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Making Russian Music:
Uncovering Pyotr Tchaikovsky's Musical Ideas through His Letters

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History 485: Historical Research

Dr. Harris

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I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help
on this work.

Abstract

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is arguably Russia's most famous composer. Although his music is widespread, his immediate impact on Russian music in the 19th century is often overlooked or unknown by audiences. This paper examines what compositional and musical ideas Tchaikovsky used in his pieces and how he expressed them through his letters. Because of the relationships he had with his correspondents, Tchaikovsky had the means to develop and learn his unique compositional style. The most significant correspondents were his patroness Nadezhda von Meck, his brother Modest, and fellow composer Mily Balakirev. They enabled him to express and develop his musical beliefs. By utilizing these beliefs in his compositions, Tchaikovsky redefined what Russian music sounded like. This paper looks at these beliefs, applies them to his pieces, and discusses how he wrote about his ideas in his letters. Then, it discusses how these beliefs were influential on Russian composers who emerged following his death.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is known today as one of Russia's most famous composers along with Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Sergei Prokofiev. It is likely that almost everyone has heard one of Tchaikovsky's compositions without realizing it. His overture *The Year of 1812*—also known as the *1812 Overture*—is often played during Fourth of July celebrations. The love theme from the *Romeo and Juliet* overture is featured in countless movies and television shows. Music from *The Sleeping Beauty* ballet was used and adapted for Walt Disney's movie, *Sleeping Beauty*. Of course, his ballet *The Nutcracker* is one of, if not the most famous ballet. In short, Tchaikovsky's music is everywhere. Although his music is widespread, Tchaikovsky himself is not often discussed in detail among everyday listeners. Although his music is utilized so often today, his immediate impact on 19th century Russian classical music is unknown among casual listeners. Musicologist Francis Maes sums up Tchaikovsky's importance on Russian music well: "His music was considered the starting point of a Russian tradition that was no longer bound up with folk music."¹

In this paper, I will argue that Tchaikovsky's musical developments grew because of his relationships with his family, friends, and colleagues by using his letters to his family, specifically his brother Modest; friends, such as Nadezhda von Meck; and colleagues like Mily Balakirev. Such correspondence enabled him to express and develop his musical beliefs. By applying these beliefs to his compositions, Tchaikovsky redefined Russian music and shaped how audiences and musicians view it today. He specifically worked to reshape classical Russian music to fit the European standard by combining Russian folksongs with the Western compositional tradition. He also expressed compositional independence by pushing the boundaries of traditional styles, such as including symphonic music in his ballet music.

¹ Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 165.

Tchaikovsky emphasized the importance of music's beauty and held the belief that simplicity was better than complexity. This is seen in his unique melodies, which he specifically wrote to convey music's beauty. Tchaikovsky's lasting impact on Russian classical music may not have developed in this way if it were not for his letters. Therefore, it is especially imperative to recognize their importance.

One of the major sources for information of Tchaikovsky's relationships are his letters to various correspondents. Of his 5,383 known letters, the Tchaikovsky Research website includes 5,339, with 2,838 translated into English. The database not only includes letters, but also telegrams, notes on visiting cards, and statements to newspaper editors for publication in journals and newspapers.² Many of the letters used for this project were written to Modest Tchaikovsky, Nadezhda von Meck, and Mily Balakirev. However, these are not the only ones. Letters to other family members, colleagues, and friends also include useful information about Tchaikovsky's musical ideas. Other primary sources include memoirs from people who knew Tchaikovsky, his brother Modest's biography of the composer, *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky* (2014), and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's autobiography, *My Musical Life* (1947).³ Of course, Tchaikovsky's music is a vital source for this project. His Symphony No. 1 in G minor, *Winter Daydreams*, Op. 13, the opera *Yevgeniy Onegin*, *The Nutcracker*, the *Romeo and Juliet* overture, and *The Year of 1812* overture are examined in relation to his composition style.

Secondary sources on Tchaikovsky's life and musical style include reactions to his music and provide analysis of his musical opinions. They can be separated by theme: ones focused on

² Tchaikovsky Research contributors, "Letters," *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified April 25, 2020, <https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Letters&oldid=80314>.

³ Rimsky-Korsakov was another Russian composer and a member of The Five, who will be discussed later.

Tchaikovsky's life and ideals, his music and attitude towards it, and Russian music in a broader sense. There is extensive scholarship on Tchaikovsky's life and music, the first biography being published soon after his death. These biographies provide insight into the man himself, especially his relationships with friends and family. Musicologist David Brown's article "Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism" from 1961 is one such source that discusses Tchaikovsky's life.⁴ However, he focuses on one aspect of Tchaikovsky's life: the correspondence between Tchaikovsky and Mily Balakirev, the leader of The Five—a group of Russian musicians who strove to define Russian music—and argues that past historians who studied the Russian style of music overly focused on nationalism as the main source of conflict between Tchaikovsky and The Five. Instead, he claims that the composers disagreed on the Western tradition that could best integrate folksong: an older "thematically developing symphony" that Tchaikovsky studied, or a new "symphonic poem and thematic transformation" used by Berlioz and Liszt.⁵

A similar biographical source on Tchaikovsky's life is Alexander Poznansky's book *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man* (1991). It is "a study of the man who wrote the music" with no musical analysis.⁶ In the book, Poznansky strives to uncover Tchaikovsky's private life, but not in a way that disrespects his memory. He presents Tchaikovsky as who he really was. He also wants to separate fact from fiction, as many "great men" have exaggerations and made-up stories written about their lives, including notable composers like Tchaikovsky.⁷

⁴ David Brown, "Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism," *Music & Letters* 42, no. 3 (1961): 227-41.

⁵ Brown, "Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism," 241.

⁶ Alexander Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man* (New York: Schirmer, 1991), xi.

⁷ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, xiii.

Tchaikovsky (2009) by Roland John Wiley incorporates a biography with a musical analysis.⁸ In the preface, Wiley explains that other biographies are outdated and that not all of Tchaikovsky's music could have greatly impacted his life like some say. Therefore, he separates the biographical aspects of the book from the musical analysis.⁹ He first explains the composer's life over a number of years in one chapter and in the next, analyzes the music written during said years.

In other studies, musicologists wrote books and articles analyzing Tchaikovsky's music itself. These sources provide information on the theory and technique behind Tchaikovsky's pieces. One such book that examines Tchaikovsky's works is *Tchaikovsky's Ballets: Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Nutcracker* by also by Wiley.¹⁰ He includes musical analysis and discusses the first performances of each ballet. He also investigates Tchaikovsky's composition process of the ballets' scores and how producers interpreted them.¹¹ Damien Mahiet's article "The Aesthetics and Politics of Wonder in the First Nutcracker" also centers on Tchaikovsky's ballets, but only *The Nutcracker*.¹² He discusses the first production of *The Nutcracker* and how it may have affected "the imperial 'scenario of power'—the myths and ceremonies that... characterize the successive reigns of Russian monarchs."¹³

Information on Tchaikovsky is not limited to Tchaikovsky-specific sources. Sources on

⁸ Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky, The Master Musicians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁹ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, xiii-xviii.

¹⁰ Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets: Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Nutcracker* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

¹¹ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, xii.

¹² Damien Mahiet, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Wonder in the First Nutcracker," *19th-Century Music* 40, no. 2 (2016): 131-58.

¹³ Mahiet, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Wonder," 134.

Russian music and performance in general include material on Tchaikovsky's music as well. For example, *The Mighty Five: The Cradle of Russian National Music* by biographer Victor Seroff is a chronological narrative of The Five's formation, and also includes information on each member of the group.¹⁴ Although primarily focused on The Five, who will be discussed further in the paper, the book describes Tchaikovsky's relationship with the group, specifically Mily Balakirev. Books with an even broader scope on Russian music include *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar* by Frances Maes.¹⁵ He stresses the importance of including nationalism when talking about Russian music. The purpose of his book is to summarize the "new historical picture" of Russian music, which focuses more on the development of composers and their personal backgrounds.¹⁶ His information on Tchaikovsky consists of breakdowns of his composition style and differences from other composers, specifically The Five. He explains Tchaikovsky's goal to find a professional model for music that would entertain the most prestigious European standards.¹⁷ Overall, secondary scholarship on Tchaikovsky is centered on him as a person and analysis of his music, be it from the view of the 19th century or today. This paper focuses on both Tchaikovsky's personality and his music. Although the aforementioned sources have evaluated his musical ideas and applied them to his music, this study is the most narrowly focused on the topic.

¹⁴ Victor Ilyitch Seroff, *The Mighty Five: The Cradle of Russian National Music* (New York: Allen, Towne & Heath, 1948).

¹⁵ Maes, *A History of Russian Music*.

¹⁶ Maes, xii.

¹⁷ Maes, 73.

Tchaikovsky's Background

On April 25, 1840, Ilya and Alexandra Tchaikovsky's second son, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born in the Russian town of Votkinsk.¹⁸ Pyotr was Ilya's fourth child and Alexandra's third—Ilya was married before and had one daughter, but his first wife died.¹⁹ According to Modest's biography, Pyotr's musical talent developed early in his life: "No sooner had he acquired some rudimentary knowledge from his mother, than he could repeat upon the piano all he heard on the orchestration. He found such delight in playing that it was frequently necessary to drag him by force from the instrument."²⁰ As will become obvious, Tchaikovsky's extraordinary musical talent was evident throughout his entire life. In 1862, he enrolled in the St. Petersburg Conservatory and studied under Anton Rubinstein, the conservatory's founder. After three years, Tchaikovsky graduated from the conservatory and won a silver medal for his graduation piece "To Joy."²¹ That same year, Rubenstein's brother Nikolay Rubinstein visited the conservatory to employ a theory teacher for his new music school in Moscow, the Moscow Conservatory. Although he was not the first choice, Tchaikovsky got the job.²² Tchaikovsky was not particularly happy teaching and would only become unhappier after he received a marriage

¹⁸ Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, xi, 4; Tchaikovsky Research contributors, "Project: Old Style and New Style Dates," *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified February 10, 2019, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/Project:Old_Style_and_New_Style_Dates. The Julian calendar was used in Russia during Tchaikovsky's life and was different from the Gregorian calendar used in the West. Called "Old Style," the Julian calendar was twelve days behind the new Gregorian calendar. The Old Style will be used in this paper.

¹⁹ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 4.

²⁰ Modest Tchaikovsky, *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, trans. Rosa Newmarch (Project Gutenberg, 2014), 12, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45259>.

²¹ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 28-29, 42.

²² Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 39.

proposal.²³

On March 26 1877, Tchaikovsky received a letter from Antonina Milyukova, a student at the Moscow Conservatory.²⁴ In it, she told him she had loved him for four years. She claimed that she knew he liked her, “but he was shy and would never make a proposal.”²⁵ However, Tchaikovsky did not like Antonina, at least not in the way she liked him. He was gay and therefore did not reciprocate her love. He expressed his homosexuality in a multitude of letters, specifically to his brother Modest. He made it clear to Antonina that if they married, he could only love her with “the love of a brother.”²⁶ Antonina accepted this and the two were married on July 6, 1877. It is possible that Tchaikovsky agreed to marry Antonina because of his financial situation. He supposedly mentioned this to her before their marriage, and she told him she expected a 10,000-ruble inheritance.²⁷ It is also possible that he was trying to “rehabilitate his reputation” among other musicians and society in general.²⁸ Whatever the reason, their marriage brought him great grief and the two only stayed together for two months. Without a doubt, his homosexuality and the couple’s “psychological incompatibility” were the factors that caused them to separate.²⁹ However, they never divorced because Antonina vanished from Moscow in

²³ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 73.

²⁴ Alexander Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky Through Others' Eyes*, trans. Ralph C. Burr, Jr. and Robert Bird (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 106.

²⁵ Antonina Tchaikovskaya, “With P. I. Tchaikovsky's widow,” December 5, 1893, quoted in *Tchaikovsky Through Others' Eyes*, trans. Ralph C. Burr, Jr. and Robert Bird (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 115.

²⁶ Antonina Tchaikovskaya, “With P. I. Tchaikovsky's widow,” 115.

²⁷ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 148.

²⁸ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 148.

²⁹ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky Through Others' Eyes*, 107.

the summer of 1878.³⁰

Now that he was no longer troubled with his marriage, Tchaikovsky's creativity flowed once again. At the same time as his marriage, he became financially stable because of a patron, Nadezhda von Meck. Their relationship will be described in more detail below. Throughout the rest of his life, Tchaikovsky composed brilliant works, conducted concerts worldwide, and received recognition throughout Europe and America. In October 1893, Tchaikovsky prepared to make an appearance at a concert of the Russian Music Society in Moscow. On October 20, he returned from a dinner at Leiner's restaurant with an upset stomach. It worsened throughout the next day and in the evening of October 21, a doctor was called. He diagnosed Tchaikovsky with Asiatic cholera.³¹ Throughout the next two days, Tchaikovsky's condition went up and down until on the 23rd, he "stopped believing in the possibility of recovery."³² On October 25, he died at 3:15 A.M. surrounded by his brothers Modest and Nikolay, as well as his nephew Vladimir Davydov and the doctor Nikolay Mamonov.³³

Tchaikovsky's Correspondents

Throughout his life, Tchaikovsky corresponded with almost four hundred people including friends, family, and associates. One person who recognized Tchaikovsky's talent was Nadezhda von Meck, his patroness. A lover of music, von Meck was the widow of the wealthy railroad tycoon Karl von Meck. During their marriage, Nadezhda von Meck supported and

³⁰ Roland John Wiley, "Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Il'yich," Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.51766>.

³¹ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky Through Others' Eyes*, 239-240

³² Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky Through Others' Eyes*, 240.

³³ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky Through Others' Eyes*, 240.

promoted musicians, many of whom lived in the von Meck's home. In 1876, Tchaikovsky's friend Iosif Kotek lived in von Meck's house and probably introduced her to Tchaikovsky's music which she gained a great interest in.³⁴ After learning of his current financial problems, von Meck helped Tchaikovsky by commissioning a few "simple works" and paying him much more than necessary.³⁵ There was one unusual aspect about their relationship: they promised to never meet in person. Except for a couple accidental run-ins in public, von Meck and Tchaikovsky "never exchanged a word, scarcely even a casual greeting."³⁶ Today 768 of Tchaikovsky's letters to von Meck and 451 of von Meck's to Tchaikovsky still exist. Clearly, Nadezhda von Meck and Tchaikovsky's relationship was more than one between patron and client. It was a true friendship. The content of Tchaikovsky's letters to his patroness ranges from short notes on trivial subjects, to long, complicated paragraphs detailing his life or music. It is in these letters detailing his music where Tchaikovsky shared his beliefs, ideas, and composition style.

Another of Tchaikovsky's major correspondents was his younger brother Modest. Modest and his twin brother Anatoly were ten years younger than Pyotr and, along with their sister Alexandra, were dearest to the composer out of his siblings.³⁷ Modest was a playwright, tutor, and writer, as well as Pyotr's closest friend. He wrote the librettos for Pyotr's operas as well as his biography. After Pyotr's death, Modest helped to establish the Tchaikovsky Museum

³⁴ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, 196.

³⁵ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, 199.

³⁶ Modest Tchaikovsky, *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, trans. Rosa Newmarch, 208, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45259>.

³⁷ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky Through Others' Eyes*, 2.

at Klin.³⁸ The Tchaikovsky Research database currently has 674 letters from Pyotr to Modest, though many of them have not been translated into English. Modest's letters to Pyotr are currently kept in the Klin House-Museum Archive. Like his letters to Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky's letters to his brother vary in content, although they tend to be briefer.

Another correspondent with whom Tchaikovsky often wrote concerning music was Mily Balakirev, another Russian composer. At age ten, Balakirev moved to Moscow to take music lessons. Although he had two teachers, Balakirev was mainly self-taught. Upon meeting the famed composer Mikhail Glinka in 1855, he decided to pursue a career in music.³⁹ Glinka took Balakirev under his wing, helped spread his name and works throughout Moscow, and named him his successor, "the Patriarch of Russian music."⁴⁰ Unfortunately Glinka died in 1857, leaving Balakirev to find a new mentor in Vladimir Stassov.⁴¹ At this point, Russian musicians decided it was time to stop "borrowing" music from other Europeans and create true Russian music. Stassov and Balakirev were among the musicians who decided to take up this difficult task.⁴²

It was from this foundation that The Five emerged. Also known as "The Mighty Handful," "The Balakirev Circle," and "the kuchka," the members of The Five were Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Alexander Borodin.

³⁹ Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 16-20; Tchaikovsky Research contributors, "Mily Balakirev," *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified November 16, 2019, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Mily_Balakirev&oldid=71929.

⁴⁰ Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 20.

⁴¹ Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 21.

⁴² Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 26.

Unlike Tchaikovsky, they were not professionally trained. César Cui was an Army Corps Engineer and the first to join Balakirev's group. He took piano lessons as a child from his sister and later a violinist, but they were not substantial enough to truly develop Cui's talent.⁴³ Modest Mussorgsky, an artillery officer from a noble family, became friends with Cui who introduced him to Balakirev in 1857. He was an extremely talented pianist and took lessons while in the Guards Cadet Academy, but was not taught music theory. This was significant since he wanted to compose. Upon graduation, he turned to a military career, but was truly interested in music.⁴⁴ Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov was a midshipman at the Naval Academy. He was seventeen years old with "almost no musical training and could hardly play the piano."⁴⁵ Balakirev took Rimsky-Korsakov under his wing and immediately told him to begin writing a symphony to test his skills.⁴⁶ Alexander Borodin, a doctor and chemist, was the final member to join Balakirev's group. He was the son of a descendent of Georgian kings. At age twelve he became deeply interested in music, but his mother insisted that he become a scientist. He ended up marrying a pianist named Ekaterina Protopopova who helped him develop his musical skills. Borodin met Balakirev at a friend's house and was invited to a meeting with the other three members of Balakirev's group.⁴⁷ Finally, the group was complete. These were Russian composers who also wanted to make music that was completely Russian. One major point they focused on was the use of Russian folksongs in music. They believed that the folksong had become too Westernized

⁴³ Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 27.

⁴⁴ Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 31-34.

⁴⁵ Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 48.

⁴⁶ Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 48.

⁴⁷ Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 68-73.

and foreign. Therefore, they needed to bring the folksong back to its “true Russian heritage.”⁴⁸

The group’s view of Tchaikovsky appeared to depend on each person. Mussorgsky and Cui disliked Tchaikovsky’s music. Mussorgsky shamed Tchaikovsky for using his music to bolster his career and the two disagreed on professional education and routine.⁴⁹ Perhaps this was because of Mussorgsky’s amateur training. Furthermore, Cui often gave scathing reviews of Tchaikovsky’s work.⁵⁰ Balakirev had the friendliest correspondence with Tchaikovsky out of The Five. He was the person who suggested that Tchaikovsky write the *Romeo and Juliet* overture and even gave him feedback on the composition. However, his review of the original score was highly critical. This and Balakirev’s constant attention caused Tchaikovsky to “shrink away from him.”⁵¹ Tchaikovsky’s opinion of the group was one of contempt. He saw himself as the professional and The Five as the amateurs.⁵² In his autobiography, Rimsky-Korsakov mentioned the obvious difference between The Five and Tchaikovsky. After hearing Tchaikovsky’s Symphony in G minor, the group’s attitude toward him improved, but “Tchaikovsky’s Conservatory training still constituted a considerable barrier between him and us.”⁵³ Tchaikovsky received a traditional Germanic musical education at the conservatory and

⁴⁸ Jennifer Fuller, “Epic Melodies: An Examination of Folk Motifs in the Text and Music of *Prince Igor*” in Andrew Baruch Wachtel, ed., *Intersections and Transpositions: Russian Music, Literature, and Society* (Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 35.

⁴⁹ Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 207; Richard Taruskin, “Some Thoughts on the History and Historiography of Russian Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 3, no. 4 (1984): 335, <https://doi.org/10.2307/763585>.

⁵⁰ Modest Tchaikovsky, *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, 179, 415.

⁵¹ Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 154-56.

⁵² Seroff, *The Mighty Five*, 206.

⁵³ Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life* (New York: AAKnopf, 1947), 75.

The Five did not. Because of this, he was “in a diametrically opposite position to Balakirev.”⁵⁴ However opposed the two were, they were still amiable. The Tchaikovsky Research database has forty-seven letters from Tchaikovsky to Balakirev, many of which feature Tchaikovsky’s impressions of other pieces and musical ideas.⁵⁵ He also wrote eighteen letters to Rimsky-Korsakov that include similar content as his letters to Balakirev.⁵⁶ Additionally, Tchaikovsky expressed his thoughts about The Five in letters to a handful of other people. Because they highlight what Tchaikovsky did not like in terms of music, these letters are also important.

Tchaikovsky’s Musical Beliefs

Before beginning his musical career, Tchaikovsky was on track to become a civil servant. His parents decided to send him to the School of Jurisprudence in St. Petersburg and in August 1850, he began classes and continued his studies there until May 1859.⁵⁷ After graduating, Tchaikovsky went back and forth contemplating his future profession. In 1862, he was up for a promotion to become a clerk, however he did not end up getting the position.⁵⁸ In a way, this pushed Tchaikovsky towards a profession in music. After learning about the Russian Music Society, formed in 1857, from a cousin, Tchaikovsky enrolled in classes they offered. The Russian Music Society’s goal was to educate Russians in music and embolden their musical

⁵⁴ Brown, “Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism,” 229.

⁵⁵ Tchaikovsky Research contributors, “Mily Balakirev,” https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Mily_Balakirev&oldid=71929.

⁵⁶ Tchaikovsky Research contributors, “Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov,” *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified March 8, 2019, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Nikolay_Rimsky-Korsakov&oldid=64700.

⁵⁷ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, 10, 50.

⁵⁸ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, 60.

talent. Significantly, the society introduced public music classes to Russia. Before this, lessons were given privately in homes or private schools. Because of this, there were very few professional Russian musicians.⁵⁹ The St. Petersburg Conservatory emerged from these classes, and Tchaikovsky was one of the first students. It was here that Tchaikovsky learned the essentials of music theory and composition, as well as formed his musical beliefs.⁶⁰

Tchaikovsky's compositions from his time at the St. Petersburg Conservatory reveal his plan to "reconcile the controversy over national versus international which divided Russian music in his day."⁶¹ During his time as a student, Russian musicians grappled with nationalism in music. This stemmed from the importance of Russian national identity during the 1800s, when folk music and "European art music" were viewed as complete opposites.⁶² This idea emerged from Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky's *The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality* (1855) in which he explained the differences between "natural singing"—folk music—and "artificial singing."⁶³ Folk music was the best form of nationalistic music. It emerged from nature and was reflective of the people of the nation. Art music on the other hand, was created by humans and embellished to the utmost degree. It was not natural and emotional; therefore, it was not nationalistic.⁶⁴ As an extension, any music that was not naturally created in Russia was looked down upon. Tchaikovsky's goal was to integrate national and international music. He wanted to

⁵⁹ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, 62.

⁶⁰ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, 62.

⁶¹ Wiley, "Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Il'yich," <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.51766>.

⁶² Maes, *A History of Russian Music*, 3.

⁶³ Maes, *A History of Russian Music*, 3-4.

⁶⁴ Maes, *A History of Russian Music*, 4.

create a Russian professional standard that would comply with European criteria.⁶⁵

Reworking the Russian style of music was easier said than done; however, Tchaikovsky did it. This is evident in his Symphony No. 1 in G minor, Op. 13, composed in 1866.⁶⁶ Titled *Winter Daydreams*, the symphony consists of four movements.⁶⁷ The first and second movements include subtitles. Movement I is titled “Daydreams on a Winter Journey” and movement II, “Land of Gloom, Land of Mist.”⁶⁸ Movements II and III include themes from two other pieces by Tchaikovsky: *The Storm* and the Piano Sonata in C-sharp minor, Op. 80.⁶⁹ Tchaikovsky weaved together the Western and Russian styles of music in this piece, specifically through the structure of the movements. Like in Robert Schumann’s Fourth Symphony, the first and fourth movements are hybridized and lively, while the second and third give way to “beauty and attractiveness.”⁷⁰ Additionally, the symphony’s ties to Russian folk music are evident in the fourth movement. Its main theme is based on the Russian folksong “Shall I plant, then little sweetheart.” The folk song not only underscores the Russianness of the piece, but also the 18th

⁶⁵ Maes, *A History of Russian Music*, 73.

⁶⁶ David Fuller, “Opus (i),” Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.20394>. Op. stands for “opus” which is Latin for “work.” Opus numbers are used to number the published works of a composer.

⁶⁷ Stanley Sadie, “Movement,” Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.19258>. A movement is essentially a section within a large work. Each one has a different tempo and they are separated from each other by silence.

⁶⁸ Alexander Poznansky, *The Tchaikovsky Handbook: A Guide to the Man and His Music*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 141.

⁶⁹ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 59; Tchaikovsky Research contributors, “Piano Sonata in C-sharp minor.” *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified February 10, 2019, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Piano_Sonata_in_C-sharp_minor&oldid=40703. The piano sonata was published posthumously which explains why the piece was published as “Op. 80.”

⁷⁰ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 58.

century tradition of including “rustic” themes in a finale.⁷¹ Although some musicologists have suggested that Tchaikovsky was considerably anti-nationalist, this symphony and many of his other pieces refute that claim. Additionally, he often expressed his desire to return to Russia when traveling abroad.⁷²

Tchaikovsky’s adaptation of Russian music for Western audiences can also be seen in his opera *Yevgeniy Onegin* based on the novel by Alexander Pushkin. The opera includes Russian concepts and phrases, and does so in a way that Russians will recognize them, but will still sound “universal” to Westerners.⁷³ Tchaikovsky began writing the opera in 1877 after the subject was recommended to him by the singer Elizaveta Lavrovskaja. It was completed in January 1878, but was revised four times. It tells the story of Tatiana, a woman who falls in love with her sister’s fiancé’s friend, Onegin. However, Onegin rejects Tatiana and the rest of the opera revolves around the complications from his rejection.⁷⁴ *Yevgeniy Onegin* was a popular tale in Russia, making it a perfect candidate for Tchaikovsky’s plan. Clearly, the opera was rooted in Russian culture, but “it is Russianness of an urbane sort most Western ears cannot descry as such.”⁷⁵ This was and is a point of controversy among Russian music lovers who only link folksong to Russianness. Additionally, Tchaikovsky did not include every line from the novel and added other text, which probably made fans of the novel unhappy.⁷⁶ *Yevgeniy Onegin* does feature

⁷¹ Maes, *A History of Russian Music*, 77.

⁷² David Brown, “Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism,” *Music & Letters* 42, no. 3 (1961): 240.

⁷³ Richard Taruskin, “P.I. Tchaikovsky and the Ghetto,” in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 52.

⁷⁴ Poznansky, *The Tchaikovsky Handbook*, 37-8.

⁷⁵ Richard Taruskin, “Yevgeniy Onegin,” Grove Music Online, 2002, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O008246>.

⁷⁶ Anna Fishzon, *Fandom, Authenticity, and Opera: Mad Acts and Letter Scenes in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 159.

characteristics of folk tunes, but they are “obviously nothing more than an aspect of décor.”⁷⁷

Another early development in Tchaikovsky’s compositional style was his “independence in thought.”⁷⁸ His compositions during his time at the conservatory balanced musical technique “with unabashed beauty for its own sake.”⁷⁹ This is also seen in his First Symphony.

Tchaikovsky’s compositional independence is visible in the first movement. The first theme heard features contrasting motives that combined, create a melody that is so complex and expressive that it stretches the boundaries of the traditional sonata form.⁸⁰ The contrasting melodies exist because of the unmetered sound of the first melody. Without it, there would be no way to move onto the second theme. Roland John Wiley explains this well, writing “The atmospheric, ametric opening theme is self-contained, forcing the composer to add a countersubject in order to progress to the second subject group.”⁸¹ It is clear that Tchaikovsky wanted to stick with tradition, but recognized the extent to which he could push it. He also believed that music did not have to be written for one type of piece or another: “To his mind music was simply music, whether used it for a symphony, an opera, a ballet or a piano concerto. If he wrote ballet music in a symphony, he was also capable, as in parts of ‘The Sleeping Beauty’, of writing symphonic music in a ballet.”⁸² Tchaikovsky’s symphonic style was not

⁷⁷ Taruskin, “Yevgeny Onegin,” <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O008246>.

⁷⁸ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 39.

⁷⁹ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 39.

⁸⁰ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 58; James Webster, “Sonata Form,” Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.26197>. Sonata form does not refer to an actual sonata. It is the form of the individual movements within a sonata, symphony, string quartet, etc. Typically, a movement consists of three sections: exposition, development, and recapitulation.

⁸¹ Wiley, “Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Il’yich,” <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.51766>.

⁸² Gerald Abraham, “Tchaikovsky: Some Centennial Reflections,” *Music & Letters* 21, no. 2 (1940): 113.

heard in ballets before. Because of this, dancers unlocked a new “range and tone color in the human body.”⁸³ With the music of *The Sleeping Beauty*, for example, Tchaikovsky created “musico-choreographic action” in which the music tells the story as much as the dancers do.⁸⁴

Music’s beauty was of utmost importance to Tchaikovsky. To him, the best music had a positive aesthetic impact on the listener.⁸⁵ In his teenage years, he found that others did not hold music to such a high standard as he did: “Everyone with whom he came in contact regarded music merely as a pastime, without serious significance in life.”⁸⁶ Tchaikovsky had a particular aversion to Brahms and Wagner who he believed did not concentrate on beauty in their music. In his diary he wrote, “Played Brahms. It irritates me that this self-conscious mediocrity should be recognised as a genius... And Brahms is so chaotic, so dry and meaningless!”⁸⁷ To Tchaikovsky, Brahms’ music lacked beauty and only focused on structural intricacy. His similar dislike of Wagner’s music stemmed from his belief that it was too demanding of the audience.⁸⁸ In a letter to Modest, he reviewed Wagner’s music after attending the Wagner Festival in 1876:

An accumulation of the most complicated and refined harmonies, the colourlessness of everything that is sung on the stage, endlessly long dialogues, the pitch darkness in the theatre, the absence of anything interesting and poetic in the plot — all this exhausts one’s nerves to the utmost degree. So this is what Wagner’s opera reform is striving after? Composers in the past sought to delight people with their music; now what they do

⁸³ Jennifer Homans, *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2010), 276.

⁸⁴ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky’s Ballets*, 131.

⁸⁵ Maes, *A History of Russian Music*, 138.

⁸⁶ Modest Tchaikovsky, *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, 23, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45259>.

⁸⁷ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, October 7/19, 1886, quoted in *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, ed. Modest Tchaikovsky, trans. Rosa Newmarch (Project Gutenberg, 2014), 519, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45259>.

⁸⁸ Maes, *A History of Russian Music*, 138.

instead is to torment and exhaust them.⁸⁹

In Tchaikovsky's mind, although the composition process might torment and exhaust the composer, it should not do the same for the audience.⁹⁰ He did not like this type of music "that lacked this inward lyrical feeling or in which it was, in his view, smothered by elaborate technical treatment."⁹¹

Tchaikovsky also had a unique and spontaneous style when writing melodies. He viewed well-defined melodies as one of the most important aspects of music. His creative melodies are present in essentially every one of his pieces: "They are important... they must contain essence of Tchaikovsky's art: this warm, spontaneous, clear-lyrical melody that to him was almost the be-all and end-all of music."⁹² Additionally, they are not too complex and "are more likely to be repeated or amplified, going on to be part of larger melodic units, which in turn are succeeded by new ideas."⁹³ Although they do not include motivic growth, they connect with each other to create one, substantial melody.⁹⁴ One beautiful example is the *Andante maestoso* of the *pas de deux* of the ballet *The Nutcracker*. Tchaikovsky began work on *The Nutcracker* in February 1891 and finished in March 1892. *The Nutcracker* tells the story of a Clara, a young girl who receives a nutcracker for Christmas. After the nutcracker is broken by her brother Fritz, she lovingly takes care of her broken toy and sneaks downstairs in the middle of the night to check on it. Suddenly,

⁸⁹ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Modest Tchaikovsky, August 8/20, 1876, trans. and ed. Tchaikovsky Research contributors, "Richard Wagner," *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified February 17, 2019, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Richard_Wagner&oldid=56924.

⁹⁰ Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, 181.

⁹¹ Abraham, "Tchaikovsky: Some Centennial Reflections," 113.

⁹² Abraham, "Tchaikovsky: Some Centennial Reflections," 117.

⁹³ Benedict Taylor, "Temporality in Nineteenth-Century Russian Music and the Notion of Development," *Music & Letters* 94, no. 1 (2013): 109.

⁹⁴ Taylor, "Temporality in Nineteenth-Century Russian Music and the Notion of Development," 109.

mice led by the Mouse King appear and the nutcracker comes to life. A battle ensues, the nutcracker defeats the Mouse King with Clara's help, and he is transformed into a prince. He takes Clara to visit his kingdom, the Kingdom of Sweets (Confiturenburg). They are welcomed by the Sugar-Plum Fairy and are treated to a feast as members of the kingdom perform dances for them. A final waltz is danced by every performer, and the ballet ends with a final recognition of Clara.⁹⁵

The *pas de deux* is performed by the Sugar-Plum Fairy and Prince Coqueluche, her cavalier, during the second act. The piece relatively simple, as it is made up of “little more than descending octaves.”⁹⁶ However, these descending octaves repeat over and over within the melody, creating a dark, dramatic sound. At the same time, the melody is extremely romantic, especially when it swells to the final cadence. While Tchaikovsky was composing *The Nutcracker*, his sister Alexandra died. It is believed that the *Andante maestoso* of the *pas de deux* was written for her—a final send-off for his dearest sister.⁹⁷ Gerald Abraham wrote that Tchaikovsky's melodies have another thing in common other than spontaneity: “They are decidedly convolute in outline, marked by leaps rather than steps, moving boldly up and down like handwriting full character... They are, I suggest, the secret of his musical individuality, his real contribution to our art.”⁹⁸ The *Andante maestoso* of the *pas de deux* fits perfectly into Abraham's outline of Tchaikovsky's melodies.

A similar romantic melody is heard in the *Romeo and Juliet* overture during what is

⁹⁵ Poznansky, *The Tchaikovsky Handbook*, 118.

⁹⁶ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, 232.

⁹⁷ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 415.

⁹⁸ Abraham, “Tchaikovsky: Some Centennial Reflections,” 117.

called the “love theme.” This section of the piece is often heard in movies and television shows during cheesy, romantic moments. The overture was actually suggested by Balakirev in 1869. Tchaikovsky began writing it in October, and by November, it was finished. However, Tchaikovsky revised the piece twice by the request of Balakirev who continued to critique the piece. In the second version, Tchaikovsky added a new introduction and coda along with other changes.⁹⁹ He revised it for the final time in August 1880 and only changed the last eighty bars.¹⁰⁰ The piece’s structure is an adaption of sonata form.¹⁰¹ The love theme is played twice during the overture—first in measure 81 and second in measure 366.¹⁰² The first time it is heard, it is in the key of D flat major and is soft, perhaps indicating the secrecy of the balcony scene.¹⁰³ By the second time—the recapitulation—it starts soft again, but crescendos into a more intense, swelling version of the theme in D major.¹⁰⁴ Although not built around descending octaves like the *Andante maestoso* of the Nutcracker *pas de deux*, the *Romeo and Juliet* overture’s love theme has the “warm, spontaneous, clear-cut” characteristics that Abraham links to Tchaikovsky’s melodies.¹⁰⁵ Each of these ideals and styles that Tchaikovsky utilized in his music were discussed at some point in his letters.

⁹⁹ Bullivant, Roger. “Coda.” Grove Music Online, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.06033>. A coda is the final part of a piece or melody with the insinuation that it is different from or something is added to the original form.

¹⁰⁰ Poznansky, *The Tchaikovsky Handbook*, 180-81.

¹⁰¹ Newmarch and Tchaikovsky, *Tchaikovsky; His Life and Works*, 23.

¹⁰² Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *Romeo and Juliet*, TH 42, ČW 39, in *Romeo and Juliet Overture and Capriccio Italien in Full Score* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1986).

¹⁰³ Newmarch and Tchaikovsky, *Tchaikovsky; His Life and Works*, 23.

¹⁰⁴ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 64; Newmarch and Tchaikovsky, *Tchaikovsky; His Life and Works*, 23.

¹⁰⁵ Abraham, “Tchaikovsky: Some Centennial Reflections,” 117.

Expression Through Letters

Tchaikovsky's letters to his various correspondents reveal many of his ideas and values, and were a medium for him to express them. First were his attempts to unite national and international music. In a letter to Balakirev from October 2, 1869, Tchaikovsky tried to convince Balakirev to see the appeal of introducing Russian music to the rest of Europe:

Your Armenian-Georgian-Jerichonian fantasia has been received, and Rubinstein is now playing it daily at the Conservatory. If you want to know what impression it made, I can tell you that those who have heard it can be divided into three categories. Some go into foolish raptures over it (here I should mention in particular Albrecht—when he hears the piece a veritable frenzy seems to come over this German); others treat your piece as if it were some kind of curious monster (for example, Laub and Dupont, a conductor at the Italian Opera); finally, those in the third category don't like it at all. For the sake of justice it must be said that there are very few of the latter.¹⁰⁶

The “Armenian-Georgian-Jerichonian fantasia” that Tchaikovsky referred to was Balakirev's piano piece *Islamey*.¹⁰⁷ Tchaikovsky also mentioned Konstantin Karl Albrecht, son of German composer Karl Albrecht, in the letter. Albrecht clearly enjoyed the piece based on the “veritable frenzy” he went into when he heard it.¹⁰⁸ By pointing this out to Balakirev, Tchaikovsky stressed that Germans—and people from other nations in general—could and should appreciate Russian music.¹⁰⁹ It did not need to stay in Russia. In another letter to Balakirev from November 17, 1869, Tchaikovsky pushed Balakirev and other members of The Five to compose vocal pieces

¹⁰⁶ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Mily Balakirev, October 2/14, 1869, ed. Tchaikovsky Research contributors, trans. Luis Sundkvist, *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified November 16, 2019, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Letter_151&oldid=71935.

¹⁰⁷ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Mily Balakirev, October 2/14, 1869; Brown, “Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism,” 230.

¹⁰⁸ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Mily Balakirev, October 2/14, 1869.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, “Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism,” 230.

for Albrecht. The Five already denied the request once, so Tchaikovsky tried again, writing, “I know that, with all your obligations, you don't have any time to occupy yourself with trifles, but I do hope that you will hand over the chorus for men's voices which you composed for the Free Music School to our German, who is a fervent admirer of yours.”¹¹⁰ Here, Tchaikovsky tried to convince Balakirev to compose for Albrecht, a German. However, to Balakirev, this was not keeping Russian music within Russia.

Although Tchaikovsky wanted to introduce Russian music to the rest of Europe, he was not anti-nationalist. In a letter to Nadezhda von Meck, with whom he shared many of his beliefs, he wrote:

As regards the Russian element in my works, I may tell you that not infrequently I begin a composition with the intention of introducing some folk-melody into it. Sometimes it comes of its own accord, unintentionally (as in the finale of our symphony). As to this national element in my work, its affinity with the folksongs in some of my melodies and harmonies proceeds from my having spent my childhood in the country, and having, from my earliest years, been impregnated with the characteristic beauty of our Russian folk-music. I am passionately fond of the national element in all its varied expressions. In a word, I am Russian in the fullest sense of the word.¹¹¹

It is clear from this letter that Tchaikovsky loved Russia and strove to include folk music in his compositions. Following Tchaikovsky's death, Vladimir Stasov, a mentor of The Five, claimed that although Tchaikovsky was patriotic and a true Russian, his music was not nationalist enough.¹¹² Later, he even went as far as to say that Tchaikovsky's love for Russia “was merely

¹¹⁰ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Mily Balakirev, November 17/29, 1869, ed. Tchaikovsky Research contributors, trans. Luis Sundkvist, *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified November 16, 2019, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Letter_159&oldid=71938.

¹¹¹ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Nadezhda von Meck, March 5/17, 1878, quoted in *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, ed. Modest Tchaikovsky, trans. Rosa Newmarch (Project Gutenberg, 2014), 281-82.

¹¹² Tchaikovsky Research contributors, "Vladimir Stasov," *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified March 10, 2020, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Vladimir_Stasov&oldid=77863.

self-deception.”¹¹³ Although Balakirev, The Five, and Stasov may have viewed Tchaikovsky as anti-Russian, he distinctly expressed his appreciation for his home country to von Meck. Even though his patriotism was clear throughout his music, others could not hear it. Perhaps this is why he confided in von Meck about it: to clarify his nationalism.

His appreciation of Russia is evident in *The Year of 1812* overture. The piece was commissioned by Nikolai Rubinstein for the opening of the Arts and Industrial Exhibition of 1881 and the consecration of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, which was built in commemoration of Napoleon’s defeat in Russia in 1812.¹¹⁴ The overture is passionately patriotic and begins with the tranquil melody of the Russian hymn “God, Preserve Thy People.”¹¹⁵ Then, parts of “La Marseillaise” are heard, representing the French army. The Russian hymn and French national anthem compete until finally Russia triumphs.¹¹⁶ “God, Preserve Thy People” returns, but more triumphantly this time. Finally, the orchestra swells and Tchaikovsky quotes “God Save the Tsar,” bringing a close to “the joint work of faith and might.”¹¹⁷ *The Year of 1812* is undoubtedly Tchaikovsky’s most nationalistic piece, and rightly so, as multiple folk songs are quoted and the subject matter is inherently Russian.

Tchaikovsky’s dedication to Russia is also noticeable in the ballet *The Nutcracker*. The best examples are the battle scene in Act I and the trepak—the Russian dance—in Act II. During

¹¹³ Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 45.

¹¹⁴ Poznansky, *The Tchaikovsky Handbook*, 189.

¹¹⁵ This hymn is also called “O Lord, Save Thy People.”

¹¹⁶ Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 241.

¹¹⁷ Damien Mahiet, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Wonder in the First Nutcracker,” *19th-Century Music* 40, no. 2 (2016): 143.

the battle scene between the mice and toys in act I, the music is reminiscent of the *1812 Overture*. With fanfares and cannons throughout both pieces, they could be confused for one another. Interestingly, Tchaikovsky attended a performance of the overture in March 1891, only a few days after meeting with Marius Pepita to talk about the ballet.¹¹⁸ The outcomes of both “battles” are also similar: “In *The Nutcracker* as in the *1812 Overture*, the figure of the enemy—the mice and their sovereign—is not merely vanquished but entirely suppressed.”¹¹⁹ The trepak dance is also highly nationalistic. Unlike in the preceding character dances during the divertissement in act II, the trepak’s melody begins right on the first beat. In the others, “Tchaikovsky underscores contrast and prompts comparison by beginning most dances with a distinct rhythmical accompaniment that marks difference in meter, tempo, timbre, and texture even before the main melody has been heard.”¹²⁰ Perhaps Tchaikovsky left out a rhythmic beginning to the piece because Russia needed no introduction. Plus, in the 19th century the trepak was associated with Russian identity, specifically the Cossacks and physical and military expertise.¹²¹ This pushed the piece to even further Russian heights. Through these examples, it is clear that although Tchaikovsky wanted to reconcile national and international music, he was not trying to move away from Russianness in music. He was creating a new version of Russian classical music.

Musicologist David Brown claims that the real disagreement between Tchaikovsky and Balakirev was actually based on which Western tradition would better incorporate the folk song:

¹¹⁸ Mahiet, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Wonder in the First Nutcracker,” 141.

¹¹⁹ Mahiet, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Wonder in the First Nutcracker,” 143.

¹²⁰ Mahiet, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Wonder in the First Nutcracker,” 147-48.

¹²¹ Mahiet, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Wonder in the First Nutcracker,” 148.

the Viennese tradition in which symphonies were thematically developed, or the newer “symphonic poem and thematic transformation” of Berlioz and Liszt.¹²² However, Brown also points out that Tchaikovsky did not stick to the tradition he learned at the conservatory, and that was where he was better than The Five: “By not confining his activities to the camp which he had been brought up, Tchaikovsky not only demonstrated his freedom from bigotry but showed, by the lower average of his symphonic poems, that his choice had been a right one.”¹²³

Tchaikovsky’s compositional independence was what made him successful. Early on in their correspondence with each other, Balakirev had a sizeable hold over Tchaikovsky. Although Tchaikovsky did not agree with Balakirev’s ideas, he still tried to follow them in order to be accepted by Balakirev. In a letter to Tchaikovsky, Balakirev wrote extremely detailed instructions for a cantata called “Night”:

A cantata mustn't have a definite subject, but let it be lyrical and descriptive, for then it will be a cantata and not an opera, and let it finish with a valedictory chorus of spirits. As dawn approaches the spirits depart, taking their leave of each other until the next night (a gradual diminuendo). Finally the orchestra alone depicts the dawn, rises later to a crescendo, getting lighter and lighter; then the last orchestral chords depict the rising sun, with which the whole work ends. Let the cantata be preceded by a short orchestral prelude. Throughout the whole work the atmosphere of fantasy must be maintained.¹²⁴

Balakirev wrote to Tchaikovsky in an extremely patronizing tone, making sure to include each tiny detail of how he wanted the piece to be written. It can only be assumed that Balakirev wrote like this to Tchaikovsky often. Tchaikovsky often wrote about Balakirev’s attitude. In a letter to his publisher Pyotr Jurgenson, he wrote, “Merci for Balakirev. He's actually a kind and good person, but there's no-one else I want to see less. He is a very difficult and despotically

¹²² Brown, “Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism,” 241.

¹²³ Brown, “Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism,” 241.

¹²⁴ Mily Balakirev to Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, quoted in David Brown, “Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism,” *Music & Letters* 42, no. 3 (1961): 232.

demanding companion.”¹²⁵ Here, Tchaikovsky shared his thoughts about another musician to his friend and publisher, meaning he felt secure enough to complain about Balakirev with others. Although in his early days after leaving the conservatory he relied on Balakirev and The Five for musical growth, eventually he realized that their severity towards him “elicited from him the effort which he needed to enable him to discover his true artistic self.”¹²⁶ In a way, The Five—specifically Balakirev and his letters—allowed Tchaikovsky to recognize the need to break away from tradition.

Tchaikovsky stressed the importance of beauty in music in many of his letters. Clearly, beauty and aesthetics were some of, if not the most important aspects of music to him. Tchaikovsky held music to a high standard in general. He described music as “not just a straw in the wind, but a genuine friend, protector and comforter, and it alone makes life worth living” in a letter to Nadezhda von Meck.¹²⁷ In this letter, he opened up to von Meck and through her had another person to share his appreciation of music with. Music was more than just a trivial art form to entertain the listener to Tchaikovsky—it was his best friend. After hearing *Symphonie Espagnole* by Lalo, a French composer, Tchaikovsky wrote to von Meck, “Like Leo Délibes and Bizet, Lalo is careful to avoid all that is *routinier*, seeks new forms without trying to be profound, and is more concerned with musical beauty than with tradition, as are the Germans.

¹²⁵ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Pyotr Jurgenson, October 20/November 1, 1878, ed. Tchaikovsky Research contributors, trans. Brett Langston, *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified January 14, 2021, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Letter_946&oldid=82287.

¹²⁶ Brown, “Balakirev, Tchaikovsky and Nationalism,” 233.

¹²⁷ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Nadezhda von Meck, November 23/December 5, 1877, ed. Tchaikovsky Research contributors, trans. Brett Langston, *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified January 16, 2020, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Letter_659&oldid=74779.

The young generation of French composers is really very promising.”¹²⁸ Tchaikovsky was extremely impressed with Lalo and *Symphonie Espagnole*, particularly with the fact that he was not extravagant with the music. He kept the piece simple and was not overly traditional to the point that the music’s beauty was compromised.

In another letter, Tchaikovsky complained about Brahms—which he did often—to Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich: “Now, there is just no way one can say that Brahms’s music is feeble and insignificant. His style is always elevated; he never chases after outward effects, he is never banal; everything in him is serious and noble, but the most important thing—beauty—is missing!”¹²⁹ Tchaikovsky clearly named beauty as Brahms’ “most important” grievance, furthering its importance to music. Keeping up with his dislike of Wagner, he wrote to Modest about the opera *Das Rheingold* and said, “Musically, it is inconceivable nonsense, in which here and there occur beautiful, and even captivating, moments.”¹³⁰ Although some aspects of *Das Rheingold* were beautiful to Tchaikovsky, he believed the overall music was much too complicated. In his description of a piece by Massenet, Tchaikovsky wrote, “His opera, however, has captivated me by its rare beauty of form, its simplicity and freshness of ideas and style, as well by its wealth of melody and distinction of harmony.”¹³¹ Again, he stressed the simplicity of

¹²⁸ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Nadezhda von Meck, March 3/15, 1878, in *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, ed. Modest Tchaikovsky, trans. Rosa Newmarch (Project Gutenberg, 2014), 280, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45259>.

¹²⁹ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich, October 2/14, 1888, ed. Tchaikovsky Research contributors, trans. Luis Sundkvist, *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified April 23, 2020, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Letter_3685&oldid=80190.

¹³⁰ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Modest Tchaikovsky, August 2/14, 1876, quoted in *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, ed. Modest Tchaikovsky (Project Gutenberg, 2014), 181, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45259>.

¹³¹ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Nadezhda von Meck, January 20/February 1, 1879, quoted in *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, ed. Modest Tchaikovsky, trans. Rosa Newmarch (Project Gutenberg, 2014), 333 <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45259>.

Massenet's opera, but also its melody and harmony. Tchaikovsky strove to connect with his audience and felt obligated to share his music with them.¹³² Therefore, it could not be overly confusing like Wagner's and Brahms' music—it had to be beautiful. He expressed this appreciation of the audience in a letter to Nadezhda von Meck after an outstanding premiere: “I have never had such a triumph; I could see that the greater part of the audience was touched and grateful. Such moments are the best in an artist's life.”¹³³ Although he was often overwhelmed by the audience's appreciation of him, it obviously fueled his dedication to music and he wanted von Meck to know it.¹³⁴ It is clear in these letters that Tchaikovsky was not afraid to voice his opinions of other musicians to family and friends who may or may not have agreed with him.

Tchaikovsky's emphasis on straightforward melodies can be found in others letters as well. He criticized Wagner's melodic composition in a letter to Nadezhda von Meck on November 26, 1877:

For all these kaleidoscopic, variegated musical chunks, which follow each other incessantly without ever actually getting anywhere or allowing you even once to take comfort from some easily grasped musical form — I really cannot call that music. Not once is the singer given the scope of a single broad, complete melody. He has to spend all the time chasing after the orchestra and making sure he does not miss his note which has no more significance in the score than some note given to some 4th horn.¹³⁵

Here, Tchaikovsky complained about Wagner's melody, claiming it was too complicated for the performer to sing. Because of that, the singer's part did not stand out as much as it could have.

¹³² Richard Taruskin, “Chaikovsky and the Human,” in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 260.

¹³³ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Nadezhda von Meck, January 18/30, 1885, quoted in *The Life & Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, ed. Modest Tchaikovsky (Project Gutenberg, 2014), 473, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45259>.

¹³⁴ Taruskin, “Chaikovsky and the Human,” 260.

¹³⁵ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Nadezhda von Meck, November 26/December 8, 1877, ed. Tchaikovsky Research contributors, trans. Nick Winter, *Tchaikovsky Research*, last modified February 18, 2021, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Letter_661&oldid=82402.

He also complained about Brahms' melodies. In the same letter to Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich where he grumbled about Brahms' lack of beauty, he explained:

In the music of this master (for his mastery can of course not be denied) there is something dry and cold which repels my heart. He has very little melodic inventiveness; his musical thoughts are never spoken out to their conclusion; no sooner has one heard a suggestion of a melodic form that can be easily appreciated, than the latter has already sunk into a whirlpool of meaningless harmonic progressions and modulations.¹³⁶

Tchaikovsky claimed that Brahms' melody was insignificant because it easily got lost in the background harmonies and tonal modulations. In short, the melody was not the main focus of the piece. Through these letters, Tchaikovsky had a way to express his true beliefs about elements of music and how it should sound, as well as critique other musicians. He was a rather quiet man, so writing out his ideals and attitudes towards music is the best way musicologists can truly understand how he composed music.

Tchaikovsky's Influence

The foundation Tchaikovsky laid for other composers has been undoubtedly built upon since his death. His true influence on Russian music during his lifetime may not have appeared noticeable at first, but it was outstanding. Before the Revolution of 1917, Russian pieces composed by Tchaikovsky's pupils—as well as Rimsky-Korsakov's—were reminiscent of the romantic pieces he composed: “The central place in Russian song was still held by the passionate or elegiac *romance*, the direct descendant through... Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky.”¹³⁷

These romances were based on folksongs, or adaptations of them.¹³⁸ There were also a number

¹³⁶ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich, October 2/14, 1888, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/index.php?title=Letter_3685&oldid=80190.

¹³⁷ Gerald Abraham, *Essays on Russian and East European Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 29-30.

¹³⁸ Abraham, *Essays on Russian and East European Music*, 5.

of Tchaikovsky imitators in Russia who created a risk of devaluating Tchaikovsky's "genuine artistic coinage."¹³⁹ The way Tchaikovsky mixed Western and Russian music also impacted composers after him. Because of his union of the two musical spheres, an "urbanized, sophisticated, cosmopolitan Russian style" that composers such as Stravinsky and Prokofiev worked towards was possible.¹⁴⁰

Tchaikovsky also had a major influence on Russian ballet. According to Jennifer Homans, *The Sleeping Beauty* was the first ballet that was fully Russian. Instead of imitating the French ballet, *The Sleeping Beauty* was a "pitch-perfect summation of the rules and forms that had shaped the Russian court since Peter the Great."¹⁴¹ This was partly because of Tchaikovsky's music. He was the first major composer who viewed ballet as an important art and his music reflected that. Before Tchaikovsky, ballet music was connected to dance forms and rhythms. Composers followed the ballet instead of leading it. Tchaikovsky's ballet music was significant in that it challenged dancers. The music along with the choreography pushed dancers to move in new ways. Many believed Tchaikovsky's ballet music was "too operatic or big or difficult for the public, especially dancers, to fathom."¹⁴² However, it drove ballet in a new creative direction. Again, without Tchaikovsky's ballets, Stravinsky and Prokofiev would have had a more difficult foundation to build upon.

After his death, Tchaikovsky's pieces surged in popularity, especially his Sixth Symphony, also known as the *Pathétique*. This was the last symphony he composed and

¹³⁹ Wiley, "Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Il'yich," <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.51766>.

¹⁴⁰ Taruskin, "P.I. Tchaikovsky and the Ghetto," 52.

¹⁴¹ Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, 277.

¹⁴² Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, 278.

conducted its premiere only nine days before he died. Rimsky-Korsakov detailed its second performance after his funeral: “This time the public greeted it rapturously, and since that moment the fame of the symphony has kept growing and growing, spreading gradually over Russia and Europe.”¹⁴³ The force that his death created led audiences to appreciate the symphony more. Rimsky-Korsakov also mentioned that the public understood the second performance conducted by Napravnik, another Russian composer, better than Tchaikovsky’s first performance. Rimsky-Korsakov claimed that they had not listened to it closely enough the first time and their interest in it only skyrocketed because of Tchaikovsky’s sudden death.¹⁴⁴ He was not only influential through his music, but also his death.

Pyotr Tchaikovsky’s music is well known across the world today. When one thinks of Russian classical music, he is likely the first composer to pop into their head. His melodies are memorable and his ballets are performed year after year. This reserved Russian man permeated through society all because of his music. Exactly how he did that is often overlooked. Most significantly, he reconciled the relationship between Russian music and the rest of Europe’s music. He did this by incorporating folksongs into his pieces, as well as Western compositional practices, such as Schumann’s symphonic form. He was also independent in his composition style, often pushing the boundaries of longstanding traditions such as sonata form. He focused on the simplistic beauty of music, particularly melodies. For Tchaikovsky, beauty was the most important aspect of music. If a piece was too complicated or a melody too difficult to hear, its beauty was compromised. Tchaikovsky expressed these and many other ideals in his letters. His most common correspondents with which he shared these beliefs were his patroness Nadezhda

¹⁴³ Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*, 340.

¹⁴⁴ Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*, 340.

von Meck, younger brother Modest, and fellow composer Mily Balakirev. It was through these letters that Tchaikovsky could put his ideas into words and receive feedback on them. Although letters he received are not easily accessible, the few that are available offer insight into techniques that he applied to his compositions. By examining Tchaikovsky's letters, the extent of their importance to his music is revealed. Without them, his musical ideals might not be known today.

In regards to research on Tchaikovsky, there could be more studies on his rise to fame following his death. It is clear that his music is used in a multitude of mediums today, but how did that start? When did directors begin to use Tchaikovsky's music in their movies and television shows, and what does this say about how classical music is used today? This question could apply to all aspects of classical music, not just Tchaikovsky. Similarly, research on the tradition of *The Nutcracker's* performance during each Christmas season would be fascinating. Essentially these would be studies into Tchaikovsky's music's use throughout the years after his death. This would not only be research into the lasting impact of Tchaikovsky's music, but the use of music in popular media over time. Any direction—negative or positive—that the research on Tchaikovsky heads in will continue the legacy of one of Russia's greatest and most influential composers.

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