

## St Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music

During the 1980s and 90s, the rediscovery of 'Entartete Musik' and the avant-garde music of the early Soviet era sparked off considerable interest in both the concert halls and recording industry. This re-evaluation of 20th-century music has recently broadened to encompass serious investigation into the flourishing of Jewish art music in Russia and Eastern Europe of the same period. Alexander Krein (1883-1951) and Mikhail Gnesin were the central figures of this Jewish National School in Russia.

The group was led by the music critic, composer and publisher Joel Engel (1862-1927). In addition to Gnesin (1883-1957?) and Alexander Krein (1883-1951), the composers included Joseph Achron (1886-1943), Moshe Milner (1886-1952), Solomon Rosowsky (1878-1962), Lazare Saminsky (1882-1959), Ephraim Skliar (1871- ?) and Alexander Weprik (1899-1958). They did research on Jewish traditional music, published music scores and essays on Jewish music, organised musical events, issued a periodical, set up a library, and opened departments in other cities. The movement grew up under the influence of the nationalistic trends prevailing in Europe at the time, creating renewed interest in traditional musical styles. The breeding ground for the St. Petersburg Society was Rimsky-Korsakov's composition class at the conservatory attended by several members of the Society, where they were encouraged to explore their Jewish musical heritage.

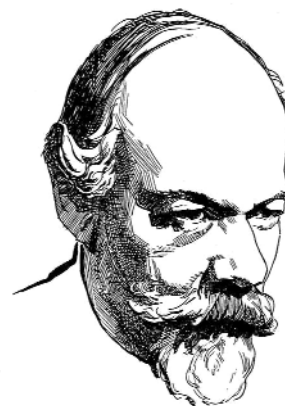
A favourite student of Rimsky-Korsakov, the young composer Gnesin started out brilliantly with original works like his orchestra piece *Vrubel*, which won him the Glinka prize. Yet he found his true calling as a composer in the field of Jewish music. Gnesin wrote: "Elements of Jewish music captured my musical feelings and imagination to such an extent that even when I did not have the mission to look for a Jewish style, those elements appeared in my works (in Braun, J., *Jews in Soviet Music*, in: Miller, J., ed., *Jews in Soviet Culture*, p. 69). Gnesin's first Jewish work, *Nigun fun Shaikhe Pfaifer* was published in 1914 by the *Society for Jewish Folk Music*. Numerous compositions on Jewish themes followed, including arrangements of traditional material and original works ranging from the smaller forms of song and chamber music to the larger forms of symphonic, choral and operatic works.

Alexander Krein came from a musical family – his father was a synagogue Cantor – and emerged as an important figure in the musical life of Moscow for more than two decades from around 1910. His unique combination of Jewish materials and impressionist, often exotic colouring lends his work particular appeal. Initially a follower of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff, his interworking of Jewish folk and sacred materials into a language of considerable subtlety won him acclaim and led to him being hailed as the 'leading representative of the Russian Jewish School of composition' by the authoritative scholar Boris Asafyev. However, after the early 1930s Jewish nationalism was discouraged by Stalinist artistic policy, thus Krein and many other musicians fell into obscurity.

These concerts provide a rare opportunity to hear compositions from the short flourishing of the Jewish art music movement in Russia and of two Jewish composers who were important figures in this movement as well as in the musical life of Russia for more than two decades in the early 20th Century.

Wednesday 13 and Thursday 14 November 2002 7.30pm

## St Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music



Mikhail Gnesin

Inspired by the teachings of Rimsky Korsakov, to research Jewish folk music, the Russian composers Gnesin and Krein were prominent members of the *St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music* (founded in 1908). Their classical compositions based on Jewish folk melodies found much favour before Stalin's take-over and suppression.

Wednesday 13 November 7.30pm

**Music of Mikhail Gnesin**  
**Songs and Chamber works on Jewish Themes**

Sovali, soprano and International Ensemble  
Supported by the Royal Netherlands Embassy

Thursday 14 November 7.30pm

**Music of Alexander Krein and Gnesin**  
**with Rachmaninov and Enesco**

Susanne Stanzeleit, violin  
Joseph Spooner, cello  
Jonathan Powell, piano

St Giles, Cripplegate, Fore Street, London EC2

Tickets £12 concessions £8 (concession price if booking for both concerts)

Box Office: Ticketweb 08700 600 100 [www.ticketweb.co.uk](http://www.ticketweb.co.uk)

Presented by the JMI International Forum for Suppressed Music  
with London ArtsFest

Wednesday 13 November 7.30pm

## Music of Mikhail Gnesin

### Songs and Chamber works on Jewish Themes

Sovali, soprano

Perry Robinson, soprano and sopranino clarinet

Grigory Sedukh, violin & piccolo violin

Alexander Oratovski, cello

Anat Fort, piano,

Tsivi Sharett, piano

Roberto Haliffi, percussion

*Nigun for Schajke-Pfaifer* (1914) cello, piano 1:50'

*Improvisation*, ensemble 7'

*Song of a Knight Errant* opus 34 (1921) cello and piano 1:45'

*Jewish Songs*, opus 37 (1923-1926) arr. with improvisations, voice, ensemble 20'

1. Her delicate hand, text, Zalmen Shneur

2. Song of Miriam (vocalise) from the tragedy *Herod and Miriam* by Hebbel

3. From *Song of Songs*, Chapter 8, verse 8-10 *Akhot lanu ktana (We have a little sister)*

4. Song about red-headed Mottele, text, Josef Utkin

5. The enemy is at the gates, text, Osher Schwartzman

*Sonata in G-major*, opus 43 (1928) violin, piano 7'

*Three Melodies* opus 60 (1942), clarinet, violin, cello, piano 3:30'

1. Dzjerèn's Song, based on a Tšurkmenean melody

2. Ukrainian Dance

3. Lyric Intermezzo

*Ora*, Piano, four hands

interval

*The Story of red-headed Mottele* by Josef Utkin, opus 44 (1929) voice, piano 20'

1. Song about red-headed Mottele

2. Who's business is it?

3. At the market

4. Standing in line

5. The Clock - Song of current affairs

6. In the Synagogue

7. Funeral Song

8. What's the answer - thinking about life

*Jewish orchestra on the ball of the bailiff (Grotesque)* - incidental music for the performance of Gogol's *Revisor* at V.E. Meyerhold's theatre - opus 41 (1926) arr. with improvisations, ensemble ca. 20'

Concert supported by the Royal Netherlands Embassy

### The Performers

With various musical backgrounds and residing in different countries, the musicians have devoted their time and energy – each from an individual point of view – to the performance and interpretation of Jewish music. Each one has developed specialties. Violinist Grigory Sedukh and cellist Alexander Oratovski, both exponents of the classical

Russian tradition, started their rediscovery of the Russian Jewish composers in St. Petersburg with their concerts and CDs. Clarinetist Perry Robinson represents the American tradition of improvised music and is closely connected to the Jewish new wave in New York. Percussionist Roberto Haliffi, who originates from Libya, is a specialist in klezmer and world music. Pianist Anat Fort and vocalist Sovali, who both have a background in classical as well as improvised music, serve as the bridge between these worlds. Anat Fort, from Israel, carries with her the musical atmosphere of the Middle East and Sovali, from Amsterdam, studied cantorial melodies. These musicians have worked together in different combinations, but in this project they have all come together as a group for the first time.



Panorama of St. Petersburg, 1850. Charles Claude Bachelier

Thursday 14 November 7.30pm

## 2: Krein and Gnesin with Rachmaninov and Enesco

Susanne Stanzeleit, violin

Joseph Spooner, cello

Jonathan Powell, piano

Gnesin, *Sonata-Ballade* opus 7\* cello and piano 16'

Krein, *Poème* (1907-10), cello and piano 8'

Rachmaninov, *Piano Sonata no. 2* original version 22'  
interval

Krein, *Elégie*\* (1913), violin, cello and piano 5'

Krein, *Melodie* (publ. 1943) (cello and piano) 4'

Krein, *Deux poèmes*, opus 10, piano\* 6'

Krein, *Deux petites poèmes*, opus. 31, piano\* 6'

Krein, *Aria* (1927), violin and piano\* 8'

Enesco, *Impressions d'Enfance* violin and piano 15'

\* indicates a UK premiere

### The Performers

Composer and pianist Jonathan Powell developed an interest in Alexander Krein as part of his doctoral research at Cambridge. On occasion, he literally smuggled scores out of the Moscow Conservatory library to have them photocopied, so Krein's works could be brought to a larger audience. Powell and cellist Joseph Spooner, a champion of neglected repertoire, have taken part in several successful premiere performances of works by Krein, most notably at the London Barbican Centre's St Petersburg festival in June 1999. Together with violinist Adam Summerhayes they have recorded an entire disc of Krein's chamber works for ASV (available summer 2003). For the concert at St Giles Cripplegate, Powell and Spooner are joined by the versatile violinist Suzanne Stanzeleit, who has recently recorded works for violin and piano by Enesco for Meridian (available spring 2003). The concert will be a rare opportunity to hear music by Krein, Gnesin and Enesco, with some of the works being played for the first time in the UK.