

ANATOLY ALEXANDROV Piano Music, Volume One

1 **Ballade, Op. 49** (1939, rev. 1958)* 9:40

Four Narratives, Op. 48 (1939)* 11:25

2 No. 1 *Andante* 3:12

3 No. 2 'What the sea spoke about during the storm':
Allegro impetuoso 2:00

4 No. 3 'What the sea spoke of on the morning after the storm':
Andantino, un poco con moto 3:48

5 No. 4 'In memory of A. M. Dianov':
Andante, molto cantabile 2:25

Piano Sonata No. 8 in B flat, Op. 50
(1939–44)** 15:00

6 I *Allegretto giocoso* 4:21

7 II *Andante cantabile e penseroso* 3:24

8 III *Energico. Con moto assai* 7:15

Echoes of the Theatre, Op. 60
(mid-1940s)* 14:59

9 No. 1 *Aria: Adagio molto cantabile* 2:27

10 No. 2 *Galliarde and Pavana: Vivo* 3:20

11 No. 3 *Chorale and Polka: Andante* 2:57

12 No. 4 *Waltz: Tempo di valse tranquillo* 1:32

13 No. 5 *Dances in the Square and Siciliana: Quasi improvisata – Allegretto* 2:24

14 No. 6 *Gavotte: Tempo di gavotte* 2:19

Romantic Episodes, Op. 88 (1962) 19:39

15 No. 1 *Moderato* 1:38

16 No. 2 *Allegro molto* 1:15

17 No. 3 *Sostenuto, severo* 3:35

18 No. 4 *Andantino, molto grazioso e rubato* 0:57

19 No. 5 *Allegro* 0:49

20 No. 6 *Adagio, cantabile* 3:19

21 No. 7 *Andante* 1:48

22 No. 8 *Allegro giocoso* 2:47

23 No. 9 *Sostenuto, lugubre* 1:35

24 No. 10 *Tempestoso e maestoso* 1:56

TT 71:01

Kyung-Ah Noh, piano

*FIRST RECORDING; **FIRST RECORDING ON CD

Anatoly ALEXANDROV

Piano Music Volume One

Piano Sonata No. 8, Op. 50
Echoes of the Theatre, Op. 60
Romantic Episodes, Op. 88
Four Narratives, Op. 48
Ballade, Op. 49

Kyung-Ah Noh, piano

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS



ANATOLY ALEXANDROV: PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

by Malcolm MacDonald

The 'Russian Piano Tradition' – a term widely used in scholarly discourse, though more often in discussions of performance than of composition – is a distinct and yet insufficiently mapped and chronicled phenomenon of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The rich and complex interrelationships of a legion of remarkable pianists, composer-pianists, pianist-pedagogues and composer-pedagogues established a dynamic of excellence and master-pupil relationships (especially but not exclusively confined to the Conservatoires of Moscow and St Petersburg/Leningrad) that saw the emergence of generation after generation of great performers and great music, continually reacting upon one another. To mention the names only of – for example – the brothers Rubinstein, Pavel Pabst, Mily Balakirev, Karl Klindworth, Sergei Taneyev, Alexander Skryabin, Georgy Catoire, Felix Blumenthal, Sergei Lyapunov, Nikolai Medtner, Sergei Rachmaninov, Samuil Feinberg, Nikolai Myaskovsky,¹ Sergei Prokofiev, Arthur Lourié, Nikolai Roslavets, Alexander Goldenweiser, Alexei Stanchinsky, Konstantin Igumnov, Leonid Nikolayev, Dmitri Shostakovich, Lev Oborin, Vladimir Sofronitsky, Maria Yudina, Herman Galynin, Emil Gilels, Viktor Merzhanov, Svyatoslav Richter, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Nikolai Kapustin – and not to invoke the current astonishing efflorescence of Russian pianistic talent – is to adduce evidence of one of the most vibrant and creative traditions in the history of the piano.

Within this galaxy of mingled talent, mastery and genius the figure of Anatoly Nikolayevitch Alexandrov holds an honoured place at least in Russia, though outside it his name remains hardly known. He is a fascinating if eventually enigmatic figure.² Clearly he was a survivor, for he lived a very long life by the standard of Soviet composers, dying in his nineties. Yet beyond basic biographical facts and occasional anecdotes it is difficult to grasp a sense of his character and career. As far as it is possible to

¹ Myaskovsky, though certainly a composer-pedagogue, was not a pianist. But his piano compositions, especially the first four sonatas, occupy a significant position in the repertoire of early-twentieth-century Russian piano music.

² At once a cautionary note: he should not be confused with the composer and conductor Alexander Vasilievitch Alexandrov (1883–1946), composer of the Soviet (and now Russian) National Anthem and many fine choral works as well as founder and director of the Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble.



Recorded on 21–23 May 2013 in the Murchison Performing Arts Center at the University of North Texas, Denton
Producer: Brad Beckman
Engineer: Blair Liikala
Tuner: Cyrillus Aerts
Editor: Matt Bowers

Booklet essay by Malcolm MacDonald (with thanks to Anthony Phillips for the information on Dianov and Gumilyova)
Design and layout: Paul Brooks, Design and Print, Oxford

Executive producer: Martin Anderson

TOCC 0186

© 2013, Toccata Classics, London

© 2013, Toccata Classics, London

Toccata Classics CDs are also available in the shops and can be ordered from our distributors around the world, a list of whom can be found at www.toccataclassics.com. If we have no representation in your country, please contact: Toccata Classics, 16 Dalkeith Court, Vincent Street, London SW1P 4HH, UK
Tel: +44/0 207 821 5020 E-mail: info@toccataclassics.com

world of feeling, and the return of the dance music, its innocence disturbed, is more pensive. The ninth Episode – *Sostenuto, lugubre* in D flat minor [23] – occupies a single page and is the only piece to bear an individual date: 1950, a grim year for Russian composers, with the *Zhdanovschina* at its height, Stalin entering the last phase of his tyranny and Valentina Myaskovskaya's brother dying of stomach cancer. The piece is a kind of chorale, deeply serious, though its restlessly roving harmonies deprive it of any shadow of religious comfort.¹² The tenth and final piece, in B flat [24], is marked *Tempestoso e maestoso*: a stunning virtuoso outpouring, its figurations rise and fall like massive waves crashing on a rocky shoreline. After several pages of such oceanic writing a defiant chordal coda ends the cycle in a mood of hard-won triumph.

Malcolm MacDonald is the author of the volume on Brahms in the 'Master Musicians' series (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2002). He has also written The Symphonies of Havergal Brian (three vols., Kahn & Averill, London, 1974, 1978 and 1983) and edited the first two volumes of Havergal Brian on Music (Tocatta Press, London, 1985 and 2009); further volumes are in preparation. His other writings include books on John Foulds, Schoenberg, Ronald Stevenson and Edgard Varèse.

Kyung-Ah Noh was born in 1982 in Seoul, South Korea. She started to play the piano at the age of seven and studied at Deokwon Art High School with Eun Kyung Park. From 2001 until 2005 she took a Bachelor's degree at the Kyung Hee University with Leda Kim and Joo Hyun Cho and received her Master's degree at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, with Bruce Brubaker, in 2008. There she was a winner in the Honor Competition, playing Busoni's *Toccata* in Jordan Hall – a performance included on a CD of the New England Conservatory in 2009, *NEC: It's about the music*. She participated in a Messiaen centenary concert in Jordan Hall and played as a representative of the piano department in an NEC 'Commencement' concert. She continued her studies with Joseph Banowetz at the University of North Texas in Denton, where she held a teaching fellowship for three years.

She has won a number of piano competitions including those held by *The Korea Daily News*, the National Filial Piety Music Contest and the Korean Piano Academics Association in South Korea. She won first prize in the International Piano Workshop Competition in Varna, Bulgaria, in 2010.

Her interest in chamber music was encouraged by coaching from Mai Motobuchi and Stephen Drury at the New England Conservatory of Music and with Igor Borodin, George Papich and Susan Dubois at the University of North Texas. She has participated in master-classes with Balázs Fülei, Joseph Stanford, Mihail Milkov and Murray McLachlan. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of North Texas, where she holds the Peggy Boston Duggan and Dean's Camerata piano scholarships.

¹² The rather Brahmsian spacing of the chords brings to mind the first of that composer's Op. 10 *Ballades*, with its tragic tale of parricide derived from a Scots border ballad.

discover, his external life, long though it was, appears – and perhaps was – almost devoid of incident. Probably to a large extent his composing, performing and teaching was his life. But his inner being, as suggested by the evidence of his music, was intense and often troubled.

Alexandrov was a Muscovite, and was born and died in, and seldom strayed far from, that city. Born on 13 (Old Style)/25 (New Style) May 1888, he was the son of Nikolai Alexandrovich Alexandrov (1858–1936), who was then teaching chemistry at the German School in Moscow and would later be appointed Professor of Pharmacology at the University of Tomsk. Anatoly Nikolayevitch's musical leanings were more likely inherited from his mother, the piano-teacher Anna Yakovlevna Alexandrova-Levenson, born Alexandra Levenson (1856–1930), who at Moscow Conservatoire had been a pupil (and subsequently remained a friend) of Tchaikovsky; she also studied piano under Karl Klindworth, the former pupil of Liszt and passionate campaigner for Wagner who was then Professor of Piano at the Conservatoire. It was she who gave her son his preliminary musical education, and who sent him in 1907 to study counterpoint and composition privately with Tchaikovsky's protégé Sergei Taneyev, which led on to study with Taneyev's pupil Nikolai Zhilyayev. (Alexandrov was already studying philosophy at Moscow University.)

In the extreme conservatism of Taneyev's teaching and outlook, and in Zhilyayev's enthusiasm for the latest music of Skryabin and Debussy, Alexandrov discovered the opposing tendencies which he would strive to balance throughout his career. His earliest works, such as the *Six Preludes*, Op. 1, were admired by Rachmaninov and Nikolai Medtner; the latter became a firm friend of Alexandrov and proved a moderating presence by showing him, for a time, a way to reconcile these conflicting influences.³

From 1910 to 1915 Alexandrov was a student at Moscow Conservatory, where his teachers included Sergei Vasilenko (theory), Alexander Ilyinsky (composition) and Konstantin Igumnov (piano). He graduated with a gold medal. In addition to the continuing influence of Skryabin and Medtner, Alexandrov was also considerably affected by the music and personality of his fellow-student and close friend Alexei Stanchinsky. Considered a near-genius by his classmates, Stanchinsky (1888–1914) suffered from mental problems and his death by drowning was perhaps suicide. Almost all his surviving works are for piano, and they were prepared for publication mostly by Alexandrov.

From 1916 Alexandrov was active as a pianist, giving many recitals. In 1923 he joined the faculty of Moscow Conservatoire; he was appointed Professor of Composition in 1926 and remained in that post until his retirement. It was perhaps during the mid-1920s, in the period before the emergence of Shostakovich and the return of Prokofiev from abroad, that his reputation stood at its highest in the USSR. The published

³ They remained friends, though their aesthetic aims eventually drew further apart as Medtner's distrust of contemporary music deepened: in a memoir of Medtner, Alexandrov recalled that he when he tried to explain to Medtner a course on 'Modern Harmony' that he was teaching, Medtner was so displeased he refused to listen. Cf. Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music*, Scholar Press, Aldershot, 1995, p. 186.

correspondence of Prokofiev and Myaskovsky shows that in 1923 the latter made repeated efforts to persuade an at best mildly impressed Prokofiev, then living the life of an itinerant virtuoso in western Europe, to include Alexandrov's works in his recitals.⁴ In 1927 the critic Viktor Belyayev wrote that among composers then working in the USSR Myaskovsky, Samuil Feinberg and Alexandrov were widely spoken of as the most outstanding representatives of the new era, going on to characterise Myaskovsky as 'a thinker', Feinberg as 'a psychologist', but Alexandrov as 'before anything else, a poet'.⁵ A more recent assessment has described Alexandrov as a 'post-Rachmaninovichian',⁶ and indeed it seems that from around the beginning of the 1930s Alexandrov began to compose in a more traditional late-Romantic idiom than hitherto. All the works on this disc date from after this modification of ethos: it is not that modernism has been rejected in them, but that modernist traits – especially in terms of post-Skryabinesque expressionism, intense dissonance and chromatic involution – have been subsumed within a larger, more traditionally conceived design in which they tend to have a local rather than decisively structural function.

Any sort of eminence in the early years of the Soviet Union was at best a fragile and conditional state, and Alexandrov was a casualty of the ideological warfare and in-fighting between the various post-revolutionary Russian musical organisations. He himself was a member of the Association for Contemporary Music (ASM) founded in Moscow in 1923 by Myaskovsky, Belyayev and other like-minded musicians. The ASM aimed to disseminate wider understanding of new musical trends within and outside the USSR, and promoted concerts and visits by contemporary composers from western Europe and the USA. In the later 1920s its members found themselves under attack by the more left-ideological Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), which for a time was in the political ascendant. The ASM was vilified as an alleged hotbed of anti-democratic and decadent musical trends: to describe someone as holding 'asmovskiy' views was a term of abuse, and Alexandrov, like Myaskovsky and Roslavets, was publicly traduced as an 'aesthete'. Both organisations were dissolved by state decree in 1932, but the experience evidently left its mark on Alexandrov, who seldom put his head above the parapet. Though he received several state awards in his later career, culminating in People's Artist of the USSR in 1971, he held no political posts and apart from giving concerts and song-recitals with his wife, the singer Nina Alexandrova, held himself aloof from public musical life. He died in Moscow, aged almost 94, on 16 April 1982.

Alexandrov was a prolific composer: his catalogue of works includes two symphonies, a piano concerto, five operas (one of them for children) and four string quartets, but he remained best-known for his

The first piece, *Moderato* in E minor, is both lyrical and dignified, almost like a minuet, contrapuntally enlivened with touches of canon [15]. It is only when the tune appears towards the end harmonised high up in a chilly chain of major-minor triads that one begins to wonder if there is something more than surface appeal at work. The ensuing *Allegro molto* in B major is a busy, charming butterfly of a piece, spun around a continuous stream of quavers in the middle register, rising to a crystalline gesture of farewell [16]. Profound seriousness enters the cycle with the third Episode, *Sostenuto, severo* in E flat minor [17], which bears a dedication to N. V. Simonovskaya.¹¹ It starts as a grim funeral march with evocations of the brazen and comfortless clangour of church bells. A central section in the tonic major, *dolcissimo, sognando* introduces tender melodic writing, though the distant rumble of the march never ceases, and breaks out again with cruel force before fading into the gloom.

No. 4, *Andantino, molto grazioso e rubato* [18], is a fragrant, rather Chopinesque invention in F sharp major, and No. 5, *Allegro* in C major [19], a kind of dashing, feverish *moto perpetuo*. But the jewel and the heart of the cycle is the sixth Episode, an *Adagio, cantabile* in E major [20], which is headed 'To the memory of my wife, N. G. Alexandrova'. The direction *cantabile* is of the essence here. Surely no-one who listens to this wonderful piece could doubt that it paints a vivid portrait from memory of a singer, singing to piano accompaniment; and the ability of the pianist to carry a sustained line with beauty of tone is paramount. The songs of Medtner, Rachmaninov and of course Alexandrov himself are the soil from which the music flowers. The basic unit here is the quintuplet: the five-in-a-beat shaping of the accompanimental figuration and the phrasing of the melodic line keep the music, so deeply felt, from the faintest breath of sentimentality and also creates a subtle, inbuilt *rubato*. Beginning with real tenderness and delicacy it rises to a passionate outpouring of emotion only to master itself and fade resignedly into the mists. Had Alexandrov written nothing but this movement, he would deserve a high rank among Russian piano-composers.

After this utterance the wan beauty of the seventh episode, an *Andante* in A minor [21], comes as something of a relief. In itself it is a charming piece, full of imitations between and crossings of the hands, the whole springing from the haunting interval of a falling minor third. No. 8 [22] is again dedicated to Simonovskaya: in stark contrast to the funeral march of No. 3 it starts out as a cheerful, dancing *Allegro giocoso* in F major – a little scherzo, in fact. But the rich Rachmaninovichian melancholy of its trio section in D flat hints at a different

¹¹ Natalia Viktorovna Gumilyova, *née* Simonovskaya (1920–2004), artist, illustrator and Eurasianist, married to Lev Nikolai Gumilyov, the son of Nikolai Gumilyov and Anna Akhmatova. The multiple arrests and imprisonments of Lev, whose father was executed when he was nine years old, form the subject matter of Akhmatova's *Requiem*. Despite spending almost all his youth – indeed, most of his life until his early forties – in hard-labour prison camps, Lev not only continued to write poetry but became a noted historian, Arabic linguist, geographer and ethnologist, and formulated the 'passionarity' concept of ethnogenesis, a still controversial attempt to codify the rise and fall of activity and cultural influence, particularly of the tribal peoples of the steppes of central Asia. After her marriage Natalia Viktorovna devoted herself to the support and promotion of her husband's writings and was herself a committed 'Yevrasiistka' (Eurasianist) (information supplied by Anthony Phillips).

⁴ S. S. Prokofiev i N. Y. Myaskovsky *Perepiska* Sovyetski Kompozitor, Moscow, 1977: cf. especially several exchanges between pp. 160 and 182.

⁵ Quoted thus by Christoph Flamm in notes for *Piano Music by Anatoly Alexandrov* (Hyperion CDA 67328, released in 2002).

⁶ Larry Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1994, p. 199.

settled world and formal decorum of the Baroque era; but they either invest them with unsettling undertones or are undercut by unexpected stylistic juxtapositions which well illustrate Alexandrov's mastery of musical characterisation. The gorgeous 'Aria' [9], which sets out singing in D major but turns sombrely before the end to the pathos of the relative minor, immediately makes the first approach abundantly clear. A 'Galliarde and Pavana' follows, [10] but this is not a binary pair of dances. Rather, the busy E major Galliard (a distinctly twentieth-century spin on the archaic genre, reminiscent if anything of Ravel's approach in *Le Tombeau de Couperin*) encloses and envelops the grave and restrained A minor Pavan, whose archaism is entirely genuine, for a footnote reveals it is a transcription for piano of a sixteenth-century lute piece.

In the third movement, the soft, bell-like harmonic clashes of the Chorale (in which Alexandrov writes chains of consecutive tenths for the left hand) preface a raffish and cheerily dissonant Polka – sacred and highly profane brought cheek to cheek [11]. A tranquil Waltz in A major comes next [12]: it seems blithely simple, a sunny right-hand melody unfolding against a conventional left-hand accompaniment, yet contrives to hint at unstated emotional complexities before the end.

'Dances in the Square and Siciliana' is the title of the fifth movement [13]: Alexandrov is perhaps thinking of a mediaeval or Renaissance Italian scene, maybe even tangentially of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. Opening nominally in D major, a brief pugnacious introductory recitative prefaces a pair of bustling, boisterous dances (*Allegretto*) with an intricate rhythmic life of their own; the tempo then slows to *Andantino* for the D minor Siciliana, an exquisite bittersweet piece. A recall of the rough recitative leads directly into the last movement, an extended Gavotte [14] whose apparent cheerful innocence is somewhat belied by knowing jazzy harmonies, and an unexpectedly majestic last few bars.

The ten pieces, most of them comparative miniatures, brought together under the title *Romantic Episodes*, Op. 88, are collectively dated 1962, though at least one of them is considerably earlier: Alexandrov, now in his seventies, seems to be looking back at the high days of Russian romantic piano music, but from a highly personal standpoint. Certainly it is music that carries a heavy freight of memories, as is indicated by the dedication of the set 'to V. Ya. Myaskovskaya', a name which for Alexandrov must have been redolent of former times,¹⁰ and the individual dedications attached to three of the pieces.

¹⁰ Nikolai Myaskovskiy, who had died in 1951, shared a flat in Moscow with his two sisters, Vera and Valentina Yakovlevna: the latter is Alexandrov's dedicatee. According to Prokofiev, of the two sisters Valentina was by far the more sensitive and in tune with her composer brother. Vera was married (confusingly, to a man named Yakovlev), while Valentina – despite keeping the name Myaskovskaya – was early widowed: her husband had shot himself when he 'got himself mixed up in dubious financial transactions', as Myaskovskiy told Prokofiev. Observing the ménage in 1927, Prokofiev commented that Valentina's sixteen-year-old daughter, a militant member of the Komsomol, made her mother's and Myaskovskiy's lives a misery by constantly upbraiding them for their 'bourgeois ideas'. Cf. Sergei Prokofiev, *Diaries 1924–1933*, Vol. 3: Prodigal Son, ed. and transl. Anthony Phillips, Faber and Faber, London, 2012, pp. 445–46.

voluminous output of piano music (including fourteen sonatas) and many songs. (His wife became one of the foremost interpreters of his songs, through their joint recitals.) He also edited the music of other composers, including Tchaikovsky's string quartets for the Complete Edition of his works.

The *Four Narratives*, Op. 48, date from 1939. The story-telling aspect of these pieces might recall Medtner, though in Russian Alexandrov calls them *Povyestvovania* rather than using Medtner's habitual term *Skazki*. The distinction is perhaps that here Alexandrov also presents himself as a teller of tales, but his tales are truth rather than fantasy. The first piece, a haunting *Andante* in E minor [2], sets the narrative pace in the phrasing of its opening theme, but soon becomes agitated and moves into a solemn *Quasi Marcia* with heroic-tragic accents. The opening theme returns, beset with anxious triplet rhythms, and melds with distant echoes of the march in the closing bars.

The second *Narrative*, in a chromatically much-expanded C major [3], is headed 'What the sea spoke about during the storm'. Never still, it is one of Alexandrov's more 'modernist' pieces, a lashing *Allegro impetuoso*, post-Skryabinesque in its harmonic fluidity, borne up and down by squally triplet figurations which ceaselessly make and remake long chromatic chains without ever quite producing a twelve-note row. At the end, a brief and unexpectedly diatonic C major fanfare is immediately negated by a ten-pitch chromatic flourish, with C providing the cadence point and the eleventh tone. *Narrative* No. 3, 'What the sea spoke of on the morning after the storm', is a complete contrast [4]. This E major *Andantino* has the freshness of an aubade, though there is still a tidal ebb and flow in the left-hand figuration. The chorale-like subject of the A minor middle section has a calm majesty before an elaborated return of the opening music.

The fourth and last piece, in B minor, is inscribed 'In memory of A. M. Dianov';⁷ and is redolent less of Medtner than of Mussorgsky [5]. It begins *Andante, molto cantabile* with steady, majestic tread and contrary motion between the hands. A brighter, more childlike theme appears, prefaced by a little fanfare, but rapidly expands to an unexpectedly grand climax only to subside into the final span of the piece, richly and sonorously harmonised and subtly intertwining both ideas.

An altogether larger narrative than those of Op. 48, the *Ballade*, Op. 49, was also composed in 1939 and revised in 1958 (it is the revised version that is heard on this CD) [1]. An eventful work in D that could pass for a compressed single-movement sonata, it grows from a gaunt *Moderato* theme in octaves, whose pendant is a brassy figure in 'horn-call sixths', contrasted with a lyrical, misty theme typically marked *indefinito*; after a *risoluto* climax, a broken *staccato* figure in the deep bass brings this opening phase to an end. What has been heard so far has constituted a kind of exposition, and at first Alexandrov seems to be starting an exposition repeat, but the music soon deviates from that course and accelerates into a surging, volatile *Allegro tempestoso*

⁷ Anton Mikhailovich Dianov (1882–1939), a Muscovite composer of piano music (two suites in 1913 and 1924, a sonata in 1925 and some smaller pieces), choral music, songs (to texts by Balmont, Tyutchev and Verlaine) and chamber music for strings and piano.

development in D minor that rises and falls in huge waves of sound. The broken *staccato* figure reappears, only immediately to form the basis for a resolute fugue. As the textures thicken, fugal writing is progressively abandoned and the music drives to a brazen climax. Some of the opening matter is recalled, and then a coda begins with the unexpected suggestion of a distant dance, melting into a tranquil epilogue that spirals up into the higher reaches of the keyboard.

From the end of the nineteenth and into the third decade of the twentieth century, many Russian piano composers explored the Lisztian ideal of the one-movement piano sonata (the model being not so much Liszt's huge B minor Sonata as his earlier *Dante Sonata* from the second book of *Années de pèlerinage*). The last six sonatas of Skryabin, highly compressed and stylistically adventurous, were the immediate inspiration for such potent and passionate effusions as the respective Third Sonatas of Prokofiev and Miaskovsky, as well as sonatas by Medtner, Mossolov, Roslavets, Feinberg and even the First Sonata of Shostakovich. Alexandrov's first three sonatas, all single-movement utterances, have their place in this tendency, but afterwards he preferred to adopt multi-movement designs. He also asserted⁸ that up to Sonata No. 8, his odd-numbered sonatas reflected 'modernism' and the even-numbered ones 'Medtner', though it is sometimes difficult to hear any such neat distinction in the works themselves. Nevertheless the 'Medtnerian' tendencies of the three-movement **Piano Sonata No. 8 in B flat, Op. 50**, are clear enough, if they are located in terms of exhaustive and resourceful motivic exploration, an onward-surging rhythmic drive, lyric expression that is the volatile by-product of thematic development rather than its basis, and a sense of an unfolding narrative. Thus the Sonata does seem to bring the 'story-telling' tendencies of the *Four Narratives* and the *Ballade* to some sort of climax. Its impressive unanimity of expression belies what was clearly a difficult parturition, for the sonata was composed over the course of five years, 1939–44 – although nothing in it seems like a deliberate reference to what Russians know as the Great Patriotic War.

At first hearing, the *Allegretto giocoso* first movement [6] seems very close in conception to one of Medtner's *Skazki*, with a cheerful main theme that is put through some athletic paces courtesy of the busy accompanimental figures that give a continual sense of journeying (though Medtner would probably not have written Alexandrov's streams of left-hand parallel fourths). It is a fully-worked-out if rather terse sonata-movement, with a second subject fashioned from spiky semiquaver figuration in both hands. After the exposition the opening of the development is signalled by a trombone-like *poco pesante* variant of the main theme in octaves, and it proves to be an even busier affair, with a lot of the thematic interest in the bass. A *fortissimo* fanfare, itself another thematic variant, heralds the recapitulation, in which the material continues to be shown in different lights, and combined with the octave motif the fanfare also brings the movement to an end, though this is not the last we have heard of it.

⁸ Quoted without further attribution by Christoph Flamm, *loc. cit.*

The slow movement, in a seldom clearly defined E minor, opens by presenting a shapely and memorable melody, oscillating metrically between 3/4 and common time [7]. In a footnote Alexandrov identifies this theme as a Chuvashian folksong.⁹ He re-presents it in a more contrapuntal texture and then in a romantic variant over murmuring quintuplet arpeggios. After further development the melody returns in the pristine form of the opening, but now with a hollow, tolling octave pedal B in the bass. The contrapuntal treatment and the variant with arpeggios are recalled, leading to a melancholic coda in which the melody is deconstructed as the music rises higher and higher on the keyboard and fades out.

A portentous introduction (actually an augmentation of the first-movement fanfare) prefaces the finale, the longest and most complex movement, in form a kind of sonata-rondo [8]. The rondo theme, marked *Alla danza energica con moto assai, ma un poco sostenuto*, again has affinities with some of Medtner's liveliest *Skazki*, though Alexandrov footnotes it, without further detail, as a Russian folksong. The movement derives much of its impetus from its vivacious anapaestic rhythms. The first episode (and second subject) is a dance of a hauntingly different kind (the music is marked *alla danza severa e solenne*) that begins in E major and whose comparative gravity and resonance emanate from the way the anapaestic rhythm has been slowed to half speed and transferred to chiming inner pedals of repeated notes. After a varied return of the rondo theme the second episode presents a slightly slower and altogether more romantic third theme, *cantabile, affetuoso, rubato*. Here a diatonic soprano melody is intertwined by a fine-spun net of chromaticism in the alto and tenor registers. Alexandrov works it to a passionate climax before returning to the lively rondo theme. The *danza severa* then recurs, now beginning in A major, and is given sustained development before the rondo theme reappears, this time in combination with a variant of the fanfare from the first movement, before Alexandrov recalls the introductory passage of the finale (also a form of the fanfare), which in turn gives way to a spirited development of that element as a march in 3/4 time. It works up to a brief *Maestoso* coda with progressively more grandiose statements of the augmented fanfare. Manifestly the music has arrived somewhere, but the mood is pugnacious rather than triumphant, and the final cadence feels open-ended, as if the dance could resume at any moment.

The other two works in this recital, somewhat later in date, are suites of short pieces, very different from one another, that enlarge awareness of Alexandrov's very wide expressive range. *Echoes of the Theatre*, Op. 60, is undated but presumably comes from the mid-1940s; without ever descending to specifics its movements seem to evoke music for plays and ballets. These six beautifully crafted pieces do not bear the subtitle 'in Old Style', but some of them certainly could, for they appear to hark back nostalgically to the

⁹ The Chuvash people form a distinct ethnic group concentrated in the Middle Volga region between Nizhny-Novgorod and Kazan; their origins are disputed, but they are generally believed to be the descendants of the Suars, a Turkic people who, fleeing the Mongol invasions, had assimilated with the Mari, a Finnic people, in the mid-thirteenth century.