

## Creativity and destinies of some homosexual composers

**Marina Vuksanović, Darko Breitenfeld, Branimir Krištofić,  
Danijel Buljan<sup>1</sup>, Ivan Šimunec, Zoran Zoričić<sup>1</sup>, Ankica Akrap,  
Marija Živković**

*Croatian physicians' music society (CMA), Zagreb, Croatia*

*<sup>1</sup>University Department of Psychiatry, University hospital Centre Sestre milosrdnice,  
Zagreb, Croatia*

**Summary** – In this article, some destinies and creativity of composers, supposed to be homosexuals, are presented. It is evident that the amount of mentioned composers indicates the creativity potentials of some homosexual artists.

**Keywords:** composers, homosexuality, creativity, destinies

### INTRODUCTION

Many famous homosexual thinkers and artists are mentioned in historical scientific literature. Among those, the most famous are: Sapho, an ancient greek poetess from the island Lesbos, philosophers Plato and Socrates, Michelangelo Buonarroti and Leonardo da

Vinci. Furthermore, among them were also writers Wilde, Whitman, Lorca, Yesenin and many others. It is often hard to define the composers who lived before the twentieth century as people of homosexual orientation, because very little documented data exist about their personal lives, and the information is found in biography books, music encyclopedias, and other records. Therefore the evidence about Corelli's, Haendel's (both with cardinal Ottoboni), Wagner's (with King Ludwig), and Beethoven's (with nephew Karl) homosexuality are uncertain.<sup>1-5</sup> Homosexuals were often described as particularly gifted. There are only implied circumstances, but for the most of them we can still determine

Correspondence to: **Darko Breitenfeld**, M.D., Ph.D., Derenčinova 25, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia.  
E-mail: darko.breitenfeld@gmail.com

whether they had same-sex romantic or erotic affairs.<sup>6–11</sup>

**JEAN-BAPTISTE LULLY**  
(1632–1687)

He composed the first French opera and was a French (Italian born) composer at the court of Louis the XIV who favored him very much. Although his influence on the European opera was immense, his career ended because of a homosexual scandal. His enemies spread various rumors about his homosexual affairs which were mostly untrue. He was incredibly professional, skilled, ambitious and resourceful. He was married and had many children, but an affair with a young man who was educated in the royal service led to the composer's conviction. Lully wasn't legally persecuted, but he had to end the relationship and was banished from court. After hitting his little toe with a baton during a concert he died in agony from gangrene and consequent sepsis.

**FRANZ SCHUBERT**  
(1797–1828)

He was an Austrian composer and one of the first and main representatives of romanticism. He loved company, had many friends and enjoyed eating and drinking. Schubert favored his musical colleagues and mingled mostly in male circles. Based on his lifestyle, passionate friendships and lack of interest for wo-



Fig. 1. Franz Schubert

men, most biographers agree that he was a homosexual. He had an affair with an old school friend Joseph von Spaun, a young poet Johann Mayrhofer and young and rich Franz von Schober who were the most important people in his life. He and Schober often lived in the same apartment for a long time. Schubert's alleged homosexuality and its influence on his music are still subjects of many discussions among music historians and critics. He suffered from syphilis and died a sudden death from a typhoid fever.<sup>12</sup>

**VINCENZO BELLINI**  
(1801–1835)

He was one of the most famous Italian opera composers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He refused to bind with anyone to keep his freedom, which allowed him a lot of

travelling, social popularity and success with women, especially opera singers. The main relationship in his life he had with Francesco Florimo. After Bellini's death, Florimo was regarded as his spiritual successor which some biographers thought was a proof of his homosexuality and others just an act of romantic friendship. He was also linked with an Italian tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini. He died at the age of 34 from dysenteric syndrome.<sup>13</sup>

**FRYDERYK CHOPIN**  
(1810–1849)

Polish composer and pianist. Despite his enormous popularity and extensive documentation about his life, Chopin remains a mysterious person. He was of weak and delicate health and temper, and was very connected to his mother, for



Fig. 2. Fryderyk Chopin

whom it was said was his only true love. Although his name was linked with a few ladies in Paris, George Sand remains his only proven mistress despite few intimate relationships with Polish aristocrats. Allegedly there are some letters which mention his love for a young Polish student, his childhood friend. However biographers have different opinions about the meaning of those letters, so his private life still remains a mystery. He suffered from tuberculosis for a long time, and probably died of it at the age of 39.<sup>14</sup>

**MODEST PETROVICH**  
**MUSSORGSKY**  
(1839–1881)

He was one of the most eccentric Russian composers of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who didn't have a normal relationship with women, and was timid and anxious. He never got married. While working in the royal service he often lived in communes with friends, among whom the most famous were Roman Korsakov and opera singer Petrov, whose death, for him, was hard to get over. He spent his nights in public houses and brothels, and lived a disorderly, careless and wanton life. During his life he often felt affection for men, among whom some were heterosexuals like Victor Hartmann, towards whom he felt a painful, hopeless fascination and infatuation. After his mother's death and loss



Fig. 3. Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky



Fig. 4. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

of his land and income, he turned to alcohol, to which his latent homosexuality bounded him even stronger. Chronic alcoholism was the cause of his self-destruction, with several delirium states and finally, serial epileptic seizures. He died, partly recovered in a hospital after alcohol poisoning caused by large amounts of vodka.<sup>15</sup>

#### PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

He was a Russian composer, conductor, music writer, critic and pedagogue. In Sankt Petersburg he attended a law school and lived in a boarding school, where he was very lonely, mingled in male company and established strong friendships. There was a lot of homosexuality in the military academy, and it is considered that is when his homosexual

tendencies and affairs started. At the age of 21 he decided to fully devote himself to music, and became one of the first conservatory students, where he also later held lectures. His financial safety and life abroad was made possible by countess von Meck. Their platonic love was documented in over two thousand friendly-love letters throughout 15 years. Generally one must be very careful with the information about his life. Since homosexuality was punishable in imperial Russia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is clear that all information that could lead to it was hidden. Tchaikovsky was sensitive, withdrawn, benevolent, and especially charming which aroused a special interest in women because he was an »unconquerable fortress«. Although he married his former conservatory student Miliukova, he tended to spend as much

time as possible away from her, visiting relatives and friends. He never respected her as an individual, nor had even friendly emotions for her, and even said they never consumed their marriage. Most historians believe Tchaikovsky had homosexual affairs, like the one with his servant Alyosha and his nephew Vladimir Davydov. Evidence that he was a homosexual are derived from his letters and diaries, and also from the letters of his brother Modest, who was also a homosexual, and it is possible that they were in an intimate relationship. In his letters to his brother he admitted that he was in love with Josif Josifovich Kotek, a former Moscow's conservatory student. He died at the age of 53, formally of cholera, but today it is known that briefly before his death he had to attend the Court of honor, where his sexual affinities were judged, which was enhanced by the fact that his latest fourteen year old lover was a member of the highest aristocratic circles. The court of honor ordered him to kill himself to avoid being banished to Siberia and ruining his reputation. After returning from this unpleasant meeting, Tchaikovsky publicly in several occasions drank uncooked water which also contained arsenic. That led to severe pain, stomach cramps, diarrhea and insatiable thirst, similar to the dysenteric syndrome. Because of his guilt caused by his homosexuality, (»Z«) acted excessively in music, he composed, and drank a lot of alcohol. Despite his growing glory, he ended

up tragically, not reaching the top of his creativity.<sup>16</sup>

ARTHUR SEYMOUR SULLIVAN  
(1842–1900)

He was an English composer of operettas, and operas, and an opera conductor. He cooperated more than well with a librettist Giovanni for many years in performing of his operettas. It is assumed that both of them were concealed homosexuals, but there is no evidence, except assumptions to confirm it. Sullivan never got married, but lived a turbulent life, surrounded by multiple lady friends. Gilbert was married, but never had children, and his marriage was considered asexual to a larger degree. Sullivan died suddenly from a heart attack.

EDWARD GRIEG  
(1843–1907)

He was a Norwegian composer, pianist and conductor. He lived a stressful life, full of concert tours, and consequent physical exhaustion, depression and mood swings. Although he married his cousin, there were rumors that he was a bisexual. He was allegedly fascinated with a young, handsome Australian composer Percy Grainger. Their common interest was Scandinavian folk music. There is a quote of him saying: »I love him as I would love a young woman«. He suffered from tuberculosis since his youth, and died in the

end due to heart problems (iatrogenic death due to morphine injection).

**GABRIEL FAURE**  
(1845–1924)

He was a French composer, organist and pedagogue. His teacher was Claude Debussy. It is considered that he was not a homosexual, but his homophilic tendencies were highly indicated. He was attractive and knew he attracted other men, like his old friend and older teacher Camille Saint-Saëns. He was among the first who were fascinated with Faure. The only obstacle in his life was his hearing loss. He died due to pneumonia.

**CAMILLE SAINT SAËNS**  
(1853–1921)

He was a French composer, pianist, conductor and writer who loved to travel and tended to enjoy scientific and philosophical discussions. His private life was dramatic and glamorous, followed by rumors and assumptions. He was a mysterious and lonely individual of some sort, who sometimes disappeared for several weeks, but was also an excellent host and entertainer. He allegedly danced wearing a ballerina outfit for his friend, composer Tchaikovsky. In his older age he traveled a lot through Africa, so he could realize his homophilic tendencies. Literature mostly declares him as a homosexual, because he did not hesitate to admit himself as such. He died from a stroke.

**FREDERICK DELIUS**  
(1862–1934)

He was an English composer of German heritage. He lived a bohemian life, and caught syphilis in Florida in the 1880. There he met Thomas Ward who was his teacher, and with whom he allegedly had an intimate relationship, but his sex life in Florida remains a mystery without any facts. He was also connected with Percy Grainger. His life and art were filled with physical desire and eroticism. He got blind later, and his young friend and caretaker- amanuensis Eric Fenby helped him to write notes of his compositions. He had syphilitic tabes dorsalis from which he died.

**CLAUDE DEBUSSY**  
(1862–1925)

He was a famous French composer, the founder and the most important representative of impressionism in music. He had an unusual and turbulent life. It is considered that he was a homosexual who had many affairs with men and women. He died from a rectal carcinoma.

**ERIC SATIE**  
(1866–1925)

He was a French composer of a peculiar temper and rather small amount of creativity. He was withdrawn, reserved, sensitive and shy, and an unequal friend of overly self-confident Debussy. He allegedly had a love affair with Utrillo's



Fig. 5. Maurice Ravel

mother. He was also a great friend of Jean Cocteau who helped him a lot and encouraged his work and creativity. Although he was connected to Cocteau, there is no evidence to support that, except that he allegedly might not have approved of Cocteau's sexual tendencies. He died because of abusive alcohol consumption and consequent liver cirrhosis and finally, pneumonia.

#### MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

He was a French composer and pianist. He was close to his parents for a long time because of his tender stature, shortness, and general physical and mental infirmity. His timidity alienated him from women, leaving him without any intimate relationships. He was of a nervous temper, tended to smoke, take opiates, and drink heavy wines and black

coffee. He was associated with de Falla and Vines, but there is no evidence that he had a lasting relationship with either sex. Most biographers quote that his only emotional relationship was with his mother. He visited several fun fairs («Les Apaches») which were known for homosexual gatherings. After a blow to the head caused by a car accident, he started to lose the ability of talking and communicating over time, and five years after the accident, because of the suspicion he had a brain tumor- hydrocephalus, he agreed to a cerebral operation. He died tragically due to surgery complications.

#### MANUEL DE FALLA (1876–1946)

He was a Spanish composer and pianist. It is known that he was a homosexual, and he allegedly had a «ménage à trois» with French composer Maurice

Ravel and Spanish pianist Richard Vines. De Falla and Ravel hid their sexuality very well, not leaving any written evidence about it. Their contemporaries were the ones who revealed their relationship to the public. De Falla's sensual, elegant and erotically enriched music gave the public more proof of his homosexuality than any written documents would. Shortly after the beginning of The World War One, he met Frederic Garcia Lorca, a poet who was also a homosexual, and soon his close friend and associate. During that time his home was a place of gathering for Spanish homosexual intellectuals and artists. Besides being highly respected among Franco's nationalists, he could not stop Lorca's execution. After being disappointed with Franco's homophobia, he left his job and country and emigrated to Argentina where he lived a lonely life with his sister. He died suddenly due to heart problems at the age of 70.

**PERCY GRAINGER**  
(1882–1961)

He was an Australian composer and pianist, and was a memorable person who gained a lot of merit in the field of ethnomusicology. He was generous, outgoing, energetic, very intelligent, extremely talented and hardworking. He wasn't ashamed of his great sexual appetite and perverse tendencies like sadomasochistic sex. He liked to punish others during sex, as well

as he liked being punished. It is considered that his mother's extreme possessiveness and strictness was in a way the main reason for his serious involvement in sexual masochism. In 1918 he married a woman whom he adored because she indulged in his deviant sexual affinities. He established a research center »Grainger Museum« in Melbourne where one could see a collection of whips, clothes and utensils that he used with his lovers, and different photos of his sexual adventures, which reached a level of forensic pathology. His mentors were all older people, but his sexual fascination was with young men and women. He was associated with the Norwegian composer Edward Grieg, who was completely fascinated with him. They allegedly had an intimate relationship for a while. He died due to extensive brain metastases from prostate cancer.

**KAROL SZYMANOWSKI**  
(1882–1937)

He was the greatest Polish composer after Chopin. Homoeroticism is unequivocally present in his music, and his homosexuality becomes visible through ancient topics (myths) that he used. Religion was an important part of his life, but he minded the church's attitude on homosexuality. He was a manifest homosexual and was mostly publicly declared as such. He died from tuberculosis.



**COLE PORTER**  
(1891–1964)

He was an American composer of film music and numerous songs. Although he was exclusively a homosexual, he was married to an older woman who knew and tolerated it. Despite agreeably stepping into marriage which they never consumed, they loved each other. They lived in a luxurious apartment in Paris where extravagant and scandalous parties with a lot of homosexual activities, dressing up into opposite sex clothes and drug use were held. Different international musicians came to the parties, as well as Italian aristocracy. Porter had a rapacious sexual appetite and endless series of affairs with male prostitutes, sailors, and truck drivers whom he paid for sex. Among many of his male lovers, some were: Boris Cochno (a Russian poet to whom he wrote desperate and passionate letters), narcissistic John Verno Bouvier III, Nelson Barfeld (a former marine, dancer and choreographer), actor Jack Cassidy, architect Ed Tauch, director John Wilson and many others. All of his sexual activities had homosexual character, and he was especially attracted to Afro-Americans. Day by day he was more open in showing himself as a homosexual which nearly led to his divorce. In the old age he broke his leg and died of complications due to heavy narcotic painkillers addiction.

**VIRGIL THOMPSON**  
(1896–1989)

He was an American composer and critic, who is also numbered among homosexuals, although he was hiding that part of his life and never publicly declared himself. He had relationships with painters Maurice Grosser and Roger Baker. He was also associated with choreographer Frederick Ashton, architect Phillip Johnson and Lincoln Kirstein. He died from the old age.

**GEORGE GERSHWIN**  
(1898–1937)

He is a world famous American composer of a Russian heritage and Jewish religion, and also the author of the first American opera Porgy and Bess. He had a series of homosexual relationships and



Fig. 6. George Gershwin

practically openly practiced that way of life. He died young, from a brain tumor.

at the age of 90 because of respiratory insufficiency.

**FRANCIS POULENC**  
(1899–1963)

He was a French composer and pianist. He studied with the Spaniard Vines, through whom he met de Falla, Satie, and others. He was a declared homosexual, and his partners were: Richard Chailaire, Raymond Destouches, and Louis Gautie. He died a sudden death caused by a heart attack.

**AARON COPLAND**  
(1900–1990)

He was an American composer, music writer, conductor and pianist of a Russian-Jewish heritage. His private life was a huge disappointment. He was not attractive at all, so his first sympathies turned him down. Only at the age of seventeen with handsome and attractive Victor Kraft did he manage to establish a long lasting relationship with many break-ups and conciliations. Kraft got married twice to get back with Copland, for his constant cheating with younger men, betrayals, and humiliations. Although Copland is seen as a lifelong bachelor, he was one of the first prominent homosexual composers who openly lived with his partner. Among others who were declared as his partners were: artist Alvin Ross, pianist Paul Moor, dancer Eric Johns and composer John Brodbin Kennedy. He died

**MARC BLITZSTEIN**  
(1905–1964)

He was an American composer and music critic. He was a latent homosexual for the public, while only his friends knew of his homosexual tendencies. Although he got married, he continued to have romantic relationships only with men, which his wife was aware of. During his short stay on island Martinique, he was beaten to death and robbed by three sailors with whom he allegedly tried »something more«, and he died due to intracranial hemorrhage. The case was hushed up and never fully solved.

**SAMUEL BARBER**  
(1910–1981)

He was an American composer who was in a relationship with Gian Carlo Menotti. As he got older, Menotti's interest for him faltered. After unfavorable critics of his late work, he retreated himself into isolation and fell in depression. For him, it was humiliating to watch Menotti in relationships with men half his age. He died from a cancer at the age of 71.

**GIAN CARLO MENOTTI**  
(1911–2007)

He was an Italian composer, conductor and librettist who lived and worked in Europe and America. His life partner with

whom he went to college and later spent 40 years was a composer Samuel Barber. Composers Leonard Bernstein and Stanley Hollingsworth were his close friends since college. He died of the old age.

**EDWARD BENJAMIN BRITTEN**  
(1913–1976)

He was an English composer, pianist and conductor. He wrote the music for many songs for a poet W.H. Auden, with whom he cooperated and allegedly had an intimate relationship. After that, he cooperated with an English tenor Peter Pears for whom he composed many



Fig. 7. Edward Benjamin Britten

songs, mostly opera parts. Their musical and intimate partnership lasted for 35 years. He suffered from a heart valve disease and a stroke during the operation which affected his right extremities. He

died due to progression of his primary heart disease (of streptococcal or syphilitic origin), and was buried next to his life partner.

**LEONARD BERNSTEIN**  
(1918–1990)

He is the second most famous American conductor and composer after George Gershwin. Like many other homosexual men of his generation he publicly showed himself as a devoted husband and wonderful father, but behind the curtains he was a promiscuous homosexual, for which there are unquestionable and well documented evidence. As a student he was already in a relationship with his mentor, famous Dimitri Mitropoulos, and after that he was close to a composer Aaron Copland and Tom Cothran. He was always accompanied by young handsome men, especially his students. After his wife's death, he became addicted to alcohol and drugs and revealed his homosexual tendencies. He died from a multiple myeloma followed by a heart attack.

**CONCLUSION**

Homosexuality was once more and is now less convicted. Now it is considered as a specific sexual orientation. Although some more conservative circles consider it sociologically and biologically less useful to the society, this review shows that sensibility, creativity and a partial solitary life or friendships with the same sex

helped in the development of their creativity in several ways. As it became particularly a dominating phenomenon in some areas in the past century, in some artistic orientations, this sexual orientation can be seen as suitable for creative self-realization.

### STVARALAŠTVO I SUDBINE NEKIH HOMOSEKSUALNIH SKLADATELJA

**Sažetak** – Homoseksualizam je kao etiološki višeslojni i višestruko uvjetovani razvoj ne-

koć bio više, a sada sve manje optuživan. Sada ga se smatra kao posebnu spolnu orijentaciju. Iako neki konzervativniji krugovi smatraju da je socijalno i biološki manje koristan za društvo, ovaj prikaz navodi da je senzibilnost i stvaralaštvo te djelomično samčački život ili istospolno druženje pomagalo u razvoju njihove kreativnosti na više načina. Kako je u nekim sredinama u prošlom stoljeću postao gotovo dominirajući fenomen, kod nekih se umjetničkih usmjerenja može gledati na takvu spolnu orijentaciju kao pogodnu za stvaralačko samoostvarenje.

**Ključne riječi:** skladatelji, homoseksualnost, kreativnost, sudbine

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