

## Tchaikovsky's Orchestral Style (exemplified by his Fourth Symphony, mvm. 1, with emphasis on thematic counterpoint)

### *Introduction: General considerations of 'counterpoint' and 'texture'*

Hardly any other composer has attracted more debate around his work than Tchaikovsky. Despite the advocacy of composers like Stravinsky and Shostakovich the safest routine among western musicologists has been that of keeping a condescending tone when dealing with Tchaikovsky's works.

After the centennial anniversary of the composer's death in 1993 there seems - among some musicologists - gradually to be emerging a tendency of a partial or even total opposition against this mainstream. But for those championing Tchaikovsky's cause in the academic milieu, the impression remains that there is still a long way to go; in the Grove chapter on The Symphony, the article-writer has provided approximately one single line for Tchaikovsky, whereas e.g. Carl Nielsen is represented with twenty times the space offered Tchaikovsky.<sup>1</sup>

This article will primarily deal with Tchaikovsky's poly-linear style, with special focus on thematic counterpoint.<sup>2</sup> General studies in orchestral texture and orchestral counterpoint are few. Some literature on the subject exists, though these writings do not focus to any notable extent on textural strategies.<sup>3-4</sup> Particularly scarce are studies of thematic counterpoint in symphonic context, thus characteristics like 'counterpoint' or 'contrapuntal' are used *en passant* in the majority of biographies upon symphonists. Carl Dahlhaus' article on counterpoint in the classical and romantic eras may serve as a suitable point of departure before proceeding further into a more specific discussion on the subject.<sup>5</sup> The Grove-article encompasses important aspects, yet several others call for substantial future research. 'Counterpoint', as rendered by Dahlhaus, is thus confined to the more traditional conceptions covering the term (for example, *dicantus* and *fugato*), probably because they are those most easily detected and easiest to handle in a contrapuntal discourse.

The main objective of this article is to suggest that Tchaikovsky, by way of his versatile dialectically founded textural approaches, is a notable orchestral architect.

Since orchestral *texture* is not much debated in musicological writing, we should perhaps consult 'Orchestration' and 'Instrumentation' in *Grove*:

*Orchestration*: (1) The art of scoring mus. for an orchestra or band. Many composers show special skill in this, (...). (2) Arrangement of a work for orch. which was comp. for another medium, e.g. Ravel's orchestration of his own *Ma Mère l'Oye*, written for pf. duet.

*Instrumentation*: Writing of mus. for particular instruments, especially referring to composer's knowledge of what is practicable on various instruments. Also used in sense of orchestration.

The above treatment of these central terms is disappointingly thin. The reader should notice that these citations do not reflect the fact that composers like Tchaikovsky wrote directly for the orchestra, and that an orchestral episode would appear fully orchestrated from the start in the composer's imagination.<sup>6</sup> Thus, to some - and presumably Tchaikovsky - writing for orchestra gives the composer extended *constructional* or *architectonic* possibilities as compared to smaller ensembles. *Texture*, in general musicological writing, seems mostly to cover aspects of *materiality*; *timbre*, *density* etc., sooner than *construction*, though *contrapuntal textures* is sometimes a term which is referred to - strangely enough - just *en passant* by some authors.

<sup>1</sup> Jan Larue, et al. 'Symphony.' *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> 'Imitative counterpoint' may sometimes replace 'Thematic Counterpoint', though the former concept does - by far - cover all the aspects attached to the latter.

<sup>3</sup> See Antony Hopkins: "Sounds of Music", J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. (London 1982) and

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Dunsby. *Music & Letters*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Feb., 1989): *Considerations of Texture*, pp. 46-57.

<sup>5</sup> Grove Music Online: Counterpoint; The Classical and Romantic eras, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Tchaikovsky quotation in a letter to N. von Meck.

## Tchaikovsky

### *Introduction*

*Counterpoint* is not in any way associated with Tchaikovsky in either biographical writing or in the overall musicological literature. Whith this article I will try to shed some light on specific constructive elements in Tchaikovsky's music; qualities that have been poorly recognized or even completely left out in much biographical and musicological reading: his predilection for and masterful skills in contrapuntal textures and constructive orchestration (as an alternative to merely "colorful").

In order to investigate this constructional tendency, several approaches from T's vast and extremely varied output might have been possible. I have for some time been rather reluctant to support the view that Tchaikovsky should be left out when speaking of 19<sup>th</sup> century composers particularly occupied with counterpoint.<sup>7</sup>

Even so, for this occasion I have chosen to settle on the *Fourth* Symphony, first of all because most readers are more likely to have some previous knowledge of this work than, for example, his three initial symphonies, which are also highly contrapuntal works. The musical selections in the main chapter of this document are made on the hypothesis that sharply contoured thematic counterpoint is a chief characteristic of this composer, occurring to a quite notable extent in the first movement of the Fourth Symphony.

### **Poly-linearity**

Tchaikovsky's orchestral style is *constructional* in sense of having originated from poly-linear architecture. His constructions are characterized, above all, by their *dialectic* textural approaches. This two- or multi-sidedness may be observed by its notable use of multi-focus as regards:

- Timbre (timbral contrast)
- Physical direction/counter-direction (ascension/descent) and textural transfer
- Thematic counterpoint
- Local counterpoint

These poly-linear techniques may be used separately or in combinations.

The terms '*thematic counterpoint*' and '*local counterpoint*' may need clarification:

### **Thematic counterpoint**

Thematic (motivic or *substantial*) counterpoint is the definition of a contrapuntal episode involving at least two individual voices utilizing thematic/motivic elements or their derivatives. Each voice may stem from the same thematic/motivic element or from different elements, these elements deriving from the same or from different themes.

In practice this will imply the use of two or more thematic ideas simultaneously, or the use of such elements in overlapping situations, i.e. implying the overlapping of voices involved in the contrapuntal episode. A context where ideas only overlap by one note/chord – something which is a quite common phenomenon in 19<sup>th</sup>-century orchestral music – is not qualifying for the designation 'thematic counterpoint';<sup>8</sup> the longer the overlap, the stronger the presence and impact of the thematic counterpoint.

On this occasion we shall first of all focus on the occurrence of thematic counterpoint within the selected movement, and discuss some adjacent tendencies as the movement proceeds.

Thematic counterpoint may very well serve as an "intensification of motivic work" to quote Dahlhaus, thus standing out as a very commendable developmental procedure.

In brief, substantial, thematic counterpoint is the realization of one thematically rooted event written as a counterpoint to another thematically rooted event.

### **Local counterpoint**

'Local counterpoint' describes a contrapuntal context where only one of the parts involved is – or is derived from – a thematic (substantial) element.

This may be the type of counterpoint we may sometimes refer to as '*counter-melody*' or a *discantus*.

An extremely elegant bass-line may be credited as performing a 'contrapuntal' feat; the more 'independent' a textural ingredient is, and the more capable of attracting our attention, the more we may be justified in allocating it contrapuntal merit.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. *Grove Music Online: Counterpoint; The Classical and Romantic eras*, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Though such incidents may possibly give the listener the *impression* of being contrapuntal.

Borderline cases may occur where a section of local counterpoint *recurs*, but where the elements turn out to be rewritten/further developed. By definition it is still a local counterpoint, though it may become a question of definition if or when the local counterpoint actually gains status as a new theme; an outcome that is not very much likely to happen.

### Symphony No. 4 in f-minor, op. 36

(Composed May 1877–January 1878, first performed Feb. -78)

#### Reception at the turn of the millennium

During his skillful study of the first movement of this symphony, Francis Maes notes that

“The dramaturgy of the first movement of the Fourth Symphony is not based on the transformations of themes in the German sense. The crux is the rhythmic opposition between the motto and the first theme.”<sup>9</sup>

However, this is just half the truth; what characterizes Tchaikovsky’s orchestral style, even in this movement, is that this rhythmical contrast is for the most part rooted in melodic material, ensuring substantial passages of thematic counterpoint, truly an “intensification of motivic work” (Dahlhaus). Maes and Taruskin are much occupied with what they conceive to be the waltz–polonaise dialectic in the movement, an approach which in no way conflicts the forthcoming findings, but which does not sufficiently emphasize Tchaikovsky’s notable contrapuntal achievement.<sup>10</sup> But above all the Fourth Symphony is a further elaboration, stylization and clarification of the contrapuntal techniques Tchaikovsky already had used extensively in his three previous symphonies.

#### Poly-linearity with focus on thematic counterpoint in the first movement

The main thematic material is found in the introductory motto (Ex. 1). Cells *a* and *b* are particularly much used throughout the movement. As regards *c*, this factor refers just as much to a general linear principle, but it is also re-found as a culmination of the first statement of the main theme (mm. 48–52). The half-step *d*-factor (m. 4) is, of course, found in almost any musical composition in existence, yet in this case we shall later re-find a quite similar way of quoting this cell on the second and the third beats in the horns. Thus we may classify all these four elements as *substantial (motivic/thematic)*.

Example 1. Introductory “Fate” Theme / basic material<sup>11</sup> (“not.”: transposed; “notated”)

Evidently, and as we might expect, most of the cells in the forthcoming main theme are derived from the introduction, directly or in form of inversions or other permutations:

Example 2. Main Theme (Initial statement)

<sup>9</sup> Francis Maes, *Geshiedenis van de Russische muziek: Van Kamarinskaja tot Babi Jar* (1996), English translation 2002 (UCLA) p. 162.

<sup>10</sup> Taruskin, Richard; *On Russian Music* (University of California Press, 2008), p. 131–2.

<sup>11</sup> Tchaikovsky referred – in his often-quoted “program” in a letter to von Meck – to the motto as “the Fate”, a denotation which he later partly rejected.

In accordance with Tchaikovsky's usual habit, he starts immediately to develop the main theme, whereby the thematic counterpoint-principle comes immediately to the fore: Elements from the main theme are counterpointed in the woodwinds and the strings respectively. The ascending half-step in the horns – reminiscent of the introduction – recurs in this episode from measure 53 (sensed in the strings from 52) to 65.

In addition to the utilization of thematic counterpoint, the linear, counter-directional principle is also clearly evident. The majority of the motives used in the contrapuntal work are interrelated in these three contrapuntal layers. In all the forthcoming excerpts, the composer does not yield to repetitive sequential standard types of formulas, like what may, for example, occasionally be found in Brahms's symphonic production (see Ex. 36, with further comments). Most often the counterpoint – even when the music flows most effortlessly – is characterized by a rather close to note-per-note relationship and changing harmonic foreground, especially as compared with numerous thematic counterpoints of Brahms, who is, after all, the most interesting contemporary *central-European* composer as regards thematic counterpoint.<sup>12</sup>

**Example 3.** Thematic/Motivic counterpoint / Counter-directional principle / Textural imprint (horns)

The elements taking part in the poly-linear work are varied continuously by the use of still new combinations of simultaneous motives, yet the motivic interconnections continue to make the music flow effortlessly. In addition to the contrapuntal work, the composer simultaneously ensures a “longitudinal” structuring and planning of specific voices (see Ex. 12, 15, 25). Special attention should also be drawn towards the thematic elements: they do not occur in strict sequential orders, their lengths and types of construction vary. Sometimes they appear in a linear combination which is akin to that of the actual theme-construction; in such cases the bracket is stretched over the entire combination, as shown in Ex. 4.

**Example 4.** Thematic/motivic counterpoint

During the development of this part of the exposition, further aspects to Tchaikovsky's style become obvious: Sometimes the variation of a cell is given a new role in a forthcoming texture, for example, as shown in measure 67 (Ex. 5); the cell has an impact upon – or puts a direct imprint on – a new textural layer. Tchaikovsky usually, as is also seen in Ex. 5, aims at using this type of approach with convincing clarity: First the cell (which is a derivative from a cell in the main theme) is performed by the woodwinds, thereafter it is subsequently caught up by the strings where it reasserts itself, gaining improved status. Thus having been absorbed in the thematic development, the cell strengthens its position as a chromatic, inverted stature in the woodwinds again from measure 70. The transfer from one section to another most often, like here, results in an utterly clean

<sup>12</sup> If we examine Brahms's four symphonies, his thematic counterpoint-statements are simpler in the way that they not often represent rapid harmonic shifts combined with countermovement and/or a closer (almost) note-to-note counterpoint, as (often) opposed to Tchaikovsky. See for example Brahms's Symphony No. 1, mvm. 1: m. 189 ff, 229 ff, 321 ff, Symphony No. 2, mvm. 1; 52 ff, 136 ff, 246 ff. etc.

architectonic construction; the woodwind-layer is much more than just a *run* or a *passage* (a fact underlined also by the withheld *Moderato* tempo); it is the transformation of a thematic cell, utilized in a new textural construction. Two measures of the Main Theme now counterpoint the extreme descending chromatic cell-transformation. An “imprint” from the theme has produced a new layer (even continuous new layers) taking part in a constantly developing and transforming thematic counterpoint.

This cell is traceable directly back to the introductory motto. Typical, though, is the gradual, organic transformation of such a small element from one textural field to another. The rather anonymous brass layers in measures 70–3 (Ex. 5) and 82–6 (Ex. 7) are rendered in order to demonstrate the utmost clean-cut dissonance treatment: Even though this article focuses on selected aspects of dialectic textural construction, it ought to be mentioned that another typical feature of Tchaikovsky’s style is his supreme ability in solving conflicts between separate layers, ensuring optimal orchestral clarity and transparency.

**Example 5.** Thematic/motivic counterpoint and textural imprints; organic/continuous formation of new layers

The musical score for Example 5 spans measures 66 to 70. It features three staves: Woodwinds (W.w.), Strings (Str.), and Brass (Br.).  
 - **Measure 66:** Woodwinds play a melodic line starting with a dynamic of *mf*. Strings play a rhythmic accompaniment. Annotations include 'IMPACT' and 'IMPRINT'.  
 - **Measures 67-68:** The woodwind line continues, with a 'cresc.' marking. The string accompaniment remains. Annotations include 'FORMS A NEW LAYER' and 'f'.  
 - **Measure 69:** The woodwind part is more active, with 'CONTINUED IMPACT; THE CELL FORMS A NEW LAYER' written above. Brass instruments (Cor., 2 Tr., 4 Cor.) enter with a *ff* dynamic. Annotations include 'Fag., (+Trbn., C.b.)'.  
 - **Measure 70:** The woodwind part continues with 'CONTINUED IMPACT; THE CELL DEVELOPS AND FORMS A NEW LAYER'. Brass instruments continue with 'X' markings. Annotations include '(Cl. / Fag. 8va b.) (a 2)', '2 Tr.', and '4 Cor.'.

Worthy of notice is the contrasting constructional relationship between the two substantial layers rendered in mm. 70–1; the theme in the strings is kept rather unchanged (before being absorbed by the derived cell from m. 72 ff), while the woodwind-counterpoint is built upon the (more remote) cell-permutation.

Similar substantial thematically motivated layers continue to ensure thematic counterpoints to fragments of the main theme; see for example the *x*-deviation in measure 72–3 (Ex. 5) which occurs in a permuted form at measure 79 and 81 (Ex. 6).

**Example 6.** Thematic counterpoint and continuous formation of new layers via motivic development

The musical score for Example 6 spans measures 78 to 81. It features three staves: Woodwinds (W.w.), Brass (Br.), and Strings (Str.).  
 - **Measure 78:** Woodwinds play a melodic line with an 'X' marking above. Brass instruments (4 Cor.) play a rhythmic accompaniment. Annotations include 'Fl. & Ob. (Cl. & Fag. 8va b.)' and '4 Cor.'.  
 - **Measures 79-80:** The woodwind line continues with 'X' markings. The string accompaniment is labeled 'THEME I'.  
 - **Measure 81:** The woodwind part continues with 'X' markings. The string accompaniment continues. Annotations include 'ff'.

The transformation of motivic layers continues seamlessly, resulting in new textural fields containing thematic counterpoint. The principle of countermovement and physical direction between the thematic elements is gradually enforced, having direct impact on the forming and permutation of the substantial, contrapuntal elements, that is to say; the majority of typical/original melodic cells are permuted in order to form ascending or descending lines.

**Example 7. Thematic counterpoint**

The subsidiary theme (Ex. 8) is a compound stature consisting of a melodic element in the first clarinet (Ex. 8, 2a), supported with motivic echoes in the flutes and first bassoon. There are two complementary ideas in the violas and cellos. The cello-element in measure 118 prepares the ground for the theme's b-section (Ex. 8; 2b, from m. 122 ff, see also Ex. 9):

**Example 8. Subsidiary Theme / Thematic counterpoint**

In both examples the counter-directional principle is highly present. But more important: The *simultaneous* statement of two substantial elements in one theme is a fact. The 2b-element is the less characteristic, but the most utilized in the movement, and is isolated from the thematic counterpoint from m. 134. But there is absolutely nothing which is thematically new when this occurs; in measures 122, 125, 128 and 135 this thematic element has been counterpointed to the 2a-element, and it was, as mentioned previously, even introduced already from m. 118 (cellos) and 120 (violas). When the 2b-element stands forth as an isolated stature, the episode is strikingly similar to the thematic presentation in second movement (waltz) from the Serenade for Strings<sup>13</sup>, m. 21 ff: both the texture – which merely consists of naked, parallel thirds in the violins – and the fundamental melodic interval-connection (5-3-6-4-5-3) are identical. Even the ascending up-beat is present in both examples; in the symphony the up-beat takes its origin from the start of the 2a-element.

The concurrent statement of two simultaneous thematic units is remarkable.

The woodwind-figurations are found later in the recapitulation of the second movement, complementing the movement's main theme. This episode is only constructed on thematic counterpoint if we choose to accept that the woodwind-figurations are not just isolated to the second movement, but are imported from thematic material from the first movement. Not only are the figurations quite identical; the combination of changing woodwind instrumentation, periodical leaps between them and their irregular shifts of physical direction immediately makes the impression of being highly thematic (Ex. 10):<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The String Serenade in C was written in 1880, only approximately two years after the 4<sup>th</sup> Symphony.

<sup>14</sup> Further there is a palpable resemblance with the first two measures of the main theme from the second movement of the Fourth Symphony and a substantial element from the first movement of the Second Symphony (see for example Symphony No. 2, first movement m. 92 and 99–100): Even though they interact in very different episodes from both a structural and textural point of view, they are constructed quite similarly, even in respect of phrasing. (The Fourth Symphony was composed between the first and the second version of the Second Symphony.)

**Example 9.** Subsidiary Theme / Thematic counterpoint

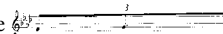
The musical score for Example 9 spans measures 120 to 122. It is written for a full orchestra. The top system (measures 120-121) features the Flute (Fl.) and Clarinet (Clar. (B), natura) parts, with dynamics ranging from *pp* to *p*. The middle system (measures 120-121) includes Violin I and II (Vn. I, II), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vcl.), and Contrabass (C.b.) parts, with dynamics from *pp* to *p*. The bottom system (measures 122) continues the Flute (Fl.) and Clarinet (Clar. (B), natura) parts, with dynamics from *p* to *pp*. The score includes annotations for 'ELEMENTS, THEME 2a (cont.)' and 'ELEMENTS, THEME 2b (cont.)', along with performance markings such as 'cantabile' and 'Fag.' (Fagot).

**Example 10.** Textural construction found in the second movement (resembling mv. 1)

The musical score for Example 10 spans measures 199 and 200. It is written for Woodwind (W.w.), Violin I (Vn. I), and Flute (Fl. 1). The score features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamics, including *p*. The top system (measures 199-200) includes Flute 1 (Fl. 1) and Violin I (Vn. I) parts. The bottom system (measures 199-200) includes Woodwind (W.w.) and Violin I (Vn. I) parts. The score includes annotations for 'Fag. 1', 'Cl. 1', and 'Ob. 1'.

The Codetta, starting at measure 161 (Ex. 11), also to some extent originates from the opening motto. It is introduced in the strings, while the trumpets and trombones first counterpoint the opening of the codetta between m. 161–4. This counterpoint in the brass echoes the thematic cell which dominates the transition leading on to it, communicating the spirit of the opening motto. This is felt primarily as a result of the permutation of motto-elements from mm. 3–4 (i.e. rhythm, note-repetition, melodic seconds or thirds).

From m. 165 Theme I-cells counterpoint a fragmented, permuted version of the codetta (now displayed as shuttered, broken seventh-chords),<sup>15</sup> the two layers retain a basic countermovement for every two measures. The subsequent restatement in the horns is counterpointed by the woodwinds and violins (from m. 169); a counterpoint which is even more closely related to the main theme, both as a result of its instrumentation and because of the conjunct cell-combinations, permuted as to give countermovement to the descending codetta-

<sup>15</sup> Although all the thematic material is derived from the opening motto, the last two notes of the  - cell, when played by the strings in conjunct motion, is so closely associated with the opening of the main theme that it is most often referred to as a Theme I - cell. Related to this typical rhythmization of parts of the Subsidiary Theme, see in particular mm. 86-91.

**Example 11.** (Thematic transition +) Thematic counterpoints

**m.155** (sempre string) **Moderato con anima**

Vn.I  
Vn.II (+Vla./Vcl. 8va b.) *p* *crescendo* (Vcl. 8va b.) *f*

161 Tr./Trbn. 8vb. **THEME I, PERM.** CODETTA PERM./  
Trbn. DEFrag.

Str. *fff* **CODETTA** **THEME I Cell**

166 Tr. Trbn. Tr.

**Example 12.** Voice structure and Thematic counterpoint (m. 169-74)

**m.155**

Vn.I  
(+Vla./Vcl. 8va b.) *p* *crescendo* (161) **CODETTA**

Vn.I *f* *fff*

Vn.I

(169) 4 Cor(nat.) *fff* (173)

Vn.I Vn.I,II **C.P.** *fff* Vn.I

Vn.I **(TUTTI)** *fff* +Vn.II in 8va b. +Vla. & Vcl. in 8va b.

Vn.I I  
II

Vn.I Vn. unis. Vla. Vcl. **OPENING**  
Vla. // C.b. **MOTTO**

triad. This broken chord – or ‘codetta-cell’ – is reshaped in a permuted/inverted form from m. 284 ff in the trombones, and in the Coda (mm. 399–402) just before the augmented restatement of the main theme.

Although the codetta-incident is not reworked to any notable extent during the development, it is treated and reworked quite radically during its presentation.

The string-part from measure 155 ff also demonstrates Tchaikovsky’s long-term planning of a single, predominant orchestral part; the first violin-part is rendered from measure 155 to the return of the motto at m. 192.<sup>16</sup>

Compared to similar voice-structures by other composers of the romantic era, the above quotation is not as unique and characteristic for the composer as Tchaikovsky’s thematic counterpoints. But the smooth transfer between registers, the equally smooth change of roles (the example encompasses e.g. the thematic counterpoint with the horns from m. 169) are, non-the-less, quite descriptive characteristics of this type of Tchaikovsky’s

<sup>16</sup> See also mm. 231–294.



voice structure (see also mm. 231–294 in this movement). It has thus a constructional side which carries the stamp of dialectical angling; not only is the listener directly confronted with the poly-linear episodes when they actually appear, the persistent voice-continuation increases the listener’s expectation for new poly-linear episodes – or at least contrasting layers – to occur.

The principle of thematic counterpoint must not be confused with more standard type of orchestral texturing, where motives are being complemented<sup>17</sup> in different orchestral parts. (The question-and-answer method is perhaps the most common and ordinary type of such complementary textures.) The type of procedure which is rendered in the next example is a borderline case; a rather common type of complementing texture bordering to the principle of thematic counterpoint. A discourse concerning an episode’s eventual poly-linear qualities may time and again relate to the question whether the continuation of existing layers turn to standard voice-leading procedures as soon as a new thematic entrance takes place. Although such procedures may be expertly executed, they may be of insignificant thematic importance. The question concerning the originality of a given thematically rooted counterpoint seems to be a demanding yet extremely interesting subject for future research. Here (Ex. 13) each voice, as a result of the most elegant voice-leading, carries traces of the concluding descent-motive from the motto, a motive which is found regularly throughout the movement (see for example m. 5–6, 48, 49, 50–52).

The reason for mentioning this example is to stress that the quality and originality of this type of textures leans towards a “quasi-thematic-counterpoint”, a procedure which Tchaikovsky is most often above.

The opening of the development is such a standard type of complementing texture, bordering to thematic counterpoint; the “anonymous” subsidiary layers are just vaguely rooted in thematic material (Ex. 13).

**Example 13.** Ordinary, motivic complementation

In example 14, thematic counterpoint is far more significant. As seen already in examples 3–11 Tchaikovsky’s thematic counterpoint usually creates a forward drive. But in these early episodes of the development section this propulsive effect is reduced by means of periodic halts in the counterpoints and a general withheld aloofness.

**Example 14.** Thematic counterpoint

<sup>17</sup> ‘Complementation’ is a term suggesting that two or more thematically founded parts relieve each other by no overlap or just a minimum of overlap. In this essay the lower limit for an episode aspiring for thematic counterpoint is set to a minimum of two notes. This limit is set for operational reasons. The larger the thematic overlap, the more profound the contrapuntal impact.

In our next example, once again the linear structure of the first violin part is worthy of comment: During the directional, arch-shaped “rise and fall” from m. 236 to m. 294 the violin-part conveys foregrounds and backgrounds; thematic material which is at times directly quoted from the theme, at other occasions developing organically from the theme. The part is formed as an extremely coherent organism, where much of the “accompanying” sections have their roots back to thematic material. Tchaikovsky rarely falls into excessive use of, for example, arpeggio, which is sometimes the case with Brahms. Even when the violins are supporting the fate-motto in the trumpets (m. 253 ff, 263 ff, one semi-tone transp., 278 ff), the violin-part is purely thematic (see Ex. 15).

There are similar examples of linear voice-planning for the first violins in mm. 334–55 and mm. 373–422.

**Example 15.** First violin-part, measures 236–294

m.236 (+ Vn.II)  
*sf* *mf* *cresc.* *f* (+ Vn.II & Vla.)

(243) (247) (+ Vn.II, Vla.&Vcl.)

*simile* *ff* *fff* **C.P. (TR.: OPENING MOTTO)** (-Vcl.) (I, II)

(255) (+Vn.II,Vla.)

(261) (TR.: OPENING MOTTO)

(266)

(271)

274 (LII) (+ Vn.II, Vla. & Vcl.) (TR.: OPENING MOTTO)

(279)

282 (I,II,Vla.) **MAIN THEME**

\* two measures respelled *mf* *dim.*

There is always the danger that thematic counterpoint may become “mechanical”, but Tchaikovsky’s thematic counterpoint is extremely versatile. Even at the rather simple manifestation from m. 236 (Ex. 16), he avoids mechanical transposition, even though the counterpoint is, to be sure, a repetitive (and not just necessarily an imitative) creation. The episode grows organically out of the previous strings-woodwinds dialectic, putting its mark on the episode proper (m. 234–6); forwarding it, and leaving its clear imprints on it.

**Example 16.** Thematic counterpoint – *comparatively insignificant*, in the shape of thematically rhythimized harmonic alterations

The previous episode leads up to a climax at measure 253, containing three thematic layers within the textural construction: 1: the introductory motto in the trumpets (this time on the minor scale's fifth degree), 2 & 3: descending and ascending (inverted) thematic layers in the upper and lower instruments respectively. The episode at m. 253 has a profound impact as a result of the clean-cut simultaneous three-part thematic handling, and not because of mere tone-coloristic effects (rather on the contrary; the coloristic aspect is almost erased as a result of the periodic doublings of the woodwind and brass-layers). There is practically nothing in the score which is not profoundly rooted in thematic material (except for the timpani, which are omitted in the rendering of the score).

In measure 254 the additional trombone-layer leads to a construction with four thematic layers, adding a thrilling rhythmic counterweight (Ex. 17):

**Example 17.** Thematic counterpoint

In order to make a clear argument for the thematic counterpoint in Example 19, a look back to, for example, measures 224–6 feels appropriate: In mm. 225–6 the violin-figuration is a discreet foreboding of what is going to happen in m. 258, established as a development of the syncopated accompaniment right in advance, absorbing the thematic development in the cellos and the first bassoon:

**Example 18.** Motivic coherence/development and thematic counterpoint

From measure 259 there is a change of scoring approach as regards strategy of mere instrumentation; the counter-directional thematic layers are no longer in the upper and lower parts respectively, but in the high and middle strings and woodwinds. The bass instruments (of both sections) turn towards a markedly more aggressive, bouncing and contrasting bass-line.

**Example 19.** Thematic counterpoint

The violin figuration in Ex. 20, which is stated in the violins at the return of the “Fate” motto, contains parts of the folk song in the Finale (notes 3–6). Thus the exact quotation of the string cell in Ex. 20 is re-found in a poly-linear episode from the finale (m. 146 ff). With Tchaikovsky, such whirling layers in tutti *ff*-episodes are often created from more than mere haphazard solutions; they tend to be thematically orientated.<sup>18</sup> The violin cell may, naturally, also be interpreted as a permuted quotation from the opening motto, but it is an even more direct link to the “Birch-Tree”-theme from the Finale:

**Example 20.** Thematic counterpoint (first movement)

<sup>18</sup> The Transfer-textures from the development of the first movement of the Sixth Symphony is another telling, quite similarly constructed example (mm. 171–205).

This semiquaver-figuration in the lower strings serves as re-transition and, at the same time, prepares the ground for the simultaneous restatement of the main theme, counterpointed by a permutation of the codetta. The permutation is crafted with the intention to achieve counter-movement, and the “codetta-triad” is broken in a way that results in enhanced formal counterpoint between the two themes.

**Example 21.** Motivic counterpoint

As a matter of form it ought to be mentioned that the start of the original statement of the codetta might be regarded as an expanded form of the string-motive from the Subsidiary Theme, just the way *that* motive is a stylization of an excerpt from the opening motto’s measures three and four: Driven to its logical conclusion, almost everything that happens in the movement derives from the opening motto:

**Example 22.** Thematic coherence

The restatement of the Subsidiary Theme ends with a fragment derived from the Motto and the Main Theme (and partially the b-part of the Subsidiary Theme). This fragment is subsequently augmented in the flutes and clarinets, counterpointed by another fragment from the same theme in the strings; a fragment-variation which has much in common with some earlier episodes. Rhythmically this layer is in accordance with the initial statements. This episode serves as an intermezzo – or rather a calm prelude – to the coda.

**Example 23.** Thematic counterpoint

The same motive is then further reshaped in the strings: Transferred between m. 381–89 from the middle to the upper register, it establishes itself as a counterpoint to fragments from the opening motto (in the trumpets and horns) from m. 389:

**Example 24.** Thematic counterpoint (from m. 389)

**m.381** *Molto più mosso* THEMATIC ELEMENT, TRACEABLE TO THE OPENING MOTTO, THEME I, THEME II

**m.385**

**389** INTRO. MOTTO  
Cor. III, IV  
Tr. I, Cor. I  
Tr. II, Cor. II

**393** Tr. II  
(+Cor. I, II 8va b.)

Even though we focus on thematic counterpoint on this occasion, one more suitable example of Tchaikovsky's linear transfer-method ought to be rendered: After the above episode is repeated, the concluding measures from 393 develop towards a permuted statement of the codetta triad at m. 399. The thematic cells in the strings climb to the top of that episode's register, and "hang" at mm. 399–401 while the brass play the codetta-permutation, after which the strings continue with a culminating variation of the main theme (m. 402 ff), rounding off the episodic arcade (Ex. 25).

**Example 25.** (from m. 393, *second* time) Textural design

**m.393 (2. v.)**

**399** **400**

BRASS: CODETTA PERM.

**402** *fff* (STR.: MAIN THEME AUG./PERM.)

*Più mosso. Allegro vivo*

In the romantic era – with the exception of his own preceding symphonies – no chief symphonic movement contained a greater amount of sharply contoured thematic counterpoint than that of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony until the time of its creation.

In the chief movements of the first three symphonies, the portions of thematic counterpoint are equally massive as in this main movement from the Fourth.

In the first symphony thematic counterpoint is driven to the extreme in the developments of the first and the fourth movements, almost in the entire first movement of the Second Symphony and also considerable portions of the outer movements of the Third Symphony.

Tchaikovsky did not confine himself to the usage of refined thematic counterpoint in his symphonies (included Manfred); the technique is almost equally present in his overtures and fantasias. Even works which would not – theoretically – seem to call for that type of intensified development, like for example *Capriccio*

*Italian* and *Marche Slave*, where richly supplied with sharply contoured thematic counterpoint. In this respect Tchaikovsky surpasses Brahms, who utilises such approaches only to a very modest extent in his smaller scale orchestral works.

### A fellow contemporary: Brahms's thematic counterpoint; a short addendum

Until about 1890 Brahms was – to this writer's knowledge – the most versatile practitioner of thematic counterpoint among the Western & Central European composers of the romantic period. His approach, to be sure, differs profoundly from that of Tchaikovsky. Although very interesting poly-linear passages may be found in his symphonies; like the Second Symphony (mvm. 1, m. 204 ff, mvm. 4, m. 177 ff) and the Fourth (mvm. 1, m. 393 ff), it may with some justification be held that the procedures in question are constructed from rather short motives, sometimes with just insignificant harmonic implications; see for example Symphony No. 1, mvm. 1, mm. 161 ff, 189 ff, 229 ff, Symphony No. 2, mm. 52, 136, 246.

In his book "Brahms and the principle of developing variation" Walter Frisch is partly critical to Brahms's development sections, finding some of his contrapuntal approaches "mechanical".<sup>19</sup> The following excerpt from the first movement of Brahms's first symphony might possibly be one such episode, which represents little more than a very standard, basic, traditional sequential progression, built upon short, identical blocks. If we search through Tchaikovsky's total symphonic output, we will not succeed in finding this type of extremely predictable solutions:

Example 26. Brahms: Symphony No. 1, first movement; thematic counterpoint

## Santrauka

### Čaikovskio orkestrinis stilius

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Pagrindinis pranešimo tikslas yra iškelti mintį, kad Čaikovskis su savo dualistiniu požiūriu į faktūrą yra didis orkestrinės muzikos architektas.

<sup>19</sup> Frisch, Walter: *Brahms and the principle of developing variation*, University of California Press, 1984, p. 121.