Autumn Issue

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Vol. 26 No. 4  OCTOBER  1943
RUSSIAN SILHOUETTES
Mussorgsky, Stanislavsky, Diaghilev.

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NAagar, India

Mussorgsky

"DODONSky, Katonsky, Lyudonsky, Stasensky"—these were the nick names of the Golinishchev-Kutuzov sisters which Mussorgsky used to hum as he worked at his compositions in their house. The mother of Elena Ivanovna was called Katonsky from her name of Katherine Bobrovo. There are many stories of his stay with this family and later with the princess of Shakhovsky at Bobrovo—she being the one called Stasensky. Dodonsky afterwards became Princess Putyatin and Lyudonsky was Lyudmila Rizhov.

After Mussorgsky's last visit to Bobrovo, and at the time he became seriously ill, a most unfortunate thing occurred. Piles of the rough drafts of his compositions were discovered there but through negligence almost all of them were burnt. No one really knows what was lost, complete works perhaps or many fresh inspirations. Ignorance and carelessness are responsible for such losses and in many a warehouse and garret valuable manuscripts are still being handed over to the mice.

There have been several biographies of Mussorgsky but all of them omit certain characteristic details. Had he not been the uncle of Elena Ivanovna we ourselves might never have heard of certain episodes in his tragic career. This year the centenary of his birth is to be celebrated and there is probably still much to be learned concerning his life. We ourselves remember his name in connection with many events. We recall the choruses of Mussorgsky sung in the studios of the Society for the Advancement of the Arts under the direction of Stephen Mitu-sov. It was at A. A. Golinishchev-Kutuzov's house that Mussorgsky composed "The Great Captain." We can also recollect Stravinsky's sonorous rendering of "A Night on Bald Mountain" (familiar to movie-goers through Disney's Fantasia). We also remember Chaliapin, in Paris, teaching a Raskolnitsa to sing "Sin, Deadly Sin" from Kovanshchina. The poor woman was unable to render the weighty intonation of Feodor Ivanovich and the passage had to be repeated, over and over again. She almost burst into tears when Chaliapin shook his finger in her face and insisted "Now remember, you are singing Mussorgsky." In thus emphasizing the name, the great singer expressed the admiration which every Russian must feel for Mussorgsky. The only setting I ever made for Kovanshchina was that of the Chamber of Prince Golitsin, which I painted for Covent Garden. And here in the far off Himalayas we can hear the strain from the "Streltsi Quarters."

In all Mussorgsky's work there is the primordial Russian spirit. Stasov was the first to call Mussorgsky to my attention at a time when people ignored him or thought that it was useless for him to continue his work. Stasov's circle, however, small it may have been, was very influential and all who attended the first Belyaev concert were admirers of the great Russian genius.

Perhaps if Mussorgsky had lived today he would have been better understood, but one can never be certain; and perhaps recognition would again have been withheld for half a century. Many may think it a scandal that such misunderstandings can still occur. May the lessons of the past serve to enlighten the future.

It is a pleasure to know that Russia will celebrate this centenary and that the Kovanshchina is to be produced. The producers will realize that it is unnecessary to make cuts in the score or alter the text and that this great masterpiece ought to rise up to its full stature.

The more complete and authentic the produc-
tion of such a masterpiece the more is it likely to prove inexhaustible.

Hail to Mussorgsky.

Stanislavsky*

A good eye is rare. An evil eye can be found very often. Stanislavsky impressed upon his pupils: "Know how to find not the worst in everything, but the best." The great sensitive artist knew that the majority of people take pleasure in serving the cult of evil, not knowing how to approach that which brings joy.

People eagerly belittle what they do not like. They are ready to spend a long time around that which seems to them abhorrent. Often contacts with something they dislike inspire colorful expressions and vivid comparisons. Quick are the man's words. And expressive are the movements. And their eyes sparkle. But on the other hand how dull are the words of praise and approval. People are afraid to find something admirable and acknowledge it. The very vocabulary of good words becomes poor and trivial, and the eyes lose their glow.

Once we tested a connoisseur of art. I went behind with a watch and without his knowing it, marked the time he spent examining paintings. It appeared that he spent twice as much time criticising as he spent admiring. There was no need for him to look at what should have given him joy; he had to spend the time condemning. At last I said to him: "Now I know with what to attract you: you should be surrounded by objects which you hate."

But great masters always decree; if something seems bad, it does not deserve discussion. Life is too beautiful, too great for one to debase oneself by contemplating an unworthy sight. There is around us too much of the joyful, so worthy of enthusiasm and admiration. But one must know vigilance and joy.

One must learn how to rejoice and to admire the uplifting and the beautiful. If people have besmeared their eyes and words, they must learn how to cleanse them. One must strictly keep away from contact with evil. And then the good eye will open.

These uplifting thoughts came into my mind after my meeting with Stanislavsky. He was not only a magnetic personality but also an untiring sower of everything encouraging and creative. One can say of him that he had indeed the good eye.

It was very sad to receive news here, in the Himalayas, that Stanislavsky is no longer on our earthly plane. But where he is now, he will be happier, because his unquenchable enthusiasm will lead him to new radiant summits.

Several great men have lately left us. Chaliapin is no longer. Gorky and Glazunov have gone. Trubetzkoy has passed away. Yakovlev has departed, the last mail brought the news of Kuprin's death. One remembers Anatole France's masterful story how great souls meet beyond earthly borders and continue there to unfurl their ideas, which inspired them in life. How much wonderful enthusiasm Stanislavsky will spread everywhere, wherever he may be. And we gratefully retain in our hearts the memory of his unforgettable theatrical impersonations and that uplifting enthusiasm with which he imbued everyone who met him.

No doubt everyone who knew him was moved by the description how even after death he was placed in the mourning hall of his theatre—which always was for him a true Temple.

Diaghilev

A grandiose exhibition of Theatrical Art dedicated to Diaghilev was held last summer at the Louvre. Organized by the famous dancer Lifar it was an event for Paris.

A decade has elapsed since the passing of this remarkable Russian patron of Art, with whom began a new era for the Russian Theatre. Chaliapin, Pavlova, Bakst, Stravinsky, Nijinsky, Benois, Sert, Picasso, Lifar—the artists in all fields of Art were connected with Diaghilev.

Who does not know the ballets of Diaghilev, which were renowned throughout the world? To the friends in India a memoir of the great Russian Leader of Art will be of special interest.

Diaghilev has gone. Something far greater than an individual force has passed away with him. We may regard his achievement as that of the great individual, but it would be truer to regard him as representative of synthesis of the great moment when modern art freed itself from conventionality and superficiality.

Diaghilev's life was stormy, as in the life of every genuine artist. More than once our personal relations were severed and renewed. Dia-
hilev was first to show the faith in the value of my painting “Messenger.” At the time of Paris Exhibition of 1900, he requested my painting “The March,” for his section, but the painting had been promised, however, for the section of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts and this estranged him.

When I became Editor of Art, published by the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of Art, Diaghilev was taken aback, fearing that I would be associated with official circles. But life brought us together, thanks to Serov.

In 1906, Diaghilev asked me to design the “Polovetsky Camp” for his ballet. It was a joyous period when French critics, such as Blanche, heralded the Russian ballet and Russian art. I was no longer bound to the Academy of Fine Arts and its exhibitions, and could participate in the exhibitions of Diaghilev and Mir Iskustva, of which society I became president in 1910. From this time nothing clouded my relationship with Diaghilev.

Then came the productions of Prince Igor, Ivan the Terrible and Kitege of Rimsky-Korsakov, and our last work together was Sacre du Printemps and a revival of Prince Igor in 1920 in London when Diaghilev invited me there from Sweden. I met him for the last time in 1923 in Paris, and I recollect this friendly meeting, so full of memories.

One might often disagree with Diaghilev and yet not feel it to be personal. Only questions of art or of vital activity can allow of such friendly conflicts. Because of this, no one remembers his dissensions with Diaghilev, but remembers only his great constructive work for the benefit of humanity.

Diaghilev was not one to advocate a drowsy life. From childhood, he was a talented musician and recognized genuine art. It was not superficial modern art, but Beauty.

I remember how, during the exhibition of Mir Iskustva in 1903, I completely changed my painting “The Building of the City.” During the process, Diaghilev arrived. When he saw the painting, he grasped my arm saying: “Not a stroke more! This is the right expression. Away with academic forms.”

His motto, “Away with academism” was not necessarily destructive. He understood the genius of Mussorgsky. He valued the best of Rimsky-Korsakov. Against contemporary pettiness, he evoked the power of Stravinsky, and it was he who so carefully fostered the art of Prokofiev, and the most interesting works of French composers and artists.

Only those who knew him personally at the time of his indescribable difficulties, could value his constructive genius, his refined sensibility. His partners may recollect how in Paris, during one day he was active as usual and no one sensed any danger in the air. In the evening he said: “Now you deserve to have a quiet supper, because we were almost ruined. Only five minutes ago I received the news that all has been settled.”

With a smile, his great spirit engaged in the battles for Art, taking on his own shoulders all its responsibilities. Never did he spare himself. He knew that the battle to beautify life was necessary.

It has been said that his enterprise was a personal one. Only evil tongues could have pronounced such a slander; he was a crusader in the service of beauty. Lending his own name liberally, he assumed many responsibilities. I remember when during a most critical moment, he said: “Well, I alone shall sign. Please hold me liable for this.” This was not the sign of egoism, but of a great fighter who knows why he holds both sword and shield.

Was he narrow in his opinions? Only an ignorant person could say that he only cared for the modern. In his historical exhibitions of portraits, he showed the whole history of Russia from its very beginning, with equal respect for modern as well as the old, even the icon-painters. In his magazine Mir Iskustva he showed the most modern artists as well the discoveries of old masters. Being very sensitive he felt the sources from which the renaissance arose, and showed the hidden treasures of ancient times and our hopes for tomorrow.

Could any one think him onesided in music? No! The Italian primitives and the most modern French composers equally attracted his attention. His productions were always festivals of beauty, feasts of enthusiasm, of faith in an enlightened future, where all the real values of the past were cherished as signs of progress.

Without vulgarizing art, he revealed what was genuine in all its forms. To relate all the productions, exhibitions and artistic enterprises of Diaghilev is to write a history of Russian art from the nineties to 1928.

Remember the quality of his magazine Mir Iskustva! Remember his work with princess Tenishev! All the exhibitions—historical, for-

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of the board of the club also served on the board of the school.

The Board of Education viewed this new project with much skepticism, but finally agreed to map out an approved course of study for the strange venture. It prospered, and grew in numbers, and in 1927 was officially incorporated under the Regents of the State of New York, and given a charter, so that its diploma is recognized as the equivalent of that of the public schools.

Enrollment has now increased to 270 students between the ages of six and sixteen. Admissions are limited to children doing professional work—some of them very highly paid—in such varied fields as ballet, ice-shows, circus, modelling, music, night clubs, and vaudeville, as well as the more familiar categories of legitimate stage, movies and radio. As most of them are above the average in intelligence, their class standing is apt to be a year in advance of children of their age.

Classes do not begin until ten a. m. so as to give the young pupils time to catch up on much-needed sleep, and they end at 2 o'clock, so as not to conflict with rehearsal or matinee hours. In addition, provision is made to take care of the schooling of children who must go on the road. Classes are conducted by correspondence, texts and outlines of work being sent to the pupils, and homework returned to the teacher by mail. When time comes for examinations, these are mailed to the school in the town where the young actor is at the time, and one of the local teachers is only too proud to act as tutor to the gifted pupils.

All but the first four grades have homework, and they do especially well in French and in English. Their favorite extra curricular occupation is the staging and production of plays. Twinkle-toe Watts of Stars on Ice is one of the best-known of their younger pupils, and they also number in their lists the children in Tomorrow the World, Kiss and Tell, Janie, Harriet, Skin of our Teeth. They have a flourishing alumni association, and a magazine The Masque to chronicle their activities. Ann Thomas, whose clever performance as the telephone girl in Counselor-at-Law won so much praise, is president of the Association. Every year at commencement time the alumni give a benefit performance to raise funds for the school, and former pupils, now notables of the profession, gladly give their services to aid the school to which they feel so much gratitude and devotion.

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