

KOPYLOV

Alexander
Alexandrovich
(1854-1911)

Kopylov was a Russian composer, violinist, chorister and teacher. He entered the Imperial Chapel in St. Petersburg at a very early age and remained there for many years, later being enrolled on the teaching staff. By the time that Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov assumed their responsibilities in 1883 as, respectively, Director and Assistant-Director, Kopylov was already 29 years old, and much the same age as A.K. Lyadov, also at that time on the teaching staff of the Chapel.

As a composer, Kopylov wrote secular music in keeping with the style of his greater contemporaries of the St. Petersburg school. He also wrote a great quantity of religious music for voices. Kopylov was not trained at the Conservatoire, though he apparently received private lessons from Rimsky-Korsakov. The latter introduced him to M.P. Belaieff, who published many of his works, including a symphony.

Kopylov's useful and otherwise uneventful career at the Imperial Chapel was marred by the far-from-cordial relations with the autocratic Balakirev, whose antipathy towards him 'appeared to increase' as Balakirev neared the end of his tenure in office. V.G. Kulchinsky, a pupil at the Chapel, relates how one day before visiting Balakirev, he rehearsed Kopylov's prize-winning string quartet.¹ Kopylov asked Kulchinsky to convey his regards to Balakirev. 'And you say to him, that I don't send him mine' was the short but blunt reply.² Balakirev's justification for this retort lay in his antipathy towards Belaieff and the latter's favourite, Glazunov (described by Balakirev as 'a fat, succulent beefsteak'); Balakirev felt that Belaieff pandered to Glazunov by publishing works by Kopylov, Sokolov and others, not all of whom merited this honour.³ Rimsky-Korsakov defended Kopylov against the antagonism of Balakirev, and deplored the extremely serious loss to the Chapel, if Kopylov, a magnificent teacher of choral music, were to leave.⁴

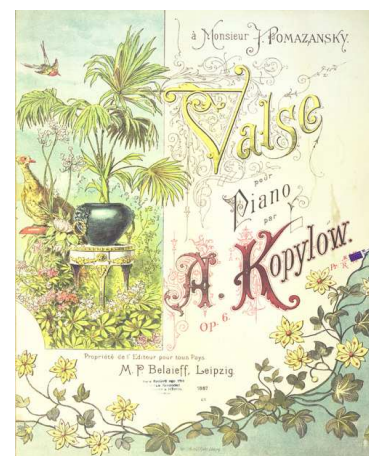
On 8th March, 1894, S.D. Sheremetev (1844 -1918), a director of the Imperial Chapel wrote to T.I. Filippov (1826 -1899), president of the folksong committee of the Russian Geographical Society, asking him if he would prevail on Balakirev, in regard to the removal of Kopylov, 'this could result in an undesirable complication'. The matter had been brought to the attention of the Tsar. It is suggested that the incident arose as a result of friction in the relationship of Kopylov with another in the Chapel.⁵ It is somewhat curious that this matter should have surfaced at the same time as the award to Kopylov for his string quartet. Whatever animosity Balakirev felt towards Kopylov, it does not appear to have disturbed the latter's equanimity. Kurbanov, in his memoirs, tells of Kopylov's presence at Belaieff's 'Friday' gatherings: 'He had a very cheery character, easily amused and usually at supper time on the 'Fridays', he sat at the end of the table, on the left side where Evald, Sokolov, convivial fellows, were sitting, telling merry anecdotes and stories, his thin laughter flowed continuously in a stream, among the others' guffaws'.⁶ Despite Balakirev's hard feelings, Kopylov was present at Balakirev's funeral in 1910. He himself died the following year.⁷

Belaieff published upwards of twenty miniatures for piano solo by Kopylov, notably the Study in F major, Op.9, and the three fugues, Op.12. However, as an instrumentalist, Kopylov was most at ease with the violin, for which he wrote four quartets. Of these, the first, in G major, Op.15, polished and melodious, won him the first prize in one of Belaieff's competitions. He also contributed a polka to the two suites of movements for string quartet known as 'Les Vendredis' (1895), named after the Friday evening chamber music gatherings at Belaieff's home in St. Petersburg. The polka is the last work of Kopylov to be found as having been published by Belaieff. Thereafter, Zimmerman published a few works.

The Moscow firm of Jurgenson published the first of Kopylov's music in 1886, and continued to publish his religious music until 1906. It appears, also, to have duplicated one or two works published by Zimmerman and Belaieff.



Kopylov - Scherzo Op. 10



Kopylov - Valse pour piano Op.6