

Classical Music Appreciation—Introductory

Session 6 notes

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Tonight's agenda

Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 5
Tchaikovsky, Marche Slave
Delius, On hearing the first cuckoo in spring
Saint Saëns, Symphony No. 3

Peter Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) (Russia) Symphony No. 5



Although we may not have applied the label at the time, we've already encountered “program” music—music that illustrates a story, mood, or something else external to the music itself. Peer Gynt, the Planets, Pictures at an Exhibition, Prelude à l'après midi d'un faune—these are all examples. Knowing the imagery behind the piece helps us understand and enjoy it.

But what if the music was “program music” as far as the composer was concerned, but with a program not divulged? Is it still “program music” to the listener? This is the dilemma we face with Tchaikovsky's 5th. By the time Tchaikovsky wrote his 4th symphony, he had come to the view that a symphony should have an underlying program. And the 4th symphony is indeed based on an explicit program, which he expounded at length in a letter to his patron, Nadezhda von Meck. Yet oddly, Tchaikovsky never said a word to anyone about any program underlying the 5th. However, we know from notes of his unearthed in the 1950s that indeed a program there was, though Tchaikovsky apparently took most of it to his grave in his head. The only snippet he committed to paper was this:




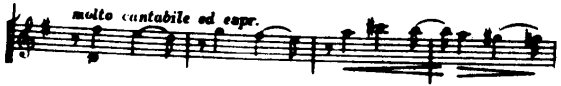




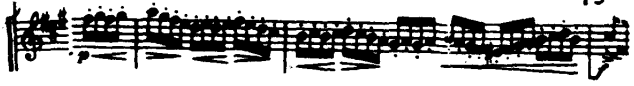
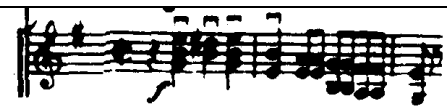

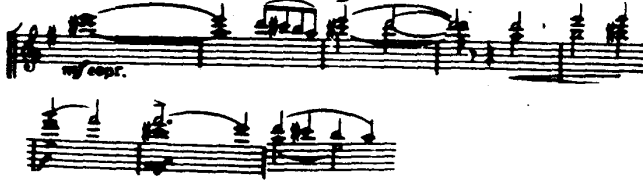
Introduction. Complete resignation before Fate, or, which is the same, before the inscrutable predestination of Providence. Allegro. (I) Murmurs, doubts, plains, reproaches against XXX . . . (II) Shall I throw myself in the embrace of faith?

So much for a program, or lack thereof.

For additional insight into Tchaikovsky and his fifth symphony, see Richard Freed's excellent program notes at http://www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index.cfm?fuseaction=composition&composition_id=2080

For our purposes tonight, here's a "map" of the symphony that we can use to keep our bearings. Relative to our recording, which is by Georg Solti with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (on London 425 516-2), times indicate the time at the beginning of the segment, relative to that movement.

Theme Reference

Motto Theme	
First Movement	
First Theme	
Second Theme	
Third Theme	
Second Movement	
First Section	
First Theme	
Second Theme	
Second Section	
Third Movement	
Waltz Theme	
Trio Theme	
Fourth Movement	
First Theme	
Second Theme	
Third Theme	

First Movement

Sonata form

<i>bar</i>	<i>time</i>		<i>remarks</i>
1	0:00	Introduction	(clarinet) the “motto” theme, which shows up repeatedly throughout the symphony
		Exposition	the movement’s melodic elements are stated
42	2:30	First Theme	clarinet and bassoon
116	4:20	Second Theme	strings
170	5:36	Third Theme	violins
		Development	the themes are “developed,” somewhat like variations
194	6:20		development begins with a bold restatement of the First Theme by brass and woodwinds
		Recapitulation	the themes are restated
321	8:53	First Theme	solo bassoon
373	10:07	Second Theme	strings
427	11:21	Third Theme	strings
451	12:02	Coda	horns and trombones announce the Coda with the powerfully stated First Theme. The coda is based on elements of both First and Second Themes

Second Movement*Slow, serious, and rather dark. ABA form.*

<i>bar</i>	<i>time</i>		<i>remarks</i>
		Second Movement	serious and rather dark
1	0:00	First Section (A)	(strings) introductory chords
8	0:48	First Theme	solo horn
24	2:21	Second Theme	oboe and horn duet
33	3:09	Reprise	(cellos) restatement and development of First and Second Themes
67	5:56	Second Section (B)	(clarinet) a new theme, contrasting and a little more urgent
99	7:24	Bridge	(trumpets and woodwind) the Motto Theme makes its first brief reappearance, strident and self-important. [Listen to the bass trombone and contra-bassoon thumping out their triplet figure way down there in the nether regions.]
108	7:46	First Section reprise (A)	
111	8:04	First Theme	(violins) notice the newly introduced obligato (counter melody) in the woodwinds
128	9:22		(woodwinds) 1st Theme continues, now with a new counter melody from horns
142	10:02	Second Theme	now returning in a full-orchestra fortissimo climax
158	11:10	Coda	(trombones and bassoons) Motto Theme—making another reappearance, now forceful and menacing
171	11:56		(strings) Second Theme—a tranquil contrast, bringing the movement to a peaceful close

Third Movement*Waltz and trio*

A short, happy, and airy waltz movement, more light hearted than a typical classical-era scherzo and trio.

<i>bar</i>	<i>time</i>		<i>remarks</i>
1	0:00	Waltz Theme	violins
72	1:29	Trio	(violins) a busy and fussy contrast to the song-like waltz
145	2:58	Waltz Theme reprise	(strings) notice how the fussy Trio theme continues, competing with the (oboes) Waltz reprise for a few bars before finally yielding the floor
241	5:01	Coda	(clarinet and bassoon) Motto Theme—here it is again
256	5:21		(violins) First Theme—a very brief fragment based on the first theme elbows out the motto theme to complete the movement

Fourth Movement

Sonata form

<i>bar</i>	<i>time</i>		<i>remarks</i>
		Fourth Movement	
1	0:00	Introduction	the Motto Theme reappears, majestic and resolute, running for 57 bars in its most extended form yet.
51	2:34		strings tease us with fragments that hint at the theme to come
		Exposition	
58	2:56	First Theme	strings
98	3:31	Second Theme	strings
128	3:57	Third Theme	woodwinds
172	4:33	Development	trumpets and trombones announce the Development with (what else?) the Motto Theme
		Recapitulation	
296	6:28	First Theme	notice how the two elements of the first theme are now played concurrently, with the first figure in the lower instruments and the second figure in the higher register
340	7:06	Second Theme	strings
378	7:38	Third Theme	woodwinds
		Coda	
426	8:20		(brass) the motto theme appears in a transitional role
474	9:12		(strings) triumphant strings sound the motto theme
490	9:58		trumpets and oboes wrest ownership of the motto theme (no, I can't really hear the oboes either, but the score says they're indeed involved)
	10:25		now Tchaikovsky treats us to one of my favorite figures—the relentlessly stepwise-rising bass line
546	11:13		First Theme of <i>First</i> Movement! Now in the major key. As in the Third Movement, the Motto Theme is elbowed out at the very end of the piece

Peter Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) (Russia) March Slave

Throughout his career, Tchaikovsky composed “occasional” pieces to mark various events, often connected with the lives of colleagues or Russian dignitaries. The *Marche Slave* is one such piece, commissioned in 1876 by the Russian Musical Society for a Red Cross concert for the benefit of Russian troops in Serbia and Montenegro. To help boost morale and raise money, the piece is based on Serbian folk songs, and also quotes the Tsarist national anthem. *Marche Slave* is one of the Tchaikovsky’s more popular concert marches, and is often found on classical “pops” collections.

We need to give the title “March” some latitude, as it normally implies a steady 120-beats-per-minute tempo, and usually a major key. In contrast, *Marche Slave*’s opening

theme connotes not so much marching as trudging. [0:14]¹ The melancholy minor-key melody is first featured in the lower strings and then moves to higher registers, each repetition underpinned by a new counterpoint. [1:23] The opening theme abruptly gives way to an optimistic lyrical theme from the second violins. After a busy bridge passage [1:41], the full orchestra brings back the opening theme [2:29].

[3:40] The mood now changes as the clarinets take up a surprisingly happy and jovial theme, which is soon joined [4:17] by a variant of the opening march theme which, this time around, has a bit more of a spring in its step.

[5:04] Here's the Tsarist national anthem for the first time, which you may recognize from Tchaikovsky's well-known 1812 overture.

[6:08] Now the opening theme returns, this time sounding even more optimistic. After a reprise of the lyrical theme, we enter a bridge passage that takes us into another major mood change [7:40], again with clarinets handling the kick off, and now sounding happier than ever. Low brass throw in their weight with the national anthem, and the march heads into a brilliant and upbeat [8:55] coda.

Frederick Delius (1862-1934) (England) On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring



Small orchestra

Of wealthy German parentage, Delius was born and raised in England. He moved to France in 1888 and spent the rest of his life there. Five years younger than compatriot Edward Elgar, the two never met until 1933, the year before both died.

Delius was not a prolific composer. His music is unlike that of any other, and tends to have a dreamy, ethereal quality, very evocative of the mood scenes it portrays. As a result, it demands the greatest care and empathy from its performers, lest it should sound trivial and simplistic.

On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring dates from 1912. Just over seven minutes long, its uncomplicated structure is based on a Norwegian folksong that composer Edvard Grieg

¹ Timing are relative to the London recording 430 410-2, London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leopold Stokowski.

had published in a piano collection of folk tunes. Although the overall design of the piece is simple, Delius achieves a very rich—yet delicate—string sound, dividing each of the usual orchestral string lines into two (with the exception of basses). The harmony becomes more and more chromatic and complex as the piece progresses, enriching the lush texture.

The cuckoo call is a ubiquitous and universally recognized sound in the summer English countryside (and I suppose in France too), but probably quite unknown to most American ears. It's a simple two-note falling third; the name "cuckoo" being itself an imitation of the sound, which the clarinet gets the job of making in this piece.

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) (France) Symphony No. 3



Saint-Saëns is one of those composers whose popularity now rests on a small number of works, in spite of a large output and considerable fame and reputation during his lifetime. He was a virtuoso pianist and organist, gaining entrance to the Paris Conservatoire at the tender age of 13 and later earning his living as an organist. He gained fame for his organ improvisations, some of which found their way into his published works, including the Third Symphony.

Saint-Saëns' Third Symphony is the only one to hold a place in today's repertoire. The other four are almost never featured on concert programs and are very sparsely recorded. (A fairly deep scan of the Amazon catalogue reveals no recordings by world-class orchestras.)

The Third Symphony is Saint-Saëns' last, and is so numbered because two others were unpublished until after his death. Completed in 1886, the Third—which has acquired the ineluctable nickname of "the organ symphony"—was the result of a commission by the Philharmonic Society of London. Saint-Saëns' music was popular in England, and this period marked the zenith of his fame and compositional creativity. The first performance was, appropriately enough, in London, conducted by the composer.

Saint-Saëns presents the symphony as a two-movement work rather than the usual symphonic design of four. However, the two movements are each constructed as rather distinct halves, joined by connecting passages, and thus we can choose to think of it as a

four-movement work. Indeed, the recording we'll hear divides the symphony into four tracks.

The work is dedicated to the composer Franz Liszt, and borrows Liszt's idea of theme transformation, in which a motto theme recurs throughout the entire work, changing its character to conform to its context. Saint-Saëns shows remarkable ingenuity in this respect, and the symphony is thus superbly integrated.

Outline of the symphony

Timings are relative to the recording by Charles Dutoit and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, London 410 210-2.

Movement I₁

Sonata form

<i>ref</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>structure</i>	<i>remarks</i>
[start]	0:00	introduction	
[start]+11	1:18	exposition first subject	motto theme
[F]	3:36	second subject	
[H]	4:50	development	
[M]	7:02	recapitulation first subject	
[O]+13	8:47	second subject	
[P]+9	9:30	coda/bridge to I₂	here is a delicate adaptation of the motto theme (triplets, with the third triplet missing)

Movement I₂

ABA form

<i>ref</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>structure</i>	<i>remarks</i>
[P]+35	0:00	A	
[S]+3	4:48	B	this theme is actually a variation on A, providing a pleasant contrast to A yet tightly integrating the movement through its close relationship
[U]	5:14	link	here's a stroke of genius: this figure is what I referred to above as the 'delicate adaptation of the motto theme' from the close of I ₁ , which led us into I ₂ . Now Saint-Saëns brings it back in extended form, again to preface the reprise of theme A, thus muddying up the boundaries of our pulling apart of his two movements.

[V]	6:24	A	notice how the ‘delicate adaptation of the motto theme’ continues as pizzicato accompaniment
[X]	7:46	coda	

Movement II₁*Sonata form*

<i>ref</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>structure</i>	<i>remarks</i>
[start]	0:00	exposition first subject	the motto theme, transformed so that it retains much of its rhythmic character but little of its melody
[C]+12	1:29	second subject	a new idea, but I think I could almost convince myself it’s derived (melodically anyway) from the motto theme
[F]+4	2:01	development	an ingenious development section built largely on the transformed motto theme, which this time retains its melodic elements but replaces its frenetic staccato with a lyrical flowing rhythm strongly reminiscent of the melody of I ₂ .
[K]+14	3:26	recapitulation first subject	
[O]+2	4:54	second subject	
[Q]+6	5:31	coda/link to II₂	
[R]+4	6:14		notice the motto theme in basses and cellos; here the melody is transformed not at all, but the rhythm certainly is.

Movement II₂*Free fantasia*

This movement makes for a glorious finale as Saint-Saëns gives free rein to his imagination, quite unconstrained by considerations of adherence to any design template. The entire movement is derived from the motto theme, and most of the way you don’t need too much imagination to make the connection.

I won’t attempt a detailed analysis because I don’t think it would add much to your listening enjoyment²—it would be complex and confusing rather than enlightening. I will, however, point out a few highlights (but I’ll remind you here that I’m a brass player):

² And writing it would make my brain hurt.

<i>ref</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>remarks</i>
[R]+16	0:00	the organ gets the first bar all to himself here with a rich C major chord. I love to watch sleepy-looking audience members as a live performance approaches this point.
[S]	0:30	the dreamy-sounding extended melody in strings is clearly the transformed motto theme. Notice the busy and pretty accompaniment from the piano (one instrument, four hands)
[T]	1:46	here's a fugue
[AA]+31	4:19	how 'bout them trumpets?
[CC]+12	5:32	not to be outdone, trombones and tuba strut their stuff. The Montreal brass section is a powerful unit indeed.
[FF]+9	6:24	here's the culmination of a movement (and symphony) that, for brass players, makes all that bars-rest counting worthwhile.