

Chandos

CHAN 8500

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

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- 2 **Valse-Scherzo Op. 34** (5:27)

Souvenir d'un lieu cher Op. 42

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Cinq Mélodies Op. 35bis

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LYDIA MORDKOVITCH Violin TT = 62:27

MARINA GUSAK-GRIN Piano

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Printed in West Germany / Imprimé en Allemagne
CHANDOS RECORDS LTD, LONDON, ENGLAND



TCHAIKOVSKY:

Sérénade mélancolique in B flat minor Op. 26

Valse-Scherzo Op. 34

Souvenir d'un Lieu Cher Op. 42

1. Méditation; 2. Scherzo; 3. Mélodie

Considering how beautifully Tchaikovsky writes for strings in his large-scale orchestral works, several of which are enhanced by great solo violin passages, such as the *pas de deux* music in the second act of *Swan Lake* or the solo writing in the Suite No. 3, it is difficult to understand why he did not compose at least one major chamber work, such as a Sonata, for the violin. Indeed, the only large-scale work for the instrument was the Violin Concerto, and the composer suffered so much criticism from both players and critics before its qualities were recognised that this may well have affected his attitude.

An important consideration in writing a work for solo instrument and orchestra is who will perform the piece, and the finest violinist in Russia was the Hungarian-born Leopold Auer, who became Professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1868, when only twenty-three. During 1874 Tchaikovsky had been humiliated by his friend Nicholas Rubinstein, who had declared the B flat minor Piano Concerto, composed specially for him, to be badly written. That December Tchaikovsky altered the dedication and gave the First Piano Concerto to Hans von Bülow, and it is understandable that writing works for the piano was put from his mind. In January 1875, still smarting from Rubinstein's rebuke, Tchaikovsky composed a work for Leopold Auer, his *Sérénade mélancolique*, where melodic invention and expressive beauty go hand in hand. Originally for violin and orchestra, Tchaikovsky later arranged a piano and violin version.

Auer may not have considered Tchaikovsky important enough to take too seriously, or circumstances may have worked against his finding time, but the first performance of the *Sérénade mélancolique*, on 28 January 1876 in Moscow, was given by the brilliant young Russian violinist Adolf Brodsky. An omen, perhaps, for Tchaikovsky, Auer and Brodsky, for the Violin Concerto,

composed in 1876 for Auer, was attacked by the Hungarian in much the same way as Rubinstein had attacked the First Piano Concerto, and it was Brodsky who introduced it to the world, in Vienna in 1881.

In between these events Tchaikovsky had composed a *Valse-Scherzo*, also for violin and orchestra, which was first played in Paris on 20 September 1878, when the soloist was Stanislav Bartsevich. This is an essentially *salon* piece of fiddle showmanship, for which the composer also provided a violin and piano arrangement.

Tchaikovsky's only original work for violin and piano is the *Souvenir d'un lieu cher*, set down between March and May 1878, the first performance of which has not been recorded. Here it was the first version of the Violin Concerto which seems to have provided the impetus. In his first sketches for the Concerto Tchaikovsky had composed a *Méditation* for the slow movement. However, he soon realised that this movement was too slight for a major work, and laid it aside in favour of the present *Canzonetta*. The *Méditation*, however, was ideal as the first of three *salon* pieces for the growing market of drawing-room musical evenings, and he completed the set with a lively *Scherzo* and a charming little *Mélodie*.

GLAZUNOV: Grand Waltz from *Raymonda*

Alexander Glazunov's music for *Raymonda* was the first of the ballet scores he wrote for choreography by the great St. Petersburg Director Marius Petipa. It was produced in 1898 and much of the music has been used for later ballets, for example by Balanchine for his *Pas de dix* in 1955 and *Raymonda Variations* in 1961. The most colourful movement is the *Grand Waltz*, here played in a violin and piano arrangement by Efrem Zimbalist.

PROKOFIEV: Cinq Mélodies Op. 35bis

In 1920 Prokofiev composed five *Songs Without Words* for the American soprano Nina Koshits. This was in December, while he was enjoying a delightful and successful tour in California. Their success in the concert hall prompted him to return to them on other occasions. The first was a setting of the second song, *Mélodie*, for voice and orchestra, also in 1920. Then, in

1925, he rescored them all in this version, giving the vocal role to the eloquent solo violin. Finally, in 1930/31, in his *Six Pieces* for piano, Prokofiev went back to his *Songs Without Words*, transcribing the *Scherzino* as the fourth movement. Instrumentalists are happy that this violin and piano transcription so beautifully illustrates how close the solo violin can be to the human voice.

RACHMANINOV: Romance Op. 6 No. 1

This charming little gem is the first of two *Pieces* Rachmaninov composed in 1893, the other being a *Hungarian Dance*. That summer he stayed on the Lisikov's estate and was thoroughly spoiled by Madame Lisikova because he resembled her dead son. He was just twenty and flushed with the success of his opera *Aleko* at the Bolshoi, when the great Tchaikovsky had been seen giving enthusiastic applause.

STRAVINSKY: Parasha's Song from *Mavra* and Russian Dance from *Petrushka*

These two colourful arrangements were the result of Stravinsky meeting the young American violinist Samuel Dushkin, and by the composer suddenly discovering the unique sonority of the violin. Both *The Fairy's Kiss* and *Capriccio* show a new approach to the strings, following the more austere scoring for *Apollo*, completed early in 1928. With Dushkin to inspire him, Stravinsky went even further than in *Capriccio*, where the solo piano shares the solo stakes with each of the string instruments, down to the double-bass. From 1931 the violin caught his imagination, first with the *Concerto* that year, then the *Duo Concertante*, completed in 1932, a *Divertissement* suite from *The Fairy's Kiss* and this transcription of Parasha's song from his opera *Mavra*, first produced in Paris on 2 June 1922.

Both *Mavra* and the ballet *Petrushka*, which had been produced in Paris in 1911, are concerned with theatrically realistic subjects from the early 19th century, and the *Russian Dance* from the ballet, here transcribed for violin and piano by Samuel Dushkin, exemplifies the strong Russian personality

which can be projected by the violin.

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Lydia Mordkovitch was born in Saratov in the USSR and studied the violin from the age of seven. After graduating from the Odessa Conservatory she became a pupil of David Oistrakh at the Moscow Conservatory and was a prizewinner in the Long / Thibaud Competition in Paris. She emigrated to Israel in 1974, since when she has established a new career in the West.

Now resident in England, Lydia Mordkovitch made her British début in 1979 with the Halle Orchestra and she has since appeared with the Philharmonia, Scottish National, Royal Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras, as well as all the regional BBC orchestras.

She made her US début in 1982 with the Chicago Symphony under Sir Georg Solti and other overseas engagements have included concerts with the Rotterdam Philharmonic, the Residentie Orchestra in The Hague and the Amsterdam Philharmonic, as well as several appearances in Scandinavia.

She has recorded the Brahms Concerto with Kurt Sanderling, solo sonatas by Bartók, Honegger and Prokofiev, and her albums for Chandos include sonatas by Fauré and Strauss, Prokofiev and Schumann, all with pianist Gerhardt Oppitz.

Marina Gusak-Grin made her performing début at the age of six in Russia and was winner of the Gold Medal in the International Polish Radio Competition at the age of eleven. She was an outstanding student at the Professional Music School for Gifted Children in Moscow, and as an already successful concert pianist she continued her studies at the Moscow State Conservatory under David Oistrakh, Leonid Kogan and Yuri Yankelevitch. Upon her graduation, she joined the faculty of the Conservatory, a rare honour.

During the next ten years Marina Gusak-Grin reached the heights of a Russian musical career, performing regularly in the Great Concert Halls of Moscow and Leningrad and touring throughout the Soviet Union. In 1970 she

received a special diploma in the International Tchaikovsky Competition. She has also made several chamber music recordings.

She now lives in Philadelphia with her husband, the conductor Leonid Grin, and their two children. She has performed regularly as a member of the Moscow Trio and is currently active as a concert pianist and private instructor.

A Chandos Digital Recording

Recording Producer: Tim Handley; Sound Engineer: Ralph Couzens
Recorded in the Great Hall of University College School, Frognal, Hampstead, London on March 21 & 22, 1986
Front cover photo by Clive Barda, London
Cover Design: Mantis Studio, London; Art Direction: Janet Osborn

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