

Pierre Benjamin Monteux 4 April 1875 – 1 July 1964 was a French (later American) conductor. After violin and viola studies, and a decade as an orchestral player and occasional conductor, he began to receive regular conducting engagements in 1907. He came to prominence when, for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes company between 1911 and 1914, he conducted the world premieres of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and other prominent works including *Petrushka*, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, and Debussy's *Jeux*. Thereafter he directed orchestras around the world for more than half a century.

From 1917 to 1919 Monteux was the principal conductor of the French repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. He conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra (1919–24), Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra (1924–34), Orchestre Symphonique de Paris (1929–38) and San Francisco Symphony (1936–52). In 1961, aged eighty-six, he accepted the chief conductorship of the London Symphony Orchestra, a post which he held until his death three years later. Although known for his performances of the French repertoire, his chief love was the music of German composers, above all Brahms. He disliked recording, finding it incompatible with spontaneity, but he nevertheless made a substantial number of records.

Monteux was well known as a teacher. In 1932 he began a conducting class in Paris, which he developed into a summer school that was later moved to his summer home in Les Baux in the south of France. After moving permanently to the US in 1942, and taking American citizenship, he founded a school for conductors and orchestral musicians in Hancock, Maine. Among his students in France and America who went on to international fame were Lorin Maazel, Igor Markevitch, Neville Marriner, Seiji Ozawa, André Previn and David Zinman. The school in Hancock has continued since Monteux's death.

Tchaikovsky

Pathétique Symphony

PIERRE MONTEUX

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



Tchaikovsky composed this music between February and August 1893, and conducted the first performance on October 28 of that year in St. Petersburg. Already in 1890 Tchaikovsky had written to his patroness of 13 years, Nadezhda von Meck, about a possible "program symphony." By 1893 he was ready to follow through on the idea, dedicated to his nephew Vladimir Davidov, the "Bobyk" (or "Bob") of many diary-entries and letters during the 1880s. After a successful premiere, however, he was not satisfied with Program Symphony (No. 6) on the title page. Several days later Modest suggested "pateticheskyy," which in Russian means "1, enthusiastic, passionate; 2, emotional; and 3, bombastic" (rather than "pathetic" or "arousing pity," as in English). Pyotr Il'yich was delighted by the suggestion: "Excellent, Modya, bravo, pateticheskyy!" He wrote this onto the score, and sent it the same day to his publisher, Jurgenson. Two days later, however, he had qualms and asked Jurgenson to suppress subtitles -- to issue the work simply as Symphony No. 6, dedicated to Bobyk. One week later, he was dead. As for Jurgenson, he could not resist the opportunity in 1893 to publish No. 6, in elegant *Lingua Franca*, as *Symphonie pathétique*. The sobriquet has stuck ever since.

During the work's incubation Tchaikovsky was in rare good spirits, pleased with his boldness and fluency, especially in the trailblazing finale, a drawn-out Adagio of funereal character. Where others still wrote conventional slow movements, he hit on the idea of "a limping waltz" in 5/4 time. And he made the scherzo a march that builds to such a pitch

of excitement that audiences ever since, everywhere, applaud at the end.

A lugubrious Adagio prologue begins with a bassoon solo in E minor that makes its way upward through the murk of *divisi* string basses, followed by a nervous little motif that blossoms into the main theme of an Allegro *ma non troppo* sonata-structure in B minor. The memorably sighing, mauve-hued melody that dominates this movement is actually its secondary subject. A crashing orchestral tutti sets up the passionately agitated development section, followed by a condensed reprise and a brief, calmed coda.

Tchaikovsky's marking for this D major "waltz" movement is *Allegro con grazia* -- a song and trio with extended coda whose mood may be wistful, even melancholic midway, but whose spirit is balletic, to the extent of echoing Nutcracker's "Waltz of the Flowers," composed a year earlier.

The March-Scherzo, *Allegro molto vivace* in common time, has an elfin character at the start. It is a sonatina (exposition and reprise without development) that quick-steps to an explosive climax but always returns to tonic G major.

Another sonatina (symphonic developments were Tchaikovsky's *bête noire*) is anchored in B minor, although the tragic second theme enters in D major. The overall mood is inconsolably grieving, but not "pathetic." Ultimately, the music returns to those murky depths in which the symphony was born some 40 minutes earlier -- without, however, benediction or hope.

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Symphony No. 6, Op. 74 In B Minor "Pathétique" (44:14)

- 1 Adagio; Allegro Non Troppo 17:29
- 2 Allegro Con Grazia 7:05
- 3 Allegro Molto Vivace 9:04
- 4 Adagio Lamentoso 10:35

Recorded by RCA January 26, 1955, Symphony Hall, Boston.
Engineer [Recording] – Lewis Layton Producer – John Pfeiffer



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