

# Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

(1840–1893)



Peter Tchaikovsky was the most important Russian composer of the Romantic era. He wrote symphonies, concertos, and program music with beautiful melodies and rich harmonies that reflected his love for Russia and appealed to a wide audience.

He was born in Votkinsk, a small town in the Ural Mountains of Russia. At the age of eight, he was sent to school in Saint Petersburg so that he would have better cultural and educational opportunities. He studied piano, but did not decide on a career in music until he was twenty-three years old. He attended the Saint Petersburg Conservatory and graduated in three years. Tchaikovsky then

joined the newly-opened Moscow Conservatory as professor of harmony. His first piano concerto was a success.

Tchaikovsky had a long relationship with a wealthy widow, Nadejda von Meck, who gave him enough money so that he could compose music without financial worries. The two never met, but carried on their friendship with letters for fourteen years.

In 1877, he had a brief, unsuccessful marriage to one of his students, Antonina Milyukova. His ballet *Swan Lake* was first performed that year. When his marriage ended, Tchaikovsky left the Conservatory and produced some of his most popular works: *The 1812 Overture*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the opera *Eugene Onegin*. He toured the United States and Europe from 1888 through 1893 and led four concerts at the opening of New York's Carnegie Hall. It was during this time he wrote his famous ballets: *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. Tchaikovsky became sick with cholera after drinking unboiled water. He died on November 6, 1893.