

Svetlana Savenko

**THEORY AND PRACTICE OF NEW MUSIC IN THE ACADEMIC COURSES
OF THE MOSCOW STATE CONSERVATOIRE**

Савенко С. И.

**ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА НОВОЙ МУЗЫКИ В УЧЕБНЫХ КУРСАХ
МОСКОВСКОЙ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЙ КОНСЕРВАТОРИИ**

Abstract. The New Music occupies currently an important place in the Conservatoire's curriculum, including the fundamental courses of music history, harmony, counterpoint, musical forms, etc. Since the early 2000's some new special courses have been added. They are given by the members of the Conservatoire's Contemporary Music Department. The contents of the courses are related to the specialization of students. For example, the future composers are studying especially new composition techniques, while for the future performers new repertoires and new techniques of playing are more important. There is also a post-graduate class on contemporary orchestra, offering a specialization in the field of New Music performance practice and serving as a base for the internationally renowned ensemble of soloists Studio for New Music.

Аннотация. В настоящее время преподавание новой музыки занимает важное место среди учебных дисциплин консерватории. Ее материал изучается в фундаментальных курсах истории и теории музыки, таких как гармония, контрапункт, учение о формах. Наряду с этим с начала 2000-х годов предлагаются специальные курсы, которые ведут педагоги Кафедры современной музыки. Их содержание связано со специальностями студентов. Так, для композиторов на первом плане находятся новые техники сочинения, для музыкантов-исполнителей – новый репертуар и новые способы игры на инструментах. Исполнительскую специализацию в сфере новой музыки предлагает аспирантский класс «Современный оркестр», который служит базой Ансамбля солистов «Студия новой музыки», имеющего международную известность.

Key Words. Moscow Conservatoire, Association of Contemporary Music, Centre for Contemporary Music, Studio for New Music.

Ключевые слова. Московская консерватория, Ассоциация современной музыки, Центр современной музыки, Студия новой музыки.

At first I would like to remind you of some rather well-known facts.

The Soviet cultural politics was completely determined in the 1930's and remained unchangeable almost until the collapse of the USSR (1991). Like other areas of spiritual activities, musical creativity was subordinated to the strict ideological standards of socialist realism, which left no room for free artistic experimentation. Under these conditions, the full-fledged development of the new music as a social phenomenon was impossible. The artistic heritage of the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s was displaced to the periphery of musical life and was eventually all but

forgotten. The term 'formalism' was coined to designate art that was considered alien to the Soviet people. Officially, the term was deciphered as predominance of form over content, but in fact it served as a tool of ideological pressure. In such circumstances there could be no question of the existence of new music institutions, including those related to the learning process. This situation continued in more liberal times, which began after Stalin's death. 'Dodecaphony is cacophony!', declared Nikita Khrushchev at a meeting with artists in 1962. No surprise that in Soviet Russia, even after the debunking of the cult of Stalin (1956) and the advent of the so-called 'Thaw', and almost right up to Gorbachev's 'Perestroika', probably every major composition written in a 'new' language was accompanied by ideological cross-examinations, and the chances for its performance in the country were seriously restricted. The political stagnation transformed itself into a hardened artistic-aesthetic routine, and the process of natural evolution in art acquired the value of an almost heroic stoicism, as the life stories of a number of artists have shown.

Nevertheless, the development of the Russian post-war avant-garde began in the second half of the 1950's, with the first twelve-tone work dating from 1956 (*Musica Stricta* for piano by Andrei Volkonsky) and a group of works employing serial techniques appearing in 1963–64 (Symphony No. 1 by Arvo Pärt, 'Italian Songs' by Edison Denisov, 'Music for Piano and Chamber Orchestra' by Alfred Schnittke, etc.). In mastering new compositional techniques, Russian music followed the Western avant-garde, although frequently it found its own individuality. Perhaps the broadest international resonance amongst Russian works of the time was achieved by Denisov's chamber cantata 'Sun of the Incas' (1964). Though performed by the world's best known musicians, it caused violent criticism on the part of the Union of Soviet Composers and provoked sharp discussion in the journal *Sovetskaya Muzika*. Another way to fight with the avant-garde was to keep silent about its achievements in the official press.

However, the 'advanced' new works gradually penetrated into concert halls; new music became known and even popular among the concertgoers, who perceived it as a symbol of spiritual freedom.

All this had yet no relation to educational institutions and to teaching, which remained hopelessly conservative. The real institutional changes came only in the 1990's, after the collapse of the USSR. On the one hand, they were dramatic, as the state virtually kept from the financial support of culture; on the other hand, they opened a way for private initiative.

There were three main trends related to new music: first, the establishment of new composers' associations; second, the organization of festivals of contemporary music; third, the institution of performing collectives associated with them.

In 1990, a group of middle-generation composers announced the formation of the Association of Contemporary Music (ACM-2) and the eponymous ensemble, in opposition to the traditionalist line of the Union of Soviet Composers. In its initial form, ACM-2 did not last long – the collapse of the USSR and the mass emigration of the Association's members automatically transformed it into a section of the Moscow Union of Composers; however, its activities left a clear imprint on the last two years of Soviet music. It was just then that the festival Moscow Autumn, established by the Moscow Union of Composers, found its conceptual regeneration.

In 1993, the Centre for Contemporary Music was created, whose purpose was the establishment of a new infrastructure, embracing all aspects of the functioning of modern music – from educational programs to festivals and concerts. In the same year, the ensemble Studio for New Music was founded, and in 1994 the annual international festival of contemporary music Moscow Forum had its first edition. All of these actions were initiated to integrate the Russian music into the broader European musical context.



Illustration 1: Studio for New Music at the Venice Biennale 2011, Teatro Malibran

These three institutions, namely the Centre for Contemporary Music, the Studio for New Music and the festival Moscow Forum, were set up in the Moscow State Conservatoire, and therefore played a crucial role in the formation of new teaching principles in the domain of contemporary music. Now I will introduce them in a few words.

The Centre for Contemporary Music in Moscow (CCMM) is an associate member of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM). Formed as an independent department of the Moscow Conservatoire, it unites musicians whose interests are concentrated in the field of contemporary music and plays a leading role in the development of serious contemporary music by supporting and encouraging composition, performance and research. The Centre's activities include:

- 1) monthly concerts by its core ensemble, the Studio for New Music;
- 2) annual international festival of contemporary music, the Moscow Forum;
- 3) discussions, workshops and lectures, musicological conferences;
- 4) young composers' competitions, performances of their works;
- 5) promotion of new Russian music at home and abroad.

The Studio for New Music (SNM) is an ensemble-in-residence at the Moscow Conservatoire and the leading contemporary music group in Russia. The ensemble was established by composer Vladimir Tarnopolski and conductor Igor Dronov after the model of the similar high-class Western collectives. Their first concert was given in France with Mstislav Rostropovich conducting. Every year the ensemble performs about 50 programs in Moscow and throughout the country, and is a frequent guest in many Western contemporary music festivals. SNM has performed at such major venues as Philharmonie Berlin, Paradiso Amsterdam, Konzerthaus Berlin, Jacqueline Du Pré Concert Hall Oxford, Deutschlandfunk Cologne, Cité de la Musique Paris, Schoenberg Centre Vienna, and Festspielhaus Hellerau Dresden, to name but a few. They have conducted a number of workshops at the major universities, including Oxford, Harvard, and Boston. SNM has been the first and so far the only Russian group which was invited as ensemble-in-residence at the Darmstadt International Courses for New Music in 2010. The group has given many concerts in most of European countries and more than once toured the USA.

SNM has introduced in Russia and abroad some 900 pieces of Russian and foreign composers. It has cooperated with leading foreign ensembles, including Ensemble Modern, in first Russian performances of works by Andriessen, Boulez, Ferneyhough, Grisey, Hurel, Lachenmann, Ligeti, Murail, Rihm, Nono, Stockhausen, and many others.

SNM has presented about 60 concerts-portraits of the leading contemporary composers. Some of them, including Ivan Fedele, Nicolaus A. Huber, Enno Poppe, Roger Redgate, have written their new works especially for the group. Another particular interest is given to all kinds of collaboration with young composers in competitions and workshops, as well as in other forms. During last years the Studio for New Music has actively worked on the projects with live electronics, video and multimedia commissioning new works from Russian and European composers, as well as introducing in Russia such outstanding works as Fausto Romitelli's 'An Index of Metals' (its Russian premiere took place in December 2013). A special attention is also given to the Russian avant-garde of the 1920's (Gavriil Popov, Nicolai Roslavets, Alexander Mosolov, and others). One of the most important events of this kind was the world premiere of the Chamber Symphony No. 2 by Roslavets, composed in 1934 and only recently discovered in an archive.

SNM is the core ensemble for the Moscow Forum festival of contemporary music. In 2002, 2005 and 2012 it won the prestigious grants of Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung for several two-year series of concerts in Moscow and the rest of Russia. In 2010, SNM won the grant of the European Commission for the realization of the large-scale project 'Europe through the eyes of Russians, Russia through the Eyes of Europeans', with 18 new compositions by Russian and European composers commissioned.

And now about the Moscow Forum festival. Since 1994, it takes place every year upon the initiative of the Moscow Conservatoire's Centre for Contemporary Music. Its artistic director, composer and composition professor Vladimir Tarnopolsky conceived the Moscow Forum as a panorama of the Russian and international



Illustration 2: Moscow Forum 2007

musical avant-garde, as well as a discussion panel for the musical cultures of different countries.

The primary duty of the Moscow Forum Festival is to propagate Russian music of the 20th century and to stimulate the creativity of young composers. The festival also tries to compensate the lack of information and the resulting cultural gap regarding the classics of the international avant-garde.

The Moscow Forum festival has gained high esteem in Russia and abroad, as is attested by its list of participants. The festival boasted performances by such high-class ensembles as Ensemble Modern (Germany), Klangforum Wien (Austria), Scharoun Ensemble (Germany), De Volharding (The Netherlands), Alternance (France), XX Century (Austria), Toscanini Orchestra (Italy), Arditti Quartet (UK), Danel Quartet (Belgium), and many more.

So, what can students learn under the new conditions?

The theoretical and practical contents of the teaching programs are coordinated by the Centre of Contemporary Music. Special postgraduate studies are organized for those graduates from the Orchestra Department who are interested in playing new repertoire. The special class in question, known as Contemporary Music Orchestra, serves as a basis for the Studio for New Music. During the postgraduate course, the young musicians are taking part in the concert activities of the Studio, they are rehearsing together and participating in concerts. They are mastering new techniques of instrumental playing that are usually absent from academic curricula. To enter the Contemporary Music Orchestra, a young musician must pass the examination whose program includes new virtuoso pieces by contemporary composers such as Berio, Carter, Donatoni, Boulez, Henze, Xenakis, Peter Maxwell Davis, Scelsi, Dorati, Fedele, Denisov, Dusapin, Penderecki, Manoury, Crumb, Kurtag, Lachenmann, Murail, Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Ligeti, Stockhausen, Karamanov, and so on. The teaching at the Choral Conducting Department is also practical: the Conservatoire Chamber Choir performs mainly a contemporary repertoire.

There are also special courses where students can learn contemporary works. They willingly visit them, as the new repertoire is now a part of many competitions. The pianists or strings players have also the opportunity to learn new techniques, which is necessary for performing such repertoire. The complete course of studies takes one semester and includes a wide range of topics, for instance:

1) New types of piano music notation in the 20th century. New kinds of sound production and their notation: soundless touch, resonances, echoes, the third pedal, playing on the strings, harmonics, noises. Measure and its absence; proportional notation. Octave shifts. Repetition and repetitive patterns. Aleatoric compositions. Graphical notation and its decoding.

2) New techniques of sound production (some examples)

Cowell, *Aeolian Harp*, *The Tides of Manaunaun*

Cage, *The Perilous Night*, *Bacchanale*

Crumb, *Makrokosmos I, II. A Little Suite for Christmas*, A. D. 1979

Lachenmann. *Wiegenlied*, *Guero*.

3) Contemporary music competitions and festivals. Orientation in the competition requirements, new music competitions. Program requirements of Olivier Messiaen Competition (Paris), Maria Yudina Competition (St. Petersburg), 20th Century Music Competition (Orléans), Gaudeamus Competition (Amsterdam).

Finally, I would like to mention the Composition Department of the Moscow Conservatoire, which has received significant benefits owing to both the Studio for New Music and the Centre for Contemporary Music. The students of the Composition Department have a good chance to hear their own works for chamber ensemble. Moreover, there is a special course for future composers entitled 'Composition Techniques in the 20th Century Music'. It combines in-depth study of new music with practical mastering of non-traditional instrumental techniques.