

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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ALEXANDER BORODIN

Nationality: Russian

Born: 12th November, 1833, St. Petersburg

Died: 27th February, 1887, St. Petersburg (age 53)

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Alexander Porfiryevich Borodin was a Russian chemist and Romantic musical composer of Georgian ancestry. He was one of the prominent 19th-century composers known as "The Mighty Handful", a group dedicated to producing a uniquely Russian kind of classical music, rather than imitating earlier Western European models. Borodin is known best for his symphonies, his two string quartets, the symphonic poem 'In the Steppes of Central Asia' and his opera 'Prince Igor'.

A doctor and chemist by profession and training, Borodin made important early contributions to organic chemistry. Although he is presently known better as a composer, he regarded medicine and science as his primary occupations.

As a cellist, he was an enthusiastic chamber music player, an interest that increased during his chemical studies in Heidelberg between 1859 and 1861. This early period yielded, among other chamber works, a string sextet and a piano quintet. Borodin based the thematic structure and instrumental texture of his pieces on those of Felix Mendelssohn. In this period he wrote a CELLO SONATA, outlined below...

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Cello Sonata in B minor (for cello and piano)

Duration: 24 minutes (approximately)

Composed: 1860 (age 26-27)

The sonata has a very stormy, quasi contrapuntal, opening allegro movement with a moderately difficult piano part. The opening theme is based on one from Bach's unaccompanied Violin Sonata in G Minor, BWV 1001, however the development is more romantic than baroque. The second movement Pastorale: Andante dolce, is quite nice with typical Borodin Russian melodies with a cadenza section for solo cello that is enjoyable. The third movement Maestoso - Presto returns to the Bach theme and finishes with a brilliant presto movement in B Major. The sonata is about 21 minutes in length and overall it is enjoyable, not the highest level, but good romantic repertoire and worth hearing. The sonata was left unfinished by Borodin and was completed in 1982 from extensive, surviving sketches by a Russian named, Michael Goldstein. Goldstein claims copyright and partial authorship of the sonata and that is probably why it is still so costly at this time (over 25€)....



Portrait of Borodin by Ilya Repin - 1888

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