



# From Humanistic Interpretation to Intelligent Teaching: Influencing Factors, Structural Features, and Educational Implications of Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons*

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**Abstract.** To align with the conference theme of "Humanities, Smart Education, and Service Management," this paper discusses the core content of Tchaikovsky's piano suite *The Seasons*. Using the interaction between the 19th-century Russian socio-cultural context, national musical consciousness, and Western professional training as a thread, the paper systematically discusses the formation mechanism of Tchaikovsky's compositional philosophy. By examining the overall structure, form, tonality and harmony, thematic development, and piano performance techniques of *The Seasons*, the paper reveals how the work establishes a unified musical narrative between Russian life scenes, seasonal experiences, and Romantic lyrical expression. The study argues that *The Seasons* is not merely a collection of lyrical miniatures, but a mature piano suite that integrates Russian national cultural imagery, European classical formal order, and Romantic emotional expression. Most of the twelve pieces are based on the principles of simple or compound ternary parts, while enhancing structural coherence and aesthetic layers through modulation, sequence, thematic transformation, textural contrast, and major-minor key shifts. This paper translates teaching and performance conclusions into practical approaches for smart music education, proposing a digital teaching path centered on a three-pronged approach of "technology-culture-context," providing a reference for the understanding, interpretation, and cultivation of humanistic qualities in piano teaching.

**Keywords:** Tchaikovsky; *The Seasons*; Russian Folk Music; Piano Teaching; Smart Education.

## 1 Introduction

Tchaikovsky holds a pivotal position in the history of Russian music, bridging the past and the future. He differs from composers who solely rely on academic techniques, and is not entirely synonymous with members of the Russian national school known for its "purely nationalistic" stance. Instead, he developed a unique, comprehensive creative perspective, drawing upon Western European Romantic writing experience and the psychology of Russian indigenous culture. This paper explores two core questions:

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first, what were the key factors influencing the formation of Tchaikovsky's creative concepts? Second, what systematic characteristics does *The Seasons* exhibit in its structural organization and piano performance techniques?

This study employs a combination of textual research, historical context analysis, and musical score analysis, focusing not only on the political and social changes, the awakening of national consciousness, and cultural identity anxieties in 19th-century Russia, but also on the internal organization of *The Seasons* as a piano suite in terms of form, harmony, tonality, melody, and texture [1]. Unlike typical studies that view *The Seasons* merely as a collection of piano teaching pieces or lyrical miniatures, this study emphasizes that the work possesses a triple attribute: cultural text, musical structure, and teaching resource. This resonates well with the HWESM conference's focus on the integration of humanities, education, and technology.

## **2 The Shaping of Tchaikovsky's Creative Perspective by the Socio-Cultural Context of 19th-Century Russia**

### **2.1 Social Reform and Reconstruction of Cultural Identity**

The political and cultural changes in Russian society during the latter half of the 19th century are a crucial prerequisite for understanding Tchaikovsky's creative vision. Following the reforms of Alexander II, especially the abolition of serfdom, the social structure of Russia began to loosen, a middle class gradually formed in cities, and intellectual circles engaged in unprecedentedly active discussions about "what is Russia" and "how Russian art can establish its own identity while absorbing Western influences." Music was no longer merely an aesthetic decoration in aristocratic salons, but gradually assumed the functions of expressing national spirit, recording real life, and constructing cultural identity [2]. It was against this backdrop that Tchaikovsky developed an artistic stance that simultaneously embraced Western professional compositional techniques and actively absorbed the essence of Russian culture.

### **2.2 The Dual Role of National Consciousness and Western Training**

Tchaikovsky's uniqueness lies not in simply transplanting folk melodies, but in integrating the spirit of national music into a more mature European compositional logic. On the one hand, Russian aristocratic society had long admired French and German culture, and academic music education was deeply influenced by Western European traditions; on the other hand, ordinary people retained a rich tradition of folk songs, dances, religious chants, and seasonal ritual music. Tchaikovsky received rigorous Western professional training, yet his artistic sensibility consistently pointed to Russian life experiences, natural landscapes, and national psychology [3]. Therefore, unlike some nationalist composers who pursued direct folk song collages, he internalized national identity as part of his musical language through melodic progressions, tonal colors, rhythmic vitality, and the creation of atmosphere.

### **2.3 The Transformation from "Russian Life" to "Seasonal Narrative"**

*The Seasons* is a concentrated manifestation of this creative perspective. The twelve pieces correspond to the twelve months of the year, superficially depicting seasonal changes, but actually portraying Russian social life: hearth scenes, festive celebrations, spring larks, white night lyricism, summer barcarolles, fieldwork, hunting scenes, autumn contemplation, and Christmas celebrations [4]. In other words, Tchaikovsky did not abstractly depict nature, but rather connected seasonal experiences with concrete life, emotional memories, and cultural symbols, giving the works a distinct humanistic narrative quality.

## **3 The Structural Logic and Musical Expression Mechanism of The Seasons**

### **3.1 Overall Layout and the Ternary Principle of The Seasons**

The twelve works in *The Seasons* exhibit a highly consistent yet varied organizational structure. Generally, each piece is built upon the principle of a simple or compound ternary form, achieving narrative space and emotional layers through the use of introduction, transition, recapitulation, and coda [5]. This approach continues the balance and clarity valued in Classicism, but it is not bound by strict formal symmetry; rather, it serves the emotional development and scene depiction of Romanticism. In other words, Tchaikovsky did not abandon tradition at the formal level, but rather used tradition as a framework to incorporate Russian life scenes and subjective lyrical content, forming a distinct characteristic of "structural stability—emotional flow."

### **3.2 Comprehensive Use of Tonality, Harmony, and Thematic Development**

In terms of compositional techniques, various methods are employed, including modulation, sequence, transposition, thematic transformation, and phrase expansion [6]. It is noteworthy that the major-key works present a brighter, more lively, and extroverted atmosphere, while the minor-key works tend towards contemplation, melancholy, and introspection. Tchaikovsky did not merely adhere to the linear progression of functional harmony in his work; instead, he frequently employed color harmony, chromatic treatment, and modal shifts to enhance the emotional density of his music. This approach maintains the delicacy of European Romantic harmonic language while reflecting the Russian musical aesthetic preference for natural minor keys, modal blending, and folk tonal colors.

### **3.3 Seasonal Imagery, Life Narratives, and Cultural Encoding**

The value of *The Seasons* lies not only in its beautiful sound but also in its connection of seasons with life, nature with culture, and individual emotions with national

experience. Particular emphasis is placed on the domestic spaces, work scenes, festive activities, and natural landscapes depicted in the work, which collectively constitute a musical archive of daily life in 19th-century Russian society [7]. For example, the light motifs and lively textures in *March: Song of the Lark* convey a sense of awakening as spring returns to the earth; *June: Barcarolle* uses a continuous, lyrical melody and swaying accompaniment to create a gentle, flowing waterside atmosphere; *October: Autumn Song* uses descending lines, dark harmonies, and extended melodies to evoke a Russian sense of melancholy. Thus, seasons are no longer merely objective times, but become a symbolic system carrying cultural memories and national sentiments.

### 3.4 Structural Observation Using *June: Barcarolle* as an Example

*June: Barcarolle* is highly representative. Known for its highly lyrical main melody, layered accompaniment texture, and flexible rhythmic treatment, it is one of the most widely circulated pieces in *The Seasons*. The first part of this work employs a relatively clear ternary structure, with the theme unfolding against a flowing accompaniment background. Tension is built up through local modulations and textural variations, culminating in a cyclical conclusion achieved through the contrast and recapitulation in the middle section. Figure 1 shows the musical example of measures 5-6 of *June: Barcarolle*.

The image displays a musical score for measures 5 and 6 of 'June: Barcarolle'. The tempo is marked 'Andante cantabile'. The score is written for piano (p) and consists of two systems. The first system shows measures 5 and 6, with the right hand playing a melodic line and the left hand providing a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system continues the piece, showing measures 7 and 8. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 1. Musical example of measures 5-6 of *June: Barcarolle*.

As can be seen, the melodic line has a distinctly singing quality, while the left-hand accompaniment presents a rhythmic feel reminiscent of a boat swaying. The two are not simply in a dominant-subordinate relationship, but rather together create a sonic space interwoven with ripples, breath, and a sense of distant scenery.)

Analytically, *June: Barcarolle* illustrates how Tchaikovsky compressed "formality," "lyricism," and "nationalism" into a medium-length piano piece. On the surface, it is a lyrical work easily accessible to listeners; on a deeper level, it demonstrates a highly mature professional writing style through harmonic color, phrasing, and voice relationships. This duality of "superficial intimacy and internal refinement" is a key reason why *The Seasons* continues to be vital in teaching and research.

## 4 From Performance Technique to Smart Music Education

### 4.1 Technique Should Not Be Detached from Cultural Connotation

The Seasons' piano technique is not the end point of virtuosity, but a means of expressing musical meaning, stylistic details, and cultural temperament. Performers must not only handle timbre, touch, pedaling, phrasing, layering, and balance well, but also understand the context, season, and cultural imagery corresponding to each piece [8]. For example, in *June: Barcarolle*, the lyrical quality of the melody must be built upon a sense of breath and temporal flexibility; if one mechanically pursues legato and dynamic balance while ignoring the sense of floating on water, a sense of distance, and Russian lyricism, the music will lose its inherent poetic quality. Similarly, *February: Carnival* requires the dynamism and folk character of a festive scene, *July: Song of the Reaper* emphasizes the rhythm of labor and simple vitality, and *October: Autumn Song* demands meticulous emotional progression and long-line control [9].

### 4.2 Three Paths Towards Smart Music Education

First, constructing "structural visualization" teaching. Based on the results of form analysis, teachers can create digital musical notation, flowcharts, or interactive classroom presentations for each piece, illustrating its A-B-A logic, tonality changes, key motifs, and harmonic nodes. This allows students to understand how the music is organized while viewing the score.

Second, construct "culturally contextualized" teaching. Smart education is not simply about using technological tools; more importantly, it's about effectively bringing cultural background back to the classroom. Teachers can create cross-media resource packages that combine Russian history, festival customs, literary poetry, and seasonal imagery, allowing students to develop a multimodal understanding through listening, reading, watching, and playing. In this way, the analysis of a piece goes beyond pitch and rhythm, reaching the level of humanistic meaning.

Third, construct "data-driven" teaching. In piano teaching, recording playback, tempo curves, dynamic trajectories, pedal capture, or intelligent practice platforms can be used to periodically compare students' rhythmic stability, voice balance, coherence, and dynamic control. This data can then be correlated with the stylistic goals required by the piece. In other words, technical feedback is not meant to replace teacher judgment, but rather to help students see more clearly the gap between "what I played" and "what the work truly needs."

## 5 Conclusion

This paper argues that the academic value of Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons* lies in at least three levels. First, it is a musical and cultural text that clearly reflects the socio-cultural transformation, the development of national consciousness, and the composer's

personal aesthetic orientation in 19th-century Russia. Second, it is a highly mature Romantic piano suite in terms of form, harmonic arrangement, thematic development, and piano texture, demonstrating an effective fusion of Western technical skill and Russian national character. Third, it is also a work with enduring educational vitality; its value lies not only in performance training but also in unifying structural analysis, cultural understanding, and aesthetic interpretation. For presentations at HWESM 2026, the significance of *The Seasons* extends beyond a case study in music history. It suggests that in the context of smart education, the core task of the humanities is not to be replaced by technology, but rather to leverage technology to achieve deeper understanding, dissemination, and pedagogical transformation. Introducing the research findings of *The Seasons* into digital piano teaching, cross-media classrooms, and visualization analysis practices will not only help improve students' musical comprehension but also cultivate their cultural imagination and aesthetic judgment. Therefore, Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons* not only belongs to 19th-century Russia, but can also continue to generate new academic and pedagogical value in contemporary smart education scenarios.

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