

The Other Tchaikowsky



A biographical sketch of André Tchaikowsky

David A. Ferré

Cover painting: *André Tchaikowsky* courtesy of Milein Cosman

(Photograph by Ken Grundy)

About the cover

The portrait of André Tchaikowsky at the keyboard was painted by Milein Cosman (Mrs. Hans Keller) in 1975. André had come to her home for a visit for the first time after growing a beard. She immediately suggested a portrait be made. It was completed in two hours, in a single sitting. When viewing the finished picture, André said "I'd love to look like that, but can it possibly be me?"

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Preface

As I maneuvered my automobile through the dense Chelsea traffic, I noticed that my passenger had become strangely silent. When I sneaked a glance I saw that his eyes had narrowed and he held his mouth slightly open, as if ready to speak but unable to bring out the words. Finally, he managed a weak, "Would you say that again?"

It was April 1985, and I had just arrived in London to enjoy six months of vacation and to fulfill an overdue promise to myself. My specific goal was to attend concerts coincident with the proclaimed Musical Year celebrating the birth tercentenaries of Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti. I've never been able to have a vacation without suffering a guilt of inactivity, so I promised myself I would also write a long-postponed magazine article or two about concert pianist and composer André Tchaikowsky. At that time I knew nothing about André other than information contained in a short biographical sketch from one of his 1978 concert programs that I attended in Rochester, New York, and a 1982 newspaper account of his strange Last Will. But before I could start my research activities, I needed a place to live.

It is well known that short-term housing in London can be found around Earl's Court so I drove to Hogarth Road, across from the Earl's Court tube station. A number of real estate agents in this area advertised "Holiday Flats." I picked an agent at random and inquired. Yes, they did have something that had just come into the office, and someone would come and show me the flat. A gentleman arrived, we got into my car and, following his directions, drove towards Chelsea.

Like any prospective landlord, mine wanted to know a bit about me: how long had I been in London, what did I do for a living, and so forth. I told him I was an American free-lance writer and wanted to make London my home base for six months while relaxing, absorbing the events of the Musical Year, and researching a magazine article. I asked, "Did you ever hear of a concert pianist named André Tchaikowsky?" When he replied, "Would you say that again?" I repeated, "Have you ever heard of André Tchaikowsky?" Now pale, he stuttered, "André Tchaikowsky lived in my house for three years!" And so I met Michael Arnold.

I didn't rent Michael Arnold's flat in Chelsea - there was too much traffic noise -- but in short order I did meet his wife, Judy. Indeed, in the years 1963 to 1966, André Tchaikowsky lived in the Arnold household, along with another visiting pianist, Alfred Brendel. For the years 1963 to 1969, Mrs. Arnold acted as André's personal secretary, taking care of his business affairs and correspondence. After our initial conversation, the entire framework for two magazine articles was established, and Mrs. Arnold gave me names and locations of key persons who could provide details.

Two magazine articles were completed during my stay in London; one was published in *Music and Musicians* in November 1985, and the other in the *Musical Times* in December 1985. However, behind the facts recited in these articles lay hundreds of unanswered questions, and the mystery of how personality and talent had merged into this enigmatic artistic persona. There was also an accumulated trove of highly amusing anecdotes (highly disturbing to some of those involved) of shatteringly iconoclastic behavior. Always serious about the integrity of music when it was threatened by egos, hypocrisies or pretensions, André Tchaikowsky was also very sensitive to the vulnerabilities of others, and often devilishly humorous in exploiting them. Paramount is the question of personality and its effects on his career, but there is also the question of the motive and intellectual content of his compositions, and what part the unique circumstances and events of his childhood played in these.

Clearly, there was much more that should be recorded about his life and his music, so I decided to continue my research to a point where at least the draft of a biography could be written. By 1987, after five research trips to Europe (two to Poland), interviews of 75 people, and extensive correspondence, I felt that the research was complete enough to begin the biography.

It wasn't until the summer of 1989 that I was able to set aside a block of time to write my draft biography, followed by another block of time in the Spring of 1990 to complete the manuscript. Given my time constraints, I decided to do a biographical sketch rather than a full portrait. In its present state, my sketch is little more than an accumulation of the accounts provided me by André's friends, relatives, and colleagues, and a compilation of related documents and correspondence. The result is a factual account of André Tchaikowsky's life, but without any analysis of the evidence, for which considerably more technical research would be required in the areas of both music and the human psyche. It is hoped that a later, fuller realization of the account will be undertaken using my research materials, all of which shall be turned over to André's music publisher, Josef Weinberger, Limited, 12 Mortimer Street, London, WIN 7RD, England.

All who helped with the research, correspondence, and photographs used in making this book are identified in the Acknowledgments section at the back of this book. I thank them all, but I cannot possibly express the gratitude I feel for their personal help, support, and interest in my project.

André Tchaikowsky devoted his life to music as composer and pianist. He went about this in a way that made him exceedingly interesting to everyone who met him or who heard him perform. I have tried herein to record this dedicated and extraordinary life.

David A. Ferré

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On doit des égards aux vivants; on ne doit aux morts que la vérité.

[We owe respect to the living; we owe to the dead only truth.]

Voltaire