

Vasily Kalinnikov – Orchestral Works (1990)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Overture In B-flat Major (Bylina)* 2. *Serenade For String Orchestra In G Major* 3. *The Cedar And The Palm - Symphonic Picture After Heine* 4. *The Nymphs - Symphonic Picture After Turgenev* USSR Symphony Orchestra Evgeny Svetlanov – conductor

Like those of his Belgian contemporary Lekeu and his older countryman Mussorgsky, the story of Vasily Kalinnikov is a tragically short one in which a handful of works gives a tantalizing glimpse of what may have been.

Born in the village of Voin in the province of Orlov, Kalinnikov was the son of a cleric who also held the position of local police chief. The elder man was musically inclined, playing guitar and accordion as well as singing in the church choir. Young Vasily learned the latter instrument on his own and with the help of the village doctor, later adding the violin to his accomplishments. Further on he joined the church choir, learning the basics of music theory in the process and becoming the choir conductor at 14. Kalinnikov resolved to make music his career.

At 18 and with the most tenuous of financial resources, Kalinnikov set out for Moscow to study music at the conservatory, transferring to the Philharmonic Music School a half year later. While there, he bolstered his meager income by taking a course in bassoon, which resultantly enabled him to play in various orchestras as bassoonist, violinist, or timpanist. He also took on work as a music copyist.

Having graduated, Kalinnikov held various teaching posts and was assistant conductor at an opera company. However, the delayed effects of the strain of holding multiple positions during his student years undermined his health and he contracted tuberculosis. For this the composer

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traveled south, meeting Tchaikovsky in 1892. He received praise from the older man when he showed him the score of his own orchestral suite. This encouragement was a morale boost for the ailing young composer and he began work on his First Symphony in C minor. Completed in 1895, it was performed by the Russian Music Society in 1897. By that year, Kalinnikov had also completed his Second Symphony in A flat, this despite consumption of the throat compounding his health problems. The following year he completed the symphonic poem The Cedar and the Palm and received a commission to provide incidental music for a production of Tolstoy's Tsar Boris, for which he completed a substantial amount of music. But the young man's skein was running out and he succumbed to his illness on January 11, 1901, too frail to attend a performance of his Prologue to Boris.

In the centenary year of his birth recordings of the two symphonies led to the discovery of Kalinnikov by the public. While his premature passing is to be lamented, the small body of works which he left are very enjoyable exercises in late Russian Romanticism. Although these pieces are unmistakably Slavic in flavor, they seem to escape the brooding and gloom so omnipresent of his time and place in the arts, all the more curious given the external misery of his life. As such, Kalinnikov's work, especially the symphonies, are a happy if lesser known addition to the Russian orchestral literature. --- Wayne Gerard Reisig, All Music Guide

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