

LYADOV

Anatol
Konstantinovich
(1855 -1914)

A comprehensive account of Lyadov, his life and music, is that by Mikhail Kesarevich Mikhailov, originally published in 1961 and followed by a much expanded second edition in 1985, to which some of these brief comments on aspects of Lyadov are indebted.¹

Lyadov, too well-known to the world at large for his exquisite though slight piano piece, 'Une tabatière à musique. Valse-Badinage', Op.32,² occupies an esteemed place, together with Glazunov, as the most brilliant of the first generation offspring's of the 'Moguchaya Kuchka'. He was a major figure in the furthering of Belaieff's music publishing house, a composer of orchestral, instrumental and piano music of the highest quality, a fine conductor and teacher of eminence.

Lyadov was born into a musical family. The conductor, N.G. Lyadov, who died in 1839, was Anatol's grandfather. He had seven children, one of whom, Konstantin Nikolaevich Lyadov (1820 -1871), Anatol's father, was a charming but dissolute man and a prominent figure at the time, both as director of the opera at St. Petersburg and as a composer, notably of choral music. Lyadov's mother, an Antipov, died when he was six years old, and he and his sister, Valentina, grew up with a neglectful father blamed for much of Lyadov's indolence. Reduced to penury for long periods by the absence of the father, we may well marvel that Lyadov's brilliance could blossom from the outset in the face of such adversity.

After early piano lessons from his aunt, V.A. Antipova, Lyadov entered the St. Petersburg Conservatoire in 1867 by means of a scholarship founded by Russian opera artists in honour of the twenty-five years of musical activity of Lyadov's father, Konstantin, to whom a fulsome panegyric was addressed. The panegyric concluded that the founders wished to perpetuate Konstantin's name as a token of his work 'in the field of musical art', adding that if Anatol could be the first to be honoured, 'he would create a succession worthy of you, bearing for all of us your dear name.'³ Konstantin Lyadov, despite his failings, was indeed held in high esteem. Rimsky-Korsakov first encountered Lyadov (and G. O. Dutsch) in 1867, singing in a concert conducted by Balakirev, at the time of Berlioz's visit to St. Petersburg⁴(see also Shcherbachov commentary). At that time Lyadov stayed with a certain A.A. Shustov, spending Sundays and holidays with the Antipov family; he then moved to his sister, 'with whom he lived for the greater part of his years of study.'⁵ Also in 1867 Lyadov entered the conservatoire, at the age of twelve (the start of a long haul to graduation in 1878), to be expelled (with Dutsch) in 1875, after repeated complaints of indolence.⁶ Outside the Conservatoire, however, Lyadov was attracting attention. Musorgsky wrote to Stasov, on 2nd August, 1873, about Lyadov's 'new, undoubted, original and young Russian talent.'⁷ The same letter also refers to Rimsky-Korsakov's favourable impressions, despite Lyadov's behaviour at the Conservatoire. At the end of 1876, Lyadov was already assisting Balakirev in revision and editing of Glinka's operas.⁸

In 1878, accepted back to the Conservatoire, Lyadov redeemed himself by composing a Cantata to the closing scene of the play 'Die Braut von Messina' (1803) of J.C.F. von Schiller (1759 -1805). This was known as 'Messinskaya Nevesta/The Bride of Messina'. It was required as a graduation work, and, performed in 1878, caused general delight.⁹ Stasov's enthusiasm was boundless. The Requiem, to a Latin text, absent in Schiller's original,¹⁰ he likened to 'the amazing requiem of Schumann in his 'Manfred', describing the closing chorus as one of the 'most remarkable creations of our century.'¹¹ M. Mikhailov writes with particular interest about this little known work, suggesting a vocal style traceable back to that of the equally unjustly neglected opera, 'William Ratcliff', of Cesar Cui, to whom 'The Bride of Messina' is dedicated.¹²

Lyadov's brilliant showing brought immediate recognition, earning him an instant teaching post at the Conservatoire and, a little later, a conducting appointment with the Maurer Orchestra, where he came to meet Belaieff and Glazunov.¹³ The evolution of the Belaieff publishing house and creation of a selection committee consisting of Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov and Lyadov is covered elsewhere in this work.

These two activities of Lyadov, established in the period 1880/1886, continued, in effect, until his death in 1914. They probably overshadowed his work as a composer and consumed