THE IV CATALONIA INTERNATIONAL PRIZE

The panel of judges of the International Catalonia Prize, made up of the members of the Advisory Council of the Catalan Institute for Mediterranean Studies, meeting at the UNESCO offices in Paris on 6 February 1992, agreed by absolute majority to award the IV International Catalonia Prize to Mstislav Rostropovitx, for the following reasons:

First: For his exceptional artistic capacity, which makes him a creative musician of an irresistible communicative virtuality and a fullness of sound impregnated with power and nuance. As an integral cellist, Mstislav Rostropovitx identifies so closely with his instrument that he eliminates any sense of technical servitude and occupies a unique position amongst the great musicians of all time.

Second: For his vigorous defence of freedom, of human rights and of the democratization of his people, which have made him an emblematic figure with a profound humanist conception of mankind and society.

And third: The judges want to stress Mstislav Rostropovitx's link with Pau Casals, in which admiration, cordiality and correspondence come together on the personal and musical planes, as well as that of ethical awareness.

Catalònia offers the text of the speech made by Mstislav Rostropovitx on 26 May 1992, when he was awarded the prize by the President of the Generalitat de Catalunya, Jordi Pujol.
One of the first words I learnt to say when I was a child was Casals, Pau Casals. My father, who was a great musician, was a disciple of Casals, he worshipped him, and in the closed atmosphere which ruled by then in my distant country, so profound and passionate, we anxiously listened to Casals’s records, for we received this way the echoes of a great musical message which, like every true creation, also brought with it a call for freedom.

Today, my friends, I am in Barcelona, in Catalonia, for the presentation of the IV Premi Internacional Catalunya, and this is an excellent opportunity to tell you that each of my visits to Catalonia has been marked by my sincere admiration towards the genius of its people and, in first place, towards the immortal Pau Casals. I was one with this land even before I knew of its existence.

I thank, therefore, the Institut Català d’Estudis Mediterranis and its judges for awarding me the Premi Internacional Catalunya. For this reason and because I know that it has been granted by an open Catalan and Mediterranean generosity, which, in spite of the appearances and the distance, lies very close to what makes up the core of the Russian soul, faithful and cordial. A prize, this one, in which I have been preceded by the philosopher Karl R. Popper, the physicist Abdus Salam and the oceanographer Jacques-Yves Cousteau; I like to walk beside them, I like it very much. They are great creators.

And I would like to define what I understand by creation. Well, I firmly think that the first impulse of creation appears especially in a person who knows how to believe. To believe in any image of eternity or immortality—say, Christ, Buddha or simply the spirit of Man, which never dies with us.

I mention Christ because I cannot imagine the harmony of our life without a Creator. I personify it, then, in the figure of Christ, as so many other people tend to do: a whole civilization. Through him, I confine the undeniable force which constitutes the essence of the first Creator. And music, I am sure of it, is a gift from our Creator.

The more I immerse myself in music, the more certain I am that sound is a bridge between our real world—into which we all eventually pass—and a Godly world, a spiritual world. Perhaps an oblique proof of this is the existence of sound in all of the different temples and churches: I’ve heard the choirs in the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches, the organs in the Catholic and Protestant churches, the cantors in the Jewish temples and the drums in the Buddhist temples. Sometimes, in some rare cases in my imagination, together with the music rising out of the silence, I experience an emotional communication with my departed friends.

Therefore, the creator’s impulse is already in some people when they are born. People are all roughly equal, but they are born with their own differentiated spirit. Like the existence of the ants or the bees, which are classified by their different tasks in the community. God has done alike with people, although we often do not recognize it and we presume to be all the same. Some are born to create, some to consume, others to work, a new group to invent, every one according to the programme introduced into them when they are born.

Within the category of the creators there are people born to bring beauty to life. Beauty and culture, so that others can have a spiritual life; they raise their lives. It is a stimulus from God. Mozart, for instance, received it: he took from all that initial magma a wonderful opera, a symphony, and he gave it to the world. But nothing is given gratuitously. The stimulus, the talent, has to be educated and worked on. You have to work hard on it, putting all the energy possible into it. Because if the talent, the energy and the will go separately, the result is a mess, and you cannot arrive at a positive result. Man is also
his effort. This ought to be learnt by the young, to be understood and adopted by all mankind; let no one believe that wealth and freedom come by themselves, for they are the fruit of effort. In spite of everything, I think, no one should stop and think he has reached his goal and feel he is finally safe and can rest. As Lev Tolstoi said, we have to feel our way towards our objective, towards our ideal, as we pursue a lamp we ourselves carry. I have worked hard, I still do. When I was young I had more time for the work of preparation. Nowadays, although I give many more concerts, I devote even more time to preparing myself, basically at the expense of my sleeping hours. You always work under the same mystery, the same unknown: though you know how to begin, you hardly guess what will happen later. As I start interpreting in a concert a work by any composer, whether I am playing or conducting, it is as if I were starting to construct a building, and, to a large extent, everything depends on how you start. A little while later, I can already see the end of the work, towards which I am building a bridge, and at which I will arrive after all the clashes which may take place along the path. And in each concert it is different every time, yet with the same work. And you must work and educate yourself because God has given you that talent to pass on to others. It is here, then, that you may come up against an unlucky obstacle, one that prevents you from performing that work and giving it to your brothers. That is when they deprive you of your freedom. These are the dictators that oblige you to work but prevent you from being what you want to be. The worst thing about dictatorships is that they limit the expression of talent as they destroy freedom. But what is freedom?, many have wondered, and often with the object of destroying it. I shall tell you what it is: what the birds possess. A bird can settle on any branch of any tree. No one will tell him that tree is not his and he can only sing in that other tree. Freedom lies in each one finding his place among people and doing good. I shall try to illustrate all this with a story. A real story of which I am the actor and which began on the night of August 19th last year. That night I had learned of the putsch in Moscow, and was then in my Paris apartment. Watching and listening, while I was waiting for the broadcast of the press conference of the junta leading the coup, I was horrified. As I saw it, the cursed terror that had reigned in my country for over seventy years was returning.
the gusting wind aborted that plan. The junta could not have known that they had planned the overthrow for the Holy Feast of the Transfiguration. I am absolutely convinced that we were only saved through the intervention of Godly forces. When I left, at three o'clock in the morning, with the constant expectation of the attack, to walk among the volunteer defenders surrounding the building, I saw many, many people bearing symbols of their faith —using them as defence and salvation. In the silence of the night, broken by the sound of moving tank-treads, the aura of faith was almost palpable. That moment, and the salvation of all of us—and of the future of the country—came only from God. There are not words enough to cover the spectrum of emotion I felt during those three days. The three happiest days of my life. Days of unity of Faith with my people.

But I want to talk to you about your people, too, about Catalonia. About its creators, for a people expresses itself especially through its creative capacity. Catalonia, who gave the world Pau Casals. Casals had the magical virtue of communication with the audience through music. There exists the concept of technical purity, which is important as a way of reaching one's objective. But the objective must be the depth of ideas and emotions. Therein, indeed, lies the interpretation of music. And when this objective is reached, it is no longer very important how you went about it. That was Casals, he always reached his main objective.

Many others can join Casals in Catalonia. You have, we have Gaudi: you look at his fantasy and the beauty it creates, and you are impressed to learn that he worked like a miner, piece by piece. A huge task. Work and creation: it is essential that both things go together. And Dali, his orgy of fantasy. I feel happy that life has granted me the privilege of meeting him personally, the same as Pablo Picasso, who was educated in his young days in Catalonia. We must not forget Miró, either, who created according to the principle of Rodin, simply by removing from a stone what is useless...

I admire this Catalan people, compact and creative. And let me feel, thanks to the Premi Internacional Catalunya, one more of you.