

EDUARD NAPRAVNIK

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This Czech composer was born at Byst in Bohemia on 24 August 1839. He was the son of a schoolmaster and choirmaster. He went to school in Prague but, in 1853, his father died and his mother died two years later making him an orphan and reducing him to poor circumstances. He studied at the Organ School in Prague and at the Maydl Institute becoming an assistant teacher. He undertook orchestration privately with J B Kittl. Kittl offered Napravnik the post of conductor at the Frankfurt Opera

Eduard Francevic Napravnik went to St Petersburg in 1861 to conduct the Prince N Yussupov's private orchestra at the recommendation of Kittl. He became répétiteur at the Marinsky Theatre in 1863. Later, he succeeded Anatoli Liadov as chief conductor of the Imperial Russian Opera from 1869, having been the assistant conductor for two years, a prodigious position he held up to his death in 1916. In 1863, at Liadov's suggestion, he became the organist of the Imperial Theatre



It is thought that he conducted over 4,000 performances of operas. He gave the premiere of Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov in 1874.. He gave the first performance of Rimsky Korsakov's Nizhegorodtsy at the Maryinsky Theatre in 1869 and, while he was rehearsing Cui's William Ratcliffe, he performed his own incidental music to Don Juan Op 14 scored for soloist, chorus and orchestra and speaker. Rimsky Korsakov wrote a review calling it tedious, uninteresting and interminable. That damaged his relationship with Napravnik for the rest of his life. He was five years younger than the Bohemian composer and did not have his experience.

However, Napravnik was a surly fellow and not easily likeable.

But he was admired by Tchaikovsky and in his autobiography of 1935 Stravinsky spoke well of him. It is clear that he was a very successful and admired musician, despite his unfortunate manner, and did more than most to raise the standard of musical culture in Russia.

As to Rimsky Korsakov's other works, Napravnik conducted Sadko in March 1871, premiered The Maid of Pskov on 1 January 1873 and accepted May Night for performance which was premiered on 21 January 1880. The opera Snyegoorochka he was willing to conduct with cuts which he did in the 1891-1892 season. He did not like the opera Mozart and Salieri and wanted that cut as well. Its composer called Napravnik sour and surly.

He conducted the operas of Glinka to great success particularly during the 1875-1876 season. He also premiered three Tchaikovsky operas Oprichnik of 1874, Vakula the Smith and The Maid of Orleans (1881) which is dedicated to Napravnik.

Being an workaholic meant that Napravnik was prone to illness. In 1877 he went to the Steppes of Samara to regain his health. That was the year in which his Piano Trio in G minor, Op 24 won a coveted prize much to Rimsky-Koraskov's disdain. In the 1881-1882 season Napravnik's Fantasy on a Russian theme, Op 39 (Song of the Volga Boatman) was premiered. Earlier he had composed an Overture, Song on the Volga, Op 16

He composed four operas of which Francesca da Rimini, Op 71, was the most successful and given first in December 1902. The other operas are Nizhegorodey, Op 15, premiered at St Petersburg in January 1864, Harold of 1886 and Dubrovsky, Op 54. He composed four symphonies, his third, Op 18, is subtitled The Demon and dates from 1874, a piano concerto which he called concerto symphonic, two sets of national

dances Op 20 and 23, a Solemn Overture, Op 17, three string quartets, two piano trios, a piano quartet, a piano quintet and songs.

The Piano Concerto in A minor was composed in 1877 at the suggestion of Lescheititsky who was the teacher of the famous pianist Anna Espivo who premiered the work on 17 December 1877 at the Russian Musical Society. The Dies Irae of Verdi's Requiem is mirrored here and the influence is that of Brahms. The slow movement which is a larghetto in B flat is followed by a vigorous finale suggesting merry making of people in the fields engaged in Russian dance.

He died in Leningrad in 1916.

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