

Extended Essay

Zixuan Zhao

Music

Tchaikovsky's methods in adapting La Marseillaise into the “*1812 Overture*”

How does Tchaikovsky incorporate the La Marseillaise into the 1812 Overture and developed a theme based on this material?

Word Count: 3963

Abstracts

Being one of Tchaikovsky's most influential and well-known orchestral pieces, the 1812 Overture has often been researched regarding its intense link to the historical context—the French Russian 1812 War—but seldom analyzed on its musical features and intricate design of themes. In this essay, Tchaikovsky's techniques and methods in incorporating the famous melody of La Marseillaise into the 1812 Overture and developing the material into theme will be analyzed and summarized.

Music theory and score analysis will be conducted on the 1812 Overture; the sections featuring the La Marseillaise will be located and analyzed in detail. Comparative analysis will be conducted between the original La Marseillaise and Tchaikovsky's re-arranged version in the 1812 Overture. All significant patterns and techniques sought will be summarized.

Based on the analysis, it is clear that Tchaikovsky has put great emphasis on the tension and energy building and releasing process when incorporating and developing the La Marseillaise material in the 1812 Overture. Some conspicuous and crucial technique/methods include: modulation, fragmentation, repetition and rising motion throughout; many more are discussed in the essay.

Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 General Introduction.....	4
1.2 About Tchaikovsky	4
1.3 About the 1812 Overture.....	5
1.4 About La Marseillaise	7
1.5 Methodology.....	8
2. Analysis.....	8
2.1 First Appearance.....	8
2.2 Second Appearance	19
2.3 Third Appearance	25
3. Conclusion.....	34
4. Bibliography	35

1. Introduction

1.1 General Introduction

Being one of the most famous compositions by Tchaikovsky, the 1812 Overture is best known by the world for its astonishing and innovative use of cannons in a symphonic piece. Personally, I appreciate and enjoy the majestic development sections more than the grandeur and well-remembered climax. The intricate, powerful and even magical development had always captured my ears and gifted me with excitement and energy. Among those development sections, the theme featuring the famous melody of La Marseillaise had been especially conspicuous and inspiring; the miraculous method Tchaikovsky used to create such huge power within the theme had long put me in wonder. However, existing researches on the 1812 Overture¹ and the composer² had primarily focused more on the historical context of the piece than the musical techniques that Tchaikovsky uses to incorporate and develop materials such as La Marseillaise. Thus, this essay would be dedicated to answer the **research question:**
how does Tchaikovsky incorporate the La Marseillaise into the 1812 Overture and developed a theme based on this material?

1.2 About Tchaikovsky

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1953) was considered as one of the greatest

¹ Gerald Abraham, "Tchaikovsky: Some Centennial Reflections," *Music & Letters* 21, no. 2 (April 1940): 110-19, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/727175>.

² Russian Anthology, "Tchaikovsky, Psychology, and Nationality: A View from the Archives," *19th-Century Music* 35, no. 2 (November 2011): 144-61, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2011.35.2.144>.

Russian composers of all time. Upon the first hearing of most of his works, listeners can immediately sense the existence of Russian elements, such as folk songs and certain harmonic arrangements. However, unlike his contemporary composers, who had exaggerated the importance of Russian folk materials as to make them the most prominent element their compositions³, his education in the Saint Petersburg Conservatory had allowed him to pour more thoughts over designing delicate harmonies, counterpoints and orchestrations⁴. As an international figure, Tchaikovsky seems to have a special love for music from other European cultures, especially French; the “borrowing” of structures and melodic ideas from these pieces can be frequently sensed in his music. The Western traditional, Viennese academical approach to craft music, combined with the composer’s Russian cultural background and familiarity with music and culture from other areas in the world, makes some of Tchaikovsky’s pieces extremely versatile and rich in cultural content; among those pieces, the 1812 Overture is perhaps the most well-known, representative and diverse masterpiece.

1.3 About the 1812 Overture

In middle 1880, Tchaikovsky was tasked to write a composition to be performed at the All-Russian Arts and Industry Exhibition the following year⁵. Being inspired by the

³ Russian Anthology, “Tchaikovsky, Psychology, and Nationality: A View from the Archives,” *19th-Century Music* 35, no. 2 (November 2011): 144–61, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2011.35.2.144>.

⁴ Alexander Poznansky, “Tchaikovsky: A Life – Tchaikovsky Research,” en.tchaikovsky-research.net, April 12, 2023, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/Tchaikovsky:_A_Life.

⁵ Pyotr Jurgenson to Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, letter, June 10, 1880.

then nearly completed Cathedral of Christ the Saviour⁶, which was built to commemorate Napoleon's defeat against Russia in 1812, the composer chose to write an overture about that triumph.

In January, 1812, the French army marched forth into the Russian lands under the lead of Napoleonic Bonaparte. The French forces quickly broke through the Russian defense and continued to march forward until they reached Moscow in September 14. Gradual but overwhelming losses along the way, the terrible winter weather and the tenacious Russian resistances forced Napoleonic to retreat his troops. The retreat continued under the fierce offensive of the Russian forces and resulted in a glorious victory of the Russians as they forced the French forces completely out of Russian territory⁷.



Figure 1 Oil painting depicting the 1812 Russia-French war.⁸

⁶ "The Year 1812 - Tchaikovsky Research," en.tchaikovsky-research.net, August 13, 2023, https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/The_Year_1812#cite_note-note2-3.

⁷ Fid Backhouse, "French Invasion of Russia | Description & Facts | Britannica," www.britannica.com, October 16, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/French-invasion-of-Russia>.

⁸ Bogdan Willewalde, The Russian-French War in 1812, November 11, 2014, Oil Painting, November 11, 2014, Fine Art America,

In the 1812 Overture, the composer dissected the 1812 war into different sections, each of them represented by different themes developed from the French and Russian culture to present the whole picture of the 1812 war and eulogize the triumph and mightiness of the Russian empire. This essay will focus on the most prominent and heavily developed theme, the La Marseillaise theme.

1.4 About La Marseillaise

La Marseillaise, France's national anthem, is possibly one of the world's most famous military songs. It was created in 1792 by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle, a captain in the French army, in response to the Prussian and Austrian invasion to the newly-revolutionized French Republic⁹. The lyrics of the song reflect the fervent desire for freedom and resistance against tyranny, calling the people of France to fight against the invaders and protect their own rights and liberty¹⁰; Its driving rhythm and triumphant melody evoke a sense of urgency and rallying courage, highlighting the spirit of revolution and resistance. Because of its popularity within the French republic, it has long been considered as a symbol of France itself. In the 1812 Overture, Tchaikovsky utilized this symbol abundantly to represent the advances and victories of the French forces.

<https://fineartamerica.com/featured/scene-from-the-russian-french-war-in-1812-oil-on-canvas-bogdan-willewalde.html>.

⁹ Celine Segueg, "The French National Anthem: History, Meaning, and Translation of La Marseillaise," LingoCulture, July 3, 2024, <https://lingoculture.com/blog/culture/french-national-anthem/>.

¹⁰ Alysa Salzberg, "Marseillaise: The Turbulent French National Anthem - with Lyrics," French Together, March 30, 2020, <https://frenchtogether.com/french-national-anthem/>.

1.5 Methodology

In fulfilling the research purpose and answer the research question, this essay will primarily conduct music theory and score analysis on the 1812 Overture, focusing on each of the sections where the La Marseillaise theme appears. To be specific, the scores will be analyzed in detail, regarding motives, color, texture, timbre and many more; underlying patterns and techniques behind the carefully crafted theme will be found and summarized at the end. Additionally, comparative analysis between the themes in 1812 Overture and La Marseillaise will be included to identify Tchaikovsky's techniques and intensions in incorporating the material into the piece.

2. Analysis

2.1 First Appearance

The La Marseillaise theme first appeared in the D section, or bar 96. It started with a miscellaneous but well-designed introduction in the strings on E flat minor. Rapid and furious sixteenth notes are played in multiple string (and woodwind) parts, performing ascending motion in general (figure 2); each of them perfectly transitions to the next one. Heavily accented eighth notes scatter throughout, adding to the creating of tension.

G flat major
E flat minor

Rapid sixteenth notes
smoothly transitioning
to the next

Heavily accented eighth notes
add tension

Figure 2 1812 Overture, bar 99-107¹¹

Then the orchestra keeps building tension and energy by a climbing repetition of eighth notes—which are mostly presented three in a row, starting on the upbeat (figure 3). Each group of three is a half note higher than before.

¹¹ By author

108

Eighths in groups of three
Each a half step higher than before

Ascending motion in each part
More parts added in gradually
Energy and tension built in

Ties linking eighth notes;
adding variance into the motion

Figure 3 1812 Overture, bar 108-114¹²

This march-like, determined repetition leads directly up to a climax, marked with the sudden clash of the cymbal. Afterwards, another rapid descending sequence of

¹² By author

sixteenth notes leads the orchestra into presenting the famous melody of La Marseillaise.

Figure 4 1812 Overture, bar 115-118¹³

In general, Tchaikovsky has managed to build great tension within a 20-bar introduction, which leads the piece from the grave and restrained ending of the previous

¹³ By author

theme to the exciting and energetic appearance of the La Marseillaise motive. The uneasy and restless nature of the introduction also foreshadows the great advantage that the French are gaining on the battlefield.

Throughout the entire piece, only one section of La Marseillaise is being used: the world-famous opening phrase (figure 5). Being heavily used throughout the entire piece, this is an important motive that directly represents the French forces.

Fieramente assai

Al lons, en - fants de la pa - tri - e ! Le jour de
gloire est ar - ri - vé.

Figure 5 La Marseillaise (original version), bar 1-5¹⁴

The composer has managed to make the motive more “neat” and somewhat martial. Most of the dotted notes are replaced by eighths and quarters; sixteenth notes are added to the beginning of each phrase; and the long, holding notes are being dissected into groups of steady quarters (figure 6). Compared to the original version, the re-arranged motive is more orderly and clearly punctuated—just like the uniform marches of the well-trained French troops—and has a stronger implication towards the martial nature of La Marseillaise, as well as corresponding with the invasive acts of the French.

¹⁴ Olivier Miquel, *La Marseillaise*, Score (Olivier Miquel, 2012),
<https://imslp.org/wiki/Special:ReverseLookup/176887>.



Figure 6 Comparison between the original opening line of La Marseillaise and the motive¹⁵

After the introduction, Tchaikovsky immediately presented 6 consecutive phrases featuring the motive. These phrases are all re-arranged to be in different keys, having different intervals, and assigned to different brass instruments:

Table 2 the phrases featuring the first appearance of La Marseillaise theme¹⁶

Number	Score			Key
1 (bar 119-121)	Hn III (F) <i>f marcato</i>	Hn IV (F) <i>f marcato</i>		G flat major
2 (bar 121-123)			Hn I (F) Hn II (F)	G flat major
3 (bar 123-127)			Cmt I (Bb) Cmt II (Bb)	B flat major
4 (bar 127-129)	Hn III (F) <i>f marcato</i>	Hn IV (F) <i>f marcato</i>		B flat major
5 bar (129-131)	Hn I (F) <i>f marcato</i>	Hn II (F) <i>f marcato</i>		F major
6 bar (131-135)			Tpt I (E) Tpt II (E)	F major

In some cases the motives are fragmented (phrases 1, 2, 4, 5) keeping only the first half. The shortened length and the ascending nature of the phrases naturally provides a great platform for rapidly changing keys and building tension.

¹⁵ By author

¹⁶ By author

There is a certain pattern behind all of the changing of keys: the first quarter note of each phrase is always the very same note as the last note of the previous phrase (figure 13). Because of the ascending nature of the phrases, the ending note is always higher than the first quarter note in the short phrases (1,2,4,5); in the complete phrases (3,6) these two are the same. This ensures that, by following this pattern of change, this repetition of the same motive naturally creates a sequence that is always rising and adding to the tension. This could also be considered as a representation of the forward-marching of the French troops.

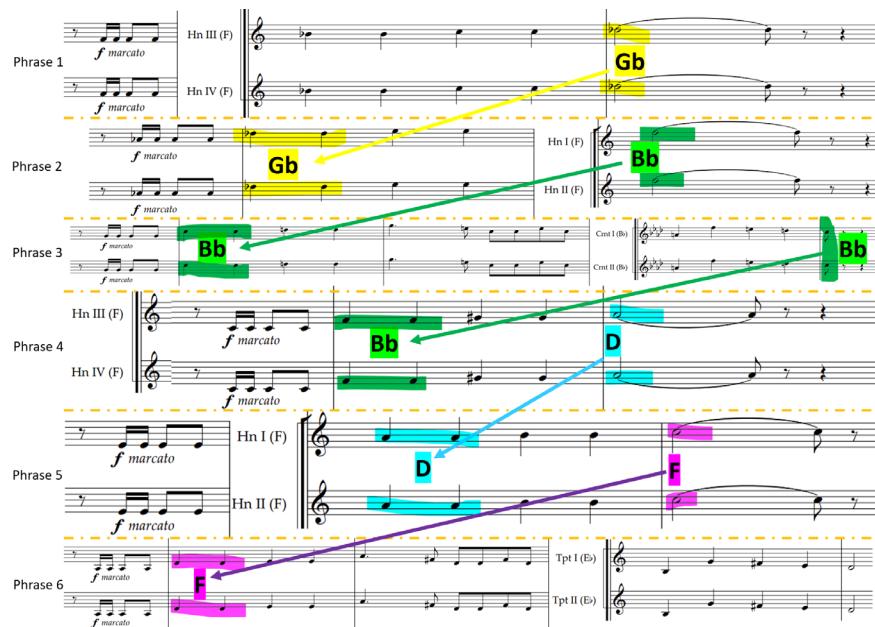


Figure 7 The pattern of changing keys within the phrases¹⁷

Additionally, the short phrases contain their own unique color, which are caused by their different intervals within (compared to the original version). While the original version of La Marseillaise follows the “Major 2nd—Perfect 4th” interval pattern, the short phrases here (table 2) follow “Major 2nd—Minor 2nd” and “Augmented 2nd—Minor 2nd” patterns. This change results in a more aggressive and negative mood

¹⁷ By author

imposed on the phrases, which is also correspondent to the invasive nature of the French troops.

The musical score displays five distinct phrases of brass instrumentation. The instrumentation includes four parts: Hn III (F), Hn IV (F), Hn I (F), and Hn II (F). The score is annotated with various interval patterns and performance markings:

- Original Phrase:** Starts with a melodic line labeled **M2** and a harmonic line labeled **P4**.
- Phrase 1:** Labeled **f marcato**. Shows a melodic line labeled **M2** and a harmonic line labeled **m2**.
- Phrase 2:** Labeled **f marcato**. Shows a melodic line labeled **A2** and a harmonic line labeled **m2**.
- Phrase 4:** Labeled **f marcato**. Shows a melodic line labeled **A2** and a harmonic line labeled **m2**.
- Phrase 5:** Labeled **f marcato**. Shows a melodic line labeled **M2** and a harmonic line labeled **m2**.

Figure 8 The difference in interval patterns¹⁸

Meanwhile, the strings and the woodwinds are performing sixteenth notes as decorative accompaniments, in similar manners to the introduction: furious, rapid, intense. Each of the sixteenth notes are compactly connected to the next, creating a “flowing” yet fierce atmosphere that surrounds the melody phrases in the brass section, as though mimicking the fierce winter winds that blows through the French troops, as they trampled over the Russian grounds. Similar to the introduction, this accompaniment also mainly serves to add tension into the piece.

¹⁸ By author

The musical score for the 1812 Overture, bar 123-125, is shown in a multi-staff system. The instruments listed on the left are Picc., Fl. I, Fl. II, Ob. I, Ob. II, C. A., I (B), II (B), Bsn I, Bsn II, n I (F), v II (F), III (F), IV (F), t I (B), II (B), t I (E), II (E), Tbn. I, Tbn. II, bn. III, Tba, Timp., S. Dr., Vln I, Vln II, Vla, Vc, and Dp. The score is divided into three main sections:

- Accompaniment** (bars 123-125): This section is enclosed in a green box and features continuous sixteenth-note patterns from various woodwind and brass instruments.
- Melody section** (bars 126-127): This section is enclosed in a red box and features eighth-note patterns from the bassoon (Bsn I) and double bass (Dp).
- Accompaniment** (bars 128-129): This section is enclosed in a green box and features continuous sixteenth-note patterns from the strings (Vln I, Vln II, Vla, Vc).

Figure 9 1812 Overture, bar 123-125¹⁹

After the six consecutive phrases, the theme turned into another miscellaneous yet organized section that utilizes rapid, continuous sixteenth notes and accented eighths—

¹⁹ By author

in the same manner as the introduction—to create another surge of tension and energy that builds up to a re-statement of La Marseillaise, at bar 149. Note that still, the composer has included only the famous opening phrase as the motive here; but it is treated as a small, local climax of the whole piece.

To start with, the brass section (besides the trombones and tuba) blasts out the motive with astonishing power—under the notation of “triple forte”. Along with the oboes and bassoons, they create a powerful and triumphant sound that represents the successes that the French forces are achieving on the battlefield. The motive is repeated three times consecutively; however, each time the number of parts playing it decreases: in the second time the cornets and trumpets drop out and in the last time it is only played by the clarinets and bassoons. This form of repetition effectively releases the energy of the climax, as well as the tension built previously, and prepares the upcoming transition into the fourth theme.

Figure 10 1812 Overture, bar 149-153²⁰

Figure 11 1812 Overture, bar 154-158²¹

The accompaniment here also corresponds with the releasing of energy in the melody line. The woodwinds and strings performed continuous lines of eighth notes (the strings playing with tremolo). Though these lines include both upward and downward movements, the overall trend is descending, and the lines are also transferred

²⁰ By author

²¹ By author

from higher instruments to those with lower ranges. These features make the accompaniment an effective aid in helping the piece releasing the tension and slowly lower its energy, and transition into the next theme.

The overall trend is descending despite occasional upward motions

Figure 12 1812 Overture, bar 149-153²²

To conclude, in the first appearance of the La Marseillaise theme, the following techniques and methods are featured: rapid and furious phrases repeated in ascending motions; re-arrangement of the La Marseillaise melody into the La Marseillaise motive; intense modulation, fragmentation and repetition of the La Marseillaise motive; brass tutti of the motive at the climax; and repetition of the motive with reduction to release the energy.

2.2 Second Appearance

The La Marseillaise theme appeared again at section J, or bar 224. Similarly, it opens with an introduction, as miscellaneous and orderly as the introduction into the first appearance. However, this time the La Marseillaise motive is made to be shown early during, or even before the introduction, as shown below in figure 13.

²² By author

A combination of eighth notes with staccatos and furious sequences of sixteenth notes is performed in the strings to quickly build tension and unrest from the tranquil atmosphere of the previous theme's ending. Then a familiar motive shows up: the climbing sequence of three eighth notes in a pair, starting on the upbeat, as shown in figure 3, re-appears here. However, it is stretched into quarters and only repeats two times before the melody takes over. Meanwhile, a solo trumpet plays an accompaniment that features the iconic rhythm derived from the La Marseillaise motive: two successive sixteenth notes, combined with steady eighths. The display of the “triple-eighths” motive and rhythmic accompaniment further accumulates energy into the piece.

31

rhythmic motive`

Fast sixteenth notes + eighth notes with staccato

Motive re-presented

re-arranged form of the melody line

Figure 13 1812 Overture, bar 224-235²³

Like the first appearance of the theme, Tchaikovsky still only used the opening phrase of La Marseillaise here. However, he re-arranged the motive more intensely and combined them in a more complex way:

²³ By author

Ob. I

Cl. I (B♭)

Cl. II (B♭)

Bsn I

Bsn II

Hn I (F)

Hn II (F)

Hn III (F)

Hn IV (F)

Tpt I (E♭)

Tbn. I

S. Dr.

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Ab Major

Db Major

Ascending motion

Emphasis on the new key

Ab **Db** **Emphasis on the new key**

Emphasis on the new key

Ab **A** **Emphasis on the new key**

Ascending motion

Figure 14 1812 Overture, Theme 3, bar 229-232²⁴

The motivic phrases are assigned to multiple parts and enters in pairs—in a fugato

²⁴ By author

style (figure 14). The horns enter first, followed by the bassoon and trombone, then the violins and violas, and finally the oboe and trumpet. Each of those pairs have their own re-arranged phrases, but they are all based on the original phrase for they share some identical traits: the two successive sixteenth notes at the beginning, a subsequent perfect fourth leap upwards, and two (or four) successive quarter notes. Additionally, the pairs are arranged in such a way that an overall ascending pattern is established; it is either that the next pair entering is higher than the current pair, or that the pairs perform steady, upward motion within themselves. This repetition or fugato results in the continuous building of tension throughout.

Similar to the first appearance, changes in harmony occurs, adding more dramatic element and complexity into the piece and contributes to the tension-building (figure 20). The horns first entered in A flat major. However, with a sudden change from an A flat to G flat in the first two beats of bar 231, the key is changed into D flat major. Although the sudden change from the tonic to a passing tone might sound awkward, the composer added another series of eighth notes that further confirms the transition and fully leads the section into D flat major.

The key is simultaneously transitioned in the strings, where an A flat is followed by a minor 2nd interval, leading to A; the subsequent upward motion of B flat, C and D flat leads the section directly to the tonic of the new key, and solidifies the dominance of D flat major. Besides, the entering of the oboe and trumpet lines, which emphasizes D flat's position as tonic, helps establish the new key.

This arrangement of the melody phrase occurred again after three bars. However,

this time, through a brief transition in the strings, the lines entered in the key of A major. The passage remained in the same form, but is simultaneously raised by one half note. This uprising, though subtle and inconspicuous, gives a general sense of rising energy into the theme.

Figure 15 1812 Overture, Theme 3, bar 233-235 (transition in the strings)²⁵

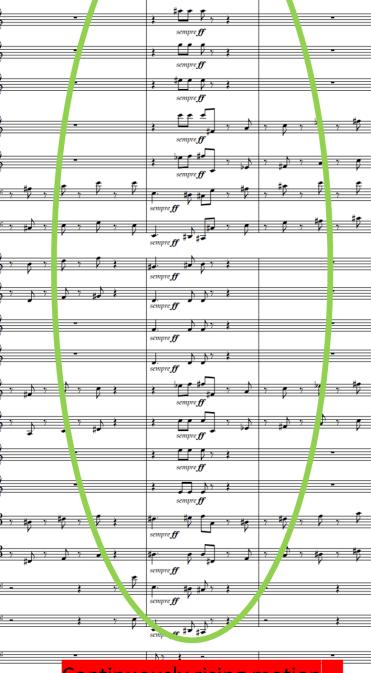
The rest of this appearance is very much like the last one, thus will not be elaborated again. After the introduction discussed above, the introduction went on to build tension and energy through furious, continuously ascending sequences of sixteenth notes, accented eighth note, and aided with fierce punctuation in the percussion part. Then the climax is reached, the brass section blasts out the melody phrases of La Marseillaise again to emphasize the success of the French forces, and quickly calms down—just like

²⁵ By author

the ending of the last appearance.

247

Picc. Fl. I Fl. II Ob. I Ob. II C. A. Cl. I (B) Cl. II (B) Ban I Ban II Hn I (F) Hn II (F) In III (C) In IV (F) mrl I (B) mrl II (B) 'ptl I (B) 'ptl II (B) Tbn. I Tbn. II Trsn. III Tim. Cym. B. Dr.



Accented eighth notes

Vln I Vln II Vla Dcl. Dcl.



**Continuously rising motion—
to build energy & tension**

Figure 16 1812 Overture, bar 247-249²⁶

Introduction-building tension

263

Perc.

Fl. I

Fl. II

Ob. I

Ob. II

C. A.

L. I (Bb)

L. II (Bb)

Bsn. I

Bsn. II

In I (F)

In II (F)

(III) (F)

IV (F)

L. I (Bb)

L. II (Bb)

Thns. I

Thns. II

Thns. III

Thns. IV

The brass blasting out the melody phrases

Contrasting, descending motion in accompaniment
Foreshadowing the failure of the French

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla

Vc

Dbs.

Figure 17 1812 Overture, bar 263-267²⁷

Climax-presenting La Marseillaise melody phrase

To conclude, in the second appearance of the theme, the following techniques and methods are featured: frequent appearance of rapid/accented sequences in ascending motion as accompaniment; re-arrangement and fragmentation of the La Marseillaise motive; fugato structure and intricate modulation; brass tutti at the climax; and gradual reduction in the tutti with repetition of the La Marseillaise motive.

26 By author

²⁷ By author

2.3 Third Appearance

The third appearance of La Marseillaise is perhaps one of the most exciting and shocking passage in classical music. It starts at bar 307, right after the tranquil ending of the last theme. In the low and somber humming of the double bass and timpani, the horns bring out the opening phrase of La Marseillaise in the key of E flat major:

Figure 18 1812 Overture, bar 307-314²⁸

The whole motive is presented two times in the horn parts. Right after the first display of the motive, the strings play a transition passage that leads from the E flat major to the F minor: a rapid descending sequence of eighth and sixteenth notes that features the rhythm of the motive, with appearances of D flat to indicate the change to the F minor key. Then the horns play the motive another time, though in F minor, and all notes have been raised by a major 2nd, which adds to the tension-building process.

Afterwards, the key continued to rise. Here Tchaikovsky has isolated the first two

²⁸ By author

beats of the motive and treated it as a rhythmic representation of the motive; orderly arranged eighth and quarter notes followed. This type of short phrase is considered as a tool for the composer to quickly change keys (and thus build tension) with the modulation from phrase to phrase (in a fugato form), while retaining fragments of the motive to link the passage to the French forces:

Figure 19 1812 Overture, bar 315-317, horns section²⁹

After the complete motive has been presented the second time in bar 311-313, another similar transition in the strings led to the first short phrase discussed above (figure 20). This phrase entered in the key of G minor, which is yet another major 2nd above the last presence of the motive (in F minor, figure 18).

²⁹ By author

Figure 20 1812 Overture, bar 315-319³⁰

The short phrases in the first and second horns kept modulating from G minor to C minor through a perfect 4th upwards leap, which builds more tension and energy into the theme. Accompanying short phrases in the third and fourth horns aids the modulation by remaining in the previous key and resolving to the next key through leading tones. The strings, still playing the rapid sixteenth notes sequences, helps

³⁰ By author

transitioning from phrases to phrases and modulates through subtle changes in notes in the sequences.

In bar 330, the woodwinds then joined the horns (in unison) to play the short phrases together (figure 21); the eighth notes in the phrases are now changed to quarter notes, replacing the agility with more energy and passion. The consecutive phrases quickly ascended from A flat major to G flat major.

The modulation, like the previous few bars, is aided by other phrases in this fugato (figure 22): the trombones, bassoons and violas playing fragments of the phrase, as well as the violins playing the rapid sixteenth notes sequences, performed resolutions from leading tones to the tonic of the next key.

Ab major

Gb major

Fl. I

Fl. II

Ob. I

Ob. II

C. A.

Cl. I (B_b)

Cl. II (B_b)

Bsn I

Bsn II

Hn I (F)

Hn II (F)

Hn III (F)

Hn IV (F)

Changing from eighth notes to quarters

Fragments of the phrase
Leading tone to the new key

Figure 21 1812 Overture, bar 320-323, woodwinds and brass³¹

³¹ By author

Figure 22 1812 Overture, bar 320–323, brass and strings³²

Starting on bar 324, the short phrases are made even shorter by cutting it in half, only left with the rhythmic representation of the motive and an ascending sequence. Consequently, with the cornets and trumpets playing in rapid succession and the woodwinds in unison, the modulation is made even faster, piling up extensive energy and tension: in merely four bars, the key changed four times: from D flat major to E flat, F and G flat major (figure 23). The short phrases are being repeated four times by the cornets and trumpets, each one higher than the last one—with major 2nd step between the first three phrases, and a minor 2nd step between the third and fourth phrase. The strings performed tremolos on descending sequences of quarter notes in contrast to the rest of the orchestra, adding color to the uniform modulation (figure 24). This passage, with its rapid, fierce modulation quickly builds up great energy and tension, pushing the piece into the greatest climax.

³² By author

Figure 23 1812 Overture, bar 324-327, woodwinds and brass sections³³

Figure 24 1812 Overture, bar 324-327, strings section³⁴

After the last short phrase, which ends on G flat major, the trumpets and cornets blast out the last, most powerful appearance of the La Marseillaise motive, bring the whole piece to its grandeur climax:

³³ By author

³⁴ By author

Figure 25 1812 Overture, bar 328-330³⁵

The motive starts off by an upwards major 2nd step from the previous short phrase (figure 23). Besides the first two beats, the entire motive is being stretched from quarter notes to halves, slowing down the overall pace and allow more thorough release of the tension built before. Being at the climax, every part is instructed to be played at the maximum volume in order to create an atmosphere as strong as possible, as indicated by the “ff” and “marcatissimo” (meaning in heavily accented manner³⁶) marks (figure

³⁵ By author

³⁶ Collins Online Dictionary, “Marcatissimo,” in *Collins Online Dictionary*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/marcatissimo>.

25). The natural sonorous and bright timbre of the trumpets and cornets displays this world-famous motive in a fierce, powerful and even unconquerable manner.

Similar to before, the strings and woodwinds bring out accompaniment in downwards stepwise motion of eighths (the strings performing in a tremolo-styled manner). This creates contrasting motion in relation to the energetic, upward moving motive of La Marseillaise, adding to the presentation of the tension.

One of the most famous and remembered features of this piece is its surprising use of real cannons. Those first appeared in this climax, as shown in figure 25. Its accompaniment not only creates a grandeur and overwhelming atmosphere, but also corresponds with the martial nature of this theme.

In general, this climax, through its use of strong brass, as well as cannon, blasts, gives La Marseillaise its most recognizable and powerful presence throughout the whole piece—even throughout history—that mainly depicts the last and largest victory that the French armies have gained before they started to retreat from the fierce counterattack from the Russian forces.

To conclude, in this appearance, the following techniques and methods are featured in the manipulation of tension: frequent occurring/repeating La Marseillaise motive; fragmentation and intense modulation of the motive; overall ascending motion; and grandeur brass tutti at climax, accompanied by blasts of cannons.

3. Conclusion

This essay, through music theory and score analysis and comparative analysis of the 1812 Overture, investigates Tchaikovsky's various manipulations on the La Marseillaise material and characteristic techniques in transforming it into a full theme. In general, each of the appearances of the theme has three sections: a development passage, a climax, and a restoration passage; in each of the sections, different techniques are featured

The development passage mainly aims to create tension and accumulate energy, preparing for the climax. Devices such as modulation, repetition and fragmentation are used. Conspicuous ascending motion and intense decorative accompaniment lines are also included. While the use of each might alter between different appearances, they all effectively prepare tension and energy for the climax. The climax displays the tension and energy created previously, with the blasting of brass sections and intense accompaniment throughout creates grandeur and magnificent sounds. The resolution features the gradual reduction of lines playing, fragmentation and descending motion throughout that effectively releases the tension and energy.

Thus, highlighting Tchaikovsky's emphasis on the tension and energy building and releasing process, it can be stated that Tchaikovsky incorporates La Marseillaise into the "1812 Overture" and developed its theme mainly through modulation (of the motivic materials), fragmentation (of the motives), repetition (of the motives and phrases), overall ascending motion and many other methods of tension building and resolving.

4. Bibliography

2. Abraham, Gerald. "Tchaikovsky: Some Centennial Reflections." *Music & Letters* 21, no. 2 (April 1940): 110–19. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/727175>.
3. Anthology, Russian. "Tchaikovsky, Psychology, and Nationality: A View from the Archives." *19th-Century Music* 35, no. 2 (November 2011): 144–61. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2011.35.2.144>.
4. Backhouse, Fid. "French Invasion of Russia | Description & Facts | Britannica." www.britannica.com, October 16, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/event/French-invasion-of-Russia>.
5. Collins Online Dictionary. "Marcatissimo." In *Collins Online Dictionary*. Accessed September 3, 2024. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/marcatissimo>.
6. en.tchaikovsky-research.net. "The Year 1812 - Tchaikovsky Research," August 13, 2023. https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/The_Year_1812#cite_note-note2-3.
7. Encyclopedia Britannica. "Sinfonia | Music," June 17, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/art/sinfonia-music>.
8. Jurgenson, Pyotr. Letter to Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Letter, June 10, 1880.
9. Miquel, Olivier. *La Marseillaise*. Score. Olivier Miquel, 2012. <https://imslp.org/wiki/Special:ReverseLookup/176887>.
10. Norris, Geoffrey. "Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture: The Complete Guide." Gramophone, May 1, 2018. <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/features/article/tchaikovsky-s-1812-overture-the-complete-guide>.
11. Peter, Burkholder J. "The Uses of Existing Music: Musical Borrowing as a Field." *Notes* 50, no. 3 (1994): 851–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/898531>.
12. Poznansky, Alexander. "Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky | Biography, Compositions, & Facts." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*, February 14, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pyotr-Ilyich-Tchaikovsky>.
13. ———. "Tchaikovsky: A Life - Tchaikovsky Research." en.tchaikovsky-research.net, April 12, 2023. https://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/Tchaikovsky:_A_Life.
14. Salzberg, Alysa. "Marseillaise: The Turbulent French National Anthem - with Lyrics." French Together, March 30, 2020. <https://frenchtogether.com/french-national-anthem/>.
15. Segueg, Celine. "The French National Anthem: History, Meaning, and Translation of La Marseillaise." LingoCulture, July 3, 2024. <https://lingoculture.com/blog/culture/french-national-anthem/>.
16. Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Ilyich. *The Year 1812 Manuscript*. May 1882. Score. Moscow. Russian National Museum of Music.
17. Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Ilyich, Tchaikovsky Research, and Brett Langston. *The Year 1812 Festival Overture Score*. January 1, 2007. Score. <https://imslp.org/wiki/Special:ReverseLookup/18473>.
18. Wikiwand. "Wikiwand - French Overture." Accessed July 21, 2024. https://www.wikiwand.com/en/French_overture#google_vignette.
19. Willewalde, Bogdan. *The Russian-French War in 1812*. November 11, 2014. Oil Painting. Fine Art America. <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/scene-from-the-russian-french-war-in-1812-oil-on-canvas-bogdan-willewalde.html>.