



BY DOLBIN

## DEAN OF SOVIET COMPOSERS

VISSARION SHEBALIN

**N**ICOLAI MIASCOWSKY, Professor of the Moscow conservatory, is a leading figure in Russian musical life today, although he belongs to the older generation. He was born in 1881, in Novogeorgievsk Fortress (formerly of the Government of Warsaw) into the family of a military engineer. At Saint Petersburg Conservatory he attended the composers' class conducted by Rimsky-Korsakov and Anatole Liadov. His first efforts in composition date back thirty-five years.

Miascowsky has written nine string quartets, several piano sonatas, a violin concerto and many songs. But his chief contribution is in his orchestral works. Here he is the bearer of Russian classical traditions and at the same time the founder of the Soviet symphony. He dedicated his *Sixth Symphony* to the Russia of after the October Revolution, the theme of the *Twelfth* is life on the collective farm, the *Sixteenth* honors the Soviet "conquerors of the air," the *Eighteenth* is based on Russian musical folklore. For the *Twenty-first*, a work of lyric and philosophical content, he was awarded the title, Stalin Prizewinner, in 1941.

During the present war, two more symphonies have been written. The *Twenty-second* depicts the grim events of 1941; its first and third movements abound in vital war images, the second, slow movement gives us the passionate melodies of the people's anguish and wrath. This work was written in the Caucasus, where the composer spent over a year studying the national music of the Kabardin-Balkar people. That study also resulted in the *Seventh Quartet*. But whereas the symphony is written as dramatic narration, the quartet exploits its lyrical motives and elegiac melodies.

Following the quartet, Miascowsky composed another symphony, his twenty-third, on Kabardin-Balkar folk themes. This is an epic in whose

three movements varied popular melodies have been used. Here are old Balkar chants, tragic and heroic, the fiery Kabardin folkdances, the festive solemnity of drinking songs. The symphony was followed by two piano sonatas and an eighth quartet, which for profound feeling, lucidity and expressive musical speech, ranks high among Miascowsky's finest chamber compositions.

Miascowsky has also written an overture for brass orchestra; a cantata for choir solos; symphonic music on the theme of the heroic defense of Leningrad, and two brass band military marches. He is the author of well over half a hundred songs with piano accompaniment. His first songs were written to the words of Eugene Baratynsky, a poet of Pushkin's time, whose verse reveals a spirit of philosophic calm and contemplativeness. This was appropriate to the style of Miascowsky's music in that period. After the October Revolution, there appeared his second vocal cycle – six songs to words of the Russian poet, Alexander Block. The year 1931 marked the beginning of a new and fruitful era; Miascowsky's vocal compositions were now more emotional than before. During the last twelve years he has written three songs of the Soviet Armies for two part chorus with piano accompaniment, and one song, *To Soviet Pilots*, for mixed four-part chorus. *Buds are Swelling on the Poplars*, a war piece of the same character, has become very popular. Besides these, the composer has two excellent songs for solo – the first dedicated to Stalin, entitled *With All our Hearts*, to words of Djamboul, the oldest Kazakh poet; the second is in honor of Romain Rolland. Their melodiousness has made both widely popular with the Soviet public. Two songs about Polar travellers have also received a deserved response.

For twenty years Miascowsky has been active as a teacher at the Moscow Conservatory. Strict in his demands, he knows how to impart to his students a discriminating taste in the various technics of composition and a serious attitude towards art. Among his pupils may be mentioned the composers Aram Khachaturian, Dmitri Kabalevsky and Victor Biely. I myself was fortunate in being one of his group. Through his person, the old Russian intelligentsia hands down to youth its noble traditions.

For fruitful constructive work, long years, and for distinguished services in the development of Soviet musical culture, Miascowsky has been decorated with the Order of Lenin.