

Биографии Современных Русских Композиторов

Музыкальный Сектор – Государственное Издательство

Москва, 1927

GEORGY L'VOVICH CATOIRE was born in Moscow on April 27, 1861. He evinced musical abilities at an early age (his first experiments in composition date from the age of six), but did not prepare himself for a musical career. At 14, already a pupil of Kreymann's gymnasium in Moscow, Catoire began taking piano lessons from the famous pianist Karl Klindworth, a personal friend of Wagner's and author of the best editions of the latter's music and dramatic compositions. From his teacher, Catoire learned how to love and understand Wagner; thus, he can be called the first Russian Wagnerian. At that time, Wagner was barely known in Russia, not only to the public but also to leading musicians whose attitude toward him was definitely negative, with a disagreeable edge (Tchaikovsky, Rubinstein, Taneyev). Thanks to Klindworth, Catoire joined the Wagner Society and, after finishing the gymnasium in 1879, he went to Bayreuth for the Wagner festivities. Klindworth gave Catoire lessons as a pianist, but seeing his student's abilities and interest in music, he did not limit lessons to piano technique. Catoire was thus introduced to the larger music literature as well as its newest trends. In 1884, while Klindworth went abroad, Catoire became a senior in mathematics at Moscow University, from which he graduated with outstanding honors.

After graduation, Catoire started working at his father's commercial business, without feeling any particular interest in that occupation. At the same time, he could not quit music, with which his infatuation seemed strange and hard to comprehend to his family and relatives. Catoire took lessons for a while from Klindworth's student, V. I. Vilborg, who also gave him superficial lessons in harmony. The result of these short-lived lessons with Vilborg was the composition of a piano sonata (which remains only in its hand-written form) and several piano pieces. During the same period, Catoire transcribed Liszt's "Après une lecture du Dante" for four hands and created other transcriptions for piano, including the Introduction and Fugue from the First Orchestral Suite by Tchaikovsky. Later, upon Tchaikovsky's recommendation, Jurgenson published this work. Catoire's choice of Tchaikovsky's compositions for transcription was not accidental. From the beginning, Tchaikovsky's music made an immense impression on Catoire and his affinity for Tchaikovsky's creations became dominating. The trends of his first period of creative activity were thus determined.

In December 1885, not fully satisfied with Vilborg's lessons, Catoire went to Berlin in order to continue taking lessons from Klindworth, who had moved there from Moscow. In the summer of 1886, he made short trips to Moscow, during which a turning point in Catoire's life and composing career took place. The event was his personal acquaintance with Tchaikovsky, which came about through the vocal professor Galvani. Tchaikovsky greatly approved of Catoire's first real experiment in composition (set of piano variations) and told the young composer that "it would be a sin if he did not devote himself to composition." It was then that the introduction to Jurgenson took place. Inspired by Tchaikovsky's warm and vitalizing reception, Catoire came back to Berlin where, concurrent with Klindworth's lessons, he took composition and theory lessons from Otto Tirsch. Unsatisfied, he then went to Philip Rufer (a composer he later used to say was "deprived of originality"). Catoire used the services of the former for only a month and the latter for three months. For Rufer, Catoire wrote a string quartet, of which only a hand-written slow part has survived (due to the fact that it has Tchaikovsky's own marks.) Having returned to Russia in May of 1887, Catoire did not venture a debut as pianist, despite the fact that Klindworth considered him quite ready for performances on stage. In the summer of that same year, Catoire's second meeting with Tchaikovsky took place (in the presence of Gubert and Taneyev at Jurgenson's store). Catoire showed Tchaikovsky the quartet written for Rufer. Tchaikovsky and Taneyev deemed its texture inadequate, but the music itself received their approval. Realizing his insufficient technique, Catoire went to St. Petersburg and, upon Tchaikovsky's recommendation, went to Rimsky-Korsakov with a request for composition and theory lessons. Rimsky-Korsakov gave him just one lesson (which resulted in three piano pieces that were later published as Op. 2) and passed Catoire to Liadov, with whom he studied counterpoint and wrote several pieces. Among them was the Op. 3 "Caprice" that underwent Liadov's scrupulous criticism and refinement. Liadov's lessons, seemingly unsatisfactory to both teacher and student, completed Catoire's schooling years.

Returning to Moscow, Catoire became close with Arensky. At that time, he wrote his second string quartet (this time completely self-made), which remained in manuscript form and later was remade into a quintet. Also written was a small cantata, "Mermaid" Op.5, for solo voice, women's choir and orchestra, published only in its transcription for piano and voices and never performed in its original form. At the beginning of his composing career, Catoire found neither support of his calling from family nor friendly sympathy of his affinities and artistic ideals from musicians. He suffered through a number of disappointments so severe that in 1889 he withdrew to the

countryside and almost decided to quit music completely. He was in such a state for about two years, having broken off all relations with his musical friends. Nothing, though, could silence Catoire's musical aspirations and as a result of his seclusion, the Op. 7 Symphony emerged, which at first was in the form of a sextet. The Symphony was never performed, although its separate parts were played in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

The first small success which destiny gave the composer came to his Op. 9 Romances, which brought their author a number of new musical acquaintances (the Conus brothers and Koreshchenko, among others).

Translation from the Russian anthology, *Biographies of Contemporary Russian Composers*

©1999 Chronos Studios, Philadelphia

Вспоминания о Московской Консерватории

In the Moscow Conservatory of the Twenties

In 1921, the author entered the Conservatory to study composition and piano. He was a student of such prominent musicians as R.M.Glier, G.L.Catoire, N.Y.Miaskovsky, A.B.Goldenweiser and S.E.Feinberg.

By V. G. Fere

Personal Reminiscences

(Excerpts)

For the first time, in 1921, the Moscow Conservatory's faculty started systematic training in formal analysis. At that time, the schools of analysis coexisted with representation by such outstanding musician-scientists as G.L.Catoire and G.E. Conus. Attending at least one of these courses was considered obligatory. But those interested—myself included—attended all the classes on our own initiative. It was most interesting, even though the content and teaching methodology were completely different. Both of these courses were based mainly on a classical foundation. Catoire's theories involved the developing academic traditions and particularly emphasized the functional meaning of harmonic structure in the creation of form.

I think of my piano lessons with A.B.Goldenweiser and S.E.Feinberg with great gratitude. Studying in those classes, our repertoire always included compositions by Catoire, Medtner and Feinberg.

I studied composition first in the class of R.M. Glier, then with G.L.Catoire and finally N.Y. Miaskovsky. Each of them had his own traditions and methods of teaching. Glier did not constrain his students with anything: each student wrote whatever he wanted to compose and as best he could. Reinhold Moritsovich somewhat overestimated the skill level of his students in systematic, independent work. He likely should have given us concrete assignments more strict than he did.

Studying with G.L.Catoire, I immediately experienced serious difficulties. Catoire's teaching method was diametrically opposed to that of Glier's. From the very beginning, Georgiy L'vovich kept his students within the limits of rigorous academic discipline. He gave us precise and concrete tasks, supervising their fulfillment strictly. He especially emphasized the role of harmony in the structure and form of any composition. Catoire's personal tastes and preferences were determinative: a student was assigned an entirely

Of course, such a prescriptive method had its pluses and minuses. We got used to the strict logic and systematic thinking and gained solid skills, but there was little room left for the revelation of one's creative personality. At first it was not too perceptible, but when a young composer's own tastes and preferences started defining themselves more distinctly, friction arose between teacher and student which not infrequently resulted in the student's leaving for a different class.

Still, it is impossible not to admire Catoire's exceptional thoughtfulness for every student of his. Georgiy L'vovich worked with us the same way he would work for himself. He was an altogether honest man, true to his precepts and embraced his students with a deeply caring commitment.

Вядаыщяея деятели теоретико-композиторского факультета Московской Консерватории

Prominent Figures of the Moscow Conservatory's Theory and Composition Department

By V. G. Fere

GEORGIY L'VOVICH KATUAR (CATOIRE)

(1861 - 1926)

(Excerpts)

Almost all compositions by Catoire present challenges for performers of even the highest qualifications, especially in the sphere of ensemble playing. I believe that this particular circumstance is one of the main reasons why his compositions are performed so rarely and therefore not well recognized.

Catoire began his creative activity as a true innovator. He was, undoubtedly, Scriabin's predecessor. But his works suffered a peculiar and to some extent mysterious fate. His music, despite its evident virtues and beauty, has still not received wide advocacy.

Catoire's compositional teaching method was rigorous. He particularly emphasized the role of harmony in the form of any composition: "Harmony is the soul of music," Georgiy L'vovich used to say. The professor considered carefully all the details of a composition and kept track of every phrase, every measure and every melody.

As one of G.L. Catoire's students, having studied under his leadership up to his last day, I can confirm that in his class we received the strictest logic and a systematic character of thinking, while gaining solid professional skills. However, because of that, there was often not enough room left for a student's individual display. At times, conflicts arose between teacher and student, which in some cases resulted in the student's departure for a different class. Georgiy L'vovich took every incident like that quite hard. However, in response to the students' "complaints" about the "professor's dominance," he always said: "In order to learn how to write, one must sacrifice a few compositions. Just regard them as school works, as doing your homework, as technical exercises. After graduation, no one will restrain you."

Life has proved the truth of these statements. Catoire's disciples always turned out well prepared in their capability to build logical and well-developed musical forms.

It was impossible not to admire Catoire's exceptional conscientiousness and attentiveness to every student. Georgiy L'vovich, as though he lived with me through the whole process of a composition's creation, was distressed in the case of failures, felt vexed at difficulties and was at times angry at a student's musical constraints; conversely, he became very happy at the smallest success and experienced true pleasure when a work started to satisfy both the student and himself.

Quite often after a lesson, to keep close contact, Catoire would mail a letter or card to a student with additional instructions, accompanied by written-out musical examples. Who of us has not kept such epistles by Georgiy L'vovich? And what about the enormous pedagogical significance of Catoire's irreproachable taste? He would not tolerate even barely noticeable signs of banality and platitude in music. The "cruel" romantic songs widely spread at that time drove him mad. He took pleasure in compositions of both Russian and foreign classics; he worshiped Scriabin's early- and middle-period works and rated Medtner and Rachmaninov very highly. He did not, however, accept compositions of Scriabin's late period, pointing out a "full decomposition of form," and their "absence of harmonic movement and tiresome stasis."

One of the great virtues of Catoire's creative personality was the extraordinary fidelity of his artistic ideals. This quality was often misunderstood and not infrequently construed as intolerance and conservatism. Here is one very characteristic episode: In 1925, Darius Milhaud came to Moscow. In addition to concerts in which he conducted, a report on the paths of modern musical development was supposed to be provided. The Board of Sofil (the Philharmonic Society) came to Catoire with a request to translate it. Not willing to be ungracious toward the guest, Georgiy L'vovich agreed. The next day, however, in his official open letter to Sofil, he flatly refused to be a translator of the report, since he did not wish to participate in the propagation of ideas which he not only disapproved of, but also was their adversary.

Nikolai Yakovlevich Myaskovsky considered the musical grounding of students trained by Catoire very highly. Myaskovsky considered Catoire a magnificent pedagogue.