



PHCD 150

THE MUSIC OF

Alfred Schnittke

Levon Ambartsumian, Violin

Moscow Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra

Vladimir Fedoseyev, Artistic Director and Chief Conductor

Michail Kukushkin, Conductor

CONCERTO NO. 3 FOR VIOLIN AND
CHAMBER ORCHESTRA (1978)

Levon Ambartsumian, violin

Moscow Tchaikovsky Symphony
Orchestra, Michail Kukushkin—
Conductor

1. Moderato 8:57
2. Agitato 5:47
3. Andante 10:52

SONATA NO. 2 "QUASI UNA SONATA"
(1968)

Levon Ambartsumian, violin

Anatoly Sheludyakov, piano

4. Senza tempo 19:57

5. A PAGANINI (1982) 12:56

Levon Ambartsumian, violin

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A Paganini — Recorded in Hugh Hodgson Hall in the University of Georgia
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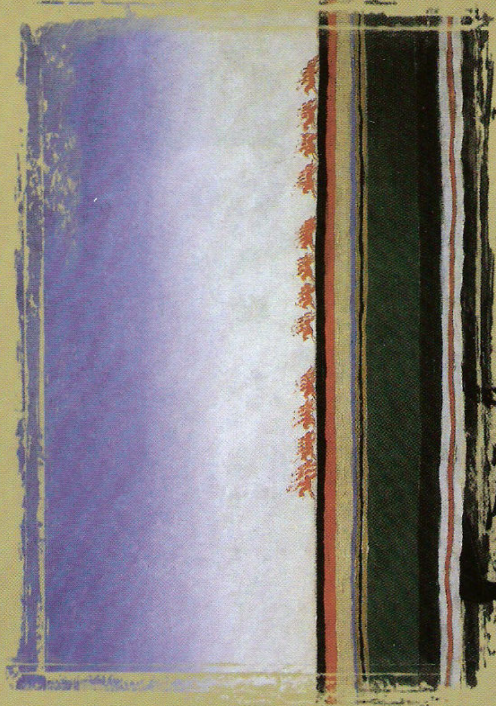
THE MUSIC OF

Alfred Schnittke

CONCERTO NO. 3 FOR VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA

SONATA NO. 2 FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

"A PAGANINI" FOR SOLO VIOLIN



Levon Ambartsumian, Violin

Moscow Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra

ALFRED SCHNITTKE was the leading figure of the Soviet post-war avant-garde and remains a prominent composer of international acclaim. Born of German decent on November 24, 1934, in Engels, on the Volga River, he began his musical training on the piano in 1946 in Vienna where his father worked for two years as a correspondent for a German-language Soviet newspaper. In 1948 the family moved to Moscow, where Schnittke continued his musical training, receiving a diploma in choral conducting. From 1953 to 1958 he attended the Moscow Conservatory studying composition. As these comprised the years of the "Khrushchev Thaw," which ended an almost 30-year period of cultural isolation, Schnittke was exposed to the new techniques and experimentation of the Western avant-garde. Completing his training in 1961, he immediately began a ten-year tenure as instructor of instrumentation at the Moscow Conservatory. Beginning in 1972, he supported himself as a composer. One who enjoyed being provocative, he went through a difficult period in which his music was almost entirely banned from performance and publication in the USSR. During these years as an "unofficial" composer, he managed to support himself chiefly as a composer of film music, and, ironically, through the efforts of many prominent performers, gained increasing exposure and critical acclaim internationally. In 1985, he survived the first of a series of strokes. He moved to Hamburg in 1990 and died on August 3, 1998 after suffering another stroke. He has been the recipient of many awards and honors, including Austrian State Prize in 1991, Japan's Imperial Prize in 1992 and Slava-Gloria-Prize in Moscow in June 1998.

His numerous works can best be described as eclectic. The majority were written using the classical forms of symphony, sonata and concerto, but with twentieth-century freedoms applied. The result is a mixture of past and present and is representative of his hallmark trait of "polystylism." His reasons behind his compositional style are illuminated in the following quote:

The idea of several historic periods acting together in the same piece is ... vitally important.... That is why I resort fairly often to the technique of polystylistics, which enables me to bring together various musical epochs. The idea of the universal character of culture, of its integrity, seems particularly apt today when our concepts of time and space have undergone drastic transformations.

Schnittke's *Sonata for Violin and Piano, No. 2* (1968) was his first experiment into polystylism and contains sharp musical contrasts and collisions of distant, even polar, styles and ideas. It begins with a single, unexpectedly loud chord on the piano, which, after a long pause (approximately 6 seconds), is answered in the same manner by the violin. A struggle between the worlds of disharmony (present) and harmony (past) ensues. Brief, dissonant chords, glissandos and agitated, chaotic sounds are juxtaposed with various transformations of the motif B-A-C-H, first introduced in the piano in a quiet chorale harmonization. In other settings it appears in a romantic style, *à la Liszt*, and later in combination with the theme from Beethoven's *Variations, Op. 35*. In its final guise, the motif is tainted by dissonance's "impurities," thus ruling out the possibility of pure harmony in today's disjunct world.

Although also composed using polystylistic techniques, Schnittke's *Concerto No. 3 for Violin and Orchestra* (1978) is a bit more restrained. While energetic at times, the overall sense and direction of the piece is towards the quiet and deeply moving ending. The chant-influenced orchestra writing treats the ensemble like a large organ in which each instrument functions like a "stop," reserving the section string sound for the very end. The last movement also contains a vestige from the past in the form of a theme in the style of Carl Maria von Weber. Coupled with a return of the chant-like theme in the strings, it creates a dark, ominous atmosphere at the close of the work.

As one would expect from its title, central to Schnittke's *A Paganini for Violin* (1982) are excerpts from Niccolò Paganini's violin music, namely the Caprices. The themes are presented as part of a cadenza (direct precursor to the caprice), once again interrupted by harsh chords. Non-Romantic in conception, this very difficult piece could be interpreted as a nightmarish portrayal of Paganini's so-called "devil-inspired" violin playing.

~ Laura Tomlin



LEVON AMBARTSUMIAN Born in Moscow in 1955, Levon Ambartsumian began to study violin at the age of three. He then enrolled in and graduated from the Central Music School. Five years later, Ambartsumian graduated from the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory with a special Artist Diploma, where his teachers were Felix Andrievski, Yuri Yankelevitch, Leonid Kogan and Igor Bezrodny.

In 1977 he became the First Prize winner of Zagreb International Violin Competition headed by Henryk Szering. Two years later he was a prize winner of the Montreal International Competition, and in 1981 he won the All-Union Violin Competition in Riga. Levon Ambartsumian was distinguished as Honored Artist of Armenia and 1988 and Honored Artist of Russia in 1997.

Since 1977 Ambartsumian has performed regularly in all the main cities of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. He appeared as a soloist and recorded for radio and television with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, Bolshoi Theater Orchestra, Kirov Opera, the Philharmonic orchestras of Budapest, Bucharest, Sofia and Peking among others.

Since 1988 he performed in the USA, Canada, Italy, France, Germany, Greece, Spain and South Korea. In 1988 Ambartsumian founded the Moscow Chamber Orchestra "ARCO" which regularly performed in Russia and now resides in Athens, Georgia, USA.

The repertoire of Mr. Ambartsumian includes the major violin pieces: concertos by Sibelius, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, Kachaturian, Bartok; sonatas by Bach, Schubert, Brahms, Frank, Prokofiev, Bartok, and Schnittke; concert pieces by Wieniawski, Saint-Saens, Sarasate and Tchaikovsky. He devotes himself to contemporary Russian music and has made several important world premiers.

Since 1978 Ambartsumian has taught at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory. He also taught as Visiting Professor at Indiana University School of Music (Bloomington, Indiana). In 1995, Ambartsumian accepted the position of Franklin Professor of Violin at the University of Georgia School of Music (Athens, Georgia).

During the last two years, Ambartsumian has released several CD's including music by Wieniawski, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Vivaldi and Russian contemporary music.