th Century" (Philips Classics). Pletnev's recording of the Third Piano Concertos by both Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev (Deutsche Grammophon) with the RNO and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich received a 2004 Grammy Award nomination. Two major events in which Mikhail Pletnev performed with Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra include the 1997 New Year's Eve Concert and the Europa Konzert 2000, both of which were televised and broadcast world-wide from the Philharmonie in Berlin.

As a composer, Pletnev's works include the *Classical* Symphony, Quintet for Piano and Strings, *Triptych* for Symphony Orchestra, *Fantasy on Kazakh Themes* for Violin and Orchestra, and *Capriccio* for Piano and Orchestra. In December 1998, the world première of his Concerto for Viola and Orchestra took place in Moscow, with Yuri Bashmet as soloist.

His stature in Russia was formally recognized in 1995, when he was awarded the First State Prize of the Russian Federation by President Yeltsin. In 2002, he again received this honour from President Putin.

