



ISSN 2782-3598 (Online), ISSN 2782-358X (Print)

International Division

Interview

УДК 78.071.1

DOI: 10.56620/2782-3598.2022.4.096-109



Electronic Music in St. Petersburg: An Overview. Interview with Composer Alexander Kharkovsky

Anton A. Rovner^{1,2}

¹*Moscow State P. I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory,
Moscow, Russia*

²*Moscow Humanitarian University, Moscow, Russia*

^{1,2}*antonrovner@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5954-3996>*

Abstract. In his interview the St. Petersburg-based composer Alexander Kharkovsky, a specialist in electronic music and an organizer of electronic music concerts, tells about his own musical compositions, and also presents the history of the formation and the development of electronic music in St. Petersburg, starting from the 1970s. He describes the musical compositions and the artistic paths of the primary pioneers of electronic music in St. Petersburg, such as Sergei Belimov and Anatoly Korolyov, recounts about the musical compositions and musical activities of younger electronic composers, such as Sofia Levkovskaya, Svetlana Lavrova and others, and also tells about his participation in various events devoted to contemporary music, including electronic music, such as the festival *From the Avant-Garde to the Present Day*, the activities of the *PRO ARTE* Institute and the *eNsemble* contemporary music ensemble, the lectures of Moscow-based electronic music specialist Andrei Smirnov. All of this presents a lively picture of the contemporary music scene in St. Petersburg in the late 20th and early 21st century.

Keywords: contemporary music, electronic music, Sergei Belimov, Anatoly Korolyov, contemporary music festivals, *From the Avant-Garde to the Present Day*, *PRO ARTE* Institute

For citation: Rovner A. A. Electronic Music in St. Petersburg: An Overview. Interview with Composer Alexander Kharkovsky. *Problemy muzykal'noj nauki / Music Scholarship*. 2022. No. 3, pp. 96–109. DOI: 10.56620/2782-3598.2022.4.096-109

Международный отдел

Интервью

Электронная музыка в Санкт-Петербурге: экскурс. Интервью с композитором Александром Харьковским

Антон Аркадьевич Ровнер^{1,2}

¹Московская государственная консерватория имени П. И. Чайковского,
г. Москва, Россия

²Московский гуманитарный университет,
г. Москва, Россия

^{1,2}antonrovner@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5954-3996>

Аннотация. В интервью петербургский композитор Александр Харьковский, специалист по электронной музыке и организатор концертов электронных сочинений, рассказывает о собственном музыкальном творчестве, а также представляет историю становления и развития электронной музыки в Петербурге начиная с 1970-х годов. Он характеризует музыкальные произведения и творческий путь основных мэтров петербургской электронной музыки, таких как Сергей Белимов и Анатолий Королёв, очерчивает музыкальную деятельность Софьи Левковской, Светланы Лавровой и других. Кроме того, высказывается о своём участии в различных мероприятиях, посвящённых современной музыке, в том числе и электронной, таких как фестиваль «От авангарда до наших дней», работа института «ПРО АРТЕ» и ансамбля *eNsemble*, лекции московского специалиста по электронной музыке Андрея Смирнова. Всё это представляет оживлённую канву в области современной музыки Петербурга конца XX и начала XXI веков.

Ключевые слова: современная музыка, электронная музыка, Сергей Белимов, Анатолий Королёв, фестивали современной музыки, «От авангарда до наших дней», институт «ПРО АРТЕ»

Для цитирования: Ровнер А. А. Электронная музыка в Санкт-Петербурге: экскурс. Интервью с композитором Александром Харьковским // Проблемы музыкальной науки / Music Scholarship. 2022. № 4. С. 96–109. DOI: 10.56620/2782-3598.2022.4.096-109

Alexander, it would be interesting for our readers to learn about your musical activities and about how you started composing electronic music.

I was born in Leningrad in 1960. I began my studies at the N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov College affiliated with the Leningrad Conservatory (as a composer and a musicologist), then entered the Leningrad Conservatory. I began my studies as a

composer and studied for a year with Boris Alexandrovich Arapov, then switched to musicology as my major field and completed my studies at the Conservatory as a musicologist. However, I never stopped composing, and I chose particularly this compositional technique for the theme of my musicological studies, which was quite unusual and exotic for those times. But I shall tell about this a little later. Speaking about

the Conservatory, the instruction there at first was rather conventional and traditional, and we almost never touched upon the avant-garde trends in music, especially the electronic domain, which is almost entirely unavailable for us during those years. We knew that in Moscow in the 1960s and 1970s composers gathered around Evgeny Murzin at the Moscow Studio of Electroacoustic Music, which at that time was situated at the Scriabin Museum, and composed music on the ANS synthesizer. We, on the other hand, drew all of our knowledge about electronic music merely from a number of books and articles written by prominent musicologists.

One particular book which was very famous and popular at that time was “Tehnika kompozitsii v muzyke XX veka” [“Compositional Technique in 20th Century Music”] by Czech composer Ctirad Kohoutek, which was published in Russian translation in the mid-1970s, which all the musicians knew practically by heart, and the students studied it thoroughly from beginning to end. Obviously, I also read it carefully and discovered numerous rare names and descriptions of compositional techniques in it. From there I learned, among other things, about the structural element of Arnold Schoenberg’s twelve-tone composition. From there I also learned that there existed such a composer as Iannis Xenakis, the description of whose stochastic technique at that time greatly mystified me. But where could it be possible to listen to such music? However, we did have the course “Contemporary Music,” in which I remember we listened to Messiaen. But I do not remember listening to any electronic music during those years. During the years of studies at the music college, when I studied Kohoutek from cover to cover out, for the first time I realized that there existed such music which is not written down

in notes, but recorded directly on tape. I learned about Pierre Schaeffer’s *musique concrète* from the same book. After a few years, while I was completing my studies at the Leningrad Conservatory, I was already writing a diploma thesis about Xenakis – the first work on the musical legacy of this composer in our educational institution.

A great amount of influence was exerted on me by Sergei Belimov, who was virtually the only composer who worked in the sphere of electronic music at that time. My composition studies in his class at the Rimsky-Korsakov Music College, my attendance of his concerts with the premieres of his compositions and my regular communication with him impelled me towards composing electronic music (although, obviously, not only that). A great amount of new music and new approaches towards composition we, Belimov’s students, learned from the listening sessions which he organized and from the LP records which he brought to class.

I myself began composing electronic music as a student of the Conservatory in the mid-1980s, making use of consumer tape recorders. I showed my compositions at the student organization which was present at the conservatory that time, where I brought my own tape recorders and columns. Of course, these etudes were not strictly electronic: to the best of my abilities, I played the recorder and on the strings of the piano, rustled paper, knocked on makeshift materials, even recorded the wails of the centrifugal machines (obviously, washing machines) and, most importantly, brought the microphones closer and farther and superposed the created sounds on each other. Sometimes this resulted in some interesting effects. These compositions do not exist anywhere, except on my tapes. As I learned later, similar things were done



by European and American experimenters from the 1940s to the 1960s.

Then it turned out that a *Kurzweil* synthesizer appeared in our milieu at the Leningrad Composers' Union. This instrument was given by American composer Joel Spiegelman. As I remember, this took place in 1988, at a large international contemporary music festival, when our city was visited by Luigi Nono, John Cage and other luminaries of avant-garde music. For the first period of time the synthesizer stood there unpacked, and then it was switched on in some way and began to be used. During those years, many contemporary music festivals, including our eldest and most important festival "St. Petersburg Spring," included small-scale chamber concerts right in the halls near the recording laboratory, where the electronic compositions created on this synthesizer were sounded out. However, as I remember, for the most part they resembled applied cinema music: at this stage the composers were simply mastering their technique.

It is paradoxical, but, nevertheless, it remains a fact: new musical influences were brought into our country sometimes in the forms of gifts of technical devices from other countries. Our state of affairs at that time was quite poor at that time, and we were in no condition to buy any such instruments as the *Kurzweil* by ourselves. But, whatever the case was, the composers began acquiring experience of composing electronic music. I, myself, gradually accumulated knowledge in this sphere. Following my early experiments carried out with the help of tape recorders, after my diploma thesis on Xenakis (naturally, I familiarized myself with his electronic music which was available at that time – courtesy of the Conservatory's recording laboratory!), I acquired additional experience for my mature works.

Please tell us about your own music. What kind of electronic compositions have you written, and what electronic programs do you use?

In my own music I have dealt with montage technologies. This has been the case from my student years and up to the present day. I have worked with samples – either creating them myself, or taking various fragments from the sounds of whatever there was and processed them by various means, including applying the technique of granular synthesis. I have never worked with live-electronics, and I have absolutely no inclination for working in that direction. Among my electronic compositions, I would like to highlight a few which I consider to be the most representative. First of all, I should mention my *Tsifrovaya sonata "Vremena sutok"* [*Digital Sonata "The Times of Day"*], composed in 2003, which consists of four movements, as is proper for sonatas from the Classical and Romantic periods. One of the movements was even assembled in sonata form, despite the fact that the composition was written entirely by electronic means. It was presented several times on various music festivals. Next comes my composition *Zmey Kamlanna* [*The Serpent of Camlann*]. This piece includes a program note: "Camlann is that place where, according to legend, the final battle took place between the English King Arthur and his nephew Mordred, which was instigated by a case of misapprehension." Both armies were set up in line across from each other, everybody was frightfully tense, but negotiations were going on, and there was a possibility for the uncle and the nephew to come to an agreement with each other. And everybody would have remained alive. But an accidental occurrence happened: one of the warriors drew out his sword to slay a serpent crawling by in the grass,

the army of the opposing side perceived the weapon drawn out during the course of the negotiation as a sign of treachery and deceit – and the tragedy played out. Both armies perished entirely on the Camlann field. This serious dramatic piece was written in 2007. I think of these two pieces as the most representative of everything I have ever composed.

I also have a number of short humorous electronic pieces in which I tried under the guise of a joke to create something in the vein of pure music. For example, one of my pieces has a title, which carries a deliberate mistake in it: “ArtisTSism” – this is a typo error which I had seen somewhere and decided to incorporate it into the title of my composition, to create a funny preannouncement and then, correspondingly, to use it to the best effect in the music. Its complete title is: *ARTISTSISM. Variativnye muzykal'nye uzly* [Artistry. Variable Musical Nodes] (the second part of the title is also derived from the speech of a sports commentator). There is also the composition *Nestroynye khory* [Discordant Choirs], which consists of three movements, which features the sounds of Japanese flutes, then nightingales and then people, and all of this singing happening in various kinds of unhuman voices.

My latest completed work is my piece *...Es ist wie Gras*, an electronic piece based on the penitentiary church chant of the Russian Orthodox Christian Old-Believers living in Oregon, USA, recorded by Elena Nikolayevna Razumovskaya. She was my teacher of folk music in the music college, a remarkable person, a collector and researcher of Russian folk music, who opened up for us, her students, an unusually important and diverse musical world. As I perceive it, this sound world penetrated quite organically into this particular electronic piece. In fact, this work does not have any other

sounding material besides the sound of the voices singing the folk penitentiary verse (obviously, in a processed and complexly mounted way).

Please tell us about Sergei Belimov, about your studies with him and about his electronic compositions. As I understood, he exerted a considerable amount of influence on you and the other composers who studied with him.

Sergei Belimov lived a regrettably short life: he was born in 1950 and died in 2011. He is, indeed, one of the very first electronic music composers in Leningrad. I studied with him during the last three courses of the music college. In his class there was a standard procedure: to devote part of the studies to examining the students' compositions, while resorting the rest of the time to listening to various kinds of contemporary music, including the most innovative, rare, and what at that time was perceived to be the most unusual. As part of the course he gave us assignments – to prepare presentations on the works of many contemporary composers. This was all very beneficial for us and brought in a lot of variety into our perception of contemporary music.

At the time when I only discovering the existence of electronic music, Belimov was already working actively in this sphere. His activities in the field of musical composition were multifarious. He had the three most important contacts in the sphere of electronic music about which he told us. In the early 1970s he made frequent trips to Moscow where he worked with the famous engineer Evgeny Murzin, composing music on the ANS synthesizer. Then he worked with Bulat Galejev and his development laboratory *Prometey* [Prometheus] in Kazan. A number of his pieces were composed by him with the assistance of engineer



Alexander Nesterov, who at that time was an employee of the “Lennauchfilm” [Leningrad Studio of Popular Science and Educational Films] and built his own synthesizer, which functioned on other principles rather than the ANS synthesizer. I had the opportunity to communicate with Nesterov only once – in the mid-1980s, during the years when that synthesizer was active to the utmost degree. The unusual music composed on it was used in tutorial films on scientific themes. Many composers created music on that synthesizer. Unfortunately, I, myself, never saw it. Later on, when together with composer Sofia Levkovskaya I hosted a radio program titled *Svobodny electron* [*The Free Electron*], Belimov took part in our shows and recounted to us in great detail about his interactions with these three masters of early electronic music in the Soviet Union.

One of Belimov’s first significant electronic compositions was his six-minute fragment from his First Symphony created on the ANS synthesizer. This fragment appears close to the finale of the symphony. As Belimov later told us, this was the very first case when electronic music sounded in the Grand Hall of the Leningrad Philharmonic Society. For us, young composers and musicologists at that time, and especially for his students, the world premiere of his First Symphony, which took place in 1981, with the insertion of that fragment of electronic music was a very conspicuous event. Besides the electronic fragment, the symphony included singing in the style of folk music, and also an immense bell was situated on the stage, and the conductor was pulling at its tongue; generally, that symphony demonstrated not even a poly-stylistical, but a poly-cultural musical mixture. This was a very large-scale work, which was written when Belimov was only 31 years old. All of this

was unusual and intriguing for us. During the rehearsals of the symphony, Belimov was reprimanded for “having enlaced the entire Philharmonic Hall with wires.” He brought special acoustic systems on a truck, since for the sake of a quadro effect he had need of four columns, so wires really had to be interlaid across the entire hall.

Belimov’s next significant electronic composition from that time is called *I solntse v nochi* [*And the Sun at Night*]. Composed for flute and magnetic tape, it was created in Leningrad in 1985 by means of Alexander Nesterov’s synthesizer, which was set up at the “Lennauchfilm.” Four years later, in 1989 at the artistic studio bureau “Prometey” the composer created a special new version for a hall built for spatial music. As the composer described it, the engineers who worked there had a special object resembling a chess board or a box with transplant seedlings, comprised of twenty-four squares. Inside the cells there were photo elements which it was necessary to illuminate with a flashlight, as a result of which various dynamics were turned on. Upon a spatial translocation of sound there occurred a sort of vestibular anomaly: any person in the hall listening to the music lost all sensation of upward or downward direction. In 1993 Sergei moved to France, where he lived for the last seventeen years of his life. There he worked already on a UPIC computer, which is a machine with a graphic interface for drawing sound projected by Xenakis. With the help of the UPIC in 1995 Belimov created his electronic composition *K inomu istochniku potoka* [*Towards A Different Source of the Flow*] for soprano, flute and magnetic tape, and then, in the 2000s, he wrote the trilogy *Videniya Dante* [*Dante’s Visions*], which consists of three movements, each of which featured its own live solo instrumentalist playing together

with the electronics. The first piece of this trilogy, *Ad [Hell]*, composed in 2001, was for saxophone and magnetic tape; the second composition *Chistilishche [Purgatory]*, which was created in 2005, had the cello playing with the electronics, and the third piece, *Ray [Paradise]*, completed in 2006 was for flute and electronics.

Another notable composer of electronic music in St. Petersburg, besides Belimov, is Anatoly Korolyov. Please tell us about him and his music?

Subsequently, already in the mid-1990s, Anatoly Alexandrovich Korolyov began working in the same cabinet where they had placed the Kurzweil synthesizer. Presently he is a professor of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he teaches computer information technologies to composers. At first he assumed the modest position of an engineer. During those years he began composing electronic works which now I already perceive as classics of electronic music. At that time, I was especially impressed by his composition which was called *Shalyapin.wav*. The composer received a commission to restore recordings of baritone Feodor Shalyapin's singing, but he understood that they can also be made into samples, which could be used in an electronic piece. The latter he created out of separate glissando sounds, as well as out of interesting articulation-based fragments appearing in recordings whether the great baritone sang. As a result, in Korolyov's composition we hear Shalyapin's recognizable voice, but at the same time, obviously, what turns out is absolutely new music created by the composer himself. At the same time, there arises the strange sensation of the presence of Shalyapin, who in certain fragments sings simultaneously, as if in choral fashion, in several voices.

Incidentally, this composition exists in recording. Korolyov has created many other original, interestingly well thought-out electronic compositions. He has also written other works, besides the electronic music, but this falls outside of our present subject.

Did you establish connections during those years with electronic composers or organizations promoting electronic music in other cities, besides Leningrad? Indeed, in the late 1980s in the Soviet Union there appeared numerous interesting musical societies and significant contemporary music festivals, including those devoted to electronic music.

At that time a new society appeared, called VAKMiMI – Vsesoyuznaya assotsiatsiya kamernoy muzyki i muzykal'noy informatiki [The All-Union Association of Chamber Music and Musical Informatics], which was organized by Mark Rais in Tallinn. This society held a founding congress, which I, myself, attended while being a student. A remarkable programmer went there together with me, Nikolai Kirsanov, at that time also still a university student (as far as I know, later he left St. Petersburg). This was a very multifaceted person, a polyglot and an amateur multi-instrumentalist musician, while in the sphere of computer programming he was a highly professional specialist. Together with him I created stochastic etudes on the university computer, which was situated on the basement of one of the buildings of the new student university complex on Martyshkino (while the second floor hosted the operational hall with dozens of terminals). So, together with him, I went to Tallinn to the VAKMiMI congress, which also featured electronic music concerts as part of its program. They represented



the entire Soviet Union. Composers from various cities and republics of the country gathered there, including, naturally, the three Baltic republics, as well as guests from Moscow. We all shared our ideas, conceptions and technologies with each other there. On the basis of the results of this event, compilations of articles based on electronic music and the festival's concerts were published. I remember a remarkable situation, when the organizers of the concert decided to organize a concert of Xenakis' works. But they had no access to his electronic compositions (today it is virtually impossible to imagine such a state of affairs, but back then that was how things stood), so they found no better means of obtaining them than to ask me in St. Petersburg to record these compositions from studio tapes from the Conservatory recording studio onto bobbins (during the process of which some of the works turned out to be cut into fragments) and to send them as a package by mail, and, after having received them, they glued them back together and thereby would be able to present the recordings on the concerts. So some of the musical events were organized by collecting the musical material presented on it in such a half-amateurish, half-underground fashion.

Please tell us about your subsequent musical activities in the 1990s.

Later on, in the 1990s, I withdrew from the main processes of contemporary music, because I started my work on radio "St. Petersburg" and on "Radio Russia – St. Petersburg," where I worked full-time for about ten years. I liked this work very much, everything was very interesting for me, I found myself in a wonderful artistic company, but I had much less time to pay attention to my music. Besides my journalistic, editorial and purely musical

aims which comprised my duties, there was another attraction for me there: at that time there was an active technical re-equipment of the radio. I studied everything I could: mounted patches of recordings on tapes in various ways (both with scissors, in the old-fashioned way, and on the lathe of an electronic montage), and then processed them through a computer. I became an expert in all of these technical aspects. So, when the next era began, and we were all able to buy computers for ourselves, even if they were not of the best quality, in order to work with them and compose electronic music at home, at that moment a whole set of musicians, including me, were already morally prepared for this. Although, obviously, we did have to learn some additional features.

I was helped a considerable amount by friends: for example, electronic engineer Sergei Koreshkov, flutist and performer of early music (at that time he was also a master of musical instruments and concurrently a computer genius) Pavel Andreyev. I also wrote numerous articles which were published in a journal for audiophiles *AudioMagazin* [*AudioStore*] and in the publication of the philosophic society *Skripichny klyuch* [*Treble Clef*], while one article – about Xenakis – even came out in the famous St. Petersburg-based thick journal *Zvezda* [*Star*]. When I worked on the radio, Sergei Belimov visited the festival *Tribune of Electroacoustic Music* in Amsterdam as an official representative of the St. Petersburg radio. Because of that, our radio received – and I myself was given, since I worked there at that time – an immense amount of electroacoustic music represented on that festival in 1996. This was a very intriguing thing for all of us, because it presented an area of music culture which previously was completely

unavailable for us, since, as you can fathom, there was no internet available at that time. And here all of a sudden this immense bulk of materials ended up at my disposal with a detailed description of how all this music was created, with annotations written by the composers themselves. I tried to listen to all this music, as well as to demonstrate it at my lectures and everywhere where it was possible to show. Of course, first of all, they were presented on the radio. I was allowed to open up a lengthy radio program – an hour's length! It was broadcast after midnight and was called *An Hour of New Music*.

Later on, towards the late 1990s, the Conservatory opened up a studio of new informational and computer technologies, and soon Anatoly Alexandrovich Korolyov also started to work there, and after that Anton Valeryevich Tanonov. They teach there, and they have already raised several generations of students. These include composers who are capable of creating electronic music considerably more professionally than we were able to when we started our activities. And maybe, more professionally than we do even now.

When and how did you return to composing electronic music, and on what concerts and festivals did you demonstrate it?

In the beginning of the decade of the 2000s I started experimenting with sounds on a replenished computer (at that time, buying a sound card was itself a rare event: a decent sound card was frequently more expensive than the computer itself), not understanding clearly that I was really composing an electronic piece. One day I received a phone call from my friend, St. Petersburg-based composer Igor Vorobyov, who organized and for many years maintained the musical festival *From*

the Avant-Garde to the Present Day together with our elder colleague and pedagogue Igor Efimovich Rogalyov, and he said that Rogalyov and he came up with the idea to include electronic music into the concerts of their festival. They invited me to participate in their festival with my compositions. By that time, I had not composed music for already ten years and was just beginning to return to that activity particularly by means of electronics. It turned out that I already had ready pieces, and I ventured to demonstrate them on the festival. As a result, my new composition titled *Tsifrovoy diptikh* [*Digital Diptych*] was sounded out, of all places, at the Small Philharmonic Hall. It was a little strange to demonstrate my music in the hall where from childhood I listened reverently to great musicians. Nesterenko sang here, Virsaladze and Krainev played here. It is awe-inspiring to say this, but Shostakovich himself took his bows here, and I remember seeing him, when I was 14 years old... And here my electronic entity was heard – either resounding or screeching... But this first time it was a short diptych, and I ventured toward it. And I was happy that in this hall my piece was presented, which the audience and the organizers not only listened to carefully, but even accepted and approved of. The following I presented on this festival my aforementioned twenty-minute electronic sonata *Vremena sutok* [*The Times of Day*], which virtually presented *tape music* created on a computer.

Who else was engaged in electronic music? Did you have any contacts with them?

At about that same time Igor Vorobyov and I established connections with a very interesting group, which built a new instrument – not a musical one, but an instrument of visualization of sound, named “chromotonal synthesizer.” The group



which was headed by Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences Mikhail Mefodyevich Nesterov, was working on a project in a laboratory affiliated with the St. Petersburg Institute for Informatics and Automation of the Russian Academy of Sciences (SPIIRAN. – A. R.). Nesterov was searching for musicians with whom it would be possible to create musical and other types of art works and present them to the public. Even though Igor Vorobyov never composed and still does not compose electronic music, he, nonetheless, offered a few of his vocal and instrumental compositions recorded on tape to be used for these experiments. In particular, some very intriguing light-generated visual decorations were created to his partly children's ballet "Assol" based on Alexander Grin's novelette. I also offered this group my electronic pieces, to start with, so that they could simply experiment with them. For example, the selfsame *Digital Sonata* was performed with a video sequence created in real time by the chromotonal synthesizer. Subsequently, I myself was taught to change the adjustments on this synthesizer, which by that time was realized as a computer program: as a result, I created a piece called *Skazka kholodnoy zimy* [*A Cold Winter Tale*], which carried in it a reference to Shakespeare's play *A Winter's Tale*. This piece was already especially conceived as a synthetic composition, which meant that I chose such samples on which this program titled "chromotonal synthesizer" would react in the most interesting manner in real time, and which would provide the most original and enthralling visual results.

During the course of many years you organized electronic music concerts under the auspices of the festival "From the Avant-Garde to the Present Day." Could you tell us about them?

In 2005 Igor Rogalyov and Igor Vorobyov suggested organizing electronic music concerts as part of the festival *From the Avant-Garde to the Present Day*. First we had a probationary concert, which took place immediately in the Grand Hall of the Academy of Sciences on University Embankment (thanks of Mikhail Mefodyevich Nesterov and the chromotonal synthesizer presented on that concert). Then we began organizing concerts as the Journalists' Building on Nevsky Prospect, where we held two or three events (thanks to our colleagues among the journalists). Later, all of this relocated into the hospitable multimedia hall, which was also the cinema hall of the Bobrinskys Palace on Galernaya Street, where the Department of the Free Arts and Sciences of the St. Petersburg State University (formerly the Smolny Institute of Free Arts and Sciences) was situated. There we organized concerts for many years, and in addition to the concerts, together with composer Sofia Levkovskaya, we organized a parallel project of radio programs in the studio "Radio Russia – St. Petersburg." We hosted a radio program called *Svobodnyy electron* [*Free Electron*], while the concerts became sort of traveling face-to-face meetings with the audience. Such concerts occurred at least once a year, sometimes two or three times annually. Thereby, we had a rather large time span, into which we could already fit in occasional retrospective concerts, including concerts with the classics of electronic music, and sometimes even multimedia projects, such as, for instance, Zbigniew Rybczinski's audiovisual works. We already started inviting composers from other cities, including our Moscow-based colleagues, such as, for instance, Feor Sofronov, who presented his compositions. In our concerts we also presented works by deceased Moscow-based composers,

such as Albina Stefanou (Stoianova), who composed electronic music while working at the Theremin Center, the Moscow Conservatory's electronic studio in the 1990s, and in 1995 went to America to study at Dartmouth College, as well as Alexander Nemtin, who is most well-known for his completion of Scriabin's *Prefatory Action*, who composed electronic music on the ANS synthesizer in the 1960s.

I presume that your concerts included electronic music not only by composers from Moscow, but also those from St. Petersburg, too.

Of course, we demonstrated electronic music by contemporary composers from St. Petersburg, as well as those from other Russian cities. In particular, Anatoly Korolyov at that time began to compose very interesting works in the sphere of live-electronics and to come up with ideas that were phenomenally effective from the point of view not only of music, but also of visual effects. For example, he has a piece incorporating a flashlight, the title of which is *Flashlight Music* (connoting not only an electric flashlight, but also a flash or spot of light), an interactive electronic composition where the composer himself, who is also the performer, directed the live electronic process by means of the light coming out of a flashlight – this is a true example of synthetic audiovisual art. During the performance, the audience followed with its eyes the spot of light moving on the screen, as if spellbound. And, naturally, everybody listened to the resultant sounds this motion created. Another composition is *Spektry khimericheskikh elementov* [*The Specter of Chimeric Elements*], four multimedia etudes, – a witty and amusingly elaborated composition. We also cooperated with the St. Petersburg-based composer Vladimir

Rannev, and a number of his compositions was presented by us, which were very interesting and unusual: Vladimir had mastered certain computer technologies in Germany earlier than anybody else did, having worked at the Cologne electronic studio. Presently, he is a composer of world renown, having created several operas with the use of multimedia technologies.

In time, we began to invite composers of the younger generation – either Korolyov's students from the Conservatory, or young composers who attended the courses of Andrei Ivanovich Smirnov from Moscow. The latter made trips to St. Petersburg and conducted courses and practical sessions at the *PRO ARTE* Institute at the Peter-and-Paul Fortress. Among the young participants, mention must be made of composer and pianist Andrei Glazkov, as well as composer Sergei Khismatov. Later we were joined by composers Artur Zobnin (who is also a wonderful violinist and the director of the Molot Ensemble dedicated to performing contemporary music) and Yuri Akbalkan, the latter virtually thought out and assembled the last two or three programs of our concert. Yuri is very knowledgeable in the sphere of electronic music, a remarkable inventor and, generally speaking, a person of great energy. At the same time, among the composers of the elder generation, we presented those who were very seldom performed in St. Petersburg, such as, for instance, Alexander Tunik. The latter created some curious works which included processing of recordings of bird songs, after which I turned his pieces into audiovisual opuses by means of the chromotonal synthesizer. Composer Alexander Berdyugin, who, unfortunately, has passed away, also gave us his compositions for our programs. Naturally, we also presented in our concerts



the music of Sergei Belimov, who sent out to us his electronic phonograms from Paris. A few years ago, the festival *From the Avant-Garde to the Present Day* ceased to exist, and with that our electronic music concerts also came to an end.

In which other endeavors at organizing contemporary music, especially electronic music concerts did you participate during those years?

Besides the festival *From the Avant-garde to the Present Day*, my music was also performed at the contemporary music festival *Sound Ways* organized by St. Petersburg-based composer Alexander Radvilovich. In the beginning of the decade of the 2000s, I also took part in an endeavor which was very important for me. I have already mentioned the musical programs of the *PRO ARTE* Institute and Foundation which was situated in the Peter-and-Paul Fortress (the foundation exists up to the present day, but it no longer has any musical programs). An ensemble was formed under its auspices, bearing the strange, but memorable name *eNsemble*, directed by the St. Petersburg-based composer Boris Filanovsky, the chief conductor of which was Feodor Lednyov. These two musicians began organizing various contemporary music concerts – both retrospective, featuring the music of Anton Webern and other early 20th century composers, and devoted to present-day music, and also organizing competitions of contemporary compositions, moreover, with separate voting by a professional jury and by the audience (a very instructive experience!)

During one of the retreats of the *PRO ARTE* Institute in Vyborg, we started discussing with Boris Filanovsky the prospects of organizing concerts and courses devoted to electronic music. It was particularly upon the initiative of Boris

that the Institute invited to St. Petersburg the aforementioned Andrei Smirnov, a great specialist in this sphere, the former director of the Theremin Center affiliated with the Moscow Conservatory, an author of a number of books devoted to electronic music, to read a course of lectures devoted to new electronic technologies. This resulted in a large cycle of lectures, which went on for an entire year, featuring one lecture a month, and I, myself, attended all of them regularly. Smirnov also held practical lectures for young composers, which were attended by people with musical, as well as those with technical, sound engineering backgrounds. They included such interesting future composers and experimenters as, for example, Yuri Didevich and Sergei Khismatov, who now represent the next generation of electronic composers, who are very active in this sphere.

Thus, a hotbed devoted to electronic music was formed. The *PRO ARTE* Institute obtained two Mackintosh computers, on which the composers could master the technology, compose music and mount together patches of sound. Andrei Smirnov gave advice, which programs could be used, if the composers had Windows software installed in their computers, and, generally, gave a lot of valuable practical instruction. In other words, there gradually appeared a technical base, and we all received another useful impetus for our subsequent work.

As I understand, the St. Petersburg-based composer Sofia Levkovskaya took an active part in the organization of many of the concerts and festivals devoted to contemporary, and, most notably, to electronic music. Please tell us about her own musical compositions?

Sofia Levkovskaya, who, unfortunately, passed away at the height of her powers

in 2011 – and this became a shock to everybody who was acquainted with her – wrote different kinds of music, not all of it was electronic. Her main direction was that of instrumental theater. However, in the sphere of electronics she composed a number of highly individual and memorable compositions. For example, I was literally stunned by her piece *Verdi. P.S.*, which was created by means of montage of fragments of a recording of Verdi's Requiem. Of course, her half-an-hour-long chamber opera *Carmen. PEREZAGRUZKA [Carmen. RECHARGE]*, which features Sofia's highly concentrated dialogue with a certain very well-known musical work. Here it would be appropriate to mention her composition for electric guitar and orchestra *Das ist fantastisch*, as well as her piece *Freid otdykhayet [Freud Pales in Comparison]* for string quartet, percussion, video and electronics. Some of these compositions, obviously, presume, a certain amount of theatricality in their conception. It must also be mentioned that the electronic phonograms to these pieces, taken separately, create an impression by themselves, and have been demonstrated in concert practice in this quality.

Have any concerts or other events connected with electronic music been organized at the St. Petersburg Composers' Union?

At the St. Petersburg Composers' Union during a certain period of time there existed a Section for Electronic Music and Multimedia, whose participants were a group of highly gifted composers. We, the organizers of concerts at the *PRO ARTE* Institute and at different festivals, were friendly with them and exchanged compositions with them. This Section included three musicians – Svetlana Lavrova, Sofia Levkovskaya and Elena Igotti (Antonenko). They put up their

own concerts and organized their festival *Vremya muzyki: Fin de siècle [The Time of Music: Fin de Siècle]*, which was directed by Svetlana Lavrova. I also participated to a certain degree in this festival, as did my colleagues who composed electronic music. later Elena Igotti began organizing her own concert programs, including thematic ones, such as, for instance, *20th Century French Composers: Vocal Music* (Elena is a professional singer), and some of the programs were devoted to electronic music. One especially memorable concert was devoted to the works of Italian 20th century composer Giacinto Scelsi, in the organization of which Elena was helped by a remarkable artistic person – the sound engineer Dmitri Yalkin; I gave an introductory speech at the beginning of this concert. Dmitri Yalkin and Elena Igotti together prepared many intriguing concert programs, some of which included Elena's own compositions. For some of which Dmitri set up for the singer (who was also the composer and the improviser) special technical devices and props, which she herself directed during her performances. In other words, she sang, and her voice was elaborated by the computer program in real time, and simultaneously she directed these technical devices in an intuitively comprehensible way. At our concerts at the cinema hall on Galernaya Street we were joined by the wonderful sound engineer and musician Leonid Levin. His participation included him demonstrating his own multimedia poetical-improvisational compositions created with the participation of Olga Pavlova (and as for the technical side, we could not have organized a single concert at the department without his assistance, – when everything works ideally, you do not notice the sound engineer at all, even though it is his miraculous work which helps convey



all the music to the audiences). I shall also mention Gleb Rogozinsky, an exceptionally interesting person from the St. Petersburg State Bonch-Bruyevich University for Telecommunications who composes music combining serial technique and electronics. In other words, on the one hand, he makes use of a technique which had been broadly applied in prior decades, which in our time is considered to be somewhat academic and outdated. But because due to his main technical education, he is in perfect command of the language of programming, namely, the Csound program, designated for a low-level programming of sound (in this context, “low” is not something bad, but rather something good, since it involves complete control of the quality of sound), he has created some very intriguing compositions with no less intriguing “scientific” *PRO ARTE* titles (for example *Podprostranstvo 4* [*Subspace 4*]). Incidentally, fanciful titles can also be found in the titles of Alexei Glazkov, stemming from the astronomical nomenclature of various planets and stars. It goes without saying, that each of these

composers is possessed with a unique style with its own references and implications.

If I could sum up my entire story, here is the moral. At first, it is difficult for everybody, everything is new and unusual, since at a certain time in the past the access to new technologies was hampered, and at this stage, everybody always invents his own approaches and the individual directions for his search (or, as Mussorgsky would have said, “fumbling”). But then – and this greatly helps in life – if somebody gains access to technology or knowledge which is appropriate for creating something of worth, or at least intriguing, then everybody becomes happy with the opportunity of showing each other the results, giving some advice, and even allowing to give a try. And as a result, an artistic milieu is created, in which one can interact with other people. But – do not forget this! – every person continues to be different from everyone else. Most likely, because there are many possibilities in store. And the people who join our sphere are hardly dull in character.

Thank you very much, Alexander, for speaking to us!

Information about the author:

Anton A. Rovner – Ph.D., Cand.Sci. (Arts), Faculty Member at the Department of Interdisciplinary Specializations for Musicologists in the Moscow State P. I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory; Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy, Sociology and Culturology in the Moscow Humanitarian University.

Информация об авторе:

А. А. Ровнер – Ph.D., кандидат искусствоведения, преподаватель кафедры междисциплинарных специализаций музыковедов Московской государственной консерватории имени П. И. Чайковского; доцент кафедры философии, социологии и культурологии Московского гуманитарного университета.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 23.09.2022

Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 21.11.2022

Accepted / Принята к публикации: 23.11.2022

