



## The First Modern Composer

Although many consider Tchaikovsky another “ye olde” composer, he was actually an early example of the modern guest conductor. Keep in mind that:

Through his *agent*, Tchaikovsky was summoned by *telegraph*, to come on an *iron ship* across the Atlantic Ocean to America where, pursued constantly by *reporters*, he *guest-conducted* a fine orchestra, in *Carnegie Hall*, for a concert that was *reviewed* by newspapers such as the *New York Herald*.

These diary entries paint a vivid picture of Tchaikovsky’s visit to America as described in his own words:

**We can only imagine Tchaikovsky’s amazement at crossing the ocean to discover:**

*“I am ten times better known here than in Russia. Of all the people I have met, [the Americans] are the most generous and open-hearted.”*

**Tchaikovsky approaches New York City with a child-like delight, writing:**

*“I went for a stroll down Broadway. An extraordinary street! Houses of one and two stories alternate with nine-storied buildings. The houses downtown are simply colossal; I cannot understand how anyone can live on the 13th floor. The view was quite splendid, but I felt quite giddy when I looked down on Broadway... Every morning, people rush east to a place called ‘Downtown,’ then rush home again at night... [The hotels here have] lavatories with basins, bath and washstand. Hot and cold running water. Lighting by electricity or gas — candles are never used — and the constant rumble of the elevator going up and down at incredible speed.”*

**Newspaper descriptions of the concert give us a vivid sense of high society in 1891:**

*“All was abustle outside the big temple of music before the festival began. Carriage after carriage rolled up to the broad entrance and deposited its precious freight... At one time there was a line of carriages standing from the entrance to the hall a full quarter of a mile away. Long before the doors opened the street in front of the hall was crowded with people who wanted to enter... ladies, whose bonnets must have cost more than the average laborer receives a week for his labor, stood in line waiting for the doors to open... The audience rose and lifted up its thousand voices to the tune of ‘America.’”*

*—New York Herald*

**Tchaikovsky was both terrified and exhilarated by his trans-Atlantic crossing. He wrote:**

*“The ship is superb. A veritable floating palace... The ship moves so quietly that one can hardly believe one is on the water. Last night, the weather got worse and worse. Everything creaked and groaned. One minute we were tossed up to the clouds, the next we sank into the depths. The horrible shocks each time the screw lifted out of the water could not be silenced... It was impossible to go on deck, for the wind almost blew one overboard.”*

**During rehearsal, Tchaikovsky complained:**

*“Several workmen were hammering, shouting, and running hither and thither... I stopped the Pianoforte Concerto at the first movement, as the parts were in confusion and the musicians exhausted.”*

**In the Railway Age, rivers of steel were laid around the world. Tchaikovsky loved trains:**

*“I entered the drawing room car. The easy chairs are placed close to one another, in such a way that it is possible to turn in all directions. The windows are large and the view on both sides is completely unobstructed. Next was the dining car and the smoking car with buffet (with desks for writing letters and telegrams). The cars are much more luxurious than ours. There are numerous compartments in which are washstands with hot and cold water, towels (regarding towels, there is an amazing supply here in general), cakes of soap, brushes, etc. There is a bath and a barber shop. As there are almost no stops, it is all the more tiresome.”*