

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) Piano Trio in A minor Op.50 "In memory of a great artist"

- 1. Pezzo elegiaco: Moderato assai Allegro giusto 18'26
- 2. Tema con variazioni:
 Andante con moto 18'16
- Variazione finale (Allegro risoluto e con fuoco) e coda (Andante con moto-Lugubre) 7'33

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

4. Trio élégiaque No.1 in G minor 13'16

Klára Würtz piano · Dmitri Makhtin violin · Alexander Kniazev cello

Recording: 26/27 June 2017, Westvest Church Schiedam, The Netherlands Producer & engineer: Peter Arts
Piano: Steinway D, tuned by Charles Rademaker
Photos: Maurice Lammerts van Bueren

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Tchaikovsky's negative sentiments towards the piano trio were clearly set out in a letter of October 1880 to his patron, Nadezhda von Meck, in response to her enthusiastic praise for one composed by her resident pianist – a young Frenchman called Claude Debussy (a piece long thought lost but rediscovered in 1985). In rejecting her hint that he should write something similar, Tchaikovsky elaborated on his antipathy to the format, not only on principle – the characteristics of violin, cello and piano being in his view inherently incompatible – but for the purely subjective reason that their combination would be "pure torment" for him (notwithstanding the passages for exactly those instruments in the second movement of the recently completed Second Piano Concerto). While conceding that other composers, notably Beethoven Mendelssohn and Schumann, had produced excellent examples, he could not be tempted in that direction. And that seemed to be that.

The sudden death in Paris of Nikolai Rubinstein on March 23rd 1881 seems to have been the catalyst for an abrupt change of mind. Although their relationship had always been prickly - Rubinstein had famously damned the First Piano Concerto as, among other things, badly written and vulgar - it was based on solid friendship and mutual respect and Tchaikovsky was devasted by the news. He did not however embark on the work which he was to dedicate to "the memory of a great artist" immediately: it was only in mid-December that he wrote from Rome to Mme von Meck indicating that he was thinking of experimenting with the form he had previously dismissed so comprehensively. The elegiac nature of the passages in which piano, violin and cello played together in the Second Concerto, dedicated to Rubinstein but which he never lived to play, may have encouraged him to attempt a full scale work using these same forces and, although quite different in detail, the thematic contours of the relevant parts of two works are not dissimilar. After initially finding composition hard going, Tchaikovsky warmed to the task and the trio was completed by mid-January 1882, in time to be sent to Russia for private performance on the anniversary of Rubinstein's death. He was aware of potential flaws as result of his "excessive haste", and insisted that before the premiere, the performers Taneyev, Hřímalý and Fitzenhagen should play it through to members of his musical circle so everyone present could provide constructive feedback. After hearing the work himself in April he made several changes in detail and structure, including some large scale ad libitum cuts, and this revised version received it first performance in October 1882.

Its unconventional format – a sonata-form movement followed by an extended theme and variations - takes as its model Beethoven's final sonata Op111. The monumental first movement is built around two main themes - the first, based on a falling five note figure, is stated by each instrument in succession, the second (allegro guisto) is introduced by the piano in double forte octave chords, and the thematic material undergoes sequential elaboration rather than conventional development. The recapitulation, preceded by a transitional passage for solo violin, is at a much slower tempo (Tchaikovsky expressly instructs the players to follow all his markings "extremely closely") which has the effect of applying a brake to the movement's seemingly inexorable momentum and in the coda, unison violin and cello repeat phrases from the main theme obsessively over the piano's fragmentary figures. The emotional intensity of the first movement is dispelled by the lighter mood of the second and there are some who find this disparity unsatisfactory. Although T chaikovsky dismissed the suggestion that the variations represented different facets of Rubenstein's life, he admitted privately to some [auto]biographical associations derived from "memories" of their shared experiences, including visiting an amusement park and attending a ball and the charmingly lopsided theme is apparently based on a folk melody he had heard in Rubinstein's company. Loosely related to the work's opening motif, the theme is recognisably elaborated in the first four variations but loses its shape in the fifth with its tinkling music box effect. There is a change of theme (and key) in the waltz of the much longer sixth variation, but the original is restored in the gruff seventh and is then given a lengthy fugal treatment perhaps embodying Rubinstein's roles as a teacher and theorist, in the eighth (which Tchaikovsky indicated could be omitted). An andante flebile, prefiguring the mood of the coda, is followed by a sprightly mazurka. When revising the work, Tchaikovsky introduced a break between the tenth variation and the sonata form Variazione finale (with its modified theme and new key) dividing the movement into two distinct parts. He also authorised a substantial cut after the statement of the theme (which is adopted in this performance) taking the music directly to the recapitulation and considerably shortening this section (although at the expense of its formal structure). It ends in massive double forte restatement of the principal theme of the first movement, violin and cello once more in unison over surging piano before fading away in the bleak coda to the accompaniment of spare pianissimo piano chords.

Tchaikovsky died in October 1893 almost exactly eleven years after the first performance of the revised version and on the same day Rachmaninoff began work on a Trio élégiaque in D minor in his memory. This was not however his first attempt at this format. At his first major public concert in Moscow in late January the previous year, he had performed a single movement elegiac trio in G minor, together with cellist Anatoly Brandukov and violinist David Krein. According to the dates on the score, it had been composed rapidly a few days before the concert, but it was probably written much earlier and revised specifically for that performance. It has no known commemorative associations and was perhaps intended as a stylistic exercise paying homage to the celebrated trio by the then living Tchaikovsky. This is demonstrated most clearly in its first theme which is closely related to main theme of the earlier work and the ending where the alla marcia funebre mirrors its coda. Episodically constructed, it is a less assured work than the supposedly earlier First Piano Concerto (suggesting that it in fact predates it) and once its more substantial and identically titled successor appeared, it fell into obscurity, remaining without an opus number and unpublished until 1947.

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Klára Würtz was born in Budapest, Hungary, and started playing the piano at the age of five.

At the age of fourteen Klára was admitted at the Ferenc Liszt Music Academy, Budapest, where she studied at the faculty for the exceptionally gifted children with Mrs. Máthé, and later with Zoltán Kocsis, Ferenc Rados and György Kurtág and András Schiff.

In 1985 she won the Ettore Pozzoli piano competition in Milan. In 1988 she was one of the prize winners at the International Piano Competition in Dublin.

In 1991 she signed up with Columbia Artists Management, New York, and since then has performed over a hundred concerts in the United States and Canada. She made her North American debut with orchestra as the soloist in Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto with the Czech

Philharmonic conducted by Jiří Bělohlávek. Her most successful recitals were in the Kennedy Center, Washington and at the Ravinia Festival in Chicago.

In 2001 she made her successful debut in the Concertgebouw Amsterdam playing

Schumann's Piano Concerto with the Philharmonia der Nationen conducted by Justus Frantz.

She is a member of the Amsterdam Piano Trio. She plays duo with Israeli cellist Timora Rosler, and played with violinists such as Janine Jansen and Dmitri Makhtin. She made nearly 20 CD recordings, among which the complete Piano Sonatas of Mozart, a selection of Schubert Sonatas and the Piano Works of Robert Schumann.

In spring 2003 Klára made her debut in the Symphony Hall of Boston and Carnegie Hall, New York with the Boston Symphony with conductor Bernard Haitink.

Her debut recital in the Great Hall of the Concertgebouw Amsterdam was an overwhelming success.

In summer 2004 she gave an open-air concert for an audience of over 30.000 in the central square of Budapest broadcasted live on national television, playing Ravel's Piano Concerto with the Budapest Festival Orchestra conducted by Iván Fischer.

In 2006 she was invited to play a Mozart recital in the Mozarteum as part of the prestigious Salzburger Festspiele.

In 2008 she played with the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Theodore Kuchar.

Every year she returns to the USA for chamber music concerts with the Amsterdam Klaviertrio, one of which was called "The best chamber music concert of the year" by the Washington Post.

Klára Würtz is professor of piano at the Conservatory of Arts in Utrecht and lives in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

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Born in St Petersburg in 1975, Dmitri Makhtin started his musical education at the age of four with his parents, both professional violinists, and joined the Music School for gifted children in 1981. In 1989, he won the first prize at the Russian violonists competition. In 1990, he obtained a scholarship from the Young Musicians Foundation and of the Idyllwild Arts Academy (California), and then studied with P. Hirshhorn and H. Krebbers.

He is also the laureate of international competitions such as the Kloster Schontal, Niccolò Paganini, Louis Spohr, Tibor Varga, Montréal, Sibelius and Praetoria Competitions.

Dmitri Makhtin made his debut in 1997 in Paris with the State Academic Symphony Orchestra of the Russian Federation, under the baton of Yevgeny Svetlanov, and in 1998 in the United States with the

Cleveland Orchestra, conducted by Leonard Slatkin.

Since then, he is regularly performing with the Ural Philharmonic Orchestra, Monte-Carlo, City of Prague and Saint Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestras,

Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Orchestre National de Montpellier, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra; as well as the Swedish Radio, Singapore and Dallas Symphony Orchestras, Orchestre National de Lille or The European Soloists of Luxembourg. He performed with conductors such as Leonard Slatkin, James DePreist, Sakari Oramo, Alexander Dmitriyev, Jiří Bělohlávek, Jerzy Semkow, Yuri Temirkanov, Jean-Claude Casadesus, Alexander Vedernikov, Yevgeny Svetlanov...

Dmitri Makhtin is regularly invited to festivals of Saint Petersburg, Lisbon, PietraSanta, La Folle Journée in Nantes and Tokyo, La Roque d'Anthéron, Menton, Salzburg, Radio France Montpellier, Saint-Denis Music Festival, Automne en Normandie... He also performs recitals and chamber music in the most prestigious venues in the world: the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels, Lincoln Center in New York, Saint Petersburg Philharmonia, Tivoli Vredenburg in Utrecht, Pushkin Museum in Moscow, Salle Pleyel in Paris...

He plays chamber music with Plamena Mangova, Andrei Korobeinikov, Boris Berezovsky, Alexander Kniazev, Alexei Ogrintchouk, Miguel Da Silva and Renaud Capuçon.

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Alexander Kniazev is the worthy successor of Mstislav Rostropovitch and one of Russia's leading contemporary cellists.

Born in 1961 in Moscow, Alexander Kniazev made his debut in 1978 in Russia, England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Austria, USA, Japan, Korea, South America and South Africa.

He has performed as a soloist under Evgeny Svetlanov, Mstislav Rostropovitch, Kurt Masur, Yuri Temirkanov, Yuri Bashmet, Vladimir Fedosseyev, Neeme Järvi, Alexander Vedernikov, Hans Jörg Albrecht, Vassily Petrenko, Andris Poga, Maxime Chostakovich, Mikhail Pletnev, Charles Dutoit, Kazuki Yamada, Stéphane Denève, Jean-Claude Casadesus; with the Saint Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Wiener Symphoniker, the Russian State Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic

Orchestra, Bayerischer Rundfunk Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse, Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra, Göteborg Symphonic

Orchestra, Den Haag Residentie Orchestra, Prague Philharmonic Orchestra and NHK Symphony Orchestra...

He is a regular guest of the festivals of December Nights in Moscow, White Nights in Saint Petersburg, Saint-Denis (France), Folles Journées de Nantes, Nuits du Suquet (France), La Roque d'Anthéron (France) and of the prestigious Tanglewood, Lugano and Salzburg festivals...

In chamber music, he has played with Nikolai Lugansky, Valery Afanassiev, Elisabeth Leonskaya, Kun Woo Paik, Boris Berezovsky, Andrei Korobeinikov, Plamena Mangova, Victor Tretiakov, Mario Brunello, Ivan Monighetti, Boris Berezovsky, Dimitri Makhtin, Jean Guillou and Vadim Repin.

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