

MINNESOTA COMPOSERS FORUM

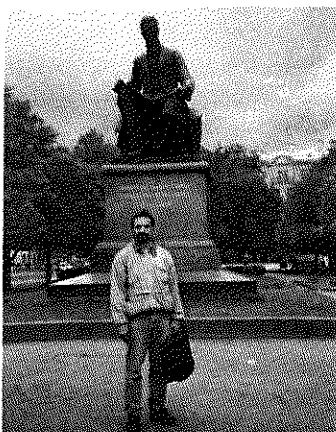
In the Shadow of Rimsky-Korsakov

by Jeremy Beck

For the fall semester of 1993, I was awarded a grant from the American Council of Teachers of Russian through the University of Northern Iowa to be a Visiting Instructor in American Music at Herzen University in St. Petersburg, Russia. While my initial assignment was to teach a variety of courses in both concert and popular American music to non-music majors (mainly English and education majors), once I was there I also was invited to give a graduate seminar in Herzen's music department and, later on, to present some lectures to composition students at the Conservatory. Both the graduate seminar and the lectures had to be given with a friend translating.

As an American composer, I had two goals in mind when I took on this "extra" teaching. First, to introduce American concert music to Russian musicians and second, to learn as much as I could in four months about Russian music, composers and the current state, in general, of new music in the new Russia.

The first thing one quickly learns to understand about Russia today is that the news reports we receive in the West are no exaggeration. Nothing there is absolute, everything is subject to constant and rapid change. The present rate of hyper-inflation increases monthly, even weekly—there is no way that salaries for musicians and stipends for students can keep pace. Many of these people hold down two or three jobs—some in music, some not—just to survive. While many Western products and foodstuffs are now available in the stores, the high prices make access to them simply inconceivable for most Russians. With so many problems in their day-to-day lives and an often frustrated, dim view of the future, it is difficult to imagine that Russians would be interested in the arts or music, much less



Jeremy Beck at St. Petersburg Conservatory, Russia, in front of the statue of composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

new music. But the arts, especially music, are deeply connected to the spiritual and religious history of the Russian people. I often felt that, for them, attending a concert or the opera is akin to being in a cathedral. Mussorgsky's choruses from *Khovanschina*, the string quartets of Shostakovich, and even Schnittke's recent *Concerto for Choir* tap deeply into the soul of the Russian people, beyond the manacles of the past Soviet regime and the present pain of economic and political re-definition. In this context, music is not what one pursues once "leisure time" is achieved—it is understood to be ever-present, as simple and as necessary as a loaf of bread.

When I first met with the graduate students in Herzen's music department, I asked them which American composers they had heard of or knew something about. Besides the popular triumvirate of Gershwin, Copland and Bernstein, they knew about Ives and Carter (but didn't really know about their music) and also knew quite a lot about minimalism, citing pieces by Cage and Adams. (Adams' *Harmonielehre* had been played in Petersburg two years ago as a part of a new music festival.)

I decided the best approach for their seminar would be a chronological one mixed with certain discussions about style, influence or

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Reflections on Self-Publishing for Composers

by Denice Rippentrop

As musicians and composers, our training focuses almost exclusively on the development of musical skills. We receive limited guidance in creating and developing a career, and we are often too involved in polishing our art and craft to give those issues much thought anyway. The result may be limited performances and slow career advancement.

One option for reaching a wider and more diverse group of performers and audiences is through publishing. While there are numerous advantages and disadvantages to working either with existing publishers or self-publishing, this article will concentrate on my experiences in establishing my own publishing company.

Things to consider

While self-publishing has proven to be a very good choice for me, it is important to carefully weigh your own circumstances before taking such a major step. If you set up and maintain your own business, the investments of both time and resources can be substantial. Here are some questions you should ask yourself before beginning:

- who is my market?
- how can I best reach them?
- how large will the business be?
- do I have the time, desire and ability to manage the business side of the publishing, or will I need outside help?
- do I have the financial resources for start-up costs (e.g., preparation and printing of music inventory, promotion, office supplies, equipment)?
- would I be happiest and most productive working alone or with other composers?

Advances in computer technology have created a burgeoning self-publishing boom in all fields, not just in music composition. Self-publishing can be as simple as making

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technique. I also decided to include some pieces and composers they may already have had some experience with (like Ives' *The Unanswered Question*), placing these in an historical context while showing connections and filling in gaps along the way. Finally, given the somewhat limited time factor (the seminar met once a week for two hours), with the exception of Varèse, it seemed best not to spend too much time talking about any composers who were not native-born Americans. They already knew a lot about Schoenberg and Stravinsky anyway!

While this seminar was in progress, I was simultaneously meeting composers and musicians associated with the Conservatory and the House of Composers (formerly the Union of Composers). In this way, I was asked to speak to some classes at the Conservatory and was invited to many concerts of new music that I otherwise might not have known anything about. I was also able to hear a number of pieces by Russian composers in informal "listening sessions". One whose music was most impressive—and should be known and performed in the West—is that of Boris Tischenko, a Professor of Composition at the Conservatory. When he had been a student at the Conservatory, Professor Tischenko had studied with Shostakovich. I had the opportunity to hear his *Symphony #5* and his *Cello Concerto*, among other pieces. The *Cello Concerto* was the most striking work of these two. Its language is clearly related to that of Shostakovich, yet it grows in a new direction, having absorbed other technical elements from the later twentieth century. This gives a powerful impression of music that is not tonal and not atonal, in which the penetrating focus of the solo 'cello against the seemingly unstable orchestra is overwhelming in its intensity.



Next month: In the Shadow of Rimsky-Korsakov, Part 2

Jeremy Beck received his MMA and DMA from Yale University. He has studied with Jacob Druckman, Martin Bresnick, Stephen Jaffe, Lukas Foss, Marlos Nobre, Anthony Davis, Thomas Oboe Lee and David Loeb. His recent commissions include works for the Brno Chamber Orchestra and the Alaria Chamber Ensemble. He has received fellowships from the Pierre Boulez Composers/Conductors Workshop at Carnegie Hall. He has taught at the University of Northern Iowa since 1992. Recent premieres include his Rhapsody (1994) for clarinet and ten instruments at the Oregon Bach Festival and Shadows and Light (String Quartet #3-1994) on a concert produced by the Iowa Composers Forum.

MINNESOTA COMPOSERS FORUM

**In the Shadow
of Rimsky-
Korsakov: Part
Two**

by Jeremy Beck

From November 14-20, 1993, the House of Composers produced the Third International Festival of Contemporary Music. According to the Artistic Director of the Festival, Alexander Radvilovitch, because funding is so scarce, they are only able to produce this festival biennially. Still, for all its funding difficulties, the program for last year's festival was truly international. It featured music and musicians from Russia, the United States and many different parts of Europe.

I was able to attend a number of the concerts presented that week, including the opening concert held at the House of Composers. The soot-covered and run-down appearance of the outside of this House belied its gorgeous and well-maintained nineteenth-century interior. The chamber orchestra "Mozarteum" opened the festival in a large, wood-paneled room—not large enough to be called a hall—for an intimate audience of about 50. (I don't think they could have fit any more chairs into that room even if they had wanted to.) This chamber orchestra's performance included Pärt's *Fratres*, Gubaidulina's *Seven Words*, Penderecki's *Capriccio for Oboe and Strings*, Ligeti's *Ramifications* and Slonimsky's *Concerto Buffa*. Performances of American music that week included Crumb's *Makrokosmos I, II, III and IV*, Feldman's *For Bunia Marcus* and *Palais de Mari*, Riley's *Sunrise of the Planetary Dream Collector* for string quartet, Ives' *Hawthorne* and Cage's *String Quartet in four parts* as well as his *TV Köln*.

I had a chance to meet with Sergei Slonimsky at the Conservatory a week or so after the festival was over, when I gave a presentation of my music to his analysis class. We discussed and compared the current state of new music in our two



Lenin Memorial, Finland Train Station, St. Petersburg, Russia.

countries and he expressed his concern that European art music still seemed to have "too much influence" over the concert music he frequently heard coming from the United States. Additionally, he was rather suspicious of minimalism, not altogether accepting of many a composer's stated philosophy behind this particular style or technique.

This sentiment turned out to be something of a common theme—back in my graduate seminar at Herzen, I began the course with pieces by MacDowell, Beach and Foote from the nineteenth century to give a sense of perspective. We then rapidly entered the twentieth century with Ives, Cowell, Cage and Partch (they adored Partch!) while later classes introduced them to the usual line-up from the 1920s-60s. But it was after we began discussing minimalism, post-modernism and current approaches to pluralism and synthesis that their ears really pricked up. Much of the American concert music they already knew was generally composed before 1970. Even if new recordings and scores were available (which they aren't), most Russians, even the Library of the Conservatory, can't afford to buy them. They know something about minimalism because, being very popular throughout Europe, various pieces in this genre have made their way onto festival programs in Petersburg. The Russian graduate students,

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**American Music
in Search of an
Audience**

by Brooke Portmann

Why aren't people coming—if not in droves, then at least in sizeable numbers—to concerts of 'serious' music by American composers?

To find an answer, I began first by interviewing a variety of people—composers, musicians, presenters of concerts, listeners—asking each the question, "What has encouraged and what has discouraged the performance of American art music?"

In the often fascinating interviews, we seemed to come around to a kind of sticking place: "American cultural inferiority" would receive the greatest share of "blame," although "ugly sounding music" was not far behind, at least among non-composers and non-musicians.

I was dissatisfied with "American cultural inferiority" as an answer. It did not explain much, it seemed to me. It certainly did not lead me to ideas for stimulating the interest of new people in new music concerts, which was one of the other reasons I began the study, since, at the time, I was general manager for *Zeitgeist*, a new music ensemble.

It's not that Americans aren't listening to music. Many Americans are listening to a lot of music. First, they are listening to symphonic music. While symphonic audiences may not be large enough to meet orchestra expenses, still, there are more bodies in seats for music by dead (or mostly dead) European composers than for orchestral or chamber music by American composers, living or dead. Second, it's not that Americans aren't listening to American composers. They (we) flock to concerts and record stores for the newest works by popular and folk American composers.

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while more interested in minimalism than Slonimsky had been, told me—very politely—that they found this type of music to be “a little wearying” after studying a few different pieces in this style.

At the time of these discussions at Herzen about minimalism, I gave a second lecture at the Conservatory, this time for the composition class of Boris Tischenko. I gave this lecture in a small classroom which contained little that was unusual: two grand pianos, some chairs and a music stand. But the portraits on the four walls of this small room testified to its historical legacy. It was here, in this particular room, that Rimsky-Korsakov had taught *his* composition class, followed by Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Arapov and others.

The presentation I gave that day focused only on music composed after 1970. These students at the Conservatory, like those at Herzen, were mostly interested in the music which had developed after the first wave of minimalism. This music—difficult to define categorically in terms of style—seemed to them to have broken free of an academic European influence without completely rejecting it; it was American in a fresh way, without resorting to pastiche or obvious references to popular music. They were anxious to know more about this music, music by composers who have shown themselves to be unrestricted in style, utilizing whatever technical and aural features of the twentieth century might be appropriate to the purpose of a given piece. The works I played for them included Rochberg's ground-breaking *String Quartet #3* (1972), Corigliano's *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* (1977), Harbison's *Twilight Music* (1984), Bresnick's *Three Choral Songs* (1991) and my own *State of the Union for Orchestra* (1992).

Each of these pieces in its own way, according to them, seemed to have assimilated and synthesized many of the most interesting ideas of the twentieth century without any of them ever being solely about any one idea or another. They felt they were not hearing self-conscious exercises in atonality, structural schematics or novelty for novelty's sake, but real music that communicated something about the United States at the end of the twentieth century. After four months of my experiencing over and over the beauty and spirituality of their music, of Russian music both old and new, it was with great pleasure that I felt I had been able to invite some Russian music students and composers for a

short visit into our own—new, small and somewhat fragmented—American cathedral.

At the invitation of Alexander Mnatsakanjan, the Dean of the Conservatory and the Chair of the Composition Department, I returned to St. Petersburg in May-June of this year to give another series of lectures on recent American music.

Certain positive developments have been taking place in the new music community, even under the shadow of impossibly low salaries and a diminished quality of material life. For example, a new chamber music series is being planned, with concerts to be held concurrently at the House of Composers and the Rimsky-Korsakov Apartment-Museum, which will feature new works by both known and unknown St. Petersburg composers. Also, the Conservatory is reorganizing its Composition Division and opening up an electronic music facility with computers and other equipment donated by German manufacturers. Such developments are a welcome relief from the daily stress of further deteriorating economic conditions.

In spite of everything, the composers and musicians I spoke with seem more determined than ever to make a place for themselves in the emerging new system, whatever it will turn out to be. Their patient tenacity deserves our full support as well as our lasting respect and admiration.



Jeremy Beck lived in St. Petersburg, Russia, during the 1993 fall semester, and he returned for two months this past summer to present another series of concerts on American music at the Conservatory. His work, State of the Union, was among those selected this fall for the MCF Orchestral Reading Project. Beck received his D.M.A. and M.M.A. from Yale University, his M.A. from Duke University and his B.S. from The Mannes College of Music. His recent commissions include works for the Brno Chamber Orchestra and the Alaris Chamber Ensemble. He has won prizes and awards from the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, Yale School of Music and the National Federation of Music Clubs. He has also received fellowships from the Pierre Boulez Composers/Conductors Workshop at Carnegie Hall, Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, Wellesley Composers Conference, American Council of Teachers of Russian and New Dramatists Composer/Librettist Workshop as well as numerous grants from Meet the Composer. He has been Instructor of Composition and Theory at the University of Northern Iowa since 1992. His recent premieres include Rhapsody (1994) for clarinet and 10 instruments at the Oregon Bach Festival and Shadows and Light (String Quartet #3-1994) on a concert produced by the Iowa Composers Forum.