

Mieczysław WEINBERG

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME TWO

SYMPHONY NO. 22, OP. 154

SIX BALLET SCENES: CHOREOGRAPHIC SYMPHONY, OP. 113

Siberian Symphony Orchestra
Dmitry Vasilyev

MIECZYŚLAW WEINBERG: ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME TWO

by David Fanning

Either side of his 50th birthday in 1969, Weinberg's principal creative concern was with opera. His sensational debut in the genre with the largely Auschwitz-based *The Passenger* was followed by another wartime-memorial, the more restrained but still profoundly moving *The Madonna and the Soldier*, then by the operetta *D'Artagnan in Love* and two comic operas, *Mazl tov!* and *Lady Magnesia*, to texts by Sholom-Aleykhem and George Bernard Shaw, respectively – all this in the space of eight years, when he was at the height of his powers.

Meanwhile his symphonic compositions were more widely spaced than they had been previously or would be after this point. But those that did appear – Symphony No. 10 in 1968 and No. 11 in 1970 – were among the most stylistically daring in this output, and the same goes for the *Six Ballet Scenes*, Op. 113 (end-dated 22 July 1973 in the manuscript score). The work was composed at the dacha town of Valentinovka, north-east of Moscow, which had been made over by Stalin in 1938 for the use of members of the Bolshoy and Maly opera companies (it was once the home of the Schnittke family, before their move to Moscow).

The *Six Ballet Scenes* is a strikingly heterogeneous opus, based on transcriptions from Weinberg's never-performed 1958 ballet *The White Chrysanthemum* (the story of a Japanese girl, Hanako, who is blinded by the atom bomb at Hiroshima but cured twelve years later by Soviet doctors at the time of the Sixth Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow, and reunited with her sweetheart, Taro). The composer's archived correspondence indicates that there was at some point a contract for the ballet with the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre in Moscow; but for reasons undetermined – though possibly connected with the Soviet Union's problematic relations with Japan at the time – it never reached the stage. Since no full score has been discovered, it may well be that Weinberg left *The White Chrysanthemum* unorchestrated, pending a confirmation of performance that never arrived.

The orchestral transcriptions in the *Six Ballet Scenes* are placed cheek-by-jowl with improvisatory passages that seem determined to rival the extravagant innovation of younger Soviet composers of the time, such as Schnittke and Denisov. The outer sections of the fast first Scene, an *Allegro molto* 1, are

derived from the Prelude to Act 3 of the ballet; the middle section pulls twelve-note clusters of scales for *divisi* first violins and a manic fugato out of the hat, and a careering coda attempts some kind of synthesis. Most of the *Adagio* second Scene [2] is a transcription of the blinded Hanako's Romance from Act 1; here it is the mysterious outer sections that were added in 1973. The following *Allegretto* [3] reworks the 'Blue masks' dance from Act 2, placing it alongside an étude that layers a twelve-note string theme and morse-code rhythmic patterns for the wind section, adding ghostly ripples for celesta and harp on their repeat. The fourth Scene [4] is another spiky scherzo, this time taken from 'Green masks', framed by a newly composed sternly dissonant introduction and coda, and with a phantasmagorical middle section, also new, consisting of anarchic rushing scales over a *cantus firmus* for trombone and tuba. The highly romantic *Adagio* [5] – not so far removed from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, despite the orientalisms that run all through Weinberg's ballet – is a straight transcription of Hanako and Taro's *pas de deux* in Act 1 (where he offers himself to her despite her blindness, but she remorsefully turns him away); this time there are no added modernist glosses. Notably Prokofievian also is the *Presto* finale – the only movement not based on *The White Chrysanthemum*, at least not on anything in its surviving piano score. It is a bustling galop [6] that runs without undue complications until the final gesture, where blaring full-orchestral B flats are subverted by *pianississimo* first-violin harmonics on a high E – a strikingly enigmatic gesture that would soon find an echo at the end of Weinberg's Thirteenth Symphony, Op. 115.

On one of the two extant autograph manuscripts of the Ballet Scenes, Weinberg added the title 'Choreographic Symphony' in brackets. Whether this title was equally valid in his mind or a mere afterthought, perhaps aimed at increasing the chances of performance, is uncertain. There are certainly plenty of precedents for the appellation, going at least as far back as Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloë*, but there is no reason to read too much significance into it, beyond the suggestion that the music is to be regarded as self-sufficient and independent of any staging. The official catalogue of Weinberg's works compiled in the mid-1980s makes no mention of it, and so far as is known the work was not performed before the making of this recording.

Weinberg's last years were blighted by the decline of his health and reputation. In December 1989 his 70th birthday was modestly acknowledged, and in 1990 he received the last of his official honours: the State Prize of the USSR, conferred at a special ceremony in the Kremlin, attended by the composer (although he was suffering from a high temperature) and broadcast on state television. This event was to be his last moment of public acclaim, other than his appearance at the premiere of his last opera, *The Idiot*, on 19 December 1991.

Meanwhile the infrastructure of the society that had been his safe haven for nigh on fifty years was also crumbling. Days after the premiere of *The Idiot*, the USSR was officially dissolved, and the consequent withdrawal of state subsidy from Russian cultural institutions – exacerbating the effects of general economic downturn during the years of *perestroika* – was a disaster for composers of non-commercial music. Some who had publishers or other connections in the west emigrated around this time, although often retaining a base in their homeland. But Weinberg had effectively no such contacts, and his health was far too fragile for him to contemplate a move. Financially he had sustained himself for many years by composing film scores. But by the 1990s that source, too, had dried up as commissions went to younger composers. Nor had he assembled a community of pupils or administrative colleagues to whom he might have been able to turn for support. These factors were compounded by havoc in a once-admired health service, exactly when he most directly required its support.

After Weinberg completed his Fourth Chamber Symphony in 1992, matters took a marked turn for the worse. Tommy Persson, the Swedish judge who was by this stage the most active force for propagating Weinberg's music in the west, reports:

Weinberg fell in his apartment and broke a hip. Having been taken to hospital, where he stayed for just a few days (during which he was not operated on), he was brought back to his apartment (with much pain from his broken hip-bone). There he had to stay in bed for all the remaining days of his life. During this period he also suffered severely from his long-standing Crohn's Disease.¹ He got depressed, of course, not being able to compose. But in spring 1994, he became a little better (from the medicine I had managed to send him) and managed to complete the piano score of his last composition, his 22nd Symphony. Unfortunately, the illness then deteriorated, and he was not able to orchestrate it.²

The surviving manuscripts of the Symphony bear the dedication 'To Olya, my wife' – Olga Rakhalskaya tended him until his last days – along with the movement titles 'Fantasia', 'Intermezzo' and 'Reminiscences'. A draft short score contains sporadic instrumental indications and numerous crossings-out, and its materials are further developed and put into order in a complete fair copy. Also in the family archive are two instrumentations. One – incomplete and comprising roughly a tenth of the 'Fantasia' only – was done by Weinberg's friend, Veniamin Basner, who died on 3 September 1996, only six months after Weinberg himself. The other is a complete version by Kirill Umansky (b. 1962), composer and professor of orchestration at the Moscow Conservatoire; Umansky's own account of his work is given later in this

¹ A chronic and at that time largely untreatable inflammatory bowel disorder.

² E-mail to David Fanning, 17 March 2008.

booklet. Weinberg himself evidently never began an orchestration, and although his short score was shown after his death to other composers close to him – namely Boris Tishchenko and Alexander Raskatov – neither appears to have attempted a completion.

The Symphony No. 22 – tenuously framed by, rather actually in, D major – is an austere, long-drawn work, valedictory in some aspects, but never lachrymose or self-indulgent. In slow–fast–slow format, the *Lento* first movement [7] opens with a broken-triadic solo line, indicated for piano in the first draft score but for clarinet in the fair copy, which returns at various points in the movement, including at the beginning of the faster middle section, as well as later in the Symphony. The course of this ‘Fantasia’ is steady and unsensational, initially disconsolate and wandering, but with a steadily increasing sense of direction and expressive urgency. From around 7:30 the thematic material reworks Nastasya Filippovna’s aria from near the end of Act 2 in *The Idiot* – one of the most touching central moments in the opera, where the *femme fatale* takes pity on her would-be suitor and saviour Prince Mishkin (the ‘Idiot’ because of his innocent belief in the inherent goodness of people, even when they deceive and mistreat him), asking him ‘Why are you crying?’

The long-delayed goal of the first movement is reached (around 15:50) shortly before the slow concluding section, in a statement – allocated to cor anglais, as the draft score stipulates – of Marta’s aria from Act 2, Scene 6, of *The Passenger*. The topic of this aria is the poet’s plea to choose his manner of death: in the cause either of love or of freedom. The aria itself was a transplantation, from Weinberg’s *Sándor Petőfi Songs*, Op. 70. The relevance to Weinberg’s condition at the time of the Symphony is obvious. Moreover, the non-performance of *The Passenger* in his lifetime was a bitter disappointment that Weinberg took to the grave.

The ‘Intermezzo’ [8] is an *Allegretto*, initially hushed, transparent and contrapuntal in texture, that eventually reaches a defiant climax, only to subside rapidly and without a break into the final ‘Reminiscences’ (also the title of a song collection, Op. 62). Laid out as *Adagio – Moderato*, this finale [9] slowly wends its way back, via a number of thematic recollections (hence ‘Reminiscences’), to the disconsolate mood of the opening ‘Fantasia’ and its song-derived cor anglais theme. Weinberg’s first draft score shows several attempts at a conclusion. The definitive version incorporates chorale-like harmonies, increasingly fervent in tone, together with the clarinet solo from the very opening of the work, now varied and higher up on the flute. This option is itself considerably extended in Weinberg’s final draft, which ends, like the Fantasia, with a quizzical pizzicato solo – for cello here, for violin in the first movement – echoing the farewell gesture of his preceding opus, the Chamber Symphony No. 4.

David Fanning is Professor of Music at the University of Manchester and has a varied career as scholar, pianist and critic. Following books on Nielsen and Shostakovich, his most recent publications include a concise monograph on Weinberg. In addition to ongoing research on Weinberg, not least for a much expanded version of the Weinberg book in preparation for Toccata Press, he is currently working on a translation and commentary of selected letters of Carl Nielsen. He is also active as critic for Gramophone and The Daily Telegraph, and as a BBC broadcaster and public speaker.

ORCHESTRATING MIECZYŚLAW WEINBERG'S 22ND SYMPHONY

by Kirill Umansky

The initiative to orchestrate Mieczysław Weinberg's 22nd Symphony and have it performed in the 2003 'Moscow Autumn' festival came from the composer's widow, Olga Yulyevna Rakhalskaya, and the directors of the Moscow Composers' Union, in particular its chairman Oleg Borisovich Galakhov. It was Olga Yulyevna who passed the score to me so that I could work on it. Weinberg left the music as a piano score which was very lucidly presented – for example, there was never any doubt as to the notes that he wanted – but only in a few places were there indications of the instrumentation he had in mind or, as in the development of the first movement, sequences of dynamic markings.

Before I started my work on orchestrating the 22nd Symphony, I went through the scores of something like half of Weinberg's other symphonies in order to study them and to immerse myself more deeply in his symphonic style; I paid especial attention to Symphony No. 21 as the work written immediately before No. 22. But it wasn't a question of simply 'applying' the scoring of his earlier works to this one: I learned from them, naturally, and did my best to understand the principles governing his work, but I tried to let the music of No. 22 suggest its own instrumental colours.

I worked on the orchestration during the winter of 2001 in 'Ruza', the Artistic Residence for Composers in the Moscow Region, where in earlier years Weinberg himself often stayed and worked. Awareness of this fact helped me work and inspired me in a special way.

The first performance of the 22nd Symphony took place on 11 November 2003, performed by the Symphony Orchestra of the Belgorod State Philharmonic Society under the direction of Alexander Shadrin.

Weinberg apparently wanted the 22nd Symphony, his last work in the genre,³ to act as a summing-up and to throw a glance behind him – there is evidence for this view in the titles of the three movements: ‘Fantasy’, ‘Intermezzo’ and ‘Reminiscences’. At the end of the first movement there appears an expressive motive played by a solo violin, which is answered by a passage played by a solo cello in the finale – both indicated as solos by the composer himself – suggesting that it might have had particular meaning to Weinberg.

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

by Kirill Umansky

I was born on 24 April 1962 in Moscow. I graduated from the Moscow Conservatoire – from the composition class of Nikolai Sidelnikov in 1986 and from the organ class of Svetlana Bodul in 1992.

The main works in my catalogue are, in chronological order:

- *Fantasy in memory of Nikolai Sidelnikov* for organ (1992)
- *Approaching* for four trombonists and five percussionists (1997)
- *Imperativo – non imperativo* for fifteen performers (2000)
- *Valaam Island* for timpani, vibraphone and organ (2001)
- Concerto for String Orchestra (2003)
- *Long and Short Lines* for two cellos (2004)
- *Evening in the Steppe* for orchestra (2006)
- String Quartet No. 1 (2009)
- *Mantsinsaari Island* for violin and orchestra (2010)
- *Attainment of Light* for solo piano and orchestra (2012)
- Chamber Symphony for fifteen performers (2013)
- *Lyric Poem* for orchestra (2013)
- String Quartet No. 2 (2015)

My compositions have been performed in numerous contemporary music festivals, including ‘Moscow Autumn’, ‘Moscow Forum’, ‘Alternativa’, ‘Music of Friends’ and ‘Russian Academy’; my music

³ In fact, Weinberg wrote 26 symphonies in total when one includes the four Chamber Symphonies, which in scale and scoring have much in common with several of the numbered symphonies.

has also been heard in the countries of the former Soviet Union and in Austria, Finland, France, Holland, Norway, South Korea, Sweden and the USA.

The orchestration of Weinberg's Symphony No. 22 is far from the only time I have undertaken such a task. I have orchestrated and arranged numerous classical works – for example, *Tale about Russia* by Serafim Tulikov, the *Pskov Cantata* by Mark Minkov, the First, Second and Third Piano Concertos, ballet *Puss in Boots*, symphonic poem *Peace and War* and opera *Live Forever* by Vladislav Kazenin, and the opera *The Flight* by Nikolai Sidelnikov. And I have also made arrangements of variety songs by contemporary Russian composers, at the requests of popular singers or the composers themselves, among them Nikolai Baskov, Anita Choi, Yury Shevchuk and Igor Sukachov.

My compositions have won a number of awards. In 1997 I gained the Third Prize of the radio station Orfey at the International Competition '2000', organised by BBC radio for my composition *Approaching* for four trombonists and five percussionists. In 2002 I won the Third Prize at the International Composers' Competition in Saarlouis, Germany, for my *Valaam Island* for timpani, vibraphone and organ. And in 2010 I won Third Prize of the YouTube Composers' Competition for my *Evening in the Steppe* for orchestra. In 2010, too, I became a laureate of the Dmitri Shostakovich Prize. In 2011 I was awarded a special 'Golden Mask' Prize for the reduced instrumental edition and orchestration of Nikolai Sidelnikov's opera *The Flight*, based on Mikhail Bulgakov's play. In 2012 I became the winner of the Second Prize of the Sixth International Prokofiev Competition for *Attainment of Light* for solo piano and orchestra.

In 2014 my arrangements for the Russian singer Valeria were performed at the Royal Albert Hall in London at a concert which included the participation of the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra under the direction of Paul Bateman.

Currently I am secretary of the Russian Composers' Union and an Associate Professor of the Composition Department of the P. I. Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatoire.



Kirill Umansky

Dmitry Vasilyev was born in 1972 in the city of Bolshoi Kamen in Primorsky Krai in the Russian Far East. He graduated from the Rostov State Conservatoire and then took a post-graduate course and probation period under the guidance of Alexander Skulsky at the Nizhny Novgorod State Conservatoire. He also participated in the master-classes of Alexander Vedernikov and Vladimir Ziva in Moscow.

He has since been active all over Russia. In 1997 he set up the Tambov Symphony Orchestra in Tambov, south of Moscow, which he led as artistic director and chief conductor until 2005, touring with the Orchestra to France and Moscow. While in Tambov he was artistic director of the International Rachmaninov Festival in 2001 and 2002, the Tambov Musicians' Festival in 1999, 2000 and 2001 and the Musical Province Festival in 2002. In 2003–5 he held the position of guest chief conductor of the Sochi Symphony Orchestra on the Black Sea, and since 2005 he has been principal conductor of the Siberian Symphony Orchestra in Omsk (it is known domestically as the Omsk Philharmonic), where in 2008 and 2010 he was artistic director of the New Music Festival. In June 2009 he took the Siberian Symphony Orchestra to Moscow to participate in the Fourth Festival of World Symphony Orchestras.

He has also conducted in Moscow, St Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don, Saratov and elsewhere in Russia and, internationally, in France, Italy and Poland. In 2003 he was awarded a diploma in the Fourth International Prokofiev Competition in St Petersburg and in the same year recorded a CD of Stanford and Schumann for Antes Edition with the Rostov Philharmonic Orchestra. The soloists with whom he has appeared include the soprano Hibla Gerzmava and bass Vladimir Matorin, the pianists Denis Matsuev, Nikolai Petrov and Eliso Virsaladze, the violinists Pierre Amoyal, Alexandre Brussilovsky and Oleh Krysa and the clarinetist Julian Milks.

Among the world premieres Dmitry Vasilyev has to his credit are works by Mikhail Bronner, Sofia Gubaidulina, Ilya Heifets, Alemdar Karamanov, Ephraim Podgaitis, Tolib Shakhidy, Andrey Tikhomirov and Mieczysław Weinberg as well as Russian premieres of music by Woldemar Bargiel, Karl Jenkins, Charles Villiers Stanford, Alexander Tchaikovsky, Eduard Tubin and others.

The **Siberian Symphony Orchestra** (SSO) is one of the largest Russian orchestras. It was founded in 1966 at the instigation of the conductor Simon Cogan, who remained at its head for more than ten years. From the beginning it attracted talented graduates from the Leningrad, Novosibirsk and Ural Conservatories, each institution with a well-earned reputation for producing dynamic and highly professional musicians. For many years the Siberian Symphony Orchestra toured the cities of the former Soviet Union, giving



concerts in Moscow and Leningrad, Krasnoyarsk and Chita in central and eastern Russia, the cities along the Volga, Riga in Latvia, Kiev in Ukraine, Minsk in Belarus and Almaty in Kazakhstan. Since 1975 the Orchestra participated in the contemporary-music festivals organised by the Union of Composers of the USSR, performing music by Khachaturian, Khrennikov, Shchedrin and other prominent composers.

From 1978 the Siberian Symphony Orchestra was headed by the conductor Viktor Tietz, under whose leadership it reached artistic maturity and developed a wide repertoire, winning first prize at the All-Russian Competition of Symphony Orchestras in 1984. From 1992 to 2004 the chief conductor of the Orchestra was Evgeny Shostakov. Since 1994 the Siberian Symphony Orchestra has regularly travelled abroad on tour and in 1996 it was awarded the title of 'Academic' – an honour in Russia.

Over the years the Orchestra has also worked with such distinguished conductors as Veronika Dudarova, Karl Eliasberg, Arnold Katz, Aram Khachaturian, Fuat Mansurov, Nathan Rachlin and Abram Stasevich. The soloists with whom the SSO has worked include the pianists Dmitri Bashkirov, Lazar Berman, Peter Donohoe, Denis Matsuev, Mikhail Pletnev, Grigory Sokolov and Eliso Virsaladze, the violinists Pierre Amoyal, Viktor Pikayzen and Viktor Tretyakov, the cellists Natalia Gutman, Mstislav Rostropovich and Daniil Shafran and the singers Dmitry Hvorostovski and Alexander Vedernikov.

The last decade has been a period of growth and flowering of the SSO. Its huge repertoire includes the symphonic classics and works by composers of the 21st century. The composition of the orchestra is in line with European standards, boasting more than 100 experienced, highly professional musicians in its ranks. The discography of the SSO includes the four symphonies of the Danish composer Victor Bendix on Danacord and the Orchestral Suites Nos. 1 and 2 by Vissarion Shebalin, the first of its recordings for Toccata Classics (TOCC 0136), which was followed by CDs of music by Mieczysław Weinberg (*Polish Tunes* and *Symphony No. 21* on TOCC 0193) and Philip Spratley (*Cargoes, A Helpston Fantasia* and *Third Symphony* on TOCC 0194). In recent years the Orchestra has also toured in Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Ukraine and the USA.

Since 2005 the principal conductor of the orchestra has been Dmitry Vasilyev. Under his direction the repertoire of SSO has become even wider and now includes not only the classics but also contemporary music, jazz, rock, musicals, film soundtracks, and so on, and the Orchestra participates in a wide range of innovative projects, from festivals of contemporary classical music to the World and European ballroom dancing championships. In 2009 the SSO took part in the Fourth Festival of World Symphony Orchestras held in the Hall of Columns in Moscow; and in April 2010 it became a member of the Forum of the Symphony Orchestras of Russia in Yekaterinburg.



Recorded on 11–12 July 2015 in the Omsk Philharmonic Hall, Omsk, Siberia
Recording engineer: Sergei Zhigunov

Booklet essays by David Fanning and Kirill Umansky, with thanks to Tommy Persson
Cover photograph of Weinberg provided by Tommy Persson, © Olga Rakhalskaya
Cover design: David M. Baker (david@notneverknow.com)
Design and layout: Paul Brooks (paulmbrooks@virginmedia.com)

Executive producer: Martin Anderson

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