

*Tchaikovsky*  
**SYMPHONY No. 4 IN F MINOR, Op. 36**  
 BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA • PIERRE MONTEUX, Conducting

Produced by John Pfeiffer • Recording Engineer: John Crafusford

Fate, with a capital F, was a favorite word with all the Romantics, and no one rolled it on his tongue more often and more sonorously than Peter Tchaikovsky. Early in his career he wrote a symphonic poem called *Fate*, and the word appears constantly in his letters; it is especially associated, however, with his Fourth Symphony.

Tchaikovsky did not like to provide literary "programs" for his symphonies, and even when he had a "program" in mind, as in the case of the "Pathétique," he refused to divulge it. But not long after the completion of the Fourth Symphony, in March 1878, he sent his "beloved friend," Nadejda von Meck, a description of the work which amounts to a "program." This was never intended for publication, but it has been available in print for many years, and it is impossible to discuss the symphony without it.

The symphony is held together by a recurrent motif, a dramatic, hammering figure with repeated notes heard in the horns at the very beginning. This, Tchaikovsky told Mme. von Meck, "is Fate, the inexorable force that prevents our hopes of happiness from being realized . . . it is Damocles' sword, hanging over the head in constant, unrelenting, spiritual torment." The drooping, descending, principal theme that follows is intended to symbolize submission to Fate; at length the composer turns from reality and sinks into dreams. (As Gerald Abraham has pointed out, the music suggesting this lovely dream strikingly resembles a balletic waltz; no one knew more about the ballet and its dreamlike appeal than the composer of *Swan Lake*.) Fate, however, roughly awakens us. "So life itself is a persistent alternation of hard reality with evanescent dreams and clutches of happiness . . . This, approximately, is the 'program' of the first movement."

The second movement is marked *Andantino in modo di canzone*. The *canzone* might well have been a Russian folk song. It is a nostalgic, wistful melody played by the oboe. A broader theme in the strings provides contrast, and then the oboe tune comes back. This movement, according to the composer's letter, suggests "the melancholy that comes in the evening when we sit alone and, weary of work, we try to read, but

the book falls from our hand." Gentle reminiscences crowd one's thoughts. "It is sad and somehow sweet to sink into the past."

In the third movement Tchaikovsky plays about among the choirs of the orchestra. The movement is a scherzo in which the strings put down their bows and pluck, as if the string body were suddenly transformed into a gigantic balalaika. There are also whistling, gay tunes in the woodwinds, and a march in the brass. This scherzo, says Tchaikovsky, "is a succession of capricious arabesques, those intangible images that pass through the mind when one has drunk wine and feels the first touch of intoxication . . . The imagination has free rein and has begun, one knows not why, to draw strange designs. Suddenly comes to mind a picture of a drunken peasant; a brief street song is heard. Far off, a military procession passes. The pictures are disconnected, like those which float through the mind when one is falling asleep . . ."

The finale depicts a peasant festival and is based on a Russian dance tune: "If you find no joy within yourself, look for it in others. Go to the people. See, they know how to make the most of their time, how to give themselves up to pleasure!" But "no sooner do you forget yourself in this spectacle of others' joy than merciless Fate reappears to remind you of yourself." This, of course, is the horn theme of the opening, which returns at the climax of the last movement. But the music gathers energy once again, and the symphony comes to a blazing conclusion.

At the end of his letter to Mme. von Meck, Tchaikovsky invokes a line of Heine: "Where words cease, there music begins." His literary "program" for the Fourth Symphony, in other words, is not to be taken too literally, and in all probability, it occurred to him after the music was composed rather than before. Yet it has some value and throws some light on Tchaikovsky's personality; and it is all but unique among the documents of this composer's life.

Russian music and French music have always been sisters under the skin. Russian composers like Tchaikovsky learned their exceedingly brilliant orchestral technique from French models, especially the model of Berlioz, and Russian music won its first audience not in Moscow or St. Petersburg but in Paris. The famous Ballets Russes of Sergei Diaghileff had their headquarters in Paris, introduced the Russian folklore pieces, like Stravinsky's *Firebird* and *Rite of Spring*, to Parisian audiences—and their conductor was Pierre Monteux.

After touring the United States with the Diaghileff ballet, Monteux remained here to conduct the French and Russian repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera. Later, when he held permanent conductorial posts with the Boston Symphony, the San Francisco Symphony, the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam, and the Symphony Orchestra of Paris (which he founded), his advocacy of Russian music, both romantic and modern, broadened and grew even more authoritative. Today, as he approaches his eighty-fifth birthday, Monteux's activities are not confined to any one city, country or continent, but in this recording he returns to the first orchestra with which he held a permanent position and to a branch of the repertoire on which his celebrity was founded.

Notes by ALFRED FRANKENSTEIN  
 Music and Art Editor of the San Francisco Chronicle

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