

Sections

- today
- opera
- classical
- comedy
- visual arts
- gaming
- Books

Search

- new music
- film
- theatre
- dance
- tv
- CD/DVDs

Search form

Search :

- today | new music | opera | film | classical | theatre | comedy | dance | visual arts | tv | gaming | cd/dvds | books

- reviews | features | gallery | q & a | promos | first person | we recommend

Home » Classical Music » Theartsdesk Q&A: Composer Rodion Shchedrin

■ reviews, news & interviews

## theartsdesk Q&A: Composer Rodion Shchedrin

Neglected for unmusical reasons, the ballerina's husband is back

by [Ismene Brown](#) | Saturday, 18 September 2010

[Share](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Email](#)



Maya Plisetskaya as Carmen and Nikolai Fadeychev in Shchedrin's 1967 ballet for her

The Russian composer Rodion Shchedrin has long been damned faintly by two facts - that he is the husband of the Bolshoi prima ballerina Maya Plisetskaya and that he was for a long time the president of the Russian Composers' Union in the USSR. These two things were plenty enough to remove discussion of him from the musical arena to the seething forum of

politics where every Soviet composer's actions were given intense non-musical scrutiny both inside and outside the USSR.

Recently, however, Shchedrin - now 78 and long hardly heard in Russian and European concert halls coming to terms with their complex Soviet past - has been undergoing strenuous rehabilitation by Valery Gergiev. As chief conductor of the LSO, Gergiev has been on a mission in the past two years to sweep away the political chaff surrounding Russia's composers and to place them as musicians on the orchestral platform for innocent ears and minds, with the LSO one of the main vehicles for the international Shchedrin revival.

Next week Gergiev opens the LSO 2010-11 season at the Barbican with a programme two-thirds of which is Shchedrin's music, including his most famous work - the *Carmen* ballet suite, created imaginatively on the Bizet opera for his wife Maya Plisetskaya to dance - and his fifth piano concerto, to be played by Denis Matsuev. One of the Edinburgh International Festival's big events two years ago was a semi-staging under Gergiev of Shchedrin's meditative opera *The Enchanted Warrior*. At the time Gergiev told me: "Shchedrin is a master. He never made anything nonsense or by half, or left anything unclear."



“A composer's life is a marathon. It's not a sprint

where you win and then you're a winner for eternity. No, you go up and down.”

rating



explore topics

- Interviews
- Classical music
- politics
- Soviet Union

share this article

[Share](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Email](#)

the future of arts journalism

You can stop theartsdesk.com closing!

We urgently need financing to survive. Our fundraising drive has thus far raised £33,000 but we need to reach £100,000 or we will be forced to close. Please contribute here:

<https://gofund.me/c3f6033d>

And if you can forward this information to anyone who might assist, we'd be grateful.



Subscribe to theartsdesk.com

Thank you for continuing to read our work on theartsdesk.com. For unlimited access to every article in its entirety, including our archive of more than 15,000 pieces, we're asking for £5 per month or £40 per year. We feel it's a very good deal, and hope you do too.

To take a subscription now [simply click here](#).

And if you're looking for that extra gift for a friend or family member, why not treat them to a theartsdesk.com [gift subscription?](#)

more classical music



Kaploukhii, Amadeus Chamber Orchestra, Stuckenbruck, St Peter's Church, St Albans review - young Russian announces himself as a serious talent  
Thrillingly authoritative and stirring poetic in Brahms



Crouch End Festival Chorus, Hertfordshire Chorus, Temple, RFH review - massed forces for lesser-known Elgar oratorio  
Committed and high-class performance doesn't quite overcome doubts about the piece



Classical CDs: Dirge canons, dances and a donkey  
Late music from a 20th century giant, a neglected symphony and an epic work for solo guitar



Alisa Weilerstein, Pavel Kolesnikov, Wigmore Hall review - charismatic performance from two luminously accomplished musicians  
Sonatas by Brahms and Prokofiev were revealed in all their intricacy



Mahler's Tenth Symphony, LPO, Jurowski, RFH review - overscoring kills a rare completion  
Rudolf Barshai's performing version undermines fine conducting and playing

This November, Paris adds to the Shchedrin resurrection with the visit to the **Théâtre du Chatelet** by the Mariinsky Ballet performing Alexei Ratmanský's new staging of Shchedrin's first ballet, *The Little Humpbacked Horse* - again a renowned vehicle for his wife (**the pair pictured above right**) in the early years of their marriage. Last year I visited St Petersburg to **watch the world premiere of this staging**, and had a conversation with the composer about his career, the misperceptions of him, and his new rehabilitation in his homeland.

*ISMENE BROWN: You are being rediscovered everywhere, it seems.*

**RODION SHCHEDRIN:** For 35 years there was a dictatorship of the avant-garde and I was never a member of it. For me music's all about intuition and emotion. This was really a very powerful dictatorship. If you aren't in the circle you are not a composer, you are bad *a priori* - without them hearing one bar of your music. Any kind of dictatorship is terrible, and in art it's terrible.

*There is a lot of your music being played now - Valery Gergiev is championing many of your pieces, it's being played in Slovenia, Germany, Edinburgh. Carnegie Hall. The LSO is playing your music in Vilnius. So it seems you are suddenly a new fashion.*

I have to say that a composer's life is a marathon. It's not a sprint when you win and then you're a winner for eternity. No, it's a marathon. You go up and down, you lose energy, you get revitalised. Of course it's a good thing if you receive a long life from the gods (laughs). My feeling is quite basic, it's really just about the musical score having a life, a body, parts to it. Not being a waxwork, that's lifelike but not alive. If music is like that, I don't know how it can survive after tomorrow. But anyway this has happened for me. You have to believe in yourself, if you feel you have some kind of connection with your genetic code, to start with. And also a higher connection to something up there.



*You also have the higher connection now of Gergiev (the pair pictured left in St Petersburg last year).*

Yes, he is fantastic. He says so many right things to the orchestra - don't just play it as music, this is "theatre"! And so they play it in a totally different

manner.

*What was the importance of ballet scores when you were a student? When you were young, there were many more ballet scores written than operas.*

My one opera totally failed. Premiered, then the next four performances were cancelled because the subject was may a little too early for the time. It was called "Not love alone" - *Ne tolko lyubov*. It was a story of a middle-aged lady falling in love with a 17-year-old boy who has a bride.

*Was it emotionally too naked?*

For that production in Bolshoi at the time, the director wasn't a courageous person. He changed the age of the woman, made her younger, and it more "natural" for the boy, so the public didn't understand that the point was the age difference. You

know, I'm already an old man but I remember myself after the Second World War, in our village it wasn't at all a male population, it was only ladies. Ladies danced with ladies in the village dance-parties, because in the western part of Russia half people were partisans, the other half went with the Germans, and the men killed each other. It was not officially talked about. But back to your question, you're right - in opera it was much harder, because of the words. In ballet you operate only with sounds, like fairy tales.

**Hear Daniil Shafran (cello) and Anton Ginzburg (piano) play the Quadrille from *Ne tolko lyubov*:**

*What was your inspiration for writing the ballet Konëk-Gorbunok (The Little Humpbacked Horse)?*

I was a student in the Moscow Conservatory and I knew a Bolshoi dancer, Alexei Yermolayev, who was a very special person who produced solo shows in the Filial Theatre of the Bolshoi, and composers used to do "black work" for him - underground work [in defiance to the Stalinist official line]. Somebody recommended me, I had no money, of course, at the time. It was a very poor time - I played a bit in an orchestra, for funerals, that was quite normal at the time. He invited me and paid me some money just like that!



**Johnston, Purves, BBC Philharmonic, Bihlmaier, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester review - light amidst the gloom**  
From misery to fun to grim discovery in a vivid opera-in-concert performance



**Asal, Hallé, Ward, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester review - something rewarding and exciting**  
Award-winning pianist makes his mark with mystery and magic



**Vinnitskaya, LPO, Jurowski, RFH review - Russian iron and steel, Ukrainian slagheaps**  
Welcome return of one of the world's greatest conductors with a fascinating programme



**Kopatchinskaja, Shaham, LSO, Rattle, Barbican review - Hungarian footstamping, pure Spanish joy**  
A live-wire violinist in top form, and a programme contrasting mystery with good humour



**Beisembayev, BBC Philharmonic, Storgårds, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester review - Beethoven v. Americana**  
Clear and crystalline pianism in contrast with Ives and Adams



**Death of Gesualdo, Gesualdo Six, St Martin-In-The-Fields review - a dark treat for sombre times**  
A ravishingly beautiful depiction of the composer's life in tableaux vivants



**Sean Shibe, QEH Foyer, Purcell Room review - bold try at a moveable three-parter**  
The most creative of guitarists invests in everything, but it didn't all work for the audience

newsletter

Get a weekly digest of our critical highlights in your inbox each Thursday!

Simply enter your email address in the box below

Sign up for our newsletter

[View previous newsletters](#)

*"Black work" - that's like black market?*

Yeah, yeah. He gave me money, he said, this will be in the Filial with the Bolshoi orchestra. I said, Ok! It was my first contact with the world of ballet. In the rehearsal for this ballet, [the choreographer] Alexander Radunsky took me to the ballet class to say, "You have to understand more about ballet." So at 10 o'clock we went there, and I just went, "Oh my god, girls!" Blondes, black hair, brunette. And Maya, with her red hair. We had mutual friends - I had met her through Lilya Brik, the lover of [the poet] Vladimir Mayakovsky.

*Did you introduce yourself? Or did she come to you? Was it the coup de foudre?*

We already had met in the salon of mutual friends. I wrote music for Mayakovsky's poetry. One of my friends took me there, and I played my *Levoi Marsh* ("Left March"), which goes, "Left - left - left -...", and they loved it. I played it twice, three times, they kept saying, "Fantastic." Then Lilya's last husband, Katanyan, a playwright, did a play, "They Knew Mayakovsky" - the world premiere took place in the Alexandrinsky Theatre, here in St Petersburg - and they recommended me to do the music. I used this "Left March", because they'd loved it. This march was my passport into their society! Such a famous circle - Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova. famous people. And I met Maya there.

*So it was because you composed this march that you got your pass to Maya.*

It was my first real money. The Alexandrinsky Theatre is very beautiful, the oldest theatre in Russia, in fact. We met there and a few days later when I saw her in ballet class - well, you know, between a lady and a man, it's just a look that matters.

*What was the first ballet you made for her?*

"The Little Humpbacked Horse", which I wrote as a Bolshoi Theatre commission [1955-56, first staged 1960]. I got that when I was very young because few composers would do it. Vasily Vainonen [then the Bolshoi's leading choreographer] was a very stubborn man, who would say, "No no no, that's a bad composer, and *that's* a bad composer." The Bolshoi Theatre wanted to do this subject, but you know, it was forbidden for Russian theatres to stage ballet stories with a Tsar as a character. If there was a person of power, he had to be an eastern potentate, a Han, a Sultan, not a Tsar. It was like an examination for me. Could I write the first scene? Then they'd consider. They explained to me who were all the people who would be on stage, this number of bars, that number of characters. Prescribed this to me in a very old-fashioned way. Dmitri Kabalevsky had commended me after hearing my examination work. Vainonen looked at me very sceptically - he gave me a week. It was his idea was to do the choreography originally.

*How daunting.*

No, I was very excited, to have Vainonen, the Bolshoi Orchestra, and Alexei Yermolayev. I worked on it very fast, I played it to him on his terrible little piano - he said, "Well, maybe we'll go on." It was quite a long time after that the ballet went on. Vakhtang Chabukiani came in as artistic director and wanted to do something else. Or it was Gusev. But then came back Leonid Lavrovsky to the Bolshoi and he said it was a good idea, "The Little Humpbacked Horse", and here is this young composer who's half-completed the score. But by then Vainonen was out of the theatre so Alexander Radunsky came instead, and for his version I wrote a few extra numbers, because he had a slightly different conception in the last act.

*Did you know it was to be Maya who would be the Princess?*

Yes, of course.

*So you were writing love music!*

We were already married, in 1958 officially, but unofficially a bit earlier! I'll tell you something funny. A friend of mine is a typical Russian, and if he drinks a bit he beats his wife. I asked him, "Come on, why?" He said, "She gave me everything on the first night." I have never beaten Maya for that reason!

**Watch the Mariinsky Theatre's trailer for the new staging of Shchedrin's ballet "The Little Humpbacked Horse":**

*What other music were you writing at the time?*

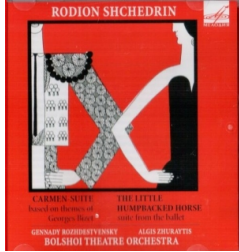
Most of the Western press writes everything in black colours but it's not true - the level of education and performance at that time was fantastic. Orchestras were of fantastic quality, like the Bolshoi Theatre orchestra. Now I think the Mariinsky Theatre orchestra is of a fantastic level but then it was the Bolshoi. It wasn't black and white. When you are young you don't think about political dictatorship you look at girls' legs and think about spring coming!

*When you were writing a ballet score, was it a very different challenge from a symphony? Presumably you had to come up with a large number of short themes*

*Symphony: I presumably you had to come up with a large number of short themes to do in 16-bar or 32-bar treatments?*

No, it's not that hard. If you have inspiration and enough technique - at that time of course I didn't have much technical expertise but now I know how to calculate things exactly. Still, then I was powerful and fresh and had a lot of imagination, and my ballet school was Russian, of course, Tchaikovsky, Glazunov, Rimsky Korsakov, Prokofiev... Stravinsky. Though at that time it was possible to see his work only in libraries - *Firebird*, *Petrushka*. But if you had determination, it was possible to see it.

Also a lot of old musicians had these scores at home. I remember how I asked to be taken to a production of *Petrushka* and I got the score. It's important, the kind of character you have - in *any* political society or political system, if you are just a sleeping person you'll never get any information about anything, whether London or New York. You have to have curiosity, and then you'll get much information, even in terrible political systems.



*Is composing a ballet a great chance to play with the orchestra, even more than a symphony?*  
**(Left, recording of Carmen and Humpbacked Horse recommended by theartsdesk)**

Of course. In a symphony you just go the way of your intuition, but with a ballet you have specifics, limits, challenges, which you have to meet. I like to be given limits. If I'm given a deadline I work much more successfully. That's my character.

*With a ballet, if a student is saying, "Why should I write ballet?", how would you persuade them?*

Well, I completely enjoyed doing it. I say again, I had worked with Yermolayev, and I enjoy this whole arrangement of the orchestra in the pit, conductor, the girls

stretching! It's magic. I love it, really I do. And my relationship with Maya gave me even more happiness. At that time, I have to say, there were a lot of very beautiful female dancers in the Bolshoi. Really true. It's not just because I'm an old man looking back. Recently I was in an elevator with young ballet dancers in the Bolshoi corps de ballet, maybe 25 of them in the life, and I looked around their faces and thought, "No, it's not like it was." It's not just my imagination. I mean, if you're 20 to someone of my age you're already beautiful. No, it was something genetic then in Russia. Real beauties.

Because in the ballet school some of them came through official protection - this one's father worked in the government, or that one's mother was connected to this or that person. Some of these girls didn't have correct bodies or faces for ballet, but all parents sent their children to ballet and said, "Oh she will be a second Plisetskaya, or second Pavlova." They never thought that it was terrible everyday routine work, a terrible profession actually. But now I think, "Well, thank goodness, they choose for lovely bodies and abilities without those kinds of reasons." It was like that in those early days - but some of them were really beautiful.

*I'd like to ask about your position as a supposed avant-garde composer in the Soviet Union? Did they see you as inventing something that would be problematic for other composers to accept?*

You know, I'm quite a natural and instinctive person. I do what I want. What was interesting to me technically was happening in the new continents, but the emotional side of the avant-garde always irritated me. They lost emotion, lost tempo - most of their pieces were very slow. [In Russian] Some very important tools, like rhythm and momentum, a very important part of music. The old techniques that come from far back. Lassus, the old school, you need to keep those tools.

*You tried to work in the 12-tone system - your second symphony.*

Yes. I tried to use this but to operate it with emotion, with rhythm, using the chromatic system but not taking away the imaginative side, the ostinato.

*How did other composers see these experiments? Everyone was experimenting?*

Yes, of course, it was attractive. It was in the Sixties that it really came.

*Your second symphony was in '65 - so you were working after Koněk-Gorbunok on totally different sounds. In the Composers Union, what was the system? If you wanted a new piece of music played in public, you had to play it first to the Composers Union?*

You can read in my autobiography the exact dates of when Schnittke or Gubaidulina was played. You will have the exact information of which works were written when and performed when and where. There's a lot of disinformation around, some very simplistic disinformation.

*But as a young man you had to join the Composers Union? At the Conservatory?*

After my first piano concerto I arrived in the Union without any help. I didn't ask for it. The concerto was a big public success with Rozhdestvensky conducting. I played the concerto myself, and, without asking, in the year 1954 I received a letter that the Composers Union [he speaks briefly in Russian] had heard my piece and invited me to join. To become a member of the Union was a very big privilege. At that time you had to work somewhere. If you didn't, you got what happened later with Yosif Brodsky [the poet charged with "social parasitism", jailed and eventually



expelled from the USSR]. If you were a member of the Union in any arts circle, composers, writers, painters, it was a fantastic privilege - you would work.

*Yes, and have a living.*

Not money so much, as be a "worker". You wouldn't have to work as a teacher. You were a privileged professional composer. For instance, they produced all the materials needed for an orchestral piece without any pain.

*If you were in the CU, and you came up with an unusual piece in a new form, did it have to be played to fellow composers before it could be played in public?*

Yes, it was mostly the decision of the next Plenum meeting of the composers, who created programmes [to be performed in major halls]. At that time our sponsor was our state. Of course they kept control over ideological matters, but they paid for everything. concert hall, conductor, the orchestra, the composer, the orchestral materials. Now today the first word is "sponsor", not "mama".

*How many people would decide about your piece?*

It's not that primitive. Each composition you did would give you more status and rating, in terms of being interesting. It's normal, like in gymnastics. You build up points, in a way. They would know that you'd been interesting in this last piece - so

you just collected drops of authority as you went.

*Was it helpful to you to have so many opinions on your work?*

Not so much the opinions but the performances. You got connections with a conductor who'd conducted one of your pieces, and he would know that the orchestra's reaction had been positive - so that would be a very valuable connection. It's the same today. If Gergiev says, "I'll do it", well... I was lucky with conductors. Eugene Ormandy, Lenny Bernstein, they performed my works, and then they'd commission me. It was important that a conductor believes in you.

*So if you bring a symphonic idea to other composers to hear, and some of them discuss it while it's in development and perhaps say they don't like it. Do you have to make changes to suit them?*

No. That's too simplistic. Life is always more unpredictable, more colourful than that. It's about relationships. For instance, my relationship with Rozhdestvensky was very important, my friendship - we played four hands together. He knew I was a good musician - he knew me beforehand and he'd say to me, "Here's Shostakovich's symphony, let's play it, two together." It's important that Shostakovich had known me since I was nine years old, my father was his secretary in the Second World War. It's a lucky chance. In life it's just the one chance that makes a difference. Like when Mayakovsky liked my "Left March", and that's how I met Maya, and then through that I met Katanyan, author of my first opera libretto. Everything is connected.

---

*“ For me the first thing is the reaction of the orchestra - are they interested in the music or are they bored? You can't cheat the orchestra. ”*

---

*Whom you know is so important.*

Yes. Like Bernstein just looked at my first concerto for orchestra [subtitled "Naughty Limericks", 1963]. It's recorded with his performance. And in that Soviet time he sent me a commission for the second concerto for orchestra without any special "protection". He just believed in me. That was '68.

*So if he sent you a commission from the US, did it have to be done through the Composers Union?*

It was much more difficult. You had to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I wasn't allowed to be at the New York premiere, and I was not allowed to receive money. But Lenny performed it. It's fantastic. Though I was not happy that I was not there.

*When was it played in Russia?*

Maybe five years after with Temirkanov.

*So when you were writing for Lenny did you try to do something different?*

No, I just tried to be interesting. For me the first thing is the reaction of the orchestra - are they interested in the music or are they bored? You can't cheat the orchestra. Just look at the faces of players rehearsing some avant-garde pieces. "OK, it's on the six, or the eight, or the 12." But if it's under Gergiev they are on fire. The reaction of the orchestra for me was always of number one importance. Second is the attention of the public. Not the reaction of my colleagues or the critics. Because critics always say this thing or some other thing for some reason. I remember Shostakovich came with an article about his concert, which Rostropovich had cut out - an article about the concert - and Shostakovich was angry, he was smacking the paper, he was saying, "Shame on you, how can you, a serious musician, read that?" To me the most important thing is that nobody has tuberculosis in the hall, that there isn't coughing. You can feel if you have power over the audience, and if you also have power over the orchestra, then you're a winner. Critics are important, but for me they are not of the first or second importance.

*Now, this is ground you have walked on a great deal, but in your role as the secretary of the Russian Union of Composers, how different was that from the Tikhon Khrennikov role as the very political secretary of the USSR Union of Composers.*

First of all, the Russian Composers Union was Shostakovich's child. It was a little bit in opposition from the Soviet Union of Composers. It is the same door as his private flat. Six floors up was his office and flat, right till today, in Moscow. Just five

rooms.

*How many people were in it?*

All the Russian composers. To this day I'm honorary President. And, second, Shostakovich asked me to do it. He was already very sick, his legs were bad, he asked me to take his chair. He had known me from my childhood, and he was always really nice to me, helped my family so much, my father, my mother, my uncle. We kept this bond always between us.

*Were there many in the Soviet Union of Composers?*

Yes, thousands of them. In the Russian Union, there were only mainly the composers of Moscow and St Petersburg. Not the ones of Crimea, Armenia, Georgia and so on.

*So was the Soviet Composers Union more about politics?*

Of course this Union system was created by Stalin to control artists. First, there was the Union of Writers - of course the writers were an ideological problem that Stalin wanted to control. But composers? Look, take a symphony like Shostakovich number 5... During his life Shostakovich heard all his 15 symphonies played, under great orchestras and great conductors, Mravinsky, Kondrashin, Svetlanov. But of Schubert, not one note of his ninth symphony was heard. So you see, it's much more complicated than Western critics think.

*Overall, what is the thing that annoys you most about the way the West defined you? You think there is a perception that gets in the way of appreciating your music?*

Yes, what you are saying is very important. For my music to be heard for itself, it will be better once I'm in heaven, because then it will be more objectively looked at. The quality of the scores, the quality of the technique. I met many prejudices against me, even before people listened. My colleagues worked hard against me - that reality still exists. There is jealousy that my music is performed by very good conductors. They write about this experimental, banal music that is a constant copy in fifth generation of Webern, or Nono or Maderna. Jealousy exists. And defamation too. But they are just as political in the West as we in Russia. I was never a member of the Communist party, yet I remember a critic in England wrote, "I can't believe he was not a member of the party, because he wrote a score of a film called *Kommunist*" - a great film actually [by Yuli Raizman, 1957], totally against communism. But this critic took the title and assumed something quite wrong. And because I was president of the Russian Union of Composers too. It was totally different. This was the credo of Shostakovich to help everybody.

*[Next week the LSO will open its season with the fifth piano concerto on the programme, played by Denis Matsuev.] You wrote five piano concertos?*

Six.

*You premiered them all? (Young Shchedrin, the pianist, pictured right)*

The first three. Later ones commissioned by the Concertgebouw, and Denis Matsuev did Number 5, but the world premiere of it was with Olli Mustinen in LA under Esa-Pekka Salonen.

*How many of the piano concertos did you write before the fall of the Soviet Union?*

I think, three.

*You've written a lot of music in the past 15 years. [Of his 125 published works, more than a third have been composed since the fall of the USSR.]*

Yes, a lot. Because now the situation is normal!

*Your mind feels changed?*

I am now geographically free. It gives me much more ventilation, not only my body but in my brain! To be free makes a great difference. I have more commissions, more deadlines to make. I am like Tchaikovsky or Stravinsky, I like to know that on this date I must send something off.

*In your later years you have achieved an acceptance that you maybe had to fight for when you were younger?*

No. I'm not regretful about a single day of my life. My grandfather was a Russian priest, so maybe I had a bit of protection from the gods. Of course, sometimes I feel bitter about this critic or that colleague saying this or that out of prejudice. There are a lot of Jewish-Russian émigrés in the world and Russians are everywhere but not everybody is successful. There is professional jealousy, of course. Jealousy about success. Professional jealousy is not like jealousy between men and women over love. It is poisonous. It's stupid when a critic writes something despite the evidence.

*You've remained contained in your head, though. You've not suffered depression*



*you've remained contained in your head, though. You've not suffered depression, like Shostakovich. You are optimistic by nature.*

I think I am, naturally. But for all that, Shostakovich's answer, despite his depression, was always to write a piece. It is the best remedy for depression. When I'm in a bad mood I go to my writing table.

*And you have had a long and happy marriage with Maya too.*

Of course. I am so lucky. We found each other! This is important. With Shostakovich's first wife [Nina Varzar] it was a big tragedy. She was mother to his children. A fantastic lady, but she fell in love with this physics academic, Artyom Alikhanian - I knew him very well because I used to play poker with him. And with Shostakovich. This academic was a bit of a playboy, very attractive, very beautiful, a real man. And she died in Armenia. For Shostakovich it was a big tragedy. We spent the last summer there with Shostakovich and his last wife. He was a very closed person but he told me, "I want to have a dacha here in Armenia." It was a wound, it was a scar he always felt. We are human beings. We have depressions. We feel pain. We have to pay for things we did ourselves. But if it's just slander, then that hurts in a bitter way when it's not true. My reputation in Russia is excellent, always was. But in Western countries it's been hard work.

*I think in the West people saying bad things about each was not going to affect people very much, whereas in the USSR a bad word could ruin a life.*

Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. We have a very old Jewish joke. A rabbi is walking along. Two Jews are talking about a rabbi. One says, "I'm against him because his daughter is a whore." The other says, "But he doesn't even have a daughter." "Never mind," says the first, "it's important I told you."

**Watch a video mini-feature with cellist David Geringas explaining his interest in playing Shchedrin's *Sotto Voce* cello concerto, written for his teacher Mstislav Rostropovich, and his enthusiasm for Valery Gergiev:**

- [The London Symphony Orchestra opens its season under Valery Gergiev on 25 September with a programme including Shchedrin's \*Carmen\* ballet and his fifth piano concerto \(soloist Denis Matsuev\), finishing with Musorgsky's \*Pictures at an Exhibition\* \(Ravel arrangement\)](#)
- [Read about the \*Carmen\* ballet in its rival versions for Plisetskaya in Moscow and Alicia Alonso in Cuba](#)

## RODION SHCHEDRIN CV

**Born:** Moscow, 16 December 1932

**Trained:** Moscow Conservatory 1950-1955 (composition with Yuri Shaporin; piano with Yakov Flier). Postgraduate studies from 1955-1959. Under Shostakovich and Prokofiev influences, but daringly championed then-banned Stravinsky and Mahler. Specialist in Russian folk music, later incorporated jazz and pop music in theatrical pieces. After fall of USSR became more spiritually drawn to instrumental works.

**Married:** Bolshoi ballerina Maya Plisetskaya 1958

**Principal works:** Three symphonies, six piano concertos, three string concertos (for Rostropovich, Vengerov and Bashmet), operas ("Not Love Alone", "Dead Souls", "Lolita", "The Enchanted Wanderer", "Boyarina Morozova"), ballets ("Humpbacked Horse", "Carmen Suite", "Anna Karenina", "The Seagull", "Lady with a Lapdog"), cantata ("Lenin Lives"), piano music (two piano sonatas, 24 Preludes & Fugues etc), vocal and choral music, two string quartets, a piano quintet.

**Positions:** Professor of composition Moscow Conservatory 1964-69 (Honorary Professor 1997); succeeded Dmitri Shostakovich as president of Russian Composers' Union 1973 (life President 1989)

**Home:** Since 1992 has lived in Munich with Plisetskaya

 **Add comment**

[Post a comment](#)