Coronation March, Capriccio Italien
Francesca da Rimini, Romeo and Juliet,
Marche Slave

Tchaikovsky Selections

Russian National Orchestra
Mikhail Pletnev

PENTATONE

SUPER AUDIO CD

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

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Total playing time: 74. 35

Russian National Orchestra
Alexei Bruni, concertmaster
Conducted by **Mikhail Pletnev**

Coronation March (1883)

Often enough, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) has been accused of striving only for superficial effects in his works, of always giving himself free rein; and in his ceremonial *Coronation March* in D, this is frankly the case. Tchaikovsky composed this five-minute march in 1883, for the coronation of Tsar Alexander III, who had indeed commissioned the work. It was first performed on May 23, 1883 in Moscow, under the direction of Sergei Taneyev. Symbolically and with great reverence, Tchaikovsky quotes the national anthem of the Russian empire several times. In fact, not only does he quote this anthem, but also the Danish national anthem – thereby referring to the native country of the Empress, Princess Dagmar of Denmark.

Tchaikovsky himself did not speak too highly of his *Coronation March,* which he considered "rowdy, but bad"; nevertheless, in this representative piece he proved one thing in particular: that he had a feeling for effect, pomp and splendour, even if this was interpreted as a weakness in his style of composition – especially in Germany. And on October 28, 2011, it again became clear that the work retains its raison d'être, especially in such a traditional country as Russia. For on that day, after several years of renovation, the Bolshoi Theatre was reopened with full state pomp as one of Russia's great cultural centres; and the final hymn to be heard was – the *Coronation March.*

Capriccio italien, Op. 45 (1879-80)

The *Capriccio italien,* Op. 45 also demonstrates another facet of Tchaikovsky's character: his serenity, relaxed approach, and joy, which ran parallel to his gloom and melancholy. He first drafted the work while in Rome during 1879 – 1880, i.e. in the period between his "heavyweight" fourth and fifth symphonies. He completed the *Capriccio* in May 1880. The work is about 15 minutes in length, and is structured as a suite with overlapping movements. It begins with a fanfare, derived from the last post (= bugle call) of the Italian army, which is followed by a national folk melody. The woodwinds play a catchy Neapolitan folk song, and the entire orchestra joins in. Alternating with a rousing tarantella, the capriccio steadily increases momentum. In the hurly-burly of the tarantella, it undergoes a final intensification, displaying the full splendour of the orchestra.

Francesca da Rimini, Op. 31 (1876)

In addition to the six symphonies and the *Manfred Symphony,* Tchaikovsky also distinguished himself in his magnificent tone poems. His passion for reading was of great benefit to him when searching for inspiration in great literature; after all, he ranked "reading among the most elevated moments of happiness." However, Tchaikovsky was not interested in elaborating a precise literary programme or a detailed presentation of the plot in his programmatic works; what truly appealed to him – as is the case here

in *Francesca da Rimini* and *Romeo and Juliet* – was the psyche of the heroes and heroines; the development of their characters; and even the emotional dead ends and vortices, into which they manoeuvred themselves or into which they were drawn.

While journeying to the première of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in 1876, Tchaikovsky was reading Dante's *Commedia Divina (= Divine Comedy)*. He must have been impressed by the episode from the fifth song in the "Inferno" about the unfortunate and forbidden love felt by Francesca da Polenta for her brother-in-law, which ended with the violent death of both lovers. Tchaikovsky wrote the three-part tone poem in just three weeks' time upon his return in 1876 from Bayreuth to Moscow, where the première later took place on February 25, 1877 under Nikolay Rubinstein. In the outer movements, Tchaikovsky portrays the torments of hell-fire. Especially at the beginning of the work, the music sounds extremely drastic, garish, loud and dissonant, dominated by a kind of motto theme. Through repetition of the highly chromatic motivic material in ostinato fashion, the composer evokes the never-ending torments of hell. The middle section tells of the love between Francesca and her brother-in-law Paolo. Love themes intoned by clarinet and strings dominate the music, until the arrival of Francesca's husband Giancitto is announced by the horns. The seal is set on the final ending of the lovers. In the third movement, the music reverts to the agony of the beginning, before the percussion emphasizes with downright brutal severity the perpetual atonement demanded of the doomed lovers.

Romeo and Juliet

(the 1880 version)

Like many other composers, Tchaikovsky also sought inspiration in stories of disastrous and destructive love. An interesting note is the huge encouragement the young composer received from Mili Balakirev to get down to work. Balakirev suggested that Tchaikovsky base his composition on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* – he probably knew of Tchaikovsky's unrequited love for the Belgian soprano Désirée Artôt, and assumed that the composer would find inspiration for his work in the well-known Shakespearean lovers.

Tchaikovsky began work without too much enthusiasm, following Balakirev's detailed instructions for the composition: "Start with the music that represents Brother Lorenzo, then interrupt this with the dispute between the feuding families, and then portray the young lovers." In November 1869, Tchaikovsky completed the first version of his fantasy-overture Romeo and Juliet. At Balakirev's recommendation, he completed two further versions, in 1870 and 1880 respectively. But more than 10 years went by before Tchaikovsky was completely satisfied with his work. While planning the music, Tchaikovsky focused on the three primary elements of the drama, which he then implemented in sonata form.

Through its chorale-like character, the lengthy Adagio introduction communicates a sense of devoted spirituality, as portrayed in the figure of Friar Laurence. In the Allegro giusto, a brutal episode is added, containing the rhythmically energetic main theme that symbolizes (percussion!) the

fight between the Montagues and the Capulets. Finally, the second subject appears, a lyrically flowing canto in the woodwinds, which represents the love shared by Romeo and Juliet. The overture was given a cool reception at the première in Moscow in 1870, and the first performances in the West were to fare no better. But Tchaikovsky lived to see opinions change, and today his *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the most famous musical portrayals of Shakespeare plays to be found in the literature of the orchestra.

Marche slave, Op. 31

(1876)

The *Marche slave,* Op. 31 was written in the autumn of 1876, so to speak at the same time as the instrumentation of *Francesca da Rimini*. The première of the work took place on November 5, 1876. It had been commissioned by Nikolai Rubinstein for a concert held in aid of the Slavic charitable association for wounded soldiers. Tchaikovsky wrote the piece in a surge of patriotic fever brought about by the brief yet bloody Serbian-Turkish War. He had originally intended to give his Op. 31 the title of *Serbo-Russian March*. Unsurprisingly, the main theme is a Serbian folk song. In the coda, it is combined with the Russian National Anthem of the day ("God save the Czar"), in order to invoke the unity of the Slavic peoples.

Russian National Orchestra

The Russian National Orchestra was founded in 1990 and today is recognized as one of the world's top orchestras. Of its 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." The RNO has been 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)*.

A frequent guest in the music capitals of Europe, Asia and the Americas, the RNO is also founding orchestra of Napa Valley Festival del Sole and Festival of the Arts BOCA. Its concerts are regularly aired by National Public Radio in the United States, Kultura in Russia, and the European Broadcasting Union.

The RNO has made many recordings for PENTATONE, including one of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* and Beintus's *Wolf Tracks*. Conducted by Kent Nagano and narrated by Sophia Loren and Bill Clinton, the disc received a 2004 Grammy® Award, making the RNO the first Russian orchestra to win this honor. The RNO's ongoing Shostakovich cycle on PENTATONE is acclaimed as "the most exciting cycle of the Shostakovich symphonies to be put down on disc, and easily the best recorded." *(SACD.net)*

The orchestra maintains a full Moscow season and has established the annual Grand Festival, which opens the Russian capital's cultural season each September. Unique among the principal Russian ensembles, the RNO is a private institution funded with the

support of individuals, corporations and foundations throughout the world.

For more information, visit www.rno.ru

Mikhail Pletnev

Conductor

Mikhail Pletnev's genius as pianist, conductor and composer enchants and amazes audiences around the globe. He was Gold Medal and First Prize winner of the 1978 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition when he was only 21, a prize that earned him early recognition worldwide. An invitation to perform at the 1988 superpower summit in Washington led to a friendship with Mikhail Gorbachev and the historic opportunity to make music in artistic freedom.

In 1990 Pletnev formed the first independent orchestra in Russia's history. Many of the country's finest musicians joined Pletnev in launching the Russian National Orchestra. Under his leadership, the RNO achieved in a few short years a towering stature among the world's orchestras. Pletnev describes the RNO as his greatest joy and today continues to serve as its Artistic Director and Principal Conductor.

Pletnev's performances and recordings have proved him to be an outstanding interpreter of an extensive repertoire, both as pianist and conductor. His recordings have earned numerous prizes including a 2005 Grammy Award for the CD of his own arrangement, for two pianos, of Prokofiev's *Cinderella*. He received Grammy nominations for a CD of Schumann Symphonic Etudes and for his recording of Rachmaninov and Prokofiev Piano Concertos No. 3 with the RNO and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich. BBC Magazine called his 1996 Gramophone Award-winning album of Scarlatti's Keyboard Sonatas "piano playing at its greatest… this performance alone would be enough to secure Pletnev a place among the greatest pianists ever known."

Pletnev's compositions include works for orchestra, piano, strings and voices. Today he is one of Russia's most respected and influential artists. Pianist, conductor, composer and cultural leader — all are significant facets of Mikhail Pletnev's life as an artist. Yet he considers himself, simply, a musician.

Krönungsmarsch (1883)

Oft genug wurde Peter Iljitsch Tschaikowsky (1840-1893) vorgeworfen, er ziele in seinen Werken primär nur auf den vordergründigen Effekt, gäbe stets dem Affen Zucker. Auf seinen Feierlichen Festmarsch D-Dur trifft das sicherlich unumwunden zu. Diesen etwa fünfminütigen Marsch komponierte Tschaikowsky für die Krönungsfeierlichkeiten von Zar Alexander III. im Jahre 1883, der das Werk auch bei ihm beauftragt hatte. Uraufgeführt wurde es am 23. Mai 1883 in Moskau unter Leitung von Sergei Tanejew. Mehrfach zitiert Tschaikowsky voller Ehrerbietung und symbolträchtig die Zarenhymne. Aber nicht nur diese, sondern auch die dänische Königshymne – eine Referenz an das Heimatland der Kaiserin, Prinzessin Dagmar von Dänemark. Tschaikowsky selber sprach in keinen allzu hohen Tönen von seinem Krönungsmarsch, den er für *„lärmend, aber schlecht“* hielt. Dennoch bewies er in diesem Repräsentationsstück vor allem eines: Gespür für Effekt, Pomp und Glanz. Auch wenn ihm dies – insbesondere in Deutschland – als kompositorische Schwäche ausgelegt wurde. Dass das Werk auch heute noch seine Daseinsberechtigung hat, zumal in einem traditionsverhafteten Land wie Russland, beweist der 28. Oktober 2011. An diesem Tag wurde das Bolschoi-Theater als kulturelles Zentrum Russlands nach mehrjähriger Renovierung mit einem Staatsakt wiedereröffnet. Als Schlusshymne erklang – der Krönungsmarsch.

Capriccio italien op. 45 (1879-80)

Das *Capriccio italien* op. 45 zeigt die heitere, gelöste und freudige Saite, die trotz aller Schwermut und Melancholie durchaus in Tschaikowsky schwang. Eine Skizze des Werkes entstand während des Rom-Aufenthaltes 1879/80, zeitlich also zwischen den emotionalen Schwergewichten Vierte und Fünfte Symphonie. Vollendet hat Tschaikowsky das *Capriccio italien* dann im Mai 1880. Das etwa fünfzehnminütige Werk ist suitenartig angelegt, die Sätze gehen direkt ineinander über. Eröffnet wird es von Fanfaren, die dem Zapfenstreich der italienischen Armee entstammen, auf die wiederum eine nationale Volksweise folgt. Die Holzbläser spielen ein eingängiges neapolitanisches Volkslied, in welches das ganze Orchester einstimmt. Im Wechsel mit einer alles mitreißenden Tarantella nimmt das *Capriccio* immer mehr an Fahrt auf. Im Wirbel der Tarantella erfährt es im vollen Orchesterglanz eine finale Steigerung.

Francesca da Rimini op. 31 (1876)

Neben den sechs Symphonien und der *Manfred*-Symphonie tat sich Tschaikowsky auch mit der Komposition großartiger Tondichtungen hervor. Bei der Inspiration durch hohe Literatur kam ihm seine Leseleidenschaft zugute, schließlich zählte Tschaikowsky *„das Lesen zu den größten Glücksmomenten“*. Bei seinen programmatischen Werken ging es ihm aber nicht um das Ausarbeiten eines präzisen literarischen Programms

oder um die detaillierte Darstellung von Handlung; vielmehr reizte ihn – wie hier in *Francesca da Rimini* und *Romeo und Julia* zu erleben - die Psyche der dargestellten Figuren, deren charakterliche Entwicklung oder auch die emotionalen Sackgassen und Verwirbelungen, in die sie sich selber manövrierten oder in die sie hineingezogen wurden.

Auf der Fahrt zur Uraufführung von Richard Wagners *Der Ring des Nibelungen* im Jahr 1876 las Tschaikowsky in Dantes *Commedia Divina (Göttliche Komödie)*. Dabei muss ihn die Episode aus dem 5. Gesang aus dem „Inferno" über die unglückliche, da verbotene Liebe von Francesca da Polenta zu ihrem Schwager, die mit dem gewaltsamen Tod der beiden Liebenden endete, besonders beeindruckt haben. Die dreiteilige Tondichtung entstand 1876 nach Tschaikowskys Rückkehr aus Bayreuth innerhalb von nur drei Wochen in Moskau und wurde am 25. Februar 1877 unter Nikolai Rubinstein ebenda uraufgeführt. In den Eckteilen stellt Tschaikowsky die Qualen des Höllenfeuers dar. Extrem drastisch, grell, laut und dissonant geht es vor allem am Beginn des Werkes zu, das von einer Art Motto-Thema beherrscht wird. Durch ostinatoartige Wiederholungen des hochgradig chromatischen motivischen Materials evoziert der Komponist die nicht endenden höllischen Qualen. Der mittlere Abschnitt berichtet von der Liebe zwischen Francesca und ihrem Schwager Paolo. Von Klarinette und Streichern intonierte Liebesthemen bestimmen das lyrische Geschehen, bevor die Ankunft von Francescas Gatten Giancitto durch Hörnerrufe angekündigt wird. Das Ende des Liebespaares ist besiegelt. Im dritten Satz fällt die Musik in die Höllenqualen des Anfangs zurück, bevor das Schlagwerk die ewige Sühne der Verdammten mit geradezu brutaler Härte unterstreicht.

Romeo und Julia (Fassung von 1880)

Wie zahlreiche andere Komponisten auch, so ließ sich Tschaikowsky von der verhängnisvollen, ins Verderben führenden Liebe inspirieren. Interessant ist dabei, dass der junge Komponist von Mili Balakirew zur Kompositionsarbeit regelrecht animiert wurde. Balakirew schlug Tschaikowsky vor, Shakespeares *Romeo und Julia* als Vorlage zu nutzen – wahrscheinlich wusste Balakirew von Tschaikowskys unerwiderter Liebe zu der belgischen Sopranistin Désirée Artôt und nahm an, dass sich der Komponist durch das berühmte shakespearesche Liebespaar zur Komposition ermutigen lassen würde.
Tschaikowsky machte sich ohne große Begeisterung an die Arbeit und befolgte die detaillierten Kompositionsanweisungen von Balakirew: *"Beginne mit der Musik, die Bruder Lorenzo repräsentiert, unterbrich diese dann durch den Streit der verfeindeten Familien und porträtiere dann die jungen Geliebten."*
Im November 1869 vollendete Tschaikowsky die erste Fassung seiner Fantasie-Ouvertüre *Romeo und Julia*. Auf Ratschlag Balakirews folgten zwei weitere Fassungen in den Jahren 1870 und 1880. Und es sollte auch dann noch mehr als zehn Jahre dauern, bis Tschaikowsky mit seinem Werk vollauf zufrieden war. Bei der Planung der Musik konzentrierte sich Tschaikowsky auf drei primäre Elemente des Dramas, die in Sonatensatzform umgesetzt wurde.

Die lange Adagio-Einleitung vermittelt durch ihren choralartigen Charakter ein Gefühl ergebener Spiritualität, wie sich in der Figur des Bruder Lorenzo darstellt. Es schließt sich im Allegro giusto eine brutale Episode an - mit jenem rhythmisch energischen Hauptthema, das den Kampf zwischen Montagues und Capulets symbolisiert (Schlagwerk!). Schließlich tritt das Seitenthema ein, ein lyrisch strömender Holzbläser-Gesang, der für die Liebe zwischen *Romeo und Julia* steht. Bei der Uraufführung in Moskau 1870 wurde die Ouvertüre kühl aufgenommen und bei den ersten Aufführungen im Westen erging es dem Stück nicht besser. Aber Tschaikowsky erlebte es, dass sich die Meinungen änderten und heute zählt Romeo und Julia zu den berühmtesten Shakespeare-Vertonungen in der Orchesterliteratur überhaupt.

Marche slave op. 31

(1876)

Der *Marche slave* op. 31 entstand im Herbst 1876, sozusagen parallel zur Instrumentation der *Francesca da Rimini*. Am 5. November 1876 wurde das Werk, das im Auftrag von Nikolai Rubinstein für ein Konzert zugunsten des slawischen Wohltätigkeitsvereins für verwundete Soldaten komponiert wurde, uraufgeführt. Tschaikowsky schrieb das Stück im patriotischen Fieber, das ihn in Gestalt des kurzen, aber blutigen Serbisch-Türkischen Krieges gepackt hatte. Ursprünglich lautete der Titel von op. 31 auch „Serbo-Russischer Marsch". Das Hauptthema ist wenig überraschend ein serbisches Volkslied. In der Coda wird es mit der seinerzeitigen russischen Nationalhymne („Gott, erhalte den Zaren") kombiniert, um die Einheit der slawischen Völker zu beschwören.

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TCHAIKOVSKY: THE SYMPHONIES AND MANFRED

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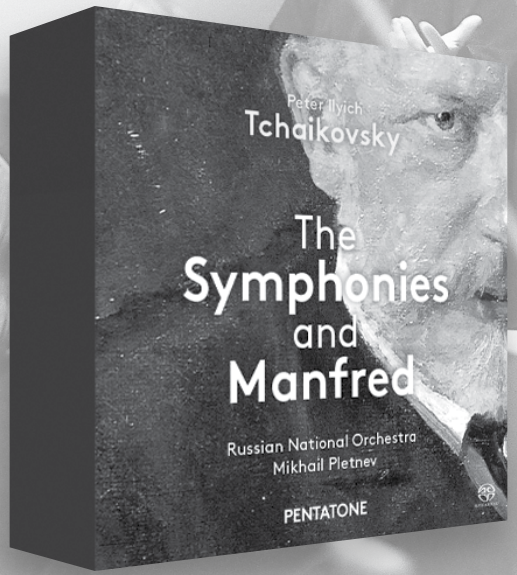

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