TCHAIKOVSKY'S FIFTH SYMPHONY

15–18 APRIL 2026

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Emirates
Principal Partner

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PATRON Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world's finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world's great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

The Orchestra's first chief conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australian-born Simone Young commenced her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra made its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS CONCERT

Expect to enjoy yourself! Maybe your heart will beat a little faster. Maybe your hair will stand on end. It's hard to predict or describe how the vast sound of a symphony orchestra will affect each of us. Just bring an open mind and engage with the music – close your eyes, watch the conductor and the musicians, or just sit back and let the music take you away.

When do I clap?

Good question. Most pieces of music are broken up into different movements – usually, people only clap at the end of a piece, so there will be silent pauses between movements. On the next page you will see how many movements the pieces in this concert have, and the duration of each piece. But the simplest thing is to wait until the conductor turns around – or when everyone else starts applauding.

The conductor may leave the stage and come back on a few times, and acknowledge the different sections of the orchestra. You can keep clapping as long as you want to – and feel free to cheer and stomp your feet if you really enjoyed the concert!

Can I take photos or videos?

You can take photos and videos on your phone during the applause at the end of a piece of music. **Please switch your phone to silent, make sure the flash is off and dim the brightness of your screen so you don't distract other audience members**. And if you share it to your socials, tag us in your posts! We love seeing what people have captured.

Please leave professional and semi-professional camera gear at home and limit yourself to a phone camera inside the venue.

What happens at interval?

The interval will begin when the conductor leaves the stage and the lights go to their full brightness. You can choose to stay in your seat and wait, go to the bathroom, walk around or purchase food or drink from one of the foyer bars.

An announcement will play through the speaker system 10 minutes, 5 minutes and 1 minute before the concert resumes.

2026 CONCERT SEASON

TCHAIKOVSKY'S FIFTH SYMPHONY

DONALD RUNNICLES & LEONIDAS KAVAKOS

Donald Runnicles conductor
Leonidas Kavakos violin

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)
Violin Concerto No.1 in A minor, Op.99 (formerly Op.77) (1947–48)
I. Nocturne (Moderato)
II. Scherzo (Allegro)
III. Passacaglia (Andante) – Cadenza –
IV. Burlesque (Allegro con brio- Presto)

INTERVAL

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)
Symphony No.5 in E minor, Op.64 (1888)
I. Andante – Allegro con anima
II. Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza
III. Valse (Allegro moderato)
IV. Finale (Andante maestoso – allegro vivace – moderato assai e molto maestoso)

Wednesday 15 April, 8pm
Friday 17 April, 8pm
Saturday 18 April, 8pm
Emirates Masters Series

Thursday 16 April, 1.30pm
Emirates Thursday Afternoons

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

Pre-concert talk

By Stevan Pavlovic in the Northern Foyer at 7.15pm (12.45pm on Thursday).

Estimated durations

The concert will run for approx. 2 hours.

Cover image

By Craig Abercrombie

ABC Classic

Friday's performance will be recorded for broadcast on 8 May at 1pm, and streaming online.

These performances have been generously supported by Paolo Hooke and Fan Guo.

We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of the land and water on which we work and perform. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

WELCOME

Welcome to **Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony**, the third concert in the Emirates Masters Series for 2026.

The Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor Sir Donald Runnicles is someone who knows the power of relationships. His career has been marked by long-standing engagements with a select handful of orchestras and organisations, including artistic leadership positions at the Deutsche Oper Berlin (2009-2026), Grand Teton Music Festival (since 2005), San Francisco Opera (1992-2008), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (2009-2016) and Orchestra of St. Luke's (2001-2007). Sir Donald was also Principal Guest Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for more than two decades (2001-2023) and he has been our Principal Guest Conductor here in Sydney since 2019.

We at the Sydney Symphony Orchestra know well the value of enduring partnerships. Together with our Emirates, we have created one of the most significant and enduring relationships in Australia's performing arts, one we continue to be immensely proud of. We have recently renewed our partnership, which makes it Emirates' longest-running collaboration with a non-sporting organisation.

This partnership is built on our shared belief in the power of connection – enabling music to transcend borders, cultures and audiences – and on a shared vision to create unforgettable journeys and remarkable experiences. Our mutual commitment to excellence at the very highest level is reflected in this concert, Emirates' support as Presenter of this Masters Series and in their championing of exceptional local and international talent including our Chief Conductor, Simone Young AM.

We are delighted by the continuing success of our long-term partnership and trust you will enjoy this marvellous concert.

Craig Whitehead
Chief Executive Officer
Sydney Symphony Orchestra

YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)
Violin Concerto No.1 in A minor, Op.99 (formerly Op.77) (1947–48)

This essentially symphonic work was composed for the brilliant violinist David Oistrakh. It is in four movements: an enigmatic Nocturne is followed by a sardonic Scherzo, while the powerful slow Passacaglia is likewise paired with a Burlesque.

Begun in 1947, the piece only appeared in 1955, the year that saw the start of the Vietnam War, the establishment of a sovereign West Germany and the first appearance on stage of Edna Everage.

Contemporary music included Pierre Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître*, Gerald Finzi's Cello Concerto and Stravinsky's *Canticum sacrum*.

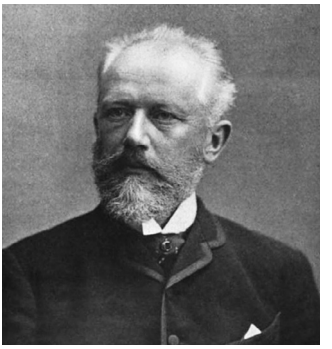
Shostakovich in 1942

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)
Symphony No.5 in E minor, Op.64 (1888)

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony is a 'motto symphony', that is, it contains a theme or motto which appears in all four of its movements. This has contributed to numerous attempts to decode a hidden narrative in the piece. In its use of a motto, and its four-movement design, it joins the tradition of Schumann and Brahms symphonies, and plays for about 50 minutes. Its outer movements (after a short slow introduction in the vase of the first) are fast and substantial; the inner ones are a justly famous andante and a waltz.

It was completed in 1888, the year that saw the inauguration of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam, the London matchgirls' strike and the British Lions' first tour of Australasia.

Contemporary music included Gabriel Fauré's Requiem, Mahler's First Symphony and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade*.



1888 photograph of Tchaikovsky by German-French photographer Émile Reutlinger (1825–1907).

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

DONALD RUNNICLES conductor

Over a career spanning 45 years, Sir Donald Runnicles has built his reputation on enduring relationships with several of the world's most significant opera companies and orchestras. He is especially celebrated for his interpretations of the Romantic and post-Romanic repertoire which are core to his musical identity.

The 2025-2026 season is one of transition: it marks both his final season as Music Director of the Deutsche Oper Berlin as well as his first season as Chief Conductor of the Dresden Philharmonic. He also continues to serve as Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival and as Principal Guest Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Sir Donald concludes his tenure with the Deutsche Oper Berlin with Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer*, new productions of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* by Michael Thalheimer and Korngold's *Violanta* by David Hermann, all culminating in two cycles of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in a Stefan Herheim production that he premiered with the company. Over the course of his sixteen-year tenure, Sir Donald cemented himself as one of the central figures in the German cultural scene.

In Sir Donald's inaugural season as Chief Conductor with the Dresden Philharmonic in 25/26, he leads ten weeks of programs including a concertante version of Strauss' *Elektra*, highlights his British heritage with performances of William Walton's Viola Concerto with British violist Timothy Ridout, and Scottish composer Sir James MacMillan's Symphony No.4 (originally composed to celebrate Sir Donald's 60th birthday), and concludes the season with a ten-city Asia tour of Japan and Korea.

He returns to conduct four weeks as Principal Guest Conductor of the Sydney Symphony with performances of Shostakovich's Symphony No.5 and Violin Concerto No.1 with violinist Leonidas Kavakos, as well as Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.5. Guest engagements for the 25/26 season include performances with San Francisco Symphony, the BBC Scottish Symphony and his debut with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London.

Sir Donald spends his summers as Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival. This eight-week festival of symphonic and chamber music, five of which are conducted by Runnicles, takes place amid the breathtaking beauty of Grand Teton National Park.

Past chief artistic leadership roles include the San Francisco Opera (1992-2008), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (2009-2016), and the Orchestra of St. Luke's (2001-2007). Sir Donald was also Principal Guest Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for more than two decades (2001-2023).

A regular guest conductor with the Chicago Symphony, Runnicles' performance history with the orchestra dates back to 1997. Over a decade-long relationship with the Vienna State Opera, he led new productions of *Parsifal*, Britten's *Billy Budd* and *Peter Grimes*, as well as pieces from the core repertoire. He's conducted the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Orchestre de Paris, among many of the world's leading orchestras.

Donald Runnicles was born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was appointed OBE in 2004, and was made a Knight Bachelor in 2020. He holds honorary degrees from the University of Edinburgh, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Photo by Simon Pauly

ABOUT THE MUSIC

LEONIDAS KAVAKOS violin

Leonidas Kavakos is recognised across the world as a violinist and artist of rare quality. Acclaimed for his captivating artistry, superb musicianship, matchless technique and the integrity of his playing, Kavakos performs with the world's leading orchestras as both soloist and conductor, and in recital at the world's premier venues. In 2022 Kavakos founded the ApollΩn Ensemble, a chamber group of elite Greek musicians who are in increasing demand internationally, and in 2025 he takes over as the Artistic Director of the "Classic Revolution" Festival at Lotte Concert Hall, Seoul.

Highlights of Kavakos's 25/26 season include performances with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, NHK Symphony, NDR Symphony, Santa Cecilia, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and conducting engagements with Czech Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Barcelona Symphony and Minnesota orchestras. He appears in recital in London, Milan, Oslo, Budapest, Zagreb and elsewhere; with the ApollΩn Ensemble he performs at the Edinburgh International, Verbier, Santander festivals, London's Wigmore Hall and Vienna's Musikverein.

Kavakos's extensive and award-winning discography includes the Brahms Violin Concerto with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and Riccardo Chailly (Decca), and the Beethoven Violin Concerto which he also conducted with the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks (Sony Classical). He was named ECHO Klassik Instrumentalist of the Year for his recording of the complete Beethoven Sonatas with Enrico Pace. With Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma, Kavakos has released a series of trio recordings to the highest critical acclaim. With the ApollΩn Ensemble, he has recorded Bach's Violin Concertos.

Kavakos curates an annual violin and chamber music masterclass in Athens, where he was born and brought up in a musical family. In 2022, He was elected by the Academy of Athens as a member of the Chair of Music in the Second Class of Letters and Fine Arts for his services to music. In 2024, he was appointed professor of violin at the Basel Academy of Music. Kavakos plays the 'Willemotte' Stradivari violin of 1734.

www.leonidaskavakos.com
www.facebook.com/leonidas.kavakos.violin

Photo by Marco Borggreve

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT SHOSTAKOVICH

Shostakovich was an adolescent at the time of the 1917 revolution. Unlike his near contemporary Prokofiev, or the slightly older Stravinsky, Shostakovich saw no need to travel abroad, let alone emigrate. The twenty-one year old composer's First Symphony premiered in his home town of Leningrad (St Petersburg) in 1928; its introduction to the West by Bruno Walter assured Shostakovich of world celebrity, but was also an announcement of the optimistic, outward looking Russia of the immediate post-Revolutionary period. That Shostakovich was broadly in sympathy with the ideals of early revolutionary Russia is suggested by his Second and Third Symphonies, subtitled 'To October' and 'The First of May' respectively. It should be noted, however, that these works pre-date the official promulgation of the concept of 'socialist realism'; in them, Shostakovich displays an exuberant interest in the techniques of Western art music, such as dissonance and irony.

The political backdrop to Shostakovich's early career was the power struggle between Trotsky and Stalin that began with the death of Lenin in 1922. By the early thirties the ascendancy of Stalin was complete and in 1934 the purges, known in the Anglosphere as the Great Terror, began. Within that period (1934-38) were two particularly bloody years where N. I. Yezhov, chief of the NKVD (later the KGB) oversaw the imprisonment and murder of Stalin's principal remaining Party rivals as well as leading scientists, writers and musicians. The effect of the purges was to rob the USSR of millions of its citizens, especially leading figures in most fields, so that by the end of the 1930s the country's intellectual infrastructure was almost fatally weakened.

Shostakovich in 1942

Despite having enjoyed a spectacularly successful two-year run, Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was attacked in the pages of *Pravda* in 1936 as 'chaos instead of music' and its composer warned that 'this could all end very badly'. Shostakovich, or the orchestral management in Leningrad, immediately withdrew his demanding Fourth Symphony, a powerfully disturbing behemoth of dissonance and irony. The composer, like many of his generation, is said to have slept for a time in the hallway of his apartment so that the seemingly inevitable arrest wouldn't traumatise his young family. (Shostakovich suffered several reversals of fortune: he was denounced in 1936, rehabilitated with the premiere of the Fifth Symphony, denounced again in 1948, despite having been awarded the Stalin Prize in 1940 and the Order of Lenin in 1946.)

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE VIOLIN CONCERTO NO.1

Paradoxically, the Second World War lulled some Soviet artists into a false sense of security. They, like the rest of the populace endured the privations and dangers of battle and invasion, but the war provided some relief from the Great Terror of the 1930s. That Shostakovich, for one, had let his guard down is evident in the events surrounding his Ninth Symphony for which Stalin had 'suggested' the composer use Beethoven's Ninth as a model. Shostakovich, unable to write to victory symphony expected, nonetheless felt safe enough to produce an ostensibly 'light' Ninth Symphony in 1945.

With the defeat of the Nazis, Stalin's administration returned to the business of enforcing its values on the Soviet people, and his cultural commissar Andrei Zhdanov initiated a series of crackdowns on artistic life. By February 1948 a Party Decree had been promulgated which attacked those proponents of 'formalism' in music. Shostakovich, despite publicly acknowledging his 'errors', was relieved of his teaching duties. Richard Taruskin has pointed out that a first draft of the Party Decree included the resolution 'to liquidate the one-sided, abnormal deviation in Soviet music towards textless instrumental works'. In the event, 'liquidate' was replaced with 'censure', but the intention is plain: textless works are susceptible to many interpretations, and therefore less easy to censor. Perhaps for that reason, Shostakovich kept the Violin Concerto that he began in 1947 under wraps for some years – it only saw the light of day in 1955 when Stalin was safely embalmed.

The impetus for the work was almost certainly the series of concerts given by David Oistrakh in 1947 entitled 'The Development of the Violin', and Shostakovich's response to Oistrakh's amazing artistry was to compose this big, four-movement, essentially symphonic work and dedicate it to him. It which was initially given the opus number 77 but when published appeared as Op.99. Oistrakh himself made many illuminating remarks about the work, saying:

> This composition sets before the violinist a fascinating and noble task...enabling him not only to display his virtuosity, but, in the first place, to give utterance to the most profound feelings, ideas and emotions.
>
> The concerto is not readily grasped by the violinist. I recall that a clear perception of it came to me slowly and not without difficulty. I became more and more interested in the work as the days went by, until finally I found myself wholly under the spell of the music.

Yevgeny Mravinsky, David Oistrakh & Dmitri Shostakovich in 1957.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The music weaves that spell gradually on its audience. The opening *Nocturne* – and how seemingly perverse to begin a bravura work with a Nocturne! – is neither symphonic sonata-allegro nor virtuosic display. Rather the soloist is presented as a lyrical, meditative character, tentatively exploring a sombre landscape and rising by degrees to more impassioned, double-stopped gestures before retreating slowly. Oistrakh described the movement's 'suppression of feelings' and air of 'tragedy in the best sense of purification'. The comparison with the following *Scherzo* – one of Shostakovich's more mordant jokes – could hardly be greater. Here the music is, in Oistrakh's words 'malignant, demonic, prickly'. The solo part, often playing in counterpoint with solo woodwinds, requires all the virtuosity apparently lacking in the first movement. The movement reaches a grim climax with the bone- rattling timbre of the xylophone.

While there is some gallows-humour in the *Scherzo* (and references to the DSCH motive which functions as Shostakovich's musical signature), the *Passacaglia* is unapologetically baleful. Its theme, hinted at in the Scherzo but fully stated here by low strings and timpani, has an ominous tread to which the violin replies with long, heart-rending melodies – again called upon to play double-stopped sections at moments of high drama. Like the *Nocturne,* the *Passacaglia* emphasises the melodic, rather than the bravura, aspects of the solo instrument, but as the movement dissolves into the concerto's cadenza, there can be no doubt that this is music conceived for a prodigiously talented performer. The cadenza requires the full gamut of the soloist's technical armoury, and leads without a break into the finale *Burlesque*.

It is only here, where the orchestra (again rendered brittle by the xylophone), plays the introductory bars without the soloist, that we realise how constant a presence the violin has been until now, and what stamina is required to play a work of such dimensions. But there's more, and it's not long before the violin is drawn back into the maelstrom, responding with astounding agility to a movement of classic Shostakovich. There is black humour, and acid energy, and ever more impossible seeming gestures for the soloist before a brief reminiscence of the *Passacaglia* is peremptorily dismissed by a sudden cadence.

Oistrakh gave the first performance in Leningrad in 1955 and a few months later introduced it to the west in a concert at Carnegie Hall. The US press went wild; Stalin would have turned in his mausoleum.

Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto is scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling cor anglais), 3 clarinets (3rd doubling bass clarinet) and 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon); 4 horns and tuba; timpani, percussion, celeste, 2 harps, strings and violin soloist.

The concerto was premiered by soloist David Oistrakh with the Leningrad Philharmonic under Yevgeny Mravinsky on 29 October 1955.

The Sydney Symphony gave the Australian premiere of the concerto in July 1962, with Leonid Kogan conducted by Jascha Horenstein.

Other notable Sydney performances include those by Nelli Shkolnikova conducted by Moshe Atzmon (1970); Erich Gruenberg/Louis Frémaux (1979); Igor Oistrakh/ Semyon Bychkov (1989); Cho-Liang Lin/Eri Klas (1993); Julian Rachlin/Jaap van Zweden (2006) and Sasha Rozhdestvensky/Vladimir Ashkenazy (2009).

We also performed it in the state finals of the 1980 Instrumental & Vocal Competition – the name for the ABC Young Performers Competition at the time – with Vančo Čavdarski conducting Léone Ziegler, now a member of our First Violin section.

Our most recent performances were in November 2017, with Ray Chen conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy.

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SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA | Emirates Principal Partner

ABOUT TCHAIKOVSKY

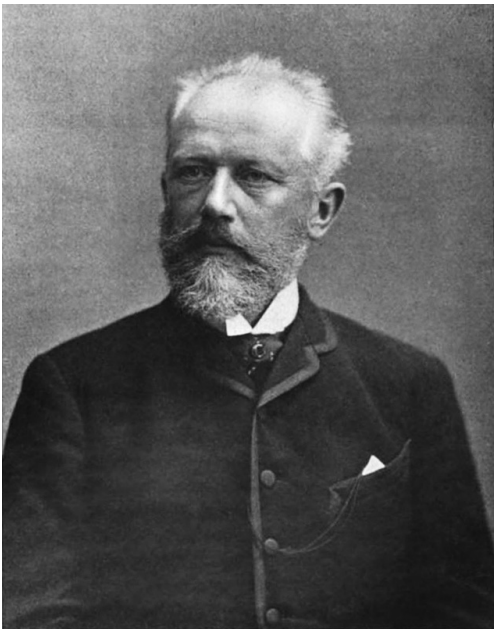
ABOUT TCHAIKOVSKY

Tchaikovsky was born in Votkinsk, in the Urals, where his father was a mining engineer. His musical education began with the orchestrion, a mechanical contraption that played popular operatic excerpts. He also began piano lessons in 1845. The family moved to St Petersburg in 1852, where Tchaikovsky attended the School of Jurisprudence. On graduating in 1859 he was employed at the Ministry of Justice, but attended classes run by the Russian Musical Society. Under the leadership of Anton Rubinstein, the Society founded the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1862, and Tchaikovsky enrolled in its first class, with Rubinstein as his composition teacher. After three years there, Tchaikovsky was invited by Rubinstein's equally illustrious brother, Nikolai, to teach harmony for the Moscow branch of the Russian Musical Society, which would soon become the Moscow Conservatory.

Around 1868 he became, briefly, quite friendly with the group of composers known as the Kuchka ('The Five' or 'Mighty Handful'), led by Mily Balakirev. Balakirev believed that Russian composers should create distinctly Russian music, unpolluted by the techniques of Western composition. But although Tchaikovsky had used some traditional melodies, he was an internationalist at heart, and by 1877 he had broken with the Five.

Despite being homosexual, Tchaikovsky became engaged to the Belgian soprano Désirée Artôt in 1868. It didn't last.

Tchaikovsky saw no reason not to marry, and in 1877 the hour produced the woman, in the form of Antonina Milyukova, from whom Tchaikovsky received a series of love letters. It didn't last either, with Tchaikovsky abandoning Antonina for his sister's estate at Kamenka in Ukraine. He did at least provide for her in her old age.



1888 photograph of Tchaikovsky by German-French photographer Émile Reutlinger (1825–1907).

A year before the marriage, Tchaikovsky had received a letter from another woman, Nadezhda von Meck, who was a huge fan, but expressly did not want to – and never did –meet Tchaikovsky. She did, however, want to use some of the considerable wealth her railway-tycoon husband had left her to commission new music, and for 14 years supported Tchaikovsky so that he could give up teaching and concentrate on composition. He and Meck corresponded frequently, offering us an insight into Tchaikovsky's aesthetics and methods.

As symphonist, and great composer for ballet, Tchaikovsky was fêted as far afield as the United States and Britain. In November 1893, days after conducting the premiere of his Sixth Symphony in St Petersburg, he became ill and was treated for cholera which was epidemic in the city. The treatment was successful, but Tchaikovsky died of complications.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE FIFTH SYMPHONY

Composers get themselves into terrible trouble talking about their works, and even worse if something casually written down – say in a diary or private letter – comes to public attention. Misinterpretation on the basis of such documents is an easy trap into which to fall; there are, for instance, numerous cases in the letters of Mozart where the composer is being economical with the truth or indulging in tactful white lies to set his father's mind at ease. Tchaikovsky, similarly, is frequently misinterpreted on the basis of written remarks, as his music seems so clearly to reflect the apparent turbulence of his emotional life. We can take at face value his comment that symphonies should express 'sincere feelings', but his remark to his patron Madame von Meck that 'anyone who believes that the creative person is capable of expressing what he feels out of a momentary effect aided by the means of art, is mistaken' should also give us pause.

So much of Tchaikovsky's work, and particularly the last three symphonies, is interpreted as a kind of diary of the emotional vicissitudes of a somewhat hysterical gay man in a repressive society. Recent scholarship has shown this – and indeed the idea that Tchaikovsky committed suicide –to be largely a myth. Tchaikovsky himself unwittingly did himself no favour by writing in his diary shortly, before beginning the composition of the Fifth Symphony in 1888,

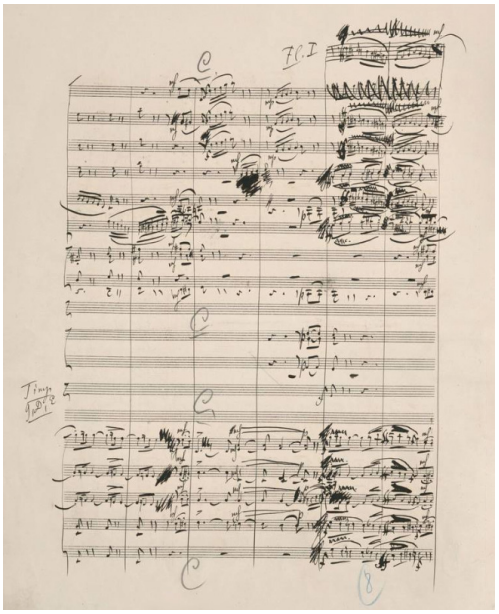
> Introduction. Complete resignation before Fate, or, which is the same, before the inscrutable predestination of Providence. Allegro (I) Murmurs, doubts, lamentations, reproaches against XXX. (II) Shall I throw myself into the embraces of Faith?

On such slender evidence the myth of this work's being a testament to his tragic heroism in the face of his homosexuality (that must be what XXX means, mustn't it?) has been built and continues to stand.

Tchaikovsky was at the height of his creative powers in 1888, and had come to a personal and artistic rapprochement with Brahms (whom he once described as a 'giftless bastard', but who was arguably the leading symphonist of the day). Tchaikovsky's Fifth (like his fourth) is in some respects an attempt to contribute to a genre associated with Brahms' mentor Schumann, and which Brahms himself used, the motto symphony. In short, the work is unified by a 'motto' or theme stated in the introduction to the first movement. Again, Tchaikovsky has been taken at his word when he protested that the symphony 'has a mountain of padding; an experienced eye can detect the thread in my seams and I can do nothing about it'. In fact the experienced eye and ear of Brahms was, as well it might have been, highly impressed by the work's cohesion. The work too displays some of Tchaikovsky's most inspired orchestration. In fact, in addition to the use of the motto theme, Tchaikovsky gives his work its special sense of coherence through the use of a web of key relations, and 'subliminal' motifs which occur from movement to movement.

The first movement's introduction sets the tone with lugubrious scoring which features the low register of the clarinet, and instrument which also heralds the faster material of the main body of the movement. The energy gradually increases, with marvellous antiphonal writing for the winds against the passionate surges of the strings and the urgent punctuation from the brass. The 'second subject' group of themes forms a sharp contrast in its more lyrical, noble mood. The material forms the basis for dramatically contending music, but the movement ends quietly and in a sense inconclusively. The slow movement is justly famous for its long breathed horn theme, and its powerful climaxes (Tchaikovsky's directions for the second climax are' with desire and passion'). The balletic *Valse* may have anecdotal significance, but it also provides a relaxation in the intensity of the music (despite a late reminiscence of the motto) before the finale, in which the tension between tragedy and joy is decisively concluded in favour of joy.

ABOUT THE MUSIC



Handwritten page from Tchaikovsky's manuscript score of his Fifth Symphony. Source: Russian National Museum of Music, Moscow (ф88, No.59).

The work does have moments of unarguably tragic tone, which, if biographical explanation is required, may relate to these specific events: the composer fell ill in 1886 and experienced poor health for the following year – to the point where he became convinced that this was his final illness. More importantly, a number of his closest friends died at this time, including Nikolai Kondratiev whose demise provided the inspiration for the symphony. Scholar Roland John Wiley argues that the rhythm of the motto theme corresponds to a Russian Easter chant which sets the words 'Christ is risen'. As Wiley says,

> if that connection was intentional, various aspects of meaning in the Fifth Symphony would be clarified. The triumphal variant of the motto in the last movement would be more than a defeat-to-victory cliché, while the clash between the motto and the worldly intonations of the inner movements would make sense.

This is not say that the work is a 'program symphony', but that it contains a meaning more complex and important than is admitted in more common, glib accounts.

Notes by Gordon Kerry © 2002 (Shostakovich) and 2005 (Tchaikovsky)

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony is scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons; 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba; timpani and strings.

It was premiered at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, Russia on 17 November 1888, conducted by the composer.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra has a long history of performing this work. The earliest recorded performance was in March 1941, when Percy Code conducted it for radio broadcast; the first public performance came in May that same year under Bernard Heinze.

The piece was a favourite of the Orchestra's first Chief Conductor Eugene Goossens, who conducted the work in 1948, 1949, 1950, on a NSW Regional Tour in 1951, and in 1952.

Other notable performances include those conducted by then-Chiefs Nikolai Malko (1957), Dean Dixon (1967), Moshe Atzmon (1969 & 1970), Willem van Otterloo (1977), Louis Frémaux (1981), Edo de Waart (2000) and David Robertson (2017). The Orchestra also performed the work under Chief Conductor Stuart Challender in 1988, both in Sydney and on its USA Tour.

Notable guest conductors to have led performances include Lorin Maazel (1961), Walter Susskind (1973), Yuri Temirkanov (1996) and Daniel Harding (1998).

Our most recent performances were in 2024 under conductor Han-Na Chang.

Scoring and history by Hugh Robertson

GOOSSENS DRIVES THE TRAIN

The Sydney Symphony's first Chief Conductor (1947–956), Eugene Goossens (left) takes a ride in the driver's compartment of a train – possibly on the 1951 tour of NSW during which the Orchestra performed Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony.

A long-serving member of our viola section, Helen Bainton, recalled a similar scene in her memoir *Facing the Music*:

> '[Goossens] had a passion for trains and it was said he owned one of the largest collections of pictures of them in America. During his travels he had once driven the Ohio express ten miles, which he found a most exhilarating experience because he loved the feeling of controlling a powerful machine. On one of our tours he travelled up to Newcastle, New South Wales, sitting in the driver's cabin. Rumour had it, of course, that he was actually driving us so that we wondered if we would reach our destination alive, but when we arrived in Newcastle he stepped off the train as urbane as ever, even though he was dressed in dungarees and an old cap, with a somewhat grubby face and carrying an oily rag in his hand! The welcoming committee received a shock when they saw their famous conductor, but as usual he was the complete master of the situation and enjoyed himself hugely.'

Helen Bainton, *Facing the Music*
(Currawong Publishing Co., Sydney, 1967)

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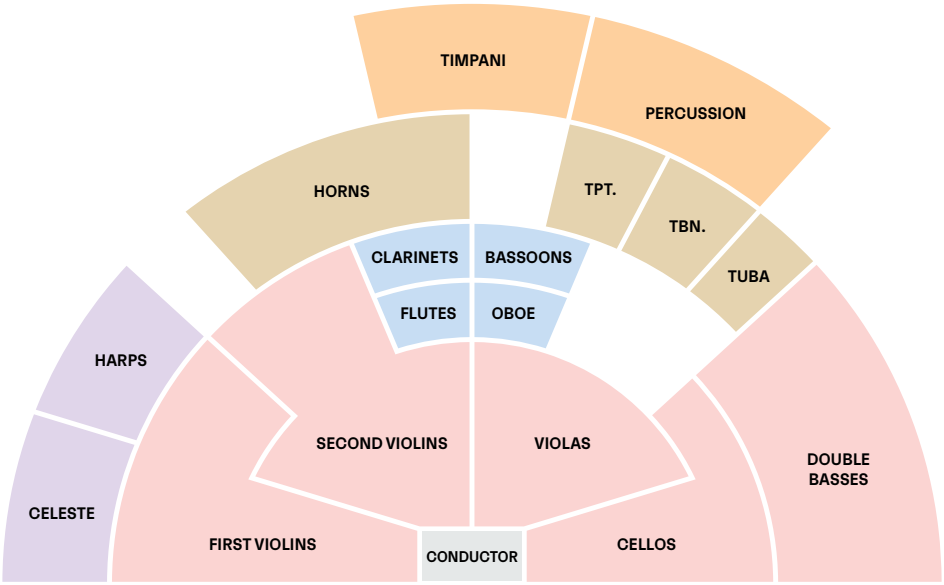

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Claire Herrick
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