

**Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35**  
**Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

*Allegro moderato*

*Canzonetta: Andante*

*Finale: Allegro vivacissimo*

This immensely popular staple of our repertoire was written in 1878, in Clarens, Switzerland, where Tchaikovsky had apparently gone to restore his balance, after his disastrous marriage to Antonina Miliukova. It is not quite clear on what facet of all this, the 'lamps of history' should be shone. Tchaikovsky regularly wishing to perhaps atone publically for his 'other' behaviour would combine himself unsatisfactorily with the affections of a woman. Of course, this wouldn't work. In recent years, Tchaikovsky experts have ceded two very valid points. The first is that after people found out about his homosexuality, especially as a critique of his work in Europe and beyond, they used his sexuality to falsely condemn his music. The same music they had praised to the skies, before knowing. The second point is more interesting and core to the whole story. Tchaikovsky, though concerned about public humiliation, managed to lead a very active and self satisfying sex life, enjoying relationships with many young men, many of whom were pupils. It is always interesting to note that all the great romantic tunes, including the one in his great score *Romeo and Juliet*, can be specifically attributed to male lovers.

One such, a losif Kotek, had travelled with him to Clarens, to apparently help him out of his 'so called' depression. Kotek had just been in Berlin with the great Joachim and Tchaikovsky and he played through Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole* at the piano, which may have been the catalyst for the great concerto we have today. As with most concertos the piece is in three movements.

These approximately three hundred words above lay some ground work for what our readers may imagine while listening to the piece. However, far more exciting and useful, would be to get into the mind of the soloist – and share personal and fascinating insights from a performers perspective. I have had the great fortune of having some illuminating conversations regarding this piece, with our very own violin virtuoso and Music Director, Marat Bisengaliev. I now share the gist of those interactions for our season brochure and I know you will greatly appreciate this 'tack' as much as I have.

All virtuosi talk of this piece and its difficulties. Not so with Marat. In his recollection he lumps it in with two other extraordinary virtuosic concerti, the Mendelssohn and the Paganini. All three had to be played and mastered - and were at an early age as a pupil of the Moscow School. It is interesting to note that one is a pupil of the school, in early acceptance, before one is considered a student at the conservatory – so the mastery of these three pieces was part and parcel of the Bisengaliev repertoire 'right off the bat'. However, Marat recalls how he was aware – even as he had to pass through his academia – that the innately stilted style in which he was forced to learn these pieces, represented a musical burden. He constantly tried to "get away from the Soviet style encrypted into my playing, - which I didn't like at all, in fact which I hated." He also recalls how fanatical this stylistic interpretation

could be and how in later years, with a notable Russian conductor who will remain unnamed, had forced, aggressive and public disagreements on the platform, trying to rehearse this piece. This, of course, is what one should expect from a musician who always seeks to go deeper and find a personal thread of logic from the composer that transmits directly into his hands during performance. This is what has made Marat's performances the more compelling and why his interpretations of many, including the great Edward Elgar are beyond comparison. Was the Tchaikovsky a hard concerto? He says "not really, not as hard as the Havergal Brian". His extraordinary virtuosity is always shrugged off, without a second thought.

Marat's '*school of playing*' is something that you will not hear him mention without noting a sudden reverence in his attitude, followed almost immediately by a playful twinkle in his eye that he belongs to a special elite club, the timing for which to join it, has come and gone. He takes his lead from Oistrakh, and from the great Russian pedagogue, Stoliarsky. He also takes his mantle in part from Leopold Auer, creating a sort of unbroken line, directly back to Tchaikovsky. Auer was always more disturbed later in life that he had treated Tchaikovsky's dedication of the Violin Concerto with such a lack of respect – but it was apparently fashionable to denigrate Tchaikovsky's first concerti, as also happened with Rubinstein's outcry with the first piano concerto. Critics are always most damned by their own words. Why does Marat reflect this great lineage in his playing? Because, their interpretations of Tchaikovsky were interesting, penetrating and different and not dogmatic and predictable - which he has come to loath.

Out of all the Tchaikovsky interpreters, Marat hails Mikhail Pletnev. Aside from the close personal family ties, whilst growing up, and the memories of Pletnev that include his late virtuoso brother, Marat recognizes that there is an iconoclastic, barrier-breaking quality to Pletnev, ***on and off the platform***. Whether or not one knows or acknowledges the 'details' one can not deny the sheer force of the music making. I am, of course, always delighted to write programme notes for our audiences, and hope that in some way, my excitement about the history and the compositions will 'rub off'. In a season where I have the joy of conducting the orchestra, this process is greatly heightened. However, shared personal moments such as these are to be treasured, so I thank Marat for his insights. We both very much look forward to performing this great work for you.

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