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Robert Schumann

PIANO CONCERTO in A minor, Op. 54

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. I. Allegro affettuoso | 14:15 |
| 2. II. Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso | 5:08 |
| 3. III. Allegro vivace | 10:10 |

Sviatoslav Richter

Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra / Stanislav Wislocki
Originally issued on Deutsche Grammophon 1959

Pyotr Tchaikovsky

PIANO CONCERTO No. 1 in B flat minor, Op. 23

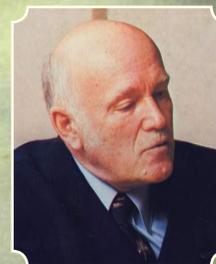
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|---|-------|
| 4. I. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso - Allegro con spirito | 21:50 |
| 5. II. Andantino semplice - Prestissimo - Tempo I | 6:44 |
| 6. III. Allegro con fuoco | 7:01 |

Sviatoslav Richter

Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Herbert von Karajan
Originally issued on Deutsche Grammophon 1962

Total Time 65:20

Produced & Mastered by Paul Arden-Taylor (www.dinmore-records.co.uk)



Schumann & Tchaikovsky Piano Concertos

Sviatoslav Richter

alto



The *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (New Music Journal), founded in 1834 contained several attacks from **Robert Schumann** (1810–56) on the current state of music-making in Germany and in 1839 he lamented the fact that the piano concerto, taken over by what he called ‘salon composers’ had become virtually redundant. ‘The separation of the piano from the orchestra is something we have seen coming for some time. Defying the symphony, contemporary piano-playing seeks to dominate by its own means and on its own terms’. He noted that over the past five years no more than 16 or 17 new piano concertos had been reviewed in the journal and asked where was the genius to ‘show us in a new and brilliant way how piano and orchestra might be combined, how the dominant soloist might unfold the wealth of his instrument and art while the orchestra, no longer a mere spectator, may interweave its manifold facets into the scene’. That genius was Schumann himself who had already made several attempts at composing a piano concerto before, in 1841 writing the single movement *Phantasie in A Minor*. Two years earlier he had told his then-fiancée Clara that he could not compose for virtuoso players. The *Phantasie* was played twice in August 1841 by Clara Schumann and the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra conducted by Felix Mendelssohn. It was never published during Schumann’s lifetime and only revived in the 1960s.

In the summer of 1845 Schumann revisited the *Phantasie*, making it the first movement of a new concerto. He added the beautiful slow movement which leads into the finale without a break (Schumann liked to consider these two additions as one single movement), the transition consisting of a recurrence of the main theme from the opening movement. For the finale Schumann answered Clara’s prayers for a more virtuoso movement as the pianist’s fingers scamper playfully about the keyboard. The scoring was completed on 31 July 1845 and Clara wrote ‘I am happy as a king at the thought of playing it with an orchestra’. It fell to Clara to promote the work, since the great virtuosi of the day, including Liszt, chose to ignore it after Clara gave the first performance in Dresden in December 1845, conducted by Ferdinand Hiller, to whom the score was dedicated. Performances in Leipzig and Prague soon followed.

Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-93) was occupied with three works in 1874: the *Second String Quartet in F major* (Op. 22), an opera *Vakula the Smith* and at the tail end of the year, his **First Piano Concerto in B flat minor** (Op. 23). The concerto had yet to be orchestrated when, on Christmas Eve 1874, he showed it to Nikolai Rubinstein, who he hoped would welcome a new work offering new challenges to the performer. He was completely taken aback by Rubinstein’s negative comments and the composer commented afterwards: ‘It seems that my concerto is worthless,

unplayable and passages so awkward and clumsy that nothing could be done to put them right.’ When Rubinstein saw the effects his negativity had upon Tchaikovsky he offered to perform the new work on condition that Tchaikovsky make sweeping changes. But Tchaikovsky was less than enthusiastic about outside interference (Balakirev’s unwanted suggestions about corrections to his *Romeo and Juliet Overture* had led to a coolness between the two in 1870, although Tchaikovsky later adopted Balakirev’s suggestions). He dedicated the piano concerto to Sergey Taneyev but changed his mind again and offered it instead to Hans von Bülow, doubtless with a mind to seeing the work performed outside Russia.

The German Hans von Bülow had no qualms about accepting the concerto and he gave the premiere in October 1875 whilst on a concert tour of the U.S.A. Afterwards he relayed details of the successful premiere to Tchaikovsky by telegram, probably the first time Boston and Moscow had been connected in this way. The Russian premiere took place in Petersburg and in Moscow it was conducted by Nikolay Rubinstein (to atone for his earlier remarks?) with Taneyev as soloist. The following year Tchaikovsky met Rubinstein half-way and sanctioned alterations prior to the second edition, published in time for the first London performance.

One of the alterations concerned the piano chords that follow the famous horn motif at the beginning of the work. It is often remarked that Tchaikovsky’s grandiose and striking opening fails to reappear during the course of the concerto (likewise the opening motif of the *Violin Concerto*). Following the arresting opening the meter changes to duple time as a jaunty theme, based on a Ukrainian folk-song, emerges. This alternates with a rather melancholy sighing motif heard initially from the woodwind instruments. The beautiful slow movement features a gentle flute melody played above pizzicato strings embellished by the piano. This is contrasted with a scherzo section. The finale opens with a Russian folk-tune followed by a sweeping string melody. These two themes hold sway in a movement which gives ample opportunity for dynamic virtuosity from the soloist.

Sviatoslav Richter (1915–97) gave his first public recital in Odessa in 1934 and was taught by Heinrich Neuhaus at the Moscow Conservatory. Having played Prokofiev’s *Fifth Piano Concerto* under the composer’s direction, Richter gained a formidable reputation in the USSR and played in the West for the first time in 1960. Each subsequent visit was eagerly awaited, but Richter became highly selective in his choice of venue, (always preferring smaller venues and following an

extensive tour of the USA in 1970, he chose not to return to that country; Aldeburgh and selected sites in France and Italy became his preferred venues outside Russia). In 1986 Richter gave 91 concerts over a four-month period during a massive tour by car from Leningrad to Vladivostok and then back to Moscow. In addition to numerous solo concerts Richter often played alongside friends such as Britten, Rostropovich, Fischer-Dieskau, Schreier, Oistrakh and Fournier.

No classical musician has divided opinion quite like **Herbert von Karajan** (1908–89). He made his debut conducting *Fidelio* (Salzburg 1927) and was then based at Ulm (1929-34), Aachen (1934-42) and the Berliner Staatsoper (until 1945). He was signed by Walter Legge to record for Columbia in 1946 and soon became known outside Germany and Austria, making his debut in 1948 both for La Scala and the Philharmonia Orchestra. In 1954 he succeeded Furtwängler as Music Director of the Berlin Philharmonic and later held this and other prestigious posts concurrently, including the Artistic Directorship of both the Wiener Staatsoper and the Salzburg Festival (where he founded the Easter Festival in 1967, directing many of the operas himself). As well as the BPO and the Philharmonia, he was associated with other orchestras including the Vienna Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris and the Vienna Symphony (with whom he recorded the Tchaikovsky concerto with Richter in 1962). Outside the concert hall he has often been vilified for his wartime Nazi affiliations but by 2008, his centenary year, his considerable services to music were revisited and once again recognised.

Witold Rowicki (1914–89), born in Russia, made his debut in 1933. For several years he performed as a chamber musician but after the war he founded the Katowice Radio Orchestra. He became chief conductor of the Warsaw Philharmonic in 1950, remaining with them for many years and making numerous recordings. Between 1983 and 1986 Rowicki was also associated with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra. This recording of Schumann’s Piano Concerto was made in 1958.

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