

Lyadov -The Forgotten Russian Master

By Alla Cohen

Anatoly Lyadov (1855 -1914) was a prominent Russian composer, conductor and teacher. Now his name is half-forgotten, maybe because he worked mostly in the genre of musical miniature, but his exquisite, carefully polished, filigree small pieces deserve our attention even today. He was born to the musical family –his father was a conductor of St. Petersburg Imperial Opera. He began his musical training with his father then entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory, but he was expelled for failing to attend classes, and then readmitted again. After graduation he became an instructor in music theory, counterpoint and composition at the Conservatory. Among his students were Sergei Prokofiev and Nikolai Myaskovsky. As a composer he was greatly influenced by his teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov.

Many of his works possess the imaginative quality of Russian fairytales. He was fascinated by variation techniques and canonic writing. Among his most popular works are the orchestral miniatures: “*Baba Yaga*,” “*The Enchanted Lake*” and “*Kikimora*.” Besides being a drunkard, he was proverbially lazy. The unusually small output and slow tempo of his creative process stem from this. It is a well known fact that it took him 13 years to complete “*Baba Yaga*.” He even asked his wife not to give him dinner until he finished his composition, so reluctant he was to work that he needed some external push in order to do something. It is interesting that laziness precluded him from accepting the commission from the Ballet Russe to compose the famous “*Firebird*.” Diaghilev then offered this commission to Stravinsky, who accepted it, and the world soon acknowledged the great new star. For Stravinsky it was the first truly significant work that made him famous. Thankfully however, he was much more at ease and efficient in writing his piano works. None of the pieces are longer than a few minutes, but they are diverse in their musical style. One is reminiscent of Chopin and other of Debussy and Scriabin, but one can always see the genius of Lyadov’s voice. He mastered the short forms of mazurka and prelude. Lyadov was greatly interested in Russian Folk songs and together with Balakirev and Liapunov he collected folk songs for Imperial Geographic Society.

On the 27th of February, there will be a concert festival at New England Conservatory dedicated to the 150th Anniversary since Lyadov’s birth. This festival is organized by the faculty member of New England Conservatory, Tatyana Dudochkin. Lyadov’s creative work will be represented with all genres. There will be orchestral pieces – “*Kikimora*,” “*The Enchanted Lake*,” and “*Baba Yaga*,” performed by Symphony Pro Musica, Mark Churchill, music director; Scherzo for String Quartet, performed by NEC Honors String Quartet; the ballet “*Puppets*” performed by members of the Boston Ballet, Victor Plotnikov, choreographer; three arrangements of Russian Folk Songs performed by the Boston Russian Chorus, Irena Shachneva, conductor; three piano miniatures including the famous “*Musical Snuff Box*” performed by Tatyana Dudochkin; a Trio for piano, violin and cello performed by Masuko Ushioda, Tatyana Dudochkin and Ronald Lowry; two pieces for violin and piano performed by Ushioda and Dudochkin; two early songs performed by Yelena and Tatyana Dudochkin, Five songs for voice and orchestra performed by Galina Nikonovskaya and Symphony Pro Musica.

The concert will start at 8:00 pm at Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory. We are welcome to come and enjoy the music of the interesting though forgotten Russian master.