

VALERY ALEFF

WHAT IS MUSIC?

I have never asked myself how I should live or whether I had better not live at all. Unlike Hamlet, I have never been duty bound to avenge somebody, be it my father or friend; or indeed myself. Nor have I ever tried to communicate with anybody, seeking to win a few battles and conquer the world, music lovers – many of whom are music haters now – and common, all-too-common readers. Even now I think only in terms of victory over myself, over my intrinsic death and sloth, over the melancholy I share with Samuel Johnson whose notes on Shakespeare I do not approve of. As for my life, untouched, unretouched by a latter-day James Boswell, I have enjoyed every minute of it because I am living through each minute, playing it on the piano, describing it in minute detail.

When I take the trouble to analyse the word ‘recognition’ in the light of what is going on today, I realise that both Hegel and Kojève underestimated the sheer pleasure of staying in bed, of having breakfast and dinner almost horizontally, under the protection of a blanket and propped up by a stack of pillows; so that, under the circumstances, the Hamletian question becomes, ‘To get up or not to get up?’ Busoni and Rachmaninoff, Toscanini and Furtwängler keep all living and kicking and thumping performers at bay. I can throw my head back in ecstasy without leaving my bed; it is enough to sit up in it. And I am not likely to forget that in the Seventies I studied under Gilels. Why should I listen to updated, downgraded Mozart and Brahms?

I do get up and do what I have to do, even if no one calls me to say I have to fly to another continent and play a few Beethoven sonatas.

Neither in my life nor in my literary works are there plots, cliffhangers and other tricks of the trade. Why should I model my style upon the common reader’s great expectations and teeny-weeny-mindedness? Shakespeare and Dante are worthier of my attention.

Once upon a time, after a concert in the United States, a man told me, ‘Tonight you taught me how to listen to silence.’ I hope there is a second such man somewhere; and a third.

INTRODUCTION

FOREWORD

The pieces included in this book were mostly written for concert programmes and CDs, depending on what I performed on those occasions. And since my repertoire does not feature the music prior to Bach's watershed achievements, those canons and aesthetics remain beyond the bounds of my investigations, though not really beyond my ken. Time and energy permitting, some day I may write about the composers I cherish dearly without being able to perform them either on stage or privately: Gesualdo, Monteverdi, Guillaume de Machaut. In the process of describing *their* works, however, I may encounter problems which are easily dealt with in the realm of nineteenth-century music: Romantic composers are not impervious to the scrutiny of a poet trying to eschew a purely analytical approach to music. 'Starting with Beethoven,' wrote Mahler, 'there is no new music that does not have an internal programme.' Indeed one gets the feeling that Schubert's works do all they can to take centre stage in a sort of drama played out for our benefit whenever we are honestly determined to listen only to notes and not to ideas or poetical images. But the music of Palestrina, for example, is rather unwieldy in this respect, for it creates a self-sufficient, self-contained world of sounds governed by themselves and evoking no ideas, no images, except those associated with God and angels. And even a prolix contemporary writer is not likely to speak about angels for hours and hours.

Would my present essays be different had I taken into consideration Dufai, Obrecht and the Gregorian chant? *About Interpretation* terminates with the statement that every piece of music encompasses the entire range of its past and future performances as well as performers: singers, pianists and conductors. Had I at any point given thought to, say, Orlando di Lasso, I would not have included interpreters in this infinity for the simple reason that his works do not require the interference of human beings with their lives and passions, their torments and joys: not every piece of music is a playground for performers. And in Dante's days the Gregorian chant was supposed to encompass the whole of humanity, not only the people who did not sing out of tune.

In the essay *Madness* I venture a hypothesis that may shock some purists: Even in the hands of a deranged person Bach's music neither becomes a target for psychiatrists nor makes us shudder with abhorrence. Even to a greater degree the same goes for Bach's predecessors, at least for the pieces correlated with the Church's rituals: God takes no notice of jerks and quirks of the human mind.

'Does a music score look like the starry heaven? Is that what "the music of the spheres" means?' The pages of sixteenth-century music resemble the starry heaven much more than Beethoven's scores with their ever-repeated bars, slurs, etc. On the other hand, Pierre de la Rue

and Josquin des Prez confided to paper only part of what was to be performed—in contrast to Mahler who would write down *everything*. Can't we hear in those invisible notes the music of the spheres?

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

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Moscow

AUTHENTIC NEWS

Some think that music is nowhere because nightingales' songs have nothing to do with Haydn's quartets. Of course music is somewhere, considering that our composers continue to offer us their opuses without which our life would be rather poor, for nightingales are not as ingenious and infinite as Wagner and Bruckner. Some say that music is our invention, our contraption – something like a luxurious car we drive from time to time, when in the mood for going somewhere. The point is, when getting in touch with music (in all senses of the word) we do not go anywhere; we remain rooted to the spot. I suppose that Parmenides would have been rather pleased upon reading this hypothesis of mine. Let me put it bluntly: music is everywhere and what you are supposed to do when getting in touch with it – your sense of touch should necessarily acquire the sixth sense – comes down to listening: six ears instead of one. Nine souls instead of one.

According to statistics, Soviet writers drank six bottles of vodka for every one consumed by composers. Six times more, as they say nowadays, shaking their heads as if they could see six corpses instead of a solitary mummy. Doctors and commentators might ask themselves why this phenomenon sees the light of day. This light and day permit you to see six corpses on the one side, and only one corpse on the other side. Why do you drink yourself to death? You are addicted to white pages and letters and words that come out of nothing. But whenever you yield to the temptation and cover these pages from top to bottom you become a traitor, an intruder: you deform the world where you live and enjoy your life, to some degree. You see something or somebody and you attempt to describe these two phenomena (call them what you wish) and thereby add a finishing touch to creation. Do you think the world needs a finishing touch? Isn't it finished? Is God really in the making?

Michelangelo was preoccupied with the way he encroached upon God's prerogatives, whenever his statues represented either prophets or heroes. Or anybody, anything else. These heroes or anti-heroes lived around the sculptor and they did not need his intervention, his art to go on in their own sweet ways. Or they lived in the memory of someone who knew them personally or through his grandmother's tales. There are no tales about Beethoven's symphonies because you cannot recount them; and yet they are everywhere, as it were. Beethoven revealed them and that is one of the greatest revelations one can experience in the world. Moreover, it is not a *fake* revelation, representation. It is *authentic* and no grandmother will ever contradict his *Seventh Symphony*. But some grandmother might say, after much memory-searching, while looking at Michelangelo's masterpiece, 'David was different. I don't recognise him anyway.' And the

sculptor might have thought that God would talk to him along the same lines at the Last Judgment. But even God will never say to Beethoven, 'This is not *my Sixth Symphony*.' Because it *is* His *Sixth Symphony*. Or His *Quartet op. 132*. One might conclude that music is the astral body of the world. One might say that literature is just fake news, hugely fake news. The same goes for art in general, with the exception of music.

THE ESSENCE OF MUSIC

Once, when I was at primary school, our history teacher was taken ill. For two or three lessons he was replaced by a middle-aged man who sacrificed Mesopotamia or Ancient Egypt for the sake of one rhetorical question, 'What is history?' The whole lesson was devoted to this question: the new teacher would approach it from different sides. He did not say a word about the Chinese and their devotion to chronology, nor did he touch upon the absence of dates in the early history of India. He did not so much as mention the names of Hegel and Joachim of Fiore with whom our history might have begun. He just contented himself with asking one question only, 'What is history?' We are sitting in a classroom. An ordinary lesson. Does this event belong to human history? Is it an event at all? If so, what kind of event is it? Is the life of Nicholas Ivanov an event, a historical episode, however short and insignificant?

After such questions one was likely to question one's own existence. At long last, after much trial and error, we answered the question, but I have forgotten the answer and even the explanations leading to it. What I do recollect is a litany of questions; a dozen of them went unanswered. I wonder if my love for questioning originates in that memorable event—along with my unscientific indifference to answers.

The question 'What is music?' has been haunting me ever since I tried my hand at writing about the pieces I perform as a pianist and a conductor. Of course I attempt to answer them, but out of those answers sprout other questions, more tantalising than the former. What about a sound one may hear in the fog, in the suburbs of Moscow? A drawn-out, solitary, sorrowful sound? Is it music? John Cage used to ask himself bizarre questions such as, 'Would a piece of music created by a truck grow more harmonious if it drove near a Conservatory?' Would it sound mournful in the vicinity of a cemetery? And what about the phenomena located *beyond* the realm of sounds? Are we allowed to introduce them into the sphere of music? Is a flourish of my pen musical? And the pattern of my thoughts? Do they sound more musical when I write about music? Or is it advisable to disengage oneself from all occupations, however musical, and keep one's thoughts at bay, immersing one's brain in silence? Sometimes I am under the impression that a memory is more musical than an actual event or a thought focused upon the present instant, for our memory is full of sounds that seem to envelop the past.

When preparing this book for publication, I hit upon the idea of including in it one of my long stories, but eventually changed my mind on the grounds that an unpublished story contains more music than any number of printed words. Would I have answered the question 'What is music?' if I had never put it either to myself or anybody else? Hardly. Even silence and the void

are of no assistance, let alone Hegel or indeed any Chinese philosopher. Perhaps the flower that the Buddha held out one day is nearer to the answer than silence or a long rambling, all the more so as he did not say anything to the crowd awaiting a regular sermon. But flowers and birds are too easily associated with music, and this superficial link is bound to deflect our attention away from the core of sounds. What is essential in music? Is any piece of music essential, definitive? One word is often more important than another. A declaration of love hinges on the word 'love' and this word ends by obliterating the preliminary remarks some of which might have referred to mushrooms or clouds. In the realm of music, however, every sound is momentous: Schoenberg's twelve-tone system is the most eloquent demonstration of this equality. So we might conclude that music speaks neither about clouds nor mushrooms. But is it a valid statement? What if music speaks *only* about clouds with which incidentally it has a lot in common? It is as distant and intangible as clouds. And at the same time it is so incredibly close to us that we may almost feel it in our hands. But even an object lying in the palms of one's hands cannot be described with utmost precision, let alone probed to its very core.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

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Moscow

THE ANATOMY OF MUSIC

Why does music produce such an effect on our souls? Why do tears well up in our eyes? Why do we feel something in the pit of our stomachs? Do we feel anything in the pit of our stomachs or is it a figment of our imagination? Is the effect produced by music only a figment of our imagination? Does music act upon our imagination or upon our hearts and souls? Does it make a physical impact or a psychological one? Do our hearts beat in rhythm with the music we happen to hear? What do we think during a concert? Do we think in words, in images or in sounds when a piece of music is performed in our presence? How do our thoughts correspond to this piece of music? Is there any correlation between them? Do we think at all during those moments of musical delectation? Do our legs or arms feel anything? Is the human heart the most appropriate receptacle of organised sounds? Is music merely an organisation of sounds? Why do certain groups of organised sounds reach into us deeper than other groups of sounds? How would an unorganised piece of music affect human beings? Does it exist at all? Could a great composer write an unorganised piece of music? Would such a piece endanger and indeed harm his hearing, his mind? Would he lose the capacity to reason soundly? Would the health of a concert-goer be in danger if he or she indulged in unorganised music? How to recreate chaos by means of music? Are only mad composers capable of tackling such a problem? Or only chaotic composers? What is the difference between them? Do their hearts beat differently? Is it necessary for the human heart to get involved in music-making? Does everyday life influence our comprehension of music? How? What events are instrumental in bringing us closer to music? What events are liable to take us away from music? Can music estrange us from life? Can it make us hate life in any shape or form? Are we likely to fall in love with nature upon listening to Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*? Does this piece have anything in common with the gardens of Kyoto? Does the feeling of love help us understand the works of so-called Romantic composers? Does the feeling of hatred prevent us from enjoying music to the utmost? Is music a mere expression of love? Are dissonant chords an expression of hatred? Are they its aftermath or harbinger? Does sad music give rise to sad emotions? Can one feel happy when listening to sad music? Does one always feel happy when listening to a masterpiece? Is sadness the yardstick by which we can measure the value of music? Does music reflect the fleeting character of life phenomena? Does the pace of music bespeak the shortness of human life? Does music move in pauses or come to a standstill? Does life come to a standstill during a concert? Do we feel the futility of life when the sounds we hear die away? Do we realise in those moments the fragility of love? How does the phenomenon of catharsis operate in the sphere of music? What does 'the music of the spheres' mean? Do

inanimate objects radiate inaudible music? Does inaudible music affect our hearts? Is human skin the most appropriate receptacle of inaudible music? Can dogs hear inaudible music? Can dogs appreciate inaudible music? Can dogs appreciate audible music? Do their reactions—barking, howling—mean anything? Do their musical reactions have anything in common with ours? Do birds create music? Do dogs create music? Do animals communicate through music? Can humans communicate through music? How does a quarrel sound in terms of music? How does a declaration of love sound? Does the billing and cooing of a woman in love have anything to do with music? And what about our reaction to her billing and cooing? Is it comparable to what we experience in concert halls? What does the expression 'the music of love' mean? Is love a piece of music? Is it composed in a minor or a major key? Is love a symphony or a sonata? Or a trio? Or a quartet? What is the source of music? Did it exist before the birth of Time? Did it move in those immeasurable days? Did it remain motionless? Did it limit itself to pauses, to silence? Did only one chord resound through the uncreated universe? One chord, one sound? Can we reproduce this sound today? What would be the result of its resuscitation? Would Time disappear from the universe? Would the universe itself disappear? Is there such a thing as timeless space where only one sound can be heard? What does our planet sound like? Is its music unique, inimitable, or do all planets sing in unison? Do angels sing in unison? Do they sing at all? Where did music originate? Does a piece of music resemble a river? Is it a sound river, a river of sounds? Does a music score look like the starry heaven? Is that what 'the music of the spheres' means? Does music resemble anything? Does it occupy a special niche in the edifice of Creation? Are humans worthy of music? Is it a gift of God? Is it a gift of Polyhymnia? Can music be taken from us as a punishment for our sins? What would become of us without music? Would we lose our ears or our hearts or our souls? Would we look like humans in a world of silence? Would we act like humans or at least like animals? Would we love without music? Would we die without music? Can music be replaced by poetry? Are rhymed verses closer to music than free ones? Is music older than poetry? What instrument did Adam play? Is the human voice the first and best instrument? Is the Aeolian harp an instrument? Who plays it? How did the Big Bang sound? Was it the first piece of music? How will the last piece of music sound? Will it sound at all? Will it be silent? Are we listening to the last piece of music? Is chaos a piece of music? Is absurdity a piece of music? Is death a piece of music? Is music eternal?

1995

Versailles

COMPOSERS

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

HOMAGE TO BACH

I

Any one of your fugues
Is a library.
Every page of yours
Is as huge as *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*.

Only a blank sheet of paper
Can represent your music,
For it contains everything:
A Shakespeare sonnet,
A Webern cantata...

II

What did I do this morning?
I took a bath and drank
Two cups of coffee.
There was no milk in the fridge.
There was some sugar in the kitchen cupboard,
But I used none: I'm on a diet.
There was an English film on a subscription channel.
I watched it for a while, then switched the TV off.
An ordinary morning, yet it can be found
In one of your preludes.

III

Music is supposed to be an ideal, absolute art
Divorced from the baseness of human existence.
A piece of music doesn't remind us of reality:
No landscapes, no small talk, but a skilful,
Quasi-mathematical succession of consonances
And dissonances that elevate our matter-shackled
Soul and sublimate our drab, dreary existence.

Your harmonies

Are ordinary and extraordinary. 'Burmese pagodas
 Have nothing to do with religion. They're simply
 Treasure chambers,' said Thohanbwa. Your *H.T.K.*
 (*Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* in Conservatory
 Slang) is both a treasure chamber and a prayer.
 And also a walk between my bathroom and my study.

IV

According to the *Glass Palace Chronicle*,
 The Ananda Temple had its origins
 In the visit to Kyanzittha's palace
 Of eight Indian monks. They informed the king
 That they had once lived in the legendary
 Nandamula cave temple. Kyanzittha,
 Always fascinated by Buddhist tales,
 Invited the monks to return to his palace
 During the rainy season
 To tell him more
 About this imaginary province.
 Through the potency of meditation
 The monks made the mythical landscape
 Appear before Kyanzittha's eyes.
 (From a tourist guide.)

In short,

The king had a dream-temple built
 In his kingdom. What temple would have appeared
 On the hot, dry plain of central Burma
 Had your music been played for Kyanzittha?
 The same temple, I suppose—
 A dream around which
 One can walk for hours on end.

The Ananda Temple.

V

You encompassed the whole of human existence

(Though not in the way soap-operas do).

A down-to-earth person, you were closer to Heaven

Than those who have their heads in the clouds.

Anyway Heaven is not as far from Earth

As one might assume.

SPACE

Once, on television, a famous Russian poet ventured the opinion that Time was far more important to writers than Space. I watched the programme in the company of literati and glitterati none of whom took exception to his grandiloquent view. They probably thought (as I did at the time) that Space lying before us like an open book appeals more to travellers than to writers. The latter prefer to explore enigmatic or, better still, inaccessible lands and realms. And Time is perhaps the most intriguing phenomenon in this world of ours. Only our memories and guilty consciences enable us to revisit or revise it; and these forays into the realm of Time are so intangible and imaginative as to become a valuable source of material for a writer to draw upon.

Yet Space should not be despised or relegated to the rat-swarmed cellar of a writer's ivory tower. In the lecture on modern literature that I recently delivered in Moscow and St Petersburg I stressed the importance of Space in Samuel Beckett's novels, in Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* and in *Das Schloß* and *Der Bau* by Franz Kafka.

The following passage from Beckett's *Malone Dies* can give some idea of how flexible, elusive, enigmatic and inaccessible Space is, when handled by a writer of genius:

Strange, I don't feel my feet any more, my feet feel nothing any more, and a mercy it is. And yet I feel they are beyond the range of the most powerful telescope. Is that what is known as having a foot in the grave? And similarly for the rest. For a mere local phenomenon is something I would not have noticed, having been nothing but a series or rather a succession of local phenomena all my life, without any result. But my fingers too write in other latitudes and the air that breathes through my pages and turns them without my knowing, when I doze off, so that the subject falls far from the verb and the object lands somewhere in the void, is not the air of this second-last abode, and a mercy it is. And perhaps on my hands it is the shimmer of the shadows of leaves and flowers and the brightness of a forgotten sun.

Actually, in Beckett's works Time is deprived of its perspective or perspectives—the past and the future; it is rather flat, being mostly confined to the present moment within which the hero attempts to disentangle his thoughts and sensations or merely crawls on all fours through the mud.

Something similar happens in Bach's works.

Bach seldom predicted the musical future of the world as if leaving this arduous task to Beethoven who was indeed the greatest prophet in the history of music: the composers born after him were all, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced by his various styles.

Likewise Bach's links with the past are neither telltale nor significant. What *can* be found in his works, however, is the whole range of human feelings, hopes, pleasures and catastrophes—human Space, as it were.

An enticing mixture of secular and religious sentiments, which provides him with a psychological foundation for his music, is exhaustive enough to cover not only the upper regions of the human Microcosm—Mind, Spirit, *nous*—but also its more prosaic parts. And these parts—our everyday life—are rendered with such eloquence, with such infinitesimal nuances, that even a most obstinate believer in pure music cannot help feeling Bach's works as an object (a photograph hanging on a wall) or a familiar sentiment. One is even likely to recognise one's grandfather in a fugue or a cat in a prelude—in the sounds that seem to obey only musical laws. Compared with what other composers remind us of—our moods, our love, our despair—Bach is very realistic, not to say materialistic. The following poem is another homage to Bach: after all, Joyce is Bach's literary successor.

A SHOUT IN THE STREET

A Homage to James Joyce

Staircases, staircases...

Why don't we stay on the same floor?

Up and down. We spend our time

On various stairs, large and small.

Why don't we stay

On the earth,

On its hospitable surface?

Lifts, lifts, lifts...

They pierce clouds and intrude

Upon Zeus's privacy.

Olympus is cluttered

With old lifts.

Dressed in white,

Old lift attendants

*Carry around
Plates and decanters.*

*I prefer horizontal staircases—
The ones that lead up nowhere,
Not even to the end of the road.*

*So much can happen
On the way.*

Bach seems to have more *temporal* links in the realm of literature than in music. One of his forerunners is Dante whose *Commedia*, in T.S. Eliot's words, 'expresses everything in the way of emotion, between depravity's despair and the beatific vision, that man is capable of experiencing. It is therefore a constant reminder to the poet, of the obligation to explore, to find words for the inarticulate, to capture those feelings which people can hardly even feel, because they have no words for them...'

These horizontal staircases are mirrored and *justified* by the most ambitious staircase ever constructed—the Tower of Babel that all artists re-create in their works, in the very attempt at creation:

'And if I were to stand up again, from which God preserve me, I fancy I would fill a considerable part of the universe.'

In the last paragraphs of *Le Temps retrouvé* Proust puts his characters on stilts which, being a metaphor for their lifespans, go down through Time, piercing and transfixing it. (A wonderful interpenetration of Time and Space—a close encounter of the *first* kind!) And he himself happens to be perched on the last step of his private Tower of Babel—throughout the novel.

Bach is of course a master builder. He specialises in towers, Gothic cathedrals, modest country churches, bourgeois houses and even huts. What I seek to emphasise has no relation to the so-called architectonic qualities of his works, which are evident to anyone whose knowledge of both music and architecture exceeds the level of charity concerts and haphazard snapshots; at this point I am solely concerned with the *tangibility* of Bach's works. One actually walks inside

them, touching their walls and occasionally sitting down on one of the chairs scattered all around their spacious rooms. How about a tankard of beer or a cup of coffee?

Even Bach's God is tangible. In his famous book Albert Schweitzer devotes a lot of pages to the analysis of how Bach conveys the *literary* meaning of religious texts. His crowd yells out and mocks their victim, being composed of simple folk rather than singers wearing tails and evening gowns. Luckily enough, those yokels can also sing a beautiful chorale.

In a sense, *Matthäus Passion* is an ideal film soundtrack. And an efficient prayer reaching far beyond 'the range of the most powerful telescope'.

MADNESS

The scope of Bach's music is so wide as to encompass the areas of which the composer himself knew nothing or next to nothing. For some reason I believe he was immune to the allurements of madness. At least there are no vestiges of it in the numerous books I consulted when preparing for the Bach Competition in Leipzig (1968).

Last autumn I paid a visit to my friend Vadim Sukhanov in Munich. We spent a few days together, practising for our Brahms recording. Right before our departure for Switzerland I chanced upon an odd-looking box which contained six cassettes—the excerpts from a few recitals Dimitri Gaiduk had given during his stay in Germany.

Gaiduk studied at the Moscow Conservatory, sharing activities and troubles with his fellow students; like some of them, he aspired to settle down in the West. For a while he stayed in Germany, in Southern Bavaria. There are at least three versions of his death.

The cassettes I heard in Munich testify to his mental illness. He plays a number of preludes and fugues (sometimes only preludes without fugues), the first movement of Beethoven's op. 111, Mozart's sonatas, Ravel's *Ondine*. Most of the recordings are unbearable. Not only in terms of music. Involuntarily the listener becomes a spy—an eavesdropper, at best: he is forced to hear what usually goes on in the secrecy of a bedroom, within the bounds of the unconscious; something that never surfaces in public life, in concert halls, in theatres.

All these recordings are *physically* unbearable except Bach's preludes and fugues. It is as if there was enough room for madness in them: madness, failure, loneliness, wrong notes, rhythmical inexactitude—the pathetic plight of a pianist who lost his gift, his friends and finally his life. Bach accepts and includes *everything*.

1995

Versailles

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

I

'Art formulates questions but gives no answers.' I heard this maxim a long time ago—at the age of fifteen or sixteen, when I began to take an interest in cinema, in the great film directors of our time: Antonioni, Fellini, Bergman. We were strolling along Tverskaya Street, my friend and I. One of our customary walks. And a turning point in my life. In the days of *L'avventura* and *8½* there were many turning points in our lives—not only on account of our age. Everything moved so fast in the sixties. My friend had read one of Bergman's interviews and was eager to share his knowledge with other film buffs. 'Art formulates questions but gives no answers.' Ever since that memorable stroll I have come across many versions of the same idea; and my novels—enigmas in their own right—are teeming with questions of all sorts. '*Das Fragen ist die Frömmigkeit des Denkens*,' as Heidegger put it. Questioning is the piety of thought. And the piety of art.

Today we are too fond of clear-cut solutions and exhaustive explanations. Writers and film directors are supposed to shed light even on those nooks and crannies which should remain dark for the sake of perspective. And readers as well as cinema goers should remain in the dark about this and that for the sake of the same perspective, the same space, the same labyrinth. Alas, there are no more dark ladies either in sonnets or in novels. We have forgotten the aroma of unanswerable questions. And yet every masterpiece is an unanswerable question. And so is every artist of genius.

In Pushkin's short tragedy *Mozart and Salieri* there are many unanswerable questions. Actually it ends with such a question: 'Is an evil deed compatible with genius?' (Gesualdo, who was unquestionably a composer of genius, killed his wife. But does this murder answer the question?) In the opening monologue Salieri ruminates over his music-oriented life and asks a crucial question: 'Why would God choose an obscene child to be his instrument?' That is how Peter Shäffer formulates the same question in *Amadeus*.

Was Mozart an obscene child? Why should God have chosen Salieri in preference to Mozart? Salieri was an honest, hard-working musician: neither Pushkin nor Shäffer deny him that. What is more, his musical erudition did not prevent him from relishing Mozart's masterpieces with every fibre of his being (with every fibre of his *soul*, as the Russians would say)—a rare, priceless gift. At the end of Pushkin's tragedy Mozart says that if everyone could feel harmony as Salieri does, the world might come to an end, no one caring about the base needs of life, everyone luxuriating in art. What a pity the world will never come to an end through art. As a matter of fact, to paraphrase T. S. Eliot, such an end might turn out to be a magnificent beginning.

Why should an honest, virtuous (and virtuoso) composer be given preference over an obscene child? For argument's sake let us admit that Mozart *was* an obscene child—'a boastful, lustful, smutty, infantile boy,' as Salieri puts it when airing his grievances against God in Shäffer's play.

The problem is not as nonsensical as might appear at first glance. Even at the turn of the century obscenity, spitefulness and impudence—let alone evil deeds—were regarded by some moralists as incompatible with art. In 1897 a Russian philosopher, Vladimir Solovyov, wrote an article entitled *The Destiny of Pushkin* in which he criticised the poet for his epigrams, among other things. He also maintained that Pushkin died not of his wound but because he took a shot at his adversary, Georges d'Anthès, during the fatal duel in 1837. In other words, he died of his sins: he was quick-tempered, vengeful and intolerant. Luckily, on his deathbed, he underwent a kind of spiritual metamorphosis—according to Zhukovski and Vyazemski. He even pardoned his murderer. Would Mozart have pardoned Salieri had he anachronistically read *Amadeus* or Pushkin's masterpiece?

II

Can music express forgiveness, reconciliation? Can music express anything outside itself? At the end of *Le nozze di Figaro* a miracle happens—a miracle that should be recognised and registered by the Church, in my opinion. The Count asks his wife's forgiveness; and she pardons him. This reconciliation, as far as the music is concerned, comes out of the blue: it has very little in common with both the Count's character and the rest of the opera. The contrast is all the more striking since Mozart habitually excels in the characterisation of his operatic figures. (The reconciliation in *Così fan tutte* is half-hearted and thus in keeping with the characters and the plot.) The episode is nothing short of a revelation, of a divine vision that often comes out of the blue. Was Mozart capable of the feeling he incarnated in *Le nozze di Figaro* (and in many other works)? Did Mozart the man live up to his own musical standards?

What did he experience on his deathbed? He was engaged in writing the *Requiem* which, to Salieri's bitter disappointment, he did not finish. Incidentally, Salieri's idea to appropriate the *Requiem* and the way he notes it down at Mozart's dictation are the weakest points in *Amadeus*. (As it transpired after Mozart's death, the *Requiem* was commissioned by an amateur musician, Count Franz von Walsegg, who ordered works from professional composers and performed them under his own name—hence Shäffer's idea. But Salieri was a *professional* musician whose style could not change overnight.) Pushkin, on the other hand, made his protagonist listen to the *Requiem*—a stroke of genius on his part, considering that Salieri had just poisoned Mozart. In one of Agatha Christie's

novels a dying man paints a portrait of his murderer, bringing out the latter's malignant, triumphant smile. In Pushkin's tragedy the murderer sheds tears—for the first time in his life. And the dying man plays his own *Requiem* and watches the tears run down his murderer's cheeks. Incidentally, Salieri might have been outraged by my cheeky juxtaposition of Agatha Christie and Pushkin.

In Bach's vocal music there are many examples of pictorial symbolism: he would write, say, a rising scale to 'depict' resurrection. This kind of symbolism is not frequent in Mozart's works. But the last passage he composed is perhaps the best example of pictorial or spiritual symbolism in the history of music.

Quo resurget ex favilla

Judicandus homo reus.

(From the dust of earth returning,

Man for judgement must prepare him.)

Carried by a heartrending, pathetic, sublime sequence of upward-moving chords, Mozart musically—literally rises to heaven from his deathbed, from the dust of earth. (From the dust of earth to stardust.) Is it a coincidence that Mozart's last creative élan was devoted to the rendering of these words?

III

Solovyov laughed at the people who thought that Pushkin would have written many other masterpieces had *he* killed Georges d'Anthès. In his opinion Pushkin might have renounced the world for the purpose of self-reconciliation and repentance. 'Anyway, after the catastrophe, he would have lived for the salvation of his soul and not for poetry.' Obviously Solovyov regarded art as incompatible with a guilty conscience.

Mozart would have written many masterpieces had he lived as long as his supposed murderer—no doubt about that. But *did* he have a guilty conscience? What made him a target for Salieri's accusations? (My Salieri is a cross between Pushkin's and Shäffer's protagonists who are very much alike, as a matter of fact. The latter is much more talkative of course, Shäffer's play being a *long* tragedy.) Incidentally, in his lifetime and after his death Pushkin often played the part of *his* Mozart; he was surrounded by all sorts of Salieris who accused him of being *gulyaka prazdnïy* (an idle reveller), unworthy of the gift that God had bestowed upon him. In their eyes he was 'a boastful, lustful, smutty, infantile boy'. In a way, *Mozart and Salieri* is a requiem that Pushkin wrote for himself.

*Confutatis maledictis,
 Flammis acribus addictis
 (When the wicked are confounded,
 Doomed to flames of woe unbounded)*

What the music suggests, however, is more akin to bone-crushing than to flames; as if the Commendatore were giving his victim a big bear hug. In *Amadeus* the Commendatore is played by Mozart's late father who seems to have been born at the beginning of the twentieth century—in Freud's gloomy imagination.

IV

Do Freud and Mozart have anything in common? Both have come to be associated with childhood: the former turned it into a breeding ground for complexes while the latter created a musical counterpart of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. (And Freud's teaching is a psychoanalytical counterpart of the shadow that the Marshalsea Prison casts over its inmates in *Little Dorrit*.) Mozart contributed a lot to the notion of childhood, which makes us smile whenever a child appears within our field of vision—even if it is a naughty boy jumping on a Louis XV armchair or a capricious girl. Ivan Karamazov says that children are innocent and quite different from grown ups until the age of seven; St Augustine, on the other hand, enumerates the sins of which he was guilty in his cradle. Mozart would have agreed with Dostoevsky, I suppose. And he might have prolonged the biological song of innocence until the age of eighteen or nineteen, disregarding the high rate of juvenile delinquency. So the faces of children that Bergman shows in his *Zauberflöte* are not out of place; all those children sitting in the audience actually seem to take part in the opera.

The *Requiem* is Mozart's song of experience; and yet even in the *Requiem* I feel something unmistakably childish—the fear of the dark, for instance. Sure enough, the 'black man' who, according to legend, commissioned the work was an embodiment of the dark; or an embodiment of Fate, to use the terminology of an experienced human being. In *Amadeus* the 'black man' is played by Salieri trying to pass himself off as the ghost of Mozart's father. But no father is powerful and omnipresent enough to personify Fate. Even the gods are subservient to it. Actually the 'son' was far more affected by the colour of his commissioner's clothes than by the man himself. Had the latter been wearing a green or a brown suit, the composer might have lived for another 20 or 30 years, eventually letting his fame catch up with him.

In the first scene of Pushkin's tragedy Mozart comes to Salieri's house in order to perform a piece he composed during a sleepless night. Before sitting down at the piano he asks his host to imagine someone...Mozart himself—a little younger...in love, not too much...with a beautiful girl...or with a friend—with Salieri, for instance...Suddenly: an otherworldly apparition, the sudden dark or something like that...In this passage Pushkin brilliantly outlines the two main aspects of Mozart's music. '*Videnye grobov*' which I translated as 'an otherworldly apparition' is also a graveyard ghost or a landscape one chances upon in the Hereafter. The second part of Mozart's (and Pushkin's) description is studiously vague and corresponds to what Kierkegaard calls angst—a feeling that has no definite object. The 'black man' might be regarded as an embodiment of angst. (A contemporary writer would supply a much more detailed and explicit description of what Salieri should imagine while listening to Mozart's piece.) Through experiencing angst one is supposed to leap from innocence to sin and, if the challenge of Christianity is accepted, from guilt to faith. I am not sure Mozart accomplished any Kierkegaardian ritual, but both Pushkin and Shäffer seem to have written their versions of *Crime and Punishment*, which might be entitled *Sin and Punishment*. (*Confutatis maledictis*.) What did Mozart sin against? Art, God, his own genius, his father?

Two weeks ago I had a nightmare which would have prompted me to seek a psychoanalyst's advice had I been infatuated with Freud's doctrine. In my bedroom I saw a man whom I instantly recognised as my father; yet he did not look like my father. We quarrelled and I flung an apple at him: there was a bowl of apples on my bedside table. I missed but, luckily for me, there were lots of apples in the bowl. So I picked up another apple and flung it at my father's face. After a while the bowl was empty. My father crumpled in a heap on the floor and I took his pulse to make sure he was dead. Upon awakening I realised that my nightmare had grown out of a desire to get rid of Mozart's father whose presence in *Amadeus* is too obtrusive. And the apples I had used for the purpose seemed to have come from Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* where something similar happens the other way round: it is the father who resorts to apples in order to drive his unfortunate son away from the living room. I shudder at the thought of submitting this nightmare of mine to Freudian analysis.

In some recent biographies of Mozart the role his father played in his life and death is wildly exaggerated; as if the biographers were influenced not only by Freud and his complexes but also by Kafka, by his stories *Die Verwandlung* and *Das Urteil*, by the letter he had written to *his* father. The nightmare I described in the previous paragraph might have shadowed forth my desire to demonstrate how pygmy-like and even grotesque Kafka's father was in comparison with the distant, obscure representatives of Fate that one comes across in his writings: the Castle and its authorities,

the judges, the animals prowling around their burrows. In *Die Verwandlung* the protagonist's sister proves far more obnoxious and malicious than his father who is just an ordinary bully, a second-rate domestic tyrant.

V

Wittgenstein said that Fate (*Schicksal*) played no role in Haydn's or Mozart's music. '*Damit beschäftigt sich diese Musik nicht.*' (That is not the *concern* of this music.) And yet some of Haydn's works sound so inexorable—the finale of the *Funèbre Symphony*, for instance—that I cannot help thinking about them in terms of Fate, of death-oriented Time. I remember a film I saw in Poland thirty years ago. A woman dies and another woman tries to comfort the disconsolate husband. After a while she succeeds and marries the man, becoming a new mother to his children, a boy and a girl. They all go on a picnic; the children romp happily around in the woods; the man and his wife kiss and caress each other, leaning against birch trees. As if nothing had happened. The children kiss their new mother as if she was their *only* mother. But the scene is dominated by the soundtrack—the *Adagio and Fugue in C Minor*, KV 546. Neither the shouts nor the moans of pleasure can be heard. The newborn family and their domestic bliss seem spectral, non-existent. And the music is omnipresent like Time and oblivion which are synonymous with Fate. Incidentally, the film might have sunk into oblivion even faster than the dead woman, but for the ingenious use of Mozart's masterpiece.

The overture to *Don Giovanni* starts with a few awesome chords which are matched only by the beginning and the end of Mahler's *Sixth*. And by the ending of the first movement of Bruckner's *Ninth*. Even the opening of Beethoven's *Fifth*—Fate knocking on the door—pales into insignificance beside them. And the scales following shortly after are unsurpassed in their determination and ruthlessness. Apparently Mozart wrote the overture during the night that preceded the première of his opera. The introduction was taken from the second act, scene 17. Mozart then dozed off and wrote the rest during short periods of wakefulness. Didn't he deserve Salieri's verdict (*Urteil*) on that occasion? Stendhal goes so far as to pretend that one can hear *when* Mozart dozed off.

VI

Salieri must have been shocked and enraged by the discrepancy in Mozart's works: some of them seemed to be composed by a genius of the highest order, others by an idle reveller who was not utterly devoid of musical gifts. Few music lovers are prepared to admit that the greater part of Mozart's heritage consists of works which might have been written by someone else—by another

Salieri. As a matter of fact the idle reveller, the infantile boy, was far more prolific than the genius of the highest order. (With a few exceptions, Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, Bruckner and Mahler composed only masterpieces.) As I said once, when asked to describe Mozart in a few Dickensian words: 'The best and the worst of great composers.'

'You're a god, Mozart. And you're not aware of that,' says Salieri in Pushkin's masterpiece. 'An instrument of God, His incarnation,' says his doppelgänger in *Amadeus*. Only Christ could experience the solitude one hears and feels at the beginning of the *Requiem*—the solitude epitomised by the words: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' But sometimes Mozart was *not* a god. Nor was he an angel on those occasions. In a way, he was a *fallen* angel on those occasions. At least Salieri might have thought so.

When Ludwig II of Bavaria met his idol, Wagner, for the first time, he was surprised and shocked by the discrepancy between the picture of the composer he had painted in his mind and the reality. There stood before him a man of small stature, whose head was abnormally large and whose legs were disproportionately small. Wagner resembled neither Lohengrin nor a great composer. Ludwig had a strange feeling that the man was not Wagner; his Wagner was elsewhere, in another room, in another castle. Something along these lines happens in *Amadeus*. Salieri is curious to know what a man who wrote a symphony at the age of seven looks like in everyday reality. He wanders through a palace where Mozart's music is to be performed and, after a while, spots a lascivious boy playing with a little girl on a carpet, under a pastry-loaded table. Mozart resembles neither an angel nor a great composer.

And yet his music is angelic—the pieces composed by the genius of the highest order. Recently I met an old friend in Munich. We went to the Spatenhaus and had dinner during which he touched on Mozart several times. 'Everybody says his music is angelic. I couldn't care less. He was writing hits, pop music, schlagers. Haydn is much more refined and stimulating. Do you know that Shostakovich too preferred Haydn?' Another friend of mine—we had dinner in Liechtenstein—told me just the opposite: 'I like Haydn of course. But Mozart needs just a few notes to express Haydn's most complicated idea. Angels are not long-winded—they're long-winged. And not too complicated, I suppose. Mozart was long-winged too.' It is noteworthy that angels were mentioned at both dinners.

Another friend of mine was surprised at hearing that, in my opinion, Beethoven was the best exponent of Paradise in music. (We were having dinner in Salzburg, not far from the Mozarteum.) He pointed out that Mozart was a better 'candidate for the job'. 'Beethoven followed in Dante's footsteps, going all the way from Hell to Paradise,' I answered. 'Mozart always stayed in

Paradise...except a few leaves of absence. The journey through Hell and Purgatory offered Beethoven an indispensable perspective.'

Salieri must have been shocked and infuriated by the discrepancy between Mozart's angelic music and his *normal* behaviour. Solovyov, who is a Russian counterpart of Salieri, at least within the bounds of this essay, *was* shocked by the discrepancy between one of the most renowned poems in the Russian language, *Ya pomnyu chudnoe mgnoven'e* (I recollect a wondrous moment), and the way Pushkin referred to the woman who had inspired it: 'That whore of Babylon.' Mozart might have dropped the same remark about Constanzia, when in a frantic or playful mood. At least he might have done so in the atmosphere that pervades *Amadeus*, especially its screen version. But even in *Amadeus* he does not behave like a lascivious boy. Nor does he display any of the characteristics of the idle reveller in Pushkin's short tragedy. And in everyday life, in *his* everyday life, he looked and behaved like a normal human being, I suppose. (And he worked day in, day out.) But only a saint could live up to the standards he established in his music—in the pieces composed by the genius of the highest order. I wonder to which angelic order he belongs now?

Mozart was no saint. He might have been boastful now and then. And frivolous. At least he used three frivolous librettos for his operas. And his detractors lost no time in drawing parallels between the creator and his creations—a time-honoured procedure. '*Don Giovanni* expresses the absolute purity of erotic desire and also the dreams of the soul—beyond any ethical value,' wrote Kierkegaard. Was he more influenced by the subject matter or the music? There is no denying that love in Mozart's operas is rendered so sweetly that the senses ache at it.

Well, whatever the accusations brought against Mozart over two centuries, he was just normal; but by no means vulgar. He was not the boy next door, contrary to what the film *Amadeus* seems to suggest—a misplaced application of the principles associated with democracy. Even Mozart's normality bore the stamp of his genius.

Art is determined by the forces of supply and demand. Are artists of genius needed nowadays? Or just writers and composers next door? A Salierian line of questioning.

On the other hand, I do not object to the plots of Mozart's operas being brought up to date by a gifted stage director. Why should works of art be imprisoned in Time and Space? Why should an updated version of the Marshalsea Prison cast a shadow over them? I like Peter Sellars' staging of *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte* and *Le nozze di Figaro*. I wonder what baroque enthusiasts think about them?

Wittgenstein was very fond of Tolstoy's story *The Three Hermits* which is not out of place in an essay on Mozart. A fisherman rows a bishop across to an island where three hermits have lived for many years. Upon arrival the bishop asks the hermits how they serve God. They answer that the only prayer known to them is: 'Three are we, three are we. Have mercy upon us!' The bishop chuckles and teaches them how to pray. On the way back he suddenly sees the hermits walking on the water in a halo of light. They ask him to repeat the prayer they have forgotten. 'Your own prayer will reach the Lord, men of God,' answers the bishop. 'It is not for me to teach you. Pray for us, sinners.' That is exactly what Salieri should have said to Mozart after hearing or reading one of his best works. Didn't he realise Mozart *could* walk on water? I hope that Solovyov would have proved as sagacious and judicious as the bishop, had he seen Pushkin walking on water.

In the first act of *Amadeus* Constanzia pays a visit to Salieri in order to secure his protection and help. She shows him some of her husband's works. I like neither Shäffer's play nor Forman's film, but I cried as I watched the scene once in London, twice in Paris, and several times on my television screen in Versailles. I recalled hearing *Don Giovanni* for the first time; and the tears I shed that afternoon. A turning point in my life. I am sure Salieri experienced the same feelings.

He was overwhelmed by Mozart's depth and courage—the words used by Pushkin in connection with the piece performed in the first scene of the tragedy. His thoughts were flying at the speed of light to cover the space separating him from *Don Giovanni*, from its mystery. And when at last he came down to earth, to his own body and mind, he realised he had lived through many lives during his interstellar journey. He might have grown much older than I did in the same circumstances: he knew neither Scriabin nor Prokofiev whose works I played at music school. I heard *Don Giovanni* much later—at the age of fifteen.

VIII

Almost everyone entertains the idea that history moves faster and faster. The supposed acceleration of Time was noted in the 1790s by Thomas Malthus and in 1909 by Henry Adams who wrote:

The world did not double or treble its movement between 1800 and 1900, but, measured by any standard...the tension and vibration and volume and so-called progression of society were fully a thousand times greater in 1900 than in 1800—the force had doubled ten times over, and the speed when measured by electrical standards as in telegraphy, approached infinity, and had annihilated both space and time.

Actually the annihilation of Space and Time does not accelerate our time and consequently our lives. Just the opposite happens—our time slows down or stops altogether because we no longer measure it in both our mind and body.

'What would Adams say about the year 2000?' exclaims Stewart Brand (*The Clock of the Long Now*). 'We speak in his terms about the events of decades now, not centuries.' And he adds gleefully: 'The pace of Moore's Law has become the pacesetter for human events.'

In *The Clock of the Long Now*, Moore's Law is formulated thus: 'The number of components (transistors) that can be fitted on a chip doubles every eighteen months.' Stewart Brand also pontificates on Metcalfe's Law (the power of a network grows as the square of the number of users on the net) and Monsanto's Law (the ability to identify and use genetic information is doubling every twelve to twenty-four months). I propose now to expound Mozart's Law.

In te, anima meus, tempora metior. (It is in you, O mind of mine, that I measure Time.) The eleventh book of St Augustine's *Confessionum* often provides a convenient starting point for debates about Time.

How do I measure Time in my mind? And in which part of my mind do I measure Time? Wittgenstein compares mental processing with sleep. There is deep sleep and shallow sleep. There are deep thoughts and the ones which 'romp about on the surface' (*Gedanken die sich an der Oberfläche herumtummeln*)—like those children in the film. But Time and Fate are measured by the *Adagio and Fugue in C Minor*.

The majority of laws that govern the contemporary world just romp about on the surface of my mind. Einstein had no wish to memorise his telephone number. Many modern innovations and revolutions are like a new telephone number. Or a new cellular phone. Why should I pay attention to them? Anyway it is better to read Dante and Walter Benjamin than 'communicate' with someone who has not read them.

During a war the time of soldiers and civilians moves very fast indeed: within a few minutes they may die and rise from the dead several times. And there were lots of wars between 1800 and 1945. There were also composers, writers and painters of genius. Thanks to their inspiration and craftsmanship one could go through a number of lives (and incarnations) *peacefully*, without running any danger. We can still embark on a journey through Time via their works; but we do not *await* them any longer. And waiting for a new masterpiece accelerates Time much more than the quantity of components that can be fitted on a chip.

How did Salieri wait for Mozart's new opera? (In Pushkin's tragedy he relinquishes the idea of committing suicide because he is waiting for Haydn to compose another quartet or symphony. Today he might have poisoned himself.) He tried to guess its structure, outlines, harmonies,

deducing them from Mozart's previous works. But how could *Die Zauberflöte* be deduced from *Don Giovanni*? How many versions of *Die Zauberflöte* did Salieri compose before actually hearing the opera? And how many lives did he go through thanks to Mozart's genius and craftsmanship?

In my childhood I also composed several versions of *Die Zauberflöte*. At the age of ten I announced to my piano teacher that Mozart was my favourite composer. At the time no recordings of Mozart's operas were available in the Soviet Union; and only *Le nozze di Figaro* was performed at the Bolshoi. My teacher said Mozart had written an opera entitled *Volshebnaya Fleyta*. The following day, at my request, my father bought me a toy flute; and I began to compose my first *Zauberflöte*. Whenever I recall those years of my childhood I hear the sound of that flute and also Mozart's opera—*his* opera. A nice example of counterpoint.

We are often mistaken when trying to surmise what a great artist's opus may reveal to us on the basis of the pleasures we have already experienced in his or her company. Marcel, being slightly tired of Vinteuil's famous *Sonata* and *la petite phrase* that is as renowned as *Là ci darem la mano*, endeavours to imagine the rest of the composer's creative output; but the figments of his imagination have nothing in common with the *Septet*—the posthumous opus he discovers in *La Prisonnière*. His abortive attempts are likened to what some poets do when describing Paradise: they adorn it with *our* meadows, flowers and rivers.

In the sixties Time moved faster than now; yet only local wars were fought during that period, and the map of Europe remained intact. But a few great artists were still in the land of the living. And we awaited their works. Many conservatory students tried to guess what Shostakovich's new quartet or symphony would sound like. And they exchanged their views on the subject. And of course we awaited Nabokov's novels. And Beckett's plays. And Antonioni's films. Moreover, we had to adjust to new 'movements' in painting. And all women were fashion victims because fashion designers did not content themselves with changing colours only. (Clothes are more personal than chips and therefore affect our Time more effectively.) And there was the Moon of course, the journey to the Moon; and all the journeys that had preceded it. In those days we spoke in Adams' terms about the events of seasons.

Nobody is prepared to travel to the Moon again, let alone to Mars. And Concorde will stop its flights in a few years.

Nothing really happens when Space romps about on computer screens. It is in you, O body of mine, that I measure Space and Time.

Mozart's Law cannot be formulated as easily as Metcalfe's Law and Monsanto's Law. My aim is to shift the emphasis from the outskirts to the core of the mind, from fingers pushing buttons to every fibre of the body, from the speed of light to the speed of life. And to the speed of Fate.

Mozart's Law contradicts yet another *idée reçue*. Almost everybody believes that children grow faster now than in days of yore. But do our children write symphonies at the age of seven? And Onegin gets bored of women and life in general at the age of eighteen. He is literally bored to *death*: it is out of boredom that he kills Lenski in a duel.

The average human lifespan in the developed countries has increased over the last two hundred years. Wislawa Szymborska enlarges upon the subject in her magnificent poem *Our Ancestors' Short Lives*:

*Few of them made it to thirty...
There wasn't a moment to lose,
no deferred questions, no belated revelations,
just those experienced in time.
Wisdom couldn't wait for grey hair.
It had to see clearly before it saw the light
and to hear every voice before it sounded.*

Why don't we hear voices before they sound?

It is useless and ludicrous to hope for the advent of another Mozart in the world where the 'death of the subject' has been consummated and 'genius', the very notion of it, is regarded as a quaint romantic value. (In the thirties Lukacs said: 'To make a decent table today, a man needs all the genius once required of Michelangelo to complete the dome of St Peter's.' What would Lukacs say about the year 2000? In his times the word 'genius' was not antiquated yet.) Worse still, I am not sure that any living composer can emulate Salieri's *Tarare*. And what about the Italian composer's lifelong, boundless devotion to the cause of art which, in Pushkin's tragedy and in *Amadeus*, drives him to murder? Of course he did not kill anyone: at least this question has been answered, apparently. But he might have frowned upon Mozart's light-heartedness and the speed with which he composed his works. (The speed of light-heartedness. How many components could be fitted on Mozart's chips?) And he would have thrown out the violinist who, in Pushkin's tragedy, maltreats one of Mozart's tunes. (The composer himself is convulsed with laughter.) How many contemporary artists are as honest and exacting as Salieri?

I wish Mozart's Law could become the pacesetter for human events; and a breeding ground for great artists. Even Salieri's Law would be beneficial to humanity.

1999

Versailles

SALIERI

1

We live in the midst of legends mostly conveyed through the media and the conversations we have whenever we meet our neighbours and friends. Even if we shun a lot of nonsense we constantly hear and read about, we are influenced by some news items which tell us about baddies and goodies, about Hitler's inheritors and newborn saints.

For many decades, Salieri has been treated badly, although no one can really prove he was a baddy par excellence. According to his pupils, he was rather a goody, but Mozart was following in his footsteps and whenever Salieri is touched upon, it is Mozart one thinks about. Nowadays the two composers are inseparable. In one of his longish poems, Mayakovski declares, 'We say "Lenin" as we think about the party. And vice versa.' (It is better to misquote such pronouncements.) Well, many musicians are aware that Mozart's recent popular resurrection is partly due to Forman's *Amadeus* which draws our attention to both the music and the tear jerker we have been talking about for the sake of talking about tear jerkers. 'The Japanese need a drama,' as my manager said last summer in Tokyo. We are humanists to our fingertips and often our concern with the human touch makes us forget about music and the arts in general; and about everything else. Yet what is more human and touching than music?

Pushkin needed a short tragedy and therefore could not help thinking about Salieri's hypothetical jealousy that might have induced him to poison Mozart. According to Pushkin, Salieri was eaten up with jealousy as he listened to the premiere of *Don Giovanni*. Anxious to alleviate his torments, he left the opera house and Pushkin thought that such an act was tantamount to murder. 'Such a man is capable of pouring arsenic into his adversary's glass,' he wrote. I have left a lot of concert halls and opera houses – sometimes at the very outset of a performance; yet I have poisoned no one. After all, according to my manager, all I need is *drama*; whereas Pushkin was in need of a *tragedy*.

Today's artists need lions, tigers, miniskirts and infirmities to survive in the world where human drama takes pride of place. Mozart needs neither wolves nor poison. He does not even have to survive for the simple reason that he lives. He is neither immortal nor eternal. He is just in our midst and his works are our best friends, as Marilyn Monroe points out in her song about diamonds and girls. I do not think that any performance of Mozart's works pays tribute to his genius because a bad performance is always a betrayal; if not a crime. But if, after watching *Amadeus* – or reading Pushkin's *Mozart and Salieri* – someone buys Bruno Walter's recording of *Don Giovanni* and the *Jupiter*, we must thank Salieri for this gift to humanity.

2

Thanks to Pushkin's short tragedy, many individuals grew aware of the frank and loyal brotherhood of Mozart and Salieri, sons of Music' – well before Shaffer's birth and Forman's bout of inspiration. If analysed at all, Salieri's music has consistently been used as a foil for Mozart's celestial harmonies. So we might be surprised at hearing that Mandelstam, for one, thought highly of Mozart's supposed assassin; at least he praised his professional and scholarly attitude towards music.

*I cut up music like a corpse; I tested
the laws of harmony by mathematics.
Then only, rich in learning, dared I yield
to blandishments of sweet creative fancy.*

Pushkin, *Mozart and Salieri*, scene I, Nabokov's translation.

When re-reading this masterpiece, I am tempted to side with Salieri who thinks his rival is unworthy of the gift bestowed upon him. Nor do I subscribe to Mozart's view that turns the happy few – a group of artists to which he and his assassin belong – into high priests instead of using the French word '*artisan*'. 'Beauty is not a demigod's whim, but the rapacious eye (*glazomer*) of an ordinary joiner,' as Mandelstam puts it. ('*Glazomer*' is a measure-oriented eye.) At the end of her essay on both composers – and on her husband, as usual – Nadezhda Mandelstam unsurprisingly comes to the conclusion that they should live together in every true artist. But for the anatomy lesson touched upon by Salieri, any birth of creative fancy may be justifiably likened to a stillborn child. On the other hand, if you are unable to give birth to a child, your anatomy lessons are doomed to deal only with corpses. We must therefore thank Pushkin for using Mozart as a foil for Salieri's seriousness and devotion to art.

*How often, in my solitary cell,
Having toiled for days, having sat unbroken hours,
Forgetting food and sleep, and having tasted
The rapture and the tears of inspiration,
I'd burn my work and coldly watch the flame
As my own melodies and meditations
Flared up and smoked a little and were gone.*

We are predictably reminded of Gogol and Part Two of *Dead Souls*. How many works did Mozart burn?

2015

Bierges

DISDAIN AND DEFIANCE (*ICH BIN MOZART*)

We are social animals and the very word ‘social’ indicates and presupposes our capacity to identify with others. I have devoted many pages to these others and their whims. We cannot ignore them, if we are determined to remain social and even achieve the recognition about which both Hegel and Kojève speak so eloquently; in other words, we are supposed to come to terms with those whims.

If you are a performing artist and therefore are called upon to perform some works you have not created – they are produced by other pens, inspirations and ambitions – you ought to make sure you are on the same wavelength with their creators. To some extent, I *am* Mozart when I play his works, although I was not born in Salzburg and do not speak German as fluently as he did.

I knew a pianist who, whenever studying yet another piece of music, proceeded pragmatically and realistically. Not only did he read the composer’s biographies and letters, but he went so far as to enact a few episodes from his life. For the sake of his music-oriented impersonation, he was even prepared to wear a wig – not in public, though. Yet I do not think his performances of Mozart’s sonatas were in any way on a par with his assiduous efforts.

I do not think many people will attend my funeral, but I know five men and three women who *are* likely to see me off, providing they do not die prematurely. Anyway, I am not eager to appropriate the following description I chanced upon in the Encyclopaedia Britannica: ‘He died in Vienna on December 5, 1791, and the next day he was buried, unattended by anyone except the gravedigger, at St Mark’s cemetery.’ Of course I might ask my friends not to attend my funeral, but this slice of life (or death) would hardly influence my interpretation of Mozart’s works.

Here are a few other slices of Mozart’s life I found in the same article:

The family left Salzburg for a second trip to Vienna on September 11, 1767, and returned on January 5, 1769. In Vienna, Wolfgang composed his first German operetta, *Bastien und Bastienne*, K. 50, and his first Italian opera, *La finta semplice*, K. 51, on a libretto by Marco Coltellini. Although the Italian opera was ordered by the Emperor, intrigues prevented its being produced; this is the beginning of a sorry tale of such resistance.

Early in March 1781 the Archbishop summoned Mozart to Vienna, where he arrived on March 16. Mozart enjoyed the patronage of many members of the Viennese aristocracy, including Countess Thun and Count Cobenzl, and the Archbishop enjoyed the reflected

glory of his young composer; but Colloredo did not allow him to play in houses other than his own and forced him to eat with the servants. The already strained relations between the two soon came to a head, and in a shameful scene the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg addressed Mozart in the language of the street (using the third person singular reserved for low-grade servants), and Mozart resigned. Shortly afterwards, not having received his official dismissal, Mozart brought it in person, only to be subjected to more street language from the Archbishop's high steward, Count Karl Arco, who earned for himself a dubious immortality by actually kicking Mozart out 'on his behind' (Mozart's own words).

In another attempt to save his failing finances, Mozart undertook an extensive concert tour, leaving Vienna on April 8, 1789, with his pupil and noble patron, Prince Karl Lichnowsky, who was later to be a firm supporter of Beethoven. Mozart went to Dresden, Leipzig (where he studied J.S. Bach's manuscripts), Berlin, and Prague, returning to Vienna on June 4, 1789; the financial results of the tour were negligible, as were those from his last concert tour to Frankfurt am Main, where the emperor Leopold II was crowned on October 9, 1790. His financial position was now catastrophic, for he was deeply in debt.

And here are Mozart's own words:

He took the first part *prestissimo* – the *Andante allegro* – and the Rondo more *prestissimo* still. What merit is there in this? The listeners (I mean those worthy of the name) can only say that they have *seen* music and piano-playing. All this makes them hear, and think, and feel as little – as he does. You may easily believe that this was beyond all endurance, because I could not venture to say to him *much too quick*! Besides, it is far easier to play a thing quickly than slowly; some notes may then be dropped without being observed. But is this genuine music?

I am still filled with the gall of bitterness, and I feel sure that you, my good kind father, will sympathise with me. My patience has been so long tried that it has at last given way. I have no longer the misfortune to be in the Salzburg service, and today is a happy day for me. Three times already has this – I know not what to call him – said the most insulting and impertinent things to my face, which I did not repeat to you, from the wish to spare your feelings, and I only refrained from taking my revenge on the spot because I always had

you, my dear father, before my eyes. He called me a knave and a dissolute fellow, and told me to take myself off. And I endured it all, though I felt that not only my own honour but yours was aggrieved by this; but as you would have it so, I was silent.

Anyway, it was impossible to get in a syllable, for his words blazed away like a fire. I heard it all with calmness; he actually told me to my face the deliberate falsehood, that I had a salary of 500 florins – called me a ragamuffin, a scamp, a rogue. Oh! I really cannot write all he said. At last my blood began to boil, and I said, ‘Your Grace does not appear to be satisfied with me.’ ‘How! Do you dare to threaten me, you rascal? There is the door, and I tell you I will have nothing more to do with such a low fellow!’ At last I said, ‘Nor I with you.’

My *very practical* reply shall not fail that arrogant jackass, were it twenty years hence; for to see him and to return his kick without an instant’s delay, will be one and the same thing, unless I am so unlucky as to see him first in some sacred place.

Dearest friend, if you could help me with my most urgent expenses, please do it. To save money I’m staying here in Baden and come into town only when it is absolutely necessary. I am forced to sell my quartets, all that hard work, for a trifle, just to get some cash into my hands and meet my immediate obligations. I have also begun to compose some Clavier sonatas with that in mind. Adieu. Send me whatever you can spare.

I am so bold as to entreat your Royal Highness to present to his Majesty, with your sanction, this humble petition. Desire of fame, love of work, and the conviction of my capabilities, all embolden me to presume to apply for a second situation as Kapellmeister, especially as that very able Kapellmeister, Salieri, has never devoted himself to church music, whereas I from my youth have carefully acquired this style. The reputation I enjoy in the world for my pianoforte-playing makes me venture to solicit also the honour of being appointed musical instructor to the Royal Family.

A propos. N. N. (you know whom I mean) is a beast. He is very pleasant to my face, but he runs down *Figaro* in public – and has treated me most abominably in the matters you know of – *I know it for certain.*

The N. N.'s had a box this evening, and heartily applauded everything; but he, the stupid idiot, showed himself such a thorough Bavarian, that I could not stay with him, or I must have called him an ass to his face. Unluckily I was in their box when the second act began, with a very solemn scene. He laughed all through it. At first I had the patience to attract his attention to various passages, but he persisted in laughing. This was rather too much, so I called him Papageno, and took myself off; but I don't believe the thick-headed oaf understood the allusion.

As Nietzsche does his best to castigate *ressentiment* and its involuntary exponents, he quotes Thomas Aquinas: '*Beati in regno coelesti videbunt poenas damnatorum, ut beatitudo illis magis complaceat.*' (The blessed in the kingdom of heaven will see the punishments of the damned, in order that their bliss be that much greater.) This sadistic statement is nothing more than a summary of what Tertullian wrote many centuries before about the tortures to which Roman Emperors – among other anti-Christians – would be subjected in the Hereafter. (A draft of Dante's *Inferno*.) I, for one, do not think that Mozart was addicted to *ressentiment*. One might, on the other hand, attribute to him the qualities associated with intellectual and poetical rebels among whom the *poètes maudits* justifiably have pride of place. In spite of the passionate contempt I have for the destroyers of music, I am not likely to enjoy the scenes of their lives in Hell: at least one of my feet is bound to while away its eternity in Paradise – as a reward for my devotion to music and art in general. And to the dignity of the mind, of the heart. Alas, one cannot help being bombastic as one enlarges upon Heaven and Hell.

A great many of today's high officials – managers, chairpersons – destroy the remains of music by taking on charismatic nonentities, by releasing their recordings in a blaze of publicity, by letting them violate any sense of decency in the concert halls that still remember Rachmaninoff, Busoni, Toscanini, Furtwängler, Gilels and Oistrakh. To protect these remains from irreverence and wickedness, one is even allowed to forget one's manners – for once, the end justifies the means.

And what about today's audience? Lucifer's jaws are spacious enough to accommodate all traitors.

In the film *Amadeus*, when asked to parody Salieri, Mozart breaks wind. I would never allow myself such an act of disdain and defiance.

Anyway, Mozart is far more magical and Jupiterian than any Berliner.

Bierges

INTERPRETATION ET PARTICIPATION

Je ne sais s'il faut méditer sur le conseil que Pierre de Coubertin nous donne en mettant l'accent sur la participation et non sur la victoire. Il est vrai que nous voulons gagner toujours et partout, ce qui est compréhensible, étant donné la structure commerciale et médiatique du monde où nous vivons jusqu'à nouvel ordre. Il y a des gens qui croient que toute participation est une victoire – en particulier dans le domaine des arts. Dans les autres domaines, ils gagnent sur tous les plans, surtout sur celui de l'argent, mais cela ne leur suffit pas, car ils veulent prouver à tout le monde que la musique, entre autres, leur tient à cœur et qu'en dehors des yachts et des terrains de golf ils investissent leur argent dans les festivals, dans les salles de concert et même dans des artistes dont la valeur artistique leur échappe pour la bonne raison qu'ils ne connaissent presque rien à la musique. Mais ils se veulent des humanistes et les critères qu'ils utilisent pour sélectionner leurs élus sont déterminés par le cœur et le malheur, sans considération pour les notes. « A beaucoup souffert » suffit parfois pour déclencher une compassion financière de la part de ceux qui feraient mieux de rester sur leurs yachts, ou de perfectionner leur maîtrise des trous de golf et de billard.

Un milliardaire crée un orchestre de toutes pièces pour démontrer à ses amis golfeurs son intérêt pour la musique. L'orchestre joue mal, mais cela n'intéresse personne. Avant chaque concert, une jolie fille fait un petit discours pour signaler que les membres de l'orchestre viennent de tous les pays du monde. Ni elle ni son patron ne se rendent compte que, pour qu'un orchestre soit homogène sur le plan musical, il faut de préférence choisir les ressortissants de la même école, ce qui devient de plus en plus difficile, il est vrai, étant donné le caractère global du monde où nous continuons de vivre. Mais le public ignare et bienveillant pense qu'un seul pays ne saurait contenir un nombre aussi impressionnant de grands musiciens, et le but est atteint. Le mécène passe pour un grand bienfaiteur de la musique, d'autant qu'il se passionne pour un compositeur qui a beaucoup souffert et par conséquent compose avec son cœur, pas avec une tête froide et calculatrice. (Les autres compositeurs ont recours à la table de multiplication.) Personne ne cherche à savoir si sa musique correspond à des critères musicaux qui ne vont pas toujours de pair avec l'humanisme et la gentillesse. Souvenons-nous du cas Wagner.

Une milliardaire participe, elle aussi, à la vie musicale en collectionnant ses propres « ont beaucoup souffert » qui se produisent chez elle, dans des fermes et même au conservatoire. Je ne connais que deux de ses élus souffrants : un jeune homme et une jeune femme. Le jeune homme est issu d'une famille nombreuse. Les qualités de la jeune femme se bornent aussi à la vie de

famille dans le cadre de laquelle elle a donné naissance à un fils et s'est fait battre par un mari qui contribue ainsi à son succès social et musical.

Au lieu de demander à ces bienfaiteurs de ne pas participer, de ne pas se mêler des affaires intérieures de l'art, leur entourage applaudit à des efforts qui se soldent toujours par les défaites de la musique. Je ne vois pas pourquoi on ne pourrait badiner avec l'amour : après tout, le badinage est une de ses facettes, de ses attraits incontestables. On peut également badiner avec un terrain de golf, surtout si les futurs Ballesteros ne s'y entraînent guère. On ne badine pas avec la musique.

N'allez pas aux concerts. Aujourd'hui, ce passe-temps est moins prestigieux que le bridge ou un simple bavardage au coin du feu. Jouez au bridge au lieu de soutenir des nullités en applaudissant à leurs exploits discutables et destructeurs. Bavardez autant que vous voulez, à condition de ne pas vous appesantir sur des génies en herbes. (Vous savez... hier soir... un jeune chef... une jeune pianiste... un jeune violoncelliste...) Laissez la musique tranquille. Exercez votre philanthropie ailleurs. Pour une fois, ne soyez pas des bienfaiteurs de l'humanité. Si vous persistez et signez, n'oubliez pas cette règle d'or : ~~modeste, a beaucoup souffert, ai connu sa mère.~~

Un jour, un violoniste russe me demande de participer à son festival. Il me fait part de ses idées et m'offre un CD. J'écoute les amis du violoniste et je décide de prêter mon concours à son projet. La veille de mon récital, je donne une interview à *La Voix du Nord*. Voici quelques extraits de cette interview :

Votre présence est une caution pour un nouveau festival. Qu'est-ce qui vous a incité à répondre « présent » aux Musicales ?

Je condamne sans appel beaucoup de manifestations musicales et beaucoup d'initiatives dans ce domaine. La prolifération des nullités est incroyable. Le public n'écoute pas la musique ; il regarde les interprètes. C'est pour cela que l'âge et le « charisme » jouent un rôle aussi important. Que vous soyez jeune ou vieux, aveugle ou paralysé, cela n'a aucune importance. Il faut bien jouer. Hélène Grimaud est toujours en extase, dit-elle. Les grands artistes d'autrefois étaient plutôt distants. Il s'agissait d'une énergie intérieure et musicale, pas des balancements d'une tête. La scène n'est pas une balançoire.

Vos interprétations de Beethoven sont considérées comme inhabituelles.

Aujourd'hui, les critiques et les mélomanes écoutent des enregistrements et ne regardent pas des partitions. Par rapport à Brendel et à Pollini, mes interprétations de Beethoven et de tous les autres compositeurs sont en effet inhabituelles. Je suis fidèle aux partitions, pas aux

interprétations de soi-disant stars. Dommage que je ne puisse pas écouter mes enregistrements en compagnie des partitions et de ceux qui disent que je fais n'importe quoi. Dommage aussi que la plupart de ces gens ne savent pas déchiffrer la musique – dans tous les sens du terme.

Vous êtes grand connaisseur de vins. Par la dégustation de quels crus accompagneriez-vous les œuvres de votre concert ?

Des vins complexes avec beaucoup de corps. Surtout pas des vins frais, légers, des vins « de soif ». De vieux vins. Les vins d'aujourd'hui ressemblent trop aux jeunes d'aujourd'hui : trop de charisme, pas de longueur en bouche (dans l'oreille).

A quoi participe-t-on en jouant du Mozart ? « Platon présentait, à titre d'hypothèses, plusieurs schémas de participation : participer, c'est prendre part ; mais aussi, c'est imiter ; et encore, c'est recevoir d'un démon... » Ainsi parlait Gilles Deleuze. La participation apparaît le plus souvent comme une violence subie par le participant. Serais-je plus tranquille au coin du feu ? au cours d'un bavardage sans lendemain ? Ceux qui croient que Mozart est susceptible de guérir les humains et même les vaches se trompent : sa musique nous enfonce encore plus dans un corridor sans issue, dans un tunnel au bout duquel il n'y a pas de lumière, même pas celle d'une bougie. Et nous nous demandons si cela vaut la peine de sortir du coma pour raconter à tout le monde qu'il y a une lumière au bout de n'importe quel cancer, n'importe quelle existence ; et que cette lumière est une nouvelle Jérusalem ou simplement le Paradis.

La discordance dont Mozart nous entretient est terrifiante d'autant plus que, d'une façon générale, elle est harmonisée et structurée au point de nous paraître normale, banale, quotidienne. Ni Haydn ni Beethoven ne sont aussi harmonieux que Mozart qui force la note sans cesse en nous laissant croire que même l'agonie est harmonieuse et presque désirable. (La mort est une séductrice sans pareille. La belle dame sans merci.) A l'époque de Bach cette harmonie était plus dans la nature des choses. L'exploit de Mozart s'apparente aux paradis artificiels. La musique de Haydn et de Beethoven nous offre une marge de liberté où nos caprices et nos sautes d'humeur folâtraient à qui mieux-mieux. Bach et Mozart sont une expression impitoyable du déterminisme que seul l'*amor fati* est capable d'apaiser.

« Si la participation consiste à prendre part, écrit Deleuze, on voit mal comment le participé ne souffrirait pas d'une division ou d'une séparation. Si participer, c'est imiter, il faut un artiste extérieur qui prend l'Idée pour modèle. Et l'on voit mal enfin quel est le rôle d'un intermédiaire en général, artiste ou démon, sinon forcer le sensible à reproduire l'intelligible, mais aussi forcer l'Idée à se laisser participer par quelque chose qui répugne à sa nature. » Laissons cette phrase telle quelle, sans commentaire : une fois encore, il vaut mieux ne pas participer, contrairement à

ce que nous conseillent la vie et Pierre de Coubertin. On ne peut s'empêcher d'aimer la *Sonate en la mineur*, KV 310 (300d). On n'est pas obligé de la jouer – d'y participer, d'y vivre. Je ne la jouerai jamais en public.

Il y a des œuvres que je ne joue pas dans les salles de concert, par crainte de pleurer sur scène pendant leur exécution. Je n'ai pas peur de pleurer en public : je l'ai fait maintes fois, en écoutant Gilels, Karajan, Oistrach et Michelangeli. Mais on ne pleure pas sur scène en jouant : les interprétations en souffriraient.

On peut pleurer dans un studio d'enregistrement.

Au moins on ne souffre pas d'une séparation d'avec Mozart.

La participation n'est ni matérielle, ni imitative, ni démonique : elle est émanative. Emanation signifie à la fois cause et don : causalité par donation, mais aussi donation productrice. La véritable activité est celle du participé ; le participant n'est qu'un effet, et reçoit ce que la cause lui donne. La cause émanative est la Cause qui donne, le Bien qui donne, la Vertu qui donne.

Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

In his lectures on *Anna Karenin*, Nabokov drops a curious remark about how Tolstoy handles Time in his works: 'He is the only writer I know of whose watch keeps time with the numberless watches of his readers...What really seduces the average reader is the gift Tolstoy had of endowing his fiction with such time-values as correspond exactly to our sense of time.' In the same lecture Nabokov reproaches Tolstoy for devoting too many pages to the agrarian problems and provincial elections which are bound to grow obsolete, being 'linked up with a certain historical period'. I think, however, that Tolstoy's (and our) time depends a lot on short-lived, 'local' matters: in our everyday life we cannot help getting involved in all sorts of unimportant, ephemeral events and problems. They cannot be kept in the margin or ignored altogether; and even if we do not give much thought to such and such daily occurrence, its mere existence usurps our time, casting a shadow on the sun-drenched monuments of our ideas and ideals. (The same goes for those thoughts of ours to which we do not give much thought.) Besides, our body *always* meddles in the internal affairs of our mind and soul, according to some philosophers and religious thinkers. And to scientists.

Tolstoy does not put Anna's life in a nutshell, contrary to what most novelists might have done in their eagerness to hold the reader spellbound. During her last trip to the railway station she automatically takes notice of the signboards gliding past her: 'Office and warehouse. Dentist...Filipov's bun shop.' Those signboards expand the time (and space) of Anna's interior monologue, conveying a peculiar rhythm to the whole chapter—the rhythm of the heart that might miss a beat now and then. (It is not a metronome.) The agrarian reform, provincial elections and the author's numerous meditations, which are so frowned upon by many readers, including Nabokov, play the same role in the overall structure of the novel, expanding, humanising its literary time, amplifying its pages until they reach the size of a landscape: Tolstoy's space also coincides with ours. After all, our meditations, our interior monologues are part of the things we are looking at. Throughout the novel quite a number of so-called nonlocal connections are thus established. All this contributes to the three-dimensional—better still, quantum reality of Tolstoy's characters about whom, to paraphrase Nabokov, elderly Russians talk at their evening tea, failing to distinguish between Anna, Kitty, Vronsky and their own acquaintances.

Nonlocal connections are the essential part of quantum theory. Each event is influenced by the whole universe. Anna's destiny is influenced by what seems to happen somewhere else, in another novel—in the novel devoted to the provincial elections and Lyovin's search for good and God. Einstein could not bring himself to accept the existence of nonlocal connections, saying that

God did not play dice. Well, Tolstoy did play dice. So did Beethoven, especially in his last period. Within his late quartets and piano sonatas the laws of music can be formulated only in terms of probabilities.

The Classical sonata, which emerged in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, replacing the Baroque sonata, has many affinities with psychological novel—and with our sense of Time and our mind in general. Human life seems to have been composed in the sonata form: the exposition, the development, the recapitulation. The so-called contrast of key that reached full expression in Haydn and Mozart reflects the conflict between the hero and his destiny (incarnated by a mortal enemy, an unrequited love, a war)—an unavoidable feature of human life and the novel.

Haydn's works, for all their individual, intimate traits, remain on this side of the mirror, as it were. They may be likened to the novel of manners, to the historical novel and sometimes even to the picaresque novel where a roguish theme embarks upon a series of tonal adventures. The plots of his late symphonies and quartets often rival the intricacies of *Tom Jones*. And of course his works are very realistic; they impart immediacy, almost tangibility to the world of anonymous sounds so that we are reminded of real objects and natural phenomena. And yet Haydn's orchestral and chamber music has no literary programme; the *Abschiedssymphonie* is a notable exception. What is reflected in Haydn's mirror? Cosmology, high-society balls, fancy dress balls, open-air dances, harvests, games, grandfather clocks, animals, etc. It is not for nothing that various nicknames were bestowed on some of his symphonies: *Le Matin*, *Le Midi*, *Le Soir*, *La Poule*, *Surprise*, *The Clock*, *Drum Roll*, *Military*. Only *La Passione* and *Funèbre* remind us of the names given to some of Beethoven's piano sonatas: *Appassionata*, the *Sturm*, the *Mondlicht*.

Mozart likewise remained on this side of the mirror; and yet he strove to break it many times. What actually happens when you look in a mirror? The world is seen only from the outside; and even your perception of whatever surrounds you comes not from your mind but from your own reflection which is part of the picture. At least you *might* get the feeling of being outside yourself. What is reflected in Mozart's mirror? A lot of dramatic conflicts. Mozart is primarily a composer of operas and his handling of the sonata form reveals his predilection for contrasts and disguises. He prefers strongly differentiated themes and often reshapes his second subjects when they reappear in the recapitulation, as if unconsciously imitating the metamorphoses that his characters undergo in *Così fan tutte* and *Le nozze di Figaro*. He goes so far as to create a tonal conflict between the first and the slow movements, setting the latter in keys only distantly related to those of the former. As to Haydn, he has a penchant for combining

dualistic key schemes with monistic thematic material, using the basic theme in both keys and thus attenuating the conflict.

Mozart dramatised instrumental music to the point of making it sound like an opera where he himself takes part, incidentally, being one of his own characters. In some of his works, however, he attempts to transfer the action into his mind, breaking the mirror. But even in the *Requiem* we find ourselves in the presence of two Mozarts: one is at a writing desk, the other on his deathbed. The former is composing a requiem for the latter—or for the mythical 'black man' who commissioned it. The final (unfinished) product does not sound like Anna Karenin's death-tinged interior monologue. (Or like the second part of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.) Actually it does not sound like an interior monologue at all. And many of Beethoven's pieces do sound like interior monologues.

'There's something bizarre and sombre in your music because you're sombre and bizarre yourself. And the style of a musician is always the man,' said Haydn to young Beethoven who, for a short period of time, was his pupil in Vienna, studying composition and counterpoint. As a true representative of the age of Enlightenment, Haydn might also have desired to teach his pupil a more impersonal, harmonious approach to personal feelings. He continuously strove for balance between emotions and thoughts, whereas in Beethoven's works there are too many thoughts, too many emotions—at the expense of naturalness and objectivity.

In both his life and music Haydn was dependent on Esterhazy and other patrons or sponsors, to use modern terminology; he often worked to a tight deadline and therefore had no time for living either with his works or his own self. He had neither the time nor the inclination to forestall Lewis Carroll and cross the looking glass in order to withdraw from the world, replacing it by his mind and heart. The feelings he expressed were shared by those who walked around him and danced in nearby towns and villages. (Is there such a thing as a general feeling of solitude? Did Haydn ever express the feeling of solitude?) Beethoven, on the other hand, was an independent composer—the first musician to receive a salary with no other duties than to compose how and when he felt inclined. He could afford to work on the same piece for years, resorting in his search for the *note juste* to his 'second thoughts' and 'third thoughts' and 'fourth thoughts' and so on and so forth.

According to Flaubert, a writer should be everywhere and nowhere, reigning over his or her characters and sentences from invisible thrones. (Nowadays it is the reader that reigns over characters and sentences—over books in general. And there are powers behind the throne.) The music of Haydn corresponds to this conception; so do many Mozart's works. But Beethoven never leaves his melodies and harmonies alone, often behaving like a busybody or even a bully—especially when composing a fugue. Indeed, in contrast to some artists who happily assume the role

of a medium, he never attempts to copy an alleged pre-existent idea from the mind of God. Nor does he ever copy a work that exists already in the listener's mind. And yet his music seems to be inhabited by the people about whom we might talk on the terrace of a country house. In other words his watch keeps time with our watches; and his heart beats in rhythm with our hearts. It is noteworthy that the *Missa Solemnis* bears in epigraph the following words: 'From the heart. May it penetrate to the heart again.' These words seem to have been written by Tolstoy: the style of his late works is both ponderous and poignant. However, he might have replaced 'the heart' by 'the soul'.

Had Beethoven been a novelist he might have anticipated Tolstoy's stylistic method, forcing his thoughts upon his characters (and upon the reader). 'We have the feeling now and then that Tolstoy's novel writes its own self, is produced by its matter, by its subject, not by a definite person moving a pen from left to right, and then coming back and erasing a word, and pondering, and scratching his chin through his beard,' says Nabokov in his lectures on *Anna Karenin*. I, for one, never have the feeling that Tolstoy's work was dictated to him by angels or other heavenly emissaries, by those who have first-hand experience of Platonic ideas: a work of art is a Platonic idea after all. On the contrary, Tolstoy *always* moves his pen from left to right (and from top to bottom). Moreover, he writes on our hearts and souls, erasing in the process our own thoughts and feelings—as every tyrannical teacher does.

Carried along by his didactic élan, Beethoven often repeated chords or arpeggios or just one note (the final movement of the *Piano Sonata*, Opus 110) as if to inculcate a musical idea into his sluggish, indolent audience. Actually he had no need to do so: in the long run the accumulation of his thoughts produced a new brand of musical communication, somewhat akin to what is called psychokinesis. We are constantly under the impression that everything is repeated several times, leaving an imprint inside our bodies. (From the body. May it penetrate to the body again.)

The *Heiligenstadt Testament* ends thus: 'As the leaves of autumn wither and fall, so has my own life become barren: almost as I came, so I go hence. Even that high courage that inspired me in the fair days of summer has now vanished.' In Dickens' *Dombey and Son* I chanced upon the following example of psychokinesis: 'Mr Dombey represented in himself the wind, the shade, and the autumn of the christening. He stood in his library to receive the company, as hard and cold as the weather; and when he looked out through the glass room, at the trees in the little garden, their brown and yellow leaves came fluttering down, as if he blighted them.' Let me repeat in this connection the words that Haydn addressed to his pupil: 'There's something bizarre and sombre in your music because you're sombre and bizarre yourself.' This remark dates back to the years when Beethoven was still unaware of what lay in store for him—the deafness which plagued him for the greater part of his life. Yet he already represented in himself the wind (or rather the tempest), the

shade, the autumn. And the leaves of his autumn had withered and fallen long before he picked up a pen to write the *Heiligenstadt Testament*. (Actually that pen was moving from left to right for many years.) In my essay on the *Diabelli Variations* I attribute the origin of Beethoven's deafness to his unconscious desire to shield himself from the Vienna School, from its objectivity and easy-going style. Likewise his unconscious might have been looking for an excuse: Beethoven had to exonerate himself from Haydn's (and other people's) accusations. And his body obligingly provided an excuse, playing the part of a courtier who kills somebody (an heir to the throne) only because he thinks his sovereign wants him to commit the murder. As might have been expected, in the *Heiligenstadt Testament* Beethoven blames everything on his disease: 'O ye men who think or say that I am malevolent, stubborn or misanthropic, how greatly do you wrong me. You do not know the cause of my seeming so. From childhood my heart and mind were disposed to the gentle feeling of good will.'

Apart from providing him with a pretext to withdraw from society, his deafness put an end to his career as a virtuoso pianist. Did he unconsciously desire it? He might have been aware of the danger lying in his wonderful, unmatched gift for improvisation: even Mozart was inferior to him in this field. The gift for improvisation would certainly have influenced Beethoven's music, barring the way to his second thoughts, let alone his third thoughts. No wonder that, at the end of his life, he felt nostalgia for the days when he used to improvise a piece of music before a wonder-stricken audience. And this nostalgia gave rise to many passages—to entire movements—which sound like improvisations; or like interior monologues. But these improvisations are the fruit of a time-consuming and painful creative process in the course of which music often seized Beethoven by the throat, to paraphrase his own words. ('I will seize fate by the throat,' he wrote in a letter to his friend Franz Wegeler.) For hours and hours, for days on end, he would pace up and down his room, shaking his head (to loosen a symphony's grip) and abstaining from food despite his landlady's culinary efforts. When composing a fugue he would not touch food for two or three days. In those moments he was not merely in the throes of creation: his very life was at stake.

Notes, notes, notes—to paraphrase Hamlet's words. Adjusting notes to his life. And adjusting his life to notes. The other side of the mirror—the *inner* mirror. Now and then Beethoven seems to go in circles as if exploring the vicious circle where he has been imprisoned. (And only prisoners can experience the intoxicating variety of freedom epitomised by improvisation and the opera *Fidelio*.) In this respect he was also akin to Tolstoy who would have become addicted to variations as a musical form had he been a composer. Both Beethoven and Tolstoy strive to express their thoughts with the utmost clarity and completeness; and variations is

a form best suited for the purpose. (After all, life is a cycle of variations on genes.) What is more, it coincides with the subjectivity of human time about which St Augustine spoke so eloquently in his *Confessionum*. It is the form of our interior monologues that are often centred upon one idea, one thought—one theme, in musical terms. The famous last episode of Joyce's *Ulysses* is thus centred upon love. Molly's thoughts circle around love, around its light, until both are extinguished by sleep. We are far from what Calvino advocates in his *American Lessons*: fastness and lightness. Of course neither Tolstoy nor Beethoven are long-winded and slow-witted. A lot happens in Beethoven's works; in comparison with Schubert's pace and space, they are packed with action. So are Tolstoy's novels and even his sentences. Here is what I chanced upon in my edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica: 'If Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is a greater novel than Fielding's *Tom Jones* or Dickens' *David Copperfield*, it is not because its theme is nobler, or more pathetic, or more significant historically; it is because Tolstoy brings to his panoramic drama the compression and urgency usually regarded as the monopolies of briefer fiction.'

The same goes for Beethoven, naturally. How do the compression and urgency operate in his works? Let us take a piece that everybody knows by heart: *Für Elise*. Why is it so intense, so popular—so inevitable, in a sense? The theme is rather simple, not to say primitive. A short motif (a compressed melody) is repeated many times with only slight variations. But most people would consider it a haunting, hypnotic melody. Why? On account of its simplicity? Sure enough, many melodies written by Beethoven are simple and even rudimentary. Often they consist just of a short arpeggio. And *Für Elise* starts with a trill in slow motion. But works of tremendous complexity grew out of those 'genes'. Why do they haunt us despite their complexity which is invariably frowned upon in the realm of art? (Many people talk about Mozart's 'divine simplicity'. I have never heard anybody utter the same words in relation to Beethoven's music.) Why are we tempted to treat them like our old acquaintances, our friends and even our mistresses?

A hypnotist repeats the same words in a suggestive tone. We fall asleep and dream of things we are not likely to recall in our waking hours. Beethoven often repeats the same motif with only slight variations. The first movement of the *Fifth* is a good example. We stay wide awake of course, but something similar to a hypnotic seance does happen during a performance of his work—even if there are no ostentatious repetitions in it.

Beethoven drives everything home. 'Home' is one of his keywords. In addition to his hypnotic powers he occasionally reveals his surgical skill as well, carrying out a heart transplant operation to reduce his motto 'from heart to heart' to its simplest form.

In Beethoven's sketchbooks one might follow the metamorphoses undergone by his symphonies and sonatas, by his quartets. Some melodies would get reduced, abridged, as he

continued to work on them—for years; others expanded, came into blossom as if to counteract the autumnal predominance upon which he touched in the postscript to the *Heiligenstadt Testament*. The *Adagio* of the *Emperor Concerto* is a good example of the latter variety. So is the *Andante* of the *Kreutzer Sonata*. 'Spring' is another keyword.

The way Beethoven worked on his melodies reminds me of the following passage from Richard Dawkins' *River Out of Eden*:

Each generation is a filter, a sieve: good genes tend to fall through the sieve into the next generation; bad genes tend to end up in bodies that die young or without reproducing. Bad genes may pass through the sieve for a generation or two, perhaps because they have the luck to share a body with good genes. But you need more than luck to navigate successfully through a thousand sieves in succession, one sieve under the other. After a thousand successive generations, the genes that have made it through are likely to be the good ones.

No composer had ever worked like that before. And very few did after.

The river of DNA 'flows through time, not space. It is a river of information, not a river of bones and tissues: a river of abstract instructions for building bodies, not a river of solid bodies themselves...The river of pure digital information, majestically flowing through geological time and splitting into three billion branches.' *Für Elise* and the first movement of the *Fifth Symphony* are based on building blocks—on genes rather than on themes. So are the *Piano Sonata in F Major*, Opus 54 and the greater part of the *Piano Sonata in E Major*, Opus 109. They have more affinities with living matter than with works of art, displaying the phenomenon of self-organisation whose key features are self-renewal, adaptation and evolution.

The first movement of the *Eroica* is chiefly based on an arpeggio-theme which, in the course of its self-renewal, adaptation and evolution, outgrows the habitual framework of the sonata form, eventually introducing a gigantic, tumour-like coda. It sounds like a benign tumour at first; there follows the Funeral March.

All his life Beethoven strove to counteract the postscript to the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, seizing fate by the throat. Sometimes the result is a *naïve* outburst of joy; sometimes his joy seems to border on hysterics—in the finale of the *Ninth*. But a lot of melodies that adorn his slow movements are placid, serene and may be likened to Japanese poetry. They disclose no sensual nuances which are so characteristic of Mozart's melodies.

Picking a violet,—

The slender
Heart of Spring!
 (Gyôdai)

Silent flowers
Speak also
To that obedient ear within.
 (Onitsura)

'*Mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei*' ('more as an expression of the feeling than painting')—in these words he described his *Pastoral Symphony*. (Many of his works might have been nicknamed '*Pastoral*'.) Another reflection in the inner mirror, another interior monologue. A great many of Beethoven's thoughts originate in his heart so that, instead of 'heartfelt', I should rather say 'heartthought' with regard to his music, thereby coining a new word. Another of his keywords.

Matthew Arnold wrote in one of his essays: 'The truth is we are not to take *Anna Karénine* as a work of art; we are to take it as a piece of life.' (This novel has all the ingredients of a huge slice of life—the agrarian problems, among other things.) And Haydn composed works of art. So did Mozart, Brahms, Chopin, Monteverdi. They did not play dice. Beethoven is closer to Bach in this respect; and in many other respects. Psychologically, mentally, he is closer to Bach than to Haydn and Mozart, especially in his last period. Yet Bach's interior monologues were dialogues in disguise—a continuous prayer.

A lot came to be reflected in Beethoven's inner mirror: Napoleonic Wars and Japanese poetry, the Moon and Filipov's bun shop, dead leaves and the Garden of Eden. In my essay on the *Diabelli Variations* I said that Beethoven was the best exponent of Paradise in music, for all his trials and tribulations. Actually he seems to have made a Dantean journey: from Hell to Paradise, from Minor to Major (often within the same work), from Time to Eternity. And like Dante he had the knack of predicting the future—at least that of music. In a way, he was writing science fiction novels.

And the future can be reflected only in the inner mirror. The future also speaks to that obedient ear within.

1999
 Versailles

FRANZ SCHUBERT

THE TRUTH

Now and then Schubert is still regarded as a nice, naïve composer, light-heartedly singing the delights of rustic life whose stock components—brooks, windmills, etc—are often mentioned in the texts he used for his lieder. The point is a great many of his innocent-sounding lieder—let alone the tragic ones—presage Hugo Wolf's nightmares.

Bach's minor tonalities often have a joyful connotation as if sufferings and injustice were part of God's overall design. Spinoza says that evil exists only in the finite minds of men, deteriorated by Space and Time; in the timeless, infinite Mind of God everything is beautiful—*tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté*, in other words. 'To God all things are fair and good and just, but men have assumed some to be unjust and some just,' says Heraclitus. In Beethoven's music, Major and Minor seem to denote the traditional opposites of our moods: joy and sadness. In the last years of his life Schubert endowed Major with tragic overtones, trying our powers of endurance to breaking point. In his late works Major and Minor are almost interchangeable, which often results in their rapid, sudden, illogical juxtaposition. The dancing rhythms that run (or walk or tiptoe) through his works have nothing in common either with Viennese habits—the inhabitants of the city seem to dance even when they moon around—or with village fêtes as painted by Brueghel. Rather, they make one think about psychoanalysts and their patients, if not of lunatic asylums. And they also bring to mind the German word '*unheimlich*' which may be translated as follows: uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, dismal, uncanny, ghastly. In 1919 Freud wrote an essay entitled *Das Unheimliche* in which he dissects the word and gives a few examples of its intervention in our life. At some point he compares the words '*unheimlich*' and '*heimlich*', the latter meaning just the opposite: intimate, friendly, comfortable, tame, familiar. But '*heimlich*' is a word of manifold meanings and one of them is identical to its opposite, '*unheimlich*'. 'In general,' writes Freud, 'we are reminded that the word "*heimlich*" is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight.' On account of this ambivalence '*heimlich*' is even more uncanny (dismal, ghastly) than '*unheimlich*'. And Schubert's music is an ideal proving ground for my hypothesis.

Listening to Schubert may give rise to a feeling of uneasiness, for he cannot help getting beyond the limits of music—of art in general. He announces the truth lying outside the realm of sounds, words and colours. And this truth reaches beyond both the rules of catharsis and those of musical composition; hence the accusations of clumsiness and amateurism that Schubert had to endure throughout his life.

There are very few variants in his music: the truth needs no variants.

1993

Versailles

A TRAITOR

*Per ch'io mi volsi, e vidimi davante
e sotto i piedi un lago che per gelo
avea di vetro e non d'acqua sembiante.*

Dante, *Inferno*, Canto XXXII

Schubert was perhaps the most lovable composer in history. Even his piano-playing must have been lovable, in a way. It is all the more bizarre to associate him with the Ninth Circle of Dante's *Inferno*—the frozen waters of Cocytus in which various types of traitor can be found and observed. (And nowadays the word 'bizarre' is used exclusively in a pejorative sense.)

I do not think that Schubert ever betrayed anyone—at least his biographers are silent on this point. But he did betray himself and what he stood for in the minds of those who were aware of his existence. And he also betrayed the Vienna School, its Edenic harmony.

In his early years he often betrayed the dark side of his nature. In the *Grand Duo* (D.V. 812), for example, he seeks to soften, to 'disarm' the most tragic episodes with fast tempos: the sinister, syncopated, creepy Trio of the third movement becomes a melancholy lied, while the final movement's metastases are turned into benign tumours.

In his late years Schubert *always* betrayed his *Ländler* and lieder, his beautiful *Müllerinnen* and handsome shepherds. He would accomplish this self-appointed task through thunderous, chord-loaded interruptions, and with the aid of tonal deviations where Minor was the proverbial 'fly in the ointment'. And the number of flies increased almost daily. Proportionally, the quantity of the ointment decreased.

In the *Fantasy* for violin and piano Schubert resorts to spectacular pyrotechnic displays—his most cunning self-betrayal, in my opinion. Indeed the piece seems to have been written for virtuoso performers, acting as a catalyst for applause. Yet its self-mockery and self-destruction are terrifying, almost as masochistic as in the *Wanderer Fantasy*. Worse still, Schubert oversteps the boundary of his own inner conflicts and levels his musical criticism at the brilliance of his epoch, of Vienna—a rare occurrence in the history of music. More explicitly Schumann achieved the same result in his *Carnival*. On the other hand I do not think that Mahler was mocking philistines in the finale of his *Seventh Symphony*. He believed in 'affirmation' and, from a musical point of view, was equally successful as both an optimist and a pessimist. But there is no room here for polemics against Adorno. So much for the betrayal of virtuosity.

Last in my Dantean catalogue of treasons (which are treasures) there comes the 'betrayal of *espressivo*'. No other composer was so fond of long-drawn-out pianissimo. (*Himmlische Längen*,

forsooth!) These Bergmanian whispers undermine and often destroy the underlying 'bel canto' of Schubert's tunes. It is as if a singer were humming a lied of yesteryear, having sung himself hoarse. *Les mélodies d'outre-tombe*. (Incidentally, the greater part of the *Unvollendete* must sound pianissimo.) These otherworldly pianissimo-spaces have a lot in common with Dante's frozen lake—the final destination of the *Winterreise*.

In one of my essays I ask how many circles Schubert would have added to Dante's *Inferno* had he lived for another ten years. Today I wonder how many infernal circles he harboured during the last two years of his life. At any rate, his pastoral landscapes bleed like the trees in the Wood of the Suicides depicted in Canto XIII of the *Inferno*.

1997

Versailles

AN UNDERDOG

In Japan, winners have their reward in terms of worldly success but traditionally serve as a foil to losers idolised by historians and the multitude—two or three centuries after their deaths. In the West, Christian spokesmen privilege the underdog in society, often to the detriment of the rich, hedonists and Nietzschean supermen. It is no easy task to imagine our lives *outside* traditions and dogmas. And yet I think that even a man living on an island innocent of history would instinctively feel pity for a wounded animal, let alone for the sufferings of a fellow man. And I do hope that pity is a *natural* human instinct which neither Darwinian evolution nor Nietzsche's philosophy nor any New World Order will ever eradicate completely.

Schubert succeeded in transmuting the base metals of his misfortunes into musical gold. As a composer, he was exceptionally outspoken: even Freud would not have drawn more confessions out of his unconscious. Only Mahler, Gesualdo and Schostakovich might be compared to him in this respect.

Schubert was an underdog *par excellence*—after all, in a letter to Leopold Kupelwieser, he describes himself as 'the most unfortunate, the most miserable being in the world'. And I am certain he was not unconcerned about his social and musical status. I consequently disagree with Adorno who regards the *Great Symphony* as the last authentically positive orchestral piece. I should rather call it 'authentically negative'. So is the *Wanderer Fantasy*, in my opinion. Both are unmitigated pictures of the underdog. (I wonder what kind of picture gallery Schubert would have chosen had he been commissioned to compose *Pictures at an Exhibition*.) In both pieces the second movement is almost annihilated by the preceding and following movements. And both endings are mechanically ruthless.

For some reason, Schubert identified with a wanderer, although he hardly ever ventured outside Vienna. And he could not even appeal for help to those organisations which try to assist displaced persons: he was living at home after all. What is a pianist supposed to feel upon reading the following excerpt from Schubert's biography: 'The only public concert Schubert gave took place on March 26, 1828—eight months before his death. It was both artistically and financially a success, and the impecunious composer, it is recorded, was at last able to buy himself a piano'?

1997

Versailles

DER LEIERMANN

Es ist wirklich unglaublich, wie nichtssagend und bedeutungsleer, von außen gesehen, und wie dumpf und besinnungslos, von innen empfunden, das Leben der allermeisten Menschen dahinfließt. Es ist ein mattes Sehnen und Quälen, ein träumerisches Taumeln durch die vier Lebensalter hindurch zum Tode, unter Begleitung einer Rehe trivialer Gedanken. Sie gleichen Uhrwerken, welche aufgezogen werden und gehen, ohne zu wissen warum; und jedes Mal, daß ein Mensch gezeugt und geboren worden ist, ist die Uhr des Menschenlebens aufs neue aufgezogen, um jetzt ihr schon zahllose Male abgespieltes Leierstück abermals zu wiederholen, Satz vor Satz und Takt vor Takt, mit unbedeutenden Variationen.

Schopenhauer, *Der Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*

In the epigraph to my essay, *A Traitor*, I quoted an excerpt from Canto XXXII of Dante's *Inferno*, which describes the frozen waters of Cocytus and the interminable, immobile *Winterreise* of its sinful inhabitants. And I spoke about Schubert's fondness for 'pianissimo-spaces': their quasi-immobility and coldness—'espressivolessness'—are somehow akin to the frozen waters of Cocytus. Indeed there is something icy about Schubert, for all the apparent warmth of his music and personality—something icy and immobile. The symbol of this immobility is the last lied of the *Winterreise* during which the *Leiermann* first becomes his own instrument and then a block of ice, a snowman, a showpiece of winter. The organ grinder plays the same tune over and over again for the simple reason that he cannot do otherwise: he has no other tune at his disposal. Schubert had a myriad tunes at his disposal; perhaps no composer in the history of music gave birth to so many beautiful tunes. And yet I often get the feeling that his music consists of one tune only—a mournful tune echoing itself throughout his works.

Of course there are lots of tunes in Schubert's works which never succumb to the lure of monothematic structures. His tunes never grow out of each other, as often happens in the works of Liszt, for instance; they are quite independent and their variety seems astonishing even to those who, in the sixties, regarded Paul McCartney as a modern substitute or a re-incarnation of Schubert. And yet the latter's sonatas, symphonies and quartets are the first examples of what has come to be known as 'repetitive music'. (Needless to say, in this essay I am solely concerned with the history of Western music.) Incidentally, while thinking about the repetitive nature of Schubert's music I sometimes imagine Ravel's *Bolero* performed slowly and softly—up to the

bitter end. And of course the tune is different. What kind of tune do I hear? A cross between the *Leiermann* and the second movement of the *Piano Sonata in A Major*, D. V. 959 (without the central episode).

To many people, even to professional musicians, Glen Gould included, Schubert's works appear 'monotonous', 'structurally deficient'. I do not think Schubert's music is monotonous—or structurally deficient, for that matter. Rather, it is motionless, uneventful, '*espressivoless*'. Some of Beethoven's works also sound motionless: the ending of the *Sonata in C Minor*, Opus 111, the slow parts of the third movement of the *Quartet in A Minor*, Opus 132. But they seem to be situated outside Space and Time—outside musical space and time, at least. Though subjected to rhythm and harmonic rules, Beethoven does his best to 'get off the track': he blurs melodic contours by means of trills and other *agréments*; he simplifies and unifies harmonies so that the whole sounds like one harmony gently moving within itself. As a result, those parts of his works often get off the time-track, ending up in a sort of no-rhythm's land and no-harmony's land. (Let us not forget that, as far as music goes, rhythm is Time and harmony Space.) Schubert does nothing of the sort: he always remains within the bounds of musical space and time. And he even emphasises the time-element in his works by an overabundant use of tunes which are the carriers of musical time. I actually think that Time in music came to the fore with the appearance of tunes—of secular music. Anyway the sentiment of Time is associated with secular feelings, as opposed to the timelessness of God and sacred art. The Gregorian chant as well as the choral music of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are part and parcel of religious rituals and have no time of their own. On the other hand, an amorous adventure is wholly dependent on Time. But this is a subject for another essay.

In a way, Schubert relies on Time to make us aware of the breathtaking beauty that his tunes display even in his most Hell-born, neurasthenic works. But he repeats those tunes at length: he does not bother to modify them, adjusting their contours to the structural development of the material he uses and shapes. The structures of his works seem to have been stunted in their development. And their beauty wears off, becomes '*espressivoless*' and downright irritating, sometimes. Or painful, physiologically painful. Indeed, 'painful' is the word I use and 'feel' quite often in connection with his music.

What is so painful about it? Its monotony, its uneventfulness and '*espressivolessness*', I suppose—the beauty of the world repeated over and over again until it becomes its own parody, its own caricature; until it wears off and dies away; until we die and pass into the world where Beethoven's last quartets await us beyond Space and Time. But even in Paradise I would be unhappy if I heard Schubert's *String Quintet in C Major* or his last quartet. And I would be

unhappier still if I was to play his last piano sonatas. Only beauty and Time can make us feel ugliness and death—the *espressivolessness* of the Hereafter.

Espressivolessness. This word seems to express Schubert's music better than any analysis, any comparison—this long, cumbersome, self-negating, neologistic word. *Espressivolessness*. And yet his works are so expressive, so humane. And yet his works are inhumane, unmerciful, inexorable. 'And yet'—another verbal expression of his oppressive, contradictory music. And yet, for more than a century, almost everybody mistook him for a naïve, pastoral composer.

Time is nothing but one moment repeated over and over again. That is what we hear and fear in Schubert's music. In no work of art can I feel Time so acutely as in his works; in his *Moments musicaux* and in his last piano sonatas—in those *heures musicales*. And any expression grows meaningless with the passing of the years. Any expression, any feeling. Anything.

1997

Versailles

HECTOR BERLIOZ

I

The history of music and destiny played a trick on Berlioz, putting him in a sort of cul-de-sac: the portion of time he lived in came to an end with his death and consequently he had no followers, no disciples. Oddly enough, this aspect of his life is reflected in most of his melodies that stop abruptly or deviate from their paths, from what we expect to hear. They seem to sound within the walls against which they bump whenever trying to reach a logical conclusion. They are illogical, so to speak. The same goes for Berlioz's harmonies: their ways are unfathomable.

Perhaps there is a structure in the human brain, which responds to beauty as such. Can one affirm that there is the 'universal sense of beauty'—very much like Chomsky's 'universal grammar'? It is said that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder (and in the ears of the listener). This saying always makes me think about Helen of Troy who was worshipped by all men without exception. The number of Mozart's admirers also seems to contradict any *personal* approach to beauty, but Berlioz requires an effort on the part of a listener: his music does not assert itself with the certainty of a law to which everyone should submit without a murmur. It does not conform to the universal morphology of beauty, to its pattern, occasionally clouding the issue or drawing a red herring across the trail. All of a sudden we find ourselves in the realm of harmonies which are not traditionally associated with beauty. And Berlioz's melodies are like a man who, ashamed of his own grandeur, sticks out his tongue or does something utterly inconsistent with his previous conduct. (The second movement of the *Symphonie fantastique* is an exception to the rule of unpredictability: it displays a melody proceeding straight to its logical conclusion—not on a bumpy road but on a sort of motorway.) So why did Toscanini maintain that the love scene in *Romeo et Juliette* was the most beautiful music in the world? Probably because love chokes on itself. Anyway it is permanently short of breath; only a self-assured lover can go through a declaration of love without stammering and lowering his eyes. Berlioz's music keeps shifting its ground. In a way, it is like those modern buildings which, due to their mobile structure, become successively a concert hall, a cinema, a theatre, an exhibition centre, a sports stadium. But in the domain of art many opt for dignified beauty associated with immobility: old castles, temples.

With a few exceptions, Berlioz offers neither a smooth flow of sounds nor the immobility of magnificence. That is why he mirrors human psychology better than Mozart, Raphael and Freud whose theories are too smooth, in my opinion. And his symbols have often lead to an ossification of psychoanalytical practices.

II

Last night I had a claustrophobic dream: for a long time I got stuck in a lift. For many hours, perhaps forever. Upon awakening I recalled *Les Troyens* and *Le Requiem*, their immobility, the symptoms of claustrophobia one suffers from when listening to them. As my wonderful friend Jacob Joffé put it, 'From beginning to end there hangs fatum over *Les Troyens*. It is the only music tragedy. Wagner composed dramas.' And the melodies one hears in this opera are not jittery at all, being oppressed, almost crashed by fatum. And *Les nuits d'été* may be likened to eighteenth-century castles. There are no loose ends in this work; every melody seems to have been carved in stone.

Death is always akin to a motionless lift. Where was it going? Up or down? Will it ever budge from where it got stuck? Be that as it may, I would not have predicted the ending of this essay.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 24, 2003

Moscow

FREDERIC CHOPIN

Borges said once that readers should enjoy themselves. In other words, the chief goal of a writer is to provide enjoyment for his readers. The same goes for other creative artists, I imagine: painters, composers. What kind of enjoyment are they supposed to provide?

Borges was talking about the pleasure he derived from Oscar Wilde's books, if I remember rightly. I also enjoy reading Oscar Wilde, disregarding many a disparaging remark aimed at this hedonist by some of his fellow writers. My love for Oscar Wilde does not prevent me, however, from enjoying Joyce, Kafka, Proust, Musil and Beckett, who are my favourite writers of the twentieth century. In the realm of music, this mixture of diametrically opposite pleasures could be personified by Chopin and Schoenberg, for instance. I love both of them, and sometimes I cannot even distinguish between the pleasures I experience when listening to their respective works. What I actually experience is pure musical joy accompanied by all sorts of bodily reactions: beatific smiles, shivers of ecstasy, tears, etc. In those moments of bliss I do not really care about consonances and dissonances, tonality and atonality. I forget that many people find Chopin nice and charming and Schoenberg abrasive, if not intolerable.

Chopin is neither nice nor charming. It is true that his music was admired in the Parisian *salons* and other intimate halls where he played his nocturnes and mazurkas in order to make his living and air his grievances. But nineteenth-century *salons* had nothing in common with today's supermarkets where one can hear soft music or a Beethoven symphony interpreted by Karajan. (Not by Furtwängler or Klemperer, mind you.) In those *salons* and castles the best music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was born and performed. (Oscar Wilde owed a great deal to *salons* and castles.) There used to be a vital link between aristocratic and artistic élites which combined their efforts to offer the world the highest achievements of the human spirit. Nowadays, alas, this link is not vital any longer despite the linguistic similarity between the words 'aristocrat' and 'artist'. What is more, neither of those élites can be found anywhere except in the past, in the glorious, enviable past. (Not even in backward countries do they exist nowadays.) But, for all technological novelties, time machines are not on the market yet.

Chopin should not be compared to the composers who supply soundtracks for contemporary movies: nice, charming, nondescript music. Unlike most artists struggling for life and universal renown in our business-oriented world, he never pandered to public taste, whatever lay people might think when listening to broadcasts of his works. He was far more influenced by the Polish language in which the words 'honour' and 'sadness' play such an important role—to the detriment of the word 'vulgarity'. (In *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin owns up to his inability to translate

the word 'vulgar' into Russian.) Like Schubert and Webern he was an enigmatic figure. His works have been analysed in Kabbalistic terms by one of the most prominent musicologists, Alexey Kandinsky. (He also applied Kabbalistic methods to Liszt's *Sonata in B Minor* and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*—with amazing results. Oddly enough, Schumann's music seems impervious to these mathematico-linguistic methods.) Besides, even those who are not acquainted with the Kabbalah can fully enjoy the texture of Chopin's works. Whenever I play his nocturnes, mazurkas, polonaises and ballads I am reminded of Dickens whose sentences are so rich, so intense, so full of echoes, modulations and transitions that no plot is required to prop them up, contrary to the view some literary critics seem to hold. Chopin's works are a 'fixed improvisation', to use the definition that a friend of mine coined during one of our discussions. In this respect Chopin reminds me of Gogol, especially when he indulges in wonderful, fioritura-like cadenzas which are in a way similar to Gogol's comparisons, to those stories within a story. Chopin also reminds me of Dante's *Purgatorio* which is full of sadness and nostalgia. Of course Schubert was a more assiduous explorer of the *Inferno*. But even Schubert and Dante himself would have been surprised by the sheer despair resounding throughout Chopin's *Sonata in B Flat Minor*, the last movement being the tempest that carries Paolo and Francesca around their vicious circle (*ombre portate da la detta briga*). No wonder that the third movement became the soundtrack for funerals all over the world. And yet we continue to enjoy the *Sonata in B Flat Minor*. A masochistic enjoyment, in a sense. Heidegger thought that awakening angst was the chief goal of philosophy. And in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* books are considered dangerous and irresistible because they make people unhappy.

As a matter of fact, Chopin reminds me of everybody. And of nothing.

2000

Versailles

ROBERT SCHUMANN

A lot has been written about the influence of music on the human soul. Boethius devotes a few pages to it in the *Libro Primo* where he tells how Pythagoras pacified a riotous youth by using an appropriate harmony for his song. Resorting to the same method, he also dealt with a drunkard who was about to force his way into the house of an irreproachable maiden.

Nowadays music therapy often replaces a good old medicine or a brutal injection by a few Mozart melodies which, however, may in the long run prove rather harmful, considering the destructive nature of music. (Once again the composers prior to Bach remain outside the scope of my analysis.) Even a most placid nocturne harbours something dreadful and therefore disrupts our train of thought and is sure to destroy our peace of mind unless we stop listening to it with the utmost concentration. This kind of reflection is often prompted by Schumann—not only because he himself was a notorious victim of music, its life-long incurable addict. Last night I heard a minimalist work in which dominated the spirit of a calm, self-assertive Schumann: he did write some unclouded, solemn pages designed to subdue the souls of hooligans and, above all, his own unruly soul. In the piece I heard last night this self-possessed solemnity was repeated over and over again; all of a sudden I got the feeling that, stuck in his own tranquillity, Schumann had gone mad once more. Before a bout of morose insanity, which may be punctuated by hysterical outbursts, some lunatics exhibit a smile as if reconciled to the world and themselves. Such smiles remind me of an eerie photograph where unruffled Nietzsche stands beside his mother. The Schumannian piece carried on in its own triumphant way; the sounds grew more and more serene, almost transparent, immaterial. Nothing foretold a hysterical outburst and, naturally enough, it never took place. I do not think the composer counted on the audience's unrestrained reaction which, strictly speaking, would not have been out of tune, offsetting the unsavoury self-righteousness of the work, its phoney haven of peace. Actually a wild reaction to such music is quite in keeping with common sense: if, for the space of fifty minutes, you are shown a straitjacket—someone is waving it before your very nose—you cannot help going into hysterics, being in this respect not very different from an ordinary bull irritated by a scarlet rag. And the greater part of Schumann's music may be likened to a straitjacket. Even the *Kinderszenen* are liable to drive you crazy by their grown-up childishness; an adult seems to laugh at his own untaught, unsophisticated former self. And what about the ecstatic gravity of the *Fantasy's* second movement? Suffice it to say that, on Soviet TV, it used to accompany the images of banquets at the Kremlin which was a regular madhouse, especially in Brezhnev's days.

But let us go back to the *Kinderszenen* and the bout of insanity lurking deep down. Schumann skirts round the abyss, now and then stopping on the very brink of it and looking at its bottom where his childhood and also his death seem to await him. Unexpectedly the straitjacket dancing before his eyes leads to a haven of peace, to an ivory tower inside which a poet is measuring the distance between his present state and the games he used to indulge in as a child. Another distance lies between his body bent over a writing desk and his death. Perhaps it is the same distance, the same body that has always been in the cradle or at least in a kindergarten. Meanwhile music dissolves into poetry and vice versa; madness adjusts itself to life which is so incredible and illusory as to make us doubt the testimony of our eyes. Have we already gone mad and are in the grip of a drawn-out delirium? Anyway, writing a piece of music or poetry is a sort of delirium or madness. In the act of creating artists deviate from a normal train of thought, get off the beaten tracks to reach the Garden of Eden or another circle of Hell which, incidentally, may be situated on a Russian country road, in a ditch, in the proverbial mud. The Garden of Eden they look for in their quest is private, unreliable and short-lived; whereas any circle of Hell can become their permanent dwelling place. Why venture into those circles, spheres and jungles?

Schumann's music and destiny will not answer this question. With peculiar obstinacy he did his best to restore a psychic equilibrium in his body, soul or mind. Judging from his works, he did not know exactly where to restore this equilibrium. Some passages sound so muscular as to suggest it is his body that the composer had in mind. And others seem to take care of his mind, if not of his soul—for instance, the third movement of the above-mentioned *Fantasy in C Major*, Opus 17. But often he stopped caring about anything except the chaos that a Russian poet, Feodor Tutchev, mentions in one of his poems, 'Don't awake the sleeping tempests / Under them there stirs a chaos.'

Romantic composers and twentieth-century music did not make things easier for therapists; even Pythagoras would have been thrown off balance by Schubert, Schumann and Hugo Wolf. But, after all, it is pointless to pacify unbridled young men. Let them unleash their demons! Anyway how to guard somebody like Schumann against irrationality? The cosmic harmony upon which dwelt Boethius and Pythagoras is not to be found in his music. And even the harmony he manages to set up within his microcosm is precarious because there is a close bond between microcosm and macrocosm. Schumann might have put his confidence in Renaissance counterpoint, but he was inexorably driven to the *Kreisleriana*, to the carnival of feelings and thoughts. No one was in a position to stop him in his tracks; likewise no one prevented Nietzsche from writing *Ecce Homo*. No real artist ever stops midway between the beginning and the end. At

times the latter is off-limits, as it were: beyond the human mind. So is the former as a matter of fact.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 16, 2003

Moscow

FRANZ LISZT

Aelia Laelia Crispis is neither man, nor woman, nor androgyny; neither a child nor a youth, nor an old person; neither chaste nor a whore—but everything.

A legend about the great fourteenth-century German mystic Meister Eckhart relates that one day a girl announced herself at the monastery gate as his daughter, pointing out that she had no name. She was neither a virgin nor a spouse nor a widow, neither a lord nor a lady, neither a thrall nor a wench. In relation to God, she was all of these things and also their opposites. In 1567 Richard White of Basingstoke explained the riddle thus: Aelia Laelia Crispis is the soul which is male in women and female in men. Aelia is solar, Laelia lunar, Crispis earthly. When the soul acquires knowledge of herself, she realises that her origin lies above duality.

In his comparatively long life, Liszt often behaved like a star pianist. He had many mistresses and gave a helping hand to many young musicians. (Usually composers have neither the time nor the penchant for everyday flirtation and master classes.) As a composer, he also behaved like a pianist. Even some of his orchestral works sound like brilliant piano improvisations; and his early piano pieces faithfully reflect their author's incomparable virtuoso gift. His late piano pieces, on the other hand, reflect his mind, his sadness and lassitude—and the future of music; so that Princess Carolynne was right when she said, 'Liszt has flung his spear far into the future.' He has also flung his spear heavenward—high enough to realise that the origin of music (and his own origin) lay above duality. His method of 'transformation of themes'—from which Wagner derived the 'system of leitmotifs'—enabled him to obliterate the clear-cut, male-or-female, black-or-white identity of themes. Indeed he was in the habit of turning them into their opposites within a few pages. In this respect, some of his works have a pronounced androgynous flavour.

The *Sonata in B Minor* has given rise to so many literary interpretations that I for one am tempted to regard it as a piece of pure music. Or perhaps, when composing the *Sonata*, Liszt drew on his personal experience rather than on Goethe's *Faust*, the Bible or Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Or perhaps he just composed a piece of music which seems to illustrate the following line from *Macbeth*: 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair.' Let us not forget that W.B. Yeats embroidered upon the subject in one of the 'Crazy Jane' poems:

*'Fair and foul are near of kin,
And fair needs foul,' I cried.*

The third theme of the introduction undergoes a previously unheard-of metamorphosis—from Mephistopheles' laughter to purity associated with angels, Margaret and the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve before the Fall. (I resort to literary associations exclusively for argument's sake.) In other words, the theme becomes its opposite within five pages. And at the end of the *Sonata* it becomes a sort of androgyny: neither Mephistopheles nor Margaret, neither the Serpent nor Eve, neither Fate nor the princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein—one of the composer's favourite mistresses. In a way, it becomes Liszt himself: neither a god nor a human, neither a monk nor a libertine—but everything. The last page of the *Sonata* reconciles the opposites.

The heavy is the root of the light.

The tranquil is the ruler of the hasty.

From *Tao-te ching*

The *Sonata* also reconciles Liszt's early and late works—the different periods of his life.

Once I attended a recital of songs during which a few works by Schubert, Schumann and Tchaikovsky were performed. There was also a Liszt song in the programme. I was so struck by its beauty that I forgot whatever had preceded its performance. And I was unable to concentrate on the songs that followed it.

After forty-five years of piano-playing one's soul gets a bit blasé about piano-composers, but I am often struck by the beauty of Liszt's works *before* I actually recognise what is performed. This happened with the *Sposalizio*, the *Consolations* and the *Sonetto 104 del Petrarca*, which I have heard in various restaurants as background music. Their sensuous beauty is counterbalanced by the late pieces which are austere, ascetic, if not downright ugly. In the *Sonata* the ugliness crops up in the fugato which seems to depict a multitude of baby devils crawling out of fissures in the earth. But the F-Sharp-Major episode is as beautiful as anything Liszt ever composed.

Here is another example of how the opposites can be reconciled: 'When Confucius was in his sixtieth year, in that year his views changed. What he had before held to be right, he now ended by holding to be wrong; and he did not know whether the things which he now pronounced to be right were not those which he had for fifty-nine years held to be wrong.'

Liszt's views and music began to change when he was in his fiftieth year. At the time he was living in Rome. He was increasingly occupied with religious music. He completed the oratorios *Die Legende von der heiligen Elisabeth* and *Christus*. And in 1862 he composed his variations on a theme from Bach's cantata *Weinen, Klagen* which was inspired by the death of his daughter Blandine.

Twenty years later, in the winter of 1882-83, he stayed with Wagner and Cosima in Venice. Suddenly he interrupted his work on the oratorio *Die Legende von heiligen Stanislaus* and wrote two pieces entitled *La lugubre gondola*—an echo of the funeral processions he saw on the canals. Two months later Wagner died and his body was carried in a similar procession.

At the end of his life, Liszt reduced the quantity of notes in his works; and, oddly enough, the quantity of beauty, assuming that beauty is quantifiable. At least in his late piano pieces he is far more preoccupied with its opposite. And in those days foul was just foul, although these pieces do have a beauty of their own—a kind of otherworldly beauty. They are said to have anticipated the harmonic style of Debussy. But Debussy's music deals with earthly phenomena: scents, sails, winds. His clouds are far closer to the earth than Liszt's *Nuages gris* (i.e. neither black nor white, but both), which do not seem to have been made of small drops of water, being UFOs in their own right. And alien harmonies are different from ours. (In my opinion Liszt has much more in common with Schoenberg.)

Totentanz, Funérailles, Trois Odes Funèbres, Requiem, Am Grabe Richard Wagners, Csardas Macabre, La lugubre gondola I, La lugubre gondola II, Trauer-Vorspiel und Marsch, Unstern—quite a number of Liszt's works were inspired by funeral rites and his funereal moods. And with the passing of the years his music grew heavier and heavier as if striving to give an adequate, *realistic* expression to these words in the burial service: 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.' (Crispis to Crispis.) But, in accordance with Taoist tenets, his music also grew lighter. The third *Klavierstück* (1873) and the forth *Klavierstück* (1876) are almost translucent and have an ethereal quality—Aelia, Laelia.

Unstern means 'unlucky stars'. *Un-stern*. The Heideggerian hyphen discloses several shades of meaning in this word: the inaccessibility of stars, the opposite of stars, the absence of stars, the refusal of stars. The subject-matter of *Unstern* is the force of gravity. And weightlessness.

Literary works often provided a stimulus for Liszt's creative élan. How can writers ever repay him for his generosity?

UN-STERN

*When something approaches the earth
People get frightened
And chase the alien substance away
With drums, prayers and curses.*

And with rockets.

I haven't seen anything

Approach the earth.

I think many things

Get away from the earth.

I am also trying

To get away from the earth.

She holds me in her embrace.

Yet she doesn't love me.

Here is a relevant line from Petrarch's *Sonnet*, N° 104: *E volo sopra 'l cielo e giaccio in terra.* (I fly to heaven and stay on earth.) Incidentally, the *Sonnet* has a pronounced androgynous flavour.

2001

Versailles

RICHARD WAGNER

I do not think that the life of any celebrity deserves close scrutiny, and therefore the efforts of biographers mostly result in small talk which cannot teach anything to anyone. The pleasure one draws from such talk and books do not substantially differ from the chitchat of concierges. And offering to the inquisitive world one's autobiography is permitted only to great people whose heritage mirrors the network of relations and nuances that govern their lives. I have no desire to submit to the judgement of the reader my musical past where transports of delight are stored next to fatigue and the downright aversion I experienced in my childhood and also in my youth whenever I had to repeat the same passage ad infinitum. The attempts to avoid what is called '*dolbyojka*' by Russian pianists led me in the long run to Bach's preludes and fugues that I played one hour every day instead of hammering my technique into shape by means of etudes, scales and the *Hannon*. No wonder that in my childhood I was keener on mathematics and physics than on piano playing. And I might not have become a musician at all had I not heard the *Jupiter*, *Don Giovanni* and, somewhat later, *Tristan* and *Die Walküre*.

In connection with Wagner one is bound to ask oneself the following question, 'Does music acquaint us with the feelings we cannot experience otherwise?' Of course I have no need of *Tristan* to discover the sentiment of love. Thanks to *Die Walküre*, however, I knew what life has denied me so far: the joys and sorrows of fatherhood. Perhaps the life of any man is more or less unfinished without this particular brand of joy and sorrow. And those unwilling to shackle themselves with the duties of a family man may resort to Wagner who, like a surgeon, performs a heart transplant as we listen to *Die Walküre* recorded by Furtwängler in 1954. And the heart beating in our chest—Wotan's heart—tells us a lot about the death of a son, about a heart-to-heart talk with a daughter, about an irrevocable parting with her. In my youth I experienced all these events so intensely that even now I have no urge to compare virtuality and reality, replacing Wotan's heart by my own. (My body will never reject his heart.) Actually Wagner's world is not virtual by its very nature: it is real to the point of making the Verists sound false. In *Tosca*, for instance, I can hear the *musical* suffering of a woman, her *musical* murder and suicide. *Die Walküre* operates on the genetic level. How does it achieve such a result? Wagner's name is closely associated with the 'system of leitmotifs' that he thought up with the help of Berlioz and Liszt. Basically this system is psychological, not to say biological. Let us take a hackneyed example: a man falls in love with a woman. Let us suppose this is a love at first sight. In one of my works I define it as follows, 'The first glance that may last forever.' Even now I think there is some truth in my statement, for love at first sight may be reduced to the first glance the duration

of which depends on circumstances, on the benevolence or malignity of fate. This glance can last a week, several years, a lifetime, eternity. The glance that spotted Beatrice in the Florentine crowd has come down to us through centuries and might even endure in Paradise where, I hope, the poet is never forsaken by his beloved. Whatever the amount of habits and moods accumulated in our memory as a result of watching the person we are in love with, a lot remains of the proverbial first glance. And if this person does not disappoint us, our love will be accompanied by the initial melody we heard on the memorable day of our first meeting. Our heart may perform the leitmotiv of love in a different tempo, in another orchestration, but we shall always recognise it on account of the same tremor or, to use music terminology, of the same melody.

Sometimes I get the feeling that all loves sound alike: love at first sight, love at second sight...love for a woman, for a man, for a son...for a cat or a dog. The diversity of the love-leitmotifs that Wagner showers on his characters might have been imposed by the imperatives of music: minimalism is good to a certain point. On the other hand, I would not mind hearing the love-leitmotiv associated with Sigmund and Sieglinde during King Mark's monologues or in the second act of *Parsifal* where Kundry yields to the allure of the '*reine Tor*'. Did Wagner love Cosima, his dog and his son in the same manner? Anyway he did not compose anything like the *Siegfried-Idyll* for his dog.

Last year I met a woman I had been in love with at the age of sixteen. Time had not spared her, but no amount of wrinkles could prevent me from feeling our love—leitmotiv in every particle of my body, in every fibre of my being. I physically felt the inevitability of love, its vitality and tenacity, to which, incidentally, I had been prepared by Wagner's operas. An aria is just an oasis bounded on all sides: it begins and terminates at some point. A leitmotiv has a beginning but is open-ended, so to speak. The unlimited duration of leitmotifs raises doubts about their origins. Do they ever begin or pursue us throughout centuries? Are they like genes that disseminate love and hatred, angst and death? I often quote Leibniz who wrote in a letter to Arnauld, 'The individual notion of each person involves once and for all everything that will ever happen to him.' Whatever happens is inscribed on the tablets of the Law that dates back to the Big Bang or even precedes it. We have been enmeshed in a tangle of leitmotifs from the very start. In a Stuttgart production of *Die Walküre* the scene of Sigmund's death is first projected on a gigantic screen where two armour-clad dummies fight a duel. Holding each other in a warm embrace, Wotan and Sigmund watch the film; neither protests when it is over. Sigmund defers to the Law and Hunding kills him. He is killed in his turn by Wotan's glance. This glance also has a long history because Wagner's operas begin before the curtain goes up. In my staging of the *Ring* I would show the outline of the plot a few days before the actual performance. Perhaps every

Wagner opera should be performed two times, three times in a row—to illustrate the length of his genes in the future.

The leitmotifs are often listed in the scholarly editions of his music, but none of those catalogues exhausts all their meanings. At some point in *Die Walküre* Wotan suddenly understands Brunnhilde's motives, forgives her, changes his attitude towards her crime or misdemeanour. The fatherly love transfigures him and illuminates the end of the opera so that the fire protecting Brunnhilde from vulgar assaults may be termed à la Turgenev 'the fire of triumphant love'. And I hear this leitmotiv not only when I recall my former loves or stop being angry but also in a moment of ephemeral bliss. Even a short-lived victory of joy over melancholy conjures up this leitmotiv in my mind.

One chord from Wagner's opera can become a leitmotiv of doubt, heartache, hope, resignation, appeasement. A mere thought about Wagner takes me back to my youth, to the days when I discovered his music and realised that life is just a transcription of his operas. In his early years Beethoven premièred his own music with panache. But whenever he had to play those works again he invariably bungled the job: he could not bear repetitions, *dolbyojka*. Like any creative artist, a composer never repeats anything, even though he or she may labour over the same work for years and years: every correction or addition pledges a new life, opens up new horizons. An interpreter is confined to the space of the work they perform; their horizons are bounded by the pages of the score. At the piano I often feel enmeshed in a net of notes from which I cannot disentangle myself. 'Repetition is the mother of learning,' say the Russians; but in the context of piano-playing repetitions remind me of Wotan's fury. When practising the works I have already played I come across the same technical problems and cope with them in the same way. Pianists really *hammer* the pieces they perform into shape and there are passages at which you have to hammer away for hours—the leitmotiv of boredom or death. Let us not forget that Philodemus advised against learning to play a musical instrument on the grounds that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages: *dolbyojka* spoils the euphoria. But listening to music is a source of joy, he thought, so it does not contradict the tenets of Epicure's teaching.

And yet this death-leitmotiv enables me to reach the leitmotiv of life concealed in every great work that was born before us and will outlive our boredom, parading the vitality of Schopenhauer's *Wille*. A good performer shares in this vitality and is nourished by it. As a poet, I cannot bear *dolbyojka* in any shape or form, but Schubert's leitmotifs help me along as I prepare his sonatas for a next concert. They are my genes I have to fondle in order to materialise the dream of Ancient China and modern geneticists—immortality.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 11, 2003

Moscow

GIUSEPPE VERDI

In the domain of so-called classical music I like almost everything. Even Donizetti may offer me a few moments of delectation because his melodies are very beautiful. Generally speaking, a beautiful melody can justify and condone a lot: a primitive accompaniment, a rudimentary handling of texture, a composer's foul disposition.

In the domain of literature, however, I pick and choose: a novel cannot get away with a nice plot. In a novel one expects to find the polyphony and texture that are conspicuous by their absence in Donizetti's music. Even such a great writer as Dostoevsky does not always enchant us with intricate texture, which somewhat simplifies his novels, reducing them to shadow plays. But he makes up for the textural insufficiency by the casuistry to which his underground man resorts in order to unravel his private Gordian knots. Yet I invariably get a little bored as I re-read Dostoevsky because I know exactly when and why Stavrogin will put his arms behind his back instead of inflicting a severe punishment on Shatov. And the words describing his gesture do not spin a web of metaphors and literary allusions which might have cut the whole episode into dozens of pieces. And it is far more difficult to analyse and memorise a mosaic than Malevich's *Black Square*. (There are many black squares and triangles in Dostoevsky's novels, but they never look like an image in a kaleidoscope.) Proust and Tolstoy are rooted in three-dimensional reality, voluminous and luscious, which endows their works with an infinite perspective. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, frequents too often the fourth dimension noted for its flexibility: it is malleable to the extent of coinciding with our fears and false revelations. And it also looks like Malevich's *Black Square*; or *White Square*, as the case may be. (For the same reason, I am more eager to re-read Musil than Kafka.)

In literature my tastes change with the passing of the years and are liable to undergo a radical metamorphosis: in my youth I adored Dostoevsky and disliked Tolstoy intensely. In the domain of music, however, I am faithful to my idols and semi-idols. Verdi does not take pride of place in my life where I erected monuments to Gesualdo, Schubert, Wagner and Schoenberg. But I always liked some of his operas, especially the ones to which I was introduced by Arturo Toscanini: *Otello*, *Falstaf* and, oddly enough, *La Traviata*. In Verdi's music one can hear Tolstoy's full-blooded world where the wines are always full-bodied. This fullness might stem from the Tolstoyan link to the earth, to whatever is earthy and palpable. The fourth dimension, where reigns Hugo Wolf who is Dostoevsky's musical cousin, does not interest Verdi. Even his elves and witches are down-to-earth creatures, in a way. Nevertheless, his *Macbeth* adds something to the original: the three-dimensional, earthly phantasma is even more frightening.

In *Otello* the texture is so intricate as to enable Jago to enmesh the 'credulous' Moor in its net; the latter might have found the former out had Verdi composed this opera at the early, straightforward stage of his career. For all his 'credulity', the Moor would have seen through Jago's melody and accompaniment. 'Othello is not jealous but credulous,' said Pushkin. In Verdi's early opera he might have been either jealous or credulous; in the late masterpiece he is both—as well as in Shakespeare's play. Credulity is one of the components of jealousy. A man in whose body and mind there are lots of 'jealous genes' does not always need credulity or suspicions: he may murder his wife on the spot if he happens to find a rival in the nuptial bed. But no man, however credulous, is likely to kill his wife after listening to a few ill-founded accusations levelled against her, if he has got no jealousy—genes. The handkerchief in Cassio's hands is a piece of circumstantial evidence, nothing more. To turn it into a tangible proof, Meyerhold intended to put it in the middle of the stage—the first object seen by the audience. Besides, jealousy lends itself to musical and literary treatment far more readily than credulity. I think that neither Shakespeare nor Verdi would have written anything about it. Robert Walzer wrote about credulity, but he has nothing in common with Verdi whose characters always take centre stage instead of vegetating in the wings. Verdi's music also takes centre stage as if erecting a monument to itself.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 19, 2003

Moscow

POSTSCRIPT:

In *Stages on Life's Way*, Kierkegaard imagines Socrates in Othello's shoes, a burst of laughter replacing the delicate smile for which the Athenian philosopher was justly famous. I still remember rather vividly how Laurence Olivier walked *barefoot* around the stage at the Kremlin Theater (1964). Actually Othello's shoes do not fit the situation for yet another reason: in Kierkegaard's book the Athenian philosopher catches his wife red-handed.

JACQUES OFFENBACH

I remember how surprised I was upon learning that Sollertinsky—a legendary Russian musicologist—counted Offenbach among the most outstanding composers in history. I regarded him as a 'light' composer and therefore listened to his music with a light part of my brain. But the heart cannot be divided into parts so easily: even the broken heart suffers in its entirety. From then onward I began listening to his operettas in earnest and the weight of Offenbachesque pleasures I have experienced over almost forty years is imposing enough to make me put the composer into the 'heavy' league.

It is the 22nd of December today and I already feel like listening to Offenbach, which I traditionally do at Christmas and on New Year's Eve. Love is never light because it cannot be jettisoned on the spur of the moment: its sheer weight prevents one from throwing it overboard. This unwieldy weight is the result of accumulated delights and sorrows that have to be disposed of one by one. The love suggested by Offenbach's music *is* light, temporary, illusory, and has a lot in common with dreams which, contrary to most dreams, are not forgotten upon awakening. Mozart's or Verdi's operas usurp reality and make us live a different life as we listen to them; but they are no dreams and we do not awake upon the fall of the curtain. Offenbach's operettas are dreams from which we awake without forgetting them. But the more we listen to his music, the heavier these accumulated dreams become so that, in the long run, their mass may outweigh reality.

I remember watching a film on Offenbach in which his love for a singer was told in minute detail. I think she forsook him at some point, but he did not suffer much; one day he turned up in a café he used to frequent—as cheerful and light-hearted as ever. He had just awoken from a dream. I also awake from my love-dreams rather easily now, for life is nothing more than an operetta where one may encounter a beautiful woman leaving in her wake an exquisite perfume.

December 22, 2003

Versailles

ANTON BRUCKNER

THE ANSWER TO A JAPANESE JOURNALIST

THE QUESTION: Furtwängler's love for Bruckner is well known. However, he never performed the *Ninth Symphony* after the Second World War. Do you think that the great conductor distinguished this symphony from other works by Bruckner?

THE ANSWER: I know the live recording of the *Ninth*—1944, if I am not mistaken. It is so wonderful that even Furtwängler would have been unable to conduct this symphony better. And no one wants to admit to themselves their own weakness. Also, the post-war world was different: gone were the demons in whose midst Furtwängler lived and conducted. The angels might have vanished along with the demons. Bruckner used to say that his music was dictated to him by angels; but demons play an important role in the *Ninth*, especially in the second movement where they seem to vociferate and mock the composer and those who perform the symphony. Incidentally, this remark about the angels is rather noteworthy, being an exception to the rule. In Bruckner's times the composers listened to themselves—to their souls, at best—and not to angels and other heavenly envoys. During the Renaissance era the composers heeded the cosmos and angels much more than nineteenth-century creative artists. Beethoven heard the cosmos, angels or God only at the end of his life—thanks to the beneficial intervention of Palestrina whom he assiduously studied in those days. But of course every great artist reflects the cosmic phenomena; Beethoven is no exception to *this* rule. To establish such a long-distance relationship, however, he needed his body, soul or just a bad mood: it is through their agency that he could reach out for heaven. Palestrina had no need of intermediaries. As for Bruckner, his music with its immobile layers reminds us of the Renaissance composers. Ensconced in a worn armchair, he might have listened to his angels for hours and hours without stirring from his seat. Beethoven, on the other hand, was in the habit of pacing up and down or walking jerkily on the outskirts of Vienna. His creative process seemed to depend on movements, on bodily rhythms, on the clash of thoughts. Bruckner was sitting in his armchair which might have brought his inner rhythms to a sort of common denominator, to monotony of the self, to receptiveness, to silence. Nothing prevented him from listening to the music that came from the outside. He listened and listened and listened. And we listen in our turn, hearing what the composer heard in his armchair, availing ourselves of a double listening. A huge space is thus created around Bruckner's music that comes from the outside, from afar, from the armchair where nobody is sitting now; or from the angels who withdrew from the world. In Beethoven's works of the middle period the space is not so impressive because we participate in them, our sentiments filling in all the gaps. In other

words, our emotions are every bit equal to the way we hear his music, and often our heart takes precedence over our ears. Also, a piece like the *Mondlicht Sonate* is sure to give rise to many thoughts and conjure up the memories totally unconnected either with the *Sonata* or the moonlight. But Bruckner's music overpowers our mental processes and the restlessness of our past. We would not follow any train of thought if angels honoured us with their presence, would we?

Along with his other symphonies, the *Ninth* is an enigma that should be solved at all cost. To solve or to die! We listen to this enigma with the utmost concentration for fear of missing a nuance, an unveiled hint of truth. Such a mental effort leaves no room for feelings, *other* thoughts and moods; and all we can borrow from our memory in such moments amounts to Oedipus' answer to the Sphinx: human life. Thus yet another space is created outside the work, if not within it—*otstranenie* (making distant or strange); we realise that the knowledge of the answer is even more fraught with peril than ignorance.

The term *otstranenie* was coined by the Russian formalists to denote the 'otherness' of a literary text and demarcate it as specifically a literary entity. The second term they used quite often was *literaturnost'* (literariness). Why not coin a similar term in the domain of music? *Musikal'nost'* (musicaliness) would not be out of place in a treatise on Bruckner's music.

What I said about Bruckner applies even more to Schubert in whose works there are immobile layers that remain monotonous in terms of dynamics as well: no other composer indulged so voluptuously in long-drawn-out pianissimi. But Schubert did not say anything about his commerce with angels so we are driven to the conclusion he was an angel himself—at least partly. But I have strayed too far from Furtwängler, from his angels and demons, from his unwillingness to perform Bruckner's *Ninth* after the Second World War.

Angels *can* exist without demons, but a desire to hear if not to behold them is stronger in the periods of worldwide catastrophes, in a den of iniquity. The presence of angels might be dependent on our desires and hopes. During the Second World War the intensity of good and evil was brought to such a pitch that even a second-rate conductor did not become the laughing stock of concert-goers when performing Beethoven's or Brahms' symphonies—especially if he had the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra at his disposal. Furtwängler was a conductor of genius; during the war he reached the summit of his art. In those years he might have achieved the impossible by abolishing the space in Bruckner's symphonies and becoming their active component. He heard the angels in the third movement of the *Ninth*; he watched the demons dance in its second movement. He sang with the former and danced with the latter.

Bruckner was not in the habit of listening to demons, but on the threshold of the Hereafter he might have questioned his final destination. Was he among the elect? St Augustine often points out that no human being can know for sure whether they belong to the elect or the reprobate. And Bruckner, for all his spiritual and physical proximity to angels, might have got terrified at the prospect before him. The horror he experienced can be heard in the diabolic dances that are the centrepiece of the second movement. And it is not for nothing that the trombones mar the ecstatic serenity of the finale. The dialogue between them and the trumpets sounds too prophetic to be dismissed as irrelevant and paranoid. St Augustine warned us that a good-hearted man, a benefactor of humanity acclaimed by all and sundry, might land up in Hell. No wonder that in the Augustian Hereafter an inveterate criminal stays in a five-star hotel and just wallows in luxury for centuries. For Bruckner, who was good-natured, generous and naive, all goes well in the end—at least in the *Ninth Symphony*. In the coda, after getting rid of the importunate body and ill-grounded fears, his soul embarks on its journey through the spheres of Paradise. Or is the whole movement a sort of journey like the one depicted in the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*? Perhaps I write too often about this book; after all, every day is a journey depicted in it. Or in the Psalms.

The elect might stay in a five-star hotel, drinking old, eternal wines and luxuriating in hot baths every morning. But, ensconced in his armchair, Bruckner listens to angels and forgoes other delights—the impression conveyed by the coda of the third movement. Even Dante proved to be more modest: he reserved a seat in the theatre of Purgatory. As to Furtwängler, during that memorable, recorded concert he found himself in Paradise, following in Bruckner's footsteps. Shortly afterwards he returned to Hell as if turning Dante's *Commedia* (and Bruckner's *Symphony*) upside down. A journey fraught with perils. The Church-sanctified trend towards celestial bliss had gone into reverse. But it was even more painful to play the part of the dying composer, exposing himself to the fears, hopes and torments expressed by his work. Furtwängler succeeded in identifying with the symphony and its creator. Some conductors perform their duty under water; others in a vacuum. The former sculpt a musical phrase out of sounds; the latter throw a handful of signs towards the musicians who are punctually given their cues and do not have to be prompted twice. (Throwing cues into the orchestra.) They play together, reassured and relaxed, and their performance is as complacent as the water filling a bath in a five-star hotel. But their five-star hotel is situated not in Paradise but in the city where they are giving their concert. Toscanini, Bruno Walter and Erich Kleiber conducted under water. They did all they could to cross the space separating them from the composers they performed. Often Furtwängler's left hand traced a slow, legato line in the air or rather under water. Even Karajan conducted under water, although not much of his style reminded one of the great conductors of the past. The

orchestras too have forgotten their glorious predecessors in a doubtful bid for precision and impeccable intonation about which neither Klemperer nor Furtwängler cared a lot. And they no longer sweat their guts out during rehearsals. Incidentally, both the conductors and orchestras seem to have converted to Hinduism, for the goal does not count much; only the way is important. Any off-the-beaten-track effort goes against the conductor who will never be invited again, whatever the result of his job. And Toscanini would have been kicked out after the first swear word. No point in taking these orchestras on a journey through Hell. Nor do they know much about Paradise, although their members are capable of performing the *Ninth* twice a day. So are most of today's conductors. No one would say about them, echoing Dante's contemporaries, 'These people have been to Hell.' And David Oistrakh, after Furtwängler's concert with the Berlin Philharmonic, rushed towards the artists' entrance to have a look at the human beings who had played so divinely. But all this happened *after* the war, so Furtwängler could not have conducted Bruckner's *Ninth* on that occasion. What *did* he conduct? Hell and Paradise are not confined to Bruckner's music.

At the Moscow Conservatoire—I was nineteen at the time—I gave a lecture on his symphonies, in which I emphasised their structural and psychological likeness. Nevertheless, every symphony is unique: the *Fifth* is renowned for its gigantic fugue; the *Ninth* is composed by a dying man. And it could not have been finished, whatever some musicologists maintain. One of them reproaches Bruckner's friends for having forced the composer to revamp his old works. 'But for those superfluous corrections, he would have finished the *Ninth*,' he says. Nothing could have succeeded the third movement; it is not only Bruckner's testament, but also the last word he uttered on his deathbed. And what is to be said after the last word? The third movement would have been different had a finale followed it. And Bruckner's advice to perform *Te Deum* after the symphony might have been prompted by his desire to consolidate his status in Paradise. The third movement just drops a hint; this ambiguous declaration is similar to what happens in Goethe's *Faust*. 'Sie ist gerichtet (She's judged),' says Mephistopheles about Margaret. 'Ist gerettet (She is saved),' says a voice from above. *Ist gerichtet, ist gerettet*. Both statements sound alike to such an extent that the latter may be mistaken for an echo of the former. Or is it really an echo?

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

October 21, 2003

Tokyo

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Suppose you make the acquaintance of a young person who is handsome and attractive, but who seems to be harbouring a secret. It would be tactless and reprehensible to try to penetrate this secret and wrest it from him. But it is doubtless permissible to inquire whether he has any siblings, to see whether their nature could not perhaps explain the enigmatic character of the stranger. This is exactly how the true critic inquires into the sibling of the work of art.

Walter Benjamin, *The Theory of Criticism*

A London friend of mine maintains that every novel has its own voice. In my opinion, however, every writer—every *great* writer—has his own voice which is recognisable in all his works, however short or untypical. In (great) novels even fools, madmen and criminals speak with their author's voice.

Composers also have their own voices which are less metaphorical, more physical; after all, sounds are the *prima materia* of music. Sometimes it is no easy task to define a composer's voice. What is Wagner's voice, for instance? Brass instruments, Wotan's bass giving orders and deploring the fragility of the world, the shouts of the Valkyries? (Whenever Wagner's music becomes an object of irony and parody, for some reason it is the Valkyries who are chosen to represent him.) And what is Beethoven's voice? Mozart's voice?

In my mind Brahms is associated with the cello and clarinet (Brahms' instruments), the latter being the composer's favourite instrument at the end of his life. He also has my uncle's voice—the voice of an uncle I might have had in nineteenth-century Russia. In some respects his music reminds me of Chekhov; but not of *Uncle Vania*. *The Cherry Orchard* is closer to Brahms' spirit; and *Three Sisters*. We might have talked in our country house while eating strawberries from our garden; we might have gone fishing and hunting. Actually Brahms' music is more akin to country houses and landscapes than palaces and big cities. Wagner, on the other hand, might be represented by a medieval castle. I might have *talked* to Brahms—that is the point I am trying to make. I would not have dared to enter Beethoven's room, listening instead to his groans and footsteps from behind the door. I would not even have dared to look at him through the keyhole. And Mozart might have just put his hand on my shoulder and glanced at me—as he does in a Russian film upon leaving the tavern where he dined with Salieri. He goes through the door, meets a violinist who maltreats his

music, puts his hand on the violinist's shoulder and looks at him—his farewell glance. In his music Mozart often bids us farewell.

In my essay on Beethoven I said that we might talk about the people, who seemed to inhabit his music, on the terrace of a country house. The Russians are very keen on this variety of *résidence secondaire* which they call a 'dacha'—the word listed in the *Webster Dictionary*. But their presence in my essays is not a tribute to my motherland, although I do have a nostalgic longing for dachas. The point is the terrace of a country house is a most appropriate place for talking about this and that, especially in wet weather: in a city there are other ways of dealing with boredom. My attention, however, is focused much more upon the manner in which Beethoven and Brahms are talked about. The latter was looked upon as the successor of the former—to such an extent that his *First Symphony* was regarded as Beethoven's *Tenth*. (In Japan, Beethoven's *Tenth* is now more popular than his *Ninth*.) But I would not talk about them in the same manner—in the same key, to use musical terminology. Actually I am not tempted to talk about the people inhabiting Brahms' works. His music does not seem to be inhabited—or haunted, for that matter; the works of Hugo Wolf, Mahler and Berg *are* haunted. I would rather listen to the composer himself, to his voice, to my uncle's voice—to the stories my uncle might tell me. Brahms' works often sound like stories told during inclement weather or at twilight or on a sunny morning—on the terrace of a country house.

I am also tempted to tell stories *about* Brahms; and about Bruckner. But not about Beethoven or Wagner. I shall tell three stories in the present essay: the story of Brahms' only recording, the story of his meeting with Mahler and the story of his death. Oddly enough, the first and second stories are sadder than the third.

One day a representative of Edison's team got in touch with Brahms, suggesting he should record something for posterity. The composer was elated and at once agreed to make a recording of the *Rhapsody in G Minor*, Opus 79—one of his best works for piano. Shortly before the recording session, however, he changed his mind, opting for a much more popular piece—the *Hungarian Dance in G Minor*. He had probably realised the *size* of his audience, present and future, and accordingly put aside a more or less recondite work in favour of a piece whose appeal was wider, including the people who had no ear, no heart for music. His enthusiasm was so genuine that he started to play without waiting for a sign; the opening bars of the dance are therefore missing. That day he also recorded an excerpt from a Johann Strauss waltz. And he was asked to play the *Hungarian Dance* once again—for the sake of the missing bars; whereupon his face darkened. There followed a pregnant pause—one of the most pregnant pauses in the history of music. 'I'll never make another recording in my life,' he said at last.

What happened during the pregnant pause? Brahms might have grown angry with himself for taking into consideration the popular appeal of the *Hungarian Dance in G Minor*—to the detriment of his masterpiece, of the mirror he had held up to his inner nature. He might also have realised that technology is double-edged: recordings depreciate the value of music by making it *easily* available. And of course they destroy the uniqueness of musical performances.

Anxious to restore the ritualistic aspect of music-making, Celibidache refused to record anything. Rituals cannot be reproduced by a CD player, a television set or a computer: one is supposed to be involved in them *physically*, becoming an integral part of their space and time.

Brahms might also have realised that recordings deprive a performer of freedom—of the possibility to play a given piece in a different way. And they imprison him within the bounds of *one* interpretation that he is forced to repeat ad infinitum without even knowing where and under what circumstances he does it. He is sometimes rewarded by a few journalists and critics who call his unchangeable and yet perfidiously disloyal performance a 'definitive version', increasing the sales of his CD and decreasing the size of the recorded work. Indeed definitive versions prevent both music lovers and interpreters from searching for another truth, another facet of the work in question. Thus recordings increase the size of an artist's audience and decrease the size of the work he or she performs.

The putative size of Brahms' audience prevented us from hearing his interpretation of the *Rhapsody in G Minor*, Opus 79. What tempo would he have taken? There is a lot of *rubato* in his version of the *Hungarian Dance* which, though composed in G Minor, has little in common with the *Rhapsody*.

Like many Germans (and Russians), Brahms was sentimental about his childhood and his old age, about his mother and life in general. And every sentimentalist is receptive and almost addicted to endings of all kinds, which often leads to what might be termed an 'eschatological mentality'—the chief trait of many Russian thinkers. On the fateful day of his first and last recording Brahms must have foreseen the end of music. And, during a legendary walk in the woods, he spoke about it to Mahler. I am still asking myself whether it is a legend or not. What exactly did he say? 'The history of music has come to an end.' So has human history, according to George Bush and Francis Fukuyama. 'I am the last of the Mohicans.' No, I do not think he put it so bluntly, so immodestly. But he did say something about the future—about its absence, rather. And Mahler replied, pointing to a brook, 'That's the future.' In a way, he was right: brooks will certainly outlive not only their reflections, their echoes in the arts, but the arts themselves—despite the ecological state of our planet. In music they may have died already: I can hear brooks only in the *old* recordings of Beethoven's *Pastoral* and Mahler's symphonies. Perhaps I am just sentimental. Or eschatological.

Mahler must have tackled the problem metaphorically, though. For all the importance he attached to brooks, they could not mean to him the *entire* future of mankind. Did he optimistically assume that the future of the earth *was* on God's agenda? Did he believe that the future made no sense without human beings or music? If so, the brook he pointed at was an eloquent answer to Brahms' pessimistic outlook. But I am not sure that the future of mankind depends on the arts—the biological future of mankind, which might be on God's agenda after all: I do not think we should fear either a new flood or an atomic war. Plato and Freud thought that the arts distracted men (and women) from more serious occupations, thereby denoting the immaturity of the human mind. Well, for the last twenty-five years we have been witnessing the triumph of the human mind so that not even Freud could have picked holes in us.

'In the summer of 1896 Brahms and Mahler were out for a walk near Ischl.' I heard the story from a Parisian friend. And then I read about this walk in Alma Mahler's memoirs. According to her account, the composers stood in front of a mountain stream, fascinated by the sight of the water breaking into foam time after time over the stones. Mahler looked upstream and pointed to the endless procession of swirling eddies. 'Which is the last?' he asked with a smile. Can we trust Alma Mahler's memory, her sincerity? There are so many inaccuracies in her memoirs.

Anyway Brahms was far more interested in the past than in the future. Even the present appealed to him less than remembrance of things past. His music sounds like an uninterrupted, voluptuous reminiscence—a mirror held up to memory, to the things and events which are no more. In this respect—and not only in this respect—he is rather close to Chopin. I wonder if anybody ever dared draw a parallel between these composers.

What did he recall on the brink of death? After a peaceful night he woke and realised he was dying. He uttered no word. He just cried for a few minutes. What did he recall during those minutes? A few episodes from his life? The *Rhapsody in G Minor*, Opus 79? What a pity we cannot hear a recording of his dying thoughts, of his last stream (brook) of consciousness. Was there enough room for the future within it? In other words, did he give any thought to God?

On the day before his death Brahms was in good spirits. And he asked for a glass of wine. His doctor, who was aware of the imminence of his death, raised no objections to his patient's dying wish. So the latter was given a glass of wine. And several times he said '*Schön*' (lovely), while drinking it.

Let me at this point return to Chekhov whose affinities with Brahms may be questioned only by those who believe that music is a world in itself—no extraterritorial comparisons allowed! (Stravinsky was of their number.) Here is a description of Chekhov's last moments:

German and Russian medical etiquette dictated that a doctor at a colleague's deathbed, when all hope was gone, should offer champagne. Schwörer felt Anton's pulse and ordered a bottle. Anton sat up and loudly proclaimed 'Ich sterbe' [I'm dying]. He drank, murmured 'I haven't had champagne for a long time,' lay down on his left side, as he always had with Olga, and died without a murmur, before she could reach the other side of the bed.

(Donald Rayfield, *Anton Chekhov, a Life*)

For years I thought that *Ich sterbe* were Chekhov's last words. 'I haven't had champagne for a long time' seems to match not only '*Schön*' but also W. B. Yeats' poem *Lapis Lazuli* where he speaks about Hamlet, Lear, Ophelia and Cordelia. They 'perform their tragic play'; but when the curtain is about to fall they do not 'break up their lines to weep'.

*...Hamlet and Lear are gay;
Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.*

Well, Brahms did break up his lines to weep. (I am sure he would not have minded this bit of playfulness on my part.) A servant saw him shedding tears a few minutes before his death. But those tears were a sort of postscript to *Schön*—the word he uttered when drinking the last glass of wine.

I often emphasise tragic elements in the pieces of music I write about. 'I wish Mozart would have composed in minor keys only,' I said in an essay of mine. Indeed he handled C Minor, D Minor and A Minor with unparalleled skill.

For once I propose to look on the bright side—'gaiety transfiguring all that dread'.

In the above-mentioned poem by W. B. Yeats three Chinamen are *eternally* climbing towards a house, being carved in lapis lazuli. They are both motionless and moving—like the characters from Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. 'Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.'

'To live in concord with nature' is a Chinese precept. And a wise man is also supposed to live in concord with his times. This precept mainly concerns the periods of decadence, I suppose. But what was the yardstick by which philosophers of Ancient China measured human decadence?

In *Simon del desierto* Satan fails to perturb the saint's spirit through his *conventional* tricks—the ones he tried on St Anthony and other hermits of the past. At the end of the film, Bunuel hits upon a marvellous idea: Satan takes the saint to a disco. What would Mahler have said to Brahms had he listened to a rap song?

Whatever his opinions and forebodings, Brahms lived in concord with nature and his times. Both in his life and music he behaved like a sage who:

...does not display himself:

Thus it is that he is brilliantly displayed.

He does not count himself right:

Thus it is that his rightness is made manifest.

He does not fight his own cause:

Thus it is that he is victorious.

(*Tao-te ching*, translated by E. R. Hughes)

Wagner did just the opposite: he displayed himself and fought his own cause. So did Tolstoy to some extent, for all his wisdom and knowledge of philosophy. And so did Brahms when he prepared, in conjunction with two other composers, a 'manifesto' showing an unfriendly attitude towards the tenets of the progressive 'Neo-German' school of composition. But that hostile act was rather an exception to the rule. Incidentally, Brahms was never upset by the diatribes against his music; instead he found them amusing.

Chekhov's life and works, on the other hand, also fit the description of a sage. His plays as well as Brahms' music have an aura of tranquillity about them—an aura of Space, so to speak. In *The Seagull* a shot is fired backstage. 'Something has probably exploded in that medicine chest of mine,' says Dorn. There is a tradition of backstage suicides to which Chekhov pays tribute in *The Seagull*. And there is a backstage duel in *Three Sisters*; and a backstage fire. And the last scene of *The Cherry Orchard* also takes place outside—the axes knocking against the trees. But even when *nothing* happens either backstage or on stage, one has a feeling that something does happen, that other plays are performed—offstage, as it were. Who takes part in those plays? The same characters; but also some other characters, some unknown characters.

A lot happens 'offscore' in Brahms' late works. What we do hear often sounds like echoes—remembrance of things past. Borges says that we remember not the actual event but our last memory of it. In many of his late works Brahms seems to offer us his memories of a distant event—a memory of a memory of a memory. The result turns out to be just the opposite of what Proust strives for and achieves in his masterpiece where Time and Paradise are always regained.

But something also happens 'onscore'; and the contrast between the memories and 'on-the-spot reports' is rather striking. (The *Ballad in G Minor*, Opus 118, the *Rhapsody in E Flat Major*, Opus 119. And the *Rhapsody in G Minor*, Opus 79.)

The stories I have told in this essay are also the uppermost layers of memories that lie around in heaps on the cerebral landscape, levelling down with the passage of Time. I am not sure whether Mahler pointed to a brook or a bird. I am not sure that the tears Brahms shed before his death were seen by a servant and not by a nurse or a distant cousin of his. (Brahms often seems to recount the events of which he has only a second-hand knowledge.) And I do not know what wine he drank at his last dinner. Was it a Gewürztraminer Spätlese or a Riesling Auslese? Was it a claret by any chance? Or a white Burgundy? The space of imprecision, guesswork and remembrance stretches between us. The space of imagination.

So Brahms drank a glass of wine—or two, three glasses of wine—and retired to his bedroom. He soon fell asleep; upon awakening he realised he was dying. And for five or six minutes he thought of death—a postscript to the joy experienced the night before. There was another postscript in his life, a similar postscript. In 1890 he finished the *String Quintet in G Major*, Opus 111. And he was determined never to compose again. For a while he stuck to his resolution: the *Quintet* was his *Ode to Joy* and he obviously wished to conclude his creative work on a cheerful, merry note—with a glass of wine in his hand. But gradually he yielded to his creative urge, to a six-year-long inspiration. He wrote a series of works which are partly memories and partly meditations on death. Postscripts are situated in a sort of no-man's-land: after an end, before another end. In between. 'I've been here and I've been there / And I've been in between,' says a King Crimson song. I remember listening to this record (*In the Court of the Crimson King*) on the eve of my final departure from Moscow in 1974. Strictly speaking, I cannot call my departure 'final' because I went back to Moscow in 1989. And ever since I have been going there at least once a year. But in 1974 I thought my departure was final, irrevocable. And the night before I listened to King Crimson's record and to Brahms' *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings*, Opus 115 that is still my favourite piece of music. I was also somewhere in between. And I feared I might be in between life and death—an appropriate time for listening to one of Brahms' postscript-works. Incidentally, the *Rhapsody in G Minor*, Opus 79 was the first piece I played as a 'free man'—a holder of a UN passport.

As I said earlier, Brahms cared more for the past than for the present and future; yet he influenced the future almost as much as Wagner who is generally labelled 'revolutionary in art'. His influence can be detected in the music of Webern, especially in his early and last works—in his cantatas. And also in some of Bartok's late opuses. And Shostakovich was much closer to Brahms than to Wagner.

In the sixties many music lovers thought that Paul McCartney was an incarnation of Schubert. Glen Gould was outraged and did all he could to combat this opinion. I think that

drawing a parallel between Paul McCartney and Schubert is not blasphemous—it is merely pointless. On the other hand, several pop groups do remind me of Brahms: King Crimson, Pink Floyd, Genesis, Yes. I have in mind the recordings they made before 1977. And I do not think it is pointless to investigate the matter, analysing their *Wahlverwandtschaften*.

Another King Crimson recording, *Red*, is a sort of requiem mass, its opening song sounding like the finale of Brahms' *Fourth Symphony*. Indeed many things disappeared in the mid-seventies. Many great artists and philosophers died: Shostakovich, Heidegger, Visconti, Pasolini, Nabokov. By that time Beckett and Borges had already written their masterpieces. And Bunuel shot his last film in 1977. The words spoken by Brahms during the historic walk in the woods seem to have come true. Would he have stopped writing music had he known for sure the history of art would come to an end? In the early seventies one of my Moscow friends said quite earnestly, 'I'd commit suicide if an oracle informed me that Shostakovich is the last great composer in the history of music.' We were walking around the *Neskuchniy sad*—a beautiful garden on the Moscva River.

Brahms explained the meaning of his *Piano Quartet in C Minor*, Opus 60 as follows: 'Just picture a man who is going to shoot himself and has no other choice left.' At the time he was more than ever in love with Clara Schumann.

Wittgenstein too was planning to commit suicide; oddly enough, it is the slow movement of this *Quartet* that made him change his mind—on three occasions.

*One asks for mournful melodies;
Accomplished fingers begin to play.
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.*

Hope is often expressed in music; anyway many people see and hear hope almost everywhere. Every work of Palestrina, for instance, might be said to contain a huge amount of hope. But Brahms goes a step further: in the first movement of the *String Quintet in G Major*, Opus 111 as well as in the slow movement of the *Violin Concerto* he adds, by means of a new, unexpected theme, yet another hope to the one he has expressed already, thereby creating a polyphony of hope.

Let us return to the two glasses I mentioned at the beginning of my essay. One is held by Brahms, the other by Chekhov (in chronological order). Both are on the brink of death. Chekhov knows it; Brahms does not.

Oh, my dear sisters, our life has not yet come to an end. Let us live! The music is playing so gaily, so joyfully...

In Laurence Olivier's production of *Three Sisters*, the military band starts playing the *Internationale* at this point. I would get rid of the band in order to put on an old recording of Brahms' *Violin Concerto*.

POSTSCRIPT:

Can music and art in general come to an end? Have they come to an end already? There are ups and down in our moods; there are ups and downs in human history. But will there always be ups and down in human history? After all there *is* such a thing as irreversible evolution.

In Pushkin's short tragedy *Mozart and Salieri* the latter listens to the former's *Requiem* and sheds tears. At first Mozart regrets that very few people can feel the power of harmony to such an extent. But if they did, 'the world would come to an end,' he adds at once: everybody would indulge in 'free art' (*Vse predalis' bi vol'nomu iskustvu*). Perhaps our instinct for self-preservation is too powerful—more powerful than Mozart's harmonies. And for those who do indulge in writing songs or novels, art is not a matter of life and death—as it was for Brahms and Wittgenstein. And such an art creates no space, no Heideggerian truth. '*Die Wahrheit des Seienden*'. 'The truth of beings.' Every translation, however readable and accurate, increases the distance between us and the original. When translating Heidegger into Russian I sometimes offer as many as four synonyms in my endeavour to get closer to the original.

'Werksein heißt: eine Welt aufstellen.' 'To be a work means to set up a world.'

1999

Versailles

MODEST PETROVICH MUSSORGSKY

THE DRAMA OF THE COMMON RUN

At the beginning of the eighties I was asked to write an essay on a forthcoming production of *Boris Godunov* at the Grand Opera. Though in no way limited in the matter of theme, I chose 'narodnaya drama', falling back on Russian traditions: at the time I was in no mood to write about Mussorgsky the composer—the amateur of genius, as one might put it nonchalantly—nor about Boris as historical or literary figure. (*Narodnaya drama* is a theatrical play or an opera where the common run plays an uncommonly prominent role with dire consequences.) Almost ten years had elapsed since my final departure from the Soviet Union, but I could not calm down and went on deploring my destiny which had amateurishly arranged my birth in Russia during the grimmest period in her history. I did not go so far as to curse my motherland and her inhabitants who provoked no feelings of hatred in my *bosom*: I still used the bombastic word *grud'* whenever in the grip of strong emotions. Nor did I feel any gratitude towards them or the Russian émigrés I met in Brussels where I settled in June 1974. The latter were under no obligation to help me, needless to say. Yet the Belgians and the French did so with such inexplicable generosity that ever since I have not regarded the refined version of 'You're welcome'—'My pleasure'—as a Victorian figure of style. On the other hand, no one needed to put spokes in my wheel, and I am still surprised at how skilfully two Russian aristocrats managed to spoil my party. The prince felt honour-bound to put his friends, among whom there were some Soviet diplomats, in the picture about my 'childishness', as he defined my wish to stay abroad for good, requesting political asylum; anyone acquainted with the KGB method of the seventies will understand to what danger he deliberately exposed me. With enviable diligence the count maintained I was a Russian spy and many Belgians believed him because the Russians are supposed to know everything about their fellow-countrymen. Both are dead now. My posthumous diatribe sounds, alas, like an indecent requiem which does not concern a remarkable old Russian lady I used to call upon in Brussels at the end of my Belgian life. Incidentally, *Boris Godunov* often sounds like a requiem.

In 1980 I moved from Belgium to France, but Russia had no intention of budging from where she had settled after the Revolution, being reluctant to transfer her inhabitants into another, more acceptable, dimension. In 1913, during the jubilee of the Romanovs, Lenin said that nothing would happen in Russia for another three centuries. My hatred for Lenin and his stooges did not prevent me from having the same feeling in 1980. The war in Afghanistan was the forerunner of a new revolution and some specialists must have noticed that; but I was not of their number. In France the Socialists came to power, inviting four communists to share in government. During a

discussion, which was loaded against the Bolsheviks and bolshies, I said all of a sudden, 'Why waste your energy on the Soviet Union and communists? It's not them you should fear.' I still have no idea what allowed me to gain insight into the present state of affairs.

Would I have written this essay differently today? Would I have chosen another subject? *Narod* has haunted the Russian intelligentsia for at least three centuries. According to my Moscow friend, the reason for it lies in the so-called *rascol* (split) which occurred in the seventeenth century and was tantamount to a revolution. No artists were spared by this abiding fashion, not even the composers who might have recalled that music is situated beyond politics, metaphysics and everyday life. Glinka said that music was created by *narod*: composers just arranged it. Tolstoy went even further by declaring that any folk song was better and deeper than Beethoven's *Piano Sonata in A flat Major*, Opus 110. By the way, I still do not know how to translate *narod* into English. Nation, people, folk? None of these words reflect the ubiquitous power of *narod*, its capacity to reconcile the opposites such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Even Pushkin whose prose is teeming with Gallicisms was eager to pontificate about *narod* and artists' dependence on it. In the French version of this essay I quote the letter in which Pushkin airs his worries about the reception of *Boris Godunov*. He says that the failure of his play would make him unhappy and draws a comparison between Shakespeare and Racine—to the detriment of the latter. He says that Russian playwrights should not take their cue from Racine because, contrary to Shakespeare, he was more interested in the rituals of the royal court than in *narod*. In the light of this attitude *Boris Godunov* might indeed have put a brake on the development of the Russian theatre, had it got a frosty reception from the critics. In spite of himself Pushkin was acting like one of his future monuments which, in accordance with the Soviet ritual, always show tourists and passers-by the right direction—even when the poet's arms are crossed on his chest. Yet there is nothing to point at in the realm of Time: the present moment will follow its course, calmly going about its business and taking no notice of our arms. Only words can induce this ever-progressing moment to change its direction—*musical* words.

Prejudiced in favour of 'popular drama', Pushkin made an error in the domain where the Russians are usually at their best—prophecy. The Russian theatre offered us a ghostly, almost gothic comedy *Revizor* (The Government Inspector) and the bitter-sweet, silence-muffled plays where Chekhov expressed his love for music without ever talking about it. In his plays, music and words seem to while away the time on the same divan, embracing occasionally. *Narod* does not obtrude upon this intimacy, and whenever it does, its interference sounds like a dissonance.

Narod also jarred on the ears of the Conservatoire students—both in our study or free periods. We sought help and liberation in the works of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Ligeti,

Berio and Stockhausen. But in those years *narod* was hounding us through headlines, catchwords and slogans. Pushkin, Mussorgsky and Tolstoy would also foist *narod* on our professional occupations and even leisure hours, overlooking the obvious fact that a large group of people respects only the law of inertia. Artists, on the other hand, endeavour to throw off yokes of all kinds, relying mainly on centripetal force and centrifugal force: the former makes them withdraw into themselves, the latter brings them to that point where the components of the universe will meet at the moment of the Big Crunch.

Should one be afraid of mistrusting or despising the crowd in our democratic times? Nietzsche despised not only the crowd but democracy itself, using for the purpose the expression '*demokratische Heerdenthier*'. Actually I do not think that every crowd-hater deserves the unflattering title of 'fascist'. Even Charlie Chaplin, noted for his unparalleled humanism, declares in *Limelight*: *I admire them...as individuals: there's a greatness in everyone. But, as a crowd, they're like a monster without a head that never knows which way it's going to turn and can be prodded in any direction.* W. H. Auden writes in one of his poems:

*And always the loud angry crowd,
Very angry and very loud,
Law is We,
And always the soft idiot softly Me.*

Both the idiot and the crowd expropriate Law, confusing it with inertia.

All the 'isms' of the twentieth century appealed to the crowd and bowed before it, omitting to detect in the mass of grey suits an equal number of brains. The human body is unique too, but it is often hidden by a grey suit and gets lost amidst other suits and shoes and what not. Are we permitted to equate the crowd with *narod*? Today *narod* has been replaced by professional unions and the electorate. According to history books, in nineteenth-century Russia *narod* was a dark, sleeping crowd; but a few outbursts of anger caused Pushkin to write these famous words, 'God forbid I should see a Russian revolt, senseless and merciless.' Another sixty years had to elapse before one could witness a genuine Russian uprising—the events of 1905. *Narod* awoke with a start or went on sleeping. Or rather, some slept and others ran somewhere. Even the Eisenstein-glorified storm of the Winter Palace resulted in the death of only four people, one of whom drowned in a barrel of wine. Once in a while I recall this spectacular victim of Bacchus as I open a bottle from *my* cellar.

At the end of Pushkin's drama *narod* keeps silence. Perhaps *narod* always keeps silence, but suddenly a man or a woman begins to run. Others follow in his or her tracks without so much as casting a glance on the surrounding landscape that is far more important than the number of running feet. Thus revolutions are born. But any revolution, however ground- or bottle-breaking, is nothing in comparison with small bangs and crunches created by an artist's imagination. The history of the Russian theatre did not live up (or down) to Pushkin's hopes. In his Petersburg mirrors Gogol reflected Molière and not Shakespeare's *narod*. And, for some obscure reason, Chekhov resolved to predict Samuel Beckett instead of meddling with *mujiks* and *babas*. Actually he was fond of wooden terraces, of un-Shakespearian knocking, of the Russian tea ceremony and musical, meaningless discussions.

The presence of a few drunkards in *The Wives of Windsor* does not endow Shakespeare's output with a *narodny element*, so dear to Pushkin's heart; and the absence of drunkards in Racine's tragedies in no way alludes to the etiquette of Louis XIV's court. The tempest unleashed in *King Lear* equally concerns kings and peasants, workmen and princes: every human being has been humiliated, forsaken, betrayed—if only once. Titus is bidding farewell to Beatrice; their parting, its despondent and pathetic music, can be heard in any parting, in any 'last word'. Characters and props are nothing but a pretext to express joy and sorrow, horror and rapture. The struggle of classes is engulfed by the omnipresence of art.

In reducing Shakespeare to an ideological slogan Pushkin revealed his anxiety about the independence of Russian art. He was afraid of aping the West, which Peter the Great seemed to have encouraged to a dangerous degree. In his poem *The Bronze Rider*, Pushkin speaks about a window that gave the Russians access to the cultural and commercial riches of the West. But the word he uses on this occasion—'*prorubil*'—reminds one of an indefatigable traveller who hacks his way through an impenetrable jungle. And the Russians have a sort of nostalgia for this jungle which sometimes returns to them in the shape of *narod* or in other, more sophisticated shapes. The matters debated by 'Westerners' and 'Slavophiles' are still on the agenda: even now some musicians maintain that Tchaikovsky was a German composer in disguise. Glinka placed *narod* on the stage where it got stuck for almost two centuries. And Mussorgsky offered his contemporaries an opportunity to witness a Russian revolt with all its delectations—in the *Scene Near Kromy*. Like Dostoevsky, the composer proved to be an exemplary prophet; and yet he did not give us the exact number of the victims of *narod's* zeal, which amounts to 100,000. All the components of the *bunt* are brought into play—a theatrical play—in *Boris Godunov*. The *boyar* Khrushchev, bearing by chance the name of the future Russian ruler, becomes a plaything in the hands of the rebels. In my French essay I touch upon the rituals of the insurgent crowd mocking

its victims with exquisite mastery. It is noteworthy that, in Tarkovsky's staging of *Boris Godunov*—I did not know it when embarking on my French essay—the crowd is also treated like a beast which, being prodded towards cruelty, accomplishes its task without fail. Perhaps the very notion of *narod* was poisoned by the Soviet regime. *Narod* itself seems to be disgusted by this notion today, otherwise it would not do its best to split into an impressive number of rich individuals. As I indicated earlier, in other languages *narod* does not sound as obtrusive and implacable as in Russian. In my motherland this word was accompanied by the image of the crowd going somewhere, a multitude of arms swinging to the rhythm of a march. (A funeral march in most cases.) Nowadays one can see such a ballet during a local demonstration bringing to the fore a group of people who are bent on getting more money for their work or just for doing nothing. Most of the time *narod* stays at home in front of computer or television screens. And even poets are not afraid of any virtual or actual revolts that would not change anything: neither blood nor religious fervour is able to vanquish money. Our peaceful and eventless life made me reconsider my views on ideologies as such and on the Soviet regime in particular. A false idea may harm an individual to the point of causing his or her death. But any idea, however cruel and inhuman, is human nonetheless, for a human being is bound to make mistakes. And money is so abstract as to deprive the rich of an opportunity to make mistakes and sacrifice their lives for the sake of an idea, either poetic or prosaic. Those who perish for the sake of money do not sacrifice their lives, ascending to the status of heroes, but just part with them stupidly. The Soviet regime had no advantages except that it made us forget about money: personal contacts were far more efficient than money in that phoney socialist life. As to the arts, the result turned out to be not as bad as might have been presumed; and yet Schostakovich, Prokofiev and Platonov had to hack their way through a jungle grown by Soviet officials and censors with a view to separating them from the West, its 'bourgeois influence', and also from their own ideals. In these cases, however, the result seems to justify the process. The same goes for Achmatova and Zabolotsky. Perhaps I belong to those extremists who are ready to sacrifice other people's lives for the sake of art they can enjoy. But Nietzsche pointed out that the aim of history was to create geniuses; and often geniuses are created at the expense of their lives—or other people's lives, come to think of it. 'Yes: when all is said, we are both patricians, Lavinia, and must die for our beliefs,' says the 'handsome' captain in *Androcles and the Lion*. I am not sure Pushkin would have recommended Shaw as a model for Russian playwrights, but it is not his fault that such a statement cannot be heard today in Russia; nor in any other 'civilised' country, I'm afraid. (Pushkin might have said something along these lines on the eve of his duel—in French.) So geniuses are gone forever, and that is what the drama of the common run is all about. Oddly enough, neither Pushkin nor

Mussorgsky had any inkling of it. But is it so important to *whom* the *jurodivy* offers his lamentation? It is his tale of woe that counts.

Russia did not move into another dimension, for all the unbridled capitalism that succeeded the unfledged communism and the promises of a better life. Even now you can be hurt by a door sent flying into your face by a casual walker who does not hold it until you pass for the simple reason that he does not notice you. In this indecorous ritual I see another *narodnaya drama*. But the Russian ways or waves cannot affect the man whose happiness depends solely upon a literary attitude towards the world and who has a chance of writing in Russian. In one of his interviews Nabokov said that he preferred the English language as a tool. He was probably right. But within the dictionary of the Russian language there are delights unknown in other languages. And now I fully avail myself of these delights because, for the first time in twenty-six years, I am writing in Russian. In the moments of such literally bliss the *jurodivy's* lamentation sounds *pianissimo*.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 21, 2005

Moscow

PIOTR ILICH TCHAIKOVSKY

As a student at the Moscow Conservatoire I had no liking for Tchaikovsky who did not appeal to my friends either: in our milieu his works seemed to be incompatible with greatness and also with modern trends in music. Shedding tears during a concert was frowned upon, although such a manifestation might have been condoned, if triggered by Schubert or Purcell. The point is I often shed tears when hearing Tchaikovsky's music in parks or cinemas. I also heard it at the Bolshoi Theatre where I spent many hours relishing the art of the dancers who might have partly been responsible for my sentimental outbursts. Actually *Giselle*—especially the second act—is a tear-jerker in its own right, and I would have sobbed my heart out had I been in the theatre alone, following in the footsteps of Louis II of Bavaria. But usually the theatre was packed and I had no alternative but to hide my face or make for the nearest corridor.

In the winter of 1972, Emil Gilels played Tchaikovsky's *Second Concerto* at the Big Conservatoire Hall. At the outset Svetlanov conducted *Romeo and Juliet*. I heard the overture for the first time, strange as it may seem; this fact fully reveals the monstrosity of my musical snobbishness. Throughout the overture the tears were rolling down my cheeks, but I did nothing either to withhold or hide them. Nor did I derive any pleasure from crying in public: I just could not do otherwise. I mean, I was too bewitched and therefore quite incapable of any action, however salutary. Ever since I have never felt ashamed of my music-inspired tears.

As a reaction to a work of art, tears deserve a thorough study which, to my knowledge, has never been undertaken. I, for one, would be reluctant to embark upon such a work: it is enough to remove Tchaikovsky's operas from a shelf and read them like a book. *The Pique Dame* is a magnificent treatise on the subject, a sort of *summa lacrimosa*. And the sequenzas with which the composer peppered his symphonies, especially their developments and codas, seem to make the sobs rise *mechanically* from our lungs, step by step, higher and higher—until they reach our throats. This description of how our lachrymal glands function in the domain of music does not belittle Tchaikovsky's accomplishment: Shakespeare and Mozart also make me cry.

But do I shed the same tears under the influence of Mozart and Shakespeare? Or is their impact on my lachrymal glands more spiritual? Can one speak about 'spiritual tears' in connection with art that never goes beyond the limits of what the Fathers of the Eastern Church disparagingly refer to as 'enchantment' (*prelest*)? Spiritual tears are obtained through meditation and an upright life; they do not obey our tender emotions and never keep them company. But in this essay I am chiefly concerned with the permanence of Tchaikovsky-incited tears. Over the last three decades I have become my own doppelganger owing to an impressive number of anti-Kafkaesque

metamorphoses brought about by reading and travelling. But this doppelgänger has inherited *my* lachrymal glands and consequently sheds the same number of tears when listening to Tchaikovsky's music.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 25, 2003

Moscow

GUSTAV MAHLER

My desire to write about Mahler is on a par with my incapacity to write about him. And I am quite incapable of enlarging upon this incapacity, if only because Mahler, as it seems, was able to encompass everything in his symphonies and lieder. The sunny and shadowy aspects of life are taken for granted and inflict no pain, providing they come to us from a work of art. But if Mahler's music were a city I would not set foot on its streets for fear of dying at the hand of a Jack the Ripper. Nor would I enter some houses, for their inhabitants and even furniture might deprave and corrupt the curious. And it is dangerous to listen with close attention to Mahler's night where a number of pre-historical animals and post-historical humans are constantly on the prowl.

It is likewise dangerous to write about Mahler. One has an urge to come out into the open and say what is best forgotten, effaced from one's memory; for instance, the death of a person one loves. And one wants to speak about it as if addressing the man or woman in question.

Two or three months before your death you said to me as we talked on the phone, 'After I'm gone you'll understand everything.' What did you have in mind? Our chaotic love? The value of human life? Once we were watching an old film about Lermontov. On the way to the place of his last duel he would stop his horse all the time: in front of a river, by a tree. And right before the duel his second told him, 'Let's hurry. Trubetskoy is waiting for us with champagne.' And Lermontov answered, 'Yes. We'd better finish this comedy as soon as possible.' After all, he was fighting a duel with an old-standing friend. But you said, 'He meant life.' All this is unbearably trivial from a literary point of view.

Mahler's music is also trivial in parts: trivial, sentimental, prone to bad taste. Even Klemperer—one of the maestro's favourite disciples—did not like *all* his works. For instance, he was not particularly fond of the famous *Adagietto* of the *Fifth Symphony*, known by many as the soundtrack to *Death in Venice*. I am not sure the protagonist of Thomas Mann's story ever heard this movement, which did not prevent him falling in love and dying on the seashore.

I love all Mahler's works because in his city there are not only avenues, but also byways and dead ends where a man dies without rhyme or reason. Perhaps I love this city for the everlasting presence of inner death which obviates the need for assassins. (It is not for nothing that in almost every symphony of his there is a funeral march.) Perhaps I love this city for the impossibility of describing it: the streets have no house numbers, no names. Many public places are covered in scaffolding so that one gets the impression of wandering in the woods. What comes to mind is foolish sayings such as, 'A stranger's soul is dark.' But why should I analyse

Mahler's music in the light of Russian sayings, Lermontov's duels and our talks? You never heard a note of Mahler in my presence: we had other things to do. Is this the only way to listen to his music together?

(Translated from the Russian by the
author)

November 18, 2003

Moscow

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG

The older we grow the more we hark back to the halcyon days of our youth, longing to meet the friends who are no more. An old, weary civilisation also calls upon our memory to sustain its own life and nourish the arts. Thus Silvestrov often speaks about 'remembrance' that unables him, with the aid of Schubert and other composers, to create the works where our impotence is justified by its own consciousness and the striving for beauty. But there are times that are potent enough to create *original* works in which, however, one might detect the forthcoming diminuendo of this potency, the end of the creative élan. To such epochs belongs the beginning of the twentieth century.

In literature the forthcoming catastrophe is predicted by Hofmannsthal, Kafka, Robert Walzer and, most of all, by Robert Musil. All these writers were born and lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Vienna was the nucleus of this gruesome presentiment that did not limit itself to world wars: the very essence of human life was to undergo a metamorphosis. Egon Schiele contributed a lot to this apocalyptic *summa*. In the domain of music it is Schoenberg who bore the brunt of the decadent assault.

One of my closest friends says there is nothing more beautiful, touching and pathetic in music than Schoenberg's pre-serial compositions; I cannot agree more. Even Schubert does not score a palpable hit when I listen to these works. Indeed, what is more autumn-like and beautiful than *The Second String Quartet* or *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, Opus 15? In a way, Mozart and Schubert are self-sufficient and inevitably become disorientated, almost lost in the presence of the fragile, 'hanging' quality of Schoenberg's early works that are always hanging by a thread, as it were. After all, weakness often vanquishes force, disarming it by its knowledge of death; both the Bible and folk tales teach us this truth. So does Pushkin with his autumn and also the common sense: we know it is better to give our purse to a potential assassin.

In this day and age it is too late to compose such works because the people capable of doing so are either irritated by what is happening or resigned. And when somebody decides to take up the challenge against all odds, nobody understands him or her—with a few exceptions. The foundations have already fled no doubt, but some artists can still meditate on this disappearance; Alexander Levkovich is of their number. Even those who hear the old Vienna in his works just shrug their shoulders, for in their surroundings there are no doppelgänger—no distant doppelgänger even—of Musil, Wittgenstein and Klimt. But every farewell is an individual manifestation of sorrow. You can wave your handkerchief long after the train's disappearance beyond the horizon. Newcomers, who are already flooding onto the platform,

know nothing about yourself, let alone about the person to whom this suspended-in-midair handkerchief is destined. But should you pay any attention to their bewilderment? Let them think you are mad.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 18, 2003

Moscow

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Stravinsky played cards with various epochs as if distributing Time around a card table.

Art is a living organism that often develops in an unpredictable way, puzzling those who are too accustomed to order and regularity in everyday life. But, on closer inspection, every new work, however revolutionary and unique, appears to have *something* in common with its predecessors. Shoenberg said that he had done nothing new, being largely influenced by Bach and other masters of counterpoint. Oddly enough, the more revolutionary an artist the deeper he is immersed in the perspective of the past that endows his works with richness and ambiguity. The artists who try to break with the past, pretending to invent an altogether new pattern, unknown to their predecessors, either delude themselves or deprive their works of the massive background provided by the history of art. Paradoxically, Shakespeare's and Beethoven's masterpieces contain not only the past but also the future. They encompass everybody and everything, going far beyond manifestos, ideologies and technical innovations. They are living substances the life of which differs from ours only in duration.

Let us regard the previous paragraph as a card or rather a key card upon which an important game is focused. Throughout his life Stravinsky played this game with utmost care, making his works *parade* their bond with the past. It was as if he were holding the history of music like a pack of cards from which he would draw an epoch and put it on the table—foreverybody to see. And whenever one got the feeling he *had* broken with the past—in *Le Sacre du Printemps*, for instance—he proved to have gone even further into it, as far as pagan rites. The longer he lived the shorter grew the distance between his works and the past. When in the fifties he adopted the twelve-tone idiom, this distance hardly exceeded several years instead of the millennia spanned in his early works.

In general he handled Time with mastery, shuffling rhythms in his pack as the whim took him. And Time deferred to him to such a point that one might think he would be able to stop it finally and become immortal. But no less than Time Stravinsky studied death and destiny, to which eloquently testify *La Persephone* and *Oedipus Rex*—a game of patience. And Eternity comes under close scrutiny in the *Symphony of Psalms* which is no game but St Augustine's *Confessionum* set to music. Indeed it does not differ much from what St Augustine must have experienced on his deathbed, in utter solitude, as he read the Psalms written for his benefit on the opposite wall. And, without knowing it, he listened to Stravinsky's work, for Eternity does not care about chronology and is incurably anachronistic.

Stravinsky's physical presence in Moscow disclosed to me the tangibility of Time and Eternity which cannot be studied abstractly: only waiting, hope and anguish teach us the authentic nature of Time. And Eternity is as slippery as an eel because one can never get a straight answer out of it. Stravinsky questioned Eternity in his symphony and the answer he got was exhaustive but rather short: around twenty-five minutes.

The present essay is short too and consequently does not impart the nature of Eternity. (It may have something in common with Time, though.) And a sequence where Stravinsky conducts one of his works lasts only a few minutes—at least on *my* video cassette. But I watch this sequence many times in a row.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 20, 2003

Moscow

LOLITA AND LULU

ALBAN BERG

Once, in a book of English reviews, I read that *Lolita* might be singled out as an outstanding love story—'a rare specimen in modern literature'. Over the last ten years I have cooled towards Nabokov so much that I make no bones about criticising him in my spacious and unfettered commentary on Dante's *Commedia*. Among other things, I analyse his maniacal outspokenness which does not allow Lolita to daydream aimlessly, forcing her not only to focus on a particular object but even to disclose its identity, often in minute detail. At some point she questions her paramour about the name of the hotel where they stayed at the outset of their frantic journey and thereby lets the 'astute reader' guess the name of her future lover. Why can't she keep *everything* to herself? Why not limit this dialogue to an exchange of smiles and interrogatory glances?

During my last trip to Kyoto I became an unwilling witness of an ugly scene in a McDonald's where I partook of a sushi meal bought in a nearby shop. (Looking at my table, the foreign tourists might have concluded that in Japanese fast food restaurants sushi was served alongside Big Macs.) At the next table there was a middle-aged man whom one might easily have taken for a bum. I have nothing against bums, especially if they live in Kyoto or Paris; the man sitting opposite me really looked repulsive. One could not help suffering from nausea in his presence so I did my best not to glance at him. But I did not manage to keep him out of my field of vision because, shortly afterwards, a Japanese Lolita sat down at his table. Her playfulness and charm were on a par with what Nabokov writes about at the beginning of his novel, when trying to define an ideal 'nymphet'. At first I thought she was the bum's daughter, but even my utter ignorance of the Japanese language did not prevent me from realising my mistake. In the course of half-an-hour I spent in that McDonald's—I could not leave, mesmerised by the repulsive scene—she was pulling out all the stops to seduce the bum. Now and then she sprang from her seat to let him enjoy the outlines of her legs, hypocritically hidden at the top by a mini skirt of sorts. She sucked a straw suggestively and made eyes at him. For all her mastery and charm—she was by no means a late developer—something was missing in her ritual of seduction.

I often speak about the Japanese notion of *mono-no-aware* which, if applied to a woman, may be imperfectly rendered by the word 'languor': 'languorous look', 'languorous mood' or, as Shakespeare put it, 'my heart's deep languor'. The Japanese Lolita had no liking for the bum—no doubt about that; she just took her geisha-glorified métier rather seriously. But any love scene in Berg's *Lulu* scores over the intensity of her childish ritual because a *mature* woman bent on seducing a man of forty or fifty does justice to languor by setting it off in her glances and

movements, in the tone of her voice. Thanks to her unconscious awareness of *mono-no-aware*, Lulu can bring languor into play, if necessary, although she is more often dynamic and whimsical. To a layman *Lulu* sounds thus: pandemonium, two or three voices arguing in the middle of dissonant chords and then, suddenly, a divine melody that comes out of the blue. It resounds several times throughout the opera as if anxious to acquire the status of a leitmotiv. Intentionally I have read nothing about *Lulu* and so have no idea what this leitmotiv relates to: passion, languor, love, femme fatal. I listen to this opera as a man unversed in the science of music so that, in the cacophonic jumble, to experience the sentiment of a passer-by who comes across a woman of rare, peerless beauty—in the middle of a thoroughfare. I knew a man who wandered around Paris in the hope of meeting such a woman. He himself told me about his wanderings, about the hours he would spend in pursuit of a fugitive whose identity was to remain unknown to him. His chase was not confined to the boulevards and parks; in a café, in a restaurant, he often had a closer look at the object of his desire who sat nearby, sipping a cocktail or eating a *fricassée de champignons*. From his vantage point he studied her gestures, the way she manipulated a fork. And whenever her manners and voice happened to match his ideal, his languor (coupled with longings) knew no bounds. Once again I have no alternative but to use the German word '*Sehnsucht*' in which I hear and almost see an unquenchable thirst for the inaccessible, a pointless striving for the unreachable. Gradually I realised that my friend's *Sehnsucht* was directed towards an anonymous image that could not be found in the women he followed. It was as if, in his quest for the Grail, he had to content himself with the sound of this word.

The leitmotiv one hears in *Lulu* seems to be indissolubly blended not with the heroine or the heroes, but with a mysterious entity, not necessarily a woman. But it has its source in the aura of a mature woman who has an inkling of what lies in store for her. From her bitter experience, which has considerably grown since her nymphet days, she knows that Time is not to be manipulated like a fork and that life can become a knife in somebody else's hand. As if influenced by the remoteness of happiness, she has included in the repertoire of her charms 'unfulfillment' that concerns not only the desires of the men seeking her company but also her own desires. One might put Lolita's remoteness down to her age, to her childish eagerness to play hide-and-seek. Her looks and ways have nothing in common with the contralto of Saint-Saens' Delilah, in the depth of which *la langueur* blooms like a flower in a hothouse. Delilah's third aria (*Répond à ma tendresse*) is one of the most stunning expressions of languor in music which succeeds in describing such moods far better than other arts. In this aria languor is partly expressed through a downward chromatic movement. The indeterminate leitmotiv in *Lulu* seems to be sung by a

contralto; yet the heroine is incarnated by soprano, and anyway the leitmotiv sounds only in the orchestra. That is why it aims at nothing and calls upon the inaccessible which, however, can be encountered in the streets of Paris or Moscow.

Since the Second World War there have appeared very few novels where love is treated with dignity and in depth. In modern literature, if not in our society, love is deprived of primeval languor, of that *Uhr-Sehnsucht* that alone ensures its survival on the highest plane of the human psyche and pushes Swann into the arms of an unworthy woman or makes Ulrich seek the company of his sister. Nabokov did not know much about music and this ignorance might have barred him the way to *Sehnsucht* which led Parsifal towards the Grail. In *Lolita* and other novels, with the exception of *Invitation to a Beheading*, he was unable to direct his characters into the void: they always travel to point B. Humbert Humbert is looking for a nymphet. He does not love the sentiment of love for its own sake.

Where do my feelings tend as I listen to *Lulu*? I cannot even rely on a hand holding a fork in some restaurant or other. Music spoils us so irreparably that we stop trusting reality. Last month, in Moscow, I went to a restaurant chiefly frequented by students, with a view to having a quick lunch before an important rendezvous. A young beauty went down the stairs right in front of me and, a few minutes later, returned to her table upstairs. I called the waitress, said something about the draught and proceeded upstairs where the beauty was eating fish in the company of another young lady. I heard her voice that did not sound like Delilah's. And the way she held a fork had nothing to do with my favourite melodies. Luckily, my memory is trained sufficiently to provide me with the void in all its pristine beauty for which hanker so many music lovers and Platonists.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 22, 2003

Moscow

ANTON WEBERN

On hearing Webern's music for the first time I reverted to my childhood when mathematics had been the nucleus of my existence. The composer was in the habit of throwing a piece away if something did not work in it from a mathematical point of view. Perhaps we are also discarded if our organism forgets an equation, a theorem; madness awaits the mind which strays from the pattern formed by numbers.

Many mathematicians speak about the beauty of their profession and keep ugliness at bay, at least in their pronouncements. They doubt the usefulness of ugly mathematics. I wonder if the formulas which laid the foundations of the atom bomb were ugly or beautiful, but this is beside the point. Webern's music is remarkably beautiful and one can find in it both the harmony of the spheres and that of one's soul. Boethius speaks about three kinds of music: cosmic, human and the one that needs instruments to accompany a song. Webern's complete works might serve as an illustration to Boethius, but I am much more preoccupied with myself and the way music illustrates or engenders my state of mind, my moods and Time flowing through my life. Or is it the other way round? Does my life flow through Time which remains motionless, unaffected either by music or my sentiments? For all their conciseness, Webern's works seem to reproduce the *expanse* of Time that has come to a stop and coincided with Space. Again I am under the impression that it is the other way round: Space is set into motion and thus coincides with Time. Melancholy drives away the things I used to care about and with them goes Space, their natural habitat. What remains is Time that enables me to focus my attention on the word 'man' or 'human'—to the detriment of the cosmos and the exact sciences. It is melancholy and not self-conceit that induces me to speak so often about myself, reducing humankind to the dimensions of my armchair or pillow. That is why Webern's music is no longer associated in my mind with Boethius and Pythagoras, all the more so since in the *Cantatas* (Opus 29 and Opus 31) yet another kind of music seems to be born. Retrospectively one might detect in it the composer's premature, unexpected death. Of course death is never unexpected and, from a deterministic point of view, always comes on time. And cosmic music reflects the punctuality of death, his royal politeness, whereas human music ignores it. In Webern's late works it is the other way round.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 22, 2003

Moscow

SERGEI PROKOFIEV AND DIMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

THE GOLDEN MEAN

The freedom in art and the lack of it are the notions that do not submit to mathematical analysis as easily as one might expect. They are like a loose-leaf book, the pages of which can be taken out and put somewhere else—in the opposite camp. I do not think that Shakespeare enjoyed absolute freedom when working on his plays: a lot depended on actors, their availability, and the theatre he was writing for. Dante's *Commedia* is fettered by the *terzinas* which reflect the Trinity and also the medieval philosophy founded on the dogmas of the Catholic Church. A true artist seeks to imprison himself within a pattern, keeping away from absolute freedom in order to offset a quasi-sexual allure of chaos. Some poets affirm that it is far more difficult to write free verses: metre and rhyme help one choose the right word and image by limiting the scope of research. And those who use the Internet on a regular basis complain about the amount of information they get in answer to their bibliographical questions. Indeed, how to cope with hundreds of titles that appear on the screen one after another, looking like a crowd where a man or a woman of genius might get lost now and then? How to single those geniuses out? All the screen-supplied entities wear the same clothes and have no glitter in their eyes.

There are other impediments that a respectable artist may throw in for good measure. Joyce, for instance, refused to work in Valery Larbaud's quiet flat because he needed people coming and going all around him. At any rate, he was afraid of being unable to write his infinite opuses in a corridor or a kitchen—after tasting the luxury of Parisian silence. When confronted with a limitless amount of Time, some writers and composers experience what is usually referred to as the 'fear of the blank sheet of paper'. Prokofiev and Shostakovich did not suffer so much from the Soviet regime as many people think, influenced as they are by a sort of backlash. At least they knew how to stretch their serfdom out to the point where it might coincide with the restraints imposed by ingenious artists on their freedom. Of course one hesitates to say that the Party's decrees worked wonders for their inspiration, but I cannot refrain from declaring my love for Prokofiev's late works and Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony* which, apart from the author's acknowledgement of neo-classic tendencies, was a more or less sincere reply to the 'just criticism' he was subjected to in 1936. That unjust criticism drove him away from the 'formalism' exhibited so candidly in the *Second* and *Third Symphonies*.

On the brink of death Kieslovsky said something along these lines, 'We've got what we were dreaming about—shit.' He was speaking of today's Poland. Nor did the freedom of creation

produce anything of note in Russia because, outside the domain of commercial art, it resulted in the lack of interest on both sides: the state and artists. A prison guard always remembers a prisoner; a passer-by goes unnoticed. Fighting windmills and metaphysical problems is a task to which only fanatics give their undivided attention; and these fanatics are bred on the resistance of material. The Gulag is at the opposite pole of the shoddy welfare that unleashed Kieslovsky's wrath, but there is something in between—a realm where artists are neither literally crushed by their doom nor cuddled by it. A poet might be persecuted by the authorities looking after their own welfare which, for some reason, is linked in their minds to immobility. Such persecutions should be condoned neither by common sense nor unwritten rules; yet they often prove to be the rhyme that is not easily found in the illiterate nature.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 23, 2003

Moscow

GIYA KANCHELI

There comes a moment when our memory, instead of being deferential to our nostalgic yearnings, turns into an old hag who keeps a lot to herself—out of sheer malice, no doubt. And often we have no idea what exactly has been lost on account of her inborn wickedness: retrospectively we realise that she used to let us down even in those halcyon days at school when we had not a care in the world. But there are memories which cannot be lost—or found for that matter; the opening canto of the *Purgatorio* is of their number. But I will resist the temptation to quote it, for my life is larger than any quotation, however relevant and infinite. After all, nostalgia is the sentiment I have been accustomed to for many years. (A great many inhabitants of the *Purgatorio* suffer from this psychological disease as they recall their paradises on earth; and their perfidious memories do not let them down.) I was nostalgic even in those halcyon days at school, although the past on which I might look back at the age of thirteen was in no way comparable to the history I am dragging around on the eve of my sixtieth birthday. Perhaps I have always been in the grip of melancholia—like Samuel Johnson or Giya Kancheli's music.

Can a work of art suffer from melancholia or any other psychological disease? Edvard Munch's paintings seem to lead an organic life, judging from the impression we get while looking at them and also from what the painter himself strove to impart to us. In his diaries he talks about a weary movement of the eyes, about the lips that continue to whisper; as if the canvas in question were alive and therefore susceptible to the whole gamut of emotions. Kancheli's works communicate with the listener outside the domain of music so that I stop being a musician in their presence; our relationship is more intimate, more human. They give me back the past which is the fountainhead of *mono-no-aware* (the Japanese variety of melancholia). Presently I realise, however, that I do not belong to the past any more; nor does the past belong to me, for it is not organically, tangibly alive. I cannot embrace it, stroke it, hold it in my hands. The more I concentrate on it, the further off it moves as if repelled by my thoughts, by my inaccurate rendering of its nuances. But I listen to it, listen to the very impossibility of its re-appearance and nothing enchants me more than the torment of Tantalus devised by Kancheli. Through his music I regain my lost paradises and even seduce a young lady who, almost half-a-century ago, rebuffed my inept courtship. From where I was sitting in our classroom I could see the nape of her neck adorned by a few golden curls and a part of her profile. It was no easy task to make her turn round and glance in my direction. But today, bewitched by Kancheli's music, she smiles and listens benevolently to the nonsense I talk for hours and hours. And the future does not seem superfluous

any longer—the spheres of Paradise, the sphere of the Moon. For the sake of such euphoria I am prepared to give up my profession. Profession: musician. Profession: human being.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

January 8, 2007

Moscow

VALENTIN SILVESTROV

LE TEMPS PERDU

Music brings the past in its wake because, when listening to a symphony or a sonata, we lose what we have just heard in order to find it later on. The 'lost time' comes back only to make us realise it *has* been lost on the way, submerged or replaced by other harmonies and tunes. In other words, the recapitulation sounds like a remembrance, arousing a melancholy feeling about which the Japanese used to converse so much in the old days. Incidentally, I am not talking now as a musician for whom a recapitulation does *not* sound like a memory; it is rather Swann's way of dealing with music.

I have often written about *mono-no-aware*—the feeling brought about by our realisation of the flowing, fleeting, fleeing nature of Time. 'From hour to hour, we rot and rot,' as 'melancholy Jacques' put it. In music Time may be restored back to life—in the flesh, so to speak—because we listen to a recapitulation and are in a position to hear the whole piece once again. Generally speaking, in any work of art Time can be recaptured; in life, however, it disappears irrevocably despite Proust's command of French. Neither art nor psychoanalytical sublimation will bring back the past, if only because we were not alone in it. But the arts hold out the possibility of an immediate and complete resuscitation of whatever happened to us; music inveigles us into believing in ghosts even more successfully than literature or sculpture—on account of numerous repetitions.

In Japan, more than in any other country, one realises that repetitions are illusory and agree only with the doctrine of eternal recurrence that music illustrates to perfection. My last trip to Kyoto once more demonstrated the shifting, unsteady, almost fluid nature of Japanese gardens that depend on seasons, on cherry-blossom, on maples. The appearance of a new colour confounds our memory and makes us forget the recent past. And we realise that, sooner or later, our memory will betray us; it is already unfaithful to us because it swaps colours with abandon. But even without these insolent switches one is not likely to recognise a Japanese garden, perplexed by the configuration of bushes and stones. Everything seems to remind one of memory lapses, of how days and years sink into oblivion. Yet one is unlikely to forget Zen gardens because they are situated beyond memory, feelings and everyday life. In the course of that trip I once again visited the Silver Pavilion. I did not recognise it at first. Only the truncated cone in the Buddhist part of the garden conjured up a host of memories: my previous visits to Kyoto, the pages I devoted to *mono-no-aware*. It reminded me of the *temps perdu* that I partly recovered

through its agency. But I lost it once more and this time forever, it seemed to me. I realised that the truncated cone was impervious to seasons and colours: even snow melts on it rather quickly. In that garden it represents *samadhi* in which all colours are dissolved—all colours and also the desire to contemplate them.

In music I experience this sentiment as I listen to Dufai, Okegem and Obrecht whose Masses remain aloof from the vagaries of our moods and memories. They may remind us of the *temps perdu* only to take us away from it once and for all. Webern and Martynov also have a knack of protecting us against ephemeral phenomena. The works of Silvestrov to whom this essay is dedicated seem to draw on Zen gardens, their quiescent spirit, and on a sort of anti-Zen garden I visited twice during my autumnal stay in Japan.

I went to it on the 17th of October, after a recital in Osaka. And then I spent almost an hour in it on October the 27th. In spite of the pleasure I derived from my first visit I would not have gone to this garden for the second time in the space of two weeks: there are so many exquisite gardens in Kyoto. It would have been surprising if I had recalled its name when planning my itinerary; a weary European memory does not easily retain Japanese words. The bamboo-flanked alley leading to it looked familiar, but the sensation of *déjà vu* lasted for a few minutes only. When I entered the garden itself my memory turned out to be utterly unresponsive to its paths and trees—as if I had deliberately blanked them out. Alternating with intolerable alacrity, recognitions and non-recognitions pursued me around the garden until I came to the spot from where I had already seen the sacred mountain Hiei that 'looks different every time one glances at it, as though it were going through some magical transformation'. What did I recognise at that point? Did I recall the mountain or the text I had read during my first visit to the garden? Only eleven days had elapsed between these two visits. I was re-reading the text now, alternatively glancing at the words and at the mountain Hiei which *was* altering all the time—under the influence of the text, no doubt. I would have been appalled by my gigantic lapse of memory, but for these reassuring words printed on a small sheet of paper one is given at the entrance to the garden: 'looks different every time one glances at it'. Not only the mountain but the whole garden looked different because it had been created for the purpose of awakening us to *mono-no-aware* which is bound up with *temps perdu*, non-recognition and death.

Silvestrov's late pieces also lead us to non-recognition. And yet we constantly recognise something in the *Oral Music*, in *Sanctus* and *Benedictus*. But the blissful sensation of *déjà entendu* does not last: we lose the recognition before it has enough time to assert itself, to take root in our conscience. We also lose what we have not been offered by this music: our personal, chaotic past. And when the music finally dies away—it really *dies* in the process—we feel

ourselves much poorer than before, much weaker; as if a thousand cells had been removed from our body. We also seem to have lost at least one litre of our blood. And no eternal recurrence, no Nietzschean affirmation, no triumph of the past, will lie in store for us; instead we shall find the loss of the past—in this particular case, the loss of the pieces we have just heard, for we are not likely to recognise them. Worse still, we shall undergo a humiliating test during which recognition and non-recognition will alternate with alarming perseverance, causing a heartache similar to the one described by Keats at the beginning of his *Ode to a Nightingale*. This music may awaken the sentiment of *mono-no-aware*, provided we are ready to receive it. And, under favourable auspices, this sentiment may lead to *samadhi*—a state which can hardly be experienced in the twenty-first century: so few people are willing to shut themselves up in a monastery, leaving their computers behind.

By dint of listening to Silvestrov's pieces over and over again one may obtain an ersatz version of *samadhi*, however; twenty, thirty times one should listen to them. Then one begins to recognise them like that landscape seen from the garden of the Okochi Sanso. And the recognition does not depend on our memory, on our memorising the pieces: one can know the notes by heart without being able to recognise the music. What counts in this case is our awareness of *mono-no-aware*, our desire to break off with the slippery past once and for all. Suddenly we recognise what Silvestrov is striving to remember and realise that we can do without the past, for anyway we shall have to live and die without it. In our attempt we shall be assisted by the modern world that is also dying without the past.

But if one listens to these pieces 108 times one will yearn again for Schubert's music, for the poetry of Keats, Hölderlin and Baratynsky. In the domain of art, *mono-no aware* is always superior to *samadhi*. But even a confirmed recluse (and a hardened businessman) cannot always resist the temptation to look at the cherry-blossom—if only from a window.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 14, 2003

Moscow

SERGEI ZAGNY

THE STARS

'And a star talks to a star,' writes Lermontov in one of his poems. What dazzles an unbiased observer, however, is the silence prevailing in the realm of the stars, in their dominion. Even a shooting star utters no word as it traverses the sky like the luminous stroke of a pen.

The stars speak to us without words, without interfering with the silence that might have reigned in the universe, but for the clamour of our cities and our interior monologues. We do not listen to the stars or to the space created by the nocturnal sky that differs from a sunlit afternoon when everything centres upon the sun, upon the light where we luxuriate, taking no notice of its environment. And its environment is space, cosmos, silence, music. Actually the sun itself is music, for it is also silent, provided we do not use it as a means to some end, which puts an end to silence.

For all its magnificence, the sun is only one note—one chord at best. The stars are an orchestral score we hear whenever we contemplate a starry night. Even clouds do not prevent us from taking notice of the 'infinite immensity of spaces I do not know and which do not know me,' as Pascal put it. (*Combien de royaumes nous ignorent!*) If I am not mistaken, he also speaks about the silence of those *royaumes*, which frightens him. I have read *Les pensées* so often that my thoughts might have merged with the book without my being aware of this brotherhood, this mutual plagiarism. And I am not eager to verify the quotation: a lapse of memory is silence and vice versa.

Stars, interstellar space, silence. What would an astronaut hear during his 'space odyssey'? The stars, a great many notes disseminated around the sky.

The pattern they form is not irregular: the stars are harmonious. Sergey Zagny's *Vertical Stars* and *Anti-Vertical Stars* are harmonious and spacious. They are as anonymous as God, as mathematics. But mathematics is as poignant as love and death.

Actually stars do talk to stars in Zagny's works.

Juin, 19, 2006

Versailles

JACQUES-ALPHONSE DE ZEEGANT

Today, one cannot help fearing that the times of composers and writers are gone, especially if one takes into consideration Foucault's strata and the requiem he wrote for '*l'homme*', one of his favourite notions which, according to him, is doomed to disappear pretty soon. If one thinks in terms of periods, falls of empires and the sheer exhaustion of the human intellect, one is likely to forget our visceral attachment to what is often defined as 'human mythology'. Even over the last disastrous decades we have lost neither the sentiment of love, nor our capacity to fight stupidity and cruelty. Nor have we lost our awareness of suffering. Our mythology induces us to express our innermost feelings, and music is arguably the most suitable medium for such a task, for such a duty.

Jacques-Alphonse De Zeegant does not think in terms of periods, fashions or standing ovations. After all, what counts is one's tangible presence in this world, and the emotions communicated through music are probably even more powerful than whatever one might experience in the intimacy of a 'dark object of desire'. Jacques-Alphonse uses a variety of elements which perform a melancholy dance, a '*ritournelle*', as Gilles Deleuze would have put it. Indeed, even his wrath and despair are somehow melancholic, which unifies his works, conferring on them a sort of harmony one can associate only with music. When listening to his concertos and symphonies, I realise once again that the world offers us a lot of infinities and that the shifting of its elements makes our lives extremely intense and desirous. Even if, in the final analysis, it is just another dark object of desire we constantly come across.

THE BODY

Plato and Christian philosophers accustomed us to the thought that the body is thoughtless; worse still, it constantly puts spokes in our mind's plans. The body is sensuous and consequently diverts our attention from serious problems and our soul from its search for salvation. In the nineteenth century, however, the body was redeemed first by Goethe and then by Nietzsche. The latter went so far as to declare that the body was a precious instrument for every self-respecting philosopher worthy of its name. 'To write philosophical books with one's body' seems to have been Nietzsche's motto.

Not only in the domain of rock music does the body play an important role. Oriental musicians who deal with traditional instruments often enlarge upon the importance of being attuned to one's body. Until recently, their European counterparts seldom paid homage to it. Nowadays the body enjoys an unstoppable rise in popularity among pianists, violinists and other interpreters. A famous singer says he performs with his whole being, which boils down to an impressive number of bodily and facial contortions. I, for one, am invariably distracted from music by this kind of show. Actually, during such performances, I hear neither music nor the body; instead, I *see* a grotesque caricature of music.

Leonardo da Vinci insists on the primacy of visual elements in life – on the superiority of sight over other senses. But a concert hall is not a picture gallery; nor is it a landscape or a cityscape. Even during a rock concert your ears must work harder than your eyes for the simple reason that, first and foremost, a concert is a tribute to music. Lights, dances and special effects may be spectacular indeed, but they are a sign of weakness, of a performer's incapacity to devote his or her energy to music.

Energy is another keyword in our modern society which is full of go-getters who often get nowhere because point B where they do get to is still far away from point Z: energy must be well-adjusted, well-grounded. When speaking about the notion of the 'great man', Burckhardt points out that he has nothing in common with a celebrity who panders to big business, to his fellow creatures in general – to their tastes and whims. A great man looks inside, probes deep into his own nature. He is not a model child; he is an exception to the rule.

In the late Seventies, in Paris, I attended a Pink Floyd performance. I don't know whether one can speak about greatness in connection with a rock concert: today, this is totally irrelevant. But a great artist is a great man to some degree, especially if he looks inside and not outside. (The same goes for women.) I was struck by Pink Floyd's austerity, by their absolute devotion to music and to the cosmos which is both inside and outside. They did not swagger around; nor did

they dance. Their energy was stored inside and therefore radiated throughout the hall without any tawdry acts that often hide the shallowness of music. I *listened* to their songs instead of *looking* at them. Of course there were some visual effects which did attract my attention for a while. But nonetheless it was a concert, not a show, and my body felt it perfectly. They were almost motionless, as if they were playing with their souls and with their bodies. But my body reacted and was wounded in a sense: music is dangerous when it comes to you from the inside. Recently I read in a newspaper: 'Troops have been issued with new armour-piercing anti-tank grenades.' That is how a great artist speaks to you. He (or she) speaks to you like Zarathustra, like an armour-piercing anti-tank grenade. Human beings are thick-skinned and only a great artist can reach their souls.

But we are keen on peacekeeping missions, on peacemakers, on peace dividends. The peace we are rightly looking for is everywhere, unfortunately. Let me be wounded in a concert hall or by a CD, by a DVD. I don't mind bleeding to death in a concert hall and even at home, for blood is of vital importance, especially when you lose it. Why do you offer me contortions instead of music? Why do you admire this energy which is anti-musical and superficial to the point of becoming non-existent? Only music really exists in a concert hall; only music can reach your soul through your body.

Emil Gilels was my teacher and I had many opportunities to listen to him not only at concert halls but also in his apartment. I always shut my eyes when I listened to him in order not to lose a single note, a single nuance, a single nerve of my body, a single fibre of my being. He did not pander to the world we were living in: he had his own world to take care of. Actually he did not have to take care of it: this world of his was growing, radiating just because he devoted his energy to music and not to movements, to the 'show of music'. He was not going through the motions, in other words.

The same goes for the great rock groups of the past. King Crimson was probably my favourite group, although I also adored Pink Floyd and Genesis, to some extent. But there are artists you can admire from afar; there are others you hear inside you, for they hear *you* inside themselves.

I like dictionaries and I quote them rather often. In Bernard Shaw's play *Caesar and Cleopatra*, a soldier comes to Caesar and says, 'The Library of Alexandria is burning.' And Caesar replies, 'So what?' The soldier says, 'The history of humanity is burning.' He might have said, 'The past of humanity is burning.' It does not matter, really. And Caesar replies, 'Let it burn.' Dictionaries are the history of languages, which are one of the histories of humanity. If we quote dictionaries, we put this history in a safe deposit box.

‘A reciprocal action or arrangement involves two people or groups of people who behave in the same way or agree to help each other and give each other advantages.’ King Crimson hear me; I hear them. Whenever I am distressed, I listen to *Red* which is Mozart’s *Requiem* to some extent. There are no fugues in this recording, but what I hear is fugue-like: the inevitable eventually happens. I could also compare *Red* to Bach’s *Art of the Fugue* that I regard as the most astounding piece in the history of music. We get the feeling that only one theme has been played – a theme on which someone embroiders to make it adjust to human life, to our identity and metamorphoses. Indeed we are always the same, and we vary all the time.

I was born in 1947, in Moscow of all places. In the Soviet Union there was only one theme, one party, one way of living. One was not even supposed to compose a set of variations on this theme. What could a poet say under the circumstances? Every life is a variation on the theme of life. What we are confined to is a theme on which we are obliged to embroider in order to survive. That is what I hear in King Crimson’s *Red*. That is why I create my variations on this theme whenever I am in the mood for doing so.

Why do these old recordings and concerts produce such feelings? According to Burckhardt, a great man unites the past and the present. In other words, he journeys from point A to point Z, from his day and age to ancient times, picking up odds and ends to create a global work of art, something that Wagner and Scriabin were dreaming about. When I listen to King Crimson’s or Pink Floyd’s recordings, I hear Obrecht and Dufay, Schubert and Brahms; I hear the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans; and the cave man. The history of humanity is music.

The Stoics as well as Jean-Marie Guyau speak about one force that inhabits and moves the universe. A human and a star are made of the same material, of the same spirit so that there is no difference between us. When I listen to the legendary recordings of the rock groups I heard in my youth, I feel this force, the unity of Creation; and all sorts of pompous words come to my mind. I am not afraid of being pompous on these occasions because ‘grand narratives’ is a key notion of my life. Compared to today’s narratives, King Crimson and Pink Floyd are so big that one wonders if we still live in the same world. It’s a small world indeed – a small world full of small fry. Sometimes I ask myself if there are any narratives today because a narrative is a journey from point A to point K at least. Do we often get beyond point C?

What is the body? What is music, what is poetry? I have already dealt with these questions to the best of my abilities. But what is the body? What is the difference between the body and the mind, between the body and the spirit?

Apollo appears to us once again as the apotheosis of the principium individuationis. Only through him does the perpetually attained goal of primal Oneness, redemption through illusion, reach consummation. With sublime gestures he reveals to us how the whole world of torment is necessary so that the individual can create the redeeming vision, and then, immersed in contemplation of it, sit peacefully in his tossing boat amid the waves...Apollo, as an ethical deity, demands moderation from his followers and, in order to maintain it, self-knowledge. And thus the admonitions 'Know thyself' and 'Nothing to excess!' coexist with the aesthetic necessity of beauty, while hubris and excess are considered the truly hostile spirits of the non-Apolline realm, and hence qualities of the pre-Apolline age, the age of the Titans, and the world beyond the Apolline, the world of the barbarians...The Apolline Greeks also saw the effect of the Dionysiac as 'Titanic' and 'barbaric', unable to conceal from themselves the fact that they themselves were also inwardly akin to those fallen Titans and heroes. Indeed, they were forced to feel even more than that: their entire existence, with all its beauty and moderation, was based on a veiled substratum of suffering and knowledge, revealed to them once again by the Dionysiac...The individual, with all his restraints and moderations, was submerged in the self-oblivion of the Dionysiac state and forgot the Apolline dictates. Excess was revealed as truth, contradiction; the bliss born of pain spoke from the heart of nature. And consequently, wherever the Dionysiac invasion was successful, the Apollonian was negated and destroyed.

Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

Let us suppose that Pink Floyd and King Crimson followed the Apolline dictates to the letter, reaching back to primal Oneness and redeeming the world through illusion. The opposite must be related to the Dionysiac state in which the *principium individuationis* sinks into oblivion, being submerged by an orgy of bodily functions. The body dances, gesticulates, screams, and the mind loses all control over what happens right under its nose. The mind is at one with the body, allowing it to do whatever it feels like doing. In other words, the mind no longer exists; the body is on its own.

In Euripides' play *The Bacchae* there are women who leave their houses and gad about on the wooded mountain-slopes, dancing in honour of Dionysus. Their minds are elsewhere, their bodies everywhere. The scene may remind us of rock concerts which worship the body to the detriment of the mind and the Apolline dictates; to the detriment of music. The members of the audience scream, drowning out the sounds coming from the stage; they do not need them. They need the presence of a rock star, his gestures, aura, energy and fame. At the end of my last visit to St Petersburg I saw a drunk who stood in the middle of the street, swaying uncertainly and trying

hard to stay upright. Those youngsters are in a stadium; they sway rhythmically and do not try to stay upright. Some of them are drunk; others are drug addicts. But a concert, wherever it may take place, is not a drug; it is a *fête de la musique*, as we say in France.

Why do I single out young people? There are certainly middle-aged men and women in the audience. A star; all sorts of rock paraphernalia. In *The Bacchae*, Teiresias says: 'It will be said, I lack the dignity of my age, to wear this ivy-wreath and set off for the dance. Not so; the god draws no distinction between young and old, to tell us which should dance and which should not. He desires equal worship from all men: his claim to glory is universal; no one is exempt.' Am I exempt?

I often hear and read about pupils who outshine their teachers. Actually teachers often confine themselves to the domain where one can hardly shine unless history does justice to what may be called 'modest facts' without which no pupil, however gifted, will ever rise to prominence.

I remember one of these facts linked to the problem no one pays attention to nowadays: How should the piano sound? My first teacher at the Moscow Conservatoire, Jacob Zak, came up to me one afternoon and prodded my back with his finger so that I felt both pain and excitement. 'That's how it should sound,' he said as his index finger established the relationship between the piano and the human body. From then on I have treated the piano as a living creature. I know I have to caress it even when playing fortissimo. And I know these caresses ought to be slightly painful as if to remind the piano and myself about our common destiny, about death.

I know that, without the body, the mind would be stupid and even non-existent, given its incapacity to think independently of what contains it, of its bodily envelope. I feel my body even when I think about abstract notions such as eternity and freedom. My body is neither eternal nor free; yet I cannot think about either eternity or freedom without my body's participation. Sometimes I wonder whether my body thinks about these things the meaning of which may elude my mind. Perhaps only my body knows what freedom and eternity are; and I hope they have a close relationship to sounds, even to those one hears when a great pianist plays. You hear destiny and death and life; you hear the body and the soul. At least that is what I heard when Emil Gilels played in my presence.

So I have nothing against the body; on the contrary, I cherish it to the point of renouncing the afterlife if I am deprived of it: Origen said that, at the resurrection, our physical bodies would be transformed into absolutely ethereal bodies. And I need my *physical* body to enjoy life and music.

Pink Floyd's *I Wish You Were Here* is a wonderful hymn to primal Oneness, for this unity is achieved only when one longs for it. Freedom is not offered to you automatically by a country where you were born. 'A free country, isn't it?' does not mean that you are free. Your country may be free, although I wonder which country is really free nowadays; your neighbours may be free. But you must get your freedom from nowhere, or rather from your heart of hearts. You should expand your space – or your 'heart of hearts' – to the point where you become as free as the wind. And yet I wonder if the wind is really free. That is what I hear in *I Wish You Were Here*: the wind, the rain, my beloved's words, my own confessions, my doubts, my consolation, her love and her absence, her death. The point is primal Oneness does not care about death. Could you hear your doubts and your consolation in Michael Jackson's songs? Or in Madonna's songs? You can hear Michael Jackson's death in his songs because you know he was fragile. But they are not universal songs of death, of love, of loss. They do not refer to primal death, love, fragility and austerity. Michael Jackson was full of energy, but that was not enough to allow him to link a star to a button of my shirt or to find everything in a grain of sand. King Crimson and Pink Floyd did exactly that.

Let me go back to the concert I heard in Paris; I also saw it. An animal flew out of the wings; it was just an animal, nothing more. The songs went on: they could not stop on account of an animal appearing on the stage. Nothing could stop their music. What *can* stop music, I wonder?

We listened to them as if they were the only artists entrusted with the treasure of music. In my opinion, there is no difference between Brahms and King Crimson, between Pink Floyd's songs and Mahler's symphonies. Mahler is probably greater than Pink Floyd, but they were devoted to music, all of them; and that is what counts for me now.

During today's concerts, I don't get the feeling I am united with the people around. Beethoven's *Ninth* comes to the fore, as might be expected; but people do not unite only because they attend a rock concert. They can unite through music, not through bodily functions, bare rhythms and drugs.

The *principium individuationis* does not prevent us from feeling at one with the universe and its inhabitants. But uniting with others is no easy task, given that a true unity can be achieved only through what Nietzsche calls 'primal Oneness' and Jung 'archetypes'. Only through human mythology do men really come together, otherwise one is reminded of Britney Spears and Marx's appeal to 'proletarians of all countries'. 'I wish you were here' acts all the more powerfully since it also concerns the dead.

April 28, 2010

Montrichard

THE SEVEN WORDS

Borges speaks about a poet who hit upon the idea of writing an epic in which the whole world would be contained, the whole universe. He finished it, put the date and his signature at the bottom of the last page, looked up and saw the moon; whereupon he realised that the moon was missing from the manuscript. In this book I have not paid enough attention and tribute to the composer who means much more to every self-respecting musician than the moon. It is true that I dedicated to him a poem where these lines can be found:

...all words are music, not only
The Seven Last Words.

It ends with the following affirmation:

*And all my poems,
Written and unwritten,
Come down to seven words.*

In this poem the word 'word' is repeated seven times.

Under the pressure of destiny and Time, which is part of our destiny anyway, the lives of some people may come down to the seven words that Christ uttered on the Cross. The stigmata bestowed upon St Francis are the symbol of this kind of minimalism, although others too deserved such a tangible proof of their faith, of their devotion to Christ. It goes without saying that St Francis' life was not confined to the Cross and the *Laudes Creaturarum* testifies to it. When thinking about him, however, first of all we light upon the stigmata—probably because many remember Christ in a period of suffering, not in a joyous mood. And faith is mostly bestowed upon one in a moment of weakness when one starts looking for help outside the material world.

Some abridge the world, bringing it down to a few words only; others are doing their best to enlarge it in order to have a comprehensive dictionary of the universe at their disposal. The number of words used by Dante in the *Commedia* is far inferior to Shakespeare's vocabulary. Beckett went on shortening his prose and narrowing down the options of his characters. (And narrowing his eyes.) When Vladimir, who waits for Godot with his companion, speaks of the penitent thief, i. e. of the Crucifixion, we realise that the remark 'All my life I've compared myself

to Him' comes down to the seven words. Whenever thinking about Haydn I first remember his quartet *Die Sieben letzten Worte unseres Erlösers am Kreuze*—despite the inexhaustible range of moods, events and stylistic delicacies offered by his works. With the exception of the short and bitter finale, all the movements of the *Quartet* are slow, and therefore Haydn's works as well as the entire musical heritage slow down in my mind, which may account to some degree for my infatuation with slow tempi in general. In literature only a long, glutinous phrase can mirror adequately one of these endless movements that cannot end because every word is endless. And Christ's Passion, owing to its imitators or 'bearers', has already lasted for twenty centuries.

The protagonists of Beckett's most famous play exchange commonplaces about life. In such a dialogue the Passion is bound to crop up because comparing one's life to it is an honourable cliché that should not be denounced out of aesthetic considerations: the very first pain, either physical or psychological, will refute our hasty criticism. But should we reduce human life to sufferings and pain? Joy is also a commonplace—in the life of a Buddhist, for instance. Oddly enough, in some of Haydn's words there resounds a serene joy that seems to be out of place, considering the tragic circumstances. This joy may be accounted for by the contemplation of Christ's body and the forthcoming Resurrection. Yet we are confronted with the most tragic event in human history on which the past and future sufferings converge so harmoniously. From a Christian point of view, which is more common in Catholic countries than in Russia, this is indeed the most tragic event in human history. And Haydn was a Catholic.

Dante was also a Catholic, but the word that rounds off every part of the *Commedia* is *stelle* (stars). When reading the last Canto of the *Paradiso*, one seems to contemplate a radiant point on which all other cantos converge. Several times I read the *Commedia* from the last page to the first, putting Dante's time-machine into reverse to go *back* to the end of the *Paradiso*, now and then: one *must* go back to it, if only out of aesthetic considerations. Most poets agree that the last Canto of the *Paradiso* is the highest achievement in the history of poetry. The uninitiated (and the wicked) prefer the *Inferno*. In the past centuries majority rule was not omnipresent; yet Dante came to be associated with Hell and its tortures. In our times the adjective 'Dantesque' is often replaced by 'Kafkaesque' that adds a touch of absurdity to our life.

Nothing has replaced Dante's Paradise, his stars.

Every word on the Cross is infinite and thus encompasses all other words. The *Commedia* may be summed up with one all-absorbing word, *stelle*, in which love, sufferings, death and resurrection come to agreement. The whole of music converges on Haydn's *Seven Words*; in their turn, they blend into one word of Dante and one glance at the starry heaven that the Hants identify with the worm-nibbled coat of a bear.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 27, 2003

Moscow

CODA

THE DEATH OF THE COMPOSER

In *La mort de l'auteur*—a short essay published in 1968—Roland Barthes buries writers and gives birth to readers on the grounds that both cannot live at the same time, in the same world. 'The birth of the reader,' he writes, 'must be at the cost of the author.' Besides, 'the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture', which results in a process—a sort of decentralisation—where the author loses his or her identity, eventually melting into the distance as the text continues to conquer Space and the past. According to Barthes, 'it is language that speaks, not the author.'

But the author often *speaks* in his works as he unravels the story of his life or that of his distant cousins. In spite of my long-standing relationship with Tolstoy's novels I was surprised to learn that many of his characters—let alone his certified mouthpieces like Lyovin in *Anna Karenina*—bear the stamp of his moods and shamelessly draw upon their author's entourage. Thus Kitty merges with Tolstoy's wife, Sofya Andreyevna, as she plays up to Lyovin whose declaration of love is modelled on the game of Scrabble. Now I cannot get rid of Sofya Andreyevna and her photographs even upon re-reading the novel, let alone watching a movie based on it. Nor do I succeed in hushing up the nursery rhyme that features Tolstoy and his wife in Yasnaya Polyana where the former walks barefoot and the latter obstinately partakes of fish and meat, contrary to her husband's exhortations: this nursery rhyme resounds in my head at this very moment. What I face up to is consequently the birth of the author's wife whose omnipresence cuts down to size not only Xanthippe—with whom she was loath to be compared—but also some Dostoevsky heroines renowned for their loose morals.

Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev is virtually unknown outside the Russian borders; even inside them his contribution to music seldom gets beyond the framework of *The Kreutzer Sonata* where Tolstoy murders him. Beguiled by his inconspicuous personality, for many years I had no idea to what extent this counterpoint-inebriated composer endangered the precarious peace of the writer's household. Apparently my favourite—and by no means dead—author went so far as to suggest his wife must choose between her infatuation and her matrimonial duties. 'Either you stop seeing your pianist or I'll leave you and go abroad,' he said, paying no tribute to Taneyev the composer. In the summer of 1897 Sofya Andreyevna asked her favourite composer to stay at Yasnaya without her favourite writer's permission. The latter issued another ultimatum. 'This time, however,' A. N. Wilson points out, 'he stuffed the letter into the leather upholstery of the armchair

in his study where it was discovered, four years later, by his daughter Masha. He had decided once and for all that he would leave his wife. Their beliefs and life styles were incompatible.'

When I first read *The Kreutzer Sonata* I had no inkling of what the author had gone through before embarking upon his tale which, from my unenlightened point of view, was no more than an *exercice de style*. In other words, Tolstoy's participation in it was limited to the text from which there arose a jealous husband, his wife and her lover: a tissue of quotations drawn from various (distant) sources. The language continued to speak while the author was mowing the rye amidst his peasants; the language fell in love and committed a crime. Was there anyone behind the throne?

The more I read Tolstoy the louder his voice sounded as if to shout down the language and whoever loomed out of it. Hammering his point home, he repeated words within the same sentence—a practice frowned upon by so-called Russian stylists. The number of cultural centres on which his novels and stories might have drawn got smaller and less significant. Every paragraph seemed to zero in on the author who was steadily outgrowing his photographs, the images conveyed by nursery rhymes, anecdotes, biographies and even his own texts. Plato said that the wise are doing in their sleep what others succumb to in their waking hours. Tolstoy murdered his wife in *The Kreutzer Sonata* and probably also in several nightmares, but in his waking hours he contented himself with outbursts of wrath and bitter smiles. He indulged in many occupations on which his works do not embroider; and yet we are constantly aware of his presence. Tolstoy is a busybody who interferes with his and other writers' texts, putting Shakespeare in the corner, driving his point home or leaving his home forever. Incidentally, he seldom if ever plays with words.

Tolstoy murders the text; Dante seems to mistrust it, relying more on a tête-à-tête relationship with the author. Doesn't he need Virgil's presence by his side as he journeys through the realms where only the dead feel at home? The *Aeneid* is not enough. In Canto X of the *Paradiso* he actually abandons the text—the *Summa theologiae*—and encounters Thomas Aquinas in the flesh, figuratively speaking. The author is reborn. Word of mouth turns out to be more reliable than the text. Jung, for one, maintains that no amount of books will ever instruct us as efficiently as rubbing shoulders with a wise man or woman.

Composers do not become larger-than-text figures; they melt into the distance while pianists continue to play their works. I never think about Beethoven's sufferings either on stage or at home where I listen to his symphonies performed by the *alte Meister*. It is true that *seid umschlungen Millionen* may elicit an irreverent comment on my part: hardly anyone had an urge to embrace Beethoven in his lifetime. (And only Dante knew what would happen to Beethoven

after his death.) But a literary text always brings us closer to writers and composers who make use of it.

In a way, Kierkegaard commits suicide as he hides his identity beneath a sumptuous array of pseudonyms. But the more he writes the bigger emphasis he puts on the external, on the man (or God) who reveals himself. 'As times passed,' writes Joakim Garff, 'from having been the implacable defender of inwardness, Kierkegaard became its no less implacable prosecutor. This is why his writings can be read retrospectively as an elaborate history of the abolition of inwardness, an abolition that in work after work pushes its behind-the-scenes manager, the actual author Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, forward into the front lines, so that by the end no one would have any doubt about who was doing the talking.' (Translated by Bruce H. Kirmmse)

Even if we had at our disposal only anonymous literary works, we would do our best to reconstruct the lives of their authors because a stranger walking through a village—either barefoot or otherwise—arouses the curiosity of its inhabitants. But composers walk nowhere; they may dance in Paradise, though.

On hearing Beethoven's *Fifth* for the first time I *might* have thought about the author's sufferings and ill-founded ecstasies. The more I listened to the symphony, however, the blurrier the author's image grew as if he had been banished from his opus by conductors and orchestras—by the reader. Now I think more about Karajan's concert in the second part of which he conducted the *Fifth* (Moscow, 1969) than about Beethoven, about his solitary figure haunting Vienna and its suburbs. And I listen to the text.

August 15, 2005

Versailles

WORKS

THE BIRTH OF THE WORK

A week ago, at the end of my holiday in Switzerland, my car broke down and was towed to the nearest garage which happened to be located at Crissier—one of the gourmet capitals of the world. Well do I recall the dishes I partook of in Fredy Girardet's restaurant, associated in my mind with the CDs I made in La-Chaux-de-Fonds: I would go there before and after the recording sessions. This time, however, I cancelled a reservation I had made in Annecy—another gourmet capital of the world. (Marc Veyrat is regarded by some as the chef of the century.) The whole episode comes under the head of what Jung dubbed 'synchronicity'. Indeed it is astonishing that my car broke down in Crissier of all places; and on the day when I was supposed to have lunch at Marc Veyrat's restaurant.

'Meaningful coincidences' fascinated Jung to the point of making him undertake an astrological experiment which, unfortunately, yielded no tangible results. Actually he was more interested in 'a-causal connection between psychic states and objective events' than in a penchant for unity I am so eager to track in nature, the sciences and the arts.

The philosophical ideal, Whitehead writes in *The Concept of Nature*, is the 'attainment of some unifying concept which will set in assigned relations within itself all that there is for knowledge, for feeling, and for emotion'. Mystics and philosophers often ponder about unity and the way we strive to achieve it, if only in our mind. Kant points out that through understanding (*Verstand*) we acquire particular empirical knowledge; reason (*Vernunft*), on the other hand, can guide us towards completeness. 'In all our possible perceptions,' he writes, 'we always remain involved in conditions, whether in space or in time, and come upon nothing unconditional. In its empirical meaning, the term "whole" is always only comparative. The absolute whole of quantity (the universe), the whole of division, of derivation, of the condition of existence in general have nothing to do with any possible experience.'

I am acquainted with a music lover who spends hours and hours listening to the same piano piece performed by different artists. For instance, he has got nineteen recordings of Chopin's *Preludes*. 'No interpretation offers you a *complete* version of such and such a piece,' he maintains. 'So I buy as many facets of it as I can and put them together—sounds like a puzzle, you know.'

It is true that no interpretation, however inspired, reveals to us the whole of a piece: unconditional surrender is unknown in the domain of art. But we *are* allowed to catch a glimpse of the Absolute—to use Bradley's terminology—on condition that the stars do not mind our cosmological (or astrological) experience. A revelation of this kind is rare indeed and no music

lover knows for sure when and how it is bound to happen. Sometimes you just whistle a melody in your bathroom and, all of a sudden, the melody becomes a harmony.

August 18, 2005

Versailles

THE ART OF THE FUGUE

Solzhenitsyn said once that Russian proverbs helped him overcome the obstacles he encountered in the Soviet Union. I am not very keen on proverbs, on wise sayings: they are too wise, in my opinion. I need something lighter – a few words you say en passant – which renders your life easier, smoother, more acceptable. But I like the French saying '*plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose*', for it is both light and wise. It does not claim the moral high ground and disappears as unobtrusively as it appears. Yet it stays to remind you that you change every minute and, in spite of this permanent round-the-clock metamorphosis, you remain the same. You stick to your guns, although some of your habits and customs may pass away, replaced by fresh, up-to-date whims. But there is no doubt that you will die, your own old self, and nobody is likely to stand in for you on this occasion.

The fugue reflects life in the same way, using stronger, lengthier arguments: after all, you can talk about human destiny for hours and hours. There is a theme (or a subject) on which the entire argumentation is constructed – your own self pursuing you day and night. Like the Almighty or some biological formula, the subject seems to lay the foundations for all human existence, not only for your puny, private 'I'. The notion of '*nisus*' might help us unravel the secrets of the fugue's genetics; yet the notion itself is rather hazy and cannot be defined easily. According to Jean-Marie Guyau, the *nisus* is 'an obscure form of life, endowed no doubt with a deaf consciousness and in any case with a capacity to adjust; it is identical with organic memory'. To some extent the *nisus* answers the question 'What is the origin of life?' And yet the *nisus* itself is a big question to which no one has found an answer for the simple reason that nowadays this notion makes no sense and has therefore sunk into oblivion. It is 'the vitality of life', as Michel Onfray puts it. 'It is the *nisus* that makes us become what we are,' he goes on. And Guyau speaks of the 'more or less conscious memory of the living molecule.' '*Nisus*' means 'effort' in Latin and, according to Littré, it is 'synonymous either with vital force or with plasticity; by this term we characterise more or less vaguely a faculty for being born and regenerated that possesses anatomical elements and tissues'. Dolbac says that 'the *nisus* defines the continuous pressure that exerts upon each other the forces which seem to be at rest'. I have read these definitions several times and I am still none the wiser.

Luckily, we have got *The Art of the Fugue* which may throw light on the problem, provided we regard it as an image of life, of time, of the *nisus*. Nothing prevents us from judging every work of art in these terms: life, time, the *nisus*; but *The Art of the Fugue* is in a class of its own.

When we listen to Webern's works, for instance, we hear silence and time growing out of this silence, out of every note which is the *nisus* in its own right. But we do not have enough time to avail ourselves of this knowledge of time: Webern's opuses are too short for that. Besides, *The Art of the Fugue* gives us an opportunity to tackle the problem to which Sartre and Lévinas devoted many pages: *l'Autre*.

A theme comes out of nothing, out of the region where there is no life, no biological foundations. It is alone, on its own, and consequently it may stop at any moment because it is not a Gregorian chant whose life expectancy has no bounds. It is joined by another theme, by a sort of answer which lends it a helping hand and encourages it to go on, to develop its potential, to become what it is already: 'You should become what you are,' said Pindar.

At first the answer sounds like a friend, like an answer to a prayer: 'I'm too lonely, I need company.' But not every creature is as faithful to you as your dog, although it may follow you up and down the street and walk with you in a park. The answer begins to betray the theme to which it is attached, as if the theme could not get on without it. Actually it cannot, for it is already involved in a complicated relationship with other answers, with echoes of all sorts that surround it like a crowd. This crowd is harmonious, but it may unexpectedly turn you upside down or shorten you to such a point that you hardly feel yourself. Your arms and legs have been amputated, but you are still yourself, your old self, for you can hear the theme of your life. 'The Other' is a dangerous companion and, for all its efforts, the subject does not succeed in getting rid of it.

Perhaps the subject has no wish to get rid of it, of this faithful companion, of this dog of sorts. A friend comes to your place and urges you into going with him on a drinking spree. What he actually has in mind looks more like a drug than a glass of beer in a nearby pub. In the course of your escapade you undergo many metamorphoses and the images your mind lavishes upon you finally get the upper hand in their struggle with Hieronymus Bosch's visions.

In *The Art of Fugue* the subject undergoes many metamorphoses the number of which continues to grow as time goes its own sweet way. In a fugue from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* we deal with so-called quanta-time: one period, one situation. In *The Art of the Fugue* we come across time itself—on account of the work's duration and monotheism, as it were. We listen to it and suddenly realise that what we hear is the beating of our own heart which alters its rhythm in accordance with our movements, our thoughts and our passions. Our heart is always inside us, but it does not behave in the same way, following instead the ups and downs of our existence. It joins our senses – all of them or just our sight and sense of smell. We may have a hole in the heart or a heart attack; our heart often skips a beat. Sometimes our heart is in the right place, sometimes in the wrong place. Sometimes our heart is in our boots; sometimes we wear it on our sleeve.

Life is both predictable and unpredictable—not only because we are bound to die without knowing when and where our death awaits us. We cannot escape death, which also reminds me of *The Art of the Fugue*: the subject is inescapable, so to speak. (Nor can we escape life—as long as we live.) For all its vitality and affinities with the *nissus*, it also speaks about death, if only because Bach died when composing the last fugue.

Throughout the opus *magnus* we keep listening to time which grows audible as we go from one fugue to another. Bergson says that in order to understand the nature of time one must materialise it, spreading its components out on the ground. Then you realise that time has components, that it is not homogenous. If you say, ‘The population of the village has remained remarkably homogeneous,’ you don’t mean that there is only one person living in it. There are several houses and in every house there reside several people. It is the equivalent of those people you see when you spread time out on the ground. You see a man and his son. They look more or less alike; yet when you watch them amble around the village, you cannot help feeling they are poles apart. The same goes for brothers and sisters, for mothers and grandmothers: they all look alike, which does not prevent them from being different.

In *The Art of the Fugue* there are simple fugues, counter-fugues in which a variation of the main subject is used in both regular and inverted form, double and triple fugues with two and three subjects respectively, mirror fugues in which the *complete score* can be inverted, canons labelled by interval and technique and the last fugue: *Fuga a 3 Soggetti (Contrapunctus XIV)*. Its third subject is based on the BACH motif, B♭—A—C—B♭ (‘H’ in German letter notation).

Music is always in motion; at the same time it is as immobile as eternity. Achilles will never catch up with the tortoise; Zenon’s arrow does not fly. If you photograph an arrow, you find out it is rooted to the spot, suspended in the air forever. The immobility of music is reinforced by the permanent presence of one theme which haunts the listener until he or she realises that neither time nor music flows, dies away.

The last subject of the last fugue is Bach himself who becomes his own work and, like an arrow, comes to a standstill. His death is nothing but the immobility of music. He cannot finish his work because he is no longer there. But he is everywhere and does not really need to live in Leipzig again. He gets rid of the subject, of Leipzig, of his family and friends, of his life—he is no longer a subject—and becomes himself at last.

May 10, 2010

Montrichard

THE FANTASY IN D MINOR, K V 397

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river—

That is how Mozart's *Fantasy in D Minor* begins; or by the feeling a solitary space traveller might experience when facing the sad immensity of the cosmos. In his old movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Kubrick conveys this particular brand of solitude through an excerpt from Khachaturian's *Gayane*.

Then something looms out of the fog. A dream-like figure, a ghost—a worthy predecessor of the one haunting the second movement of Beethoven's *Geistertrio*. Other shapes and shades creep in.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead describes the visions one is likely to cope with in the intermediate state between death and rebirth.

*Alas! when the Uncertain Experiencing of Reality is dawning upon me here,
With every thought of fear or terror or awe for all visions set aside,
May I recognise whatever visions appear, as the reflections of mine own consciousness—*

If the dead person fails to identify those visions—Peaceful and Wrathful deities, among other ghosts—he is tortured by The Lord of Death:

The Lord of Death will place round thy neck a rope and drag thee along; he will cut off thy head, extract thy heart, pull out thy intestines, lick up thy brain, drink thy blood, eat thy flesh, and gnaw thy bones; but thou wilt be incapable of dying...Thy body being a mental body is incapable of dying even though beheaded and quartered.

At the end the fantasy suddenly switches to D Major and presents the other side of the picture—light, radiance, Paradise Lost. Thus it seems to be composed in reverse: from end to beginning, from death to life.

Was this order natural to Mozart? Be that as it may, the fantasy seems to have been composed by two different people. Or by one person with a many-sided brain, like the protagonist of my poem *Deformation*:

*I've got several brains in my head.
Some of them are closed. (I don't know
What goes on inside them.) Others open.
Wide-open, in point of fact.*

1995

Versailles

THE *FANTASY IN C MINOR*, K V 475

I wrote the essay on the *D Minor Fantasy* (KV 397) in March 1992. In April 1992 I was asked to write in French an essay on the *Fantasy in C minor* (KV 475). I had plenty of time, but soon realised that I could not add anything to what had already been written in the essay on the *Fantasy in D Minor*, except two sentences: *A la fin, la terreur revient. Le cercle vicieux des tourments.* (At the end the terror returns. The vicious circle of torments.)

1995

Versailles

THE *ADAGIO IN B MINOR*, K V 540

Mozart is the most tragic composer of all time—whenever he takes the trouble to write in minor keys. Schubert and Gesualdo carry off the palm for weirdness; Brahms is the best exponent of melancholy in music.

Obediently, almost automatically, tears well up in my eyes whenever I happen to hear the *Requiem*. Once I waited for a friend of mine outside a church where the *Requiem* was being performed. Hardly any sound reached me in the habitual pandemonium of Paris. Yet, after a while, I was obliged to hide my tears from passers-by.

I do hope I shall never be so imprudent as to expose myself to the danger of hearing the present *Adagio* in public.

1995

Versailles

THE TEMPESTS

Some words can be understood both literally and figuratively, thereby revealing the links between the inner and outer worlds, between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Their number varies from one language to another. There might be a language which excludes figurative sense altogether; at least one can *conceive* of such a language. On the other hand the Kabbalists seem to regard every word in the Torah as a starting-point for a lifelong investigation of God's mystery. They study hidden meanings to the detriment of literal sense—the method epitomised by the following declaration: 'If the Torah were a mere story, not a God-written text, it would be of no interest to us. As a matter of fact we might have told a far better story.'

What is the figurative sense of the word 'tempest' (and of its synonym 'storm')? To disturb violently (a person, the mind). And it is in this sense that the word 'tempest' may be applied to Beethoven's *Sturm Sonate*, Opus.31 N° 2. The title originated in the imprudent remark that Beethoven dropped, when asked about the theme of the *Sonata*: 'Re-read Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.' But in Shakespeare's play the tempest takes place outside—in the macrocosm, so to speak. Of course the minds (the microcosm) of those who suffer from the consequences of Prospero's strategy in *Scene I* are violently disturbed, but the scene lasts for a few minutes only—around 70 lines; and the rest of the play is all serenity and reconciliation. Beethoven's *Sonata*, on the other hand, displays no serenity, no wisdom, except in the second movement which, however, lacks the presence of Ariel and whatever is associated with him: flying, dancing, the heights. And these are the very attributes of wisdom, as defined by Nietzsche's Zarathustra. And they *are* present in the second movement of Beethoven's *Sonata in C Minor*, Opus 111. Besides, the *C Minor Sonata* ends with the second movement, its flights and Ariel's songs, its magic and resignation. The second movement of the *Sturm Sonate* is followed by yet another tempest, a minor one. (And there is only one tempest in Shakespeare's play.) So Beethoven did set *The Tempest* to music, but in another sonata. Incidentally, the first movement of the *C Minor Sonata* is more extroverted, more macrocosmic, more Shakespearean than its counterpart in the *Sturm Sonate*. But it is less naturalistic than the fourth movement of the *Pastoral Symphony*: like most Beethoven pieces, it has far more in common with the microcosm.

Proust uses the word '*tempête*' in connection with the predicament of a lover who expects to see his beloved and finds that she is gone:

...la brusque dépression qui se produit alors dans notre âme jusque-là ensoleillée, soutenue et calme, détermine en nous une tempête furieuse contre laquelle nous ne savons pas si nous serons capables de lutter jusqu'au bout.

Retrospectively, the *Sturm Sonate* might be to some extent identified with *A la recherche du temps perdu*—with those parts that relate to Swann's and Marcel's torments. The first movement expresses the whole gamut of Proustian emotions: from astonishment to despair, from prostration to despondency. The second movement corresponds to that sunlit, calm soul which indulges in the contemplation of future happiness. And then comes the furious tempest...and also weariness, the sentiment of defeat.

The literal and figurative senses of the word 'tempest' are wonderfully expressed in Canto VI of the *Divina Commedia*; and also in its 'microcosm'—the first poem of Eugenio Montale's *La bufera e altro* (*The Storm and Other Things*). In one of his letters Montale touches upon the double theme of the poem, saying it represents 'cosmic war, the perpetual war of all' and 'distance, separation, even the doubt that she's still alive'. Paolo and Francesca are both alive and dead, like other characters from the *Commedia*. (Dante himself is half-dead in the course of the journey.) Their bodies are both entwined and separated. And all around their bodies rages the Dantean tempest:

*La bufera infernal, che mai non resta,
mena gli spirti con la sua rapina;
voltando e percotendo li molesta.*

*(The hellish storm, which never rests,
leads the spirits with its rapine;
whirling and battering, it vexes them.)*

The tempest depicted by Liszt in his *Sonata* is quite naturalistic—on a par with Beethoven's *Storm* from the *Pastoral*. Of course it 'rests' now and then to give us an opportunity to hear what Francesca imparts to Dante. But Liszt often combines the love theme with 'whirling and battering' so that the tempest rages in our mind throughout the *Sonata*. In my opinion Peter Greenaway makes a mistake when, in his version of the *Inferno*, he isolates the lovers' bodies from the tempest.

The feeling of love is inseparable from inner tempests which often turn out to be so powerful that our bodies cannot hold them. So they slip outside and become 'a cosmic war' or 'the hellish storm, which never rests' or '*une tempête furieuse contre laquelle nous ne savons pas si nous serons capables de lutter jusqu'au bout*'. And only now and then can we disengage ourselves from it and, like the two bodies in Greenaway's film, remain motionless (and emotionless) for some time.

In a way, all tempests sound more or less alike. But farewells are somehow different from each other. Here is Montale's farewell:

Come quando

Ti rivolgesti e con la mano, sgombra

La fronte dalla nube dei capelli,

Mi salutasti—per entrar ne buio.

*(As when you turned around and, with your hand, the cloud of hair
clearing from your forehead,*

you waved to me—and stepped into darkness.

Translated. by William Arrowsmith)

And here is Shakespeare's farewell:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,

As I foretold you, were all spirits, and

Are melted into air, into thin air:

And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,

The solemn temples, the great globe itself,

Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,

And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,

Leave not a rack behind.

The first farewell is depicted at the end of the *Sturm Sonate*; the second at the end of Beethoven's last *Piano Sonata*, Opus 111.

2001

Versailles

THE RECONCILIATION

'No money,' said Beethoven, when asked about the 'subject matter' of the *Sonata in E Minor*, Opus 90. Perhaps it was no joke: though unable to express quantities and real things in general, music *can* depict the state of mind caused by indigence. It is the *quality* of the wind that Beethoven alluded to as he drew a parallel between Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and his *Sonata in D Minor*, Opus 31N°2. His tempest was rather metaphorical and concerned chiefly his room, which was always a total shambles, and his inner disposition. The *Sturm Sonate* has little in common with the short-term turbulence that Prospero triggers at the beginning of Shakespeare's fairy tale. Beethoven's devastation persists throughout the first movement and resumes its course in the finale where a tiny motif is repeated so many times that one cannot help feeling the effects of what the Buddhists call 'karma'—the eternal recurrence of torments. Prospero, on the other hand, creates his miniature Hell to pave the way to Paradise where he 'drowns' his book: he does not need it any more. Shakespeare, too, must have lost interest in books after finishing his last masterpiece. Beethoven bid farewell to music and life in the *Sonata in C Minor*, Opus 111 and in the *Missa Solemnis*. The finale of the *Ninth* is a hysterical and improbable bear hug in which the whole of humanity gets involved, with the exception of a few solitary artists. Beethoven was of their number and his musical participation in this global union was all the more pathetic since, in real life, he was stoned by children and shunned by adults. A union of sorts did take place, however, as ten thousand people flocked to his funeral; but the deceased no longer cared for any expression of love, however impressive and sincere. Besides, the harmony he achieved in the last piano sonata and the *Missa Solemnis* is far more consummate than any belated recognition.

One wonders how he managed to break out of the vicious circle depicted in the finale of the *Sonata in D Minor*, Opus 31N°2 where, in addition to endless monotony, the aforementioned motif strives to close upon itself like a snail shell, assisted in this endeavour by the left hand moving towards it. The double vicious circle brings to mind the organ grinder immortalised by Schubert: the repetitive nature of whatever he performs and the handle of his instrument. No piece of music treats eternal recurrence so ruthlessly as Schubert's *Leiermann*, and yet the composer had no intention of refuting Zarathustra for the simple reason that he knew nothing about him. Nor did Beethoven harbour a grudge against Nietzsche whose faith in repetition defied his own unhappiness and physical pain. Oddly enough, the harmony one hears in the *Missa Solemnis* and the last sonata is akin to Nietzsche's self-assertion, although it lacks rhetorical devices and plays down the jubilation with which Zarathustra proclaims his doctrine. But there is a dionysian dance in the second movement of the *C Minor Sonata*, Opus 111; and the *Missa*

Solemnis, especially its conclusion (*dona nobis pacem*), may be entitled *The Invitation to a Dance*. Thomas Mann and Adorno insist on the objective character of this music as opposed to the subjectivism of Beethoven's middle period. I disagree with their opinion on the grounds that the dionysian dance I touched upon earlier is the only 'rock episode' in the *Arietta* from the last sonata; whereas the finale of the *Sonata in D Minor*, Opus 31 N°2 lends itself to any modern arrangement. So does the *Mondlicht Sonate* and many other works of the middle period, including the *Fifth* and the *Appassionata*. Beethoven's last 'hit' was, arguably, the *Ninth*: it is not for nothing that the protagonist of *The Clockwork Orange* revels in it throughout the movie. That is why the imaginary millions might swing to it during a rock concert. But the ending of the *Missa Solemnis* and the *Arietta* are far removed from rock concerts and even from the stage as such, being more attuned to Beethoven's solitude, to his inner freedom and harmony. Prospero gets rid of his book. At the end of the *Arietta*, which is an involuntary homage to Ariel, the rhythm vanishes into thin air as if to deprive the proverbial millions of the easiest way to global agreement.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

September 16, 2004

Adler

BEETHOVEN'S LAST WORKS

Undeniably, people are fascinated by mirrors. Held by an obliging sorceress, a mirror can offer us images of the past and even of the future—useful and sometimes horrific knowledge. The destiny of a curious man—Macbeth, for example—is stored in a mirror; and likewise feminine beauty which is sorcery in itself.

The inhabitants of the Fiji Islands believe that man has two souls: bright and dark. The dark soul ends its days in Hell; the bright one permanently dwells in a reflection, in a mirror.

The history of art is swarming with reflections. Some works turn out to be reflected in both the mirror of the past and that of the future.

In his youth Beethoven followed in Haydn's footsteps. On the other hand the works of his 'middle period' exerted a strong influence on many composers: Schubert, Berlioz, Brahms, Wagner, Shostakovich. For almost two centuries Beethoven has been involved in the mirror-ritual. Up to a certain point.

One feels rather uneasy when listening to his last quartets and piano sonatas. One might get the same feeling in the presence of someone who, contrary to the laws of physics—this particular law was contradicted neither by the theory of relativity nor by quantum mechanics—is not reflected in a mirror.

The disappearance of a reflection bodes no good, for it is traditionally attributed to the interference of evil spirits who are in the habit of playing tricks on us, though not always in such an ostentatious way. A dozen or so legends put us on our guard against 'reflectionless' people who might be vampires, demons in disguise and what not. Nor should we disregard the moral of the short story by E.T.A. Hoffmann *Die Geschichte vom verlorenen Siegelbilde*. Keep a close eye on your shadow!

What *does* one experience with regard to those works which seem to have no extension, being withdrawn into themselves? It is as if history, instead of going on—a one-track, inexorable movement—made a detour, stopped somewhere. Schoenberg admitted that he did not understand Beethoven's last quartets. No composer seems to have been influenced by this music. It simply has no reflection in the future. Has it ever been composed at all? Has it ever been printed? Are the scores bound to disappear some day or other?

Beethoven's last quartets and piano sonatas, Scriabin's last works, all of Berlioz, *Finnegans Wake* are ends in themselves, cul-de-sacs; beyond, there is no time.

'But is there anything Beyond?'

(Translated from the French by the author)

1978

Bruxelles

POSTSCRIPT:

This essay was written twenty-five years ago when I was quite engrossed in the emotional and metaphysical aspects of music, paying no attention to their ingredients, as it were—to sounds. In those days the piano was just a means of putting into practice an ideal combination of notes which, in their pristine state, reminded me of Leonardo's drawings: all those machines and buildings doomed to remain in the realm of pure virtuality. To some extent, like Leonardo's drawings and sketches, those notes existed on their own, yearning for no instruments, no vocal cords. Beethoven's early piano sonatas justify this point of view because they seem to have been adjusted to the piano from the outside instead of being born inside it. Even the sonatas of the middle period abide, in a way, *beside* the piano, lending themselves to all sorts of arrangements and transcriptions. But Beethoven's last sonatas were born and bred in the piano; they dwell inside it.

By his illness Beethoven was driven away from the Vienna School and human society in general. But moving off is just a sophisticated way of getting closer and closer. While leaving behind all superficial manifestations of human existence Beethoven drew closer to the heart about which, in the epigraph to the *Missa Solemnis*, he says a few heartfelt words where the heart seems to rebound, as it does in this sentence. He was also drawing closer to the heart of the piano. In the last period of his life he indeed looked like a doctor listening to the piano by means of a stethoscope. But he held the 'stethoscope' in his teeth, which enabled him to hear the piano sounds, or rather their distant echo, through his bones. The deafness-born nostalgia brought him closer to sounds, to their source. (The Germans adore the prefix '*uhr*' that refers to the origin of whatever can be found in the universe.) One sound was enough now to make up a melody, and one harmony might last almost forever (the third movement of the *Sonata in A flat Major*, Opus 110). The heart too repeats the same note many times and its harmony is not interrupted immediately.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

October 29, 2003

Tokyo

THE SECOND MOVEMENT

As we grow older and older, we are tempted to view everything in terms of our life which, however long and toilsome, is unable to encompass the whole world and the stars. Something remains outside of it and we regret the impossibility of dealing with all phenomena and all our fellow creatures who go about their business, taking no notice of us and our desires. Do we want to embrace them as Schiller and Beethoven did in their fashion? Probably not. But at least we would like to include them in our vision of the world, in our perception of the daily routine. We want to prove to ourselves that even the most humdrum events lead us to a higher plane, to the Tower of Babel from the top of which we shall study the truth and its ramifications. The harmony we find in music induces us to share with Plato his addiction to the truth, which he revealed through his attachment to the purity and loftiness of ideas.

Recently I played Beethoven's last sonatas in Vienna. I seldom play encores and I never play anything after finishing Beethoven's very last sonata about which Kretschmar – a character we come across in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* – said that 'the sonata had come, in the second, enormous movement, to an end, an end without any return'. He wasn't speaking about the last sonata only; he meant 'the sonata in general, as a species, as a traditional art form'. Yet, a little bit later, Schubert composed *his* last sonatas that are in no way inferior to Beethoven's contribution to the sonata as traditional art form.

As we approach the end of our life we get into the habit of always reading our decrepitude, if not senility, into whatever happens. Every work of art acquires eschatological nuances that do not really belong to it unless we deal with Mozart's *Requiem* or Bach's *The Art of the Fugue*. After all these pieces came to their untimely death on account of the fatal blows dealt to the composers by their respective diseases. Beethoven did not die after finishing the second movement of his last piano sonata. Kretschmar rightly points out that no additional touch could have widened the scope of the sonata, which however does not mean that the sonata as a species expired once and for all.

As a traditional music form, variations remind us of genes that to some extent govern our life, making us fear certain cancers or strokes because our ancestors suffered from them. The second movement of the *Sonata in C Minor*, op. 111, is slow on the uptake and therefore may suggest a long childhood – a boy or a girl who start speaking only at the age of four. It was my case, incidentally, and at some point my parents thought I was either an idiot or a deaf-mute who would never become a musician. For some reason, my parents' dearest wish was to have me

espouse a musical career. My father offered me a violin and there was an upright piano at home. This piano had survived the Second World War and also the death of the house where I was born.

We moved to a sort of skyscraper where I spent twenty years, sowing my wild oats and getting ready for piano competitions. The most boisterous variation reminds me of those bygone days. Why does this movement remind me of my childhood, of my youth, of my age? Because I yearn to reach the heights of the happy ending that leaves no room for the third movement – for any movement, notes and moods, for any longings, any passions.

One entering into meditation must be a master over anger, attachment to the world, and the desires of the senses, free from the pairs of opposites, void of self-seeking, empty of expectation.

Clothed with dust, housed under the open sky, I will make my lodging at the root of a tree, surrendering all things loved as well as unloved, tasting neither grief nor pleasure, forfeiting blame and praise alike, neither cherishing hope, nor offering respect, free from the opposites, with neither fortune nor belongings.

Mahabharata

Before settling down at the root of a tree, however, we had better climb to the top of the Tower of Babel to distance ourselves from the world. Is there any better way of removing from the body grief and pleasure, hope and the opposites? From the top of the Tower of Babel everything must look alike.

After spending some time in the immediate vicinity of the stars, we may come down and choose an appropriate tree under which we shall eventually make our lodgings. We are so used to the absence of the opposites that even birdsong and a storm sound alike to us. That is what actually takes place at the end of the sonata; one gets the feeling that the last pages sum up not only the variations but also the first, storm-like movement. Beethoven offers a haven of peace and serenity away from the bustle of the city and our passions. A leafy oak concurs with the harmony of the ending.

A thousand years I have enjoyed the things of sense, while still the craving for them springs up unceasingly. These I will therefore renounce, and direct my mind upon Brahman; indifferent to the opposites and free from self-seeking, I will roam with the wild.

Through forbearance towards all creatures, through the ascetic life, through self-discipline and freedom from desire, through the vow and the blameless life, through equanimity and

endurance of the opposites, man will partake of the bliss of Brahman, which is without qualities.

Free from pride and delusion, with the evils of attachment conquered, faithful always to the highest Atman, with desires extinguished, untouched by the opposites of pain and pleasure, they go, undeluded, towards that imperishable place.

Bhagavata Purana

The theme of the variations is placid enough to make us reach our goal without a hitch: Beethoven is a wonderful guru. There is however an A-Minor chord that is likely to perturb our peace of mind. At the beginning it is rather mild and does not really interfere with our aspirations; at the end it seems to threaten not only our hard-fought serenity but also our very life. This is the last temptation, the last nervous breakdown, the last drinking bout. The C Major asserts itself and an infinite trill testifies to its triumph and eternity. With a smile we accept the inevitable and go, undeluded, towards that imperishable place.

HAMMERKLAVIER

Some philosophers, theologians or whoever say we know neither beginnings nor ends: we live mainly in the middles and in the midst of this or that. We wake up and what we see around us is neither an evening nor a morning – just some light you attribute to anything, even to the twilight of the gods; unless the sun shines outrageously, bent on destroying every other interplanetary object and subject. And what if, in spite of this inauspicious, suspicious greyness, we put on our slippers and go out? It can be either the end or the beginning: all depends on the state your legs are in and also on the road. In my present state, it is rather hard to be on the road, and that is why I recently wrote a series of essays while riveted to my bed and therefore trying to reduce my world to that bed of mine, to its canopy. Is that what they call solipsism?

So there are beginnings and ends nonetheless; at least in some fields, in that of novels, for instance. And we know that Beethoven's *Fifth* starts with: ta-ta-ta-ta-tam. And I know that one day I read about *Hammerklavier* – the sonata of whose existence I was not aware at all. I read about it in the book devoted to Joseph Hoffman, but in the book it was mostly played by Hoffman's rival Ferruccio Busoni. At once this sonata acquired the status of a myth – within my mind. Some time later I laid my hands on the score and even played it to the best of my abilities. I finished well before the fugue which I would not have played anyway, being saturated with fugues, with Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier* I was learning by heart. I don't think I said to myself, 'This is the piece I'd like to play on my deathbed' – I am not as quick-witted and commercially minded as Yja Wang. (Should I really look her name up on the Internet?) Well, if she does play the piece either on her deathbed or simply on the day of her death, she will go to Hell – that's for sure.

Could I say I have lived in the middle of this sonata ever since I first laid my hands on it and on the keyboard? I am not sure, but I was living with it to some extent, and at some point I realised it would be unbearable to leave this world before recording it. This dream of mine has been realised, contrary to many other dreams that remain suspended in mid-air. What a pity I have no idea where this particular mid-air is situated. Could I say I am now living at the end of this sonata, after this sonata? Has it really ended; at least in my life? Of course not: I shall have to listen to the edits and make corrections on the way. And even after the way, as often happens. And once more, twice more: after the first version, after the second version. But there is an end to everything, as they say; even to the corrections one might make in the wake of a recording. The process has not yet started. Let us wait for its beginning.

What to say about the recording sessions that took place near Hanover? They were my personal (if relative) triumph over the vicissitudes and downright perversities of the sonata. It was also a triumph of friendship as such, praised so highly by Cicero and Montaigne and Seneca and many others. I was not well during the recording sessions, my legs almost refusing to walk. And going up or down without help was out of the question. So, whenever the question arose, I called Gerd Finkenstein, Philipp Nedel and Gerhard Betz who would immediately come to my rescue. (Every time I wished to reach the Yamaha standing in the middle of the stage I had to climb two steps. And if you climb some steps, sooner or later you will have to

descend them; or some other steps. By the way – what a magnificent instrument the mythical piano tuner, Gerd Finkenstein, found!) They went so far as to install a makeshift bed on the stage so I might get rest whenever weary of my body-related efforts.

Let me dwell for a while on my dearest friend, Gerd Finkenstein, who also found a cat, a British shorthair looking exactly like my cat; the latter died six years ago on February 18. His grave is in the garden, which allows me to deposit flowers on it – for different anniversaries and also as a testimony of remembrance and eternal love. Real friendships always look for new ingredients. And what about long-standing friendships, the ones I have known for 50, 60 years? They have a tendency to dissolve, disintegrate, losing their components. At first you find yourself exposed to private mockeries; and then these mockeries become public. For instance, my best friend said in public, ‘Your Russian poems are second-rate.’ ‘Luckily for me, your English isn’t up to my English verses’ standards,’ I said. The same friend, after hearing me play Beethoven’s *First Concerto*, said, ‘I wonder who plays this *Concerto* well. Probably Kissin.’ Once again, this remark was aired in other people’s presence. Another friend of mine, my second best friend, said in a restaurant, ‘Our common friend asked me to advise you to repeat some of Czerny’s studies.’ ‘Why?’ ‘Your hands are uneven.’ ‘I haven’t practised much,’ I confessed. ‘Why?’ asked my second best friend’s wife. ‘Because my cat died.’ ‘I remember, you cried on the phone,’ said my best second friend. Well, friendship, as a category, returns to my life thanks to this recording and, generally speaking, to the people I work with. My Japanese friends, for instance. Let me forget my former best friends, for the sake of Montaigne and Cicero; and for my own sake.

And what about *Hammerklavier*? In his French interview, Wilhelm Kempf compared it to the cosmos. Any Beethoven piece can be compared to the cosmos – even his *Bagatelles*. But which cosmos? One of them? All of them together? Let me point out that this *Sonata* is also a homage to Plato’s dialogues in which you hear many fugues with Socrates as a main theme; in most of them. The most eloquent expression of what I have in mind is the *Symposium*, an account of Alcibiades’ final speech where friendship and love come to their almost ecstatic conclusions. Fenelon’s discussion aimed at other worlds and Giordano Bruno’s beast of the Apocalypse – the fugue from *Hammerklavier* – should also be inscribed on the list of companions. On my personal list there is Gerhard Betz whose help was on this occasion not only exceptional, but also inevitable – ineluctable, as Joyce might have put it. All this partly ended up at Frankfurt Airport, with two cups of coffee. I am waiting for the results of the editing. All this would not have taken place, but for Philipp Nedel’s ubiquitous presence. It would be hard to say what he did not organise, what he did not take part in, with the exception perhaps of Gerd’s piano. I hope it was not our last meeting.

To pay homage to the commercial tradition, I wished to record *Les Adieux* so that the duration might correspond to what is usually done today in the world of CDs. But the details, the texture as I usually say, *Hammerklavier*’s texture, required a double act of attention on our part. The duration of the recording is not double, however – it is just 15-20 minutes longer than my colleagues’ inspirations, which might mean I am

a crushing bore. Well, here it is for what it is worth, standing alone on its pedestal. A monument to itself and to humanity. Not only to music.

***VARIATIONS ON A WALTZ BY A. DIABELLI*, OPUS 120**

Yesterday I saw a programme on Stanley Kubrick who had died last week. A prominent critic said that Kubrick's films appealed to almost everybody: teenagers, intellectuals, housewives, confirmed bachelors. 'And it's much more difficult to create a work of universal appeal,' he pointed out. And he added that Shakespeare's works were also admired by everybody. Obviously he had not seen Al Pacino's movie *Looking for Richard* in which representatives of different social groups are interviewed on the subject. Most of them find Shakespeare boring, abstruse and perplexing.

Nowadays the romantic notion of a misunderstood genius is out of fashion for the simple reason that works of art have become commercial products: the more people buy them the better. As an American film-director put it, 'I felt when I made my last film that I had a real grasp on public taste. Public taste was my taste. We don't make these films to hang in the Louvre. We make them to be seen by as many people as possible.' The same goes for the arts in general, I suppose: contemporary artists seldom regard the Louvre as an appropriate place for their works.

Some critics are tempted to re-write the history of art, declaring for instance that Schubert was understood and worshipped in his lifetime. They seem to forget that only now—170 years after his death—some aspects of his works can be properly understood. Not many people raise their eyebrows when I say that his music is more akin to Hell than to Paradise. Only now *all* his works can be performed in spite of the economic (and artistic) crisis. In other words, all his works have become commercial. The matter stood differently in the fifties when Sviatoslav Richter began to play his piano sonatas. Even the professors at the Moscow Conservatoire raised their eyebrows, saying he should play Schumann and not Schubert—at least not the latter's sonatas with the exception of the last one (D. V. 960).

Many professional musicians, let alone ordinary music lovers, are still not fond of the *Diabelli Variations*. (Was it much easier to compose than the *Ninth Symphony* appealing even to the protagonist of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*?) I cannot help but stand in awe of this work which is absolutely unique in the history of music. (And it is *difficult* to write about this 'esoteric' opus. I would already have finished my essay on the *Ninth Symphony*. And on Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.) I learnt it four years ago. At the time I was engaged on my longest novel *Chasey Saves the World*. The novel is almost 1,000 pages long. I do not think I would have been able to write a work of such scope had I not been somehow influenced by the *Diabelli Variations*, by

their intoxicating freedom and diversity. Perhaps *Chasey Saves the World* is just an essay on the *Diabelli Variations*.

Michel Butor devoted a book to them—150 pages. Dante seems to have been inspired by them too, when writing his *Commedia*. And what about God? After all, our history is a number of variations on a rather inane theme—humanity. Just a number of variations, not more than 33. Perhaps even less. But Beethoven was generous. At first he refused to compose anything on such a trivial theme. He then changed his mind and sent a letter to Anton Diabelli, asking his permission to write not 1 but 6 or 7 variations on the theme the latter had submitted to several composers among whom were Schubert, Czerny, Hummel and Liszt. Finally Beethoven got carried away by his work. I wonder if something similar happens in our history. Our world might not have come into being. And the Flood might have put an end to it—after 6 or 7 variations. And how long did God refuse to create anything? But of course there was no time before the Big Bang.

Suppose there were a world *outside* the universe. Suppose its inhabitants could read our universe like a book. Would this book become a bestseller?

Here is the poem I wrote a few days ago:

THE PERSPICACITY OF THE BODY

*I think our body knows better
What we need and don't need—
Better than our soul and mind.*

*Some go deaf because they need no sounds
And their silent lives lead them to God,
The silent movies of their lives.
Deafness led Beethoven to his last quartets
And piano sonatas.
It led him to God as well—at least to Paradise,
Judging from the third movement of the Opus 132.
And those who hear Paradise on earth
Are not really deaf.*

*Deafness has nothing to do with the sense of hearing:
Everything happens in the mind which has its own*

*Ears and eyes, nose and skin.
But the mind is tutored by the body.
And the mind is an unruly child.*

*Beethoven had no wish to go deaf.
As a matter of fact, he did his best
To escape from the world 'in which
Only fishes can live and prosper'.*

*He almost committed suicide—
The ultimate act of escapism.
But the body is allergic to death
In any shape or form.*

I do believe that Beethoven had to go deaf in order to get rid of Haydn's influence and, generally speaking, the Vienna School which might have toned down his private musical pursuits, his audacious forays into the future. Indeed he predicted not only the musical development of his own century but also our century, our music and even our literature. In a way he predicted Flaubert and Nabokov who never used the same stylistic and structural patterns twice; and also Joyce whose *Ulysses* is full of Beethovenian echoes. The very idea of interior monologue might have originated on the one hand in Dujardin and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and on the other in the *Arietta* from the *Sonata in C Minor*, Opus 111 where one theme, one mood undergoes a number of metamorphoses and eventually dissolves into one harmony—into the harmony of sleep, like Molly's stream of consciousness at the end of *Ulysses*. (The erotic mood in *her* case.) Or into the harmony of death, into the harmony of the 'pure white rose' (*candida rosa*) that Dante contemplates at the end of *his* space odyssey.

But these prophecies are less important than the sheer pleasure one derives from Beethoven's late pieces, from the way he brings together the most heterogeneous fragments, creating a startling musical entity—the *Diabelli Variations*, for instance. Or any of the last quartets. And he unfolds his musical thoughts with unparalleled frankness, allowing one to penetrate into his laboratory—into the innermost recesses of his brain. (Deprived of the sense of hearing, Beethoven had no alternative but to withdraw into his brain.) And I do not think that even Mahler, Berg or Shostakovich bared their thoughts and feelings to such an extent and with such anatomical candour. Haydn used to stop halfway, although his brain is more visible than

Mozart's. He always submitted himself to the discipline of the sonata form; his music would have hindered Beethoven's progress towards transparency.

These inner landscapes remind me of *The Fantastic Voyage*—the movie in which a group of scientists is injected into a dying man's brain with a view to soldering together some damaged tubes or neurones. The brain-scenery is so beautiful, so enticing, that they often forget about their job.

And one is also allowed to travel around Beethoven's heart—an equally enticing journey, another space odyssey. Metaphorically the heart is associated with romanticism and sentimentality. I think that Beethoven was the most sentimental composer in the history of music, outstripping in this respect any Italian or Russian composer. Even old Russian *romances* are less sentimental because they always 'beautify' heartache, making it into charming, often heartrending tunes. Beethoven proceeds otherwise: he stumps the growth of his tunes, stripping them of ornaments—and of Wagnerian endlessness—so that there remain only short, basic motifs repeated several times as if to hammer into *our* hearts a quintessence of sadness (Variation XXIX). Or on the contrary he adorns a simple tune with an impressive number of ornaments which embroider upon it, telling the same sad story in great detail. The grief expressed by the tune is thus intensified to an almost unbearable pitch (Variation XXXI). Incidentally, these two variations together with Variation XXX might be entitled *The Anatomy of Sadness*. Or *The Quintessence of Sadness*. Brahms' late pieces are often more melancholy; some Chopin's nocturnes and mazurkas more nostalgic and poignant. Yet I have never heard anything so grief-stricken as these three variations.

What follows, however, may be likened to the last cantos of Dante's *Paradiso*: for all his desperate moods and woeful outbursts, Beethoven was far closer to Paradise than to Hell. Variation XXXII (*Fuga*) sounds like those cantos where the Christian doctrine, the Creation and the hierarchy of angels are expounded. (Even Beethoven's fugues have a scholarly touch; yet they are unbridled, undisciplined in comparison with Bach's and Mozart's.) And Variation XXXIII corresponds to the last four cantos of the *Paradiso*. In the above-mentioned third movement of the *String Quartet in A Minor*, Opus 132, a number of chords succeed each other with ritual-like majesty. And rituals are situated beyond Time. (And their space is symbolic—a church or a sacred site.) The same happens in the last variation. This *Menuetto* sounds like a ritual—like a ritualistic dance, rather. Or like the beginning of Canto XXXI:

*In forma dunque di candida rosa
mi si mostrava la milizia santa*

*che nel suo sangue Cristo fece sposa;
 ma l'altra, che volando vede e canta
 la gloria di colui che la 'nnamora
 e la bontà che la fece cotanta,
 sì come schiera d'ape che s'infiora
 una fiata e una si ritorna
 là dove suo laboro s'insapora,
 nel gran fior discendeva che s'addorna
 di tante foglie, e quindi risaliva
 là dove 'l sùo amor sempre soggiorna.*

In form then of a pure white rose the saintly host was shown to me, which with His own blood Christ made His bride. But the other host—who, as it flies, sees and sings His glory who enamours it and the goodness which made it so great—like a swarm of bees which one moment enflower themselves, and the next return to where their work acquires savour—was descending into the great flower which is adorned with so many petals, and thence reascending to where its love abides forever.

(Translated by Charles S. Singleton)

I do not think that words are inadequate to describe or express a piece of music.

Beethoven is the best exponent of Paradise in secular music. Of course he often caught glimpses of Hell and even in the *Diabelli Variations* there are some Hell-inspired moments, for instance Variation XXI where demons torment and mock their victims. (One of its counterparts is Canto XXI of the *Inferno*.) There is also a strange parody of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (Variation XXII) which might be attributed to demonic interference. Nevertheless, the contemplative mood is predominant in this awesome masterpiece. And also pure joy—pure white joy—which is often expressed so exuberantly that the air seems to swarm with myriads of Botticelli angels (Variation XXIII).

In Canto XXI Dante and Virgil are overtaken by a spirit who greets and questions them. There ensues a conversation in the course of which the shade—the poet Statius—acknowledges his debt to Virgil's poetry. Statius soon realises he is in Virgil's presence:

*Già s'inchinava ad abbracciar li piedi
 al mio dottor, ma el li disse: 'Frate,*

non far, ch  tu se' ombra e ombra vedi.'
Ed ei surgendo: 'Or puoi la quantitate
comprender de l'amor ch'a te mi scalda,
quand' io dismento nostra vanitate,
trattando l'ombre come cosa salda.'

Already he was stooping to embrace my teacher's feet; but he said to him, 'Brother, do not so, for you are a shade and a shade you see.' And he, rising, 'Now you may comprehend the measure of the love that burns in me for you, when I forget our emptiness and treat shades as solid things.'

(Translated by Charles S. Singleton)

The quintessence of *Sehnsucht* in literature! Incidentally, Variation XXXI sounds like a Chopin nocturne, and Chopin is the best exponent of Purgatory. And Schubert is the best exponent of Hell, needless to say.

It is noteworthy that the number of variations Beethoven wrote on Diabelli's theme is equal to the number of cantos in the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*. The *Inferno* contains 34 cantos because Canto I is a sort of introduction—the theme of the *Commedia* announced by Virgil (a journey through the Hereafter).

In the late sixties I heard Maria Yudina play the *Goldberg Variations*. As usual she spoke a lot during the recital, assigning to each variation a verse or an episode from the New Testament. I was so irritated by those far-fetched comparisons that I left in the intermission—one of the most foolish things I have ever done. I continued to ignore her concerts.

I do realise that the parallels I draw between Dante's *Commedia* and the *Diabelli Variations* might appear incongruous, but I simply cannot help comparing Dante and Beethoven whom I consider the most outstanding artists in the history of mankind. I will embrace their feet, if granted a rendezvous with them in the Hereafter.

No artist may be compared to Beethoven, not even Bach or Mozart. Not even Shakespeare. (And yet I do not subscribe to Wittgenstein's peculiar statement, "Beethoven's great heart"—nobody could speak of "Shakespeare's great heart.") Only Dante and Beethoven may be compared to God, for only they succeeded in creating the worlds which are as infinite and eternal as our world. Better still—only through their works can one experience the nothingness that preceded the Creation.

*Then was not non-existent nor existent: there was no
realm of air, no sky beyond it.*

What covered in, and where? And what gave shelter?

Was water there, unfathomed depth of water?

*Death was not then, nor was there aught immortal: no
sign was there, the day's and night's divider.*

That One Thing, breathless, breathed by its own

nature: part from it was nothing whatsoever.

(From The Rig-Veda, translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith)

POSTSCRIPT:

Our history is a number of variations

On a rather inane theme—humanity.

And it's a dance-theme, I imagine.

Something like a waltz, Diabelli's waltz.

(Strauss was too magnificent for humanity.)

Something like Céline's Rigodon.

(Céline himself was hard rock.)

The repetitive nature of life

Is mirrored and echoed by dances.

And the merry-go-round

Of its rounds:

Another round of peace talks,

Another round of a wrestling match,

Another round of golf,

Another round of ammunition,

Another round of drinks,

Another doctor on his rounds.

And its futility: the cicada

That follows the ant's advice.

(The ant itself executes a dance—

A gavotte or an allemande.)

And vanity, and smugness.

And our tango-like destiny.

1998

Versailles

THE MOMENTS MUSICAUX

Faust says to the moment where he gets stuck in the course of his last monologue, ‘*Verweile doch, du bist so schön!*’ The literal translation goes thus, ‘Oh linger yet, thou art so fair!’ But there are French and Russian translations which enjoin the moment to *stop* instead of lingering. (*Arrête-toi, tu es si beau!*) The moment about which Faust speaks so eloquently stretches out on a sofa where it spends an hour or just a few minutes before catching up with time—back to barracks, so to speak. It is a lazy and voluptuous moment that dreams about eternity and has no wish to take part in the everyday routine imposed by time, by toil and trouble, by Faust’s infatuation with productivity on which Erich Fromm lays particular stress. This unique moment—it is really in a class of its own—seems to play Romeo’s part; at least in the scene where Juliet does her best to delay her lover’s disappearance from her room.

Juliet. Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day.

It was the nightingale and not the lark

That pierc’d the fearful hollow of thine ear.

Nightly she sings on yond pomegranate tree.

Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

Romeo. It was the lark, the herald of the morn,

No nightingale. Look, love, what envious streaks

Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east.

Night’s candles are burnt out, and jocund day

Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.

I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

The moments depicted by Schubert neither stay nor go—or go reluctantly—as if living in no-time’s-land, between time and eternity. They linger, yawn and stretch on sofas, on couches; or just lie on them motionless, wool-gathering and listening to silence. Glenn Gould who did not think much of Schubert’s *himmlische Längen* might have told the second or the fifth Moment, ‘I wish you’d get a move on!’

‘Why should I move at all?’ the Moment would have replied. ‘This room is beautiful. So is the bed where I’m lying. Its canopy is almost as beautiful as the sky so I don’t need to go outdoors or look out of the window. I’ve got my personal stars in this room, my own Milky Way. What’s

more, I own it, I can touch it. Can *you* touch the Milky Way? Besides, Juliet will come at any moment. If she doesn't, somebody else will pay me a visit. Isolda, for instance. Or Helen of Troy.'

Schubert is usually associated with the winter or the summer—the seasons chosen by those who perform his *lieder* or listen to them. His *Moments musicaux* seem to opt for the autumn, the favourite season of many poets. Pushkin is of their number; so is Keats. 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' reminds us of the first Schubert Moment. And here is *their* second Moment:

Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies

And here is the third one:

Where are the songs of spring? Aye, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too

The last Moment, however, belongs to the winter, to the snow-covered trees I saw yesterday in Versailles. And yet it was the 7th of April. That is what Schubert's music is about; it hovers in between the winter and the summer, between cold weather and a fireplace. And even his last piano sonatas are just moments, Japanese moments.

Daffodils!
Here and there
In the cold capital.
(Buson)

The Japanese elevate a moment to the status of eternity. Deleuze says that only concepts distinguish philosophers from the rest of humanity and any concept worthy of its name strives to encompass if not the entire world, at least a part of it. The Japanese, on the other hand, split the world into a myriad of moments. A moment is always singled out for special treatment. But this moment vacillates between here and there, between action and no action. Japanese poets have the

knack of driving it to the brink of eternity. Daffodils! Here and there...Their warmth stands out against the cold capital. The summer is opposed to the winter or embraces it fraternally.

Schubert's *himmlische* melodies—daffodils—often bloom in a cold, pianissimo atmosphere which renders them even more immaculate, genuine, faithful to the truth. Daffodils! 'Only these flowers have the power to move men's hearts and purify them,' comments R. H. Blyth. 'The cleansing is expressed in the k's and s's:

'Sui sen ya samuki miyako no koko kashiko'

April 5, 2008
Versailles

THE SONATA IN G MAJOR, OPUS 78

And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receiving us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow.

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*

Some people appreciate and even enjoy the horror of whiteness. In this respect nothing rivals or equals Malevich's *White on White* that superimposes a geometrical whiteness upon a white infinity—the horror of Time looming out of the horror of Eternity. In pictorial terms at least, this painting denotes the bounds of what a human being can endure *psychologically*.

I am indebted to Borges for many of the literary pleasures I have experienced over the last twenty years. The pleasure of ‘white horror’, as we may euphemistically and tautologically call it, is the one I cherish most of all—perhaps on account of Schubert's *Sonata in G Major*. I wonder to what extent artistic pleasures can be masochistic.

Obviously I tend to emphasise the weirdness of Schubert's late pieces to the detriment of their more cheerful aspects. The point is the latter are even weirder than the former, insofar as whiteness is weirder than blackness.

Unlike Scriabin and Rimsky-Korsakov, I am not endowed with the gift of so-called *audition colorée*, and yet I do feel and see the unbearable whiteness of the *Sonata in G Major*. Its opening movement seems to be situated not at the beginning but at the end of something—a meditation, a long journey, a long insomnia-frozen night, a short life. Glenn Gould said that Mozart ought to have died earlier. I wonder what would have become of music had Schubert lived for another two or three years.

The first movement of the *Sonata in G Major*, which seems to contain only finales, reminds me of the last, ‘white’ pages of Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*:

The white ashy material fell now continually around us, and in vast quantities. The range of vapor to the southward had arisen prodigiously in the horizon, and began to assume more distinctness of form. I can liken it to nothing but a limitless cataract, rolling silently into the sea from some immense and far-distant rampart in the heaven....A sullen darkness now hovered above

us—but from out the milky depths of the ocean a luminous glare arose, and stole up along the bulwarks of the boat.

For all its dance-rhythms, which presuppose the invisible presence of carefree, beer-swilling country folk, the *Sonata in G Major* is strangely inhuman, inanimate, desolate. Now and then an otherworldly shape makes its appearance only to enhance the impression of loneliness:

Today there floated by us one of the white animals whose appearance upon the beach at Tsalal had occasioned so wild a commotion among the savages. I would have picked it up, but there came over me a sudden listlessness, and I forbore.

In the second movement Schubert succumbs once again to the sadistic temptation of interrupting an angelic, immaculate tune with a cluster of brutal chords. It is as if he was accusing himself of hypocrisy, immaturity or double-edged humanism—the sins of commission I dealt with in the following poem:

*From time to time we happen to hear,
'This is the end!' We shout, 'Oh dear!'
We rush towards our desperate friend
And snatch the pistol from his hand.*

*And should our friend hold no pistol
(He might prefer skyscrapers and poisons)
We simply pat him on his shoulders
And, while doing so, administer*

*Piquant words of flattery, murmuring,
'Come on, cheer up, you're healthy,
Intelligent and rich. And Betsy
Is the best wife anyone could hope for.'*

*We count unconsciously on our fingers
His wife's betrayals and false oaths.*

*We figure out the steady growth
Of his lung cancer. He still lingers*

*On our earth. What for? To feel
Excruciating pain? To find out
About his dear wife's outings?
To have another gorgeous meal*

*In his favourite restaurant?
To read a story by Chesterton?
The Innocence of Father Brown.
We bring the book and a dressing gown.*

As to Schubert's friends, they were mostly of a busy-body type, urging him to shorten his 'himmlische Längen' and to write nice, beautiful lieder similar to those he had composed in his adolescence. They sought to suppress what sounded like a long-drawn-out, unmitigated, musical suicide.

The *Unfinished Symphony* is finished of course—even the second movement is unnecessary. The third and the fourth movements of the *Sonata in G Major* quicken the tempo of horror. And yet everything remains immobile—finished, as it were.

In his essay on *Die Verwandlung*, Borges says the pathos of Kafka's unfinished novels owes much to the infinite number of obstacles their identical heroes have to overcome. Those novels could not have been finished. They are infinite. So is Hell. The hero of *Der Proceß* is actually executed in the first chapter.

Is that what the expression 'himmlische Längen' means?

1993

Versailles

THE SONATA IN A MINOR, D. V. 845

The people who happen to find themselves on the brink of death—in an intensive care unit or in a crashed car—are sometimes granted an awesome opportunity to catch a glimpse of the Hereafter and return later on to our world, thanks to their doctors' skill or the timely intervention of a tramp. The stories told by these involuntary successors of Dante have a few common features such as a long tunnel and a light awaiting souls at the end of the tunnel.

Schubert had no experience of this kind and yet the works of his late period seem to represent in musical terms both the long tunnel along which the souls of the dead trudge on their way to the Hereafter and also the light—in his case, the fire in a furnace of Hell.

*Chasms, chasms. I might call them holes
Or downward perspectives. I call them chasms.
They yawn at my feet whenever I stop.
I can't be on the move. Always. So
They split the floor open.*

*I do not fall into these chasms,
Contrary to what might be expected.
One step would be enough.
A half-step.*

*In my mind
Stands a tree.
I can't find it.*

The tree growing in the mind of the speaker is a tiny imitation of the Tree of Life which has a long history in the catalogue of human symbols. He cannot find it and is therefore precluded from taking his own life. He goes on living in the proximity of those chasms that tantalisingly yawn at his feet, affording a partial view of Hell's territory. '...I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on,' as Beckett puts it at the end of *The*

Unnameable, after having supplied us with *his* version of Hell. Why did Beckett go on? Why did Schubert go on?

1994

Versailles

THE SONATA IN D MAJOR, DV 850

*One, two,
Buckle your shoe.
Three, four,
Knock at the door.
Five, six,
Pick up sticks.
Seven, eight,
Lay them straight.*

The *Sonata in D Major*, DV 850 is an assortment of games played by Schubert and those pianists who condescend to become children again without incurring the wrath of their friends and colleagues: ‘You’re in your second childhood!’ Tolstoy says that we had better remain children throughout our lives; at least we are supposed to be as open-minded and curious as our descendants – our youngers and betters, so to speak. But I don’t feel like bursting into a song of innocence because what I have in mind is beyond both second and first childhoods. Is there anything beyond? There are games and also murders in Peter Greenaway’s film *Drowning by Numbers*. And these murders are often committed by children. If I remember rightly, there is a girl with a skipping rope; and she sings something along the lines of: ‘A boy is a servant to a girl.’ And then she orders her servant to provide a coach so she can go shopping to cheer herself up – a Russian version of ‘Buckle your shoe’ or of the nursery rhyme sung by a character in Greenaway’s film. To tell the truth, I remember neither Greenaway’s film nor my childhood. But I know I played not only soccer, but also hopscotch. Unlike Schubert, I shall never play hopscotch again except in some of his sonatas.

What other games did Schubert play? Riding on a hobbyhorse. *Ritter vom Steckenpferd*, as Schumann puts it in his *Kinderszenen*. Schubert does justice to this game throughout the *Sonata*, indulging in it mostly in the third movement, with the exception of the Trio where an old man, who is no doubt in his third childhood, contemplates his distant shadow riding a hobbyhorse. He never rode a horse in his life, but he did ride a hobbyhorse. Now even hobbyhorses are out of his reach. He can, however, look at them and at himself – the rider – to his heart’s content. But he soon gets weary of his memories: they are also hobbyhorses to some extent. They are no longer on his agenda. Nothing is on his agenda except diseases.

The second movement – a landler, not a lied, contrary to what many pianists read into it. The hero is in his *second* childhood. He is not completely estranged from the exploits he made display of in his youth. When reminded of Diaghilev, Nijinsky jumps in a madhouse – shortly before his death. One hears jumps in the second movement and some of them are broadcast from a madhouse.

The first movement is a sort of *Summa theologiae*: we have got three childhoods together, side by side. We play round the clock, we admire our games, we are tired, we are desperate; but we don't give up yet – that is a winning formula. Back in the day, we had an apartment with a swimming pool. In a few years' time, we'll have an ocean at our disposal. The further we get, the more we realise that the ocean is a glorified pool or rather a glorified puddle.

Fourth movement. Fourth childhood? Is there anything beyond? *2001, A Space Odyssey*. An old man looks at a foetus. His own foetus? Eternal recurrence? Time dwindles away, becoming what we habitually regard as eternity. In Schubert's Manuscript there is no coming back to the initial tempo: time is slowing down to yield power. Some publisher thought that any return of the initial theme meant *primo tempo*. Perhaps there is no '*primo*' either in music or elsewhere – no eternal recurrence, in other words; everything happens only once. Hopscotch, spipping ropes. What next? Remembrance of things past, as usual. This cliché does not live up to our expectations. And the movement I am speaking of is our expectation or just a sort of status quo. No news is good news.

Was Schubert an eternal child? Unlike many Russian literary heroes, he was by no means an eternal student; and yet, at the end of his life, he decided to study counterpoint. Was he a descendant of Perceval – Parzifal, as Wolfram von Eschenbach names him?

So departed Parzival, bearing knightly ways now and the looks of a knight, except, alas, as he was troubled by many a twinge of unsweet discomfort. To him width seemed too narrow and breadth too close, all greenness looked withered to him, and his red armour seemed white. So did his heart constrain his eyes. For now that he had lost simplicity –

When did Schubert lose his simplicity? In the domain of music he *was* bearing knightly ways and the looks of a knight; but, at some point, he felt a little discomfort as if after an operation of some kind. From then onward, he saw blood even in the course of a sumptuous meal. 'They went up to a great hall. A hundred chandeliers all aglow with candles gave light from above to the household assembled there, and little candles were burning all around on the walls.' And then we are allowed to avail ourselves of a contrast we often come across in Schubert's mature works: 'In

through the door dashed a squire, bearing a spear in his hand. This rite sharpened their sorrow. Blood gashed from the point and ran down the shaft to the hand that bore it and on into the sleeve. And now there was weeping and wailing throughout the whole wide hall.'

Percival is a forest-dweller, a virgin, ignorant of courtly life – of life in general. After a few awkward manoeuvres he achieves knighthood at King Arthur's Round Table. He is invited to the castle of the Grail by the Fisher-King immobilised by an injury to his legs. He attends a sumptuous meal during which there appear before him first a young man holding a bleeding spear, then two young girls – one holding a jewel-encrusted cup (the Grail) and the other a silver tray with food. Percival's curiosity is aroused – he is a child in his own right – but he fails to ask about the spear, about the person who is being waited on in this way. 'Alas that he did not ask the question then! I still sorrow for him on that account.' Had Percival asked the question, the Fisher-King would have been cured, lifting through his recovery the spell on the land of the Grail. (No more infertility.)

Either you ask no questions and are told no lies, or you give too many answers. Lévi-Strauss thinks that Percival's discomfiture is an exact inversion of the riddle confronted by Oedipus – 'the clever hero whose answer exceeds "communication" to the point of incest. Percival is the virginal hero who does not know how to ask a question.' Schubert asked no questions and consequently was told no lies: his last works are horrifying. 'His dream was stitched with sword thrusts round the hem, and in the centre with mighty jousts. From the hurtling onrush of horses he suffered in his sleep great pain. Had he been awake, he would rather have died thirty times.'

In the last movement of Beethoven's last quartet a question is asked: '*Muss es sein?*' The answer is: '*Es muss sein.*' Let it be, in other words. Must I? Should the world exist? Beethoven answers these questions abusively. Isn't it better to leave them unanswered? There are artificial paradises in his works. We enjoy them musically, but I am not sure we should accept them psychologically.

The world of Beethoven is one of accelerated communication. At the end of the *Ninth Symphony* we are supposed to embrace each other: '*Sind umschlungen Millionen.*' No symphony, however long and great, can make us change our minds and manners overnight. Schubert procrastinates and eventually withdraws into a world where communication is interrupted. No wonder that for many decades no one understood his late works.

'The answer to which there is no question,' as Lévi-Strauss put it. The sumptuous feast, the blood: Percival and Schubert took this ambiguous situation for granted. They asked no questions.

They spent their lives wandering around the world – rather, around the worlds. ‘World’ in the plural is ‘worlds’.

‘It is not wise for anyone to venture a journey into this wild region,’ says Kundry to Perceval. ‘Grave harm can befall a stranger here. I have heard and also seen how many have lost their lives here and found their deaths in combat...But tell me first where you spent the night?’ And Perceval replies: ‘It is a mile from here or more. I never saw a castle so magnificent, with all manner of riches.’ Kundry says to him: ‘For thirty miles around no wood was ever cut nor stone ever hewn for any building, save for one castle which stands here all alone. Rich it is in all earthly perfection. He who diligently seeks it will not find it, alas. Yet many do search for it. He who shall see the castle must chance upon it unawares.’ The maiden speaking to Perceval is his mother’s sister’s child. What matters, however, is the castle upon which Franz Schubert chanced unawares around 1825 – the year when the *D Major Sonata* was composed. The bleeding spear is not quite visible yet, but in every movement one can chance upon it unawares. The sumptuous feast; the blood.

It is not wise for anyone to venture a journey into the region where Schubert’s late sonatas are performed. Yet we might play hopscotch instead of dying of liver cancer. We are destroyed by the second law of thermodynamics or by our second, our third childhoods; by our first childhood. Luckily for us, a multitude of skipping ropes are scattered around the world.

Neither Schubert nor Bruckner asked questions; they were told no lies. (Bruckner’s *Ninth Symphony* is horrifying.) Beethoven and Mahler (the *Eighth Symphony*) heard many lies.

Schubert, Bruckner.

Beethoven, Mahler.

Perceval.

Oedipus.

And what about Bruckner’s *Te Deum*? And the *Forellen-Quintet*?

THE SONATA IN B FLAT MAJOR, D 960

If experienced physically, a hearing of the 5th and 6th books of Gesualdo's madrigals would result in the listener's death. The effect of catharsis prevents us, however, from taking art too seriously.

I remember with nostalgic poignancy the day when, as a student at the Moscow Conservatory College, I heard for the first time Schubert's *Quartet in G Major*, Opus 161. Despite my determination to concentrate mainly on the structural aspect of the piece, I could not help feeling that, especially in the second and fourth movements, the music reached beyond its own limits, becoming an acoustic definition of the word 'horror'. Many years later I had a similar impression in Milan while visiting an important exhibition of Munch's paintings and engravings.

'We feel that we are on the brink of some absolute truth, dazzling in its splendour and at the same time almost homely in its perfect simplicity,' says Nabokov about a work of a writer he invented. Absolute truth—or its musical equivalent, perfect harmony—may be found and enjoyed by a sentimental listener in the works of almost every composer, Schubert included. Indeed Schubert's early works, his lieder in particular, provide us with an impressive number of celestial themes that are scarcely perturbed by casual dissonances. The *B Flat Major Sonata* begins without any of the Major-Minor switches I enjoy so much in Schubert's late works. (Yet another masochistic pleasure.) But the anticipation of an imminent disclosure—'we are on the brink of some absolute truth'—peters out, fades away, neutralised by the tonal restlessness, by a low-pitched trill. The most uncanny trill in the history of music.

'The man is dead and we do not know it.' What we are left with sounds far more like a horrifying falsehood than the absolute, dazzling truth that seemed to be hinted at in the opening bars.

Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, la vie est là,

Simple et tranquille.

Cette paisible rumeur-là

Vient de la ville.

Just another example of weirdness in art: life is close enough to make one suffer like Tantalus. The fact that the poet was imprisoned at the time does not detract from the omnipresent value of the poem. Verlaine was aware that city life, its hustle and bustle, could hardly be regarded as peaceful and simple. Compared with his own inner turbulence, however, it *was* peaceful: another weird touch.

The apparent simplicity and calmness of the outer world may have inspired Schubert to compose those dance rhythms which, in the finale of the *B Flat Major Sonata*, are darkened by the monstrous intrusions of minor chords. It is as if a merry, tipsy yokel playing his fiddle was suddenly struck by lightning.

The whole procedure reminds me of what Bergson said about the soul being able to merge in God only temporarily, however strong the mystical *élan*; for something remains outside—the will that created the union.

Two years ago the double-pattern of Schubert's late works mingled strangely with my own literary preoccupations. In the course of my long stay in Munich I hit upon the idea of writing a novel about Louis II of Bavaria or rather about a man longing to identify with him (*Hall of Mirrors*).

The identification is never complete. The fissure in my hero's identity gives rise to a series of double-pattern situations that lead to his suicide—nothing more than a broken mirror:

Every now and then I happen to overlook a line, a dot, a plant growing on my terrace, a leaf rustling under my slippers, a pain revelling in my stomach. I am regularly faced with the prospect of correcting my glaring mistakes, of adding the missing lines, plants and pains to my picture, of appending postscripts to my letters. Neither French nor English offers me a foothold. Wagner is of no help either.

1986

Versailles

SCHUBERT'S LAST SONATAS

Upon finishing the Bach recording I felt that my whole life had become included in *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*: my past as well as my future. The present recording reflects my mood—my present, in other words. My bitterness and my disgust. Do they match what Schubert himself experienced on the brink of death? He believed he had been poisoned and consequently refused to eat anything, especially fish. And everything around him must have stunk of fish in those days. He did not recognise his own room, mistaking it for a cubby-hole located somewhere underground. 'Don't I deserve a place *on* the earth?' he asked. He did not recognise his own room because Beethoven was not in it. (And I do not recognise Paris because Proust, Joyce and Beckett no longer live here. It is as if we *were* living underground, in some cubby-hole.) Did he want to go on living and composing music? Great artists do not die if they really want to live and work. During the composition of the *Requiem*, Mozart had no will-to-live either; hence the appearance of the 'black man'.

A great many things went into conjuring up the ideal atmosphere for performing these last piano sonatas. Among other things I chanced upon two of the blackest novels in the history of literature: *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy and *Happy Moscow* by Andrey Platonov. In the first novel a child kills his two brothers and hangs himself on the grounds that children are burdens on their parents and therefore should not be born. In Platonov's novel a protagonist comes to the conclusion that the dead can be raised from the dead only by the dead, thanks to the elixir of life secreted by the human body at the moment of death. And, at one point, he shows the whereabouts of the human soul, thrusting his hand into a fresh corpse—into the void between the undigested and digested food. I had loved both writers for many years. Why did I light upon these novels in those days? *Happy Moscow* was published only in 1991, which partly accounts for my belated awareness of its existence. It is an unfinished novel.

Before the recording sessions I was feverishly engaged in work on my last novel, *Tristan on Earth*, from which the following excerpt is borrowed:

Well, I have switched them off at long last. No more small talk, no more big talk. No more big boys, no more big ideas...Only my computer is still on, buzzing with my thoughts and prophecies. Let me talk to my computer. Let the computer touch me now and then, as long as I live. My fiftieth birthday. Some people begin to celebrate their jubilees a year in advance. And they go on celebrating them for three years at least. I'll celebrate my birthday in the woods. Hopefully there

will be fewer joggers around on that day, fewer joggers than usual. The best birthday present my contemporaries can offer me.

Would I have written these lines had I not been supposed to record Schubert's last sonatas three weeks later?

Something strange happened at the end of the recording. I said to the artistic producer, Gerhard Betz, that I did not understand why Schubert had finished the *A Major Sonata*. Indeed he might have offered us yet another unfinished work—only two movements: even such a genius as Schubert was unable to create anything to match the second movement of this sonata. (Would the final movement of the *B Flat Sonata* match it?) The third and fourth movements are beautiful of course, but they neither sustain the tension of the second movement nor counterbalance its drama. Nothing can ever counterbalance the drama depicted in this movement—not even the finale of Beethoven's *Ninth*, come to think of it. I recorded the second movement rather quickly and we went out to lunch. We returned to the studio around 4 p.m. and resumed our work. What struck me immediately was the metamorphosis undergone by the piano in our absence. I did not recognise it. In a way, it refused to co-operate. Constantly it went out of tune, for all the efforts of Robert Richter—one of the best tuners in the world. And, on top of everything, torrential rain set in, making it impossible for us to continue the recording. We had to stop for almost an hour. But we did finish the sonata (and the entire recording)—around 10 p.m.

Schubert must have feared the dark side of his nature. Only on the brink of death did he let himself go: the final movement of the last piano sonata is merciless and irredeemable. How would he have finished the *A Major Sonata* had he composed it two years later?

By fair means or foul Schubert strove to counterbalance his dark impulses. He clung to the traditional sonata-form, disregarding Beethoven's contribution to it only because he believed in its harmony-providing stability. But, now and then, he allowed himself to write a relatively slow first movement (*Moderato*). And those movements are terrifying, abysmal—abnormal from a 'classical' point of view. (The sonatas D.V. 845 and D.V. 894.) The first movement of *the A Major Sonata*, despite the indication 'Allegro', leans towards moderato. At least it is a cross between an allegro and a moderato—between the first movements of the *C Minor* and *B Flat Major Sonatas*.

The first movement of the *C Minor Sonata* is a truly Beethovenian allegro. Yet even in this movement there are moderato-abysses to which I cannot help doing justice. Actually several pauses sound like abysses; so do the pauses in the third movement—even the short ones that punctuate the accompaniment throughout the Trio. There is an embryonic fugato in the second

movement—a bad omen in Schubert's works. (This sonata is a bad omen from beginning to end.) And there is a ride in the last movement; at least that is what it sounds like in most interpretations. And a fast ride at that! A gallop, no less! Yet it is just an allegro, not even a vivace, let alone a presto. Besides, the very character of the movement has no affinities with horse races. It reminds me rather of Keats' poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*—not of the *Erlkönig*, oddly enough. The child is frightened of the Erlkönig from the very outset of the poem. The Belle Dame is far more horrific, for she is an embodiment of love.

*Oh, what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing!*

Loitering, instead of galloping! This movement is far more ambiguous and mysterious than the *Erlkönig*.

*Oh, what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?*

The middle episode corresponds to the description of the lady that the knight met in the meads: 'Full beautiful and fairy child'.

*I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long;
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A fairy's song.*

But, as often happens with Schubert, a major key—B Major, in the present case—is full of baleful overtones. As a matter of fact, it is much more tragic than any 'normal' Minor.

*And there she lullèd me asleep,
And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide!—
The latest dream I ever dreamt
On the cold hill side.*

*I saw pale kings, and princes too,
 Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
 They cried—'La belle Dame sans merci
 Thee hath in thrall!'*

'That the Belle Dame represented Love, Death by Consumption... and Poetry all at once can be confirmed by a study of the romances from which Keats developed the poem,' writes Robert Graves in *The White Goddess*. Love and Death. A poetry-sanctified 'grand duo'. In her notes on translation Marina Tsvetaeva says, 'I'll always translate the rhyme "*amour-toujours*" by "*lubov'-krov*" (love-blood). Schubert *physically* experienced this fateful conjunction. His first *real* encounter with love took place in a brothel where he caught syphilis—the medical cause of his premature death.

There were other causes. The death of Beethoven, for instance. Apart from solitude, which one might term 'spiritual', Schubert experienced a hitherto unknown feeling: all the responsibilities had fallen on his shoulders. And he was not self-assured enough to bear such responsibilities. Did he guess that the destiny of music was now in his hands? I think he was aware of his own greatness, for all his proverbial meekness. Incidentally, one of the books he read on his deathbed was Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*.

But he desperately tried to assert himself: in the *Great Symphony*, in the first movement of the *A Major Sonata*. But the pomposity that seems to set the tone to the whole movement—it is particularly bombastic in the recapitulation—finally dwindles to a sort of elf-dance. Dostoevsky was keen to quote Derzhavin's ode *God*, especially the line: '*Ja tsar'—ja rab—ja cherv'—ja Bog*' (I'm a tsar—I'm a slave—I'm a worm—I'm God). Pascal airs the same idea throughout *Les Pensées*. We are also reminded of Pope's line: 'The glory, jest and riddle of the world', which sounds like an understatement, when compared with its Russian counterpart. 'I'm a worm—I'm God.' The most striking contrast in the history of literature. 'I'm a bug—I'm God' would be less impressive. On the other hand Byron did not mind being less impressive when he wrote: 'Half dust, half deity, alike unfit to sink or soar.' The second movement is a worm in comparison with the self-assertive character of the sonata's opening bars. And there is a worm-God contrast *within* this movement. Or a worm-fatum contrast. Only eight decades later—in Mahler's symphonies—can one find such contrasts. And only in Mahler's music can one hear such despair—a despair of *almost* the same intensity. Not quite, not quite. I do think that the second movement of the *A*

Major Sonata is the most tragic piece of music ever—closely followed by the final movement from Mahler's *Sixth* and *In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus* from *Kindertotenlieder*.

Dreadful, horrific, eerie, uncanny, weird, inscrutable. A score of synonyms, three or four languages (including Russian) are needed to give an *approximate* description of this movement. It is another *Winterreise*—minus the third-rate Müller poems. Plus Schubert's unrestrained, unbridled inspiration. 'Beethoven was even unhappier than Schubert, I think. Schubert had some friends,' I said to Gerhard before the recording. 'Whose destiny can be more miserable than that of Schubert?' he answered. And he was right of course. The second movement is an eloquent proof of Schubert's superiority in the sphere of misery. The Champion of Misery, as Kafka might have put it.

At least in this text will the *A Major Sonata* remain unfinished.

'Nikolay Vsevolodovich, I'm a slave, I'm a worm, but not God—that's what makes the difference between me and Derzhavin,' says Lebiadkin to Stavrogin in *The Possessed*. In the last sonata there are neither gods nor tsars. Only slaves and worms. What happens in the first and second movements? If you have a sudden loss of cabin pressure at 20, 000 feet, people become torpid, experience increased stupor and lose consciousness in ten minutes. That is what happens to the protagonist of the sonata—a worm or a slave, as the case may be. Torpor, increased stupor. Only, he/she/it does not lose consciousness. The *Winterreise* minus the journey. There is nowhere to go. Contrary to what Coriolanus declares in Shakespeare's play, there is no world elsewhere. Actually the same happens in the third and fourth movements, with this difference that the semi-conscious substance begins to stir a little bit—to stir, to squirm, to writhe, to agonise. But it remains rooted to the spot. It is not even a journey into fear or to the end of night.

The first movement.

*In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus,
In diesem Braus,
Sie ruh'n als wie in der Mutter Haus,
Von keinem Sturm erschreckt,
Von Gottes Hand bedeckt,
Sie ruh'n wie in der Mutter Haus.*

The first movement *is* akin to the ending of Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*. It is not an ending. It is just a beginning. The agony comes afterwards. The hand of God does not protect the substance,

nor does anything remind us of 'home, sweet home'. The first movement of the last sonata is Mahler's lied—minus God, minus shelter, minus death (and minus Rückert's second-rate poetry).

The second movement is also unprotected—not even by pedal, in my interpretation. The lied-sounding melody is suspended in the air. It is as if the melody had hanged itself, swaying now in a distant attic—rhythmically, endlessly. The middle episode is just a memory. And not a happy one at that. A memory. Or a chair on which the melody is about to climb in order to hang itself.

The third movement. Another ether-inspired memory. In a sense, the music is lying on an operating table. And the middle episode is the purest expression of what is alternately called 'vicious circle' and 'karma'.

The fourth movement. The music is on the operating table. Indeed Schubert seems to perform an autopsy on his own lieder and dances. But the substance is somewhere else. Nobody will ever convey the substance to a hospital. Nobody will ever help it. As the Hunter Gracchus puts it in Kafka's story:

Nobody will read what I say here, no one will come to help me; even if all the people were commanded to help me, every door and window would remain shut, everybody would take to bed and draw the bed-clothes over his head, the whole earth would become an inn for the night. And there is sense in that, for nobody knows of me, and if anyone knew he would not know where I could be found, and if he knew where I could be found, he would not know how to deal with me, he would not know how to help me. The thought of helping me is an illness that has to be cured by taking to one's bed.

(Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir)

Did Schubert's contemporaries really know where he was?

The substance is more miserable than the Hunter Gracchus. He fell from a precipice...he died...but his death ship lost its way. So he is alive too. His ship is driven by the wind blowing in the undermost regions of death. And yet he does not really suffer—at least nothing in his living death reminds us of the fourth movement of Schubert's last sonata, not even the fact that no one will ever come to help him. Nothing can remind us of this movement. Nothing can be compared to it. And to think that for many years I regarded it as unworthy of the rest. Incidentally, there is a nice outburst of self-assertion in the coda: the self-assertion of a vicious circle.

If asked to draw parallels between composers and writers, I would compare Schubert to Kafka: after all, *Das Schloss* is also a *Winterreise*.

The substance is more miserable than another of Kafka's character, Gregor Samsa, for he lived in his parents' house and died in his own room. Every insect is entitled to death. Not the protagonist of Schubert's sonata.

And finally the substance is more miserable than Schubert himself. William Hazlitt offered us a definition of greatness. 'A really great man,' he said, 'has always an idea of something greater than himself.'

1997

Versailles

THE PIANO SONATA IN A MAJOR, D. V. 559

‘Without wishing to sound conceited, I am the best composer in the world.’ In his music, if not in his life, Schubert often departed from the image created by his biographers and admirers who regarded him as a meek and mild human, deprived of pride and whatever goes with it: success, glory, immortality. He was immortal—or eternal, as Spinoza might have put it—and he did not overlook the fact. And he knew he was dealing with facts and not chimeras when focusing on his music, on his personality abundantly mirrored in his sonatas and quartets. Actually, he did not need to assert himself because his very ego was self-assertive: a few chords played on the piano, performed by an orchestra or a trio. (No point in calling on the superego.) Even one note sung by a tenor was self-assertive, eternal. Self-assertive or self-destructive. Only a living creature can destroy himself or herself. He was very much alive; and we live in the house of the dead. So we enjoy ourselves.

But we cannot sing the song we hear in the final movement of the *Sonata*. It is sung by someone who happens to dwell in the land of the living, not in the house of the dead. Let him sing this song until Doomsday. Only someone who committed suicide—in the second movement of the *Sonata*—can sing such a song. And only Schubert could commit suicide and remain in the land of the living, getting the best of both worlds.

Let us go back to the second movement. One can only go back to it. Why stay inside it or nearby? (Why play the third movement?) Nor does one yearn to go forward if this movement is the end of the journey. Well, not the end, properly speaking. But would you spend a night in such a place? What kind of place is it? Is it inhabited by ghosts? It is not inhabited at all. It is no void either. It is not *inhabited*, which means it *could* be inhabited. It is not. What happened? Something did happen—something horrible, no doubt; something atrocious, ghastly, hideous. One gets used to words. One cannot get used to the second movement of the *Piano Sonata in A Major*, D.V. 559. Switching one’s CD player off is the only solution to the problem. One *can* get used to silence. But not to the silence of this movement that is also silence, the other side of it. The same side.

April 5, 2008

Versailles

FIERRABRAS

Music lovers, who have never touched a piano or a violin, often get the feeling they know such and such a composer intimately as if he was their father or brother. (Even I succumb to this illusion now and then, as testified by the beginning of my essay on Brahms.) Actually great composers keep aloof from both their audience and interpreters: their greatness alone puts an impassable barrier between them and those who admire and play their music. The same goes for all creative artists whose style is a product of so many circumstances that one may liken them to God's messengers, to the scarcity of *their* visits to our globe.

In spite of my lifelong devotion to Schubert, until recently I did not know he had written an opera, joining the ranks of those who believed that one was duty bound to have a go at this music genre to become truly great and immortal. The opera is entitled *Fierrabras* and revolves around love and Oriental potentates, which does not distinguish it from, say, Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. But, instead of relying on Mozart or Italian composers—a natural choice under the circumstances—Schubert turned to Beethoven in his endeavour to master the genre unknown to him. A lot of easily drawn parallels surface as we listen to *Fierrabras* where there is a choir of prisoners and also a trumpet that announces their liberation. *Fidelio* crops up here and there as if to persuade us that Beethoven was an operatic composer par excellence. And yet every music lover knows that *Fidelio* enjoyed no great success when it was first performed in 1805. Only nine years later, after being heavily revised by the composer and a new librettist, it became one of the classics of the German theatre. (It is noteworthy, however, that Toscanini, when given an opportunity to perform an opera with the NBC Orchestra, chose *Fidelio* rather than *La Bohème*, *La Traviata*, *Otello*, *Aida*, *Falstaff* and *Un ballo in maschera*, which he recorded later on.)

In a way, Schubert turned to Beethoven in search of a human being who might help him overcome the problems inherent in opera as a genre. He leaned upon him in the hope of paternal advice, of something lying beyond a merely professional relationship. I am reminded of how Joyce coped with the theatrical genre when embarking upon his only play *Exiles* which, to some extent, mirrors Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* where Judge Brack behaves as if he was a forerunner of Robert Hand—a journalist portrayed by Joyce. With clearly defined form—which also seems to have been borrowed from one of Ibsen's plays—it has sparseness and significance of dialogue. Why didn't Joyce follow the lead so bounteously offered by many English and Irish playwrights? After all, he was writing in English and never discarded his Irish background—not in his works at least. 'Truth as judgment and disclosure, and exile as the artistic condition: these were to be the positive and negative poles of Joyce's own state of mind,' writes Richard Ellmann. 'The figure of

Ibsen, whose temper, he said in *Stephen Hero*, was that of an archangel, occupied for Joyce in art the place that the figure of Parnell had taken on for him in national life.' In other words, Ibsen was a man whom Joyce could trust in a moment of need.

Of course neither Joyce nor Schubert relied on their future admirers, on those who are prepared to make allowances as they deal with *Fierrabras* and *Exiles*. These giants did not expect *us* to behave like a father bestowing his caress upon a prodigal son. 'Why did you venture into a domain where your gift couldn't display itself to the utmost?' But there is no denying that Schubert showed his weaker side in *Fierrabras* which, therefore, enables one to come closer to its creator, to see the composer as a young man in need of protection and loving care.

Many think that the hero of the *Winterreise* is Schubert himself: it is he who trudges through the snow, buffeted by the wind, pursued by a crow that keeps him company. But even in *Der Leiermann* whose sorry plight has not been equalled in the domain of music—an early specimen of minimalism—we cannot get close enough to Schubert; and our paternal or maternal instinct showers its favours on the unfortunate protagonist while the composer remains beyond our reach, beyond our ken.

'He also has my uncle's voice—the voice of an uncle I might have had in nineteenth-century Russia,' I wrote in my long essay on Brahms. Could I say that Schubert is my younger brother?

March 13, 2006

Versailles

THE NOCTURNES

The inhabitants of Dante's *Purgatory* seem to yearn much more for their wretched earthly state than for the felicity to come—the nuance that did not escape the notice of a few literary critics. Chopin is the best exponent of nostalgia in music, and even in poetry one seldom comes across such a *Sehnsucht*, such a longing for the past, for the *temps perdu*, for the lost motherland. Some of his works—the nocturnes in particular—are the most realistic expression of human memory. The following paragraph is borrowed from my novel *Hall of Mirrors* (after all, memory is a distorted mirror of the past):

My memory, my memory. Sitting in a rocking chair, twisting her white hair in her yellow fingers, talking wistfully about everything under the sun, under the moon. She leans against the window, rests a hand on the back of my armchair, stares at me—

The woman whose profile is silhouetted against the window in the room where Chopin performs his nocturnes—in my imaginary film, in my dream—is young of course, young and beautiful. And her hair is not white but yellow, being borrowed from a W. B. Yeats poem. (W. B. Yeats is one of the best exponents of instant historical nostalgia in poetry, creating a ready-made sense of the Celtic Twilight.) She stares at Chopin to remind him of another woman, of a landscape, of a distant city, of a recent farewell. Actually some of his nocturnes sound like farewell ceremonies, like the drawn-out disappearances of a beloved mistress or a long-standing friend.

*I would have broke mine eye-strings, crack'd them, but
To look upon him, till the diminution
Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle;
Nay, followed him, till he had melted from
The smallness of a gnat, to air: and then
Have turn'd mine eye, and wept.*

Chopin's farewell ceremonies fit this description from *Cymbeline* in everything but their immobility, their status quo. Indeed his travellers seem rooted to the spot. So do his carriages, his ships. They ignore the laws of perspective, which would reduce them to the size of a gnat.

...he did keep

*The deck, with glove, or hat, or handkerchief,
Still waving as the fits and stirs of's mind
Could best express how slow his soul sail'd on,
How swift his ship.*

The souls that inhabit Chopin's nocturnes do not sail, either slowly or swiftly; and yet motion is inherent in the nature of music. Indeed no other art relies so much on tempo and rhythm; and especially on repetition and variation that are the hallmarks of motion. What we hear in the nocturnes can be expressed by a paradoxical formula 'immobile motion'. In this respect they are akin to the photograph of a close friend or relative. The photograph itself is immobile, but our memory animates it somehow because we remember—we know how the person immobilised by the photographer moves and lives. In a way, the nocturnes are 'sound photographs'. When thinking about Chopin I cannot help recalling this and that—so closely is his music linked to memory.

The Secret Miracle by Borges tells the story of one Jaromir Hladik, the author of an unfinished drama. Hladik is sentenced to death; God grants him the time he needs to accomplish his literary labour. 'The guns converged on Hladik, but the men who were to kill him stood motionless....On a paving stone of the courtyard a bee cast an unchanging shadow. The wind had ceased, as in a picture.' Or in a photograph. Or in Chopin's nocturnes.

I said above that *some* of the nocturnes sound like farewell ceremonies. As a matter of fact, *all* of them sound like farewell ceremonies, even the *Nocturnes* Opus 9 N°2, Opus 32 N°2 and Opus 37 N°2. I recall a conversation related by Robert Frost at one of his poetry readings. Apparently someone said of his poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*: 'This is a death poem.' Puzzled, Frost asked for an explanation. 'I guess all poetry is death poetry,' his interlocutor replied. The audience burst into laughter. The legendary Japanese poet, Bashô, said something along the same lines—on his deathbed. At least he said that all *his* poems were death poems.

I would not go so far as to suggest that Chopin composed only death music. But, to some degree, most of his works are linked to death or rather to the state where a human being hovers between life and death. An eternal farewell. Amongst poets only Emily Dickinson and Lermontov were fond of this 'no-life's land' or 'no-death's-land'. Here is a poem by Lermontov in Nabokov's translation:

In noon's heat, in a dale of Dagestan,

*With lead inside my breast, stirless I lay;
The deep wound still smoked on; my blood
Kept trickling drop by drop away.*

*On the dale's sand alone I lay. The cliffs
Crowded around in ledges steep,
And the sun scorched their tawny tops
And scorched me—but I slept death's sleep.*

*And in a dream I saw an evening feast
That in my native land with bright lights shone;
Among young women crowned with flowers,
A merry talk concerning me went on.*

*But in the merry talk not joining,
One of them sat there lost in thought,
And in a melancholy dream
Her young soul was immersed—God knows by what.*

*And of a dale in Dagestan she dreamt;
In that dale lay the corpse of one she knew;
Within his breast a smoking wound showed black,
And blood ran in a stream that colder grew.*

The whole setting of the poem, which was written in 1841, a few months before Lermontov's death, fits in with what Chopin *describes* in his nocturnes. (Music seldom describes events. But it can faithfully—more faithfully than any other art, in fact—describe a state of affairs or a state of mind.) Sometimes the wound is purely psychological, sometimes it seems rather realistic—for instance, in the *Nocturne* Opus 27 N°1. And the *Nocturne* Opus 32 N°1 is interrupted so brutally that only physical pain seems an adequate response on the part of a listener. But mostly these wounds are psychological and even imaginary. Many artists are *malades imaginaires* in their own right, which does not prevent some of them from being sick in earnest.

At the end of Lermontov's poem the young woman is dreaming of a corpse. The protagonist, it later transpired, was Lermontov himself: he died in a pistol duel with a fellow officer at the foot of Mount Mashuk in the Caucasus. Perhaps in anticipation of that fatal encounter he warded off the danger poetically by writing, during the same year, a poem in which 'the cold sleep of a grave' is exchanged for a kind of immortality, a no death's-land. During his eternal sleep the protagonist longs to feel the 'forces of life' and even requires the presence of an oak tree by his side. Death is suspended indefinitely. What is more, the oak tree is not allowed to lose its leaves, not for an instant (*vechno zeleneya*). Pushkin was fond of late autumn. At the end of his life Lermontov seemed to opt for late spring and summer. Incidentally, the poem was set to music, thereby becoming a Russian *romance*—a genre that has a lot in common with Chopin's nocturnes.

Lying motionless...blood trickling drop by drop...the sleep of death...native land...an evening feast in the native land...young women crowned with flowers... merry talk, far away, inaudible talk...a young lady sitting alone, lost in thought...a melancholy dream...Dream is another keyword of Chopin's music. His nocturnes are dreams; at least they are the most faithful representations of dreams in music.

But let us go back to the main keyword of Chopin's vocabulary—remembrance. *Remembrance of Things Past. A la recherche du temps perdu*. In a way, he was a precursor of Proust. So was Emily Dickinson who, in 1863, wrote the following poem:

*A Thought went up my mind today—
That I have had before—
But did not finish—some way back—
I could not fix the Year—*

*Nor where it went—nor why it came
The second time to me—
Nor definitely, what it was—
Have I the Art to say—*

*But somewhere—in my Soul—I know—
I've met the Thing before—
It just reminded me—'twas all—*

And came my way no more—

Emily Dickinson was rather fond of dashes—the corridors of memory. And the corridors of thoughts.

What happens during a performance of Chopin's music resembles both this poem and Proust's perpetual exploration of the past; and also the feat performed by those who succeed in remembering their former lives. When I heard a broadcast of the *Ballad in F minor* for the first time I got an eerie feeling of déjà vu, or rather déjà entendu. The same happened with some nocturnes and waltzes. And yet I was sure I had never heard those pieces before. Only once did I experience a similar feeling in connection with literature—when reading Dickens's *David Copperfield*. In Russian. Not surprisingly, the phenomenon of déjà vu transcends linguistic barriers rather easily.

How many people undergo the same experience in a hall, in a room where Chopin's music is performed? How many people recognise themselves in his works, identify with them? (To paraphrase Walter Pater, all men and women should aspire to the condition of music.) This occupation is, incidentally, far more idiosyncratic and artistic than identifying with a literary hero or heroine—an aesthetic sin from which only children, who are often in search of models and examples, can be absolved. After all, grown-ups have photographs and Chopin's nocturnes at their disposal when in need of the past, of a lost friend, of a lost sensation, of their own identities. A novel and a poem might have some affinities with a piece of music. To write a novel-nocturne would be an exciting adventure, I suppose. (Virginia Woolf's late novels are nocturnes, to some extent.) But a novel-photo (*roman-photo*) is a contradiction in terms.

To meet a woman-nocturne or a woman-ballad. Or to become a man-fantaisie, a man-sonata. Incidentally, I would not mind being Chopin's *Sonata in B Minor*, Opus 58. But it might be dangerous to identify with the *Sonata in B Flat minor*, Opus 35 'Funeral March'.

Do we all belong to a sort of secret society whose members were Chopins in their former lives? How many people identify with him whenever they fall in love or suffer or take a stroll down memory lane?

Alas, there are no Chopins around nowadays. Even a man-sonata is rarity, let alone a woman-nocturne or a woman-mazurka.

2000

Versailles

THE WALTZS, THE POLONAISES

It is often said that one cannot dance to the accompaniment of Chopin's waltzes, mazurkas and polonaises. Of course many dance companies use these pieces as springboards for their inspiration. But I am thinking about another kind of dancing which might match this wayward, moody music.

Two lovers dance a waltz, but their senses are far from the pattern they should follow as they move their legs and the rest of their bodies. They take advantage of every *rallentando*, of every pause to exchange kisses and make yet another declaration of love. They do their best to stop the music which, however, does not stop.

As to the polonaises recorded on this CD, they seem to have been composed for those who find themselves at a turning point. One is reminded of the famous polonaise *Farewell to the Motherland* by Oginsky. A new leaf, a new life; or rather death, judging by the *Polonaise in E Flat Minor*. From time to time you lose your consciousness as you dance on your deathbed. How many deaths are we supposed to live through?

THE MAZURKAS

A friend of mine maintains that, to some extent, every piece of music is modelled upon the waltz. In a way he is right because the waltz seems to be an almost tangible expression of harmony as such. A circular movement is more harmonious than any other movement: even a vicious circle is harmonious. And the smooth unperturbed rhythm that distinguishes the waltz from, say, the mazurka also fits in with our notion and sensation of harmony.

I am not sure that one can find the vestiges of the waltz, its pattern and soothing movement, in every piece of music. But undeniably dance as a form is omnipresent in both music and our lives. Owing to their rhythmical framework, the dances of gods and heroes bring about the world's cycles of creation and annihilation. And ritual dances are the means of establishing a link, a vital bond between heaven and earth, which is accomplished by conjuring up rain, love, victory and fertility. Eventually dancing may lead to the extinction of everything and everybody in the divine Unity.

It is also a manifestation of spiritual life. (The dance of David in front of the Arch.) On a lower level it is a manifestation of mental life. In my novel *The Philosopher's Way* I cast aspersions on the manner in which Joyce depicts the so-called stream of consciousness: 'Our thinking is three-dimensional, four-dimensional—smells are also our "ingredients"—so that, to represent our minds more or less faithfully, pages should acquire the shape of cubes, of unknown super-geometrical figures.' Sometimes I get the feeling that Chopin's mazurkas suit the purpose even better than four-dimensional literary works. Our thoughts do not exist on their own, being coloured and poisoned by our moods, apprehensions and hopes. Chopin's mazurkas are 'coloured thoughts' dancing along as they skirt around thorny problems or on the contrary probe into the utmost secrets of the unconscious. Actually one might attribute a colour to every mazurka—a colour, a smell and other 'secondary qualities'. On the other hand they seem to be deprived of some 'primary qualities' such as solidity, extension. Like many of Chopin's works they are full of nostalgic feelings. What are the objects of their nostalgia? The past of course. And also the future, heaven, the bond between heaven and earth. On an intimate, personal scale they are ritual dances that conjure up love, the dead, death itself. But unlike the ritual dances of Hindus and Buddhists, dervishes and African tribes, they do not accomplish anything.

Chopin's mazurkas

Don't lead to death,

Yet they're sad

*And mad
And dead
And sweet
And what not.
Nor do they lead
To life
Or to love.*

They lead nowhere.

Plato thinks that dance is of a divine origin. Chopin's mazurkas are of a human origin; yet they establish a link between heaven and earth—a personal, intimate link.

2002

Versailles

NOTE TO *KREISLERIANA*

I

I am often asked why I have written theatrical plays on the *Kreisleriana* and the *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The point is the enigma of music scores should be brought to light or, pompously speaking, to life by every means available to performers. As a writer, I cannot hold back from making a literary comment on the works I play or record, and this commentary may include the presence of an actor on the stage. Every masterpiece is infinite so that my theatrical comments have been embedded in the *Kreisleriana* and the *Pictures* ever since their creation or indeed from time immemorial. I have no idea whether anything like that is woven into the texture of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier*, but many musicians will agree that Schumann and Mussorgsky are rather theatrical by their nature and consequently can inspire a writer, a playwright.

Commissioned by the Graz Festival, the *Kreisleriana* is about a lifelong sacrifice required by art. In the long run a performer may become the composer he plays. My hero identifies with Schumann and Kreisler, going mad in the process. The première of the first version featuring my life-size doppelgänger—a doll from Zagreb—took place in 1991. The story of the present version is told at length in the essay entitled *In Memory of Sviatoslav Richter*. The actor playing the part of the pianist is not supposed to touch the piano, but whenever I myself play the part—that is what has happened thus far—the fourth and sixth pieces are performed live. My own recording supplies the rest. At the very end of the *Kreisleriana* the actor, in my opinion, must not tinker with the record player, for the music becomes an audible imprint of fate and sounds by itself to the last note. And beyond it.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 28, 2003

Moscow

II

In his famous essay, *Der Erzähler*, Walter Benjamin bemoans our incapacity—or rather that of our grandparents—to recount stories: in the thirties, the gift of storytelling seemed to be lost forever. And yet, a few decades before, Lescov whom Benjamin singles out from an impressive number of ancient storytellers used to entertain his readers with implausible Russian peasants or artisans and their adventures. Benjamin did not live long enough to witness the abundance of stories showered upon my contemporaries by Hollywood producers, novelists and even *rapisti*—the word coined in Russia to designate those who actively indulge in the pleasures of rap.

Bookshops are literally overloaded with stories of all kinds, making it hard to sell the writers whose propensity for telling stories is somewhat mitigated by philosophical or psychological musings. In *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, for instance, the reader beholds the cessation of Time, which gives rise to the creation of Space where everything is mixed and human life may lose its momentum and relinquish the very desire to move towards the future, towards a new episode of our common story. The main character sits by a window and his inner eye—into which, now and then, penetrate some debris of the outside world—focuses upon the past, former longings and failures. Arjuna's chariot comes to a halt, introducing the space of *The Bhagavadgita* where the tale of hatred and war no longer makes any sense. On French television Nabokov declared that the primary duty of a writer was to provide the reader with a beautiful story or a number of beautiful stories intertwined in a whimsical pattern—the figure in the carpet, as Henry James might have put it. But, in other interviews, he dwelt on the otherworldly aspect of his works, presumably situated beyond Time and its tales of horror and imagination.

Our world chokes on its own stories told by newspapers, TV, computers, films, novels and *rapistami*. Only occasionally does Time freeze to the spot in this world of ours. And yet, contrary to the widespread opinion, I do not have the feeling that it moves very fast. I think it is rather on the slow side, but its progress is relentless and very few realise in what horror movie we are taking part: to watch this particular movie, one must check the progress of Time. Alas, even if we do succeed in bringing Time to a halt, the Apocalypse will catch up with us. Heidegger's remark 'Only God can help us' seems to be as obsolete as Benjamin's essay. So why not sink into your favourite armchair—either by a window or in front of a wall—and listen to your stream of consciousness until it smuggles you out of the 'tale told by an idiot'? 'Oh, that way madness lies.'

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 20, 2005

Moscow

III

What is a 'doppelgänger', according to E.T.A. Hoffmann and Dostoevsky? A caricature, a potpourri of the hero's negative traits that Jung defined as 'shadow'. But a man who, turning a deaf ear to Hegel's counsel, resolves to probe into the mystery of his own ego is bound to come across a great many doppelgängers or even the whole of humanity, the cosmos mirrored in the cabalistic image of Adam Kadmon. Composers, writers and painters need an infinite catalogue of doppelgängers; pianists and, generally speaking, performing artists narrow down this catalogue to the composer whose works come back to life through their assiduous intervention. According to

Nietzsche, a good performer tells his own story; while telling it, however, he should not forget the composer, *his* story. In other words, the performer's story should coincide with that of the composer or at least encompass it.

Today, concertgoers are given no opportunity to grasp that only one melody resounds in the world. Instead, an infinite number of Jungian shadows—composers in disguise—moon around concert halls, climb on walls, hang from chandeliers.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 20, 2005

Moscow

KREISLERIANA

A ONE-ACT SOLO PERFORMANCE

PIANIST: *a man between fifty and ninety.*

At centre stage there is a piano, an armchair, and a table on which a compact disc player, a music score, a book and a scalpel can be seen. The pianist enters, lingers by piano, walks over to table, sits down, opens CD, takes disc out, puts it in player and switches player on.

THE FIRST PIECE

PIANIST: (*switching player off.*) That's how I used to play. (*Staring at his hands.*) They're still beautiful. The only beautiful parts of my body. My only beauty, my soul. (*Pause.*) 'A serious condition in which a person's joints become painful, swollen and stiff.' In times gone by I had to look for 'arthritis' in dictionaries. Here it is. Found it at last. And it found me. '*Inflammation limitée à une articulation ou plusieurs articulations.*' I know my misery in every language. My polyglot pain. All languages know my misery. (*Pause.*) 'She described herself as crippled with arthritis.' The Cambridge Dictionary provides an example. I don't need your examples any more. My exemplary arthritis. When will you put me in your dictionaries? 'A Russian pianist destroyed by arthritis.' Put me in the Oxford Dictionary. (*Pause.*) She killed herself by slitting her wrists. (*Staring at his hands.*) The most important parts of my substance, of my essence. More important than the head and the heart. If it weren't for my hands, my head and my heart would never *express* themselves. They wouldn't become *audible*. I've got a pair of hands, therefore I am. *Ergo sum*. A mute brain is useless. So is a mute heart. And my heart speaks through my hands. My heart *used* to speak through my hands. The grammar of my life is in the past tense now. Should transpose a humdrum existence into the major key of the past. I'm a musician after all. (*Pause.*) I play in the past, therefore I am. I was, therefore I am. (*Pause.*) Can still play *something*, in the present. I am Antony yet. (*Pause.*) Antony without Cleopatra. (*Pause.*) In the present. (*Showing CD cover to the audience.*) And in the future. I have immortal longings in me. (*He puts CD cover back on table.*) In the present. Slow pieces—not the one you've just heard. Schumann didn't compose it for sick pianists, for invalids. For cripples. It's mad pianists he had in mind, in his demented mind.

Healthy but crazy. Better to be crazy and healthy than normal and sick. Better to be crazy. Normal pianists play *Kreisleriana* too romantically, too *beautifully*. This music is mad, mad, mad. Mad music disease. (*Staring at his hands.*) My hands are also mad—quite suitable for *Kreisleriana*, one might say. Too difficult, too fast for my mad hands. There are two slow pieces in *Kreisleriana*—the fourth and the sixth. The second piece is also slow, but there are two fast episodes in it. Too fast for my slow hands. I can still push buttons—slowly, slowly, slowly.

He switches player on, picks up score and opens it as if to follow music.

THE SECOND PIECE

He switches player off and puts score down.

Mad, isn't it? Another kind of madness. Calm madness. Still waters. Calm on the seas...Not like the delirium you heard in the first piece. The second piece, a second madness. The madness of second thoughts. On second thoughts a madman decides to play hide-and-seek with his friends and relatives. As my friend put it, 'I shut my eyes and vanish into thin air.' Stole a bottle of beer in a shop. They ran after him and he shut his eyes—no strength to flee like Fleance. (*Pause. He shuts his eyes and opens them.*) Music wouldn't vanish even if I plugged my ears. (*Pause.*) What am I talking about? Playing hide-and-seek with myself? (*Pause.*) On second thoughts a madman decides to play hide-and-seek with his friends and relatives. Hiding his darkness under a bushel. Talking to you calmly, almost suavely. Smiling broadly. (*He smiles.*) Giving himself away, now and then. He repeats himself. Madmen often have lapses of memory. Their thoughts don't move in straight lines. Only their second thoughts do. Their first thoughts move in zigzags and come back to square one—or square two, as the case may be. Or square three. The madness of repetition, the vicious circle of madness. The vicious zigzag of madness. The vicious square. (*Pause.*) Once I met a lawyer who told me the same story twice. In the course of *one* conversation. A long story. And he told it twice, in the course of a *short* conversation. Or thrice. Was he mad? Another lapse of memory? Or was it a test, a politeness test? A test of my tolerance threshold? Well, I didn't say anything. Listened patiently to the story. Twice. Thrice. Schumann tells the same story thrice. In the course of a short piece. It's not as short as all that, especially in my interpretation. But the story is definitely long. I mean, the first theme. And Schumann repeats it thrice. Someone must have told him it was too crazy and he cut a small bit off at the end. On second thoughts. On third thoughts. I disregard the cut. (*Pause.*) Music is nothing but gaping cuts. (*Pause.*) Luckily for me, there are some slow pieces in the realm of music. *Festina lente*. (*Singing tunelessly.*)

*I'd love to get you
On a slow boat to China,
All to myself, alone.*

Only the words of this song, not the tune. Another cut. On a slow boat to China. Or to Russia. To Moscow, to Moscow, to Moscow. Slow, slow, slow. There's a dance called 'slow', I'm told. Can't dance anything. Too late to learn. Perhaps a slow, just a slow. My legs aren't affected, not yet.

He switches player on, picks up score and opens it.

THE THIRD PIECE

He switches player off and puts score down.

Schumann never played this piece. Nor would he have recorded it. Arthritis, arthritis, arthritis. At some point he stopped playing the piano. His wife played in his stead. But she didn't like *Kreisleriana*. Who's afraid of *Kreisleriana*? The love letters he sent her. 'The piece I'm composing now is our love. And your beauty.' And his madness of course. And Kreisler's madness. (*He picks up book and opens it. Reading.*) 'Music has too much of a grip on you and consequently its influence on your whole being can't be anything but pernicious. When you perform a masterpiece, you're so penetrated by it that your features twist into a distraught expression.' (*He shuts book and puts it down.*) Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffman: *The Meditations of Murr the Cat*. Or *Johannes Kreisler*. Or *Robert Schumann*. Or *Valery Afanassiev*. A mad title. (*Pause.*) What about *my* features? Do *they* twist into a distraught expression whenever I play *Kreisleriana*? (*He sings the aria of Griaznoy tunelessly.*) 'Ne uznayu teper' ya sam sebya.' Should I translate it? Let the entire universe understand my interior monologue! (*He sings the aria of Griaznoy tunelessly.*) 'Now I don't recognise myself.' Don't I? (*Pause.*) I am Schumann. On stage. (*Looking at his hands.*) And outside, in life, in everyday life. Invalids, aren't we? (*Pause.*) Politically correct. Some people find this word offensive. I don't. An invalid, that's what I am. Musically correct. I do recognise myself. No offence taken! There's no escaping the fact I'm an invalid. Even on the moon I would be one. Or two. Or three. (*Pause.*) I am Schumann. And Kreisler. Even on the moon. Let other pianists go and play on Schumann's pianos. Let them make their recordings in the houses where he lived. 'Authenticity' they call it. I call it 'facts'. But facts are important nowadays. People believe in facts, not in spirits. (*Pause.*) Hard times. (*Pause.*)

I believe in spirits. And in shamans. In Schumanns. Not in facts and figures. (*Pause.*) My heart is not mute when I play his music. And my brain. My love.

He goes to piano, hesitates, walks back to armchair, sits down and switches player on.

THE FOURTH PIECE

He switches player off.

No time for love. My teacher believed I needed all my energy for piano-playing. Fell in love when preparing an international competition. Invited her to my place. My parents were away. Yuletide, a popular ski resort. (*Pause.*) My teacher stayed in town. Called me every three hours to find out if I was practising. (*Pause.*) We drank a bottle of champagne and I kissed her, by the Christmas tree. Jingle bells, jingle balls. Then I heard the faint tinkle of a telephone, my telephone. She called me again—three minutes later. My teacher, my guru. My saviour. Calling every three minutes, at regular intervals. (*He sets metronome into motion.*) Calling, tolling. Torture by telephone bells. Sound torture. No—'sound' is a positive adjective too. And there was nothing sound in those sounds. (*Pause.*) I was already unsound in mind. And in body, mind you! Brazen bells.

Too much horrified to speak,

They can only shriek, shriek, shriek,

Out of tune

I shriek too. Every three hours, out of tune. (*Pause.*) Couldn't kiss her any more. Just stroking her face. Slowly, slowly, slowly. (*Pause.*) All of a sudden the telephone stopped ringing. Still couldn't kiss her. Waiting for another call, another ring, another bell, another hell. (*Pause.*) Doe to the book, quench the candle, ring the bell! And the doorbell rang at last. Why did you come? (*Imitating an old woman's voice.*) 'I'll call the police! I'll call the police! I'll call the police!' (*Pause.*) My only chance, the only way out of my vicious circle. (*Vehemently.*) I might have squared the circle! (*Pause.*) Golden age, golden day, golden hour. Golden bells. Let her out through the back door. Fortune and Antony part here, even here do we shake hands. Every ounce of my energy was needed to win that competition. And win it I did. So what? (*Looking around.*) My house also suffers from arthritis. (*Pause.*) A famous violonist said on TV, 'I'm doing what I love to do and get paid for it.' Another smart alec. One up on many viola players. Stars. Do they ever hear brazen bells? Light years away. Invalids.

He switches player on, picks up score and opens it.

THE FIFTH PIECE

He switches player off and puts score down.

Can't play fast. Never been able to play fast, not even at the height of my powers. My golden age. (*Showing CD cover to audience.*) Wasn't I playing fast? In the past, when my hands were *not* affected? Do you think it's not *my* recording? Put a CD on and tell your guests *you* are playing! Open a bottle of champagne and they'll forget to check on the artist's name! (*Showing CD cover to audience.*) I'm on the cover. And on the CD. Diseases can't lord it over my name! (*Putting cover down.*) Recording sessions are different from live performances. You can *repeat* the piece, some bits of it, some bars. Back to square one, square two, square three. Three times, thirty times. And they edit it afterwards. Who's afraid of playing fast in a concert hall? (*Pause.*) Just put on a record and ape the performer, his gestures! (*Pause.*) Sometimes I'm happy I can't play this music any more. At the piano you experience it *physically*, from the inside. (*Pause.*) My best friend put creative artists far above interpreters. 'Creative artists write the history of the human brain,' he used to say. 'And interpreters just place a given masterpiece in Space and Time.' Died two years ago. A poet, poor thing. By the world forgot. I've also sunk into oblivion. (*Pause.*) I had some money. Pianists get more money than poets. Even bad pianists get more money for their labours than poets of genius. (*Pause.*) Wagner said something about creative artists being inferior to interpreters. Might have been thinking about the body. Composers don't feel their bodies, do they? (*Pause.*) Lucky you! Even if crippled with arthritis, you can go on writing your masterpieces. (*Pause.*) Let there be no mistake about it—not all of my colleagues play with their bodies. (*Laughing.*) Some of them can't even play with their fingers. And, judging from the way they use the pedal, their legs are crippled with arthritis. (*Pause.*) They feel their bodies *elsewhere*. Happily married, all of them. But they never take their wives on tours. Girlfriends in every city, in every god-forsaken spot. Placing female bodies in Space and Time. And nobody rings them up during their candlelit dinners. Nobody rings their doorbells in the dead of night. Only servants come and go through their back doors. And they play Beethoven only in their leisure hours, when tired of their 'sexertions'. Losing art, winning life. (*Pause.*) A Pyrrhic victory?

He switches player on, picks up score and opens it.

THE SIXTH PIECE

He switches player off and puts score down.

They play *Kreisleriana* and lots of beautiful girls wait for them in their backstage rooms. 'Thank you very much. Thank you for your roses.' As if nothing had happened. As if they'd played Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*. (Pause.) Only hotel rooms and solitude awaited me. Mini bars, mini spaces. Endless Time. Endless night. (Pause.) No more mini bars, no time left. Dawn is drawing nigh. Or another night. (Pause.) I could sing perhaps. Nothing's wrong with my *voice*. No arthritis of any kind. I don't smoke, you know. (*Singing tunelessly*.) I'd love to get you— (Pause.) I do remember *some* tunes. (*Singing Massenet's Elegy*.) *O, gde vi, gde, dni lyubvi, sladkie dni*—(Pause.) Of course I love Clara Schumann. Kreisler too was in love with two women. So what? (Pause.) The old witch is still alive. As fit as the fiddle of that happy fiddler. Still playing the piano. *Easy Progressive Studies* by Lemoine. *Kinder-Etüden*. In her third childhood. She doesn't call me any more. I'm the one who calls her now. My solitude, my hands, my heart. I talk to her about that girl. Natasha, my Natasha. All to myself. Could have been happy with her in my former flat, in my motherland, and the birch trees, and the churches. Could I? (Pause.) And she? (Pause.) We drank a bottle of champagne. Her breasts. Still in my fingertips, like a Chopin nocturne. No memory lapses. No cuts, this time. (Pause.) What time? Eternal recurrence. (Pause.) Never saw her again. My Natasha. (Pause.) Talking, tolling. Cut the crap! Another cut. (Pause.) What's the point of *killing* the old witch? Nothing can express my feelings, my loss. Not even music, not even slaughter. Not even self-slaughter. The long day's task is done, and we must sleep. (Pause.) Open the floodgates!

He switches player on and slowly rolls up sleeve. He picks up scalpel and raises it. Two seconds before Etwas langsamer he brings it down to slash wrist, but his hand stops abruptly in midair.

THE SEVENTH PIECE

He switches player off and drops scalpel.

Why should I cut a long story short? Long stories are bound to end. And I'm at the cutting edge of *Kreisleriana*'s last piece. *Rezhu bez nozha*. Cutting without a knife. (Pause.) Some prefer concerts, live performances. Recordings are tin cans to them. (Pause.) What would I do without great artists of the past, without the dead? Who can match them today? Tin gods? The living dead? (Pause.) Stars. Black holes, not stars. (Pause.) The gods are still living...up there, in another world. *In anderer Welt*. I'm being translated into another language. I'm a poet after all. What's a poet supposed to do in this day and age? Sing about the gods! Sunk into oblivion, aren't

they? *(Pause.) Kreisleriana's* enough. Tchaikovsky was killed by his last symphony, not by a glass of unboiled water. Cholera, my foot! His *Pathétique*. His cholera, his razor. And he conducted the première in St Petersburg, exposing his body to the razor. His veins. *(Pause.)* My blood. '*Die Nichts-, die Niemandrose.*' Nobody's rose. Flowing, flowing away. All rivers flow into the Pacific. I'm writing the history of human blood. Everybody's rose. *(Pause.)* No, not yet. A compact but a long playing disc. You can close a book and open another book. You can't close a symphony or *Kreisleriana*. *(Pause.)* Or your own veins. *(Pause.) Kreisleriana* isn't over yet. From square one to square eight. *(Pause.)* On a slow boat, from point A to point B. To point D, to point D, to point D. *(He picks up book and opens it. Reading.)* 'One fine day—nobody knows how or why—he vanished. Many claimed to have perceived signs of madness in him.' *(He shuts book and puts it down.)* That's what you'll hear now. Exit. I'm leaving you. But I'm leaving my recordings behind. My body, my soul. A vicious circle, a magic circle. Space and Time. Infinity. Immortality. Christmas. Life. Love.

He switches player on.

THE EIGHTH PIECE

August 1, 1997

Versailles

FOUR BALLADS, OPUS 10. FANTASIES, OPUS 116

Even in his boisterous, *sturm-und-drang* youth, Brahms often assumed the air of a patriarch that was so characteristic of his later years. Whenever in the omniscient mood he obviously preferred subterranean tunnels and landscapes to the open air and the flowers with which Goethe and Heine—and the young Schumann—used to strew their works. And he preferred short pieces to sonatas, chamber music to symphonies. And he preferred to depict reality in Schopenhauerian terms partly borrowed from Hindu sacred books. He seemed to remove the 'veils of Maya', one after another, as he approached the core of life, the reality of illusions.

In Straussian terms, *Opus 10* is a dance of four veils; and *Opus 116* a dance of seven veils. Of course Brahms has nothing in common with Richard Strauss and his opera *Salomé*—if they are to share a room at Madame Tussaud's their figures should be placed in opposite corners—but some of the aforementioned pieces do sound like dances: *Opus 10, No. 3*; *Opus 116, No. 5*. The latter conjures up the image of a prehistoric bird that flies over a desert, flapping its gigantic wings.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

*The silence continued, breathless and heavy and full
of shame.*

William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*

*Silence is always full of shame.
Some are ashamed of having said too much
And vow not to utter another word.*

*Others are ashamed of what they've heard
And silence the talker.*

*When the sea is dead calm
It remembers Atlantis.*

*And deserts always
Remember dinosaurs,*

Even during sandstorms.

Silence is sure to have the last word.

Dinosaurs will be raised from the dead.

I wrote this poem last summer. At the time I had not heard of the movie *Jurassic Park*. I am not sure I would have brought dinosaurs into prominence had I known anything about this latest exploit of Hollywood's toy-makers and promoters.

Occasionally there are sandstorms in his deserts: *Opus 10, N°3*; *Opus 116, N°7*. They really are sandstorms rather than hurricanes and tempests: the air is turbulent with flying grit.

In search of musical truth Brahms seems to have travelled through Time towards the distant past situated before human history. The veils of darkness, their tinctures and textures, succeed each other in *Opus 10, N°4*. By the end they are superimposed, piled up. In the course of the piece Brahms constructs a pyramid of darkness.

He might also have travelled forward, reaching the future situated *after* human history.

1994

Versailles

THE SONATA FOR TWO PIANOS, OPUS 34B

I

Brahms was a late child and his mother played an important role in his existence. Happily the consequences of that filial love bore no imprint of Freud's discoveries, evolving instead into a beautiful and touching friendship with Clara Schumann. That love impregnated Brahms' works with a kind of motherly wisdom excluding neither passion nor sacrifice.

The fundamental ambiguity of his music lies in a singular combination of classical structure on the one hand, and sentimentality, passion, hysteria—in short, unbridled romanticism—on the other. The feeling one gets is that the composer does all he can to break away from the patterns he himself has imposed upon his works. Into a perfectly logical structure he might, for instance, insert a tune that seems to have come out of the blue, as it were (the *String Quintet in G Major*, Opus 111; the coda of the first movement). But what he mostly does when confronted with a particularly strong outburst of his inborn romanticism is to impose an even more austere pattern upon his musical imagination (the last movement of the *Fourth Symphony*).

II

Patterns, patterns, patterns. Some people are more sensitive to them than others. Some people need them badly so as to organise their lives in accordance with a tradition-sanctified set of rules that seem to promise if not a happiness on earth at least an agreeable stay in the Hereafter. Some people need God and others do not. Some poets compose rhymed verses and, moreover, strap them into the straitjacket of classical metre—to guard their output against chaos, presumably; the others, on the contrary, let their imaginations run amok.

A famous Russian poet and novelist, Andrey Bely, decided at some point to re-write his old poems, making them fit in with his own prosodic theories. Luckily for us, Schoenberg was not tempted to alter his atonal compositions after his 'discovery' of the twelve-tone system. Perhaps I am old enough to own up to my preference for Schoenberg's pre-serial opuses.

Beckett was a notorious lover of chaos. He always insisted on his works being chaotic, unstructured—a truthful, 'authentic' image of our world.

III

I have no idea of how Brahms looked on God and, frankly speaking, I am not curious enough to probe into the matter. Perhaps he unconsciously believed in his mother or in Goethe's Mothers—in a maternal source of life, in a maternal hand caressing the world. What I do know however is

that his music has a centre around which every single note constantly revolves. As the years go by his works continue to create a vicious circle of logic and form, utterly excluding the superfluous and the peripheral. There are exceptions of course. There is also a tension within these formal bounds so that one may get the feeling of being on the brink of catastrophe, on the verge of a tremendous revelation. But the sounds die away and Brahms remains sitting on his bench with the air of a patriarch—majestic, wise and unperturbed. And immensely sad.

IV

Job's unjust sufferings are rewarded by an elevation to the rank of the Supreme Judge—the rank previously allocated only to God (by God Himself). Unconsciously, unwillingly, Job judges the doings of the living God, making out His negative, shady side.

Brahms knew that music was first and foremost a harmony achieved through a reconciliation of different tonal and rhythmical tendencies. At times, however, he would become suspicious of that pre-established harmony whose clear-cut shapes and solutions seemed inadequate to express the innermost feelings of a man confronted with God's amnesia and light-heartedness—the less-than-human side of God's nature, to borrow Jung's terminology. In the final movement of the *Sonata* he therefore goes over the musical bounds of his epoch, introducing something redolent of Mahler's popular, 'low' tunes. Instead of a cathedral, a concert hall or a museum, one suddenly finds oneself in a poorhouse. A complaint, a moaning, a desperate prayer can be heard. The music is being pushed to extremes. Yet everything remains in its place: the introduction, the exposition, the development, the recapitulation, the coda. The most devastating coda in the history of music! Yet the score remains on the music rest. It has neither been torn nor burnt. Brahms is sitting on the bench. Job has not renounced God, nor has he challenged Him. He repents 'in dust and ashes'.

1995

Versailles

BRAHMS' LATE WORKS

Chaque artiste semble ainsi comme le citoyen d'une patrie inconnue, oubliée de lui-même, différente de celle d'où viendra, appareillant pour la terre, un autre grand artiste. Tout au plus, de cette patrie, Vinteuil dans ses dernières œuvres semblait s'être rapproché. L'atmosphère n'y était plus la même que dans la sonate, les phrases interrogatives s'y faisaient plus pressantes, plus inquiètes, les réponses plus mystérieuses ; l'air délavé du matin et du soir semblait y influencer jusqu'aux cordes des instruments.

Marcel Proust, *La Prisonnière*

Some artists choose to ignore old age, the approach of death and the closeness of the Hereafter. Others inform us about their otherworldly fears with hysterical frenzy. To the latter group belong Van Gogh and Shostakovich.

Like a Japanese garden, Brahms can be savoured through the prism of seasons. Autumn and winter seem to permeate his late works.

Brahms has a lot in common with Schopenhauer whose philosophy bestows a harmonious pattern on the tragedy of human existence by making our unruly will toe the line. With the passing of the years Brahms succeeds in taming the romantic outbursts of his early opuses. With enviable craftsmanship he shifts about the components of life and death. His logical, almost inevitable arrangement of musical material foreshadows the parsimony of Webern. The melancholy atmosphere of his last works, often brought about by clarinet with its autumnal timbre, reminds one of Tyutchev, Housman and Verlaine. Oddly enough, his last works also remind me of the majestic 1961 Trotanoy: its dark purple colour and port-like bouquet have the same touch of mystery and sadness.

The old composer's glance seems to move away from life and consequently from the photographers and painters who endeavoured to immobilise it. In *A Doll's House* a dying doctor takes leave of his friends:

'At the next fancy-dress party, I shall be invisible...There's a big black hat—you've heard of the Invisible Hat?—you put it on, and then no one can see you.'

We find the same acceptance of destiny in the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci, in their tints and landscapes, in the smiles of his Madonnas. (Whoever we may compare him to, Leonardo stands apart in the history of humanity. The only comparison worthy of his genius is the

universe—all of its intricacies and ambiguities.) In the paintings of La Tour and Rembrandt we come across a musical softness of twilight that often merges into pitch-dark night.

But only poetry can vie with music in the representation of what the Japanese call *mono-no-aware*: the sadness we feel upon noticing the flight and disappearance of Time. 'Content you, let them burn: / It is not your concern; / Sleep on, sleep sound.' Or let us take Verlaine's poem that begins as follows: '*Le grand sommeil noir descend sur ma vie*' ('The big black sleep descends upon my life') and ends by the trivial word of manifold meaning: 'silence'.

Brahms' late works are more akin to silence than to sounds.

1988

Versailles

SUBJECTIVITY

Haunting and insoluble, the big problems of human life—religion, art, love—continue to breed misunderstandings and bizarre notions. For example, many believe that the sacred duty of an artist is to 'reflect' his epoch. Alas, there are epochs that are not worthy of being reflected or even talked about: the last two decades, among other dark pedestrian ages.

The artist who eagerly assumes the role of a mouthpiece or a medium gets bogged down in his time, now and then, becoming incomprehensible and boring to future generations. The small officials bowing and scraping in Gogol's masterpieces still have a hold over us, which cannot be explained away as merely a wistful affection for nineteenth-century Russia. Their fear, vanity and respect for bureaucratic pecking orders belong to the eternal mythology of humankind.

On the other hand artists cannot break out of their epochs: nobody can, not even short-sighted, untalented people. They are influenced by their surroundings, by the ups and downs of everyday life. Small artists scrape and bow before reality, paying attention to local colour only. Great artists make their way through the looking glass and reach the realm of human mythology.

Kafka was no prophet and predicted neither the Lubianka nor a Nazi concentration camp; he described in minute detail the futility of struggling against the inexorable laws of life. Beckett was not concerned with 'lost people' searching for their 'identity' in the wake of the Second World War; he merely embroidered on Pascal's *pensée*: 'I see these terrifying spaces of the universe which close in upon me, and find myself attached to a corner of this vast area without knowing either why I have been placed here and not elsewhere, nor why the span of life I am allotted should occupy this point of eternity and not another, preceding or following it.' We have always had a bad sense of direction.

In the mid nineteenth century Mussorgsky joined the group called 'The Powerful Heap' in Russia ('The Five'); he shared the patriotic enthusiasm of his fellow members and used the word '*narod*'—people, folk, nation—with gusto and sometimes to no purpose. (In those days the Russian intelligentsia used to think big.) But he was one of the most idiosyncratic artists in history, which enabled him to translate the elusive whims of our consciousness and heart into music.

In his piece *Meditation* he allows the listener to follow his train of thought that reveals an inconstant, almost hysterical mind. The music slackens for no reason, picks up again, leading to an episode that jars with both the end and the beginning of the piece. Mussorgsky does not offer the elegiac, frozen image of a musing man; he manages to describe the unpredictable itinerary of his own ideas and moods.

'Mussorgsky did not attempt to reproduce in his music the subjective impression called forth in him by the exhibited pictures, but tried rather to describe them objectively, such as they were,' says the preface to *The Pictures at an Exhibition*. Those acquainted with Hartmann's pictures must admit that, except for the titles, they have little in common with the pictures of Mussorgsky. The latter was following the sinuous itinerary of his thoughts. The works he saw at an exhibition in 1873 were nothing but an impulse—the springboard for a new musical thought. Once again Mussorgsky spirited himself through the looking glass. He was a faithful and objective witness of subjectivity, of human mythology.

The play I wrote in October 1987 does not depict Mussorgsky 'objectively', whatever this word might mean in the realm of art. I drew on *The Pictures* and a few anecdotes recounted and perhaps concocted by the composer's fellow artists.

1991

Versailles

NOTE TO *THE PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION*

In 1987, at a small festival in Austria, Dunya Tot staged a production of *The Pictures*; at the time she was the director of the *Zagreb Puppet Theatre*. In the play an actor read Mussorgsky's letters for which, after much soul-searching, I substituted my own text, running the risk of being unfavourably compared with the composer's epistolary heritage. The première took place in Zurich, at Tonhalle. Several months later, at the Frankfurt Alter Oper, the puppets did not join us because of the war in Yugoslavia. Only the actor playing the part of Mussorgsky kept me company on the stage. Two years later, in Sicily, I found myself alone on the stage: they had not found anybody to play the composer's part. Thus the third and last version saw the light of day or rather limelight. Like the *Kreisleriana*, *The Pictures* were written in English. I myself translated the text into French and Russian. The German version was done by Katharina von Bismark. I thoroughly revised the German version of the *Kreisleriana* done by another German friend of mine. I perform both plays in four languages. Often the way I speak and behave on stage is dictated by the language I use. I wonder if my musical interpretation depends on the words I utter as I put on the dressing gown and strike the pose 'which reminds one of the portrait of Mussorgsky painted by Ilya Repin in 1881'.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 28, 2003

Moscow

THE PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

A ONE-ACT SOLO PERFORMANCE

PIANIST: a man between thirty and eighty.

There is a table and an armchair, centre stage. A dressing gown is lying on the armchair. On the table stands a bottle of vodka and three glasses: big and small. Alongside, there is a wineglass and a basket with a bottle of red wine in it. The pianist enters and sits down at the piano, hesitates, gets up, goes to the armchair and puts the dressing gown on. He sits down in the armchair and strikes the pose which reminds one of the portrait of Mussorgsky painted by Ilya Repin in 1881.

THE PIANIST: That's how we all imagine him. A famous picture by Ilya Repin depicts Mussorgsky in a dressing gown, with a red nose...sitting in a hospital somewhere. (*Looking around.*) The world is just a huge hospital—any self-respecting pessimist is aware of that. Nothing but a huge hospital. (*Pause.*) He died in a dressing gown, in a hospital, on March 28. A nurse heard him cry out: 'All is over! How unfortunate I am!' He didn't know I'd be playing his music tonight. I'm wasting my time and energy on a figment of his imagination. (*Pause.*) Wasting my time and energy. I'm not immortal, am I? And I haven't learnt all Beethoven's sonatas yet! He *was* lucky after all. (*Pause.*) His portrait by Ilya Repin is reproduced in dictionaries, encyclopaedias...on record covers. Tousled hair, red nose. Drinking forever and ever...sitting and drinking in his eternity. Looking sideways. Not at us...sideways. As if loath to look at the future. As if he didn't believe in his future. (*Pause.*) And I play *The Pictures at an Exhibition*...in his eternity. That's what they call immortality, I presume. (*Pause.*) Sitting and playing his *Pictures*. Alongside Beethoven's sonatas! (*The pianist pours some vodka into small glass and gulps it down.*) That's how he drank, how the Russians usually drink. The process itself doesn't count. (*The pianist cautiously picks winebasket up. He pours himself a glass of wine. He looks at its colour, rolling it along the inner side of glass, swirls it, smells it. He slowly takes a sip, rolls the wine over his palate as if rinsing the mouth.*) That's how the French do it. They enjoy the colour, the bouquet—the process, not the result. The Russians wish to pass into another dimension, to get away from Russian life...as soon as possible. It's the result that counts. They hardly notice *what* they drink. They pass into another dimension. That's just what he did. His colleagues treated him

like an outcast. Tchaikovsky was outraged by *Boris Godunov*, saying that one should be forbidden to compose like that. (*Pause.*) He got so far away from human life that one day his landlady dumped his suitcase on the doorstep and locked him out. So he found himself in the street.

The pianist gets up, takes dressing gown off, throws it on armchair, goes to piano, sits down and plays.

PROMENADE. GNOMUS

THE PIANIST: He was mostly alone, sitting in an armchair at his friend's house or lying on some bed, with nothing to keep him company but his nightmares. Creative artists *are* solitary. They live on their home-made planets and very few people are willing to undertake such a long journey. Audiences like what they are familiar with. They don't want to waste their time probing the mysteries of the artist's mind and soul. The man in the street prefers comfort to adventure. And art is an endless, infinite journey. Up hill and down dale. (*Looking at the armchair.*) The landscapes of his brain were as strange and distant as the craters on the moon. Now we can travel to the moon. From time to time.

PROMENADE. THE OLD CASTLE

The pianist gets up, goes to armchair, puts dressing gown on and strikes the same posture.

THE PIANIST: What's going on in here? Is that *my* music? I didn't mean *that* when composing *The Pictures*. What *did* I mean? Can't remember. But not that. Not that, I'm sure. Too slow, isn't it? Endless. No wonder they're always running my music down. (*Looking at the piano.*) Who engaged this pianist? Tchaikovsky? To make me the laughing stock of Russia? Is that what you call immortality? (*The pianist gets up, takes dressing gown off and throws it on armchair.*) Artists can't know all the ins and outs of their creations, which continue to grow as Time passes by. A change is as good as a rest. Beethoven is quite different from what he used to be in the nineteenth century. Our knowledge of Kagel and Kafka, of Einstein and Eisenstein, has enriched his sonatas and symphonies. What a refreshing change! Masterpieces are open to the influence of Time. (*Pause.*) Not a new idea. An old castle. But a castle nonetheless! *Il vecchio castello. Il nobile castello.* (*Pause.*) Those baroque fanatics...they fancy living in an old castle...just an old

provincial museum cluttered with copies, armless statues. Old castles ought to be constantly rebuilt, every day, at every performance. *Con mortuis in lingua viva*. To each his own old castle.

The pianist goes to piano, sits down and plays.

PROMENADE. THE TUILERIES

BYDLO

The pianist goes to armchair, picks dressing gown up and puts it on.

THE PIANIST: The Russians. Suffering, starving. The nineteenth century, the twentieth century. Status quo. They come and go. The old and the young, generation after generation. They're not different. As if Time had been done away with. The twenty-first century, the twenty-second century. *Bydlo*. The same cart drawn by the same oxen. *Bydlo*. What a word! *Bydlo*. How to get rid of this word? To remove it from dictionaries? (*The pianist gets up, takes dressing gown off and throws it on the floor.*) *Bydlo*...thundering along like a steam-roller...levelling everything in its path. A headlong blind movement. The Crowd. Nobody depicted its destructive power better than Mussorgsky. In *Boris Godunov*. The French Revolution, the Russian Revolution. Enthusiastic crowds are the same everywhere. As if geography had been done away with. As if Time had been done away with. Status quo. Communism, nazism. (*Pause.*) Democracy. A change is as good as a rest. (*Pointing at armchair.*) Mussorgsky is not the same either. Doesn't look like Repin's portrait at all. Doesn't he look like...Claude Debussy? (*Walking around armchair.*) Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky, Alban Berg, Sergey Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich, Max Ernst, Edvard Munch, Alexander Soljenitzin, William Faulkner, Valery Afanassiev. They all live in him now. (*Pause.*) And also the innumerable victims of human cruelty...all those people who were tortured and butchered in the twentieth century. Our children laugh and play within the cemetery walls. Status quo.

The pianist goes to piano, sits down and plays.

PROMENADE. BALLET OF THE UNHATCHED CHICKENS

SAMUEL GOLDENBERG UND SCHMUYLE

THE PIANIST: The number of possible readings of the Torah is equal to the number of the 600,000 children of Israel who were present at Mount Sinai. In other words, each single Jew approaches the Torah by a path he alone can follow. Samuel Goldenberg, Schmuyle. To each his own Torah. (*The pianist goes to armchair and sits down.*) Better red than dead. Everything seems to be better than death: stupidity, cruelty, ignominy. Why do we cling to life with such abominable energy? Why do we never grow tired of history? (*Pause.*) Does it still make sense, human history? Can we build the future of mankind on our past, on our poisoned memory? On our poisonous memory? On the tear of a child? On the tear of a middle-aged man? On the tear of an old maid? On the death of a maiden? Ah, these Dostoevskian questions! (*Pause.*) Why not? St Petersburg was built on a bog...and on bones. Builders, master builders. To them there's no difference between the sea of troubles and a swamp. Make no bones about bones, do they? (*Pause.*) *Con mortuis in lingua mortua.*

The pianist gets up, goes to piano, sits down and plays.

PROMENADE. A MARKET PLACE IN LIMOGES. CATACOMBS

The pianist gets up.

THE PIANIST: The multitude is always right. Market! Marketability! Prime time TV! To each his own Mc Donald's. As if geography had been done away with. (*Pause.*) Democracy. The same old story. The same new story. A headlong blind movement. *Bydlo. Bydlo.* (*Pause.*) Stupidity and cruelty have discoloured human blood. *Titanic* and suchlike are made and watched by fluffy little nestlings. Unhatched chickens. They've never been born entirely. They cast no shadows. The sun and the moon don't notice their silhouettes. The sun and the moon and the earth ignore them completely. Absolutely. The Milky Way despises them. (*Pause.*) Nothing but art can justify and vindicate our history. An ideal world should be governed by artists: poets, composers. Do ideal worlds exist only in our imagination? Or underwater, like Atlantis? Or in a hospital somewhere, in a dark wood, on the bare mountain where an artist creates his recondite, bewitching, immortal works? Beyond stupidity and brutality!

BABA YAGA. THE BOHATYR GATE OF KIEV

The pianist picks dressing gown up, puts it on and goes out.

1987

Versailles

THE *SYMPHONY* No. 6 IN B MINOR, OPUS 74 (*PATHÉTIQUE*)

On the 21st of April this year I conducted Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* for the first time; the concert took place in Tokyo and was recorded. A few days after my return to France I dozed off at the steering wheel of my car as I was driving along a motorway. Tchaikovsky died eight days after the première of the *Pathétique* that he had conducted himself.

Let us suppose the above paragraph were the finale of my last symphony, its fourth movement. Here is the third movement:

How easy it is to play the piano or any other instrument! You just listen to yourself. A great Russian pianist, Sofronitsky, said he played his best recitals when he was able to listen to himself from afar—as if someone else was playing in his stead.

Conducting an orchestra is even less wearisome. Conductors and their orchestras can play Tchaikovsky's Sixth ten times in a row on a world tour.

Performing artists do not need inspiration. When practising at home they might deal with technical problems at least. Besides, they are allowed to lean upon the author's shoulder, as it were: he supplies all the notes and a multitude of nuances.

Performing artists need not invoke the muses or Apollo.

They can easily murder a piece they perform, but nothing prevents music lovers from enjoying what they listen to: postmodernists maintain that there is no difference between the low and high cultures. Or between good and bad performances. You murder the difference and get away with it.

Playfully entitled *Différance*^{*}—a postmodernist homage to Jacques Derrida—this text was not written about the *Pathétique* and actually has no link with the present essay except that it does not match the opening paragraph, creating a contrast which may remind us of what happens in Tchaikovsky's work: the third movement seems to have been composed for another symphony. Ideally it should be performed by an amateur orchestra at a village fair. (I was delighted to find a discreetly 'dirty' chord in the recording of the Tokyo concert.) In the Soviet film *Tchaikovsky* this piece resounds off-screen while its author, borne shoulder-high, is forthwith awarded an honorary

^{*} 'Ce qui s'écrit ici *différance* marque l'étrange mouvement, l'unité irréductiblement impure d'un *différer* (détour, délai, délégation, division, inégalité, espacement) dont l'économie excède les ressources déclarées du logos classique. C'est ce mouvement qui donne unité aux essais ici enchaînés.' That is how Derrida explains the word he coined in relation to his work *L'écriture et la différence*. In a way this *mouvement* imparts unity to Tchaikovsky's *Symphony* and my essay.

doctorate at Cambridge. And in the very next sequence (or *sequenza*) his solitary figure walks along the snow-covered pavements of St Petersburg; the wind is picking up. It is as if the third movement were played in another country.

Even Shakespeare was unable to reveal the true nature of hope with such uncompromising realism: the word 'hope' is indissolubly associated—at least in the mind of a Christian—with one of the three theological virtues.

*Hope: he is a flatterer,
A parasite, a keeper-back of Death,
Who gently would dissolve the bands of life
Which false Hope lingers in extremity.*
(*Richard II*, II, ii, 69-72)

But in Tchaikovsky's last symphony theological virtues are conspicuous by their absence. Only music is apt to obliterate God in the space of forty-five minutes.

Schopenhauer deplores the longevity of some errors that appeal to the multitude and besmirch the history of mankind for decades, if not for centuries. 'In style, grammar, and orthography,' he writes, 'there are such whims that have a life of only three or four years. In the case of more egregious errors, we are, of course, bound to lament the shortness of human life, but shall always do well to lag behind our own times when we see these about to go backwards. For there are two different ways of not standing *au niveau de son temps*, either below or above them.' Tchaikovsky often remains below his times or any other times as if aware that no times, however auspicious, can accomplish anything except the destruction of former times. In this respect he is the first postmodernist composer.

Even in the nineteenth century a slow pace was advisable, given the outraging results of so-called progress. Tchaikovsky *was* lagging behind the times. His *sequenzas* are naive in comparison with their infinite, ecstatic counterparts in Wagner's *Tristan* whose protagonist strives for nothing, for *nichts*, for night. His yearning is quite different from the sententious monotony of Tchaikovsky's developments which, instead of weaving a tapestry, seem to proclaim that there is no point in climbing up because everything can be found down below. But Wagner brought music to a dead end—with the aid of Schoenberg and his disciples. In a manner of speaking, his genes were less vigorous than those of Tchaikovsky who continues to live in the neoclassical

Stravinsky (*Le baiser d'une fée*) and, along with Schubert and Schumann, in the works of minimalists. *Chi va piano, va sano*.

The world is a spinning die, and everything turns and changes: man is turned into angel, and angel into man, and the head into the foot, and the foot into the head. Thus all things turn and spin and change, this into that, and that into this, the topmost to the undermost, and the undermost to the topmost. For at the root all is one, and salvation inheres in the change and return of things.

(Martin Buber, *Ten Rungs: Hasidic Sayings*, translated by Olga Marx)

In Tchaikovsky's *Fifth* it is demons that turn into angels: eventually the *Fatum*-leitmotiv becomes a triumphant march. In the *Pathétique* all things spin and change, the topmost to the undermost, and the undermost to the topmost—on account of proverbial *sequenzas*. (First movement, the closing of the development; the climax of the finale.) These *sequenzas* have nothing to do with yoga or hysterics; they reflect our life, our feet and head. And Tchaikovsky's monothematism reminds us that at the root all is one and salvation inheres in the change and return of things.

Let us return to the third movement. Should a conductor begin the finale at once—*attaca*—so as to emphasise the contrast? Or should he or she make a long pause?

Suppose you attend a cocktail party where you encounter a woman you loved many years ago. Now she is old and ugly. A shock. *Attaca*.

Heidegger describes a person who comes home after a dinner party where he enjoyed himself. After a while he realises he did *not* enjoy himself as Time continues to obliterate everything both inside and outside. A long pause; a blank space. *Nichts*.

The way in this world is like the edge of a blade. On this side is the underworld, and on that side is the underworld, and the way of life lies between.

(Martin Buber, *Ten Rungs: Hasidic Sayings*)

In the second movement perhaps. The way of life.

September 13, 2005

Versailles

NEVERTHELESS

(Written for a lecture at the end of which this piece by Georges Pelècis was played)

Last month one of my Moscow friends received a telegram from his fellow musicians congratulating him on his sixtieth birthday: 'You are a talented composer and a wonderful man.' He is neither—at least within the bounds of his imaginary world where he enjoys the status of a great composer, which happens to be counterbalanced by 'my evil nature', as he puts it. When saying so he might remember the words attributed to Mozart in Pushkin's *Mozart and Salieri*: 'Genius and an evil deed are two things incompatible.' Of course my friend would never go so far as to murder a human being, even if the latter is not as 'talented' as Mozart. (The word 'talented' is often applied to sexagenarians who, in my opinion, can be either great or second-rate—nothing to write home about.) He might think, however, that an evil nature and genius match each other perfectly, otherwise he would not gloat over his bad character.

What about a good nature and beautiful music? Are they compatible or not? Apparently one does not write a great book with good sentiments so that whatever we create lies beyond good and evil—at least with regard to the genesis of a particular work. The solution to this problem—which is no problem at all—is clear-cut; and yet some continue to lecture on goodies and baddies in the domain of art and elsewhere. The problem I am about to tackle now is far more intricate: Should a creative artist be hot or cold? In other words, can a work of art be analysed in terms of dryness? Of course a piano teacher might say to his or her pupil: 'Too dry—you should moisten this melody a little bit'—meaning that more pedal would be in order. But what about composers and their critics, their listeners?

Georges Pelècis—called Gosha by his friends and next of kin—has recourse to this word when confronted with a piece of music he feels uneasy about. His bias may be linked to the exceptional warmth of his nature, to the 'radical moisture' (*humidum radicale*) which, according to alchemists, works from the heart like the sun in the macrocosm, like God in the 'supracelestial world'. Or does his attitude originate in music itself whose foundations may be moist or dry, for all I know? Do composers have any affinities with alchemists?

Alchemists say that the *lapis* is produced by the unity of divine opposites: *primo*, the sphere of divine unwillingness, non-being and death; *secundo*, the sphere of divine will, being and life. Dionysius, the Sun's shadow, kills and dismembers the alchemist; the Sun-God Apollo raises the alchemist to eternal life.

Words, however appropriate and scholarly, are likely to betray a piece of music, accustomed as they are to ill-treating whatever we come across during our wanderings both inside

and outside ourselves. Nevertheless, music is not impervious to comments and feelings one may voice during a friendly discussion centred upon a sonata or a symphony. Even composers may feel like *showing* their works, let alone speaking about them in the presence of virtual listeners. Gosha spoke about *Nevertheless* and also showed it as I sat at the dinner table in his Riga apartment. He was an alchemist dismembered and raised to eternal life.

The piece is composed for a violin, a piano and a chamber orchestra. The piano part is rueful at first and therefore does not evoke Dionysius *directly*; no violence is audible unless one regards melancholy as a means of destruction. Nor does the violin sound like Apollo—at least during the cadenzas where one hears a supplication, a prayer, an urgent appeal. At some point the violin seems to fall upon its knees so as to address the piano more effectively, more physiologically. At first the piano does not come round to the violin's 'point of view'. To a second plea it responds with two notes that betray uncertainty: the piano is on the verge of a revelation. And then it happens at last or 'nevertheless', as the title of the piece suggests without ambiguity. 'Nevertheless', 'in spite of', 'at long last', 'come hell or high water'. What comes is paradise of course.

In a recording studio one might watch this divine comedy on a screen where dynamics are represented by luminous lines. One line surges upward spasmodically; the other does not even show up at first. The former goes on jumping higher and higher; the latter scarcely makes its appearance. At last both lines reach agreement as they perform a vertical dance, mostly staying in the upper part of the screen.

A woman declares her love to a man who turns a deaf ear to her eloquence, to the sound of her voice. In the long run he yields to her verbal caresses and they kiss each other, blessed by the Sun-God Apollo. (In this short comedy the part of the supplicant is played by a woman only because the violin is feminine in Russian.)

Alongside arpeggios of all kinds, scales are an important element in the domain of minimalist music so that some composers use them almost automatically, with no regard for moisture or warmth. Any ascending scale, they assume, is joyful, provided it is performed with energy and exactitude. But these repetitive scales seldom or never approach what Bach understood by ascension, ecstasy and bliss, as depicted by music graphics. *Nevertheless* proves to be an exception to the rule, all the more so since the descending scales one hears in it are downhearted enough to serve as a foil to their heaven-oriented counterparts.

Words and images are rudimentary in comparison with music that always wins. Let it win once again.

March 11, 2006

Versailles

THE *REQUIEM*

(Written for a lecture at the end of which this piece by Vladimir Martynov was played)

In the history of art a forward movement goes hand in hand with a sort of nostalgia that induces an artist to draw upon his or her predecessors. Only in the twentieth century does one come across a few revolutionary groups—the Dadaists are of their number—which were determined to make a clean sweep of the past. With the advent of neo-classicism, however, an opposite tendency made its appearance and nostalgia became a key sentiment to which Stravinsky, for one, dedicated some of his works. But even he might have thought in terms of the future when engrossed in the *Symphony of Psalms*, for instance. Indeed, his neo-classical works have a more pronounced influence on modern composers than the twelve-tone method which, according to its creator, was to assure the supremacy of German music for a hundred years to come.

Vladimir Martynov thinks in terms of the present and, unlike the distant past, the present is supposed to overlap the future. His post-modern attitude towards art and life in general prompts him to shun history-sanctioned forms such as symphonies, operas and even piano sonatas associated in his mind with concert halls, with antediluvian music spaces. His works are often performed in a huge room (*dom*) where one can enjoy a glass of beer while listening to his wife's ensemble *Opus Post*. Ingmar Bergman said in a television interview, 'What a pity my works are not anonymous.' In *The End of Composers' Days* Martynov speaks of how innovators have been gradually supplanted by imitators—by the composers who skilfully combine traditional, well-known elements to come up with a second-hand truth. For all their lack of originality, these imitators do not become anonymous; they just lose their claim to the unknown, exotic truth. Brought into prominence by Lévi-Strauss, the *bricoleur* makes do with whatever is at hand. His objects—his second-hand objects—are made out of the debris and residue of other creations that he picks up and puts together. But an element of chance, which is a faithful ally of creators (or innovators), enters into his work as well, for he does not have *everything* at hand.

Lévi-Strauss contrasts the work of the *bricoleur* to that of the engineer who creates specialised tools and materials for each new project he embarks upon; the *bricoleur* works with materials that are always second hand. Don't I work with second-hand materials? What are the materials I am using in this essay? Dante put into his *Commedia* whatever he could lay his hands on: St Thomas, troubadours, the *Aeneid*. The requiem as a genre is not inferior to comedy in spite of our aversion to whatever reminds us of death which spoils the fun, to use contemporary jargon. So I have enough material at my disposal to deal with Martynov's opus written in a major key—a

major innovation, considering a propensity of his former and present colleagues to compose this particular Mass in minor keys. What kind of material did *he* use when composing his requiem?

These tercets are from Canto III of the *Paradiso*:

*'Frate, la nostra volontà quieta
virtù di carità, che fa volerne
sol quel ch'avemo, e d'altro non ci asseta.
Se disiassimo esser più superne,
foran discordi li nostri disiri
dal voler di colui che qui ne cerne;
Che vedrai non capere in questi giri,
s'essere in carità è qui necesse,
e se la sua natura ben rimiri.'*
*Anzi è formale ad esto beato esse
tenersi dentro a la divina voglia,
per ch'una fansi nostre voglie stesse;
sì che, come noi sem di soglia in soglia
per questo regno, a tutto il regno piace
com' a lo re che 'n suo voler ne 'nvoglia.
E 'n la sua voluntade è nostra pace:
ell' è quel mare al qual tutto si move
ciò ch'ella cria o che natura face.'*

('Brother, the power of love quiets our will and makes us wish only for that which we have and gives us no other thirst. Did we desire to be more aloft, our longings would be discordant with His will who assigns us here: which you will see is not possible in these circles if to exist in charity here is of necessity, and if you well consider what is love's nature. Nay, it is the essence of this blessed existence to keep itself within the divine will, whereby our wills themselves are made one; so that our being thus from threshold to threshold throughout this realm is a joy to all the realm as to the King, who draws our wills to what He wills; and in His will is our peace. It is that sea to which all moves, both what It creates and what natures makes.')

Thus speaks Piccardia whose fault, if any, imprisons her in a 'low' sphere of Paradise from where she cannot escape. But she has no wish to exchange her truncated bliss for higher ecstasies because she is obedient to the will of the Lord who 'draws our wills to what He wills'. As a young

girl she entered the convent of Saint Clare, but her violent and scheming brother Corso compelled her to leave the convent. Was it *her* fault? Anyway, the *Requiem* I am pondering over sounds like a long quotation—an Italian text translated into Russian or English. Corelli, Bellini, Verdi. All these composers seem to have taken part in the process thanks to which this opus saw the light of day. Martynov says that, when engrossed in his requiem, he drew upon whatever is beautiful and joyful in European music. A forty-minute-long quotation. Not quite.

Martynov is fond of Okegem and Pierre de la Rue, of their requiems. But he does not quote them—not literally, not musically. What he does has little in common with the procedure adopted by Pierre Menard who, in Borges' famous story, re-writes *Don Quixote* word by word. His novel is an exact copy of what Cervantes wrote in the seventeenth century. Martynov does not *copy* his predecessors as he explores the soul and body of someone who was lucky enough to land in Paradise, in one of its spheres. Let us suppose that it is the sphere of the Moon where Piccardia is placed because of vows broken or imperfectly performed. She knows that Creation is impaired by the wicked, but the attitude she adopts may remind one of what Leibniz says about our world which, in his opinion, is the best of all possible worlds. At any rate it has a greater surplus of good over evil than any other possible world. God could have created a world without evil, but it would not be so good as the actual world for the simple reason that some great goods are logically bound up with certain evils. But for the *Inferno's* dusky circles, the elect would not shine so brightly in the *Paradiso*.

*Confutatis maledictis,
Flammis acribus addictis:
Voca me cum benedictis.*

*(When the wicked are confounded,
Doomed to flames of woe unbounded,
Call me, with Thy saints surrounded.)*

So even *Confutatis* is written in a major key: the elect gloat over the punishment undergone by evildoers who have always acted as a foil to their numerous virtues. Why doesn't Martynov claim to have taken down this opus from dictation? Why not add to the list of his models Anton Bruckner? But archangels would not have dictated to Martynov such a piece, for they have no direct knowledge of death. And they are unlikely to sing these words:

*Ingemisco, tamquam reus:
Culpa rubet vultus meus:
Supplici parce, Deus.*

*(Guilty now I pour my moaning,
All my shame with anguish owning;
Spare, O God, Thy suppliant groaning.)*

So the *Requiem* is composed by a spirit that used to live and suffer on earth; or by a human whose knowledge of what a spirit might feel in the Hereafter knows no bounds—a feat worthy of Enoch, Dante and Swedenborg. The suffering is a thing of the past and yet the spirit cannot help mulling over it as it flies around its allotted sphere.

*Uomini poi, a mal più ch'a bene usi,
fuor mi rapiron de la dolce chiostra:
Iddio si sa qual poi mia vita fusi.*
*(Then men, more used to evil than to good, snatched me from the sweet cloister; and God knows
what then my life became.)*

These men or women, the wicked. They must have been punished already. But for my suffering on earth, I wouldn't be so happy here. Actually I do know what my life has become—in the long run. Many affirm that life begins only in the Hereafter compared with which our earthly existence is just a shadow. A shadowy photograph would mirror it more or less faithfully. But why should anything mirror it? Joy is everywhere and whatever doesn't fit into Paradise where I have been living for some time makes no sense. All my suffering is just another shade of joy I experience twenty-four hours a day, eternally. For earthly creatures everything is black or white, but here everything is white. Always. So everything is white on earth as well. A pure white rose.

*Mors stupebit et natura,
Cum resurget creatura,
Judicanti responsura.*

*(Death is struck and nature quaking,
All Creation is awaking,*

To its Judge an answer making.)

Death doesn't exist. Creation is always wakeful and watchful. All creatures listen to the voice of our Lord. And we answer Him without waiting for the Last Judgement. We sing His praises all day long and there's no night in Paradise. No death, no night.

*Dies irae, dies illa
Solvat saeculum in favilla:
Teste David cum Sibylla.*

*(Day of wrath and doom impending,
David's word with Sibyl's blending!
Heaven and earth in ashes ending!)*

What does it matter now! Paradise is everywhere and the ashes have been turned into sparks.

*Di corno in corno e tra la cima e l'basso
i movien lumi, scintillando forte
nel congiugnersi insieme e nel trapasso*
*(From horn to horn and between the top and the base, lights were moving that sparkled brightly
as they met and passed...)*

These lights are moving around the image of the Cross.

*E come giga e arpa, in temprata tesa
di molte corde, fa dolce tintinno
a tal da cui la nota non è intesa,
così da' lumi che lì m'apparinno
s'accogliea per la croce una melode*
*(And so viol and harp, strung with many cords in harmony, chime sweetly for one who does not
catch the tune, so from the lights that appeared to me there a melody gathered around the
cross...)*

If the music we are about to hear has anything in common with this melody, Martynov is no composer. At least he is at odds with Mozart, Berlioz, Brahms and Verdi. Suppose he did compose the *Requiem*—from the point of view of someone who placidly recalls our trials and tribulations. The point is Martynov does not *recall* our life: he is in the midst of his enemies who insult and mock him. (The discomfiture of a revolutionary.) Cherubini was the last great composer to have written a requiem in a major key. But he did not know Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*; nor did he experience the Second World War—either directly or through books and films. How does Martynov justify his joyful stance?

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis. Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion, et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem: exaudi orationem dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.

(Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine on them. A hymn becometh Thee, O God, in Sion and a vow shall be paid to Thee in Jerusalem. O hear my prayer: all flesh shall come to Thee. Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine on them.)

The lights are moving around the image of the Cross.

'Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine on them.' Doesn't this verse call for a celebration? What kind of celebration?

Pastor Ron concluded the service by inviting those who wanted to be 'blessed' to raise their hands and 'move forward in an orderly fashion'. Two strong men, one of them Pastor Ron's muscular assistant, got up and walked systematically from one person to the next. Pastor Ron approached each man and women anxious to be blessed and 'receive Jesus'. He pushed each backwards, shouting, 'Find the Lord,' causing them to fall into the strong waiting arms of the two men. This went on for another forty minutes or so before the service was over. The effects of this emotional event lingered long after Pastor Ron left the podium. Kara, holding onto the side of her chair, was squatting and jumping, crying and laughing, while another woman was shaking uncontrollably, emitting unrecognisable sounds. A man, his face flushed bright red, was gasping for breath as he swayed back and forth, muttering, 'Praise the Lord.'

Barbara Victor, *The Last Crusade*

The sounds we are about to hear are recognisable. Anyway this opus has nothing to do with born-again Christians and totally disregards those happy-clappy individuals who live in Paradise under

false pretences. This opus post makes us experience what vanished from the earth a few centuries ago. The earth *was* reduced to ashes at some point, but these ashes sparkle as they fly around the area where *lux perpetua* shines on Dante, Shakespeare and other creators of human mythology. Aren't they *bricoleurs* in their own right? Myth, like *bricolage*, is an assembly of disparate elements.

And what about Martynov? Didn't he contribute to an archetype nearly forgotten by earthly creatures? His *Requiem* is a spectrum of joy, a kaleidoscope of rapture.

Chiaro mi fu allora come ogni dove

In cielo è paradiso, etsi la grazia

Del sommo ben d'un modo non vi piove.

(Then was it clear to me how everywhere in Heaven is Paradise, even if the grace of the Supreme Good does not there rain down in one same measure.)

January 22, 2007

Versailles

HOW DOES A PIECE OF MUSIC AFFECT OUR SOUL?

'Whenever I hear a piece of music my soul seems to be lying on a beach like a pebble. A wave comes and rolls over my soul; the wave departs and my soul yearns after it. Another wave comes and engulfs my soul. That's how I feel a piece of music. Coming and going. Didn't Heidegger say something to this effect?'

I have taken part in many conversations focused upon music and the way it affects human beings, animals and plants. 'I don't believe in God because we have no need of Him—music is enough.' 'I think it's music that created the world.'

What Heidegger says about a work of art, about its tendency to approach us and flee our embrace, may indeed be applied to God (and to a capricious woman). As described by Nicholas of Cusa, God is 'touched without being touched'. Over and over again Cusanus asks himself how God the Infinite can be grasped by a human being whose finitude is beyond any doubt? If for an instant we do feel the presence of God, His immediate presence, our disappointment will be all the greater when we find ourselves alone, forsaken, cursed.

'You're right about those waves,' I chimed in. 'A sound wave penetrates your body while a piece of music continues to resound in a concert hall, in your room. Does this wave remain inside your body—or your soul, for that matter? It does not. You admitted as much yourself. I call this phenomenon the "space of non-understanding". Actually in Russian it sounds much better—*nedoponimanie*. To understand in part, darkly, through a glass. The piece of music is both inside and outside. Motionless. It's your feeling that comes and goes. Or your soul, if you wish. Do you think your soul stays within you all the time? It may leave you now and then—during your sleep, for instance. Or when you forget about it. But music reminds you of your soul, doesn't it?'

A piece of music is ungraspable, although it may come so close to us that we get the feeling it is at our disposal. 'Infinite', 'enigmatic', 'unfathomable', 'unreachable'—I often utter these words when a piece of music is under discussion, as if influenced by medieval philosophers. 'Will you unfold for us the mystery of Beethoven's brain?' I was asked in Japan.

'Young pianists do that perfectly,' I answered. 'Music seems to lie in the palms of their hands. You're allowed to touch or even swallow it. An object you acquire in a shop.'

'*Stille Wüste*', '*Meer seiner Grundlosigkeit*'. '*Gott ist namenlos, denn von ihm kann niemand etwas sagen noch verstehen*' (Meister Eckehart). A silent desert. God is groundless. A bottomless sea. God is nameless, so nobody can either say or understand anything of Him. Music is also nameless, in a way.

Music is all the more unreachable since it *can* be reached every now and then; or rather, it reaches *into* us. And then it retreats like a wave, going home—back to the bottomless sea.

'Everything is God,' says Spinoza. And what about hate and envy, murder and grief? But Spinoza does not think in terms of comings and goings because the world where grief presides over other sentiments is unsubstantial, non-existent. Invisible men and women come and go through that world without leaving tracks in the snow or elsewhere. (*Les pas sur la neige* was not composed for them.) And only waves frolic on beaches.

The other day I saw a programme devoted to Beethoven's *Ninth*. The finale was played on various instruments, on many occasions. The main theme was distorted beyond recognition, sung as it was by Chinese and Romanians, Americans and Greeks. 'Blasphemy,' said my friend.

'No harm done,' I told him. 'But if the symphony is performed in a legendary concert hall—'

People go to Musikverein and expect to hear *the Ninth*. What they hear, however, sounds like a gift-wrapped object.

They come and go: conductors, orchestras, music lovers, usherettes. And music is motionless. Today the *Ninth* cannot be *heard* in a concert hall. Let the Vietnamese sing it to their heart's content. Something will endure.

February 17, 2006

Versailles

A PROGRAMME

Beethoven: *Bagatelles op. 119* N°1, N°2, N°3, N°4

Liszt: *Vier Kleine Klavierstücke, La Lugubre Gondola II, Les nuages gris*

Debussy : Trois préludes : *Voiles, Des pas sur la neige, La cathedrale engloutie*

Beethoven, *Marcia Funebre* from the *Sonata in A Flat Major*, op. 26

Chopin, *The Funeral March* from the *Sonata in B Flat Minor*, op. 35

Wagner-Liszt, *The Solemn March to the Holy Grail* from *Parsifal*

Liszt: *Funérailles*

I usually devote my programmes to one composer only. This time I am devoting it to Liszt surrounded by his colleagues – in the past as well as in the future. He learnt a lot from Beethoven and his late pieces are somehow reflected in the bagatelles I shall be playing at the beginning of the programme. And Debussy learnt a lot from Liszt.

I am not as fond of mirrors as I used to be; the same goes for labyrinths which every artist has to explore without talking too much about them. This recital, however, is a hall of mirrors where even funeral marches echo each other. There is therefore one funeral march in this programme; and only one bagatelle. Any life can be defined in these terms.

Only Wagner's *Solemn March to the Holy Grail* stands apart – beyond the hall of mirrors. It reflects neither life nor death. Quantum mechanics postulates a multitude of worlds that may interfere with our daily rounds. Does this music belong to one of these other worlds? Or is it just the Holy Grail and the temple where it shines?

However, there is one mirror in *Les Funérailles* that reflects the Holy Grail.

INTERPRETATION

CREATION AND INTERPRETATION

*Con tanta servitù, con tanto tedio
e con falsi concetti e gran periglio
dell'alma, a sculpir qui cose divine.*

(To sculpt divine things here can be done only with great slavery and great tedium, with false ideas and with grave danger to the soul.)

We talk eagerly about our soul as if its existence had been proved once and for all by the Ancient Greeks or by Leonardo, Dante or any other representative of the era known as the Renaissance or *Vozrozhdenie*. According to some philosophers and theologians, however, it is better not to prove anything in the domain of religion because if we do manage to prove something – the existence of God, for instance – our faith will disappear from the Earth forever.

So we believe in the existence of what is called ‘soul’ and even affirm that it is material to some extent; but no material substance is immortal so that we had better not provide the soul with atoms. Michelangelo, for one, believed that one should not compete with God by creating works of art the existence of which might hint at the deficiency of Creation.

Is the existence of the soul proved by UFOs and their interference in our earthly life? Some say that extra-terrestrials are prepared to help us as long as we remain kind to them and make no attempt to deprive their bodies of what Michelangelo might have called ‘divine rights’. Even our thoughts are supposed to be unsullied, unspoiled by malicious intentions. Did the two pilots intend to destroy the alien spacecraft? However brief and fragile, this stratagem seems to have backfired on these disrespectful warriors. And what about creative artists? Do they infringe upon God’s prerogatives? Is their inspiration a sign of disrespect? Do they partly destroy the harmony of the cosmos by adding a few finishing touches to it?

If you perform a Beethoven sonata, you are likely to be held back by the composer – if you are not respectful enough of the signs you see in his score. It is God Himself Who holds you back if your sonata does not correspond to His ideas. Once your labours are over, however, your work rightfully, almost *legally* settles down in the universe. And young pianists can tamper with it to their heart’s content: God will not take the trouble to punish them. And only the composer will endeavour to halt this act of profanity while angrily turning in his grave.

Anyway, it is more exciting to struggle with God than with Beethoven.

DIFFÉRANCE

(Homage to Jacques Derrida)

How easy it is to play the piano or any other instrument! You just listen to yourself. A great Russian pianist, Sofronitsky, said he played his best recitals when he was able to listen to himself from afar—as if someone else was playing in his stead.

Conducting an orchestra is even less wearisome.

Performing artists do not need inspiration. When practising at home, they rely upon the text which gives them an opportunity to deal with technical problems at least. Besides, they are allowed to lean upon the author's shoulder, as it were: he supplies all the notes.

Performing artists need not invoke muses or Apollo.

They can easily murder a piece they perform, but nothing prevents music lovers from enjoying what they listen to: postmodernists maintain that there is no difference between the low and high cultures. Or between good and bad performances. You murder the difference and get away with it.

YOUNG PERFORMERS

I

Children are carrying our genes into the future where they may mishandle them or even do away with our instincts and gifts altogether. I wish I could lay my hands on the child who was responsible for the total disappearance of Beethoven's genes to which Anton Webern yearned to build a monument. (Berlioz, Brahms, Wagner and Schoenberg put his genes on permanent display.) Of course a lot of children might have been involved in the process of destruction—an army of children, an entire generation.

We entrust our children with the safekeeping of the future because we cannot do otherwise: our words and deeds are not biological enough to disseminate our genes effectively, materially. Whatever these emissaries may accomplish in the decades to come is beyond our control. However, we should co-ordinate their handling of the past which is still under our control, even if we are too old to play the piano or give lectures on music. Child prodigies may be truly prodigious, but their experience is too poor to help them understand Beethoven's last sonatas: they know nothing or next to nothing about *Tod und Verklärung* (death and transfiguration). 'You'll understand these sonatas only at the age of sixty,' my college professor told me once. At fifty-eight I understand them in part, darkly. The point is you have to *understand* these sonatas, not only *feel* them.

Rimbaud wrote astounding lyrics at the age of seventeen; he mapped out his own maturity. And mankind adjusted to his maturity. (The future is open-minded.) Performing artists cannot achieve the same results because they are called upon to project their death instinct into the past and not into the future. And the past has its own pattern that does not welcome any death instinct, any talent, any virtuosity. Only experience and knowledge can teach us what this pattern is about. Besides, neither Rimbaud nor Schubert had to perform other people's deaths; they just allowed their own death instinct to conquer the world.

Only Time can inject into us Beethoven's genes. A piece composed by Schubert at twenty-five comes into its own when performed by a middle-aged or an old maestro.

These youngsters play all over the world and elderly concertgoers rapturously watch a Romeo or a Juliet—their feet hardly reach the pedals—dispose of Schubert's sonatas. Our mature concertgoers, who might have heard Gilels or Michelangeli, stand up and applaud because they do not *listen*. They just *look* at Romeo and Juliet, at the carriers of their genes. The former is in a garden, the latter on a balcony. What the concertgoers may hear during those concerts comes

down to a few components of so-called piano technique: octaves, scales, arpeggios. But Romeo and Juliet were not supposed to perform Schubert's sonatas.

II

What should young pianists do, in your opinion?

They should write music or poetry or both. They should learn 32 Beethoven sonatas and 48 preludes and fugues from *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* in their teenage years. They should study philosophy. They should remember that it's easier to play at the age of thirteen than in your thirties or forties when your experience catches up with you. How to mirror it in your music-making? There are so many elements at your disposal. And you're no longer naive, spontaneous, touching.

What should they avoid at all cost?

Going to concert halls instead of listening to great pianists and conductors of the past at home. Playing competitions before they're mature enough to profit from them. (A good test for nerves, and a test of the tolerance threshold.) Playing too many concerts. Enjoying triumphs—the whole world can be mistaken. I wonder when our customers are right nowadays.

What should they do to become great?

There are no great artists around them, no great professors, no great listeners. And you cannot become great on your own. But no one forbids them to love music.

Is there an absolute yardstick by which one can measure the quality of a pianist?

Kant would have said, 'No.' But had he been given an opportunity to compare Michelangeli with any contemporary pianist, he might have realised he was wrong.

April 26, 2006

Versailles

TO DRAIN THE SWAMP

In almost every introduction he appended to his Russian works, Nabokov touched upon the Viennese delegation, alias Freud, Freudians and Lacanians. Obviously, he was determined not to miss any opportunity to stigmatise their methods which, especially when applied to literary works and their mysteries, were bound to wreak havoc on our brains. Nor did Karl R. Popper take Freud's notions seriously, but at least he accepted their fairy-tale bias. After all, one might analyse a fairy tale – Nabokov's definition of a literary masterpiece – in fairy-tale terms without being exposed to Prokofievian sarcasms. Well, I have no aversion to the Viennese delegation and its members: I neither read their literary studies nor call on shrinks.

There is no denying that Nabokov is an honourable man. Trump, on the other hand, is dishonourable in whatever sphere he touches upon. Yet I do not mind using his punchy slogans such as, 'Let's drain the swamp' or even 'Lock her up' enthusiastically chanted by his supporters. There are many swamps in this world of ours and the one I am about to focus upon – my Viennese delegation, as it were – concerns me intimately and excruciatingly. Today, our concert halls have a lot of affinities with swamps, but no one intends to drain them. In other words, there are no Donald Trumps in the world of music; only Hillary Clintons have pride of place. And there are many delegations: a Russian delegation, a Chinese delegation, a French delegation – you name it. Trump's notions and suggestions scandalise a lot of people, but no one seems to be upset when listening to how a young pianist literally tears to shreds an awesome sonata or a fragile mazurka. Russian, Chinese and French pianists (violinists, cellists) may remind one of a Bible-sanctified swarm of locusts. At least one might get the feeling that there is such a thing as a five-year (or one-year, or one-month) plan as a result of which an army of young geniuses invade concerts halls, record shops, television screens and the Internet. Is there really a market out there for another young genius? The answer being obviously 'yes', no one asks this question.

These geniuses are launched in a blaze of publicity – often to the detriment of old masters. I once chanced upon such a publicity gimmick in Munich, of all places. One of the leading newspapers advised its readers to forget Horowitz, Gilels, Gould and *even* Kissin, for the simple reason that they cannot hold a candle to Trifonov. Of course you do not have to forget Dante if you fall in love with Shakespeare, and anyway there is enough room for everybody, as many 'music lovers' say when you point out that there are too many worthless youngsters around. Never mind destroyers. Never mind Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert.

Out of sheer curiosity – I do not trust publicity stunts – I watched Trifonov's performance of Beethoven's *Sonata in C Minor*, op. 111. (Carnegie Hall, Deutsche Grammophon, as usual.)

The first page was more or less all right. But any student can play this page acceptably, provided he or she listens to the chords instead of fidgeting about. Well, Trifonov made a terrible mess of the rest of the Sonata, but during the performance he looked like Mephistopheles, except when he played *pianissimo*. In those moments his looks and attitude might remind one of an angel. As to my train of thought, I kept wondering whether either Mephistopheles or angels sweat buckets.

I also watched Trifonov's performance of Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz*. (Mephistopheles playing at home.) To tell the truth, I do not think Mephistopheles would miss so many notes, losing time and space all the time, throughout the piece. Be that as it may, I am not prepared to forget Horowitz, Gilels and Gould. As for Kissin, I do not need Alzheimer's to let him slide into oblivion. Karl R. Popper thinks that Freud's theories and notions are not scientific because they cannot be refuted. But Trifonov and his Chinese, French, Korean, Georgian and Japanese counterparts can and must be refuted. (Not *all* of them, though.) And this is not a matter of taste, as many unprofessional concert goers think.

During my visit to China I was asked what I thought about leafing through music scores on the stage either unaided or with the help of a page-turner. I suppose this question refers to Lang Lang's recent fear of memory lapses. Actually, if you do not renounce the use of music text during your concerts, you make things easier not only for your memory, but also for the rest of your brain and for your fingers. Indeed, it is much easier to play a virtuoso passage if you can follow its intricacies with your eyes. And, as Richter pointed out, all pianos and fortes, all *crescendi* and *diminuendi*, are just in front of you. What is more, the audience does not seem to mind; and yet the ritual associated in our collective mind with piano recitals does not resist this crutch-like practice.

In Pushkin's *Egyptians Nights* a Neapolitan poet pays a visit to his Russian counterpart whose Petersburg-centred life effortlessly combines poetic inspiration with balls and other social gatherings. In his colleague's presence, the Neapolitan poet displays a rare gift: he improvises a poem on a theme nonchalantly suggested by his host. The poem thus created is one of the best Russian poems. A pianist plays a piece composed a long time ago. And even if we hear a recent opus, we are under the impression that it is being improvised for our sake, on the spur of the moment. I was quite prepared to suspend my disbelief during Gilels' and Michelangeli's recitals. I have no idea what I would experience when watching a sort of dance on music rests. Luckily for me, I no longer go to concert halls.

One might be tempted to compare my harshness and rashness to the way Donald Trump was talking to Hillary Clinton. ('You'd be in jail.') The point is I forget my manners only when faced with a matter of life and death. And music-making is at death's door. Anyway, the life of

music is more important than social niceties. In the booklet I appended to my recent Mozart CD, I explain why I do not draw the line at naming names. (But I do draw the line at saying, ‘Lock her and him up.’) In this essay, however, I shall limit my discourtesy to the names of Trifonov, Lang Lang, Kissin and Hélène Grimaud.

Once I talked to a French music lover about today’s standards of music-making. She nodded and said, ‘Yes, everything has always gone down the drain. But there are exceptions – Hélène Grimaud.’ I had no alternative but to add that blue-eyed pianists were no exceptions to this particular rule. The point is that Hélène Grimaud is not the only blue-eyed pianist in the world and the woman I was talking to did her best not to understand my allusion. So why beat about the bush?

Why write an essay on our rotten kingdom of music? Indeed, I would rather continue to enlarge upon so-called grand narratives: space-time, death, memory, identity and its crises. Besides, I do realise I have always fought a losing battle in the world where neophytes invariably opt for music-without-toil tactics. There are far more destroyers than preservers in our midst. And there are heavy odds against people safeguarding whatever remains of the Golden Age of music-making. Be that as it may, I feel duty-bound to have a go at draining the swamp, and this cannot be done properly unless one forgoes political correctness and naming-no-name rituals. I am quite aware of brick walls and the fragility of my head. But I am also aware of how important it is to sow doubts, even if that means sowing the seeds of one’s downfall.

Anyway, the Ancient Japanese were keen on losing battles and worshipped those who fought them.

GREAT PIANISTS OF THE PAST

I remember what I experienced when listening to a Rachmaninov recording for the first time. He played some of his own pieces and a Chopin waltz. And I remember the concerts Michelangeli gave at the Moscow Conservatory Hall in 1964. What did I experience when Michelangeli touched the first notes of Bach's *Chaconne*? A shock. Ecstasy. The word 'ecstasy' should be uttered more often in connection with music—*always*, as a matter of fact. It was as if I had never heard or seen the object looming up ahead of me: I was sitting in the seventh row. A sort of UFO. Then I realised the piano was a warm, living creature I could fall in love with and caress.

Van Gogh said his aim was to express the feelings of a human being—not the ideas and ideals of any school of painting. The pair of shoes he painted is more alive than any pair of *real* shoes—at least Heidegger thought so. Rachmaninov, Horowitz, Sofronitsky, Gilels, Michelangeli, Glenn Gould. Their interpretations are more real than anything—more real than the computer into which I am feeding this text. And my memories are far more real than anything I can hear nowadays in concert halls.

I do not think children are born untalented at the end of our century, but anyway no one looks for talent any longer. Gone are the days of Sol Hurok and other indefatigable talent scouts—the seekers of musical truth. Those who are destined—or rather *designated*—to become stars are often chosen at random, on the spur of the moment. Human beings cannot live without faith. Now they believe in prestigious record companies and television hosts. All over the world some people always shout 'Bravo' even after a most frightful concert. Every such shout is an insult to great artists of the past, to the standards they set for the future.

I cannot bring myself to praise my living colleagues merely out of politeness: I would hate to be impolite towards the dead. Montaigne wrote that nobody had to give utterance to *every* thought. 'But whatever *is* said should be true.' In our decadent epoch *everything* should be said, I think; every truth should be told out loud. (That is what I call 'real politeness': one should be polite towards one's own ideals.) The more we speak about our own decadence the better. Only by brooding on our mediocrity can we pave the way to the 'return of the living dead'.

I often say to young pianists, 'What a pity you'll never hear Michelangeli: no recording of his can give one an idea of how his piano sounded. What a pity you'll never hear Gilels. And I heard him in his flat, in his room.' Among the newborn one can stumble upon a few promising ducklings who cannot however mature into swans without an appropriate *Stimmung* created only by the public demand for greatness and by great artists.

I wonder what Rachmaninov's piano sounded like in concert halls. I had an opportunity to hear Horowitz live. And I was fortunate enough to attend the last performance of the legendary Russian pianist Sofronitsky; I was twelve years old.

Here is the poem I wrote upon learning about Michelangeli's death:

*The birth of a great artist
Is never announced on TV:
For all their omniscience,
Journalists cannot
Predict the future.*

*Actually
They're quite indifferent
To future masterpieces,
For art is neither a bullet
Nor a president's interview.*

*But they're fond of death—
An important item of news—
So that even an artist
Might appear on television
Alongside a row of corpses.
His story might be told
Before some fashion parade
And a record-breaking pole vault.*

*'The music world has lost—'
They didn't bother to say
What you had died of.*

*I unexpectedly saw you
Playing Debussy's prelude,
Danseuses de Delphes,*

(A few notes, only an excerpt)
In the evening news.
Broadcast from the Hereafter...
Or so it seemed at first.

Is your Hereafter
Just a video-cassette?
A laser disc, at best?
Chopin's Berceuse?

Or something
You've never played?
The Diabelli Variations?

1997

Versailles

SOFRONITSKY

I was lucky enough, at the age of twelve, to attend one of Sofronitsky's last recitals. In those days I was much more interested in physics than in music. So I braced myself for a boring evening and went to the Small Conservatoire Hall in the company of my teacher. What I heard, however, reminds me now of Mozart's well-known remark: 'Sometimes I can hear a whole symphony in one single moment. These are the happiest moments of my life.' I still remember how Sofronitsky abolished Time that evening, adding another touch—an invisible yet audible touch—to Borges' refutation of Time. The recital sounded like one harmony, which was a feat in itself, considering that he played Liszt's *Sonata in B Minor* among other things. One harmony, one moment—one of the happiest moments in my life.

As a true romantic artist, Sofronitsky greatly relied on his inspiration so that one had the feeling he was improvising, creating the pieces he performed. Even his recordings seem to be different every time I listen to them as if they were alive—better still, divinely inspired. For all their technical, Soviet-era deficiencies, they have also preserved his legendary sound. After all, Dante and Shakespeare cannot be spoiled by bad translations.

1995

Versailles

HOMAGE TO SVIATOSLAV RICHTER

Last July, at a summer festival in Belgium, I performed my play based on Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. After the performance the artistic director of the festival told me, half-jokingly, 'We should sign a contract right now. Next year I want you to do your *Kreisleriana*.' I was about to tell her that one of the protagonists of the play—the puppet—had got lost in the suburbs of Zagreb (and that puppet was my life-size doppelgänger, not a Salzburg marionette). But there were too many people around and I said nothing.

Upon my return home, however, I decided to write another version of *Kreisleriana*—a one-man show this time. (I am not likely to get lost in the suburbs of Zagreb, am I?) I kept dragging my feet: at the end of July the weather was splendid and I did not feel like writing anything. There was only one rainy day and, instead of taking my customary walk, I embarked upon my new *Kreisleriana*. I sat down at my computer around 3 p.m. and got up past midnight. Naturally enough, I was exhausted and sleepy. But I did not fall asleep, contrary to my expectations. And since I am not accustomed to day-dreaming at night, I got to my feet again and resumed my work, hoping to finish it before dawn. I did finish it before dawn—around 5 a.m. Here is the ending:

I'm leaving you. But I'm leaving my recordings behind. My Space and Time. My immortality.

Two days later I learnt that Sviatoslav Richter had died of a heart attack the same night, around 5 a.m.

My new play is a hymn to pianists, which may seem rather odd, considering my life-long preference for composers and creative artists in general. I do think that creative artists are far more important than interpreters, for they write (or compose) the history of the human brain; whereas interpreters merely place masterpieces in Space and Time. (For example: November 26, 1997, Musikverein, Vienna.) In the play, however, I express the opposite view. My protagonist talks about the *physical* aspect of live performances—the wave energy one is exposed to in concert halls.

Well do I recall the physical sensations I experienced during Richter's concerts in Moscow. Alongside many other students I aspired to become his doppelgänger. Not a life-size one, needless to say—just a Tom Thumb. My only regret is that, hypnotised and almost crushed by Richter's musical power, I missed a lot of talented pianists and violinists. And so did most concertgoers, alas. In the sixties there was no musical pluralism in Russia. The people who would

never have idolised a Tsar, let alone a First Party Secretary, worshipped Richter like a deity. And their religion was monotheistic.

I was not personally acquainted with him. But I attended at least a hundred of his concerts and that 'musical field' might have ultimately engineered our paranormal, fourth-dimensional, Kreislerianesque meeting. (The 'parapsychological aspect' of live performances.) Incidentally, Richter never played the Schumann piece.

What a pity I shall never hear a great pianist again. Should I have entitled this tribute to Richter's art *The Last of the Mohicans*?

What a pity I have never heard a great conductor. What physical sensations would I have experienced at Furtwängler's concert?

1998

Versailles

EMIL GILELS

Not one person in a hundred knows how to be silent and listen, no, nor even to conceive what such a thing means. Yes, only then can you detect, beyond the fatuous clamour, the silence of which the universe is made.

Beckett, *Molloy*

Nowadays silence has become a rare phenomenon that is energetically set upon by various machines, machine guns and the twittering of human voices. Silence is out of our reach because we have forgotten how to listen to it. As if brushing it aside, we fill in the pauses that turn up here and there. Silence withdraws into itself, punishing us for our nonchalant scorn. The instrumentalists who opt for fast tempos seem to apprehend the absence of notes. All the time they move their fingers or vocal cords to sidestep the chasms at the bottom of which there lies the source of music, its eternal mystery. I often say that silence is the foundations of music. Recently I found a similar thought in a work of the writer who remains, however, beyond the scope of my usual readings—François Mauriac. I was not surprised in the least: my idea is perfectly banal. I am rather surprised that musicians do not express it in every interview. All you have to do is guard against any noise without stopping to listen to yourself and the world. And gradually music comes into existence.

Like nobody else, Emil Grigorievich knew how to worship and handle silence. Even his way of speaking testified to this knowledge, for he often interrupted his speech to let the people around him meditate on what had been said and also listen to silence. Not only did he speak musically but music literally spoke through his voice, his manners, his thoughts; it never forsook him, not for an instant—a beautiful example of requited love. Even in his jokes one could hear music—something akin to the technique *perlé* which was one of his numerous fortes.

According to my Japanese friend, there has been no pianist like Emil Grigorievich in the history accessible to us. Indeed it is not difficult to reach such a conclusion upon analysing all available recordings. No pianist seems to have had such a command of the instrument without insufficiencies and blind spots. One of the giants in this field, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, did not have the dynamic range comparable to what I heard once at the Big Conservatoire Hall. That night Emil Grigorievich rounded off his programme with Liszt's *Spanish Rhapsody*. I have never heard such a *forte* either at the Conservatoire or elsewhere. Even the Berlin Philharmonic under Karajan's baton did not make the air resound so mightily. As for the use of the pedal, Gilels' only rival was again Michelangeli; and only Rachmaninov's recordings disclose to us the inner essence

of rhythm so implacably, with the same determination. But, I repeat, no pianist has had at their disposal *all* these qualities: the refined pedal, an incomparable dynamic range that seemed to include both six pianos and six fortes, the divine sound that had no counterpart in nature, *perlé*, octaves, trills. I once asked Emil Grigorievich how to play trills. He said they should be played slowly: even in trills one might be able to hear silence, its serene, unruffled presence. Garrulous trills are obnoxious. The way Emil Grigorievich practised the instrument also reveals his intimate bond with silence. In contrast to Richter, who repeated the same passage over and over again, he never made his neighbours wonder, 'Will he ever drop with exhaustion?' Whenever I go away from the piano and sit down on a divan to hear the piece I am learning with the 'inner ear', I remember my teacher, his habits, his sonorous silence. He taught me to hear not only music but also life itself; or rather, he taught me to hear music in life. I wish I could say there is nothing in the world except music. Whatever happens in it is music. Even death is music.

Some maintain that Gilels was above all a virtuoso. He *was* a virtuoso in the highest and noblest sense of the term, being different in this respect—in *all* respects that is—from contemporary virtuoso pianists, dubbed by promoters 'the athletes of the piano', who just play fast and have no inkling of how the instrument should sound and how to use the pedal. These so-called virtuosos are not acquainted with many components making up the notion of virtuoso playing. And since they violate silence as soon as they sit down at the piano—and before, and after—often their fast tempos produce no effect. What these 'spectacular' tempos boil down to is a lump of notes. These pianists do not listen to the music they perform and consequently hear no silence in it. One should play Gilels' recording of Chopin's *Etude in F Minor*, Opus 25, to learn what piano-listening amounts to, when demonstrated by a great pianist. And what about the way he listened to Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Grieg? Can one, upon the testimony of his recordings (and concerts), affirm that he was the greatest musician among pianists?

Many had the feeling that Emil Grigorievich was a restrained, unnatural person. But how could a man who played so naturally turn out to be unnatural in everyday life? Why confide in strangers anyway? Our drawn-out conversations which often lasted far into the night seemed to prove that I was no stranger to him. Does music depend on the ways and characters of the people who are professionally involved with it? Perhaps not: Wagner's example is sufficient to deter one from prying into composers' lives. When prying into Gilels' life, however, one is sure to be struck by his natural approach to everyday events—as if his musical style were spreading around him. A lot can be said about his humanity, but I am prevented from doing so by his own modesty, by his unwillingness to display his generosity in public.

I cannot refrain, however, from revealing a story told by his son-in-law, Peter Nikitenko. Several times a year Emil Grigorievich asked Peter to depose flowers on the tombs of the composers buried at the *Novodevichye* Cemetery in Moscow. I know several people who, upon arriving in a city they have never visited, rush towards the nearest cemetery: they are tomb collectors. But those who can *hear* cemeteries, their silence and music, are few and far between.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 17, 2003

Moscow

PIANISTICALLY CORRECT

Only velocity and precision are venerated today; the latter is part of universal campaign against incorrectness. Whatever is politically correct seems to be right; and yet our modern pasteurised language is just a courteous germ-free labelling system beneath which a lot can be hidden. The more correctly we speak the greater the number of hideous thoughts we harbour for the simple reason that, relying on our language to protect us from any accusation, any suspicion, inwardly we let ourselves go.

Performers who think (and play) only in terms of precision do not necessarily harbour hideous thoughts; actually *nothing* is hidden beneath the courteous exterior of their performance. It is as if they were just talking about the weather at a tea party—among the people who have been invited to the tea party and not to a concert. Then the cups are deposited on a table and the people go home, talking of what was said during the party. Yes, one gets the feeling that something was *said* during the concert, something politically or rather musically correct.

Here is a quotation from *The Book of Tea* by Okakura Kakuzo:

Rikiu was watching his son Shoan as he swept and watered the garden path. 'Not clean enough,' said Rikiu, when Shoan had finished his task, and bade him try again. After a weary hour the son turned to Rikiu: 'Father, there is nothing more to be done...Not a twig, not a leaf have I left on the ground.' 'Young fool,' chided the tea-master, 'that is not the way a garden path should be swept.' Saying this, Rikiu stepped into the garden, shook a tree and scattered over the garden gold and crimson leaves, scraps of the brocade of autumn! What Rikiu demanded was not cleanliness alone, but the beautiful and the natural also.

A music critic wrote back in the sixties that, whenever Richter took risks, he played wrongs notes, scattering gold and crimson leaves over his garden. 'These are his best recitals,' added the critic. I do not think that Richter's chief preoccupation was to remain on the safe side and that sometimes he unwillingly jeopardised his safety. Perhaps he just occasionally did more justice to an old-fashioned brand of inspiration and the expression 'on the spur of the moment'. But our society is prone to confuse a commonsense attitude with artistry so that any deviation from correctness is regarded as a proof of amateurism. Fischer-Dieskau pays tribute to *l'air du temps* when he says about Richter: 'What's amazing is that he never played wrongs notes.' So people continue to sweep and water their garden paths.

Furtwängler writes that the advent of recordings radically changed the style of music-making, for artists came to model their concerts on the sterile perfection of their recordings. He advocates the opposite trend. I think that studio recordings should remain what they are: monologues addressed to oneself, meditations, solitary confessions. I enjoy the atmosphere of a recording studio—the void that is far more submissive than any audience.

And concerts should be as inexorable, dynamic and, in a sense, as vulnerable as life itself. What indeed is more natural (and beautiful) than inspiration that sometimes makes one forget the materialist origin of sounds! Anyway shamans have never been on the safe side.

1994

Versailles

THE RUSSIAN SCHOOL

I am often asked what this notion or legend means; and if there is such a thing at all. There is no denying that, for more than a century, there was a Russian piano school and, arguably, this school was unparalleled in the history of music. Even today one might find a few vestiges of it – in the person of Alexei Lubimov, for instance. But leftovers, however succulent, cannot be compared to a banquet crowning the enthronement of a Russian tsar.

So there *is* such a thing as the Russian piano school. But what on earth does that mean? What are the ingredients of this imperial banquet? Usually, critics talk about one ingredient only: singing. However, it does not seem to fit the notion we are dealing with *exclusively*. (Didn't Bruno Walter use the verb 'to sing' rather often?) It is true that, to some extent, our school was more vocal than, say, the French piano school; it was *voice*-oriented, whereas the German school concentrated more on the *instrumental* aspect of music-making. In other words, the German piano sounded like the piano and not like Chaliapin, Caruso or Callas. But there is another element which is often – or rather always – overlooked by both music critics and lovers.

What I am about to do now reminds me of Walter Benjamin's letter to Gershom Scholem on Kafka. In the middle of it he quotes a passage from Eddington's *Nature of the Physical World*. Let me quote a passage from the book entitled *Introducing Chaos*. This book is part of the series designed for neophytes. And, sadly enough, I am a neophyte in the domain of chaos; and in many other domains related to pure and applied sciences.

For three planets to be in stable orbits, it is necessary that their resonances are not in simple ratios like 1:2 or 2:3. In order to remain stable, the planets must be quasi-periodic – that is, the periods never exactly repeat themselves. If the periods do repeat themselves, the perturbation may be amplified with each orbit. Small events in this situation can have a major effect. The planets' orbits could snap, sending them whizzing off through space.

The above quotation does not seem to have much in common either with Russia or the piano, but the text used by Benjamin in his letter speaks of instability, uncertainty, not of castles, trials and the Great Wall of China. Benjamin wishes to convey his idea of where and how Franz Kafka's works are situated in our world and its representation. Had he known anything about chaos theory, he might have added, 'We no longer see the solar system as a simple mechanical clock. It is a constantly changing, complex system.'

What they actually tried to teach us at the Moscow Conservatoire was a quasi-periodic approach to music-making. We were supposed to avoid ‘squareness’ (*kvadratnost’*) or clockwork structures. If you pull back at some point, slightly delaying a new phrase or just a chord, you should on no account repeat your nuance, if the same pattern reappears.

Schubert is far more periodic than Beethoven, but if you systematically pull back before first beats and slow down at the end of every phrase, your interpretation deserves the comparison that my first Conservatoire professor, Jacob Zak, would resort to with gusto: ‘Like squelching through the mud.’ To put it more leniently, it is on the heavy side or heavy going. Dostoevsky says at some point, ‘They lost the thread’ (*The Possessed*). At the Moscow Conservatoire they talked about a ‘pivot’ and its loss.

Perhaps I am too nostalgic or biased, but the Russian school and its particularities, for what they are worth, make me unable to listen tolerantly to Alfred Brendel’s or Radu Lupu’s performances of Schubert’s works; for all the praises showered upon them. The latter’s attitude seems all the more puzzling since he studied piano-playing (and music-making) in Moscow. Critics say that Radu Lupu is a lyricist in a thousand. I think he is just a sentimentalist. In a thousand, in a hundred – it does not really matter. And sentimentality was a taboo word (or rather a taboo propensity) at the Moscow Conservatoire.

What Radu does on a regular basis was called *predikhaniye* (pre-breathing) by our teachers. Instead of letting time and music flow organically, he almost stops before every significant utterance as if to point out how beautiful and profound it is. His interpretations often sound like a series of ahs: Ah, how lovely! Ah, how tragic! Ah, how sad! Ah, how mad! In order to remain stable, the planets must be *quasi*-periodic: the periods never *exactly* repeat themselves. Schubert’s music is extremely stable – at least from a structural point of view. (Not in terms of harmonies, to be sure.) But it grows gelatinous or muddy if you indulge in repetitive ahs, ohs, and other lyric, all-too-human digressions. Needless to say, the media and audiences revere all-too-humanism. Besides, ahs, ohs and ouches are easier to understand than pivots and quasi-periodic structures. And a planet whizzing through space has far more impact than the harmony of the nocturnal, cloudless sky.

Of course one might think that Russia is a distant, Siberia-dominated country, and that, in spite of all unwarranted *ralentandi* and *accelerandi*, a Vienna-born (or a Bucharest-born) pianist plays Schubert much better, if only for geographical reasons. Likewise many concert-goers believe that French pianists play Debussy and Ravel better than Germans or Italians. But Giesecking and Michelangeli contradict them rather imposingly.

Nabokov thinks that we should waste neither our time nor breath on airport fiction. (This reminds me of a famous pianist who, many years ago, while stranded at some airport or other, was reading Joyce's *Ulysses* – a good specimen of the *library-of-Babylon* fiction.) But so-called great literature must be torn to pieces, if it is neither great nor literature.

For once I shall leave in peace Lang-Lang and Hélène Grimaud. No more wasting of breath. A five-second grin is enough.

Why leave in peace *great* pianists? After all, I am answering the question: What is the Russian piano school?

Anyway, taking my cue from Nietzsche, I do not criticise individuals. (No wasting of time.) It is modern trends I am wholly preoccupied with.

These pernicious trends are somewhat like a 20-page-long version of *War and Peace* in which Prince Andrei does not die and Natasha becomes a top model. The digestibility offered by today's performers is made up of grimaces and gestures that seem to have originated in both Mephistopheles' conduct and angels' announcements. And even if a pianist just stares fixedly at the ceiling, without moving either her head or torso, she indulges in so many aches and ochs that you get the feeling she is in bed and not at the piano. And this lovemaking is done to the detriment of quasi-periods and structures in general. It is true that lovemaking is more associated in one's mind with a planet whizzing through space than with the harmony of the nocturnal, cloudless sky.

Rachmaninoff, Horowitz, Sofronitsky and Gilels may seem too cool to the fans of *La Soirée Hot* – a series of erotic films that occasionally features a young female pianist. Indeed some conservatoire students (in Moscow and elsewhere) listen more eagerly to Chinese or Georgian pianists than to Rachmaninoff, even if they play his own concerti. In other words, audiences opt for hot concerts, décolletages and short dresses; and ah, ah, ah, oh, ah, ouch. Crescendo-accelerando, ouch, diminuendo-rallentando.

Of course, in comparison with these more or less young ladies, Radu Lupu is in a deluxe category. Yet, to some extent, he is Hélène Grimaud's grandfather.

There are many pernicious trends in today's music-making, but they all boil down to a common denominator known as *Abbau* or deconstruction. Alfred Brendel, Radu Lupu and Gregory Sokolov deconstruct phrases and global structures so that what we are left with amounts pathetically to odds and ends (as if paying homage to Beckett's late works). Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida did their best to bury metaphysics and God. I do not think that music should undergo the same therapy.

Joachim Kaiser told me once, 'Sokolov has three climaxes in every phrase.' The problem with so many ahs, ohs and ouches is that they are aimed at the lowest common denominator. But in our day and age any common denominator is far more common than Highest Faithfulness.

Sokolov may be defined as Lang-Lang's sophisticated grandfather. Or Bang-Bang's brother. Anyway, I am fairly convinced that he is not Emil Gilels' son.

DEFINITIVE VERSION

In his lecture *Ulysse Gramophone*, Jacques Derrida recounts one of his 'experiences' in Tokyo. As he was noting down some titles in a book shop a typical American tourist bent over his shoulder, complaining, 'So many books! What is the definitive one? Is there any such book?' This story reminds me of another story—the one I heard at the Moscow Conservatoire back in the sixties. I do not think the story I am going to tell is funny or profound, but it seems adequate for the purpose. Two policemen intend to buy a birthday present for their colleague. One of them suggests they should offer him—the third policeman—a book. 'He's already got the book,' says the second policeman. I am pretty sure he spoke neither of the Bible nor of that marvellous, multifaceted, multifarious book described by Bruno Schulz in his *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. Nor did he have in mind James Joyce's masterpieces *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*—the books Derrida had in mind when about to satisfy the curiosity of the American tourist. In the light of this literary quest, 'definitive version'—a pet expression of music critics—is rather harmless: indeed they refer to interpretations, not to creations.

In *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* Nietzsche says that a pianist performing the work of a master should make us believe he recounts an episode from his own life and not from the life of the master whom we are supposed to forget. But no life is definitive, let alone an episode from it.

What can be regarded as 'definitive' in a musical interpretation? And what on earth does that mean? Should the work in question be abandoned for good to be worshipped only in its perfect rendering—the one praised so highly and 'definitively' by the music critics? And what about an artist offering a radically different interpretation? Is he a mere impostor or, to borrow theological terminology, a false prophet, an apostate? 'The criterion that determines whether something is "a correct presentation" (*Darstellung*) is a highly flexible and relative one,' writes Gadamer in *Method and Truth*. 'But the fact that the representation is bound to the work is not lessened by the fact that this bond can have no fixed criterion. Thus we do not allow the interpretation of a piece of music or a drama the freedom to take the fixed "text" as a basis for arbitrary, ad-lib effects, and yet we would regard the canonisation of a particular interpretation—e.g., in a recorded performance conducted by the composer, or the detailed notes on performance which come from the canonised first performance—as a failure to appreciate the real task of interpretation. A "correctness" striven for in this way would not do justice to the true binding nature of the work, which imposes itself on every interpreter immediately, in its own way, and does not allow him to make things easy for himself by simply imitating a model....In a certain sense interpretation probably is re-creation, but this is a re-creation not of the creative act but of

the created work, which has to be brought to representation in accord with the meaning the interpreter finds in it. Thus, for example, historicising presentations—e.g., of music played on old instruments—are not as faithful as they seem. Rather, they are an imitation of an imitation and are thus in danger "of standing at a third remove from the truth" (Plato).'

There are no definitive instruments. I like playing pianos I have never touched before. They are an invitation to adventure, as Weber might have put it. So are cities, incidentally—not only their concert halls, but also their backstreets—and a change in the weather, and travelling companions...and thousands of other *major* details I am not prepared to disregard for the sake of an ideal, all-purpose, all-weather interpretation.

The incredible and proverbial richness of human life to which The Old Testament pays such wonderful tribute might occasionally become reduced—in the hands of ideologically-minded people—to a handful of precepts and clear-cut rules. I disagree with those who obstinately and somewhat smugly turn Bach's awesome enigma into mere problems of phrasing. What I endeavour to do as a performing artist is just the opposite: I broaden the scope of my interpretation in order to approach the infinity of the works I record or play in public. Anyway I cannot keep my life out of my music-making in the name of some new-fangled 'authenticity'. Or should I keep my life away from whatever I do?

Moreover, I am reluctant to reproduce my own 'definitive versions' for the sake of stability, inner peace and success. (Just to be on the safe side, as the expression goes.) Taking risks is the backbone of the creative process.

1994

Versailles

ON THE ART OF CONDUCTING

KARAJAN (to his wife, after a performance of *Don Giovanni*):
Furtwängler would have hated it.

Karajan in Salzburg

*Die eigentliche Wiederholung einer gewesenen
 Existenzmöglichkeit—dass das Dasein sich seinen Helden
 wählt—gründet existenzial in der vorlautenden Entschlossenheit.*

Heidegger, Sein und Zeit

*And bad conductors get more money than bad pianists. (Imitating
 a young woman's voice.) 'He's got such energy you can't help
 falling for him.' (Speaking in his own voice.) Energy must be
 focused skilfully. Steered, directed, conducted. On music. Not on
 photogenic grimaces and the search for sponsors. Energy indeed!
 Bandits are also bursting with energy, aren't they? (Pause.) And
 here's another doctrine, 'Conductors should be invisible.'
 Invisible ones, inaudible ones. Like bandits. And the result is the
 same—murder.*

Valery Alev, Kreisleriana

In his book *Masse und Macht*, Elias Canetti devotes a small chapter to conductors whom he blames for nightly public displays of omnipotence and omniscience. The book appeared in 1960. Furtwängler had died six years earlier, but Knapperstbusch and Klemperer were alive. The next year, in Vienna, Bruno Walter gave his last concert. In 1960 one could still talk about the dictatorship of conductors.

Nowadays this chapter seems hopelessly out-of-date. A modern concert-goer is unlikely to understand what elicited so much wrath and mockery on Canetti's part. Of course conductors still turn their backs to the audience. (Canetti enlarges on this particular aspect of orchestral performances.) And they still move their arms. But their function is closer to that of a good-natured prime minister than to a demi-god like Julius Caesar. It is as if Julius Caesar had been killed again—in the name of *musical* democracy this time. Even Margaret Thatcher would encounter problems if she decided to devote the rest of her life to this profession.

In the first half of our capricious century the so-called hero-cult was at its peak. In the wake of the Second World War humanity grew tired of heroes. And of divinities, oddly enough. Even cinema is affected now by this unquenchable thirst for the man in the street. And for 'the girl next door'. Gone is the age of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich. John Doe's granddaughters take pride of place. Olympus has become a mere coffee shop.

In the wake of the Second World War heroes came to be associated with tyrants. And yet music is the very opposite of tyranny and repression so that my abhorrence of Hitler becomes even more pronounced, almost reaching fever pitch, whenever I watch the war-time, swastika-adorned film recordings of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Furtwängler. What, however, reminds me most of totalitarian regimes—despite the democratic décor—is the tendency of some contemporary musicians to give prominence to the ideas of *how* music should be played—to the detriment of intuition, inspiration and emotion. Alas, so many concerts sound like Highway Code lessons nowadays.

What was so remarkable about those orchestras, those musicians, those great conductors of the past? The intensity and idiosyncrasy of intention, the polyphony and overall richness of execution. The spatial polyphony of Mengelberg and Toscanini. There was no military or mathematical togetherness in the way their orchestras played. Instead, a number of soloists skillfully combined their monologues, brass instruments lagging slightly behind to create a perspective of horror or triumph.

In the wonderful, nostalgia-fraught film *Great Conductors of the Past* Hugh Bean speaks thus about 'precision' which has become a symbol of modern, digital music-making: 'Klemperer was not concerned with precision. If it happened he liked it and accepted it. With Furtwängler precision in orchestral play was not a primary aim. I often had the feeling that Furtwängler actually didn't want this. His rather—we used to call it "puppet on a string"—physical way of conducting enabled him to avoid the sleek modern American whip-crack chords. He wanted more weight, more heaviness.' And more polyphony, no doubt. And more individualisation. And more intensity, poignancy.

Great orchestras of the past. Concertgebouw. Philadelphia. Berlin Philharmonic. High-strung, high-tension orchestras.

Nor was Furtwängler much preoccupied with 'intonation'—another hallmark of modern orchestral performances. Perfect intonation. Many pianists of the past knew that a slightly out-of-tune piano sounds warmer and more fulsome than one tuned with mathematical intransigence. Apparently Rachmaninov and Horowitz often had their pianos 'untuned'. Recently I had a talk

with Robert Ritscher—one of the most refined tuners in the world. He told me how difficult it is to 'untune' pianos and make them imperceptibly uneven.

What are the other hallmarks of modern orchestral performances? The lack of relief. Nothing sticks out. Nothing perturbs the pleasant and soothing flow of music. Brass instruments lend only moral support to the orchestra. (And they would often pierce, transfix the orchestral mass during Toscanini's and Knappertsbusch's concerts.) The sound is nice and homogeneous. A Beethoven symphony often sounds like a commercial for a Beethoven symphony. A shadow of a shadow, as Shakespeare would have put it. Of course there are a few exceptions to this malignant rule.

Sometimes, in the hands of a talented conductor, an orchestra might present us with a fresh-as-a-daisy phrasing or an unexpected emphasis. But musicians like Abendrot had no need of bright ideas. They had enough natural grandeur to bring Brahms and Wagner back to life. Like a shaman, Furtwängler used to conjure up the spirits of the composers he conducted; his every concert was an aesthetic and a physical experience. A bodily experience.

That is what modern conductors (not only conductors) lack most: natural grandeur, epic thinking.

That is what we lack most in concert halls nowadays: the bodily presence of composers.

One is reminded of a French-cheese counter in some prestigious New York grocery store; tightly wrapped-up in plastic, cheeses do not smell. And one day, I am told, in New York harbour they burnt a whole consignment of *Epoisses*, for this cheese is not pasteurized. God forbid!

Modern orchestral performances *are* pasteurized. Nothing to worry about.

And they smell of vanilla like those modern wines maturing in new-oak barrels. It is from those barrels that they draw a semblance of structure and power. Not from the grapes, not from Time. Modern wines also lack natural grandeur. And personality. There are no isolated phenomena in the world.

'One of the most frequent charges levelled against modern orchestral performances is that they're bland or impersonal, with executant efficiency taking precedence over true individuality,' writes Rob Cowan in a note on Mengelberg's recordings of French music.

'Nobody wants strong personalities any more. Life is so much business-oriented, nowadays. All those recordings which are to be made...and concert tours...There's no time for rehearsals. There's no more room for great individualists who need a lot of time to rehearse in order to play music in their own way,' says Bernard Haitink in a television programme devoted to Mengelberg.

The lack of time is one of the shortages we suffer from, but I am afraid the main problem lies elsewhere. (Knappertsbusch, for one, could not bear rehearsals.) There is something wrong with the 'stuff', so to speak: a hundred rehearsals devoted to one symphony would not appreciably enhance the quality of the performance. 'He is the stuff that heroes are made from' could be said about any of the great conductors of the past. Nowadays there is something wrong even with the 'stuff as dreams are made on'. Besides, some people do not dream at all.

1995

Versailles

‘MILLIONS FLOCK TO CONCERTS’

My problems with antis – not with antics or my aunties, mind you – began on the day when I had to read a few pages from the work entitled *Anti Düring*. I spell it as I can, especially since I do not really care for this work which was written by Engels, if am not mistaken; or by Marx himself. Well, I am not really concerned with either of these thinkers, dreamers, sham philosophers or shamans – call them what you will, if you wish to call them anything at all. As I was born in the Soviet Union, I was bound to come across them and many other antis – I prefer my aunties and even ants to those antis, needless to say – that continue to haunt me, if only within the province of my mind.

In a world of antis (anti-art, anti-freedom, anti-dignity, anti-talent, anti-thought) one has no alternative but to become an anti-antis. And I do not keep my antism to myself, taking my cue from Socrates’ systematic and public destruction of Sophists. Whenever I buy a newspaper – books are more expensive and often more disappointing – once again I realise I am duty-bound to publicly kick against a trend and an ecstasy I am strongly opposed to.

In *The Times* I recently read – and I am supposed to rejoice at this piece of information – that ‘people attend classical concerts as crickets matches, according to figures that show a growing appreciations for orchestral music.’ How could you really appreciate live performances today, I wonder? Of course you might be unaware of their poor quality, or you might think any music is better than no music; any live performance is better than a dead performance – that of Furtwängler, for instance.

I beg to differ and I think it is much better and healthier to stay at home, listening to old recordings and also enjoying dainty dishes and wines. But young people are not old enough to realise that old masters offer an unparalleled introduction to music: they are large as life, eternity-like. What counts is quality, not quantity. ‘A report by the Association of British Orchestras found that attendance last year was 4.83 million, a rise of 3 percent since its last survey in 2013.’ I am against this rise (anti-rise) because neither Furtwängler nor Bruno Walter conducts those concerts. Down wanton, down. In this domain aristocracy goes one better than democracy.

According to Mr Pemberton, however, these larger audiences ‘do not bring in more money and, if anything, actually increase losses’. Actually orchestras suffer a ‘double whammy: a decline in earned income alongside significant cuts in public funding.’ I do rejoice at this piece of information. ‘The enthusiasm for live performances goes against trends for the genre. Album sales have dropped every year between 2006 and 2015, falling from 5.2 million sales to 2.3 million.’

FRIENDS

NOTE TO *FRIENDS*

A writer is permitted to while away his life inside an ivory tower, storing his works in a trunk or throwing them pell-mell onto his desk in the hope that future generations will take notice of them. Or he may abandon all hope and content himself with the ritual to which every creative artist is indebted: inspiration, meditation, materialisation. The last part of this ritual means much more to a composer who cannot contemplate the notes he or she has written without having an urge to hear them *outside* the proverbial ivory tower. Some composers resort to their pianos even at the very first stage of materialisation: they need to *hear* their inspiration and meditation. But an orchestral piece appears in a truncated version whenever it is performed on the piano. Few composers are self-sufficient enough to resist the temptation of attending a performance of their symphony in a concert hall—even if the hall is half-empty. For all his unconcern with *our* world, Bruckner was so elated as he listened to a rehearsal of his *Fourth Symphony* that he said to the conductor, 'Play whatever notes you wish, Maestro!'

Interpreters need to spend a lot of time networking and building up contacts: they are not likely to make it into Carnegie Hall, for instance, if they do not have influential friends around them. They have got other friends too: their colleagues, the people they meet during concert tours. (Writers can afford to neglect their colleagues.)

A great many memoirs written by interpreters have come out over the last twenty years. From them we learn when and how such and such a celebrity partakes of his *medianoche*—a useful piece of information for those who are interested in whatever their idol does in everyday life. These books are nothing more than memoirs; they primarily deal with *extraneous* aspects of music-making: friends, incidents, jokes. I am duty bound to do justice to this part of materialisation. After all, I am a pianist—outside my ivory tower.

2005

Versailles

COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM

I rely on you to misrepresent me.

Oscar Wilde

A week ago I answered a few questions I had got by fax in my hotel. My answers were printed in the brochure that is handed out before my concerts in Tokyo. During my stay in Kyoto from where I have just come back I heard at last my answers scrupulously translated by my indefatigable companion. I was rather surprised by the discrepancy between the printed text and what I had actually meant when answering the questions. At times the discrepancy was so extravagant that I had the impression of witnessing the 'coincidence of opposites' about which Taoists talk with sincerity and fervour. In Europe this theory was championed by Nicholas of Cusa.

In the interview I declare, for instance, that in the domain of musical interpretation the process is far more important than the result. Actually I think just the opposite. What indeed can be said about a pianist or a conductor who enjoys himself at home or during orchestral rehearsals and does not care about his concerts, about the quality of his performances on stage? In our profession the result is far more important than the process. Nobody should wonder how many hours I practise at home and what kind of emotion I arouse during my orchestral rehearsals. What counts is the concert. Furtwängler's rehearsals are said to have been rather uninteresting and even boring.

In the interview I owe up to having always pandered to the tastes of the audience. As a famous cellist put it, 'In the States I play faster than in Europe because American life is faster.' My interpretations, however, take no notice of longitudes, latitudes and the lassitude that some members of the audience may manifest by coughing or leafing through a programme. I play in enclosed spaces, so to speak. But don't I sometimes vibrate in unison with the audience—in the moments of musical bliss? We are all listening to the same music.

Of course I know that Schubert had no intention of finishing the *Unfinished Symphony*: his state of health was in no way responsible for his indolence. But who can gauge to what extent our diseases hold sway over our bodies and minds? And how to gauge the exactitude of this or that answer? The process also counts—for the Buddhists, among other people, who pay little attention to the result. 'The goal is important only as an idea,' wrote Jung. 'The essential thing is the opus which leads to the goal. That is the goal of a lifetime.' The organic process that presides over the birth of an interpretation plays an important part in every concert. And we are not always in control of the result, which accounts for the ups and downs in the life of a great artist. The

interpreter with whom I have been working for several years—one of my closest Japanese friends—is aware of that as well as I am. That is why, instigated by my woolly answers, he created a sort of doppelgänger who is bound to haunt and contradict me for years to come.

(Translated from the French by the author)

October 31, 2003

Tokyo

LYDIA DUBROVSKAYA

Few interpreters have an urge to venture *outside* their daily routine that seems to encompass the entire world—at least within their minds. But the world is not *so* small, contrary to what they often hear and say upon meeting their colleagues during their extensive concert tours. The greater part of the world remains beyond the scope of their interests while they repeat again and again that music is their life. Carried away by their egocentric agoraphobia, they forget that music is much bigger than their life and even exceeds the bounds assigned to it by managers and musicologists. In a way, music can be likened to the Internet so that the more you communicate with its distant, underestimated or unknown spheres, the better.

Lydia Dubrovskaya spends the greater part of the day *outside* what journalists call 'career', although she may awaken in the middle of the night, haunted by a phrase from Beethoven's *Violin Concerto*. But, unlike most of her colleagues, she does not deprive this concerto of its universal network where she finds such 'irrelevant' themes as parapsychology, the Kabbalah, Mme Blavatsky and Paul Klee. The space she creates within her life—*outside* it, I am tempted to say—endows her performances with the epic dimension that disappeared from concert halls a long time ago; upon the death of Celibidache, no doubt.

February 14, 2006

Versailles

PLAYING TOGETHER

To Vadim Sukhanov

We first met thirty years ago. We both studied at the Moscow Conservatoire but our friendship depended less on its walls and lecture rooms than on the Boulevard Ring and the Unboring Garden. Once we spent a whole day in an amusement park. Disregarding the rowdy appeal of American Mountains—the Soviet version of a ride that goes under the name of *montagnes russes* in French-speaking countries—we bribed our way into an enclosure where a number of miniature cars jerked along a sinuous railway track. Only children were allowed into the enclosure. We took a drive in a mock-up of an old Renault. Perhaps a sharp-eared angel will detect an echo of that remote drive in *our* Mozart, Schubert and Brahms.

1995

Versailles

OUR COLLABORATION

Ten years have elapsed since I first made a recording for Denon. Eighteen discs have been released in the course of those years. Naturally I should like to say a few words about our collaboration.

A word comes to my mind whenever I think about the people with whom I have worked so far: 'purity'. The purity of purpose, the purity of professional commitment. And the purity of sound. I have never been asked to play something popular, to make concessions—to cross over, in modern parlance. (To cross over to a sort of *all-man's land*.) I would not have done it anyway. I should rather not make recordings than make concessions, reaching a dishonourable compromise with the requirements of our age. And as my *Cambridge Dictionary* puts it: 'Don't compromise your beliefs/principles for the sake of being accepted.' Dictionaries are always right.

The young man I met almost at the outset of our collaboration—Yukio Akehi—was most instrumental in creating the present style of our recordings. He suggested I write essays for every CD of mine—'essays long enough to prevent anybody from interfering with your ideas'. Sure enough, my essays are so long that there is no room left for a *classical* analysis provided by a musicologist or by the artist himself. I set forth my *personal* approach to the pieces I record—the only ecstatic, shamanistic approach to music, in my opinion. It is not really an approach as such. At the height of your own confession you are likely to find yourself *inside* music. And vice versa: 'Composers are inside you,' as a mystic might express it. And yet I do accept the notion of 'interpretation', which has the overtones of an insult nowadays. A composer himself is bound to become an interpreter should he set out to perform his own music. In mystical terms, every human being interprets God in his own manner.

Yukio also suggested I choose an appropriate image for every cover. Only exceptionally do my photographs appear on discs and, whenever this is the case, they fit into the overall design. I have always disliked the way most recordings are visually presented: conductors smile on CDs devoted to Rossini's *Overtures*; they frown on the photographs that adorn, say, Brahms' *Fourth Symphony*. Producers must still have problems with Toscanini: he never smiled on stage. Stefan Zweig mentions the fact in his essay on the uncompromising conductor.

Often the dialogues between performers and producers sound thus:

'Have you got everything, Jimmy?'

'Yeah, I've got everything.'

And, reassured, the performer strikes up another movement.

Gerhard Betz with whom I have worked on many CDs would never answer, 'I've got everything.' He would not even bother to answer such a question. Nor would I ask it, to tell the truth. Together we listen to every bit of the recorded material to make sure we do have everything—and the best of everything at that. We choose and combine the takes, doing the greater part of the editing on the spot. What remains to be done is materialisation, properly speaking: cutting, putting together, etc.

Gerhard is a pianist himself and feels duty bound to learn and play whatever I record in order to help me 'from the inside', as it were. And I wonder how many people on earth can boast of such a sense of hearing. I remember the way he dissected one of Gould recordings, pointing out when the piano was tuned, when they called it a day.

It is hard to make a *Bugatti Royale* and very few people can afford it. And very few people really *need* it. For all my inability and shortcomings, the aim I pursue in a recording studio is to create the musical equivalent of a *Bugatti Royale*. Alas, even by jumping higher than my head—a Russian idiom—I can supply Gerhard only with two or three parts of the legendary motorcar. Four parts at most.

1998

Versailles

IN PRAISE OF MADNESS

'Strange' people are frowned upon nowadays. Perhaps, in the realms of finance and technological progress, 'strangeness' is out of place and only extravagance is tolerated—an exuberant display of one's riches. In the realm of art, however, the word 'strange' should be used without inverted commas. Indeed the very nature of art is strange; 'normal artist' is a contradiction in terms.

Actually I think that the amount of madness does not vary much throughout the history of mankind. But today madness has shifted from the realm of art to the American law courts where it is not only tolerated but also encouraged. And art is associated with normalcy and so-called 'authenticity' which is a synonym for normalcy, as a matter of fact. (The word 'authenticity' should be flanked by inverted commas except when we talk about the authenticity of a feeling, the authenticity of self-expression—the authenticity of madness, in short.) *Titanic*, which is acclaimed as 'the best film in history' (the inverted commas are *not* out of place), is an 'authentic representation of the catastrophe'. Is it an authentic representation of love? I wonder. A Swedish woman, who attempted to imitate the heroine of the movie—her ecstasy, her romantic, bird-like poses on the prow—fell into the sea and drowned. A nice example of authenticity.

Nietzsche bestows high praise on madness, which often amounts to self-praise, needless to say. In the *Morgenröte* he quotes Plato who attributed the best achievements of Greek civilisation to madness. According to the Ancient Greeks and to Nietzsche, there is something divine in madness. And of course it is associated with genius.

I hit upon the idea of this small essay (my ode to madness) when I heard Arnaud de Beauregard for the first time.

2000

Versailles

IN MEMORY OF PHILIP HIRSHHORN

I

There are people whose lives can be reduced to two words: quantity and stability. There are artists who bring their arts down to the same common denominators. From my point of view, art is fragile and as unpredictable as life itself.

In the forties and fifties old musicians used to tell how Arthur Nikisch conducted Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*. In the first movement, for instance, it was a quick upward flick of his index-finger that showed the outset of the development—instead of a sweeping movement of both arms announcing to the audience the forthcoming catastrophe.

In the early seventies I heard several stories like that about Philip. Even in those days he was already a legend. His admirers recounted his concerts. And every time they did so, they uttered the words that remind me of Philip whenever I hear them, 'He's a true artist.'

He was unpredictable, unbending, proud and fragile—an artist to the fingertips, which is not unimportant for a violinist. In his ideas and musical adventures he would go to the end of the road, never repeating 'last night's accomplishments', as Glenn Gould put it. Nor was he afraid of future failures. Actually, the failures of true artists are triumphs in comparison with the achievements of second-raters.

I seldom heard him live. But I have got his audio and video recordings; and also his legend—the numerous stories I heard in my youth and, later on, in Belgium, in France. Even these stories have a greater musical and emotional impact than a multitude of concerts one can attend nowadays.

(Translated from the French by the author)

November 15, 1997

Versailles

II

I wrote the above text for the concert given by Philip's friends and pupils a few months after his death. Ever since I have heard some of his live recordings and talked about him with a violinist whose sound and on-the-spot music-making are also dedicated to Philip—as if the commemorative concert were going on. And my memory continues to create his legend out of our meetings that took place after my arrival in Belgium in 1974, where I settled for six years. Driven to search for lost time by both Time and Space, I was about to give up my career as a pianist for the sake of a nebulous novel which was to mirror my departure from Russia; and all departures,

all farewells. Besides, I was loath to alleviate the boredom every pianist or violinist is exposed to by imagining I performed this or that piece for the first time.

'A violinist may be likened to a Japanese archer shooting an arrow from his bow,' Philip said once. 'Repetition is at the core of music-making. Any rite is based on repetition.'

'But concerts are neither religious rites nor mantras,' I objected. 'What can be mystically assimilated through the repetition of Bach's partitas?'

'Philosophy, poetry, the entire universe—you name it!'

Though I still disagree with Philip's romantic assertions, I miss our discussions because very few performers are inclined to analyse the process of music-making either in a book or a friendly talk, falling back on nice stories whenever the subject comes up. They look puzzled when I say that Philip advocated reading the *Tao-te ching*, which 'is vital to any musician':

We look at Tao; it is imperceptible.

We listen to it; it is inaudible.

We use it; it is inexhaustible.

March 26, 2004

Versailles

TO GIDON KREMER

Dear friend,

Many happy returns of the day.

Sadly, my cat died last week and I am grief-stricken. But only at such times does one realise how important life is.

Here's wishing you many happy years to come, many CDs and many concerts.

Looking forward to seeing you again. You are always welcome at my place.

FROM GIDON KREMER

Dearest friend!

Having answered today to all who remembered my special day,I didn't neglect your personal message...

A friend in deep grief deserves-no doubt!-special attention.

My helpless words will not be able to calm your pain and let you forget the loss.

Life is short for all of us and even much shorter for those we care-like your beloved cat.

We must accept the injustice as such-some of our dearest friends passed away having enjoyed life for shorter periods as we ourselves.

The other day i had to think about all those great musicians-not even speaking about Mozart or Schubert-who were around us.be it G.Gould,D.Oistrakh or B.Perfamenschikov, Ph.Hirschhorn, Oleg Kagan, Heinrich Schiff, Zoltan Kocsic etc...

Have you ever asked yourself-why such a privilege of a LONG life is given to us? Maybe-it is after all not just a "privilege" ,but a certain "burden"-to experience more,to suffer stronger?

Loosing friends-especially close ones-is a special challenge.

I want you to know, that I do feel pain thinking, that you have to go through this and wish you to remain strong as I know you from your writings, your playing and your curiosity for the yet unexperienced.

The good things obviously turn into wonderful memories and I wish you to find a way to cherish them as part of our own short life.

Warmest hugs from your fragile old friend.G

Sent from my BlackBerry - the most secure mobile device

TO GIDON KREMER

My dear, dear friend,

Thank you very much for your email.

For several days I thought about how to answer it and what to say about our friendship and the fragility we can see everywhere. Life itself is fragile, needless to say, but there are myths and legends in it. And they're not fragile. You've been a legend for a long, long time. I told you that in Tokyo and I repeat it now. I'm proud of having played so many concerts with you and of having attended many of your own concerts. They are my private legend which is not fragile, I can assure you. As long as I live, this legend will live with me and, thanks to our recordings, many true music lovers will share this legend with me.

I'm sure you have many projects and there will be many other beginnings in your life. But please don't forget that your life itself is very important. You're a living symbol of art. Do take care of yourself – for the sake of music, culture and human dignity.

Yours forever,

Valery

POWER

The very notion of power dazzles people and appeals to them with almost sexual intensity, which often confuses the issue, mixing up the categories of power. What is usually meant by the word 'power' comes down to political might and astronomical amounts of money, whence the expression 'Money talks'. It is so garrulous, in fact, that neither silence nor music can hold their own against it. Let us try and investigate the ins and outs of political power that is always linked to money nowadays.

Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar did not disdain the allure of power and made the most of it—to a certain degree. A great general leading his army up hill and down dale must control the moods of his soldiers and sustain in them the fighting spirit. Keeping this spirit up to the mark depends on how he masters the art of rhetoric, among other things; it is an enticing and worthy task. I think that outwitting Roman senators was a respectable game but, despite the presence of living pieces, it might have been inferior to chess. Anyway it was far more beneficial, in my opinion, to go back home and read Horace or Alexander of Rhodes. Secular power often prefers quantity to quality. Yet Julius Caesar, who was a great general and a very good writer, declined the crown offered to him—three times in a row: he was already the first in Rome and had no need of other numbers. Incidentally, he might not have refused the office of Pope, grasping the difference between secular and spiritual power.

Let us take a general or rather a generalissimo of our times—Joseph Stalin. Cutting a shabby figure among his own generals, he, however, outwitted them all and often continued the games beyond their traditional limits: it is pleasant to play cat and mouse with a defeated opponent. But such games are not worth a bean, I suppose. The people that Stalin triumphed over despised him and he felt their scorn, their moral and mental superiority, which must have spoiled the fun. Poets and composers put many flies in Stalin's ointment; they were Tsars of the flies who, unconsciously most of the time, did their best to poison the life of the dictator. Mandelstam vanquished him; so did Shostakovich and Platonov. Only those befuddled by the propaganda yielded to him; some forever, others until the Twentieth Party Congress. The latter's victory came too late no doubt, but Stalin might have foreseen it in his nightmares and daydreams which, judging from his persecution mania, were nightmares in their own right. Again that might have spoiled the fun. Anyway even the word 'fun', which is a cheap variety of pleasure, has never been associated in my mind with the defeat of a person deafened by loudspeakers. Of course there are people who, left to their own devices, would go to Hell; they are in need of a guide and are

prepared to follow anybody, anywhere. But neither Stalin nor Hitler gloated over *their* defeats, I suppose. If they did, there is no point in talking about them.

Let us take another man about whom one does not feel like talking—Lavrenty Beria—who exerted his Politburo-secured influence over the women walking along the Garden Ring in Moscow or appearing on cinema screens. His art of seduction was literally in the hands of his stooges: no effort on *his* part was required. I am sure some womanisers have envied him for the past sixty years. But is it really so exciting to *force* a woman to perform sexual intercourse? His victims were brought to his dacha where he put them through their paces. One day, as he entered the room where yet another victim awaited him, he saw a heap of clothes on the floor; the beauty stood stark naked in front of him. And he left the room—not because the sight disappointed him. By playing the part of a doll—a rubber thing one can purchase in a sex shop—the victim defeated Beria. She was not even a talking doll. Besides, he might have expected her to offer token resistance—another variety of the cat-and-mouse game. Anyway he must have felt the loathing he inspired in all those women.

Today's political life does not arouse much interest in bystanders because the world has become a kind of doll that utters just a few words and offers no resistance to hidden aggressors, to a power behind the throne. And the throne itself looks benevolent and advocates freedom. The students' uprisings of the sixties are not on the agenda any longer, let alone revolutions. A few isolated terrorists are so obnoxious that one does not feel like talking about them in an essay devoted to music and art in general. No successor to Napoleon is capable of carving up Europe, Asia and America. Of course, under the pressure of nationalistic moods and groups, the world goes on learning its multiplication table, but again this happens with the same lifeless doll. Whoever kneads it in his hands has no fun, I suppose. What is the point in financing political parties? My friend devotes the greater part of his time and money to this occupation. What does he need all this money for, anyway? At his villas in Switzerland and France he spends no more than two months a year. And he never leaves his Moscow apartment alone. Even in his own bedroom he is afraid of being poisoned—in a glass of *kefir* which is a Russian variety of yoghurt.

'The more money you've got the better you live,' is not a mathematical formula and therefore depends on psychology, circumstances and one's scale of values. Some inexpensive pleasures are worth millions of dollars: reading Dante and Plato in the original, for example. The words 'iambic tetrameter' cost nothing, which should not prevent us from reading Tennyson and Pushkin. Money may come in handy when one feels like indulging in aristocratic delights: old wine, eighteenth-century furniture (Régence, Louis XV), luxury restaurants. Unfortunately pianists are supposed to abstain from riding horses. But, along with other artists, they are allowed

to rule over human minds. Even to a greater degree this is done by creative artists who are called in Russian *vlastiteli dum* (rulers of minds) and are on a par with Nietzsche's superman. In this sense Mandelstam has always enjoyed more power than Stalin; and George W. Bush is just Derrida's chauffeur. Plato and Kant modified our train of thought—and consequently our history—much more than Napoleon. (Oswald Spengler would have disagreed with me on this point.) But even Napoleons (and Raskolnikovs) are superannuated: our post-modern world needs neither great artists nor charismatic politicians.

Last winter I bought a lot of books in Germany and was given a small book on the greatest personalities in human history. Among one hundred geniuses listed in it I found only two composers: Bach and Mozart. On the other hand, I came across J. P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, Hitler, Mussolini, Lenin and Stalin, who seemed to have usurped the positions of Haydn, Beethoven, Tolstoy, Wagner, Heidegger and Kafka. (Rockefeller and Hitler do not belong to the same category of human beings. I put their names side by side only to point out that neither of them should figure in such a book.) The last genius was Gorbachev who must have been put there instead of Wittgenstein or Paul Klee. I sent the book by post to my former friend.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 29, 2003

Moscow

JOSEPH BRODSKY'S MUSICALITY

When dealing with music and poetry one need not care overmuch about dates so that Akhmatova, among other poets, adopted a nonchalant attitude towards the chronology of her literary output. I do not recall when I heard and saw Brodsky read his poems in New York; a friend of mine who took me to that reading might have assisted my memory, but I am loath to obtrude upon his privacy for the sake of data of secondary importance. Anyway the reading was in the early eighties—prior to the Nobel Prize ceremony during which Brodsky held forth about language and the role it plays in our mental process. In the late seventies I saw a television programme where he compared Space and Time to the detriment of the former, but his eulogy of Time had nothing to do with the innumerable occasions on which he read his poetry or discussed his favourite poets. What he had in mind concerned the medium to which he devoted the greater part of his life. And within this medium Time flows, jerks to a halt, stutters, jumps, dances a tarantella. In terms of chronological time, however, the reading I attended in the company of my friend was squeezed between the televised interview and the Nobel Prize ceremony. As Brodsky appeared on stage I got the feeling he had already received all Nobel prizes, including that for peace. 'Be quiet!' he said to the obedient audience; I was reminded of ink-spotted desks and the right-hand corner which seldom remained empty. But a self-appointed primary teacher may turn out to be a remarkable poet and Brodsky proved it in the second half of his life. And a good poet is often at odds with hedonists whose everyday life is not restrained to a mere upkeep of their brains. Banished from Petersburg, Brodsky chose New York where his mental life was sustained by the brilliant elite and the lacklustre restaurants that he immoderately praises in his dialogues with Solomon Volkov. When looking for the remark in question I lighted upon another hymn to New York, linked with the name of Antonio Machado who had never visited America. Brodsky thinks that New York can be described only by the superman from strip cartoons and one wonders if Machado would have become such a superman had he taken a stroll along Fifth Avenue or gone jogging to Central Park. Be that as it may, I have not become a superman despite the number of visits I paid to my American friends from 1980 to 1986: in my opinion, skyscrapers, Star Wars, melting pots and even intellectual elites are not as musical as genuine Gothic architecture, the Hundred Years' War and gastronomy. Indeed, the most renowned Swiss *povar* (chef), Fredy Girardet, was compared to Mozart, and Brodsky himself speaks about cuisine in terms of music: 'If you were to compare, I would say that Russian cuisine is traditional harmony, whereas Chinese is the twelve-tone system. Except it tastes good—because I'd rather not have the real twelve-tone system for lunch.' (Incidentally, in the Russian original he falls back on the expression 'twelve-

tone system' instead of saying *dodecaphony*—the word used by professional musicians.) In his monologues, which Volkov does his utmost to turn into dialogues, he sings praises of all exotic and ethnic cuisines that are 'probably at their peak here, in New York' and overeggs the pudding when declaring they are 'head and shoulders above what you'd find in their respective countries'. Did he ever go to Hong Kong and Taiwan? If not, one might regret it even more than Machado's reluctance to visit New York. If yes, he must have been too engrossed in writing a speech or selecting poems for another *poeticheski vecher* (a poetry reading), which, incidentally, suits a poet's vocation far more than fiddling with puddings and eggs.

Going back to eggs, Brodsky never noticed the scarcity of French cheeses in New York grocery stores; and yet, during his sojourns in Paris, he might have been keenly alive to the difference between them and their rudimentary counterparts he had partaken of during privately organised readings in Petersburg and Moscow. He did notice French restaurants in New York and found them 'tremendously expensive' so that I have no idea whether he had an opportunity to compare their quality with that of their Paris and Lyon originals. I hope he did not; after all, some great poets *were* attuned to the music of the palate. But I think it is time for us to tune in to the music of Brodsky's poems, especially to what I heard at the Nakhamkin Gallery that night.

There weeds submit to green; a sort of common harness.

A principle of sound owes to a bee that's harmless.

A copy, sparing its original, stays armless.

Brodsky read his poems monotonously; as I continued to swallow (or smoke) the drug of his prosody I heard the music of Time that goes past without looking at you. Actually the greater part of Brodsky's poems are said *en passant* and to feel their fleeting character one need not listen to them in the author's interpretation. 'I feel I must say *en passant*' seems to be the key note of his literary output, although '*en passant*' presupposes not one note but a scale or rather a work based on an '*en passant* technique'. According to Joyce, in modern times one cannot describe Paradise; Brodsky might have been more romantic in the days of Dante or even at the beginning of the twentieth century when Yeats re-invented the *Divina Commedia*. Nowadays Hell should be described *en passant*, otherwise one might get stuck in it for good despite New York's exotic restaurants; despite the wines one might drink in Versailles or elsewhere. Brodsky judged exotic cuisines from a European point of view and no wonder they appeared to him in the shape of 'the twelve-tone method' that he was reluctant to cope with in everyday life. I am as used to *pirozhek* as any Russian poet and therefore cannot help feeling out of tune with exotic cuisines which may

become attuned to my palate however, providing they are refined enough to satisfy my overall sense of beauty. Alas, my genes do not include anything capable of judging Japanese or Chinese cuisines on their own terms and I share this predicament with all the people whose ancestry happens to be confined to Europe, the Middle East, Africa and America and who compare Chinese cuisine to *chinoiserie* of all sorts—Puccini's *Turandot*, among other things. At least wines come under the heading of what, thanks to Chomsky, is known as 'universal grammar' so that my international friends will understand the following metaphors: Bach is Latour, Mozart Margaux (prior to 1961), Beethoven Mouton, Schubert Haut Brion, Mahler and early Schoenberg Mission Haut Brion.

'A copy, sparing its original, stays armless.' Was he writing about New York? Actually, the poem is about Russia where armlessness and headlessness have been wandering around woods, valleys and cities for almost a century. Or is it about our world in general, our mutilated statues? A brain nourished by New York restaurants thus creates not a geographic point but a state of mind which discards tastes buds and taste as such, exposing itself to the noise associated with bees and their daily routine—a stock market on a Monday morning. 'Look, look then at that locus / that's better out of focus.' The poem in question is entitled *The Fifth Anniversary*. Again Brodsky speaks about Russia or the whole world that is out of focus somehow. The Russian original reads as follows, '*Vzglyani, vzglyani tuda, / kuda smotret' ne stoit*' (Look, look at what it's better not to look). Why did he translate his own poem so whimsically, so ironically? J. M. Coetzee pinpoints Brodsky's imbroglia as follows, 'There is a continual shuttling back and forth between colloquial and formal diction; and when a bon mot is in the offing, Brodsky can be trusted to scamper after it...Brodsky, David Bethea has observed, never quite succeeded in commanding the "quasi-civic" level of American discourse, as he never entirely commanded the nuances of ironic humour, perhaps the last level of English to be mastered by foreigners.' Did he offer us a sample of his English humour when insisting on the superiority of New York restaurants?

'Look, look then at that locus that's better out of focus.' The locus-focus rhyme is too artificial to convey the haunting sobriety of the original because 'locus' is a formal word and consequently is out of focus with everyday diction and Russian *toska* one cannot feel in any other language except by piling up a dozen words: melancholy, sadness, despondency, depression, gloom, dejection, grief, misery, sorrow, torment, desolation, long-term unhappiness. As a staunch believer in rhymes, Brodsky should have realised that, under the influence of this wordplay, the reader was likely to dismiss the whole poem as another instance of hocus-pocus. What is actually better out of focus? Everything, I suppose; nowadays everything is better out of focus. Even some of Brodsky's poems are better out of focus, assuming they have ever been focused on anything

except their author, his friends, a few cities. Some of the countries he visited were not yet out of focus in the seventies, in the eighties, when one could relish Giotto's frescoes in Padua without consulting one's watch and casting imploring looks at the attendants.

Brodsky's *poeticheski vecher* and his *toska* reminded me of the famous story about two *balalaika* players one of whom throws his instrument up in the air, enjoying both the music and his own rendering of it, whereas his colleague contents himself with brushing the strings in a regular, monotonous way, his face looking remarkably composed. A passer-by stares at them for a while and then asks the monotonous player, 'Why are you so boring? Why don't you follow your colleague's example?' And the maestro answers, 'My colleague is searching, I've already found everything.' In the last years of his life Brodsky found himself and the numerous aspects of the world where he lived and wrote poetry. And all those aspects sounded monotonous and were rhymed as if to comment upon our global village: a coke machine in Kyoto rhymes with its American original and Petersburg rhymes with New York, for all its columns, statues and spires. But Brodsky's Petersburg does not rhyme with New York because a true poet rhymes only with himself or herself.

The thought of you is receding like a chambermaid given notice.

No! Like a railway platform, with block-lettered DVINSK or TATRAS.

Dvinsk, Tattras, Petersburg, Moscow, New York. Schubert is also poetically monotonous. Brodsky found himself, Schubert, Haydn, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost, W. H. Auden and partly myself. And the music I hear in his poems is not different from that of the Versailles market to which I go every Sunday and where I meet some of my Parisian friends. Yet Versailles does not 'rip the rational sacs with lances / clanging loud like returning empties'. Nor does Paris fit into Brodsky's description, for one can book a table at the Tour d'Argent where clients are allowed to consult the best wine list in the world and have the privilege, once their choice is made, of admiring Léonin and Pérotin—the Notre-Dame school—through one of the windows mesmerised by the Cathedral of Notre-Dame.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

March 9, 2004

Versailles

VLADIMIR MARTYNOV

We are not always in a position to shower praises on our friends and colleagues as much as they deserve it. 'The greatest poet of all times' can be said about Dante; when speaking about a man living next door, however, we refrain from such a compliment because most of his colleagues would stop greeting us. So let me limit my definition of Vladimir Martynov's art to the jejune statement, 'One of the most remarkable artists in today's Russia.' (To me the notion of artist includes composers, writers, poets, painters, philosophers and also the people whose thoughts and feelings are beautiful.) When appraising the role of our friendship in my life I may go so far as to say that, but for his solicitous presence, I would have been a different man: an unhappy pianist who has lost a greater part of his genes during his onerous and, to some extent, pointless tours around the world. Even interpreters who are totally deprived of any creative élan are bound to feel bitter as they realise they have no part in the process to which the God-like composers they perform devoted their divine lives. It is odd that the number of suicides among interpreters is rather small. And if one of them does take their own life, the motives of their act have nothing to do with his or her exclusion from the society of creative artists. According to a music critic, Bernstein might have been 'one of the happiest men in the world'. But, as a composer, he was relatively unrecognised, which tormented him to the point of making his life a (relative) misery. He feared he might not be God-like after all, and this fear must have hastened his death. I am also thankful to Volodya for the assistance he gave me during the composition of this book. He was indeed its first reader or rather—listener: apart from myself, no one can decipher my handwriting. My every stay in Moscow is punctuated by our almost daily meetings. Even in Versailles I often yield to the temptation of communicating with his soul which, like every soul, is used to air travel.

In the Russian edition of this book an excerpt from our correspondence is published: eight letters. I shall *describe* them here because some of the details can be properly understood only in the light of what happens in Russia today, which is not the subject matter of this book. We are living in a global village and every hut in this village is important; but people all over the world are keener to know what goes on in American barns than in Russian palaces. Centralisation is no bad thing in the domain of art, provided its centre is psychological and not geographical. Last week I saw again a Russian film entitled *The Winter Night in Gagra*. The protagonist is a former tap dancer who has lost everything: his fame, his daughter with whom he danced in Gagra once, his wife. Both his wife and daughter are alive and well, but he seldom if ever sees them—a blessing in disguise. When his daughter eventually pays him a visit she asks him not to come to

her imminent marriage. He is neither a drunkard nor a tramp, but she has 'another father' now whom she wishes to protect from unpleasant emotions. This scene is situated at the very centre of human mythology, in the Palace of Art. But who knows of this film outside Russia, outside a narrow circle of old film buffs?

Perhaps our letters have not been deposited in the Palace of Art—at least, not in the Ballroom, not in the Hall of Mirrors. The point is we did not really *work* on them, anxious to preserve their spontaneous, epistolary character. Moreover, some details would demand an explanation; and there are too many explanations in this book already. So I shall give the gist of our correspondence, shortening the argumentation and omitting a few local hints cherished by our fellow students.

In my first letter to Volodya I take up the theme which often enlivens our conversations: the timing of artistic genres. 'You are writing an opera on the *Vita Nuova*; yet you are quite aware that, in this day and age, such an exploit is out of anyone's reach. And I was writing my novels merely because some things cannot be expressed in other forms. The framework of a story is a more or less acceptable breeding ground for Wittgenstein's language games. Only the novel, however, enables one to deal with the whims of memory, of the unconscious; otherwise memory would be too short and the unconscious too shallow.'

I also recount the concert I attended in Moscow. There is a famous Russian painting by Ivanov, *The Appearance of the Messiah to the People*. The faces of the people I saw on my way to the Big Conservatoire Hall glowed with excitement to such an extent that one might say they were to witness the appearance of *three* Messiahs at once: three international stars took part in the concert. Their performances were hideous, but, instead of hissing with disgust, the audience applauded as if the three Messiahs *had* showed up in spite of everything. In Russia this enthusiasm is programmed to come on whenever the name of a Messiah appears on a poster or a bill. And tickets for such performances cost 200 times more than 'ordinary' tickets. But I promised not to enlarge upon *local* matters. Let me just add that not everybody shared the ardour of the crowd. A woman from Paris, whom I met two days afterwards, said with a grimace, 'What a hideous concert.' In my letter I assure Volodya that, if accused of giving concerts, I would be at a loss for an answer because I do not suffer from what I call 'scenomania'. But creative artists write their works beyond Space and Time, in the four last Cantos of the *Paradiso*. 'And if Space does crop up here and there in order to betray a poet, as it did in the case of Blake or Musil, the poet may still count on the co-operation of Time.'

In his first letter Volodya affirms that there are only horrid concerts nowadays: the very form of concerts has grown obsolete. The concert is one of the forms in which music exists.

Everyone knows that there are music forms: rondo, sonata, opera, symphony, etc. But not many people give a thought to how these forms exist. Concert is a form where only some music genres may flourish. Outside them, concerts make no sense. They were born alongside public galleries, museums and libraries and respond to the advent of the public as such—in the eighteenth century. All this happens within the framework of the Enlightenment and concerns only some composers: Beethoven, Mahler, Brahms. Even late Webern does not fit into this pattern. And what about Okegem, Obrecht or Machault? And what to say about the Gregorian chant, Hindu raga or folklore ritual?

But even the works that do fit into this pattern are no longer performed appropriately, Volodya maintains, because the pattern itself has considerably worn down. So we must look for another, more propitious situation. The twentieth century tackled the problem of language in earnest. Now it is situation that we must care about, not language. Our heroes to come will neither create a new language nor speak their own languages; but they will be ingenious enough to create a framework in which language may function afresh. At the end of the letter Volodya airs his loathing for the artists who litter art and life with impunity. Businessmen are often killed. (Let us not forget that Volodya lives in Russia.) An acrobat can fall and sustain serious injuries. Only composers, painters and poets are free to do whatever they want in their pursuit of glory and money, as if playing on a chessboard with an infinite number of squares and pieces. The words 'rights' and 'self-expression' are another target of Volodya's fury, who finally suggests that Louis II of Bavaria might have been hounded to death by the relentless onslaught of those 'rights'. So, 'with uplifted arms', he entered the waters of Starnberger See.

My friend's letter is an eloquent instance of 'self-expression', it seems to me. That is what I say at the beginning of my second letter. 'Your music too gives expression to your self in various forms. As to your rights, you see to it that your works are performed appropriately, otherwise you would not spend so much time in recording studios. What we have to worry about, in my opinion, is not "self-expression" and "rights" but the quantity of bad writers, composers and instrumentalists. Anyway let us not lump together creative artists and interpreters—they are *not* alike except that both categories are swarming with second- or rather third-raters.' Then I ask myself if a *kustar' odinochka* can be found today.

Kustar' odinochka. In my dictionary this is translated as follows, 'handicraftsman working for himself'. I have nothing against 'handicraftsman': many artists as well as *grands cuisiniers* insist on being *artisans*; but the second part of the definition—'working *for* himself'—makes me uncomfortable because the Russian word *odinochka* does not suggest 'for'. Or at least *odinochka* suggests it *partly*, meaning 'loner'. Handicraftsman working in solitude and sometimes, alas, only

for himself. I use this term rather often in our correspondence and conversations; it is one of the key terms ensuring my survival in the world that is utterly incompatible with my ideals. Solitude is an essential element in the life of any artist of note; it is a key situation, as it were. And I have gone to great lengths, which are defined by some of my well-wishers as 'self-destructive', in order to safeguard my literary work against intrusions of all kinds. In point of fact it is the only 'situation' I have really cared about in my life. What Volodya had in mind, however, when using this word, is more akin to Spengler's (and Foucault's) point of view. In the early twenties he wrote that philosophical systems could no longer be constructed; even ethical philosophy was hopelessly out of date, according to him. Poetry was also in the throes of agony. So he advised his readers to become sailors and economists instead. 'The world would have lost Paul Celan if everyone had taken notice of Spengler's counsel,' I write in my letter. Actually, this would also have resulted in a fearful shortage of ships.

Among the prizewinners in Brussels last year there was not a single Russian pianist—an unprecedented fact in the history of this prestigious Competition. Perhaps the Russians heeded Spengler's warning without reading his book: they do not send their children to music schools any more. Many Russian sailors have turned businessmen, too. No wonder that, for some time, the term *kustar' odinochka* has been used disparagingly in Russia. Have they survived at all, those mavericks? They might have, for traditionally they keep aloof from history and are unmoved by its ups and down: prosperity, degeneration. They are capable of thinking everything up—the beginning of the world, its end—and therefore take no heed of Spengler's warning, even after reading *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. At least Heidegger did not: *Sein und Zeit* came out four years after Spengler's masterpiece. And *his* masterpiece is one of the greatest systems in the history philosophy, a real *summa philosophiae* where a few sections are devoted to ethical problems.

In his second letter Volodya says I depend on history because I ask whether one *should* depend on it, which proves that I regard it as a real fact. And even if I choose *not* to depend on it, I shall act in accordance with its rules owing to the *necessity* of any choice. Actually I know one cannot get away from history: I state it clearly in my last novel. But there is a difference between living inside it as an artist and adjusting oneself to whatever happens outside. Here is a sample of Volodya's literary style:

Yet we are the children of history, whether we desire it or not. We see the world through history, otherwise you would not have spoken about periods of prosperity and crises to which, according to your words, you are indifferent. If you were indifferent to them, you would not know what they

are about. But you know about them as well as I do. It is quite naive to regard the epoch in which we are living as a material supplying us with this or that theme. It is the other way round: we ourselves constitute the material from which Time creates this or that theme. Time is always a challenge. What is more, I think that Time is a call addressed to every one of us, it is the Sphinx's enigma that every one of us should solve. We should solve the enigma of this call, we should solve this enigma—only thus can we touch reality. What should we do at this particular moment, under these particular circumstances? Should we create works of art? Should we navigate ships? Should we do business? Should we make love? Our encounter with the Real depends on the correctness and accuracy of our answer. It is not we who choose when we are to be born and to live. It is not we who choose the time for the solution of our private problems. Time chooses us for the solution of its problems, and it seems to me that those through whom these solutions are put into practice must be happy. Some call such people 'great'. In this sense there are no good or bad times. In every historical moment there is a point from which the ascension to heaven might begin. All one must do is find this point and join it with one's 'Self'. However, it is very difficult to do when one has one's pretensions and objectives.

The time of great geographical discoveries is gone; so is the time of discoveries in art. There is no denying that artists can make a good living and are given many opportunities to pour out their souls. They can even discover something in themselves. But they *cannot* discover a *real* continent. So writing novels, operas and symphonies is a proof of ignorance and stupidity. It is likewise too late to create works of art about the impossibility of creating works of art (8½). We must realise this fact and act accordingly, trying to overstep the limits of art in order to discover the continent that lies *beyond* it. What it comes down to is the great principle of action—non-action. In the light of our problem this principle may be defined as the art of non-art.

In my third letter I enlarge upon the point 'from which the ascension to heaven might begin'. Beneath its beautiful exterior the sentence hides a quasi-religious justification of our infirmity. For the Church there are indeed no *bad* times because the way to God is always open; and any persecution of the Church—the so-called hard times—cannot but stimulate one's soul in its endeavour to get beyond the clouds. I have no intention of justifying our times on religious or selfish grounds. As a confirmed *kustar' odinochka*, I am just hoping to terminate the Jamesian 'figure in the carpet': this figure can become a starting point for the ascension to heaven.

'Time chooses us for the solution of its problems.' What kind of problem is Time coping with today, I wonder? Has Time itself decayed so outrageously? And why has it forgotten art? Is Time's memory so short that nothing can remind it of its past greatness? May this amnesiac tick

away and leave us alone! In this respect I have come to prefer Confucius to Taoists: he was prepared to live in harmony only with the times and spaces consistent with his ideals. (Nor would Taoists have adjusted to our times, I suppose; they could not foresee such a thing would ever happen.) Whatever is in the news seems actual, but it is not: in most cases—and not only retrospectively—invisible men lord it over visible ones. In other words, banner headlines might pale beside a brief exchange between two vagabonds.

I left the Soviet Union in 1974. And in the early nineties I erected a number of barricades between myself and our times. These barricades are still our meeting point. Insurgents often climbed on their barricades to have a talk with the enemy, didn't they?

The times of great geographical discoveries *are* gone because the earth is not infinite. But the game of chess *is* infinite and consequently one need not augment the number of pieces or squares. Nor does one have to *reduce* art to one square, however big; or to Malevich's *Black Square* which is a naked idea, a slogan, a manifesto comparable to *Campbell's Tomato Soup*. Our meeting point with art is that figure in the ever-moving, elusive centre of the infinite carpet—in texture. Slogans are good at election campaigns and demonstration, but in art there is only one person walking along an infinite street. In *Ulysses*, Joyce said 'Yes' 359 times. If I intended to say 'No' or, in other words, to paint a black square, I would write something along the lines of *Ulysses*, repeating 'No' 1,000 times. I need the texture of *Ulysses* to express this 'No', spreading it all over the universe. It is not enough to type out 'No' 1,000 times.

'A great orator is like a stutterer.' At the beginning of his third letter, Volodya advises me to take particular note of these words. He himself is always reminded of them when listening to Theolonious Monk. Nowadays the truth manifests itself not in the perfection of texture, but in transgressions, in destruction, in a 'stutter' that make us think of a superhuman texture, of the 'other side' of Being. Every carpet has two sides, and if we turn the right side up to have a look at the reverse we shall find some clumsy and messy stitches—a pale reflection of the magnificent figures adorning the right side. But these clumsy, 'stuttering' stitches are the reverse of those figures. Monk's stutter...the 'tongue-tiedness' of many contemporary creators...Bearing testimony to something higher than the most perfect texture, they are the reverse of some inaccessible, unknown figures in a carpet. But even the time of great stuttering might have gone and now we are compelled to seek the solutions identical to those which put an end to the problems of the Gordian knot and Columbus's egg.

Volodya goes on to tell a story of a Buddhist who, in the course of his ascension, suddenly saw a pair of naked female legs down below. The ascension stopped abruptly. 'To use your terminology, one might say that this hermit was betrayed by a sort of space. But does he have any

time at his disposal—the time on the co-operation of which he can count? At any rate, if you think he does, I shall repeat the words of Pasha Anosov who, when charmed by one of his fellow drinkers, used to say, "Nice to be you!"

In my fourth letter I put in my turn the following question, 'Is the time of great stuttering gone as well?' Time might have two legs; one of them goes deeper and deeper into the grave, the other remains motionless. If one leg of Time was not rooted to the spot, the very word 'tradition' would sink into oblivion. I am very fond of traditions and my past was set into motion by the name of Anosov whom I knew slightly, however. (The past might also have two legs, one climbing *out* of the grave.) So I asked Volodya to recount an episode from the past in his next letter.

In his fourth and last letter Volodya just told a story of how, armed with a catapult, he had killed a bird in our mutual friend's garden. I did not know the story where wordplay, a sequence from Hitchcock's *The Birds* and a forthcoming exam blended into a nightmarish harmony. A musical harmony, according to Volodya. Anyway our correspondence could not end otherwise, could it?

December 16, 2003

Versailles

FREEDOM

Some time ago I wrote a text about an orchestra I had played with last summer. I had no alternative but to accede to the request of a conductor whose entreaties brought about this essay where the difference between a sentimental value and a value judgement comes to the fore, providing you know where the author stands.

A member of an orchestra said once, 'Doing military service—that's what our job boils down to.' Something of an overstatement. Absolute freedom is a myth concocted by anarchists and anyway it is better to rely on a great conductor, his inspiration and savoir-faire, than on your own abilities; unless you are a violinist of genius like David Oistrakh. Orchestras are Adam Kadmon whose body spans the universe, and yet I get the feeling that today's kollektivï are made up of civil servants who dream of creature comforts, domestic appliances or animals. Couscous, tiramitsu. The Molodyozhniy Orkestr enticed me into a sphere of freedom, curiosity, passion and love—a sphere of Paradise. Being young is not enough to enter this sphere; you must be a born musician.

I do not like this orchestra, but the conductor is my friend.

January 28, 2007

Versailles

THE AUDIENCE

Almost a century ago Akutagava said that in days of yore affluence had been a natural concomitant of culture. 'Now it is just the opposite: the rich do not care about art.'

Engrossed in phoney pleasures, they overlook and eventually forget the very essence of life that art reveals with unyielding frankness. I have no wish to deny the importance of money as a catalyst for cultural projects, but at the moment I am more interested in how it affects one's personal approach to music.

In the days of Akutagava's unsavoury analysis, money could enable a concert-goer to attend a performance of Busoni, Rachmaninov, Mahler, Toscanini, Furtwängler, Mengelberg and other glorious artists. Affluence was a natural concomitant of culture in the first half of the twentieth century—contrary to what Akutagava wrote with such bitterness. But he dazzlingly predicted what would become of concert-goers at the end of the twentieth century when public performances began to estrange their victims from music and art in general. But the victims behave anachronistically, aping the ritual of their fortunate predecessors: they applaud, shout 'bravo' and stamp their feet. They travel to Chicago, San Francisco, Bayreuth, Vienna and thereby expose themselves to the danger of which they seem to be ignorant like someone eating a poisoned dish with a happy smile. Indeed, in this day and age concerts may annihilate one's sense of beauty, if taken seriously. And they *are* taken seriously, judging by the money some people squander on tickets, hotel suits and flowers. (Flowers are still offered to pianists, violinists, singers and conductors—in spite of everything!) So sagacious music lovers lock their rooms and switch their music systems on.

With a few exceptions, the best readers can be found among the illiterate: they have not been poisoned by contemporary novels and other graphospasms. Yet we should not suffer from persecution mania either on the stage or at a writing desk; we are *not* behind enemy lines. One member of the audience is bound to understand what we are doing. And we can always count on a distant reader who, in the twenty-third century, may chance upon one sound from this book.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

April 9, 2006

Chita

TRAVEL NOTES

NOTE TO *TRAVEL NOTES*

As I pointed out earlier, the space of music is not confined to ivory towers and those squares or suburbs around which a composer may moon in search of inspiration. In my mirror that I am supposed to hold up to music this outer space should be reflected, if only for the sake of completeness. I often use the word 'space' in relation to art which is rather cramped for space nowadays. (And overpopulation has nothing to do with this phenomenon.) There is no denying that travel notes represent the lowest form of musical *space*, but the more we utter this word the better, whatever the context.

2005

Versailles

BACK TO THE USSR

*Homecoming is dangerous. Not on account
Of human forgetfulness and indifference.
We're not forgotten. Our long-lost friends
Do care about us. (No telegrams,
No long-distance calls. Unaided,
Their memory has cuddled us
For years, for decades.)*

*There's no room for doubt:
We'll recognize them in the crowd
At the squalid Moscow airport.*

*We studied maths at school and know
How to deduct time from a face
And square-root a hair root
To do away with baldness.*

*So we recognize our friends
And even their old parents.
What next?*

*We talk.
We talk and laugh and resurrect
The happy days of yore
And everything seems unchanged.
(As if it was yesterday!)*
Not everything.
Our friends would have said, 'Yes'
Many years ago.
Now they say, 'Absolutely.'
What's the difference?
Their words are different,

Their smiles and frowns.
And our glances don't coincide.
My friends look past me, as it were.
One inch at the utmost.
Not much
After so many, many years.
Not much
Compared with the length of the barbed wire
And the heights of the former Great Walls.
One inch.

Though much smaller,
The new frontier
Is impassable.

On December 30, 1989 I returned to Moscow for the first time since 1974. On June 17, 1974 I requested political asylum in Belgium and thus incurred the wrath of Soviet officials who lost no time in sentencing me to seven years' imprisonment in absentia.

How many times did I answer the question 'Do you miss Russia?' during those 15 years of exile? Did I miss Russia or the Soviet Union? I would answer I missed rather my past or my friends than Russian landscapes and birch trees that had become a sentimental and commercial symbol of my native land. The following poem mirrors my nature, and consequently Hamlet's precept, far more faithfully than my elusive answers:

THE 'UNBORING' GARDEN

In summertime
I walked daily around this garden.
I may have walked here before my birth
So well do I know it.
In my youth
I walked these paths with my girlfriends
And dared them bathe in the fountains.

They never did.

In my thirties

I was guided through its paths and bushes

By my nightmares that knew it better

Than I did.

In my thirties

I often returned to Moscow at night-time.

My insomnia would bring me back. My nightmares

Kept me there.

My insomnia

Allowed me to visit my dearest friends.

They showed no surprise, no wonder, as if

I had been expected.

My friends

Didn't fear for my life. They'd realised

I was with them only in thought. I was a thief

Of Space.

My nightmares

Guided me across the flowerbeds of the garden.

I walked through the statues. I saw no friends.

I saw nobody.

My garden

Was empty. Only shadows were falling and

Criss-crossing in an all-too-familiar pattern—

A twilight prison.

My passport

Was no longer valid. 'You've no return visa.'

I never got any further

Except last May.

My garden. I do hope

I'll come here every other day.

After my death.

Actually I used to think I would go back to Russia only after my death and was quite surprised (and thrilled, and moved) when the Berlin Wall and other walls, visible and invisible, were finally abolished, annihilated, razed to the ground.

So I went back home. I cannot possibly describe all my feelings and meetings in this essay which, after all, is supposed to deal with my recital at the Big Conservatoire Hall. Not all of my friends had changed. (In some cases we just took up where we had left off, continuing our interrupted discussions.) Not all of my professors had died.

And what about Moscow? I took a walk in the Unboring Garden (*Neskuchny sad*) and did not find the statues I had been dreaming about.

But the architectural beauty and the acoustics of the Big Hall were attuned to my dreams and memories. I just took up where I had left off.

1994

Versailles

HOMAGE TO JAPAN

NOTE TO *HOMAGE TO JAPAN*

The present essay is published in this book not because Japan, with her gardens and tea ceremony, is musical by nature; yet a lot can be said about the harmony of her rituals and the melodious movements that are the hallmark of the Noh and Kabuki performances. Actually I was more interested in the beauty of transitory, far from meaningful, phrases and discussions. I relished in the charms of uselessness, of nonsensical pastimes when one's senses unexpectedly come into their own. The modulations through which glides the iambic tetrameter in *Eugene Onegin* are probably the main source of the music one hears in it. But without a fair amount of *boltovnya* (idle talk)—to use Pushkin's own expression—this novel in verse would not sound with Mozartian lightness and loveliness. *Le mariage de Figaro* is a bauble which, instead of inspiring a 'fleshier bauble yet', gave Mozart enough material on which to draw for his melodies and harmonies, for a bubble is often deeper than the sea.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

November 28, 2003

Moscow

HOMAGE TO JAPAN

Last month I spent a few days in Japan. During my stay I gave a few concerts and a lecture on music; I also attended a cocktail party at the end of which I met a young lady, a niece of my long-standing friend. In the course of our conversation I mentioned the hotel where I was staying—a rather charming hotel whose style might be defined as half-Japanese and half-European. Actually its only Japanese feature was the sliding windows letting in a soft, suggestive light; but one Japanese feature, especially if it is linked to the penumbra that Tanizaki praised so gracefully in his famous essay on shadow, makes one forget at least fifty percent of the European and American way of life. But I had no time to enunciate my preference for *lumière tamisée*, all the more so since I suddenly realised that the young lady had asked me about the *duration* of my stay: 'when' often sounds like 'where' in the hullabaloo of a cocktail party. I made up for my involuntary mistake by reeling off the dates of all my concerts. A few minutes later, however, she went back to the subject of my whereabouts, saying thoughtfully, 'So you're staying at the Capitol Tokuy Hotel.' At that point I really had no time to sing the praises of sliding windows and penumbra: my friend was already waiting for us. I only said a few words about the metaphysical depth of wines prior to 1961 and once more deplored today's shallowness. Contrary to my expectations, we did not have dinner together that night, which might have allowed me to add some apocalyptic touches to my description of the modern world.

Next day my friend told me on the phone that he had spoken with his niece about the Capitol Tokuy Hotel. 'Tonight we had dinner in a Chinese restaurant. And my niece talked about the Chinese restaurant at your hotel. So I told her you were staying there. She was quite surprised.'

I was surprised as well. And I told my friend we had discussed my whereabouts the day before. He said his niece must have misunderstood me. I said she could not have because she repeated the name of the hotel a few minutes after I had uttered it. But my friend was not to be swayed so easily: he said his niece had forgotten this part of our conversation (within twenty-four hours).

Our memory is indeed so unreliable that even important events often sink into oblivion before they can substantially influence human history. And we are prone to forget the names of the people who *have* influenced our life. Nevertheless I am pretty sure that my friend's niece did *not* forget the name of my hotel. It might have slipped her mind at the moment she began to talk about our Chinese restaurant, but she was bound to recall it when my friend said I was staying there. Why did she express surprise?

This episode lends itself to many interpretations, which proves that, for all our efforts to get rid of unprofitable mysteries, they still can be found in everyday life—if only by those who look for mysteries. Some of these interpretations are more Japanese, more musical than others. Did the young lady just want to change the subject? Why? To pass on to more important matters? She also might have been unwilling to disclose her awareness of where I was staying on the grounds that such a piece of information was incompatible with the fleeting, fortuitous nature of our relationship—within the bounds of the traditional (Japanese) code of behaviour.

Some explanations are tainted and even impaired by what can be justly regarded as wishful thinking on my part. I cannot help hoping that she might have brought up the subject on purpose, seeking to get in touch with me through her uncle. Of course he was unlikely to mention this episode during his call. It was therefore important to *make* him talk about it. Why *did* he talk about it? Because of a twinkle in her eye, of the way she pronounced 'Oh, really?' Or was it a superfluous, meaningless gesture that put him on the 'right track'?

Suppose she did want to get across a sort of message. 'I'm thinking about you.' 'Could we meet during your present stay in Japan?' This message might be a test as well. 'Will you understand my message? If you do, we are on the same wavelength.' I am reminded of a story that Kierkegaard refers to in *Fear and Trembling* by quoting Johann Georg Hamann: 'What Tarquinius Superbus said in his garden by means of the poppies was understood by his son but not by the messenger.' Tarquinius Superbus had a son, Sextus Tarquinius, who was in the city of Gabii—yet another territory appropriated by the Roman Empire. The son sent a message to his father, inquiring what he ought to do next. Mistrustful of the messenger, the father went out to his garden and, using his stick, lopped the heads of the tallest poppies. The messenger reported the scene to Sextus Tarquinius who grasped the meaning of the silent gesture and soon thereafter murdered the most powerful men in the city. The father and the son had thus communicated via a third party—a puzzled, bewildered messenger. I am pushing my analysis so far only for argument's sake, being fully alive to the pathetic bias of my thinking. Or does the whole casuistry originate in my lifelong attachment to Japan, to her art and customs?

I never really *came* to Japan. I seem to have always lived there—ever since I read some haiku and saw Hokusai's waves and waterfalls. At first I was a passive spellbound witness of Japanese delicacy and deep-rooted melancholy. At the age of sixteen I began a series of haiku-inspired poems—a never-ending series. For two years I wrote nothing but short poems in which I attempted to imitate the mood and elusive meaningfulness (or elaborate meaninglessness) of the Japanese poetic style. I also listened to the records of Noh performances that my friend's distant relatives had brought from Japan. Another friend of mine gave visual expression to the

Man'yôshû poetry in a number of abstract watercolours that hung around his room. His sister was studying Japanese; several years later she became a professional interpreter. On solemn occasions she would wear a homemade kimono painted by her brother.

We truly lived in Japan. Alas, our adoration was somewhat akin to the helplessness of unrequited love: Soviet citizens were not allowed to go abroad on their own initiative. So we had to wait and wait—perhaps for years, for decades.

In 1974 I defected to Western Europe; my travel arrangements became far more personal. At last, in 1983, my knowledge of Japan took on a tangible shape. The shadows and dreams of my youth were replaced by an implacable order of reality. I saw a few Noh performances in which I 'recognised' the records I had heard in Moscow, Zeami's plays and treaties I had read in Paris, the Noh mask my German friend had shown me in Munich. I visited the Japanese gardens whose photographs had haunted me in Brussels and St Petersburg. And during my stay in Kyoto I saw Bashô's house and tomb—a new haiku perspective.

I continue to recognise Japan. This drawn-out remembrance has something in common with Plato's theory of knowledge postulating the immortality of the soul. The young lady I met last month, her artificial surprise that looks and sounds so natural, almost organic in the context of Japanese culture, brings up to date my recognition of Sei Shônagon's *Pillow Book*. In chapter 53, Sei Shônagon speaks of her brother who, during one of his visits, complained about an Imperial Adviser by the name of Tadanobu. 'He wants to know where you're staying. I said nothing but he pressed all the harder so I had a difficult time hiding the truth from him. I knew that if I so much as glanced at him I should start giggling. To save myself, I snatched a piece of seaweed from the table and popped it into my mouth.' Several days later Sei Shônagon received a letter from her brother inquiring whether he should still keep her whereabouts secret. By way of reply, Sei Shônagon merely wrapped a little seaweed in a piece of paper and sent it to him. The elegance of her message was further enhanced by its being in full accordance with the Taoist principle 'Perfect Man (or Perfect Woman) should leave no traces of his (or her) conduct'. Indeed, if reproached by the Imperial Adviser for her reluctance to let him know her address, she might have said she knew nothing about his inquiries. In this case, the seaweed she sent to her brother would have become a delicate reminder of a stroll on the seashore.

In Chapter 24, Sei Shônagon admits the necessity of idle talk as she quotes the following insignificant dialogue:

'Well, well, Madam,' says the man, leaning forward so that the upper part of his body comes behind her curtains, 'what a long nap you're having after your morning adieu! You really are a lie-abed!'

'You call me that, Sir,' she replied, 'only because you're annoyed at having had to get up before the dew had time to settle.'

'Their conversation may be commonplace, yet I find there is something delightful about the scene,' Sei Shônagon rounds off. (Translated by Ivan Morris)

In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger devotes a chapter to idle talk (*Gerede*). He speaks about its groundlessness (*Bodenlosigkeit*) and the possibility it offers of 'understanding everything without previously making the thing one's own'. But the above conversation is grounded in the misty dawn, in the interior of the room where the man notices an open fan with a magnolia frame and purple paper—near the woman's pillow; it is grounded in the *atmosphere*, as it were. Both the man and woman make this atmosphere their own before engaging in their idle talk that becomes an integral part of the room and of the mist outside. ('A lie-abed' sounds rather misty.) It is as if their words were an object lying beside the open fan.

My friend, Tatiana Tolstoy, said once that we had forgotten the Art of Conversation. The Japanese of the Heian Period knew what this art was about. They also knew how to enjoy the meaninglessness of life.

Yoshida Kenkô, who lived in the Muromachi Period, describes the Art of Conversation as follows:

It is a joyful thing indeed to hold intimate converse with a man after one's own heart, chatting without reserve about things of interest or the fleeting topics of the world; but such, alas, are few and far between. Not that one desires a companion who will sit opposite and never utter a word in contradiction—one might as well be alone. Far better in hours of loneliness the company of one who, while he will listen with respect to your views, will disagree a little, and argue, saying 'Yes, that is so, but...', or 'For this reason such and such is the case.'

(Translated by G.B. Sansom)

The Art of Conversation is a subject that demands long, meticulous treatment. For the moment I am rather concerned with the Problem of Message I first tackled in my teenage years. At the time I was studying in the Music College where I was in love with three or four girls at once. One of them seemed to be initiated in the Art of Message, which finally distinguished her from the other

beauties. Once, during a coffee break, she said all of a sudden, 'A man who fails to understand how important love is doesn't deserve it.' There were several people present—five or six, to be exact; among them was my friend whom I kept in the picture about my infatuations. He paid attention to the remark—this messenger was not bewildered—and a few hours later I learnt everything about the coffee party. I got the message and grew bold enough to elicit a more outspoken, realistic response from the girl I was in love with. Our love is one of my best memories. She is Jewish; her tenderness and ardour used to remind me of the *Song of Songs*—in Russian translation. We still talk sometimes on the phone.

The Art of Message is part of the Art of Conversation; in its turn the latter can be subdivided into several parts: the Art of Glance, the Art of Exclamation, the Art of Silence. They all compose the Art of Living which has deteriorated markedly over half a century—alongside literature and music. Yin and yang, rhythm and harmony. What gets irretrievably lost in periods of decadence is the inner structure of life. 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold,' writes W. B. Yeats in his poem *The Second Coming*. Today things do not fall apart; anyway the things that Yeats had in mind exist no more. And their surrogates just drift apart or quiver in the wind: we are not worthy of an apocalypse. The centre disappeared a long time ago and we do not even know its former whereabouts. But now and then somebody can remind us of those things, of the centre—of the music of life.

There is a theory according to which music creates an optimum balance of surprise and predictability. (The seaweed that Sei Shônagon sends to her brother comes as a surprise after his rather predictable letter.) Too much surprise results in random noise; too much predictability is monotonous to the point of dullness. This explanation might appear simplistic but it does afford us a glimpse into the inner structure of music which in a way mirrors the structure of the universe and that of our life: the opposites, their alternation and combination.

Heidegger spoke about *Staunen* (astonishment, amazement) at the University of Friburg in 1919. Thanks to *Staunen* we re-discover the world, the intensity of living, the texture of life and the possibility of miracles. But astonishment goes hand in hand with predictability that supplies it with a sort of background. If miracles happened all the time we would mistake them for daily routine.

'It is a joyful thing indeed to hold intimate converse with a man after one's own heart, chatting without reserve about things of interest or the fleeting topics of the world; but such, alas, are few and far between.' In this sentence Yoshida Kenkô gives expression to an ordinary wish that any of us, even confirmed loners, could have from time to time. But then he slightly deviates from the route traced by this ordinary sentence: 'Not that one desires a companion who will sit opposite

and never utter a word in contradiction—one might as well be alone.' This is an extraordinary sentence in comparison to the previous one, and the feeling of mild surprise it arouses in the reader broadens immensely the scope of Yoshida Kenkô's meditation. We wonder if he ever found a suitable companion and if it is possible at all to find him or her, considering the number of requirements to be fulfilled on either side. We also realise that literature and life are not one-dimensional, contrary to what many contemporary novels seem to convey both through their contents and inner structures.

Let me go back to that memorable scene in the Chinese restaurant. Why did my friend's niece mention another Chinese restaurant located at the hotel where I was staying? On my account? Or had she just spent a pleasurable evening there some time before? Be that as it may, she must have recalled I was staying at the hotel when her uncle told her about it. What would an ordinary woman have said under the circumstances? 'Oh yes, I remember now. He told me he was staying at the Capitol Tokuy Hotel.' My friend's niece pretended not to have known the fact, creating thereby a surprise, an open-endedness without which this essay would not have seen the light of day.

Suppose she did so purely on a whim—for the fun of it, as the saying goes. I am not particularly fond of the word 'fun', but I must admit that it is appropriate for most of the whims in which my contemporaries freely and carelessly indulge. In no way does it fit the situation I am dealing with now. Even the word 'whim' seems out of tune with the surprise shown by the young lady. I had rather describe her conduct in terms of music: a melody, a counterpoint, an engaging dissonance. Or in Heidegger's terms: *Staunen*, *Lichtung* (clearing, glade). I might even use the French word '*étonnement*' which softens the impact of the surprise, stretching it out. For instance, Paul Valéry writes in *Variété*: '*L'étonnement, ce n'est pas que les choses soient; c'est qu'elles soient telles, et non telles autres.*' The mere existence of things does not surprise us; we are surprised because they are like that and not otherwise. I am surprised that the young lady acted as she did and not differently—like an ordinary woman. And over the last three weeks the *étonnement* has been spreading over my mind and body.

Most of the time the word 'meaningless' has a pejorative connotation. Let us take the following lines from Yeats' poem *Easter 1916* at the beginning of which the poet depicts the once 'motley' Dublin of individual caprice:

*I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words*

The young lady's surprise might have been meaningless after all. But this meaninglessness, if any, has no pejorative connotation in my mind, for it imparts to the whole episode an old-world charm associated with the names of Sei Shônagon, Boswell and Proust. And it does so much more eloquently than any sophisticated, chess-like (or *Go*-like) stratagem, however delighted I might be to play the part of an addressee. In olden times so many things were done just for 'the caprice of it'; for the sake of a beautiful, musical, meaningless action.

Perhaps a meaningless, aimless action reflects the inner structure of life more accurately than a philosophical treatise or even a great poem.

Among the maxims on Lord Naoshige's wall there was this one: 'Matters of great concern should be treated lightly.' Master Ittei commented, 'Matters of small concern should be treated seriously.'

(Yamamoto Tsunetomo, *Hagakure*, translated by William Scott Wilson)

2002

Versailles

POEMS

NOTE TO *POEMS*

My poems are printed in this book for several reasons. *Primo*, they all touch upon music that sounds either in their fore- or background. *Secundo*, poetry and music are always intertwined to some degree, which has given rise to many comparisons between them. 'Only to love is music inferior, but love is a melody,' said Pushkin. Only to music is poetry inferior, but music is poetry too. Even musicians who are used to looking down on other artists cannot help respecting poets. *Tertio*, in this book, as in my novels and stories, there is a pattern which can be detected in the section *Composers* and also in the essay *Vladimir Martynov*. In both cases there is a sort of movement from analysis to dissolution; everything tends to a poetical image where words and sounds blend harmoniously and many opposites are allowed to coincide: syllogisms and metaphors, fancy and reality. In *The Seven Words* the meeting point is the word '*stelle*'; Martynov's last letter provides a solution to the problem of art's future *modus operandi* by telling a story which is both ephemeral and fundamental—like music or poetry.

2005

Versailles

WHAT IS MUSIC?

What is music?
 The anatomy of melancholy,
 The anatomy of joy,
 The anatomy of despair,
 The anatomy of itself.
 It is nothing. Not this, not
 That. Like God it is
 Omnipresent. I hear it
 All the time,
 Everywhere:
 An aria from *Don Giovanni*,
 Brahms' string quartets,
 Schubert's piano sonatas—
 As if I were walking
 Along a soundtrack.
 Neither God nor music
 Can be conceived or expressed
 In terms of finite, existing things.

Being social animals,
 We need somebody or something
 To keep us company.
 If there's nobody around—
 No representative of the human species—
 We try to alleviate our boredom
 By talking to ourselves. Did music originate
 In the irresistible urge
 To get rid of meanings, of words,
 Of interior monologues?

Meaningless sounds. What do they
 Point to? Our feelings,

Celestial spheres, the Hereafter,
Eternity,
God?

You can hardly
Point to God or a feeling.

Everything is music;
Consequently
Nothing is music. Stones are
Music
But they're silent.
The flight of a bird is music. What we hear
Is the flapping of the bird's
Wings,
Not the flight itself. And it's the flight
That is music.
Thoughts are music too. We hear
Words,
Not thoughts. And words are also music
When deprived of their meanings.
And meanings are also
Music
When deprived of words.
When we are at one with the world,
'One' is music.

2000
Versailles

WRITING MUSIC

What does music tell us?
The same question
Was asked by Mahler
In one of his works,
In many of his works.
And he asked this question
Not about music
But about woods and lakes
And birds and love
And death.
And he answered this question
Through music.

Only music can say
What music is about;
I'm not good
At writing music.

Yet it resounds in my mind
Day and night:
I often dream of music.

And I often mistake it
For love.

And I can fall in love—
Musically.

A man in love
Writes music.

2001, Versailles

SIRENS

We have not exchanged letters
For many months. We have not seen
Each other for years. But yesterday—
Around 8 p.m.—I heard the song
You used to hum
In the days of our love.

Love, music, death—
Nobody cares to find out
What these words mean.
Last night the truth
Dawned on me at last.

Tied to a mast, Ulysses
Heard the same song and died.
He never returned to Ithaca.

1993
Versailles

THE INEFFABLE NAME

There's a background music in our lives.
Its disappearance means death;
But sometimes it returns
After lingering a few hours outside.

So we hear it once again.
A distant music—nearer to our hearts
Than the people we love and worship;
Sounding neither like a Mozart aria
Nor like a heavenly choir.

The tune is both unknown and familiar.
No instrument can reproduce it.
And human voices garble it beyond recognition.

1993
Versailles

MELODY AND HARMONY

What is harmony?
My thoughts that dwell upon
Themselves, my consciousness,
My heavy conscience,
The past, the future.
The present is reduced
To your telephone call.
Waiting for your call, listening
To the melody of the present.
And harmony is 'yes'
I hear on the phone.
Harmony is the light
That enables one to write about
Harmony.

2003
Versailles

WATERLESS SEAS

There are many waterless seas
Where you can drown.

Day and night
They roll and roll their waves,
Their waterless waves.

Every waterless sea
Has a music of its own.

This music is so rhythmical
It can replace
The beating of your heart.

Is that the only way
To become immortal?

2001
Versailles

CONCRETE MUSIC

Dying would be easy if one was to discover
Something else: the lining of the world,
The other side of the coin. Alas, our coins drop on various
Counters or jingle in our pockets. There are
Other coins somewhere,
But we have no access to them. Our world has
No lining, either silver or otherwise—
Just a world and nothing else. Like our coins, it drops
On some counters and, lost amidst other worlds, jingles
In someone's pockets. But we are allowed
To listen to this music.

2004

Versailles

IN MEMORY OF EMIL GILELS

I've played a lot of concerts
Since your death. All of them
Are dedicated to your memory.

I've written nothing about you
Except a short article—
A clear, factual account.

And yet I've written so many pages
About pianists and film directors.

It's easy to write about those
One loves from a distance,
And we spent so many hours
In your apartment
And strolling along
The boulevards of Moscow.

It's easy to write about those
One just admires and respects.

It's easy to write about music
In your presence.

2001
Versailles

THE TRUTH

How music lies to me!
I don't love everybody;
Nor am I loved by everybody.
Not even by you.
An ordinary-looking CD
Contains so much love,
So many lies.

Music doesn't lie
When it speaks of loneliness.
And it often speaks of loneliness.

Music doesn't lie
When it speaks of death.

2001
Versailles

THE ODE TO MUSIC

Angels need not breathe the earthly air,
Or any other air, for that matter.
They just walk on the air,
Along the air, around the air.
They're squeamish and cannot stand
Our smells and perfumes. To them
There's no difference between our perfumes
And car exhaust fumes.

Angels do not need eyes
And they often shut them
When walking through our world.
They're squeamish and cannot stand
The sight of human creations.
They cannot even stand
The paintings where they're depicted.
They call Fra Angelico a 'filthy-minded surrealist'
And scream in the Scrovegni Chapel.

Angels do not need to hear anything.
But to the Music of the Spheres
They listen all day long. And their day is
Eternal.

They even listen to human music:
Humans have no part in it.

Versailles

2001

AN UGLY PIECE OF MUSIC

Now and then I get the feeling
Music forsakes me. What I
Hear in those moments
Has nothing to do with music.
What is it? Just sounds. Every sound
Is music: John Cage thought so.
Silence is also music.

It is not silence I hear in those moments.
I hear alien sounds. Some of them are beautiful
But they're not music.

I'd rather hear an ugly piece of music.

2002
Versailles

THE NOWHERE

An old Japanese man said
He would miss nothing in the Hereafter
Except the sky.

How can one get away
From the sky? It's everywhere.
Even the earth is the sky,
Its other side.

Death will deprive us neither of the sky
Nor of the earth: there's a moon
In the Hereafter
And a pond where its reflection floats
Day and night.

Music is reflected
Everywhere.
How could one lose it?
Music is reflected
Nowhere.
How could one lose
The Nowhere?

2002
Versailles

THE FLUTE

Every hope is a treasure in itself.
Why should we attach our hopes
To future events? Do they count?
Something will happen anyway.

Whatever happens,
The core of our being
Will endure,
Provided
We hope it'll endure.

Life is a piece of music.
If you listen carefully to it
You can hear a flute
In the wings.

2002
Versailles

LANGUAGES

Life is an isolated phenomenon.
One living substance communicates with another
Through murder, caresses and languages.
Caresses are also a language.
And murder is a dead language
Spoken by everybody,
Taught at home, at school.
A caress accentuates our loneliness.
In a way, caresses are mute:
They're the language of the deaf.
Oddly enough, music is also a caress.

2002

Versailles

THE SEVEN LAST WORDS

Are my poems like music?
Perhaps not. And yet
They have a music of their own:
All words are music, not only
The Seven Last Words.

A word of mouth is music,
A printed word is music,
A four-letter word is music.

My words are music.
And all my poems,
Written and unwritten,
Come down to seven words.

2004
Versailles

ANOTHER INSTRUMENT

I write in three languages. What do they speak of?
What do *I* strive to express? One note that could be played
On the piano or any other instrument. I always
Hear this note; I can't play it. So I write poems and essays
For want of anything better.

Nothing counts except this note.
In vain do I look for its synonyms:
A note has no synonyms.
It can be repeated, though.

I recall this note over and over
Again. I can't translate it into English,
French or Russian. I translate it into the language of smells and
That of touch. Actually it's the other way round:
My whole life has been translated into this note. But words aren't
Sensitive to it. What are they sensitive to? My despair,
My joy? One note encompasses all my moods. There's nothing
Beyond it except the same note played on
Another instrument.

2004
Versailles

REPETITION

Let me repeat what I've said
Many times.

No matter *what*
I repeat. Let me repeat
Something.

Let me listen
To what I repeat.

No matter
What I say. Let me
Repeat it.

Let me repeat
What I've not said.

Let me listen
To what I've not said.

That's what music is about.

2005
Versailles

PAUSES

Why are there pauses in music?

Why does music ever stop?

It needs to listen to itself.

Even during a period of silence

Music listens to itself.

It never stops.

2002

Versailles

I CAN HEAR IT

There's something
In every cloud.

Around the stars,
Beyond my heart.

Not other hearts,
Stars or clouds,
But music.

I can
Hear it.

2003
Versailles

THE SOUND

A dot—death or
Life.

The dot is a word,
The word.

The note where I was
Born.

July 7, 2006

Versailles

CODA

NOTE TO AN UNPUBLISHED LONG STORY

My interest in chemistry was born on the day when I saw a drop of red dye diffuse until it was evenly spread out in a glass of water. In much the same way, slowly but surely, music has expanded throughout my life, usurping not only my consciousness, where it sounds either clearly or *con sordino*, but also my unconscious. Perhaps there is nothing else in my unconscious and in the unconscious of my unconscious. Be that as it may, music certainly lords it over my thoughts and even co-ordinates my gestures, for all their maladroitness. The following note, intended for a long story which was not printed in this book, underlines the role of music in everyone's life:

The present story is not directly related to music despite the obtrusive presence of a violinist and Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata. From Moscow streets, by-streets and suburbs we slowly move towards the Big Conservatoire Hall and the Composers' House or rather its garden which no longer exists, incidentally, having been replaced by a monstrous scaffolding. The protagonist has no ear (and no heart) for music which, within the narrow bounds of his existence, is confined to the choice of a lover for his wife and a regular re-reading of Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata. But music does influence his life, insidiously dragging him into its own sphere on account of the musical structure of the story where, for instance, Chapter Eight is somewhat similar to an episode in the development, destined to play a fatal part in the vast Beethovenian coda. The recapitulation is indicated with graphic precision; moreover, in connection with the story one might think of Mahler's Ninth, of its first movement, which displays no less than two false recapitulations. Actually, the likeness to the Ninth is not limited to the false recapitulations: in the ending there is something akin to the finale of the symphony and to Mahler's Tenth. Even in the domain of literature I am unable to get away from music. Needless to say I have never wished to distance myself from it either in my literary works or in everyday life: my unconscious would not have tolerated such a move anyway. But even those who find classical music boring or insufferable seem to depend on it to the point of modelling their deaths upon the very first general pause.

Music is everywhere; in a way, any book is a book on music, however distant its subject matter may lie from what I have written about composers. Even in the essays devoted to them there are

so-called non-local connections: things that are not habitually associated with their music and music in general. The point is, music turns non-local connections into local ones on account of its omnipresence. All essays in this book revolve around music. I wish I could write a book where music would not be so much as touched upon, which might enable me to prove that music is somehow embedded in it. I wish the present book were not so music-oriented. It is better to disorient readers by speaking about irrelevant things in order to make them realise that nothing is irrelevant, as far as music is concerned. Its centre is everywhere, its circumference nowhere.

(Translated from the Russian by the author)

Moscow

November 9, 2003

A NOTE ON THE SECOND BOOK

Bach finished the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* in 1722. The second book appeared twenty years later. Only six months elapsed between the two series of recording sessions during which I performed respectively the first and the second parts of this masterpiece that Hans von Bulow had likened to *The Old Testament*. What happened during those six months? Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. I am sure this murderous act can be heard in the recording of the second book.

I recorded the second book on another piano which, incidentally, had been made in Hamburg twenty years after the piano used for the recording of the first book. And I played differently, of course, influenced by Bach's and my own Time-wrought 'otherness'.

When recording this cycle I did not even bother to unify the style of my interpretation: every prelude and every fugue should sound like a microcosm, which is their real authenticity, no pleonasm intended.

I do not dream of becoming a conductor any more. (I do conduct every now and then, but this kind of music-making is rather akin to piano-playing or violin-playing so that I prefer writing poems, novels or essays.) However, a part of the dream remained: I never listen to Mozart's *Requiem* in Süssmayr's version except in concert halls. At home I switch off my player right after *Lacrimosa* or even at the peak of the famous chord-sequence.

but just—nothing except
harmony which is no ordinary harmony,
the sounds one can hear in a communal apartment,

(A common procedure nowadays. Copying something from the minds of customers, whoever they may be: concert-goers, readers, television-viewers.)

Fortunately I did not go as far as committing suicide for the sake of the present CDs.

In one of my novels I speak about Agatha Christie in relation to Pushkin. Once again I am prepared to commit such a sin which, I am certain, would be dismissed as a mere peccadillo by all lovers of detective stories. I am not of their number, I'm afraid; I still cannot figure out why many

French literati regard George Simenon as a great writer worthy to appear in the prestigious edition of the *Pléiade*. In Agatha Christie's novel, which is relevant to the subject, a story is told about an artist who paints a portrait of his murderess. Out of jealousy, a young woman puts some arsenic in his cup of coffee. The artist paints her face; Hercule Poirot is struck by a gleam of triumph in her eyes. This is a triumphant glance of a murderess watching her victim to die.

Judging from his portraits, Bruckner's face was incapable of expressing a malignant triumph: his candour did not include such emotions. But his glance was following Furtwängler during the performance of the *Symphony*, and it was a murderer's glance. Perhaps the conductor could not bear this naive, benevolent yet mortal glance. This musical glance.

All those links and coincidences surfaced once again when, in Lockenhaus, Gidon asked me to play the *B Flat Major Sonata* as a substitute for a cancelled trio. *The Hall of Mirrors* had already been finished; I was reading Montaigne's essays (*Nous avons eu raison de faire valoir les forces de notre imagination, car tous nos biens ne sont qu'en songe*); I was thinking about my fourth novel. Unhampered by the merry-go-round of concert tours, favoured by the easygoing musicianship of the festival, my memories, readings and projects fused into a pleasant synthesis which, being recorded, helps me now to conjure up visions of that midsummer night, of that hall in the Burg where I played the *B Flat Major Sonata*. I am only afraid that my inborn sentimentality makes me condone the shortcomings of my interpretation too easily.

TWO RHAPSODIES, OPUS 79

As a writer, I cannot help drawing parallels between various arts, disparate events and heterogeneous objects. I would not compare a Chopin nocturne to a Swiss landscape but I do think that the *Rhapsodies* Opus 79 depict what is commonly known as fate or destiny. These rhapsodies sound inexorable, inevitable, inflexible, implacable, relentless, merciless—especially the second one: fate also needs to get into its stride, to gather momentum. (It is noteworthy that Brahms' Opus 54 and Opus 89 are entitled respectively: *Schicksalslied* [Song of Destiny] and *Gesang der Parzen* [Song of the Fates].)

Here is an excerpt from a short story I wrote last year:

... 'Don't linger on the surface of life,' my grandfather used to say. 'Go deeper and deeper into it! You should dive into the sea of life. Don't swim on the surface! Dive! Dive! Deeper and

deeper! Life begins in the bowels of the earth. And life ends at the centre of the earth. You should squeeze into holes and tunnels and keep moving until you reach the centre of the earth, the core of life—the truth.'

Easier said than done. Of course the truth is hidden under the surface of life—under every word, under every movement, under every object. But how to find it? You can remove the objects to discover what is hidden underneath. You cannot remove a movement, a word, a landscape, unless you close your eyes and stop your ears.

'Probe to the bottom of every word you hear,' my grandfather used to say. 'You'll find a huge lie, a pile of lies, a pyramid of lies, a sea of lies! And these lies are the truth—the truth of our existence.'

I stand in the middle of nowhere. A landscape unfolds before my eyes. And there is another landscape beyond this landscape. There is another twilight beyond this twilight, another lie beyond this line of trees...'

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE HUMAN RACE

*The world is bound to end.
Snow will fall and cover our beds,
gently, gently—like a new dream.
And we are not to wake up.*

*In our sleep we shall attend
the funeral of the world.
I wouldn't mind bearing its coffin.*

*Perhaps the world has already died
and we live on only by momentum,
reluctant to close our eyes.*

We might have outstayed the stars.

ANGST

How can I ward off catastrophe?

Should I walk slower?

Should I lie down?

Time might stop by my bedside.

Should I forget everything,

leaving the soil of the future untilled?

The future doesn't grow in deserts.

The future grows amidst ruins.

Why are we so fond of forebodings?

Why can't we live in the present

and leave the future alone?

The future knows its job.

When in doubt, it repeats the past

and Madame Bovary dies once more,

swallowing some arsenic or drowning in a bath.

In the present instance, the future is synonymous with Time:

Why can't we leave Time alone?

Time knows its job.

When in doubt, it repeats itself.

Hence the doctrine of eternal recurrence.

With a few notable exceptions, Brahms' late pieces and, oddly enough the *Ballads* Opus 10 are situated beyond the inexorable rhythm of fate: a wise solution to the problem of determinism. (The exceptions are: Opus 10, No. 3; Opus 116, No. 7; Opus 119, No. 4.)

Only mothers belong to us. Even dead mothers are more caring than living creatures, living strangers. Even when they cannot hear us. Our mothers. They still hear us. Their inner ear always hears us.

My mother has killed women in my body, in my blood. What a paradox it is. All women are mothers. They kill women in us and they raise them from the dead. Is that what the expression 'love-hate relationship' means? There is no womanhood without motherhood.

She would devour my body if I let her do what she aspires to do. She no longer caresses my body but she still aspires to devour me. All mothers prefer to keep their children inside them. We are prisoners of their bodies. Forever. We simply cannot be born.

I seldom leave her room now; And I never go outdoors. What would I do outdoors? The world died with my mother, foreverything and everybody had lived only inside her body, inside my mother's body.

(The quotations are from my recent story *The Queen*.)

Here are a few excerpts from *Answer to Job* by Jung (R.F.C. Hull's translation):

....a mortal man is raised by his moral behaviour above the stars in heaven, from which position of advantage he can behold the back of Yahweh, the abysmal world of 'shards'....Truly, Yahweh can do all things and permits himself all things without batting an eyelid. With brazen countenance he can project his shadow side and remain unconscious at man's expense. He can boast of his superior power and enact laws which mean less than air to him....The drama has been consummated for all eternity: Yahweh's dual nature has been revealed, and somebody or something has seen and registered this fact. Such a revelation, whether it reached man's consciousness or not, could not fail to have far-reaching consequences.

Formerly he was naïve, dreaming perhaps of a 'good' God, or of a benevolent ruler and just judge. He had imagined that a 'covenant' was a legal matter and that anyone who was party to a contract could insist on his right as agreed: that God would be faithful and true or at least just, and, as one could assume from the Ten Commandments, would have some recognition of ethical values or at least feel committed to his own legal standpoint. But, to his horror, he has discovered that Yahweh is not human but, in certain respects, less than human.

PARTA QUIES

*Good-night; ensured release,
 Imperishable peace,
 Have these for yours,
 While sea abides, and land,
 And earth's foundations stand,
 And heaven endures.*

*When earth's foundations flee,
 Nor sky nor land nor sea
 At all is found,
 Content you, let them burn:
 It is not your concern;
 Sleep on, sleep sound.*

THE MAKROKOSMOS BY GEORGE CRUMB

Modern composers belong to the same history of music, although their links with the past are often obscured by their unorthodox approaches to tonality, musical structure and timbres. Berlioz continued and somewhat expanded Beethoven's style; Kagel, in his ironic film about Beethoven, also expanded the latter's mentality, pushing it to extremes. In the introduction to the *Makrokosmos*, George Crumb dwells upon his affinities with Romantic composers, Schumann and Chopin in particular. He also mentions Mozart, Mahler, Pascal, Rilke, Bartok and Debussy.

These influences are mutual somehow. Crumb was influenced by Rilke; in his turn, he may influence our understanding of Rilke's poems. After watching Kagel's film, we cannot hear Beethoven's symphonies in the same way. In a sense, Kagel changed, re-wrote Beethoven's symphonies;

It is thus extremely important to perform the ancient and modern music side by side, in the same concert, bringing out all these links—the whole network of musical interrelations. Schumann's *Etudes symphoniques* add a new dimension to *Makrokosmos* and vice versa.

Art is not simple, as many people seem to believe; its complexity should not, however, become too eccentric, too abstruse. A work of art should not be complex for the sake of complexity.

Modern composers belong to the same history of music, although their links with the past are often obscured by their unorthodox approaches to tonality, musical structure and timbres.

(The problem of vicious circles will be tackled in the next essay.)

For all their thematic dissimilarities, these fantasies sound alike. And they create the same feelings. (The problem of psychological effects produced by music will be tackled in the essay on the *Adagio*, KV 540.)

The Wrathful deities...the Lord of Death...'Off we go again!' as Vladimir says in *Waiting for Godot*.

THE *FANTASY IN C MINOR*, K V 396

That is why I enjoyed recording this fantasy in its uncompleted form, interrupting the performance at the spot where Mozart had abandoned the piece. Paradoxically enough, my faithfulness to history seems to have prolonged the *Fantasy* far beyond its would-be bounds, imparting to it an infinity of numberless virtualities.

Anyway vicious circles are endless.

So I have nothing to add. Except one of my poems:

VICIOUS CIRCLE

*Forbidden fruit grows everywhere
And we eat it all the time:
There's nothing else to eat.*

*Even fools know too much.
Even the impotent rape baby girls.*

*Even St Augustine
Sinned in his cradle.*

*So Lewis Carroll
Built a minus-world
Beyond the looking glass.*

He built this world for us, not for Alice.

*There everything was "plus".
And the Tree of Knowledge stood
Upside down and its fruit,
Though by no means forbidden,
Tasted like the forbidden fruit.*

In short, it was a wonderful park.

Somebody mistook it for the garden of Eden.

THE SONATA IN C MINOR, K V 457

The *Sonata in C Minor* is engendered by the preceding *Fantasy*. A fantasy-born sonata.

Its second movement is flanked by two fantasies which sound like the other *Fantasies* on this circular recording. They are more rigorous, more structured, but the feelings they create—

O nobly-born, listen undistractedly. On the Thirteenth Day, from the eastern quarter of thy brain, the Eight Kerimas will emanate and come to shine upon thee. Fear that not.

From the east of thy brain, the White Kerima, holding a human corpse, as a club, in the right hand; in the left, holding a skull-bowl filled with blood [...]

From the south-east, the Red Pukkase, holding intestines in the right hand and with the left putting them to her mouth [...]

From the north-west, the Yellowish-White Tsandhalī, tearing asunder a head from a corpse, the right hand holding a heart, the left putting the corpse to her mouth. She then eats thereof...

The long, cadenza-like scales in the second movement also remind us of the *Fantasies*. And a few chromatic motives have a distinct hellish touch. But, on the whole, the movement is calm, harmonious, beautiful—like an Italian aria; or like the Peaceful Deities in the same Tibetan book.

Thereupon, through the power of anger, thou wilt beget fear and be startled at the dazzling white light and wilt wish to flee from it; thou wilt beget a feeling of fondness for the dull smoke-coloured light from Hell. Act then so that thou wilt not fear that bright, dazzling, transparent white light. Know it to be Wisdom.

And the notion of 'correctness' seems to exclude from concert halls and discs whatever is personal—*real* in music-making. (Aren't we closer to composers when we are *really* ourselves?)

And the audience has no say in the matter. And it is the audience that must be called upon to choose their own heroes—the way things stood in the first half of the century. The virtual stars, who turn into real stars overnight, are presented to the audience as great artists (young or old, as the case may be); and the audience applaud—automatically, unanimously, as if Stalin himself were on stage, twiddling his moustache.

Thus begins my ninth novel. And as it is partly an autobiographical novel I cannot help sharing the views of my hero. And I am therefore tempted to honour the past and even my memories. Luckily enough,

Can one experience a similar sensation nowadays? I doubt it. No longer does the notion of virtuosity seem to comprise the sound and the pedal, for example.

The same goes for today's music-making: the fewer wrong notes are played during a concert, the less suspicion arises the No wrong notes are allowed. Sometimes Gilels played wrong notes. But he knew how to use the pedal. And his piano sounded like a warm, *living* creature.

That is why I *always* caress the piano on stage—before every piece.

Naturally I was tempted to pay homage to the great pianists of the past. Only to the pianists of the *past*—the reason why I did not include a homage to Richter: he was still alive in 1996. Nor did I dwell here upon my memories of Rosenthal, Gieseking, Schnabel and Edwin Fischer whom I worship almost as much as the pianists I do celebrate in the present recording.

'Do you think children are born dull, untalented nowadays? How come? Do they have other genes?'

Another excerpt from my last novel.

But where are the snows of yesteryear? Nowhere, not even in Siberia.

'Every talent needs an appropriate atmosphere for its development. An appropriate Stimmung, to use a Heideggerian term. What is lacking today is a Stimmung.'

A journalist who risks his life for the sake of a valuable piece of information is not admired any more—not even by teenagers. A pianist who plays two or three wrong notes in their quest for composers, for the information they can get from them But pianists do not have to risk their lives. And pianists can do without Nowadays it is not only better to be on the safe side; others must know On this occasion I would not use the word 'risk' which has other overtones in our business-

oriented society. on think that Richter best recitals had much more in common with than with the word 'risk' which has other connotations in our business-oriented world. 'golden mean', however dear the latter expression may have been to Aristotle and, for different reasons, to Buddha. There is no denying that the golden mean—not too fast, not too slow... in musical terms—can assure one widespread recognition, long-term success:

There is a touch of Judeo-Christian religious fervour in this quest for oneness.

I will not dwell on this subject any longer for the simple reason that I devoted at least one-third of the lecture I gave at the Tokyo Summer Festival to 'definitiveness'.

In this respect my poems, quoted in the second essay of this brochure, are as relevant and 'authentic' as whatever Beethoven said or might have said about these two sonatas. They are part and parcel of these sonatas, because *I* play them. Because I played them in *Moscow*. Because I played them in *December 1990*. I would have played them differently in any other city, at any other moment. I would play them differently tonight, in Paris. And the difference would not concern minor details only. Is it primarily a question of instruments and acoustics?

As for the wrong notes and other 'technical' shortcomings of my performance, here is another quotation from *The Book of Tea* (this essay seems to be geographically connected with Japan, its bookshops and gardens):

The above statement concerns solely live performances: in my studio-recordings I seek to eliminate even the shadows of wrong notes.

The *Consolations* are dedicated to the beauty of Liszt's music and personality. Tchaikowsky's piece is a homage to the Moscow Conservatoire which is dead to some extent, dead and buried. But I hope that the dead will rise from their tombs, one day—not only in horror movies.

The last piece is a homage to Italian cinema which has played a very important role in my life. (For the first time I heard this marvellous Wagner piece in *Ludwig* by Luchino Visconti.) Perhaps Italian cinema is dead. Perhaps cinema is dead. Well, let us hope for the best.

the truth of lies,

'Let us use common sense instead of dragging in Hinduism or Christianity. Anyway I don't think a concert has anything to do with a mantra or a prayer. "I hate any piece of knowledge that doesn't goad me to action," said Goethe. Whatever a poet comes across can be found in his stanzas. Sooner or later I'll write about our present discussion.'

The first part of this essay was written for the commemorative concert. Legends. What were we talking about? Can't remember. When searching for the past I often find the present and myself. (Heidegger, Sorge?) He said performing arts were a discipline comparable to *a tire de l'arc*. Or a mantra. (A quotation from Tantra.) I spoke to him of Goethe, 'I hate any piece of knowledge that does not goad me into action.' Something along these lines. Cappadocia. Writing lectures about music. Ricoeur. Anaximander, Kant – the immobility of time in music. How shall I express it in my conference? More exciting than composition of music. He said, 'A prayer.' Usually artists (the best of them) say, 'As if it were for the first time.' Cheating oneself and others. But a creative artist doesn't have to lull himself into a false sense of security (into a smug equilibrium). Everything is new. Russian obsession with high ceilings. Cappadocia. First the underground city. The universe of the ancient (Koyré). Saint Marc in Florence. My thought rebound towards myself.

Brahms is one of the composers I cherish most and that for many reasons. Some of these reasons are quite personal, others purely musical, if music can ever be judged on its own terms.

Russians are not in the habit of describing every artist of note as a 'genius'. (The matter stands differently with the French.) Moreover, I am reluctant to use this word in connection with an interpreter. Yet I am very much tempted to say that Richter was a genius.

The following quotation is from *The Book of Tea* by Okakura Kakuzo:

Enshiu was complimented by his disciples on the admirable taste he had displayed in the choice of his collection. Said they, 'Each piece is such that no one could help admiring. It shows that you had better taste than had Rikiu, for his collection could only be appreciated by one beholder in a thousand.' Sorrowfully Enshiu replied: 'This only proves how commonplace I am. The great Rikiu dared to love only those objects which personally appealed to him, whereas I unconsciously cater to the taste of the majority. Verily, Rikiu was one in a thousand among tea-masters.'

The sequenzas one comes across in mirror his emotions which are so t.

In the *Pathetic* one encounters something that may remind one of Mahler's equivocal 'affirmation': the third movement. One is tempted to discard it as a mere 'something'—as something inserted in the symphony for the sake of yet another contrast. They let him down (*on le laisse tomber*).

The third movement would be kitschy if one listened to it separately—without knowing the rest of the symphony. Where could one hear this movement *separately*? Even military orchestras do not play it.

The pauses between movements. Rostro in Moscow. Suddenly you see a woman who has grown old. A shock. You come home and little by little—angst. Heidegger—after a dinner party. (Grundbegriff) Chance would be a fine thing. Kiks. A village orchestra. A triomphe de pacotille. Tchai born on shoulders in the Russian film. I didn't notice it—organic, natural.

I just finished the second Edit after your 3 requests and pauses between the each Movements. I made it as possible as longer...This is final edited CDR, very sorry, because we have not so much time to finish Products CD fabrication, but we are happy with this final version.

, enlarging upon the recapitulation in the First Movement or deploring the deficiencies of the Finale. The word 'chance' con

Why did Tchaikovsky insert this movement into his most tragic symphony? For the sake of violent romantic contrast? In search of overall balance? Or did he just pull out all the stops as if to indulge in the intoxicating freedom for which Dostoevsky's characters are justly renowned all over the world? Actually it is hard to avoid a kitschy comparison when probing into Tchaikovsky's motives because his music has often been branded as a symbol of kitsch, his detractors mainly resorting to kitschy arguments. Let us try to break out of this vicious circle. (In a way, the *Sixth Symphony* is another expression of a vicious circle: the Finale returns to the initial Angst *despite* the third movement.)

Impossible to grasp the concept 'kitsch' in a free-floating aesthetic way. The social moment is essentially constitutive of it. For by serving up past formal entities as contemporary, it has a

social function—to deceive people about their true situation, to transfigure their existence, to allow intentions that suit some powers or other to appear to them in a fairy-tale glow...Music is very much a part of all this. It is assigned the task, above all, of eliciting the impression of collective commitment by means of the preservation of old and superannuated formal types; of employing individual means of expression—such as romantic harmonies and today, already, impressionist harmonies—at a moment when they have come loose from their original formal contexts and can circulate like a kind of musical small change; of utilising melodic arcs that still bear traces of their former emotional significance conventionally as mere phrases.

(Theodor W. Adorno, *Kitsch*, translated by Susan H. Gillespie)

Modern physicists express the same idea as follows: 'An elementary particle is not an independently existing unanalyzable entity. It is, in essence, a set of relationships that reach outward to other things.' 'Every particle consists of all other particles.'

His sincerity or seriousness, which is not mirrored in my sentence 'Conducting an orchestra is even less wearisome', imparts to the third movement of his last symphony a prophetic touch: aren't we too presumptuous and optimistic today? We should listen more often to the Finale of the *Pathétique* that follows a bombastic statement akin to what one may hear today when taking notice of G. W. Bush's speeches.

Adorno wrote his essay on kitsch in 1932 when impressionist harmonies might have been toyed with to pander to the multitude, creating another fairy-tale of sorts. In Tchaikovsky's days there were no impressionist harmonies one could rely upon to deceive a listener hankering after aesthetic (or ethical) truth. But in nineteenth-century Russia a composer was likely to serve up 'past formal entities as contemporary' without knowing it: any backward country traditionally gives birth to radical innovators on the one hand—Mussorgsky, for instance—and to innocent traditionalists on the other. Actually Russia's proverbial *otstalost'* (backwardness) was instrumental in creating the 'Great Russian Literature' that enlarged upon *spiritual* problems—sometimes to the detriment of romantic predicaments judiciously tackled by Stendhal and Flaubert.

and for the present recording. So my wish to dwell on the subject of madness in connection with Bach's music might seem irrelevant, if not irreverent. Moreover, the story I am about to recount is so delicate and intimate that I risk incurring the anger of those for whom good taste is more important than completeness of information. Yet it is for the sake of completeness that I shall disclose the origin of the present recording, which might never have taken place, due to my light-hearted resolution to *forget* once and for all *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. By the way, I am aware that my treatment of prayers in spatial terms at the end of the previous chapter is prone to the same accusation. But I had to follow my argument through, for Bach does it again and again, whatever the consequences.

Volodya thinks that many of them have died and raking up the past is not his cup of tea. I would not mind raking it up, however, even though the novel might be dead. What counts first and foremost is my desire to write novels, not their absence in the Chariot of Time. It is my modest barouche that has deprived me of any project in this field. My novelistic cells are undoubtedly dead. Long live those assigned to a poetical meditation on melancholy, on short-lived feelings, on the paradoxes of Time!

In this case Margaret is damned. Perhaps it is not an echo, but the voice from above. Life is ambiguous, and no answer is given to our cardinal questions. Nor is there an answer in Bruckner's last work. We do not know whether he heard voices from above, but death *can* be heard in his *Ninth Symphony*. And Furtwängler was in a position to restore this death to life.

'You are writing an opera on the *Vita Nuova*; yet you are quite aware that, in this day and age, such an exploit is out of anyone's reach.'

In this respect I have come to prefer Confucius to Taoists: he was prepared to live in harmony only with the times and spaces consistent with his ideals.

He didn't have everything at hand, not Beethoven.

He doesn't have Evil at hand. He disregards it. Evil evil, which doesn't contribute to the Good. His evil is situated within Paradise.

His piece sounds as a long quotation.

My authorship. This essay sounds like a long quotation.

Silvestrov thinks only of the past or rather of the way one can recall it. The term he uses in his attempt to describe what happens during his working hours is *pripominanie* (remembrance). No wonder he often speaks of Schubert in relation to his own works: the latter was also a memory addict. In his lieder he recalled a great many paradises lost before settling down in Hell.

Whatever is in the news seems actual, but it is not: in most cases—and not only retrospectively—invisible men lord it over visible ones. In other words, banner headlines might pale beside a brief exchange between two vagabonds.

(Oswald Spengler would have disagreed with me on this point.)

In 1962, somewhere in Siberia, a military plane took off and after a while two pilots informed their superiors about the presence of a bizarre object flying within their field of vision. Their superiors said they should land at once.

Soon the plane begins its final descent into the airport. Those who watch it from the surface of the Earth get the feeling that it does not fly in accordance with the noise they hear: the jet engine has reached the utmost limits of its power, but the plane is hardly moving as if held back by a supernatural grasp. The result of this excursion into the sky seems to be a foregone conclusion.

Why did the aircrew crash into a mountainside? A few officers saw a gigantic figure – a superman in white – who left the scene of the crime in a dignified manner. Why did he commit the crime?

THE *APPASSIONATA*

I have no idea if our civilisation means anything apart from the words ‘communication’ and ‘information’. In the domain of art, these words are meaningless and I wonder if they have any meaning within our lives or even outside them. Of course one might say that whatever can be found in the universe communicates with the rest of it; at least physicists enlarge upon non-local connections – in relation to this phenomenon. But the matter stands differently with books and paintings; and even films do not communicate anything to cinema-goers, even if they are shot in Ancient Rome or some inner-city slum. And no information can be gleaned from philosophy and poetry.

In his praise of Richter, Glen Gould puts particular emphasis on ‘communication’ and I understand what he means when listening, for instance, to Richter’s live recording of the *Appassionata*. And I cannot help wondering if this communication fulfils its function. What *does* it communicate? Energy, dynamics? *Allegro ma non troppo* – Beethoven’s tempo of the finale – becomes merely *troppo*; or *vivace*, for that matter. Richter was a great pianist; so was Gould. And their *troppos* somehow fell within the scope of music. Today, there are too many *troppos* everywhere and every minute – not only when two terrorists assassinate journalists in their eagerness to avenge the Prophet. Composers *are* prophets but performing artists should not

behave like terrorists who communicate their egos to the world. Is that what they call ‘information’?

In his lecture *What is the Act of Creation?* Giles Deleuze unceremoniously disposes of both communication and information. Instead, he defines a work of art as an ‘act of resistance’. Not to death, as Malraux put it; unless everything is death, even the multitude of worlds and immortality. Resistance to stupidity, resistance to the herd instinct, resistance to the lowest common denominator; and also to success stories. Should one resist the urge to avenge Beethoven?

JE SUIS BEETHOVEN

On the morning of 7 January 2015, at about 11:30 local time, two masked gunmen armed with assault rifles and other weapons forced their way into the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris. They fired up to 50 shots, while shouting ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ (Arabic for ‘God is [the] greatest’), killing eleven people and injuring eleven others during their attack. They then killed a French National Police officer shortly after. The gunmen identified themselves as belonging to Al-Qaeda’s branch in Yemen (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), which took responsibility for the attack. Five others were killed and another eleven were wounded in related shootings that followed in the Île-de-France region. France raised Vigipirate to its highest level: terror alert, and deployed soldiers in Île-de-France and Picardy. A massive manhunt led to the discovery on 9 January of the suspects, brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, who exchanged fire with police. The brothers took hostages at a signage company in Dammartin-en-Goële, and were gunned down when they emerged firing from the building. On 11 January, about two million people, including more than 40 world leaders, met in Paris for a rally of national unity, and 3.7 million people joined demonstrations across France. The phrase *Je suis Charlie* (French for ‘I am Charlie’) was a common slogan of support at the rallies and in social media.

Wikipedia

We seldom, if ever, think about every destruction in terms of a murder; and yet death is much larger than bullets, Kalashnikovs, bombs and terrorist threats. And terrorists can be found everywhere. They do not always wear hoods and masks. They might, on occasion, parade around in miniskirts or exhibit a communicative décolletage.

On a concert stage, you can wear whatever you like, although suits and long dresses are more in keeping with the time-honoured rites of musical performance. If you play Beethoven’s sonatas stark naked, concertgoers will probably pay more attention to your nakedness, albeit hideous, than to Beethoven and other composers you might dare to perform. What counts is your interpretation and not your appearance: your clothes, gestures and facial acrobatics. Alas, what counts for audiences often boils down to freak shows – to the detriment of music. And the freaks we come across on these occasions have nothing in common with those in Tod Browning’s legendary movie. Instead, we listen to terrorists who assassinate music.

Of course one should not go over the top when judging contemporary music-making. Life itself is destructive and our bodies succumb to the second law of thermodynamics even if we

listen only to Furtwängler, Busoni, Rachmaninoff and Toscanini. But art is a token of eternity and we should preserve it as much as we can. Performing artists can be both destroyers and preservers. That is why the phrase '*Je suis Charlie*' does make sense within the framework of our attitude towards music. I am Charlie, I am a Jew, I am Beethoven, I am Bach, I am Mozart, I am Thou.

HARMONY

Harmony-disharmony, good-bad, love-hate. A love-hate relationship is a traditional feature of our life. And, for all the ends of our history, we still inhabit a good-bad world that does not seem to care about our aspirations and analyses. According to ecologists and moralists, we live in an utterly bad world that both reflects and infects our consciousness. Yet harmony appeals to our senses more than its opposite. Of course we are aware that opposites may coincide and thereby swap their meanings and energies.

'I know nothing better than the *Appassionata*,' said Lenin. In the Moscow Conservatoire we thought he knew nothing *but* the *Appassionata*. (In his youth, he might have heard *Für Elise*, though.) 'An *unhuman* (*nechelovecheskaya*) music.' More than superhuman, more than overhuman. 'You feel like stroking heads. But you should hit them.' The *Appassionata* is almost exclusively built upon harmonies as if to prove that a harmony can unbuild or deconstruct any melody, let alone any life, including that of Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov-Lenine. Did this unhuman music stroke his head or hit it, whenever he was in the company of Issay Dobrowen who used to play it for him? Did he really die of syphilis?

An *inhuman* piece of music.

A PERFORMANCE

To Gerhard Betz and Philipp Nedel

Whatever happens happens only because it should happen, and we are supposed to accept these happenings as if we were just unbiased observers. When you play the piano, you communicate with the composers whose work you perform, and with the universe and angels. You are a medium and a multitude of waves and particles go through you as you play this and that. You wish to play by yourself, on your own, but your will is somehow abolished in the process, during the ritual that makes you become a sonata or a composer or both. You also become the hall where you perform sonatas. And you become your producers and sound engineers, when you make a recording. You accept with gratitude this ritual of which you are only a part because the whole world speaks through you.

Life recordings, the quality, sound. Michelangeli in Carnegie. Sofronitsky. I like the quality. Nostalgia. To speak about video – Gould. Helen Grimaud – ecstatic. Detachment, as if from afar.

THE AMBITIOUS PROJECT

*Then, welcome each rebuff
 That turns earth's smoothness rough,
 Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
 Be our joys three-parts pain!
 Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
 Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!*

*For thence, – a paradox
 Which comforts while it mocks, –
 Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
 What I aspired to be,
 And was not, comforts me:
 A brute I might have been, but would not sink i'the scale.
 Robert Browning, *Rabbi ben Ezra**

INTRODUCTION

I am used to posterity and eternity – if only within the bounds of virtuality I create when writing my books and reading Dante, Plato and Spinoza; when playing Bach and Beethoven. My wish to record what I have played ever since my Conservatoire years might stem from the creative urge I assuage in front of my computer. I am allergic to the procedure to which the Russians refer as follows: writing into the desk. Whenever I give concerts, I have the feeling I play into the hall which, under the circumstances, may be likened to the aforementioned desk except that your writings may survive the next world conflagration, whereas your concerts vanish into thin air unless they are recorded and stored up. For further information on this subject, see below.

As I saunter around record shops I often come across huge boxes that span a pianist's or a conductor's lifelong achievements. I am not the only performing artist whose ambitious projects mirror this tendency and I thought I might follow in their footsteps without departing from my deep-rooted, almost inborn modesty. I talked about *my* ambitious project in an email I sent to a remarkable man, Ryusuke Kozawa, thanks to whom I have made a few recordings for Sony Classical; if not for posterity.

Dear friend,

I hope you're well.

Last week I went to a record shop and saw a few boxes which made me change my mind about our venture centred upon my seventieth birthday. For years and years I wondered why Rostropovich's recordings were not available on an international scale. The point is he recorded his boundless repertoire for many companies and not just for Deutsche Grammophon. (This is the situation I'm facing as well.) Finally they managed to put all his recordings together, releasing a huge box 10 years after his death. A similar box devoted to Furtwängler's legacy (106 CDs) saw the light of day 62 years after *his* death – due to more or less the same reason, I suppose. Anyway, these boxes are available now and I think we might model our project upon them. It goes without saying that I'd rather see the result of this venture in my lifetime and not from a hut pathetically lost in a corner of Purgatory. Of course I don't compare myself to the giants I'm talking about, which doesn't prevent me from going one better by – in terms of variety – by including in the box the video recordings of my plays, my video interviews, my orchestral recordings and so on.

We failed most piteously, I must admit. I expressed my disappointment (and fury) in the following immodest outburst:

Werner Herzog is back; at least I found two boxes devoted to his films which I have liked for so many years. At some point I thought he had disappeared forever, but there are other points and also eternal recurrence which one should not dismiss nonchalantly. I am delighted to find he is understood even by teenagers whose computers are not *always* engaged in races and star wars. There are probably no other worlds in our world and beyond it, but we can count on other *points*, on their friendliness and comprehension.

Fitzcarraldo is one of my favourite cinema heroes. Instead of heading downstream, he sailed *up* the Amazon. And he said at some point, 'Only one is here. I'm going to move a mountain.' And he dreamt about bringing to the jungle Caruso, not a petty charismatic tenor.

I cannot come back, even if the number of points I am talking about is astronomical and thereby includes all oblivion-consigned artists: at this moment in time, I am not even worthy of oblivion. But one day this project of mine may see the light of day – to commemorate my 150th birthday, for instance.

Herzog speaks of a pharaoh who was 1400 years ahead of his time. Well, my 1550th anniversary, then.

This outburst was printed in the booklet appended to the CD we devoted to Mozart. There are other outbursts in that booklet, but I am not tempted to have them re-printed. After all, neither space nor time are as magnanimous as our daydreams.

Generals are seldom, if ever, reduced to the ranks. But what I experienced upon realising that my ambitious dream is not likely to come true in the near future may be even likened to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Well, Ruysuke and I ended up reducing our ambitious project to a small, rather modest box I shall talk about in due time.

THE QUESTION

I have never asked myself how I should live or whether I had better not live at all. Unlike Hamlet, I have never been duty bound to avenge somebody, be it my father or friend; or indeed myself. Nor have I ever tried to communicate with anybody, seeking to win a few battles and conquer the world, music lovers – many of whom are music haters now – and common, all-too-common readers. Even now I think only in terms of victory over myself, over my intrinsic death and sloth, over the melancholy I share with Samuel Johnson whose notes on Shakespeare I do not approve of. As for my life, untouched, unretouched by a latter-day James Boswell, I have enjoyed every minute of it because I am living through each minute, playing it on the piano, describing it in minute detail.

When I take the trouble to analyse the word ‘recognition’ in the light of what is going on today, I realise that both Hegel and Kojève underestimated the sheer pleasure of staying in bed, of having breakfast and dinner almost horizontally, under the protection of a blanket and propped up by a stack of pillows; so that, under the circumstances, the Hamletian question becomes, ‘To get up or not to get up?’ Busoni and Rachmaninoff, Toscanini and Furtwängler keep all living and kicking and thumping performers at bay. I can throw my head back in ecstasy without leaving my bed; it is enough to sit up in it. And I am not likely to forget that in the Seventies I studied under Gilels. Why should I listen to updated, downgraded Mozart and Brahms?

I do get up and do what I have to do, even if no one calls me to say I have to fly to another continent and play a few Beethoven sonatas.

Neither in my life nor in my literary works are there plots, cliffhangers and other tricks of the trade. Why should I model my style upon the common reader's great expectations and teeny-weeny-mindedness? Shakespeare and Dante are worthier of my attention.

Once upon a time, after a concert in the United States, a man told me, 'Tonight you taught me how to listen to silence.' I hope there is a second such man somewhere; and a third.

POSTERITY

Swift and Borges warn us against the allurements of immortality, depicting senile and decrepit people who cannot even recall themselves, let alone their deeds and masterpieces. I am 68 and I think I have never felt more buoyant and efficient in my life. Even my body seems to enjoy the pleasures associated with Paradise more powerfully than its juvenile, inexperienced predecessor. And I hope it is better equipped for protecting my mind and soul from the onslaughts of diseases and other calamities. I would not mind spending an eternity, however truncated, in this state of mind and body and natural joyfulness. Yet I know I am not immortal and therefore I have to treasure every moment of my existence, squeezing as much advantage from it as I can. I am surprised at finding how the people I am acquainted with handle the time allotted to them. They read bestsellers and go to concert halls, convinced that their lives are imbued with culture, arts and the intricacy of philosophical ideas. And when I say they had better read Spinoza, Leibniz and listen to old recordings, they shrug their shoulders, shake their heads and take French leave.

At some point Glenn Gould resolved to limit his participation in the universal music-making to frequent sojourns in a recording studio. Yet the times he lived in were far more bountiful than ours despite the lack of mobile phones and computers from which our fathers and grandfathers did not seem to suffer beyond measure. At least, in those days, one could speak of concert halls and their *raison d'être* without bursting into laughter or frowning, clearly annoyed. The Nobel Prize for literature had its *raison d'être* too and occasionally one could even enjoy the stylistic quality of a bestseller. However, Gould thought he should estrange himself from his day and age, devoting his time to posterity. In his opinion, playing concerts was a waste of time; and yet both audiences and pianos were far superior to what every pianist comes across in the course of a concert tour. And going on a journey with one's own piano solves only a part of the numerous problems lying in store for travellers and performers. Besides, playing the same piano over and over again augments the quantity of the boredom one may experience when practising a virtuoso piece.

Gould thought that playing concerts and touring our globe was a waste of time; I agree with him on this issue all the more wholeheartedly since our times are rather merciless and make one think of the future with utopia-influenced ardour. Whatever I do is done for posterity; and yet I am not sure that all the futures do not share some common characteristics. Dashing our hopes seems to be any future's speciality and therefore one would be well-advised not to pin one's hopes either on the end of the world or on communism. Well, I have no choice and choosing posterity is somehow equivalent to Hamlet's positive answer to the eternal question.

THE OTHER

I am weary of the 'other' as defined and described by Sartre, Levinas and their followers. And yet I cannot say I am weary of others, undescribed, undefined – of those I see in the streets and also at my place, which does not compromise my unconditional, deep affection for loneliness: one can feel lonely in the midst of a city and during an anti-war demonstration. My weariness of philosophical, other-oriented notions does not prevent me, however, from enjoying Locke's hesitation as to the importance of 'being for oneself'. In his opinion, one's existence for oneself is more important than whatever one represents for others; yet this relationship (one-others) is not far from Absolute Truth. I am reluctant to look up the exact wording of this ambiguity: for some time I have been on Hegel's side. He quoted others from memory, often misquoting them in the process.

Whenever I re-read my literary works, I am as surprised as Andrzej Wajda (and many other creators) who exclaim in identical circumstances: 'Did I really create this stuff?' In other words, I do not always recognise myself in spite of my being always the same so that I am not different from an adolescent who wrote a hundred poems in Russian. And I acknowledged my authorship of these poems by having them published in Moscow last year – alongside my recent Russian poems.

Whenever I listen to my old recordings I am driven to analyse the history of my two-sided relationship with Beethoven, Schubert and other composers. I see them now from another angle; and yet they are the same – not only because their scores do not change their contents. I might compare them to my friends who continue to grow older, following in my footsteps, as it were. We grow older and so do the composers I play; at least they grow older within my mind and whenever I play once again the same sonatas, the same preludes and fugues.

In days of yore this music was performed and recorded by great artists. One must be audacious indeed to add anything to the immortal collection, some items of which are available every day – even in ordinary record shops. I dare more than most of my colleagues by offering a few versions of Beethoven's last sonatas, among other pieces. Let us say I am eager to show how one's brain matures and dies in their company.

NOSTALGIA

One may experience the feeling of nostalgia on many occasions. Leaving one's motherland forever is only an instance of what one may go through when subjected to the power of this manifold notion traditionally linked to the heart, if not to the soul and its immortality. According to Dante, many inhabitants of Hell and Purgatory think of the past on a regular basis, obliterating, if only in part, their present tortures. I cannot say I have paid a worthy tribute to this word in relation to Russia that I left 42 years ago, requesting political asylum in Belgium and thus incurring the Soviet authorities' wrath: they sentenced me to seven years in absentia.

Of course I have played a great many concerts in Russia ever since Gorbachev and his edict allowed all defectors to plunge once again into their motherland's bosom without staying for a while in the local Purgatory. But nostalgia can also allow us to revisit a few *sensations* as if in the footsteps of Proust's chronicler who constantly chances upon the odds and ends of his childhood and adolescence through the intermediary of his voluntary and involuntary (and even recalcitrant) memory.

I voluntarily recall a number of recordings I heard in my youth; some of them adorn my study for the simple reason that, on the eve of my irrevocable departure from Moscow, I put them in one of my suitcases. Most of them belong to the category of live recordings and I must admit their very imperfections make me enjoy what is loosely defined as a 'euphoric mood'. On account of this phenomenon, within my memory and study, Furtwängler rubs shoulders with Sofronitsky who hated studios and even their microphones which are unaffected by the inspiration- and concentration-provoking vibes of a concert hall.

Involuntary or voluntarily, my own live recordings convey me once more to my Moscow life, to the Berlin archives stolen by Soviet officers, to Sofronitsky and the Conservatoire studio where I heard Glenn Gould's live recordings (made in USSR). In Kyoto, several years ago, I met the head of the only Nô Company – a wonderful actor whose performance I was privileged to attend, sitting alone in a gorgeous garden. His collection of opera recordings is far superior to

mine. In *his* study one can light upon as many as 12 recordings of *Tristan und Isolde*. I asked him if he went on adding contemporary items to his collection. He said, ‘Yes, for the sake of the sound.’ I am quite satisfied with four old recordings of *Tristan* I have got on my shelves.

Whenever in a nostalgic mood, I put on *Die Meistersinger* conducted either by Toscanini (Salzburg, 1937) or Furtwängler (Bayreuth, 1943). These recordings make me aware of time’s light and shade which might go unnoticed if you limit your field of hearing to the present, to the so-called perfection of our microphones and machines. Of course they do reflect a particle of time – this age and its technology – but in my mind perfection, abyssal depths, spiritual heart attacks and physical tears are associated with a background noise, with a welcome distortion that raises the dead as efficiently as the New Testament; and more audibly. Time speaks to us about our resurrection unless we are not worthy of it, of our ultimate test and penultimate judgement. Bergson says that the same state of things – the same piano, the same studio – reveals neither history nor duration. I do not mind ‘imperfect’ live recordings and the pianos I play for the first and last time.

WHAT NOT TO DO?

You should do just the opposite of what both journalists and audiences expect you to do. The latter shouldn’t be given an opportunity to speak more of your life than of your art. What does it matter if you are a solitary rebel or a social monster? What counts is your performance. You shouldn’t talk too much about God and His support. When you play Beethoven, you’re created in *his* image. And in the image of God. Not in that of Hélène Grimaud or Lang-Lang. Forget the slogan ‘The more people listen to classical music, the better.’ What counts is the quality of those who listen and that of performers; not their quantities.

INITIATION

Nowadays, there are too many smart alocs in our midst. Actually they are neither smart nor alocs but they count on our democratic bias which, according to their hopes, liberates them from the necessity of learning anything prior to any opinion. And they voice their opinions so nonchalantly one might suppose, if only for a second, they do know something. Luckily for us, their insolence – and our democracy – permits them to acknowledge their ignorance so they might say, for

instance, ‘We don’t understand the first thing about music.’ And then they launch into a long speech centred upon twelve-tone music or Beethoven’s last quartets. And you cannot choose but hear them, listen to them – by virtue of the same democratic rules.

To tell the truth, I do not really mind such pompous asses because, for all their ignorance and light-heartedness, they seem to respect and even worship classical music. I can hardly tolerate a far more vicious group of asses who think that Michael Jackson is as important as Bach – by virtue of post-modern rules. (Today the blurred distinction between high and low culture seems normal rather than novel. Indeed, thanks to postmodernism, terms like ‘high culture’ are difficult to use without irony.) I have no idea whether Madonna believes she should be ranked alongside Mozart and Jane Austen. But Serge Gainsbourg, for one, differentiates between what he defines as ‘major and minor arts’. To him, a song – his song or any other song, not a Schubert lied – is part of low culture on the grounds that it requires no initiation; or no effort on the part of consumers. To enjoy Michael Jackson’s art, you need not know anything except the language he uses in between a series of Moonwalks. Even words are of no consequence: you just look at his dances and a sort of sexual ecstasy saturates your body. That is what they call ‘ideal communication’, I suppose.

There can be no true democracy without initiation; and differentiation.

INTERPRETERS

When Hegel comments upon a few of Kant’s contemporaries, he says they strove to become great but did not succeed. Today, you had better aim at becoming a second-rater, otherwise people might think you are pretentious, bizarre, abstruse, eccentric, if not anomalous. This state of things might explain why we have mostly third-raters in our midst, on television and computer screens, in concert halls. Most of these fourth-raters are affable – ‘nice guys’, in common parlance – but some of them have what the same people call ‘personality’. For instance, a pianist is defined as a ‘solitary rebel’, and yet this woman is neither solitary nor a rebel; she is just what the Russians define as a ‘*scandalist*’. She insults conductors and other colleagues of hers and, generally speaking, displays a sort of defiance that has nothing to do with music.

Actually, an interpreter’s life has nothing to do with the music that he or she performs. Whether she is a solitary rebel or a social animal makes no difference, as far as Beethoven’s sonatas go and sound. Any interpreter has a life of his own, but this life is his ‘personal business’, as the Russians put it; so that the audience is not supposed to talk about his solitude or social

conscience. Of course any interpreter's life has an impact on her performances, for any interpreter tells her own story; at least in accordance with Nietzsche's thesis. But whatever lies behind this story should remain private, as one of Samuel Beckett's characters put it. Alas, nothing remains private today, especially in the kingdom of the stars. And you are not likely to become one if you do not care about handicapped children or undernourished animals. Of course you *are* duty bound to care about them – in private.

The matter stands differently with creative artists: their private lives *are* important, according to Nietzsche. (On the whole, they are *far* more important than performing artists.) Of course you can listen to Schoenberg's music without his biographers' help but I, for one, do not discard his observations related to music 'lovers'. At some point he said, 'These concert goers are the worst enemies of music.' And at another point, 'But for my detractors, I wouldn't have become what I am.' And the last word he uttered was 'harmony'. He *was* a rebel and his stance on ignoramuses does count, I suppose. And the word 'harmony' adds a finishing touch to his private and public lives.

INTERPRETATION

'Did We not open thy breast for thee?' – the version I heard when watching a series of documentaries on Jesus and Islam. (The Koran, Surah 94.) I was immediately reminded of Pushkin's *The Prophet* where a six-wing seraph turns up and 'tears my sinful tongue out' (replaced on the spot by a 'serpent's wise tongue'). Taken out of context, a quotation might create a misleading impression, but this time the opposite happened: I was disappointed by the rest of the Surah. What is more, I was disappointed by other translations of the verse. ('Did We not expand thy breast for thee?' A. J. Arberry.) N. J. Dawood skips the verse altogether as he embarks, without further ado, upon the relief granted by Allah: 'Have We not lifted up your heart and relieved you of the burden which weighed down your back?'

One should not mind being relieved of any burden, however unrelated to the original sin, but I thought not only of Pushkin in this connexion. I thought about Furtwängler's recording of *Tristan und Isolde* that almost literally opened my breast as I listened to it for the first time. (I was 14-years old.) This operation carried out by a surgeon-like seraph – or by Wagner and Furtwängler – was also akin to Arberry's *expansion* of the breast. Not quite, though.

In a way, one expands one's breast when taking a deep breath. But even Asiatic healers are not always in a position to *open* their own breasts. And there is no other way of acquiring the gift

of the gab in the domain of music-making. To burn the hearts of men, as Pushkin says in his poem.

NOTES ON MUSIC

Even if a writer takes down notes, supplying himself with very clear instructions, he will always manage to make a mess of them because, in essence, literature is always muddled; whereas music is an expression of order, even if it is meant to sound disorganised.

Music is finite and literature infinite. Notions, images and words follow one another, endlessly branching out into other worlds and syntheses. Literature is an expression of *samsara*; music belongs to the earthly paradise known as *nirvana* – for all the suffering one seems to detect in it.

A piece of music is never unfinished. Even Bach's last fugue is not. A train of thought never stops in spite of a final 'yes' or 'no'. Music always does; even the music of the spheres cannot do anything about it.

Music seems to ignore Giordano Bruno and his infinite number of worlds. Music belongs to one world only, and this world is tyrannical. There is no music beyond this world. Contrary to what Paul Celan thought, there are no songs beyond humanity. On the other hand, there are a great many poems without music. Even beyond humanity.

Music disagrees with Coriolan: there is no world elsewhere.

The only finite work of literature is Dante's *Commedia* – a tribute to Ptolemy.

Music is quite superfluous. That is why it is in a class of its own and indispensable. What would we do without the superfluous?

Of course one can say that music resounds everywhere, even in the worlds of silence. One can also say that everything is quite superfluous, with the exception of music. One often says that neither words nor movements can define anything. Only music can and probably does.

THE TESTAMENT PROJECT
HIS LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

Any activity pursued on behalf of an ideal and against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality.

John Dewey, *A Common Faith*

To avoid the concensus and settlement of a meaning which the audience fastens on like a security blanket, to be antic, mettlesome, contrary, to retain the right to impudence, to raise hackles, to harry the audience into wakefulness – to do all this may not only be permissible but necessary if poetry is to keep on coming into a fuller life.

Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue*

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.

George Bernard Shaw

INTRODUCTION

I had no alternative but to shelve my ambitious project until doomsday or a sort of turning point beyond which my dreams may come true at last, if only after my death. The texts above were written for that distant project. What follows was done for the sake of a modest (one of the keywords of this booklet) yet pragmatic undertaking whose affinity with its big brother is death, among other things.

I often enlarge upon the same issues as if guided by the doctrine of eternal recurrence. But I am not afraid of repeating myself. In the last text I quote Anna Arendt who said at some point, ‘If you don’t shout, no one will hear you.’ The same goes for repetition and its effectiveness. So I had better repeat what I said much earlier (and several times) so as not to infuriate even more those who opt for political correctness to the detriment of artistic brilliance. ‘You should refrain,’ I wrote in my Mozart booklet, ‘from personal comments if you take part in a game of billiards. But we are playing no games: the illness that the world of music suffers from is not to be treated lightly.’

In one of my French comments I touch upon Hélène Grimaud – not anonymously, mind you – in order to remind music lovers that she is not the only blue-eyed, piano-oriented woman in the world. ‘So if someone agreed with you, saying, “Everything goes down the drain in the domain of music, but there are exceptions to this drastic rule – Hélène Grimaud, for instance,” you could retort that blue-eyed pianists are no exception to this rule. And you will beat about the bush for half-an-hour at least, dropping hints, exploring the history of France, deploring cancers and childhood traumas (she suffered a lot), but stopping short of uttering her name. As a result, you are likely to hear, ‘What are you talking about? What are you driving at?’

As I pointed out earlier, neither time nor space are as magnanimous as our daydreams and nightmares. So I will not beat about the bush. But let me assure both feminists and all politically correct individuals that, for all my criticism of Khatia what’s-her-name (Butinashvili?), I continue to worship Beatrice, Jane Austin, Sophia Kovalevskaya, Marlene Dietrich and Audrey Hepburn.

TO K.

Dear friend,

On second thought I resolved to explore the idea you touched upon in your email – a four-disc box set. We might present it as my last legacy, my farewell to the world, my last will and testament. As usual I'll append a text to the recordings in which I could ask young artists not to think too much in terms of fame and first-class tickets. An old artist assuming an air of patriarch, of the last of the Mohicans. On the threshold of death. Perhaps it is high time I took advantage of fashions and human stupidity. I'm neither blind nor deaf. A composer I know has a daughter whose handicap (she *is* deaf) has been shamelessly exploited by a multimillionaire whose love and knowledge of art is limited to suffering. (And yet he's not Russian.) 'You've suffered a lot,' he said to the composer, some tears welling in his eyes. 'From now on you won't suffer. You'll never suffer again, I swear.' The multimillionaire has already spent a few millions on the composer's fourth-rate works. A rich seam to mine, isn't it? The works I'm planning to record constitute a wide range of styles and epochs and can therefore stand on their own as a sample of my art – if any, I might add, out of false modesty which is appreciated almost as much as suffering. Besides, this subterfuge would allow me to enjoy these CDs in my lifetime. Though not fatally ill, not yet – at least not to my knowledge – I may pass away at any time. (There are too many reckless drivers on Belgian roads.) So let us give a thought to the idea you hit upon. Thank you again.

ROBOTS AND HUMANS

We are afraid of being supplanted by robots, by their intelligence that might destroy our race: in the long run they are sure to come to the conclusion we are too stupid and so ought to be allowed neither to replenish the Earth nor govern it. What key notions do preside over *our* trains of thought and activities? Ideas, precepts, commonsense, common denominator, go-getting, V-sign. I suppose our machines have been acquainted with this sign for many years, otherwise they would not have scored over our chess idols so brilliantly and undoubtedly. Is poetry a game of chess in which a computer can outwit any wits? And what about music?

Today, performers can be programmed thus: ecstasy, bodybuilding, pianissimo, fortissimo, climax, diminuendo, angel, crescendo, demon (or God), theatricals of all kinds (gnomes, elves), conquest, triumph, applause, standing ovation, sales and emails. They (all of them) must have been stuffed with these ingredients for years, otherwise I would be hard put to explain why this paraphernalia works so automatically and perfectly almost everywhere, with the exception of

Taiwan. But that is another subject I shall enlarge upon, weather permitting, age permitting, death permitting.

There are objects and subjects everywhere; if we are bent on networking, we construct a net where we find ourselves intengled, interneted, googled and garrotted. A young pianist's ecstasy is attuned to her worshippers' pleasures and cancers. What they hear is her energy, youth and faith that have nothing to do with music. But they feel rejuvenated and that counts much more than Brahms' mezzo pianos.

A machine can reproduce our state of mind inexorably linked to a falling apple – to Newton's physics. And many apples of this kind are falling in today's literature and music. What counts, however, is the apple that does *not* fall; and yet, to all intents and purposes, it should fall and lie on the Earth, under my feet. It does not fall. Or if it does, it interrupts its flight and remains suspended in midair – like Semiramis' gardens. This apple is made in my garden and in China, to some extent.

Style is the key word and there are probably no other words one should take notice of when leafing through the Oxford Dictionnary; through the Paris Dictionnary. Style is a quirk of fate, of gate to Paradise, a quirk in the rules, a quirk in our lives. I wonder what quirks or quarks I multiply when sitting either in front of a computer or a piano, sunk in thoughts, in words, in sounds, in burial mounds.

No machine will ever reproduce my burials and resurrections, my *quantum* nuances (nothing to do with their *mechanics*) and love. Phoney ecstasies rule the waves (acoustic, electromagnetic, erosmagnetic, euromagnetic, radio) and the world. Are they really phoney? Aren't they rather Deutshegramophoney?

TO K.

My dear friend,

My search for money is especially ludicrous in the light of what happens with our so-called stars for whom grand pianos are transported to lakes where swans disport themselves without, however, indulging in their songs – that would spoil the fun. Hundreds of people are invited for the making of the clip and Gerd Finkenstein tunes one of his pianos as he despondently shakes his head. Another star travels only first class in his mother's and teacher's company. And I think in terms of the history of music and of human dignity. The young generation will have to start from scratch. Some of my colleagues and I are called upon to provide this scratch, but no people in

charge seem to care. Well, I have a few friends who understand the importance of legacies (and the importance of being Earnest), even if the one we are currently dealing with is not the last.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A CANCER PATIENT

You read an article about a star whose cancer was revealed by a paparazzo or a public relation officer. She did all she could to keep her cancer under wraps, but the wraps came off and the fans are rushing to the concert hall where the artist's swansong is about to be performed. Then the fans and the population at large learn that the song our paparazzo talked about was a *penultimate* song and so on. Shortly afterwards, the reader learns that her cancer has been in remission for several years. And her cancer will be in remission for several decades because she fights for her life, displaying the vitality of her indomitable spirit. She goes to Speaker's Corner and shouts, 'Regular screenings for cervical cancer. That's what you need!' That's what she or he needs for publicity. *On fait feu de tout bois*. One looks around and finds a lot of wood. And one makes bonfires to attract attention of concert goers and CD buyers. Why not accept your destiny, your cancer? *Amor fati*? *Hator fati*? Death is not an event because there are no events in Neo-Confucianism. No events, no time, no death – just a process. Another box, another series of recordings, another book.

MY LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

Of course I could write something along these lines, 'Young pianist and musicians in general! Don't think in terms of money. And if you see a boutique on your way to a concert hall, you should look elsewhere – at a handicapped girl, for instance. Generally speaking, you should avert your gaze, eyes and face from fashion designers and jewellery, focusing instead on Brahms.' I could write such a book, taking cue from some of my colleagues, but I shall nip this nebulous urge in the bud. Why waste my time on conquerors, on pets? On death? On *their* death? They do not even fight their fatal diseases: they might have none. Their whole lives are made up of a cancer and I think I know the name of this cancer.

I tried to help a wonderful pianist I still admire, Sergey Kasprov. Some individuals admire him privately, but private admiration is far less close to public scrutiny than the private life of a

star. That is why he is not a world-renowned star, a pianist whose performances make me think of Busoni, Rachmaninov and Gilels.

Of course I can say to youngsters of all kinds, 'Every morning you should rise from the dead. Every time you play *La Pathétique*, you should play it for the first time. Don't think in terms of fame.' And what if they do not think at all? What if their thoughts look like notes? Nots, notes, notes, notes. Not like the Gordian knot, mind you. Like notes? Perhaps like notes. Just like notes.

THE FIRST SESSION, APRIL 24-26, 2018

My cat died two months ago. I cried when I began this recording session, and I thought I would not be able to go on. Even pianists know that sometimes our show must not go on, especially if it is not a show. Just a man sitting in front of a piano, playing Haydn's *Sonata*, one movement, four times, forever. Last week my gardener took me to my cat's tomb after cleaning it with his tools and machines. He put a cross in its centre. Did I feel my cat's tomb when recording the Second Movement? For Posterity? For Austerity? For Myself? Should I always feel responsible for the notes I play in the middle of the night, during a midsummer dream?

We had an argument about *staccato* and *legato*, Gerhard and I. The former in the left hand, the latter in the right one. Gerhard called it 'polyphony'. I told him, 'We're not the Kabbalists. Unfortunately, unfortunately. This is not the Zohar. Unfortunately. Gilels worked with me on one of these sonatas. We didn't go to any archives. Music, moods, tears, blood. Don't they count? Should we spend our lives on one note?'

Both theosophical and theological approaches are equally evident in kabbalistic speculation about the Sefirot in general and their relationship to the Emanator in particular. When it comes to the sequential development of the Sefirot, on the other hand, and to the individual function of each, especially from the second Sefirot onward, a strong Gnostic and mystic element begins to predominate. The kabbalists continuously stressed the subjective nature of their descriptions: 'everything is from the perspective of those who receive' (*Ma'arekhet*

ha-Elohut); all this is said only from our view, and it is all relative to our knowledge' (Zohar 2: 176a).

Whatever I played and how I did it is only relative to my knowledge, non-knowledge, anti-knowledge. One death is enough to teach you everything and I was taught this lesson by my grandmother's bed and also in front of my cat's recent tomb that plants and flowers begin to adorn as I turn back and go home. Do I need this crown? Does my cat need it? What crown does a poet need?

Do I receive anything? I do. And all is relative, as the Russians and Einsteinians say, whenever any truth is uttered in their presence. I played only truth in the course of the three days I spent in Versen with my friends and priceless collaborators. The Emanator is One, be it a Haydn sonata or a Debussy piece. And the Infante's death is also one, whoever looks after her body's burial. My death is not different from hers, but I did not think about my death during the recording of the piece. You do not have to think about death all the time. He takes care of everything and consequently do not need our assistance.

The Emanator is One and I have responsibility for hearing and receiving His waves, emanations, evil-marvel vibes – whatever they ascribe to his Power of Communication. I just sit down in front of a keyboard and play – either this text or Haydn's sonatas. And it is my responsibility to ensure the project finishes on time.

This project involves more than three persons. (The whole world, the whole future, as Edison and Brahms would have put it.) But these persons are in the studio all the time. And they hear the cacophony I produce as I awkwardly touch the keyboard and Haydn, Beethoven, Frank, Bizet, Ravel. I touch whatever I touch and the result is often disastrous; not to say always. I suppose the result is not always disastrous, otherwise I would never touch anything again. Anyway, I can touch myself and my computer – to my heart's content; they do not mind, as far as I know. But why should Gerd Finkenstein, Philipp Nedel and Gerhard Betz listen to how I go through the whole rigmarole of pressing and releasing Bösendorfer's keyboard? I did it over and over again;

perhaps I had not done my homework properly. ‘For homework I want you to write an essay on endangered species,’ as some professors say to their students. Well, the pieces I have recorded on these CDs *are* endangered species.

Apologies are not out of place, even if they are uttered prolifically, automatically; for the sake of talking and being nice. They are not out of place and that is why I apologise to all my colleagues; for any inconvenience caused, as they say. I owe my greatest and warmest apologies to Gerhard Betz whose patience and knowledge have allowed me to make so many recordings over 30 years. I offer my apologies to Gerd Finkenstein and Philipp Nedel. And my infinite thanks. (If you make a recording, you should think in terms of eternity; otherwise there is no point in doing anything.) Thank you for going through the whole rigmarole over and over again. For the sake of music and human dignity.

Tears abundantly shed upon listening to LPs, CDs and DVDs are a lifelong responsibility.

TO K.

Dear friend,

Emboldened by our successful session last month, I’ve decided to make three CDs in August as well. In addition to the Prokofiev and the Schumann, I might record a Schubert CD. (The *Impromptus op. 142, Sonata in A Minor, D. 537.*) Whenever I think about the big box – my personal Big Bang – I say to myself that asking the impossible is not wise, especially on the threshold of my 70th anniversary. It is high time I became more pragmatic and less romantic – at least in the domain of business. On the other hand, the six-CD box (a small bang) doesn’t seem out of reach. All these recordings belong to Sony Classical. As I pointed out in one of my emails, you can release them whenever you wish. The costs are being kept to a minimum, and I even wonder if we haven’t broken a number of records in the course of this venture. (My friends’ generous help, no advance payment, six CD in six days, a convenient, cheap studio.)

This box explores various aspects of my musical and literary personalities. And we might present it as my *Last Will and Testament*. I don’t think anyone will be tempted to compare it to Friedrich Goulda’s ignominious farce. He announced his death to test his friends’ and relatives’

but to record *all* Beethoven sonatas, the task my dear teacher didn't accomplish. Death, as usual. Another alternative is death, the same and only death, and I'd rather to record Beethoven's, Mozart's and Schubert's sonatas. I hope you'll be with me on those occasions too.

LISTENING

'Know thyself' is good advice except that you do not know how to both penetrate yourself and remain outside to note down your impressions and change your angles of vision. Others can help you by looking straight into your eyes; in their eyes you might spot a particle of yourself, if only for an instant. If you perform a piece by Beethoven or anyone else, you come across yourself all the time because, as a matter of fact, you are not yourself: you are others, which does not mean you become what Heidegger calls '*Das Man*' and Sartre '*les autres*'. If you perform a Beethoven sonata and listen to it, you are not Joe Bloggs unless you do your best to become Joe Bloggs. Why should you?

Yesterday I went to Berlin, to Philipp Nedel's studio where he works with others' recordings and points of view. Oddly enough, when listening to myself in *his* studio, I realised I was another man or woman or animal – somebody and something I had not known so far. My producer, Gerhard Betz, had brought the first edit of our Schubert recording and I listened to myself, to Schubert, to Berlin and the space we had all covered as if space needed to be covered, protected. 'Protection' is the keyword in our lives, as Heidegger might have put it, and we had better protect, preserve and hand down to whoever comes after the Flood (*le déluge*) our Schubert, our Schumann, our own selves.

I listen to my recordings and think I am omnipotent enough to do many things at the same time; I am Julius Caesar who could have played the piano, recorded his performances and listened to them in Berlin, under Philipp Nedel's guidance. I listen to what I was six months ago; to what I might have been. I am what I was; I am the world that permits me to go to Berlin and listen to Philipp's apparatus, my own trials and tribulations.

When playing a concert, I am one person doing one thing only. I listen to what I do, to the composer I play and to time, space and my mood. When I listen to my recordings I realise I am a guest in my own house. And I am not sure my house is big enough to welcome such a guest, so many guests, moods, artists and parallel worlds.

Do I recognise myself? Sometimes it is better not to recognise anything, especially in our world which is unrecognisable to some degree. If I realise I am unrecognisable, I know that

sooner or later I shall come to terms with myself, provided I keep in touch with the composers I play and my recordings; and my writings. Is it enough to recognise yourself? To know yourself? It is enough to listen to the sounds I listen to; they succeed each other. So do I.

Sooner or later, however, this paraphernalia boils down to one world, one I and one armchair in which all these particles and waves go on listening to Schubert or Beethoven.

OUR HUMANISM

In Buster Keaton's film *Our Hospitality* we are told a story about a vendetta, about a man who pays a visit to his deadly enemies. They recognise him at last but decide not to kill him as long as he stays in their hospitable house. As soon as he gets outside, however, they hunt him, their revolvers cocked. Their indoor smiles are instantaneously replaced by snarls amidst birch trees, oaks and what looks like the Niagara Falls.

To some extent, our humanist tendency fits this pattern: those who might be killed in the domain of the arts, if we judged them only in terms of sounds, letters, colours and movements, are taken notice of and even welcomed on account of their illnesses and misfortunes. It is on the strength of their weakness that we acclaim them, saying, 'You know she's got cancer and was recently operated on.' Overnight this pianist becomes great and her art unquestionable: it is easier to understand the gravity of cancer than musical beauty or hideousness.

Nietzsche puts a strong emphasis on the body, its health and weakness, and I cannot help siding with him on the subject, whatever Bergson might teach us about the body's insignificance. But cancer victims do not become great overnight or retrospectively, let alone in the distant future. I am not sure that a fatal illness can help us conduct Mozart's *Requiem*, even though both our suffering and joys are somehow reflected in whatever we do or think. Nor do we grow better and better with the passing of the years: time is not always a guru or a great teacher like Schoenberg or Mahler or Plato. So we need not only hours and seasons, but also Plato, Mahler, Schoenberg and ourselves; and our libraries, our walks in the woods.

Nietzsche does not tell us we should judge every work of art in terms of its creator's (or performer's) health. We can stroke a cancer victim's head and shoulders – to our heart's content, if necessary; we are not duty-bound to shed tears when listening to her Brahms' concerti.

We pin our hopes on children who are supposed to carry the torch forward for us in the event of our demise. If a boy plays relatively well at the age of 13, we assume he will become three times better at the age of 39. We seem to forget that the time-space we confront in our sleep as well cuts both ways: you can go down the drain throughout your life.

Our fellow women listen to a young conductor – the youngest of the bunch – and say, ‘He has his whole life ahead of him,’ if you venture to voice a doubt as to his personality and gift. And they add that never was such a juvenile invited to conduct the Vienna Philharmonic on January 1. What does all this waffle have to do with music?

These artists pay us visits and some of our fellow men (*humanisme oblige*) open their arms. Haven’t they outstayed their welcome?

OUR DEMOCRACY

Civil rights include freedom, equality in law and in employment, and the right to vote. We often vote automatically, without taking the trouble to go into detail. We elect a blockhead because he is a multi-millionaire and we think he is skilful enough to turn us into billionaires if not overnight, at least over three or four years. In France many individuals voted for François Hollande because, according to the rumours they had heard in some café or other, he had a really good sense of humour. He was (and still is, apparently) a clown in his own right, but I would not say his speeches and interviewssparkled with his own subtle blend of wit and charm; with his blend of half-wit and anti-charm, rather.

Children often express themselves in painting and we admire their paintings because they are children and their Rousseauesque purity is not yet marred by our civilisation, our lies and frauds. Besides, their spontaneity seems to lie closer to heavenly regions where angels with their own blend of innocence and purity repetitively dance and sing their farandoles and arias. Anyway, for two decades at least, professionalism and maturity have been frowned upon. I know a composer who, when asked where he studied orchestration and counterpoint, invariably answers, ‘I worked in Africa for ten years.’ One immediately assumes he was saving the poverty- and cancer-stricken as he brought them food and pills; and happy pills. Why didn’t he stay in Africa instead of writing operas?

We are supposed to remain children to the end of our lives: in a few decades, we are likely to become perpetual (*perpetuum mobile*), thanks to organ transplants and other immortality tricks. Logically enough, we express ourselves at every opportunity, often talking through our hats: we do not always know the first thing about what we are talking about. But our free countries (and *Mai* 68) incite us to express ourselves to the utmost. It is little wonder that, most of the time, we are wide of the mark and over the top. People today suffer not from information overload, as might be presumed, but from an avalanche of shallow, unfounded (democratic) opinions.

A woman talks to you about a concert she attended last week. 'He was given a standing ovation,' she says about the conductor. I seldom, if ever, saw a standing ovation except at the meetings of the Socialist Party in France. Even if a few friends rise from their seats at the end of your concert, it does not mean you are a new Rachmaninoff or Furtwängler. And even if all the concert-goers rise from their seats and indulge in long-drawn-out applause, no one can ever prove they know the first thing about music.

But our democracy allows us to skip all these stages: first thing, second thing, third thing. We go straight to the point, as our purity-saturated children do. A man admits he knows nothing about music and five minutes later he gives me a piano lesson as he analyses a CD we have just listened to. 'Too much pedal, too much *rubato*.' What does he know about *rubato* and pedals? About Bach, about Schubert? How much does he know about life, about dignity, perseverance and real pleasures? Freedom of choice, freedom of reflection, freedom of education, freedom of silence. Why do we limit our prerogatives to freedom of *blabla*?

YOUNG PERFORMERS

I

Children are carrying our genes into the future where they may mishandle them or even do away with our instincts and gifts altogether. I wish I could lay my hands on the child who was responsible for the total disappearance of Beethoven's genes to which Anton Webern yearned to build a monument. (Berlioz, Brahms, Wagner and Schoenberg put his genes on permanent display.) Of course a lot of children might have been involved in the process of destruction – an army of children, an entire generation.

We entrust our children with the safekeeping of the future because we cannot do otherwise: our words and deeds are not biological enough to disseminate our genes effectively, materially. Whatever these emissaries may accomplish in the decades to come is beyond our control. However, we should co-ordinate their handling of the past which is still under our control, even if we are too old to play the piano or give lectures on music. Child prodigies may be truly prodigious, but their experience is too poor to help them understand Beethoven's last sonatas: they know nothing or next to nothing about *Tod und Verklärung* (death and transfiguration). 'You'll understand these sonatas only at the age of sixty,' my college professor told me once. At 58 I understand them in part, darkly. The point is you have to *understand* these sonatas, not only *feel* them.

Rimbaud wrote astounding lyrics at the age of 17; he mapped out his own maturity. And mankind adjusted to his maturity. (The future is open-minded.) Performing artists cannot achieve the same results because they are called upon to project their death instinct into the past and not into the future. And the past has its own pattern that does not welcome any death instinct, any talent, any virtuosity. Only experience and knowledge can teach us what this pattern is about. Besides, neither Rimbaud nor Schubert had to perform other people's deaths; they just allowed their own death instinct to conquer the world.

Only Time can inject into us Beethoven's genes. A piece composed by Schubert at 25 comes into its own when performed by a middle-aged or an old maestro.

These youngsters play all over the world and elderly concertgoers rapturously watch a Romeo or a Juliet—their feet hardly reach the pedals—dispose of Schubert's sonatas. Our mature concertgoers, who might have heard Gilels or Michelangeli, stand up and applaud because they do not *listen*. They just *look* at Romeo and Juliet, at the carriers of their genes. The former is in a garden, the latter on a balcony. What the concertgoers may hear during those concerts comes down to a few components of so-called piano technique: octaves, scales, arpeggios. But Romeo and Juliet were not supposed to perform Schubert's sonatas.

II

What should young pianists do, in your opinion?

They should write music or poetry or both. They should learn 32 Beethoven sonatas and 48 preludes and fugues from *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* in their teenage years. They should study philosophy. They should remember that it's easier to play at the age of 13 than in your thirties or forties when your experience catches up with you. How to mirror it in your music-making? There are so many elements at your disposal. And you're no longer naive, spontaneous, touching.

What should they avoid at all cost?

Going to concert halls instead of listening to great pianists and conductors of the past at home. Playing competitions before they're mature enough to profit from them. (A good test for nerves, and a test of the tolerance threshold.) Playing too many concerts. Enjoying triumphs – the whole world can be mistaken. I wonder when our customers are right nowadays.

What should they do to become great?

There are no great artists around them, no great professors, no great listeners. And you cannot become great on your own. But no one forbids them to love music. And to live and learn.

THE RUSSIAN SCHOOL

I am often asked what this notion or legend means; and if there is such a thing at all. There is no denying that, for more than a century, there was a Russian piano school and, arguably, this school was unparalleled in the history of music. Even today one might find a few vestiges of it – in the person of Alexei Lubimov, for instance. But leftovers, however succulent, cannot be compared to a banquet crowning the enthronement of a Russian tsar.

So there *is* such a thing as the Russian piano school. But what on earth does that mean? What are the ingredients of this imperial banquet? Usually, critics talk about one ingredient only: singing. However, it does not seem to fit the notion we are dealing with *exclusively*. (Didn't Bruno Walter use the verb 'to sing' rather often?) It is true that, to some extent, our school was more vocal than, say, the French piano school; it was *voice-oriented*, whereas the German school concentrated more on the *instrumental* aspect of music-making. In other words, the German piano sounded like the piano and not like Chaliapin, Caruso or Callas. But there is another element which is often – or rather always – overlooked by both music critics and lovers.

What I am about to do now reminds me of Walter Benjamin's letter to Gershom Scholem on Kafka. In the middle of it he quotes a passage from Eddington's *Nature of the Physical World*. Let me quote a passage from the book entitled *Introducing Chaos*. This book is part of the series designed for neophytes. And, sadly enough, I am a neophyte in the domain of chaos; and in many other domains related to pure and applied sciences.

For three planets to be in stable orbits, it is necessary that their resonances are not in simple ratios like 1:2 or 2:3. In order to remain stable, the planets must be quasi-periodic – that is, the periods never exactly repeat themselves. If the periods do repeat themselves, the perturbation may be amplified with each orbit. Small events in this situation can have a major effect. The planets' orbits could snap, sending them whizzing off through space.

The above quotation does not seem to have much in common either with Russia or the piano, but the text used by Benjamin in his letter speaks of instability, uncertainty, not of castles, trials and the Great Wall of China. Benjamin wishes to convey his idea of where and how Franz Kafka's works are situated in our world and its representation. Had he known anything about chaos theory, he might have added, 'We no longer see the solar system as a simple mechanical clock. It is a constantly changing, complex system.'

What they actually tried to teach us at the Moscow Conservatoire was a quasi-periodic approach to music-making. We were supposed to avoid ‘squareness’ (*kvadratnost’*) or clockwork structures. If you pull back at some point, slightly delaying a new phrase or just a chord, you should on no account repeat your nuance, if the same pattern reappears.

Schubert is far more periodic than Beethoven, but if you systematically pull back before first beats and slow down at the end of every phrase, your interpretation deserves the comparison that my first Conservatoire professor, Jacob Zak, would resort to with gusto: ‘Like squelching through the mud.’ To put it more leniently, it is on the heavy side or heavy going. Dostoevsky says at some point, ‘They lost the thread’ (*The Possessed*). At the Moscow Conservatoire they talked about a ‘pivot’ and its loss.

Perhaps I am too nostalgic or biased, but the Russian school and its particularities, for what they are worth, make me unable to listen tolerantly to Alfred Brendel’s or Radu Lupu’s performances of Schubert’s works; for all the praises showered upon them. The latter’s attitude seems all the more puzzling since he studied piano-playing (and music-making) in Moscow. Critics say that Radu Lupu is a lyricist in a thousand. I think he is just a sentimentalist. In a thousand, in a hundred – it does not really matter. And sentimentality was a taboo word (or rather a taboo propensity) at the Moscow Conservatoire.

What Radu does on a regular basis was called *predikhanie* (pre-breathing) by our teachers. Instead of letting time and music flow organically, he almost stops before every significant utterance as if to point out how beautiful and profound it is. His interpretations often sound like a series of ahs: Ah, how lovely! Ah, how tragic! Ah, how sad! Ah, how mad! In order to remain stable, the planets must be *quasi*-periodic: the periods never *exactly* repeat themselves. Schubert’s music is extremely stable – at least from a structural point of view. (Not in terms of harmonies, to be sure.) But it grows gelatinous or muddy if you indulge in repetitive ahs, ohs, and other lyric, all-too-human digressions. Needless to say, the media and audiences revere all-too-humanism. Besides, ahs, ohs and ouches are easier to understand than pivots and quasi-periodic structures. And a planet whizzing through space has far more impact than the harmony of the nocturnal, cloudless sky.

Of course one might think that Russia is a distant, Siberia-dominated country, and that, in spite of all unwarranted *ralentandi* and *accelerandi*, a Vienna-born (or a Bucharest-born) pianist plays Schubert much better, if only for geographical reasons. Likewise many concert-goers believe that French pianists play Debussy and Ravel better than Germans or Italians. But Giesecking and Michelangeli contradict them rather imposingly.

Nabokov thinks that we should waste neither our time nor breath on airport fiction. (This reminds me of a famous pianist who, many years ago, while stranded at some airport or other, was reading Joyce's *Ulysses* – a good specimen of the *library-of-Babylon* fiction.) But so-called great literature must be torn to pieces, if it is neither great nor literature.

For once I shall leave in peace Lang-Lang and Hélène Grimaud. No more wasting of breath. A five-second grin is enough.

Why leave in peace *great* pianists? After all, I am answering the question: What is the Russian piano school?

Anyway, taking my cue from Nietzsche, I do not criticise individuals. (No wasting of time.) It is modern trends I am wholly preoccupied with.

These pernicious trends are somewhat like a 20-page-long version of *War and Peace* in which Prince Andrei does not die and Natasha becomes a top model. The digestibility offered by today's performers is made up of grimaces and gestures that seem to have originated in both Mephistopheles' conduct and angels' announcements. And even if a pianist just stares fixedly at the ceiling, without moving either her head or torso, she indulges in so many aches and ochs that you get the feeling she is in bed and not at the piano. And this lovemaking is done to the detriment of quasi-periods and structures in general. It is true that lovemaking is more associated in one's mind with a planet whizzing through space than with the harmony of the nocturnal, cloudless sky.

Rachmaninoff, Horowitz, Sofronitsky and Gilels may seem too cool to the fans of *La Soirée Hot* – a series of erotic films that occasionally features a young female pianist. Indeed some conservatoire students (in Moscow and elsewhere) listen more eagerly to Chinese or Georgian pianists than to Rachmaninoff, even if they play his own concerti. In other words, audiences opt for hot concerts, décolletages and short dresses; and ah, ah, ah, oh, ah, ouch. Crescendo-accelerando, ouch, diminuendo-rallentando.

Of course, in comparison with these more or less young ladies, Radu Lupu is in a deluxe category. Yet, to some extent, he is Hélène Grimaud's grandfather.

There are many pernicious trends in today's music-making, but they all boil down to a common denominator known as *Abbau* or deconstruction. Alfred Brendel, Radu Lupu and Gregory Sokolov deconstruct phrases and global structures so that what we are left with amounts pathetically to odds and ends (as if paying homage to Beckett's late works). Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida did their best to bury metaphysics and God. I do not think that music should undergo the same therapy.

Joachim Kaiser told me once, ‘Sokolov has three climaxes in every phrase.’ The problem with so many ahs, ohs and ouches is that they are aimed at the lowest common denominator. But in our day and age any common denominator is far more common than Highest Faithfulness.

Children and many adults are fond of fairy tales. Neophytes like stories related to the artists they hear and admire. These stories delight them far more than sonatas and symphonies they hear because they understand the former and put up a good show while listening to the latter: you do not need any music diploma, any love for music to understand a fairy tale. First tale: Before touching a piano, Sokolov takes it apart and checks every hammer, every damper. Second tale: some pianists travel with their own pianos. Third tale: there are pianists for whom pianos are manufactured in accordance with their diagrams. Fourth tale: they go so far as to plane their hammers smooth.

Gilels did nothing of the sort; and he was one of the three greatest pianists in the history of music. Only the results (concerts, recordings, their quality) should be taken into consideration. *Tout le reste est littérature.* (‘The concert was marvellous, *chère* Charlotte. By the way, this pianist travels with his own piano. Poor thing, he suffered a lot in his youth. He’s still young, you know. What a pity he suffers from diabetes. And his heart –’)

Sokolov may be defined as Lang-Lang’s sophisticated grandfather. Or Bang-Bang’s brother. Anyway, I am fairly convinced that he is not Emil Gilels’ son.

‘MILLIONS FLOCK TO CONCERTS’

My problems with antis – not with antics or my aunties, mind you – began on the day when I had to read a few pages from the work entitled *Anti Düring*. I spell it as I can, especially since I do not really care for this work which was written by Engels, if am not mistaken; or by Marx himself. Well, I am not really concerned with either of these thinkers, dreamers, sham philosophers or shamans – call them what you will, if you wish to call them anything at all. As I was born in the Soviet Union, I was bound to come across them and many other antis – I prefer my aunties and even ants to those antis, needless to say – that continue to haunt me, if only within the province of my mind.

In a world of antis (anti-art, anti-freedom, anti-dignity, anti-talent, anti-thought) one has no alternative but to become an anti-antis. And I do not keep my antism to myself, taking my cue from Socrates’ systematic and public destruction of Sophists. Whenever I buy a newspaper –

books are more expensive and often more disappointing – once again I realise I am duty-bound to publicly kick against a trend and an ecstasy I am strongly opposed to.

In *The Times* I recently read – and I am supposed to rejoice at this piece of information – that ‘people attend classical concerts as cricket matches, according to figures that show a growing appreciation for orchestral music.’ How could you really appreciate live performances today, I wonder? Of course you might be unaware of their poor quality, or you might think any music is better than no music; any live performance is better than a dead performance – that of Furtwängler, for instance. And even LP’s (or short-playing, 78-tour records) are ‘piles of soup tins’ to you. Sure enough, you are far more alive and kicking in opera houses and concert halls where music has a soothing vibe. And you feel rejuvenated when listening to a *budding* genius’ recital.

I think it is much better and healthier to stay at home, listening to old recordings and also enjoying dainty dishes and wines. But young people are not old enough to realise that old masters offer an unparalleled introduction to music: they are large as life, eternity-like. What counts is quality, not quantity. ‘A report by the Association of British Orchestras found that attendance last year was 4.83 million, a rise of 3 percent since its last survey in 2013.’ I am against this rise (anti-rise) because neither Furtwängler nor Bruno Walter conducts those concerts. Down wanton, down. In this domain aristocracy goes one better than democracy.

According to Mr Pemberton, however, these larger audiences ‘do not bring in more money and, if anything, actually increase losses’. Actually orchestras suffer a ‘double whammy: a decline in earned income alongside significant cuts in public funding.’ I do rejoice at this piece of information.

‘The enthusiasm for live performances goes against trends for the genre. Album sales have dropped every year between 2006 and 2015, falling from 5.2 million sales to 2.3 million.’ Don’t let feelings of depression swamp you.

In 1969 Gunther Stent (a distinguished biologist, then of the University of California at Berkeley) wrote: ‘I shall try to show that internal contradictions – theses and antitheses – in progress, art, science, and other phenomena relevant to the human condition make these processes self-limiting; that these processes are reaching their limits in our time and that they all lead to one final, grand synthesis, the Golden Age’ (*The Coming of the Golden Age*). ‘This state of affairs,’ John D. Barrow writes in his book pessimistically or hesiodically entitled *Impossibility*, ‘is compared to the characteristic history of the South Sea Islands. They were settled by an adventurous race of seafarers who set out from South-East Asia across the Pacific Ocean three thousand years ago in tiny open boats in search of a better place to live. Over the next two

thousand five-hundred years, motivated by the search for food and land, they spread out and colonised all the habitable Pacific islands. But when that process was complete, some four hundred years ago, things began a downward spiral. In the face of fertile lands and the abundant harvest of the sea, the spirit of adventure decayed, hedonism grew, intellectual endeavour languished, and the creative arts of the past were left to fade and die.'

In 1969 the Golden Age was not over yet, not entirely.

USES AND ABUSES

Today, it is easy to get accused and abused: time must have grown weary of itself and its incessant search for new language games. Pascal might have concluded it no longer manages to stay on its own at home, on its deathbed. Of course it is boring to stay eternally in bed, especially if this bed of yours happens to be a deathbed. Time has been dying and rising from the dead for millions of years and from time to time it comes up with new ideas that are supposed to render our life more bearable, respectable and dignified. Often it is just the opposite we have to put up with, and we do put up with whatever society imposes upon our will (social contract). We fear we might be deprived of the delights magnanimously showered upon us by our fellow creatures and their performances, political correctness, charity élans and moral support. And we had better not neglect the last item on this list because, sooner or later, we may find ourselves on a deathbed or its ersatz.

Last year my Belgo-Polish friend invited me to dinner, hoping I would hit it off with his friends whose charitable dispositions concern mainly music: orchestras, festivals, young artists. They boasted about their music investments so whole-heartedly and radiantly that I was in two minds whether or not to give them a piece of my mind. Such sponsors are firmly convinced they are preservers of music, not its destroyers, and I do my best to make them admit they are the latter. In the course of that memorable dinner – I do not go out much – I missed a nice opportunity to keep silent, as the French put it rather elegantly. Worse still, I shall have no other opportunity to accomplish this ritual: my friend is not likely to invite me again. And if he does, for some obscure reason, these friends of his will not salute me in the living room.

With a few exceptions, we are more than social animals: even antelopes have no propensity to gather together for any reason, however unsubstantial or ludicrous. Group therapy, in-group, interest group, peer group, pressure group, special interest group, splinter group, support group, user group, working group. Pascal is certainly right: no activity seems to be more arduous than

staying alone in a room. So you communicate with others and listen patiently to their tales of joy and woe, the former being far more frequent and long-winded, especially in the United States. You listen to their pride and prejudices as you await your turn which always comes, provided you are in the midst of high society. But in the midst of those individuals you are not supposed to speak badly of this day and age: not only do we try our utmost to persevere in our being (Spinoza), but we are vehemently bent on enjoying every minute of our life on Earth. And how could you enjoy this life without sharing the bliss you experience at Musikverein and Carnegie Hall? You would not talk about a game of billiard to ladies, would you? Besides, you have an irresistible urge to touch upon the festivals you support both morally and financially. Alas, even the members of the middle society do not realise that charity balls have nothing in common with sponsorship of musicians (unless we focus on the infirm in general).

The wealthy often feel duty bound to participate in the cultural life of the universe, and they know as well as I do that helping youngsters and (former) sufferers is far more advantageous than looking for a genuinely gifted musician. (To whom could you talk about *crescendi* and *diminuendi*?) Besides, it is less time-consuming and delicate: almost anyone can pick up a young charismatic sufferer from a crowd of candidates for financial support. The matter has always stood differently with genuine artists. How to appreciate the use of the pedal and the abuses of ‘squareness’? The alternation of predictability and unpredictability? Orchestral polyphony – or ‘space polyphony’, as I call it?

If they say to you (and someone always does), ‘He’s the youngest conductor to be invited to Vienna for the New Year Concert,’ you might think he has every quality one expects to find in a conductor: personality, ears, iron will, uncompromising taste, epic thinking. Instead, they might point out he is very kind, affable and adorable. And if you dare to voice a critical remark, they are sure to remind you that ‘he’s got the whole life ahead of him’.

It is pointless to explain why I cannot listen to today’s orchestras whose conductors will never understand that togetherness is not a quality per se – in every sense of the term. (Today, I never feel united with other people in friendship and understanding unless I compromise and become politically correct, artistically incorrect.) In the wonderful, nostalgia-fraught film *Great Conductors of the Past* Hugh Bean speaks thus about ‘precision’ which has become a symbol of modern, digital music-making: ‘Klemperer was not concerned with precision. If it happened he liked it and accepted it. With Furtwängler precision in orchestral play was not a primary aim. I often had the feeling that Furtwängler actually didn’t want this. His rather—we used to call it “puppet on a string”—physical way of conducting enabled him to avoid the sleek modern

American whip-crack chords. He wanted more weight, more heaviness.’ And more polyphony, no doubt. And more individualisation. And more intensity, poignancy.

Today – I wish the day before yesterday were here, to paraphrase *Pink Floyd* – you often hear the monophony of togetherness and phoney musicality. And a pile-up of emotions. Destroyers have the upper hand. Paradoxically enough, they always win hands down. One of the greatest conductors in the history of humankind, Otto Klemperer, was rehearsing with the Philharmonia Orchestra. Orchestra members are often more indulgent than great conductors, although for them too – in those times at least – music-making was a question of life and death, not a problem of breaks and holidays. At some point they were so satisfied with one of their colleagues’ solo performance they started to stamp their feet. ‘It’s easy to have success in this orchestra,’ said Klemperer.

Today it is easy to be a howling success in concert halls: you are a handsome young man, a pretty woman, and you throw your head back as if in ecstasy; or your head remains motionless – a rare boon, but it does happen from time to time. Never mind – you come from an exotic country: China, Georgia, Peru. Concert goers have their fill of Germans, Russians, French and Americans, and all over the world they only talk about fresh blood.

Last year, on Russian television I saw a programme devoted to our world and its rulers. Anti-Semitism is an incurable disease, alas: even the horror of the Final Solution – I am afraid Conrad’s favourite word is not horrible enough to describe it – did not manage to extirpate this obsession from the post-war human consciousness and unconscious. The Russians said the world was ruled by the Rothschilds and the Rockefellers. (The Jews are everywhere!) I wish they were right. Unfortunately they are wrong: neither of these families would ever have deprived us of the harmony one is sure to experience when listening to a great orchestra under a great conductor’s baton. Nor would we agonisingly lack geniuses in the domain of literature. (I, for one, am only interested in geniuses – no time for others.) And Gilels would have at least a dozen sons and daughters.

Today it is easy to get abused and misused: you become a macho or even Hitler either overnight or on the spot, instantaneously. (They can murder you with a blot of ink, to paraphrase W. B. Yeats.) ‘Millions flock to concerts,’ I read in *The Times*. A bad piece of news, in my opinion: today, all concerts (with a few exceptions) destroy music; perhaps irremediably, irredeemably. I have voiced this opinion many times, for more than 20 years. And I have done it for the sake of music, not for my own sake. You have to shout to be heard, as Anna Arendt put it. In a desert.

Incidentally, Glenn Gould whose gift for gambling is well-known would have lost heaps of money in the 21st century. He thought that Schoenberg had better chances in the domain of immortality than any of his 20th century counterparts; and he actually bet on him in the course of a television programme. I do not know if he ever bet on the gradual disappearance of concert halls, but he certainly talked and wrote about this virtual phenomenon. He seems to have overestimated our sense and sensibility: Schoenberg is all but forgotten, according to Philip Glass. As for concert halls and their survival, Gould underestimated our herd instinct.

WHAT TO SAY ABOUT MUSIC?

YOUNG WIVES' TALES

Today, we know more about Jupiter (the planet, not the god) than 30 years ago, but that hardly means we are superior to Dante and Beethoven. Luc Ferry affirms that Milan Kundera and Philip Roth go one better than Tolstoy because they are aware of the unconscious, of which Tolstoy was unaware. Nor did Shakespeare know the first thing about psychoanalysis and quarks. To cut a long story short, an impressive number of individuals outrageously proclaim our superiority with regard to our ancestors whose ignorance of mobile phones seems to invalidate any claim they might have on the time we spend in libraries, museums and concert halls. To cut the same story even shorter, we are always right – with regard to days of yore and even to the end of the last and partly peerless century.

If a music critic says, 'No one sings today like Schwarzkopf,' she means our performances are more faithful and beautiful. Anyway we cannot be wrong because we are alive and Furtwängler died 63 years ago. (Yet he *was* acquainted with the theory of relativity.) And if you play slower than others, they use the word 'old' as if to remind one that whatever is old, with the exception of furniture and Stradivariuses, should go under the heading 'Old Wives Tales'.

TO K.

Dear friend,

Thank you very much for your email and for your understanding. I am thinking about the works which deserve to be released on your label and I am looking forward to hearing from you to see what your suggestions are. Please send me your list.

Thank you again. I am sure you understand to what extent this project is vital for me.

‘Sales’ is a nice word often used by nice guys, and I understand their attachment to it. What seems surprising, however, is the appearance of many boxes about which you spoke in one of your emails. Of course there is a box devoted to Pires’ and Pogorelich’s art. They seldom, if ever, play concerts now and so the argument based on the assumption that, in order to be financially efficient in the world of recordings, a pianist should give at least a hundred concerts a year does not hold water, I’m afraid. I am not sure their boxes sell well: their admirers know their recordings by heart and consequently need not buy them once again. That might mean they were released for the sake of art, whatever this art might be. I honestly think my box could be released for the sake of art – my project is even more audacious than that of Glenn Gould. After all, he conducted only one movement of Mahler’s symphony and his theatrical sketches cannot hold a candle to my *Kreisleriana* and *The Pictures at an Exhibition* recorded in Japan. Of course I have got these videos and they might be released alongside my other recordings.

Dear friend,

I go on working on the box project. After much-soul searching, I suggested to Philipp and his associate to include around 50 CDs in the box. Emboldened and inspired by the box you generously offered to Peraia (70 CDs), I was unwilling to sacrifice any of my old recordings, with a few exceptions. I think that even Tchaikovsky’s *Concerto* should figure on the list – it is very poetic. I’m also thinking about two recordings that haven’t been thrown away, I hope. One features Schubert’s *The Trout* and the other Brahms’ *Second Concerto* recorded in Bonn with a Polish orchestra.

TESTAMENT

We live through many a death, walking along a vista of incarnations. Sometimes we have no idea what life we are living in, for an unreasonable welter of emotions, memories and instincts engulfs our mind and body to such an extent that we are tempted to touch our face, to look at ourselves in a mirror to find out if we are still loyal to our so-called self.

When working on the *Testament* box, I had to cope with the overwhelming presence of my Conservatoire years and ideas. And the memories focused on my teachers, on the very walls of this venerable institution – in the Fifties and Sixties the Moscow Conservatoire was arguably the best Alma Mater in the world of music – helped me perform the pieces I have played for many years once again. But for this opportunity offered by Sony Classical, I might never again have performed Prokofiev’s *Sixth Sonata* which I learnt at the Moscow Music College. As for the Beethoven Sonatas (op. 7, op. 31 N°1, op. 49 N°1), I played them for many years; but only for myself.

Coming to terms with one’s own past is no easy task, given the number of disappointments and phoney, short-lived triumphs; given the number of dead relatives, friends and professors. But I also recall

the wonderful concerts I attended in Moscow, Paris and Salzburg. These were the happiest years of my life. And my relationship with Gilels at the Conservatoire belongs to the sphere where only miracles happen (my personal wonderland.) The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence that divides the past and the future; and also this life and the hereafter. For many centuries human beings pinned their hopes on the future. I, for one, side with Hesiod who thought the Golden Age had gone forever. Be that as it may, both literally and musically, this box displays my present state of mind, my heart and also my immortal soul.

I would like to thank a myriad of people, but I am not supposed to overstep the limits of what I am entitled to. Gilels, Rachmaninoff, Furtwängler, Plato, Pascal and Spinoza would take pride of place on my list. However, for all my devotion to the past, I should not forget the quick who continue to assist and encourage me: my Japanese and Russian friends. It would be indecent, almost vulgar, to ask today my ritual question: For whom do I write in three languages and play the piano? Common and even uncommon concert-goers no longer listen to music. They look at pin-up pianists who play some Rachmaninoff or Chopin. In the last email I sent to the producer Gerhard Betz, I answered my own question rather grandiloquently, 'Perhaps we do all this only for God.' This award seems to contradict that view. Anyway it is in the line of *duty* – the keyword of my life. I hope I shall not forget it on my deathbed. According to Leibniz, last words and thoughts are important: they are a bridge between this life and the hereafter.

LA SONATE EN RÉ MAJEUR DV 850

Un, deux, trois
 Nous irons au bois,
 Quatre, cinq six,
 Cueillir des cerises
 Sept, huit, neuf,
 Dans mon panier neuf,
 Dix, onze, douze,
 Elles seront toutes rouges...

La *Sonate en Ré majeur DV 850* est un inventaire de jeux joués par Schubert et les pianistes qui condescendent à redevenir des enfants au risque d'encourir les reproches de leurs amis et de leurs collègues : « Vous êtes retombé en enfance ! » Tolstoï dit que nous ferions mieux de rester enfants toute notre vie ; au moins sommes-nous encouragés à avoir l'esprit aussi large et curieux que nos descendants. La valeur n'attend pas le nombre des années... sainte Jeunesse, priez pour nous... Mais je n'ai pas l'intention d'entonner un chant d'innocence parce que ce que j'ai dans l'esprit dépasse à la fois l'enfance et le retour à l'enfance. Il y a des jeux et aussi des meurtres dans le film de Peter Greenaway *Drowning by Numbers* (*Triple assassinat dans le Suffolk*). Et ces meurtres sont souvent commis par des enfants. Si je ne m'abuse,

il y a une petite fille avec une corde à sauter ; c'est elle qui chante quelque chose dans le genre de « Un garçon est le serviteur d'une fille ». Et elle ordonne à son serviteur de lui trouver une voiture afin d'aller faire des courses pour se remonter le moral – une version russe de *Nous irons au bois* ou de la comptine chantée par un personnage du film de Greenaway. A dire vrai, je ne me souviens ni du film de Greenaway ni de ma propre enfance. Mais je sais que j'ai joué non seulement au football, mais aussi à la marelle. A la différence de Schubert, je ne jouerai plus jamais à la marelle, sauf dans certaines de ses sonates.

A quels autres jeux Schubert joue-t-il ? Au cheval à bascule. *Ritter vom Steckenpferd*, comme dit Schumann dans ses *Kinderszenen*. Schubert rend justice à ce jeu tout au long de la *Sonate*. Il s'y adonne avec délices, surtout dans le troisième mouvement, à l'exception du Trio où un vieil homme, sans nul doute retombé en enfance depuis des années, contemple son ombre lointaine montant un cheval à bascule. Il n'a jamais monté un vrai cheval de sa vie ; rien qu'un cheval à bascule. Désormais, même les chevaux de bois lui sont interdits. Mais il peut les regarder et se regarder – lui, le cavalier – à satiété. Il se lasse vite de ses souvenirs : ce sont aussi des chevaux à bascule en quelque sorte. Ils ne sont plus à l'ordre du jour. Rien n'est plus inscrit à son ordre du jour, en dehors de ses maladies.

Le second mouvement – un *ländler*, pas un lied, contrairement à ce qu'y voient ou plutôt y entendent beaucoup de pianistes. Le héros est retombé en enfance. Mais il n'est pas complètement détaché des exploits de sa jeunesse. Peu de temps avant sa mort, quand il entendit le nom de Diaghilev, Nijinski exécuta un saut. On entend des sauts dans le second mouvement et quelques uns sont retransmis depuis un asile.

Le premier mouvement est une sorte de somme théologique : l'enfance, le retour à l'enfance et le gâtisme avancé y vivent côte à côte. Nous jouons sans discontinuer, nous admirons nos jeux, nous sommes fatigués, nous sommes désespérés ; mais nous ne renonçons pas encore, nous tenons bon – c'est une formule gagnante. Hier nous avions un appartement avec une piscine, dans quelques années, nous aurons l'océan à notre disposition. Plus nous avançons, plus nous nous rendons compte que cet océan n'est qu'une mare, une petite flaque d'eau.

Le quatrième mouvement. Un ultime retour à l'enfance ? 2001. *L'odyssée de l'espace*. Un vieillard contemple un fœtus. Son propre fœtus ? L'éternel retour ? Le temps s'estompe pour devenir ce que l'on considère habituellement comme l'éternité. Dans le manuscrit de Schubert, il n'y a pas de retour au tempo initial : le temps ralentit pour céder le pouvoir. Un éditeur a pensé que la réapparition du thème initial impliquait le retour au *primo tempo*. Peut-être n'existe-t-il pas de « *primo tempo* », ni dans la musique ni ailleurs – pas d'éternel retour. En d'autres termes : toute chose ne se produit qu'une seule fois. La marelle, la corde à sauter. Qu'y a-t-il ensuite ? Le souvenir des choses perdues, comme à l'accoutumée. Pas de nouvelles, bonnes nouvelles.

Schubert était-il un éternel enfant ? A la différence de nombreux héros de la littérature russe, il n'était pas un éternel étudiant ; et pourtant, à la fin de sa vie, il décida d'étudier le contrepoint. Etait-il le descendant de Perceval — Parzival, comme l'appelle Wolfram von Eschenbach ?

Ainsi s'en alla Parzival ; il avait à présent les manières et l'allure d'un chevalier, si ce n'est qu'il était, hélas, tiraillé par les élancements ininterrompus d'un mal désagréable. La largeur lui paraissait trop étroite et la profondeur trop proche ; les vertes frondaisons lui paraissaient flétries et son armure rouge lui paraissait blanche. Ainsi son cœur abusait-il ses yeux. Car il avait perdu la simplicité.

Quand Schubert perdit-il sa simplicité ? Dans le domaine de la musique, il avait les manières et l'allure d'un chevalier. Mais à un certain moment, il se mit à ressentir un léger malaise, comme après une opération. A partir de ce moment-là, il vit du sang, même au milieu d'un somptueux festin. « Ils montèrent à la grande salle. Une centaine de lustres rayonnant de multiples chandelles éclairaient d'en haut les officiers de la maison, tandis que sur les murs, des chandelles plus petites illuminaient le pourtour de la pièce ».

Alors surgit un contraste que l'on rencontre souvent dans les œuvres de la maturité de Schubert : « Un écuyer s'engouffra dans la porte, la main traversée d'un coup de lance. Ce rite raviva leur chagrin. Le sang jaillit de la blessure et courut sur la hampe de la lance jusqu'à la main qui la tenait et se répandit dans la manche. Alors des pleurs et des plaintes se répercutèrent dans tout l'espace de la grande salle.

Perceval est vierge ; il habite les forêts et ignore la vie de cour – et la vie en général. Après quelques entreprises maladroites il est adoubé chevalier et siège à la table ronde du roi Arthur. Puis il est invité au château du Graal par le Roi Pêcheur immobilisé par une blessure aux jambes. Puis vient le festin somptueux durant lequel apparaît devant lui un jeune homme tenant une lance ensanglantée, puis deux jeunes filles, l'une tenant une coupe incrustée de bijoux (le Graal), l'autre portant un plateau d'argent chargé de victuailles. La curiosité de Perceval est éveillée — c'est un véritable enfant — mais il ne pose pas de question à propos de la lance, à propos de la personne qui est servie de cette manière. « Dommage qu'il n'ait pas posé la question alors ! J'en suis encore navré pour lui ». Si Perceval avait posé la question, le Roi Pêcheur aurait été guéri et, à sa guérison, il aurait levé le sortilège sur le pays du Graal. (Plus d'infertilité).

Soit, comme le veut le dicton anglais, vous ne posez aucune question et on ne vous dit aucun mensonge, soit vous donnez trop de réponses. Lévi-Strauss pense que l'échec de Perceval est l'exact contraire de l'énigme à laquelle est confronté Œdipe — « le héros intelligent dont la réponse excède la 'communication' jusqu'au point de l'inceste. Perceval est le héros virginal qui ne sait pas comment poser une question ». Schubert ne posait pas de questions et, en conséquence, on ne lui disait pas de mensonges : ses dernières œuvres sont terrifiantes. « Son cauchemar était cousu d'épées enfoncées jusqu'à la garde tout autour et au centre de joutes implacables. Les assauts impétueux des chevaux lui procuraient de grandes douleurs dans son sommeil. S'il avait été éveillé, il aurait préféré mourir trente fois ».

Dans le dernier mouvement du dernier quatuor de Beethoven, une question est posée : « *Muss es sein ?* » La réponse est : « *Es muss sein* ». En anglais : *Let it be*. En français : Cela doit être ainsi. Dois-je exister ? Le monde doit-il exister ? Beethoven répond à ces questions de manière abusive. Ne serait-il pas

mieux de les laisser sans réponse ? Il y a dans son œuvre des paradis artificiels. Nous y prenons du plaisir musicalement, mais nous ne sommes pas sûrs de les accepter sur le plan psychologique.

Le monde de Beethoven est celui de la communication excessive. A la fin de la *Neuvième symphonie*, nous sommes censés nous étreindre mutuellement. « *Seid umschlungen Millionen* ». Aucune symphonie, si longue et si grandiose soit-elle, ne peut transformer nos esprits et nos mœurs du jour au lendemain. Schubert fait traîner les choses et finalement se retire dans un monde où la communication est interrompue. Rien d'étonnant que durant tant de décennies, personne n'ait compris ses dernières œuvres.

« La réponse à laquelle il n'y a pas de question », comme dit Lévi-Strauss. La fête magnifique ; le sang. Perceval et Schubert prennent cette situation pour argent comptant. Ils ne posent pas de questions. Ils passent leur vie à errer autour du monde – ou plutôt autour des mondes.

« Il n'est prudent pour personne de s'aventurer dans ces régions sauvages », dit Kundry à Perceval. « De grands malheurs peuvent survenir à un étranger. J'ai entendu dire et même vu que beaucoup ont perdu la vie ici et trouvé la mort au combat... Mais dis-moi d'abord où tu as passé la nuit » Et Perceval répond : « C'est à une lieue d'ici au plus. Je n'ai jamais vu un château aussi magnifique, avec des richesses aussi impressionnantes ». Kundry lui dit : « A trente lieues à la ronde, aucun bois n'a été coupé ni aucune pierre taillée pour aucun édifice, si ce n'est pour un château qui se dresse seul, dans l'isolement. Il est riche de toutes les perfections terrestres. Celui qui le cherche avec application, ne le trouvera pas, hélas. Et pourtant, beaucoup le cherchent. Celui qui verra le château tombera sur lui à l'improviste, sans le chercher ». La jeune demoiselle qui parle à Perceval, est l'enfant de la sœur de sa mère. Ce qui importe, toutefois, est le château sur lequel Franz Schubert tombe à l'improviste vers 1825 – l'année où fut composée la *Sonate en Ré Majeur*. L'épée sanglante n'est pas encore visible, mais dans chaque mouvement on peut tomber sur elle à l'improviste. La fête magnifique. Le sang.

Il n'est prudent pour personne de s'aventurer dans la région où sont jouées les dernières sonates de Schubert. Toutefois nous pourrions jouer à la marelle au lieu de mourir d'un cancer du foie. Nous sommes détruits par la seconde loi de thermodynamique ou par nos retours en enfance – par notre enfance tout court. Heureusement pour nous, une multitude de cordes à sauter sont disséminées autour du monde.

Ni Schubert ni Bruckner ne posent des questions. Par conséquent, on ne leur raconte pas de mensonges. (La *Neuvième symphonie* de Bruckner est terrifiante.) Beethoven et Mahler (la *Huitième symphonie*) ont entendu beaucoup de mensonges.

Schubert, Bruckner.

Beethoven, Mahler.

Perceval.

Oedipe.

Mais que dire du *Te Deum* de Bruckner ? du quintet *La Truite* ?