

Nikolai Medtner

Nikolai Medtner is one of the the most profound Russian composers and brilliant pianists of 20th century.

After emigration from Russia he lived 11 years in France (1924-1935), where he was a friend of the great French organist **Marcel Dupré**, and thereafter for 16 years in Britain (1935-1951) where he was elected honorary member of the Royal Academy.

N. Medtner was one of the central figures of the Russian Silver Age, both because of his musical œuvre and philosophical work. Steeped in two currents of western music—Russian and German—he succeeded in creating a synthesis and fully deserves a place comparable to **Bach**, the latter initiating the cycle of classical European music, the former closing it out. A great scholar with a mind for philosophy, witness his spiritual testament, the book *Muse and Fashion*, N. Medtner was the first Russian composer to reach the **realm of pure music**. The asceticism of his personality made his music appeal to a refined elite and put his oeuvre close to the genius of the last **Beethoven** quartets.

He also was an **excellent pianist**, perhaps the best of his times. Similar to Chopin, the piano was his chosen instrument and chamber music his preferred field. Evidence is his concerts for piano and orchestra, and his sonatas –grand frescoes lasting 40 to 50 minutes.

The Russian intelligentsia's active search at the beginning of the 20th century for finding the way **back to the sacred sources of art** materialized in N. Medtner's last melodies op. 61, which can be seen as the quintessence of his oeuvre. This opus in three parts is his musical testament, a unique and integral work which in a majestic manner represents the three steps of evolution of the European culture: biblical, classical antiquity, and Christian, while also evoking the eternity of human values—goodness, beauty and love.

For the 80th anniversary of the birth of Medtner, Leonid Sabaneev, biographer of the great Russian composers at the beginning of the 20th century wrote:

« Franz Liszt once said: « A certain kind of music requires that one comes towards her, she does not come towards the listener. The works of Nicolas Medtner belong to this category. The spirit prevailing in our age today is barely favorable to the propagation of an art of this nature. The music of Nicolas Medtner is not made for our times of selfish interests and commercialization, but is above and beyond our time. But this music can, and must, be reborn

eventually and come into its due place, as was the case for the music of J.S. Bach »¹.

S. Rachmaninov, who much supported Medtner and studied his work with pencil in hand, said in 1921 when he received him in Paris:

« I repeat what I told you already in Russia: you are, in my opinion, the greatest composer of our times »

The admiration of Orient expressed for the music of N. Medtner through the person of the Maharaja of Mysore and the financial support the latter provided Medtner at the end of his life, witness the importance of Medtner's oeuvre and the universality of its message.

The Maharaja of Mysore appeared in his life in 1946 and contributed substantially to the creation of the Medtner Foundation, which allowed Medtner to record most of his large compositions, such as the romances based on Goethe poems with the famous singer Elizabeth Schwartzkopf.

According to **Leonid Sabaneev**, biographer and friend of Scriabin and Taneev, Medtner was the first Russian composer to reach the realm of pure music. In the same article on occasion of Medtner's 80th anniversary he wrote:

« ... he was a scholar, a man of great culture with a mind for philosophy; through its qualities of seriousness and depth his oeuvre stands aside from all other Russian music.

Medtner is a pure musician, like Beethoven, Schumann, and Brahms. His compositions come close to the last works of Beethoven, in particular the last quartets which are not broadly known by the wider public. They are close to Beethoven's music because of their ascetic tonality, and because they come from a similar spirit. »

« In a certain period his name shone in the Russian Olympus next to Scriabin and Rachmaninov. He was the youngest of the three, but was seen as one of the « conservatives », because his center of gravity was not with the search for new colors, as was the fashion of the time, but with the search for new rhythms and explorations of form.

In his art, he was a pure and honest personality, a sort of spiritual knight ready to battle for the purity of music, for his aesthetical positions. Belonging,

¹ *Pensée russe*, Paris, December 1959.

with Schumann and Beethoven, to the family of « pure musicians », he lived happily in his music which he considered as a « kingdom of predefined harmony », where happiness and suffering were perfectly equilibrated.

His music remains an art for the few, for the distinguished persons, a sort of musical elite somewhat like the music of Bach (by the way, the families of Bach and Gebhard - Medtner mother name - are among the great families of organists and preachers of Thuringia). »

Composer and pianist by education, taught by Paul Pabst, the pupil of Franz Liszt, N. Medtner was also a great thinker of his times; during the long years of immigration he kept a rich correspondence (4 volumes are under preparation) with his friend the Russian philosopher Ivan Iliyn.

The spiritual testament of Medtner, the book *Muse and Fashion* was published due to the efforts of S. Rachmaninov in 1935 and a second edition appeared fifteen years ago in YMCA-PRESS. The book defends the foundations of musical art.

Heir to the two currents of western music—Russian and German—and contemporary of S. Rachmaninov and A. Scriabin, Nicolas Medtner remains true in his book to the traditional concept of musical Logos and as such takes a position as last representative of the Apollonian spirit of order and beauty in Russian musical culture.

Canzona Serenata. Nikolai Medtner & Ekaterina Derzhavina. *Forgotten Melodies*, Op. 38: II. Danza Graziosa. Nikolai Medtner & Ekaterina Derzhavina. *Forgotten Melodies*, Op. 38: VIII. Alla Reminiscenza. Nikolai Medtner & Ekaterina Derzhavina. *Stimmungsbilder*, Op. 1: II. Allegro. Nikolai Medtner & Ekaterina Derzhavina. *Forgotten Melodies*, Op. 38: III. Danza Festiva. Nikolai Medtner & Ekaterina Derzhavina. *Der Komponist Nikolai Medtner. Ein Porträt* by Natascha Konsistorum (ISBN 3-89487-500-3, Henschel, Berlin, 2004). German translation by Christoph Flamm; also available in the original Russian. A personal account of Medtner's life and music, with selected letters and a good number of photographs. Includes two CDs with recordings of the piano quintet and a number of piano works and songs. *Nietzsche's orphans: music, metaphysics, and the twilight of the Russian Empire* by Rebecca Mitchell (Yale, 2015). Nikolai Medtner: Sonata-Idylle in G Major, Op. 56: I. Pastorale. Allegretto cantabile, Medtner : 2 Fairy Tales Op.20 : No.1 in B flat minor, Piano Sonata in F Minor, Op. 5: I. Allegro - Maestoso, ma a tempo - Alla breve and other songs. Complete discography, Stations, Concerts, recommendations, and similar artists. Nikolai Karlovich Medtner. 1K likes. "Inspiration comes, where thought is saturated in emotion, and emotion is imbued with sense." - Nikolai Karlovich... In this video, I explore the second theme of the first movement, up to the development section. In this video, I explore the second theme of the first movement, up to the development section. Nikolai Karlovich Medtner. May 8. An intelligent, thorough and a super interesting analysis of my 'Night Wind' sonata, episode 1 of the series. The compositional language of Russian composer-pianist Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951) demonstrates an evolution of the traditional forms and harmony. Following the classical and romantic traditions, Medtner's compositional technique reveals his individual and original approaches to form and harmony. The compositional language of Russian composer-pianist Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951) demonstrates an evolution of the traditional forms and harmony.