

In Memory of a Colleague

From the Editorial Board

On May 12, 2025 Valentina Nikolayevna Kholopova passed away. She was a musicologist with whose name, it could be said without exaggeration, an entire epoch of Russian music scholarship is connected. A talented and serious-minded researcher who aspired to penetrate into the mysteries of the artistic process, Kholopova artfully disclosed both the musical content and the technology of musical composition in her works. She was endowed with a sophistication of perception of music and an ability to express her perspective in a maximally vivid and precise way. She spoke about herself: “God granted me the capability of swiftly creating applicable music theories, transposing what is perceivable by the ear into rational notions.”¹ And, indeed, the inseparable unity of the two sides of music — essence and form — in the scholar’s academic studies led to the comprehension of what may be labeled as the concrete revelation of the abstract, or, otherwise, — towards the discovery of the eidos of the world of sound, the means of its existence.

The range of Valentina Kholopova’s scholarly interests was extraordinarily broad, but contemporary music always remained the center of attraction for her. Having been one of the first in Russian musicology to do so, Kholopova turned to studying the works of Anton Webern, Sofia Gubaidulina, Alfred Schnittke, Edison Denisov, and Rodion Shchedrin, disclosing all the richness and depth of these composers’ musical universes. A sizeable contribution on her part was made into the comprehension of the most important categories, such as rhythm, melodicism, texture, thematicism and form. Kholopova’s dissertations

for the degrees of Candidate of Arts and Doctor of Arts were devoted to the historical and theoretical aspects of musical rhythm. One of the musicologist’s greatest merits is the elaboration of the different types of rhythm (the regular-accented, the irregular-accented, the regular-unaccented and the irregular-unaccented) and their connections with the stylistic systems of Debussy, Stravinsky, Bartok, Prokofiev, Shostakovich and other greatest 20th century masters. Research of the rhythmic aspect of Russian music led to an entire set of discoveries, among which is the acknowledgement of the national specificity of Russian rhythm, the discoveries of the innovative quests of the 19th century Russian classical composers, who had prepared the ground for Stravinsky’s rhythmic innovations.

The viability of Kholopova’s ideas was incredibly high. The scholar’s conceptions were conducive to the enrichment of both scholarly thought and the system of Russian musical education. Kholopova elaborated the theory of musical content. The concept brought into Russian musicology, having pervaded over not only the spheres of genre and style, but also musical psychology, semiotics, performance interpretation, musical emotions, etc., has formed a substantial counterbalance to the compositional teachings concentrated on musical grammar.

The theory of musical content has formed a new direction in Kholopova’s academic school and has transformed Russian pedagogy. Through the scholar’s efforts, a new department was created at the Moscow Conservatory — the Department

¹ Kholopova V. N. O tvorcheskoy protsesse muzykoveda [On the Creative Process of a Musicologist]. *Protsessy muzykal'nogo tvorchestva* [Processes of Musical Creativity]. Issue 7: Collection of Works No. 165. Ed. and comp. by E. V. Vyazkova. Moscow: Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, 2004, pp. 192–211.

of Interdisciplinary Specializations for Musicologists — and a specialized course devoted to the theoretical and practical studies of the figurative-artistic world of music has been implemented in Russian schools, secondary specialized colleges and higher educational institutions.

Valentina Kholopova was not only a significant scholar, but also a talented pedagogue, who has brought up an entire assemblage of brilliant musicologists. Among her students are such

outstanding researchers as Ivanka Stoianova, Dina Kirnarskaya, Marina Lobanova, Natalia Vlasova, Tatiana Frantova.

Valentina Kholopova was connected with *Russian Musicology* through artistic and personal friendly contacts. During the course of many years, she was a member of our journal's editorial board. The interview presented below provides a tribute of memory of the outstanding scholar, colleague, associate and like-minded person.

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"Valya Kholopova Loves Music Tremendously..." An Interview Written in the Form of a Monologue*

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Abstract. The presented material is based on a conversation the author of the article had with the outstanding Russian musicologist, Doctor of Arts, and Professor at the Moscow Conservatory, Valentina Nikolayevna Kholopova (1935–2025). The main focus of the discussion revolves around the musicologist's influence on the creative biography of composers, as well as on the fate of Russian music as a whole. In the interview, Valentina Kholopova recalls her remarkable classmates from the Moscow Conservatory, among whom Sofia Gubaidulina, Edison Denisov, and Alfred Schnittke particularly stand out. The collaboration between the musicologists and the composers of the "Sixtiers" generation significantly shaped many pathways of Soviet musical culture, facilitating the integration of Soviet music into the global musical landscape. The role of the musicologist in these processes was also exceptionally high; it is enough to recall the story of the creation of the monograph on Anton Webern. The monograph, written by Valentina and Yuri Kholopov, is one of the first books about 20th-century music written in Russian; it became a true bestseller, sparking discussions among musicians throughout the country.

Keywords: Valentina Kholopova, Soviet music, 20th century music, avant-garde composers, musicology

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This material has been prepared on the basis of a conversation with Valentina Nikolayevna Kholopova that took place at the Moscow State Conservatory on June 27, 2016.

I had wished for a long time to question her about things that, unfortunately, rarely form the topic of interest on the part of musicologists, and even more seldom provide the subject of scholarly publications. One of the few exceptions of this was Valentina Nikolayevna's own article *O tvorcheskom protsesse muzykoveda* [On the Creative Process of a Musicologist] (2004), [1] a sort of concise autobiography, in which the outstanding scholar tells about the creation of the concepts, themes and works, precisely identically to the way a composer, writer or artist may have told about it. The brilliant and full-fledged scholarly activities, the materials of which were formed by artistic destinies and musical compositions, — and this is still not its entire content. No less significant is her belonging to a living music history and her direct influence of its formation and development.

This was a special choice on the part of the musicologist — to write about music that is created from the pens of contemporary composers, moreover, those who were rather young at that time. The discovery of unknown names, the analysis of unknown compositions... Presently, these names and these works belong to eternity, but, after all, at a certain period, there were also some people who heard and understood them for the first time.

The musicologists of the generation of the 1960s were able to create what their teachers

could only have dreamed of, — an artistic union with composers based on friendship and professional trust. Valentina Nikolayevna mentions the names of Mikhail Tarakanov, Yuri Kholopov and Evgeniya Chigareva, but this list may be continued onwards.



I requested Valentina Nikolayevna to answer my question about the influence of a musicologist on a composer's creativity and on the possible aspects of such an influence. I also asked her, whether she ever had the experience of discussing with composers the ideas of their future compositions. Valentina Nikolayevna did not answer me at once, but

later she sent me a list of works that composers had dedicated to her. It follows from this list that Kholopova's ideas have acquired yet another sound in our days. I am presenting it here in Valentina Nikolayevna's redaction:

- Yuri Vorontsov. *Sirius* for piano (a real concert piece present in the repertoires of several pianists).
- Lu Chanuang. *2–3–5–7–8 Weeping* for clarinet, violin and marimba. (My ideas regarding rhythm.) Performed on my previous jubilee celebrations.
- Another Chinese composer. Composition for Orchestra. (My ideas regarding texture.)
- Roman Ledenev. *Micro-Variations* (small variations on a simple motive — my monogram). The composer performed this work on my 70th anniversary.
- Sergei Zagny. *Hommage à Valentina Kholopova* for piano. (Following our conversations about the content of music).

Valentina Kholopova
about a Musicologist's Influence
on a Composer's Music

A musicologist exerts his or her influence not solely by separate books, even though they be voluminous. We can rather talk here about the influence of everything there is in a human being. For example, it is possible to exert an influence in the sphere of pedagogy — there have been instances when what I had taught on the first course, later reechoed in the fifth course.

Composers have always turned to me as a person who was capable of providing professional evaluation. And this is true not only in regard to the young composers. For example, Sergei Slonimsky has recently invited me to a production of his opera *King Lear*, in which Vladimir Yurovsky acted in the role of one of the protagonists. Then he called me and asked for my opinion. And I understood that even such a great composer, a master about whom the press around the world writes, may be in need of the support of a professional.

As for direct influence, it usually does not happen that a composer would hear something from a musicologist and immediately start applying such ideas in his or her music, although I do remember a few such occurrences. Once I made a presentation in Lithuania, where I spoke about Stravinsky and polyrhythm, and later I became acquainted with a musical work by a Lithuanian composer wherein this technique was incorporated. The same applies to my students at the Conservatory: once I presented them Sofia Gubaidulina's electronic composition *Vivente — non vivente* to listen, after which they composed electronic music themselves. I have heard responses to Yuri Kholopov's harmony course. Students remarked that this course had endowed them with a high and sturdy professional education and had taught them technique.

Regarding the support for young composers: when I studied at the Conservatory, I was certain that there existed a composer developing among us who would later become a classic. I was looking around and asking the question: who is it? And I detected Schnittke. He studied one year ahead of me, we were almost of the same age. But I was always attentive to him, trying to perceive, how he was thinking, how he was speaking, how he was writing... It was very difficult to support him: at that time, even this hissing sounds constructed from the first letters of the composers' last names — Schoenberg, Schnittke ... — aroused the desire of prohibiting them. There were no opportunities for writing something and having it published, I waited for two decades for this to happen.

But Schnittke noticed my attention towards him, he saw my tremendous interest. I listened to all of his compositions, attended all the premieres of his works, and did not miss a single one of them. I knew that this was very important for a composer — to express moral and artistic support.

The same thing was the case with Gubaidulina. Once, when I had already started writing about her, a group of students from the Advanced Training Department came to me. I read a lecture about her music. Not long before that my article *Obnovlenie palitry* [Renewal of the Palette] was published in the journal *Sovetskaya muzyka* [Soviet Music]. [2] It turned out that they read it before they listened to the music! And when I was writing another article — *Dramaturgiya i muzykal'nye formy v kantate S. Gubaidulinoi "Noch' v Memfise"* [Drama and Musical Forms in Sofia Gubaidulina's Cantata Night in Memphis], [3] — Sonya was constantly asking me: "When will it come out?" — she was waiting for it intensely. Since more frequently these composers were hearing not words of support, but only abuse. I remember how a few years earlier Victor Bobrovsky's article *Otkroite vse okna*

[Open All the Windows] [4] had been published, and Sonya was wondering: “What is this? Are we really in such a hot and stuffy place?” Of course, the title was thought of not by Bobrovsky, but by the editorial board, but it really hurt.

However, everybody did have the need for support, even the most talented, even the most established composers. For example, the selfsame Sergei Slonimsky invited me to the premiere of his 27th Symphony, which took place at the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall.² The success was tremendous, and the orchestra was called up for an “encore” 7 or 8 times... This is an absolutely contemporary classical trend! I also wish to speak of success in regard to *King Lear*. After all, a symphony is a homogenous genre, whereas *King Lear* is an opera. Slonimsky was able to create a theater within a theater — in the part where he brings in a dialogue between Leo Tolstoy and Shakespeare. As the result, it became possible to present an image of Shakespeare, a discussion of Shakespeare, the philosophy of Shakespeare, and the present-day perspective of all of this.

When Vladimir Yurovsky began studying the opera’s plotline, he saw that there were many acts of killing in it. He made the decision not to write about this, but to sing it, not to show it, but to tell about it. At the same time, all the major ideas remained in it.

I told Slonimsky that the idea was absolutely fantastic — to present a theater within a theater, and that this was the type of theater I wished to attend. And he replied that all of this is prescribed in the score. He was very pleased that his discovery was registered by me. So even the most acknowledged composer has great need for the support of a musicologist.

There were also other moments of support. For example, when Sofia Gubaidulina showed

me her *Third String Quartet*, I was filled with admiration for it: such innovation, such mastery! And I was the first to have written about Alfred Schnittke’s *First Symphony*. I had always read his articles. Once I observed that, when writing about Stravinsky, he had in mind particularly this symphony. Later, I transferred this fragment into my own article, and then in my book, which we wrote collaboratively with Evgeniya Chigareva. [5] After having read it, Schnittke asked me: “How did you guess it?” Of course, a composer will always trust a musicologist who is able to make such guesses. I have taken two large interviews with composers. One of them was with Schnittke, upon the commission of the journal *Nashe nasledie* [Our Heritage], [6] which had been supported by Raisa Gorbacheva. Prior to that, when I had turned to Schnittke with requests to give an interview, he asked me: “This would cost me half a sonata.” After such words. Of course, it was difficult to insist. And here, the journal itself turned with the commission.

The second interview I did with Rodion Shchedrin for publication in the newspaper *Pravda*. [7] I asked different things from each one of them. But both of them told me: “The questions you have asked me were never asked of us by anybody else.” This shows me that the musicologist’s perspective is not merely unique, but presents composers with new turns of thought.

Wherein did they see our capability of understanding and valuing their music? One time Gubaidulina and Schnittke were talking about me, and they came together in one thought, which they expressed the following way: “Valya loves music tremendously.” And, after all, this does not always happen among musicians. The selfsame Schnittke said:

² This took place on December 18, 2010.

“The people with absolute pitch are sitting and they do not hear anything.” In reality. The ability to hear a composition does not always depend on perfect pitch. And if somebody “loves music,” — this means that such a person may be trusted.

We were also always in dialogue with Edison Denisov. He presented me with many of his compositions, and he saw my support. And the most important thing consisted in the trust.

Musicologists exert an influence not only on composers, but also on performers. When I taught a course on analysis in music college and at the Conservatory, for example, among the pianists, I demonstrated many new compositions. And these works were later played by them not only in specialized piano class, but also at the state exams. Thereby, music by contemporary composers entered the repertoires of performers through the tutorial process.

This had been told me numerous times by my student Andrei Kurdyashov.³ Students turned to him with the request to listen through their performances of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* from the positions of musical content. They had a great amount of trust for his evaluations. At one time, his portrait hung at the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music — in the class where he read his lectures. When I held classes there, under his portrait, I thought that this was not right: it was not I, but he was supposed to hold classes under my portrait...

Composers considered our responses to be very important for them. Denisov always invited us to performances of his compositions,

and we endeavored to understand them together. Altogether, our generation comprised a special group of like-minded colleagues. We all supported each other. There was a cohesion of thoughts, ideas, intentions and understanding. The ill-wishers called us a “hornets’ nest.”

When we had our books published, the composers read them. I remember, once we were standing near the library together with Denisov and Schnittke and discussing my book about rhythm. [8] The articulation of the problem itself was evaluated by the composers very highly. And the monograph about Anton Webern that and I wrote together with Yuri Kholopov [9] exerted a considerable amount of influence. Without exaggeration, the success of this book was tremendous. The news about its publication spread throughout the entire Soviet Union. It was discussed everywhere, and everybody who was interested in new music was very impressed by this research work. At that time, Schnittke wrote a certain poetic construction, which he called a “rhyme.” This rhyme was placed by me into the book.

At that time, almost nothing had been written about contemporary music. For this reason, *Anton Webern* made a perceptible impact on the musical culture. The book’s ideas were avidly absorbed by composers. It was also important that now the difficult and incomprehensible Webern also became “ours.”

This concept, “our composer” meant much — a new perspective, a new type of musicology. It was used for the first time by Schnittke. When Chigareva told him that she was going

³ Andrey Yuryevich Kudryashov (1964–2005) was a musicologist, pianist, and educator. In 1994, he defended his Candidate dissertation titled *Iсполнител'skaya interpretatsiya muzykal'nogo proizvedeniya v istoriko-stilevoi evolyutsii (teoriya voprosa i analiz "Khorosho temperirovannogo klavira" I. S. Bakha* [Performative Interpretation of a Musical Work in Historical and Stylistic Evolution (Theory of the Question and Analysis of J. S. Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*)] under the guidance of Valentina Kholopova. Since 1991, he taught at the Department of Interdisciplinary Specializations for Musicologists at the Moscow Conservatory. He also worked at the M.M. Ippolitov-Ivanov State Musical-Pedagogical Institute and the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music.

to write a book about Mozart, he exclaimed: “About Mozart? This is so remarkable! Now Mozart will also be ours!” So, when speaking about influence, it is necessary to have in mind the entire complex: knowledge, love for music and the psychological climate. This is what is the most important!

We studied the composers’ music, and they studied our books. Once I came to Schnittke’s house to listen to his *Faust*.⁴ And he started to read my book about texture [10] I brought to him as a present. I listened and even cried — I felt pity for Faust when he died... When I finished, Schnittke said: “Here is such an example from Glinka — several reharmonizations on one note.” He was fascinated by the composer’s skill.

Our interest in the best composers created an atmosphere in which they felt themselves to be normal people engaged in normal activities. It was always the case that, having shown us one of their compositions, they later brought us a new work of theirs.

Of course we took great risks. To take the example of Yuri Nikolayevich Kholopov — how he suffered for his love for contemporary music! Half of his life passed, before he was able to defend his dissertation. And, after all, it was not possible to lay any blame on talent. But a research work could be attacked for its theme — subject matter presented an easy target. This negative attitude on the part of the Communist Party leadership also spread to me. They talked the following way: “Kholopov’s sister is interested in Hindemith and, generally, there is something that could be perceived in her...” And the article about Gubaidulina? In order to have my material about the cantata *Night in Memphis* published, I knocked at the doors of all the publishing houses.

The compilation *Muzyka i sovremennost'* [Music and Contemporaneity] was closed down, everything was suspended. And, all of a sudden, there was a dearth of materials there, and I was asked: “Give us any material you wish.” So I gave this article, and it was published. Yes, at times we had to resort to cunning. But there is no wall that is absolutely deaf: if one knocks all the time, somewhere there will necessarily form a loophole. The musicologists of the elder generation were present in an ideological circle from where they were not able to free themselves in any way. The chief emotion in Soviet society was the sensation of fear, and the older a professor was, the stronger this was perceived.

For many there were other musical ideals in existence. Such as, for instance, for Victor Zuckerman, they were Chopin’s *Mazurkas*. A student of Yavorsky, who studied religious content based on the Gospel present in music, Zuckerman never once told us about this and did not even provide a hint.

For this reason, we learned about contemporary music not from the professors, but from Denisov and Schnittke. They provided us with books, textbooks, opened up new names for us... Musical enlightenment at the Conservatory stemmed chiefly from these two people.

I also wished to write about Rodion Shchedrin. [11] But when he was a great superior at the Composers’ Union, it was not possible to approach him. And then, already later, when I turned to him, he said: “Nobody has written about me for a longtime. You are the first to have stretched your hand to me.”

All of this is our history. It is necessary to speak about it, write about it. If we shall be gone, nobody else shall recount it.

⁴ Schnittke A. Cantata *The History of Doctor Johann Faust* for countertenor, contralto, tenor, bass, mixed choir and orchestra (1983).

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