Review: Tchaikovsky. 1840-1893

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A ST. CECILIA'S DAY CELEBRATION.

THE BISHOP OF LONDON ON MUSIC.

The earliest known celebration of St. Cecilia's Day took place in the year 1683. In the following year it took place in the Hall of the Stationers' Company, where the festivals were held until 1703. The Account of the Warden of the Company contains this entry:

Received, the 25th of November, 1684,
for the Musical Feast kept in the Hall - £2 . 0 . 0

This amount is entered under the head of 'Feasts and Funerals.' The Feasts need no explanation: the Funerals for which the Hall was used were those of persons whose obsequies were attended by a great concourse of relations and friends. On those occasions the Hall was hung with black draperies, which were kept for the purpose, and the corpse being conveyed over-night, was thence borne, followed by its long train of mourners, to its final resting-place. Stationers' Hall was long associated with feasts of music, especially the St. Cecilia Day celebrations. Dr. Blow composed no fewer than four Odes that were performed there; and in 1692 Henry Purcell not only composed an Ode to celebrate the day, but the counter-tenor solo in it—'Tis nature's voice'—was 'sung with incredible graces by Mr. Purcell himself'!

To pass from the end of the 17th to the beginning of the 20th century, an interesting celebration of St. Cecilia's Day took place on the day—November 22—when the Livery Club of the Worshipful Company of Musicians held high festival in the very same Hall of the Stationers' Company wherein Purcell sang and other old-world musicians had conducted their compositions. Mr. Clifford B. Edgar presided, and among the guests who honoured the Club by their presence were the Bishop of London and Dr. W. H. Cummings, Principal of the Guildhall School of Music.

The Bishop of London, in responding to the toast of 'The visitors,' began by saying: 'I am nothing of a musician: I wish I was.' In the course of his remarks he said: 'Music is one of the greatest rests that we have in this weary London. When I was a working missionary in East London, music was one of the most powerful influences which I experienced in my work.' He then went on to speak of an oratorio performance in Bethnal Green, at which 2,000 persons paid twopence each for admission, on which occasion '100 hooligans became spell-bound before the music of the Messiah.' When the Bishop made a few remarks in the course of the performance, one man shouted out 'When are we going to 'ave the 'allelujah chorus?' 'Give the people the best music,' said his Lordship, 'and they love it.' Referring to church music, he remarked upon that at St. Paul's Cathedral, saying, that after the anthem had been sung on some Sunday afternoon when he had been going to preach, he had asked himself, 'What more of a sermon could be needed than that? The words of the anthem go home to the soul better than any sermon.' The foregoing are some of the thoughts to which the Bishop gave expression, and his utterances on the uplifting influences of music are most valuable and encouraging.

As usual on these occasions music was made a special feature of an enjoyable evening, thanks to Mr. Arthur F. Hill, the Treasurer of the Club. The programme included two songs from a St. Cecilia Ode by Boyce, and similar excerpts by Blow, Purcell and Handel, in addition to a sonata for the violin by Nicola Matteis. Mr. Hill had also, as on previous occasions, prepared a dainty programme-book. This contained by way of frontispiece the

facsimile of an elaborate card of invitation to the St. Cecilia's Day Celebration in 1696, which reads:

Sir,

You are desired to meet a Society of Gentlemen Lovers of MUSICK on Munday ye 23^d. of this instant Novem^{br} 1696, being the Sequel of St. Cecilia's day, at 9 of ye Clock exactly, at St. Brides Church in Fleet-Street, where will be a Sermon & Anthem, & afterwards to dine at Stationers Hall, near Ludgate, where before Dinner there will be a Performance of MUSICK.

[Then follow the names of the eight Stewards, including those of Moses Snow, B.M., and Nicola Matteis, Gent.]

Pray pay 10^s. at ye receipt of this Ticket & bring it with you.

No Servants will be admitted, care being taken for attendance.

Dr. Cummings, in response to the toast of 'Music,' expressed the hope that the sermon in St. Bride's Church and a performance of sacred music there might be revived as part of the celebration of St. Cecilia, and a capital speech by Sir Ernest Clarke was by no means the least attractive feature of a pleasant St. Cecilia celebration.

TCHAIKOVSKY.*

1840-1893.

Twelve years have come and gone since Tchaikovsky (to adopt the spelling of the name given in the book under review) drew his last breath at the age of fifty-three. His 'Life and Letters' were compiled and edited in the Russian language by his brother, M. Modeste Tchaikovsky, and issued in three volumes by M. P. Jurgenson, the well-known music-publisher, of Moscow. To this publication succeeded a German version (2 vols.), and now English readers are put in possession of the curious life-story of a very remarkable man and musician. At the outset it may be said that Mrs. Newmarch, in the attractive volume before us, has produced a most fascinating book. 'Wherever feasible,' she says, 'I have preferred to let Tchaikovsky himself tell the story of his life.' This is excellent, but none the less does she merit the highest praise for the skilful manner in which she sets forth the story of Tchaikovsky's career. In so doing she contributes to musical literature a biography that is in perfect taste and of absorbing interest.

Born in May, 1840, the son of a Russian Government official, Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky lost his mother when he was only six years old. He entered the world handicapped with a neurotic, indolent temperament, which developed into a morbid disposition and culminated in spiritual and mental disturbance when he had arrived at years of discretion. The only music in the house of his childhood was an orchestration, to which the boy owed his first musical impressions. This instrument he was never tired of hearing, especially in a Mozart composition (airs from 'Don Juan'), which, as played by the orchestration, awakened in him 'a beatific rapture.' At this early age he fell in love with Mozart, to whom he remained true throughout his life, as many instances in Mrs. Newmarch's book abundantly testify. His earliest creative attempts were in the nature of childish improvisations, 'just for myself alone when I feel sad,'

* 'The Life and Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky.' By Modeste Tchaikovsky. Edited from the Russian, with an Introduction, by Rosa Newmarch: Illustrated. London: John Lane.

as he records. He was never exploited as a musical prodigy, indeed his musical propensities were regarded as 'useless trifling,' and one of his friends suggested the avocation of an inspector of meat as a lucrative and suitable calling in life. Educated at the School of Jurisprudence at St. Petersburg, Tchaikovsky obtained a post in the Ministry of Justice, but in 1862, at the age of twenty-two, he entered the Conservatoire of Music at St. Petersburg, which Anton Rubinstein had founded in the previous year (1861). There he studied harmony and composition under Rubinstein, who had original methods in teaching the young ideas how to shoot. For instance, he set Tchaikovsky the task of orchestrating Beethoven's D minor pianoforte sonata in four different ways, whereupon the young student 'elaborated one of these arrangements, introducing the English horn and all manner of unusual accessories, for which the master reprimanded him severely.' A very warm and lifelong affection, however, sprang up between Tchaikovsky and both the brothers Rubinstein, Anton and Nicolas; on one occasion the latter lent the composer of the Pathetic symphony his dress coat in order that the youth might attend a ball. At the Conservatoire Tchaikovsky studied the flute, which he played in the orchestra; also the organ. For the latter instrument he composed nothing. On the completion of his academic course he became a professor of harmony and composition at Moscow Conservatoire until he relinquished all teaching engagements for the more congenial occupation of composition. The ups and downs of his professional life, including his excursion into the field of musical journalism, are most pleasantly related in Mrs. Newmarch's never-dull pages.

English readers will feel interested in the references to the land of 'Rule, Britannia.' As a young man, aged twenty-one, Tchaikovsky paid his first visit to London in 1861. 'London is very interesting,' he records, 'but makes a gloomy impression. The sun is seldom visible, and it rains all the time.' This was in the summer. He heard Madame Adelina Patti, who then made her English début in opera, but he saw 'nothing particular' in her, though in later life she fascinated him. His later visits to England, as a famous man,—in 1888, 1889, 1893 (the year of his death)—will be fresh in the memory of the public, who will find pleasure in reading his impressions of our country and its institutions, including his visit to Cambridge and the honorary degree of Doctor of Music which was then conferred upon him, his conductorship of the Philharmonic concerts, &c. His visit to America in 1891 was not without its amusing experiences.

It is always interesting to find foreign musicians in bonds of sympathy with English literature: so with Tchaikovsky. As a young man of twenty-five he writes (in a letter):

I laugh heartily over Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, with no one to share my mirth; but sometimes this thought incites me to even wilder hilarity. I recommend you to read this book; when one wants to read fiction it is best to begin with such an author as Dickens.

Again, much later in life and in a letter to his biographer-brother, Modeste, he sounds a pathetic note:

Modi, I am writing at night with tears in my eyes. Do not be alarmed—nothing dreadful has happened. I have just finished *Bleak House*, and shed a few tears, first, because I pity Lady Dedlock and find it hard to tear myself away from all these characters with whom I have been living for two months, and secondly, from gratitude that so great a writer as Dickens ever lived.

Once more, writing at the age of forty-three, he says:

I am devoured by impatience to master enough English to master Dickens easily, and I devote so many hours a day to this occupation that, with the exception of breakfast, dinner, and the necessary walk, I literally spend every minute in hurrying madly to the end of something. This is certainly a disease.

Another English author who made a great impression upon him was George Eliot. In this connection M. Modeste Tchaikovsky relates a specially interesting incident:

At this time we discussed subjects for a new opera. Peter Ilich's favourite author in later life was George Eliot. Once during his travels abroad he had come across her finest book, *The Mill on the Floss*, and from that time he considered she had no rival but Tolstoi as a writer of fiction. *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner*, and *Middlemarch* stirred him to the greatest enthusiasm, and he read them over and over again. He cared less for *Romola*, but was particularly fond of *Scenes from Clerical Life*. For a time he seriously contemplated founding the libretto of his next opera upon *The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton*. He wished me to read the tale and give him my opinion. I must confess that, from his own account of it, I persuaded him to give up the idea.

I do not know if I actually convinced him, or whether he lost interest in it himself, but he never referred to this tale again when he spoke of other subjects for a libretto.

As may be assumed there are many references to the compositions of Tchaikovsky in the 782 pages of this admirable biography, to only a few of which reference can now be made. In regard to the '1812' overture the composer rightly designates it 'very noisy,' and goes on to say: 'I wrote it without much warmth of enthusiasm; therefore it has no great artistic value.' We are told that the principal subject of his first pianoforte concerto (in B flat minor) is a phrase sung by Malo-Russian blind beggars at a village fair at Kamenka:

In regard to pianoforte technique, he writes:

As I am not a pianist, it was necessary to consult some virtuoso as to what might be ineffective, impracticable, and ungrateful in my technique. I needed a severe, but at the same time friendly, critic to point out in my work these external blemishes only.

He played this concerto to Nicolas Rubinstein, who said the work was 'impossible,' that 'it needed to be completely revised,' and that if it were remodelled according to his requirements, he would bring it out at one of his concerts. 'I shall not alter a single note,' replied Tchaikovsky, 'I shall publish the work exactly as it stands.' He did.

One of his earliest creations, as it was one of Beethoven's latest, was a setting of Schiller's 'Ode to joy.' The fourth symphony (in F minor, and dedicated to 'My best friend') was his favourite composition. He looked upon his fifth symphony (in E minor) as a failure. 'There is something repellent, something superfluous, patchy, and insincere, which the public instinctively recognises.' The title 'Pathetic' bestowed upon the famous B minor symphony is due to M. Modeste Tchaikovsky, who thus records the incident:

The morning after the concert [which took place on November 18, 1893, new style] I found my brother sitting at the breakfast-table with the score of the

Symphony before him. He had agreed to send it to Jurgenson in Moscow that very day, and could not decide upon a title. He did not wish to designate it merely by a number, and had abandoned his original intention of calling it 'A programme Symphony.' 'Why programme,' he said, 'since I do not intend to expound any meaning?' I suggested 'tragic Symphony' as an appropriate title. But this did not please him either. I left the room while Peter Ilich was still in a state of indecision. Suddenly the word 'pathetic' occurred to me, and I returned to suggest it. I remember, as though it were yesterday, how my brother exclaimed: 'Bravo, Modeste, splendid! *Pathetic!*' Then and there, in my presence, he added to the score the title by which the Symphony has always been known.

In an interesting letter (p. 496, and written in 1885) on 5-4 rhythm, he says: 'It would be curious, and certainly "an effort to be original," to write a piece with a simple rhythm of 2-4 or 3-4 time in 5-4 time.' The well-known pianoforte-piece 'Chant sans paroles' was composed when he was twenty-seven, at Hapsal, while on a holiday tour in Finland during the summer of 1867. In regard to his use of the celesta in the 'Nut-cracker' Suite (or Fairy Ballet), the following letter speaks for itself; it is dated June 15, 1891, and written to his publisher, M. Jurgenson:

I have discovered a new instrument in Paris, something between a piano and a *glockenspiel*, with a divinely beautiful tone. I want to introduce this into the ballet and the symphonic poem. The instrument is called the 'Celesta Mustel,' and costs 1,200 francs. You can only buy it from the inventor, Mustel, in Paris. I want to ask you to order one of these instruments. You will not lose by it, because you can hire it out to the concerts at which *The Voyevode* will be played, and afterwards sell it to the Opera when my ballet is put on. . . . Have it sent direct to Petersburg; but no one there must know about it. I am afraid Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazounov might hear of it and make use of the new effect before I could. I expect the instrument will make a tremendous sensation.

As is more or less the case with hypochondriacal men, Tchaikovsky was not without a sense of humour in his mental equipment. For the Russian coronation festivities of 1883 he was asked to arrange the popular 'Slavias' from Glinka's opera 'A life for the Tsar' for performance by a chorus of 7,500 voices. After accomplishing this somewhat uncongenial task he sent the arrangement to M. Jurgenson with the following remarks:

There are only a few bars of 'original composition' in the work, besides the third verse of the text, so if—as you say—I am to receive a fee from the City of Moscow, my account stands as below:

For the simplification of sixteen bars of choral and instrumental music, to be repeated three times	3 <i>r</i> .
For the composition of eight connecting bars	4 <i>r</i> .
For four additional lines to the third verse, at forty kopecks per line	1 <i>r</i> . 60 <i>k</i> .
Total	8 <i>r</i> . 60 <i>k</i> . = 16 <i>s</i> . 11½ <i>d</i> .

This sum I present to the City of Moscow. Joking apart, it is absurd to speak of payment for such a work, and, to me, most unpleasant. These things should be done gratuitously, or not at all.

He makes an amusing reference to a critic who, speaking of the variations in the Third Suite, said 'that one variation describes a sitting of the Holy Synod and another a dynamite explosion'!

Tchaikovsky's love affairs occupy no inconsiderable portion of this biography. His infatuation for Désirée Artôt; his mysterious marriage with the 'rather good-looking' Antonina Ivanovna Milioukov—a union which lasted two months only; and his friendship with Nadejda Filaretovna von Meck, a widow. The last-named lady was not only a great admirer of the composer, but she greatly befriended him financially. Much correspondence of an intimate nature passed between them; but strangely enough to the end of their days they never exchanged a word, scarcely even a casual greeting. M. Modeste Tchaikovsky refers to Madame von Meck as his brother's 'best friend and benefactress.'

It is time, however, and only fair, to refrain from further quotation from Mrs. Newmarch's excellent book—one that, from a reviewer's point of view, contains as many plums as a Christmas pudding, to use a seasonable simile. Enough has been said to induce the reader to peruse these entertaining pages. The get-up of the volume is above reproach, and its twenty illustrations include a photograph of the fine portrait, painted by Kouznetsov in the year of Tchaikovsky's death. By kind permission of Mr. John Lane, the publisher of the English edition of the 'Life,' we are enabled to give this as the special portrait supplement in the present issue of THE MUSICAL TIMES. No truer, or more living likeness of Tchaikovsky exists.

MR. RANDEGGER AND THE NORWICH FESTIVAL.

Mr. Randegger brought away with him from Norwich some tangible proofs of the esteem in which he is held by those who have been associated with him at the Musical Festivals there which he has conducted since 1881. The principal artists (Mr. Ben Davies acting as their spokesman) presented the veteran musician with a handsome solid silver loving-cup on which, in addition to the names of the donors, is engraved:

Presented to CAVALIERE ALBERTO RANDEGGER, as a small token of the respect, esteem, and admiration of the principal singers of the Norwich Musical Festival, 1905.

The Executive Committee, at the hands of Sir Charles Gilman, gave a massive silver Monteith bowl, mounted on an ebony plinth and bearing the following inscription:

Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Musical Festival.

Presented to ALBERTO RANDEGGER, ESQ., by the Committee of Management as a token of their appreciation of his valuable services as conductor during the last twenty-four years. October, 1905.

The London Symphony Orchestra—their first appearance as an organized body at a provincial Festival—showed how much they esteemed the conductor-in-chief at Norwich by begging him, 'as one of their best friends,' to accept a silver inkstand to which they had all subscribed.

Mr. Randegger, with that geniality which characterizes all his utterances, made suitable and appreciative acknowledgments of this trio of gifts. As his remarks on the London Symphony Orchestra have more than personal or local import, we quote from a report in the *Eastern Daily Press* of the speech he made in acknowledging the gift of the inkstand. After saying that the band 'were indeed the prima donna of the Festival—there was no mistake about that,' and that 'their playing had been a great treat to him,' he paid

The Musical Times.]

This portrait of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky is photographed from an oil-painting by Kouznetsov, in the Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow, and is reproduced from Mrs. Newmarch's 'Life' of the composer, by kind permission of the publisher, Mr. John Lane.

[December 1, 1905.

П. Чайковский.