Cosmopolitan Romanticism: Tchaikovsky Part 1

Scherzo à la russe, Op. 1
Romeo and Juliet, Overture-Fantasy
The Mighty Five never knew exactly what to make of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky. He was a conservatory graduate and he composed symphonies more or less in the classic style with orthodox developments. That was enough to make one suspicious. On the other hand, he liberally quoted folk songs, and his music was undeniably Russian. That was good. So where did he stand? At first there was hostility between Tchaikovsky and The Five … there was a truce … But Tchaikovsky never had a high opinion of Balakirev and his circle.

Harold Schoenberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*
He was a nervous, hypochondriacal, unhappy man—unhappy at home, unhappy away from home, nervous in the presence of other people, terrified lest his homosexuality became open knowledge. He was largely successful at hiding his emotions, his fears and neuroses, from most of the persons with whom he came into contact.

Harold Schoenberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*
Was he just a neurotic homosexual, retreating into himself and releasing all his self-pity in an incontrollable deluge through his music? Perhaps nowadays we are scarcely so simplistic, yet this image is not completely dead. In fact, the real Tchaikovsky was a person who seems to have aroused universal affection, a man who was devoted to his family and his real friends, possessing a notable fund of common sense, a marked understanding of some aspects of human nature, by no means unsociable with those he really liked and trusted, with a sense of fun and an open-handed generosity that endeared him to all who came to know him properly, and who could not only pour out some of the most deeply lacerated music ever written, but also produce musical inventions as fresh and open-hearted as anything his contemporaries could write.

David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Early Years 1840–1874*
Tchaikovsky’s Growth

❖ Product of a well-to-do middle-class family
❖ No special interest in music until he was in his early 20s
❖ Eight years of study in law school
❖ Five years as a clerk at the Ministry of Justice in St. Petersburg
❖ Four years at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, starting 1862
❖ January 1866 became a professor at the new Moscow Conservatory
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Scherzo à la russe, Op. 1

Alexandre Kantorow, piano
This piano piece is Tchaikovsky’s first published composition.

He wrote it at the request of Nikolai Rubinstein, eminent pianist and recent founder of the Moscow Conservatory, in 1867. Rubinstein gave it its first public performance.

The original title was Capriccio, but he decided upon publication in 1868 to retitle it Scherzo à la russe.

It’s in classical Scherzo-Trio-Scherzo form with a short, slow cadenza-like passage leading into a coda.

The main theme is a Ukrainian folk song that he was to use again in one of his string quartets.
Scherzo

Trio

Scherzo

Adagio

Coda
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Lullaby, Op. 16 No. 1

Christiane Stotijn, piano
Julius Drake, piano
One can make a good argument for Tchaikovsky being an underappreciated composer of art songs.

His many songs—most called “Romances”—are set to Russian poets as a rule, and some of them were even intended for children.

This *Lullaby* opens his first set of Romances, written in 1872. The text is by Apollon Nikolayevich Maykov.

*Nota bene:* Rachmaninoff later made a transcription of this lovely song for solo piano.
**Spi, ditja majo, spi, usni! spi, usni!**
Slatkij son k sebe mani:
V njan’ki ja tebe vzjala
Veter, sontse i arla.

**Sleep, my baby, hushaby! sleep, hushaby!**
Welcome sweet sleep:
Nannies three watch over you —
Wind, sun, and eagle.

Uletel arjol damoj;
Sontse skrylas’ nad vadoj;
Veter, posle trjokh nachej,
Mchitsa k materi svajej.

The eagle flew home;
The sun hid over the water;
The wind, after three nights,
Comes racing to his mother.

Sprashyvala vetra mat’:  
“Gde izvolil prapadat’?  
Ali zvjozdy vajeval?  
Ali volny fsjo ganjal?”

His mother asked the wind:  
‘Where have you been hiding all this time?  
Were you playing battle with the stars?  
Or just pushing waves around?’
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Romeo & Juliet, Overture-Fantasy

Claudio Abbado, conductor
Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Romeo and Juliet

- Written in 1870, and revised several times; it’s the third version from 1880 that is in the repertory.
- It’s a symphonic poem, but it does not tell the story of the play.
- Works with melodic materials that are suggested by the story
- Musical themes represent themes in the play.
Themes

❖ Hymn Theme
❖ At the beginning of the piece
❖ During the development
Themes

- Vendetta Theme
- First statement
- Beginning of development
Themes

❖ Sighing Theme
❖ First appearance
❖ In the coda
Themes

❖ Love Theme
❖ In Exposition
❖ In Recapitulation
❖ “Transfigured” in the Coda
Introduction (Andante)

**Hymn theme**

  Low woodwinds, *pp*

**String motives**

  Anguished quality; contrapuntal

**Strumming harp**

  With “announcements” in the high woodwinds

**Hymn theme**

  High woodwinds with pizzicato strings. Followed by the string motives and harp; the “announcements” are now in the strings

**Buildup**

  Ends with drum roll, *f*

**Preparation**

  Prepares for the main section; *p*, then crescendo
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 13 “Winter Dreams”: I

Herbert von Karajan, conductor
Berlin Philharmonic
Tchaikovsky was struggling with the elemental techniques of basic sonata form (the underlying form of most Classical and Romantic first movements) when he wrote this very early symphony, shortly after being appointed to the faculty of the Moscow Conservatory.

It is highly Mendelssohnian in nature, almost a Russian version of the “Italian” symphony—but even at this very early age Tchaikovsky’s personal ‘sound’ was already in place.

The symphony had a rough beginning, as it was rejected for performance by any number of orchestras, but eventually it has come to be seen as an early glimpse of the great symphonist to come.
The “Winter Daydreams” symphony by Tchaikovsky is one of his early and almost one of his first orchestral works...In this first symphony—this is a beginning composer with wonderful instincts, who has much promise. In general, this symphony makes a pleasant impression; its freshness, naturalness, simplicity and wonderful sonority win over listeners.

From a Moscow review, 1886
We’ll hear the first four some-odd minutes of the first movement, encompassing most of the movement’s important thematic elements.
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 17: IV

Leonard Bernstein / New York Philharmonic
About Symphony No. 2

- **Written 1872; revised extensively 1879–80**
- Strongly saturated in nationalist materials, esp. Ukrainian folk songs
- Last movement combines theme & variations with sonata form. The variations are on the Ukrainian song “The Crane.”
Introduction

Primary Group

Transitional Group

Secondary Group

Closing Group
Introduction

Primary Group

Pa  a  a  b  a  b  a  a  a
v1  v2  v3  v4  v5  v6  v7

Transitional Group

1Ta  b  c  Pa  2T  Pa  3T
v8  v9

Secondary Group

Sa  a  a  a  a

Closing Group

1Ka(P)  a  a  a
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 23: III

Stephen Hough / Osmo Vänska / Minnesota Orchestra
It turned out that my concerto was worthless and unplayable; passages were so fragmented, so clumsy, so badly written that they were beyond rescue; the work itself was bad, vulgar; in places I had stolen from other composers; only two or three pages were worth preserving; the rest must be thrown away or completely rewritten.

*Nikolai Rubinstein’s reactions to the concerto, according to Tchaikovsky*
Finale

- A classic sonata-rondo form that would have been familiar to Mozart, Haydn, or Beethoven.
- But the Coda includes a grandiose statement of the Secondary theme — a Tchaikovsky handprint.
Exposition

P_a  P_b  P_a'  1T_a  1T_b  S_a  S_a  2T_a  P_a  P_b

Development

N  1T_a  1T_b  S_a  S_a  2T_a  P_a  P_b  P_a'

Recapitulation

Coda

S_a  P_a+N  Cadenza  S_a  Conclusion

Introduction (orchestra)
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36: II

Leonard Bernstein / New York Philharmonic
About Symphony No. 4

- Written in 1876–77
- Personally challenging time for Tchaikovsky
  - Met Nadezhda von Meck
  - Married Antonina Ivanovna Milyukova
- Resigned from the Moscow Conservatory
It is the melancholy that steals over us when at evening we sit indoors alone, weary of work, while the book we have picked up for relaxation slips unheeded from our fingers. A long procession of old memories goes by...And yet these recollections of youth are sweet. We regret the past, although we have neither courage nor desire to start a new life. We are rather weary of existence.

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, to Nadezhda von Meck
Bar Form, A.K.A. Sentence

2 measures  2 measures  4 measures