

Tchaikovsky SYMPHONY No. 5, IN E MINOR, Op. 64

Boston Symphony Orchestra • Pierre Monteux, Conducting

James Slagiano, French Horn Solo

Musical Director: Richard Mahr • Engineer: Lewis Layton

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony is easy to know and to love. It is easy to know because it is clear, straightforward, sincere and convincing. It is easy to love because it can communicate to us the emotional state of a sensitive, urbane, thoughtful and articulate man, effecting and affecting a similar and sympathetic state in ourselves. And, too, the music is ingratiating as a simple, sensuous pleasure for the composer has lavished upon it his unmeasured gift for melodic invention, his sensitivity to rhythmic pulse, his uncommon skill in orchestration.

This symphony provides little pretext for psychiatric speculation upon the anatomy of melancholy—a spiritual condition which the composer enjoyed most of the time. The music has neither the febrile exuberance, the escapist abandon of the Fourth Symphony, nor the morbidity, despair and “withdrawal” of the Sixth. It is sane and sound. Its joys are vital and vigorous rather than frantic; its moments of introspection and longing are healthy, normal and optimistic, or at least sanguine, in their conclusions: its humor, if somewhat diffident, is graceful and wholesome. More than any other of Tchaikovsky's symphonies, it is informed with the quality of universality—a quality essential to and characteristic of every valid work of art.

The Fifth Symphony is a product of a period spent by Tchaikovsky in a little country house where he had gone to seek solitude, quiet and peace. Here he knew the happiest days of his life, though they were few and were quickly followed by a term of misery, homesickness and personal grief. Success in conducting some of his own music in England brought some relief, and perhaps encouraged Tchaikovsky to undertake a journey to America in the spring of 1891. Here he conducted six concerts, in Boston, Baltimore, New York and Philadelphia, the program including works by Weber, Wagner, Mendelssohn, Massenet, Delibes, Donizetti and Mozart, as well as his own B-Flat Minor Piano Concerto and the *Serenade for Strings*. The Fifth Symphony had been completed before the composer left Russia, but was not played here, perhaps because of Tchaikovsky's lack of confidence in himself as a conductor, especially with a strange and hastily organized orchestra. At least he had an able assistant conductor and first cellist—an American of Irish birth who spoke with a German accent—Victor Herbert.

Thematically and structurally the symphony is as clear, strong and comprehensible as it is emotionally sound. If the casting of one movement in the form of a simple, graceful waltz (third movement) following the emotional exhaustion of the preceding section caused lifted eyebrows in Tchaikovsky's time, it really needs no evidence to justify it. A precedent exists in the classical symphonies with their pretty minuets, and the waltz provides a welcome relief from the exigent emotional demands of the preceding music, as well as preparation for the impact of what follows.

The many lovely melodic fragments which Tchaikovsky synthesizes to make his wonderful music are too numerous to count, and too candidly exposed to make any indication of their necessity here. There are two of special interest, however. In the second movement, after seven measures of harmonies, rich and solemn in the strings, comes one of music's most poignant melodies, and one of the most perfect and beautiful tunes ever written for the solo horn. It is the basis for the movement, and, notwithstanding certain violently contrasting passages, dominates the movement in one orchestral texture or another.

Another thematic incident of special interest (clarinet) occurs at the very beginning of the music, where it assumes importance as a structural member of the movement. Somewhat surprisingly we come upon it again, as a basic motif of the fourth movement. Here it is assigned to the deeper strings, and in the major instead of the minor mode, and with more vigorous accents; but it is, nevertheless, the very same idea that initiated the symphony. Yet it is transformed, and speaks now of a calm joy rather than of foreboding, of dark spirits exorcised, of a soul in command of itself.

Many sensitive people, many artists and some scientists believe in the existence of a human faculty which they call “synaesthesia,” by which the sensory impression caused by one stimulus—let us say, color—is duplicated by and associated with the impression caused by another—sound, for instance. Rimsky-Korsakoff, a master of orchestration, and Alexander Scriabin, musician and mystic, independently worked out a scale of colors which to them represented tonalities. While its validity may be questioned, its aptness with respect to the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies of Tchaikovsky is striking; so are the

disagreements of the two:

	Rimsky-Korsakoff	Scriabin
Symphony No. 4 in F Minor	Green	Red
Symphony No. 5 in E Minor	Blue	Bluish-white
Symphony No. 6 in B Minor	Somber, purplish-blue	Purple-violet

Whatever the “color” of Tchaikovsky's music, whether we see with our ears or hear with our eyes, there can be no denying the infinite variety, richness and total levelness he sets before us.

The association of Pierre Monteux with any of the world's great orchestras—and he has conducted most of them—is certain to produce memorable results. When that association is with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, we can anticipate a memorable performance. When to such a performance RCA Victor brings the realities, the subtleties, and the conviction of modern recording, we can assume that such a recording is utterly definitive, profoundly moving, and as close to immortality as any man-made thing can be.

Notes by CHARLES O'CONNELL

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The music as originally recorded on triple track was then produced as a dual track stereo disc by combining the three original tracks under controlled conditions, to insure correct stereo frequency range, maximum spatial effect, and ideal balance and dynamic contrast.

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Tchaikovsky **SYMPHONY No.5**
PIERRE MONTEUX conducting the BOSTON SYMPHONY

