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About Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Popular Romantic composer of 6 symphonies and some of the world's most performed ballets including Swan Lake, The Nutcracker and Sleeping Beauty.

Finally, we list resources for further information. Any attempt to proclaim a single masterpiece of any genre, from opera or symphony to rock song or jazz concert, as the greatest, the most influential or even the most enjoyable is properly dismissed as utterly meaningless. It seems futile to offer a definitive abstract of Swan Lake, as most stage presentations reflect sweeping departures from the original conception. Indeed the synopsis published with the full score differs, often fundamentally, from those provided with many recordings. Thus ballet faces an immediate hurdle when compared to the narrative devices used in other primarily visual performing arts, as it is unable to specify meaning by relying upon and benefiting from the specificity of lyrics opera, dialog movies, plays, operetta, shows or titles and inserts silent film. John Martin observes that the accepted practice of the time was to use the plot of a ballet as a mere thread upon which to hang a succession of divertissements regardless of their appropriateness to the theme. Swan Lake was no exception – each act but the last includes extensive danced entertainment that has little to do with the plot and often interrupts it. In a sense, though, the bare stories of ballets hardly matter – as James Lyons notes, they tend to be embarrassingly trite when reduced to cold type. Rather, "in the theatre they are told on quite another level of discourse. Please click here for a more detailed structural outline that may be more helpful in following the references to the numbers and for several, their subparts that are used throughout this article. Scene 1, his elderly tutor Wolfgang invites villagers to dance 2: After she departs, the peasants try to cheer him up 4: Pas de trois; 5: Now inebriated, Wolfgang dances awkwardly and collapses 6: As the others depart, his friend Benno urges him to come on a swan hunt 9: As the hunters approach, a beautiful girl appears, dressed in white and wearing a crown. She explains that she is the Princess Odette, under a spell cast by the evil sorcerer Von Rothbart that binds her and her companions to be swans by day and humans at night and that can only be broken by a vow of eternal love. In the guise of an owl, Rothbart threatens Siegfried. Enamored of Odette, Siegfried tosses aside his weapon, confesses his love and invites Odette to the ball 11 and Transformed into maidens, the swans return and a variety of dazzling dances ensue for the entire ensemble, smaller groups, Siegfried and Odette as solos and then together Dances of the Swans. Odette promises to attend the ball, but as dawn nears she tears herself away to join the other maidens who reappear on the lake as swans Foreign guests pay their respects Dance of the Corps de Ballet and Dwarfs. Six eligible princesses are announced and each dances for, and briefly with, Siegfried, who cannot choose among them Rothbart enters with his daughter Odile, who is dressed as a black swan and is disguised as Odette. Foreign guests present their native dances as entertainment Pas de six; Czardas [Hungarian Dance]; Bolero [Spanish Dance]; As thunder crashes, Rothbart and Odile reveal their treachery to the horror-stricken court and gloat as Siegfried rushes out Dances of the Little Swans. She tells them of her betrayal A happy ending at the Bolshoi At this point, the treatments differ radically There are many variants: All it lacks is the requisite happy ending of just rewards in which evil is thwarted, the social order is restored and the lovers live happily ever after. Rather, at least as originally conceived, Rothbart triumphs, the lovers are dead and the enslaved swan maidens return to their dismal future of endless misery. The urge to bodily expression is prehistoric, may predate language and is assumed to have played a major role in ancient religious ritual. The depth and pervasiveness of its cultural roots is evident from the frequent references to dance in the Bible and its frequent depiction in images ranging from the Parthenon friezes to the Hindu god Shiva balanced on one leg. King Louis XIV in full ballet regalia Formalized ballet as we know it can be traced to the sumptuous royal entertainment of Elizabethan masques and Louis XIV, an ardent and accomplished enthusiast, in whose court the nobility performed strict dance routines to exhibit the grace and dignity of their high culture and, undoubtedly, to distinguish themselves from the raucous, lusty dancing of the peasantry. By the baroque era, the dances themselves assumed an integral part of serious abstract music as in the Bach Suites and played a major role in symphonies both classical as minuetts and romantic scherzos. As a measure of the popularity but lesser status of 19th century ballets, they

often were performed as part of a lengthy program following a complete opera. The earliest full ballet remaining in the repertory is the hour-long *La Sylphide* which, in a harbinger of the plot of *Swan Lake*, finds a Scotsman fatally lured through witchcraft from his bride-to-be by an enchanting woodland nymph. Perhaps the ultimate test of a ballet score or a film soundtrack, for that matter as pure music is whether it can sustain interest in a concert hall or as an audio-only recording; until Tchaikovsky, none could. Compare Tchaikovsky's "the same catalog lists 16 records of his complete *Nutcracker* plus another 37 of the *Nutcracker Suite*, 6 of *Sleeping Beauty* plus 32 of its suite and 6 of *Swan Lake* plus 34 of selections. To be fair, James Lyons asserts that great ballet music does not have to be great music, as dance is the most ephemeral of the arts, a thing of the moment and memory. And, as Lincoln Kirsten observes, ballet music has intrinsic limitations "while it serves as the root rhythmic base that impels movement while ordering and emphasizing the activity on stage, it should not compete with the action, much less dominate it. In the mid-nineteenth century an influx of imported talent had shifted the focus of ballet to the wealth of czarist Russia, but in the view of several scholars the artistic level soon sank. As Peggy Cochrane put it: In 1876, Vladimir Begichev, a friend with whom Tchaikovsky had travelled throughout Europe, and who had become the director of the Russian Imperial Theater in Moscow of which the Bolshoi was the crown jewel, commissioned a score for a libretto he had fashioned, possibly in collaboration with Vasily Geltser, the ballet-master of the Bolshoi and Julius Reisinger, its resident choreographer. Tchaikovsky wrote that he accepted the commission for *Swan Lake* "partly because I needed the money and partly because I have long cherished a desire to try my hand at this type of music. The story of *Swan Lake* was intriguing, as it was rooted in ancient myths of swans as a symbol of womanhood and legends of women transformed into birds. Sobechshanskaya and Karparova But Tchaikovsky also might have been enticed by its derivation from operas in which men fell in love with enchanted women, a situation eerily resonant with his own bizarre personal history, in which he foreswore marital life for a chaste but deeply passionate relationship, conducted entirely through correspondence, with a wealthy widow. He sketched the entire score that summer and, amid other work, completed the orchestration by April. The original score is no longer extant, and scholars largely have been unable to recreate the premiere performance, forcing reliance upon inferences from surviving artifacts. Yet it seems clear that the debut was a severe disappointment due to a confluence of problems. The conductor was an amateur, ill-equipped to handle the challenges of the score. Anatole Chujoy considers the choreographer Reisinger "a hack with no talent or taste for the task" and the prima ballerina, Pauline Karpakova, a "run-of-the-mill dancer past her prime. Critics were brutal, focusing on monotonous and unimaginative choreography. One cited the "incoherent waving of arms and legs [that] continued for the course of four hours" as torture. A later *Odette* "Pavlova and friend While the practice of the time was for a composer to closely tailor a ballet score to a detailed scenario as Tchaikovsky would do for his *Sleeping Beauty* and *Nutcracker*, in this instance he had little direct guidance from the authors and was left largely to his imagination. As a result, the music was structured in broad gestures and treated rather abstractly. Even so, Tchaikovsky blamed himself for the failure. Charles Reid characterized him as "an introspective young genius with a talent for psychological self-torture. Indeed Tchaikovsky had so little self-confidence that he consented to write another ballet, *Sleeping Beauty*, only if he was promised exhaustive guidance in the form of minute details of the required numbers. As for *Swan Lake*, Tchaikovsky intended to rewrite the score but never did. As Charles Reid asserts: One cannot imagine the music bettered. When he died in it was assumed that the dim flame of *Swan Lake* had flickered briefly and would remain forever extinguished. That soon would drastically change. Act II was included in a February memorial program, freshly choreographed by Lev Ivanov and brilliantly danced by the acclaimed Italian ballerina Pierina Legnani. It attracted great interest "one critic raved: Petersburg, arguably the foremost ballet venue in the world at the time, undertook a revival of the full work. Musical integrity aside, the Maryinsky revival was a huge success, due in no small part to the masterful choreography. As traced by Carol Lee, Petipa had a broad background to prepare for his key role "he had been trained in music, absorbed the colorful rhythms and steps of Spain, served as premier danseur in St. Petersburg, and developed a gift for diplomacy to assuage the egos of his artists. Lee credits him with emphasizing abstraction over story-telling and expression over pantomime, while synthesizing superb physical skill with sumptuous spectacle, an approach that pleased

audiences without compromising artistic integrity. Even so, he choreographed only the first and third acts of Swan Lake, entrusting the rest to his equally brilliant assistant Ivanov who is credited with taking inspiration from the score itself to create new movements and patterns as organic extensions of the musical principles. Indeed, this seems analogous to the way in which a musical melody line blends and interacts with its harmony, so that the dancing operates on a level parallel to the score. Sarah Kaufman notes that, without a reliable record of the original intention, Swan Lake necessarily is an evolving work of art, and indeed its greatest strength lies in forcing successive artists to offer new insights tailored to their times and colleagues. Even so, most further productions were mere abridgements or isolated acts, as the first full presentations reached England only in and the US in While most are traditional, perhaps the most drastic adaptation is by South African Dada Masilo; according to reviews and press releases, "retooling the narrative to address issues of societal pressure, segregation and homophobia," it features a gay Siegfried, barefoot men in tutus and traditional African dances. Many commentators now rank Swan Lake as the most popular of all ballets although the sheer ubiquity of the Nutcracker, which few ballet companies can resist mounting to replenish their coffers each winter holiday season, clearly has come to supersede it in the public eye. Indeed, no other composer has placed three ballets in the standard repertoire and only Minkus, Delibes and Prokofiev can boast two , much less at the very top. The reasons given are many: Leo Lerman asserts that after the revival "every reigning ballerina measured her importance by the success of her Odette-Odile and every premier danseur did not believe himself established until he had partnered her. Yet as Reid stated: The two halves of the recurring "swan" theme The symphonic craft that Tchaikovsky brought to the theatre was as revitalizing as the touch of theatre that he brought to symphony writing. Clearly they used the term rather loosely, as the score hardly resembles the structures and thematic development of a genuine symphony. More recent analyses point to the then-revolutionary use in a ballet score of recurrent leitmotifs primarily the "swan theme" that appears in manifold guises to signify character and to unify the entire work, together with a wide variety of textures and colorful orchestration to underline mood and sustain interest throughout a long evening. Gruen praises its scope, as it "captures like no other the full range of human emotions from hope to despair, from terror to tenderness, from melancholy to ecstasy. But much of that level of analysis is rather subtle, especially when audiences are properly focused on the stage. Far more palpable is the profusion of magnificent melodies that Tchaikovsky lavished on Swan Lake. The tunes comprising earlier ballet scores serve their immediate purpose well enough but float in one proverbial ear and out the other. Yet their charm and resilience occasionally prompts censure as shallow, prompting Reid to note that the bulky miniature score is a handy size "for throwing at the heads of critics who are lofty about Tchaikovsky because the milkman and butcherboy have been known to whistle him. Nor, unlike in The Nutcracker, does Tchaikovsky ever resort to stylized natural sound the tolling clock, the percussive battle or a wordless chorus to underline his purely instrumental musical conceptions. And yet, it would seem that by including the sections of sheer entertainment and diversion that had nothing to do with the story but were dances for their own sake, Tchaikovsky invested Swan Lake with enough traditional elements that should have ensured its immediate acceptance. In the longer view of history Goodwin concludes that, by treating ballet as a subject worthy of musical imagination, Tchaikovsky not only achieved an enduring masterwork but set a new standard for the role of music in ballet. Yet despite what might be assumed from the titles of numerous recordings there is no comparable "official" compilation for Swan Lake.

2: Tchaikovsky sheet music.

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3: Classical Notes - Classical Classics - Tchaikovsky - Swan Lake, By Peter Gutmann

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