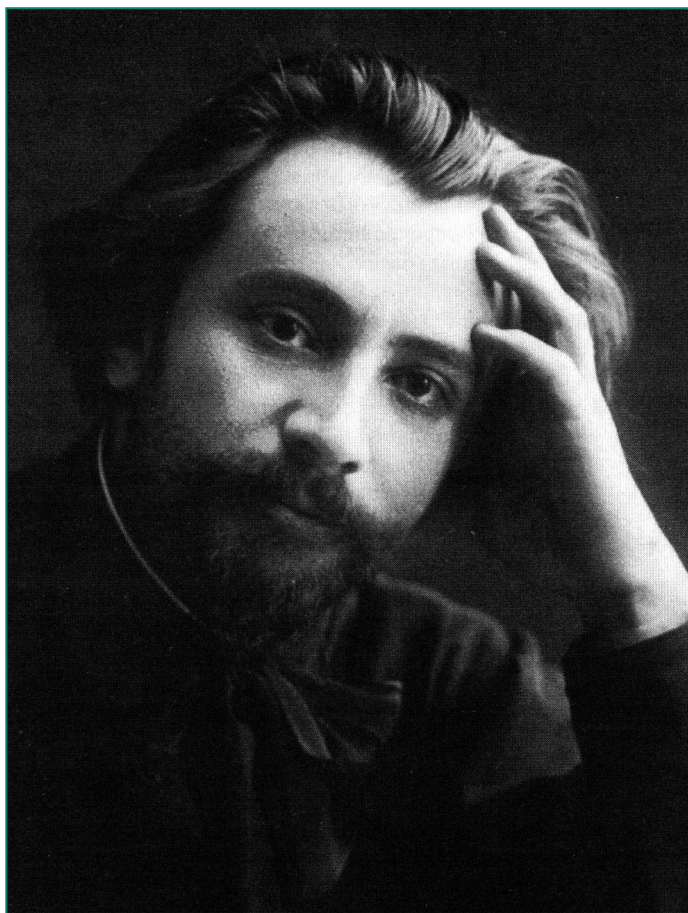


History of the
Russian Piano Trio • 10
Soviet Avant-garde

ROSLAVETS • SHOSTAKOVICH

The Brahms Trio



History of the Russian Piano Trio • 10

Soviet Avant-garde

In the history of Soviet music of the first half of the 20th century there is a huge gap where the genre of the piano trio should be. Scriabin and Glazunov did not write in this genre, neither did Myaskovsky and Glière, the leading composers of the first decades of Soviet authority, nor did Prokofiev, who returned to the USSR in 1936. For a century, it was not only the piano trios that had been written by the composers of the Russian Abroad, but also the works of avant-garde composers who welcomed the revolution and stayed in the Soviet Union, that were unheard.

The artistic experiments of these musical pathfinders, who embraced freedom and believed in both their special mission and their power over matter and space, knew literally no bounds. The October Revolution, which acted as something of a 'Big Bang' in the creation of a new world, gave carte blanche to the creators of new Russian art. A new musical world was being born in their imaginations. New systems of sound organisation were emerging, and the very structure of music was changing, as were attitudes to instrumental texture, principles of form development, and the construction of climaxes. The discoveries of the Russian avant-garde – the most daring, paradoxical and brief period in Russian art – are now seen as the harbingers of many defining trends of 20th-century musical art.

During the avant-garde era, the piano trio experienced an unprecedented prosperity. This is quite a paradoxical fact, considering that the piano trio is one of the most conservative genres within musical art. Nevertheless, during the first two decades of the Soviet Republic, just over 40 works were written in this genre, which is almost one and a half times more than during the entire 19th century. Moreover, a significant portion of these works was published in the 1920s by the Musiksektor Gosizdat (USSR State Music Publisher). The editor-in-chief at that time was Nikolay Andreyevich Roslavets, and it was him who approved the scores for publication. After Roslavets was ostracised, everything related to his activities was either destroyed or hidden in a secret archive of the KGB.

Of the five piano trios composed by Nikolay Roslavets in the 1920s, he only had the opportunity to hear the *Third* performed during his lifetime. The *Second* and *Fourth* trios were brought back from oblivion decades after the composer's death thanks to the efforts of musicologist Marina Lobanova, a pre-eminent scholar of Roslavets' legacy, and were first published by Schott in 1991. These trios only became available to listeners with the advent of the 21st century. The *First* and *Fifth* trios have disappeared.

Nikolay Roslavets was one of the greatest musical innovators of the 20th century, and one of the most tragic figures in the history of music. He fashioned his own original theory of composition based on what he termed 'synthetic chords', which replaced traditional tonality and became new musical references. Alongside Schoenberg's twelve-tone serialism, Roslavets' 'New System of Sound Organisation' was a revolutionary breakthrough in the history of musical systems. Many of Roslavets' ideas found their way into the music of subsequent generations of composers, but Roslavets himself was only rediscovered by the end of the 20th century.

Roslavets was friends with Malevich, Mayakovsky, Burliuk, Lentulov and other representatives of 'left-wing' art. It is no coincidence that his system of *synthetaccords* echoes Malevich's Suprematism in both meaning and terminology. Like many 'leftists', Roslavets enthusiastically welcomed Soviet power. After 1917, he worked in government structures for several years and was one of the founders and heads of the Association for Contemporary Music – an organisation aimed at creating a new, truly proletarian culture. But this did not save him from assaults by RAPM (the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians), who accused his music of promoting decadent sentiments characteristic of a decaying bourgeois society, which were contrary to the needs of the Soviet working class. By the end of the 1920s, Roslavets had become a target of the most cruel bullying. He publicly repented, renounced his views and his music, rewrote his biography several times, tried to compose mass songs, and left for Tashkent, where he created the first Uzbek ballet, *Pakhta* ('Cotton'). None of this helped him. He was banned from his profession, his works were no longer published, his music was forbidden to be performed, and he was on the verge of arrest. But, in 1939, he suffered a severe stroke, which led to loss of speech and paralysis, and he was forgotten. Everyone thought he had been shot in 1939, but he lived for another five years in a room in a communal

flat on Arbat Street in Moscow, and died in 1944 of a second stroke, humiliated and forgotten. Even his grave in Vagankovo Cemetery in Moscow was later destroyed.

Written in 1927, during a period of persecution and confrontation with 'proletarian musicians', and on the threshold of his tragic turn of fate, Roslavets' *Fourth Piano Trio* marks the culmination of his mature artistic period. Today, this composition is perceived as a manifesto of the new musical universe created by Roslavets, incorporating all of humanity's accumulated emotional, intellectual and artistic experiences, and freeing musical language from the inertia of established patterns. This grandiose four-movement work, Romantic and passionate in spirit, with its complex polyphony of musical themes, ideas and rhythms, absolutely flawless in form, sometimes ironic to the point of mockery, sometimes frightening in its prophecies, architecturally perfect and mesmerisingly beautiful, was destined to become as much of a milestone in the history of the Russian piano trio, and the pinnacle of the ensemble repertoire, as is Tchaikovsky's *Trio in A minor, Op. 50*, written in the previous era. But instead, a chasm appeared that swallowed up not only Roslavets himself and his music, but an entire movement that ultimately never came to fruition within the history of the Russian piano trio.

By 1932, the musical avant-garde had been suppressed and destroyed amid violent confrontation with the regime. Most of the music of that period was banned from performance and was left, forgotten, in archives for decades. One such example is the constructivist experiments within the piano trio genre by one of the leaders of the Soviet avant-garde, Leonid Polovinkin. The manuscripts of two of his early trios, written at the beginning of the 1920s, and a later one, created in 1937 to honour the 100th anniversary of Alexander Pushkin's death, were only recently discovered in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art. There is a theory that the manuscript of Alexander Mosolov's *Suite, Op. 27* for piano trio, which is considered lost (Mosolov was declared an 'enemy of the people' in 1929 and imprisoned in 1937), is still kept in the KGB archives. Some of the manuscripts were demonstratively destroyed, such as Vasily Barvinsky's *Trio in E flat minor*, written in 1911 and burned when the composer was arrested in 1948.

One of the very few surviving piano trios from the avant-garde period is Dmitry Shostakovich's single-movement *Piano Trio No. 1 in C minor, Op. 8*, written in 1923. This work marks the beginning of the history of the Soviet piano trio. There is a peculiar parallelism here with the very first Russian trio – Alexander Alyabyev's single-movement *First Piano Trio in E flat major*, written a hundred years earlier in the same city of St Petersburg. The freely interpreted sonata form in both works, which is akin to a romantic poem, carries a poetic subtext of musical offering. Unlike Alyabyev, who left no dedication in the score, in Shostakovich's case, the romantic circumstances of the composer's life and the details of the genesis of this trio (originally titled *Poem for violin, cello and piano*), preserved in his epistolary legacy, naturally become a part of the musical exegesis.

The trio is dedicated to Tatyana Glivenko, whom the 16-year-old Shostakovich met while at a sanatorium in Yalta in the summer of 1923. The young lady lived in Moscow, the young man in Petrograd. The summer love story continued through correspondence. In October 1923, a sketch version of the trio was sent to the dedicatee in Moscow with one of the letters, but it did not reach the addressee. Historians assume that it was this copy that ended up in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art a long time later. On December 1923 the *Trio* was performed by the composer, violinist Veniamin Sher and cellist Grigory Pekker at a concert at the Petrograd Conservatoire. A little while later the performance of this trio was repeated at the Moscow Conservatoire. In 1925, the trio was published, but like the vast majority of Gosizdat publications of the 1920s, this score was yet to be found. The first crisis in Shostakovich's artistic life dates back to that time. He later recalled that 'he was suddenly seized with doubt about his vocation... and in a rush of "disillusionment" destroyed almost all his manuscripts'. Some scholars believe that among those destroyed was the score of the *First Trio*. However, much later, in the late 1950s, this manuscript appeared in the archives of the Glinka Museum in Moscow. Whatever the case, Shostakovich did not include this trio in the list of his works compiled in 1947, and so this beautiful work was not performed or published again during the composer's lifetime. It was only after Shostakovich's death that his pupil and friend, the composer Boris Tishchenko, conducted a comparative analysis of both manuscripts and restored the missing fragments, which miraculously coincided with the cello part later discovered in the archives of the Leningrad Philharmonic Society. This revised version of the work was performed for the first time by The Moscow Trio in the Small Hall of the Moscow

Conservatoire on 25 September 1981, the 75th anniversary of Shostakovich's birthday. Tatyana Glivenko was in attendance at the concert. Two more years later, in 1983, Shostakovich's *First Piano Trio* was published in his Complete Works Edition.

According to senior colleagues who were familiar with 'DD', as they call him, Shostakovich himself did not like to talk about this trio, dismissing it as a naive student work. Perhaps this was because the genuine sincerity and optimism of the music, crowned with a triumphant, sparkling C major climax, was painfully dissonant when compared with everything that was happening in both Soviet musical art and Shostakovich's own life in the years that followed.

From the late 1930s onwards, not for the sake of technical complexity, but for the possibility of speaking to the listener behind the backs of the authorities, the surviving avant-gardists were mastering esoteric codes and ciphers in music. The first to do so was Shostakovich, in whom, as Levon Hakobyan writes, after *Lady Macbeth's* demonstrative denunciation in 1936, which became a part of a campaign against artistic dissidents at the beginning of a Great Purge, 'Russian music lost its most prominent adherent of the avant-garde, gaining instead a great tragic and symbolic figure'. Symbols and metaphors, accessible only to those in the know, began to take up residence on the pages of Shostakovich's instrumental scores. Through combining the 'ulichnaia pesnia' ('street songs', or Russian chanson, such as *Murka*, or *Bublichki*) and the *lamento* motif that Shostakovich never abandoned after *Lady Macbeth*, sometimes blending to the point of indistinguishability Kabbalistic symbols and Baroque rhetoric, and the textural and timbral techniques of Bach and Mozart, Mussorgsky and Mahler, he appealed to the intellectual, emotional and aural experience of those people who were capable of perceiving the author's semantic message on an associative, and perhaps even subconscious, level. This is the very principle of 'intellectual montage' formulated by Sergei Eisenstein in 1923, which became the main contribution of the Soviet avant-garde to the art of the world. This language would become a universal one for the survival of music in the Soviet era of the subsequent decades. More than any other, it would operate with a category of 'content' unknown or marginalised to the rest of Europe.

Dmitry Shostakovich's *Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, Op. 67* became a key work of the 20th century, overcoming decades of losses and silence and mastering the art of musical conversation between the lines. It is one of the most famous, and most performed, piano trios. In this work, which has a colossally powerful emotional impact, the ideas and discoveries of the Russian avant-garde are accumulated and brought to their utmost capacity, and in contention with the regime, they became the building materials for the new ambivalent language of Soviet art.

This masterpiece, written by Shostakovich in 1944 and dedicated to the memory of his friend, the outstanding musicologist Ivan Sollertinsky, defined the entire subsequent epoch in the history of the Russian piano trio. Shostakovich's disciples and followers would go on to compose in the same way in the second half of the 20th century, and the energy of this work still fuels the inspiration of composers embarking on the task of creating piano trios to this day.

Natalia Rubinstein

The Brahms Trio

The Brahms Trio is one of the leading Russian chamber ensembles. Since its foundation in 1990, the trio has regularly appeared at prestigious international concert venues, such as the Large Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, Elbphilharmonie Laeiszhalle Grand Hall, Brucknerhaus Linz and Seoul Arts Centre, as well as at festivals in Melbourne, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Copenhagen, Paris and London. Legendary musicians such as Tatiana Gaidamovich, Rudolf Barshai, Alexander Bonduriansky (Moscow Trio) and Valentin Berlinsky (Borodin Quartet) have had a significant influence on the formation of the performing style and career of the trio. The musicians of The Brahms Trio are professors at the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory. The Brahms Trio has made an invaluable contribution to the expansion of chamber repertoire by rediscovering unknown piano trios of Russian composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 2020, Naxos began to release a series of 15 albums entitled *History of the Russian Piano Trio*. These releases have subsequently been nominated for an International Classical Music Award (ICMA), and were named as the best albums of 2021 by *Gramophone* and *American Record Guide*. In 2022, The Brahms Trio was nominated for Opus Klassik Awards in the categories of Best Chamber Music Recording, Ensemble of the Year and Outstanding Contribution to the Expansion of the Repertoire. www.brahms-trio.ru

Nikolay Roslavets was one of the great musical innovators of the 1920s, described by Stravinsky as ‘the most interesting Russian composer of the 20th century,’ but vilified by the Soviet regime on account of his constant experimentation. His *Piano Trio No. 4* is notable for its romantic and passionate spirit, and complex polyphony. Shostakovich’s *Piano Trio No. 2* is one of the most harrowing and revered of all his chamber works. The *Piano Trio No. 1*, a remarkable composition for a 16-year-old student, is a work of romantic intensity cast in a musical language recognisably that of Shostakovich.

History of the Russian Piano Trio • 10

The Silver Age and Art Nouveau Era

ROSLAVETS • SHOSTAKOVICH

Nikolay ROSLAVETS
(1881–1944)

Piano Trio No. 4 (1927)

- | | | |
|----------|------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Moderato con moto – | 40:25 |
| 2 | II. Allegro vivace | 11:36 |
| 3 | III. Lento | 6:52 |
| 4 | IV. Allegro risoluto | 11:07 |
| | | 10:47 |

Dmitry SHOSTAKOVICH
(1906–1975)

5 Piano Trio No. 1 in C minor, Op. 8
(1923) 11:49

Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor,
Op. 67 (1944) 27:14

- | | | |
|----------|---|-------|
| 6 | I. Andante – Moderato –
Poco più mosso | 7:34 |
| 7 | II. Allegro con brio | 3:09 |
| 8 | III. Largo – | 5:24 |
| 9 | IV. Allegretto | 11:02 |

The Brahms Trio

Graf Mourja 1–4, Nikolai Sachenko 5–9, Violin
Kirill Rodin, Cello
Natalia Rubinstein, Piano

Recorded: 22 January 2017 **5**, 23–24 March 2021 **6–9** and 19–24 March 2024 **1–4** at the Large Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, Russia • Producer, engineer and editor: Mikhail Spassky

Booklet notes: Natalia Rubinstein • Publisher: Schott Music – Edition: Mainz, 1991 **1–4**, DSCHEditions – Edition: rev. Boris Tischenko (1981); Moscow, 2010 **5**, State Music Publishers – Edition: Moscow, 1968 **6–9**

Cover photos: *Left*: Nikolay Roslavets • *Right*: Dmitry Shostakovich (both by unknown photographers)