



rit. *a tempo* (5)

Sergei VASILENKO



Complete Music for Viola and Piano

Viola Sonata
Zodiac Suite
Four Lute Pieces
Four Pieces
Sleeping River
Lullaby
Eastern Dance

Elena Artamonova, viola
Nicholas Walker, piano

FIRST COMPLETE RECORDING

SERGEI VASILENKO AND THE VIOLA

by Elena Artamonova

The viola is occasionally referred to as ‘the Cinderella of instruments’ – and, indeed, it used to take a fairy godmother of a player to allow this particular Cinderella to go to the ball; the example usually cited in the liberation of the viola in a solo role is the British violist Lionel Tertis. Another musician to pay the instrument a similar honour – as a composer rather than a player – was the Russian Sergei Vasilenko (1872–1956), all of whose known compositions for viola, published and unpublished, are to be heard on this CD, the fruit of my investigations in libraries and archives in Moscow and London. None is well known; some are not even included in any of the published catalogues of Vasilenko’s music. Only the Sonata was recorded previously, first in the 1960s by Georgy Bezrukov, viola, and Anatoly Spivak, piano,¹ and again in 2007 by Igor Fedotov, viola, and Leonid Vechkhayzer, piano;² the other compositions receive their first recordings here.

Sergei Nikiforovich Vasilenko had a long and distinguished career as composer, conductor and pedagogue in the first half of the twentieth century. He was born in Moscow on 30 March 1872 into an aristocratic family, whose inner circle of friends consisted of the leading writers and artists of the time, but his interest in music was rather capricious in his early childhood: he started to play piano from the age of six only to give it up a year later, although he eventually resumed his lessons. In his mid-teens, after two years of tuition on the clarinet, he likewise gave it up in favour of the oboe. He began to study music more conscientiously in private lessons with Richard Nokh in 1888, going on to study – privately – theory with Alexander Grechaninov, harmony with Sergei Protopopov and composition with Georgy Konyus. He studied law at the Moscow University from 1891 to 1896 and then, from 1895 to 1901, composition at the Moscow Conservatoire under Sergei Taneyev and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, graduating with a gold medal; during this time he also took private piano tuition from Vasily Safonov. After concert engagements as a conductor in Russia and abroad, some with the Private Opera Society (also known as the Opera Mamontov) in 1903–5, he gained recognition as a composer with special emphasis on Russian national traditions and history, including Old Believers³ chant and folk music, and Symbolist and mystic themes. Vasilenko also collaborated with his family friend Constantin Stanislavski, the creator of the internationally known ‘Stanislavski system’ of acting, and composed incidental music for a

¹ Melodiya CM 03687-8. The LP has no issue date, which was typical for the time, although the coding indicates that it was produced in 1961–69.

² Naxos 8.572247. Fedotov is the Principal Viola of the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra.

³ Reforms to the practices of the Orthodox Church in the mid-seventeenth century led to a schism, with the ‘Old Believers’ adhering to the earlier rites.

few stage productions of the Society of Art and Literature, the forerunner of the Moscow Art Theatre. He became a respected authority in orchestration and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, the director of the Moscow Conservatoire, offered him a post teaching instrumentation and then a professorship of composition, a position he occupied for almost fifty years (1906–41 and 1943–56). He died on 11 March 1956, leaving an extensive list of compositions, including five symphonies; concertos for balalaika, trumpet, cello, harp, clarinet, piano and horn; a number of shorter orchestral works (including two *Chinese Suites* and an *Exotic Suite*); works for the stage, including seven operas and seven ballets; chamber and instrumental music; and songs, choruses, folksong arrangements and more.

In view of the paucity of music for stringed instruments and piano in Russia in the first decades of the last century, Vasilenko's seven compositions for viola assume especial importance. His innovative style – expanding the technical and sonorous potential of the instrument, and the rhythmic and harmonic resources of Russian music in general – launched new standards in viola performance as well as expanding its repertoire. Vasilenko left no written explanation as to the stimulus that brought these works into being. Certainly, the Sonata was composed in 1923 under the influence of the thriving concert activities of a young violist, Vadim Borisovsky (1900–72), who drew attention to the viola in the early 1920s.⁴ Nevertheless, Vasilenko's first composition for viola and piano, the *Four Pieces on Themes of Lute Players of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Op. 35, was written in 1918, at a time when Borisovsky was only one of many violin students in Moscow (he switched to the viola only in that year). In view of Vasilenko's reputation as a master of instrumentation, it seems reasonable to assume that his interest in the viola arose from his desire to experiment with different instrumental techniques, timbres and sound-effects, which he explored in these pieces. For whatever reason, only the Sonata was acknowledged and performed time to time in the viola class of Borisovsky, who was the driving force behind most solo-violita activities in Moscow for forty years (1923–63), until a heart attack brought his busy schedule to a stop. Borisovsky certainly knew of the existence of the lute pieces: he included them, along with the Sonata, in a catalogue of viola repertoire⁵ he compiled in 1931 with Wilhelm Altmann, a German chamber-music specialist, but there is no evidence that he ever performed them in public and they have remained unperformed to this day.

The main reason was, as so often at the time, political. In the early 1930s the Soviet authorities – through the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), which effectively controlled Soviet musical life – decided that the viola was an instrument that overloaded the educational programmes. As a result of this directive Borisovsky was forced to resign from his viola professorship at the Moscow Conservatoire, and seven years later he ran into serious trouble because of the viola catalogue he had published with Altmann. On 4 January 1938, he was attacked in a *Pravda* article, 'Suspicious Partnership', by the music-critic Georgy Khubov who accused him of

⁴ Borisovsky was one of the founder-members of the Beethoven Quartet in 1922–23, remaining in the group until 1964, when he was replaced by Feodor Druzhinin.

⁵ Wilhelm Altmann and Vadim Borisovsky, *Literaturverzeichnis für Bratsche und Viola d'amore*, Verlag für musikalische Kultur und Wissenschaft, Wolfenbüttel, 1937.

being a Nazi advocate – even though the catalogue had been put together well before the Nazis came to power. An official claim against Borisovsky was accepted for legal action and the file delivered to the Kremlin for further investigation; it was passed for the attention of Vyacheslav Molotov, a leading Soviet politician and a protégé of Stalin.⁶ Molotov's secretariat summoned Borisovsky to the Kremlin for a meeting where, fortunately, the entire trumped-up charge was dismissed. He was lucky to survive.

It was a lucky escape also for Vasilenko, not least because his roots in the Russian aristocracy would hardly have endeared him to the new dispensation in Soviet Russia. Even the subjects that interested him were considered suspect: 'ancient' music, with its natural absorption of spirituality and the troubadours' idealised model of love; likewise, a decade or so later with the themes of his pieces of 1950s, and their pastoral dreams and fantasies influenced by Symbolism and Silver Age aesthetics. Such ideas contravened the limitations of Soviet 'socialist realism' and were not officially tolerated in atheist Soviet society.

But it cut both ways: he was also interested in themes that did chime with the regime. For instance, the Russian composers of the second half of the nineteenth century favoured by Stalin – Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov in particular – were also his heroes. And in different phases of his compositional career he was influenced by Russian folklore and history, and Middle Eastern and oriental subjects (Japanese, Indian and Chinese ones among them) – an outlook which coincided with the nationalist emphasis in Communist ideology. Most important of all, Vasilenko was a cautious man and, heeding the Borisovsky warning, turned his attention away from the viola. He was to write nothing more for the instrument for almost three decades.

With the viola works therefore under wraps, and Borisovsky unable to perform them, Vasilenko turned instead to topics that were politically approved by the Soviet state: stories of the Russian heroic past and present, folk traditions and folk instruments, including the balalaika. But fate can play cruel tricks. His enforced conformity with the ideals of the Communist Party, and the fact that his career was allowed to proceed relatively unchecked, led to the view in the post-Soviet world that he had simply been a puppet of the state apparatus. Much fine music has been neglected in consequence.

Vasilenko in Context

The first two decades of the twentieth century are referred to as the 'Silver Age' of Russian culture because of the emergence of a generation of gifted musicians, writers and artists. Dissatisfaction with the realistic portrayal of life embraced by poets and other writers in the nineteenth century stimulated a wave of creativity unprecedented in the cultural history of Russia. This period was dominated by a number of artistic movements, including Symbolism and Futurism, which cross-fertilised literature, music, the visual arts, theatre and philosophy with a strong emphasis on the distinctiveness of Russian spirituality. All these movements were unified by irrationalism, eliminating positivism in favour of intuition and 'cosmic consciousness'.

⁶ His name passed into history as one of the signatories of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939.

The socialist revolution of 1917 brought a further degree of artistic freedom to the Russian musical scene. The radical innovations and new trends of the avant-garde were led among others by the young Nikolai Roslavets, Alexander Mossolov and Leonid Sabaneyev from the 1890s until 1932, when the movement clashed with the state decree 'On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organisations' that marked the start of the epoch of Socialist Realism: from then on art was thoroughly controlled by the state. The compositional style of the avant-garde was characterised by complex harmony and rhythm, the rejection of conventional tonality and the adaptation of traditional forms – the most popular instrumental structure, for example, was one-movement sonata form. The movement took its first inspiration from the individualism of Russian Symbolist composers, Scriabin in particular, but moved further away with extreme experimentation in form, rhythm and language including synthetic chords, twelve-tone rows and free atonality.

This was an avant-garde which publicly rejected authority and the achievements of its predecessors. A second, transitional group of composers such as Alexander Grechaninov and Vladimir Rebikov followed a more traditional path but gradually became inspired by some elements of the modern tendencies, including polytonality and the moderate modification of forms. A further third group known as *Proletkult* ('Proletarian Culture') believed that any music in the new Socialist society had to be independent from bourgeois influence in order to become truly proletarian – an intransigent conviction which led to the simplification of music to a degree of amateur primitivism.

Vasilenko's music did not feature any radical innovations, which led some left-wing supporters of the avant-garde to dismiss his compositions with barely concealed irony. Writing in October 1919, his contemporary Boris Asafiev (1884–1949) commented that Vasilenko 'does not look behind and he cannot look ahead. So he will not discover any new paths but he is always modern.'⁷ Asafiev was right, to a degree: Vasilenko took his inspiration from Silver-Age aesthetics with its mysticism, symbolic approach and visual images; his musical language had its roots in the traditions of earlier Russian composers, particularly Taneyev and Rimsky-Korsakov, but it was also moderately influenced by Debussy and Scriabin.

The modernism that Asafiev describes can be distinguished in the Viola Sonata: the modernist approach to form in its single-span structure, the experiments with polyrhythms and polymetre, and the moderate modifications in the harmonic language with freely used seventh and ninth chords and unusual chromatic modulations – not extending to atonality, but bringing a degree of nonconformity and novelty to the tonal plan. Vasilenko's most important achievement, in his works for viola and piano, was to expand the range of the viola with a quasi-orchestral range of colours, and an equal intensity of musical and technical material that was rare in chamber music. And he did so without losing touch with tradition.

⁷ Boris Asafiev, *O muzike XX veka*, Muzika, Leningrad, 1982, p. 111.

Early Works and Early Music

Another reason that Vasilenko fell on the right side of the authorities may have been his philanthropy. Between 1907 and 1917 he ran a series of ‘Historical Concerts’, which popularised and introduced classical music in chronological sequence among the financially insecure and deprived audiences of students, teachers and workers. The critics described this educational mission as the ‘peoples’ university of the world history of music’.⁸ A number of leading performers took part in these concerts, among them Henri Casadesus, Arthur Nikisch, Konstantin Igumnov, Alexander Goldenweiser and Wanda Landowska, often waiving their fees in order to keep the ticket price low. No composition was performed twice in these series and so Vasilenko was constantly on the search for new and interesting works. The collection of early music at the Moscow Conservatoire Library, which he used for his concerts, was limited in scope and soon ran out. He therefore made a number of research trips to Europe, investigating archives in Vienna, Bologna, the Schola Cantorum in Paris, and the Berlin Musical Instrument Museum (at the Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung) where the rich collection of lutes generated Vasilenko’s interest in this instrument. He was allowed to copy the scores of a number of little-known and anonymous Renaissance and Baroque composers, and on his return to Russia he wrote several pieces of his own based on the material he had discovered, among them two suites dating from 1912 and 1914: *15th–16th Century Lute Music of the Minnesingers*, Op. 24, and *16th Century Lute Music*, Op. 24a, for chamber orchestra, followed by *Four Pieces on Themes of Lute Music of the 16th–17th Centuries*, Op. 35, for viola (or cello) and piano (1918).⁹ In his posthumously published memoirs (the files themselves date from the 1940s) Vasilenko revealed how difficult these arrangements were to make:

The original was often a long, tedious and inconclusive improvisation with interruptions and without any cadencies or clear rhythmical structure. These were the losses of the time or perhaps the mistakes of later copyists. Often, there were musical phrases and sections of amazing beauty, but they were like precious pearls hidden behind other ideas not only of a lesser value, but often uninteresting and unconnected with the previous context.¹⁰

Op. 24a was a revised version of Op. 24, in which Vasilenko gave titles to those pieces without names, including ‘Knights’ and ‘Serenade for the Lady of my Heart’, and slightly changed the order of works and the orchestration. It was his continuous search for reconstruction of timbres and sound effects similar to those of the early period that

⁸ Nikolay Kashkin, ‘Concerts’, *Russkije vedomosti* 42 (17 February 1909), quoted in Sergey Vasilenko, *Stranitsi vospominaniiy*, Gosudarstvennoe muzikal’noe izdatel’stvo, Moscow and Leningrad, 1948, p. 26.

⁹ Vasilenko’s titles not only vary between versions; they are inconsistent across the sources. He also pays little regard to historical accuracy: the Minnesingers flourished from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, and two of the movements of *16th–17th Century Lute Music*, Op. 24a and Op. 35, have their origins in the fifteenth century.

¹⁰ Vasilenko, *Memoirs*, Sovetskij kompozitor, Moscow, 1979, p. 306.

led him in 1918 to arrange the material for viola (or cello) and piano as his Op. 35. The second, third and fourth movements – ‘Madonna Tenerina’ [7], ‘Serenade for the Lady of my Heart’ [8] and ‘Knights’ [9] – he borrowed from the orchestral suites Opp. 24 and 24a; the opening ‘Pavane’ [6] came from a collection of photostats sent from Paris in 1913, of which more below. The composers of the music in Op. 35 were anonymous apart from that of the piece Vasilenko called ‘Serenade for the Lady of my Heart’: Valentin Bakfark, a famous lutenist of the mid-sixteenth century about whose life little was then known – and more recent scholarship has not been able to add much more.¹¹ The Moscow critics were enthusiastic (‘early’ music was virtually unknown in Russian musical circles at the time), especially admiring two pieces by anonymous fifteenth-century composers – the exquisite ‘Madonna Tenerina’ and ‘Knights’, an energetic and rough *Allegro*:

The centre of the programme of the next of Vasilenko’s Historical Concerts was the performance of lute music of the Minnesingers. [...] Vasilenko’s contribution is immense. He dug out this precious *objet d’art*, arranged it and made it performable in our contemporary setting. Many musicians were amazed to learn about the existence of this completely unknown musical stratum of the 15th–16th centuries [...]. ‘Madonna Tenerina’ is a truly exceptional work not only for its time but also for a later period.¹²

Vasilenko admitted that he was no musicologist, and in any case there was hardly any information available to him about this period: he referred to the originals as lute music only because no other instrument was mentioned in his sources.

The suite *Zodiakus*, Vasilenko’s Op. 27, was initially arranged for small orchestra, as with Opp. 24 and 24a; he conducted its premiere in Moscow on 18 December 1914. In his *Memoirs* he explains how he acquired the manuscript which formed the basis of this work. In 1913 Henri Casadesu, the violist and founder of the famous quintet Société des Instruments Anciens, recommended that he write to the Schola Cantorum in Paris (which was unusual at the time in its emphasis on early music), asking for interesting manuscripts of early pieces. The reply, written in July of the same year, was polite but rather terse: Vasilenko was sent photostats of four manuscripts of anonymous early composers with a note requesting copies of his orchestrations. The tone of the second letter from Paris was rather different:

Dear Sir,

We received your score and understand that we are dealing with a true Master of the orchestra. We are sending you a copy of a very rare manuscript, only recently discovered.¹³

¹¹ Bakfark, called Bálint Bakfark in Hungarian (he was ethnically German), was born in Brassó (Kronstadt) in Transylvania (now Braşov in Romania) in c. 1526–30 and served at a number of European courts, eventually becoming one of the highest paid musicians of his day. He and his family died in Padua in 1576, in an outbreak of plague.

¹² Leonid Sabaneyev, ‘Concerts’, *Golos Moskvī*, 23 October 1912, quoted in Vasilenko, *Memoirs, op. cit.*, pp. 308–9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

This new manuscript contained a series of short but elegant pieces by a number of anonymous eighteenth-century French composers, hidden behind a peculiar pseudonym, *Zodiakus I.A.S.*, the significance of which remains unknown. Vasilenko chose seven of these pieces (of an unknown total number) for his orchestral suite, which also received high praise from Paris.

The undated and previously unknown arrangement for viola and piano includes four pieces from the orchestral suite [12]–[15] and also a new one, ‘Musette’ [16], from the same original Parisian source.¹⁴ This viola version is not mentioned in any published or archival sources; one may suppose that it was composed after 1931 as Borisovsky did not include it in his catalogue. Technically it is much more demanding and inconvenient for the fingers than the lute pieces – occasionally, indeed, it borders on being unplayable on the viola. Vasilenko generally followed the style of the eighteenth-century originals but applied a twentieth-century language, including liberal use of double-stops, experiments with polyrhythm and a succession of movements unrelated by key (F major, F major, A major, A minor, G major). The viola part is often active in the higher part of its register, which was far from typical for the Baroque period – but for a good reason: I found Vasilenko’s manuscript (unused!) in material from Borisovsky’s music library, and one can reasonably conclude that this arrangement was intended for him.

Middle-Period Works

In 1922 Vasilenko wrote a graceful yet virtuosic *Oriental Dance*, Op. 47, for clarinet in B flat or viola with piano [11]. The manuscript of the clarinet version survived, and the work was published in this form at least three times, in 1931, 1949 and 1959. But the viola manuscript seems to have been lost and was never published.¹⁵ The viola edition used in this recording makes adjustments of articulation and phrasing to the clarinet version to render this charismatic work more suitable for a stringed instrument.

The single-movement *Viola Sonata* of 1923 – which makes considerable technical demands on both players – blends reminiscences of Oriental and Romantic music with unrestrained emotional expression and power. Vocal-type themes and exotic chromatic and modal harmonies with augmented and diminished intervals feature especially in the second section, *Andante amorevole*. Its second theme is a strophic song in a contrasting minor-major mode that follows a verse-chorus format, typical for vocal traditions. These elements are combined with aspects of a modernist approach in extensive chromatic and sequential modulations and transformed sonata form. Simultaneously, the emphasis on rhythm and contrapuntal texture with expanded tonal harmony relate this language to Neoclassical aesthetics. This unusual synthesis of counterpoint and song was first introduced by Sergei

¹⁴ The viola version drops the word ‘French’ which features in the title of the earlier orchestral version, and which Vasilenko also used to describe the material in his *Memoirs*.

¹⁵ That it was also intended for viola is confirmed in two catalogues of Vasilenko’s works: Georgy Polyanyovskiy, *Sergei Nikiforovich Vasilenko i ego tvorchestvo*, Muzika, Moscow, 1964, and Georgy Ivanov (ed.), *Sergei Nikiforovich Vasilenko. Notograficheskiy spravochnik, Sovetskiy Kompozitor*, Moscow, 1973.

Taneyev in his attempt to create a distinctive Russian instrumental form, a combination of western counterpoint and Russian folksong.

The Sonata was dedicated to Borisovsky, who gave the premiere in the Moscow Conservatoire, with the composer at the piano, on 8 January 1924. The structure combines traditional sonata form and the four movements of the traditional symphony, also offering the soloist one big cadenza and three short solo episodes, which add a *concertante* element to the work. The opening sonata allegro (*Allegro moderato*) [1] condenses exposition and development, concluding with the dramatic cadenza. Instead of an immediate recapitulation, a second section, *Andante amorevole* [2], presents two independent, very intimate and melodiously exceptional themes. A short, vigorous episode, marked *Molto agitato*, introduces the next section, a *Fughetta* [3] with an exposition and counter-exposition but no development; and a contrastingly contemplative passage, *Sostenuto*, leads to a fourth section, *Tempo del commincio* [4], which acts as the recapitulation of the first movement, also presenting a modified and shortened version of the third-movement fughetta which then leads towards the vigorous coda.

Late Works

Vasilenko's viola works are all very different in style and technique. The Soviet musicologist Yuri Fortunatov was of the opinion that colour, timbre and sonority took on increasing importance in Vasilenko's language, which more often reflected the external characteristics of different musical styles rather than revealing an aesthetic consideration of the underlying philosophy. The Sonata, for example, offers a synthesis of strict Neoclassical contrapuntal elements with colourful Oriental idioms and unreserved Romantic outpourings; and his stylisation of the Baroque in *Zodiakus* and the lute pieces imported the instrumental advantages and inventions of the twentieth century:

Timbre guided the composer's thoughts, giving him clues to the best choices of images and even the melodic structures of voices. [...] The development of an idea forms a chain of feelings: timbre, register and theme. During the process of work, a theme gains its shape only after the composer has heard certain timbres in his inner ear.¹⁶

This evolution in his interests may explain why Vasilenko returned to the viola a few years before his death, almost thirty years after his first composition for this instrument, since a series of viola pieces of 1951–53 (which remain in manuscript) merge aspects of Impressionism and Russian Symbolism with the challenges of modern string-technique – complex rhythms with metric modulations, extensive chromatic passages and harmonic modulations.

Sleeping River [10], which bears the date 5 August 1951, is Vasilenko's arrangement of a movement from his *Ancient Suite* for piano.¹⁷ The arrangement not only changes the key to D major from the original E major but considerably reviews the entire text, giving the viola a quasi-cadanza section in the middle. Both instruments are

¹⁶ Yuri Fortunatov, 'Sergey Vasilenko', in Theodor Myuller (ed.), *Vidayushchiesya deyateli teoretiko-kompozitorskogo fakul'teta Moskovskoy konservatorii*, Muzika, Moscow, 1966, pp. 14–15.

¹⁷ No *Ancient Suite* can be found in Vasilenko's output: this single movement, described as an excerpt/fragment from the

equal partners, but carrying out different roles: the viola leads the theme throughout and the piano gives a colourful harmonic display.

The manuscript of the *Lullaby* [5] is undated, but the style suggests that this composition belongs to the early 1950s. This beautiful and charming piece in E minor follows the style of a lullaby but unexpectedly develops into a very expressive and agitated middle section with a viola cadenza before eventually returning to the tranquillity of the initial theme.

Vasilenko's **Four Pieces** survive in manuscript as contrasting picturesque movements without an opus number; a date, 25 August 1953, appears only on the second piece, 'Etude'. Nevertheless, the pieces undoubtedly belong to the same cycle, which consists of a Prelude [17], Etude [18], Legend [19] and Scherzo [20]; they survive only as piano-violin scores, with many modifications, which are at times almost impossible to read. (An earlier, even rougher, version of the Scherzo, inscribed 'Toccata' and then marked as the third in the cycle, does have a separate viola part, with several passages of continuous double-stopping, which Vasilenko did not transfer to the Scherzo.) Dmitry Rogal'-Levitsky, a Vasilenko student who became a prominent musicologist, pointed to the distinctiveness of his teacher's musical language. In whatever period he was writing, his works reflect events in his personal life:

In spite of the first impression of estrangement in his compositions from his inner world and of a certain impersonal character, they all exist with his thoughts and ideas. They are closely related to him and he himself lives on in them.¹⁸

This statement might sound meaningless to anyone who tries to interpret it directly, but for a reader who has lived under Soviet restrictions and who fears for his physical existence – as Rogal'-Levitsky then did – his words hint at a hidden meaning. Vasilenko had to balance his language with the material from the lute manuscripts to make the outcome stylistically close to past times but also communicative to a twentieth-century audience. His stylisation is laconic and effective. Nevertheless, the austere simplicity and ominous harmonic language in 'Pavane' and especially of 'Madonna Tenerina' are strongly reminiscent of the Russian Old Believers' chant – unembellished

Ancient Suite, was published in Ivanov's catalogue of his works. The editor of the catalogue, Georgy Ivanov, states that this piece for piano was published in 1916 in Moscow in an anthology *For the War Victims*, No. 5, published by Obshchestvo muzikal'no-teoreticheskoy biblioteki. An *Ancient Suite* by Vasilenko is announced in Jürgenson's *Music Anthology 'Klich'* of vocal and piano works, among others by Rachmaninov, Ippolitov-Ivanov and Glazunov, published in Moscow in February 1915. Perhaps this anthology, which I found at the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) in Moscow, never reached publication, since the copy I saw had hand-made corrections over the printed text, suggesting that it was a working or editorial stage. Perhaps Vasilenko planned to write an *Ancient Suite* but left it in sketches which did not survive – one can only guess.

¹⁸ Dmitry Rogal'-Levitsky, *Sergey Vasilenko i ego al'tovaya sonata*, Muzikalniy sector Muz'izdata, Moscow, 1927, pp. 6–7.

monodic singing with minimal melodic expression – in which Vasilenko showed particular interest before the Revolution. He could not reveal his continued fascination for religious subjects during the Soviet times (even if he briefly mentions it in his *Memoirs*¹⁹), although its concealed influence continues to live on in these works. In one of his unpublished archival writings,²⁰ Vasilenko admitted that despite all the achievements of his life he was always alone, one to one with his music, perfecting his skills and exploring the unexplored. He did not seek public acclaim, though he was awarded the prestigious Order of the Red Banner, the title Merited Worker of Arts twice, in 1939 and 1940, and then in 1947 the Stalin Prize, which allowed him a number of social privileges. His personal archive in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) in Moscow has official photos, showing him posing in a formal suit with his Soviet medals on his blazer – but there are also casual photos taken at home which show icons hanging in the *krasnuy ugol* ('red' or 'beautiful corner') which are displayed only in very religious homes. Vasilenko was a devoted musician deeply rooted in Russian culture with a broad spectrum of knowledge, interests and talents, some of which Soviet life taught him to keep to himself. These days Vasilenko's music has fallen from view – in Russia itself, never mind further afield – and the little reputation he retains is as a conformist Soviet composer. The works on this CD show him in a new light.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 105–12.

²⁰ Contained in a file dating from the 1940s and early 1950s, with autobiographical writings and photographs, housed in RGALI.

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Elena Artamonova was born in Moscow and studied at the Gnesin Music College with Ludmila Vernigora and at the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire with Yuri Bashmet. After gaining her diplomas with honours in 1993 and 1998, she continued her studies in London with Martin Outram, violist of the Maggini Quartet, and attended the master classes of Nobuko Imai, Simon Rowland-Jones and Levon Chilingirian. During her postgraduate course, she won several prizes, including the British Reserve string prize and Michael Stucky Trust award. In April 2000 she was awarded the Associateship of the Royal College of Music with Honours and Fellowship of the London College of Music, subsequently becoming Musician in Residence and Head of Strings at Rannoch School, Scotland. Since moving back to England a few years ago, Elena has enjoyed a career as a performer and string coach. She is currently Musician in Residence at New Hall School, Essex.

In 2003–4, commissioned by Comus Edition, Elena translated a book on the history of the viola written by a Russian author, Stanislaw Poniatowski. This historical area has been a central interest for her for some years. Since autumn 2008, she has been researching ‘The Unknown Viola Music of the Russian Avant-garde Movement’ at Goldsmith College, Centre for Russian Music, University of London, under the guidance of Professor Alexander Ivashkin, studying at the central libraries and archives in Moscow, London and New York.

Elena has performed as a soloist, chamber-musician and as a viola leader in Russia, Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, Netherlands, the USA and South Korea with various chamber groups and orchestras including the English Symphony/String Orchestras, Moscow Gnesin Chamber Orchestra, Moscow Conservatoire Chamber Orchestra, Leonardo Orchestra and the Russian Chamber Orchestra of London.

Nicholas Walker, acclaimed by *The Evening Standard* London as ‘a prodigy, of awesome technical fluency backed by exceptional artistry’, studied at the Royal Academy of Music and at the Moscow Conservatoire. Winner of the first Newport International Piano Competition, he has performed with major British orchestras, recorded for BBC Radio 3, Cirrus, ASV, BMG Arte Nova and Chandos, and given recitals worldwide. The first two discs of his recording of the complete Balakirev piano music for ASV received considerable critical acclaim, as has his live recording of the Lyapunov Sonata on Danacord. He is also preparing an edition of all Johann Baptist Cramer’s piano concertos, the first of which he played in the London Festival Orchestra’s ‘Virtuoso Pianists’ series. In St Petersburg recently he gave the first public performance of Balakirev’s *Grande Fantaisie on Russian Folksongs*, and a Balakirev Festival commemorating the centenary of the composer’s death was held at St John’s Smith Square at the end of 2010. He is currently recording the complete piano music of Balakirev for Naxos.

The Artamonova-Walker duo gave its first performance in April 2005 and since then has explored a fascinating, often undiscovered and diverse repertoire for viola and piano or harpsichord from Marais and Handel to Alexander Grechaninov and Alfred Schnittke. Their concert programmes, with special emphasis on the Russian heritage, have brought to light some remarkable arrangements by Vadim Borisovsky of works by Vivaldi-Bach, Schumann and Dmitry Bortnyansky as well as little-known viola music by Anton Rubinstein, Sergei Vasilenko, Vladimir Kovalev, Sulkhan Tsintsadze, Georg Kirkor and Sergei Slonimsky.



TOCCATA CLASSICS

TOCC 0127

The Russian composer Sergei Vasilenko (1872–1956) was influenced by the nineteenth-century nationalist school, by his teacher Taneyev and by Scriabin, adding an interest in Symbolism and hints of early modernism. The discovery of the seven viola compositions on this CD – most of them unknown before now – not only expands the repertoire of the instrument; it also points to the courage of a composer who spent his life treading the tight-rope between his own musical interests and the demands of Soviet 'socialist realism'.

SERGEI VASILENKO Complete Music for Viola and Piano

Viola Sonata, Op. 46*

- | | | |
|----------|---|------|
| 1 | I. <i>Allegro moderato</i> – | 8:37 |
| 2 | II. <i>Andante amorevole</i> – | 3:21 |
| 3 | III. <i>Fughetta. Molto energico</i> – | 2:30 |
| 4 | IV. <i>Tempo del commincio (Allegro moderato)</i> | 4:16 |

5 Lullaby

4:01

Four Pieces on Old Lute Music, Op. 35 14:43

- | | | |
|----------|---|------|
| 6 | No. 1 Pavane | 4:01 |
| 7 | No. 2 Madonna Tenerina | 3:46 |
| 8 | No. 3 Serenade for the Lady of my Heart | 3:11 |
| 9 | No. 4 Knights | 3:45 |

10 Sleeping River

2:18

11 Oriental Dance, Op. 47 (arr. Artamonova) 5:33

Suite Zodiakus I.A.S. after Unknown Authors of the Eighteenth Century 13:20

- | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|------|
| 12 | No. 1 <i>Ouverture</i> | 3:22 |
| 13 | No. 2 <i>Passacaille</i> | 2:57 |
| 14 | No. 3 <i>Minuet</i> | 1:51 |
| 15 | No. 4 <i>Plainte</i> | 2:50 |
| 16 | No. 5 <i>Musette</i> | 2:20 |

Four Pieces (1953) 8:09

- | | | |
|-----------|----------------------|------|
| 17 | No. 1 <i>Prelude</i> | 1:32 |
| 18 | No. 2 <i>Etude</i> | 1:16 |
| 19 | No. 3 <i>Legend</i> | 3:09 |
| 20 | No. 4 <i>Scherzo</i> | 2:12 |

Elena Artamonova, viola
Nicholas Walker, piano

FIRST RECORDINGS EXCEPT*

TT 67:34

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