

# What Can Come from Russia Musically With Most of Its Creative Forces in Exile? Asks Rachmaninoff

Celebrated Composer-Pianist Bemoans His Lost Home at Ivanovka—How He Came to Leave Russia—An Ardent Champion of His Dead Compatriot Rimsky-Korsakoff—Latter Known by Too Few Works in America—Surprised by Growth in Musical Appreciation Here in Last Dozen Years—Spirit of Laughter Not Alien to Russian Music

By **FREDERICK H. MARTENS**

[Portrait on Front Page]

A MAN who, as composer, conductor and pianist, has reached that position in the world of music enjoyed by Sergei Rachmaninoff does not always wish to dwell, in conversation, on the more purely esthetic or cultural aspects of his art, and who can blame him? The greatest of musicians are also the most human, and the distinguished Russian master is no exception to the universal rule. The writer was privileged to meet him on Washington's Birthday, and the view of the Stars and Stripes fluttering from the windows of other houses in the same street probably emphasized for Mr. Rachmaninoff the fact that he was a stranger in a strange land, and called up visions of the Russia from which fate has driven him—for the great composer is an ardent lover of his own country.

"It is not that I do not appreciate the United States, or the kindness that has been shown my music and myself during the past two years of my residence here," he said, "but (he added with a smile) even if I wished to take out naturalization papers, and—from a utilitarian standpoint it might be well for me to do so, I suppose, since then my compositions would enjoy the protection of copyright in this country—my little daughter would never allow me to do so. She is only thirteen, but is a real little Russian in her love for her native land, and though she goes to school here, her thoughts are all for her home in Moscow and on what was once our farm out in the country. And since she is very determined, and has her mind made up that we are all going back to Russia sooner or later, I am inclined to think she will have her way.

"Of course, I like America. And I have been surprised, during this last stay of mine here, by the growth in general musical appreciation throughout the country. It seems to me that there has been a great advance since 1909-1910, when I concertized here before. California, I think, is a wonderful country, and in Nebraska, when I was playing there, I saw the same deep, black earth we have at Ivanovka, my summer farm, that lay about one night's journey south of Moscow. It reminded me of all the pleasant summers I spent there with my family, and made me feel quite homesick.

"I am inclined to believe that Mr. Brailsford's recent article in the *London Nation* paints rather too rosy a picture of present-day Russian musical conditions. I write to Russia and hear from my friends there, and their letters are delivered in Russia by means of a kind of 'underground' postal service. There are individuals in Reval or Riga who carry on an unofficial mail service for the benefit of those who want to know how their friends and relatives in Russia are faring. My own custom is to send a draft of \$100 to my 'postman,' who charges about \$5 per letter—I do not know how many thousand Esthonian roubles this may be—for delivery, and the letters really seem to reach their destination. When my 'balance' is exhausted, I am notified, and send on another draft. But it is difficult actually to send money into Russia. And, though

life is hard enough in Moscow and Petrograd, no doubt, it is still harder in smaller places. My mother, for instance, is living in a little town, where there is much actual distress. Recently she absolutely needed a new dress, and my sister was obliged to go to Moscow and—since she did not have enough millions of depreciated roubles to obtain a dress of any kind for her—had to go to our house in the city and take down some heavy window *portières* to make my mother a dress of them.

### Glazounoff Is Not Dead

"The recent report of the death of Glazounoff, whom I know intimately, and of whom I think a great deal, is, so far as I know, quite without foundation. But nearly all of Russia's great musicians have left the land; in a number of cases, like my own, conditions have forced them to leave it, and under such circumstances how can music, in the higher sense of the word, flourish? I think that general moderate opinion in Russia regards with equal distaste Czarist reaction and Communist extravagance, and hopes that a good régime of some sort, which avoids either extreme, will eventually come into being and save Russia. But for the present, at least, it seems to me that Russia is ruined. And it is not easy for many of us, who are exiles and whose lives have been devoted to art, who have stood aside from politics and have loved their native land, from which they have been driven, to reconcile ourselves to the thought.

"I had a big, beautiful summer farm at Ivanovka, where I went with my family every summer, and before the revolution I never had difficulties of any kind with the peasants. Our relations were always friendly. (Rachmaninoff's kindly smile is a warrant for the fact that his personal creed is one of good will.) Well, shortly after the revolutionary disorders began, while we were living at Ivanovka, a party of some 200 peasants came there. They did no damage and made no threats, but their leader, in the most good-natured way, drew me aside and said: 'Sir, I am going to give you some good advice: Leave this place!' He smiled at me and added: 'We know you make a great deal of money. How and where you make it we do not know, nor do we care. What you should do is to go away from this place to the

place where you make your money and stay there—and leave this farm to us. And—I tell you as a friend, sir!—you would do best to go away soon!'

### To Sweden with a Cherished Score

"Perhaps it was well that I took his advice, and that I left Ivanovka within the next month or so, and went to Sweden; for practically all the other owners of farms or landed estates in the neighborhood were killed soon after, and their land was divided among the peasants. All I managed to take with me was a little money, some 2,000 roubles—since my family consists of four persons, and the Soviet government would not allow anyone leaving the country to carry more than 500 roubles with them—and my orchestral score of Rimsky-Korsakoff's 'Coq d'Or,' which I treasure like a kind of breviary, so much do I love its music. The tragedy of it all, so far as my family and myself are concerned, is not my financial losses. I am not much of a business man, and money in itself does not mean so much to me. I knew I could always make more money. But it is my lost country, my lost home—we were all so fond of Ivanovka and had learned to love it so well. . . . I sometimes give up hope of ever seeing Russia again, though my little daughter, who is a Russian, heart and soul, is more sanguine.

"Of course, in some ways America is a far more wonderful country musically than Russia. You have fine symphony orchestras in a score and more of cities outside of New York and Boston; in Chicago, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Denver, Cleveland, Detroit, etc.—while in Russia really first-class symphonic orchestras were to be found only in Moscow, Petrograd and Kieff. Yet the Russian people as a whole is a very musical one, very. But now . . . with most of Russia's great musicians living in exile. . . ." Mr. Rachmaninoff took from a nearby table a copy of a new review which is printed (in Russian) in Paris, and said: "You see, it is the same with our writers: they write in Paris, and this review, *Annales Contemporaines*, has been founded to give them an opportunity to express themselves.

### A Plea for Rimsky-Korsakoff

"I cannot complain that the American public has not treated my works and myself in any but the kindest and most appreciative fashion; and yet I could wish that some of our great Russian composers received more recognition in the United States. There is Rimsky-Korsakoff, for example. Take his 'Coq d'Or.' After the wonderful success it made at the Metropolitan, such an outstanding success, had it occurred in Russia, would have led the management to ask at once: 'Has not this composer any other scores?' And it would have insisted on seeing them. Rimsky-Korsakoff has written some fifteen other operas, beautiful scores. And it is the same with regard to his symphonic music. Here, practically the only orchestral things known or heard are the 'Schéhérazade' and the 'Caprice Espagnole.' And the other beautiful things he has written: the three symphonies, the orchestral suites, symphonic poems, overtures and fantasies, are not performed. In Russia all his symphonic music was continually given. I regard Rimsky-Korsakoff as one of the greatest of masters, and it seems a pity that, relatively speaking, so few people know his music or realize its beauty. I wish you could have seen, as I did—when Diaghileff united the greatest artists of Russia and other countries in the Russian gala concerts he arranged in Paris in 1907—the respect, the admiration, the homage which was paid Rimsky-Korsakoff on all sides. I was there, and it was at once a revelation and a profound satisfaction to realize the honor in which he was held by the rest of musical Europe. "And see how much Debussy owes him! I could take the score of 'L'Après-

midi d'un faune' and show you page after page—the exact places, the very measures—where Debussy has borrowed from Rimsky. If I played 'The Children's Corner' in Russia to an audience unacquainted with it, the first thing I would be asked would be, 'What work of Rimsky's or Moussorgsky have you been playing?'

"Yes, I would like to see Rimsky-Korsakoff appreciated here at his true worth. Another point. My friend, Alfredo Casella—who recently informed me of my election as an honorary member of the St. Cecilia Academy of Rome, a very great honor, and one which I appreciate—not long since expressed himself in an article to the effect that he feared the spirit of laughter had deserted Italian music, and recommended Rossini to the modernists as a good antidote for musical melancholy. Rimsky-Korsakoff, for all the vast difference between his music and that of Rossini, and in spite of the Slavic sadness of much that he has written, is no musical pessimist, and in many of his works has also paid homage to the happiness, the free and joyous laughter which no great music should ever be entirely without. In his 'Sadko' and in 'Schéhérazade' he shows plainly that one may be joyous, even though a Slav, and that the Russian musical temperament can reconcile grief and joy."

Mr. Rachmaninoff did not glance at the clock—he is too amiable to do anything of that sort—but the writer did, and realized that, though centuries have passed, there is still point to the saying of *Ecclesiastes*, that "there is a time to every purpose under the heaven." And a time was drawing near when even a great composer might reasonably be expected to take to himself that mundane pabulum which plays its part in keeping alive the flame of inspiration. The Russian master, however, reassured him on the head of his having in a way delayed a process which might cause his inspiration to suffer. "While I am playing concerts, as I am at present, I can neither compose nor conduct," said he, "nor can I play when I compose." And pleased to think that he had not thrust a spoke into the creative wheel, one that might have retarded the shaping up of some noble work like the beautiful piano Concerto in C Minor, the writer went his way, reflecting that, though Mr. Rachmaninoff's present sojourn in the United States is Russia's loss, it is decidedly America's gain.

### Plan Choir Competition for Buffalo Fall Festival

A new feature of the National American Music Festival which will be introduced next fall in Buffalo is the church choir contest, which is to be held on Oct. 8. The compositions which have been chosen for the choir trials are Philip James's "The Days of Old" and Charles Gilbert Spross's "Lead, Kindly Light."

### Nicastro Under Friedberg Banner

Miguel Nicastro, conductor and violinist, at present touring in Havana, will be heard in the United States and Canada in concerts under the direction of Annie Friedberg. Mr. Nicastro recently made a successful début at Washington, D. C.

Ernesto Berúmen, the pianist, gained a success in his recital at Sweet Briar College, Va., March 5.

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