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Mieczysław WEINBERG

Complete Violin Sonatas Volume Two

Violin Sonata No. 2, Op. 15
Violin Sonata No. 5, Op. 53
Sonata for Solo Violin No. 2
Op. 95
Moldavian Rhapsody, Op. 47

Yuri Kalnits, violin
Michael Csányi-Wills, piano

FIRST COMPLETE RECORDING

MIECZYŚLAW WEINBERG: THE MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, VOLUME 2

by David Fanning

Mieczysław Weinberg had a remarkable life-story, even by the standards of those many composers who were buffeted by the storms of mid-twentieth-century Europe. He was born in Warsaw in 1919, and his early musical experiences were as pianist and ensemble leader at a Jewish theatre where his father was composer and violinist. From the age of twelve he took piano lessons at the Warsaw Conservatory, and in later life his fluency as a sight-reader and score-reader was much vaunted; among his several fine recordings are his own Piano Quintet with the Borodin Quartet and the piano-duet version of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony with the composer.

In 1939 he fled the German occupation of Poland (in which his parents and sister were murdered) to Belorussia, where a Russian border-guard reportedly inscribed his documents with the stereotypically Jewish first name Moisey. That became the name by which all official sources thereafter referred to him; his friends and family generally used the pet-name Metek. In Minsk he attended the composition classes of Vasily Zolotaryov, one of Rimsky-Korsakov's numerous pupils. Following the Nazi invasion of the USSR, he moved on to Tashkent in Uzbekistan. Then at the invitation of Shostakovich, who had been impressed with the score of his First Symphony, he moved to Moscow, where he lived from September 1943 until his death in 1996.

Though never enrolled as one of Shostakovich's official pupils, Weinberg readily acknowledged the inspiration: 'I count myself as his pupil, his flesh and blood.'¹ And Shostakovich lost no opportunity to commend Weinberg's music to friends and colleagues. Both composers worked across a wide range of genres and in a gamut of styles from folk idioms (including, especially for Weinberg, Jewish ones) to twelve-note elements. Yet for all the unmistakable echoes of his revered role-model, Weinberg retained a higher degree of independence than did many of his Soviet colleagues, distancing himself both from official academic conservatism and from the younger generation's fervent embrace of formerly forbidden Western-style modernism. Both Shostakovich and Weinberg left an imposing body of symphonies and string quartets – in Weinberg's case numbering 26 and seventeen, respectively. In string-quartet production, indeed, Shostakovich engaged his disciple in friendly rivalry, expressing satisfaction in 1964 when he was narrowly the first to reach No. 10.²

¹ Anon., 'Pis'ma o lyubvi' ('Letters about love'), *Muzikal'naya zhizn'*, 2000, No. 2, p. 18.

² Letter to Isaak Glikman, dated 21 July 1964, published in *Story of a Friendship: The Letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman*, Faber and Faber, London, 2001, p. 117.

Festival Orchestra, Mozart Festival Orchestra, Arpeggione Chamber Orchestra, London Soloists' Chamber Orchestra, Novosibirsk Symphony Orchestra, Kazan Chamber Orchestra 'La Primavera', London Musical Arts Ensemble, Minsk Symphony Orchestra and the New Philharmonic in Cologne.

Equally active as a chamber musician, he joined the Erato Piano Trio in 2010 and has since performed with the group across the UK and recorded music by David Braid for Toccata Classics. The first volume of his complete recording of the Weinberg violin sonatas for Toccata Classics was recently awarded a prestigious Diapason d'Or.

In 2011 he was one of the organisers and a jury member for the London Gates Education Group String Project, a series of master-classes and competition aiming to provide an opportunity for young players to obtain scholarships to leading European conservatoires.

Michael Csányi-Wills graduated from the Royal Academy of Music as a pianist but found himself increasingly drawn to composition. Since then, he has written works ranging from chamber music to choral and orchestral works and film scores. He recently completed a 42-minute song-cycle set to A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* for tenor, baritone and chamber orchestra. His works have been heard around the world, most recently in performances of a number of orchestral works given by the Welsh Sinfonia under Mark Eager and *The Last Letter*, sung by mezzo soprano Krisztina Szabo at the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in Toronto.



Between 1997 and 2012 Michael collaborated with the composer Nigel Clarke on a series of film scores, including the Warner Brothers films *The Little Vampire*, *The Little Polar Bear* and *The Thief Lord* and independent films such as *Jinnah*, *Rocket Post* and *The Baseline*. In recent years he has also been in demand as a composer for a range of feature documentary work.

He was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in January 2012. He was appointed Head of Composition at the World Heart Beat Music Academy, London, in January 2013 and is currently composer-in-residence of the Welsh Sinfonia.

David Fanning is Professor of Music at the University of Manchester and has a varied career as scholar, pianist and critic. Following books on Nielsen and Shostakovich, his most recent publications include a study of Shostakovich's Eighth String Quartet for Ashgate Press, a five-volume performing edition of Russian opera arias for Peters Edition, and a new critical edition of Nielsen's piano music for the Carl Nielsen Edition. In addition to ongoing research on Weinberg, not least for a monograph in preparation for Toccata Press, he is currently working on a historical survey of the symphony in the Soviet Union for Yale University Press. He is also active as critic for Gramophone and The Daily Telegraph, and as a BBC broadcaster and public speaker.

Born in Moscow into a musical family, Yuri Kalnits received his first violin lessons from his father and went on to become a pupil at the Central Music School and later at the Gnessin Music School for Gifted Children. At the age of sixteen he began studying at the Royal College of Music in London with Itzhak Rashkovsky, winning several major College prizes, including the Foundation Scholarship, the W. H. Reed and Isolde Menges prizes and the Leonard Hirsch Prize for the outstanding string-player of the year. He went on to win other major awards, notably the Yehudi Menuhin Award from the Sudborough Foundation, the KPMG/Martin Musical Scholarship (UK), Cziffra Foundation competition (France), Web Concert Hall Competition (USA) and Barthel Prize from the Concordia Foundation. Upon graduation from the Royal College Yuri was awarded the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Scholarship for postgraduate studies there. He completed his training with Yfrah Neaman at the Guildhall School of Music and Vasko Vassiliev at Trinity College of Music while receiving further artistic guidance from eminent musicians such as Shlomo Mintz, Abram Shtern, Igor Oistrakh, Edward Grach, Sergei Fatkulline, Sylvia Rosenberg and Valentin Berlinsky.

He has played at many important venues including The Purcell Room, St John's, Smith Square, the Barbican and St Martin-in-the-Fields in London, the Small Hall of Moscow Conservatoire, Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center and Suntory Hall in Tokyo. Tours have taken him to Russia, Ireland, Germany, Israel, France, Switzerland, Spain, Greece, USA, Hong Kong and Cyprus. He has participated in such international festivals as the Festival Musicales Internationales Guil-Durance (France), Young Artist Peninsula Music Festival (USA), Festival Cziffra (France), the Waterford International Music Festival (Ireland), Irina Kandinskaya and Friends (Russia), the Pharos Trust Festival (Cyprus), Musica da Camera (Germany), the Festival International Ciudad de Ubeda (Spain) and the Loch Shiel Spring Festival (Scotland). Among the orchestras with whom he has appeared as a concerto soloist are the London



One important difference between them is that where Shostakovich left only two mature piano sonatas and one each for violin, viola and cello, Weinberg composed nearly thirty in all. Of these, six are for violin and piano and three for violin solo, in addition to sundry smaller pieces. The violin was his father's instrument, although, as Weinberg himself put it, 'not on a very high professional level',³ and in later life the composer was at various times close to a number of fine Soviet exponents, not least David Oistrakh. Although not a player himself, his command of the idiom was sure-footed, almost from the beginning.

The Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano, Op. 15, was composed in February–June 1944. No information has come to light regarding any commission or early performing history for the work; nor is it known if Weinberg had any particular artists in mind. In fact, the premiere was not given until 3 January 1962, by Oistrakh and one of his favourite accompanists, Frieda Bauer. The manuscript carries a dedication to Oistrakh, probably added retrospectively. Like the immediately preceding String Quartet No. 3, Op. 14, the Sonata shows signs of increasing ambition, but also a few residual uncertain touches.

As in the First Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 12, the first movement [2] is a lyrical allegro, initially in a straightforward G major, but broadly laid out and with an impressively grave coda in the tonic minor. The dotted-rhythm motif that launches the movement strongly recalls the first movement of Shostakovich's Second Piano Sonata, composed the previous year – the first of numerous passages in Weinberg's output that evoke this particular work. Various techniques of intensification, such as an extended fugato in the development section and thematic synthesis at the point of recapitulation, suggest higher ambitions than the First Violin Sonata. As with that piece, the manuscript shows plenty of evidence of changes of mind, with whole pages crossed-out and re-written. Even so, there is a degree of sameness of texture and even of motivic material, both within the first movement and between it and the B major slow movement. The latter, marked *Lento* [3], is a warmly romantic song-without-words that runs without a break into a finale [4] – in E minor rather than the G major of the first movement – that is again predominantly lyrical but this time with a punchy folk-like energy in the first episode (in 5/4 metre). As with the Third String Quartet, the conclusion arrives unexpectedly and perhaps not with total conviction. Not until the Piano Quintet, Op. 18, composed later the same year, did Weinberg deploy the cyclic sonata construction with full mastery of proportion and drama.

In 1948 Weinberg, in common with many prominent Soviet composers, fell foul of the 'anti-formalism' campaign spearheaded by Party functionary Andrey Zhdanov (hence the term *Zhdanovschina*, 'the Zhdanov business'). This campaign was designed to warn composers of the dangers of internationalism and to remind them of their civic duties. Again in common with his colleagues, Weinberg composed a large number of works based on folk or folk-like material as part of his rehabilitation.

Composed in 1949, the *Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes*, Op. 47, No. 3, is one of Weinberg's most immediately appealing works [1]. The original is a purely orchestral work (Op. 47, No. 1); the composer's own arrangement

³ Lyudmila Nikitina, 'Pochti lyuboy mig zhizni – rabota' ('Almost every moment of my life is work'), *Muzikal'naya akademiya*, 1994, No. 5, p. 17.

for violin and piano was published with fingerings for the solo part by David Oistrakh, and the composer himself referred to a further version for violin and orchestra, the materials for which are currently unlocated.⁴

The choice of themes from Moldavia may have been connected with the fact that Weinberg's mother originated from Kishinyov (now Chişinău), the capital of what was then the Russian territory of Bessarabia and would later become the Moldavian Soviet Republic, now the Republic of Moldova. Bessarabian musical folklore was strongly influenced by the huge Jewish population in the area, and the musical language of the *Rhapsody* has many Jewish-sounding inflexions.

The early reception of the work in the Soviet Union was complicated by the 'anti-cosmopolitan' (read 'anti-Semitic') campaign that was already under way by the end of 1948. Nevertheless, its tunefulness and energy eventually won through, and the work was evidently deemed worthy of export, at least within the eastern bloc, since there were reports in 1952 of successful performances in East Germany, Bulgaria and Romania. It has since become one of his popular and often-performed scores.

It was not only the anti-formalism campaign that Weinberg had to worry about in the late years of Stalin's rule. His father-in-law, the great Jewish actor Solomon Mikhoels, had been executed on Stalin's order in January 1948, and for five years after that Weinberg found himself shadowed by the secret police. That murder was the harbinger of a new campaign, against so-called 'rootless cosmopolitans' that came to a head with the 'Doctors' Plot' at the beginning of 1953. Mikhoels' cousin was among those implicated. It was during the night following the first performance of the violin version of the *Rhapsody* (with piano or orchestra is not entirely clear), on 6 February 1953, that Weinberg was arrested and subsequently held for eleven weeks in the Lubyanka prison, on the preposterous charge of 'Jewish bourgeois nationalism'. Shostakovich took it upon himself to write on his behalf to Lavrenty Beriia, the feared head of the MGB (soon to be rebranded as the KGB), and Weinberg was released at the end of April, not long after the death of Stalin.

The Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 5 in G minor, Op. 53, was composed in July 1953, the first work he completed after his release from the Lubyanka. It carries a dedication to Shostakovich, which it is hard not to see as a token of gratitude for his friend's courageous support. Two years later Shostakovich singled the Sonata out for praise in his musings on the feeble state of Soviet chamber music.⁵ The premiere was given on 30 December 1955 by Mikhail Vayman and Mariya Karandashova.

The wistful modal theme on which the preludial *Andante con moto* [12] is based (in a kind of free strophic form) is a fine example of Weinberg's ability to absorb folk-like intonations into his personal style. In that respect it is a perfect synthesis of his first mature chamber-music style of the mid-1940s and the simpler idiom he had been more or less compelled to explore in the intervening years. The *Allegro molto* second movement [13] is restless

⁴ The other works in Op. 47 are the *Polish Times* (No. 2) and *Serenade* (No. 4), both for orchestra. It is not known why Weinberg chose to group these works together, but it is certainly the case that several other works from this time remained unpublished and without opus number.

⁵ Shostakovich, 'Beseda s molodimi kompozitorami' ('A conversation with young composers'), *Sovetskaya muzika*, 1955, No. 10, p. 14.

and hard-driven, repeatedly marked *agitato* and *espressivo*, and with a dynamic range from *ppp* to *fff marcatisimo*. Even more macabre is the following scherzo, marked *Allegro moderato* [14], whose material appears to look back to Schubert's A minor Piano Sonata, D845 (Schubert was one of Weinberg's favourite composers for pianistic recreation) and to the more proximate example of the D flat Prelude (No. 15) of Shostakovich's 24 Preludes and Fugues, Op. 87. The yet more devilishly driven finale [15] – initially cutting between *Allegro* and *Andante*, then *Allegretto* for the main part – has a defiant fugue for piano solo at its heart but is framed by meditative reminiscences of the first movement that eventually supply a heartsome coda (with shades of the broken textures at the end of Weinberg's Op. 46 Sonatina for Violin and Piano⁶). In its precisely honed detail and bold overall conception, this intensely memorable work can surely claim to be not only the finest of Weinberg's violin-and-piano sonatas but also one of his most outstanding achievements in any genre.

Around 1960 Weinberg switched his attention from duo to solo string sonatas. In fact, the Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 69, of 1959 heralds this move, as it also does the singularly abrasive tone of many of the solo sonatas. By comparison with the First Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 82 (1964),⁷ the Second, Op. 95, is admittedly less confrontational in character and more of a suite in overall conception. Composed between 24 May and 7 June 1967, it is dedicated, like the First Sonata, to Mikhail Fikhtengolts, one of the remarkable succession of Jewish violinists who established the Soviet Union as a violinistic superpower from the late 1930s. Notwithstanding the prowess he must have had in order to cope with the First Sonata, Fikhtengolts could have been forgiven a sigh of relief that the demands of Op. 95 are rather less extreme. No details of a premiere performance are recorded.

In seven inter-linked movements, the Sonata is essentially a series of études, whose movement titles – Monody [5], Rests [6], Intervals [7], Repliques [8], Accompaniment [9], Invocation [10] and Syncopations [11] – suggest 'formalism' in its best sense: an exercise in creative musical imagination within artificial, self-imposed constraints. Like several of his Soviet contemporaries, including his friend Boris Tchaikovsky (not least his *Chamber Symphony* of the same year), Weinberg was clearly developing an experimental side to this work around the time. Apart from the example of the younger generation of Soviet composers he could have found models in the Polish school (though this Sonata is milder in its sonoristic effects than the First, or than Weinberg's Seventh Symphony of 1964 or the Tenth of 1968) and in Britten's Cello Suites (the first of which, composed in 1964, Rostropovich had proudly brought back to the Soviet Union and demonstrated wherever he could). Nowhere is this unapologetic experimentalism more evident than in 'Intervals', the third movement, which moves systematically from octaves down to unisons and back. Before that, the 'Monody' and 'Pauses' are modest and playful, respectively; the later 'Repliques', 'Accompaniment', 'Invocation' and 'Syncopations' are progressively more extravagant and technically demanding.

⁶ Recorded on Volume One of this series (Toccat Classics TOCC 0007).

⁷ Likewise recorded on Volume One of this series (TOCC 0007).