

Alexander Glazunov (1865–1936)

Saxophone Concerto in E flat major, Op.109 (1934)

Alexander Glazunov is a fascinating figure – an authentic musical prodigy (he had his First Symphony premiered at the age of just 16), and a man gloriously and unashamedly out of his time. He stayed stubbornly faithful to his lush Romantic style as the musical world around him was embracing dissonance, atonality and primal rhythm; as director of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, he felt baffled by the modernist music being written by his pupils Prokofiev and Shostakovich, but he was no less supportive of them for that. He stuck it out in Russia for a decade following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, finally emigrating to Paris in 1928 – where he managed to remain blithely unaffected by the city's remarkable cultural ferment.

It was in Paris, though, that he came across the saxophones of the city's Republican Guard band, later feeling inspired to write for the new-fangled instrument – although invented in the 1840s, it had yet to find its feet among classical musicians. But again, when Glazunov wrote for the instrument – in his Saxophone Quartet of 1932, and then in the 1934 Saxophone Concerto – it was in a thoroughly lyrical, old-fashioned way, one that ignored both contemporary classical trends and any hint of jazz.

The Concerto was also inspired by the playing of the German-born virtuoso Sigurd Raschèr, who was insistent in his demands for a Concerto from Glazunov (the composer wrote to a friend that he had written the work 'under the influence of attacks rather than requests from the Danish (sic) saxophonist') and worked with the composer on the solo part. Raschèr went on to work with several other prominent composers on pieces for his instrument, effectively establishing a classical concert repertoire for the saxophone.

David Kettle

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Chamber Symphony in C minor, Op. 110a

[arr. R. Barshai] (1960)

- 1 Largo
- 2 Allegro molto
- 3 Allegretto
- 4 Largo
- 5 Largo

The language of music with its keys and symbols, lends itself perfectly to espionage: spies as well as composers have hidden messages on manuscript paper. For some, like Schumann, it was a game; for Shostakovich, there were times when the only way he could express himself fully was through covert signals. 1959–60 was just such a time.

At the height of the Cold War, Shostakovich found himself forced to travel abroad as a Soviet cultural ambassador despite his loathing of the establishment. To cap it all, in 1959 he was also forced to join the despised Party. He travelled to Dresden to work on a film, but hit writer's block with the soundtrack. He turned his attention instead to a string quartet, and completed it in three days.

On return to Moscow, he declared that he would dedicate it to himself In Memoriam. Then he threatened to commit suicide. Writing of this music in 1960, in a letter to his friend the publisher Isaak Glickman, Shostakovich sounds on the verge of breakdown: "Since coming home, I've tried to play it through twice, but again the tears started flowing."

The weakness of music as a code is its obliqueness – specific meaning is elusive without explicit clues. But there is enough here for any ears to understand the autobiographical content – and depth and authenticity of his anguish. His musical signature (Dmitri Shostakovich – in standard German notation = D, E-flat, C, B) is ubiquitous, often distorted. Quotations from other works pepper the score: his First, Fifth, Eighth and Tenth Symphonies, his second Piano Trio. Telling is his inclusion of the phrase he used to set the line "Tortured by merciless enslavement" from *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. More universal musical tags chime in – not least the medieval chant for the dead, *Dies Irae*.

It may seem remarkable that a composer would release music as raw and personal as this into the hands of another – but Rudolph Barshai was no ordinary friend. A founding member of the Borodin Quartet, and creator of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, one of his many gifts is the capacity to respond creatively to another composer's work. He immediately perceived 'symphonic' qualities in this new quartet by Shostakovich, and as he remembered it: "Shostakovich saw the score of my orchestration of the Eighth Quartet. He was very happy with it: he was the one who gave it the name of 'Chamber Symphony op. 110a.' "

Barshai would go on to orchestrate three more quartets and, many years later, he arranged Ravel's String Quartet for Scottish Ensemble. It is a measure of the success of his work that this arrangement is as often heard as the original. As for Shostakovich, he managed to overcome the depression and recover his equanimity. And when his time came, in 1975, this was the piece they performed in his honour on the day of his funeral.

Svend Brown

Giya Kancheli (b1935)

Night Prayers (1994)

Georgian composer Giya Kancheli has often been lazily lumped together with the so-called 'holy minimalists' such as Arvo Pärt and Henryk Górecki, and although his music sometimes shares the profound spiritual longing and stillness often found in those composers' works, it's often subtly darker, even at times disturbing.

Born in Tbilisi in 1935, Kancheli initially worked as a composer of music for film and theatre – not an uncommon situation for musicians earning a living under the Soviet system, and one that honed his abilities to conjure hugely evocative, almost cinematic vistas using the simplest of musical means. But following the break-up of the USSR and unrest in his homeland, he emigrated to Berlin and then to Antwerp, where he has lived since 1991.

Exile has become a recurrent theme in his works, as have grief, solitude and nostalgia; his haunting music – often still and strangely brooding, sometimes interrupted by unpredictable, violent outbursts – seems to sum up his homeland's collective suffering.

Kancheli wrote *Night Prayers* in 1992 as the final part of his enigmatically titled *Life Without Christmas*, a four-work meditation on spiritual need. *Night Prayers* was originally scored for string quartet and tape, and in 1994 Kancheli wrote an expanded version for saxophonist Jan Garbarek, with string orchestra and tape. To try to understand the work's slowly unfolding music in terms of developing themes, structure or resolution, though, is to miss the point. Instead, *Night Prayers* is more concerned with mood and emotion, generating a powerfully expressive impact even though very little might seem to be happening – a few layers of sustained notes, a keening saxophone line, some discreet melodic decoration. The soloist occasionally breaks free for more rhapsodic, assertive passages, and improvises against dense string harmonies in a more impassioned section near the middle of piece. In the work's magical concluding moments, the saxophonist is joined by Georgian boy treble Vasiko Tevdorashvili on tape, who sings the yearning invocation 'O Lord, hear my prayer' – in Kancheli's sorrowful words, 'to remind us of the voices of angels we have never heard'.

David Kettle

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

Serenade for Strings in C major, Op. 48 (1880)

- 1 Pezzo in forma di sonatina: Andante non troppo – (Allegro moderato)
- 2 Walzer: Moderato – (Tempo di valse)
- 3 Élegie: Larghetto elegiaco
- 4 Finale (Tema Russo): Andante – Allegro con spirito

In the autumn of 1880, Tchaikovsky was working on two pieces simultaneously. He disparaged one as "loud and noisy," and took it on solely because there was a fat fee on offer; while the other came from the heart. "I am violently in love with this work," he wrote, "and cannot wait for it to be played." These two pieces represent very characteristic but opposite extremes of Tchaikovsky's world. The loud and noisy work was the 1812 Overture, while the labor of love was this *Serenade*, conceived as an homage to Tchaikovsky's idol, Mozart.

His love of Mozart was fanatical. At the age of 10, he heard *Don Giovanni* for the first time and was immediately inspired to become a composer. Describing his *Serenade's* connection to Mozart, he wrote: "It is intended to be an imitation of his style, and I should be delighted if I thought I had in any way approached my model." The model in question could well have been Mozart's own *serenade*, *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*. Both pieces are large-scale, four-movement works – effectively symphonies for strings. (In fact, Tchaikovsky first intended to use this music in a symphony for full orchestra, but in a moment of inspiration he realized that the music was better suited to strings alone.) There the direct resemblances end.

Tchaikovsky's music is very much of its own time and place, with allusions to Strauss waltzes in the second movement and two folk songs in the Finale that hint at Russian nationalism.

Tchaikovsky nonetheless approaches the spirit of Mozart by creating music of direct popular appeal and also clever, intricate thought. The piece opens and closes with a theme constructed out of the simplest building block available to a composer: a descending C-major scale.

Any beginner piano student could pick it out. But listen closely and you will hear this humble scale permeating the fabric of the music, always handled with such brilliant imagination that your ear never tires.

Svend Brown

Amy Dickson

Twice Grammy-nominated Amy Dickson made history by becoming the first saxophonist and the first Australian to win the 2013 MasterCard Breakthrough Artist of the Year Classic BRIT Award with her third album released on Sony Music. It had previously attained the coveted No. 1 position in the UK classical charts. Sydney-born Amy has spearheaded something of a classical saxophone revival on account of her unique take on the genre and her distinctive approach to the instrument, and has won several major competitions which have never been won before by a saxophonist.

Recognized widely for her remarkable tone and exceptional musicality, she has performed throughout the world in venues such as Wigmore Hall, the Royal Albert Hall and the Sydney Opera House. She has also performed as a soloist with many orchestras including the Philharmonia, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the Vienna Chamber Orchestra.

Amy has released five critically-acclaimed recordings for Sony Music. She is deeply committed to the development of new repertoire for the saxophone, whilst also championing existing repertoire.

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