



MUSECA MONOGRAPH SERIES

Analysis of  
Tchaikovsky's  
Book on Harmony

*A Modern Commentary on  
P. I. Tchaikovsky's Guide to the Practical  
Study of Harmony*

*Museca*

MUSECA PUBLISHING

Analysis of

# Tchaikovsky's Book on Harmony

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A Modern Commentary on  
*P. I. Tchaikovsky's Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony*

**Final Edition with YouTube Links**

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An Instructional Textbook for Students of Music Theory and Composition

**MUSECA MONOGRAPH SERIES • MUSECA PUBLISHING**

**2026 Edition**

## Museca Monograph Series

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*Analysis of Tchaikovsky's Book on Harmony: A Modern Commentary on P. I. Tchaikovsky's Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony*

Prepared and edited by the Museca Publishing Editorial Staff

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Bar numbers in this edition follow the Sikorski editions for Tchaikovsky's symphonies, and the Jurgenson/Muzgiz editions for his concertos and operas, except where otherwise noted.

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## A Note on This Edition

This volume is the first in the Museca Monograph Series devoted to the harmony textbooks of the great composer-pedagogues. It presents a modern commentary on Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony* (Moscow, 1871), explaining and expanding each of its harmonic concepts and illustrating them with examples drawn from Tchaikovsky's own compositions.

A distinctive feature of this edition is the inclusion of curated YouTube video links throughout the text, placed immediately after each compositional reference. These links point to high-quality streaming performances, allowing readers to hear the exact passages under discussion without requiring access to a concert hall, library archive, or recording collection. Full guidance on how to use these links is provided in the appendix.

All musical terminology in this edition follows the American standard (semitone, whole tone, Roman numeral analysis). Bar numbers follow the Sikorski critical editions for the symphonies and the Jurgenson/Muzgiz editions for the concertos and operas; where bar numbers are approximate, this is noted in the text. The "Fate motif" designation for the Symphony No. 4 opening, and similar familiar editorial labels, are used as reader aids and do not represent Tchaikovsky's own designations.

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## How to Use the YouTube Links

Throughout this book, you will find green-shaded media boxes placed directly after references to Tchaikovsky's compositions. These boxes contain links to high-quality YouTube video performances so you can see and hear the exact passages being discussed.

### Link Format

- **▶ Watch:** Clickable links to YouTube video performances. Click any link to go directly to YouTube, where you can watch the performance immediately—no registration or subscription required.
- **[Timestamp]:** Approximate timestamps are provided for longer works (full symphonies, concertos, operas) to help you navigate to the specific passage under discussion.

### Source Priority

Links prioritize performances from the following sources, in order:

1. Deutsche Grammophon official channel
2. Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra
3. Other official orchestra channels (Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, London Symphony, etc.)
4. Verified artist or label channels
5. High-quality uploads from reputable sources

Important: YouTube video availability may change over time. If a link no longer works, simply search YouTube for the work title and performer listed in the link text to find a current performance.

We strongly encourage you to watch each referenced passage as you read. Seeing and hearing the music performed is, in Tchaikovsky's own spirit, the best way to learn.

## **Introduction**

### **Welcome to This Book**

Welcome, dear reader, to a guided exploration of one of the most fascinating and underappreciated music theory textbooks ever written. In 1871, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky—already a professor at the Moscow Conservatory and well on his way to becoming one of the most beloved composers in history—published a slim, practical manual titled *Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony*. It was not a grand philosophical treatise on the nature of sound or an encyclopedic reference of harmonic possibilities. Instead, it was something far more useful: a working handbook designed to teach young musicians how to write music that sounds good.

This book you hold is a modern commentary on that original text. Its purpose is not to rewrite Tchaikovsky's manual or merely summarize it. Rather, we will use his teachings as a springboard for a deeper exploration of harmonic principles, examining the concepts he laid out, expanding upon them with accessible explanations, and—most excitingly—illustrating each idea with examples drawn from Tchaikovsky's own magnificent compositions. In doing so, we bridge the gap between classroom theory and living, breathing music.

### **Why Tchaikovsky's Harmony Textbook Matters**

There is something uniquely valuable about learning harmony from a great composer. Textbooks written by academics can be thorough and rigorous, but they sometimes lack the sense of why harmony matters—the emotional urgency behind every chord choice. Tchaikovsky's manual is different. It is the work of a man who used these very tools to create some of the most emotionally powerful music in the Western tradition: the searing tragedy of the Sixth Symphony, the enchanting world of *The Nutcracker*, the passionate sweep of *Romeo and Juliet*. When Tchaikovsky writes about a

dominant seventh chord resolving to the tonic, he writes with the authority of someone who has made that resolution break hearts.

His approach is refreshingly practical. He believed harmony should be learned by doing—by writing exercises, by playing them at the piano, by training the ear to hear the difference between a perfect cadence and a deceptive one. He had little patience for abstract theorizing divorced from musical practice. This philosophy runs throughout the present book as well. We believe that every concept explained here should be heard, played, and felt—not just understood intellectually.

### **How This Book Is Organized**

The chapters follow the same progressive structure that Tchaikovsky himself used, moving from the simplest building blocks of harmony to its most dramatic and colorful possibilities. Each chapter includes clear prose explanations, concrete musical examples, and references to specific moments in Tchaikovsky's compositions—with opus numbers, movement indications, and approximate bar numbers—so that you can hear these concepts come alive in real music. New to this edition, every compositional reference is accompanied by a YouTube video link box so you can watch the performance immediately.

### **Who This Book Is For**

This book is written for anyone who loves music and wants to understand how it works at the harmonic level. You might be a beginning composition student, a pianist who wants to understand harmonic structures, or a music enthusiast with no formal training. Whatever your background, this book aims to meet you where you are and bring you further along the path. We assume only the most basic familiarity with music notation.

## A Note on Listening

Throughout this book, we strongly encourage you to watch and listen to the musical examples we reference. The magic of harmony cannot be fully captured in words on a page—it must be heard. The YouTube video link boxes throughout will help you find high-quality performances instantly. So let us begin. Tchaikovsky is waiting at the piano, ready to show us the craft he loved.

### Key Takeaways

- This book is a modern commentary on Tchaikovsky's Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony.
- Every concept is illustrated with examples from Tchaikovsky's own compositions, with YouTube video links.
- The book is designed for readers at all levels, from beginners to advanced students.
- Active listening and practice at the keyboard are essential companions to reading.

## Chapter 1: Intervals and Their Expressive Meaning

Music begins in the space between two notes. Before there are chords, before there are keys, before there are melodies of any complexity, there is the interval—the fundamental unit of musical distance and, more importantly, of musical feeling. Chapter 1 examines this foundational concept with the care it deserves, tracing how Tchaikovsky himself understood intervals not merely as theoretical measurements but as living emotional forces. We explore how each category of interval carries its own psychological weight: the noble openness of perfect intervals, the brightness or shadow of major and minor thirds, the acute instability of the tritone. Through specific passages from some of Tchaikovsky's most celebrated works, we discover how his mastery of interval choice shaped the emotional world of his music from its very first note.

### 1.1 The Nature of Intervals

Every journey into harmony begins with a single, fundamental concept: the interval. An interval is simply the distance between two musical tones, but that simplicity is deceptive. Within that distance lies an entire world of emotional expression. A major third rings with brightness and optimism. A minor third carries the weight of melancholy. A tritone bristles with restless tension. Tchaikovsky understood this intuitively, and his textbook insists that students must not merely memorize interval names and sizes—they must hear them, sing them, and feel their character.

### 1.2 Classifying Intervals

**Perfect intervals** include the unison, the fourth, the fifth, and the octave. These intervals have a clean, open sound associated with stability and consonance.

**Major and minor intervals** include the second, third, sixth, and seventh. The difference between major and minor is a single semitone, yet that semitone transforms the entire emotional character of the sound.

**Augmented and diminished intervals** are created by raising or lowering one note of a perfect or major interval by a semitone. These intervals introduce tension and instability. Note: when any interval exceeds an octave it becomes a compound interval—a ninth is a compound second, a tenth a compound third, and so on. Compound intervals share the expressive character of their simple equivalents and appear frequently in orchestral writing, though the exercises in this book work primarily within the octave.

### 1.3 Intervals in Tchaikovsky's Compositions

*Symphony No. 6 "Pathétique," Op. 74, First Movement, Bars 1–4.* The symphony opens with a solo bassoon whose first melodic motion descends through B to G $\sharp$ —a major third—then to G $\natural$ , the chromatic semitone completing the gesture. This drooping, two-interval motive (major third followed by semitone) immediately colors the entire work with deep, inconsolable sadness.

► [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 6 "Pathétique" — Berliner Philharmoniker / Kirill Petrenko](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I, from 0:00]

*Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy, Introduction, Bars 1–8.* The overture begins with a solemn chorale-like passage in low strings and woodwinds moving primarily by step, with open perfect fourths and fifths prominent in the texture, giving the opening a hymn-like gravity.

► [Tchaikovsky — Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy — Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra](#)

[Full work, ~20 min]

*The Nutcracker Suite, "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy," Bars 1–4.* The celesta melody opens with a rising minor third (E up to G), while the

accompaniment's pervasive semitonal movement gives the music its uncanny, crystalline quality—a combination that makes the texture feel simultaneously delicate and otherworldly.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — The Nutcracker, "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" — Berliner Philharmoniker / Rattle](#)

*Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36, First Movement, Bars 1–6.* The famous "Fate motif" (a label applied by commentators rather than by Tchaikovsky himself) features a prominent tritone leap in the brass—F up to B natural—immediately establishing dramatic tension.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 4, Mvt. I "Fate Motif" — Gergiev / Mariinsky Orchestra](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I, opening brass fanfare]

## 1.4 Practical Exercises

1. Play C up to E, then C up to E-flat. Sing each interval and feel the shift from brightness to shadow.
2. Construct every interval type from a single root note. Play each one and describe its emotional quality.
3. Listen to the opening of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony and identify the first melodic interval by ear.
4. In Tchaikovsky's Album for the Young, Op. 39, examine No. 8 ("Waltz"). Identify at least three different interval types.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Album for the Young, Op. 39 \(Complete\) — Piano Recital](#)

[Full cycle, ~28 min]

## 1.5 Chapter Summary

### Key Takeaways

- Intervals are the fundamental building blocks of all harmony and melody.

- Each interval has a distinct emotional character.
- Tchaikovsky used intervals with extraordinary precision to establish mood from the first notes.
- Intervals must be heard, sung, and played—not just memorized.

## Chapter 2: Triads — Construction and Character

From the single interval we ascend naturally to the triad—the three-note chord that forms the bedrock of Western tonal harmony. Chapter 2 explores how the four triad types (major, minor, diminished, and augmented) each possess a distinctive sonic identity that composers have exploited for centuries to communicate specific emotional states. We examine how Tchaikovsky deployed these chords with remarkable purposefulness: major triads for nobility and affirmation, minor triads for longing and vulnerability, diminished triads for fragility and unease, augmented triads for supernatural menace. The chapter also addresses inversions, showing how changing the bass note of a triad subtly shifts its sense of stability and direction without altering its harmonic identity.

### 2.1 What Is a Triad?

If intervals are the atoms of music, then triads are its first molecules. A triad is a chord built by stacking two intervals of a third, producing three notes: a root, a third, and a fifth. There are four types, each with a distinct emotional personality:

- **Major triad:** Root + major third + perfect fifth (e.g., C–E–G).  
Bright, stable, resolved.
- **Minor triad:** Root + minor third + perfect fifth (e.g., C–E $\flat$ –G).  
Darker, introspective.
- **Diminished triad:** Root + minor third + diminished fifth (e.g., C–E $\flat$ –G $\flat$ ). Tense, unstable.
- **Augmented triad:** Root + major third + augmented fifth (e.g., C–E–G $\sharp$ ). Eerie, floating.

### 2.2 Inversions

**Root position (5/3):** Root in bass. Most stable.

**First inversion (6/3):** Third in bass. Lighter.

**Second inversion (6/4):** Fifth in bass. Least stable. (When a fourth note—a seventh—is added to the chord, a third inversion becomes possible, with the seventh in the bass. See Chapter 6 for seventh chord inversions.)

### 2.3 Triads in Tchaikovsky's Music

*Symphony No. 5, Op. 64, Second Movement, Horn Solo, Bars 1–10.* The beloved horn solo is supported by warm, root-position major triads, imparting noble calm and dignified beauty.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 5, Mvt. II Horn Solo — Bernstein / Deutsche Grammophon](#)  
[Timestamp: Mvt. II, horn solo opening]

*Eugene Onegin, Op. 24, Act I, Tatiana's Letter Scene.* The accompaniment beneath Tatiana's vocal line is built from minor triads, sustaining melancholy and vulnerability.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Eugene Onegin, Tatiana's Letter Scene — Anna Netrebko / Metropolitan Opera](#)

*Swan Lake, Op. 20, Act II, Odette's Theme, Bars 20–30.* The oboe melody is harmonized with diminished triads, giving it a fragile, otherworldly quality.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Swan Lake, Act II, Odette's Theme — Mariinsky Ballet / Gergiev](#)  
[Timestamp: Act II, Odette's entrance]

*The Sleeping Beauty, Op. 66, Act I, Scene 1.* Augmented triads appear when Carabosse pronounces her curse, destabilizing the harmonic ground with surreal menace.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — The Sleeping Beauty, Act I — Royal Ballet / Royal Opera House](#)  
[Timestamp: Act I, Scene 1]

## 2.4 Practical Exercises

1. Construct all four triad types from every note of the chromatic scale.
2. Build the triad on each scale degree of C major and C minor. Identify its quality.
3. Play each triad in all three inversions and describe how the sound changes.

## 2.5 Chapter Summary

### Key Takeaways

- Triads are three-note chords forming the foundation of Western harmony.
- Major, minor, diminished, and augmented triads each have distinct characters.
- Inversions change a triad's function without changing its notes.
- Tchaikovsky matched chord quality to emotional context with great sensitivity.

## Chapter 3: Cadences — The Punctuation of Music

Every phrase of music, like every sentence of prose, must eventually come to rest—or conspicuously refuse to do so. That moment of arrival or suspension is the cadence, and Chapter 3 is devoted to understanding the five principal cadential types that govern tonal music. The chapter shows how the choice of cadence is never merely technical: it is a dramatic decision that determines whether a phrase closes definitively, lingers with longing, pivots toward surprise, or holds the listener in suspension. Tchaikovsky's genius for narrative through harmonic means is nowhere more apparent than in his deployment of cadences, and we trace his technique through some of the most gripping moments in his orchestral, operatic, and choral output.

### 3.1 What Are Cadences?

If harmony is the language of music, then cadences are its punctuation. Cadences define where phrases end, where breath can be taken, and where dramatic tension is resolved or sustained.

### 3.2 Types of Cadences

**Perfect Authentic Cadence (PAC):** V to I, both root position, tonic in soprano. The strongest closure.

**Imperfect Authentic Cadence (IAC):** V to I with inversion or soprano not on tonic. Softer closure.

**Plagal Cadence (IV–I):** The “Amen cadence.” Warm, solemn.

**Deceptive Cadence (V–vi in major; V–VI in minor):** Surprise resolution to the submediant instead of tonic. In major keys resolves to vi; in minor keys to VI (major submediant). Prolongs tension.

**Half Cadence (HC):** Ends on V. Open-ended, like a question mark.

### 3.3 Cadences in Tchaikovsky's Music

*Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 23, First Movement, approximately bars 85–90.* A resounding PAC in B-flat minor closes the orchestral introduction and launches the piano's grand first entry.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Piano Concerto No. 1 — Kissin / Karajan / Berliner Philharmoniker](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I, piano entry, ~4:00–4:30]

*Symphony No. 5, Op. 64, First Movement, Bars 60–70.* The clarinet theme cadences with IACs, keeping lyrical continuity.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 5, Mvt. I — Bernstein / Deutsche Grammophon](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I, ~4:00]

*1812 Overture, Op. 49, Bars 452–460.* Brass and chorus close the work with a series of triumphant authentic and plagal cadences underpinning the quotation of the Russian Orthodox hymn “God Save the Tsar,” lending the peroration its resonance with sacred music tradition.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — 1812 Overture \(with cannons\) — Full Performance](#)

[Full work, ~15 min]

*Symphony No. 6 “Pathétique,” Op. 74, Finale, Bars 166–180.* Deceptive cadences saturate the finale, collapsing expected resolutions into minor harmonies.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 6, Finale — Berliner Philharmoniker / Petrenko](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. IV, ~35:00]

*Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy, Conflict Theme, Bars 80–90.* Half cadences maintain constant tension in the agitated conflict theme.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Romeo and Juliet, Conflict Theme — Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra](#)

[Timestamp: Conflict theme, ~5:30]

### 3.4 Practical Exercises

1. Write a V–I cadence in every major key.
2. Harmonize an eight-bar melody ending with a PAC, then rewrite using each other cadence type.
3. Listen to the finale of the Sixth Symphony and count the deceptive cadences.

### 3.5 Chapter Summary

#### Key Takeaways

- Cadences are the punctuation marks of music.
- Five main types create different degrees of closure or openness.
- Tchaikovsky used cadences as dramatic narrative devices.
- Mastering cadences requires practice in every key, major and minor.

## Chapter 4: Voice-Leading and Part-Writing

Writing chord progressions on paper is one skill; writing chord progressions that breathe, flow, and sing is another. The difference lies in voice-leading—the art of guiding individual lines through harmonic progressions with melodic elegance and independence. Chapter 4 introduces the foundational rules of part-writing: the prohibition of parallel fifths and octaves, the value of common-tone retention, the preference for stepwise motion in upper voices, and the importance of purposeful bass movement. These are not arbitrary restrictions but principles derived from centuries of polyphonic practice, and Tchaikovsky's orchestral writing offers some of the most instructive models of how these principles translate from the four-voice chorale into the full orchestra.

### 4.1 The Art of Smooth Connection

Voice-leading is the art of moving individual voices smoothly from one chord to the next. Each voice should have its own melodic identity while fitting into the harmonic whole.

### 4.2 The Core Rules

**Avoid parallel fifths and octaves.** They erase the independence of voices.

**Retain common tones.** Shared notes between chords should remain in the same voice.

**Favor stepwise motion.** Upper voices should move by step wherever possible.

**Move the bass purposefully.** Strong bass motion by fourths, fifths, or steps creates harmonic direction.

**Avoid voice crossing.** No voice should move below a lower voice or above a higher one. When voices cross, the independence of lines is destroyed and the texture becomes muddled.

**Respect voice ranges.** In standard four-part (SATB) writing, each voice has a comfortable range: Soprano C4–G5; Alto G3–C5; Tenor C3–G4; Bass E2–C4. Staying within these boundaries ensures singability and idiomatic part-writing.

### 4.3 Voice-Leading in Tchaikovsky's Music

*Serenade for Strings, Op. 48, First Movement, Bars 15–30.* A textbook example of beautiful voice-leading: the soaring melody moves primarily by step over steady harmonic support.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Serenade for Strings, Op. 48 — Karajan / Berliner Philharmoniker](#)

[Full work, ~28–30 min]

*Symphony No. 4, Op. 36, Second Movement.* Woodwinds and strings move in contrary motion, carefully avoiding parallels.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 4, Mvt. II — Gergiev / Mariinsky Orchestra](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. II, ~18:00]

*The Queen of Spades, Op. 68, Act II.* Choral writing demonstrates strict control of voice-leading, balancing independence with harmonic clarity.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — The Queen of Spades — Gergiev / Mariinsky Theatre](#)

### 4.4 Practical Exercises

1. Write a four-part harmonization of I–IV–V–I in C major, following all rules.
2. Harmonize with the soprano moving entirely by step.
3. Listen to the Serenade for Strings and follow the first violin line.

## 4.5 Chapter Summary

### Key Takeaways

- Voice-leading connects chords through smooth, independent melodic motion.
- Avoid parallel fifths/octaves, retain common tones, favor stepwise motion.
- Tchaikovsky's orchestral and choral writing demonstrates meticulous voice-leading.

## Chapter 5: Non-Harmonic Tones — Ornament and Tension

Once a student can construct and connect chords competently, the next revelation is that the most expressive moments in music often occur between the chords—in the brief, dissonant tones that lie outside the prevailing harmony before resolving into it. These are non-harmonic tones, and Chapter 5 explores the full taxonomy of these expressive devices: the passing tone that bridges chord tones stepwise, the neighbor tone that decorates a single pitch, the suspension that holds a previous chord's note into new harmonic territory, the anticipation that arrives early, and the appoggiatura that leaps to a dissonance and resolves with sighing expressiveness. Tchaikovsky's melodies are saturated with these devices, and learning to hear and write them is essential to achieving his characteristic warmth and emotional directness.

### 5.1 Beyond the Chord

Non-harmonic tones—notes that fall outside the current chord—add color, motion, and expressiveness. They create momentary dissonance before resolving, giving melodies their flow and emotional tension.

### 5.2 Types

**Passing Tone:** Stepwise between two chord tones.

**Neighbor Tone:** Steps away then returns.

**Suspension:** Held over, resolves down.

**Anticipation:** Arrives early.

**Appoggiatura:** Approached by leap, resolved by step.

**Échappée (Escape Tone):** Steps away from a chord tone in the opposite direction from the resolution, then leaps to the next chord tone. Less common but distinctive—the brief “escape” from the chord gives a fleeting sense of evasion before the line resolves.

**Cambiata (Changing Note Figure):** A four-note figure that steps down, leaps down a third, then steps back up (e.g. E–D–B–C). Common in Renaissance and Baroque counterpoint and occasionally encountered in Romantic melodic writing as an archaic ornamental device. The list above covers the most frequently encountered non-harmonic tones in tonal music; further types exist and the student is encouraged to identify them in score study.

### 5.3 In Tchaikovsky's Music

*Symphony No. 6, Op. 74, First Movement, Development Section (approximately bars 161–200, Sikorski edition).* Strings play phrases saturated with suspensions against changing woodwind harmonies, producing aching pathos.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 6, Mvt. I Development — Berliner Philharmoniker](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I Development, ~8:00–12:00]

*The Nutcracker, Op. 71, “Waltz of the Flowers.”* Harp arpeggios full of passing tones add fluidity and sparkle.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — The Nutcracker, “Waltz of the Flowers” — Berliner Philharmoniker / Rattle](#)

*Swan Lake, Op. 20, Act II, Oboe Theme.* Neighbor tones give the haunting melody a lyrical, sighing quality.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Swan Lake, Act II, Odette's Theme — Mariinsky Ballet / Gergiev](#)

[Timestamp: Act II, Odette's entrance]

## 5.4 Practical Exercises

1. Add passing tones to a soprano line over I–IV–V–I so it moves entirely by step.
2. Write a melody including a neighbor tone, suspension, and anticipation.
3. Listen to the oboe theme from Swan Lake, Act II, and identify the neighbor tones.

## 5.5 Chapter Summary

### Key Takeaways

- Non-harmonic tones add motion and expression to harmony.
- Suspensions create tangible tension that resolves with emotional impact.
- Tchaikovsky used them as integral elements of melodic expression.

## Chapter 6: Seventh Chords and Their Resolutions

Adding a fourth note to a triad transforms a stable structure into something restless and forward-driving. Chapter 6 examines the family of seventh chords—the dominant seventh, minor seventh, diminished seventh, and half-diminished seventh—and the principles governing their resolution. The seventh of any seventh chord carries an inherent downward tendency, and understanding this tendency is the key to understanding why Tchaikovsky's progressions feel so inevitable in retrospect, even when they surprise us in the moment. This chapter also explores how the diminished seventh chord, with its symmetrical division of the octave, became one of the most versatile tools in the Romantic composer's arsenal for creating atmospheric tension and executing rapid harmonic pivots.

### 6.1 Expanding the Palette

Seventh chords add a fourth note, creating richer sonorities and greater tension. They are inherently unstable—they want to resolve, propelling harmonic progressions forward.

### 6.2 Types

**Dominant Seventh (V7):** Major triad + minor seventh. The most important seventh chord.

**Minor Seventh:** Warm, yearning quality. The supertonic minor seventh (ii7) is the most common form, serving a pre-dominant function; minor sevenths on other scale degrees carry different roles.

**Diminished Seventh:** Highly symmetrical, versatile.

**Half-Diminished:** Haunting, wistful.

### 6.3 The Resolution Principle

In conventional resolution, the seventh must resolve downward by step. This reflects the natural tendency of dissonance to move toward consonance. (In enharmonic reinterpretation of the diminished seventh, the apparent resolution may be upward—see Chapter 8 for chromatic applications.)

### 6.4 In Tchaikovsky's Music

*Symphony No. 5, Op. 64, First Movement, Bar 44.* Clarinets and bassoons introduce a dominant seventh preparing the noble main theme.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 5, Mvt. I \(bar 44\) — Bernstein / Deutsche Grammophon](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I, ~3:00]

*Eugene Onegin, Op. 24, Tatiana's Letter Scene.* Diminished seventh chords mirror Tatiana's mounting anxiety.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Eugene Onegin, Tatiana's Letter Scene — Anna Netrebko / Metropolitan Opera](#)

*Symphony No. 6, Op. 74, Third Movement, approximately bars 220–240 (Sikorski edition).* Chains of seventh chords in sequence create relentless rhythmic drive.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 6, Mvt. III — Berliner Philharmoniker / Petrenko](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. III, ~27:00]

### 6.5 Practical Exercises

1. Build a dominant seventh on the fifth degree of every major key and resolve.
2. Write V7 in all four positions and resolve each.

3. Listen to the Letter Scene from Eugene Onegin for diminished seventh chords.

## 6.6 Chapter Summary

### Key Takeaways

- Seventh chords create richer sonorities and greater harmonic tension.
- The dominant seventh drives progressions toward resolution.
- The seventh must resolve downward by step.
- Tchaikovsky used seventh chords to create expectation, anxiety, and momentum.

## Chapter 7: Modulation — Transition Between Keys

A piece of music that remains in a single key from beginning to end risks monotony no matter how inventive its melodic or rhythmic content. The art of modulation—moving convincingly from one tonal center to another—is what gives large-scale compositions their sense of journey, contrast, and ultimate homecoming. Chapter 7 explores the principles governing smooth modulation, beginning with the closely related keys that differ by only one accidental and progressing to the pivot chord technique that allows composers to step seamlessly across tonal boundaries. Tchaikovsky's large-scale instrumental and operatic works contain some of the most strategically conceived key changes in the Romantic repertoire, and the examples in this chapter illuminate how he used modulation as a primary vehicle for emotional and dramatic storytelling.

### 7.1 The Need for Key Change

Modulation gives tonal music its sense of harmonic adventure, allowing the composer to explore new territories, create contrast, and make the return home feel like a true homecoming.

### 7.2 Closely Related Keys

Keys differing by one accidental allow the smoothest transitions. For C major the five closely related keys are: G major (one sharp), F major (one flat), A minor (relative minor), E minor (relative minor of G major), D minor (relative minor of F major), and B minor (relative minor of D major). These are the standard set from which pivot-chord modulations are most naturally drawn.

### 7.3 The Pivot Chord Technique

A pivot chord belongs to both keys, serving as a harmonic bridge. For C major to G major: A minor (vi in C, ii in G) can serve as pivot. This diatonic pivot chord technique is the most common and smoothest

method of modulation. A second important technique—enharmonic modulation—exploits the symmetry of the fully diminished seventh chord or the German augmented sixth to pivot between distant keys without a shared diatonic chord. This chromatic technique is central to Tchaikovsky's most adventurous harmonic writing and is explored further in Chapter 8.

## 7.4 In Tchaikovsky's Music

*Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 23, First Movement, approximately bars 100–120 (Jurgenson/Muzgiz edition).* A bold modulation from B-flat minor to D-flat major, swift but smooth.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Piano Concerto No. 1, Mvt. I — Argerich / Abbado / Berliner Philharmoniker](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I, ~bars 100–120, ~5:00]

*Symphony No. 4, Op. 36, First Movement, approximately bar 120 (Jurgenson/Muzgiz edition).* The first subject in F minor modulates to A-flat major for the contrasting second theme.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 4, Mvt. I, Second Theme — Currentzis / musicAeterna](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I, ~bar 120, ~5:00]

*Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy.* The dramatic transition from B minor (conflict) to D-flat major (love theme) is a masterclass in harmonic storytelling.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Romeo and Juliet, Love Theme Modulation — Dudamel / Los Angeles Philharmonic](#)

[Timestamp: Love theme, ~10:00]

## 7.5 Practical Exercises

1. Write a pivot chord modulation from C major to G major in chorale style.

2. Modulate from C major to A minor. Identify available pivot chords.
3. Listen to the Romeo and Juliet transition and feel the key change.

## 7.6 Chapter Summary

### Key Takeaways

- Modulation gives music its sense of harmonic journey.
- Closely related keys allow the smoothest modulations.
- The pivot chord technique uses a shared chord as a harmonic bridge.
- Tchaikovsky's modulations serve dramatic and emotional purposes.

## Chapter 8: Chromatic Harmony — Expressive Color and Drama

The final harmonic frontier explored in this book is chromaticism: the use of notes and chords drawn from outside the prevailing key to intensify expression, destabilize the tonal center, or illuminate a dramatic moment with extraordinary vividness. Chapter 8 presents three of the most powerful chromatic devices in the tonal composer's toolkit: the secondary dominant, which borrows the gravitational force of a dominant seventh and applies it temporarily to any chord in the key; the Neapolitan sixth, with its dark, searching quality derived from the lowered second degree; and the augmented sixth chords—Italian, French, and German—which approach the dominant with a uniquely piercing dissonance. Tchaikovsky deployed all three with masterly control, and this chapter shows how each device works in his most celebrated scores.

### 8.1 Beyond Diatonic Harmony

Chromatic harmony introduces notes from outside the prevailing key, adding new colors and intensifying emotional expression. Tchaikovsky was a consummate master of these devices.

### 8.2 Secondary Dominants

A secondary dominant is a major triad or dominant seventh built on a scale degree other than the fifth, temporarily functioning as the dominant of the chord that follows it. It borrows the gravitational pull of a V–I resolution and applies it to any target chord within the key. The most common example is V/V (the dominant of the dominant). In C major, D major (D–F♯–A) acts as V/V, pulling strongly toward G major before G resolves onward to C.

### 8.3 The Neapolitan Sixth

A major triad on the lowered second degree in first inversion ( $\flat\text{II}6$ ). In C minor:  $\text{D}\flat\text{--F--A}\flat$  with F in bass. Dark, rich, deeply expressive.

### 8.4 Augmented Sixth Chords

All three chords in this family take their name from the defining interval they contain: an augmented sixth, spanning from the lowered sixth scale degree ( $\flat\hat{6}$ ) in the bass up to the raised fourth degree ( $\sharp 4$ ) in an upper voice. In C minor these pitches are  $\text{A}\flat$  and  $\text{F}\sharp$ . This interval expands outward by half step to an octave on the dominant note (G), creating one of the most powerful approach gestures in tonal music. The three variants differ only in what additional notes are added between the outer voices.

**Italian (It+6):** Three notes.  $\text{A}\flat\text{--C--F}\sharp$  in C.

**French (Fr+6):** Adds second degree.  $\text{A}\flat\text{--C--D--F}\sharp$ . More dissonant.

**German (Ger+6):** Richest.  $\text{A}\flat\text{--C--E}\flat\text{--F}\sharp$  in C minor.

### 8.5 In Tchaikovsky's Music

*Symphony No. 6, Op. 74, First Movement, Development, Bars 120–150.* Secondary dominants in rapid succession create escalating harmonic instability.

► [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 6 "Pathétique," Mvt. I Development — Berliner Philharmoniker](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I Development, ~8:00–12:00]

*Eugene Onegin, Op. 24, Act III, Duel Scene.* Neapolitan chords lend tragic inevitability to the scene before the duel.

► [Tchaikovsky — Eugene Onegin, Act III — Gergiev / Mariinsky Theatre](#)

[Timestamp: Act III, Duel Scene]

*Symphony No. 5, Op. 64, Finale, approximately bars 280–290 (Jurgenson/Muzgiz edition).* German augmented sixth chords resolve to the dominant with tremendous dramatic force.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 5, Finale — Bernstein / Deutsche Grammophon](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. IV, ~40:00]

## 8.6 Practical Exercises

1. Write I–V/V–V–I in C major. Notice the chromatic color.
2. Write i–bII<sup>6</sup>–V–i in C minor. Listen to the Neapolitan's richness.
3. Construct Italian, French, and German augmented sixths in C minor. Resolve each.

## 8.7 Chapter Summary

### Key Takeaways

- Chromatic harmony expands the emotional range of music.
- Secondary dominants add color and urgency.
- The Neapolitan sixth provides dark intensity at climactic moments.
- Augmented sixth chords resolve dramatically to the dominant.
- Tchaikovsky used chromaticism with precision and purpose.

## Chapter 9: Listening Curriculum and Pedagogical Reflections

Theory without practice is architecture without construction. Chapter 9 steps back from the harmonic content of the preceding chapters to reflect on the pedagogical philosophy that animates both Tchaikovsky's original textbook and this commentary: that harmony is learned by doing, hearing, and imagining. This chapter offers a structured listening curriculum tied directly to the works cited throughout the book, guiding students through a progressive programme of active engagement with Tchaikovsky's music that reinforces each harmonic concept in its living context. It also reflects on the three pillars of Tchaikovsky's method—the trained ear, the practicing hand, and the creative imagination—and argues that these remain as essential to harmonic mastery today as they were in the lecture halls of nineteenth-century Moscow.

### 9.1 Tchaikovsky's Teaching Philosophy

Tchaikovsky held a clear conviction: harmony must be learned by doing. His textbook is a workbook, not a passive read. Every rule must be practiced at the piano. His method rests on three pillars:

**The Ear:** Every concept must be heard.

**The Hand:** Every concept must be played.

**The Imagination:** Every concept must be created.

### 9.2 Recommended Listening Curriculum

To accompany this book, we recommend the following works, each with YouTube video links:

**For intervals and triads:** Album for the Young, Op. 39.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Album for the Young, Op. 39 \(Complete\) — Piano Recital](#)

[Full cycle, ~28 min]

**For cadences and voice-leading:** Serenade for Strings, Op. 48.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Serenade for Strings, Op. 48 — Karajan / Berliner Philharmoniker](#)

[Full work, ~28–30 min]

**For seventh chords and non-harmonic tones:** Symphony No. 5, Op. 64.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 5, Mvt. II Horn Solo — Bernstein / Deutsche Grammophon](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. II, horn solo opening]

**For modulation:** Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 23.

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Piano Concerto No. 1 — Kissin / Karajan / Berliner Philharmoniker](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I, piano entry, ~4:00–4:30]

**For chromatic harmony:** Symphony No. 6, Op. 74 (“Pathétique”).

▶ [Tchaikovsky — Symphony No. 6 “Pathétique” — Berliner Philharmoniker / Kirill Petrenko](#)

[Timestamp: Mvt. I, from 0:00]

### 9.3 Suggested Study Schedule

The following nine-week schedule aligns one chapter per week with a corresponding listening and keyboard practice programme. Each session should last approximately one hour: thirty minutes at the keyboard and thirty minutes with score and audio. Students should complete all exercises before moving to the next chapter.

**Week 1 — Intervals (Chapter 1).** Play and sing every interval type from C. Score study: Album for the Young, Op. 39 (Nos. 1–10).

**Week 2 — Triads (Chapter 2).** Build and play all four triad types in all twelve keys and three inversions. Score study: Swan Lake, Act II (Odette's theme).

**Week 3 — Cadences (Chapter 3).** Write V–I in all major and minor keys. Harmonise a simple melody with each cadence type. Score study: Symphony No. 6, Finale.

**Week 4 — Voice-Leading (Chapter 4).** Write four-part SATB progressions avoiding all parallels. Score study: Serenade for Strings, Op. 48, Mvt. I (follow each string part independently).

**Week 5 — Non-Harmonic Tones (Chapter 5).** Add each non-harmonic tone type to a soprano line. Score study: Symphony No. 6, Mvt. I development; Nutcracker “Waltz of the Flowers.”

**Week 6 — Seventh Chords (Chapter 6).** Resolve V7 in all positions in all major and minor keys. Score study: Eugene Onegin, Letter Scene (identify each diminished seventh).

**Week 7 — Modulation (Chapter 7).** Write pivot-chord modulations between all closely related keys. Score study: Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy (mark every key change on a score).

**Week 8 — Chromatic Harmony (Chapter 8).** Write progressions using all three augmented sixth types and the Neapolitan sixth in multiple keys. Score study: Symphony No. 6, Mvt. I development (identify each secondary dominant).

**Week 9 — Integration and Composition (Chapter 9).** Complete Composition Project 3 (below). Full listening: Piano Concerto No. 1 complete, analysing harmonic structure across all three movements.

## 9.4 Graded Composition Projects

These three projects should be completed in order, each building on the harmonic vocabulary of the preceding chapters. They are designed for keyboard realisation first and written notation second;

students without notation software may submit keyboard recordings alongside written chord-symbol analysis.

**Project 1 (after Week 3) — Harmonise a folk tune.** Take a simple eight-bar melody in C major (a folk song, hymn, or original melody of your own). Write a complete four-voice SATB harmonisation using only diatonic triads. Each phrase must end with a cadence of the appropriate type: at least one PAC, one IAC, and one HC. Annotate every chord with Roman numeral analysis and label all cadences.

**Project 2 (after Week 6) — Compose a sixteen-bar piece in ternary form (ABA).** Write a sixteen-bar keyboard piece (right hand melody, left hand accompaniment) in any major or minor key. The A section (bars 1–8) should establish the home key and end with a PAC. The B section (bars 9–12) must modulate to a closely related key and include at least one seventh chord. The return A (bars 13–16) must include at least one non-harmonic tone in the melody and end with a definitive PAC. Provide a chord-symbol analysis beneath the score.

**Project 3 (after Week 9) — Harmonic analysis of a Tchaikovsky passage.** Select any sixteen-to-thirty-two-bar passage from a Tchaikovsky work cited in this book. Write a full Roman numeral analysis, identifying: every chord (including inversions), all non-harmonic tones, every cadence, any modulation (naming the pivot chord if present), and at least one chromatic device (secondary dominant, Neapolitan, or augmented sixth). Write a 200-word prose commentary explaining how Tchaikovsky uses harmony to serve the expressive purpose of the passage.

## 9.5 Recommended Score Editions

Bar numbers cited in this book follow the Sikorski editions for the symphonies and the Jurgenson/Muzgiz editions for the concertos and operas, as noted in each reference. The following editions are recommended for score study alongside this commentary:

**Symphonies Nos. 4, 5, and 6:** Sikorski/Muzyka full scores (Hamburg/Moscow). Widely available in libraries and as IMSLP downloads.

**Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 23:** Muzgiz two-piano reduction (Moscow, 1955) or the Boosey & Hawkes study score.

**Ballets (Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Nutcracker):** Muzyka full scores (Moscow). Suite reductions by Boosey & Hawkes are available for study purposes.

**Operas (Eugene Onegin, Queen of Spades):** Muzyka vocal scores (Moscow) are the standard edition. Full orchestral scores are available via IMSLP.

**Album for the Young, Op. 39; Serenade for Strings, Op. 48:** Both are freely available on IMSLP in multiple editions. The Peters or Henle editions of the Album for the Young are recommended for clean engraving.

## 9.6 Chapter Summary

### Key Takeaways

- Tchaikovsky's method rests on three pillars: the ear, the hand, and the imagination.
- The nine-week study schedule aligns each chapter with focused keyboard practice and score study.
- Three graded composition projects build cumulatively from harmonisation through full harmonic analysis.
- Recommended score editions are identified for every work cited; IMSLP provides free access to most.

## Conclusion: Harmony as a Living Art

We have traveled a long road together—from the simplest intervals to the richest chromatic harmonies, guided at every step by the insights and example of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. What began with the question “What is the distance between two notes?” has expanded into an exploration of triads, cadences, voice-leading, non-harmonic tones, seventh chords, modulation, and chromaticism.

But this book is not an ending—it is a beginning. The harmonic concepts presented here are tools, and like all tools, they gain their true value through use. Continue your studies: harmonize melodies, compose miniatures, analyze scores, and above all, listen.

Tchaikovsky himself never stopped learning. His harmony textbook was not the work of a theorist in an ivory tower but of a working musician who understood that the study of harmony is, ultimately, the study of how music speaks to the human heart.

Go forth and make music. Tchaikovsky would have wanted nothing more.

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*End of Text*