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Guild
HISTORICAL

Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

- | | | |
|----------|--|-------|
| 1 | Marche Slave | 9:11 |
| 2 | Romeo and Juliet – Fantasy Overture | 20:53 |
| 3 | Waltz from ‘Sleeping Beauty’ | 4:29 |
| | ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Recorded: Abbey Road Studio No.1, London, 5, 25 & 27 January 1960 HMV SXLP 20023 STEREO | |
| 4 | ‘Theme and Variations’ from Suite No.3 in G major | 19:53 |
| | Manoug Parikian, solo violin
PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
Recorded: Kingsway Hall, London, 24 March & 8 June 1955 HMV ALP 1372 | |
| 5 | 1812 Overture | 15:25 |
| | ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Recorded: Abbey Road Studio No.1, London, 5, 25 & 27 January 1960 HMV SXLP 20023 STEREO | |



**SIR
MALCOLM
SARGENT**

TCHAIKOVSKY

**Marche Slave
Romeo and Juliet
1812 Overture
Theme and Variations
Suite No.3
Sleeping Beauty
Waltz**

**Royal Philharmonic
Orchestra
Philharmonia Orchestra**

Recorded 1955 & 1960

Tchaikovsky * "1812" etc. * Sargent

HMV CONCERT CLASSICS STEREO



TCHAIKOVSKY

'1812'

MARCHE SLAVE
ROMEO & JULIET
SLEEPING BEAUTY WALTZ

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
SIR MALCOLM SARGENT



HMV Concert Classics

A GUILD HISTORICAL RELEASE

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– *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* – each drew from the composer some of his finest and most memorable music, individual movements from which he selected as concert suites almost from the time when the ballets were first produced. Each ballet has a memorably inspired waltz (which was arguably Tchaikovsky’s favourite dance form – waltzes are to be found in his orchestral concert music, including the Fifth Symphony), and that from *The Sleeping Beauty*, composed in 1889 and first produced in January 1890, remains one of Tchaikovsky’s most inspired creations in this form. The Waltz is heard near the beginning of Act I, danced by townspeople celebrating Princess Aurora’s 16th birthday.

Our programme ends with the festival overture *The Year 1812* (to give the work its proper title). The *1812 Overture* is more well-known than the *Marche Slave* and is of course another orchestral piece commemorating the retreat of Napoleon from Moscow in 1812 as a consequence of his aborted invasion of Russia. The work was written in 1880 at the instigation of Nikolai Rubinstein, ostensibly to coincide with a number of commemorative events, including the 70th anniversary of Napoleon’s defeat, and was first performed in 1882. The work is a tapestry of musical fragments, many of which would have been obvious to the composer’s contemporaries (and which, in various ways, remain so to us today), brilliantly and effectively put together in dramatic-narrative form. The coda is quite exceptional in including parts for military cannon and extra brass, which are heard on Sargent’s recording, as well as an organ, to bring the work to a suitably exciting and splendiferous conclusion.

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In the fifteen years following the end of World War II, four native-born conductors dominated British musical life: Sir Adrian Boult, Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir Malcolm Sargent and Sir John Barbirolli. Of the four, and although each of them appeared during the annual summertime Henry Wood Proms season at London’s Royal Albert Hall, it was Sargent who, conducting the vast majority of the programmes, was to become the undisputed ‘star’ of the Proms.

He dominated each Proms season, conducting the majority of the concerts, until ill-health forced his sudden withdrawal in 1967. He lived in the apartment building next door to the Hall, where he died in October of that year at the age of 72. Sargent’s heyday at the Proms was in the 1950s: during that decade, unlike today, concerts did not take place on Sundays, there were no ‘late-night’ or chamber-music Proms in other venues, foreign visiting orchestras were unknown, and programmes in the main were longer than they tend to be now. Unusually as it may seem to today’s listeners, for a concert series promoted by the BBC, not every Prom at that time was broadcast in full, and so there are no surviving recordings of every Prom before about 1960, after which the then-new BBC Controller of Music, William Glock, insisted that every Proms concert should be broadcast.

For many people, Sargent’s Proms appearances with his somewhat flamboyant and dapper appearance – though never foppish – tended to overshadow his undoubted musical qualities, which were considerable. For example, he was a gifted organist and pianist – in the latter discipline, he played several concertos by Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky earlier in his career – and he was also a composer, his best-known work being for orchestra, *An Impression on a Windy Day*, which he first conducted at a Prom in 1921 and for the last time in 1954 – this latter occasion being an early televised Prom, with Mark Hambourg as soloist in Liszt’s *Hungarian Fantasia* (Hambourg having first appeared with Henry Wood in 1895 in London). However, Sargent abandoned composition soon after his conducting career began to take off in the 1920s, yet he did make the occasional orchestral arrangement (most notably, perhaps, a fine orchestration of Brahms’s *Four Serious Songs* Opus 121).

In two areas, however, Sargent was supreme: conducting a large choir and accompanying concertos. In the 1930s, it was Sargent who partnered Artur Schnabel in the first integral set of the

Beethoven piano concertos, and his recordings of Elgar's 'The Dream of Gerontius' and Handel's 'Messiah' remain benchmarks for their sheer musicality for the period. Sargent conducted the premieres of Walton's 'Belshazzar's Feast' in 1932 and his 'Gloria' in 1961, and also of his opera 'Troilus and Cressida' at Covent Garden in 1954, though in the last instance Sargent was criticised for his vanity in refusing to wear the spectacles he had been prescribed, which caused him, especially at rehearsal, to miss and overlook details in the score.

Nonetheless, with the range of the Proms programmes, Sargent's repertoire was exceptionally wide, and he would often promote the music of contemporary composers of the time and bring to British audiences works he felt were unjustly neglected. In this regard, it was Sargent who gave the British premiere of Rachmaninoff's last work, the Symphonic Dances, in 1954 – fourteen years after the work was first heard in the USA! – and it was Russian music to which Sargent found himself more strongly drawn outside of the standard Austro-Germanic and British music repertoires.

Sargent's performances of Russian music were not confined to works of the nineteenth century – he conducted the British premiere of Shostakovich's Second Piano Concerto (at a Prom with Eileen Joyce in 1958) and Eleventh Symphony (the score withheld by the Soviet authorities, and only released 36 hours before the scheduled performance in January 1958) and gave the London premiere (at the Proms) of the composer's then-recently-released Fourth Symphony (a reading of considerable accomplishment and energy); he recorded the Ninth Symphony with the LSO, and Prokofiev's Fifth with the same orchestra (described as 'a great performance' by the English composer and critic John McCabe), and conducted (at the Royal Festival Hall in April 1957) the UK premiere of Prokofiev's Symphony-Concerto for cello and orchestra with Rostropovich, which they recorded at the same time for HMV. A year before, they had recorded Miaskovsky's Concerto, also for HMV, and it was around that time that Sargent was to make the first UK recording of Rachmaninoff's Third Symphony, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, also for HMV.

That 1957 Rostropovich concert concluded with two works by Tchaikovsky – the Rococo Variations for cello and orchestra Opus 33 and the Theme and Variations from the Third Orchestral Suite Opus 55, which was written in 1884. This latter piece is the 20-minute finale of

the Suite, which was a regular separate concert favourite at the time but is hardly ever heard today. It was a Sargent speciality, although Henry Wood himself and Sargent's colleague Basil Cameron conducted more performances of the piece at the Proms.

Yet Sargent often conducted the Theme and Variations, and his account with the Royal Philharmonic which ended that same Rostropovich appearance in 1957 earned the Russian cellist's enthusiastic endorsement. On this CD, we hear Sargent in an all-Tchaikovsky programme, which includes the Third Suite's Theme and Variations in a recording he made with the Philharmonia Orchestra in 1955 – most beautifully phrased and shaped, especially the solo violin part, played by the orchestra's then leader, Manoug Parikian.

The four other works here were all recorded with Beecham's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in January 1960, and if the variations finale from the Third Suite appears to have dropped out of the international repertoire the other items assuredly have not. Tchaikovsky's Slavonic March (*Marche Slave*) was composed in 1876, and although it is a relatively brief composition the background surrounding its genesis is somewhat complex, emanating from the Serbo-Turkish war then being fought and in which Russia sided with the Serbs. Tchaikovsky had been commissioned by the Russian Musical Society, founded 17 years before, to write a short piece for a Red Cross concert given in aid of the wounded. Tchaikovsky responded with this notably Slavic and sympathetically patriotic work, founded upon folk themes, which made an immediate impression. Four years later, Tchaikovsky was to allude to themes from it in his more extended *1812 Overture*.

This was in 1880, the year which saw not only the composition of the *1812 Overture*, but also the final version of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* Overture. This work had been originally drafted ten years earlier, and was first heard under Nikolai Rubinstein, but it came under criticism from several of Tchaikovsky's colleagues, including the highly influential Mily Balakirev. Two years later, Tchaikovsky produced a second version, yet this, too, was not to his entire satisfaction and it was only in 1880 that the work, now universally accepted as one of the composer's greatest and most characteristic masterpieces, received its final form and is, of course, the one Sargent recorded here with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Although individuals will always have their favourite from Tchaikovsky's three great ballets