

[Submitted by Rebecca Burkhardt, University of Northern Iowa]

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No.5, E minor Op. 64

The Fifth Symphony (of six completed symphonies) is, like the Fourth, a motto symphony. Tchaikovsky premiered this work in St. Petersburg in November of 1888 to enthusiastic crowds but disappointed critics. This lack-luster critical response to the work probably had more to do with its poor presentation under Tchaikovsky's baton than his compositional prowess. The work began to receive the praise it deserved with subsequent performances, and has endured as one of the gems of the symphonic repertory.

The motto, a theme which occurs in several or all of the movements of a symphony, is heard initially in the introduction to the first movement and is played by unison clarinets in the lowest register. The march-like main theme of the ensuing *Allegro* in the clarinet and bassoon contrasts the secondary theme, almost Viennese in its waltz design, and the closing theme with its peasant-dance quality in the woodwinds and horns.

Strings lay the harmonic foundation of movement II (*Andante cantabile*) for one of the most famous horn solos in the repertory. The lengthy, well-spun and soaring melody (one of Tchaikovsky's trademarks) is passed throughout all sections of the orchestra. Ultimately, it is interrupted, not once but twice, with the motto of movement I by the brass section at its fullest *forte*. The second movement ends quietly with clarinets playing in unison.

Valse titles movement three and the melody in the first violins presents this dance form elegantly. The second of a three-part form is defined by a staccato 16th-note motive passed from strings to woodwinds and the *valse* theme returns to end the movement. Before the final phrase of these pleasantries however, the motto theme makes an almost sinister appearance, again in the lowest registers of the clarinet and bassoon.

The final movement begins in E major, a bright complement to the dour quality of the opening of the symphony. The motto, majestically played by the full string section, is given a significant display in the introduction before the launch of the *Allegro vivace* and a return to E minor. The movement's principal theme offers a quality of agitation created by the repeated down bows of the strings. The second

theme is lyrically spun in the *tutti* woodwinds and the closing theme in the brass employs the motto once again. The close of the Finale brings a return of E major and the motto theme marked to be played *molto maestoso* by the entire string complement. One final surprise, in the last 20 measures of the symphony, Tchaikovsky reintroduces the march-like principal theme of the first movement. With this return, the trumpets and oboes bring the Fifth Symphony to a thematic close.

The work is scored for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.