BEETHOVEN'S EMPEROR

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2025 | 7:30 PM

CENTURY II CONCERT HALL

Daniel Hege

Music Director & Conductor

Michelle Cann

Piano

PROGRAM NOTES

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CARLOS SIMON

Born in 1986, in Washington, DC

Fate Now Conquers (5')

This is the first performance of a Carlos Simon work by the Wichita Symphony.

With a GRAMMY Award nomination, numerous commissioned works, and several recordings to his credit, Carlos Simon is regarded as one of the leading young voices among contemporary composers. His musical styles include jazz, gospel, and neo-romanticism, often reflecting the Black gospel tradition in which he grew up. He has composed concert music for both large and small ensembles, as well as film scores. He has served as a music director and keyboardist for GRAMMY Award winner Jennifer Holiday and GRAMMY-nominated artist Angie Stone. Last season, he was appointed to the inaugural Composer's Chair at the Boston Symphony. He earned his doctorate at the University of Michigan, where he studied with Michael Daugherty, a composer whose music has been performed by the Wichita Symphony in recent years.

Simon was appointed as the Composer-in-Residence at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, beginning with the 2021–2022 season for a three-year term. His residency was extended through the 2026–2027 season. His piece, "Warmth from Other Suns," a meditation on the Great Migration, was performed at the season-opening gala on September 27, 2025. Later this season, his Double Concerto for Violin and Cello will premiere with the National Symphony, featuring soloists Hilary Hahn and Seth Parker Woods. In light of the administrative upheavals at the Kennedy Center last spring, Simon mentioned in an interview with The New York Times that he would continue his relationship with the Center, stating that his music could "reflect what's happening in the world – unapologetically." He further added, "Now is not the time to pull back. Now is the time for artists to create."

In an interview with The Washington Post, Carlos Simon reflected, "My dad, he always gets on me. He wants me to be a preacher, but I always tell him, "Music is my pulpit. That's where I preach."

For a full biography about Carlos Simon, please visit his website at: carlossimonmusic.com/biography.

Probably Simon's most performed work, *Fate Now Conquers* was a commission by the Philadelphia Orchestra, which asked three composers to compose music in response to Beethoven's symphonies to celebrate the 250th anniversary of his birth in 2020. Perhaps the titled proved to be coincidentally clairvoyant, as the scheduled premiere on March 26, 2020, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. The work was subsequently recorded later that summer at the Orchestra's outdoor Mann Center and released digitally on October 8, 2020.

Carlos Simon chose the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony as his point of departure. He provides these program notes to *Fate Now Conquers* on his website.

> *This piece was inspired by a journal entry from Ludwig van Beethoven's notebook written in 1815: "Iliad. The Twenty-Second Book But Fate now conquers; I am hers; and yet not she shall share In my renown; that life is left to every noble spirit And that some great deed shall beget that all lives shall inherit."* [In citing the *Iliad,* Beethoven references the mortal combat showdown between Hector and Achilles during the Trojan War.]

> *Using the beautifully fluid harmonic structure of the 2nd movement of Beethoven's 7th symphony, I have composed musical gestures that are representative of the unpredictable ways of fate. Jolting stabs, coupled with an agitated groove with every persona. Frenzied arpeggios in the strings that morph into an ambiguous cloud of free-flowing running passages depicts the uncertainty of life that hovers over us.*
>
> *We know that Beethoven strived to overcome many obstacles in his life and documented his aspirations to prevail, despite his ailments. Whatever the specific reason for including this particularly profound passage from the Iliad, in the end, it seems that Beethoven relinquished to fate. Fate now conquers.*

The listener would be excused for not hearing references to Beethoven's music. As Simon notes, he uses gestures, some of which are quick, buried in the texture, or too obscure for most listeners. Do you notice the short two-note rhythmic tattoo as a nod to the repeated notes in Beethoven's rhythm? Listen closely for a quoted reference to Beethoven's rhythmic motive that appears in the timpani and double basses. A descending sequence of thirds heard in the piccolo, flute, and clarinets appears to track Beethoven's harmonic progression. Overall, it's probably best to experience the piece for its sweep and not worry about the musical gestures referencing Beethoven.

Simon's frenzied music has a different mood from Beethoven's relatively stately processional. Simon appears to draw from Beethoven's well-known struggles with health and social issues, and in doing so, possibly comments on today's societal problems. 2 Simon's work follows a straightforward ABA structure. The opening is intense, featuring a two-note tattoo with rapid 32nd notes accented off the beat in the strings, swirling arpeggios across the violins, quick scale passages, and splashes of color in the winds and trumpets layered over the texture. Variations in dynamics from soft to loud enhance the overall effect.

A brief contrasting middle section, played mysteriously, features softer dynamics, sustained lines in the upper strings, and a lyrical solo for the principal cello. The rapid repeated notes gestures of the first section continue to be heard in the piccolo, flute, and trumpets, along with the two-note rhythmic motive in the timpani. Eventually, these rhythmic interruptions increase in the winds, and scales lead back to the frenzy of the opening section. The work ends with a final crescendo to a punctuation of the two-note motive and sustained open fifths in the low strings.

Simon orchestrates his piece for piccolo, flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

Listen to this performance of *Fate Now Conquers* by the American Composers Orchestra, Daniela Candillari, conducting.
https://youtu.be/QH8Tj5z3yjU?si=cwU-8gW2_8-f2IG6

As a point of reference and comparison, here's a video of the second movement from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony.

https://youtu.be/ESilvOS2O9k?si=WRt7fy_uW8aR_9Iv

Here's a short clip of Leonard Bernstein discussing the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh, which explains the uniqueness and fascination that musicians have with Beethoven's music.

https://youtu.be/_HHIb9tcc9c?si=bDJ1lvOQfruGgUwN

Don is the retired CEO (2012 - 2024) of the Wichita Symphony. He holds degrees in piano and music history from Bucknell University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He also studied piano at the Salzburg Mozarteum and the University of Maryland, College Park, where he coordinated the University's International Music Festivals and Competitions for piano, cello, and voice. In 1988, he founded the National Orchestral Institute, an advanced training program for aspiring orchestral musicians, managing it for twelve years. NOI, as it's fondly known by participants, has helped young musicians prepare for and win professional auditions in orchestras around the world, including the Wichita Symphony. The program continues today under the leadership of internationally renowned conductor Marin Alsop and director Richard Scerbo.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany
Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73 "The Emperor"

1. Allegro (20')
2. Adagio un poco mosso (8')
3. Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo (10')

The most recent Wichita Symphony performance of Beethoven's Emperor Concerto took place on February 23, 2020, when pianist Stewart Goodyear performed all five Beethoven piano concertos across two concerts. Daniel Hege conducted. The WSO has programmed the concerto ten times in its history. The first performance by the Symphony was the weekend of February 27 and 28, 1950. Jean Casadesus was the pianist, and Orien Dalley conducted. Other notable pianists who have performed the Emperor in Wichita include Alexis Weisenberg, Gina Bachauer, and Claudio Arrau (twice).

There is no mistaking the opening of Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto* – bold, confident, and brilliant, with an unprecedented display of virtuosic splendor at the outset of a classical period concerto. The three big orchestral chords outline the most basic harmonic progressions in classical music – tonic, subdominant, dominant – with a final resolution on the tonic E-flat of the main theme. Between each of these chords are written-out cadenzas for the piano soloist that embellish the harmony and introduce the germinal motivic ideas that will form the foundation of the entire movement.

This is a concerto of heroic proportions, and as a work from 1809, it marks the culmination of Beethoven's so-called Heroic Period, which began in 1802 with the initial work on the Third Symphony, known as the Eroica. The two pieces share certain similarities. Both are in the key of E-flat Major, a key that Beethoven often associated with heroic qualities.

On the surface, both works seem to stem from feelings about Napoleon Bonaparte. The Eroica was originally dedicated to Napoleon until he crowned himself Emperor in 1804, which caused Beethoven to remove the dedication in a burst of anger. Toward the end of 1808, Beethoven flirted with an offer from Napoleon's brother, Jerome, King of Westphalia, to take up residence as Kapellmeister. Fearful of losing one of Vienna's most esteemed musicians, three of Beethoven's main supporters—the Princes Kinsky and Lobkowitz and Archduke Rudolf—persuaded Beethoven to stay by granting him a lifelong annuity that guaranteed his financial security. They signed this agreement on March 9, 1809. This generous offer reflects the vision of the three young noblemen, especially Rudolf, who was only 21 years old. Beethoven dedicated his Fifth Piano Concerto to Rudolf.

A few months later, Napoleon was once again part of Beethoven's life. A fourteen-year-long series of wars between Austria and France brought Napoleon to Vienna's doorstep. A 24 hour bombardment battered Vienna into submission. Beethoven cowered in the basement of his brother's house, covering his ears with pillows to protect his delicate hearing. From May 13 to November 20, 1809, French troops occupied Vienna. The summer of 1809 was a difficult time. Beethoven writes, "We have been suffering misery in a most concentrated form…since May 4, I have produced very little coherent work…What a destructive, disorderly life I see and hear around me: nothing but drums, cannons, and human misery in every form."

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73 "The Emperor"
continued

Despite lifelong conflicting opinions about Napoleon, the nickname "Emperor" attached to his Fifth Concerto was not Beethoven's idea. The origins of the nickname are not entirely clear. One story reportedly tells how a French officer at the premiere exclaimed, "It is the Emperor!" Whatever the source, the nickname fits. It may reflect Beethoven's confidence and pride in his work as an artist.

If Beethoven didn't admit it, he likely felt like the Emperor of the musical world, as his art had reached a peak that distinguished him from all his contemporaries. The turbulence evident in works like the Fifth Symphony or the Appassionato Piano Sonata from a few years earlier now seemed to be replaced by a more confident, inner calm. As Maynard Solomon notes, the music became infused with "a new lyrical strain" marked by "pre Romantic freedom of harmonic motion and structural design."

The **first movement** of the concerto introduces new dimensions for Beethoven. Longer than any of the movements in his symphonies up to that point, it pushes the boundaries of the sonata form while surprising our expectations. Although Beethoven started his Fourth Concerto with the piano quietly stating the main theme, the Fifth's opening with a cadenza was groundbreaking. The structural cues of the first and second themes, along with the transition into the development, are obscured by the multiple ideas and constant development of the motives, which seem more aligned with Brahms's later "developing variation" concept than a nod to Beethoven's earlier works.

There is a "military" feel to the music, especially in the march-like second theme. Music historian Alfred Einstein described this concerto as the culmination of the military concept 2 that was part of Austrian and French musical traditions. According to Einstein, the people of Vienna at that time "expected the first movement in four-four time of a 'military' character; and they reacted with great pleasure when Beethoven not only met but exceeded their expectations." This military quality, according to Maynard Solomon, may have expressed Beethoven's "response to the tide of Napoleonic conquest."

But what's particularly striking about this little march idea, which initially seems to come from a distance, is its harmonic relationship to the main theme in E-flat major. During the orchestral exposition, it doesn't shift to the dominant key of B-flat major as we might expect. Instead, it stays firmly on the E-flat tonic, but in the minor mode. When it reappears in the piano's solo exposition, it appears as a variation in the key of B minor, a key quite distant from E-flat. However, almost as if to make up for straying, Beethoven immediately repeats the theme in the orchestral tutti in the key of B-flat major, not through a harmonic transition, but with an abrupt half-step downward shift to B-flat, which he has used several times before in his piano concertos.

This structural half-step relationship becomes a main source of tension in the piece. We hear it again during the transition from the second to the third movement, when the tonic key of the second movement (B) shifts down to B-flat, which then becomes the dominant in the key of E-flat major. These details might sound very technical, but they are quite easy to hear. Similar relationships between keys also appear in the third movement.

While the transition from the exposition to the development in the first movement might seem unclear to some listeners, the return to the recapitulation and E-flat major will be unmistakable. Once again, the orchestra plays the opening three chords, each followed by a piano cadenza that is even more ennobled by the addition of octave passages in the piano.

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73 "The Emperor"
continued

The **second movement** is a tranquil hymn that is significantly shorter than the first movement. It acts as an interlude of grace and repose between the grand outer movements. The tempo is marked *adagio* (slow) *un poco mosso* (with a little motion). In other words, as Beethoven's student Carl Czerny taught, "it must not drag."

The movement highlights the sounds of the solo piano, winds, and strings. Timpani and trumpets are not present. The form is a simple variation with three distinct statements of the hymn. The final statement is a beautiful moment of introspective orchestration. We hear the unadorned hymn theme in the winds, while the piano supports it with a murmuring embellishment. Meanwhile, the strings play the melody with detached bow strokes on the second half of each beat.

As the music gently fades away, it settles on a B note, which then slips down to B-flat, as mentioned before. The piano, hesitating slightly, hints at the upcoming theme before launching into the full rendition of the rondo theme that begins the **third movement.**

The theme is rollicking, victorious, and joyful, with a rough dance quality. The form is a sonata-rondo, with the rondo section marked by each return of the dance theme. The meter is 6/8, meaning there are two main beats per measure, but Beethoven often creates rhythmic tension by placing three-beat and four-beat patterns against this two-beat pulse.

The coda is another creative stroke of orchestration. With timpani reinforcing a dotted rhythmic pattern reminiscent of military parades around Vienna, Beethoven harmonizes a descending scale that resolves on the tonic of E-flat. In a final burst of energy, the piano dashes off a final flourish of scales, which the orchestra concludes with a cadential treatment of the rondo's dance theme.

The concerto was not premiered immediately after it was completed. Its first known performance took place in Leipzig with the Gewandhaus Orchestra on November 11, 1811. As Beethoven's deafness worsened, he could no longer risk performing in public. The soloist's part was played by Friedrich Schneider. The first performance in Vienna happened three months later, with Carl Czerny as the soloist. The orchestration consists of woodwinds in pairs, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings, along with the piano soloist.

The Leipzig press acknowledged the importance of the new concerto. The review published in January 1812 said, "it is, without doubt, one of the most original, imaginative, most effective, but also one of the most difficult of all existing concertos." Beethoven pushes the limits of both the instrument and technical skills as they were understood at the time. He utilizes the full range of the piano, and there are several striking moments in the upper treble of the instrument.

For anyone today who might question the relevance of classical music, one only needs to consider this concerto. The late pianist Alfred Brendel states that the *Emperor* is "a grand and radiant vision, a noble vision of freedom." Similarly, biographer Lewis Lockwood believes that present-day listeners do not hear pieces like the Emperor or Eroica "as antiquated expressions of a political idealism…but as evocations of the human possibilities that might be realized in a better world." As you listen to this magnificent concerto written over two hundred years ago, reflect on the message and relevance it conveys to you, and may we hope that the music continues to be meaningful and inspirational in the centuries to come.

There are many great performances of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto on the web. Try this one with the great Beethoven interpreter Alfred Brendel, who passed away this past June. He performs it here with conductor Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic.

https://youtu.be/76DXQLbXEks?si=g2T9eHGBcuuRdqQ9

Or, try this with pianist Krystian Zimerman and Leonard Bernstein conducting the Vienna Philharmonic.

https://youtu.be/m0evC5OMofs?si=MahFYQW7tquwTR8i

If you wish to follow along with the score, here's a YouTube video. Helene Grimaud is the pianist. Vladimir Jurowski conducts the Staatskapelle Dresden.

https://youtu.be/2Y5YTNkiCrw?si=jjmHlwpIi4rVasDU

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PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

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

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

1. Andante - Allegro con anima (16')
2. Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza (14')
3. Valse: Allegro moderato (6')
4. Finale: Andante maestoso - Allegro vivace - Moderato assai e molto maestoso (14')

The Wichita Symphony has performed Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony nine times, most recently on October 13 and 14, 2012, with Daniel Hege conducting. The first time was on November 3 and 4, 1968. James Robertson was the conductor.

In the spring of 1888, Tchaikovsky experienced one of his frequent bouts of depression and self-doubt. In a letter to his brother Modest (1850–1916), he complained that his imagination was "dried up" and that he felt no urge to create music. Throughout his life, he was insecure about his talent as a composer. That spring, his mood was made worse by his constant fear of death after losing a close friend the previous summer. In a letter to his patron and benefactor, Nadezhda von Meck,[1] Tchaikovsky wrote that he was experiencing "one of the darkest periods" of his life.

By late spring, Tchaikovsky started working on a new piece, which he described in a letter to von Meck as a symphony with themes of fate and death. He noted he was having difficulty with the project but was gradually gaining inspiration. He was eager to prove he could still compose. By early August, he had finished half of the work's orchestration but still complained about exhaustion. By the end of the month, he managed to complete the Symphony but remained dissatisfied with his achievement. Unlike his Fourth Symphony, which he attached a detailed programmatic description, he offered only the general idea of fate as the meaning behind the Fifth Symphony.

Many listeners will attend the concert already familiar with Tchaikovsky's music; if not with the Fifth Symphony specifically, then with another one of his six symphonies or well-known works, such as his ballets *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker,* the First Piano Concerto, or the famous *1812 Overture.* As a prominent composer of symphonies, opera, and ballet in the 19th century, he is considered by many to be the equal of the leading German composers of that time, Richard Wagner and Johannes Brahms. Interestingly, Tchaikovsky attended the opening of Wagner's Bayreuth Festival House in the summer of 1881 and experienced the Ring Cycle, which he found to be "exhausting to the nerves in the extreme." He also met Brahms in 1887 and again in 1889. Although the two composers enjoyed a lunch together where they "got quite drunk," Tchaikovsky didn't care for Brahms's music, declaring that it has "great pretensions to profundity," but "never expresses anything." Entitled to his opinion, Tchaikovsky's comments about his German peers reflect a different approach to composition.

Besides loving Mozart's music, Tchaikovsky did not feel a strong connection to the Austro German traditions of composition. He also thought the nationalist tendencies of the Russian composers in the *kuchka,* or Mighty Heap —which included Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov—were too simplistic. Instead,

[1] Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck (1831 – 1894) was a business woman and philanthropist married to a German civil engineer who made his fortune developing the Russian railway system. Mrs. Von Meck began supporting Tchaikovsky in 1876 and continued the support until 1890 with the stipulation that the two would never meet in person. Her generosity and belief in Tchaikovsky enabled him to work exclusively as a composer. Copious correspondence between the two exists, and they never met!

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64
continued

Tchaikovsky preferred the music of French composers like Bizet and Delibes. He also appreciated Grieg's music and maintained a good friendship with him.

As we listen to Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, consider some qualities that make the music uniquely his. Tchaikovsky's music often feels connected to ballet or dramatic scenes in opera. His talent for creating memorable melodies and using them as structural elements stands out. The Fifth Symphony is filled with beautiful melodies, especially the horn solo in the second movement, which is one of the most famous melodies in all of symphonic music. Tchaikovsky crafts long, expressive melodies, like the horn solo, that seem to unfold with every ounce of emotion he can evoke. Other melodies, such as the opening of the first movement, are shorter and rely on repetition. These melodies, inspired by folk music and dance, present a simple idea that is then repeated. Because of their length, Tchaikovsky's melodies don't develop in the same way as those of composers like Beethoven and Brahms, who elaborate on motives through complex interplay. In comparison, there is little contrapuntal texture in Tchaikovsky's music. Instead, development for Tchaikovsky often occurs through changes in orchestration and repetition, with excitement building through rhythmic repetition, thickening the orchestral texture, and shifting to higher pitch ranges (tessitura).

The **first movement** begins with an introduction and what most agree is Tchaikovsky's "fate or destiny theme" for this symphony. Clarinets, played in their lower, darker register, introduce the theme, supported by low strings. Soon, bassoons join in, creating an even darker sound. Remember this "fate theme" as it appears in various forms throughout each movement of the symphony, helping to unify the work. Since the theme appears in all four movements, it forms a cyclic structure. How it changes with different orchestrations, dynamics, minor versus major keys, and even the musical context in which it appears will influence our emotional responses to the music.

After a pause, a livelier *allegro* begins the exposition. Tchaikovsky continues with his clarinets and bassoons, which introduce a folk-like tune, possibly Polish in origin. Finally, the richness of the orchestral strings picks up this theme. Gradually, Tchaikovsky builds to his first big climax with the entire orchestra playing triple fortissimo (fff), and the frenzy of violins pushed into their upper range.

After retreating from this peak into softer music, Tchaikovsky introduces a new theme, slightly more animated and characterized by rhythmic repetition in the woodwinds and horns, answered by a scale in the strings. It may evoke a sleigh ride in the country. What follows is one of Tchaikovsky's emotional melodies played off the beat by the violins. This melodic "sigh" with its syncopation is one of the piece's key emotional moments. Together, these two ideas, with their distinctive rhythms, build momentum toward a new peak.

Once again, the music ebbs and then enters a development section that uses the original folk-like first theme and the "sleigh ride" rhythm. Building intensity through repetition of these two ideas defines the development section.

The recapitulation is signaled by another pause and the entrance of the bassoon quietly playing the folk theme. The sequence of musical events closely follows what we heard in the exposition, but as the music approaches its final climax of the movement, Tchaikovsky increases the impact by pushing the instruments into an even higher tessitura.

There will be no grand finale to this intense movement. Listen to how Tchaikovsky pulls back from the frenzy to reach desolation and despair, shifting from the loudest fortissimos to the softest pianissimos, from the primal cry of the entire orchestra to the lonely tones of the bassoon, timpani, and low strings. Whatever fate has in store, it remains unresolved, and a sense of hopelessness lingers.

After soft introductory harmonies in the low strings, the **second movement** begins with one of the most recognizable melodies in all symphonic music. It features an extended solo for the principal horn that became a popular hit in the mid-20th century. [See music links below]. A beautifully shaped phrase with a repeating rhythmic pattern, Tchaikovsky creates tension by raising the repetition of the melody a half step higher, then resolving it through a sequence of falling intervals that sound like sighs. The clarinet, followed by the oboe, enters in a touching duet with the horn. After the horn solo ends, the cellos take up the theme, adding warmth with their tone. Woodwinds contribute to the texture with fragmented commentary on the melody, sometimes doubling the cellos with the clarinets. The violins, which initially provided background, join in with an extended version of the melody. Listen as Tchaikovsky builds an emotional climax by adding instruments to the texture. As the violins rise chromatically, the bass line gradually descends until the music blossoms into a triple fortissimo climax. The entire first section leads up to this point and then slowly recedes from the peak.

A more animated contrasting section starts with a brief phrase by the clarinet, then is taken up by the bassoons. Again, through a process of repeating fragments and building excitement by adding instruments to the texture, Tchaikovsky moves toward a new climax. This climax surprises us with the foreboding return of the "fate" theme, hammered out by brass and winds in triple fortissimo over a timpani roll, tremolo low strings, and accented upper strings. Full orchestra chords, followed by a pause, then softer, echoing string chords played pizzicato signal a shift in mood.

The first section returns, this time featuring the famous melody in the first violins, accompanied by a counter-melody in the oboe. This repetition mostly follows the sequence of events from the first iteration, except that now Tchaikovsky intensifies the accompaniment with repeated chords, gradually accelerates the tempo, and pushes the violins even higher to surpass the intensity of the earlier climax. Once again, the fate theme interrupts more insistently with cadential chords hammered out by the entire orchestra. Almost exhaustively, the music trails off in the clarinets and bassoons. A coda passage follows, with melodic fragments from the theme as the music descends into the lower instrumental ranges and fades away on a solo clarinet.

This second movement exemplifies Tchaikovsky's style, using expansive melodies and vibrant orchestral colors to shape emotional expressions and develop his material. Music historian Francis Maes compares this movement to a dramatic operatic scene. The listener is free to imagine their own story and emotional reaction to the implied scene.

After wringing us out emotionally with the second movement, Tchaikovsky provides a breather in the **third movement,** a graceful and lyrical waltz tinged with nostalgia. Here, we hear music from one of the greatest ballet composers. Enjoy the flowing melodies, the warmth of the strings, and the vibrant colors of the woodwinds, which sparkle in the solo spotlight. A contrasting middle section feels faster, with swift, detached sixteenth notes in the strings and woodwinds. The waltz returns. As it fades, the clarinets and bassoons softly repeat the "fate" theme, reminding us that even amid the distractions of a ballroom, fate remains ever-present.

The three-quarter waltz beat dissolves, ending with the decisive rhythm of cadential "fate" chords in a two-beat pattern.

By ending the third movement with the "fate" theme, Tchaikovsky creates a transition into the **fourth movement,** where the first music we hear is, again, the "fate" theme, now heard in the key of E major and enhanced by the warmth of the strings. The winds repeat the theme against a triplet rhythmic accompaniment in the strings. Tchaikovsky instructs that the music be played "maestoso," or majestically, but not quickly. As you listen, ask yourself how different the "fate" theme makes you feel in this new context. Structurally, this opening section functions as an introduction.

After a pause, a rustic, folk-like dance in E minor begins. Repeated patterns within the phrase emphasize its strong rhythmic character. Tchaikovsky drives his music forward through repetition, contrasted by variations in orchestration. New melodic ideas emerge— one introduced by the oboe and another by the strings. Much of this activity occurs above long-held bass notes, or pedal points, heard in the double basses, tuba, and timpani, which enhance a sense of harmonic stability.

Eventually, the pedal tones in the bass form a quarter-note pattern that functions as a transition, accelerating into a new melodic idea first presented by the winds and then by the strings. This theme, in turn, is interrupted by the "fate" theme in the brass, punctuated by swirling splashes of color from the winds and strings. Tchaikovsky's wealth of ideas flows one after another in a quilt-like fashion. Organizing his work was probably a challenge for him. He struggled with this movement, and many critics found fault with its structure. Still, everything seems to come together as the music relentlessly moves toward its climax with a majestic repetition of the "fate" theme, followed by a headlong rush to the finish. It's exciting in a rather bombastic way!

Tchaikovsky conducted the premiere of his Fifth Symphony in St. Petersburg on November 17, 1888. The composer's friends and the public responded positively to the new work, but critics were less impressed. César Cui (1835–1918), a composer in the Russian nationalist group known as the "Mighty Five," or the *kuchka,* thought the work was unoriginal and lacked ideas, which was a surprisingly harsh reaction, or perhaps a case of jealousy. When the symphony was played in Boston a few years later, a critic for the *Boston Evening Transcript* described the finale as a "horde of demons struggling in a torrent of brandy, the music growing drunker and drunker." Tchaikovsky was initially unsatisfied with the work, but he eased his self-criticism after additional performances. More recently, Tchaikovsky's biographers still find the finale problematic, citing its bombastic style and excessive orchestration. However, this view has never seemed to bother audiences who enjoy the excitement and sense of victory at the end. Like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Tchaikovsky's "victory over strife" symbolism was especially popular among Allied audiences during World War Two.

Tchaikovsky's orchestration follows typical conventions of its time. The score features three f lutes, with the third doubling on piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets (sometimes expanded to four), three trombones, a tuba, timpani, and strings. Pay attention to how Tchaikovsky uses the low ranges of bassoons and clarinets throughout to darken the orchestral color, and of course, listen for the famous horn solo in the second movement.

If you want to reacquaint yourself with Tchaikovsky's Symphony before the concert, or hear it for the first time, here is a YouTube performance with Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990) conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra at the Tanglewood Music Festival. The video doesn't specify a date, but it's likely the 1974 performance mentioned in sources. You might notice that the orchestra has four musicians playing each wind instrument instead of the usual double winds. Increasing the number of wind players was common in the 20th century, especially in orchestras with larger budgets, where conductors aimed for a fuller sound that highlighted the winds. Today, it's less common because of cost.

https://youtu.be/ljG5OUNEkMY?si=Dwyi5vL6zAsaEru7

The famous theme of the second movement was adapted as a 1939 popular song titled "Moon Love." Andre Kostelanetz is credited with the first adaptation. Here is an arrangement by Bill Finnegan made popular by the Glenn Miller Orchestra.

https://youtu.be/6BYHDaauvBE?si=g0VEsQnaksCWcYUj

The tune was still going strong in 1964 when Jerry Vale recorded it with an orchestrally rich arrangement by Percy Faith that was later used by former dance sport champions Karen and Marcus Hilton for a 1998 video performance.

https://youtu.be/y5kWZe-Ntyg?si=X6mtB1Wm5KAzSkvP

Don is the retired CEO (2012 - 2024) of the Wichita Symphony. He holds degrees in piano and music history from Bucknell University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He also studied piano at the Salzburg Mozarteum and the University of Maryland, College Park, where he coordinated the University's International Music Festivals and Competitions for piano, cello, and voice. In 1988, he founded the National Orchestral Institute, an advanced training program for aspiring orchestral musicians, managing it for twelve years. NOI, as it's fondly known by participants, has helped young musicians prepare for and win professional auditions in orchestras around the world, including the Wichita Symphony. The program continues today under the leadership of internationally renowned conductor Marin Alsop and director Richard Scerbo.