



PYOTR ILLYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 2 in C minor "Little Russian"

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.

Symphony No. 2 in C minor, Op. 17 was composed in 1872. One of Tchaikovsky's joyful compositions, it was successful right from its premiere and also won the favor of the group of nationalistic Russian composers known as "The Five", led by Mily Balakirev. Despite its initial success, Tchaikovsky was not satisfied with the symphony. He revised the work extensively in 1879-80, substantially rewriting the opening movement and shortening the finale. This revision is the version of the symphony usually performed today, although there have also been supporters of the original version. Because Tchaikovsky used three Ukrainian folk songs to great effect in this work, it was nicknamed the "Little Russian" (Russian: Малороссийская, *Malorossiyskaya*) by Nikolay Kashkin, a friend of the composer as well as a well-known musical critic of Moscow. Ukraine was at that time frequently called "Little Russia". The first folk song is a Ukrainian variant of "Down by Mother Volga", featuring a solo horn. The second appears in the middle of the second movement, "Spin, O my Spinner", and the final song appears in the finale; "The Crane" is heard after an expansive fanfare.