

Russian 330
Spring 2007

The '1812 Overture' of Peter Tchaikovsky



'1812 Overture'

- Written in 1880 for the Consecration of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow;
- Premiered in 1882
- It was written by ...

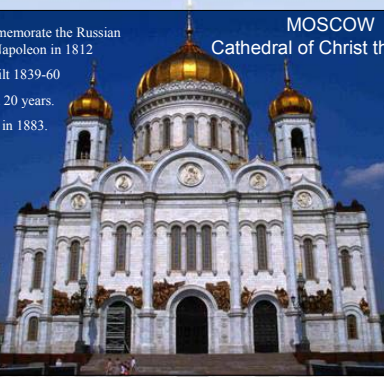
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MOSCOW
Cathedral of Christ the Savior

- Built to commemorate the Russian victory over Napoleon in 1812
- Structure built 1839-60
- Frescos took 20 years.
- Consecrated in 1883.



Piotr Tchaikovsky (1840-93)

- Son of mining engineer and factory manager
- Saw a Russian opera when 10, which enchanted him.
- Worked as a clerk in the Ministry of Justice before devoting himself to music full time



NAPOLEON!!!

- Came to power in France in 1799
- Invaded Russia in 1812
- Battle of Borodino: 80,000 dead. A draw, but Napoleon occupies Moscow in a week
- He retreats after a month because the city had been abandoned and winter was coming
- Famous Russian novel *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy is based on this period



Program music

- Psychology, impressions, ideas ...not documentary
- A mini-encyclopedia of Russian music
 - Extensive use of musical quotations, songs which everybody knows and which mean something to them ... and represent something in this overture
- A political statement, combining three elements of government policy:
 - The church
 - The czar
 - Russian national identity

Sections of the overture

1. Asking God for help: Russian church hymn
2. Theme of worry
3. Russian army prepares for battle
4. The armies take their position
5. French national anthem interwoven with battle theme
6. Interlude: hope theme
7. Interlude: folk song representing peaceful Russian people
8. 'Development' of themes and rhythmic figures heard so far
9. French national anthem and cannon shots
10. Full orchestra returns to opening hymn in victory
11. Czar's anthem (with cannons) symbolizing Russian victory

3. Russian army prepares

- Horn fanfare represents Russian military and its preparation
- Violin theme on top of the fanfare
- Repetition 4 times of a question: are we ready?

1. Asking God for help

- Begins with strings (cellos) playing Russian hymn 'Oh Lord, Save Thy People' (*Спаси, Господи, люди твоя*), begging God for help.
 - First listen to the *Choir of the Don Cossacks* singing the hymn (17)
 - Characteristics of a hymn:
 - » four-part harmony
 - » slow tempo,
 - » simple (boring!) rhythm,
 - » melody proceeds in small steps
 - Now Tchaikovsky:

4. Battle starts

- Agitated, syncopated violins: armies take their positions

2. Worry

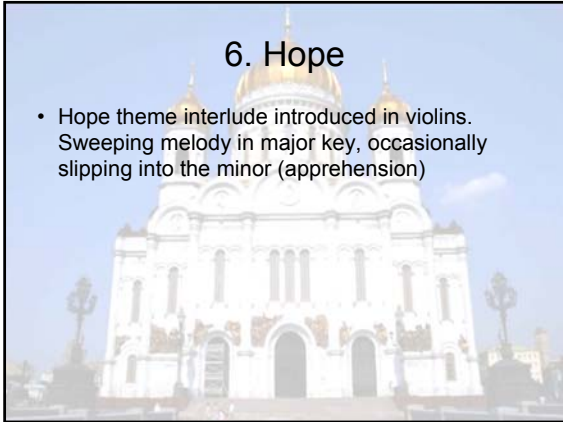
- Falling melody in woodwinds
- Violins
- Trombones and tubas

5. The French invade

- 'The Marseillaise' is the French national anthem; here it represents the French.
- It originated during the French Revolution in 1789
- The Marseillaise sounds in the brass (horns and trumpets) alternating with battle preparation theme from section 4.

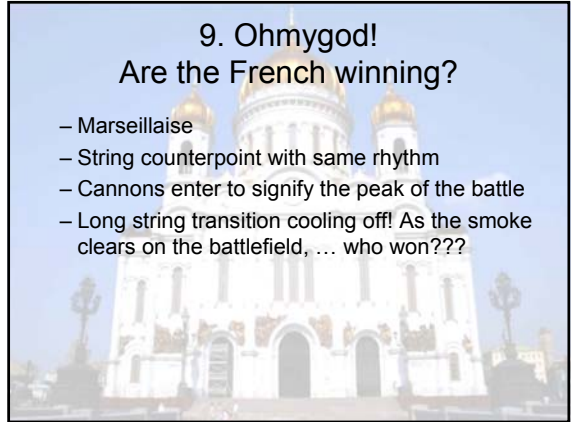
6. Hope

- Hope theme interlude introduced in violins. Sweeping melody in major key, occasionally slipping into the minor (apprehension)



9. Ohmygod! Are the French winning?

- Marseillaise
- String counterpoint with same rhythm
- Cannons enter to signify the peak of the battle
- Long string transition cooling off! As the smoke clears on the battlefield, ... who won???



7. Folk theme represents Russian people

- Woodwinds play folk dance theme in a minor key.
- ‘At the gate, at Grandfather’s gate’
- У ворот, у ворот бабушкиных



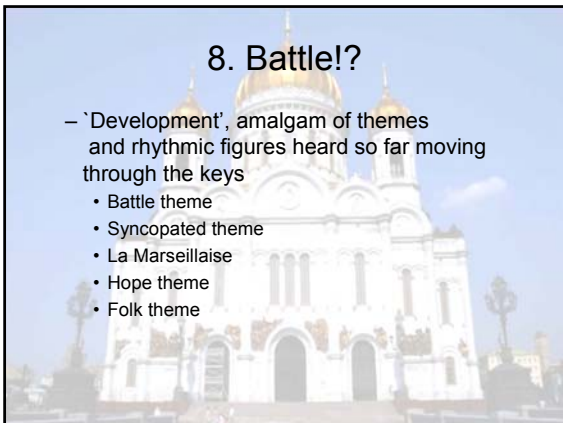
10. The Russians won! God saved Russia!

- Full orchestra returns to opening hymn (from section 1). Now with:
 - carillons simulating church bells
 - lots of brass (horns) instead of strings
 - agitated strings in accompaniment



8. Battle!?

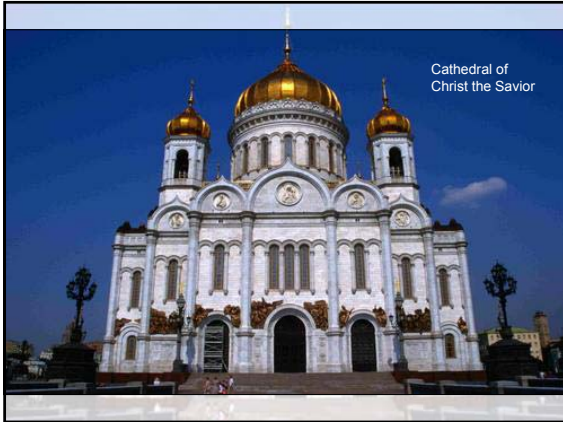
- ‘Development’, amalgam of themes and rhythmic figures heard so far moving through the keys
 - Battle theme
 - Syncopated theme
 - La Marseillaise
 - Hope theme
 - Folk theme



11. Long live the czar!

- Starts with Russian military theme (from part 3), then anthem of the Romanov dynasty: ‘God Save the Czar’ (with fireworks)





Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, 1931

The church was destroyed under orders from communist dictator Joseph Stalin in 1931 in order to build a Palace of the Soviets on that spot. Technical problems with the site could not be overcome and a swimming pool was built there. The cathedral was rebuilt from scratch 1995-1999.

