



Sofia Gubaidulina



Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky



Igor Stravinsky



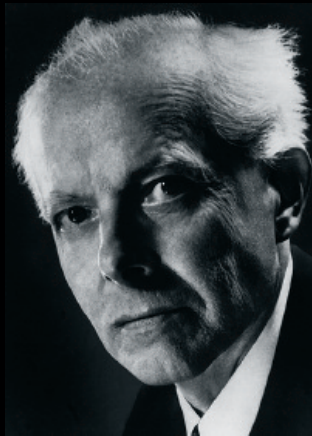
Witold Lutosławski



Krzysztof Penderecki



Dmitri Shostakovich



Béla Bartók



György Ligeti

Foreign Correspondence

BY MATTHEW BARKER

CURTIS TRAVELS TO THE LAND OF REVOLUTIONS AND ORTHODOXY, ICONS AND SAMOVARS, TO EXAMINE THE VAST MUSICAL CULTURE OF RUSSIA AND EASTERN EUROPE.



György Kurtág



Sergei Rachmaninoff

Music is at the heart of cultural identity. It's a personal diary, a mirror, and a history book; a time machine and a passport. Musical languages differ from culture to culture, but they are all part of a greater lexicon that crosses borders and centuries. Performing the music of the Second Viennese School, or Paris between the world wars, allows for a deeper understanding about people and events from those periods. And rightly, a study of their history and culture further informs the music. These have been the aims of Curtis's all-school projects, which focus on significant times, places, and artists—and the music that embodied them.

The 2013–14 project, "Russia: A Land and Its Influence," is well underway, with coursework in Russian history, art, literature, dance, and film providing

The orchestra's April concert is "an important opportunity for our students to take the measure of Russia's enormous contributions to culture in general, and music in particular," says Ignat Solzhenitsyn.



Ignat Solzhenitsyn conducts the Eastern-inflected April concert of the Curtis Symphony Orchestra.
PHOTO: DARIO ACOSTA

both context and a framework for the students' ongoing musical dialogues with our planet's largest nation and its neighboring regions. "Russia has had such a massive influence all over the world and Europe," says Curtis President Roberto Díaz, "not just artistically, but politically."

In the past century alone this global powerhouse was at the center of a series of revolutions, uprisings, world wars, and cold wars—events which have brought change "not smoothly, but in fits and spasms," says Díaz. Out of great conflict came great music and musicians, and throughout that time Russia's turbulent relationship with the West left a considerable artistic impact on both cultures, as well as regions that were erratically created and divided throughout the Eastern bloc.

The scope of this project, wider in both time and geography than all of the previous all-school projects combined, allows for diverse explorations revealing very different influences from Russian culture. This was evident in the two major Russian works that headlined the opening Curtis Symphony Orchestra concerts in October. Curtis alumnus Michael Stern, music director of the Kansas City Symphony, guided the orchestra through Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* and Stravinsky's contemporary watershed, *The Rite of Spring*. Those performances set the tone for an entire season of orchestral repertoire tied to the all-school project.

ORCHESTRAL JOURNEYS

January's Curtis Symphony Orchestra concert ventured further into the 20th century with all its tumultuous developments: Shostakovich's epic Symphony No. 7, "Leningrad," highlighted a program that also included Hungarian composer Béla Bartók's Concerto for Two Pianos, Percussion, and Orchestra and the overture to Mikhail Glinka's opera *Ruslan and Ludmila*, both led by conducting fellow Kensho Watanabe. (The Shostakovich was conducted by Kensho's mentor conductor, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra; see page 11.)

The orchestra's upcoming April 13 concert features another special collaboration, this time with Curtis faculty member and alumnus Ignat Solzhenitsyn. The program opens with Stravinsky's early showpiece *Fireworks*, followed by the U.S. premiere of Krzysztof Penderecki's Concerto doppio featuring violinist Benjamin Schmid and violist Roberto Díaz. The finale is Tchaikovsky's late masterwork, the Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique," extolled by Solzhenitsyn as "a revered signpost of Russian culture."

The Moscow-born pianist and conductor brings a unique perspective to the podium as a lifelong traveler between East and West. The son of Nobel Prize-winning Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, he approaches this repertoire with passionate enthusiasm. "I think it's an important opportunity for our students to take the measure of Russia's enormous contributions to culture in general, and music in particular," says Solzhenitsyn. "It's stunning to consider the meteoric evolution of Russian 'academic' music, from virtually non-existent in 1813 to a world-leading position in 1913"—the year of *The Rite of Spring's* premiere—"to universally known and loved in 2013."

Performances of modern and contemporary music have flourished at Curtis in recent years, aided by a growing number of composer residencies. This spring's residency underscores the emphasis on Russia and Eastern Europe, as the esteemed Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki visits Curtis during his 80th-birthday season. Mr. Penderecki will work with Curtis students both in the classroom and on stage as he oversees the Curtis 20/21 Ensemble in a program of his own music to be performed in Zankel Hall in New York on March 20 and Gould Rehearsal Hall at Curtis on March 22.

Penderecki "is one of the most significant composers of the 20th century—or really any century," says David Ludwig, dean of artistic programs and artistic director of Curtis 20/21. "With his early works he brought a new language of notating music that allowed sounds that had never been heard before to happen." He adds that Mr. Penderecki's influence "is heard from popular music, to American composers young and old, to the many film scores that have used his compositions."

Along with the portrait concerts, the extended visit allows for a more lasting impression on the students as they learn first-hand to speak the composer's musical language. "The



Flutist Tim Munro (right) of eighth blackbird rehearsed Sofia Gubaidulina's *The Garden of Joy and Sorrow* with violist Yoshihiko Nakano and harpist Anna Odell for a November residency recital with the Curtis 20/21 Ensemble. PHOTO: PETE CHECCHIA

A mid-November visit by eighth blackbird focused on works by the Russian Gubaidulina, Penderecki and his fellow Pole Lutosławski, and the Hungarians Kurtág and Ligeti.

opportunity to work with a living legendary composer like Penderecki is a unique experience that musicians get rarely in their lifetimes,” says Dr. Ludwig. “Someday these students will be teachers themselves, and this week spent with Maestro Penderecki will be something that they will be able to share with their own students.”

CONNECTIONS BOTH BROAD AND DEEP

Myriad other performances are being offered this season, both at home and abroad, in conjunction with the all-school project, from the Music in the Galleries series at the Philadelphia Museum of Art to the dozens of solo and chamber works performed in historic Field Concert Hall as part of Curtis’s Student Recital Series. A mid-November visit by eighth blackbird, the perpetually bracing contemporary sextet, now in the second year of its residency at Curtis, featured a collaborative recital with Curtis 20/21 in a program highlighting Russia and Eastern Europe. Works by Sofia Gubaidulina, Penderecki and his fellow Pole Witold Lutosławski, and the Hungarians György Kurtág and György Ligeti presented connected yet contrasting approaches to the music of that region. American composer Steven Stucky made a noteworthy appearance on that program in the form of his ravishing song cycle, *The Stars and Roses*, set to poems by Polish author Czesław Miłosz.

It’s a huge amount of music, but Mr. Díaz sees each work leading students and audiences towards a deeper connection to this music and culture—in the same way he cultivated his own appreciation for Russian repertoire and culture as a member of the National Symphony Orchestra through concert tours with its then-music director Mstislav Rostropovich, who was also once a Curtis cello faculty member. Mr. Díaz believes “when you have a place that really fascinated so many of us and is so important to what we do, it’s an incredible opportunity to spend some time learning more about it.”

Today there are fewer barriers separating East from West than at any point in history. Until relatively recently, thanks to an on-again, off-again adversarial relationship, Russia was as foreign to many Westerners as the moon. But our current digital world brings distant corners of the globe into our homes and smartphones, allowing for unprecedented exploration into both music and humanity, while revealing our similarities as much as our differences. In music, as Curtis students are learning, there are no barriers.

Says Mr. Solzhenitsyn: “great art is universal by definition. It belongs to us all.” ♦

Matthew Barker is director of recitals at Curtis.

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