

Liliya Ugay, piano

SILENCED VOICES: MUSIC OF SOVIET RUSSIA

With special thanks to Boris Berman and Patrick McCreless



Program:

Prelude (1915) Nikolai Roslavets (1881-1942)

Four Preludes, op.8 (1922) Samuil Feinberg (1890-1962)
I. Allegretto
II. Misterioso
III. Tumultuoso
IV. Con moto

Two Nocturnes, op. 15 (1925/6) Alexander Mosolov (1900-1973)
I. Elegiaco, poco stentato
II. Adagio

Intermission

Sonata No. 6 (1988) Galina Ustvolskaya (1919-2006)

Village Sketches (1970s) Valery Gavrilin (1939-1999)
I. In the old house
II. Lullaby
III. Ditty
IV. The lads' lament

Sonata No. 6 (1960) Mieczyslaw Weinberg (1919-1996)
I. Adagio
II. Allegro molto

The life and the career of one of the most prominent 20c Russian avant-gardist **Nikolai Roslavets** offers an example of a striking downfall caused by the changes in the state's policies towards the art of music. Roslavets was born in 1881 in Surazh (Bryansk region, near Ukrainian border) and was a son of a railway clerk - the facts that he later changed in favor of more "proletarianized" biography: stating that he was born in the remote Russian village Dushatino in a family of peasants. He studied violin and composition at the Moscow Conservatory, from which he graduated in 1912 with a silver medal. It was during his final years in the conservatory when he invented his own harmonic system - the system of what he called synthe-chords. Roslavets founded Russian Association of Contemporary Music, and along with Myaskovsky and Sabaneev was one of its most active members. Until the appearance of Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) Roslavets held multiple important positions: he was a main editor of the magazine "Muzikalnaya kultura" ("Music culture"), a director of Yelets Music School, a rector (head) of Kharkov Music Institute as well as the head of the Department of the Art Education of Ukrainian SSR.

In the mid-1920s the newly established RAPM together with its Moscow Conservatory sub-organization started to attack Roslavets and his music. Roslavets was accused of "bourgeois decadence", "class hostility" and formalism. The continuous accusations ended with a so-called "cleanup" - which factually meant a prohibition on one's professional career. In his search for the rehabilitation Roslavets moved to Tashkent (Uzbek SSR), where for two years he worked on the first Uzbek ballet. The composer's return to Moscow was very disappointing and humiliating: he could not get a permanent job, was not paid the honorariums that he had earned, and in addition, was refused membership in the Union of Soviet Composers. Fearing repression and arrest Roslavets had a stroke in 1939, which was followed by the second stroke in 1942 - this time it resulted in composer's death. However, even then his enemies did not stop: they ruined Roslavets's grave. They went after Roslavets manuscripts (the large part of which he hid with his brother in Ukraine), which they found and destroyed.

In the history of Russian music **Samuil Feinberg** is renowned as one of the outstanding pianists of his time; however, his compositional oeuvre remained largely forgotten. Feinberg was born in Odessa in 1890 and in the age of four moved to Moscow, where he lived his whole life. Feinberg studied piano and composition in Moscow Conservatory with Goldenweiser and Zhiliayev: his graduation recital became legendary as it included an enormous repertoire including both books of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier. In 1920s Feinberg had a remarkable piano career: he toured in Europe and in the USA receiving rave reviews and critical acclaim. He premiered works of Prokofiev (the USSR premiere of Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto), Myaskovsky (who dedicated him his Fourth Piano Sonata), Alexandrov and others. Feinberg released many recordings, including recordings under the prestigious Deutsche Grammophon label. Despite such an active performance activity Feinberg composed a lot and produced his most interesting compositions during this period. In 1922 he became a professor at the Moscow Conservatory, where he taught for 40 years, also serving as a chair of the Piano Department.

However, starting from 1934, with the sharp turn of the Soviet ideology towards the "proletarian culture" Feinberg was forbidden to travel, as he was a Jew and had never been a member of the communist party. Subsequently his composition style moved towards the simplicity, diatonicism and more distinct melodicism - the stylistic features that were necessary to apply to one's

compositions in order to remain untouched by the mass attacks of the critical eye of the Union of Soviet Composers. At that time his teacher and friend Zhiliyev was imprisoned, and the fear of repressions caused Feinberg to stop performing his earlier more modernist works. He composed infrequently, limiting himself to the genres of song and transcriptions; he was concentrated mainly on teaching and performing within the USSR. He was allowed to travel abroad only on two occasions: when he was invited to be on a jury panel of piano competitions in Vienna and Brussels. Nevertheless, Feinberg was highly admired by his contemporaries as well as his students. Tatiana Nikolaeva described his piano sonatas as each of them is “a poem of life”. In 1946 Feinberg was awarded Stalin Prize for his Second Piano Concerto. Besides his music and recordings he left two large literary works, both published posthumously: his book *The Pianism as an Art*, and *The Fate of the Musical Form* (a set of the articles written by Feinberg throughout his life). Feinberg died in 1962 in Moscow.

The composer of the famous orchestral work *Iron Foundry* **Alexander Mosolov** was born in 1900 in Kiev, and like in case of Feinberg, his family moved to Moscow when he was four years old. He was raised in a typical upper middle-class artistic environment: Mosolov’s mother was a professional singer, and his stepfather was a successful painter; many artists, musicians, etc. visited their family. As a young man, Mosolov was very inspired by the idea of the revolution and volunteered into Red Army, where he served for more than three years until he was medically discharged in 1921. Mosolov studied at the Moscow Conservatory: composition with Gliere and Myaskovsky and piano with Konstantin Igumnov. Despite the rather late start, Mosolov quickly recommended himself as one of the most talented, forward-looking composers of his generation, and was granted a membership in Russian Association for Contemporary Music (ACM). At this time Mosolov’s primary activity was piano; however, his focus changed after the success of his First String Quartet at the festival of International Society for Contemporary Music in Frankfurt in 1927. The same year he presented *Iron Foundry*, which received a tremendous success and was subsequently performed multiple times abroad.

Such an international success of the futurist composer could not be tolerated by the RAPM, which started to persecute his music. In desperation in 1932 he wrote a long letter to Stalin, in which he states: ‘For three years (since 1929) I have not been published at all; since 1928 my works have gradually stopped being performed, and in 1930-31 there wasn’t a single piece that resulted in a performance, from mass song to large symphonic and theatrical works. Gradually all Moscow music institutions, frightened by my ‘odious’ name, stopped any communication with me on the grounds of the absence of work or ‘harmfulness’ of my music.’” At the conclusion of the letter he asks for help, which he sees in two possible ways: either to influence RAPM to allow him to work in the USSR and guide him how to compose in order to be treated fairly, or to authorize his emigration. There is no evidence that Mosolov received any response; however, there is a possibility that his letter could become one of the reasons why RAPM was disbanded in 1932. However, it did not prevent him from being arrested in 1936 for drunkenness and hooliganism, and in 1937 for counter-revolutionary activities, for which he was sentenced to eight years in Gulag (Soviet forced labor camp). Thanks to the letters of Gliere and Myaskovsky he was imprisoned for only six months. The sentence was replaced with an exile: for five years the composer was prohibited to live in Moscow, Leningrad or Kiev.

After being in Gulag, Mosolov's compositional language changed radically. He took trips to Central Asia (Turkmen, Kyrgyz and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics,) where he collected folk material, which he used as a basis of his works. He eventually rehabilitated himself in Moscow but the music he composed since that time had nothing in common with the forward-looking highly individual voice he had during his early creative years. He died in Moscow in 1973.

“The lady with the hammer” **Galina Ustvol'skaya** was born in 1919 in Petrograd (in 1924 it was renamed as Leningrad, and from 1991 – Saint Petersburg), where she lived her entire life. From 1939 to 1947 she studied at the Leningrad Conservatory in the class of Dmitri Shostakovich with whom she developed a close artistic and personal relationship. Shostakovich held very high opinion of her talent and said that her music would achieve world fame. In one of his letters to her he also stated: “It's not *you* who are under my *influence*, it's *me* who is under yours.” However, Ustvol'skaya, later in her life, expressed an extremely negative attitude towards Shostakovich, speaking scornfully both about his music and his personality. Upon graduation Ustvol'skaya was accepted to the Union of Soviet Composers. Her music had occasional success and was even recorded by the famous Soviet recording company “Melodiya”.

However, Ustvol'skaya renounced from most of her works of her earlier period. Instead, she preferred to write music “for the desk drawer,” but to express freely her artistic individuality. She lived in poverty making her living by teaching in the Leningrad music college (equivalent to a high-school specialized in music.) Her music was rarely performed. Finally good fortune came to her: in late 1980 the director of German publishing house Sikorski, Jürgen Köchel, and Dutch musicologist Elmer Schönberger, came to Leningrad and heard her music, by which they were enormously impressed. Köchel bought the publication rights on her works, and Schönberger organized a series of concerts of her music in Europe: (1995, 1996, 2005, 2011 in Amsterdam, 1998 in Vienna, 1999 in Bern, 2001 in Warsaw.) Conductor, composer, and pianist Reinbert de Leeuw became another important propagandist of her music. Since then, her music has been widely performed in Europe; however, in Russia it was still largely ignored. Nevertheless, Ustvol'skaya rejected all proposals for emigration. She died in Saint Petersburg in 2006.

Like Galina Ustvol'skaya, **Valery Gavrilin** lived in Leningrad and taught in the Leningrad music college. However, his esthetic values and his position in the USSR music scene was antipodal to Ustvol'skaya's. Gavrilin was born in 1939 in Vologda, and grew up in the village (the province of Vologda). His father died fighting in the Second World War; his mother was a director of an orphanage house. She was arrested for theft when Gavrilin was 10, after which he himself was sent to the orphanage in Vologda. There he also started to attend a children's music school, and a few years later his talent was noticed and he transferred to Leningrad Special Music School, where he studied clarinet and composition. In 1964 Gavrilin graduated from the Leningrad Conservatory as a composer and a musicologist-folklorist. In 1965 he became a member of the Union of Soviet Composers.

Unlike Ustvol'skaya, Gavrilin's music had a considerable success in the USSR. He received the main honors and awards one could achieve during those times (Honoured Artist of USSR, People's Artist of USSR, USSR State Prize, etc.). His music naturally represents the ideology that Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians had propagandized: it is simple, melodious, influenced by folk

materials, and the life of the ordinary country people. Hence, he leaned to the genre of the song and the vocal cycle. Much of his music was inspired by people's sufferings during the Great Patriotic War (WWII): his cycles *War Songs* and *Chimes* are true examples of Soviet realism in music. Gavrilin was strongly supported by another, more famous and influential Russian composer, Georgy Sviridov. After Gavrilin's death in 1999, his music have been celebrated even more than before: the publishing house "Kompozitor" in Saint Petersburg planned to issue all Gavrilin's works (7 volumes out of 20 have been issued already); his name is now applied to the name of the Vologda Philharmonic Orchestra; there are festivals of Gavrilin's music in Russia and an International competition for young musicians after Gavrilin's name in Vologda. However, outside of Russia his music still remains unknown.

Mieczyslaw Weinberg was referred to his close friend Dmitri Shostakovich as "one of the most outstanding composers of the present day." Weinberg's life went through all the worst struggles a man could experience in the twentieth century as he was in the center of both Hitler's and Stalin's persecutions. Born in Poland, in Jewish musical family, Weinberg graduated from the Warsaw Conservatory as a pianist soon before the Nazis attacked Poland. He fled to the USSR border and became a refugee; however, his parents and a sister did not make it, and as he learned 20 years later, all of them died in a concentration camp. Later Weinberg said that because the war took life of many of his closest family, it had to become one of the main themes in his music.

In the USSR Weinberg studied composition at the Minsk Conservatory for two years; in 1941 the Nazis attacked the USSR, and Weinberg, who could not be mobilized into the army due to his health problems, was evacuated to Tashkent, Uzbek SSR. During the Second World War Tashkent became a main evacuation place for the Leningrad intelligentsia: there, Weinberg met Natalya Vovsi, a daughter of a famous Jewish actor and activist Solomon Mikhoels. While in Tashkent Weinberg finished his first symphony and sent it to Shostakovich, who was impressed by the work and invited Weinberg to Moscow. In 1948, during the Soviet antisemitic repressions Mikhoels was murdered on the personal order of Stalin, and it was followed by Weinberg persecution and his arrest in early 1953. Weinberg spent 79 days in jail and was released the same year, thanks to Stalin's death.

Shostakovich and Weinberg became very close friends, who regularly shared with each other the music they wrote, as well as playing Shostakovich's symphonies in four-hand piano duos. Consequently, the two had a significant influence on each other. Unlike Ustvolskaya, Weinberg admired Shostakovich and considered himself his student although he never took lessons with him. It seems that Weinberg preferred to stay in the shadow of his older friend; it could be a safe position because fame could lead to more persecutions. Weinberg's music nevertheless was appreciated and performed by the most respected Soviet musicians, among which are Leonid Kogan, Emil Gilels, Mstislav Rostropovich, Kirill Kondrashin, and German conductors Kurt and Thomas Sanderling. Weinberg died at the age of 76 in Moscow. His music is currently actively being revived worldwide.

Compiled by Liliya Ugay

