Russians on Russian music, 1880–1917

An anthology

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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).

nevertheless retains the usual symphonic structure of four movements; secondly, in its inner contents, the third movement portrays the free life of shepherds who live in the mountains, while the fourth movement represents an orgy. There is no orgy in Byron's poem, so obviously the composer thought it up to obtain a more animated finale for his symphony.

Of all the four movements of *Manfred*, the first is the most significant; this movement of the symphony, it seems to me, belongs in profundity of conception and unity of development amongst Mr Tchaikovsky's finest pages, alongside *Francesca*. The first, main theme provides a masterly description of Manfred's gloomy, noble image as conceived by Byron:

> Manfred: 'But was my own destroyer, and will be
> My own hereafter' [Act III scene 4, lines 139–40[7]]

The orchestral timbre in which the first theme appears is extremely successful; the dull sound of three bassoons and bass clarinet in unison is interrupted by dry, fitful chords in the violas and the cellos with basses in their lowest registers. Lacking the opportunity of following all the beauties of the main theme's development in the orchestral score, we confine ourselves to pointing out the second, delightful theme of Astarte (Andante, $\frac{3}{4}$), the magnificent pedal-point on C, and the majestic final occurrence of the main theme (Andante con duolo) in the strings in unison, rhythmically accompanied by clarinets, bassoons and horns – a device of instrumentation often employed by Franz Liszt. We must also note here the original and beautiful effect of three flutes in their lowest register combined with strings in unison. It is no more possible to describe the enchanting instrumentation of the second scene (Scherzo) than it would be to paint a picture 'of the rainbow of spray from a waterfall from which an Alpine fairy appears to Manfred' [quotation from score].

We shall restrict ourselves to pointing out to the reader the second scene of Act II of Byron's drama where Manfred describes the Alpine fairy. The Witch of the Alps asks: 'What wouldst thou with me?' Manfred replies: 'To look upon thy beauty – nothing further' [Act II scene 2, lines 37–8]. As with this reply of Manfred's, the critic is obliged, referring to this movement of the symphony, to answer the question 'What wouldst thou with me?' 'only by listening'. The trio of this movement, which is well contrasted with the main section (by means of a clearly defined tonality), is nonetheless somewhat insipid in its ideas; on its repetition Manfred's theme appears. The ending of the Scherzo, that is the fairy's disappearance, is of ravishing refinement.

[7] Quotations from Byron's *Manfred* have been checked against Byron: *Poetical Works* edited by Frederick Page in the new edition corrected by John Jump (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

The third movement is a pastorale, elaborated in various ways using familiar techniques: the sustaining of the tonic and the fifth in the basses. It is very difficult to be original here because the character of the pastorale depends on the use of shepherds' instruments – bagpipes and shepherd's horn. We shall allow ourselves at this point to draw the reader's attention to one place which is particularly interesting as regards harmony. The second section ends in B major [III, bars 35–6]; immediately after that comes an A minor triad [bar 36], forming parallel fifths; and then, in the eleventh bar of the same page [bar 46] the harmony returns afresh to the triad of B minor (again with parallel fifths), which then moves to a dominant seventh in the key of G [bar 47] to serve as transition to the first variation. Manfred's entrance makes a strong impact; is it not depicting his rescue at the moment when he intends to throw himself into the abyss? The decline of his strength is graphically portrayed by the gradually clearing harmonic progressions – up to the sustained C, in the woodwind [bars 178–91].

In the final movement, the first theme is made out of the second motive of the principal theme of the first movement. This borrowing seems extremely characteristic of subterranean spirits if one recalls that Manfred fell under their influence by his own fault. It also makes a significant impression in combination with the second theme of the infernal orgy (in the form of an oriental dance) and in the fugato (four spirits attacking Manfred – fourth scene of Act II in the play). The sudden breaking-off of the wild dance makes a huge effect. The episode corresponding to that, Lento [IV, bar 161ff.] is very fine; it is based on the main motive of the whole work. Similarly fine is the appearance of Astarte's shade and the repetition of the excerpt from the first movement Andante con duolo [bar 394ff.]. In Tchaikovsky, Manfred dies unbending, at his full strength, just as in Byron. At the conclusion of this movement, with the organ, the finale's first motive appears again, but in D major [bar 464] [actually on an E major triad, preceding the final key of B major], as if lightened, that is, depicting his redemption.

It is very remarkable that, in portraying the hero's death, both composers, Tchaikovsky and Schumann, present a scene of his salvation and pardon in addition, which is entirely contrary to Byron's intentions. The final words of the poem are:

> Abbot: 'He's gone – his soul hath taken its earthless flight;
> Whither? I dread to think – but he is gone'.
> [Act II scene 4, lines 152–3]

We can see, therefore, how powerfully an all-forgiving conclusion is demanded by music, the resolution of every discord, even the most inexplicable – the dissonance of life itself. It is superfluous to mention that

Tchaikovsky's texture and instrumentation are masterly; we can only thank him for his new contribution to the treasure-store of our nation's symphonic music.

(c) G. A. Laroche: The concert on 11 August at Pavlovsk, Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* and *Hamlet*. *Theatre Gazette*, 15 August 1893, no. 7, p. 6. Laroche 2, pp. 155–9

The fantasy overture *Hamlet* was composed in 1888. This concert was given in pleasure gardens at a distance from the capital.

P. I. Tchaikovsky is at the forefront of contemporary Russian music. But being in the forefront of it now, when musical technique and musical learning have spilled over to an extensive constituency of specialists and a great many talented composers have emerged, is by no means the same thing as it was in the 1860s when Russian composers were very thin on the ground. Along with five or six others, mostly older than him, he is also at the forefront of the music of the whole civilized world – and there too his kingdom, though shared with others, is as little open to question and as gladly acknowledged as it is in Russia.

He has attained this eminent position by the intensity and magnetic power of his talent, and not at all by its universality. He has tackled the most varied kinds of music and displayed a colossal gift in every one, but he displays himself completely in only a few. If ever beneficent nature contrived to produce a musical genius as an illustration or practical corroboration of the theory of 'absolute music', Hanslick's theory,[8] then that musical genius is Tchaikovsky – so greatly is he filled with music on the one hand, so little on the other hand is he drawn towards musical illustration of poetic content, towards programme music or music drama.

To opera, as to programme music, he has devoted a huge share of his time and energy, and as regards opera one may say that, after a whole series of more or less unsuccessful experiments, he at length found a form in complete affinity with his gift, that is *one where the present-day demands for musical drama are reduced to a minimum*. Maybe some day he will reach the equivalent position in the orchestral fantasy on a poetic subject, that is, in the 'symphonic poem'. That will be when he finally discards the recently introduced but already long outmoded seasonings which for some reason are considered essential once a title has been taken from some famous poet: long sequences in an uncertain key, pauses, instrumental recitatives, a colossal din

[8] The Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904) set out these ideas in *Vom musikalisch-schönen* ('On the Musically-Beautiful'), first published in Leipzig in 1854; they offered a viewpoint contrary to that of the 'Weimar school'. Laroche was a rare Russian subscriber to Hanslick's ideas.

on the diminished seventh, unfinished short phrases transposed from key to key and the obligatory tam-tam [Laroche has a play on words: 'iz tona v ton i . . . tam-tam']. In rejecting all this and being satisfied with writing music which is melodious and rounded in form, we are reverting to the standpoint of Raff, who calmly composed one symphony after another and gave them such titles as *The Fatherland*, *The Forest*, *Leonore*, *Spring* and so on. In the eyes of M. A. Balakirev, to whom *Manfred* is dedicated, that will be the ultimate degradation, the rejection in music of everything poetic, everything ideal. I, on the other hand, do not give a brass farthing for that idealism which comprises instrumental recitative, the diminished seventh and the tam-tam.

But Mr Tchaikovsky's symphonic poems are not all recitative and tam-tam. Alongside the direct imitation of Liszt which holds sway in the weakest sections of these compositions, each of them contains a greater or smaller number of pages where the composer apparently forgets altogether the Weimar wisdom, with which he has so little kinship and which he has adopted so superficially. A beautiful melody will be flowing along (generally speaking, the more beautiful it is the less it shares the character of the poem or situation), the orchestration will set itself free from the thunder of the percussion – that invariable sign of the most profound thoughts – and unfold all its magic from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo;* you don't even have time to look round before the real symphonist has awakened and an animated development section begins, with that pungent dissonant counterpoint of which our composer has such an inimitable command. Dante, Byron and Shakespeare are all forgotten. Alas! their turn will come again: like the ghost of Hamlet's father, they will stand before the composer again and start to eat away at him: 'What are we doing here? When are you going to get down to poetry? When are scrappy phrases, transpositions, pauses, general pauses and the tam-tam going to come along?' And, torn forcibly from the world of inspiration and beauty, the composer will again stick to the beaten track, and the protracted 'programmatic' proceedings will stretch out before us once more.

This inorganic mixture of two mutually alien and irreconcilable elements does not occur in the same way in all Tchaikovsky's symphonic poems. In this respect *Manfred* numbers among the most raw and unfinished of his compositions. Harmonic sequences extend over whole pages, going somewhere – but not getting anywhere, leaving an impression of mystery and uncertainty cribbed from Liszt, though cribbed not in a mechanical fashion but with the addition of some of the technical sequins which cost our deft and resourceful composer so little effort. There are particularly many such ultrapoetic pages in the symphony's first movement which, contrary to convention, is not an Allegro but a huge Adagio with various more or less faster episodes. And,

while we are on the subject of poetry, why is this first movement scored so loudly? Has Manfred really endured a shipwreck or bombarded Paris? I can understand the percussion instruments being used in the central section of *Romeo and Juliet*, because the composer was imagining a street fight in the savage Italy of the fourteenth century; I can doubly understand them in *Hamlet*, for in Shakespearian tragedy material catastrophes, violence and murders take a large place, although we have become used to looking only for philosophical and psychological subtleties; I am ready, finally, to accept the bass drum and cymbals in the finale of *Manfred*, as it is there that the court of the subterranean king Arimanes is displayed in all its glory. But the first movement, which according to the programme represents something like the quintessence of Manfred's monologues, not only does not need such cheap seasonings in my opinion, but because of their use distorts the spirit of Byron's poem and takes on the character of some battle or natural calamity, which is not even so much as mentioned in the English poet. In Byron the drama springs from within, and Manfred's torments are essentially those of a solitary melancholic and monomaniac haunted by a kind of *idée fixe*; for all his criminality, the hero is a member of the aristocracy of the spirit, and the hellish apparitions with which he habitually holds conversations understand the most subtle speeches and are able in their replies to wound him without resorting to noisy yelling.

But along with the 'programmatic' side of *Manfred*, which seems to me false and even prosaic, there is a purely musical side which is barely linked to the other – and here Tchaikovsky may be seen at his full stature, though I cannot say at one of his loftiest moments, not the Tchaikovsky of the Third Suite or the Fourth Symphony, but nonetheless full of melodic warmth and sincerity, rich in graceful harmonic turns, in unforced and euphonious counterpoint, rhythmically interesting and original, inexhaustibly diverse and captivating in instrumentation. To all this part of *Manfred* (much greater in bulk than the *poetic* or *Lisztian* part), one listens with the greatest interest, it is splendid in thematic development even more than in its melodies, has nothing in common with Liszt and, to my way of thinking, nothing in common with *Manfred*.[9] To that category first and foremost belongs all of the third movement – the 'pastorale', although the only thing pastoral about it is that there is an episode representing bagpipes, but where the elegance of form and musical development are sublime beyond description. Also to it belongs the so-called trio in the scherzo which has the character of a free

[9] Author's note: To clarify this attitude for the listener by means of a concrete example, I shall point to Schumann's *Manfred*. There one finds music which, in my opinion, contains both a Byronic atmosphere in general as well as various episodes in the drama, each one individually conveyed with astonishing vitality and truth.

expanse of steppe and idle languor, evocative of Gogol, Turgenev or Fet rather than Manfred, but in any case enchanting; to it belongs, lastly (apart from a few short episodes in the first movement, which it would take me too long to enumerate), the superb polyphonic development in the finale, full of movement, fire and compelling interest.

Hamlet (which in general terms I place immeasurably higher than *Manfred*) – is a completely different matter. It was saved, apparently, by the circumstance that it was initially envisaged not as a symphonic poem at all but as the overture to the tragedy which it was intended to perform in Russia in a French adaptation. When performed together with the literary work by which it was inspired, music does not need to cast about for the intelligibility of the spoken word, for the spoken word will itself show in due course wherein the subject lies and what the poet's individual ideas are.

However that may be, Tchaikovsky's *Hamlet* is to a significant extent more free than his *Manfred* from the ballast of the commonplaces of 'programme music': it is simply an overture, though not, of course, one composed to a template, though again with an episode in the national Russian style, very well done and completely out of place, but coherent and robust in form with the most superb principal theme,[10] slightly Beethovenian in character and with a development section which one can call straightforwardly a work of genius (the harmonic progression before the return of the principal section [from 8 bars before 'Non si cambia il Tempo']). The only thing which pains me in this work, which is as inspired as it is masterly, is the loud baying of the orchestra on the diminished seventh, masked not without skill by passing notes, but nevertheless representing a trite illustration of every sort of storm – at sea, on dry land and in the soul.

[The rest of the programme and the standard of performance are discussed.]

(d) N. D. Kashkin: P. I. Tchaikovsky's new symphony. *Russian Thought*, January 1889. Kashkin/Tchaikovsky, pp. 199–202

The Fifth Symphony was composed in the summer of 1888 and first performed in St Petersburg on 5 November of that year.

[Tchaikovsky's career goes from strength to strength, despite the hostility of a section of the St Petersburg press.]

P. I. Tchaikovsky's new Fifth Symphony in E minor is made up of the usual four movements, but with the scherzo replaced by a waltz. The symphony's

[10] Author's note: I regard as the principal theme not that which opens the introduction (Lento lugubre, A minor), but what is known as the principal section (Allegro vivace, F minor).

first movement is preceded by an introduction where the main theme which occurs in every movement is stated, with a change from the minor mode to the major where the symphony ends. The first Allegro opens with a beautiful theme of powerful character which is distantly related melodically to the first theme but completely different in rhythm. The course of the first theme takes it in the normal way to the second theme in the key of the dominant minor. This theme is elegiac in mood and extremely graceful and beautiful, and a third so-called closing section follows it in the key of D major. After the development, the first section of the Allegro returns, but the second theme occurs in C-sharp minor instead of B minor and the closing section in E major. A very significant addition returns to the initial E minor where the first movement ends.

The symphony's second movement is an Andante cantabile, the unusual beauty of whose melody can stand alongside the best works of Tchaikovsky, who is so rich altogether in melodic inventiveness. The whole dreamily passionate colouring of this movement is superbly maintained, with the movement rising in places to moments of the most powerful excitement, shifting with an uncommonly beautiful and powerful modulation based on $\frac{6}{4}$ triads to a calmer, fading mood. The theme of the introduction appears in the second half of the Andante, here with a menacing character, and leads to a repetition of the Andante's main theme which occurs here in its most powerful statement; the theme of the introduction appears again before the end in a compressed version, then everything dies away and finishes in a scarcely audible *pianissimo*. This entire movement is so beautiful, so permeated by genuine, deep feeling, that it constitutes a masterpiece in itself.

The third movement, a waltz, is kindred to those delightful waltzes found previously in Mr Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings and Suite; it represents a moment of tranquillity after the passionate spiritedness of the preceding movement. The waltz contains an abundance of superb harmonic details of refinement and elegance, such as the violins' rising scale against the theme in progress in the wind instruments. The Trio of the waltz is built on a rapid figure in which the two-beat pattern sometimes gives way to a three-beat one, thus imparting an especial rhythmic savour. The theme from the introduction enters again at the end, but now in a mood of calm reconciliation.

The final movement opens with the theme of the introduction, but now no longer in the minor, as on its first appearance, but in the major. From this theme the Allegro of the finale develops, again in E minor. This whole movement is the work of a master of the first order, and although its themes are inferior to those of the previous movements, it nonetheless offers such a

wealth of development, such artistic finish as a whole, that one may call it the best of all the movements in the symphony.

The new symphony as a whole is the work of a talent which is fully mature and in free and easy command of all the resources of the art of music. With regard to artistic balance, clarity and perfection of form, it occupies, if not the first place, then one of the very first places among Tchaikovsky's works.

(e) G. A. Laroche: P. Tchaikovsky's *Mazeppa*. *Moscow Bulletin*, 2 January 1889, no. 22, pp. 3–4. Laroche 2, pp. 129–35

This opera, composed in 1881–3, was staged in the Bol'shoy Theatre in Moscow on 3 February 1884.

Perhaps the reader will resent me telling too hackneyed an anecdote, but I cannot resist quoting an apocryphal dictum of the dying Hegel, so apt to the occasion does it seem. The philosopher – as the legend affirms – said first: 'Of all my pupils there was only one who understood me'. Then, after a short silence, he added: 'And even he misinterpreted me'. The original form in which the great writer wrapped his idea is eminently suitable to describe the state of musical drama in present-day Russia. Imitating him, we shall say that, of all present-day Russian composers, Tchaikovsky alone is capable of writing operas, and Tchaikovsky's operas are in essence not operas at all.

When we say that the creator of *Cherevichki* ('The Slippers') is one of those first-class musicians who lack a genuinely dramatic temperament, or that Mr Tchaikovsky's operas when compared with his other compositions, especially his symphonies, occupy a secondary place, we are placing him in an extremely honourable company. The same may be said of Beethoven and Schumann, who wrote one opera apiece, and of Berlioz, who wrote as many as four. It is true that, in the number of his attempts in this genre and by the strength of will with which he tries again and again to solve the riddle of the sphinx called Russian musical drama, Tchaikovsky differs sharply from the Western masters I have named, whose operas, even those of Berlioz, are merely episodes in an extended field of activity devoted to entirely different ends. Counting *Undina*, which was never staged anywhere and which, if I am not mistaken, the composer destroyed, Tchaikovsky, who has by no manner of means reached old age yet, has already written eight large-scale operas. It is not open to doubt that he is indebted precisely to them, or to some of them, for a significant part of his fame, or that there is a whole division of his admirers who know him only as the creator of *Eugene Onegin*. But the very predilection of the public for this opera above all the others by the same composer already provides a partial description of his

attitude to musical drama. Not one of Tchaikovsky's other operas shows so few pretensions to drama; in no other does the inspiration flow in such an even, uninterrupted stream. One may say without being paradoxical that, for this intelligent, sensitive and educated artist, so-called dramatic truth in music always comes in inverse proportion to the efforts made to achieve it. I have just spoken about the large number of our composer's operas, but his taste for drama is demonstrated not by quantitative definitions alone.

It is most interesting to cast a glance over his choice of subjects. Leaving his first two operas to one side as youthful works, *Eugene Onegin* as a score intended initially for production in a conservatoire and consequently written for a particular ensemble with the limitations which such a situation inevitably entails, and *The Slippers* which was composed for a competition on a prescribed libretto, we are left with four operas written when his talent was more or less at a mature stage in its development and using subjects, obviously, chosen by him in complete freedom. What is immediately striking is the sombre, harrowing character of the plots, the abundance of horrors and blood, the note of melodrama. Born in 1840 and growing up, apparently, like all Russians of our generation, on the peaceful literature of Gogol, Turgenev and Ostrovsky, our composer – as one could reason *a priori* – ought to have been bound to share the distaste common to people of our time for daggers, scaffolds, scoundrels and red cloaks. But in fact it turns out that, except for the red cloaks, all these ingredients play a significant role in his works: from the horrors of the *oprichnina*[11] to the evil deeds within a family in *The Enchantress*, a broad river of blood runs through his operas, and the brutality of the dramatist, who in private is of astounding gentleness and placidity, goes so far that even Schiller's Joan of Arc, whose fate the German poet softened, is again condemned to a terrifying death in the flames. It goes without saying that subjects of this cast (and *Mazeppa* too belongs among them, with its executions and torturing) require the strongest, harshest, and most staggering means of expression in the music as well. I invariably have the impression of a highly gifted composer doing violence to his talent. I certainly do not wish to say that Tchaikovsky is capable of setting only tender and sentimental scenes. No, he does have energy and breadth of scale, but his energy and broad scale are, if one may put it this way, exclusively major-key. Rejoicing, celebrating, a splendid festive tone – these are what he succeeds magnificently with time and again, and an unconscious sense of his innate power, as it seems to me, tempts him to employ it in exactly the opposite direction, where it almost invariably refuses to serve him. The weakest places in his operas are those where he has to depict dramatic

[11] This term refers to a special bodyguard created by Tsar Ivan IV.

confrontations; among such places in *Mazeppa* is the scene of the quarrel [no. 6], where constant divergence can be sensed between the situation and the music, where, for example, the big ensemble in C minor, even by the choice of metre ($\frac{9}{8}$) and rhythm, cannot have the dramatic energy for which the composer was evidently striving. Equally alien to Mr Tchaikovsky's nature, and just as unsympathetic to me in its treatment, is the challenge posed by the prison scene.

For all his love of strongly dramatic subjects, our composer takes little interest, apparently, in one of musical drama's most vital resources. I mean recitative. One can point to many phrases in *Mazeppa* whose declamation [word-setting] is hard to accept: read the text without the music, adopting the expression suggested naturally by the situation of the characters involved, and very often your declamation will be different from Mr Tchaikovsky's. If that phenomenon can be observed in recitative, where no demands of *cantilena* constrained him, then it occurs even more frequently in lyrical and rounded phrases; moreover, there are instances where the initial motive of the *cantilena*, which is normally composed directly under the influence of declamation, reveals no such influence in Tchaikovsky's case. The gifted master's operas, exactly like his symphonic poems, remind us often and eloquently of the too easily forgotten axiom of right-minded aesthetics that music is not an art of expression, that, by forcing her to *speak* and *depict*, we are doing violence to her nature, that she finds her true power and beauty where she is completely free of poetic pretensions. The greatest models of musical drama are no more than compromises between the nature of art and our age's striving to illustrate stage action musically, compromises in which the composer is obliged at every turn to hold the balance between opposing demands, to walk a tightrope. This tightrope-walking calls for a special talent which has become particularly rare in our day and age, and Mr Tchaikovsky is a true child of his time in this, as in many other respects, in possessing this special talent only in the smallest degree.

And why should he grieve for it when he has all the others? While, for the most part, displaying major deficiencies in construction and scenario and not exploiting musically even those advantages which are preserved in their libretti, his operas, nonetheless, afford aesthetic enjoyment year in year out to the most musical, most enlightened part of our public. Together with Mr Tchaikovsky's symphonic scores, albeit to a lesser extent, they are numbered with the noblest creations of Russian art, and the musical beauties so generously strewn through them more than compensate for the absence of that dramatic nerve which present-day criticism pursues so exclusively. An incomparable melodist, who as the years go by acquires even more richness, versatility, succulence and grace in his melody, our composer has displayed