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Tchaikovsky's Other Piano Concerto

by **LESLIE ATKINSON**

IT comes as a surprise to many concert-goers to learn that Tchaikovsky wrote a second piano concerto. The universal success of the first, the B Flat Minor Concerto, has in the past gone to the heads of performers and public alike. Assuredly it is a stupendous work, full of excitement from start to finish; but, can one venture to say now, a little too well known? There is even a third piano concerto, which can be discounted at once; only one movement was ever completed, and was put together from sketches intended for a seventh symphony. That leaves for consideration then, Concerto No. 2 in G Major, Opus 44, for Piano

worthy instruments a generous share of the glamour which they do not, as a general rule, look for in a work featuring the pianoforte. This movement becomes, in reality, a triple concerto. It does not encourage heroics—its very nature is gentle and unassuming; even the cadenza is in character. The finale of the concerto is an honest romp and is to be enjoyed as such.

It is very interesting to compare Tchaikovsky's original version of this concerto with subsequent editions. Tchaikovsky was no pianist. Even the piano part of the B Flat Minor Concerto was eventually rewritten by Nikolay Rubinstein to render it eminently pianistic. Tchaikovsky seemed unaware of the devices that make a solo part exciting to play and to listen to, and had to rely on advice and practical help from soloists. It was Taneiev who prepared the G Major Concerto for pianists. Possibly it was he who advised the drastic reduction in the length of the slow movement. Originally it was twice as long, with insufficient work for the soloist. Musically, the movement gains enormously by the cut. It was on the last movement that Taneiev concentrated his efforts. His version, while not increasing the technical difficulty, gives the piano a brilliance which Tchaikovsky could not obtain.



LESLIE ATKINSON

and Orchestra, dedicated to his friend Nikolay Rubinstein, the same who damned the first concerto in its infancy.

This unreasonably neglected second concerto contains a wealth of material; the rhythm of the opening is instantly arresting; themes that follow have all the Tchaikovskian flavour one could desire; soloists find numerous and extended solo passages which encompass practically every note of the piano. Even the principal violin and cello of the orchestra are spot-lighted in this work, for in the slow movement they join the pianist who must perform accompany them discreetly and graciously, and even retire completely at one stage to give these

George Balanchine has used this concerto for his ballet, frequently performed by the Sadler's Wells Company, called *Ballet Imperial*. While it is a debatable point using a piano concerto as music for a ballet, especially as the work is ruthlessly cut to fit the choreographer's inspiration, it is impossible to deny that Tchaikovsky's music is redolent of the ballet. Here in the second piano concerto, listeners should have little difficulty visualising the scene, the animation and the excitement of the dance.

The introduction of this work to New Zealand audiences should prove interesting. Let us hope at least it shall ring a pleasant change; at most, that it has come to stay.

(Leslie Atkinson will be playing Tchaikovsky's Second Concerto with the National Orchestra under James Robertson at Invercargill on September 13.)

Dunedin Youth Concert

MAURICE TILL (left) will be the soloist at the Dunedin Youth Concert on Thursday, September 11. He will play Khachatryan's Piano Concerto, written in 1935, and now a concert favourite in the Soviet Union. The composer, born in 1903, is the son of an Armenian bookbinder, and was 19 when he began his serious musical studies. In this concerto he uses some of his native Armenian folk tunes, and there are echoes of Armenian instruments in it—it should have an especial appeal to a young audience as it is a fresh work with plenty of gusto. Khachatryan, like most of his fellow composers, has had trouble with the Soviet rulers from time to time—his last brush with authority occurred in 1948. Also on the programme is a Jazz Interlude, a Suite from "Midsummer Night's Dream," and "Capriccio Espagnole."



Spencer Digby photograph