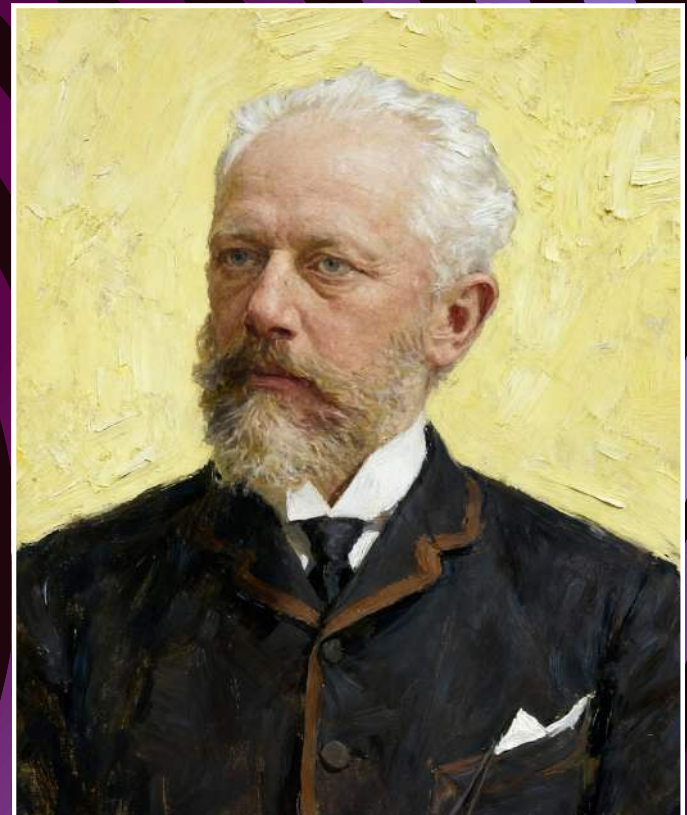


# TCHAIKOVSKY

## Symphony No. 5

USSR Symphony Orchestra

Evgeni SVETLANOV



**Piotr Ilich Tchaikovsky**  
***Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 645***

1	I. Allegro ma non troppo	15:46
2	II. Adagio	15:32
3	III. Scherzo. Presto	12:07
4	IV. Allegretto	10:26

**USSR Symphony Orchestra**  
**Evgeni Svetlanov, conductor**

Recorded in 1967

Original producer uncredited

Original engineer: Alexander Grosman

Originally issued in 1967 on LP as Melodiya 33Д—020395~96

**NOTES ON THE PROGRAM**

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Tchaikovsky's disastrous marriage in 1877 left him suicidal but thanks to an annuity of 6000 rubles from his patroness Nadezhda von Meck he was less reliant on commissioned work. His troubled private life did not however make him immune from the emotional instability of others. His regular visits to his sister Sasha's home became more irksome as her children grew up and her health worsened. One of her daughters in particular gave him problems: in 1882 the twenty-year old Tanya Davidova had shocked Tchaikovsky with her openly flirtatious behaviour with her music teacher Blumenfeld. She had also become a morphine addict and her increasingly eccentric behaviour caused Tchaikovsky to flee Kamenka in January 1883, travelling first to Berlin and then to Paris. To his horror his brother arrived in Paris with Tanya in tow who not only had to undergo painful treatment for her addiction but who also gave birth to an illegitimate child.

Whilst in Paris Tchaikovsky was approached to compose three pieces as part of the coronation celebrations for the new Tsar Alexandr III on the suggestion of Anton Rubinstein whose brother Nikolay had died in 1881. The three pieces were to consist of a transition passage linking a chorus from *A Life For The Tsar* with the national anthem to be sung by seven and a half thousand students outside the Kremlin; a ceremonial

march to be sung in front of the Tsar in the Sokolniki Park; and a cantata '*Moscow*' with an excellent text by Apollon Maikov (1821 – 97) celebrating the history of the city. Once again Tchaikovsky shelved an operatic project (in this case *Mazeppa*) in order to fulfil the commission for which he was to receive 1500 roubles. The Tsar decided to give this sum to the composer in the form of a ring, which Tchaikovsky immediately pawned for 375 roubles;

that very same day he carelessly lost both the cash and the pawn ticket! It has been agreed that *Moscow* is by far the most successful of all Tchaikovsky's cantatas. Appropriately his music shares some of the characteristics of the first great Russian opera *A Life For The Tsar* as well as the national anthem and his own *1812 Overture*. The text traces the history of Moscow from its founding in peaceful times, to its invasion and destruction by barbarous outsiders. The third part chronicles the rebirth of the city and in the following baritone aria the advent of the Russian Empire is foretold. As the soloists sing of the desire of all Slavic people to stand shoulder to shoulder the entire company round off the cantata with a triumphant hymn of praise for the ancient capital city.

Tchaikovsky began his *Fifth Symphony* in 1888 following a period of extended travel abroad as conductor. He was greeted with enormous acclaim in Leipzig, Berlin, Hamburg, Prague, Paris, and London, making the acquaintance of several composers including Brahms, Grieg, Ethel Smyth, Gounod, Massenet, Faure, Widor and Dvořák, as well as Richard Strauss, Mahler and Busoni, who were yet to establish themselves internationally. The exertion of and planning for the tour led to composition taking second place, but soon after his return to Russia in late March 1888 he began to plan new works. First and foremost, so he told his brother, was to be a new symphony (interestingly he was also contemplating an opera: he discounted *The Queen of Spades* because the subject failed to touch him and he felt that he 'should compose it indifferently'. However he soon changed his mind and *The Queen of Spades* became what many feel to be his finest opera).

That summer Tchaikovsky moved into a new house at Frolovskoye, between Klin and Moscow where he planned to relax, garden and compose to his heart's content in the kind of privacy he had not experienced for some time. After a brief but slightly discomfiting visit to St Petersburg when he met his family and also the Tsar he returned to Frolovskoye resolved not only to compose the symphony but also a

second work, a symphonic poem based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. By the end of May 1888 Tchaikovsky was able to tell his brother Modest that he had begun work on his *Fifth Symphony* and a month later he had finished preliminary sketches of this work. Instead of immediately proceeding to the scoring of the symphony however, he sketched out *Hamlet* and only then returned to finish work on the symphony. By the end of August the *Fifth Symphony* was fully scored, and he then assisted his friend Laroche in scoring an overture. That done he set about orchestrating *Hamlet* in time for both this and the *Fifth Symphony* to be premiered in November.

Tchaikovsky set out the following to bear in mind for the first movement of the *Fifth Symphony*: 'Introduction: Total submission to Fate, or put another way, the inscrutable predestination of Providence. Allegro. 1. Murmurs, doubts, laments, reproaches against... XXX. 2. Shall I cast myself into the embrace of *faith*? A wonderful programme if it can only be fulfilled'.

Commentators have speculated freely as to the meaning of 'XXX' here; Tchaikovsky's homosexuality seems as good a guess as any. However, in contrast to the *Fourth Symphony*, there is nothing malevolent about the Fate motif that opens the *Fifth* and both David Brown and Gerald Abraham comment that it is surely no accident in Tchaikovsky's quotation of Glinka's *Life for the Tsar* as part of the Fate motif (Glinka's words here are 'Do not turn to sorrow'). Only during the mighty slow movement does the Fate motif throw doubt on a positive outlook on life. Its reappearance at the end of the finale, if slightly banal, merely serves to rubber-stamp a somewhat false victory or rather an emphatically total submission to Fate.

## NOTES ON THE ARTIST

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The conductor **Evgeny Svetlanov** (1928–2002) was the unsurpassed authority on Russian Romantic orchestral music in the last decades of the 20th century.

From 1965 until 2000, Svetlanov conducted the USSR State Symphony Orchestra, and recorded an extensive catalogue of Russian music, amassing the largest recorded legacy of any Russian conductor. At one point Svetlanov even claimed to have recorded "absolutely all the Russian symphonic music that has ever been written."

Svetlanov initially trained as a pianist and was also active as a composer throughout his career. From 1955, he conducted at the Bolshoi Theatre, and established a reputation for dramatic readings of Russian operas, always to high musical standards.

At the time of his appointment to the USSR State Symphony Orchestra, he had already worked with them for ten years, and the collaboration was an enduring success. Svetlanov was able to establish a leading international profile for the orchestra through extensive touring. By the 1980s, Svetlanov had also established significant connections with several Western orchestras leading to appointments with the London Symphony Orchestra, Residentie Orchestra and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In 2000, Svetlanov was controversially sacked from his Moscow appointment by the Russian culture minister, Mikhail Shvydkoi, who cited the excessive time that the conductor was spending with foreign orchestras. However, three years after his death, the orchestra was renamed in the conductor's honour, and is known today as the State Academic Symphony Orchestra 'Evgeny Svetlanov'.

**James Murray**

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