

Mihailo Trandafilovski – Chamber Music

Programme Notes

The pieces appearing on this CD are all relatively recent, and share some similar characteristics. One of these is the influence of the Macedonian folk music tradition: not in the sense of borrowing specific musical material, but in the presence of various, more general, aspects, such as the use of irregular meter, ‘rough-sounding’ instrumentation, certain melodic properties, perhaps the use of quarter-tones etc. The inclusion of these elements in my music is not a fully conscious decision on my part; I do not strive to use them because of a need to establish an identity – in fact, while I lived in Macedonia, where folk music is constantly present in everyday life, I felt no need, as a violinist, to engage with such influences at all. However, having lived outside Macedonia for a while now (I left to study in the States in 1994), in my writing there seems to be a partially unconscious, spontaneous impetus to embrace these influences. On a conscious level, for me, they offer new areas in music to explore, which maybe precisely because of the ‘roughness’ and ‘irregularity’ can be beautiful in their own way.

Perhaps even more importantly, I feel there are deeper common aspects in these pieces, which are difficult to describe, but, I feel, important to mention. These are very general ways of organising the musical material, such as tension/release, maintaining momentum/pace, hierarchical way of organising harmonic and melodic features, and, underneath all the dissonance and irregularity, a tendency to look for an implicit, and organic, order. I find the combination of specific elements (such as the Macedonian influences mentioned above), and such ‘universal’ qualities, creative and exciting, and I think of both of these as necessary in adding ‘life’ to music, however specialised it is.

The following programme notes highlight specific aspects of the compositions, but I should add that I do not consider anything I write here essential for listening to the pieces. The reason for this is, partly, that I like to explore physicality in music, which, one could say, can communicate directly; this, of course, does not have to exclude conceptual understanding, but can complement it, ideally resulting in music that can work on various levels.

Strike - Flow (in three phases) for chamber ensemble: flute, clarinet in Bb (bass clarinet), piano, violin, cello
(2006)

Two seemingly opposing principles are interwoven in this piece: abrupt, instantaneous action and gradual change. I see these as different aspects of one same reality, manifested in various ways throughout the three phases of the composition (as well as the connecting ‘joints’). For example, this is reflected in the musical gestures, in the melodic motion, in the way meter is used, and, on a larger scale, in the way the musical material unfolds throughout the piece.

Strike - Flow was written for Lontano’s 30th Anniversary concert series, and first performed at The Warehouse, London, in 2006, conducted by Odaline de la Martinez.

Violin duos (selection) from the cycle ***Čekori*** (2002-2005)

1. *March* (14)
2. *Chromatics* (8)
3. *Meditation (phasing)* (7)
4. *Bumblebees* (24)
5. *Pulsing* (34)
6. *Colours/limits* (32)

These six short pieces are a selection from my cycle *Čekori* (Macedonian for *Steps*), written as part of my doctoral studies at the Royal College of Music. *Čekori* is a collection of thirty-eight compositions for violin, ranging from beginners’ level to virtuosic. The pieces gradually progress in difficulty, both in terms of violin technique and musical material. Elements from contemporary music are introduced consistently throughout the cycle. The majority of the pieces are written for two violins, the first part being played by the student, the second by the teacher; there are also solo pieces, pieces with piano accompaniment, and so on. Many of the compositions focus on specific areas of technique and musical material: for example, in the selection included on this CD, *March* is completely diatonic, and is played by the student in 3rd position throughout; *Chromatics*, as the title suggests, explores chromatic material, and is in 1st position; *Meditation (phasing)* uses semibreves only

(no other rhythmic values), the rhythmical displacement coming from the 2nd violin, etc.

I tried to arrange the pieces here in a way that would help the overall musical thread - therefore they do not appear in the exact order as in the collection (indicated by the numbers in brackets), although they do reflect the general progression from easier to more difficult compositions.

The selection as it appears here was first performed by Peter Sheppard Skærved and myself at Wilton's Music Hall, London, in August 2009, but various other selections/combinations of pieces from *Čekori* have been played by us and other violinists before and after this date.

Crystal Threads for solo violin

(2009-2010)

Crystal Threads is the most recent piece on this CD. Similarly to some other pieces I have written in the last 2-3 years (that do not appear here), it is in some ways simpler, steadier, and perhaps more contemplative than a number of my older works.

However, the exploration of pace/momentum, among other elements, is still central. Thread-like lines gradually develop the musical material, crystallising in the process

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This composition was commissioned by the Macedonian Composers' Association (SOCOM) and written for Caroline Balding. It was first performed in 2010 by the Macedonian violinist Vladimir Kostov at the Days of Macedonian Music festival, in Skopje, Macedonia.

A-de-scent for violin, cello and piano

(2007)

The title of this piece refers to the combination of rising and falling movement throughout the work, in terms of pitch, texture, tension and overall development. The

material is strongly influenced by Macedonian folk music, reflected in the ‘rough’ sound quality, the use of irregular meter and the rhythmic, ‘dance-like’ character of the outer movements; these are balanced by a sparse 2nd movement in which held notes/chords with a clear attack (a common element in all three movements) are more prominent. The piece requires a ‘physical’ performance in which the stomps and the percussive extended instrumental techniques are fully integrated with the pitched material.

A-de-scent was commissioned by the Macedonian Composers’ Association (SOCOM), and appeared on the SPNM (now Sound and Music) shortlist between 2008-2011.

Quartet for string quartet
(2007)

This piece is a meeting point for many of my influences and ideas as a composer. It was written for the Kreutzer Quartet, soon after I joined the group – consequently the dynamics of the quartet, the expressive potential as I imagined it from inside the group, and the material we had covered were all integral to the compositional process.

The three movements of the piece all relate, very generally, to different types of Macedonian folk music: the first mainly contemplative, peaceful in character; the second a wild dance; the third ‘grounding’ the energies of the first two movements with a more steady, measured ‘feel’. This contrast in character, however, is complemented by many shared aspects between the movements, such as the exploration of sound quality, the use of quarter tones, melodic/rhythmic elements etc.

This work was first performed by the Kreutzer Quartet at the Duke’s Hall, Royal Academy of Music, London, in 2007.

Violin concerto for violin and mixed ensemble: flute (piccolo), clarinet in Bb (bass clarinet), horn, trumpet in C, percussion, piano, viola, cello
(2004-2005)

This is the final piece, and culmination, of *Čekori*. In both movements, various techniques developed throughout the collection are employed. I used a variety of musical material in this work, organised in such a way that different aspects balance each other: symmetry and asymmetry, in terms of meter and form; chromatically dense, dissonant and more diatonic sections; energetic, intense areas leading to more peaceful music and vice versa; abrupt joints between sections and an underlying gradual development ...

The *Violin concerto* was first performed by violinist Mihkel Kerem and the New Perspectives Ensemble, conducted by Edwin Roxburgh, at the Royal College of Music, London, in 2005. It received the *Panče Pešev* award (2006) for best new Macedonian piece at the contemporary music festival Days of Macedonian Music.

Most of the music on this CD was born in close and long-term collaboration with my Kreutzer quartet colleagues (Peter Sheppard Skærved, Neil Heyde and Morgan Goff), Lontano and Odaline de la Martinez. I would like to thank them all for their support and inspiration, which have allowed me to explore music in ways that would otherwise not have been possible.

Mihailo Trandafilovski