

Vissarion SHEBALIN

COMPLETE MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, OP. 51, NO. 1

FOUR LIGHT PIECES

ORIENTALIA: SUITE

CONCERT PIECE

FOUR PIECES

SUITE FOR SOLO VIOLIN

Sergey Kostylev, violin
Olga Solovieva, piano

VISSARION SHEBALIN: COMPLETE MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

by Paul Conway

Vissarion Shebalin was one of the foremost composers and teachers in the Soviet Union. Dmitri Shostakovich held him in the highest esteem; he kept a portrait of his slightly older friend and colleague hanging on his wall and wrote this heartfelt obituary:

Shebalin was an outstanding man. His kindness, honesty and absolute adherence to principle always amazed me. His enormous talent and great mastery immediately earned him burning love and authority with friends and musical community.¹

Recent recordings have rekindled interest from listeners and critics alike in the works of this key figure in mid-twentieth-century Soviet music.

Vissarion Yakovlevich Shebalin was born in Omsk, the capital of Siberia, on 11 June 1902. His parents, both teachers, were utterly devoted to music. When he was eight years old, he began to learn the piano. By the age of ten he was a student in the piano class of the Omsk Division of the Russian Musical Society. Here he developed a love of composition. In 1919 he completed his studies at middle school and entered the Institute of Agriculture – the only local university at that time. When a music college opened in Omsk in 1921, Shebalin joined immediately, studying theory and composition with Mikhail Nevitov, a former pupil of Reinhold Glière. In 1923 he was accepted into Nikolai Myaskovsky's composition class at the Moscow Conservatoire. His first pieces, consisting of some romances and a string quartet, received favourable reviews in the press. Weekly evening concerts organised by the Association of

¹ 'To the Memory of a Friend', in Valeria Razheva (ed.), *Shebalin: Life and Creativity*, Molodaya Gvardiya, Moscow, 2003, pp. 238–39.

Contemporary Music introduced him to the music of Bartók, Hindemith, Prokofiev Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Webern. In 1928, Shebalin graduated and started teaching at the Moscow Conservatoire, where he was made a professor in 1935 and, from 1940 to 1941, head of the faculty of composition. He then served as director from 1942 until 1948. By this time he had garnered several honours, including a doctorate in arts in 1941 and two Stalin prizes – for his Fifth String Quartet in 1943 and the oratorio-cantata *Moscow* in 1947.

Disaster struck in 1948, when he was dismissed from the Conservatoire in the wake of the First Congress of Composers in Moscow of that year. At that infamous gathering, Shebalin was accused of being a principal leader of the ‘formalist’ trend in music. He was demoted to a subordinate job, teaching theory at a bandmasters’ school, but he was reinstated as professor of composition at the Conservatoire in 1951. On 14 September 1953 Shebalin suffered the first in a series of strokes, which left him partially paralysed on the right side; he nonetheless continued to teach and to compose. He learned to write with his left hand and, with the help of his devoted wife, Alisa Maximovna Shebalina, kept a journal of his activities. Shebalin died in Moscow on 29 May 1963.

In addition to being an erudite musician and a technically gifted composer, he was also an outstanding teacher. Gerard McBurney has credited him with inspiring ‘the highest standards both of craftsmanship and artistic aspiration’² in his students, among whom may be numbered Edison Denisov, Sofia Goubaidulina, Nikolai Karetnikov, Karen Khachaturyan, Tichon Khrennikov, Boris Tchaikovsky and Veljo Tormis. He carried out conscientious editorial work, rooting out and completing the *Overture-Symphony on Russian Themes* by Glinka (1937). He also produced what is arguably the finest incarnation of Mussorgsky’s unfinished opera *Sorochyntsi Fair* (1931–32), superseding previous attempts by Anatoly Lydaov, César Cui, Yuri Sakhnovsky and Nikolai Tcherepnin.

At the core of Shebalin’s output lies his series of five symphonies (1925–62) and nine string quartets (1923–63), of which the fifth (‘Slavonic’, Op. 33) became the best known.

² Gerard McBurney, ‘The Music of Roman Ledenev’, *Tempo*, No. 177 (June 1991), p. 24.

He wrote a concertino for violin and strings (1933) and a horn concertino (1933, revised in 1958) – together, they form his Op. 14 – but his major work for soloist and orchestra is the Violin Concerto, Op. 21, of 1936–40 (it was revised in 1959). Other orchestral pieces include the *Overture on Mari Themes*, Op. 25 (1936), the *Variations on the Russian Folktune ‘Oh, You my Field’*, Op. 30 (1939–40), and three Suites for Orchestra, Opp. 18, 22 and 61 (1936, 1962 and 1935–63).³ Among his music for the stage is the musical comedy *The Bridegroom from the Embassy* (1941–42) and the ballet *The Lark*, Op. 37 (1943). His songs are distinguished by his sensitivity to well-chosen texts. He also wrote a good deal of music for choirs, both a *cappella*⁴ and accompanied, as well as making choral arrangements of Russian folksongs. His *magnum opus* is the opera *The Taming of the Shrew*, Op. 46 (1946–56), which was staged at the Bolshoi Theatre in 1957 and acclaimed as a masterpiece.

By nature more lyric than epic, Shebalin is arguably at his best in more intimate genres, and chamber-instrumental music forms a notable part of his output. In this medium he composed a string trio, Op. 4 (1924, rev. 1934), a sonata for violin and viola, Op. 35 (1940–44), and a piano trio, Op. 39 (1947). His music for solo piano comprises a sonata, Op. 10 (1926, rev. 1963), and three sonatinas, Op. 12 (1929), and he also wrote a number of works for solo guitar, including some preludes (1951 and 1954) and a sonatina, Op. 60 (1963).

The **Suite for Solo Violin** (1933), which bears no opus number, consists of four short movements in the manner of studies. The fiery, toccata-like opening *Vivo* [12] generates considerable energy during its brief span. There is a relentless quality to its offbeat accents, rhythmic patterns and repeated-note figures. Shebalin’s idiomatic writing for the solo instrument takes in double-stopping and arpeggiated episodes. The patterns and forms may seem familiar, but they are couched in the composer’s own, highly individual and fully matured musical language. After this urgent opening movement, there follows a contrasting *Andante* of expressive weight and impassioned lyricism [13]. The solo line is wide-ranging and unfolds in long-breathed paragraphs. Shebalin exploits the capacity

³ Suites Nos. 1 and 2 appear on Toccata Classics TOCC 0136; a second volume is in preparation..

⁴ His complete a *cappella* choral cycles are featured on Toccata Classics TOCC 0112.

of the violin to sing and to relay a sustained musical narrative in this fluently eloquent utterance.⁵ In the Bachian *Allegretto* [14], the two halves of the movement are repeated, emphasising its carefully balanced, Neo-Classical character. The finale [15] is marked to be played as fast as possible and brings the Suite to a sparkling conclusion. The repeated notes in its initial phrases and the close-knit, violinistic passagework recall the opening *Vivo*, lending the Suite a satisfying unity.

Shebalin's **Four Pieces** for violin and piano, which likewise have no opus number, date from 1936 and 1946, and take the form of a collection of free-standing character pieces. The first, entitled 'Improvisation' [1], begins with a short, spontaneous-sounding, introductory passage with decuplet flourishes for solo violin, leading directly into the main section of the piece, a gently flowing *Andante con moto*. In the style of a gavotte, the following piece is written in Shebalin's naturally tuneful vein [2]. In 'Remembrance' [3], the melodic impulse is maintained, especially in the insouciant central *Allegretto alla mazurka*. The final 'Scherzo' [4] is more challenging to play than the preceding, intermezzo-like pieces, as Shebalin savours the ability of the violin to dash off scurrying semiquavers, played *spiccato*. Elegance and charm are to the fore in this delightful quartet of vignettes which, though wholly original, capture successfully the spirit of Russian folk-music.

The **Four Light Pieces** for violin and piano, written in 1946 and again allocated no opus number, are couched in a relatively straightforward style for both executants and were probably aimed at young performers for domestic use. The opening 'Minuet' [16] is gentle and moderately paced. Its deft harmonic turns are typical of Shebalin and add interest to the simple theme. The opening of the 'Berceuse' [17] takes advantage of the sombre and sonorous qualities of the violin in its lowest register, but by degrees the music ascends to a more optimistic ending. The second 'Minuet' [18] has a distinctly Classical grace and equilibrium. The final 'Giga' [19] is marked *Allegro assai* and evolves effortlessly, thanks to Shebalin's inherent grasp of melodic development. An unexpected *rallentando* in the closing bars stems the smooth flow of this directly communicative piece.

⁵ It is surely this movement Igor Boelza was thinking of when he wrote that Shebalin's Suite 'is a splendid example of a protracted unfolding melody' (*Tempo*, No. 12, September 1945, p. 10).

Also dating from 1946, the *Orientalia* suite for violin and piano (it, too, without an opus number) is more challenging for both players. The opening *Moderato* [5] makes a feature of double-stops in its bold writing for violin. The central *Andante assai* [6] is wistful and songlike, with the mellow violin line borne aloft on an unceasing flow of the triplet figurations in the piano. Virtuosity is also present in this piece, however, not least in the octave passages in the violin. The closing *Allegro molto* [7] is the most exotic sounding of the three movements, though its framing czárdás-like passages are decidedly more Hungarian than oriental. Shebalin has fun with the harmonic and melodic diversions of this flamboyant crowd-pleaser.

The lively *Concert Piece* for violin and piano (1952) [20] is another work designed as a vehicle to show off the violinist's technical prowess (and the fifth of these violin works not to have an opus number). Glissandos and harmonics, as well as a frequent recourse to the upper register of the instrument, all serve to challenge the performer before the exciting final dash for the tape in the breathless coda.

The *Concert Piece* would later provide the material for the finale of Shebalin's **Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major, Op. 51, No. 1** (1957–58), the first in a trilogy of sonatas which Shebalin wrote for stringed instruments.⁶ Though the Violin Sonata is recognisably from the same pen as the shorter pieces for violin and piano featured here, it has more range and versatility, as befits a contribution to a major genre.

In the opening *Allegro* [8] both main subjects, which are closely related, are enhanced by Shebalin's melodic gifts. Of especial note is the charmingly conversational writing, alternating solo violin and piano, at the start of the development section. The recapitulation is heralded by a dramatic broadening of the principal theme. When the secondary theme is reprised, the piano takes on the melody supported by murmuring, repeated figures on the violin. These sleights of hand show Shebalin at his most confident, giving his music that satisfying balance between the expected and the unexpected which is the mark of an accomplished composer.

⁶ The second, Op. 51, No. 2 (1957–58), is for viola and piano, and the third, Op. 51, No. 3 (1960), for cello and piano, is dedicated to Rostropovich, who premiered it in the year of its composition.

The dashing *Scherzando* [9] has real verve. In line with the tendency towards even-handed allocation of material in the previous movement, the working-out of the rustic main theme here is shared between both instruments. A slower central section ends in an unexpectedly hushed and mysterious transitional passage where time seems to stand still and the violin floats above the spare piano accompaniment. But such hesitancy is soon shaken off, and the dancing main idea rapidly regains momentum. A judicious use of violin harmonics and double-stopping shines new light on the material before the final flourishes of this infectious dance-movement.

The opening theme of the following *Andante* [10] is directly expressive and affecting. A more flowing central passage builds to a climax, ushering in the return of the initial material. In the closing bars the violin strays into its highest tessitura and the music gradually fades away. Relaxed and engaging, this slow movement has the unforced eloquence of a composer with long and varied experience of writing for both instruments.

Though recycling its material from the *Concert Piece* of 1952, the spirited *Allegro* finale [11] is also closely related to the main theme of the opening movement. The exciting coda and the grand final gestures, which, in their original context, seemed so appropriate for a stand-alone virtuoso statement, feel entirely commensurate with the irresistible sweep and broad expressive scope of the Sonata as a whole. The score is dedicated to the violinist Rostislav Dubinsky, who premiered the work with pianist Luba Edlina in Moscow on 26 November 1960.

The Sonata for Violin and Piano was written when Shebalin was facing serious health problems, although that could hardly be deduced from such life-enhancing music, produced *in extremis*. As the Czech composer Václav Kučera commented on the occasion of Shebalin's 60th birthday in 1962, 'His scores from the past decade, and his correspondence with friends, were all written with his left hand. But this music gains all the more in terms of profundity of thought and humanity'.⁷

⁷ Quoted by Per Skans in his booklet notes accompanying the 2000 release of Shebalin's String Quartets Nos. 4, 5 and 9 on the Olympia label (ocd 664).

Paul Conway is a freelance writer specialising in twentieth-century and contemporary British music. He has reviewed regularly for The Independent, Tempo and Musical Opinion, provided programme notes for The Proms and Edinburgh, Spitalfields and Three Choirs Festivals and contributed chapters to books on John McCabe and Robert Simpson.

The violinist **Sergey Kostylev** was born in 1976 into a family of violinists. He started to learn the violin at the age of five under the guidance of his parents. He graduated from the Russian Academy of Music in Moscow in 2003, where he had studied in the violin class with Khalida Akhtyamova (herself a student of David Oistrakh) and in the quartet class of Valentin Berlinsky, the cellist of the Borodin Quartet for six decades. He received the diploma at the 12th Henryk Wieniawski International Violin Competition in Poznań.

From 1998 to 2001 he played first violin in the chamber ensemble Mysterium, giving performances in Russia and abroad. Since 2003 he has been a violinist in the Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra (the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of which is Vladimir Fedoseyev); currently he is the assistant to the leader and first violin in its string quartet. He has also appeared as soloist with the Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Vladimir Fedoseyev, as well as with such orchestras as Tokyo Symphony, Lugansk Philharmonic, Pskov Symphony, Yaroslavl Symphony, Far Eastern Symphony, Perm Opera and Ballet Theatre and the Russian Academy of Music Symphony. As chamber musician he has performed with such pianists as Pyotr Aidu, Irina Graifer, Anna Grishina and Eduard Miansarov. He has toured Japan, Hungary and the UK.

Sergey Kostylev has as a number of solo-violin recordings to his credit, and he has also participated in recordings by the Brahms Quartet of chamber music by Schubert, and with the ensemble Mysterium of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, recorded in Tokyo and issued by the Russian label Extraphone, as well as with Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra in extracts and solos from Glazunov's *Raymonda*, Delibes' *Sylvia* and other ballets.

He plays a Paulo Granchino violin provided by the Russian State collection of unique instruments.



The pianist **Olga Solovieva** was born in Moscow, graduated from the Russian Academy of Music in Moscow and took a post-graduate course as an assistant to Leonid Blok. Since 2004 she has been a professor at the Gnessin Musical College, and has given master-classes in Ireland and Belgium. She has been a prize-winner at the Russian Open Taneyev Chamber Music Competition (1999) and a finalist at the 20th Chamber Music Competition in Trapani, Italy (2000). At the 12th International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow she was awarded the 'Best Accompanist' prize. She is also the winner of the Boris Tchaikovsky Society Award (2010). She has performed in Russia and abroad (Belgium, Brazil, Ireland, France, Germany, Lithuania), including such festivals as the West Cork Chamber Music Festival in Ireland and Raritäten von Klaviermusik in Husum, Germany; she has also played in some major venues, among them the Sala São Paulo (with the conductor Wagner Polistchuk), the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire and the Moscow Kremlin.



Her partners in chamber music have included The Vanbrugh Quartet, Vilnius String Quartet, the cellists Roel Dieltiens, Alexander Rudin, Christopher Marwood and Dmitry Khrychov, the violinists Haik Kazazyan, Fanny Clamagirand and Tai Murray, the clarinetist Julian Bliss and the flautist William Dowdall.

Her discography consists of a number of recordings for Toccata Classics (with music by Boris Tchaikovsky and Herman Galynin) as well as for such labels as Naxos, Grand Piano, and Albany Records, and the complete piano music by Anatoly Lyadov (on four CDs from Northern Flowers).

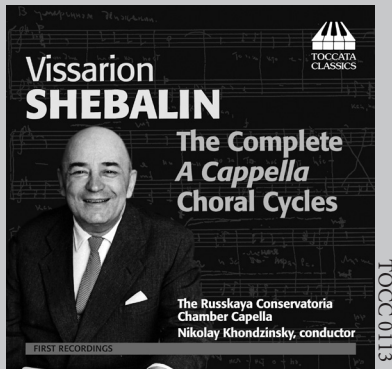
Her website can be found at www.olga-solovieva.ru.

More Shebalin on Toccata Classics



‘Dmitry Vasiliev leads the Siberian Symphony Orchestra (from Shebalin’s hometown of Omsk) with performances that bubble with energy in the animated numbers, but are sensitive and passionate in the introspective ones.’

—Bob McQuiston,
NPR Deceptive Cadence Blog



‘The singing of these *a cappella* pieces [...] is magnificent. These settings are by turns resolute and poetic with plenty of variety. The choir sports a treasureably silvery and inwardly lit soprano sound. The music evidently matters to these singers and meticulous professional attention is accorded to every note.’

—Rob Barnett, MusicWeb International



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VISSARION SHEBALIN Complete Music for Violin and Piano

Four Pieces for Violin and Piano (1936, 1946)	10:26
1 No. 1 Improvisation	2:45
2 No. 2 Gavotte	1:31
3 No. 3 Remembrance	4:12
4 No. 4 Scherzo	1:58
 Orientalia: Suite for Violin and Piano (1946)	 7:25
5 I <i>Moderato</i>	2:26
6 II <i>Andante assai</i>	2:26
7 III <i>Allegro molto</i>	2:33
 Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 51, No. 1 (1957–58)	 21:00
8 I <i>Allegro</i>	7:10
9 II <i>Non troppo vivo. Scherzando</i>	4:38
10 III <i>Andante</i>	4:50
11 IV <i>Allegro</i>	4:22
 Suite for Solo Violin (1933)	 6:04
12 I <i>Vivo</i>	0:51
13 II <i>Andante</i>	2:08
14 III <i>Allegretto</i>	1:34
15 IV <i>Presto possibile</i>	1:31
 Four Light Pieces for Violin and Piano (1946)	 5:37
16 No. 1 Minuet	0:59
17 No. 2 Berceuse	1:30
18 No. 3 Minuet	1:25
19 No. 4 Giga	1:43
20 Concert Piece for Violin and Piano (1952)	4:23

Sergey Kostylev, violin
Olga Solovieva, piano

TT 54:54
FIRST RECORDINGS