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Harp Concerto

Taylor Ann Fleshman, Harp
Moscow Symphony Orchestra
Arthur Arnold



Alexander Mosolov (1900–1973)

Symphony No. 5 • Harp Concerto

'The Soviet avant-garde was the thrilling cultural movement of its day, but by the early 1930s, Stalin had all but destroyed it. Mosolov's music is a testament to the revolutionary spirit of his time.' These words are from the promotional material to *Mosolov's Suitcase*, an experimental biographical film which, among other things, laments the lost status that music had briefly enjoyed during the heady days of the newly formed Soviet state before individual artistic experimentation fell victim to the destructive ills of narrow-minded ideology. The title refers to a suitcase full of Mosolov's manuscripts, which was supposedly lost or stolen in the 1930s. The filmmaker Matthew Mishory says: 'Nobody really knows exactly what happened to his suitcase, but our best guess – and I'm not the only one to have suggested this – is that most likely some of Mosolov's music survives because he was able to smuggle it into the West.'¹ One of the film's central protagonists is the nonagenarian Russian musicologist Inna Barsova, whose real life association with Mosolov provides us with a vital musical link between Stalin's time and our own. Barsova has made it part of her life's mission to disinter the works of long banished and largely forgotten Soviet composers, including Mosolov, whose contribution to their country's artistic development was for so long relegated to the briefest of uninformative, whitewashed chapters.

In the late 1980s, the new transparency that emerged from *glasnost* ('openness') afforded Soviet citizens the opportunity to reassess many of their country's artists, writers and composers from the not-so-distant past. Musical works that had previously been repressed were now received and consumed with an eagerness that is normally reserved for fast-moving breaking news stories. Among the composers to be looked at anew was Mosolov. Although his music was not entirely unknown to the public in the years before *glasnost*, his claim to fame rested on just a single piece, *The Iron Foundry*, a 'constructivist orchestral episode' dating from the late 1920s, which was occasionally aired under the direction of approved conductors such as Evgeny Svetlanov and Gennady Rozhdestvensky. In 1976, well before the introduction of *glasnost*, Barsova was permitted

to write about Mosolov in the journal *Sovetskaya muzika*, but her article, which focuses on his career in the 1920s, is understandably non-contentious and maintains a discreet and studied silence concerning all sensitive aspects of his colourful persona. By 1989, however, the liberating effects of *glasnost* gave Barsova the scope to write a more searching piece about Mosolov in *Sovetskaya muzika*. Her new essay refers to his 1937 arrest and imprisonment, and even includes a reproduction of his prison release card.

Alexander Vasilyevich Mosolov was born in Kiev in 1900. Before the Revolution, he enjoyed a well-to-do middle class life of luxury and foreign travel, but as an impressionable teenager he got to know Lenin whose personal mail he was even entrusted to deliver. When the Bolshevik Revolution began, Mosolov volunteered for the Red Army and fought on the Polish and Ukrainian fronts. In 1921, he was medically discharged from the army, suffering from what we would now recognise as post-traumatic stress disorder, but not before he was twice awarded the Order of the Red Banner for heroism on the battlefield. He then moved to Moscow to study at the Conservatoire, where his composition teachers included Reinhold Glière and Nikolay Myaskovsky. Not long after graduating, Mosolov received a commission from the Bolshoi Theatre to compose one section of a four-part collaborative stage work called *The Four Moscows*. His particular contribution to this ballet, which sadly never saw the light of day, was to have been a futuristic accompaniment to a scenario imagining the Moscow of 2117, two hundred years after the Revolution. Among fellow composers involved in this aborted project was a precociously talented teenager by the name of Dmitry Shostakovich.

During the 1920s, Mosolov evolved to become one of the foremost composers of the Russian avant-garde, drawing praise from many of his peers including the self-exiled Sergey Prokofiev, who singled out Mosolov as the most interesting of Russia's new talents. If Mosolov's creative flair brought him to the attention of the public, so too did his restless personal life. With his immaculately

parted brilliantined hair, he appears in photographs like a matinée idol from the 'Roaring Twenties', his brooding features gazing defiantly through modishly curling wisps of cigarette smoke. Confident of his own artistic worth, and disdainful of those who failed to recognise it, he was a dandy, hard drinker and inveterate womaniser. He also made enemies, and clashes involving personal and professional rivalries were not uncommon. Indeed, beyond musical circles, Mosolov's reputation for bar fights and love affairs elicited rather more comment than his originality as a serious composer.

One spectacular instance of Mosolov's obsequiousness stands out because of its unintended repercussions. In 1932 he wrote to Stalin, pleading for the leader to intercede on his behalf and authorise his departure abroad, where 'I, with my music, could be more useful to the USSR than here, where I am harassed and badgered, where I'm not allowed to display my forces, to test myself.' Mosolov's wish was not granted, and the eventual upshot was that in February 1936 he was expelled from the Union of Soviet Composers and had most avenues of work cut off. The ostensible cause for Mosolov's expulsion was 'hooliganism' following one particularly egregious show of unruly behaviour in a restaurant, when he treated the waiters with absolute contempt and became involved in a drunken brawl. However, it can surely be no accident that Mosolov's undoing coincided with the publication in *Pravda* of a rancorous diatribe by the opportunistic young composer Tikhon Khrennikov, who shamelessly condemned his older comrades, including Prokofiev and Shostakovich, for writing confused music that the masses failed to understand.

In an attempt to rehabilitate himself, Mosolov travelled to Soviet Central Asia to resume his scholarly (and comparatively safe) study of the region's folk music, which he had first begun several years earlier, seemingly out of genuine interest. But his efforts were in vain. He was arrested in November 1937 for 'counter-revolutionary activities' and sentenced to eight years forced labour. Representations to the highest government bodies were made by his erstwhile teachers Glière and Myaskovsky, who spoke warmly of Mosolov's outstanding creative ability. They insisted they had never observed any anti-

Soviet tendencies in their former pupil, so after just eight months in the Gulag, Mosolov had his sentence commuted to five years' internal exile and was expressly forbidden from visiting Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev. He dutifully set about manufacturing music that his artistic and political foes could not possibly construe as manifestations of 'formalistic perversion' or 'petty-bourgeois anarchy'.

Mosolov reinvented himself so thoroughly that few, if any, of his old futurist traits survived. In a rather sad footnote to an article written in 1988 for the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Marina Frolova-Walker says 'It becomes impossible to discern the former avant-gardist in the works written from the late Thirties onward: his style had been irreversibly "corrected" by his experiences in a labour camp.' The *Harp Concerto* is an example of Mosolov's obediently pliant style of composition from this period. Three of its movements were first performed in 1939 at the Moscow Conservatoire with Vera Dulova as the soloist, but the manuscript score and parts were subsequently consigned to oblivion before being rediscovered and restored for performance by the conductor Arthur Arnold. This concerto surely deserves a place in the mainstream harp repertoire, where it would make a valuable companion piece to Glière's *Harp Concerto*, which was commissioned by Dulova's teacher Ksenia Erdelyi in 1938. The world premiere of all four movements of Mosolov's concerto took place in Moscow on 26 January 2019.

In the first half of the 1960s, Mosolov largely busied himself in writing uplifting patriotic potboilers with titles such as *Hello, New Harvest* and *Glory to Moscow*, but he also managed to produce a handful of more enduring works for his desk drawer. These include the *Symphony No. 5*, which was never performed in his lifetime and remained unpublished until 1991. Its colourful, if uncontroversial, scoring makes it an enjoyably fascinating addition to the corpus of neglected Soviet-era symphonies now seeing the light of day for the first time.

Anthony Short

¹ Sandy Cohen: *From Russia to Palm Springs With Love* from *Palm Springs Life*, 2 April 2020

Taylor Ann Fleshman



Photo: Jeff Osarczuk

International award-winning harpist Taylor Ann Fleshman is a rising talent in the classical music scene. Based in New York, she has performed throughout the United States and in fourteen countries spanning four continents. As a soloist she has won First Prize in both the 2018 PRISMA Concerto Competition and the 2017 Three Arts Competition. In 2020 she won Second Prize with her ensemble, Duo XCIV, at the Ceren Necipoğlu International Festival. Fleshman made her solo debut with the Jakarta Simfonia Orchestra in 2018, where she performed the Asian premiere of Marjan Mozetich's concerto *The Passion of Angels*. The following year she was invited to perform the world premiere of Mosolov's *Harp Concerto* with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra. Praised for her orchestral sensitivity, Fleshman has held positions as associate member of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, co-principal with the Richmond Symphony and principal harpist for The Orchestra Now. She holds a Bachelor of Music from the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music and a Master of Music from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, where she was the recipient of the prestigious Jacobs Fellowship.

www.harpsthings.com

Moscow Symphony Orchestra



The Moscow Symphony Orchestra is one of Russia's leading orchestras. Since its inception in 1989, it has been an active participant in the musical life of its home city. The orchestra performs an annual series of concerts in the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory with soloists such as Yuri Bashmet, Victor Tretiakov, Vadim Repin, Alexander Knyazev and Alexander Rudin, directed by eminent conductors. Former music directors have included Antonio De Almeida and Vladimir Ziva, and Arthur Arnold has been music director and conductor since 2012. A regular guest at international festivals, the Moscow Symphony Orchestra has successfully toured the world, including the United States, South America, China, Japan, South Korea and most European countries. The Orchestra is recognised for its outstanding discography, with its recording of film music by Bernard Herrmann (Marco Polo 8.225168) named among the top ten recordings of 2001 in *The Economist*. International awards for its recordings include CD of the Month awarded by *CD Review*, the prestigious Diapason d'Or and the Chairman's Choice at the Cannes Classical Awards.

moscowsymphony.ru/en

Arthur Arnold

Photo: Dasha Slikova



Dutch-born conductor Arthur Arnold leads captivating performances with symphony orchestras around the world. Music director of the Moscow Symphony Orchestra since 2012, Arnold conducts the Master Series in the Grand Hall of the historic Moscow Conservatory. Arnold recently performed and recorded the world premieres of Mosolov's *Symphony No. 5* and *Harp Concerto* as well as *Turkmenian Music* with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra. Arnold has discovered lost manuscripts of other works by Mosolov in libraries in Russia, including the 1958 and 1962 symphonies, which will be premiered and recorded in 2021 on Naxos. Maestro Arnold is a guest conductor for orchestras in Europe and North America, and is the co-founder and artistic director of the PRISMA Festival and Academy (Pacific Region International Summer Music Association) on Canada's west coast. The annual festival attracts world-renowned musicians and top international music students, and draws over 5,000 concertgoers to the daily musical events. Recent engagements have included concerts with the Silesian Philharmonic in Katowice, Poland and the Spokane Symphony in the US, and a three week concert tour of China with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra.

arthurarnold.com

Alexander Mosolov was one of the foremost composers of the Russian avant-garde during the 1920s. His music was considered ‘a testament to the revolutionary spirit of his time’, but the legacy of his fame from that period now rests solely on *The Iron Foundry*. Soviet-era politics brought persecution and imprisonment, and these two recently rediscovered works were both composed after his ‘rehabilitation’. The *Harp Concerto* – a piece worthy of a place in the mainstream repertoire – is Mosolov’s ‘response’ to the concerto by his teacher Glière, and is heard here in its first complete performance. Coupled with the first recording of his final colourful *Fifth Symphony*, these are fascinating additions to the corpus of neglected Soviet-era works.

Alexander
MOSOLOV
(1900–1973)

Symphony No. 5 (1965) 31:28

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|----------|---|--------------|
| 1 | I. Largo – Allegro – Maestoso | 11:56 |
| 2 | II. Adagio – Sostenuto andante – Allegretto –
Andante – Maestoso – Largo | 9:07 |
| 3 | III. Andante recitativo – Allegro – Maestoso, trionfale | 10:18 |

Harp Concerto (1939) 37:21

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| 4 | I. Sostenuto – Lento – Adagio | 16:02 |
| 5 | II. Nocturne | 10:32 |
| 6 | III. Gavotte | 3:32 |
| 7 | IV. Toccata | 7:03 |

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Taylor Ann Fleshman, Harp 4–7

Moscow Symphony Orchestra • Arthur Arnold

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