Alexander Borodin

Chemist and Composer

Alexander Borodin was a proficient chemist as well as composer, who was co-credited with the discovery of the Aldol reaction and composed several well-known pieces of music. Born the illegitimate son of a Georgian nobleman and a married Russian woman, his father provided rich tutoring as he was unable to attend proper schools since Alexander was officially a serf. In 1850, Alexander enrolled in the Medical-Surgical Academy in St. Petersburg to pursue a career in chemistry. After his graduation, he spent several years abroad studying in Western Europe. Upon returning to St. Petersburg in 1862, he met a fellow member of The Five, Mily Balakirev, who tutored Borodin in composition.

Under Balakirev’s tutelage, Borodin, as well as Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, made up the group known as The Five. These five composers worked to create distinctly Russian music, largely in Balakirev’s vision. Alexander, uniquely among The Five, embraced chamber music and wrote two string quartets.

Among his two string quartets, Borodin also composed 11 other chamber pieces, as well as 4 operas, 4 orchestral pieces, 7 piano works, and numerous solo songs. Arguably his most famous works are his opera piece *Prince Igor*, his orchestral *In the Steppes of Central Asia*, and his string quartets. His third symphony and *Prince Igor* were both finished posthumously by Alexander Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov, respectively, the former of which only included the two movements finished by Borodin.

[String Quartet No. 1]
[String Quartet No. 2]
[Prince Igor]