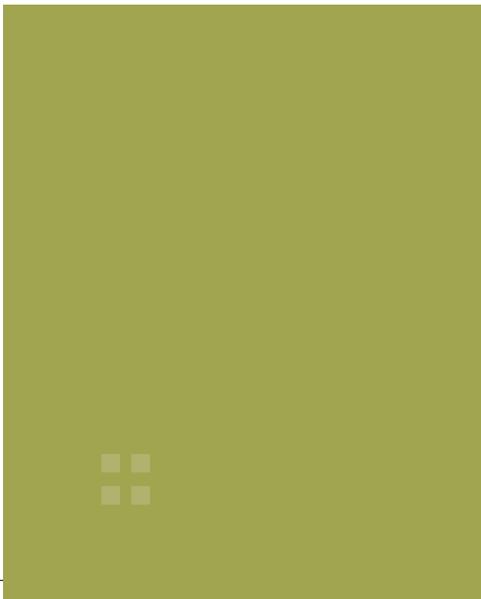




CHANDOS :: intro

CHAN 2023

*an introduction to* Aram Khachaturian





*Classical music* is inaccessible and difficult. It's surprising how many people still believe the above statement to be true, so this new series from Chandos is not only welcome, it's also very necessary.

I was lucky enough to stumble upon the wonderful world of the classics when I was a child, and I've often contemplated how much poorer my life would have been had I not done so. As you have taken the first step by buying this CD, I guarantee that you will share the delights of this epic journey of discovery. Each CD in the series features the orchestral music of a specific composer, with a selection of his 'greatest hits' played by top quality performers. It will give you a good flavour of the composer's style, but you won't find any nasty surprises – all the music is instantly accessible and appealing. The discs are beautifully presented, and very good value for money, too.

I sincerely hope this CD marks the start of your own lifelong passion for classical music.

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Classic FM presenter



## Aram Il'yich Khachaturian (1903–1978)

	<b>Four movements from 'Gayaneh'</b> *	<b>12:31</b>
1	I Sabre Dance	2:34
2	III Dance of the Rose Maidens	2:23
3	V Lullaby	4:39
4	VIII Lezghinka	2:55
	<b>Suite from 'Masquerade'</b> *	<b>16:27</b>
5	I Waltz	3:57
6	II Nocturne	3:31
7	III Mazurka	2:41
8	IV Romance	3:08
9	V Galop	3:07
	<b>Suite No. 2 from 'Spartacus'</b> *	<b>20:44</b>
10	1 Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia	8:52
11	2 Entrance of the Merchants – Dance of a Roman Courtesan – General Dance	5:30
12	3 Entrance of Spartacus – Quarrel – Harmodius's Treachery	4:57
13	4 Dance of the Pirates	1:23



- 14 **Symphony No. 3 'Simfoniya-poema'**† 24:54  
 Simon Lindley organ  
 Allegro moderato, maestoso – Allegro –  
 Andante sostenuto – Maestoso – Tempo I
- Total time 74:37

Scottish National Orchestra\*  
 Edwin Paling leader  
 BBC Philharmonic†  
 Leo Phillips guest leader  
 Neeme Järvi\*  
 Fedor Glushchenko†

Aram Khachaturian could be described as a true post-Revolution Russian composer, since his father, a bookbinder in Tiflis, was too poor to take advantage of his son's obvious talent and only able to send the boy to study in Moscow after the Revolution had broken down social barriers. Aram was sent first to the Gnessin School in 1923, six years later being admitted to the Conservatory, working under Sergey Vassilenko and then the prodigious symphonist Nikolai Miaskovsky, a pupil of both Lyadov and Rimsky-Korsakov. Khachaturian originally studied the cello, but was a natural composer, some works being published soon after he had studied with the Gnessins. When he graduated from the Conservatory in 1934 it was with high honours and his First Symphony being played to acclaim by the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra. He was encouraged from every quarter and his work was soon being heard in the West, especially when Russia joined the Allies against the Nazis. He had a natural flair for colour and distinctive rhythms, which won immediate response from lovers of popular music, while works such as the Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto found themselves regularly played in the concert hall. A particularly spicy ingredient came from Khachaturian's uninhibited use of Armenian folksong.

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*four movements from 'gayaneh'*

Khachaturian demonstrated a gift for musical imagery and a great sense of colour, which inevitably drew him towards the world of drama, and he composed memorable scores for ballet, the theatre and the cinema, of which perhaps his music for *Spartacus*, *Masquerade* and *Gayaneh* has become the most universally popular. Of these the 'Sabre Dance' from *Gayaneh* has achieved a status as evergreen

An introduction to Aram Khachaturian



to rival Rachmaninov's Prelude in C sharp minor or Tchaikovsky's Overture 1812.

The ballet *Gayaneh* was originally seen at Yerevan in 1939 under the title *Happiness*, choreographed by Ilya Arbatov. It was revised extensively for a production in Leningrad by the Kirov Ballet, which opened on 20 February 1945, with choreography by Nina Anisimova.

Gayaneh is the name of the heroine, a cotton picker on a cotton co-operative in Armenia. She is married to Giko, a drunkard who maltreats her. He is eventually arrested and found guilty of being an incendiary. When this is proved and he is imprisoned, Gayaneh is able to end their marriage and marry the co-operative's chairman, Kasakov. Their wedding not only provides a happy ending, but also the excuse for a colourful divertissement, the climax of which is the 'Sabre Dance'.

The 'Lullaby' is hauntingly expressive while the 'Dance of the Rose Maidens' evokes Armenian folk-music; the 'Lezghinka' is a colourful dance similar to a tarantella.

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#### suite from 'masquerade'

The present CD offers the concert suite which Khachaturian put together in 1944 from the incidental music he had composed for a production of Mikhail Lermontov's play *Masquerade* in 1941.

The 'Waltz' has become a favourite piece for light music programmes, while the beautiful 'Nocturne' includes an eloquent solo for the first violin; gutsy rhythms dominate the 'Mazurka', the 'Romance' is poignantly wistful and the final 'Galop' appropriately uninhibited and joyous.

© Denby Richards

#### suite no. 2 from 'spartacus'

Khachaturian's *Spartacus*, first produced in a version by L.V. Jacobson at the Kirov Theatre, Leningrad on 27 December 1956, has proved one of the most enduring and popular of Soviet ballets, despite its chequered history in two further radically altered productions by I.A. Moiseyev (Moscow, 1958) and Y.N. Grigorovich (Moscow, 1968). Recognition in the West came in 1969 with the London performance of the 1968 version (now regarded as definitive), when it was hailed by Clive Barnes, writing in the Covent Garden magazine *About the House*, as undoubtedly the most successful Soviet ballet since Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. The story, originally adapted by N. Volkov, is taken from Roman history (Plutarch and other sources). It concerns the fate of a rebel slave, Spartacus, who successfully led a revolt against his Roman captors, only – through the treachery of corrupted followers – to be betrayed and brutally put down. The subject was ideally suited to the aesthetics of 'Socialist Realism'. In Grigorovich's production the choreography effectively contrasted a coldly formalised, neoclassical style of dancing (Crassus, the ruthless Roman leader, and his armies) with the more 'plastic', romantically expressive movements of Spartacus, his wife, Phrygia, and their comrades-in-arms.

Khachaturian's score – which was awarded the Lenin Prize in 1959 – is folk-orientated, lush, full-blooded and tuneful. To Western ears it sounds as an uninhibited blend of the nineteenth-century Russian Nationalist School (Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov in particular), Ravel and Gershwin – and yet it retains its own fresh individuality. Shostakovich, whose own music spoke a more complex and austere language, was generous in his praise of *Spartacus* in 1955 when he wrote:

The wonderful ability of Aram Khachaturian to characterise his heroes with distinctive imagery and themes is clearer than ever in his new ballet, *Spartacus*, in which he skilfully combines the principles of symphonic



development with the specific requirements of choreography. The music, moreover, is also remarkable for the unusually original colourfulness of the orchestration... It seems to me that one of the finest features of Khachaturian's music as a whole and of *Spartacus* in particular, is its popular spirit... It is a great and joyful event in our musical life.

Three orchestral suites from the ballet appeared between 1955 and 1957. (A later, fourth suite was compiled in 1967.) The Second Suite is memorable for the music of the famous love scene between Spartacus and his wife, in which they are reunited at Crassus's villa before the revolt. Its radiant melody lies in that great Russian tradition of such lyrical expression that goes back, via Rachmaninov, to the famous love music of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*. Merging (in its middle section) with Spartacus's heroic fanfare, it symbolises the positive theme of liberation in this 'optimistic tragedy'. The music of the second movement is associated with Crassus's mistress Aegina's temptation (by means of money and female seduction) of Spartacus's followers. In contrast we have the agitated and dramatically tense music of the third movement, which accompanies the scene of dissent and treachery in Spartacus's camp, presaging the hero's defeat and death at the hands of the Romans. The concluding wild and drunken 'Dance of the Pirates' is also a number associated in the ballet with dark forces, for the Pirates break their earlier promise to help Spartacus.

© Eric Roseberry

### *symphony no. 3 'simfoniya-poema'*

In November 1953, following the death of Stalin six months earlier, Khachaturian acted on the encouraging signs of a cultural thaw and wrote an article for the magazine *Sovetskaya Muzika* pleading for

greater creative freedom. The way forward, he wrote, would have to be without the bureaucratic interference that had marred the creative efforts of previous years. How often in the past, he continued,

have we listened to 'monumental' works... that amounted to nothing but empty prattle by the composer, bolstered up by a contemporary theme announced in descriptive titles?

He was surely thinking of those countless odes to Stalin, Lenin and the Revolution, many of them subdivided into vividly worded sections; and in that respect Khachaturian had been no less guilty than most of his contemporaries. Only now, from a distance, are we beginning to make distinctions between so many of these party-line blockbusters, discovering for example how much of his own ironic and questioning self Prokofiev crammed between the lines of his *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution* or – at the other extreme – how true and beautiful a vein of simple melody Shostakovich was able to tap in *The Song of the Forests*. Symphony No. 3 makes fascinating study, for although it is painted in cruder Soviet-poster colours than even Shostakovich at his most raucous was prepared to contemplate, this noisily ambivalent work was written just before Stalin's right-hand man Andrei Zhdanov in 1948 made his infamous attacks on 'formalism in music', and presents a sharp contrast to some utterly uncomplicated works that were written long after.

Khachaturian may have described his Third Symphony, subtitled 'Symphony-Poem' as 'an apotheosis of joy and confidence in the future, a hymn to labour' but in its own, deliberately bludgeoning way it continually undermines that sense of confidence as surely as the terrifying finale of Prokofiev's Sixth Symphony (both works received their Moscow premieres at the same concert on 25 December 1947). Only mention the Third Symphony's central feature of fifteen extra trumpets (in addition to the three in the large orchestra) and the listener anticipates a blast of C major right



at the start. Yet the first note we hear is a *tremolo* B on strings, swiftly crescendoing towards a tam-tam crash and the seven-part entry of the trumpets – indeed in C, but tension has already been established. Their fanfares are further undercut by the organ – appearing not in majesty but in toccata-like panic, the one-man equivalent of a Shostakovich orchestral scherzo as the organist runs the gamut in chromatic semiquavers, ignoring more fanfares and eventually sweeping the strings along with him.

This is modernism of a kind, Khachaturian's belated equivalent to the kind of experiments that Shostakovich and Prokofiev had got out of their systems in the 1920s. What follows is Khachaturian's more familiar, very personal brand of synthetic melody. Born in Georgia of Armenian parents and receiving a long-overdue musical education in Moscow, he soon learnt to blend elements of the transcaucasian folksong familiar from his childhood – it would be hard to trace them exclusively to Armenian, Georgian or Azerbaijani roots – with a more conventional European romantic vein. The unmistakable string melody, *espressivo con anima*, at the heart of the Third Symphony is a classic example. It looks back to the slow movements of the two concertos with which Khachaturian had made his name in the 1930s and forward to *Spartacus* (the less familiar of that ballet's two *pas de deux* clearly shares its eastern inflections). Here, however, Khachaturian's temporary modernist ambitions spice the theme with bitonal ornamentations, and the eventual climactic outcome is a threatening march. An interlude interrupted by rapid woodwind figurations proves short-lived; the fanfares and the organ fantasia make a lengthy reappearance and all fifteen trumpets blast out the lyrical theme with unashamedly overscored support of the full orchestra. The final victory charge boisterously asserts C major as expected.

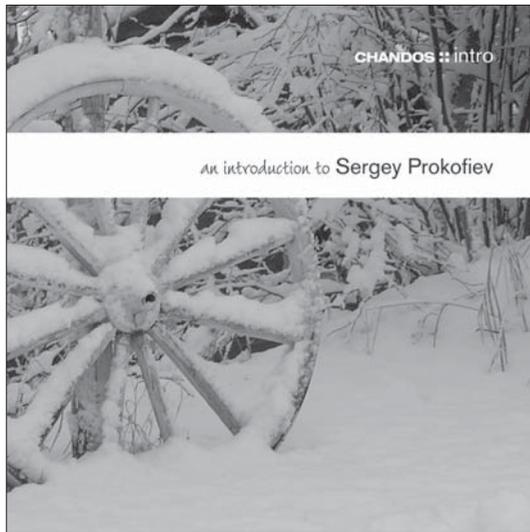
In spite of that massive happy end, there was enough so-called 'eccentricity' in this 'Symphony-Poem' to place Khachaturian under

scrutiny at the 'First All-Union Congress of Composers' organised by Zhdanov the following April (though even had the work been completely harmless, one imagines that the party would have found fault with it; after all, the catalyst for all the troubles, Muradeli's operatic homage to Georgia, *The Great Friendship*, was innocuous enough). Khachaturian withdrew into writing film and ballet scores, and after Stalin's death he was too deeply entrenched in his role as the party's musical spokesman to take the advice of his own 'courageous' article.

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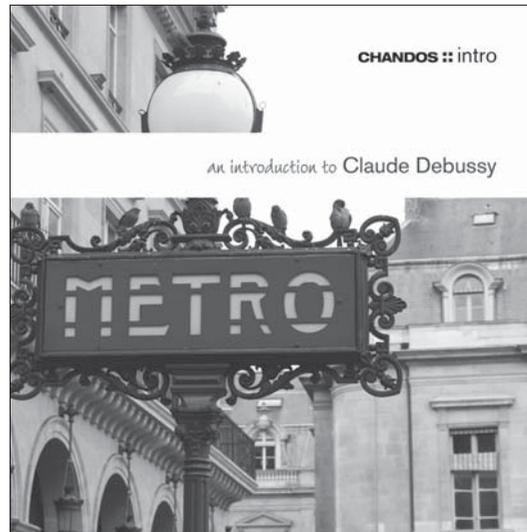


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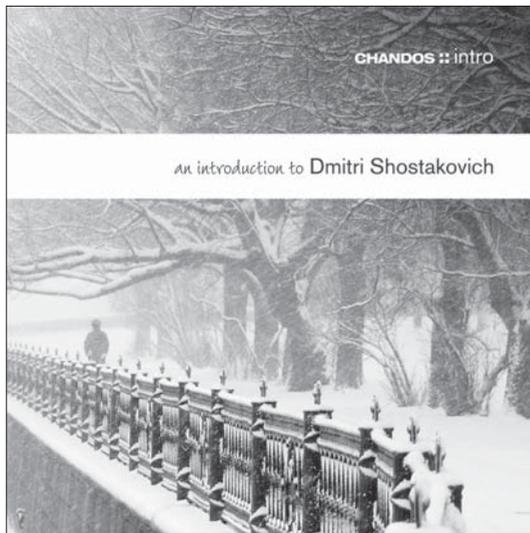
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## Aram Il'yich Khachaturian (1903–1978)

Aram Khachaturian wrote some of the most colourful music of the twentieth century. It is deeply rooted in the folklore of Armenia and his native Georgia and the exotic beauty of his musical themes and rich orchestral writing made him internationally famous. The 'Spartacus' Suite No. 2 in particular demonstrates his style: sumptuous orchestral textures and colouristic vividness combined with tunefulness and primitive vigour.

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