



UTOPIA

VLADIMIR MARTYNOV

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI conductor
JUN HONG LOH violin
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA and CHOIR

FOREWORD

MICHAEL TAY

In commissioning Vladimir Martynov to compose a symphony in 2004, I could not have foreseen a trajectory leading to this recording by the London Philharmonic Orchestra at the Abbey Road Studios. It was a leap of faith.

Martynov was inspired by the idea of a small country struggling with survival and emerging with something unique and enduring. He set the libretto to the *Tao Te Ching*, an ancient text that speaks of the Tao (‘the Way’) as the underlying reality that permeates and drives the universe. Martynov likens the search for Utopia to the Tao: ‘The tao that can be described is no longer the Tao’. Utopia is elusive, not a destination or a state of being, but a process of becoming and striving to do better.

Martynov is a composer for our times and the search for Utopia has never been more pressing. As I pen this, a pandemic is rampant across the world, with no respect for bodies, borders or boundaries. There is a palpable and universal sense of death and foreboding – a tragic reminder of our vulnerability to the forces of nature.

The libretto is intriguing for its prescience. To be respectful of death and not leave your homes. To embrace smallness and intimacy, even if we can be global. To have a hundred

tools at hand but not to use them. In our almost mindless drive to progress, to globalise, to embrace technology, we have lost part of our humanity. For *whom* are we ‘progressing’ and ‘globalising’?

The *Utopia* Symphony is a universal call to arms – to rethink and reshape the principles that underlie our actions and existence. It is an attempt to recapture our sense of beauty and order in nature and society; to become better beings than ourselves, to re-imagine Utopia. Like the idea of Utopia, the Symphony will be a work in progress. An allegory for our search for meaning – an empty vessel filled by new meanings as time passes, ‘mother of all things’, ‘doing by not doing’, like the Tao.

It poses the ultimate question of our lives: as you venture into the world each day, will you slouch towards Gomorrah or will you strive towards Utopia?

MICHAEL TAY
Founder/Director
Foundation for The Arts and Social Enterprise

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L–R: Tatiana Grindenko, Vladimir Martynov, Vladimir Jurowski and Michael Tay at the recording of Vladimir Martynov’s *Utopia*. Abbey Road Studios, London. © The Foundation for the Arts and Social Enterprise

VLADIMIR MARTYNOV

UTOPIA SYMPHONY

“A most unusual commission!”, says the composer down the line from Moscow.

“A commission from an ambassador! Not so much a musical commission, more a geo-political commission!”.

Michael Tay is the energetic music-loving diplomat who had the idea. In May 2003, just five months after arriving in Moscow as Ambassador from the Republic of Singapore to the Russian Federation, he attended a performance of Vladimir Martynov’s choral and orchestral setting of Dante’s *La Vita Nuova*, and was spellbound. As he afterwards wrote to the composer:

“I remember sitting in the theatre, entranced and moved by the sounds and sonorities enveloping the hall. It seemed like you had carved out a sacred space for the music to evolve.”

Deeply inspired, Ambassador Tay asked Martynov if he would consider writing a ‘symphony’ in celebration of Mr Tay’s own native ‘sacred space’, Singapore. There was just one problem: Martynov had never been to Singapore.

Michael Tay knew what he wanted. As he later recalled:

“The symphony was a milestone. When I commissioned it in Russia, I had a silent but fairly immediate objective: to transform the psyche of Russians, who had an image of Singapore as an exotic tropical island and not much else. I wanted to transform that kind of thinking into something different.”

To prepare Vladimir Martynov for this ‘unusual’ project, Michael Tay invited him – with his wife, the distinguished violinist Tatiana Grindenko – to come and see the city for themselves. He summed up his feelings in an excited letter:

“Your visit to Singapore on 28 February to 6 March 2005 was an important first step to understanding the Singapore story – where we came from, where we are now, and perhaps, a glimpse of where we are going. When you returned, you spoke of Singapore as an ‘ideal’ and global city; that it had changed the way you thought of yourself as a ‘traditionalist’ working to rediscover and sometimes recreating the essence and nature of music past. You felt that Singapore was no longer an accidental cluster of ethnic groups but had moved beyond that to achieve something different and greater than the parts. You

also wanted to know about the ‘shadows’ that must exist in Singapore, and I told you that perhaps, Singapore’s ‘shadows’ would always be in the future because we could never take our existence for granted.”

Even by the variegated and unpredictable standards of modern Russian music, Martynov is an unusual artist. And an especially unusual one for Michael Tay to have alighted on. Long ago in the late 1970s Soviet Union, Martynov was already well-known, partly for his adventures into rock music, but even more for the way he exasperated and provoked Soviet ‘classical music’ snobs with concert works sometimes of abrasive violence, sometimes of luminously and outrageously kitsch simplicity, even drifting towards the ear-poppingly syrupy. He was routinely described by commentators in Moscow as ‘our first minimalist’, though it was not always clear whether this was an insult or a compliment. At all events, Martynov himself has always taken pleasure in rejecting labels (except ones that might annoy other people). With a gleam in his eye, and sometimes a dry mocking laugh, he has been known to declare himself not a composer at all, or, even, an ‘anti-composer’. And his music as non-music or anti-music. He is an obviously ideological thinker (this at least is identifiable as a self-consciously *à la russe* position), but paradoxically so, as his own typically idiosyncratic comments on this ‘symphony’ *Utopia* make very clear:

“The horrors of our days take the most varied forms, but have one single cause: the Elusiveness of Existence. It is this that is the only cause of all the fears and phobias that hound us in our modern world. If, in earlier times, we were saved from those horrors... by religious, ethical and moral foundations, nowadays with the loss of all of these, we are left only with a childish faith in the magical power of repetition: the same fairy-tale again, the same game again, the same gesture again.

“The repetitive technique of minimalism is essentially a matter of the embodiment of this childish faith which, notwithstanding its apparent infantilism, is in fact unbelievably serious – indeed, it actually resurrects the power of archaic rituals.

“In Singapore, such rituals have materialised in the rituals of the contemporary megalopolis, through the repetition of whose meaningless cycles of work and leisure shines the light of the utopia of Lao Tzu, summoning us to turn away from reliance on arms, cars and literacy.

“In a newly edited text, once again created on Michael Tay’s initiative, the rituals of the contemporary megalopolis are replaced by the cosmic rituals of the binary opposition of Heaven and Earth, Day and Night, Sun and Moon, Life and Death, through which the Way of the Tao takes on more concrete characteristics.

“The Way of the Tao is the way of the solitary, and that is why *Utopia* is an Anti-Ninth Symphony of Beethoven. If Beethoven and Schiller urged us to ‘Embrace one another, ye millions!’, Lao Tzu summons people until old age and death not to visit one another. The Way of Millions is the way to the hell of the contemporary world, the Way of the Tao is the way out, the Exodus from that hell.”

Stirring words! But, in practical terms, how did Vladimir Martynov respond musically to Michael Tay’s ‘most unusual commission’?

To the Ambassador’s uncontained delight, what sprang into his head in response to his trip in the company of Tatiana Grindenko to the so-called ‘Little Red Dot’, was a 50-minute epic for voices and orchestra, falling, approximately into two halves.

In the original Russian-language version, the title was *Singapore – A Geopolitical Utopia*, and it was under this name that it was first performed in Moscow in September 2005. On that occasion, the somewhat surprising text of the first half of the work was drawn from a highly unusual source: the entry under the word ‘Singapore’ from the once legendary *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, the original edition of which consisted of 65 huge volumes published over 22 years from 1926 to 1947 (in other words, across almost the whole of the Stalinist period).

Soviet life being what it was, there were several subsequent editions of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, in the course of which entries were removed, papered over, re-written and expanded, according to the always shifting political (one might almost say, to use Martynov’s word, ‘geopolitical’) changes that took place daily over the course of the USSR’s existence. The weirdly palimpsestic character of this mammoth publication might thus also give us another clue as to why Martynov should have taken from it the laconically flat and ‘factual’ words he chose to set to music in the first part of this piece.

The text of the very different second half was assembled – with Michael Tay’s help – from the world-famous ancient Chinese text, the *Tao Te Ching* (The Way of the Tao), traditionally attributed to Lao Tzu but probably compiled by several different hands around 250 years before the time of Christ, though there is some dispute about this matter among scholars.

So... texts from two absurdly different but, in some eerie sense, similarly unreliable and curiously complementary sources. Musically, as happens in several other works of Martynov, there are memorably present in this score a number of what one might call distilled or objectified quotations (cultural artefacts, as it were), as well as other moments which sometimes sound like quotations even though they may not be. Of those that really are

quotations, the most disturbingly obvious – easily identifiable about three quarters of the way through – is when a piano from within the orchestra launches into the extremely famous opening of Robert Schumann’s 1838 piano cycle *Kinderszenen*, a very short piece much loved by beginner-pianists all over the planet, entitled *Von fremden Ländern und Menschen*. Apart from that title’s obvious relevance to the idea of a Russian writing a ‘symphony’ about Singapore, the significance of this quotation becomes perhaps a little clearer – or perhaps actually more opaque! – when we remember Martynov’s comments about how in the modern world we are ‘left only with a childish faith in the magical power of repetition’. And, also, when we learn that Martynov asks the conductor to make sure that the orchestral pianist play this well-known fragment ‘dumbly... like someone who has no idea what it means’.

In a recent interview, Michael Tay recalls the Moscow premiere of this large-scale work which he is so happy to have commissioned:

“There was a lot of media coverage about the Symphony in Russia, and it caught the imagination. The Russian public saw it not as a ‘Singapore’ project but a ‘Russia’ project. After visiting Singapore, the composer felt that Singapore was a small country but a big idea: he felt we had achieved something called Utopia that

the Soviet Union could not achieve in its 70-year history.”

Over the years since that first performance, Martynov has made a number of changes to the original score. Some musical details have been altered and the word ‘Singapore’ cut from the title, which now stands as the *Utopia* Symphony. And in this new version, the text, rewritten in English for non-Russian performers, no longer includes the original extract from the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*. Instead, texts from the *Tao Te Ching* are sung throughout, in English translation.

Thus, the palimpsest is scribbled over once again! Music written for one set of words, re-purposed to another set of words, saying something quite different. Or perhaps not so different...

Programme note © Gerard McBurney 2020

Sky and earth
Once for ever, not for them but for all
Find the world in your small room
Do not look, then you see
O, sky and earth
Those who know do not talk, those who talk do not know
Do not look, then you see
Sky and earth once and forever, not for them but for all
It is better for a kingdom to be small and its people few
Let people have dozens and hundreds of tools, but do not look for use from them
Let people be respectful towards death and not leave their homes
Even if there are boats and carriages, let no one travel on them
Even if there are pikes and arrows, let no one take them into his hands
Let people forget writing and weave bundles instead of letters
Eat good food and love your clothes
Live in peace and love your customs
Let neighbouring settlements be visible
And the barking of dogs and singing of cocks from there be heard
And people not visit each other until old age itself and death
O, sky and earth, sun and moon
O, day and night, life and death

No! A path you know can't be known. It is not a constant one
Names which can ever be named are also not constant ones
Where there is no name is the start of all things
Where the name is, is the mother of all things
When eternally free of desire you will see its source
And when eternally filled with desire you will see its end
One or other, they are both the same
They have many different names, but in essence are one
In the secret place is yet secrecy
That is from where every miracle comes



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FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

The Foundation is a non-profit and private sector-led platform based in Singapore. It develops and promotes arts initiatives with global impact, driven by the conviction that the arts are the creative impulse that drives a first-world society. Acting as a venture capitalist in the arts space, The Foundation takes an interventionist approach in converging the arts, business and philanthropy. The Foundation is project-driven, making modest, calculated investments to achieve impact, leveraging on the influence and resources of The Foundation's patrons.

Founded in 2013 by Michael Tay, a former Ambassador of Singapore to Russia and also founder of the Singapore International Jazz Festival, The Foundation counts amongst its first projects an album recording produced by Incognito's bandleader Jean-Paul 'Bluey' Maunick for Singaporean acid jazz band The Steve McQueens, who went on to open for Incognito at The O2 in London. As part of its operational DNA, The Foundation cultivates meaningful partnerships locally and globally, engaging with artists, arts institutions, corporates and the government to design arts initiatives that enrich society and promote international cultural exchange.

The Foundation is now entering a new phase, with the *Utopia* Symphony as the first in a suite of Iconic Initiatives to be rolled out from 2020. Efforts include commissioning projects across art forms, beginning with a 10-year music commissioning series to systematically build up a canon of serious Singapore musical works, as well as the incubation of an Artist Showcase to take Singapore art and artists to the global stage. In the long term, The Foundation aims to become the premier platform in Asia to generate high-impact arts initiatives through strategic fund-raising, catalyzing a viable arts ecosystem and extending a regional market for the arts.

The Foundation for the Arts and Social Enterprise is registered as an arts charity in Singapore.

thefoundation.sg

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VLADIMIR MARTYNOV COMPOSER

© Nick Rutter



Born in Moscow in 1946, Vladimir Martynov represents a generation of great classical Russian composers who worked on the cutting edge of music during Soviet times. He studied the piano under Mikhail Mezhlurnov and composition under Nikolai Sidelnikov at the Moscow Conservatory.

In 1973, he began working in the studio for electronic music of the Alexander Scriabin Museum, the meeting ground for many leading composers of the Russian avant-garde. There, he became a founding member of the rock group Boomerang, for whom he composed the rock-opera *Seraphic Visions from St. Francis of Assisi* (1978). At the same time, he was also exploring an emerging strand of Soviet minimalism with Arvo Pärt and Valentin Silvestrov.

Martynov's highly diversified interests led him to study folk music (his travels took him to ethnic regions across Russia including the Caucasus and Tajikistan), medieval Russian and Western music, alongside religious musicology. Towards the end of the 1970s, he embarked on a quest of preserving traditional Russian religious chant during his teaching tenure at the Theological Institute of the Trinity

Lavra of St. Sergius. Between 1980 and 1983, his musical output was mainly devoted to the service of the church.

Martynov returned to composition in the 1990s with a newfound individuality that assimilated the roots of American minimalism with Russian Orthodox chant. His repertoire ranges from the experimental – *Twelve Victories of King Arthur* (1990) for seven pianos and *Night in Galicia* (2001) – to biblical themes in major works such as *Lamentations of Jeremiah* (1992), *Opus Posthumum* (1993), *Games of Humans and Angels* (1999) and *Litanies to the Virgin* (2000). More recently, the London Philharmonic Orchestra performed the world premiere of his opera *Vita Nuova* in 2009 and his piece, *The Beatitudes*, composed for the Kronos Quartet was featured in the 2014 Academy Award-winning Italian film, *La Grande Bellezza*.

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI CONDUCTOR

© Simon Pauly



One of today's most sought-after conductors, acclaimed worldwide for his incisive musicianship and adventurous artistic commitment, Vladimir Jurowski was born in Moscow in 1972. In 1990 he relocated with his family to Germany.

In 2017 Vladimir Jurowski took up the position of Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the

Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and also celebrated ten years as Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. 2021 will see him take up the position of Music Director of the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich. In addition he holds the titles of Principal Artist of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Artistic Director of the Russian State Academic Symphony Orchestra, and Artistic Director of the George Enescu International Festival, Bucharest. He has previously held the positions of First Kapellmeister of the Komische Oper Berlin, Principal Guest Conductor of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Principal Guest Conductor of the Russian National Orchestra and Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera. Vladimir Jurowski appears regularly at festivals including the BBC Proms, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the George Enescu Festival of Bucharest, Musikfest Berlin, and the Dresden, Schleswig Holstein

and Rostropovich Festivals. In 2017 he made an acclaimed Salzburg Festival debut.

He collaborates with many of the world's leading orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Cleveland and Philadelphia Orchestras, New York Philharmonic, Chicago and Boston Symphonies, the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic Orchestras.

A committed operatic conductor, Jurowski has conducted at the Metropolitan Opera New York, the Opera National de Paris, Teatro alla Scala Milan, the Bolshoi Theatre, the State Academic Symphony of Russia, the Semperoper Dresden, the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, the Komische Oper Berlin and the Bayerische Staatsoper.

Jurowski's discography includes CDs and DVDs with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, the Russian National Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

JUN HONG LOH VIOLIN



Singaporean violinist Jun Hong Loh graduated with a Masters of Music from the Juilliard School, under the tutelage of Professor Glenn Dicterow, Joseph Lin and Sylvia Rosenberg. In 2009, Jun Hong received his Bachelor of Music from Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore, where he studied with the Head of Strings,

Professor Qian Zhou.

Jun Hong is a regular at the Verbier Festival, Switzerland. He led the festival orchestra in numerous concerts as concertmaster and associate concertmaster under the baton of Charles Dutoit, Daniel Harding, Valery Gergiev and Gianandrea Noseda.

Intent on developing the music scene in his home country, he founded “More than Music”; a concert series dedicated to presenting engaging and intimate concerts for audiences. He also served as the co-Artistic Director of the Singapore International Festival of Music in 2015. Aside from producing concerts, he is also active in the education scene as part-time lecturer at Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, coach of the Singapore National Youth Orchestra and the School of the Arts.

He has won numerous awards, including notably 1st Prize at the Gisborne International Music Competition, 1st Prize and Audience award at the Atlantic Symphony Orchestra Concerto Competition in Boston, 1st Prize at the Singapore National Piano and Violin Competition, 3rd Prize at the 13th Andrea Postacchini International Competition held in Fermo, Italy, and the best Singaporean Award at the Singapore International Violin Competition.

Jun Hong’s performance track record ranges from performances in Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, New York, to solo recitals in Berlin and Washington for the WETA radio station, to tours in Asia, New Zealand, UK, France, and USA, to premieres of the violin transcriptions of Scarlatti’s Piano Sonata in Berlin by publishing company Ries & Erler.

Besides performing for various charity groups in Singapore, he also gives back to the community through education.

Jun Hong has held numerous workshops and masterclasses for the younger generation in schools and youth orchestras. He has also served as the juror for the Semarang Open Violin Competition.

LONDON PHILHARMONIC CHOIR



The London Philharmonic Choir was founded in 1947 as the chorus for the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

It is widely regarded as one of Britain’s finest choirs and consistently meets with critical acclaim. Performing regularly with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Choir also works with many other orchestras throughout the United Kingdom and makes annual appearances at the BBC Proms. It has performed under some of the world’s most eminent conductors – among them Marin Alsop, Pierre Boulez, Semyon Bychkov,

Sir Mark Elder, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Edward Gardner, Bernard Haitink, Neeme Järvi, Vladimir Jurowski, Kurt Masur, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Sir Roger Norrington, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Georg Solti, Nathalie Stutzmann and Klaus Tennstedt.

The London Philharmonic Choir has made numerous recordings for CD, radio and television. The Choir often travels overseas and in recent years it has given concerts in many European countries, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Australia. **lpc.org.uk**

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world’s finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra’s performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trail-blazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world’s greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. Vladimir Jurowski was appointed the Orchestra’s Principal Guest Conductor in March 2003, and became Principal Conductor in September 2007. From September 2021 he will become the Orchestra’s Conductor Emeritus

The Orchestra is based at Southbank Centre’s Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992, giving around 30 concerts a season. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for over 50 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski. **lpo.org.uk**



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VLADIMIR MARTYNOV (b. 1946)

	47:20	Utopia Symphony
01	24:38	Part I
02	22:42	Part II

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI *conductor*
JUN HONG LOH *violin*
NEVILLE CREED *speaker and chorus master*
LONDON PHILHARMONIC CHOIR
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Kevin Lin *leader*

Recorded at **ABBEY ROAD STUDIOS**, London