

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.

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5

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, 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.



6

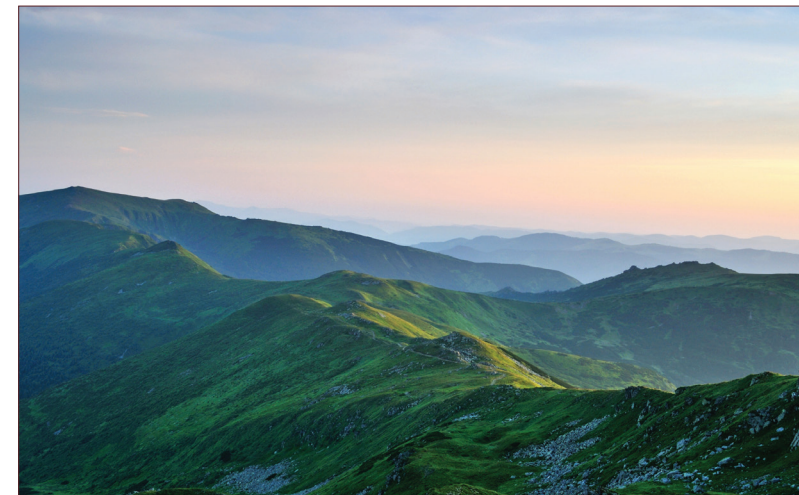


LYATOSHYNsky

Symphony No. 1 • Grazhyna

Ukrainian State Symphony Orchestra

Theodore Kuchar



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Boris Lyatoshynsky (1895-1968)
Symphony No. 1, Op. 2
Grazhyna – Symphonic Ballad, Op. 58

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.

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Lyatoshynsky's *Symphony No. 1, Op. 2*, although completed by 1919, did not receive its première as a complete work until 1923. The piece had evolved gradually over several years: the first movement to be heard in public – conducted by the composer – was the *Molto lento*, introduced as an independent work under the title *Lyric Poem*, in 1917. The *Allegro non troppo* was written the following year, whilst Lyatoshynsky was completing his studies as the Kiev Conservatory, and was submitted as his graduation work. He subsequently revised the *Molto lento* and added the finale in 1919. The full première of 1923 was conducted by Lyatoshynsky's composition teacher, Reinhold Glière, who was also the director of the Conservatory.

Despite the lengthy gestation of this Symphony, written at a time when Lyatoshynsky was still exploring and experimenting with a broad range of styles, the clearest musical influence in the piece is the harmonic language of Scriabin, which had obviously made a strong impression on the young composer. The lush, grand textures of the orchestral writing also points to Romantic models of the previous generation – in particular Borodin, Tchaikovsky and Wagner. In this sense, the piece both provides a strong indication of Lyatoshynsky's earliest musical inspirations, and contains the seeds of his own emerging compositional voice. Already in the first movement, brief, angular melodic and rhythmic fragments point to a raw approach, which was to become a common feature of his later works; and these are combined with two longer, principal themes that more directly reflect his Russian musical heroes. Dense orchestral textures, often dominated by the brass, again bring to mind Scriabin and Tchaikovsky in terms of both power and emotional complexity. Yet this is combined with sophisticated polyphonic writing, in which short themes and motifs are cleverly passed between players. The result is a potent combination of expansive, impassioned drama and small, carefully refined gestures and textures – a musical world of contrasts that Lyatoshynsky further developed in later life through the inclusion of folk melodies. In the words

of the Ukrainian musicologist Mykola Hordiychuk, "the device of 'surrounding' broad, melodic themes with shorter, expressive folk tunes throughout his creative output appears to be one of the most distinctive features of the composer's individuality".

The second movement of the Symphony is ambiguous, melancholic and curiously dreamy, in which floating string and wind gestures slip and slide over constantly destabilised harmonies. Rather than the bass dictating the direction of the music, it is the harp and violins that drift from one chord to another, pulling the rest of the orchestra with them. Gradually the brief interjections of the woodwind are knitted together into an extended climax, which dissolves once more into fragments. The finale draws together a range of thematic material from previous movements, juxtaposing bold, jaunty brass fanfares with frenetic, angular writing for the full orchestra. As the movement unfolds, further fanfares are contrasted with expansive lyrical passages that are reminiscent of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, and sudden dark, brooding interjections from the lower strings and brass. Despite the triumphant major-key conclusion, there is a sense of tragedy and intense struggle at the heart of all three movements of this work.

The symphonic ballad *Grazhyna, Op. 58*, one of Lyatoshynsky's most accomplished works, dates from much later in his career. Composed in 1955, the work was written to commemorate the centenary of the death of the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855). A programmatic work, based on Mickiewicz's poem of the same name, it relates the story of a mythical Lithuanian chieftainess, who battled with the Order of the Teutonic Knights and was eventually killed by her enemies. The first page of Lyatoshynsky's score contains a detailed programme of the various episodes of his composition, which faithfully follows Mickiewicz's poem. Despite the forward-moving, episodic nature of the story, the piece is written in sonata form – Lyatoshynsky uses the necessary structural repetitions of material, and in particular the coda, as an opportunity to recast earlier themes (and introduce some new material) in the light

of past events, often dramatically altering the orchestral colour and texture. This 'reclothing' of the music seems particularly appropriate given the tragedy of Grazhyna's death – she disguises herself as her husband to lead the Lithuanian troops against the Knights, and dies in battle. It is easy to see how such a dramatic tale of fighting for freedom would have resonated with Lyatoshynsky's countrymen, even following Stalin's demise. Both the

première, and the many subsequent performances of this emotionally-charged tone poem, were greeted by both critics and followers of Lyatoshynsky with extreme interest and enthusiasm.

Volodymyr I. Rozhok
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