

ALEXANDER MOSSOLOV

David C F Wright DMus

Mossolov is only generally known by one work and that is *The Iron Foundry* a very short orchestral piece that made his name in 1926, but, thereafter, he was forgotten.

Alexander Vasilyevich Mossolov was born in Kiev on 11 August 1900. His mother Nina Alexandrona was a professional singer with the Bolshoi Theatre. Alexander's father Vasily Alexandrovich died in 1905. The family had moved to Moscow in 1904. Nina's second marriage was to Mikhail Leban, a successful painter and pedagogue.

The young man was in High School until 1916 and the following year worked in the office of the Peoples Commission for State Control and, among his duties, he sometimes delivered letters to Lenin. Alexander volunteered for the Red Army, the first Cavalry regiment, and saw action on both the Polish and Lithuanian borders. He received the Order of the Red Banner twice but then suffered from post traumatic stress disorder and was discharged in July 1921.

He entered the Moscow Conservatory studying with Myaskovsky and Gliere and had piano lessons with Gregory Prokofiev and Konstantin Igunov. He achieved fame in 1926 with *The Iron Foundry* one of four pieces that made up the ballet, *Steel*.

Mossolov's String Quartet no 1 was performed at the ISCM Festival in Frankfurt on 30 June 1927 and was very well received and the composer was appointed secretary of the Russian branch of ISCM in that year.

Like other composers such as Schubert, Chopin, Scriabin, Elgar and Britten, Mossolov was a very difficult and thoroughly unpleasant person. He entered into many conflicts with the Soviet authorities and was removed from the Composers Union in 1936. He was involved in drunken brawls and gross discourtesies with waiters and other guests, and, on 4 November 1937, was arrested for alleged counter-revolutionary activities and was imprisoned in the gulag in 1937 on an eight year sentence.

Due to the kindness and advocacy of both Myaskovsky and Gliere, Mossolov was released after nine months. He turned his attention to setting Turkmenian and Kyrgyz folk songs into orchestral suites. Eventually, he conformed to Russian dictates, but never enjoyed any success. At one time, he wrote to Stalin asking for his support.

The opera *Signal* was begun at the outbreak of World War Two mainly to depict air warfare. He wrote a ballet *The Four Moscows* to suggest what Moscow might be like in 2117.

He composed five piano sonatas, one of which is apparently lost, two piano concertos, two cello concertos, four string quartets, twelve orchestral suites, many vocal and choral works and allegedly eight symphonies but we can only account for seven.

The symphonies are not listed in some lists of his works and confusion reigns. But the details are:

Symphony no 1 Op 20 believed lost

Symphony no 4 to the memory of Lermontev (1941)

Symphony in E (1944) sometimes known as the war symphony

Symphony in C (1958-9)

Symphony no 3 in B Symphonic Song based on texts by Zemle

Symphony no 5 in A minor

Symphony no 6 (unfinished)

The splendid war symphony is available on Northern Flowers CD number NFMA 9978 coupled with the very attractive Cello Concerto no 2 in D minor. The orchestra is the St Petersburg State Academic SO conducted by Alexander Titov. There are four movements, the first three being largos but there are never dull or inactive. The finale is an allegro. It is a tremendous and magnificent work.

The piano music is exemplary and strikingly original which is essential for any composer to be great. It has a rugged virtuosity and cannot really be compared with any other composer. Having said that, if you enjoy the late piano sonatas of Prokofiev you will have to elevate a few gears to value these remarkable pieces. Incidentally, Mossolov was a brilliant pianist.

Despite his falling out with the Soviet authorities he was nationalistic as shown, for example, in his String Quartet no 2 which is based on patriotic themes from 1812.

However, he did not find favour in Russia or elsewhere in his life time which is an injustice since his music, technique, skill and orchestration is first class and, as Copland said, really great composers are comparatively rare.

He died in Moscow on 11 July 1973 a month short of his 73rd birthday.

I have some scores but they are probably still in copyright and so I cannot publish them, which is a great pity.

Hats off, gentlemen... this is a great composer!

(751)

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