

FACT SHEET

Symphony No. 4

Taneyev (1856-1915)

Composed: 1898

Genre: Orchestral

First Performed: Leipzig, 1901

Length: 33 mins

In Brief:

In Sergey Taneyev's music, the charm of Tchaikovsky meets the rigour of Brahms, and in the case of the work heard at this concert, the soaring silhouette of Richard Strauss is detectable too. The Fourth Symphony is Taneyev's great orchestral masterpiece: from its arresting opening bars flows an energetic, voluptuous piece that wrings everything from its huge orchestra, climbing summit after summit, and arriving magnificently at a gleaming brass-drenched finale – a largely unknown, but utterly irresistible work.

Structure:

- I. Allegro Molto
- II. Adagio
- III. Scherzo
- IV. Finale: Andante Energico

In Depth:

Having been taught by both Tchaikovsky and Nikolay Rubinstein throughout his life, Sergey Taneyev was well positioned to assume the position of Harmony Teacher at the Moscow Conservatory upon Tchaikovsky's retirement. Whilst in this position his compositional output increased and in May 1885 he reluctantly accepted the position of Director. Taneyev was regarded as one of the most proficient Russian teachers of his generation, and he enjoyed the opportunity to mentor students including Skryabin and Rachmaninov. Despite this, he became increasingly frustrated with the time demands of the job and in 1889 after only four years, he resigned in order to focus on composition.

In the period following, Taneyev spent a great deal of time working on his first and only opera *The Oresteia*, as well as writing a comprehensive book on counterpoint, a method that greatly

interested him. His technique was so detailed that he never wrote a single part of a composition until the whole work had been planned, its high and low moments pre-determined. For this reason his scores are among the most well maintained in Russian music. Symphony 4 in C minor is a wonderful example of the precise and thoughtful composer Taneyev had become.

His final symphony is marked by rich textures engineered with polish. The first movement is generally considered his finest instrumental work and abounds with dramatic inspiration. The slow movement opens with an emotive melody, expansively treated. Its lyrical charm is evident in the ethereal violin solo that ends the movement on a sustained high note. This is followed by a capricious scherzo, where Taneyev gleans delightful colour and vibrancy from the woodwind section. The finale introduces a more serious mood, tying together themes from the previous movements with sufficient weight to ensure unity.

Interestingly, Taneyev was rarely content with his musical accomplishments. This symphony was originally titled Symphony 1 (despite being his fourth) – indicating his satisfaction at finally offering what he would consider a worthy symphony.