

Mieczysław **WEINBERG**

**Symphony No. 21,
Op. 152, Kaddish**

**Polish Tunes,
Op. 47, No. 2**

Veronika Bartenyeva, soprano
Siberian Symphony Orchestra
Dmitry Vasilyev, conductor

FIRST RECORDINGS

MIECZYŚŁAW WEINBERG: MEMORIES OF POLAND

by David Fanning

The last five years of Stalin's rule were a dark period for Weinberg. Like many of his Soviet fellow-composers he had been stigmatised in the anti-formalism campaign of spring 1948. He was also tailed by the secret police in the aftermath of the murder (also in early 1948, and ordered by Stalin himself) of his father-in-law, the great Jewish actor Solomon Mikhoels. His unfortunate family ties included Miron Vovsi, Mikhoels' cousin and one of those implicated in the 'Doctors' plot' trumped up by Stalin and his entourage as a result of a toxic mix of paranoia and anti-Semitism. This nexus culminated in Weinberg's arrest on 7 February 1953 and an eleven-week period of imprisonment in the infamous Lubyanka jail in Moscow.

The coping strategy for composers in the aftermath of the anti-formalism campaign involved writing music 'for the people,' which should ideally be tuneful and based on folk traditions. Here Weinberg was in luck. With part of his family background in Moldavia, his own upbringing in Poland and a Jewish family culture, he had three traditions to draw on: ones that would set his music apart from his peers and that meant all the more to him because of his status as a refugee from Nazi invasions. All three traditions figure prominently in his music from these years. His *Sinfonietta* No. 1, composed in 1948 on the eve of the 'anti-cosmopolitan' (a euphemism for anti-Semitic) crackdown, made extensive use of Jewish idioms. And two versions of his *Moldavian Rhapsody* are included in his Op. 47, enclosing the four-movement set of *Polish Tunes*, Op. 47, No. 2.

The *Polish Tunes* enjoyed less success than those other works – its premiere on 13 December 1950 by the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra under Karl Eliasberg¹ is documented, but there

¹ Eliasberg (1907–78) is best remembered for having given the first performance of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, the *Leningrad*, in the besieged city itself, on 9 August 1942. The work had been premiered in Kuibyshev on 5 March, and then played in Moscow, London and New York, but Eliasberg's local premiere – given with the few musicians he could muster – was of immense value in boosting morale and as propaganda.

is no evidence of other performances at the time. Yet it is scarcely less charming, and its efficient, undemanding scoring makes it well adapted to the requirements of student or amateur, as well as professional, orchestras. If its unmistakable folk-like tone registers as rather less distinctive than that of the *Rhapsody* or the *Sinfonietta*, that may be partly because its evocations of slow waltz, polka and mazurka (in the second [2], third [3] and fourth [4] movements, respectively), sound much more familiar to ears attuned to Chopin. The abundant Lydian-mode (sharpened-fourth) inflections, heard at the beginning of the short introductory movement [1], are markers of Polishness that Chopin himself used, and Weinberg would later deploy them in the more serious contexts of a number of later works, above all in the Polish village scenes of his second opera, *The Madonna and the Soldier* (1970–71). Weinberg evidently thought highly enough of the final movement to recycle it in his second ballet, *The White Chrysanthemum* (based on the aftermath of the atom bomb) of 1958.

In 1990, now in his seventies, Weinberg received the last of his official honours: the State Prize of the USSR, specifically in recognition of his *Chamber Symphonies* Nos. 1 and 2. The award was conferred at a special ceremony in the Kremlin attended by the composer (despite his suffering from a high temperature) and broadcast on state television.² It was to be his last moment of public acclaim. His health had never been robust, and he was now suffering from the progressive effects of Crohn's disease. At the same time his music was beginning to fade from view. The Composers' Union had long resisted avantgardist, western-style music, with the result that when the latter made its definitive breakthrough in the early 1980s, interest in the more traditional humanistic values represented by Weinberg (and even Shostakovich) was to a significant degree overtaken. Financially Weinberg had sustained himself for many years by composing film music. But after his 1989 score for Boris Yermolayev's *Our Father* (based on a short story about the Nazi occupation of Odessa), that source also dried up as commissions went to younger composers.

What remained was the inner imperative to memorialise those who had died during the Second World War, in particular Weinberg's own family, who had been unable to join him in his flight from Warsaw in September 1939.

The single-movement Symphony No. 21, Op. 152, was composed between 1989 and 1991 and is dedicated 'To the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto'. From various statements to interviewers,

² A photograph in *Sovetskaya muzika* (1991, No. 1, p. 4) documents the occasion.

it seems that Weinberg interpreted that phrase rather loosely, since on more than one occasion he mentioned that his family had been murdered in the capital, even though he had been told that they actually perished in Trawniki, some 200 kilometres away. In the catalogue of works prepared in the Soviet era, details of the Symphony are entered by hand, with the added subtitle 'Kaddish', referring to the Jewish prayer for the dead. That title does not appear in the surviving manuscripts, though these do show that Weinberg contemplated several variants of the dedication, and even considered the generic title *plach* ('lament'). Lamentation is certainly conspicuous in the long violin solos that dominate the opening *Largo* [5]. Weinberg's draft score names the 'Irdische Leben' setting from Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* as source material, and its refrain 'Mutter, ach Mutter, es hungert mich' ('Mother, ah, mother, I'm hungry') seems to be paraphrased in these despondent, downward-spiralling lines.

Weinberg was not religious in a practising sense. But he did once observe:

I would say that God is in everything. Ever since my First Symphony I have had a kind of chorale wandering around with me, which [...] can be found [in my Eighth Symphony], in my music for [Vadim] Korostilyov's play *The Warsaw Alarm-Bell*, and in the [Auschwitz-based cantata] *Diary of Love*. And the same chorale is a dominating theme in my 21st Symphony, dedicated to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This is not a church melody, but one of my own: some quite elementary chords.³

This statement does not refer to the sad hymn that opens the Symphony on the strings but rather to its variant some six minutes into the work, in the brass a minute or so later, and again in the strings at intervals thereafter. As Weinberg hinted, both the hymn and the chorale come to the surface elsewhere in the work, notably at the high-point of the succeeding *Allegro*. More remarkable is the piano solo quoting the opening melody from Chopin's First *Ballade* some ten minutes into the work, which Weinberg clearly intended as a symbol of the nation of his birth and its sufferings. This quotation calls to mind Roman Polanski's 2002 film *The Pianist*, where the pianist Władysław Szpilman is shown playing this very piece in the Warsaw ghetto for the Wehrmacht officer who befriends and shields him. Of course it is possible – though unlikely – that Weinberg had read

³ Quoted in Lyudmila Nikitina, 'Pochti lyuboy mig zhizni – rabota' ('Almost every moment of my life is work'), *Muzikal'naya akademiya*, 1994, No. 5, p. 23.

Szpilman's 1946 memoir *Śmierć Miasta* ('Death of a City') on which the film is based,⁴ though in the book the Chopin piece in question is the Chopin *Nocturne* in C sharp minor, op. posth. Delivered in the basic tempo of the *Largo* – as Weinberg's score appears to demand, and as this recording faithfully reproduces – the funereal tone of the *Ballade* quotation is almost unbearably protracted. An austere duet for muted trumpets – one piccolo in D and one ordinary in B flat – leads into it, followed by the fourth statement of the chorale theme. Not for the first time in Weinberg's output, the music evokes devastated spaces, in the manner of his Georgian contemporary, Giya Kancheli.

This quotation is by no means the only one. In the second of the six clearly defined sections of the Symphony – a driving *Allegro* [6] – the nagging woodwind figures are picked up from the second movement of Weinberg's own Fourth String Quartet, Op. 20, a reference that becomes even clearer when the main theme of that movement bursts in on cellos and basses to form the first contrasting episode of the *Allegro*. It may well be that the theme had Jewish connotations, although if so they are unknown today. At any rate, with this self-quotation the Symphony falls into line with Weinberg's first three *Chamber Symphonies*, Opp. 145, 147 and 151, which are more or less re-workings of his Second, Third and Fifth String Quartets, respectively, and his Flute Concerto No. 2, Op. 148, the first movement of which recycles a movement from his Second Violin Sonata, Op. 15.

The *Largo* third section [7] is remarkable for the alien-sounding double-bass solo that intrudes on its passionate laments. Such solos had featured in Weinberg's Symphony No. 10, Op. 98, and the Requiem, Op. 96, and they would do so again in the *Chamber Symphony* No. 4, Op. 153. In this instance, though, he was drawing directly on the third movement of his Sonata for Solo Double-Bass, Op. 108. This bizarre self-quotation heralds a brief klezmer-like interlude for clarinet over solo violin and (again) double-bass; Weinberg actually included a reference to 'klezmer orchestra' in his draft score. A short, brutal *Presto* [8] then recasts the klezmer material, before the brakes are slammed on and a declamatory transition leads to a desolate *Andantino* [9], led off by xylophone and violin solos. This stricken wasteland continues with a reworking of the klezmer theme on oboes and, later on, of the second idea from the opening *Largo*, now in a passionate *tutti* outburst. The triadic triplet figures leading to the final *Lento* [10] are closely related to an element in Weinberg's

⁴ *Śmierć Miasta* (published by Wiedza in Warsaw) was suppressed by the Communist authorities on political grounds shortly after its first publication; it was republished in 1998 as *Das wunderbare Leben* (Ullstein Verlag, Berlin) and *The Pianist* (Victor Gollancz, London); it has since been translated into some 30 other languages.

opera on Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, specifically its music for the idealised figure of Aglaya. The *Lento* itself is if anything even more numb emotionally. Its pain is only slightly assuaged by an off-stage wordless soprano, singing variants on the Mahlerian solo-violin theme from the first section of the symphony. The Chopin *Ballade* then returns, and a harmonium appears, musing on the naïve triadic material. Protest and desolation are held in tense balance until the very end.

The draft score of the Symphony indicates that Weinberg made at least three attempts at a conclusion, involving various combinations of tuned percussion. The definitive ending is dated 16 February 1991. This score also contains a setting of 'Our Father' (the Lord's Prayer), dated 13 October 1988, which is unrelated to the musical material of the Symphony, in all probability being a sketch for his score for the film of that name, made the following year.

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 concise monograph on Weinberg. In addition to ongoing research on Weinberg, not least for a much expanded version of the Weinberg book in preparation for Toccata Press, he is currently working on a historical survey of the symphony in the Soviet Union for Yale University Press. He is also active as critic for Gramophone and The Daily Telegraph, and as a BBC broadcaster and public speaker.

The soprano **Veronika Bartenyeva** was born in Omsk in 1987 and showed an interest in music from an early age, winning the first prize of the radio competition *Thumbelina* for her singing in the show *Success* as a six-year-old. In 1996 she won a diploma in the international competition 'Wind Rose' in Sochi (in the pop vocal category) and in 1997 won another diploma, this time in the 'Morning Star' competition in Omsk; in the same year she was the laureate of 'Zlatoglavaya: All-Russian Festival of Children's Creativity' in Moscow. In 1998 she won a further diploma in the regional competition 'Hope of Siberia' (again, as a pop vocalist) in Omsk. In 2002 she entered the conducting and choral department of the Vissarion Shebalin Music College in Omsk, becoming a soloist with the female-voice chamber choir 'Music for All', winners of the Schubert Competition in Vienna. In 2007 she enrolled in the Department of Culture and Arts of the Dostoevsky Omsk State University, specialising in 'vocal art', and won first prize in the 'Silver Voice' competition in Moscow (in the academic vocal category); a year later she won the Grand Prix of the international 'Star of Omsk' competition (again, academic vocal) and in 2009 she won both the 'Art of Peace' competition in Sochi and second prize in the 'Golden Siberia' competition.

In 2011 she appeared with the Omsk Philharmonic (as the Siberian Symphony Orchestra is known at home) as an actress and also entered, at fifth-year stage, the Operatic Singing Department of the Urals Mussorgsky State Conservatoire in Ekaterinburg. During her studies there she won a diploma in the All-Russia Competition of Young Artists celebrating the 110th anniversary of Vissarion Shebalin, and in 2012 she received a special prize for the best performance of Shebalin in Omsk that year. Her work with the Omsk Philharmonic, including four solo programmes in the Chamber and Organ Hall, has often involved the Omsk Academic Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra. The conductors she worked with in the



2012–13 season in Omsk included Enkhe (Enkhbaatar Baatarzhyvan), Richard Hegland, Vladimir Rylov and Dmitry Vasilyev.

From July to December 2013 Veronika was a student of the MASA project, a joint initiative of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Government of Israel, working as an intern in the Municipal Conservatorio of Ness Ziona in central Israel.

Dmitry Vasilyev was born in 1972 in the city of Bolshoi Kamen in Primorsky Krai in the Russian Far East. He graduated from the Rostov State Conservatoire and then took a post-graduate course and probation period under the guidance of Alexander Skulsky at the Nizhny Novgorod State Conservatoire. He also participated in the master-classes of Alexander Vedernikov and Vladimir Ziva in Moscow.



He has since been active all over Russia. In 1997 he set up the Tambov Symphony Orchestra in Tambov, south of Moscow, which he led as artistic director and chief conductor until 2005, touring with the Orchestra to France and Moscow. While in Tambov he was artistic director of the International Rachmaninov Festival in 2001 and 2002, the Tambov Musicians' Festival in 1999, 2000 and 2001 and the Musical Province Festival in 2002. In 2003–5 he held the position of guest chief conductor of the Sochi Symphony Orchestra on the Black Sea, and since 2005 he has been principal conductor of the Siberian Symphony Orchestra in Omsk, where in 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014 he was artistic director of the New Music Festival. In June 2009 he took the Orchestra to Moscow to participate in the Fourth Festival of World Symphony Orchestras.

He has also conducted in Moscow, St Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don, Saratov and elsewhere in Russia and, internationally, in France, Italy and Poland. In 2003 he was awarded a diploma in the Fourth International Prokofiev Competition in St Petersburg and in the same year

recorded a CD of Stanford and Schumann for Antes Edition with the Rostov Philharmonic Orchestra. The soloists with whom he has appeared include the soprano Hibla Gerzmava and bass Vladimir Matorin, the pianists Denis Matsuev, Nikolai Petrov and Eliso Virsaladze, the violinists Pierre Amoyal, Alexandre Brussilovsky and Oleh Krysa and the clarinetist Julian Milakis.

Among the world premieres Dmitry Vasilyev has to his credit are works by Mikhail Bronner, Sofia Gubaidulina, Ilya Heifets, Alemdar Karamanov, Ephraim Podgaits, Tolib Shakhidy and Andrey Tikhomirov as well as Russian premieres of music by Karl Jenkins, Charles Villiers Stanford, Alexander Tchaikovsky, Eduard Tubin, Benjamin Yusupov and others.

The **Siberian Symphony Orchestra** (SSO), known domestically as the Omsk Philharmonic, is one of the largest of Russian orchestras. It was founded in 1966 at the instigation of the conductor Simon Cogan, who remained at its head for more than ten years. From the beginning it attracted talented graduates from the Leningrad, Novosibirsk and Ural Conservatories, each institution with a well-earned reputation for producing dynamic and highly professional musicians. For many years the SSO toured the cities of the former Soviet Union, giving concerts in Moscow and Leningrad, Krasnoyarsk and Chita in central and eastern Russia, the cities along the Volga cities, Riga in Latvia, Kiev in Ukraine, Minsk in Belarus and Almaty in Kazakhstan. From 1975 the Orchestra has participated in the contemporary-music festivals organised by the Union of Composers of the USSR, performing music by Khachaturian, Khrennikov, Shchedrin and other prominent composers.

From 1978 the SSO was headed by the conductor Viktor Tietz, under whose leadership it reached artistic maturity and developed a wide repertoire, winning first prize at the All-Russian Competition of Symphony Orchestras in 1984. From 1992 to 2004 the chief conductor of the Orchestra was Evgeny Shestakov. Since 1994 the SSO has regularly travelled abroad on tour and in 1996 it was awarded the title of 'Academic' – an honour in Russia.

Over the years the Orchestra has also worked with such distinguished conductors as Veronika Dudarova, Karl Eliasberg, Arnold Katz, Aram Khachaturian, Fuat Mansurov, Nathan Rachlin and Abram Stasevich. The soloists with whom the SSO has worked include the pianists Dmitri Bashkirov, Lazar Berman, Peter Donohoe, Denis Matsuev, Mikhail Pletnev, Grigory Sokolov and Eliso Virsaladze, the violinists Pierre Amoyal, Viktor Pikayzen and Viktor

Tretyakov, the cellists Natalia Gutman, Mstislav Rostropovich and Daniil Shafran, and the singers Dmitry Hvorostowski and Alexander Vedernikov.

The last decade has been a period of growth and flowering of the SSO. Its huge repertoire includes the symphonic classics and works by composers of the 21st century. The composition of the Orchestra is in line with European standards, boasting more than 100 experienced, highly professional musicians in its ranks. The discography of the SSO includes the four symphonies of the Danish composer Victor Bendix on Danacord and the Orchestral Suites Nos. 1 and 2 by Vissarion Shebalin, the first of its recordings for Toccata Classics (TOCC 0136), which was followed by a CD of music by Philip Spratley: his *Cargoes, A Helpston Fantasia* and Third Symphony (TOCC 0194). In recent years the Orchestra has also toured in Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Ukraine and the USA.

Since 2005 the principal conductor of the SSO has been Dmitry Vasilyev. Under his direction the repertoire of the Orchestra has become even wider and now includes not only the classics but also contemporary music, jazz, rock, musicals, film soundtracks, and so on, and participates in a wide number of innovative projects, from festivals of contemporary classical music to the World and European ballroom dancing championships. In 2009 the SSO took part in the Fourth Festival of World Symphony Orchestras held in the Hall of Columns in Moscow; and in April 2010 it became a member of the Forum of the Symphony Orchestras of Russia in Yekaterinburg.

A Note on the Omsk Philharmonic Hall

The Omsk Philharmonic Hall was redeveloped between September 2010 and April 2011: the redevelopment had to be completed in time for a concert by Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra. The idea was to renovate the existing hall acoustically, but to achieve a hall that would be acceptable we had to tear out all the inner walls, the ceiling and even the main floor, digging down some 2.5m. The hall originally had a steep seating rake rather like a cinema, which we reformed with a much flatter main floor and a balcony. It also originally had a proscenium, which we replaced with a concert platform.

Within the external walls of the concert-hall space we created new reverse-fan-shape and tilted walls to generate strong early lateral reflections in the audience areas. When reflected sound in a concert hall arrives at a listener's ears from the left and right, he or she should feel enveloped in the music. Our early studies showed that reverse-fan-shaping of the side walls can enhance this effect, and it is a feature of our concert-hall designs for the Meyerson Symphony Center, Dallas, and Symphony Hall, Birmingham.

Our more recent studies include modelling the strong effects of 'audience-grazing attenuation' – an effect that occurs when sound propagates only just above the heads of the audience and which can render the cellos inaudible. We have found that by tilting the side walls inwards, the sound will propagate from sufficiently above audience head-height to avoid this effect. In the unique design of Omsk, we have employed both reverse-fan shaping and tilted walls to enhance the strength of the early lateral sound. Although Omsk is the first concert hall to have these features, its success ensures that it will not be the last.

Nicholas Edwards
Acoustic Dimensions
Coventry

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Recording engineer: Sergei Zhigunov

Booklet essay by David Fanning

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Design and layout: Paul Brooks, paulmbrooks@virginmedia.com

Executive producer: Martin Anderson

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Telephone: +49 40 2783790 E-mail: peermusicclassicaleurope@peermusic.com www.peermusic-classical.de

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Tel: +44/0 207 821 5020 E-mail: info@toccataclassics.com



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 style has much in common with Shostakovich's: 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. Since his death in 1996, his vast output – which includes 26 symphonies, seven operas and seventeen string quartets – has enjoyed increasing recognition as some of the most individual and compelling music to have been composed in the twentieth century. This recording pairs an early orchestral work, the suite *Polish Tunes* of 1950, with the last full orchestral symphony he was to complete, dedicated to the memory of those who died in the Warsaw Ghetto.



TOCC 0193



WEINBERG Symphony No. 21; Polish Tunes

Polish Tunes, Op. 47, No. 21 (1950) 13:38

- | | | | |
|---|-----|-------------------------|------|
| 1 | I | <i>Adagio – Allegro</i> | 2:11 |
| 2 | II | <i>Andantino</i> | 4:06 |
| 3 | III | <i>Allegro</i> | 3:27 |
| 4 | IV | <i>Allegro moderato</i> | 3:54 |

Symphony No. 21, Op. 152, *Kaddish* (1991)

- | | | |
|----|------------------------|-------|
| 5 | <i>Largo –</i> | 53:50 |
| 6 | <i>Allegro molto –</i> | 17:47 |
| 7 | <i>Largo –</i> | 7:18 |
| 8 | <i>Largo –</i> | 5:26 |
| 9 | <i>Presto –</i> | 3:00 |
| 10 | <i>Andantino –</i> | 7:08 |
| | <i>Lento –</i> | 13:10 |

Veronika Bartenyeva, soprano
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TOCCATA CLASSICS
 16 Dalkeith Court,
 Vincent Street,
 London SW1P 4HH, UK

Tel: +44/0 207 821 5020
 E-mail: info@toccataclassics.com

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