

Prelude

“Inside Masterworks”



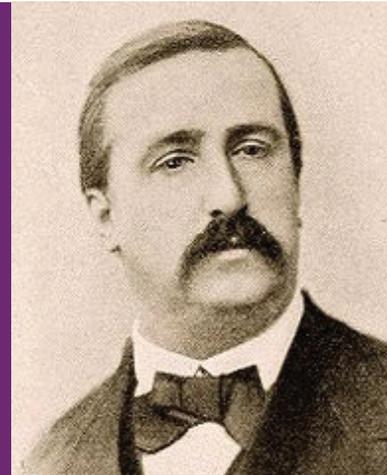
HARTFORD
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MAY 2017

Masterworks #8: Russian Intensity May 12-14, 2017

Overcoming his illegitimate birth to become a well-respected 19th century scientist, Borodin was also a brilliant composer, whose music earned a Broadway Tony Award nearly 60 years after his death.



Born in 1833, Aleksandr Borodin was the illegitimate son of a wealthy 62-year-old Georgian prince, Luka Gedevanishvili, and a married 25-year-old woman, the wife of an army doctor.ⁱ To

conceal the circumstances of his birth, Borodin's father registered the boy as the son of one of his Russian serfs, Porfiry Borodin, thus explaining the composer's surname.ⁱⁱ As a result of the registration, both Borodin and his "designated father" were officially serfs, owned by Borodin's biological father.ⁱⁱⁱ The nobleman father emancipated Borodin from serfdom when he was 7 years old, and provided housing and funds for his lover and her child, allowing Borodin to grow up in relative comfort.^{iv} Sadly, Borodin's birth mother never truly acknowledged her child; the boy grew up referring to his mother as his "aunt."^v

Deemed a commoner in a system of nobles, he was barred from attending the educational institutions reserved for those of royal birth, but thanks to his biological father's largess, private tutors were engaged to oversee young Borodin's education. He lived in a large four-story house, a

gift from Prince Gedevanishvili to Borodin and his 'aunt'.^{vi} The young boy's gift for languages and music was immediately evident: he learned to play piano, flute and cello, as well as compose.^{vii}

Despite his obvious musical gifts, Borodin was, first and foremost, a scientist, who viewed music as a pleasant distraction. In his own words, "Music is a pastime, a relaxation from more serious endeavors."^{viii} From 1850 to 1856, he studied at the Medico-Surgical Academy in St. Petersburg, the renowned institution that would later be home to Ivan Pavlov.^{ix} With a specialty in chemistry, Borodin graduated with his doctorate in 1858, spent a year as a surgeon in a military hospital, and then embarked on a three-year course of advanced scientific study in Europe.^x

Shortly after Borodin's return to Russia in 1861, he accepted an adjunct post at the Medico-Surgical Academy and by 1864, was a full professor of chemistry.^{xi} His scientific career focused on research, lecturing and overseeing the education of others. Some of his most famous work as a chemist involved the study of aldehydes.^{xii}



Bust of Aleksandr Borodin in Tikhvin Cemetery, Saint Petersburg, Russia

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In 1862, Borodin fell deeply in love with Ekaterina Protopopva, a brilliant 29-year-old piano virtuoso, and soon began taking composition lessons from Mily Balakirev.^{xiii} His Piano Quintet was composed during this time. The young composer's lack of experience in orchestration hampered his ability to write his First Symphony, which took five years to complete.^{xiv} Nevertheless, with only a few major works under his belt, word of Borodin's exceptional musical talents quickly spread, and Franz Liszt took a special interest in the new composer, conducting his music whenever he could.^{xv}

A renowned scientist whose research and achievements are well documented, Borodin's stellar abilities as a composer were so notable that he became one of the "Mighty Five," the group of five influential Russian composers (including Mily Balakirev, Caesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov) whose opinions greatly impacted all Russian music composed in the 19th century.^{xvi} Despite the fact that chamber music was viewed with some hostility by The Five, Borodin, a skilled cellist, continued to compose chamber music and string quartets, art forms that were not favored by The Five.^{xvii} In addition to being fiercely independent in his musical choices, he was clearly a man ahead of his time: a noted advocate for women's rights and education in Tsarist Russia, Borodin was the founder of the School of Medicine for Women in St. Petersburg.^{xviii}



Borodin's compositions and melodies reflected Russian folk tunes and, like other Russian composers of that time, he used striking harmonies not found in western European music.^{xix} Despite his considerable music achievements, his music was never more than a hobby as compared with his 'real' work as a scientist and teacher. Borodin and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, also a member of the "Mighty Five," shared something in common: both had primary careers outside of music.^{xx}

The haunting melody of "Stranger in Paradise," from the 1953 musical *Kismet*, is an adaptation of *Polovtsian Dances*, from Act II of Borodin's opera *Prince Igor*. The compelling score of *Kismet* earned Borodin a posthumous Tony Award for music in 1954.^{xxi} Borodin, who died at 53, never lived to complete *Prince Igor*, which many view as his most significant work; the opera was completed after his death by his friends, Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov.^{xxii} The Russian Bolshoi State Opera and Ballet Company revived the opera in a 2013 production, and in 2014 the Metropolitan Opera of New York City mounted its own production of *Prince Igor*.

We eagerly invite you to join the Hartford Symphony Orchestra as we highlight the music of Russian masters Borodin, Glazunov and Tchaikovsky on **May 12-14, 2017.**

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Wondering How the Music Will Sound?

Please try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE below, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage!

Listen to *Prince Igor Overture* while watching beautiful views of Russia:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkTPOkSfOWE>

To see the Kirov Ballet perform the beautifully choreographed *Polovstian Dances* see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8C8frqCKKg>

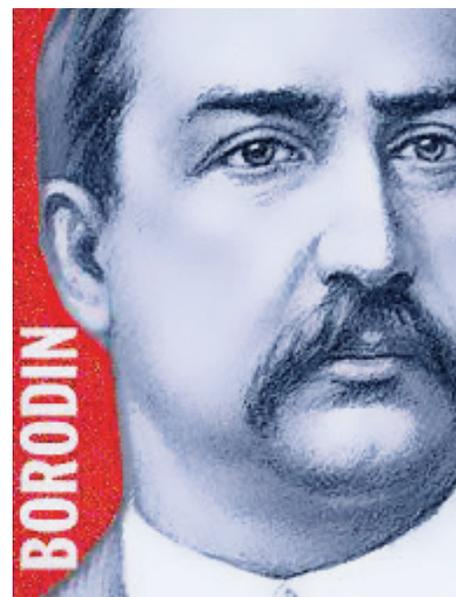
Watch this clip from the 1955 movie *Kismet* to hear how *Polovstian Dances* became "Stranger In Paradise":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Pla3cli15U>

To hear Borodin's music in *Kismet*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2SsdeYMEOg>

Hilary Hahn's performance of the Glazunov Violin Concerto may be enjoyed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igqj4IAV6UY>

And for fun, we offer two versions of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony! First, please watch the students from the New England Conservatory in Boston:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsPAXd7VDq8>

For contrast, see a videotaped live performance by the New York Philharmonic, conducted by Leonard Bernstein:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEHNGgrEYyA>



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**THE KOSKI
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The return of Casey's Classics

Recommended recordings for your listening pleasure!

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program?

Coleman Casey, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers the following recommendations for recordings of selections featured on our upcoming Masterworks Concert:

Borodin's *Prince Igor* Overture is compelling in a recording of all-Russian works with George Solti and the London Symphony (DECCA).

Glazunov's suave and tuneful Violin Concerto is stylishly and ardently performed by Gil Shaham and Mikhail Pletnev conducting the Russian National Orchestra (DG).

Tchaikovsky's powerful Symphony No. 4 receives a blistering digitally recorded performance from Valery Gergiev and the Vienna Philharmonic (PHILIPS); this is an example of a recording where it helps to have a native-born Russian conductor on the podium!

Did you borrow this *Prelude*? Get your own free copy!

Whether you're a ticket buyer, donor, curious about the music, or know someone who is, just send an email to rsovrnsky@hartfordsymphony.org.

We'll make sure you receive *Prelude* by email, in advance of each HSO Masterworks concert!

i <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aleksandr-Borodin>

ii Ibid

iii Ibid

iv Ibid

v Ibid

vi Ibid

vii Ibid

viii <http://www.classicfm.com/composers/borodin/>

ix Pavlov was the Russian physiologist, well-known for his work in classical conditioned response, and his famed studies to create conditioned reflexes in dogs.

x <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aleksandr-Borodin>

xi <http://www.classicalconnect.com/composer/alexander-borodin>

xii Ibid

xiii <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aleksandr-Borodin>

xiv Ibid

xv Ibid

xvi Ibid

xvii Ibid

xviii Ibid

xix <http://www.classicalconnect.com/composer/alexander-borodin>

xx <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nikolay-Rimsky-Korsakov>
Rimsky-Korsakov was a naval officer.

xxi <http://broadwaymusicalhome.com/shows/kismet.htm>

xxii <http://www.classicfm.com/composers/borodin/>