

## SILVESTROV

Symphony No. 8
Violin Concerto

Janusz Wawrowski, Violin
Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra
Christopher Lyndon-Gee



#### Valentin Silvestrov (b. 1937)

#### Symphony No. 8 · Violin Concerto

Valentin Vassilyevich Silvestrov (Kyiv, b. 30 September 1937) emerged as one of the leaders of the 'Kyiv avant-garde' school by the time he was 30, in the late 1960s. Indeed, this aspiring and inspired group of young composers more often than not met at the apartment of Silvestrov's parents, when they were not at lessons with the great mid-century composer Boris Lyatoshynsky (1895–1968), whose still spectacular and compelling *Third Symphony* (1951, rev. 1954) occupies an inalienable place alongside the music of Shostakovich and Myaskovsky, Prokofiev and Denisov. Silvestrov's companions on this earliest stage of his journey included Leonid Hrabovsky, Vitaliy Hodziatsky and Volodymyr Zahortsev; a tight-knit group, sometimes known as the 'Sixtiers' (Шестидесятники – 'Shestidesyatniki'), alongside their literary and scientific counterparts, recognised in this term as the rebels against the Brezhnev period of crackdown against artistic and intellectual freedom that closed in following the brief loosening of the Khrushchev period. (Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964 was himself a Ukrainian who had grown up and achieved his first career steps in the Donetsk region.) The name of Silvestrov's most prominent colleague in later years, Myroslav Skoryk (1938–2020) is absent as a member of this group of composers, since the latter was born, to German-speaking parents, in the western city of Lviv, which was at the time part of the Second Polish Republic (as was eastern Lithuania), and who first studied there, prior to relocating to Moscow for graduate work under Dmitry Kabalevsky. Only in later life, after a brief period of three years living in Australia, did Skoryk return in 1999 to Ukraine, where he became artistic director of the National Opera of Ukraine in Kyiv, a post he held until his death.

Lyatoshynsky's dominating influence on his young charges in the 1960s conveyed overwhelmingly the power of the modernist style, supplemented by the firm international connections of the conductor Igor Blazhkov, who was in lively correspondence with Varèse and Stockhausen; just as their Moscow-based colleague Edison Denisov exercised a decades-long secret exchange of letters with Pierre Boulez. Amplifying this trajectory, the young composer Leonid Hrabovsky² (b. 1935, since 1990 living in Brooklyn, USA) translated Webern's *The Path to the New Music* and other texts of the dodecaphonic school, providing additional stimulus and *imprimatur* to the group.

Silvestrov's own path, through the jungle of what we now know to have been the late-Soviet period, was far from easy. He was twice expelled from the Composer's Union; both following his protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and again in 1974. For the authorities, his 'dissident' status was enshrined not so much in political statements (to which he remains averse to this day), as in the uncompromising nature of his musical style, which was found to be confrontational. His response to this indignity in 1974 was to withdraw from active participation in public life, writing over the next three years his collection of 24 *Silent Songs* [Стіхі Піснії], many of these on texts of Ukraine's national poet, Taras Shevchenko. And it was from this period of withdrawal that his mature style emerged. The modernism of his first four symphonies becomes tempered with reflection, with inwardness; with melancholy and with longing; with a sense of panoramic perspective, as if gliding far above the tumult of our times. His is a style full of ambiguities: allusion without quotation; memory without nostalgia; strength without anger; softness without sentimentality.

Essential to his highly personal world-view is, not the collision, but the simultaneity of all that has gone before. Though, earlier in his career (the 'eschatological' period of the *Symphony No. 3 'Eschatophony'*, 1966) he may have joined many others in believing that we were living in the artistic 'end times', in his much more mellow maturity, he has succeeded in synthesising, not just his own life experience, but the whole of musical history.

Shortly after the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Silvestrov's daughter Inga [Nikolenko] all but compelled him to leave Ukraine. He reluctantly agreed to this for her sake and that of his granddaughter, declaring (in an interview of 17 March 2022, with Anastassia Boutsko for *Deutsche Welle*) 'they are young! They have to live! That's why I agreed to leave.'3 Their departure was dramatic. Already possessing tickets, on 5 March, at the chaotically crowded principal station of Kyiv, there seemed to be no physical possibility of making their way onto a train within many hours, if even that same day. An acquaintance caught sight of them, offered them space in his minibus parked outside, and drove them first to Lviv, using safer secondary roads and roundabout routes, then next day to the Polish border. From here, they progressed by train through Warsaw, ending exhausted in Berlin two days later. Silvestrov brought with him a single suitcase, filled with manuscripts, barely anything else. They now live comfortably, but with the deep unhappiness of those deprived of their land, their people, their lifelong habits, in the Wilmersdorf apartment of the artistic director of one of Germany's great festivals.<sup>4</sup>

Since his exile Silvestrov has been showered with worldwide attention, as the pre-eminent representative of his country's music. Not for nothing has he survived the end of the Stalinist period, the brief relaxation of cultural strictures under Khrushchev's tenure as First Secretary, artistic exile and rebuttal under Brezhnev, the confusion of the fall of the Soviet system, the even greater confusion, as artist, of the polystylism of the current era; and now, Vladimir Putin's attempt to crush the resolutely westward-facing stance of the new Ukraine. Though already well known before, he is now performed, and cited as an inspiration throughout the world. Perhaps in culmination (for the moment), his music was chosen for the Nobel ceremony of 11 December 2023 when the prizes for physics and the Peace Prize were presented.

#### Violin Concerto (2016)

In a famous, and rare interview, Silvestrov has said: 'There are two principles underlying my *Violin Concerto* (2016): the "moment" and the "memory" (or remembrance). Both have their origin in my so called "Bagatelle period" (2003–17).'5

This 20-minute *Violin Concerto* of 2016 is perhaps the junior cousin of the 44-minute *Symphony for Violin and Orchestra* written in 1990–91. And in the intervening 23 years, his language has undergone a winnowing, a leaning-in towards economy of expression and argument. The notion of 'Bagatelle' to which the composer refers above leads inevitably to thoughts of Beethoven at his most intimate and economical. Indeed, the 'moment' is of the essence in this work; a genre that Silvestrov later characterised as a 'collecting of echoes, a form opening not to the end, as is more usual, but to the beginning.'6

Just as in the thematically linked *Symphony No. 8* of just three years earlier, in his *Violin Concerto* Silvestrov toys with the idea of treating a 'great form' in a different, more intimate way; the opposite of grandiose. Often, this is articulated through the questing innocence of a circling phrase, echoed across instruments, enveloped in a cloud of string harmonics or clusters that do not quite obliterate it.

An opening triadic theme, darkly presented in C minor by the orchestra, is transformed into something altogether more delicate by the solo violin, taking over the theme at half tempo, initially in A minor. Each overcast and rapid return of the orchestra receives a similar response from the violinist, who insists upon lyricism and introspection, until the orchestra, too, succumbs, transforming the opening motif into a Mahlerian cantabile, first in F major, then in E major. This duality of nature will characterise the entire *Concerto*, most fully in its third movement, labelled *Pastorale*; and in the concluding *Serenade*, where the doubling of a solo piano echoes the violin's trajectory towards the triumph of lyricism.

In other words, Silvestrov has, in this work, fully brought to life his most fundamental beliefs about the art of music, namely that:

Poetry is the salvation of what is most important, namely melody as a holistic and indispensable organism. Either this organism exists or it does not exist. I consider music – even if it is instrumental – to be a form of song. It represents not only a philosophy or worldview, but is a song of the world about itself and a musical testimony of existence.

Silvestrov's music deals with fundamental questions of life, especially regarding the meaning, origin and justification of human existence. In his compositions he emphasises beauty, depth and harmony which can emerge life affirming, transcendent from conflict. As so often in Silvestrov's compositions, the conclusion of the work fades back into the silence from which it emerged, leaving echoes like the long-circling ripples on a black lake at dusk.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Symphony No. 8** (2012–13)

In the first half of 2022, while studying the score of Silvestrov's *Eighth Symphony* I experienced a powerful feeling throughout – terrifyingly confirmed during rehearsals in September 2022 – that Silvestrov already knew in 2012 and 2013 everything that would befall his country, not just in Crimea in 2014, but a decade later throughout the length and breadth of the land.

The inner force of his music is powerfully that of the prophet or mystic; or perhaps more accurately that of a deeply introspective man whose perceptiveness of the truth of the human condition, and fellow-feeling with all that afflicts humankind are rare indeed. Through his music alone – not with grand pronouncements, not with interviews or articles or explanatory screeds – he has both foretold and chronicled the agony of his country.

As the orchestra and I worked on this astounding *Eighth Symphony* and its closely linked *Violin Concerto*, only a matter of months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we came face to face with the suffering and anguish of Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel, of the theatre at Mariupol, the railway station at Kramatorsk, of the port cities of Kherson and Odessa. And yes: many of us have family links or personal friendships with those who were caught up in this conflict. For me, this especially means my brilliant musician colleagues of the Presidential Orchestra of Ukraine, all of whom serve as soldiers, many of whom went to the front lines early in the war. The orchestra will not be the same again.

Silvestrov famously avoids speaking of his music, preferring it to speak for itself. Unusually, however, he has referred to the symphony in this way: 'Like my *Violin Concerto* and *Concertino*<sup>8</sup> (2015), my *Symphony No. 8* is based on the idea of treating the great form in a different way – as a chain of moments and not as a dialectical development.'

Here is the key to the symphony, that is cast (like almost all of Silvestrov's works of the last 20 years) essentially in a single, unbroken span. The division of the symphony on the page into six 'movements' is somewhat misleading, as these are played *attacca*, without breaks, each arising out of the dissolution of what went before. The thematic materials continuously evolve and transmute, without 'development' in the traditional sense; rather, the composer presents a mosaic structure of constantly circling themes.

In lesser hands, such an improvisatory approach might result in a music that is diffuse; Silvestrov's genius is able to imbue his mosaic structure with compelling logic that, while never predictable, is always drawing the listener onwards into new perspectives and unexpected juxtapositions.

Among the elements that make up this symphony-long, grand mosaic are:

a descending chromatic cluster, C - B - B flat -A - G sharp, in which the tones are presented in disjunct octaves, such that the edge of dissonance is softened; leading directly to -

pulsating minor chords, with the third of the triad uppermost: this introductory pair of phrases will dominate much of the work, at constantly varied pitch points;

a plangent, falling motif of fourths and tritones, built around the same minor chords;

a muscular, defiant rising scale figure, whose force rapidly dissipates as it rises;

contrasting clarion call rising motifs, sometimes of consecutive fourths, sometimes of interlocking tritones, dissolving into Silvestrov's favoured upwards chromatic cascade of diminished sevenths;

It is this opposition of elements that are less and more 'tonal' that articulates the whole work. And into the mosaic structure are inserted three episodes that each appear only once:

an unsentimental yet yearning piano solo, essentially in D major, that occupies much of the short third movement, enveloped in a 'Cloud of Unknowing' of dissonant string clusters; this piano melody is briefly taken over by the violins, only to dissolve as quickly as it appeared;

a minor key 'Celtic' theme introduced at the mid-point of the fourth movement by the harp, briefly taken over by flute in G: this, too, is music which is always on the edge of dissolving;

brief snatches in the sixth 'movement' of a D major triadic melody in solo flute and clarinet: short phrases that are always interrupted by the rising tritone motif, left hanging in the air.

Throughout each of these truncated, broken-off attempts at extended melody, the symphony is a homage to the human race; to the fundamental life-force; to the tragedies that repeat themselves over and over in our existence. But also, to love and to humanity, to hope and to renewal. The silence into which the work descends at its close is not a silence of defeat, but of rich, meditative summation of all that has gone before.

Thus has Silvestrov's music been described by Gidon Kremer: 'This music is like a Mass for everything that exists that is desirable, unattainable, or only to be arrived at in one's imagination.'10

#### Is Silvestrov a Postmodernist Composer?

What, exactly, is meant by the term 'postmodernism' has yet to be satisfactorily defined.

Jean-Jacques Nattiez has famously written, in his great essay about Boulez's *Répons*<sup>11</sup>, 'Modernism created a gulf with the public, and postmodernism wants to bridge that gap.'

Such a 'definition' would seem to give free reign to the all-too-often superficial neo-Romanticism of much contemporary composition, to mimicry and facile imitation; to 'easy listening' for modern ears; to abandoning challenge or depth of any kind in favour of 'entertainment.'

We are living in a pusillanimous age of 'political correctness', this era of a civilisation that has lost its way; thus it is hardly surprising that much of the art that paints a picture of our times reflects lack of purpose and clear direction in its very banality. Composers throughout the ages have used 'models', have paid homage to their imperishable predecessors in ways that are more often than not loving tributes: think Josquin's *Déploration sur la mort de Jean Ockeghem*, Mozart's very early piano concertos that are unabashed 'arrangements' of Johann Christian Bach, or Alban Berg's *Violinkonzert 'Dem Andenken eines Engels'*. Much of what is being written today is, however, merely derivative; betraying a lack of courage or of vision, straining our faith in music as an art-form with any future at all. Much contemporary art qualifies, indeed, barely as 'entertainment' any more, for it has been hijacked by the 'addiction-directed' processes of the internet, whose attention span is measured not even in minutes, but in seconds.

Where did we go wrong?!

Perhaps we did not all go wrong, for ...

... no such facile solutions could be further from the truths contained in the work of the great Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov, now a temporary exile in Berlin, where he remains for the time being, impatient to return to the stones and squares and parks and to the air and to the light, the trees, the churches and the hills that have been his companions and inspiration his entire life.

No, the music of Valentin Silvestrov is decidedly not about nostalgia, nor is it about seeking to recreate something that is 'easier' to listen to than the modernist journeys of the post-Second World War period. Not nostalgia: on the contrary, it is about lament.

Postmodern is the melancholia of realising that our era and our culture are passing. Postmodern is a lament for sounds half-heard, barely remembered from a past full of beauty and spiritual aspiration. Postmodern is recall through a veil or a fog of uncertainty, of that which in the past meant everything to us, but is now disappearing under the onslaughts of a more brutish culture.

Valentin Silvestrov is not seeking to keep hold of this world that is dying in front of our eyes; he has long ago accepted his role as the one who is writing its epitaph.

When, in Silvestrov's music, we think we hear quotation, what he is in fact presenting to us is infinitely artful pastiche; nay, half-heard memory, that approaches the listener like a shade hesitatingly revealing its presence from behind a lace curtain ('Une dentelle s'abolit'12).

If Silvestrov seems to allow a quotation from Mozart, or Chopin, or Webern, or Mahler to invade his hesitant musical textures, these are in fact not citations but allusions; the composer putting on the clothes, for an instant or a truncated phrase, of one of these illustrious predecessors – never an actual quotation, but a shadow presence of homage, a half-remembered nostalgic wish, inevitably altered by all that has come since. For in Silvestrov, everything is a postlude to that which is slipping, inevitably and unceasingly from between our fingers.

'I do not write new music. My music is a response to and an echo of what already exists,' said Silvestrov. 'Music is still song, even if one cannot literally sing it: it is not a philosophy, not a world-view. It is, above all, a chant, a song the world sings about itself, it is the musical testimony to life.'13

As Raymond Tuttle expresses it, 'Silvestrov's music is usually in the process of fading into nothing ...'14

Or, in Malcolm MacDonald's words, Silvestrov 'seems to compose, not the lament itself, but the lingering memory of it; the mood of sadness that it leaves behind.'15

Silvestrov's music is in the end a 'nothing' filled, not with lament, but with the richness and beauty and depth of that which is never finally lost; for it stays in the memory and the heart even when no longer instantly present to the eyes, the ear or the soul. Perhaps in this music we find a salvation from the superficial, attention-poor cacophony of our age.

- Much of this history is documented in the article by Max Chukhlib, *Composers-Sixtiers: Unknown Kyiv avantgarde*, first published on 23 August 2022; consulted on 22 September 2023 at slukh.media/en/texts/kyivavant-garde/
- <sup>2</sup> In 1959 Shostakovich wrote of his All-Union prize-winning work, 'the *Ukrainian Songs* by Hrabovsky pleased me immensely his arrangements attracted me by the freedom of treatment and good choral writing.'
- 3 This full interview is available at https://www.dw.com/en/ukrainian-composer-valentin-silvestrov-what-are-youkremlin-devils-doing/a-61158308
- <sup>4</sup> These details of the 'escape' were shared by Valentin and his daughter Inga at a meeting with Christopher Lyndon-Gee in Berlin, on 15 July 2022.
- <sup>5</sup> Cited on the Schott Music website, at https://www.schott-music.com/en/concerto-no368557.html
- 6 One of Silvestrov's responses to an interview by Tat'yana Frumkis, published as Sokhranyat' dostoinstvo ... in Sovetskaya muzhika, No. 4 (1990)
- <sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Paul Griffiths for this memorable analogy.
- <sup>8</sup> The Concertino is available from the same performers on Naxos 8.574123, released in 2020.
- <sup>9</sup> Silvestrov agreed with my reference to the anonymous 14th-century neo-Platonist work in Middle English positing a god who is pure essence, beyond any capacity of human comprehension.
- <sup>10</sup> Gidon Kremer, in booklet notes to his recording of *Dedication* on Teldec 4509-99206-2, released 1996, Hamburg.
- Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Boulez in the postmodern era: The Time of Répons*, included in *The Battle of Chronos and Orpheus*, Oxford University Press 2004, translated by Jonathan Dunsby; original edition *Le Combat de Chronos et d'Orphée*, Paris 1993 (Christian Bourgeois).
- Here I allude to the title of Mallarmé's 1893 poem that is set by Pierre Boulez as the third movement of *Pli selon Pli ('Fold according to fold')*, his quasi-symphony of the mid-1960s, revised and rescored in the 1980s.
- 13 Both these citations are from the same interview with Tat'yana Frumkis: see note 6 above.
- 14 Raymond Tuttle, review of the Requiem for Larissa at Classical.Net, 2004 www.classical.net/music/recs/reviews/e/ecm01778a.php
- Malcolm MacDonald, in a concert review cited by Seth Brodsky at www.allmusic.com/artist/valentin-silvestrovmn0001901195/biography; used by permission of Malcolm's widow, Libby Valdez.

#### Janusz Wawrowski



Janusz Wawrowski's solo career has led him to perform in a number of the world's most important concert halls, including the Musikverein Wien, Wigmore Hall in London and the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg. A double winner of the Fryderyk Award, he has been associated with the Warner Classics label for many years, for which he has released eight acclaimed solo albums and a number of singles. One of his most recent albums, *Phoenix*, received nominations for ICMA 2021, PdSK, Opus Klassik 2021 and Fryderyk 2021, and was chosen as Presto Classical's Editor's Choice and Classic FM's Album of the Week, among others. Wawrowski has given numerous premieres of violin concertos, and is the dedicatee of works by Tomasz J. Opałka, Marcin Markowicz and Norbert Palej, among others. An important part of his career is the interpretation and research of Polish music, and among his many other accolades, Wawrowski has been awarded the Polish Medal for Merit to Culture – Gloria Artis. He plays a 1685 Stradivarius 'Polonia' violin.

#### **Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra**



The Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra (LNSO) was established in 1940 by the composer, conductor and pianist Balys Dvarionas. The orchestra presents around 50 concerts annually in the Lithuanian National Philharmonic Hall and across Lithuania. It has also performed in some of the most prestigious international concert venues, such as the Musikverein Wien, the philharmonic halls of Cologne and Berlin, and the Barbican Centre in London. The basis of the LNSO's rich repertoire consists of oratorios and symphonies from various epochs, as well as modern contemporary music, with an emphasis on well-known works by Lithuanian composers and also first symphonies by many young composers. Since 1991, the LNSO has regularly participated in the GAIDA contemporary music festival. The orchestra also presents music by Lithuanian composers on Euroradio broadcasts. The LNSO's discography includes numerous releases on the Ondine, Accentus, Marco Polo, Col Legno, Ella Records, Naxos and Avie Records labels. Modestas Pitrėnas has served as artistic director and principal conductor since 2015. Robertas Šervenikas is the orchestra's second conductor, and Juozas Domarkas is honorary conductor.

#### **Christopher Lyndon-Gee**



Internationally renowned conductor Christopher Lyndon- Gee is known worldwide for his catalogue of many dozens of recordings. almost all of these since 1994 with Naxos. These include the complete orchestral music of Igor Markevitch and of Edgard Varèse; most of the symphonies and orchestral works of George Rochberg (a project still in progress); and, since their first collaborations in Kyiv in 2016, the present series of music of Valentin Silvestrov. Other prizewinning recordings include the music of Hans Werner Henze, Ottorino Respighi, Dmitry Shostakovich, Larry Sitsky (his opera *The Golem*), Igor Stravinsky, Arthur Bliss and Richard Strauss. His musicianship has been recognised by the Sydney Critics 'Best Conductor' award for his work with the then Australian Opera (now Opera Australia), by five GRAMMY Award nominations, multiple nominations for other major awards such as Cannes and Echo Klassik; and by the Pizzicato Prize in Luxembourg. His history and close associations with many orchestras include Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Germany, England, Australia, the United States, Lithuania, the Republic of Georgia, Russia, France, Switzerland, the Havana Philharmonic (Cuba), and the Kyiv Philharmonic, Presidential Orchestra and Kyiv Chamber Orchestra in Ukraine. Primarily a composer, Lyndon- Gee won the Onassis Prize in Athens for his ballet score II Poeta muore ('The Poet

Dies'), based on the life of Pier Paolo Pasolini and on Loris Jacopo Bononi's book of the same title. The Australian National Critics awarded him 'Artist of the Year' for his choral-orchestral *Hymn for Sarum: Te Deum*; and, also in Australia, he won the Spivakovsky prize for his *Poema per Gaspara Stampa*, honouring Italy's great 16th-century female poet. Numerous other works led to two MacDowell Fellowships in the USA; to a Paul Sacher Foundation Fellowship, and (for his writing about music) to multiple Visiting Scholar invitations to the Berenson Library at Villa I Tatti, Florence. He is currently working on a concerto for violin that will be entitled *Mémorial pour Pierre*, slated for its premiere in November 2026 in Vilnius.

Valentin Silvestrov was forced to leave his native Ukraine after the Russian invasion of 2022. His music has a prescient quality that unerringly seems to express the fate of his homeland. The intimate *Violin Concerto* and the heartfelt, single-span *Eighth Symphony* are notable for their economy of expression and emphasis on beauty, depth and harmony. This is music that hovers on the edge of silence in an uplifting homage to love and humanity, hope and renewal.



#### Valentin SILVESTROV (b. 1937)

			,	D. 17
Violin	Concerto	(2016)	19:	35

1	I. Elegie: Al	legretto – Andante –
	Animato – A	Adagio –
	TT T	ATT

- 2 II. Intermezzo: Allegro –
- 3 III. Pastorale: Andante -
- 4 IV. Serenade: Andantino

19:35	Symphony	No. 8	(2012-13)	34:11
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	5	I. Andantino – Adagio [alternating] –	
5:59		più mosso –	4:50

- 3:24 6 II. Moderato Allegro –
- 6:30 Allegro assai Maestoso 5:00
- :42 7 III. Intermezzo: Andantino 2:48
  - 8 IV. Andante Allegro assai Allegretto – Andante –
  - Allegretto Andante 10:23

    9 V. Moderato Allegro vivace 5:08
  - **10** VI. [dolce, leggiero] 6:02

#### WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

# Janusz Wawrowski, Violin 1-4 Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra

### **Christopher Lyndon-Gee**

Executive producer: National Philharmonic Society of Lithuania: with special thanks to their general director, Mme. Rūta Prusevičienė, and to production manager Vaiva Bukytė.

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