

Myroslav **SKORYK**



Music for Violin and Piano

**Violin Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2
Allegretto and Dance
Spanish Dance
Melody
Poem
Carpathian Rhapsody
Caprice for solo violin**

**Solomia Soroka, violin
Arthur Greene, piano**

FIRST RECORDINGS

MYROSLAV SKORYK AND HIS MUSIC

by Solomia Soroka*

Myroslav Skoryk is one of the most prominent composers in Ukraine. He is the author of a diverse body of works, which includes opera, ballets, cantatas, instrumental concertos, orchestral works and instrumental and vocal chamber compositions; he has also written incidental and film music. He has a chair in composition at the Lysenko Music Academy in Lviv, Ukraine, teaches composition at the National Music Academy in Kyiv, and in spring 2011 he accepted the position of Artistic Director of the National Opera in Kyiv.

Myroslav Skoryk was born on 13 July 1938 in Lviv.¹ His family was deeply connected with the intellectual life of western Ukraine. His parents were educators: his mother was a chemistry teacher and his father was a director of the gymnasium in Sambir, a small town in western Ukraine. Skoryk's grandfather was a well-known ethnographer, and his grandmother's sister was the world-famous operatic soprano Solomiya Krushelnyska.² It was indeed Skoryk's renowned great-aunt who recognised his musical talent at an early stage and encouraged him to study music. He began his musical education in the Music School at the Lviv Conservatoire, but it did not last long. Krushelnyska was unfortunate enough to be visiting her sisters in western Ukraine in September 1939 when the Soviet army invaded. She was never able to return to her home in Italy, and was forced by the Soviet authorities to 'sell' all her estates in Italy to them for the symbolic price of one loaf of bread in exchange for the promise of her own safety and the safety of her closest relatives.³ That promise was not kept: in 1947 Skoryk's family was deported to Anzhero-Sudzhensk in Siberia and he was able to return to Ukraine only in 1955 – without his parents, who were not allowed to accompany him and had to remain in Siberia. He had managed to continue his musical studies in Siberia, but only on an irregular basis – and anyway, as the composer recalls,⁴ he was more interested in soccer than in music. He was

¹ Lviv is the most important city in western Ukraine (and eastern Galicia). At the time of Skoryk's birth it was part of the Second Polish Republic (as Lwów) after a period (as Lemberg) in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1772–1918); incorporated (as Lvov) into the Soviet Union in 1939, it was occupied by the Germans in 1941–44. Ukraine gained its independence in 1991.

² Solomiya Krushelnyska (1872–1952), Ukrainian soprano, who travelled around the world, singing with Toscanini, Caruso, Battistini and others. In 1904 she sang *Madama Butterfly* in Brescia at Puccini's request, reviving the opera after its initial failure three months earlier. In 1920 she left the operatic stage (where her repertoire numbered no fewer than 63 parts) and began a concert career three years later. After World War II she taught at Lviv Conservatory.

³ Lyubov Kiyanovska, *Myroslav Skoryk: The Person and the Artist*, Ľ, Lviv, 2008, p. 28.

⁴ From my interview with Skoryk, Lviv, 23 May 2010.

*I am grateful to Lyubov Kiyanovska for some of the information on Skoryk's life and music in these notes.

nonetheless still able, at age thirteen, to begin studying piano with a former student of Rachmaninov, Valentina Kantorova, who was also exiled in Anzhero-Sudzhensk, and violin with another political prisoner, Volodymyr Panasiuk. He tried to compose, too, and wrote his first works there. As did millions of others, Skoryk found Stalin's death in 1953 to be a blessing, and he received a new passport without the dreaded political black mark.⁵ Once back in Lviv, he was able to study at the Conservatoire and begin to realise his parents' dream that he become a composer. But there was no composition department in the Conservatoire at the time and, after only four years of study in Siberia, his chances of entering the institution as a violinist or a pianist were virtually non-existent. In the end, he passed three entrance exams and became a student of musicology. In the absence of a degree course, Skoryk was able to take composition classes only on the side, from the prominent western-Ukrainian composer Stanislav Lyudkevych – who then decided that Skoryk had no talent as a composer and asked him to leave his studio. Skoryk, a determined young man, therefore switched to the studio of the composer Roman Simovych, who in turn criticised his music for being too dissonant. When Skoryk refused to compromise, Simovych threw him out of his studio as well. Skoryk kept writing, finally graduating from the studio of his third composition professor, Adam Soltys, with the cantata *Vesna* ('Spring'), whereafter he was admitted to the Moscow Conservatoire to complete his doctoral studies with Dmitri Kabalevsky.

In 1963 Skoryk himself became a professor of theory and composition in the Lviv Conservatory, and in the same year the youngest member of the Ukrainian branch of the Soviet Composers' Union. In 1968 he moved to Kiev (now Kyiv) to accept a position of professor of composition at the Conservatoire there. Immediately he inherited the studio of one of the most prominent Ukrainian composers of the twentieth century, Boris Lyatoshynsky, who had died earlier that year. In 1984 Skoryk accepted another professorship, this time at the Lviv Conservatoire, although continuing to teach in Kiev. In 1987 he returned to Lviv, where he is now the chair of the composition department, in addition to maintaining his positions in the Kyiv National Conservatoire and Kyiv National Opera. He resides mainly in Lviv with his wife Adriana; he has two children, Milana and Nazar, and three grandchildren. In recent years he has appeared as conductor and pianist in Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia and the USA.

I have known Myroslav Skoryk since I was a child, and have performed his Second Violin Sonata with him at the piano in Australia and in the USA. My impression of him is that he is extremely introverted and generally quiet – but with a sarcastic sense of humour. This sarcasm can also be heard in his music, which in a way reminds me of Prokofiev, whose music influenced Skoryk's.⁶ He has told me that there are quite a few composers whom he liked and whose music influenced his own works, among them his teacher Kabalevsky as well as Prokofiev, Stravinsky and Milhaud.

⁵ The passport of everyone forcibly deported to Siberia by the Soviet authorities was marked with a black stamp, which meant that the passport-holder could not leave his or her assigned place of residence and so was deprived of freedom of movement.

⁶ In 1963 Prokofiev's music – specifically, its use of modality – had been the subject of Skoryk's doctoral thesis.

Skoryk does not like to talk about his music. When I asked why he quoted a theme from the Beethoven ‘Moonlight’ Sonata in all three movements of his Second Violin Sonata, he answered that he did not really know, adding that he brought with him a good book where all of his works are analysed really well, and perhaps I should read that.⁷

Melody (1981)

Beginning with Lesya Ukrajinka’s play *The Ruler of Stone* (a Ukrainian interpretation of the Don Juan legend) in 1973, Skoryk has now written incidental music for some forty theatrical productions, as well as 22 films (including a handful of cartoons). His *Melody* [1], composed for the film *The High Pass* in 1981, has become universally popular in Ukraine, and Skoryk has received countless requests to transcribe it for various instruments and ensembles – although he once confided to me that he cannot stand to hear the piece any more.

Violin Sonata No. 1 (1963)

The Hutsuls are an ethnic group who inhabit a large area in the Carpathian Mountains of western Ukraine. In their isolation they have preserved characteristic traits of music, dance, philosophy and art. Two so-called ‘Hutsulian modes’ are known in western musicology, the Hutsulian major and minor modes. Bartók, who himself collected over two hundred Ukrainian folksongs, studied these modes and used them in some of his own compositions, such as the Second Violin Rhapsody (1928) and the ‘Ruthenian Kolomejka’, the 35th of his *44 Duos* for two violins (1931). Much of Skoryk’s inspiration flows from Hutsulian culture, which has proved a potent source of inspiration for many Ukrainian composers, and the First Sonata (1963) is a prime example. One of its first performers was my teacher Olga Parkhomenko, who edited the violin part; David Oistrakh was also fond of this work and recommended it to his students.

The Sonata, which consists of three movements, is written in a neo-Classical style downstream from Prokofiev and Stravinsky, with elements of impressionism, diatonic modes independent of an harmonic framework (*à la* Stravinsky) and, most of all, the folkloristic brightness of the thematic material.

The first movement [2] is written in a clear sonata form. The *Andante* introduction becomes a leitmotif, repeated a few times during the course of the work, and in augmentation at the end of the movement. The second movement, *Largo* [3], is written in a simple ternary form (ABA). Its brevity notwithstanding, the movement is monumental, dramatic and impersonal. In the course of approximately four minutes of music the metre changes nineteen times, and the voices are at rhythmic odds with one another as well. The last part of the movement is compressed, with Skoryk leaving each phrase hanging in the air. The third movement [4] is a toccata-rondo, which also includes both elements of the *kolomyika*⁸ and jazz progressions. Ostinato – centred on A, surrounded

⁷ His reference was to Lyubov Kiyanovska’s *Myroslav Skoryk: The Person and the Artist*, *op. cit.*

⁸ The *kolomyika* is a Hutsulian song-dance, always in a fast tempo, strophic in structure. The melody is repetitive, but the words are

by irregularly accented double-stops – is the main means of development. The refrain is in 5/4 with constant interruptions by bars of 7/4, 2/4 and 3/4. The second episode has the character of a lullaby but in this company no one is going to get any sleep.

Allegretto and Dance from Hutsulian Triptych (1964)

In 1964, just as the *shistedesiatnyky*, the short but brilliant movement of artistic dissidence in Ukraine, began to lose ground to the repression of the new Brezhnev era, Sergei Paradzhanov, an Armenian film director, came to Ukraine to film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, after the eponymous novel by the nineteenth-century Ukrainian writer Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyj. To everyone's surprise, he commissioned the music from the then unknown Myroslav Skoryk. The film was a milestone in Ukrainian cultural history, and Skoryk's music is so evocative of the folk culture that it serves as an essential element of the storyline. Later, in 1967 Skoryk created a three-movement orchestral work, *Hutsulian Triptych*, based on the music to the film. He made an arrangement for violin and piano as well, but didn't transcribe the last movement of the orchestral *Triptych*, explaining to me in one of our conversations that the orchestral polyphony of the last movement made it impossible.

The story takes place in a distant village in the Carpathians. Marichka and Ivan are in love but cannot get married because of the different social status of their families. Ivan decides to hire himself out as a shepherd in order to earn some money, which would enable him to marry his beloved. He leaves the village with the group of shepherds for the summer. During one of his sleepless nights he hears the sound of the *trembita*⁹ and has a worrying premonition. It turns out that his beloved Marichka has drowned in the turbulent mountain river, trying to save a young sheep.

The first movement of the *Triptych*, *Allegretto* [5], is written in a simple ternary form, beginning with the piano depicting the noise of the mountain river in which the heroine will eventually drown. The violin melody in the outer parts of the movement, superimposed on the flowing piano accompaniment, represents Ivan's love and longing for his beloved while he is away. In the middle section both piano and violin imitate the sound of the *trembita* during Marichka's funeral which Skoryk achieves by using dotted-rhythm double-stops with trills on both pitches, gradually moving from the lower register of the violin to one of the highest positions of the instrument. The effect is dramatic, as the sound becomes extremely rough and highly dissonant.

After the dramatic *Allegretto*, the second movement, 'Dance' [6], is a reminiscence of the happy times of the young couple together. Here again Skoryk uses elements of Hutsulian folk music, not least the *kolomyika*.

very expressive. The text of a *kolomyika* usually treats subjects from everyday life in a humorous context.

⁹ The *trembita* is a Hutsulian alpine horn, up to three meters long, made out of wood. It is used to signal deaths, funerals and weddings.

Caprice for solo violin (1978)

This solo-violin piece [7] was commissioned as a compulsory piece for the Lysenko competition. It is composed in free binary form. The structure of the piece is similar to that of the 21st of Paganini's *24 Caprices*. In Paganini, the first slow section is set in double-stops, and is melodically close to Italian folksong, whereas the faster part consists of difficult *staccato* passages. In Skoryk's *Caprice*, the first part is also relatively slow and heavy, and mostly chordal, but not folkloristic in sound. In the fast second part, Skoryk could not resist using Hutsulian harmonic and rhythmic elements again. He finishes the piece with some diatonic scales and perfect fifths (the most difficult interval for string-players to play in tune) ascending to the highest positions of the violin.

Carpathian Rhapsody (2004) and Poem (2006)

These two pieces were written also for performance as test works, this time in the David Oistrakh International Violin Competition in Odessa. In the *Carpathian Rhapsody* [8] Skoryk continued his earlier direction by again using Hutsulian modes, melodies and dances. But there is no trace of these characteristics in the *Poem* [9], which instead is reminiscent of the eclectic style of his Second Violin Sonata of sixteen years earlier.

Violin Sonata No. 2 (1990)

The Second Violin Sonata was commissioned by the Grazhda Festival of Ukrainian culture in Hunter, New York State, and premiered by Oleh Krysa and the composer. I gave the Australian premiere of this piece with Skoryk at the piano in Sydney in 1996. It belongs to the period of Skoryk's music defined by Ukrainian musicologists as 'the game of styles' – in other words, eclecticism. Each of the three movements bears a name which describes its character. Skoryk also uses a quotation from Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata as a link between the three movements, the characters of which could not otherwise be more different.

The first movement, 'The Word' [10], is a dramatic recitation, a kind of heated dialogue between two instruments. The second movement, 'Aria' [11], is written in the traditional ternary form of the Baroque *da capo* aria. In contrast to the thematic richness and diversity of the first movement, the 'Aria' is Baroque also in its aesthetics, expressing a single emotion – melancholic meditation. The third movement, 'Burlesque' [12], is a parody in rondo form. The refrain is built on the intonations of the Hutsulian *kolomyika*, but at the same time sounds suspiciously like the fast second movement of Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto. In the second episode Skoryk used a modified ragtime theme from Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with the violin playing a sentimental, tango-like melody, a combination which together creates the sound of Galician popular hooligan songs of the inter-war period.

Spanish Dance 1978

The *Spanish Dance* [13] is the final movement of the suite for string orchestra composed for Ukrajinka's play *The*

Stone Ruler. My teacher Bohodar Kotorovych, professor of violin at the Kyiv Conservatory, told me an amusing tale about the origins of this piece. Skoryk transcribed the *Spanish Dance* for violin and piano at Kotorovych's request and brought the piece to his review. Kotorovych told the composer he wasn't happy with the piece, since it was not enough difficult for him. Skoryk then added fingered octaves in the last section, bringing tremendous difficulty to the piece as a result.

Solomia Soroka was born in Lviv, Ukraine. She earned her master's degree and completed her postgraduate studies in the Kiev (Kyiv) Conservatory, and later served on its staff in the department of chamber music. She also has a DMA degree from Eastman School of Music. She studied with Hersh Heifetz, Bohodar Kotorovych, Lyudmyla Zvirko and Charles Castleman. Solomia Soroka made her solo debut at ten, playing the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with the Lviv Philharmonic Orchestra. She has appeared at concerts and festivals in Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Taiwan and Ukraine. Since her American debut in 1997, she has performed throughout the United States as well. She is a professor of violin at Goshen College, Indiana.

She has given the Australian and American premieres of a number of important contemporary Ukrainian compositions for violin, among them works by Lyatoshynsky, Skoryk and Stankovych. Her recording of four violin sonatas by William Bolcom for Naxos, made together with her pianist-husband, Arthur Greene, was selected as recording of the month by Classics Today with the highest ranking for both artistry and sound. Their recording of violin sonatas by Nikolai Roslavets (again for Naxos) also received international acclaim. For Toccata Classics they recorded a CD of music by Arthur Hartmann (TOCC 0089), of which Jonathan Woolf (on MusicWeb International) wrote that 'the performances are warm, sympathetic and very well recorded. Solomia Soroka displays elegance and refinement in the Debussy transcriptions [...] and elsewhere digs in with abandon and force. The ensemble between her and Arthur Greene, a husband and wife team, is splendid'.

Arthur Greene was born in New York, and studied at Juilliard with Martin Canin. He won first prizes in the William Kapell and Gina Bachauer International Piano Competitions. He has played the complete solo piano works of Brahms in a series of six programmes, and the ten sonatas of Scriabin, also as a cycle; he has also recorded the complete etudes of Scriabin (for Supraphon). Arthur Greene has served as a United States Artistic Ambassador to Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia for the United States Information Agency. The orchestras he has performed with include the Philadelphia, the San Francisco and National Symphonies, the Czech National Symphony, the Serbian Radio-Television Orchestra, the Tokyo Symphony and the National Symphony of Ukraine. He has played recitals in Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Rachmaninov Hall in Moscow, Bunka Kaikan in Tokyo, São Paulo Opera House in Lisbon, City Hall in Hong Kong and the Mozart Hall in Seoul, as well as in Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu and Taiwan.

He is on the piano faculty of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.



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The leading Ukrainian composer of today, Myroslav Skoryk (born in Lwów, now Lviv, in 1938) grew up in Siberia, where his family was deported after the Second World War, and he began to write music under the tutelage of other political prisoners there. He later studied with Kabalevsky in Moscow before settling back in his native city, where he soon became an important teacher and is now a major figure in Ukrainian cultural life. His music is direct and forthright, with echoes of Prokofiev: there are passages of driving energy and power and a keen sense of drama – and Skoryk, too, is not afraid of writing a glorious tune when he wants to.

MYROSLAV SKORYK Music for Violin and Piano

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|----------|---|--------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Melody from the film The High Pass (1981) | 3:38 | 7 | Caprice for solo violin (1978) | 4:40 |
| | | | 8 | Carpathian Rhapsody (2004) | 5:41 |
| | | | 9 | Poem (2006) | 5:50 |
| | Violin Sonata No. 1 (1963) | 17:27 | | Violin Sonata No. 2 (1990) | 14:48 |
| 2 | I. <i>Andante – Allegro molto – Andante – Largo e grave</i> | 7:19 | 10 | I. The Word: <i>Moderato con moto</i> | 5:04 |
| 3 | II. <i>Largo</i> | 3:26 | 11 | II. Aria: <i>Andante con moto</i> | 5:55 |
| 4 | III. <i>Allegro molto</i> | 6:42 | 12 | III. Burlesque: <i>Vivo</i> | 3:49 |
| | Allegretto and Dance from Hutsulian Triptych (1964) | 9:19 | 13 | Spanish Dance (1978) | 4:11 |
| 5 | I. <i>Allegretto</i> | 5:29 | | | |
| 6 | II. <i>Dance</i> | 3:50 | | | |
| | | | | | TT 65:42 |

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