

GLAZUNOV
Alexander
Konstantinovich
(1865-1936)

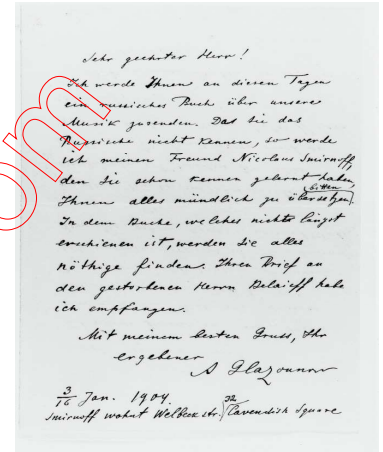
Alexander Glazunov, Russian composer, was born in St. Petersburg, on the 29th, July, 1865, the eldest of four children of Konstantin Il'ich Glazunov (1828-1914) and Elena Pavlovna Glazunov (1846-1925), née Turygina. They were married in 1863.¹

The family book publishing business, founded by a Glazunov ancestor in the late eighteenth century, with outlets in St. Petersburg and Moscow, was prominent and purveyed literature and scientific material of high quality.² Both Glazunov's parents were musical, especially Elena Pavlovna who, after teaching herself to play the piano at her Swedish boarding school, continued her studies with Adolf von Henselt, Theodor Leschetizky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Balakirev.³

In this wealthy, secure, serene, music-intellectual atmosphere, Glazunov's prodigious gifts were nurtured. In 1877, he came to be taught by Nartsis Nartsisovich Elenkovsky, a pupil of Alexander Dreyschock. (Elenkovsky, destined for a career as a virtuoso pianist, damaged his hands and was compelled to confine himself to teaching.⁴) Glazunov held Elenkovsky in high regard over very many years; besides his dedication of youthful works for piano solo, piano duet and voice & piano, there is a dedication of the large scale - in places Brahms-like - second piano sonata in E minor, Op. 75 (1901), 'a son maître et ami, Narcisse Jelenkowski'. This work received its first performance on 3rd, November, 1903 by a pupil of Anton Rubinstein, Lydia Kashperova,⁵ who recounted in her memoirs a distressing incident in connexion with Rubinstein and Glazunov in regard to the latter's Fourth Symphony.

Glazunov composed a great quantity of music in those early years, commencing in 1878. Little, if any, was published until 1951 when a fragment of a piano sonata dating from 1880, appeared.⁶ A more significant manifestation of the desire to compose on a large scale is to be seen in the fragments of two operas with which Glazunov toyed between 1878 and 1881, a sketch for a piano concerto in D flat, and several works published a few years later. In fact, it is not until we reach the Fourth Symphony, dating from 1893 that Glazunov proceeds without recourse to previous material, so far as his advancement of symphonies is concerned. He then moves forward on a new path, to his creative peaks, the orchestral 'Scènes de Ballet', the three staged ballets and sixth symphony - some might also categorise thus his seventh and eighth symphonies and violin concerto but acknowledge a decline thereafter.

Glazunov's output, in terms of quantity, is closely related to the years of his association with Belaieff. Commencing in 1882 (when Glazunov was still only 17 years old) and continuing to the end of 1903, and Belaieff's death,⁷ he composed seven symphonies, a full length ballet, two one-act ballets and a great mass of orchestral music, as well as five string quartets and several other works for string ensemble and other miscellaneous pieces, including some for piano solo, and a very few songs. At the time of Belaieff's death, Glazunov, still only 38 years old, had another 32 years to live, but from that time forward the output reduced, at first moderately slowly, but from 1910 onwards with rapidity. The last years produced a few works of quality. Although this drastic reduction in terms of quantity of music produced may have been due, in part, to Glazunov's increased administrative responsibilities, both with the Belaieff edition following Belaieff's death, and his directorship of the Conservatoire from 1906,⁸ the demise of Belaieff removed an obvious pressure to compose. One infers, that, in terms of volume, Glazunov's output over the years of his association with Belaieff was partly dictated by Belaieff's demands. Glazunov the 'wunderkind', for whom Belaieff had created an organ for publishing his music, was expected to perform with a new orchestral work each year, to be played at the Symphonic Concerts. Rimsky-Korsakov confirmed that these were the expectations.⁹ But did quality suffer? Cui certainly thought so, at the time of Glazunov's experiments with large-scale works, such as 'The Forest', Op. 19 and 'The Sea', Op.28.¹⁰ And was this the cause of Glazunov's constant 'ill-health' sojourns in clinics, so distressingly related by Stasov at the time of Glazunov's composition of his Fifth Symphony, an ill-health which continued to attend him during the last sad years in the west? He died in Paris, in 1936.¹¹



An example of Glazunov's handwriting.