

12 Silver Age Aesthetics versus New Conceptions of Soviet Time in Music: Continuity or Discontinuity with the Past?

Our listening habits are firmly rooted in our upbringing, our inner circle and surroundings that form our interests, likes and dislikes. We associate the idea of a national character with folklore and authenticity of traditions, in which art is recognizable and, therefore, appeals to its people. The newborn world of socialism in 1917 wanted to break with tradition and find complete freedom of expression for artistic personality. It sought to revolutionize the world and discover new horizons. In order to achieve these goals, the new Socialist state needed new music, literature and art created by faithful citizens. This formal renunciation of everything connected to the past laid foundations for the appearance of new tendencies and experiments in music, which, in the words of Nikolai Roslavets, one of the most unconventional composers of the avant-garde, ‘dreamt of new unheard worlds of sound’.¹ Did composers really break with tradition or skillfully adjust and modify their language according to the requirements of the new musical era? The aim of this chapter is to find out how far and why these concepts found their continuation and modification in Soviet times. The under-researched

1 Nikolai Andreevich Roslavets, ‘N.A. Roslavets o sebe i svoym tvorchestve’ [Nikolai Roslavets on Himself and His Creativity], *Sovremennaya muzyka*, No. 5 (14 January 1924), p. 133. Russian avant-garde artists of this period (1890s to early 1930s) strove for radical innovations and experimentations in art, music and culture by pushing artistic and social boundaries of tradition and the norm. All quotations from Russian sources and texts cited in this chapter have been translated by the author, Elena Artamonova.

writing of Alexei Losev on music will also be discussed. The analysis in this chapter relies heavily on unpublished and little-researched materials from the archives in Moscow.

Writing about the production of *Boris Godunov* in 1913, the music critic Viacheslav Karatygin emphasized the following:

Tradition is a faceless arithmetical average of different performances of a certain work by various talented artists. Its honesty rests in the fact that distinguished talents took part in its creation. Its deceit is that it is an average proportional, uncoloured, bloodless and faceless object. Abandon its deceit without forgetting about its honesty and breathe new life and power into tradition. Do not break ties with what it has of true honesty. Impart this honesty to a new light that is shining with the fire of your talent.²

Issues of spiritual and artistic unity as well as efforts to strengthen the force of spirit by discovering sacred sides of other worlds occupied the thoughts of young Russian intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century. This period is regarded as the 'Silver Age' of Russian culture owing to the emergence of a highly gifted generation of musicians, writers and painters. The inner world of an artist of the Silver Age was intensely engaged with questions of life and death. They were the staples of internal existence and, therefore, the reality coexisted with people's dreams and images.

The ideas of one of the most distinguished Russian philosophers and philologists of the twentieth century Alexei Fedorovich Losev (1893–1988) were on the cusp of the Silver Age and the avant-garde cultures. They had an immense impact on the musical language of the time:

A musician is so intoxicated with his inner depths of thought standing at the edge of a deep abyss of the cosmos, of irrational images of mysteries and discoveries, and

2 Viacheslav Karatygin, 'Muzykal'naia drama. O postanovke Borisa Godunova' [Musical Drama. On the Production of Boris Godunov], *Apollon*, No. 8 (1913), p. 68. Quoted in *Iz istorii muzykal'noi zhizni Rossii. XIX–XX veka* [From the History of Musical Life in Russia in the Nineteenth-Twentieth Centuries], ed. E. K. Kulova (Moscow: MGK, 1992), p. 79.

he is so much absorbed in the magical world of sounds that he carelessly observes catastrophes happening in real life.³

This was a certain cause for an alliance with the new Soviet power. Many philosophical works of Losev were published in the twentieth century, but his short stories and novels were discovered only shortly after his death by his second wife in the drawers of his working desk at his home in Moscow. His understanding of music and its content as well as the issue of the correlation and dissimilarity between music and human life are the key subjects of these works. Akin to the conception of one's own exploration through cognition, for Losev 'cognition is the creation, feast and symphony of life itself'.⁴ Consequently, one should interpret creativity in music as a method of cognition and the means of getting to the inner meaning of existence.

This subject matter of affinity between the elements of existence and creativity in music, as a method of cognition and as a synthesis of all mortal beauty and inventiveness in the world, traditionally associated with the pre-Revolutionary Silver Age aesthetic, was also expressed by the avant-garde composers, including Arseny Avraamov, Nikolai Roslavets and Arthur Lourié. Thus, Arseny Avraamov (1886–1944), the Commissar of Arts of the Soviet Republic, an academic of the GAHN⁵ and the creator of the ultra-chromatic 48-tone microtonal system called 'The Universal System

3 Alexei Losev, *Ia soslan v XX vek* [I Am Sent to the Twentieth Century] (Moscow: Vremia, 2002), Vol. 1, p. 126. More than 800 pieces of Losev's work were written on different subjects in aesthetics and dialectics, ancient and Christian philosophies as well as on myth, logic and name. Losev gained professional degrees in philosophy, classical philology and music as well as in mathematics. However, the basis of his ideas was not only the result of remarkable formal intellect and erudition. The perception of unity, first introduced by the philosopher Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), made a great impact on Russian writers, musicians and philosophers, and guided and directed the philosophical views of Losev.

4 Losev, *Ia soslan v XX vek*, Vol. 1, p. 180.

5 GAHN is the abbreviation for the State Academy of Arts Science. It was founded in 1921 in Moscow in order to pursue detailed scientific research into issues of art and culture, including a synthesis of the arts. It had the following three departments: physics/mathematics, philosophy and sociology.

of Tones', who is better known for his *Simfoniia gudkov* (Symphony of Factory Sirens, 1922), also tried to combine the epistemology of life with creativity. He interpreted creativity as love, art, religion, science, philosophy and revolution, and as a synthesis of all mortal beauty and inventiveness in the world. In August 1923, Avraamov called these six powerful 'Virgin-Leaders' (gurus) as the 'six great creative powers force Mankind towards the boundless steppes of the Future on their way from epistemology to creativity in life.'⁶ However, he admitted that these powers were opponents who fight with each other. Avraamov even compared these antagonists with the legend of the construction of the Tower of Babel as they failed despite their individual strengths. He acknowledged that this failure was the ominous paradox of the present Soviet time. Avraamov believed that the unity of these powers through revolutionary actions would bring 'the Great Kingdom of Harmony', which would direct humankind to breathtaking prospects of creativity.

Striving for independence and the value of one's own experience and evaluation based on personal wisdom as the means of creative perfection, while retaining the favor of the authorities of the past, occupied young intellectuals at the turn of the century. This viewpoint also correlated with the position of the new Soviet authorities that publicly denied the value of the achievements of ancestors. Thus, Avraamov commented that, in his view, the contribution of Johann Sebastian Bach led to chronic stagnation in music:

In 20–30 years, the great legacy of Bach will become a part of ancient legend ... It is enough that we have already lost two hundred years of logical evolution in arts. We will answer with our counterrevolution to the revolution of Bach regardless of the many sacrifices this would bring to the altar of our future.⁷

6 Arseny Avraamov, 'Revtraktat o NOV MUZERE "bez predkov" SSSR 6-oi god I-go veka' [Revolutionary Treatise on New Music 'Without Ancestors' in the USSR of the Sixth Year of the First Century]. Quoted in Sergei Rumianzev, *Ars novyi, ili dela i prikliucheniia bezustal'nogo kazaka Arseniia Avraamova* [New Arts or Activities and Adventures of the Tireless Cossack Arseny Avraamov] (Moscow: Deko-VC), p. 60.

7 Arseny Avraamov, 'Griadushchaia muzykal'naia nauka i novaia era istorii muzyki' [The Future Science of Music and the New Era of Music History], *Muzykal'nyi*

This approach in turn links with the idea of the Silver Age aesthetic in which the means of comprehension was not simply an intellectual process but a heroic deed of life, which became a destiny for only a few. 'The definition of understanding means for one to experience, renovate and rise above the renovated, and then to be transformed into the *raison d'être* or in other words into existence.'⁸ These dreams of idealistic ethics proved to be unattainable outside their philosophical, literary and artistic contexts, but astonishingly they correlated with Bolshevik ideas to create a new world with a newly transformed man. The only difference was that the Bolsheviks wanted to involve all masses in this process of reformation of minds, whereas the Silver Age aesthetic was almost exclusively targeted at intellectuals.

Throughout the first years after the Socialist Revolution of 1917 and especially after the end of the Civil War, there was a general atmosphere of euphoria. It was the time of outstanding human endeavor to build and construct a new society with equal rights for all. 'This life is given only once! And you must live through it in such a way that you do not torment yourself about years spent aimlessly and that you do not feel devoured by disgrace for the despicable past!'⁹ This quotation was an aphorism of the time given in the powerful message of Pavel Korchagin, a young worker who was severely disabled because of his wounds during the Russian Civil War and faced the rest of his life as an invalid. Despite his physical immobility, he found the strength of soul to live and create. At the end of the twentieth century, his words were turned into farce when the belief in an imaginary perfect world where everyone is happy proved to be a communist utopia with no connection to reality. However, the implication of this declaration, given in a plain language by a worker with an unrefined background, bears a similar message to the philosophy of Losev on the exploration of yourself and cognition as the ways of perfection and creation.

sovremennik, No. 2 (1916). Quoted in Rumianzev, *Ars novyi, ili dela i prikliucheniia bezustal'nogo kazaka Arseniia Avraamova*, p. 193.

8 Losev, *Ia soslan v XX vek*, Vol. 1, p. 287.

9 Nikolai Ostrovsky, *Kak zakalialas' stal'* [How the Steel Was Tempered], <https://librebook.me/kak_zakalialas_stal/vol2/3> (Accessed 14 February 2021).

This striking resemblance between the ideologies of the classes in Russian society was the main reason why many scholars, writers, composers and musicians initially supported the Socialist Revolution or at least maintained political neutrality, despite the unprecedented scale of brutality of that time.

This perception of unity as the means of coexistence was first introduced by the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov in 1877: 'The subject of mystical philosophy is neither the world of phenomena that reflects our senses nor the world of ideas that form our thoughts. It is the reality of the life of mortals in their inner existence.'¹⁰ Existence and life are the elements of universal essence/being. The significance of Losev's writing as an adherent of Vladimir Solovyov's philosophy rests not only in his generation's intellectual conceptions of aesthetic value, but also in its vivid portrayal of living in Russia during the pre- and post-revolutionary periods. His symbolic interpretation of real events is a literary reflection of the thoughts and insights into the lives of the most talented musicians and performers that were the cream of the crop of the musical field of the time.¹¹ This life with its vileness and loathsomeness creates the unmanageable insanity of a man and his music because any music contains the image of a continuously changing existence or life. However, it is not entirely a material image. Thus, in the novel *Tchaikovsky Trio*¹² the music of Scriabin, first, carries away the main character Vershinin to the boudoir of a lady-pianist that he has fallen in love with and then the tunes of Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* cause the appearance of the witches' orgy in his mind. Finally, the image

10 Vladimir Solovyov, 'Filosofskie nachala tsel'nogo znaniia' [The Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge]. Quoted in Alexei Losev, *Vladimir Solovyov* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2009), p. 107.

11 Losev denied any personifications in his prose. He showed the first draft of his novel 'Zhenshchina myslitel' [Woman as a Thinker] to Maria Yudina, a leading pianist and a family friend of Losev. However, she interpreted the main character as a characterization of her life and beliefs. Their friendship was ruined forever despite the depth of influence and correlation of Losev's philosophy with Yudina's principles in music. It was the first and only attempt of Losev to share his literary works with his friends.

12 Alexei Losev, 'Trio Tchaikovskogo' [Tchaikovsky's Trio], in Losev, *Ia soslan v XX vek*, Vol. 1, pp. 106–230.

of Michelangelo's fresco 'The Creation of Adam' represents an acute sense of foreboding 'of an invincible sea of the fierce battles of life' and with the sounds of bells in the finale of the *Poem of Ecstasy*, the whole world of Vershinin is destroyed by the bombing that begins the First World War.

These mystical images and the consequent effect of Scriabin's music in this work are symbolic. The appearance of a fresco by Michelangelo is a reminder of the true Creator of the world and the word of God. In the words of Losev, the music of Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner was a genuine creation of the Western European individualistic culture when man started to idealize his limited world as opposed to the one of God. This influence spread, and Scriabin, in turn, followed this path in search of his own Absolute. These beliefs of Scriabin were enriched with a characteristic Russian element of mysticism. The attempt to bring harmony to the material and spiritual senses influenced his language, and it inspired further innovations in music led by his contemporaries and followers, including Roslavets.

Nikolai Andreevich Roslavets (1880–1944) was one of the most intriguing representatives of the group of composers that later in the twentieth century was given the name of 'Russian Avant-garde Composers' or 'Modernists'. The invention of Roslavets called 'The New System of Organised Sounds' received special attention among his contemporaries. Today, a century later, it still generates exceptional interest in this most unconventional composer and man of many contradictions. For some critics, Roslavets revolutionized the world of music, but others regarded him only as a radical manufacturer. In the words of Roslavets himself, he wanted to break with tradition and his compositional language was destined to open new horizons in music. 'In spring 1913', he wrote, 'I started to unravel the mystery. Towards 1919, I finally found my individual technique, which gave me complete freedom of expression for my artistic personality.'¹³

Roslavets felt that he had to cut his ties with everything he was taught at the Moscow Conservatoire, which one would have thought gave him all the musical knowledge and skills needed for a professional existence. Roslavets considered these skills too conventional and banal. They were not

13 Roslavets, 'N. A. Roslavets o sebe i svojom tvorchestve', p. 134.

appropriate for his ideas of musical expression and for the representation of his inner ego, which ‘dreamt of new unheard worlds of sound’.¹⁴ He admitted that he was unsatisfied with this ‘anarchy’ in musical creation and strove for new ideas and greater efficiency. Many critics labeled this desire as eccentric. Perhaps Roslavets’s missionary zeal and patriotic fervor, and unpredictable turn of phrase, with which he declared himself a classicist and at the same time denied any possibility of applying ‘the classical system’ in music, played a negative role and tarnished his image.

This means that Roslavets is a crazy person and an extreme individualist. It seems as if I do not write anything, do not read anything, as if I have discharged myself from everything and have gone nowhere. I am a classicist, who has studied the art of our time. I do not tear flesh from flesh, bone from bone in musical culture. I conquered everything and I declare that I do not break any ties with the development of the art of music. Through my students and through their students I would like to launch a new system of organised sounds. It would replace the classical system, to which there would be no return. In this system a man would feel as Beethoven did when he created his masterworks. I managed to find this triad.¹⁵

His formal renunciation of everything connected to the past and to tradition, his rejection of musical conventions and the creation of new musical conceptions helped establish the reputation of Roslavets as a radical and something of an eccentric.

Did he really break with tradition or create his new musical idiom based on the discoveries of past generations? Toward the middle of the 1920s, his compositional style, meticulously perfected from 1913 and endorsed by the great number of successful public performances, had reached its peak. In January 1927, Roslavets wrote the following about his system: ‘Up until now I have not made any public speeches but kept checking it as a laboratory scientist for many years.’¹⁶ A brief overview of the musical language, form and timbre palette of Roslavets during this period of his creation

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁵ Nikolai Roslavets, Lecture, 17 January 1927, Manuscript. Housed in RGALI (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow), Fund 2659 (Nikolai Andreevich Roslavets), List 1, Folder 72.

¹⁶ Ibid.

should answer the above query. In order to avoid any comparisons with or replications of existing analyses, one should take a lesser-researched composition, preferably using a manuscript. Roslavets's 'Sonata for Viola and Piano' (1926) should be a perfect example of such work.¹⁷

The composer entrusted the viola with a beautiful, placid and transparent theme in *piano* dynamic that remains unchanged for the first page of the piano score. The piano part accompanies the viola voice with ascending legato passages in semiquavers grouped in two sets of triplets. Their roots are based on a combination of series of chords changed between C and F. Each chord has six notes, which may be expanded in octaves or repeated within both instrumental parts. This description of chords corresponds to the one by Roslavets in his unpublished lecture written for the Igor Stravinsky Musical-Vocal Courses in Moscow on 17 January 1927. He declared that the central six-tone harmony of his new system is *Sintet'akkord* (a Synthetic Chord).

I think you would have an ecstatic experience if you would explore the notes and discover that this is a six-note chord that is built up in thirds or in fourths. It has a romantic character and I called it a Synthetic Chord since it has all chords found by musical civilization during its evolution.¹⁸

The thesis of his unpublished lecture 'The New System of Organised Sounds', which he wrote for the Stravinsky Courses on 3 December 1926, contains certain details that prove the assumption that the relationship of these opening chords or series is similar to a tonic and subdominant. Roslavets specified the following:

This synthetic chord must replace the 'main triad' of Classicism. A simple repositioning of this chord a perfect fifth up or down brings a formula similar to the classical

17 This sonata was included in his list of works completed by hand in the early 1940s. The precise date of this list is unknown. Nikolai Roslavets, 'Spisok muzykal'nykh proizvedenii N. A. Roslavtsa' [List of Musical Works by Nikolai Roslavets], Manuscript. Housed in RGALI, Fund 2659, List 1, Folder 100. Nikolai Roslavets, 'Sonata for Viola and Piano', 1926, Manuscript. Housed in RGALI, Fund 2659, List 1, Folder 31.

18 Roslavets, Lecture, 17 January 1927.

tonality of T-D-S [Tonic-Subdominant-Dominant]. Synthetic Chords are destined to take on not only the external role of colourful and sonorous tools in the structure of a composition, but also the internal role and to be a substitute for a tonality.¹⁹

The initial relation of notes within the synthetic chord moved on to relate the keys of the structural parts in the Sonata. The recurrence of this 'triad' performs the role of a traditional tonic and a substitute for tonal relations. Therefore, the harmonic layout in this sonata is a pure example of the composer's application of his compositional method with hidden links to traditional functional harmony.

Roslavets did retain some conventional features in this work but modified his approach and language. It is a one-movement sonata written in sonata form with some elements of the language of Late Romanticism. The composer preserves the illusion of a certain tonal association²⁰ between different synthetic harmonies despite the fact that the music is clearly atonal. However, this atonality has very interesting links with traditional tonal relations. The keys of the main and second subject in the exposition follow the traditional rules of sonata form. They are, in the terminology of functional harmony, a 'tonic', C, and a 'relative major', E flat. The most important feature of sonata form is that these themes reappear in the recapitulation in the 'tonic' key, C. It is a sonata, because of its title, key relations and reasonably standard format of sections.²¹ The position of a new episode (C) after reasonably traditional development and recapitulation sections, its radical transformation, first, from a contrast theme to one distantly related to the main subject and then to the modified main subject in the coda is a pure invention of Roslavets.

The form of this sonata is a monocycle. It is rather static and circular/spiral than temporal because of the reappearance and exact duplication of

19 Nikolai Roslavets, Abstract of a Lecture, Manuscript. Housed in RGALI, Fund 2659, List 1, Folder 72, Bullet point 16.

20 The phrase 'tonal association' means that either or both vertical and melodic lines have preserved certain elements of a tonal center/basis.

21 One can describe this form as AB (Exposition) – Development – C – AB (Recapitulation) – C with Coda. A and B stand for the main and second subjects.

themes/sections. In the words of Karol Berger, it is a cycle not an arrow.²² However, one may emphasize that it also has the features of a linear model of time. It also becomes an arrow because of the new episode (C) and its unpredictable metamorphosis into a theme, which acquires some elements of the main subject. According to the philosophy of Losev, the formation of any musical work has three stages. First, the music is always a formation; second, this formation is felt through the diversity of its types; and finally, this diversity forms an integrated development.

A musical composition consists of many sounds. They create an impression of unity, and simplicity, and at the same time of something flowing and shapeless. This unity travels and, thus, amalgamates everything and brings flowing unification in many features.²³

Similarly, the harmonic language of this sonata is based on synthetic chords that operate and transform according to 'The System of Organised Sounds'. Therefore, this diversity of chords is not chaotic but organized. This formation of chords travels and creates a sense of unity within the sections. This amalgamation is hidden beneath the surface of this dense piece of writing that concurrently produces the impression of something indistinct and cohesive. Only a close analysis can reveal the tonal and diatonic relations that unify all segments of its harmony.

Scriabin had a rather methodical and mathematical approach to his compositions:

I always accept that mathematics should play a bigger role in a composition. It happens that sometimes I need to have a full calculation when I compose: the calculation of a form and of a modal plan. These features cannot be incidental otherwise there will be no crystal form.²⁴

22 Detlef Gojowy, *Neue sowjetische Musik der 20er Jahre/Novaia sovetskaia muzyka 20-kh godov* [New Soviet Music of the Twentieth Century], trans. Natalia Vlasova (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2006), p. 267.

23 Alexei Losev, *Muzyka kak predmet logiki* [Music as the Means of Logic] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1927), p. 23.

24 Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Scriabine* [Memoirs About Scriabin] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo muzykal'nyi sektor, 1925), p. 57.

Roslavets showed a similar approach to the form and language in his manuscript by calculating bars, copying certain fragments of the existing musical material and maintaining tonal relations throughout his sonata.²⁵ What made Roslavets calculate the structure of this work apart from his effort to create a 'crystal form'? Analytical and rational approaches become characteristic of the time. In the words of one of the leaders of Russian Futurism, the artist Pavel Filonov, 'creation is an organisational factor that transforms the intellect of an artist into divine power.'²⁶ It is not without reason that Roslavets's contemporaries called him a scientist, a researcher or a manufacturer of some kind. 'He does not call himself a composer, but an organizer of sounds. Classification, logical endurance and steely determination to keep up his creative ideas are the major peculiarities of the musical portrayal of Roslavets.'²⁷ However, Roslavets denied the existence of any external inspirations for his music. 'I know that creative art is not some mystical trance or divine discovery, but rather a moment of highest exertion of the human intellect, as it strives to transform the unconscious into a form of consciousness.'²⁸ Did he implement this in his timbre palette?

The first impression of the main subject of the Viola Sonata (1926) bears a striking resemblance to Impressionism. The central aspect of Impressionistic style is the usage of color and sound instead of a detailed outline in order to create effects of feeling.²⁹ Roslavets denied any presence

25 The manuscript of this sonata has composer's signs such as ticks, stars, rectangles and crosses in bars 2, 12, 25, 52, 116, 130 and 154, with which Roslavets indicated points of transposition and repetition.

26 Pavel Filonov, 'Zhivopis' i grafika. Katalog vystavki' [Drawings and Graphics. Catalogue of an Exhibition] (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1988), pp. 107–108. Quoted in *Iz istorii muzykal'noi zhizni Rossii. XIX-XX veka*, p. 130.

27 Yevgeny Braudo, 'Nikolai Roslavets. Organizator zvukov' [Nikolai Roslavets. An Organizer of Sounds], *Vestnik rabotnikov iskusstv* (1925), Vol. 2, p. 14.

28 Roslavets, 'N.A. Roslavets o sebe i svoym tvorchestve', p. 136.

29 *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music* provides a similar description: 'It was applied by musicians to the music of Debussy and his imitators because they interpret their subject in a similar Impressionistic manner, conveying the moods and emotions aroused by the subject rather than a detailed tone picture' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 356.

of feelings in his music. However, the manuscript of this Viola Sonata has the following markings: *espressivo*, *dolce* and *cantabile e molto espressivo*, which directly refer to a portrayal of a musical mood and aura. The soft pastels and tender melody of the main subject instantly remind one of Debussy and the French Impressionists with their diverse palette of sounds, colors and light. Similar attributes characterize the musical language of Schoenberg and Webern. A new linear style needed new timbres and sound colors, which expanded performers' horizons.

It is also intriguing to recall that Roslavets was a fine artist. Some recently published documents from the archives of Kazimir Severinovich Malevich (1879–1935), an artist and the founder of the group 'Supremus' and of Suprematism (one of the most radical movements in fine arts of the pre-revolutionary period), shed light on Roslavets's youth.³⁰ Malevich's father worked at the same railway office administration as Roslavets's father, at first in Konotop and then in Kursk, and the young Kazimir and Nikolai became friends. In 1930, Kazimir Malevich remembered the following:

I acted in the field of arts, but I had a friend, who is now well-known as a composer across the whole musical world, Nikolai Roslavets. He acted in the field of music. He was the only friend that I met in Konotop.³¹ In Kursk, my life was tirelessly devoted to drawing and Kolia³² Roslavets developed his work in the field of music. He founded a big Ukrainian choir and then an orchestra. The aim of this choir and orchestra was not to perform in churches, but to sing only for the Art itself.³³

30 Kazimir Malevich, 'Konotop'. Quoted in Aleksandra Shatskikh, *Kazimir Malevich i obshchestvo Supremus* [Kazimir Malevich and the Supremus Society] (Moscow: Tri kvadrata, 2009), p. 204.

31 Kazimir Malevich, 'Glavy iz avtobiografii khudozhnika' [Chapters from the Autobiography of an Artist]. Quoted in Nikolai Khardzhiev, *Stat'i ob avangarde v dvukh tomakh. Arkhiv russkogo avangarda* [Articles on the Avant-garde in Two Volumes. The Archive of the Russian Avant-garde] (Moscow: RA, 1997), Vol. 1, p. 120.

32 Kolia is a diminutive form of the name Nikolai.

33 Malevich, 'Konotop'.

A sketch of a picture 'Portrait of Roslavets: A Song to the Blue Clouds' by Kazimir Malevich dated circa 1907 has survived and is held in Amsterdam, at the Stedelijk Museum.³⁴ It depicts a violinist who is playing and looking toward the countryside with trees and bushes painted and structured in geometrical abstract patterns.

Roslavets continued this theme of incorporating music and nature in his own paintings and music. Three of his watercolors have survived and are held at the RGALI, Moscow. One of them is especially stunning. It was completed in 1910 and has the signature of Roslavets in the corner.³⁵ It is hard to believe that Roslavets, with his analytical mind, chose scenic beauty as the subject matter of his work. Its landscape around a lake has a wonderful palette of colors depicting trees, bushes, grass and the sky. The artist used tiny, graceful strokes of paint to produce their detailed reflection in the water. This technique of painting bears a striking resemblance to the elegance of harmonic language, the exquisiteness of rhythmical approach and the immaculate precision of form in the *Viola Sonata*. The possibility of transpositions of synthetic chords brings elegance to the language. Roslavets achieved this elegance through the resourceful management of synthetic chords according to their place within the form. His knowledge of timbres is conducive to the formation of contrasts and transformations of themes. Roslavets showed a similar approach in this painting by creating pure images of the countryside as well as their reflection and shades. The range of the artist's palette widened to include plain and neutral in combination with vibrant and deep colors. Roslavets's methodical mind took careful and effective control of all segments of the picture. However, this painting most certainly engenders feelings of beauty, excitement and splendor: another remarkable contradiction between the words and the work of its master.

Some musicologists, including Detlef Gojowy, noticed a certain tendency among Russian composers such as Roslavets, Protopopov, Anatoly

34 Kazimir Malevich, 'Eskiz k portretu Roslavtsa: Pesn' golubym oblakam', paper, pencil, 11x12.3 cm, in Shatskikh, *Kazimir Malevich i obshchestvo Supremus*.

35 Nikolai Roslavets, 'Peizazhi' [Landscapes], Manuscript. Housed in RGALI, Fund 2659, List 1, Folder 80, Item 2.

Aleksandrov as well as Medtner to write one-movement sonatas.³⁶ This practice was influenced by Aleksandr Scriabin, who preferred this form for his sonatas from 1907. What attracted Roslavets and other composers of his time to a one-movement sonata form? The model of the sonata continued to inspire composers as an effective form for a musical argument, though the term 'sonata form' became rather rhetorical due to all the alterations and modifications to its structure and rudiments. The far-reaching radical innovations in the musical language of the avant-garde movement needed to regain a formal balance between the new and old. The application of a traditional form was a disingenuous strategy aimed at equilibrium and a smoother transition toward the unknown. Besides, it served as an ideal basis for further experimentation within a static/circular setting with the aim of achieving an intensity of contrasts of musical development within this minuscule structure. This impermanent form compared to a conventional sonata offered diverse compositional, harmonic, instrumental and textural approaches that all worked for the same purpose. This was a missionary endeavor. Roslavets faced the challenge by initiating skillful textural, instrumental and timbre maneuverings in addition to his elegant and methodical work with synthetic chords.

The philosopher Pavel Florensky characterized this propensity in music using the word *prostranstvennost* (expansiveness): 'Certainly, music and poetry have extreme freedom in organizing space. They can and do create spaces that are so different ... Music uses material less connected to outer necessity and even more conformable to any manipulations of a creative power.'³⁷ By 1920s, Roslavets moved away from vocal genres, in particular, his beloved romances and the poetry of leading poets of the Silver Age, including Igor Severianin, Aleksandr Blok, Zinaida Gippius and Fedor Sologub. Apart from their bourgeois content unwelcomed by the Soviet

36 Karol Berger, *Time's Arrow and the Advent of Musical Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 12.

37 Pavel Florensky, *Sochineniia* [Works] (Moscow: Mysl', 1994), pp. 61–63. Quoted in *Russkaia muzyka i XX vek: russkoe muzykal'noe iskusstvo v istorii khudozhestvennoi kul'tury XX veka* [Russian Music and the Twentieth Century: The Art of Russian Music in the History of Art Culture of the Twentieth Century], ed. Mark Aranovsky (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut iskusstvoznaniia, 1997), p. 495.

authorities, such texts limited Roslavets's capacity for *prostranstvennost'*, while instrumental genres opened new artistic dimensions. Moreover, a one-movement sonata corresponded well to the fundamental principle of the avant-garde to be organized, formatted and, at the same time, sensitive to modifications of space or form. The basis of this principle and others of the time were not only the result of a remarkable formal intellect and erudition but also the 'fruits of the labors' and evolution of previous generations of writers, musicians and philosophers. Their legacy guided and directed new ideas as well as modified and reshaped conceptions that had a great impact on the Russian cultural heritage of this period.

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