THREE CENTURIES OF RUSSIAN VIOLA SONATAS

Music by Bunin, Glinka, Shebalin and Sokolov

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INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS
The Russian viola-sonata repertoire is both richer than is generally known and also somewhat smaller and less well tended than a violist might hope. Recent years have brought recordings of previously obscure works by composers like Alexander Grechaninov, Nikolay Roslavets, Sergei Vasilenko and Grigori Frid, and viola works have also benefited from a general rise of interest in composers like Mieczysław Weinberg. Still, there are some ways in which conditions peculiar to Russia and the Soviet Union have affected the production and reception of this repertoire.

One factor is that for most of the twentieth century, the view of pre-Soviet Russian music presented on stages and relayed by critics and historians largely followed the advocacy of Vladimir Stasov in privileging the putatively more national works of the so-called ‘Mighty Handful’. These composers, including Mussorgsky, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov, mainly concentrated on opera and programmatic orchestral music, leaving little chamber music. Meanwhile, works like Anton Rubinstein’s 1855 Viola Sonata in F minor, Op. 49, might have been more prominent in the viola repertoire had it not been for Stasov’s positioning of Rubinstein (and of his brother Nikolai) as western, cosmopolitan and conservatoire-trained, and therefore not truly Russian (perhaps, needless to say, the Jewish heritage of the Rubinstein brothers also played a role here).

Another factor is the disruptions of Russian musical culture caused by the Revolution. Composers who reached artistic maturity before the Revolution sometimes either had their music actively suppressed in the Soviet Union (Roslavets) or largely neglected (Vasilenko). Two of the composers featured on this recording, Vissarion Shebalin and Revol Bunin, also had careers severely impacted by political intrigue.

1 Elena Artamonova’s recordings of viola works by Grechaninov, Vasilenko and Frid can be found on Toccata Classics TOCC 0234, TOCC 0127 and TOCC 0330.
Perhaps the most important element would be the various constraints that hampered the creation of a larger repertoire through the initiative of individual players. First off, Russian and Soviet conservatoires were especially slow to support viola instruction as an independent subject (although that is generally true also of conservatoires outside Russia). As late as the 1920s, Vadim Borisovsky was the only viola student at the Moscow Conservatoire, and there is no Russian violist of the previous generation who played the role of Lionel Tertis in England, commissioning and performing works in the first decades of the twentieth century. The nearest equivalent might be Vadim Borisovsky’s teacher, Vladimir Bakaleinikov, about a decade younger than Tertis, and a professor of viola at both the St Petersburg and Moscow conservatoires. Bakaleinikov certainly deserves credit for forming a pedagogical tradition, but does not seem to have done much to enlarge the viola repertoire.

Even so significant a player and teacher as Vadim Borisovsky faced many restrictions. He did not have the opportunity to perform outside the Soviet Union and promote new works. In the 1920s and 1930s, when Paul Hindemith was touring internationally and performing and recording his own viola works, Borisovsky was struggling to maintain his position at the Moscow Conservatoire. Nor did Borisovsky have the opportunity within the Soviet system to take the initiative to commission works. Composers might have been more inclined to compose a viola sonata if Borisovsky had been likely to perform it (as was probably the case with Vasilenko), but by the 1930s Soviet composers were essentially civil servants, with the commissioning, purchase, evaluation and performance of compositions all controlled by the state, the only true patron of the arts. Even in the early years of the Cold War, when artists like Emil Gilels and David Oistrakh were permitted to tour in the west, there were no violists travelling with them. Perhaps the viola sonatas by Revol Bunin and Vladimir Kryukov would be better known if Rudolf Barshai had toured them, or if he had been primarily a violist instead of a conductor when he emigrated.

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All that said, violists and listeners should be grateful for the many works that have come from Russia, and all four of the sonatas on this recording are fully worthy of being better-known, with the Shebalin Sonata an especial treasure – and the Bunin and Shebalin works are receiving their first recordings in modern sound. The gestations of the works also betray the small and close-knit nature of the networks of composers and violists in the Soviet Union.

**Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka**  
(1804–57)  
**Viola Sonata in D minor (1825 and 1828)**  
edited and completed by Vadim Vasilievich Borisovsky  
The Glinka Viola Sonata constitutes an apparently impeccable starting point for the Russian viola repertoire. What more appropriate source could there be than a work by the Father of Russian Music, a composer who created a distinctively Russian musical language and was worthy of comparison with Pushkin? The significance of the work is only magnified by its association with the violist Vadim Borisovsky, who edited and completed the Glinka Sonata in 1931. Borisovsky essentially created the Soviet school of viola-playing as a soloist, quartet-player and teacher, as well as vastly expanding the viola repertoire through transcriptions and new works dedicated to him. A closer examination of the creation and rediscovery of the Glinka Sonata reveals a less tidy story, but one that is surprisingly revealing of the tensions of the early Soviet era.

The Glinka who was so beloved of later nineteenth-century Russian musicians was the Glinka who was exposed as a child to Russian folksongs by servants on his father’s estate, and who consciously decided to forsake the fashionable musical styles of Italian opera for a distinctly Russian manner. This style reached its fullest expression in *A Life for the Tsar*, an opera in which a heroic Russian peasant sacrifices himself to lead a Polish army away from a newly selected Romanov tsar. But this Glinka is not the one who composed the Viola Sonata. Childhood servants notwithstanding, the Glinka of the Viola Sonata not only was years away from conceiving or creating a Russian opera, but he hadn’t even spent the years in Italy that would allow him to become familiar enough with Italian opera to reject it, at least notionally.
Glinka moved to St Petersburg in 1818, first for training to prepare him for the civil service, and subsequently for a position with the Board of Communications. This career-path was near-inevitable for a child of the Russian gentry, and Glinka was in close contact with leading poets and dramatists (including Pushkin), as well as other aristocratic and cosmopolitan figures. During his time in the civil service, Glinka habituated the salons of St Petersburg, and it was for this world of private cultural and social interaction that the Viola Sonata was intended. Glinka composed the first movement in 1825 and added
most of a second movement in 1828. He also planned a final rondo using a ‘motif in Russian style’, but never wrote it down. Glinka played the first movement of the Sonata twice in 1825, once as a pianist and once as a violist. Both his own memoirs and the Sonata itself suggest that he was more accomplished as a pianist than as a string-player.

Although Glinka did not complete the Sonata, he did write out three different manuscripts. The first (and presumably earliest) is a draft with numerous corrections, containing the entire first movement and the first 187 bars of the second movement. A second manuscript has only the viola part, but continues to the end of the second movement, here with 205 bars. Finally, Glinka seems to have returned to the Sonata in the 1850s and written out a third autograph, with an optional violin line in addition to the viola part. Here, again, the end of the second movement is missing, possibly because the final pages have been lost.

In spite of Glinka’s enormous prestige in pre-Soviet Russia, the Viola Sonata remained unpublished and unperformed until Vadim Borisovsky brought it into the repertoire in the 1930s. He created a new edition, premiered the Sonata with the pianist Elena Bekman-Shcherbina in 1931 and published his version in 1932. The Borisovsky edition, which has remained the standard version of the work, both combines elements of the three Glinka manuscripts and provides a piano part (by Borisovsky) for the final 40 bars of the second movement (now extended to 238 bars).

Borisovsky’s professional and artistic successes, as well as his enormous importance for violists both in the Soviet Union and internationally, have obscured the fraught early stages of his career. He rose quickly after his graduation from the Moscow Conservatoire in 1922, moving to the principal chair of the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra, forming the

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4 Glinka’s memoirs have been published in English as Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka: Memoirs, transl. Richard B. Mudge, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1963.

5 More information on the gestation and different versions of the Glinka Sonata can be found in Elena Artamonova, ‘Vadim Borisovsky and His Viola Arrangements: Recent Discoveries in Russian Archives and Libraries, Part II’, pp. 19–30.

6 Ibid., pp. 22–27.
Moscow Conservatoire String Quartet and taking over the viola professorship at the Conservatoire in 1925.\(^7\) The Moscow Conservatoire String Quartet became the Beethoven Quartet, the leading quartet in the Soviet Union for over half a century, and the group that premiered almost all of the Shostakovich string quartets (Shostakovich’s String Quartet No. 13, Op. 138, is dedicated to Borisovsky). Borisovsky’s Conservatoire studio produced a long line of distinguished players, extending from Rudolf Barshai and Fyodor Druzhinin to Yuri Bashmet. Borisovsky was also active as a soloist on both the viola and the viola d’amore, and contributed over two hundred arrangements and transcriptions to the viola repertoire.\(^8\)

Nonetheless, Borisovsky’s professional status was far from secure at the time that he was reviving the Glinka Sonata. Born in 1900, he began his university education (both in medicine and in music) shortly after the Russian revolution, a time when class background was of paramount importance. Borisovsky, born into an affluent and cultivated family, recipient of an elite education and fluent in multiple languages, was suspect on multiple counts. His grandfather, Peter Smirnov, founded a trade house and distillery which brought him substantial wealth (his product is still famous as Smirnoff Vodka). Borisovsky’s father and stepfather, both successful merchants, were executed by Soviet security forces in 1919 and his mother was disenfranchised of her rights as a Soviet citizen. Borisovsky hid his connection to his grandfather, but he was still vulnerable to politically motivated attacks, especially from the Russian Association for Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), who felt that a viola programme at the Conservatoire was a luxury unnecessary for a nation of workers. Borisovsky lost his position temporarily in 1931, although he was reappointed a year later, after the replacement of organisations like RAPM with state-supported unions. Borisovsky came under attack again in 1938, when

\(^7\) Borisovsky was replacing his teacher Vladimir Bakaleinikov, who had emigrated to the United States, where he was principal violist of the Cincinnati and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras, composed for Hollywood films and also held conducting positions in Los Angeles, Cincinnati and Pittsburgh: cf. Hax McCullough and Mary Brignano, *Play On: An Illustrated History of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra*, Pittsburgh Symphony, Pittsburgh, 2011, pp. 52–54.

his collaboration with a German musicologist on a catalogue of viola repertoire led to an accusation of Nazi sympathies. This type of allegation was literally a matter of life and death at the height of Stalinist terror, and Borisovsky was fortunate to survive the purges.¹⁹

Glinka’s status in the early Soviet era was also surprisingly tenuous. His *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, a fairy-tale opera after Pushkin, never left the Soviet repertoire, but Glinka’s own class background, his association with Tsar Nicholas I and the subject matter of *A Life for the Tsar* were problematic for Soviet functionaries, and he was largely ignored by Soviet scholars. It was not until a lavish restaging of *A Life for the Tsar* in 1939, under the title of *Ivan Susanin*, and with a new libretto, presented at the Bolshoi Theatre with Stalin himself sitting in the former Tsar’s Box, that Glinka was restored to his patrimonial position in Soviet histories of Russian music.¹⁰ Thus, whereas from the vantage point of the early 21st century, the reconstructed Glinka Viola Sonata is the result of a collaboration between two prominent names, from the perspective of the early 1930s it is a highly fortunate product of decidedly adverse political circumstances.

The *Viola Sonata in D minor* is very early Glinka, but it already reveals a composer of sure technique and rich melodic invention. Stylistically, the Sonata reflects both the chamber music that was broadly popular in Europe and Russia at the time, like that of Johann Nepomuk Hummel and the piano music of John Field, who spent most of his career in Russia, and with whom Glinka took three piano lessons. The third of Glinka’s manuscripts has the title (in French) ‘Sonata for the Pianoforte, with the accompaniment of Viola or Violin’.¹¹ This nomenclature reflects an earlier world of sonatas intended

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for accomplished amateur pianists assisted by less proficient (and sometimes socially inferior) string-players, but does not indicate the division of material in the Glinka Sonata. The melodic material is shared quite equally, in a way that is both attractive to the modern listener in a concert setting and also would have been fulfilling for musicians playing the music for their own pleasure at the time. The piece can function both as a convivial private conversation, or as a performance of such a conversation. It is true that the more overtly virtuosic passage-work is mostly entrusted to the pianist. The viola part, though very rich in melodies, could be played almost entirely in the first position (although one wouldn’t) and barely requires anything beyond the third position.

The opening Allegro moderato begins with the first theme in the piano. The theme starts with a pick-up of three quavers, immediately giving a sense of forward motion, and, surprisingly, begins with a pitch from outside the home key of D minor (G sharp), again giving the illusion of joining a process already underway. This theme sweeps up through almost two octaves, and its repetition by the viola covers most of the functional range of the instrument for this piece. A second idea is also traded between the two instruments, with the dialogue now proceeding in shorter phrases. In a procedure common in music of the time by virtuoso instrumentalists (Hummel, Spohr, Field, Chopin), each theme-group concludes with more overtly brilliant material. Here, the tempo picks up for short bursts of semiquavers, at first shared by both players but then taken over by a longer flourish from the pianist. The elegant second theme is again an opportunity for conversation. The new melody is introduced by the viola, repeated by the piano with commentary from the viola, and then shared in a quasi-canonic setting. Once again, this theme-group is capped by brilliant semiquavers from the piano, and accelerates to a firm close of the exposition. A hasty modulation to the subdominant leads the development, which opens with an apparent return of the first theme, but soon moves to an Agitato section marked by running quaver triplets, a subdivision of the beat found only in this section of the movement. The recapitulation largely proceeds as expected, although Glinka does make some deft additions and changes to the material heard in the exposition.
The following *Larghetto ma non troppo (Andante)* is in triple metre and belongs to the graceful and flowing *Andante* family of slow movements rather than to the slower and more deeply expressive *Adagio* type. Again, the opening idea begins with pick-ups, and again it forms a broad melodic arch, rising through an octave and a half before dropping back down. A sort of instrumental recitative featuring the viola leads to a more active middle section filled with semiquaver triplets. This passage rises to a *ff* climax before the opening material returns, now also more rhythmically active, with semiquaver motion in the accompaniment. The proportion of Borisovsky to Glinka is significantly higher in this movement than in the preceding one. The first major alteration comes at the beginning of the movement, where Borisovsky presents versions of the opening theme from different manuscripts sequentially, thereby both providing variety not present in any of Glinka’s autographs and also lengthening the movement. As mentioned, Borisovsky also supplied a piano part for the conclusion. His own touch is most tangible in the final *Meno mosso*, where he introduces the opening motive from the first movement in a sequential pattern and then breaks into a fuller piano texture than found anywhere in Glinka’s originals.

**Revolution Samuilovich Bunin**
(1924–76)

*Viola Sonata in D minor, Op. 26 (1955)*

Revol Bunin’s Viola Sonata is closely tied to two musicians who were major figures in his life: Dmitri Shostakovich, to whom the Sonata is dedicated, and the violist Rudolf Barshai, who premiered the work. Bunin was born in 1924, named ‘Revol’ after the October Revolution, and grew up in Stalin’s Soviet Union. He began his composition studies at the Moscow Conservatoire with Vissarion Shebalin, but formed a much stronger connection with Shostakovich, with whom he studied in Moscow after being discharged from military service in 1943. Bunin was Shostakovich’s first official pupil in Moscow, and Shostakovich brought Bunin with him as an assistant when he was re-appointed to the Leningrad Conservatoire in 1947.
Bunin’s career was sidetracked shortly after this move when Shostakovich was dismissed from the Leningrad Conservatoire in 1948 during the ‘Zhdanovshchina’ affair, of which more below. After a stint as an editor at the state music-publishing house, Bunin largely supported himself by ghost-writing works for would-be composers from non-Russian Republics of the Soviet Union.\(^{12}\) This labour – producing works credited to others – is presumably what Shostakovich was referring to when he wrote to a friend in 1966, ‘God grant [Bunin] health and success; he has a difficult life, and there seems to be little hope of it getting any easier’.\(^{13}\)

Shostakovich’s pupils have been accused of allowing their admiration for him to extend to adopting his style of eyeglasses and mimicking his physical mannerisms, and there is reason to believe that Bunin may have fallen into this category, but he does not seem to have imitated Shostakovich as a composer, especially in comparison to many instances of near-plagiarism by other Shostakovich students.\(^{14}\)


Bunin’s works were championed by some of the major performers of the Soviet Union, including the conductors Yevgeny Mravinsky, Gennady Rozhdestvensky and Yevgeny Svetlanov and the pianist Tatiana Nikolayeva, but he was most closely connected professionally and personally to Rudolf Barshai, who premiered and recorded Bunin’s Viola Concerto and Viola Sonata, and conducted the first performance of a number of Bunin’s orchestral works with his Moscow Chamber Orchestra.\textsuperscript{15} Barshai, a student of Borisovsky, also founded a major Soviet string quartet, in this case the Philharmonic Quartet of Moscow, which became the Borodin String Quartet. Barshai also played in the Tchaikovsky Quartet, led by Julian Sitkovetsky, before shifting his focus to conducting and the formation of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra in 1955.

In comparison with the Glinka Sonata, the Bunin \textbf{Viola Sonata in D minor} was clearly composed for a professional virtuoso string-player. The viola frequently climbs to the higher positions, and the part is full of multiple stops and even some left-hand \textit{pizzicato} and harmonics. Perhaps more importantly, the Sonata demands full and effective tone-production to maintain balance with the piano. The work is in three movements. The opening \textit{Allegro appassionato} \textsuperscript{3}, as was typical for Soviet music of this era, clearly outlines a sonata-allegro form. Three firm crotchet chords from the piano announce the first theme, a flowing and, yes, passionate melody in the viola over pairs of quavers in the piano. After some \textit{marcato} chordal writing for both instruments, the opening melody returns in the distant key of E major before the tempo subsides for the second theme-group. This section has two elements, a quiet fanfare in horn fifths (piano first, then viola in double stops) and a new idea in triple metre, initially marked by syncopated left-hand \textit{pizzicato} on the open D string of the viola, and moving to a waltz character. A brief reminiscence of the fanfare (viola now \textit{pizzicato}) leads to a development section based on the first theme. The recapitulation omits the fanfare, but does

\textsuperscript{15} Barshai’s recordings of Bunin’s Sonata (1957, with Tatiana Nikolayeva) and Concerto are in \textit{A Tribute to Rudolf Barshai}, ICA Classics icab 5136, released in 2015.
include the waltz theme. The tempo increases in the coda to an appropriately assertive conclusion.

The second movement, *Andantino semplice* [4], is far from simple, and has a surprisingly wide emotional range. The opening ostinato accompaniment and plain viola melody in C minor could come from the world of a Schubert song, as, perhaps, could the brief, *fff* turn to C major (but with a minor sixth) when the viola moves up an octave. The rhythmic pattern and melody soon lead much further afield, passing through a canon between viola and piano, and a *ff* statement (chords from the viola) that builds to a climax, followed by a dramatic pause. The opening character and key eventually return, this time with the accompaniment strummed by the viola and the melody in the piano, with the hands three octaves apart. The movement ends in C major, with the viola playing the accompaniment figure in harmonics. The third of the final chord (E natural) is heard only as a viola harmonic, resulting in a pure third, instead of the tempered third that the piano would have required.

The final movement [5] begins with a *Sostenuto* introduction moving in heavy crochets in triple metre, which leads to the main section, *Allegro spirituoso*, also in triple metre. This lively section is filled with motifs, characters and gestures that are strongly evocative of Shostakovich, especially some of his chamber-music scherzos. Given that the Sonata is dedicated to Shostakovich, these echoes seem more likely to have been an intentional homage than the effect of the older composer’s influence. This idea might be supported by the very end of the Sonata, where the piano intones an anagram of Shostakovich’s musical signature, DSCH, under a D major chord. The notes are in the wrong order (SCHD), but that can hardly be a coincidence.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{16}\) This cipher is created by taking the pitches D, E flat, C and B natural and expressing them in the German language as D, Es, C and H, and then phonetically replacing ‘Es’ with ‘S’. The musical signature appears repeatedly and prominently in Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 10, composed in 1954 – a year before Bunin wrote his Viola Sonata.
Ivan Glebovich Sokolov
(b. 1960)
Viola Sonata (2006)
Ivan Sokolov is the most recent composer represented on this recording, the only living composer and the only composer whose career has extended into the post-Soviet era. It is possible to link Sokolov to the older generations, since his primary composition teacher was Nikolai Sidelnikov, with whom he studied at the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire, and whose assistant he was from 1984 to 1986. Sidelnikov, in turn, studied with Vissarion Shebalin. Tidy as this connection is for narrative purposes, Sokolov has already had a significant and multi-faceted career as both a pianist and a composer, and defies any simple categorisation or suggestion of membership of a compositional school.¹⁷

As a pianist, Sokolov was known for his performances of then-officially approved twentieth-century composers in the late Soviet years, and then for adding to his repertoire post-Second World War modernists like Boulez, Kagel and Stockhausen. By the end of the twentieth century, Sokolov’s compositions were characterised by a wide diversity of styles and expressive means, but his more recent works have taken a (perhaps) surprising turn. Sokolov writes of his Cello Sonata, written in 2002, that it is another attempt to return in a new way to the world of music where my childhood and youth went by: the world of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Rachmaninov and Mahler. I wondered if it would be possible to discover what had already been discovered a long time ago. In science: no. In the arts: yes. Perhaps because the major factor in the arts is sincerity of feeling, with which the external stylistic orientation does not matter much.¹⁸

The *Viola Sonata*, from 2006, also seems closer to Rachmaninov than to any more recent composer. According to Sokolov, it is part of a ‘string trio’ made up of the first Violin Sonata (*Solnechnaya*, or ‘Sunny’; 2005) and the sonatas for viola and for cello, and functions as an ‘interlude’ between the other two, longer sonatas. The three sonatas

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¹⁷ A detailed account of Sokolov’s training and career is given in William Melton’s notes for *Ivan Sokolov: Chamber and Instrumental Music*, Toccata Classics TOCC 0560, released in 2020.

¹⁸ From the notes for *Homage to Fiddlers*, Ariel Ventures AVCD006, released in 2010.
are also linked through the ascending scale-fragment that begins all three works, as well as the similar characters of their opening sections (the initial themes share rhythmic and melodic shapes that go beyond the first four notes).

The Viola Sonata is in four sections, played without pause and linked by both motivic and timbral elements. The opening D minor Allegro moderato is described by the composer as ‘agitated’, but the flowing quavers over a bass line in semibreves and the dark, legato theme on the C and G strings can also be heard as elegiac. Although the section is not in sonata form as such, there is a contrasting theme that begins in the remote key of G flat major. The steady quavers in the piano continue, as does the melodic motion in crotchets, but both the new theme in the piano right hand and a countermelody in the viola are in much higher registers. This texture is interrupted by new elements: chirping quavers with grace notes in the piano, harmonics and a high trill from the viola, possibly reminiscent of the crumb-eating birds in the ‘Petit Poucet’ movement of Ravel’s Ma mère l’Oye. After this passage the opening material returns, but quickly moves in new directions, much as a development might. In spite of multiple attempts to repeat the opening section, a short viola cadenza leads to the second section, an Andante. Here again, there is a consistent pulse in the piano left hand. The melody, in the upper register of the piano, is rhythmically and

19 From the notes for Amberwood, Ariel Ventures, released in 2007.
20 Quotations from Sokolov in this paragraph are taken from the notes for Amberwood.
motivically balanced, with a pair of two-bar phrases with the same shape answered by four single-bar gestures with the same rhythmic profile. After a dialogue with the viola, a brief single-line cadenza for the piano precedes a return of the Andante theme in the viola, now accompanied by the chirps and trills from the piano. The texture fragments into short gestures, ominous bass tremolos and motifs from the first section, and then builds again to the third section, Allegro \[8\]. This section, described by Sokolov as a ‘short scherzo link’, is the most aggressive portion of the Sonata and provides a point of high tension, after which the return of the melodies and textures of the opening section in the final A tempo (lugubre) \[9\] comes as a welcome relief. The viola rises to the top of its range, the birds make a final cameo appearance and the Sonata ends in a placid D major.

**Vissarion Yakovlevich Shebalin**

(1902–63)

**Viola Sonata in F minor, Op. 51, No. 2 (1954)**

The career of Vissarion Shebalin traced a path similar to that of his close friend Dmitri Shostakovich. Four years older than Shostakovich, Shebalin, born in Omsk, in Siberia, attended the Moscow Conservatoire, where he was the prize pupil of Nikolai Myaskovsky. Although not a name with which to conjure outside Russia, Myaskovsky was the leading composer of his generation to remain in the Soviet Union, and Shebalin was the most significant composer to continue in Myaskovsky’s lineage. Shostakovich met and befriended Shebalin in autumn 1923, and Shostakovich’s public debut as a composer was at a concert in March 1925, on a programme at the Moscow Conservatoire split between his works and those of Shebalin.\(^{21}\) Both composers participated in their respective branches of the Association for Contemporary Music in the later 1920s, thereby aligning themselves with international modernism instead of the more politically radical programmes of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians, who attacked

the institutions that supported high culture and promoted composers of mass songs like Aleksandr Davidenko.

Shebalin began his teaching career earlier, starting at the Moscow Conservatoire in 1928, whereas Shostakovich did not take students before 1937, and teaching was a more important part of Shebalin’s career: he became a professor in 1935, head of the composition faculty in 1940 and director of the Conservatoire in 1942.22

Both composers received official accolades during the war years, with Shostakovich receiving Stalin Awards (First Class) in 1941 and 1942 for his Piano Quintet and Symphony No. 7 (*Leningrad*), and Shebalin awarded the same prizes in 1943 and 1947 for his String Quartet No. 5 (*Slavonic*) and his cantata *Moscow*.23 Both composers were named People’s Artists of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1947.24

Regrettably, these parallels also extended to both composers being denounced as ‘formalists’ in a 1948 resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and being caught up in a sweeping series of purges of leading cultural figures instigated by

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22 Additional biographical information about Shebalin can be found in Gregor Tassie, ‘Vissarion Shebalin – The Honourable Man in Soviet Music’, *Musical Opinion*, September–October 2013, pp. 18–20, and the notes for the recordings of Shebalin’s orchestral, choral and violin works on Toccata Classics (тосс 0112, тосс 0136, тосс 0164 and тосс 0327).

23 A full account of the process by which these works were selected is given in Marina Frolova-Walker, *Stalin’s Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2016.

Andrey Zhdanov – the ‘Zhdanovshchina’ I mentioned earlier. Shostakovich and Shebalin were both dismissed from their conservatoire positions, and largely cut off from their sources of income. Shebalin was devastated by the consequences of the resolution, and, although he returned to teaching at the Moscow Conservatoire in 1951, he suffered a stroke in 1953 and had to learn to write music with his left hand. In an interview with Elizabeth Wilson, Mstislav Rostropovich described Shebalin as ‘a profoundly honest and pure man. Shebalin suffered tremendously from the Decree, you might simply say that it killed him. He was without doubt a great composer. Had he lived in a different country than Russia, he would have been a prominent national composer.’

The two men were very close personally, with Shebalin amongst the few people with whom Shostakovich used not only the informal personal pronoun but also his pet name, Ronya. Shostakovich listed Shebalin as one of his favourite Russian composers in response to a 1927 questionnaire, and dedicated his String Quartet No. 2 to Shebalin in 1944, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of their friendship. It was Shebalin whom Shostakovich visited on his trips to Moscow, Shebalin with whom Shostakovich went to football matches, and Shebalin’s apartment into which Shostakovich temporarily moved when his first marriage foundered. Their friendship apparently cooled when Shostakovich joined the Communist Party in 1960, but when the Polish composer Krzysztof Meyer visited Shostakovich in 1968, a photograph of Shebalin was prominently displayed in Shostakovich’s workroom.

Shebalin’s Viola Sonata in F minor (1954), like that of Bunin, comes from shortly after Stalin’s death in 1953, but does not seem to be connected to political circumstances in any obvious way. Instead, it was inspired by a more personal circumstance. The Sonata is dedicated to Shebalin’s son Dmitri, a violist trained at the Moscow Conservatoire, who

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25 Wilson, op. cit., p. 249.
26 Glikman, op. cit., p. xvi; Wilson, op. cit., p. 341.
27 The responses to the questionnaire, as translated by Malcolm Hamrick Brown, are in Shostakovich and His World, pp. 27–41. Excerpts from Shostakovich’s letter to Shebalin with the quartet dedication are in Fay, loc. cit., p. 142. Levon Hakobian suggests that the Shostakovich Quartet No. 2 may have been inspired by Shebalin’s Slavonic Quartet – Hakobian, op. cit., p. 157.
29 Meyer, op. cit., pp. 528 and 539.
in 1953 had succeeded Rudolf Barshai as violist of the quartet that would soon be known as the Borodin Quartet, a position he would hold for the next 43 years.

The Viola Sonata is a lovely, melodic work that betrays no obvious sign of the composer’s emotional distress or physical challenges, although it does demonstrate firm faith in his son’s technical capacities. In general, there are some similarities to Myaskovsky’s later works in Shebalin’s combination of a flexible and colourful harmonic language with material in a more straightforward, perhaps even folk-pastiche, style. The first movement opens with a brief and free upwards statement from the piano (Con libertà), which eases into an accompaniment figure in steady crotchets for the main Allegro. As Sokolov would later, Shebalin starts with the viola on the rich and resonant C string for the first theme. This theme builds to a local climax with ff chords for both instruments. This climax is an excellent example of Shebalin’s more pungent harmonic language, as F minor chords with an added sixth alternate with unexpected E minor chords, also with an added sixth (this relationship was hinted at by the B natural and E natural in the opening piano gesture). This passage quickly gives way to a charming melody in his folkish mode, in a (mostly) untroubled C major, providing a juxtaposition typical of Shebalin’s style. This second theme also builds and subsides, ending in a rather spooky, quiet chordal passage with parallel fifths in the bass. The development opens with the return of the first theme, now forte and in G sharp minor, and continues on to the second theme in A flat major. The recapitulation is fortissimo, with the opening theme in the viola in double stops, two octaves higher than its initial appearance. After the second theme is stated in F major, the movement ends with a final presentation of the opening theme, now in its original register on the C string, but rhythmically augmented to half-tempo.

The following Andante con moto has five crotchets to the bar, generally an indication of a Russian folk topic, and, indeed, the viola presents another attractive diatonic melody. The melody is repeated as a canon between piano and viola before a middle section in triple metre becomes more intense and agitated. A climax that combines the triple metre of the middle section with the tempo and motif of the piano
introduction gives way to a gentle return of the five-beat melody, now muted and accompanied by flowing semiquavers.

The vigorous concluding Allegro assai [12] is based on two ideas. The first begins with repeated down-bow crotchets on an open C, and is marked by harmonic clashes, especially the combination of B natural with F minor sonorities already prominent in the first movement. Again like the first movement, the contrasting idea is a folky symmetrical tune in C major, this time mostly over a static C pedal. This idea quickly becomes more harmonically adventurous and involved in brief canonic activity. The various elements are combined in an increasingly active texture that leads to a false conclusion before rising again to a rousing finish.

Derek Katz is an Associate Professor of Music History at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he received his Ph.D. He also holds a degree from Harvard, and has studied at The Free University of Berlin on a Fulbright Fellowship. His book Janáček Beyond the Borders was published by the University of Rochester Press in 2009. In addition to a focus on Czech music, his more recent work deals with music and middlebrow culture, émigré musicians, and institutional support for chamber music in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. He also works extensively in public musicology and audience enhancement. He has written for The New York Times, the San Francisco Opera, the Teatro Real Madrid and the Bavarian State Opera, and spoken at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. He also collaborates with the San Francisco Opera Guild, the Ives Collective and the Hausmann Quartet. He is an enthusiastic amateur violist and chamber-music player.
Basil Vendryes is Principal Violist of the Colorado Symphony and a former member of the San Francisco Symphony, the New York Philharmonic and Rochester Philharmonic Orchestras. He currently serves on the faculty of the Lamont School of Music of the University of Denver. As a member of the Aurora String Quartet (1986–95) he performed recitals in New York, London and Tokyo, as well as given the west-coast premieres of works by Richard Danielpour, John Harbison, Benjamin Lees, George Perle and many others. From 2000 to 2018 he directed the Colorado Young Sinfonia (which he also founded), comprising some of the best young talent in the Denver area.

Basil Vendryes was born in Queens, New York City, in 1961 to West Indian parents, and began his musical training in the public schools of New York City at the age of eleven. He received scholarships to the Manhattan School of Music and the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Sally O’Reilly, Francis Tursi and Heidi Castleman. He joined the San Francisco Symphony in 1982 at the age of 21 and the New York Philharmonic two years later, moving to the Colorado Symphony as Principal Viola in 1993. He has also served as guest principal violist for the Western Australia Symphony Orchestra and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

He has appeared at many festivals, including those of Spoleto, Heidelberg, Sunflower, Midsummer Mozart, Interharmony, Taconic and the Grand Tetons. Working with promising talent is one of his passions, and he has given classes in viola and chamber music in Europe and throughout the United States. He has served as a juror for the Sphinx Competition for African American and Latino string-players and the Hong Kong International Music Festival. In April 2008 he performed the American premiere of Giya Kancheli’s *Styx* with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Jeffrey Kahane, a performance repeated at the 2008 League of American Orchestras National Conference.
Basil Vendryes has recorded for the Albany, Ariel, Cadenza Music, Centaur, CRI and Naxos labels, in addition to his contributions as an orchestral violist for recordings on BIS, Columbia, Decca, Hyperion, Nonesuch, RCA and Telarc. He plays on a rare Italian viola made in 1887 by Carlo Cerruti.

During his forty years at Iowa State University, **William David**’s primary performance focus was as a founding member of the Ames Piano Quartet. The APQ concertised throughout the United States and internationally in Austria, France, Mexico, Taiwan and South Africa. The ensemble also spent a week performing and teaching in Havana, the first American chamber group to be invited to Cuba in over forty years. They recorded fifteen well-received albums, with their recording of the two Dvořák Piano Quartets for Dorian hailed as ‘one of the chamber music recordings of the century’ by *Fanfare* magazine.

Since his relocation to Colorado, he has continued to be active in chamber music. He has collaborated with members of the Colorado Symphony and the Front Range Chamber Players, as well as faculty members from Colorado State University, University of Denver and the University of Wyoming.

He received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree *summa cum laude* in piano performance from the University of Michigan. His major teachers there were György Sándor and Eugene Bossart.
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Piano technician: David Hebert
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Engineering, mixing and mastering: Brad Smalling and Athena Wilkinson, Evergroove Recording, Evergreen, Colorado
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## THREE CENTURIES OF RUSSIAN VIOLA SONATAS

**Mikhail Glinka**  
(1804–57)  
Viola Sonata in D minor (1825/28)  
(ed. and compl. Vadim Borisovsky)  
1. *Allegro moderato*  
2. *Larghetto ma non troppo*  

**Revolutionary Bunin**  
(1924–76)  
Viola Sonata in D minor, Op. 26 (1955)*  
3. *Allegro appassionato*  
4. *Andantino semplice*  
5. *Sostenuto – Allegro spirituoso*  

**Ivan Sokolov**  
(b. 1960)  
Viola Sonata (2006)  
6. *Allegro moderato –*  
7. *Andante –*  
8. *Allegro –*  
9. *A tempo (lugubre)*  

**Vissarion Shebalin**  
(1902–63)  
Viola Sonata in F minor, Op. 51, No. 2 (1954)*  
10. *Con libertà – Allegro*  
11. *Andante con moto*  
12. *Allegro assai*  

Basil Vendryes, viola  
William David, piano

*FIRST DIGITAL RECORDING*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Time</strong></th>
<th><strong>Movement</strong></th>
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| 17:03    | Mikhail Glinka: Viola Sonata in D minor (1825/28)  
| 9:20     | Allegro moderato  
| 7:43     | Larghetto ma non troppo  
| 9:24     | Allegro appassionato  
| 5:33     | Andantino semplice  
| 6:02     | Sostenuto – Allegro spirituoso  
| 12:04    | Ivan Sokolov: Viola Sonata (2006)  
| 5:38     | Allegro moderato –  
| 2:18     | Andante –  
| 1:13     | Allegro –  
| 2:55     | A tempo (lugubre)  
| 7:44     | Con libertà – Allegro  
| 4:58     | Andante con moto  
| 6:50     | Allegro assai  

**Total Time**: TT 69:39