

**The Birth of Contemporary Russia out of the Spirit of Russian
Music**

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The title, you of course realize, is a Wagnerian joke. Not only do I not believe that music is prophesy, or even (so to speak) cultural seismography, I seem to be devoting my life to combating the king of romantic overvaluation that leads to its decline. I have also published a book recently Defining Russia Musically, that could be read, perhaps, although I would not insist on it, as a sustained polemic against Russian exceptionalism. So it may be that I am starting out with two strikes against me with respect to what you may be expecting from a musicologist.

And the third strike would be the impossibility of supporting my observations with relative examples. The trouble, after all, with music is that it takes time. And since I have been given twenty minutes to speak, and since one of the most symptomatic pieces I will be mentioning tonight is a composition for four instruments that takes two and one-half hours to perform, you can see that this will be a handicap. but of course we are going to hear a concert tonight , to which these remarks can serve as a kind of preconcert talk, even though I have not heard the program I am introducing. But that may make it more interesting. You can decide for yourselves, as will also be deciding, whether the music we will hear together later on confirms or disconfirms the general observations I intend to make.

In considering the best way to focus my remarks on what could seem an unmanageably broad and shapeless topic – the effect of recent Russian history on Russian music. I finally decided that the best way to go might be to cast the talk as a response to

an unusually stimulating article that appeared in The Musical Quarterly, the oldest academic music journal in the United States, in the late fall of 1992, that is –Year One of the post-Soviet era. A survey of recent Russian concert music against the background of contemporary Russian music life, it was called “The Paradox of Russian Non-Liberty” (probably someone’s translation of Zagadka russkoi nevoli), and it was by an Alexander Ivashkin, a remarkable musician and writer with whom I was slightly aquatinted, having once spent an afternoon chatting with him in a Berkley café.

Ivashkin is a cellist who used to lead the cello section of the Bolshoi Theater orchestra in Moscow. From 1978 to 1991 he directed the Bolshoi Soloists Ensemble, which gave very well-attended concerts of new music. He is also a gifted writer, who has published monographs on Alfred Schnittke, whom he knew intimately, as well as Krzysztof Penderecki and Charles Ives. Since 1992, like many of the prominent Russian or otherwise post-Soviet composers (Schnittke, Gubaidulina, Kancheli, Pärt, Dmitry Smirnov), he has lived abroad, having found a job as a professor of cello and music history at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. He is a tall man, slim, trim and blond, a natty dresser, very cosmopolitan and sophisticated. When the two of us stand side by side I am the one who looks like a mad Russian. I can assure you.

So I was quite taken aback to find my elegant, globe-trotting friend trading so heavily in the old romantic rhetoric of difference and exceptionalism, and continuing to purvey so many familiar national stereotypes. It’s a stale discourse, but one we still have to deal with, it seems, because everyone seems nostalgically attached to it, although reasons for attachment vary. In Defining Russia Musically, which I’ll quote from briefly so that you may see where I am coming from, I put it this way : “Tardy growth and

tardier professionalization, remote provenience, social marginalism, the means of its promotion, even an exotic language and alphabet of its practitioners have always tinged or tainted Russian art music with an air of alterity, sensed, exploited, bemoaned, asserted, abjured, exaggerated, minimized, glorified, denied, reveled in, traded on, and defended against both from within and from without.”

Now here is Ivashkin, writing from within : “ I have discussed the morphological, rather than syntactic, character of Russian musical mentality. We borrow Western syntax and destroy it, moving deeper t the roots, paying more attention to the expression of the particular moment than to its structure.” Or this : “ A work of Russian art is a confession. There is nothing commonplace in it, nothing decorative, well balanced, or moderate. Everything is extreme, sometimes shocking, strange.” Or this : “ An urge to interpret, to ‘endure’ is inherent in Russian culture. You will never find just a ready made product in art or in music. This is true also of Russian icons : your positive relation to an icon when you view it is very mobile, multi-angled. To understand its symbolic meaning, you have to enter the space of the icon and more in different directions.”

So we still have the old picture of the Russian composer as some kind of cross between Oblomov, Raskolnikov and the vurodiviv from Boris Godunov. And just as Oblomov must have his Stolz and Raskolnikov his Razumikhin, this totalized or essentialized specter in the totalized and essentialized West : rational, syntactic, structural, balanced, moderate, readymade. Ivashkin’s comparison of stereotypes has its counterpart, perhaps in a sense its origin, in a famous remark by Musorgsky : “ When a German thinks, he reasons his way to a conclusion. Our Russian brother, on the other hand, starts with the conclusion and might amuse himself with reasoning. That’s all I

have to say to you about symphonic development.” The traditional stereotype of Russian music is in fact a portrait of Musorgsky – Repin’s portrait of Musorgsky, to be exact – with a soupçon of Chaikovsky (that is, the program of the Fourth Symphony and the subtitle of the Sixth) thrown in for the sake of confession. But what about the many who don’t fit in? where does Rachmaninoff enter the scheme? Where is Prokofiev, the least confessional composer who ever lived (perhaps because he had the least self to confess) ? Where is Stravinsky, who was widely accepted for a long time as the main avatar of all the Western values Ivashkin has implicitly constructed against his Russian icon. Ivashkin, a performer by training, even coins a stereotype all his own to cast Russian music in opposition to western. He calls it “performance ephemera,” and like a true Eurasian, goes on to say that it is “probably an Oriental feature, like the Japanese art of flower arrangement, which is also ephemeral.” From this he generalizes : “ all ephemeral things, and only ephemeral things , are beautiful for Russians : music, performance art, and ultimately life itself.” But of course this specifically excludes Scriabin from the ranks of the Russians, and like any number of their contemporaries in Silver- Age Russia, was obsessed with the transcendent, the supernatural, the enduring, the One. And of course that, too, is often touted (if not by Ivashkin) as a characteristically if not exclusively Russian trait.

And where is Anton Rubinstein, the most famous (and, many thought, the greatest) Russian musician of the nineteenth century? Not a Russian? Not “really” Russian? There in a nutshell is why we’d better think twice about defining the Russian musical essence. As soon as you’ve defined authentic Russian music, you have also identified, through music, a class of authentic Russians. What an abuse of music! And

that is not even the worst of it. As feminists and queer theorists have discovered, trading in essence plays into the hands of misogynists and the homophobes, who of course do it too, and usually define the essences quite similarly. Compare David Brown, Chaikovsky's most recent British biographer : "His was a Russian mind forced to find its expression through techniques and forms that had been evolved by generations of alien Western creators, and, this being so, it would be unreasonable to expect stylistic consistence or uniform quality." And yet, despite Chaikovsky's having inherited a "wholly different set of racial characteristics and attitudes," Brown concludes that "a composer who could show so much resourcefulness in modifying sonata structure so as to make it more compatible with the type of music nature had decreed he would write was no helpless bungler." Nature? Racial attitudes? Is Brown a racist? If so, so is Ivashkin.

Is there any way to stop thinking this way? Is it so hard to regard musical style as an aspect of behavior, to be discussed and evaluated alongside other forms of musical behavior such as performance and reception, rather than as an emanation of essence? Ivashkin's biases lead him to interpret only those musical responses to recent Russian history that confirm his stereotypes as being "correct" or "authentic" responses. In particular, he is in pains to devalue responses that see the fall of Soviet power, the crumbling of walls, and so forth, as an opportunity to erase difference, or at least to erase the mythology of national difference. He sees this attitude as threatening loss of the "inner tension" that sustained Russian music and made it great. A young post-Soviet composer, Vladimir Tarnopolsky, put it to Ivashkin this way : "Maybe I've lost programmatic, extramusical ideas, but I've got a new quality, and a new understanding of

pure sound instead.” I’d certainly like to quarrel with Tarnopolsky’s dichotomy of “extramusical ideas” vs. “pure sound”, but Ivashkin picks a different fight. He sees Tarnopolsky’s attitude as being akin to privatization of the economy, which implies objectivity and commercialism, both un-Russian traits. “Now we can export our music and art,” he complains. “Russian music and Russian composers are known everywhere. Sometimes it seems to be not far away from our century’s very common stream.” The “typical attitude” of such a moment, Ivashkin asserts, is “Everything must be sold.” Clearly, his idea of Russianness has been colored by his Soviet education.

But there is another way of looking at the attitude Tarnopolsky expressed, possibly a more attractive- or at least a less objectionable-one. In 1991, the year of the August putsch and the dissolution of the Union, another Moscow composer, Alexander Raskatov, composed a lovely piece for cello and piano called Dolce far niente : “ A Sweet Nothing.” On the face of it such a response may seem reminiscent of Robert Benchlev’s wonderful old essay, Johnny-on- the- Spot, which begins:

If you want to get a good perspective on history in the making, just skim through a collection of news photographs, which have been snapped an those very moments when cataclysmic events were taking place throughout the world. In almost every picture you can discover one guy in a derby hat who is looking in exactly the opposite direction from the excitement, totally oblivious to the fact that the world is shaking beneath his feet. That would be me, or at any rate, my agent in that particular part of the world in which the event is taking place.

And that would be music, some would say : or more to the point that should be music. Music is for Dolce far niente, or for “a new understanding of pure sound,” not for social cataclysms. It can be an especially attractive idea when one has been brought up with the opposite idea-that your music must register engagement with history, and with a particular view of it at that. this happened once before in the fairly recent history of Russian (that is, Soviet) music. The most widely publicized musical reaction to the post – Stalinist “thaw” of the mid-50s to mid-60s was the emergence of the so-called underground avant-garde in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev. At a time when artists and writers were “pushing the envelope” of permissible by treating social problems unrecognized within the canons of socialist realism, a group of young composers began aping the styles of the then-current Western European avant-garde – mainly composers associated with the summer classes at Darmstadt : Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Lucian Berio.

The figure widely regarded then as the ringleader was Andrey Volkonsky, a scion of one of the great noble families of Russia, who was born in Geneva in 1933, studied composition, like so many others, with Nadia Boulanger, and moved back to Russia with his family in 1948, a rather inauspicious year for Soviet musicians. His embrace of serialism was as much a rejection of the Boulangerie as it was of the Moscow Conservatory, and it may seem a paradox – shall we call it the “Paradox of Russian Non-Liberty?”- that his first celebration (or assertion) of post-Stalinist creative freedom should have been a composition called Musica Stricta for piano (1956), in which he attempted of the “totally controlled” or “totally organized” serialism then associated with the Darmstadt school. His most famous piece, Zhalobi Shchazi (or Les Plaintes de

Chtchaza, as its published title page puts it), was a slavish imitation of Boulez's Le Marteau sans maitre that it was quickly nicknamed "The Hammer without the Sickle" in the West, where of course it was chiefly performed. It makes tame, faintly embarrassing listening now, as do the first works of Edison Denisov and Alfred Schnittke to have achieved performance in the West. The Sun of the Incas (1964) by the former and Pianissimo for orchestra (1968) by the latter, although they would have marked the composers in the West as camp followers and conformists, and though their musical content was doggedly abstract and noncommittal, were received both at home and abroad as harbingers of "dissidence" and a par wit the writings of Dudintsev or Sinyavsky.

But there is really no paradox at all. Nothing is received out of context, and the context in this case is obviously the cold war, which invested this rigorously academic, socially alienated music with an aura of civil disobedience, simply because its methods were opposed by the culture politicians in the one sphere and touted by the culture politicians in the other. The composers of the early underground avant-garde did not help their careers in the narrow sense by their affiliation with it, but they gained an otherwise unavailable prestige, not only in the West (where at the time Soviet music, even Shostakovich's, otherwise attracted very little interest) but also at home, where their names, as I can testify, were spoken in reverent whispers by conservatory students. And at least one western academic – Joel Spiegelman, a professor of music at Sarah Lawrence College – made his career almost exclusively on the basis of his Soviet avant-garde importing and brokerage business.

The abstract and academic serial model did not keep its prestige very long within the Soviet Union, even among the dissident set, which by now was an irrevocable

presence on the scene, and there is no discernible movement toward its revival in the post-cold war environment of today, when it has lost its prestige even in the western academy. For even Soviet dissidents and post-Soviet free traders are Soviet composers after all, who now regard the old western avant-garde and the work of its more recent epigones, in Ivashkin's well-chosen words, as "too dietetic, too vegetarian." I will never forget a conversation I had in 1972 with Nikolai Karetnikov, then one of the best known Soviet composers "for the drawer," whose works were nevertheless a frequent presence in Warsaw and (until 1968) in Prague, and were even recorded in Leningrad expressly for foreign broadcast ("to show we have ugliness too," he chuckled). He earned his living the usual way, by writing soundtrack music for cartoons. He, too, wrote serial music, but one would never take it for Darmstadt music. When I told him this he made a wry face and said, "If I thought that music was just a zvukovaya igra (a play of sounds) 'I could write a symphony every week.' No k sozhaleniyu, I est' dramaturgiya. 'But unfortunately, there is also dramaturgy.'" Nor did he think of that dramaturgy as something "extramusical." God bless him. Speaking of God, Kolya was also drawn to composing church music in a modernistic style. What an instinct for success, I thought. But yes, there was "inner tension" in his music aplenty, and great vitality. One hears it too, albeit more naively, in the early work Arvo Pärt, in which Darmstadt avantgardism rubs up against neomedievalism. That equation of the archaic and the up-to-the-minute was characteristic of the Western avant-garde, too. Anything that deviated from the "mainstream" was fair game, whether the mainstream was defined westernly as the commercial mainstream, or Russianly as the political or civic mainstream. Nowadays, having divested himself of his Cold war (that is, twelve-tone) baggage, Pärt has attached

his archaism to a more viable contemporary discourse, joining the ranks of the New Age (or, as they like to call it in the music biz, “newage”). He has become, in the witty words of the *New York Times*, “the gentlest and least angry of our Luddites,” and right now by far the most popular of the post-Soviets.

One spots the same pattern in Volkonsky’s career: unable to gain a hearing as a composer, in the sixties he fell back on his keyboard training, became the Soviet Union’s best known (or only) professional harpsichordist, and founded an early music group on the model of the New York Pro Musica, known as Madrigal, that played to sold-out houses both at home and abroad. Even the music of Josquin des Prez or William Byrd, in what was by then the Brezhnevite stagnation, could give audiences a frisson of dissidence. Now, in the laissez-faire state that Russia has become artistically, not even Heavy Metal rock can. The prevailing musical mood is one of futility, and not only because economic prospects are so poor.

But the mainstream or official modern style that the dissident faction played off against in late-Soviet Russia was one that contradicted Ivashkin’s romanticized image of Russian music in every way. The combination of excellent training and well-rewarded conformism had produced a music of repellent glibness: ready-made and commonplace in every way, completely devoid of “confession,” utterly “syntactic,” absolutely nothing “extreme, shocking, or strange.” Sometime in the mid 1980s, around the time of Gorbachev’s accession but (as I recall) just a bit earlier, a delegation of young talents handpicked by the Union of Soviet Composers visited several American campuses including Columbia University, where I then taught. They were led by Sasha Chaikovsky (no relation), who has since disappeared from view (at least from my view)

but who at the time was touted as Tikhon Khrennikov's eventual successor as Union head, and it included several composers from the outlying "republics"—Baltic, Caucasian, Central Asian. No matter where it came from, though, the music was in a very alarming way the same: it seemed to revive the old Baroque fortspinnung ("spinning-out:) technique, the manner of writing that makes Baroque music such a dependable reservoir of sonic wallpaper to be dispensed by FM radio. The music was anodyne, remarkably polished, and seemingly unstoppable, like a Fidel Castro speech. There didn't seem to be such a thing as a short piece any more in the USSR. Or maybe it just seemed long.

But the worst of it all was the universal reliance on hothouse folklore—an old Russian vice, to be sure, as was its exportation to the republics. But there was a difference. Rather than treating folklore, in the older Russian fashion, as thematic material for academic elaboration, this newer Soviet music belonged to what had by then been known for a decade or so as the novaya fol'kloristicheskaya volna, the "new folkloric wave." As in the older movement retrospectively christened "neonationalism" by art historians, which touched music but little, the new Soviet folklorism sought not merely thematic material but stylistic principles in folklore. To quote Yakov Tugenholt's 1910 review of the Firebird ballet, now famous as an encapsulation of neonationalism, "the folk, formerly the object of the artist's pity, is now increasingly the source of artistic style." Neonationalism promised an "authentic" modernism: that is, a modernistic style based not on the abstract universalism of numbers (as in serialism and its antecedents), but on the particular reality of particular national traditions.

As the reference to Firebird already suggests, the one Russian composer to embrace neonationalism wholeheartedly in its time was Stravinsky. But Stravinsky's neonationalist works, such as Le Sacre du printemps and especially Svadebka, were particularly reviled during the Stalinist period, when modernism was anathematized and a modernistic style based on folklore could only be interpreted as mockery of the folk. The official embrace of neonationalism a half century later under the rubric novaya folkloristicheskaya volna looked liberal enough—but only until one recalled the connections between the older neonationalism and Evrazivstvo, “Eurasianism,” the extreme protofascist Russian nationalism hatched in the emigration between wars, in which Stravinsky, alas, also participated. This was the worst and most intolerant manifestation ever of Russian exceptionalism, and its resurrection as an official Soviet modernism in opposition to the serialism that was tainted by its association with Schoenberg, a “rootless cosmopolitan” to say it po-sovetskomu could only strike another rootless cosmopolitan like me as sinister.

There are unwelcome echoes of Evrazivstvo as well as Oblomovshchina in Ivashkin's diagnosis of the current situation in Russia. “The fateful role of Russia is to join West and East in both a social and cultural sense,” he writes. “In the past, there was no real contact between the culture of the West and Russia. Russia never had freedom. And life in Russia was never so scheduled, so well organized, as in the West, so the perception of Western traditions and cultural pattern could not be direct: there was always some Russian amendment, some modification.” But this, of course, is another form of the same glibness I was protesting a moment ago in its musical manifestation.

I am happy to say that there has been a change, although Ivashkin's essay does not register it. I encountered it in May 1991 at a conference in Chicago organized in connection with the American premiere, by the Chicago Symphony under Daniel Barenboim, of Edison Denisov's Symphonie pour grand orchestre, a piece that continued, as its very title suggests (and as Denisov had always done), to appropriate Western traditions and cultural patterns without any Russian amendment. But a few hours earlier, at a chamber concert at the Chicago Art Institute devoted to recent works by Soviet composers, I was powerfully struck by the renunciation, not only of folklore, but of all easy rhetorical effect and of the smooth spinning-out of bland ideas that had so appalled me a few years before. The younger composers (especially Yelena Firsova, who now lives with her husband Dmitry Smirnov in England, and Sofia Gubaidulina, now living in Germany) seemed to have lost their voices, so determined did they seem to avoid the specious volubility of the recent past. The models here, of course, were two: the late quartets of Shostakovich, particularly the Thirteenth (which made a point of voicelessness with its unsettling substitutions of bow-tapping on music stands for conventionally played notes), and above all the recent work of Shostakovich's former pupil, the mysterious, reclusive Galina Ustvolskaya, whose music figured in the Chicago concert, and will also figure in the concert tonight. Behind it all lay the example of Beethoven, especially the passage in the Cavatina from the B-flat Major Quartet (prefigured at the end of the Eroica Symphony's Funeral March), where Beethoven breaks his song with sobs and gasps, made explicit with the marking beklemmt ("choked up").

At the very end of the Soviet era, then, composers seemed to be doing costly penance for past loquaciousness, and I found it intensely moving. Now the mantle of beklemmtheit, “tongue-tiedness,” has fallen on Alexander Knaifel, another hermetic figure. His Agnus Dei is the 2 ½ hour chamber quartet to which I made reference earlier. Filling such a span of time with music might seem the opposite of tongue-tied, but imagine a conference report like the one I am now giving delivered by a morbidly bashful speaker with a severe stammer. That is the effect for which Knaifel, who I sometimes think of as the Russian Morton Feldman, is celebrated, and for which he is beginning to be revered the way Schnittke and Denisov were once revered.

But Denisov, in whose honor the chamber concert was given, remained loquacious: his clarinet quintet, played on the same program as Ustvol'skaya and Firsova, seemed very Soviet indeed in its smooth garrulity. And although my saying so may win me few friends, that is how I have always felt about the teeming prolific work of Alfred Schnittke, too, whose very public and oratorical stance and whose easily-decoded dichotomies and antitheses have always struck me as socialist realism minus socialism. The difference, and it was a saying difference, lay in the stylistic eclecticism (or “polystylistics”) that Schnittke’s international prestige helped make newly respectable—not just in Russia, but everywhere. Ivashkin, who was Schnittke’s close friend and confidant, is especially eloquent on this score. In Schnittke’s late- or post-Soviet idiom he sees “the development of a new type of culture, a meta-culture.” Reminding us that “meta” is the Greek for “post,” which is Latin for “after,” he explains:

Meta-culture takes different traditions, different idioms, and puts them into a new context, or at a different level. These idioms, traditions, ready-made products, of particular cultures are amalgamated in a meta-culture, where they begin to function as primary elements of a new parasitic culture, and they are productive at the same time. For example [Ivashkin continues], the heroes of works by James Joyce, Charles Ives, Luciano Berio are styles and historical traditions, mixed and melted together.

The three names are well chosen. They show that Schnittke's polystylistic idiom was not so novel after all, that it was not preternaturally Russian, and that in view of hardcore modernist antecedents like Joyce, there is no point in slapping the fashionable postmodern label on it. Rather than postmodernism it is simply post-ism, after-everythingism, an evocation of Dostoevsky's terrifying world without God where everything was possible, and so nothing mattered. In the context of the Leninist world in which Schnittke lived, where nothing was possible and everything mattered—or in that of the equally administered, equally deterministic western world of academic modernism—such a vision promised not nihilism but liberation, or at least a change.

Now we've had the change and nihilism has begun to set in. Nostalgia for the bad old days is returning in the music world, as it is doing everywhere. Remember Ivashkin's comment on the "inner tension" that sustained Russian difference. Here are the two sentences that preceded it: "Of course, the cultural context changed completely after the Second Russian Revolution of August 1991: there is no longer any pressure, control, or censorship. Russia has become a new country, but in spite of its new freedom, something

is definitely missing.” I would suggest that what is missing for Ivashkin and many other nostalgic Russians, and what he is calling “inner tension,” is in fact the heroism, the greatness, that we like to imagine that tyranny calls forth in response. Without Stalin there cannot be a Shostakovich, this theory runs, and it is fed by the torrent of strained sentimental revisionism now being visited on poor Dmitry Dmitrievich, who is being shamelessly promoted, both in Russia and (even more) in the west, not merely as an anti-Stalinist but as the veritable anti-Stalin.

These ideas, too, are nothing new. They are the stalest romanticism. Consider Stendhal’s Life of Rossini, a book first published in 1825. Throughout, the author argues that art, and music in particular, can flourish only under tyranny, never in a democracy. This is so for two reasons: first, because democracy demands so much participation from its citizens that they will be left with no leisure for art: and second, because under tyranny the arts give silenced people a precious avenue of expression. The day that the people rise up against the Papal government, Stendhal wrote, will “mark the end and death of art in Italy, and in its place there will be nice political discussions as in London or Washington.” When followed to the point of idiocy, as in certain writings of George Steiner, the implicit overvaluation of art breeds contempt for democracy, indeed for politics tout court. God knows there’s a lot of that about in Russia these days.

But I hasten to remind you that Stendhal himself did not follow his reasoning to the point of idiocy. Artist and art-lover though he was, he kept things in perspective, finally acknowledging that “the arts are only a luxury in life: the essentials are honesty, reason, and justice.” And that is why at first I resisted the invitation to participate in these exercises. I feel no nostalgia for the totalitarian past however great the concomitant

musical glories, still less do I regret the loss of new music's dissident cachet in post-Soviet Russia, nor have I any presumptuous predictions to offer. I do have some advice, perhaps. As Nietzsche wrote, "Music reaches its high-water mark only among men who have not the ability or the right to argue." Let them now get used to honest argument in Russia, let us lose the habit of heartless fatalism, and maybe one day we'll have great art and honesty, reason, and justice, too.

? I think we can, and there is no reason why Russian music cannot help show the way. Eclecticism need not be so omnivorous as it was in Schnittke's octopus embrace, which was never a loving embrace. Practiced more selectively, as in the work of Shostakovich and some of his contemporaries like Benjamin Britten, Kurt Weill, or Francis Poulenc, the melange of styles and historical traditions could be read as a musical surrealism. The topic opens out on a terrain that leaves our present concerns far behind, but I want to leave you with the suggestion that we are all taking leave, at century's end, of the phase of modernism that demanded formal unity, stylistic purity, and novelty in sound, and entering a phase that demands a stylistic and semiotic counterpoint that can adequately represent the global culture of today. The surrealistic canon of Shostakovich, Britten, Poulenc and the rest has recently found its first persuasive historian in Daniel Albright—not, I regret to say, a musicologist but a musically sophisticated professor of comparative literature. What he persuades me of is that the music historiography of the twenty-first century will look more like his version than the music historiography that we have been used to. The heroes will not be the Schoenbergs, who (Albright writes) "worked to emancipate harmonic dissonance," but the composers of the surrealist canon,

who “worked to emancipate semantic dissonance.” Their music will also be valued for its originality, but it will be an originality “not in the way that their music sounds, but in the way that it means.” Esthetics, the way art communicates with its audiences, will replace author-centered poetics as the primary object of study.

Now far be it from me to deal in essences, especially by way of peroration: but in the history of the twentieth-century art these have eminently been Russian concerns, partly because of political pressure, but also because of traditions of social solidarity and of love of honesty, reason and justice that go back to earlier phases of Russian history. I do not suggest that Russian music should go back to sounding Russian: still less that it should join all other musics in what Olivier Messiaen once despairingly called “the international grey on grey.” “We are all individual music cultures,” as the ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin has inspiringly written, co-existing in a “fascinating counterpoint of near and far, large and small, neighborhood and national, home and away.” And what inspired him to this formulation was his study of the music that forms the residue of the last multi-ethnic empire to collapse, some of which we will be hearing later tonight.