

Having learned the fundamentals of music from his father, Sviatoslav Teofilovich Richter taught himself the piano and had already given public concerts before entering the Moscow Conservatory in 1937. While still a student, Richter won first prize at the All-Union Contest of Performers of 1945. His playing earned him considerable renown, and by the time of his graduation in 1947 he had devoted fans. In 1949 he garnered the coveted Stalin Prize.

Richter gave the 1942 premiere of Sergei Prokofiev's Piano Sonata No. 6 -- the composer's first work in that form for years, and the first one he did not premiere himself. This resulted in wild acclaim for both performer and composer. Thereafter, Richter was a great proponent of Prokofiev's music, premiering also the Seventh and the Ninth Sonatas, the latter of which is dedicated to him.

Though word of Richter's excellence (and occasional poor-quality recordings) had spread outside of Russia, his foreign engagements were limited to Eastern Bloc countries (and, in one case, China) where Soviet officials felt there was reduced risk of defection. However, his 1958 performance of Prokofiev's Fifth Piano Concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra (on tour in Leningrad) generated such excitement that he was finally permitted to tour the United States, further bolstering his reputation as a virtuoso. Engagements in all of world's musical centers followed. Richter was known as a pianist of transcendent abilities, particularly adept at highlighting the nuances of different styles. Though his interests focused primarily on music of Beethoven, and Prokofiev, he was also highly regarded for his Schubert, Schumann, Bach, Debussy, and Ravel; and in the early 1960s he made a memorable recording of Benjamin Britten's Piano Concerto with the composer conducting.

Richter did not favor studio recordings; therefore, most of his recordings are from live performances. Many of them, particularly those from Soviet concerts, suffer from indifferent sound quality and excessive audience noise, but his playing had an electric quality that transcended these handicaps.

The pianist earned a reputation for being difficult and aloof. He was notoriously apt to cancel performances on whims, or arrive late without explanation or apology. However, those who heard him were rarely disappointed. He preferred intimate concert settings over big auditoriums, and thus returned many times to the Aldeburgh and Spoleto Festivals. He was the centerpiece of the Fêtes Musicales, held annually beginning in 1964 at Grange de Meslay, near Tours.

Among his greatest recordings are his Schubert sonatas, Rachmaninov and Prokofiev concertos, Liszt concertos (these have the benefits of first-rate sound), and his Schumann. He has also served as a chamber musician and accompanist, playing piano duets with Britten, and accompanying Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, among others.



*S. Richter*



## **Tchaikovsky**

### **Piano Concerto No.1**

In B Flat Minor

**Sviatoslav Richter**  
piano

**Herbert von Karajan**  
Vienna Symphony Orchestra



Although Tchaikovsky was already an accomplished composer (having already produced his first two symphonies, a string quartet, and two notable tone poems, all of these successful and enduring works), he still sought the approval of mentors such as Balakirev and Nicolas Rubinstein. On Christmas Eve 1874 he played the concerto for Rubinstein (its intended soloist) in an empty classroom. Rubinstein responded with a torrent of castigation, made famous by Tchaikovsky's own recollection. Tchaikovsky slunk off in despair. Later Rubinstein called him back and detailed a list of changes that must be made by a certain date if Rubinstein were to perform it. Tchaikovsky wrote that he responded, "I shall not change a single note, and I shall publish the concerto as it is now." He continued in his reminiscence, "And this, indeed, I did." Well, not entirely. Although there are no really substantial changes, he did subject the concerto to some minor revision before it was printed, as happens with most compositions. The premiere fell to Hans von Bülow, who played it first in Boston, October 15, 1875. The audience was enraptured and demanded a repeat of the entire final movement. Von Bülow took the concerto back to Europe, where it was quickly added to the repertoire of other leading pianists; even Rubinstein started playing it in 1878. It has been a giant success, virtually the epitome of the romantic piano concerto, ever since.

The form of the concerto is lopsided: possessing a notably large scale introduction, the broad melodies of the first movement run its length out to nearly 25 minutes, more than the length of the two remaining

movements combined. Its arresting opening horn call, with bold orchestral chords interrupting, leads immediately to one of the most recognizable and beloved of classical melodies, played by strings with rich harmonic support from the piano solo. Tchaikovsky initiates a great formal surprise by going straightway into a full-fledged cadenza for the piano solo, a powerful treatment of the theme. The strings then reassert the melody in its original form -- and all this is only the introduction to the first movement proper. A lengthy introduction to be sure (106 measures), but once it ends, that's the last time in the concerto this music is used in any way. The movement proper is a full-scale sonata-allegro treatment of two themes, one reputedly a Ukrainian folk theme, the other a gentle romantic theme. There is great drama and passion in its working out; when it is all over one realizes that there is also a minimum (for Tchaikovsky) of angst and pathos.

The second movement is tender, beginning with pizzicato chords so quiet as to be almost whispers. A flute melody of young adolescent tenderness is the main theme of the movement. There is a central section with a delicate waltz.

The finale opens with a rushing string figure and a powerful drum stroke. The main theme is an arresting, galloping dance made up of many short phrases. Yet another romantic theme provides contrast.



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Sviatoslav Richter, piano

Herbert von Karajan Vienna Symphony Orchestra

1. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso

Allegro con spirito 22:08

2. Andantino semplice - Prestissimo - Tempo I 6:55

3. Allegro con fuoco 7:06

Total Time: 36:09

Recorded by DGG 1963

Transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape



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