

Tchaikovsky composed this work between May and the end of August 1888, and conducted its premiere at St. Petersburg on November 17 of that year. Eleven years separated the "fateful" Fourth Symphony of 1877 from the Fifth, about which Tchaikovsky expressed ambivalent feelings both during its composition and later on. To his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck, he wrote in August 1888 that "it seems to me I have not failed, and that it is good." After conducting it in Prague, however, he wrote "...It is a failure; there is something repellent, something superfluous and insincere that the public instinctively recognizes." Yet by March he could write: "I like it far better now."

By no means did Tchaikovsky neglect the orchestra between 1877 (when he committed, in his words, the "rash act" of marriage) and 1888. He composed four wholly charming and fanciful suites, of which the second and third could have passed as symphonies had he chosen to call them that. Furthermore, he wrote the unnumbered but inspired Manfred Symphony in 1885. Yet Tchaikovsky never found symphonic structure as congenial as opera or ballet. His method was closer to Liszt's tone-poem procedure than to the Austro-German heritage, continued by Brahms and Bruckner among his contemporaries. Tchaikovsky favored sequences (in his case, the iteration and reiteration of four-bar cells) over enharmonic evolution. Listeners who've sometimes found his music as irritating as he found Brahms' tend do so because of sequence overload, finding that such repeated gestures result in an overblown effect. His greatest gifts were melody and orchestration: witness the popular songs plagiarized from his music, such as "Moon Love," cribbed from the slow movement of Symphony No. 5.



# TCHAIKOVSKY SYMPHONY NO. 5

LENINGRAD PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, EVGENY MRUVINSKY



Like so many Russian musicians, Mravinsky seemed first headed toward a career in the sciences. He studied biology at St. Petersburg University, but had to quit in 1920 after his father's death. To support himself, he signed on with the Imperial Ballet as a rehearsal pianist. In 1923, he finally enrolled in the Leningrad Conservatory, where he studied composition with Vladimir Shcherbachov and conducting with Alexander Gauk and Nikolai Malko. He graduated in 1931, and left his Imperial Ballet job to become a musical assistant and ballet conductor at the Bolshoi Opera from 1931 to 1937, with a stint at the Kirov from 1934. Mravinsky gave up these posts in 1938, after winning first prize in the All-Union Conductors' Competition in Moscow, to become principal conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonic. He remained there until his death, long ignoring many guest-conducting offers from abroad. Under Mravinsky's direction the Leningrad Philharmonic came to be regarded as one of the finest orchestras in the world, although the world had comparatively few opportunities to hear it aside from the rare tour (about 30 performances in 25 years, starting in 1956), some dim Soviet recordings, and a very few highly acclaimed records for such Western European companies as Deutsche Grammophon and, in the end, Erato. Mravinsky was made People's Artist of the U.S.S.R. in 1954, and in 1973,

he received the order of Hero of Socialist Labor. But his more lasting international acclaim came for his performances of Mozart, Beethoven, Bruckner, Wagner, Sibelius, Bartók, Stravinsky, and anything Russian or Soviet. His reputation only rose upon his retirement from the Leningrad Philharmonic, particularly with the posthumous releases.

Mravinsky's rehearsal manner was said to be autocratic and brutal, and the resulting performances were tightly clenched. Yet they were also technically precise, finely detailed, subtly colored, and highly dramatic -- and this not always because he was in the habit of whipping fast finales into a frenzy. His readings had an intensity, concentration, and -- despite the arduous rehearsal -- spontaneity comparable to those of Wilhelm Furtwängler. In the West, Mravinsky was particularly noted as an interpreter of Shostakovich, whose Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth symphonies he premiered, and of Tchaikovsky. His recordings of the Tchaikovsky's last three symphonies, made in 1960 for Deutsche Grammophon while the orchestra was on tour in London, are touchstones of the Russian repertory.

# TCHAIKOVSKY SYMPHONY NO. 5

LENINGRAD PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, EVGENY MRVINSKY

**1 Andante - Allegro Con Animo 14:33**

**2 Andante Cantabile Con Alcuna Licenza 11:55**

**3 Valse (Allegro Moderato) 5:26**

**4 Finale (Andante Maestoso - Allegro Vivace) 11:03**

Recorded by Deutsche Grammophone  
9 November 1960 in Wien at Musikverein, Grosser-Saal

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