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### Music, Musicians, and Migration:

#### Movement, Place, and Time in the Lives and Works of Sperger, Glière, and Weinberg

This recital traces an arc from Classical comedy and Romantic melodrama to Modernist tragedy. The three works in this program represent different historical incarnations of sonata form, a compositional device that challenges attentive audience members to use their aural memory to trace the evolution of melodies that undergo a musical journey. Like these migrating musical themes, the composers and first performers of these pieces moved between places over their lifetime for economic, political, or religious reasons. Their experiences of emigration for employment, survival under authoritarianism, and wartime displacement remind us of the harsh realities that migrant workers, political prisoners, and stateless refugees face in the world today.

Johannes Matthias Sperger (1750-1812) was born in Feldsberg (now Valtice in the Czech Republic) and moved to Vienna in 1767 to study music theory with organist Johann Georg Albrechtsberger and violone with Friedrich Pischelberger. The five gut strings of the Viennese violone were tuned differently from the four steel strings of the double bass, its modern descendant. Viennese tuning favors certain major keys by making the melodic patterns of the Classical period more convenient and naturally resonant, which inspired 28 concertos featuring the violone as a solo instrument in the second half of the eighteenth century, including 18 concertos that Sperger composed for his own solo performances in Vienna, Leipzig, and Berlin.<sup>1</sup>

Sperger married Anna Tarony from Linz in 1776. A year later he joined the court orchestra of Cardinal Batthyani in Pressburg, but the cultural, economic, and religious reforms of Emperor Joseph II, compelled his patron dissolve this ensemble in 1783. Sperger went on to serve Count von Erdödy in Fidisch, but became unemployed after the death of his patron in 1786. For the next three years Sperger worked as a copyist in Vienna and traveled in search of employment as a performer. From December 1787 to June 1788 he visited Prague, Berlin, Ludwigslust, Ansbach, and Passau, and from March to June 1789 he went to Parma, Trieste, and Bologna in Italy. In July 1789 he secured a permanent position in the court orchestra of the Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin in Ludwigslust (near Hamburg), where he remained for the rest of his life and composed seven symphonies, seven concertos, and chamber ensembles including bass.<sup>2</sup> Sperger emigrated from the Catholic Austro-Hungarian Empire to Protestant north Germany.

Sperger composed his Concerto No. 15 in D Major in 1796 for “il contrabasso” and two oboes, two horns, two violins, viola, violoncello, and violone. As soloist, Sperger would have led this ensemble in the role of concertmaster. The jovial first movement mixes elements of Classical sonata form with ritornello form, a Baroque musical device based on the periodic return of a refrain. The orchestral exposition introduces the first heroic theme in major, the second lyrical theme in minor, and the refrain, which returns to mark the start of both the development and the recapitulation. The soloist elaborates on the two main themes but skips the refrain. Instead, the soloist unexpectedly introduces three new themes in successive contrasting episodes during the development. None of these new themes return in the recapitulation, however, which further embellishes the main themes from the exposition and introduces new melodic ideas. At the end of this movement, as in many Classical concertos, the orchestra stops, giving the soloist the

<sup>1</sup> Rodney Slatford, “Double Bass,” *Grove Music Online* (2001), <http://doi-org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.46437> (accessed April 27, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Meier, *Thematisches Werkverzeichnis der Kompositionen von Johannes Sperger*. Edited by Eitelfriedrich Thom. Michaelstein/Blankenburg: 1990.

opportunity to improvise a cadenza. In the cadenza, the soloist extemporaneously recombines the abundant thematic material and varied virtuosic figurations from the body of the movement.

The *minore* second theme from the first movement foreshadows the funereal minor key of the second movement, which modulates to a cheerful major key in its middle section before the opening theme returns. The third movement exemplifies sonata rondo form, yet another musical form built around the principle of return. The opening rondo section alternates with several contrasting episodes, including a *minore* episode that harks back to the second movement. In this final movement, the soloist can improvise brief *Eingänge*, or lead-ins, before the return of the rondo theme, as well as extemporaneous embellishments on the rondo theme itself. Sperger's performing skill and expressivity are evident in his obituary: "He displayed a rare mastery and purpose on his instrument, knowing how to impart character to the performance as a whole."<sup>3</sup>

Born in Kiev, Ukraine of German and Polish ancestry, Reinhold Glière (1875-1956) studied violin, composition, and music theory at the Moscow Conservatory until 1900. Glière went on to study conducting at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik from 1905 to 1907 and then taught at the Kiev Conservatory before becoming its director in 1914. Glière's *Four Pieces for Double Bass and Piano* originated as two separate pairs of character pieces: the *Intermezzo et Tarantelle*, op. 9 (1902) and the *Prélude et Scherzo*, op. 32 (1908), which he dedicated to the Russian double bass soloist Serge Koussevitzky (1874-1951), his close friend and fellow conducting student.

Koussevitzky was born into a Jewish family in a town between St. Petersburg and Moscow. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was three years old, leaving his father to raise him and teach him various musical instruments, including trumpet, tuba, and bass. After his applications to study music in Moscow were refused twice because Jews were prohibited from living in the Russian capital, Koussevitzky chose to be baptized at age 14. Shortly thereafter he began studying with Czech bassist Josef Rambusek on a scholarship from the Moscow Philharmonic Society School. Koussevitzky joined the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra in 1894 and became principal bassist in 1901, the same year that he launched his career as a solo recitalist. In need of recital repertoire, Koussevitzky composed four salon pieces of his own for bass and piano, which include the *Andante et Valse Miniature*, op. 1 (1899, first performed in 1901), *Chanson Triste*, op. 2 (1906, first performed in 1907) and *Humoresque*, op. 4 (n.d.). After his 1905 marriage to Natalie Ushkov, the daughter of a wealthy tea merchant, Koussevitzky joined Glière in Berlin to study conducting. In 1908, the same year that Glière first conducted an orchestra in Russia, Koussevitzky debuted as a conductor with the Berlin Philharmonic in a program that concluded with Glière's Second Symphony. Koussevitzky programmed the *Intermezzo* and *Tarantella* on separate recitals in his extensive tours of European capitals during the 1906-1907 season, but never premiered the *Prelude and Scherzo*, as his conducting soon eclipsed his bass playing. He moved to Paris in 1920 before emigrating to the U.S. in 1924 to conduct the Boston Symphony.<sup>4</sup>

Glière's four pieces contain greater compositional complexity and require more interpretive virtuosity than Koussevitzky's salon pieces. This disparity reflects Glière's formal training as a composer and Koussevitzky's focus first on the double bass and later on conducting. Like Koussevitzky's pieces, Glière's pieces alternate between slower melodic movements and faster dance forms. Glière's pieces each contain two contrasting themes within compact sonata forms

<sup>3</sup> Andrew McCredie, "Johannes Sperger," *Grove Music Online* (2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.26392> (accessed April 27, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Kohn, "Koussevitzky's Double Bass Repertoire: A Reassessment," *Online Journal of Bass Research* 9 (2017), <http://www.ojbr.com/volume-9-number-1.asp> (accessed April 26, 2018).

that consist of an exposition, brief development, recapitulation, and short coda. The nostalgic Prelude alternates between extroverted heroism and introverted lyricism, which Glière conveys in part by juxtaposing traditional consonant and dissonant harmonies with searching modulations to distant keys. The gallant Scherzo is a lively jig in triple time that gives way to a passionate melody in its middle section. The graceful Intermezzo is an intimate interlude that vacillates between tenderness and insistence. The intrepid Tarantella, a twirling Italian folk dance, dazzles with its virtuosic feats and beguiles with another impassioned theme before a triumphant ending.

Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, Glière returned to Moscow in 1920, where he taught composition at the conservatory until 1941. After adhering to the Russian Romantic style in his early works, like the Four Pieces, Glière navigated the political transition from aristocratic Russian Empire to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics by establishing a reputation as a nationalist composer who incorporated folk music from eastern Soviet republics into his operas. As part of the privileged musical elite, Glière was the inaugural chair of the Music Section of the Stalin Prize Committee, which later awarded him three first-class prizes for his Concerto for Voice and Orchestra (1946), String Quartet No. 4 (1948), and the ballet *The Bronze Horseman* (1950). The Music Section determined these annual awards by anonymous vote following live performances of the pieces under consideration that often sparked intense ideological debates.<sup>5</sup>

Polish composer and pianist Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996) studied piano at the Warsaw Conservatory and played in his father's Jewish theater. Weinberg's parents and younger sister died in September 1939 when the Nazis burned the Warsaw Ghetto. Weinberg escaped alone on foot across the demarcation line between Nazi and Soviet forces to modern-day Belarus, where he studied composition at the Minsk Conservatory. Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Weinberg was evacuated by train to Tashkent in Uzbekistan, a journey of 2500 miles, where he met and later married Natalia Vovsi-Michoëls, daughter of the prominent Jewish actor Solomon Michoëls. The score of Weinberg's First Symphony so impressed Dmitri Shostakovich that he obtained a permit for Weinberg to move permanently to Moscow in 1943.<sup>6</sup>

Tragedy struck again when the Soviet secret police executed Weinberg's father-in-law in 1948. Weinberg was placed under surveillance for the next five years until the Soviet authorities arrested him following a concert of his music at the Moscow Conservatory, accused him of "Jewish Nationalism," and imprisoned him for 78 days during the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign in 1953. Shostakovich wrote a letter to the chief of the Soviet secret police demanding Weinberg's release, which was granted in the aftermath of Stalin's death. Weinberg's enduring friendship with Shostakovich encompassed their parallel activities as composers and pianists. They shared each of their new compositions with one another and performed fourhanded piano arrangements of their symphonic works before the orchestral premieres. The Soviet cultural censors, however, systematically marginalized Weinberg as a Jewish immigrant, with the result that he did not attain the widespread acknowledgement that Shostakovich received. The Stalin Prize Committee Music Section, which Glière had chaired at its inception in 1940, continually denied Weinberg official recognition for his artistic work. His compositions never advanced in the annual voting process despite repeated attempts at advocacy on his behalf by Shostakovich.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics* (London: Yale University Press, 2016), 315-321.

<sup>6</sup> Per Skans, "Mieczysław Weinberg – ein bescheidener Kollege" in *Shostakovich and the Jewish Heritage in Music*, ed. E. Kuhn, A. Wehrneyer, G. Wolter (Berlin: Ernst Kuhn, 2001): 298-324.

<sup>7</sup> Frolova-Walker, 98-100, 123-124, 279.

Weinberg composed multiple solo sonatas for the violin, viola, and cello, but only one Sonata for Double Bass Solo, op. 108, which he wrote in Moscow over six days in July 1971, immediately after composing the Sonata No. 1 for Viola Solo, op. 107.<sup>8</sup> Though the bass sonata bears no dedication, Rodion Azarkhin (1931-2007), principal bass in the USSR State Orchestra in Moscow, published his edition of the piece in *Sovetskij Kompositor* in 1978. Both Weinberg and Azarkhin experienced the political assassination of close family members and wartime displacement. The Soviet secret police killed Azarkhin's father in 1935 in the first of Stalin's purges. Azarkhin, his mother, and his sister were evacuated from Kharkov in Ukraine to Tashkent in 1941. Motivated by free student housing at the relocated Leningrad Conservatory, Azarkhin began studying cello in 1945 before the professors compelled him to change to bass a year later. Azarkhin had a genetic disorder of the body's connective tissue called Marfan syndrome, which gave him uncommonly large hands. He pioneered the use of the thumb and all four fingers throughout the fingerboard, experimented with a bent metal endpin, and added metal weights to his bow. Azarkhin's virtuosity is evident in his annotations of Weinberg's sonata, which document his unique choices of fingerings, bowings, articulations, and dynamics.<sup>9</sup>

The Sonata for Double Bass Solo, op. 108 contains excruciating dissonances, schizophrenic counterpoint, extended tonality, metric ambiguity, and extreme contrasts within a symmetrical arch form of six continuous movements. This piece encapsulates three principles of sonata form: restatement, continuous development, and transformed return of memorable musical material. Weinberg employs this tripartite cyclical process within each movement and in the whole work by referencing elements from the two contrasting sections of the opening movement throughout the entire sonata. The first movement establishes a conflict between two opposing characters that persists throughout the sonata: the bombastic fury of the beginning tirade and the somber solemnity of the ensuing processional invocation. The second movement continues this divisive duality with a frustrated, whirling-dervish scherzo and a plaintive, tuneful trio. The third movement, standing at the center of the arch form, consists of fraught alternation between loud, heavy-heeled marching and soft, light tip-toeing that escalates into a violent altercation, ending with frantic high-pitched cries cut short by low percussive explosions. The fourth movement evokes the second movement with a furtive minuet and a wandering trio. The fifth movement develops the cantorial lyricism from the first movement but, as in the third movement, the melody ascends inconsolably, answered by sinister tolling bells. The sixth movement is a desperate argument between the competing characters introduced in previous movements, which shout or murmur with low and high voices in quick succession, working themselves into a frenzy before crashing to a halt. In the eerie epilogue, thematic fragments return as whispered echoes until the high and low voices meet in the middle, finding resolution in the final peaceful chord.

I dedicate this recital with gratitude to Dr. Richard Tomlinson (1924-2018) and perform it in memory of my great aunt Anita Keefe (1925-2018) and great uncle Joel Tibbetts (1936-2018).

*Ces notes de programme sont écrites par l'étudiant-interprète et sont présentées en tant que réalisation partielle des critères de leur cours. These program notes are written by the student performing and are presented by them in partial fulfillment of the requirements of their course.*

<sup>8</sup> Verena Mogl, "Juden, die ins Lied sich retten" - der Komponist Mieczyslaw Weinberg (1919-1996) in der Sowjetunion Musik und Diktatur, Band 1 (Münster: Waxmann, 2017): 422.

<sup>9</sup> Donovan Stokes, "Rodion Azarkhin: Passion and Survival," *Double Bassist* (Autumn 2007): 50-54. Donovan Stokes, "Rodion Azarkhin and Kontrabass (1978)," (DMA Thesis, Indiana University, 2006), 12-23.