



# Pyotr TCHAIKOVSKY

## *Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64*

**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (7 May 1840 – 6 November 1893) was a Russian composer of the romantic period, whose works are among the most popular music in the classical repertoire. He was the first Russian composer whose music made a lasting impression internationally, bolstered by his appearances as a guest conductor in Europe and the United States. He was honored in 1884 by Emperor Alexander III and awarded a lifetime pension.

Although musically precocious, Tchaikovsky was educated for a career as a civil servant. There was scant opportunity for a musical career in Russia at that time and no system of public music education. When an opportunity for such an education arose, he entered the nascent Saint Petersburg Conservatory, from which he graduated in 1865. The formal Western-oriented teaching he received there set him apart from composers of the contemporary nationalist movement embodied by the Russian composers of The Five, with whom his professional relationship was mixed. Tchaikovsky's training set him on a path to reconcile what he had learned with the native musical practices to which he had been exposed from childhood. From this reconciliation he forged a personal but unmistakably Russian style - a task that did not prove easy. The principles that governed melody, harmony and other fundamentals of Russian music ran completely counter to those that governed Western European music; this seemed to defeat the potential for using Russian music in large-scale Western composition or for forming a composite style, and it caused personal antipathies that dented Tchaikovsky's self-confidence. Russian culture exhibited a split personality, with its native and adopted elements having drifted apart increasingly since the time of Peter the Great. This resulted in uncertainty among the intelligentsia about the country's national identity - an ambiguity mirrored in Tchaikovsky's career.

The Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64 by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was composed between May and August 1888. Unlike its two predecessors, the 5th Symphony has no clear program. On 15 April 1888, about a month before he began composing the symphony, the composer sketched a scenario for its first movement in his notebook, containing "... a complete resignation before fate, which is the same as the inscrutable predestination of fate ..." It is however uncertain how much of this program has been realised in the composition.

The mood of the entire Symphony is set by the introduction, a somber motto in the clarinets that reappears throughout the work and hints at some hidden extra-musical agenda. After the Introduction, the first movement continues with a resolute march theme, almost a grim procession through adversity. A second beautifully orchestrated theme reveals how many ways there are to represent a sigh in music. Even the idyllic ambience of the second movement, its main theme one of the repertory's great horn solos, followed by a more animated theme for solo oboe, opens with ponderous introductory measures for the double basses and cellos, playing the underlying harmony of the motto.

The third movement is a waltz based on a street melody the composer had heard in Florence ten years before. It also has an undertone of sadness, and towards the end the somber motto is again heard, the mood continuing into the Finale.

The last movement presents the motto as the focal point of a final struggle between darkness and light, symbolized by the vacillation between its original E minor and E major. The stately introduction mirrors the opening of the piece, although in an ambiguous mood and mode. With the Allegro, the key returns decidedly to the minor, but the tempo picks up into a spirited Trepak, a Russian folkdance. Finally, following a grand pause, the key switches definitively to E major - with great pomp and fanfare - for a majestic coda based on the motto and a final trumpet blast of a version in E major of the first movement march.