

Contemporary Musical Art

Interview

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An Interview with Composer and Pianist Nina Siniakova

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Abstract. The journal *Problemy muzykal'noi nauki / Music Scholarship* would like to present its readers with an interview with Nina Siniakova, a composer and pianist of a diverse cultural background and broad interests. Her music explores the eternal subjects of beauty, love, life, and death. Her colleagues describe her style as “unique and refined,” (Mark Hagerty, composer, USA) and that in their opinion makes Nina Siniakova “one of the most interesting composers of her generation.” (Krzysztof Meyer, Professor Emeritus, Cologne Hochschule für Musik) Her interests in musical genres span from music written in the contemporary classical style to minimalism, jazz, easy listening, and music for children.

Nina Siniakova is active as a composer, pianist, educator, and a sales representative at Cunningham Piano Company in Philadelphia. A Doctor of Musical Arts, she was born in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, received her education at the Minsk Glinka Music College, the St. Petersburg State Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatory and the Musikhochschule in Cologne. Besides having developed her activities in music she has also studied theatrical acting professionally. Siniakova is a recipient of numerous awards, including the First Prize and the People’s Choice Award at the XII Open Competition of Composers named after Andrei Petrov in St. Petersburg, Russia (in the nomination “symphonic music” for her Concerto for Two Violins and Orchestra), a stipend from the DAAD (the German Students’ Exchange Service), a stipend of Exploring the Metropolis program NYC and many others. As a pianist and a composer, she has appeared at the Carnegie Weill Recital Hall, Symphony Space in New York, Harvard University, the Beethoven House in Bonn, the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic and the Zink jazz Bar in New York. With such an assortment of diverse accomplishments in music, Nina Siniakova appeared to be the perfect musician to take an interview from which the readers of the journal would find of great substance.

Keywords: Nina Siniakova, composer, pianist, Minsk, St. Petersburg, Cologne, United States of America, Philadelphia, contemporary music

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Современное музыкальное искусство

Интервью

Интервью с композитором и пианисткой Ниной Синяковой

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Аннотация. Журнал «Проблемы музыкальной науки / Music Scholarship» представляет читателям интервью с Ниной Синяковой, композитором и пианисткой, имеющей многообразные творческие работы и ведущей широкую музыкальную деятельность. Её музыка выражает вечные темы красоты, любви, жизни и смерти. Коллеги описывают её стиль как «уникальный и рафинированный» (Марк Хэгerti, композитор США), и это, по их мнению, делает Нину Синякову «одной из самых интересных композиторов своего поколения» (Кшиштоф Мейер, заслуженный профессор Кёльнской Высшей школы музыки). Жанровые и стилевые интересы музыканта охватывают современные устоявшиеся традиции, минимализм, джаз, лёгкую музыку и пьесы для детей.

Нина Синякова активно проявляет себя как композитор, пианистка, педагог, а также торговый представитель (коммивояжёр) Каннингемской фортепианной компании в Филадельфии. Доктор музыки, она родилась в Минске, столице Беларуси, получила образование в Музыкальном училище имени М. И. Глинки, в Петербургской консерватории имени Н. А. Римского-Корсакова и Высшей школе музыки в Кёльне. Помимо музыкальных занятий, она также профессионально обучалась актёрскому мастерству. Синякова — обладатель множества премий, включая Первую премию и Приз зрительских симпатий на XII Открытом конкурсе композиторов имени Андрея Петрова в Петербурге (в номинации «симфоническая музыка» за Концерт для двух скрипок с оркестром), стипендию от DAAD (Немецкой студенческой программы обмена), стипендию от программы *Exploring the Metropolis* в Нью-Йорке и другие. Как пианистка и композитор она выступала в Карнеги-холле (в Концертном зале *Weill Recital Hall*) и *Symphony Space* в Нью-Йорке, в Гарвардском университете, Бетховенском доме в Бонне, Академии музыки в Филадельфии, Петербургской филармонии и нью-йоркском *Zink jazz Bar*. С подобным разнообразием музыкальных достижений Нина Синякова представляет такой образец музыканта, который достоин внимания и беседа с которым может быть интересна читателям.

Ключевые слова: Нина Синякова, композитор, пианистка, Минск, Петербург, Кёльн, Соединённые Штаты Америки, Филадельфия, современная музыка

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Nina, can you tell us, how did you begin your musical activities? You have lived in several different countries, so you have a broad worldview and a rich musical background. Where did you study piano and composition, and who were your teachers? Which composers have influenced your musical style?

Well, indeed, I am lucky enough to have completed my studies in Belarus, Russia and Germany. Presently I live in the United States.

My parents never questioned what I should do. At the age of two I pretended playing the piano on our coffee table. I started taking music lessons at the age of four, and composed my very first piece at the age of six. Consequently, I was accepted at Central Music School No. 1 in Minsk. The first couple of years we studied ear training as our main subject. I felt so excited on those lessons! Most of my friends had a very unfavorable attitude towards ear training, but it was definitely my favorite subject. Musical ideas and melodies were easy to hear, to recognize, and to notate. At some point my teacher, Lubov Victorovna Makeyeva, suggested to skip a grade, which I did. Eventually, under her guidance I was able to become one of the winners of the All-Belarus Ear Training and Music Theory Competition. At some point, Lubov Victorovna asked us to write a small *polka*. It was a part of the ear training program. I remember her fascination with my tiny piece. She played it for several of her other students, but I could not understand what was so special about it. I suppose the other children wrote something much simpler.

Nevertheless, Lubov Victorovna recommended me to take composition lessons at our music school. At that time, it was taught by rather an unusual teacher, Ludmila Karpovna Schleg — she is a well-known



composer in Belarus. She was highly original in that she tried to teach schoolchildren things which were really above their age and understanding. I remember how she gave us lengthy list of various museums around the world and made us learn about all the museums of Vatican City in Rome.

At the age of 14, I was accepted to Glinka State Music College in Minsk, first as a music theory major, later adding the additional discipline of piano performance. The music theory students were required to study composition as part of the curriculum. Thus, we had composition lessons for 45 minutes twice a week — my teacher there was Mikhail Dmitrievich Vasyuchkov, another unique and likewise important personality in my life.

The first assignment he gave me was to complete a *Waltz* for piano. It had to be based on modal harmonic progression. This was done within a couple of weeks, and my teacher told me: “You are too advanced for the first composition course of the college, so you should pass on to the second course.” During the second course we were required to compose program music. I wrote a cycle of short pieces for piano for four hands, which my teacher gave the title of *City Pictures*. At the present day not only is the score to this cycle published, but this composition is regularly performed on all the four-hand piano competitions in Minsk, although I wrote it when I was a teenager.

I had a number of talented classmates with whom I studied together at the music college — one of them is Valery Voronov, who is a very worthy composer with a highly deserved reputation. We studied composition with Vasyuchkov together, and then after my subsequent studies in St. Petersburg Valery helped arrange for me to come to Cologne, Germany to study composition there. Presently he is a very well-known composer both in Germany and in Belarus. We have remained close friends.

After that, a surprising turn of events happened. I was seriously considering entering the Moscow Conservatory. I have met several professors in Moscow who were openly enthusiastic about me studying there. But instead, I decided to stay in Minsk, complete my studies at acting school and enroll in the Belarus Academy of Music. To my astonishment, I was not accepted to the Composition Department. My music seemed to be too innovative for the eldest members of the faculty. However, I was accepted there to the Musicology Department, so I studied musicology for two years, composing when I wished to do so.

Then a remarkable event occurred — I went to the well-known Belarusian city of Vitebsk to participate in a musicological conference there. The conference was named after the exceptional Russian musicologist, Ivan Sollertinsky. It took place on my 20th birthday, and there I made the acquaintance of the famous St. Petersburg composer Boris Ivanovich Tishchenko — that was the birthday present I received that day. Tishchenko suggested me to come to St. Petersburg to study with him. I made a trip to the city for consultation with him and, subsequently, for the entrance exam. My compositions were approved of, so in 1995 I began my studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. The years in St. Petersburg and my studies with Boris Ivanovitch influenced my entire being. I would never have become who I am without that most fascinating phase of my life.

After having completed my studies there and receiving a Doctor of Musical Arts degree, in 2001 I was awarded a scholarship from the *DAAD* foundation and went to Cologne, Germany to study with Krzysztof Meyer, a Polish composer who lived in Germany. He frequently said to me: “Nina, you are so talented, you have to do something with yourself and your music.” I spent six years in Germany, where I met my present husband, composer Kurt Nelson, who was also a composition student in Cologne. I married him while I was living in Germany and subsequently moved with him to the United States, where I have lived since 2008.

You have had many professional contacts with various composers in different countries. Which composers influenced your musical style?

When I was studying at the music college in Minsk and especially in St. Petersburg,

I was, probably, influenced the most by the music of my teachers and my classmates. The people with whom you study tend to make an impact on you. Here I must say that I was extremely lucky with the friends I had during my period of studies, and I presume that I would not shape up to what I am now, had I not such an active supporting group around me. I was greatly influenced by my teacher Boris Tishchenko, who was a very strong personality of a world level, as well as the music of all the other teachers of the St. Petersburg Conservatory and the major St. Petersburg-based composers. Among them I could name my orchestration teacher Gennady Banshchikov and my dear friend and colleague Alexander Popov. My classmates Svetlana Nesterova and Natalia Volkova, both of whom are at present very well-established composers, definitely played a big part in my compositional development.

After having studied for a year in St. Petersburg, I made a trip to Radzizowice, Poland, a small charming composers' residency about an hour away from Warsaw, to attend a two-week-long master-class organized by the *International Society of Contemporary Music* (ISCM). There were many people to come to the master-class, both among the students and the teachers. Tishchenko was rather a proprietorial teacher, and he did not like it when his students went out to study with other composers, so he was not happy with my sojourn in Poland. There was one teacher from Lithuania, Osvaldas Balakauskas, who looked at my music and asked me, why was it that I had a certain note in a particular spot in my composition. Later, I found out that he was a serial composer, so he was very particular about certain pitches occurring in certain spots of musical compositions. However, this critical comment of his affected me,

so, after having returned to St. Petersburg, I started composing music which was to a certain degree serial.

In my opinion, when you study, if you are ready to research different types of music, if you live in a very productive artistic environment, which provides you with a sufficient amount of inspiration, this is greatly conducive to fast growth and development. The case can be made for the art works of Van Gogh, who at some point of his life lived in Paris and regularly paid visits to various artists. So, his brother, when looking at each new painting which the artist painted in the evening, knew which of his colleagues he had visited during the daytime. Each time he was under the influence of different artists, but at the end he found his own personal style. It seems to me that a composer who is 20 years old is easily susceptible to new influences.

Meanwhile, St. Petersburg-based composer Alexander Radvilovich presented an impressive amount of contemporary music on his festival Sound Ways. This was the first Russian festival of this kind. I cannot say that the music performed at his festival exerted a great influence on me, but still I attended most of its concerts and educated myself and familiarized myself with certain musical concepts and conceptions.

In Germany, when I began studying with Krzysztof Meyer, during my first lessons he made a comment that in my music the rhythm was overly regular and monotonous, and that I had to find my own voice. Although I objected to his comment at that time, it exerted an impact on me, so the simplicity of the rhythmic structure disappeared entirely from my music since then.

After coming to the United States, I was greatly impressed with the music of Gyorgy Ligeti, Kaija Saariaho and Georg Friedrich Haas. I was also greatly affected by jazz

music, which holds a very important position in my life, as well as Belorussian folk music, from where my musical roots stem. I believe, these diverse musical elements have blended together organically into my personal compositional style.

You are also quite active as a pianist who performs contemporary music, since you have frequently played works by living composers in New York and its suburbs. Who were your piano teachers?

My first memorable piano teacher was Vera Feodorovna Beliakova at my music school. I believe it is because of her my performance has often been praised for its phrasing. Later, when I started studying piano at the music college in Minsk, I had a very good teacher, whose name was Liudmila Alexandrovna Tsikhun. She taught me how to discover many intricate elements in piano performance and open up certain emotional “channels” which I was not able to use before. At the Conservatory in St. Petersburg, I studied piano with Vladimir Viktorovich Polyakov and took chamber music classes with Tatiana Alexandrovna Voronina, who was an exceptional instructor. I remember how during the fifth year of my studies at the Conservatory, when I was actively performing works by contemporary composers from St. Petersburg and have already made a name for myself, I came to my first chamber music class with her, where she observed my way playing and said: “Nina, how can you play with such hands?” She had reason to believe I did not have a certain amount of freedom in my hand position. Tatiana Alexandrovna gave me some invaluable advice and helped completely change my posture and my touch. I am very much indebted to her for that. It often happens that the teachers with whom you study for many years provide merely

the background for the true impact which is frequently created by somebody who is not a major teacher, or with whom you meet by chance — those are the people who are often the most helpful to your formation. With that particular interjectory remark and with the few very helpful suggestions she made, Voronina greatly changed my attitude towards piano playing for the better.

I have performed in contemporary music concerts in St. Petersburg, in Germany and in the United States. During my years of study in St. Petersburg, in addition to regularly playing in the student concerts at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, I had a few chances to perform in professional concerts outside of the Conservatory. At some point my two close friends Natalia Volkova and Svetlana Nesterova and myself decided to perform in a single concert together, in which each of us would play one of Boris Tishchenko’s piano sonatas. I chose his Eighth Sonata, dedicated to the most distinctive St. Petersburg-based composer Gennady Banshchikov. The concert turned out to be a very successful one. After that performance Gennady Banshchikov invited me to give the premiere performance of his *Fifth Piano Sonata* at the Composers’ Union Building in St. Petersburg (Dom Kompozitorov). Subsequently, he dedicated this sonata to me. This was the beginning of my active performance life, when I continuously presented new music by living composers for piano. I have even had a recording of an entire CD of my performance, *The Music of St. Petersburg*, where together with an exceptional singer Olga Petrussenko I presented vocal cycles by Boris Tishchenko, Gennady Banshchikov, and Leonid Desyatnikov.

What kind of activities have you been engaged in after you moved to the United States?

After I arrived in the United States, I had to become used to new conditions, which are totally unlike those in Europe. My children were born, and my husband and I moved to the suburbs of New York, which were somewhat at a distance from the city's cultural life. Nonetheless, I was able to establish connections with various composers and composers' groups in this country. Most notably, I was introduced to the *New York Composers' Circle* in 2010, and I have been cooperating with them since then for over ten years. At that time the *New York Composers' Circle* was headed by Jacob Goodman. I wrote to him, he responded and set up an audition for me, where I had to demonstrate my compositions, after which I was accepted to this group. Shortly after, several of my pieces received its premieres being chosen from performers' "calls-for-scores". That truly helped establishing more connections with other different composers and new music performers, with most of which I have remained on very friendly terms since then, and my music began to be performed in New York and in other cities in America. I even remember an instance when I had two different world premieres of my compositions in two different venues in New York on the same day.

At that time, I also established close connections with ballet companies, including the New York City Ballet at Lincoln Center, the American Ballet Theater, Steps on Broadway, and the summer ballet program at the Juilliard School, in all of which I worked at alternate times, accompanying the dancers at the piano.

I would say the United States is rather a challenging country for a newcomer-artist. A great deal of our understanding of "how things should be done" is not applicable here. Let us say, most of Russian-speaking musicians grow up with the idea of being

unique and talented. Because of that many things can be forgiven. You can be late, you can be unready, you can fail to come to class or to a rehearsal, but since you are very talented, this probably will be forgotten. The state of competition in the United States is extremely tight. Every big city has several high-profile music schools. We are spoiled by having only one Conservatory in St. Petersburg. Imagine, how we would feel, if there were ten similar institutions — or twenty. Surely, there will be a couple, which would be the most prestigious, but the rest would not be that bad either.

Punctuality, readiness to work and the ability to come to the first rehearsal fully prepared are of a high value. I am always amazed by these qualities with American musicians. They are easy to understand. If you do not follow these simple rules, you will not be invited anymore, notwithstanding your talent.

On the other hand, things take much longer here for establishing a solid career. It has been 13 years since I came to America, and, I would say, only now certain invitations started to come by themselves.

During the last three years, I have had the greatest amount of performances of my music in all of my life, not only in the United States, but in many other countries as well. In 2018 I won a composers' competition in St. Petersburg for my Concerto for Two Violins and Orchestra, which I had written during the times of my close cooperation with the Jackson Heights Orchestra in Queens. They asked me to write this composition, since my friend Julia Meynert-Guarrino and her husband John Guarrino, who played the two solo violin parts were previously collaborating with this orchestra, so they were able to arrange for a performance of this composition. The Concerto for Two Violins and Orchestra was also performed

in St. Petersburg by soloists Alexandra Korobkina and Alexander Danilevsky together with the St. Petersburg State Academic Orchestra conducted by Alexander Titov. It was also featured at the opening night of the International Contemporary Music festival Sound Ways in St. Petersburg.

Since around that time numerous requests have been made for me from people living in various places to write compositions for particular ensembles.

One especially successful example was my suite *Three Wishes* for flute and piano, which I initially composed for accordion in 2014, upon a request from a dear friend, renowned St. Petersburg accordionist Vladimir Orlov. After that, the piece was transcribed for solo piano, and then for flute and piano. Since many people began requesting this music for themselves, I have altogether created seven arrangements of this piece for various instruments or instrumental ensembles. Finally, the flute and piano version of *Three Wishes* has recently been published at the *Kompozitor* publishing house in St. Petersburg.

I suppose, one of my favorite compositions was written in 2013 for the *Melodia* Women's Choir in New York. Its title is *From the Four Winds*, and it is scored for four French horns and female chorus. I enjoyed working on that project immensely, since in this work I set to music texts from the Bible in four languages — English, Belorussian, German and Greek — and incorporated four horns. The composition expresses the conception of the four archangels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds, as described in the Book of Revelation in the Bible.

In 2021, among other things I wrote a composition *Athena* for cello solo, which I am very pleased with. The piece was performed by Tom Cranes as a part of the project

organized by the *Philadelphia Chapter of the American Composers' Forum*. I was selected from a number of composers to take part in this concert, as the result of which I wrote a rather complex composition in a style that is somewhat unusual for me. I also composed a piece for solo organ called *Point Nemo*, which was performed in Moscow last spring by organist Olesya Rostovskaya. I must say, in recent years I have become very selective in my musical ideas, not allowing them to flow in a haphazard manner, but always trying to shape and polish them.

I am in a habit of working on several projects simultaneously, alternating from one to another. I have just completed a new piece, *Immagini sfuggenti (Escaping Images)* for the Bacchanalia baroque music ensemble based in New York. Additionally, I am finishing a cycle for young violinists, called *Emojis*, a new cycle for voice and piano based on Belarussian folk poetry, a set of jazz etudes for piano and a new large-scale composition for sextet.

I am also very active as a pianist performing contemporary music, and I regularly take part in contemporary music concerts, engaged in my own works, as well as those by other composers. I have a number of piano pieces, which I have played in various concerts, in New York, in Philadelphia, where I have lived for the last five years, and in other cities in the United States. I have also performed music by different contemporary composers at the concerts of the *New York Composers' Circle* and other concert organizations in the New York metropolitan area.

Most recently, my creative life has received a new swing. I have received an overwhelming amount of offers, both as a composer and a pianist. Premieres of my works in Belarus, Russia and the United States, along with requests and commissions

made my year 2023 quite booked. I am writing a chamber opera *A sei* for six women, that is planned to be premiered in Philadelphia in November 2023. There is a serious commission from the Bacchanalia baroque music ensemble in New York, made possible with the support of New York State Council on the Arts. Then there is the ongoing collaboration with the concert series *Musical Bridges* directed by you, where I am honored to be a featured composer in many of your concerts.

One of the leading Philadelphia contemporary music ensembles *Network for New Music* would like me to write a new piece for the coming season; I am discussing a project with a Philadelphia-based woodwind quintet *Revolution Winds* for which I would like to write a 15-minute philosophical composition presenting a research, if you will, on freedom and liberty. Solo recitals across the East Coast, a chamber ballet for children, a release of two albums, *One Step from Love* and *Frozen Reflections*, collaboration with another well-known contemporary music ensemble *Orchestra 2001* add to the variety of my creative activities. A lot to look forward to!

Can you tell us about your own music? How can you generalize your musical style? What are the goals you set before yourself in your music?

I remember many years ago having read an interview with Vladimir Tarnopolsky from about 2010, or even earlier. He stated that a composer in our time resembles a painter who is endowed with an immensely broad palette, and depending on the idea he wishes to express, he uses a particular paintbrush and applies particular colors to his canvas, creating the most diversely styled painting. I am interested in very different musical styles, and in my opinion, this comes close

to the ability to speak in several different languages. I greatly enjoy composing absolutely casual music, such as children's pieces, or various types of merry jazz pieces, and I feel that I am quite successful in composing this kind of music. I believe jazz rhythms enrich the language of my serious compositions. Jazz, especially its most genuine variety, has very complicated rhythms, as well as very complex harmonies, so when composers learn the language of jazz, they might find this very beneficial for themselves. This knowledge can very well be applied in contemporary music. I regularly listen to a large variety of music of the most diverse styles and directions, and in regards to real contemporary music, there is one thing which interests me to a great degree. It required many years for me to finally understand that I am interested in the quality of beauty. I think that music must possess noblesse and beauty. The latter concept is presently entirely out of fashion, unlike many other attributes, such as brilliance, virtuosity, or challenge, and has become "outdated." I am absolutely against such a state of affairs. I think that in contemporary music intricacy of feelings and of expressive means can very well exist, and even when a composition expresses an aggressive state, even so there can be a harmonious side to this aggression, which may very well be perceived. Undoubtedly, everything depends on the final result. I think that even if I would be asked to write music for a very grotesque and bloody storyline, I could still find in it such moments which would enable me to demonstrate in it the element of beauty, or, at least, harmony.

I also feel very strong connections with my national Belarusian roots. Belorussians represent a very holistic nation. In Belarus the folk culture and particularly folk music form an integral part of everyday life, and

is not limited merely to old ladies singing in villages. All the major folk holidays are celebrated not only in villages, but also in the cities. This element of the musical culture and the understanding of nature as an indispensable element for existence, has been present in Belorussian culture from the earliest pagan times. Everything which stems from folklore is absolutely imprinted in our genes, and in my case it forms a solid foundation. It is present in the way melody, rhythm and counterpoint are constructed and developed.

I have heard a large number of your musical compositions, and can testify of their extreme diversity of style. Some of them are written in a European avant-garde idiom with atonal harmonies and innovative textures, while many others have a more romantic style with tonal harmonies. By now these classifications have gradually become irrelevant, and we may grant the right to musicologists to engage in classifying the different stylistic directions of uses music into separate categories. This stylistic diversity can be best observed in your piano works. Your piano composition “Ad veritatem” for piano, composed in 2008, contains a mixture of atonal and tonally centered harmonies and vivid, virtuosic piano textures, ranging from traditional contrapuntal to modernist textural. It was written especially for the International Beethoven Piano Competition in Bonn, and it is composed as a set of variations with the initial theme — from Beethoven’s Sonata opus 110 — appearing at the very end. Your “Elegie” for piano, composed in 2018, is a plaintive, mournful piece combining romantic and modernist harmonies and textures. “Nocturne” is entirely atonal and harmony and contains elaborate exquisite modernist textures, while your piece

“Le Temps Filant” is rather statically diatonic in its harmonies and appears to be deceptively simple at first, but upon closer hearing, the listener discovers the immensely complex rhythms and continuously changing meters present, which endow the piece with its substance. To cite an example of your music for larger ensembles, your Concerto for Two Violins and Orchestra presents a case of organic combination of modern textures and atonal harmonies alternating with romantic textures and tonal harmonies. It begins with virtuosic passages played by the two violins, after which the orchestra enters subtly, gradually taking over the momentum from the soloists, bringing in loud dramatic orchestral textures. Towards the second half of the composition, tonal harmonies begin to prevail in the composition, producing a metamorphosis of style and harmonies. Do you consider this stylistic diversity a major element of your overall musical style?

I would say so. I would call it being “multi-lingual” in music. Many things interest me, and I am eager to take upon new challenges. I do hope though that a certain “main stream” or “backbone,” if you will, remains visible, despite all the stylistic changes in my music.

As a particularly striking example of my musical style, I can talk about my composition *Gelidi riflessi (Frozen Reflections)* for violin and harpsichord, about the history of its composition and of the result which has appeared.

My long-time friend from Minsk, a violinist, who now lives in Milan, Italy, was supposed to play a program called *Winter in Italy*. She turned to me with the request to compose a piece for her program. I thought about this for a long time, remembering my two trips to Italy, and conjuring up the usual commonplace associations with Italy, such as: pizza, Verdi, Mario Lanza (who turned out to be from Brooklyn), Luciano Pavarotti,

oranges against the background of a brightly blue sky in mid-January, as well as white walls brilliantly reflecting the rays of the sun. I had no idea how to make use of any of these elements to describe winter in Italy, since I wished to avoid clichés. After having pondered over this for a long period of time, I ended up discovering a set of black-and-white photographs of Venice in the wintertime. These were absolutely different from what I had described earlier. The first photograph which made an impression me depicted a reflection of a seagull in a half-frozen puddle, that eventually gave me an idea for the title, *Frozen Reflections*.

I was also impressed by a photograph of the gondolas lying abandoned covered with snow falling from a gray sky, reminding of the sky in St. Petersburg during the winter. It turned out that this symbol of love and leisure of life is lying forgotten and neglected under the snow. A third photo showed the Piazza San Marco [St. Mark's Square] in Venice all infested with seagulls. So, the first movement of the piece is called *A Misty Morning on Piazza San Marco*, the second movement is called *Seagulls*, and the third is called *Gondolas Covered with*

Snow. I had the chance of bringing many different types of experimental instrumental textures and sonorities into a piece which I composed, in which I vividly described Italy in the gray winter as I had imagined it. Incidentally, the feeling of beauty, which I talked about earlier, I believed was achieved quite successfully in this piece, as well as a sense of harmoniousness. The manner in which the two instruments interact with each other in ensemble contains many of the already standard techniques of contemporary music, including noise effects, imitations of seagulls, as well as sounds produced in the strings of the harpsichord. It seems to me that this remains one of my most successful pieces, in which I made use not only of many extended techniques, but also of numerous contrasting expressive means.

Information about me and my music, as well as recordings of some of my compositions may be found on the website: <https://www.ninasiniakova.com>

Thank you very much, Nina, for the interesting and substantive conversation. We wish you ongoing success in your musical endeavors.

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