

Russian Romantic composer **Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky** (1840-1893) is perhaps best known for his ballets, such as *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*. Although his family intended him to enter civil service, Tchaikovsky entertained his musical interests by attending the theatre and opera with his schoolmates. His first real attempt at composition was a waltz in his mother's honor after she passed away from cholera in 1854. In 1863, after three years in the Ministry of Justice, he decided to focus instead on his music, and his First Symphony premiered in Moscow in 1868.

Unlike his compositional predecessors, theme and melody drove Tchaikovsky's music more than development and form. He lamented his "inability to grasp and manipulate form in music," claiming that he never wrote anything that was "perfect in form." Russia's traditional music also tended to focus on a pattern of a few notes, and it has less forward motion than Western music. After being introduced to Western traditions during his studies at St. Petersburg Conservatory, Tchaikovsky fought a lifelong battle trying to merge the Western symphonic and sonata forms with his country's music and his natural gift for melody.

Tchaikovsky began to truly merge the drama and emotion of the Romantic period with the symphonic form in his *Fourth Symphony*. In his own notes on the piece, he identifies the opening horn fanfare as fate, a force that shall always prevent total happiness, and it "can never be overcome—merely endured, miserably." With such hopelessness presented by reality, Tchaikovsky brings the listeners into the world of a pleasant day dream with a playful woodwind melody, but alas Fate always returns throughout the first movement.

The second movement is intended to be a melancholy reflection on one's life. It is both pleasant and wearying, and a bittersweet recollection. In a slight continuation, the third movement is a collection of images, but none in particular stand out. Tchaikovsky names some ballet, the first effects of a little wine, peasants in the street, and a distant military procession. It is like another dreamlike state before the finale. For the fourth movement, Tchaikovsky explains, "if within yourself you find no reasons for joy, then look at others." He describes the joy and celebrations of other people. The unrelenting theme of fates makes an appearance, but it does not completely overcome the "simple, but powerful" force of joy.

Notes by Jillian Robb

In the 1790s, Anton Weidinger created a keyed trumpet, which was basically a tube with holes drilled in it combined with flute-like keys. The natural trumpets of the time were valve-less and had a limited number of playable notes, especially in the lower range. **Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809) wrote his *Trumpet Concerto in E flat Major* for Weidinger and his keyed trumpet in 1796, and it premiered in 1800. In contrast to the natural trumpet concertos, whose melodies had to be set in the high range to accommodate the instrument, Haydn used the piece to explore the instrument's new ability to play chromatically throughout its range.

"Ombra mai fù" is the first aria in **George Frideric Handel's** (1685-1759) opera *Xerxes*. The opera was inspired by the Xerxes I of Persia, though the libretto takes many artistic liberties. The story is essentially a complicated love triangle (or perhaps love hexagon, more accurately) between King Xerxes, the two daughters of one of his vassals, the king's brother, and the king's scorned fiancée. "Ombra mai fù" is Italian for "Never has there been a shade," the first line of the aria. Xerxes is enjoying some time under his favorite tree before the main events of the opera commence.

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) wrote his Cello Concerto No. 1 in 1872 for Auguste Tolbeque, a Belgian cellist and instrument maker. Tolbeque was closely associated to the concert society in France at the time, and he premiered the piece in 1873. The piece itself breaks with several conventions in concertos. The cello introduces the main theme of the piece after one short chord from the orchestra, as opposed to the tradition of an orchestral exposition followed by the soloist. Melodies interweave between the orchestra and soloist, and they seem to call and answer each other throughout the exciting first movement.