

MELODIYA APRIORI

MELODIYA APRIORI WAS A CYCLE OF FOUR MONTHLY CONCERTS HELD IN THE FIRST PART OF THIS SEASON ON THE STAGE OF THE SMALL HALL OF THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY. AS PART OF MOSCOW'S HECTIC MUSICAL LIFE, IT DISTINGUISHED ITSELF AS A NON-PROFIT-MAKING EVENT, ALBEIT SET TO MAKE HISTORY.

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Vadym Kholodenko and Andrei Zhilikhovsky

THIS NEW PROJECT, in which young, multi-award winning, yet largely unrecognized talents, performed little known or completely unknown pieces of music, was bound to ensure a half empty house... and that is exactly what happened. However, this proved to be a worthwhile effort, which provided an ample opportunity to see splendid musicians joined into musical groups set to explore unconventional paths in music and make their mark.

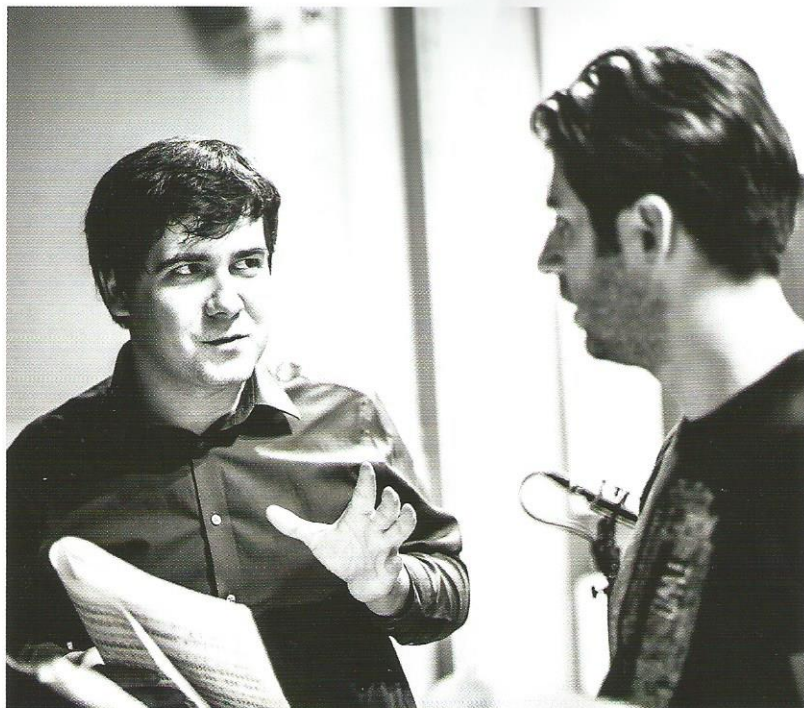
Fortunately, all four concerts have been recorded and will be available on CD and iTunes. The name of the cycle was created from the combination of the names of the two companies responsible for organizing the project. These are the following: Apriori Arts Agency, which has recently been actively promoting Russian musicians of the younger generation and the well-respected *Melodiya*

Company, which after a twenty five-year break decided to revive an old tradition of live recordings noted for their lifelike, non-sterile atmosphere.

Melodiya Apriori was the first experiment in that direction. Mikhail Spassky of the Moscow conservatory took upon himself the important role of sound engineer in this project.

The four programs, featuring two-six performers, were most carefully devised and tailor-made for each participant. The first program *Low Strings* was much more than the alto viola, cello and double bass, but the creative team of Serge Poltavsky, Evgeny Rumyantsev, and Grigory Krotenko on a mission to explore untrodden paths.

The pieces selected for this rather uncommon combination of musical instruments played by an obscure ensemble were from the music



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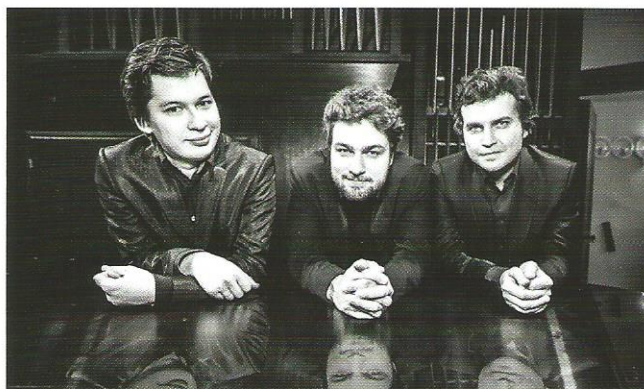
of the seventeenth and twenty first centuries with the mix deliberately made sharply contrasting. Beethoven was followed by Efrain Oscher, the Uruguay-Venezuelan composer; the avant-garde composer Alfred Schnittke was followed by his milder contemporary Vladimir Ryabov; seventeenth century English Baroque composer, Matthew Locke, who composed for the viol, the predecessor of the modern string instruments, was played alongside contemporary composers synchronizing live sound with electronic music.

A wonderful find was a *Concertino* for the three instruments, composed by the German cellist Bernhard Romberg, who visited Russia and, reportedly, gave private music lessons to Prince Nikolai Borisovich Golitsyn.

The second concert, which drew the largest audiences was "Quintet +", now called "The New Russian Quartet," featuring Julia Igonina, Elena Kharitonova, Michael Rudoy, and Alexey Steblev, accompanied by the pianist Ludmila Berlinskaya. The + represented the clarinetist Igor Fedorov, who joined the group for two pieces out of the four. This time, instead of great rarities, the program included the acclaimed masterpieces of the twentieth century music: the Shostakovich *Piano Quintet* and Prokofiev's *Overture on Hebrew Themes*. Music by those celebrated composers was now supplemented by another rarity from the extended Silver Age, the *Piano Quintet* by Nikolai Medtner (he started composing it in 1904 in Russia and completed the piece in 1948 in London) and the brand new Sextet by Alexei Kurbatov, especially written for this program and this musical group.

On the third month of the cycle, the "3x3" program was launched. Three musicians, including the pianist Lukas Geniušas, the violinist Aylen Pritchkin, and cellist Alexander Buzlov, played three widely differing trios written in the first part of the twentieth century: the scarcely recognizable *Trio No. 1* by the romantic seventeen-year-old Shostakovich, *Trio Op. 24* by Mieczysław Weinberg (composed in 1945) and the darkly apprehensive *Trio in A minor* by Ravel, written as a reminder of the outbreak of World War I.

The highlight of the program was a piece by Weinberg, a composer who suffered a hard personal and artistic life. Born in Poland, he managed to escape from his German occupied homeland to the Soviet Union; but his parents and his sister were left behind in Poland and later died in a concentration camp. For a very long time, the composer of twenty two symphonies, seventeen quartets, several operas, ballets and plenty more, was known only for composing music for the animated film "Winnie-the-Pooh" produced in the Soviet Union in 1969. He won world recognition as a brilliant composer only in the last decade. Finally, his fame crossed the borders of Russia and resonated so well with Russian audiences that several theatres are staging his operas this season. As a younger contemporary



Aylen Pritchkin, Lukas Geniušas, Alexander Buzlov



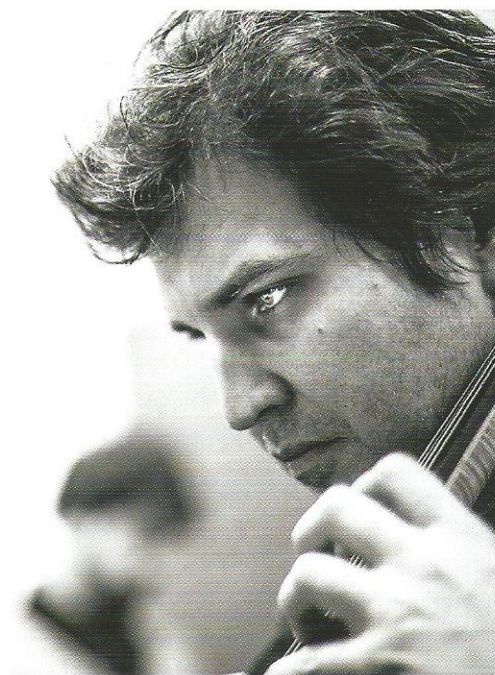
New Russian Quartet, Igor Fedorov, Ludmila Berlinskaya and Elena Kharakdidzyan

of Shostakovich he was for a long time considered a mere epigone. But his artistic individuality was later reassessed. He was rediscovered as more reckless, more intense, and free-spirited than the man he was believed to be emulating.

So the young musicians who undertook to play his exceedingly tormented music in which the twentieth century thunderously reverberated, spared no effort in delivering the composer's message. Their performance of the Weinberg *Trio* enjoyed most stunning success.

Another impressive performance at the finale of the program was the debut of the new group *Liederabend*, featuring two bright musicians who would probably never have met, but for *Melodiya Apriori*.

After winning the Van Cliburn competition in Texas, pianist Vadym Kholodenko had previously paid only flying visits to Moscow, having been busy touring the world giving solo recitals and concerts. The other member of the twosome was baritone Andrei Zhilikhovsky, who worked up the ladder from the Bolshoi Theatre's Youth program to the main troupe of the Bolshoi. His impressive career as an opera singer, now in full-swing, encompasses



Alexander Buzlov



Serge Poltavsky, Evgeny Rummyantsev, Grigory Krotchenko


Andrei Zhilikhovsky, Elena Kharakidzyan (recitals' producer),
Vadym Kholodenko, Mikhail Spassky (sound engineer)

leading roles in Tchaikovsky, Mozart, and Puccini operas. The two musicians met through their mutual admiration of Hugo Wolf, a dedicated fan of Wagner and post-romantic follower of the Austro-German tradition of song lyrics, who over his short life wrote 300 songs, rarely performed in Russia. The composer was very particular when selecting lyricists, similarly when going into the psychological details of the solo parts and accompaniment. His method was notable as much for a perfect balance between the parties in the ensemble as for a preference for the piano. Therefore, celebrated pianist Vadym Kholodenko's choice of Wolf's music alongside with music by Alban Berg and Paul Hindemith comes as no surprise.

Andrei Zhilikhovsky faced his own problem, as he had to adjust his routine of acting on a spacious opera stage, to performing in a small chamber concert room; besides he had to use a coach to learn German pronunciation, which was vital for an effective performance.

The composer referred to his songs as "poems for voice and piano" as he put special emphasis on reciting skills. To describe the results of this joint musical venture, formed just a week before the concert, as "impressive" would be an understatement.

Eighteen songs by Hugo Wolf on poems by Edward Mörike performed by Andrei Zhilikhovsky and Vadym Kholodenko were followed by *Morgen* by Richard Strauss as an encore. Passion, elegance, and rapport, along with a deep insight into every emotional curve and subtlety of language, shone through this unique performance.

Liederabend (an evening of songs) proved to be *Liederabend* indeed.