

Season 2015-2016

Thursday, January 7, at

8:00

Friday, January 8, at 2:00

Saturday, January 9, at

8:00

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Fabio Luisi Conductor

Christian Tetzlaff Violin

Glinka Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*

Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35

I. Allegro moderato—Moderato assai

II. Canzonetta: Andante—

III. Allegro vivacissimo

Intermission

Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74
("Pathétique")

I. Adagio—Allegro non troppo

II. Allegro con grazia

III. Allegro molto vivace

IV. Adagio lamentoso

This program runs approximately 1 hour, 50 minutes.

Philadelphia Orchestra concerts are broadcast on WRTI 90.1 FM on Sunday afternoons at 1 PM. Visit WRTI.org to listen live or for more details.

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Jeffrey Griffin



The Philadelphia Orchestra is one of the preeminent orchestras in the world, renowned for its distinctive sound, desired for its keen ability to capture the hearts and imaginations of audiences, and admired for a legacy of imagination and innovation on and off the concert stage. The Orchestra is transforming its rich tradition of achievement, sustaining the highest level of artistic quality, but also challenging—and exceeding—that level by creating powerful musical experiences for audiences at home and around the world.

Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin's highly collaborative style, deeply-rooted musical curiosity, and boundless enthusiasm, paired with a fresh approach to orchestral programming, have been heralded by critics and audiences alike since his inaugural season in 2012. Under his leadership the Orchestra returned to recording, with two celebrated CDs on the prestigious Deutsche Grammophon label, continuing its history of recording success. The

Orchestra also reaches thousands of listeners on the radio with weekly Sunday afternoon broadcasts on WRTI-FM.

Philadelphia is home and the Orchestra nurtures an important relationship with patrons who support the main season at the Kimmel Center, and also with those who enjoy the Orchestra's area performances at the Mann Center, Penn's Landing, and other cultural, civic, and learning venues. The Orchestra maintains a strong commitment to collaborations with cultural and community organizations on a regional and national level.

Through concerts, tours, residencies, presentations, and recordings, the Orchestra is a global ambassador for Philadelphia and for the United States. Having been the first American orchestra to perform in China, in 1973 at the request of President Nixon, The Philadelphia Orchestra today boasts a new partnership with the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing. The ensemble annually performs at

Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center while also enjoying summer residencies in Saratoga Springs, New York, and Vail, Colorado.

The Philadelphia Orchestra serves as a catalyst for cultural activity across Philadelphia's many communities, as it builds an offstage presence as strong as its onstage one. The Orchestra's award-winning Collaborative Learning initiatives engage over 50,000 students, families, and community members through programs such as PlayINs, side-by-sides, PopUp concerts, free Neighborhood Concerts, School Concerts, and residency work in Philadelphia and abroad. The Orchestra's musicians, in their own dedicated roles as teachers, coaches, and mentors, serve a key role in growing young musician talent and a love of classical music, nurturing and celebrating the wealth of musicianship in the Philadelphia region. For more information on The Philadelphia Orchestra, please visit www.philorch.org.

Music Director

Chris Lee



Music Director **Yannick Nézet-Séguin**, who holds the Walter and Leonore Annenberg Chair, is an inspired leader of The Philadelphia Orchestra, and he has renewed his commitment to the ensemble through the 2021-22 season. His highly collaborative style, deeply rooted musical curiosity, and boundless enthusiasm, paired with a fresh approach to orchestral programming, have been heralded by critics and audiences alike. The *New York Times* has called him “phenomenal,” adding that under his baton, “the ensemble, famous for its glowing strings and homogenous richness, has never sounded better.” Highlights of his fourth season include a year-long exploration of works that exemplify the famous Philadelphia Sound, including Mahler’s Symphony No. 8 and other pieces premiered by the Orchestra; a Music of Vienna Festival; and the continuation of a commissioning project for principal players.

Yannick has established himself as a musical leader of the highest caliber and one of the most thrilling talents of his generation. He has been music director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic since 2008 and artistic director and principal conductor of Montreal’s Orchestre Métropolitain since 2000. He also continues to enjoy a close relationship with the London Philharmonic, of which he was principal guest conductor. He has made wildly successful appearances with the world’s most revered ensembles, and he has conducted critically acclaimed performances at many of the leading opera houses.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin and Deutsche Grammophon (DG) enjoy a long-term collaboration. Under his leadership The Philadelphia Orchestra returned to recording with two CDs on that label; the second, Rachmaninoff’s Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini with pianist Daniil Trifonov, was released in August 2015. He continues fruitful recording relationships with the Rotterdam Philharmonic on DG, EMI Classics, and BIS Records; the London Philharmonic and Choir for the LPO label; and the Orchestre Métropolitain for ATMA Classique.

A native of Montreal, Yannick studied at that city’s Conservatory of Music and continued lessons with renowned conductor Carlo Maria Giulini and with Joseph Flummerfelt at Westminster Choir College. Among Yannick’s honors are appointments as Companion of the Order of Canada and Officer of the National Order of Quebec, a Royal Philharmonic Society Award, Canada’s National Arts Centre Award, the Prix Denise-Pelletier, Musical America’s 2016 Artist of the Year, and honorary doctorates from the University of Quebec, the Curtis Institute of Music, and Westminster Choir College.

To read Yannick’s full bio, please visit www.philorch.org/conductor.

Conductor



SANTINA LUISI

Grammy and ECHO Klassik Award-winning Italian conductor **Fabio Luisi** serves as general music director of the Zurich Opera and principal conductor of the Metropolitan Opera. He launches a new appointment as principal conductor of the Danish National Symphony in the 2017-18 season. He made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 2011; this is his second appearance with the ensemble.

In 2015-16, the fifth season of his Met tenure, Mr. Luisi conducts David McVicar's acclaimed double bill of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*; Richard Eyre's new production of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*; and Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. In his fourth season at the helm of the Zurich Opera he premieres new productions of Berg's *Wozzeck* and Bellini's *I Puritani*; and leads Verdi's *Falstaff*, Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, and Puccini's *Tosca*. He also tours with the Accademia Teatro alla Scala Orchestra, and returns to La Scala, the Opéra National de Paris, the Danish National Symphony, the Malaysian Philharmonic, the Santa Cecilia Orchestra, the Teatro Regio di Torino, and Juilliard.

As former chief conductor of the Vienna Symphony, Mr. Luisi was honored with the ensemble's Golden Bruckner Medal and Ring. Other previous appointments include general music director of Dresden's Staatskapelle and Sächsische Staatsoper, artistic director of Leipzig's Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk, music director of the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, chief conductor of the Tonkünstler Orchestra in Vienna, and artistic director of the Graz Symphony. He received a Grammy for his leadership of the last two operas of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* when Deutsche Grammophon's DVD release, recorded live at the Met, was named Best Opera Recording of 2012. His extensive discography also features operas by Verdi, Salieri, and Bellini; symphonic pieces by Honegger, Respighi, and Liszt; works by Franz Schmidt and Richard Strauss; and an award-winning account of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony. In 2015 the Philharmonia Zurich launched its Philharmonia Records label with Luisi's recordings of works by Berlioz and Wagner, and Verdi's *Rigoletto*. A native of Genoa, Mr. Luisi was awarded the Grifo d'Oro for his contributions to the city's cultural legacy.

Soloist

Georgia Bezazi



Violinist **Christian Tetzlaff** made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 1993. In demand as a soloist with most of the world's leading orchestras, he has also appeared with the Vienna, Berlin, Rotterdam, New York, and Los Angeles philharmonics; the Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Toronto, London, and Bavarian Radio symphonies; and the Cleveland and Royal Concertgebouw orchestras. In addition to these current performances, highlights of Mr. Tetzlaff's 2015-16 season include return engagements with the San Francisco Symphony, the Budapest Festival and Minnesota orchestras, the London and Israel philharmonics, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's at Carnegie Hall; a tour with the Gewandhaus Orchestra with performances in Leipzig, Vienna, Paris, and London; and chamber music tours in North America and Europe.

Born in Hamburg in 1966, Mr. Tetzlaff began playing the violin and piano at age six but did not begin intensive study of the violin until making his concert debut playing the Beethoven Violin Concerto at age 14. Since then he has performed and recorded a broad spectrum of the repertoire, ranging from Bach's unaccompanied sonatas and 19th-century masterworks by Mendelssohn, Beethoven, and Brahms to 20th-century concertos by Bartók, Berg, and Shostakovich and world premieres of contemporary works. A dedicated chamber musician, Mr. Tetzlaff frequently collaborates with other artists, including the Tetzlaff Quartet, which he founded with violinist Elisabeth Kufferath, violist Hanna Weinmeister, and his sister, cellist Tanja Tetzlaff.

Mr. Tetzlaff's latest recordings include the three Brahms piano trios with Ms. Tetzlaff and pianist Lars Vogt on the Ondine label; the complete Bach Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin for the Musical Heritage and Hänssler labels; Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No. 1 with the Vienna Philharmonic led by Pierre Boulez for Deutsche Grammophon; the Schumann and Mendelssohn concertos with the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra and Paavo Järvi for Edel Classics; and Jorg Widmann's Violin Concerto, written for Mr. Tetzlaff, with the Swedish Radio Symphony and Daniel Harding, also for Ondine. Mr. Tetzlaff currently performs on a violin modeled after a Guarneri del Gesù made by the German violinmaker Peter Greiner.

Framing the Program

Parallel Events

1842

Glinka

Overture to
*Ruslan and
Lyudmila*

Music

Wagner
Rienzi

Literature

Dickens
American Notes

Art

Ingres
*Odaliske und
Sklavin*

History

Treaty of
Nanking

1878

Tchaikovsky

Violin Concerto

Music

Sullivan
H.M.S. Pinafore

Literature

James
Daisy Miller

Art

Degas
*Singer with a
Glove*

History

Edison patents
phonograph

1893

Tchaikovsky

Symphony
No. 6

Music

Verdi
Falstaff

Literature

Wilde
*A Woman of No
Importance*

Art

Munch
The Scream

History

Ford builds his
first car

"The acorn from which the whole oak of Russian symphonic music grew." That is how Tchaikovsky once described a piece by his formidable predecessor, Mikhail Glinka, generally acknowledged as the first great Russian composer. The all-Russian program today opens with Glinka's sparkling overture to his opera *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, the story of a knight and his princess bride who overcome an evil sorcerer.

Two masterpieces by Tchaikovsky follow, the first of which he wrote mid-career, the other his last composition. Although his Violin Concerto ultimately emerged as one of his most beloved and often performed works, some family, friends, and critics initially expressed various degrees of dissatisfaction. Audiences, however, immediately responded to its passion, energy, and virtuoso fireworks, hallmarks of the composer's style.

Tchaikovsky's final symphony, known as the "Pathétique," has the usual four movements, but seemingly in the wrong order—the work ends with a despairing slow movement that became a model for Mahler and later symphonists. The composer conducted its premiere just nine days before his unexpected death at age 53. The second performance a few weeks later garnered more attention, with some viewing the work as his own Requiem. Tchaikovsky was enormously proud of the piece, remarking that he thought it his best composition: "I love it as I have never loved any of my other musical offspring."

The Music

Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*



Mikhail Glinka
Born in Novospasskoye,
Russia, June 1, 1804
Died in Berlin, February 15,
1857

From its composition in fits and starts between 1837 and 1842, Mikhail Glinka's magical opera *Ruslan and Lyudmila* has captured the fancy of many musicians. Glinka wrote in his *Memoirs* that in 1842 Franz Liszt "played *à livre ouvert* [from the score] several numbers from *Ruslan* from an autographed score of mine, not known to anyone before, and to the general astonishment he didn't miss a note." In 1866, 11 years after Glinka's death from complications from the flu, music critic and teacher Nikolay Kashkin remembered that at the inauguration of the newly opened Moscow Conservatory Tchaikovsky wanted the first music to be that of Glinka "and sat down at the piano and played from memory the overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*." And one of Stravinsky's earliest musical memories was attending a performance of *Ruslan* by his father, a renowned bass, which prompted the young composer to call Glinka "my musical hero."

"Music Is My Life" Born into a wealthy well-connected landowning family in 1804, Glinka was essentially self-taught. Raised first by his grandmother, who spoiled him "unbelievably," the composer wrote that "My musical talent expressed itself at the time by a passion for the ringing of bells (chimes): I would listen hungrily to the sharp shrill sounds and could skillfully imitate the bell ringers on two copper bowls." His grandmother kept him inside most of the day because he suffered from severe bouts of anxiety—a condition that plagued him throughout his life. His uncle had a serf orchestra that played Haydn and Mozart and Russian songs, and Glinka recalled that after hearing a performance he confided to his drawing teacher, "Music is my life." He soon began to study violin and was sent to boarding school in St. Petersburg to train as a civil servant. There he took three piano lessons from the Irish composer John Field. Singing lessons followed and he made an extended journey to Italy (1830-33), where he met Bellini and Donizetti, learning the finer points of Italian opera. He then headed to Berlin where he had counterpoint lessons with music theorist Siegfried Dehn and began to compose his first opera, *A Life for the Tsar*. Its huge success in 1836 led to a prestigious appointment as master of the Court Chapel Choir in St. Petersburg,

Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila* was composed from 1837 to 1842.

The Overture was first performed by The Philadelphia Orchestra in February 1917, under Leopold Stokowski's baton. Its last subscription appearance was in May 2012, conducted by Charles Dutoit.

The Philadelphians have recorded the work twice: in 1946 and 1959 for CBS with Eugene Ormandy.

The score calls for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

Performance time is approximately five minutes.

which, like his rocky marriage to distant relative Maria Ivanova, did not last long.

The dissolution of job and relationship by 1840 left Glinka time and space to devote to his second opera, *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. It is based on a poem by Alexander Pushkin, with whom he had hoped to collaborate, but was foiled by the writer's untimely death during a duel in 1837. Glinka began to compose the music before he had a narrative design, confessing in his *Memoirs* that the poet Konstantin Bakhturin "sketched it out in half an hour, while drunk, and—how about this?—the opera was written according to that plan!" The five-act work follows the story of the knight Ruslan and his bride princess Lyudmila. The evil sorcerer Chernomor kidnaps Lyudmila on her wedding night, and after numerous battles Ruslan wakes her by touching her head with a magic ring.

A Closer Look While the entire *Ruslan and Lyudmila* opera is rarely performed outside Russia, its overture has become a concert-hall favorite. The idea for it came to Glinka at a dinner party: "I was up in the balcony, and the clattering of knives, forks, and plates made such an impression on me that I had the idea to imitate them in the prelude to *Ruslan*. I later did so, with fair success." The colorful and spirited overture is a far cry from the plodding and disjointed opera skewered by Alexander Serov, Russia's preeminent music critic, as "not a drama, not a play, hence not an opera, but a randomly assembled gallery of musical scenes."

The brilliant Overture begins with a bright, square, major first theme played by the violins at breakneck speed. A carefully crafted woodwind transition leads the listeners to an Italianate second theme. The development follows the age-old practice of fragmenting the first theme. Stark juxtapositions of louds and softs mark this section, which transitions back to the big dance feeling of the opening theme. The second theme reemerges followed by an unbridled closing. The whole-tone scale, one that inspired modernists like Debussy and Stravinsky, appears in the coda. In this vibrant music, Glinka laid the foundation for Russian composers to follow: Shostakovich called him "our first professional composer."

—Eleonora M. Beck

The Music

Violin Concerto



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk,
Russia, May 7, 1840
Died in St. Petersburg,
November 6, 1893

Although Tchaikovsky ultimately triumphed with his Violin Concerto, which became one of his most beloved and frequently performed compositions, its path to success was unusually discouraging and came during a period of deep personal crisis. The turmoil began with his ill-considered marriage to a student in July 1877, undertaken to quiet gossip about his homosexuality. After a few weeks together Tchaikovsky left his wife and fled Russia to spend the next eight months wandering Europe. Intense work on two masterpieces came in the immediate wake of the marriage fiasco: the Fourth Symphony and the opera *Eugene Onegin*. As Tchaikovsky's mental state stabilized, however, he found it increasingly difficult to compose and wrote mainly trifles.

Seeking “Musical Beauty” In March 1878 Tchaikovsky settled in Clarens, Switzerland, where he was visited by a former student, a young violinist named Iosif Kotek who was studying in Berlin with Joseph Joachim, for whom Schumann, Brahms, Dvořák, and others wrote concertos. The two played through some violin literature together and Tchaikovsky was particularly delighted with Eduard Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, which inspired him to compose his own Violin Concerto in the space of just some three weeks. What he admired was that Lalo, “in the same way as Léo Delibes and Bizet, does not strive after profundity, but he carefully avoids routine, seeks out new forms, and thinks more about *musical beauty* than about observing established traditions, as the Germans do.”

This comment is very revealing of Tchaikovsky's musical values and his antipathy toward the gloried German tradition exemplified at the time by Brahms and Wagner. Tchaikovsky preferred composers who are now considered minor figures, such as Delibes (remembered best for his ballet *Coppélia* and opera *Lakmé*) and Bizet. “I think that music's entire future is now in France,” Tchaikovsky declared after playing through a four-hand arrangement of Brahms's brand new First Symphony, which elicited his comment: “God, what a loathsome thing it is.”

It is in this spirit that Tchaikovsky set about to write an attractive concerto that would please listeners, and yet initially the work did not completely please anyone. The first

discouraging response came from Kotek and Tchaikovsky's brother Modest, who liked the first and third movements, but not the middle one. Tchaikovsky decided to write a new slow movement. The next blow came from his extremely generous patroness, Madame Nadezhda von Meck, to whom over the years he would send most of his works and who usually reacted enthusiastically. In this instance, however, she expressed some dissatisfaction with the opening movement. Tchaikovsky responded by thanking her for her honesty but saying "I must defend the first movement of the Concerto a little. Of course there is much that is cold and calculated in any piece written to display virtuosity, but the ideas for the themes came spontaneously to me and, indeed, the whole shape of the movement came in a flash. I still hope you will come to like it"

Premiere Troubles Things got much worse with the scheduled premiere of the Concerto in March 1879. The dedicatee, the distinguished violinist Leopold Auer, declared the piece unplayable and refused to take it on. Tchaikovsky later recalled: "A verdict such as this from the authoritative St. Petersburg virtuoso cast my poor child for many years into the abyss, it seemed, of eternal oblivion." There may have been a performance of the published violin and piano version in New York in 1879 played by Leopold Damrosch, but no details survive and the real premiere was still nowhere in sight.

It took Tchaikovsky some time to find a willing violinist in Adolf Brodsky, who gave the much delayed orchestral premiere in December 1881 with the Vienna Philharmonic under Hans Richter. That under-rehearsed performance evidently left a good deal to be desired and led to an infamous review from the powerful critic Eduard Hanslick, who condemned the vulgarity of the Concerto, especially its lively folk-like finale: "We see plainly the savage vulgar faces, we hear curses, we smell vodka. Friedrich Vischer once observed, speaking of obscene pictures, that they stink to the eye. Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto gives us for the first time the hideous notion that there can be music that stinks to the ear." Modest Tchaikovsky said no review more hurt his brother, who could recite it word for word until his death.

Tchaikovsky was himself often ambivalent about the quality of his compositions, and it must not have helped when friends, family, and critics were unsupportive. In the case of the Violin Concerto, however, public enthusiasm came quickly and it did not take long for the piece to emerge triumphant in the standard repertoire. Leopold Auer, in fact,

Tchaikovsky composed the Violin Concerto in 1878.

Fritz Kreisler was soloist in the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the Concerto, in February 1905; Fritz Scheel conducted. The piece's most recent appearance on subscription concerts was in January 2014, with violinist Vadim Gluzman and Tugan Sokhiev.

The Orchestra has recorded the work five times: in 1946 for CBS with Bronislaw Huberman and Eugene Ormandy; in 1949 for CBS with Isaac Stern and Alexander Hilsberg; in 1958 for CBS with Stern and Ormandy; in 1959 for CBS with David Oistrakh and Ormandy; and in 1978 for EMI with Itzhak Perlman and Ormandy. The Concerto also appears on The Philadelphia Orchestra: The Centennial Collection (Historic Broadcasts and Recordings from 1917-1998) in a 1961 performance with violinist Michael Rabin and William Smith.

The score calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings, in addition to the solo violin.

The Concerto runs approximately 35 minutes in performance.

became a champion (he slightly edited the solo part), as did many of his celebrated students, including Jascha Heifetz, Mischa Elman, Nathan Milstein, and Efrem Zimbalist (who long served as president of the Curtis Institute of Music).

A Closer Look The opening **Allegro** begins with the violins quietly stating a noble tune (not heard again) that soon ushers in the lilting appearance of the soloist. Both of the principal themes in the long movement are lyrical, the second one marked "con molto espressione." Although the themes do not contrast, ample variety is provided by interludes, including a majestic one with a Polonaise rhythm, and by a brilliant coda of virtuoso fireworks to conclude.

The brief **Canzonetta: Andante** projects a plaintive mood and proves a satisfying substitute for Tchaikovsky's original thoughts. (He published his rejected slow movement as *Méditation* for violin and piano, the first of three pieces in *Souvenir d'un lieu cher*, Op. 42.) The energetic finale (**Allegro vivacissimo**) bursts forth without a break. A brief orchestral introduction leads to the soloist's unaccompanied entrance in a cadenza-like passage that teasingly tips over into a dazzling rondo theme that keeps returning and gives further opportunities for virtuoso display.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

The Music

Symphony No. 6 (“Pathétique”)



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

The story so often told about Tchaikovsky's final Sixth Symphony, the “Pathétique,” is a pathetic one. A depressed Russian composer, sad and lonely, writes a musical suicide note, a despairing cry from the heart. The myths around the piece extend to his personal life at the time and continue to circulate widely. The verdict in Sigmund Spaeth's *Stories behind the World's Great Music*, an extremely popular guide from the late 1930s, is typical: “Some say he committed suicide. ... It was a pathetic end to a pathetic life.”

Such views die hard. The 1980 edition of the authoritative *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* dignified a more recently proposed tale that Tchaikovsky committed suicide after appearing before a court of honor. The court allegedly condemned his homosexual relationship with a young man from a prominent aristocratic family and forced him to kill himself by drinking a glass of contaminated water from which he contracted cholera.

Changing Titles The facts seem to tell a different story, beginning with the title of the Symphony. As Richard Taruskin, the preeminent scholar of Russian music, explains: “Pateticheskaya simfoniya means roughly the same thing Beethoven meant when he called his Sonata in F minor, Op. 57, the *Appassionata*—impassioned. The Russian title does not have the connotations of its better-known French translation—*Symphonie Pathétique*, ‘a symphony of suffering.’” Moreover, neither this title nor any other was to be found when Tchaikovsky conducted the premiere on October 28, 1893. According to an oft-repeated report from the composer's younger brother, Modest, it was he who suggested titles, first “Tragic” and then “Pateticheskaya.” But a letter written a month earlier by Pyotr Jurgenson, Tchaikovsky's publisher, has recently surfaced that casts doubt on Modest's story, or at least on its chronology. Jurgenson inquired weeks before the premiere: “About this Pathétique Symphony of yours. Should it be called not ‘Sixth Pathétique Symphony,’ but rather ‘Symphony No. 6, Pathétique.’ Do you agree?”

Tchaikovsky had toyed with other titles earlier. In May 1891 he wrote down the following idea for a new

symphony: “The ultimate essence of the symphony is *Life*. First movement—all passion, confidence, thirst for life. Must be short (the finale *death*—the result of collapse.) 2nd movement, love; the 3rd: disappointment; the 4th ends dying away (also short).” Tchaikovsky sketched this symphony in E-flat and began orchestrating it, but eventually became dissatisfied and abandoned the work. (A Soviet musicologist reconstructed the piece in the late 1950s and The Philadelphia Orchestra gave its Western Hemisphere premiere in 1962.)

Happily Composing a Sad Symphony Tchaikovsky started anew in early February 1893, although it seems that some of the conceptual ideas from the aborted work were carried over to its successor. In a letter to his nephew Vladimir Davidov (known as Bob), to whom he eventually dedicated the Sixth Symphony, Tchaikovsky explained his progress. As emerges in other letters over the next few months, after the discouraging abandonment of the “Life” Symphony he was now clearly elated that he was not burnt out, that he still could come up with fresh ideas:

I want to tell you about the excellent state of mind I'm in so far as my works are concerned. You know that I destroyed the symphony I had composed and partly orchestrated in the autumn. And a good thing too! ... Now, on my travels, the idea for a new symphony came to me, this time one with a program, but a program will remain an enigma for everyone. Let them try to guess. The work will be called simply “A Program Symphony (No. 6).” ... The program is completely saturated with subjective feeling and quite often on my journey to Odessa, composing it in my mind, I wept profusely. ...

Tchaikovsky goes on to remark how quickly the composition is coming—the first movement in less than four days—and comments on its unusual form: “There will still be much that is new in this symphony and the finale will not be a loud allegro, but the slowest adagio. You cannot imagine my feelings of bliss now that I am convinced that the time has not gone forever and that I can still compose.”

We do not know what the intended program for this “program symphony” was—it remains an “enigma,” about which we do indeed have to “guess.” But given that he died just nine days after conducting the premiere of the piece, it is hardly surprising that people have guessed—or rather invented—tragic stories.

“The Best Thing I Have Done” Although Tchaikovsky suffered from depression, his spirits during his last year were generally high, as shown in the letter to Bob. He wrote to friends and family about how proud he was of this particular work. To Bob he declared: “I can tell you in all sincerity that I consider this symphony the best thing I have done. In any case, it is the most sincere. I love it as I have never loved any of my other musical offspring.” To Jurgenson he wrote: “I have honestly never in my life felt so pleased with myself, so proud, so happy in the knowledge that I have written something good.”

It would also be a mistake, moreover, to think of the Symphony as a provincial work by a colorful Russian. By this point in his career Tchaikovsky was an international figure. When Carnegie Hall opened in 1891, he came to conduct and lend his fame. (The program listed him as one of the three greatest living composers—Brahms and Saint-Saëns being the other two.) A New York critic commented that the greatest German music was now being written in Russia. When the redoubtable critic Eduard Hanslick heard the Sixth in Vienna he found “not a trace of national Russian color ... [its] character is downright West European and reveals a nobler mind and a more heartfelt interest.” During the summer of 1893, while composing the Sixth Symphony, Tchaikovsky received an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University.

The story of a “court of honor” ordering Tchaikovsky’s death, first proposed around 1980, was quickly discredited by Taruskin, Alexander Poznansky, Malcolm Brown, and other scholars. There is likewise no evidence of suicide. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that the 53-year-old Tchaikovsky thought his end was near in 1893; his health appeared to be fine. Modest later told of going to see a play with his brother a few days after the premiere of the Sixth Symphony in St. Petersburg and how during the intermission the topic of death came up. “There is plenty of time before we need to reckon with this horror; it will not come to snatch us off just yet!” The composer said, adding, “I feel I shall live a long time.”

Tchaikovsky conducted the premiere of the Sixth Symphony in St. Petersburg on October 28, 1893, and was disappointed with the reserved response. As he wrote to Jurgenson: “Something odd is happening with this symphony: it’s not that people don’t like it but are somewhat puzzled by it.” And then he returned to his

Tchaikovsky composed his Sixth Symphony in 1893.

The first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the Symphony took place in March 1901, with Fritz Scheel conducting. Most recently on subscription, Kurt Masur led the Orchestra in the work in May 2011.

The Symphony is one of the more frequently performed works in the Orchestra's history and has been led here by such conductors as Leopold Stokowski, Eugene Ormandy, Arturo Toscanini, Igor Markevitch, Lorin Maazel, Bernard Haitink, Seiji Ozawa, Claudio Abbado, Riccardo Muti, Klaus Tennstedt, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Christoph Eschenbach, and Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

The "Pathétique" has been recorded seven times by The Philadelphia Orchestra: in 1936 with Ormandy for RCA; in 1942 with Toscanini for RCA; in 1952 and 1960 with Ormandy for CBS; in 1968 with Ormandy for RCA; in 1981 with Ormandy for Delos; in 1989 with Muti for EMI; and in 2008 with Eschenbach for Ondine. The Orchestra also recorded the third movement only in 1921 with Stokowski for RCA.

The score calls for three flutes (III doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam), and strings.

The work runs approximately 50 minutes in performance.

familiar refrain: "So far as I am concerned personally, I am more proud of it than any other of my works." The posthumous performance a few weeks later may have been better prepared (reports are not in agreement about Tchaikovsky's effectiveness as a conductor), included the "Pathétique" title, and was enthusiastically received. But by then, of course, any performance would have been viewed as a memorial to Russia's greatest composer.

A Closer Look As Tchaikovsky readily acknowledged, the formal layout of the four-movement Symphony is unusual. The first movement begins softly, slowly, and darkly (**Adagio**), from the depths of the orchestra, but soon arrives at a faster tempo (**Allegro non troppo**). Tchaikovsky explores various moods in the movement, with one of the most passionate themes at a moderate pace first sung by the violins. The music eventually becomes slower and plumbs to the softest sound imaginable in the bassoon (marked *pppppp*) before a shocking *fortissimo* chord from the full orchestra ushers in a much faster and animated middle section. The opening themes return and the movement ends quietly. Tchaikovsky briefly alludes to a passage from the Requiem Mass of the Russian Orthodox Church with the words "With thy Saints, O Christ, give peace to the soul of thy servant," a quotation that would have been recognized by most of his Russian contemporaries and is another clue used to guess the work's overall program.

The second movement (**Allegro con grazia**) is an extraordinary waltz in 5/4 time (2 plus 3), that would be a challenge to dance to (at least with two feet), but sounds delightfully normal when heard in this context. The third movement (**Allegro molto vivace**) is a rousing march: Tchaikovsky at his most exciting and brilliantly paced. With the breathless closing measures of the movement it is easy to think the Symphony over, but we are immediately plunged into the anguished finale, marked **Adagio lamentoso**. It was rare before this work for a symphony to conclude slowly and quietly, although Mahler, Shostakovich, and others would do so later. The work ends with cellos and basses alone, the depths of the orchestra, dying away.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

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Musical Terms

GENERAL TERMS

Cadence: The conclusion to a phrase, movement, or piece based on a recognizable melodic formula, harmonic progression, or dissonance resolution

Cadenza: A passage or section in a style of brilliant improvisation, usually inserted near the end of a movement or composition

Canzonetta: A short, simple song. The term was also adopted for instrumental pieces of a songlike nature.

Chord: The simultaneous sounding of three or more tones

Chromatic: Relating to tones foreign to a given key (scale) or chord

Coda: A concluding section or passage added in order to confirm the impression of finality

Counterpoint: A term that describes the combination of simultaneously sounding musical lines

Dissonance: A combination of two or more tones requiring resolution

Harmonic: Pertaining to chords and to the theory and practice of harmony

Legato: Smooth, even, without any break between

notes

Meter: The symmetrical grouping of musical rhythms

Op.: Abbreviation for opus, a term used to indicate the chronological position of a composition within a composer's output. Opus numbers are not always reliable because they are often applied in the order of publication rather than composition.

Polonaise: A Polish national dance in moderate triple meter

Rondo: A form frequently used in symphonies and concertos for the final movement. It consists of a main section that alternates with a variety of contrasting sections (A-B-A-C-A etc.).

Scale: The series of tones which form (a) any major or minor key or (b) the chromatic scale of successive semi-tonic steps

Sonata form: The form in which the first movements (and sometimes others) of symphonies are usually cast. The sections are exposition, development, and recapitulation, the last sometimes followed by a coda. The exposition is the introduction of

the musical ideas, which are then "developed." In the recapitulation, the exposition is repeated with modifications.

Tonic: The keynote of a scale

THE SPEED OF MUSIC (Tempo)

Adagio: Leisurely, slow

Allegro: Bright, fast

Andante: Walking speed

Con grazia: With grace, prettily

Con molto espressione: With much expression

Lamentoso: Mournfully, plaintively

Moderato: A moderate tempo, neither fast nor slow

Vivace: Lively

TEMPO MODIFIERS

Assai: Much

Molto: Very

Non troppo: Not too much

MODIFYING SUFFIXES

-issimo: Very

DYNAMIC MARKS

Fortissimo (ff): Very loud

Pianississimo (ppp):

Very, very soft

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