

## PREFACE

### Biographical Note

César Cui has been underrated as a composer for much of the twentieth century, and this in spite of having been at the forefront of Russian music for over fifty years. His oeuvre encompasses 106 works with allocated opus numbers and over thirty works without, and includes sacred and secular vocal music, chamber music, opera, orchestral music, and numerous piano miniatures. The lack of attention his compositions have received compared to the other members of the *Moguchaya kuchka*—known in English as the ‘Mighty Handful’ or ‘Russian Five’—is surprising. He was held in high esteem by many of his contemporaries and colleagues. Balakirev dedicated his first piano sonata to him. Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and the great music critic Stasov all held a high opinion of Cui’s opera *Angelo*. Both Tchaikovsky and Liszt highly praised his opera *William Ratcliff*<sup>1</sup>. In fact one of the very last works Liszt penned was a piano transcription of Cui’s orchestral *Tarantelle* Op. 12.

Apart from his musical activities, Cui was also a Lieutenant General of the Imperial Russian Army, a renowned expert on fortifications. He held a full time teaching position as Professor of Fortification at the Academy of Military Engineering, where members of the royal family, including the future Tsar Nicholas II, were amongst his students.

Cui was an accomplished man of letters, being a corresponding member of the *Académie Française* and the *Académie royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts de Belgique*. He was also a prolific music critic and essayist, writing the very first book on Russian music and composers *La musique en Russie* in 1880 and contributing over 700 articles to European and Russian periodicals. Musically he held a succession of important posts, including Chairman of the Mariinsky Theatre opera selection committee and Director of the St. Petersburg branch of the Russian Musical Society.

### *Petite Sonatine* Op. 106

Although Op. 106 is the last number in the official catalogue of Cui’s works, it is unlikely that this is his *Opus Ultimum* or last work to be composed. Cui’s opus numbers do not always reflect the real order of composition, as is best exemplified by the Variations-Preludes that were assigned three opus numbers at different times by Cui, starting out as Op. 100, then Op. 103<sup>2</sup> before eventually ending up as Op. 104. The *Petite Sonatine* probably predates most of the Miniatures Op. 105.

Cui made use of sonata form in his three string quartets (Opp. 45, 68, 91) and also wrote a Sonata for piano and violin (Op. 84); however he never used the form in a work for solo piano. The *Petite Sonatine* Op. 106 is therefore the only example in his entire *oeuvre* of a solo piano work that comes close to using sonata form, albeit very loosely, in the first movement. Remarkably for a work of a member of the ‘Russian Five’, it has until now never been published.

The *Petite Sonatine* is mentioned only once in the surviving correspondence of Cui’s last years, in a letter to M. C. Kerzina dated 11<sup>th</sup> December 1917. He writes:

At any rate, during the time of my blindness I wrote 17 short pieces (not wrote, but composed), a short sonatina, and am now working on a [little] theme and variations.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. F. Nazarov, *Цезарь Антонович Кюи* [César Antonovich Cui] (Moscow, 1989), 62 and 103.

<sup>2</sup> I. L. Gusin, ed.: *Ts.A.Кюи: Izbrannie Pis'ma* [Selected Letters] (Leningrad, 1955), 474. (Letter number 711, dated 16 January 1917 to the publisher A. K. German).

<sup>3</sup> Gusin, 480. (Letter number 724).

The little theme and variations that he mentions cannot possibly be the grand Variations-Preludes Op. 104 which were finished before the onset of Cui's blindness. Unfortunately the manuscript of the smaller set has not been discovered.

Prior to commencing work on the *Petite Sonatine*, Cui had completed and orchestrated Mussorgsky's unfinished opera *Sorochintsï Fair* (composing by his own admission two fifths of it) and completed work on the fair copy of the Variations-Preludes Op. 104, one of his most important works for solo piano and the last work for piano solo that he actually wrote down himself. Presumably at the same time, he started work on the Miniatures Op. 105. The process of composition of these last works is detailed in several letters. Although the *Petite Sonatine* is not mentioned, it is almost certain that Cui faced the same problems working on the *Sonatine* as with the Miniatures. In a letter to Kerzina dated 12<sup>th</sup> December 1916, Cui writes:

I compose miniatures for about an hour, during the day and in the evenings. [One sentence illegible.] Three of my friends come over and notate these compositions, but they are having a difficult time doing it.<sup>4</sup>

The next documented mention of miniature piano works is four months later in a letter to the publisher B. P. Jurgenson dated 10 April 1917. He writes:

...but I am unable to read a single word or write a single note, therefore my compositional activity has come to an end. The only thing left to me is to compose short piano pieces that are then notated by someone else.<sup>5</sup>

The very next day—11 April 1917—he writes to Kerzina:

Recently I composed several little piano pieces. In their midst are some that are successful and are not in my typical manner. I had them notated. That the rhythm and pitch is correct and precise is without doubt, but what of correctness and beauty of orthography, who will correct this?<sup>6</sup>

In a letter to Kerzina dated 11 June 1917, we have a fascinating account of the process of composition and Cui's frustration by the limitations of blindness. The number of pieces he has already collected is mentioned for the first time.

Now about my creative process and its fixation on paper. Vocal works are out of the question, as I am unable to read, and can't learn it by memory due to a lack of [illegible], memorising does not suit my age. What remains is therefore instrumental piano music, and even so in miniature forms. Let's suppose I get a good idea but am unable to write it down, so I have to remember it. I repeatedly play it on the piano about 25 times, go for a walk, come back, and mostly cannot recall it. How can I consider composing anything large in such circumstances? Let's suppose the work is composed and it has to be written down. A friend comes along, I play it through slowly, in parts, first one, than the other hand, and they write it down. Then they play it through to me and we correct mistakes. The notes should all be correct, but whether it will be orthographically beautiful is questionable, other than if they will be edited by a *real* musician. Of such pieces I already have fifteen. Some are different to my usual manner [illegible], there are tragic and humorous ones.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Gusin, 471. (Letter number 706).

<sup>5</sup> Gusin, 476–477. (Letter number 718).

<sup>6</sup> Gusin, 477. (Letter number 719).

<sup>7</sup> Gusin, 477–478. (Letter number 720).

## Form

The *Petite Sonatine* is a work in three contrasting movements. The first, an introductory movement in a moderate tempo is loosely based on sonata form. The second is a lyrical slow movement that alternates two highly contrasting sections. The third is a fast, almost virtuosic rondo (ABACA coda).

The following table provides an overview of the *Sonatine* and illustrates the proportions within the work. It shows the key, time signature, suggested tempo and metronome indications and the number of bars in each movement.

Movement	Key	Time signature	Suggested Tempo and M.M. indication	Number of Bars
I	F major	C	<i>Moderato</i> (♩ = 92)	32
II	d minor / D major	6/8	<i>Adagio</i> (♩. = 52)	55
III	F major	3/8 and 6/8	<i>Presto</i> (♩. = 72)	109

The approximate duration of the *Petite Sonatine* is 6 minutes.

## Sources

This edition is based on the only available source—a working copy in pencil—located in the manuscript section of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg under the archive number RNL estate 413, C. Cui, No. 103. Pages 1, 4 and 6 of this manuscript are reproduced after the Preface.

Although the manuscript is untitled and does not specify the composer, it was part of the Cui Estate, and the title page or part of the cover (separate from the manuscript and on a different type of paper) is also located in the RNL under the archive number 177.

The *Petite Sonatine* is notated on the same paper type as the Variations-Preludes Op. 104 and was initially thought to be in Cui's hand. However a detailed handwriting analysis failed to find similarities with known samples of Cui's handwriting in such key features of the score as clefs, braces and notation of ornaments.

The score contains numerous shortcuts in notation (e.g. the A section in the Rondo is written out only once). Although the score contains detailed articulations, numerous vital details such as tempo indications and dynamics are missing. There are also numerous minor inaccuracies, such as missing dots and inconsistencies in voicing. All instances of editorial intervention are outlined in the Critical Report.

I sincerely hope that this edition will contribute to the revival and re-evaluation of César Cui's piano works and of his standing within the nineteenth-century musical world, as well as increasing the available literature for the piano and in doing so being of use to the ever increasing number of professional pianists, teachers, students and scholars. May it also bring the pleasure of discovering neglected works to music lovers.

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Sydney  
January 2013

This image shows a page of handwritten musical notation, likely a score for a string quartet or similar ensemble. The page is divided into three systems, each consisting of four staves. The notation is written in dark ink on aged, slightly yellowed paper.

- System 1:** The first system contains two measures. The first measure features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes, possibly a tremolo or a fast scale. The second measure is simpler, with fewer notes. There are some markings above the staves, possibly indicating dynamics or articulation.
- System 2:** The second system also contains two measures. The notation is more melodic and rhythmic than the first system. There are some markings above the staves, including what looks like a fermata or a similar symbol.
- System 3:** The third system contains two measures. The notation is similar to the second system, with some markings above the staves. There are some markings below the staves, possibly indicating fingerings or other performance instructions.

The handwriting is clear and legible, though there are some corrections and erasures visible. The overall style is that of a working draft or a composer's sketch.

Handwritten musical score for guitar, page V. The score consists of several systems of staves. The first system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. It features a complex melodic line with many beamed notes and rests, and a bass clef staff with a simpler accompaniment. The second system continues the piece with similar notation, including a trill marking (*tr.*) above a note. The third system is marked *a. Tempo* and features a prominent triplet of eighth notes in the treble clef staff. The notation is dense and expressive, with various slurs and dynamic markings throughout.

This image shows a page of handwritten musical notation on six staves. The notation is dense and complex, featuring many beamed notes and rests. The first system consists of the first three staves, and the second system consists of the last three staves. A measure number '20' is written above the second staff in the second system. The handwriting is in black ink on aged, slightly yellowed paper. The notation includes various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, often grouped together with beams. There are also some sharp and flat accidentals visible throughout the score.