

MOSCOW FORUM

X Festival for Contemporary Music

1. TEN STEPS OF THE “FORUM”

The beginning of the nineties [...] A time when everything was possible. Some people opened up businesses, some people went into the government, whereas some people deviated from their professions. There was a mass exodus of composers to the West, comparable only to a similar exodus during the post-revolutionary years in Russia or to the situation in Germany during the 1930s. Here is an incomplete list of only Moscow-based composers who have left the country during that period: Alfred Schnittke, Sophia Gubaidulina, Vassily Lobanov and Alexander Raskatov moved to Germany, Elena Firsova, Dmitri Smirnov and Vladislav Shoot ended up in England, Leonid Hrabovsky moved to America and Nikolai Korndorf – to Canada, while Edison Denisov was compelled to relocate to France for medical treatment after a car accident. Following them, many younger composers, not being greatly on demand in their native land, go away in search for success to other countries more suitable for their professions. “A whole musical culture has left Russia” – this is how prof. Yuri Kholopov characterized the situation in one of the musicological conferences.

Amid this cultural debris politicians were searching for a new national idea, economists were seeking a new life-saving economic model, while the average people in the street were scrambling together the means for a basic livelihood. “The tongue-less street is squirming – it has nothing by means it could scream or converse” – these lines by Mayakovsky had acquired a similar topicality in Russia at the end of the previous century as they had during the revolutionary years.

It was particularly at this epoch that our festival, the “Moscow Forum,” was created. We wanted to help the “tongue-less street” find a new language. The conservative socialist realism was discredited together with its ideology, but at the same time neither the early Russian avant-garde nor the contemporary Western avant-garde were known to any great degree, even by professional musicians. The historical as well as the cultural and geographic roots of our culture were rudely extirpated during the previous decades. Hence, the main idea of the new festival was an aspiration to overcome our cultural isolation, our chronic lagging behind in the domain of new music, whereas the aim of our work became the integration of contemporary Russian music within the general European context.

Not having any support - neither from the government, nor from any of the private structures, we, nonetheless, tried to build up in miniscule proportions a complete distinct type of cycle of functioning of new music: the “Studio for New Music” ensemble, established in 1993 has become one of the main locomotives of contemporary music in Russia, the Center for Contemporary Music became its headquarters, the Contemporary Music Department became its “universities”, whereas the Jurgenson International Competition for Young Composers became its competing polygon. The triad of “education – creativity – cultural activism” was highlighted by the festival “Moscow Forum”, which gave Russian composers and performers the possibility to hear and

perceive themselves within an overall European context, and presented visiting musicians from other countries to become acquainted with the new music in Russia.

The “Moscow Forum” festival immediately became one of the most important tribunes for new Russian music, which could be manifested not only by the reviews by some of the major Russian and foreign publications - from “Izvestia” and “Kommersant” to the “New York Times”, “Frankfurter Allgemeine” and “Financial Times”, – but, most notably, by the “starring” makeup of its cast of participants. At various years our guests have been the Ensemble Modern (Germany), Klangforum Wien and XX Jahrhundert (Austria), the Schoenberg Ensemble, the Orchestra de Volharding and the Het Trio (Holland), ensemble Alternance (France), the Da Capo Chamber Players, the Oxalis ensemble and the Danel quartet (Belgium), the Fretwork ensemble (Great Britain), the Xenia ensemble (Italy), the Arbos Trio (Spain) and many other ensembles. Among the Russian musicians who have taken part in the festival was the Mark Pekarsky Percussion Ensemble, the Pokrovsky Folk Music Ensemble, MACM, the Ensemble of Clarinets under the direction of R. Bagdasaryan, the WA-ON Ensemble, the Brahms Trio and numerous others. The festival has hosted unforgettable performances of such well-known soloists as Alexei Lubimov, Tigran Alikhanov, Vladimir Tonkha, Alexander Ivashkin, Yekaterina Kichigina, Alexei Volkov, Vladislav Igolinsky, Dmitri Cheglakov, Felix Korobov, Barbara Hannigan, Frances-Marie Uitti, Harrie Starreveld, Patricia Kopachinskaya, Harry Spaarnay, Elena Vassilieva, Michel Marang, Nicholas Isherwood, Jonathan Nott, Friedrich Goldmann, Frank Guttschmidt, Peter Burwik, Christina Ascher, Johannes Kalitzke, Reinbert de Leeuw and others. We are especially pleased to note that as part of the “Moscow Forum” the first performances of such ensembles as Opus Posth under the direction of Tatiana Grindenko and the Roslavets Trio.

A permanent participant of all the “Moscow Forum” festivals is the “Studio for New Music” ensemble, which became its core ensemble. As part of the festival’s programs the ensemble under the direction of Igor Dronov has carried out dozens of Russian and world premieres, presenting young composers with the opportunity to try out their boldest musical ideas. Especially memorable were the projects which involved joint performances of the “Studio” in conjunction with well-known foreign ensembles. Thus in 1995 in the Large Hall of the Conservatory the “Studio for New Music” together with Ensemble Modern carried out the Russian premiere of Hans Werner Henze’s monumental “Requiem”. That concert turned into a huge political event at that time and was broadcast on the radio across the entire country. Interesting joint projects were also carried out together with the Dutch orchestra De Ereprijs, with the Chamber Chorus of Boris Tevlin and with such outstanding soloists as Harrie Starreveld and Helen Bledsoe (flute), Ernest Rombout (oboe), Michel Marang (clarinet), Marco Blau (trumpet), Frances-Marie Uitti (cello) and others. In their turn the participants of our ensemble performed together with some of the best musical groups from other countries - conductor Igor Dronov, pianist Mikhail Doubov and clarinetist Oleg Tantsov performed with the Ensemble Modern, and Olga Galochkina performed together with the Schoenberg Ensemble.

A special point of pride have been the joint performances of the “Studio for New Music” ensemble with some of the greatest stars among the country’s performers - Natalia Gutman and Gidon Kremer, Ivan Monighetti and Alexander Rudin, and numerous others. Our ensemble has been accepted in most European countries, the USA and the countries of Central Asia. The “Studio” has represented Russian the concerts as part of the “Year of Russia” in Germany (2005), the ensemble regularly performs in such

celebrated halls as the Berlin Philharmonic Hall and the Konzerthaus. With the forces of our ensemble several touring sessions of the “Moscow Forum” have been carried out in various Russian cities as well as in other countries, including such famous universities as Oxford University (2002), Harvard University (USA, 2002), and Boston University (2002, 2003) and the Tallinn Music Academy (2005). The ensemble also performed with master-classes as part of the Dresdener Tage für Neue musik (2005) and at other venues.

However, one of the most important features of our festival is that it has become a starting ground for many wonderful young composers, whose names are presently known not only in Russia, but also in Europe. Among them are Olga Rayeva, Setlana Roumyantseva, Alexandra Filonenko, Zhamilya Zhazyzbekova, Artyom Vassiliev, Vadim Karassikov, Dmitri Kourliandsky, Alexei Sioumak, Boris Filanovsky and others. Such well known composers as Yuri Vorontsov, Alexander Wustin, Victor Ekimovsky, Dmitri Capyrin, Faradj Karayev, Yuri Kasparov, Igor Kefalidis, Roman Ledenyov, Albert Lehmann, Vladimir Nikolayev and Sergei Pavlenko have entrusted our festival with premieres of their compositions. Overall, as part of our festivals about 150 premieres by Russian composers and 40 premieres by composers from other countries have taken place as part of our festival.

The programs of the first “Moscow Forum” festivals were built as a dialogue between contemporary Russian music and the music of an especially invited guest-country. At that each festival was given a special concrete theme, relevant toward the current situation. Our first “window to the West” became the festival, organized in 1994, which had the title “Russian-Dutch Musical Assemblies”. Such a grandiose name and the reference to the great epoch of Tsar Peter I certainly sound rather droll nowadays, especially if one is to remember that the festival was organized literally “on our hands and knees” – at that time we did not have a space for rehearsals or even our own desk. The Conservatory had one single fax machine which did not work most of the time. The posters were written by hand on the back side of announcements of previous concerts and there could be no question of any festival catalogue! This is why, unfortunately, there has not been any documentation preserved about our first festival.

For the Dutch this festival also turned out to be a “window” – a window into the previously unknown and inaccessible Russia. An entire Dutch brigade landed in Moscow, consisting of two ensembles – de Volharding and Maarten Aaltana ensemble, as well as a dozen of composers and musicologists! For us, who were brought up on puritan notions of the avant-garde as something always being “frighteningly serial” and unpalatable for the general public, the acquaintance with a totally different kind of avant-garde, which is free of all dogmas, which can turn easily and naturally to various styles and not shunning the so-called “popular” genres – from jazz to rock – all of this became a real revelation. After a few years, turning to the theme “Contemporary Music – Freedom or Engagement?” we have once again dedicated our “Moscow Forum” festival, already being the fourth in number, to the continuation of the acquaintance with Dutch music, since it was particularly in the culture of the Netherlands that the question, brought out onto the festival’s title, is posed in the most direct and acute way.

Our second “Forum” – the Russian-German (1995) – was dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the victory over Nazism, so, naturally, the main idea of this festival turned out to be the presentation of the music of our two countries, that has been written during the last few decades. It could be said in all honesty that it was the first time during the

previous half a century that the music of contemporary German composers sounded in Moscow on the same concert programs together with that of Russian composers, including those pertaining to the wartime generation. Today, twelve years later, it is somehow difficult to believe that at that time the idea of that kind of juxtaposition occasionally caused a deep incomprehension even among very respected and authoritative musicians. At that time for the first time Russian performers presented to the public landmark compositions by such brilliant musical antagonists as Lachenmann and Henze. At the Rachmaninov Hall a great cycle of Stockhausen's Klavierstücke was performed. And the climax of this festival was marked by concerts of the brilliant Ensemble Modern, including a joint concert together with the "Studio for New Music" ensemble.

As one of the most brilliant pages of the "Moscow Forum's" history one could recall to mind the Russian-Austrian festival of 1997, in the programs of which we attempted to examine the problem of "Music of the period of the Fall of Empires", where the accent was made on the Austrian music of the early 20th century and the Russian music of the late 20th century. At that time it was not possible to bring out that title as a heading for the festival, since a number of people - both from the Russian and the Austrian sides - deemed such a statement as tactless. Nonetheless, the festival's program itself generated a mass of interesting conclusions on this topic. While two Austrian ensembles - Klangforum Wien and the "XX Jahrhundert" ensemble seemingly competed with each other in the versatility of their repertoire and the virtuosic performance of the high avant-garde, an alternative concert venue - the Oval Hall at Plyushchikha - presented genres which were entirely new for "serious" festivals - a show of the famous Austrian disc-jockey Richard Dorfmeister and a multimedia performance of Elisabeth Schimana.

In a completely different manner the programs of the Russian-French festival "Specters of Time" (1999) were assembled. One of the accents of this project was the music of the Russian emigrants in France - from the post-revolutionary years (Stravinsky, Wyschnegradsky, Obouhow) until the present days (Andrei Volkonsky). However, especially important was the fact that at this forum for the first time the works of the French composers of the "spectral school" were performed by Russian musicians. Their names were practically unknown in Russia. I remember very well how even the highly professional editors of the "Muzykal'naya Akademiya", publishing an interview with me, had to decide how to transcribe into Cyrillic characters the name Grisey in the most appropriate manner. By the way, Gerard Grisey was planning to come to our festival, and had even started to learn Russian a little; however a year prior to the festival this outstanding composer unexpectedly passed away. Subsequently we carried out a whole cycle of concerts-portraits and master-classes of many well-known French Spectralist composers, among which I especially want to accentuate the visit to Moscow of Tristan Murail and Philippe Hurel.

Just as unknown in Russia was the music of contemporary Italian composers. Even in those days when in Europe there was a real boom for new Italian music, Luigi Nono and Lucian Berio were known in this country only by their names, mentioned most of all in regards to their left-wing political views, whereas their music was not performed at all. And if one is to take, for example, such classics of the avant-garde movement as Giacinto Scelsi and Salvatore Sciarrino, even the names of these composers in Russia were not at all known, and even today the spelling and pronunciation of their names raises questions. The highly artistic, refined and virtuosic world of Italian music was presented at the Rachmaninov Hall in three concerts of the "Toscanini Orchestra" in the

Spring of 1997. This was a sort of anthology of the Italian avant-garde. Subsequently we included Italian music into the programs of the festival, which once even hosted the wonderful Xenia Ensemble, however, our chief pride is in the fact that the Russian premiere of Luigi Nono's String Quartet "Fragmente – Stille, an Diotima" sounded particularly at the Moscow Forum (Danel quartet, 2001).

A broad resonance was created by the 9th Forum "Old Music on New Instruments; New Music on Old Instruments" (2003). We tried to trace how many forms of music making, which seemingly had become out of date, unexpectedly arise in the newest music. Thus, in the concert "Tablatures" along with the pieces "Tabulatura nova" by S. Scheidt (1624) there was a performance of Valentin Silvestrov's "Projections," and along with the Fantasia by V. Buckfark there was a graphic piece by Edison Denisov "The Singing of Birds". The concert titled "The Avant-garde from the 17th century" was juxtaposed with a concert of "Avantgarde in an Early Style", the program of which included not any stylizations of older styles by contemporary composers, but a number of radically avant-garde compositions, in a paradoxical manner based on pre-classical musical categories. The programs of that festival included simultaneously three brilliant ensembles from abroad – the Schoenberg Ensemble, the New York group the Da Capo Chamber Players and the British early music ensemble Fretwork. The success of the festival turned out to be the attempt of combining together two extremely different and previously entirely dispersed audiences - those of early music fans and avant-garde fans.

In the first years of the new millennium both the cultural and the political climate in Russia changed considerably. Thus in 2001 in Russian society the debate arose about the expediency of reviving the old Soviet national anthem. In our multiform, multi-national and multi-confessional country the tricolor democratic flag ended up peacefully getting along with the two-headed eagle and the music of the Soviet national anthem. Musicians also took part in this debate. In the programs of the festival of 2001, titled "Avant-garde on the Crossroads of Ethno and Techno" featured performances by composers of various countries, connected with the debated theme: the Dadaist-pacifistic in their nature "National Anthems" by Sergei Zagny, created from the simultaneous sounding of national anthems of many countries were presented in one concert together with the "Hymn" by Alfred Schnittke, which constituted variations on an old Russian church anthem. A separate evening was dedicated to the "Hymns" by Stockhausen, which have already become a classic, the performance of which was carried out in the form of a multimedia choreographic performance. As part of the festival's conference, a broad presentation was made by J. P. Hieckel about Helmut Lachenmann's "Tanzsuite mit Deutschlandlied", written by the composer particularly in that period when the issue of the German national anthem was actively discussed in Germany.

It became symptomatic that each of our Forums aroused a wave of new stylistic searches by young composers. Thus, during the last decade and a half in the music of young composers several times the waves of the Lachenmann style has passed, a definite influence has been exerted by Spectralism and, sometimes, by some concrete compositions, which were performed at our festival. Possibly, sometimes these influences turned out to be too strong for the musicians, who have not yet formed their own voice, hence, they have demonstrated themselves too bluntly. However, we hold the stance that a composer's individuality is formed not on the basis of ignorance and lack of knowledge, but quite the contrary – on the basis of broad erudition and professional competency. A composer should know everything and make his or her own

conscious choice – at the present this is no more and no less relevant than during the times of Glinka or Stravinsky.

Glancing backwards in retrospect and comparing the present-day situation in the domain of contemporary music with that in which we were forced to begin, one could ascertain its considerable improvement. The festival was able to form its own auditory particularly during that period when serious art was pushed farther and farther aside to a marginal domain, it has to a certain degree helped us to form more concrete perspectives of what is in its essence this “new music”. After all, in the beginning the very term, in itself quite neutral and conventionally used, aroused a strong antipathy from the conservative part of the musical community. It is a curious phenomenon that, on the other hand, a certain portion of the new, young press of the 90s at first was also in total confusion - coming to our concerts, some critics expected to hear something in the manner of the music of the recently then opened clubs, based on various types of hybrid blends of jazz, rock, minimalism or rap. The real complexity of new music, its emotional and intellectual saturation, its gearing towards the prepared listener contradicted entirely with their naive suppositions about “contemporary music”.

Of course, our Forum was not the only festival in Moscow, dedicated to contemporary music. A tremendous role has been played and is still played by the “Moscow Autumn” Festival, organized by the Moscow Composers’ Union, as well as the “Alternativa”. However the goal of the “Moscow Autumn” was to present the panorama of music by five hundred Moscow-based composers of the most varied stylistic trends, among which in the 90s only about ten composers could be classified as pertaining to “new music”. The “Alternativa” festival also has its own specific feature, already established in the very title of the festival. The profile of our festival, on the other hand, was established from the very beginning - to present the “high avantgarde”, without ingratiating itself or flirting with the listener. As one of the critics said “people like it that here the musicians do not complicate or simplify contemporary music. They simply perform it well.”

2. UP THE STAIRCASE WHICH LEADS DOWNWARDS

If the 90s in Russia were characterized by an opposition between the avant-garde and conservatism, during the recent years the situation has changed. Contemporary art is no longer a shocking novelty, it has become a composite part of our living style. At the same time, with the washing out of the social strata of intellectuals, among the “consumers” of new art there are more and more frequent cases of the “hanging-out types”. Their specific values of life and a very superficial aesthetic experience brought to life a very peculiar phenomenon, which could be called not “post-” but “pop-avant-garde”. A striking example of this is the latest Moscow Biennale. A characteristic feature of “pop-avant-garde” has been aims of pure entertainment, an aspiration to create “out of whim” and also to perceive art “out of whim”. “Pop-avant-garde” tries to mimic genuine avant-garde, transforming its profound and radical artistic-constructive ideas into outward décor, a sort of peculiar modern make up, and converting its fundamental discoveries directly into commercial success. Its fervent motto – “this could be done by everybody” – postulates the idea of a total inflation of professionalism.

The irony lies in that the state, which for decades has been extirpating the avant-garde, today, adorning itself with the toga of a “progressive stance”, is now putting in immense

means in the creation of its simulation. Truly, our country is a country of contrasts: here the government either builds next to the Pushkin Museum palaces for aesthetic kitsch production of Glazounov-Shilov-Tseretelli, or pumps in millions into glamorous scrapheap installations of the Biennale.

We are aiming to oppose these cases of ersatz with the art of “high avant-garde”, the aim of which would be not to appease the public, not to entertain, not to provoke it, but to form a new auditory culture of the 21st century. Hence, we are trying to represent in our programs composers, who generate veritably new ideas, and we perform compositions, which open up new thoughts by means of new sounds. Unfortunately, this time the program of our festival has not found support from the Russian Cultural Agency. Just as practically all of our previous projects had not received any support, among which are:

The premiere of the Chamber Symphony by Nikolai Roslavets, the score of which has been found by the wonderful musician, Mark Belodubrovsky sixty years after its creation. The world premiere of this outstanding composition took place through the assistance of the Ford Foundation, while the Moscow premiere took place with the support of the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung.

“Vladimir Vogel - an Unknown Russian Genius of the 20th Century”. The name of this composer is not present in any single Russian encyclopedia, despite the fact that particularly he in many ways personified new Russian music in Europe in the late 20s and early 30s; a Concert-Portrait took place with the support of the Swiss Pro-Helvetia Foundation.

“An Anthology of the Musical Avant-Garde in the Russian Provinces”. This three-year cycle, consisting of 30 concerts is organized by the “Studio for New Music” in various Russian cities with the assistance of the Kulturstiftung des Bundes and the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung.

This list could be continued for a long while. However, it is much more pleasant to express the gratitude to all those, who during the course of many years have supported our festival, notwithstanding numerous difficulties, both objective and subjective. The organization of this present festival became possible exclusively due to the self-sacrificing work of the employees of the Conservatory’s Center for Contemporary Music: E.A. Izotova, V.A. Serebryakova, N.N. Cherkasova and F.M. Sofronov.

*Vladimir Tarnopolski
Artistic Director of the Festival*