

CHAMBER MUSIC NOTES

The LCMS Magazine

ISSUE 15 2019/2020

Welcome!

During the 2019/2020 season, the London Chamber Music Society continued our contribution to 'Venus Unwrapped', Kings Place's year-long celebration of women in music, and this issue of Chamber Music Notes highlights a few such memorable women.

In 'Behind the Notes' Peter Fribbins reviews the work and career of Agnes Zimmermann, including a cogent argument for the pleasures of her rediscovered violin sonatas. Many of you were lucky enough to hear Mathilde Milwidsky and Petr Limonov's October LCMS concert, when they played her Violin Sonata No. 2 in A minor. If you missed out, do not despair: from January 2020, Milwidsky and Sam Haywood's CD recording of Zimmermann's three piano and violin sonatas will be available on Toccata Classics.

LCMS' interest in women composers predates 'Venus Unwrapped', and will continue. Sally Beamish, whose 'Divertimenti' will be given its London premiere at our 23 February concert, is in conversation in this issue with LCMS trustee Walter Rudeloff. Her role model when she was young was Clara Schumann because she had never heard of any other female composers! The many other gifted and successful female composers through the centuries simply didn't make it into the history books.

Leon Levy 'Meets' in this issue Julia Desbruslais, the passionate and dedicated executive director and cellist of the London Mozart Players,

who celebrated their 70th anniversary in 2019. A member of the LMP for 30 years, she plays a leading role in its vast education and outreach programme.

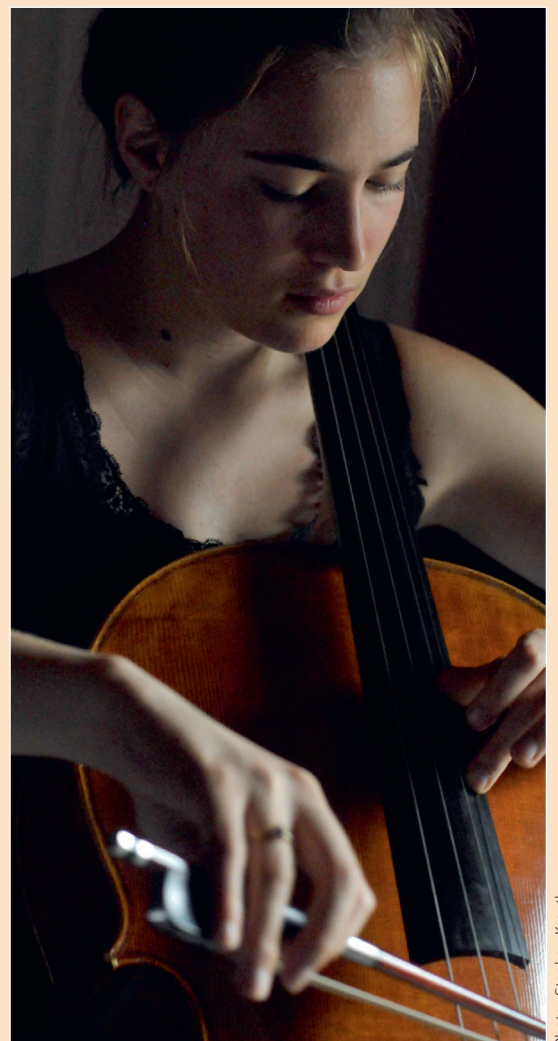
Russian composers are another focus of this issue. Camerata Tchaikovsky's 27 October concert of Russian Romantic Classics inspired trustee Pat Kremer to reflect on the history and enduring appeal of that music, especially that by Tchaikovsky. Chris Bradshaw's review of Stephen Johnson's book, 'How Shostakovich Changed my Mind', reveals the solace the Russian composer's music can provide to "anyone with ears ready to hear."

The personal role of music is also exemplified in this issue in 'Dreams of a Violinist', by the multi-talented Jacqueline Vanasse, who reminds us that music can be "an act of revenge on the harshness of life".

Last but not least, we wish you a happy and musical 2020, and urge you to consider making a donation to LCMS, to ensure that we can continue to bring you these exciting and varied musical offerings.

Jane Sufian
Editor

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Nadège Rochat

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Behind the Notes: The Violin Sonatas of Agnes Zimmermann

To the majority of musicians and music-lovers of the present day the mention of Agnes Zimmermann would chiefly recall her well-known editions of the works of Mozart and Schumann and the Sonatas of Beethoven-classics to which she brought stores of accumulated knowledge and the most painstaking accuracy. In the musical world of the 'seventies, 'eighties, and 'nineties, Agnes Zimmermann occupied a central place among artists. She was a familiar figure... both as soloist and in collaboration with those masters among instrumentalists, Joachim, Madame Norman-Neruda (Lady Halle), Ludwig Straus, Piatti, and others. In all the 'musical matinees' and fashionable concerts of those days Agnes Zimmermann took part. She also visited Leipsic, Hamburg, Berlin, Brussels, and Frankfurt, often in conjunction with Dr. Joachim. At the Halle concerts at Manchester, Agnes Zimmermann was a frequent and welcome visitor, and also at the great English provincial towns....

The Musical Times, 1 January 1926: memorial tribute

Sunday, 24 January 1915, witnessed a remarkable event in the South Place Sunday Concerts in London, the precursor to the long-running series taking place since 2008 at the London Chamber Music Society Series at Kings Place. Following the worst of the unrest of the Suffragette movement, South Place featured a concert of music entirely by contemporary women composers, performed by notable female musicians. The Sonata in D minor for Pianoforte and Violin by Agnes Zimmermann was by far the most substantial work performed that evening.



Agnes Zimmermann

Agnes Zimmermann, then in her late 60s, had enjoyed a highly successful career. Born in Cologne in 1847, she was brought by her parents to England in the early 1850s. She entered the Royal Academy of Music to study piano

with Cipriani Potter and composition with Charles Steggall and then George Alexander Macfarren, being awarded the King's Scholarship in both 1860 and 1862. A prodigiously gifted performer, whilst still a 16-year-old student she made her debut as a pianist at the Crystal Palace. In 1864 Zimmermann undertook the first of numerous concert tours to Germany, and in 1865 she gave the first of many recitals and chamber concerts at the Hanover Square Rooms in London. The daily periodical *The Era* commented: 'No one who has watched the young lady's progress can doubt that greater triumphs are yet in store for her, and that she will promote the dignity of the English school.'

In 1866 some of Zimmermann's first compositions were published: two songs issued in London, and 'Canon, Sarabande and Gigue' in Leipzig – the latter demonstrating her keen interest in baroque music, which included works by Bach and Handel transcribed for keyboard. She also began to include her own compositions in her recitals, and in 1868 performed in the first of two piano recitals with Clara Schumann.

Zimmermann also became a regular chamber-music partner to the famous violinists Joseph Joachim, Wilma Norman-Neruda, and Emil Sauret and to the cellist Alfredo Piatti. Their programmes often included the chamber works of Brahms, and in 1891, in a trio with Joachim and Piatti, she gave the British premiere of the revised version of Brahms' B major Piano Trio, Op.8. Zimmermann also went on to become a distinguished editor,

particularly for well-known editions of the works of Mozart, Schumann and the sonatas of Beethoven. As well as songs and piano pieces, her extant compositions include a Suite for piano trio, a cello sonata, and three substantial violin sonatas.

In 1868, Joachim commented in a letter: 'Fraulein Agnes Zimmermann is a first-rate pianist, indeed, an artist, and I wish her the success she deserves in Germany with all my heart.... I played the Kreutzer Sonata with her in public in London and was delighted with her performance, but still more with her knowledge of old music and her interest in modern music. She has also composed some very charming things, and a piano and violin sonata dedicated to me will shortly be published, which has, at any rate, many good points. If I were a Concert Director I would speak for her... She is the right kind of musician...'¹

The sonata for Joachim, the first of three for violin and piano which Agnes Zimmermann was to write, is a substantial four-movement work. Published in 1870 as her Op.16, its title shows the legacy of the Beethoven sonatas, with 'Sonata for Piano & Violin' articulating the more collaborative and equal status of the instrumentalists, and signals Zimmermann's own important role at the piano. In 1869 *The Musical Times*² commented: 'Here we have a clearly defined and well-written Sonata, by a young artist who has already fairly won her way to public favour as a pianist of the highest class... In the

1. Bickley, Nora, 'Letters from and to Joseph Joachim', (London: Macmillan & Co. 1914), 377

2. Sonate, für Pianoforte und Violine by Agnes Zimmermann; *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 13, No. 311 (1 Jan. 1869), 645 (Courtesy of JSTOR)



Joseph Joachim



Wilma Norma-Neruda



Frédéric Chopin

writing of this Sonata ... a laudable desire to follow the highest models is observable in every movement.'

Zimmermann's music shows the influence of Mendelssohn and Schumann; yet also a distinctive musical voice and personality. The first sonata is an impressive achievement from a composer of only 21, and whilst Zimmermann develops her style in each of the three sonatas, each one demonstrates a

sense of classical tonal architecture and classical Viennese models of organicism. We also have a sense of Schumann's style, Mendelssohn's melodies and quick-silver textures, and arguably the influence of famous contemporaries whose music is less familiar today. Her music is also reminiscent of the sensitivity and colour of the music of Chopin, whose music we know Zimmermann performed in her piano recitals.

Zimmermann's second 'Sonata for Piano & Violin', in A minor, was premiered in 1875 and published as her Op.21 the following year;³ both second and third violin sonatas were premiered by Wilma Norman-Neruda, the famous Moravian violinist, who went on to marry the German-British conductor Charles Hallé in 1885. *The Musical Times* in 1875⁴ commended 'the highly favourable impression it made on its performance in two successive seasons at the composer's concerts. The first movement, in A minor, is a model of refined and intellectual writing...'

As well as a successful pianist and composer, by this time Zimmermann was becoming a distinguished editor of piano works. Arrangements of works by Bach, Handel, Gounod and Haydn were followed by a complete edition of the piano sonatas by Beethoven in London in 1873, followed later in the 1870s by a complete edition of Mozart's piano sonatas, and in the 1880s, the complete works for piano by Robert Schumann.

Zimmermann's last violin sonata dates from 1879, and was dedicated to Lady Louisa Sophia Goldsmid, well known for her efforts to improve the education provision for British women and who took a leading role in persuading Cambridge University to permit women graduates. Zimmermann lived with her for many years following the death, in 1878, of Louisa's husband, the famous politician (and first Jewish barrister in England) Sir Francis Henry Goldsmid.

Zimmerman died in London in 1925, leaving an estate of nearly £40,000.

Her musical legacy has been largely lost: whilst she did not write much, what survives is impressive, in particular the three violin sonatas. There is nothing in these that tends towards trivial English Victoriana. Each one is ambitious and lasts nearly half an hour, often with expansive and confident themes in the piano that imply orchestral textures, for instance strings, woodwind interjections and horn lines.

Given the high quality of Zimmermann's chamber music, it is a shame that she was not allowed the opportunity to compose for orchestra;

the evidence is that her writing would have been confident and distinctive. Whilst a woman, particularly one who was such an accomplished pianist, might have been allowed to compose chamber works in the 1860s and 70s, it was clearly more difficult to have the opportunity of writing for the orchestra, not least because orchestras of the time were solely male.

Composers like Hubert Parry and Charles Stanford seemed to have reserved their more serious musical ideas for orchestral works such as the symphony; hence many of their chamber works, and in particular their violin sonatas, are lighter and often more whimsical in character. However, since Zimmermann had fewer options, her most serious and weighty musical thoughts were poured into chamber-music works. For this reason, Agnes Zimmermann's sonatas for violin and piano may ultimately be remembered above some of those by her contemporary male British composer colleagues.

Professor Peter Fribbins ©
LCMS Artistic Director



Mathilde Milwidsky



Sam Haywood

A CD recording of the three Agnes Zimmermann piano and violin sonatas, performed by Mathilde Milwidsky and Sam Haywood, funded by the Ambache Charitable Trust and Middlesex University, will be released on Toccata Classics in January 2020.

³ Zimmermann's Sonata for Piano & Violin No. 2 in A minor, Op.21, was performed at the 6 October 2019 LCMS concert at Kings Place by Mathilde Milwidsky and Petr Limonov. Ed.

⁴ *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 17, No. 392 (1 Oct. 1875), 245 (Courtesy of JSTOR)

Sally Beamish: Creating Music



Sally Beamish's new string quartet, 'Divertimenti', will be given its London premiere by the Divertimenti Ensemble at the 23 February 2020 LCMS concert. Recently, she discussed her creative life in music with LCMS trustee, Walter Rudeloff.

Walter Rudeloff I am sure that our members would like to know how you came to composing. You have said before that your mother taught you to read music and gave you a notebook in which you began putting things on staves. You always knew that was what you wanted to do. Could you elaborate on the origins of that urge to create music?

Sally Beamish I was a creative child, always wanting to make things. I painted and drew, made my own dolls and their clothes, and later on my own clothes. I loved baking, and writing stories, and still do. So I think it was partly that my mother had given me a means to create, by teaching me notation, and that was what I used. I was surrounded by music: my mother's practice, my father's joy in singing round the piano, and the fact that his job with Phillips meant that he regularly brought home records in brown-paper sleeves to be checked for faults. In my own work I can still identify the influence of those much-loved pieces that randomly entered my consciousness: Malcolm Arnold's 'Tam o' Shanter', Ravel's 'La Valse', Walton's viola concerto – as well as Dvořák and Beethoven.

WR Later, when you studied composition with Anthony Gilbert and Lennox Berkeley, did you have any particular goal or objective or was it more a general passion that drove you on to complete the onerous studies at the Royal Northern College of Music? Was there any singular experience in your education that confirmed your decision to be a composer?

SB It never occurred to me that I could earn my living as a composer. I just always knew I wanted to write music. That was why I studied viola at the RNCM – it seemed the safest way to be sure of a regular income to enable me to continue composing. I had a few lessons with Lennox Berkeley and he was encouraging, which was very important. He wrote to me when I was studying viola in Germany and told me not to forget that I was 'a composer'. These things mean a lot. Anthony Gilbert kindly helped me at the RNCM, but I was never on the composing course, nor did I manage to get a place anywhere for post-graduate composition studies. I think this was due in part to the fact that I was, and still am, a 'tonal'

composer, which was unfashionable at the time. It took me a long time to find my own voice, as I was intimidated by the music I heard in contemporary-music concerts, and didn't really feel it was for me. It was Oliver Knussen who helped me take my first steps into exploring and discovering a language of my own.

WR You have said that Clara Schumann (my favourite female composer of the past) was a role model for you in your youth. Is there anything in particular about her 'story' that struck you as, say, heroic? or admirable? her perseverance in the face of adversity? Is there anything you can describe in her music that particularly appeals to you?

SB Clara Schumann was my role model because I had never heard of any other female composer. In fact she is perhaps not an ideal role model, because she herself said that she didn't believe that she could write music. "No woman has ever been able to do it; why should I be the first?" Of course we know now that there were many gifted and successful female composers throughout the centuries. They simply didn't make it into the history books.

WR Looking at the body of your compositions, there is a good percentage cast in the traditional forms, such as the string quartet – your second string quartet, 'Opus California', was performed at LCMS last year. Do you find chamber music forms a source of inspiration for composing?

SB If anything, I am more drawn to orchestral music, as I enjoy the broad palette of colour. I find it much more difficult to compose for small groups. Now that I am playing viola again, I am reconnecting to that world of chamber music which I left behind in the 90s. The first piece of my own that I performed when I returned to playing (after a gap of over 20 years) was 'Opus California'. It reminded me of the importance of awareness of one's performers. If it feels good, it will sound good, and the players will be more free to express something of themselves through the music. This is a vital connection for me – that alchemy between composer and performer. I hope to write more chamber music from now on.

WR The Divertimenti Ensemble are going to perform your recent work, 'Divertimenti', a quintet for strings, at the LCMS concert in February. Could

you tell readers a bit about your connection with the group, where you all first met and how you came to write this piece for them? Would you also give us an idea of what the piece is 'about', if that's not inappropriate for this work?

SB I was a founder member of Divertimenti before I left London to study in Manchester. I played with them for several years when I returned, in the 80s, and it was wonderful to be invited to write for these special musicians, whose playing I know so well.

When I started work on the piece, I was about to move back from Scotland to England, and a lot of my music in 2018 reflects the mixed emotions of this big life change. 'Divertimenti' is one of six chamber pieces, for six, five, four, three, two and one instrument(s) respectively, which are about anticipation and loss – and very much about Scotland, drawing on a Celtic-inspired language, which crept into my music from the early days of my life in Scotland.

There are five movements, and the piece responds to the symmetry of the group. The outer movements are 'tutti' – for the whole ensemble; the second and fourth feature duos of violins and cellos; and the central 'lullaby' is for viola – my own instrument. This is an elegiac movement, and is about that parting which every mother experiences when her children are grown and no longer need her. Incidentally, this same lullaby, expanded and developed, forms the central section of my new piece for the Academy of St Martin, 'Hover' (the UK premiere took place on 12 November 2019) – again on solo viola. I think the lullaby is the emotional core of 'Divertimenti'. Each movement takes a fragment from the Burns' song 'Ae Fond Kiss' as its melodic material.

WR Are you working on anything at the moment? Can you give readers a 'sneak preview'?

SB I'm working on several projects, including a piece commissioned by Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture, with a text by my husband, writer Peter Thomson. I also have two concertos on the go: the concerto continues to be an important inspiration for me.

Dreams of a Violinist

When I was three or four years old my grandfather would take me to the university's library. He would sit me on a table and surround me with books, asking me to watch that the letters did not get all mixed up, and saying that while I was at it, I might as well read a page or two. I remember clearly what was happening in my little head at that moment. "Read a page or two? I was a baby; did he not know that I could not read?" I had no choice but to start gathering all the information I had collected in the past days from the world around me and make up a story.



On the 30-minute ride back home, my grandfather would ask to hear about those stories I had supposedly read all afternoon. I remember being able to tell beautiful stories. New ideas were generated from words already found in the library. The infinity of possibilities was striking. When the car was finally stopping in the driveway, he would always turn to me smiling and say: "You improved. You read better and better." It was the magic moment, the validation that everything was possible, that life was a big dream.

My grandfather taught me to believe. He taught me the beauty of imagination and that literature can be soothing and let one take an act of revenge on the harshness of life just as – I found out later – music also does. By encouraging me to observe my surroundings and live like a sponge, he offered me the gift of sensitivity.

I played the violin well and seriously from age six to 12; then I stopped. I stopped practicing but did not stop being a violinist. At age 18, I went to hear the finals of the Queen Elisabeth International Competition in Brussels, which was dedicated to the violin that year. It was enough to rekindle the stars: my passion for classical music was back. After completing an undergrad degree in Montreal and a year of an advanced violin course in Belgium and Italy, I arrived in New York, where I studied and worked.

When in New York, I was aware of living in the 'centre of the world', but yet I could not feel lonelier and more misunderstood. On a cold and rainy afternoon, I was walking back home from school and in defiance I asked life to send 'a sign'. I did not have to wait long before a mad man ran into me, confused and sorry-looking in his yellow rain coat. I recognized the famous pianist Evgeny Kissin. However, I decided that it could not be a sign, until...he appeared a second time, five minutes later. From that moment on, I started meeting and interviewing the great musicians of the world.

At that time, wanting to make more opportunities for musicians, I co-founded Soirée 54, a concert series created as a platform to connect the upper echelons of New York cultured society and the performers who would benefit from patronage. We were creating a feast, the perfect atmosphere – never the same – with just enough mystery, just enough joy, for the music and the musicians to shine at their best. In fact, I came to understand that I never claimed to do anything but try to make people better at being themselves.

New York was a wonderful city for whoever had dreams and determination. It taught me that if there was a lack of

enthusiasm and understanding for classical music in particular and for life in general, it was up to me to bring it back. It taught me that I might know what kind of violinist I wanted to be but that I also needed to know in what world I wanted to be that violinist.

Then a few years later, on the last night of a summer spent in Italy, a few musicians gathered for a late dinner. When I was asked where I would be next, I joked that I was going to go to Asia. My response provoked general hilarity. They laughed and laughed, then they stopped because a Taiwanese cellist mentioned that in fact, they never had any Western classmates in Asia, and that it would have changed a lot in their musical journey if they had had one. I was up to the task: I was going to be that Western classmate and colleague in Asia.

Four years later I was back in the West, playing violin better than ever before and speaking Chinese. I was back and looking for a chance to keep building bridges between music scenes and musicians of the world. I always thought of London as a place reuniting the best of both America and Europe, and as it is the capital of classical music, it was natural for me to head there. From day one, London has been very good to me, people of London have been wonderful in believing in me and giving me opportunities. The London Chamber Music Society especially became my little hub, a safe nucleus nurturing and inspiring me in the hectic capital.

Jacqueline Vanasse





Leon Levy Meets Julia Desbruslais

LCMS was delighted to welcome the London Mozart Players in November 2019 to perform as part of the orchestra's 70th-anniversary celebrations.

This time I was invited to the luxurious surroundings of the Royal Festival Hall members' lounge to interview the executive director of the London Mozart Players ('LMP'), Julia Desbruslais, and through her, virtually the famous ensemble itself.

The orchestra is 70 years old this year, and those of us of a certain age will remember Harry Blech, its founder, inspiration and music director for 34 years. The late 40s was a period for pioneers who were seeking to restore and rebuild the artistic and cultural life of London. Harry Blech was one of these, gathering together an orchestra of talented musicians to make its debut at the Wigmore Hall in 1949.

In the 50s, the orchestra performed during the first week of the newly built Royal Festival Hall, and success followed success until it became resident at the Fairfield Halls in Croydon. Thus began the long association between the LMP and south-east London, most notably in the Upper Norwood and Crystal Palace area. This area is not widely known for its art and culture, but the LMP is truly embedded in the life of the local community. Following this local policy of bringing music to small communities, the LMP always includes smaller venues in its UK tours in order to bring classical music to places where live performance is very seldom heard.

The ensemble has also followed a policy of giving public platforms to young performers at the beginning of their careers, some of whom have gone on to greatness, most notably Jacqueline du Pré and Nicola Benedetti, and continues to work with them once they have achieved star status.

After one of the most distinguished careers in British music, Harry Blech retired in 1983. With the appointment of a new managing director (Louise Honeyman), the LMP embarked on a policy of innovation at the same time as maintaining their highly regarded connection with the standard classical repertoire.

Jane Glover was appointed music director; a BBC series was launched; and commissions from new composers followed. Matthias Bamert took over as music director in 1992, and he inspired a successful series of recordings of music by Mozart's contemporaries. In 2000, Andrew Parrott brought a new style of interpretation to the classical repertoire, and he was followed by Gerard Korsten in 2009 until 2014.

There followed a dip in the fortunes of the orchestra. A commercial sponsor withdrew after 19 years of support, and national and local-council funding dried up. The members of the orchestra took matters into their own hands with new vigour, and the ensemble is now player-led both in terms of management and artistically. The post of formal music director was abandoned, and there are now two leaders, Ruth Rogers and Simon Blendis.

Following its already established local-community links, the ensemble moved its home to St. John the Evangelist Church in Crystal Palace with great success, and in 2019 started to play regularly again in the newly refurbished Fairfield Halls. Requests for recordings and new commissions soon returned, but at the same time, its repertoire of core composers was always maintained. Latterly, it has taken up a residence in Hastings to bring classical music to yet another outpost.

And so to my interviewee herself, Julia Desbruslais, executive director and cellist of the London Mozart Players. A musician more dedicated to the LMP cause would be hard to find. She has been a member of the orchestra for 30 years, and since 2015, has combined this with her executive role, as well as her family life.

As an administrator and a musician, she needs to be well organised, starting her day with practice at 6.15 in the morning and then on to a full day at the office for her not insignificant executive responsibilities, as well as fitting in rehearsal time.

A cellist from a young age, Julia studied with Florence Hooton at the Royal Academy of Music from the age of 16, and went on to win many major competitions, giving live broadcasts and recording regularly.

She is passionate about bringing music to both children and the elderly, and plays a leading role in the vast education programme of the LMP. She is quite simply thrilled with her association with the orchestra, with its enormous variety, playing in smaller and larger ensembles and in a wide range of venues, and especially with its commitment to the local community.

We discussed the role of conductors and the current trend for the orchestra to play at times without a conductor. The music to be performed is always taken into account and in this context, the orchestra retains its renowned flexibility.

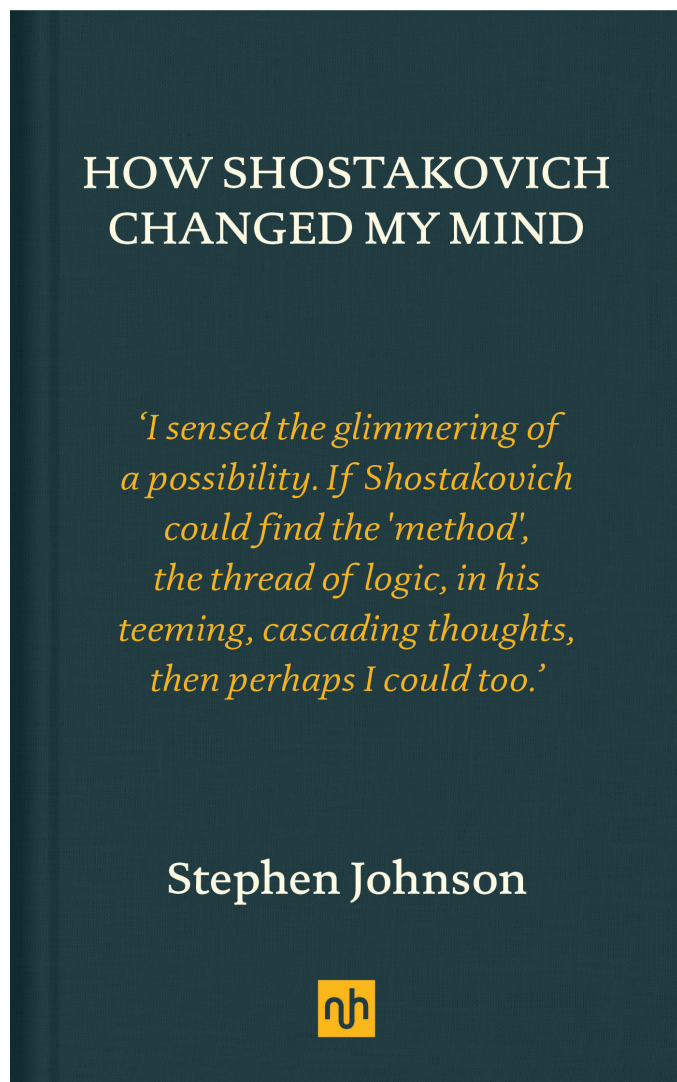
Julia's main complaint was the lack of rehearsal time, a complaint echoed over nearly all the British classical-music scene.

Julia and her dedicated band of musicians and administrators are a fine example of how a group of musicians can not only treat audiences to fine musicianship but also reach out to communities where classical music is almost unknown. Here's to the next 70 years.



'How Shostakovich Changed my Mind'

by Stephen Johnson. Notting Hill Editions Ltd.



A while ago I read an article in the Kings Place magazine by the BBC music broadcaster Stephen Johnson outlining the power of music to influence the brain and emotions. In 'How Shostakovich Changed My Mind', Johnson enlarges and explores these ideas in much more detail, which initially sent me in two directions: one, to delve into Shostakovich more deeply; and, two, to supplement my knowledge of Russian history in the Stalinist era, which turned out to be somewhat patchy.

This fascinating book also plunges the reader into the vitally important subject of mental health, which thankfully is now in the forefront of public issues. Johnson investigates his bipolarity with great insight, drawing on his knowledge and investigative enquiries as well as personal experience.

The author recognises that music can give both pleasure and relief. Reactions to music vary, from the group fervour of the football terraces and the excitement of pop concerts, to tears as the notes or singing or chorus evoke memories and emotions. Audiences of classical concerts can respond with silent awe or be fidgety or loud with their bravos.

This book centres mostly on Shostakovich's music, which has given Johnson a sort of meaning to his life from early childhood. He mentions several times his anger and

frustration at a reviewer's crass dismissal as a "colossal non-sequitur" of what is to Johnson the "awe-inspiring coda" finale of the Fourth Symphony, saying "How *could* he say that?" The "manic colouring at the heart of the finale" reached a young man's heart, mind and brain.

Johnson refers to a radio documentary he made with the BBC ('A Journey into Light'), which involved visits to Russia and many intriguing interviews with people who had known Shostakovich and Stalinist Russia. These far-reaching interviews were obviously more like conversations, an interplay of memories, political analysis, questions and speculations about Shostakovich and Soviet Communism.

How much was Shostakovich manipulated by the authorities and how much did he manipulate them? 'How Shostakovich Changed my Mind' particularly quotes from Johnson's conversations with Isaak Glikman, a Russian literary and theatre critic, librettist, screenwriter, and teacher at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and a great friend of Shostakovich, and offers very personal contributions from, among others, Paul Robertson, Viktor Kozlov, and Manashir Yakubov. It is difficult to imagine the hell of fighting against the Communist Party of the time, endeavouring to keep out of harm's way while creating amazing scores which might or might not get played.

The Fifth Symphony provoked many reactions when it was premiered in Russia in 1937. The audience was ecstatic, recognising in the music both their collective suffering and grief and the enigmatic finale, where the composer invites you to "choose between Heaven and Hell". The symphony also reached out to Johnson in his early teens, comparing his own reactions to those of Russian audiences while accepting that his own circumstances were entirely different – but "it was for anyone with ears ready to hear." Yet various apparatchiks continued to present hostile criticism: "Comrade, there is no place for sadness in our glorious Socialist Utopia, write more pieces in the major"; and his work was even called "unhealthy individualism."

The struggles Shostakovich experienced echoed throughout his music and also seeped into the mind of a young lad who had a difficult childhood. Johnson does not dwell sentimentally on his own background and clinical depression but describes a sad upbringing, where his mother had difficult mental-health issues, which eventually led to her being sent to a psychiatric ward, and his father had a complete breakdown. He found a voice in Shostakovich's music that gave him the feeling of being "dragged out of his corner and introduced to real individuals through music." He acknowledges the support he had in later years from therapists, friends and his wife, but as a troubled teenager he found solace in the colour and line of music. The impact of Shostakovich's music was immediate but also grew into something lastingly rewarding.

Stephen Johnson beautifully shows us how music can be 'received' in various ways and how it is possible for music to alleviate livid, raw feelings. It may not be the answer to all depressive episodes but it happily seems to have contributed to Johnson's more contented adult life.

Chris Bradshaw

Reflections on Russian Romantic Composers

Thinking of the LCMS concert given by Camerata Tchaikovsky on 27 October 2019, I am reminded of the prologue of Orlando Figes' book, 'Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia'. Figes quotes the description in Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' of how aristocratic Natasha Rostova visits a simple hunting lodge at the country estate of her uncle and there, responding to peasant songs played on a balalaika, dances like a peasant girl. This moving scene reflects the 19th-century Russian pull between the 'homeland' folk culture and the encroaching, mainly aristocratic and middle-class yearning for a European and Western lifestyle and culture.

We see this conflict in the work of contemporary writers like Chekhov, Turgenev and many others; and it is reflected in the two great Russian cities of St Petersburg and Moscow, the first, founded in 1703, with its classical palaces and canals facing out towards the Enlightenment across the Baltic; the second, with its copulas and fortifications turning towards the steppes and its Eastern lands.

What might be called a Russian school of classical music emerged in the late 18th century under the encouragement of the German-born Catherine the Great. Concerts were previously mainly presented within the private theatres of the nobility on their great estates, though there were very popular troupes of serfs, who were trained by professional musicians and who were often of a very high standard.

St Petersburg and Venice shared a love of Italian opera, and it was a foreigner, a Venetian, Catterino Cavos, who pioneered opera in Russia, with music strongly influenced by Russian and Ukrainian folk songs. Cavos championed Mikhail Glinka, considered by many to be the father of modern Russian music, particularly with his use of vibrant, peasant musical culture.

In 1862 a group was formed in order to promote a distinctly Russian school of music. Its members wished to further a sense of nationalism in classical music, especially in the wake of the fall of Napoleon. 'The Mighty Five' consisted of Balakirev, Cui, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Borodin, the first composer in 'our' October concert.

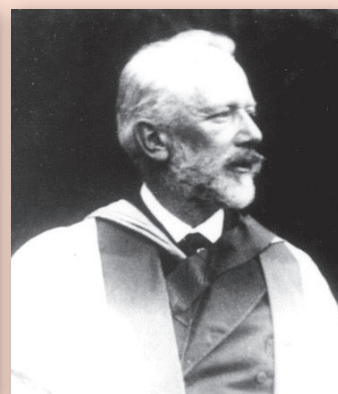
Alexander Borodin, born in 1833, was the son of a Georgian prince. He showed early promise as a musician, but like many composers of this period studied for a different profession. He first studied medicine, then became professor of chemistry at a St Petersburg military hospital (he later founded a school of medicine for women). As well as composing he was always very involved in his academic work. He was, however, a fully practising musician, playing four instruments. He followed Glinka and dedicated his opera 'Prince Igor' to Glinka's memory, but he also had a great love of Mendelssohn, which must have fed his classical Romantic feelings.

Borodin wrote broad melodies, some rich and heavy with oriental overtones. His haunting, evocative themes remain amongst theatre and concert-hall favourites. He died suddenly, in 1887 at a masked ball. He left several works unfinished, which were completed by his friends Rimsky-Korsakov, Blumenfeld and our second October composer, Glazunov.

Alexander Glazunov was born in 1865 in St Petersburg, and his music combined the exciting nationalistic influences with a growing cosmopolitanism. He too showed very early promise, and soon came to the attention of 'The Mighty Five'. Belyayev, a wealthy timber merchant, became his mentor and took him around Europe, where he met Liszt. Glazunov aided Belyayev to establish a music-printing business, which furthered the



Mikhail Glinka



Tchaikovsky

careers of Russian composers. He was later elected director of the St Petersburg Conservatory, and supported many up-and-coming students, particularly through the turbulent revolutionary years. He resigned in 1928 and went back to Europe, where he enjoyed international acclaim, known like his Romantic contemporaries for his great ballets, symphonies and melodies, effortlessly combining the classical and oriental. He always remained in favour in Russia, unlike Rachmaninov, another of our composers.

Next in the October programme was Tchaikovsky, an arrangement of the beautiful andante cantabile of his first string quartet, the melody of which, it was said, Tolstoy listened to with tears running down his cheeks. Educated into the civil service, Tchaikovsky, of course, left a legacy of our favourite Russian Romantic music, ballet, opera, symphonies, songs and chamber music. More than maybe any of our other concert composers he was responsible for the spread and popularity of Russian Romantic music. He was very much the first and most lauded Russian composer in the West, gaining awards from the Académie de Beaux Arts and Cambridge University. He composed works of great depth and intensity for his public. He deeply influenced the final two concert composers: Sergei Rachmaninov, the virtuoso pianist and conductor of the late Romantic period, and Anton Arensky, a composer, conductor and pianist, perhaps best known for his chamber music.

For me, Tchaikovsky's beautiful melodies and passionate themes contributed greatly to my earliest awareness of classical music, and I've loved him ever since.

These reflections on Russian Romantic music were provoked by this popular programme. It made me wonder how many other listeners had had their early musical experiences so inspired by these wonderful composers.

Pat Kremer