

Marlow U3A Music Appreciation Group

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PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

1840 – 1893



Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Tchaikovsky's intensely emotional music combines many influences in an individual style: Russian folk song with Western European technique; nationalism with a deeply personal agenda; the bombastic with the haunting and beautiful. The effects of the composer's (supposed) homosexuality on his music and the mystery surrounding his death still cause speculation.

Tchaikovsky wrote 159 pieces of music in his lifetime - 47 Orchestral pieces, 7 Chamber pieces, 31 Piano pieces, 25 dramatic pieces and 49 vocal pieces.

I will only have time to play two pieces:-

**VARIATIONS ON A ROCOCO THEME
and
THE OVERTURE ROMEO AND JULIET**

Variations on a Rococo Theme

The variations for Cello and Orchestra was the closest Tchaikovsky ever came to writing a full Cello Concerto. The style was inspired by Mozart, his role model, but the *Thema* is not Rococo in origin, but actually an original theme. It was premiered in Moscow in December 1877 with Nikolai Rubenstein Conducting and William Fitzenhagen a German Cellist, playing the solo part. The piece is scored for a reduced orchestra, to reflect a typical 18th century orchestra.

The piece comprises a theme and seven Variations (roughly 20 minutes)

1. Thema: Moderato Semplice

Brief introduction by Orchestra followed by the Solo Cello stating the simple elegant theme.

2. Var.I: Tempo della Thema. A variation in Triplets.

3. Var. II: Tempo della Thema. In double speed. Conversations between Orchestra and Soloist.

4. Var.III: Andante sostenuto. In key of C and played more contemplatively.

5. Var.IV: Andante grazioso. Back to A major and is a livelier version of the theme.

6. Var.V: Allegro Moderato

This variation contains two **Cadenzas** with full Orchestra “sandwiched” in between. The second **Cadenza** is longer and more difficult, it is “brazen” and filled with chords and refuses to resolve to its minor key

7. Var.VI Andante. Restatement of theme in D Minor

8. Var.VII e Coda: Allegro vivo. The soloist’s most difficult variation. The orchestra has difficulty keeping up with the blazing speed of the finale, the solo flute in particular

OVERTURE ROMEO AND JULIET

Tchaikovsky's first great orchestral work composed at the age of 30. Many romantic composers felt an artistic kinship with Shakespeare because of his passionate poetry, dramatic contrast, and profound knowledge of the human heart. Examples Verdi's *Macbeth* and *Othello*, Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Berlioz "Dramatic Symphony". Tchaikovsky was no exception

This overture was a dismal failure when it was premiered in 1870. He set about composing a new theme for Friar Lawrence (the opening theme) following a suggestion by his friend Balakirev. Only about 20 years later, after further revisions did it achieve worldwide popularity.

The music glorifies a romantic love powerful enough to triumph over death. Highly contrasted themes are used to express the conflict between family hatred and youthful love

- ♪ Tchaikovsky **opens** the overture with the Friar Lawrence theme, a **solemn hymnlike melody**. A slow introduction unfolds, brooding strings set an atmosphere of **impending tragedy**.
- ♪ In the **Allegro Giusto** (second theme) the clash of swords and the **anger** of the feuding families is suggested by the violent first theme of the Allegro. Syncopations, rushing strings, and massive sounds create enormous excitement.
- ♪ The **second part** of this theme evokes tender love.

- ♪ In the **Coda**, Tchaikovsky transforms the **love theme** into a song of mourning, while timpani softly beat the rhythm of a **funeral march**.
- ♪ Then, a **new hymn** and a tender reminiscence of the love theme suggest that Romeo and Juliet are reunited in death.