

Los Angeles Philharmonic: Dudamel Conducts Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5

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Saturday, March 1, 2014, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles



USC students travel to the beautiful Walt Disney Concert Hall to see the world-renowned Gustavo Dudamel conduct Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony with the incredible Los Angeles Philharmonic. Tchaikovsky's Fifth has been compared to Beethoven's Fifth for its trajectory from tragedy to triumph, and it has served Dudamel well. He has recorded it to wide acclaim, and it capped the program when Dudamel made his U.S. debut at the Hollywood Bowl in 2005.

ROSS SCIMECA of the USC Libraries has selected the following resources to help you learn more about the symphony.

Introduction

The *Variations on a Rococo Theme* is actually an extended cello concerto. The twenty-minute piece was completed in March 1877. It is interesting to note that immediately before composing this very classically oriented piece, Tchaikovsky finished writing the highly dramatic tone poem *Francisca da Rimini*. The contrast between these two pieces cannot be more different. Indeed, as with most of his completed music, Tchaikovsky is both a romantic of the storm and stress variety and, at the same time, a very classically orientated composer who worshiped Mozart. The statement of the original rococo theme is followed by seven variations ending with a coda. The piece is not often performed, but when it is, the solo cellist will reveal the intricate beauty of the work.

With the Fifth Symphony (1888), Tchaikovsky is continuing a theme that can be heard in his last three symphonies. This theme is one of fate. Just as Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is often referred to as the "fate symphony," so too are the last three numbered symphonies of Tchaikovsky. In the Fourth Symphony (1878), fate enters savagely and is responded to in very strong and powerful musical retorts. The Sixth Symphony (1893) is a reconciliation and resignation to fate in extremely mournful musical language. The Fifth Symphony, however, is really questioning fate openly in a very musically sentimental manner. It's an open question what exactly this fate is. It could refer to Tchaikovsky's homosexuality or his gambling addiction. What this fate really represents for the composer, we really do not know for sure. The books I recommend in the bibliography will each deal with this very interesting question of fate, which the composer himself only identifies as "X" or "XXX" in his notebooks. The "fate theme" is introduced in the very opening of the first movement and continues in all the remaining movements. In the first movement the "fate theme" has almost a funereal character which will transform to a very pensive expression in the second movement, then a waltz in the third movement, and finally a march in the final movement. Unlike the *Rococo Variations*, the Fifth Symphony, like the Fourth and the Sixth, is very often performed by the major orchestras of the world.

Recommended Books

Tchaikovsky (1978)

By David Brown

This is a four-volume treatise on the composer that many critics claim definitive.

Music Library: ML 410 . C 4 B 7 1978

Tchaikovsky And His World (1998)

By Leslie Kearney

Music Library: ML 410 . C 4 T 3 6 1998

Tchaikovsky, a Self-Portrait (1990)

By Aleksandra Anatol'enva Orlova

This unique documentary biography is the first to draw on the composer's own private documents—over 5,000 letters, his diaries and articles—to present the most complete and compelling picture ever of his turbulent life and work.

Music Library: ML 410 . C 4 O 7 5 1990

Recommended Recordings

Naxos Music Library (accessible via the USC Libraries' homepage at usc.edu/libraries) offers more than ten online performances of the *Variations on a Rococo Theme*. This database also has over 100 recordings of the Fifth Symphony. I highly recommend listening to the Mravinsky, Temirkanov, Szell, Abbado or Ormandy performances. All of these conductors give unique interpretations to this symphonic masterpiece.