

**Great Masters:  
Tchaikovsky—His Life and  
Music**

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Professor Greenberg is creator, host, and lecturer for the San Francisco Symphony's Discovery Series. The Discovery Series is a special subscription series in which participants attend four 3-hour lectures over the course of the concert season on topics that are geared to the repertoire under performance.

Professor Greenberg has taught and lectured extensively across North America and Europe, speaking to such corporations and musical institutions as Arthur Andersen and Andersen Consulting, Diamond Technologies, Canadian Pacific, Strategos Institute, Lincoln Center, the Van Cliburn Foundation, the University of California/Haas School of Business Executive Seminar, the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, and others. His work as a teacher and lecturer has been profiled in the *Wall Street Journal, Inc.* magazine, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Times* of London. He is an artistic codirector and board member of COMPOSER, INC. His music is published by Fallen Leaf Press and CPP/Belwin and is recorded on the Innova Label.

Professor Greenberg has recorded 256 lectures for The Teaching Company, including the forty-eight-lecture super-course *How to Listen to and Understand Great Music*.

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## Great Masters: Tchaikovsky—His Life and Music

### Scope:

When Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony (the so-called *Pathétique*) was premiered on October 28, 1893, the composer was at the height of his powers. He had attained a degree of fame and popularity rarely accorded a living artist. But a few days later, on November 4, 1893, he lay dying. The facts of his death were kept from the world for a century by his countrymen. The apparent truth was that this musical idol had been forced to commit suicide lest he disgrace himself and his associates by public exposure of his homosexuality.

To know Tchaikovsky's music, we must be familiar with the details of his life, because his music, as his Sixth Symphony so abundantly demonstrates, is so often an intimate confession, a mirror of a personal life tormented by doubt and sexual anxiety.

Tchaikovsky was an unusually sensitive child, with an abnormal dependency on his mother and an obsessive love of music. As a child of a nineteenth-century upper-class Russian family, however, Tchaikovsky's musical talent was not particularly encouraged. His parents had him educated for the more "suitable" profession of the civil service at the Imperial School of Jurisprudence in St. Petersburg. It was at school that Tchaikovsky discovered his homosexuality. It was also while still a schoolboy that Tchaikovsky lost his mother to cholera. Her death was a shattering experience for the fourteen-year-old Tchaikovsky, and it found its poignant expression in his later music.

After Tchaikovsky graduated from the School of Jurisprudence, he was employed as a government clerk but not for long. His obsession with music eventually won out and he entered the newly founded St. Petersburg Conservatory. He graduated in 1866 at the age of twenty-six and joined the teaching faculty at the likewise newly established Moscow Conservatory. In 1868, his First Symphony was premiered. It already possesses the hallmark of Tchaikovsky's musical style: formal classical construction coupled with Romantic expression. For the rest of his career, Tchaikovsky would successfully tread a fine line between Russian emotional excess and Germanic intellectual control. He was the only composer in Russia at that time who could combine the best of Western European technique with his own Russian heritage.

Despite his growing musical success, Tchaikovsky remained prey to self-doubt about his compositional abilities, to bouts of severe depression, and to anxiety that his homosexuality would be publicly exposed. His sense of alienation, brought on by his homosexuality, seems to have turned him inward to a world of self-expression that he might not otherwise have discovered had he felt less isolated.

Among the great works of the 1870s were the iconoclastic First Piano Concerto and the music for the ballet *Swan Lake*, which revolutionized the art and substance of ballet. Another masterwork was the opera *Eugene Onegin* of 1877. That year also saw Tchaikovsky's brief but disastrous marriage and the blossoming of his unique relationship with his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck. Nadezhda's devotion to Tchaikovsky and his music resulted in one of the strangest relationships in music history. She supported Tchaikovsky with the agreement that they would never meet, but only exchange letters. Her generosity enabled Tchaikovsky to leave his teaching post at the Moscow Conservatory in 1878 and concentrate on his compositional career. By the early 1880s, he had become an international celebrity. He conquered his fear of conducting and toured Europe promoting his own music.

In 1890, however, he was devastated by the loss of his friendship with Nadezhda von Meck, who withdrew her financial support because of family problems. She also ceased to write letters to Tchaikovsky. He became embittered and began to age visibly. Nevertheless, in 1891, he undertook a highly successful conducting tour of the United States and, a year later, received an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University.

In late August 1893, Tchaikovsky completed his Sixth Symphony, which reveals a composer at the height of his power. Two months later, he lay dying. His homosexual affair with a young nobleman had been discovered and it was in danger of becoming a public scandal. A group of former classmates of the School of Jurisprudence decided that Tchaikovsky was jeopardizing the reputation of their alma mater. They forced him to commit suicide. The public was told that he had died of cholera, a not uncommon disease at the time.

Tchaikovsky's music remains an enduring monument to a man who was not only a great composer but also a highly popular composer. He possessed the unique ability in his day to blend the fire and passion of Russian nationalism with Germanic compositional technique. He infused his music with a rare intensity of expression and a rich harmonic and melodic beauty that guarantee his place among the greatest contributors to the repertoire.

# Lecture One

## Introduction and Early Life

**Scope:** Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, premiered on October 28, 1893, reflects the composer at the height of his career, filled with physical energy and incredible musical imagination. He had never felt more content. Yet on November 4, 1893, he lay dying. The true facts of his death were hidden from the world for a century by Russians who were unwilling to disclose that he had been forced to commit suicide because of his homosexuality. Tchaikovsky's inner life and private life from his childhood onward were reflected to a rare degree in his music. Tchaikovsky was an extremely sensitive child who quickly developed an obsession with music and an abnormal dependence on his mother. His musical ambitions, however, were postponed while he dutifully fulfilled his parents' wishes and trained for a career as a civil servant. In 1854, Tchaikovsky's mother died of cholera. This was a shattering experience for the fourteen-year-old boy and one that found poignant expression in his music.

### Outline

- I. The controversy surrounding Tchaikovsky's death is even greater than that surrounding Mozart's death.
  - A. On October 28, 1893, Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony was premiered in St. Petersburg.
    1. This work plumbs a range of expression from profound despair to brilliant machismo. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74, Movement 3.
    2. Symphony No. 6 represents Tchaikovsky at the height of his creative powers at age fifty-three.
  - B. On November 4, 1893, Tchaikovsky lay dying.
    1. Tchaikovsky's brother Modest announced that the composer had contracted cholera after drinking unboiled water.
    2. Modest Tchaikovsky, and subsequent generations of Russian censors, actively promoted this cover-up.
    3. The truth is that Tchaikovsky was a homosexual in a society that severely punished homosexuality.
- II. Tchaikovsky's private life was given powerful expression in his music.
  - A. Tchaikovsky's music was so often an intimate confession, a mirror of a life tormented because of his sexuality. An example of this is the cry of despair that opens the final movement of the Sixth Symphony. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74, Movement 4, Opening.



- V. In 1852, Tchaikovsky's family moved to St. Petersburg.
  - A. Tchaikovsky entered the Imperial School of Jurisprudence.
  - B. On June 25, 1854, Tchaikovsky's mother died of cholera at the age of forty-one.
    - 1. Her death was a crushing blow for the fourteen-year-old Tchaikovsky.
    - 2. It was probably one of the sources of depression that characterized his psyche and often found poignant expression in his music.
    - 3. The end of the last movement of the Sixth Symphony could be described as Tchaikovsky's cry of despair for his mother and his own innocence, which died together that June day in 1854.  
**Musical example:** Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74, Movement 4, Conclusion.

## Lecture Two

### A Career in Music

**Scope:** Tchaikovsky's education at the St. Petersburg Imperial School of Jurisprudence included visits to the opera. According to Tchaikovsky, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* was the inspiration for his musical career. At school, he also discovered that he was homosexual. After a brief and eminently forgettable stint as a civil servant, he enrolled at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he trained in all aspects of music. He graduated in 1866 and joined the teaching faculty at the new Moscow Conservatory. In 1868, his First Symphony was premiered. The work possesses formal Germanic construction coupled with Romantic Russian expression. For the rest of his career, Tchaikovsky would tread a fine line between Russian emotional excess and Germanic intellectual control. He was the only composer in Russia at that time who had the education, craft, and talent to combine the best of Western European compositional technique with his own Russian heritage.

### Outline

- I. Tchaikovsky graduated from the Imperial School of Jurisprudence in 1859.
  - A. At school, the students were taken to theater and opera performances.
    1. Tchaikovsky sang in the school choir and took piano lessons.
    2. He saw Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, which made a great impression on him.
    3. As a result, so he later claimed, he determined to make music his career.
    4. The adolescent homosexual experimentation at his school also revealed to Tchaikovsky that he was a true homosexual.
  - B. After graduation in 1859, Tchaikovsky worked as a government clerk and pursued a private life of physical pleasure.
    1. By the time he was twenty-one, however, Tchaikovsky was talking of a career in music.
    2. This time, his father supported the idea.
- II. In 1862, Tchaikovsky enrolled at the recently established St. Petersburg Conservatory.
  - A. The conservatory had been founded by the Polish-born pianist and composer Anton Rubinstein, who wanted to create a music school in Russia in the Western European style.
  - B. Tchaikovsky learned all aspects of music at the conservatory, including conducting.
  - C. He developed a phobia about conducting, believing his head would fall off if he did not hold it with one hand while conducting with the other!

- D. He graduated from the conservatory in 1866.
- III. After he graduated, Tchaikovsky moved to Moscow to join the teaching faculty at the brand new Moscow Conservatory.
- A. The Moscow Conservatory had been founded by Nikolai Rubinstein, Anton's brother.
  - B. Although Moscow was his base of operations for twelve years, Tchaikovsky was never comfortable there.
    - 1. Moscow was not as sophisticated as St. Petersburg.
    - 2. It was also a violently homophobic city.
  - C. Tchaikovsky's musical career truly began with the premiere of his Overture in F in May 1866. The Overture was an instant success.  
**Musical example:** Overture in F, *Allegro*, Opening.
- IV. In February 1868, Tchaikovsky's First Symphony was premiered in Moscow.
- A. Tchaikovsky, typically, worked with almost crazed intensity on his First Symphony.
    - 1. He subtitled the work *Winter Daydreams*.
    - 2. It was substantially revised in 1874; this later version is the one with which we are familiar today.
    - 3. The symphony's subtitle should not be taken too literally to specifically evoke imagery of a Russian winter scene so much as a generalized mood. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 13 (*Winter Daydreams*), Movement 1, Opening.
    - 4. In writing a symphony, Tchaikovsky proved himself to be a classicist.
    - 5. The symphony has a formal construction that gives it a musical independence from any story it might be telling.
    - 6. Tchaikovsky would tread a fine line between Romantic expression and classical structure, between Russian emotional excess and Germanic intellectual control.
    - 7. This dualism invited criticism: for the academics, Tchaikovsky was too Romantic and for the Romantics, he was too academic; for the Russian nationalists, he was too German and for the Germans, he was too Russian.
  - B. Tchaikovsky's essential model was the nineteenth-century composer Felix Mendelssohn, whose music balanced structural clarity with a generalized Romantic expressive content.
    - 1. The second movement of Tchaikovsky's First Symphony is subtitled *Land of desolation, land of mists*. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 13, Movement 2, Opening.
    - 2. Again, the subtitle is meant to describe a generalized mood rather than a specific programmatic image.

- C. Tchaikovsky abandons subtitles completely for the third and fourth movements.
  - 1. He adapted the third movement directly from a student work written in 1865. It is a gentle scherzo that evokes Mendelssohn's Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. **First musical example:** Mendelssohn's Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1826), "Enchanted Forest" music. **Second musical example:** Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 13, Movement 3.
  - 2. The fourth movement opens with a soulful introduction that eventually yields to some *maestoso* ("magnificent") music. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 13, Movement 4.
- D. The First Symphony exhibits many of the merits and defects of Tchaikovsky's mature musical style.
  - 1. It possesses strong melodies that often have a Russian folksong quality.
  - 2. It demonstrates a reliance (and, occasionally, an over-reliance) on varied repetition rather than genuine thematic development.
  - 3. It makes nontraditional use of the orchestra to create unusual timbres, such as the flute/bassoon duo heard during the opening of the first movement.
- E. Tchaikovsky's former teacher Anton Rubinstein was very critical of the First Symphony, which deeply offended Tchaikovsky. He carried this resentment to his grave.
- F. Neither Anton nor his brother Nicholai would champion Tchaikovsky; instead, he found an ally in Mili Balakirev, the nationalist leader of an anti-conservatory, anti-German, and anti-Rubinstein-brothers group of composers.
- V. Around 1825, a Russian nationalist movement of writers, poets, and musicians arose.
  - A. The intellectual and artistic classes of Russia were inspired by the spirit of freedom and nationalism represented by the failed Decembrist Revolution of 1825.
    - 1. These artists included Alexander Sergeyeyich Pushkin (1799–1837) who gave artistic legitimacy to the Russian language.
    - 2. Pushkin's works inspired operas by Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, and Glinka.
    - 3. Glinka did for Russian music what Pushkin had done for literature. He showed that Russian-language opera and Russian-tinted music belonged in the opera house side by side with Italian and German opera.
    - 4. Glinka's operas *A Life for the Czar* (1834) and *Ruslan and Lyudmilla* (1842) forever changed Russian music.

- B.** Mili Balakirev (1837–1910) was a champion of Glinka’s music and formed a group of nationalist composers called “The Mighty Handful” or “The Russian Five.”
1. The other members of this group were Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Alexander Borodin.
  2. None of them had formal music training.
  3. They all had nonmusical careers.
  4. Balakirev succeeded Anton Rubinstein as conductor of the Russian Musical Society.
  5. Balakirev became a champion of Tchaikovsky, who was the only composer in Russia at that time who had the education, craft, and talent to combine the best of Western European compositional technique with his own Russian heritage.

## Lecture Three

### The First Masterworks

**Scope:** Tchaikovsky's musical career was helped considerably by his friendship with the Russian nationalist composer Mili Balakirev. Balakirev championed Tchaikovsky's music and suggested the idea for Tchaikovsky's first masterwork, the Overture-Fantasy *Romeo and Juliet* of 1869. Tchaikovsky's First and Second Symphonies and the iconoclastic First Piano Concerto were written between 1868 and 1872. His growing success allowed him to acquire his own apartment, an event that changed his lifestyle. He was now free to lead a double life as a homosexual. Yet all the while, he dreaded public exposure in a country that severely punished homosexuality.

### Outline

- I. The year 1868 was pivotal for Tchaikovsky.
  - A. Several works were premiered:
    1. The First Symphony
    2. The opera *The Voevoda*
    3. The symphonic fantasy *Fatum*.
  - B. Tchaikovsky strengthened his friendship with Mili Balakirev.
  - C. Tchaikovsky "fell in love" with Belgian soprano Desirée Artot.
    1. He believed his homosexuality was a "correctable" deviance and that marriage would "redeem" him.
    2. His friends tried to dissuade him.
    3. Nicholai Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky's friend and mentor, told Desirée's mother about Tchaikovsky's homosexuality.
    4. Subsequently, Desirée broke off the relationship.
- II. In 1869, Balakirev suggested that Tchaikovsky compose a work based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.
  - A. Around this time, Tchaikovsky fell in love with Eduard Zak, a fifteen-year-old student.
  - B. Zak is generally accepted to be Tchaikovsky's inspiration for *Romeo and Juliet*. **Musical example:** Overture-Fantasy *Romeo and Juliet*, "Love Theme," Recapitulation.
  - C. *Romeo and Juliet* was Tchaikovsky's first masterwork.
    1. It consolidated his position in Russia as one of the most promising native composers.
    2. It ultimately helped to establish his European reputation.
  - D. Tchaikovsky wrote his first mature set of songs immediately after completing the first version of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1869.

1. These are beautiful pieces that deserve to be performed more often than they are.
  2. There are six songs in the set, including *None But the Lonely Heart*, text by the German poet Johann Goethe. **Musical example:** Six Songs, Op. 6, No. 6, *None But the Lonely Heart*.
- III.** The years 1871 to 1872 saw the composition of the First String Quartet and the Second Symphony.
- A. The second movement of String Quartet No. 1 in D Major, Op. 11, is based on a Russian folksong entitled *Sidel Vanya*. **Musical example:** String Quartet No. 1 in D Major, Op. 11, Movement 2, Opening.
  - B. Leo Tolstoy is said to have wept on hearing the second movement.
  - C. Tchaikovsky's growing success enabled him to get his own apartment in Moscow. His newly found privacy allowed him to indulge his taste for the pedophile and homosexual demi-monde.
  - D. As his fame grew, so did Tchaikovsky's fear of public exposure of his homosexuality.
  - E. Tchaikovsky began his Second Symphony during the summer of 1872 while he was staying on the estate of his sister Sasha and her husband, Lev Davidov, at Kamenka, near Kiev.
    1. The Second Symphony was premiered in Moscow on February 7, 1873.
    2. Its title, *Little Russian*, alludes to Ukraine, where his sister's estate was located, and to its use of Russian folksongs.
    3. The fourth movement—reportedly Tchaikovsky's favorite—is based on a Ukrainian folksong called *Let the Crane Soar*.
    4. Typical of Russian folk music are the almost obsessive repetitions of the same melodic ideas and the sense of buildup created by use of instrumentation and dynamics alone. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 17, *Little Russian*, Movement 4, Theme.
    5. The Second Symphony was a great success, yet Tchaikovsky complained at the time of being depressed. "Post-success" depression would become typical of Tchaikovsky.
- IV.** Between 1872 and 1874, Tchaikovsky wrote the symphonic overture *The Tempest*, the opera *Vakula the Smith*, the String Quartet No. 2, and the First Piano Concerto.
- A. The First Piano Concerto was written in "short score" in six weeks. Short score is a sketch that can be played on the piano. It is the basis of the fully orchestrated score.
  - B. Tchaikovsky's choice of pianist for the new work, Nikolai Rubinstein, criticized the work as "worthless and unplayable."

1. The opening of the concerto is one of the most famous passages in the repertoire. **Musical example:** Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor, Op. 23, Movement 1, Introduction.
2. Noteworthy is the piano's position as the orchestra's equal.
3. After the opening, the piano embarks on a virtuoso cadenza; eventually, the strings re-enter for another impassioned playing of the introductory theme. **Musical example:** Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor, Op. 23, Movement 1, Introduction.

## Lecture Four

### Maturity

**Scope:** Tchaikovsky took a number of structural liberties with his First Piano Concerto that drew criticism, as well as praise. The work was premiered in Boston in 1874. Within four years, the work had become a favorite with audiences throughout Europe and the Americas. Despite the success of the concerto and other works, Tchaikovsky, typically, lacked confidence in his creative abilities. At the same time, his homosexuality made him feel increasingly alienated from the rest of his world, a condition that seems to have forced him to turn inward to a world of self-expression that he might not have discovered had he felt less isolated. Between 1875 and 1876, he wrote his first full ballet score—*Swan Lake*—which revealed his love of dance. This music revolutionized the art and substance of ballet in the way it depicts the mood, the dramatic action, and the characters of the tragic story.

### Outline

- I. Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto has a vaguely Slavic-sounding introductory theme.
  - A. **Musical example:** Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor, Op. 23, Movement 1, Introduction, First Phrase.
    1. This theme is followed by an explosive cadenza. **Musical example:** Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor, Op.23, Movement 1, Introduction, Piano Cadenza.
    2. The cadenza is followed by a reprise of the introductory theme. **Musical example:** Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor, Op. 23, Movement 1, Introduction, Reprise of Theme.
    3. The introductory theme is not heard again.
    4. This is one of the structural liberties that Tchaikovsky takes in this work that baffled Rubinstein and others.
  - B. The concerto's second movement is a love song. **Musical example:** Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor, Op. 23, Movement 2, Introduction.
  - C. The concerto's finale is a wild rondo. A rondo is a musical procedure in which a single theme keeps returning again and again after various contrasting episodes. **Musical example:** Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor, Op. 23, Movement 3, Theme.
  - D. The concerto ends with a fire-snorting version of the rondo theme. **Musical example:** Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor, Op. 23, Movement 3, Conclusion.

- E. Tchaikovsky found another pianist willing to perform the work, Hans von Bülow.
  1. Von Bülow was a German-born piano virtuoso, conductor, and student of Franz Liszt. He is also one of music history's most famous cuckolds.
  2. He married Liszt's illegitimate daughter, Cosima.
  3. In the 1860s, he became a champion of Richard Wagner's music.
  4. Wagner "rewarded" von Bülow by having an affair with Cosima, who eventually got a divorce from von Bülow and married Wagner.
  5. Von Bülow took Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 on tour to the United States, where he performed it 139 times!
  6. The Piano Concerto No. 1 was premiered in Boston on October 25, 1875, and to an even more enthusiastic audience in New York on December 11.
  7. Later, Nicholai Rubinstein learned the piano part and became one of the concerto's great champions.
  8. Within four years, the concerto became a favorite with audiences throughout Europe and the Americas.
  
- II. On March 14, 1876, Tchaikovsky's Third String Quartet was premiered.
  - A. The Third String Quartet is a melancholy and brooding piece.
    1. It is dedicated to the memory of Tchaikovsky's friend, the violinist Ferdinand Laub.
    2. Many consider this work to be some of the best music Tchaikovsky ever wrote.
    3. The music is imbued with an intensely personal, intimate tone.
    4. **Musical example:** String Quartet No. 3 in E Flat Minor, Op. 30, Movement 1, Opening.
  - B. Tchaikovsky managed to be consistently productive despite his depressions and neuroses.
    1. At the time he wrote the Third String Quartet, he told his brother Anatoly that his homosexuality had caused "an unbridgeable gulf" between himself and the rest of the world.
    2. Tchaikovsky's increasing self-loathing and feeling of isolation seems to have turned him inward, where he found a world of self-expression that he might never have discovered had he felt less alienated from human society.
  
- III. Tchaikovsky met the French composer Saint-Saens in 1875.
  - A. Both composers were homosexuals.
  - B. Both liked to impersonate female dancers.

- IV. Between 1875 and 1876, Tchaikovsky wrote his first full ballet score, *Swan Lake*.
- A. The premiere of *Swan Lake* on March 4, 1877, at the Bolshoi Theater was a failure, although the ballet would become a staple of the repertoire.
  - B. Tchaikovsky's ballet music is an equal partner in telling the story.
    1. It revolutionized the art and substance of ballet.
    2. The Act 1 finale deftly encapsulates the passion and the sadness of this story of tragic love. **Musical example:** *Swan Lake*, Op. 20, Act 1, Finale.
    3. Act 1 contains one of the most famous waltzes in the entire repertoire. Dramatically, it is meant to convey Prince Siegfried's purity, his youth, and high spirits. The pain and death his love for Odette will ultimately bring about are still far in the future. **Musical example:** *Swan Lake*, Op. 20, Act 1, Waltz.
    4. The Polish mazurka heard in Act 3 is one of a number of national dances in the ballet score. **Musical example:** *Swan Lake*, Op. 20, Act 3, Mazurka.
- V. In August 1876, Tchaikovsky went to the first Bayreuth Festival to review Wagner's music drama *The Ring*.
- A. Tchaikovsky found Wagner's music boring.
  - B. His views on Wagner reveal Tchaikovsky to be a populist composer, whose central article of faith was to please and move his audience.
    1. The essential way Tchaikovsky pleased his audiences was to write long, singing, memorable melodies that lend themselves to repetition, rather than thematic development.
    2. Tchaikovsky, however, was frustrated by his inability to write convincing developmental music.
    3. His music has been criticized because of its lack of developmental material.
- VI. Tchaikovsky wrote his *March Slav* in response to Turkish massacres of Christians in the Balkans.
- A. In 1876, Nicholai Rubinstein asked Tchaikovsky to write a piece for the Russian Musical Society that would benefit the war victims.
  - B. *March Slav* is a superb and calculated bit of patriotic, musical jingoism, that uses Serbian folk tunes for its themes, as well as *God Preserve the Czar*. **Musical example:** *March Slav*, Opening.
  - C. *March Slav* was premiered on November 17, 1876, to an ecstatic audience, many of whom were said to have been in tears.

## Lecture Five

### Three Women: Tatyana, Antonina, and Nadezhda

**Scope:** In 1877, Tchaikovsky wrote *Eugene Onegin*, an opera inspired by Pushkin's tale of unrequited love. Tchaikovsky was attracted by the human drama and the psychological aspects of the story that resonated with his own experiences of life. The opera contains a poignant scene in which its heroine pours out her heart in a letter to a man who does not return her love. By an amazing coincidence, Tchaikovsky himself received such a love letter from a former conservatory student, Antonina Milyukova. They met and were married in July 1877. The marriage was such a disaster that Tchaikovsky would attempt suicide. He separated from Antonina that October. At that time, he was exchanging letters with a very wealthy widow. Although they would never actually meet, Nadezhda von Meck would become Tchaikovsky's patroness and lifeline for the next fourteen years.

### Outline

- I. The first few months of 1877 were among the most productive of Tchaikovsky's life.
  - A. He was well on his way to completing the Fourth Symphony.
  - B. He also began work on an opera inspired by Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. He was attracted to the poetry, human drama, and psychological aspects of *Eugene Onegin* and the degree to which the story and its characters related to his own life.
  - C. *Eugene Onegin* is a tragic tale of unrequited love.
    1. Tatyana falls in love with Eugene Onegin.
    2. He rejects her. She is crushed.
    3. She eventually marries someone else.
    4. Onegin returns from wanderings abroad and confesses his love for Tatyana.
    5. She rejects him; he is crushed.
  - D. The key scene in the opera is the so-called "Letter Scene."
    1. Tatyana pours her heart out in a love letter to Onegin. **Musical example:** *Eugene Onegin* (1877), Act 1, Scene 2, "Letter Scene."
    2. Tchaikovsky later wrote that he completely "identified" with Tatyana.
- II. While working on *Eugene Onegin*, Tchaikovsky received a love letter from a former conservatory student, Antonina Milyukova.
  - A. In his brief letter of reply, Tchaikovsky told Antonina to "master her feelings."

- B. Antonina wrote again, this time accusing Tchaikovsky of cruelty.
  - C. Tchaikovsky identified himself with Onegin and Antonina, with Tatyana.
  - D. Tchaikovsky and Antonina eventually met and Tchaikovsky proposed a platonic relationship between them. Antonina does not seem to have understood that Tchaikovsky was homosexual.
  - E. Tchaikovsky married Antonina on July 18, 1877.
  - F. The marriage was a disaster from the very beginning.
- III.** During this period, Tchaikovsky began to develop a very close friendship with a wealthy patron of the arts, Nadezhda von Meck.
- A. Nadezhda became Tchaikovsky's patroness, provider, and lifeline for the next fourteen years, although the two would never meet.
  - B. She was the widow of a Russian railway tycoon named Karl Fyodorovich von Meck, who had died in 1876.
  - C. Nadezhda was ecstatic about Tchaikovsky's music and had commissioned some piano and violin music from him in December 1876.
  - D. The two began to exchange letters.
  - E. In Nadezhda, Tchaikovsky seems to have found his soul mate.
  - F. Nadezhda wanted only a platonic relationship based on Tchaikovsky's music and correspondence.
- IV.** Tchaikovsky's despair over his marriage led him to make an unsuccessful attempt at suicide.
- A. Tchaikovsky's old friend and mentor Nikolai Rubinstein and his brother Anatoly broke the news to Antonina that Tchaikovsky had left her.
  - B. Antonina did not seem to understand her situation.
  - C. Nadezhda von Meck offered Tchaikovsky an annual subsidy of 6,000 rubles.
    1. Evidence suggests that she knew Tchaikovsky was homosexual but was unconcerned.
    2. In fact, she might have considered it an asset, because she knew she would never lose him to another woman.
    3. Nadezhda would remain Tchaikovsky's soul mate, patroness, and lifeline for the next fourteen years.

## Lecture Six

### “My Great Friend”

**Scope:** Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony was premiered in Moscow in 1878, while the composer was living abroad, thanks to the generous financial support of Nadezhda von Meck. Inspired by Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, Tchaikovsky’s Fourth is about fate, or destiny. Typically, it is a highly subjective work—a sublimation of Tchaikovsky’s personal suffering and intimate experiences. It was quickly followed by the brilliant Violin Concerto in D Major, which became a pillar of the repertoire within a few years. In the fall of 1878, Tchaikovsky resigned from the Moscow Conservatory to compose full time. He embarked on a life of traveling around Europe and Russia, lavishly supported and encouraged by his patroness Nadezhda von Meck.

### Outline

- I. Nadezhda von Meck’s generosity allowed Tchaikovsky to remain abroad in France, Italy, and Switzerland well into 1878.
  - A. The Fourth Symphony was premiered in Moscow on February 22, 1878, while Tchaikovsky was in Florence, Italy.
  - B. The Fourth Symphony is dedicated to “My Great Friend”—Nadezhda von Meck, who had asked to remain anonymous.
  - C. Tchaikovsky described the symphony’s program to Nadezhda.
    1. The introduction contains the main idea of the whole work—the idea of destiny, fate. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36, Movement 1, Introduction, Opening.
    2. The feeling of doom grows stronger in the first theme. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36, Movement 1, Theme 1.
    3. Tchaikovsky explains to Nadezhda that his music then suggests that perhaps dreams can provide relief from the despair of reality. At this point, the music becomes evocative of a dream-like state. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36, Movement 1, Theme 2, Climax.
    4. But the feeling of doom returns with the “fate” theme. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36, Movement 1, Theme 1, Return.
    5. Tchaikovsky explains that his music reflects life’s constant alternation of harsh reality and dreams of happiness, from which there is no relief.
  - D. The inspiration for Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony was Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, with its idea of “fate knocking at the door.” **First**

**musical example:** Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67 (1808), Movement 1. **Second musical example:** Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36, Movement 1.

- E. The second movement depicts a state of nostalgic sadness. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36, Movement 2.
  - F. The third movement evokes a state of mild intoxication, when imagination gives play to elusive images. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36, Movement 3.
  - G. The fourth movement presents an image of festivities where people are enjoying themselves. As Tchaikovsky puts it, if you are unhappy, try looking for relief outside yourself in the happiness of others. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36, Movement 4.
  - H. Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony was his first major work to synthesize the many stylistic and expressive elements he had used separately in earlier works.
  - I. These elements include his love of dance music, folk elements, the atmosphere of the Russian countryside and its people, and the extremes of joy and *angst* so basic to his expressive voice.
- II. The most enduring work that Tchaikovsky composed during his post-marriage "exile" is the Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35, of 1878.
- A. Tchaikovsky began the concerto in Clarens on Lake Geneva in Switzerland.
    - 1. Tchaikovsky was living extravagantly on Nadezhda von Meck's patronage.
    - 2. He wanted to dedicate the Violin Concerto to the violinist Yosif Kotel, a bisexual and a former lover of Tchaikovsky.
    - 3. He did not do so, because he feared "malicious gossip."
    - 4. Instead, he dedicated the work to a friend and conservatory colleague, Leopold Auer.
    - 5. Auer, however, pronounced the work "impossible to play."
    - 6. Tchaikovsky went back to Kotel, who now also pronounced the concerto unplayable, even though he had played it through during its composition.
    - 7. Tchaikovsky then offered violinist Adolf Brodsky the dedication and the premiere performance.
    - 8. Brodsky accepted and performed the concerto at its premiere on December 4, 1881, in Vienna, Austria. **Musical example:** Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35, Movement 1, Theme 1.
    - 9. The composer Bill Conti appropriated this theme for his score for the movie *The Right Stuff*. **First musical example:** Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35, Movement 1, Development, Part 1. **Second musical example:** Bill Conti's March from *The Right Stuff* (1983).

- B. The premiere of the Violin Concerto was a fiasco.
  1. The eminent Viennese music critic Eduard Hanslick gave the concerto a terrible and mean-spirited review.
  2. Tchaikovsky was so upset by Hanslick's review that he was able to recite it in the original German to the day he died.
  3. Other reviews were also highly critical of the work.
  4. Within a few years, however, the concerto had become a mainstay of the repertoire, where it remains today.
  5. Leopold Auer later recognized his mistake, apologized to Tchaikovsky, and became one of the concerto's great champions. He introduced the work to his students, including Mischa Elman and Jascha Heifetz.
- C. The concerto's finale is a brilliant Cossack dance in rondo form.
 

**Musical example:** Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35, Movement 3.

  1. Noteworthy is the drone-like accompaniment that gives the music its rustic feel.
  2. The violin initially plays the theme on its G string, giving the music a deep, resonant, slightly gritty sound.
  3. As in any good country dance, the music gets faster and faster.
 

**Musical example:** Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35, Movement 3.
  4. A lyric folk-like melody follows. **Musical example:** Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35, Movement 3.
  5. The movement and concerto end with some of the most brilliant music ever written for violin. **Musical example:** Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35, Movement 3, Coda.

III. Tchaikovsky returned to Moscow to prepare for the fall semester at the conservatory.

- A. He read a gossipy article about illicit love affairs at the conservatory.
  1. Fearing exposure of his homosexuality, he decided to resign.
  2. Nadezhda von Meck was delighted by his decision. She had always felt that the teaching position was unworthy of him.
- B. Tchaikovsky embarked on a life of travel around Europe and Russia.
  1. Nadezhda's financial support enabled him to live lavishly.
  2. By traveling constantly, Tchaikovsky was able to avoid Antonina, who hounded him and often threatened to expose his homosexuality to the police.
  3. Three years after Tchaikovsky's death, Antonina was committed to an insane asylum outside St. Petersburg, where she spent the remaining twenty years of her life.

## Lecture Seven

### “A Free Man”

**Scope:** With his separation from Antonina in the fall of 1878 and Nadezhda’s generous subsidy, Tchaikovsky was, in his own words, “a free man.” He no longer had any delusions about his sexuality, and Nadezhda’s generosity allowed him to compose full time without the burden of teaching. The masterwork of 1879–80 is the Serenade for Strings, for which Tchaikovsky himself had a special affection. In the 1880s, Tchaikovsky became an international celebrity. He conquered his fear of conducting and promoted his own music across Europe. Perhaps more important, he became a popular composer with a following beyond the concert hall. Yet he was still unhappy, partly because of bouts of depression and anxiety over public discovery of his homosexuality. The final years of the 1880s saw the creation of the Fifth Symphony. Like the Fourth, this work is about fate, but it finishes with a triumphant, life-affirming transformation of the theme.

### Outline

- I. The women and subsequent events of 1877 and 1878 shaped the rest of Tchaikovsky’s life.
  - A. Both Antonina and Nadezhda liberated Tchaikovsky in their own ways.
  - B. Antonina freed Tchaikovsky of any remaining delusions about his sexuality.
  - C. Nadezhda freed him to be the full-time composer he always wanted to be.
  - D. There is no doubt that Nadezhda loved Tchaikovsky, although their relationship remains one of the strangest in the history of music.
- II. Between 1879 and 1880, Tchaikovsky produced the Suite No. 1 for Orchestra, the opera *The Maid of Orleans*, the Second Piano Concerto, the Serenade for Strings, *Capriccio Italien*, and the *1812 Overture*.
  - A. The true masterwork of this period is the Serenade in C Major for Strings, Op. 48.
  - B. Tchaikovsky himself had a special affection for this piece.
  - C. Tchaikovsky’s first important teacher and second toughest critic (Tchaikovsky was his own toughest critic), Anton Rubinstein, considered the Serenade to be Tchaikovsky’s best work to that date.
    1. The first movement opens with a stately introduction, which returns near the end of the fourth and last movement like a musical bookend. **Musical example:** Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48, Movement 1, Introduction.

2. The introduction gives way to a simple, dancing theme of great charm. **Musical example:** Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48, Movement 1, Theme 1.
3. The second movement is a gracious waltz. **Musical example:** Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48, Movement 2, Opening.
4. Tchaikovsky loved to dance and he loved dancers. His waltzes have an instinctive sense of line, physicality, and movement that transcend those of every other composer of his time.
5. The gorgeous third movement, *Elegy*, like the waltz before it, is based on a simple, rising, scalar melody.
6. The fourth and final movement, entitled *Russian Theme*, is built out of two Russian melodies. The first is a traditional Volga River hauling tune; the second is a raucous dance theme. **Musical example:** Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48, Movement 4, Opening.

### III. Tchaikovsky became an international celebrity in the early 1880s.

- A. His music was performed across Russia, Europe, and North America.
- B. Perhaps more important, he was becoming a popular composer with a following beyond the concert hall.
- C. Nevertheless, Tchaikovsky was not happy.
  1. He continued to feel guilt and fear over his increasingly promiscuous sex life.
  2. Problems arose from the illness of family members.
  3. His lifestyle created feelings of rootlessness.
  4. He continued to be plagued by chronic depression.
- D. Tchaikovsky wanted a house of his own.
  1. His opera *Eugene Onegin* had made him a rich man.
  2. In February 1885, he found a house for lease at Maidanovo, near Klin, a town sixty miles north of Moscow.
  3. For the rest of his life, his days followed a strict routine.
  4. The house at Maidanovo provided the peaceful haven he had sought for so long.
- E. In January 1887, Tchaikovsky swallowed his fear of conducting and conducted the premiere of his opera *Cherevichki (The Enchantress)*.
- F. The performance was a triumph, and Tchaikovsky began a new and profitable career as a conductor of his own music.
- G. In late December 1887, he undertook a ten-week concert tour, conducting his music across Europe.
- H. In the course of the tour, he met Brahms. Although he never warmed to Brahms's music, he became less critical of Brahms the man.

- IV. When Tchaikovsky returned to Russia in 1888, he began work on a new symphony.
- A. Like the Fourth Symphony, Tchaikovsky's Fifth is "about" something. It is a "catharsis" composition that starts darkly in a minor key and ends brilliantly in the major.
    - 1. The symphony begins with a dark, almost tragic theme, heard initially in the clarinet. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64, Movement 1, Introduction, Theme.
    - 2. This theme appears in every movement of the symphony.
    - 3. Tchaikovsky described the theme as "complete resignation before Fate."
    - 4. This description can be interpreted to mean that Tchaikovsky had accepted his fate— his homosexuality with all its attendant joys and terrors.
  - B. The second movement of the Fifth Symphony features one of Tchaikovsky's most endearing love themes, heard initially in the horn.
    - 1. This horn solo is one of the most famous and difficult in the entire orchestral repertoire. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64, Movement 2, Opening.
    - 2. The fate theme of the first movements returns twice as a constant reminder that love and fate are inextricably linked for Tchaikovsky.
  - C. The third movement is an engaging waltz, said to have been inspired by an Italian street song that Tchaikovsky heard ten years before.
  - D. In the fourth movement, the fate theme is transformed into something brilliant and life affirming. First we hear how the symphony began. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64, Movement 1, Introduction, Theme.
    - 1. Now we hear how the fourth movement begins with the fate theme well on its way to becoming something very different. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64, Movement 4, Introduction, Theme.
    - 2. By the end of the movement, the fate theme has become a triumphant march. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64, Movement 4, Introduction, Theme.
    - 3. As with so many of his works, Tchaikovsky's high opinion of his Fifth Symphony faded once it had been premiered.
- V. Tchaikovsky's last five years were incredibly productive.
- A. These years saw the creation of the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the ballets *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*, the concert overture *Hamlet*, and the opera *Queen of Spades*, for which Tchaikovsky's brother Modest was the librettist.
  - B. Tchaikovsky was happier than he had ever been.

## Lecture Eight

### The Last Years, or Don't Drink the Water

**Scope:** In 1890, after a relationship of fourteen years, Tchaikovsky lost his soul mate and patroness, Nadezhda von Meck. Nadezhda's children were bankrupting her. She could no longer support her beloved composer. Their correspondence also ended. Tchaikovsky was devastated. After his fiftieth birthday, he began to age rapidly. Nevertheless, in 1891, he undertook a highly successful conducting tour of the United States. By 1892, he had attained a level of fame and popularity rarely accorded a living artist. He was awarded an honorary doctorate by Cambridge University. In August 1893, he completed his Sixth Symphony, an anguished masterwork that some believe to be the composer's musical premonition of his own death. By November 4, 1893, he lay dying of self-inflicted arsenic poisoning. He had been forced to commit suicide by former schoolmates who feared that the public exposure of his homosexuality would jeopardize the good name of their alma mater, The Imperial School of Jurisprudence. Tchaikovsky's family and generations of Russians covered up the true story of his death, publicly announcing that he had died of cholera. Tchaikovsky's music endures, a unique marriage of Western European compositional technique and passionate Russian nationalism.

### Outline

- I. Tchaikovsky's last years were filled with composing, traveling, performances of his music, and new friends.
  - A. He met Anton Chekhov. The two men were full of mutual admiration for one another.
  - B. Chekhov dedicated his book *Gloomy People* to Tchaikovsky, expressing the hope that he would one day become Tchaikovsky's librettist.
  - C. Among the new works composed during this period was the String Sextet in D, entitled *Souvenir of Florence*, written in memory of a visit to that city in 1890 during the composition of *Queen of Spades*.
  - D. The second movement of the Sextet in D is one of the most glorious that Tchaikovsky ever wrote. **Musical example:** *Souvenir of Florence*, Op. 60 (1890), Movement 2, Opening.
- II. Between November 1889 and March 1890, no letters were exchanged between Tchaikovsky and Nadezhda von Meck.
  - A. This break in their correspondence was the longest since it had begun thirteen years before.

- B. In July 1890, Nadezhda sent Tchaikovsky an entire year's subsidy in advance, something she had never done before.
  - C. In September 1890, she wrote him that her children were running her estate into the ground.
  - D. This is the last letter from Nadezhda von Meck to Tchaikovsky to have survived.
  - E. Her next letter is now missing but from Tchaikovsky's response to it, it is evident that she told him of her impending bankruptcy, her intention to cease supporting him, and that he should "remember her sometimes."
  - F. Tchaikovsky was devastated.
  - G. Nadezhda never replied to his letter.
  - H. Thus ended one of the most extraordinary relationships in history.
  - I. What Tchaikovsky did not know and what now appears likely is that Nadezhda's relatives threatened to expose Tchaikovsky's homosexuality if she continued to support him.
  - J. Her continued silence embittered Tchaikovsky.
  - K. As his fiftieth birthday came and went, he began to age rapidly.
- III. In April 1891, Tchaikovsky embarked on a conducting tour of the United States.
- A. He received an enthusiastic welcome in New York.
  - B. In turn, he appreciated the sincerity, generosity, and kindness that was shown to him in the United States.
  - C. He returned to Russia in June 1891.
  - D. Over the next couple of years, he wrote the tone poem *The Voevoda*, the opera *Iolantha*, and the ballet *The Nutcracker*.
  - E. By 1892, at the age of fifty-two, Tchaikovsky had attained a level of fame and popularity rarely accorded a living artist.
  - F. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University.
  - G. After relations with Nadezhda von Meck were broken off, a new correspondent entered Tchaikovsky's life. This was his nephew Vladimir Davidov, nicknamed Bob, the son of Tchaikovsky's sister Sasha and her husband, Lev.
  - H. Tchaikovsky fell in love with Bob and dedicated his Sixth Symphony to him.
- IV. The Sixth Symphony was completed on August 31, 1893.
- A. Tchaikovsky told Bob that he loved the Sixth as he had never loved any other of his works.

1. The last movement of the Sixth Symphony begins with an anguished cry of pain. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74, Movement 4, Opening.
  2. **Musical example:** Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74, Movement 4, Conclusion.
  3. Over the years, this music has been interpreted as Tchaikovsky's premonition of his own death.
  4. Tchaikovsky was terrified by the subject of death; it is unlikely that the symphony was intended to convey the idea of death.
- B.** The Sixth Symphony was premiered in St. Petersburg on October 28, 1893.
- V.** Tchaikovsky died on November 6, 1893.
- A.** The official story was that he had died of cholera after drinking unboiled water on November 2.
1. The explanation for his death was not convincing.
  2. Tchaikovsky could not have succumbed to cholera as quickly as he reportedly did.
  3. The cholera story survived until the last years of the twentieth century.
- B.** Evidence has now come to light that Tchaikovsky committed suicide by poisoning himself with arsenic.
1. Sometime during 1893, Tchaikovsky began an affair with a young nobleman named Alexander Vladimirovich Stenbok-Fermor, who was the eighteen-year-old nephew of Count Alexey Alexandrovich Stenbok-Fermor, a close friend of the czar.
  2. The count discovered the affair and wrote a letter to the czar about it.
  3. By coincidence, the letter bearer, Nicholai Jacobi, had been a classmate of Tchaikovsky's at the School of Jurisprudence.
  4. Jacobi discovered what the letter was about and feared the threat of scandal to his alma mater.
  5. Jacobi convened at his home a so-called "court of honor" consisting of seven of Tchaikovsky's former schoolmates.
  6. Tchaikovsky was asked to attend this "court of honor."
  7. The members of the court announced to Tchaikovsky that the only way they would withhold the letter from the czar was if he committed suicide.
- C.** On November 2, Tchaikovsky began taking arsenic, which produces symptoms similar to cholera.
1. Tchaikovsky's "court of honor," his brother Modest, and his doctors believed that by counterfeiting cholera, Tchaikovsky could avoid disgrace and exposure.
  2. Homosexuality was rife in czarist Russia. Tchaikovsky's sin was to have been caught.

- VI.** In his will, Tchaikovsky left the bulk of his fortune to his nephew Bob Davidov with the understanding that royalty payments from his music would be disbursed to other family members as Bob saw fit.
- A.** Bob Davidov never recovered from Tchaikovsky's death and committed suicide in 1906.
  - B.** Modest Tchaikovsky died of cancer in 1916.
  - C.** Nadezhda von Meck outlived Tchaikovsky by only two months.
- VII.** Tchaikovsky's musical style is encapsulated in his *March Slav*, a work that represents Tchaikovsky at his brilliant, orchestral best. *March Slav* combines the fiery, passionate heart of a Russian nationalist with the compositional technique and savvy of a composer trained in the Western European style. **Musical example:** *March Slav*, Conclusion.

## Vocal Text

### Eugene Onegin “Letter Scene”

#### Tatyana

*(After pacing about, she returns to the table and sits down to write once again.)*

Who are you? My guardian angel or a wily tempter?  
Put my doubts at rest. Maybe this is all an empty dream,  
The self-deception of an inexperienced soul,  
And something quite different is to be...

*(She rises again and paces thoughtfully about the room.)*

But so be it! My fate henceforth I entrust to you;  
In tears before you, your protection I beg you,  
I beg you.

Imagine: I am all alone here!

No one understands me!

I can think no more,

And I must die in silence.

I wait for you, I wait for you!

Say the word to revive my heart's fondest hopes

Or shatter this oppressive dream

With, alas, the scorn, alas, the scorn I have deserved!

*(She goes quickly to the table, finishes the letter, signs and seals it.)*

Finished! It's too frightening to read over.

I swoon from shame and fear,

But his honor is my guarantee and in that I put my trust!

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## Timeline

- 1840 ..... Born in Votkinsk, Russia, May 7.
- 1848 ..... Tchaikovsky enrolls at school.
- 1854 ..... Tchaikovsky's mother dies.
- 1859 ..... Graduates from the Imperial School of Jurisprudence.
- 1862 ..... Enrolls at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.
- 1866 ..... Moves to Moscow and becomes Professor of Music Theory at the Moscow Conservatory.
- 1868 ..... First Symphony.
- 1869 ..... *Romeo and Juliet* Overture-Fantasy.
- 1871 ..... First String Quartet.
- 1872 ..... Second Symphony.
- 1874 ..... First Piano Concerto.
- 1875 ..... Third Symphony.
- 1876 ..... Nadezhda von Meck enters Tchaikovsky's life; Third String Quartet
- 1877 ..... *Eugene Onegin*; marries Antonina Milyukova; attempts suicide; premiere of *Swan Lake*.
- 1878 ..... Leaves Moscow for St. Petersburg; Violin Concerto; Fourth Symphony is premiered.
- 1880 ..... *1812 Overture*; Serenade for Strings; Second Piano Concerto.
- 1885 ..... Settles at Maidanovo.
- 1888 ..... Fifth Symphony.
- 1890 ..... Nadezhda von Meck breaks off friendship with Tchaikovsky.
- 1891 ..... Tours United States.
- 1893 ..... Symphony No. 6 (*Pathétique*) is premiered; Tchaikovsky dies in St. Petersburg on November 6.

## Glossary

**Atonality:** The absence of an established tonality, or identifiable key.

**Cadenza:** Virtuoso music designed to show off a singer's or an instrumental soloist's technical ability.

**Classical musical style:** Designation given to works of the later eighteenth century, characterized by clear melodic lines, balanced form, and emotional restraint. The style is brilliantly exemplified by the music of Franz Joseph Haydn.

**Concerto:** Musical composition for orchestra and soloist(s) typically in three movements.

**Consonance:** Two or more notes sounded together that do not require resolution.

**Crescendo:** Gradually increasing in volume.

**Dissonance:** Two or more notes sounded together that require resolution.

**Exposition:** Opening section of a fugue or sonata-form movement in which the main theme(s) are introduced.

**Movement:** Independent, self-standing piece of music within a larger work.

**Musical form:** Overall formulaic structure of a composition, such as sonata form; also the smaller divisions of the overall structure, such as the development section.

**Overture:** Music that precedes an opera or play, often played as an independent concert piece.

**Pedal note:** Pitch sustained for a long period of time against which other changing material is played. A pedal harmony is a sustained chord serving the same purpose.

**Polyrhythm:** The simultaneous use of contrasting rhythms.

**Polytonality:** The simultaneous use of two or more different keys (major and/or minor) or modes.

**Requiem:** Mass for the dead, traditionally in nine specific sections.

**Rhythmic asymmetry:** Rhythms that do not use regular accents.

**Short score:** Two- or three-staff score that can be played on the piano and serves as the basis for a full orchestral score.

**Sonata:** Piece of music typically in three or four movements, composed for a piano (piano sonata) or a piano plus one instrument (violin sonata, for example).

**Sonata form:** Structural formula characterized by thematic development; usually used for the first movement of a sonata, symphony, or concerto.

**String quartet:** (1) Ensemble of four stringed instruments: two violins, viola and cello; (2) Composition for such an ensemble.

**Symphony:** Large-scale instrumental composition for orchestra, containing several movements. The Viennese Classical symphony typically had four movements.

**Voice:** A range or register, commonly used to refer to the four melodic ranges: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass.

## Biographical Notes

**Balakirev, Mili** (1837–1910). Leader of the famous radical anti-German “Russian Five” or “Mighty Handful,” a group of five self-taught Russian nationalist composers whose “gods” were the Russian language, Russian folk song, Pushkin, and Glinka. Balakirev succeeded Anton Rubinstein in 1867 as conductor of the Russian Musical Society and, thus, became the most powerful musical figure in St. Petersburg. Balakirev was an early champion of Tchaikovsky’s music; he suggested that Tchaikovsky write a work inspired by Shakespeare’s tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

**Brodsky, Adolf** (1851–1929). Russian violinist who premiered Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto on December 4, 1881, in Vienna. The work is dedicated to Brodsky.

**Bülow, Hans von** (1830–94). German pianist and conductor who championed the music of Richard Wagner. Von Bülow became one of musical history’s most famous cuckolds when his wife, Cosima, illegitimate daughter of Franz Liszt, had an affair with and later married Wagner. Von Bülow premiered Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto in Boston on October 25, 1875.

**Davidov, Vladimir** (“Bob”) (1871–1906). Tchaikovsky’s nephew, son of Tchaikovsky’s sister Sasha and her husband, Lev Davidov. Tchaikovsky was infatuated with his nephew and dedicated his Sixth Symphony to him.

**Davidova, Alexandra** (Sasha) (1842–91). Tchaikovsky’s sister Sasha was married to wealthy landowner Lev Davidov and was the mother of Vladimir (“Bob”) Davidov, to whom Tchaikovsky dedicated his Sixth Symphony.

**Dürbach, Fanny** (1822–95). French governess in the Tchaikovsky household from 1843 until 1848. Fanny was much loved by the young Tchaikovsky.

**Meck, Nadezhda von** (1831–94). Wealthy widow, patroness, and devotee of Tchaikovsky and his music, Mme. von Meck financially and emotionally supported Tchaikovsky in one of musical history’s most unique relationships for fourteen years from 1876 to 1890. The two never met, in accordance with Mme. von Meck’s wishes, but they exchanged numerous letters over the years. Nadezhda von Meck outlived Tchaikovsky by only two months. According to her daughter-in-law, she could not endure Tchaikovsky’s death.

**Milyukova, Antonina** (1849–1917). Tchaikovsky’s wife (they were married in July 1877) in a disastrous marriage. The mentally unstable Antonina outlived her estranged husband by twenty-four years, dying in a lunatic asylum in 1917.

**Pushkin, Alexander Sergeevich** (1799–1837). Russian poet whose poem *Eugene Onegin* became the literary source of Tchaikovsky’s opera of the same title.

**Rubinstein, Anton** (1829–94). Russian pianist, conductor, composer, and teacher, Rubinstein became conductor of the Russian Musical Society in 1859

and founded the Imperial Conservatory in St. Petersburg in 1862. Rubinstein introduced European (German) compositional techniques to Russian music education and established high standards of performance. Tchaikovsky was one of his students at the Imperial Conservatory.

**Rubinstein, Nicholai** (1835–81). Russian pianist, conductor, teacher, composer, and brother of Anton Rubinstein, Nicholai became the first director of the Moscow Conservatory in 1866 and brought Tchaikovsky to the conservatory's teaching faculty that year.

**Tchaikovsky, Alexandra** (1813–54). Tchaikovsky's mother, to whom the composer was neurotically attached. Tchaikovsky was utterly devastated when she died of cholera in 1854 at the age of forty-one.

**Tchaikovsky, Anatoly** (1850–1915). Tchaikovsky's younger brother.

**Tchaikovsky, Ilya Petrovich** (1795–1880). Tchaikovsky's father, a civil servant and member of the lesser nobility.

**Tchaikovsky, Modest** (1850–1916). One of Tchaikovsky's brothers, Modest was a playwright and librettist. He was the closest intimate of his brother and wrote the basic biography of Tchaikovsky. He also wrote the libretti for Tchaikovsky's operas *Queen of Spades* and *Iolanthe*.

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