

CHOPIN & TCHAIKOVSKY

7.30PM, Thursday 11 June
Auckland Town Hall

Programme Notes

Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Eugene Onegin: Polonaise (1878)

DURATION: c.4'

Pushkin's novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* (pronounced: Evgeny Onyaygin) is a classic of Russian literature and inspired Tchaikovsky's most famous opera. Written concurrently with Tchaikovsky's courtship and short-lived marriage to Antonina Milyukova, the work reflects Tchaikovsky's desire for a subject where the dramatic tension was internal rather than external.

Although suspecting that the opera might not succeed due to the lack of overt theatrics, Tchaikovsky persisted with his work: "if there was ever any music written with genuine enthusiasm, with love for the plot and characters it is inspired by, then that is the music to *Onegin*. I was melting and quivering with indescribable delight when I wrote it."

The Polonaise is a glittering introduction to the third-act ball in which the titular character meets the heroine, Tatyana, for the second time. Now married, wealthy and sophisticated, she is poised to reject Onegin, who had rejected her years earlier.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

Piano Concerto No.1 (1830)

- I. *Allegro maestoso*
- II. *Romance: Larghetto*
- III. *Rondo: Vivace*

DURATION: c.35'

"Not music for the piano", wrote a reviewer of Chopin's First Piano Concerto in E minor at Chopin's Paris debut, "but music for pianists." Although the framework of the concerto is unoriginal, Chopin clothed it with his signature fluid passagework and elegiac tone.

"[The Adagio] is not meant to be loud, it's more of a romance, quiet, melancholy," wrote Chopin to his friend Tytus Wojciechowski ahead of the earlier Warsaw premiere. "It should give the impression of gazing tenderly at a place which brings to the mind a thousand dear memories."

Even the faster outer movements, while not lacking in virtuosity, contain extended rippling solo passages where the pianist seems caught up in their own world with occasional orchestral support, rather than outwards-facing bravura. The finale is based on a Polish folk dance, the duple-time *ozwodny*.

Although the E minor Concerto is known as the first due to it being published first, it is actually the second concerto Chopin wrote and premiered. The earlier F minor Concerto was received with confusion so it was with relief that Chopin wrote to Wojciechowski of the E minor Concerto, "Yesterday's concert was a success, I hasten to let you know. I inform your lordship that I was

Conductor Alan Buribayev

Piano Eva Gevorgyan

not a bit nervous, and played the way I play when I'm alone, and it went well.... Furious applause."

INTERVAL

Vasily Kalinnikov (1866-1901)

Symphony No.1 (1895)

- I. *Allegro moderato*
- II. *Andante commodamente*
- III. *Scherzo: Allegro non troppo – moderato assai*
- IV. *Finale: Allegro moderato*

DURATION: c.35'

Kalinnikov's richly melodic First Symphony was composed in 1895, contemporary with Tchaikovsky's Sixth, Dvorak's Ninth, and Mahler's Second. Women in Aotearoa had just won the right to vote, Queen Victoria was in the sixth decade of her reign and Tsar Nicholas II had just assumed his throne.

Russian composer Vasily Kalinnikov was living in Yalta, a popular resort city in the Crimea, where the mild climate and beautiful setting on the edge of the Black Sea bought him extra years before tuberculosis eventually claimed his life in 1901.

Born in 1866 the son of a policeman, his musical aptitude was discovered early and he put himself through studies at the Moscow Philharmonic Society School, combining a scholarship with his work as music copyist and performing in theatre orchestras as bassoonist, violinist and timpanist.

His talent for composition was noticed by Tchaikovsky who recommended him for the post of director at Maly Theatre; however he had to leave the post within months due to his ill health which sent him to Yalta in search of milder climate.

Kalinnikov described music as "a language of moods... the states of our mind that cannot be expressed in words and do not lend themselves to definite description." The second movement is particularly notable for these inexpressible emotions, opening with a harp ostinato over which a sublime cor anglais melody emerges. Although more melodies are introduced through the movement, the harp ostinato functions as an independent motif throughout the movement.

The energetic Scherzo, characterised with a strident string sound with offbeat accents, bookends a slower section over an extended drone note, recalling the harmonic stasis of the second movement harp ostinato but with different execution. The finale opens with the same melodic gestures that opened the symphony, but Kalinnikov had more to say, switching the key to G major for a more joyful interpretation of the initial G minor statement.

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