

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF REINHOLD GLIERE

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Reinhold Moritzovich Gliere was born in Kiev on 11 January 1875. Although Russian he was of Belgian-Jewish descent.

His father manufactured wind instruments.

As a boy Reinhold learned the violin and began to compose at an early age performing his pieces at home which was a regular meeting place for musicians.

In Gliere's boyhood and young adult life, that is between 1880 and 1905 there were enormous advances in Russian industry and production increased by over 300%. Most of the capital came from European businessmen and this created jobs in the cities and took the workforce away from the agricultural needs to work in industry and, as a consequence, there were not enough workers in the fields. Food production was put in serious jeopardy and there were inadequate supplies for the industrial workers in the cities where there was also shortage of housing and workers lived in poor and crowded accommodation. To add to the problem Russia had no parliament and all political parties and organisations were banned. In 1881 Tsar Alexander II was assassinated by revolutionaries. Opponents of the succeeding Tsar were sent to appalling prisons in Siberia

The time was ripe for revolution and it came in October 1905 and in many parts of the Russian empire. In Odessa sailors on the Potemkin mutinied and refused to obey orders. Political parties were being formed. Russia's war with Japan in 1904 ended in Russia suffering a terrible defeat. After the October revolution the Tsar promised and granted some reforms but appointed Stolypin as his Chief Minister and it was he who sent 21,000 revolutionaries to Siberia and another 1,000 were executed. In 1907 it was declared that most peasants and industrial workers were unable to vote. The Russian people were discontented.

But to go back to young Gliere. In 1891 he attended the Kiev Music School where he studied composition and the violin for three years. In 1894 he went up to the Moscow Conservatory where his violin tutors were Sokolovsky and Hrimali. His harmony teachers were Anton Arensky and Konius and Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev was his tutor for counterpoint. Mikhail Ippolitov- Ivanov was his teacher in composition and instrumentation.

Anton Stepanovich Arensky was born in Novgorod in 1861 and studied with Rimsky-Korsakov. As well as his academic posts he composed three operas, two symphonies, two string quartets, a piano concerto, a piano trio, many piano pieces including the piano duet suites and a glowing set of variations on a theme of Tschaikovsky. Arensky died in 1906 at Terijoki in Finland.

Another student of the past generation at the Moscow Conservatory was Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev. His years of study were 1866-75. His composition teacher was Tschaikovsky and Nikolay Rubinstein (1835- 1881), the brother of the composer Anton Rubinstein, taught Taneyev the piano. He had his professional debut in 1875 with Brahms' magnificent Piano Concerto no. 1 in D minor, Opus 15. The following year he toured with the violinist Leopold Auer (1845-1900) whose fame rests on his refusal to play the Tschaikovsky Violin Concerto which was dedicated to him. Taneyev had important posts at the Moscow conservatory becoming director in 1885. He wrote books on theory, six symphonies an entertaining Overture on Russian themes and string quartets. He also completed a vocal version of Tschaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet. He gave the first Moscow performance of Tschaikovsky's Piano Concerto no 1 in B flat minor a work savaged by Rubinstein. Taneyev was opposed to Russian nationalism in music and, like Gliere, preferred a more romantic style. However, Gliere was always true to the current Russian policies and government and wrote a lot of patriotic music which may embarrass many today. Taneyev died at Dyudkovo in 1915.



He is often confused with his uncle, Alexander Taneyev (1850- 1918), who studied with Rimsky -Korsakov and wrote operas, three symphonies, three string quartets and many other pieces.

One of the most interesting of Gliere's teachers was Ippolitov-Ivanov who was born in Gachna in 1859. Sadly he is only remembered today for his Caucasian Sketches. He also studied with Rimsky-Korsakov before becoming the Director of the Tiflis Conservatory (1883 - 1893). He was also patriotic and wrote Song of Stalin. He added three acts to Mussorgsky's unfinished opera The Marriage and composed six operas himself of which The Last Barricade of 1934 deals with revolutionary subjects, a symphony, symphonic poems, two string quartets and other pieces. He died in Moscow in 1935. His nationalism was in opposition to Taneyev.

Gliere graduated in 1900 with his one act opera-oratorio Earth and Heaven after Byron. Immediately after graduation he taught at the Gnessin School of Music in Moscow.

He had already composed his String Sextet no. 1, Opus 1, in 1900 and his String Quartet no. 1, Opus 2 and the Symphony no. 1 in E flat, Opus 8 written between 1899 and 1900. There was the Romance for violin and piano, Opus 3, the Ballad for cello and piano, Opus 4 both date from 1902 whereas Opus 5, The Twelve Pieces for cello and piano date from 1910.

The Symphony no. 1 is a gem. It is unpretentious, colourful, cheerful but not superficial. Themes abound and what good themes they are. The orchestration is magical, never extreme or overpowering. The music is natural and fluent. It is neither episodic or spasmodic. It is music in the Russian tradition although more refined than Tschaikovsky who was Gliere's senior by 35 years

Rachmaninov, who was two years older than Gliere, had composed his Symphony no. 1 in 1895 and the story goes that Glazunov conducted the premiere IN 1897 and was drunk and so the performance was an abject failure. Rachmaninov sought the help of hypnosis from Dr Nikolay Dahl and recovered and the Piano Concerto no. 2 in C minor was the result. This dates from 1901.

It is important to note that for several decades the music of Gliere was far more popular than Tschaikovsky's. But, later, orchestras in the West responded more favourably to Tschaikovsky because his music was that of a showman.

The Symphony no. 1 has four movements. The first begins with an andante introduction before entering into an allegro. It is warm, encouraging, tuneful and beautifully written and scored. The second is a joyful old-fashioned scherzo which is also hugely enjoyable. The slow movement is lyrical and exceptionally lovely. The finale is exciting and heads towards a stirring conclusion. It is a soul-satisfying work.

His Symphony no. 2 in C minor, Opus 25, was dedicated to Sergei Koussevitzky and dates from 1907, the year of the completion of Rimsky Korsakov's The Golden Cockerel. With the Koussevitzkys in mind Gliere composed Two Pieces for double bass and piano, Opus 32, the following year, 1908. Koussevitzky was a double bass player. The massive Symphony no. 3 in B minor subtitled Ilya Muromets, Opus 42, dates from 1909-11. It is a very splendid piece.

It is important to state Koussevitzky's philosophy. He used to say that a conductor's role was to perform the music as written and as the composer intended it to be, that no conductor should interpret the music his own way and put his individual stamp on it. This was also the philosophy of great conductors such as Reiner, Boult and Bryden Thomson but there are conductors who alter things or do not follow the composer's instructions but, sadly, many of these renegade conductors are popular and have a following. Some of the worst offenders are claimed to be Celibache, Solti, Haitink and Simon Rattle.

Along with Gliere's major works there were many semi-educational pieces including the Twelve Easy Pieces for violin and piano, Opus 45, of 1909, the Ten Duos for two cellos, Opus 53, and the Seven Instructive Pieces for violin and piano, Opus 54, of 1911.

This indicates how prolific he was in that he had over fifty works to his name in eleven years of composing. It also shows his versatility in that his work ranged from learning pieces to enormous orchestral scores. There

were also nineteen sets of songs from opus 6 to opus 55.

Between 1905 to 1907 Gliere studied conducting in Berlin with Oscar Fried while political upheaval was happening in Russia. In 1908 he was back in Russia teaching at the Moscow Conservatory. His only real claim to fame as a conductor was in that he conducted the premiere of Prokofiev's exciting Piano Concerto no. 1 in D flat with the composer at the piano.

The years 1910 to 1913 were monumental in the history of Russian music with three stunning ballet scores by Igor Stravinsky, *The Firebird*, *Petroushka* and *The Rite of Spring* - music ahead of its time in the environment of Russian orthodoxy in music.

Gliere moved to Kiev in 1913 and taught composition at the conservatory there being elected its director in 1914.

The Symphonic Poem: *The Sirens*, Opus 33 dates from 1913. It is another portrait of those seductive women who used their sexuality to lure sailors to their doom. And yet there are sirens in all walks of life, women who treat men like commodities which, after a few years, if that, they trade in for a new model, like a car. It may be true to say that most men are boringly predictable but they are more stable. Women are often said to be so changeable, moody and unpredictable. This sounds sexist but even that term is unjust. If a man says something critical about a woman, even if it is true, it is sexist but a woman can say the same things about a man and it is not sexist. It is a woman's world. There is no equivalent word for a male siren. The first woman of all was Eve and she teased Adam and caused his doom and women have been doing that ever since.

The Sirens is a good piece with an eventual climax. There is no excess, no musical madness, no over-statement, just honest and gratifying music.

Such a review and that of the *Symphony no. 1* might suggest blandness. There is nothing bland about his music. There lies behind the composer a sure and quiet hand of confidence, no sensationalism and no playing to the gallery, just honest well-crafted music.

Russia entered the first world war because they had a duty to protect the Serbs as they were also of Slavic origin. The Russians approved of this action and, as a result, the Tsar was in favour.

The war began well for the Russians but by the end of 1914 they had suffered terrible defeats at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes. They made the mistake of relying on numbers and did not take into account the might of German artillery. Large numbers of the Russian Army deserted. The Tsar decided to take charge of the war effort in August 1915 and that made matters worse and his popularity reached rock bottom.

The war necessitated rations for the troops, and in advance, and there was not enough food in the country itself. Russian transport was supplying the troops first. Many peasants were called up to fight and therefore could not tend the crops. The Tsar ignored warnings by the Duma, the Russian government 'arranged' after the first attempt at revolution.. His main concern was now for his son, Alexei, who had a fatal blood disease and for his wife Tsarina Alexandra who believed that the corrupt monk, Rasputin, could heal the boy. The monk was assassinated in 1916. Unease continued in the country and the people rebelled but the Tsar would not listen. In March 1917 he was forced to abdicate. His brother, Mikhail, took over for a while but soon stood down. In June of that year a major attack against the Germans was a disaster.

The Bolsheviks were a communist party representing the working class. It was led by Vladimir Ilich Lenin who determined to move Russia into socialism. It was Karl Marx who developed socialism and communism stating that the working class, the proletariat, were the most important members of any society and therefore had to rule. By November 1917 the Bolsheviks were in power, the Provisional Government being no match for them.

Gliere moved back to Moscow in 1920 and was engaged in concert tours and interested in the national culture of Russia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan. He was also made the Head of Musical Sciences in the Department of Peoples Education at the Moscow Conservatory.

But there was still unrest in Russia. Most Russians did not want the Bolsheviks to be in power. The anti-Bolsheviks were called the Whites and the Bolsheviks the Red Army. Civil war broke out and in 1920 the Reds defeated the Whites. Trotsky headed up the Red Army and used Tsarist generals and officers to fight for the Reds by keeping their families as hostages. Fearing that the Whites might obtain the help of the exiled Tsar the Reds had he and his family executed in 1918.

The communists won the war and then there was a terrible drought causing the crops to fail and millions died of starvation. The crops that did exist had been harvested to feed the powers that be and the Red Army. Ordinary citizens did not matter. And the Red Army were called upon to quell further rebellion.

Lenin introduced show trials in 1922 in which he brought to trial anyone opposed to communism. Such people included the Whites, Kulaks, the Bourgeoisie, Jews and Christians. Socialism had no time for Christianity or religion. Marx said that religion was the opium of the people. All religious people and their places of worship were attacked and destroyed by Lenin. When he died, Stalin took over defeating Trotsky and making him and his followers enemies.

It was in 1923 that Gliere began his detailed study of Azerbaijan folk lore. It was really a Communist dictate to sell propaganda. He made a long visit to Baku and the result was his opera *Shah-Senem*, Opus 69, written in 1923 -24 produced in Baku on Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea in 1934 after some extensive revision.

The year 1924 saw the composition of two of his patriotic works the *Fantasy for the Festival of the Comirteen* for military band and the *Red Army March*, also for military band. In 1921 he composed his *Symphonic Poem: The Zaporchy Cossacks*, Opus 64, which he developed into a ballet-pantomime. In 1925 he wrote another ballet-pantomime called *Cleopatra*. Instrumental music for *Aristophanes' Lysistrata* appeared in 1923 and for *Beaumarchais's marriage of Figaro* in 1927. The *String Quartet no. 4*, Opus 67, dates from 1928.

In 1929 Stalin introduced collectivism namely the policy that everything was owned by the state and any variation of this policy was capitalism classified as the unacceptable policy of the West. The peasants had to produce more grain to sell abroad to raise capital and Stalin's demands were impossible. The Kulaks, the peasant farmers, unable to meet these ridiculous demands were then persecuted by Stalin and thousands upon thousands were killed by Stalin's Red Army and their homes destroyed. In addition, there was a severe famine in 1932-33 resulting in about five million dying. Stalin's policies were killing his own people.

In 1934 Stalin ordered the assassination of all his enemies and opponents. This was no different to what Hitler was doing in Nazi Germany.

During the thirties Gliere was often out of the picture studying the folk music in the Caucasian countries travelling in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. He composed a ballet *The Comedians after Lope de Vega* in 1930, the *Symphonic poem Zapovit*, Opus 73, in 1933, the *Heroic March for the Bayiet Mongolia ASSR* opus 71, in 1936 and, in 1937, a *Solemn Overture for the 20th anniversary of the October revolution*, opus 72.

To quote but one example of Gliere's skill, if you listen to the *Dance of the Moorish Girls* from the *de Vega* ballet you can only be amazed at the superb orchestration. The Spanish flavour is brilliantly captured without stamping feet and the annoying clatter of castanets.

He also wrote three concertos one of which is unique. This is the *Concerto for coloratura soprano and orchestra*, Opus 82. There is also a *Horn Concerto*, Opus 91 and a very engaging *Harp Concerto*, Opus 74, written in the late 1930s. His early career was of three symphonies and in his sixties and seventies he composed three concertos.

Gliere was the Chairman of the Committee of the Union of Soviet Composers from 1938 until 1948. In 1938 he was awarded the Title of People's Artist. Prior to and after the Second World War when composers like Prokofiev and Shostakovich were condemned in another purge by Stalin, Gliere remained in favour.

The suppression of some music in the USSR, regarded as formalistic, and the policy of social realism in the arts which included the dictate that all music must be optimistic and praise the achievements of the USSR and of

Communism itself may have stemmed for the fact that Stalin was very fond of the movies and with the introduction of sound and music found himself admiring film music by Tikhon Khrennikov who was born at Elets in 1913. Stalin appointed him as secretary-general of the Union of Soviet Composers. It was a terrifying prospect because Stalin dictated the only type of music that was permitted to be composed and performed by musicians in the Communist state. Khrennikov was unwittingly a prisoner of the system and warned composers as to what was politically correct and that non-conformity could land them in trouble. Stalin sent many writers to the gulags for not complying with Soviet policy but, as far as is known, no composer was so punished and this is due to the good influence of Khrennikov. But he has taken a lot of flack for this. Stalin's purges had to be obeyed and both Shostakovich and Prokofiev, who were under threat, responded with works that were politically acceptable. With Shostakovich, it was the memorable Symphony no. 5 and with Prokofiev the glowing Violin Concerto no. 2.

A further dose of Stalin's purges came about in 1948 and Khrennikov was the chief prosecutor. It is very easy and convenient to blame him, but he had no choice. There were composers who did not publish or publicise their work because it did not conform to Soviet restrictions although underground performances took place. It was the same in Communist countries generally so that Peter Eben in Czechoslovakia was a victim as well as a very fine composer in the USSR, Edison Denisov.

The music of conformity did produce some fine composers but music of the Communist age was so conformed and consequently predictable that it has struggled survived although there are moves now to make it known although it is already branded as anachronistic. Fascinating music is emerging from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Russia and its provinces but it will accrue the definition of old-fashioned and as music not of its time but backward-looking and therefore not very original.

It is interesting to note that music written under communist regimes are seldom played as is the case with music written by communists in non-communist states. In Britain that applies to Rutland Boughton, Alan Bush and Bernard Stevens although Stevens has had some recordings because substantial donations to such recordings have been given by the pop group, The Grateful Dead.

But to return to Khrennikov, he wrote three operas, two fine symphonies, a cello concerto and a violin concerto, songs and, of course, film music.

It took the world by surprise when Stalin signed an anti-aggression pact with Hitler in 1939 which stunned the world. The Russians and the Germans agreed not to go to war against each other and to divide Poland if the Nazis took it. In The Second World War about 20 million Russians died.

The 1940s saw more music from Gliere conforming to Soviet ideals and policies such as the Overture: Friendship of the Peoples, Opus 79, On the Fifth Anniversary of the Stalin Constitution, an Overture on Slav Themes, also dating from 1941, For the Happiness of the Fatherland of 1942, For the Twenty fifth Anniversary of the Red Army in 1943 which year also saw a War Overture and in 1945 a Victory Overture. In 1948 he wrote another String Quartet and set to work on his great ballet, The Bronze Horseman.

On the death of Stalin in 1953 Nikita Khrushchev came to power. He said that Communism must no longer be harsh and called for a process of de-Stalinisation.

Gliere died in Moscow on 26 June 1956. He was 81.

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