

Silvio Varviso (26 February 1924 – 1 November 2006) was a Swiss conductor who spent most of his career devoted to conducting opera. He began his conducting career working in minor opera houses in Switzerland in the mid-1940s. He became the principal conductor of the opera house in Basel in 1956 where he served for six years. In the late 1950s he began appearing with major opera houses on the international stage as a guest conductor. During the 1960s, he became a fixture at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City and at the Royal Opera House in London. In 1965 he became the music director of the Royal Swedish Opera, and later in his career served as the music director of the Staatsoper Stuttgart and the Paris Opera. During the early 1990s he became a permanent guest conductor at the Vlaamse Opera where he remained active up until his death.



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## Facts about this Recording

Transferred from a Decca LP

Producer: Michael Williamson Engineer: Kenneth Wilkinson

Recorded: 2&8 May 1958 Kingsway Hall, London

# TCHAIKOVSKY

## 1812 Overture • Capriccio Italien

Kenneth Alwyn • London Symphony Orchestra Band of the Grenadier Guards

## Francesca Da Rimini

Silvio Varviso Conducts  
L'Orchestre De La Suisse Romande



**HD TT**  
HIGH DEFINITION TAPE TRANSFERS

**DSD256**  
DSD  
Direct Stream Digital

Mastered in DSD256

Kenneth Alwyn (b. 1925) was long renowned for his work in ballet and film. Alwyn's recording career dates to 1958, when he recorded the first stereo version of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture for Decca Records with the London Symphony Orchestra and the Band of the Grenadier Guards. The recording famously featured slowed-down gunshots instead of cannon fire. It remained a mainstay of the classical catalogue for almost forty years.

Tchaikovsky actually tells the story of Napoleon's retreat from Russia in 1812. In fact, Tchaikovsky even references the French national anthem *La Marsillaise* and Russia's *God Save the Czar* within the music. The 1812 Overture was commissioned in 1880 by Nikolai Rubinstein for the Moscow Exhibition of 1881. The newly-constructed Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was scheduled to be opened in commemoration of the historical events of 1812, the year that Napoleon invaded Russia. After Moscow burned, he ordered French troops to retreat, but winter set in early. Casualties in the French Grand Army were catastrophic. Napoleon's forces were effectively wiped out, forcing him to return to France to raise a new army. Given the historical observance and the occasion of the cathedral opening, Tchaikovsky combined French and Russian anthems with Russian Orthodox chant and a healthy dose of military bombast. The result was one of the most popular overtures ever composed.

Tchaikovsky completed his Slavonic March in the autumn of 1876, and it received its first performance in St. Petersburg on the 17th November of that year. The occasion was a concert in aid of Russian volunteers wounded in the Serbo-Turkish War, which Russia joined in 1877. Based on Russian and Serbian folk melodies, the score bears the heading "in the manner of a funeral march." There was an air of patriotic enthusiasm at the time for a 'wider' Pan-Slavonic movement, to which Tchaikovsky lent his support. This was recognised (together with his varied State Commissions over the years) by the Czar who, rather

belatedly, awarded him a life pension in 1888. Based on Russian and Serbian folk melodies, the score bears the heading "in the manner of a funeral march." Yet, the "trio section" enjoys a carnival atmosphere in rustic figures for clarinets and bassoons. Out of the full orchestral complement tuba and string pound out the Russian National Anthem, "God Save the Czar." Later, a lengthy development based on the opening theme ensues, until it re-emerges in all its triumphal glory on oboes, brass and cellos and played out into a valedictory chord. Tchaikovsky re-introduces the processional carnival atmosphere in the clarinets as a jaunty dance rhythm. The horns then enter with a parallel marching theme (the 7th in this short work) out of which the Russian Anthem re-emerges and blazes forth in magisterial triumph, leading into a coda in thrilling volleys and cannonades!

Tchaikovsky composed his Italian Caprice in 1880. While it starts somberly, with a tune taken from a Rome barracks fanfare – the Royal Cuirassiers - the Caprice turns to high spirits and merry-making. Essentially a virtuoso piece of orchestration, Tchaikovsky adds various rustic elements to a series of Italian folk songs. Tchaikovsky sought to create a Mediterranean fantasy, writing to his patroness Mme. Von Meck, "Thanks to the charming themes, some of which come from collections and some of which I have heard in the streets, this work will be effective." Typical of Tchaikovsky's mastery of orchestral colors, the piece vibrates with pageant and excited energy, passing through a slightly melancholy phase to a climax redolent with the popular tarantella, a favorite of composers taken with the abundant folk life of the Italians.

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