Pjotr Iljitj Tjajkovskij (1840–1893)

Symphonies

Symphony No. 1 in G minor Op. 13 "Winter Daydreams"

1. Allegro tranquillo ('Dreams of a Winter Journey')
2. Adagio cantabile ma non tanto ('Land of desolation, Land of mists')
3. Scherzo: Allegro scherzando giocoso
4. Finale: Andante lugubre – Allegro maestoso

According to Tchaikovsky's younger brother Modest, no other work caused the composer such labour and suffering as his First Symphony, which occupied him through much of 1866, the year of his 26th birthday. In January he had moved from St Petersburg to Moscow, where Nikolay Rubinstein, Director of the newly-opened Conservatory of Music, had engaged him as Professor of Harmony, thereby alleviating the financial hardship that had beset him since he resigned a minor post at the Ministry of Justice three years earlier to devote himself to music.

He lodged in Moscow with Rubinstein, and it was probably at his suggestion that Tchaikovsky began a more extended work than anything he had previously attempted. He had revised a student composition, an Overture in F major, which Rubinstein conducted at a concert in March and brought the composer his first public success. Much encouraged, he began sketches for a symphony right away, working by night as well as by day in addition to teaching, until physical exhaustion set in. He was further cast down by a belated and scathing review in St Petersburg of his graduation composition, a cantata on Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' (the text set by Beethoven in his Ninth Symphony).

Very soon Tchaikovsky was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, forcing himself to continue working in spite of sleeplessness, persistent headaches, hallucinations and a recurring sense of dread that he would not live to finish the Symphony, all of which he mentioned in his letters. A doctor was called in and said his case was hopeless, which did not exactly help matters. In fact, most of the Symphony was written by the summer, when the composer showed it to Nikolay Rubinstein's brother Anton, his former teacher at St Petersburg, who advised some revision before he would consider it for performance.

Back in Moscow, Tchaikovsky eventually went along with the suggestions made to him, but then the work was first performed in a strangely piecemeal fashion. The Scherzo movement alone was played at a Moscow concert in December, without much success (according to Modest), but this and the second movement were more favourably received when Nikolay conducted them at St Petersburg two months later. Another year went by before the Symphony was given in its entirety, at Moscow on 15 February 1868. Tchaikovsky then made more revisions and a few cuts before a first edition was published in 1874. The version now heard was not performed until 1886, and a corrected printed edition eventually appeared in 1888, 22 years after it was begun.

Tchaikovsky's publisher, Jürgenson, had brought out the first Russian editions of some German symphonic classics in the early 1860s, and we know that the composer enjoyed playing through the symphonies by Mendelssohn and Schumann. His own first essay in the form owes something in style to both these models, as in the use he made of descriptive titles and in his method of reconciling the disciplines of symphonic form with his own romantic imagination and developing technique. After his later revision he wrote in a letter: 'Despite its deficiencies I have a soft spot for it. It is a sin of my sweet youth'.

He also referred to it when writing to his longtime patroness, Nadezhda von Meck, the wealthy widow of a railway engineer who virtually financed him for some 15 years out of admiration for his music, but on condition that they never met. 'Although it is immature in many respects', he told her, 'it is essentially better and richer in content than many other, more mature works'. In giving it the title of *Winter Daydreams* he was no doubt copying Mendelssohn's practice as well as seeking to define his own approach.

Tchaikovsky then bestowed separate titles on each of the first two movements. The opening *Allegro tranquillo* he called 'Dreams of a Winter Journey', but this seems to have no specific relevance to anything in the music, which is a sonata-type structure of two contrasting ideas. Both the main themes are introduced by the woodwind, the first by flute and bassoon playing two octaves apart, the second by a solo clarinet. In general it is the movement's melodic charm and instrumental detail that is more engaging than the modest though skilfully adapted symphonic development.

The second movement he inscribed 'Land of desolation, Land of mists'. It is certainly a mood-picture, a decidedly Russian landscape of the mind through which musical images are brought into focus. The implications of the subtitle are somewhat contradicted by an opening phrase now known to have come from Tchaikovsky's earlier Overture on Ostrovsky's drama, *The Storm*, where it had different emotional connotations. However, the folklike song of an oboe is extended and elaborated as it travels from one instrument to another, the varied orchestration and counterpoint doing duty for musical development.

The other movements have no more subtitles, we do not know why. The third movement Scherzo was more or less ready made, being taken over from a Piano Sonata in C sharp minor he wrote the year before, transposed to a new key and reworked to take more advantage of orchestral colour (the original keyboard work was subsequently published posthumously). Mendelssohn again comes to mind in the elegance of phrase and graceful manner, but it is the newly-written trio section in waltz-time that acquires a special significance as the progenitor of all the later and much-loved orchestral waltzes.

The finale, although again in sonata form with two subjects, derives most of its character from a single Russian folksong, which Tchaikovsky also later arranged as one of a published collection. Its melody provides the basis for both the slow introduction and the jaunty second theme of the movement, as well as serving to some extent in shaping the movement's sturdy first subject. By way of development, Tchaikovsky here parades his contrapuntal skill in a fugal passage with entries in different keys, while generating an energetic rhythmic impetus that carries the movement through with a flourish.

Symphony No. 2 in C minor Op. 17 "Little Russian"

Revised 1879 Version

1. Andante sostenuto - Allegro vivo
2. Andantino marziale, quasi moderato
3. Scherzo and Trio: Allegro molto vivace
4. Finale: Moderato assai – Allegro vivo

After the trouble and tribulation caused him by the composition of his First Symphony, it was another six years before Tchaikovsky attempted a further work in a form he never found particularly congenial, though he did think he ought to try to master it. His Second Symphony was begun with this in mind, to improve on the faults of style he felt there were in the earlier work, especially as regards 'symmetry of form', as he put it in a letter, but it was so enthusiastically received at its Moscow

première on 7 February 1873 that the Russian Musical Society changed its programmes in order to give a repeat performance two months later.

Its immediate appeal at the time was to some extent due to the composer's use of melodic themes borrowed from Ukrainian folksong, which led to Nikolay Kashkin, a teacher and critic and friend of Tchaikovsky, calling it the 'Little Russian' Symphony (Little Russia being the common name for the Ukraine). The nickname stuck, to become virtually the work's subtitle. Another distinction it has among Tchaikovsky's seven Symphonies (counting *Manfred* with the numbered six) is in musical subject-matter that reflects a wholly unmorbid side of the composer's personality.

He began it during a summer holiday, one of several spent with his married sister, Alexandra Davidova, and her family at Kamenka, their home in the Ukraine, which she encouraged her brother to look on as a second home for him too. He was then aged 32, and dividing his time between teaching as Professor of Harmony at the Moscow Conservatory headed by Nikolay Rubinstein (who conducted the Second Symphony's première) and his own composition, most recently the *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy-overture, a String Quartet (No. 1 in D minor) and an opera, *The Oprichnik*, which he learned at the end of the year had been accepted for production at St. Petersburg.

By the time he returned to Moscow he was 'so engrossed' in the Symphony, he wrote, that other work was irksome, and it was finished and orchestrated during the winter. He played the finale over on the piano at a party given by Rimsky-Korsakov early in January and was delighted by the enthusiasm this aroused. Even so, and despite the successful concert performances, he remained personally dissatisfied with some aspects of it, and six to seven years later (in the wake of his Third and Fourth Symphonies) he rewrote much of it into the revised version which is now usually performed and is recorded here.

His most extensive revision was in the Symphony's first and third movements, though he mentions an 'enormous cut' in the finale which perhaps improved its proportions. At any rate, the work made new friends when it was first heard in its revised form at St. Petersburg on 12 February 1881, and the present-day listener will find it generally lighter in expressive character than his other Symphonies. Its slow introduction to the first movement has a variant of a folksong, 'Down by Mother Volga', heard as a horn solo, which later emerges amid the development of two other ideas and is reintroduced as a better ending to the movement than either of those.

Instead of a lyrical slow movement, Tchaikovsky made use of a Bridal March from his rejected opera, *Undine*, composed three years earlier. Now adapted as the basis of a rondo-scheme, it alternates with a string melody as a first contrasting episode and a central passage derived from a folksong, 'Spin, O my spinner', found in the '50 Russian Folksongs' he arranged for piano duet. This movement is an attractive partner to the Scherzo, which most resembles Tchaikovsky's ballet music in its rhythmic vivacity, especially a trio-section that foreshadows a *Sleeping Beauty* dance and which, at the end, is played again in 2/8 time by the woodwind while the rest play the main scherzo music in 3/8.

Folksong again furnishes the finale, principally one called 'The Crane' which Tchaikovsky overheard the Davidov's butler singing at Kamenka. There is a contrasting melody of Tchaikovsky's own, a syncopated little dance tune, but the movement is chiefly concerned with the folksong theme varied not in terms of changing the melody much but of presenting it, or phrases from it, in different keys and instrumental colours, gradually absorbing the second tune until a loud stroke on the tam-tam heralds a *presto* coda that carries the work home in a bright C major.

Symphony No. 3 in D major Op. 29

1. Moderato assai (Tempo di marcia funebre) – Allegro brillante
2. Alla tedesca: Allegro moderato e semplice
3. Andante elegiaco
4. Scherzo: Allegro vivo
5. Finale: Allegro con fuoco – Tempo di polacca

When Tchaikovsky composed his Third Symphony in a matter of a few weeks during his summer holiday in 1875, he was 35 years old and the work helped to banish the melancholia that afflicted him through the previous winter. An emotional, sensitive man, he was prone to bouts of depression throughout his life, which he is now thought to have ended by his own hand in one such fit of despair, to avoid being disgraced by a public scandal of homosexual involvement. In 1875, however, his state of mind was affected as much by professional as emotional matters.

The year began badly for him with the celebrated occasion when he played over his sketches for the B flat minor Piano Concerto to Nikolay Rubinstein, its intended dedicatee and Director of the Moscow Conservatory where Tchaikovsky was then teaching, only to hear Rubinstein denounce it as 'worthless and unplayable'. Before the year was out, the Concerto would be successfully launched not in Russia but in Boston, USA, by a new dedicatee, Hans von Bülow, but Tchaikovsky's spirits were reflected in the *Sérénade mélancolique* he wrote in January that year for violin and orchestra.

His letters to his brothers Anatoly and Modest at this time expressed his wish to die, as well as more mundane irritation with his teaching duties, and although he craved travel, or escape from the city to the countryside, he no sooner went anywhere than he started to feel homesick. He busied himself with some songs, and with correcting his fourth opera, *Vakula the Smith*, ready for a prize competition which it would win later in the year: it has come down to us in a revised form as *Cherevichki* (The Little Slippers), but is still seldom heard.

A different fate attended another major work Tchaikovsky began that year, after the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres invited him to compose the music for a ballet intended for production at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. How much of a subject for it was already decided, and characteristic of Tchaikovsky, is the means by which this Third Symphony acquires the unconventional structure of five movements instead of four.

Ostensibly it serves as a kind of scherzo to balance the movement that bears this designation on the other side of the central slow movement, itself the most imaginative in the work and the heart of its expressive ideas. Tchaikovsky was later to declare: 'All my life I have been much troubled by my inability to grasp and manipulate form in music ... I shall end my days without having ever written anything that is perfect in form'. We might nevertheless feel that he was the greater composer because (like others of his time) he varied form to suit his ideas, and in the present instance the Symphony gains greatly in character from the added movement.

Like all Tchaikovsky's symphonies except the first, it begins with a slow introduction, this in D minor and marked to be played in funeral-march tempo. Sorrowful as it is, the sounds are beautiful in Tchaikovsky's scoring, and the shadows are soon lifted in an accelerating lead into the major key and a processional theme for the main Allegro. The link passage and theme are only the first of several harbingers of *Swan Lake* music; another is the B minor melody on the oboe which marks the second subject. Both ideas are concisely stated then extensively developed according to the sonata principle, eventually being repeated and used to build a vigorous finish.

'Alla tedesca' for the second movement refers back to what was known as a 'German Dance' (Allemande or Deutsche, later the Ländler) before the waltz came into its own. Begun by the oboe and

clarinet over plucked strings, it has a main theme of beguiling grace and elegance enclosing a trio section animated by chattering woodwind in triplet phrases passed among the orchestra. The opening tune returns and ends with its leading phrase also passed about before dropping away on the bassoon.

The elegiac slow movement recalls the mood and D minor key of the opening funeral march as broken phrases carry an affecting flute melody at the outset to other woodwind and a sorrowful horn, before the strings in richer harmony offer a more consoling idea, with this tune doubled by clarinets. As it is extended it becomes interwoven with the previous D minor phrases, but gradually overcomes all lingering doubts until the solo horn brings the movement to rest on a final chord in the security of D major.

The scherzo movement proper brings Mendelssohn irresistibly to mind in the delicacy and charm with which the whirring phrases on woodwind and strings (the latter muted throughout the movement) are embellished by the horn, later by a trombone. A trio section changes the underlying metre as the horns sustain a pedal-note D while other groups of instruments offer a new tune in seven different keys in turn, as if inviting a choice. A climax is reached by way of arpeggio phrases and fanfare figures, after which the opening section returns to bring about a disarming ending.

The polonaise tempo invoked for the finale is the ensemble dance in triple metre that adorns some of the best-known scenes in Tchaikovsky's theatre music, *Evgeny Onyegin* as well as *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. It is exuberantly extended by the full orchestra before giving way to a pompous, almost hymn-like second subject. The development is by way of repetition and a somewhat academic-sounding fugal passage, leading to the second theme swelling out grandly like an anthem to crown the Symphony in confident splendour.

Symphony No. 4 in F minor Op. 36

1. Andante sostenuto – Moderato con anima
2. Andantino in mòdo di canzona
3. Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato
4. Finale: Allegro con fuoco

Soon after the first performance of his Fourth Symphony, at St Petersburg on 22 February 1878, Tchaikovsky wrote to a friend that it was 'the best thing I have done', He was then 38 years old, and the composition had occupied him intermittently at much the same time as his opera, *Evgeny Onyegin*, which was premiered in Moscow a year later. Both these works are particular examples of the technical mastery that suddenly showed itself during what were some of the most critical years of the composer's life, while the symphony as a form became his means of expression for inward thoughts and feelings of the more subjective kind, emotions with which most listeners can readily identify.

Like the Violin Concerto, which immediately preceded it, the Fourth Symphony was begun during Tchaikovsky's convalescence abroad after the breakdown brought on by his ill-fated marriage. Some years before, in trying to escape from what he felt to be the burden of his own homosexual nature, he became engaged to an opera singer, only to be jilted suddenly and without explanation. Then, in 1877, one of his students asked him to marry her, a proposal close to that in Pushkin's story of Onyegin. But whereas Onyegin turned the girl down, and lived to regret it, Tchaikovsky accepted her, and came to regret that much sooner.

Incapable of loving his wife, Antonia Ivanovna (who was later found to be mentally unstable anyway), Tchaikovsky soon fled from her and suffered a serious breakdown, which threatened his own sanity and led him to contemplate suicide. He took himself to Switzerland and Italy to seek recuperation, and we owe it to another lady who came into his life some months earlier that he was

able to continue working at all. Nadezhda von Meck was the wealthy widow of a railway engineer, and she conceived such a passion for Tchaikovsky's music that she offered him generous financial help so that he could concentrate on composition without the need to earn other income, and this became an annuity which he received for almost 15 years.

Her patronage led to an extraordinary friendship between them maintained by remote control, as it was accompanied by the delicate stipulation, carefully kept on both sides, that they should never meet. Their association was entirely through the letters they exchanged, often long and fascinating (and still awaiting an adequate English version), such as the descriptive 'meaning' the composer wrote for her of his Fourth Symphony, which they referred to as 'our Symphony' in their correspondence. Some quotations from this are included here, but the reader should also keep in mind Tchaikovsky's disclaimer to his correspondent that the work was 'a musical confession of the soul', which words could never adequately explain.

His contribution to symphonic form as a means of musical expression was to extend its scope and to bring to it new and vivid contrasts of melody and harmony. These are a distinctive feature of the Fourth Symphony, which ranks with the *Pathétique* (No. 6) and *Manfred* Symphonies as the composer's finest achievement in this form. No. 4 is filled with imaginative instrumental scoring throughout the orchestra; with harmonic skill in the use of inverted and chromatically altered chords, and especially with richness of melody. Tchaikovsky was never afraid of exposing a good tune for all it was worth, and then turning it upside down to make another just as effective, as happens in the first movement of this Symphony.

It is a long and complex movement, beginning with a slow introduction in which fanfares of horns and trumpets, supported by woodwind, announce a fateful and foreboding theme that recurs throughout the movement. 'This is Fate', wrote Tchaikovsky to Madame von Meck, 'that inevitable force which prevents our hopes of happiness from being realized ... It is inescapable and it can never be overcome'. To his composer-friend Sergey Taneyev he acknowledged Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as the model for the musical idea. Sometimes it is heard in stark isolation, sometimes integrated into the orchestral texture, but always with compelling power. After the change of tempo the other main themes are an agonised melody in waltz-time introduced by the strings, which is answered by a more hopeful, dreamy tune on the clarinet. The transformation and development of these is twice interrupted by slower sections based on contrasted ideas before the movement reaches a threatening and despairing coda.

The sense of isolation induced by feelings of unhappiness is intensified in each of the next two movements. The *Andantino in mòdo di canzona* (in mocking mood) is characterized by a nostalgic melancholy in the haunting song played by the oboe ('One is sad because so much is gone, past ... And one regrets the past, yet has no wish to begin living again'). The procession of memories is invigorated by an answering string-theme in three low-pitched octaves, with a quieter and more dance-like middle section begun by clarinets and bassoons ('Recalling happy moments when the young blood pulsed warm through our veins and life was good'), after which the opening song is heard again, first on the violins and then ending the movement in a sad strain from the bassoons.

Now follows one of Tchaikovsky's most original and daring feats of orchestration, the massed strings played *pizzicato ostinato* throughout, like plucked balalaikas. The theme is notable for wide leaps and repeated notes, evoking what he called 'capricious arabesques, elusive apparitions that pass through the imagination when a little wine has been drunk and one feels the first stage of intoxication'. Among them are 'a roistering peasant and a street song', represented by a rustic woodwind tune, and 'a military parade passing in the distance' heard from the brass. All these elements are then woven together in a colourful and exhilarating tapestry of themes.

A flamboyant flurry of sound launches the finale, followed quickly by a quiet statement of a theme derived from a Russian folk-song well-known in Tchaikovsky's day, 'In the woods there stood a birch-tree', which is treated to much variation. 'Go to the people, who know how to enjoy themselves', Nadezhda von Meck was instructed, 'but Fate returns again and others pay no heed ... Simple, strong joy does exist even so. Rejoice in the happiness of others and life is still bearable'. The variants of the folk-song generate developing excitement until the second of them is frightened out of its festive brilliance by the sudden return of the baleful Fate motif from the opening movement. For a moment it seems to have taken control as the music shrinks beneath it, but with a last upsurge the Symphony recovers its high spirits to end exultantly.

Symphony No. 5 in E minor Op. 64

1. Andante – Allegro con anima
2. Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza
3. Allegro moderato
4. Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace

Each of Tchaikovsky's symphonies (seven, counting *Manfred*) gives insights into his musical personality, and the Fifth has long been among the most popular of its kind. To a great extent this is because the composer made use of symphonic form not to develop a reasoned musical discussion but as a vehicle for his own inward thoughts and feelings. 'Should not a symphony', he wrote to a friend, 'reveal those wordless urges that hide in the heart, asking fervently for expression?' He answered the question by enabling listeners to identify directly with the emotions conveyed through the musical ideas, which often haunt the mind as well as delighting the ear.

His Fifth Symphony was one of the works made possible by the financial support he received for almost 15 years from Nadezhda von Meck, the wealthy widow of a railway engineer. She conceived such a passion for Tchaikovsky's music that she paid him an annual sum to allow him to give the time he needed to composition without having to earn other income as he climbed to the peak of his career. Yet her generosity was accompanied by the firm stipulation, rigorously kept on both sides, that they should never meet.

Their association was carried on entirely through the letters they exchanged, in one of which Tchaikovsky wrote: 'I have tried more than once to express in music the torment and delight of love ... Words alone are not enough, and where they are powerless, a more eloquent language comes fully armed: music ... What you say about words hurting music, dragging it down from some unscalable heights, is true enough, and I have always felt it deeply. Perhaps that is why I have succeeded better with instrumental works than with vocal compositions'.

He was a mature and successful composer when he began work on the Fifth Symphony in the summer of 1888. Some 10 years had elapsed since the first performance of the Fourth Symphony (Op. 36 in F minor) in Moscow. In between, Tchaikovsky had devoted much of his energy to opera, bringing to the stage *Evgeny Onyegin*, *The Maid of Orleans*, *Mazeppa*, *Cherevichki* and *The Sorceress*, besides which he composed the Piano Concerto No. 2 in G, *Italian Caprice*, Serenade for Strings, the Overture *1812*, and the *Manfred* Symphony, among other works. He also overcame his fear of conducting to make a start in that direction at St Petersburg in 1887, when he was aged 47.

After that he was encouraged to undertake his first tour as a conductor, visiting Germany, France and England early the next year, and returning in the spring to a new home at Frolovskoye, between Moscow and Klin. It was a plain *dasha* in wooded surroundings, remote and secluded, and the composer started gardening with much enthusiasm. Looking back on his successes, though, he suffered the recurring fear of all creative artists, and wrote to his brother Modest that he was

'dreadfully anxious to prove both to others and to myself that I have not yet sung myself out'. There being no better way to do this, he set to work on the new symphony.

Less than four months later, he was able to write to Nadezhda von Meck: 'Now that the symphony is about to be finished I may say that, thanks be to God, it is not inferior to the other one' (meaning the Fourth). Some notes were among his papers suggesting that he had a vague programme in mind for what he composed. The Symphony's introduction, for instance, was to reflect 'Complete resignation with regard to Fate', and this comment was followed by a disguised reference to the central emotional problem of his homosexuality, forcibly repressed by the laws and social conventions of his time. As a Soviet writer once put it: 'If Beethoven's Fifth is Fate knocking at the door, Tchaikovsky's Fifth is Fate trying to get out'.

The Fate or Destiny motif this time is very different from the battering assault of its counterpart in the Fourth Symphony. It is the foreboding figure first uttered in the low register of the clarinets at the outset of the introduction, laying immediate claim to an emotional response from the listener. The motif will be heard again in each of the four movements, serving musical as well as expressive purposes, and is possessed of an ingenious rhythmic character which will identify it even when heard without the melody. The mood is one of resignation, later verging on despair, and is intensified in the opening bars by the hesitant accompaniment from the lower strings.

Its basic simplicity of harmony is continued in the main *Allegro con anima* of the first movement, but the sombre instrumental colouring is soon changed and extended to build a brilliant climax. The rhythmic pattern begets a subsidiary theme on woodwind and horns, from which grows a characteristic yearning melody to provide the movement's main second subject. Both elements are then dramatically developed in the course of the movement, reaching another big climax before subsiding again, and when the opening ideas are repeated they continue into a coda that brings back the sombre earlier mood. A long, tender melody played by a solo horn is the warmly expressive opening to the slow movement (the tune has had more than one set of words fitted to it to make popular songs in the years gone by). After a clarinet has added a counter-melody, the music gathers intensity with repetition, and a subsidiary theme from the oboe leads by way of a surging climax to a central section, *Moderato con anima*, with a quirky woodwind figure and sonorous writing for the horns, into which the Destiny motif suddenly and almost balefully intrudes. The movement's opening section returns, with a different scoring, and again develops feverishly, with a further dramatic incursion by the Destiny motif before dying away to a feeling of wistful frustration.

The third movement brings a decorative contrast in a waltz that might have been designed for ballet. Graceful and extremely pretty, its main section is divided between the strings, followed by the wind instruments. A central trio section has a perky semiquaver figure played *spiccato* (with the tip of the bow) by the strings and spreading through the orchestra, giving added embellishment to the main waltz theme when it returns. Suddenly, as if recalling that he was, after all, writing a symphony and not a ballet, Tchaikovsky causes the waltz rhythm to be disturbed by a reminder of the Destiny theme, low on clarinets and bassoons, just before the end.

The motif is transposed from E minor into E major in the lengthy introduction to the finale, thereby striking a somewhat artificial pose. The clipped chords forming the main theme are derived from the introduction, and although there is a return to the minor key Tchaikovsky has given the broadest possible hint that he intends a 'happy ending', whatever Destiny may say. In the course of the movement Destiny says quite a lot, especially after the march-like second subject. The coda treats the motif still more grandiosely in E major, until the first theme of the first movement is eventually brought back and brandished like a talisman, *ffff*, to assert an ultimate triumph, though perhaps with more bravado than conviction.

Symphony No. 6 in B minor Op. 74 "Pathetique"

1. Adagio – Allegro non troppo
2. Allegro con grazia
3. Allegro molto vivace
4. Finale: Adagio lamentoso

The composer's death at St Petersburg a mere nine days after conducting a none-too-successful premiere of his *Symphonie pathétique*, as he titled it, imparted a tragic aura to the work right from the start. It was even said the n that the music reflected a conscious premonition of death on Tchaikovsky's part, and although it was officially put out that he died after drinking impure water during a cholera epidemic prevalent at the time, present evidence inclines to the belief that he did indeed take his own life to avoid being disgraced by a public scandal of homosexual involvement.

Tchaikovsky was then aged 53, the most honoured and celebrated of Russian composers, and with an international reputation. In the summer before he died he paid his third visit to Britain, to conduct a concert for the Philharmonic Society in London, and to receive a Doctor's degree in music from Cambridge University (also conferred at the same time on Boito, Bruch, Saint-Saëns and Grieg, although the last-named was not present), and by this time the Sixth Symphony was already in short score awaiting orchestration.

It was his second attempt at a symphony within 12 months. Sketches from the previous year for a work in E flat found their way instead into the one-movement Piano Concerto No. 3, Op. 75, and a separate Adagio and Finale, Op. 79, for piano and orchestra (they were all reconstructed back into a symphony in the 1950s by Semyon Bogatiryov, and so published and performed in the USSR). Having discarded those ideas, Tchaikovsky seems to have overcome some creative crisis in his mind and fresh thoughts began to flow.

To his nephew, Vladimir Davidov, he wrote that he had 'the idea of writing a programme symphony, but to a programme that should remain an enigma for everyone but myself: let them try to guess it! I intend to call it simply "Programme Symphony". It is full of subjective feeling, so much so that as I was mentally composing it during the journey (home from Odessa) I frequently shed tears. As soon as I arrived I set to work with such ardour that in four days the first movement was done and the rest clearly thought out in my head ...'

In the same letter he added that he intended several innovations of form, and mentioned that 'the finale, for instance, is to be not a noisy allegro but a long adagio'. He expressed his delight that his creative force was not as spent as he feared. From the time of his Fourth Symphony (1877), which marked his recovery from the serious mental breakdown that followed his disastrous marriage, Tchaikovsky's music became more deeply subjective in emotional character – a form of self-revelation, offering not only his heart on his sleeve but his soul in his hand.

The great Russian literature of his time made much of themes involving psychological analysis before this was codified into theory and practice by the Viennese specialists. Especially is this true of Dostoyevsky, whom Tchaikovsky in his youth thought talked 'very foolishly' on musical matters, but whose work he later came to admire. His own later music, particularly in symphonic form, could be said to resemble a Dostoyevsky character in its desire to strip the emotional soul naked, and not least the Symphony that was to end his life's work.

He finished the full score by the end of August 1893, when he wrote again to Davidov: 'I consider this Symphony the best thing I have ever done. In any case, it is the most deeply felt'. In October it was played through by students of the orchestral class at the Moscow Conservatory (where Tchaikovsky once taught). He then took it to St Petersburg for rehearsals, and was unhappy that the

orchestral players did not seem impressed by it. Their coolness may have inhibited his conducting of the premiere on 28 October. A few days later he was taken ill, and he died on 6 November.

On the day after the premiere Tchaikovsky asked his brother, Modest, if he could think of a more suitable title than 'Programme Symphony'. Modest first suggested 'Tragic', but this was turned down. His next suggestion was the present one, which Tchaikovsky accepted; he later changed his mind, but it appeared on the first published score. It should be realised, however, that 'pathetic' in present-day English has a different connotation from what was then intended, the Russian *pateticheskoy* (and its French equivalent) being closer to the Greek *pathos* in its original sense of 'suffering'.

A slow introduction is begun by a dark, lugubrious theme emerging from the depths of the orchestral strings on the bassoon, climbing slowly and painfully, and only gradually moving into the home key of B minor. At the change of tempo to Allegro, the subject is at once taken up agitatedly by the strings and extended to become the first theme of a sonata structure. The contrast is provided by the yearning, romantic melody introduced by the cellos, with a counter-melody from flute and bassoon to enrich it.

The development of these ideas begins explosively and continues in violent dynamic contrasts of loud and soft: Tchaikovsky extends the usual range of dynamic markings in the score from *ffff* in several places to *pppppp* for the bassoon at the end of the lyrical second theme. Restless, syncopated rhythms persist, and the yearning theme becomes dominant before being given a solemn burial.

Two intermezzo-type movements now follow, the first a 'limping waltz' which acquires a slightly feverish and macabre quality from being written in 5/4 time instead of 3/4, an irregular and unusual metre already anticipated by Tchaikovsky in his 'Sapphire' solo for the Jewel Fairies in the last Act of *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890). In the darker central section a bitter-sweet melody is accompanied by relentlessly repeated notes on basses, bassoons and timpani.

Much of the accumulated doubt and gloom is dispelled at this point by the third movement, a sequence of brilliant march-like variations developed from a few phrases and contrasts of tone-colour. It seems to promise a triumphant outcome, but the mood is dramatically dispelled by the grief-laden lamentations that begin the finale. Now the composer seems to echo Masha in Chekov's *The Seagull*: 'I am in mourning for my life'.

The first despairing phrases are answered by a more consoling theme in the major key, marked to be played 'with gentleness and devotion', but it cannot prevent the earlier grief from returning in still more anguished intensity. Even the consoling theme is overcome by this, so that its recall is changed into a woeful minor key. The music grows weaker, sinks lower and finally loses itself in soft, solemn chords of trombones and tuba, ending what Tchaikovsky had virtually composed as his own epitaph.

Manfred Symphony in Four Scenes Op.58

1. Lento lugubre – Moderato con moto
2. Vivace con spirito
3. Andante con moto
4. Allegro con fuoco

Romantic music in the 19th century often found its stimulus in the other arts, poetry and Iiterature drama and painting. *Manfred* is a long dramatic poem by Lord Byron (1788-1824), first published in 1817, which had a fertile influence on the Romantic movement as a whole throughout Europe. It drew major musical works from Schumann (Overture and incidental music) and Tchaikovsky whose Symphony, he said, cost him 'a whole year of [my] life'. Counting from his first reading of the poem

In the autumn of 1884, the sketches were begun in the following April and the full score finished in October, eight years after the Fourth Symphony and three years before the Filth.

The idea for *Manfred* went back much earlier, to Berlioz's last visit to Russia in 1867 when he conducted performances of his *Symphonie fantastique* and *Harold in Italy* (also linked to Byron) among other works. These 'programme symphonies' caused lively discussion, and the composer Mily Balakirev passed on to Berlioz a suggestion for a 'Manfred Symphony' outlined by the critic Vladimir Stasov, but the Frenchman turned it down. Nothing daunted, Balakirev later tried it on Tchaikovsky in the wake of the latter's *Romeo and Juliet*, complete with descriptive programme and key-scheme but at first Tchaikovsky said it left him 'absolutely cold'.

Two years went by until Balakirev, who seems to have spent more time pressing ideas on other people than in composing his own, tackled Tchaikovsky again, who reluctantly promised to do something about it. He read Byron's poem on a visit to Switzerland, and then found his imagination stirring. Ignoring or changing many of Balakirev's suggestions (which were curiously fixated on keys containing two sharps or five flats), Tchaikovsky went ahead. At the end, he said it left him more exhausted than any work since his First Symphony.

As always, he was in two minds about the worth of what he had done, even alter the first performance at Moscow on 23 March 1886 conducted by Max Erdmannsdörfer. To his patroness Nadezhda von Meck he wrote: 'It seems to me the best of my symphonic compositions', but he also considered dropping the last three movements and converting it into a symphonic poem. We may be glad he let it stand in all its grandeur of expressive character, to which the short prefaces to each movement quoted below afford the literary key:

1. Manfred wanders in the Alps, tormented by doubt and racked by remorse and despair at the memory of the beautiful Astarte, whom he has loved and lost.
Tchaikovsky mentioned that his first movement is not meant to depict a specific scene, but to reflect Manfred's state of mind. A 'Manfred theme', the idée fixe, is played at the outset by bassoons and bass clarinet, with detached chords on lower strings perhaps suggesting the hammer-like blows of relentless fate. His despair is also felt in a further theme involving a falling seventh followed by a rising phrase. The music inclines to A minor, but does not settle in a definite key until the end of the movement. At a climax the Manfred theme is proclaimed with the trumpets directed to play pavillon en l'air (the bells of their instruments lifted high) to heighten the tonal brilliance. A change of tempo to Moderato con moto brings a more tender version of part of the Manfred theme, and soon after this the memory of Astarte is recalled by muted strings with an Andante melody in 3/4 time. It grows more eloquent and impassioned but, after a sudden pause, the Manfred theme lapses into renewed despair as the music sinks to a doleful B minor with a feeling of irrevocable grief.

2. The Fairy of the Alps appears to Manfred beneath the rainbow of a waterfall.
Woodwind and strings dominate a sparkling musical scene in the form of a scherzo and trio. The Fairy's song is perhaps expressed in the graceful melody for strings with harp in the D major trio section. Manfred's theme from the first movement makes his presence explicit, as he contemplates Byron's scene:

It is not noon; the sunbow's rays still arch
The torrent with the many hues of Heaven,
And roll the sheeted silver's waving column
O'er the crag's headlong perpendicular
And fling its lines of foaming light along.
No eyes but mine now drink this sight of loveliness

3. *Pastorale. The simple, free and peaceful life of the mountain folk.*
A gentle oboe melody introduces a G major movement modelled, as Balakirev suggested, on the 'Scène aux champs' in the *Symphonie fantastique*. The pastoral serenity is periodically disturbed by the *idée fixe* as Manfred apostrophises the scene in the dawn light: 'My mother Earth! Thou fresh-breaking day – and you, ye Mountains! Why are ye beautiful?' His self-questioning occasions a powerful musical climax before a distant bell heralds the return of the opening mood.

4. *The infernal palace of Arimanes, where Manfred appears in the midst of a bacchanal. Evocation of the shade of Astarte, who predicts the end of his earthly sufferings. Death of Manfred.*
A march-like tune brings Manfred to the abode of Evil. The furious bacchanal is Tchaikovsky's invention, not in Byron, and the Manfred theme recurs in the midst of it, together with other motifs from the first movement. They include the Astarte music, after her shade appears to the sound of muted divided strings and harp glissandi. Manfred makes a last impassioned plea, and B minor gives way to C major, despair to exultation, as he welcomes the end of his suffering. The organ underscores his death with triumphant affirmation, the tranquil closing bars quoting the liturgical plainchant of Dies irae. In Byron, Manfred defies the fiends and claims the right to be his own destroyer, dying unpardoned. Tchaikovsky makes one last change of mood and key to B major, suggesting that his hero was redeemed in the end.

Noël Goodwin

Capriccio Italien Op. 45

During the same visit to Rome early in 1880 when he undertook some of the revision on his Second Symphony, Tchaikovsky began one of his most exuberant works, the *Capriccio Italien*. In a letter from Rome he wrote to a friend: 'I have sketched the rough draft of an *Italian Capriccio* based on popular melodies. It will be effective because of the wonderful melodies I happened to pick up, partly from published collections and partly out in the streets with my own ears'. On his return to Russia later that year he scored it for a large orchestra, and it won him another success when it was first performed at Moscow on 18 December 1880.

His handling of the orchestra is daring and immensely effective for its time, the work modelled (as he acknowledged) on Glinka's 'Spanish' pieces like the *Capriccio brillante* (1845), and displaying unashamed pride in the blaze and blend of instrumental colour. The initial fanfare is based on a cavalry bugle-call the composer heard each night during his stay at a Roman hotel close to the Corazziere's barracks at Caracalla. As it subsides, the strings insinuate a swaying, nostalgic melody like a Venetian gondolier's song, and this is continued at some length before the bugle theme loudly breaks in again.

With a change of key the oboes introduce another typical song-tune, more lighthearted than the first, with a diverting echo effect decorating the end of each phrase. On its first repeat it is boldly given to two cornets and echoed by the glockenspiel. Its continuing and elaborate treatment is followed successively by another popular tune, a dashing march, and a return of the gondolier's song. The finale is a *saltarello*, a fast Roman dance in 6/8 time, through which the song-melody bursts forth to a broad and exciting climax.

Noël Goodwin

Suites for Orchestra

Tchaikovsky's musical cosmos is too rich and varied to be described in a single word. It encompasses the filigree miniature of the Nutcracker Overture and the casual, playful virtuosity of the "Rococo Variations" just as much as the romantic emphasis of the "Romeo and Juliet" Fantasy Overture and the camouflaged selfrevealing programmatic descriptions of the composer's three great symphonies (Nos. 4–6). To classify Tchaikovsky's formally more conventional works, more strongly rooted in tradition, as marginal, "off-hand" compositions would most certainly be a mistake. Any study of the Russian composer's biography reveals that classicism accounts for a large, important part of his aesthetics. This is in accord with Tchaikovsky's disinterest in future-oriented ideologies such as that of the "New German School", a group of composers who, in the words of their spokesman Franz Liszt, set out to pour "new wines into new skins". The Russian's predilection for finding recourse in "old skins" was a direct outgrowth of his work ethics. As Tchaikovsky stated in 1878 in a letter to his correspondent Nadezhda von Meck, he considered it the artist's self-evident duty to prove himself worthy of his talent through untiring work. Any creative artist with this attitude, however, must have the recourse of choosing from an existing vocabulary and tested forms.

In 1877 Peter Tchaikovsky composed his fourth symphony, in F minor, a work surpassing all of his earlier compositions in grandeur and artistic content. For some time afterward the thirty-seven-year-old composer seemed unable to achieve greater accomplishments. Although in letters of the early 1880's Tchaikovsky wrote of his plans to compose a new symphony, his initial musical ideas were not strong enough to stand the test of his relentless self-criticism. It was not until 1888 that the composer achieved a true breakthrough with his Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, written within the space of three months (the "Manfred" Symphony is to be seen more in the context of his other orchestral works).

Nonetheless, in the decade spanning the fourth and fifth symphonies, Tchaikovsky wrote a respectable number of orchestral compositions. Apart from the "Manfred" Symphony, these include his violin concerto, his second piano concerto and the Concerto Fantasy opus 56, the "Capriccio italien" and the Serenade for Strings, the "1812 Overture", various smaller pieces and a series of four orchestral suites – the fourth of which was not composed by Tchaikovsky himself but consists instead of his orchestration of pieces by Mozart which were little known at that time.

Suite for Orchestra No.1 in D minor, Op. 43

1. Introduzione e Fuga
2. Divertimento
3. Intermezzo
4. Marche miniature
5. Scherzo
6. Gavotte

The Orchestral Suite No. 1 was written between the late summer of 1878 and early 1879. Apart from the violin concerto, it was the first orchestral work Tchaikovky tried his hand at since composing his fourth symphony. As if desiring to make a clean break from the personally revealing F minor opus, Tchaikovsky began the suite with a movement in an archaic style, an "Introduction and Fugue" whose form and musical themes continue the tradition of the baroque while tapping the resources of the contemporary style. The following movements leading to the concluding "Gavotte" also borrow from the musical past.

After finishing the score at the end of April, 1879 and submitting the manuscript to Jürgenson, his publisher, Tchaikovsky was suddenly appalled to discover a "careless oversight": every movement in the suite had an even-numbered time signature. In order to correct this error, which he called

”impossible” (meaning that the suite was too uniform), he immediately composed a Divertissement in the style of a waltz and pleaded with Jürgenson to exchange it for the Marche miniature, which he had ”very serious doubts” about anyway. Later, however, Tchaikovsky agreed to leave the march in the suite, and it was this six-movement version which premièred on November 23, 1879 under the baton of Nicolai Rubinstein.

This première acquired a bitter aftertaste for Tchaikovsky when he learned that Rubinstein had judged the new work far too difficult, ”nearly impossible to perform”. The composer reacted extremely irritably: he was aware, he said, that is instrumentation nearly always presented a challenge for orchestral musicians. But he was not demanding too much. He had, after all, taught instrumentation long enough himself. If Rubinstein wanted to chastise him like a pupil, this could mean that he either knew nothing about the orchestra or that Nicolai Grigorievich had been ”in a bad mood once again”. From a modem perspective, Tchaikovsky’s bittemess seems only too justified. His first orchestral suite is just as attractive now as it ever was, a credit above all to his intentional, original and highly diversified use of orchestral colors.

Suite for Orchestra No. 2 in C major, Op. 53 ”Suite caracteristique”

1. Jeu de sons
2. Valse
3. Scherzo burlesque
4. Rêves d’enfant
5. Danse baroque

Tchaikovsky began work on his second orchestral suite in the autumn of 1883, and this time there were no afterthoughts about the composition or disagreements over the première. ”I am very satisfied with my suite”, Tchaikovsky wrote in a letter to his brother Modest on October 15 of that year. ”You will most certainly be pleased with it, and in particular with the ’Children’s Drearns’”. Eight days later, he reported to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck: ”My suite has five movements, named 1) Game of Sounds, 2) Waltz, 3) Scherzo burlesque, 4) Children’s Dreams, 5) Danse baroque. I have finished the orchestration and am now working on the arrangement for piano four hands ... I am altogether quite satisfied with this work. And incidentally, it’s the same old story again: I love this new opus as long as it remains in my hands and nobody else is acquainted with it; as soon as it becomes public property, however, my love cools off”.

The five movements of this suite surpass Opus 43 in two ways. Firstly, they are all on a grander scale of composition, with the first movement in particular taking on nearly symphonic dimensions. Secondly, Tchaikovsky’s instrumentation and orchestral forces are even more elaborate than in the first suite. In order to include unconventional orchestral sounds, for example, he daringly specified the use of four accordions in the Scherzo movement!

The C major suite was first performed on February 16, 1884 in Moscow. Max Erdmannsdörfer was at the conductor’s rostrum; in gratitude. Tchaikovsky dedicated his third suite, composed shortly afterward, to him.

Suite for Orchestra No. 3 in G major, Op. 55

1. Elégi: Andante molto cantabile
2. Valse mélancolique: Allegro moderato
3. Scherzo: Molto vivace
4. Tema con variazioni: Andante con moto

Tchaikovsky's four suites were composed between 1878 and 1888, the period spanning the writing of his fourth and fifth symphonies. This was a time when his dedication to tradition was expressed with particular eloquence. He wrote his third orchestral suite in 1884. ”Strolled through the garden and generated the seed for a future suite (not a symphony)”, the composer, not quite forty-four years old, wrote in his journal under the date April 16. At the end of June he wrote to Tanayev, his former pupil: ”At present I am writing a (third) suite. I actually wanted to create a symphony but didn't succeed. But what's in a name? At any rate, I am composing a larger symphonic work in four movements ... It will probably be finished around the end of the summer, for I am working very regularly and with enthusiasm.” The work was finished by the intended deadline and was first heard on January 12, 1885 in St. Petersburg under the direction of Hans von Bülow The sixty-five-year-old guest conductor from Germany had now ”discovered” Tchaikovsky (having earlier done the same with Wagner and Brahms). Von Bülow promoted the new suite with boundless enthusiasm and elicited ”miracles” from the orchestra, to quote Tchaikovsky's brother Modest. The première was an event registered across Europe. ”Never before have I experienced a triumph of this order”, the composer wrote.

The suite's initial success did not decline in the years to come. It was geeted with far greater enthusiasm than, for example, Tchaikovsky's fourth symphony – most likely a credit to the accessible character of its four movements. Each had a form which was fully familiar to the ears of that time, and each had its own characteristic ”coloring”. The Andantino for instance, in the character of a pastorale, is notable for its carefully crafted compositional treatment, despite the unchanging elegiac tone. The second movement, with the heading ”Valse Mélancholique”, is a sort of negation of the most popular social dance of the time, with the pointed waltz rhythm mitigated by accents on the unstressed beats of the measure. The main theme, relegated to the violas and the lower registers of three flutes, acquires an unaccustomed ”overcast” timbre. The Scherzo, written in the style of a tarantella, boasts a brilliant interplay of strings and woodwinds, followed in the middle section by fragments of a faroff military march. In the Finale a simple theme is subjected to twelve variations, exploiting every rule of the composer's craft. The movement begins with figural, ornamental variations of the theme (variations 1–3), leads to a variation in the minor key, a fugato and various character pieces – such as a ”song scene” of the solo violin in variation 10 – and culminates finally in a festive, pompous polonaise.

Suite for Orchestra No. 4 in G major, Op. 61 ”Mozartiana”

1. Gigue: Allegro (Gigue K. 574)
2. Menuet: Moderato (Minuet K. 355)
3. Preghiera: Andante non tanto (Ave verum corpus K. 618)
4. Thème et variations: Allegro giusto (Unser dummer Pöbel meint, K. 455)

”…played Mozart, and with great satisfaction. Had the idea of compiling a suite with music of Mozart”, Tchaikovsky noted in May 1884 while at work on his third suite. But three years were to pass before he began work on the project during a trip to the Caucasus. At the end of June, 1887 Tchaikovsky, then staying in the German city of Aachen, sent the score to Jürgenson, his publisher-friend in Moscow. It was an orchestration, extensively note for note, of Mozart's Gigue (K. 574), Minuet (K. 355), ”Ave Verum” (K. 618, reworked by Franz Liszt) and Variations on the song ”Unser dummer Pöbel meint” (K. 455), originally taken from a Singspiel by Gluck. Tchaikovsky stated that his intention in making these adaptations was to draw the public's attention to some of ”Mozart's most admirable little compositions (even if they were hardly known in their day)”. The ”Mozartiana” Suite, first performed in Moscow on November 19, 1887 with the composer himself conducting, is the most significant document of Tchaikovsky's lifelong veneration of Mozart, whose work, he felt, was ”the highest, most perfect culmination ever attained by beauty in the realm of music”.

Ingo Harden

Popular orchestral works

Few composers have been so adept as Tchaikovsky in maintaining a populist style alongside his 'serious' work. The raw material may have been the same for both, but his ability to tap veins of popular sentiment in his *pièces d'occasion* was unerring. Often he relied upon the use of folk material to provide the memorability and nostalgic appeal required of him in a celebratory score; he also used such themes in his symphonies, but there they became only the melodic fuel for his compositional skills, not musical objects of importance in their own right.

With the exception of the ballet suite, the works recorded here all make extensive use of folk tunes; one wonders whether by calling upon such themes Tchaikovsky was also able to distance himself a little from the kind of unalloyed jollity that such music demanded – often at times when his personal affairs were anything but jolly.

Marche slave, Op. 31

In the *Marche slave*, for instance, the three main themes derive from Serbian culture. In 1876 the composer was asked to provide a new piece for a concert that was to raise funds for Russian volunteers who had gone to fight with their fellow Slavs in Serbia and Montenegro against the Turks. In composing a tripartite Slavonic March he threw in the Russian national anthem for good measure, generating a suitably rousing apotheosis. It was an enormous popular success.

Capriccio italien, Op. 45

No such public occasion produced the *Capriccio italien*, but it seems deliberately intended to court popularity. Tchaikovsky spent the winter of 1879–80 in Rome, and there, in an unaccustomed burst of exuberance, he wrote the *Capriccio italien*, using folk tunes he noted down in the streets and found in collections, and getting the celebrations under way with a trumpet call he heard every evening from the cavalry barracks next door to his hotel. He orchestrated the score on his return to St Petersburg.

1812 Overture, Op. 49

Then he set to work on two more commissions, one of them a piece to celebrate the opening of the Moscow Exhibition.

This resulted in the *1812 Overture*; 'very noisy' and 'with no artistic merit', he described it, and perhaps its structure and invention are not of the most sophisticated kind. Nevertheless it demonstrated again Tchaikovsky's ability to give his public what it wanted to hear: no event in recent Russian history had generated more patriotic pride than Napoleon's ignominious retreat from Moscow in 1812, and the way in which it is portrayed in the Overture was calculated to set pulses racing. Nowadays everyone remembers the cannons, but the use of folk songs and the Russian national anthem to create a grandiose apotheosis must have been the most important elements contributing to its initial success.

The Nutcracker Suite, Op.71a

1. Miniature Overture
2. Characteristic Dances
a) March
b) Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy
c) Trepak
d) Arab Dance
e) Chinese Dance

f) Dance of the Reed Pipes
3. Waltz of the Flowers

By contrast, the ballet score which Tchaikovsky wrote towards the end of his life on a scenario from E.T.A. Hoffmann's fairy tale *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* was not at first well received. Vet the first performance of the complete ballet in December 1892 had been preceded nearly a year earlier by *The Nutcracker* Suite; perhaps public delight with the Suite had led to expectations of the complete ballet that were pitched too high. Certainly in creaming off the most colourful numbers from the score for the Suite Tchaikovsky was conscious of the unevenness of his last ballet. *The Nutcracker* Suite has remained more popular than the larger work that spawned it.

Andrew Clements

Ballets

Swan Lake, op. 20

More than a century after the first production of *Swan Lake* at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre on 4 March 1877, it has long been the most universally popular of classical ballets and the music most closely identified with Tchaikovsky. It was the first of his three celebrated scores for ballet (*The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* did not follow until over a decade later), and was commissioned by the director of the Moscow Imperial Theatres, Vladimir Petrovich Begichev. He was on friendly terms with Tchaikovsky, and seems to have played a large part in mapping out the ballet's scenario.

Tchaikovsky at this time was thirty-five years old, a melancholy, introspective man on the verge of his brief, disastrous marriage and finding teaching at the Conservatory increasingly irksome. He had composed his first three symphonies and the B flat minor Piano Concerto, as well as four operas including *Undine* and *The Voyevode*, from both of which he borrowed musical ideas to use in *Swan Lake*. He told Rimsky-Korsakov he undertook the ballet partly because he needed the money and also because 'I have long wanted to try my hand at this kind of music'.

That was unusual at a time when music for ballets was customarily supplied by staff composers at the theatres, who readily tailored it to the needs of the ballet-master in choreographing the dances. Other composers found this not to their liking but, without actually setting out to 'reform' ballet music, Tchaikovsky seems to have gone about his task as primarily a musical conception. He was guided only by the dance-forms he had already used in his symphonies and operas, but he treated the balletic narrative as a dance-drama worthy of a stronger and more imaginative musical element.

Nobody was credited with the story in the original programme, but it may have had some association with a children's entertainment devised some years previously among the family and friends of Tchaikovsky's sister, Alexandra Davidova, for which he wrote some music. The subject was, of course, of much wider provenance from collections of folk-tales familiar in Germany, Scandinavia and even India, and its treatment was very much of the Romantic epoch in showing man's quest for an ideal in terms of a love that is unattainable, poetically similar to earlier ballet classics like *La Sylphide* (1832) and *Giselle* (1841).

To unfold the tale in dance, Tchaikovsky composed what is, in effect, a four-part tone-poem, divided into the short Pas de deux, ensembles, character-dances and mime scenes necessary to dancing, but symphonically unified by a carefully planned key-structure and identifiable melodic shapes. The music opens in B minor and ends in B major, and around these circulate mainly flat keys for the forces of evil and bewitchment, sharper keys for the character-dances and wider-ranging divertissements.

Some instrumental associations are also apparent, as in the oboe linked throughout with the bewitched Odette, while her sinister double, Odile, has the slithery clarinet to personify her. The falling oboe phrase in the minor that begins the Prelude is a signal of tragedy for Tchaikovsky not just here, but in other works such as *Eugene Onegin* and the 'Pathétique' Symphony; it recurs in the ballet in varied form both to lead the Prince from reality into fantasy at the end of Act One, and again to precipitate the climax of Act Four. The 'national' dances in Act Three are worth close musical attention for their wit and invention, and even the six would-be brides are musically differentiated in the Pas de six (No. 19) that should present them individually to the Prince (though it is seldom seen this way on the stage).

Such richness of musical content disconcerted artists and audiences alike at the first performances, which seem to have been poorly played and conducted. Tchaikovsky made himself amenable to some changes, writing the extra 'Russian Dance' for Act Three (here between Nos. 20 and 21), and composing a new Pas de deux in this Act (between Nos. 19 and 20) to steps already set (by Marius Petipa) for a more senior ballerina at the ballet's fourth performance. This had used music conveniently written by Léon Minkus, but Tchaikovsky was rightly not prepared to tolerate this being interpolated into his score (both the extra numbers are published as appendices to the full score in the Collected Edition).

In spite of indifferent choreography by two ballet-masters (Wenzel Reisinger first in 1877; Joseph Hansen in 1880 and again in 1882), *Swan Lake* achieved forty-one performances up to 1883, although Nikolai Kashkin, who wrote the piano score, noted: 'Not only the decor became ragged, but the music suffered more and more until nearly one-third was exchanged with music from other ballets – and not necessarily good ones'. Thereafter it was not performed again before Tchaikovsky died, although evidence suggests that revivals were planned after the success of his later ballets.

After his death a new staging of Act Two only was given at St Petersburg as a memorial tribute in 1894, and the complete ballet there the following year in what became the crucial historical version with choreography by Petipa (Acts One and Three) and Lev Ivanov (the Lakeside scenes). Modest Tchaikovsky, the composer's brother, helped to modify the storyline for this and sanctioned some musical changes, of which the most important involved the transfer from Act One to Act Three of No. 5, the music now known as the 'Black Swan' Pas de deux. Some other music was cut, and three Tchaikovsky piano pieces orchestrated by the conductor Riccardo Drigo were added.

This 1895 version was recorded in Stepanov notation and brought with other ballets to Britain by Nicholas Sergeyev, the St Petersburg *régisseur*, to become the basis for later Western productions beginning at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London, in 1934 (led by Alicia Markova and Robert Helpmann, with Margot Fonteyn among the corps de ballet). Productions within Russia descended from the same source by way of other choreographer/directors, and since Vladimir Bourmeister at Moscow in 1953 there have been occasional versions restoring the music as originally composed, still the most rewarding way to hear it in recorded performance.

Noël Goodwin

A synopsis

Introduction

The first audiences for *Swan Lake* would have had a surprise even as they settled themselves into their seats, for instead of the conventional overture to cover conversation and the arrival of late-comers, Tchaikovsky wrote a short outline of the emotional content of the drama. The opening melody is the first Swan theme, and presently there sounds beneath it one of the descending 'Fate' scales that mark

the whole invention. The movement, brief as it is, serves to call attention both to the serious nature of the drama and to some of the musical techniques that will be called upon to express it.

Act I

No. 1: Scene

Scène (Allegro giusto)

In a magnificent park, with a castle visible in the background, Prince Siegfried and his friends are seated drinking. A crowd of peasants comes to congratulate the Prince on his birthday, and they entertain him with their dances. These are light in nature, and set within a more ambitious musical structure.

No. 2: Waltz

Valse (Tempo di valse)

By setting this, one of the most famous waltzes in history, in the 'action' key of A, Tchaikovsky confirms its role as organic, connected to the birthday celebrations and the Prince's need to choose a wife.

No. 3: Scene

Scène (Allegro moderato)

Prince Siegfried's mother arrives to enjoin marriage upon him; he is aware, despite the consolations of Benno, that this means an end to his carefree life. The Princess's fanfares interrupt the young people's A major merry-making, turning their light triplets into something more serious; this is abandoned for a shortened version of the opening music when she has left.

No. 4: Pas de trois

I Intrada (Allegro)
II Andante sostenuto
III Allegro semplice – Presto
IV Moderato
V Allegro
VI Coda (Allegro vivace)

The first of two divertissements for the peasants, in six sections, this lies in B flat and 'outside' the plot. The numbers are: Intrada; Andante sostenuto; Allegro semplice (a lively polka); Moderato; Allegro; and a more substantial Coda (Allegro vivace).

No. 5: Pas de deux

I Tempo di valse ma non troppo vivo, quasi moderato
II Andante – Allegro – Molto più mosso
III Tempo di valse
IV Coda (Allegro molto vivace)

The second divertissement, for two of the merry-makers, consists of two waltzes separated by a contrasting movement. The numbers are: Tempo di valse; Andante – AIIegro, a slow violin solo leading into a fast dance; Tempo di valse; Coda.

No. 6: Pas d'action

Pas d'action (Andantino quasi moderato – Allegro)

The tutor Wolfgang, drunk, lurches into an awkward dance. His dignified theme gradually falls into disarray, and then collapses; the others take his theme up in a new form for a general dance.

No. 7: Sujet

It is growing dark. One of the guests proposes that the last dance shall be with their goblets in their hands.

No. 8: Dance with goblets

Danse des coupes (Dance with goblets) (Tempo di polacca)

A brilliant polonaise, anchored to E major though with suggestions of menace in the chromatic inflections and in the pulls to flat keys.

No. 9: Finale

Finale (Andante)

A flight of swans appears. Benno suggests a hunt; they agree to abandon the now incapable Wolfgang. A new 'Swan-maiden' melody appears (possibly retained from the original children's ballet), and this main theme is developed into a powerful B major climax, ending Act I on an ominous note.

Act II

No. 10: Scene

No. 10 Scène (Moderato)

Siegfried and his friends watch the swans as they cross a moonlit lake. Originally designed as an entr'acte, this later became a so-called scenic tableau.

No. 11: Scene

Scène (Allegro moderato – Moderato – Allegro vivo)

As the hunters take aim, the swans become beautiful girls; their leader is Princess Odette, bewitched by her evil stepmother and Rothbart. Only a marriage vow contracted in the face of death can break the spell. Rothbart appears, and menaces Siegfried. This is the most elaborately narrative section of the score so far, deriving its form from the detail of the action.

No. 12: Scene

Scène (Allegro – Moderato assai quasi andante)

Siegfried throws away his weapon, and begs Odette to attend the ball on the morrow at which he must choose his bride. A second scene of narrative and action.

No. 13: Dances of the swans

Danses des cygnes (Dances of the swans)
I Tempo di valse
II Moderato assai – Molto più mosso
III Tempo di valse
IV Allegro moderato
V Pas d'action (Andante – Andante non troppo – Tempo I – Allegro)
VI Tempo di valse
VII Coda (Allegro vivo)

Though having the function of a divertissement in an act of narrative, this is an essential part of the plot and the lyrical centre of the act as Siegfried and Odette declare their love. It is therefore quite closely organized, as a Rondo with an A major waltz as the theme (one of the episodes is the dance now usually known, since Petipa, as the Dance of the Young Swans; Tchaikovsky reserved that title for his No. 27) There follows a substantial *pas d'action* (originally part of the love duet from the discarded opera *Undine*). This satisfies the need for a Grand Adagio in the convention of

contemporary Russian ballet; but its musical substance gives it a greater expressive weight than was then normal. There is a reprise of the Waltz, and a Coda that takes the form of a general dance.

Act III

No. 15: Allegro giusto

In the ballroom of the castle, the guests are admitted, followed by the Princess, Siegfried and their retinue.

No. 16: Dances of the corps de ballet and the dwarfs

Danses du corps de ballet et des nains (Dances of the corps de ballet and the dwarfs) (Moderato assai – Allegro vivo)

The Master of Ceremonies orders the revels to commence. In contrast to the principal dance, with full orchestra, the dwarfs' dance is scored, with neat oddity, for woodwind and horns answered by pizzicato.

No. 17: Scene: Arrival of the guests and waltz

Scène. Sortie des invités et valse (Arrival of the guests and waltz) (Allegro – Tempo di valse)

The guests include six eligible Princesses. There is a double introduction to the waltz, before it finally gets under way.

No. 18: Scene

Scène (Allegro – Allegro giusto)

Siegfried refuses to choose a bride; but when Rothbart enters with Odile in the guise of Odette, he welcomes her. The waltz music is modified into 4/4 and Odile's arrival is to an open statement of the Fate theme, with the harsh scoring of the swan theme suggesting her outward resemblance to Odette.

No. 19: Pas de six

I Intrada
II Moderato assai
III Variation 1 (Allegro)
IV Variation 2 (Andante con moto)
V Variation 3 (Moderato)
VI Variation 4 (Allegro)
VII Variation 5 (Moderato – Allegro simplice)
VIII Coda (Allegro molto vivace)

Numero supplémentaire: Pas de deux
I Introduction
II Moderato – Andante
III Variation 1 (Allegro moderato)
IV Variation 2 (Allegro)
V Coda (Allegro molto vivace)

Variations for the visiting Princesses; an Intrada, five variations and a coda, skilfully designed by Tchaikovsky so that the occasion for a divertissement is also brought structurally into the drama as each Princess is brought forward as a candidate for Siegfried's choice. Tchaikovsky added here a Pas de deux for Siegfried and Odile in the form of an Introduction, two variations, and coda; however, only the second variation was orchestrated by him. There then follows a set of national dances, which Tchaikovsky is careful to set outside the key 'plot' by casting them in a sequence of sharp keys:

No.20: Hungarian dance

Danse hongroise. Czardas (Hungarian dance) (Moderato assai – Allegro moderato – Vivace)

A dance cast in the csárdás pattern of *lassu-friss*, slow followed by vigorous, fast, stamping rhythms.

No. 20a: Russian dance

Numero supplémentaire: Danse russe (Russian dance) (Moderato – Andante simplice – Allegro vivo – Presto)

At this point, Tchaikovsky was forced to add a Russian Dance for Pelagaya Karpakova. Its repetition of the slow-fast pattern is rather too close to the Hungarian Dance for the dance sequence, but Tchaikovsky liked it enough to arrange it as No. 10 of his op. 40 piano pieces.

No. 21: Spanish dance

Danse espagnole (Spanish dance) (Allegro non troppo. Tempo di bolero)

A bolero, opening with clicking castanets and vehement dotted rhythms, and including a warmer central tune.

No. 22: Neapolitan dance

Danse napolitaine (Neapolitan dance) (Allegro moderato – Andantino quasi moderato – Presto)

A cornet Andantino followed by a Tarantella.

No. 23: Mazurka

Mazurka (Tempo di mazurka)

For full orchestra with a central section on oboes and clarinets, danced by soloists and corps de ballet.

No. 24: Scene

Scène (Allegro – valse – Allegro vivo)

The Princess is pleased that Siegfried accepts Odile. He announces their betrothal. But the hall darkens; Rothbart turns into an owl and flees screeching; and as he glimpses the true Odette through the castle archway as a white swan, Siegfried rushes out into the night. The need to compress much action into a short space turned Tchaikovsky towards motivic methods, with themes taken from the waltz (No. 17) and from the main swan music; and by bringing the act to a very abrupt, harsh end, he is enabled to emphasise the irony between the easy pleasure of the dances and the sudden horror that has interrupted them.

Act IV

No. 25: Entr'acte

Entr'acte (Moderato)

The music is taken over from Tchaikovsky's early opera *The Voyevoda*, the introduction to Act III (in turn based on a duet from Act II).

No. 26: Scene

Scène (Allegro non troppo)

Odette's friends await her return by the lake. The music of the Entr'acte is developed in new forms, its fragmentation suggesting the confusion among Odette's friends.

No. 27: Dances of the young swans

Danses des petits cygnes (Dances of the young swans) (Moderato)

A melancholy, concentrated dance, deriving from the *Voyevoda* theme and taking another theme from Act I of the opera.

No. 28: Scene
Scène (Allegro agitato – Molto meno mosso – Allegro vivace)

Odette, heartbroken at Siegfried's apparent desertion, rushes into the arms of her friends; Siegfried pursues her through a rising storm. This is the emotional climax of the four numbers of the Act. The music is, from the rise of the curtain, the most concentrated and symphonic of the ballet; but rather than depending upon thematic development, Tchaikovsky draws on the classic Russian method, first put into general currency by Glinka, of developing by means of modified repetition. Thus the themes introduced at the start of the Act recur to bind the action together, with even the Dance of the Young Swans taking its place as a reflection of the tragedy, as they circle obsessively around the theme, trapped in their distress and incomprehension.

No. 29: Final scene
Scène finale (Andante – Allegro agitato – Alla breve. Moderato e maestoso – Moderato)

The Prince begs Odetta's forgiveness, but she dies of grief in his arms. The waters rise and engulf the lovers; and as the surface calms, the swans are seen gliding across the lake. More music from *The Voyevoda* introduces the scene. The swan theme achieves a triumphant B major climax over Fate; but it is perhaps the enigmatic open B, neither major nor minor, which provides the true ending to the tragedy.

John Warrack

The Sleeping Beauty, op. 66

Tchaikovsky and the Sleeping Beauty

Tchaikovsky was at work on his Fifth Symphony when, in May 1888, the idea of composing music for *The Sleeping Beauty* as a ballet-spectacle was proposed to him by Ivan Alexandrovich Vsevolozhsky, Director of the Imperial Theatres at St Petersburg. It was more than 10 years since *Swan Lake* was produced at Moscow with only partial success, but when Tchaikovsky read the outline Vsevolozhsky sketched out he replied that he was 'enchanted' by the idea and added: 'I could not want anything better than to write the music for it'.

This time Vsevolozhsky arranged from the outset a collaboration with Marius Petipa, the French-born choreographer, then aged 70, who had been the St Petersburg ballet-master for 26 years and whose 42 original ballets raised the art to a new level of splendour and style. Petipa wrote a detailed breakdown of each planned episode and dance, and sent this to Tchaikovsky with his own thoughts for suitable music; he later commented that his problems were eased 'when one collaborates with a composer of genius like Tchaikovsky'. Petipa's manuscript in black ink, with red ink for the musical suggestions, is preserved in Moscow's Bakrushin Museum, and Tchaikovsky found this helpful enough to sketch the entire score in some 40 working days, though the orchestration proved more difficult. He kept quite close to Petipa's ideas, and modified them only when he thought the musical interest required it. A few changes were made during rehearsals, including the dropping of an entr'acte (almost a mini-concerto intended for Leopold Auer, a celebrated violinist) because it delayed the last Act too much.

The ballet's underlying conflict of good and evil is set out in the orchestral Introduction, with the angry theme of Carabosse, the wicked fairy, overcome by the graceful tune of the benevolent Lilac Fairy. The Prologue and three Acts follow a conscious musical as well as choreographic design, each

having narrative music to begin and end them, enclosing dances that also carry the story forward, but these in turn surrounding central divertissements. Throughout the ballet Princess Aurora is associated with waltz-rhythms, and often with a solo violin. These solos, and others for cello, flute, oboe and clarinet, in particular, demand playing of concerto standard. Just a few highlights that abound in the score include six-part violins for the entry of the Prologue Fairies, the Rose Adagio in 12/8 time as the first part of a linked sequence of dances in the Birthday scene, the same melody in the Vision scene played at different speeds to show contrasting aspects of Aurora, or the rhythmic subtlety of the Panorama music that precedes the Awakening.

Although there were criticisms after the St Petersburg premiere on 15 January 1890 that the music was 'too symphonic', the ballet was successful enough to be given on 21 of the 45 ballet nights that first season. Carlotta Brianza was the first Aurora, with Pavel Gerdt the Prince, Petipa's daughter Marie the Lilac Fairy, and Enrico Cecchetti, who later became a great teacher in London, doubling Carabosse and the Bluebird.

Outside Russia, *The Sleeping Beauty* was first awoken in the West when Sergey Diaghilev staged his lavish production by the Ballets Russes at London's Alhambra Theatre in 1921, prompting Stravinsky to declare then that the music is 'the most convincing example of Tchaikovsky's great creative power'. The ballet has been a foundation-work of The Royal Ballet and its classical style since 1946, when it reopened the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, after the war, with Margot Fonteyn and Robert Helpmann (who doubled the Prince and Carabosse); it also launched the company's international reputation on their first visit to New York in 1949.

Noël Goodwin

The story of The Sleeping Beauty

Prologue: The Christening

No. 1 Introduction

No. 2 Marche

No. 3 Scène dansante

No. 4a Pas de six: Introduction
No. 4b Adagio
No. 4c Variation I Candide
No. 4d Variation II Coulante – Fleur de farine
No. 4eVariation III Miettes qui tombent
No. 4f Variation IV Canari qui chante
No. 4g Variation V Violente
No. 4h Variation VI La fée des lilas
No. 4i Coda

No. 5 Finale

King Florestan and his Queen have invited all the Fairies to be present as Godmothers at the christening of the infant Princess Aurora. Unfortunately, the Fairy Carabosse has been forgotten, for she has not been seen for a long time. But nevertheless she arrives, vastly insulted, just as the other Fairies are bestowing their magic gifts; she gives a spindle by way of a christening present, and then announces that one day Aurora shall prick her finger with it and die. Happily, the Lilac Fairy still has her own gift to bestow, and she confounds Carabosse by promising that Aurora shall not die, but shall

instead fall into a deep sleep, from which she shall be awakened after a hundred years by a Prince's kiss.

ACT I: The Spell

No. 6 Scène

No. 7 Valse

No. 8 Scène

No. 9a Pas d'action. Rose Adagio
No. 9b Danse des demoiselles d'honneur et des pages
No. 9c Variation d'Aurore
No. 9d Coda

No. 10 Finale

It is Princess Aurora's 20th birthday, and four Princes have come to woo her. During the festivities a strange woman approaches and shows her something which she has never seen before – a spindle. In examining it she pricks her finger. At her cry the suitors rush to her aid. The old woman throws back her cloak, revealing that she is Carabosse, and vanishes. Now the Lilac Fairy appears to fulfil her promise. She casts a spell of sleep over the whole scene and commands a forest to grow up that shall utterly conceal the palace.

ACT II: The Vision

No. 11 Entr'acte et scène

No. 12 Colin-maillard

No. 13a Scène
No. 13b Danse des duchesses
No. 13c Danse des baronnes
No. 13d Danse des contesses
No. 13e Danse des marquises

No. 14a Farandole. Scène
No. 14b Danse (Mazurka)

No. 15 Scène (Désiré et la Fée des Lilas)

No. 16a Pas d'action (Scène d'Aurore et de Désiré)
No. 16b Variation d'Aurore
No. 16c Coda

No. 17 Scène

No. 18 Panorama

No. 19 Entr'acte

No. 20 Entr'acte symphonique (le sommeil) et scène

No. 21 Finale

A hundred years later the young Prince Florimund is hunting in this same forest with some of his court. When a stag is sighted, the Prince's companions join the chase, but Florimund remains behind, dreaming of an ideal love. The Lilac Fairy appears and shows him a vision of Aurora, and next summons the vision to dance with Florimund. He implores the Lilac Fairy to lead him to where Aurora

sleeps, and the Lilac Fairy takes him on a journey to the overgrown and wooded palace where Aurora lies. They encounter Carabosse outside the palace gates and the Lilac Fairy b anishes her from the kingdom. Florimund finds the Sleeping Beauty and wakens her with a kiss and the magic spell is broken.

ACT III: The Wedding

No. 22 Marche

No. 23 Polacca

No. 24a Pas de quatre
No. 24b La fée-or
No. 24c La fée-argent
No. 24d La fée-saphir
No. 24e La fée-diamant
No. 24f Coda

No. 25 Pas de caractère (Le chat botté et la chatte blanche)

No. 26a Pas de quatre
No. 26b Cendrillon et le Prince Fortuné
No. 26c L'Oiseau-bleu et la Princesse Florine
No. 26d Coda

No. 27a Pas de caractère (Chaperon rouge et le loup)
No. 27b Cendrillon et le Prince Fortuné

No. 28a Pas Berrichon
No. 28b Coda

No. 29a Pas de deux
No. 29b Entrée
No. 29c Adagio
No. 29d Désiré
No. 29e Aurore
No. 29f Coda

No. 30 Sarabande

No. 31 Finale

No. 32 Apothéose

Fairy-tale characters come to the wedding celebrations of the Prince and Aurora. They pay their respects to the bride and bridegroom, and then the whole assembly joins in a general dance. In a final apotheosis, the Lilac Fairy appears to bless the marriage.

Clement Crisp

The Nutcracker, Op. 71

Tchaikovsky's second ballet *The Sleeping Beauty* was first performed at the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg in January 1890, but although the composer deemed it one of his best creations the first audiences and critics thought otherwise, treating it as coolly as they had his earlier ballet *Swan Lake* in 1877. Despite this generally unfavourable reception the score did, however, attract the admiration of the Director of Imperial Theatres who had commissioned it, Ivan Vsevolozhsky. One of

Tchaikovsky's greatest champions, Vsevolozhsky soon had the composer involved in another project for the Maryinsky Theatre, a double-bill comprising a one-act opera and a ballet.

As a basis for the opera Tchaikovsky chose the play *King René's Daughter* by the Danish dramatist Henrik Hertz, the composer's brother Modest providing the libretto. Vsevolozhsky himself picked the subject for the ballet, suggesting an adaptation of E. T. A Hoffmann's story *Nussknacker und Mausekönig* (The Nutcracker and the Mouse King), an idea with which Tchaikovsky was initially very unhappy. When Vsevolozhsky dropped his opera *The Queen of Spades* from the Maryinsky Theatre early in 1891 after only thirteen performances, Tchaikovsky's uneasiness turned to anger. In response to a sharply-worded inquiry Vsevolozhsky re-affirmed his faith in Tchaikovsky's music, replying 'On your *Daughter of René* and on *Nutcracker* I place all my hopes for the next season. This will be the chief attraction next winter'. Vsevolozhsky and his ballet-master Marius Petipa succeeded between them in persuading Tchaikovsky to start work on the new project and by 9th March he was able to write to his brother, 'I am working extremely hard and am beginning to reconcile myself to the subject of the ballet'.

However, Tchaikovsky never did achieve full sympathy with the glittering, fairytale world of *The Nutcracker*, for he found it lacking any of the real dramatic and emotional tension that had inspired the two earlier ballets. Throughout 1891 work on the new ballet continued between conducting tours in Europe and America, although Tchaikovsky's continual dissatisfaction with both the subject-matter and his own music, combined with personal grief at his sister's death led him to consider abandoning the project. By August even Vsevolozhsky was beginning to share the composer's doubts: 'I feel bitter remorse for having requested this ballet from you', he wrote, 'I know you do not find it sympathetic'. However, the score of *The Nutcracker* was eventually finished in April 1892, although six dances were performed in concert earlier in March as *The Nutcracker Suite*.

Despite his unhappiness with the subject of the new ballet Tchaikovsky had been acquainted with the Hoffmann story for several years, as his friend the music critic Sergei Flerov had sent him a copy of his new translation in 1882. The adaptation of Hoffmann's fantasy was undertaken by Petipa, with whom Tchaikovsky had already worked on *The Sleeping Beauty*. However, although the ageing Petipa drew up the two-act scenario from the French translation of Alexander Dumas *père*, he suddenly fell ill and most of the choreography was provided by his assistant Lev Ivanov, who was later to be responsible for the first successful production of *Swan Lake*. In adapting *Nussknacker und Mausekönig* for the stage most of the flavour of the original story was excised by Petipa and Ivanov and Hoffmann's masterly, even frightening oscillation between fantasy and reality was transformed instead into an artificial world of childish, fairy-tale dreams providing much spectacle though little real drama.

Synopsis

Act 1

After a lightly-scored overture in which a dream-world is skilfully depicted the curtain rises on the house of Councillor Silberhaus, President of the local town-council, where Christmas Eve is being celebrated. Silberhaus and his wife organise the decoration of the Christmas tree and after the owl clock has struck nine their children Clara and Fritz burst into the room with some friends (No. 1). Silberhaus calls for a march to be played and the children join in the lively dance around the room (No. 2). The march turns into a galop, the children's parents enter dressed as fops and dandies and they dance to the popular French tune *Bon voyage, cher Dumollet* (No. 3).

Clara's godfather Councillor Drosselmayer now enters and at first his odd appearance frightens the children. However, when he produces mechanical dolls and soldiers from a large cabbage and a pie the children cheer up and the toys begin to dance (No. 4). As Clara and Fritz are not allowed to take

the toys away they become upset, but Drosselmayer soon comforts them with a new toy, a Nutcracker shaped like a man. Fritz manages to break the new toy, but Clara takes the Nutcracker and cradles it soothingly in her arms, singing a lullaby over it. The guests join in a final dance before departing (No. 5).

The children are sent off to bed, but Clara soon creeps back to see her beloved Nutcracker. As the owl dock strikes midnight it seems to take on Drosselmayer's face and Clara collapses in fright as mice appear (No. 6). A fight now ensues with the gingerbread soldiers, who are eventually eaten up by the mice. The Nutcracker then engages in combat with the Mouse King, but is only victorious when Clara kills the Mouse King by throwing her slipper at it. Transforming himself into a handsome Prince the Nutcracker invites Clara to visit his kingdom (No. 7).

Guided by gnomes Clara and the Prince make their way through a snow-bedecked pine-forest (No. 8). When they arrive in the Prince's country they are greeted by the King and Queen and the first act ends with monarch and subjects dancing the *Waltz of the Snowflakes* (No. 9).

Act 2

The second act opens in the palace of the Kingdom of Sweets with the Sugar-Plum Fairy demonstrating the treasures of her realm (No. 10). (Tchaikovsky characterises the Sugar-Plum Fairy by using a celesta, an instrument he had only discovered in Paris in June 1891 and which he was to immortalise in the *Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy*). Clara and the Prince are welcomed into the palace and the Prince then tells his sister of how Clara saved his life. A stately banquet is prepared in their honour and the guests sit down to be entertained (No. 11).

They are offered a divertissement of six dances (No. 12) in which Tchaikovsky skilfully conjures up a variety of national styles, weaving into his music several folk melodies such as the Georgian 'Iav, nana' in the *Arabian Dance* and the French 'Giroflé giroflа' in *Mère Gigogne et les polichinelles*. The entertainment ends with a dance for the attendants of the Sugar-Plum Fairy, the famous *Waltz of the Flowers* (No. 13). In the *pas de deux* following, a passionate prelude introduces a tarantella for the Prince, leading to the renowned *Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy* (No. 14). With a concluding waltz the court celebrates the return of the Prince and pays tribute to Clara's devotion (No. 15).

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The première of the double-bill on 18th December 1892 provoked a very mixed reaction. 'The success was not absolute', wrote Tchaikovsky. 'Apparently the opera (renamed *Yolanta*) gives pleasure, but the ballet not really.' Today, however, Tchaikovsky's score is enjoyed as a superb musical evocation of a childhood fantasy world and ranks as one of the most popular of all ballets.

Ewan West

The Nutcracker, Op. 71

Ballet in two Acts

Miniature Overture

Act I

No. 1 The Decoration of the Christmas Tree

No. 2 March

No. 3 Children's Galop and Entry of the Parents

No. 4 Arrival of Drosselmayer

No. 5 Grandfather Dance

No. 6 Scena (Clara and the Nutcracker)

No. 7 Scena (Battle)

No. 8 Scena (In the pine-forest)

No. 9 Waltz of the Snowflakes

Act II

No. 10 Scena – The Kingdom of Sweets

No. 11 Scena (Clara and the Prince)

No. 12 Divertissement:
(a) Chocolate (Spanish dance)
(b) Coffee (Arab dance)
(c) Tea (Chinese dance)
(d) Trepak (Russian dance)
(e) Flutes/Tanz der Rohrflöten
(f) Mother Gigogne

No. 13 Waltz of the Flowers

No. 14 Pas de deux:
(a) Variation I – Tarantella
(b) Variation II – Sugar-Plum Fairy and coda
Pas de deux (coda)

No. 15 Final waltz and Apotheosis