

# REVIEWS AND CRITICISM

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REVIEW OF THE BOOK VALENTINA N. KHOLOPOVA.  
PUT' ARTISTA: VLADIMIR SPIVAKOV  
[THE PATH OF THE ARTIST: VLADIMIR SPIVAKOV].  
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**Annotation.** *The author of the book is Dr Valentina Nikolayevna Kholopova, who is a professor at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory. The subject of the research is the performing art of the outstanding musician of modernity, Vladimir Spivakov. The biography shows his formation as a violinist and conductor, the founding of the "Virtuosi of Moscow" chamber orchestra, the "National Philharmonic Orchestra" and the "International Beneficiary Foundation," his work as the president of the Moscow International House of Music and as organizer of international festivals. Analysis is presented of many of Spivakov's interpretations, from Vivaldi and Mozart to Franck, Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Mahler, Schoenberg, Shostakovich and Schnittke. The book applies historical-documentary and musical-analytical methods of research on the basis of musical scores and live performance sound. The novelty of the work is determined by the fact that for the first time the basic facts of Spivakov's artistic biography are systematized in it, his evolution is traced from a solo violinist to a conductor of a large symphony orchestra, and the significance of his role in artistic culture is disclosed.*

**Keywords:** *music, biography, violin, orchestra, chorus, conductor, foundation, festival, tours, interpretation.*

The book was written by Valentina N. Kholopova, professor at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory.

Vladimir Spivakov is an epoch-making musician in the culture of the contemporary world. On September 12, 2014 he will turn 70. In his renown he holds a status similar to Mstislav Rostropovich and Yuri Bashmet, which means that he is known by each cultured family in Russia and in most countries of the world. Therefore, it follows that it is necessary for a serious book to be written about him. So, in 2013 in the Moscow-based publishing house «DEKA-VS» such a book was published. It was written by professor at the Moscow Conservatory Valentina N. Kholopova. Their musical destinies intertwined together with a nonrandom accident: the young Vladimir Spivakov became a student of Valentina Nikolayevna Kholopova in her course of musical form at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory. He was so distinguished in his original talent that his then young professor began to follow his career closely. She began writing articles in newspapers and journals, which was most indispensable at that time.

After all, the musician was carrying out more and more grandiose plans, having organized the chamber orchestra «Virtuosi of Moscow,» the «National Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia,» the «International Beneficiary Fund of Vladimir Spivakov,» and several musical festivals and having become the president of the Moscow International Music House, founded upon his initiative. All of this required assessment, support and just plain informational dissemination. Valentina Kholopova wrote dozens of articles and a number of small books, all of which paved the way for the resultant monographic book of 2013.

The monographic book consists of two large sections; the first one is called «The Human Dimension: Biography,» and the second is called «The Dimension of Music: Interpretations.»

The first, biographical section brings together a mass of events, with which the life of the great artist is so abundant. They include the financial difficulties upon the purchase of the first violin, the mischievous pranks of the ingenuous child in school, and the first demonstrative success: at the age of 13 he won the

First Prize at the «White Nights» in St. Petersburg (Leningrad). The talents of the young violinist were so distinct that he was suggested to move to Moscow to attend the famous Central Music School affiliated with the Moscow Conservatory and recommended to study with the famous violin professor Yuri N. Yankelevich. From there the direct path was opened to the Moscow State Tchaikovsky to study with the same professor. And it was here that Vladimir Spivakov encountered worldwide success, having become the winner of the International Marguerite Longue and Jacques Thibault Competition. The Soviet cultural directors began to view him as a reliable «champion» of his country at the most prestigious world forums and directed him to several of the most challenging competitions in a row: the Paganini Competition in Genoa, the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow and to Montreal. In all of these he earned the title of a laureate.

Most instructive were his relations with his teacher, Yuri Yankelevich. The teacher was asked, how he instructed such students. He answered: «I simply tell my students: you must have an attitude of a most bitter enemy towards your performance.» The «bitter enemy» invited his dear teacher to his solo recital at the Grand Hall of the Conservatory.» The later said: «I felt happy at the concert, since I saw that my student had no further need of my tutelage.»

The worldwide success of the violinist with the remarkable, unique sound became stunning: in 1975 in New York's Lincoln Center the entire hall stood up before the 31-year-old musician and in 1979 a triumphant tour of various cities in the USA took place. During the latter year a remarkable occurrence took place: he *conducted (!)* the world famous Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Towards that time he had acquired the experience of a member of a string quartet in Moscow, as well as a teacher (at the Russian Gnesins' Academy of Music) and began taking conducting lessons from Izrail Gusman. Later he was to be instructed by Lorin Maazel and Leonard Bernstein, the latter having presented him with a baton.

Meanwhile, Spivakov's ambitions were brave and lofty: to create his own orchestra. If each musician would play as a fabulous virtuoso, the world would grasp with wonderment! Following the principle of choosing only the best players, he gathered together many of the pupils of Rostropovich, Oistrakh and Yankelevich, invited Bashmet, applies «a hundred different cunning devices,» overcame a thousand different difficulties and created the chamber orchestra «*Virtuosi of Moscow*» (1979). The orchestra received an official status only in 1982. The conductor established in it the principles of «manly brotherhood,» according to which nobody becomes offended at anyone for any reason, the orchestral musicians can

make critical remarks to the conductor and the attitude of democracy prevails. While still being a student at the Yerevan Conservatory, during a tour of the «*Virtuosi of Moscow,*» I witnessed the following scene. At a rehearsal, having noticed us, students, Spivakov asked: «Who are these?». The maestro permitted us to remain at the rehearsal. And we saw how one of the musicians arose, walked across the entire stage and suggested another musician to play a certain musical phrase softer, while the conductor waited calmly. I had never encountered anything of the sort before, and I thought: «What are they permitting themselves to do?» in the evening the entire hall was filled up to the brim, but the maestro had not arrived. It turned out that he had persuaded the administration to let in all those present on the street who wished to come in — and succeeded in persuading it. These principles of Vladimir Spivakov's work are what the reviewed book describes and explains. The maestro's tours had reached the level of a marathon, ranging up to 120 concerts a year. But the most important element in the orchestra was its quality of performance: «The remarkable ensemble of musicians who understand each other from a single sigh and play a single voice» («*New York Post*»).

In the chapter «The Spanish Drama — the Rejuvenation of the *Virtuosi,*» Kholopova recounts in a most detailed manner of how the orchestra found itself in Spain and then made a return trip to their homeland, renewed its membership and once again achieved the prestige if the «*Virtuosi of Moscow.*»

The book also recounts of a crime-related dramatic story of the «*Virtuosi,*» when two musicians from the ensemble were attacked by robbers who dealt serious injuries to them. Spivakov behaved in a manner typical for him: he did everything to provide medical treatment for them to assist their recovery, having preserved their places in their orchestra, and when they returned to work, the performance of the ensemble remained ideal.

In the chapters «The Formation of the Symphony Orchestra» and «The Director of the NFOR» Kholopova narrates in detail of the complex process for Spivakov of establishing «his own» symphony orchestra. First Mikhail Pletnyov invited Vladimir Spivakov to become the chief conductor of the «*Russian National Orchestra.*» However, due to conflicts arising in that orchestra, Spivakov decided not to renew his contract with it. It was then that assistance came to him from the highest ranks of the government: Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested the conductor to establish «his own» new orchestra, which received the name of «*National Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia.*» This became the most serious turn in the life of the conductor, who now was able to approach the most complex orchestral repertoire in all of musical culture,

the sphere of Russian music (which was required, since the name of the orchestra was «national»), and, in general, to acquire a thorough knowledge not only of string instruments but also of winds and percussion. The book examined by us highlights all the important moments of interaction between Putin and Spivakov: the attendance by the President of the inauguration of the Music House in Moscow, performance by children from the Spivakov Fund during Putin's meeting with Jacques Chirac, photos of them standing together. Spivakov's activities in the sphere of culture are so multifarious that the book examines his festivals, as well as his work in the Beneficiary Fund. An especially important festival takes place in Kolmar, where Spivakov has worked as an artistic director since 1989. «Vladimir Spivakov has enraptured Kolmar, who was just waiting for that,» as the city's vice-mayor, Gabriel Breuner wrote. The forum in Kolmar became one of the leading ones in the whole world. Spivakov came up with the idea of dedicating each musical festival to one important musician: Glenn Gould, David Oistrakh, Yehudi Menuhin, Pablo Casals, Feodor Shalyapin, Leonard Bernstein, Jessye Norman and others. He also took pains to acquaint the public with specimens of contemporary music, having included the works of Schnittke and Penderecki into his programs. Along with bright stars among the performing arts, Spivakov also presented in an appropriate manner performances by children — stipend recipients of his fund. Among the musicians who began their dazzling careers there were pianist Evgeny Kissin and percussionist Rostislav Sharayevsky.

The director applied his experience at Kolmar also for the organization of the Russian festivals «Vladimir Spivakov Invites...» which took place first in Moscow and then in other cities (since 2001). The author of the book shares her impression: «The city was subjected to a pleasant breath of fresh air: Muscovites, overwhelmed with their work, as well as guests of the Russian capital found themselves unexpectedly invited by somebody — and not just anybody...!»

The book especially highlights the appearance in Moscow, at the very first festival of the peerless African American singer Jessye Norman. An entire stream of unprecedented reviews is brought to our attention: «The reaction of an average person to Jessye is akin to a shock...» «This is simply beyond the boundaries of God and Evil, cannot be described even by specialized terms, surpassing the scope of technique and mastery...» etc.

Spivakov would not be himself, had he not established his Fund. Kholopova writes: «The founding of the International Vladimir Spivakov Beneficiary Fund (MBV)» became one of the most impressive achievements in the life of its founder. A man of an im-

mense Soul and an immense Heart, he is endowed with a most uncommon quality of sympathy for other people. Other people's misfortunes affect him personally.» People have recounted how in connection with the establishment of the Fund it was discovered, to what extent numerous children were in need not only of material assistance, but also of medical treatment. Fascinating stories have been told of such cases of such assistance. One of the girls requiring aid was deemed to be hopelessly ill, and only one hospital outside of Russia offered to give her treatment, demanding a huge amount of money for it. Spivakov turned to his rich acquaintances and donated his entire honorarium to this cause. The doctors were not able to save the girl, while Spivakov finished performing his concerts on a gratuitous base... Nevertheless, there also have been numerous felicitous stories. For example, little Ivan underwent an open heart operation, after which the saved child learned to play the violin and became a musician. An intense passion is felt on the part of the director of the Fund for donating instruments, and up to the present day, he has donated over 400 violins, cellos, pianos, clarinets, etc. This type of altruism is encircled in the book by an aura of sacred actions. This is absolutely justified, especially since the scale of his various cases of assistance, including professional education can be measured in the thousands of young musician and an entire army of cultural activists.

The book lists the names of the stipend recipients from the Fund who have already become world celebrities. Besides the aforementioned Kissin and Sharayevsky, they include pianist Ekaterina Mechetina, trumpet players Sergei Nakaryakov, Kirill Soldatov and Alexander Vetukh, oboist Alexander Ogrinchuk, guitarist Dmitri Borodayev and Artyom Dervoyed, Accordionist Nikita Vlasov and many others. As it is indicated in the book, «the benefactions of the Fund became so noticeable in the world that back in 2000 the general director of UNESCO, Koitira Matsuura personally awarded the Fund with the medal «For Contribution to the Development of Musical Culture in the Third Millennium.» There is a quotation of the words from the press of the city of Togliatti: «The Spivakov Fund is a remarkable endeavor, which is headed by a great musician.

**The second part of the book**, smaller in its size, is devoted to Vladimir Spivakov's performing art. While the first part is addressed to the broadest category of readers, the second is meant either for a very sophisticated listener or a professional musician. In it the famous musician is portrayed in his three roles: those of a violinist, conductor of a chamber orchestra (the «Virtuosi of Moscow») and conductor of a symphony orchestra (the «National Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia»).

Valentina Kholopova here demonstrates herself as a profoundly professional researcher of written and sounding music, one who is capable of perceiving it in all of its depth and fineness. Spivakov has said numerous times that Valentina Nikolayevna is capable of hearing better than anyone else all of his musical endeavors, all of his ideas in terms of interpreting musical compositions. And, indeed, when gliding through the pages of the musical analysis of this monographic book, the reader is carried into the artistic atmosphere of the concerts of one of the best musicians in the world.

About the solo violin we read: «The communication of Spivakov himself with a violin or different violins presents a real novel, one that includes self-immersion, courtliness, two «marriages» (Gobetti and Stradivari), philosophy and the realm of mysticism.» (The mystical element can be said to have been present when upon trying out a new violin Spivakov said: «it sounds with the voice of Isaac Stern»; and, indeed, it turned out to be Stern's violin.)

An object of analysis is presented by short pieces for violin and piano, performed in ensemble with Sergei Bezrodny. We read about Debussy's Valse «La plus que lente»: «This short waltz by Debussy with its slowness of flow, languorous harmonies, free tempo and insinuating gentleness of movement is a most refined musical composition. ...The inimitable specificity of the melody is comprised of ascending lines leading to soft culminations on the highest notes. ...In Spivakov's interpretation, each such soft culmination is so amorously entrancing, as if it represents Goethe's 'stopped moment.'» When such little known compositions as Hartmann's «Funereal Concerto» or Schnittke's «Five Fragments on Paintings by Hieronymus Bosch,» the author of the book even brings in music examples (in the entire book they are given only on these pages).

In the performances of Spivakov's «Virtuosi of Moscow» Kholopova was especially intrigued by the renditions of works by 20<sup>th</sup> century composers. An unmatched interpretation was that of Arnold Schoenberg's «Verklärte Nacht.» The committee of experts of the firm «Capriccio», which recorded this compact disc, decided to annul all the other recordings.

The musicologist traces out in a most expressive way the entire path of the composition and its performance in their synthesis.

For example, this is what she writes of the beginning. *Zwei Menschen gehn durch kahlen, kalten Hain; der Mond läuft mit, sie schaun hinein.* [Two people are walking through a bare, cold wood; the moon keeps pace with them and draws their gaze.] «A picture of movement «with a millstone on the heart» arises. In Spivakov's performance the sensation of oppressive

psychological heaviness/.../is conveyed with such psychological fidelity, that the entire *fullness of expression* of this state is achieved — it is not possible to convey it more fully.» About the climax, describing the words of new happiness: «Spivakov performs the approach towards the E-major section with such an intense expectation, that the listeners hold their breath and then the «chord of happiness» is brought down with the entire mass of the orchestral sound.»

Besides Schoenberg, several compositions of Shostakovich were highlighted, and special attention was focused on Schnittke's Piano Concerto, which has become a real masterpiece in the repertoire of Spivakov, especially with the participation of Alexander Gindin as soloist.

Upon analysis of Spivakov's performance of orchestral works, it became clear, how much more massive his performing art has become. Mention is made of Scriabin (the «Poem of Ecstasy») and Richard Strauss, three entire symphonies by Mahler are examined in detail (the First, Fourth and ultra-tragic Sixth). The appellation of a «Mahlerian conductor,» as Kholopova writes in all fairness, «is a super-characterization of the person at the conductor's podium.» The author of the monographic book discovers that at this period, particularly two personalities among all the composers become especially close to Spivakov's nature — Rachmaninoff and Shostakovich. And the musician is attracted particularly to the tragic element in their music.

Out of Rachmaninoff's oeuvres, the «Bells» and the «Symphonic Dances» are taken. In «The Bells» — a composition for chorus and soloists set to the poem by Edgar Allan Poe — of the work's four movements, the last two contain the subject of death. As is demonstrated in the analysis, in virtually the entire composition Spivakov catches and emphasizes the motive stemming from the symbolic «Dies irae», deepening the tragic aspect of the composition.

In the «Symphonic Dances» the conductor ventures on an unprecedented rendition — the approach in the finale towards the idea of the Day of Judgment. According to Kholopova, this kind of thought arises particularly on the basis of Spivakov's interpretation. She writes: «In the general culmination, Spivakov denotes its extraordinary musical constituent parts — the glaring whole-tone chords in the brass, the whirls of the virtuosic passages in the woodwinds, the dumbfounding sounds of the percussion instruments with the participation of the fatal tam-tam. And with the entire force of the immense orchestra, he places such a shattering final «period,» as if he is embodying the words: «Dies iræ! Dies illa Solvet sæclum in favilla: Teste David cum Sibylla!» [«Day of wrath and doom impending, David's word with Sibyl's blending, Heaven

and earth in ashes ending!]). Spivakov even wrote about his understanding of Shostakovich in his essay «Golos vseh bezgolosykh» [«the Voice of all those Bereft of a Voice»], which was published in the edition: Volkov, S. Shostakovich i Stalin: khudozhnik i tsar [Shostakovich and Stalin: the Artist and the Tsar], Moscow, 2005. The title of the essay was taken from a line of a verse by poet Marina Tsvetayeva. Kholopova quotes Spivakov's words: «Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich perceived the tragedy of the epoch as his own personal tragedy. It was this circumstance in particular that gave his music its remarkable energy. Shostakovich felt himself to be responsible for his time. He felt himself at fault that he lived in such a time.»

The inclination towards the tragic element is disclosed by Kholopova especially clearly on the examples of Spivakov's interpretations of Shostakovich's Fifth and Ninth Symphonies. Regarding the true meaning of the finale of the Fifth Symphony and the entire conception of the composition there are disputes going on up to the present day. The pages of the book establish the symbolism of the main theme due to its relatedness to another melody by the composer set to the poem of Robert Burns: «So gaily,/desperately/he walked to the gallows». In addition, the author emphasizes the relief aspect of the theme of funeral prayer in Spivakov's interpretation. Also in connection with the year of the creation of the symphony, 1937, at the height of Stalin's political repressions, Kholopova defines the meaning of the present rendition as «Symphony of the Year 1937.»

The tendency towards tragic expression is also observed in the book in connection with Spivakov's understanding of Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony.

It is customary to interpret this music as joyous, «Haydnesque,» light and cheerful. Contrary to that assumption, the conductor finds a counterbalance to this mood. For instance, in the initial phrase he makes 50 string instruments make such a flourish, which «has the goal of evoking fear»; in the seemingly comical subsidiary theme group he emphasizes the «music of the place of arms»; in the pensive solo in the second movement he hears «the cry of the widow,» etc. as a result the «symphony-scherzo» acquires the features of a «symphony of the grotesque.»

As a supplement to the main text of the book there is a carefully compiled list of Spivakov's awards and honors, which are numerous. Of considerable interest is the selection of the most significant photographs; the entire design of the book published by «DEKA-VS» is quite felicitous. One can only regret the lack of a discography with recordings of his performances, which is customary to include in such editions. The biographical and interpretational sections of the book could well have been broadened further, although the size of the book is already large enough, comprising 328 pages.

In summation, Valentina Kholopova's monographic book about Vladimir Spivakov «Put' artista» [«The Path of the Artist»] presents a multifarious research work of one of the most important musical figures of our times. It gives knowledge not only of the path of life of one person and the specificity of his performances, but also demonstrates a broad dimension of the world cultural life of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The book is worthy of being translated into other languages of the world, since it would be of interest to people from the most different countries of the world.

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