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## Editorial

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They told Filipp Herschkowitz that, according to a certain fortune-teller, the end of the world was due to take place on the fifth of August. 'That's impossible,' said Herschkowitz. 'The end of the world has already happened. We are all living after the end of the world.'

Viktor Suslin

*Tempo* concluded its 50th anniversary editorial by affirming its disbelief in 1989's briefly fashionable concept of 'the end of history'. How distant that year's certainties seem: we are clearly in not for an absence of history, but a surfeit of it. And not just 'new' history either, but the re-writing of the old as testimony of various kinds accrues from those countries which for so long have had to make do with a single official version.

Symptomatic of Western fascination with the transformations overtaking Eastern Europe (which will, inevitably, transform us too) is the keen attention we now direct at contemporary composers in the Soviet Union: the plethora of festivals, broadcasts, recordings and articles devoted to the work of Denisov, Schnittke, Gubaidulina and others (most recently the Georgian, Giya Kancheli). The current issue of *Tempo* seeks to do something different. Reflecting the new 'openness' in matters of recent history, it explores the conditions which engendered the current Soviet avant-garde.

Three men in particular are glimpsed here, from several different angles: Shostakovich, the central creative figure of Soviet music; Tikhon Khrennikov, the leading representative of its official regimentation; and a figure of the utmost obscurity, the Romanian exile Filipp Herschkowitz, who turns out to have been crucial for the younger composers who now so absorb our attention.

Western commentators remain fascinated by Shostakovich above all other Soviet musicians. The struggle still rages for possession of his memory, both in the USSR and outside it (the emergence of the 'anti-Zhdanov' cantata *Rayok*, which appears to supply such wonderful ammunition for political controversy, demonstrates that all too clearly). The lifelong self-censorship practised by this profoundly ambiguous figure, once represented as a Soviet

lackey and now in danger of canonization (at least as a 'holy fool'), has long enabled others to project their own ideals, prejudices and complexes onto him, even claim him as their personal property. By now this sufferer and determined survivor under a not-quite-unique tyranny almost disappears beneath competing symbolisms and 'interpretations'. It does him no better service to represent his works entirely as coded protest (a level that is unquestionably present), sermons on the abundant evil of Stalinism, than did the old Soviet accounts of them in terms of brawny proletarian heroism and socialist utopia (perhaps also present on occasion). That is to practise an equal but contrary reductionism, substituting an horrific cliché for a banal one. If any serious underlying message emerges once we scrape away the faecetiae of *Rayok*, it is surely Shostakovich's contempt for those who think that music exists to fulfil any such subservient role.

We badly need a study of Shostakovich as a composer (albeit one operating under hideous pressures) and not as a metaphor for any of his commentators' personal cultural and political obsessions. Why is it that concert audiences the world over have taken this man's music - an enigmatic maze of tonal, structural, and stylistic ambiguities - so thoroughly to their hearts: so that he may be the most-performed composer of the 20th century, as his Fifth Symphony (that so-called 'Soviet Artist's Reply to Just Criticism') is certainly the most-played 20th-century symphony? If the answer is the 'obvious' one - that he was a great composer - then ultimately the integrity of his music *as music* transcends his human experience and conduct under tyranny, however profoundly they helped to shape it. And in this context integrity is not a matter of moral certainties but of pursuing the practice of one's art, at all its levels, to the utmost of one's abilities. It remains by no means clear what *kind* of great composer Shostakovich was. An uneven one, certainly; and even in his most popular, seemingly straightforward, harmonically and melodically 'conservative' works, one who reflects a very modern sensibility - who offers no certainties whatever, and refuses to reconcile

irreconcilable expressive impulses. The music seeks, if you like, to go on living even after the end of the world.

Oddly enough it seems to have been Arnold Schoenberg, of all people (but who better?), who uttered, presciently, the ideal epitaph on Shostakovich (and by extension all Soviet composers). In a letter of 1944, written in ignorance of much that we now know, he commented:

... I still think Shostakovich is a great talent. It is perhaps not his fault that he has allowed politics to influence his compositorial style. And even if it is a weakness in his character - he might be no hero, but a talented musician. In fact, there are heroes, and there are composers. Heroes can be composers and vice versa, but you cannot require it.

It is in that spirit that the present issue of *Tempo* offers itself as a series of footnotes to some future history of 20th-century Russian music.

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## Berthold Goldschmidt

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### 'Brief Encounter, 1931'

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In the Spring of 1931 the German section of the ISCM staged a small-scale festival at the old-fashioned, but horticulturally attractive spa of Pyrmont in Lower Saxony. Apart from a witty and graceful Violin Concerto by my friend and co-student from Schreker's masterclass at the Berlin Academy of Music, the Polish-American Jerzy Fitelberg (son of the renowned conductor of the Warsaw Philharmonic, Grzegorz Fitelberg), the quality of the works performed was rather poor. They were certainly lacking in colour against the background of rare azaleas and bulging rhododendrons .... My own piece, now (luckily) lost for ever - a *Promenadenmusik* for small orchestra, meant to flatter the 'genius loci' - was a flop, though Aaron Copland and Marc Blitzstein were both generous about it.

Making their acquaintance was not the only pleasant outcome of this otherwise low-profile venture. A few days later, back in Berlin, the fact that I had conducted the Dresden orchestra with some success resulted in a phone-call from the Busoni pupil Wladimir Vogel: who, being half-Russian, worked as liaison officer in cultural matters concerning the exchange of artists between the Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union. I was told that owing to the favourable press I had had for my conducting, the Leningrad Philharmonic was offering me some concerts during their summer season, partly open-air events. I gladly accepted, but because of certain professional commitments I could manage the requested dates only with the help of air travel. Vogel had to ask his opposite number - and back came the nicely inflated reply: '*Luftschiff für Goldschmidt bewilligt*' (airship for Goldschmidt

granted). Financially this was a bold step by the Leningrad authorities, as hard currency was involved.

Direct air routes between Berlin and Leningrad did not exist in those days; I had therefore to fly by Lufthansa to Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) in what was then East Prussia, from where a Russian plane would connect with Leningrad. The night-flight from Berlin, equivalent in distance to London-Glasgow, took several hours and I landed roughly (in more than one sense of the word) at 2.00 a.m. Accommodation for the rest of the night was a wooden bench in what looked like a barn but was, in fact, the lounge of Lufthansa's terminal building in 1931. About 7 a.m. somebody called out: 'Our plane is waiting' - it was the voice of my only fellow-passenger. We boarded the small single-engined aircraft, and waved our hands in greeting to the Russian pilot, who was sitting in an open cockpit, his ears protected by a leather helmet.

Hedge-hopping at a very low altitude across the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, one had a good view of many a cow and the mixture of agricultural land and enormous swamps, the former becoming increasingly less cultivated the nearer one got to the Russian border. En route, the plane landed at Riga and Tallin for refuelling and the pilot's refreshments - each time paid for in the requested currency, taken from sealed envelopes in the pilot's pocket. When we came down on a wide meadow studded with molehills, I was invited to disembark as we had reached our destination: Airport Leningrad.