From Pre- to Post-Soviet Russia: a Panorama of Representative Works for Violin and Piano

by

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Abstract

The full thesis for this degree consists of three components: one) a professionally produced recording of works for violin and piano from pre- to post-Soviet Russian composers; two) accompanying scholarly notes (c. 60 pages); and three) the recording of the live performance of the same works, given at Convocation Hall on Aug. 13, 2021. The first four works or sets of pieces (N. Rimsky-Korsakov/E. Zimbalist, Phantasy on "*Le coq d'or*"/*The Golden Cockerel*, 1907/21; R. Glière, *Romance* from "The Red Poppy", 1927; V. Hodyashev, Pieces-Pictures from "*The Magic Embroideress*", 1977; A. Machavariani, Pieces from "*Othello*", 1957/74) are arrangements from staged works; the fifth and last work (S. Gubaidulina, "*Der Seiltänzer*", 1993) was presented with a choreographic element (guest dancer). The scholarly notes offer varied, context-giving information, including each work's background or historical genesis, the underlying synopsis of each movement, stylistic features and musical characteristics (with musical examples), and some broader artistic and political context (e.g., social realism, regionalism, spirituality, Shakespeare in Russia, etc.). The discussion also focuses on the acts/notions of transcription, translation/interpretation, creative transformation, and multidisciplinary collaboration. Research contributions include the first-known archival research and recording of the Hodyashev pieces, and the second-known recording of the Machavariani pieces.

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Introduction

This program features a selection of rarely performed works for violin and piano by Russian and Soviet composers, most of them adapted from ballets. Written between 1905 and 1993, these works are representative examples of three periods of Russian history: first, the Pre-revolutionary Tsarist period ("*Le coq d'or*", 1907); second, the period of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) ("The Red Poppy", 1927; "*Magic Embroideress*", 1977; "*Othello*", 1974); and third, the period immediately following the dissolution of the USSR ("*Der Seiltänzer*", 1993). These selections will be here introduced in some detail (i.e., historical context, storylines, stylistic or technical features, etc.).

From a broader perspective, these works also point at the important acts of ***collaboration*** (e.g., between a composer and a transcriber or a performer; between artists and politicians; between performers, etc.), of ***transcription and translation*** (between instrumental idioms, between languages and concepts, but also between civilizations, epochs, gestures, and ideas), and of ***interpretation*** (including the views of the composers, their political and professional environment, and other norms or symbols). These various aspects inform the performances.

In terms of a research contribution, this recording and the accompanying notes add to several areas including:

- the area of music performance, as the recordings demonstrate a variety of advanced techniques and playing styles, and the product of a close collaboration with pianists;
- the area of string literature, by bringing attention to repertoire that have rarely or never been performed or recorded; of note, this thesis marks the first known archival research and recording of V. Hodyashev's Pieces-Pictures from "*The Magic Embroideress*", and the first known Canadian performance of A. Machavariani's Pieces from "Othello";

- to the fields of music history and musicology, by documenting and contextualizing these works, and linking them to broader lines of inquiry; and,

- to the area of multidisciplinary research in the arts (i.e., a danced component was added to the *Der Seiltänzer*).

These notes include supporting musical examples and historical photographs. Supplemental audio recordings are available through the University of Alberta Education & Research Archive (ERA) at https://era.library.ualberta.ca/search?search=viktoriia+grynenko. Special thanks are extended to N. Philipova, of the Chuvashian Central Library; to A. Akuratnov, who provided scanned scores from Russian libraries; and to Prof. T. Borisenko of the Kyiv Glière College, for access to scores and documents.

The Works

Rimsky-Korsakov/Zimbalist *Concert Phantasy on "Le coq d'or"* (1921)

The program opens with a work that is perhaps the most familiar to violinists, though often only by name. This transcription (titled *Concert Fantasy)* by violinist Efrem Zimbalist (1889-1985) reflects both his virtuoso training as a prominent pupil of Leopold Auer at the St-Petersburg's Conservatory and his personal relationship with the composer (as his composition student, and via the composer's son, a fellow violin student at the Conservatory). Zimbalist had seen the original score in draft form and was a likely witness to the intrigues that resulted in the censure of the work in Russia. He transcribed and published this Fantasy in 1921 in New York City (where he finally saw the opera performed) and recorded it in 1931 for Columbia Records (a performance demonstrating his extraordinary abilities). Zimbalist also wrote a *Carmen Fantasy*, among others, and would have been very familiar with similar works by Paganini, Ernst, Wieniawski, Sarasate, etc.[1] Concert fantasies on operatic themes were perfect vehicles for virtuosi touring concert halls and salons throughout the 19th and early part of the 20th century – often sharing recital programs with opera singers.

Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) set to work on *Le coq d'or* in 1906 after the first Russian Revolution of 1905, the focal point of which was the uprising of the working class – further worsened by Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. Students at the Saint-Petersburg Conservatory became involved in revolutionary activities and Rimsky-Korsakov's support for their cause became known. The satirical, revolutionary-themed opera was first performed

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[1] *Discography of American Historical Recordings*, s.v. "Columbia matrix 98733. Concert fantasy on Rimsky-Korsakov's "Le coq d'or," part 1 / Efrem Zimbalist."
https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/2000145316/98733-Concert_fantasy_on_Rimsky-Korsakovs_Le_coq_dor_part_1

posthumously under strict censorship in 1909. Its first uncensored production was given in Paris in 1914 as an opera-ballet produced by S. Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, in a choreography by M. Fokine.[2]

The storyline of the *Golden Cockerel* was adapted from Pushkin's fairy tale *Zolotoy Petushok (Golden Cockerel)*. Tzar Dodon, a lazy and entitled ruler, is given by the Astrologer a Golden Cockerel (coq d'or), a magical bird that can forewarn of military attacks on the Kingdom. A war with the neighboring Kingdom of Samakha ensues, in which the Queen of Samakha seduces Dodon in a bid to save her kingdom. Upon Dodon's return, the Astrologer requests payment for the Golden Cockerel, asking for the Queen of Samakha. Refusing to give up his new bride, Dodon kills the Astrologer, triggering the immediate revenge by the cockerel (i.e., Dodon is pecked to death). The Astrologer then re-appears to tell the audience that everything that just happened was an illusion, and that only he and the Shemakhan Queen were real.[3] (In Pushkin's version, the Astrologer cryptically states that everything was a lie).

As such, the ambiguous message was clear enough to contemporary audiences, starting with the red, French-inspired rooster as a symbol of revolution in Russia, representing the people's awakening and fight for their future.[4] Russian audiences would have also understood that the Queen of Samakha's seductive dance with the Russian Tzar Dodon (a clumsy dancer – and going against the royal norm) pointed at the disastrous diplomatic relationships with the Orient.[5] Fokine's vision for the Paris production made references to the traditional culture of

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[2] Michel Fokine, *Fokine: Memoirs of a Ballet Master*. [1st ed.]. Little, Brown, 1961, 476-477.

[3] Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, and Vladimir Ivanovich Bel'skiĭ, *The Golden Cockerel*. Metropolitan Opera House Grand Opera. Libretto. F. Rullman, 1945.

[4] Nadezhda Soboleva, *Ocherki Istorii Rossiyskoy Simvoliki : Ot Tamgi Do Simvolov Gosudarstvennogo Suvereniteta*. Moscow, Russian Federation: Institut rossiĭskoĭ istorii (Rossiĭskai͡a akademii͡a nauk), 2006, 217.

[5] Katherine Rabinovich Delaney, "Diaghilev's *Gesamtkunstwerk* as Represented in the Productions 'Le Coq d'or' (1914) and 'Renard' (1922)," April 10, 2008. https://search-ebscohost-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsndl&AN=edsndl.oai.union.ndltd.org.uvic.ca.oai.dspace.library.uvic.ca.1828.553&site=eds-live&scope=site, 47-48.

Russia– and this, only a few months after the infamous premiere of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps.* However, it did not seem to emphasize the contemporary political overtones of the work:

> In the dances, poses and groups, I tried to convey the style of the Russian lubok, and the fantastic Orient, both of which are so ingeniously interwoven in the music of Rimsky-Korsakov. Besides the Russian folk paintings, I found inspiration in carved toys, positions of figures on antique icons, the remains of wall paintings, and Old Russian embroidery. But most of all I listened to the suggestions in the music. From it, I extracted the puppethke, primitive kingdom of Dodon. From the curled chromatics, the snakelike music of Korsakov's East, I created a fantasy of subdued Oriental contortions. Parallel with the contrapuntal knitting of the orchestra, I wove on the stage the tender quivering and, at times, wavy and gliding grace of the Queen of Shemakha, with the angular movements of Dodon's peasants (Fokine 1961, 230).

Zimbalist's Fantasy opens with the cry of the Golden Cockerel, an exact quote from the overture, first outlining the F Major chord, followed by a modal expansion in F minor that resolves into c-diminished chord (Figure 1, blue brackets). He then merges the Queen's chromatic leitmotif in a quick descending sequence outlining the octatonic collection (see Figure. 1, red brackets).

Figure 1. Rimsky-Korsakov/Zimbalist *Le coq d'or*, opening, Golden Cockerel Theme, Shemakha Queen Theme, m. 1-6.

Next comes the Astrologer's leitmotif in artificial harmonics imitating the xylophone and harp. The juxtaposition of two major chords half a tone apart (Eb-E6, B-C6, etc.) create a fleeting impression of an augmented triad between them (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Rimsky-Korsakov/Zimbalist *Le coq d'or*, **Astrologer's Theme, 21-24.**

The Queen's chromatic leitmotif, which will return at different points of transition, also figures prominently in the celebrated "Hymn to the Sun", sung by the Queen (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Efrem Zimbalist *Le coq d'or, the aria "Hymn to the Sun", m. 33-36.*

The melody re-appears in a different key and is presented in different registers and textures (notably, using the mute). Zimbalist also uses double-stops to introduce the celli's countermelody.

The three above-mentioned characters (the Cockerel, the Astrologer, and the Queen) are musically connected through chromaticism and the octatonic scale, a favorite symmetrical collection used by Rimsky since 1867.[6] The octatonic collection creates an abundance of diminished and augmented chords, tritones, and encourages modal mixtures; it typically induces appealing – but disorienting – impressions. They are the magical beings who act as one force against Dodon, who is contrastingly associated with the tuneful, but comparatively simplistic, diatonic Russian melody (Figure 4). The contrast offers an opportunity for Zimbalist to add abundant technical intricacies for the violinist (e.g., rapid broken fingered octaves, chromatic double stops, ricochet, arpeggio runs, and double-stops in high positions).

Figure 4. Rimsky-Korsakov/Zimbalist *Le coq d'or*, octave passage on Russian melody, m. 113-114.

In his arrangement, Zimbalist creates rich and colorful textures by layering thematic elements that create cross-rhythms (e.g., 3 over 2) or cross- meters (e.g., 6/8 in violin and 3/4 in piano) (Figure 5).

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[6] Olga Bozina, "O Tonal'nykh Kharakteristikakh Opernykh Personazhey N.A. Rimskogo-Korsakova." *Muzsoderjanie*, n.d. http://www.muzsoderjanie.ru/component/content/article/6-nauchnie-publicacii/95-bozina-o-ton-har-opernih.html.

Figure 5. Rimsky-Korsakov/Zimbalist *Le coq d'or*, cross-rhythms and thematic superimposition, m. 136 and m. 144.

In one of Dodon's dances, Rimsky quotes from the nursery rhyme song "Chizhik Chizhik gde ti bil" ("Siskin, Siskin, where have you been?" (Figure 6, piano) while the violin carries an explosive ascending passage with elements of modal mixture and whole-tone scale. The audience musically witnesses Dodon losing himself – and his kingdom – in a dance, with chromatic elements starting to surface (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Efrem Zimbalist *Le coq d'or*, "Chizhik Chizhik gde ti bil", m. 28-31.

In many ways, the *Golden Cockerel* belongs to a family of popular, tuneful showpieces by Rimsky-Korsakov, such as the *Flight of the Bumblebee*, the programmatic *Scheherezade*, or the all-out *Russian Easter Overture*. Musicologist Richard Taruskin has argued that these works contributed to a perception that the composer is not to be taken too seriously by Western

audiences – though he is revered in Russia.[7] Many of Rimsky's theoretical/harmonic advances were outlined in his 1884-5 *Practical Manual of Harmony,* which is still studied today in Russia. While Rimsky's influence on Stravinsky – his most famous student – is obvious, Stravinsky apparently downplayed the impact that his mentor had on his own innovativeness (Taruskin 2016, 170-171).

Finally, the high virtuoso demands of this work and a lack of familiarity with the original opera may explain why it is not so often performed in North America and why the audience should likely be informed of the work's context, storyline, and musical motives.

On Transcriptions and Transcribing

If one of the performer's main creative tasks is to interpret the music, one should also remember that in the context of a transcription, the work has already been interpreted (i.e., transformed and edited) by one or many arrangers, including the composer. The Russian word for general *transcription* or *arrangement* is *perelozhenie*, which in turns translates back to English as "translation". *Perelozhenie* is interactive - between the author and translator (who are sometimes the same person)– and ultimately highlights the *translator*'s vision and preferences for the piece (see Zharkov 1994, Mironova 2013, Pilatyuk 2011, 2013). At their core, transcriptions and arrangements must preserve some degree of meaning; the prolific Russian violinist-arranger D. Tzyganov, stated that: "A good arranger will not allow the spirit of the piece to extinguish; in the process of arrangement, the imagery should become more vivid, bringing new nuances. Changes that are made arbitrarily, without necessity, are sacrilege. A

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[7] Richard Taruskin, Russian Music at Home and Abroad: New Essays, chapter 4. University of California Press, 2016, 169-185.

violinist could bring something new into the piece, but it should feel organic, and not alien and foreign."[8]

The violin literature has been enriched over the years by many transcriptions, often given as spectacular finales or as 'signature' encores in recitals featuring many vignettes. Important contributors included celebrated violinists, such as Joachim, Ysaÿe, Kreisler, Elman, Heifetz, and Oistrakh, who at times provided their own version of the same piece. Many lesser-known artists were also inspired to create such original content, at times influenced by their associations with contemporary composers. Arrangements may have been meant for a particular audience, or to re-introduce a well-known work 'in new clothes'. The genre also served as a vehicle for teaching and developing compositional skills.

To distinguish different types of transcriptions, one may start with a definition of "*arrangement*": a "reworking of a musical composition, usually for a different medium from that of the original."[9] Other sources (Cellier 1925, Schwager 1973, Raykoff 2002) specify that a "*technical arrangement*" is a "*transcription*", while the word "*paraphrase*" or "*fantasia*" refer to forms of *creative arrangement*.[10] Zharkov's dissertation "Music Arrangement: Problems and Solutions" further dwells on this division between technical and creative arrangements, with four types defined by the level of transformation involved.[11] The first type presents insignificant changes, such as reductions brought by necessity (e.g., piano reduction to accompany ballets or

[8] Denis Hahamov, "Iz Istorii Razvitiya Skripichnoy Traditsii", https://rucont.ru/efd/677628.

[9] Malcolm Boyd, "Arrangement." *Grove Music Online.* 2001. https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000001332.

[10] Ivan Raykoff 2002, "Transcription, Transgression, and the (pro)Creative Urge." *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 150–76.

[11] Zharkov Oleksandr, "Khudozhniy Pereklad v Muzytsi: Problemy i Rishennya." Dissertation, Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, 1994, 9-11.
Leonard B. Meyer 1994, Music, the Arts, and Ideas. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 197-198.

concertos), often prepared by the composer. The second type involves significant changes in instrumentation and timbre but keeps the overall structure true to the original (e.g., artistic arrangements that are not commanded by specific circumstances – for example, Tchaikovsky's three versions of his *Romeo and Juliet* or Ravel's version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*).

In the third type of arrangement, the original is treated as a theme developed by the arranger, with additions and structural changes (e.g., a virtuosic concert transcription, such as Wieniawski's *Faust Fantasy* or Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Giovanni*). In the fourth type of arrangement, the original work is absorbed into a new musical idiom, form, and/or character, as could be found in a modernist, poly-stylistic fantasy, or a paraphrase, such as Michael Finnisy's *Gershwin Arrangements*.

In this program, the work by Glière represents the first type of arrangement, where the *Romance* is a violin-piano reduction from the ballet. The transcriptions by Machavariani and Hodyashev are examples of the second type, realized by the composers themselves – selecting scenes from the ballet and creatively re-assigning the orchestra timbres. Zimbalist's *Le coq d'or*, is an example of the third type of arrangement: a virtuoso transcription in which the main themes of the opera are developed or transformed (for example, the clumsy characteristics of Tzar Dodon's themes are given added brilliance, while the Queen's theme creatively serves as a connecting tissue throughout).

As for Gubaidulina's *Dancer on a Tightrope*, it is an original piece, not a transcription or an arrangement. However, one could argue that the composer 'translates' an ambiguous basic storyline (the image of a tightrope dancer, or something more abstract involving tension and balance) in a 'new sonic system' characterized by codes and techniques. Further, this more

abstract piece opens the possibility of being 'transcribed' in the language of dance or other visual

representation (See Melançon, 2009).[12] This form of translation into new gestures and settings

suggests the creative/interpretative essence of the fourth type of transcription in Zharkov's

system.

However, one may ask about the notion of "taking liberties" and the ultimate purposes of

a transcription or a paraphrase. Ivan Raykoff's theorizes[13] on such questions, claiming that critics

often portray transcriptions as "distorted" or "perverted" music, or that arrangers themselves feel

uneasy about performing such pieces publicly or having them circulating in the public. Glenn

Gould, for example, would write: "I have the most hair-raising piano transcriptions of Strauss

poems that you'll ever hear. I play them privately" (Raykoff, 167). Raykoff adds that:

> [A paraphrase] is idiosyncratic and unpredictable: it is performative in that it enacts a
> self-conscious display of technique, style, and personality; improvisational in that it veers
> off unexpectedly from the original score with flights of fantasy; and discontinuous
> because the arranger steps into the accepted reproductive progression, displacing to a
> significant extent the original ancestral forebear. In short, the paraphrase is queerly and
> transgressively reproductive (Ibid.,161).

This notion of a paraphrase as "a musical drag" (Ibid., 162), an impersonation of 'the

original work' that disguises its identity through exaggerated technical feats distracting the

audience from the underlying storyline or tensions is not without evidence in the musical

literature. The *Golden Cockerel* is an interesting case in point in that this 'masking' or

'disguising' may be said to be already at work in the original characters. The audience is soon

introduced to the idea that the Queen, the Golden Cockerel and the Astrologer are perhaps not

what they are presented to be, and that the chromatic language of each character is indicative of

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[12] *Sofia Gubaidulina: Dancer on a Tightrope*. *YouTube*. YouTube, 2015.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxWLOozHcHQ.

[13] Raykoff, Ivan. "Transcription, Transgression, and the (pro)Creative Urge." In *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. 150-176.

duality or duplicity. In contrast, Dodon's diatonicism makes him a stock character, object of ridicule and manipulation. As it advances, the fairy tale turns into a manipulative plot with a darker – and deliberately ambiguous – revolutionary message. While plausible, it is not clear if Zimbalist considered these ideas in the process of transcription, perhaps deliberately toying with the original, revolutionary intentions of the opera and creating another 'masked' piece tailored for an uninformed bourgeois audience fascinated more by glittering virtuosity than by its original substance.

Glière *Romance* from the Ballet "*The Red Poppy*" (1927)

The Kyiv-born composer Reinhold Glière (1875-1956) saw his Soviet revolutionary ballet, "The Red Poppy", edited multiple times to reflect the Soviets' ongoing relationship with China. Written and premiered in 1927 for the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution, its initial idea came from Bolshoi Theatre painter Michael Kurylko, who had been inspired by the reporting of the detention of a Soviet ship delivering food to Soviet workers in China. With the knowledge that the Communist Party was at the time encouraging theatres to write the first ballets on a socialist topic, Kurilko approached ballerina Elena Geltser, who had toured in China, and recruited the Kiyv- and Moscow-trained Glière for the music. All were to convey an authentic Chinese colour to the work, and Glière set himself to study Chinese songs. As such, this project was departing from the classical romantic ballet traditions of Tchaikovsky, Minkus, or Adam, moving toward the socialist realism ideals that would become the official norm and rule after 1932. (Glière became the inaugural chair of the Music Section of the Stalin Prize Committee, which later awarded him with three first-class prizes).[14]

The original ballet was popular, though intensely criticized, resulting in a new version,[15] and two more versions (in 1949, to commemorate the Soviet-Chinese friendship, and in 1957, replacing 'poppy' by 'flower' to avoid the reference to opium). The ballet was presented across

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[14] Glière, 1995, *Red Poppy*: The Complete Ballet. CD liner notes. Naxos
https://www.naxos.com/mainsite/blurbs_reviews.asp?item_code=8.553496-
97&catNum=553496&filetype=About+this+Recording&language=English.
[15] To cater to the needs of the government and critics, ballet obtained numerous and not always matching music qualities.

the Soviet Union, China, Europe and the USA,[16] and was recently staged (in 2010) by two

theatres: the Russian Krasnoyarsk and Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.

In *The Red Poppy*, dancer Tao-Hoa falls in love with the captain of a Soviet cargo ship,

to whom she gives a red poppy. Her fiancé, Li-Shan-Fu, becomes jealous and plots to kill the

captain by having her give him poisoned tea. At first, she agrees but then later refuses and even

saves the life of the captain during a workers' uprising. Shot by Li-Shan-Fu, Tao-Hoa hands a

red poppy to a little Chinese girl as she dies - a sign of love and freedom.

Figure 7. A scene from *The Red Poppy, 1927* [17]

Similarly, to *Le coq d'or*, the ballet 'The Red Poppy' presents four broad, and sometimes

jarringly contrasting, thematic styles: Chinese pentatonicism, Soviet communist marches and

dances, the more "bourgeois" or Western dances such as Foxtrot, Charleston, and Waltz-Boston,

and music in the Tchaikovskian tradition (Kiselyova 2016). The *Romance*, in the latter style, is

[16] Natalia Kiselyova, "Balety R.M. Gliera v Istoriko-Kul'turnom Kontekste"
https://dlib.rsl.ru/viewer/01006650296#?page=2, 2016.
[17] "Photo." Photo "Ballet "Red Poppy". "Rossijskie profsoyuzi – kitaiskim rabochim"", 1 janvarya 1948 - 1 janvarya 1957, Moscow – Istoriya Rossii v fotografiyah. Accessed July 14, 2021. https://russiainphoto.ru/photos/18998/.

heard in the Second Act and features a dream-sequence in an opium den. The accompanied violin solo supports a love scene between Tao-Hoa and the Captain, where she dreams of a Golden Buddha, an ancient goddess, butterflies, birds and flowers. The piece has nothing to do with the propagandist features of the ballet and, as a *romance sans parole* (with formal sections: A|B|A'|C), is dominated by the initial main theme (first 8 bars, elements of which re-appear time and again) (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Reinhold Glière *Romance* from *The Red Poppy*, m. 1-8.

The closing material of the *Romance* serves as a background to Tao-Hoa waking up from her opium dream. In a typical Russian manner, Glière introduces syncopations, superimposes 3 over 4, modulates, develops long-ranging phrases supported with large chords in the piano, and

draws on octaves for the violin at the high points. A small cadenza inserted in the B section adds to the expressive effect. Not surprisingly, the *Romance* was a favorite recital piece during Soviet times (e.g., recorded by D. Oistrakh, A. Gorokhov, and L. Kogan, among others). However, perhaps losing a sense of the ballet's storyline, performances gradually projected a more reserved, "Soviet" manner that contrasts with other famous violin solos, such as those in in as *Swan Lake*, *Raymonda*, or *Giselle*.

ON SOVIET SOCIAL REALISM

On that note, **Soviet social realism** aimed to create 'accessible' art that glorifies the working class and the communist ideology. To serve that aim, the government funded music and art schools in every city and encouraged every republic and nation of the USSR to create art with folk elements – in some cases with minimal regard for the accuracy of such elements. Visually, social realism was strongly connected to the prominent 19th-century tradition of Realist Art in Russia (from which originated the "*peredvizhniki*" style associated with a group of painters who traveled Russia to exalt Russian sceneries and traditions).[18] The tropes of social realism included: the idealized life of farmers, the hard work for the greater good of the union, and the glorification of communism. In this view, the 'mimetic' art forms -literature, fine art, sculpture, and theatre - were best positioned to serve these tropes, while architecture and music gained from merging with these artforms.

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[18] *Realizm v Russkom Iskusstve. Iskusstvo i Pravda*, 2020. https://media.rusmuseum.ru/blog/ob-iskusstve/realizm-v-russkom-iskusstve-iskusstvo-i-pravda/

Denis Popov argues that social realism was not a style or method, but rather an ideology imposed on art.[19] Social realism in music was initially expressed through the vocal genres, setting the socialist texts with varying levels of directness.[20] For example, Alexander Davidenko (1899-1934) used the genre of declamatory 'propaganda placard' ("About Lenin", 1925) for unaccompanied soloists. Conveying socialist messages was also possible in instrumental genres, incorporating revolutionary melodies and themes or evoking socialist images through programs and catchy titles such as "*Pioneers in the Park*", "*Citizen's Oratorio*" (Ibid., 109-112). Music propaganda had its own specialists, such as M. Koval, A. Kastalskii, D. Vasilev-Buglai; other composers (and among them Prokofiev, Shostakovich, or Khachaturian) continued their creative activities while trying to stay at a safe distance from the authorities. While the personal tastes of high-ranking party members could influence the style in which music was written (e.g., often opting for melodious diatonicism and simple forms at the expense of a more adventurous language), composers were not prevented from pushing boundaries and employing avant-garde techniques, so long as they could justify such decisions within the ideology.

Another important dimension in a discussion of Social Realism in the Arts was that of national identity. On one hand, the bolshevism that Lenin and Stalin promoted relied on a notion of 'internationalism' worldwide: working classes realized their common oppression and overcame differences of nationality or ethnicity in their efforts to overthrow capitalism and the bourgeois elites.[21] On the other hand, communist leaders also understood that identity and nationalism were unavoidable realities that a developing sense of international socialism could

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[19] Denis Popov 2013, "Socialist Realism: Method, Style, Ideology?" *Manuscript* 12, 162–66.

[20] Neil Edmunds 2004, "'Lenin Is Always with Us': Soviet Musical Propaganda and Its Composers during the 1920s." In *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin: The Baton and Sickle*, 105–22. (London: Routledge Curzon), 109.

[21] Ronald Grigor Sunny 2011, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*. 2nd ed (Oxford University Press, 248-250

perhaps only tame and control.[22] The Soviet Union of 15 republics required each republic to recognize its languages, to build its institutions, and train its elites for assuming power (and this included adopting policies for national cultures through theatre, ballet, films, literature, folk ensembles, etc.).[23] The 1932 policy confirmed that regional art had to adopt national forms and be social in content.[24] Artists who were often not native to the land and did not know the folklore intimately were still incentivized to create on such subjects, resulting in final products that could be seen lacking in authenticity and creativity, or that mostly looked to the past. The controversial 'Russification' policy[25] created further lopsided effects in artistic production (Martin 2001, 461).

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[22] Terry Martin 2001, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. The Wilder House Series in Politics, History, and Culture (Cornell University Press), 2001, 3.

[23] My paper "Rachenitsa: Violin and Dance Project" explores the subject of government funded folk dance ensembles.

[24] Philipp Herzog 2010, "'National in Form and Socialist in Context' or Rather 'Socialist in Form and National in Content?": the 'Amateur Art System' and the Cultivation of 'Folk Art' in Soviet Estonia." *Nar. umjet*, no. 47/1, 115–40.

Machavariani *Pieces from the Ballet "Othello" for Violin and Piano (1974)*

The ballet *Othello* (1957) by Aleksi Machavariani (1913-1995) sets Shakespeare's famous play into a Georgian context (for reference, the republic of Georgia, located east of the Black Sea, is a neighbor to Armenia, Azerbaidjan, and Turkey). Machavariani was a successful Soviet Georgian composer: he was the laureate of numerous awards and prizes, including the 1974 Golden Medal of "Centro Cultural Braidense – Milano" for his *Othello.*[26] A graduate of the Tbilisi Conservatory, he became one of its faculty members at the recommendation of D. Shostakovich and T. Hrennikov. He wrote 4 ballets, 3 operas, 7 symphonies, and a highly regarded violin concerto, which was performed by D. Oistrakh, M. Vaiman and other established violinists. His musical style evolved dramatically during his career, from the more conventional Soviet pieces to his more abstract large-scale one-movement symphonic works based on a technique of thematic transformation (Ibid.). His music characteristically sounds 'Georgian' whether he explores topics related to his Georgian heritage or not. This style typically features 'exotic' characteristics such as a singing-lamenting melodies, syncopations, dissonances, traditional modes, and recognizable folk-dance rhythms.[27] Reflecting on Machavariani's *Othello* (the main character is also known as 'the Venetian Moor'), L. Polyakova argues that other Russian composers similarly struggled to capture musically the 'sound' of other cultures, citing the cases of Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky.

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[26] Alexi Matchavariani - The Official Web Site. Accessed June 16, 2021. http://www.matchavariani.ge/alexi/bio.html.
[27] Polyakova, L. "Balet o Venetsianskom Mavre." *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, n.d.

SHAKESPEARE IN THE USSR

The Soviet interest for Shakespeare can be retraced to the October Revolution (1917), when educating workers and exposing them to art was regarded as a priority. While newer works were not always deemed suitable for staging, the idea of adapting older works took hold. The famous theatre director Sergei Radlov (1892-1958), echoing German socialist Franz Mehring (1846-1919), wrote: "Shakespeare found support with aristocratic – but nonetheless strong and valiant – youths, who during that time of greatest progress, when broad horizons were opening, were the vanguard faction of the great people."[28] "The greatest progress" here refers to Shakespeare being a contemporary to the sixteenth century English Reformation, regarded as an example and predecessor for the October Revolution. Shakespeare in that view, was "the singer of the rising class of his time" and, according to Radlov, "the greatest realist" and the "true friend and mentor, teacher and comrade" to the developing Soviet theatre (Ibid., 8).

Staging Shakespeare and interpreting Shakespeare facilitated the Soviet agenda of internationalism and the homogenization of art across the republics. It was also used as a point of pride in the ongoing relation with the West. For the Soviet Shakespearean scholar, A. Anikst (1910-1988) "In England and the United States, we see a systematic, decadent perversion of Shakespeare's great legacy…this dirty work has one goal: depriving the nations of the great democratic and realist art traditions."[29] Shakespeare was a tool in guiding audiences towards grasping the cultural significance of socialist realism and shaping optimistic and hopeful Soviet subjects. For example, *Romeo and Juliet* was regarded as an 'optimistic' tragedy where the focus was the detachment - death as sacrifice - from feudal families and aspiring towards a socialist

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[28] Bishop, Joubin, Khomenko. 2021. *The Shakespearean international yearbook 18,* 4.

future.[30] Elements of the plays in the USSR would therefore be under- or over-emphasized to reach the Party's social realist objectives (Bishop, Joubin, Khomenko 2021, 9-11).

Shakespeare's plays remained favorite canvases for Russian composers (with *Othello, Hamlet, The Taming of the Shrew, King Lear, Richard III* leading the list) and most theatres in all the USSR republics staged Shakespeare. For example, Shostakovich wrote music for 3 different versions of Hamlet, for King Lear, and created his *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*; Prokofiev wrote for *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*; Khachaturian provided for a film version of *Othello*, two stage productions of *King Lear*, and for *Macbeth*.

The resounding success of Machavariani's *Othello* after its November 1957 premiere in Tbilisi led to tours across the USSR, Europe, and the United States. The role of Othello was danced by the ballet's choreographer, V. Chabukiani. Even Shostakovich showed his pleasure and reviewed: "The music is talented and beautifully orchestrated."[31] The Georgian violinist Shota Shanidze (dates unavailable) is listed as the editor of the composer's own transcription for violin and piano (1974); the notation however leaves several challenging and sometimes puzzling passages.

In *Othello*, Machavariani pursued a Prokofiev-style psychological drama through dance that required an increased role for the orchestra. Leitmotifs[32] representing ideas such as love, conflict, and people's celebration undergo thematic transformations that reflect the emotional tensions of the moment.[33] For example, Desdemona's Theme transforms as Othello's perception

[30] Natalia Khomenko 2020, "Feeling Love in Soviet Russia." *The Shakespearean International Yearbook*, 92.
[31] Vakhtang Matchavariani - The Official Web Site. Accessed June 16, 2021. http://www.matchavariani.ge/alexi/compositions.html.
[32] Aleksej Nikolaevič Ermolaev 1978, "Dancing in Prokofiev's Ballets." In *Sergei Prokofiev: Materials, Articles, Interviews*,(Moskva: Progress), 250-251.
[33] Polyakova, L. "Balet o Venetsianskom Mavre." *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, n.d

of her changes from gentle at the beginning of the ballet, to suspicious and aggressive at the end (Figure 9).

Figure 9. From the Ballet *Othello* – V. Chabukiani, Desdemona – V. Zignadze, 1958 (Ibid.)

Machavariani's version of *Othello* focuses on the love story and shrinks the tragic drama, – compressing the original three acts into two and filling the musical space with romantic themes. Through the technique of "naplyv stsen" ('fragmenting of scenes') (Ibid.), scenes are often left unfinished, triggering memories as another scene takes over (e.g., the second movement, "Tale", has 3 different character themes that cut each other's ending).

Of the six movements in the violin-piano transcription, two are love scenes and the other four come from crowd scenes. The love themes are characteristically more Western and Prokofiev-like in style, while Othello's conflicts or the festive dance scenes are given in full Georgian colors, with some attempts at suggesting the Moorish/Spanish elements.

The first movement, "Revels", employs accented weak beats, dissonances, and clusters. The main theme is unique in its written-out measured trills and large dissonant grace-note intervals (probably descriptive of drunk revelers) (Figure 10). The middle section, Georgian in

sound, outlines a tritone and an angular accentuated rhythm. Left hand pizzicato and

juxtaposition of arco and pizzicato are common techniques in the suite.

Figure 10. Alexi Machavariani, *Othello*, "Revels", m. 4-5.

The second movement, "Tale", relates the love between Othello and Desdemona. The

harmonic language is tonal and reminiscent of Prokofiev with octave jumps, unexpected

modulations, dissonances, and long melodies (centered on CM7 with a recurring added F#).

The third movement, "Dance of the Three Girls" (Figure 11), is from the "Renaissance"

group of elegant pieces, associated with government activity in the plot. In this scene,

Desdemona and girls are embroidering. The middle section *piu mosso*, just like in the "Revels",

is Georgian in style, with off-beat accents, outlining perfect fourths (Figure 11a).

Figure 11. Alexi Machavariani, *Othello*, "Dance of the Three Girls", Main Theme, m. 25-27.

Figure 11 a. Alexi Machavariani, *Othello*, "Dance of the Three Girls", *piu mosso, m. 40-41.*

The fourth movement "Elegiac Dance" is gently lyrical. Desdemona shows off Othello's gift, a shawl, that will eventually bring to her death. Prokofiev's influence is also perceptible in this movement: quick waltz character, featuring the dramatic transformation of Desdemona's Theme. From carefree, the theme becomes dark and sinister, in the image of Othello's jealousy. G minor against F-sharp signals the imminent tragedy. The returning waltz leaves a minor second unresolved.
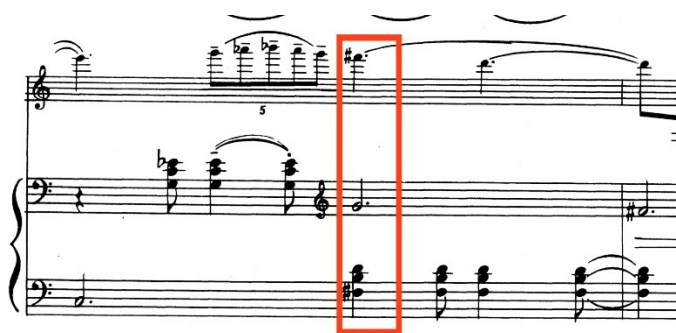
Figure 12. Alexi Machavariani, *Othello*, "Elegiac Dance", m. 28-29.

The fifth movement, "Dancing Cyprus", is a group dance scene celebrating Venice's victory over the Turkish aggressor. Othello, a member of the Venetian Senate, offers wine to the citizens assembled in the streets. The energetic - and impossibly fast - violin part presents a variety of virtuosic techniques (jumps, high register, quick double- stops, and harmonics),

creating a wild, out-of-control character for the movement. The B section in chromatic spiccato

climbs higher and higher while the C section on the G string mostly is played with repeated

down bows. The "influx of scenes" technique is applied here too, and the movement finishes

unexpectedly - a brief recall of elements from the B section. At the beginning, parallel intervals

and cluster-like chords are on display, common in Georgian music[34] (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Alexi Machavariani, *Othello*, "Dancing Cyprus", m. 1-4.

The last movement, "Dance of the Moorish Girls", would normally appear in the middle

of the previous movement, "Dancing Cyprus". The Moorish girls remind Othello of his

homeland, with Arabic or Spanish elements such as syncopated rhythms, augmented seconds,

and a 5/4 meter (arguably, more typical of the Georgian dances *Horumi* and *Sachidao*, with

emphasis on the second eight of the 4th beat).[35] The middle section is loosely based on the

violin's lament, with more elaborate melismas (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Alexi Machavariani, *Othello*, "Dance of Moorish Girls", m. 5-6.

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[34] Gabisonia, Tamaz 2014, " Kriterii 'Autentichnosti' v Gruzinskom Narodnom Muzykal'nom Ispolnitel'stve." *Muzikologija*, no. 17, 21–44.
[35] Culukidze, A. "Zametki o Gruzinskoy Muzyke." *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, n.d.

Hodyashev, *Pieces-Pictures from the Ballet "The Magic Embroideress"* (1977)

This series of transcriptions has apparently been performed only once and was never recorded. A well-written group of pieces with interesting violinistic challenges, it may only require some more context for it to become appreciated and more widely performed. The following information was compiled from different sources (newspaper reviews, short articles, and unpublished libretto) provided by the Central Chuvashian Library.

Viktor Hodyashev (1918-2000) was raised in the small Chuvashia Republic located about 600 kms east of Moscow. Predominantly Turkic in ethnicity,[36] Chuvashia's art and history was influenced by both Islam and Christianity.[37] Hodyashev trained as a musician in Chuvashia and Moscow, gradually becoming recognized as Chuvashia's leading composer. He taught violin and composition, became head of theory and musicology at the Chuvashia Music College, then worked as a concertmaster and conductor for the Academic Drama Theatre and Philharmonic Orchestra, and, finally, as composer in residence He wrote music for more than 50 plays, some of them his own.[38] In addition, Hodyashev wrote chamber music, choir works, song cycles on Chuvashian texts, and a still-popular Violin Concerto dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution (performed by accomplished Soviet musicians such as E. Grach, I. Zhuk, and E. Altman) (Ibid., 352-354). Hodyashev's style aligned well with the government's agenda for social realism: his harmonic language is mostly diatonic, and he frequently used Chuvashian folklore elements and pentatonic modes.

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[36] Their ethnic makeup is similar to Tatars, Turks, and Mongols.
[37] Ivanov, Matveev, Egorov 1995, *Kul'tura Chuvashskog Kraya. Chast' I: Uchebno Posobiye*. Cheboksary: Chuvashia Knizhnoe Izdatelstvo, 15-21.
[38] S. Makarova 2009, "Viktor Aleksandrovich Hodyashev." *Mastera muzykal'nogo iskusstva : [ocherki]*, 350–351.

The Magic Embroideress ballet, premiered in 1979 shortly after the opening of the new Chuvashian Theater, is regarded as a high point in the composer's production (Ibid., 355). Composed in 1972, on a libretto by Maria Uhsai (a Chuvashian author of children plays) it was, the composer wrote, "[…] especially dear to me, as I wanted to tell about the soul, about the Chuvashian people, about their thoughts imprinted in fine embroidery, about the fight of good and evil, and about the triumph of love" (Ibid.). Hodyashev's own student, musicologist O. Makarova, confirmed that Hodyashev frequently used such binary opposites in his works (Ibid.). Stanislav Koshkin closely executed Hodyashev's vision for the stage backdrop and costumes (Figure 15, 16, 17, 18).

The violin arrangement (1977, completed before the premiere), titled "Pieces-Pictures from the Ballet *The Magic Embroideress*", was realized by the composer and edited by the renowned Russian violinist Eduard Grach. The premiere (undated, no location provided) was given by violinist Georgy Stepanov and pianist Olga Gordeeva in Chuvashia.

The reviews of the ballet *The Magic Embroideress* were mostly unified, praising the creative and folkloric music of Hodyashev. However, some were less enthusiastic about the dance portion of the ballet, choreographed by Alexei Andreev.[39] Music critic Mikhail Kondratyev stated that, while he approved of the syncretic idea of combining classical ballet and folk-dance elements, these two components were not combined organically, and rather looked forced together. Multiple sources enthusiastically compared the dance movements to a form of embroidery by the bodies and the feet.[40] Yet, not all was considered perfect in capturing details of traditional embroidery and authentic storylines. The composer himself was disappointed at the

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[39] Shihareva, Z. "Vstretimsya s «Chudesnoy Vyshival'shchitsey»." *Sovetskaya Chuvashiya*, 1979.
[40] Kondratiev, V. "Vstrecha s Novym Baletom." *Sovetskaya Chuvashiya*, 1979.

production and at the reception of the ballet and hoped for a new staging, which he did not live to

see.

The imaginative storyline is unique: the embroideress Elpige has a special talent: her

embroidery comes alive. An evil witch, Moolabi, kidnapps Elpige and forces her to embroider a

scene of war to bring it upon the people. To defeat the witch, it falls upon Elpige's sweetheart,

Yuman, together with a Sage, to fly to the Moon and find the shiny witch-crushing moonstone.

On the moon, they meet princess Ursula, who also falls in love with Yuman. However, Yuman

manages to retrieve the moonstone by fighting the Moon inhabitants, including the American-

styled Rock-and-Roll-loving *stilyagi*.[41] He returns to find Elpige, who was about to be burnt at

Moolabi's castle. The moonstone magically forces Moolabi and her servants away, a cause for

grand festivities.[42]

The Magic Embroideress fits social realism and regionalism with identifiable tropes of

craft (embroidery), glorified working class - and the added condemnation of American culture.

«Чудесная вышивальщица»
(Оперăпа балет театрĕ, 1980 ç., Шупашкар)

Figure 15. One of the backdrops by Stanislav Koshkin for *The Magic Embroideress*, 1980 (Kondratiev 1979)

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[41] Cultural movement in 60s Russia, which followed American culture and fashion in particular.
[42] From unpublished libretto by Maria Ukhsai, provided by the Central Chuvashian Library.

Figure 16. Traditional Chuvashian embroidery (Kondratiev 1979)

Figure 17. Elpige (Galina Vasilieva) and Yuman (A. Fyodorov); traditional folk costumes are visible in the picture, 1979 (Kondratiev 1979)

Figure 18. Elpige (L. Ivanovskaya) and Yuman (V. Korolkov); traditional folk costumes and backdrops are visible in this picture, 1979 (Kondratiev 1979)

The first movement, "Three Portraits: Elpige, Ursula and Yuman", introduces Elpige's mostly pentatonic theme with ample use of ornamentation (presumably, a representation of embroidery). This theme will return in various forms in other movements (Figure 19). The opening gesture is reminiscent of Rimsky-Korsakov *Scheherazade*'s theme and strongly associates Elpige's character with the solo violin sonority. The manner of playing the passage would again suggest embroidering. In contrast, Ursula's theme - associated in the score with the oboe, is anxious and urgent (*andante mesto e recitando con affetuoso*). Yuman's march-like theme, with a driving double-dotted rhythm, is given to the trumpet (or piano, in the transcription) and conveys Yuman's haste in rescuing his fiancée. The theme of the Elpige re-appears in the middle of the movement to perhaps remind Yuman of his purpose and the closing section merges the themes of Elpige and Yuman.

**Figure 19. Viktor Hodyashev, *The Magic Embroideress*,"Three Portraits: Elpige, Ursula and Yuman",
Elpige's portrait, m. 7-10.**

The second movement, "Scene of Elpige and Yuman", is a love scene, with the outer
sections based on Elpige's portrait-theme, with some greater rhythmic freedom. The short middle
section is loosely based on Yuman's portrait, with a march-like character and ornamentation.
The violin arrangement includes upbow staccato and passages in a high register.

Oddly, the third movement, "Bees', does not refer to a scene in the storyline. One may
assume that this could be from the Moon scene or from Moorabi's castle, perhaps one of the
obstacles that Yuman must overcome to rescue his beloved. This swirling, chromatic movement
(not pentatonic, like the Chuvashian characters) is again reminiscent of Rimsky-Korsakov
("Flight of the Bumblebee", from the *Tale of Tsar Saltan*), in a register where the violin seems to
'embroider' while the piano carries the melody (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Viktor Hodyashev, *The Magic Embroideress*, "Bees", m.1-2.

The fourth movement, "Lullaby", and the fifth movement, "Dance with Colourful Threads", correspond to two linked scenes taken from the end of the First Act in the ballet, played without interruption. In this sequence, the Witch Moolabi hopes to steal Elpige's embroideries by first making her fall asleep (lullaby, based on Elpige's theme). The development of Lullaby is less pentatonic and suggests the evil influence of Moolabi (augmented chords created by neighbour motion in the accompaniment points that something may not be right/safe) (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Viktor Hodyashev, *The Magic Embroideress*, augmented chords in piano from "Lullaby", m.1-2.

That melody develops, and dramatically doubles in octaves. A short middle section uncovers the evil character of the witch, with fast spiccato in double-stops, doubled by the piano. Fortunately, the Sage interrupts the spell and warns Yuman that he must protect Elpige from the Witch. The scene ends with a symbolic dance with the colourful threads of Elpige, Yuman, and other embroideresses girls, celebrating a "beautiful, bright, and useful life."[43] This cheerful and dance-like finale is challenging for both instruments. The repetitive knocking of the pianist' right-hand finger (with thimble) on the piano effectively creates an evocative and characteristic

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[43] From unpublished libretto by Maria Ukhsai.

sound for the first part of this movement (Figure 22). The violin's double-stops alternate syncopations and hemiola patterns against the piano again suggest 'Chuvashian' music.

Figure 22. Viktor Hodyashev, *The Magic Embroideress*, Finale; thimble part in piano and "Chuvashian" rhythms in both parts, m.15-17.

This compact 14-minute suite based on a children tale shows Hodyashev's preference for creating portraits of the different characters rather than recreating whole scenes. Perhaps limited by the expectations of the genre, it remains an oddly old-fashioned work for its time, harking back to Rimsky-Korsakov, and ignoring some of the innovations of Prokofiev. To perform the transcriptions without some staging element (in a school setting, for example), and without first introducing the characters, would probably leave too much to the imagination. From a violinistic point of view, the Ysaÿe-like technical challenges in the violin part surpass a threshold that most violinists would be willing to commit to (e.g., "Bees" is chromatic in a very high register, "Lullaby" has a large section in double-stops and fingered octaves in the pentatonic mode, and the finale is played almost exclusively in uncomfortable and unusual double-stops). Hopefully, this recording will spur new interest and further research on this neglected, yet charming, ballet; individual movements may interest concert violinists looking for unique encores.

Gubaidulina *Der Seiltänzer* (1993)

The last work on the program, by the Tatar-Russian composer, Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931), contrasts with all the other works on this recording and provides some overarching perspective. Originally written for violin and piano, *Der Seilänzer* could not be transcribed to any other instrumental combination. It is a powerful example of this composers' contemporary idiom and aesthetics. Its interpretation remains more open-ended, though will benefit, just like the others, from some context and discussion.

A 'cosmopolitan'[44] composer, Sofia Gubaidulina was born in Tatarstan (the eastern neighbor of Chuvashia) to a Muslim Tatar father and an Orthodox Russian mother). She has often pointed in interviews to the connection of East and West in her upbringing and how she sees herself as a bridge between the two (Ibid.). Gubaidulina spent forty years of her adult life in Moscow, where her avant-garde writing, influenced by the music of Cage, Ives, Cowell, and others, was by and large mostly ignored in the USSR.[45] International success came in the 1980s, notably from the performance of *Offertorium*, a concerto for the violinist Gidon Kremer. She has lived in Hamburg, Germany since 1992.

Musicologists have so far discussed three main stylistic periods in her oeuvre, each with a specific focus: 1950-1970 - instrumental timbres, 1970-1995 - numbers and rhythm, 1995-present – microtones (Ibid., 2-5). Her music, often concerned with Orthodox Christianity, is guided by the idea that "there is no other reason for composing music than spiritual renewal."[46]

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[44] Istochnik publikatsii Russkoye Pole. "Sofiya Gubaydulina: 'Nel'zya Vklyuchat'sya v Nenavist'..." Muzykal'noye obozreniye, September 5, 2016. https://muzobozrenie.ru/sofiya-gubajdulina-nel-zya-vklyuchat-sya-v-nenavist/.

[45] Alexandra Birch 2017, "Balancing Mathematics and Virtuosity: a Performer's Guide to Sofia Gubaidulina's 'Dancer on a Tightrope,'" Dissertation, 14-17.

[46] Robert Everett-Green, "Making the Sign of the Cross." The Globe and Mail, November 23, 2006. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/making-the-sign-of-the-cross/article20417188/.

By design, it seems that *Dancer on a Tightrope* (*Der Seiltänzer*), written in 1993 - only a few years after the official demise of the USSR, sets to leave unanswered the many questions that performers and listeners may be contemplating during its performance. Its exact meaning, symbolism, and compositional process, seems deliberately left as ambiguous, meant to be re-experienced anew each time, with an open mind and imagination. The English translation itself is ambiguous, as the German word 'seiltänzer' could have also invited the metaphoric meaning of 'Balancing Act' (Figure 23).
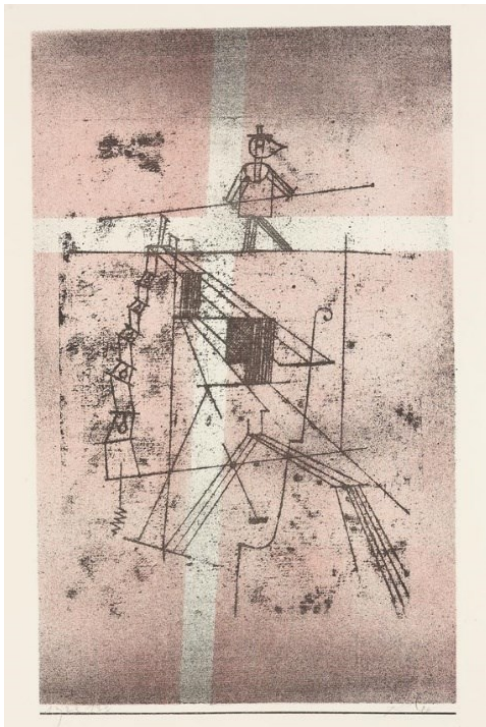

Figure 23. Paul Klee *Seiltänzer (1923).[47] Klee is another artist who turned to this topic, in a lecture from 1921 said: "The tightrope walker with his pole (is a) symbol of the balance of forces. He holds the forces of gravity in balance (weight and counterweight). He is a pair of scales." The bottom lines resemble music staff, perhaps a reference to Klee's deep connection to music.*

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[47] Klee, Paul. "Seiltänzer [Tightrope Walker]." National Galleries of Scotland. National Galleries of Scotland. Accessed July 15, 2021. https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/16186/seilt%C3%A4nzer-tightrope-walker.

Der Seiltänzer is representative of Gubaidulina's main compositional interests during that period – i.e., instrumental timbre and rhythm.[48] In the first section, the violinist performs various thrown 'ricochet' strokes on the taut open A string - upbow, downbow, speeding up, slowing down, and then on the natural harmonics' series on one string, on double harmonics, and col legno battuto (Figure 24, 25).

Figure 24. Sofia Gubaidulina, *Der Seiltänzer*, speeding and harmonics ricochet, m.11-12.
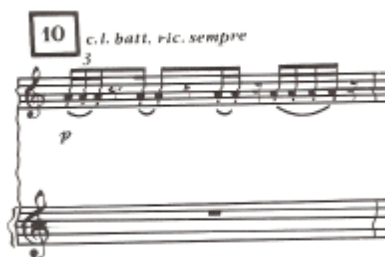
Figure 25. Sofia Gubaidulina, *Seiltänzer*, con legno ricochet, m.54.

Similarly, the pianist explores a variety of sounds made 'within its walls', from direct actions on the strings with a tumbler glass, sliding it in different directions, and imitating the violin's ricochet stroke; with fingers, playing tremolo on the strings, and with thimbles (Figure 26, 27).

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[48] Program note by Gubaidulina to *String Quartet #2*. https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/work/24110/String-Quartet-No-2--Sofia-Gubaidulina/

Figure 26. Sofia Gubaidulina, *Der Seiltänzer*, thimbles on the piano, m.164.

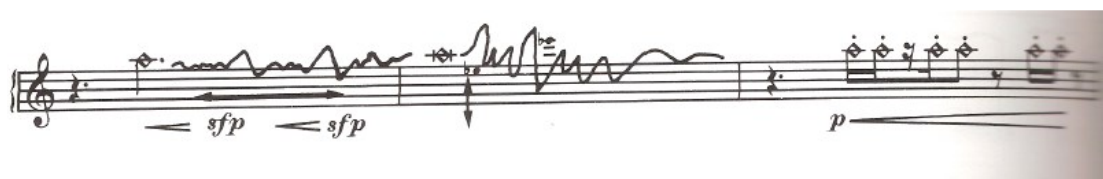**Figure 27. Sofia Gubaidulina, *Der Seiltänzer*, tumbler glass glissando and ricochet, m.48-50.**

The composer's fascination with numbers, and in particular the Fibonacci[49] series and the Golden Ratio,[50] finds some expression in details such as the number of ricochets notes expected under the violinist bow (3, 5, or 8), or the number of beats in each section (Birch 2017, 31-33). She stated that she strongly believes that "the farther we move away from the Fibonacci series, the less perfect the proportion."[51] Valentina Kholopova, a close friend of the composer, further theorized that Gubaidulina combines five Expression Parameters (EP), each employed/intended as dissonance or consonance (and to be realized as such by the performers)[52]: 1) articulation and sound production, 2) melody, 3) rhythm, 4) texture, and 5) compositional writing (precise or

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[49] Numbers that create the Fibonacci series are linear, additive, and recurring.

[50] Valeria Tsenova 2000, Cislovye tajny muzyki Sofii Gubaidulinoi. (Moscow, Russia: Moskovskaya gos. Konservatoria im PI Caikovskogo), 8-11

[51] Vera Lukomsky, and Sofia Gubaidulina 1999, "'Hearing the Subconscious': Interview with Sofia Gubaidulina." *Tempo*, no. 209, 28.

[52] Philip A. Ewell 2013, "The Parameter Complex in the Music of Sofia Gubaidulina." Music Theory Online, September 1, 2013. https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.3/mto.14.20.3.ewell.php.

aleatoric) (Ibid.). Staccato is considered a dissonant EP, while the all-important legato is consonant (Kholopova, Ewell, and Kurtz) (according to Gubaidulina, legato is also etymologically and spiritually connected to the idea of 'religion' ("*re-ligio*", or "*re-legato*", the restoration of the link between one's soul and God.")[53] The ricochet and staccato strokes are therefore manifestations of a disrupted connection that must be restored.[54] Michael Berry[55] also considers that the composer choreographs the performers' gestures to become invested with particular meanings, and categorizes them as 1) "practical" (sound-producing), 2) "expressive" (sound-facilitating), 3) "cues", or as 4) done in silence. Gestures in silence are the most charged, as can be witnessed in works with predominantly no sound, such as "*Fisches Nachtgesang*", "*Stimmen…Verstummen…*". In *Fisches,* an ensemble is on stage and the score contains only instructions on how to move, but the musicians produce no sounds. In *Stimmen,* the conductor has instruction to motion before an orchestra that sits in silence.

The performance guide of *Der Seiltänzer* (Birch, 2017) takes a literal and limited understanding of the title: a dancer (represented by the violin's ricochet) is balancing on a tightrope (piano strings) (Birch 2017, 32). Gubaidulina (interview, 2014) offers more cues as to her metaphorical intentions: "I think for each person who chose this [art] path, it is like the edge of a knife. We [artists] are always like dancers on a tightrope. That is how it is going to be. This is the destiny of an artist… All artists have been choosing this path: they get up on the tightrope

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[53] Vera Lukomsky, and Sofia Gubaidulina 1998, "'The Eucharist in My Fantasy': Interview with Sofia Gubaidulina." *Tempo*, no. 206, 33.

[54] Kurtz, Brown, Lohmann, eds. 2002 *Sofia Gubaidulina: a Biography*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).

[55] Michael Berry 2009 "The Importance of Bodily Gesture in Sofia Gubaidulina's Music for Low Strings." Music Theory Online, https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.09.15.5/mto.09.15.5.berry.html.

and start to dance. Very often - you fall."[56] Gubaidulina's philosophical view is therefore vividly represented in *Der Seiltänzer*.

The piece's sections are easily differentiated by the violin strokes- is overall in the ABA' form, where A is staccato/ricochet, and B is legato. This creates the basic storyline of a powerful transformative experience, from section A to section B and back to A' (transformed).

Section A, from beginning to Rehearsal 25 displays the anxious staccato attempts (over the tightrope) toward more persistent and prolonged strokes (from Rehearsal 19), toward continuous, legato (experienced in section B, from Rehearsal 25 to 38, with greater rhythmic and expressive flexibility). The legato section covers different registers over the metallic sounds of the piano strings. A cadenza with thimbles on the piano brings back the ricochet stroke and, with it, Section A'. However, now the piano is in 'normal mode' (i.e., using the keys, sounding chords, toward a transcendental, *fffff* climax).

Silence plays an important role in the piece: between short phrases, between the 3 sections, and at the very end (8 beats of silence).[57] The space is typically filled with choreographed gestures prior to silence, which then seems filled with the memory/meaning of gestures (Figure 28) that were visually and aurally distinctive.
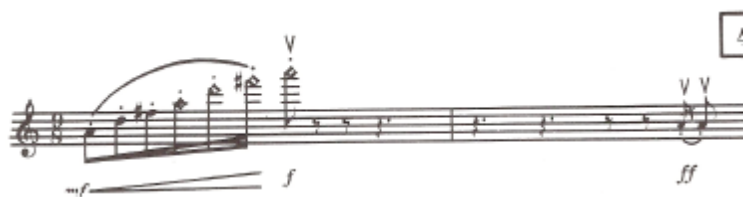
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[56] Istochnik publikatsii Russkoye Pole. "Sofiya Gubaydulina: 'Nel'zya Vklyuchat'sya v Nenavist'…" Muzykal'noye obozreniye, September 5, 2016. https://muzobozrenie.ru/sofiya-gubajdulina-nel-zya-vklyuchat-sya-v-nenavist/.
[57] Vera Lukomsky, Sofia Gubaidulina 1998, "Sofia Gubaidulina: 'My Desire Is Always to Rebel, to Swim against the Stream!'" *Perspectives of New Music* 36, no. 1, 15.
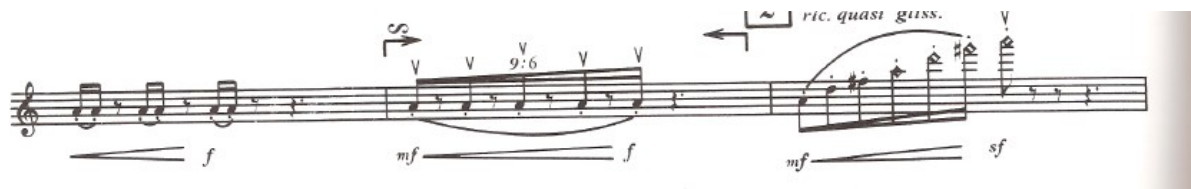
Figure 28. Sofia Gubaidulina, *Der Seiltänzer*, choreographed gestures prior to silence, m.19, m. 10-12.

The main thematic kernel is a dotted rhythm in ⅜ with ricochet, appearing throughout the piece - from staccato pp to legato fffff, and played arco, pizzicato, col legno (stick on string), glass on the piano strings, or with thimbles (Figure 29). The endlessly repeated motive may suggest a persistent living cell undergoing existential changes/stresses.

Figure 29. Sofia Gubaidulina, *Der Seiltänzer*, kernel of the piece, m.14, m.208, m.242.

Other effects also stand out: 1) a glissando gesture with ricocheting harmonics on one string (crescendo), or 2) in sequences across the fingerboard, 3) on the piano strings in both directions, or 4) as bursts of *sforzati* with the piano glass over the strings. In the ricochet sections, the violinist's gestures will seem higher above the violin than in regular playing, and the frequent wide-ranging slides will similarly create the impression that the left hand operates on a larger scale than usual. Tension is also created by the fact that the pianist must stand and bend into the piano for most of the duration of the piece while depressing the sustained pedal throughout. More body movement than usual is required for the piano sounds to be produced convincingly, adding a further choreographic or theatrical dimension.

Gubaidulina emphasized the importance of composer-performer-audience triangle, where performer is an interpreter between the composer and audience. "I really like when performers bring their own initiative", she said.[58] While the piece is designed to create a powerful musical and theatrical experience on its own, the composer may therefore not have objected the idea of adding a separate choreographic component in the form of a dancer reacting to, amplifying, or generally embodying the music's gestures.

This addition of a real dancer (in a 'dialogue' or 'response' of sort with the imagined dancer of the title) also represents a 'balancing' movement opposite to this program's general reduction from staged works to violin-piano transcriptions. The collaboration in performance will represent a form of 'in-the-moment' transcription or translation between disciplines, with some amount of spontaneous interactivity between dancer and musicians likely. In contrast to the violin-piano transcriptions that call on the listener to re-imagine the original staged works, the added dancer will now create an additional, tangible, layer of representation.

SPIRITUALITY AND MUSIC

The spirituality in Gubaidulina's music invites a reflection on USSR's uneasy relationship with religion, and the Orthodox church in particular. While practicing religion was not prohibited, it was encouraged only if it served the interest of the state or the party. For example, church goers could be harassed by individuals opposed to religion, atheist publications circulated were circulated by the government, and some sacred places were turned into museums

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[58] Branko Džinović 2017, "The Composer-Performer Interrelationship in the Bayan and Accordion Compositions of Sofia Gubaidulina," 16-17.

offering a critical stance on 'the opium of the People.' Complete religious freedom was restored in 1988.[59]

Gubaidulina's spiritual journey and reflection on her Christianity is evident in the many evocative titles of her works: *Introitus (1978). In Croce (1979), Sieben Wrote (1982), Oratorio of St. John (2000)*. The above-mentioned *Offertorium* (1980) was also named after the sacrificial section of the Catholic Mass, reflecting on both the performers' and the composer's sacrifices and quest for freedom.[60] Gubaidulina has compared her own composing to the crucifixion and stated that her music was not meant as part of a religious ritual, but rather as a symbol-rich religious experience in itself (Ibid., 82). *Offertorium* and *Der Seiltänzer* share many gestures and ideas: repetitive short motives, exploration of timbres, large-scale ascending motion and culmination. The symbol of the cross (or Cross) fundamentally inspires Gubaidulina:

"That joy and inspiration at the beginning is like a vertical sound of colourful, moving, clashing chords, completely mixed up and jumbled. It is wonderful and beautiful, but it isn't real. My job is to turn that vertical sound into a horizontal line. Those two lines, horizontal and vertical, make a cross, and I think about that when I compose" (Ibid., 28).

Musicologist I. Cojbasic further comments: "The horizontal line symbolizes the human experience in life and the vertical line represents men's striving for full realization in God. The meeting point of these lines is crucial, for it is there that a human being undergoes transformation" (Ibid., 31). A similar meeting of horizontal and vertical is at work in *Der Seiltänzer* contrasting the earthly with the exalted, between rigidness and the freedom to imagine, and between comfort and risk-taking. Music like this asks us to reflect on our own balancing acts and sacrifices we are willing to make in our lives.

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[59] "Russia's Journey from Orthodoxy to Atheism, and Back Again." Religion & Politics, December 11, 2018. https://religionandpolitics.org/2018/10/16/russias-journey-from-orthodoxy-to-atheism-and-back-again/.
[60] Jenna Smith 2011, "Sofia Gubaidulina's Violin Concerto Offertorium: Theology and Music in Dialogue," 28-33.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that performers and listeners gain from developing a broader and more detailed understanding of the works presented in performance. By questioning various aspects of the works – such as their context and structure – the range of potential interpretations can be narrowed down, yielding performances that are more authoritative (i.e., closer to the original intentions) and projected in more vivid ways. This was the purpose of these notes.

This program featured one original work and various types of transcriptions, which have been described according to their relative distance to the original works. Some are relatively well-established (e.g., "*Le coq d'or*"), while others have been significantly neglected (e.g., "*The Magic Embroideress*"). These works were selected as representative examples of three periods in Russian history: the Pre-revolutionary Tsarist period, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and the period immediately following the dissolution of the USSR. Each period involved unique artistic environments, professional opportunities, sources of inspiration, regional and national developments, with changing perceptions vis-à-vis political authorities, Russia and the world, or one's relationship with music (love, celebration, identity, spirituality, etc.)

This project may have emphasized the critical role played by the active and well-informed interpreter who can draw from the full extent of instrumental techniques and can initiate and nurture collaborations with other artists and institutions. This project may have also reinforced the notion that transcribing as a genre offers stimulating opportunities to discover and engage with a repertoire that performers and audiences may have overlooked (such as the ballets of Hodyashev or Machavariani). Transcriptions continue to offer unique concert experiences and serve as an excellent vehicle for refining one's performance and interpretative skills. Clearly, the

role of the violin in these elaborate transcriptions is not limited to simply leading with the main melodies. A more expansive involvement is expected, with textural, orchestral, and coloristic considerations demonstrating the imaginative exploration of the full range of possibilities – even expanding these possibilities at times. This last realization brings to the fore an important notion: that the artist will be called as a result on re-visiting the frames of reference of his or her practice.

In particular, the topic of *gesture* in relationship to performance takes on its fuller meaning in a program like this, whether it refers to the context of a ballet or the more abstract or metaphorical effects that could not ever be properly notated (e.g. Gubaidulina, beyond the printed notes, into the realm of gesture and spiritual *intention*).

Historically, the path of creativity for the violinists and musicians has often started with transcriptions and arrangements, through the re-staging and recycling of ideas. One remains hopeful that this art form will be maintained, perhaps through new multidisciplinary collaborations that invite new meanings and opportunities for artistic exploration.

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