

# The Music of Eastern Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>1</sup>

Minori Nakaune and Malcolm Benson

(Received on May 26, 2011)

## Introduction

The underlying ideas of this paper are (a) that Eastern European music (here including music composed in Russia, Poland, Hungary, and what is now the Czech Republic) was *different* in the nineteenth century, and continued to be *different* far into the twentieth century. And (b), that this Eastern European music fundamentally altered the course of Western music, giving it new life and inspiration.

Regarding the first point one might ask, *different* from what? Different from the established mainstream of European music, which at that time was centered on Paris. These differences relate directly to the second point because the Eastern European composers were at first laughed at, then admired, and finally accepted as a permanent and influential part of the Western canon. In the nineteenth century, for example, the music of Mussorgsky, Balakirev and Borodin was thought of – when it was thought of at all – as being barbaric, crude and without value. One critic wondered why anybody should trouble “to discuss it as if it was as important as that of the older civilizations, and to study it as if it was in the same category as Beethoven’s”.<sup>2</sup> Music originating in this area of Eastern Europe was therefore regarded as a late and unmannered intrusion into the ongoing party, the party that had enshrined church music and sonata form and the major-minor key system as the *ne plus ultra* of composition. However, acceptance grew with the passage of time and the concomitant changes in social thinking, so that today concert halls are proud to present twentieth century Eastern European music.

The circumstances under which Eastern European music was composed in the nine-

---

1 This paper is an edited account of six lectures given at Hiroshima Shudo University, Japan, between October 1st and December 10th, 2010.

2 M. D. Calvocoressi, *A Survey of Russian Music*, London: Penguin, 1944, p. 12.

teenth century were quite distinct from those that pertained in the more developed and “civilized” West. Particularly, these circumstances contained two dominant elements: the first was a folk music tradition of immense strength; the second (after the end of the Napoleonic Wars) was a rising national identity. These two “Romantic” notions were intertwined as each country (or would-be country) sought to establish its legitimacy:

All over Europe, every branch of art and literature was mobilized to illustrate and to embroider national themes... Musicians recruited the harmonies and rhythms of their native folk dance and folksong to elaborate distinctive national styles... From the exquisite mazurkas and polonaises of Chopin and the Hungarian Rhapsodies of Liszt a brilliant trail leads through... the Hungarians Béla Bartók (1881-1945) and Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967)... and the famous Russian ‘five’ – Cesar Cui (1835-1916), Mily Balakirev (1836-1910), Alexander Borodin (1833-1887), Nicholas Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), and Modeste Mussorgsky (1839-1881). These national schools served to widen the social appeal of music.<sup>3</sup>

Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), for example, owed his musical nationalism to Glinka (1804-1857), “the father of Russian music,” whose operas *A Life of the Tsar* (1836) and *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842) the ‘Five’ regarded as models to be emulated, as they had supposedly arisen from Russian folk life. “They are the fountain-head of Russian national music, almost every characteristic aspect of which appears in them”.<sup>4</sup> “As well as absorbing Glinka’s nationalistic ideas, Rimsky-Korsakov examined other European music, for example that of Berlioz, Schumann and Liszt. His wide-ranging interests helped him to become professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1871 (though this alienated him from the rest of the ‘Five’), and from this point onwards he exerted an influence on many young Russian composers.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century a significant new challenge faced the Eastern European artistic world. The rise of communist ideology in the whole area – but especially in Russia after the 1917 Revolution – presented new opportunities and problems for musicians. The nineteenth century ideas of collecting and incorporating folk music and producing nationalistic works disappeared. In their place came directives that music must be available to the masses, not only to the elite. Over the years following the Revolution Eastern European composers divided into two camps: those who felt that they should remain in their home-

---

3 Norman Davies, *Europe A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 819–820.

4 Calvocoressi, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

lands and support the new idea; and those who felt obliged to travel abroad for recognition and better support.

Those who chose to stay where they were and work with the new political arrangements include Dmitry Shostakovich (Russia), Karol Szymanowski (Poland), Leoš Janáček (Czech Republic), and Zoltán Kodály (Hungary).

The group who left to seek a less-troubled life in the West included Rakhmaninov who left in 1917, Prokofiev, who left in 1918 but returned later, and Stravinsky, who even by 1910 was already living in Paris and working in the European musical world. Apart from brief visits, Stravinsky never returned to Russia, and was finally buried in Venice.<sup>5</sup>

A few managed to bestride both domestic and international worlds with ease. These included Ignacy Jan Paderewski, international pianist and composer, and briefly Prime Minister of Poland; Béla Bartók (Hungary), who led an international life and finally emigrated to the United States; and Krzysztof Penderecki (b. 1933), brought up in Poland, but able to move comfortably between East and West.

The idea that music from Eastern Europe contributed new and different ideas to Western music provides the underlying rationale for our choice of composers from Russia, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic.<sup>6</sup> We shall start with perhaps the most radical of them all, Igor Stravinsky.

### (1) Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Igor Stravinsky was Russian born and Russian educated, and should be regarded firstly as proceeding from the great Russian tradition of Glinka, Borodin, and his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov. Secondly, however, he should be regarded as having been equally influenced by the French composers Debussy, Dukas, and Ravel. Thus, in his early works such as *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911), and *The Rite of Spring* (1913) we not only meet Russian-style features, but also some that are close to the French tradition. *The Firebird*, for example, is a ballet version of a typical Russian folk-tale in which a Prince out hunting in the forest encounters a magic creature. She is half bird and half girl. He naturally wants to capture her and manages to grab her, but she pleads with him and he lets her go, and so on. In trying to pinpoint Stravinsky's style it may therefore

---

5 Michael Oliver, *Igor Stravinsky*. London: Phaidon Press, 1995.

6 Unfortunately, due to space constraints, the composers Josef Suk (1874-1935) and his pupil Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959) will have to be omitted.

make sense to refer back to Stravinsky himself, who said, “I was guided by no system. I heard, and I wrote what I heard.”<sup>7</sup>

Similar mixed elements – Russian and European – may be seen in *Petrushka*. Here the principal characters are puppets – Petrushka, a Ballerina, and a Moor – exhibited at the St. Petersburg’s Shrovetide Fair by their magician owner. The crowd scenes remind one of similar scenes in Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas, but the music of the three puppets is pure Stravinsky. It has been said that *Petrushka* represents a final break with his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov, in part because of its re-thinking of the orchestra itself. His use of dissonance to represent the two sides of Petrushka, the grotesque puppet and the suffering human, as being two irreconcilable parts, was not new, but shows how Stravinsky was re-examining the basic elements of musical language even in his early compositions.

Stravinsky began work on *The Rite of Spring* in 1910 and from the beginning seems to have known that it was a major work. He said of it, “I saw in imagination a solemn pagan rite: wise elders, seated in a circle, watching a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring.” The original title of the ballet was to be *Great Sacrifice*.<sup>8</sup> He worked mostly at Clarens, in Switzerland, where he had a house and a special room in which he did his composing. By the end of 1912 it was almost finished.

Stravinsky gave the following account of his composing:

... The room where I composed the *Sacre du Printemps*... I saw these mountains, a little bit trees, and I composed here all of the whole *Sacre du Printemps* (*Rite of Spring/Haru no Saiten*). I put my table here and the chair here, and I put the piano on this wall. I worked from the beginning of the day to the end of

---

7 Stravinsky lived very much for the moment, as shown in this quotation, and systems as such did not interest him. This applied to the political sphere as well. In the years up to 1917 he had supported the unsuccessful attempts to overthrow the Tsar and form what he imagined as a new “United States of Russia”. With the same enthusiasm he wrote to his mother immediately after the Revolution, talking of “these unforgettable days of happiness that are sweeping across our dear, liberated Russia”. However, once the Revolution touched him personally – his property in the Ukraine was taken from him – he quickly became disillusioned with the new regime. Thereafter, the communist ideological system held little interest for him. Within months he was in Madrid, Rome and Naples for a season with the Diaghilev team, at which time he met and became lifelong friends with Picasso. Musical life was just too busy to get worried about communism. (Oliver, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–91).

8 Michael Oliver, *Igor Stravinsky*. London: Phaidon Press, 1995, p. 42.

the day. I remember very well that at this time, or at this period of my life, I didn't take naps. I just worked and after eating I went to the piano and I continued to work. After that it was the 5:00 tea so I didn't pay much attention to it, and it was a dinner time and I was there with my dear wife and I continued to work after the dinner and I was very, very tired. I went to bed and I remember I slept very well. And I composed the first part of the *Sacre*.<sup>9</sup>

Two other significant people were directly concerned with the production of *Sacre du Printemps*: the impresario Diaghilev and the dancer-choreographer Nijinsky. But the first night, on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1913, was a disaster, and there was near chaos. The reasons for this were clear: "... the music was intensely dissonant, its powerful rhythms disconcertingly asymmetrical".<sup>10</sup> This was later to be regarded as its main strength and its revolutionary power. Further, the dancers themselves utterly disliked the costumes (which made them look silly) and the movements they were required (by Nijinsky) to perform. Soon, however, the ballet gained acceptance, and established Stravinsky as a leader of the avant-garde. However, "the sheer richness of incident, extravagance of orchestral resource and barbaric power of *The Rite* were unrepeatable",<sup>11</sup> and Stravinsky had to turn to other forms of music after that.

## (2) Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Sergey Sergeevich Prokofiev (1891-1953) was, as one writer said,

"the exact opposite of Stravinsky: carefree, impulsive, never concerned with abstractions. Nor are the style and character of his music ever determined by any preconceived notion of what music ought or ought not to be".<sup>12</sup>

This comment applies mainly to Prokofiev's early years, when he set out to shock and amaze audiences, taking on the role of *enfant terrible* of Russian music. Even the names of some of his early pieces are arresting: *Chout* (*The Tale of the Buffoon*, ballet, 1915), *The Love for Three Oranges* (opera, 1921), and so on. It has been remarked that while his material may have been amusing and even farcical, his music was of the highest order.<sup>13</sup>

---

9 Stravinsky, Interview for Tony Palmer's *All My Loving* (DVD, 2).

10 Michael Oliver, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

11 Michael Oliver, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

12 M. D. Calvocoressi, *A Survey of Russian Music*, London: Penguin, 1944, p. 94.

13 Calvocoressi, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

*Chout*, for example, had been composed in 1915 but was revised by Prokofiev in 1920. This ballet in six scenes got its premiere in Paris on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1921 under Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. It was a huge success and was greeted with great admiration by an audience that included Jean Cocteau, Igor Stravinsky and Maurice Ravel. Stravinsky called the ballet, "the single piece of modern music he could listen to with pleasure", while Ravel called it "a work of genius".<sup>14</sup>

Prokofiev's early phase lasted until approximately the October Revolution of 1917, which saw him depart for the USA on what he thought would be a concert tour, but which kept him out of Russia until 1927. He finally settled back in Russia in 1936 and produced much of his greatest work there.

For Prokofiev the 1930s and 1940s were years in which the now-mature composer expanded his range of compositions to include film scores (e.g., *Alexander Nevsky*, for Eisenstein's film of the same name, 1938), ballets (e.g., *Romeo and Juliet*, Brno, 1938), a comic opera (*Betrothal in a Monastery*, or *The Duenna*, Prague, 1946) and his tale for children *Petya I volk (Peter and the Wolf)*, 1936).

An online description of the origin of *Peter and the Wolf* says:

In the same genre and at the same time, Prokofiev was asked by the Central Children's Theater to write a new musical symphony just for children. The intent was to cultivate 'musical tastes in children from the first years of school.' Intrigued by the invitation, Prokofiev set about the project with usual aplomb and completed *Peter and the Wolf* in just four days' time. The debut on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 1936 was, in the composer's words, inauspicious at best: "(attendance) was rather poor and failed to attract much attention".<sup>15</sup>

However, the story has since become a classic. *Peter and the Wolf* starts as follows:

Peter, against his grandfather's wishes, ventured alone into the dangerous meadow where he and his animal friends, the duck and the bird, met a fierce wolf...

This magic world where ducks and birds speak, and where every character is given his own musical signature tune and instrument, is endlessly enjoyed by children, and indeed by adults too.

In the late forties Prokofiev fell foul of the purges effected by Andrey Zhdanov, who

---

14 Wikipedia entry, *Prokofiev*.

15 Wikipedia entry, *Prokofiev*.

accused him, and others, of “formalism,” a code word used to criticize composers who displeased Stalin. If music – or indeed any other form of art – failed to conform to Marxist utilitarian ideology, or appeared to elevate personal over mass feelings, or appeared to be separated from its economic and social context, it was officially condemned. To these accusations Prokofiev had little answer, and he quietly withdrew from active musical life. However, his legacy is secure:

As a composer he stands... in the forefront of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian culture. In his early years he set out purposefully to shock his public in music of flamboyance and hair-raising virtuosity, but in his 30s his musical style mellowed and he consolidated his reputation for ready tunefulness, rhythmic élan, instantly appealing charm, and alert humour, expressed with a zestful openness which has rendered much of his music enduringly popular.<sup>16</sup>

### (3) Shostakovich (1906-1975)

If we try to separate Dmitry Shostakovich the person from Dmitry Shostakovich the composer, we will probably fail, because the connections between the two are so many, and so complicated, that the one has almost no meaning without the other. In short, as an artist he was forced to think politically; as a political person (everybody had to be, at that time) he thought like an artist.

In him you find elements of the loyal Soviet citizen, the clever critic of the regime – the loyalist and the rebel. He lived an artistic life under a regime that often denied essential freedoms yet sometimes championed great music and musicians.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike Prokofiev, Shostakovich spent little time outside Russia except for visits related to performances of his music.<sup>18</sup> He was a child prodigy, entering the Petrograd Conservatory at age 13, and thereby coming under the eye of Alexander Glazunov, the director. With his first symphony (1926) he established himself as the most brilliant exponent of Russian music. Almost immediately came his First Piano Sonata (also 1926), then

---

16 Alison Latham, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, Oxford, 2002, *Prokofiev*.

17 James Naughtie, *The Making of Music*, London: Murray, 2007, p. 268.

18 For example, he attended the Aldeburgh Festival (UK) in 1960, where he met Benjamin Britten. They developed a deep friendship, even though neither spoke the other's language! (M. Oliver, *Benjamin Britten.*, London: Phaidon, 1996, p. 169).

music for a play, two ballets, a silent film, and two operas: *The Nose* (Leningrad, 1930), and *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (Leningrad, 1934).

The latter opera provoked the first of the two denunciations against him. It was at first hailed as a masterpiece with its dramatic and sensual music and its raw sexuality. It was seen as “a model of the new concept of socialist realism,” and “the result of the general success of Socialist construction, of the correct policy of the Party”.<sup>19</sup> For two years it enjoyed success both in Russia and across Europe. Then, one night in 1936, Stalin saw it. Within a couple of weeks the official newspaper *Pravda* had come out against it (“Chaos instead of Music”) and the opera was dropped. It was not seen again in Russia until 1963, and even then under a new name: *Katerina Izmaylova*.

Shostakovich’s response to his denunciation was the Fifth Symphony (1937), still popular and frequently played.<sup>20</sup> It bore on the title page the words, “A Soviet artist’s response to just criticism”. One wonders whether this comment was simply his formulaic way of placating the Soviet authorities, or whether he really meant it. As has been pointed out, it was a response, not a recantation, and its music is positive and direct, with strong emotional impact.<sup>21</sup> Its music has clear outlines, is straightforward, and is well orchestrated. Its dramatic qualities are positive and direct, and it does not appear to have been composed in any spirit of compromise or apology.

In any case, in 1941 Russia entered the War, and Shostakovich found himself involved in the German siege of Leningrad. There he started writing his famous Seventh Symphony (*Leningrad*, 1941), in which he captured the heroic mood of the people. He described it as “a symphony about our epoch, about our people, about our sacred war, about our victory”. The symphony’s early days were dramatic:

The score was flown out of the Soviet Union through Iran to the west. The propaganda value of the score, combined with Shostakovich’s picture on the cover of *Time* magazine wearing a fire-fighter’s helmet, led to a scrap between the conductors Arturo Toscanini and Serge Koussevitzky as to who should give the first performance in the west. Toscanini won their argument, but both were pipped at the post by Sir Henry Wood, who conducted it at a Prom[enade] concert in June...<sup>22</sup>

---

19 Wikipedia entry, *Dmitri Shostakovich*.

20 However, Naughtie (*op cit.* p. 271) calls it “bleak”.

21 Christopher Headington, *A History of Western Music* (London: Bodley Head, 1974).

22 Naughtie, *op cit.*, p. 269.



Apparently the score was then flown back to Leningrad where it was heard in August, played by a mixed orchestra because the radio orchestra had only 14 surviving professionals. Anyway, the reception there was ecstatic – the people recognized how the symphony reflected the cruelty, bravery and horror of the siege. Shostakovich said of it, “I couldn’t not write it. War was all around... I wanted to create the image of our embattled country, to engrave it in music”.<sup>23</sup>

In his advancing years Shostakovich dedicated his Fourteenth Symphony, for voices and orchestra, to Benjamin Britten, who conducted its first performance outside the Soviet Union in 1970. Its subject was death.

#### **(4) Szymanowski (1882-1937)**

Karol Szymanowski was one of a group of four Polish musicians (the others were Fitelberg, Rózycki, and Szeluto) called “Young Poland in Music, whose aim was to update Polish music. Szymanowski received his first musical education at home, and in 1901 moved to Warsaw where he had private lessons in harmony and composition. His *Concert Overture* (1906), *Second Symphony* (1909-10) and *Second Piano Sonata* (1910-11) all show traces of Wagner and Richard Strauss. He finally shook off these German influences when he visited Sicily and North Africa in 1914, as these locations gave him an interest in Mediterranean and Arab cultures.

The World War 1 years (1914-1918) were a relatively calm time for him as he was exempted from military service (for a knee disability), and he was able to “find himself” as a composer in the peaceful atmosphere of the family estate in Ukraine. At this point he was influenced by Debussy, Ravel, and late Skryabin. and composed great piano cycles: *Metopes* (1915), *Masks* (1915-16), *Myths* (1915, for piano and violin), *Songs of a Fairy Princess* (1915), *Songs of an Infatuated Muezzin* (1918) and *Four Tagore Songs* (1918). This bout of composition culminated in his *First Violin Concerto* (1916) and *Symphony No. 3, Song of the Night* (1914-16), the two works for which he is most famous.

However, the events of 1917 in Russia saw everything in his life collapse: the family estate was destroyed (his grand piano being thrown in the lake) and his family had to flee and make do with whatever accommodation they could find. Polish independence in 1918 brought some consolation, and he became Director of the Conservatory, then Rec-

---

23 Naughtie, *op cit.*, p. 270.

tor of the new State Academy (1926-1930). However, these appointments only led to battles with the new establishment, whose ideals he did not share.

Prominent among his works are his *Symphony No. 3* (op. 27), which is arranged for tenor, chorus and orchestra, and old but excellent recording being by the Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jerzy Semkow. Another piece of interest is one of the three poems that constitute *Mythes* (Op. 30, 1915:), for piano and violin. This is exceedingly popular with violinists, particularly No. 1. "Arethusa's Fountain". Also of interest is his *Violin Concerto No. 2* (1932-33), which was famously played by Henryk Szeryng with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jan Krenz (1972). Szeryng himself is also of interest, having been born in Poland in 1918 (d. 1988). He was a pupil of Carl Flesch in Berlin, though he later made Mexico his home.

#### **(5) Paderewski (1860-1941)**

What a life! He was brought up in a variety of homes (none of them poor!), and entered the Warsaw Conservatorium at age 12, becoming tutor there from 1878. He studied in Berlin, and married in 1880. He made his musical debut in Vienna in 1887 (then Paris 1889, London 1890, USA 1891). During the first World War he engaged in social and political activities in the USA. Back in Poland he caused what is called the Greater Poland uprising (1918), and became Prime Minister of Poland in 1919. Later he became the Polish Ambassador to the League of Nations, and retired from politics in 1922, buying a vineyard in California in 1924. He continued to give concerts in the USA, for example in Carnegie Hall and Madison Square Garden, the latter with 20,000 seats filled! A film of his remarkable life called *Moonlight Sonata* was made in 1936. At this point he re-entered public life, now as Head of the Polish National Council government in exile in London in 1940. He died 1941 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. A delightful short piece of his is simply called *Menuet*.

#### **(6) Penderecki (1933- )**

Krzysztof Penderecki became famous for his *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima for 52 strings* (1961) after studies at Cracow Academy of Music and Jagiellonian University. He became one of the avant-garde European musicians during the 1960s and 1970s, along with figures like John Cage, Stockhausen, and Boulez. By the mid-1970s, however, he had returned by a more traditional style, and in his own words had "rediscovered him-

self". The result was a synthesis of modern and traditional, as in his concertos for violin (1976), cello (1982), *Symphony No. 2 "Christmas"* (1980), and the operas *Paradise Lost* (1978), *Te Deum* (1980) and *Polish Requiem* (1980-84). "What I have been doing," he said in 1994, "has been to collect and transform the experience of the entire century".

The appearance of *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* was a major event. The piece contains previously unheard means of powerful expression – explosive and liberating. By employing both known and unknown means of articulation, Penderecki made strings sound like percussion and wind. The piece opens unexpectedly with a poignant cry in the highest possible register, with an orgy of hissing, noise and rasps, played in all possible ways. The music intensifies with a series of clusters, subdued at first, then glissando aggressive and rising.

"I had written this piece," the composer said, "and I named it, much as in Cage's manner, 8', 37". But it existed only in my imagination... [after recording]... I could listen to an actual performance, I was struck with the emotional charge of the work. I thought it would be a waste to condemn it to such anonymity, to those "digits". I searched for associations and, in the end, I decided to dedicate it to the Hiroshima victims" (1994)<sup>24</sup>

*Symphony No. 3* (1988-1995) is the work of a mature mind, constructed slowly and painstakingly. "I've been writing my *Third Symphony* for seven years," Penderecki said later, "... my ideas take a long time to mature".

Penderecki's best known works are *Stabat Mater*, *Hiroshima*, *Third Symphony*, and *Fluorescences*. Recently, his music has been used in several movies, for example in Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980).

## **(7) Bartók (1881-1945)**

Béla Bartók was born in a small town in the Kingdom of Hungary, which at the time was under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He had a German mother who spoke Hungarian fluently, and a father who considered himself pure Hungarian, despite the maternal side being of Roman Catholic Serbian extraction. The result was that Bartók was usually described as ethnically "mixed Hungarian".

By the age of four he could apparently play 40 pieces on the piano, and in 1899 he

---

24 Label notes for *Orchestral Works Vol 1*.

entered the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest in 1899. He stayed there until 1903, when he wrote his first major work, *Kossuth*. At a holiday resort in the summer of 1904 he overheard a nanny singing folksongs to the children in her care, and this gave him a life-long interest in folk music. He was not only interested in folk music, but allowed it to influence his own compositions.

In 1905 he began to work with his lifelong friend Zoltán Kodály, and in 1907 both were appointed to teaching posts at the Academy. Together they collected folk music from Romania, Croatia, Serbia and areas farther afield. Bartók soon became addicted, and said, “Folk music studies are as necessary to me as fresh air to other people”. The rhythms and melodic shapes of Eastern European folk music gave an unmistakable flavor to Bartók’s music, similar to the influence of British folk music on Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst.

Like other composers interested in folk music, Bartók possessed a powerful melodic gift. However, the piece *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (1936), which the composer himself described “contrary to the music of today” is highly structured in accordance with the ideas of the “Golden Section” on the one hand, and the 12-degree chromatic scale on the other.<sup>25</sup> A description of the first movement of this piece gives an idea of its complex construction:

The movement is written as a fugue, the first entry being given to muted violas, with subsequent entries following at intervals of a fifth... [it] is highly unusual in its construction, including, as it does, the ratios of the “golden section”. As the starting-points of the thematic entries ... all twelve degrees of the chromatic scale are used. Starting out from the note A and progressing through the circle of fifths, Bartók reaches the remotest key of all, E-flat, which thus constitutes the climax of the movement as a whole. The theme is now inverted and is led back to its opening note of A through a series of further entries. The result is a symmetrical structure...<sup>26</sup>

Bartók’s inspiration here came from Fibonacci (c. 1170-c.1250, Italian mathematician who brought the Hindu-Arabic number system to the West). Under Fibonacci’s system it is possible to construct the Golden Section, and in this work Bartók uses this idea to

---

25 E. Lendvai, *Béla Bartók: An Analysis of his Music*. London: Kahn and Averill, 1971.

26 Knut Franke (trans. Stewart Spencer). Programme notes for CD *Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein, 1991.

reach a peak (the E-flat mentioned above) in bar 55 out of 89, these being adjacent numbers in a Fibonacci sequence. (The musical working-out of this idea is shown in Appendix 1).

Melodies became more lyrical and more simple in Bartók's later music, written in the decade between the mid-1930s and his death; so it is usual to say his style mellowed. The *Violin Concerto No. 2* (1938) is more approachable than some of his earlier works, with the finale being a variation of the first movement. It was the last piece he wrote before he migrated to the United States. The *Violin Concerto* was dedicated to his friend Zoltan Székely, who premiered it on March 29, 1939. The first movement begins with a folk dance, again stressing his links with Eastern European folk music. The main theme is repeated on several instruments, and in different ways.

Finally, the *Concerto for Orchestra* (1943) has rightly become popular, with its obvious charm and vivacity on the one hand, and an *Elegy* on the other, the latter expressing his disillusionment with what he called his "horrible position" in the United States.

### **(8) Kodály (1882-1967)**

Zoltán Kodály learned to play the violin from his father, who was a keen amateur musician. Kodály went to the University of Budapest to study modern languages, and also attended to Franz Liszt Academy of Music there. In 1905 he gained a Ph.D in Philosophy and Linguistics ("The Stanzaic Structure of Hungarian Folk Song"). It is clear that his deep interest in folk music was already apparent even while he was studying. By 1907 he was a professor at the Academy of Music, but continued collecting folk music assiduously with his friend Bartók. From around 1910 they put on joint concerts with young musicians. In that year he married Emma Sandor, a gifted musician and translator approximately 20 years older than himself. Kodály's first major success was in 1923 with *Psalmus Hungaricus*, in honour of Budapest's celebration of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This piece laments the fate that had befallen his country.

Kodály developed his own philosophy regarding the position of music in relation to people. It consisted of the following points:

- All people capable of lingual literacy and also capable of musical literacy.
- Singing is the best foundation for musicianship.
- Music education to be most effective must begin with the very young child.
- The folk songs of a child's own linguistic heritage constitute a musical

mother tongue and should therefore be the vehicle of all early instruction.

— Only music of the highest artistic value, both folk and composed, should be used in teaching.

— Music should be at the heart of the curriculum, a core subject used as a basis for education.

As can be seen, several of the above points relate to children. From around the late 1920s Kodály became increasingly interested in the teaching of music to children, and he wrote a lot of music for them (*The Straw Guy*, *The Gypsy Munching Cheese*, etc.). He worked on the musical curriculum for Hungarian schools, and became particularly interested in the Tonic Sol-Fa method of introducing children to music.<sup>27</sup>

The objectives of this philosophy were firstly to get the child to sing, play instruments, and dance from memory, using the traditional folk music of the child's heritage. Secondly, Kodály wanted children to perform, listen to, and analyze the great art music of the world. Thirdly, they should achieve mastery of musical skills, such as musical reading and writing, singing and part-singing. Finally they should improvise and compose, using their known musical vocabulary at each developmental level. This ambitious plan took root in Hungarian schools, and later worldwide. The "Kodály method", as it became known, hoped to involve children in melody, rhythm, form, harmony, tempo, and so on. It was applied to young children at first, and then to middle and high school students, in a sequential progression.

### **(9) Janáček (1854-1928)**

Leoš Janáček lived much of his life in Moravia, now part of the Czech Republic, with just brief visits to Prague, Leipzig and Vienna to study. He founded and became the first director of the Brno Organ School in 1881. From 1885 onwards he began to collect Moravian folksongs, emulating Musorgsky, who aimed at realism and orientalism in his musical style. Janáček indeed became known as "Musorgsky in Bohemia". All this preparation bore fruit in 1904 with his opera *Jenůfa*, a passionate tale of love and jealousy set in a Moravian village. Jenůfa's suffering in the opera is usually attributed to the death of

---

27 This method had been invented by Sarah Ann Glover (1785-1867) in Norwich, England. It had been popularised by John Curwen (1816-1880) and was popular in English schools by the end of the 19th century. Kodály built on Curwen's work in England, and introduced his own version of the Curwen's hand signals. (Wikipedia, Tonic Sol-Fa)

Janáček's daughter Olga (d. 1903). At first unsuccessful, the opera was revised and the new version had its premiere in Prague (1916), establishing his reputation.

From this time onwards, and for about 12 years, Janáček composed prolifically, his muse being a woman 38 years younger, Kamila Stösslová. She inspired several of his other operas and works, particularly *Kát'a Kabanová* (1921).<sup>28</sup> His music has strong individuality and character, and his operas display his dramatic interest in the bizarre and unusual, with many oriental elements. Further, Tolstoy's short story *The Kreutzer Sonata*<sup>29</sup> is known to have influenced the first of his string quartets (1923), while his own *Intimate Letters* (written to Kamila) influenced the second (1928). In his later years speech melody superceded tonality, and tended towards unconventional sounding – sometimes called “affective vibration”.

The monumental orchestral work *Sinfonietta* was composed in 1926, when Janáček was 72. It rapidly gained international status, and was performed in London, Vienna and Dresden.

#### (10) Ševčík (1852-1934)

Otakar Ševčík, the Czech violin virtuoso and pedagogue, began collecting and adapting folk music from around 1874. His sources were mainly Czech folksongs, and in turning to folksongs for inspiration he was following the nineteenth century Romantic tradition of seeking out folk or historical sources rather than classical ones. Ševčík's interest in folksongs was therefore part of a general European trend, one which included Smetana (1824-1884) and Dvořák (1841-1904). As has been noted: “The veneration of the folk song is typically Romantic; it has even a mystical tinge. For the Romantic movement believed in the anonymous origin of folk song, in its birth from the very womb of the ‘nation.’”<sup>30</sup> The folksong also had patriotic resonances, which musicians and others exploited to the full.

Ševčík's aim was to make folk music accessible not only to violin practitioners like

---

28 Janáček's passionate letters to Kamila Stösslová, hundreds of them, have provided important information about his artistic intentions and inspiration. The letters she wrote to him have been lost, except for a few postcards. (Wikipedia: Janáček)

29 Not to be confused with Beethoven's work! In Tolstoy's story a wife plays *The Kreutzer Sonata* by Beethoven with her male companion playing the violin, both unaware that her husband is secretly listening.

30 Alfred Einstein, *Music in the Romantic Era*, London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1947, p. 40.

himself, but also to more general teachers in the schools, who usually found the portable violin more convenient than the cumbersome piano. Interestingly, Ševčík's teaching was considered to be of such excellence that over his lifetime more than 1,200 violinists came to him to learn violin technique, including many famous names. Among these were two Japanese performers, Ryusaku Hayashi and Kensho Wanibuchi, who carried his methodology back to Japan. Ševčík, moreover, improved on the Paganini technique in an artistic way in his compositions.<sup>31</sup>

Ševčík had gone to Kiev in 1875 and he stayed there until 1892. In Kiev he met other Czech musicians, and from time to time used to return to his homeland in south Bohemia. Possibly living in Kiev helped him to appreciate the Czech musical heritage. As a result of this work he published a collection called *Seven Czech Dances*, the first of which is called *Holka modrooká* (The Girl with Blue Eyes). In this still-popular Czech song, the words at first seem to be directed to a child, but may also be seen as a love song. An English translation gives the general idea:

#### **The Girl with Blue Eyes**

You, blue-eyed girl,  
Do not sit by the brook.  
You, blue-eyed girl,  
Do not sit there.  
There is deep water in the brook;  
It could take you away, great pity.  
Blue-eyed girl,  
Do not sit there.

Ševčík's works continue to be re-published even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, giving an indication of how effective his pedagogy was.

#### **(11) Kubišová (1942-)**

In more recent times, the Romantic theme of patriotism was brought into sharp focus by the next and final person being dealt with here: Marta Kubišová. This popular singer came to international prominence during the Prague Spring of 1968 in much the same

---

31 For a full account see Minori Nakaune, "Otakar Ševčík: The Enduring Legacy". Hiroshima Shudo University, *Studies in the Humanities and Sciences*, 46(1), 190–129. September, 2005.



way, and for many of the same reasons, as Joan Baez did in America. She began her career in singing and acting, both locally (in Poděbrady) and then from 1964 in Prague. By 1968 she was one of the most popular singers in Czechoslovakia. During the Prague Spring<sup>32</sup> she recorded many singles and one LP, *Songy a Balady* (1969), including the song, “Modlitba pro Martu” (“A prayer for Marta”). However, she was distrusted and disliked by the authorities and banned from performing in that country. With the arrival of the Velvet Revolution in 1989 she was reinstated. One of her most famous recordings was a Czech-language version of Paul McCartney’s *Hey Jude*. This song resonated with the people of Czechoslovakia, and remains a perennial favorite both there and abroad.

## (12) Conclusion

At the outset of this paper it was stated that the music of Eastern Europe was *different* (from that of Western Europe, particularly as centred on Paris, Vienna, and so forth). We may now pose the question: In what specific ways was this new music different? What did it add to the standard repertoire that was not there before? And has the music of Eastern Europe created new audiences or merely extended the range of existing ones?

A quick and non-technical answer to the first of the above questions would be that by and large the music of Eastern Europe was not religious in character. A number of the above – mentioned composers were atheists (Stravinsky, Bartók, Janáček), while others lived under Marxist realism, which precluded religion (Shostakovich, Prokofiev). Several may have held beliefs but chose to suppress them (Ševčík, Kodály). Consequently, the masses, oratorios, requiems, sacred cantatas, hymns, and so forth found in earlier times, or in avowedly Christian countries, were absent. Further, this lack of religious content possibly fitted well with the contemporary audiences whose religious beliefs were tentative or perhaps absent altogether.

The new music certainly added new elements to the existing ideas about form. Stravinsky, for example, continually experimented with new forms, some of which delighted and some of which attracted criticism. He paid little or no attention to what the audience might think or expect: he simply tried to perfect what he felt necessary to do: “That which specifically appertains to my conscious emotion cannot be expressed in

---

32 Notes from Wikipedia entry for Marta Kubišová.

regulated form”.<sup>33</sup> No two of his works are similar; it is only the overall *oeuvre* that bears the stamp of the man himself. The young Prokofiev wanted to bring a spirit of fun to music: he experimented with bi-tonality and used farcical plots in his ballets and operas, to which he wrote delightful music. Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály both drew on the folk music traditions which they saw around them, integrating these folk melodies into their works. Of particular interest here is Zoltán Kodály’s contribution to music education, which has resulted in his ideas being copied and reworked for schoolchildren everywhere. Bartók, for his part, succeeded in bringing together Western music (harmonic overtone systems and French impressionism) and Oriental folk music (the pentatonic scale).

Krzysztof Penderecki has been part of the modern experimental group, which, for example, includes John Cage, trying to establish what form late 20<sup>th</sup> century music should take.

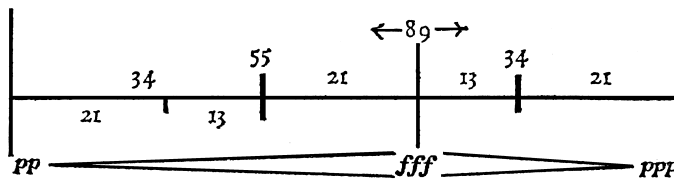
Another way to think about Eastern European music would be to ask what international contribution it has made. Of the above-mentioned composers, many have added to the international classical canon, and are played regularly by Western orchestras as well as by amateur groups and solo performers. Works by Stravinsky, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Szymanowski, Bartók, and Janáček are now part of the everyday fare of musicians, and recordings of their works are available in music shops worldwide. In the educational context we find the material provided by Kodály and Ševčík still relevant and in print for the training and improvement of youngsters and learners. Apart from these names one might mention the earlier generation of Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakof, Mussorgsky, Liszt, Dvořák, Smetana, and a host of others from Eastern Europe who in the nineteenth century provided the West with fresh impetus and new models.

---

33 In M. D. Calvocoressi, *A Survey of Russian Music*, London: Penguin, 1944, p. 93.

## Appendix 1

Bartok's use of Fibonacci's system:<sup>34</sup>



34 From Ernő Lendvai, *Béla Bartók, An Analysis of his Music*. London: Kahn & Averill, 1971.