

## Warsaw Period of Viktor Kosenko's Life (1898–1914): the Influence of a Multinational and Multicultural Environment

Olga Volosatykh / vololga7@gmail.com

Petro Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine, Kiev, Ukraine

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*Viktor Kosenko (1896–1938) was one of the brightest representatives of Ukrainian musical culture of the first half of the 20th century. He was a brilliant pianist, a genius composer, and an outstanding teacher. But the first twenty years of his biography are a “white spot”, a gap in modern musicology. There are almost no materials related to this time in his personal archive, as well as in the funds of the Composer's Memorial Apartment. So let's look for the reasons for the “mysterious disappearance” of the information about the artist's childhood and youth period. We will find the information in other sources and reconstruct this period of his biography, immerse ourselves in the atmosphere that surrounded the future composer during his stay in Warsaw, restore impressions and memories of his school life period, which could be reflected in his future work.*

Key words: *Viktor Kosenko's biography; Suvorov Warsaw Corps of Cadets; the reconstruction of a lifetime period*

At the present stage of humanitarian knowledge development, historical and cultural explorations are becoming more and more relevant, with an emphasis on the processes of bringing foreign cultural heritage to the national tradition as well as on the processes of rethinking and transforming foreign ethnic influences into the formation of modern Ukrainian culture. In particular, some aspects and factual materials connected with the integration of a European educational tradition into the domestic pedagogical system are covered in the works of I. Dubrovina, K. Khorash and A. Karmazin.<sup>1</sup> It is also mentioned that Ukrainian, Russian and Polish musical

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<sup>1</sup> Dubrovina, I. – Khorash, K. – Karmazin, A. (2019). Enlightening Activity of the Volhynian Lyceum As an Example of Pedagogical Dedication. *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal*, 11/2, 108–118.

traditions<sup>2</sup> were combined in a portrait of an outstanding creative person. Similar contacts in the field of theater provoke the appearance of both individual articles<sup>3</sup> and thorough monographs.<sup>4</sup> In line with such trends, it would be interesting to consider another outstanding figure of Ukrainian musical art of the first half of the twentieth century. Upon closer examination, the first 20 years of Viktor Kosenko's life appear in the domestic musicology almost as a complete gap. There are almost no materials related to this time in his personal archive, as evidenced by the recently published catalog,<sup>5</sup> as well as in the funds of the Composer's Memorial Apartment. However, Volodymyr Mudryk,<sup>6</sup> a director of the Memorial Apartment, managed to reconstruct some details of the artist's study period. The leading sources of such biographical details are the memoirs of graduates of the Warsaw Corps of Cadets, published during the second half of the twentieth century in various publications by associations of former students of the Russian Cadet Corps in exile.

The statement about the formation of the composer "at the break of cultures and traditions" is not an exaggeration. The artist's childhood and youth coincided with the turbulent first two decades of the twentieth century. Two radically different historical epochs simultaneously determined his destiny and path. The social order and the usual way of life broke down in the Kosenko family: the beginning of the First World War put an end to possible plans for further studies with professors of the Warsaw Conservatory; turbulent socio-political events between 1910 and 1920 forced a graduate of the Petrograd Conservatory, a concertmaster of the Mariinsky Theatre, leave the capital and settle in the provincial town of Zhytomyr.

Artistic tendencies also underwent radical changes: the century "under the sign of Romanticism" was replaced by an era of bold creative experiments, aesthetic pluralism, and later—the most rigid ideological canons.

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- 2 Nazarenko, V. – Vilinsky, Yu. – Volosatykh, O. (2019). Vitold Malishevskiy u muzychnomu zhytti Ukrainy ta Polshchi. *Chasopys Natsionalnoi muzychnoi akademii Ukrainy imeni P. I. Chaikovskoho: naukovyi zhurnal*, No. 2 (43), 20–48.
  - 3 Volosatykh, O. (2018). Ukrainska tematyka v teatralnomu repertuari Pravoberezhnoi Ukrainy pershoi polovyny XIX stolittia. *National Academy of Managerial Staff of Culture and Arts Herald*, No. 3 (2018), 271–275.
  - 4 Garbuziuk, M. (2018). *Obraz Ukrainy u polskomu teatralnomu dyskursi XIX stolittia: stratehii ta formy reprezentatsii*. Lviv: Prostir-M.
  - 5 Ivanova, O. (2019). *Arkhiv V. S. Kosenka (1896–1938) u fondakh Instytutu rukopysu Natsionalnoi biblioteky Ukrainy imeni V. I. Vernadskoho : biohrafichne doslidzhennia; naukovyi katalog*. Kiev.
  - 6 Mudryk, V. (2016). Viktor Kosenko: shliakh vid kadeta do artysta (za materialamy onovlenoi ekspozytzii Muzeiu-kvartyry kompozytora. *Naukovyi visnyk Natsionalnoi muzychnoi akademii Ukrainy imeni P. I. Chaikovskoho*, Iss. 115 (Vol. 1), 8–30.

Another area of intersection of cultures and traditions is family traditions. The noble family of Ukrainian origin<sup>7</sup> (all known personal documents of Viktor Kosenko and his brothers indicate their nationality as “Ukrainians”) tried to combine ethnic roots with everything that gave the position of a high-ranking personnel officer. The children got an excellent education at that time: Oleksandr was a graduate of the Faculty of Natural Sciences of Petrograd University, Maria graduated from the Warsaw Conservatory. But apparently the parents hoped for a continuation of the family tradition of a military career for their sons, so Semen and Viktor graduated from the Warsaw Cadet Corps. Despite civil training and education, Oleksandr managed to take part in the First World War and was seriously injured. The fate of Semen (November 4, 1889 – October 17, 1945) after graduating the cadet corps is unknown,<sup>8</sup> but starting from May 1919 he served the Red Army, and most likely, he was a professional in applied economics or legislation and got awards. According to the memoirs of V. Kosenko’s relatives, Semen taught at Frunze Military Academy for a long time. It seems that Semen also felt the opposition of two worldviews – being a musically gifted person with a wonderful voice, but at the same time an enthusiastic philatelist: this “incredulous, silent, with big kind and always sad eyes” man in a uniform gave the impression of being bored by military service. However, he did not accept the offer to leave his military career and try to make a music one.<sup>9</sup>

Another worldview of the family is related to the cultivation of artistic traditions. Numerous memories demonstrate the fact that the pearls of classical music alternated with Ukrainian songs in Kosenko’s home music, and their leisure was revived by colorful folk humor. Modern researchers determine the deep, sometimes even subconscious, permeation of the composer’s musical language with folk intonations.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the history of the Kosenko family is closely connected with the Polish territory. Since 1898, in connection with their father’s duties, they lived in Warsaw, but apparently ten years earlier the family was in the Kingdom of Poland – both Viktor’s older brothers – Oleksandr (b. 1888) and Semen (b. 1889) – were

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7 A father comes from Kherson Region; according to some sources, Leopolda Doroshevich, a mother, had a complex polyethnic background. (Shamayeva, K. (2016). From Viktor Kosenko’s archive. *Naukovyi visnyk NMAU*, Iss. 115 (Vol. 1), 60–61.)

8 The search for Viktor Kosenko’s family ties is complicated by the prevalence of the surname and, apparently, the presence of namesakes, whose biographies are erroneously combined in modern reference books.

9 Kanep, R. (1997). Komentar do foto. *Viktor Stepanovych Kosenko: pohliad z 90-kh rokov*. Kiev, p. 33.

10 Kharitonova, D. (2019). *Riznovydy symboliky v ukrainskii instrumentalnii sonati XX stolittia*. Candidate (PhD) of art studies degree thesis, P. I. Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine, Kiev.

born in Novoradomsk, Petrokovsky province (now Radomsko, Radomsko district, Łódź voivodship).

All in all, it was the connection with Polish culture that later became the formal reason for Oleksandr's arrest and death. Volodymyr Yershov, a well-known researcher of Volhynia culture, notes: "For some time, Oleksandr Stepanovych Kosenko (1888–1937) worked as a lecturer of natural sciences at the institute. The teacher was accused of describing "the life of the USSR people" in his letters to his sister, who lived in Poland, and of "praising Polish culture" among children. According to the archives, this was enough for him to be arrested on September 17, 1937 for counter-revolutionary activities and to be shot on November 24, 1937."<sup>11</sup> The glorification of Polish culture, mentioned in the document, obviously refers to the memories of childhood period in Warsaw, which were suddenly mentioned at lessons and lectures he conducted, and which the Kosenko brothers were willing to tell about in a friendly circle.<sup>12</sup>

The composer himself was obviously aware that such a thing was not worth mentioning in Soviet Ukraine at the time, so in the document dated March 1934, he defined his own education at the conservatory as "a real vocational school"<sup>13</sup>.

But there was really something to remember. An extraordinary atmosphere prevailed in the Suvorov Warsaw Cadet Corps, where the future composer studied from 1907 to 1914. It was one of the most prestigious secondary schools for boys at that time. The level of education allowed<sup>14</sup> graduates to continue their studies both in military schools and universities (including the Warsaw Polytechnic Institute, the Forest Institute), art schools and more. In addition to teaching specialized and general educational disciplines, much attention was paid to the formation of the general cultural and artistic worldview among students: the program included

11 Yershov, V. (2011). Represii proty vykladachiv Zhytomyrskoho pedinstytutu imeni Ivana Franka (1929–1941). *Reabilitovani istoriieiu. Zhytomyrska oblast. Knyha 5*. Zhytomyr: Polissja, p. 30.

12 «Kosenko told a lot about their Warsaw period of life, about their musical leisure and so-called "amateur" concerts, performances, jokes that flourished at their home on 18 Jerusalem Street. Gradually, all this was moved to Zhytomyr on 6 Dmytrivska Street» (Kanep, R. (1997). Komentar do foto. *Viktor Stepanovych Kosenko: pohliad z 90-kh rokiv*. Kiev, p. 31.)

13 Kosenko, V. (1939) Avtobiohrafichni zapysky V. S. Kosenka. *Radianska muzyka*. No. 5, p. 26.

14 The list of subjects according to the certificate: God's law, Russian (written, grammar and literature), French and German, arithmetic, algebra, geometry ("with algebra attached to geometry"), trigonometry, analytical geometry, natural history, physics, cosmography, geography, history, law, chemistry, drawing (Iz «Chernovoj tetradi» i iz arhiva objedinenija. (1956). *Suvorovcy: sbornik*. Vol. 7. New York: Association of the Suvorov Cadet Corps, p. 35.)

choreography, singing, piano lessons, various additional classes, and also an issue of the magazine “Suvorovets” was published.<sup>15</sup>

The teacher of singing V. K. Pichugin,<sup>16</sup> worked in the educational institution since the beginning of its existence. He is mentioned in the description of Lev Heine’s painting depicting a solemn prayer service on the occasion of the corps founding.<sup>17</sup> Memoirists have repeatedly written about the wonderful cadet choir, which accompanied the services and celebrations, as well as participated in traditional graduation performances.

Student orchestras such as brass, balalaika and chamber also functioned. As Serhiy Dvigubsky mentioned, “The brass orchestra was the object of special attention on the part of authorities and enjoyed the exceptional, unchanging love of the cadets. Different indulgences were made to the musicians.”

The reader must not think that the conductor—the German Schene—had nothing to do with it, and that everyone chose his own instrument and played whatever he wanted. This essay is just an attempt to describe the musicians of the already formed orchestra. Schene was talented, although he was nervous and spoke bad Russian. In class, driven mad by a stupid student, he could break his wand on the lectern and even nervously snatch the instrument, hitting lightly the head... he blushed, bounced, squatted and led cadets to indescribable delight when he shouted: “This disgrace... this... this only the devil knows what it is ”... But he did his best, and the corps brass orchestra played well for many years. And in 1916, when the corps moved from Warsaw to Moscow, it was recognized as the best orchestra of four corps: three Moscow and one Suvorov.<sup>18</sup> Talented musicians among the cadets were also involved in celebrations and concerts as soloists, encouraged actively and strongly, including valuable gifts (expensive instruments, etc.).<sup>19</sup>

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15 Mudryk, V. (2016). Viktor Kosenko: shliakh vid kadeta do artysta (za materialamy onovlenoi ekspozytsii Muzeiu-kvartyry kompozytora). *Naukovyi visnyk NMAU*, Iss. 115 (Vol. 1), p. 20.

16 The name and patronymic have not been established yet, the initials are presented according to the signed photo.

17 Vitte, N. (1954). V 3-hetazhnom bolshom, serom zdanii na Belvederskih allejah pod No. 21 pomeshchalsja nash korpus (prodolzhenie). *Suvorovcy: sbornik*. Vol. 4. New York, p. 2.

18 Dvigubsky, S. (1952). Muzykanty. Iz «Obshchej tetradi». *Voennaja byl*. No. 1, March 1952. <http://lepassemilitaire.ru/muzykanty-iz-obshhej-tetradi-s-dvigubskij/>

19 Warsaw graduates mentioned that for a brilliant performance Zeifart, a cornetist, <directly in the text – Zeifart I, but obviously referring to Konstantin Zeifart> received a silver cornet from Grand Duke Constantine, and for the participation in the concert Viktor Kosenko was awarded a personal watch, given by the distinguished visitor (Mudryk, V. (2016). Viktor Kosenko: shliakh vid kadeta do artysta (za materialamy onovlenoi ekspozytsii Muzeiu-kvartyry kompozytora). *Naukovyi visnyk NMAU*, Iss. 115 (Vol. 1), p. 20.)

Lev Heine, a graduate of the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, taught drawing techniques and the history of art to cadets: “The lessons in the drawing class at the end of the 2nd company were truly a holiday for all of us. Ljova was not demanding of his talented or incapable students—but he fascinated all students when he devoted a class hour to the history of art. He could vividly draw Egyptian temples, Ionian and Corinthian capitals, the Pantheon and the Temple of St. Petro on a blackboard.”<sup>20</sup>

The training of students (in particular, their knowledge of the perspective laws, the ability to draw quite complex architectural forms from <sup>21</sup>nature) was later praised by Nicholas Roerich who was a director of the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts during 1906–1918, where Lev Lynevych, the memoirist, studied after graduating the Corps of Cadets.<sup>22</sup>

But the conversation on the subject of painting could be brilliantly supported even by the corps priest and teacher of God’s laws—Grygoriy Modzalevsky. He was a man of bright and multifaceted personality and later his students reported on his work in one of the ministries of the newly created Ukrainian state in Kyiv.<sup>23</sup> It is clear that it is confusion due to the coincidence of the surnames (perhaps a distant kinship) of the corps priest and a prominent Ukrainian socio-cultural figure, who was a historian, an archivist, a genealogist and an art critic, Vadym Modzalevsky.

An exceptional position of the Warsaw Suvorov Corps was also emphasized by the ceremonial side of life, in particular by providing its own musical accompaniment. Only here the heroic polonaise by Osip (Józef) Kozlovsky, “Let the Thunder of Victory Rumble!”, which was once created on the occasion of one of the victories of a prominent commander, was performed during the festivities. The rest of the cadet corps used only military marches and signals, including the counter-march.

Representatives of different nationalities as well as their family environment associated with the corps also added a specific color to the atmosphere in which the future composer was formed as a personality. Communication with teachers and staff—who were the representatives of different nations and cultures—naturally

20 Piatibokov, A. (1954). 1907–1914–1920. *Suvorovcy: sbornik*. No. 4, p. 16.

21 In the memoirs of another student we found: “The building was located opposite Łazienki Royal Park, where we were sometimes taken by our tutor, instead of a gymnastics lesson. We rode in boats, or Lev Andreevich Heine, a teacher of drawing, taught us to draw small Łazienki palaces from nature” (N. G. (1974). *Malen'koe vospominanie iz dalekogo proshlogo. Suvorovcy: sbornik*. No. 24, p. 24.)

22 L. P. L. (1955). *Blizhajshij ugol. Suvorovcy: sbornik*. No. 5, p. 22.

23 Pismo «v redakciju» N. N. Strashkevicha. (1956). *Suvorovcy: sbornik*. No. 7, p. 37. However, in the next issue, another graduate denied the sensational information about Grygoriy Modzalevsky, reporting on his teaching philosophy and logic in 1919 at Poltava Seminary for Teachers.

encouraged a deeper learning of foreign languages. Semi-anecdotal mentions of memoirists about their poor command of Russian confirm this indirectly.

There were other interesting, in particular in the musical aspect, coincidences and meetings. Arthur Christian Korjus, the father of Miliza Korjus—Olena Muravyova's future student at the Lysenko Music and Drama Institute, a soloist of the Dumka choir and an Oscar nominee for her role in the film "The GreatWaltz", became a German teacher in 1911. In fact, Viktor Kosenko's fellow students remembered her as "the youngest lady" of the 1913 cadet ball—"a sweetie with a huge pink bow on her blond head."<sup>24</sup> Her siblings, Nina and Mykola, were also musically gifted. Nina became a violinist of the State Symphony Orchestra of the USSR. According to some reports, it was Arthur Korjus who taught his children how to play the violin.<sup>25</sup>

A dance teacher Vikenty Slovatsky (in his students' memoirs—"Pan Slovatsky", which lets us suggest that he was Polish) had the fame of an unsurpassed mazurka performer in Warsaw at the time. "Our ball opened the winter season in Warsaw. It was almost the most brilliant ball. Many students longed for this ball. <...> both halls were brightly lit; the parquet was shining. In the White Hall, there was the Orchestra of the Lithuanian Lifeguard Regiment; in the gym—30 of the infantry Poltava regiment.<sup>26</sup> The halls were the largest in Warsaw. <...> Conductors directed the dances confidently. But Vikenty Jakovlevich Slovatsky, a dance teacher, kept an eye on everyone in the halls. And his "mazurka", with one of the best high school girl-student, who was giggling happily because she was in the first pair with Slovatsky, was watched by everyone with great pleasure."<sup>27</sup>

On the group photo of the VIII issue (1913) you can still see the facial features of art teachers, Viktor Stepanovych communicated with. They are dancer Slovatsky, choirmaster Pichugin, conductor Schene.<sup>28</sup>

A bright component of the life of the Warsaw Suvorov Cadet Corps were student (mostly with the participation of graduates) performances. The level of organization and attention to this artistic process is evidenced by the facts of construction of a large stationary stage in the gym, providing cadet actors with costumes from a professional state theater, and so on.

24 Piatibokov, A. (1954). 1907–1914–1920. *Suvorovcy: sbornik*. Vol. 4, p. 16.

25 Korius, N. (1955). XIII vypusk – rokovoj i poslednij. *Suvorovcy: sbornik*. No. 5, p. 17.

26 Another memoirist clarifies that one of the military orchestras that played during the ball was a string orchestra (in the White Hall) and the other was a brass one. (Politansky, A. (1974). *Suvorovskij kadetskij korpus. Kadetskaja pereklichka: periodicheskij zhurnal Objedinenija Kadet Rossijskih Kadetskikh korpusov za rubezhom*. No. 36. New York, SCC, p. 111.)

27 Vitte, N. (1953). Poslednij korpusnoj prazdnik v Varshave. I. X. 1913. *Suvorovcy: sbornik*. No. 2, p. 6.

28 The photo can be found at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ruscadet/7222635738/>, but the image is pretty damaged, so the article does not provide it.

The tradition was apparently started by the first issue, at least in the memoirs of Konstantin Globa-Mykhailenko we found: “Back to 1904 or 1905, when he was in VI or VII class, “The Government Inspector” by Gogol was put on by cadets. The costumes were brought to us from the theater. As far as I remember, female roles were also played by cadets.”<sup>29</sup>

It is not known whether the initial initiative for the performances came directly from the young actors or was proposed “from above.” The theatrical idea found fertile ground and flourished, transforming into a source of bright pages of memories: later an amateur drama group was formed, rehearsals and performances of which also took place on the stage in the gym, teachers and educators arranged their own performances as well...<sup>30</sup> And the boys from the junior classes were really into theater. Creating their own illusory unusual world, reliably separated from the usual everyday life, even with the help of two blankets on a wire, became the most exciting activity for them.<sup>31</sup>

Along with artistic activities, attending concerts and the theater was an unforgettable page of years of study for the cadets. They were real theater-goers, both in organized groups and in a family circle during the weekend. Brilliant concerts and theatrical life of Warsaw at the break of the century deserve special coverage, so we will not touch on it in this research. It should be noted that the cadets of the first company (grades 6 and 7) also had the opportunity to attend performances, including operas.<sup>32</sup>

One cannot ignore a musical component of Viktor Kosenko’s Warsaw environment outside the Corps walls—Józef Judycki and Aleksander Michałowski, his teachers from the Warsaw Conservatory. Michałowski, an outstanding interpreter and editor of Chopin’s works, one of the inspirational founders of the International Competition for Pianists named after him, could not help but pass on to his student his artistic love for the world of Polish music genius. Through Kosenko’s mediation, certain principles were laid down by Michałowski and they obviously influenced the formation of the national tradition of Chopin’s repertoire interpretation. To confirm this, we can mention an unforgettable impression which Viktor Kosenko made on listeners while performing Chopin’s repertoire. Abram Lufer (1905–1948), a well-known pianist and a soloist of Kyiv Philharmonic, consulted Viktor Kosenko while

29 Iz pisma K. A. Globa-Mihajlenko. (1957). *Suvorovcy: sbornik*. No. 8, p. 27.

30 Piatibokov, A. (1954). 1907–1914–1920. *Suvorovcy: sbornik*. No. 4, p. 19.

31 Linevich, L. (1955). Nat Pinkerton. *Suvorovcy: sbornik*. No. 6, pp. 19–20.

32 “It was completely free. I remember Baklanov’s tour that week; I saw “The Devil” and “Rigoletto” instead of my evening classes. I didn’t miss a single performance of The Alexandrinsky Theatre (Piatibokov, A. (1956). Shtyk. The 1<sup>st</sup> company. Journal «Suvorovets». *Suvorovtsy: collection of articles*. Vol. 7, p. 32–33.)

preparing to participate in the Second Chopin Competition (1932), and later he won one of the prizes there.<sup>33</sup> In this context, the comparison of the phenomenon of two creative personalities—Kosenko and Chopin—looks very typical.<sup>34</sup>

The multinational and multicultural environment of the earliest Warsaw period of Viktor Kosenko's life probably left its mark on the artist. Being at the intersection of cultures and traditions—military and artistic environments with inherent worldviews, the change of artistic and socio-political orientations beyond the XIX and XX centuries, presence of several national traditions in everyday life (officially declared Russian, Warsaw urban culture, preservation of Ukrainian origins in the family circle, a diverse environment of teachers and student fellows, etc.), and in the end—a unique phenomenon of “Russian” educational institution in the formally and administratively annexed Polish territory, the institution with an educational paradigm of forming attitudes to these areas and culture as to “the native ones”—all these could not help but influence the growth of the creative composer's personality that was Europeanized and opened to other cultures. Yes, it would be too naive and superficial to explain the brightness of Viktor Kosenko's mazurkas and to mention about his admiration for Vikenty Slovatsky's brilliant dancing skills. However, the tracing of multilevel and multi-vector influences on the formation of creative ideas and their further concretization looks like a promising area for further studies of the artist's work.

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33 Ilnytska, M. (2016). Koryfei polskoi shopenistyky – Aleksandr Mikhailovskiy. *Naukovyi visnyk NMAU*, Iss. 115 (Vol. 1), pp. 220–226.

34 Komenda, O. (2020). *Universalna tvorchia osobystist v ukrainskii muzychnii kulturi*. Thesis for the Habilitation of the Degree of Doctor in Art Studies, P. I. Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine, Kyiv, p. 266.