

Leonidas MELNIKAS

Maximilian Steinberg: Irony of Fate

Maksimilianas Šteinbergas: likimo ironija

Abstract

The article analyses and evaluates the artistic work of Maximilian Steinberg (1883–1946), a major figure of Russian musical culture of the first half of the XX century who was born and raised in Vilnius. The article focuses on a reconstruction, based on historical documents, of his connections with Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky, and his pupil Shostakovich, as well as with notable Lithuanian musicians Stasys Šimkus, Juozas Tallat-Kelpša, Jurgis Karnavičius and Juozas Žilevičius. In the context of reviewing historical circumstances and Vilnius sources, an attempt is made to analyse the formation of specific traits of Steinberg's personality, to point to views of art characteristic of him, and to trace the formation of his life philosophy. The article cites memoirs of both Steinberg and those who knew him closely, evaluates his place in the musical culture of the first half of the 20th century, and addresses views of Steinberg most often found in modern musicological literature.

Keywords: Steinberg, Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky, Shostakovich, music of the first half of the 20th century, Lithuanian music, Vilnius, Lithuanian Jerusalem.

Anotacija

Straipsnyje analizuojama ir vertinama Vilniuje gimusio ir užaugusio įtakingo XX a. I pusės Rusijos kompozitoriaus ir pedagogo Maksimiliano Šteinbergo (1883–1946) kūrybinė veikla. Remiantis istoriniais dokumentais, rekonstruojami jo ryšiai su Nikolajumi Rimskiu-Korsakovu, Igoriu Stravinskiu, Dmitrijumi Šostakovičiumi, primenama apie pas jį studijavusius Stasį Šimką, Juozą Tallat-Kelpšą, Jurgį Karnavičių, Juozą Žilevičių. Susiklosčiusių istorinių aplinkybių ir vilnietiško ištakų kontekste aiškinami M. Šteinbergo asmenybės bruožai, meninės nuostatos ir gyvenimiškos filosofijos formavimosi dėsningumai. Straipsnyje pateikiami autentiški M. Šteinbergo ir jį artimai pažinojusių amžininkų atsiminimai, supažindinama su šiuolaikinių tyrėjų požiūriu į šį muziką, jo vietą XX a. I pusės kultūros procesuose.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: M. Šteinbergas, N. Rimskis-Korsakovas, I. Stravinskis, D. Šostakovičius, XX a. I pusės rusų muzika, lietuvių muzika, Vilnius, Lietuvos Jeruzalė.

Introduction

Sociocultural influences are always brought forth by specific people who by their acts, deeds and thoughts create the conditions which color and drive not only their own lives, but the lives of those with whom fate brings them together. Influences of this kind are an important factor in musical work; furthermore, such influences come not only from thoroughly recognized masters but also from those whose names are not readily recognized, and whose art is less visible. In the process of creation of great music, the only important question is whether fate has placed one at the center in the place and time of such creation: being there, of itself, already distinguishes the musician and makes his contribution to art inarguable and significant.

Maximilian Steinberg (1883–1946) should be thought of as among such musicians. During various periods of his life he was a confidant to Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich. Thus Steinberg himself became a participant in the creative processes which make up the international history of great music. His personality and activity arouses our interest no least because of his pivotal role in the lives of such great musicians.

Although the artistic interaction between Steinberg and his great contemporaries is well established, the nature of the interaction itself can nevertheless be assessed in various fashions. Many questions arise regarding Steinberg's true character and the role he played in the musical culture of his time. The answers to such questions, as a rule, reflect a fairly broad range of opinions. On the one hand, Steinberg is often described as very knowledgeable and erudite; on the other – based on these very same qualities – he is deemed to be a conservative, a traditionalist, a musician although “far from talentless”, is nevertheless “hopelessly academic”¹.

Most writing about the history of music of the first half of the 20th century, especially about Stravinsky and Shostakovich, tends to express a negative assessment of Maximilian Steinberg as a conservative and retrograde. However, many also note that Steinberg was a wonderful expert in his field. It is not my intent in this article to argue for or against either view. My goal is somewhat different: to try to find, in the environment in which Steinberg was formed and from which he emerged, an explanation for the controversial qualities in Steinberg's creative aspect. In other words, I would like to find in the work of this

musician the connection with the cultural traditions of the city of his childhood and youth – Vilnius, then known as ‘Wilno’.

I. The Beginning of a Musical Path

Vilnius

Maximilian Steinberg was born in Vilnius in 1883. His father, Ovsei (Ieshua, Ioshua, Osei, Hosea) Steinberg (1830–1908) was Russia’s most significant Hebraist, a scholar of Talmudic culture, and the author of research works in lexicography and Hebrew. Among his books published in Vilnius are *The Hebrew and Aramaic Etymological Dictionary to the Books of the Old Testament* (1878), *The Full Russian-Hebrew Dictionary* (1880), and *The Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch)* with a word-for-word Russian translation and commentaries (posthumous edition 1914). In his research he started from the idea of the common origin of languages, their inter-borrowings and development through the path of growing complexity. In his view, the sacred language of the Old Testament was at the root of all languages. This is how he formulated his scholarly views:

“The study of the root language of the Book of Books, the language which itself represents the most brilliant incarnation of the creative spirit, the language which, with its wondrous technique and transparency of forms, appears to open to us the innermost secrets of the emergence of the word and to disclose before us the mysterious history of thought, the language which has had the most decisive influence on initial religious writing and then the very ways of thought of the educated peoples of Europe – the study of such a language cannot but be in the highest degree important for everyone who is interested in linguistic science and the history of human civilisation. This is why the study of the root language of the Old Testament from the outset has occupied and still occupies the best minds in the most civilized countries of the world”².

Ovsei Steinberg’s credentials were appropriate to his position. He was the inspector of the Vilnius Jewish Teachers’ Institute – the only educational institution in the Russian empire which prepared teachers for city Jewish schools. Steinberg’s position (the only one of its kind in Russia) was second in importance only to that of the director (or dean), and its sphere of responsibility included issues of education and training for its students. The institute had a special function, since only its graduates could become teachers in city Jewish schools throughout Russia (these were under the jurisdiction of the imperial Ministry of national education). Education here presupposed not only an in-depth knowledge of Judaica, the Hebrew

Bible (Tanakh) and the works of Jewish thinkers, but also faultless knowledge of Russian and excellent credentials in the natural sciences. Thus both the teachers of the institute and its leaders were the subjects of extremely high expectations. Ovsei Steinberg fully met these demands; his authority was unquestionable.

Why such an in-depth presentation of the work and knowledge of the elder Steinberg? It is a key to understanding the environment in which his son, Maximilian, grew up. His father had an excellent education and was given to selfless academic research; although not religiously Orthodox, he kept strong ties with the faith of his people. In his ambitions he completely fit into the stream of Haskalah, the Jewish enlightenment, which in many ways also formed the spiritual qualities and life philosophy of his son.

The circle of the young Maximilian Steinberg was oriented towards spiritual values, knowledge, and the desire to think through and understand the essence of phenomena. Maximilian could not help but be steeped in these very values, all the more so since the family encouraged everything that had the potential to develop the intellect and to enrich the spirit. The younger Steinberg’s openness to perceiving spiritual phenomena served as an important factor in bringing him into the artistic world of music.

Music was an inalienable part of Vilnius’s cultural life. At the turn of the century a respectful attitude towards musicians could clearly be observed in Vilnius, which boasted many wonderful, highly-educated artists who graduated from both Russian conservatories and foreign musical educational institutions. In Vilnius they created the nurturing environment which gave a push for the development of so many extraordinary musical talents. For example: the renowned pianist Leopold Godowsky, who spent his childhood and youth in Vilnius. In his memoirs Godowsky emphasized that he never had “real” teachers and that he learned everything as an autodidact. All the same, he grew up in the Vilnius home of violinist Louis (Chaim) Passinok, an alumnus of the Leipzig Conservatory.

This is how Steinberg himself recalled his musical childhood in Vilnius:

“My youth was filled with music. In the city of Wilno ... music took pride of place. Already during the years in the gymnasium, i.e. in the beginning of the nineties of the last (19th) century, Wilno annually enjoyed Italian opera, which brought forth in concert world-class celebrities. In the summer in the city garden ..., in the large wooden theatre building there were stagings of Russian opera under the direction of Nezlobin³. The artistic level of this theatre was quite high ... In this theatre I first got to hear a whole series of prominent creations of operatic art”⁴.



Wilno, the Jewish Teachers Institute where Ovsei Steinberg worked (postcard from 1913)

During Steinberg's childhood and youth Vilnius was visited by quite a few top-flight musical stars. Concerts were given here by Anton Rubinstein, Alexander Siloti, Sergey Rachmaninoff, Josef Hofmann, Raoul Pugno, Alfred Reisenauer, Pablo de Sarasate, Eugène Ysaÿe, Karl Davydov, Leopold Auer, Fiodor Shaliapin, Leonid Sobinov and many others. Musicians who lived and worked in Vilnius were likewise of fairly high calibre. Concerts and lessons were given by graduates of the St. Petersburg Conservatory including the pianists A. Spasskaya and M. Treskin (the class of Rubinstein), the violinists S. Veinbren, K. Pushilov and Ilya Malkin (the class of Leopold Auer), and the cellist M. Veinbren (the class of Davydov). The Imperial Russian Musical Society ran a musical school, and there were several private musical schools as well.

Steinberg grew up in an enlightened family where his passion for music was encouraged. He took music lessons, engaged in music-making and gave school concerts (one such solo violin recital took place in May 1901 and is mentioned in the history of Lithuanian music by Juozas Gaudrimas⁵). Everything argues that Steinberg's childhood and youth were spent in musical surroundings of excellent quality.

In 1901, having finished the First Vilnius Gymnasium with a gold medal, he was admitted to the natural sciences department of St. Petersburg University and – at the same time – to the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Leaving for the city on the Neva, where during the next six years he dutifully divided his time between the musical classes at the conservatory and the chemical laboratory of the university, he took with him a brilliant humanities education received both in his family and in the gymnasium, as well as musical talent and youthful dreams of success, fame and happiness. Together with all those gifts, however, he could not have helped but bring a deeply hidden, subconscious historical memory of his Jewish ancestors.

Saint Petersburg. Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov

“Thus, I am at once a science student of the university and a modest pupil of the conservatory. Father is quite unhappy with this combination, finding that there is no need to “chase two birds at once” and, in any event, one must first get a general education and see what to do afterwards. However, I am unmoved – I have the possibility of becoming a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, before whom I feel an ever-greater awe, although I have yet to meet him,”⁶ wrote Steinberg in his memoirs.

Steinberg learned of the art of his future hero Rimsky-Korsakov back in Vilnius. He studied the operas *Snegurochka* and *Sadko* based on their piano scores (!), and they amazed him by their novelty and special, previously unheard of style. Even back then he came under the “desire no matter what to become a student of Rimsky-Korsakov and to learn for real the art of musical composition”⁷.

Everything in the actions of the young Steinberg evidenced the consciousness of the choice made by him and a firm desire to achieve the goal he had set. And he succeeded full well. He began his studies at the conservatory in the elementary harmony class of Lyadov, whereas two years later, in the fall of 1903 he was at last admitted to the counterpoint class of Rimsky-Korsakov; still later – his practical composition class. It is probable that in the same year he also met Glazunov and after a time began to audit his classes in reading in keys, later – instrumentation and orchestration⁸.

Steinberg's desire to learn from Rimsky-Korsakov was easily explained. Rimsky-Korsakov was a completely legendary figure and had, at the time, tremendous fame. His activity was so multifaceted and wide, carried such a potential for further development, that even now, a century later, it offers the ability to discover new, previously unappreciated facets. In this connection the renowned musicologist Richard Taruskin has noted with undisguised pleasure, in connection with the establishment of the authorship of the octatonic scale that spread in the music of the first half of the 20th century, that only now “European and American music theory has at last caught up with Rimsky-Korsakov”⁹.

Describing his impressions of his first meeting with Rimsky-Korsakov, Steinberg admitted: “the stern visage of the tall old man with the aureole of world fame, the slightly dry tone of speech – all of this could only increase my anxiety”¹⁰. However, with the closing of the distance between pupil and teacher this impression gradually changed:

“A feeling of the greatest respect for a figure which at first glance was so stern and somewhat dry began to be supplemented by an emotion of great devotion and love, when it turned out that the external cover hid a tremendously soft and kind soul with sensitivity and sympathy towards the smallest setbacks of his pupils”¹¹.

Steinberg became especially close to his professor in the wake of the student disturbances of 1905: in protest of the treatment of the students, Rimsky-Korsakov left the conservatory, and their lessons were transferred to the composer's house at Zagorodny Prospect 28, apt. 39. Soon Steinberg began coming there not only for lessons (by the way, Rimsky-Korsakov continued to give home lessons to Steinberg even after returning to the conservatory). Steinberg became the constant participant of the famous musical evenings held at Rimsky-Korsakov's place on odd Wednesdays of each month. These evenings gathered the flower of musical society of St. Petersburg. At Rimsky-Korsakov's house Steinberg also met his future wife (and the famed composer's daughter) Nadezhda. Stravinsky's *Fireworks* was written for the occasion as a wedding present to them. Incidentally, by allying himself through marriage to the family of the Rimsky-Korsakovs, Steinberg in a unique manner reinstated their connection to Lithuania, since it is known that the Rimsky-Korsakov line goes back to Venceslaus Korsak (Korsakas), who came to Russia from Lithuania in 1390¹² and, it seems, accompanied the princess Sophia (the daughter of Vytautas) for her marriage to the Muscovite duke Vasily (the son of Dmitry Donskoy).

Rimsky-Korsakov took his pedagogic tasks extremely seriously and was quite tight with praise. "If once in a while I praise you in class, this doesn't yet mean that I am all that ecstatic. Otherwise they start to ask in society: is it true that I have student so-and-so, who evinces all the signs of almost genius?"¹³ he admitted to his students. All the more meaningful, then, are the high marks shown by him to Steinberg, who was undoubtedly his most beloved student. The great musician was more and more certain in his high praise and did not conceal this. According to contemporaries, Rimsky-Korsakov "praised Steinberg extremely for his seriousness and conscientiousness"¹⁴, called him a "magnificent musician"¹⁵, someone "greatly gifted"¹⁶, and expressed certainty that "with respect to him, for his composing future there need not be any fear"¹⁷. Rimsky-Korsakov drew his certainty from rich pedagogic experience and lengthy observation of Steinberg, who, in his words, "as Glazunov, never wrote like a student and made every assigned work a composition of its own"¹⁸.

Decades later Igor Stravinsky, first a close friend of Steinberg, but later clearly not a well-wisher, remembered in interviews with R. Craft, with a clear dose of dissatisfaction, how in those long-ago times Rimsky-Korsakov treated him and Steinberg:

"Rimsky was careful then and later not to compliment or encourage with a loose use of the word "talent". In fact, the only composer I ever heard him refer to as talented was his son-in-law, Maximilian Steinberg, who was one of these ephemeral, prize-winning, front-page types, in whose eyes conceit forever burns, like an electric light in daytime"¹⁹.



A fragment of a manuscript of a study by Steinberg which shows handwritten remarks added by Rimsky-Korsakov. The manuscript itself is at The Russian Institute of the History of Arts in St. Petersburg

The high value Rimsky-Korsakov placed on Steinberg and the trust in him turned into a special privilege – he was permitted to work together with the composer. Steinberg remembered that at the end of 1905 Rimsky-Korsakov turned to him with a "request to review the proofs of the piano and orchestral scores of *The Legend* [of the Invisible City of Kitezh]. Need I say how proud I was to have been given such an important task by my favorite teacher? Later, toward the end of September 1906, I received from Nikolay Andreyevich as a gift that very proof of the orchestral score, and two months later – the just-printed piano score"²⁰.

The experience of such cooperation was fully satisfactory to Rimsky-Korsakov and was continued in the preparation of other works for publication. This is what Rimsky-Korsakov wrote in a letter of 28 March 1908 to his publisher B. Yurgenson in connection with another instance of such cooperation:

"when the orchestral score [of the *Golden Cockerel*] is ready, not knowing how many author's copies you normally give, I ask that you give me not less than two of them, since I



Left to right: Igor Stravinsky, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, Nadezhda Rimskaya-Korsakova (daughter married to Steinberg), Maximilian Steinberg, Katerina Stravinsky (wife of Stravinsky)

must give one as a gift to my student, someone close to me, M. O. Steinberg, who always worked with me on the proofs of the piano and orchestral scores, and without whose help it could not be brought into adequate shape; I don't have the right to offer payment to him for this work, and he will not want any"²¹.

Upon Steinberg's graduation from the conservatory, Rimsky-Korsakov gave his student a brilliant, if characteristically laconic, evaluation: "a diverse talent for composition; wonderful technical development; ability to work; knowledge of musical literature"²².

II. Shostakovich's Controversial Teacher

Custodian of the Legacy of Rimsky-Korsakov

In 1907 Maximilian Steinberg completed university, and in 1908 – with a small gold medal - the conservatory. In that same year Glazunov, then the rector of the conservatory, invited Steinberg to become one of the teachers of that renowned school with a clear hint that Steinberg would inherit the teaching practice of both Rimsky-Korsakov and his own. Steinberg had before him the possibility of a brilliant career. The premiere of his First Symphony was a sign of a kind. In the words of Richard Taruskin, "that evening, 18 March 1908, marked Steinberg's official investiture as heir apparent to leadership of the New Russian School, a title to which he also, as Rimsky-Korsakov's son-in-law-elect, had a familial claim"²³.

Steinberg was lit by his first rays of fame, he was full of ideas and brainstormed born in the atmosphere of the "Silver Century", in communing with extraordinary contemporaries – musicians, artists, writers, reformers of the theatre, amongst whom there were both the acknowledged followers of the settled traditions of national romanticism

and the genius creators of Russian symbolism, modernism and "the World of Art". It would seem that his path was set – in the fog of the future there already loomed new opuses: symphonies (in total he created five of them, the first during his student years of 1905–1906), musical-theatrical pieces, and choir, vocal and chamber-instrumental music.

Steinberg's choice, however, turned out to be somewhat different. Endlessly grateful to his teacher, who believed in him and who took him up into the circle of musical "unbelievers" of the time, Steinberg determined his duty to be in worshipping Rimsky-Korsakov's legacy. He worked on the completion of several unfinished compositions of Rimsky-Korsakov. From the first days after the death of Rimsky-Korsakov and to the end of his life he paid great attention to the publication of pedagogical works of his teacher: many times he republished a "corrected and supplemented" and "further corrected and supplemented" textbook on harmony²⁴, which his mentor wrote back in 1886 (the last edition of this textbook during Steinberg's life, issued in 1937, was already the sixteenth!²⁵); in 1913 he published Rimsky-Korsakov's capital work on orchestration²⁶ (it is symbolic, that the second, repeat edition of this "last work"²⁷ (in Steinberg's words) of Rimsky-Korsakov came in 1946²⁸ – the year Steinberg himself died).

The duty to keep safe and propagate the legacy of Rimsky-Korsakov, which never left Steinberg, seemed to unite both the feeling of awe before the teacher and the showing of loyalty by a member of his family "clan". In a wondrous manner this duality, which became inseparable in the work of Steinberg, found its specific expression in the introduction of the first edition of the orchestration work of Rimsky-Korsakov, where the words of homage to teacher and father-in-law alternate with the expression of heartfelt gratitude to his widow (and mother-in-law of Steinberg): "... I want to express the deepest gratitude to Nadezhda Nikolayevna Rimskaya-Korsakova, who entrusted me with editing of this work and thus gave me the opportunity in even a small way to fulfill the sacred duty before the memory of the unforgettable teacher"²⁹.

The key to understanding Steinberg's mission of safe-keeper of traditions is given in his editor's foreword to the second edition of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Orchestration*:

"The editor was faced with a dilemma – whether to publish the book in the form in which it was first published, or to supply it with a series of more or less important additions in various sections which were little developed or not at all addressed by the author. After a certain amount of indecision I decided to leave the work of Rimsky-Korsakov untouched, on the one hand as a historical monument, and on the other as a guide which in its aspect has no equal in

the musical-pedagogic literature, since it is based on the creative experience of the author himself and on the samples of his own composition. An 'automonograph' of this sort is a document of a certain era and an expression of a certain creative method"³⁰.

These words sound most fair and correct when applied to the question of editing a work which had already become, by the moment of its second publication, an important historical document. Unfortunately, Steinberg did not limit the application of this principle to a one-time publishing project. On the contrary, this gained the status of a life philosophy and a universal approach to work, expressing itself in an absolute orientation towards the safekeeping and scholarly conservation of existing accomplishments. This turn from the search for new possibilities of artistic self-expression to the mere variation and endless perfection of earlier, solidified ideas gelled in Steinberg fairly early, in essence prior to the time when he could find his own manner of artistic expression. In 1915 the well-known critic of the time, Yuliy Engel, wrote:

"Yesterday's (sixth) symphonic gathering of the Russian musical society was opened by the dramatic fantasy for orchestra by Maximilian Steinberg. In this piece of the young Petrograd composer, student and son-in-law of Rimsky-Korsakov, there is dramatism, and fantasy, and good orchestral sound – and yet it does not belong to the company of those pieces which have their own visage, which one wants to hear again. This is like a trial, intermediate work before something more significant"³¹.

Steinberg never did take this last decisive step towards positioning his own individual artistic self, although he had seemed to have all the prerequisites for doing so. For him, the status of the safekeeper turned out to be fateful.

Not incidentally, Steinberg began to devote more and more time to teaching. He saw in it his mission and the richest field for his endeavors, and devoted himself entirely to it. He considered it his duty to transfer to students correct and tested knowledge – knowledge he perceived as the great gift of Rimsky-Korsakov. In the name of such knowledge he stopped experimenting; moreover, he dissolved himself in it. By the end of his life he wrote: "I consider myself the continuer of the school of my late teacher Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov"³².

Memoirs of his colleagues and students confirm the perception of Steinberg specifically in the high role of the keeper of traditions of Rimsky-Korsakov. "The true pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, he did much for making eternal the memory of his great teacher"³³, wrote Shaporin, while Kushnarev called him an "outstanding representative of the school of Rimsky-Korsakov"³⁴.

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For almost four decades Steinberg was one of the leading pedagogues of the St. Petersburg (Petrograd/Leningrad) Conservatory. He brought up an enormous number of students. Among them, as if in memory of his Vilnius childhood, were also the leading lights of Lithuanian musical culture – Stasys Šimkus, Juozas Tallat-Kelpša, Jurgis Karnavičius, and Juozas Žilevičius. The Lithuanian cohort can also partially claim Joseph Achron, born in Lazdijai – a brilliant musician whom Arnold Schönberg, a great fan, called the "one of the most underestimated of modern composers"³⁵.

Undoubtedly, Steinberg's most famous pupil was Dmitry Shostakovich. Shostakovich studied in his composition class from 1919 to 1925 and for some time also attended his classes in polyphony, musical form and instrumentation. Shostakovich later wrote: "I can consider myself fully a pupil of M. O. Steinberg"³⁶.

Steinberg as Remembered by Shostakovich

Shostakovich's studies with Steinberg began during a dramatic period of Russian history. However, neither the tragic events of social upheaval and civil war, nor hunger, nor the destruction which characterized this time, could cool the passion of the young musician and his fervent desire to absorb from his teacher deep knowledge and

rich artistic experience. V. Bogdanov-Berezovsky, a close friend of Shostakovich and his fellow student in Steinberg's class, remembered:

"We met in the class of Maximilian Oseyevich Steinberg during our first year in that winter of 1919–1920, when the conservatory building was not heated at all, classes were intermittent and during class everyone sat in hats, galoshes, gloves or mittens taken off only to write on the chalkboard a harmonization of a choral melody or to play a modulation on the icy piano keys. The class, at first quite crowded, quickly melted, but the youngest of the students – calm, polite, steady with all in his demeanor, the modest boy in glasses – attended the classes always notwithstanding and was ahead of all in grades"³⁷.

What attracted Shostakovich to Steinberg, what was most important and what, in contrast, distanced them from each other? There are many very complimentary utterances by Shostakovich about his teacher, unambiguously attesting to the high value Shostakovich placed on his mentor and the recognition of that mentor's role in the process of his own artistic growth.

In the war years while in evacuation in Kuibyshev, Shostakovich related to Flora Litvinova:

"You cannot imagine how much I gained at the Conservatory from Professor Steinberg. He was severe, strict and demanding. At the piano we dissected the scores of the whole world of musical literature. Many students did not like his classes, they said that he dries out everything, dissecting harmony 'down to each bone', but at that time I too liked to dissect thoroughly, what is written there and how"³⁸.

In 1956, a decade after Steinberg's death, Shostakovich wrote of him, remembering his student years:

"I studied with great enthusiasm, I would say even rapturously. Everything that Steinberg taught me I took in greedily, absorbing it like a sponge, all his pointers and advice. Steinberg expertly and sensitively inculcated good taste in his students. It is to him that I am indebted for learning to value and to love good music"³⁹.

In a 1962 article for a collection dedicated to the 100th anniversary of his *Alma Mater*, Shostakovich also did not fail to bring up his teacher:

"Studies in the class of M. O. Steinberg were very interesting. In addition to going through the academic disciplines, including composition, he greatly emphasized general musical development. In his class we played duets and analysed the form and instrumentation of the pieces played. Maximilian Osseyevich clearly and cogently explained everything that had to do with harmony, always pointed our attention to

interesting places in the score in terms of harmony, spliced harmonic taste onto us, developed the ability easily and freely to play any modulation on the piano"⁴⁰.

Shostakovich's extant utterances speak not only of Steinberg's exceptional professional competence, but also of his pedagogical gift. Musical teaching is not, of course, limited to the development of a pupil's professional skills; an even greater measure of attention is paid to the development of the pupil's individual talent. A pedagogue need not and should not "bury" his student under an avalanche of information and various professional "tricks". On the contrary, his goal is to teach the pupil how to make the right choices and to gain self-assurance while the pupil masters new and ever greater possibilities of artistic self-expression.

Steinberg was excellent in this respect, and Shostakovich acknowledged as much when he emphasized the achievements of his mentor. On the nature of the composer's art, he wrote:

"Self-assurance – far from simply a high opinion of oneself – is rather a quality necessary for every composer. This quality is inculcated by degree. And here, the educators of the young play a significant role. ... I am so very grateful to my teachers, M. Steinberg and L. Nikolaev [Shostakovich's piano teacher], who sensitively, skilfully brought forth in their students, including me, this wonderful sense of certainty in one's powers"⁴¹.

One more quality of the pedagogic aspect of Steinberg, which was quite in accord with the musical orientation of Shostakovich, was his love of music-making. During Steinberg's youth, Vilnius, the source of his musical roots, was clearly oriented towards performance art. As noted, it had many good professional musical performers and welcomed many more exceptional musicians on tour. As to composition, in this sphere the successes were rather more modest. It is natural that musical education in the first instance was oriented towards the development of performance skills. The results of such education can be judged based on the brilliance of Godowsky, Heifetz, the brothers Alexander and Mischa Schneider (famed musicians of the Budapest Quartet); like Steinberg, they all made their start in Vilnius.

Music-making skills from Vilnius were used by Steinberg throughout his life, determining important priorities in his future work. Steinberg conducted, was an excellent violinist, violist and pianist, as well as organist⁴². In his student days he visited Leopold Auer's quartet class. While Rimsky-Korsakov was still alive, Steinberg performed on the viola in the household's quartet with Rimsky-Korsakov's sons and their friend N. Sheinin, or played the piano, either solo or in a duet (including with

Stravinsky), playing new works directly from the sheet and immediately discussing and assessing these. Until the end of his life he found joy in music-making, to which he also introduced his students. He often played with Shostakovich, introducing his student in this way to the classical literature.

Possibly thanks to the hours spent with Steinberg, Shostakovich became convinced of the importance to the composer of comprehending music at the performing level. Later he would say:

“Now in Conservatory classes they listen to the set pieces. This is also very important – to listen to wonderful conductors and performers. But something is lost in comparison to playing an arrangement of a symphony on the piano and the study of the score with one’s own eyes. The music you produce with your own hands and within your head and soul is incomparable with anything else”⁴³.

Shostakovich’s words form part of his reminiscences of the lessons taught by Maximilian Steinberg.

The Teacher’s View of his Pupil

Steinberg fully realized the great talent of his pupil and made maximum efforts in order to shore up this talent with knowledge and skills. Being a great pedagogue, he did not question the extraordinary gifts of his pupil even when the latter, in his creative searches, went beyond the usual frameworks. Even though Steinberg disapproved, in the end he did not challenge the right of his pupil to choose his own path. In 1926 in a review made at the time of the completion by Shostakovich of the conservatory program, he wrote:

“During the whole period of study at the conservatory Shostakovich was distinguished by a rare work ethic, reliability, and a responsible view of his duties. On the other hand, Shostakovich is undoubtedly the most talented of the young Leningrad composers. In the latter years he wrote several large compositions... These pieces, which evidence great technical maturity, are marked by a bright, fresh and individual talent. Some of these pieces are planned for publication..., whereas the Symphony will be played at the Leningrad academic philharmonic in a concert of the Association of Modern Music on the 8th of May of this year. Given his youth (he was born in 1906), it is to be hoped that in the future his artistic talent will blossom”⁴⁴.

This evaluation, and especially the mention of the playing of the Symphony (this was Shostakovich’s legendary First Symphony) needs a few additional comments. Steinberg wrote this document at a time when Shostakovich’s big public successes were still a matter for the



A fragment of a manuscript of Shostakovich’s Scherzo Opus 1 (dedicated to Steinberg); the fragment shows handwritten remarks added by Steinberg. The manuscript itself is at the Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture in Moscow

(near) future. By stating unequivocally that Shostakovich was the “most talented youthful composer in Leningrad”, Steinberg expressed his personal view and belief in the exceptional quality of his pupil and put the full weight of his authority in support of Shostakovich.

On the other hand, Steinberg was never a man who remained on the sidelines. He took an active role in the artistic fate of Shostakovich and cared for him not only in respect of his artistic development and professional preparation but, not least, in respect of “pushing” his works.

Having given full due to Shostakovich’s symphony, Steinberg did everything in his power to enable it to commence a performance life. He found the right solution and the right partner for the famed debut of his pupil by requesting help from the main conductor of the Leningrad philharmonic, Nikolay Malko. Steinberg shared with Malko not only the memory of study together in the class of Rimsky-Korsakov, but also a long-standing personal friendship. In his memoirs

Steinberg wrote about the arrival of Malko in Vilnius for a school-vacation visit in the summer of 1905, and about the photographs of Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov with gift autographs to their Vilnius pupil⁴⁵. In Malko's notes we find evidence of Steinberg's request on behalf of Shostakovich: "Steinberg asked me to listen to the symphony of his pupil Shostakovich"⁴⁶. What followed is well known: the 19-year-old composer's symphony, played by Malko in 1926, was an overwhelming success and became the triumphal beginning of the "starry" path of its composer. As early as 1927 the symphony was conducted in Berlin by Bruno Walter, in 1928 in Philadelphia by Leopold Stokowsky, and in 1931 in New York by Arturo Toscanini. The push given by Steinberg truly had the effect of an avalanche of acclaim for the art of the new musical genius.

The kind and friendly care by Steinberg resonated with Shostakovich, from whom we find many instances of gratitude and respect towards Steinberg.

Evidence of Shostakovich's high opinion of his teacher can be found not only in his words, but in his actions. The dedication to Maximilian Steinberg of Shostakovich's *Scherzo* in F# Minor for symphony orchestra – a piece nominated by Shostakovich as his Opus One – speaks of his extreme respect. This dedication is highly indicative, since (as the later research shows) Shostakovich exactingly and thoughtfully chose the composition as being "worthy" of being Shostakovich's first opus⁴⁷.

A Changing Relationship between Teacher and Pupil

Time changes people and their views. There is nothing unusual in a gradual change in the character of the relationship between pupil and his professor, and likewise in the change in views of each other's art. Much of what Steinberg did certainly could, with the passage of time, seem traditional, outdated, and irrelevant to Shostakovich. Therefore it is not surprising, for example, to read in the commentaries of Shostakovich's close friend and long-time correspondent, Isaak Glikman, that "Dmitry Dmitriyevich had restrained feelings towards the art of his teacher, valuing him more for other qualities"⁴⁸, or that "it pained Dmitry Dmitriyevich that in Maximilian Oseyevich – a man of great culture – there was such an adherence to the canons and rules, together with pedantry and something akin to an insular guild mentality"⁴⁹. Shostakovich's post-conservatory letters (in the Shostakovich Archive in Moscow) also contain many critical expressions of the former student about his teacher.

Changes that accompany the passage of time are an inevitable fact of our existence. In the case of Shostakovich and Steinberg it heralded an inevitable mutual distancing and an erosion of mutual understanding. Dmitry

Shostakovich and Maximilian Steinberg came from entirely different generations and emerged from principally different approaches to art. In this sense, their "artistic conflict" was programmed by time itself. It would indeed have been unlikely that the student prodigy remained within the scholastic framework of his teacher. Similarly, the teacher was unable to accede to the reform of the artistic traditions he held sacrosanct and had honoured throughout his life.

Indeed, with time the "trajectories" of Steinberg and Shostakovich's artistic activity continued to evolve and to cause a reassessment of their respective values. This was recorded in marvellous fashion in Shostakovich's letter of 18 October 1925 to B. L. Yavorsky, describing the then ongoing discussion around Shostakovich's piano trio:

"Two years ago, when I had just composed the trio, was a good time. I liked [the trio] very much, and savoured going through [learning] it with the musicians. Now, though, I do it without any psychic uplift. ... I told Steinberg that the trio is bad, that I do not like it anymore. Steinberg, though, responded to me thus: 'it is not for you to judge what of yours is good and what is bad. [You are] too young still'⁵⁰.

(The inevitable distance between the generations, and the concomitant misunderstandings, were also wonderfully expressed by Igor Oistrakh, who, during any heated discussion with his father and teacher, would say with a certain irony: "You learned from Stolyarsky ..., whereas I – from David Oistrakh"⁵¹.)

According to Steinberg, a watershed in his relationship with Shostakovich was the piano cycle *Aphorisms*, composed by the young composer in 1927, which became the "maximum expression of his new direction"⁵². In 1936, speaking during the infamous discussion at the Leningrad Union of Composers, Steinberg said:

"If I am not mistaken, this was the last time when I saw Shostakovich at my home. Before this, Shostakovich came over quite often and was treated as a son. When he came to me with *Aphorisms*, I told him that in these *Aphorisms* I did not understand a thing and this was alien to me. This was the last time when I saw Shostakovich at my place, after that Shostakovich did not come over... I suffered very deeply at such treatment by my best pupil, but this did not interfere with my being able to treat him completely objectively"⁵³.

The pause in contact between teacher and pupil lasted from 1927 to 1936. The events of this latter year, although not fully overcoming the cooling between them, nevertheless undoubtedly introduced a wholly new quality into their relationship.

The Era of Stalin ('Chaos Instead Of Music')

Not merely the passage of time, but also specific time and place played a significant role in Steinberg and Shostakovich's relationship. Their fate was to live in the era of Stalin, when people were broken, their lives mangled. Shostakovich felt the brutish essence of totalitarianism in full in 1936, when *Pravda*, the mouthpiece of Stalinist propaganda, published the article *Chaos instead of Music*, pouncing on his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*. This article was perceived as a rallying cry for what was to become a vilification of the composer. Isaak Glikman recalled:

"In all major cities as well as in Moscow and Leningrad, musical societies denounced not only *Lady Macbeth*, but along with it almost all other Shostakovich compositions ... this was a sign of the times. It seemed that even respected people lost all elementary dignity, lost all shame. ... it seemed that *Chaos instead of Music* irreparably split in two the artistic life of Dmitry Dmitriyevich. The era of his deserved fame disappeared into eternity, and now there came another, merciless era, the gloom of which would eclipse the star of his extraordinary talent"⁵⁴.

By attacking Shostakovich upon the signal of the authorities, his colleagues were defending themselves: that is how life was. The instinct for self-preservation and a herd mentality drove people to partake *en masse* in state-inspired campaigns of this kind.

Maximilian Steinberg, though, behaved with exceptional courage and dignity. During a discussion of the *Pravda* article organized by the Leningrad Composers' Union, intended to humble and crush Shostakovich, Steinberg did not distance himself from his pupil.

Steinberg's speech during the discussion is quite instructive. Although at the beginning he warned that he was speaking "impromptu" and would be speaking "somewhat chaotically"⁵⁵, in fact he constructed his exposition with great subtlety. His words contained not only a well-founded defense of Shostakovich, and not only disdain for the conformism of those whose criticism was built "on a lark"⁵⁶, failing to supply a basis "on specific material required for every professional"⁵⁷, but also a clear-sounding personal grievance regarding the changing artistic priorities and values of younger contemporaries.

Steinberg began his speech by noting that he "fully joined" the opinion of composer Petr Ryazanov, already voiced during the discussion, which turned out to be one of the few speaking about Shostakovich in a positive light. (A summation of Ryazanov's speech: "Many both in musical and non-musical spheres have begun to speak about Shostakovich as a corpse, or rather as a living corpse. This is an unhealthy viewpoint, which we must oppose, and we

must create all of the conditions so that Shostakovich – a composer alive, young, talented, sometimes erring – will receive the most favorable atmosphere for his growth, and so that our sensitive, comradely treatment will be a maximally generous soil for his growth"⁵⁸).

Steinberg thus indicated from his first words his position with respect to Shostakovich, and further clearly delineated his personal link with him, leaving no doubt in the listeners of his readiness to share the blow:

"Shostakovich is my pupil from alpha to omega, and, anyway I have always viewed Shostakovich as my best pupil. I must say that Shostakovich's drama is my personal drama. I would be a very bad teacher and would not fulfill the testaments of my teacher N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov if I were to be impassive in the face of all that my pupil is facing and suffering in his art"⁵⁹.

As to the opera in question, Steinberg also did not find it necessary either to hide his high opinion of the work, or to keep silent about what called forth his disapproval:

"... I must say that having been at the dress rehearsal, I was greatly impressed, as during the premiere. Analyzing afterwards my impressions for the third and fourth time and having tasked myself with listening to the whole opera from beginning to end on the radio in order to completely and precisely determine my view, I came to the conclusion that the opera works as a whole, both artistically and musically... However, when we speak of the plot of "Lady Macbeth" ... I personally did not understand why such a young composer, who was 26 at the time, could choose for his first creation such a plot, where there are no human beings, but only savages throughout"⁶⁰.

In his statement Steinberg used the opportunity to criticize Shostakovich for departing from artistic values close to Steinberg's own. However, in exculpation of his pupil he noted that the subject was "a youth who then was only 20"⁶¹ and who, having graduated from the conservatory, came under an alien influence⁶². By the way, in touching upon persons who, in his view, so influenced Shostakovich, Steinberg pointed to Ivan Sollertinsky, whom he did not particularly like and who was at the epicentre of the critical storm along with Shostakovich⁶³.

At last, having outlined his most important positions, Steinberg tried to transfer the discussion from an ideological plane to a purely professional one, and at the end of his speech started a counterattack – accusing the newspaper *Leningradskaya Pravda* of having "falsified the status of things"⁶⁴. He finished with a clear subtext: "if we do not criticize with a basis in specific material, we risk undermining the desire of one or another composer to compose"⁶⁵.

In these difficult, fateful moments for Shostakovich, Steinberg went even further. Early in 1937 Shostakovich appealed for his help in securing a post at the Leningrad Conservatory and Steinberg quickly did everything in his power to help so that Shostakovich would at least find some firm ground beneath his feet.

On 6 January 1937, Steinberg noted in his diary: "On the 4th Mitya Shostakovich came to visit ... Wants to teach at the conservatory, since composition isn't going [well now]. Let's see what can be done."⁶⁶ Steinberg's efforts were successful, and quickly. On 31 January he wrote again in his diary: "... came Mitya Shostak., wh. has been invited to teach orchestration"⁶⁷.

Shostakovich's acceptance as pedagogue into the Leningrad Conservatory did not merely give him a salary. In the totalitarian bureaucratic Soviet state of the time, the effect of obtaining this employment was laden with significance: prestigious teaching work in the respected and famed Leningrad Conservatory gave social status, and in the eyes of many served as a sign of Shostakovich's readmission to normal artistic life.

In an environment where Shostakovich was ostracized and publicly "branded", when his works ceased to be performed (he had been forced to withdraw his Fourth Symphony from performance, for example), Steinberg's continued friendship and assistance required considerable fortitude. It was after all a time when even the smallest demonstrations of sympathy towards the victims of persecution might be perceived by the authorities as a show of disagreement with their "general line", putting in real danger not only the sympathiser himself but also family and friends. Steinberg was not immune from this peril. However, his sense of decency and honor could not let him act otherwise.

Steinberg remained true to himself and was not prepared to sacrifice his values. Various people who had run into him noted that he was a "man in the highest degree decent, a man of his word and honor" (B. Zagursky⁶⁸), "a man of deep principles" (Yury Tiulin⁶⁹), "a true Petersburger, always completely honest, honorable, noble, and not hypocritical" (Dmitry Tolstoy⁷⁰). The situation with Shostakovich displayed these qualities clearly.

By this time, no fair or rational person could fail to understand the criminal essence of the regime in power in Moscow. In 1935 it became legally possible to apply the death penalty to children who had reached the age of 12. By 1937, the purges ceased to be "precision-aimed" and took over the whole country, becoming massive in character and affecting hundreds of thousands of people. By then, the central authorities had broadened the scope of the purges by setting quotas of repression for every region. Individuals were no longer named as targets; rather, the authorities simply set the numbers, by region, of those

to be shot or imprisoned in the labour camps. (In their perverse eagerness to please, representatives of the local agencies of repression constantly requested the central authorities to increase these horrifying quotas.) This was the historical context of Steinberg's action in employing Shostakovich.

Dmitry Shostakovich could not but see and feel all of this thoroughly. The moral lesson given by Steinberg to his pupil must have had its sobering effect. Relegated to the past were Shostakovich's rapturous treatment of the "builders of the new world" and the feeling of condescension towards the generation of his teachers fostered by closeness to such "builders". In those years, it seems Steinberg had weighty reasons to complain that his pupil didn't value the experience and knowledge received from the conservatory and that he betrayed the art of his teachers. With pain Steinberg recalled a clipping from *Pravda* which mentioned that in a speech, Shostakovich stated that "in the Conservatory they only ever interfered with his composing", and further made the naïve conclusion that to correct all this, "two or three Marxists-musicologists should be invited to the Conservatory"⁷¹.

1936 became the watershed year. Shostakovich now had occasion to experience in full how the moral principles of apologists for the new *nomenclatura* really worked in practice. Steinberg's deeds contrasted strongly with their behaviour; his adherence to strong values of the past suddenly and unexpectedly put into stark relief the worthlessness and criminality of the "new way of thinking" fostered by the Stalinist regime.

These events must only have strengthened Shostakovich's respect for Steinberg. The same fear, pain and horror which had swept the country now became the inseparable companions of both the life and art of the great composer. Twenty years later, Isaiah Berlin, with whom Shostakovich stayed in 1958 when he received an honorary doctorate from Oxford University, wrote:

"S.'s face will always haunt me somewhat, it is terrible to see a man of genius victimised by a regime, crushed by it into accepting his fate as something normal, terrified almost of being plunged into some other life, with all powers of indignation, resistance, protest removed like a sting from a bee, thinking that unhappiness is happiness and torture is normal life..."⁷²

Steinberg and Shostakovich differed so much in so many things; nevertheless their fate turned out to be inseparable and their artistic divergences did not in the least affect their mutual respect and compassion. They remained in close contact until Steinberg's death in 1946.

The death of his teacher turned out to be a difficult emotional upheaval for Shostakovich. Having learned

the sad news, he immediately travelled from Moscow to Leningrad and was by the side of Steinberg's family during the days when the musical world said goodbye to the deceased. Towards the end of the mourning ceremony held at the Leningrad conservatory, he came to the open casket and kissed the deceased⁷³.

III. Conservatism and its Price

Steinberg's Vilnius Origins and Certain Specifics of his Artistic Personality

Evidence from Shostakovich himself and from people close to him allow a glimpse of the way in which the composer perceived Steinberg. This evidence, however, does not relate all there is to know about Steinberg himself and the circumstances that directed his artistic path. The key concepts here – and those qualities most often mentioned by contemporaries – include *a devotion to the past; conservatism; competence; knowledge; a preference for following traditions*.

Undoubtedly one of the most important factors in forming Steinberg's character was his Jewish origin. At the turn of the 20th century, Vilnius – the city of Steinberg's birth – was an unofficial capital of Eastern European Jews, called the "Lithuanian Jerusalem". According to an 1897 census, of the 154,532 inhabitants of Vilnius some 63,800 were Jews. There were five synagogues, 90 prayer houses, two state Jewish schools, three private ones, as well as 110 cheders⁷⁴. Jewish cultural and religious traditions therefore naturally exerted a strong influence at that time.

Vilnius was also the birthplace of the so-called Litvak branch, which played an important part in the religious heritage of European Jews. Rationality, authoritarianism and a fierce defence of traditions differentiated Litvaks from other European Jewry. In the 18th century they were even called *mitnagdim*, in Hebrew "those who do not agree". Although the main meaning of this moniker came from their strict opposition to and separation from the Hasidic movement that was emerging among the Eastern European Jewry in the 18th century, in this word we can nevertheless find a deeper semantic meaning.

Maximilian Steinberg grew up in the geographic center of Litvak religious and cultural tradition and absorbed its values. This might partially explain the emergent tendency in his work toward academism and his strict adherence to tradition. The unswerving faithfulness to and observance and defence of deeply absorbed artistic principles – characteristic of this musician and strengthening with time – completely fit into the religious context of the Litvak testaments.

Alas, the flip side of such "loyalty" in artistic work was that Steinberg's preferences fell more and more "behind" contemporary artistic reality. He was aware of the

phenomenon and noted the growing divergences between his creative views and those artistic tendencies emerging among his younger contemporaries. Nonetheless he did not change his opinions. In a letter to Yازهp Vitol of 26 March 1928 Steinberg wrote rather bitterly:

"Although I am far from considering myself a retrograde, and although I am always ready to accept everything that is valuable from the new, I nonetheless cannot digest so-called clean linearity, i.e a full rejection of any vertical common sense. [...] it is left to us, students of Rimsky-Korsakov, to defend our positions vigorously, since in attacking us all methods seem to be fair game. It is understandable that in such an environment one gets little joy from teaching and sometimes one comes close to total despair"⁷⁵.

As an aside, Steinberg's conservatism showed itself not only in his musical taste. With time, the tendency to cling to the old became second nature to him. Isaak Glikman, who sometimes accompanied Shostakovich during visits to Steinberg, wrote: "I was struck by a certain decorum, neatness, measuredness that ruled in the house of the son-in-law of Rimsky-Korsakov. The precepts of the great composer were followed as something sacred, not only in Steinberg's artistic conceptions, but, it seemed to me, in the everyday way of life of the household"⁷⁶.

A Preference for Learning

Not only Steinberg's conservatism, but also his preference for deep, fundamental knowledge might be explained from the viewpoint of the values expounded in the milieu of Vilnius Jews. At its root was the same Litvak tradition which in every way rewarded "bookishness"; the interest towards in-depth study and the learning and interpretation of the texts of sacred books. "Learnedness" and a pull towards knowledge were viewed as unquestionable priorities and emerged as the reward of all forms of intellectual and creative activity.

Moreover, this tradition, common to Lithuanian Jews, was strengthened by the standing of the Steinberg family, which completely supported and encouraged education.

The arrival of Steinberg in St. Petersburg and his education in the capital's institutions of higher education is likely to have had a significant influence on the musician's values. The overarching quest for education and knowledge, so typical of Russian Jews at the turn of the twentieth century, arose not only from age-old religious traditions, but also through concrete socio-historical conditions.

The Tsarist government's policy towards the Jewish population was extremely hostile. Jews were categorically forbidden from living and working outside the so-called "pale of settlement", where abject poverty and despair ruled due to overpopulation, the absence of elementary rights and the lack of opportunity for ambitious Jews to exercise

their potential. Education seemed the only option in solving the problem, since higher education gave one the right to choose one's place of habitation (including beyond the "pale") and sphere of work. However, this path was also made extremely difficult. The access by Jews to universities was strictly limited to a minuscule percentage of total student enrollment; many legal barriers made life difficult.

The right of the St. Petersburg and Moscow conservatories not to limit their intake of Jewish students by percentages (in contrast to universities) became one of the reasons why the profession of a musician gained such respect in Jewish circles. It offered a real chance to attain a more enlightened and financially-secure future; to feel like a free person and to escape from the pressure of the pale of settlement.

Even here, though, Jewish students suffered a great deal. In his memoirs, Leopold Auer wrote of the humiliations inflicted by the authorities on his students, some of whom later became renowned violinists⁷⁷. He also wrote about those who ultimately became "prominent figures in sciences and arts" if they were able to overcome such man-made obstacles and to finish their education⁷⁸.

The more costly the education the more faith and hope attached to it. Knowledge, attained at such a heavy price, gained something of sacredness, and often a person was no longer capable of doubting such knowledge.

A Weapon against Discrimination

Steinberg was in essence always more of a keeper and continuer than an explorer or destroyer. Such, it seems, was the cast of his character, such was his internal predisposition. However, in constantly returning to the concept of his dogmatism and conservatism and in striving to determine their roots, we inevitably touch again and again upon the issues of the prevailing environment. That environment ultimately strengthened and solidified these qualities in him and made him as he was.

Steinberg lived during an eventful and complex era. Fate held many trials in store for him. Looking over his biography, it is clear how much his life matches the context of its time.

In her wonderful work about Stefan Zweig (1881–1942), a Steinberg contemporary, Hannah Arendt asserted that only great artistic success could serve as a means of establishing self-esteem for a Jewish intellectual, overcoming anti-Semitism, whether overt or covert. "...[S]o that a Jew is taken for an equal, he needs no less than to obtain fame"⁷⁹, wrote Arendt; "... the international society of the successful and famous turned out to be the only one where Jews were equal to all"⁸⁰. Step by step Arendt follows Zweig's efforts to establish himself on this "path", later exposing the tragedy that was to see him lose everything

that had been so hard-won. Something similar could be said about the fate of Maximilian Steinberg.

Vilnius, the city within the Russian empire of Steinberg's childhood and youth, was full of hostility to Jews. The well-known Russian writer Alexandra Brustein (1884–1968), a contemporary of Steinberg, also born in Vilnius and brought up in a family of Jewish intelligentsia (her father was the respected doctor Yakov Vygodsky), in her autobiographical trilogy *The Road Goes into the Distance* left unpalatable evidence of the ethnic intolerance that ruled there, inserting into the mouth of one of her characters the following wrenching words:

"Hereabouts – merciful Lord! – all are different, and all are going at one another! The Russians say: "It's all the Poles muddying things!" The Poles then: "And what did the Russians come to us for? This was our kingdom here!" While the Lithuanians take offense: "It wasn't a Polish kingdom here", they say, "but ours – a Lithuanian one!" And as to the yids... apologies... everyone calls them so, and me as well... Well then, as to these Jews here, well they don't really count for humans around here! Everyone treats them badly, for no reason..."⁸¹

Steinberg grew up feeling the hostility of his surroundings. As with all of his people, the only thing he could counterpose to such hostility was the power of his knowledge and abilities. Through his talent, ambition and diligence, Steinberg reached great heights even while still very young: along with good will and much expectation of future achievements, he was accepted into the ranks of the great Russian composers of the time; he was taken into the family of Rimsky-Korsakov, and became the most authoritative scholar and continuer of the traditions of the school of his teacher. He experienced success and fame, and in 1914 took part in Diaghilev's *Saisons Russes* in Paris and London, where his ballet *Midas* (the second part of the tryptich *Metamorphoses*) was staged by Mikhail Fokine with the legendary Tamara Karsavina in the lead. In his theatrical projects he worked together with Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, Leon Bakst, Nikolay Reikh. Finally in 1915 he became a professor of the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

The motor of his success could very well have been an internal desire, even if not entirely conscious, to overcome an initial inequality derived from his Jewish origins and to become impervious to prevailing prejudices and meanness.

Were such subconscious fears justified in Steinberg's case? It would seem so, since a splash of hostility born of anti-Semitism could appear from anywhere and from anyone. Richard Taruskin identifies this as precisely the cause of the hostility of Stravinsky towards his erstwhile friend: "...no amount of success could ever assuage the envy a



Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, Costume Sketch of a Nymph for the Ballet *Midas* (Postcard, 1914)
 Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, Costume Sketch of a God for the Ballet *Midas* (Postcard, 1914)

musical scion of the Polish nobility felt toward this upstart Vilna Jew who had displaced him in Rimsky-Korsakov's esteem and in his ménage. More than half a century after Rimsky's death—and sixteen years after Steinberg's own—that envy was still consuming him⁸².

From this viewpoint, the instinctual desire by Steinberg to make himself safe from the possible excesses of anti-Semitism appears to be fully understandable and justified. The question, though, is how successful was the fulfillment of this desire. Alas, here Steinberg in many ways repeated the fate of Zweig as described by Arendt. Having achieved all this success and fame, Steinberg quickly comprehended the instability and illusory nature of his seemingly unassailable position.

Having begun his career so brilliantly, he was to see everything dear to him ruined. Contemporary artistic development embarked upon a road that was unacceptable to him; the October Revolution transformed the prevailing lifestyle, destroying with it the system of old values. Even the Conservatory ceased being the safe harbour where the spirit of order, so dear to him, had formerly prevailed ("...total chaos rules here at our Conservatory"⁸³, he wrote in 1924 to Jazeps Vitolis).

People close to Steinberg were leaving Russia. One was Jurgis Karnavičius (Karnovich), later a famous Lithuanian composer. Karnavičius was Steinberg's friend from the Vilnius Gymnasium, later his student at the Conservatory and still later his Conservatory colleague, with whose family Steinberg shared an apartment during the years of the Civil War. Karnavičius wrote to Steinberg that "logic and instinct are forcing people to emigrate when the earth ceases to produce bread; when the desire to work with music engenders only laughter"⁸⁴.

Thoughts of leaving occasionally visited Steinberg as well. In 1921 he tried to ascertain whether it would be possible to move to Latvia, writing to Ya. Vitol, then the rector of the Riga Conservatory⁸⁵. It is likely that the very thought of leaving Russia and starting over must have been exceptionally painful for Steinberg – the equivalent of an admission of failure.

However, a further blow awaited him. It transpired that teaching in Riga was undertaken in the Latvian language. (Similarly, knowledge of Lithuanian was needed for pedagogic work in Kaunas, where Karnavičius moved, changing his name from Karnovich to Karnavičius in the process. A special exemption from a minister permitted Karnavičius, only for one year, to communicate with students in Russian, which is why he "was studying [the] language very intensively"⁸⁶.)

Life continued, and the outer reaches of the Russian Empire ceased to consider themselves a part of Russia. The elites reverted to their own languages and further developed their own culture. Steinberg, who had brought up a whole generation of Baltic composers, ultimately was no longer wanted there.

Steinberg sensed that he was gradually losing his hard-won positions, and this hurt him deeply. In a similar situation, as in the destruction of the model of the world built by himself for himself, Arendt saw the personal tragedy of Zweig.

Fate played a cruel trick upon Steinberg. As his world collapsed around him, all that was left was to "barricade" himself in, to conceal himself in the memories of his past: to stay in the world of yesterday, which had promised so much but did not keep its promises. People sometimes become prisoners of the world they themselves create,

though often they themselves do not realize it. They lack the courage and willpower to reject their own creations.

At least Steinberg did not live to see the “campaign against cosmopolitanism, formalism and the preponderance of the foreign in culture”, which brought back to life the evil ghosts of his childhood and youth. (The height of the War notwithstanding, in August 1942, a memorandum “On selecting and putting forward cadres in art” was circulated amongst Stalin’s closest Party circle. It asserted that Soviet culture was run by “non-Russian people (mostly Jews)”, and within the list of these Jews there flashed the name of Steinberg amongst a constellation of such other musicians as David Oistrakh, Emil Gilels, Yakov Flier, Alexander Goldenweiser, Grigory Ginzburg, Roza Tamarikina, Samuil Feinberg, Samuil Samosud and many other similar “unreliable persons”⁸⁷.)

The labyrinth in which Steinberg found himself did not have an exit. The navigating strings, which used to provide some guidance, were torn. Artistic ideas highly valued by his teachers’ generation in his youthful compositions went into the faraway past. Education, independence of thinking, decency ceased being values which determined life in Stalin’s Russia. He remained as he was, but this only strengthened in him the feeling of being an outcast. All became different – art, people, life. Turning inwards, he also lived in a country which isolated itself from everyone, and fenced itself off from time itself. Space narrowed immeasurably, and time stopped. The result could not help being inauspicious. “Steinberg’s position in the world of music, like that of the Soviet composers of his generation, became more and more provincial as his life went on”⁸⁸, as a bitter result, as the sentence of fate, ring the words said about him by Richard Taruskin.

In Conclusion

History retains the names and heritage only of a select few, not of all. In this there is a measure of “justified unfairness”; it could not be otherwise. Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky, Shostakovich undoubtedly belong to the select few; Steinberg, unfortunately, does not. However, nothing passes without trace. A human being is always a mystery, especially one as colorful and talented as Steinberg. Thinking of Rimsky-Korsakov, we remember his favourite student, Steinberg, who was near him in the latter’s waning years and who dedicated himself to the safekeeping of his legacy. It is the same with Shostakovich: whenever Shostakovich is mentioned, we also implicitly acknowledge the achievements of his teacher Steinberg. Had Maximilian Steinberg not been as he was, perhaps Dmitry Shostakovich could have turned out differently. The memory of Steinberg is also kept alive by the pieces dedicated to him: Stravinsky’s *Fireworks*; Glazunov’s *Dramatic Overture*

The Song of Fate; Shostakovich’s *Scherzo*; Myaskovsky’s Eleventh symphony. All of these are landmarks that gave meaning to the life of a particular man and that today link great art to all of us.

Steinberg’s fate is rather paradoxical. His name is often and justly mentioned in publications on the history of Russian music of the first half of the 20th century. The number of these mentions, however, does not at all compare to their quality. With rare exceptions, most of what is written about Steinberg has little foundation and clearly could be better. Moreover, when looked at closely, these materials usually leave one dissatisfied and frustrated: copied from publication to publication, criticisms of Steinberg’s conservatism and academism appear to be more in the nature of following of a routine, or the duplication of set cliches, rather than being thoughtful, serious assessments.

It is time to reject the superficial, one-sided view of the work and art of this clearly extraordinary musician. The moment has come to try to delve more intensely and deeply into what he did, how he lived, and why his life turned out as it did. Having done so, we will not only right a wrong, but will gain an understanding of the inner “springs” of the music of the 20th century, along with a deeper comprehension of important processes in the history of the last century.

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Santrauka

Muzikos kūryba neatskiriama nuo aplinkos, kurioje gyvena ir savo veiklą plėtoja menininkas. Sąlytis su aplinka lemia, kokiomis vertybėmis jis vadovaujasi, kokia jo pasaulio vizija, kokius meninės saviraiškos būdus atranda ir pasirenka. Kartais šis sąlytis yra darnus ir taikus, retsykiais, priešingai, lydimas konfliktų, nesupratimo, priešiško. Tačiau nei viena, nei kita nekeičia „energetinio“ jo pobūdžio. Abiem atvejais stipriai išgyventas ir individualiai ištartas menininko žodis yra inspiruojamas sąlyčio su aplinka, atspindi kūrėjo skirtingai suvokiamą savo esybę jį supančiame kontekste.

Aplinkos iššūkių įtaka menininko jausmų, minčių, pozicijų formavimuisi – įdomi mokslinė problema dar ir dėl to, kad kiekvienu atveju ji įgyja vis kitokią išraišką. Čia neįmanomi jokie universalūs visrakčiai, nes žmogaus likimas visada ypatingas ir nepakartojamas. Kita vertus, kaskart analizuodami šią problemą, atrandame nepastebėtus reiškinių tarpusavio ryšius ir logines įvykių sekas, geriau imame suprasti tai, kas buvo anksčiau neaišku, gaubiamas paslapties.

Kaip tik tokiu kampu mėginama žvelgti į Lietuvai menkai pažįstamą, bet su šiuo kraštu artimai susijusį kompozitorių ir pedagogą Maksimilianą Šteinbergą (1883–1946), menininką, kurio gyvenimas atspindėjo tragiškų istorinių lūžių laiką, o kūryba ir veikla – artimą ryšį su kai kuriais garsiaisiais XX a. muzikos meno kūrėjais.

M. Šteinbergas gimė Vilniuje garsaus kalbininko ir judaikos specialisto Ovsejaus Šteinbergo šeimoje, augo intelektualioje, dvasingoje aplinkoje, kurioje vyravo žydų Apšvietos (Haskalos) idėjos. Mokėsi muzikos, dalyvavo koncertuose, daug skaitė, domėjosi teatru, aukso medaliu baigė gimnaziją. 1901 m. įstojo į Sankt Peterburgo universiteto Gamtos fakultetą, jį baigė 1907 m. Neatsispyręs pagundai muzikuoti, lygiagrečiai 1901–1908 m. mokėsi ir konservatorijoje. Čia jo pedagogais buvo Nikolajus Rimskis-Korsakovas, Anatolijus Liadovas, Aleksandras Glazunovas.

Garsūs Sankt Peterburgo konservatorijos profesoriai vertino M. Šteinbergo kompozicinį talentą, išskyrė jį iš kitų studentų, pranašavo jam didelę kūrybinę sėkmę. N. Rimskis-Korsakovas jį laikė gambiausiu savo mokiniu (pas šį pedagogą mokėsi daugiau kaip du šimtai muzikų, tarp jų pasaulinio garso kompozitoriai Igoris Stravinskis, Sergejus Prokofjevas, Otorinas Respigi ir kt.). Visa tai nulėmė M. Šteinbergo apsisprendimą siekti muziko karjeros, juolab kad 1908 m., mažuoju aukso medaliu baigęs konservatoriją, jis buvo pakviestas dėstyti šioje prestižinėje muzikos mokymo įstaigoje (profesoriumi tapo 1915 m. būdamas trisdešimt dveju). Perėmęs iš mokytojų „Galingojo sambūrio“ muzikinės estetikos tradicijas, M. Šteinbergas griežtai jų laikėsi savo kūryboje, siekė

jas perduoti mokiniams. Su „Galinguoju sambūriu“ jis susijęs ir asmeniškai: 1908 m. M. Šteinbergas vedė savo mokytojo N. Rimskio-Korsakovo dukterį Nadeždą. Šia proga I. Stravinskis, jo draugas ir bendramokslis, įteikė gražią dovaną – jauniesiems dedikuotą kūrinį „Fejerverkas“ (fantazija dideliame orkestrui „Feu d’artifice“, op. 4, 1908).

M. Šteinbergo muzikinis paveldas didelis ir įvairus. Jaunystėje jis buvo suartėjęs su rusiškojo modernizmo ir simbolizmo skelbėjais, bendradarbiavo su teatro reformatoriais, meninio sambūrio „Mir iskusstva“ („Meno pasaulis“) atstovais. Sergejaus Diagilevo užsakytu sukūrė baletą „Midas“, 1914 m. įtrauktą į legendinių „Ballets Russes“ („Rusų baletas“) sezonų Paryžiuje ir Londone repertuarą (baletu choreografiją parengė Michailas Fokinas, pagrindinį vaidmenį atliko Tamara Karsavina). Vis dėlto M. Šteinbergas buvo labiau susijęs su XIX a. pab. rusų muzikos tradicija nei su tuomet atsirandančiomis naujomis kūrybinėmis tendencijomis. Toks vis akademiškesnis kūrybos pobūdis ne tik atspindėjo kompozitoriaus būdą bei estetines nuostatas, bet ir turėjo ryšių su litvakiškoje aplinkoje praleista jo vaikyste. Deja, polinkis į akademiškumą ir nepalankia linkme pasisukusi istorinės raidos vaga susiaurino kompozitoriaus kūrybinių intencijų erdvę, neleido realizuoti daugeliui jaunystės sumanymų.

Kone išskirtiniai M. Šteinbergo nuopelnai muzikos pedagogikoje. Suvokdamas atsakomybę dėl to, kad yra didžiųjų savo mokytojų tradicijų tęsėjas, jis daug laiko ir energijos skyrė mokiniams. Beveik keturis dešimtmečius

dėstęs Sankt Peterburgo (Leningrado) konservatorijoje, parengė puikių muzikantų, tarp jų lietuvių kompozitorių Juozą Tallat-Kelpšą, Stasį Šimkų, Jurgį Karnavičių, Juozą Žilevičių.

Garsiausias M. Šteinbergo mokinys – XX a. muzikos klasikas Dmitrijus Šostakovičius, mokėsis pas jį 1919–1925 m., vėliau gražiai prisimindavęs studijas, su dėkingumu rašęs apie profesoriaus pastangas ugdyti muzikinę mokinių kultūrą, lavinti nepriekaištingą jų skonį, padėti jiems tobulai įvaldyti kompozicinę techniką.

Laikydamasis tradicinių, net konservatyvių kūrybinių nuostatų, M. Šteinbergas toli gražu ne visada pritarė D. Šostakovičiaus ieškojimams. Tačiau net ir nesutikdamas su tuo, ką darė mokinys, pašiepdamas ir aštriai kritikuodamas jį, M. Šteinbergas nesiliovė žavėjęsis D. Šostakovičiaus talentu, visokeriopai rėmė savo mokinį ne tik jam studijuojant, bet ir baigus mokslus. 1936–1937 m., įsisiautėjęs stalininiam terorui, M. Šteinbergas gynė D. Šostakovičių, kai šis tapo įnirtingo ideologinio puolimo objektu, Rusijos muzikinę kultūrą sudrebinusio straipsnio „Sumbur vmesto muzyki“ („Chaosas vietoj muzikos“) pagrindiniu veikėju. Savo mokytojui D. Šostakovičius dedikavo pirmuoju opusu pažymėtą kūrinį – skerco fis-moll simfoniniam orkestrui.

M. Šteinbergo veikla ir kūryba neatskiriama nuo litvakiškų dvasinių šaknų, turi aiškia vilnietišką žymę. Gimtasis kraštas, tėvų namai, mokytojai ir istorinės aplinkybės formavo M. Šteinbergo asmenybę – tokį jį pažino ir iškilieji amžininkai. Priartėjęs prie jų, Šteinbergas savo vardą įamžino XX a. muzikos istorijoje.