



S. Prokofiev: Symphony No. 5 & P. Tchaikovsky: Romeo and Juliet

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Mily Balakirev, one of the 'Mighty Five' amateur Russian composers of the mid-eighteenth century, encouraged Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to write a piece based on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, knowing that Tchaikovsky had recently emerged from his infatuation with a Belgian soprano named Désirée Artôt. Balakirev continued to make suggestions about the work throughout the ten years before the final version was published in 1880. Described as an 'Overture-Fantasy' by its composer, the overall design is a symphonic poem in sonata-form with an introduction and an epilogue. The work has become one of the most popular in the classical repertoire and its passionate love theme has been used in many movies, including Wayne's World. Sergei Prokofiev's monumental Fifth Symphony was premiered in 1945 in the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory by the USSR State Symphony Orchestra conducted by the composer himself. The Red Army had announced its victory in the war a few minutes before the premiere, so the heroic spirit of the work fitted perfectly. The music was a great success at its premiere and remains one of Prokofiev's most popular works. This rewarding SACD release features fine performances of both these fine Russian works by the Novosibirsk Academic Symphony Orchestra, directed by its permanent guest conductor, Thomas Sanderling. Founded by the government in 1956 to enliven Siberian cultural life, this orchestra has subsequently acquired an increasingly international reputation, giving concert tours throughout Western Europe and Japan.