

Tchaikovsky's Cello Concerto

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Tchaikovsky's Cello Concerto

Yuriy Leonovich, a Ukrainian cellist living and studying in the United States, has completed a cello concerto based on Tchaikovsky's unfinished sketches. In this article the author explains his inspiration and methodology.

Prelude

Like all great composers, authors and inventors, Pyotr Il'ich Tchaikovsky brainstormed a multitude of ideas, only some of which were eventually realised. The majority of these conceptions became merely memories, while the better ideas were turned into sketches, and the fortunate ones evolved into great musical works. However, because the composer's life was cut short, many of his later sketches did not get a chance to see the light of day. Several sketches were completed posthumously by his friend and colleague [Sergei Taneev](#). The works included the "Night Scene" of the unfinished opera [Romeo and Juliet](#) and the [Andante & Finale](#) for piano and orchestra, Op. 79.

I have always been interested in rarely-played works in the cello repertoire. Being a cellist myself, I live with hopes of reviving them. Some of these works include concerti and shorter works of cellist/composers: David Popper, Julius Klengel, Gaspar Cassado, Georg Goltermann, Bernhard Romberg, and the not-so-famous Cello Concerto in A major by Antonin Dvorak.

I first heard of the Tchaikovsky Cello Concerto when I was 16 years old, and I was immediately intrigued to find out more about the work. To my disappointment, I found that the work had never been completed. After some research I came across Brett Langston's web site about the composer; including a comprehensive list of all works by Tchaikovsky, both sketched and realized. Eager to find out more about the work, I asked the Tchaikovsky expert a list of questions that led me to the 60-measure sketch, found in the *Cajkovskij-Symposium*, published by Schott. So began my journey to completing the B-minor Concerto left unfinished by Tchaikovsky.

By the age of 18 I had written thirty cello concertos of my own, and was familiar with the medium. I also studied much of Tchaikovsky's works to get a sense of his style, orchestration, and harmony usage. This was no easy task, but I began outlining the work. The opening theme was in a triple meter. This was very unusual of Tchaikovsky's concertos, with the exception of the introduction to the [First Piano Concerto](#). Hence, I decided to treat the 60 measures as such. After the 70-odd bar introduction, I decided to write a first and second themes of my own for the exposition section. After spending about a year on the concerto, I felt like my resources had run dry, having spent half of that time on trying to move from the exposition to the first solo episode in the development section. Frustrated with the results, I gradually put the work aside. But the concerto never left my mind. I was always brainstorming new ideas about how the work should unfold.

After an unfortunate crash of my computer, about a year later, I was back at square one. I had lost many projected and completed works that remained unprinted: the Tchaikovsky Concerto, a Concerto on the themes from [Bach's Saint Matthew's Passion](#), a Flute Concerto and other files.

By the summer of 2006 I had written two more cello concertos and arranged quite a few pieces for cello ensembles. My new wave of inspiration got catapulted by the reading of Cassado's rendition of Tchaikovsky's [Piano Pieces Op. 72](#), in a Cello Concerto form. I immediately reconnected with Brett Langston, and was ready to finish Tchaikovsky's Cello Concerto.

I. Allegro maestoso

This time I employed the 60-bar sketch as the actual first theme of the first movement's exposition. A twelve-bar introduction precedes the cello solo. The concerto begins quietly with a bassoon solo. The music grows to a mighty *fortissimo*, which dies right down, giving way to the soloist. The 9/8 theme is sturdy, with a powerful etched rhythm and second-beat emphasis. It brings to mind the main theme of the Lalo Cello Concerto in D minor, and the opening to the [Brahms](#) Op. 111 String Quintet. Surely, Tchaikovsky was familiar with both works.

The theme of Tchaikovsky's main sketch is in A-B-A form. The "B" section gives way to an abrupt 3/4 meter. The second theme is my original and is very passive, to complement the opening motive. The second theme is in G major, a likely key relationship for Tchaikovsky, who loved the flat-3 and flat-6 areas. This theme unwinds, passionately, towards the codetta, in E major. The G major melody is somewhat related to the B section of the first one. And the codetta is a further variation on the theme. The variation/monothematic concept in Sonata form can be traced back to the early Classical Era, especially in the music of [Joseph Haydn](#).

The development erupts with the second theme, dying down to the A major solo episode. After this episode the orchestra explodes once again, now in F, bringing us to a B \flat minor restatement of the main theme. After the cadenza, characteristic of Tchaikovsky, we end up in the B-A section of the main theme, leading to the second theme, now in D major. Likewise, the B major codetta takes us to the B minor coda, where the first movement dies away as it began.

Most key relationships in my reconstruction are based on thirds: B-G-E, C...-A-F, F...-D-B. This outline gives the large Sonata form a sense of direction. We can see this linear pattern in some of Tchaikovsky's major works like the [Fourth Symphony](#) and the [Second Piano Concerto](#), since Tchaikovsky's first movements are so expansive. Exploring the mediant area was very typical of all Romantic composers, and for this reason I decided to move to D major instead of B major in the recapitulation. This was also propitious for practical reasons, the keys of A, D and G being the brightest areas of the cello.

II. Andante

The second movement is derived from a sketch to the Third Piano Concerto, also dating from 1893. Originally in B \flat major, I transposed it to G major, pursuing mediant harmonies. This movement is in ternary (A-B-A) form and lightly orchestrated. The B section is in E \flat major, another mediant relationship to B major. A cadenza returns us to the A section, which is followed by a brief coda. This movement has also been used in Semen Bogatyrev's realization of Tchaikovsky's unfinished [Symphony in E \$\flat\$ major](#).

III. Allegro vivo—Meno mosso—Presto

The Finale takes us back to B minor with a lively Rondo. The two themes used are a Russian folk song 'Our Wine Cellar' [Винный наш колодезь], and the sketch to a Cello Sonata, never realized by Tchaikovsky. This movement is a typical Tchaikovsky rondo. The key areas are once again B minor and G major, and in the recapitulation B Minor and A major. The development is very unstable key-wise. The coda restates the second theme in B major, in a much slower tempo, but then accelerates to round off the piece in B major.

Coda

I feel honored to have had an opportunity to pay tribute to my favorite composer. I must thank Mr Brett Langston for his invaluable help putting this project together. This was quite a journey, and it all began six years ago, when the dream was born. And I must say that Mr. Langston and [The Tchaikovsky Handbook](#) were most helpful in having this dream realized. I hope that this is not the last project we do together.

Every composer's wish is to be remembered. This Cello Concerto is a memory that has been brought to life.

Yuriy Leonovich

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