

PETER ILICH TCHAIKOVSKY

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born May 7, 1840 in Votkinsk, Russia | Died November 6, 1893 in St. Petersburg, Russia

FAMILY & CAREER

Tchaikovsky grew up with four brothers, two sisters, and a French nanny. When he was 10, he was sent to a boarding school 800 miles away from his home. While there, he entertained himself by going to the opera with his friends – hearing the works of Rossini, Verdi, and Mozart – and by improvising variations on the piano. When a School of Music opened in St. Petersburg in 1862, Tchaikovsky became one of its first students. Thanks to his wealthy patroness Nadezhda von Meck, who supported him financially for many years but never met him in person, Tchaikovsky became Russia’s first full-time professional musician.



MUSIC

Tchaikovsky was one of Russia’s most important composers. Today he is best known for his three ballets: *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, six symphonies, the *1812 Overture* (which includes actual canons!) and *Romeo and Juliet*, which includes one of the most recognizable love themes ever written.

FUN FACT

The music from Tchaikovsky’s ballet *Sleeping Beauty* was used in the Disney movie of the same name.

SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN E MINOR

BY PETER ILICH TCHAIKOVSKY

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHEN WAS IT COMPOSED?

In 1888, Tchaikovsky wanted to write his fifth symphony. However, he had trouble finding inspiration, and he was afraid that his imagination had dried up. He spent that summer at his vacation house on a forested hillside, and was able to gather enough ideas to write his Symphony No. 5 in E minor. He was self-critical throughout the whole process of writing the piece.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The symphony has four movements and lasts about 50 minutes. Although Tchaikovsky didn’t write it about any specific story, the music is very emotional. The symphony begins with a solemn, gloomy clarinet theme. The second movement features a long, beautiful horn solo. The third movement is a waltz and the fourth movement is full of energy. As you listen, think about what emotions Tchaikovsky was trying to convey. Do you think the symphony will have a happy or a sad ending?



Program Notes for kids

Liszt & Tchaikovsky
Saturday, November 2nd
8 p.m.
Michigan Theater

WANG JIE

Symphonic Overture on “America, the Beautiful”

LISZT

Piano Concerto No. 2 in A Major

TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 5 in E Minor

WANG JIE

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born January, 1980 in Shanghai, China

Wang Jie began taking piano lessons when she was just 4 years old. She was a child prodigy, but her fingers were too small to play a lot of advanced music. When she was a teenager, her parents sent her to a boarding school to study science. While there, Wang sneaked classical cassettes in her suitcase and skipped her physics classes to practice piano.



She eventually decided to keep pursuing music and moved to New York City in 2001 to study composition. Now she writes all sorts of music and has written almost 100 works so far.

Ms. Wang said: “If you find yourself elated by my music, the credit goes to the muses. If you hate it, well, it’s only 15 minutes long.”

FUN FACTS

Ms. Wang enjoys creative writing, badminton, rock climbing and softball. She bats left and throws right. She also owns a small white dog named Pilot.

SYMPHONIC OVERTURE ON “AMERICA, THE BEAUTIFUL”

BY WANG JIE

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHAT KIND OF PIECE IS THIS?

An *overture* is the music that is played at the beginning of an opera, ballet, or a musical to set the mood and get the audience excited. A *symphonic overture* is played at the beginning of a concert instead of an opera, but is still meant to get the audience excited.

HISTORY OF “AMERICA, THE BEAUTIFUL”

“America, the Beautiful” is a well-known patriotic song. The lyrics were written in 1893 by Katharine Lee Bates, who was inspired to write the poem after climbing Pikes Peak, a 14,000 foot tall mountain near Colorado Springs, Colorado. In 1910 the lyrics were published with the music (written by Samuel Ward) that the song is sung with today.

WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?

A few years ago, the Colorado Springs Philharmonic asked several composers to write pieces inspired by “America, the Beautiful” and Pikes Peak. Wang Jie was excited for the opportunity, and composed Symphonic Overture on “America, the Beautiful.” It was first performed by the Colorado Springs Philharmonic in October of 2016.

“O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!”

FRANZ LISZT

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born October 22, 1811 in Raiding, Hungary (now Austria) | Died July 31, 1886 in Bayreuth, Germany

Franz Liszt was an only child. He took piano lessons from his father, who was an amateur musician. At 11 years old he began performing and composing. He traveled around Europe to study and perform, he even met Beethoven! He went on to be a very influential performer, conductor, and composer of many works for piano and orchestra.



THE WORLD’S FIRST ROCKSTAR

Liszt was a talented pianist who grew very famous during his lifetime. He had thousands of fans who loved to watch him play the piano, and even did things like fight over his broken piano strings or locks of his hair at concerts. It was Liszt-o-mania!

Liszt also changed the way pianists performed. Before him, pianists didn’t memorize their music. But Liszt never took his sheet music on stage with him. He made sure people could see his face while he performed and he was very expressive. He moved around a lot, and flipped his long hair while he played.

However, the rock star life wasn’t for Liszt. He stopped performing in his 30s, but he continued to focus on conducting and composing. Later in his life he started studying to become a priest and was henceforth known as “Abbot Liszt.”

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2 IN A MAJOR

BY FRANZ LISZT

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHAT KIND OF PIECE IS THIS?

A *concerto* is a piece of music where a soloist is accompanied by an orchestra. This is a piano concerto, meaning there will be a piano soloist playing with the orchestra. Most concertos are three movements long, but this one is seven.

WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?

Liszt started composing this concerto in 1839 and continuously revised it until his final edition in 1861.

FUN FACT

Piano Concerto No. 2 in A Major was first performed by Franz Liszt’s student, Hans von Bronsart.