



# Learning Resource

## Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor (Pathétique)

Australian Curriculum Links: Years 7–10, 11 & 12

Suitable for music specialists and general classroom teachers



QUEENSLAND SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

CONNECT

# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

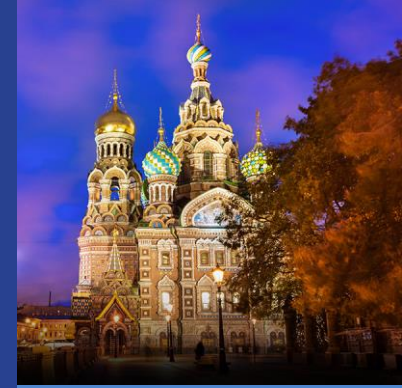
## BACKGROUND

Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky was a Russian composer from the nineteenth century, classified as the Romantic period in music (1800–1910). Music from the Romantic period is typically melodious, emotionally expressive, and dramatic, and Tchaikovsky's music is no different. His music is admired for its beautiful and emotional melodies, exciting harmonies, and colourful orchestration. Repetition is also a feature of Tchaikovsky's musical style, and was an important part of Russian music at that time.

Tchaikovsky composed a number of operas, ballets, choral works, and works for orchestra and small ensembles. His most popular compositions include the *1812 Overture* and *Romeo and Juliet* (orchestral works), and *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Sleeping Beauty* (ballets).

Symphony No.6 was the final completed work Tchaikovsky composed. He died nine days after it was premiered. Although it's known as *Symphony Pathétique* (meaning 'evoking pity'), this came about from a mistranslation into French from the Russian title Tchaikovsky gave it – the 'Passionate Symphony' ('Pateticheskaya' in Russian). Tchaikovsky is said to have commented, 'without exaggeration, I have put my whole soul into this work' and called it 'the best thing I ever composed or shall compose'.

Descending motion in the form of descending scales and motifs are a theme throughout the work. The final movement of the symphony is unlike many other symphonic final movements because it is slow and lamenting instead of lively and grand.



### Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

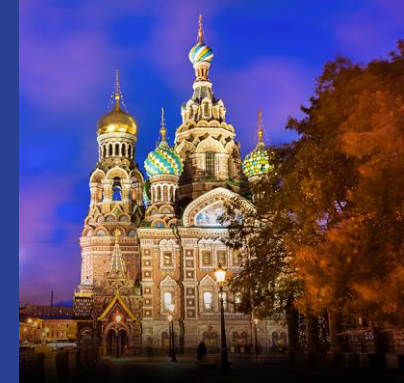
Russian composer of the Romantic period in music.

His music combined aspects of his Western training and Russian nationality.



# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## INSTRUMENTATION



### Woodwinds

3 Flutes + 1 Piccolo  
2 Oboes 2 Clarinets  
2 Bassoons

### Brass

4 Horns 2 Trumpets  
3 Trombones 1 Tuba



### Strings

Violins Violas  
Cellos Double Basses

### Percussion

Timpani Bass Drum  
Cymbals Tam-tam



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# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## OUTLINE OF WORK

There are four movements in this symphony. They are listed by their **tempo** markings:

1. Adagio—Allegro non troppo  
*Slow – Lively and fast, but not too fast*
2. Allegro con grazia  
*Lively and fast with grace*
3. Allegro molto vivace  
*Lively and fast, very lively*
4. Adagio lamentoso  
*Slow and lamenting*

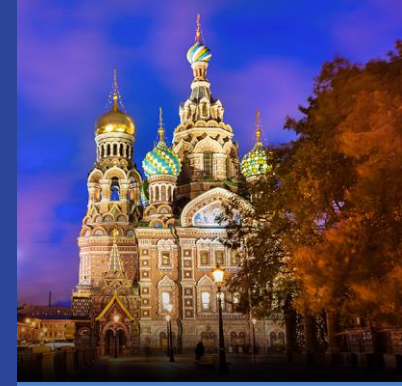
You can listen to a recording of the symphony [here](#). Timestamps from this recording appear in **orange**.

**Movement 1: 0:35–20:52**

**Movement 2: 20:52–28:55**

**Movement 3: 28:55–38:18**

**Movement 4: 38:18–50:30**



**Tempo:** the speed at which a piece of music is played.



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# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## FIRST MOVEMENT 0:35–20:52

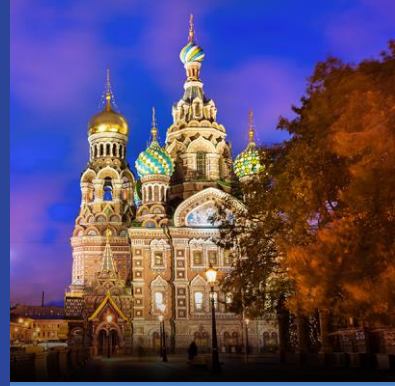
The first movement is around twice the length of the other movements in this symphony. It is characterised by a descending, scale-wise movement, which you will hear throughout the symphony. The movement contains a number of different tempos, but the two main sections are the *Adagio* (slow) and *Allegro non troppo* (lively and fast but not too fast) sections. The opening *Adagio* section can be heard from **0:35–2:44**.

The music begins quietly in instruments in the orchestra's lowest range – the double bass and the bassoon. Over a descending **chromatic** line in the double basses you will hear the main, intense, mournful-sounding **theme** in the bassoon.



'Fagott' is the German word for bassoon

The opening bassoon theme consists of a group of four, stepwise notes which are repeated (an interval higher each time) and finished by the violas. This theme is repeated then heard in the oboe then clarinet before the next section of music. The third and fourth notes of the theme form a sighing **motif**.



**Chromatic:** a chromatic scale uses twelve different pitches or notes, and includes the semitone intervals between notes of a major scale.

**Theme:** a musical subject (usually melodic) of a movement or work.

**Motif:** a short, recurring musical idea.

Sighing motif

Bassoon

Fagotte 1. 2

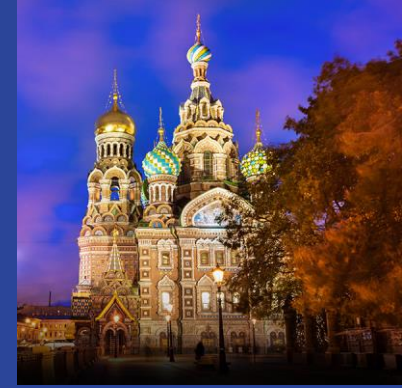


Viola

Viola (divisi)

# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## FIRST MOVEMENT



### The Bassoon

The bassoon is the one of the largest and lowest-sounding instruments in the woodwind family (the largest woodwind instrument is the contrabassoon).

The instrument is made of wood. Metal keys cover the holes along the instrument. The mouthpiece is made of a metal pipe called the **crook**.

The mouthpiece contains a double reed. Reeds vibrate and create sound when musicians blow into the mouthpiece. A reed is made of bamboo or cane, and carved to be very thin.

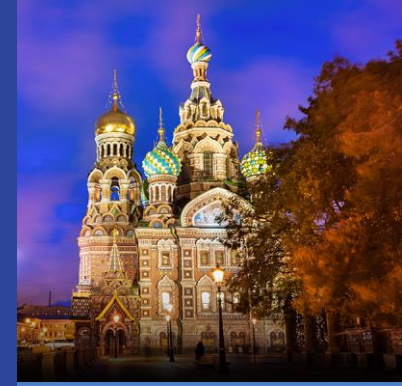
The oboe and bassoon use double reeds, while a clarinet uses a single reed.



Bassoon

# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## FIRST MOVEMENT



**Staccato:** a dot above or below a note indicating for it to be played short and detached.

**Dynamic:** the level of sound in a piece of music.

**Arpeggio:** a broken chord, where notes can be heard ascending or descending.

The next section in this movement, *Allegro non troppo*, can be heard at **2:44–5:23**.

First violas (accompanied by second violas and cellos) extend and transform the opening bassoon theme through the addition of more notes (including a descending, scale-wise passage in semiquavers), a faster tempo (around double the speed of the opening tempo), and the use of **staccato**.

This theme is passed to the flute and then to other instruments, and it gathers momentum using descending scale-wise motion to propel forward. The music grows louder until it reaches the **dynamic** of **f** (*forte* – loud) with the arrival of trumpet fanfares. It then begins to slow down to an ascending **arpeggio** beginning in the cellos, ending in the violas, which brings us to a new section marked *Andante* (moderately slow).

### Viola theme:

Original bassoon theme  
& extension of theme

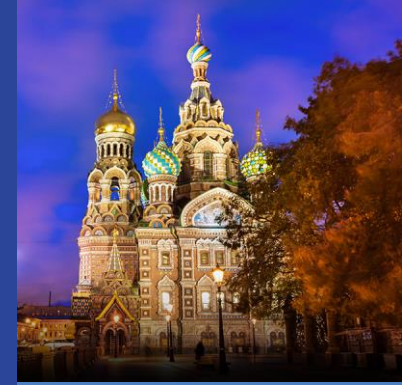
Staccato (indicated by dots above or below note heads)  
mean that notes are to be played— short and detached.

Descending, scale-wise motion in semiquavers



# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## FIRST MOVEMENT



**Aria:** a tuneful piece for solo singer

**Triad:** a set of three notes that belong to a harmonic chord.

The third section – *Andante*, which can be heard at **5:23**, begins with muted violins and cellos.

This new section is more expressive and romantic, and the melody sounds like an operatic **aria**. It features a falling **triadic** line.

'con sordini' means 'with mutes'

Expression marking 'tenderamente, molto cantabile, con espansione' means *tenderly, very singable, expansively*

Falling triadic line

**Andante** (♩ = 69)  
*con sordini teneramente, molto cantabile, con espansione*

Violin 1  
*p*

Viola

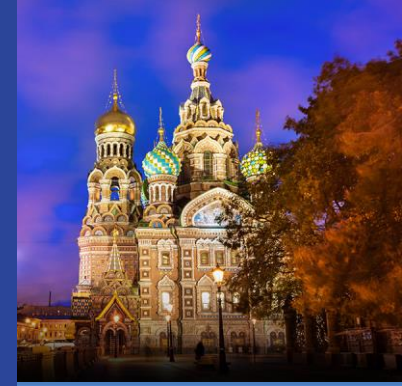
Cello  
*p*

Double Bass  
*con sordini*  
*pp* < *mp* > *pp* < *mp* >



# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## FIRST MOVEMENT



**Syncopated:** used to define music with a variety of rhythms which disrupts a regular beat.

The next section, marked *Moderato mosso* ('less moderate'), begins at **6:32**.

The flute introduces a new theme which has a rising motion (instead of the descending motion in previous themes), and the bassoon echoes the flute's theme.

Moderato mosso  $\langle \text{♩} = 100 \rangle$

Fl. 1

Fag. 1

The music here sounds more hopeful and optimistic. The clarinet then begins the theme, mimicked again by the bassoon, and then both flute and clarinet join together to play the theme, again repeated in the bassoon.

This theme occurs over **syncopated** strings which constantly whirr away underneath.

# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## FIRST MOVEMENT

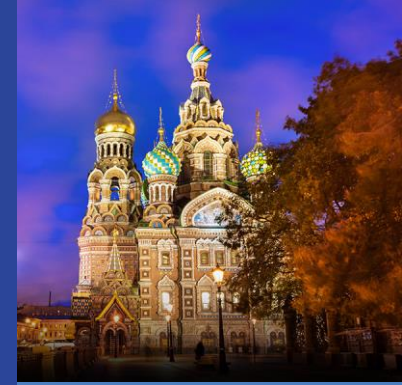
In the next *Andante* section at **7:58**, upper strings re-introduce the passionate, operatic melody from earlier.

At **10:02**, a soft, gentle melody in solo clarinet gently descends and is taken over by bassoon. The movement sounds as though it is drawing to a close, but don't be deceived – it is only the middle of the movement and Tchaikovsky has something else in store for us!

Going suddenly from **pppppp** (*pianissississississimo* – as soft as possible) to **ff** (*fortissimo* – very loud), announced with a very loud chord played by all instruments, the music leaps into action. The music is fast and furious, but if you listen carefully to the rapid-fire notes you can hear fragments and developments of earlier themes.

The brass intensify the music before it grows into more expansive waves of sound, driven by the trombones and tuba.

Once again, we hear the tender operatic theme and, again played by solo clarinet, though this time it gently leads us to the end of the movement with delicate-sounding brass and winds and soft, **pizzicato** strings in a descending scale which fades away.



**Pizzicato:** a technique where strings are plucked with the finger instead of being bowed.



Clarinet

# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## SECOND MOVEMENT 20:52–28:55

Cellos open the second movement, *Allegro con grazia* (lively and fast with grace) with a graceful, flowing, dance-like theme, which is then passed to flutes, oboes, and clarinets.

This theme is accompanied by clarinet and bassoons with a sighing, descending motif, interspersed by horns. Second violins, violas, and double basses play pizzicato.



Sighing motif

1. in A  
Klarinetten

2. in A

Fagotte 1. 2

1. 2. in F  
Hörner

3. 4. in F

Pizzicato strings

Violine 1

Violine 2

Viola

Violoncell

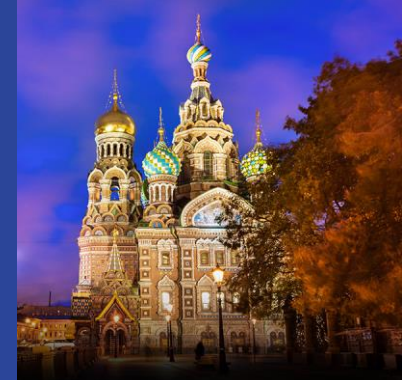
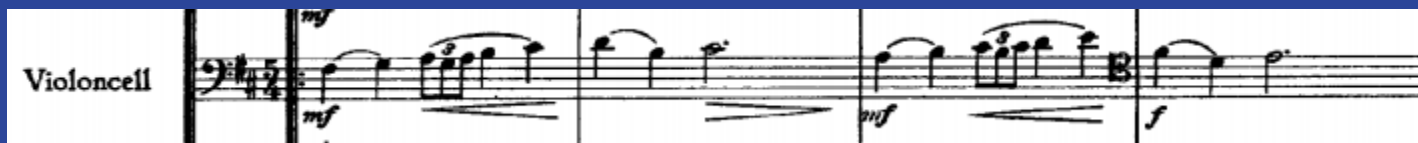
Kontrabaß

Main melody in cellos

# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## SECOND MOVEMENT

Unlike the first movement, where we can hear the influence of opera, in this movement we can hear music reminiscent of Tchaikovsky's ballet music. The music sounds like a **waltz**, however it is not in triple time which is typical to a waltz. The time signature is 5/4, five crotchet beats to a bar, and the waltz is displaced by two beats. When the waltz enters on the third beat of the bar, its first beat is spread out over the three notes of a **triplet**.

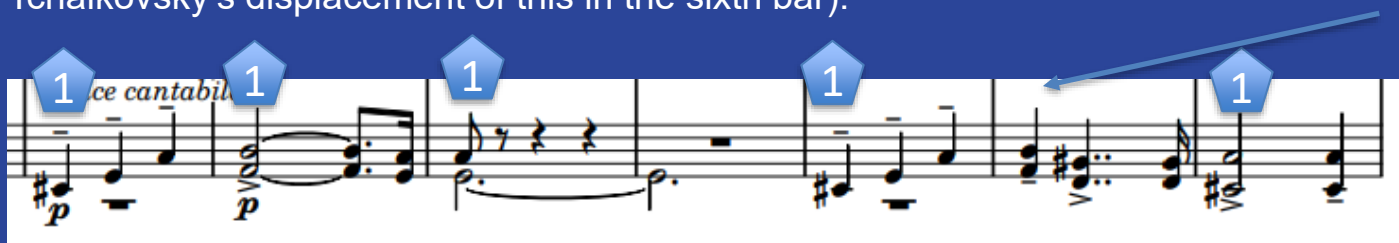


**Waltz:** dance music that is in triple meter, with the emphasis on the first beat.

**Triplet:** a group of three notes of equal length, which fit into the time of two note values.

Can you think of any other tunes in 5/4?

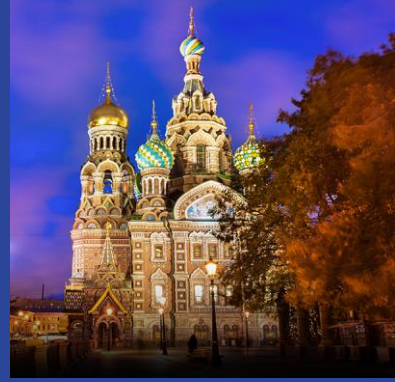
In a traditional waltz, the first beat is the strongest, with a medium emphasis on the third beat. Take, for example, the melody from Tchaikovsky's 'Waltz of the Flowers' from his ballet *The Nutcracker* (1892), which largely has the typical 1-2-3 waltz pattern (notice, however Tchaikovsky's displacement of this in the sixth bar):



Waltz melodies are typically accompanied with music that emphasises the first beat and offsets the second and third beat, sometimes referred to as 'oom-pah-pah' accompaniment.

The next page shows the waltz accompaniments Tchaikovsky employed for *The Nutcracker* and this second movement in his sixth symphony.

# Tchaikovsky, Comparison of Waltz accompaniment



*dolce cantabile*

Waltz melody in 'Waltz of the Flowers'

'Oom-pah-pah' accompaniment

1. in A  
Klarinetten

2. in A

Fagotte 1. 2

1. 2. in F  
Hörner

3. 4. in F

Violine 2

Viola

Violoncell

Kontrabaß

Waltz accompaniment on second and third beats of waltz (fourth and fifth beats in the bar due to displacement)

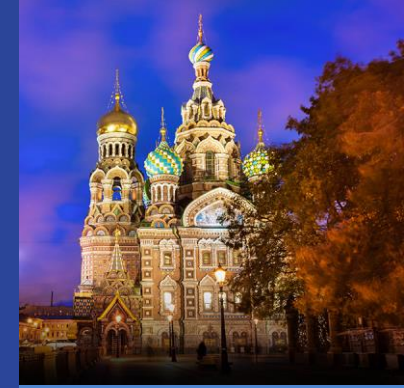
Displaced waltz accompaniment on second and third beats in horns

Emphasis on first beat of waltz in upper strings

Waltz melody in Symphony No.6, 2nd mvt

# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## SECOND MOVEMENT

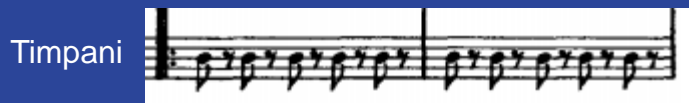


**Pedal:** a sustained tone, usually in the bass, which grounds other parts.

**Coda:** meaning 'tail' in Italian, it is an extended passage that brings a piece of music to an end.

The opening waltz section is repeated before we hear the violins and violas introduce a variation of the opening waltz, followed by flutes and oboes, and then repeat this variation before the original waltz tune returns.

A contrasting central section of the movement is based on another sighing motif based on a descending scale. This is heard in the flutes, first violins, and cellos.



Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

Double Bass

This sighing, central theme is pushed along by a pulsing bass **pedal** in the timpani and double basses.

After a reprise of the original, main theme, descending scales in the woodwinds lead into a **coda** which is reminiscent of the middle contrasting section of the movement, before the movement ends calmly.

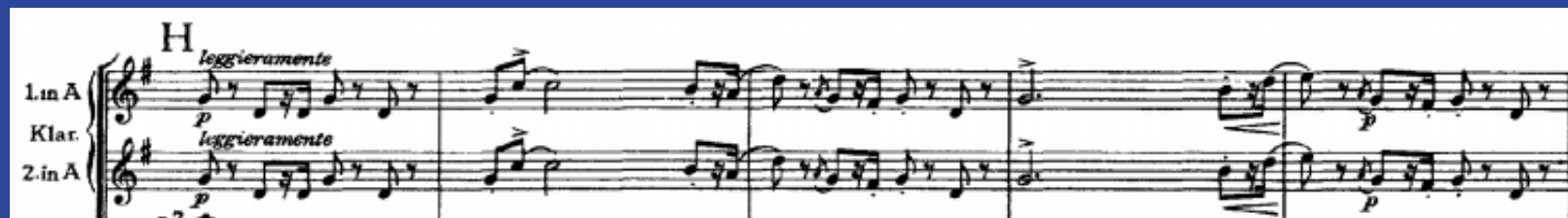
# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## THIRD MOVEMENT 28:55–38:18

The third movement, *Allegro molto vivace* ('very lively and fast') is the most upbeat movement of the symphony. It is in 12/8 (12 quaver beats to a bar) and begins with a **scherzo** with racing triplets in the strings and very quick and light woodwinds.

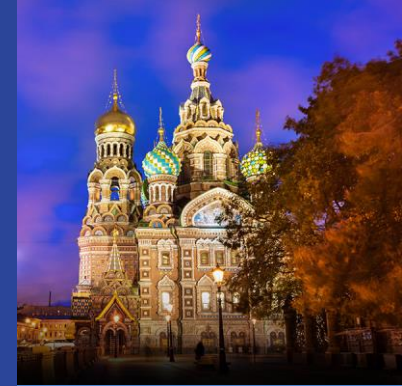
The constant stream of notes continues, but a triumphant marching theme begins to emerge. Descending scale passages in the strings lead on to more segments of the march theme emerging, before it makes its full appearance at **31:01** in the clarinets then violins.

### March theme in clarinets:



The image shows a musical score for two clarinets (1. in A and 2. in A). The music is in 12/8 time and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The tempo is marked 'leggeramente' and the dynamics are 'p' (piano). The score is written for two parts, both in A major. The first part is marked 'H' and the second part is marked 'Klar.'.

After revisiting music presented earlier in the movement, the march returns in full force, powering on until the end of the movement. Descending scales in the brass push us towards the end of the movement which is triumphant and grand, making it sound like the end of the entire symphony, however there is still one more movement to follow.



**Scherzo:** a light or playful piece of music which can form a movement or part of a movement in a larger work, for e.g. a symphony

# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## FOURTH MOVEMENT 38:18–50:30

While the final movement of a symphony is typically lively and grand, the finale of Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony is slow and sad-sounding.

This movement has two main sections. It begins with the *Adagio lamentoso* ('slow and lamenting') section. The opening melody is shared between the first and second violins, who each take turns playing one note of the melody in alternation. Even though it's not clear from their individual music lines below, the violins sound out the first five notes of a descending scale which resolves up a step (the repetition of this melody includes an **appoggiatura** – the D before the last note in the phrase, C). Can you see the notes of the descending scale below?

F E D C B C      F E D C B (D)C

Adagio lamentoso (♩ = 54)

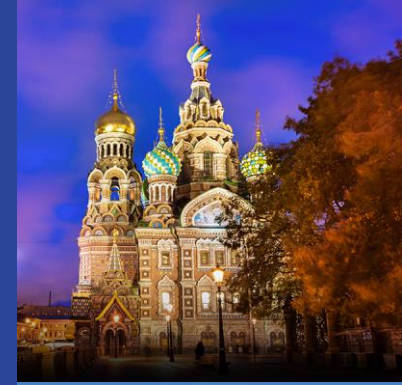
Violine 1

Violine 2

Viola

Violoncell

Kontrabaß



**Appoggiatura:** an ornamental note that temporarily displaces a harmonic note but then resolves (usually by stepwise motion) to the main note.

### Descending scales

Have you noticed that descending scales and motifs have been a theme throughout the entire symphony? Can you remember where else they have occurred?

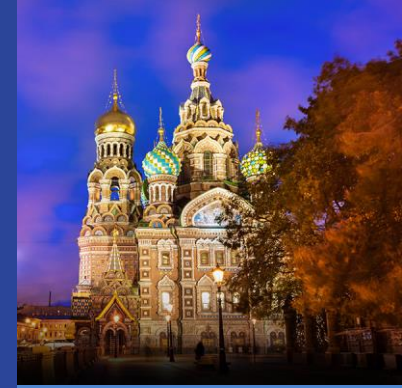


# Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.6 in B minor

## FOURTH MOVEMENT

A descending scale in the solo bassoon, accompanied by horns and strings, dies away, leading us into a contrasting *Andante* ('moderately slow') section. This next section begins with horns, over which we hear a tender melody in the first violins and violas, echoed by the trombones. The melody swells in the orchestra, with the music growing in passion and speed, reaching its climax with fast, downward scales.

The theme from the opening of the movement returns, and is stretched out and expanded in the orchestra. A brass **chorale**, consisting of trombones and tuba, lead us into the final, anguished-sounding section of the movement. The music fades away and, just as it began, the symphony ends with mournful-sounding low strings and woodwind – bassoons, cellos, and double basses.



**Chorale:** in an orchestral context, a chorale is a small ensemble of instruments containing different instrumental lines, or 'voices'.



Cello



Double Bass



Bassoon



Trombone



Tuba

# CURRICULUM LINKS

*This resource responds to the following aspects of the Australian Curriculum*

## Years 7–10

- Analyse composers' use of the elements of music and stylistic features when listening to and interpreting music **(ACAMUR097)**
- Identify and connect specific features and purposes of music from different eras to explore viewpoints and enrich their music making, starting with Australian music including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples **(ACAMUR098)**
- Manipulate combinations of the elements of music in a range of styles, using technology and notation **(ACAMUM100)**
- Evaluate a range of music and compositions to inform and refine their own compositions and performances **(ACAMUR104)**
- Analyse a range of music from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their music making, and consider music in international contexts **(ACAMUR105)**

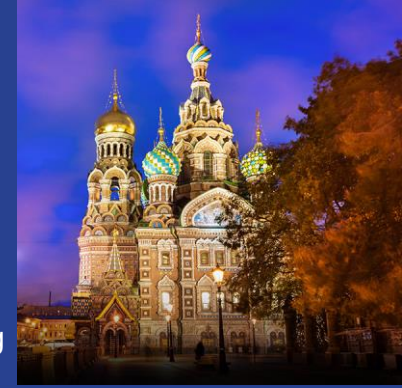
## Years 11 & 12

**Designs (Unit 1), Innovations (Unit 3), and Narratives (Unit 4) units of the Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority Music General Senior Syllabus.**

2. *Explain the use of music elements and concepts* When students explain, they present descriptions and reveal relevant facts of music elements and concepts in repertoire or music sources.

4. *Analyse music* When students analyse, they examine and consider the constituent parts and the relationship between music elements, concepts and stylistic characteristics.

8. *Evaluate music to justify the use of music elements and concepts* When students evaluate, they make judgments about the ideas and concepts evident in music in relation to purpose and context, examining and determining the value or significance of music from various perspectives. When students justify, they give valid reasons or evidence to support a viewpoint, response or conclusion.





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