Graham School of General Studies · The University of Chicago

Tchaikovsky

John Gibbons
john@holdekunst.com · www.holdekunst.com · 708-393-9729

Course Description:

Counts as a Music Genre course for the Language of Music Certificate.

This course will give Tchaikovsky his due as a Russian nationalist and reveal how gracefully he navigated between the sometimes rough-hewn Slavocentrism of his contemporaries, "The Five," and the technical demands of Western cosmopolitanism. With his profound melodic gift, Tchaikovsky also entranced audience after audience and provided us with a living soundtrack for 19th century Russia. Works studied: *Swan Lake*, the magnificent Pushkin operas *Queen of Spades* and *Eugene Onegin*, the supposedly autobiographical fourth and sixth symphonies, and more.

Syllabus

Sessions 1, 2, 4, 6 & 8 follow a chronological "Life and Works" format. Weeks 3, 5 and 7 are dedicated, respectively, to Tchaikovsky's orchestral style, opera and ballet oeuvre.

Week 1: Tchaikovsky at the School of Jurisprudence and the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky and Balakirev. Featured: 1st Symphony, 1st String Quartet, *Romeo & Juliet*.

Week 2 - Tchaikovsky as professor in Moscow. Tchaikovsky's social circle. Featured works: Second Symphony, First Piano Concerto, *The Tempest*.

Week 3 - Tchaikovsky's orchestral Style. Featured works: The Four Suites, Hamlet, *Manfred* Symphony,

Week 4 - Tchaikovsky's disastrous marriage. His patroness, Nadezhda von Meck. Fourth Symphony, *Eugene Onegin* (opera), Choral work, Liturgy of St. John Christotam,

Week 5 – Tchaikovsky as an opera composer, Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky and Slavic nationalism. Tchaikovsky and Italian and French models. An overview of the operas concentrating on *Mazeppa* and *Pique Dame*.

Week 6 - Tchaikovsky the international master. The Imperial Tchaikovsky. Tchaikovsky vis a vis Brahms, Wagner. Featured works: Second Piano Concerto, Fifth Symphony, Piano trio, Violin Concerto.

Week 7 - The sovereign ballet composer: musical analysis & DVD of *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Romeo & Juliet*.

Week 8 - The circumstances of Tchaikovsky's death. Featured work: Symphony No. 6, Pathetique. .

Nota Bene: Tchaikovsky's piano music and songs although numerous are of relatively minor musical importance. However, they are typically illustrative of Tchaikovsky's personal life or preoccupations and will be presented as an adjunct to biographical considerations.

Recommended Readings

Tchaikovsky: The Man and His Music by David Brown
Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man by Alexander Poznansky
Tchaikovsky and His World from Princeton University Press
Tchaikovsky through Others' Eyes (Russian Music Studies) from Indiana University Press
Defining Russia Musically by Richard Taruskin
On Russian Music by Richard Taruskin
Tchaikovsky: Letters to His Family (An Autobiography) by Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Life & Letters of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky by Modest Ilich Chaikovskii
"To My Best Friend": Correspondence between Tchaikovsky and Nadezhda von Meck, from Oxford University Press
The Tchaikovsky Handbook: A Guide to the Man and His Music by Alexander Poznansky