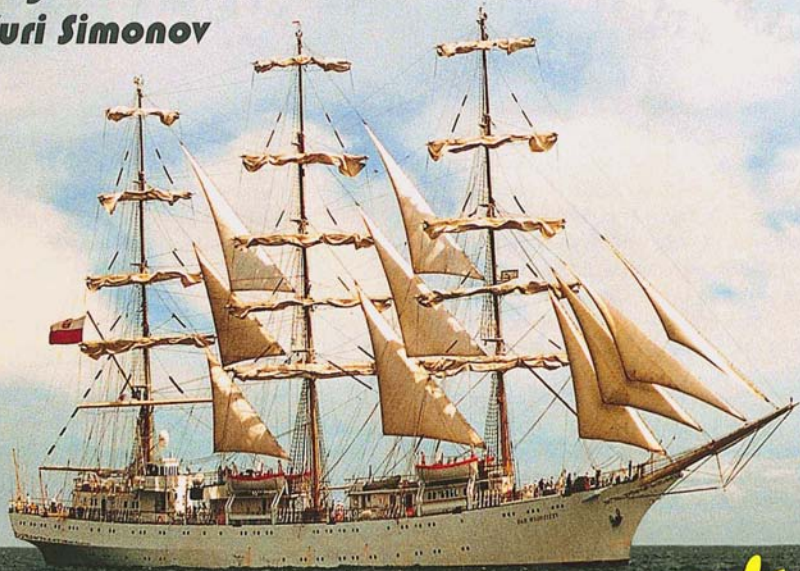


Khachaturian Ballet Suites *Spartacus, Gayaneh, Maskarade*

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Yuri Simonov



alto

Khachaturian Gayaneh / Spartacus / Masquerade

Aram Khachaturian, (1903 - 1978) one of the leading Soviet composers of his generation, was born in Tiflis (Tbilisi), Armenia. As a boy he taught himself to play the piano and in 1922 enrolled at the Gnesin Music Academy where he first learned to play the cello. Three years later he began taking lessons in composition. In 1929 he transferred to the Moscow Conservatory where he was taught by Myaskovsky (1881 - 1950). Whilst a student in Moscow Khachaturian had some local success with his Trio (a work much admired by Prokofiev), his Symphony no. 1 and the Piano Concerto, his first work to achieve international acclaim in 1936. He also composed a cantata, *Song of Stalin*, in 1937, a work popular at the time but now largely forgotten.

In 1939 Khachaturian composed a ballet *Happiness*, the title being the name of a collective farm where the action takes place. Three years later he reworked the music to form a new ballet *Gayaneh* with a similar synopsis. Gayaneh, the daughter of a collective farm chairman, is in love with a young Red Army soldier, Armen. Armen's rival Giko persuades a spy to infiltrate the farm but the spy is caught and Giko is imprisoned. The remainder of the ballet is taken up with the wedding celebrations of Gayaneh and Armen. The ballet contains one of Khachaturian's most famous works, the *Sabre Dance*, which occurs during the last section of the ballet during the wedding celebrations. There have been many different arrangements of this dance over the years, including a version on film of the dance played by eight pianists accompanied by coloured dancing fountains, but heard in this, its original version, it is undeniably thrilling.

The Dance of the Rose Maidens forms part of the scene setting for the finale. Lullaby features a flute solo based upon an Armenian folk tune which builds to a passionate climax before dying away. *Lesghinka* is a furious dance in 6/8 time reminiscent of music from the Caspian region. *Ayasha's dance* is a typically poignant and nervous piece. Its wistful main melody is played first by the wind instruments and then by the upper strings to a rhythmical accompaniment. *Gopak* is a powerfully masculine dance, a mixture of posturing and wild leaping which gathers momentum, but which strangely appears to end in mid air. *Gayaneh*, choreographed by Anisimova, was first performed by the Kirov company in the

Urals, where they were based during the Second World War. Khachaturian revised the work in 1957 and gave it a new synopsis.

From the same period comes Khachaturian's incidental music to Lermontov's drama *Masquerade*. Lermontov (1814 - 41) had written this play in 1835 - 6 but owing to its critical view of aristocratic life in Moscow, it was not performed until 1862 when the Maly company staged it. There was an important production in 1917 directed by Meyerhold with music by Glazunov, and further stagings took place in 1933 and 1938. Khachaturian was commissioned to write new music for the play in 1940 and his concert suite followed three years later. The story bears a strong resemblance to Shakespeare's *Othello*: Arbenin, a rich man about town, has married the young and beautiful Nina. He flies into a jealous tantrum when it is reported to him that a bracelet given to Nina has been seen paraded by a certain Prince. Arbenin poisons Nina and is later visited by two men: one is the Prince who proves Nina's innocence and the other is a man who has long planned Arbenin's downfall and who relishes Arbenin's descent into madness. Of the three extracts presented here the most famous is the Waltz, a Tchaikovskian piece of romantic gaiety.

The Romance is a portrait of the beautiful but tragic heroine Nina and the *Nocturne*, in which a prominent role is played by the solo violinist, is effectively the calm before the storm.

Khachaturian's other work in the 1940s include the *Second* and *Third Symphonies* and the *Cello Concerto*. For these last two pieces Khachaturian faced severe criticism for composing 'formalist Western' music and he meekly confessed his guilt. Clearly hoping to curry favour with the Party chiefs and Stalin in particular, he turned his attention to film music (film being Stalin's favourite art form) and he took up a teaching post at the Moscow Conservatoire. At the same time he appealed for greater creative freedom for artists and less bureaucratic interference.

In 1954 (Stalin having died the previous year) Khachaturian turned his attention back to ballet with the four act dance drama *Spartacus*, choreographed by Yokobson at the Kirov in 1956. The story of a heroic Thracian slave, martyred in his pursuit of freedom from his imperialist Roman oppressors, made an ideal subject for a Soviet Socialist Realist work and the work was an immediate success, Khachaturian being awarded the Lenin Prize. However, some felt

that the ballet was unwieldy and the composer with the choreographer Grigorovich (b 1927) rearranged the score in 1968 so that epic scenes alternated with intimate ones. This new three act version swept not only Eastern Europe and the USSR but also the West. The first extract heard on this disc is the famous *Adagio*. Following its use as opening title music for the BBC period drama *The Onedin Line* it is impossible to hear this piece without seeing unfurled sails, but in the ballet it represents a love scene between the slave Spartacus and his wife Phrygia. The *Dance of the Maidens* is a passage where the Romans are being entertained by dancing girls from Cadiz (known in Roman times as *Gadifanaea*). The following dance feature an exotic percussion instrument, the crotalum, made from wood or bone which held in the hand are played like castanets. The final extract from *Spartacus* is a quick waltz danced by Aegina, the mistress of the Roman commander Crassus, which moves swiftly into an orgiastic dance.

Khachaturian's musical style is unmistakable: his upbringing in Armenia ensured that he was always susceptible to the rich vein of folk music and ritual dance from that region and he commented that 'the natural soil of Armenia nourished my work'. He also found inspiration in music from oriental Russia and this colourful mixture of exotic and folk dance gives his music a barbaric yet lyrical quality. Despite his public dressing-down in 1948, his essentially optimistic outlook made him a popular figure in the Soviet Union and he received a number of awards from the authorities. Of the many Soviet composers writing ballets, he was probably the most successful at reconciling new subject matter with the traditional ballet formulae of short character dances, solos, duets and epic pictorial scenes. He died in Moscow in 1978.

The conductor, Yuri Simonov, comes from a family of opera singers and studied in St Petersburg, later assisting Yevgeny Mravinsky. Having won the Santa Cecilia competition in Rome (1968) he became the youngest ever Chief Conductor of the Bolshoi Opera. In 1985 he founded the Maly Symphony Orchestra. At present Simonov is Music Director of both the Moscow Philharmonic and the Belgian National Orchestras and is in constant demand worldwide.

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Aram Khachaturian (1903-78)

Famous Ballet Suites: Spartacus – Gayaneh - Maskarade

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Yuri Simonov

Gayaneh:

[1]	<i>Sabre Dance</i>	2.16
[2]	<i>Dance of the Rose Maidens</i>	2.43
[3]	<i>Lullaby</i>	4.39
[4]	<i>Lesghinka</i>	2.32
[5]	<i>Ayesha's Dance</i>	2.45
[6]	<i>Gopak</i>	3.20

Spartacus:

[7]	<i>Adagio of Spartacus & Phrygia</i> (“Onedin Line” theme)	10.32
[8]	<i>Dance of the Maidens</i>	7.49
[9]	<i>Scene and Dance with Crotalums</i>	3.32
[10]	<i>Variations of Aegina and Bacchanalia</i>	3.40

Maskarade (Masquerade):

[11]	<i>Romance</i>	4.44
[12]	<i>Nocturne</i>	4.52
[13]	<i>Waltz</i>	4.01

Total playing time 58:26

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Aram Khachaturian (1903-78)

Famous Ballet Suites:

Spartacus – Gayaneh - Maskarade

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Yuri Simonov

ALC 1080

alto

“recording quality is staggeringly realistic; you will not be disappointed. As for Simonov he is an impulsive magician ‘pushing the envelope’ in some cases. At others he finds the just tempo - unhurried in the Lullaby from *Gayaneh*. Simonov’s evolutionary bloom rate for the *Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia* is expansively unrushed.....perhaps evidence of Simonov’s experience as ballet conductor at the Bolshoi.Simonov’s smoking spontaneity has the climactic statement in flames in seconds and the RPO’s trumpets peachy vibrato is fleshily rich. It is a superbly built momentNo one has brought out the excitement of the thunderous *Crotalum Dance* at its apex as well as Simonov. Not routine music-making” (Rob Barnett, MusicWeb)

Gayaneh:

Sabre Dance - Dance of the Rose Maidens – Lullaby –

Lesghinska - Ayesha’s Dance - Gopak

Spartacus: *Adagio of Spartacus & Phrygia* (“Onedin Line”)

Dance of the Maidens - Scene and Dance with Crotalums

Variations of Aegina and Bacchanalia

Maskarade (Masquerade): *Romance - Nocturne - Waltz*

DDD, 1995

Time: 58:26



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