

CBSO PROMS

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Tchaikovsky

1974

Wednesday 10 July 1974 at 7.30 p.m., Town Hall Birmingham

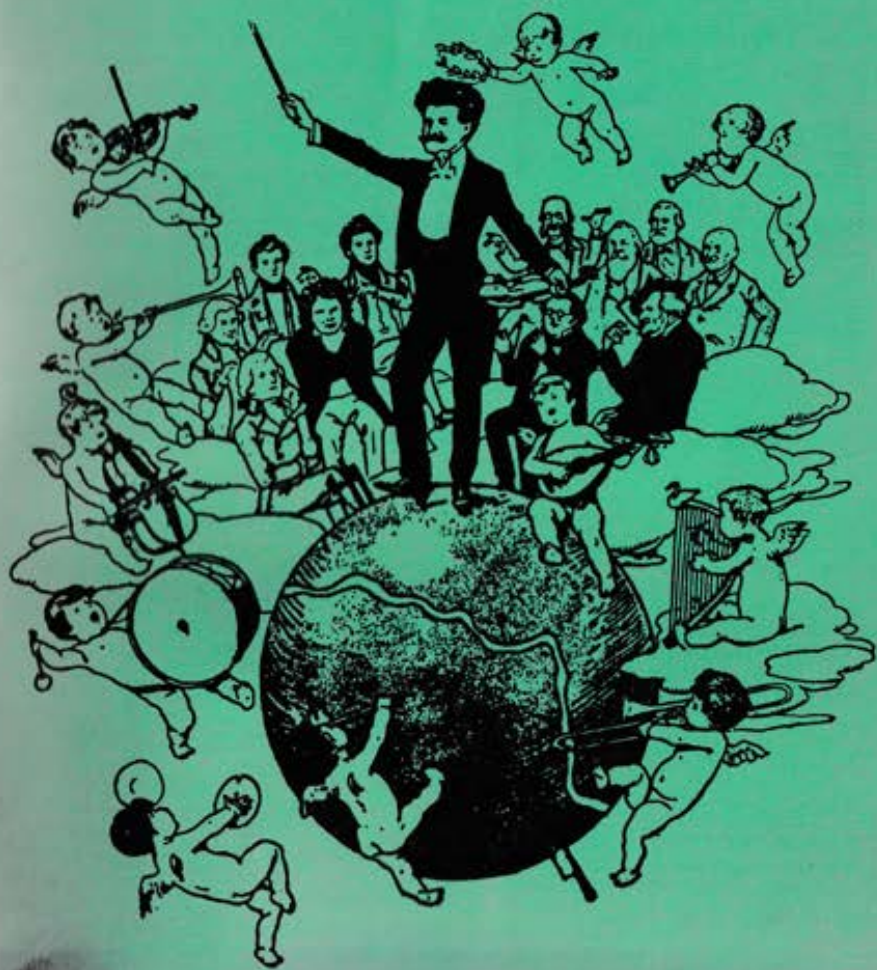




Photo: Constantine

**Maurice
Handford**

Cover: 'Strauss Concert in Heaven', by Theo Zasche. Johann Strauss II is in the centre. The front row of his celestial audience comprises Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Wagner. Behind are Haydn, Johann Strauss I, Lanner, Offenbach, Brahms, Verdi and Bruckner.



Leader: John Bradbury
Conductor: **MAURICE HANDFORD**
Soloist: **MALCOLM BINNS**
Tchaikovsky

Fantasy-Overture, Romeo and Juliet
Piano Concerto No. 1 in B \flat minor, opus 23

INTERVAL

Refreshments are available in the Basement Hall 6.45-10.0 p.m.
Licensed Bar

Light refreshments available in the Lower Gallery during the interval

Ballet Suite, Swan Lake

Overture, 1812, opus 49

Patrons are asked not to enter or leave the auditorium while the Orchestra is playing. It would be appreciated if patrons would refrain as far as possible from coughing during the performance

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Floral decorations provided by the Amenities and Recreation Department, City of Birmingham

Symphonic Sketches — an exhibition of musical cartoons — is on view in the Basement Bar throughout the Proms. Hand-coloured copies of the cartoons are for sale. The cartoons are by the Orchestra's resident cartoonist — Jeremy

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra receives financial assistance from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Birmingham District Council, the West Midlands Metropolitan County Council and the Midlands Authorities Orchestral Association



MALCOLM BINNS has established himself as one of Britain's finest young pianists and is in regular demand for concerts both in Britain and abroad. He has appeared as soloist with all the British orchestras and offers the widest possible repertoire, including a number of contemporary works of which he has given first performances, one of these being Prokofiev's Concerto for the Left Hand, which he played at the Royal Festival Hall.

Malcolm Binns has appeared as soloist in the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts in no less than nine seasons, including three Last Nights. He also played in the BBC Concert Orchestra's twenty-first birthday concert at the Royal Festival Hall. He appears as recitalist and with orchestra in many parts of the world and besides being a frequent visitor in the European continent has appeared in Persia, Turkey and South Africa.

Malcolm Binns recently toured in Scandinavia, playing the Prokofiev Concerto No. 4 with the Malmo and Gothenburg Symphony Orchestras. He will be performing the No. 2 Piano Concerto of Tchaikovsky in the Henry Wood Proms this year.

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PROGRAMME NOTES

Peter Ilch Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Fantasy-Overture, Romeo and Juliet

This orchestral work, arguably one of Tchaikovsky's finest and most well-known compositions, owes its existence to the influence of Mily Balakirev, the leader of the group of five Nationalist Russian composers known as the *Kuchka* (Mighty Handful). Although Tchaikovsky was not a member of this group he was on friendly terms with the older composers who greatly encouraged him. 'Owes its existence to' is too mild a phrase for Balakirev, Svengali-like, drew the work out of Tchaikovsky by telling him that he would write an overture on this theme with 'a *religioso* introduction portraying Friar Lawrence; there would follow a sonata form *allegro* in B minor illustrating the *two households who from ancient grudge break to new mutiny*, the second subject would be in D \flat major . . . the themes would be developed and the overture end with the death of the lovers.' The year was 1869, the month was May. During the summer holiday the idea germinated and on his return to Moscow in September some ideas were committed to paper. A letter arrived from Balakirev complaining at the delay and containing some practical suggestions including six bars of suggested opening to the *allegro* (containing, by the way, clashing chords and rushing semiquavers) and, more importantly, advice to induce composition as follows: 'Put on your rubber shoes, take a walking stick and go for a walk on the boulevards, starting from Mikitsky. Let yourself become permeated with the subject, and I am sure by the time you reach Sretensky you will have found some theme or episode.' Suffice it to say that Tchaikovsky sketched the overture in October and completed the scoring in November, with constant reference to Balakirev who made many suggestions, but was very pleased with the work as a whole. It was first performed in March 1870, conducted by Nicholas Rubenstein and further revised in the summer of 1870, which, apart from some minor alterations in 1880 is the version we know.

William Mann, in an excellent note on this work, urges the listener to make no attempt to read Shakespeare's tragedy too closely into this overture, for how does Friar Lawrence become mixed up in the brawl . . . 'we had far better listen to Tchaikovsky's overture as a piece of music.' There is no doubt that this work is in sonata form with a slow introduction, the material from which is used in the development. But once one is familiar with the basic synopsis of Shakespeare's play it becomes increasingly difficult to do as William Mann suggests. Listening to the work several times, for the purpose of this note, had the odd result of convincing the writer that the answer was that Shakespeare's play was written in sonata form, but that cannot be so. No, of course each event is not represented in the music, but it is programme music at its very best — a clearly recognisable series of character sketches incorporated into the discipline of a musical form.

Clarinets and bassoons announce a chorale-like theme (Friar Lawrence) which is accompanied by an ominous theme, which pervades the whole work, surely suggested by the line 'a pair of star-crossed lovers'. The harp anticipates its tragic rôle at the end of the work. *Pizzicato* strings suggest the Friar's potterings in his garden and eventually the slow introduction leads into the *allegro* and the first subject in B minor (as instructed). The taunted springy rhythm suggests Romeo and all the other young 'men-about-town' who unwittingly prepare the ground for the great tragedy to follow. The running fight between Montagues and Capulets is depicted by cymbal clashes (most tricky rhythm) over running semiquavers. As the crowds scatter the music prepares for Juliet's theme (D \flat major) superbly scored for cor anglais and viola, which has, as its second section the most beautiful sighing strings to suggest the love of the young couple. The balcony scene must have been in the composer's mind as this section is worked to a climax with most exotic counterpoint for



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Prospectus and information from Miss Patricia Meakin, the School Administrator.

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the french horn. The harp seals the scene with its ephemeral chords. But trouble awaits and the development begins with disquieting references to Romeo, the duel and the ever-diminishing calm of Friar Lawrence's theme, this works up to the greater climaxes and once again the clashing cymbals denote the crash of swords — no doubt at all they are those of Romeo and Tybalt. The recapitulation of both subjects occurs in D major, not with an idyllic mood but a defiance against all worldly odds. The coda returns to B minor and the first subject, suggesting perhaps Romeo's flight and return to Verona. The world falls apart with the brutal timpani roll which ushers in the Funeral March, referring so poignantly to the second subject and Friar Lawrence's theme and his abortive effort to save the hapless couple.

The harp bestows its final blessing but the work ends with four bars of angry chords. Tchaikovsky resisted all attempts to remove this ending. How right he was, for surely one can feel nothing but anger and rage when the two families shake hands over the biers of the two lovers, at the end of the play?

Harry Jones ©

Piano Concerto No. 1, in B \flat minor, opus 23

allegro non troppo e molto maestoso — allegro con spirito

andantino semplice — prestissimo — andantino semplice

allegro con fuoco

It is sometimes said that the popularity of this concerto depends upon a single theme, the first. If that were true, the situation would be curious indeed, for the big *maestoso* theme is purely introductory; once superseded, it is nowhere resorted to again. To suggest that, on the strength of the opening, Tchaikovsky can pin us in our seats for three whole movements is to credit him with magical rather than musical powers. In fact there is plenty of appealing thematic material, much of it deployed with considerable skill, and the lay-out for piano and orchestra is invariably effective. Some of the cadenza-like passage-work may well be felt to reflect Tchaikovsky's confessed need to 'hammer pianoforte passages out of my brain', but the work as a whole is a brilliant extension of the Schumann-Liszt tradition. The date of composition is 1874-5, which means that, apart from the fantasy-overture *Romeo and Juliet* (1870), the Piano Concerto is the earliest of Tchaikovsky's works in the standard repertory. But only just so. *Swan Lake* followed in 1876; then came the Fourth Symphony (1877) and the Violin Concerto (1878), and the opera *Eugene Onegin* also belongs to this period.

Tchaikovsky's dedication of the Concerto, first to his pupil and friend Taneyev, then to the renowned Hans Von Bülow, has been the subject of much confusion. It is often stated that the original dedication was to Nikolay Rubinstein, and that this was changed when Rubinstein declared the work 'worthless, absolutely unplayable... bad, trivial, common'. The row with Rubinstein is described in one of Tchaikovsky's letters to Nadejda von Meck, but there is no shred of evidence that Rubinstein was ever the dedicatee. It seems rather that the 'savaged' composer decided that the backing of an international virtuoso was essential to the success of his concerto. Von Bülow was delighted and gave the first performance, in Boston, U.S.A., in October 1875. The first Moscow performance was given by Taneyev, with Rubinstein conducting! Three years later, Rubinstein himself played the solo part.

The real point of these details — apart from setting the record straight — is the light they throw on the state of music in Tchaikovsky's Russia. On the one hand was the musical establishment, the 'official' school of classicists

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to which Rubinstein belonged; on the other were the avowed nationalists (The Five) grouped around Balakirev — and there was also Tchaikovsky, who was scarcely less Russian than The Five but decidedly outward-looking in his musical sympathies. In the B \flat minor Concerto the Russian element is strong, especially in the finale, where the principal theme is closely modelled on the Ukrainian folk-song *Come, come, Ivanka*. The principal theme of the first movement, too, is Ukrainian in origin, but in each case the treatment embraces the virtuoso piano style of the Romantic tradition. Another aspect of Romanticism is reflected in the slow movement, where the outer sections are in the manner of a nocturne or a 'song without words': the delicate scoring for muted strings and solo woodwinds is as characteristic of Tchaikovsky as the brashness of the Concerto's opening and closing pages. The middle section of the slow movement, marked *prestissimo* (it sounds slower than this suggests), is based on a *chansonette* (*Il faut s'amuser, danser et rire*) which belongs to the Francophil culture typical of the official classes in nineteenth-century Russia. There is French grace, too, in the quiet string theme from the first movement (to be precise, the second theme in the second group). It was the richness and exuberance with which Tchaikovsky combined these elements that so dismayed the classicists — and soon delighted nearly everyone else.

Hugh Ottaway ©

Ballet Suite, Swan Lake

scene

dance of the swans

pas de deux

waltz

Commissioned by the Imperial Theatre in Moscow, *Swan Lake* was Tchaikovsky's first full-length ballet. The original version, in four acts, was composed in 1877, immediately after the Third Symphony. This was not a success and the work was quickly dropped, to remain unnoticed during the rest of Tchaikovsky's lifetime.

Why the failure? A poor, even amateurish, production is usually said to account for it, but this is not the whole story. Undoubtedly the score was too long and over-written; Tchaikovsky himself was not happy about it. In a letter to Mme. Nadezhda von Meck, written in Vienna in December 1877, he described *Swan Lake* as 'poor stuff compared to *Sylvia*. Nothing during the last few years has charmed me so greatly as this ballet by Delibes and *Carmen*'.

The lesson of lightness and delicacy learnt from Delibes is certainly reflected in *Swan Lake* as we know it today; but this contains no more than half of the original music. Over the years Tchaikovsky extensively re-worked his score, discarding much of it and introducing new material. The second act, which is in itself a complete ballet, was successfully revived at a commemorative performance shortly after the composer's death, and it is this that has since become the most popular of all Russian ballets. The complete work was revived in 1895.

The concert suite contains music from the first three acts. The opening *Scene*, with its magical oboe melody, is associated with the first appearance of the swans and conjures up the essential, fairy-tale atmosphere of the ballet, as indeed does the *Dance of the Swans*, which follows. In both these pieces the 'colour' of minor keys, together with simple but effective scoring, is basic to the musical mood. The *Waltz* is more heavily scored, with an eye

to the full *corps de ballet* and an elaborate spectacle, and is really No. 2 in the Suite, but when the closing *Scene* is not being given, a change in the order is justified: *Waltz* has all the qualities of a brilliant finale.

Hugh Ottaway ©

Overture, 1812, Opus 49

'1812' is probably the most popular piece of descriptive music ever written, partly because of the majestic background suggested by its title and partly because of its brilliant downrightness. The work has suffered from excessive popularity and — in this country at any rate — it is usually assumed that what is popular must be *ipso facto* second rate. This assumption is obviously silly, but none the less one perhaps gets the best out of the overture if one forgets previous hearings and listens to it as if it was having its first performance in Russia, to an audience to whom '1812' meant almost as much as Waterloo means to us. Then one can get the full effect of its dramatic drama.

The overture opens slowly with a solemn chordal tune, partly on low strings and partly on wind; the full orchestra then enters and the storm-clouds gather, to be followed later by the sound of trumpets. The echoes die away; there is a pause, and the battle begins. Through its rough and vigorous texture are heard snatches of the *Marseillaise*. Later comes a serene tune, suggestive of quiet confidence, and, by way of piquant Russian folk song, we come back once more to the atmosphere of war. The battle is still more intense and again it is succeeded by the serene melody and the folk song. Once more a climax is worked up, this time to culminate in a triumphant presentation of the opening tune. At the end, amid the blaring of trumpets, this triumph is consummated by the Russian National Anthem.

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- TWO 404 — Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony/Frémaux
- ASD 2753 — Carnival of Animals etc/Frémaux, Ogdon/Lucas
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also

Prom Prospectus (in May Music Stand, 15p) — Annual Prospectus (published mid-July 25p) — The First Fifty Years (30p) — An Orchestra Abroad (now reduced to 25p).

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Tomorrow

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Forthcoming Proms

LOUIS FRÉMAUX
CBSO CHORUS

Berlioz

Les Troyens: Trojan March
Royal Hunt and Storm
Roméo et Juliette: Queen Mab Scherzo
Hamlet: Funeral March
Symphonie Fantastique

Friday
12 July

HAROLD GRAY
LEO WITOSZYNYKJ
Family Prom II
España

Rhapsody, España	Chabrier
Guitar Concerto	Rodrigo
Guitar solos	
Suite, Carmen	Bizet
The Three-Cornered Hat: Three Dances	Falla

This concert is due to end at approximately 9.0 p.m.

Saturday
13 July

LOUIS FRÉMAUX
Italian Festival

Overture, The Italian Girl in Algiers ..	Rossini
The Fountains of Rome	Respighi
Italian Symphony	Mendelssohn
Overture, Benvenuto Cellini	Berlioz
Roma: Carnival	Bizet
Italian Caprice	Tchaikovsky

Tuesday
16 July

HAROLD GRAY
Nights at the Ballet

Suite, The Sleeping Beauty	Tchaikovsky
Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune	Debussy
Faust: Ballet Music	Gounod
Suite, Horoscope	Lambert
Firebird Suite (1919)	Stravinsky

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 Richard Howarth
 Enid Beaumont
 *Cyril Read
 Andrew Szirtes
 Gisela Hess
 John Sutton
 Paul Smith
 Sheila Clarke
 Stuart Ford
 Diana Levitas
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 David Wood
 Henry Birch
 Michael Buckley
 David Hiscox
 James Hunter
 David Parsons
 Paul White
 Anne Ashcroft
 Louise Dayman
 Thelma Maden
 Pauline Lowberry

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