Recomposing Tchaikovsky's Coda from Symphony 6, Movement 2

Introduction

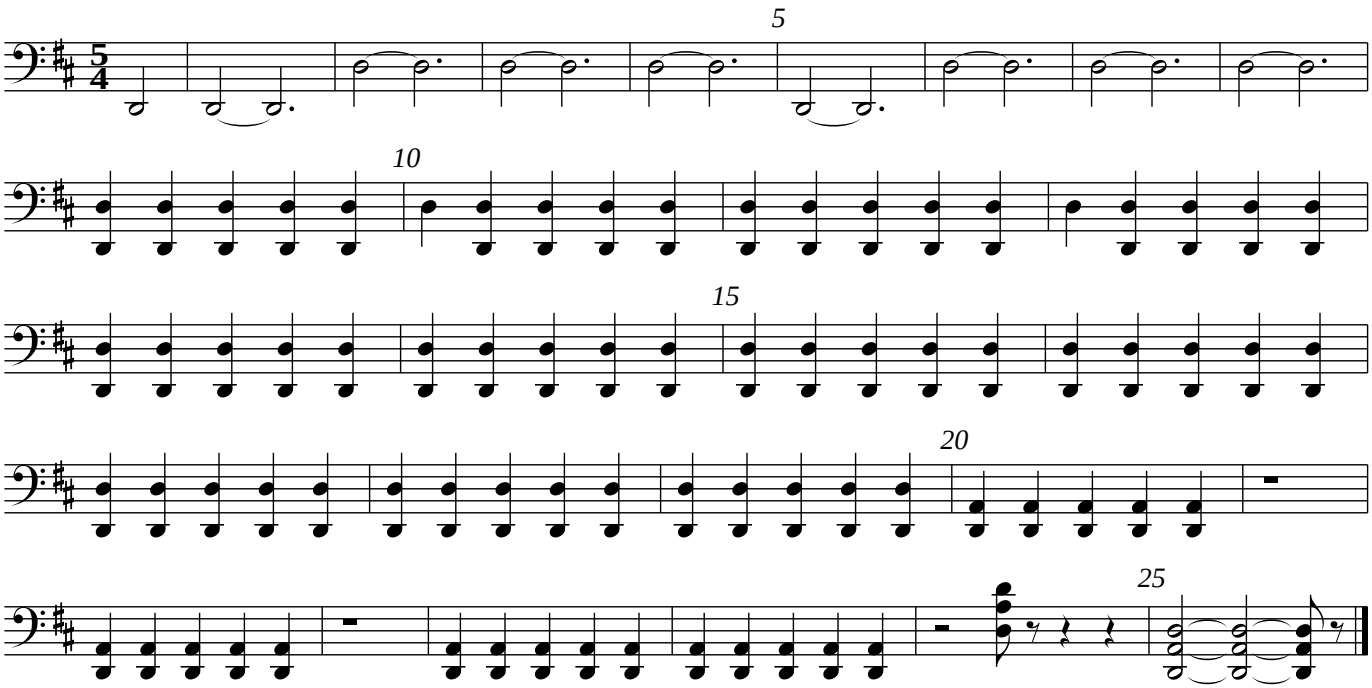
A coda is an extension of a musical piece, an appendix. A nice example of a coda shows movement 2 of Tchaikovsky's Symphony 6. Its form is an A−B−A−Coda. So a ternary form A−B−A with an appendix. Since many movements have no codas, we could suppose that the composer is asking for some attention when extending his piece. There is nothing more to say.
Technically spoken, codas differ in length, form and content. A coda can be a short extension, rhapsodically built with recurring motives. A coda can become a new section (as in Beethoven's symphony V, movement 1, where the coda is as long as the exposition and development: 125 measures).

Tchaikovsky's coda is short (27 measures) and in fact a prolongation of the tonic triad: the first tone D as Pedal in the lowest voice, while the other voices are revisiting melodic ideas, while embellishing the third and the fifth of the tonic triad.

The objective of this text is analyzing the tonic prolongation technique, based on the piano arrangement by Henryk Pachulski from 1897, which is attached.

Step 1: prolongation of tone D

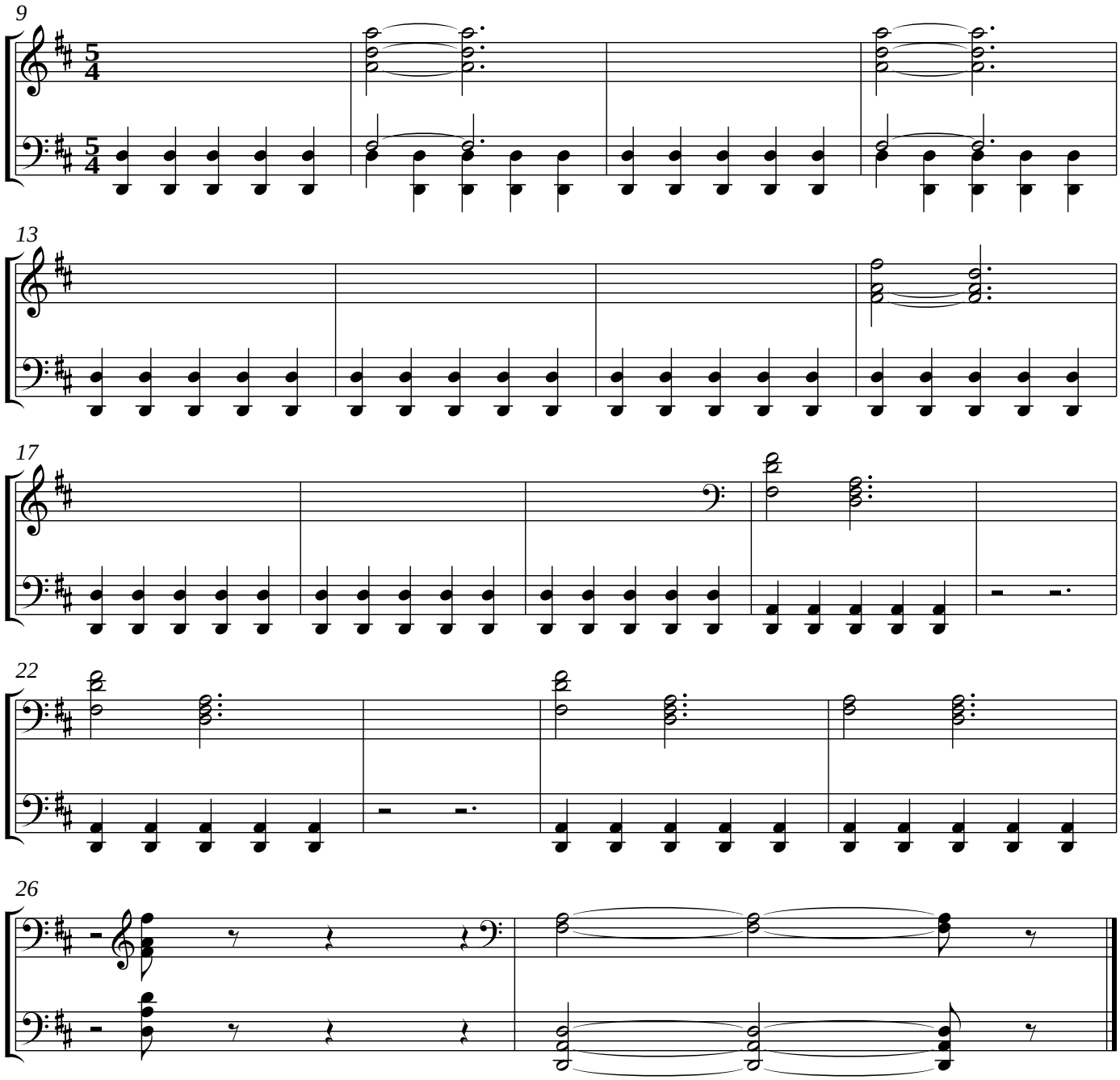
The easiest way of prolonging a tone is repetition. Register change, rhythmical variety and changing intervallic context can make repetition more lively. Tchaikowsky follows this procedure for the lowest voice of the coda, the tonic D.



This 'Pedal' idea dominates the whole second movement, especially B−section (in section A is more harmonic activity, however rather basic: primarily alternations of tonic and dominant).

Step 2: prolongation the tonic triad on D

The prolongation of a triad can be done in the same way: repetition, changing of register and varying the chord structure. Tchaikovsky's basic prolongation of the tonic triad is as follows (from bar 9 till the end):

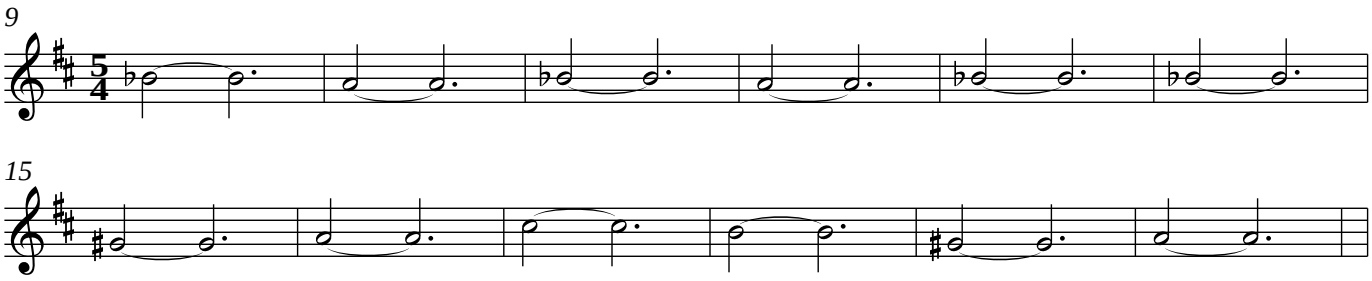


Prolongation question now is how to connect these D triads: step 3.

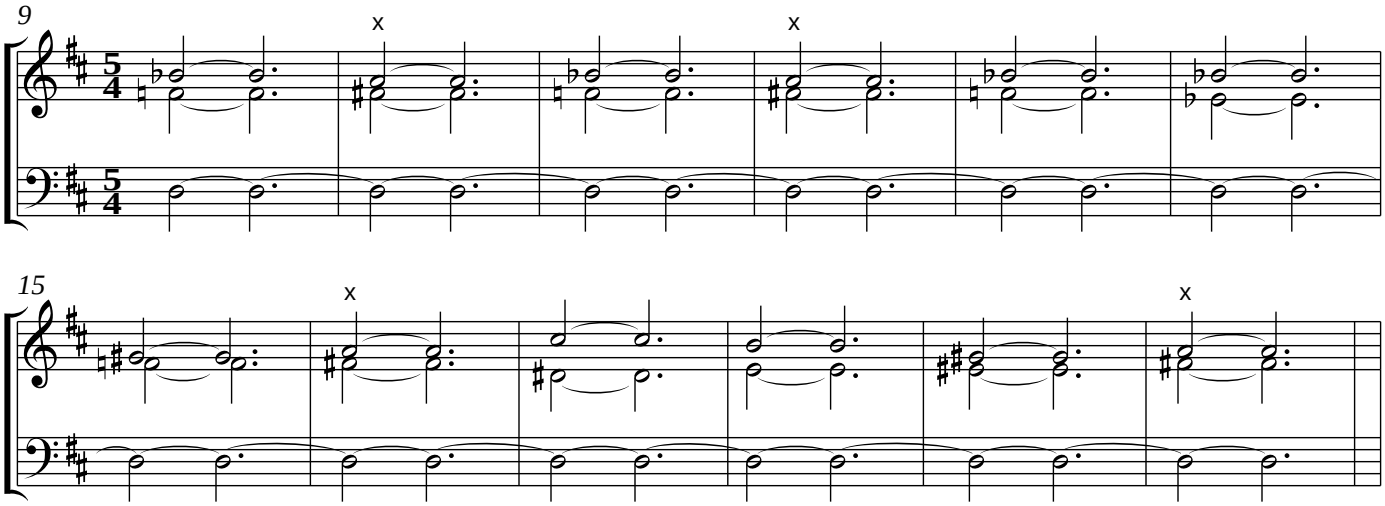
Step 3: prolongation the tonic triad on D by embellishing tones

Using upper and lower neighbour tones results in a more interesting prolongation of a tone. In the same way, neighbour 'chords' (or better: multiple neighbour tones!) are useful means in the prolongation of a triad. I'll show you this in a few steps.

Step 3a: prolonging tone A by neighbour tones (measure 9−20)



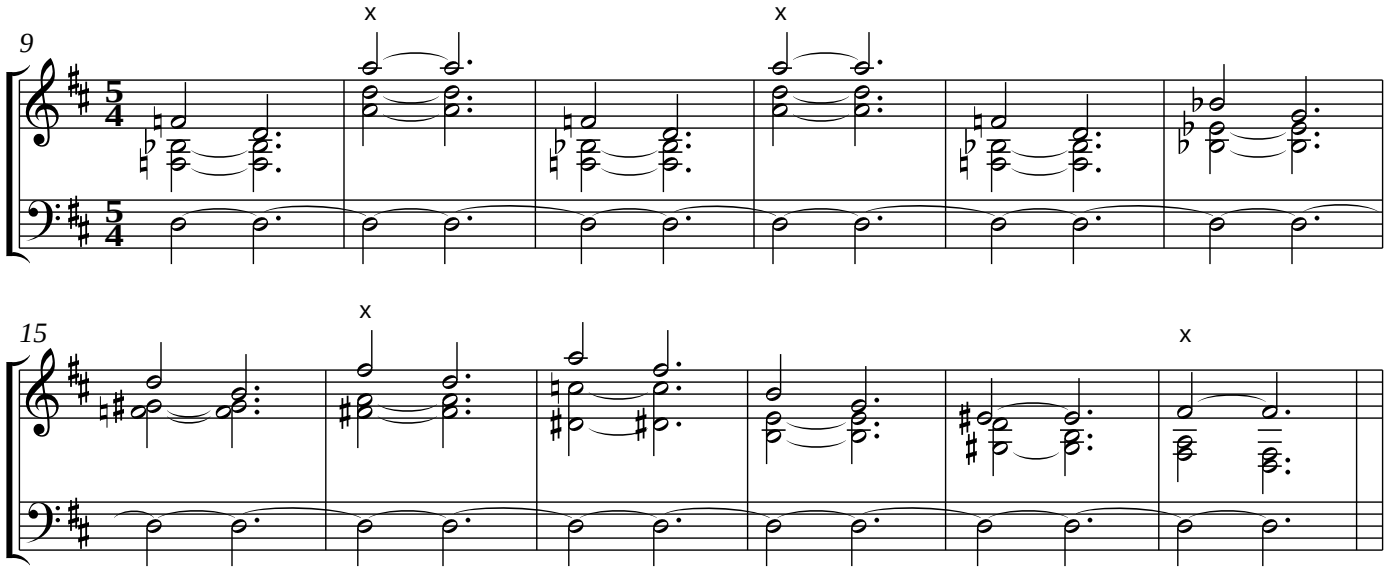
Step 3b: prolonging the tonic triad (measure 9−20). Note: Pedal reduced to tone D



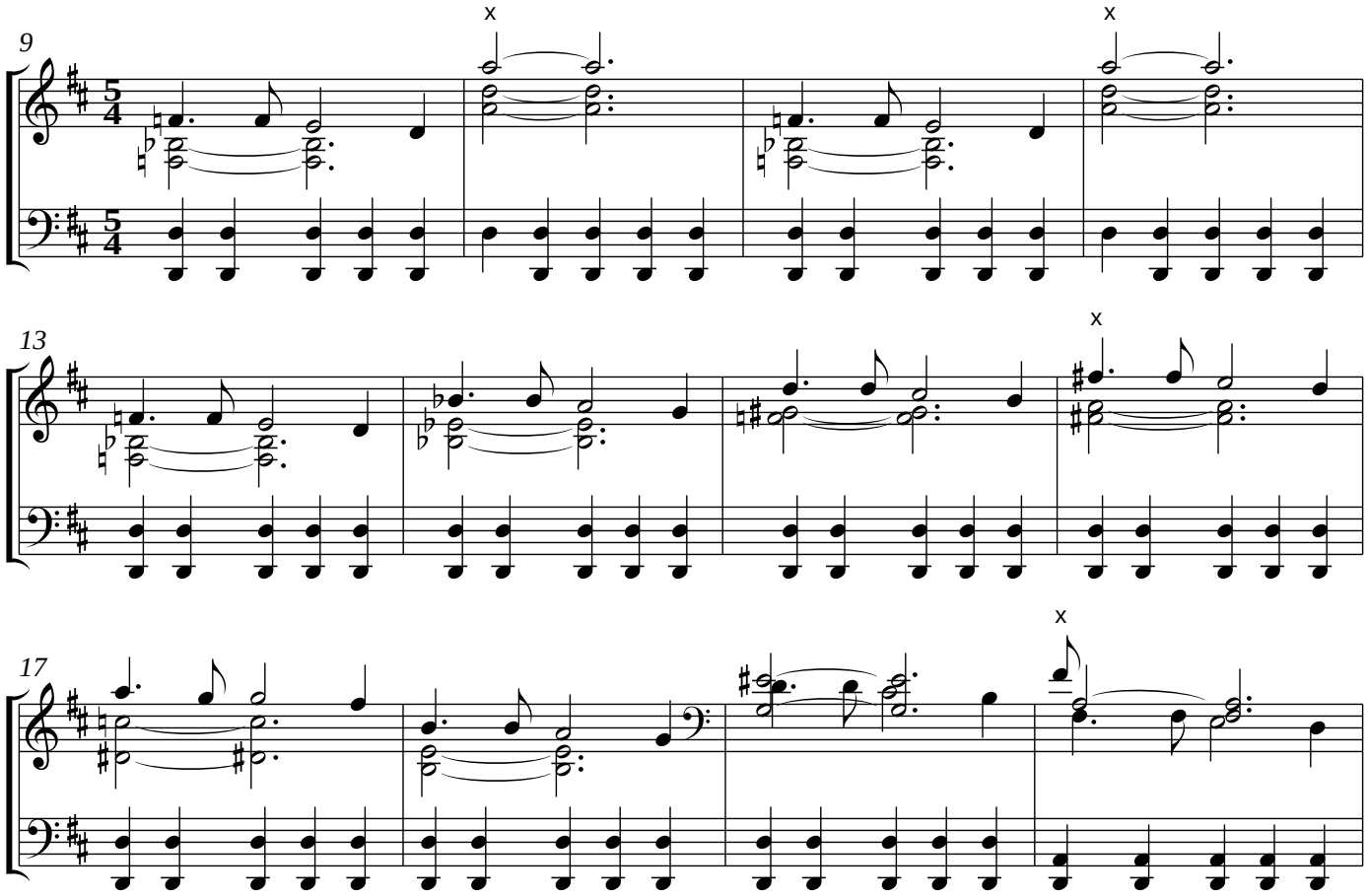
Note that the middle voice can be described as a prolongation of tone F#, the third of the tonic triad.

Tchaikovsky's basic prolongation is the result of doubling tones, voice exchange and replacing tones to an other register: step 3c

Step 3c: Tchaikovsky's basic prolongation of the tonic triad (measure 9−20). Note: Pedal reduced to tone D

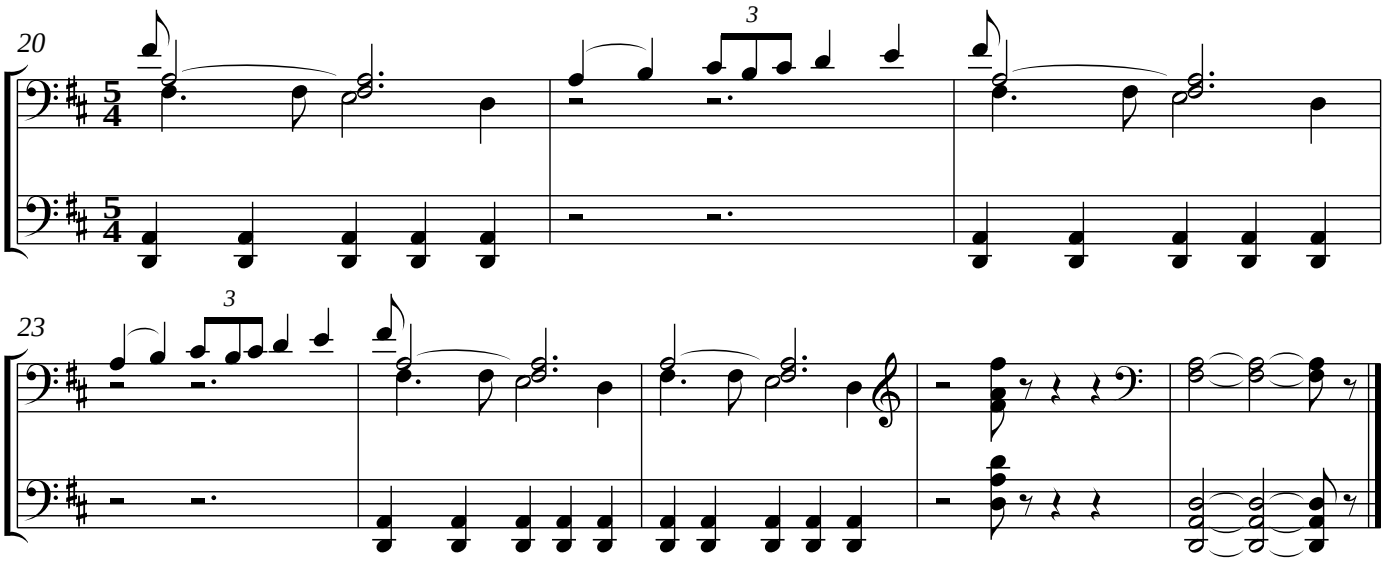


Step 3d: Tchaikovsky's final prolongation of the tonic triad (m. 9−20), embellishing the structure of step 3c.



Let's have a look to the other prolongation parts: the end and the begiining of the coda.

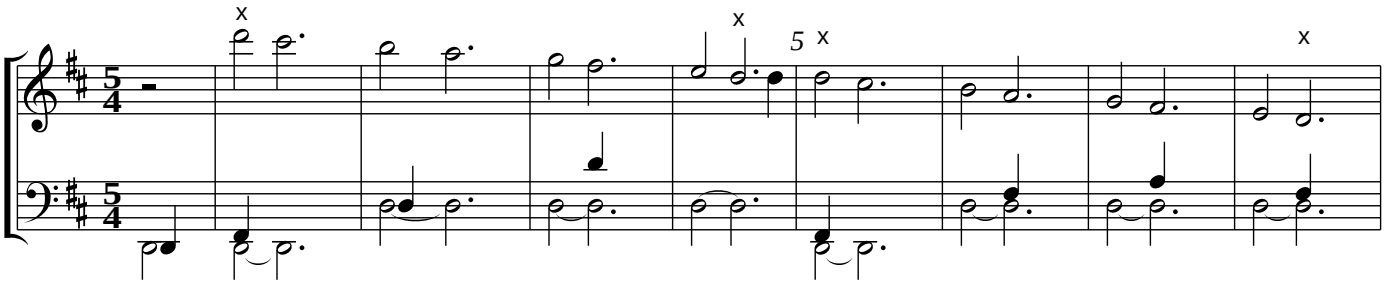
Step 4: Tchaikovsky's prolongation of the tonic triad in m. 21 − 27: repetition and inserting material



In fact, measure 20 is repeated, while a solo melody (= earlier presented as theme) is inserted. At the end (m. 25−27) the reduction to a simple tonic triad is prepared.

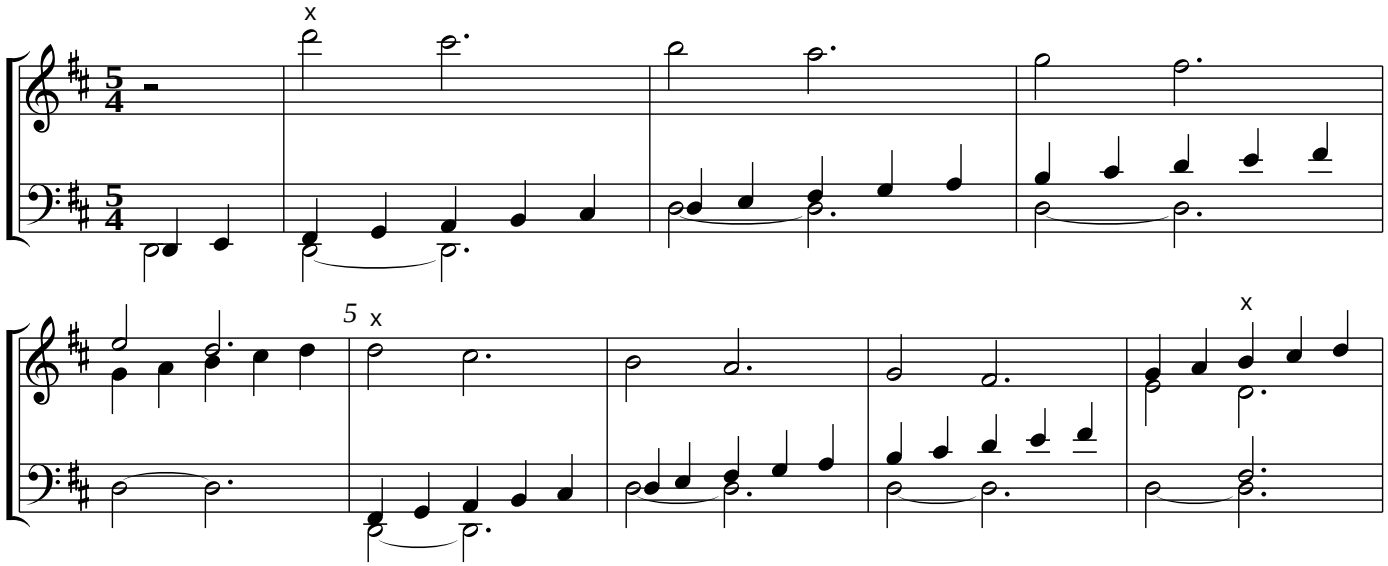
Tchaikovsky's prolongation of the first nine measures can be compared with Step 4. However, lines are now the connecting elements.

Step 5a: Tchaikovsky's prolongation of the tonic triad in m. 1−9: repetition tone D as part of the tonic and inserting material: line from D''' to D'



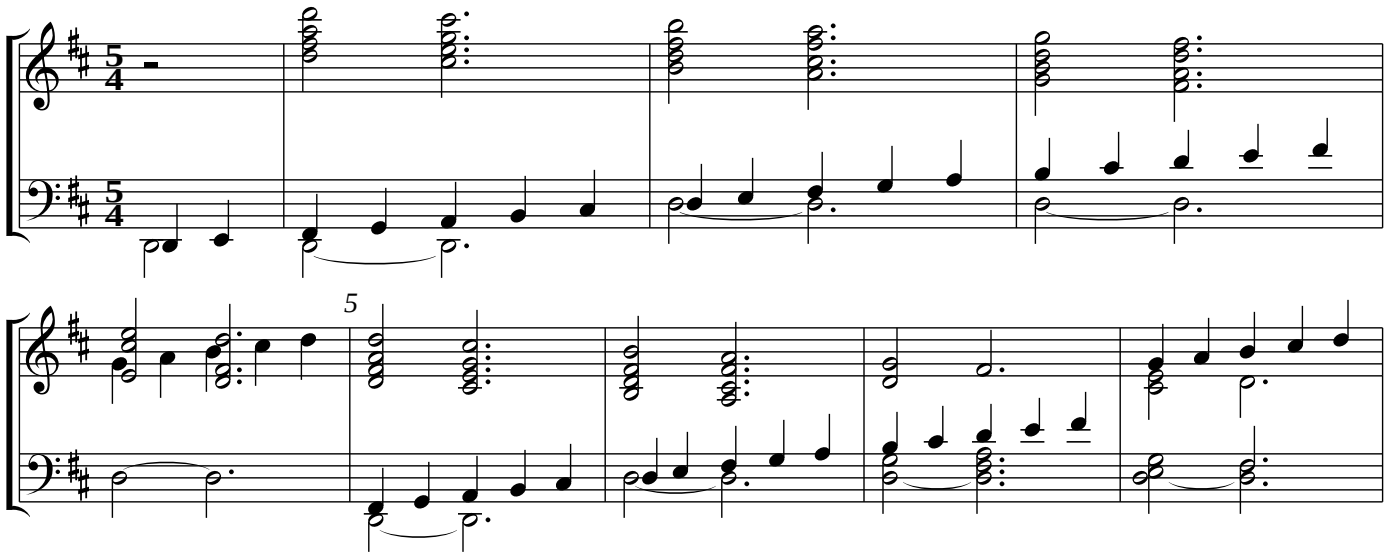
Now the middle voice becomes an ascending, contrapuntal line.

Step 5b: Tchaikovsky's prolongation of the tonic triad in m. 1−9: new line in the middle voice



The last elaboration is adding tones in more or less parallel motion to the upper voice

Step 5c: Tchaikovsky's prolongation of the tonic triad in m. 1−9: adding tones to the upper voice



Final remarks

So, three prolongation techniques can be distinghuished in Tchaikovsky's Coda:

1. neighbour tones, embellishing the main tones of the tonic triad
2. lines, connecting the main tones of the tonic triad
3. new material, inserted between the main tones of the tonic triad

Important features are rhythmical variation, voice exchange and register change.

In his 'Guide to the practical study of harmony (1900), Tchaikovsky writes about the Pedal (paragraph 64):

"In the organ−point on the tonic we may modulate into the Dominant (mostly in minor), into the sub−Dominant or into the sub−Dominant of the sub−Dominant"

According to this receipt, Tchaikovsky should have modulated in D major to A minor or G or C. We have seen that he does not follow his own rule. Again, we see a discrepancy between theory and practice. So, time to leave the theory of harmony and learn from analyzing works of great composers from a melodic point of view!

Tchaikovsky knew what he did. In the section 'Deviation of the laws of harmony' he writes:

"The preponderance of the melodic element and the influence it exerts on chord progression is best exhibited in the irregular resolution of dissonant harmonies."

Indeed melodic forces are explaining the coda, as I showed you.

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