

# Melody and Meaning

For 5th-8th grades



## Lesson 3 — *Composer Study: Tchaikovsky and Coleman*

### Objective

Students will become familiar with the life of two composers from different eras, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and Valerie Coleman. They will understand what the music of these two composers share in common and how a composer's culture, heritage and life experience can affect his or her work.

### Suggested Materials

- Fast Facts about Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet handout (provided)
  - Fast Facts about Valerie Coleman's "Seven O'Clock Shout" handout (provided)
- Recording of Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet, Love Theme  
Time Stamp: 13:36-15:10 (audio links can be found at [youtube.com/user/BfloPhilharmonic](https://www.youtube.com/user/BfloPhilharmonic))
- Recording of Valerie Coleman's "Seven O'Clock Shout" (audio links can be found at [youtube.com/user/BfloPhilharmonic](https://www.youtube.com/user/BfloPhilharmonic))

### New York State Arts Standards

MU:Re7.1.5a	MU:Re7.1.6a	MU:Re7.1.7a	MU:Re7.1.8a
MU:Re7.2.5a	MU:Re7.2.6a/b	MU:Re7.2.7a/b	MU:Re7.2.8a
MU:Re8.1.5a	MU:Re8.1.6a	MU:Re8.1.7a	MU:Re8.1.8a

### New York State English Language Arts & Literacy Standards

Reading, Standard 1, 2 & 7  
Writing, Standard 7  
Speaking & Listening, Standard 1, 2 & 3  
Language, Standard 1 & 6

### Procedure

- 1) Introduce the lesson: We will listen and compare two pieces of music for orchestra – one that was written in 1880 and one that was written in 2019, over 130 years apart. We will find what is similar between the two pieces and what is different. We will also discuss ways that each composer's culture, heritage, and life experiences may be represented in the music that they wrote.
- 2) Play the Love Theme from Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet (Time Stamp: 13:36-15:10) for students. Discuss: Is this music familiar to them? Where have they heard it before? Do they know who wrote it and/or what it is called?
- 3) Play the Love Theme from Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet (Time Stamp: 13:36-15:10) again and ask students to think about a couple of questions while they are listening: How would they describe this music? What instruments do they hear? What kind of pulse do they feel? Do they hear any rhythms, patterns or melodies repeating? Add any questions that you think are important. After listening for a while, ask students to share their responses to the questions and discuss.
- 4) Now play the opening of Coleman's "Seven O'Clock Shout." Ask students to think about the same questions that you asked with the Tchaikovsky: Is this music familiar to them? How would they describe this music? What instruments do they hear? What kind of pulse do they feel? Do they hear any rhythms, patterns or melodies repeating? Etc.

### **Lesson 3 — Composer Study: Tchaikovsky and Coleman** *(continued)*

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- 5) Ask students to identify what they think is similar between the two pieces of music. Make a list for all to see. What is different between the pieces? Make a separate list for the observations of differences.
- 6) Now share the two Fast Facts handouts on Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* and Coleman's "Seven O'Clock Shout" and give students time to read them. Then, discuss: Tchaikovsky's heritage was European; Russian to be specific. He was born in Votkinsk, Russia and lived in Saint Petersburg, Russia for most of his life. He began piano lessons at age five and frequently attended the opera with his friends. Valerie Coleman's heritage is African American. She was born in Louisville, Kentucky and currently teaches music at the University of Miami, where she continues to play flute and write music. Discuss with students: How might the music that they just heard reflect each composer's culture, heritage and life experience? Could they hear influences of Tchaikovsky's Russian background in his music or his early experience with opera? How about influences of Coleman's African American heritage or her experiences listening to jazz and vocal music growing up?

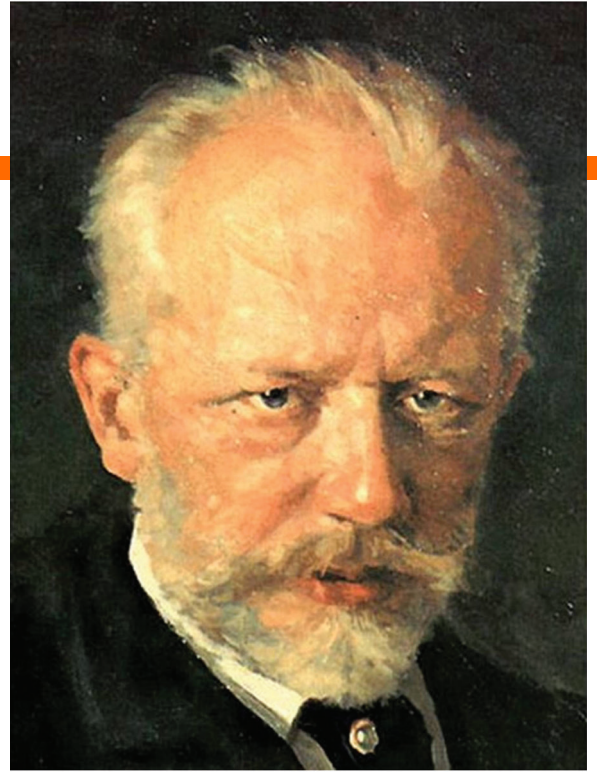
#### **Extending the Learning:**

- 7) Students may bring in music that they feel reflects their own heritage, culture and life experiences. Share these musical selections with the class and ask the student to say why they feel their selection reflects their background.

## Fast Facts

### ***Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky*** ***Romeo and Juliet, Love Theme***

- Born in Votkinsk, Russia
- Most popular Russian composer of all time
- Began piano lessons at age 5
- Was one of St. Petersburg Conservatory's first composition students
- Traveled throughout Europe and the United States studying music
- Wrote *Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*, three of the most popular ballets of all time
- His music is used frequently in popular music and film
- Died in St. Petersburg, Russia



## The Composer

Tchaikovsky was born in Votkinsk, Russia in 1840. He was one of seven children and exhibited a clear interest in music from childhood. He began taking piano lessons at age 5 and was one of the first students to attend the new St. Petersburg Conservatory in Russia, where he studied composition. After graduating, he moved to Moscow to teach music theory, eventually producing his first symphony. By 1869, Tchaikovsky had composed what was considered his first recognized masterpiece, *Romeo and Juliet*.

During his mid 30's, Tchaikovsky left Russia to travel in Europe, where he experienced the operas of Bizet's *Carmen* and Wagner's *The Ring*. During this time, his music grew in popularity both within and outside of Russia. Tchaikovsky began promoting Russian music as a conductor and was invited to the United States in 1891, where he conducted before audiences in New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia. Upon his return to Russia, he completed two of his most celebrated compositions- *The Nutcracker* ballet and his Symphony No. 6 (*Pathétique*). He died in St. Petersburg in 1893.

## The Piece

During the Romantic era, Shakespearean plays captured the imagination of several major composers. Rather than portray the play's events, Tchaikovsky presents a variety of characters and moods whose melodies offer effective musical contrast. He completed the work in just six weeks and it premiered in Moscow in 1870. The love theme signifies Romeo and Juliet's first meeting in the scene at Juliet's balcony. The music then shifts to suggest violence, with a chaotic theme for the feuding families. As the piece progresses, love and violence share the stage until the love theme returns, in a sadder tone, suggesting the couple's tragic deaths.

The overture's love theme is universally acknowledged as one of the greatest melodies ever written and has been used as the classic "love at first sight" music in numerous television series and movies.

*"Undoubtedly I should have gone mad but for music. Music is indeed the most beautiful of all Heaven's gifts to humanity wandering in the darkness. Alone it calms, enlightens, and stills our souls. It is not the straw to which a drowning man clings; but a true friend, refuge, and comforter, for whose sake life is worth living."*

— Tchaikovsky

## Fast Facts

### **Valerie Coleman** **Seven O’Clock Shout**

- Born in Louisville, Kentucky in the same neighborhood as boxer Muhammed Ali
- Plays the flute
- Creator of the famous wind quintet, Imani Winds
- Considers Duke Ellington a role model because he wrote for people and personalities
- First African-American woman composer to be commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera
- Currently teaches at the University of Miami, while continuing to write music



## The Composer

Valerie Coleman was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky. Her father died when she was nine, and her mother raised her and her sisters as a single working mother. She began playing flute in the fourth grade and immediately became interested in composing music. By age fourteen, she had written three full-length symphonies and had won several local and state competitions.

Coleman attended college and earned a dual degree in music theory/composition and flute performance from Boston University. Her musical style mixes modern orchestration with jazz and Afro-Cuban genres. Her compositions include works for wind quintet, chamber music, orchestra, concert band, and solo flute. She is currently an Assistant Professor at the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami.

## The Piece

Seven O’Clock Shout is an anthem inspired by the tireless frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the uplifting ritual of evening serenades that brings people together amidst isolation to celebrate life and the sacrifices of heroes. Coleman created the piece to address frontline workers who come home at 7 p.m. to shouts and cheers from grateful bystanders. The work begins with a lone trumpet fanfare to represent the isolation forced upon society, and the need to reach out to one another. The fanfare leads into a lush landscape to depict nature and the celebration of nurses and doctors who are working to save lives.

Commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra and written specifically for socially-distanced musicians, Seven O’Clock Shout has become the orchestra’s anthem in response to COVID-19, celebrating the strength of human connection even during times of isolation. Coleman wrote the piece in just two weeks during pandemic lockdown. It was designed to be performed together, in isolation. Each member of the Philadelphia Orchestra individually recorded themselves playing their parts. Those parts were then sent to the orchestra’s sound editors who edited and mixed them together into a single orchestral piece that was premiered as part of the orchestra’s online event.

*“To me, Seven O’Clock Shout is a declaration of our survival. It is something that allows us our agency to take back the kindness that is in our hearts and the emotions that cause us such turmoil. . . We cheer on the essential workers with a primal and fierce urgency to let them know that we stand with them and each other.”*

— Valerie Coleman