

**February 10, Young Peoples' Concert**  
**Musical Stories told by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Vivaldi**

**Tchaikovsky Biography:**

Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born on May 7, 1840, in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Vyatka, Russia. He was the second eldest of his parents' six surviving offspring. Tchaikovsky's father, Ilya, worked as a mine inspector and metal works manager.

When he was just 5 years old, Tchaikovsky began taking piano lessons. Although he displayed an early passion for music, his parents hoped that he would grow up to work in the civil service. At the age of 10, Tchaikovsky began attending the Imperial School of Jurisprudence, a boarding school in St. Petersburg. His mother, Alexandra, died of cholera in 1854, when he was 14 years old. In 1859, Tchaikovsky honored his parents' wishes by taking up a bureau clerk post with the Ministry of Justice—a post he would hold for four years, during which time he became increasingly fascinated with music.

When he was 21, Tchaikovsky decided to take music lessons at the Russian Musical Society. A few months later, he enrolled at the newly founded St. Petersburg Conservatory, becoming one of the school's first composition students. In addition to learning while at the conservatory, Tchaikovsky gave private lessons to other students. In 1863, he moved to Moscow, where he became a professor of harmony at the Moscow Conservatory.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY Slavonic March (*Marche slave*), Op. 31

BORN: May 7, 1840, in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Vyatka province, Russia

DIED: November 6, 1893, in Saint Petersburg

WORK COMPOSED: *Marche Slave* - Completed on October 7, 1876

WORLD PREMIERE: November 17, 1876, in Moscow; Nikolai Rubinstein conducting



“It is terrifying yet also gratifying that our beloved country is deciding at last to give confirmation of her worth,” Tchaikovsky expressed when he learned that Russian soldiers were volunteering to support the Serbs in their war against the Turks. Tchaikovsky was a patriotic Russian and, sympathetic to the Serbian cause, he must have felt honored when his friend Nikolai Rubinstein asked him to compose a patriotic work to honor the Russian volunteer soldiers. In fact, it took him only five days to compose the Slavonic March, completing it on October 7, 1876.

Lingering discontent within the Ottoman Empire erupted in a chain of events that led to a major war in the Balkans in 1875. Early in 1876 there was a Bulgarian uprising to overthrow the Turkish rulers, which led to the Turks mercilessly hoping to put a quick end to the rebellion and discourage further actions by making an example of the Bulgars. The Serbians, outraged by the atrocities, rose up to support the oppressed Bulgars. The Russians, who had always resented the Ottoman Empire, supported and

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encouraged the Serbs. In June 1876 Serbia declared war against the Ottomans and in a wave of patriotic enthusiasm for the Slavonic people, Russian volunteers came to their aid. However, the Serbian army was ill-prepared and suffered several crushing defeats in July and August. On August 26 Serbia pleaded with the major European powers to help mediate an end to the war. Eventually the Russian-Serbian alliance triumphed – Russia declared war against Turkey in April 1877 and after a short war the Turks asked for peace in January 1878. Instead of fighting for a victory the Russians bowed to international pressure and settled for the independence of Serbia, Romania and Montenegro.

Learning a little bit of the history lends a better understanding of this piece. The music begins with a funeral march portraying the Turks' oppression of the Serbs. To describe this Tchaikovsky uses two Serbian folk songs, *Sunce jarko, ne sijaš jednako* (Bright sun, you do not shine equally) by Isidor Ćirić, and *Rado ide Srbin u vojnike* (Gladly does the Serb become a soldier) by Josip Runjanin (who also composed the Croatian national anthem). The first appearance of *God Save the Czar*, the Russian national anthem that Tchaikovsky also used in his *1812 Overture*, signifies the Russians arriving to support their Serbian allies. The following section reprises the Serbs' cry for help and the Russians again joining their cause. The music builds to an emotionally moving finale that depicts an unequivocal victory.

An audience member described the atmosphere at the premiere on November 17, 1876: "The rumpus and roar that broke out in the hall beggars description. The whole audience rose to its feet, many jumped up upon their seats: cries of 'bravo' and 'hurrah' were mingled together. The march had to be repeated, after which the same storm broke out afresh ... It was one of the most stirring moments of 1876. Many in the hall were weeping."

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Suggested Listening Activities for *Marche Slave*

Tchaikovsky *Marche Slave* conducted by Leonard Bernstein

<https://youtu.be/YwqdOhF6LhE>