

SYMBOLS, METAPHORS AND IRRATIONALITIES IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY MUSIC

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*A poet should prefer probable impossibilities to
improbable possibilities...
once the irrational has been introduced and an air of
likelihood imparted to it,
we must accept it in spite of the absurdity*
(Poetics, 24)

Twentieth century music is both very rational and extremely irrational. On the one hand, very strict rational composition techniques have been established, especially in the serial way of composition and in the post-serial works by Boulez, Messiaen and Xenakis. On the other hand, many ideas of twentieth-century composers have been influenced by chance theory, indeterminacy while using symbolic context, hidden meanings and metaphors.

In his seminal book *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach describes two major types of world culture, two types of utterance. One is direct, taking its origin in Ancient Greek culture. The second is indirect, ambivalent, comes from Old Testament texts and never had existed before (Auerbach 1974: 23). As Auerbach wrote, «The two styles [Homeric realism and Old Testament symbolism], in their opposition, represent basic types: on the one hand fully externalized description, uniform illumination, uninterrupted connection, free expression, all events in the foreground, displaying unmistakable meanings, few elements of historical development and of psycho-

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near Boston, where all the transcendentalist philosophers lived in the mid-nineteenth century.¹

Like Emerson and Thoreau, Ives considered music as part of the spiritual language of a Nature. «We would rather believe that music is beyond any analogy to word language» wrote Ives, «and that the time is coming when it will develop possibilities inconceivable now — a language so transcendent that its heights and depths will be common to all mankind» (Ives 1970: 8). In his Sonata, Ives makes an attempt to create a new, symbolic, esoteric musical language with many references to music history.

There are many symbols in the first movement, *Emerson*. One can hear a modified version of the opening tune from Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* (which Ives called «a human-faith-melody»); J.S. Bach's monogram BACH; religious hymns by American composer Stephen Foster; an allusion from the *Second Piano Sonata* by Brahms; Ives' own monogram (C-H-A-E= Charles Ives); the opening of Beethoven's Piano Sonata op.109; J.S. Bach's chorale *Es ist genug*. Of course, all these quotations and symbols are never too direct. They form a very wide, surrealist historical «context» — very similar to James Joyce's novels written at the same period.

The second movement, *Hawthorne*, is rather mystical, surreal Scherzo, like Hawthorne's novels and stories. As Ives wrote in his *Essays*, «The substance of Hawthorne is so dripping wet with the supernatural, the phantasmal, the mystical, so surcharged with adventures... It is not something that happens, but the way something happens... or something about the ghost of a man who never lived, or about something that never will happen, or something else that is not» (Ives 1970: 42). Still, one can hear motives such as BACH, allusions from Beethoven and Brahms' piano sonatas. In the middle of the movement Ives found an almost mystical effect of «shining»: part of the keyboard should be silently pressed with a ruler, giving a special shimmering effect, similar to the «mystical rainbow» chords in the music written half a century later by Olivier Messiaen.

In the third, slow, movement of the Sonata, Ives presents the unique atmosphere of a family house. Here again, one can hear religious hymn tunes melted together with Beethoven's «*Hammer-*

logical perspective; on the other hand, certain parts brought into high relief, other left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, «background» quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal-historical claims, development of the concept of the historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic» (Auerbach 1974: 23).

The secret meanings in music are in line with these very old traditions. «Multi-layeredness» in many various cultures has been naturally connected and historically related to the symbolic character of church tradition. And this tradition was, at the same time, the direct continuation of older mysticism, and, most importantly, of the tradition of Old Testament symbols, with their enigmatic meaning and necessity of «interpretation».

This latter type was inherited by nineteenth and twentieth century composers. First by Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) and Charles Ives (1874-1954), and later by Russian composers, including Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) and Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), and composers of the Paris circle in 1920s-1930s (see below). It was later followed by Galina Ustvolskaya (1919-2006), Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998), Sofia Gubaidulina (1931-), and Vladimir Martynov (1946-).

One of the greatest masterpieces of the twentieth century is American Charles Ives' *Sonata No. 2* for piano, «Concord». For many years, Ives, often called a «businessman writing music on weekends», had been a co-owner of a successful insurance company, Ives and Myrick in New York City. He was always reluctant to make a living by composing music. Music for him, as he often said, was «a metaphor of a human soul.»

Ives worked on the sonata for many years (1909-1915). The published score of the Sonata in the first edition also included fragments from Ives' *Essay before a Sonata* — his philosophical work, written as an extended commentary to the Sonata (Ives 1970).

All his life Charles Ives was very close to the transcendental American philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne. *Nature* by Emerson and *Walden* by Thoreau were two of Ives' most important books: he read and quoted them almost constantly.

The titles of the four movements of the «Concord» sonata are the names of Ives' favourite philosophers: «Emerson», «Hawthorne», «Alcotts» and «Thoreau.» The full title of the Sonata is *Concord, Mass., 1845*. Concord is the name of a small town in New England,

¹ Ives never lived in Concord, however he was born in Danbury, very close to Concord, and spent more than half of each year in his country-house in West Redding, in this same area of New England.

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klavier» *Sonata* motive and the monogram BACH. But the development of this movement, unlike the others, is slow and very clear, like some «sermons» or a prayer with many references. A lyrical mood dominates throughout it, bringing allusions from the music of the three «great B's»: Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.

The final movement of *Concord* is called *Thoreau*. It follows the meditative mood of Henry Thoreau's *Walden*, the book which he wrote while living in a small cabin near a pond in Concord. There are no bar lines in the score, music flows like an improvisation without any strict boundaries. It emerges from morning mist and dissolves into the sound of an evening church bell. Ives uses here all twelve tones and the monogram BACH becomes just a part of this chromatic palette. As Ives writes about Thoreau, «His meditations are interrupted only by the faint sound of the Concord bell... He releases his more personal desires to her [Nature's] broader rhythm, to the harmony of her solitude» (Ives 1970: 68).

Ives' last, unfinished work was his *Universe Symphony*, a further development of his ideas expressed in the *Concord Sonata* and the *Essays before a Sonata*. He was planning to perform his *Universe Symphony* outside, somewhere in the hills of India or Tibet, with several orchestras playing in the different corners of the valleys. This *Symphony*, a life-long work by Ives, was never finished and only left sketches.

At approximately same time, around 1914-1915, a very similar project called «Mystery» was planned by Russian composer Alexander Scriabin. Like Ives, he never finished the work. His *Mystery* was also to be performed in outdoor gorges in Tibet or India. Both Scriabin and Ives meant their works to be performed in the same place, although they did not know anything about each other.

Scriabin, known for his theosophical ideas, had a very strong influence on Russian culture in the twentieth century. His ideas were in many aspects symbolic and very important as expressions of major issues of Russian culture in general. He said, «It is necessary to understand that the material of which our Universe is made is our imagination, our creative idea, our desire. And therefore, of terms of the material, there is no difference between the state of mind we call "a stone which we hold in our hands" and the state of mind called "a dream." A stone and a dream are made of different same matter and they are equally real. They only occupy different positions in our mind. The... stone is a psychological process which

happens at present... A dream is a process in the future» (*Russkiye Propilei*, quoted in Asaf'iev 1923: 146).

Scriabin indeed managed to bring Nature and Culture closer to each other. His last finished orchestral piece, *Prometheus*, was written for an orchestra, a chorus, a piano solo and a «colour organ» (a special keyboard producing colour beams at the time of the performance; Scriabin notated this instrument in detail in the score). The work was built on one particular chord (which was later called the «Prometheus Chord» – C, F#, Bb, E, A, D), which could be also seen as a scale, and was used by Scriabin as a mode in *Prometheus*. This scale is part of a natural overtone row, which always existed in the physical world. The Prometheus Chord is often called a «mystic chord» because Scriabin used it to build chords, melodies and harmonies, expanding it into three-dimensional space. It also consists of many major elements heard and known in music history: a whole-tone scale, a series of fourths, a major triad, and an enhanced dominant chord. The mystic chord also combines the qualities of medieval, Romantic and jazz harmonies, depending on its position.

Scriabin's idea of *Mystery* being performed in Tibet had a strong resonance in the so called «Eurasian» movement of the 1920s-30s. A large group of composers, philosophers and writers who immigrated to Paris from Soviet Russia wanted to see new Russian culture instead of standardized, modern European culture. They saw Russian culture based on the tradition of Eastern mysticism, with an important spiritual mission.

In his recently published book, *Eurasiiskoe uklonenie v muzyke 1920-1930 -kh godov* (*Eurasian Inclination in the Music of the 1920s-1930s*), Igor Vishnevetsky discusses Eurasian ideas in Russian culture in the early twentieth century (Vishnevetsky 2005). Composers who left Russia, Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), Arthur Lourie (1891-1966), Vladimir Dukel'sky (1903-1969), Alexander Tcherepnine (1899-1977), Nikolai Obukhov (1892-1954), Ivan Vyshnegradsky (1893-1979) found their centre in Paris (and some of them later in the USA). The ideal of the Eurasian movement was to establish a new and correct identity for Russian music, which should be independent from Western «modernism.» The theoretical foundations for these Eurasian ideas came mostly from Piotr (Pierre) Souvtchinsky (1892-1985) and Arthur Lourie. Lourie was convinced that «The artist, with the gift from God, had to replace a priest» (Vishnevetsky 2005: 47).

Russia and Germany are only two countries where one can find an exceptionally well structured system of music schools, colleges and conservatories. This system is non-existent in English-speaking countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and Canada, where music performance and composition are taught at universities, and where well established performance groups are often formed by semi-amateurs who were never systematically trained in performance (such is the case of various «consorts» or chamber orchestras). It is probably not accidental that two major totalitarian regimes of the twentieth-century produced and established the best systems of vocational music and sports education.

It is a well known fact that since the 1900s it was typical for Russian families to attend classical music concerts regularly (series of tickets for different concerts, called *abbonement*, are still sold in advance, something unheard of in the Western classical music industry). Classical music, performance inclusive, was a part of normal education, just like languages and sciences. You could find a piano in almost every flat in Moscow during Soviet times. Composers were therefore always supported by a wide audience. This is why the «prophetic» heroic, Romantic profile of a composer, performer, writer, poet or a painter was always a norm in Russia and in Germany. The need for a person with super-human qualities has been very typical throughout Russian history. Even long before the Romantic age, there were pagan «witches» and «wizards» in Russian tales and the concept of Russian monarchy resided in this need. It still remains a norm in post-Soviet Russian culture, with its well established hierarchy of names including artists and politicians. Understanding history as a hagiography has always been a part of Russian history and can explain a constant search for something extra – or meta – in Russian culture and history. Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906), the key figure in 19th century *Narodnichestvo* (populism), and the one behind many of the ideas of the «The Five» composers group, surprisingly saw these roots present also in Eastern cultures. *Byliny* (Russian folk stories similar to the Homeric Odes) are very similar to Buddhist and Eastern prototypes, in particular to the poetic creations of Eastern nations geographically close to Russia.²

² Vladimir Stasov, *Proiskhozhdenie russkikh bylin*, 1894, quoted in Igor Vishnevetsky 2005: 31. Vishnevetsky finds more Stasov's statements on Eastern sources of Russian

During the 1910's (the so called «Silver Age» because it is one of the highest points in Russian cultural history) Russian culture was very hermeneutic, trying to find and to establish its identity in the common roots of many various cultures and religions. Andrei Bely, in his book *Symbolism* (1910), called symbolization a mentality (*miroponimaniye*). Pavel Florensky, in his dissertation *Stolp I Utverzhdenie Istiny* (*The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theology in Twelve Letters*), attempted to explain the equal importance of the rational and irrational, with a definite preference for the latter. He said that «a rationalist says that the contradictions of the Bible (*svyashennogo pisaniya*) prove their non-Divine nature; a mystic states that in the state of Lucidness [*Prosvetlenie*] the contradictions prove their Divine nature» (Florensky 1914: 504). It may sound like a paradox, but the irrationalities and symbolism in Shostakovich's music come from the mentality belonging to the Silver Age, a way of thinking saturated with the ideas and doctrines of the Orthodox Faith.

Young Shostakovich witnessed the birth of many of the most important aesthetic theories in Russia during the 1920s to the 1930s. It was during this time that Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) started to formulate his theory of dialogue and chronotope, and published his seminal book *Problemy Poetiki Dostoevskogo* (1929). At the same time, Alexei Losev (1893-1988) published his *Filosofia Imeni* (*Philosophy of Name*, 1927), *Muzyka kak predmet logiki* (*Music as a subject for logic* – 1927) and *Dialektika mifa* (*Dialectics of a Myth*, 1930). In these books, Losev established the hermeneutics of music and metaphorical meanings of nearly everything in real life. It is not surprising that both Losev and Bakhtin were banned as «dangerous idealists» and spent many years in Stalin's camps, only able to return to normal research activities after Stalin's death. In the 1960s-1980s, Losev published a fundamental work, *History of Poetics in Antiquity*, closely related to Aristotle's *Poetics*. In 1930 he wrote about myth in the style of Aristotle's phrase that I have used as epigraph to this paper: «Any living organism is a myth... Personality is a myth not because it is a personality, but because it is formed and thought through a mythological mentality... Even not living objects – blood, hair, heart... – can also be mythical... because they have been con-

culture: Indian and Persian elements in Russian ornaments, and Turks and Mongol elements in Russian bylinas (Vishnevetsky 2005: 32-33). See also discussion of Eurasian ideas in Taruskin's *Stravinsky and Russian Traditions* (Taruskin 1996: 119-136).

structured from the point of view of a mythical mentality» (Losev 1990: 461).

Boris Asaf'ev (1884-1949) published his first articles and books related to his theory of the intonation and «energy» of music.³ A Swiss musicologist, Ernst Kurth, wrote *Romantische Harmonik und ihre Krise in Wagners Tristan*, published in 1920 in Switzerland. It was not allowed to be translated into Russian until 1975, but it nevertheless became quite well known amongst Russian musicians, especially after a Russian edition of Kurth's first book *Grundlagen des linearen Kontrapunkts* (1917), published in Russia in 1931 and edited by Asaf'ev. The very first paragraph of this second book by Kurth speaks for itself. He talks about «harmony as a reflection of energies of a psyche... a reflection of something irrational» (Kurth 1920). The book finishes with the rhetoric question, «What is music?» Asaf'ev tried to answer this question two years later in his article «Value of Music,» stating that «music is a world of relations, a world of functional dependence with no room for materialism» (*muzyka – mir otnošenii, mir funktsional'noi zavisimosti, v kotorom net mesta veshchnosti – Asaf'ev 1923a: 19*).

Shostakovich's good friend, Boleslav Yavorsky (1877-1942) built his theory of «modal rhythm» upon similar ideas of music, music seen as a world of functional relations, based upon the energy derived from the interval of a triton, and representative of the universal force of gravitation in it. His affirmation that «gravity in music is an expression of life, and the sense of gravity is a sense of life. Delaying the moment of a resolution is a delaying of death, and, at the same time, a prolongation of a sense of life» (Yavorsky Archive, 146/346/64) is in line with Kurth's ideas shown in *Romantische Harmonik und ihre Krise in Wagners Tristan!* This can be said to be a typical example of «idealism» in music, so opposed to the official doctrine of «Socialist Realism.» Shostakovich, well aware of that theory (Yavorsky published the first volume of his *Uprazhneniia v obrazovanii ladovogo ritma [Exercises in Modal Rhythm]* in 1915), was fascinated with Yavorsky's personality. So much so that he asked to

³ It was much later, in 1948, when Asaf'ev betrayed many great Russian musicians, including Shostakovich, and took the line of the Soviet officialdom. Before that Asaf'ev's ideas were important for many Russian musicians, in particular for Shostakovich's creative work.

be his student twice, once 1925 and then again in 1938.⁴ Yavorsky, a popular piano and performance professor, was researching into symbolism found in J.S. Bach's music. The results of his research were never published, but it is certain that Shostakovich knew about what Yavorsky's ideas were, since they had been presented at numerous seminars in Kiev (1916, 1917, 1919), Moscow (1924-25, 1927-28, 1938-41) and Saratov (1941-42). Even though they are still unpublished, we know that Yavorsky believed in that there was a system of musical and religious symbolism in Bach's keyboard compositions, especially in his *Well-Tempered Clavier* and in his keyboard Suites. Yavorsky stated that «sounding musical events, after centuries of development, have been transformed into Bach's music, into organizing structures bearing meaning, into symbols» (Yavorsky Archive, 146/4454). His explanation of Bach's meaning is based upon the fact that Bach used symbolic elements (for example, well known church chorales) in his fugues themes, like in the «Well-Tempered Clavier» (Nosina 2006: 11-20). This way we find that every interval, every ascending or descending passage, has a hidden meaning related to the original text of the chorale, which requires certain knowledge and interpretation.

Losev, Bakhtin, Florensky, Yavorsky, Asafiev and their theoretical ideas made a very important and significant impact on the mentality of Soviet composers and listeners, and in the meaning of music in Soviet society in general. Paradoxically, when Socialist Realism was declared the official ideology for the Soviet Art, that same art was very much in the line with the ideas of early Christian symbolism.⁵ Myth, mythological situations, symbols were all important for hermeneutic art and for the closed society in Soviet Russia. It reflected the way Russian people saw the life and its values. Soviet socialist realism was created using myth and mythological symbols, just like many of the rituals used during party events. The overuse of German patterns in numerous musical Soviet com-

⁴ His 66 letters to Yavorsky, recently published, show importance of Yavorsky's influence for Shostakovich, especially in 1925-26, before he met Ivan Sollertinsky completely». «After meeting with Yavorsky my mentality has been changed of the people in the Kremlin had much in common. They, like him, reject art for art's sake. Art for them is just a means "to transform life"... Artists are "engineers of souls"» (Morrison 2002: 310).

⁵ «It may seem strange, but the views of [Andrei] Bely at the time [1907] and views (Morrison 2002: 310).

openly offered the Soviets a real and practical way of «collaborating with the Devil» (Sviridov 2002).

«Art for art's sake may exist anywhere except in the Russian cultural tradition. In Russia this type of art is quickly obliterated from memory. Usually, our geniuses are summoned to share in our people's woes» — wrote Alexander Solzhenitsyn in 1980s.⁶

This was an especially important statement for the music of Dmitri Shostakovich, who, unlike his many contemporaries — Prokofiev, Rakhmaninov, Stravinsky —, was destined to spend all of his life in Soviet Russia. Shostakovich's spirituality was, surprisingly and perhaps unconsciously, based upon religion. His Mussorgsky-like music composed after 1936 sounds very similar to music of old believers with its rather austere diatonic palette.

Shostakovich never wrote music for church service (it was impossible in Soviet Russia), and although he wasn't a church-goer he was well aware of the practices of Russian church services. His widow, Irina Shostakovich, witnessed that Shostakovich was not a believer⁹ but an atheist. Nonetheless, he was educated in old gymnasium, learnt the *Zakon Bozhii* (Basic Fundamentals of the Orthodox Religion — taught at schools before the October Revolution), and was undoubtedly familiar with Russian sacred tunes.¹⁰

He learnt much through Mussorgsky's music, a type of music directly inspired by old believers. Shostakovich's music after 1936 became mostly based on the *obikhod* mode. Very effective and deeply religious, these old tunes remained unidentified by Soviet officials, since they looked upon them, because they sounded very similar, as folk music, music which belonged to people, and so was part of the music of Socialist realism.

A unique feature of Russian music during the 10th–17th centuries is that folk tunes were based on the same *Obikhod* (*Znamenny*)

positions, such as the almost religious reliance on sonata allegro form, show the deep influence German Classical philosophy had on Soviet mentality.⁶ Part of this might come from the fact that there were compulsory studies of «historical materialism» in all tertiary institutions, which, together with the compulsory study of Communist Party, included serious studies of German classical philosophy. This was to such an extent that it was actually the only serious philosophical course found in the standard programs of the Soviet School — thanks to Marx and Engels. Some compulsory books written by Vladimir Lenin (such as his *Philosophical Notebooks*) were also related to German philosophers.⁷ Lenin's book, which Soviet people enjoyed reading at the time and which included some fascinating quotes from otherwise unknown European philosophers, was in fact a collection of his marginal, often quite rude, comments on the publications by leading European philosophers. The most important ideals found in German philosophy, like for example syllogism, were inserted into Soviet mentality through various sources, including classics of Marxism-Leninism.

The influence of theoretical thought upon creative processes continued throughout the 1960s–1980s. Publications like Bulgakov's and Platonov's novels in the late 1960s, and books and lectures by Yuri Lotman are an example of this. In the 1970's Philip Gershkovich became equally important for Russian intelligentsia in the time of Khrushchev and Brezhnev. All of these theories reflected the flavour of the time, with a strong underground resistance present together with the primitive cultural politics of the official Soviet regime. The abridged publication (it was cut by Soviet censors) of Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* in 1968, was like a bombshell; millions of people read it overnight. The novel was a very simple demonstration of the typical duality found in any reality, but particularly in Soviet life, with its ambivalence between the vulgarity of everyday life and the heights of the ever present spiritualism in Russian history. The novel immediately gained enormous popularity because of this and it still is so forty years after. Some «right wing» Soviet artists and critics stated that the novel gained such popularity because it

⁶ Boris Tishchenko in private conversation with the author in his St. Petersburg home on 17.02.07 said that Sonata allegro is a universal structure which could be found in any good music.

⁷ He called some of them (Hegel, for instance) «idealistsicheskaya stoloch» [a bastards' idealist].

⁸ Private letter to Mstislav Rostropovich. The Rostropovich Archive in St. Petersburg, Russia.

⁹ In 1973 Shostakovich was able to competently consult Benjamin Britten on Russian church tunes when Britten approached him in relation to the tune *So Svyatymi Upokoi* in his *Solo Cello Suite No 3*. As Britten wrote in his Preface to the Suite: «I based this Suite on Russian themes; the first three tunes were taken from Tchaikovsky's volumes of folk-song arrangements; the fourth, the *Koriatkion* (Hymn for the Departed), from the English Hymnal. When I played the Suite through to Dmitri Shostakovich during our visit to Moscow he remarked that he had been brought up on a different version of the *Koriatkion*» (Britten 1996: 35).

Communist leaders used this powerful tool to make their speeches and their meetings more convincing. It is well known that Lenin and Stalin were constantly returning to the same issues in their public speeches. Ritualistic repetitiveness was one of the major principles in Lenin's and especially Stalin's rhetoric. These «ritualistic» principles, very important also for pop music today, were very typical of the Soviet mass-culture songs during the 1930s-1950s. Exploring this repetitiveness, Shostakovich was able to find new resources for his musical language, conveniently suitable for the demands of «official» propaganda and for his own use, without any compromise in musical terms.

Opposed to Stravinsky's irregular rhythmical structures, Shostakovich's rhythm is deliberately regular. One crochet, two quavers, is the most typical rhythm pattern found in his music. This pattern can be easily found in almost all of his composition. Why is Shostakovich so rhythmically repetitive? Was he concerned about making his music in line with the official demand for «*dostupnost*» — a concern easily understood? Interestingly enough, Shostakovich's typical rhythmical pattern — a crochet, two quavers — can be found in the so-called Church *Azbuikas* (syllabaries) of the 18th century. These books were designed to help learn the language, as well as prayers. Each character of the alphabet had to be presented in a very regular rhythmical way, a kind of old Russian rap. In both old Russian ABC books and Shostakovich's music this regular, simple rhythm helps to understand the basics of a language, help to fathom a meaning. Otherwise, Shostakovich's repetitions are devoid of logical or structural meaning.

Violinist Mark Lubotsky told me in 2004 that Shostakovich used to say him «You have to "stomp" on the spot before you move else-moving ahead. There are numerous examples of this: the beginning of the *1st Cello Concerto*, the 1st movement of the *15th Symphony*, the Finale of the *6th Symphony*. Any change always comes after the second attempt. This principle applies to rhythmical structure, motivic development and general structural patterns in Shostakovich's music.

This tradition is definitely related to the magical number 3 found in Russian fairy tales and in Russian prayers. If the first attempt is unsuccessful, the third will definitely be a success. This very old Russian superstition has been part of Russian mentality for

mode that church music (old believers tunes) was. So «folk» — in a broad sense — was always «sacred» and «sacred» was «folk» (Rudneva 1994: 138-157). This situation, though, was changed by Peter the Great in the late 17th century. One of the oldest folk tunes — No 1 in Balakirev's collection — «*Ne bylo vetru*» (*There Was No Wind*) is a good example of a tune sung in *obikhod* mode. This tune is very similar to the opening of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, melody used and quoted by Shostakovich so many times.¹¹ We hear it in the *Scherzo* of his *Tenth Symphony* (1953), in the finale of his *Second Violoncello Concerto* (1966), in the Ninth and Tenth String Quartets (1964), in the *Burlesque* of his *First Violin Concerto* (1948), at the beginning of his *cantata Execution of Stepan Razin* (1964) and in his *Unfinished String Quartet* (1963). It's not surprising that Shostakovich not only destroyed but literally burnt his *Unfinished String Quartet*, which had old church tunes in it. He was afraid that the real meaning of these tunes was too obvious.

Pavel Lamm's edition of Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina* piano score shows an example of an old believers prayer, which Mussorgsky knew. Stravinsky later used these tunes for the reconstruction of *Khovanshchina*'s finale. This tune, used by Mussorgsky in the final scene of *Khovanshchina*, was sung in Armenia (where many old believers, there called *mollokane*, still now live) by a woman named *Praskovia Tsaritsa*. It is in the *obikhod* mode and is very similar to the opening of *Boris Godunov*. Old Russian liturgical singing has been preserved by Nekrassov Cossacks' community since the 18th century. There is a unique recording made by Professor Margarita Mazo of Ohio State University, USA, in Russia in the early 1990s.

The repetitive character of Shostakovich's music finds its roots also in Russian religious music and in its spiritual, almost fanatical and obsessive, power. A Russian Orthodox Church Service is very long. Easter liturgy lasts all night and is a very repetitive service; you must repeat the same prayer over and over again. Shostakovich's long, slowly unfolding mature compositions after 1937 are influenced by this particular characteristic of the Orthodox liturgy.

There are stunning similarities between the repetitiveness of Russian Orthodox Church service music and Soviet official rituals.

¹¹ Mussorgsky's tune (pointed out to me by Professor Margarita Mazo in 2006) is a folk song *Gory, Gory Vorobyovskkiye* [Hills, Sparrow Hills]; nevertheless it is based on the *Obikhod* mode of old believers.

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many centuries. There are always three roads to choose from in Russian fairy tales. The Russian Orthodox *Molitvoslov* (*Book of Prayers*) teaches us to repeat the same text of the prayer either 3 or 7 times. You kiss your friends three times. You believe in the Trinity. You say «God loves number Three.» The same can be found much later in the superstitious numerology of Tchaikovsky's (and Pushkin's) *Queen of Spades*: three – seven – ace (one). Shostakovich takes this three-based pattern everywhere. His music may seem rhythmically monotonous, but this is something taken from a genetic well of old Pagan and Christian religious roots. Like in any ritual, complexity comes from simplicity. Like in a ritual, structure is often not important. Energy comes often out from a single, primitive, basic pattern which evolves by itself in an organic way, just like a genetic code. Shostakovich's music doesn't come from a religious context, however, it has inherited spiritual symbolism's meaning from the Mahler's influence and the influence of Mussorgsky idioms and the early twentieth-century, together with Mussorgsky idiom and the use of the «genetic well», of the *obikhod* mode. His «socialist realism» was in fact a new, ritualistically coloured, post-modernism. Paradoxically, Shostakovich, who wanted to make his language more realistic, managed to make it more ritualistic. Like Columbus, he discovered the new world and new recourses in a rather intuitive, involuntary act, while he was being pushed in an opposite direction through Galina Ustvolskaya's (1919-2006) official catalogue through the only twenty-four works. Her style has remained consistent throughout her career. The works from the 1940s sound almost exactly the same as her most recent ones in the 1990s. Her music does not fit easily into any traditional categories of Western music. Ustvolskaya said that her music is not religious, but spiritual. She used hidden monograms in her music, often presenting the word «Deus» and different spelling: In her 5th piano sonata it is spelled D flat. In the second presented by a fanatically repeated single tone D flat. In the composition No 1 for a group of instruments movement of her composition No 1 for a group of instruments is spelled like D – E – Es [E flat]. In Composition No 2 the word *tigo* (punishment) is spelled like G and A flat [As] and in Composition No 3 she repeats the tone F sharp (fis) 7 times, hinting at the *fistula* (in Latin «trumpet»), meaning the Seven trumpets of the Judgment.

Numerous examples of symbolism, numerology and irrationalities can be found in Alfred Schnittke's and Sofia Gubaidulina's

works. They are related to a well-known European tradition that is to the use of the number alphabet. Music text often needs to be deciphered in many of the works created by poets and composers of the 17th century. Thus, J.S. Bach often used his monogram BACH in relation to the number 14 (shown in either rhythmical values or in the bar numbers) as follows: B = 2, A = 1, C = 3, H = 8.

It has been suggested by Friedrich Smend (the editor of Bach's Complete works in the 1940s) that Bach used cabalistic technique in many of his compositions. The latest research by Ruth Tatlow, in her book *Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet*, does not corroborate this theory. She thinks that Bach wouldn't use cabalistic technique because of its assigned specific theological purposes.¹² «The possibility of Bach's use of magical number alphabets must be ruled out on the grounds of his reputation and character. Any active involvement in magic would have led to dismissal from his Leipzig post» (Tatlow 1991: 127). However, Bach definitely used the notes BACH for his monogram (in his last and unfinished work, *Die Kunst der Fuge*), and also could use various number alphabets to place hidden messages in his works.

Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998) became very interested in learning more about Bach and the cabala after Ulrich Siegele, a German musicologist (the mentor of Ruth Tatlow, and who also inspired her in writing the book mentioned above), showed him an example of Bach's hidden messages written in cabalistic technique. Numerology and the technique of enciphered names was something, which Schnittke used many times in his music. His Fourth Violin concerto, for example, is built upon the monogram of Gidon Kremer, and his Symphony No 3 is full of hidden German composer names and allusions on the styles of their compositions. Like Shostakovich, Schnittke also used the *obikhod* mode in many of his works (*Second String Quartet*, *Four Hymns*). His *Fourth Symphony* is a unique example in music history where hymns from all four religions – Judaic, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant – are brought together for reconciliation. One of the pages of his *Symphony No. 2*, «Missa Invisibilis», visually presents a gigantic cross.

¹² «Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century cabalistic gematria as an exegetical technique which employed the Hebrew or Greek millesian alphabet to gain a deeper persuading Jews that Jesus was the Messiah» (Tatlow 1991: 127).

Sofia Gubaidulina (born 1932) does the same in her *Violin Concerto «Offertorium»*, a piece based upon a theme from Bach's theme *Das Musikalisches Opfer* (Musical Offering). In many of her compositions we find a constant use of numerology. Gubaidulina herself says it is the basic principle of the structure of her works. Gubaidulina has often used the Fibonacci series as major structural element in her music since the 1980s. The proportion and rhythmical profile of her compositions are related to very different but clear structural ideas (golden mean, Fibonacci series, monograms). The piece for violin and piano *Dancer on the Tightrope* is built on certain proportions. «A tightrope dancer,» says Gubaidulina, is «a metaphor for opposition: life as risk, and art as flight into another existence» (Gubaidulina 2001). The length of the violin's phrases (counted in crochets) correspond to the Fibonacci series: 2 - 3 - 5 - 8 - 21 - 5 - 5 - 8. «The climax at the point of a golden mean is determined by the number 666 – "devilish number", a symbol of "fear". At the moment of a golden mean the fear is overcome» (Gubaidulina 2001).

In *Meditations on Bach Chorale* for harpsichord and string quintet (1993) Gubaidulina uses not a choral «Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit» (which isn't Bach's own composition), but his *Choralvorspiel* (Choral Prelude), BWV 668, based on the chorale melody and printed in the Bach Edition. It is believed that Bach dictated this Prelude to his son-in-law just few days before he died. Gubaidulina only borrows a melody of the chorale, as well as Bach's formal ideas and Bach's numeric proportions. Gubaidulina sees the numbers in Bach (and in her own music) as symbols, and as principles of natural proportions. So, the structure of both Bach's and Gubaidulina's pieces are determined by the Fibonacci series. On a symbolic level, both composers use same numbers for the beats:

14 = Bach
 23 = J. Bach
 32 = S. Bach
 37 = Jesus Christ
 41 = J.S. Bach
 = (32+41)
 88 = 14+2+37
 158 = Johann Sebastian Bach
 48 = Sofia

Vladimir Martynov (born in 1946) is even more radical. In his recently published book *End of Composers' Time* he accuses Giulio Caccini

of destroying traditional meaning in arts in his *Le nuove musiche* (1602). According to Martynov the new age started, not at the time of German classical philosophy, but much earlier, with Caccini's manifesto. From then on, music gradually fell into slavery in favor of literature and subjectivity. The ancient system of the seven arts always listed music alongside with geometry, arithmetics and astronomy, in the *quadrivium* group, while grammar, rhetoric and dialectic formed a smaller group of «trivium.» Caccini's ideas changed the very fundamentals of music's nature. Music was simply taken out of the «quadrivium» and put into the «trivium.» Instead of discussing the principles of cosmic and divine proportions, music degraded into a simple art of rhetoric and of representation. The period of «professional,» «authored» music, which started in the late 16th century in Florence, laid the foundation for at least four centuries of European music. It is time now, according to Martynov, to stop writing professional music. The time given to the composers has expired. The only exception made is for church service music. Otherwise music should return to the «quadrivium» (Martynov 2002: 202).

Russia has never created art for art's sake. The real content, the real tensions, are between words and sounds. In Dostoyevsky's novels, the heroes are ideas, not people. More precisely, people are represented as the bearers of ideas. And so, Russian art has always been in the «quadrivium.» According to Vassily Kandinsky's essay «On the Spiritual in Art», all abstracts, figures, and single colors were considered symbolic, spiritual entities.

The development of Russian music was more intense during harsh political pressure and social discomfort than it is nowadays that Russians have the freedom to travel, bargain, and sell. Fewer freedoms increased creativity, and, conversely, more freedom has diminished creativity. It has never flourished under the so-called total freedom. It has always been more productive in an atmosphere of social and political restriction. The long periods of social repression in Russian history have produced music of greater power and symbolic character, with hidden levels of meaning, requiring investigation and interpretation. Russian life and art is like an iceberg, much of it is hidden.

But the origins and roots of the «hidden» meanings and metaphoric language in culture are deeper and older than just a political resistance and dissidence in the non-liberty situation of a communist regime. Christian responsibility often created a similar

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context of non-liberty in the past. Christian art, from its very beginning, was never an art of freedom. And there is no art for the sake of art for a believer. With no political or social pressure, there is always a sense of a higher, hidden substance in symbolic art.

Russia inherited the spiritual traditions of early Christianity from the Byzantine Empire, which was The Second Rome. It is enough to compare mosaics in Ravenna, once a capital of Eastern Roman Empire and in Kiev, the old capital of *Rus* until Russia was united under Moscow. They are the same.¹³ Moscow was «The Third Rome.» History's line was clear and continuous.

And in the same way the spiritual mentality of the twentieth century is in a continuous line with Aristotle. As Aristotle stated, «a poet should prefer probable impossibilities to improbable possibilities... once the irrational has been introduced and an air of likelihood imparted to it, we must accept it in spite of the absurdity» (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 24). This acceptance of «absurdity» or irrationality is the key factor for the spiritual ideas of the generations to come. Admitting so called irrationalities based upon philosophical symbolism has been particularly important for twentieth-century art. Russian priest and philosopher, Pavel Florensky, develops Aristotle's statement: «The common sense cannot explain certain things, and the major spiritual foundations are far beyond any carnal (*plotskii*) pragmatism (*rassuditel'nost'*). And therefore they couldn't be invented by a human being; they are Divine» (Florensky 1914: 504 -505).

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¹³ It is also quite obvious on the mosaics in the St Clement's church in Rome.

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