

London Philharmonic Orchestra



TCHAIKOVSKY

SYMPHONY NO. 5

SYMPHONY NO. 6 (PATHÉTIQUE)

KARINA CANELLAKIS conductor

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA



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PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–93)

SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN E MINOR, OP. 64

- 1 Andante – Allegro con anima
- 2 Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza
- 3 Valse: Allegro moderato
- 4 Finale: Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace

Tchaikovsky's last three symphonies (Nos. 4–6) are sometimes described as a set, or even as a kind of dramatic trilogy. Of course each work is entirely self-sufficient, and they don't directly 'refer' to one another – as some of Mahler's symphonies do. But it is possible to see similar preoccupations being worked out in all three symphonies: some of them purely musical, others more personal, possibly autobiographical.

These last three symphonies are so familiar to many that their originality tends to be overlooked. In fact these are some of the most original symphonic works composed after Beethoven's titanic nine. Although all of them are in the traditional four movements, the layout is radically different in each case. The Fourth balances a huge, complex and powerfully tragic first movement with three shorter ones, which can be seen as strikingly contrasted responses to the bleak predicament outlined in the first. The Sixth (the 'Pathétique'), on the other hand, places the tragedy at the end in a shattering *Adagio lamentoso*

– symphonies ending in slow movements were extremely rare in the 19th century.

The Fifth follows yet another course. Like No. 4, it begins with what is clearly a 'Fate' motif, which here returns to haunt all three later movements. After Tchaikovsky's disastrous attempt to conquer – or at least conceal – his homosexuality by marrying one of his students in 1877, he became increasingly convinced that his life was directed by some kind of dark, implacable force. The brazen fanfare theme that begins the Fourth Symphony was specifically labelled 'Fate' by its composer. The Fifth's fateful motto theme, however, enters with a very different kind of tone and tread. Low clarinets (a colour Tchaikovsky often used to great effect) sing a mournful, funereal theme, while low string chords underscore the sense of heavy, weary movement. Eventually this comes to a halt, *pianissimo*; but then the string chords set out at a livelier pace, and a new theme – melancholic but with a new dancing

momentum – emerges on clarinet and bassoon. The Symphony appears to be attempting to counter gloom with the classic remedy of physical movement. This *Allegro con anima* has its exhilarating highs and stark lows, but the end echoes the beginning: a bassoon subtly recalls the outline of the original Fate theme before descending to a cavernous low B, as timpani and double basses close the movement unambiguously in the minor.

Sombre low string chords begin the slow movement, but now they climb towards the light, which dawns fully in a wonderful long horn melody. If the first movement's motto theme represents Fate, then this is almost certainly a 'Love' theme. Eventually the music grows agitated, and the first movement's Fate theme storms in on trumpets, bringing the music to a dead stop. Has the idyll been shattered? Tentatively at first, the Love melody returns (now on violins with oboe countermelody) and the mood grows more ardent – until again Fate intrudes, still more aggressively, on trombones. This time there is no return of the Love theme, but a tender, possibly resigned coda.

The following *Valse* (Waltz) movement is in striking contrast. Its elegant, lilting dance tune could have come straight from a ballroom scene in one of Tchaikovsky's operas or ballets. But just before the end, Fate returns again, this time quietly on low clarinets and bassoons – a dim but ghostly presence amid colourful merriment. Clearly its implications have to be faced, so Tchaikovsky begins his finale by transforming the Fate theme into a resolutely major-key march tune. This newfound determination is striking, but before long the resolve seems to falter and a turbulent *Allegro vivace* explodes onto the scene. At length this comes to a big expectant pause, then the resolute major-key version of the Fate theme marches back in on strings to launch Tchaikovsky's most positive symphonic conclusion – could Tchaikovsky be telling us that we can be reconciled with, even embrace our fate? Eventually the coda races to the finishing post with memories of the first movement's dancing *Allegro* theme shining out on trumpets and horns. Not every listener finds this final affirmation entirely convincing – but that may have been Tchaikovsky's intention. After all, how often in life do we experience unequivocal triumph?

Programme note © Stephen Johnson

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–93)

SYMPHONY NO. 6 IN B MINOR, OP. 74 (PATHÉTIQUE)

- 1 Adagio – Allegro non troppo
- 2 Allegro con grazia
- 3 Allegro molto vivace
- 4 Finale: Adagio lamentoso

In August 1893, as his Sixth Symphony was nearing completion, Tchaikovsky wrote to his nephew, 'Bob' Davidov: 'I can tell you in all sincerity that I consider this symphony the best thing I have ever done. In any case, it is the most deeply felt. And I love it as I have never loved any of my compositions.' Perhaps few would disagree with Tchaikovsky's assessment of his last work, a masterpiece of frank and disturbing emotion whose effect on the listener is made all the more powerful by the realisation that it reflects the composer's depressive state of mind during his final year.

At the time he began work on it in February 1893, he had told Bob that it was 'a programme symphony, but to a programme that should remain an enigma for everyone but myself: let them try and guess it! ... The theme is full of subjective feeling, so much so that as I was mentally composing it ... I frequently shed tears.' Death was certainly a subject that occupied Tchaikovsky's mind at this time: although he presumably did not foresee his

own demise the following autumn – almost certainly by his own hand – he did lose a number of close friends that year, and an early version of the programme scribbled down in 1892 had borne prominently the words 'life' and 'death'. But a more fundamental impetus for the Sixth Symphony was surely the spectre that had haunted the composer for many years: Fate. For Tchaikovsky, this was the implacable power that frustrated all his hopes of happiness, and his previous two symphonies had both attempted to respond to it in some way: the Fourth had confronted and then tried to brush it aside, while the Fifth had scored a somewhat hollow-sounding victory. The Sixth – subtitled by the composer 'Pathétique' – finally gives in to total defeat.

The Sixth Symphony differs from its two predecessors in having no recurring motto theme; instead, it makes use of a number of themes suggestive of upwards struggle followed by downward collapse, an outline that mirrors the overall course of the Symphony. Its presence can be

detected in the murky opening of the first movement, and the material of this introduction also forms the basis of the main *Allegro non troppo* section's restless first theme. A broad and passionate melody follows this, but any hope of consolation is violently shattered by the intervention of the central development section. This climaxes in a momentous and grinding downward sequence, and when the second theme re-emerges it is with a bitter irony that borders on pain. The passion subsides, however, and the movement closes in a mood of resignation.

The second movement promises brighter things, but its waltz-like geniality is undermined by a five-in-a-bar metre and a poignant trio and coda. It is followed by a brilliant movement in which scurrying preparations and fragments of melody lead to a seemingly joyful and triumphant march, but the descending accompaniment reminds us (as do similar figures throughout the work) that the gaiety is forced; happiness is still an illusion.

In the Finale it disappears forever in a bleak *Adagio* in which there is only hopelessness and dejection. It is a testament of despair in which optimism can find no place, and as the music sinks back into the depths from which it has struggled to rise, the final bars of Tchaikovsky's most personal and sincere symphonic statement are soft but devastating.

Programme note © Lindsay Kemp



Courtesy of the Royal College of Music, London

KARINA CANELLAKIS

CONDUCTOR



© Mathias Bothor

Universally acclaimed for her symphonic and operatic performances characterised by their emotional impact, interpretive depth and technical command, Karina Canellakis is welcomed by the finest musical institutions across the globe. She has been Principal Guest Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra since 2021, when her performances with the Orchestra led to one critic marvelling at the 'explosive chemistry between this conductor and orchestra', while another described 'a musical partnership that looks set to be one of the most exciting and rewarding in London'. She recently extended her LPO contract to the end of the 2026/27 season.

Karina is also Chief Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, and her debut recording with them, *Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra*, received a Grammy nomination in 2023.

Since winning the Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award in 2016, Karina has developed close relationships with many of the world's leading orchestras. She was Principal Guest Conductor of the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin from 2019–23, and in 2023/24 was a featured Artist-in-Residence at Vienna's Musikverein.

Already established as a virtuoso violinist, Karina was encouraged to pursue conducting by Sir Simon Rattle while playing in the Berlin Philharmonic's Akademie. She performed for several years as soloist, guest leader and chamber musician, spending many summers at the Marlboro Music Festival, until conducting eventually became her focus.

Karina was born and raised in New York City.

Karina Canellakis's position at the LPO is generously supported by Richard Buxton.

Karina Canellakis appears courtesy of Pentatone, with whom she records exclusively.

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world's finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra's performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trailblazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world's greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In September 2021 Edward Gardner became the Orchestra's Principal Conductor, succeeding Vladimir Jurowski, who became Conductor Emeritus in recognition of his transformative impact on the Orchestra as Principal Conductor from 2007–21.

The Orchestra is based at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for 60 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including those with LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti, Tennstedt and Masur, to Jurowski and Gardner.

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Recorded live at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall.

Symphony No. 5 recorded 15 March 2023

Producer: Nick Parker, Floating Earth

Engineer: Mike Hatch, Floating Earth

Symphony No. 6 recorded 2 November 2024

Producer: Andrew Walton, K&A Productions

Engineer: Deborah Spanton, K&A Productions

Executive Producers:

David Burke, Graham Wood

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LPO-0137

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