

Efrem Podgaitis born in Russia in 1949 has to date composed twelve operas, three symphonies and 26 concertos, some for more neglected instruments such as the bayan (a chromatic button accordion), marimba, mandolin, balalaika and percussion. In 2009 Mr. Podgaitis was honored by performances around the world of more than 60 major works, including the premieres of two operas and eleven concerts devoted solely to his own compositions. For many years he has written music for the renowned children's choir *Vesna*. In fact his music for children has a special place in his output; he creates music that evokes dream-like states, poetic fantasy, and love of nature. Some of the titles of his concert music bear similar poetic themes, e.g., *The Moonpipes* (fairy tale cantata), *Trip to Orchestrland* and the opera *Thumbelina*. His *Concerto for Two Violins and Chamber Orchestra* was written in 1986. The work is in traditional three-movement form marked by strong contrasts between the energetic outer movements and slow and apathetic second movement. An extremely virtuosic Finale combines complicated melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic textures, bringing the work to a climactic and unforgettable finish.

The Russian composer Mikhail Bronner (born 1952) has written over a hundred works, many of which are intended for the theater; moreover, one might say that theatrical elements are used extensively in other genres of his output. Spiritual themes play an important role exemplified in his works based on Old Testament history and characters (e.g., Adam and Eve, Abraham and Isaac) and most significantly in his large-scale Jewish Requiem.

Mr. Bronner found inspiration for the *Concerto for Violin, Chamber Orchestra and A Young Musician "In Search of the Holy Grail"* in his own thoughts: "Every one of us has a secret hope. Without always recognizing it we strive, with all our heart and soul, for something beautiful and deep-rooted. A child's laughter, a warm touch of the beloved, childhood – when mom and dad are still close by. Your heart is sinking... has a moment of happiness already come or is it still on the way? Where are you, the Holy Grail? Is it the same for all, or does everyone have their own Grail?"

Mikhail Bronner wrote his concerto *In Search of the Holy Grail* in 2004 for Levon Ambartsumian and his five-year old son Alexander. It was premiered in the University of Georgia's Hodgson Hall, then performed in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall and in the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory with a subsequent recording on CD under "Artservice" a Russian label.

The idea for the work *7 Yiddish Songs for Violin, Tuba and Chamber Orchestra*, and of the unusual performing ensemble, came to L. Ambartsumian when he listened to a performance by tuba virtuoso David Zerkel. Mr. Bronner enthusiastically responded to this request and wrote this work. Every movement of this piece has a poetic counterpart, an epigraph, taken from a genuine folk song. The cycle turns from sad to joyful and even funny at times. It tells the listeners about the people from a small Jewish locality (shtetl).

Levon Ambartsumian

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Levon Ambartsumian studied in the Moscow Central Music School and then in the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, where his teachers were Felix Andrievski, Yury Yankelevich, Leonid Kogan and Igor Bezrodny. In 1977 he became the First Prize winner of Zagreb International Violin Competition headed by Henryk Szeryng. Two years later he was a prizewinner of the Montreal International Competition, and in 1981 he won the All-Union Violin Competition in Riga. Ambartsumian was distinguished as Honored Artist of Armenia in 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 has collaborated with conductors and composers such as Valery Gergiev, Vladimir Fedoseev, Maxim Shostakovich, Tikhon Khrennikov, Aram Khachaturian, Alfred Schnittke, and many others.

Since 1988 he performed in the USA, Canada, Italy, France, Germany, Greece, Spain, Brazil, and South Korea. In 1989 Mr. Ambartsumian founded the Moscow Chamber Orchestra ARCO which performed in Russia and abroad and now resides in Athens, Georgia, USA. Mr. Ambartsumian joined the faculty of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory in 1978 where he taught for 15 years. For two years, he was a Visiting Professor at Indiana University School of Music (Bloomington, Indiana). In 1995, he accepted the position of Franklin Professor of Violin at the University of Georgia School of Music (Athens, Georgia). Mr. Ambartsumian devotes himself to contemporary Russian, Armenian and American Music and has made several important world premiers. He has released over 30 CDs under different American and Russian labels. In 2009 he was awarded a gold medal of the Moscow Composers' Union for contribution to the development of contemporary music and musical culture. As a teacher, he has given master classes in Russia, Armenia, South Korea, Canada, Brazil, Portugal and France. His former students hold principal positions in major European orchestras in Germany, France, Portugal, and Denmark, and many have been prizewinners at international violin competitions.

A native of Tashkent, Uzbekistan, **Shakhida Azimkhodjaeva** began to study violin at the Special Music School under Tashkent State Conservatory with Professor Gulnar Suleimanova. She gave her debut with the Uzbekistan Symphony Orchestra when she was eleven and won the National Violin Competition in 1985. Ms. Azimkhodjaeva graduated from the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory where she studied with Professor Irina Medvedeva (student of Leonid Kogan and Yuri Yankelevich). From 1985 to 1990 she performed with the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory Symphony Orchestra under direction of such conductors as Zubin Metha, Pierre Boulez, Dmitry Kitaenko, Valery Gergiev, Fuat Mansurov and others. As a soloist and chamber musician, she has performed in all the major cities of the former Soviet Union and in the most prestigious halls such as the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory and St. Petersburg Philharmonic. Ms. Azimkhodjaeva was one of the founders of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra "ARCO." Since 1989, she has been concertmaster, soloist, and assistant conductor of the orchestra and has performed extensively both as a soloist and concertmaster in Germany, France, Spain, Romania, Latvia, Russia, South Korea, USA, and Canada. She has made numerous recordings of the music of Vivaldi, Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich and other contemporary composers. Her recent performances include appearances at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall and the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory. Ms. Azimkhodjaeva joined the violin faculty of the University of Georgia School of Music in 1995.

Anna Seda Ambartsumian was born in 2001 to a family of professional violinists with whom she has started her violin studies. Anna's recent performances included several appearances in the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory Concert Hall, the Moscow Philharmonic Recital Hall as well as Athens Academy and Ramsey Concert Hall in Athens, Georgia.

Daniel Kaplunas is a native of Vilnius, Lithuania. He started playing the violin at the age of six under the tutelage of his mother, who is also a violinist. By the time he graduated from Vilnius Ciurlionis School for the Arts, Mr. Kaplunas had won two Young Lithuanian Musicians' competitions, as well as concertized in Denmark, Holland, and Germany, where he was a soloist with the International Chamber Orchestra of Buckow. After coming to the United States he continued his violin studies with Julia Bushkova at the Interlochen Arts Academy (Michigan) and with Philip Lewis at the University of North Texas, where he received his Bachelor's and Master's in violin performance. Mr. Kaplunas has been the concertmaster of the UNT Symphony and Chamber Orchestras, a violinist with the UNT Graduate String Quartet, and the UNT Concerto Competition winner. During his doctoral studies at UGA with Levon Ambartsumian he has appeared as a soloist with the ARCO Chamber Orchestra, also recording a compact disc of Vivaldi Concertos on the Art Classics label. He has been an assistant conductor of the UGA Philharmonia Orchestra, and also conducted several performances of the UGA Symphony Orchestra and ARCO Chamber Orchestra. Mr. Kaplunas is currently the director of the orchestra at Georgia College & State University (Milledgeville, GA), where he also teaches applied violin and viola lessons, chamber music, conducting, and courses in music theory, history and education.

David Zerkel is Associate Professor of Tuba and Euphonium and Associate Director of Administration of the Hugh Hodgson School of Music at the University of Georgia. His students have distinguished themselves by winning international and national competitions and attaining positions with professional performing organizations. Mr. Zerkel has performed with many orchestras including: the Philadelphia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and the Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra. He is a member of the Brass Band of Battle Creek, was a founding member of the Washington Symphonic Brass and has performed with the Burning River Brass. He began his performing career as a member of the United States Army Field Band and The United States Army Band, both located in Washington, D.C. In addition, he has performed as a solo recitalist at many of the leading colleges and conservatories in the United States. His first solo recording, *American Music for Tuba: Something Old, Something New*, was selected as the recipient of the inaugural ITEA Roger Bobo Award for Excellence in Recording at the 2006 ITEC in Denver, Colorado. His newest recording *Tuba Helper*, was a Bobo finalist at the 2008 ITEC held in Cincinnati, Ohio. Mr. Zerkel is currently President of the International Tuba Euphonium Association.