Welcome to The Beat! Look inside to explore the brilliant music of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, from his incredibly popular ballet music to works that he composed during—and in spite of—criticism and periods of personal struggle.
Even if you have never heard the name Tchaikovsky (say: “Chai-COUGH-skee”), you have most certainly heard his music. One of the greatest composers of the Romantic period, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s 1812 Overture is frequently heard at July 4th celebrations, and the fantasy ballet *The Nutcracker* includes dozens of melodies that are instantly recognizable. But there is much more to this composer and his music than the pieces that are still well-known more than 100 years after his death. Tchaikovsky Triumphs will take you beyond these popular pieces, exploring music that expressed Tchaikovsky’s deep inner feelings and revealing a composer of incredible commitment and perseverance.

**TCHAIKOVSKY’S CHILDHOOD AND MUSICAL TRAINING**

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born in 1840 in the small town of Votkinsk in Russia’s Ural Mountains. When he was eight years old, his family moved almost 1,200 miles to the Russian capital, St. Petersburg. Even today, it would take 24 hours to drive that far!

Tchaikovsky showed musical talent as a child, but his parents insisted that he study law because being a musician was not an “acceptable” profession. When he was a young man, he gave up practicing law and enrolled in the St. Petersburg Conservatory, a new school that taught in the musical styles of the European countries to the west of Russia. This “Western” training was controversial because it encouraged a different kind of melody and harmony than what was common in Russia.

After graduating, Tchaikovsky began teaching at the music conservatory in Moscow, which is now named for him. He received several commissions, but many of these pieces were met with sharp criticism. It wasn’t until Tchaikovsky was more than 30 years old that he achieved widespread success with his second symphony, nicknamed “Little Russian,” which got its name because Tchaikovsky incorporated many folk melodies from the Ukraine, often referred to as “Little Russia” during that time.
You may be familiar with the music and story of *The Nutcracker*, but did you know that:

- The ballet was not a big success when it was premiered. It wasn’t until choreographer George Balanchine revived the ballet in the 1960s that it was frequently performed.
- Around the same time that the ballet was revived, American jazz composer Duke Ellington wrote a swinging version of *The Nutcracker*.

The Russian Dance, also known as Trepak (say: “TRAY-pock”), is one of many immediately recognizable excerpts from Tchaikovsky’s ballet *The Nutcracker*. The ballet follows the story of a family celebrating the Christmas holiday. Late on Christmas Eve, Clara, a young girl, discovers that a toy nutcracker has come to life and is battling the mice that are scurrying around the house. After the nutcracker emerges victorious, he transforms into a prince and leads Clara to explore the land of sweets, featuring dances that represent many different countries. Tchaikovsky arranged music from the ballet into a suite for orchestra (without dancers) that is performed frequently. This suite was an immediate hit!

Listen for the driving, punctuating rhythms, which mirror the steps of the ballet dancers. Written about a year before his death, it is a great example of Tchaikovsky’s mature compositional style. What an exciting and invigorating way to begin our concert!
FATE AND FREEDOM

Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36
Andante sostenuto
Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato

Tchaikovsky wrote some of his most amazing compositions while suffering bouts of depression, including his Symphony No. 4. The first movement begins with an ominous and intense brass fanfare, using a menacing tone in the sounds of the brass instruments and a crescendo that leads this repetitive, opening motive to an abrupt silence. What a first impression! Throughout the first movement, Tchaikovsky depicts the fate that he believed was guiding his life. At times, it sounds as if there is no possibility for hope or happiness!

Was Tchaikovsky simply expressing his feelings, or did composition help him overcome his depression?

Although the first movement is full of turmoil, the third movement of this symphony is a moment of *respite* because it’s a *scherzo*. This movement takes you on a joyous journey as the strings of the orchestra ebb and flow while they play a *pizzicato ostinato*. It’s as though Tchaikovsky clicked a remote control to switch the channel from his depressed state of mind to write music that was completely different, releasing himself from the oppression of fate.
Tchaikovsky considered classical composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to be a role model. He loved the elegance of his music and imitated it in the virtuosic Variations on a Rococo Theme for solo cello and orchestra. After a short introduction, you will hear the theme, which is then transformed in a series of challenging variations. Can you recognize the theme each time it returns, or do the variations disguise it too much?

Music in the Rococo style is elegant and light. Melodies written in a Rococo style often have lots of delicate ornamentation, which you can hear in the solo cello part. In fact, Tchaikovsky’s variations are a perfect example of the decorated style!

Such a lively, cheerful piece was difficult for Tchaikovsky to write. He composed the work for his friend, German cellist Wilhelm Fitzenhagen. Feeling insecure about how good it was, he asked for input from the soloist, who re-wrote most of the piece! Tchaikovsky’s publisher was shocked and wrote to the composer:

“Horrible Fitzenhagen insists on changing your cello piece. He wants to ‘cello’ it up and claims you gave him permission. Good God!”

Tchaikovsky allowed the changes to stay, however, and today, the original is almost never performed.
Kenneth Olsen joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as assistant principal cello in 2005. He is a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music and a winner of the school’s prestigious concerto competition. His other awards include first prize in the Nakamichi Cello Competition at the Aspen Music Festival and second prize at the 2002 Holland-America Music Society Competition. His teachers have included Richard Aaron at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Joel Krosnick at New York’s Juilliard School of Music and Luis Garcia-Renart at Bard College. He also has been a participant at the Steans Institute for Young Artists (the Ravinia Festival’s professional studies program for young musicians) and at Boston University’s Tanglewood Institute.

An interview with Kenneth Olsen

**The Beat:** Tell us how you got your start playing the cello?

**Kenneth Olsen:** I started playing the cello in the 3rd grade in my public elementary school in Albany, New York, which had a strong music program. I actually wanted to play the violin, but my teachers said that there were too many violins already. Since I was taller than other students, they gave me a cello! My teacher recommended that I take private lessons shortly after I started. I was lucky to have teachers that were so nurturing and encouraging—and to all the other students too! The cello gave me an identity and I took off pretty quickly.

**TB:** What is one thing that would you tell the music students attending this concert?

**KO:** Music is a really enriching part of life! Even if you don’t want to pursue it as a career, you can still keep it really close to you.

**TB:** How do you prepare to play a solo with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra?

**KO:** I learned the *Variations on a Rococo Theme* when I first joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, almost 10 years ago. It’s been a long time since I’ve played it, so it will take a lot of practice to get ready for these concerts. Especially for the fast, technical passages, it is really important to practice slowly, using a metronome, and to gradually work it up to the performance tempo. The ending is really, really hard. I have to practice that section over and over!

**TB:** Is there anything specific that you would recommend we listen for during your performance?

**KO:** Listen closely to the theme and then try to recognize how it is transformed in each of the variations. The cadenza is a whole other world. Because I get to play this without the rest of the orchestra, I have the freedom to express whatever I want. I like to focus on making the instrument sing and explore all the different colors of the sound that I can make on my cello.
Tchaikovsky was brilliantly capable of harnessing his feelings and representing a wide range of emotions in his compositions. The Serenade for Strings, also influenced by Mozart, was a work he wrote from “inner compulsion.” He said, “this is a piece from my heart.” Compared to other pieces on our program, the string orchestra—without woodwinds, brass or percussion—definitely has a much more personal feeling.

The finale from the Serenade for Strings was built from two Russian folk songs. The first song is a slow tune that was sung by Volga draymen. The second folk song is an animated Russian dance. Listen to the way Tchaikovsky has the strings play a quick, pulsing pizzicato accompaniment to sound like the strumming of a balalaika.

At the end of this movement, Tchaikovsky cleverly brings back a theme from the first movement, transforming it into the pulsing descending scale of the dance and ending the piece with vigor.

“Music is indeed the most beautiful of all. Heaven’s gift to humanity wandering in the darkness...”

—Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Have you ever been so excited about reading a book that you couldn’t put it down? How quickly have you read an entire book? Tchaikovsky felt the same way about writing music for The Sleeping Beauty. He wrote the score for the ballet, which lasts approximately three hours, in only 40 days. 40 days might seem like a long time, but The Nutcracker took about a year to write! In composing The Sleeping Beauty, Tchaikovsky was confident and inspired, free of the feelings of self-doubt that he often encountered.

Tchaikovsky fell in love with the story of Sleeping Beauty. The fairy tale inspired his imagination, and he couldn’t wait to get all the melodies in his head onto his manuscript paper.

His ballet is an enormous production, incorporating appearances by many characters from other fairy tales, including Puss-in-Boots, Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood.

The Plot:
On the day of Princess Aurora’s sixteenth birthday, the King and Queen throw a huge party. As the princess arrives, the townsfolk perform an elaborate waltz and she dances with four princes, each of whom gives her a beautiful rose. Aurora receives a peculiar birthday present from one of the townsfolk, a spindle, on which she pricks her finger and falls into a 100-year sleep due to the curse of the evil fairy Carabosse.

The waltz performed in our concert represents the townsfolk’s arrival to celebrate Princess Aurora’s sixteenth birthday, bearing many elaborate gifts. It’s not difficult to imagine the Princess’s excitement as she dances with each of the four princes, but the music itself is exquisite and represents an important development for Tchaikovsky: music for a ballet that is equally important to the choreography.
Despair or Pride?

Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74 (*Pathétique*)
Adagio—Allegro non troppo

Tchaikovsky enjoyed huge public success and adoration toward the end of his life. In fact, he couldn’t imagine that it would be possible to extend that level of popularity, so he felt resigned that his life’s work was done and he fell into a deep despair. Tchaikovsky needed to believe in himself again and he found his motivation as he pushed forward in composing a musical masterpiece, his Symphony No. 6 (*Pathétique*). The music is tragic, yet profound. At the end of its first performance, the audience didn’t quite know what to think and the composer himself was surprised by their response:

"Something strange is happening with this symphony! It's not that it displeased, but it has caused some bewilderment. So far as I myself am concerned, I'm more proud of it than any of my other works..."

The opening melody of this symphony gives the sense of hopelessness and misfortune. As you listen, notice the foreboding quality of the melody as played by the solo bassoon in the dark, low register of this instrument.

The next section of this piece is highly dramatic and possibly the most powerful passage of music Tchaikovsky ever wrote. Listen for a descending scale in the brass that represents fate.

Although this music is extremely intense and exposes Tchaikovsky’s deepest, darkest feelings, his triumph lies in the pursuit of his musical truth. He was truly committed to composing and creating. Music was his refuge.

Tchaikovsky died only nine days after the premiere of this symphony. Although some people think that there is a strange coincidence that he died shortly after sharing such personal and intense music with the world, he had, in fact, contracted cholera, a bacterial infection spread by unpurified water or food. Still, the impact of the *Pathétique* Symphony is more significant since Tchaikovsky did not live to write any more music.

Pathétique does not translate into pathetic, but to passionate!

What is one thing that frustrates or challenges you? Do you have a creative outlet for your frustration? If so, what do you do to restore your confidence?
Our concert ends with the final movement of Tchaikovsky’s second-to-last symphony, which is an extraordinary microcosm of his musical and emotional experience.

It took four months to compose the symphony and, throughout his work, Tchaikovsky struggled with self-doubt. Toward the beginning of his work, he wrote to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck:

“At the moment it is difficult to say how this symphony will turn out when compared with my previous ones… What was previously easy and straightforward has not remained so.”

The symphony begins with a somber character in the key of E Minor, representing the composer’s resignation to fate, but the end of the final movement, in E Major, is a triumphant march. Listen for the broad melody played by the strings (9:14) and the stately fanfare of the brass. The symphony ends in a brisk, brilliant style that is typical of Tchaikovsky’s. Perhaps this optimistic ending symbolizes the motivation and commitment he expresses in this second letter he wrote after finishing his composition.

“Thank God that I still have the will to work. But my urge to produce is so great that even two lifetimes would barely be sufficient to carry out my all my plans.”

After finishing the composition, Tchaikovsky was more confident, especially about his motivation and commitment to writing music.
At the Concert

Rei Hotoda was recently appointed Associate Conductor of the Utah Symphony and Utah Opera. She was Assistant Conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra from 2009 to 2012. Ms. Hotoda has conducted other leading ensembles including the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Symphony, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago.

Ms. Hotoda is the proud recipient of several prestigious awards, including the 2006 Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship, created by Marin Alsop to mentor women conductors. Additionally, she has received a Peabody Career Development Grant, the Women’s Philharmonic Scholarship and an Illinois Arts Council International Arts Exchange Grant. Ms. Hotoda has an undergraduate degree in piano performance from the Eastman School of Music, studied conducting at the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, Maryland and holds a Doctor of Musical Arts in piano performance from the University of Southern California.

A Chicago native, Ms. Hotoda is a graduate of Albert G. Lane Technical High School on the city’s North Side. She played violin in her high school orchestra, was a member of the band’s percussion section and performed with the school ensembles as a piano soloist. She loved soaking up all the arts and culture in Chicago and encourages all students in the audience today to take advantage of our world-class city.

Founded in 1891, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is considered one of the greatest orchestras in the world. Its music director is the preeminent conductor Riccardo Muti. In collaboration with the best conductors and guest artists from around the globe, the CSO performs more than 150 concerts each year.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra is made up of more than 100 extraordinary musicians from all across the United States and from countries across the world. These musicians strive for the highest artistic level in their practicing and ensemble rehearsals, contributing their unique musical voices to performances that are much greater than the sum of each individual part.

Many Chicago Symphony Orchestra musicians began their musical journeys in school band and orchestra programs just like you.

As an audience member, you play a role at the concert.

You will demonstrate your role at the concert by:

- coming to the performance, relaxing and enjoying the music
- listening to the music very carefully and with great attention
- clapping and showing appreciation for the performers when the music ends

Remember, attending a concert performance is different from watching movies or television because the performers are in the same room with you. To do their best, the musicians need you to watch and listen very closely.
Glossary of Terms:

Balalaika – A Russian stringed instrument with a characteristic triangular body and three strings

Choreography – The sequence of movements in a dance

Draymen – Drivers of low, flat-bed wagons without sides, pulled by horses or mules

Microcosm – A small version of something that is much larger

Ostinato – A repeated rhythmic pattern

Patroness – A person who supports an artist or musician by giving them money or a place to live

Pizzicato – Italian for "pinched." To pluck, instead of bow, the strings of an instrument

Respite – A relief from a stressful or troubling situation

Rococo – A style of art, design, architecture, and music that is characterized by delicate, ornamented features

Romantic period – An artistic movement during the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that emphasized expressing and representing emotion

Scherzo – Italian for "joke." A fast musical piece that is often part of a larger work, including a symphony. They are typically fast-moving and light-hearted, even humorous

Spindle – A pointed rod that is used to turn fibers like wool or cotton into yarn

Variation – A musical form in which a theme is modified and ornamented. Usually, the theme is still recognizable

Instruments of the Orchestra

The String Family
- Violin
- Cello
- Harp
- Viola
- Bass

The Woodwind Family
- Flute
- Oboe
- Clarinet
- Bassoon

The Brass Family
- Trumpet
- Trombone
- Horn
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