

## CUI Cesar Antonovich (1835 -1918)

Cesar Cui, a Russian national born of a French father and Lithuanian mother, was an authority on military fortifications, a composer and music critic. The least Russian-orientated of the 'Kuchka', he was an individual of extremes and contradictions. The oldest in the group, whose leader, Balakirev, was born in 1837, he outlived the latter by eight years. His friendship with Bessel led to much music by the group, including his own, being published by that firm. With the emancipation of Borodin, Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov from the paternalism of Balakirev as the leader, only Cui maintained an active relationship with him in later years.

Cui's extremes are reflected in diverse ways. Besides his vast output of songs—many of great interest—his several regrettably little-explored operas and his military activities, in which he reached the rank of general, he also conducted a voluminous correspondence with his (and Borodin's) benefactress, the Countess Louise de Mercy-Argenteau. A one-time pupil of Thalberg, she was a woman of great beauty and charm, who did much to introduce Russian music to the people of Belgium. She lived in a splendid château, atop a great cliff overlooking the River Meuse, between Liège and Visé in Belgium. In the course of nine years, ending in her death in 1890, she and Cui exchanged more than three thousand letters, an average of nearly one every day of a working week.<sup>1</sup> Cui composed a suite of piano pieces which he dedicated to her, titled 'A Argenteau, 1887'. These were published by Bessel and contain attractively written music, some of it in Cui's rather sentimental manner, ingratiating to the ear, though not without nobility, e.g., 'Le Cédre', an attempt to evoke the spirit of the aged and magnificent tree in the grounds, which stands to this day.

Carlo Bronne's description of Cui at that time is of interest, 'The portraits of General Cui show an officer, bearded to eyes encircled by great spectacles, a frustrated countenance, chiselled features, hirsute and proud. His appearance was assuredly more Russian than his music. However when one knew him better, his ugliness disappeared; the look sparkled with malice under the bushy eyebrows, the voice had a timbre sympathetic and penetrating'. As well as his vocation, his character was double. Two men were in him, said Mme. de Mercy-Argenteau: 'The one intimate, sensible, expansive, jolly to the point of childishness, full of imagination, and altogether refined; the other, on the contrary, quite cold, master of his impressions, regulated, methodical, and positive; leaving nothing to chance. Add to this a great integrity, a frankness and goodness of heart which does not exclude the sarcasm of a spirit tempered by the most delicate taste'.<sup>2</sup>

This last attribute did not endear Cui, wearing his mantle as critic and author of polemics. Stasov was infuriated by his article, 'Fathers and children' in which he held forth against what Balakirev described as Belaieff's nurslings (also known as the 'Pleiades') which included Glazunov and lesser beings. Despite this, Cui was in evidence at gatherings of Belaieff. Belaieff published an assortment of Cui's works. These included the latter's contribution to the collective 'Mlada', a dramatic scene 'A feast during the plague', and a number of piano pieces and songs. Included are two title pages - the 'Suite Concertante', Op.25, for violin and orchestra and the '5 Petits Duos' for flute, violin and piano, Op.56. The superb gilt title page conceals a slight, though charming score. One of Cui's last works published by Belaieff, a ballad for voice and orchestra—'Budris and his sons', Op.98—was printed by Jurgenson in Moscow in 1916.

Cui's many other works appeared with Bessel, Jurgenson and various French publishers. His reviews, writings and letters are of great interest.<sup>3</sup>

