

## Andrzej Czajkowski's Merchant of Venice Premieres in Austria

18.07.2013 - 07.08.2013

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Photo: Jerzy Benedykt Dorys / www.polona.pl

Andrzej Czajkowski's *The Merchant of Venice*, written over a quarter century ago by the eminent composer and pianist, will premiere on the 18th of July at the Bregenz Festspiele on Lake Constance in Austria. The opera's premiere is co-produced by the National Opera in Warsaw and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute. It will be shown next season in Warsaw.

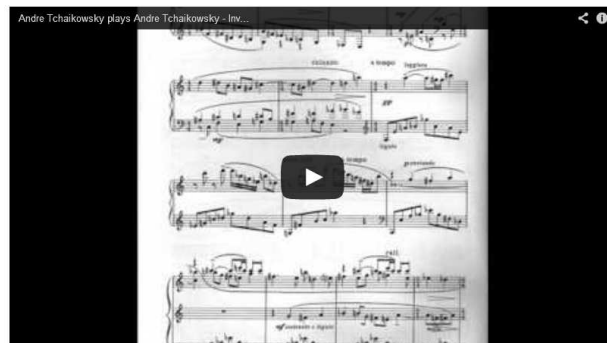
### Opera

Czajkowski worked on the opera from 1968 until his death in 1982, when, aside from a few pages of orchestration, he had completed the work. The composer's friend John O'Brien wrote the libretto, based on Shakespeare's text. *The Merchant of Venice* comprises three acts and an epilogue, and is performed with orchestral instrumentation that includes piano and harpsichord. David Pountney, director of the festival in Bregenz and head of the Welsh National Opera, describes the opera as a work "existing somewhere between the world of Britten and Berg".

One main character in *The Merchant of Venice* is Shylock, the Venetian moneylender permanently embedded in the pantheon of anti-Semitic lore. Many commentators are surprised to learn that Czajkowski – who was himself Jewish and a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto – dealt with this controversial figure. In Czajkowski's opera, Shylock is primarily a tragic figure, who may well be considered alongside Hamlet and King Lear. In the words of librettist John O'Brien, "It was a presentation of a certain anti-Jewish sentiment, but it cannot be equated with anti-Semitism".

### Symposium

Organizers of the Bregenz Festspiele have organized a three-day symposium dedicated to Czajkowski. Selected speakers include scholars of the composer's work, friends and colleagues – John O'Brien, the pianist-conductor Andrés Schiff, Christopher Seaman and Uri Segal. Other compositions by Czajkowski will also be heard at the festival: *The Inventions, op.2, Seven Sonnets on Shakespeare, String Quartet No. 2, Piano Concerto, op. 4, Trio Notturmo, op. 6*, among others. Among performers of these works is pianist Maciej Grzybowski, a great promoter of Czajkowski's music.



### André Tchaikowsky / Andrzej Czajkowski

The composer was born into an assimilated Jewish family in 1935, and named Robert Andrzej Krauthammer. His family was moved to the Warsaw ghetto during the Second World War. The boy, along with his grandmother Celina, escaped the ghetto and hid in the house of a Polish family. There he received fake documents and his name has since been Andrzej Czajkowski. Since the late 1950s, when he began his international career as a pianist, Czajkowski's promoter, the legendary Sol Hurok, insisted that he use the French spelling of his name – André Tchaikowsky.

Czajkowski began playing the piano in 1945, under the direction of Emma Altberg. In 1951, he began to take lessons in composition with Professor Kazimierz Sikorski. He was awarded eighth prize at the Chopin Competition in Warsaw in 1955, where he was also honored as the youngest participant. From there he went to Brussels, where he studied with Stefan Askenasy. There he took part in the Queen Elizabeth of Belgium Competition – one of the important piano competitions at the time – and won third prize.



Czajkowski found great success as a pianist – he toured the world, his recitals attracting a great deal of attention and a warm reception from critics. His work even attracted the attention of the great Polish-born virtuoso Arthur Schnitger. Czajkowski was blessed with a remarkable memory and had a gift for learning works from day to day. He was passionate about composition and left behind a wealth of interesting pieces, written primarily for the piano.

Source: <http://www.bregenzfestspiele.com>, <http://www.operanews.com/>, author's materials

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