



Lubomir PIPKOV

COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME THREE

PRELUDE (IN MEMORIAM CHOPIN), OP. 39

YOUTH COLLECTION, OP. 14

22 VARIATIONS

MINIATURES

TOCCATA

PANAYOT PIPKOV

COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC

Dobromir Tsenov

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

L'UBOMIR PIPKOV Complete Piano Music, Volume Three

PANAYOT PIPKOV

1871–1942

	Complete Piano Music (1893–1918)	33:00
1	<i>Bulgarian Rhapsody</i> (1918)**	5:42
2	<i>Dimka Planted Basil</i> (1900)**	5:35
3	<i>Guests Came to Radka's</i> (1906)**	3:32
4	<i>Do You Know, Anka, Do You Remember?</i> (1910)**	5:03
5	<i>Samodiva's Dance</i> ** (1908)	2:26
6	<i>Last night Yanka came down from the Balkans</i> (1915)**	3:35
7	<i>Three Variations on a Folk Theme</i> (1912)**	1:56
8	<i>Ratchenitsa</i> (1908)**	1:36
9	<i>Ratchenitsa</i> (1908)**	1:46
10	<i>Maria-Mazurka</i> (1893)*	1:49

L'UBOMIR PIPKOV

1904–74

11	22 Variations (1926)	12:05
	Youth Collection, Op. 14 (1923–57)	16:10
12	No. 1 Tiny Man with Double-Length Beard	1:23
13	No. 2 Rebel's Song	2:11
14	No. 3 Angry Maiden	0:55
15	No. 4 Heroic Grandfather	1:54
16	No. 5 Fox's Lament	1:29
17	No. 6 Hare's Wedding	1:00
18	No. 7 The Rain Narrates	1:18
19	No. 8 Spring Dance	0:46
20	No. 9 A Peasant Goes to Plough	1:12
21	No. 10 Grandmother's Goat	1:39
22	No. 11 Game	1:07
23	No. 12 Sled	1:16

24	<i>Across the Field</i>	0:58
25	<i>Folktale</i>	0:43
26	<i>Toccata</i>	0:53
27	<i>Prelude</i>	1:41
28	<i>Shepherd's Song</i>	1:14
29	<i>Game</i>	1:52
30	<i>Horo</i>	0:50
31	<i>Prelude (in memoriam Chopin), Op. 39 (1949)</i>	5:18
		TT 74:45

Dobromir Tsenov, piano

*FIRST RECORDING
 **FIRST MODERN RECORDING
 FIRST COMPLETE RECORDING
 OF THE PIANO MUSIC
 OF BOTH COMPOSERS

LUBOMIR PIPKOV: PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME THREE

by Dobromir Tsenov

This third volume presents the early and middle years of the piano compositions of Lubomir Pipkov (1904–74) and the first complete recording of the piano works of his father, Panayot Pipkov (1871–1942). The album thus traces the development of Bulgarian piano music from the first-ever published piece for piano, *Maria-Mazurka* (1893) by Panayot Pipkov, to his son's *Prelude* (1949), written to mark the centenary of Chopin's death.

'Professional music'¹ was virtually non-existent in Bulgaria until 1878, when liberation from Ottoman rule allowed a number of prominent composers to attempt to elevate their national music to the standards of more highly developed western nations.² The music of this so-called 'first generation', to which Panayot Pipkov belonged, marked a turning point, from a time when musical tradition in Bulgaria consisted primarily of sacred music, folk- and revolutionary songs and dance. Sacred music composed in the Middle Ages entered what is now Bulgaria from Byzantium and came to define the musical consciousness of the nation and provide a degree of continuity with the music that followed. In spite of promising beginnings, Bulgarian cultural development was systematically suppressed by nearly five centuries of Ottoman rule. As in other Balkan countries, until the Liberation in 1878 – when two international treaties re-established the Bulgarian state and forced the Ottoman Empire to return territory seized in the fourteenth century – music was principally an oral tradition, and thus a means of expression in the everyday life of the Bulgarian

¹ 'Professional music' refers to music composed by individuals who received formal training in specialised music schools and earned their living through playing music.

² The more prominent of the composers of that generation were Emanuil Manolov (1860–1902), Dobri Hristov (1875–1941), Georgi Atanasov (1882–1931), Panayot Pipkov (1871–1942), Angel Bukoreshtliev (1870–1950) and Nikola Atanasov (1886–1969).

people. It was thus well placed to serve as an instrument to promote national unity, lifting the spirit and maintaining hope of freedom.

In the eighteenth century there was a period of national 'awakening', known as the Bulgarian Revival. It began with the Bulgarian historiography *Istoriya Slavyanobulgarska* ('History of the Slav-Bulgarians'), written by St Paisius of Hilendar in 1762, and ended with the Liberation of 1878. Thus the period of national awareness began rather later than in most western European countries, where the Renaissance gradually gave way to the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, it was a crucial time for the suppressed Bulgarian nation, which longed for its own culture, as promulgated by the 'New Bulgarian Educational Movement' and in freedom from Greek ecclesiastical authority during the 1860s and 1870s.

During the increasingly frequent uprisings against the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the nineteenth century, poet-composers such as Dobri Chintulov (1822–86) composed the first revolutionary songs, most famous of which were 'The Wind Roars, the Balkans Moan', 'Where Are You, True Love of the People?' and 'Rise, Rise, Balkan Hero'. These songs, in a form of western harmonic language, using major and minor scales, were readily adopted by the Bulgarians – despite the absence of such elements as modal structures, asymmetric rhythms or rich ornamentation that would link them to Bulgarian folk-music.

One of the more active cultural centres in Bulgaria before the Liberation was Shumen, in north-eastern Bulgaria, thanks to the remarkable initiative and creative efforts of men such as Dobri Voynikov, Sava Dobroplodni, Vasil Drumev and their associates, whose aspiration to generate new artistic expression appealed to a society longing for cultural identity. The inhabitants of Shumen were thus able to develop an appetite for artistic performances from Europe and thus 'became witnesses to diverse cultural events – theatrical and operatic performances, orchestral renditions of European music'.³ Shumen was also the birthplace of the first theatre school (in 1846) and the first Bulgarian orchestra – one of immigrants, established by the immigrant Hungarian

³ Anon., 'Drama and Puppet Theater "Vasil Drumev"', in *History of the Shumen Theatre*, Vasil Drumev Dramatic Theatre, Shumen, 2025: <https://dkitshumen.com/about/history-en>, accessed 15 April 2025.

musician Mihay Shafran in 1851. His student Dobri Voynikov (1833–78) founded the first school orchestra in 1856, the year in which the first theatrical performance, the comedy *Mihal Mishkoed* ('Mihal the Mouse-Eater') by Sava Dobroplodni (1820–94), was produced.⁴ These cultural efforts were aimed at both local people and the nation as a whole through orchestral and theatre performances as well as in teaching.

In the years leading up to the Liberation, theatrical performances with revolutionary motifs appeared more and more frequently, the most famous of which was Voynikov's *Misunderstood Civilisation* (1871). These plays bolstered a feeling of national spirit and called for action and unity against Turkish rule. After the Liberation in 1878, the challenges of establishing a foundation for artistic development became all the more apparent. Around 1890 the director of the Prague Conservatoire, Antonín Bennewitz (1833–1926), aptly summarised the dire situation in Bulgaria when he said to the young Bulgarian composer Angel Bukoreshtliev (1870–1950): 'You are going to your homeland – a country recently liberated from Turkish rule, where music is undoubtedly at its lowest level. You will find an untapped field for your musical endeavours there. I wish you success in this difficult but noble mission.'⁵

This effort was hindered by the negligence of the ruling post-Ottoman Bulgarian bourgeoisie, which, exhausted by five centuries of Ottoman suppression of any attempts to form a national identity, remained indifferent to the plight of Bulgarian culture more generally. Nevertheless, its revival in the first decade after Liberation was marked by the formation of many grassroots, amateur artistic activities. In music, brass bands and amateur choirs were established, and many schools introduced singing as a compulsory subject.⁶ Thus in the years between 1878 and the early 1900s Bulgarian music began to flourish.

Rapid social change brought new ideas and freedom of expression. The so-called 'first generation' of Bulgarian composers focused on establishing the foundations of a new

⁴ Claire Levy, *From Traditional Folk Music to the Music of Modernity*, Institute of Art Studies, Sofia, 2019, p. 15.

⁵ Quoted by Lubomir Pipkov, 'Soviet Music Culture', *Muzika*, Vol. 1 (1948–49), No. 7, p. 1, republished in *Lubomir Pipkov: Selected Articles*, ed. Krum Angelov, Muzika, Sofia, 1977, p. 177.

⁶ Elena Toncheva, *Panayot Pipkov*, Science and Art, Sofia, 1962, pp. 3–4; and Angelov, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

Bulgarian concert music during the 1890s and the first quarter of the twentieth century. They had two difficult tasks ahead of them: first, to lay the foundations of music as a profession, all the while distancing themselves from the foreign influences assimilated during the Revival period; and second, to use existing folklore to create a Bulgarian musical 'tradition'⁷ – and they were successful in both endeavours. Among these men was Emanuil Manolov (1860–1902), who laid the foundations of the school song and paved the way with his own folksongs, which gave the newly liberated populace a sense of national identity and unity. Lubomir Pipkov noted that the 'first generation [...] has attracted audiences for decades and has had an educational influence in shaping their aesthetic taste'.⁸ Manolov worked alongside his contemporaries Georgi Atanasov (1882–1931), Angel Bukoreshtliev, Dobri Hristov (1875–1841) and Panayot Pipkov (1871–1942), all of whom shared a common goal: to establish a Bulgarian national style, which placed folksong at its forefront.

Hristov, Manolov and Pipkov *père* joined forces in this stylisation through solo, choral, children's and school songs. Pipkov made an impact through his children's songs and school songs, whereas Manolov and Hristov focused on both choral and solo songs.⁹ As a result, some critics – such as the musicologist Venelin Krastev – have perceived the work of this first generation as immature because of what was seen to be insufficient training in European techniques when compared with the second generation of composers.¹⁰ That observation matters little when considered alongside a statement by Dobri Hristov, who summarised the essence of the music of his first-generation colleagues – who were indeed all graduates of prestigious academies: 'Although their creations are anachronisms for the advanced world, for the culture of the motherland they are not unimportant, especially if the national musical folklore is developed in them.'¹¹ The significance of this first generation is undeniable: they 'humbly, but with

⁷ Ivan Hlebarov, *The Creative Development of Lubomir Pipkov*, Artcoop, Sofia, Vol. 1, 1996, p. 29.

⁸ Preface, *Piano Pieces by Panayot Pipkov*, Sofia, Muzika, 1977; Angelov, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁹ Venelin Krastev, *Profili*, Muzika, Sofia, Vol. 1, 1976, p. 221.

¹⁰ Ivan Hlebarov, *The Symphonism of the Second Generation of Bulgarian Composers*, Muzika, Sofia, 1977, p. 20.

¹¹ Dobri Hristov, *Musical and Journalistic Legacy*, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Vol. 2, 1970, p. 280.

great enthusiasm, built the young Bulgarian musical culture, reborn from the ashes of five centuries of darkness.’¹²

The piano legacy of Panayot Pipkov, born in Plovdiv, is a case in point. His father, Christo Pipkov (1840–1900), a clarinetist and a prominent pedagogue, influenced his son’s early musical development, not least by teaching him the violin, but he was reluctant to allow the leap from passionate interest to a career in music, given the conditions musicians had to endure to make a living.

The Pipkovs are the earliest musical family known in Bulgarian cultural life.¹³ Lubomir Pipkov described his grandfather:

There is one common trait in the lives of musicians – from Orpheus and Koukouzel¹⁴ to the present day – that unites both geniuses and ordinary people like my grandfather into one vast, timeless family. [...] They have all understood equality as a fundamental, natural law, according to which, at the beginning and the end of life, all people are absolutely equal. There, in life, in people’s joy and sorrow – there is music. And there, too, my grandfather remained.¹⁵

Panayot was known for his kind yet active temperament, along with a talent for oratory that was evident from his school years. He was an extremely versatile artist, adopting many different roles throughout his life, among them actor, composer, teacher, journalist, music publicist and poet. He even briefly worked as a clerk to the justice of the peace in the village of Kozludzha, Varna district, around 1890.¹⁶ These roles, unfortunately, did not contribute much to his family’s financial prosperity because of the appalling way the ruling regime treated artists at the time: the government simply failed to recognise the value of art and therefore offered little moral or financial support.

¹² Angelov, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹³ Rositsa Todorova, ‘Christo Pipkov: Founder of the Pipkovs Musical Dynasty. Historical and Genealogical Perspective’, *Bulgarian Musicology*, The Bulgarian Academy of Music, Sofia, Vol. 4 (2020), p. 30.

¹⁴ St John Koukouzelis, the late-thirteenth-/early-fourteenth-century monk, who as a singer and composer reformed Byzantine chant.

¹⁵ Angelov, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹⁶ Toncheva, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

In 1892, Pipkov wrote his first drama, *Boyko*, and a year later his first piano piece, *Maria-Mazurka*, which is given its first recording in this album. At the end of 1893, he went to study in Milan with the support of colleagues in a theatre by the name of ‘Tears and Laughter’ founded in 1892, in which he had performed as an actor. Antonio Bazzini (1818–97), the director of the Milan Conservatoire, reported that he ‘worked very hard’ during his time in Italy,¹⁷ but although his stipend allowed him to acquire a basic musical education, it ran out before he could continue his studies. This disappointment did not discourage him: in 1895, on his return to Bulgaria, he began composing his first solo songs and choral works, including the hymn ‘Already enough’, dedicated to Macedonian revolutionaries,¹⁸ that was to become famous. During this time he composed his second piano piece, *Dimka Planted Basil* (*Sadila Dimka bosilek*). The period between 1901 and 1906 was the most stable and productive period in Pipkov’s career, when he worked as a teacher at the Yosif I school in Lovech, in north-central Bulgaria.

He sank his creativity into school songs, among which the most famous and beloved to this day is the hymn ‘Go, O Revived People’ (‘Varvi, narode vazrodeni’; 1902). It praises the two brother missionaries St Cyril and St Methodius, who evangelised the Slavs in the ninth century (the Cyrillic alphabet takes its name from one of them). On the process of composing it, Pipkov said: ‘Writing the music for four identical voices took no more than fifteen minutes; however, for the first time in my life, I felt the need for more hands’.¹⁹ Days after completing the hymn, Pipkov proposed to Natka Stefanova, a school teacher and singer in the local choir who became his lifelong companion; their two sons were Hristofor and Lubomir.

In addition to his duties as a teacher, Pipkov was active in the musical life of Lovech. As a conductor, he improved the local orchestra, which performed excerpts from Verdi operas; he translated Verdi’s opera *Ernani*; he composed numerous pieces for the brass

¹⁷ Toncheva, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁸ On 2 August 1902 the ‘Ilinden-Preobrazhenie’ uprising erupted in Macedonia and Odrin, its main aim being to free these territories from Ottoman rule.

¹⁹ Ivo Vladimirov, ‘Panayot Pipkov: “With Music toward a Bright Future”’, *Bulgarian History*, 2017: <https://bulgarianhistory.org/panaiot-pipkov/>, accessed 26 October 2025.



*Panayot Pipkov with his wife, Natka,
and their sons Lubomir and Christo (right)*

band he conducted; his poems appeared in a local magazine; and in 1905 and 1906 he published the first two issues of a newspaper, *Musical Echo*, which then failed for lack of finance. One highlight of Pipkov's compositional legacy are his two children's operettas, *Children and Birds* (1909) and *A Cricket and Ants* (1910), which launched the genre of children's operetta in Bulgarian music and won him the first prize in a competition for children's and youth music organised by the state.²⁰

In the following years Pipkov endured many humiliations because of the indifference of the authorities toward Bulgarian music and culture in general. But he was not interested in recognition or medals (though he did receive some); what mattered was his part in building a foundation for Bulgarian music for the next generation of composers. Lubomir Pipkov wrote about his father:

The inspired composer was given the opportunity and great honour to transform his emotions and his love for people and his nation into song and music. However, the people returned this love a hundredfold. I believe that my father, Panayot Pipkov, received this high award even if only for the song 'Go, O Revived People'.²¹

'Go, O Revived People' ('Varvi, narode vazrodeni'; 1902) is sung every year on parade by schools on the Day of Bulgarian Education and Culture and Slavonic Script, 24 May.

Panayot Pipkov's Piano Music

Pipkov's legacy consists mainly of his school and solo songs (37 in total) and his operettas. To this achievement, one must add his instrumental music, which not only sets his own style, but was also critical in the development of the 'second generation' of composers. As well as songs, his output contains solo works for piano and violin and for wind orchestra, incidental music for the theatre, music-dramas and arrangements of folksongs; he also wrote poetry, dramatic works and music journalism. His three music-dramas – *Boyko*, *Esther* and *Deyan* – are now lost. Of the three, *Boyko* achieved the most success, being performed several times across Bulgaria. His theatre music was deeply influenced by

²⁰ Toncheva, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²¹ Preface to the collection *Go, O Revived People* by Panayot Pipkov, 1929, in Angelov, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

the Bulgarian poet Ivan Vazov.²² In his poetry, Pipkov expressed dissatisfaction with the bourgeois regime and the harsh realities of an ideology that dismissed musicians without regret when they were no longer required, particularly in times of crisis. Pipkov was a realist by nature, but his progressive views often clashed with the authorities, a situation his son Lubomir experienced a few decades later.

Panayot Pipkov's piano output consists of only ten pieces, which, though modest in quantity, are richly original. With them, Pipkov introduced the piano as an instrument that, in stark contrast to western Europe, was not widely popular in Bulgaria at the end of the nineteenth century. Bulgarian piano music advanced in two different directions at the beginning of the twentieth: through transcription of folkloric material from songs and dances and through the creation of salon-style music.²³ Pipkov focused primarily on the first of these avenues, apart from his first piece, *Maria-Mazurka* (1893), his only piano work written before 1900. The other works, dating from between 1900 and 1918, bear the spirit of the emerging national style, demonstrated through Pipkov's ability to transcribe simple folk-motifs into virtuosic pieces. These nine pieces fall into two further categories: five are virtuosic, with dense textures and complex harmonies, and treat existing folk-themes in a Lisztian style. The other four draw on Pipkov's own folklike themes, feature irregular rhythms, and are shorter and richer in ornamentation, closer to the miniatures his son was later to write. The early *Maria-Mazurka* is an outlier, being a salon-type piece with a dance-like character and no folk influence.

His best-known piano piece, the *Bulgarian Rhapsody* [1], was composed in 1918, and marks the height of his maturity as a composer. It is obviously reminiscent of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, Nos. 2 and 6 in particular, sharing a similar structure: a majestic, sustained introductory section, followed by a quick, virtuosic one.²⁴ It encompasses a plethora of such devices as rapid octaves, dotted rhythms, fast scalar runs, rich ornamentation and dynamic contrasts. In the opening section one can hear the 'broad

²² Vazov (1850–1921) is known as the patriarch of Bulgarian literature. His most significant, and best-known, work is the novel *Under the Yoke* (written in 1887–88), which has been translated into more than 65 languages.

²³ Toncheva, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²⁴ Slow (*lassú*) and fast (*friss*) sections are common in Hungarian folk-music, in 'verbunkos', the popular Hungarian folk-style.

and poetic strength' (in his son's words²⁵) of the *Rhapsody*. After a brief *recitativo* in the right hand, a smooth transition is made into the next episode, which is based on the popular folksong 'Smile for us, proud Balkans' from the period of the Liberation.²⁶ Starting lyrically, the texture gradually thickens, reaching a moment underpinned by dazzling octaves in the left hand, before subsiding back to *piano*. Following a short *fortissimo* contrast and a moment of lyricism, Pipkov then transitions into the second theme of the first section, based on the sorrowful popular song 'Give us heavy, strong wine' by Hristo Botev.²⁷ In the following *Allegro* section Pipkov seems to have drawn on his training as a violinist to imagine a gypsy-like sound, through augmented seconds, right-hand arpeggiated triplets and *pizzicato*-like quavers, as if performed by a violin. This part has a dance-like character until the very end, culminating in bravura octaves and ringing tremolos, concluding the piece with exuberance and Lisztian flair.

This main theme of *Dimka Planted Basil* [2], based on a folksong, functions as a leitmotif throughout the whole piece, skilfully varied by Pipkov (in fact, one of the main characteristics of his piano music is its use of variation²⁸). The boisterous opening *a piacere* likewise follows the model of Liszt in preparing the listener for the main theme, which then sets up a sentimental mood in F major. The tempo is *Andante*. His artistic creativity shines through in the fresh treatment of the thematic material via textual, dynamic, rhythmic and melodic variations, as can be heard in the next section, which incorporates all four of these aspects simultaneously. The right hand plays a thicker chordal texture, the dynamic is in a contrasting *fortissimo*, and the dotted rhythm adds playfulness to this episode, which continues in the next variation. Here the first example of irregular metre in Pipkov's music can be heard: $\frac{7}{8}$, a time-signature typical of Bulgarian folk-dances.²⁹ In a preface to the 1971 edition of his father's piano music, Lubomir

²⁵ Preface, *Piano Pieces by Panayot Pipkov*, loc. cit., 1971 (in Angelov, op. cit., p. 36).

²⁶ Toncheva, op. cit., p. 47.

²⁷ Hristo Botev (1848–1876) was a Bulgarian revolutionary and poet who played a significant role in the years leading up to the Liberation and is regarded as a national hero.

²⁸ Toncheva, op. cit., p. 44.

²⁹ I have analysed this metre in notes to the previous two Toccata volumes in this series, TOCC 0656 and TOCC 0744, where more examples with it can be heard in the music of his son. The rachenitsa is the most common Bulgarian dance that features $\frac{7}{8}$ or $\frac{7}{16}$.

notes these pieces as foundational, highlighting how the next generation of composers continued the legacy of incorporating such irregular rhythms.³⁰ In this dance-like variation, Pipkov expands on the main theme, distancing himself from it for a moment while maintaining its energy. A brief eight-bar section follows, serving as a modulation to A major. The opening, *a piacere*, comes back, this time as a variation, leading to an episode with grand and rich chords. After a short and joyous moment, the main key returns with a repetition of a previous variation. The piece concludes heroically, with exuberant brilliance.

Guests Came to Radka's [3] likewise recalls Liszt: it begins with a steady and poetic introduction in *Andante*, preparing the main theme. The first climax, *fortissimo*, arrives abruptly and with force in the first varied section. It is followed by a virtuosic *leggero* episode in ⁴/₈, especially demanding for the right hand, with continuous fast passages and arpeggiated triplets, interwoven with chordal excerpts from the first variation. This section is in a toccata-like style, which is a familiar stylistic approach of Pipkov's son.³¹ The piece builds momentum and drive, before culminating in a coda in octaves, which brings yet another glorious ending.



Panayot Pipkov

³⁰ Angelov, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³¹ An example: *From 1 to 15*, Op. 81, No. 18, recorded in the first Toccata volume.

The title of *Do You Know, Anka, Do You Remember?* [4] suggests that Pipkov had some folksong or -tale in mind. It begins in $\frac{4}{8}$ and follows a similar structure, starting with a broad introduction marked *Andante mosso*. A brief *forte* transition leads into the first theme. Dotted rhythms and triplets are used here as well, though in a different, more expressive context than in the previous pieces. The second theme, marked *Allegro* and in $\frac{2}{4}$, is prepared by another eight-bar phrase. It is typical march music – a familiar idiom for Pipkov, who held a bandmaster position in 1904–5. The ornamentation here is rich, though the rhythmic variety of the first theme is maintained. The harmonic language is simple but effective, with several modulations of the main material occurring along the way, predominantly from D major to B flat major. The piece draws to a close in a distinctive, noble manner.

Samodiva's Dance [5] is the second piece in irregular rhythm, $\frac{7}{16}$ this time. In Bulgarian folklore, samodivas are mythical creatures in the form of beautiful women closely connected with nature. It is both fiery and graceful, in the style of the 'rachenitsa' – a fast dance in $\frac{7}{8}$ or $\frac{7}{16}$. Unlike the previous pieces, this one is original and not based on a folksong.³² It begins and ends as if on one breath. There are no expansive introductions; instead, the listener is immediately drawn into the dance. Full of contrasts, different dynamic colours, ornaments, and light articulation, this technically demanding piece holds a special place in Panayot Pipkov's piano legacy.

Last night Yanka came down from the Balkans [6] is based, once again, on a popular folksong, which Pipkov transcribed in 1915. Thirteen years later, his son incorporated the same theme into the second movement of his First String Quartet (1928), though the two versions differ from each other. Panayot's version stays closely to the original theme, with fewer harmonic developments, whereas Lubomir attempts to 'distance himself from the main material through intonal changes and different tonalities'.³³ The piece introduces the main theme in C minor and *Andante mosso*, which is a much slower tempo than the original folksong. However, Pipkov meticulously follows the structural

³² Toncheva, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

³³ Hlebarov, *The Creative Development of Lubomir Pipkov, op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 31.

development of the original, which can be observed as the piece progresses. In the original song, a solo female voice is followed by an instrumental section, then the solo returns, and so on. In this piano version, after the slow theme of the introduction, a brief variation of the theme, *Allegro vivace*, is followed by a *Presto* section, acting as the instrumental passage. The theme representing the female voice appears several times, subtly varied, and culminates in three powerful *fortissimo* chords.

Three Variations on a Folk Theme [7], based on the folksong ‘Libe Le Gol Fudulino’ (something like ‘Love the Naked Body’) is built on an Ionian scale on G spanning sixteen bars. Ivan Hlebarov observes that here ‘The major-minor system remains relatively “pure” even in the use of folk material, especially when the natural modal scales correspond to its tonal degrees. In these instances, Pipkov’s harmonic language approaches that of the first-generation composers.’³⁴ The first variation, joyfully showcasing the dance origins of the theme, is transposed an octave higher, in $\frac{7}{16}$ metre, without major differences from the theme. The second variation introduces some ornaments and is slightly more varied, and the third and final one is the most developed, full of energy, before leading into a tranquil finish.

The first of two *Ratchenitsa* dances explicitly so labelled [8] is another miniature in $\frac{7}{8}$ metre, composed in 1908. It was commissioned by Ivan Vazov for his drama *Towards the Abyss*, along with four songs.³⁵ Perhaps with its function in the drama in mind, Pipkov presents this *Ratchenitsa* stripped of unnecessary harmonic complexities and instead showcases the dance in its pure form, bringing the rhythm to the fore. Half a century later, in 1958, his son included this piece in his own incidental music for the same Vazov work, which suggests that Lubomir found his father’s music still to be contemporary.³⁶

The other *Ratchenitsa* [9] is more dense technically, requiring some octave work from the performer, and is also richer in dynamic contrasts, and longer. As with the previous piece, it captured the attention of his son, who composed his own version of it for his

³⁴ Ivan Hlebarov, *Lubomir Pipkov: Studies*, Science and Art, Sofia, 1975, p. 83.

³⁵ Toncheva, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

³⁶ Hlebarov, *The Creative Development of Lubomir Pipkov*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 33.

Metro-rhythmical Pictures and Studies, Op. 69.³⁷ Both versions treat similar thematic material but in different ways, Lubomir's version being pianistically less demanding, with fewer accents and modest dynamic variety, focusing on the core musical idea. Thus his father's version is dynamically richer and more accentuated, also encompassing a wider range of the piano, which adds depth and separates the various voices.

Maria-Mazurka [10], Panayot Pipkov's first composition for piano, was written in 1893, the year in which he left to study in Milan. The work is clearly written in the polka-mazurka style, but it remains unclear why Pipkov gave it the name *Maria*. It has a lively, uplifting mood, beginning in B major with an eight-bar theme, before proceeding to a subsidiary theme with contrasting dynamics. The trio section modulates to E major, developing independently from the main theme. Dynamic variety becomes even more apparent here, with the climax occurring just before the return of the main material, bringing the piece to a close.

Panayot Pipkov's piano music will be remembered for its boldness and virtuosity – qualities previously unseen in Bulgarian piano literature. It also provides a vital missing link in the creation and transcription of folk material, without which the next generation of composers might not have found the common ground that allowed them to continue to develop a legacy of Bulgarian piano music. Pipkov himself pointed to its wider importance: 'When art walks side by side with life – or even precedes it to reflect its dark and dangerous corners – it will be valued not so much for its theoretical principles, but for the positive impact it has on the spirit of the broad masses of people.'³⁸

Naturally enough, the young Lubomir Pipkov was influenced by his father's piano music. In his first attempts he improvised Lisztian paraphrases of the folksongs he heard from his mother, just as his father had done in his own piano music.³⁹ His first serious statement as a composer was the *22 Variations* for piano [11], composed probably

³⁷ *Metro-rhythmical Pictures and Studies*, Op. 69, No. 3, 'Ratchenitsa', recorded on TOCC 0744.

³⁸ Quoted in Toncheva, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³⁹ Konstantin Iliev, *Lubomir Pipkov: Monograph*, Science and Art, Sofia, 1958, p. 9.

in 1926.⁴⁰ He took the work to Paris, where he performed it for his teacher, Paul Dukas. 'I went to see Dukas. I found some of his students from the previous year there. He asked me to show him something of my own. I played the *22 Variations*.'⁴¹ He then played the work in public on 18 June 1927 at the Salle Pleyel in Paris.⁴² Its warm reception notwithstanding, Pipkov himself did not regard it as having much artistic value and chose not to publish it at the time, describing it as Romantic in style – a stage he felt he had outgrown.⁴³ Indeed, stylistically these variations differ significantly both from his father's piano music, which features variations on specific folk-themes, and from his own later legacy, which began to take shape during his years in Paris.⁴⁴

Ivan Hlebarov has argued that Pipkov, like many composers, had three periods to his output. During the first of them, he worked to a specific model, such as Chopin, Schumann and Beethoven. This approach allowed him not only to practise and master harmonic and structural forms, but also to distance himself from them gradually and develop his own voice.⁴⁵ The *Variations* are written in the style of Schumann and Beethoven, whose 32 Variations in C minor Pipkov had performed during his early years as a pianist. The main theme is laid out in the first eight bars, with a thematic core of notes b¹–d¹–a¹–(g¹–f¹) acting as a leitmotif throughout the following variations, occurring in different registers and rhythms.⁴⁶

His father's music also uses leitmotifs, but Lubomir's piece differs in two ways: first, it features original thematic material not tied to a specific folksong, and second,

⁴⁰ Several dates have been suggested. Konstantin Iliev and another musicologist, Lubomir Dinolov, suggest 1923, although Pipkov himself recalled working on the piece in 1925 (Hlebarov *Conversations in Pancharevo*, Hainy, Sofia, 2004, p. 15). Ivan Hlebarov (*The Creative Development of Lubomir Pipkov*, Artcoop, Sofia, Vol. 2, 2001, p. 19), Snezhina Vrangova-Petova (Foreword, *22 Variations*, National Academy of Music, Sofia, 2021) and Simeon Zlatkov, ('Piano Variations in Bulgarian Music of the First Half of the 20th Century – Structural, Analytical, and Interpretative Issues', Ph.D. thesis, National Academy of Music, Sofia, 2023, p. 31) all cite 1926 as the year of composition. The autograph manuscript is dated 15 March 1926.

⁴¹ Hlebarov, *Conversations in Pancharevo*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁴² Pipkov, 'The Early Steps of the Pianist Al. Uninsky', *Dnes* ('Today'), No. 970, 21 April 1939, in Angelov, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁴³ Hlebarov, *Conversations in Pancharevo*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁴⁴ Vrangova-Petkova, *loc. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Hlebarov, *The Creative Development of Lubomir Pipkov*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Simeon Zlatkov, 'Lubomir Pipkov: 22 Variations' (score), National Academy of Music, Sofia, 2021, p. 8.

it is more advanced harmonically and formally and shows a more lyrical Romanticism. A comparison could be made between the 22 *Variations* and Panayot's *Three Variations on a Folk Theme*, where these differences can be heard. Varied in texture, tonality and contrast, the 22 *Variations* flow naturally from one to another through the skilful alteration of the thematic material, metrorhythmical and tonal connections between these short variations. Tension builds as the work progresses and technical demands increase, only to subside abruptly in Var. XIX (*Tempo di Marcia Funebre*). The theme re-appears at the end, echoing the main theme for the last time.

Pipkov's *Youth Collection*, Op. 14, consists of twelve miniatures with programmatic titles. This set was published in 1957, although he wrote the first three miniatures (which now appear as the final three in the collection) as early as 1924. Originally they were part of a small collection called *Children's Album*, Op. 1.⁴⁷ This earliest group in Pipkov's legacy is one he revisits in his four late piano-cycles, recorded on the two earlier volumes in this series.⁴⁸ The *Children's Album* is pivotal to his stylistic development, especially No. 11, 'Game' [22], which marks the first time he began to distance himself from the influence of a specific model.⁴⁹ This piece shows the influence of Ravel and was particularly admired by his teacher, Paul Dukas.⁵⁰ In 1938 he composed another six miniatures (the first six in this set), and gave them the title *Youth Collection*. Finally, in 1957, he expanded the collection into a larger set, adding three more pieces for the final edition (Nos. 7–9: 'The Rain Narrates' [18], 'Spring Dance' [19] and 'A Peasant Goes to Plough' [20]).⁵¹ This set is intended for both younger and professional pianists and is an excellent source for improving overall musicianship.

These miniatures are prophetic of Pipkov's later cycles, incorporating similar stylistic features and their cyclical structure. They include the irregular metres typical of

⁴⁷ Alexander Vassilenko, *The Late Piano Cycles of Lubomir Pipkov in the Context of His Overall Oeuvre*, Almanah/National Academy of Music, Sofia, 2018.

⁴⁸ *Spring Caprices*, Op. 78 (1971–72), and *From 1 to 15*, Op. 81 (1973), on Toccata Classics TOCC 0656 and *Metro-rhythmical Pictures and Studies*, Opp. 69 (1969) and 77 (1972), on TOCC 0744.

⁴⁹ Hlebarov, *The Creative Development of Lubomir Pipkov*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 78.

⁵⁰ Vassilenko, op. cit.

⁵¹ Hlebarov, *Conversations in Pancharevo*, op. cit., p. 62.

Bulgarian folk-music (e.g., Nos. 1 [12] and 4 [15] in $\frac{9}{8}$ and No. 5 [16] in $\frac{5}{16}$), rich ornamentation (Nos. 1, 3 [14], 5 and 12 [23]), choral textures (Nos. 1 and 5), toccata style (Nos. 4, 10 [21] and 12) and lyricism (Nos. 2 [13] and 7 [18]).⁵² Clear articulation of contrasting moods is particularly evident in Nos. 6 [17] and 8 [19]. The titles themselves could serve as illustrations of traditional Bulgarian folk-tales, which is another similarity with Pipkov's later piano-cycles.

The other seven miniatures recorded here were written sporadically during the same period (1946–57) as the *Youth Collection*. Little is known about them, apart from the last two – *Game* [29] and *Horo* [30] (the horo is a round dance) – which were published in 1946 as part of Pipkov's Op. 32, alongside some pieces for violin and piano. It remains unclear whether Pipkov considered these miniatures to be a cycle, but the individual pieces exhibit the same stylistic features as those in the *Youth Collection*, though they are less technically demanding.

The *Prelude (in memoriam Chopin)*, Op. 39 [31], was written in 1949 and dedicated to Chopin on the centenary of his death. Pipkov's interest in Chopin can be traced back to his early compositional attempts, when he employed a specific model which he then styled and developed in his own way.⁵³ In this piece, he returns to that approach, but now as a mature composer – and so, instead of imitating Chopin, he deliberately distances himself from the Polish composer, allowing his own musical language to speak for itself. This language involves revolutionary pathos and socialist realism, qualities to be heard in some of Pipkov's other works from the time, such as his opera *Momchil* (1948) and his *Heroic Overture* (1949). The Polish musicologist Zofia Lissa outlined some core principles of 'socialist realism': vocal and programmatic music was to be prioritised over instrumental, works were to reflect contemporary themes, remain melodic and tonal, engage with folk traditions, and connect to national and European musical heritage without regressing to nineteenth-century styles.⁵⁴

⁵² Eubomir Dinolov, *Aspects of Interpretation in the Piano Repertoire of Lubomir Pipkov*, BDK, Sofia, 1966, pp. 70–71.

⁵³ Hlebarov, *The Creative Development of Lubomir Pipkov*, Vol. 2, p. 21.

⁵⁴ David G. Tompkins, 'The Rise and Decline of Socialist Realism in Music', in *Composing the Party Line: Music and Politics in Early Cold War Poland and East Germany*, Purdue University Press, West Lafayette (IN), 2013, p. 22.

Pipkov's Prelude was heavily influenced by Chopin's revolutionary vision, as he recalled in an article.⁵⁵ This ethos was strengthened by the fact that Pipkov wrote it during a time of rapid social change, both in Bulgaria and worldwide. The Prelude is lyrical and almost nostalgic in character, and yet not pessimistic. Though written in ⁷₈ metre, it is far from the fiery *ratchenitsas* his father had written four decades earlier. Instead, it should be performed without accents: although the inner structure of irregular metres may seem asymmetrical, they remain proportional to one another; that is, they lack accentuation on the strong beats, which enhances the evenness between them – a trait typical of many of his lyrical pieces.

The Prelude begins *dolce espressivo* and maintains that lyricism. The tension builds gradually, reaching a *fortissimo* climax, with rich chordal textures supported by pedal points typical of Pipkov's use of the piano.⁵⁶ The ending is harmonically unexpected: instead of finishing in the minor key, he chooses an optimistic E flat major chord, which serves as a fond and warm tribute to Chopin.

It was in 1949, too, that his connections with the Soviet Union deepened, largely as a result of his first visit to Soviet Russia and his first meeting with Dmitri Shostakovich.⁵⁷ That exchange, and the consideration of socialist realism, raise the issue of Pipkov's relationship with the state. His career, like that of Shostakovich, was shaped by the political turbulence of his time. Both composers faced harsh criticism and censorship for their operatic works: Pipkov's *Yana's Nine Brothers* (1937) was condemned in 1943. To sustain a living and secure major commissions, Pipkov, like many composers under socialist regimes, had to navigate the strict requirements of socialist realism. Although he supported left-wing ideals, he was aware of the regime's constraints and was often disappointed by how he was treated. Reflecting on these conditions, he remarked:

⁵⁵ In 'Chopin's Vision', *Literature Front*, No. 7, 20 October 1949, where Pipkov described his lyricism as a longing for freedom and revolution (Angelov, *op. cit.*, p. 190).

⁵⁶ Dinolov, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁵⁷ This unconfirmed statement, made by Hlebarov (*The Creative Development of Lubomir Pipkov, op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 204) is based on a letter from Shostakovich to Pipkov, sent from Leipzig around that time, when Shostakovich attended an event dedicated to the 200th anniversary of Bach's death in 1750. The letter itself is missing, according to Hlebarov, but the assumption is supported by an envelope preserved in Pipkov's archive from a letter sent by Shostakovich to him from Leipzig at that time.

There is a certain dullness in the world, in the human mind. I think that some of the failures of our system are a fundamental cause of this dullness. No – perhaps not of the system itself, but of the people who carried things out. Things that were meant to happen could not happen, and this condemns humanity – it condemns! No one would have believed that this could happen! Who would have imagined that people could remain as vile as they were in the previous society? Even a little more so! After all, that society came with a kind of established morality – you knew what was acceptable and what wasn't. But now, you don't know. Even between two people, you don't know who the informer is. And now, either you will go to denounce someone, or I will. At least, one should fear someone worthy of being feared. Because where there are insinuations, where there is eavesdropping, where there is deceit, there is also fear. It is not only the guilty who are afraid. The fear of the innocent is even greater. Because the guilty at least know what they should fear, while the innocent must fear everything. It is like a hare in a vast, wild forest: you don't know what to be afraid of – of the hunter, or of the wolf.⁵⁸

Looking back on his own creative compromises, he admitted in a private conversation with his daughter Yana Pipkova, who revealed this exchange in an interview on Bulgarian National Radio in 1994:

I was foolish enough to believe that this nation needs art, that you need to lower yourself to its level, and I actually paid a cruel tax on my own stupidity, as I stopped my own development from the Paris years to write some works that were more elementary. I lost a valuable 20 years of my most creative years.⁵⁹

It can be assumed that Pipkov was fully aware of the political realities of the Communist regime.

⁵⁸ Hlebarov, *Conversations in Pancharevo*, *op. cit.*, First Conversation, p. 17.

⁵⁹ As quoted by Yana Pipkova, *loc. cit.*

Born in 1996, **Dobromir Tsenov** is in his third and final year as a Ph.D. student at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) in Manchester, currently exploring and recording Lubomir Pipkov's complete piano works under the supervision of Adam Swayne and Annika Forkert. His research is generously supported by a fully funded RNCM Studentship as well as the Bulgarian National Culture Fund. In 2024–25 he performed Pipkov's music across the UK, giving many first performances of this repertoire outside the borders of Bulgaria. Recent international conference appearances include the Doctors in Performance Festival Conference at the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki, the Performance Studies Network at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, and The British Forum for Ethnomusicology and Royal Music Association Research Students' Conference 2026 in Birmingham, UK. In May 2025 he organised the first Postgraduate Research Showcase event, part of the annual Postgraduate Research Conference at the RNCM, which aims to promote artistic performance research among doctoral students.



Photograph: Hwan Hee Kim

He earned Distinctions in M.Mus. (at the RNCM) and B.Mus. (at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire), studying with Dina Parakhina, Julian Jacobson and Daniel Browell. During his studies he developed a strong interest in the early- and mid-twentieth-century Bulgarian classical repertoire by the composers Pancho Vladigerov and his son Alexander. A prize-winner of many national and international competitions in Bulgaria and abroad, he has also taken part in master-classes with such musicians as Nelly Akopian-Tamarina, Ludmil Angelov, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, Peter Donohoe, Matthew Schellhorn and Rostislav Yovchev.

His self-published debut album, *Bulgarian Classics*, received high acclaim in Bulgaria, where it was broadcast several times on Bulgarian National Radio, as well as in the United Kingdom, receiving a five-star review and being described as 'first class in every respect' by Robert Matthew-Walker, the editor of *Musical Opinion*. He also received the Marjorie Hazlehurst Project Award given by the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire for graduating with the highest result. His second, collaborative album, *Homeland*, recorded in 2020 with the Bulgarian violinist Hristo Dunev, also self-released, presents music by Bartók, Smetana, Vladigerov and Hristoskov, and was also praised by audiences and critics (another five stars in *Musical Opinion*). His latest

albums of Pipkov's works (on Toccata Classics) have received high praise from classical-music publications such as *Gramophone*, *Fanfare*, *American Record Guide*, MusicWeb International and Classics Today. The music was also broadcast on Scala Radio in the UK.



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