

FACT SHEET

Piano Concerto 3

Tchaikovsky/Taneyev (1840-1893)

Composed: 1893

Genre: Orchestral

First Performed: St Petersburg, 1895 (first mvt), St Petersburg, 1897 (second/third mvts)

Length: 35 mins

In Brief:

The music of the Third Piano Concerto is based on Tchaikovsky's abandoned Symphony in E flat major. However, by the time he had finished orchestrating the lengthy first movement, Tchaikovsky had begun to have doubts about whether the music would stand up as a piano concerto, and was considering restricting it to just one movement. We'll never know if Tchaikovsky would have completed the concerto as he died with the final two movements in sketch form only. These latter movements were completed and orchestrated by his former pupil Sergei Taneyev, and published separately as the *Andante & Finale*.

Structure:

- I. Allegro brillante
- II. Andante
- III. Finale: Allegro maestoso

In Depth:

Tchaikovsky's Third Piano Concerto is dedicated to his friend Louis Diémer, an acclaimed French pianist at the time. Whilst composing the concerto, Tchaikovsky had been in London for a performance of his Fourth Symphony, during which he was reacquainted with Diémer. He subsequently dedicated the Third Piano Concerto to Diémer, perhaps having discussed the work with him in more detail during this visit.

Tchaikovsky met with various problems during the composition of the Third Piano Concerto. The material he drew from was symphonic in conception (a new symphony that Tchaikovsky sketched in 1891, but then rejected), which immediately made it awkward to utilise in a different form. And by the time of his death, the only completed movement was the first, which was published posthumously on its own. During work on the Third Concerto, Tchaikovsky

clearly had doubts, as he regularly sought the opinions of others, including the pianist Alexander Siloti and Sergei Taneyev, his pupil and fellow composer.

There is much controversy surrounding the completion of the final two movements by Taneyev, Firstly, it is unclear whether Tchaikovsky would have felt that his outlines for these two movements were strong enough to eventually complete, had he lived long enough to do so. In an early letter to one of his pupils Aleksandr Ziloti, Tchaikovsky wrote, *'Since it has turned out to be disgracefully long, I have decided to confine it to just one movement'* And yet, when he had completed this movement, he noted on the score: 'End of 1st movement' which perhaps implied there was more to come. Tchaikovsky had also asked Taneyev to look over the completed first movement, and Taneyev had found the solo part 'lacking in virtuosity'. Tchaikovsky had earlier claimed that if Taneyev shared his low opinion of the concerto, he would destroy it. Since this threat was not carried out, it perhaps also suggests that Tchaikovsky was intent on completing the work. Unfortunately his death prevented us from knowing his definite intentions.

Taneyev gave the first performance of the *Allegro brillante* in St Petersburg in 1895.

After Tchaikovsky's death, his brother, Modest Tchaikovsky, asked Taneyev to explore the sketches of unfinished works. Taneyev completed the orchestration of the unfinished final two movements of the Third Piano Concerto, and published the *Andante* and *Finale* in 1897, as an independent but related composition to the Concerto, with its own Opus number. The first performance took place on February 8, 1897 in St. Petersburg with Taneyev as soloist.

Not everyone shared Tchaikovsky's doubts about the Third Piano Concerto, a work overflowing with cascades of runs, scales, trills and cadenza passages. The esteemed music critic Eric Blom was an advocate of the work, both in its short and extended forms: Blom concludes:

"Why this concerto should never be performed passes comprehension, except perhaps that pianists feel that if they play Tchaikovsky, they must at all costs do the B flat minor over and over again. But surely anybody not wedded exclusively to that work—and monogamy is no virtue in concert-goers—would enjoy hearing No. 3 for once in a way and as a curiosity with the other two reconstructed movements, and more frequently by itself as a particularly attractive concert piece."