


# TCHAIKOVSKY

## PATHÉTIQUE ΕΞΟΥΟΙΤÈΗΤΑΡ

DAVID BERNARD

PARK AVENUE CHAMBER SYMPHONY





# TCHAIKOVSKY SYMPHONY NO. 6, OP. 74 PATHÉTIQUE

- I. Adagio -- Allegro non troppo. (18:05)
- II. Allegro con grazia. (7:32)
- III. Allegro molto vivace. (8:16)
- IV. Finale: Adagio lamentoso; Andante. (11:03)

Total Duration: 44:56

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Audio Engineers: Joseph Patrych, Antonio Oliart  
Design: Campagna Design  
Program Notes: Steven J. Cahn

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## ABOUT TCHAIKOVSKY SYMPHONY NO. 6

Nine days after the première of the Symphony No. 6, the composer died at the age of 53. This heartbreaking fact has entangled the symphony in suspicious narratives and dubious theories of the composer's death, as if these narratives and theories gave the symphony something to be about.

In 1894, the year after the composer's death, the playwright and music critic George Bernard Shaw heard the Sixth Symphony and, indeed, felt that this music needed something to be about:

*Tchaikovsky had a thoroughly Byronic power of being tragic, momentous, romantic about nothing at all...[He] could set the fateful drum rolling and make the trombones utter the sepulchral voice of destiny without any conceivable provocation. This last symphony of his is a veritable Castle of Otranto [Horace Walpole's Gothic horror novel, 1764], with no real depth of mood anywhere in it, but full of tragic and supernatural episodes, which, though unmotivated, and produced by a glaringly obvious machinery, are nevertheless impressive and entertaining.*

Like the tragic episodes in Tchaikovsky's symphony, Tchaikovsky's death appears to be every bit as "unmotivated" and unfortunate as the huge helmet that falls out of nowhere to crush young Conrad to death just before his wedding day in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*.

Biographers have endeavored to kill two birds with one stone: if they could figure out what motivated Tchaikovsky's death, they would have also discovered what motivated the tragic elements of the Sixth Symphony: the agitated minor themes, the funerary processions, and above all, the slow, anguished finale. One key might turn two locks!

Certain clues suggesting suicide may provide a more plausible explanation of Tchaikovsky's death than his accidentally contracting cholera. There was the cryptic remark Tchaikovsky made to Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov during the intermission immediately after the première of the symphony:

*I [Rimsky-Korsakov] asked if he [Tchaikovsky] had any program for this composition. He said that of course he had, but that he did not wish to reveal it.*





## ABOUT TCHAIKOVSKY SYMPHONY NO. 6 (cont'd)

There is the alleged report to his colleague Nikolai Kashkin of a failed suicide attempt in 1877 when Tchaikovsky's marital problems had come to a head. He was going to end his life in the frigid waters of the Moskva River, not by drowning, but by catching a fatal disease. Tchaikovsky fled the marriage, instead, and sought solace in Western Europe.

The thesis that Tchaikovsky's death was a suicide resulting from considerable personal torture concerning his homosexuality is one that some biographers have embraced, and one that some analysts have applied to the critical study of the Sixth Symphony.

By contrast, revisionist scholars have, to quote Marina Frolova-Walker, "contended that the bulk of the evidence weighed against suicide, the 'court of honor' was a fiction and that Russian high society generally turned a blind eye to discreet homosexual behavior."

We may hear Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony unburdened by the freight of suicide, and think of Tchaikovsky as an artist with long-range future plans that were cut short. But if this is the case, is Shaw right? Is the four-movement narrative — encompassing a bleak introduction, agitated opening theme, romantic contrasting theme, metrically irregular second movement, heroic third movement and lugubrious finale — a series of unmotivated episodes? Shaw is perhaps a bit extreme in his critique.

Tchaikovsky is extremely generous with the breathing room he affords musical sections within the symphonic movements. Substantial pauses set off contrasting themes and heighten other articulations within the movements. As one phase of the musical form ends, the music takes a breath, and then the next phase begins. The kind of continuity by which one musical character fluidly succeeds another, as in Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven, is mostly not found here. The silences and caesurae frame and isolate the episodes; this may be the basis of Shaw's charge that the episodes are "entertaining," but "unmotivated." But there is one instance — when the end of the development comes crashing into the opening of the recapitulation — that produces so much rhythmic energy as to electrify the piece until its conclusion. There are many other details of harmonic association that connect the movements. And as isolated as the first movement's famous Andante theme is -- which not only affirms a key, but also affirms the future that lies beyond the bounds of the work proper -- it symbolizes the great Romantic narrative of the symphony. And it is a narrative that carries the work beyond the tawdriness of "honor courts" and alleged suicide.



## TCHAIKOVSKY'S "PATHETIQUE"—A REFLECTION BY CONDUCTOR DAVID BERNARD

Tchaikovsky toyed with the public on the meaning of his final symphony, proclaiming an underlying program existed, but refusing to disclose it. His death under questionable circumstances some see as suicide shortly after the work's premiere brought a perfect storm of mystery and intrigue, leaving an imaginative public to proclaim this work was his suicide note.

The circumstantial drama that surrounds the *Pathétique* can be an incentive for performers to see each and every phrase as an opportunity to express mournful longing—a practice that isn't especially helpful to the work. And when considering the work as a whole, the 'suicide note' theory that is used as the basis for this thinking is somewhat questionable. The *Pathétique*'s immense scale and relentless passion demands a life force in the composer that simply could not exist inside a person resigned to take his own life.

The *Pathétique* is Tchaikovsky's reimagining of his earlier works in a new-found artistic voice through a more mature and effective lens. The first movement's narrative shape is unmistakably linked to his 'Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture', requiring a balance between emotional depth and penetrating line in the well-known lyrical second theme, suddenly launching relentlessly driven episodes that bring us to a gut-wrenching *largamente* and a final retelling of the lyrical theme with an epilogue through which the energy of the movement is released. The second movement reimagines Tchaikovsky's ballet waltzes, requiring a flow that enables a light half note lifted pulse at the ends of each 5/4 measure, gliding the listener from beginning to end. The Third Movement's reconstitution of Tchaikovsky's symphonic finales requires an unceasing energy that drives relentlessly to an ending that is as inevitable as it is exciting. While the first three movements offer a look back, the Finale looks inward to the present, conveying Tchaikovsky's growing awareness of his fate—portraying Tchaikovsky's emotional transformation through progressively more expansive pacing. It is here where the entire program of the *Pathétique* comes into focus gradually, note-by-note, until the work winds down to silence, with us—and Tchaikovsky—achieving closure in the silence that follows.





## DAVID BERNARD, CONDUCTOR

David Bernard has gained recognition for his dramatic and incisive conducting in the United States and in over 20 countries on four continents. He serves as Music Director of the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony and the Massapequa Philharmonic. A multiple First Prize winner of the Orchestral Conducting Competition of *The American Prize*, Bernard was described in the judges' remarks as, "a first-rate conductor...phenomenal performance...masterly in shaping, phrasing, technique and expressivity." *Lucidculture* praised Bernard's recent Lincoln Center performance of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*: "Conducting from memory, David Bernard led a transcendent performance. Segues were seamless, contrasts were vivid and Stravinsky's whirling exchanges of voices were expertly choreographed." Bernard's complete recorded Beethoven symphony cycle was praised by *Fanfare Magazine* for its "intensity, spontaneity, propulsive rhythm, textural clarity, dynamic control, and well-judged phrasing." His recent premiere recording of a new edition of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* was praised by *Gramophone* as "committed and forceful...(with) thrilling moments" and by *Audiophile*: "The recording provides an opportunity to hear into this icon of 20th-century music... no detail was lost, and Bernard leads...an affecting performance. Local guys make really good."

David Bernard is particularly active as a guest conductor and has worked on the Edwin F. Kalmus editorial team with Clinton F. Nieweg, retired librarian of the Philadelphia Orchestra, developing new editions of Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" and "The Firebird Suite—1919 Version," which has been published in 2016. In addition, he has published his own editions of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, K. 622, and Schumann's Symphony No. 2, Op. 61.

David Bernard is an acclaimed orchestra builder and is sought after for his artistic leadership and innovation in community engagement. Under his leadership as Music Director, both the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony and the Massapequa Philharmonic have thrived—with growing audiences, expanded ensembles and increased critical acclaim. Bernard's approach to growing new audiences for classical music has been acclaimed by WQXR, *Newsday*, *ClassicalWorld* and the *Epoch Times*.



## PARK AVENUE CHAMBER SYMPHONY

Since its founding in 1999, the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony has built a loyal following, both in New York City and worldwide through its extensive catalog of recordings on iTunes, Naxos, Amazon and Spotify. In 2011 the orchestra toured the People's Republic of China performing in 9 cities including Beijing, Qingdao, Dalian, Chaoyang, Jinzhou, Shenzhen, Shenyang and Xi'an. Three-time First Prize Winner of The American Prize Competition in Orchestral Performance (2011, 2012, 2013), the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony's performances were described by the judges as "extremely impressive, well-shaped. This ensemble is good enough to surpass many professional orchestras, performing incredibly difficult repertoire on a professional level." New York Critics have acclaimed Park Avenue Chamber Symphony performances as "Triumphant...polished...exquisite...with a strong sense of style and commitment...with the depth and fervor of the old school European orchestras."

The ensemble regularly features important soloists including Carter Brey (principal cellist, New York Philharmonic), David Chan (concertmaster, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra), Jon Manasse (clarinet soloist) and Whoopi Goldberg (Oscar Winning Actor and Entertainer), as well as emerging artists from Juilliard, Manhattan School of Music and Mannes. The Park Avenue Chamber Symphony performs at the DiMenna Center for the Arts, Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall and Avery Fisher Hall. Through its fundraising efforts, the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony has helped establish a new Scholarship Fund for students at the Juilliard School's Pre-College Division, as well as support The Harmony Program—a New York City organization that provides music lessons to economically disadvantaged children and is modeled after Venezuela's world-famous model of music education, "El Sistema".







