



# TCHAIKOVSKY

## *The Tempest*

**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.

**The Tempest (Russian: Буря Burya), Symphonic Fantasia after Shakespeare, Op. 18**, is a symphonic poem in F minor composed in 1873. It was premiered in December 1873, conducted by Nikolai Rubinstein. It is based on the play *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. Similar in structure to Tchaikovsky's better-known *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture*, it contains themes depicting the stillness of the ship at sea, the grotesque nature of Caliban, and the love between Ferdinand and Miranda. The love music is particularly strong, being reminiscent of the love music from *Romeo and Juliet*. Tchaikovsky was much influenced by Shakespeare: in addition to *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest*, he also wrote a *Hamlet Fantasy Overture* (1888) and incidental music to *Hamlet* (1891). Although similar in name, the work is not related to Tchaikovsky's overture/symphonic poem *The Storm*, Op. posth. 76, written in 1864.