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**THE**  
**MEDTNER SOCIETY**

*Volume Three*



*The Hallmark of Quality*

## PIANO CONCERTO NO. I IN C MINOR—OP. 33

THE recording of Medtner's First Pianoforte Concerto completes that of the three works he has written in this form, and, if we glance at them, as a whole, it is possible to appreciate the spacious treatment and versatility of musicianship his use of concerto-form exhibits. Nobody, examining these scores, could gainsay the mastery of the piano idiom revealed in them, and one would have to go to the scores of Chopin, Liszt and Rachmaninoff to find their equal in stature, in this respect. The idiom and personality of Medtner's Concertos, are irrelevant, so far as an assessment of their musical skill and virtuosity are concerned, and, even to a musician or music lover, who should prefer the idiom of Beethoven and Mozart; or let us say, Scriabin, Debussy or Ravel, or again, Prokofiev, it would surely not be possible to remain blind to the pianistic genius of these works, to their rhythmic invention, their wealth of subtle device, their *pianistic* colouring and to the plastic handling of the form and material. Only to the thought or ideas of the music could objection be legitimately—from the personal point of view—sustained, in the sense that an admirer of Stravinsky might object to the thought of Beethoven, or of Chopin to that of Brahms. To the general music lover, however, who possesses catholicity of taste and outlook, and is not confined in his likings to one school, Medtner's rich mind and poetic sensitivity, and his profound musical feeling, will assuredly appeal strongly, and one day, let us hope, not far distant, these three piano concertos will take their rightful place amongst the other great piano concertos, and thereby relieve somewhat the strain placed on certain of them. So far, however, the ignoring of them by the concert-world and its pianists, remains a baffling riddle, the peculiarity of which is increased by the praise they have called forth in isolated performance. For example, Mr. Scott Goddard wrote, after a performance of the Second Medtner Concerto, "The vivid performance given by Edna Iles raises again the eternal question of why one man's work persists and another's does not. The concertos of Medtner's contemporary, Rachmaninoff, everyone knows and every expert pianist performs. Yet Medtner's Second Concerto, equally brilliant, more refined in musicianship and more profound in thought, is seldom heard." I hope that quotation of this view may dispose of any suggestion of partizanship on the writer's part, and that, now that the three works can be heard in recorded form, their neglect may soon come to an end. Music has many Eleusinian mysteries (the neglect of Dvorak's First and Second Symphonies for over fifty years, for instance; or the total ignoring of some forty of Haydn's middle-period symphonies, or of Schubert's Fourth and Sixth, or of Tchaikovsky's finest orchestral work, Manfred). The Medtner case is another of them, which the gramophone should soon dissipate, if anything can!

The First Concerto was composed at the time of the outbreak of the first great world-war, and it may be regarded as, first, a reaction to the bombshell-like character of that event, and, in its later stages, as an expression of optimism and hope for the future, when the tragedy should have rolled away. The first subject (strings) preluded by emphatic

chords, like blows of fate (piano) seems to typify the sledge-hammer intrusion of war into the summer of peace and orderly life in 1914. The work is, roughly speaking, in one long movement, in which, as those listeners who are familiar with the other two concertos will recognize, the themes are stated, contrasted, and dovetailed in a way which resembles natural growth. It would be fascinating to show one of them in all its various manifestations and metamorphoses throughout the work. The harmonious way in which the elements of the music are set out results in a homogeneity which all works in sonata form should possess, and Medtner's combination of the latter with cyclic form, gives the music striking vitality and originality. As one writer puts it, "the continuity and coherence of his thematic developments are comparable in our own day only to those of a very differently-tempered master (Sibelius); and his remarkable modifications of classical sonata form are wholly his own." It is, in fact remarkable, that those addicted to what one may term the analytical chemistry of musical composition have not dealt with him. His rhythmic resourcefulness and invention are another feature that invites study, and his creativeness in this respect is surely as much a matter for study and admiration as the work of those who are for ever seeking to invent new tonal effects and extravagant sonorities. It is not easy to find a composer who excels him in the synthesis of mind and poetry in music, or in rich tunefulness, allied with picturesque polyphony.

The form in this Concerto is classical, and sonata-form is spread over the whole work instead of being applied, in orthodox fashion, to separate movements. Salient characteristics of the three concertos are the evolution of idea, that is, the way in which the chief themes are integrated into a unity, the parts are related and varied, and the remarkably significant way in which each is welded into the general texture, given extra or different meaning by variation, or combination and the manner in which the whole work is built up with the elements progressively unfolding, and developing into an indivisible unity. A motif for example can be traced from the first page of its quotation to the last, with the various manifestations reflecting the course and emotional phases of the whole work. Perhaps no piano concertos surpass these three works in the feeling for structural growth and consummation of purpose. As to their beauty of melody and harmony and the skill with which the orchestra (never used but to say something significant) illumines the piano, the protagonist, these will be most appreciated by the sympathetic and cultured listener, who is attracted by vital thoughts eloquently expressed. When the works are well known, I think, admirers will include the generality of music lovers.

*Side One.*

*Allegro.*

Hammer-like octaves (piano) sound a dramatic note, and violins join in with a passionate, ardent theme, a kind of *cri de coeur* :—





# MEDTNER'S FIRST CONCERTO

The Piano accompanies with a chordal figure based on arpeggios, and soon a new motif of great importance creeps in unobtrusively :—



No. 1 is varied by the Piano in octave form, and eventually asserted vehemently (piano) and carried on by piano and orchestra, until No. 2 appears, proclaimed by Piano and then by Violins (*molto cantabile e espressivo*). Medtner's repetition of themes is invariably subject to variation in the treatment, and this will be noticed here, and throughout the work. The music, to this point (quotation of No. 2—violins) constitutes the First Subject, and we now encounter a transitional phase, based on the material already introduced, the piano treating No. 2 in a quiet lyrical manner. No. 2 will be heard, varied, from clarinet during this. The mood changes (*Abbandonamente, ma a tempo*), and the piano anticipates No. 3 (the second subject) followed by horn. It is as though one, charged with an enterprise of great moment, looked into, and reflected on its deeper implications. The music becomes a nocturne-like soliloquy. We now hear the Second Subject in expanded form.



## Side Two.

The quiet mood continues (clarinet introducing a new phase (No. 4) and piano (L.H.) and violins proclaiming another motif (4a) of the Second Subject group. No. 1 is heard from the violins and piano and, later we hear, suggested first by first violins, another motif, which is related to the Second Subject also, the latter being, like the First Subject, of a composite order :—

(Violins, and harmonically supporting horns) :—  
(*Molto espressivo*).



# T H E                      M E D T N E R                      S O C I E T Y

Another cognate idea, of Subject Two, is heard (piano) :—  
(Piano) (*Tranquillo, con molto tenerezza*).



The mood becomes animated and emphatic, and familiar allusions occur. Later, No. 2 is heard in bright and animated mood, in a sort of march rhythm. Two downward scales (flute) take the "ear" and the music continues in the new-found mood of joyous assertion. This concludes the Exposition section, which ends in D major with spread chords (piano).

*Side Three. Diminuendo, calmando, poco rubato.*

Prefaced by an eloquent ascending phrase (violins, then piano), a short cadenza (piano) brings us to the development section, which consists of Variations. During this Cadenza, No. 1 is heard in rich harmony from woodwind :—clarinets, horns and bassoons, and, at the end, violins play a sombre, expressive paraphrase of No. 1, which culminates in a cognate phrase for clarinet.

*Side Four. Tranquillo, meditamente.*

Variation 1 is introduced by muted 'cellos and continued by piano, lyrically Nos. 1 and 2 play a prominent part in this. Woodwind is to the fore. Muted strings are used.

Variation 2 *Molto cantabile, assoluto.* The key changes to F minor, and the piano indulges in a polyphonic "duet" with woodwind, with a wealth of lugubrious colouring. Flute, oboe and clarinet are joined by bassoon near the end. This rather sorrowful variation ends quietly with a peaceful, perfect cadence, which rounds it off expressively.

*Side Five. Variation 3. Tempo risoluto, quasi recitativo.*

Violins, with woodwind interpolation, have the stage here, and the piano enters subsequently, the material being treated plastically and subtly. When the piano takes over, the key changes to G minor, *Molto tranquillo meditamente.*

Variation 4. *A tempo, quasi recitativo.*

This, in E flat minor, has two pronounced characteristics, firstly, a short, snap-figure, based on No. 2, and commenced by violins :—



# M E D T N E R ' S                      F I R S T                      C O N C E R T O

and secondly (later on) a leaping figure, introduced by piano (L.H.) :—



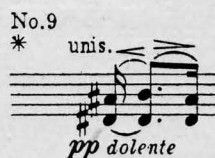
Both are intermingled with other ideas but dominate the scene. The variation is lively and bracing. No. 2 is heard from clarinet.

## Side Six.

The process of free variations continues, with No. 3 *Sostenuto* (E minor) (piano) and a variant of No. 4 (1st violins) which the piano repeats. The piano has a good deal of figuration (R.H.) and discourses on No. 3 (L.H.). Soon we get a new rhythm and a delightful, carefree scherzo-like movement begins (piano) in the bright tonality of A major with muted strings (*pizzicato*), *fantastico, ma sempre al rigore di tempo*, the music becoming buoyant and free. No. 1 supervenes, after a time (piano, L.H.) and then full strings (melodically) and woodwind (harmonically) combine in an ardent statement of No. 5, but the piano continues to assert the frolicsome scherzo mood. The trombone interpolates its imperious note (No. 5) and the piano, with an ascending scale ending in a trill, leads the way to a beautiful string (1st violins) statement (in C minor) full of yearning of No. 6 with strong woodwind (harmonic) support. This glowing song the piano sympathetically takes over (bass) and the theme is heard again in various quarters, but this time in D flat.

## Side Seven.

An oboe solo, based on No. 6, is heard, while the piano resumes the rhythm of No. 8. Piano accompanies the violins, while they repeat the oboe theme. Trombone follows suit, the music growing in power and gravitating towards the Recapitulation. A reversion to the scherzo-like style comes in the piano part, but with intensive power and a terse figure is heard from the violins :—



which has a Tchaikovsky-like ring in its suggestion of a mounting climax.

It has occurred before but acquires special significance here. A variant of No. 5 (strings) and again the terse figure follows, while the piano progresses vigorously and No. 1 rings out (violins). Not long after, the Recapitulation (concerned only with the first subject group) begins, with the latter theme ringing out passionately, and it will be heard (1½ inches from end of side) alternating with piano and orchestra, in canon form.

*Side Eight.*

A forceful passage of octaves (piano) leads up to the Coda, which is heralded by a stirring use of No. 2 (Brass, trombones, melodically) and horns (harmonically). The *Coda* is commenced by the piano's animated paraphrasing of No. 1, and orchestral statements of related material. No. 1 (piano) merges into No. 2 (piano, in thirds, R.H.) and some of the other themes and variants of them can be heard as the music progresses, from various instruments. A passage (piano) occurs with phrases based on No. 3 and No. 1,



both in the R.H. (piano), and, as has been stated in my notes of the other two concertos innumerable instances of theme metamorphosis, combination, etc., occur, which only the score can reveal, so far as the scheme of things is concerned. The ear can, of course, take in the result in sound, but not discern the means employed, which are too subtle and numerous to convey, without extensive quotation. The music grows in excitement.

Trombone (solo) can be heard, and, soon after, an elaborate *cadenza*, related primarily to No. 3. A pregnant and moving string utterance ushers in an elegiac passage for piano, with full chords (*lamentoso*, No. 1) and, thereupon, the piano (L.H.) with elaborate figuration (R.H.) discourses movingly on No. 1 while strings play *tremolo*.

*Side Nine.*

Heavy chords (piano) and a trombone proclamation of No. 2 are heard, echoes of No. 2, variously, and a string quotation of No. 3. No. 1 (piano) occurs and then a smooth, aqueous passage with piano and strings, leads to a full-blooded statement of No. 5, with powerful piano arpeggio-passages. No. 1 persists (piano) and many allusions are heard. The piano continues to emphasize No. 5, and the end is reached with colourful insistence on the main tonality (piano) and, after some further vehement arpeggios, three resounding iterations of the keynote, C.



## SONGS

## THE RAVENS. OP. 52, No. 2.

*Words by Alexander Pushkin.*

Vo - ron	k'vo - roh - noo	le - teet,
A Raven	to a raven	flies,
Vo - ron	vo - roh - noo	kree - cheet,
The Raven	to the other	cries,
Vo - ron	g'jay nahm	paw - o - byay - daht ?
Raven	where to	find a meal ?
Kark	bui nahm	aw tom praw - vay - dat ?
How	shall we	about it manage ?
Vo - ron	vo - roh - noo	v'at - fet
One Raven	to the other	answers
Znaee,	boo - det nahm	aw - byed
Just wait,	I've found	a meal.
Ve	chees - tom po - lay	pod ra - kee - toyee
On	the open field	under a willow-tree.
Bo - gah - teer	le - zjeet	oo - bee - tee
A brave man	lies	dead
Kem	o - beet ee	aw - chee - vaw ?
Who	killed him	and for what ?
Zna - et	so - kol leesh	ye - vaw
Answer	his steed alone	can give
Dah	kaw - buil - kah	vo - ro - nah - yah
Yes,	his coal-black	steed
Da	ho - zayee - kah	mo - lo - dah - yah
Or	his pretty wife	so young !
So - kol	vro - schoo	oo - le - tel
The horse	to the forest	has fled away
Ner	ka - buil - koo	ne - drook c'yel
In	the saddle	no rider sits,
A	ho - zace - ka	zjdot mee - lo - vah
And	the young wife	waits (for) her lover
Ne	oo - bee - too - vor	zjee - vor - vah
Not	the dead man	(but the) other !

## I CANNOT HEAR THE BIRDS SING (WORDS BY FET) OP. 28 No. 2.

(*Note.*—No copy of this song was available at the moment of writing these notes. In the poem, however, the poet declares that he cannot hear the birds sing, and other sounds of Nature's rejoicing, without at once thinking of his beloved. A sub-title of the song is, Serenade.)



CANZONA MATINATA. OP. 39, NO. 4.

(See Notes on Sonata Tragica for significance of this piece.)

If Medtner had orchestrated this piece for strings, it might have become his Humoresque or C sharp minor Prelude, so far as popularity is concerned. Its serene and limpid melody typifies the peace and happiness of a lovely summer's day. It was written in the later stages (1919) of the Revolution when uncertainty, distress and shortage obtained. At his house outside Moscow, and when bitter cold prevailed, Medtner, with his wife often having to hold candles for him to see better, wrote this enchanting piece.

SONATA TRAGICA. OP. 39, NO. 5.

This work forms part of the second series of *Forgotten Melodies*, Op. 39, as stated in the previous note on *Canzona matinata*. The composer intends that they should not be played apart. The series, referred to, comprises: *Meditazione*; *Romanza*; *Primavera*; *Canzona matinata*, and the *Sonata Tragica*. These five works, along with the other two series, Op. 38 and Op. 40, were composed in Russia, about 1919, that is two years after the Revolution. The three series are grouped under the title of *Forgotten Melodies* (as stated above) which owes its origin to Lermontov's poem, the *Angel*, the theme of which describes how an angel, carrying a young soul to earth and its sorrows, sings of the stainless souls in the realm of Paradise. Throughout its life of earthly trials, the soul of the young child, filled with longing, recalls the song of the angel and contrasts it with "earth's dull melodies." Medtner, in this series of pieces, tries to echo in the limited accents of earthly song, the strains of the "forgotten" heavenly melodies of the angel. The idea is interfused with the Platonic concept that we can give forth, on earth, only what we received before our arrival. The *Tragic Sonata* relates, of course, to earthly tribulation and tragedy; the *Canzona matinata* reflects the state of halcyon peace and happiness in life, as opposed to the darker side, and it appears in the sonata, as though evoking past happiness. Its incorporation therein brings to mind Dante's lines: there is no greater pain, than to recall past happiness in time of sorrow, and both themes, in their turn, are, of course, integrally related to the composer's theme of a pre-natal spiritual legacy (*Forgotten Melodies*) as part of our earthly experience.

*Side One. Allegro risoluto.*

A series of trenchant chords leads to the main theme in C minor:—



This is later carried on in the bass, and the aforementioned chords punctuate it. The theme itself is marked by the composer, "addolcito ma appassionato" and is passionately sorrowful.

The full chords end the opening part, and a soft interludial passage, with the melody in the bass (*cantando*), leads to a lyrical statement of No. 1 (in E flat major) of a consolatory nature. This eventually merges into the second subject theme of the *Canzona matinata*, "pp. cantando, con molto tenerezza," which makes effective contrast with the stress of the opening music.



*Side Two.*

The melody is expressed differently in the bass, with some poignant aspects, and some use of canon-form. A vigorous change occurs with some bold and ingenious rhythmic combinations, and the music comes to a halt on the tonic chord (E flat major)

A recitative-like section begins, with an emphatic sounding of E flat (bass) and an echo of the main theme, which is treated freely and reflectively, until the opening sequence of chords recurs, and there is some working-out of this material.

*Side Three.*

The recapitulation is heard and, at length, a *cadenza*-like section, based on No. 1, in which a sweet-sounding lyrical note is conspicuous. The music slows up and a vivid *Coda*, swift and richly notated, brings the work to a conclusion.