

# POSTCARDS FROM UKRAINE

Volume Two: Chamber Music

VASYL BARVINSKY

Piano Trio No. 1 in A minor

VIKTOR KOSENKO

Violin Sonata, Op. 18

BORYS LYATOSHYSKY

Violin Sonata, Op. 19

YEVHEN STANKOVYCH

Two Pieces for Violin and Cello

Markiyany Melnychenko, violin  
Josephine Vains, cello  
Peter de Jager, piano  
Stewart Kelly, piano

## POSTCARDS FROM UKRAINE – VOLUME TWO: CHAMBER MUSIC MASTERPIECES

Markiyany Melnychenko

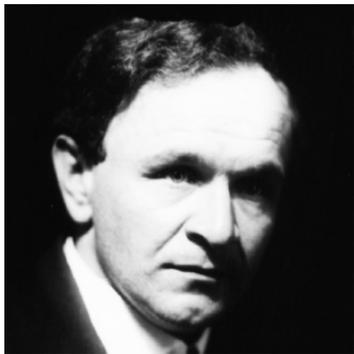
In *Postcards from Ukraine*, Volume One,<sup>1</sup> the influence of the Ukrainian folk-style on the classical compositions of Ukrainian composers was explored with a collection of miniatures for violin and piano. Although frequently turning towards the folk-music of their native country for inspiration, Ukrainian composers still based themselves, largely, on the traditional forms and structures of western-European art-music. This second volume of *Postcards from Ukraine* puts a spotlight on their chamber music, with two violin sonatas, a piano trio and a duo for violin and violoncello; the composers here are Viktor Kosenko, Borys Lyatoshynsky, Vasyl Barvinsky and Yevhen Stankovych. These little-known works demonstrate world-class craftsmanship and include some of the most outstanding examples of the unique compositional voice that Ukrainian composers have brought to classical music, despite centuries of cultural repression and appropriation.

### VIKTOR KOSENKO

1896–1938

#### **Violin Sonata, Op. 18 (1927)**

Born in St Petersburg to a Ukrainian family, Viktor Kosenko spent his childhood in Warsaw, where he grew up exposed to the finest traditions of classical music, marking him and his compositional style for the rest of his life. The outbreak of the First World War derailed his plans to enrol in the Warsaw Conservatoire, and he returned to



<sup>1</sup> Released on Toccata Next TOCN 0040.

St Petersburg with his family. In 1915 he began to study at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, where his talents made a strong impression, not least on its director Alexander Glazunov, who recognised Kosenko's promise and waived his tuition fees.

After graduating with a double major in piano performance and composition, Kosenko moved to Ukraine, spending the remaining years of his life there as a composer, performer and pedagogue. At first, he lived in Zhytomyr, becoming the director of its music school; he was heavily involved in many different aspects of musical life there, before accepting an invitation to move to Kyiv, where he eventually worked as a professor at the Conservatoire. He made major contributions to the advancement of music in Ukraine and in 1921 was one of the founding members of the Leontovych Musical Society, which was created to promote Ukrainian music in memory of Mykola Leontovych (known in the west as the composer of the 'Carol of the Bells'), after his assassination at the hands of a Soviet secret agent.<sup>2</sup>

As a composer, Kosenko is particularly admired for his lyricism, and his eclectic output contains orchestral, vocal and instrumental works. The piano features prominently,<sup>3</sup> particularly in his chamber music which consists of three sonatas for violin, viola and violoncello, as well as a piano trio. The two-movement Violin Sonata of 1927 is composed in Kosenko's trademark post-Romantic style.

The *Allegro* first movement [1] has an unsettled character, with a strong sense of 'searching' and an undercurrent of nervousness. The 'search' travels through moments of painful longing, such as the deep melancholy of the second subject, as well as moments of an almost naïve hope, although it seems too difficult to shake off the brooding quality which pervades the movement. In the end, the music does not find what it was looking for, with the movement ending in darkness and with a hint of desolation. The darkness is dissipated by the second movement, marked *Andantino semplice* [2], which seems

<sup>2</sup> Leontovych (1877–1921) was staying with his father in Tulchyn, in western Ukraine, in late January 1921 for the Christmas celebrations of the Orthodox Church. An undercover agent of the *cheka*, the Soviet secret police, came to the house under the pretext of asking for hospitality and then murdered the composer as he slept and robbed his family.

<sup>3</sup> Kosenko's magnificent *Eleven Études in the Form of Old Dances*, Op. 19, of 1927–29, were released on Toccata Classics rocc 0036, in a performance by the Ukrainian-American pianist Natalya Shkoda.

to transcend previous cares in a manner reminiscent of late Beethoven. The listener is taken on a journey filled with light and sweetness, leading to a glowing sunrise of a climax before fading away in a gentle murmur, finally at peace.

### **BORYS LYATOSHYNKY**

1895–1968

#### **Violin Sonata, Op. 19 (1926)**

After the fall of the Russian Empire and a few brief years of independence during the First World War, most Ukrainian territories came to be occupied by the Soviet Union. During the 1920s, the new Communist government attempted to discard the remnants of the 'old world' and encourage loyalty by implementing a policy of 'nativisation', allowing the ethnic minorities of the Soviet Union to develop free from cultural and political repression. It was during this time that modernism was introduced into Ukrainian classical music by Borys Lyatoshynsky, who successfully explored techniques such as Expressionism – before being denounced by the Soviet authorities along with his colleagues Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Khachaturian. In fact, as with Shostakovich, after his denunciation Lyatoshynsky kept a packed suitcase next to his door in Kyiv, fearing imminent arrest.

Lyatoshynsky's Violin Sonata was composed in 1926, only a year before Kosenko's, and the contrast between the two compositional approaches showcases the immense diversity of musical styles that were being explored in Ukraine during the 1920s. This flowering period of creativity extended across all the art forms and continued until the Stalinist repressions of the 1930s brought it to an end.

Although mostly unknown outside of Ukraine, this Sonata was described by Virko Baley as 'one of the most significant works to come out of the Soviet Union in the 1920s'.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Virko Baley, 'Lyatoshynsky, Borys Mykolayovych', *Grove Music Online*, 2001.

It is in three movements and a first-rate example of the Soviet modernist style. The music reflects the changes that were ripping through Europe at the time, including the permeation of machinery into society, with its noises and rhythms, the desire to cast aside the old world with its traditions and aesthetics, as well as the uncertainty created by the disappearance of the political, social and spiritual frameworks that had underpinned society for centuries.

The first movement, *Allegro impetuoso* [3], captures this mood of dislocation with its violence and exploration of extreme dissonance. A frenetic atmosphere dominates the music, with the composer at one point writing ‘frenzied’ as a performance indication, though moments of respite are felt in the second subject. It is noteworthy, however, that Lyatoshynsky once said (perhaps under some degree of ideological pressure) that ‘A composer whose voice does not reach the people is not even zero, but a negative value. I will strive to make my music close to the people.’<sup>5</sup> As such, he developed his avant-garde musical language in a way that still prioritised musical meaning and aimed to create a coherent musical narrative. The second movement, marked *Sostenuto e tranquillo* [4], follows the first without a break and serves as an oasis between the outer movements. The writing is highly atmospheric: there is an eerie stillness to the music, which never feels completely at peace, not least because of the machine-like repeated notes that contrast with its smooth, lyrical lines. The final movement, *Allegro molto risoluto* [5], was considered by Lyatoshynsky to be a release from earlier tensions. It opens with a resolute march-like theme and features some ecstatic writing, eventually leading to a section marked ‘with triumph’. At the end of the movement, the theme from the first movement re-appears, as if challenging the triumph, but it is overpowered in the last bars as an emphatic statement of the last-movement theme claims final victory.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Natalia Zinchenko, ‘Вспомним Лятошинского’ (‘Let’s Remember Lyatoshinsky’), *День* (“The Day”), Kyiv, 13 April 2011.

## YEVHEN STANKOVYCH

b. 1942

### Two Pieces for Violin and Cello (1972)

Yevhen Stankovych, one of Ukraine's most prominent contemporary composers, serves as the head of the composition department at the National Music Academy of Ukraine (formerly the Kyiv Conservatorium of Music). He studied at the Kyiv Conservatorium, where his teachers included Boris Lyatoshynsky, and he continued the avant-garde musical development that Lyatoshynsky had begun in the 1920s. Nevertheless, the strong influence of Ukrainian folk traditions is noticeable in his output and he, along with another of his teachers, Myroslav Skoryk, embraced the 'neo-folkloric' wave that swept through Ukraine in the 1960s. In 1978 he was at the centre of a controversial demonstration of the continued repressive policies by the Moscow authorities towards Ukrainian culture when his folk opera *When the Fern Blooms* had its premiere cancelled by a government letter in the lead-up to the performance, with subsequent destruction of sets and costumes.

The 'Two Pieces' for violin and cello were written two years after Stankovych finished his studies. They are miniatures, lasting only a few minutes, but they project a powerful degree of character and demonstrate Stankovych's firm grasp of style. The first piece, marked *Molto andante, molto piano* [6], is deeply atmospheric and embraces dissonant intervals such as the major seventh and minor second. In the outer sections, the violin and cello take turns to provide melodic commentary, supported by a still accompaniment of sustained notes. Scattered, erratic melodic fragments create a feeling of uncertainty, at times reminiscent of Bartók's night-music style. An explosion of sound creates a dramatic middle section, where complex polyrhythms are explored by a notation which has the two instruments rarely coinciding as they plough their way



through repeated dissonances. The second piece, marked *Presto* [7], begins with a furious exchange between the two instruments, alternating notes in constantly changing metres, emphatically articulated by accents and *ff* markings. Expanding on the fragmented nature of the melodic writing of the first piece, the music of the second goes through seven short sections of contrasting material before returning to finish with its opening theme. The break-neck pace means that the music doesn't dally on any section for long before it is catapulted onwards to its next destination; it's a powerful flurry of musical activity condensed into just over 90 seconds.

### VASYL BARVINSKY

1888–1963

#### **Piano Trio No. 1 in A minor (1910)**

The music of Vasyl Barvinsky offers a unique combination of the Ukrainian national style (as pioneered by Mykola Lysenko), French impressionism and the Czech school of Vítěslav Novák (1870–1949), since Barvinsky studied in Prague. His music became 'extremely influential and was vigorously discussed in most European countries in the pre-war years.'<sup>6</sup> His orchestral *Ukrainian Rhapsody*, written in 1911, was the first wholly instrumental work composed in western Ukraine and his chamber music is especially noteworthy, not least because it features some of the earliest explorations of chamber genres by a Ukrainian composer. His chamber output included two string quartets, two piano trios, a piano quintet, a piano sextet and two sonatas (one for violin and one for cello), although one each of the string quartets and piano trios, as well as the violin sonata, were lost after his arrest by the NKVD (the forerunner of the KGB) in 1948 and the burning of his



<sup>6</sup> Dagmara Turchyn-Duvirak, 'Kyiv, the 1920s, and Modernism in Music', in *Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation*, ed. Irena R. Makaryk and Virlana Tkacz, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2010, p. 323.

manuscripts. He was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in the Gulag and, upon his release in 1958, he spent the remaining five years of his life reconstructing the missing works – but he died with that task incomplete.

Some of his works escaped destruction since they had been published in the west before his arrest, but they then lay forgotten for years after his death; such was the case with his Piano Sonata, for example, which was premiered only in 1988, in New York. Even in Ukraine, although he was posthumously 'rehabilitated' by the Soviet government in 1964, his music went unplayed for almost 25 years, though since independence in 1991 there has been a drive to rediscover and embrace the music of this prodigious talent.

His Piano Trio is an early work, dating from the time of his studies in Prague: it was composed when Barvinsky was only 22 years old. It shows a striking degree of musical maturity, and reveals the influence of Ukrainian folk music on the output of the composer even at this young age. The work begins with a lone cello melody in an *Andante sentimentale* introduction [8] which pre-emptively summarises the main themes of the movement before the noble and spirited first theme, *Allegro energico*, begins the journey in earnest. The character is infused with the optimism and vibrancy of youth, as well as long flowing melodies that demonstrate Barvinsky's talent for lyricism. The second movement, *Andante* [9], is reminiscent of a dumka, a form of Ukrainian epic poetry, similar to a ballad, often based on a historical narrative. Dumkas were sung by blind singers called *kobzari* who would travel the countryside, performing their music accompanied by a traditional Ukrainian string instrument, the *bandura*. It's a form that was enthusiastically employed by other composers, Dvořák the best-known among them, and there is a definite sense of a narrative as the movement unfolds, with numerous episodes ranging from the heroic to the contemplative. The third and final movement, *Allegro giocoso* [10], is where folk elements can be heard most clearly: it is based on a Ukrainian dance called the *kolomyika*, which originated in the Hutsul sub-culture of the Carpathian mountains in south-west Ukraine. Bursting with a sparkling energy, the character has a definite twinkle in the eye, and the writing shows a masterful blending of traditional classical composition with Ukrainian folk-music influences.

The Ukrainian-Australian violinist **Markiyán Melnychenko** has been described as ‘an artist of patrician sensibility, spectacular technique’, and ‘possessing an extraordinary combination of bravura, brains and elegance’. He has served as Principal First Violin with the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra and Lecturer in Violin at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, where he is currently completing a Ph.D.

He has performed in seventeen countries, with solo performances in Alice Tully Hall in New York and the Kennedy Centre in Washington, D.C., and has made a number of solo appearances with orchestras, among them the Lviv Philharmonic Orchestra, Kobe City Chamber Orchestra, Ukrainian Festival Orchestra, Melbourne Chamber Orchestra, Corpus Medicorum, Canberra Symphony Orchestra, Zelman Symphony Orchestra and Orchestra Victoria. He has been broadcast on ABC Classic FM, 3MBS FM and Radio NZ, and has released recordings on the Tall Poppies (2019) and Naxos (2020) labels. The first volume of his *Postcards from Ukraine* appeared from Toccata Next in 2025.

In 2013 he was selected to perform in a quartet at the US Capitol for the Inaugural Luncheon at Barack Obama’s Presidential Inauguration. He is a multiple first-prize winner in national and international competitions, including the Melbourne Recital Centre National ‘Great Romantics’ competition and the Oleh Krysa International Violin Competition in Ukraine. He was also awarded the ‘Australian Development Prize’ from the Michael Hill International Violin Competition in 2013. In 2019 he was awarded the Dr Iain C. Medgett Churchill Fellowship.

He obtained his Bachelor and Masters of Music at the Eastman School of Music under the tutelage of Oleh Krysa. He was additionally awarded Eastman’s Performer’s certificate and the highly prestigious Artist Certificate, being the first violinist to receive this award in over 50 years. Additional studies have been at the Australian National Academy of Music with Alice Waten and William Hennessy, and also with Cyrus Forough.

[markiyanmelnychenko.com](http://markiyanmelnychenko.com)



**Peter de Jager** is a pianist, harpsichordist and composer based in Melbourne. His career has encompassed every style of western classical music as well as music theatre and cabaret. He is in demand as a solo and collaborative keyboardist, and has had compositions commissioned by several major Australian ensembles.

Career highlights include winning the inaugural Australian International Chopin Competition in 2011; being placed second in the Australian National Piano Award in 2016; commissioning Chris Dench's monumental 98-minute Piano Sonata, for the performance of which he was the recipient of an APRA AMCOS Art Music Award; performing the complete keyboard works of Xenakis in the Melbourne Festival to rave reviews in 2017; and co-writing and performing *Reception: The Musical* with Bethany Simons.

He is currently on staff at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music as a collaborative pianist, and teaches at the Australian Institute of Music. Projects include completing a Ph.D. in Spanish Renaissance music, singing in the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Choir (and occasionally playing the piano in rehearsals), and learning the oud.

**Stewart Kelly** is a pianist, artistic director and advisor, teacher and entrepreneur. He is founder and artistic director of Music by the Springs, a chamber-music festival held in rural Victoria each February and the owner of House of Pianos, an important piano showroom in Melbourne.

As a pianist he works principally in chamber music and art-song and collaborates with many of Australia's finest musicians and singers, performing across Australia at festivals and leading concert series. Recent recital partners include the violinists Francesca Hiew, Elizabeth Layton, Markiyana Melnychenko and Sophie Rowell, the



violinists Caroline Henbest and Christopher Moore, the cellists Blair Harris and Josephine Vains and the bassist Emma Sullivan and singers including Douglas Kelly, Michael Petrucci, Sam Sakker and Sofia Troncoso.

For seven years he presented 'Stewart Kelly and Friends' at the Melbourne Recital Centre, and his career has taken him across Australia and to performances in China, Italy, New Zealand, the UK and the USA. He also works as collaborative pianist for students of leading string and voice teachers and remains a casual staff member of the Melbourne Conservatorium at Melbourne University. He is regularly engaged to give guest classes and master-classes and as an adjudicator for prizes and competitions.

Stewart Kelly was Artistic Director for the Renaissance Tours Festival of Chamber Music in 2022 and directed the Con Brio concert series at Home of the Arts, on the Australian Gold Coast, for seven years. He also enjoys leading music itineraries for Renaissance Tours, Australia's leading cultural-tour company, combining his love of travel and the arts and presenting lectures on the programming.

He is a graduate of the Queensland University of Technology, the Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University and the Australian National Academy of Music. He holds a Bachelor of Music with distinction and a Master of Music Studies, obtained while studying under the principal guidance of Stephen Emmerson, Diane Selmon, Gillian Wills and Timothy Young. In recent years he has been mentored by the legendary song pianist Graham Johnson OBE.

**Josephine Vains** is a versatile and engaging performer, heard regularly in concert around Australia and overseas as a cellist and chamber musician. She has worked with myriad artists on diverse projects including piano trio/quartet/quintet, string quartet, opera, Baroque ensembles, contemporary and electronic music and Argentine tango music.

She is a founding member of Firebird Trio, currently presenting innovative and engaging programmes around Australia. Equally at home on modern and period instruments, she performs and records regularly with other ensembles including Academia Arcadia,



the Australian Romantic and Classical Orchestra, the Elysium Ensemble, Kammermusik, Ludovico's Band, the Melbourne Baroque Orchestra and the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra.

In Australia she has performed for the Australian Digital Concert Hall, Melbourne Recital Centre, Musica Viva, the Sydney and Melbourne Arts Festivals, Noosa Long Weekend, Castlemaine and Port Fairy Festivals, Woodend Winter Arts and Organs of the Ballarat Goldfields Festivals. International performances include the Musicfest Vancouver, the Hanover Brahms and Schumann Festivals, the White Nights Festival in St Petersburg and, more recently, at the Longyou Caves Festival in China and the Akaroa Chamber Music Festival in New Zealand.

Josephine Vains features on a number of labels, including the Royal Children's Hospital Hush, ABC Classics, Resonus Classics and Tall Poppies. In 2020 she was the winner of the Moreland Award for Arts and Culture for her contribution to community during the Covid-19 lockdown with a series of Letterbox Concerts. She is a Laureate of the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition in 1999 with Trio 303, and was the winner of the inaugural National Chamber Music Competition. She has Honours and Masters degrees in modern and historical performance from Melbourne, Germany and Switzerland.

She performs on a Thomas Kennedy Cello, made in London in 1850 and a Thomas Dodd Cello from 1800, also made in London.

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## POSTCARDS FROM UKRAINE Volume Two: Chamber Music

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### VIKTOR KOSENKO

1896–1938

#### **Violin Sonata, Op. 18** (1927)

1 I *Allegro*

2 II *Andantino semplice*

**18:19**

10:48

7:31

### BORYS LYATOSHYNSKY

1895–1968

#### **Violin Sonata, Op. 19** (1926)

3 I *Allegro impetuoso – Tempo precedente –*

4 II *Sostenuto e tranquillo*

5 III *Allegro molto risoluto*

**21:14**

8:02

7:52

5:20

### YEVHEN STANKOVYCH

b. 1942

#### **Two Pieces for Violin and Cello** (1972)\*

6 No. 1 *Molto andante, molto piano*

7 No. 2 *Presto*

**6:35**

4:58

1:37

### VASYL BARVINSKY

1888–1963

#### **Piano Trio No. 1 in A minor** (1910)

8 I *Andante sentimentale – Allegro energico*

9 II *Andante*

10 III *Allegro giocoso (alla Kolomyika)*

**26:57**

12:08

6:52

7:57

**TT 73:19**

**Markiyany Melnychenko, violin**

**Josephine Vains, cello** 6–10

**Peter de Jager, piano** 1–5

**Stewart Kelly, piano** 8–10

\*FIRST RECORDING