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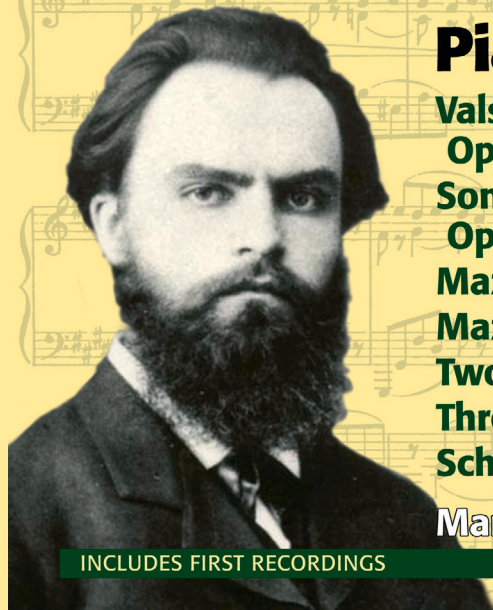
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# Sergei LYAPUNOV



## Piano Music

**Valses-Impromptus,  
Opp. 23, 29 and 70**

**Sonatina in D flat major,  
Op. 65**

**Mazurka No. 5, Op. 21**

**Mazurka No. 7, Op. 31**

**Two Mazurkas, Op. 9**

**Three Pieces, Op. 1**

**Scherzo, Op. 45**

**Margarita Glebov, piano**

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

S. LIAPOUNOV, Op. 70.



# THE 'MIGHTY TALENT' OF SERGEI LYAPUNOV

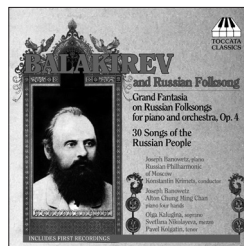
by Margarita Glebov

The Russian composer and pianist Sergei Lyapunov, the second of three gifted brothers, all of whom excelled in their professional careers, was born in 1859 in the city of Yaroslavl, north-east of Moscow. His elder brother, Alexander, went on to become a renowned mathematician; the youngest, Boris, was a respected philologist. Sergei's musical talent was discovered at an early age, after his mother began giving him piano lessons. With the death of his father in 1868, the family moved to Nizhny Novgorod, to the east of Moscow, where his music instruction was temporarily set aside until, with the opening of the Nizhny branch of the Russian Musical Society (RMS)<sup>1</sup> on 12 November 1873, Sergei was finally able to begin his formal music studies.

A shortage of teachers in the initial stages of RMS activity in Nizhny meant that Sergei studied piano, as well as harmony and counterpoint, with the violinist Vasily Villoing (1850–1922), a recent graduate of the Moscow Conservatoire. Although by all accounts an excellent violinist and a dedicated teacher, Villoing still seemed to have been unable to provide Sergei with proper instruction in piano technique. The young student could not get rid of tension in his hands while playing, a problem which endured into his subsequent training at the Moscow Conservatoire. During his time at the RMS, Sergei composed a few short pieces, including a Rondo in G for piano which he dedicated to his mother.

In June 1878 Lyapunov completed his studies at the RMS and in the autumn he entered the Moscow Conservatoire, in the hope of studying composition with Tchaikovsky and piano with Nikolai Rubinstein. Both dreams were crushed. First, Tchaikovsky left the Conservatoire within two months of Lyapunov's arrival, passing on all of his students to Nikolai Hubert. And his ambitions of studying

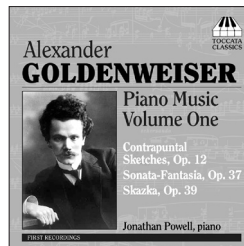
<sup>1</sup> The Russian Musical Society had been launched in 1859 by Anton Rubinstein, under the aegis of Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, an aunt of Tsar Alexander II, with two main avenues of activity: it presented the standard classics of western music in concert, and it offered, for the first time in Russia, a systematised music-education, open to all. The latter initiative led directly to the foundations of the conservatoires in St Petersburg and Moscow, which in turn sustained the RMS concert programmes. Many of the RMS music schools in the provinces also provided the basis for later conservatoires.



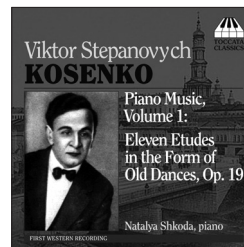
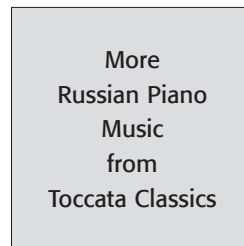
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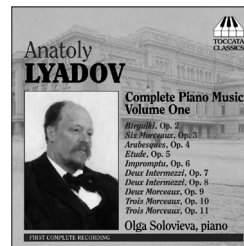
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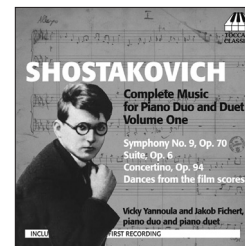
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*Impromptu*, Op. 70 [14], also published in 1922 but written three years earlier. One of the most elegant of salon waltzes, it also reveals its composer's gifts as a tunesmith, especially in the lyrical second theme which originated in an earlier, unpublished Prelude.

Donald Manildi is Curator of the International Piano Archives at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

The Russian-American pianist **Margarita Glebov** began her studies at the age of five in her native city of St Petersburg. She continued her musical career in the United States, making an orchestral debut with the New City Sinfonia in San Diego at the age of fourteen; she has since performed as a soloist with a number of US orchestras. While in San Diego, she studied with Ilana Mysior and Leonid Levitsky. In addition to her orchestral appearances, Margarita has given solo recitals in numerous venues in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area.

In 2002 Margarita received a Bachelor of Music degree from the Peabody Conservatory under the guidance of Boris Slutsky. Subsequently she earned a Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from the University of Maryland, studying with Larissa Dedova.

Margarita made her recording debut in 2010 with *Impromptu*, a CD on the Music & Arts label (CD-1245), a collection of impromptus – four of them recorded for the first time – by sixteen composers: Babadjanyan, Balakirev, Bibalo, Blumenfeld, Cui, Dvořák, Fauré, Godowsky, Liszt, Mazhara, Moszkowski, Mussorgsky, Poulenc, Rimsky-Korsakov, Volaj, Vofříšek. *International Record Review* described it as an 'auspicious début, strongly recommended for its unusual repertoire and its impressive level of pianism'. *Fanfare* agreed: Glebov takes in everything with tremendous commitment, understanding, and sensitivity. [...] All in all, a splendid debut'.



with Rubinstein vanished when he failed, on audition, to qualify for Rubinstein's advanced class; instead, he had to settle for Vasily Wilborg (a former student of Karl Klindworth) during his first two years in the institution. These disappointments laid the foundation for Lyapunov's discontent with the Moscow Conservatoire, a feeling which persisted throughout his life.

Lyapunov went on to study piano with Klindworth himself in 1880, then with Pavel Pabst (upon Klindworth's departure to Berlin), and composition with Sergei Taneyev. Of all his teachers at the Conservatoire, Lyapunov had high regard only for Klindworth: 'In terms of my musical development, I learned more during the short time I had with the refined musician and pedagogue of the Lisztian school, than during all the rest of my time at the Conservatoire.'<sup>2</sup>

His feelings toward Pabst and Taneyev were quite different. He disliked Pabst's method of teaching and thought that he played with 'fake expression' and in an 'undignified' manner.<sup>3</sup> And Taneyev was not only rather young and inexperienced as a teacher (he was in his mid-twenties); his doctrinaire views on music also stood in opposition to those of Lyapunov. While still at the RMS, Lyapunov had already become acquainted with the works of the 'Mighty Five', the group of composers – Alexander Borodin, Cesar Cui, Modest Musorgsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov – energised by Mily Balakirev. His affinity for their music, and for Balakirev's in particular, carried on through his years at the Conservatoire. Taneyev, by contrast, was critical of the New Russian School and since he and Lyapunov were unable to find common ground, their working relationship was further strained.

It should come as no surprise, then, that in 1883, upon graduating from the Conservatoire with a gold medal, Lyapunov declined an offer from the director, Konstantin Albrecht, to teach theory classes there. Instead, he decided to move to St Petersburg, a place where he believed 'lies the true path that Russian music should follow'.<sup>4</sup>

Lyapunov was finally able to realise his dream in 1885, when he did move to St Petersburg and gained acceptance from Balakirev's close circle of nationalistic composers. This entrée marked the beginning of what was to become a close-knit professional and personal relationship between Lyapunov and Balakirev, which lasted until the latter's death in 1910.

In the early 1880s Balakirev was starting to revive his career as a composer following a difficult period in his life. Most of his students were now finding their own way and so were less reliant on his guidance; some distanced themselves from him, not least because of his difficult personality and tendency to be

<sup>2</sup> Olga Onegina, *Piano Music of S. M. Lyapunov. Stylistic Features*, doctoral dissertation, St Petersburg Conservatoire, 2010, p. 27; this and subsequent quotations are translated from the Russian by Margarita Glebov.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

overbearing. Feeling neglected, Balakirev welcomed an opportunity to help the young Lyapunov, whom he referred to as the 'mighty talent'.

The correspondence between the two composers reveals Balakirev's direct influence over Lyapunov's orchestral compositions, such as the First Symphony in B minor (1887), the *Solemn Overture on Russian Themes* (1896) and *Zelazowa Wola*, a 'Symphonic Poem in Memory of Chopin' (1909). This influence can be perceived also in many of Lyapunov's piano works, including his *Twelve Transcendental Etudes*, Op. 11 (1900–5), the Preludes, Op. 6 (1895), the Piano Concerto No. 1 (1890), and the Sonata in F minor (1908).

Balakirev's support and assistance continued long after a work had been written. He tirelessly promoted Lyapunov's compositions and sometimes went as far as rating them above his own. In a letter to Arkady Kerzin, for example, he wrote:

It would be more beneficial and more reasonable for your pianists to spend their energy on [Lyapunov's] Concerto, Preludes and Etudes, rather than to break their fingers over playing my difficult Scherzo in B minor, which represents a mere half-competent attempt at composing made by a young man showing some promise.<sup>5</sup>

The two composers also collaborated on a long-term project of preparing a new edition of the complete works of Mikhail Glinka, which was to be published by P. Jurgenson and released in 1907 to mark the fifty years since Glinka's death.

Although piano works make up most of Lyapunov's output, he also wrote several major orchestral works, among them two symphonies (1887 and 1917), a set of *Variations on a Russian Theme* (1912) and a violin concerto (1915), as well as vocal works, like his *Evening Song*, a cantata for tenor, chorus and orchestra (1920) and numerous adaptations of Russian folksongs.

After Balakirev's death, Lyapunov completed a number of his unfinished works, including the Second Piano Concerto and a Suite for Orchestra in B minor. He made piano arrangements for both of Balakirev's symphonies, his symphonic poems *Russia* and *In Bohemia*, and orchestrated *Islamey*; he also conducted Balakirev's music on several occasions.

Over the years, in addition to dedicating much of his time to composing, Lyapunov held a number of jobs to support his large family of seven children. In 1893 the Russian Geographical Society commissioned him and the folklorist Fyodor Mikhailovich Istomin (1856–1920) to travel to the northern provinces of Russia to collect folksongs. They gathered as many as 265 songs, which the Society published in 1899.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

(D flat major) [5] bears a definite stylistic kinship to Balakirev's expansive mazurka-writing with its marriage of characteristic mazurka rhythms and Russian melodic flavour. (Of course, it was during the late 1890s that Lyapunov and Balakirev conducted their intensive researches into Russian folk-music.) Lyapunov's textures here are heavier than in any of Chopin's Mazurkas, with frequent octave-doublings in the right hand lending a sonorous element to the proceedings.

The next Mazurka (Op. 21 in B flat minor, published in 1904) [6] continues in much the same vein. Conceived on an epic scale (of nearly eight minutes' duration) and with a bravura conclusion, it makes full use of the entire keyboard range.

Appearing a year later, Lyapunov's *Valse-Improptu* in D, Op. 23 [7], borrows its title from a familiar piece by Liszt written half a century earlier. Here Lyapunov's skill at varying his textures is much in evidence. After a lapse of three years, Lyapunov published a second *Valse-Improptu* (in G flat major, Op. 29) [8]. This smaller-scale sequel reveals that its composer was definitely acquainted with Liszt's *Valse oubliée* No. 1; the principal themes of both pieces have very similar features. Lyapunov goes a step further, though, by briefly using canonic imitation between the hands.

Another 1908 publication (by Zimmermann in Leipzig) is the seventh of Lyapunov's Mazurkas (in G sharp minor, Op. 31) [9]. It follows the example of its predecessor in terms of its large dimensions and resonant piano-writing. (The modest opening idea, by contrast, suggests the style of Chopin, notably the melodic contour and polyphonic emphasis of his C sharp minor Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 3).

With the impressive Scherzo in B flat minor, Op. 45 (1911) [10], Lyapunov provides intrepid performers with a challenging concert piece. Appropriately, it is dedicated to the Portuguese virtuoso (and Liszt pupil) José Vianna da Motta. Although the Scherzo leaves a somewhat sprawling impression on first encounter, its formal logic soon becomes apparent. Lyapunov seizes the opportunity to include a quasi-fugato development as well as a substantial, unexpected slower interlude before the earlier material carries the work to a spectacular conclusion.

One of Lyapunov's most curious yet ingratiating piano works is the Sonatina in D flat major, Op. 65 (published in Moscow in 1922). Lyapunov himself played the premiere in Paris in 1924. It is a far cry from the didactic sonatinas of Clementi and Kuhlau. In the first movement [11], Lyapunov juxtaposes two brief, seemingly incompatible themes, using motivic play rather than extended phrases. The central *Andante* [12] is a quiet lamentation leading without a break to the concluding *Allegro* [13], a toccata in all but name and the longest of the three movements. Its driving momentum yet allows for a brief transformation of the theme of the *Andante* before sweeping to an impressive close.

The last of Lyapunov's solo-piano compositions to appear during his lifetime is the E major *Valse-*

# LYAPUNOV'S VIRTUOSO LYRICISM

by Donald Manildi

Lyapunov's extensive output for solo piano extends from 1888 to 1919. There are 71 individual pieces contained within 35 opus numbers, as well as a few additional works that appeared posthumously. Until recently, only his *Twelve Transcendental Etudes in Memory of Liszt*, Op. 11 (1900–5) had attracted the attention of a few enterprising pianists, led by Louis Kentner's pioneering 1949 recording. And among these Etudes, only No. 10 (*Lesghinka*) could claim much familiarity. The remainder of his piano catalogue contains mostly shorter pieces, except for the imposing Sonata in F Minor, Op. 27 (1906–8), and two substantial sets of variations.

Lyapunov absorbed a variety of influences from such sources as Chopin, Liszt, Henselt, his mentor Balakirev and the melodic and harmonic characteristics of Russian folk-music. His gift for assimilation was considerable, and his blending of these influences, along with his affinity for euphonious, mellifluous and often virtuosic piano-writing, gives his music its distinctive flavour. His idiomatic handling of his chosen instrument, with its undeniable command of the resources of both piano and pianist, surely took root during his early studies with Liszt's pupil Karl Klindworth.

As a composer, particularly from about 1900 until his death, Lyapunov found himself in the midst of several violent revolutions in the musical world, but he remained immune from the radical tendencies of such diverse figures as Schoenberg, Satie, Bartók, Ives and even Scriabin's later works, not to mention Prokofiev and Stravinsky. In that regard he stands closer to his conservative compatriots Blumenfeld, Glazunov, Lyadov and Rachmaninov.

The three pieces in Lyapunov's Op. 1 were published in 1888 by Belaiev in Leipzig. The D flat major Etude [1] challenges both hands with triplet figurations throughout, while offering the listener a kaleidoscopic array of harmonic changes. It is followed by a more extended Intermezzo in E flat minor [2], built in three clear-cut sections with a coda. The triptych concludes with a Waltz (in A flat major) [3] of the graceful salon variety, with a more passionate middle section. With impeccable craftsmanship, Lyapunov adds a coda that views both main themes in retrospect.

Lyapunov wrote a total of eight mazurkas. The first of these (Op. 9, No. 1, in F sharp minor; 1899) [4] appears at first to be more lyrical than dance-like, but a livelier middle section offers contrast. And this piece gives little hint of what was to follow in the succeeding Mazurkas, all of which are conceived on a remarkably large scale, both formally and pianistically. For instance, the companion Op. 9 Mazurka

From 1894 to 1902 he held the post of assistant director of the Imperial Chapel, followed by a teaching appointment as a senior music instructor at the St Helen Institute from 1902 to 1910. In 1908 he replaced Balakirev as director of the Free Music School, remaining in that position until 1911. From 1910 to 1917 he taught piano at the St Petersburg Conservatoire. From 1917 he also taught classes in instrumentation and counterpoint. Finally, he became a music lecturer at the State Institute of Art in 1919.

Throughout his career, as with many other composers, Lyapunov's feelings about teaching were ambivalent. For one thing, he resented its interference with his concentration and its demands on the time he should have spent composing. In addition, he believed that music lessons were not for everyone and that only those who are musically gifted should attempt to make a career in music. In a letter to his future wife, dated 4 November 1891, he complains that he is 'obliged to give lessons usually to individuals who should be banned by law from so much as even thinking about music'.<sup>6</sup>

While teaching at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, Lyapunov had a reputation for being quite picky when choosing his pupils. One of the students fortunate enough to be accepted to his class, Alexandrine Bouchene (dedicatee of his third *Valse-Improptu*, Op. 70, in 1919) recalls that much of his students' time was spent learning works by Russian composers, such as Balakirev, Glazunov, Lyadov and Rimsky-Korsakov.<sup>7</sup> Lyapunov assigned his own works as well. All of his students were required to play a Bach Prelude and Fugue from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* in each lesson, from memory. He believed that in the process of their study at the Conservatoire, students should have learned all 48 Preludes and Fugues.

For all his own prowess at the keyboard, Lyapunov never strove to be a concert pianist. In her thesis on Lyapunov, Olga Onegina points to his fear of performing in public as the main reason for his avoidance of the stage.<sup>8</sup> Another possible explanation was given by Lyapunov's daughter Anastasia, a musicologist, who described her father's performances in the following way:

His playing was simple, noble, calm, and possibly overly balanced. His technique was quite solid and his repertoire encompassed works of exceptional difficulty – it's sufficient to merely mention *Islamey* and his own Etudes. But, in my opinion, what he was definitely lacking is confidence on the stage, that special 'feeling for the stage' which is characteristic of virtuosos, when the performance, taking place in a concert hall with the presence of the audience, becomes enhanced with special excitement. It seems to me, father lacked that, and this may have been one of the reasons he had to give up a career as a virtuoso.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.



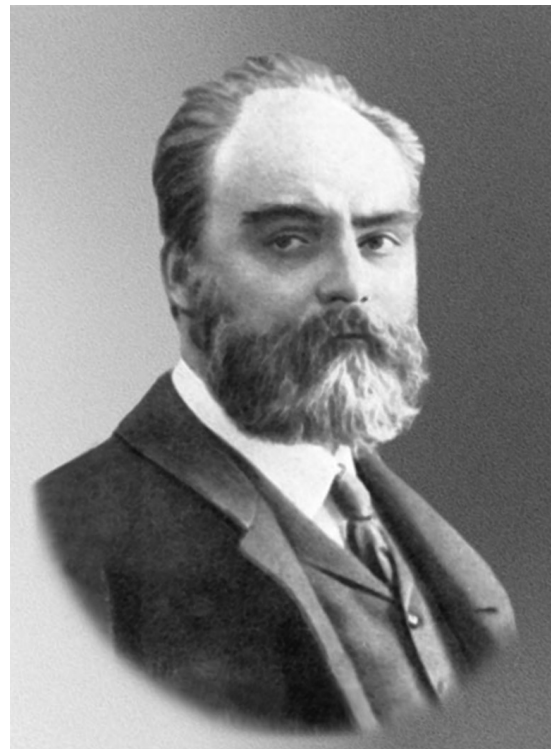
Even so, upon encouragement from his relatives and friends, Lyapunov gave a number of concerts consisting of his own works in order to promote them. He also frequently performed his newly composed works at the musical gatherings held at the homes of Balakirev and Stasov.

Few as they were, Lyapunov's performances as a pianist ceased completely during the turbulent times of the 1917 Revolution. His compositional career also slowed dramatically. He was in despair, as he felt the conditions in which he was living did not allow him to produce any work, and he often thought of leaving Russia. On 15 May 1919 he was elected warden of the Conservatoire church and entrusted with developing a course in early Russian sacred music. The new post lifted his spirits, but the feeling was not to last: starting in 1918, the Bolsheviks begin systematically to raid churches and confiscate church property and, when in February 1922 they reached the Conservatoire church, Lyapunov courageously refused to hand over the keys and to have the church sealed off. He was subsequently charged with insubordination. After a drawn-out hearing process that ended in July, Lyapunov was finally sentenced to six months' probation. The entire episode was almost unbearable, and Lyapunov grew even more despondent:

I'd like to go abroad. [...] I will not get better here, and I'm starting to feel as though I'm no longer going to be able to work. And I am tired, so tired that I could fall asleep and never wake up!<sup>10</sup>

He was finally able to leave Russia in autumn 1923 and settled in Paris with the family of an old friend, Alexander Bernardi. Suddenly, he felt inspired to perform again and made extensive plans to promote his piano works in Brussels and America. His compositions were becoming quite successful in his new home and for the first time he felt that his hard work as composer and pianist were beginning to pay off. Sadly, just when he was experiencing a revival in his artistic career, he passed away from a heart attack on 8 November 1924, hours before he was to give a concert.

<sup>10</sup> Olga Onegina, 'S. M. Liapunov in Emigration', *Musica*, Nos. 3–4, 2010, p. 33 ([http://www.conservatory.ru/files/Music\\_22\\_23\\_6.pdf](http://www.conservatory.ru/files/Music_22_23_6.pdf)).



*Lyapunov circa 1910, around the time he started teaching at the St Petersburg Conservatoire*