Theodore Kuchar

Theodore Kuchar, one of the most prolifically recorded conductors of the past decade, appears on over a hundred recordings for the Naxos, Brilliant Classics, Ondine and Marco Polo labels. He has served as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of two of Europe's leading orchestras, the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra (formerly the Czech Radio Orchestra) (2005-) and the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine (1994-2004). In the 2011-12 season he commenced his tenure as the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Orquestra Sinfónica de Venezuela. He presently also serves as Music Director and Conductor of the Fresno Philharmonic Orchestra (2002-) and the Reno Chamber Orchestra (2003-) in the United States. An avid chamber musician, he served as the Artistic Director of the Australian Festival of Chamber Music (1990-2006), and has served as the Artistic Director of the Nevada Chamber Music Festival since 2005. Highlights of the past several seasons have included a four-week, twenty concert tour of the United States with the Czech Symphony Orchestra and guest conducting engagements including the BBC Symphony, BBC National Symphony Orchestra of Wales, Berlin Symphony, English Chamber Orchestra, Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, Israel Symphony Orchestra, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic and the National Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela. He has collaborated with major artists including James Galway, Jessye Norman, Lynn Harrell, Itzhak Perlman, Yo-Yo Ma, Sarah Chang, Mstislav Rostropovich, Joshua Bell and Frederica von Stade, among others. Between 1994 and 2004 the orchestra made over 80 recordings for the Naxos and Marco Polo labels, including the complete symphonies of Kalinnikov, Lyatoshynsky, Martinů and Prokofiev, as well as major works of Dvořák, Glazunov, Mozart, Shchedrin, Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky. They also recorded the symphonies and orchestral works of Ukraine's leading contemporary symphonist, Yevhen Stankovych. The recording of Lyatoshynsky's *Symphonies Nos. 2* and *3* was awarded ABC's "Best International Recording of the Year" in 1994. Their recording of the complete works for violin and orchestra by Walter Piston for the Naxos label [8.559003] was hailed by *Gramophone* (January, 2000) as a "Record of the Year" for 1999. The complete symphonies of Prokofiev, on the Naxos label, are regarded by many critics as the most accomplished cycle available on compact disc.

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine
(until 1994 known as Ukrainian State Symphony Orchestra)

The National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine was formed in November 1918 by the Ukraine Council of Ministers. The first conductor was Oleksander Horilyj, and Nathan Rachlin was Artistic Director of the orchestra from 1937 for 25 years. Stefan Turchak, Volodymyr Kozhuchar, Fedor Glushchenko, Igor Blazhkov and Theodore Kuchar followed as Principal Conductors. Other conductors who have worked with the orchestra include Leopold Stokowski, Igor Markevitch, Kurt Sanderling, Evgeny Mravinsky, Kirill Kondrashin, Evgeny Svetlanov and Gennady Rozhdestvensky. Soloists who have performed with the NSOU include Artur Rubinstein, Yehudi Menuhin, Isaak Stern, David Oistrakh, Sviatoslav Richter, Mstislav Rostropovich, Emil Gilels, Leonid Kogan, Gidon Kremer, Oleh Krysa, Montserrat Caballé, José Carreras, and Juan Diego Florez. The orchestra has given premières of works by Sergey Prokofiev, Dmitry Shostakovich, Aram Khatchaturian, Boris Lyatoshynsky, Valentin Silvestrov, Myroslav Skoryk, and Yevhen Stankovych. Winning high praise from Shostakovich, among others, since 1993 the NSOU has made more than 100 recordings, including Ukrainian and international repertoire, winning international awards, and has undertaken concert tours throughout the world. Since April 1999 Volodymyr Sirenko has been Artistic Director and Chief Conductor, and since June 2006 Alexander Hornostai has served as Managing Director and Producer.

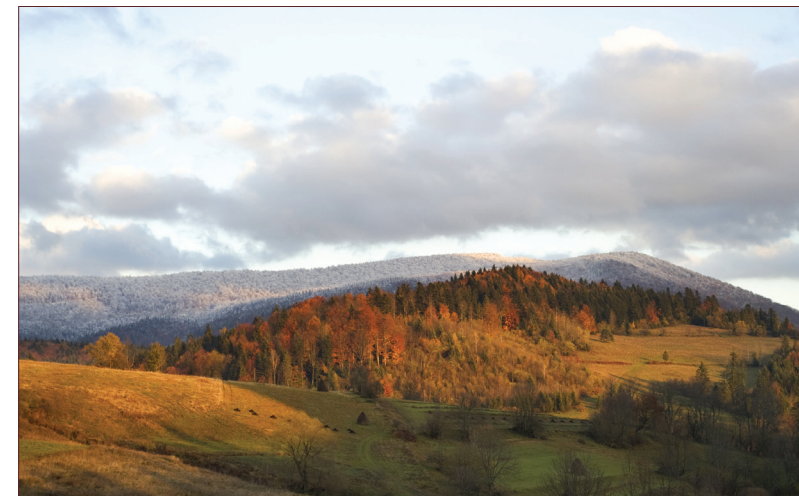

LYATOSHYNSKY
Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5, 'Slavonic'
Ukrainian State Symphony Orchestra
Theodore Kuchar

Boris Lyatoshynsky (1895-1968)
Symphony No. 4, Op. 63
Symphony No. 5, Op. 67 'Slavonic'

During the first third of the twentieth century, Ukrainian society underwent several seismic shifts as a result of political instability and oppression. Following the long and bitterly fought Ukrainian War of Independence from 1917-21, the Soviet government introduced a new policy of tolerance and 'Korenizatsiya' – literally 'putting down roots' – allowing smaller Soviet nations and republics far greater control and freedom. This resulted in a vibrant, if short-lived, cultural renaissance, and the emergence of a new generation of artists, writers and musicians, who drew on both eastern and western models as well as looking to their own national heritage.

Boris Lyatoshynsky was a leading member of this new generation of Ukrainian composers, and is today honoured as the father of contemporary Ukrainian music. Arriving in Kiev from his native city of Zhitomir in 1913, Lyatoshynsky enrolled first in the law school of Kiev University, and subsequently also at the recently-founded Kiev Conservatory, where he studied composition with Reinhold Glière. Having completed his law studies in 1918, he graduated in 1919 from the Conservatory, and took up a teaching post there in the very same year. He continued to teach in Kiev for the rest of his life, and became a professor of the Conservatory in 1935. Additionally, from 1935-38 and 1941-44 he taught at the Moscow Conservatory, and in later life acted as an adjudicator for the Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow on several occasions.

Lyatoshynsky composed in a broad variety of genres. His output includes five symphonies, several symphonic poems and other short orchestral works, choral and vocal music, two operas, and a number of chamber and solo piano pieces. He also provided incidental music for both stage and film productions.

His earliest compositions were heavily influenced by the tastes of his teacher, Glière, and are Romantic and lyrical in style, with frequent references to the music of both Schumann and Borodin. By the time he completed his *Symphony No. 1*, part of which formed his graduation work from the Conservatory, he had become interested in the impressionist music of Scriabin. But five years later, with his *Piano Sonata No. 1* (1924), he moved away from Russian models in favour of the new musical developments of Central and Western Europe – specifically, atonality. This exploration of musical expressionism, and in particular the music of Alban Berg, lasted until 1929, when Lyatoshynsky increasingly turned his attention to his Ukrainian musical heritage. For the rest of his career, and drawing on the research of the late nineteenth-century ethnomusicologist Mykola Lysenko, Lyatoshynsky drew together Ukrainian folk-songs and melodies with contemporary harmonic and formal approaches.

The golden age of cultural freedom in the Ukraine was to come to an abrupt end in the late 1920s, as Stalin took control and Socialist Realism became the new order of the day. Ukrainian national music was brutally repressed, Western European developments were condemned, and systematic purges and censorship were employed to enforce the new regime. It was not until the mid-1950s that the next generation of Ukrainian composers, all pupils of Lyatoshynsky, were able to establish a free avant-garde with the help of their mentor.

Theodore Kuchar
Edited Katy Hamilton 2014

With the death of Stalin in 1953, there was hope that previous opposition to Western formalism, forced emphasis on nineteenth-century Russian music, and the insistence on maintaining Communist Party principles (above all that of Socialist Realism) would be relaxed. For a brief period it seemed as if this might indeed transpire; but from 1963, the year before Leonid Brezhnev assumed Soviet leadership, new restrictions were placed upon composers and other artists. These policies were intended to privilege Russian culture and heritage over those of non-Russians – and in particular, the rôle of the Slavic peoples, including the Ukrainians, Belarusians, Yugoslavians and Serbians, was downplayed in favour of a 'Russification' of history.

Lyatoshynsky's *Fourth Symphony, Op. 63*, completed in 1963, was first performed in Leningrad (St Petersburg) with the Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of the leading Soviet conductor, Nathan Rachlin. Following the première, the critic M. Bialik published a glowing review of the work, observing that the composer's creative process and brilliant orchestration was proof of the ever-developing and distinctive tradition of a truly Ukrainian classical music. He went on to point out that, although Lyatoshynsky made use of a contemporary musical language, he never entirely abandoned tonality, and also incorporated Ukrainian folk-music. The first Kiev performance of the Symphony met with similar acclaim, and two notable performances followed in 1965: on 9th January, under Lyatoshynsy's own direction, the piece was given to celebrate his 70th birthday; and in March, the work featured in a programme of major contemporary symphonic music, hosted by the Assembly of the Union of Ukrainian Composers. Both critics and performers placed the *Fourth Symphony* alongside other European masterpieces by composers such as Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Bartók, Honegger and Szymanowski. And of course, there was no doubt as to its importance within the development of Ukrainian music.

This is a symphony of conflicting viewpoints – they might loosely be described as subjective and objective – and this notion of juxtaposed extremes is common to many of Lyatoshynsky's compositions. As the

Symphony begins, we are presented with an 'objective' and forceful brass, chordal motif; and this is almost immediately followed by its 'subjective', impressionistic antithesis, in the form of a light, shimmering high string texture with pizzicato cellos and basses. The tension between these two ideas provides the impetus for the following *Allegro moderato ma risoluto assai*, which builds to a mighty struggle between themes, resolved only in a brief transitional passage towards the end of the movement. This movement runs without pause into the next, *Lento tenebroso — Andante*, which draws heavily upon Ukrainian folk-music models. Its three sections are connected by a broad, solemn chorale, which is passed around the orchestra; and this is complemented by a second theme, a 'Peredzvoniv' or church bell melody, that grows out of the murky, multi-layered chorale accompaniment. As the music moves seamlessly into the finale, *Allegro molto risoluto*, we are dragged back sharply to the musical present through a flurry of highly rhythmical, often nervy and grotesque melodic fragments. Once again, contrast is crucial to the development of the movement, and the initial energy is lost as the music drops into quiet melancholy. Although the tension once again builds, it only swells each time to dip again – and finally, the serene beauty of the 'Peredzvoniv' returns to conclude the *Symphony* in peace.

From the early 1950s, Lyatoshynsky became interested in Slavonic musical heritage, and this manifested itself in a series of orchestral compositions. Following the *Slavonic Concerto, Op. 54* (1953) and *Slavonic Overture* (1961), he completed a three-movement Symphony from 1965-66 – his *Fifth, Op. 67* – and gave it the subtitle *'Slavyanskaya'* ('Slavonic').

The first movement opens with a stately, hymn-like theme marked *Andante maestoso*. This is based on an ancient Rus song about the knight-errant folk hero Il'ya Muromets, who was reputed to have saved the city of Kiev from a greedy Prince who attempted to invade it. The theme is introduced by six horns playing in unison, without harmonic support; they are then joined by other members of the brass section playing the material

canonically, but in multiple keys at the same time. The tension and uncertainty of the introduction sets the stage for an energetic *Allegro molto*, the main body of the movement. The principal theme is constructed from two Russian folk-tunes, which Lyatoshynsky blends into an energetic, dance-like motif. This is presented alongside two subordinate themes, based on Yugoslav melodies. The opening Muromets song returns to mark the recapitulation. The second movement similarly carries more than one tempo marking: outer *Lento e mesto* sections surround two marked *Andante tranquillo*, between which sits a central *Grave*. The entire movement is based on two Bulgarian folk-tunes. The first, *Oh my friend Petko, rise up*, is deeply mournful; whilst the second, *Bring here the maiden*, is a more serene and contemplative melody, reminiscent of a mountain shepherd's song. There is a feeling of unfolding narrative in their presentation, as if recounting the events of

ancient Slavic history; the movement's conclusion, with a transformation of *Oh my friend Petko*, suggests a tragic ending. The finale, moving from an opening *Moderato* to *Allegro energico,* again returns the listener to the world of the folk-dance – and church music is also incorporated. There is a growing sense of unrest and inner conflict as this movement progresses; yet in its final episode, as previous material is drawn together in an almost fresco-like presentation, the Muromets song once again appears as the affirmation of a proud race. This depiction of the deep and universal bond shared by all Slavic cultures lends the work a powerful political message; and this has given Lyatoshynsky's work greater significance not only as a Ukrainian composition, but within the broader culture of the former Soviet Union.

Marianna Kopytsia
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