
Letters to the Editor

From Gerard McBurney

Thank you for your kind review of my Shostakovich arrangements in *Tempo 188*. However, there is one very small point (hardly an inaccuracy) that is perhaps worth elaborating on.

You mention that the movement from *Hypothetically Murdered* called 'Petrushka' turns up again in *The Limpid Stream* and also (as a Polka) in the Ballet Suite No.1.

When some selections from *Hypothetically Murdered* were being rehearsed in Nizhny Novgorod in September 1993, this movement (or rather this tune) provoked unseemly mirth among the orchestral players:



When I asked for enlightenment, I was told that this was a very well-known tune (and certainly not by Shostakovich) with some very well-known words. But when I asked for someone to tell me the words there were red faces but no answers.

A month later I was in Tashkent for another performance, this time by the Uzbekistan State Symphony Orchestra. Grasping, as it were, the bull by the horns, I offered a drink to any member of the orchestra who could tell me the words of this tune. There was more laughter, but no immediate response.

In the evening when I arrived for the concert I was met by the orchestra's talented young clarinettist, Eduard Abliakimov. He was skulking rather guiltily (I think he did not want to be seen by his colleagues) and clutching a piece of paper. He told me that he had heard the tune many times and sung to a number of different poetic texts, usually by people in an advanced stage of alcoholic excitement. He had written down for me some of the more usual texts.

According to him, the most familiar of all (and, I might add, one that fits remarkably well to the tune) runs:

*U menya byla koza.
Cherez zhopy tormoza.
Ya ne nyei muku vozil.
Cherez zhopu tormozil.*

A provisional translation might run:

I had a she-goat.
(She had) brakes through her arse.
I carried flour on her.
I braked through the arse.

As may be imagined, there is a certain amount of implied word-play here, suggesting other uses to which the goat is put rather than her being used merely as a means of transporting cereals.

Another version goes as follows:

*Nashyol tebya ya bosuyu,
Khuduii, byezvolosuyu.
Dolgo ya tebya v poryadok
Privodil, no ty... mne izmenila. Blin!*

I found you bare-foot,
Thin, hairless.
I spent a long time putting you
Back into shape, but you... betrayed me. You shit!

It should be noted that the last line euphemistically breaks out of the scansion and rhyme scheme in order to suggest and avoid an indecent rhyme.

The third of Mr. Abliakimov's suggested lyrics runs:

*Vyshel Vaska na kryltso,
Pochesat' sebya yaitsa.
Sumul ruku. Net yaitsa!
Tak i yobnulsya s kryltsa.*

Vaska went out on to the porch
To scratch one of his balls.
He shoved his hand down. There's no ball there!
So he fucked himself (i.e. leapt) off the porch.

Mr. Abliakimov also provides part of a much longer text also sung to this melody. It is characterized by a delightful pattern of couplets

used to imply obscene rhyme-endings which are always left incomplete. The form of these poems is that usually associated with the intertextually significant genre of the *chastushka*, popular in playgrounds, vodka shops and public lavatories.

I cannot of course assert with any authority which, if any, of these particular *chastushki* Shostakovich might have had in mind when he quoted this tune. And I should also add that I have only the charming Mr. Abliakimov's assurance that these are indeed the usual words that the tune suggests. (As a caution it must be added that Mr. Abliakimov's own surname, which he reluctantly gave to me when I said that I was concerned to credit him for his research, sounds more than a little, er, fragrant in Russian, although no doubt it is quite respectable in Uzbek.)

P.S. I would like to acknowledge the help of my friend, the pianist Anya Alexeyev, in the elucidation of some of the more elusive meanings hidden in these interesting texts.

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From Robin Freeman

I thought *Tempo* readers might be interested by a recent chat I had with Anthony Gilbert about his *Nine or Ten Osannas* excellently reviewed by Patrick Ozzard-Low (NMC-DO14) in *Tempo* 188. The piece was written after his first trip to America, to Tanglewood in the event. His head was full of that and full as well of Cummings and Stevens, their exquisite dandyism. The music was quickly composed, some of it in the upstairs of buses. There are five or six motifs which, along with a sort of cantus firmus, appear in all of the pieces. The obligatory arrangement of six or seven of them within fixed poles is not so much

an essay in open form as in alternate versions. Each may be analyzed as if the others did not exist. Those with initials are affectionate parodies of composers Tony Gilbert would not disclose but willingly leaves for the rest of us to riddle out. This is, as it were, the 'enigma' side to his 'Variations'. The ghost ones have to do with a dream he had of a UFO pottering about his house with a sort of 'hum', a 'hum' he woke to write down. The iceman hints at what a certain school of composition, when taken too far, can do to one spontaneous talent, or, as Balzac has it, *Là où la forme domine, le sentiment disparaît*.

Tony Gilbert has always admired Britten's *Les illuminations*. The horn writing in the *Serenade* (the natural thirteenth in the opening solo, the arabesques that accompany the Lyke Wake Dirge) has sent its wild echoes flying into more than one of the *Osannas*.

I agree with P. O-L that programming tracks will not produce satisfactory 'performances' of the alternate versions, the more so here where there are some 'liaisons dangereuses' due to careless tracking plus the incorrect division of 'Osanna for the colours about some people and for the 9 lost colour years' into two parts. Beyond that, conductors need to shape the end of each osanna in accordance with what is to follow. Still one can get a satisfactory idea of the overall tone of such performances. I suggest that readers send their own favourite version to the composer care of *Tempo* so he can choose the five most successful, the results to be published as 'The Best of *Nine or Ten Osannas*'. My favourite version is 17, 23, 21, 29, 8, 18, 26, 27, 33.

P.S. The choice of the painting by Colin Rose of 'Amongst Drifting Tides Refrain' for the CD booklet was a splendid one. This sort of thing should happen more often in the world of contemporary music CDs.

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News Section

Composers

JOHN ADAMS. Violin concerto (European première)—23 June/London, Barbican/Gidon Kremer (vln), LSO c. Kent Nagano.

JULIAN ANDERSON has been commissioned to compose three large-scale works for London Musici, including a new ballet and choral-orchestral piece.

LOUIS ANDRIESEN. *De Materie* (UK première of complete work)—3 July/London, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Meltdown Festival/Askö-Schoenberg Ensemble c. Reinbert de Leeuw.

SIMON BAINBRIDGE. *Herbsttag* (première)—16 April/London, All Hallows Church NW3/Crouch End Festival Chorus c. David Temple.