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PROKOFIEV AND RACHMANINOFF

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summary

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Three Oranges is the journal of the Serge Prokofiev Foundation. It appears in May and November of each year. The Editor invites contributions on any aspect of artistic and social life in the first half of the Twentieth Century, providing it is related to the circles and places in which Prokofiev operated.

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Editorial

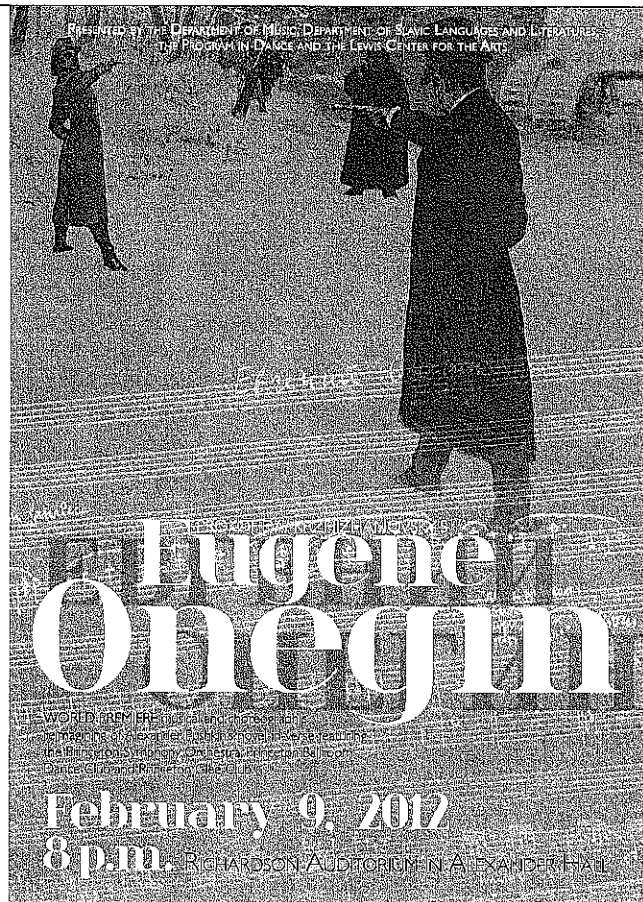
Compared to Prokofiev, little is known about the career of Sergei Rachmaninoff. Despite his tremendous fame, there exists no comprehensive study of his years in Russia, the United States, or in between. The technical literature is likewise slight, and the published editions of his letters incomplete and expurgated. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the relationship between Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev has hitherto not been studied in depth. This issue of *Three Oranges* offers a first attempt at such a study, drawing from two Moscow archives along with Prokofiev's diaries and Rachmaninoff's correspondence. The author, Elena Krivtsova, focuses on their points of contact in the United States and Paris: what the two composers thought of each other's latest works, most recent performances, and the current gossip about them in the press and in émigré Russian musical circles. The last paragraphs turn poignantly to what might have been had Prokofiev not relocated to Russia from France in 1936 and Rachmaninoff not chosen exile in America.

Two other articles in the issue address a pair of mysteries, one musical, the other (for want of a better word) social. Based on information provided by Werner Linden, I summarize the detective work that went into the rediscovery of Prokofiev's Kazakh folksong arrangements, which have just been performed and recorded in Almaty. Pilar Castro Kiltz describes how Prokofiev and his wife Lina were feted in Hollywood in 1938, while also identifying the people who joined them at a dinner hosted by the director Rouben Mamoulian in Los Angeles—settling the matter of just where that dinner took place. The article is graced with a previously unknown photograph of the Prokofievs at the 1938 Academy Awards, courtesy of the Serge Prokofiev Estate.

Following a technical study of Prokofiev's Akhmatova songs by Vera Gavrilova, the second half of the issue documents two recent world premiere events. In February at Princeton University, Prokofiev's *Eugene Onegin* was performed with the text for which the music was intended: Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky's surrealistic adaptation of Alexander Pushkin's novel in verse. Prokofiev composed the music in 1936 as part of the commemoration of the centennial of Pushkin's death, but it went unperformed owing to the prohibition of Krzhizhanovsky's iconoclastic playscript. At Princeton, both the orchestral version of the music was performed and the piano reduction. It was to the latter that Krzhizhanovsky's text was fitted, in a chamber staging directed by Tim Vasen. The performance, with a student cast, received extensive press coverage.

This past January in London and April in Moscow, Levon Atovmian's scintillating oratorio arrangement of Prokofiev's *Ivan the Terrible* performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Vladimir Jurowski. The arrangement was uncovered by Nelly Kravetz, Associate Editor of *Three Oranges*, in 2008. Her description of her research and experience of the premiere is followed by four reviews of the London performance.

Simon Morrison



Eugene Onegin at Princeton University

Matthews Acting Studio
Lewis Center for the Arts

Directed by Tim Vasen

Ten minutes to eight. The performance is about to begin. The theater is small, homey, and with all those voices and movements of the arriving audience it somehow transforms into the space of my childhood. A communal apartment appears from the back of my memory. The steps, creaky floorboards, muffled voices, dim light... I'm there already. A sound of a typewriter is heard behind the wall (the fourth wall, that is). It's a man (Matthew Spellberg as the Poet). He's sitting his back to the audience, working on his script. It's snowing. It's always snowing in his space, but that's Ok—the snow doesn't sting. It's soft and tender like the fluff of angels. O! They say angels don't exist, not anymore. What about the soul? Does the soul exist? Love is a thirst, they say, a theory of a glass of water... The man keeps typing, the snow keeps falling, the audience keeps arriving, and I keep thinking.

The snow... It's merciful. It pacifies all that hurts, all those bullet wounds of the executed manuscripts. How many of them have already been shot? It doesn't matter, really. "Ne meshaite krapive razrastat'sia nado mnoi: pust' i ona zhalit" [Don't hinder the nettles from growing over me, let them sting]. Krzhizhanovsky wrote in his notebook, talking about his grave. Its location is still unknown. Let it snow. The snow chills sting.

The bookseller enters and the typewriter freezes. The creative process is interrupted by some commercial nonsense. "Ne prodatsia vdokhnoven'e, No možno rukopis' prodat'" [Inspiration is not for sale. But it is possible to sell a manuscript]. Wishful thinking! Krzhizhanovsky never managed to do it. He never made an agreement with a "bookseller", and his *Eugene Onegin* would not see the light of dawn, as well. Not in his life time. He just doesn't know it yet. He's full of inspiration, hope and belief, and today we're joining him to see how the entire thing had played in his mind—the only place which he was free to attend to see the performance.

The two-story space in the student's theater is arranged in such a way that it skillfully structures a vertical-horizontal continuum via which the main characters are going to interact. Onegin (Gabriel Crouse) belongs to the horizontal space; Tatyana (Elena Garadjja) adheres to the vertical one: her bedroom is there, and all her dreams and thoughts occur above the earthly fuss. When she comes down she carries them with her as one carries his dream to realize it in the material space. The director's thought connects her to Juliet, and the second floor somehow emanates the image of Juliet's balcony as the implied space of the play. That hint on Shakespeare is precious to those who know Krzhizhanovsky's connection to the Bard.

Elena Garadjja's Tatyana at some point revives Olivia Hussey's Juliet, being just as passionate and with an air of innocence and sublimity elevating her monologues to the level of spiritual riches. Her almost iconic features undulate owing to the dynamic alchemy of light and shadow (a masterful work of lighting designers) as she pronounces her first monologue downstairs. This chiaroscuro not only contributes to the emotional state of the heroine, but also increases the sense of the ethereal in her character. Strong and fragile, she attempts to connect the two disconnected parts of the vertical-horizontal universe just as the soul serves to connect the pragmatic and the ideal to make one's life harmonious. The translation (by Caryl Emerson) conveys all the nuances weaving the very soul of the original. Its musicality and rhyming makes you soon forget that this is a translation. Along with Prokofiev's music and videographic images (Jeffrey Kuperman) it conducts your seamless immersion in the atmosphere of Pushkin-Krzhizhanovsky's Russia.

Tatyana is rejected by Onegin in the horizontal space, during the party, but he returns to her once again to beg for her acceptance. The scene is arranged on the first floor and the only hint on the vertical space is a round couch in the middle of the stage on which Tatyana is situated. The couch appears to be an additional little platform, slightly raised above the floor, and it divides the stage vertically, thus, preserving Tatyana's elevated position. Onegin stands before Tatyana, on the floor, and the entire scene attains a subtext of the inner struggle to access the vertical space of the soul without which one would be lost forever.

At this very moment, you realize that the previous scenes with the party and the ball point at the hidden, truly Bakhtinian opposition between the carnival society in which the man-made mask substitutes for the human soul and the sacred world of the man-soul dialogue. It is no mere chance therefore that the party ends with the appearance of mummers which symbolize the ongoing carnival in the horizon-

tal space. Their shadows are later projected onto Tatyana's dream in which Onegin plays an evil role of a destroyer. In that horizontal space he constantly oscillates between the evil and the good, but there is no way for him to find a middle ground without referring to the dialogue with his soul. In the ball scene, the variation of mummers is a group of hussars played by female actresses dressed half as males, but wearing skirts instead of pants. Their amusing, hilarious performance makes the audience split its sides with laughter, thus, turning the meeting between Onegin and Tatyana into a farce. And farce it is, for no dialogue is possible in the carnival world of shallow liaisons.

Regarding the setting, it's simple but dynamic owing to the cleverly chosen combination of stage sceneries and a videography used as a backing. A scene in Onegin's abandoned house when the old housekeeper (Lily Akerman) interacts with the video images of three young boys who try to sneak into the room is remarkable and truly amusing. Regardless of their ethereal video appearances the boys seem to be more real than everything else in that ghostly space of Onegin's past contemplations.

The videographic images change rapidly as if they are nothing but costumes of the carnival space, and in the finale Onegin wakes up on the bench on Nevsky Avenue, next to Neva-river. He's now like the other Eugene—his poor namesake from the Brazen Horseman. His creator, the Poet, is right in front of him. They stare at each other for some time as if trying to figure out who is a victim and who is a victor in that fused "author-character" relationship.

The performance is over. You leave the theater. The snow begins.

Is it falling from the sky or is it coming from the play? I wonder, remembering how Krzhizhanovsky described the process of transition in his essay on Shakespeare. The "reader of *Komedigrafia Shekspira*" [Shakespeare's Comediography] begins at the gates of the Globe Theater. The first text we confront, under the subtitle "Chernoe i goluboe" [Black and Light Blue], is a song—the Clown's song that ends *Twelfth Night*, "For the rain it raineth every day" (153). We hear the song and notice the color of the drape (black for tragedy, light blue for comedy); we feel rain on our face. Is this rain falling from the sky through the open roof, or is it coming from the song? As regards the status of "facts," we are in transition. The London Globe gives way to the enclosed theater of our present, which is compared to the carapace of the brain protecting our inner eye: the curtain is an eyelid, its fringe an eyelash (156)." (Caryl Emerson, *Krzhizhanovsky as a reader of Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw*.)

In my case, the transition is still occurring, and the farther I move off the theater the more it sprouts up all over the non-theatrical space. It follows me, making me think about the Brazen Horseman—the cruel epoch of the oppressive regime, and the author whose works have waited for so long to be finally freed from the drawer. He gave up almost everything—hope and belief, but he preserved the inspiration, choosing freedom of imagination just as Pushkin's Poet. Contemplating his fate, I suddenly realize that there is only one thing in the world that remains untouched by the carnival overturn of social roles, of fame and oblivion, of praise and disparagement. It's the soul, the constant of the world. Regardless of anything it keeps sending us its message, starting with "Ia k Vam pishu. Chego zhe bole?" "I'm writing you. What else is there to say?" And all you should do is to become engaged in the dialogue.

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contributors

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