

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

(1840-1893)

Elements of Style

Melody: Tchaikovsky used folk idioms in many works, but usually with a Western cast to the folksong stylizations. His most characteristic melodic types were dance tunes (especially waltzes). A supreme writer of melodies, Tchaikovsky, like most other Russian composers, favored repetition and sequence of materials.

Harmony: Tchaikovsky normally based his harmony upon relatively conventional progressions with decorative chromaticism. He was fond of using the major triad on the flattened submediant in a major key context. Much of the chromaticism in his music arises from contrapuntal decoration, ranging from single chromatic passing tones to extended scales that may be set abrasively against the melody.

Rhythm: Rhythm was often used with such elemental vigor that it became the main expressive ingredient. A strong metrical drive was also a favorite characteristic and was used as a means of synthetic propulsion in large-scale symphonic movements.

Form: Tchaikovsky had difficulty staying within a strict symphonic form as he was (by his own admission) somewhat inept in thematic development. Melodies were the focal point and were richly stated, but were repeated and slightly modified rather than fully developed. He used the *idée fixe* as mottos in his later symphonies.

Influences: Tchaikovsky considered Mozart the ultimate composer. He also greatly respected Beethoven, using the Beethoven Fifth Symphony as inspiration for his Fourth Symphony. He was strongly influenced by Glinka,

especially in the use of decorative chromaticism and bright and sharply differentiated orchestral coloring. The use of the *idée fixe* was a Berlioz influence. Tchaikovsky also received some nationalistic influences from the "Mighty Five," including his typically brilliant Russian orchestration.

Orchestration tendencies:

1. Separation of choirs
2. Many octave doublings
3. Great sensitivity to color
4. Frequently used reduced forces for slower, lyrical moments
5. Used successive groups to play successive phrases-almost a concertato scoring!
6. **Fondness for pizzicato effects**
7. **Dependency on scalar passages for creating excitement**