



4 Pieces of Classical Music That Altered the Course of My Life

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We all have moments that drastically change our outlook on our lives and how we are living them. There's always something that triggers these moments. It could be an event, a conversation, or even a work of art. As art is such an important part of my life, works of art inspire me the most... especially music.

Whether it was experienced in person or through a recording, music has time after time made me think about the trajectory of my life and my lifestyle. However, there are only a few pieces that have drastically changed everything, including my private life and my professional life.

Pini di Roma, P 141 (The Pines of Rome)

Ottorino Respighi (1879 – 1936)

For most of my childhood, I was convinced that one day I would be a writer. I wanted to write the next great novel, and I would dream about my plots for months on end. I can distinctively remember the plot to a novel that I had (which I will refrain from mentioning in case I decide to pursue writing it), and I would take walks through the forest surrounding my childhood home for inspiration and to imagine how the story would visually look.

Being a writer was my absolute dream. In my 8th grade yearbook, you can find my picture with a caption underneath saying just that. When I got to high school, that dramatically changed. My high school band director, seeing my growing interest in classical music, suggested I listen to *The Pines of Rome* whenever I had the time. In a time where I could barely figure out how to locate anything on the internet, I somehow was able to find a recording of this work.

The minute the piece started, my entire world shattered around me. I had a new goal in life, and it was to be a musician. I could think of nothing else. Of course, up to this point I had been heavily involved in music. I went to all the band festivals I could in middle school, went to a music summer camp at Marywood University, what would become my undergraduate institution, and had toured through the northern mid-West U.S. with the Pennsylvania All-State Lions Band. It wasn't until I heard *The Pines of Rome* that I dedicated my life to classical music. I didn't know what path within music I wanted to take, but I knew my career had to be within classical music.

Since I first heard this work, I have experienced it several times. 90% of those experiences are just of the final movement involving the addition of additional brass scattered in different spots throughout the concert hall. I have yet to witness the full work in person, but I hope that one day I will get the chance and relive the moment I decided to pursue a musical career.

Carmina Burana

Carl Orff (1895 – 1982)

Soon after deciding I wanted to pursue a career in music, I began taking lessons with my first private trumpet teacher. It was this teacher that convinced me to join various ensembles at Marywood University. Within the year that I joined, the Wind Ensemble was asked to collaborate with the Campus Choir (the university's version of a concert choir) in a version of Orff's *Carmina Burana* with a wind ensemble instead of an orchestra. Originally, I wasn't part of the chosen trumpet players in the ensemble, but my private teacher and a former trumpet teacher from the aforementioned camp at Marywood, not caring to perform the work, decided to hand over their parts to me and another trumpet player. Together, we joined who would become my college trumpet professor.

I remember being so excited that I couldn't breathe. I had heard so many incredible things about this work, and the idea of performing in an "orchestra" with a semi-professional choir was

mind-blowing for me at the time. It was the first chance I was ever given to perform with other musicians who performed on a professional level. I had performed with incredibly talented students my age, but not with adults and/or people who had taken the plunge into this career themselves. I was performing with people who had the same career aspirations as me, and that was intensely exciting.

What about this work changed my life? Well, it hammered in the decision to want to be a performer. At this point I was still convinced that being a performer could only be done if I was a music educator, but now I knew that I wanted to perform. I joined every possible ensemble I could at Marywood, became a member of a pops band local to Scranton, and was hired to play in various pit orchestras for local high school musicals.

The Christmas after I performed *Carmina Burana*, I asked my grandmother to buy me a CD of the work. Not knowing anything about classical music, she went with a recording in which she vaguely recognized the name of the conductor, André Previn. He was conducting the London Symphony Orchestra and the London Symphony Chorus. I was enamored by this work. The music, the languages used, and the atmosphere surrounding it all fascinated my young mind. To this day, I'm still drawing lines back to the day I performed this work from realizations I have about my current career. I couldn't be more grateful for having received the chance to perform this work.

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74 (“Pathétique”) Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893)

When I discovered Tchaikovsky's final symphony, it was nearly time for me to graduate from my undergraduate degree program. I had switched out of music education and into music performance because I knew that I wanted to become a historical musicologist (yes, a lot changed after performing *Carmina Burana*, but no specific work had done that). I was frantically trying to find a topic to write about for my portfolio, and everything I thought of just wouldn't stick.

One night, I was sitting on my bed and staring at the wall while desperately trying to come up with a topic for a paper that was due in a few months. As I sat there, a voice in my head said, "Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6". Now, what made this moment even more eerie, is that I had never heard the work before, and I knew absolutely nothing about the work. I had a full score of the symphony together with Symphonies 4 and 5, but that was all I had ever encountered up to this point. I pulled up a recording of the symphony on YouTube, and immediately something in my head clicked. I dug up as much research as I could on the symphony and the composer and eventually found all the conspiracies and mysteries surrounding this work and the composer's life.

The paper did not end up being about this symphony, but it changed my life. I already had a slight attachment to the composer and his works, but now, I was a fully-fledged admirer of Tchaikovsky. I needed to know everything about his life. I bought every possible book I could, and a dear friend of mine in Russia sent me books about him in Russian. I began learning the Russian language to become closer to the composer, and eventually became a translator on the Tchaikovsky research website. You can check out all the currently [published translations](#) on my website!

That's how I became a Tchaikovsky scholar. Although other composers have come close, none have been able to surpass the level of my admiration for the composer and his works. It all began

with a little voice inside my head, and I hope to one day discover the reason for being acquainted with this mysterious work.

The Nutcracker, Op. 71
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Up until this point in the article, I have addressed these pieces by when they appeared chronologically in my life. *The Nutcracker*, however, has repeatedly resurfaced in my life a countless number of times. Every time it rears its head, I learn something new about myself. The ballet has done more than become my favorite piece of music, it has become the backbone of my entire career and part of my private life.

I remember when I was a kid, my mom would consistently tell me that she wouldn't take me to see *The Nutcracker*. "It's SO boring," she would say, and I would get upset by this statement as if it was my own work that I composed. Why was I so upset about this statement? I never heard the work before. Apparently, my aunt took me to see it when I was a child, but I don't remember a single second of it. As I grew up and became a musician, I played the suite and several jazz versions of the suite several times, but I still had never heard the full ballet. All the while, I had this emotional attachment to the work.

When I was a junior in my undergraduate degree program, I was given the opportunity to work backstage at the Ballet Theater of Scranton's annual production of the ballet. This was the first time I ever heard the ballet in its entirety (even if the second act wasn't performed in the correct order). I remember feeling like something in my life had just been fulfilled. From that year on, I listened to the full ballet enough times that I can hum the entire ballet from start to finish from memory. I could probably even conduct the work from memory too if given the chance. I still listen to it whenever I need to clear my head and hit the refresh button.