Week 4

Cosmopolitan Romanticism: Tchaikovsky Part 2

Eugene Onegin
Symphony No. 5
The Nutcracker
Symphony No. 6
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Eugene Onegin: Act 2
Ballroom Scene

Renée Fleming (Tatyana)
Elena Zaremba (Olga)
Dmitri Hvorostovsky (Onegin)
Ramón Vargas (Lensky)
Valery Gergiev, conductor
Metropolitan Opera
Recorded 2007
This opera will, of course, have no powerful dramatic movement but, on the other hand, the human side of it will be interesting—and, moreover, what a wealth of poetry there is in all this!

—Tchaikovsky to Nadezhda von Meck
Where shall I find a Tatyana—the one whom Pushkin imagined and whom I have tried to embody in music? Where will be that artist able even to approach a little the ideal of Onegin, of that cold dandy filled to the core with worldly bon ton? From where shall I be able to get a Lensky, an eighteen-year-old youth with thick curls, with the impetuous and individual ways of a young poet à la Schiller?

—Tchaikovsky to Nadezhda von Meck
Pushkin’s novel in verse tells of Eugene Onegin, a ne’er-do-well son of wealth, and his encounter with Tatyana, the daughter of a prosperous rural family.

Tatyana falls deeply in love with Onegin, who spurns her, claiming that he can love nobody. (He also considers himself too good for her.)

Onegin—spoiled, vain, careless—insults his best friend Lensky (engaged to Tatyana’s sister Olga), and after accepting his now-former friend’s challenge to a duel, kills Lensky.

Years later Onegin encounters Tatyana again; now she is married to a prince while he is still alone. She remembers her love for him, but rejects him.
In this scene from Act II, Lensky confronts Onegin about his churlishness to Olga and her family (including Tatyana). The issue escalates and all are drawn in.

The scene ends with Lensky challenging Onegin to a duel.
... at the root of Onegin is not simply an encounter between two people, but the collision of two worlds as represented by those people—on the one hand by Onegin himself, bred in the elegant, decadent society of the Russian metropolish, on the other by Tatyana, a child of a rural community with its simple, provincial tastes, its natural and innocence.

—David Brown, Tchaikovsky: The Crisis Years
Tchaikovsky is certainly our greatest opera composer, and *Eugene Onegin* is the most intrinsically Russian opera.

—Sergei Prokofiev
Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64: IV

Pierre Monteux, conductor
Boston Symphony Orchestra
Recorded 1958
On May 19, 1888 Tchaikovsky wrote his brother Modest that “now, little by little, with difficulty, I am beginning to squeeze the symphony from my benumbed brain.” He squeezed throughout the summer, and on August 14 sent this succinct message to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck: “Symphony finished.”

—Scott Foglesong, program notes for 2014 New Hampshire Music Festival
Symphony No. 5 in E Minor

- The eminent British critic and musicologist Donald Francis Tovey had some distinct reservations about the Tchaikovsky Fifth, despite the symphony’s undoubted popularity with the public.
- His reservations were shared by the composer himself.
- But both came around to accepting the piece...eventually.
If the composer had intended to produce the nightmare sensation of running faster and faster while remaining rooted to the spot, he might have been said to have achieved his aim here.
There is something repellant about it, a certain patchiness, insincerity, and artifice. All this the public instinctively recognizes.
Like all Tchaikovsky’s works, it is highly coloured; and a critic who should call it restrained would be in evident medical need of restraint himself...my general impression of this symphony is that from first to last Tchaikovsky is thoroughly enjoying himself. And I don’t see why we shouldn’t enjoy him too.
The best thing is that I no longer find the symphony horrible and have started liking it again.
... the Fifth as program symphony has been largely debunked. That lessens neither its dramatic impact nor the persuasiveness of the narrative thread that runs through its four movements. A vital component in that thread is the ‘motto’ theme that appears at the very opening and recurs throughout in various guises.

—Scott Foglesong, program notes for 2014 New Hampshire Music Festival
Introduction: Motto Theme
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

The Nutcracker: Waltz of the Flowers

Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Fritz Reiner, conductor
Recorded in 1959
"I have experienced agonies of remorse for asking you to do this ballet. I know that it is unappealing to you. You are an exceptionally kind soul for not refusing me."

—Ivan Vsevolozhsky to Tchaikovsky, August 1891
The premiere of the ballet, with the opera Iolanta, took place in December 1892 in Saint Petersburg, at the Mariinsky Theatre.

"The Nutcracker was staged quite well: it was lavishly produced and everything went off perfectly, but nevertheless, it seemed to me that the public did not like it. They were bored."

—Tchaikovsky in an interview of January 1893
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 6 in B Minor
“Pathétique”

Christoph Eschenbach
Philadelphia Orchestra
About Symphony No. 6

- Written in 1893; dedicated to Tchaikovsky’s nephew Vladimir “Bob” Davidov
- Unusual layout: the finale is a slow movement
- Numerous programs have been suggested, although the evidence for an actual program on Tchaikovsky’s part is quite slender
- Tchaikovsky died shortly after the work’s premiere, which has always given the “Pathétique” a special measure of poignance.
Although we’ll be covering the Exposition only, it should be pointed out that the Development section marks a radical departure from standard practice, in that it consists mostly of new material.
Introduction

Primary Group

Secondary Group
Introduction: *Adagio*, E Minor