

Yevhen STANKOVYCH

MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

ON THE VERKHOVYNA PLATEAU: TRIPTYCH

POEM: A DEDICATION

THE ANGEL'S TOUCH

UKRAINIAN POEM

SONATA PICCOLA

MAYDAN FRESCO

MORNING MUSIC

ROMANCE

Solomia Soroka, violin
Arthur Greene, piano

YEVHEN STANKOVYCH, UKRAINIAN MASTER

by Solomia Soroka

Yevhen Stankovych, born in 1942, is one of the most important composers at work in present-day Ukraine. His creative output includes six symphonies for full orchestra, nine chamber symphonies, two operas, six ballets, three concertos for violin, two for viola and two for cello, as well as a large number of symphonic poems, instrumental and vocal works and over one hundred film-scores.

His music possesses a strong dramatic quality, but at the same time it is full of melancholic lyricism. It is harmonically colourful and rhythmically flexible, but structurally always elegant. The development of his musical material is masterly. The polyphonic unfolding of his musical thought is sometimes reminiscent of the Baroque. Although his technique is that of a modern composer, and reflects a familiarity with current trends, Stankovych also incorporates folkloristic elements in his music.

He belongs to the generation of Ukrainian avant-garde composers of the 1970s many of whose careers were mercilessly destroyed by the Soviet regime of Leonid Brezhnev. Stankovych's contemporary Leonid Hrabovsky, for example, was fired from the Kiev (now Kyiv) Conservatoire and, after two years of freelancing as a composer, moved to Moscow, where he had to work as a night guard for the Soviet Composer's Union building in order to earn his living. Stankovych fared better than many, although several of his compositions were banned in the 1970s: his opera *When the Fern Blossoms* (1979), for example, was considered nationalist, and so the premiere was cancelled and further performances forbidden. To this day, it has not been staged in its entirety.

Stankovych's music has been performed around the world. His *Chamber Symphony* No. 3 (1982) was chosen by a 'World Tribune' set up by UNESCO as one of ten best works of 1985. At home in Ukraine, he has received a number of

state awards, including the country's highest award for artistic creativity, the Taras Shevchenko National Prize (1977).

For many years Stankovych was the head of the Composers' Union of Ukraine. Currently he is the head of the composition department at the National Music Academy of Ukraine in the capital, Kyiv. His music has been recorded on the Analekta, ASV, Melodiya and Naxos labels, although all the works on this album, with the exception of *The Angel's Touch*, are first recordings.

In spite of Stankovych's stature in Ukraine, he is a very humble and unpretentious man, with deep, kind eyes that radiate warmth and charm. His conversation is animated by a lively sense of humour. When I interviewed him in summer 2016, he talked about his life with a ready wit, but he was not very verbal when it came to discussing his music; he preferred simply to say that in general his pieces reflect his state of mind at the time of their composition.

Yevhen Stankovych was born on 19 September 1942, in Svalyava, in the Zakarpattia region, now in the south-western corner of Ukraine. He likes to say that he was born in Europe rather than in the Soviet Ukraine, since the Zakarpattia region was added to Soviet Union only in 1946: at the time of his birth, Svalyava was interchangeably occupied by Czechs and Hungarians. His grandfather, Ivan Stankovych, sailed to America at the beginning of the twentieth century in hope of a better life and settled in New Jersey, and the composer's father, Fedir, was born there. But the whole family later returned to Ukraine: family history relates that one of the children suffered from tuberculosis; since the doctors recommended a dry mountain climate, the family returned to Svalyava.

Stankovych's father was a physicist, and his mother a maths teacher. His sister and brother became brilliant mathematicians but, as Stankovych puts it, he didn't have the brains for maths and so became a musician. He started studying music relatively late, at age ten, and he heard a symphony for the first time only at the age of seventeen. There was a small music school in Svalyava that offered two instruments: trumpet and accordion. Stankovych chose the accordion. He later continued his studies in Uzhgorod, the largest town in Zakarpattia. His talent was recognised, and his accordion teacher himself urged Stankovych to switch instruments: 'Why do you need an accordion? You

should change to cello.' And so he did, buying his first cello from passing gypsies, who in those days, Stankovich says, sometimes owned Guarneri and Stradivari instruments. His was neither. He had a lot to catch up with on the cello, and practised so hard that the fingers of his left hand were often bleeding.

It was in the Uzhgorod Music College that Stankovych became interested in composition. He applied to the composition department of the Lvov (now Lviv) Conservatoire, and was admitted only because of the efforts of the well-respected Ukrainian composer Stanislav Lyudkevych.¹ The problem was that Stankovych was still very young, and the faculty preferred to admit those more mature and better experienced in composition. Lyudkevych, recognising Stankovych's potential as a composer, said: 'These are silly arguments! Let this child study!' But he didn't get the chance: after his first year at the Conservatoire (1962–63), where he studied with Adam Soltyś,² he was conscripted into the Soviet Army for the next two years.

Stankovych had met his wife, Tamara Zhuchenko, a pianist and a music teacher, while in Uzhgorod, and they were married in 1961. Tamara's father was a military officer. Such families were relocated often from region to region; hers moved from Uzhgorod to Kiev, and after his term in the army was over, Stankovych therefore moved to Kiev in 1965 to be reunited with his wife. He transferred to the Kiev Conservatoire to study with the man he considered the greatest Ukrainian composer of the twentieth century, Boris

¹ Lyudkevych (1879–1979) was an important figure in Ukrainian music not only as composer and teacher but as a writer, administrator, choral conductor, editor of folksongs, musicologist and more. He was a director of the Lysenko Higher Musical Institute in Lviv between 1908 and 1939, and the chair of the composition department of the Lviv Conservatoire during Soviet times. Lyudkevych completed his musical education in Vienna with Alexander Zemlinsky and with Hugo Riemann in Leipzig. Lyudkevych composed in a post-Romantic style and spent much time collecting and cataloguing Ukrainian folksongs. His compositions include opera, cantatas, orchestral pieces and choral and other vocal works, but the quantity of his output declined under Soviet rule, since he chose not to co-operate with the Communist regime by composing ideologically correct music.

² Adam Soltyś (1890–1963), composer, conductor and teacher, studied composition with his father Mieczysław Soltyś (1863–1929), likewise a composer, conductor and teacher, and with Robert Kahn and Georg Schumann in Berlin, where he also took courses in musicology. He joined the staff of the Lwów Conservatoire on his return home and was appointed director in 1929, on the death of his father, and was active also as critic and broadcaster. His own music includes two symphonies and a number of other orchestral pieces (including a Concerto for Orchestra), chamber and piano music and songs. His best-known student is Stanisław Skrowaczewski.

Lyatoshynsky,³ and remained with him for three years. But Lyatoshynsky died in 1968, and so Stankovych finished his senior year with Myroslav Skoryk.⁴

Stankovych became an editor of the Soviet Ukrainian music-publisher Musical Ukraine (Музична Україна), serving in this capacity between 1970 and 1976. In 1973 he was invited to write music to a documentary film which was so well received that he was hired to work for a film studio and remained there until the Soviet empire collapsed in 1991. His credits include scores for such landmark films as *Yaroslav the Wise*, *Roxolana* and *Born by the Revolution*. In 1976 he was invited to teach at the Kiev Conservatoire, and has now been serving as chair of the composition department chair there for 35 years.

In 1989 Stankovych was invited to Canada by the American-Ukrainian composer Virko Baley and the Koshyts Ukrainian National Choir of Winnipeg, to stage some parts of his banned opera *When the Fern Blossoms*. He stayed in Winnipeg for the next two years as composer-in-residence of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra but returned to Kyiv after Ukraine became independent. He is still very active as composer and teacher. In recent years he has had important premieres of such monumental works as the 'Requiem-Kaddish' *Babyn Yar* (1991, revised in 2006), the orchestral *Poem of Sorrow* (1993, rev. 2010), the oratorio *The Mother of Chernobyl* (2011), as well as three ballets, two operas, seven instrumental concertos, a Sixth Symphony and many other smaller works.

³ Borys Lyatoshynsky (1895–1968) was one of the most important Ukrainian composers of the twentieth century. He made revolutionary innovations in modern Ukrainian music, and taught or influenced virtually the entire generation of composers of present-day Ukraine. He studied with Reinhold Glière at the Kyiv Conservatoire. He was a professor of the Kiev and Moscow Conservatoires, and a founder of the Society of Contemporary Music of Ukraine. Lyatoshynsky's music is influenced by symbolism and expressionism, and his compositional output consists of operas, symphonies, instrumental and vocal chamber music, piano works and film music. He, too, was a victim of Soviet repression.

⁴ Myroslav Skoryk (born in 1938), is one of the leading Ukrainian composers of today, an important teacher and a major figure in Ukrainian cultural life. He studied in the Lviv Conservatory with Adam Soltyś, and later completed his doctoral studies with Dmitri Kabalevsky at the Moscow Conservatoire. He is a professor of composition in both the Lviv Lysenko Music Academy and the National Music Academy in Kyiv. Skoryk is also an artistic director of the National Opera of Ukraine. His music includes operas, ballets, cantatas, instrumental concertos, orchestral works, instrumental and vocal chamber compositions and film music. Arthur Greene and I released an album of Skoryk's music for violin and piano on Toccata Classics TOCC 0137 in 2012.

The **Triptych On the Verkhovyna Plateau** was written in 1972, its three movements a vivid reflection of the music and customs of the Hutsuls, the people living in the Carpathian Mountains. Stankovych's musical presentation could be compared to Bartók's, in that the modernity of the musical language allows the spirit of folk-music to be presented in its free form, rhythmic inventiveness and wild, contagious energy. Hutsulian folklore is very rich in tales of supernatural characters, and Stankovych's music reflects its abundance. In my own imagination, I see the 'Lullaby' [1] picturing a tired mother hushing her child to sleep; something unnerves her, but her uneasiness passes, and she drifts off to sleep together with her child. 'Wedding' [2] paints a picture of a wild village celebration, where the polytonal texture, interchangeable rhythms and misplaced accents bring the spirit of an exuberant wedding dance vividly alive. The piece starts *ppp*, builds to a crazed climax and dies away as the morning comes and the last of the revellers disperse. The 'Improvisation' [3] is the freest, rhythmically and harmonically, of the three movements. Indeed, it sounds like the violin and the piano are never together, although the complicated rhythms are very intricately defined.

The **Sonata Piccola** [4] was composed for the Ukrainian violinist Oleh Krysa in 1977. Krysa was recording an LP of Ukrainian music and, needing nine more minutes of music, commissioned Stankovych to write a piece to complete the programme. Stankovych considers the piece polytonal and polystylistic. It is cast in a single movement consisting of five contrasting sections, the material of which is never repeated. The second and fifth sections remind me of the early, primitivist Stravinsky, in particular some movements of *The Rite of Spring*, not least 'Spring Rounds'.

The **Ukrainian Poem** [5] (1997) was composed while Stankovych was living in Canada – not because he was homesick but because he was asked to write a work for his son, who was studying violin at the Winnipeg Conservatory of Music. He gave it some thought, and decided that something ultra-modernist would not be appropriate, and he wanted to make the piece enjoyable for his son, Yevhen Jr, to perform; and so the *Ukrainian Poem* turned out to be more traditional than his earlier compositions. Nevertheless, the turbulent past and present of Ukraine can be heard in the music.

The Angel's Touch [6] was commissioned by the violinist Solomiya Ivakhiv in 2013. It was in answer to my question about the unusual title that Stankovych explained that his titles reflect his moods at the time of composition. The 'angel' is an apolitical figure: he felt the need to isolate himself from political events and somehow to experience the goodness of angels – although he cautions that 'The devil is everywhere'. Stankovych's angel, though, is very strong-minded: the music is somewhat forceful and highly emotional.

A Dedication, a 'Poem for Violin and Piano' (it was originally entitled *Poem*) [7], was commissioned as a mandatory piece for the Benjamin Britten International Violin Competition in London in 2008. Stankovych's idea of the work is to exploit the lyrical qualities of the violin, which represents the inner world of an individual. The principal melodic idea grows out of a four-note *pizzicato* motive introduced in the second bar. Although the piano part is much more difficult and dense than that of the violin, the piano is never allowed to take over the leadership from the violin line. The challenge of the piece is in sustaining the long lyrical lines in the slowest possible tempo. In 2013 the publishing house Muzychna Ukraïna published a volume of Stankovych's complete instrumental works, with the works for violin and piano in the editorial hands of the violinist Anatoly Bazhenov, a professor at the National Music Academy. Stankovych dedicated this particular work to Bazhenov, but insists that the title *A Dedication* is an abstract one – to humanity rather than to Bazhenov in particular.

Stankovych originally wrote *Morning Music* for violin and accordion, in 2006, later transcribing it for a variety of different combinations of instruments, such as violin and piano and violin and orchestra. As Stankovych put it himself, there is nothing mysterious or sophisticated about this piece: one gets up in the morning, prepares one's coffee and eggs, and here is your morning music. He joked that his children don't join him for breakfast, since he likes to fry onion with his eggs. But the piece is not about breakfast – it is a musical description of the rising sun, and dew on the wet grass, shining with all the colours of a rainbow under the sun's rays, and slowly disappearing as the morning air warms up and the day begins. *Morning Music* consists of four movements performed

without a break: ‘Morning Dew’ [8], ‘Light Wind’ [9], ‘Sun Rise’ [10] and ‘Beginning of the Day’ [11].

The *Romance* [12] was composed in the 1970s (Stankovych can’t remember exactly when), for voice and piano. Stankovych composed two romances to poems by Mykhailo Bakhtynsky (1934–2008), one of which was then transcribed by the violinist Arkady Vynokurov for himself and the pianist Valery Matiukhin; it was published in 1988. It is an impressionistic miniature, of a pastorale character.

The *Maydan Fresco* [13] was written in 2014, inspired by the events that began in November 2013 and continued through that winter, with the epicentre in the main square, the Maydan Nezalezhnosti (‘Independence Square’) in Kyiv. Peaceful mass protests against the decision of President Victor Yanukovych to remain under Russian influence rather than move towards European integration were turned into a bloodbath, and the Maydan became a battlefield where many Ukrainians were killed by sniper fire. It was a turning point for the nation. Stankovych’s composition is very descriptive, with the music expressing the events on the Maydan, with fights and screams, but also fear, hope, desperation and, in the last section, the shock of death, and the emptiness of the aftermath. Hardly surprisingly, this piece resonates strongly with Ukrainians, and when we performed it in Odessa in summer 2016, the audience gave us a standing ovation – in tears.

Solomia Soroka was born in Lviv, Ukraine. She earned her master's degree and completed her postgraduate studies in the Kiev (Kyiv) Conservatoire, 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 Lvov (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 Boris Lyatoshynsky, Myroslav Skoryk and Yevhen Stankovych. Her recitals in Washington, DC, were part of the Smithsonian Institute performing-arts series and she received the following review in *The Washington Post*: 'Soroka is a superbly equipped violinist, at ease with the technical challenges of Sarasate or of Jeno Hubay's Czardas No. 2, but even more impressive in the gentler moments [...]. Her tone is warm and mellow on the low strings, brilliant on the high strings, perfectly controlled and expressively used.'

Solomia Soroka has toured and recorded extensively with her husband, the American pianist Arthur Greene. Their recording of four violin sonatas by William Bolcom for Naxos was selected as recording of the month by Classics Today with the highest ranking for both musicianship and sound. Their recording of violin sonatas by Nikolai Roslavets (again for Naxos) also received international acclaim. For the past six years Soroka has been recording for Toccata Classics, where she has made four premiere recordings, of music by the American composer Arthur Hartmann, the Ukrainians Myroslav Skoryk and Mykola Lysenko, and of Leone Sinigaglia and Bernhard Sekles, both of whom suffered after the Nazi seizure of power. Of the Hartmann album (TOCC 0089), 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.'

Her website can be found at www.solomiasoroka.com.

Arthur Greene was born in New York and grew up in Sheffield, a small town in Massachusetts. He went to Yale University, and then The Juilliard School of Music, where he studied with Martin Canin. He now teaches at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and in the summer divides his time between Lviv and Dzembronya in Ukraine.

He won first prizes in the William Kapell and Gina Bachauer International Piano Competitions, and was a top laureate at the Busoni International Competition. He performed the complete solo piano works of Brahms in a series of six programmes in Boston, and recorded the complete études of Skryabin for Supraphon. He has performed the ten Skryabin sonatas in many important international venues, including multi-media presentations with Symbolist artworks. He has made many recordings together with his wife, the violinist Solomia Soroka, for Naxos and Toccata Classics, the latter in music by Arthur Hartmann (rocc 0089), Mykola Lysenko (rocc 0177) and Myroslav Skoryk (rocc 0137). Toccata Classics has also released the first volume in his complete recording of Lysenko's music for solo piano (rocc 0287).

He has performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the San Francisco, Utah and National Symphonies, the National Symphony of Ukraine, the Czech National Symphony, the Tokyo Symphony, and many others. He has played recitals in Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, Rachmaninov Hall in Moscow, Bunka Kaikan in Tokyo, the São Paulo Opera House in Lisbon, Hong Kong City Hall and concert houses in Shanghai and Beijing. He has toured Japan and Korea many times. He was an Artistic Ambassador to Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia for the United States Information Agency.

In 2007 he and his students presented a recital series of the complete solo works of Chopin in nine concerts; along with the performances they organised a Chopin symposium with presentations by noted musicologists. His current and former students include prize-winners in international competitions, and his former students hold important teaching posts throughout the United States.





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YEVHEN STANKOVYCH Music for Violin and Piano

<i>On the Verkhovyna Plateau: Triptych</i> (1972)	8:59
1 I Lullaby	3:27
2 II Wedding	2:48
3 III Improvisation	2:44
4 <i>Sonata Piccola</i> (1977)	8:11
5 <i>Ukrainian Poem</i> (1997)	8:34
6 <i>The Angel's Touch</i> (2013)*	10:43
7 <i>Poem: A Dedication</i> (2008)	8:04
<i>Morning Music</i> (2006, rev. 2016)	8:59
8 I Morning Dew –	3:02
9 II Light Wind –	1:50
10 III Sun Rise –	1:40
11 IV Beginning of the Day	2:27
12 <i>Romance</i> (1970s) transcr. Arkady Vynokurov	3:32
13 <i>Maydan Fresco</i> (2014)	6:31
	TT 63:36
Solomia Soroka, violin	
Arthur Greene, piano	
	ALL EXCEPT * FIRST RECORDINGS