Russian Anthology

Tchaikovsky, Psychology, and Nationality: A View from the Archives

In light of the nationalist question central to all three articles in this issue, we thought it might be revealing to look at some of the Anglophone literature on Russian music in the early years of the twentieth century. The spur to much of this discussion (reflected in Richard Taruskin’s article) was the problem of how to assess Tchaikovsky at the time when, even into the 1920s, his music still counted as modern. In both the United States and Britain, no strangers to questions of music’s national character, the issue provoked a great deal of attention—and debate; the little anthology here, reprinted from encyclopedia entries, musical journalism, and guidebooks to “great music,” is only a small sample, though a representative one. These forgotten texts suggest that the issue of musical nationalism was at once robust, controversial, and complicated. They also, incidentally, offer a vivid snapshot of the kinds of discourse and the depths of passion that we faute de mieux call “classical music” used to provoke.

—Lawrence Kramer


Tchaikovsky

If it were possible to single out one composer more than another as representative of the various phases of thought that are characteristic of the close of the nineteenth century, that composer would undoubtedly be Tchaikovsky. Summed up in a single phrase, Tchaikovsky is eminently fin de siècle. In feeling, as well as in expression, he is a decadent of the decadents. His emotion, though unquestionably sincere as far as it goes, is superficial rather than profound. He sinks to morbid pessimism, he rises to hysteria. His feverish sensibility is fanned by gusts of passion, his highly strung nerves answer to every psychic suggestion. He revels in introspection, he bares his soul to the scalpel of his art. He drags the pageant of his bleeding heart through the realms of music, he butchers his manhood to make an artistic holiday.
But with all his lack of dignity and restraint, he is an incomparable artist, or to be more accurate it is the artist in him that has stifled the man.

He views the world, life and himself with the eye of an artist alone; he pours his own emotions into the alembic of music, content to suffer if he can thereby create. It was truly said of Byron, that he had but one subject—himself, and the saying is equally true of Tchaikovsky. In all that he wrote he mirrored his own personality; he is the protagonist of his own quartets, the hero of his own symphonies. As Hamlet he stalks moodily on the ramparts of Elsinore, as Manfred he wanders among the gleaming glaciers of the Alps, as Paolo he is racked by the un pitying torments of Hell, as Ferdinand he marvels at the wonders of Miranda’s isle, and as Romeo he loves and dies under the shadow of the towers of Verona. If his personality is less puissant and terrible than that of Byron, his artistic instinct is infinitely acuter. No man has ever handled music with a more delicate appreciation of its manifold possibilities. In his hands the orchestra becomes alive, a chorus of voices taught to breathe at his will every accent of human emotion.

With his marvellous technique, his unerring instinct for sheer beauty of tone and his rhythmic fertility, he is the Swinburne of modern music. A generation will come for which the subject matter of Tchaikovsky’s music will have no interest. We who are his contemporaries, to whom his vein of thought is familiar, can appreciate the truth with which he depicts the fashionable pessimism of the hour, but to our grandchildren his melancholy will seem mere attitudinising and his raptures will ring false, though his craftsmanship can never be called in question. The simple and uneventful story of Tchaikovsky’s life has but little to do with his music. Like many other Russian composers he began as an amateur, and it was not until he was grown up and an official in a Government office that he felt any inclination to make music the serious business of his life. Afterwards he worked very hard at composition, chiefly under the direction of Anton Rubinstein; and, unlike the majority of Russian musicians, he contrived to rid himself entirely of that indefinable taint of amateurishness which is the signe particulier of so much of their music. Not only in this point did he differ from the majority of his contemporaries. Living as he did at a time conspicuous for a remarkable revival of musical activity in Russia, he fortunately contrived to steer clear of the rock upon which so many of his friends made shipwreck—the exaggerated worship of nationalism. Tchaikovsky was in many respects the most amiable and yielding of men, but where art was concerned his principles were inflexible, and he wisely refused to be persuaded by his “nationalist” friends into endeavouring to express himself in any way but that which was natural to him. He was of course denounced as a bad patriot, and in Russia it is still the fashion to compare him unfavourably with composers of the calibre of Borodin and Rimsky Korsakov. Outside the Russian frontiers he is of course rated at his true value, while the mob of “nationalists” is known only to be ignored. In England our sufferings at the hands of the minor Russian composers are almost too recent to be commented upon with that judicial fairness which would seem desirable. Fortunately, the attempt to thrust their pinchbeck wares upon the London public was as short-lived as it was disastrous, and the crowd of composers in —off and —sky has happily been dismissed to the country where daubs of local colour are accepted in place of design, musicianship and inspiration. As a matter of fact, Russian musicians can well be content to be represented abroad by Tchaikovsky, whose music to Western ears has as strong a Slavonic flavour as that of any of his compatriots, only that his use of the distinctively Russian element is subjected to due artistic restraint, whereas, in the case of the others, it is allowed, like Aaron’s serpent, to swallow everything else. In England, we know little of Tchaikovsky save as an instrumental composer. His operas, with one exception, have never reached the shores of England, and though “Eugene Oniegin” is occasionally performed in this country it has never won anything like the popularity of Tchaikovsky’s symphonies. Nor
are the bulk of his songs well known in this
country, though this is in all probability merely
because of the difficulty of providing singable
translations of the Russian words. However it
comes to this, that Tchaikovsky exists for En-
glish musicians only as a writer of orchestral
and chamber music, and it is curious to note
that the great popularity which he now enjoys
in this country dates only from the production
of his “Symphonie Pathétique.” In his life-time
he paid us several visits. He conducted several
of his works at our concerts, and he was in-
vested with an honorary degree by the Univer-
sity of Cambridge. He was always received with
politeness and respect, but the general public
never seems to have realised for a moment that
it was entertaining a great composer. Tchai-
kovsky’s death and the production of the
“Symphonie Pathétique” changed everything.
The work itself, coupled with the romantic
circumstances of its creation, the fact that it
was the composer’s swan-song and appeared to
contain in itself a suggestion of his approach-
ing end—everything combined to captivate the
popular fancy to an extraordinary degree. The
“Symphonie Pathétique” became the rage; the
mere announcement of its performance suf-
ficed to pack our concert-rooms from floor to
celing, and from this work we learnt gradually
to appreciate Tchaikovsky’s other compositions,
so that now his symphonies, suites and sym-
phonic poems are among the most popular in
the concert repertoire. It was not without good
reason that the popular imagination, which
Tchaikovsky’s earlier works had left compara-
tively cold, was touched by the “Symphonie Pathétique.” It is without question the com-
poser’s most characteristic work, that into
which he put most of himself. The fourth sym-
phony may excel it in point of sheer pictur-
esqueness, the fifth in poetic feeling, but in the
sixth symphony we feel that strongly personal
note which rarely fails to appeal to sympa-
thetic souls. Tchaikovsky affixed no programme
to it, but the story of a tortured soul, seeking
an anodyne for its misery in the rapture of
pleasure and in the ecstasy of battle, and finally
sinking to hopeless pessimism and suicide, is
scarcely to be misread. That the lesson it teaches
is noble or inspiring can certainly not be
claimed, but the resources of music for ex-
pressing human emotions have rarely been em-
ployed in our time with more consummate
success. When Tchaikovsky wrote the “Sym-
phonie Pathétique” he had attained such mas-
tery of his material as gives him a right to rank
among great musicians.


**ART AND PESSIMISM**

Optimists who undertake to soothe the soul by ex-
tracting its ills, resemble those charlatans who ad-
vertise “painless dentistry.” But the wary are not
deceived.

—Benjamin Swift

In the great Wagnerian strife, “Melody” was
the cry of the Philistines. Whatever may be
urged against them, they did at least take their
stand upon Art. To-day the Philistines (or shall
we say Pharisees?) appear not so much con-
cerned about Art, as with health and morality.
James Huneker, the American critic, used to
jest about the “diseased chords of the twenty-
sixth,” and his eloquent friend, W. J. Henderson,
has occasionally indulged in such maunderings
as modern music showing “the lurking-spot of
disease.” But now our musical literature has
become positively inoculated with this much
vaunted cry of “healthy optimism.” It leavens
all the discourses of the Philistines. They would
have the public believe that this “pestilent pes-
simism” in Art is “as deleterious as the opium
habit, and more degrading than an excessive
use of stimulants or narcotics . . . an active
corrosive of mankind . . . leading us to physical
destruction . . . a strange commentary on a
feverish desire for self-destruction.”

No wonder one of our foremost musical crit-
cics, Ernest Newman, has remarked that
although we had reached some degree of
civilisation in our literary criticisms, our opin-
ions on music were those of “untutored barbar-
ians.”

The American critic, Mr. Henderson, al-
though apparently opposed to pessimism in Art
(probably temperamentally), sees clearly that,
to condemn such Art presentments, is to throw
over the later works of Beethoven and the choic-
est products of Chopin and Schumann. But here
in England, the land of that hardy perennial
[sic], the Nonconformist Conscience, there are no such scruples among the Philistines; at any rate, their Goliath, the immaculate Mr. A. E. Baughan, exhibits none. We may remark here, in passing, that we are truly thankful to this gentleman for his recent effusions in our index of purity, the Daily News, on the question of the attitude of virtuous New York in rejecting the Wilde-Strauss opera, Salome. It reminds us that the fight of Freethought is not yet won, and that this recent crusade of the puritanical Philistines is calculated by them to influence that archaic institution, known as the dramatic censor, in preventing a performance of Salome (considered "the greatest music-drama of the age") in this country. However, we are not concerned just now with Salome. Another part of the conflict with the Philistines, the legion of "healthy optimists," claims our attention.

We believe it was Mr. Samuel Weller who was so considerate as to "stretch" one opponent conveniently on the floor so that the next would have something to fall on. Mr. Baughan has adopted this method. In his recent book, Music and Musicians, he has some unpleasant things to say, so he prepares you for it some few pages earlier, although he goes perilously near downright inconsistency in so doing. Under the sweet heading of "Poisonous Appreciations," he indulges in a sort of protest against those "who exaggerate . . . the nervous and emotional effects of Wagner's music," and hold up "Wagner and Tchaikovsky as arch-destroyers of the human soul." Furthermore, he is sure that "if Wagner, or Tchaikovsky, or Richard Strauss could have foreseen the pernicious nonsense which would be read into their music they would have burnt their scores." Precisely so. But surely our author's views must have undergone a considerable change for him to pen later in the book, such phrases, in relation to the music of Wagner, Tchaikovsky and Strauss, as "pessimistic whines," "diseased idealism," and "unhealthy insanity," which are "surely strangling the growth of modern music." He then asks: —"What good does such wire drawn, grey, drab, bloodless music do for us? Does it help us to bear the ills of life? Does it give us courage? If any sensitive amateur lets it into his soul, will he be the better able to take up his morning's fight?"

We recently read of a Dr. Meachen who lectured before the Guild of Church Musicians on "The Place of Music in the Healing Art." Why not Mr. Baughan give an oration before, say, the Liberal Club, on "The Place of Music in Social Reform." If our musical oracle has really any special kind of music that will "help us to bear the ills of life," let us have the prescription quickly, this world of ours needs it.

Let us see how literature would stand this fantastic criterion of Mr. Baughan's. Hamlet, we presume, would have to give place to She Stoops to Conquer, and Omar Khayyam to Tom Hood. Their moods are "healthier," and ergo, better works of Art. Of course the pessimist will argue that pessimism, as an Art presentment, was better than optimism, because it was better calculated to arouse an emotion which would lead to "a quickening of moral consciousness, and has the value of a constant stimulus to circumspection of life." Whether Tchaikovsky, or Hamlet, or Omar, help us to "bear the ills of life" and the "morning's fight" (strange phrases, by the way, for an optimist) or not, are purely a priori grounds, and have no logical bearing in a question of Art.

To the average man, the pessimism of Tchaikovsky as an Art presentment, is just a mood picture and no more. We have met people who go into ecstacies over the great Russian's music, and will turn livid at the mere mention of Thomson, the author of The City of Dreadful Night. Why? With the one you simply have a mood, with the other a mood plus a philosophy. And it is precisely on this point that we wish to protest against the Philistines. Music, qua music, unlike poetry, cannot be didactic. At the most it may be correlated with poetry as either lyric or dramatic. Thus it will appear that music, above all the other Arts, has a true claim to be judged by the ideal prerogative of all Art—the emotional basis. If that is sufficient, then let us see how the composer presents his Art. All else is immaterial.

Mr. Baughan protests that he does not wish to be misunderstood "as one who denies all sentiment, all pathos, all emotion in music." But we have no canon whereby we are enabled to discriminate between "pathos" and "pessimistic whines." If beauty is the end of all Art, and our author admits it "should mirror hu-
man life and thought,” may we not have an Art view of the “night side of nature,” as Thomson would say, as well as the “day side”? When Mr. Baughan compares the “pestilent pessimism” of Strauss and Tchaikovsky to the robust “All’s well with the world” of Browning, and pronounces the one bad and the other good, simply because the latter appeals to his own particular Art views, he is permitting a personal bias to serve as an aesthetic judgment.

By the way, Mr. Baughan is rather unfortunate in quoting Browning. He makes him talk like a soldier. “All’s well with the world” belongs to the barrack. What Browning did say was “All’s right with the world.” Strange to say, so careful a writer as Ernest Newman, in reviewing Mr. Baughan’s book, quotes the well-known line in Pippa Passes as “All’s well in the world.”

But this aside. Lord Derby once received a sample of wine, “warranted to cure the gout.” His Lordship tasted the vintage, and returned it with the words: “Thanks; I prefer the gout.” So with Mr. Baughan. It may be that our Aesthetic taste is unhealthy, but we prefer it to his nostrums.

Even so acute a critic as Dr. Markham Lee, M.A., in his recent analysis of Tchaikovsky’s music, descants on “health.” He enumerates the composer’s “weak points,” and among them he finds: “an unhealthy pessimism . . . not tolerable to the sane and healthy mind . . . a deadly draught if taken in unduly large quantities.” Comment on this is needless. Such talk belongs to the pharmacy, and not to Art.

Now, what do all these pleasantry of Mr. Baughan and friends really mean? Is it mere antipathy to pessimism in Art, or does it proceed from what John Morley called the execrable emotion of complacent religiosity? We are urged to the latter view. Tchaikovsky, like most pessimists, was a Freethinker. So the Philistine not only reads Pessimism, but Atheism and Materialism into his music. Witness how Dr. Markham Lee can imagine Tchaikovsky saying in the Pathetic, “There is no God” [Tchaikovsky’s Life, p. 61]. Witness how Laurence Gilman sees Tchaikovsky in the same symphony as “the perfect materialist, the perfect spiritual craven” [Phases of Modern Music, p. 19]. We see the cloven foot again in Mr. Baughan, when he talks of the “sensual materialist,” the “sensual negationist,” and the “sensual pessimist.”

We understand these gentlemen now. The brilliant Hans Von Bülow has summed up their class in a very pregnant passage, which we will quote in full.

“The principle,” says Von Bülow, “of the huge lazy mass is to let things go as God pleases. The mass sees a theophany in this world, and so its optimism accommodates itself willingly to the half-truth, which is the mother of all prejudice, the drag on the wheel of every undertaking, including, of course, art. Those trivial maxims—‘the good, the beautiful, the true’—will somehow, sooner or later, make their own way; and ‘the thing doomed to extinction is just what deserves extinction’—belong to the half-truth. When we employ the student’s phrase ‘philistinism’ we mean such principles as these. At root, philistinism is just a synonym for a species of the genus optimism, and all the banalities in the world finally rest on an optimistic view of things” [Ausgrabungen eines Clavierlehrs, vol. iii].

“History,” wrote Bacon, “makes man wise.” If the modern Philistines would be wise, let them be warned by the fate of Wagner’s contemporary critics—such men as Schlüter, Fétis and Hanslick—Titans all, compared with Mr. Baughan and company. They predicted a speedy extinction to Wagner and his music. Posterity has been charitable enough to think nothing harsher of them than of having added to the gaiety of nations. And so we can afford to smile at these puritans who offer to guide Art, to purge and purify her of her ills. Well, well; life is short, Art is long.

—H. George Farmer


The greatest of Russian composers, Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky, was born at Votinsk, in the government of Vyatka, May 7, 1840. He was the son of a mining engineer, who had no thought of his becoming a musician, and sent him to the Technological Institute at St. Petersburg to be educated. After studying jurisprudence in that city, in 1859 he was appointed to a posi-
tion in the Ministry of Justice. Already he was well known in his own circle as a musical amateur. In 1862 he left the service of the state and entered the newly founded Conservatory of Music in St. Petersburg, where he studied under Anton Rubinstein and Zaremba.

From 1866 to 1878 Tchaikovsky was teacher of harmony at the Moscow Conservatory, faithfully performing his duties and also finding time for composition, to devote himself to which he finally resigned his post, and retiring to Klin, he worked almost in seclusion, becoming known as “the Hermit of Klin.” “Although,” says Henry T. Finck, “he had an almost feminine craving for approval and encouragement, his experiences were little more than a series of disappointments. His worldly prospects nevertheless steadily improved, and in 1877 he married, to the surprise of his friends. The hasty marriage had a tragic sequel. The union was not a happy one, and the pair soon separated. The composer was so despondent that he attempted to commit suicide in such a way as to avoid scandal, by standing up to his chest in the icy river one night, in the hope of catching a deadly cold. In the following year another woman influenced his life in a happier way. He did not know her, and she preferred to keep her identity concealed, but she put aside for his benefit a sum of money which made it possible for him to give up his Conservatory classes and save his energy for his creative work."

Further details of Tchaikovsky’s life are to be found in various biographical works, but it is the purpose of the present sketch mainly to present a sympathetic estimate of his mind and his works. It is of interest, however, to recall the fact that in 1891 he visited the United States, giving concerts in New York and other cities. At Cambridge, England, in 1893, he conducted some of his own works, and from the University received the degree of Doctor of Music. In the same year the life of this remarkable man came to a close with a suddenness that was startling to the musical world that had enjoyed such gifts from his genius, to which expectation looked for more and even greater benefactions in the future. He died of cholera, at St. Petersburg, November 6, 1893.

If it were possible to single out one composer more than another as representative of the various phases of thought characteristic of the close of the nineteenth century, that composer would undoubtedly be Tchaikovsky. Summed up in a single phrase, Tchaikovsky is eminently fin de siècle. His feverish sensibility is fanned by gusts of passion, his highly strung nerves answer to every psychic suggestion. He revels in introspection, he bares his soul to the scalpel of his art. But with all his lack of restraint, he is an incomparable artist; or, to be more accurate, it is the artist in him that has mastered the man.

He views the world, life, and himself with the eye of an artist alone, he pours his own emotions into the alembic of music, content to suffer if he can thereby create. It was truly said of Byron, that he had but one subject—himself, and the saying is equally true of Tchaikovsky. In all that he wrote he mirrored his own personality; he is the protagonist of his own quartets, the hero of his own symphonies. As Hamlet he stalks moody on the ramparts of Elsinore; as Manfred he wanders among the gleaming glaciers of the Alps; as Paolo he is racked by the un pitying torments of hell; as Ferdinand he marvels at the wonders of Miranda’s isle, and as Romeo he loves and dies under the shadow of the towers of Verona. No man has ever handled music with a more delicate appreciation of its manifold possibilities. In his hands the orchestra becomes alive, a chorus of voices taught to breathe at his will every accent of human emotion. With his marvelous technique, his unerring instinct for sheer beauty of tone and his rhythmic fertility, he is the Swinburne of modern music. He has taught the world new secrets.

Living at a time conspicuous for a revival of musical activity in Russia, Tchaikovsky contrived to steer clear of the rock upon which so many of his friends made shipwreck—the exaggerated worship of nationalism. Tchaikovsky was in many respects the most amiable and yielding of men, but where art was concerned his principles were inflexible, and he wisely refused to be persuaded by his “nationalist” friends into endeavoring to express himself in any way but that which was natural to him. He was of course denounced as a bad patriot. Outside the Russian frontiers he is rated at his true value.
Neither the operas nor the songs of Tchaikovsky are as well known to Western people as are his symphonies. In the case of the songs this is in all probability because of the difficulty of providing singable translations of the Russian words. However, it comes to this, that Tchaikovsky exists for Western musicians mainly as a writer of orchestral and chamber music. In his lifetime he paid several visits to England, where his great popularity dates from the production of his “Symphonie pathétique.” In England he was always received with politeness and respect, but the general public never seems to have realized for a moment that it was entertaining a great composer.

Tchaikovsky’s death and the production of the “Symphonie pathétique” changed everything. The work itself, coupled with the romantic circumstances of its creation, the fact that it was the composer’s swan-song and appeared to contain in itself a suggestion of his approaching end—everything combined to captivate the popular fancy to an extraordinary degree. The “Symphonie pathétique” became the rage; the mere announcement of its performance sufficed to pack concert-rooms from floor to ceiling, and from this work people learned gradually to appreciate Tchaikovsky’s other compositions, so that now his symphonies, suites, and symphonic poems are among the most popular in the concert repertoire. And what is true of England if equally so in respect of other European countries and of our own as well.

It was not without good reason that the popular imagination, which Tchaikovsky’s earlier works had left comparatively cold, was touched by the “Symphonie pathétique.” It is without question the composer’s most characteristic work, that into which he put most of himself. The Fourth symphony may excel it in point of sheer picturesqueness, the Fifth in poetic feeling, but in the Sixth symphony we feel that strongly personal note which rarely fails to appeal to sympathetic souls. Tchaikovsky affixed no programme to it, but the story of a tortured soul, seeking an anodyne for its misery in the rapture of pleasure and in the ecstasy of battle, and finally sinking to hopeless pessimism and suicide, is scarcely to be misread. That the lesson it teaches is noble or inspiring can certainly not be claimed, but the resources of music for expressing human emotions have rarely been employed in our time with more consummate art. The form of the work is new, the structure of the movements is unconstitutional, but every innovation in it is justified by success.

In Tchaikovsky’s other works the same qualities and the same limitations are to be found. Of his earlier symphonies, the Fourth and Fifth alone can justly be compared to the Sixth. There is fine music in the earlier three, but they do not show the same technical accomplishment. The Fourth symphony is less subjective in feeling than the Fifth and Sixth, but it is no less brilliant an example of the composer’s extraordinary musicianship. In one of his letters the composer has given a sketch of the programme on which he worked in this symphony—the idea of relentless fate which ever steps in to frustrate man in his quest for happiness. The first movement is said to illustrate the contrast between grim reality and flattering dreams; the second is a picture of the melancholy induced by retrospection; the third is merely a series of capricious arabesques not expressing any definite feelings; while the finale draws a moral by setting the rich healthy life of the people by the side of anemic culture. Tchaikovsky added, however, that this sketch was far from exhausting the poetical meaning of his symphony, and indeed it says nothing of what to Western ears is the most striking feature of the work, its strong national feeling. It has a barbaric splendor of color that is not common in Tchaikovsky, and shows how easily, when he chose, he could beat his “nationalist” fellow-countrymen on their own ground. For once the background is the most interesting part of the picture, and in this symphony we care a good deal less about the fate-ridden hero than about the gorgeous and ever-shifting scenes through which his destiny leads him. At one time we seem to be listening to the trumpets of Tamerlane on the trackless plains of Tartary, at another sweeping with the wild hordes of Scythia along the banks of the Volga. Then the night falls and the camp-fires of a countless host twinkle beneath the stars. The hours are beguiled by the songs of bright-eyed Circassians and the sinuous dances of bejeweled slaves from the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Nothing more picturesque has ever been writ-
ten than this astonishing work. It glows with every color known to the modern palette. It is encrusted with ornament; it is viciously florid, if you will, and frankly decadent; but it is a wonderful example of what can be done in sheer scene-painting by a master of orchestral effect. The Fifth symphony is less flamboyant in style, but it is far profounder in thought, and sincerer because more personal in feeling. Some critics are inclined to call it Tchaikovsky’s masterpiece. It has not the glitter and dazzle of the Fourth, nor the agonized emotion of the Sixth, but it is, if we may use such term in connection with music, and above all with Tchaikovsky’s music, more philosophical than either.

The idea upon which it appears to be built is new to music—indeed it is only in these latest days that it could have been thought possible to clothe such an idea in music at all—but it is not new to literature. It occurs in a famous and beautiful passage in the “Troades” of Euripides. The idea is that of a great sorrow turned by some mysterious power to glory and splendor. Throughout the work runs the sad motto theme, breathing shame and sorrow, deepening the gloom of the tragic passages, darkening the sunlight of the brief glimpses of gaiety, yet in the end this very theme, fostered by the secret power of art, becomes transfigured and shines forth in splendor born from itself alone.

After the symphonies comes the long procession of Tchaikovsky’s symphonic poems, gorgeous in their varied splendor, some of them, like “Manfred” and “Francesca da Rimini,” quivering with high-strung emotion; others, like “Romeo and Juliet” and “The Tempest,” brilliant tone-pictures gleaming with the ever-changing hues that the great master of orchestral color knew so well how to group and contrast.

On the whole the symphonic poems suggest a different point of view from that which Tchaikovsky gives us in his symphonies. They are as it were the comments on certain masterpieces of literature made by a man of striking personality, and serve to illuminate the character of the critic as much as the thing criticised. In “Hamlet” we meet once more the hero of the “Symphonie pathétique,” lashing himself to heights of fevered emotion and sinking to depths of sunless gloom. There is but little of Dante in Tchaikovsky’s Paolo and Francesca, outlined for a moment against a background of such ghastly terror as only one of the greatest masters of orchestral color could paint. It is Tchaikovsky who speaks through their lips, he who has drunk the cup of anguish to the dregs, and found it sweetened by no touch of pity.

Tchaikovsky is never more himself than in his chamber music, and this is a point worth noting, since the great tone-painters of the orchestra rarely succeed within the austere limits of the quartet. Yet Tchaikovsky wrote nothing more intimately personal, nothing in which his peculiar vein of morbid feeling was more faithfully mirrored, than his quartets in D and E flat and his great trio in A minor, while the lighter moods of his varied personality are depicted with infinite grace and charm in his string sextet “Un souvenir de Florence,” a work in which, as in his gay and brilliant Italian capriccio, he paid an artist’s tribute to the immortal enchantment of Italy.

It is pleasant to find in these and similar works another Tchaikovsky than the storm-tossed pilgrim of fate whom we know so well in the “Symphonie pathétique.” Tchaikovsky had little or no humor, but in his lighter moments there is the indescribable charm of a gentle nature that has kept the fragrance of childhood and loves the simple things of life for their own simplicity. Such we find him in his delightful “Casse-noisette” ballet, a work that in its airy freshness and delicate sentiment seems like a tale of Hans Andersen transcribed into music. Two works more different in feeling than the “Casse-noisette” ballet and the “Symphonie pathétique” it would be difficult to conceive, and the two together give a good idea of the range of Tchaikovsky’s talent, and go far toward explaining the secret of his influence upon contemporary music.

That Tchaikovsky’s personality will be an abiding power in music, as Beethoven’s and Mozart’s have been, is hardly to be expected. His view of life, summing up as it does a vein of thought and feeling characteristic of his epoch, may have little interest for generations to come, but the secrets that he has taught the world of music will be a possession for all time. His unique feeling for the subtler mysteries of
orchestral color has opened our eyes to new worlds of beauty. He brought the East to the West on wings of art, uniting the sheer glory and magnificence of color of the one to the instinct for form and design of the other. That this mystic marriage is celebrated in his music is a sufficient guarantee of the permanence of his own place among the great masters of tone-painting.


Tchaikovsky was one of the leaders of the new Russian school, but not in the sense that Rimsky-Korsakoff, Glinka, and others were. Like Rubinstein he is more cosmopolitan than his compatriots, more deeply influenced by the classic form, and less a devotee of the national music. Indeed he has been accused by some of his countrymen of being more German than Russian. He is, however, the best known of the Russian composers and his music has had a larger circulation than that of any of the others. He combines both the classic and national traits in his music, but the latter are not distinctive or even conspicuous as they bear the stamp of his own individuality. He once said, “I never possessed any ideals,” and this may help account for the individuality and spontaneity of his music. He was the leader of orchestral music in Russia, but his orchestration is nearly always confined to the deeper and more sombre moods. He was high-strung, melancholy, well-nigh morbid, and his temperament is reflected in his music, and yet it covers a field wide and varied enough to save it from monotony. At the beginning of his career he was much influenced by Glinka and Mozart, though the distance between Tchaikovsky’s sombreness and Mozart’s geniality is almost infinite. He was also a great lover of Beethoven and fond of Schumann and Mendelssohn. He had respect for Haydn, but the German “Papa” was too sunny to secure his veneration. Among the moderns he disliked Wagner, had no sympathy with Chopin, and was indifferent to Brahms, both personally and musically. Critical estimates of his music are interesting. Naumann says: “While occasionally descending to trivialities, he exhibits on the whole originality combined with interesting modulation and quaint rhythms.” And Riemann: “Tchaikovksy was a lyrical, highly gifted, true musician, but at the same time a good Russian. Hence there are found in his works, side by side with moments of almost maidenly delicacy and sentiment and of the most refined construction, others of semi-Asiatic roughness and brutality.” And Coerne: “The general outlines of Tchaikovsky’s music embrace melodic subtleties, bold modulations, florid figuration, strongly marked rhythms and cadences peculiar to his own land, huge dimensions, fantastic portrayal, broad dignity of utterance, and magnificent orchestral effect.” And finally Dannreuther, who pithily sums up his style as “fiery exultation on a basis of languid melancholy.”


The music of Tchaikovsky differs fundamentally from that of the composers we have thus far discussed, and this difference may be traced to two causes; first, to the Russian National spirit, and, second, to the qualities of Tchaikovsky’s own nature. Before describing the Sixth Symphony of Tchaikovsky let us examine these two elements in his music. First of all we note that Russian music has had a history of its own apart from the music of Western Europe (and this is true of its literature also). The development of vocal polyphony described in our first chapter was hardly felt in Russia so that, when Russian composers began to appear, there was no well understood and accepted method of musical speech outside that to be found in her folk-songs. Russia artistically, politically and socially was a country apart. She has truly been called “a Sleeping Giant.” “Europe is played out,” says Ivan in “The Brothers Karamazov” and, when we listen to the music of Tchaikovsky, or read the novels of Dostoevsky we feel that as compared to Western Europe Russia is a country of immense possi-
bilities and just beginning to exercise her great strength.

We do not mean to place these men aesthetically side by side, for their impulses led them in different directions, but they are alike in the one quality noted. Dostoieffsky is the greater man. We urge the student to read his novels, particularly the one mentioned above.

Russian folk-music is rich in melody and quite untouched by outside influences. It displays particularly well defined characteristics, the chief of which is, perhaps, a repetition in design such as is found to excess in Oriental music and in Oriental architecture. [The admixture of Oriental ideas in Russian life is well known.] But Russian folk-songs are as diverse as are the peoples of Russia. One finds among them many plaintive melodies and many with a wild sort of vigor. There is a certain advantage to Russian music in this direct derivation from the pure source of the folksong, for it thereby retains its national quality and its freshness, but, on the other hand, there is a considerable disadvantage because folk-music was necessarily confined to short forms and provided no adequate means of symphonic expression. None of the early Russian symphonic composers had that mastery of counterpoint which made it possible for Haydn and Mozart to create long movements out of simple thematic material.

But the salient qualities in Tchaikovsky’s music, while reflecting in a measure these Russian characteristics, are essentially the result of his own curious and untoward nature. No other great writer, artist or composer has ever been so much at war with himself as was Tchaikovsky. There are instances enough in literature and in art of men at war with the world; in a sense, it is the office of the artist to be so. Byron, Shelley, Carlyle and many others will occur to our readers as Protestors against the world that surrounded them. Tchaikovsky’s protest was not so much against society as against life itself as he experienced it. He was “out of joint” with living; he found no lasting content in any situation. Carlyle was an intellectual pessimist, Tchaikovsky was an emotional pessimist—a pessimist by nature. Carlyle rails at society, thinks himself into an intellectual position from which he can only emit dia-

tribes. Tchaikovsky pours out from a full heart a passionate protest, a cry of pain and anguish so eloquent, so overwhelming that we cannot resist it, however rebellious toward it our intelligence may be.

Before discussing the “Pathétique” symphony we would urge our readers to study the compositions of Tchaikovsky named in the supplementary list at the end of this chapter. The Romance in F minor, for example, illustrates the plaintive quality already referred to, while its second theme is a striking example of that repetition in design which is found in much Russian music.


**National Ideals:**

**Tchaikovsky and Brahms**

At Hamburg [Tchaikovsky] met Brahms, who happened to be visiting his old home to receive at the hands of the Mayor honorary citizenship or, as we should say, “the freedom of the city.” It was for this occasion that Brahms had written the “Fest- und Gedenksprüche” (Festival and Memorial Sentences), a set of unaccompanied choruses to Biblical words beginning “Our fathers trusted in Thee.” As a symphonic writer his work was completed; of his chamber works only the quintet for strings (Op. 11) and the works for the clarinet remained to be written. He made a point of hearing a rehearsal of Tchaikovsky’s symphony and, meeting him at lunch afterwards, Tchaikovsky records that he gave his opinion of the work “very frankly and simply.”

It is an appropriate moment, therefore, to place these two masters of the symphony side by side. Their mutual opinions of each other will help us to some extent, but it is surprising to find that the finale of Tchaikovsky’s fifth symphony was the movement which Brahms liked least of the four. The reason usually given for the fact that neither cared very greatly for the music of the other is that they were men of different races, Teuton and Slav, opposed in temperament and artistic outlook. But the finale of Tchaikovsky’s fifth symphony is in its
general form, the character of its melodies, and their presentation very much nearer to the German style of writing than almost anything else which he wrote. Some pages of the score remind one quite strongly of Brahms’s own style; a positive likeness of theme exists between its principal subject (Ex. 28 a) and a prominent one in the finale of Brahms’s second symphony (Ex. 28 b):

\[ \text{\textbf{Ex. 28 a}} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{\textbf{Ex. 28 b}}
\end{array} \]

and the following development out of that theme is, in its buoyant rise and the emphasis laid on it by imitation between two instruments, more suggestive of Brahms than of Tchaikovsky.

Tchaikovsky and the Orchestra

Tchaikovsky's orchestral music is a curious blend of the two attitudes represented by Berlioz and Brahms. In his symphonic poems he set himself to illustrate a story as frankly as Berlioz himself did. The popular “1812” overture, depicting Napoleon’s invasion of Russia and his repulse, is the most positively pictorial of them all, and, planned for open-air performance, it may well be compared with Berlioz’s “Symphonie funèbre.” His own remarks about it show that Tchaikovsky was conscious of the limitations of such music, and in his symphonies he rejected the idea of direct illustration. Yet some kind of programme is present in each of the later ones. We spoke of the story at the back of Brahms’s works, and that, too, is true of Tchaikovsky’s symphonies, and is made far more obvious in them. In none of the last three great ones can the story be said to remain in the background. In the fourth and fifth symphonies the striking motto themes which begin them and cut across the course of each movement give evidence of this. Brahms, too, we have seen, used such a motto in the third symphony, but the casual hearer may listen to that symphony several times before he realizes the fact. He cannot do that with Tchaikovsky.

In the case of the fourth symphony Tchaikovsky tried to put his story into words in a private letter to Mme von Meck in order that she might sympathize the more closely. But the effort was not very successful. He was able to do little more than describe the moods...
of the themes and movements, which are so clearly evident in the music itself that the verbal comment seems halting and unsatisfactory by comparison. He describes the motto theme as fate, “a power which constantly hangs over us like the sword of Damocles.” Sorrow, hope, joy, dreams are all subject to its influence, and in the last movement, the principal theme of which is a Russian folk-song, he suggests that the only escape from fate is the unthinking life of a primitive people. In all this one sees the personal story of his own life, the strong impulses and vivid imaginativeness haunted by a morbid depression, from which he could never escape for long.

At the end of the letter he says: “Naturally my words are not clear, nor are they exhaustive enough. “Therein lies the peculiarity of instrumental music, that you cannot analyse its meaning.” These words are very significant. They lead up to the conclusion that there is no actual dividing line between programme music and absolute music. All good music has elements of both; it may be described in words, but it contains far more than words can convey; it may be analysed into its musical features, but it is the expression of something more than its outward features of sound.

The last of Tchaikovsky’s symphonies, called “The Pathetic,” is the most distinctly autobiographical of them all. It is unnecessary to lay stress upon the gloom which pervades it from its opening theme to the long diminuendo of the slow movement which forms its finale. The very fact of ending a symphony with such a movement stamps it with its peculiar character. Three out of its four movements end pianissimo, and only the third, an original mixture of the scherzo and the march, contrasts in a sort of reckless hilarity with the pervading atmosphere of disillusionment. Even the second movement, famous for its gracious melody in five-beat time, is broken in upon by a middle section, in which a drooping and sorrowful theme is played over a continuous pedal bass (that is the key-note constantly repeated). This device of a throbbing pedal adds poignancy to the last pages of the finale.

There was no sorrow of outward life to account for this increasing gloom. The last years of Tchaikovsky’s life were marked by such success at home and abroad that he had strong inducements to happiness. All sorts of stories have been built round this symphony, but it certainly had nothing directly to do with his death. When he was planning it in 1892 he wrote hopefully to his brother about the work and his own future. Its composition, too, followed closely upon the production of one of the brightest of his works, the fairy ballet called “Casse-noisette,” well known in its subsequent form as an orchestral suite. Its general mood was in fact simply the outcome of that tendency to depression with which Tchaikovsky had been afflicted at intervals and with increasing force through his life. But it is the most forcible expression of a purely personal characteristic which the art of music can show. Its personal characteristics prevented its immediate success when it was heard at Petrograd in October, 1893, but once fully realized its acceptance by the public all over Europe, and especially in England, became excessively enthusiastic. Tchaikovsky, however, did not live to see the immense popularity of his “Pathetic” symphony; he died on November 6, 1893.

Tchaikovsky was widely accepted, particularly in England, as a typically Russian composer, yet, as we have seen, he definitely put aside the conscious effort to evolve a national style. What he did was to evolve an exeedingly personal style, and because he was a Russian by birth, upbringing, and outlook upon life, his personal expression included many elements typical of his nation. Though he often drew upon Russian sources for his melody, sometimes using actual folk tunes or church tunes, for example in the slow movement of the string quartet in D, the finale of the fourth symphony, and the “1812”overture—elsewhere his melody without actual quotation suggests the rhythms and intervals of Russian folk-song—there are many other influences of foreign origin almost equally strong. There is a suavity, one might almost call it a sentimentality, in Tchaikovsky’s melody which none of the nationalist composers, Moussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, or Borodin, would consent to cultivate. His love of Italy and her music may account for this to some extent, as his great admiration for Mozart certainly accounts for that dexterity of workmanship which gives
charm to the smaller movements of his symphonies and suites. What he most shares with his contemporaries is simplicity of melodic outline combined with emphatic expression of his ideas, heightened by richness of orchestral colouring.

Tchaikovsky’s persuasive way of expressing himself carried his music abroad at a time when the obvious crudities of Moussorgsky would not have been tolerated by any audience not previously interested in Russian ideals; and the coming of Tchaikovsky to Western Europe therefore prepared the way for the coming of others of his nation.


Tchaikovsky represents a conclusive demonstration of the enormous fallacy of the question of nationalism in art. The idea persists, is apparently ineradicably fixed in the superficial consciousness, that art must express nationality, must convey an unmistakable indication of its national origin if it is to be accepted for a valid, vital art. An idea more enormously inaccurate has never been encountered. Art is an expression of an individual, not of an aggregate: we prize it in proportion to the degree with which it brings a new beauty into the world, a new, strange exquisiteness of seeing and feeling and expressing. The indubitable proof of this is the obvious fact that the art of the world that has come down to us with the accumulated approvals of the ages upon it, is art that is essentially abstract in its substance and universal in its appeal. There is practically no instance of a composition built out of national material that has been awarded the palm of enduring popularity. The great moments in music are the expressions of varying kinds and degrees of ecstasies; and for the fitting expression of these exaltations, whether of lamentation or of rejoicing, they have created a language of their own. A man who would limit himself to the obvious restrictions of idiom, would, in the very nature of the case, stultify whatever capacity for emotional expressiveness he possessed.

The point must be emphasized. It has become something of a popular habit to disparage Tchaikovsky on the ground of his cosmopolitanism, and to throw him into competitive juxtaposition (to his disadvantage) with Moussorgsky. The inaccuracy is absurd. Call Moussorgsky a great original impulse, if you will, or an interesting primitive, or an epochal mystic—call him what you will; but do not fall into the error that fails to distinguish between the genius that hints tremendously, and the genius that accomplishes beautifully. We err greatly and very slovenly in neglecting to draw these distinctions. Why do we not content ourselves, for example, in accepting Whitman as a prophet or as a sort of dithyrambic essayist or as a sort of melodious sociologist! Why do we not content ourselves in accepting Moussorgsky as an eventful potentiality, a man who brought into music certain valuable harmonic indications, but who failed to cultivate his talent with sufficient assiduity! Tchaikovsky, to the contrary, will endure because he is, precisely, one of the greatest musicians, on the purely technical side, that music has ever known. An artist must be something more than an artist to be great, but he must be a craftsman even before all else. This overwhelmingly significant secret Tchaikovsky divined. His quintessence is contained in less than a dozen words as follows: In answering an insipid inquiry from someone of an obviously banal and conventionally sentimental cast of character, he said: “My ideals! My ideal is to become a good musician.” One cannot imagine a foolish question answered at once more simply and more comprehensively.

If all art—music in particular—were the merely emotional and decorative matter some precious points of view would have it, the chief count that can be brought against Tchaikovsky would be eliminated. In other words, if one were to deny the predominant importance of the idea in music (as in relation to the matters of a sheer rhythm or a sheer decorativeness or a sheer mood), one could claim a place for Tchaikovsky in the front rank of the world’s composers. We have heard Tchaikovsky spoken of as a “second-rate composer.” The condescension is deplorable. Can we determine that a thing is “second-rate” if we have no other thing that is indubitably first-rate with
which we may properly compare it? For example, we may very properly compare Brahms with Beethoven, Strauss, to a certain extent, with Liszt or Wagner. The mould, so to speak, of the mind, and the technical means employed are obviously allied. But there is another quite different type of artist—a less weighty type, no doubt, but indispensable. One might almost dare say that the art impulse, pure and simple, is found at its keenest degree of activity when one might call the lesser or subsidiary type of artist, as in distinction to the comprehensive type wherein we find the accumulations of preceding tendencies arranged and employed in equitable distribution. It is for the individual to prefer the one type to the other if he chooses to do so: the equitable judgment will accept both types, each for its intrinsic qualifications. In the one class we find, for example, Beethoven, Brahms, Strauss and Wagner; in the other and by far the larger class, we may include Chopin, Franck, Grieg, Debussy and Tchaikovsky. In the sense of original impulses whether of a sheerly technical nature, or on the sensuous and emotional side, the importance of these men cannot be overestimated.

Tchaikovsky is of this latter group not by reason of any special quality of technical originality [as in the case of Chopin and Debussy], but by reason of what one might call a great originality of emotional point of view and manner of expression. This point should be emphasized. Tchaikovsky accepted an established medium of expression, and re-vitalized it and amplified it into the actualness of the something new. Both in his string quartets and his symphonies he supplied music with the spontaneous, vital, legitimate ramifications of which, in his age, these traditional forms were capable. There can be no doubt that he represents a kind and degree of development in the continuity of musical expansiveness that makes him the one indispensable symphonist since Beethoven. This does not for one moment mean that Tchaikovsky can be compared with Schubert or Brahms in the matter of substance: it means that neither Brahms nor Schubert present music with the unmistakable salience of Tchaikovsky both as a vehement propulsive force and as a recreator of conventional mediums of expression. The loss of the four symphonies of Brahms would not create an appreciable lapse in the history of music; the loss of the Sixth Symphony of Tchaikovsky would.

No doubt, the substance of a Brahms symphony or a Schubert symphony is incomparably finer. No doubt, the music of these men will sound long after eight-tenths of Tchaikovsky has been forgotten. Well, it is questionable if Debussy contains the staying qualities of Strauss, and yet there can be no question which, of the two, is the more precious sensation, the more precious contribution. By the same token, the distinction must be made between the quality inherent in Brahms, and the something of unique insurgency inherent in Tchaikovsky. It must be unequivocally contended that Tchaikovsky stems direct from Mozart and Beethoven in the sense that expression and means are welded together with that indescribable something of inspired and miraculous inevitability that marks the perfect manner.

Tchaikovsky is of a royal company in his gift of balancing a profound technical facility with a beauty of expression. His music is alive from its first bar to its last. Obviously, the explanation of this is to be found in the almost unprecedented vividness and vitality of the part writing. The inner voices of a Tchaikovsky score are animate to a degree beyond any other example in music with the exception of Wagner. Read a Tchaikovsky score closely, and observe the remarkable assertiveness of the inner voices; observe the ease with which they progress, progress to so independent and untrammeled an extent that they seem to possess the salience of the dominant melodic line. “The greatest contrapuntalist since Bach,” Huneker says of Brahms. “Brahms as a master of the management of notes stands with the highest,” Runciman says in an estimate otherwise far from complimentary. Well, of what avail all this! Who cares? We are not interested in a mere academic exploitation of technical procedure. The all important question is: Do the notes and the counterpoint mean anything? (Of course, the estimate is ridiculous aside from this—the greatest contrapuntalist and the greatest master of the management of notes the world has so far seen is Richard Wagner.) But our present point is the matter of contrast in the effect of spontaneity produced by a
Tchaikovsky score as opposed to a Brahms score.

After all, the end of art is the sum-total of the effect produced upon the collective mind. The matter of technical procedure is, in the last analysis, of no consequence. It is because Tchaikovsky is so essentially pre-occupied with saying something and with getting somewhere that his music exerts so powerful an effect upon the emotional attention. No composer says his say more directly: the fact that he combines this pithy, almost, one might say, caustic outspokenness with an impeccable craftsmanship constitutes, from the purely technical standpoint, his dominant characteristic. It is one of the determining factors that supply his music against the unmerciful passing of the years.

There can not be the slightest doubt that the conventional elaborations of what is invidiously called “classical” music have lost their appeal to modern ears. We no longer enjoy—if we ever did enjoy—fugue, canon and counterpoint for their own sake and quite aside from the question of their emotional expressiveness. Observe how deftly Tchaikovsky evades any semblance of premeditation in his exercises of these essentially academic contrivances. Instances of this—to choose at random—may be noted in the fugue from the first movement of the First Suite, the enormously eloquent use of the trombone in the last movement of the Sixth Symphony, and the ascending passage for the woodwind in the first variation of the theme of the last movement of the Third Suite. Note, moreover, the ingratiating gracefulness of Tchaikovsky’s counterpoint as exhibited, for example, in passages such as those in the last movement of the Fourth Symphony where the flute embellishes so exquisitely the theme of the Russian folk-song upon which the movement is founded. Again, note the apparent spontaneity of the passage in the second movement of this work where the flute weaves a pathetically beautiful counterpoint over the principal theme sung by the ‘cellos. It may be observed that the effect is one of inevitability—precisely the effect that must be attained by the work of art that would exert a compelling influence upon our sensibilities. Three-fourths of the ineffable appeal of Tchaikovsky’s music arises out of this knack of weaving together the subsidiary voices. The part-writing in the Sixth Symphony supplies in itself alone an unforgettable sensation, just as the part writing in the Tristan Prelude thrills us with its quality of irresistible progressiveness. To this may be added a merit that, I believe has never received its just due. I refer to Tchaikovsky’s great harmonic gift, a unique gift, after a fashion, in so much as it entails hardly any aspect of innovation, depending almost exclusively upon an adroit manipulation of existing and quite elementary material.

Obviously, Tchaikovsky does not discover, as Chopin does, a new harmonic material. He cannot be credited with Wagner’s sensuous magic, nor, like Debussy, does he attempt and achieve a miraculous reconciliation between hitherto unsuspected relationships of chords, creating a new beauty out of an inspired juxtaposition of sounds. The fact remains that out of material, essentially simple, Tchaikovsky achieves a degree of harmonic eloquence unparalleled in symphonic music. He is one of the most poignant harmonists in all music. Through the exercise of some adroit and indescribable knack he can make an ordinary chord of the sixth take on a new expressiveness. Note that passage in the last movement of the Fourth Symphony where, in one of the variations on the Russian folk-song, the “cellos descend through a succession of half-tones into the chord of the sixth in C major. No more wistfully, regretfully beautiful bars have ever been written; bars literally redolent with the heart-ache for the far-away. Turn, in the same movement, to that passage for wood-wind that follows immediately upon the giving out of the principal theme by the trombones. Study the acute, pathetic quality of these few bars, achieved by a dexterous finesse in the blending of the ascending figure in the clarinet with the harmonies given out by flutes and oboi. There is no sweeter, tenderer page than this in music. Mozart could not have exceeded it in grace, Schubert has nothing to show more truthfully, humanly sad. I would direct attention to a similar example of harmonic facility, to be found in the eighteenth bar of the second movement of the Second String Quartet. The effect is irresistible. Any
one at all acquainted with the technical side of
music will note the essential fundamentalness,
so to speak, of Tchaikovsky’s harmonies, and it
is precisely this quality which supplies his mu-
sic with the high degree of its tenacity of ap-
peal. As a result of this, he presents us with a
directness, forcibleness and structural solidity
in his modulations for which we must needs go
to Beethoven for our parallel. Note, in this con-
nection, the modulation directly preceding the
entrance of the love theme in the Romeo and
Juliet; the modulation at the close of the work-
ing-out section of the Fifth Symphony, from
the dominant seventh of E major to the original
key of E minor; the passage on the bassoon,
preceding the second theme of the first move-
ment of the Fourth Symphony, wherein the
keys of A and A flat are firmly related to each
other through the medium of their respective
dominant sevenths. These are salient instances
out of hundreds that might be cited.

The thing to bear in mind throughout an
analysis of the sheerly technical aspects of
Tchaikovsky’s music—the thing I wish to em-
phasize above all else—is the important fact
that these great technical attainments are in-
varily part and parcel, so to speak, of the emo-
tional eloquence. In other words, they are
never an end in themselves; and as a result [I
repeat] Tchaikovsky’s music exhibits a unique
amalgamation for which there is no parallel:
on the one hand, a technical profundity of
insurpassable substance, on the other, a poise
and finesse equalling Mozart’s in its kind of
graceful buoyancy. True, Chopin and Wagner
exhibit something of a similar miraculous equi-
librium [observe, as one instance out of thou-
sands that might be cited, the Chaminade-like
prettiness and sophisticated delicacy of the per-
mutations and developments of the “hunt”
theme in the opening of the second act of
Tristan], but the unique feature of the extraor-
dinary fusion consistently operative in Tchai-
kovsky’s music is the effect it produces of a
sort of doleful insouciance, thrice tragic by rea-
sion of the discrepancy. To those for whom this
music has a personal significance, these melan-
choly brightnesses, these lugubrious exuber-
ances and feeble flickerings, pathetically play-
ful, aristocratically debonair, represent the very
uttermost outer rim of grief. To the initiated
few, this, so to speak, laughing tearfulness, this
sorrowful badinage [in which there is both a
sort of reticent, gentle pride and a sort of deli-
cate, tender bravery] will ever remain the domi-
nant and quite incomparable characteristic of
this music.

As a result, partially, of this quality of con-
summate dexterity, Tchaikovsky has suffered
a grave misrepresentation on the matter of form.
In view of the fact that critics of considerable
eminence have contributed to the circulation
of this superficial inaccuracy, it may not come
amiss to subject this question of form to a
frank and fearless scrutiny. The fundamental
fallacy of this question of form in general, and
of its application to Tchaikovsky in particular,
is the fact that we speak of form as though it
were an absolute thing, when, in reality, it is
not. In other words, we speak of form as though
it were a fixed law inexpugnably permanent.
Nothing could be farther from the truth. Form
is not a something to be slavishly adhered to as
though it were a crucial and determining crite-
rian. Form is merely a means of communica-
tion between artist and public. In other words,
form is not a virtue in itself; it is merely a
means to an end.

The New International Encyclopedia [New
York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1928], XXII, 29–30.

Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilyitch (1840–93). The great-
est composer Russia has thus far produced, born
at a small place called Votkinsk, in the Ural
mining region, on May 7, 1840. He studied
jurisprudence in St. Petersburg, and in 1859
obtained a position in the Ministry of Justice.
In company with a young poet named Apukhtin,
who greatly influenced his future, he listened
to Italian opera whenever an opportunity pre-

tessed itself. This love of Italian music left its
traces in Tchaikovsky’s scores. He entered the
conservatory, where Anton Rubinstein, its di-
rector, was attracted by the young man’s abil-
ity. Tchaikovsky resigned his government po-

sition, studied music with all the vigor of his
nature, and, on his leaving the conservatory
three years later, he continued to study orchestra-
tion with Rubinstein and took up the flute,
piano, and organ. In 1866 he accepted the posi-
tion of teacher of harmony at the Moscow Con-
Tchaikovsky's music reveals the mighty pessimism of his nation. His symphonies are often built upon typical phrases, taken from the folk song, he is Russian in his operas, with their national texts and treatment. Some of his songs—he wrote over a hundred—are masterpieces. His Florentine string sextet is warm in color, and in his three string quartets he often strays across the borders into the pleasing country of the operatic. The world has come to recognize the last movement of the *Pathetic* symphony as an unparalleled embodiment of woe. The fifth symphony is more homogeneous; the fourth, in F minor, more Russian. There are three piano concertos, a violin concerto, and many exquisite piano pieces. The three great symphonies (4, 5, 6), the symphonic overtures, with their wealth of musical imagery, their dramatic power and thrilling effects, constitute Tchaikovsky's claim to immortality. He had a predilection for ballet music and left charming specimens of dance music in *Le cassenoisette* suite and other compositions in a light vein. His operas are seldom heard outside of Russia. *Pique Dame* (1890), immensely popular in Russia, is the only one of Tchaikovsky's ten operas ever produced in the United States (Metropolitan Opera House, 1910), and failed to impress. *Eugene Onegin* (1879), no less popular in Russia than the just-mentioned opera, had two complete performances in America in concert form.
and Iolanthe (1893) met with success in Russia. . . . A complete thematic catalogue of the composer’s works was published by P. Jurgenson at Moscow (1897).

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE [SPRING 2012]

ARTICLES

EwELINA BOCZKOWSKA: Chopin’s Ghosts

CHARLES FISK: Chopin’s “Duets”—and Mine

MICHAEL KLEIN: Chopin Dreams: The Mazurka in C♯ Minor, Op. 30, No. 4

LAWRENCE KRAMER: Rogue Pitches, the Cult of the Dandy, and Chopin’s Later Style

JAMES PARAKILAS: Disrupting the Genre: Unforeseen Personifications in Chopin