
Letter to the Editor

From Guy Rickards

In the light of the growing interest in the music of Nikolai Roslavets, seen most recently in his inclusion in the South Bank's 'Russian Spring' festival (reviewed by David Wright in *Tempo* 177) and the CD issue of the Piano Trio No. 3, what is still less than clear is what precisely caused his total eclipse from Soviet musical life – at least in Western Russia (far worse than anything Shostakovich was later to endure). While works such as *Aux heures de la nouvelle lune* and the string quartets (both included in 'Russian Spring'; why did the *Tempo* review omit the fine single-movement Third Quartet?) were undoubtedly radical for the period, especially in Russia, it is the later, mellower Violin Concerto that is usually cited as the reason for his exile. Yet the Stalinist terror was at that time years away and more advanced music was both composed in Russia without censure and welcomed from Western Europe during the later 1920s. Though censure did indeed arrive, Roslavets had by then been safely mewed up in Soviet Central Asia for the best part of a decade, so it seems to me that there is a large chunk missing from the equation. I cannot imagine many in the audience at the première finding the work so offensive – even the boorish *Man of Steel* – as to merit internal

banishment for the composer. Indeed, its gentle style is winning and close to the classic Russian concertos of Tchaikovsky, Glazunov, even Konius, for all the intricate chromaticism of some parts of the work which would have passed most listeners by (and would do today, I am sure, if so much were not made of it).

Roslavets's attempts at chromatic systemization bring obvious parallels to mind with Schoenberg, Hauer, Valen, et al, but to my ears relate back to Scriabin as much as anything and certainly retain a distinctly Russian character. Schoenberg was not yet the Great Formalist Bugbear so the language of the Concerto in itself hardly seems a legitimate cause. Perhaps *glasnost* will extend further to reveal this particular skeleton: in the meantime one can but listen to the music in wonderment, and try to forget the apparent catastrophic consequences of its composition.

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Tempo intends to return to the subject of Roslavets and his forms of serial working during 1992, when at least a partial answer to Mr Rickards's question regarding his political fate may be forthcoming. - Ed.

News Section

Composers

RUPERT BAWDEN. *The Devil's Workshop* (première)—30 July/King's Lynn Festival/Ernst Kovacic (vln), Susan Tomes (pno).

JOHN BULLER is completing an opera on *The Bacchae* for performance next year at the London Coliseum.

DIANA BURRELL. *Lucifer* (première)—2 July/Almeida Festival/Madeleine Mitchell (vln), Peter Lawrence (tpt).

ELLIOTT CARTER. *Scrivo in Vento* for solo flute (première)—20 July/Avignon Festival/Robert Aitken (fl).

JOHN CASKEN. Cello Concerto (première)—7 July/Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival/Heinrich Schiff (vlc),

Northern Sinfonia. (UK première)—11 July/Lichfield Festival/same artists.

ROBERTO GERHARD (d.1970) *Cancionero de Pedrell* (US première)—26 September/Merkin Hall, New York/Angelina Reaux (sop), Music Today Ens. c. John McGlenn.

GARETH GLYN. Symphony (première)—16 October/Swansea Festival/BBC Welsh SO c. Tadaaki Otaka.

HENRYK MIKOLAJ GORECKI. *Three Lullabies* (première)—2 August/Lerchenborg Festival, Denmark/Ars Nova c. Bo Holten. String Quartet No.2 (première)—18 August/Schleswig-Holstein Festival/Kronos Quartet. (US première)—9 November/New York, Alice Tully Hall/Kronos Quartet.