

Balakirev, a composer of genius, with his mentor, Glinka, was the greatest seminal force in the development of Russian music, well into the twentieth century. This achievement is all the more remarkable when viewed against periods of withdrawal from the world, due to cruel depressive attacks, a very Russian lethargy, resulting in few large scale compositions which took decades to evolve, and the crowning blow arising from usurpation of what he felt to be his rightful place by M.P. Belaieff.

Born in Nizhny-Novgorod, Balakirev continued his education from the age of ten, at the gymnasium¹ at which, in 1870, Balakirev's adherent, S.M. Lyapunov was enrolled as a student.² (Lyapunov had moved from his birthplace, Yaroslavl, a distant city with which Balakirev's father was associated³) Balakirev's early association with the landowner and music lover, A.D. Ulybyshev (1794 -1858)⁴ stands out as a decisive event in pointing the way to his future, for through him he came to meet Mikhail Glinka (1804 -1857) in St. Petersburg which, thereafter, became his home, with music as his career.⁵

Inheriting the mantle of Glinka, on the death of the latter in 1857, Balakirev soon assumed control of a small group of like-minded followers, Borodin, Cui, Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, collectively known (apparently inaccurately) as the 'Moguchaya Kuchka',⁶ each of whom, as the years passed, broke loose from his domination. Balakirev also came to be introduced to members of the Stasov family, with whom he was associated henceforward.⁷

In 1862/63, the founding of the Free Music School by Balakirev and Gavril Yakimovich Lomakin (1812 -1885)⁸ provided a valuable outlet for performances of new works. A philanthropic service to the community, it existed fitfully under Balakirev (and at times Rimsky-Korsakov) until its control passed to Lyapunov in 1908, due to Balakirev's ill health.⁹ One year after Balakirev's death in 1910, Lyapunov had the melancholy task of presiding over its demise, due to lack of funds. It was ushered out by the first performance of Balakirev's Piano Concerto in E flat which, after nearly fifty years, had just been completed by Lyapunov.¹⁰

The Free School is very relevant, vis-à-vis Belaieff, as the latter, in 1885, instituted his series of Russian Symphonic Concerts¹¹ which, (if not positively designed to undermine Balakirev, probably succeeded in doing so. Certainly, from Belaieff's point of view, it would not have been commercially prudent to support Balakirev's request to combine in first performances in works on which Belaieff had fixed his sights.¹²

Belaieff recognised later that his refusal to publish Balakirev's second Overture on Russian Themes, known as 'Russia', was a mistake, and he attempted to make amends in 1894 when he was obliged to be in correspondence with Balakirev in connexion with the publication of the latter's first folksong collection which Belaieff had acquired from Khavanov (Johansen).¹³

In 1896, at a time when Balakirev was working with the Russian Geographical Society, he wrote to Belaieff, asking him if he could assist over the likely charges of C.G. Röder in Leipzig for printing folksongs to be published by the Society. A year later, he again wrote, requesting permission on behalf of the R.G.S. to adapt two folksongs from his collection, published by Belaieff, as 'a capella' choruses for educational purposes. From 1899 to April, 1903, a few months before Belaieff's death, several letters passed, mostly on the question of the accuracy of scores of music by Glinka, which Belaieff consulted in preparing his edition. It is perhaps surprising that virtually all this latter correspondence was conducted between parties with what appears, on the surface at any rate, to have been courtesy, civility and helpfulness.¹⁴

Balakirev's intransigence and his failure to compromise and move with the times, as had Rimsky-Korsakov, led him into increasing isolation -an isolation tempered by his association with Lyapunov -and eventually into a cul-de-sac. In the context of these failings, he appears as a lonely, tragic figure, an impression which may be belied by the ebullient nature of much of his music; for despite his intermittent output and restricted range of compositions, he