

Tchaikovsky: The Man Behind the Music

ACT I

Tchaikovsky's study

As the curtain rises, it reveals Tchaikovsky sitting at his piano and composing his next symphony. As he struggles to transfer the music in his head to the pages of the score, he finds comfort in the memory of his mother, who was the only one during his childhood to support his passion and talent for music. Although his mother passed away while he was young, her memory will always calm him throughout the most challenging parts of his life.

Home of Leo Tolstoy

A society event, celebrating the life and work of writer Alexander Pushkin, hosted by author Leo Tolstoy. All the high society of the city is in attendance and Tchaikovsky enters the party to the cheers of the guests.

Tolstoy gathers the crowd's attention to the entertainment of the evening. Led by a young, dashing violinist by the name of Josef Kotek, a string quartet will play for the guests. During this short concert, it is clear that Tchaikovsky and Kotek are immediately drawn to each other.

At the end of the concert, the guests cheer and congratulate the musicians. Tchaikovsky asks one of his friends to deliver his business card to Kotek, asking him to help orchestrate the score for his next violin concerto.

Tchaikovsky's study

Kotek arrives at Tchaikovsky's study, where he has begun composing a violin concerto. They play music together, and when Tchaikovsky pauses to look at Kotek's score, he experiences a moment of wonder. The tension between the two musicians is noticeable, leading them to awkwardly explore each other's personalities, longing for something more, yet realizing the consequences of a possible relationship. Before leaving, Kotek gives Tchaikovsky a blank diary, inviting him to record his thoughts and music.

The Opera

The audience is rushing to the theater to hear the famed soprano Madame Désirée Artôt sing. Kotek has already arrived, and is pacing and checking his watch, waiting for Tchaikovsky. When Tchaikovsky eventually arrives at the opera house, the two men exchange glances and the visible energy between the two artists sparks gossip among the opera guests.

During the performance, Tchaikovsky is mesmerized by Mme Artôt's voice and stage presence. After the opera, he invites her to dance. Kotek observes the two and jealousy causes his temper to boil. The guests notice that Tchaikovsky is taking an interest in Mme Artôt, and suddenly the atmosphere in the room changes from dangerous suspicion to approval.

A Dacha in the Ural Mountains

Tchaikovsky and Mme Artôt have retreated to a private residence to enjoy some time alone. They dance together, engrossed in a beautiful and tender duet, yet Tchaikovsky feels no passion. Every time their dancing intensifies to the point of intimacy, he shies away

from the moment. Disappointed, Mme Artôt leaves and Tchaikovsky is left alone.

Companionless, Tchaikovsky ponders on his future, seeing time passing by, Mme Artôt getting married, and his relationship with Kotek at a standstill. He despairs over the struggle of having to choose between following his heart or conforming to society's expectations. He realizes he needs to make a decision, one that will permanently change his life.

INTERMISSION

ACT II

The Moscow Conservatory

Classes have finished for the day at the Moscow Conservatory and all the students gather in the garden to enjoy the spring weather. Among them is Antonina Michaelovna, a longtime student of Tchaikovsky's. Tchaikovsky arrives and is cheered by the adoring students. From Antonina's passionate glances toward Tchaikovsky it is clear she is in love with him. Yet, to her dismay, he barely notices her.

Later Antonina is in her dorm room, imagining her life with Tchaikovsky. She writes to him of her devotion and offers herself as his bride. She gives this letter to a friend to deliver to Tchaikovsky.

When Tchaikovsky reads her letter, he is once again conflicted. He does not love Antonina, yet she presents him with the perfect opportunity to comply with the societal pressures of his time. As he contemplates his choices, Antonina arrives. She declares her love for him and insists that he marry her. He must now make the ultimate choice of his life, and chooses to conform to society over true happiness and fulfillment. He accepts Antonina's proposal, but explains to her that, while he will marry her, he will never act as a husband to her.

The Wedding

Tchaikovsky and Antonina are married, with Kotek dutifully beside Tchaikovsky as his best man at the wedding. After the wedding celebration, the couple retires to their home where Antonina attempts to seduce her new husband. He vehemently rejects her passionate advances and is left alone in despair. He is visited in his imagination by all the people who represent the stages of his inner struggle, including Kotek, Mme Artôt, Antonina and his mother.

Judgment

As he sits alone, he imagines a "court of honor" is convened to pass judgement on him and the choices he has made throughout his life concerning his relationships.

The Death of Tchaikovsky

Tchaikovsky, having decided to end his life, dances a final solo. As he reflects upon his life, his last dance is a mix of resignation and reconciliation, sadness and joy. His mother appears to him to offer comfort one last time, and tells him not to be afraid to follow her.