

NAXOS

TCHAIKOVSKY
Manfred Symphony
The Voyevoda

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
Vasily Petrenko



Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Manfred Symphony • The Voyevoda

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky retains his position as the most popular of all Russian composers. His music offers obvious superficial charms in its winning melodies and vivid orchestral colours. At the same time his achievement is deeper than this, offering an early synthesis between the Russian and the cosmopolitan.

Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk in 1840, the second son of a mining engineer, Tchaikovsky had his early education, in music as in everything else, at home, under the care of his mother and of a beloved governess. From the age of ten he was a pupil at the School of Jurisprudence in St Petersburg, completing his studies there in 1859, to take employment in the Ministry of Justice. During these years he developed his abilities as a musician and it must have seemed probable that, like his near contemporaries Mussorgsky, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, he would keep music as a secondary occupation, while following his official career.

For Tchaikovsky matters turned out differently. The foundation of the new Conservatory of Music in St Petersburg under Anton Rubinstein enabled him to study there as a full-time student from 1863. In 1865 he moved to Moscow as a member of the staff of the new Conservatory established there by Anton Rubinstein's brother Nikolay. For over ten years he continued in Moscow, before financial assistance from a rich widow, Nadezhda von Meck, enabled him to leave the Conservatory and devote himself entirely to composition. The same period in his life brought an unfortunate marriage to a self-proclaimed admirer of his work, a woman who showed early signs of mental instability and could only add further to Tchaikovsky's own problems of character and inclination. His homosexuality was a torment to him, while his morbid sensitivity and diffidence, coupled with physical revulsion for the woman he had married, led to a severe

nervous breakdown.

Separation from his wife, which was immediate, still left practical and personal problems to be solved. Tchaikovsky's relationship with Nadezhda von Meck, however, provided not only the money that at first was necessary for his career, but also the understanding and support of a woman who, so far from making physical demands of him, never even met him face to face. This curiously remote liaison and patronage only came to an end in 1890, when, on the false plea of bankruptcy, she discontinued an allowance that was no longer of importance and a correspondence on which he had come to depend.

Tchaikovsky's sudden death in St Petersburg in 1893 gave rise to contemporary speculation and has given rise to further posthumous rumours. It has been suggested that he committed suicide as the result of pressure from a court of honour of former students of the School of Jurisprudence, when an allegedly erotic liaison with a young nobleman seemed likely to cause an open scandal even in court circles. Officially his death was attributed to cholera, contracted after drinking undistilled water, and accounts of the treatment he underwent in his final brief illness are well documented. Whether the victim of cholera, of his own carelessness or reckless despair or of death deliberately courted, Tchaikovsky was widely mourned.

Byron, above all other English poets of the early nineteenth century, exercised a fascination over the European imagination, seeming to writers such as Goethe or to Mazzini to be the epitome of the age. The French composer Berlioz had, in *Harold in Italy*, drawn inspiration from Byron's *Childe Harold*, and his visit to Russia in the winter of 1867 and a performance of the work had suggested to Vladimir Stasov, mentor and inspiration to the Five, the group of Russian nationalist composers, the possibility of a work based on Byron's

poetic drama *Manfred*.

Stasov sketched a possible programme for such a composition, and proposed to Balakirev, leader of the Five, that he should attempt the work. The latter thereupon urged Berlioz, now near the end of his life, to undertake such a composition, providing him, without acknowledgement to Stasov, with a plan for the work. Berlioz was unable to oblige him. It was some fifteen years later that Balakirev renewed proposals for a symphonic poem on the subject of *Manfred*, this time to Tchaikovsky, who had been bullied by Balakirev into the composition of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1870, followed in 1876 by *Francesca da Rimini*. 'Your *Francesca* suggested to me that you would be able to tackle this subject brilliantly - provided, of course, that you make an effort and criticize your own work strictly', Balakirev wrote, assuming once again the habit of command, after a break in relations with Tchaikovsky of a decade. This was in 1882. Tchaikovsky, however, rejected the notion, having no copy to hand of Byron's poem, and finding the outline proposed uninspiring.

Two years later Tchaikovsky was to meet Balakirev in St Petersburg, his own religious doubts and uncertainties receiving some answer from the latter's newly found brand of Christianity. The subject of *Manfred* was again raised, and Tchaikovsky, summoned to the deathbed of his friend, the young violinist Koteik, in Switzerland, took the opportunity of reading Byron's poem. In 1885 he embarked on the work of composition, and the symphony was completed in September of the same year, to be performed in Moscow for the first time the following March. The next year he could describe it as his best symphonic work, yet by 1889 he was writing of it as 'an abominable piece', and planning its destruction. The composer's ambivalence towards his own work was characteristic.

Goethe, in an article written in 1808, described Byron's *Manfred* as a derivative of his own *Faust*. For Tchaikovsky, as for Byron, Manfred represented the figure of the outsider, an outcast from society, a role in

which the composer, haunted by his own homosexuality, saw himself. In the first movement of the symphony Manfred, at midnight in a Gothic gallery in his Alpine castle, seeks self-oblivion, haunted by memories of forbidden love. He calls up seven spirits to his aid, one of which takes the shape of his beloved Astarte. At this Manfred falls senseless to the ground.

The second movement, the third in Stasov's original outline, evokes the spirit of the Witch of the Alps, appearing in a rainbow through the spray of a waterfall, but imposing conditions on Manfred in his quest that he is unwilling to fulfil, so that he must continue fatal and fated in his suffering.

There follows a pastoral *Andante con moto*, a colourful picture of rural Alpine simplicity, the counterpart of Act II, Scene 1, of Byron's work, where a chamois hunter offers Manfred what comfort he can, his wine seeming to the latter blood that mingled as he and his beloved 'loved each other as we should not love'.

The final movement opens in the subterranean hall of Arimanes, in the form of a globe of fire, surrounded by spirits with Nemesis and the Destinies. The spirit of Astarte is summoned, an ideal vision, who announces Manfred's coming death, an equivocal end. In the concluding words of the Abbot in Byron's poem:

*He's gone - his soul hath ta'en its earthless flight;
Whither? I dread to think - but he is gone.*

Tchaikovsky found a literary source for his symphonic ballad *The Voyeroda* in Pushkin, who himself had drawn inspiration from the Polish poet Mickiewicz. He sketched the new work in the autumn of 1890, while he was staying with his brother Anatoly in Tblisi, but there were to be some delays in orchestrating the piece, completed only after his visit to Paris, en route to America, in 1891, and his discovery of a new instrument, the celesta, best known for its use in the *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* in the ballet *Nutcracker*. The story of the ballad concerns a Voyeroda, a

provincial governor, who surprises his wife in infidelity and bids his servant shoot her. In error the servant shoots his master instead. The work opens with a suggestion of the voyevoda's suspicious approach and then of his wife's meeting in the garden with her lover. The voyevoda appears and secretly confers with his servant, only himself to die. Sinister in effect, it has been suggested that the work may reflect in some measure the composer's reaction to the breach of relations with Nadezhda von Meck, whose letter of apparent rejection he had received in Tblisi in October 1890, an event that provoked a marked financial and

emotional reaction. *The Voyevoda* was performed for the first time in Moscow in November 1891 in a programme that included Grieg's new *Piano Concerto*. Tchaikovsky conducted, but, in spite of the good reception given to the work, at once began to destroy the score, fearing, with his usual diffidence, that his powers were declining. The work was later reconstructed from the orchestral parts, preserved through the prompt action of Tchaikovsky's former pupil, Ziloti, promoter of the concert.

Keith Anderson

Vasily Petrenko



Born and educated in St Petersburg, Vasily Petrenko was Resident Conductor at the St Petersburg State Opera and Ballet Theatre (1994-7) and Chief Conductor of the State Academy Orchestra of St Petersburg (2004-7). He took up his position as Principal Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in September 2006, and has been appointed Principal Conductor of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain from 2008. Engagements include the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Philharmonia, European Union Youth Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Accademia di Santa Cecilia, NHK Symphony and Budapest Festival Orchestra, the Dallas, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra and the National Symphony Orchestra Washington, with scheduled débuts at Glyndebourne and the Opéra de Paris. Recordings with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra include a rare double bill of Fleishman's *Rothschild's Violin* and Shostakovich's *The Gamblers*, and a disc of suites from Tchaikovsky's ballets. In October 2007 Vasily Petrenko was named Young Artist of the Year at the annual Gramophone Awards. *Photo by Mark McNulty*

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra gives over sixty concerts each year in Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, as well as presenting concerts throughout the United Kingdom. The Orchestra has toured to the Far East, the United States and throughout Europe. In 2008, Liverpool's Year as European Capital of Culture, the Orchestra performs at the Prague Autumn and tours North Germany and the Netherlands. The RLPO is Classic FM's Orchestra in North West England; this relationship has been extended until 2012. As well as Naxos, the Orchestra has recorded for EMI, Nimbus, Universal, Virgin Classics and its own recording label, RLPO Live. Many RLPO Live recordings are currently being reissued by Avic Records. See www.liverpoolphil.com for the latest releases. The Orchestra delivers a number of innovative community education and outreach projects. The Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Orchestra enjoys close links with the RLPO. Ensemble 10/10 is the RLPO's exciting new music group. The dynamic young Russian Vasily Petrenko became Principal Conductor in 2006; his contract has been extended until 2012.



Photo by Jon Barraclough

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TCHAIKOVSKY: Manfred Symphony • The Voyevoda

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Written between the fourth and fifth symphonies, Tchaikovsky's programmatic *Manfred Symphony*, inspired by Byron's dramatic poem of the same name, contains some of the composer's most thrillingly orchestrated music and best tunes. For Tchaikovsky, as for Byron, Manfred represented the figure of the outsider, an outcast from society. The first movement depicts Manfred at midnight in a Gothic gallery in his Alpine castle, seeking self-oblivion and haunted by memories of lost love. The second movement evokes the spirit of the Witch of the Alps, appearing in a rainbow through the spray of a waterfall, while in the third movement a chamois hunter offers Manfred what little comfort he can. In the final movement, set in a subterranean hall of Evil, in the form of a globe of fire, Manfred welcomes his coming death as the end of his suffering.

Pyotr Il'yich
TCHAIKOVSKY
(1840-1893)

Manfred Symphony, Op. 58 **57:46**

1 Lento lugubre - Moderato con moto - Andante **15:43**

2 Vivace con spirito **09:37**

3 Andante con moto **11:54**

4 Allegro con fuoco **20:32**

5 **The Voyevoda**
(Symphonic Ballad after Mickiewicz), Op. 78 **11:05**

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra • Vasily Petrenko

Recorded at the Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, England, 20-21 June 2007
Producer and Engineer: Tim Handley • Booklet notes: Keith Anderson
Cover Painting: Manfred on the Jungfrau, 1837, by Martin, John (1789-1854)
(Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery/The Bridgeman Art Library)



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