



PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 1 in G minor

“Winter Dreams”

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (May 7, 1840 to November 6, 1893) was a Russian composer of the Romantic era. His wide-ranging output includes symphonies, operas, ballet, chamber music and songs. From these genres come some of the most popular concert and theatrical music in the repertoire, including the ballets *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*, the *1812 Overture*, his first Piano Concerto and last three symphonies. Born into a middle-class family, Tchaikovsky was educated as a civil servant. Yet against the wishes of his family he enrolled in the Saint Petersburg Conservatory to pursue a musical career. This step also set him apart from many of his contemporaries (such as Balakirev and the Five), who spurned Western-oriented formal training in favour of nationalistic (Russian) inspirations. Tchaikovsky’s personal life was often marred by emotional turmoil. He was known for sensitivity even as a child, and he carried this emotional instability well into his adult life. Contributing factors to bouts of depression include the abrupt end of a 13-year relationship with his patron, a wealthy widow named Nadezhda von Meck. Despite his private turmoil his reputation grew and he enjoyed many popular successes. He was honoured by the Tsar, awarded a lifetime pension and lauded in concert halls around the world. His sudden death at age 53 is generally attributed to cholera, but some suspect suicide. Tchaikovsky’s music was for a time dismissed by American music critics as being vulgar and lacking in elevated thought. By the end of the 20th century and into the 21st, however, Tchaikovsky’s status as a significant composer is regarded as secure.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky wrote his **Symphony No. 1 in G minor**, Op. 13 in 1866, just after he accepted a professorship at the Moscow Conservatory: it is the composer's earliest notable work. The composer's brother Modest claimed this work cost Tchaikovsky more labor and suffering than any of his other works. Even so, he remained fond of it, writing to Nadezhda von Meck in 1883 that "although it is in many ways very immature, yet fundamentally it has more substance and is better than any of my other more mature works." Tchaikovsky confessed later in life that he could not write within the proper rules of Western sonata form—those rules of organic growth and development of themes that Germanic composers had invented. Tchaikovsky could not write a symphony that would please his mentor Anton Rubinstein by staying firmly within a classical format while writing music that would stay true to his strengths as a composer. In the end, Tchaikovsky successfully adapted the sonata form and symphonic writing to his strengths as a melodist. The first two movements of the symphony feature titles: the first is titled “Dreams of a Winter Journey”, and the second is “Land of Desolation, Land of Mists”. While neither the scherzo third movement nor the finale contain titles, the finale uses the folk-song “Распашу ли я млада, младешенка” (*Raspashu li ya mlada, mladeshenka*) as the basis for both the introduction and the second subject.