



*more than the score...*

# P. I. TCHAIKOVSKY

## 'June' from *The Seasons*

for piano solo

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Presented by Daniel Grimwood

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# Daniel Grimwood

*talks about*

## Tchaikovsky's 'June'

The Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky has become a symbol of Russia. He is arguably the most important composer to have come out of Russia during the nineteenth century, and he is famous primarily for his six symphonies, his operas, his piano concertos and his ballets. It is from his operas I suggest we take inspiration when we start looking at what tone to set in 'June', the barcarolle from *The Seasons*.

Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons* wasn't conceived as a cycle as such but, rather, it was the fruit of a commission from a magazine called *Nouveliste*. The magazine wanted him to compose one piece of music for each of the monthly issues throughout the year.

### Barcarolle

This piece is subtitled Barcarolle. A barcarolle is a song that would be sung by the gondolier who punts you around the canals of Venice. Traditionally, barcarolles would be in 6/8 time. This one is not. Tchaikovsky chooses a different meter. He's writing in 4/4, and he stays in 4/4 pretty much the whole way through. What he's rather trying to do is capture something of the atmosphere of song and the atmosphere of water. It's not difficult to imagine an oar going slowly through the water, with this rocking accompaniment, which keeps the piece very gently and melodiously moving along.

### Orchestral imitation

I think it's very appropriate to take Tchaikovsky's most famous opera as a starting point. The beginning of *Eugene Onegin* has something of the same oppressive summer heat atmosphere to

it. If we listen to the whole first act, we shall gain some idea of what would have been in Tchaikovsky's mind. His piano writing is generally fairly similar to an orchestral reduction, and we should think of imitating other instruments. Tchaikovsky was absolutely masterful in his writing for woodwind instruments, and I feel that each of these melodies should be considered as a conversation between the woodwind instruments in an orchestra.

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Russian language,  
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### Cantabile

Let's also consider *cantabile* and the vocal style. We have a *cantabile* melody starting in the second bar: this begins simply with a scale. We obviously don't want to play it as a scale. We think about how it might be sung. Then we ought to think about how it might be sung by a Russian and some of the peculiarities of the Russian language, with its compound consonants.

When we talk about *cantabile*, we're not talking only about the sound of the human voice. We're also talking about diction. We're talking about breathing. In other words, we don't want it to be strictly even. If you listen to a Russian singer (in Russian), some of the melodic

# 'June'

from *The Seasons*

Pjotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)  
Op. 37a No. 6

Andante cantabile

*p*

5

9 *poco più f*

13

18 *dim.*