



AP European History

The 1812 Overture (1882)

Name:

Section:

The 1812 Overture (1882)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

The Tchaikovsky 1812 overture actually tells a true story using music.

The historical event the piece describes is Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's disaster-filled invasion of Russia in the winter of 1812.

The French Emperor's army seemed pretty much near invincible at the time, since they'd invaded and conquered most of the other countries in Europe.

So Napoleon thought he'd add to his collection of countries and invade Russia.

But he didn't take into account how huge and cold Russia was, and his army ended up being wasted away as they marched for months trying to keep up with the Russians.



The piece starts in a sombre mood, evoking the praying of Russians all over the country after the announcement that Napoleon's army was on its way...

We hear the evil French army approaching, with their national anthem (La Marseillaise) in the distance...

...who soon engage in ferocious battles. Their anthem grows louder and stronger. As the patriotic Russians start to band together to protect their Motherland, we hear beautiful Russian music...

The French anthem and the Russian folk music play over the top of one another, depicting the huge battle near Moscow.

Just as the French are winning and the Russians losing all hope, we here the dramatic sound of church bells, of divine intervention - God is saving Russia!

He brings about a destructively cold winter which drives the French army away. You can even hear the icy winds whirling in the strings.

The Russians capture their cannons and celebrate, with the anthem God Save the Tsar:

Interestingly, neither the national anthems in the Tchaikovsky 1812 Overture were actually used at the time of the French invasion.

"Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture Triumphant Festival Music." *Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Dec. 2013.