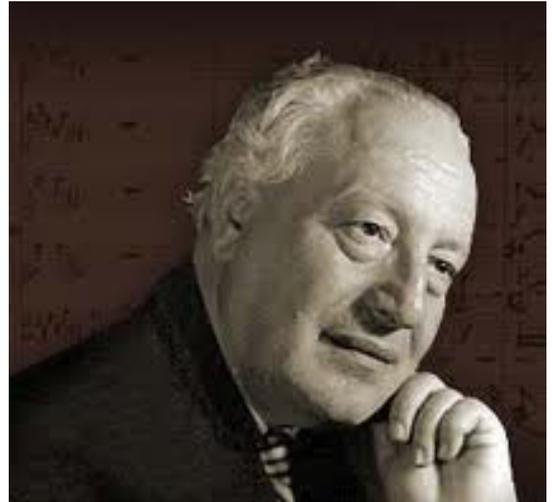


## PANCHO VLADIGEROV

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Pancho Vladigerov is, without doubt, the most well-known Bulgarian composer but he seems to be ignored in the West and elsewhere which is another example of gross injustice.

He was born in Zurich on 13 March 1899 but the family lived in Shumen in Bulgaria. His mother, Dr Elle Pasternak was a relation of the writer Boris Pasternak and she was a Russian Jew and Pancho's father, Dr Haralen Vladigerov, was a lawyer. He died in 1908 and two years later the family moved to Sofia.



Pancho's grandfather, Leon Pasternak, had left Odessa to settle in Zurich.

He was a mathematician and a champion chess player, a violinist and a part time composer. He would play the violin with Pancho at the piano and sometimes they would be joined by Pancho's twin brother, Luben, who became a respected violinist. Grandfather taught Pancho Jewish melodies and, in 1950, composed his Jewish Poem, sometimes wrongly called a symphony a work much admired by Shostakovich.

In 1912, through the good offices of his mother, he acquired a scholarship to Berlin and with his brother studied at the Staatliche Akademische Hochschule. Pancho's teachers were Paul Juon for composition and Karl Heinrich Barth for piano. Juon lived from 1872 to 1922 and Barth lived from 1847 - 1922. Vladigerov won the Mendelssohn Prize twice in 1918 and 1920 and after graduation studied with Friedrich Gersham (1839-1916) a fine composer in his own right whose Opus 1 is a fine Piano Sonata ; he also wrote four symphonies, a piano concerto, two violin concertos, a cello concerto, three piano quartets, two string quintets, four violin sonata, two piano trios and five string quartets.

Vladigerov also had some lessons with Leonid Kreutar for piano.

After graduation Pancho Vladigerov was music director of the Duetsches Theatre in Berlin working with Max Reinhardt. In 1932 he returned to Sofia and became professor of piano at the State Academy.

In the 1920s and 1930s especially, he received fame and acclaim throughout Europe and was admired by Richard Strauss, Shostakovich and Khachaturian but he still remains barely known outside Bulgaria.

He was awarded the Herder Prize by the University of Vienna in 1969

He died on 8 September 1978.

Op Title

- 1 Sonata for violin and piano in D 1914
- 2 Four pieces for piano 1915
- 3 Variations Majestic Balkan Mountains for piano 1916
- 4 Piano Trio in B flat minor 1916
- 5 Six Lyric Songs 1916

- 6 Piano Concerto no 1 in A minor 1918
- 7 Two Impromptus for violin and piano 1919
- 8 Symphonic Legend for orchestra
- 9 Ten Impressions for piano 1920
- 10 Four Pieces for piano 1920
- 11 Violin Concerto in F 1921
- 12 Four Pieces for violin and piano 1921
- 13 Music for Strindberg's A Dream 1921
- 14 Burlesque for piano 1922
- 15 Three Pieces for piano 1922
- 16 Vardar for orchestra (other versions) 1922
- 17 Six Exotic Pictures for piano 1924
- 18 Two Bulgarian Paraphrases for violin and piano 1925
- 19 Five songs 1925
- 20 Two Pieces for violin and piano 1926
- 21 Bulgarian Suite for piano 1926
- 22 Piano Concerto no 2 in G minor 1930
- 23 Seven Bulgarian dances for orchestra 1931
- 24 Classic and Romantic for piano 1931
- 25 Bulgarian Songs and dances for piano 1932
- 26 Three Songs for voice and orchestra 1932
- 27 Concert Overture Earth 1933
- 28 Sonatina Concertante for piano 1934
- 29 Shumen piano miniatures 1934
- 30 Tsar Kaloyan, opera 1936
- 31 Piano Concerto no 3 in B flat minor 1937
- 32 Six Bulgarian Folk Songs 1938
- 33 Symphony no 1 in D minor 1939
- 34 Quartet in G 1940
- 35 Concert Fantasia cello and orchestra 1941
- 36 Episodes for piano 1941
- 37 Aquarelles for piano 1942
- 38 Four Romantic symphonic Dances 1942
- 39 Two Romantic symphonic sketches 1943
- 40 Legend about the lake, ballet 1946
- 41 Six Bulgarian Folk Songs 1947 voice and piano
- 42 Six Bulgarian Folk Songs 1948 voice and piano

- 43 Six Bulgarian Folk Songs 1948 voice and piano
- 44 Symphony no 2 (May) 1948
- 45 Nine Sept heroic Overture 1945
- 46 Pictures for piano 1950
- 47 Jewish Poem for orchestra 1951
- 48 Piano Concerto no 4 in G 1953
- 49 Two Pictures Caesar and Cleopatra 1953
- 50 Suite : Happiness 1953
- 51 Suite for piano 1954
- 52 Dramatic Poem, Song to Peace 1956
- 53 Three Pieces for piano 1957
- 54 Six Bulgarian folk songs 1958 voice and piano
- 55 Six Bulgarian Folk Songs 1958 voice and piano
- 56 Six Bulgarian Folk Songs 1958 voice and piano
- 57 Three Concert Pieces for piano 1960
- 58 Piano Concerto no 5 in D 1963
- 59 Novelettes for piano 1963
- 60 Five pieces for piano 1965
- 61 Violin Concerto no 2 in G minor 1968
- 62 Six Bulgarian Folk Songs 1968 voice and piano
- 63 Lyulin Impressions for piano 1972
- 64 Three Short Pieces for piano 1972
- 65 Four Pieces for piano 1973
- 66 Four Silhouettes for piano 1974
- 67 Four Songs 1974
- 68 Four Poetic Pieces for piano 1976
- 69 Four Frescos for piano 1977
- 70 Three Bagatelles for piano 1978

As to his works his most famous work is Vardar a rhapsody for orchestra which is also in other forms. Some of the versions or how it is played are simply awful.

The Piano Concertos are generally well written. The first sets out to impress and does but the first movement is very long at 18 minutes in comparison to the rest. There is a glorious slow movement with a memorable theme although there is a brief moment when it sounds like a fairground. The music is rich, lyrical and powerful with hints of humour and a grandiose finale. The second concerto seems to be overburdened with excessive big piano chords and lacks spontaneity ; the piano part sounds too orchestral and the music does not always flow. The Piano Concerto no 3 contains some very fine music and is probably the best of the five whereas the Piano Concerto no 4 is the most original and the most compelling. The final concerto is acceptable but continues in the vein of the first concerto.

It is my belief that Vladigerov is best in his purely orchestral scores.

The Jewish Poem Op 47 is 14 minutes of strong, powerful and very beautiful music which is deeply felt but not sentimental or slushy. It is not a ghastly pompous Edwardian flag-waving piece but superbly constructed and coherent and logical. Someone has said that only a genius could have written such a piece.

The Symphony no 1 in D minor is good in parts and is vastly better than many symphonies regularly played. The third movement may be a little weak but the orchestration is quite superb. The Symphony no 2 is entitled May but does not really work.

Of great interest is the Violin Concerto no 1 which is beautiful and sweet, yet not syrupy. In complete contrast, the Violin Concerto no 2 in G minor Op 61 is wild, untamed and somewhat intense.

Much of his solo piano music is fine and deserves to be heard and played regularly. The variations Op 3 is a magnificent piece with an infectious and perhaps quirky theme. It is faultlessly written. The pieces Op 15 vary. The opening Prelude has typical big chords over a rippling bass and is passionate and virtuosic music. the Autumn Elegie is a nostalgic piece with fine harmonies but the third piece Humoreske is light hearted, comical but with inane and tedious tinkling at the top of the piano. The Sonatina Concertante Op 26 is a truly fine piece, as good as a solo piano work you will find but the title is inadequate. A Sonatina is a small sonata. This work is not that. It is a work of great purpose.

Vladigerov did not venture much into chamber music. There is a piano Trio in B flat minor Op 4 and a String Quartet in G Op 34. His Opus 1 is a sonata in D for violin and piano.

The composer tends to confuse us with seven sets of Six Bulgarian Folk Songs for voice and piano or voice and orchestra. One must be grateful that he has strong nationalistic tendencies as shown in his music.

Why is his music not known? There are many pianists who are capable of playing works which are more difficult than his ; his music is melodic and perhaps traditional. Perhaps his music lacks an original voice. The suggestion that no one wants to play it, which is often what the BBC assert, is simply not true. It is just that the public wants the usual and familiar and, therefore, more Mozart, Elgar and Schubert with lashings of Chopin and Mahler and, consequently, contemporary composers are maligned as being modern and have the unmentioned label of being decadent.

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