



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (May 7, 1840 – November 6, 1893) was a Russian composer of the Romantic era. His wide ranging output includes symphonies, operas, ballets, instrumental, chamber music and songs. He wrote some of the most popular concert and theatrical music in the classical repertoire, including the ballets *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*, the *1812 Overture*, his First Piano Concerto, his last three numbered symphonies, and the opera *Eugene Onegin*. Born into a middle-class family, Tchaikovsky was educated for a career as a civil servant, despite his obvious musical precocity. He pursued a musical career against the wishes of his family, entering the Saint Petersburg Conservatory in 1862 and graduating in 1865. This formal, Western-oriented training set him apart from the contemporary nationalistic movement embodied by the influential group of young Russian composers known as The Five, with whom Tchaikovsky's professional relationship was mixed. Although he enjoyed many popular successes, Tchaikovsky was never emotionally secure, and his life was punctuated by personal crises and periods of depression.

Contributory factors were his disastrous marriage and the sudden collapse of the one enduring relationship of his adult life, his 13-year association with the wealthy widow Nadezhda von Meck. Amid private turmoil Tchaikovsky's public reputation grew; he was honoured by the Tsar, awarded a lifetime pension and lauded in the concert halls of the world. His sudden death at the age of 53 is generally ascribed to cholera, but some attribute it to suicide. Although perennially popular with concert audiences across the world, Tchaikovsky's music was often dismissed by American critics in the early and mid-20th century as being vulgar and lacking in elevated thought. By the end of the 20th century, however, Tchaikovsky's status as a significant composer was generally regarded as secure.

The **Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35**, was written in 1878 and is one of the best known of all violin concertos. It is also considered to be among the most technically difficult works for violin. The concerto is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets in A and B-flat, two bassoons, four horns in F, two trumpets in D, timpani and strings. As with most concerti, the piece is in three movements, *Allegro moderato* (D major), *Canzonetta: Andante* (G minor), and *Finale: Allegro vivacissimo* (D major). There is no break or pause between the second and third movements. The piece was written in Clarens, a Swiss resort on the shores of Lake Geneva, where Tchaikovsky had gone to recover from the depression brought on by his disastrous marriage to Antonina Miliukova. Tchaikovsky was joined there by his composition pupil, the violinist Iosif Kotek, who had been in Berlin for violin studies with Joseph Joachim. The two played works for violin and piano together, including a violin-and-piano arrangement of Édouard Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, which they may have played through the day after Kotek's arrival. This work may have been the catalyst for the composition of the concerto. He wrote to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck, "It [the *Symphonie espagnole*] has a lot of freshness, lightness, of piquant rhythms, of beautiful and excellently harmonized melodies.... He [Lalo], in the same way as Léo Delibes and Bizet, does not strive after profundity, but he carefully avoids routine, seeks out new forms, and thinks more about *musical beauty* than about observing established traditions, as do the Germans." Tchaikovsky authority Dr. David Brown writes that Tchaikovsky "might almost have been writing the prescription for the violin concerto he himself was about to compose." Tchaikovsky made swift, steady progress on the concerto, as by this point in his rest cure he had regained his inspiration, and the work was completed within a month despite the middle movement getting a complete rewrite (a version of the original movement was preserved as the first of the three pieces for violin and piano, *Souvenir d'un lieu cher*).