CHAPTER ONE

Tchaikovsky

This period witnessed the composition of Tchaikovsky's last four operas and two ballets, the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies and *Manfred*, as well as many works in other genres. It was marked by increasing celebrity at home and ever greater international success.

(a) G. A. Laroche: *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* for four-part mixed choir. Composition by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, op. 41 (Moscow: P. Jurgenson). *Russian Herald*, January 1880, no. 1. Laroche 2, pp. 109–18

The Imperial Court Kapella held a stranglehold over the music of the Russian Orthodox Church by virtue of the requirement that any church music composition be approved by the Kapella's director for use in public worship before it could be published. The incident described here illustrates the growing perception among musicians that Russian church music had stagnated. The resulting court case broke the stranglehold, leading to the efflorescence of sacred composition in Moscow (see Chapter 5 (g)).

Among the artists in whom present-day Russia can take pride *vis-à-vis* Western Europe, a foremost place belongs to the composer whose name appears in the title of this article. Pyotr Il'ich Tchaikovsky has not yet reached the age of forty and was a comparatively late starter: fourteen years ago, at the beginning of 1866, his Concert Overture in F was performed at one of the Moscow concerts of the Imperial Russian Musical Society, which must be considered the start of his career. Since then his name has swept through Germany, Belgium, France, England and the United States. This reputation seems the more remarkable if one recalls that Mr Tchaikovsky is not himself a virtuoso performer; he has not been able to promote his compositions' success through his own performances of them; he has found himself, so to speak, constantly in the hands of conductors, singers and pianists, and his success has been entirely dependent on the degree of their attention, talent and zeal. A composer so placed is rightly thought to be at a disadvantage; but it is essential to add that by the very *kind* of composition which has

made him famous beyond Russia's borders, Mr Tchaikovsky has had even fewer chances of easy victory than many of his colleagues. Tchaikovsky is the composer of five operas, four of which have been staged. Not one of them is known abroad; only his instrumental works are known, and, although the audience for such compositions is more serious and enlightened than that for opera, it is far smaller in numbers. Just as it is harder for a composer to reach the majority of the public than a virtuoso performer, similarly, it is more difficult for an instrumental composer to win fame than for a composer of operas, and, as far as the West is concerned, Mr Tchaikovsky is for the moment a purely instrumental composer. If, despite all the disadvantages of this position, the young artist has nonetheless managed to win conspicuous and honourable standing, then we are justified in seeing therein evidence of those intrinsic qualities in his music which have overcome the external impediments and difficulties.

I shall allow myself to say a few words about these intrinsic qualities. Tchaikovsky is not a master of form in the highest meaning of the word. Taken as an entirety, his compositions (with only a few exceptions) make an impression which is not fully pleasing aesthetically. It is not so much *longueurs* as the absence of a sustained mood, the absence of unity and the juxtaposition of sections not completely suited to one another which disturb the listener and frequently leave him cold. The demand for unity is perhaps the most pressing of aesthetic demands, but it is in any case not the only one; and the works of the composer with whom we are concerned demonstrate what first-rate jewels there is room for even where that demand is [not] met. Mr Tchaikovsky is above all a wonderful melodist. The nobility, grace, depth of feeling and variety in our compatriot's abundant melodies set him apart, to extraordinary advantage, from the majority of his coevals (particularly the Germans), in whom one notices, for all their many admirable qualities, a complete absence of melodic invention. Mr Tchaikovsky's melodies are not only lyrical and easily remembered, but are marked at the same time by an individual stamp by which one can always recognize their composer even without his signature. He possesses ideas *of his own*, atmosphere *of his own*, and a world of musical images *of his own*. Mr Tchaikovsky is, moreover, a superlative harmonist. Though he seldom resorts to those risky, harsh chord progressions by which musicians of our day are so easily carried away, he shows no lack of boldness for all that; the chief merits of his harmony are refined taste and a transparency of part-writing inherited from the founder of Russian music, Glinka. He is able to retain these qualities even in the midst of the most daring chromatic and enharmonic shifts. The third virtue of his writing is an exceptional talent for instrumentation. Not only his orchestral pieces but his piano ones too always excel in their full and brilliant sonority;

the instrument is used skilfully, in a versatile manner and with many effects which are new and striking. All these external qualities of his work represent a casing for its original inner content which has a well-defined and extremely appealing form. The prevailing mood is an elegiac one, alien to stunning or heart-rending accents – one of reconciliation and harmony, like the sad, gentle colours of a fine autumn day. Mr Tchaikovsky also has moments of triumph and rejoicing; he loves even splendour and brilliance, and there are many successful pages in his works that are by no means all confined within the framework just outlined; but he is nevertheless most true *to himself* where the graceful melancholy at the root of his nature can pour forth freely. His lyricism is not a matter of ready-made phraseology taken over from others, any more than his melodic writing is a collection of commonplaces picked up in the theatre or the concert hall. One has to approach Mr Tchaikovsky's compositions with the respect that any manifestation of original creativity inspires.

It is understandable that a composer with a talent developing so strongly and gloriously should have aroused the greatest expectations when he turned, in the prime of life and at the zenith of his creative powers, from the secular music which has occupied him exclusively hitherto to sacred music and, moreover, to music intended for a practical function, that of worship. *The Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* which he has set to music was bound to represent a milestone in his work, a moment of the greatest concentration of an artist's strength, when he turned his back on the fair of worldly vanities and became engrossed in contemplating an eternal ideal. As the work of a favourite and esteemed artist, the *Liturgy* would have been met in any event with the keenest interest, even had no exceptional fate befallen it; but an incident unique of its kind has occurred which has given this innocent four-part choral composition an almost political significance.

A few days after publication a police officer entered Jurgenson's music shop and confiscated 141 copies of the edition, in spite of the fact that the *Liturgy* had been printed with the preliminary censorship's permission. The shop, of course, surrendered without question all the copies to hand, but nevertheless was visited over the next few days by officials from either the police or the censorship department. Among other things, on one of these visits the censorship copy was demanded. The police went round all the music shops in Moscow and seized all the copies sold to them from the publisher's warehouse. It soon became known that the Moscow police were acting on the basis of a memorandum received from the director of the Court Kapella. The director of the Kapella demanded that a sequestration order be imposed on the new work based on the legal requirement that the censorship of all religious music compositions belonged by right to him

exclusively, whereas Mr Tchaikovsky's *Liturgy* had gone through only the general censorship.

As everyone knows, this misunderstanding has now been cleared up. The right of the director of the Kapella relates not to the *publishing* but to the *performance in public worship* of sacred music compositions; even without being permitted to be used in churches, Mr Tchaikovsky's composition when freely circulating for sale is not unemployed capital. It may be of benefit in domestic worship, to say nothing of concerts of sacred music. The repertory of Russian music has been enriched by a new religious composition and one moreover written by the most celebrated representative of contemporary Russian music.

Russian sacred music has up to now led a lonesome existence. Not a single composition for the church has been conspicuous at the summit of art; the leading lights of music have subsisted on activities which were exclusively secular, held back in this one-sidedness, no doubt, by special conditions of censorship whose rigour was no secret to anyone even before the incident involving Mr Tchaikovsky. Sacred music was written by specialists; last century they bore famous names and their talents were recognized both in Russia and abroad; during the current century the level of our sacred music began to decline in inverse proportion to the growth and strengthening of secular music. A composer emerged on the musical horizon in the 1830s who, by his imposing stature, gave Russia for the first time an independent place among the musical nations of the civilized world. Thanks to the creator of *A Life for the Tsar*, Russia became one of the classical countries of musical creativity: her compositions, though few in number, may stand alongside compositions from nations which have progressed through a school lasting many centuries. Glinka, like his successors, was exclusively a secular composer. The aspiration towards religious art which gripped him near the end of his life was unquestionably genuine and, had it arisen earlier, might have yielded a valuable harvest; but the inspired composer died before he had time to bestow a single composition worthy of his great spirit on the church.[1] The composers active at the same time and later did not take even the slightest step towards writing music for worship: one of them, and moreover one on whom Glinka had the strongest influence, Serov, composed for the church, but for the Catholic church: his *Stabat Mater* will remain an eloquent testimony to the estrangement from his native church in which the creative mind of the Russian composer lives. Since the day of the first performance of *A Life for the Tsar*, a day which may be regarded as marking an epoch

[1] Glinka left only three short compositions: First Litany (?1856), *Da ispravitsya molitva moya* (?1856) and *Resurrection Hymn* (1856 or 1857).

in Russian music, a half-century has passed, during which Russian musical composition worthy of the name of art has served the theatre and the concert hall exclusively; sacred music has been composed detached from art music, in a realm of hackwork or superficial dilettantism, and its standard testifies deplorably to the abyss which this censorship has managed to open up between the ecclesiastical and secular worlds.

This is not what has happened in the West. I shall not dwell on the fact that all those composers whose talents have held the public's attention have worked to a greater or lesser extent for the church as well, or at least have used religious subjects. With the majority – with Schumann, Meyerbeer, Richard Wagner and Verdi – religious compositions occupy only a very subordinate place among their works; in only a few cases, such as Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, is religious music represented by many outstanding scores. Of far greater significance than these solitary diversions of gifted musicians from the concert hall or operatic routes more familiar and precious to them, far more fruitful and important for the fate of music in the future, is the movement in music criticism and history which has arisen and spread over the last fifty years. Choral music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been rediscovered, suddenly becoming visible to researchers in a radiance of imperishable and irresistible beauty. Just as an excavation by an industrious archaeologist is rewarded beyond measure and expectation by the resurrection of an ancient statue, so investigations into musical history, undertaken exclusively in terms of intellectual curiosity, have led us to an inexhaustible source of aesthetic delight. The excitement of scholars has communicated itself to performers: the enthusiasm of performers has begun to infect the public. The names of Palestrina, Vittoria, Luca Marenzio, Orlando Lasso, Gombert, Willaert and Josquin have ceased to be empty words; their works, foreign to our age in technique and evidently even more so in spirit, have begun appearing in choral concerts and churches and to resound with a harmony unusual to ears new to it but nonetheless majestic. Groups dedicated exclusively to cultivating and promoting the masters of the sixteenth century, the era of what is known as *strict style*, have been formed; expensive multi-volume editions of these masters' works have begun to appear, at first only occasionally, but later, when success stimulated emulation, with increasing frequency. This overwhelming mass of compositions, brought to light from beneath the dust of three centuries and received with undoubted pleasure – at times even enthusiasm – was bound to make an impact in the end both on critics' verdicts and composers' methods, in spite of the complete absence of similarity to the music of our times. Composers succumbed to the influence of sober and austere harmony, restrained in its use of dissonance and not prone to frequent modulation: elements long consigned to

oblivion as well as melodic turns of phrase unknown in the Viennese period (and little known even in the Neapolitan one) again won the right of citizenship. Critics in their turn began to find that these treasures, wrested from the murk of oblivion and winning unanimous appreciation, were not created to serve as useless ornaments, objects of dilettantish amusement or museum curiosities: they answer the keen demands of the religious spirit; the need for vocal music for the Christian church has found complete satisfaction in them; and a new school of church music must be educated upon these models for too long forgotten. A movement in many ways reminiscent of the cult of Pre-Raphaelite painting has now gripped a significant part of the musical world. A cult of pre-Bach music has arisen and begun to spread. Dissatisfaction with the mediocrity, coldness and sheer ordinariness of the most recent church music has engendered in many people a desire to return to that life-giving source which slaked the thirst of so many and such gifted generations for strict counterpoint. The movement grows with every year, and one can predict that in the near future we shall see the living fruits of a new critical consciousness and hear compositions created under the direct influence of the masters of the 'strict style', written in conformity with its exacting and onerous requirements.

Something similar to this reaction (meaning by that word a movement to return to a style given up for a time) could be observed even here in Russia in the 1860s and 1870s. The harmonizations of G. A. Lomakin and N. M. Potulov[2] and Prince V. F. Odoyevsky's critical articles[3] were expressions of the dissatisfaction here with church music and the aspiration towards the severe simplicity of a time long past. The reform, had they succeeded in bringing it about, would have been of an extremely radical character. The reformers were all *plus royalistes que le roi*. Prince Odoyevsky's theories and Potulov's practice sought to create a style which was even more strict that the 'strict style', to bind future composers by draconian rules which would have left no scope for their imagination and reduced musical work to the simple filling-in of a framework laid down in advance by an inexorable law. One cannot fail to admit, however, that even this ascetic tendency was received with a certain amount of sympathy. Lovers of our church chant who adopted a conscious attitude towards it recognized long before Lomakin and Prince Odoyevsky the vanity of spirit and insensitivity to form which over the course of time

[2] G. A. Lomakin (1812–85) was mentioned in *RRM* vol. 1 as a choirtrainer and director of the Free School of Music. Work with choirs drew him into church music. N. M. Potulov (1810–73) was a pioneer in harmonizing ancient Russian chants using an austere idiom.

[3] The articles which Prince V. F. Odoyevsky (1803–69) published in the 1860s articulated his dissatisfaction with the Kapella style, arguing for a treatment of the chants more in tune with their historical origins and more appropriate to worship by virtue of restraint and solemnity.

had crept into both our arrangements of sacred church melodies and our sacred music compositions, and naturally longed for a gifted and inspired hand to erect in place of ephemeral and tawdry constructions a monument filled alike with religious animation and artistic beauty.

Shortage of space does not allow me to develop here the idea which I set out just over ten years ago on the pages of the *Russian Herald*,[4] the idea that the 'strict style' of the sixteenth century is the method of writing which corresponds entirely to the spirit of the Russian church melodies and the demands of Orthodox worship. I willingly deny myself the pleasure of backing up my thesis here, since a whole series of facts indicate that the general movement of the age will sooner or later lead to it being corroborated. The progress of contrapuntal and historical learning in Germany, Belgium and France, where the 'strict style' gains new experts and disciples every year, is beginning to exert a slow but irresistible influence on our Russian musicians as well. One after another, our young composers are turning their attention to works in contrapuntal style and coming before the public with work of that kind. The stimulus given to our music by Glinka retains its momentum to this day and the spirit of the age lends assistance. One may rest assured that Russia's future church music (not all of it, of course, but the most serious and artistic part of it) will be music in the 'strict' style, or, as many people call it, the Palestrina style.

But we should not look for these reformist currents in Mr Tchaikovsky's *Liturgy*. It stands firmly on the basis of established usage; a performance of it would not startle ears used to our church compositions by anything especially out of the ordinary. Mr Tchaikovsky's heart, apparently, is not in *strict* counterpoint; just how much he is in love with *free*, post-Bachian counterpoint, and how much he is the master of all its resources he proved recently in his superb D minor Suite, played in December last year at one of the symphonic assemblies of the Russian Musical Society. But even *free* counterpoint finds the smallest, less than modest application in the present work. The same composer who has lavished the riches of fugal and imitative style on many of his works with secular content has here seemingly vowed to forget all his art and be content with the simplest means comprehensible to everyone. Generally speaking, he has kept to the limits within which our nineteenth-century church music has been accustomed to revolve. The voices sing in continuous chords and only very rarely do not all enter simultaneously; the four-part structure is not kept to throughout as the voices divide and form six- and seven-part chords. In choosing chords and chord

[4] *Mïsli o muzïkal'nom obrazovanii* ('Thoughts on Music Education'), *Russkiy vestnik*, 1869, no. 7.

progressions, the composer has not followed in the footsteps of the Weimar school,[5] nor made any attempt to create anything reminiscent of Liszt's Gran Mass, but still less has he inhibited himself by using constant triads in the diatonic scale after the manner of Mr Lomakin or Mr Potulov: one encounters chords of the seventh with their inversions as well as rather wide-ranging modulation; there is no one-sided *parti pris* in one direction or the other. The single fugato in the whole composition (to the word 'Alliluiya' [no. 14, bars 31–57]) is written very concisely and simply; in other places, such as for instance in the *Kheruvimskaya* ('Hymn of the Cherubim' [no. 6]), there are only gentle, scarcely evident hints of imitation.

It goes without saying that, while remaining within the framework laid down and established by use and wont, Mr Tchaikovsky has been able to fill it with such content as nevertheless allows one to sense in many respects that exceptional power, first being applied here to a task left for so many years to the untalented and unskilful. It is sufficient to point to the simple, transparent but deft and graceful construction of the *Otche nash* ('Our Father'), with the splendid curve of melody at 'yako zhe mï ostavlyayem' ('as we forgive') [no. 13, bars 18–20], to note the presence in this score of a genuine artist. The *Alliluiya* fugato is sketched in a light and carefree way, but even here there is a feature (the bass pedal on A [no. 14, bars 58–61] which shows the true master of part-writing. I shall also point out the fresh, bright modulation after the words 'Soblyudi nas vo vsey svyatïne, ves' den' pouchatisya pravde tvoyey' ('Keep us in Thy holiness, that all the day we may meditate upon Thy righteousness') [no. 15, bars 34–41], where, after A minor, A major enters unexpectedly and to great effect; or to the expressive but perhaps for the church too coquettish melodic phrase at the end of the *Dostoyno est'* ('It is meet') (at the words 'Tya velichayem' ('we magnify thee')), the melody in the tenor [no. 11, bars 44–7].

Mr Tchaikovsky's *Liturgy* is free of that saccharine, salonish tone which, unfortunately, has held sway hitherto in our church arrangements and compositions. But here and there you are unpleasantly struck by an Italian plagal cadence (a minor triad, a 6–5 chord on the subdominant, followed by a major triad), a legacy of the operas of Donizetti and Verdi, from which it would be more appropriate for church music to abstain. We find this turn of phrase at 'Gospodi pomiluy' ('Lord have mercy') [no. 1, bars 9–10], at 'Spasi blagochestivïya i uslïshi nï' ('O Lord, save the pious and hear us') [no. 3, bars 15–20], at 'I dukhovi tvoyemu' ('and to Thy spirit') [no. 4, bars 9–11] and at 'Slava Tebe, Gospodi, Slava Tebe' ('Glory to Thee, Lord, glory to Thee')

[5] The 'Weimar school', so called because Liszt was based there from 1848 to 1861, denotes all the innovations and new approaches associated with Liszt and Wagner.

[no. 4, bars 12–15]. I would also list among remnants of the manner which prevailed in Russia previously the so-called natural harmony (in the manner of the old horns) which has crept into the work of our composer at the words 'yedin sïy svyatïya troytsï' [no. 2, bars 44–5]. This turn of phrase occurs hundreds of times in Bortnyansky and is explained by the eighteenth century's passion for horns and huntsmen's fanfares. Small blots like these on the picture do not, however, upset the general impression. Mr Tchaikovsky's style is in general a serious and noble one, which is more necessary in Russia than anywhere because our church permits only *a cappella* singing, but where we have not up to now heard such a style. The preparation of suspensions and the frequently used sevenths on all degrees of the diatonic scale impart to the harmony a fresh, steadfast character which has a pleasing effect after the flaccid mellifluousness with which the composers licensed by the Kapella charmed our ears for so many years. As far as one can judge from reading the score without hearing a performance, choral sonority is exploited with skill and effectiveness; unfortunately, the high register predominates, especially in the sopranos and tenors. These constant Fs, Gs and even As give an impression of festive brilliance and magnificence at first, but then lose their fascination as a result of too frequent repetition. What at first seemed a truthful expression of rapture and exultation turns gradually into a purely external embellishment, like gilding on the expressionless face of an icon. The singers tire, while the character of reverent concentration on humility and spiritual peace gains nothing from this loud splendour. I do not consider it superfluous to add that these very high notes often occur on the vowels *u*, *ï* and *i*, and thus can be pitched properly only with the greatest difficulty.

To sum up, we have here the work of a conscientious artist whose sublime gift has called him – judging by the sum total of his compositions – to a new sphere of activity and who as a result has brought to his *Liturgy* an experienced, practised hand and a sense of decorum, rather than powerful inspiration. Mr Tchaikovsky's composition, wholly satisfactory and estimable though it be in itself, holds only a secondary place among his other works. It does not enhance his profile by a single characteristic trait; it does not introduce any schism, nor any attempt at reform, still less any revolution into our church music.

And that is precisely what one should have expected from the uncommon severity with which the privileged censorship office treated the composer. One should have been expecting extraordinary deviations from the accepted norm, audacious endeavours to do something completely new, unprecedented and unheard of. Nothing of the sort has happened, and Mr Tchaikovsky's *Liturgy*, with its conciliatory, almost conservative character, ought to have disarmed the censorship rather than caused it to sharpen

and hone its weapon. But the privileged censorship is implacable. The character of a work has little influence on its verdicts: with rare impartiality it punishes the innocent as well as the guilty, and raises impediments alike to the man who takes the smooth path as to the man who makes efforts to leave it. It acts 'knowing neither compassion nor wrath' and, we might add, without doing any particular harm, because it has turned out in the end that in its own eyes it had exaggerated its competence. Whether a religious composition is printed or not does not depend on it, and one may hope that this circumstance now clarified will rouse young Russian talents to follow Mr Tchaikovsky's example and try their strength in a field which they have until now despised but which offers an inexhaustible wealth of challenge to a musician's creative imagination.

(b) Ts. A. Cui: P. Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* Symphony.[6] *Music Review*, 31 December 1886, no. 15, pp. 116–17. Cui, pp. 361–4

Composed in 1886, *Manfred* was first performed on 11 March 1887 at the Russian Musical Society in Moscow.

The appearance of a large-scale symphonic work by a Russian composer, particularly Tchaikovsky, is a major event; his importance as one of the most highly talented and versatile of present-day symphonists has been firmly established by a whole series of works of that kind. He has written four symphonies, three suites (the second of which has not yet been performed here), two symphonic poems: *The Tempest* (after Shakespeare) and *Francesca da Rimini*, and the overture to the play *Romeo and Juliet*. In these last three compositions he is in successful competition with Franz Liszt (*Divina comedia*) [i.e. Dante Symphony] and Berlioz (with his symphonies *Roméo et Juliette* and *Lélio*); in *Manfred*, his new symphony in four scenes after Byron, Tchaikovsky has found himself in competition with Robert Schumann – in idea, of course, though not in form – because the latter composed music for the play which, apart from the overture, contains no symphonically elaborated movements. Tchaikovsky has cleverly chosen the moments which most lend themselves to musical illustration from Byron's dramatic poem without regard to their importance in the poem itself. Berlioz made use of similar devices in his *Harold* symphony; it seems to me that in general that work by Berlioz served our composer as a model in the composition of his *Manfred*; firstly, in respect of outward form, it is a work with a programme which

[6] Editor's note: We have been supplied with this note concerning the first performance here in Russia of this new symphony by the Russian composer; we willingly publish it in full because in general we entirely share the opinions of its esteemed author which do not differ essentially from the analysis of *Manfred* in no. 29 of *Music Review* (first year).