

DSCH JOURNAL

No. 23 - JULY 2005

5 - **COMMENT: 2006**

7 - **REMEMBERING SHOSTAKOVICH:** Boris Tishchenko

11 - **DSCH REVIEWS:**

11 - Kirov's *Nose* in London

12 - Western Premiere of opus 43a

13 - "Zun mit a regn" (plus interview with Sofie van Lier)

18 - "Cinemaphonia" in London

19 - **ARENA: Your letters to DSCH**

19 - **QUOTE, UNQUOTE:** Bernstein and the Ninth...

20 - **BOOK REVIEWS:**

20 - *Mitya*

22 - Shostakovich String Quartet No. 8 by David Fanning

23 - *The New (Revised) Shostakovich*

24 - **INTERPRETERS on SHOSTAKOVICH:** Annette Bartholdy

26 - **FIFTY YEARS AGO (1955)**

29 - **WRITING ABOUT SHOSTAKOVICH** - The constructive role of polyphony in the Second, Fourth and Eleventh Symphonies of Dmitri Shostakovich: contrapuntal features in the first movement of Symphony No. 4

56 - **DOCUMENTARY I:** *Testimony, I presume?*

59 - **DSCH NEWS**

61 - **DOCUMENTARY II: Spain and a Russian Symphony - 1947**

62 - **DVD REVIEWS:** *Hamlet, The Commissar*

66 - **CD REVIEWS :** News and analysis of recent recordings

97 - **NEW- RECORDING REFLECTIONS**

The DSCH JOURNAL - **Editor Alan Mercer; correspondence to:**
'DSCH', Les Eversins du Presle, 69870 Chambost-Allières, FRANCE
e-mail - edit@dschjournal.com; Web: www.dschjournal.com

Recordings Editor

W.Mark Roberts:

11 - 2162 Sherbrooke Ouest, Montreal, QC H3H 1G7, CANADA

e-mail: reviews@dschjournal.com

Additional editing / translation :

Nora Avins Klein

Subscription Secretary:

Howard Wilson: 2935 Larmona Drive, Pasadena, CA 91107 U.S.A.

subscriptions@dschjournal.com; FAX: (+1) 626 794 0881

DSCH REVIEW

“Zun mit a regn” (*Sun and Rain*) [1]



Review of a concert at the Synagogue in Nijmegen, The Netherlands on 6 February 2005:

Henny van de Groep

The concert took place in the oldest Synagogue in the Netherlands (the synagogue still serves as a place of worship). This recently renovated building has an intimate interior (plus dazzling lights and excellent acoustics). The attendance, considering the small venue, was not bad at all; indeed, there was a genuine interest in this concert. The programme featured an unusual list of composers: Shostakovich, Weinberg and Veniamin Basner. Weinberg and Shostakovich were of course close friends and Basner belonged to their circle. This ‘trio’ lived under the Stalin regime’s reign of terror, a fact that resulted in the reinforcement of their friendship. The men helped and encouraged each other through thick and thin.

The Programme

Mieczyslaw Weinberg (1919-96)
Jewish Songs (*Yitskhok Leyb Perets*), op. 13 (1943)
arranged for soprano and piano trio by Alexander Oratovski (2004) [2]

Introduction

Breytele (*Bread Roll*)

Viglid (*Cradle Song*)

Der jeger (*The hunter*)

Oyfn grinem bergele (*On the green mountain*)

Der yesoymes brivele (*The letter of the orphan*)

Coda

Sonata for Cello Solo No. 1, op. 72 (1960)

Dmitri Shostakovich

Piano Trio No. 2, op. 67 (- 1944)
3rd and 4th movement: Largo, Allegretto

Mieczyslaw Weinberg

Jewish songs (Samuel Galkin), op. 17 (1944)
arranged for soprano and piano trio by Alexander Oratovski (2004) [3]

No. 2 Di muter (*The mother*)

No. 4 Tsum libn (*To love*)

No. 5 Tife griber, royte leym (*Deep graves, red earth*)

No. 6 Tsu di royte kriger (*To the red soldier*)

Veniamin Basner

 (1925-1996)

Poem, op. 7 No. 1 for violin and piano

Dmitri Shostakovich

Prelude & Fugue No. 8 in F sharp minor for piano, Op 87 (1950-1951)

From Jewish Folk Poetry, op. 79 (1948) - song cycle
arranged for soprano and piano trio by Alexander Oratovski (2004)

No. 1 Zun mit a regn (*Sun and rain*)

No. 3 Shlof mayn kind (*Sleep my child*)

No. 5 Her zhe, Khasye (*Listen, Khasye*)

No. 7 Af dem boydem (*On the garrett*)

Sovali

(Sofie van Lier), soprano
Alexej Pevzner, violin
Alexander Oratovski, cello
Sander Sittig, piano

The Music

Weinberg’s Jewish song cycle was not easy to find. Through Per Skans, the singer and organizer Sofie van Lier met the musicologist Julia Broido, who had recently finished her studies on Jewish themes in Weinberg’s music. This was how she was able to lay hands on the scores.

The Concert

The Weinberg songs are based on Yiddish poems. The first cycle *Jewish Songs* on lyrics by Yitskhok Perets, op. 13 describe the world of a young child; here Weinberg’s music is uncomplicated and playful: a striking blend of lyrics and melody. From the moment Sofie van Lier began to sing, it was evident that we were in the midst of songs of amazing beauty. The power of these little gems lies in their purity and natural simplicity. Each of them has its own special character – for example the mother’s cradle song, steeped in tenderness, is contrasted with the song about the boy who wants to be a bear hunter, the music depicting a strong gallop. *The letter of the orphan* resounds with tragic refrains. After a dark instrumental introduction in the lowest register, the orphan speaks of her hard life in a letter to her mother in heaven. It’s a desperate plea for help. The song incorporates a harrowing accompaniment of drones, in fourths and even seconds, depicting the letter’s dark





mood. Spanish intonations add to the work's dramatic touches.

Cellist Oratovski performed with much verve a relatively unknown Weinberg work: his Sonata for Cello Solo. The Jewish inflections in this piece were reminiscent of the grotesque dance that influences Shostakovich's famous (Second) Piano Trio, while the Sonata's first theme bears strong similarities to DDS' ultimate opus for viola and piano.

A pity only two movements of the Shostakovich Second Trio were performed (due to the very full programme).

After the intermission the programme continued with Weinberg's *Jewish Songs on lyrics by Samuel Galkin*, op. 17. These songs have a quite different story to tell. Their subject is WWII. They relate a mother's sad tale of her son's letters arriving from the front, and the heart-breaking farewell of a soldier's sweetheart to her lover who's leaving her to do his duty for his country. '*Deep Graves, Red Earth*' tells of the massacre at Babi Yar. The final song '*To the Red Soldier*' concludes the cycle with encouragement for the son, brother, father and lover to fight the hard battle and defend their country heroically. In these songs one recognizes the voice of Weinberg from his symphonies. Then, without warning, the fourth and fifth song '*To love*' and '*Deep Graves, Red Earth*' reminds us suddenly of Shostakovich. Nelly Kravets describes this in her essay '*Shostakovich's "From Jewish Folk Poetry" and Weinberg's Jewish Songs op. 17: Music and Power*'.

With the song *To the Red Soldier* echoes of *Rothschild's Violin* (and a resemblance to Stravinsky's *L'histoire du Soldat*) sprung to mind. A coincidence?

Veniamin Basner's *Poem*, an early, relatively unknown work (op. 7) is the essence a romantic piece exuding cheerfulness and warmth, concluding with the towering bells of Zvon. This was a pleasant composition placed in between the other works.

Next, pianist Sander Sittig gave an alluring, unpretentious performance of Shostakovich's Prelude and Fugue No. 8. His touch was bright and nice pedal flattered our ears.

Shostakovich's Jewish song cycle worked splendidly in its arrangement by Alexander Oratovski, who played beautifully along with Sofie van Lier, whose expressive voice held the audience's attention throughout.

This was an unforgettable event in which the musicians gave their all. Bravo!

The Interview

After the concert, the *DSCH Journal* had the opportunity to interview Sofie van Lier along with Alexander Oratovski. Sofie opened the conversation by relating the 4-hands version of *Preludes and Fugues*, opus 87 that Shostakovich made and played together with Weinberg.

This is a detail not known by many people and a description of which can be found in a thesis by Julia Broido and in Sofia Moshevich's book *Dmitri Shostakovich - Pianist*.

SvL: To begin with, don't regard me as an authority on this subject! [4]

DSCH J: When did you begin these projects involving composers such as Gnesin and Weinberg?



Sofie van Lier

SvL: You ask me about my involvement with undeservedly neglected Jewish composers. Well, it's a long story. It started in New York, where I lived at the end of the eighties. Or maybe it started even earlier with my forefathers. You see, I have a Jewish background from my father's side, but was not raised Jewish. I always felt like a *Rainbow Child*. My musical upbringing is classical, and for some years I also was active in jazz. Yet Jewish music I always liked and collected. While in New York I was approached by a Jewish establishment through the Dutch Consulate. They were looking for a Dutch singer who could sing in a programme about Jews living in Amsterdam during Rembrandt's time.

I was interested and thought about a suitable programme. It's not easy to find 17th century Jewish music in Amsterdam, if at all! At that time the Sephardim were just arriving here, fleeing the persecutions in Spain. There are no manuscripts from that period. The subject is treated by Israel Adler in a study on the music of 16th / 17th century Jewish communities in

Europe – with musical examples. I found an 18th century hymn *Kol Haneshamah* I could use. In addition I sang songs by Constantijn Huygens, John Dowland and Ladino songs – these folk songs are ageless. The *Golden Age* was an international era, so the programme was appropriate and was much appreciated. The organizer urged me to sing more Jewish repertoire. She introduced me to Masha Benya, a singer from Lithuania who's a specialist in Jewish repertoire.

Masha at first gave me some folk songs. As I'm mostly singing classical repertoire, I couldn't fit them in very well. They needed good arrangements. I passed them on to a Klezmer band where another singer performed them. However, the same band invited me to sing a Hazanut melody for a CD-project on Jewish music from WWII.

I've quite a collection of famous hazanim on LP. But to choose a suitable melody, I needed the help of an expert. I approached hazan Hans Bloemendal [a well-known cantor in the Netherlands] who suggested I sing the *Jiskor* prayer (prayer for the six million) *El Male Rahamim*.

To sing a melody like this is a great responsibility. I don't think I'd have dared to sing it without his encouragement. Although I felt a great affinity with this style of singing, I wasn't sure I could do it. Nevertheless I took up the challenge. I knew a beautiful version by Shlomo Katz. It took some work to reconstruct the words from Katz's Eastern-European Hebrew. Bloemendal and a friend of mine helped. Finally a beautiful new version emerged with Burton Greene on piano and Perry Robinson on clarinet and me singing, of course. This took away my lack of

assurance regarding performing Jewish repertoire.

Later Masha showed me some music by composers of the St. Petersburg 'Society for Jewish Folk music' – a group of early 20th century Jewish composers who wanted to base their works on traditional Jewish music. During my musicology studies I never learned anything about this movement in Russia. The music appealed to me and I started researching it.

DSCH J: Who is the cellist Alexander Oratovski and how did you meet him?

SvL: Alexander Oratovski came from St. Petersburg to the Netherlands during *Perestroika*. He already was involved in the performance of professional Jewish music. Someone suggested I call him when I started my research on the composers of the Petersburg 'Society'. By then Oratovski had left Holland. I found him in Germany. He was very kind and interested in collaborating with me. We learned that he had performed a piece of my father's; *A tfile fun a getto jid*. He had collected many scores of Jewish composers for himself. We started to dig for more scores in St. Petersburg libraries, New York and Berlin. Everybody helped: Alexander, Grigory Sedukh, Anat Fort, my brother Hans and me.

We chose to dedicate our first programme entirely to one composer: Mikhail Gnesin. Gnesin is a good composer and fun because his music contains many different moods, which makes it easy to compile a varied programme. At first I wanted to keep the project small scale. Too many people involved might prove too expensive. But the idea appealed to

other musicians. In the end an international cast of six musicians was assembled.



Some had improvising backgrounds and wanted to improvise on themes by Gnesin. It was an unorthodox approach. Some liked it, others criticized it. In St. Petersburg we performed a classical version of the programme in the Composers' Union. Parts of the concert were broadcasted on national Russian TV.

We needed to establish a foundation for our project and named it *Jewish Music Projects Foundation*. After the success of the first project we were contemplating others featuring Achron or Milner's music – unfortunately the latter left a significant part of his oeuvre in sketches. It will take a lot of work to prepare a programme. But then another development took priority.

A concert organizer in Russia invited us to take part in a festival for the 80th anniversary of Basner's birth, commissioned by his widow. Before I could consent I had to study Basner's scores. The composer Yevgeny Khazdan who's connected with the St. Petersburg Jewish Community Centre and also a friend of Oratovski, suggested combining Basner and Weinberg as they were friends. According to him Basner had arranged some of Weinberg's music quite brilliantly, and as you know he also arranged *Katerina Ismailova*. Delving deeper into the subject it became clear to me that Shostakovich needed to be included too, and that we'd have to focus on the Jewish elements in their work. Of course, I'm familiar with Shostakovich's Jewish songs.





I thought it would be interesting to juxtapose these with Weinberg's Jewish songs. Actually these

cycles became the crux of our programme.

Unfortunately the Basner festival in Russia proved not to be feasible financially. Nevertheless there are still active exchanges up and running between Russia and the Netherlands. There's a chance we may perform our programme in Russia next year. Lusha Basner will attend our concert in Amsterdam, May 4th (WWII Memorial Day).

It is gratifying for me to sing Weinberg and Shostakovich's magnificent songs. They're not easy. Weinberg's songs have a transparency like Mozart; they seem simple, but are in fact quite difficult. And Yiddish is a tricky language. There are many different dialects, you know.

DSCH J: Alexander, how difficult was it to arrange Weinberg's music?

Alexander Oratovski: I enjoyed it very much! I love to arrange music written with so much talent. Sofie asked me to stick as closely as possible to the original, but when the instrumentation gave more possibilities I added a few voices here and there.

DSCH J: In which of Weinberg's songs do you find a connection with Shostakovich?

AO: I find connections in the Galkin-songs, especially *Tife griber, royte leym, Tsu di royte kriger* and in the last song of the Perets-songs *Der yesoymes*

brvele; also in certain motives and rhythms and use of modality. In a sense, similarities don't matter as they're not accidental. They reflect a mutual influence and the spirit of the times. But in the music of Weinberg and Shostakovich everything is in its place, it's just perfect.

DSCH J: What's your next aim with the project?

AO: I want to acquaint the Dutch and European audiences with the unique development in music that took place at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia: the Petersburg 'Society for Jewish Folk Music'. Composers were connecting Jewish folk music and Jewish religious music with European composition-techniques. This music was suppressed and remained unknown. This is a great pity, because it is interesting, sharp and witty music. And just as in the other national schools, each composer has his own individual voice.

Twenty years ago it was still impossible to give Jewish concerts in Russia. The first concerts with professional Jewish music took place in the late eighties... I helped organize them. Now I'm preparing an edition of these unknown works for cello that were never re-published after the years 1914-1918.

DSCH J: Who composed Jewish songs first - Shostakovich or Weinberg?

SvL: Weinberg, 5 years earlier.

DSCH J: When you listen and compare their songs one might think Weinberg had an influence on Shostakovich's work.

SvL: Well, one may wonder about

this. I read a fragment of Weinberg's autobiography in an article by Per Skans. Weinberg says that his first interest was impressionism before he came to Russia. Yet his entire musical conception changed through his acquaintance with Shostakovich's music after he entered Russia - this was still before he knew Shostakovich personally. It's obvious you'll find the influence of Shostakovich on Weinberg. He studied him thoroughly. On the other hand Shostakovich may also have learned some things from Weinberg, for example about Jewish music. Nelly Kravets wrote an interesting essay on the connection between Weinberg's and Shostakovich's Jewish Songs.

DSCH J: In Weinberg's Cello Sonata I recognized a fragment of the Jewish dance from Shostakovich's Second Piano Trio [a fragment Shostakovich used in other works such as in his Second Cello Concerto].

SvL: It would not surprise me if they used each other's themes occasionally and exchanged musical ideas or jokes. It's hard to prove. But as they were so close it's very well possible the inspiration was mutual. Who knows but them?

Sander Sittig, the pianist of the ensemble, who joined us, adds: "Shostakovich was the master of quotations and symbols - there was hardly anyone who composed that way."

DSCH J: Weinberg composed also a Piano Trio; do you know something about the piece?

SvL: No more than that I have the score and listened to the CD. At first hearing I got an impression it dealt with the War: the long, high

agonizing opening note in the violin underlined by the piano sounds like an alarm, or siren to me. It was composed in 1945, a year after the Galkin-songs. I should study it more.

DSCH J: Could you say more about the friendship of the Shostakovich, Weinberg and Basner?

SvL: There is not much information available about their friendship. I've read some accounts about Weinberg and Shostakovich (for example from Per Skans, Martin Anderson, Julia Broido): how Weinberg's father in law Shlomo Mikhoels (who was a close friend of Shostakovich) helped bring the score of Weinberg's First Symphony from Tashkent – that's where the Weinberg/Mikhoels family was evacuated during the war – to Shostakovich in Moscow in 1943.

And how this started their friendship. In Moscow Shostakovich and Weinberg were practically neighbours. Weinberg often played Shostakovich' newly-composed works in a 4-hands piano version with the composer for the Composers' Union. When Weinberg was arrested in 1953 during the persecution of the Russian Jewish intelligentsia in the last year of Stalin's regime, Shostakovich filed a petition to secret police chief Beria for Weinberg's release. Weinberg dedicated many of his works to Shostakovich and Shostakovich dedicated his Tenth Quartet to Weinberg.

However, apart from a few articles, we were dependent on information passed on in person. Ora-

tovski visited Lusha Basner in St. Petersburg. She related some details about their friendship: how Weinberg entrusted his archive to Basner after he was released from his arrest in 1953. Basner held a high position in the Composers' Union - he was a real big shot. Weinberg trusted him. Lusha also told about how Basner became Shostakovich's student: Basner wanted to take composition lessons from Shostakovich, but didn't dare to approach him. Shostakovich, who was a sensitive person, noticed this and helped Basner by asking him to light his cigarette.

That's how Shostakovich became Basner's teacher. I have no other details. As I understand it was a close friendship between the three of them. I hope to learn still more about it. Lusha Basner was very helpful to us. She gave us many scores: of Weinberg and of Basner. Did you know Basner composed many popular songs? For this fact he's known in Russia.

Through Lusha Basner I got the telephone number of Olga Weinberg. I wanted to tell her about the new project and collect some facts surrounding the first performances of Weinberg *Jewish songs* and other works. My friend Grigory Sedukh in St. Petersburg helped making the contact – I don't speak Russian - and finally I spoke to her daughter Anya in English.

She reacted enthusiastically to the question regarding permission for the arrangements of the songs of Weinberg to be performed:

“Why, why do you ask”!!

She was delighted and when I told her that I was fond of her father's song cycle *When I Sing this Child Asleep* on texts by Gabriela Mistral[5], she said happily: “That's for me, he wrote it for me”!



In May, Sofie van Lier and her ensemble completed their successful project “Zun mit a regn” based around the three Russian composers and the *DSCH Journal* wishes the Jewish Music Projects Foundation and the ensemble a successful continuation.

ENDNOTES

[1] ‘Zoen’ is the Dutch transcription / ‘Zun’ is the English transcription from the Yiddish word. SvL)

[2] according to Olga Weinberg performed only once at 1943 in Tashkent; and a lost arrangement for soprano and chamber orchestra by Basner, first performance in the early nineties, St. Petersburg

[3] according to O. Weinberg first performed - in 1999 at the “Club of Music-Lovers” and the “House of Scientist”, Moscow

[4] Sofie is a singer / musicologist specialising in Bartók

[5] Gabriela Mistral (1889 Chile – 1957 USA): Chilean poetess, educator and diplomat, the first Latin American to receive the Nobel Prize in literature (1945)

