

The Works of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

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Learning





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Text Audio

Who was Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky?

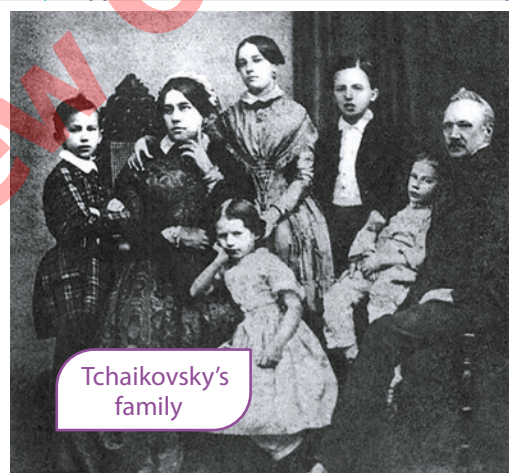
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is one of Russia's most famous composers. Many people around the world know the music from his ballets and symphonies.

However, he wrote more music than that. He wrote eleven full operas along with more than a hundred pieces for the piano, among other things!



Tchaikovsky





Tchaikovsky was born in Votkinsk, in 1840. He was the second of six children born to Ilya Tchaikovsky and Alexandra Assier. His father was the president of a metal factory.



Tchaikovsky took piano lessons as a child.

As a child, Tchaikovsky enjoyed playing music. He took some lessons, but his teachers didn't think he was very good. Tchaikovsky's father told his son to study something else so that he could get a good job later. Tchaikovsky listened to his father, did well in school, and then started working in a government office.



Tchaikovsky as a young man in 1863



However, Tchaikovsky never lost his interest in music. When he was twenty-one years old, he decided to go back to school and study music. One of his teachers thought the young man had talent. This teacher encouraged Tchaikovsky, and his music career began.

Anton Rubenstein, the instructor who saw Tchaikovsky's talent



Tchaikovsky's school in St. Petersburg, where he studied for nine years



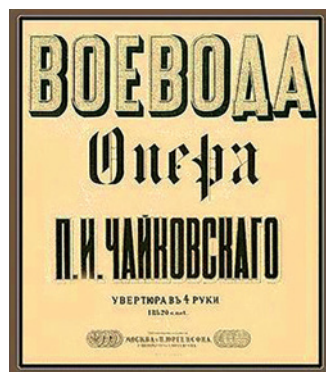


Dancers performing to the music for *Romeo and Juliet*

Tchaikovsky started off writing short pieces and songs. He completed his first symphony in 1866 at the age of twenty-six. Two years later, he composed his first opera. The year after that, Tchaikovsky composed his first real masterpiece—a piece for an orchestra. This was an overture for Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*.

For the next twenty-three years, Tchaikovsky wrote music for individual musicians, full orchestras, and shows for the theater. Sometimes critics didn’t like his work, but the public did.

A poster advertising Tchaikovsky’s first opera, *The Voyeroda*





An orchestra playing a piece by Tchaikovsky

In 1893, Tchaikovsky completed *Symphony No. 6 in B Minor*, which he thought was his best work. Also known by the name *Pathétique Symphony*, this was Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony. It was first played for an audience on October 30, 1893. Nine days later, Tchaikovsky suddenly died of cholera.



A child visits the Tchaikovsky Museum in Moscow, Russia.

Tchaikovsky's surprising death was sad news for the music world. *Pathétique Symphony* included new ideas Tchaikovsky had about music, and these ideas are what helped make the symphony a masterpiece.