

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 22 February 2022 7.30pm

Ignat Solzhenitsyn piano

Simon Barrad baritone

Timothy Ridout viola

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Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti Op. 145 (1974)

*Truth • Morning • Love • Separation • Anger • Dante •
To the exile • Creativity • Night • Death • Immortality*

Interval

Viola Sonata Op. 147 (1975)

I. Moderato • II. Allegretto • III. Adagio

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At the age of 67, **Dmitry Shostakovich** had survived two heart attacks and had been diagnosed with lung cancer. He'd known for nearly a decade that he suffered from poliomyelitis, which, despite repeated attempts at treatment, made walking difficult and weakened his hands to a point at which he could no longer play the piano. 'Some kind of spring has broken in my brain', he told his friend Isaak Glikman, early in 1973. Yet somehow he rallied. On 2 May 1974, shortly before one of his increasingly frequent hospital stays, Shostakovich told Glikman that he was working on a new string quartet, his fifteenth, and by 17 May 1974 it was complete. Two months later, on 30 July, he completed his *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti* Op. 145.

When the bass Yevgeny Nesterenko arranged to run through the *Suite* for the first time at Shostakovich's Moscow apartment in mid-October, he planned to bring his own regular pianist, Evgeni Shenderovich. In the event, Nesterenko fell ill (though he recovered sufficiently to give the world première of the *Suite* in Moscow on 23 December 1974). So Shenderovich went alone, and noticed that Shostakovich seemed 'even more anxious than I was'. 'Shostakovich asked me to repeat several episodes over and over again' he recalled. 'It was as if he could never have his fill of the music'. Shostakovich explained that he'd called the piece a 'Suite' because he didn't like the word 'cycle'; nonetheless, Shenderovich and Nesterenko 'were amazed at the philosophical power of the cyclic links between the movements'.

The ostensible pretext was the 500th anniversary of Michelangelo's birth, but this is a work on an imposing scale, conceived with symphonic rigour, and a particular musical inspiration seems to have been foremost in Shostakovich's mind: 'If someone told me that I had only an hour to live, I would want to listen to *Das Lied von der Erde*'. Musorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* provided another, more specifically Russian, model. Michelangelo's verses, however, supply a narrative that brings us even closer to what we know of Shostakovich the man. 'I speak of Dante, whose writings are regarded with scorn...' runs a line in the sixth song; 'As nothing was more shameful than his exile, so the world has never seen a greater man' declares the seventh, 'To the exile'. Solzhenitsyn had been expelled from the Soviet Union in February that year, and Shostakovich's great friend Mstislav Rostropovich had left Russia for the West in May.

For Shostakovich, Michelangelo embodied the artist as idealist: a man for whom (in the words of the poems' Russian translator, Abram Efros) 'poetry was a matter of heart and conscience'. Around those central denunciations of abused authority, Shostakovich meditates firstly (in 'Truth') on the claims of love and art against power; and later (from the ninth song onwards), upon his own impending death. But in this, of all Shostakovich's works, it's difficult to untangle form, expression and meaning. The same

stark piano figure introduces both the first song and the tenth ('Death'): Shostakovich told Shenderovich that 'it should be performed with a harsh, trumpet-like sound, reminiscent of the fanfare introducing an ancient Greek tragedy'. And then in the final song, ('Immortality'), the mood suddenly brightens and becomes playful, as Shostakovich quotes a piano piece he wrote at the age of nine. 'I still live on in the souls of all those who loved and remember me': the *Suite* ends with a guileless assertion of the enduring power of art, and ticks into silence with a final glance back across a creative lifetime.

Self-quotations flicker and drift through the Viola Sonata, too – quotations from the death-haunted Fourteenth Symphony, the Suite for 2 pianos Op. 6 (which he had dedicated to his father, back in 1922) and music intended for his abandoned wartime opera *The Gamblers*. For the most part, they're contained within the sonata's second movement, the very last of those sardonic, half-sinister Shostakovich scherzos. But the sonata's frame of reference opens still wider, now that Shostakovich has (for the last time) left words behind him. The viola's *pizzicato* opening gestures hark back across a century of Russian music to the balalaika imitations of Glinka and the pioneering Russian nationalist composers (a world that must have seemed very remote from Brezhnev's USSR); and the extended final *Adagio* opens with a solitary meditation for the viola, before summoning fragments of ghostly funeral marches and (above all) Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata.

The mood is by turns anguished and resigned, wry and intensely inward; but Shostakovich, *in extremis*, still reaches out for support and strength to a wider world of music. Shostakovich almost certainly knew that the Viola Sonata would be his last work, and he never heard it performed. 'My hand shakes, and it won't obey me', he told the sonata's dedicatee – Fyodor Druzhinin, the viola player of his beloved Beethoven Quartet. A copyist had to be enlisted to make the manuscript legible. Shostakovich cautioned Druzhinin against undue sentimentality or gloom: 'The first movement is a novella, the second a scherzo, and the finale is an *Adagio* in memory of Beethoven, but don't let that inhibit you' he told Druzhinin on 5 July 1975, a few days after starting work. 'The music is bright, bright and clear'. The sonata ended, he said, in 'radiance'.

Druzhinin received the score on 6 August 1975, and 'stood rooted to the ground' as he read the dedication on the title page. It had been posted by Shostakovich's wife Irina – the composer had been confined to hospital since 3 August with a suspected heart problem. But it was the cancer that finally killed him, around 7.30pm on 9 August 1975. Druzhinin's letter of admiration and gratitude arrived too late.

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Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti Op. 145

(1974)

Michelangelo Buonarroti trans. Abram Efros

Truth

Yest istiny v rechenyakh
stariny,
I vot odna: kto mozhet, tot ne
khochet;
Ty vnyal, Sinyor, tomu, chto
lozh strekochet,
I boltuny toboy nagrazhdeny;
There are truths in old
proverbs, and here is one:
whoever has power to do
something, doesn't do it.
My lord, you have believed
tellers of lies
and rewarded spreaders of gossip.

Ya zh tvoy sluga: moi trudy
dany
Tebe, kak solntsu luch, khot i
porochit
Tvoy gnev vsyo to, chto pyl moy
sdelat prochit,
I vse moi stradaniya ne nuzhny.
I have been your servant, my
works for you
are as rays to your sun. But
your scorn
means that all the ardour
devoted to you,
all my suffering, has been in vain.

Ya dumal, chto vozmyot tvoyo
veliche
Menya k sebe ne ekhom dlya
palat,
A lezviyem suda i girey
gneva;
I thought that your greatness
would reward me
and raise me up, not as a hollow
echo
but as a sword of justice and a
charge of wrath.

No yest k zemnym zaslugam
bezrazliche
Na nebesakh, i zhdet ot nikh
nagrad –
Chto ozhidat plodov s sukhogo
dreva.
But heaven's servants on earth
are indifferent,
and to expect any reward from
them
is like hoping for fruit from a
barren tree.

Morning

Net radostney vesyologo zanyatya:
Po zlatu kos tsvetam napereboy
Soprikasatsa s miloy
golovoy
I lnut lobzanyem vsyudu bez
izyatya!
What delightful pleasure there is
for that garland in her golden hair,
each flower eagerly pressing
forward,
as though to be first to kiss her
dear head!

I skolko naslazhdeniya dlya
platya
Szhimat ey stan i nispadat
volnoy,
I kak otradno setke
zolotoy
Eyo lanity zaklyuchat v obyatyat!
And what enjoyment for the
dress
that both clings and flows
around her,
and for the golden braid that so
eagerly
touches her cheeks and her neck!

Yeshchyo nezhney naryadnoy
lenty vyaz,
Blestya uzornoy vyshivkoy
svoeyu,
Smykaetsa vkrug persey molodykh.
Still more delight for the elegant
sash
of brightly-patterned
embroidery
that enfolds her young breasts.

A chistyy poyas, laskovo
viyas,
Kak budto shepchet: 'ne
rasstanus s neyu ...'
O, skolko dela zdes dlya ruk
moikh!
And that pure girdle, lovingly
clasping her
as though whispering 'I shall
never leave you ...'
Oh, how much there is here for
my hands!

Love

Skazhi, Lyubov, voistinu li vzoru
Zhelannaya predstala krasota,
Il to moya tvoryashchaya
mechta
Sluchaynyy lik vzyala sebe v
oporu?
'Tell me, love, do my eyes truly see
the beauty I so much desire,
or is it some creation of my
dreams,
brought to life by a chance
image?

Tebe l ne znat? Ved s nim po
ugovoru
Ty sna menya lishila. Pust!
Usta
Leleyut kazhdyy vzdokh, i
zalita
Dusha ogyom, ne znayushchim
otporu.
You should know, for this
beauty
has deprived me of all sleep. So
be it.
My lips cherish each sigh and
my soul
is flooded with an unquenchable
fire.'

Ty istinnuyu vidish krasotu,
No blesk yeyo gorit, vsyo
razrastayas,
Kogda skvoz vzor k dushe
voskhodit on;
'You see this beauty truly indeed,
for its brightness burns and
increases
as it rises through your eyes to
the soul.

Tam obretaet bozhyu chistotu,
Bessmertnomu tvortsu
upodoblyayas,
Vot pochemu tvoy vzglyad
zavorozhyon.
There it acquires a divine purity
that likens it to its immortal
creator –
that is why your eyes are
captivated.'

Separation

Derznu l, sokrovishche moyo,
Sushchestvovat bez vas, sebe
na muku,
Raz glukhi vy k molbam
smyagchit razluku?
Unylym serdtsem bolshe ne
tayu
Ni vozglasov, ni vzdokhov, ni
rydaniy,
Chtob vam yavit, madonna,
gnyot stradaniy
I smert uzh nedalyokuyu moyu;
How then, my joy, could I presume
to exist without you, for despite
my anguish,
and tears you cannot soften our
separation?
My unhappy heart shall no
longer pine away
with the cries, sighs and tears
that show you,
my lady, the burden of my
suffering
and how close I am to death.

No daby rok potom moyo sluzhenye
Izgnat iz vashey pamyati ne mog,
Ya ostavlyayu serdtse vam v
zalog.

But so that fate shall not eclipse
my devotion from your memory,
I leave my heart to you as a
pledge.

Anger

Zdes delayut iz chash mechi i
shlemy
I krov Khristovu prodoyut na
ves;
Na shchit zdes tern, na kopyu
krest ischez,
Usta zh Khristovy terpelivo
nemy.

Here swords and helmets are
made from chalices
and Christ's blood is freely
offered for sale;
thorns are shields, the Cross is
made into lances,
and yet Christ remains silent
and patient.

Pust On ne skhodit v nashi
Vifleyemy
Il snova bryznet krovyyu do
nebes,
Zatem, chto dushegubam Rim –
chto les,
I miloserdye derzhim na zamke
my.

Let Him never return to our
Bethlehems,
or His blood would again spurt
up to the heavens,
for Rome is a forest full of
murderers
and we keep mercy strictly
locked up.

Mne ne grozyat roskoshestva
obuzy,
Ved dlya menya davno uzh net
zdes del;
Ya mantii strashus, kak Mavr-
Meduzy;

The trappings of luxury have
never tempted me,
there has long been nothing for
me here;
the man who wears the robe is
like a Medusa.

No yesli bednost slavoy Bog
odel,
Kakiye zh nam togda gotovit
uzy
Pod znamenem inym inoy
udel?

But if poverty is honoured by
God,
what hope can we have when it
is stifled
by the banner under which we
live?

Dante

Spustivshis s neba, v tlennoy
ploti, on
Uvidel ad, obitel iskuplenya,
I zhiv predstal dlya bozhya
litsezrenya,
I nam povedal vsyo, chem
umudryon.

He came from heaven clothed in
mortal flesh,
he saw both hell and purgatory,
he lived to contemplate
God
and revealed to us all that he
had learned.

Luchistaya zvezda, chim ozaryon
Siyanyem kray, mne dannyy
dlya rozhdenya,
Yey ne ot mira zhdet
voznagrazhdenya,
No ot tebya, kem mir byl sotvoryon.

This shining star, whose rays
illuminated the city that gave me
birth,
could not expect any reward
from the world,
but only from You, his creator.

Ya govoryu o Dante: ne nuzhny
Ozloblennoy tolpe yego
sozdanya,
Ved dlya neyo i vysshiy geniy
mal.

I speak of Dante, whose writings
are regarded with scorn by the
general mob,
for the highest genius means
nothing to them.

Bud ya, kak on! O, bud mne
suzhdeny
Yego dela i skorb yego
izgnanya,
Ya b luchshey doli v mire ne
zhelal!

If only I were like him! If I could
live as he did
and even undergo the bitterness
of his exile,
I would wish for no finer earthly
life!

To the exile

Kak budto chtim, a vsyo zhe
chest mala.
Yego velichye vzor nash
oslepilo.
Chto chyorn korit za nizkoye
merilo,
Kogda pusta i nasha pokhvala!

We cannot honour him as highly
as we should,
for his greatness has blinded
our eyes.
Why condemn those who
wronged him
when our own praise is so meagre?

On radi nas soshyol v obitel
zla;
Gospodne tsarstvo lik yemu
yavilo;
No dver, chto dazhe nebo ne
zakrylo,
Pred Dante otchizna zlobno
zaperla.

For our sakes he explored the
depths of evil;
God's kingdom was revealed to
him;
but though heaven closed no
doors to Dante,
his homeland wickedly shut its
gates in his face.

Neblagodarnaya! Sebe na gore
Ty dlila muki syna
svoego;
Tak sovershenstvu nizost mstit
ot veka,

What ingratitude! To its disgrace,
it added to the sufferings of its
native son.
Thus baseness avenges itself on
perfection.

Odin primer iz tekh, kotorykh –
more!
Kak net podley izgnaniya
yego,
Tak mir ne znal i vyshe
cheloveka.

This is just one instance: there
is an ocean of them!
And as nothing was more
shameful than his exile,
so the world has never seen a
greater man.

Creativity

Kogda skalu moy zhostkiy
molotok
V oblichiya lyudey
preobrazhaet,
Bez mastera, kotoryy
napravlyaet
Evo udar, on delu b ne pomog,

When my rough hammer
transfigures
stone into the shape of human
beings,
it would be powerless to create
anything
without a master to guide its blows.

No bozhiy molot iz sebya
izvlyok
Razmakh, chto miru prelest
soobshchayet;
Vse moloty tot molot
predveshchayet,
I v nyom odnom – im vsem
zhivoy urok.

There resides in the hammer of
God
a mighty force that gives delight
to the world:
this is the hammer of all
hammers,
and from this one, all life
proceeds.

Chem vyshe vzmakh ruki nad
nakovalney,
Tem tyazheley udar: tak
zanesyon
I nado mnoy on k vysyam
podnebesnym;

The higher the arm is raised
above the anvil
the more powerful the blow: the
hammer is now
raised above me to the height of
heaven.

Mne glyboyu kosnet
pervonachalnoy,
Poka kuznets gospoden – tolko
on! –
Ne posobit udarom
polnovesnym.

I am like stone, a block of
unshaped material,
until God the craftsman – He
alone –
releases me by striking with all
his strength.

Night

Vot eta Noch, chto tak spokojno
spit
Pered toboyu, Angela
sozdanye.
Ona iz kamnya, no v ney yest
dykhanye:
Lish razbudi, ona zagovorit.

This figure of Night that sleeps
so peacefully
before your eyes was created
by an Angel.
She is sculpted from stone, but
she breathes:
wake her, and she will speak.

Mne sladko spat, a pushche –
kamnem byt,
Kogda krugom pozor i
prestuplenye:
Ne chuvstvovat, ne videt –
oblegchenye,
Umolkni zh, drug, k chemu
menya budit?

Sleep is sweet, even sweeter to
be made of stone,
when all around flourish
ignominy and crime.
Neither to feel nor to see is so
soothing.
Be silent, my friend. Why
awaken me?

Death

Uzh chuya smert, khot i ne
znaya sroka,
Ya vizhu: zhizn vse ubystryayet
shag,
No telu yeshchyo zhalko
plotskikh blag,
Dushe zhe smert zhelanneye
poroka.

My death is certain, but not its
hour.
I know my life is hastening to its
end,
and though my body still seeks
its pleasures
my soul now yearns for
death.

Mir – v slepote: postydnoy
uroka
Iz vlasti zla ne izvlekayet zrak,

The world is sunk in blindness.
Shame and evil
triumph and overwhelm all honesty.

Nadezhdy net, i vsyo obemlet
mrak,
I lozh tsarit, i pravda pryachet
oko.

All hope is lost, the light is
extinguished,
falsehood reigns and truth hides
its face.

Kogda zh, Gospod, nastupit to,
chego
Zhдут vernyye tebe?
Oslabevayet
V otsrochkakh vera, dushu davit
gnyot;

When will it come, Lord, that
day which is awaited
by those who trust in You? Any
further delay
undermines faith and oppresses
the soul.

No chto nam svet spasenya
tvoego,
Raz smert bystrey i navsegda
yavlyayet
Nas v sramote, v kotoroy
zastayot?

What hope is there of the light
of Your salvation,
when death suddenly and for
ever surprises us
in the state of shame in which
we are living?

Immortality

Zdes rok poslal bezvremenny
mne son,
No ya ne myortv, khot i
opushchen v zemlyu:
Ya zhiv v tebe, chim
setovanyam vnemlyu,
Za to, chto v druge drug
otobrazhyon.

Here fate has sent me untimely
sleep,
but I am not dead, though I lie in
the earth.
I am alive in you, whose
lamentation I hear,
for lovers are the reflection of
one another.

Ya slovno b myortv, no miru v
uteshenye
Ya tysyachami dush zhivu v
serdtsakh
Vsekh lyubyashchikh, i, znachit,
ya ne prakh,
I smertnoye menya ne tronet
tlenye.

I am as though dead, but as a
solace to the world
and its thousands of souls I am
alive in the hearts
of all who love, therefore I am
not turned to dust
nor am I touched by mortal
decay.

Interval

Viola Sonata Op. 147 (1975)

I. Moderato

II. Allegretto

III. Adagio

Translation by Andrew Huth