

Khachaturian

Suites & Dances

**The Valencian Widow
Masquerade
Battle of Stalingrad**

***Armenian Philharmonic
Orchestra
Loris Tjeknavorian***

alto



Aram Khachaturian (1903-78)

Masquerade – Suite

[1]	I. Waltz	4:13
[2]	II. Nocturne	4:23
[3]	III. Mazurka	2:34
[4]	IV. Romance	3:35
[5]	V. Galop	2:52

The Valencian Widow - Suite

[6]	I. Introduction	3:26
[7]	II. Serenade	5:33
[8]	III. Song	3:37
[9]	IV. Comic Dance	3:41
[10]	V. Intermezzo	5:11
[11]	VI. Dance	2:43

Two movements from *Dance Suite*

[12]	Caucasian Dance	4:05
[13]	Uzbek Dance	8:56

The Battle of Stalingrad - Suite

[14]	I. City on the Volga	1:48
[15]	II. Invasion	1:30
[16]	III. Stalingrad on Fire	4:31
[17]	IV. Battle for the Motherland	3:18
[18]	V. Forward into Victory	2:49
[19]	VI. There is a Crag on the Volga	1:46

Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra Loris Tjeknavorian, *conductor*

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Aram Khachaturian “is, musically, a Russian composer; for purposes of Soviet example he is a sometime Armenian composer - an Uzbek composer, or a Georgian composer, or an Azerbaidzhanian composer. He epitomizes, in solid Russian style, the republican composer of ultimate, and imaginary, greater Soviet maturity.”

Thus Stanley Dale Krebs, then Associate Professor of Music at the University of California, Santa Barbara, indicated in 1970 in his book *Soviet Composers and the Development of Soviet Music* Khachaturian’s multi-national background. Although Armenian by descent, Aram Ilyich Khachaturian was born in the village of Kodzhori near the Georgian capital Tbilisi but soon moved with his family into one of the southern suburbs of the city itself. Later in his life he was to recall the experience of living in this district, cramped with houses clambering up the slope of the hill. ‘Tbilisi lives in my memory as a singing city’ he explained. ‘Everybody sang: the artisan as he worked in his little yard or in the street, and the vendors selling milk, fruit and fish. Every type of vendor had a melody of his own, an expressive motif that I shall never forget. As evening fell, the courtyards were filled with song and dance melodies, some gay and carefree, others tender and languid. What a world of musical impressions assailed one at the bazaar! And the festivals!’ These musical impressions would have included songs from Georgia itself and those from neighbouring Armenia and Azerbaijan.

As a young child, Khachaturian received no formal musical training and it was not until he was eight years old, when the family moved nearer the centre of Tbilisi, that there was a piano in the house. As his parents sang folk songs to him, he tried to pick them out on the piano and was soon beginning to improvise on them as well. At school he learned to read music and, chiefly by ear, to play the tenor horn. He also started to have yearnings towards being a composer.

Khachaturian was 14 when, many miles away in Petrograd, the 1917 October Revolution took place but it was not until the Red Army marched on Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1920 that the inhabitants of Georgia realized that they too were about to be transformed into citizens of what was soon to become the Soviet Union. In the autumn of 1921, Khachaturian followed his brother to Moscow and, for a while, both of them adapted their name to Khachaturov to mask their Armenian origins. The following year Aram enrolled at the University in Moscow to study biology and also applied to the Gnesin School as a cello student although he had yet to play a note on that instrument. Fortunately he was a quick learner and, although described by Mikhail Gnesin himself as ‘a rough diamond’, before long he had joined Gnesin’s own composition class. Once he had graduated 1929 (and given up biology) he moved on to the Moscow Conservatory where his teacher was to be Nikolai Myaskovsky.

By the time he had completed his full-time musical education in 1937, Khachaturian already had to his credit his first symphony, his piano concerto, a patriotic cantata in praise of Stalin, several chamber and instrumental works (including a trio which was highly praised by Sergei Prokofiev) and his *Dance Suite*. The first performance of this *Dance Suite* took place in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory during the spring of 1933 when it was played by an orchestra made up of students. Although Khachaturian was reputed to be rather fond of this work and was to conduct the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington at its American premiere in January 1968,

it was not published during his lifetime. It's five movements - a Caucasian Dance, an Armenian Dance, an Uzbek Dance, an Uzbek March and a Georgian Lezhinka - contain various folk melodies, some of which he had presumably known since childhood. (One of those in the third movement he also used in the trio that so appealed to Prokofiev.)

After graduation, Khachaturian was soon drawn into the Soviet musical establishment for, in 1937, he became Deputy Chairman of the Moscow Composers' Union and, two years later, Vice-President of the organizing committee of the USSR Union of Soviet Composers. Over the years he was to be awarded several state prizes including a Stalin Prize in 1941 for his violin concerto and a Lenin Prize in 1959 for his ballet *Spartacus*. In 1954 he was named *People's Artist of the USSR*.

In 1948, however, Khachaturian had suffered a temporary fall from grace when, along with several other fellow composers, notably Prokofiev and Shostakovich, he was chastised for composing music for himself and 'a clique of sycophantic critics' rather than for the 'people'. It was Andrei Zhdanov, spokesman on the arts for the Central Committee of the Communist Party, who was intent on reforming music in the Soviet Union and ridding it of, amongst other things, 'formalism and anti-people perversions'. A conference was convened in January 1948 to which composers and other musicians were summoned to account for themselves. In his submission, Khachaturian did his best to justify his work while at the same time admitting that there might be a case to answer. 'I don't think Soviet composers deliberately go out of their way to write in a complicated manner,' he told the assembly, 'nor do I think they are under any strong Western influence. But we have a passion for technical virtuosity. The composers of our middle generation, owing to the Revolution, started working in earnest rather late in life - at 18 or 20. There was a rush to acquire technical proficiency. I love folk songs, and have worked much on folk material, as you know - especially Armenian folk material. But, like others, I did not want to lag behind certain high technical ideals - mistaken though they may be. So I lost control over my material.'

Fortunately, this exercise did not have a lasting effect and, especially after the death in 1953 of Stalin (on the same day that Prokofiev died), the bureaucratic hold over composers was loosened. In the meantime, musicians such as Khachaturian concentrated on less contentious aspects of composing, in particular the composing of film music. Thus, in 1949, he provided the music for *The Battle of Stalingrad*, a film which dealt with the besieging by the Germans in August 1942 of the city of Stalingrad (now re-named Volgograd) and of their subsequent defeat the following January. In 1950, the year in which Khachaturian was awarded another Stalin Prize for this film score, he created from it a symphonic suite which soon became part of the concert repertoire. As Grigory Shneerson puts it in his biography of the composer, when Khachaturian was composing this music, 'he chose the broad and mighty Russian song *There's a crag on the Volga* for the leitmotif as a symbol of the greatness of the people's exploit'. No doubt this would have pleased Zhdanov had he been able to read it but he had died in August 1948 some six months after his conference.

As well as composing the music for some 25 films, Khachaturian also provided incidental music for about 20 plays. It was back in 1940 that he was commissioned to write the music to accompany a production of *The Valencian Widow*, a Spanish comedy by the Madrid-born playwright, poet and novelist, Lope de Vega (1562-1635). The first performance of this play, complete with Khachaturian's music, took place in November

1940 at the Lenin Komsomol Theatre in Moscow. 17 years later, at the suggestion of the conductor Gennady Katz, Khachaturian created a six-movement suite from this score. Although he claimed that the music is 'characteristically Spanish', the composer also pointed out that he had not used any authentic Spanish tunes in it.

In 1941 more of Khachaturian's incidental music was to be heard in a Moscow Theatre. On this occasion the theatre was the Vakhtangov and the play *Masquerade* by Mikhail Lermontov (1814-41). Lermontov, thought by many to have been Russia's greatest romantic poet after Alexander Pushkin, had written *Masquerade* in 1836 and it is generally considered to be his best play. It has been described as 'a Russian Othello by way of Pushkin which combines romanticism and social realism' and it was presumably because this 'social realism' portrayed the dissolute behaviour of the Russian aristocracy in the 1830s that it was not performed in Lermontov's lifetime. A censored production was put on in 1852 but it was not seen as its author intended until 10 years later. Vsevolod Meyerhold produced it again in 1917 and on that occasion the incidental music was by Alexander Glazunov.

The production of *Masquerade* for which Khachaturian had been commissioned to write the music was intended to form part of the celebrations to commemorate the centenary of the death of Lermontov who had been killed in a duel in 1841. In 1944 that Khachaturian created from his *Masquerade* music the concert suite that has since become one of his most popular works. It begins with its best-known movement, the Waltz, and then comes a Nocturne with its beautiful violin solo, a lively Mazurka and a Romance which represents the play's heroine, Nina Arbenina. It ends with an exhilarating Galop with clarinet cadenza.

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NOTES ON THE ARTISTS

The **Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra** was formed in 1926 in Yerevan, the capital. The 100-piece ensemble makes its home in Khachaturian Hall there, where it gives weekly concerts in between tours of Armenia and Russia. Members are drawn from graduates of the Komitas Conservatory as well as ones in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The orchestra has played with artists such as Rostropovich, David Oistrakh, Richter, Khachaturian himself and Rozhdestvensky.

Loris Tjeknavorian was appointed in 1989 as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor. Since then the orchestra has toured the USA, Austria and Germany.

Loris Tjeknavorian is a composer with over 40 works in his own catalogue. He currently lives in Tehran. This Armenian-born composer and conductor studied at the Vienna Academy of Music (graduating *cum laude* in 1961), with Carl Orff at the Salzburg Mozarteum and at Michigan State University. He lived for many years in Vienna, New York, and London, and conducted regularly at the main London Halls, including the Royal Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and London Symphony orchestras as well as the Helsinki Philharmonic and the English Chamber Orchestra. He has toured USA, Mexico, Brazil, Israel and Western Europe.

Alto ALC1019 894640001196

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