



WEINBERG

Chamber Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3

EAST-WEST CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
ROSTISLAV KRIMER

Warsaw - Minsk - Tashkent - Moscow

M. B. Krimer



Minsk Conservatory, where Weinberg studied composition from 1939 to 1941, and received his professional diploma.
Courtesy of the Belarusian State Academy of Music



Volodarskogo Street, Minsk, before World War II.



Nemigskaya Street, the centre of Minsk before World War II when it was almost completely destroyed. Weinberg lived here during this period.



Leninskaya Street, Minsk, before World War II. Courtesy of the National Historical Museum of the Republic of Belarus



Corner of Sovetskaya and Engelsa streets, Minsk, before World War II. Courtesy of the National Historical Museum of the Republic of Belarus

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919–1996)

Chamber Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3

Mieczysław Weinberg was born in Warsaw on 8 December 1919, where he emerged as a highly regarded pianist who might well have continued his studies in the United States until the Nazi invasion forced him to flee to Minsk (in course of which his travel documents were inscribed as 'Moisey Vainberg', by which name he was 'officially' known until 1982).

During 1939–41 he studied composition with Vasily Zolotaryov, then, after the Nazi invasion, headed further east to Tashkent, where he duly became immersed in numerous theatrical and operatic projects. There he also wrote his *First Symphony*, which favourably impressed Shostakovich, and resulted in his settling in Moscow in 1943 where he was to remain for the rest of his life. Despite various personal setbacks (his father-in-law, the renowned actor Solomon Mikhoels, was murdered in 1948 and Weinberg himself was imprisoned for alleged 'Jewish subversion' then freed only after the death of Stalin in 1953), he gradually gained a reputation as a figure who was championed by many of the leading Soviet singers, instrumentalists and conductors.

Despite receiving various official honours, Weinberg's fortunes declined noticeably over his final two decades – not least owing to the emergence of a younger generation of composers whose perceived antagonism to the Soviet establishment had gained them greater coverage in the West (where Weinberg had never enjoyed more than a modest presence even during his heyday), and his death in Moscow on 26 February 1996 went largely unnoticed. Since then, however, his output – which comprises 26 symphonies and 17 string quartets, together with seven operas, some two dozen song cycles and a wealth of chamber and instrumental music – has secured an increasing number of performances and recordings and is now held in great regard as a significant as well as personal continuation of the Russian symphonic tradition.

Symphonic thinking dominated Weinberg's final decade even more than previously, with his last three symphonies and four chamber symphonies comprising an

interrelated sequence that rounds off the overall cycle through its nexus of references to and reworking of earlier works. Weinberg's *Chamber Symphonies* throw an ambivalent light over almost his whole creativity. That Weinberg began writing them after composing 19 symphonies has itself been noted; he himself admitted 'I got a bit lost', stating they differed '... neither in length nor in character from the [strings only] *Second*, *Seventh* and *Tenth*'. Aside from his not wishing to equal the 27 symphonies of Myaskovsky, the main reason surely lies in actual content – the first three *Chamber Symphonies* drawing, in whole or in part, on string quartets written decades before.

Few commentators seemed to notice that, when it appeared in 1986, the *First Chamber Symphony* was an arrangement of the *Second String Quartet* (likewise designated as *Op. 145*), which had itself been revised the previous year. Originally composed in 1940 and premiered the following year, this was the first piece Weinberg completed during his two years spent in Minsk, where he studied with Zolotaryov and so made the transition from pianist to composer in earnest. Ironic, then, that this quartet remains seldom heard, whereas its orchestral version, inscribed to the memory of Weinberg's mother and sister (both likely perishing at Trawniki in 1943), has become one of his most performed and recorded works – its formal lucidity and expressive directness helping to make this an undeniably appealing introduction to his music.

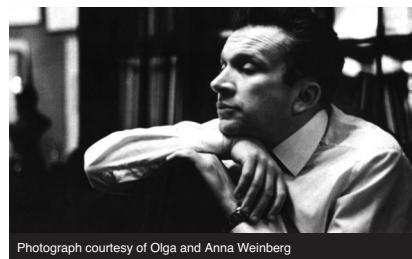
The first movement opens with an ingratiating theme whose lilting gait grows more incisive as the exposition unfolds. This is duly repeated, then a compact while eventful development emphasises the theme's latent harmonic acerbity as it builds to a brief climax. The reprise is subtly varied so as to continue a process of intensification which becomes even greater in the coda then ultimately subsides into musing uncertainty, prior to a hesitant final cadence. The second movement begins with a pensive theme over a 'walking' pizzicato which

gradually reaches a fervent climax, from where a livelier central section (added during revision) takes over. This leads to a heightened resumption of the main theme at the original tempo, though any likelihood of reconciliation is banished by the subdued detachment of the closing bars.

The third movement (added in its entirety during revision) is an intermezzo of refinement and finesse – its wistfully undulating theme constantly turning back on itself, while finding little contrast in either the Apollonian trio section or speculative coda. The finale breaks out of any impasse with its vigorous main theme, the music taking on renewed momentum as it hurtles through a brief if related central episode toward a heightened restatement of this theme, then on to a coda whose clinching chords effect the sudden yet decisive key change from G to C.

Weinberg continued this thinking the following year with the *Second Chamber Symphony*, drawn largely from his *Third String Quartet*. Then in 1990 came the *Third Chamber Symphony*, first performed in Moscow on 19 November by the USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra with Vladimir Fedoseyev. This takes as a starting point the *Fifth String Quartet*, composed in 1945 then premiered two years later, from which Weinberg duly selected the first, third and fourth movements – omitting the second while replacing the original fifth movement with a newly written finale. The relationship between chamber symphony and quartet is thus further removed compared to that of its predecessors, hence the more recent piece can only nominally be considered an arrangement rather than a work in its own right.

The first movement starts with a wandering theme which unfolds unaccompanied for some while before opening out into elegiac polyphony. A secondary theme is richer harmonically but affords little expressive warmth as this reaches a plangent culmination, before subsiding into a haunted recollection of the initial theme. The remaining movements play continuously, beginning with a *scherzo*, the driving energy of whose main theme is maintained across two subsidiary episodes that bring contrast of texture but no emotional respite. Following directly from



Photograph courtesy of Olga and Anna Weinberg

its abrasive close, the third movement could not be more different in manner – its initial theme an anguished threnody that dies down before continuing in rapt tones against a sombre backdrop. This reaches a weary climax, then proceeds to fade out uncertainly on solo strings.

The finale duly sets off at a swifter pace, its limpid main theme gradually attracting various accompanying gestures as this pursues its listless course. A secondary theme first heard on divided strings brings a measure of eloquence and poise, though this seems hardly to affect the progress of the initial theme when it returns; these two ideas duly alternating one more time before the music sinks into fragmentary solo gestures then, in turn, a soulful and even hymnal conclusion which sets the foregoing in a more consoling if hardly reposeful light.

The recording of these two *Chamber Symphonies* in Minsk (the first time any of Weinberg's music has been recorded in the city where it received his first major public performances), by the recently formed East-West Chamber Orchestra with its chief conductor Rostislav Krimer, serves as recognition of the importance of what is now the Belorussian capital to Weinberg's evolution as a composer; also as confirmation of the esteem in which Weinberg's music is now held almost a quarter of a century after his death and in the centenary year of his birth.

Richard Whitehouse



Session photographs by Evgeny Evtyukhov

East-West Chamber Orchestra

Photograph: Evgeny Evtyukhov



The East-West Chamber Orchestra is comprised of outstanding soloists, including laureates of prestigious international competitions, and concertmasters and leaders of renowned orchestras, performing on exceptional instruments including Stradivaris, Guarneris and Guadagninis. The ensemble, whose musicians hail from across the world, strengthens the bonds and cultural co-operations between Eastern and Western Europe and internationally, as well as operating as an orchestra for peace, and as ambassadors for transnational collaboration and cultural interaction. The orchestra was founded in 2015 by Rostislav Krimer as orchestra-in-residence for the Yuri Bashmet International Music Festival. The orchestra is an active promoter of contemporary music and new repertoire, as well as creating new projects such as The Classical Night in Underground, which transformed a metro station into a concert hall, and Music Of Your Heart for babies and pregnant women. As well as performances with world class soloists, the ensemble regularly participates in charity events for children, working with UNICEF and collecting funds for children's health programmes. www.EastWestChamberOrchestra.com

Rostislav Krimer

Photograph: Evgeny Evtyukhov



One of the leading artists of his generation, pianist and conductor Rostislav Krimer founded the East-West Chamber Orchestra in 2015. He is a long-term collaborator of Yuri Bashmet, and alongside numerous orchestral concerts and chamber music projects Krimer and Bashmet performed the world premiere of Valery Voronov's *Concerto for Viola, Piano and Orchestra*, dedicated to both of them in 2018. Krimer is also the founder and artistic director of the annual Yuri Bashmet International Music Festival. Krimer recently premiered a newly discovered work by Dmitry Shostakovich together with Nils Mönkemeyer at the Shostakovich Festival in the presence of Irina Antonovna Shostakovich. He has worked with Krzysztof Penderecki, Paul Badura-Skoda, Gidon Kremer, Maxim Vengerov, Sergey Krylov and Julian Rachlin. Born in Belarus and based in Bonn, Krimer studied in Helsinki, Cologne and London. His international career was launched by a highly acclaimed recital at Cadogan Hall, London in 2006. In 2018 Krimer was named a Friend of UNICEF and was recently awarded the honorary title of Star Ambassador of the 2nd European Games 2019. www.krimer.de



Photograph: Evgeny Evtyukhov

The East-West Chamber Orchestra is the resident orchestra of the Yuri Bashmet International Music Festival and is made up of concertmasters from leading orchestras and competition laureates. On this, their debut recording, they celebrate the centenary of Mieczysław Weinberg's birth. Weinberg's *Chamber Symphonies* reflect his creativity and the dramatic times in which he lived – the formal lucidity and directness of the *First* and the elegiac *Third* – both derived from string quartets composed in the shadow of the Second World War.



Mieczysław
WEINBERG
(1919–1996)

Chamber Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3

Chamber Symphony No. 1, Op. 145
for string orchestra (1987)

25:54

- | | | |
|----------|----------------|-------------|
| 1 | Allegro | 8:36 |
| 2 | Andante | 9:11 |
| 3 | Allegro | 3:56 |
| 4 | Presto | 3:53 |

Chamber Symphony No. 3, Op. 151
for string orchestra (1990)

32:26

- | | | |
|----------|----------------|--------------|
| 5 | Lento | 9:50 |
| 6 | Allegro | 4:52 |
| 7 | Adagio | 7:30 |
| 8 | Andante | 10:01 |

East-West Chamber Orchestra
Rostislav Krimer

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Producers: Vilius Keras, Aleksandra Kerienė • Engineer: Vilius Keras

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Photograph of the composer courtesy of Olga and Anna Weinberg

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