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MILY BALAKIREV’S SUITE IN D MINOR
AS AN EXAMPLE OF CHOPIN RECEPTION IN RUSSIA

Mily Balakirev was famed as a great propagator of the music of Fryderyk Chopin in Russia, as a pianist, a composer of orchestral, piano and choral arrangements, and also a publisher of Chopin’s sonatas. He also contributed to Polish musical culture, as the ‘initiator of an appropriately conceived Chopin cult’ in Poland. In 1891, after Fryderyk Chopin’s family home was rediscovered in Żelazowa Wola, he was involved in its restoration and the erection of a Chopin monument there (1894). His last initiative was to organise in St Petersburg (with the participation of Josef Hofmann and Sergey Lyapunov) a concert to mark the centenary of the composer’s birth (22 February 1910), in which he was unable to take part himself. Given its first performance in that concert was Balakirev’s last work – a four-movement Suite in D minor for orchestra composed specially for the occasion. According to an entry on the title page of the score, the Suite was treated by the composer as ‘A mark of respect for the Chopin Monument Committee in Warsaw’ on the centenary of the composer’s birth. The successive movements in the Suite are transcriptions of works by Chopin: the Prélude is an arrangement of the Etude in E flat minor, Op. 10 No. 6, the Mazurka of the Mazurka in A flat major, Op. 41 No. 3, the Intermezzo is based on the Nocturne in G minor, Op. 15 No. 3, and the Finale is an arrangement of the Scherzo in C sharp minor, Op. 39. The work was published by J. H. Zimmermann of Leipzig in 1909. Each of the movements differs in terms of forces (sparser in movements I and III, richer in movements II and IV) and the extent to which the original is recomposed.

The aim of this text is to enhance the picture of the musical reception of Chopin’s works in the late nineteenth century in St Petersburg, a city that was musically very active at that time, by outlining the historical, social and cultural contexts behind Balakirev’s efforts to promote Chopin’s music, offering a detailed analysis of the above-mentioned Suite, indicating the kind of arrangement involved (based on the author’s own classification of nineteenth-century transcriptions of works by Chopin), as well as the value of this composition and its significance in the reception of Chopin’s music.