

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

Les Saisons (The Seasons), Op. 37a (1876)

Titles	Performers
1. <i>Janvier: Au coin du feu</i> (January: At the Fireplace)	Alex Wong
2. <i>Février: Carnaval</i> (February: Carnival)	Enrico Elisi
3. <i>Mars: Chant de l'alouette</i> (March: Song of the Lark)	Dudley Du
4. <i>Avril: Perce-neige</i> (April: Snowdrops)	Ashley Chua
5. <i>Mai: Les nuits de mai</i> (May: White Nights)	Matteo Longarini
6. <i>Juin: Barcarolle</i> (June: Barcarole)	Gloria Chae
7. <i>Juillet: Chant du faucheur</i> (July: Song of the Reaper)	Vincent Li
8. <i>Août: La moisson</i> (August: The Harvest)	Vincent Li
9. <i>Septembre: La chasse</i> (September: The Hunt)	Dudley Du
10. <i>Octobre: Chant d'automne</i> (October: Song of Autumn)	Ye-Eun Kwag
11. <i>Novembre: Troika</i> (November: At the Troika)	Frederic Situmorang
12. <i>Décembre: Noël</i> (December: Christmas)	Chonglin Xu

When the St. Petersburg journal *Nuvelist* commissioned a monthly piano piece for 1876, Tchaikovsky met the assignment with characteristic ambivalence — and characteristic brilliance. The twelve pieces, legend has it, were delivered almost absent-mindedly. Yet this cycle is among the most searching in the salon repertoire. It quietly refuses the genre's decorative expectations. The title promises nature; the music delivers interiority. Each piece carries an epigraph drawn from Russian poetry — Pushkin, Fet, Pleshcheyev, Maikov. These verses set the emotional register more than any pictorial program could. January is not cold: it is firelit and inward. The piano's singing line floats above a rocking accompaniment, like thought above sensation. June's *Barcarolle* does not describe a boat. It enacts the peculiar melancholy of summer ease — the way pleasure and loss feel identical in long northern dusk. October's *Autumn Song* is among the most desolate pages Tchaikovsky ever wrote. Its descending chromatic inner voices anticipate the fatalism of the late symphonies.

What holds the cycle together is less thematic recall than a consistent pianistic voice. This voice shapes phrases that sing out in long, seamless melodies. It instinctively uses waltz rhythm, representing both joyful moments and fleetingness. Even the simplest changes in harmony are given strong expressive meaning. Heard as a whole, *The Seasons* becomes a portrait of

character rather than a calendar. The year passes as a Russian soul experiences it — celebratory, mournful, sometimes briefly joyful. In the end, as November's troika disappears into whiteness, only stillness remains.

Poems

Janvier (January): Au coin du feu (At the Fireside)

A little corner of peaceful bliss,
the night dressed in twilight;
the little fire is dying in the fireplace,
and the candle has burned out.
(Alexander Pushkin)

Février (February): Carnaval (Carnival)

At the lively Mardi Gras
soon a large feast will overflow.
(Pyotr Vyazemsky)

Mars (March): Chant de l'alouette (Song of the Lark)

The field shimmering with flowers,
the stars swirling in the heavens,
the song of the lark
fills the blue abyss.
(Apollon Maykov)

Avril (April): Perce-neige (Snowdrop)

The blue, pure snowdrop — flower,
and near it the last snowdrops.
The last tears over past griefs,
and first dreams of another happiness.
(A. Maykov)

Mai (May): Les nuits de mai (Starlit Nights)

What a night! What bliss all about!
I thank my native north country!
From the kingdom of ice, from the kingdom of
snowstorms and snow,
how fresh and clean May flies in!
(Afanasy Fet)

Juin (June): Barcarolle (Barcarolle)

Let us go to the shore;
there the waves will kiss our feet.
With mysterious sadness
the stars will shine down on us.
(Aleksey Pleshcheyev)

Juillet (July): Chant du faucheur (Song of the Reaper)

Move the shoulders,
shake the arms!
And the noon wind
breathes in the face!
(Aleksey Koltsov)

Août (August): La moisson (Harvest)

The harvest has grown,
people in families cutting the tall rye down to the
root!
Put together the haystacks,
music screeching all night from the hauling carts.
(A. Koltsov)

Septembre (September): La chasse (Hunting)

It is time! The horns are sounding!
The hunters in their hunting dress
are mounted on their horses;
in early dawn the borzois are jumping.
(A. Pushkin, Graf Nulin)

Octobre (October): Chant d'automne (Autumn Song)

Autumn, our poor garden is all falling down,
the yellowed leaves are flying in the wind.
(Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy)

Novembre (November): Troïka (Troika)

In your loneliness do not look at the road,
and do not rush out after the troika.
Suppress at once and forever
the fear of longing in your heart.
(Nikolay Nekrasov)

Décembre (December): Noël (Christmas)

Once upon a Christmas night
the girls were telling fortunes:
taking their slippers off their feet
and throwing them out of the gate.
(Vasily Zhukovsky)