

Violoncello solo
Violini I
Violini II
Viola
Violoncelli
Contrabbassi

Pyotr Tchaikovsky

ANDANTE CANTABILE

from String Quartet No. 1 in D major, Op. 11

for Violoncello and Strings

Andante cantabile, from String Quartet No. 1 in D major, Op. 11

All three of Tchaikovsky's string quartets are early works, and the first one has been part of the so-called basic repertory almost as far back as its first performance, which was given in Moscow on March 28, 1871, barely a month after it was completed. When the work was performed there again at the end of 1876 Tchaikovsky wrote in his diary, "Probably never in my life have I been so moved by the pride of authorship as when Leo Tolstoy, sitting by me and listening to the Andante of my Quartet, burst into tears." Tolstoy, for his part, wrote to Tchaikovsky a few days later, "Never have I received such acute pleasure in the rewards of my literary works as on that wonderful evening." He then incited Tchaikovsky and the four string players to choose their favorites among his novels, which he inscribed to them; Tchaikovsky, who had virtually memorized War and Peace, requested and received The Cossacks.

The Andante cantabile, which so moved Tolstoy, has had a rich life of its own. It became (and remains) a popular piece for string orchestra, and Tchaikovsky himself made a concert arrangement for cello and string orchestra in 1888. The more or less standard arrangement for string orchestra used in this evening's performance was made by Clark McAllister.

The piece opens with a gently melancholy folk tune Tchaikovsky had heard sung by a carpenter at the estate of his sister and her husband at Kamensk, in the Ukraine, early in 1869. The second theme, the composer's own, provides a radiant contrast: wistful and ethereal rather than melancholy. Back in the 1930s it was possibly the first of the several Tchaikovsky melodies to be fitted out with words and performed by dance bands all over America, when Andre Kostelanetz arranged the music and Mack David provided the lyrics, which he called "On the Isle of May."

Full Score

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P. Tchaikovsky

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Constantine Grechanivsky

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Violin II

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Violin I

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Viola

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Andante cantabile con sord. P. Tchaikovsky

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Contrabass

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Violoncello solo

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