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Anton Stepanovich Arensky

Violin concerto in A minor, op. 54

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<p>I have chosen Anton Stepanovich Arensky and his Violin Concerto in A minor as an object of my practical and theoretical final project in Metropolia University of Applied Sciences for a very simple reason and that is, I believe he and his concert never got the attention they deserve.</p> <p>In the beginning of the thesis I go briefly through Arensky's life and his entire work as there is not a lot known of him and we have very limited sources of information due to his short life and lack of interest in him. I provide a brief inside to the author's life and work.</p> <p>The main part of the thesis is focused on the analysis of the concerto from the violinist's point of view and analysis of my practicing process, suggested fingerings, bowings, and ways of interpretation.</p> <p>The recording of my performance of the concerto is also a part of this Bachelor's Thesis.</p> <p>I believe this thesis will bring more attention to the author and this piece, as in its foundation it is a good repertoire choice that gives an opportunity to demonstrate the interpreter's technical and lyrical qualities.</p>	
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1 Introduction

The topic of my final project is a relatively unknown Russian composer *Anton Stepanovich Arensky* and his *Violin Concerto in A Minor* in particular, which I have performed as my final artistic project at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences.

The object of the thesis is to present *A. Arensky* as a Russian composer of the romantic era, his life, works and to analyze the violin concerto and the practicing process.

At first I present the life of *Anton Arensky*, with focus on his professional life, his relation to *Tchaikovsky* and other Russian composers of the romantic era to determine the influences on his work. In the second part I go through all his work, the most significant piano and chamber music pieces, vocal work and operas, as it is not very extended due to his short life. In the third part I proceed to the analysis of the concerto from the violinist's point of view as well as the analysis of my practicing process.

I chose specifically *A. Arensky* and this piece because the work and its composer are not particularly known. However, I do believe that it deserves a place among other violin concertos of similar difficulty for the violin, such as *Mendelssohn's E Minor* or *Bruch's Violin Concertos*. *Arensky's Violin Concerto* was inspired by one of the biggest classical masterpieces – *Tchaikovsky's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, which we can already hear in the opening cadenza of solo violin in the first movement, but unfortunately it has never gained the same popularity.

I, myself, have found this piece only by accident many years ago in the internet library, while looking for some other compositions. Driven by curiosity I have found a recording of the concerto and immediately fell in love. At that time I was only dreaming that sometimes I could possibly get technically on the level when I could be able to perform this musical treasure. At the moment I believe I am ready to cope with the technical difficulties and virtuosity of this piece and decided to perform it.

In my opinion, this concerto is worth including into any violinist's repertoire, because of its beautiful melodies just as the melancholic main theme of the first movement *Allegro*, or coquettish theme of the *Valse*, where a player is able to demonstrate the ability to musically convey different characters and atmospheres. In addition, through the whole

piece and especially in the last movement, we can find many technically demanding passages that require and foster technical skills.

This thesis is directed especially to music students that are looking for a big concerto piece that would not be abundantly technically demanding or violinists that want to expand their repertoire with a little known piece.

2 Anton Stepanovich Arensky - 'the forgotten' composer of romantic era

2.1 Biography

Anton Stepanovich Arensky was a Russian composer, pianist and conductor. He was born on 30th June 1861 in Novgorod (Russia) to the family of professional and amateur musicians and died on 25th February 1906 in Perkjärvi (Finland). (Wikipedia, 2017)

His father, a doctor by the profession, was also an enthusiastic cellist and his mother was an excellent pianist who gave him his first music lessons. Already at the very young age *Arensky* was musically precocious, by the age of nine he had already composed a number of songs and piano pieces. In 1879, his whole family moved to St Petersburg where *Arensky* took lessons with a very young teacher *Karl Karlovich Zikke* (1850-1890) before entering the St Petersburg Conservatory, where he studied composition with *Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov* and counterpoint and fugue with *Julius Ivanovich Johannsen* (Danish-born music theorist, teacher and composer). He graduated with a gold medal in 1882. However, even before this *Rimsky-Korsakov* had been so fascinated by *Arensky's* talent, that he entrusted *Arensky* with a contribution in preparing the vocal score of *The Snow Maiden* (*N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov: Letopis' moyey muzikal'noy zhizni [Chronicle of my musical life]*). After his graduation from the St Petersburg Conservatory *Arensky* started teaching at the Moscow Conservatory as a professor of harmony, instrumentation and counterpoint. Among the most successful students of his class we could find *Rachmaninoff*, *Glière* and *Skryabin*. In the same time, after the relocation to Moscow, he became closer with *Tchaikovsky* and *Taneyev*, they both were a great source of inspiration and encouragement for *Arensky*. In the following years (1888 to 1895) he held different directing and conducting positions, he became a director of the Russian Choral Society and appeared as a conductor at various symphony concerts and from 1889 until 1893 he was appointed to the council of the Synodal School of Church Music in Moscow. Perhaps his greatest successes was with his opera *Son na Volge (A Dream on the Volga)*, based on the same *Ostrovsky's* play as *Tchaikovsky's* opera *Voyevoda*, which he started to compose under *Rimsky-Korsakov's* supervision still as a conservatory student. It was premiered in Moscow in 1891. His second opera, *Rafaél'*, composed in 1894 on the occasion of the First Congress of Russian Artists, has never reached the same success as the former composition. In 1894, after *Balakirev* recommended *Arensky* as his replacement to the directorship of the imperial chapel in St Petersburg, he resigned from his professorship at

the Moscow Conservatory and in 1895 he moved back to St Petersburg. After only six years, *Arensky* decided to leave the St Petersburg's imperial chapel with a pension of 6000 rubles (the equivalent of around 63 900 € nowadays). After that he devoted the following years of his life to composition and to other, very successful appearances both as a pianist and conductor at concerts in Russia and abroad. (Johnston, n.d.)

There is very little information available about *Arensky's* private life. He never got married and he never had children. From the very young age he had been addicted to drinking and gambling and from *Rimsky-Korsakov's* memoirs we learn, that *Arensky's* life became only more unsettled towards his last years. As a result of his addictions and depression his health was undermined very rapidly and he died of tuberculosis in 1906 in a sanatorium in Perkjärvi (Finland) at the very young age of 44. (Interlude, 2010)

In recognition of his work there is The Antarctic Arensky Glacier named after him, lying 3 miles (5 km) east of Alyabiev Glacier and flows south from Beethoven Peninsula, Alexander Island, into the north end of Boccherini Inlet. The glacier was named after *Anton Arensky* by the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1987. (National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, 2006)

2.2 Work

Arensky was one of the most eclectic Russian composers of his generation. *Rimsky-Korsakov* likened *Arensky's* musical temperament to that of *Anton Rubinstein*, perhaps having in mind the noticeably embraced influences which his music seems to reveal: *Mendelssohn*, *Tchaikovsky*, *Chopin* and *Rimsky-Korsakov* himself had a remarkable influence on his diverse style. Indeed, *Rimsky-Korsakov* said, "In his youth *Arensky* did not escape some influence from me; later the influence came from *Tchaikovsky*. He will quickly be forgotten." (Interlude, 2010) In Russia, in fact, he was oftentimes called 'mini-Tchaikovsky' because he was blessed with the same nostalgic, sentimental qualities, although not on such a grand scale. *Arensky* was a huge admirer of *Tchaikovsky* and *Tchaikovsky* was very supportive of his pupil. The perception that he lacked a distinctive personal style contributed to long-term neglect of his music, though in recent years a large number of his compositions have been recorded. Especially popular are the *Variations on a Theme of Tchaikovsky for string orchestra, Op. 35a* -

arranged from the slow movement of *Arensky's 2nd string quartet*, scored unconventionally for violin, viola and two cellos and based on one of *Tchaikovsky's Songs for Children, Op. 54*. (Niles, 2014)

Arensky is perhaps best known for his chamber music and following pieces *String Quartet No. 1 in G major, Op. 11* (1888), *String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 35* (1894), written in memory of *Tchaikovsky* is a tender, elegiac work unusual in its scoring with two cellos, *Serenade, Op. 30, No. 2, for violin and piano, Two Pieces, Op. 12, for cello and piano, Four Pieces, Op. 56, for cello and piano*, wonderfully heartfelt and virtuosic masterpiece *Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 32* (1894), dedicated to his cellist friend Karl Davidoff, *Piano Trio No. 2 in F minor, Op. 73* and *Piano Quintet in D major, Op. 51* (1900), that draws on Brahms and Mendelssohn for its sweeping themes and sparkling wit. (ArkivMusic, 2017)

Above all, *Arensky* was a miniaturist in his compositions, his flow of lyrical, oftentimes very melancholic melodies, and the easy control of keyboard textures earned him a respected place among the composers of songs in the romance manner, that were dominating Russian song in the 19th century. In like manner, he could produce delightfully turned keyboard miniatures and for that reason his most outstanding and the most gratifying pieces can be found among his songs and the short piano pieces. Similarly as in the finale of the *Piano Concerto*, the use of extraordinary rhythms is obvious also in his set of piano pieces *Essais sur les rythmes oubliés op.28*. These pieces are essentially based on the unorthodox metres of certain archaic poetic forms and the results are peculiar rather than convincing. Even though *Arensky's* music was not substantially innovatory, he was able to produce unique and distinctive music. And despite his mentor's (*Rimsky-Korsakov's*) prediction that he would be "soon forgotten", few of his pieces, for instance the *Waltz from suite no.1 for two pianos* or the *Variations for string orchestra* on *Tchaikovsky's* famous *Legend*, still reside in a corner of the modern repertoire. (Melodiya, 2014)

In the early *Piano Concerto* (1882), and especially in the first two movements, we can feel the remarkable influence of the great master of piano works, Frédéric Chopin. In a similar way as *Chopin's* two piano concertos, these two movements are filled with elegantly decorated lyrical melodies often joined by sparkling passages. The finale of the piece shows a generalized Russianness in its resemblance of the folk melodies. *Arensky* once again shows an affection for such unusual metres in the five-beat bars, which

are the most unusual feature of this concerto. He was also reportedly reproached for the habit by *Tchaikovsky*. Another of his best-known extended work, the *Piano Trio no.1 in D minor*, was also influenced by another great romantic composer, *Felix Mendelssohn* (and especially by the composer's *D minor piano trio*). This trio, composed in memory of the cellist *Davidov*, is one of *Arensky's* most successful large-scale pieces. Its commemorative purpose is particularly apparent in the third movement and its sorrowful theme. Such an elegiac vein was very characteristic of *Arensky*. This piece also demonstrates his melodic effortlessness and fluent compositional technique. Regardless of *Arensky* being primarily *Rimsky-Korsakov's* student, it is *Tchaikovsky's* influence that is far more notable in his compositions. (Nicholas, 1992)

He has also composed three operas: *Son na Volge - Dream on the Volga*, Op. 16 (1888), which uses Russian folk themes. The libretto was written by *Anton Arensky* after *Alexander Ostrovsky's* historical play *Voyevoda* and the opera premiered on January 2nd, 1891 in Moscow in Bolshoy Theatre. His second opera was *Raphael*, Op. 37 (1894), libretto by *A. Kryukov* and it premiered on May 6th, 1894 in Moscow Conservatory. The last one was *Nal' i Damayanti - Nal and Damayanti*, Op. 47 (1903), which *Arensky* composed after the Indian epos "*Mahabharata*." The libretto was written by *Modest Ilyich Tchaikovsky* after the novel by *Vasily Zhukovsky* and the first performance was held in Bolshoy Theatre, Moscow on January 22nd, 1904. (Wikipedia, 2017)

Amongst the pianists *Arensky* is probably best remembered today for just a handful of works, including *Suite for Two Pianos No. 1 in F major*, Op. 15 (1888), first one of five suites for two pianos and the most charming one. In this brilliant piece one can imagine quite vividly the magnificent chandeliers of the Czarist palaces of old Russia. However, his relatively large piano work also includes *Suite for Two Pianos No. 2*, Op. 23 "*Silhouettes*" (1892), *Suite for Two Pianos No. 3 in C major*, Op. 33, "*Variations*" (pub. 1894), *Suite for Two Pianos No. 4*, Op. 62 (1903), *Suite for Two Pianos No. 5 in Canon-form*, Op. 65, "*Children's Suite*", *Four Morceaux*, Op. 25 (1893), *Six Essais sur des rythmes oubliés*, Op. 28 (ca. 1893), *24 Morceaux caractéristiques*, Op. 36, which is a cycle covering all 24 major and minor keys (1894), *Four Etudes*, Op. 41 (1896), *Three Morceaux*, Op. 42 (1898), *Six Caprices*, Op. 43 (1898), sketches *Près de la mer*, *six esquisses*, Op. 52 (1901), *Six Pieces*, Op. 53 (1901), *Twelve Preludes*, Op. 63 (1903), *Twelve Pieces for Piano four hands*, Op. 66 (1903), a suite *Arabesques*, Op. 67 (1903) and *Twelve Etudes*, Op. 74 (1905). (Parry, n.d.)

In Arensky's vocal work we can find *Three Vocal Quartets*, Op. 57, with cello accompaniment and 3 *Cantatas*, *Cantata for the Tenth Anniversary of the Sacred Coronation of Their Imperial Highnesses*, Op. 25 (1893), *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, Op. 46 and *The Diver*, Op. 61. (Wikipedia, 2017)

His orchestral work includes: *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in F minor*, Op. 2 (1881), *Symphony No. 1 in B minor*, Op. 4 (1883), *Intermezzo in G minor*, Op. 13 (1882), *Symphony No. 2 in A major*, Op. 22 (1889), already mentioned *Variations on a Theme of Tchaikovsky*, Op. 35a, for string orchestra (1894), *Fantasia on Themes of Ryabinin*, Op. 48, for piano and orchestra (1899), also known as *Fantasia on Russian Folksongs*, *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in A minor*, Op. 54 (1891) and *Pamyati Suvorova (To the Memory of Suvorov*, 1900). (Wikipedia, 2017)

3 Violin concerto

3.1 Romantic violin concerto - violin and the concert form in romanticism

The term 'concerto', implying an aggregation of performing forces large or small, appeared for the first time already in the early seventeenth century and was used to describe many musical compositions. These ranged from vocal music accompanied by instrumentalists (*J. S. Bach* has used this title for many of his works that we know as cantatas), to purely instrumental music, characterized by the element of contrast. It was not until the end of the 17th century that the instrumental concerto developed as an independent form and soon evolved into a genre with a virtuosity as the substantial component. In the 19th century the violin concerto as a vehicle for virtuosic display flourished as never before. Romantic period was the era when the artist was seen as hero, to be worshipped and glorified, what considerably contributed to both the development and the degradation of the genre. Romantic concerto developed in three main directions, one line followed and nourished traditional musical values, while another introduced nationalistic elements, but the element of display, although omnipresent from the solo concerto's beginnings, became one of its essential ingredients. Early romantic elements can be found in the violin concertos of *Viotti*, but only the *Spoehr's twelve violin concertos*, written between 1802 and 1827, truly embrace the romantic spirit with their melodic as well as their dramatic qualities. (Stowell, 1992, 45-46)

The romantic era also brought some significant changes not only for violins but violin players as well. *Spoehr's* invention of the chin rest (c.1820), positioned initially over the tailpiece but later normally to its left side, slightly altered the appearance of the violin (and viola). In this way violinists and violists were encouraged to be more adventurous in shifting to the higher positions on all strings, thereby exploiting increasingly their instrument's higher ranges and pursuing greater conformity of string timbre within phrases. Sequences were played wherever possible with matching fingerings, bowings and string changes (largely applicable in *Arensky's Violin Concerto a minor*, e.g. using same fingerings and bowings in every repetition of the main theme of the first movement, even when the tonality is altered, as it is in the fourth movement). Neither the bow nor bowing techniques escaped the romantic aim for the virtuosity and therefore the design and the shape were altered. (Burton, 2002, 148-150).

3.2 Violin concerto in A minor, Op. 54 - Arensky's violin masterpiece

This concerto, composed in 1891 and published only ten years later in 1901 after having undergone a process of careful revision with the help of *Leopold Auer*, to whom the piece is also dedicated (MacDonald, 2009), *Arensky's violin concerto in A minor* is in my opinion an unjustly neglected concerto. It is a one-movement gem and it serves as an exquisite example of the lyrical romantic style developed by this young composer.

This violin concerto is a 20-minute piece in one continuous movement. It is quite original in its structure, resembling a little the *Liszt's First Piano Concerto*, as it falls into a pattern of opening allegro — slow movement — scherzo (a gentle waltz in *Arensky's* concerto) — and finale, where *Arensky* uses a recapitulation of the opening allegro, with a rather short, but nonetheless intense cadenza and other embellishments. This explicit and succinct structure allows author's gift for melody and pleasing contrasts to shine.

In the concerto we can find sweet melodies, tender harmonies, effervescent scoring, and a violin part filled with tremendous lyricism and virtuosity. It is a lovely work, looking back more to *Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in e minor* (1844) than to *Arensky's* friend *Tchaikovsky's* a whole lot more russian-flavored *Violin Concerto in D major* (1878). Neither does it contemplate much to *Alexander Glazunov's* (1904) concerto, although its main theme has a taste of the more feverish and haunting theme of *Glazunov*. (Curiously, all three of these Russian concertos were dedicated to the virtuoso *Leopold Auer*, though *Auer* notoriously despised *Tchaikovsky's* masterpiece.) As *Arensky* was essentially a miniaturist with a gift for seducing melody, there are flaws in all his larger compositions, but nevertheless it could be unfair to mention those more acclaimed concertos in the same paragraph as *Arensky's*, for the work does have noticeable charm and sweetness on its own.

Another proof of how underrated the concerto is, that we would search in vain for some big and significant names of current violinist's community performing this piece as well as the fact that there are very few recordings of this piece available. The Sibelius Academy library holds a copy of the recording performed by Ilya Gringolts with BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra from Hyperion Records (2009) and through my research I found only a few more, i.e. Sergey Ostrovksy's interpretation with Bournemouth Symphony orchestra by Naxos (2011), Alexander Trostiansky's collaboration with the

Members of the Sherbrooke Symphony Orchestra released by Chandos records Ltd. (1997), Irina Medvedeva with Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra (Denon Records, 2009), Sergei Stadler with The Leningrad Symphony Orchestra (ICONE, 1983), Aaron Rosand with Orchestra Of Radio Luxembourg (Turnabout, 1978) and Samuil Furer with The USSR TV and Radio Symphony Orchestra (Melodiya, 1970s). However, in today's digitalized world the primary source of recordings and inspiration for aspiring violinists and music students is the online video-sharing website youtube, where except of few already mentioned interpretations we would find only two more performances of Russian violinists. Thus, I believe this to some extent confirms my conception of the low popularity of the piece.

Obviously, every musician has his own musical ideas and taste and therefore in my opinion he will never find other interpretation that he could completely identify with his own, but if I had to choose one that would be most inspiring for me, it would be Trostiansky's. I can relate to his choice of relaxed tempos, especially in the main themes of individual movements, his melodic leading and thoughtful choice of different kinds of vibrato throughout the piece. His lyrical and delicate sound might result not grandioso enough for the concerto form, but one might argue that the characters of the first three movements require rather tender conveying of emotions than majestic sound, which we can find even in Trostiansky's performance, particularly in the cadenza and the very ending of the fourth movement.

For the reason, that the scores of the concerto are not available in the ARSCA Catalogue of the Finnish Art University Libraries, for studying the piece as well as for the picture examples in this thesis I have used the score available online (published by P. Jurgenson in Moscow, 1901), at the IMSLP (Petrucci Music Library), a very popular virtual library of public domain scores. And because I believe that most of the readers of this thesis would most likely perform the concerto, similar to me, with the accompaniment of the piano, I have decided to use for the examples the piano score rather than the symphonic orchestra score.

4 Challenges in the concerto

For some violin players it might be appealing to reach for the *Arensky's violin concerto in A minor* for its relatively short volume, all four movements go attacca and the whole concerto lasts about twenty minutes. However, these fourteen pages are filled with the whole range of technical difficulties such as many double steps passages (especially in the fourth movement), artificial harmonics in the third movement, scale runs, chromatic shifts, melodies in very high positions, and arpeggios combined with numerous bowing techniques. The chromatics and unusual tonalities make the piece even more demanding for players struggling with the intonation, as I did. All of these culminate in the longest and most challenging fourth movement. Throughout the whole concerto you can also feel that *Arensky* himself was not a violinist, as you find yourself overwhelmed with figuring out comfortable fingerings in the left hand or bowings in the right hand, for example in the *Poco piú mosso* in the third movement. Especially the fingering is a complex topic that also many pedagogues have written about. It should provide a technically easier solution to the problem, while still serving the music. As Galamian (2013, p.31) states, the fingering should assure the best sound and finest expression of the phrase, it should make the passage as easy and as comfortable as possible. Nonetheless, expression has to come first and comfort second. This important principle is often overlooked, especially by certain of the modern pedagogues. Based on this principle I justify for instance the 'one string' fingerings of the main theme of the third movement, reaching to distressing heights on the fingerboard, yet preserving the intimate sound and character of the passage. I have no doubt, that the search for the best fingering for oneself can be an arduous task; however, the knowledge gained by trial and error forces a player to be more aware of different possible fingerings and their influences on violin playing.

Even though, *Arensky's violin concerto in A minor* does not reach the complexity of the other romantic violin masterpieces, I believe it still presents an opportunity to demonstrate player's skills and virtuosity and ability to conduct different musical characters and once you get comfortable with the fingerings and bowings and you find the hidden melodies inside the melodic decorations, it will become a pleasuring experience to perform this piece. Therefore, I believe this concerto is a good option for exams, auditions or any other performances.

4.1 Allegro - the melancholic introduction

The solo violin enters the concerto with a dramatic cadenza, recalling a little bit *Tchaikovsky's violin concerto* with its dramatic thrust and the romantic flourish of the solo part, in melodic a minor making use of a big sound range of violin in profound forte. Already here we can hear the motive from the main theme, which comes right after the cadenza. The main theme of the first movement comes in the rehearsal number two, it is in the central tonality a minor and carries elegiac, anxious and rather sad character. The melodic piano requires good control of the bow hand, where, even in the legato, I would like to keep a 'portamento-like feeling' to sustain its dramatic character. For the same reason, I recommend staying on the A string and in the picture below (Picture 1) you can see the fingering I have chosen for my interpretation. The quantity of sudden changes of positions might be uncomfortable but should not be much of an issue if a player is able to keep the flexibility of the left hand.



Picture 1: Rehearsal number 2, the main theme

I use the same 'one string approach' for fingering in repetition of the main theme after a little one-bar cadenza, as well as in its every following appearance throughout the piece.

Picture 2: Rehearsal number 4, descending chromatic scale

In the rehearsal number 4 (Picture 2) starts the chromatic transition, remaining until the following Poco meno mosso. The very obvious and easy solution here is to have the

second and the third finger ready in double stop and descend from the fifth position in this finger pattern. For the bow, I believe, it is very useful to follow the written accents in this edition and to tactfully emphasize them with hand stroke to not to get lost in the triplets between the strings. This chromatic scale is followed by continuous triplets in the half position. In the last bar of this 'madness of flats and sharps' (Picture 3) I found the most comfortable fingering for me to be 1-3-2 finger pattern, that might result troublesome for players with bigger hand, and bulky fingers. To reach the h6 in the last bar of this chromatic transition, for the practicing purposes I would recommend gliding with the third finger to the h6 natural harmonics (flageolet) before pressing the string and playing the melodic harmonics with tasteful vibrato.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a chromatic scale with fingerings: 2 3 4, 1 3 2, 1 3 2, 1 3 2, and 3. The middle staff is in bass clef and contains the lyrics "di - mi - nu - en - do" with a piano (p) dynamic marking. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a harmonic accompaniment with a piano (p) dynamic marking.

Picture 3: Rehearsal number 5, bars 8-9

We find similar places like this one through the whole concerto, the next one already in the first movement, in the 14th bar of rehearsal number 7, where the interval between the previous note and h6 is very tricky minor seventh interval and therefore the safest way to reach this high note is through finding its flageolet, which is a very common practice violin players often use.

In the following Poco meno mosso (rehearsal numbers 6 and 7) *Arensky* brings up sweet and heartfelt singing melodies in the perfect 8-bars scheme. Particularly the second one (rehearsal number 7) resembles *R. Shumann* in its character. It is also a great moment for a player to relax a bit and show off the playfulness of his tone.

The first challenge of the piece for me came three bars before the rehearsal number 9, where he puts the g diminished chord into ascending tenth intervals, which present a great technical difficulty for me. For that reason I decided to change the original bowing

in this place, i.e. I slur three g notes in the end of the bar (as seen in the picture 4), and that way the tenth changes into the reversed octaves under one slur without changing the character of the music.



Picture 4: Rehearsal number 8, bars 10-13

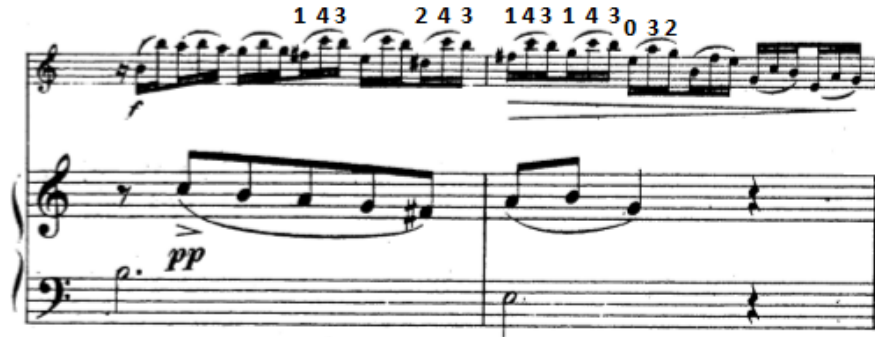
After this, in the rehearsal number 10 appears motive from the main theme again, in *grandioso fortissimo* and suddenly calms down. In the following 15 bars of pauses for the solo player various instruments of the orchestra take over the same motif until in the rehearsal number 11 *Arensky* ends the first movement with the repetition of the cadenza from the beginning of the concert, this time in c minor natural tonality. The solo violin ascends to a high trilled g6 that prompts a cadence into C, the relative major of A minor.

4.2 Adagio non troppo – pensive interlude

The second slow movement carries a folk-like theme. It starts in calm and relaxed tempo, again with the triplets, where we should focus on the melodic line, i.e. the first of the three notes and I suggest underlining these more with the vibrato in the left hand, rather than a bow stroke.

Picture 5: Rehearsal number 13

In the second bar of rehearsal number 13 I would suggest to interpret the dots above the notes not really as a staccato or spiccato, but more like Bériot (1858) describes *vif* (fast) *portamento* or in my words I would call it an 'airy detaché', to preserve the dreamy and meditating character of the second movement.



Picture 6: Rehearsal number 13, bars 9-10

In the bars 9 and 10 of rehearsal number 13 we have more fingering options, but in my opinion the most comfortable would be to start in the 1st position and then in the middle of the bar shift to the 2nd position with the 4th finger to c6 and stay there until the e5 open string, where I would come back to the 1st position. For the first note in the bar 10, fis5, I would suggest only to stretch the 1st finger downwards instead of changing position. This is followed by the sweet main theme which is decoratively embellished by the soloist and provides a background to an increasingly convoluted virtuoso writing.

However, in the rehearsal number 15 comes perhaps the biggest challenge of the whole concerto, the whole page of fast slurred runs, challenging for the intonation and the left-hand technique. My advice in this place would be to approach this place with calm, not to panic and not to get overwhelmed because this 'black sea' looks a lot scarier than it is. As a common practice, the best method to work out this part is to break the slurs into 2-3-6 notes in different bowings and just slowly get comfortable with the fingerings and gradually raise the tempo. In picture 7 you can see my suggested fingerings, that took me a long time to figure out and they still do not feel completely natural, but the more the ear is used to the intonation and is able to hear a melodic line in this 'chaos', the more comfortable it gets for the left hand as well.

After the repetition of the theme from the beginning of the movement *Arensky* uses ascending scale runs in the solo violin to modulate from B minor harmonic back to the

central tonality A minor and ends the movement with a very unusual meditative solo violin cadenza, played with sordino, in diminished lydian mode.

The image shows a musical score for Rehearsal number 15, consisting of six staves of music. The score is written in treble clef and 2/4 time. It features a series of sixteenth-note runs and slurs, with various fingering and bowing markings. The first staff is marked with a box containing the number 15. The music is characterized by rapid sixteenth-note passages, often with slurs and accents. The key signature is A minor, indicated by one flat (Bb). The score includes numerous fingering numbers (1, 2, 3, 4) and bowing directions (up and down bows). The notation is dense and technical, typical of a violin cadenza or a highly virtuosic passage.

Picture 7: Rehearsal number 15

4.3 Tempo di Valse - a coquettish dance

The third movement introduces a happy and playful Tempo di Valse, whose elegant main theme is related to the second subject of the exposition. To avoid the disturbing string changes in the bow I have decided to play the main 8-bars theme sul D. Even though it requires reaching to very high positions on the fingerboard, the sound there remains very soft and the necessity of position changing allows us to add tasteful glissandos that underline the coquettish character of the movement and make the theme even friskier. After the first two movements filled with technical difficulties this vals comes as a pleasant refreshment graciously flowing in the dancing rhythm without any major obstacles.

Also here, same as in the second movement I prefer to interpret the dotted notes in the 13 – 16 bar of the rehearsal number 22 as playful detaché rather than the jumping bowing.

Later the rehearsal number 24 brings strummed pizzicato chords and artificial harmonics as yet another element of virtuosity in the concerto.

The only really confusing place of this movement for me is Poco piu mosso (rehearsal number 27) where I got lost between all the flats in the notation but after I have read the notes enharmonically, it was very easy to find natural fingerings in the half and first, possibly the third position. Not only in this concerto but also in his other composition we find places similar to this one, when the very simple, beautiful melody is followed by its variation in unusual harmony or a passage filled with chromatics, what in my opinion shows *Arensky's* desire to step out of the conformity of the music romantic era and reach for something new, aspiring more towards the music of following generation of composers, such as *Igor Stravinsky*.



Picture 8: Rehearsal number 27, bars 9-11

After the repetition of the introductory theme *Arensky* again uses the modulation to move to the forth movement.

4.4 Poco meno mosso – a dramatic finale

As mentioned before, the fourth movement is a repetition of the first movement, with all its themes, melodies and chromatic passages, only arranged into contrasting tonality or different octave.

The rehearsal number 31 starts as identical recapitulation of the 5th bar of rehearsal number 3 in the first movement, however, culminating into imperious octave writing in the solo violin part leading to the main theme in its original tonality. In the rehearsal number 34 comes the repetition of the chromatic transition (rehearsal number 4 in the first Allegro), this time set a fifth higher. In the last bar before the high natural harmonics e7 (Picture 9), I preserve even the same fingering from the beginning of the concerto with the finger pattern 1-3-2 and in this place even the original score suggests the flageolet instead of melodic harmonics in the highest note e7.



Picture 9: Rehearsal number 35, bars 8-9

The following Poco meno mosso once more imitates the lyrical themes from Poco meno mosso in the first movement (rehearsal number 6) and sets them into very high positions on the E string. Places like this in this concerto make me question *Arensky's* intention with these beautiful lyrical themes. Does he place them into these uncomfortable places of the fingerboard with the aim of demonstrating the player's virtuosity, does he genuinely enjoy the sound of the instrument in this high pitch, that some people on the other hand detest and call it unpleasantly squeaky or is the reason behind this that *Arensky* as a pianist simply does not know violin characteristics well enough? I can only guess.

After the grandioso repetition of Tempo I in imposing fortissimo the bravura cadenza is introduced, typically the most virtuoso and challenging passage of the big concerto form. However, in this case I believe I have faced bigger obstacles sooner in the concerto. The biggest part of the cadenza is set to comfortable harmonies and comfortable positions on the fingerboard with very natural fingerings, with only few exceptions, as for instance the frighteningly looking passage starting in the 9th bar of



Picture 10: Cadenza, bar 9

the cadenza (Picture 10), for this chromatic sequence of E diminished seventh chord I use 4-3-2-1 finger pattern, same as for the main chord notes (first note of the triplet, as seen in the Picture 10), two bars later in the descending triplet passage. This fingering might seem odd in the beginning, but considering the fact that the higher we go, the distance between the fingers gets smaller, this fingering results being very comfortable and naturally coming.

 Musical score for a cadenza, rehearsal number 41. The first system shows a treble clef staff with a rapid arpeggio pattern and a bass clef staff with a piano accompaniment of sustained chords. The second system continues the arpeggio pattern in the treble and the piano accompaniment in the bass. Tempo markings include *Tempo I.* and *41 Tempo I.*. Dynamics include *sf*, *p*, and *pp*.

Picture 11: Cadenza, Rehearsal number 41

The accompaniment joins the solo violin again in the rehearsal number 41 with tender main melody in only one hand and soft piano. And while the soloist keeps arpeggio pattern in pianissimo, it is the piano that grows bigger in the sound as it is repeating the

main motif of the first as well as ending movement. The cadenza concludes with continuous, scintillating figuration up to the resolute final bars. As for the very last chords (and all the chords throughout the concerto), if we focus on the bass line and accentuate the lowest note of the chord, we will reach greater imposing sound, very much needed in the grandioso closure of this concerto.

5 Conclusion

Preparing and writing of this thesis was sometimes a little wrenching experience and difficult process, because there are not many sources available regarding *Arensky's* life, work or the violin concerto itself. On the other hand, thanks to this fact, it was always exciting to find any new information about him or his pieces.

I based my thesis on the fact that *Anton Arensky* is a 'forgotten author' of the romantic era and that is the reason why I went through his work in greater detail, as it hides some treasures of classical music worth of a lot more attention than it was given in soloistic, chamber music, vocal or opera repertoire of the musicians all around the world, as is *String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 35*, virtuoso *Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 32*, *The Piano Concerto* or *The Violin Concerto in A minor, Op. 54*.

I have always genuinely enjoyed reaching for and exploring very little known pieces, not only because they do not carry the 'interpretation prejudice' (i.e. common ideas about performing style) but also because the violin repertoire is so immensely extensive that many marvellous pieces just became 'forgotten' or lost and I believe it is big a shame that the musical institutions as orchestras or music schools do not invest in or do not support students and performers in delving deeper into those.

The opportunity to analyze the concerto in greater detail, as well as the analysis of the methods of the practicing helped me to gain a detailed knowledge of the technical difficulties, melodic figures and all the specifics of the concerto, to understand the repetitive patterns, themes and motives in the individual movements and his harmonic choices and the amount of chromatics and different musical modes forced me to focus and work hard on my intonation that I tend to neglect. This concerto does not reach the complexity of other big violin concertos, yet still provides the opportunity to demonstrate a certain level of virtuosity in technically demanding passages that are followed by more relaxed sections, for which the second movement serves as a great example. Many places, such as the quick runs in the second movement or the endings of the second and third movements serve as great solfège exercise, as well as the double steps and arpeggios in the last movement of the concerto. All of this led to a better understanding of the piece and a greater confidence during the performance of the concerto as I felt like I know every note of this *Arensky's* work.

I hope this project would help also other violinists looking for some interesting pieces to add in their repertoire and would motivate them to reach for this beautiful concerto, as it contains all the elements of a compound masterpiece, from the romantic singing melodies to technically challenging passages and make it suitable for exams, auditions or any pleasant performances.

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Concert Program

Metropolia AMK, Ruoholahdentori 6, 00180, Helsinki

Concert

16. May 2017  14.00  Kamarimusiikkisali



A. Arensky
Violin concerto A minor op. 54

- 1. Allegro**
- 2. Adagio non troppo**
- 3. Tempo di Valse**
- 4. Poco meno mosso**

violin: Mária Vojtovičová
piano: Joonas Pohjonen



Anton Arensky was one of the brightest stars of the late 19th century Russian music scene. He was born in 1861 to a pair of devoted amateur musicians. After the studies in St. Petersburg's Conservatory with Rimsky-Korsakov, in 1882 he became the youngest professor of the Moscow Conservatory and later held other positions as a pianist, composer and conductor. Death came prematurely in 1905, when after decades of hard living and overindulgence he succumbed to tuberculosis.

Like its composer, his A minor Violin Concerto is nearly unknown today. A lovely four-movements-in-one work lasting just 20 minutes, dedicated to the great violinist and pedagogue Leopold Auer, Arensky's Concerto has sweet melodies, tender harmonies and beautiful, lyrical violin part calling for virtuosity. It is a model of the flowering of Russian romantic nationalism: Tchaikovsky's influence on his friend is pleasingly evident, as is Arensky's gift for melody and delightful contrasts of musical character.