

NIKOLAI RAKOV

Dr David C F Wright

Nikolai Petrovich Rakov was born on 14 March 1908 at Kaluga. He studied the violin at the Rubinstein Music School and then studied music and composition at the Moscow Conservatory with Reinhold Gliere and Sergei Vasilenko. He graduated in 1931 which was the year of his orchestral work, the Mari Suite, and he became Gliere's assistant at the Conservatory. He became a lecturer in music in 1935 and professor of composition in 1943. By 1940 he had composed his Symphony no. 1 in D which he revised 18 years later in 1958. He wrote four symphonies, the Symphony no 2 in F of 1957 was entitled Youth, the Symphony no. 3 of 1962 in C is called the Little Symphony which is scored for a string orchestra and the Symphony no. 4 of 1973.

Rakov was very nationalistic as seen in his Russian Overture of 1947 and keen on young people and educational music. He wrote four piano concertos noted for their brevity and scored for string orchestra alone. Two were written in 1969 and the other two in 1973 and 1977 respectively.

There are two violin concertos. The first in E minor dates from 1944 and won the Stalin Prize that year and was taken up by David Oistrakh. The second in A minor was written between 1954 and 1973, and he wrote his Concertino in D minor for violin and string orchestra in 1960. His other concert work was a Concert Fantasy in G minor for clarinet and orchestra of 1968.

He had many distinguished pupils including Boris Tchaikovsky, Andrei Eshpai, Alfred Schnittke and the great Edison Denisov.

His own music is anachronistic initially the Romantic style and, therefore, not having any originality. Later his music went back further in time and became neo-classical.

Among his chamber works are two violin sonatas of 1951 and 1974 as well as a violin sonatina of 1959. His other favoured instrument, the clarinet, resulted in two sonatas of 1956 and 1975 respectively and a clarinet sonatina of 1963. There are two oboes sonatas of 1951 and 1978. He also wrote two quartets for four cellos dating from 1984 and 1986 respectively.

Although he was a violinist, he wrote much music for the piano including four sonatas and sixteen sonatinas.

As he towed the political line in the USSR, he was named as a People's Artist in 1975.

I have studied some of his piano music. The Five Preludes of 1936 are brief, straightforward and comparatively easy. I suppose the first prelude of 24 bars is grade 3 standard, the second of 45 bars is about the same, prelude 3 is the most substantial and may be grade 4 to 5 as may be the final prelude. Some might say that they are progressive in that they gradually become more difficult but perhaps their value is in the educational field rather than in a concert recital

The Poeme of 1938 and is far more interesting. It starts with a strange chord, strange for the time. A minor sixth in the bass and a diminished ninth in the treble. This piece does call for a pianist of some ability and the music flows and has ripples and cascades. It is a sort of a romantic impressionism.

The Classical Suite of 1943 has a prelude, minuet, gavotte, air and gigue. It is anachronistic and takes us back to pre-classical times. One wonders whether there is any point in writing music in such olden styles when there is so much of it which was composed at the time. The opening prelude does not seem to belong to the other four movements.



1950 saw the composition of the Sonatina no. 1, an attractive piece in three movements. It has its difficulties which makes it worth playing but it is slight as a sonatina may usually be. If the final presto in E Major is played very quickly it should have an appeal.

The Sonatina no. 4 seems to have one movement. Again, it is an attractive piece but it is not outstanding and is somewhat slight which could lead us to believe that it is another work of educational purpose and value.

The Concert Studies of 1965 are of variable quality. The fourth is probably the most interesting. But the title Concert Study seems to indicate work of great virtuosity and difficulty. These studies are not in that class.

He also wrote music for folk musicians such as the sonata for clarinet, bayan and domra.

In 1983 there appeared a Valse-Fantaisie which, like much of his work, is sparse in texture for the most part, and does not present any challenge for a concert pianist. It is rather predictable and, again, one wonders whether this was another of his many works for a pupil not yet blessed with a great talent.

His finest and most popular work is undoubtedly the Violin Concerto no. 1, no wonder Oistrakh loved it. It glows with glorious and gorgeous sounds, is powerfully expressive and unashamedly romantic. The slow movement has a beauty beyond words and some of the most superb orchestration you will ever hear. It is certainly the most beautiful slow movement of any violin concerto. It is perfection and that refers to the complete three movement concerto.

He died in Moscow on 3 November 1990. He was 82.

WORKS (not a complete list)

Piano

Two Etudes (1929)

24 Concert etudes (1929 -1974)

Four Preludes (1930)

Four Lyric Pieces (1935)

Two Pieces on Mari Themes for piano (1936)

Ten Novelettes (1937)

Nine water colours, children's pieces (1945)

Variations in B minor (1949)

Classical Suite

Sonatina no. 1 (1950)

Piano Sonata no. 1 (1959)

Sonatinas 2 3 and 5 to 14 (1950 - 1976)

24 Children's pieces in all the keys (1961)

Sonatina no. 4 (1964)

Sonata no 2 (1973)

Seven Portraits (19740

Sonatina no. 15 (1976)

Sonatina no. 16 (1980)

Sonata no. 3

Sonata no. 4

Instrumental and chamber

Story for viola and piano (1930)

Poem for cello and piano (1942)

Romance for double bass and piano (1943)

Oboe Sonata no. 1 (1951)

Sonata for violin and piano no. 1 (1951)

Sonata for clarinet and piano no. 1 (1956)

Five pieces for two violins and piano (1958 - 1962)

Sonatina for clarinet and piano (1963)

Sonatina for harp and piano (1963)

Sonatina no 2 for violin and piano
Sonatina no 3 (Little Triptych) for violin and piano (1968)
Flute Sonata (1970)
Sonatina no 2 for harp and piano (1970)
Sonatina no. 3 for harp and piano (1971)
Variations for cello and piano (1972)
Sonata for violin and piano no. 2 (1974)
Sonata for clarinet and piano no. 2 (1975)
Sonata for oboe and piano (1978)
Quartet no 1 for four cellos (1984)
Quartet no 2 for four cellos (1986)
Poem in E minor for violin and piano
Improvisation for violin
Poem, scherzino for violin
Sonata for clarinet, bayan and domra
Vocalise for trombone
Waltz for cello
Voice
Four romances (1941)
Nine Romance (1949)
Ten Vocalises (1950)
Five Estonian Songs (1957)
With You, eight songs (1963)
Orchestra
Scherzo (1930)
Mari suite (1931)
Dance suite (1934)
Symphony no. 1 (1940 rev 1958)
Heroic march (1942)
Violin Concerto no 1 in E minor (1944)
Concert waltz in A (1946)
Russian Overture (1947)
Concert Suite (1949)
Ballet Suite (1950)
Symphony no. 2 (Youth) (1957)
Symphonietta in G minor for string orchestra (1958)
Violin Concertino in D minor (1960)
Symphony no. 3 (Little Symphony) for string orchestra (1962)
Violin Concerto no 2 in A minor (1954 - 1963)
Concert fantasy for clarinet and orchestra (1968)
Piano Concerto no. 1 (1969)
Summer Day, five pieces for string orchestra (1969)
Piano Concerto no. 2 (1969)
Symphony no. 4 (1973)
Lyric Melodies
Piano Concerto no. 3
Piano Concerto no. 4

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