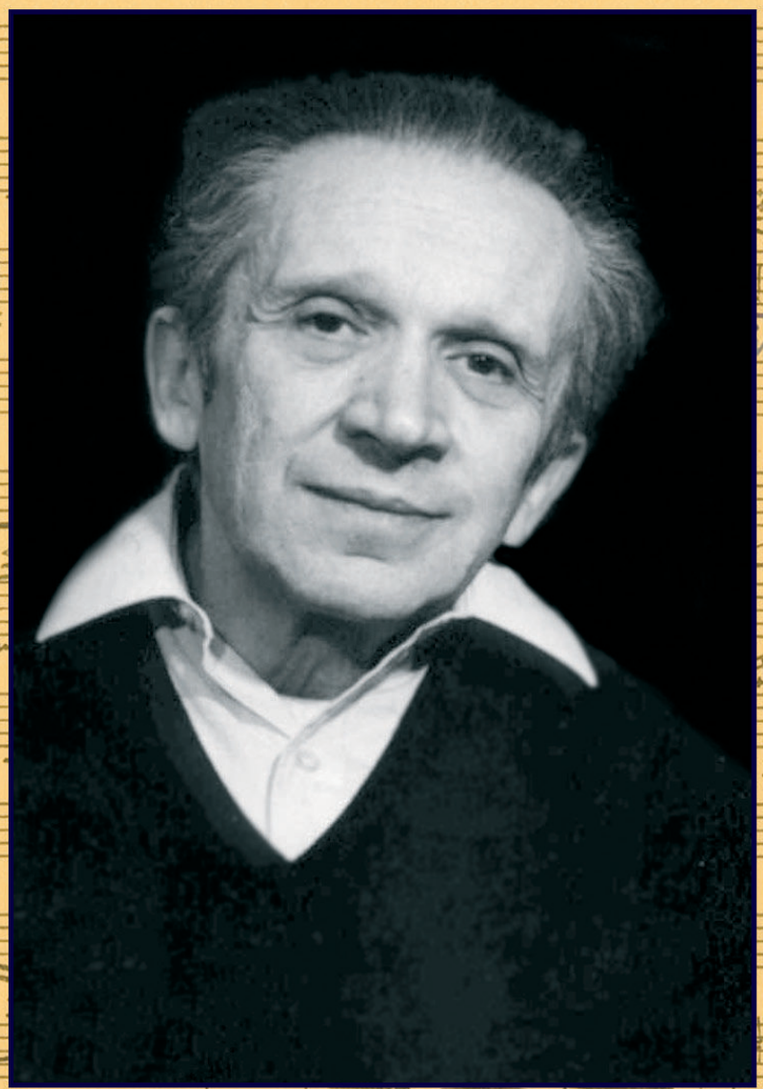
TOCCATA CLASSICS

Mieczysław WEINBERG



Complete Violin Sonatas Volume One

Violin Sonata No. 1, Op. 12

Violin Sonata No. 4, Op. 39

Sonatina, Op. 46

Sonata for Solo Violin No. 1, Op. 82

Yuri Kalnits, violin
Michael Csányi-Wills, piano

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

MIECZYSŁAW WEINBERG: THE MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, VOLUME ONE

by David Fanning

Mieczysław Weinberg – to use the western spellings he was born with and in later years still preferred – had a remarkable life story, even by the standards of those many composers who were buffeted by the storms of mid-twentieth-century Europe. He was born in Warsaw in 1919, and his early musical experiences were as pianist and ensemble leader at a Jewish theatre where his father was composer and violinist. From the age of twelve he took piano lessons at the Warsaw Conservatory, and in later life his fluency as a sight-reader and score-reader was much vaunted; among his several fine recordings is his own Piano Quintet with the Borodin Quartet.

In 1939 he fled the German occupation (in which his parents and sister were murdered) to Belorussia, where a Russian border-guard reportedly inscribed his documents with the stereotypically Jewish first name, Moisey – which became the one by which all official sources thereafter referred to him (his friends and family generally used the pet-name Metek). In Minsk he attended the composition classes of Vasily Zolotaryov, one of Rimsky-Korsakov's numerous pupils. Following the Nazi invasion of the USSR, he moved on to Tashkent in Uzbekistan. Then at the invitation of Shostakovich, who had been impressed with the score of his First Symphony, he moved to Moscow, where he lived from 1943 until his death in 1996.

There were to be many more encounters with Shostakovich, including premiere performances as pianist and a famous recording of the duet version of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony alongside the composer. When Weinberg was imprisoned in February 1953, because of family connections, at the height of Stalin's anti-semitic purges, Shostakovich took it upon himself to write on his behalf to Lavrenty Beria, the feared head of the KGB, and Weinberg was released at the end of April, not long after the death of Stalin. Interestingly, throughout the succeeding years of the Khrushchev Thaw, of Brezhnev's stagnation, Gorbachev's *glasnost* and the break-up

of the Soviet Union, Weinberg declined to exploit any image of victimhood, preferring to recall with pride that his music had been championed by many of the starriest musicians and conductors in his adopted country. Official recognition came in the form of honorary titles, in ascending order of prestige: 'Honoured Artist of the Russian Republic' in 1971, 'People's Artist of the Russian Republic' in 1980, and 'State Prize of the USSR' in 1990.

Though never enrolled as one of Shostakovich's official pupils, Weinberg readily acknowledged the inspiration: 'I count myself as his pupil, his flesh and blood'.[1] And Shostakovich lost no opportunity to commend Weinberg's music to friends and colleagues. Both composers worked across a wide range of genres and in a gamut of styles from folk idioms (including, especially for Weinberg, Jewish ones) to twelve-note elements. Yet for all the unmistakable echoes of his revered role-model, Weinberg retained a higher degree of independence than many of his Soviet colleagues, distancing himself both from official academic conservatism and from the younger generation's fervent embrace of formerly forbidden Western-style modernism. Both Shostakovich and Weinberg left an imposing body of symphonies and string quartets – in Weinberg's case numbering 26 and seventeen, respectively. In string-quartet production, indeed, Shostakovich engaged his disciple in friendly rivalry, expressing satisfaction in 1964 when he was narrowly the first to reach No. 10.[2]

One important difference between them is that where Shostakovich left only two mature piano sonatas and one each for violin, viola and cello, Weinberg composed nearly thirty in all. Of these six are for violin and piano and three for violin solo, in addition to sundry smaller pieces. The violin was his father's instrument, albeit, as Weinberg himself put it, 'not on a very high professional level',[3] and in later life the composer was at various times close to a number of fine Soviet exponents, not least David Oistrakh. Although not a player himself, his command of the idiom was sure-footed, almost from the beginning.

[1] Anon., 'Pis'ma o lyubvi' ('Letters about love'), *Muzïkal'naya zhizn'*, No. 2, 2000, p. 18.

[2] Letter to Isaak Glikman, dated 21 July 1964, published in *Story of a Friendship: The Letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman*, Faber and Faber, London, 2001, p. 117.

[3] Lyudmila Nikitina, 'Pochti lyuboy mig zhizni – rabota' ('Almost every moment of my life is work'), *Muzïkal'naya akademiya*, No. 5, 1994, p. 17.

The Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano was the last instrumental work Weinberg composed in Tashkent where, newly married, he lived with his wife Natalya Vovsi-Mikhoels and her sister and father (the famous Jewish actor Solomon Mikhoels). The manuscript score is dated 11 February–11 April 1943. The three movements follow the C minor-to-major tonal trajectory beloved of Soviet academic tradition and to be used to colossal effect by Shostakovich in his Eighth Symphony later that same year, except that the generally energetic and transparent finale rounds off with a reminiscence of the opening theme and its minor mode. Dedicated to Solomon Mikhoels, the work echoes Weinberg's recently composed First Symphony in the lyrical tone of its *Allegro* first movement, also sounding somewhat reminiscent of Shostakovich's First Cello Sonata (1934) thanks to the conversational nature of the duo-sonata medium. In the later stages of this movement, and at several points in the mainly serene central *Adagietto* as well as the final *Allegro*, there are signs of artistic uncertainty in the manuscript, with several prominent deletions and paste-overs. In the context of his output as a whole, this sonata may be open to criticism for a certain sameness of texture and pacing, and for a somewhat arbitrary tonal zig-zagging away from and back to the tonic. At the same time, it displays a restraint in thematic and textural invention that prepares the ground for the succession of masterly chamber works he would compose during his first three years in Moscow.

The Sonata No. 4 for Violin and Piano, Op. 39, was composed in 1947 and dedicated to the fine Soviet violinist Leonid Kogan (at that time still a student at Moscow Conservatory; the dedication may have been made later, as the public premiere only took place in 1968 and publication of the Sonata had to wait a further ten years). If the first three violin-and-piano sonatas have to do with Weinberg finding his compositional voice in the framework of a lyrical sonata style, the Fourth is more confident, indulging in wider extremes of character and freedom of design. Nominally in F major, the music ranges far and wide harmonically, and its three movements run continuously. The Sonata begins with a polyphonic piano solo, expanding into loose-limbed variations on the main idea of a rising triad, which retains a shadowy presence as the violin comes to the fore and continues to search and explore. The character of the central *Allegro ma non troppo* is an anxious *perpetuum mobile*, led off by the violin but gradually drawing the piano into its vortex and developing a manic momentum towards a hammered *Prestissimo* climax. Rather as in the Third Sonata, composed earlier

the same year, a brief double-stopped cadenza for the violin follows as a kind of buffer-zone, after which the concluding *Adagio primo* returns to the first movement theme by way of a slow-waltz texture similar in places to the last movement of Messiaen's *Quatuor pour le fin du temps* (composed in 1941 and published the following year).

In 1948 Weinberg, in common with many prominent Soviet composers, fell foul of the 'anti-formalism' campaign spearheaded by Party functionary Andrey Zhdanov (hence the term *Zhdanovshchina*, the 'Zhdanov business'). This campaign was designed to warn composers of the dangers of internationalism and remind them of their civic duties. Again in common with his colleagues, Weinberg composed a large number of works based on folk or folk-like material as part of his rehabilitation. But the three-movement Sonatina for Violin and Piano, Op. 46, of 1949 is not of this kind, and it had to wait until 9 October 1955 for its first performance, given by Kogan with pianist Andrey Mytnik in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire.[4] On a copy of the published score the following year, Weinberg inscribed a dedication to his composer-friend Boris Tchaikovsky. The leisurely first movement – without a central development section, as classical 'sonatina form' dictates – nevertheless registers as a deliberate attempt to fulfil the post-Zhdanov requirements for accessible, lyrical writing. More intriguing, and far more technically demanding, is the fast central episode in the slow movement, marked 'mysteriously' in the score, which leads to a broken, near-sobbing paraphrase of the opening theme; and that sense of broken, numbed expressiveness is picked up in the last pages of this deceptively innocent work.

From 1960 Weinberg switched his attention from duo to solo string sonatas, beginning with the first for cello, inspired by and dedicated to Rostropovich. In 1964, in between the first two solo cello sonatas, he composed his Sonata No. 1 for Solo Violin, Op. 82, dedicated to Mikhail Fikhtengol'ts (one of the galaxy of Soviet Jewish violinists who had come to prominence in the 1930s), who gave the first performance of the Sonata on 31 December 1965, subsequently editing the work for publication. The shift to the solo medium brought with it no lowering of artistic sights. On the contrary, this five-movement sonata is on a grand scale and makes finger-breaking demands on the violinist, not least in the dissonant quadruple-stopping that provides the frame for a violent

[4] Anon., 'Khronika kontsertnoy zhizni' ('Chronicle of concert life'), *Sovetskaya muzïka*, No. 12, 1955, p. 98.

march-like *Allegro* first movement, sustained at a pitiless *fortissimo* throughout. The *Andante* second movement offers temporary relief, at least in its relatively lyrical outer sections. But the muted central *Allegretto* is a three-way conversation between hard-edged pizzicato, spiky staccatos and graceful singing lines, at the apex of which the pizzicatos explode in multiple-stopped fury. No relaxation is granted in the declamatory *Lento* fourth movement, which is once again entirely *fortissimo* until its subdued conclusion, nor in the *Presto* finale, which is a *perpetuum mobile* of daunting proportions, topped off by a recall of the no less fearsome chords from the opening of the work.

David Fanning is Professor of Music at the University of Manchester and has a varied career as scholar, pianist and critic. Following books on Nielsen and Shostakovich, his most recent publications include a study of Shostakovich's Eighth String Quartet for Ashgate Press, a five-volume performing edition of Russian opera arias for Peters Edition, and a new critical edition of Nielsen's piano music for the Carl Nielsen Edition. He is currently working on a historical survey of the symphony in the Soviet Union for Yale University Press. He is also active as a critic for Gramophone *and* The Daily Telegraph*, and as a BBC broadcaster and public speaker.*

Yuri Kalnits has established his career both as soloist and chamber musician by performing extensively throughout the UK and abroad. He is regularly invited to participate in festivals throughout the world and has played at many important venues including The Purcell Room, St John's, Smith Square, The Barbican, Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center and Suntory Hall, Tokyo. Tours have taken him to Russia, Ireland, Germany, Israel, France, Switzerland, Spain, Greece, USA, Hong Kong and Cyprus.

Born in Moscow in 1975, Yuri started playing the violin at the age of five, studying with his father. In 1982 he was accepted by the Moscow Central Music School and studied with Galina Turchaninova. From 1983 he attended the Moscow Gnessin Music School for Gifted Children as a pupil of Irina Svetlova and frequently represented the School in concerts both at home and abroad. These included performances as a soloist with the Minsk and Yaroslavl Symphony Orchestras, playing at the Main Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, representing the School in England and leading and playing solo with the Gnessin Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra in Japan.

In 1992, Yuri began studying at the Royal College of Music in London with Itzhak Rashkovsky, winning several major College prizes; he went on to win a number of other distinctions. He completed his training with Yfrah Neaman at the Guildhall School of Music and Vasko Vassiliev at Trinity College of Music while receiving further artistic guidance from such eminent musicians as Shlomo Mintz, Abram Shtern, Igor Oistrakh, Edward Grach, Sergei Fatkulline, Sylvia Rosenberg and Valentin Berlinsky.

Recent seasons have seen him perform as a soloist with, among others, the London Festival Orchestra, Mozart Festival Orchestra, Arpeggione Chamber Orchestra and the Novosibirsk Symphony Orchestra.

Michael Csányi-Wills studied with Hilary Coates before graduating from the Royal Academy of Music where he studied piano with Christopher Elton and Frank Wibaut and composition with Nigel Clarke. In 2002 he was invited to become composition fellow at the London College of Music and Media, where he studied with the composers Martin Ellerby and David Matthews.

His solo repertoire ranges from Bach to Henze, and in recent years he has championed a younger generation of contemporary composers. Performances have taken him as far as Mexico and the USA, making orchestral appearances in Europe and, at home, with both the London Symphony and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras.

His compositions include several pieces for saxophone, (including a concerto premiered by Amy Dickson in July 2007), chamber and ensemble works, choral music, lieder and several pieces for the tango band Fugata.

Since 1997 he has collaborated with the composer Nigel Clarke on a number of feature films, and in recent years he has also worked as a recording producer for labels which include Naxos, NMC and Toccata Classics. He co-founded the music-production company Moviefonics Ltd where he works on large-scale productions and with artists such as the soprano Katie Van Kooten, the Kreutzer Quartet and the Royal Marines Band.

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Tracks 1–3 and 9–13 recorded on 26–30 August 2008 at Champs Hill, Coldwaltham (by kind permission of David and Mary Bowerman), and tracks 4–8 on 13–18 July 2009 at Moviefonics Studios, West London
Recording engineers: Rupert Coulson 1–8 and Michael Csányi-Wills 4–8
Produced and edited by Michael Csányi-Wills for Moviefonics Ltd and Toccata Classics

Booklet essay: David Fanning
Cover photograph of Mieczysław Weinberg courtesy of Tommy Persson; background: the first page of the manuscript of the Fourth Sonata courtesy of PeerMusic Classical, Hamburg
All works published by Peermusic Classical, Hamburg (www.peermusic-classical.de) except for the Solo Sonata No. 1 (Sikorski Musikverlage, Hamburg; www.sikorski.de).
Design and layout: Paul Brooks, Design and Print, Oxford

Executive Producer: Martin Anderson

TOCC 0007

Produced in association with
the International Centre for Suppressed Music

Mieczysław Weinberg, born in Warsaw in 1919, became a close friend of Shostakovich in Moscow, after fleeing eastwards before the invading Nazis in 1939. His vast output includes 26 symphonies, seven operas, seventeen string quartets and much other chamber music and some 200 songs. His style has much in common with Shostakovich, as these four violin works show: fluent contrapuntal skill, a keen feeling for melody, often inflected with Jewish cantilena, and an acute sense of drama which combines a natural narrative manner with an extraordinary ability to create atmosphere, often from just a handful of notes. Since his death in 1996, his music is being discovered by musicians and listeners all around the world.

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MIECZYSŁAW WEINBERG Complete Violin Sonatas, Volume One

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano, Op. 12* 21:59

1 I. *Allegro* 6:04
2 II. *Adagietto* 7:00
3 III. *Allegro* 8:55

Sonata No. 1 for Violin Solo, Op. 82* 24:41

4 I. *Adagio – Allegro – Adagio* 5:24
5 II. *Andante* 6:11
6 III. *Allegretto* 3:51
7 IV. *Lento* 3:29
8 V. *Presto* 5:46

Sonata No. 4 for Violin and Piano, Op. 39 13:44

9 I. *Adagio –* 8:57
10 II. *Allegro ma non troppo – Adagio tenuto molto rubato (quasi Cadenza) – Adagio primo* 4:47

Sonatina for Violin and Piano, Op. 46 14:45

11 I. *Allegretto* 4:59
12 II. *Lento – Allegro – Tempo primo* 5:42
13 III. *Allegro moderato – Lento* 4:04

TT 78:08

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DDD

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