

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 Orquesta 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.

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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 Rabinstein, Yehudi Menuhin, Isaac 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.



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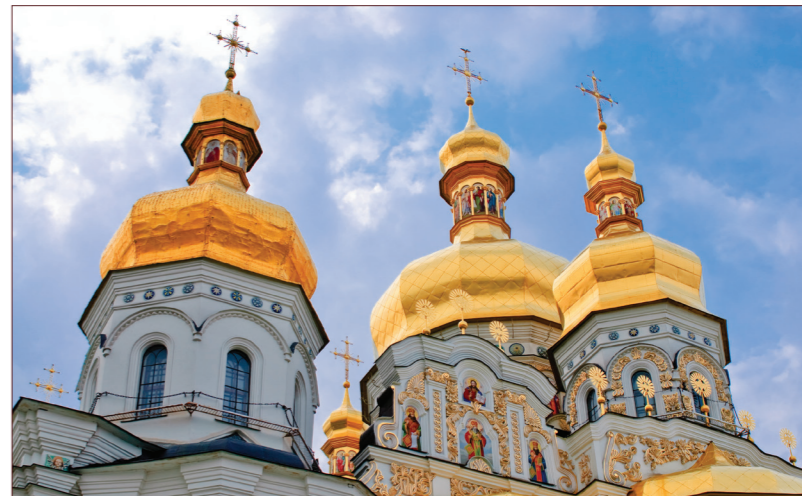


STANKOVYCH

Symphonies Nos. 1, 2 and 4

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine

Theodore Kuchar



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Yevhen Stankovych (b.1942)

Symphony No. 2, 'Heroic' (1975)

Symphony No. 1, 'Sinfonia larga' (1973)

Symphony No. 4, 'Sinfonia lirica' (1977)

During the second half of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union was responsible for producing as much internationally regarded 'classical' repertoire as any country in the world. In the period between 1970 and 1980, works appeared which are now regarded as pinnacles of technical achievement and musical mastery. In particular, Schnittke's *Concerto Grosso No. 1* (1976), in terms of composing for the most limited of orchestral resources, and Gubaidulina's *Violin Concerto 'Offertorium'*, utilising the full strength of a large symphony orchestra, best exemplify the enormous potential and range of 'sound' that might be created from the resources available.

At the onset of my career, for a little over a decade, my own activities as an orchestral musician, chamber musician and conductor brought me into regular contact with the greatest exponents and musicians most closely associated with Schnittke and Gubaidulina, the two best-known living Soviet composers. They included the conductors Gennady Rozhdestvensky and Eri Klas, with whom I worked as an orchestral solo violist; and in later years, soloists under my direction and as chamber music partners included Oleg Kagan, Oleh Krysa, Mark Lubotsky, Tatiana Grindenko, Mstislav Rostropovich, Alexander Ivashkin, Torleif Theeden and Boris Berman.

As a Ukrainian, I am embarrassed to say that my association with the music of Yevhen Stankovych came later than I would have wished. I performed the *Second Symphony* for the first time in 1993, and was immediately knocked out by its massive energy and exploration of sound – the first time that a contemporary composition had affected me so strongly. Subsequent performances have brought me closer to the musical and emotional core of the work. The more aware I have become of Stankovych's orchestral, stage and chamber works, the more convinced I am that this is a composer who is deserving of a similar reputation to those distinguished musicians mentioned above.

As was for so long the case with Boris Lyatoshynsky (1895-1968), Stankovych is, in my opinion, a major composer, although he remains largely unknown in the West. As was the case with so many gifted composers during the Soviet era, his work and international reputation were greatly affected by the political environment in which he was obliged to work. I hope that the three symphonies on this disc succeed in finally establishing a man and composer whom I admire as one of the great musical figures of our time.

Theodore Kuchar

In the music of the Soviet era, it was not always straightforward – even for the Party censors – to clearly distinguish that which was 'Soviet' from that which was 'foreign and offensive.' The individuality of Yevhen Stankovych's music often confused the official arbiters of Soviet art, whose job it was to deal with those who departed from the official Communist Party line. On numerous occasions, their inability to classify Stankovych's work resulted in the composer's forced 'rehabilitation' in an attempt to demonstrate ideological loyalty. At times, he was strongly criticised over the most minute musical details, merely as an attempt to place guilt on either his avant-gardism, or his subsequent return to an outdated aesthetic, which did not appear convincing to the officials.

Musical life in the former Soviet Union during the 1960s and 1970s was divided into two very separate camps: the followers of the traditional school (drawing upon the models of Prokofiev and Shostakovich), and the avant-garde, who were interested in the music of the Second Viennese School and their successors (most notably Boulez and Stockhausen). Young composers who fell into the second category included three Russians – Alfred Schnittke (1934-1988) Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931) and Edison Denisov (1929-1996) – and two Ukrainians, Valentin Silvestrov (b. 1937) and Yevhen Stankovych.

Stankovych is regarded by many as the most important Ukrainian composer since Boris Lyatoshynsky. He was born on 19th September 1942 in Svaliava, in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, to a family of musically untrained schoolteachers. At the age of ten, he began studies on the bayan (a kind of chromatic accordion), and quickly developed an interest in composition. Several years later, he entered the music high school in Uzhgorod and began studying the cello. In 1961, Stankovych was admitted as a student of composition to the Lviv (Lvov) Conservatory; but his studies were interrupted by compulsory military service. He was finally able to continue in 1965, this time at the Kiev State Conservatory, where he worked

with Lyatoshynsky, the man generally considered to be the father of contemporary Ukrainian music. Upon Lyatoshynsky's death in 1968, Myroslav Skoryk (b. 1938) took over as his teacher – despite being only four years older than Stankovych.

The *Symphony No 1, 'Sinfonia larga'* of 1973, for fifteen solo strings, is constructed in an extended one movement sonata form. The designation of this work as 'sinfonia' rather than 'symphony' is quite intentional (as in the case of the *'Sinfonia lirica'*): Stankovych's decision to use limited instrumental resources, and write a compact work in traditional form, creates a clear association with late Baroque and early Classical repertoire. (In this regard it is an interesting foreshadowing of Alfred Schnittke's series of *Concerto grossi*, begun in 1977.)

Stankovych delineates each section of the sonata form through dynamic and textural contrast. The principal theme never drops below fortissimo (building at one point to *ffff*), and is built vertically over organ-like pedal notes in the bass, whilst the higher strings play cluster chords above it. The music then drifts into a free-flowing sound mass, in which the articulation of certain notes seems to conjure the impression of Bachian polyphony. This slides – literally, as the players glissando up and down the strings – into the secondary theme. This is beautifully lyrical and dream-like, a distant relative of long-faded romantic melodies, played within a piano - mezzo piano dynamic range. Phrases presented by the cellos are picked up and mirrored by the higher strings, a moon-like effect, consisting of short chords played on harmonics. At the conclusion of the exposition, all lines briefly converge around D minor. The music now gathers pace as the development becomes increasingly frenetic, culminating in a kind of atonal avalanche as the heavily layered texture begins to fall apart. The recapitulation brings with it the gentler secondary theme, now surrounded by fragments of other ideas already presented. These musical rememberings build to a triple fortissimo climax, a prolonged three-toned F sharp minor cluster chord – and the end of the recapitulation and coda are built on rich chordal sonorities and colourful

sonic effects: pizzicato outbursts, clustered trills and glissandi. The dynamic levels fall again, to be disturbed by a final icy harmonic cluster before a lapse into silence.

In contrast with the *'Sinfonia larga'*, Stankovych's *Symphony No. 2, 'Heroic'*, of 1975, is scored for a large orchestra with a considerable percussion section. He asks for four flutes (doubling two piccolos), three oboes (doubling English horn), two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones and a tuba; as well as celesta, harp, piano and strings. The piece also requires a minimum of five percussionists, and uses a vast battery of instruments, small and large – and indeed, it is percussion that opens the piece, an unaccompanied snare drum. The three movements of the Symphony are played without pause. It is a dramatic, declamatory and at times tragic work, conceived by Stankovych as a protest again war, honouring the dead and the bravery of those forced to suffer in wartime. The first movement opens with the solitary snare, after which the primary, angular theme of the piece is presented as a dialogue by the strings. As this gradually unfolds, other voices of the orchestra enter and the music builds in intensity. This process is interrupted by the secondary theme, played by the oboe and clarinet over a lighter, woodwind-dominated texture. Stankovych then redeploys his considerable orchestral forces to develop and expand the musical material, until at last the texture collapses into a quiet, melancholic string passage which leads to the second movement. This extraordinary symphonic requiem, commencing with a string passacaglia, only builds in pathos with sobbing interjections from the oboes and flutes, until the trumpets and horns join the ensemble with a Ukrainian folk-song, *O glance Mother, glance*. The folk-song is then varied and developed in an increasingly rich orchestral texture, in which the composer makes full use of the instrumental colours and combinations at his disposal.

An highly compressed finale reverts to scenes from the first movement, initially adopting the gentler voicing of the second movement, but concluding with all the urgency and power of the *Symphony's* opening – a powerful, fraught apotheosis in which no solace or resolution is offered.

Stankovych's *Symphony No. 4, 'Sinfonia lirica'*, composed two years after the *'Heroic'*, in 1977, returns to the string-only world of the *'Sinfonia larga'*. This work, composed for sixteen solo strings in a single extended movement, was by Stankovych's own admission a turn towards neo-Romanticism, and a deliberate abandonment of using 'patterns' (harmonic or rhythmic). The construction of the work is ingenious in its distribution of melodies across the strings: each player has a melody of a different character which they must render often without reference to the rest of the ensemble – at times, the conductor is instructed only to lead one or two instruments whilst leaving the rest to play independently. But this careful layering of simultaneous (horizontal) musical lines produces a beautiful, rich harmonic (vertical) texture.

The principal thematic material of the Symphony is reminiscent of Scriabin's mellow lyricism; yet this is a far cry from pastiche, and Stankovych makes use of a variety of different formal and stylistic approaches to create the work. The structure, for example, is a synthesis of elements of sonata form, variation form and rondo – yet the result, building in intensity and falling away again, is cyclical. This intricate approach allows him, paradoxically, to create music with a feeling of extreme freedom and an improvisational quality: as the title implies, a piece in which the primary force appears to be a long-breathed, beautiful lyricism.

Andriy Kochur

Edited Katy Hamilton 2014