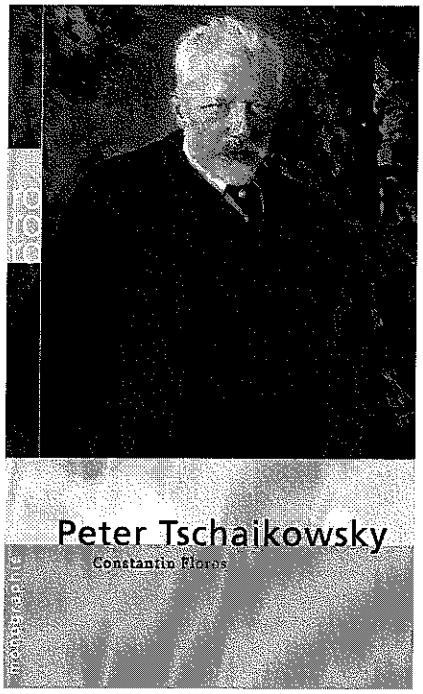

Constantin Floros

was born in Salonica, Greece in 1930. He studied composition and conduction at the Vienna Music Academy, and musicology at Vienna and Hamburg University. Professor Floros is one of the leading German musicologists. He has written 22 books and numerous papers. In 2002 he was elected a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Previous works include:
Gustav Mahler (three volumes; Breitkopf, 1977-85)

Translation rights available from
Rowohlt Verlag GmbH
Hamburger Straße 17
21465 Reinbek, Germany
Contact: Kristina Krombholz
Tel: +49 40 72 72-257
Email: kristina.krombholz@rowohlt.de

Constantin Floros

Peter Tchaikovsky

rororo monographs, September 2006, 160 pages, ISBN: 978-3-499-50668

Peter Illich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) remains one of the most beloved Russian composers. Drawing on the latest research and newly discovered sources, Constantin Floros describes the connection between Tchaikovsky's life and work, investigating the many facets of a composer who died under mysterious circumstances at the age of 53.

Please find enclosed English translations of the table of contents, preface and afterword as well as an English sample translation of one chapter.

Constantin Floros, ***Peter Tchaikovsky***. Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006. 160 pp.

Table of Contents

Preface

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky is, along with Modest Mussorgsky, the best-known and most important Russian composer of the 19th century. His life was rich in vicissitudes and altogether so interesting and bizarre that it reads like a novel. Ever since the 1970's, research on Tchaikovsky has taken a considerable upswing. Numerous new studies have come out, and important sources – letters, memoirs, tributes, etc. – have become available for the first time. In 1992, moreover, Tchaikovsky's Diaries– highly revealing documents for the inner life of the great composer – appeared in an authoritative (German) translation. The Soviet editions had, "for reasons of piety," suppressed important letters and letter passages, in which Tchaikovsky spoke about his sexual orientation and some of his relationships; not until 1992 were these published in the original Russian, as well as in German translation. Still highly controversial is the much-debated thesis that at the age of 53, Tchaikovsky was forced by the judgment of an "honour court" to commit suicide.

My endeavour, beyond narrating the chief stage of his life, is to highlight Tchaikovsky's complex, highly sensitive personality. Outwardly he appeared invariably amiable, composed and disciplined. In reality, he was often changeable, divided, torn, labouring under severe depressions and disgruntlements and subject to neurotic fits, as readers of his diaries learn to their consternation. As his brother Modest reports, Tchaikovsky gradually developed a kind of mask, behind which to conceal his psychic problems from the world. Yet to a large extent his work is autobiographically determined – an important aspect that to date has received little attention.

Tchaikovsky's major works continue to enjoy a remarkable popularity in many countries. Admittedly, there are also reservations about his music. These are in urgent need of qualification. The present monograph is intended to contribute to a revision of the current aesthetic estimate of Tchaikovsky's multi-faceted work

Personality

Not only his friends saw in Tchaikovsky a refined, gracious, amiable being, one anxious to help wherever help was needed. After his death not a few went out of their way to pay tribute to his character. The Scottish pianist Frederic Lamond called him "a great human being and a perfect gentleman," an "aristocrat of the spirit" (B169f.). Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov wrote: "We knew him as an amiable conversationalist and sympathetic human being; his demeanour was unassuming and natural, and there was a tone of cordiality and sincerity in everything he said" (N80f.). His close friend Hermann Laroche remarked astutely that Tchaikovsky's personal charm made people forgive him his artistic successes. His extraordinary readiness to help others was the subject of numerous anecdotes. Thus it was said that he let Laroche have his own room, moving into the corridor himself. His graciousness and modesty were proverbial. Tchaikovsky's own judgment was more ambivalent: he thought his modesty was only "huge, though hidden, pride" (F161).

His personal physician, Wassily Bertenson, was similarly perceptive when he spoke of the composer's "stunningly complicated character.[29] According to Bertenson, Tchaikovsky united two "natures" within himself. One manifested itself when he was even-tempered and able to work, or when he rested while being by himself. The other made him appear "as an at times almost year-round morbid and restless being – one who would certainly be of great interest to a neuropathologist like Krafft-Ebing – and sometimes turned him into an utter misanthrope, which naturally was not exactly conducive to his work." The reference to Richard von Krafft-Ebing, the notorious author of the *Psychopathia Sexualis*, is a covert allusion to the composer's homosexuality. In 1929, Tchaikovsky's friend Alina Brjullova spoke more explicitly about Tchaikovsky's "clear neurosis," which at times rose into unspeakable agony: "...an oppressive, groundless melancholy, from which he was unable to free himself, an inability to gain control over his overwrought nerves, a fear of other people and a consciousness that his condition was unworthy of him, that he ought to strive against it" (B123).

Tchakovsky's letters and journals confirm and concretize these observations; especially the latter afford profound insights into his inner being and convey an impression of his way of thinking and feeling, of his depressiveness, vulnerability and nostalgia.[30] A lucid thinker, who possessed to a high degree the capacity for self-analysis, he brooded a great deal about his own gloom and "nagging melancholy." Formulations like: "Moped dreadfully all afternoon and evening" (T39), "At twilight I was overcome by a ghastly nostalgia" (T43), "All these last days I had gloomy thoughts" (T91), "I was overwhelmed by an unimaginable sadness" (T92), "Tormenting melancholy at home, which caused me to shed bitter tears" (T204) recur repeatedly in the diaries. He asked himself: "Whence, after the morning's cheerfulness, comes this feeling of fatigue, of melancholy, this unwillingness to move...?" (T92).

Even as a boy, Tchaikovsky was hypersensitive. His governess Fanny Dürbach called him a "porcelain child." According to his physician, Wassily Bertenson, his sufferings resulted from "hyper-nervosity." As a child, he was frequently torn from sleep by "fits of hysteria." When he was among people, he often yearned to be alone. Yet he was also aware of the opposite : "Strange: I do all I can to be alone, yet as soon as I am alone, I suffer" (T288). One time in New York, when, in conversing with a Russian lady,

he felt he could give vent to feelings, he supposedly caused an instant scandal: "Suddenly tears came into my eyes, my voice began to tremble, and I was unable to keep from sobbing. I ran into the adjacent room and did not come back out for the longest time" (T345). Generally he cried and sobbed a great deal.

Box:

I have always regarded the evil in man as the necessary contrary to the good. From this standpoint (which, if I am not mistaken, I owe to Spinoza) I should never be overcome by rage and hate. But in actuality I get angry, I feel hatred and outrage, exactly like a man who does not comprehend that everyone acts solely according to the dictates of his fate. . . .I know that you translate your philosophy directly into practice. With me, however, there is a conflict between thinking and acting.

Tchaikovsky to Nadeshda von Meck, December 5, 1877 (F109)

It is incredible how afraid of people he could be. "By nature," he once wrote," I am a savage. Every acquaintance, every encounter with a strangers was ever the cause of mental anguish to me. It is difficult for me to explain in what precisely these agonies consist" (F268). His phobia often betrayed him into sounding utterly misanthropic: "Altogether the human race is hateful to me, and I would with pleasure disappear into a desert and have only a few absolutely necessary people around me."[31] On July 7, 1887, he confided to his diary: "Towards acquaintances, too, I feel an inexpressible diffidence and fear, though at the same time it depresses me to be alone" (T202). Once, when the Russian poet Ivan Turgenev learned that Tchaikovsky was traveling in a different compartment of the same train he was on himself and was anxious to meet him, the shy Peter Ilyich stole away "like a thief in the night and hid away in Third Class, until the train had reached Moscow and every last passenger was gone" (B124f.).

Often when he left his native country to travel abroad, he succumbed to a "tormenting, insane nostalgia" (T285). In July of 1873, he sojourned in Vevey on Lake Geneva. Although the majestic mountain landscape impressed him deeply, he wrote in his journal: "In midst of all the majestic glory I see and experience here as a tourist, I yet yearn for Russia with all my being, and my heart nearly stops when I think of her plains, meadows and groves. Oh, dear native land, you are a hundred times more beautiful and familiar than these wondrous mountain monsters, which at bottom are nothing but petrified spasms of nature. In our country, Nature is so serene and enchanting! But of course, everything always seems more beautiful from a distance" (T6).

Edvard Grieg proved a good psychologist when he reflected about his friend Tchaikovsky: "He is melancholy to near madness. He is a beautiful and good human being, but an unhappy one. I would never have thought so when I first met him, but so it is: If one has no enemies, one must fight against oneself."[32] Indeed, Tchaikovsky had to struggle time and again against his own neuroses, against his diffidence, against his mood swings and depressions and against his acute sensibility. He repeatedly mentioned in letters to Nadeshda what effort it cost him to overcome his nervousness before a concert appearance. Once he referred to himself as a "sick neurotic" unable to survive without the "poison of alcohol" (T270).

Fears were daily realities in his life. Repeatedly his journals record nightmares, at times "ghastly" ones. Three things frightened him most: a waning of his creative powers,

age and death. He often doubted the quality of new compositions. If the work of composing did not progress as rapidly as he expected, he would ask himself: "Am I perhaps already worn out?" (T13) If, at forty-five, he had trouble working, he would imagine the onset of old age: the thought of having lost his ability to work terrified him.

In the spring of 1887, his friend Nikolai Dmitievitch Kondratyev fell seriously ill. He was taken to Aachen, in the hope that the sulfur springs there might prolong his life by a few months. At the end of June the desperately sick man begged Tchaikovsky per telegram to visit him there, something the latter could not well deny to his friend. Returned to Maidanovo, Tchaikovsky wrote to Nadeshda on August 31: "The six weeks in Aachen were an unspeakable torment to me, since I spent them entirely in the company of the gravely ailing man, one condemned to death yet unable to die. It was one of the grimmest episodes in my life. I have aged enormously during this period. I succumbed to such weariness of life, dejection and apathy as if I, too, were about to die. Everything that used to be important to me as my life's content now seems minute, trivial and useless. I am sure this sensation will soon pass and give way to the eagerness for work of a composer who has a goal to strive for. God give that it shall be so" (F504f.).

Since that time at the latest, his thoughts frequently turned to old age and death. Significantly, on August 30 of that year, he made a new will. The death of his friend Eduard Sack affected him deeply. The thought that the beloved friend was no longer alive seemed inconceivable to him: "I cannot imagine that he no longer exists at all. Death, that is to say, utter non-being, is beyond my comprehension" (T226). In an effort to find an answer to the existential questions that now beset him, he began to ponder his religious feelings. An entry in his journal of September 21, 1887 is revealing in this connection: "How brief life is! How much one wants to do, think about and say! One puts if off because one fancies that there is still so much time ahead. Yet death already begins to lurk at every corner. . . . How strange it seemed to read how 365 days ago I was still afraid to admit that I had dared to doubt the divinity of Christ, irrespective of the fervent sympathies he roused in me. Since that time, my religion has crystallized out much more clearly.

During this period I have thought much about God, life and death; especially in Aachen, the fateful questions – wherefore, how and whence? – frequently occupied and constantly troubled me" (T273).

Tchaikovsky was highly receptive to religious observances. He frequently attended Russian-Orthodox church services and regarded the "liturgy of St. John Chrysostom" as "one of the most glorious works of art."[33] Already on November 23 of 1877, however, he confessed in a letter to Nadeshda that he had lost his faith in the dogma and had become convinced "that eternal life" was possible "only in the sense of the imperishability of matter." In any case he did not believe in a "personal immortality." Yet he also added by way of qualification that he rejected the "awful thought" of never seeing his dead loved ones again (F101).

It would be an exaggeration to say of Tchaikovsky that he was politically very engaged. Even so, the composer followed political events, both in his own country and abroad, with great interest and also corresponded about them with Nadeshda. Like many Russians, he regarded the settlement of the Balkans question at the congress convened by Otto von Bismarck in Berlin in June of 1878 as a severe political defeat. In Czarist Russia, the discontented masses were suppressed, the labor movement began to spread,

and adherents of the Panslavist movement like Ivan Aksakov reproached the generally liberal Alexander II with being overly indulgent. On September 7, 1878, Tchaikovsky wrote to Nadeshda: "We are living through terrible times, and to think about the present is terrifying. On one side, a panicked government is so confused that it sends an Aksakov into exile for his candid and courageous words; on the other side, hapless, frantic young people are exiled by the thousands, without due process, to the ends of the world, and in between these two extremes, the indifferent masses are sinking into the morass of their own selfish interests and let everything happen without protest" (F215).

In early March of 1881, Alexander II was assassinated. The news reached Tchaikovsky in Naples. "To be abroad at such a moment is awful," he wrote to his brother Modest. "I yearn to be back in Russia, closer to the source of news, and to take part in the demonstrations for the new Czar" (W217). Naturally, the new czar, Alexander III, too, did not at first succeed in restoring the longed-for quiet. In a letter written to Nadeshda from Rome on December 22, 1881, Tchaikovsky anticipated "pretty dark times" for his native land. "Unrest and discontent make themselves felt. People all feel as if they are on a volcano ready to explode at any moment; they think that this situation cannot continue and should lead to change, but no one knows. How nice it would be if a smart, strong-willed czar were on the Russian throne now, who could decisively pursue a clear-cut plan" (F386). It is evident that Tchaikovsky was quite dissatisfied with the politics of Alexander III at this point.

Several years later his outlook toward political issues became even more skeptical. There had been a time, he wrote to Nadeshda on March 5, 1885, when he honestly believed that "for the removal of despotism and the establishment of law and order, political institutions like, for example, parliaments" were needed. Now, however, he had doubts about the effectiveness of such institutions. "When I observe what goes on in other countries, I discover large measures of discontent, see partisan strife, hatred, the same despotism and disorder. I conclude from this that there can be no ideal government and that humanity is doomed to everlasting political disappointment" (F462f.).

A central aspect of Tchaikovsky's personality, as noted before, is his homosexuality. His earliest experiences of this kind he probably had at the juristic boarding school in St. Petersburg. His close relation to the poet Alexey Nikolayevitch Apuchtin, a notorious homophile, dates from that time. There were moments in Tchaikovsky's life when he cursed his homosexuality, because it was to him an "unbridgeable abyss" between himself and most other people; to this abyss he ascribed his fear of people, his "immeasurable" diffidence and suspiciousness (S142). Much as he tried "to tear the depraved passions from his heart," he never succeeded (S153). To his brother Modest he confessed, on January 19, 1877, that he had fallen in love as he had not for a long time with the violinist Jossif Kotek: "he should know that I love him immeasurably and that he should be a kind and forgiving despot and idol" (S154).

The diaries leave no doubt that Tchaikovsky felt strongly attracted to good-looking younger men. A young artillery officer by the name of Verinovsky aroused feelings of a "particular sort" in him (T52). In September of 1886 he maintained a temporary erotic relationship with his coachman Vanya.[34] Once he had a dream of flying naked with Nasar, the servant of his brother Modest (T103).

Tchaikovsky also entertained a cordial affection for his servant of many years, Alexey Sofronov (1859-1935), who was married twice. Nearly always when he had to

travel abroad without him, he would miss him. Despite occasional ill feelings (T278, 280), Alexey was indispensable to him. He took care of nearly all practical matters for him. Thus Sofronov found, and arranged the lease of, Tchaikovsky's last two country seats, in Frolovskoye and in Klin, a small village some 55 miles from Moscow; and it was he also, who, after the composer's death, took up Modest's idea of turning the house in Klin into a Tchaikovsky museum.

Especially tender relations, finally, bound Tchaikovsky to his favorite nephew, Vladimir, Lvovitch Davydov (1871-1906), called Bob or Bobyk, the son of his sister Sascha. In his diaries he calls him the "glorious, incomparable" Bob (T29), and he confesses frankly to love him and to long for him (T25). When he thought he felt that Bob's attachment to him had diminished, he was deeply unhappy (T136). On March 10, 1887, he wrote to Nadeshda: "My fervent love for this boy is growing day by day. He is so sensitive, gifted and sympathetic and has such a magnificent character! Yet he is not like other boys of his age, and his morbidly intense impressionability worries me" (F497). His affection for Bob was so great that he not only dedicated his *Children's Album* op 39 for piano and the *Pathétique* to him but also made him the heir to his royalties. The nature of the relationship has been much puzzled over. It is assumed that it remained purely Platonic. Since 1898, Vladimir, who had, like Tchaikovsky, attended the St Petersburg Law School, lived in Klin. There, in 1806, at the mere age of 35, he took his own life.

According to the findings of modern psychiatry, most male homophiles evince a strong mother fixation, as well as a tendency to depression and at times suicide.[35] In many cases, it was reported recently, an older, very masculine brother is part of the picture. Judging from that, Peter Tchaikovsky seems the very model of a homophile.

---

[29] Wassily Bertenson, "Aus meinen Erinnerungen" (1912), N257-263.

[30] The present portrait is based mainly on a study of the eleven extant Diaries. These begin in 1873 and stop in 1891. Regrettably we have no personal records for extended periods of Tchaikovsky's life. In all likelihood, several journals have been lost.

[31] To Anatol, April 25, 1866 (M1, 241.); N90, n.209

[32] Edvard Grieg to Frants Beyer, January 6, 1906 (B100).

[33] At the prompting of his publisher, Tchaikovsky composed his "Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom," op 41, in May of 1878. A concert performance of the work in Moscow aroused storms of enthusiasm, whereupon the bishop of Moscow, Ambrosius, prohibited the work from being performed in the churches of the episcopacy (F377).

[34] *Tagebücher*, 103, 106f., 164.

[35] According to a 1998 survey of 394 gay and lesbian students, 212 male and 182 female, by a group of American psychiatrists, 28% of bisexual/homosexual men and 20% of lesbian women have attempted

suicide. Only 14.5% of heterosexual women and a mere 4.2% of straight men have made similar attempts. See *American Journal of Public Health*, 88 ( ), 57-60. I thank Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Berner (Hamburg) for the reference.

Afterword

Already during his last years, Tchaikovsky was a figure of national renown in Russia. After his death the international interest in his biography grew enormously. On the occasion of the centenary of his birth in 1940, there were large-scale solemnities in every metropolitan region of the Soviet Union. Today, many of his works enjoy an amazing popularity, not only in Russia but in Great Britain, the United States and many other countries. Admittedly there are "cognoscenti" and musicologists – especially in Germany – who charge Tchaikovsky with sentimentality and triviality. These reproaches are very old, going back to critics like Eduard Hanslick, Hugo Riemann and Joseph Sittard. Yet Riemann, at least, also clearly recognized the "double character" evident in Tchaikovsky's compositions: on the one hand, "tenderness, thoughtfulness and delicacy," and on the other, a "passionate vehemence" and impetuosity.[60]

Sentimentality generally denotes something shallow: larmoyance. To Tchaikovsky, who used the word "sentimental" in titles and tempo notations of several of his compositions, it had a different meaning. The designation *Valse sentimentale* in the piano piece op. 51, no. 6, for example, means a waltz charged with feeling, to be played tenderly. Altogether, "feeling" was a central concept in his aesthetic. Time and again, he made it clear that he could write vocal music only when the poetry to be set was capable of "rousing and touching his feelings," of stirring his heart and firing his imagination. Music as a mere juggling of tones was an absurdity to him, antagonistic to his deepest personal convictions. The central criterion of his aesthetic judgment was whether a composition was inspired by "genuine feeling" (F190).

Tchaikovsky's music is multi-faceted. Always deeply felt when it conveys the elegiac, the lyrical, dramatic and tragic, it brings very different qualities to the fore when it is balletic, picturesque, illustrative or characteristic. In the final analysis, Tchaikovsky's popular appeal – as Boris Assafyiev has aptly remarked – results from the fact that the intonations of his music go "from heart to heart."

---

[60] Thomas Kohlhase, "Schlagworte, Tendenzen und Texte zur frühen Cajkovskij-Rezeption in Deutschland und Österreich," in *Caikovskij-Studien*, 3 ( ), 327-54; p. 339.

PROF. DR. DR. HC. MULT.

CONSTANTIN FLOROS

CONSTANTIN FLOROS

Constantin Floros was born in Salonica, Greece on 4 January 1930. He is involved in musicology, culture and history. After studying law at the University of Thessaloniki, Professor Floros went to the Vienna Music Academy, where he studied composition with Alfred Uhl and conducting with Hans Swarowsky and Gottfried Kassowitz, graduating in both subjects in 1953. At the same time he studied musicology with Erich Schenk at Vienna University as well as art history (with Carl Swoboda), philosophy and psychology. In 1955 he obtained the doctorate in Vienna with a dissertation on Antonio Campioni. He continued his musicological studies with Heinrich Husmann at Hamburg University, where in 1961 he completed his habilitation in musicology with a work on the Byzantine kontakion. In 1967 Professor Floros became a supernumerary professor, in 1972 professor of Musicology and in 1995 professor emeritus at the University of Hamburg. He received the honorary doctorate from the University of Athens in 1999.

Professor Floros is the co-editor of the Hamburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft and in 1988 he became President of the Gustav Mahler Vereinigung, Hamburg. In 1992 he was elected a member of the Erfurt Akademie der gemeinützigen Wissenschaften and in 1999 was made an honorary member of the Richard Wagner-Verband. In 2002 he was elected a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Professor Floros is one of the leading German musicologists and his research interests are varied. He wrote 22 books and numerous papers. His three-volume Universale Neumenkunde (1970) overturned previous theories concerning the origin of Gregorian neumes. He deciphered the oldest Byzantine and Slavic notations and developed a new method of semantic analysis. In his three-volume treatise Gustav Mahler (1977-85), and his writings on other composers of instrumental music in the 18th and 19th centuries, he examined the semantic meaning of the symphony alongside theories of the dominance of absolute music. He also carried out pioneering research on the music of the Second Viennese School, in particular Alban Berg; he discovered the hidden Programme for Berg's Lyric Suite before the relevant sources were found. His view of "Musik als Autobiographie" characterises his books on Berg (1993) and Ligeti (1996) and connects musical aesthetics with everyday circumstances.

(*One Thousand Great Scholars* published by the International Biographical Centre in Cambridge, England, in 2003.)

Review of: Constantin Floros, *Peter Tschaikowsky*

The new Tchaikovsky monograph is interesting not only for the beginner but also for readers who know its predecessor, the version by Everett Helm, and who can thus see immediately what the differences in looking at the subject are and where the new emphases lie. The differences are at once minor and major. They are minor in that both authors want to establish an immediate connection between life and work, to perceive certain character traits as expressed in the music – hardly surprising in a composer who, like Tchaikovsky, wrote "personal programs" into his later symphonies. Overall, the new edition is far more compact in the sense of user-friendly perspicuity: life and work are clearly separate, whereas in Helm's book they were closely interwoven. That also means that the music gets more weight of its own in the more detailed analyses – illustrated with revealing note citations – which yet always remain readily accessible. There are also some concrete reasons for such a new edition, namely the new sources that have become available since the 1970's, most notably the discussions about the "honour court," which actually assume traits of a mystery novel. Floros reports in detail on the various theories according to which Tchaikovsky deliberately ended his own life.

One of the strongest arguments of the book is the higher valuation of the ballets. If for Helm the "Sleeping Beauty" was "a rich score that is no more than a dance accompaniment," Floros speaks specifically about the "ravishing melodies, intricate harmonies," and the predilection for "chromatic alteration." "Swan Lake" is fully discussed in the context of genre history and music drama. Undoubtedly, however, opera is, to Floros, Tchaikovsky's greatest achievement. "Eugene Onegin" is persuasively treated in an autobiographical frame of reference, "Pique Dame" discussed along its entire dramatic arc. Floros also finds fitting words for the symphonies, e.g. the Fifth: "In the introduction of the first movement," the fate theme "is by no means "trumpeted from the rooftops," but is subtly intoned, as if to demonstrate that a human being's fate is present from the cradle" (p. 121).

As perspicuous and free of curlicues as the writing of the biography is, there are certain inconsistencies that suggest the need to interrogate music history, for example, the role of Milij Balakirev. Twice Balakirev recommended subjects to Tchaikovsky that the latter took up at first skeptically but then with great enthusiasm and dedication, namely "Romeo and Juliet" and the story of Byron's "Manfred." Balakirev is invariably charged with arrogance, by now a commonplace. But perhaps this is a misjudgment of a probably underestimated composer, whose relative obscurity should not induce us to trivialize him.

Steffen A. Schmidt, *Das Orchester.* Transl. Ernest Bernhardt