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TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 5
Romeo and Juliet

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
DANIELE GATTI

PRODUCTION **USA**

PIOTR ILYICH
TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

	Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64	45:09
1	I Andante – Allegro con anima	12:46
2	II Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza – Moderato con anima	13:54
	MARTIN OWEN <i>horn solo</i>	
3	III Valse: Allegro moderato	5:56
4	IV Finale: Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace – Molto vivace	12:33
5	Romeo & Juliet	20:39
	Fantasy Overture, after Shakespeare	

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TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No. 5 • Romeo & Juliet

TIME has tamed Tchaikovsky. Works that once must surely have seemed radical—'bold' is a word that won't do—are conventional to contemporary ears, and the sensibility that inspired Tchaikovsky at his most impassioned has over the past hundred-plus years been diluted. His intensely private drama, which he made public most notably in his final three symphonies, has been obscured by successive waves of culture and commerce that, from Tchaikovsky's day to ours, have inured us to an exceptional odyssey of passion and pain.

Tchaikovsky remains a conundrum. There is the master dramatist whose finest operas, *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*, remain stage-worthy and musically sovereign; the ballet composer nonpareil whose *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Nutcracker* seem well-nigh indestructible; the composer of songs which over time gained in technical sophistication and dramatic insights; and the orchestral composer who was best known in his own day not for his symphonies, cornerstones on which our contemporary repertory is built, but for his orchestral suites, works with charms that are abundant and accessible, but works now largely neglected.

Yet despite his unquestioned mastery, Tchaikovsky was tormented throughout his life by the most severe self-doubts, and never more than when writing his final three symphonies. Ironically, however, it was this lack of self-confidence that became the scenario for what are inarguably his finest symphonic works. The causes of his torment are the stuff of speculation. Imperial Russia, no more than many more modern societies, dealt less than gracefully with alcoholism, with addiction to gambling, with homosexuality. Tchaikovsky's homosexuality is an aspect of his persona with which he never made peace in the public arena, and, as the leading composer of his day, it was in the public arena where he lived his life. Indeed, his inability to comfortably accept his homosexuality is

most often cited as having led to both his ill-conceived marriage and his alleged suicide.

Before beginning his final three symphonies (which were composed in 1878, 1888, and 1893 respectively), Tchaikovsky wrote orchestral works that dramatically seethed. Tellingly, however, these were not his earlier symphonies or suites but two 'symphonic fantasies'—*The Tempest* (1873) and *Francesca da Rimini* (1876)—and the 'fantasy overture' *Romeo and Juliet* (1869). Like all great composers, Tchaikovsky was able not only to empathize with the characters he portrayed but to write music that captured their full spectrum of feelings, be it the turbulence of *Francesca* or the youthful ardor of *Romeo and Juliet*. With the Fourth Symphony, however, a profound shift took place: Tchaikovsky's own feelings became his subject matter, and not in 'symphonic fantasies' or 'fantasy overtures' but in symphonies, the largest and most serious orchestral statements. His own psyche's complex panorama was now his subject matter and it reflected Tchaikovsky credo to the core: I hurt, therefore I am.

Though we now may take Tchaikovsky for granted, he was groundbreaking for his time. Among his peers, the public and the press, Brahms was considered the leading symphonist; indeed, Brahms' First Symphony—"Beethoven's Tenth"—was thought to have rescued and revived the genre after Beethoven's valedictory. Following Brahms' example, the symphony was to be abstract and even austere, noble, an earnest piece of composition.

As did Brahms, Tchaikovsky venerated Beethoven—"it is astonishing how significant and forceful this giant among musicians always remains," Tchaikovsky wrote to his most ardent royal admirer, the Grand Duke Konstantin Romanov, a month before his Fifth Symphony's first performance. However, he continued to Konstantin, in the music of Brahms "there is something dry and cold which repulses me. He has very little melodic invention. He never speaks out his musical ideas to the

end. Scarcely do we hear an enjoyable melody than it is engulfed in a whirlpool of unimportant harmonic progressions and modulations, as though the special aim of the composer was to be unintelligible. He excites and irritates our musical senses without wishing to satisfy them, and seems ashamed to speak the language which goes straight to the heart." (*Life & Letters of P.I. Tchaikovsky*, ed. Rosa Newmarch; letters of September 21 & October 2, 1888).

Tchaikovsky's language, like it or not, does go straight to the heart and makes an impact that is immediate and visceral. Yet Tchaikovsky was his own harshest critic. "After two performances of my new Symphony in Petersburg and one in Prague," he wrote of the Fifth to his patroness and alter ego, Mme Nadezhda von Meck, "I have come to the conclusion that it is a failure. There is something repellent, something superfluous, patchy and insincere, which the public instinctively recognizes. It was obvious to me that the ovations I received were prompted more by my earlier work, and that the Symphony itself did not really please the audience...Every time I am more and more convinced that my last symphony is an unsuccessful production, and this feeling of an accidental failure (or maybe of a deterioration of my capacities) hurts me very much. The Symphony appears too colorful, too heavy, insincere, drawn out, in general very un-*simpaticzny*. With the exception of Taneyev* who insists that the Fifth Symphony is my best composition, all my honest and sincere friends have a poor opinion of it. Am I then, so to speak, finished? Has *le commencement de la fin* already begun?" (Vladimir Volkoff, *Tchaikovsky: A Self-Portrait*)

The Fifth Symphony might suffer most by comparison, made consciously or not, with its neighbors. On one side is the Fourth Symphony, with its extensive and elaborate program describing "Fatum, the fateful force which prevents our urge for happiness from achieving its end, enviously watches lest our welfare and peace should

*The composer, teacher and friend of Tchaikovsky, Sergei Taneyev.

become full and unclouded, hangs over our head like Damocles' sword, and constantly, unceasingly, poisons our soul," which is an excerpt from a far more extensive narrative description of the Fourth that Tchaikovsky wrote for Mme von Meck (Letter of February 17, 1878). And on the other side is the Sixth, the *Pathétique*; this most profound and pessimistic of Tchaikovsky symphonies, whose program the composer would not disclose, gains added significance since its première preceded, by nine days, the composer's own death.

The Fifth is a simpler, less troubled work. It, too, has a narrative, or the start of one, which at far lesser length echoes that of the Fourth. Here is Tchaikovsky's concept for the first movement, which is all that he left of his program (V. Volkoff, *Tchaikovsky: A Self-Portrait*):

Introduction. Complete resignation before Fate, or, which is the same thing, before the inscrutable designs of Providence.

Allegro. 1. Murmurs, doubts, laments, reproaches against...XXX

2. Shall I throw myself into the embraces of *faith*???

Thus the program; by writing 'XXX,' it is assumed by commentators that Tchaikovsky is referring to his homosexuality.

No program is needed for the Symphony's enjoyment, and indeed, many aspects of the work are unexceptional. It has four movements and begins in E minor and ends in E major (note the similarity to Beethoven's Fifth, which begins in C minor and ends in C major). The movements are unified by the recurrence of a melodic motto, which is based on the tune that opens the work.

After the slow introduction, the first movement proceeds at a march-like gait that echoes the opening of *Pesnya Zemfiri* (Zemphira's Song), a Pushkin setting (without opus number) by the teen-age Tchaikovsky. The movement then presents a succession of spirited themes which reflect the brilliant colors of Tchaikovsky's orchestration. Woodwinds weave a filigree beneath the

strings' first statement of the movement's main theme (mm. 57-65) and then, at the marking 'Un pochettino più animato' (A little more animated), they mass and join with the horns in the first iteration of the horn calls that are so integral to the movement. Tellingly, and indicative of Tchaikovsky's vast skill as a colorist, it is not the French horns themselves that sound the characteristic interval of the fifth, but the clarinets, who are supported by pairs of horns, bassoons, and oboes, the *harmonie*, or wind band, favored by Classical composers. This makes for a sonority that is at once richer and more muted than it would have been had the horns taken the lead.

The Symphony is at its balletic best in its mastery of dramatic shape and pacing, and there is no finer example of Tchaikovsky's control than in the measures that bridge the development's climax and the recapitulation of the opening theme (mm. 309-320); tempo is slowed through shifts of rhythmic emphases, rests are lengthened, as we are brought down to earth from high points of intensity and register, as we are allowed to—forced to—catch our breath before the return of the opening theme.

Notice, too, a moment near the movement's conclusion (m. 516 to the end), where, as the excellent commentator Donald Francis Tovey observes, "the diminuendo reaches a darkness almost as Cimmerian as those in the Pathetic Symphony" (*Essays in Musical Analysis*, vol. 6). The diminuendo, as Tovey remarks, is built on "a basso ostinato on the notes E, D, C, B, which persists for 28 repetitions to within 8 bars of the end," but he doesn't tell us that this descending four-note motif derives from a motivic kernel of the Symphony's introduction (m. 5).

The slow movement begins in B minor, with eight measures of hymn-like chords, before it veers up a third to D major and one of Tchaikovsky's best-loved melodies. This broad theme, sounded by the French horn, amplifies the tune of the last of Tchaikovsky's Twelve Songs, Opus 60, *Nam zvezdi krotkiye siyali* (The mild stars shone for us), a setting of the Russian poet Alexei Plescheyev that was composed two years before the Fifth Symphony. It is then complemented by two ensuing themes that again move the harmonic center, up another third to F-sharp major, and it is at the climax of these themes' development

that the motto from the Symphony's opening returns and takes the movement, via a stunning series of pizzicato chords, back to the primary theme first sounded by the horn.

Plescheyev is also the poet of *Vesenniyaya pesnya* (Spring Song, 1883), found in the collection of Sixteen Children's Songs, Opus 54, and its waltz rhythms and melody are immediately suggestive of the Symphony's third-movement waltz. It is a graceful, untroubled movement that takes on a darker hue, briefly, when the motto is heard near the end.

The Finale begins with the motto theme, which is as confidently sounded here (in the major mode) as it was tentatively heard (in the minor) at the Symphony's start. As in the first movement, there is an accumulation of melodies and acceleration of spirits; accretion is very much Tchaikovsky's method rather than the sort of organic development favored by Brahms. And when the motto returns for the final time (m. 274ff), it is not merely confident but triumphant. Whatever the inner torments with which Tchaikovsky wrestled here, here, at least, he prevailed.

For interpreters to gain the greatest insights into the Symphony, to most fully realize what Tchaikovsky might have had in mind, it is instructive to notice the metronome markings in the score, even while admitting that these markings are rarely adhered to with total fidelity, even by the composer who wrote them, and acknowledging that tempi are flexible. They admit the slowing hand of a rubato or the urgent push of an unwritten accelerando, and their plasticity is a source of their pleasure.

Tchaikovsky's notated tempi are brisker than those to which we might be accustomed. In the opening movement, in the 'Andante' introduction a quarter note equals 80 on the metronome, and in the 'Allegro con anima' the dotted quarter note equals 104. A non-comprehensive survey reveals a different picture. The conductor Artur Rodzinski, in a performance recorded in London with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 1954, towards the end of his career, takes the introduction at approximately 60 and the Allegro at approximately 96. With Herbert von Karajan, leading the Berlin

Philharmonic in 1965, the respective tempi are 63 and 80. And with Valery Gergiev, who might be assumed to lay the greatest claim to the Russian tradition, in a 'live' performance with the Vienna Philharmonic, the corresponding tempi are 60 and 80, and in a thick and heavy-handed reading these tempi seem slower still.

Daniele Gatti's tempi are far closer to the mark, with an introduction that approximates 70 and an Allegro at 96, and it is impossible not to think that these brisker than customary tempi yield a performance whose texture is lighter and more transparent than the norm.

Our critics were harsh on the Symphony, though if we can read through their prose, if we can pierce its florid excess, we perhaps can better capture the essence of the Fifth in the context of its time. Reviewing its United States première in 1889, the *Musical Courier* noted that the piece "was in part a disappointment. One vainly sought for coherency and homogeneousness. The second movement showed the eccentric Russian at his best, but the *Valse* was a farce, a piece of musical padding, commonplace to a degree, while in the last movement, the composer's Calmuck blood got the better of him, and slaughter, dire and bloody, swept across the storm-driven score." (Nicolas Slonimsky, *Lexicon of Musical Invective*)

Three years later the *Boston Evening Transcript* admitted that "of the Fifth Tchaikovsky Symphony one hardly knows what to say. It is less untamed in spirit than the composer's B-flat-minor Concerto [*Piano Concerto No. 1*, Op.23, which had received its world première in Boston, in 1875]—less recklessly harsh in its polyphonic writing, less indicative of the composer's disposition to swear a theme's way through a stone wall. In the Finale we have all the untamed fury of the Cossack, whetting itself for deeds of atrocity, against all the sterility of the Russian steppes. The furious peroration sounds like nothing so much as a horde of demons struggling in a torrent of brandy, the music growing drunker and drunker. Pandemonium, delirium tremens, raving, and above all, noise worse confounded!" (*Lexicon*)

Reviewing the same performance, the *Boston Herald* offered, among other observations, that "the Finale is

riotous beyond endurance. Instead of applying local color with a brush, Tchaikovsky emptied the paint pot with a jerk." (*Lexicon*)

None of this hindered the Symphony's success, and not just on the concert stage. In 1933, the piece was choreographed by Léonide Massine for the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo; *Les Présages* (Destiny) was the first of Massine's so-called 'symphonic ballets.' And in 1939, the luxuriant French-horn melody from the Symphony's slow movement was used as the theme of "Moon Love," a juke-box favorite of the time.

Yet despite this popular success—or perhaps because of it—Tchaikovsky remains suspect among many of music's most respected observers. Paul Rosenfeld, as open-minded a critic as we had through the first half of the 20th century, referred derisively to the "indecent exposures of Tchaikovsky" and Theodor Adorno, the eminent social theorist and music analyst, dismissed the sweeping theme from the Fifth Symphony's slow movement as "unspeakable."

Let's leave the last word to Donald Francis Tovey, the wise British critic, who offers a judiciously balanced assessment: "it would be a mistake to impute any deep psychic gloom to [the] excellent and pleasantly sardonic first movement, or indeed to any part of this symphony. [My] general impression is that from first to last Tchaikovsky [...] is thoroughly enjoying himself. And I don't see why we shouldn't enjoy him too." (*Essays*)

As for *Romeo and Juliet*, it is a fruit born from the composer's acquaintance with Mily Balakirev, the cantankerous and self-taught composer who stood at the center of a circle whose aim was to forge a national musical style. Though personally a bully, Balakirev was professionally a friend to nascent talent, and in Tchaikovsky he saw a potential advocate of his cause. He led the first St. Petersburg performance of the 'fantasy overture' *Fatum* (Fate) in the spring of 1869, just months after its composition, and it is likely that he and Tchaikovsky discussed a work based on Shakespeare's tragedy in the summer of that year.

If responsive to the notion, Tchaikovsky was stuck creatively, and it wasn't until Balakirev wrote to him, in the

fall, that ideas began to flow. A first version of the overture was completed by the end of November and performed four months later, under Nikolai Rubinstein's direction. Balakirev found fault with the work—the introduction was unconvincing, the second subject flawed—and Tchaikovsky amended the score, and would amend it again in 1880. It is this third version we know today.

We remember the work for its portraiture—the contemplative Friar Laurence, the boisterous Capulets and Montagues, and above all the deeply amorous Romeo and Juliet—and though we think of it as quintessentially Tchaikovsky, there is the strong influence of others. Liszt is recalled by the hymn-like theme with which the work begins and in the lavish use of the harp; Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmilla* comes to mind in the development; and Balakirev himself is heard in the tonal relationships of Tchaikovsky's exposition, with its juxtaposition of sections in B minor and D-flat major—Balakirev was famously, if inexplicably, partial to keys with two sharps or five flats.

The Shakespearean narrative, with strong characters who asked to be vividly sketched, provided Tchaikovsky with a congenial template. It asked him to craft striking themes and create dramatic bustle, things at which he was very good, and not to engage in more formalized symphonic development, at which he was very much less good. Emotionally forceful and confident, it stands out as the work that marks the moment when Tchaikovsky became Tchaikovsky. As David Brown, the composer's biographer, notes in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music*, it is "Tchaikovsky's first masterpiece."

— GEORGE GELLES



Ludwig Schirmer

Daniele Gatti *music director*

Considered the ‘foremost conductor of his generation,’ Italian conductor Daniele Gatti has galvanized the music world with his dramatic and instinctive style. A charismatic maestro, he demonstrates an equal mastery of the orchestra and the opera stage, delivering consistently probing interpretations imbued with fire and refined sensitivity.

Music Director of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra since 1996, Gatti has inspired audiences and critics alike with his enraptured performances; his recordings have attracted enthusiastic notices. Since 1998, Gatti is also Music Director of Bologna’s opera house, the Teatro Comunale, and has conducted opera to great acclaim the world over.

A native of Milan, Daniele Gatti studied piano and violin at the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory, earning his degree in composition and conducting. Following his La Scala debut at the age of 27, he led productions at Venice’s Teatro La Fenice, the Chicago Lyric Opera, the Berlin Staatsoper and New York’s Metropolitan Opera. Maestro Gatti was Music Director of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome from 1992 to 1997 as well as Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden from 1995 to 1997.

He made his Carnegie Hall debut in the 1989/90 season with the American Symphony Orchestra, and has since led most of the world’s major orchestras. He has become a favourite of audiences in Chicago where he first conducted the Chicago Symphony in 1994, returning every other season since. Gatti’s 1996 debut with the New York Philharmonic was hailed as a “remarkable performance” (*The New York Times*) and led to a triumphant return in 1998 and, again, in 2000.

His touring engagements at the head of the RPO frequently take him to Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Mexico and the USA.

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

The history of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra is inextricably linked to its founder, Sir Thomas Beecham, one of Britain’s greatest conductors and classical music’s more colourful figures. When in 1946 Beecham set out to create a world-class ensemble from the finest players in the country, he envisioned an orchestra that would bring the greatest music ever composed to every corner of the United Kingdom. Since Sir Thomas’ death in 1961, the Orchestra’s musical direction and development has been guided by a series of distinguished maestros including Rudolf Kempe, Antal Dorati, André Previn and Vladimir Ashkenazy. Today, under the inspired leadership and gifted musicianship of Daniele Gatti (Music Director since 1996), the Orchestra continues to expand its international reputation while maintaining a deep commitment to its self-appointed role as Britain’s national orchestra.

The RPO’s performances and recordings receive rapturous acclaim from the public and the press around the world, which has praised the Orchestra for the “quality of its playing, which [is] incisive, insightful and extremely beautiful.” (*The Guardian*)

Over the years, the RPO has enjoyed long-standing partnerships with important contemporary and living composers, and with the finest film composers of our time, from Brian Easdale’s score for *The Red Shoes* (1948) to Maurice Jarre’s music for *A Passage To India* (1984)—both of them Oscar® winners.

An orchestra of world renown, the RPO has played for Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, the President of China in Tiananmen Square, and was invited to play at the tenth anniversary celebration of Kazakhstan’s independence. Alongside its regular series of engagements in Germany, Spain, Italy and Switzerland, the RPO’s schedule for the 2003/04 season included a month-long tour of the USA under Music Director Daniele Gatti, performances in Bucharest and Amsterdam with Maxim Vengerov, as well as a long-awaited return to Mexico.

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