

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky*

Life Dates: 1840-1893

Country of Origin: Russia

Musical Era: Romantic

“I grew up in a quiet spot and was saturated from earliest childhood with the wonderful beauty of Russian popular song. I am therefore passionately devoted to every expression of the Russian spirit. In short, I am a Russian through and through!”

Peter Tchaikovsky



Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born in Votkinsk, Russia on May 7, 1840. He started his music lessons at the age of five, and when he was 11 he attended a school of jurisprudence. As a child, he was very sensitive and often cried when even the smallest thing went wrong. He loved his family dearly, especially his mother. Sadly, his mother died when he was 14, and this was when he began to write music.

Although he pursued a career as a law clerk, his first love was music. Against his father’s wishes, he began studying music at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. After graduation, he became a professor at the Moscow Conservatory when he was only 25! He soon wrote his first symphony, and the task gave him a nervous breakdown. However, he continued to write and had increasing success.

When Tchaikovsky was 37, a wealthy woman named Nadezhda von Meck decided that she would like to become his patroness and support him financially. This meant that he could stop teaching and devote all of his time to composing. They agreed to never meet in person but to write letters to one another. The two did meet by accident one day, but they didn’t even speak to each other because of their agreement.

Tchaikovsky continued to write music, work with other Russian composers, and toured around Russia, Europe and even came to America. He died on November 6, 1893.

Tchaikovsky’s sensitive personality came out in the beautiful, singable melodies that he created. He was very proud of his Russian heritage and he was known for incorporating Russian folk music into his works. His most famous pieces *Romeo and Juliet*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* were written for ballet. Another famous piece, the *1812 Overture*, depicts the war between France and Russia.

Questions from the reading: What was Tchaikovsky’s personality like?
What kind of school did Tchaikovsky attend first?

Questions for research: What was happening in Russian politics during Tchaikovsky’s lifetime?
Who was the composer that Tchaikovsky liked best?
What is “jurisprudence”?

*Tchaikovsky has several acceptable spellings. Another common spelling is Tschaikowsky.

Lesson Plan for *Swan Lake* by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

(Three lesson plan options.)



Can you name the three famous ballets for which Tchaikovsky wrote music?

(See answer below.)

Standards: Music/Visual Arts Intermediate Standards III & IV

Performance Indicators for Students:

- Through listening, analyze and evaluate their own and others' performances, and compositions by identifying and comparing them with similar works and events. (Standard IIIa)
- Compare the ways ideas and concepts are communicated through visual art with the various ways that those ideas and concepts are manifested in other art forms (Standard IIIc)
- Identify cultural context of a performance (Standard IVa)
- Identify from performance the titles and composers of well-known examples of classical concert music (Standard IVb)
- Identify the major dance forms of specific world cultures past and present (Standard IVa)

Objectives:

- Discover basic knowledge about ballet

Materials:

- Recordings of ethnic dance music, modern dance, ballet, etc.
- Array of books about composers
- Array of books on different kinds of dances
- Picture of composers
- Pictures of dances/dancers
- Filmstrip of *Swan Lake*
- Filmstrip of Tchaikovsky's life
- Vocabulary list for 3rd lesson
- Call Chart (page 22 of this guide)
- Recordings of Listening Repertoire

Listening Repertoire:

- *Swan Lake*
- Activity can be done with any selection on repertoire list.

Prior Knowledge for Students:

- Demonstrate appropriate audience behavior, including attentive listening in a variety of musical settings in and out of school (Standard IIe)

Answer: *The Nutcracker, Sleeping Beauty and Swan Lake.*

Procedures for Option 1

A teacher led discussion will enable students to become familiar with the dance form ballet.

Teacher asks leading questions:

- Have you ever danced in gym classes?
- What kind of dancing did you do?
- Do any of you take dance lessons? What kind?
- What other kinds of dances are you familiar with? (Possible answers may be jitterbugging, waltz, folkdances, jigs, square dances, reels, minuets, Highland Fling, etc.)
- What about ballet? (if this has not been suggested) What do you know about ballet? (If no response – speak a bit about ballet. Don't forget to mention that basketball coaches sometimes teach ballet moves to players so they can learn to use their bodies in a productive way while playing basketball.)
- Have you ever gone to a ballet?
- One ballet you probably know or have heard about is *The Nutcracker*. The same man who wrote the music for *The Nutcracker* also wrote the ballet music we're going to hear today. Do you know his name? (Tchaikovsky)

Tell the story of *Swan Lake*.

Students: listen and respond to story and music.

Procedures for Option 2

Teacher asks leading questions:

- Are there different ways to tell stories? (Possible answers may include speaking, writing, pantomime, dance)
- Do you know what we call a story told through dance?
- What do you know about ballet? (If no response – speak a bit about ballet.)
- Have you ever gone to a ballet?
- One ballet you probably know is *The Nutcracker*. The same man who wrote the music for *The Nutcracker* also wrote the ballet music we're going to hear today. Do you know his name? (Tchaikovsky)
- Teacher reads the story.
- What kind of music do you think you will hear that depicts Odette? the black Swan - Odile, Prince Siegfried, Rothbart? Why?

Students: respond, listen to the music of *Swan Lake* and view filmstrip when available.

Procedures for Option 3

Teacher:

- divides students into groups of 4 or 5,
- gives each group one recorded listening example from selections on the Repertoire list (taped portion need only be 2-3 minutes in duration and selected at the teacher's discretion.), a playback machine ; Call Chart (page 22 of this guide) on chart paper and marker.

Procedures (cont.)**Teacher:**

- posts Call Chart on wall.
- reviews terms to ensure students understand their meaning.

Students:

- listen in their groups to their recording at least twice.
- agree on the descriptive words or phrases that accurately reflect what they have heard.
- circle answers on chart paper.
- hang chart paper on designated space on the wall.

Teacher: replays recordings in random order.

Students: still in working groups, work to match the music examples with the descriptions on the chart papers.

Teacher: awards points to the groups that score well in matching call charts with the group whose description is most often matched with the correct recording. Then plays recordings once again.

Students: justify the selected terms in the call charts. Class may vote on which group had the most helpful, accurate description.

Indicators of Success:

- Students ask to hear more of the music during quiet time in the homeroom.
- Vocabulary words are used in the correct context.
- Seek other stories about dance at the library.
- Enjoy listening game.

Follow-up:

- Students read other books about ballet.
- Students bring in pictures of dancers or clippings about dance.

 Link Up!

■ <http://library.thinkquest.org/21702/lite/swan.html>

■ www.shomler.com/dance/swanlake/

Call Chart

Melody (Select 2)	Step wise	Large leaps	Legato	Staccato
Rhythm (Select 2)	Slow	Fast	Duple	Triple
Tone Color Any solo in- strument?	Piano	Orchestra	Voice	Band
Tempo	Fast	Slow	Medium Fast	Medium Slow
Dynamics	FF / F	p / pp	Crescendo	Decrescendo