

Pyotr I. Tchaikovsky

Composer



Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky was the author of some of the most popular themes in all of classical music. He founded no school, struck out no new paths or compositional methods, and sought few innovations in his works. Yet the power of his best music elevates it to classic status. It was Tchaikovsky's unique melodic charm that could, whether in his *Piano Concerto No. 1* or in his ballet *The Nutcracker* or in his tragic last symphony, make the music sound familiar on first hearing.

Tchaikovsky was born into a family of five brothers and one sister. He began taking piano lessons at age four and showed remarkable talent, eventually surpassing his own teacher's abilities. By age nine, he exhibited severe nervous problems, not least because of his overly sensitive nature. The following year, he was sent to St. Petersburg to study at the School of Jurisprudence. The loss of his mother in 1854 dealt a crushing blow to the young Tchaikovsky. In 1859, he took a position in the Ministry of Justice, but longed for a career in music, attending concerts and operas at every opportunity. He finally began study in harmony with Zaremba in 1861, and enrolled at the St. Petersburg Conservatory the following year, eventually studying composition with Anton Rubinstein.

In 1866, the composer relocated to Moscow, accepting a professorship of harmony at the new conservatory, and shortly afterward turned out his *First Symphony*, suffering, however, a nervous breakdown during its composition. His opera *The Voyevoda* came in 1867-1868 and he began another, *The Oprichnik*, in 1870, completing it two years later. In 1869 Tchaikovsky entered into a working relationship with composer Mily Balakirev, leader of The Five; the result was Tchaikovsky's first recognized masterpiece, the fantasy-overture *Romeo and Juliet*. Other works were appearing during this time, as well, including the *First String Quartet* (1871), the *Second Symphony* (1873), and the ballet *Swan Lake* (1875).

In 1876, Tchaikovsky traveled to Paris with his brother, Modest, and then visited Bayreuth, where he met Liszt. By 1877, Tchaikovsky was an established composer. This was the year of *Swan Lake's* premiere and the time he began work on the *Fourth Symphony* (1877-1878). The period of subsidy by Mme von Meck was abundantly productive for Tchaikovsky with a spate of outstanding compositions, including the *Serenade for Strings* (1881), *1812 Overture* (1882), and the *Fifth Symphony* (1888). In both 1888 and 1889, Tchaikovsky went on European tours as a conductor, meeting Brahms, Grieg, Dvřak, Gounod, and other notable musical figures. *Sleeping Beauty* was premiered in 1890, and *The Nutcracker* in 1892, both with success.

In 1893 he finished his *Sixth Symphony (Pathétique)* and it was successfully premiered in October the same year. Ten days after the first performance of the new work Tchaikovsky died of cholera in St. Petersburg on 6th November 1893.

Sleeping Beauty Synopsis

PROLOGUE

In the palace of King Florestan XIV everybody celebrates the christening of his daughter - Princess Aurora. With the sweet sounds of harps and violins the godmother - the Lilac Fairy with her entourage - appears. The kind fairies - Tenderness, Vividness, Generosity, Courage, and Serenity - bring the newborn their gifts, granting Aurora the finest human features.

The master-of-ceremonies Catalabutte announces that the evil and powerful fairy Carabosse is approaching the palace. She was not invited, so she is extremely angry and she hurries to the celebration of her own volition. Being furious, Carabosse predicts that the young Aurora will fall asleep forever when she pricks herself with a spindle. The Lilac Fairy calms the parents down and promises that the kind forces will destroy the evil spells. She makes Carabosse leave the palace.

To avoid the misfortune that has been predicted by the evil sorceress, the king gives order to prohibit the use of knitting needles and spindles in his kingdom under penalty of death.

ACT I

In the royal castle a celebration is being prepared because of Aurora's adulthood. Catalabutte sees a group of knitters who have come with spindles to work in the palace despite the ban, which has been in force for 16 years. They escape the death penalty only due to the celebration in honor of the princess' birthday.

The guests are coming to the palace from every corner of the kingdom, among them there are grooms, aspiring to the hand of the beautiful Aurora.

In the midst of the celebration, an old woman in a dark robe appears. She gifts the girl a spindle. Suddenly the princess pricks herself and falls unconscious. Everyone recognizes in the stranger the triumphant fairy Carabosse: her prediction came true.

The Lilac Fairy - Aurora's Godmother - surrounded by cupids, symbols of true love, appears. She cannot cancel the evil spells of Carabosse, but to weaken them is in her power: Aurora will not die, but only fall asleep. Aurora will be revived by the kiss of a prince. Waving her magic wand, she plunges the whole kingdom into a dream together with Aurora.

ACT II

Scene I

A hundred years have passed. In the magic garden Prince Desire and his convoy are hunting. The Lilac Fairy appears in front of the young man and evokes the image of a beautiful Aurora. The prince recognizes the one who often has come to him in his dreams. Desire begs to help him to find the girl.

Scene II

Prince Desire floats in a boat to the enchanted castle together with the Lilac Fairy. In the sleeping magical kingdom only the evil fairy Carabosse and her servants are awake. They block the path to anyone who intends to enter the sleeping kingdom. They hear the sounds that foreshadow the appearance of the Lilac Fairy. The villain and her army are trying to hide Aurora from the fairy and Desire, but everything is in vain. The prince sees the sleeping beauty. Conquered by her beauty, he gently kisses the girl and the evil spells are destroyed! Carabosse and her army disappear. Aurora awakens and the whole kingdom revives with her. The passionate feeling of first love embraces Aurora and Desire. The Prince asks the King and Queen for the hand of their daughter and they are glad to agree.

EPILOGUE

In the palace the magnificent wedding of Aurora and Desire is celebrated. Among the numerous guests there are the characters of fairy tales: Princess Florina and Blue bird, the White Cat and Puss-in- Boots, Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, an Ogre, Tom Thumb and his siblings. The newly married couple receives congratulations from the Fairies of Diamonds, Sapphires, Gold and Silver. The Lilac Fairy and her entourage bless the bride and groom for a long and happy life.