

Svetlanov conducts Glinka, Prokofiev & Tchaikovsky (1968)

Written by bluesever

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1 Mikhail Glinka *Symphony on two Russian themes, for orchestra in D minor, G. i193* (incomplete) 14:03 2 Sergey Prokofiev *Symphony No. 1 in D major ("Classical"), Op. 25* I. *Allegro* 4:21 3 II. *Larghetto* 4:02 4 III. *Gavotta. Non troppo allegro* 1:41 [play](#) 5 IV. *Finale. Molto vivace* 4:00 6 Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky *Symphony No. 3 in D major ("Polish"), Op. 29* I. *Introduzione e Allegro. Moderato assai (Tempo di marcia funebre) - Allegro brillante* 12:59 7 II. *Alla tedesca. Allegro moderato e semplice* 6:34 8 III. *Andante elegiaco* 11:30 9 IV. *Scherzo. Allegro vivo* 5:16 [play](#) 10 V. *Finale. Allegro con fuoco (Tempo di Polacca)* 9:23
USSR Symphony Orchestra Evgeny Svetlanov – conductor

On August 24, 1968, four days after tanks from the Soviet Union rolled into Czechoslovakia to crush the country's experiment in liberal communism, Evgeny Svetlanov and the USSR State Symphony Orchestra took the stage at the Edinburgh Festival. There had been noisy demonstrations outside and sometimes inside the halls every night of their first British tour, but inside Usher Hall Svetlanov and his orchestra were judged by their musicianship. Formed three years earlier by Svetlanov to preserve the true tradition of Russian performance practice -- a wide vibrato for the strings, a hard edge for the brass, a weird keening sound for the oboes -- the USSR Symphony was unknown in Britain except through a handful of scratchy Melodiya LP. In Usher Hall, Svetlanov and the USSR were judged and pronounced a success and the Russian tradition saved.

How does it sound decades later? A bit brutish, a little harsh, a tad rushed, and a lot over the top. Glinka's *Symphony on two Russian Themes* sounds dank and dark. Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* sounds torpid and turgid. Tchaikovsky's *Polish Symphony* sounds morbid, nervous, timid, and ultimately bathetically bombastic. The USSR Symphony itself sounds nervous and bombastic with strings that singe, brass that bite, woodwinds that wail, and a percussion section that should be kept on a leash. Svetlanov conducts with a swagger, but he's all bluff. Svetlanov's opening *Allegro* of the *Classical* starts with a swinging rhythm that starts sagging by

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the second theme. Svetlanov's Marcia funebre that opens the Polish starts misterioso, but turns cute before it gets to the Allegro brillante. And Svetlanov's Tempo di Polacca Finale of the Polish just sounds big, blunt, and dumb. BBC's remastered sound is a bit hard and a tad opaque. --- James Leonard, allmusic.com

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