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An ‘Accidental’ Premiere? New Information on the First Performance of Čajkovskij’s Violin Concerto

Brett Langston¹

Čajkovskij’s Violin Concerto is one of his most famous and beloved works. The story of how he came to write it in a flourish of inspiration, only to have it rejected as ‘unplayable’ by the maestro to whom the concerto was originally dedicated — before it was ultimately championed against all the odds by a relatively unknown violinist — is well known. Yet, as with all the best stories, the truth is rather more complicated, and now a remarkable new discovery provides a fresh insight into the history of this concert-hall favourite.

Origins

When Čajkovskij arrived at Clarens in Switzerland in March 1878², he had no intention of writing a piece for violin. Indeed, he immediately set about a piano sonata (which would eventually become the *Grand Sonata*), although he confessed to his brother on 16 March that he was struggling: “I’m again having to force myself to work, without much enthusiasm. I cannot fathom why, despite so many favourable circumstances, I’m not in the mood for work. Am I played out? I’m having to squeeze weak and feeble ideas out of myself, and ruminate over every bar. But I’ll keep at it, and hope that inspiration will strike”.³

The ‘favourable circumstances’ mentioned by Čajkovskij alluded to the fact that he was staying in one of his favourite places with the people closest to him. He had arrived at the small village of Clarens, near Montreux, on 9 March with his younger brother Modest and the latter’s ten-year-old pupil Nikolaj Konradi (“Kolya”), and accompanied by his trusty servant Aleksej Sofronov (“Alyosha”). The composer had first stayed at the *Villa Richelieu* in Clarens the previous year, along with another brother, Anatolij, during which time he recovered sufficiently from the emotional aftermath of his ill-fated marriage to be able to finish his opera *Evgenij Onegin*. Now liberated from his teaching duties at the Moscow Conservatory, Čajkovskij returned to Switzerland in order to devote himself exclusively to composition, working not only on the sonata, but also on some piano pieces that would become part of his Opus 40.⁴

The composer’s mood was lifted by the arrival on 14 March of his violinist friend Iosif Kotek, whose studies in Berlin with the virtuoso Joseph Joachim had been temporarily interrupted by Joachim’s visit to London. Nevertheless, Kotek brought with him a plentiful supply of scores for piano duet and violin with piano, which Čajkovskij eagerly played through with him, as he reported to his patroness Nadežda fon Mekk on 15 March:

Today I played all day long with Kotek, both in 4 hands and with the violin. It has been such a long time that I have played, or even heard good music, that I am indulging in this pastime with

¹ The author is greatly indebted to Ronald de Vet for his kind assistance with German-language sources.

² Unless otherwise stated, all dates mentioned follow the Western (Gregorian) calendar, which at that time was twelve days ahead of the Julian calendar used in Imperial Russia.

³ Letter 776 to Anatolij Čajkovskij, 2/14 March 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 150–151.

⁴ See Letter 773 to Anatolij Čajkovskij, 27 February/11 March–1/13 March 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 144–145.

inexplicable pleasure. Do you know the *Symphonie espagnole* by the French composer Lalo? This piece was launched by the fashionable violinist Sarasate. It was written for violin solo with an orchestra and consists of a sequence of five independent movements, built on Spanish folk motifs. This item gave me great pleasure. Lots of freshness, lightness, piquant rhythms, and beautiful melodies, perfectly harmonized.⁵

Evidently this experience provided the inspiration that Čajkovskij had previously lacked, and three days later he announced that the piano sonata had been set aside in favour of a new work:

All morning I sat over a violin concerto, which I started yesterday and became carried away to such an extent that I've abandoned the sonata for the time being. I want to take advantage of Kotek's presence here. This will be novel and difficult work for me, but also interesting.⁶

His letters recorded his further progress on the concerto:

19 March — "I am still very busy with the sonata and the concerto. For the first time in my life I had to start something new, without having finished the previous one. Until now I have always adhered unswervingly to the rule of never starting a new task until the old one is finished. This time it so happened that I could not resist the desire to make sketches for a concerto, and then I became carried away and set aside the sonata, to which I will gradually return, however".⁷

20 March — "I've been busy again, and very successfully. The concerto is coming along — not particularly quickly, but it's coming".⁸

22 March — "The first movement of the violin concerto is already prepared. Tomorrow I shall set about the second. Since the day that the propitious mood came to me, it has not left me. In such a spiritual phase of life, composition completely loses the character of work: it is purely pleasure. While writing, one does not notice the passing of time, and if no-one came to interrupt the work, one could sit all day without rising".⁹

23 March — "I've begun to write the Andante of the violin concerto".¹⁰

27 March — "I'm finishing off a violin concerto. Somehow, quite by chance, I came up with an idea for it, sat down, became engrossed, and now the work is almost ready in draft".¹¹

28 March — "The concerto is written and finished in draft".¹²

29 March — "I've begun the fair copy of the concerto".¹³

30 March — "In the morning I copied out the concerto".¹⁴

⁵ Letter 777 to Nadežda fon Mekk, 3/15 March 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 152–153. Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* in D minor, Op. 21, had been premiered by Pablo Sarasate in Paris on 7 February 1875.

⁶ Letter 779 to Anatolij Čajkovskij, 5/17–8/20 March 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 157. Kotek had already suggested the idea of writing a violin concerto to Čajkovskij in a letter of 10/22 December 1877: "In general, I am not especially anxious about you. The symphony [No. 4] will soon appear to the surprise of the whole musical world, then the opera [*Evgenij Onegin*], and then... a concerto for violin? That's right, isn't it? And in 2 or 3 years this concerto will be performed in Moscow and Petersburg by Mr. Kotek (or a mere pug-dog), and the orchestra will be conducted certainly by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Do you agree?", ČAPSS III/5, p. XXVII (Russian), p. LXXIII (English, quoted here with amendments by B. L.).

⁷ Letter 780 to Nadežda fon Mekk, 7/19 March 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 159.

⁸ Letter 779 to Anatolij Čajkovskij, 5/17–8/20 March 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 158.

⁹ Letter 782 to Nadežda fon Mekk, 10/22 March 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 162.

¹⁰ Letter 783 to Anatolij Čajkovskij, 9/21–11/23 March 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 166.

¹¹ Letter 789 to his publisher Petr Jurgenson, 15/27 March 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 178.

¹² Letter 791 to Anatolij Čajkovskij, 16/28–18/30 March 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 183.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

1 April — “I finished copying out the first movement of the concerto and in the evening I played it through. Modest and Kotik were both utterly delighted. I was very pleased with the ovation they gave me”.¹⁵

3 April — “Kotek managed to copy out the violin part of the concerto, and before dinner we played it through. It was a tremendous success for both the author and the performer. As a matter of fact, Kotek’s playing was such that he could almost have immediately performed in public [...]. In the evening we played through the Andante, which pleased far less than the first movement. Indeed, I’m not too happy with it myself”.¹⁶

4 April — “The finale of my concerto sent us into uproar, but the Andante was condemned, and tomorrow I’ll have to write a new one”.¹⁷

5 April — “I’ve written a new Andante, which left both harsh but sympathetic critics satisfied [...] [Kotek] is so taken with my concerto! Needless to say, without him I could have done nothing. He plays it wonderfully”.¹⁸

6 April — “I’m busily engaged in the instrumentation of the concerto”.¹⁹

The autograph full score bears the completion date: “Clarens 30 March/11 Apr[il] 1878”, meaning that the concerto had been written and fully orchestrated in just twenty-five days.

Publication

Having completed his new opus, Čajkovskij informed his publisher in Moscow that he was keen to see it printed as soon as possible:

I’ve finished the violin concerto [...] Since the piano reduction²⁰ is written very scrappily, and since I won’t manage to write the violin part into the full score, then Kotek, who happens to be here, will take all this to Berlin and give it to a copyist to be written out. Consequently, you will receive a verified and cleanly written copy of the piano reduction and the manuscript of the full score. Of course, I should like it if the concerto were printed as soon as possible in the form of the piano reduction and orchestral parts. But of course, you can’t argue with the devil. It would be good if you had the opportunity to print it before the autumn, because if it’s ready in time for the winter, then it will catch on all the sooner, if indeed it is destined to catch on. Can’t you write to Bock²¹ so that he’ll take it upon himself to distribute the piano reduction and full score for you? In that case Kotek, who’s been entrusted with arranging all this, will take it to him. For the sake of speed, won’t you find it possible to entrust Bock with the copying of the parts of the concerto in Berlin? Anyway, distribute it as you wish. Just know that the concerto is with Kotek in Berlin, whose address Bock will know. I’ve played the concerto here many times, and each time it caused a unanimous, or better to say, double-headed furore, because the audience, consisting of Modest and Kotek, sang unison hymns of praise to me during the concerto. Kotek assures me that it is not at all difficult.²²

¹⁵ Letter 795 to Anatolij Čajkovskij, 19/31 March–22 March/3 April 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 191. “Kotik” was one of Čajkovskij’s pet names for Iosif Kotek.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191–192.

¹⁷ Letter 797 to Anatolij Čajkovskij, 23 March/[4 April]–25 March/[6 April] 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 194. The ‘condemned’ slow movement would be repurposed as *Méditation*, the first of the set of three pieces for violin and piano, Op. 42, known as *Souvenir d’un lieu cher*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* The two ‘harsh critics’ were Modest Čajkovskij and Iosif Kotek.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Čajkovskij used the term ‘Klavierauszug’ (in Russian: клавираусцуг), translated here as ‘piano reduction’, to refer to the arrangement for violin and piano, and these terms are used synonymously in this article.

²¹ Hugo Bock (1848–1932) was a manager of the Berlin music publishing firm founded in 1838 by his father Gustav Bock (1813–1863) and Eduard Bote (1811–1888).

²² Letter 800 to Petr Jurgenson, 27 March/8 April 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 203.

Blissfully unaware that this concluding remark would return to haunt him, Čajkovskij entrusted the full score and violin-piano arrangement of the concerto to Iosif Kotek, who left Clarens on 19 April in order to resume his studies with Joachim in Berlin. The German capital was home to the music publishing firm Bote and Bock, with whom Petr Jurgenson had good relations: hence Čajkovskij's suggestion that they could help to expedite the concerto's publication and circulation.

The manuscript full score of the concerto shows the violin part and metronome markings in Kotek's handwriting, while the rest was written by Čajkovskij himself. Since the composer's reduction for violin and piano (which as we have seen, pre-dated the orchestral score) has been lost, we cannot readily judge how faithfully Kotek reproduced Čajkovskij's original violin part, or indeed whether this had originally been written down by Kotek himself.

Kotek was also tasked with making fair copies of the reduction for violin and piano. One of these was to be sent to Nadežda fon Mekkk, thereby fulfilling Čajkovskij's promise that she would see it before it appeared in print, while the other was to go to Petr Jurgenson in Moscow for publication. Kotek reported to Čajkovskij that on 22 April he had arranged for the concerto to be copied out, but this process would take two weeks, although he promised to send the first copy to Mrs fon Mekkk as soon as it was ready.²³

On 6 May, Kotek told Čajkovskij there had been a slight delay in making the fair copies, but he was expecting to receive the first of these the following day, and would send it on to Mrs fon Mekkk as soon as he had carefully checked it for errors. Kotek's letters from this time show that he took his editorial responsibilities seriously, querying possible errors, suggesting metronome markings, and even offering to proof-read the orchestral parts as well as the piano reduction.²⁴ This must have been done relatively quickly, since by the end of that month Čajkovskij was pleading with his publisher for news about "the proofs of the concerto, which were also sent off ages ago. All this is very worrying and frustrating for me".²⁵

Jurgenson's customary practice was to produce three sets of proofs for his editions, with the second set incorporating corrections from the first, and the third intended to catch any mistakes that had either been missed or inadvertently introduced during the earlier stages. Čajkovskij would often delegate checking the first and second proofs to someone else, while generally insisting on reviewing the last of the three sets himself; this appears to have been the case with the piano reduction of the Violin Concerto, where Kotek was entrusted with the earlier stages of the edition for violin and piano. On 8 September he wrote to the composer: "I have asked Jurgenson to send me the concerto again; this is essential, because there were still many mistakes in the violin part, which I didn't find anywhere to mark in the margins. After this you can review the proofs too".²⁶ However, the publisher considered this extra step to be "superfluous", and instead sent them straight to Čajkovskij instead for a final review.²⁷ By the end of November, the concerto's arrangement for violin and piano was

²³ See letter from Iosif Kotek to Čajkovskij, 13/25 April 1878 (GMZČ Archive, ref. a⁴ No. 1871), cited in PMA 15, p. 116.

²⁴ See various letters from Iosif Kotek to Čajkovskij, May 1878, *ibid.*, p. 117–118. Unfortunately the composer's replies have not survived.

²⁵ Letter 828 to Petr Jurgenson, 15/27 May 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 253

²⁶ Letter from Iosif Kotek to Čajkovskij, 27 August/8 September 1878 (GMZČ Archive, ref. a⁴ No. 1890), cited in PMA 15, p. 118.

²⁷ See letter from Iosif Kotek to Čajkovskij, 16/28 September 1878 (GMZČ Archive, ref. a⁴ No. 1892), *ibid.*, p. 119.

finally in print,²⁸ with the composer wryly noting that: “Remarkably, I didn’t find any misprints in the concerto”.²⁹

Meanwhile, Kotek continued to work on the proofs of the orchestral parts during the autumn and winter, and these duly appeared the following year.³⁰ However, publication of the complete orchestral score was deferred for several years, and did not appear in print until the summer of 1888.³¹

Leopol’d Auèr

Because of Iosif Kotek’s pivotal role in the conception and realisation of the concerto, he would have been an obvious candidate to become the work’s dedicatee, and this seems to have been Čajkovskij’s original intention. However, perhaps wary of insinuations that his relationship with the younger man may have been more than simply a close friendship (a suggestion which was not entirely unfounded³²), or a realisation that the endorsement of a more famous violin virtuoso could considerably boost the work’s popularity, Čajkovskij’s correspondence with his publisher shows that he initially wavered, before settling instead on the Hungarian violinist Leopol’d Auèr (1845–1930) as the dedicatee:

4 July 1878 — “So far as the concerto is concerned, then I want to dedicate it to Auèr, although this still has to be discussed”.³³

13 July 1878 — “I wanted to dedicate the concerto to Kotek, but, to avoid any sort of gossip, I’m probably going to dedicate it to Auèr. Not Wieniawski³⁴ or another celebrity in any event. I’m very fond of Auèr, both as an artist and as a person”.³⁵

24 July 1878 — “Take note: I’m dedicating the concerto to Auèr”.³⁶

By way of compensation, Kotek received the dedication of the *Valse-Scherzo* for violin and orchestra, Op. 34, which Čajkovskij had written for him at the



Leopol’d Auèr, pictured in the 1880s.
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

²⁸ See letter from Petr Jurgenson to Čajkovskij, 16/28 November 1878, ČJu 1 – 1938, p. 54; ČJu 1 – 2011, p. 70–71.

²⁹ Letter 1014 to Petr Jurgenson, 10/22 December 1878, ČPSS VII, p. 526.

³⁰ See letter from Iosif Kotek to Čajkovskij, 8/20 October 1878 (GMZČ Archive, ref. a⁴ No. 1942), cited in PMA 15, p. 119, and also Jurgenson’s letter to the composer, 2/14 December 1878, ČJu 1 – 1938, p. 58; ČJu 1 – 2011, p. 76.

³¹ Advertised by Jurgenson in *Signale für die Musikalische Welt*, September 1888, No. 46, p. 733.

³² See, for example, Čajkovskij’s letters to Anatolij and Modest Čajkovskij from 1877 (published on https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/Iosif_Kotek).

³³ Letter 861 to Petr Jurgenson [22 June/4 July 1882], ČPSS XII, p. 313.

³⁴ Henryk Wieniawski (1835–1880), the Polish violinist and composer.

³⁵ Letter 865 to Petr Jurgenson, 1/[13] July 1882, ČPSS XII, p. 325.

³⁶ Letter 870 to Petr Jurgenson, 12/[24] July 1882, ČPSS XII, p. 335.

beginning of 1877, while the concerto itself was published as Op. 35, carrying the inscription "A Monsieur L. Auer".³⁷

Čajkovskij had already known Leopol'd Auër for several years, and he had already dedicated to him his very first composition for violin and orchestra, entitled *Sérénade mélancolique*, Op. 26 (1875). Auër had taken part in the Saint Petersburg premieres of all of Čajkovskij's string quartets between 1872 and 1876, in his role as leader of the Russian Musical Society's string quartet in the Imperial capital (a role he held from 1868 until 1906).³⁸ He came to Russia in 1868 after Anton Rubiņštejn appointed him professor of violin at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. He had also once been a pupil of the same Joseph Joachim who was now tutoring Kotek.

No correspondence between Čajkovskij and Auër survives from this period to tell us whether the violinist had given his blessing to the concerto before it appeared in print, or if Čajkovskij hoped that he would feel sufficiently flattered by seeing his name on the title page to become its leading exponent. However, according to Auër's own account (written as late as 1923), it was the latter:

Tchaikovsky, who had dedicated his first composition for violin and orchestra, the charming "Serenade melancholique," to me, a composition which I had introduced at one of my Moscow concerts, came to see me one day in St. Petersburg to show me a Concerto for violin and orchestra which had already been engraved and was ready for circulation, and which bore the dedication "A Monsieur Leopold Auer."

Profoundly touched by this mark of his friendship, I thanked him warmly and at once had him sit down at the piano, while I, seating myself beside him, followed with feverish interest his somewhat awkward piano rendering of the score. I could hardly grasp the entire content of the work at this first audition; but was at once struck by the lyric beauty of the second theme in the first movement, and the charm of the sorrowfully inflected second movement, the "Canzonetta." Tchaikovsky left the music with me, upon my promise to study the work and to play it at the first opportunity. When I went over the score in detail, however, I felt that, in spite of its great intrinsic value, it called for a thorough revision, since in various portions it was quite unviolinistic and not at all written in the idiom of the strings. I regretted deeply that the composer had not shown me his score before having sent it to the engraver, and determined to subject it to a revision which would make it more suited to the nature of the violin, and then submit it to the composer. I was eager to undertake this work as soon as possible; but a great deal happened to prevent my getting to it, and I decided to lay it aside for a short time.

I had just been offered the directorship of the symphonic concerts of the Russian Musical Society—Davidoff having retired as conductor—and accepted. I had already been directing the orchestral concerts of the Imperial Choir for the past two seasons, as well as many others, in addition to conducting the orchestra class at the Conservatoire for a long period. This new position, in addition to all my other work, pre-empted all my time and energy: I was obliged to make up the programs for the entire season, to choose the solo artists—and the correspondence carried on with them was by no means the least part of my duties—and attend to a thousand and one other managerial details. Naturally, the Tchaikovsky Concerto suffered. In fact, I deferred the matter of its revision so thoroughly, that after waiting two whole years, the composer, very much disappointed, withdrew the original edition.³⁹

Auër was writing around forty years after the events he described, and it is understandable that time may have dimmed recollections of events. For example, Auër did not replace Karl Davydov ("Davidoff") as chief conductor of the Russian Musical Society's orchestra in St.

³⁷ A facsimile of the original title page of the arrangement for violin and piano is reproduced in PMA 15, p. 121.

³⁸ See Grigorij Moiseev, *Kamernye ansambli P. I. Čajkovskogo*, Moscow 2009, p. 258–274.

³⁹ Leopold Auer, *My Long Life in Music*, New York 1923, p. 208–210.

Petersburg until the 1883/84 season, so this could hardly have been a distraction for him back in 1879.⁴⁰

We might infer from this account that Auèr insisted that he would only perform the concerto if Čajkovskij made certain changes to the score, and that the composer refused to comply. Čajkovskij's correspondence from the time makes no mention of Auèr's opinion of the concerto, or the prospect of any revisions.⁴¹ However, in 1888 in his *Autobiographical Account of a Tour Abroad in the Year 1888*, Čajkovskij recalled:

In 1877 [*sic*] I wrote a Violin Concerto and dedicated it to Mr L. Auer. I do not know whether Mr Auer felt himself flattered by my dedication, but the point is that, in spite of his genuine friendliness towards me, he never wanted to surmount the difficulties of this concerto and in fact pronounced it to be impossible to play — a verdict which, coming from such an authority as this Saint Petersburg-based virtuoso, plunged this unhappy child of my imagination into an abyss of what seemed to be irrevocable oblivion.⁴²

Not only did Auèr refuse to play the concerto himself, but it seems he actively sought to prevent anyone else from doing so. Even as late as 15 December 1881, Petr Jurgenson told the composer that “Sauret⁴³ admitted that in Petersburg he was put off your concerto by Auèr, who said that it would be his undoing, and so on. Sauret vigorously denied it was impossible to play, but he says ‘How could I not be afraid when they said that I would be hissed, that I would fail in disgrace?’”.⁴⁴ On learning this, Čajkovskij was understandably furious: “What dirty tricks Auèr is playing to prevent Sauret and Kotek from playing my concerto. I was terribly angry, and barely restrained myself from writing rude words to Auèr”.⁴⁵

Čajkovskij felt particularly betrayed by Iosif Kotek's unwillingness to perform the concerto, having an invitation to do so in the Imperial capital in November 1881, as he complained to his brother Anatolij:

I've been having a very curious correspondence with Kotek. He did not answer my letter that I told you about in Kiev, but he went first to Petersburg and, on returning, wrote that he could not play because Sauret will be playing my concerto. I replied that, firstly, Sauret had also taken fright and did not play, and secondly that this wasn't about Sauret, nor even about the concerto, but rather the point is that I ought to have expected from him, Kotika, greater self-sacrifice for my sake, greater stoicism and fortitude, and in short that I didn't want to be disappointed in him, but I had to be. Again, he didn't answer this letter for a long time, and finally yesterday I received a very stupid letter from him. Initially he justifies himself by saying that he received the invitation only a month before the concert and therefore couldn't learn it, even though he had been cramming it for months before. In the second half of the letter he says that it is strange to demand of him than he perform an “*unplayed*” concerto in an unfamiliar city at the same time as Sarasate was there. At the same he says: “This is like saying to a person: lend me a ruble, otherwise I shall never forgive you!”. I answered this stupid and even rather impertinent letter today, as it

⁴⁰ See Nikolaj Findejzen, *Očerok dejatel'nosti S.-Peterburgskogo otdelenija Imperatorskogo Russkogo Muzykal'nogo Obščestva (1859–1909)*, St. Petersburg 1909, p. 23 (priloženie) (online <https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rsl01003763764?page=143>, accessed 18 November 2022).

⁴¹ However, in 1900, after Čajkovskij's death, a version of the score heavily edited by Auèr was published by Daniel Rahter in Hamburg/Leipzig (advertised in Fr. Hofmeister, *Musikalisch-literarischer Monatsbericht* (1900), No. 8, p. 180), and later by Jurgenson in Moscow. For much of the twentieth century the concerto was normally performed in Auèr's version.

⁴² ČPSS II, p. 340 (English translation by Luis Sundkvist).

⁴³ Emile Sauret (1852–1920), French violin virtuoso.

⁴⁴ Letter from Petr Jurgenson to Čajkovskij, 3/15 December 1881, in ČJu 1 – 1938, p. 217; ČJu 1 – 2011, p. 312.

⁴⁵ Letter 1910 to Anatolij Čajkovskij, 12/24 December 1881, ČPSS X, p. 289.

deserves. Indeed! Sad to say, but Kotek has slipped up and revealed a rather mean streak in himself.⁴⁶

While Auër's later published recollections of his involvement with the concerto were clearly disingenuous, to say the least, his memory also failed him on another point: it was not he who had premiered Čajkovskij's *Sérénade mélancolique* in Moscow in January 1876, but rather a 24-year-old Russian violinist named Adol'f Brodskij.

Adol'f Brodskij

Born in 1851 at Taganrog, son of the violinist David Brodskij, Adol'f took up the instrument even before his fifth birthday, soon becoming a pupil of Joseph Hellmesberger at the Vienna Conservatory. In 1875 he began his professional career as a teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, where he became acquainted with fellow tutor Čajkovskij.⁴⁷ Two months after giving the premiere of the *Sérénade mélancolique* at the Russian Musical Society in Moscow, Brodskij also took part in the premiere of Čajkovskij's Third String Quartet, Op. 30, in the same city.

Čajkovskij's earliest surviving letter to Brodskij is undated, but was probably from 1875, as it was requesting his assistance in proofreading the parts of his Second String Quartet, published that year:

Most Kind Adol'f Brodskovich!

Jurgenson and I would very much like you to come to Jurgenson's tomorrow (Thursday at 8 o'clock in the evening). We should like you to play my 2nd quartet from the new printed parts to establish that there are no more mistakes. Do not refuse, golubchik, to assist in this matter.

Your devoted,

P. Tchaikovsky⁴⁸



Adol'f Brodskij, pictured early 1890s
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

⁴⁶ Letter 1915 to Anatolij Čajkovskij, 18/30–19/31 December 1881, ČPSS X, p. 295–296. Kotek had also withdrawn from an earlier performance scheduled for Berlin on 16 February 1881 (advertised in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* [1881], No. 9, p. 99). Later reviews of this concert (e.g. *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 February 1881, p. 2) make no mention of Kotek's participation, and it is also evident that no orchestra was present on this occasion, so the intended performance would presumably have been with violin accompaniment only, and perhaps only an extract from the whole concerto.

⁴⁷ More details about this relationship can be found in: Lucinde Braun and Grigorij Moiseev, *Zur Drucklegung des 2. Streichquartetts – Ein bisher unbekannter Brief Čajkovskijs an den Geiger Adol'f Brodskij*, in: *Mitteilungen* 18 (2011), p. 33–41; Ronald de Vet, *Čajkovskijs Begegnungen in Leipzig und sein Albumblatt vom 29. Januar 1888*, in: *Mitteilungen* online, http://www.tschaikowsky-gesellschaft.de/mitteilungen-online/2019-12-19-Begegnungen_in_Leipzig-De_Vet-Mitt-Online.pdf.

⁴⁸ This letter was published for the first time from the original in the Leipzig Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Bibliothek (A/4900/2005), on the Tchaikovsky Research website (https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/Letter_432b), including the original Russian text and a facsimile of the autograph. An independent publication with German translation and commentary appeared in Lucinde Braun and Grigorij Moiseev, *Zur Drucklegung des 2. Streichquartetts*, p. 35–36.

The playful 'Russification' of the violinist's surname to "Brodskovich" was a sign that the two men were already on cordial terms. Indeed, in the late 1880s Čajkovskij would spend several enjoyable evenings with Brodskij and his wife Anna at their home in Leipzig, where he would also encounter Johannes Brahms and Edvard Grieg. However, after Brodskij left Russia in 1878, the violinist and the composer appear to have lost touch for a while. So we can imagine Čajkovskij's surprise when in September 1881, three-and-a-half years after the concerto had been completed, he received the following news from his publisher:

Dearest fellow! First of all, news, which I hope you will be as pleased with as I was: Brodskij wants to play your violin concerto everywhere in Germany. He played it to Hans Richter,⁴⁹ who was pleased, and it was decided it would be produced at the first new session being organised by Richter. Naturally he is asking for the parts and the score. I sent him the parts immediately, but I'm asking what to do about the score, i.e. not to you, but to him. I'll be very pleased if Brodskij is successful. How I'll rub Hřímalý's nose in it,⁵⁰ as well as that of your son of a bitch Auër, etc; after all, he still hasn't played it anywhere. Is this sh.. worthy the inscription.⁵¹

Čajkovskij's reply to this letter has not survived. However, after receiving confirmation that Brodskij's performance had indeed taken place successfully, at the third Vienna Philharmonic Society subscription concert on 4 December 1881, conducted by Richter, he could barely contain his delight, writing to a mutual friend:

I learned only yesterday in a letter from P. I. Jurgenson that our good, dear Brodskij has played my concerto in Vienna.⁵² You cannot imagine how pleased I was by this news and how touched I was by Brodskij's heroic deed. The point is that my concerto, written 4 years ago now, has been declared utterly impracticable by a variety of authoritative Russian violinists and, if I am not mistaken, it has never been played anywhere. All the time I knew that the opinion of the aforementioned authorities was an exaggeration, and everyone was waiting for the appearance of some heroic violinist, to show that the impossible could turn out to be possible. I am extremely glad that this someone turned out to be Brodskij, for whom I have always felt a sincere sympathy, and to whom I am happy to be obliged. I am well aware that for him, who has not yet firmly established his position in Vienna, it is uncomfortable and terrifying to appear before the Viennese public with a concerto by an unknown author, let alone a *Russian* one. That is why I doubly appreciate the service he has rendered me, and I feel an overwhelming need to thank him. But his address is unknown to me, and so I thought of writing to you and to ask you to convey to him my most sincerest and warmest gratitude.⁵³

Brodskij's response was equally gracious:

Playing this concerto in public became a dream of mine since the moment I looked through it the first time. This was two years ago. I took it up and abandoned it several times, because idleness overcame my desire to achieve my aim. You packed it with so many difficulties. Last

⁴⁹ Hans (János) Richter (1843–1916), the eminent Austro-Hungarian conductor noted for his popular concerts in Vienna and London.

⁵⁰ Jan Hřímalý (1844–1915), Czech violinist who in 1869 was appointed violin teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, where in 1874 he succeeded his father-in-law Ferdinand Laub as professor of violin studies. Hřímalý had also taken part in the premieres of all three of Čajkovskij's string quartets, and from 1874 until 1906 he was leader of the Russian Musical Society orchestra in Moscow. His views on Čajkovskij's Violin Concerto are unknown, but Jurgenson suggests that he had conspired to prevent it from being played in Moscow, just as Auër had in Saint Petersburg.

⁵¹ Letter from Jurgenson to Čajkovskij, 4/16 September 1881, ČJu 1 – 1938, p. 207; ČJu 1 – 2011, p. 295.

⁵² In a letter of 21 November[3 December] 1881, Petr Jurgenson wrote to Čajkovskij that "Yesterday I received a telegram from Brodskij in Vienna: Tschaikowsky in Symphonie-Concert grossen Erfolg gehabt. [Čajkovskij had great success in symphony concert']. Probably to do with your violin concerto, although one can only guess", ČJu 1 – 1938, p. 217; ČJu 1 – 2011, p. 311.

⁵³ Letter 1904 to Lev Kupernik, 1/13 December 1881, ČPSS X, p. 280.

year, while in Paris, I played through this concerto to Laroš⁵⁴ so badly that he could not fully appreciate the concerto, but he liked it all the same [...] returning to Russia, I energetically set to work on your concerto. What a delight! One can play it endlessly without ever tiring of it! This was a very important factor in overcoming its difficulties. When it seemed to me that I knew it sufficiently well, I decided to try my luck in Vienna.⁵⁵

Viennese newspaper reviews of the concert suggested that the performance had divided both the audience and the critics. Writing in the *Morgen-Post*, Dr Oskar Berggruen wrote that: “It seems to us that Čajkovskij’s violin concerto is one of the most original and effective for the violin”,⁵⁶ while the *Neues Wiener Tageblatt*’s critic Wilhelm Frey was appalled: “The work is crammed with Russian or, all the same, Slavic motifs, and this alone ought to have been sufficient for the work to be disallowed by the Philharmonists”.⁵⁷ A more balanced view came from the reviewer “ff” in the *Wiener Abendpost*:

Čajkovskij’s wildly fantastic violin concerto divided the audience for and against this original work. The first movement with its magnificently lively theme, the quiet and mysterious central movement (who could not be reminded of Turgenev’s feminine figures!) and the wild peasant dance amount to a whole to which we assign an outstanding position amongst contemporary works.⁵⁸

However, the eminent critic Eduard Hanslick wrote a blistering review for the *Neue Freie Presse*, in which he observed how in the first movement’s “crudeness” eventually won the upper hand over musical elegance; how the Adagio, with its “gentle Slavic melancholy” reconciled one briefly with the work; but how the Finale then plunged one into “the brutal, sad merriness of a Russian parish fair”: “We see nothing but wild, vulgar faces, hear coarse swearing and can literally smell the cheap liquor. Friedrich Vischer⁵⁹ once observed, referring to obscene descriptions in literature, that there are images ‘which one can see stink’. Čajkovskij’s Violin Concerto suggests the dreadful thought that there might well also be works of music whose stinking one can hear”.⁶⁰

Writing to his publisher from Rome on 27 December, Čajkovskij reported:

I recently stopped by at a Café, and happened across the Neue Freie Presse with an article by Hanslick about the Vienna concert. Amongst other things he reviews my violin concerto and it’s so curious that I advise you to obtain it (unfortunately I didn’t have the presence of mind to note the number). Hanslick says that my music stinks — eine stinkende Musik! Of course this is a passing swipe at *Brodskij* for having chosen this concerto. The point is this. If you know Brodskij’s address, then please write to him that I am deeply touched by the courage he showed by undertaking to play something so difficult and, apparently, ungrateful before a prejudiced audience. When Kotek, my closest friend, took fright and cravenly abandoned his intention of acquainting the Petersburg public with my concerto (which by the way he was frankly obliged to do, because the Spielbarkeit⁶¹ of the violin part was his responsibility), when Auèr, the dedicatee of the concerto, played all manner of dirty tricks on me — how could I not be touched and grateful to dear Brodskij, who’s now suffering because the Viennese newspapers are cursing me. I don’t fare well with the critics. In Russia, ever since Laroš left, no reviewer has had a

⁵⁴ German Avgustovič Laroš (1845–1904), Russian music and literary critic, and one of Čajkovskij’s oldest friends.

⁵⁵ Letter from Adol’f Brodskij to Čajkovskij, date unknown (quoted in *Žizn’ Č* 2, p. 502).

⁵⁶ *Morgen-Post* (No. 335), 5 December 1881. Quoted in Dombaev 1, p. 467.

⁵⁷ *Neues Wiener Tageblatt* (No. 337), 7 December 1881. Quoted in Dombaev 1, p. 467–468.

⁵⁸ *Wiener Abendpost* (No. 280), 9 December 1881. Quoted in Dombaev 1, p. 468.

⁵⁹ Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807–1887), German writer and philosopher.

⁶⁰ *Neue Freie Presse*, 24 December 1881. The relevant passages of Hanslick’s review are reprinted in *Tschaikowsky aus der Nähe*, p. 197–198. Excerpts are translated here by Luis Sundkvist.

⁶¹ I.e. ‘playability’.

single friendly word or warm recommendation from a critic; and the leading authority abroad calls my music stinking. Ah, to hell with them!⁶²

Undeterred, Brodskij had continued his efforts to champion the concerto, and on hearing that Brodskij had secured a performance London, Čajkovskij was delighted:

I just don't know how to thank you for your paternal solicitude on behalf of my concerto! Would God only will that this ill-fated concerto, which has the property of instilling in people an insurmountable prejudice against itself, does not hamper your successes. I do not want to lie and so I shall tell you frankly that as far as my authorial interests are concerned, it is highly desirable that such a wonderful violinist as you should present it to the public. But, truly, it would be extremely saddening for me to find out that because of it you have to put up with setbacks and abuse in the newspapers. Thank you, golubchik, for your friendly disposition towards my music and towards me. Believe me: I appreciate this very, very much, and although I never frequent the company of foreign musicians, I understand full well how many obstacles and complications, and how much of a struggle with deep-rooted prejudices, you are enduring on my account.⁶³

The London concert took place at the St. James's Hall on 8 May 1882, with Hans Richter conducting, as Brodskij reported:

I had a huge success at the Richter concerts. Applause broke out already at the first *tutti*. After the first movement the audience applauded a very long time. At the very end I was called for twice. He who is familiar with the London public will understand that two curtain calls in London are equivalent to five calls in Moscow. The English don't give more than two curtain calls even to their darlings: [Joseph] Joachim and Clara Schumann. In Richter's opinion, and as it seemed to me too, I played better on this occasion than in Vienna. Everyone whom I have spoken to about your concerto liked it very much. The audience listened with the keenest attention. The original motifs of the final movement were evidently to people's liking... As soon as the reviews appear, I shall forward them to you—I hope they will be better than the Viennese ones.⁶⁴

Čajkovskij replied on 16 May: “I am ineffably glad at your success, and mine, and I would again burst into expressions of gratitude, had you not asked me in your preceding letter to refrain from them. Please be so kind as to convey my gratitude to Richter for his reiterated and so successful conducting of the concerto”.⁶⁵

At the composer's instigation,⁶⁶ Brodskij was also invited to give the Russian premiere of the concerto, at the sixth symphony concert at the all-Russian Arts and Industrial Exhibition in Moscow on 20 August 1882, conducted by Ippolit Altani.⁶⁷ Three months later, Iosif Kotek finally gave his first performance of the concerto, also in Moscow, at the first Russian Musical Society symphony concert on 11 November 1882, conducted by Max Erdmannsdörfer. Petr Jurgenson had attended both performances, and reported back to Čajkovskij:

Kotek played your concerto well, but he is, in my opinion, far from a Brodskij. Despite the impeccability of the technical side, there was no enthusiasm, either on the part of the artist or on the part of the audience. What an amazing thing is temperament! Not all ardor captivates, but

⁶² Letter 1914 to Petr Jurgenson, 15/27 December 1881, ČPSS X, p. 294–295.

⁶³ Letter 2008 to Adol'f Brodskij, 15/27 April 1881. Translation by Luis Sundkvist.

⁶⁴ Letter from Adol'f Brodskij, 28 April/10 May 1882; quoted from Anna Brodskaja (Skadovskaja), *Vospominanija o russkom dome*, Feodosija-Moskva 2006, p. 113–114. Translation by Luis Sundkvist.

⁶⁵ Letter 2013 to Adol'f Brodskij, 4/16 May. Translation by Luis Sundkvist.

⁶⁶ See Letter 2028 to Petr Jurgenson, 24 May/5 June 1882, in response to his publisher asking whether Brodskij or Kotek would be performing the work: “Has Brodskij been invited? If they want one or the other of them to play my concerto, then I definitively opt for Brodskij, and ask you to keep my statement in mind in case the question needs to be resolved: which of the two?” ČPSS XI, p. 130; ČJu 1 – 2011, p. 366.

⁶⁷ The same concert would also see the world premiere of Čajkovskij's overture *The Year 1812*, Op. 49.

no coldness can ignite. True, our Musical Society audience is always restrained — and they clapped, etc. — but it couldn’t be compared with the enthusiasm at the exhibition. Such is Kotek’s playing, i.e. extremely decent, even elegant, but the elegance comes with a touch of vulgarity. Brodskij also has a dash of vulgarity, but at the same time there’s a twinkle, energy, and natural quick-wittedness. To stake one’s future on a concerto declared to be anathema by all ecumenical councils, one needs something more besides courage.⁶⁸

Brodskij later went on to give the concerto’s first performance in Saint Petersburg, at the tenth Russian Musical Society concert on 12 February 1887, with Anton Rubinštejn conducting. And Čajkovskij himself was the conductor when Brodskij played the concerto again in Moscow on 9 November 1889, at the second Russian Musical Society concert of the season.

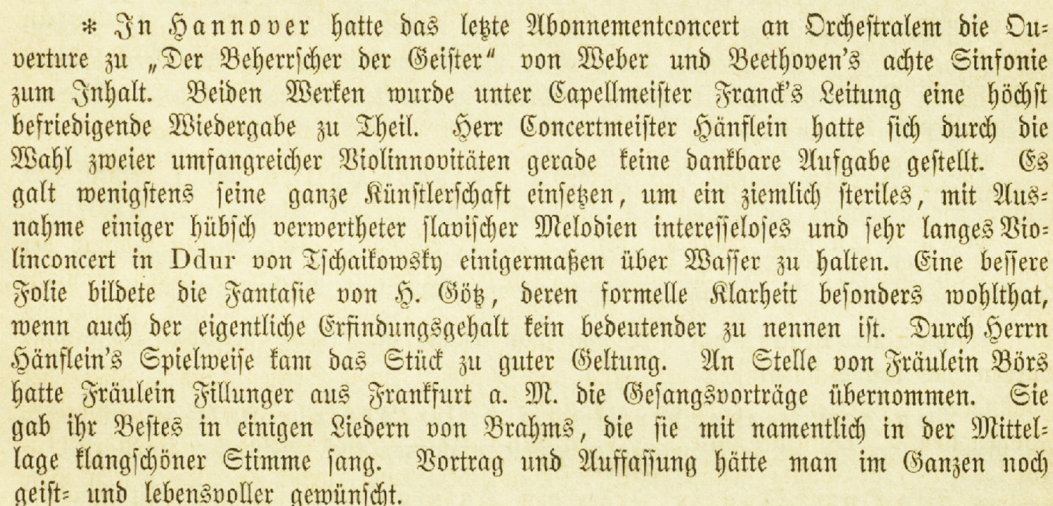
When the full score of the concerto was published in 1888, the original dedication to Auèr had been replaced with “A Monsieur Adolphe Brodsky”.⁶⁹

And so this is more or less how the story of Čajkovskij’s concerto has traditionally been told: almost becoming a morality tale of an arrogant virtuoso attempting to sabotage the concerto, being outwitted by an audacious young competitor. And so history records that Adol’f Brodskij’s performance in Vienna on 4 December 1881 was the world premiere of Čajkovskij’s Violin Concerto.

However, we can now reveal that there was a much earlier performance, which passed almost unnoticed⁷⁰.

The Hannover Performance

The modern era has seen an vast and increasing number of historical sources becoming available in the form of online digital copies, many of which are freely accessible to readers worldwide. For example, copies of the German musical journal *Signale für die musikalische Welt* — which was established in Leipzig in 1843, and continued publication until 1941.⁷¹ In one such issue, we find an early review of Čajkovskij’s Violin Concerto:



* In Hannover hatte das letzte Abonnementconcert an Orchestralem die Ouverture zu „Der Beherrscher der Geister“ von Weber und Beethoven’s achte Sinfonie zum Inhalt. Beiden Werken wurde unter Capellmeister Frand’s Leitung eine höchst befriedigende Wiedergabe zu Theil. Herr Concertmeister Hänflein hatte sich durch die Wahl zweier umfangreicher Violinnovitäten gerade keine dankbare Aufgabe gestellt. Es galt wenigstens seine ganze Künstlerkraft einzusetzen, um ein ziemlich steriles, mit Ausnahme einiger hübsch verwertheter slavischer Melodien interesseloses und sehr langes Violinconcert in Ddur von Tschalkowsky einigermaßen über Wasser zu halten. Eine bessere Folie bildete die Fantasie von H. Göz, deren formelle Klarheit besonders wohlthat, wenn auch der eigentliche Erfindungsgehalt kein bedeutender zu nennen ist. Durch Herrn Hänflein’s Spielweise kam das Stück zu guter Geltung. An Stelle von Fräulein Börs hatte Fräulein Füllinger aus Frankfurt a. M. die Gesangsvorträge übernommen. Sie gab ihr Bestes in einigen Liedern von Brahms, die sie mit namentlich in der Mittel-lage klangschöner Stimme sang. Vortrag und Auffassung hätte man im Ganzen noch geist- und lebensvoller gewünscht.

⁶⁸ Letter from Petr Jurgenson to Čajkovskij, dated to 3 October 1882 (OS) in ČJu 1 – 1938, p. 262, but more feasibly written on 3/15 November 1882, as suggested in ČJu 1 – 2011, p. 399, given that the concert did not take place until 30 October/11 November.

⁶⁹ Auèr’s name was also removed from later editions of the *Sérénade mélancolique*. See also Petr Jurgenson’s letter to Čajkovskij, 19/31 December 1881, ČJu 1 – 1938, p. 220; ČJu 1 – 2011, p. 317.

⁷⁰ For example, it is not mentioned in ČAPSS III/5, section “Early Performances and Critical Reactions”, p. LXXIX–LXXXIII (in Russian: p. XXXIII–XXXVII).

⁷¹ See https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Signale_f%C3%BCr_die_musikalische_Welt (accessed 18 November 2022).

In Hannover hatte das letzte Abonnementsconcert an Orchestralem die Overture zu „Der Beherrscher der Geister“ von Weber und Beethoven's achte Sinfonie zum Inhalt. Beiden Werken wurde unter Capellmeister Franck's Leitung eine höchst befriedigende Wiedergabe zu Theil. Herr Concertmeister Hänflein hatte sich durch die Wahl zweier umfangreicher Violinno- vitäten gerade keine dankbare Aufgabe gestellt. Es galt wenigstens seine ganze Künstlerschaft einsetzen, um ein ziemlich steriles, mit Ausnahme einiger hübsch verwertheter slavischer Me- lodien interesseloses und sehr langes Violinconcert in Ddur von Tschaikowsky einigermaßen über Wasser zu halten. Eine bessere Folie bildete die Fantasie von H. Götz, deren formelle Klar- heit besonders wohlthat, wenn auch der eigentliche Erfindungsgehalt kein bedeutender zu nennen ist. Durch Herrn Hänflein's Spielweise kam das Stück zu guter Geltung. An Stelle von Fräulein Börs hatte Fräulein Fillunger aus Frankfurt a. M. die Gesangsvorträge übernommen. Sie gab ihr Bestes in einigen Liedern von Brahms, die sie mit namentlich in der Mittellage klangschöner Stimme sang. Vortrag und Auffassung hätte man im Ganzen noch geist- und lebensvoller ge- wünscht.⁷²

In English translation:

In Hannover, the orchestral content of the last subscription concert was the overture to “Der Beherrscher der Geister” by Weber and Beethoven’s Eighth Symphony. Both works were given a highly satisfactory performance under Capellmeister Franck’s direction. Concertmaster Hänflein had not set himself a thankful task by choosing two extensive violin novelties. He needed all his artistry to keep a rather sterile, with the exception of a few nicely exploited Slavic melodies, uninteresting and very long concerto in D major by Čajkovskij somewhat afloat. A better foil was the Fantasia by H. Götz, whose formal clarity is particularly pleasing, even if the actual inventive content cannot be called significant. Through Mr Hänflein’s style of play, the etude came into its own. In place of Fräulein Börs, Fräulein Fillunger from Frankfurt a[m] M[ain] had taken on the vocal performances. She gave her best in several songs by Brahms, which she sang with a voice that was especially beautiful in the middle register. One would have wished for an even more spirited and lively performance and interpretation.⁷³

This would appear to have been an unremarkable performance of Čajkovskij’s Violin Concerto, were it not for the date of the issue in question: March 1880.



This was the last of eight bi-weekly issues of *Signale* to have been published during that month.⁷⁴ The exact date of the concert is not stated in the article, but it clearly pre-dated Brodskij’s Vienna performance of December 1881 by at least twenty-one months.

⁷² *Signale für die Musikalische Welt*, March 1880, No. 26, p. 409. Accessed via Google Books https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/_/MMGhQxc4t-cC?hl=en&gbpv=0 (accessed 18 November 2022).

⁷³ Translated by Genia Blum.

⁷⁴ Nos. 19 to 26. The issues themselves were not individually dated, with only the month shown on the front cover.

Furthermore, the work described seems unambiguously to refer to the Violin Concerto, and not to either of Čajkovskij's other short works for violin and orchestra — the *Sérénade mélancolique* in B minor, Op. 26 (1875) and *Valse-Scherzo* in C major, Op. 34 (1877) could hardly be described as a “very long concerto in D major”.⁷⁵ The reviewer's comment on the length of the work also suggests that it was performed in full, rather than just individual movements.

Aus der Provinz.

* Hannover, 15. März. [Herr Oberpräsident von Leipziger] ist gestern Nachmittag 5 Uhr via Bremen nach Leer abgereist.

□ [Königliche Schauspiele.] Das sechste Abonnements-Konzert fand am letzten Sonnabend im Logenhaus des Königl. Theaters unter Mitwirkung der Concertsängerin Fräulein Marie Füllunger aus Frankfurt a. M. statt. Dasselbe wurde mit C. M. v. Weber's Overtüre: „Der Leberscher der Geister“ eröffnet, welche das Orchester, unter der Leitung des Herrn Kapellmeisters Frank, feurig und Schwungvoll ausführte. Herr Konzertmeister Hänflein folgte dann mit einem Violinkonzert von P. Tschaikowsky und einer Fantasie für Violine von H. Götz und erwarb sich durch seinen gebildeten Vortrag und seine vorzügliche Technik den Dank des ganzen Hauses. Fräulein Füllunger sang: Recitativ und Arie „Ah perfido“ von Beethoven und drei Lieder von Johannes Brahms. Sie erwies sich als eine Sängerin von schätzenswerten Vorzügen: das Organ ist reich und wohlklingend, der Vortrag ist korrekt und sicher und be-

weist, daß Fräulein Füllunger eine gute Schule genossen hat. Dagegen entbehrt ihr Gesang der Innerlichkeit, auch muß sie sich noch einer deutlicheren Aussprache des Textes zu eigen machen. Ihre Leistungen wurden indessen durch reichen Beifall ausgezeichnet. Die zweite Abtheilung des Konzertes wurde durch die Aufführung der achten Sinfonie (F-dur) von Beethoven ausgefüllt. Dieses so vielfach verkannte Werk des Meisters ist reich an feinen Zügen in der Instrumentation und vollendet in der Detailmalerei, so daß es sich den übrigen Sinfonien Beethovens in würdiger Weise anschließt. Die Ausführung war den Intentionen des Komponisten gemäß: frisch, leicht und lebendig und hinterließ den wohlthuendsten Eindruck. Die Zuhörerräume waren gut besetzt, und sämtliche Nummern des interessanten Programms fanden die wärmste Teilnahme. — Bei der gestrigen Aufführung des „Kreischüb“ sang Fräulein Linde die Rolle der Agathe. Abgesehen von einer leicht zu erklärenden Befangenheit, welche ihrem vollen Aufgehen in der Rolle zuweilen etwas hindernd in den Weg trat, war die Leistung eine durchaus verdienstliche, und fanden sowohl ihre schöne, sympathische Stimme, sowie ihr empfindungsreicher, gebildeter Vortrag allseitige, lebhafteste Anerkennung; namentlich ist dieses von der Ausführung ihrer großen Arie im zweiten Akte zu sagen, welche einen stürmischen Applaus hervorrief. Die übrige Besetzung war die frühere.

□ [Frau Koch] ist am letzten Sonnabend im Hofoperntheater zu Wien als „Königin der Nacht“ in der „Zauberflöte“ aufgetreten und hat einen sensationellen Erfolg durch den meisterhaften Vortrag ihrer beiden großen Arien errungen. Ihre zweite Gastrolle wird die „Prinzessin“ in „Robert der Teufel“ sein.

Source: Theatre Museum, Hannover

As for the performers, “Capellmeister Franck” refers to the German conductor and minor composer Ernst Frank (1847–1889), who succeeded Hans von Bülow as conductor at the Hannover Court Opera (Hofoper Hannover) in 1879. Frank had previously held conducting posts in Würzburg (1868), Vienna (1869–72), Mannheim (1872–77) and Frankfurt (1877–79), and was a friend of Johannes Brahms.⁷⁶

The Staatsorchester Hannover is the present-day successor to the Hofkapelle, and they were very kindly able to provide a photograph of the original concert programme, as well as a review of the concert from the *Neue Hannoversche Zeitung* from 15 March 1880 (both reproduced here). The latter merely states that “Mr. Hänflein then followed with a violin concerto by P. Čajkovskij and a fantasy for violin by H. Goetz, and earned the appreciation of the whole house for his most splendid performance and his excellent technique”.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ The *Sérénade* and *Valse-Scherzo* each last approximately ten minutes to perform, compared with 30 to 35 minutes for the concerto.

⁷⁶ See Hugo Riemann, *Musik-Lexikon*. 10. Auflage bearb. v. Alfred Einstein, Berlin, 1922, p. 379. There are two pictures of Frank on the Vienna Theatre Museum website: <https://www.theatermuseum.at/de/object/f9e21ca2c4/> and <https://www.theatermuseum.at/de/object/33e819dfef/>.

⁷⁷ “Herr Konzertmeister Hänflein folgte dann mit einem Violinkonzert von P. Tschaikowsky und einer Fantasie für Violine von H. Götz und erwarb sich durch seinen gebildeten Vortrag und seine vorzügliche Technik den Dank des ganzen Hauses”, *Neue Hannoversche Zeitung*, 15 March 1880.

Königliche Schauspiele.

Sonnabend, den 13. März 1880.

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Sechstes Abonnements-Concert

im Logenhaus des Königlichen Theaters,

unter Mitwirkung der Concertsängerin Fräul. Marie Fillunger aus Frankfurt a. M.

PROGRAMM:

Erster Theil.

- Ouverture:** „Der Beherrscher der Geister“, Op. 27 . . . C. M. v. Weber.
Concert für Violine mit Orchesterbegleitung . . . P. Tschaikowsky.
 Herr Concertmeister **Hänflein**.
Recitativ und Arie aus „Ah perfido“ . . . L. v. Beethoven.
 Fräul. **Marie Fillunger**.
Fantasie für Violine mit Orchesterbegleitung . . . H. Götz.
 Herr Concertmeister **Hänflein**.
Drei Lieder mit Klavierbegleitung . . . J. Brahms.
 a. **Liebestreu**, Op. 3.
 b. **Am Sonntag**, Op. 49.
 c. **Wehe**, Op. 32.
 Fräul. **Marie Fillunger**.

Zweiter Theil.

- Sinfonie Nr. 8** (F-dur), Op. 93 . . . L. v. Beethoven.
 a. Allegro vivace e con brio.
 b. Allegretto scherzando.
 c. Tempo di Menuetto.
 d. Allegro vivace.

Concertflügel vom Hoflieferanten Herrn Duysen in Berlin aus dem Pianoforte-Lager des Herrn **W. Gertz**.

Texte der 3 Lieder an der Casse à 10 Pfg.

Preise der Plätze.

Erster Rang, Prosceniums-Loge . . . 4 M. 50 Pf.	Zweiter Rang, Logen, Mitte . . . 1 M. 75 Pf.
Erster Rang, Fremden-Loge . . . 3 „ 50 „	„ „ „ Logen, Seite . . . 1 „ 50 „
Parquet, Prosceniums-Loge . . . 3 „ 50 „	Dritter Rang, Logen . . . 1 „ 25 „
Parquet, Logen . . . 3 „ — „	„ „ „ Amphitheater . . . 1 „ 25 „
Parquet . . . 3 „ 50 „	„ „ „ Seiten . . . — „ 75 „
Parterre . . . 1 „ 75 „	Vierter Rang . . . — „ 50 „
Zweiter Rang, Amphitheater . . . 1 „ 75 „	

Cassenöffnung 6½ Uhr.

Anfang pünktlich 7 — Ende gegen 9 Uhr.

Sonntag, den 14. März. (5. V. i. 10. A.) **Der Templer und die Jüdin.**
Grosse romantische Oper in 3 Aufzügen, nach Walter Scott's Roman: „Ivanhoe“
von A. Wohlbrück. Musik von H. Marschner. **Anfang halb 7 Uhr.**

Zur gefälligen Nachricht.

Für diejenigen Abonnenten, deren Plätze im Concerthause an der Goethebrücke auf die Nummern 483—575 lauten, sind Sitze mit den entsprechenden Nummern versehen im Orchester (Eingang zum Parquet) reservirt.

A more detailed review appeared two days later in the *Hannoverscher Courier*, although the unnamed author (exhibiting more than a trace of Russophobia) was scathing in his verdict:

For the second item, we had the dubious fortune of learning a new work. A concerto for violin with orchestral accompaniment by P. Tschaiowsky. The concerto goes on for a full three-quarters of an hour, a period which must drive even the calmest man to despair when, as was the case here, he has to listen to poor music. We have never heard a more vapid and unimaginative concoction in a subscription concert. The trifling attractive motives drawn from Slavic folk melodies cannot make one forget the intellectual impotence of the composer. The work gives the impression of a *Violinschule*, and in this respect it achieves something remarkable, as we are reminded here of the equally pointless and excessive use of the flageolet. If the solo part is even managed inartistically, this applies even more to the orchestral accompaniment. If the first movement in D major can still be described as endurable, the second movement in G minor, and especially the third movement in D major, must be described as downright brutish musical concoctions, which, however, may still be apt in the composer's homeland to bring unenviable joy to the uncivilised inhabitants of the steppe. If certain so-called musical circles find pleasure in the performance of such commodities, then the subscription concerts do not seem to us to be the right place for them, for, as far as we know, they are only intended for performances of good music, and not to abuse the musical public. As usual, Herr Haenflein used all his powers to draw the best out of the work; unfortunately his struggle was in vain, for a soul cannot be breathed into a spiritless work.⁷⁸

Unfavourable as this review may have been, its description removes any possible doubt that this was a complete performance of Čajkovskij's Violin Concerto on 13 March 1880, a full 631 days before Brodskij's supposed premiere on 4 December 1881.⁷⁹ So who were the performers involved, and why was the significance of the occasion not recognised at the time?

⁷⁸ "Bei Nr. 2 hatten wir das zweifelhafte Glück, ein neues Werk kennen zu lernen. Concert für Violine mit Orchesterbegleitung von P. Tschaiowsky. Das Concert dauert volle dreiviertel Stunden, eine Zeit, welche selbst den ruhigsten Menschen zur Verzweiflung bringen muß, wenn er, wie es hier der Fall war, schlechte Musik hören muß. Ein gehalt- und geistloseres Machwerk haben wir noch nicht in einem Abonnementsconcerte gehört. Die wenigen hübschen, slavischen Volksmelodien entnommenen Motive können die geistige Impotenz des Componisten nicht vergessen machen. Das Werk macht den Eindruck einer Violinschule und leistet in dieser Beziehung allerdings das Unglaublichste, wir erinnern hier an die eben so unmotivirte, wie übermäßige Verwerthung des Flageolets. Ist nun schon die Solostimme unkünstlerisch behandelt, so gilt dies noch mehr von der Orchester-Begleitung. Kann der erste Satz in D-dur noch erträglich genannt werden, so muß man den zweiten Satz in G-moll und namentlich den dritten Satz in D-dur als ein geradezu brutales musikalisches Machwerk bezeichnen, welches allerdings noch geeignet sein kann, in der Heimath des Componisten den uncivilisirten Bewohnern der Steppe eine nicht beneidenswerthe Freude zu bereiten. Finden gewisse sogenannte musikalische Kreise an der Vorführung derartiger Erzeugnisse Vergnügen, so scheinen uns doch die Abonnements-Concerte nicht der richtige Ort, denn dieselben sind, soweit uns bekannt, nur zur Aufführung guter Musik bestimmt; nicht aber zur Mißhandlung des musikalischen Publicums. Herr Haenflein setzte, wie stets, seine ganze Kraft ein, um dem Werke die beste Seite abzugewinnen; leider mußte er vergebens sich abmühen, denn einem geistlosen Werke läßt sich eben keine Seele einhauchen. Es hat etwas Phrasenhaftes an sich, die Durcharbeitung ist jedoch schön und verständlich". *Hannoverscher Courier*, 17 March 1880 (morning edition), p. 3.

⁷⁹ According to the critic Sergej Flerov (writing as "Ignotus") in the *Moscow Register* (*Московские ведомости*), 20 December 1881 [O.S.], the concerto had been performed in 1879 in New York by the violinist Leopold Damrosch, with piano accompaniment. However, the exact date of this supposed performance is unknown (cf. also ČAPSS III/5, p. LXXX), and it has yet to be corroborated by contemporary accounts.

Georg Haenflein

As we have already seen, Georg Haenflein (Hänflein)⁸⁰ was the *Konzertmeister* of the Hannover Hofkapelle at the concert in 1880, and seems to have been accustomed to performing as a soloist in his own right. Further information can be found in Heinrich Sievers' 1984 study of musical life in Hannover:

The position of first concert master remained vacant until 1874. On 5 November 1874, Georg Haenflein (*1848, †1908), who had been active in the court orchestra since 1 January, took over. Haenflein studied at the Leipzig Conservatory with Ferdinand David from 1862 to 1865, then worked as a Russian chamber musician at the Italian Opera in Petersburg until 1871 and then perfected his skills for three years as a student of Joseph Joachim in Berlin. In doing so, he recommended himself—probably through the encouragement of his teacher—for a leading post in the Hannover orchestra.⁸¹

Although Haenflein spent time in Russia, there is no mention of his name in any of Čajkovskij's correspondence or diaries, and nothing else to indicate that the two men knew each other personally. This is perhaps unsurprising, since Čajkovskij was living in Moscow while Haenflein was in Saint Petersburg, but it is likely that the violinist knew of Čajkovskij's reputation as an up-and-coming young composer, and he would have had the opportunity to hear many of his works performed in the Imperial capital. For his first five years at Hannover, Haenflein would also have served under Hans von Bülow, another staunch advocate of Čajkovskij's music, who had premiered his Piano Concerto No. 1 in Boston on 25 October 1875.

Sievers goes on to note that:

Although Haenflein was an excellently trained soloist through and through, he placed particular value on chamber music work in the broader public. In doing so, he followed up on Joachim's highly acclaimed matinees, in which the classical string quartets were mainly heard. Haenflein also placed an emphasis on the Viennese classics, but by no means closed himself off to modernity. Schumann, Brahms and other contemporaries offered ample variety.⁸²



Georg Haenflein, pictured in the early 1890s

⁸⁰ The spellings Hänflein and Haenflein were both used during his lifetime, although Haenflein was more common.

⁸¹ "Die Stelle des 1. Konzertmeisters blieb bis 1874 unbesetzt, sie übernahm am 5. November 1874 Georg Haenflein (* 1848, †1908), der bereits seit dem 1. Januar im Hoforchester tätig war. Haenflein hatte von 1862–1865 am Leipziger Konservatorium bei Ferdinand David studiert, wirkte dann bis 1871 als russischer Kammermusiker an der italienischen Oper zu Petersburg und vervollkommnete sein Können anschließend noch drei Jahre hindurch als Schüler Joseph Joachims in Berlin. Damit empfahl er sich — wahrscheinlich durch Fürsprache seines Lehrers — für einen leitenden Posten im hannoverschen Orchester". Heinrich Sievers, *Hannoversche Musikgeschichte. Dokumente, Kritiken und Meinungen*. Band II, Tutzing 1984, p. 323.

⁸² "Obwohl Haenflein ein durch und durch hervorragend ausgebildeter Solist war, legte er in der breiteren Öffentlichkeit besonderen Wert auf kammermusikalisches Wirken. Damit knüpfte er an Joachims stark beachtete Matinéen an, in denen vorwiegend die klassischen Streichquartette zu hören waren. Auch Haenflein legte auf die Wiener Klassiker das Schwergewicht, verschloß sich aber keineswegs der Moderne. Schumann, Brahms und andere Zeitgenossen boten Abwechslung in reicher Fülle", *ibid.*, p. 323–324.

Haenflein had a difficult time in his duties as first concertmaster of the court theatre against his younger rivals. Although the orchestra service and the artistically responsible work with his string quartet cost him a lot of time and effort, he also proved himself as a distinguished soloist during his early years with notable achievements that were put to him in the subscription concerts.⁸³

Amongst the examples of such occasions, Sievers cites the review of the March 1880 concert in *Signale für die musikalische Welt* in which Haenflein performed Čajkovskij's Violin Concerto — evidently unaware of its musical significance.⁸⁴

We have already seen that the concerto's violin-piano reduction and orchestral parts had been published in November 1878 and January 1879 respectively, and these editions would have been available to Haenflein and the Hannover Hofkapelle players for their concert in March 1880. In the absence of the full score (not published until 1888), it would presumably have been necessary to create a manuscript version for the conductor using the parts and the violin-piano arrangement.

While this may seem unusual, Jurgenson had also released Čajkovskij's four previous concertante works in the form of a piano reduction and orchestral parts at first, with the full scores only following some years later. For example, the Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 23 (1874–75) and *Sérénade mélancolique* for violin and orchestra, Op. 26, were each first published in the reduction parts in 1875, with the full scores following only in 1879 (the concerto in a revised version), while the reduction and parts for the *Valse-Scherzo* for violin and orchestra, Op. 34 (1877) appeared in 1878, but the full score only in 1895. This does not appear to have hindered performances of these works, which were often heard in concert halls before their full scores had been printed.

Haenflein remained as concertmaster of the Hofkapelle until his retirement in 1899, during which he frequently performed as soloist, and also as lead violin of the string quartet he founded while in Hannover (pictured above).⁸⁵ He died on 10 February 1908 in Berlin, aged just 59.⁸⁶

There is nothing to suggest that Čajkovskij sought out Haenflein, or met with any other Hannoverian musicians, during his only visit to the city, between 17 and 19 March 1889, which perhaps he would have been inclined to do, had he learned that Konzertmeister Haenflein had been responsible for introducing his concerto to the world.

And so it would appear that everyone involved in the Hannover performance of the concerto was completely unaware that this was its world premiere, and no-one outside the city (not even the composer) seems to have known about the performance at all. While this

⁸³ “Haenflein hatte bei seinen Pflichten als 1. Konzertmeister des Hoftheaters gegen die jüngeren Rivalen mit der Zeit einen schweren Stand. Obwohl ihm der Orchesterdienst und die künstlerisch verantwortlichen Arbeiten mit seinem Streichquartett viel Zeit und Mühe kosteten, bewährte er sich während seiner Dienstjahre auch als profilierter Solist mit beachtlichen Leistungen, die ihm in den Abonnementskonzerten gestellt wurden”, *ibid.*, p. 325.

⁸⁴ More recently this performance had been noted and commented on by Dr Sanna Pederson in a 2020 edition of her blog ‘Music in Berlin, 1870–1910’, where she concluded her article by asking “What is one to make of this discovery of Hänflein’s 1880 performance of the Tchaikovsky Concerto, published the year before?... I can only observe that the early reception of Tchaikovsky’s Concerto can be more accurately documented, and this needs to be done because what we have now are contradictory accounts” (<https://sannapederson.oucreate.com/blog/docs/profiles-in-joachims-students-2-georg-hanflein-1848-1908>, accessed 18 November 2022). The present author is indebted to Dr Pederson for her permission to reproduce the above extract.

⁸⁵ Source: *Das Streichquartett in Wort und Bild*. Hrsg. von A. Ehrlich, Leipzig 1898, p. 59 (via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Georg_H%C3%A4nflein#/media/File:Haenflein-Quartett.jpg, accessed 18 November 2022).

⁸⁶ See the announcement of his death in *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels-Zeitung*, 12 February 1908 (morning edition), p. 10.

may not have been such a significant event as Brodskij's concert in Vienna on 4 December 1881, history does now need to record that Čajkovskij's Violin Concerto was introduced to the world by Georg Haenlein at the sixth subscription concert of the Hannover Hofkapelle on Saturday 13 March 1880, conducted by Ernst Frank.