



TCHAIKOVSKY

THE SYMPHONIES

CHAN 10392(6)





Peter Joslin Collection

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

COMPACT DISC 1

Symphony No. 1 in G minor, Op. 13 'Winter Daydreams' 43:54

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | I Allegro tranquillo (Dreams of a Winter Journey) | 11:51 |
| 2 | II Adagio cantabile ma non tanto (Land of desolation, Land of mists) | 11:29 |
| 3 | III Scherzo. Allegro scherzando giocoso | 7:34 |
| 4 | IV Finale. Andante lugubre – Allegro maestoso | 12:45 |

Symphony No. 2 in C minor, Op. 17 'Little Russian' 34:15

Revised 1879 Version

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|---|--|-------|
| 5 | I Andante sostenuto – Allegro vivo | 12:06 |
| 6 | II Andantino marziale, quasi moderato | 6:41 |
| 7 | III Scherzo and Trio. Allegro molto vivace | 5:09 |
| 8 | IV Finale. Moderato assai – Allegro vivo | 10:06 |

TT 78:22

COMPACT DISC 2

Symphony No. 3 in D major, Op. 29 45:10

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|---|--|-------|
| 1 | I Moderato assai (Tempo di marcia funebre) – Allegro brillante | 13:46 |
| 2 | II Alla tedesca. Allegro moderato e semplice | 6:45 |
| 3 | III Andante elegiaco | 9:41 |
| 4 | IV Scherzo. Allegro vivo | 5:59 |
| 5 | V Finale. Allegro con fuoco – Tempo di polacca | 8:39 |



COMPACT DISC 3

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36

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|---|--|-------|
| 1 | I Andante sostenuto – Moderato con anima | 41:34 |
| 2 | II Andantino in modo di canzone | 17:38 |
| 3 | III Scherzo. Pizzicato ostinato | 9:37 |
| 4 | IV Finale. Allegro con fuoco | 5:33 |

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| 5 | Capriccio italien, Op. 45 | 8:34 |
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14:18

TT 56:16

COMPACT DISC 4

Manfred Symphony, Op. 58

In Four Scenes

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|---|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I Lento lugubre – Moderato con moto | 53:43 |
| 2 | II Vivace con spirito | 15:15 |
| 3 | III Andante con moto | 9:42 |
| 4 | IV Allegro con fuoco | 10:39 |

17:47

COMPACT DISC 5

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

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|---|--|-------|
| 1 | I Andante – Allegro con anima | 43:24 |
| 2 | II Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza | 13:50 |

12:24

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 3 | III Allegro moderato | 5:25 |
| 4 | IV Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace | 11:25 |

COMPACT DISC 6

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74 'Pathétique'

43:53

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I Adagio – Allegro non troppo | 17:57 |
| 2 | II Allegro con grazia | 7:27 |
| 3 | III Allegro molto vivace | 8:20 |
| 4 | IV Finale. Adagio lamentoso | 9:48 |

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra

Mariss Jansons

Tchaikovsky: The Symphonies

Each of Tchaikovsky's symphonies affords multiple insights into the musical personality of an emotional, sensitive man and artist. He was prone to bouts of intense depression throughout his life, which he is now thought to have ended by his own hand in one such fit of despair, so to avoid being disgraced by a scandal of homosexual involvement which the society of the time would never have tolerated. The symphony accordingly became for him less a form for developing reasoned musical discussion than a means to express his innermost thoughts and feelings. 'Should not a symphony', he wrote to a friend, 'reveal those wordless urges that hide in the heart, asking fervently for expression?' He answered the question in his own way, conveying emotions through musical ideas that often haunt the mind as well as delight the ear.

Symphony No. 1 in G minor, Op. 13 'Winter Daydreams'

According to Tchaikovsky's younger brother Modest, no other work caused the composer such labour and suffering as his First Symphony, which occupied him through

much of 1866, the year of his twenty-sixth birthday. In January, Tchaikovsky had moved from St Petersburg to Moscow, where Nikolay Rubinstein, Director of the newly opened Conservatory of Music, had engaged him as Professor of Harmony, thereby alleviating the financial hardship that had beset Tchaikovsky since he resigned a minor post at the Ministry of Justice three years earlier to devote himself to music.

Tchaikovsky lodged in Moscow with Rubinstein, and it was probably at the latter's suggestion that he began a more extended work than anything he had previously attempted. He had been much encouraged when his revision of a student composition – an Overture in F major, which Rubinstein conducted at a concert in March – had brought his first public success. He immediately began sketches for a symphony, working by night as well as by day in addition to teaching, but it was not long before he was struggling against physical exhaustion. His low spirits were compounded with news of a belated and scathing review in St Petersburg of

his graduation composition, a cantata on Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' (the text set by Beethoven in his Ninth Symphony). Very soon Tchaikovsky was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, forcing himself to continue working in spite of sleeplessness, persistent headaches, hallucinations and a recurring sense of dread that he would not live to finish the symphony, all of which he mentioned in his letters. A doctor was called in and pronounced his case hopeless, which did not exactly help matters. As it was, most of the symphony was written by the summer, when the composer showed it to Nikolay Rubinstein's brother, Anton, his former teacher at St Petersburg, who advised some revision before he would consider it for performance.

Back in Moscow, Tchaikovsky eventually accepted the suggestions made to him, but when the work was first performed it was in a strangely piecemeal fashion. The Scherzo movement alone was played at a Moscow concert in December, without much success (according to Modest), but this and the second movement were more favourably received when Nikolay conducted them in St Petersburg two months later. Another year went by before the symphony was performed in its entirety, in Moscow on

15 February 1868. Tchaikovsky then made more revisions and a few cuts before a first edition was published in 1874. The version now heard was not played until 1886, and a corrected printed edition eventually appeared in 1888, twenty-two years after the symphony was begun.

Tchaikovsky's publisher, Jurgenson, had brought out the first Russian editions of a number of German symphonic classics in the early 1860s, and we know that the composer enjoyed playing the symphonies of Mendelssohn and Schumann. His own first essay in the form owes something in style to both these models, as in the use he makes of descriptive titles and in his method of reconciling the disciplines of symphonic form with his own romantic imagination and developing technique. After his later revision, he wrote in a letter: 'Despite its deficiencies I have a soft spot for it. It is a sin of my sweet youth', and later on, to his patroness, he wrote, 'Although it is immature in many respects,' he told her, 'it is essentially better and richer in content than many other, more mature works'. In giving it the title 'Winter Daydreams' he was no doubt copying Mendelssohn's practice as well as seeking to define his own approach.



Tchaikovsky then bestowed separate subtitles on each of the first two movements. The opening *Allegro tranquillo* he called ‘Dreams of a Winter Journey’, but this seems to have no specific relevance to anything in the music, which is a sonata-type structure of two contrasting ideas. Both the main themes are introduced by the woodwind, the first by flute and bassoon playing two octaves apart, the second by a solo clarinet. In general it is the movement’s melodic charm and instrumental detail that is more engaging than the modest though skilfully adapted symphonic development.

The second movement he inscribed ‘Land of desolation, Land of mists’. It is certainly a mood-picture, a decidedly Russian landscape of the mind through which musical images are brought into focus. The implications of the subtitle are somewhat contradicted by an opening phrase now known to have come from Tchaikovsky’s earlier overture on Ostrovsky’s drama, *The Storm*, where it had different emotional connotations. However, the folk-like song of an oboe is extended and elaborated as it travels from one instrument to another, the varied orchestration and counterpoint doing duty for musical development.

The remaining movements have no subtitles, we do not know why. The third movement Scherzo was more or less ready-made, being taken from a Piano Sonata in C sharp minor Tchaikovsky had written the year before, transposed to a new key and reworked to take more advantage of orchestral colour (the original keyboard work was subsequently published posthumously). Mendelssohn again comes to mind in the elegance of phrase and graceful manner, but it is the newly written trio section in waltz-time that acquires a special significance as the progenitor of all the later and much-loved orchestral waltzes.

The Finale, although again in sonata form with two subjects, derives most of its character from a single Russian folksong, which Tchaikovsky also later arranged as one of a published collection. Its melody provides the basis for both the slow introduction and the jaunty second theme of the movement, as well as serving to some extent in shaping the movement’s sturdy first subject. By way of development, Tchaikovsky here parades his contrapuntal skill in a fugal passage with entries in different keys, while generating an energetic rhythmic impetus that carries the movement through with a flourish.

Symphony No. 2 in C minor, Op. 17

After the trouble and tribulation caused him by the composition of his First Symphony, it was another six years before Tchaikovsky attempted a further work in a form he never found particularly congenial, though he did think he ought to try to master it. His Second Symphony was begun with this in mind – to improve on the faults of style he felt were in the earlier work, especially as regards ‘symmetry of form’ as he put it in a letter – but the result was so enthusiastically received at its Moscow premiere on 7 February 1873 that the Russian Musical Society changed its programmes in order to give a repeat performance two months later. Its immediate appeal at the time to some extent followed from the composer’s use of melodic themes borrowed from Ukrainian folksong, which led Nikolay Kashkin, a teacher, critic and friend of Tchaikovsky, to call it the ‘Little Russian Symphony’ (‘Little Russia’ being the common name for the Ukraine). The nickname stuck, becoming effectively the work’s subtitle. Another distinction it has among Tchaikovsky’s seven symphonies (counting *Manfred* with the numbered six) is in musical subject matter that reflects a wholly unmorbid side of the composer’s personality.

He began it during a summer holiday, one of several spent with his married sister, Alexandra Davidova, and her family at Kamenka, their home in the Ukraine, which ‘she encouraged her brother to look on as a second home for him too’. He was then aged thirty-two and dividing his time between teaching at Moscow Conservatory and composing, most recently the *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy-overture, a String Quartet (No. 1 in D minor) and an opera, *The Oprichnik*, which he learned at the end of the year had been accepted for production in St Petersburg.

By the time he returned to Moscow he was ‘so engrossed’, he wrote, in the symphony, that other work was irksome, and it was finished and orchestrated during the winter. He played the Finale on the piano at a party given by Rimsky-Korsakov early in January, and was delighted by the enthusiasm it aroused. Even so, and despite successful concert performances, he remained personally dissatisfied with some aspects of the symphony, and six to seven years later (in the wake of his third and fourth symphonies) he rewrote much of it into the present revised version which is now usually performed.

His most extensive revision was in the work’s first and third movements, though



he mentions an ‘enormous cut’ in the Finale which perhaps improved its proportions. At any rate, the work made new friends when it was first heard in its revised form in St Petersburg on 12 February 1881, and the present-day listener will find it generally lighter in expressive character than his other symphonies. Its slow introduction to the first movement has a variant of a folksong, ‘Down by Mother Volga’, heard as a horn solo, which later emerges amid the development of two further ideas and is reintroduced as a better ending to the movement than either of those.



Instead of a lyrical slow movement, Tchaikovsky made use of a Bridal March from his rejected opera, *Undine*, composed three years earlier. Now adapted as the basis of a rondo-scheme, it alternates with a string melody as a first contrasting episode and a central passage derived from a folksong, ‘Spin, O my Spinner’, found in the *50 Russian Folksongs* he arranged for piano duet. This movement is an attractive partner to the Scherzo, which most resembles Tchaikovsky’s ballet music in its rhythmic vivacity, especially a Trio section that foreshadows a *Sleeping Beauty* dance and which, at the end, is played again in 2/8 time by the woodwind while the other

instruments play the main Scherzo music in 3/8.

Folksong again furnishes the Finale: principally a song called ‘The Crane’ which Tchaikovsky overheard the Davidov’s butler singing at Kamenka. There is a contrasting melody of Tchaikovsky’s own, a syncopated little dance tune, but the movement is chiefly concerned with the folksong theme varied not in terms of much changing of the melody but of presenting it, or phrases from it, in different keys and instrumental colours, gradually absorbing the second tune until a loud stroke on the tam-tam heralds a *presto* coda that carries the work home in a bright C major.

Symphony No. 3 in D major, Op. 29

When Tchaikovsky composed his Third Symphony in a matter of a few weeks during his summer holiday in 1875, he was thirty-five years old and the work helped to banish the melancholia that had afflicted him throughout the previous winter, this time his state of mind being affected as much by professional as emotional matters. The year had begun badly for him with the celebrated occasion on which he played his sketches for the B flat minor Piano Concerto to Nikolay Rubinstein, its intended dedicatee,

only to hear Rubinstein denounce it as ‘worthless and unplayable’. Before the year was out, the Concerto would be successfully launched not in Russia but in Boston, USA, by a new dedicatee, Hans von Bülow, but Tchaikovsky’s low spirits were revealed in the *Serenade mélancolique* he wrote for violin and orchestra in January that year. His letters to his brothers Anatoly and Modest at this time expressed his wish to die, as well as more mundane irritation with his teaching duties, and although he craved travel, or escape from the city to the countryside, he no sooner went anywhere than he started to feel homesick. He busied himself with some songs, and with correcting his fourth opera, *Vakula the Smith*, ready for a prize competition which it would win later in the year. It has come down to us in a revised form as *Cherevichki* (The Little Slippers), but is still seldom heard.

A different fate attended another major work Tchaikovsky began that year, after the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres invited him to compose the music for a ballet intended for production at Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre. How much of a subject for it was already decided, and who exactly was responsible for elaborating this in theatre terms it has been impossible to discover, but



it took to the stage two years later as *Swan Lake* and, after some early vicissitudes of production, became the source of some of the composer’s most popular music.



He wrote to Rimsky-Korsakov that he took the commission partly because he needed the money, and also because he had long wanted to try his hand at music for the ballet. In a rather more hopeful frame of mind he left Moscow for another summer holiday in the Ukraine with the family of his sister. Before taking up the work, which was to be a four-act ballet with over two hours of music, he primed himself with the Third Symphony, sketching it in outline very quickly between 17 June and early July, and finishing the full scoring by mid-August. Tchaikovsky did not hear its premiere performance in Moscow on 19 November 1875, having stayed on in St Petersburg after Hans von Bülow had played his Piano Concerto No. 1 for the first time in Russia. The symphony was well received without causing much of a stir. When Sir August Manns introduced it to Britain at his Crystal Palace concerts in 1899, the conductor misguidedly billed it as the ‘Polish’ Symphony on the strength of a *Tempo di polacca* marking for the Finale, which the programme-note-writer of those days then elaborated into a



romantic fantasy of 'Poland mourning in her oppression and rejoicing in her regeneration'. The fact is that whereas Tchaikovsky's previous symphony, No. 2 in C minor, 'Little Russian', made conscious use of Ukrainian folk themes, the Third Symphony has nothing Polish about it. Manns might just as well have called it the 'German' Symphony because the second movement is designated *Alla tedesca* – especially as the addition of this movement, a waltz in all but name and another precursor of the 'symphonic' waltzes so characteristic of Tchaikovsky, is the means by which this Third Symphony acquires the unconventional structure of five movements instead of four. Ostensibly it serves as a kind of scherzo to balance the movement that bears this designation on the other side of the central slow movement, itself the most imaginative in the work and the heart of its expressive ideas. Tchaikovsky was later to declare: 'All my life I have been much troubled by my inability to grasp and manipulate form in music... I shall end my days without having ever written anything that is perfect in form.' We might nevertheless feel that he was the greater composer because (like others of his time) he varied form to suit his ideas, and in the present instance the symphony gains greatly

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in character from the added movement.

Like all Tchaikovsky's symphonies except the First, it begins with a slow introduction, this in D minor and marked to be played in funeral-march tempo. Sorrowful as it is, the sounds are beautiful in Tchaikovsky's scoring, and the shadows are soon lifted in an accelerating lead into the major key and a processional theme for the main *Allegro*. The link passage and theme are only the first of several harbingers of *Swan Lake* music; another is the B minor melody on the oboe which marks the second subject. Both ideas are concisely stated then extensively developed according to the sonata principle, eventually being repeated and used to build a vigorous finish.

'*Alla tedesca*' for the second movement refers back to what was known as a 'German Dance' (*Allemande* or *Deutsche*, later the *Lindler*) before the waltz came into its own. Begun by the oboe and clarinet over plucked strings, it has a main theme of beguiling grace and elegance enclosing a trio section animated by chattering woodwind in triplet phrases passed among the orchestra. The opening tune returns and ends with its leading phrase also passed about before dropping away on the bassoon.

The elegiac slow movement recalls the

mood and D minor key of the opening funeral march, as broken phrases carry an affecting flute melody to other woodwind and a sorrowful horn, before the strings in richer harmony offer a more consoling idea, with this tune doubled by clarinets. As it is extended, it becomes interwoven with the previous D minor phrases, but gradually overcomes all lingering doubts until the solo horn brings the movement to rest on a final chord in the security of D major.

The Scherzo movement proper brings Mendelssohn irresistibly to mind in the delicacy and charm with which the whirring phrases on woodwind and strings (the latter muted throughout the movement) are embellished by the horn and later by a trombone. A trio section changes the underlying metre as the horns sustain a pedal-note D while other groups of instruments offer a new tune in seven different keys in turn, as if inviting a choice. A climax is reached by way of arpeggio phrases and fanfare figures, after which the opening section returns to bring about a disarming ending.

The polonaise tempo invoked for the Finale is the ensemble dance in triple metre that adorns some of the best-known scenes in Tchaikovsky's theatre music, *Eugene*



Onegin as well as *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. It is exuberantly extended by the full orchestra before giving way to a pompous, almost hymn-like second subject. The development is by way of repetition and a somewhat academic-sounding fugal passage, leading to the second theme which swells out grandly like an anthem to crown the symphony in confident splendour.

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36

Soon after the first performance of his Fourth Symphony, in St Petersburg on 22 February 1878, Tchaikovsky wrote to a friend that it was 'the best thing I have done'. He was then thirty-eight years old, and the composition had occupied him intermittently at much the same time as his opera, *Eugene Onegin*, which was premiered in Moscow a year later. Both these works demonstrate the technical mastery that suddenly showed itself during what were some of the most critical years of the composer's life.

Like the Violin Concerto which immediately preceded it, the Fourth Symphony was begun during Tchaikovsky's convalescence abroad after the breakdown brought on by his ill-fated marriage. Some years before, in trying to escape from what

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he felt to be the burden of his homosexual nature, he had become engaged to an opera singer, only to be jilted suddenly and without explanation. Then, in 1877, one of his students asked him to marry her, a proposal close to that in Pushkin's story of Onegin. But whereas Onegin turned the girl down, and lived to regret it, Tchaikovsky accepted her, and came to regret that much sooner.



Incapable of loving his wife, Antonia Ivanovna (who was later found to be mentally unstable anyway), Tchaikovsky soon fled from her and suffered a serious breakdown which threatened his sanity and led him to contemplate suicide. He took himself to Switzerland and Italy to recuperate, and we owe it to another lady who came into his life some months earlier that he was able to continue working at all. Nadezhda von Meck was the wealthy widow of a railway engineer and she conceived such a passion for Tchaikovsky's music that she offered him generous financial help so that he could concentrate on composition without the need to earn other income; this became an annuity which he received for almost fifteen years. Her patronage led to an extraordinary friendship between them maintained by remote control, as it was

accompanied by the delicate stipulation, carefully kept on both sides, that they should never meet. Their association was entirely through the letters they exchanged, often long and fascinating (and still awaiting an adequate English version), such as the descriptive 'meaning' the composer wrote for her of his Fourth Symphony, which they referred to as 'our Symphony' in their correspondence. Some quotations from this are included here, but the reader should also keep in mind Tchaikovsky's disclaimer to his correspondent that the work was 'a musical confession of the soul', which words could never adequately explain.

His contribution to symphonic form as a means of musical expression was to extend its scope and to bring to it new and vivid contrasts of melody and harmony. These are a distinctive feature of the Fourth Symphony, which ranks with the *Pathétique* (No. 6) and *Manfred* Symphonies as the composer's finest achievement in this form. No. 4 is filled with imaginative instrumental scoring throughout the orchestra; with harmonic skill in the use of inverted and chromatically altered chords, and especially with richness of melody. Tchaikovsky was never afraid of exposing a good tune for all it was worth, and then

turning it upside down to make another just as effective, as happens in the first movement of this symphony. It is a long and complex movement, beginning with a slow introduction in which fanfares of horns and trumpets, supported by woodwind, announce a fateful and foreboding theme that recurs throughout the movement. 'This is Fate,' wrote Tchaikovsky to Madame von Meck, 'that inevitable force which prevents our hopes of happiness from being realised... It is inescapable and it can never be overcome.' To his composer-friend Sergey Taneyev he acknowledged Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as the model for the musical idea. Sometimes it is heard in stark isolation, sometimes integrated into the orchestral texture, but always with compelling power. After the change of tempo the other main themes are an agonised melody in waltz-time introduced by the strings, which is answered by a more hopeful, dreamy tune on the clarinet. The transformation and development of these is twice interrupted by slower sections based on contrasted ideas before the movement reaches a threatening and despairing coda.

The sense of isolation induced by feelings of unhappiness is intensified in each of the next two movements. The *Andantino*



in modo di canzona (in mocking mood) is characterised by a nostalgic melancholy in the haunting song played by the oboe ('One is sad because so much is gone, past... And one regrets the past, yet has no wish to begin living again.'). The procession of memories is invigorated by an answering string-theme in three low-pitched octaves, with a quieter and more dance-like middle section begun by clarinets and bassoons ('Recalling happy moments when the young blood pulsed warm through our veins and life was good'), after which the opening song is heard again, first on the violins and then ending the movement in a sad strain from the bassoons.

Now follows one of Tchaikovsky's most original and daring feats of orchestration, the massed strings played *pizzicato ostinato* throughout, like plucked balalaikas. The theme is notable for wide leaps and repeated notes, evoking what he called 'capricious arabesques, elusive apparitions that pass through the imagination when a little wine has been drunk and one feels the first stage of intoxication'. Among them are 'a roistering peasant and a street song', represented by a rustic woodwind tune, and 'a military parade passing in the distance' heard from the brass. All these elements are then woven together in a colourful and



exhilarating tapestry of themes.

A flamboyant flurry of sound launches the Finale, followed quickly by a quiet statement of a theme derived from a Russian folksong well-known in Tchaikovsky's day, 'In the woods there stood a birch tree', which is treated to much variation. 'Go to the people, who know how to enjoy themselves', Nadezhda von Meck was instructed, 'but Fate returns again and others pay no heed... Simple, strong joy does exist even so. Rejoice in the happiness of others and life is still bearable.' The variants of the folksong build excitement until the second of them is frightened out of its festive brilliance by the sudden return of the baleful Fate motif from the opening movement. For a moment it seems to have taken control as the music shrinks beneath it, but with a last upsurge the symphony recovers its high spirits to end exultantly.

Capriccio italien, Op. 45

During the same visit to Rome early in 1880 when he undertook some of the revision on his Second Symphony, Tchaikovsky began one of his most exuberant works, the *Capriccio italien*. In a letter from Rome he wrote to a friend: 'I have sketched the rough draft of an Italian capriccio based on popular

melodies. It will be effective because of the wonderful melodies I happened to pick up, partly from published collections and partly out in the streets with my own ears.' On his return to Russia later that year he scored it for a large orchestra, and it won him another success when it was first performed in Moscow on 18 December 1880 under the baton of Nikolay Rubinstein.

His handling of the orchestra is daring and immensely effective for its time, the work modelled (as he acknowledged) on Glinka's 'Spanish' pieces like the *Capriccio brillante* (1845), and displaying unashamed pride in the blaze and blend of instrumental colour. The initial fanfare is based on a cavalry bugle-call the composer heard each night during his stay at a Roman hotel close to the Corazzieri's barracks at Caracalla. As it subsides, the strings insinuate a swaying, nostalgic melody like a Venetian gondolier's song, and this is continued at some length before the bugle theme loudly breaks in again. With a change of key the oboes introduce another typical song-tune, more lighthearted than the first, with a diverting echo effect decorating the end of each phrase. On its first repeat it is boldly given to two cornets and echoed by the glockenspiel. Its continuing and elaborate

treatment is followed successively by another popular tune, a dashing march, and a return of the gondolier's song. The finale is a *saltarello*, a fast Roman dance in 6/8 time, through which the song-melody bursts forth to a broad and exciting climax.

Manfred Symphony, Op. 58

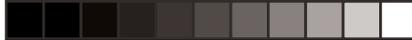
Romantic music in the nineteenth century often found its stimulus in the other arts: poetry and literature, drama and painting. *Manfred* is a long dramatic poem by Lord Byron (1788–1824), first published in 1817, which had a fertile influence on the Romantic movement as a whole throughout Europe. It drew major musical works from Schumann (Overture and incidental music) and Tchaikovsky whose symphony, he said, cost him 'a whole year of [my] life'. Counting from his first reading of the poem in the autumn of 1884, the sketches were begun in the following April and the full score finished in October, eight years after the Fourth Symphony and three years before the Fifth.

The idea for *Manfred* went back much earlier, to Berlioz's last visit to Russia in 1867 when he conducted performances of his *Symphonie fantastique* and *Harold in Italy* (also linked to Byron) among other works.

These 'programme symphonies' caused lively discussion, and the composer Mily Balakirev passed on to Berlioz a suggestion for a 'Manfred Symphony' outlined by the critic Vladimir Stasov: the Frenchman turned it down. Nothing daunted, Balakirev later tried it on Tchaikovsky, complete with descriptive programme and key-scheme, in the wake of the latter's *Romeo and Juliet*, but at first Tchaikovsky said it left him 'absolutely cold'.

Two years went by until Balakirev, who seems to have spent more time pressing ideas on other people than in composing his own, again tackled Tchaikovsky, who reluctantly promised to do something about it. He read Byron's poem on a visit to Switzerland, and then found his imagination stirring. Ignoring or changing many of Balakirev's suggestions (which were curiously fixated on keys containing two sharps or five flats), Tchaikovsky went ahead. At the end, he said it left him more exhausted than any work since his First Symphony.

As always, he was in two minds about the worth of what he had done, even after the first performance in Moscow on 23 March 1886 conducted by Max Erdmannsdorfer. To his patroness he wrote: 'It seems to me the best of my symphonic compositions',



Mazeppa, *Cherevichki* and *The Sorceress*, besides which he had composed the Piano Concerto No. 2 in G, *Capriccio italien*, Serenade for Strings, the 1812 Overture and the *Manfred* Symphony, among other works. He also overcame his fear of conducting to make a start in that direction in St Petersburg in 1887, when he was aged forty-seven. After that he was encouraged to undertake his first tour as a conductor, visiting Germany, France and England early the next year, and returning in the spring to a new home at Frolovskoye, between Moscow and Klin. It was a plain *dacha* in wooded surroundings, remote and secluded, and the composer started gardening with much enthusiasm. Looking back on his successes, though, he suffered the recurring fear of all creative artists, and wrote to his brother Modest that he was 'dreadfully anxious to prove both to others and to myself that I have not yet sung myself out'. There being no better way to do this, he set to work on the new symphony.

Less than four months later, he was able to write to his patroness: 'Now that the symphony is about to be finished I may say that, thanks be to God, it is not inferior to the other one' (meaning the Fourth). Some notes among his papers suggested that he had had a vague programme in mind for what he

had composed. The symphony's introduction, for instance, was to reflect 'complete resignation with regard to Fate', and this comment was followed by a disguised reference to the central emotional problem of his homosexuality, forcibly repressed by the laws and social conventions of his time. As a Soviet writer once put it: 'If Beethoven's Fifth is Fate knocking at the door, Tchaikovsky's Fifth is Fate trying to get out.' The Fate or Destiny motif this time is very different from the battering assault of its counterpart in the Fourth Symphony. It is the foreboding figure first uttered in the low register of the clarinets at the outset of the introduction, laying immediate claim to an emotional response from the listener. The motif will be heard again in each of the four movements, serving musical as well as expressive purposes, and is possessed of an ingenious rhythmic character which will identify it even when heard without the melody. The mood is one of resignation, later verging on despair, and is intensified in the opening bars by the hesitant accompaniment from the lower strings.

Its basic simplicity of harmony is continued in the main *Allegro con anima* of the first movement, but the sombre instrumental colouring is soon changed and extended to build a brilliant climax. The

rhythmic pattern begets a subsidiary theme on woodwind and horns, from which grows a characteristic yearning melody to provide the movement's main second subject. Both elements are then dramatically developed in the course of the movement, reaching another big climax before subsiding again, and when the opening ideas are repeated they continue into a coda that brings back the sombre earlier mood. A long, tender melody played by a solo horn is the warmly expressive opening to the slow movement (the tune has had more than one set of words fitted to it to make popular songs over the years). After a clarinet has added a counter-melody, the music gathers intensity with repetition, and a subsidiary theme from the oboe leads by way of a surging climax to a central section, *Moderato con anima*, with a quirky woodwind figure and sonorous writing for the horns, into which the Destiny motif suddenly and almost balefully intrudes. The movement's opening section returns, with a different scoring, and again develops feverishly, with a further dramatic incursion by the Destiny motif before dying away to a feeling of wistful frustration.

The third movement brings a decorative contrast in a waltz that might have been designed for ballet. Graceful and extremely

pretty, its main section is divided between the strings, followed by the wind instruments. A central trio section has a perky semiquaver figure played *spiccato* (with the tip of the bow) by the strings and spreading through the orchestra, giving added embellishment to the main waltz theme when it returns. Suddenly, as if recalling that he was, after all, writing a symphony and not a ballet, Tchaikovsky causes the waltz rhythm to be disturbed by a reminder of the Destiny theme, low on clarinets and bassoons, just before the end.

The motif is transposed from E minor to E major in the lengthy introduction to the finale, thereby striking a somewhat artificial pose. The clipped chords forming the main theme are derived from the introduction, and although there is a return to the minor key, Tchaikovsky has given the broadest possible hint that he intends a 'happy ending', whatever Destiny may say. In the course of the movement Destiny says quite a lot, especially after the march-like second subject. The coda treats the motif still more grandiosely in E major, until the first theme of the first movement is eventually brought back and brandished like a talisman, *ffff*, to assert an ultimate triumph, though perhaps with more bravado than conviction.



Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74

The composer's death in St Petersburg a mere nine days after conducting a none-too-successful premiere of his *Symphonie pathétique*, as he entitled it, imparted a tragic aura to his Sixth Symphony right from the start. It was even said then that the music reflected a conscious premonition of death on Tchaikovsky's part, and although it was officially put out that he died after drinking impure water during a cholera epidemic prevalent at the time, present evidence inclines to the belief that he did indeed take his own life to avoid being disgraced by a public scandal of homosexual involvement. Tchaikovsky was then aged fifty-three, the most honoured and celebrated of Russian composers, and with an international reputation. In the summer before he died he paid his third visit to Britain, to conduct a concert for the Philharmonic Society in London, and to receive a Doctor's degree in music from Cambridge University (also conferred at the same time on Boito, Bruch, Saint-Saëns and Grieg, although the last-named was not present), and by this time the Sixth Symphony was already in short score awaiting orchestration.

It was his second attempt at a symphony within twelve months. Sketches from the

previous year for a work in E flat found their way instead into the one-movement Piano Concerto No. 3, Op 75, and a separate *Adagio and Finale*, Op 79, for piano and orchestra (they were all reconstructed back into a symphony in the 1950s by Semyon Bogatiryov, and so published and performed in the USSR). Having discarded those ideas, Tchaikovsky seems to have overcome some creative crisis in his mind and fresh thoughts began to flow.

To his nephew, Vladimir Davidov, he wrote that he had 'the idea of writing a programme symphony, but to a programme that should remain an enigma for everyone but myself: let them try to guess it! I intend to call it simply 'Programme Symphony'. It is full of subjective feeling, so much so that as I was mentally composing it during the journey (home from Odessa) I frequently shed tears. As soon as I arrived I set to work with such ardour that in four days the first movement was done and the rest clearly thought out in my head...'

In the same letter he added that he intended several innovations of form, and mentioned that 'the Finale, for instance, is to be not a noisy *Allegro* but a long *Adagio*. He expressed his delight that his creative force was not as spent as he had feared.

From the time of his Fourth Symphony in 1877 (which marked his recovery from serious mental breakdown), Tchaikovsky's music became more deeply subjective – a form of self-revelation, offering not only his heart on his sleeve but his soul in his hand.

The great Russian literature of his time made much of themes involving psychological analysis before this was codified into theory and practice by the Viennese specialists. Especially is this true of Dostoyevsky, whom Tchaikovsky in his youth thought talked 'very foolishly' on musical matters, but whose work he later came to admire. His own later music, particularly in symphonic form, could be said to resemble a Dostoyevsky character in its desire to strip the emotional soul naked; this was especially true of the symphony that was to end his life's work.

He finished the full score by the end of August 1893, when he wrote again to Davidov: 'I consider this symphony the best thing I have ever done. In any case, it is the most deeply felt.' In October it was played through by students of the orchestral class at the Moscow Conservatory. He then took it to St Petersburg for rehearsals, and was unhappy that the orchestral players did not seem impressed by it. Their coolness

may have inhibited his conducting of the premiere on 28 October. A few days later he was taken ill, and he died on 6 November.

On the day after the premiere Tchaikovsky had asked his brother, Modest, if he could think of a more suitable title than 'Programme Symphony'. Modest had first suggested 'Tragic', but this had been turned down. His next suggestion had been the present one, which Tchaikovsky had accepted, the Russian *pateticheskoy* (and its French equivalent) being close to the Greek *pathos* in its original sense of 'suffering'. Tchaikovsky had later changed his mind, but it appeared on the first published score.

A slow introduction is begun by a dark, lugubrious theme emerging from the depths of the orchestral strings on the bassoon, climbing slowly and painfully, and only gradually moving into the home key of B minor. At the change of tempo to *Allegro*, the subject is at once taken up agitatedly by the strings and extended to become the first theme of a sonata structure. The contrast is provided by the yearning, romantic melody introduced by the cellos, with a counter-melody from flute and bassoon to enrich it. The development of these ideas begins explosively and continues in violent dynamic contrasts of loud and soft:



Tchaikovsky extends the usual range of dynamic markings in the score from *ffff* in several places to *pppppp* for the bassoon at the end of the lyrical second theme. Restless, syncopated rhythms persist, and the yearning theme becomes dominant before being given a solemn burial.

Two intermezzo-type movements now follow, the first a 'limping waltz' which acquires a slightly feverish and macabre quality from being written not in 3/4 time but in 5/4, an irregular and unusual metre already anticipated by Tchaikovsky in his 'Sapphire' solo for the Jewel Fairies in the last Act of *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890). In the darker central section, a bitter-sweet melody is accompanied by relentlessly repeated notes on basses, bassoons and timpani.

Much of the accumulated doubt and gloom is dispelled at this point by the third movement, a sequence of brilliant march-like variations developed from a few phrases and contrasts of tone-colour. It seems to promise a triumphant outcome, but the mood is dramatically dispelled by the grief-laden lamentations that begin the Finale. Now the composer seems to echo Masha in Chekov's *The Seagull*: 'I am in mourning for my life.' The first despairing

phrases are answered by a more consoling theme in the major key, marked to be played 'with gentleness and devotion', but it cannot prevent the earlier grief from returning in still more anguished intensity. Even the consoling theme is overcome by this, so that its recall is changed into a woeful minor key. The music grows weaker, sinks lower and finally loses itself in soft, solemn chords of trombones and tuba, ending what Tchaikovsky had effectively composed as his own epitaph.

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Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra can trace its roots back to the nineteenth century, to the times of Edvard Grieg and Johan Svendsen. However, it was not until 1919 that the Orchestra was established as an independent and permanent organisation under its present name. At their home venue since 1977, Oslo Concert Hall, the Orchestra gives 60 to 70 symphonic concerts a year, most of which are broadcast by the national radio, and also presents chamber concerts on a regular basis. The Orchestra's international touring activities during the last decades have included concerts at Europe's major venues and also in

Canada, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and the United States. In 1997, it was orchestra in residence at the Vienna Musikverein, and has also performed regularly at the major international festivals including the BBC Proms and the festivals in Edinburgh, Lucerne and Salzburg. With André Previn, Music Director since 2002, the Orchestra has performed in Spain, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Great Britain and the United States. Future tours are being planned with Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Music Director from the 2006-07 season. Oslo Philharmonic's recordings have been awarded several prizes, such as a number of Grand Prix du Disque, Diapason d'Or and the German Classical Music Award.

Mariss Jansons' concerts, recordings, television and radio broadcasts, and his performances and international tours with many of the world's greatest orchestras, have made him one of the most admired and respected conductors in the world today.

Born in Riga, he studied at Leningrad Conservatory before winning the International Herbert von Karajan Foundation Conducting Competition in Berlin in 1971. From 1971 until 1999 he was Associate Principal Conductor of

the St Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) Philharmonic, and from 1979 to 2000 he was Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra. Under his leadership, and through his tireless advocacy of the Orchestra, Oslo Philharmonic became one of Norway's prized cultural treasures, and one of the world's most esteemed orchestras. Between 1992 and 1997 Mariss Jansons also held the title of Principal Guest Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and from 1997 until the season 2003/04 was Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

Mariss Jansons became Chief Conductor of the Symphonieorchesters and Chores des Bayerischen Rundfunks at the beginning of the 2003/04 season, and also Chief Conductor of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam in autumn 2004.

Among the numerous international awards, prizes and honours he has received are the Commander With Star of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit, and Honorary Membership of both the Royal Academy of Music in London and the Society of the Friends of Music in Vienna.

His recordings of Tchaikovsky's symphonies with the Oslo Philharmonic



established that Orchestra's international stature, and are still the most popular set of Tchaikovsky symphony recordings today. The success of these recordings was chronicled in a BBC-TV series, *Jansons Conducts*.

In addition to his commitments as a performer, Mariss Jansons held the post of Professor of Conducting at the St Petersburg Conservatory from 1971 to 2000.



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Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

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|----------------|--|-------|
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| 5 - 8 | Symphony No. 2 in C minor, Op. 17 'Little Russian' | 34:15 |
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| 1 - 4 | Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74 'Pathétique' | 43:53 |

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Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra
Mariss Jansons

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