

COLLECTION
BBVA FOUNDATION - NEOS

Nikolay A. Roslavets

Works for piano

Nikolay A. Roslavets (1881–1944)

NIKOLAY ANDREYEVICH ROSLAVETS

Was born in Dushatino, in the former Chernigov region of Ukraine, on 5 January 1881. Until 1912 he studied at Moscow Conservatory with Sergey Vasilenko (composition), Alexander Ilyinsky and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov (theory) and Ivan Hřimalý (violin), receiving the Great Silver Medal for his final diploma. Initially inspired by the styles of Alexander Skryabin and the 'French modernists', he soon freed himself of their influence and developed a musical idiom all his own. His 'new system of tonal organisation' and his 'synthetic chord' technique, though frequently compared with Schoenberg's twelve-tone method, were worked out entirely independently of Schoenberg's ideas.

Before the Revolution, Roslavets was a freelance composer and critic in Moscow and a member of the circle known as 'The Contemporaries', a core of the future Association for Contemporary Music (ASM). After the February Revolution of 1917 he joined the non-Marxist Social Revolutionary party (SR), and in 1918 he became a member of the 'vulgar communists'. He left the party in 1921 and was a director of the ASM from 1920 on. His activities were attacked and denounced as 'formalist' and 'counter-revolutionary' by the so-called 'proletarian musicians' directly linked with the Communist Party, and ultimately he was blacklisted. In 1931 he left Moscow and moved to Tashkent, where he was active as a conductor, composer and head of the music department at the local music theatre. In 1933 he returned to Moscow, where he worked as a day labourer. Branded an 'enemy of the people', he was one of Russia's ostracised composers for decades. He died in Moscow on 23 August 1944.