

Multifaceted Creativity: Legacy of Alexander Ivashkin

Based on Archival Materials and Publications

Elena Artamonova

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Central Lancashire

Preston, United Kingdom

E-mail: EArtamonova@uclan.ac.uk

Abstract—Professor Alexander Vasilievich Ivashkin (1948-2014) was one of the internationally eminent musicians and researchers at the turn of the most recent century. His dedication, willpower and wisdom in pioneering the music of his contemporaries as a performer and academic were the driving force behind his numerous successful international accomplishments. This paper focuses on Ivashkin's profound knowledge of twentieth-century music and contemporary analysis in a crossover of cultural-philosophical contexts, together with his rare ability to combine everything in retrospect and make his own conclusions. His understanding of inner meaning and symbolism bring new conceptions to Russian music, when the irrational becomes a new stimulus for rational ideas. The discussion of these subjects relies heavily on unpublished archival and little-explored publications of Ivashkin in Moscow and London.

Keywords—*Ivashkin; the Bolshoi Soloists; new music; symbol; inner meaning; crossover*

I. INTRODUCTION

Cellist, conductor, academic and advocate of new music, Professor Alexander Vasilievich Ivashkin (1948-2014) was one of the internationally eminent musicians and researchers at the turn of the most recent century. His profound musicianship, wide-ranging knowledge, exceptional inspiration and energy won him recognition not only in his native Russia and London, where he made his home for the last fifteen years of his life, but also in many renowned concert halls, festivals, conservatories and international conferences around the globe.

Writing about Ivashkin in 1999, Gerard McBurney rightfully envisaged Ivashkin's tremendous contribution to the cultural and musical life of London and beyond: 'I would describe him as a remarkable man with a remarkable history and as someone whose work crosses the boundaries of the performer and the academic, opens up discussion and would add immeasurably [...] to the musical life of any city in which he happened to live [1].

Ivashkin's fervour, initiative, willpower and wisdom in pioneering the music of his contemporaries as a cellist, conductor and writer were the driving force behind his

numerous successful international academic and research projects, symposia and competitions, concerts and festivals. From 1999 until his death in 2014, as the Head of the Centre for Russian Music at Goldsmiths, he generated and promoted interdisciplinary events based on research and archival collections. The Centre was bursting with concert and research life, vivacity and activities of high calibre attracting international attention and interest among students and scholars, professionals and music lovers, thus bringing cultural dialogue across generations and borders to the wider world. His prolific collaborations, including with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Southbank Centre, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Barbican Centre and Wigmore Hall, St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Russian State Symphony Orchestra, Mariinskii Theatre and the Moscow Studio for New Music brought British music and musicians to Russian soil and enthused British audiences with Russian music [2].

II. SOLOISTS OF THE BOLSHOI THEATRE

Ivashkin's interest in contemporary music as an academic and performer naturally coexisted and grew from the early days of his career. It rapidly matured especially from 1978, when he became the artistic director of the Bolshoi Soloists, the ensemble that he formed from some of the best soloists of the orchestra of the Bolshoi Theatre conducted by Alexander Lazarev. This ensemble quickly became known as an active proponent for contemporary music in the USSR and abroad. Thanks to Ivashkin's exquisite programming, vision and research of available repertoire, as well as tireless and inspirational activities as a promoter and organiser, a wide variety of new music by Soviet composers was commissioned and performed along with experimental works by Western composers. It was a unique accomplishment. Described by the Guardian as "provocative and addressing" [3], the ensemble's top-class performances and recordings for the Melodia (Russia) and Mobile Fidelity (USA) labels became the key documents in the history of music of that period. Sofia Gubaidulina remembers: "The soul of the ensemble was a cellist, Alexander Ivashkin, – an excellent musician, musicologist and, at the same time, a cellist full of enthusiasm. The ensemble, apart from other activities,

commissioned composers to write for them [4]." Their concerts were oversubscribed and sometimes unwelcomed by the authorities due to the modernistic content of their mainly avant-garde concert programmes, often showing a special interest in the theatrical and experimental side of musical performances, which were not supported by officials.

The French newspaper *Sud Ouest* placed the Bolshoi Soloists on a par with the leading ensembles of the West: "The English have the *London Sinfonietta*, the Italians – the *Venice Soloists*, we have the *Inter-contemporain* [...] The Bolshoi Soloists have convincingly demonstrated to us that [...] this Ensemble can deal with the music of a broad range. There are only a few orchestras in the West that can provide such insights into contemporary music [5]." Many Hungarian critics emphasized their virtuoso technique, transparency of instrumental lines and attention to timbres and colouring, saying that "precisely detailed interpretation of composers' ideas" was the distinguishing feature of the ensemble's performances [6].

III. CONCERT PROGRAMMES AND PREMIERES OF THE ENSEMBLE — WORKS WRITTEN FOR IVASHKIN

The intensity of the USSR and world premieres given by the Ensemble are noteworthy. One may recall the concert on the 17 December 1984 at the Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow as a historical occasion which brought together notable composers of past and present. It had three parts (compared to the usual two) and included three premieres in the USSR of works by Richard Wagner *Siegfried Idyll* in original version of 1869 for 13 instruments, by Olivier Messiaen *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste* [Colours of the Celestial City] for piano solo and ensemble, 1963, with the soloist Dmitri Alekseev, and by Charles Ives *From the Steeples and the Mountains*, 1901. The Bolshoi Soloists also gave a world premiere of Nikolai Korndorf's *Da!!* [Yes!!] for soprano, two tenors and ensemble, 1982, written especially for them, which in the words of Ivashkin was "an unlikely combination of Christian mystery play, pagan ritual, opera and oratorio [7]." Vladimir Tarnopolski recalls this performance as "phenomenal" [8]. In his "Autobiography" Korndorf later recalled his collaboration with the ensemble as being very fruitful [9]. It started with *Confessions* written in 1979 and performed at the Zagreb Biennale in 1981, Korndorf's first work premiered abroad. According to Yugoslavian critics, that performance of the Ensemble in Zagreb (which apart from Korndorf, included works by Gubaidulina, Mansurian, Schnittke, Shchedrin and Slonimski) made a deep impression on the audience and received a deserved prolonged ovation [10].

In less than two months, on 12 February 1985 another memorable concert of Soviet music with works by Grigori Fried and Alfred Schnittke took place at the *Malyi* [Small] Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire, in which Ivashkin with his colleagues from the Bolshoi Soloists performed all *Four Hymns* for cello and ensemble by Schnittke, 1974-79, with *Hymn III* being dedicated to Ivashkin himself. This latter work embraced new artistic dimensions to Ivashkin as a soloist and inspired other important composers of the time to write and dedicate their music to Ivashkin in the years to

come. Among the works written especially for Ivashkin are *Hymn III* for cello, bassoon, harpsichord and bells or timpani (1974-79) and *Klingende Buchstaben* for cello solo (1988) by Alfred Schnittke, *Monogram* for cello solo (op. 58a, 1990) by Dmitri Smirnov, *Kyrie Eleison* for cello solo (1992) by Alexander Raskatov, *Ist es Genug?* for cello, ensemble and magnetic tape (1993) by Faradzh Karaev, *Passacaglia* for cello solo (1998) by Nikolai Korndorf and *Black Icons* for cello solo and ensemble (2011) by Roger Redgate.

The wide-ranging selection of works, including those with religious titles and with theatrical and visual elements, which were chosen to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution in February 1987 at the Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow with the Bolshoi Soloists is striking even today. It is also profoundly symbolic as it reflects the complex but integral national history of Russia. It is likely that such an unconventional programme in connection to the biggest state celebration of the Revolution, which in 1917 led to the destruction of churches and severe persecution of believers, was possible only due to the *glasnost'* reforms of the time. This concert presented premieres of Vladimir Shcherbachev's *Nonet* (with a dancer), 1919, and Rodion Shchedrin's *Geometry of Sound*, 1987, for 18 musicians, in which the ensemble was divided and positioned in three different places on stage, thus creating new perception of sound and timbres within the enlarged performance space. The conspicuous new work by Vladimir Tarnopolski *Choral Prelude: Jesu, deine tiefen Wunden*, was inspired by Dürer's engraving of Christ's Passion, 1987, with a visual illustration of the Cross made by percussionists walking across the stage, a Lutheran chorale in the orchestra and *lamentoso* exclamations of the string trio as a symbol of the Trinity. Schnittke's *Three Madrigals*, 1980, and Shostakovich's *Jazz Suite*, 1934, concluded the concert. The concert programme notes by Ivashkin called 'Soviet Music Yesterday and Today' underline similar tendencies in search for new musical expressions between the avant-garde period of 1920-30s and of the 1980s [11]. The author pointed out to increasing attention to subtle elements, to symbolism of the elements and their importance, to the greater meaning of theatrical components and the value of timbres and sounds. A timbre or motif become personified and played the role of main characters in a musical work. Ivashkin developed these ideas further in his later publications, of which more below.

The Bolshoi Soloists were among the first who performed banned and practically unknown music by Nikolai Roslavets. The concert called "Music of the Twentieth Century" on 16 May 1988 at the Composers Union in Moscow introduced the audience to *Nocturne* by Roslavets, 1913, and *A Crumb of Music for George Crumb* by Faradzh Karaev, in which musicians spoke in mystical voices the verse of the American poet Emily Dickenson into the open lid of the grand piano. The second half of the concert was devoted exclusively to Western music: *10 Marches to Miss Victory* by Mauricio Kagel, *Music for...* by John Cage and *Lux Aeterna* by George Crumb.

IV. BRITISH DEBUT

The British debut of the Bolshoi Soloists took place in London in June 1989 during the Ninth Almeida International Festival of Contemporary Music and Performance dedicated to Soviet Music. It was the "most distinguished array of artists" and "crème de la crème of Soviet musicians", including twenty-nine performers and eleven composers in residence, who offered a contrasting and comprehensive display of Soviet music previously unknown and unheard in the United Kingdom [12].

The Bolshoi Soloists welcoming debut in Britain consisted of two concerts. The first concert on 4 June called "Windows and Landscapes" included British premiers of works written for the ensemble by Korndorf *Amoroso*, Shoot *Warum?*, Tarnopolski *Choral Prelude: Jesu, deine tiefen Wunden* and the world premiere of his *Brooklinsky Bridge, or My Discovery of America*, as well as Schnittke's *Four Aphorisms* and Silvestrov's *Ode to a Nightingale*. The second concert on 5 June called 'Twin Concertos' included UK premieres of works by Ashot Zograban *Serenade* and Faradzh Karaev *A Crumb of Music for George Crumb*, as well as Tigran Mansurian's *Concerto no.3 for Cello and wind instruments* with Natalia Gutman as soloist, and Alfred Schnittke's *Polyphonic Tango* and *Music for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* with Vasilii Lobanov on the piano.

Here is how Ivashkin evaluated the activities of the ensemble in the previously unpublished interview with Gerard McBurney recorded during this festival:

'We started to play eleven years ago in 1978, when it was still quite difficult to perform new music. Initially, it was very difficult for us. We were forbidden to play Schnittke, Gubaidulina and Denisov, not to mention younger composers. We were forced to play Khrennikov and other more official composers. It was a very serious struggle and it took time to win such a position, which we occupy now. Gradually, the times were changing and becoming more tolerant. We started to perform in Moscow and in Leningrad as well as abroad. We had many concert tours. I think this one is our twenty-fifth foreign tour throughout these years.

We started to play new chamber music before it naturally emerged to the surface. At the same time, we so to speak caught the peak of its development. The 1960s passed and the start of the 1970s was the most interesting period in Soviet music, I think. It was the time when major paths of Soviet music found their main reflection in chamber music for large instrumental ensembles such as ours: a small chamber orchestra or a large ensemble of soloists. Therefore, it seemed to us very auspicious to play such music. Indeed, we play a lot. Our repertoire consists of more than 200 works. Mainly, these are Soviet works. At the same time, at home, in the Soviet Union, we also play music from the West: Xenakis, Boulez, Stockhausen and many others, including Crumb and Cage. When abroad, we try to play more Soviet music. We directly commission composers. I think almost all our composers wrote something for us, including from the youngest generation, such as Tarnopolski, for example, and others.

Certainly, Alexander Lazarev, who is our chief conductor, makes a very big contribution to the life of the ensemble. Although contemporary music is perhaps not the main field of his activities, he understands and conducts it very well. His primary interest is opera. He is the Principal Conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre. Throughout those eleven years of our existence, we made more than 20 LP recordings mainly with Soviet music and we have played hundreds of concerts [13]."

Less than five months later, the ensemble took part in the festival "New Beginnings. Soviet Arts" in Glasgow. This incredible celebration of Soviet culture in classical and rock concerts, art exhibitions, theatre and dance performances, talks with composers and writers, literature readings and cinema viewings lasted for five weeks from 27 October until 3 December 1989. The Bolshoi Soloists gave two concerts on 5 and 6 November. Their diverse programme consisted of the British and world premieres, apart from three works by Shchedrin, Shoot and Gubaidulina previously performed in Britain. These outstanding concerts showcased in retrospect the already established and younger generation of Soviet/Russian composers and introduced the British public to recent musical achievements in the USSR. The concert on 5 November presented *Confessions* by Korndorf, *Chamber Symphony* by Denisov, *Geometry of Sound* by Shchedrin and new work by Tarnopolski. On the 6 November the ensemble performed *Tovem* by Mansurian, *Da [Yes]* by Knaifel, *Sentimental Sequences* by Raskatov, *Warum?* by Shoot, *Double Chamber Variations for 12 Players* by Ekimovski, *The Garden of Joy and Sorrow* by Gubaidulina and *Music to an Imagined Play* by Schnittke. It was one of the last performances of the ensemble as its activities ceased with the relocation of Ivashkin to New Zealand in 1990.

V. MONOGRAPHS

Ivashkin's contribution as an academic and writer was also remarkable. The author and editor of twenty books and a prodigious number of articles published in Russian, English, Czech, German, Italian and Japanese, Ivashkin left an extensive legacy and notable monographs. They are the key references for modern researches on Charles Ives, Krzysztof Penderecki, Alfred Schnittke, Dmitri Shostakovich and Russian cellists Sviatoslav Knushevitskii, Mstislav Rostropovich and Daniel Shafran. Ivashkin's *Besedy s Alfredom Schnittke* [Conversations with Alfred Schnittke] first published in 1994 in Moscow, then revised and republished six times in Russian, Czech, Japanese and German are the most detailed and comprehensive encounters with a major composer of the second half of the twentieth century [14]. Although the author wanted it to be published in English long time ago, it still remains an unfulfilled task. Fortunately, his fundamental English monograph *Alfred Schnittke: A Biography* was published in 1996 and valuable collections of Schnittke's essays *A Schnittke Reader* in English and then in Russian in 2002 and 2004 respectively [15]. These studies offer profound original materials on the composer and provide a sharp and thorough analysis of his music and life.

Ivashkin's outstanding monograph *Charl'z Aivz i muzyka XX veka* [Charles Ives and Twentieth-Century Music],

completed in the Summer of 1987 and published in 1991, is a collector's rarity today [16]. In addition to unique biographical and musical materials, and findings from Ives's archives in the USA, the author offered thought-provoking and captivating reading on philosophical and stylistic innovations and links with Ives's unconventional musical language with Russian modernists in literature, philosophy, music, fine arts and cinema. Spiritual meaning, symbolic linguistics, philosophy of intuition, nature and mind, experimentations with abstract and colours, asymmetry and symmetry of forms and structures, film montage, ethics and creativity are among the topics that Ivashkin considered as universal tendencies in the cultural innovations of the twentieth century. Being put into new contexts they form a meta-music and meta-culture, the latter definition broadly explored by the prominent Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman. It is more than just a book on a composer but a volume on the cultural history, cross-influences, polystylism and crossover of the arts in the twentieth century across continents. Ivashkin developed these ideas further, concurrently identifying certain differences in mentality and philosophy, and consequently musical language of the West and the East, especially in his academic works on contemporary music.

VI. RUSSIAN NEW MUSIC VERSUS NEW MUSIC FROM THE WEST

Only very short fragments of the video-interview of Gerard McBurney with Alexander Ivashkin, recorded during the Almeida Festival in 1989, were used for the BBC documentary programme "Think Today, Speak Tomorrow" [17]. This TV programme on stylistic distinctiveness and developments in Soviet music is based on interviews with the leading Soviet composers of the time, including Gubaidulina, Karetnikov, Suslin, Tishchenko, Schnittke and Shchedrin. Ivashkin was the only performer and musicologist in this select group of composers who made the history of Russian music at the turn of the last century. Ivashkin's vital contribution and pioneering activities for new music were the reasons for this recording. Answering Gerard's question about the peculiarities and the differences of Russian new music compared to the new music of the West, Alexander highlighted the role of symbolism and simple elements which became symbolic within a musical structure. These initially abstract elements, such as rhythm, interval or sound, transform into distinctive musical features, thus adding strong evocative, but at the same time emotive and philosophical layers to a piece of music. They trigger new energy and depth of meanings, and create new reserves for musical vocabulary, morphology and syntax. In other words, irrational and elusive becomes a stimulus to new rational ideas. Here is Ivashkin's answer in full:

"I think that Russian music has always been different compared to the European, mainly, because of a certain non-musical external content. It is likely, that it has always existed, starting from Glinka and the Mighty Handful as well as Scriabin, who had even more of this content. Today, it is more clearly reflected in music and there are reasons for it. These reasons are social rather than artistic. For many years

we could not speak and demonstrate what we were truly thinking. It resulted in a very odd situation, in which something very small did appear on the surface and the rest remained under water. It was like a great iceberg, of which only a small part was visible on the surface. Thus appeared symbolism of usually very simple elements, which is very typical for Russian music today.

For many foreign musicians, including my friends, new Soviet music seems very peculiar, for example, music by Schnittke or Gubaidulina. They regard this music as only for local Soviet or Russian hearing. Somehow, this music does not fit in those types and frames, which are familiar for Western musicians. I think that, with time this view will change, but it is important to consider this misunderstanding. Why very simple elements, which are indeed present in our music, are symbolic for us but not for you. This tradition passed down via Shostakovich. It was especially evident in his last works, when something very simple such as an interval, sound or rhythm was being set apart. It would then become a symbol, which led a listener to think something through.

It means that music was a reason for a certain consideration and philosophical conclusion, rather than existing for its own sake. It was never a simple sound construction. Today, this tendency develops further and further. It relates to that which is clandestine and indistinct, of which we could not speak only a short while ago. This tendency also relates to the Russian character in general, which is not inclined to express something openly, but tends towards indirectness and self-analysis. To undertake a self-analysis, one should concentrate on something, sometimes on something simple and only then go deeper. I think it is our typical Russian characteristic, burdened with our troubled Soviet circumstances. These, I believe, are the main reasons why our Soviet music is different from the music of the West [18]."

VII. SYMBOL AND INNER MEANING

Ivashkin expressed similar ideas in his stimulating article on contemporary Russian music "Kul't original'nosti ili sklonnost' k samoanalizu" [Cult of Originality or Tendency to Self-Analysis] prepared for the Moscow Autumn Festival in 1986 and published in 1991 [19]. The inner harmony and beauty make a special impact on simple elements. At the turn of the twentieth century, the idea of the inner intellectual harmony, which avoided traditional recipes of external harmony, was one of the most important ideas in Russian literature and philosophy, especially in works of Dostoevsky, Florenskii and Leont'ev. Ethics was far above aesthetic vision and practical matters. It formed them. This also meant that beauty is universal. It can be seen in anything, including essential basic rudiments. This, in its turn, becomes deeply symbolic and correlates with the understanding of creativity in general, which is realised, when people give all their skills, integrity and love to the object of their creation regardless of its nature or ranking. Ivashkin regarded a search for inner reserves, conscience, eternal values and "originality" as bringing in new simplicity and new conceptions to Russian contemporary music. It departed from and became

independent of Western logical thought and trends, which were initially very important from the period of the "Thaw", when the first contacts with artists in the West were established after many years of Stalin's isolation.

Themes of symbol and inner meaning, Russian philosophical and religious thought, sacred and supernatural, were very close to personal and academic interests of Ivashkin. These themes along with very detailed and comprehensive musical analysis, which easily and naturally moved on to discussion of similar processes in fine arts, prose, poetry and philosophy, were distinctive features throughout all periods of Ivashkin's academic writings, starting with the first publications of the early 1970s. Among them are "Raznoobraznye resheniia" [Different Decisions] on music of Alexander Lokshin and Kirill Volkov, "The First Symphony of Shostakovich", "An Unconstrained and Independent Path" on new Russian music, "Shostakovich and Schnittke", "Budushchee ravnodushno k strastiam ushedshikh vremen" [Future is Indifferent to Passions of the Past Times] to the seventieth anniversary of Schnittke, "Symbols, Metaphors and Irrationalities in Twentieth-Century Music" and other publications [20]. For many years, Ivashkin was a subscriber of a journal on semiotics "Trudy po znakovym sistemam" [Sign System Studies] edited by Yuri Lotman at Tartu University from 1964-1998, which published reputable articles on semiotics in music, fine arts, philosophy and philology.

VIII. THE CROSSOVER OF ARTS

Another important topic on the crossover of arts in music, a thorough discussion of which appeared in 1987 in the first monumental monograph of Ivashkin on Ives, found its continuation in Ivashkin's later academic writings penned in London. Among them his ground-breaking writings of the 2010s on recycling in Soviet and post-Soviet music discuss allusions and the use of old and recognisable musical material in works by Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Schnittke, Martynov, Knaifel, Desiatnikov and other contemporary composers, as well as discoveries of Western origins in some musical quotations from popular Soviet songs, including by Isaak Dunaevskii and Anatoli Novikov. These papers and articles include "Songs my Mother Taught Me" completed in May 2010, "Dvoinaia pererabotka otkhodov v sovetskoi muzyke" [Double Recycling in Soviet Music] and "Who's Afraid of Socialist Realism? [21]" The ugly and absurd correlates with harmony and becomes the new expression and representation of beauty. Ivashkin found parallels of this in the fine arts and especially in works by Vladimir Yankilevskii and Ilia Kabakov.

The last exhibition of Ilia and Emilia Kabakov at the Tate Modern in London in October-January 2018 was exemplary in this regard. The biographical installation of the room 8 called "Labyrinth (My Mother's Album)" shows narrow and dark labyrinths of grey and untidy corridors of communal flats with Soviet photographs on the walls and audio-recordings of nostalgic songs of the time performed by Kabakov himself. The interconnection of grey and harsh reality of existence, darkness, hopelessness and poverty of life with open space of endless corridors appears to enlarge

them and leads away from reality, adding a light and sentimental colouring to the memories of the artist's childhood, which in their turn give a new impulse for creativity.

IX. CONCLUSION

Today, the term crossover is broadly used for describing the cultural and scientific innovations of the twentieth century. It does not surprise anyone now, but some thirty-fourty years ago it was a conceptual discovery. The legacy of Alexander Ivashkin naturally incorporates and unites aesthetic debate and technical analysis, theory and practice, musicology and performance, traditional and unconventional, the crossover of arts and cultures. It is very rare, if not unique, to find such unity and broad vision within one man, not to mention the undoubted stature and quality of his undertakings. Spanning over forty years, his vast number of academic writings and over 40 award winning recordings as a soloist and chamber musician for the Chandos, Melodia, BMG, Brilliant Classics, Alma Classics, Megadisc, Naxos and Toccata Classics labels, attest to this. They encompass the finest achievements of the past and present in Russian but also Western Classical music and cultures, they trigger dialogue and spark "new energy of meanings". This dialogue brings better understanding and opens new cultural dimensions, it leads one to yet undiscovered territory and allows the line of succession for 'cultural memory' of the past and present to be passed on to future generations. For all of these we can only be grateful.

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