

## ARTHUR DE GREEF

David C F Wright

Arthur De Greef was a Belgian composer and brilliant composer who lived from 10 October 1862 to 29 August 1940.

He was born in Louvain, Belgium and, even as a boy, was very gifted in music.

He won first prize in a local music school competition when he was only 11, and his parents realised his potential and subsequently enrolled him at the Brussels Conservatoire. His main teacher there was Louis Brassin, a former pupil of Ignaz Moscheles, although he also took counterpoint and composition studies with Joseph Dupont, François-Auguste Gevaert and Fernand Kufferath.

After graduating with the highest distinction from the Conservatoire at the age of 17, De Greef went to Weimar to complete his studies under Franz Liszt. He was a Liszt pupil for two years. A fellow pupil was Isaac Albeniz. Here de Greef was immersed in romantic piano and virtuosity



Following the Weimar sojourn, De Greef embarked on a career as a concert pianist, travelling widely. He was a friend of Edvard Grieg, whose Piano Concerto he had played publicly in 1898, and who called him “the best performer of my music I have met with”. In addition, he enjoyed the endorsement of Camille Saint-Saëns. Jonathan Woolf has written: “De Greef was, in all respects, an intensely musical, non-sensationalist, eloquent and impressive musician and whilst not being averse to some of the interventionist tactics of his contemporaries (retouching of the score) remained sympathetically self-effacing”. Many talented composers were so impressed with Greef that they dedicated works to him including Albeniz who called De Greef his dearest friend.

In fact, De Greef had many friends including Grieg, Saint Saens, Brahms, de Falla, Busonni, Pugno, Cortot, Paderewski, Rachmaninov, Ysaye, Gounod, von Bulow. He tolerated Elgar such was his non-judgmental attitude. He admired the best performers of the day such as Gigli, Melba, Shalyapin and many others.

De Greef composed a sizeable quantity of music, virtually all of which is now unheard. Among his works are two piano concertos. He was a devoted teacher, and taught piano at the Brussels Conservatoire for many years.

The two piano concertos are fine works but someone stupidly compared them with the Grieg and Schumann concertos. The first concerto of 1914 is very well-constructed and the coherence and purpose is clearly defined. The opening Moderato is an indication of what is evidently the composers’ personal style. The scherzo is a real scherzo and creates a smile, if not a laugh. It is full of life and vitality. The andante may be mournful but is often very beautiful whereas the finale has been described as a tornado. It is not basically a showy piece although it is not easy to play and the emphasis is on quality rather than gymnastics.

The second concerto dates from 1930 and was dedicated to his pupil Rene Delporte and is in three

movements namely Fear, Separation and Sursum Corda (Let us lift up our hearts). There is a long introduction to the first movement and the work is full of romanticism and dynamicism. The slow movement is often beautiful and has the character of a prayer and such music was frowned upon in these days where decadence took the place of moral values and faith. The finale has a passionate repartee between the soloist and the orchestra and the music is often energetic to correspond with the uplift of hearts.

Selected compositions include

#### Orchestral

The Marketeeress (1878)  
Slanting rays of the sun (1913)  
Humoresque (1928)  
Italian Suite  
Flandre Suite  
Autumn Impressions  
Four Flemish songs

#### Concertante works

Fantasy on Flemish Folk Songs for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 3 (1892)  
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in C minor (1914)  
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 2 in B flat minor (1930)  
Cinq chants d'amour, for soprano and Orchestra  
Piano Concertino (Concerto pour piano et petit orchestre)

#### Chamber music

Quatre pièces caractéristiques pour violon et piano (ca. 1883).  
Sonata No. 1 in D for violin and piano (1896)  
Sonata No. 2 in C for violin and piano  
Six New Concert Studies  
Piano Trio in F (1935)

#### Piano

Coucher de Soleil  
Slanting rays of the sun (1913; Orchestrated version exists)  
Five études in concert form (Cinq études de concert) (1914–1918)  
Sonata in C minor for 2 Pianos (1928; 2 pianos)  
Valse-caprice (2 Pianos)

(722)

#### Scores

[\*Four Flemish Folk Songs\*](#)

[\*Etude Nouvelles\*](#)