

The Art of Making Mistakes

Misha Alperin

Edited by Inna Novosad-Maehlum

Music is a creation of the Universe

Just like a human being, it reflects God.

Real music can be recognized by its soul -- again, like a person.

At first sight, music sounds like a language, with its own grammatical and stylistic shades.

However, beneath the surface, music is neither style nor grammar.

There is a mystery hidden in music -- a mystery that is not immediately obvious.

Its mystery and unpredictability are what I am seeking.

Misha Alperin

Contents

Preface (by Inna Novosad-Maehlum)

Introduction

Nothing but Improvising

Levels of Art Sound Sensitivity

Fairytales and Fantasy

Music vs Mystery

Influential Masters

The Paradox: an Improvisation on the 100th Birthday of the genius Richter

Keith Jarrett

Some thoughts on Garbarek (with the backdrop of jazz)

The Master on the Pedagogy of Jazz

Improvisation as a Way to Oneself

Main Principles of Misha's Teachings through the Eyes of His Students

Words from the Teacher to his Students

Questions & Answers

Creativity: an Interview (with Inna Novosad-Maehlum)

About Infant-Prodigies: an Interview (with Marina?)

One can Become Music: an Interview (with Carina Prange)

Biography (by Inna Novosad-Maehlum)

Upbringing

The musician's search

Alperin and Composing

Artists vs. Critics

Current Years

Reflections on the Meaning of Life

Our Search for Answers

An Explanation

About Formality

Golden Scorpion

Ego

Discography

Preface

According to Misha Alperin, human life demands both contemplation and active involvement. In this book, the artist addresses the issues of human identity and belonging, as well as those of the relationship between music and musician. Furthermore, he calls the reader's attention to the significance of spiritual awakening. Sharing his thoughts and experiences as a composer, Alperin also deals with certain pedagogical problems; seemingly irrelevant at times, his statements clearly manifest the composer's holistic approach to maximization of the individual's potential. His main concerns – a dual focus on the self, as well as on the subject matter; and the significance of producing professional musicians who are also whole individuals – both address the question of raising future artists.

One of the distinctive features of Alperin's teachings is how he gets personal about professional issues. He is not afraid to talk openly about any topic whatsoever. Not fitting the image of a traditional scholar, the flamboyant Alperin is all the more what we could call an experimental educator. As a proponent of the education of the human being as a whole – mind, body and spirit – he advocates the cultivation of imagination, intuition and inner life. Addressing the problem of high suicidal rates, Alperin emphasizes the importance of a person's realization of who and where in life he/she is. According to him, a musician's understanding of his/her call will help them achieve inner balance – an essential ingredient for outer accomplishments. All in all, the motivation behind this book is to inspire the reader to discover his/her originality and unique call in life.

Inna Novosad-Maehlum

Introduction

Making mistakes is part of life; learning from one's own mistakes is part of life's wisdom; turning one's own mistakes into inspiration to move forward is a true art. Such capability is a vital quality, desirable in and required of any artistic person. My aspiration is to improvise on this topic, and I look forward to your active participation.

What audience do I have in mind?

I am writing to those of you who are dissatisfied with the narrow specialization of your domain, and desire to explore the breadth of the entire spectrum of music, as well as to those who dislike artificial boundaries and limitations. Likewise, I address you who are deeply experienced in your specific field, but are now seeking inspiration in seemingly irrelevant zones and spheres. I also reach out to those of you who have lost interest in imitating "the greats," and are in search of your own voice. In other words, these notes are for creative people, for those who realize that art is not only a synthesis of craft and personal growth, but also a spiritual practice.

It must be mentioned that these notes are a collection of spontaneous ideas as well as lengthy reflections and meditations, rather than scientifically proven concepts and theories. The thoughts that I want to share with you are based on my personal experience, gained and developed throughout my long career as an artist.

I came into the world of music trusting my own voice. I thought that was enough but I was mistaken, for talent is nothing more than a potential that requires discipline and

hard work to manifest itself. Nurtured on classical music in the former Soviet Union, I constantly yearned for a fresh and playful approach. As a result, I sought refuge in the world of heavy metal, and this, I admit, worked for a while. Afterwards, I was much attracted to jazz -- until I fell in love with folklore. However, all the while I felt that discontent and frustration pushed me further into the unknown.

Over the course of more than twenty years of teaching, touring and composing, my inner voice was gradually becoming more audible. It kept saying: remember -- everything exists in unity. Nothing is capable of existing outside the larger context -- everything is connected. With time I have come to see that such a profound insight must emerge from personal experience: it's not a product of book-learning. In fact, we can't truly fathom this truth without divine help. The reason is: every single thing -- either on this earth or in the entire universe -- lies in invisible balance and harmony with the rest of creation, although it often seems otherwise. Because of this, every artistic person is in need of spiritual awareness and curiosity, as well as openness to all sorts of experiments, however radical and strange they may appear.

Finding one's own voice only to eventually lose it -- that's how I see this journey -- lifelong and exciting -- where the art of improvisation plays a huge role. Sadly, this art is mainly thought of as a prerogative of jazz, which is only half true. In the course of history, the art of improvisation has been an essential part of every possible culture. Its roots are ancient and deep.

Previously, in the world of jazz and improvisation the main focus used to be on the imitation of mainstream styles and genres, something that we now try to balance out by every credible means. The contemporary Norwegian school of improvisation is, most impressively, open to these processes. We now live in a very interesting -- if not even strange -- period. The evolution of improvisational art has been long and gratifying, yet not without its challenges: even very talented musicians, brought up in a world marked by fragmentation and imitation, generally have trouble keeping up. Often old habits become the main obstacles to fresh and original artistic ambitions. We're not talking about the extremes here -- my concern is the healthy creative medium.

But where is this golden middle? How can it be described?

Deep down, I have always believed that there must be a web -- threads that unite things and position them in relation to each other. It links different cultures, disciplines, traditions and times. Unity has continued and still continues to fascinate me much more than difference. The synthesis of unification and diversion is, in fact, the essence of Universal Harmony -- a mystery that has always drawn and attracted the human mind. It has revealed itself only partly, in glimpses; there is still much to discover and to learn. Since I am not a theorist but a practitioner, I choose to unravel one of the incredibly numerous threads of this mystery by experimenting with improvisation and composition, and by playing games in the spontaneous crossing of not only genres and styles, but also of seemingly incompatible mentalities.

How do we grow? During sleep? Physiologically, yes. But how do we grow intellectually, emotionally and spiritually? Can any of us recall the day when we stopped being children and turned into young women and men? Or, when we became adults? I don't believe we can, for growth is a process. It demands time, energy and effort. It stops when we curtail it. It continues as long as we attend to it.

According to Osho, an eastern philosopher, we cannot determine the exact boundary between day and night, despite the obvious polarity between the two. I fell for the idea from the start. Probably, that's why I began to experiment with authentic folklore, as well as chamber music and contemporary classical music, inviting it all into the world of modern jazz. The process reminds me of preparing a meal, where in order to create the desired taste and aroma one needs the right ingredients. If some of them are not at hand, a cook can always replace them. However, the result will be different from the original. It is possible (even advisable) to improvise freely with the given ingredients -- to the point that the original recipe might hardly be recognized. In the end, as long as one is open to the possible turnabout, he/she will enjoy not only the process but also the outcome. This process is what has become my daily occupation -- in the kitchen, full of fresh, often crazy, ideas, influenced by a lack of personal attachment to particular genres and styles as well as by a childlike zest for play, jest and life itself.

My path began years ago, but I still have much to learn. A long time ago, I wrote and played piano in the way a journalist would -- brashly and with sneering irony. I didn't let my readers/ listeners into my own inner world. Later on, the need to think and express myself poetically revealed itself -- it can now be easily heard in any of my works. I now have the courage to reveal my heart, be vulnerable and tolerate sustained stillness. I hope that my experiences, along with the lessons that I have learned, will inspire musicians to start their own journey inward towards finding and expressing themselves through their own voices.

Nothing but Improvising

Levels of Art

Until recently, I haven't thought much about the word "levels," and what it signifies in music. But now, I believe, is the time to pay close attention to the word and discuss its meaning in the process of a creative individual's development. Indeed, when immersed in the world of experimentation on daily basis, an artist has neither the time nor the desire to think of his/her path and spiritual growth. However, it is wise (as well as natural) to stop sometimes, to take a break, to turn one's focus from practice to perception and contemplation -- to see where one is now and where one is headed. The world's levels of material well-being are uneven, and non-balanced. The levels of personal spiritual development are in the same state. Sure enough, multiple levels exist in society, and out in the universe. If one is very little experienced in one or another sphere, if one's level of understanding of that particular field is low, one will attract not only those who can share and support one's judgments and conclusions, but also those who will reflect one's own level at that specific period in time.

This principle also applies in the world of music. The higher the level of understanding, the richer one's music and life experiences, the more transformation and change one's

music taste will undergo. Our individual taste will always depend on the level of our curiosity and thirst for knowledge -- it either changes and develops or it stays the same. All of us are in the process of learning; those who mature quicker, will naturally suffer from misunderstanding and contempt coming from those who are either not developing or doing it at a much slower pace. That's why people usually tend to hang out with those whose interests and concerns reflect and resemble their own. In other words, we are comfortable around people who are at the same level as we are.

"Born to crawl must fly." In the East they say that the only difference between a man and a beast is the man's ability to change. An animal cannot decide the scenario of its own life. A man, however, is given a unique chance to grow, to transform and to mature. Sadly, not everyone wants to use the given chance, which also applies to people of art. Every artist has two options: either to grow and mature, or to be satisfied with whatever place he/she has arrived at.

The process of development and growth is always individual, and it will always be reflected in the artist's creation as in a mirror. Otherwise, the artist may stay happy in his craft, using somebody else's wisdom gained through experience. Do you remember the saying "He followed in the footsteps of the greats, that's why he never left his own trail for others to follow?" When we are young and immature, such a state is perfectly natural. However, the period of adolescence necessarily has to end. The Estonian composer Arvo Part once said that many contemporary composers struggle with the so-called "graphomania," staying in the never-ending state of personal and professional adolescence. What a sad state of affairs... I think, one of the main reasons for such a trend is the musician's (as well as a non-musician's) dire need for approval. On the other hand, many choose to reject all and sundry, which is the other extreme. Throughout life we all need to learn the art of balancing.

Music lovers, in my opinion, belong to the most uncontaminated and decent group of individuals, connected by sincere and unselfish love for the arts. They, as opposed to professional musicians, remind the rest of us of the world's divine origin. Music serves as a deep remembrance of the lost and forgotten, enabling us to arouse and activate our distant and bygone experiences. Unfortunately, in becoming a profession, music in its

essence gets twisted and distorted -- this can happen in any realm of art. Such distortions are very natural, because monotonous, lengthy and mechanical repetitions of the same material over and over again are capable of destroying all that is alive and vital in music. Another problem is the musician who goes straight for the result, ignoring the process on his/her way: this dispenses with the essence of music, which lies in the spiritual practice of the musician. However, the latter does not always coincide fully and perfectly with the aims of the musical profession. It is not enough to learn the craft of a music-making, even at its various levels. The significant thing is that music is one means of spiritual growth. Indeed, this may be the reason why amateur musicians often triumph over professionals -- they win the hearts of their audience not by a high, professional level of performing, nor by the originality of interpretation: their major advantage is personal sincerity and loyalty to the spirit of music.

I once visited a jazz club in Asker, Norway, where I presently live. Listening to an amateur jazz orchestra, I was astounded by the musicians' openness, and the freshness of their ideas. I paid little (if any) attention to the quality of their performance -- so much did their vigor and gutsiness strike me, as if a breeze blew into the stuffy hall. I suppose my reaction was especially positive, because I work with professionals, where I often miss that kind of rawness and sparkle.

The only professional musician playing in the orchestra was my colleague Olga Konjkova. (Mish, will she approve? Ask her) During the intermission, I shared my impressions with her. To my surprise, she deprecated my argument, claiming that my impression was but superficial, and that in reality these 'performing businessmen' know way too little about music, and do not show any interest in learning more. Moreover, those guys, according to Olga, are not only unwilling to develop as jazz musicians, but also have very little knowledge of literature and cinema in general. I went home bewildered and discouraged. I then thought if that was indeed the case, then that relegates the vision of harmoniously developed personality permanently to the realm of dreams. My pedagogical experience in the Academy can only add to this conclusion. Granted, professionals *must* be on a different level from amateur musicians: their breadth of vision, the range of their interests, the depth and intensity of their search need stand apart from those of amateurs. Indeed, it is unforgivable for a future artist to

have no idea of who Fellini, or Tarkovsky or Chagall are, unless he/she has an incredible intuition.

However, it is critical to remember that *every one* of us is uniquely created. I understand that it's not that easy to agree with such a statement. It is whole lot easier to believe that there are chosen people who are luckier and more talented than we are. People make mistakes, and I believe this is very normal. Nonetheless, I try to learn from my own mistakes, so I can move forward without repeating them over and over again.

Sound Sensitivity

We have to learn to listen. Imagine that you are a big ear. Give all of your attention to listening. This needs a certain amount of discipline. Learn to take a break from sounds - daily. Then they will turn into a treasure you yearn for. An ability to listen should be very natural, but reality shows the opposite: noises and sounds are everywhere, they surround us, and we cannot do without them.

The habit of listening to music all the time is a harmful habit, just like smoking. The pause for quiet is a room for relaxation in itself. It is also a prerequisite for prayer and meditation. You can create such an atmosphere no matter where you are.

I can't cease to be amazed at how tranquil public places are in Norway. My reference is not to Oslo in the evening or during the weekend; I am talking about public transportation. During my life I have travelled quite a bit, but nowhere else have I experienced a parallel to Norwegian minimal volume, or even the virtual absence of noise. Such an experience of quietude and silence is wonderful for a musician's ear. Those who have visited Norway know that beyond its impressive nature and crystal

clear water one can always be immersed in quietness and stillness. I am certain that seeking quiet is not a person's desire or a whim -- it is our basic need.

I well understand a musician's annoyance with music he/she hears all around. Leif Ove Andsnes, a famous Norwegian classical pianist, has beautifully noted that protection of quiet is as much needed in the world as that of nature.

I have spent a week in Parma, Italy, teaching in the Academy. A hopeless state of affairs: rooms that are not insulated badger students with excessive amounts of sound -- day in, and day out. There is no place for a quiet pause. Both classical and jazz musicians tend to practice a lot; in addition, they listen to various recordings, so they inevitably get numbed through exposure to the constant high volume and the multitude of sounds. As a result, musicians become less sensitive to sound than music asks of them. Without quiet, without pausing, we are unable to apprehend Music.

I once asked the head of the Norwegian Academy jazz department, Marten Halle, (Mish, ask him if he approves of his name being used) why jazz musicians often produce too many sounds. He has a theory, which goes like this: in the beginning of the twentieth century, jazz musicians usually played in clubs and pubs, where people drank and danced; the main function of the music was that of a background. In order to make visitors listen to the music they played, musicians played non-stop. With time this habit turned into an unconscious part of the jazz musician's mentality. Even after jazz moved to concert venues, the driven mentality of the restaurant or club atmosphere persisted.

True music is born when our relationship with it becomes intimate, characterized by deep plunging and submersing into it. This process demands not only absolute devotion to it, but also the musician's sensitivity and understanding, which only comes from a place of quiet.

Fairytales and Fantasy

Everyone knows that a creative person needs imagination as fundamentally as every living creature needs air. However, few understand why limited imagination stands in the way of creating captivating music, and even fewer have an awareness of how to develop it. I would like to share with you some of my ideas.

Imagine a beautiful autumn evening in Paris. My friend Mikhail Rudy, a French/Russian pianist, and I are walking the streets of this magnificent city, passionately engaged in a debate. The subject of this particular conversation is *imagination*. I am leading the talk by throwing at Mikhail numerous, often seeming contradictory, questions; and he, as passionately as ever, is standing his ground -- and thus enriching my mind with his deep insights and vision; that's usually how it goes.

To illustrate one of his points, Mikhail mentions his friend, the professor, who has taught all his life at the Theatre Academy in Paris. Having fostered an impressive

number of actors, the professor came to realize that the primary limiting factor of people in the arts, and especially, people of the theatre, is their lack of imagination! In his opinion, this is the main reason why 'the rational and boring' prevails in the world of art. Interestingly, the professor noted that with time, the situation only worsens. Before the advent of informational technology, when people had limited access to information and were not bombarded with all kinds of ideas, they needed to conjure or pull up images or pictures from within, relying on their own fantasy and memory, and the 'collective unconscious.' Nowadays, in the time of informational overload, artists need to be on guard, diligently withdrawing focus from the outside world and redirecting it into their inner selves.

Unfortunately, Mikhail's friend is not the only one pointing to this issue. The great Andrey Tarkovsky often gave impartial and harsh comments to actors with whom he worked. He kept repeating that their main problem was poor imagination and lack of fantasy. I have been teaching improvisation and composition in the Music Academy for over twenty years, and I totally agree with the above statements of my colleagues. Sadly, this is not a rare problem, but a diagnosis that might apply to the average artist.

The question is: how can we stimulate and foster imagination?

I believe we should go back to ancient times. Eckhart Tolle says that before the time we learned to think, we processed and reflected in terms of pictures and images. In other words, thinking is a secondary product, and returning to intuition on every level and in every dimension will naturally lead us 'back home.' Let me suggest that we develop imagination with the help of fairytales, for stories and myths are considered to be amongst the earliest art genres. Reading those fairytales and picturing them in our minds is both accessible and efficient. Isn't it amazing that we can find a number of cultural analogies in cultures as different as those of Russia and Japan? Did you know that Japanese folktales resemble Russian folktales? Think of it: two distant countries, two distinct cultures, no communication whatsoever, but the stories created within each of them are identical! How would you explain this? For me, this is one of the mysteries of the universe, but out of this fact we can learn a lesson: imagination has no boundaries -- it goes beyond territorial borders, it bridges time gaps and ignores social and cultural divisions. In other words, this creative power belongs to every human

being on the planet Earth, and it ought to be developed individually -- no matter how much time and effort such a development will consume, it is still worth it.

Another important point that I want to make is: how we can build a bridge between imagination and the tools of art -- be it a grand piano, or a painting brush, or a dancer's body. Understanding this topic is pivotal. Jan Garbarek, a great Norwegian saxophonist, suggests one of the ways of creating music. According to him, one should start off with simple lullabies, as through them it is easy to access the simple, pure state of a child's heart. Other than that, try to picture yourself as an eagle that celebrates its independence and freedom, or as a lion who wields its strength and power. Get into the mind of an eagle, and the lofty bird's eye perspective will naturally come to you. Adopt the lion's mighty physical stature, and the scent of victory will lead you unerringly to the goal.

I will also encourage you to perceive the piece you are playing from the point of view of the composer: go beyond technical challenges, rhythmical intricacies and dynamical developments -- aspire to see the bigger picture. Then clear images *will* start coming to you, gradually, in the process of working on a piece. Eventually, you *will* be able to get rid of the habit of mechanical playing or the need for mere conquest -- the famous stumbling blocks that get in the way of creativity. The goal is obvious: we need to adopt the approach of the poet, no matter what kind of art we are devoted to. The poet is always in search of a secret; he/she finds it, because he/she looks for it. Jesus said: 'Seek, and you will find.' That's how it works. One of our problems is that we often are reluctant to spend time and energy needed to look for our special secret. Albeit at times it can become extra complicated -- i.e. when we don't even know what to look for. Then what? Well, it's not as simple as we would have it. But as long as you don't give up, you will find your own secret -- I promise.

In the beginning of the 90's, when our Moscow Art Trio started touring the world, a British critic wrote a review in '*The Independent*,' about a concert we gave in Manchester. I still remember one of his comments: "There are rumors that Moscow Art Trio is coming, and that their music is reminiscent of Andrey Tarkovsky's films. I went to one of their concerts, and want to assure you that this is not true: their music rather

invokes the films of another filmmaker, the great Russian/Armenian/Ukrainian Sergey Parandzhanov, whose '*The Pomegranates' Color*' immediately comes to mind." I was surprised and flattered to hear such a comment; it resonated in my heart, because 'the smell' of his films never leaves me..

In the beginning of the 90's, a close friend of Paranzhanov told me a story. It went like this:

"In one of our talks, Sergey asked me: 'I heard various people mentioning the name of Carmen. Who is she?' I couldn't believe me own ears! My reply probably seemed rude, for it was made while I was still taken back with surprise: 'Don't you tell me you haven't heard Bizet's opera! Haven't you read or watched the movie?? Well then, go to the library and borrow the book!'

"No, no, please tell me the story now,' -- he was calm and invulnerable. Still overwhelmed, I started the story: 'Once upon a time, there lived a Spanish beauty. She worked in a tobacco factory. Sure enough, she fell in love...' Here Paradzhanov stopped me: 'Thank you. This is enough for my fantasy.'

"Two years later I received a call from Paradzhanov who invites me to see the premiere of his spectacle '*My Carmen*' in Tbilisi.

"A beautiful young Spanish woman is on the stage. She starts sneezing, and does this for an endless ten minutes. Why would a two hour performance begin like this? The author's imagination had responded to the fact that the girl worked at the tobacco factory. Accordingly, she must have been chronically sensitive to tobacco.

"It was a great performance. Paradzhanov needed two sentences to create a two hour long drama. I think, it's a good illustration of the power of imagination."

In the East, people believe that intuition is the language of God. We often talk of our inner voice. Learning to listen to the inner voice is a serious spiritual practice that requires much discipline. Reflecting over and transmitting the ideas that come from within, necessitates an individual's state of trust and faith. Besides, it is difficult to think of fantasy and imagination without having some ballast of experience. This is not an easy way to go, but the gratification of tasting the fruits of imagination is indescribable. *Everyone* can experience it.

Music vs Mystery

Real music is full of mysteries, that's why it attracts, enralls, and gives no clear-cut or concise answers. I would compare music to a woman who requests attention, understanding, regard, and, subsequently, invasion of her heart and passionate love. An experienced music lover sometimes gets a glimpse into the mysteries of music -- although, generally, music does not open up to a merely curious eye. It should be taken for granted that I am talking about great music, which, sadly, we hear less and less of. Music has to be grasped and comprehended. Music is the most abstract art that humanity inherited from our Creator. It serves to connect the earth with the universe.

Musicians, music lovers, and critics attempt to analyze music. I myself have been trying for years to unravel the enigma of music, and now I wish to share with you a revelation I have had. Music is information encoded by God. Why encoded? For us, creative people, to decode: to perceive and apprehend the secrets and the mysteries of the

universe. We tend to think that composers create music. Often, that's exactly what the majority of composers themselves feel. But the great ones know that the real creator of their music is God alone. As I said, the talent of a musician is given to him/her to enable them to decode all the information they get from above. The mysteries of music reflect the mysteries of the universe, and, just like the mysteries of man, they reflect their Creator, God Almighty.

Every person is gifted; the intuition of one individual differs from that of another -- the way it works is also unique for each. We are created to be original, and our hearts and souls are singular and unequalled -- they can never be copied. When it comes to the brain, it very often turns into a mass product, which is a colossal problem. The hope is that the brain not only can -- but also should -- be balanced out by our hearts and souls.

Many musicians recognize the fact that the intellect stops working during the best moments of creating. When this happens, a miracle can take place. It can, mind you, but not necessarily does. Ultimate focus and concentration is expected of any performing musician. The performer needs to go in and out of the sound, as if it were water in an ocean. Despite surface conditions, the waters at the ocean bed are always still. Likewise, a musician can reach the point of stillness and rest while playing a piece, no matter how intricate and intense the music can sound to the listener's ear.

If the artist's intellect interferes with the process of information-transfer, it blocks the channel of communication, and then the artist has to use his own limited knowledge, experience and energy. Our human energy can never sustain itself, unless it is refueled from outside sources. When we over-intellectualize, we wind up in critical situations. We cannot afford to forget the issues of heart and soul. Contemporary art, alongside society, is in a period of crisis, only because we have relied too much on the intellect. It's time to "go home," and understand that the brain is not always intelligent. Very often it is both superficial and superfluous.

The only things that we, creative people, should train, are intuition, imagination and inner voice. The inner voice is the reality, of and from God, where everything is

perfectly balanced: the analytical and the perceptive are connected by faith. We, musicians, need to have faith: in God the Creator, first of all, and then in ourselves. This is my individual experience. I believe, however, it can become universal, and thus help many.

Influential Masters

There is a number of musicians that I find inspiring and influential, but the three I want to highlight here -- Richter, Jarrett and Garbarek -- have had a deep impact on me personally. Some of my thoughts might strike the reader as being harsh and judgmental. However, the motive behind is an attempt to express my personal attitude towards my musical heroes -- honestly and sincerely. So, please, bear with me.

***The Paradox: an Improvisation on the 100th Birthday of the genius
Richter***

The three pianists of equal quality -- Sviatoslav Richter, Glenn Gould and Vladimir Horowitz -- form the triangle of my favorite musicians. I am writing this chapter under the spell of the wonderful documentary *The Richter's Enigma*, still brooding over the phenomenon of this great man. Richter used to worry that he would be forgotten after his death, and that future generations would know neither him nor his art. Sviatoslav Teofilovich Richter, you worried in vain! You do live on in people's hearts!

God's boundless energy and timeless inspiration will always nourish our imaginations. Time is both a mystery and an illusion. Real art cannot arise without God. As His open channel, Richter was, and continues to be, a puzzle -- not only to people that heard or hear him play, but also to himself.

"Genius is a friend of paradox" -- that's how the brilliant Pushkin described this phenomenon. A genius himself, he realized the power of energy and paradox more than anyone else. Paradox is a give-away for true genius: it is the criterium by which one can determine a genius in *any* area of activity. To name a few, we have: Albert Einstein, a scientist and a mystic, who connected the incongruous; Richard Branson, a creative but rebellious billionaire; and the great producer Tarkovsky. There is one striking difference between the latter two geniuses: Tarkovsky doesn't believe in money, using his entire pool of resources for the right cause, while Branson adores money, and invests it primarily in his own dreams.

It has always been considered that science and spirituality are incompatible. However, reality proves the opposite. The above examples may easily serve as an illustration to this point. Likewise, consider the great Bach who fused deep spirituality with mathematics and geometry, or Chagall who connected the non-connectable -- these great minds break the rules that normally circumscribe common mentality.

Paradzhanov and Nordsten as well as Bardin and Stravinsky -- these creative rebels live on, no matter what.

Richter believed that performing musicians attain eternal status only if they compose. Yes, indeed, very few artists are equally grand performers and composers. Nevertheless, Richter -- not a composer -- left an unforgettable endowment not only in terms of

recordings but also the impression left in people's minds and hearts. Likewise, the Romanian pianist Lipatti. He passed away, yet he lives on in my heart: always bright and stimulating. The great musicians -- Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, Chopin, Liszt, Jarrett, Chick Corea -- approach divine status, on my personal list. We have not enough information about such harmonious and self-sufficient individuals: it comes in portions, because the music market holds it back. On the one hand, these masters appear saint-like -- they are raised up on a pedestal; on the other, they are subjected to backhanded flack -- "Jazzy Jesus" sounds, derogatorily, avant-garde.

However, we cannot change the facts. The world music market nowadays reminds me of a dead corpse: anything and everything can be sold. Such has always been the case, but the final catastrophe was caused by the division of the historical unity composer/performer/conductor, mentioned by Glenn Gould.

He himself was plagued by the fact that he didn't compose. So was Horowitz. So is Misha Pletnev. They all suffer either from an inferiority complex or 'delusions of grandeur' -- which, in fact, are two sides of the same coin.

Arthur Rubinstein's experience is amazing, that's why I want to bring it to your attention. He was suicidal in his 20s, in Berlin, but having found a new life in beauty and harmony, he lived until the age of 90 -- wrapped in love, music and visual art, in his grand house in Paris. In his complacency he stopped generating the energy of spiritual thirst and, as a result, he lost the fervency of an artistic soul. I believe this is the reason I *always* prefer Gould and Richter to Rubinstein.

Michael Naura, the famous German pianist, jazz critic and professional wine taster once called me "jazzy Richter." Back then I didn't pay much attention to it, since I dislike pathos in whatever form. However, at this point in my life I have come to the realization that it is important to learn certain lessons from Richter's life, so Naura's comment has become relevant. Richter simultaneously burned with inner energy and suffered from depression. Even when dying, he couldn't find peace. One can argue that we can only dream of peace. This is Richter's particular truth, not applicable to everyone. I am not Richter, thank God. Unlike Richter, I eventually found peace and

harmony -- let this fact become a huge inspiration for all of you in search. At the age of 57 I was reborn; since then, I have celebrated every single day of my life in joy. I dedicate my talent to God: I realize it doesn't belong to me, nor does the music I write. We all are geniuses, but only very few of us know this. I keep repeating this statement over and over again, because I truly believe in its significance. I have found myself -- and, my own voice. Now I am the composer, the performer and the teacher -- three in one, for there is no more division -- only wholeness.

Keith Jarrett

First of all, I don't want to be repetitive, for there is so much written about this artist. The interest towards him is well deserved. Jarrett provides a world of feelings and impressions; critics enjoy writing about such a fascinating personality; throughout his lifetime, he has been in search of his own voice. But what I wish to do is to share the *inspiration* I received in encountering this enormous musical talent.

In contrast to those who adore his every single note, and to those who reject his entire aesthetics, I have tried and continue to try to comprehend and sense him -- usually, with interest and some circumspection. The most attractive qualities I see in him are his

unceasing passion and his incredible capacity to work, along with his sincerity and complete dedication to his art. His driving energy cannot help but seduce his audiences. However, sometimes it seems that his strong individuality dominates his performances: one wants more of music, not more of Jarrett. Although, I have to admit, it's a great stimulation, a kind of dope for the listener. Sometimes I wish that Keith would just relax, the way he does in his famous ballads, where his talent as a singer comes alive. A ballad is the soul of jazz, after all.

Often, while improvising in collaboration with his partners, he becomes hollow, like a bamboo stick, an open channel. Then, I believe, God's energy transfuses his performance with mystery, and inexplicable things start happening. One can't predict the appearance of the divine, one can only yield to it and give up control. On the other hand, even though Jarrett is an experienced improviser who, almost fanatically, believes in the power of improvisation, he quite loses his way. This clouds his ability to perceive the entirety of the process of spontaneous music playing. The stress of losing control may be the source of his hyperactivity, so familiar to us all...

His solos can irritate by their monotony and drabness: there are no partners to start a conversation with. I am sure that, by nature, jazz improvisors (and Keith Jarrett is one of them) are akin to folklore musicians, whose strongest side is not monologue and recitative but conversation and energy exchange. That's why Jarrett's musicians so often talk of the power of trans-meditational immersion which they experience. Of course, that's the essence of groove. As they say, it means to "be in the area and surrender."

I think there are only a few interesting improvisors who can express themselves equally well while playing solo as they would while working with their partners. Hence comes the weakness of certain of Jarrett's compositions performed with classical musicians: his music written for the oboe, or the violin or a group of string instruments immediately reveals this problem. A number of contemporary improvisors (and I am one of them) attempts to write as "ordinary" composers would, and rarely do we ever succeed. At least one partner is needed to keep the excitement flowing -- and I am talking from my own experience.

However, anything can change when alone with the mic'. It so happened that Keith Jarrett became very ill and couldn't play for about two years. Despite his condition, he didn't give up. As a result, he attained a much deeper degree of intimacy in his music: for him, this period became an X-ray of his own soul. I myself had a similar experience while talking to my mic' as if to a live companion (CD "At Home" ECM).

It should be mentioned that Manfred Eicher has played a significant role in the production of Jarrett's discs during the last thirty years. Hundreds of live concerts have been recorded, many of which are not yet available to the public. This certainly affirms Jarrett's faith in his own voice.

In my *Biography* section there is an episode that describes my first and as yet only experiment wherein I composed on the spot before a live audience (in the Moscow Tchaikovsky hall). I remember coaching myself before the performance: "Don't play like Jarrett. Create short stories -- unlike him when he improvises." It did help! Although the whole thing was still stressful.

The contemporary art of improvisation is in the process of evolution. What does this mean for the individual musician? I am sure that it's not enough to simply discover one's special talent. It is very important to experiment in a wide variety of genres in order to find one's own way. It is common knowledge (at least, it should be) that everybody is an original. However, not everyone is equally curious or passionate. Now the music world is ready for experimentation, both within and without the restrictions of genre. Understanding the psychological qualities of the artist will probably help him/her perceive his/her own uniqueness and originality more clearly. Jarrett, playing at the edge of genre fusions for several decades, has provided much excitement and stimulation all this time. Inspired by Jarrett, I am gearing up to return to my old experiment of composing on the spot.

Some thoughts on Garbarek (with the backdrop of jazz)

When the British journalist and writer Mike Tucker was editing a book on Jan Garbarek, he asked me to write an article about this master of the saxophone from Norway. The article had been written, but was never added to the book. Rather, for a couple of years it found its place under the grand piano, hidden among the multitude of scores and papers, until it recently caught my eye.

It goes without saying that through Jan Garbarek the listener's attitude towards the saxophone in modern jazz has been changed and renewed. His appearance proved to be perfectly timely. Thirty years later, it is still important to discuss his profound influence in the world of jazz -- for me, personally, and for the younger generation of musicians. The reason is significant: no other giant in the history of jazz has concentrated on sound quality as much as Garbarek has. For instance, the focus of John Coltrane, despite his deep spirituality and genius of experimentation, was elsewhere, but not on the sound and its quality. Naturally, they all had their individual approaches. However, Garbarek broke through a barrier not yet crossed.

The Garbarek phenomenon is unique in the context of jazz. No classical performer who is as fixated on sound quality as much as Garbarek, would ever be considered revolutionary, since attentiveness to the sound (i.e. detailed work on the dynamics, timbre, colors and shades) has always been an indispensable part of the art of classical performance. The sound achieved by great performers always showcases their originality. Think of the sound of, say, Jacob Heifetz or Vladimir Horowitz -- one can never confuse it with anyone else's. Likewise, the touch and sonic palette of Glenn Gould establishes his own world of interpretation.

Undoubtedly, thousands of academic musicians resemble each other, just as in jazz, but the standard of the sound that classical musicians have is far beyond that of jazz performers. In improvisational music the art of sound has been and remains the very last priority. I would really like to contradict myself, but the reality is obvious. The idea of freely improvising on the spot automatically draws the musician away from his/her immersion into images and away from as his/her concern about the quality of sound. The main focus goes into resolving the primary task as improviser: what to play next, how to unfold and develop the given material. In other words, it is very difficult to simultaneously pat one's head and rub one's belly. That's exactly what Jan Garbarek managed to do.

We, jazz musicians, have subconsciously been waiting for the man who would introduce us to poetry in improvisational music. For more than 30 years Jan Garbarek has been stretching our intellectual limits and emotional boundaries, as well as

expanding the world of our imaginations. He has managed to subordinate the saxophone to his own voice. He *is* the master of sound rhetoric, where the weight of every single word is significant, and where playfulness and spontaneity provide inspiration for improvisation.

For me, his only weakness is composition. That is why I distinguish between Garbarek the instrumentalist and Garbarek the composer. In my opinion, his compositional ideas, especially in his last CDs, are far more trivial than his ways of conveying them to the listener. His methods of transmission of the given material can amazingly ennoble every idea, even a banal one. This is a mystery to me. I remember one of my earlier episodes, where I pretended to sing one of Garbarek's compositions with the voice of Josef Kobzon. I clearly imagined that Garbarek wrote it especially for this famous Soviet singer. It smelled of a Moscow concert from the Soviet times -- that really was amusing.

Some more thoughts on jazz: its competitive mentality is the main riddle and problem of this youthful art; its cliches, its triteness are beyond the expected. I don't know any other type of instrumental music where the display of quickness and rapidity is nearly that celebrated. Can it be some kind of a complex?

Garbarek is a contemporary musician, deeply interested in the world's folklore. Let us take a peek into folklore music. However transparent and natural, it is still impressively harmonious. Its virtuosity is without worries and concerns about virtuosity, and its sadness is without particular attentiveness to sadness. Although the roots of folklore are in the earth, its branches reach high up into the sky. Overnight, folklore absorbed and engaged the unseen, the secret and the wild. Its audacity is incredible! The toughest representatives of the avant-garde can (and actually should) feel jealous when it comes to folklore. It is as if folklore has never been born, thus it can never die. Folklore should be our only standard.

Jazz resembles folklore, as it feeds on the same source. However, as contradictory as it may seem, free art cannot help but show disturbing limitations and boundaries, even totalitarianism, to a degree. Obviously, jazz musicians know this reality. Strictly speaking, Coltrane is as distant from his followers and Parker from his, as Jesus is from

an average Christian, or as Buddha is from a Buddhist. It is ironic, isn't it? The putrid smell of 'coltranianism' is easy to detect and discern not only outside the great master's homeland: in America it is as strong as anywhere else.

Listen to all those artists who have come to the point of actual spiritual blossoming. Even those people don't always realize that it is necessary to take breaks: get in touch with themselves and look back, or ahead. Such is the challenge, met by all those who seek. Someone might think the same about me. Might this even be the reason why European jazz pubs are half empty, and the audience, disappointed in sound masturbation, prefers Argentinian tango and Tuva DJ to jazz music? Regarding itself as rhythmical music, jazz hasn't noticed the fact that with time it has become the most under-developed of the so-called un-rhythmical music genres. Somehow so it happened.

Sadly, but that's the fact: while the standards for the musician's technical/virtuoso accomplishments continuously rise, those set for his/her personal development decrease. I can only hope that a period of blooming will take place following the current time of crisis. Garbarek has influenced hundreds of musicians. His work on the sound that he produced is like that of a master jeweler-- it cannot help but inspire us all. Both the 70s and the 80s have blessed the world with amazing experimentation in the realm of European aesthetics. My musical imagination still feeds on it, several decades later. Long ago, when I lived in Moldova, and later, in Moscow, I was intuitively drawn to the north, with its calm deliberation and explosive quietude. I understood why when I encountered Garbarek's music.

George Russell, the American composer and trombonist, once said that he likes Norwegian jazz players because they not only send a sound far into the mountains, but also patiently wait for its return. I believe that he meant Garbarek. Having lived in Norway for several decades, I endorse Russell's playful image. When we free our minds from the boundaries between genres, epochs and territories – if that ever happens – perhaps we shall then understand why Jan Garbarek called one of his albums *All Those Born With Wings*.

P.S. Today is a new day -- it is not a copy of yesterday. What I feel about Garbarek now differs significantly from what is expressed in the thoughts above. Of course, he is still a performing musician, which is wonderful and exciting, given so many decades of stage success. However, it would be dishonest on my side to gloss over my more recent impressions of his performing. I heard him several years ago in concert at a music festival in Fiesole, near Florence, Italy. Disappointed, I left the concert much before it ended. He played technically as impressively as in the 70s, but there was no freshness, no sparkle, no novelty. In other words, nothing seems to have changed during all those years. With time, it is easy to lose sharpness of perception, it becomes difficult and not as natural to thirst and hunger after music as much as in the beginning. The reason is that the most valuable musician's instrument - the musical ear - is overused.

As his former fan, this really saddens me. I will always return to his old recordings -- they are fantastic -- but I still can't get over that particular performance. Fame often lulls vigilance to sleep. Case in point: Garbarek has been playing together with Reiner Bruninghouse for years -- this very fact shows that he is in a state of dormancy. Sadly, the ripe times of our favorite recording studio ECM and its legendary producer Manfred Eicher are bygone. There is a number of artists with legendary histories who have lost their freshness and originality. The future lies with people young in *spirit* -- not necessarily young in years. We are in 2015; not much time remains before a new upswing. The tide is about to turn.

The Master on the Pedagogy of Jazz

I want to begin with a statement, addressed to me, that could even be the starting point for a whole book: "You are a genuine justification and a true explanation of my path." During my career as a teacher I have heard many kind words regarding my pedagogical approach, and that's why I would like to talk on the topic of *pedagogy* and my understanding of it. The topic is very interesting and relevant: being a jazz pedagogue has its own challenges.

Jazz today doesn't measure up to its name, which is a problem in and of itself. The word "jazz" is becoming outdated. First of all, young jazz students nowadays don't have as much affection for jazz as we, the older generation, had. They have no connection with jazz as a genre, because its time in American mainstream is long since gone. Young people are interested in all they can get through the internet. The consumer attitude underlies their whole lifestyle. Any student today, given an incredible number of possibilities and choices, has difficulty understanding the necessity of hard work -- the object of every desire seems to be delivered at a high speed, and at a low cost. That's the trap students easily fall into. They get lost, bombarded by tons of information through their technological devices; they come to me and ask for help.

Students of jazz have no idea how to love jazz; they neither know how to stretch their limits to attain knowledge and experience, nor do they understand why they should do this. Thereafter, they know too little of jazz's roots and beginnings. In other words, the mysteries of jazz are hidden from today's younger generation -- the access to all kinds of information is way too easy.

European improvisation as well as European jazz should by now be an independent subject in the conservatory. Having taught in the Academy for more than twenty years, I realize that there is still no insightful teaching in this sphere. America's jazz education is founded on imitation of a variety of jazz styles. Jazz schools in Europe imitate those in America. Why does the imitation of styles lead us nowhere? Because becoming an artist implies much more than the ability to copy a number of styles: so, the necessity of a holistic approach is obvious.

The artistic potential of a jazz student is completely individual, it is grounded in self-reliant education and total freedom of choice under the guidance of a supervisor. This kind of approach is impossible in the pedagogy of classical music: when it comes to teaching a classical musician, there is a clear-cut pedagogical practice and tradition, used over the world. As for jazz, teaching gets complicated. In general, jazz pedagogues are experienced performers who are either born pedagogues, or not good teachers at all. Why? Because of the absence of a tradition that shows us how to teach jazzmen not only to be artists, but also to be whole human beings.

Today's jazz is a world full of endless experimentation at the intersection of genres, which requires a new, holistic approach in jazz pedagogy. I have understood that it is about time to take another look at jazz pedagogy -- like outdated medical methodology, it is in need of total transformation.

Jazz pedagogy doesn't keep up with the times, so I found it necessary to define my own system/method, based on genre synthesis, psychology, philosophy and spiritual practice. You will find the parameters of this system in the following chapters. I appreciate your attentiveness , and I welcome your participation in a discussion.

Improvisation as a Way to Oneself

I believe that every creative soul subconsciously places a barrier he/she wishes to jump over. This demands self-discipline and perseverance, which paves our road to success. What we don't understand, though, is that setting the height of the bar means setting artificial limitations. Instead of thinking about perfection, one should allow oneself incompleteness and imperfection, digging down as deep as possible to pull up and cultivate one's own voice. Humans make mistakes. It's part of individuality.

For me, improvisation is both discipline and spiritual practice. It hasn't been the same all the time. My relationship with the art of improvising, in its earlier stages, was

complex and confusing, ranging from fanatic love for free improvisation to its complete rejection. It reminds me of my previous relationships with women: since my teens, I was simultaneously attracted to and driven away by members of the female gender -- I have always been intrigued by the fragrance of freedom, yet frightened by what that freedom could lead to. Likewise have I always been intrigued by the freedom of improvisation. Even more so now. Remember: two steps forward, one step back -- that's how both life and improvisation work.

Having been educated as a classical pianist, I nonetheless developed beyond the limits of traditional sight reading. To this day I have a reserved attitude towards notes: the flatness and fixedness of sheet music has always irritated me. I have discovered that some physiological problems, such as Dyslexia, compelled me to stretch my hearing rather than my sight. To generalize from my experience: the pedagogy needs to be adapted to the individual, not the other way around.

Now let's go back to the concept of freedom. Improvising is a world in which the governing rules are conditional and flexible. Besides, we are given space and lee-way for spontaneous creativity. A good improviser is capable of instantaneously creating a thought-through and complete piece of music from a single note. A performer of classical music can be compared to a waiter who serves a dish created by someone else, unknowledgeable as to how that dish was created. An improviser, however, is a restaurant chef who cooks a dish and serves it to the customer, excited about the latter's reception of it, but confident regarding its origination. Improvising is a way to oneself. Every improviser follows this path, discovering his/her potential on the way. This journey is very individual in terms of time, pace and direction. It is of vital importance to accord each individual freedom of license so that his/her creativity may blossom.

The art of improvisation can be disappointing. From time to time, it disappointed me as well. As opposed to folklore, average improvisational art leads into a boring sphere. Folklore always works, even at its most basic stages. I believe the reason for this is that folklore as an art does not aim at quality of performance. Jazz, just like classical music,

has no such 'privilege.' Let us respect the qualities of simplicity and sincerity as essential to clear and compelling artistic expression.

The spiritual dimension in the relationship between the performer and his/her music also plays an important role. In classical music, the performer does not exist without the composer, who, in a way, prevents the performer from communicating directly with God. This is the reality of classical music. In the world of jazz, direct communication of a spiritual nature is more likely to occur.

The art of improvisation opens the doors to freedom and love, as it is part of the divine. It connects us with God. The mysterious nature of the birth of on-the-spot-music is nothing less than a miracle, and it requires closer investigation. There are several conditions that predispose for this miracle, the first one being the connection between heart and mind. The energy that comes from above, wanting to fill the performer, should not be blocked by our fears of failure. Otherwise, this energy won't flow freely through the performer, thus leading to tension and stiltedness. It is very important to learn how to stay calm and focused, for emotional ups and downs, leading to paralysis, affect the improvisor more profoundly than the performer -- the former simultaneously plays two roles: that of composer and that of performer. Low self-esteem, caused by insecurity and non-comprehension of the essence of improvisation is, in my view, the main obstacle that blocks creative flow in the improvisor. Having taught in the Academy for all these years I claim that the vast majority of students experience this very problem. How can we deal with it? By recognizing the spiritual as an indispensable part of all creative processes. Spiritual discipline and self-discipline are the most important assets that help us solve this problem. Only then can we speak of a balanced and whole person. The following words by the great Russian writer Chekhov come to mind: "Everything about a human being should be beautiful, from his soul to his thoughts, to the clothing he wears." I totally agree with this statement by this Russian literary genius. Without the spiritual dimension, art is nothing but an empty shell --lacking life potential and vital energy.

The Main Principles of Misha's Teachings through the Eyes of His Students

Eyolf Dale:

I first encountered Misha as a nineteen year old who possessed little knowledge, and even less insight and understanding.

"My first encounter with Misha took place when I was 19 years old and possessed as yet but little knowledge, and even less insight and understanding. Certainly, he made a deep impression on me. In my naivety, I believed that my lessons with a new piano teacher would have to do with other methods and techniques required for my development as a professional musician. However, already at our first meeting I realized that there was a much deeper dimension to it. Misha would speak of music as art, of composition, of the necessity of dedication to musical/instrumental improvement and refinement, and of the importance of being aware of one's own creative power. These topics were not foreign to me, yet they grew in significance as part of open and honest conversations, reinforced by detailed comments about my music.

Misha's musical powers, together with his attitude of taking music very seriously have become an important source of inspiration for me. Moreover, his insistence upon reflecting deeply about music has had a strong impact upon me as an artist. There are many important topics that we discussed, but the most profound ones were, say: "Improvisation beyond the Limitations Imposed by Genre" and "Reflections upon One's own Artistic Role." The ability to focus on given musical elements -- be it a chord, an interval, or a specific emotion -- rather than becoming a slave to the stylistic/genre boundaries, has resulted in one of the strongest skills in my development as a musician. During my lessons we had a great deal of talks on what it means to be an artist, and how the artist should relate to the world around him/her. We, people, usually create a barrier around ourselves: for protection and for defense -- in general, we want to give a better impression of ourselves. The artist has to be sensitive and sensory; capable of absorbing and processing everything life presents to us -- joy and happiness as well as sorrow and challenge.

The artist has to be capable of adhering to his/her principles and convictions, despite different opinions and changes of trend. In other words, the artist must find his/her own

voice and learn to use it. All these thoughts and ideas helped me to prioritize correctly, where music comes before my own whims, wishes and needs."

Helge Lien:

"I met Misha when I was 19 and a first-year student at the Norwegian Academy of Music. For me, meeting him was a turning point. My entire world turned upside down; my former thoughts and ideas on how to play jazz and how to improvise were questioned and challenged. I needed many years not only to grasp and digest -- but also to verify, understand, master and appreciate -- it all. In other words, everything he taught me, needed to be integrated into my own world -- into my own system that functions logically and interactively.

The first and most important lesson Misha taught me was how to get rid of the unnecessary: all those genre-typical ornaments, rudiments and dispositions that we, jazz musicians, often use, even unawares. He called it "garbage." He used to say: "get rid of this garbage," "reach the core," "focus on the length of the note," "listen to the note's strength," "concentrate on the quality of the sound," etc. He strongly opposed the initial learning of a number of standard jazz pieces, of a set of styles, various scales and chord progressions (with the intention of incorporating them into my own own music). No, this was not Misha's approach. He taught me to start from scratch and move forward. To look for the kernel. To get to the heart of an idea. This was a huge revelation, and, I believe, the most significant seed sown with regard to my artistic growth.

In a nutshell, I perceive Misha's artistic philosophy as follows: *improvisation is composition*. As a result, typical compositional techniques can also be used while improvising. They possess common traits, they are not genre limited, therefore they can be used with a variety of thematic material. For instance, it is possible to either shorten or prolong the length of different notes in a theme; it is possible to both augment and diminish chords and intervals; it is possible to reverse the theme, to build chords out of the theme notes, and to modulate them in a number of ways. It is also possible to use dynamics and orchestration to achieve a desired effect. All in all, it is possible to juggle

a number of ideas simultaneously. The most exciting and mesmerizing thing is the focus on *how* to play, rather than *what* to play. This method really helped me to develop as an improviser! The only thing needed is a short theme or melody, on which one can spend weeks, playing with various channels for its expansion: harmonic progressions, melody motifs and rhythmical patterns. With time, it gets much easier to apply these methods either to a given theme, or to a theme composed on the spot. I couldn't help but notice the escalation in my development and growth, as I learned to improvise freely as a way of composing.

One of Misha's favorite discussion topics was about creating dramatically developed forms by imagining contrasting subjects and characters. This wasn't easy to understand. One thing is the construction of two or three contrasting themes, which are to be presented one after another, but a totally different matter is their parallel and interwoven development! I spent much time engrossed in the task -- which was a serious challenge. I worked hard, and as a result of this lengthy process I can now sometimes create a sense of three-dimensional development. For me, it is important that music contains several layers. In order to achieve this, I had to learn to hold a couple of compositional ideas in my head, think in terms of contrast, and let these ideas develop simultaneously.

To conclude, I would like to describe Misha's way of teaching. Much of what I have learned is philosophical; naturally, a great deal of time was dedicated to discussions of different topics. To be precise, Misha was the one who talked. I listened. He was full of energy, incredibly passionate and vibrant. I was deeply fascinated, almost to the point of being overwhelmed. I felt I had both the opportunity as well as the capacity to understand the implications, but I was far from being able to apply this knowledge to my personal practice at that point in time. What I remember most from my lessons with him is, perhaps, when he played. I will always remember the feeling of sitting but a meter from a great master -- playing exclusively for me! It was incredibly intense."

Andreas:??

"During our piano lessons Misha always highlighted the importance of looking for my own voice, and developing it once it is found. He never stressed the necessity of learning jazz as a genre: we rather worked with composing and improvising in general, beyond genre boundaries. This is something I hang on to in my daily activities. However, it is still significant for me to work with a variety of music styles and genres, which augments the urge to further develop and grow as a composer."

Words from the Teacher to his Students

Dear musicians, it is ever so important to be in search of your own voice, not anybody else's -- even if the latter be the voice of your teacher! One of the most serious problems of professional musicians is that we want to be accepted and loved by our audiences. This problem is classic, and it calls for attention. What do we choose: honesty or success? Everybody understands that the best option is a combination of both. But how can we get there? I think we should follow the example of the great Richter who once commented: "I always play for myself, not for my audience. Knowing that my listeners appreciate my performing gladdens me. But if they don't -- who cares? It's their problem, not mine." I agree with him. He is an example of an artist who doesn't compromise in his art.

I haven't ever sold my talent and my principles as an artist, nor would I ever recommend you to do so. Our talents are given to us by God, and we should freely share the fruits of our talent with others. Be humble and modest; don't make a habit of requesting this or that. Learn to receive gifts (no matter their size and value) with gratitude, and always be thankful for what you have. Given your personal package, find your own way.

Why is it so hard for us to be thankful and joyful? I think, a person easily gets used to every good thing that comes his/her way, taking these things for granted. Comfort is definitely one of those good things. An individual wishes for comfort on the path towards a goal, but deep down his/her heart dreams of something else -- freedom and love. To reach a certain level of comfort, one has to use time and apply energy, but once he/she arrives at that point, all of a sudden he/she becomes bored. Instead of

rejoicing, one starts craving something else, being dissatisfied with his/her present emotional/intellectual state. We need to learn to receive gifts from God as well as from our friends and relations. At the same time, we have to practice the art of giving, which is part of self-discipline. If we are not careful, we may easily forget and ignore this important virtue. The world lies in a deep spiritual and economic crisis. Therefore, it is essential to apprehend the meaning of the following phrase: *Wholeness implies God, Love, Freedom, Creation, Evolution and Harmony.*

For the last 25 years I was an unofficial ambassador of Norwegian culture out in the wide world. I did it out of my love for this beautiful country and its people. I lived my life, wholly believing in music and in creation. At present, I do so too, but the time has come to realize that my beloved Norway is in as deep a crisis as the rest of the world -- because, in fact, it's a part of it. Norway is swamped in materialism. No civil rights, no laws, no oil supplies will help. We should stop giving in to illusions and self-deception. The future lies not in exercising our wits anymore. We have to realize at what place we have arrived, and ask ourselves what our goal is. The reason for the crisis is not economic, but the spiritual degradation of the world; our future depends upon recognition of this fact.

The crux of the world's spiritual crisis is our inability to see who we are and what we are here on this earth for. As a result, we are absorbed in a very dangerous attitude: "I am insignificant -- I can't dream big." This is more than a lie: it's the reason for numberless tragedies and sufferings, since it blocks and dissipates one's energy and progress. We compare ourselves to others, instead of thinking about our own process of development and maturation. Such a mindset stops us from recognizing our individuality and uniqueness. It is a surprise how little of the art that surrounds us is the product of true genius. But we must understand that those few who *are* genius, are people who managed to get out of the hell of competing with others, and to remain true to themselves. The rest of us are blind, and live in the illusions of the materialistic society.

Today scientists have proven that the centre of a human is not the brain (as has been argued up to now), but the heart. Only the heart is capable of opening a door to the

divine, to a world without conflict and without division. Cooperation between heart and mind gives us the potential for personal development and constant self-improvement. God's most significant gift however -- our freedom of choice -- we rarely recognize and appreciate. In other words, we are free to make our own lives -- but must remember that the consequences of our thoughts and actions will follow us.

To progress we need to learn -- on a daily basis -- to love God and to love one another. Sadly, religion has done the opposite of what it was expected: it has distorted our perception and understanding of God. Instead of believing that we are His children and co-creators, we have become skeptical materialists. It's about time to reconsider and change. It's about time to start living in unconditional love and in a process of creation. It's about time to stop resting on one's laurels, as many do, but to start to self-improve, to learn to catch every negative thought, changing it into a positive one. It's about time to live our lives fully.

Questions & Answers

Creativity: an Interview (with Inna Novosad-Maehlum)

They say there are two great days in a person's life: the day he is born and the day he discovers why. Tell me about your day of discovery.

Yes, that's true – these two days *are* the most important days in one's life. The statement is very well put, I have nothing to add. (Smiles) But in all sincerity, the day when I listened to Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto performed by Krainev, I consider to be my personal day of enlightenment. I remember sitting in the armchair near the gramophone, crying and thinking: 'That's why they love music.' I was nineteen by then, had been playing the piano since five. The fourteen years in between were filled with music, yet at that moment I clearly understood that my relationship with it wasn't

intact: something profound was missing. All of a sudden I saw vividly what it was – that day my passion for music was born.

What does composing mean to you?

Glenn Gould once wrote that the tragedy that gradually took hold in the world of music 200 years back was a separation. Previously, there were no ‘composers,’ ‘performers’ or ‘choirmasters’ – all of them were called *musicians*. It did not of course mean that all were like Mozart or Beethoven, but they all were taught and qualified to do practically everything: to compose a fugue, to play many instruments, to conduct the orchestra or a choir. Therefore, the general attitude towards music was different from what it is now. I personally think that when the division into conductor/performer/composer took place, that music, in a way, lost some of its sense. In his article ‘The Secret of Richter,’ in 1961, Heinrich Neuhaus commented: ‘His secret lies in his being a composer. Richter never composed, but I believe that there are two types of composers: active and passive. We all know the first type of composer. Due to various reasons, passive composers did not activate this latent talent. Both Horowitz and Richter were encumbered by this, for every great performer carries in him/herself a capacity to compose.’ I totally agree with Neuhaus. An ordinary performer is like a soldier: he/she cannot understand the overall strategy of the whole. A musician, on the contrary, is not a soldier – it’s someone who, playing only one note every fifth minute, still sees the connection with the whole of the orchestration. We live in the time of ‘homecoming.’

In the Academy where I work, a subject called ‘intuitive people’ is taught. The many unifying processes Glenn Gould dreamed of are going on there – they improvise, conduct, they compose and perform. This concept resonates with me – I don’t like divisions, I gravitate towards the whole. Working with students, I try to release the musician in them. My jazz pianists do play not only jazz music – they also learn to understand music, from Debussy to Schnittke and Arvo Part. My only goal is to help them find their own voice. My passion is music in its entirety. When I see that a

performer is more interested in music than in actual performing skills, I immediately see a huge potential in him or her.

In one of your interviews you talked about the importance of one's roots. You have lived in four different countries; considering the difference of the countries' cultural heritage, how did it affect your art? Can you see a correlation between the countries in which you lived and the music that you created there? How do you think environmental factors influenced you as a composer?

Wherever I lived, I was inspired by that country and its traditions. Inspiration is vital. Inspiration, mind you, not imitation. To imitate one's own roots, and to be inspired by them, are two entirely different things. I never wanted to imitate, so I searched for what would help me stay away from that. I found the secret, which I can gladly share with you: one simply needs to feed on folklore as a source. Folklore is strongly identified with personality. Not every artist is capable of expressing his/her roots. It is not enough to find them; much more difficult is to express them through one's own voice. One of my conversations with Stian Karlstensen can well illustrate my point. A very talented musician, this fellow has been playing Bulgarian music long enough to understand it. A Norwegian, he has lived in Bulgaria for quite a while, he has learned the language well, and he is now accustomed to the country's traditions, but his roots are Norwegian. When I asked him: 'Why do you never play Bulgarian sad music?' his answer was: 'You can learn to play the virtuoso music of a foreign country, but you will never play its downhearted and unhappy songs very well – to be able to do so you would need to have your roots in the country.'

Folklore mirrors the simple person without inner conflicts who accepts life the way it is. We, city folk, keep asking the same question over and over: 'Why?' Passed on word-of-mouth by our grannies, or as songs and ballads sung by parents – we were taught

important lessons even through our first encounters with it. Roots help us to understand everything that is beyond our time-span, they give us insight into the past as well as premonitions about the future. Our roots are the guides that enable us to build a fundament of our lives. A person without roots drifts aimlessly: s/he is very likely to be easily influenced by society and its norms. There is a huge difference between a country's traditions and its roots: putting on a Muslim hat won't make you a Muslim. In other words, rituals are insignificant regarding the issue of roots. Jewish roots are not only Jewish, for any roots belong to the same family, just like any flower belongs to the same garden. Likewise, all the folklore sources belong to the same lineage. It is significant to understand this, which happens when you come to a realization that yours is not yours any more, but part of ongoing values that are independent of the time in which you live. That's why folklore is so important: the world will survive without yet another jazz festival or individual composer. But without the spiritual preoccupation of individuals, it will cease to be.

When it comes to the impact of environmental factors on me as a composer, I admit they play an important role. There is much that is Norwegian in my music, even though I come from the south. There are two reasons for this: I adore this country, and I have lived here for about twenty years. Norway is a country of space and light with its hidden abundant colors and subtle shades. In other words, it's a country of mysteries, and mysteries always attract and excite an artist. At the same time, in many of my works one can easily hear elements belonging to other sources. The explanation is simple: I am a Ukrainian Jew who for long time lived in Moldova and Russia.

Can you recall any particular circumstances that inspired any of your compositions? Do you experience new ideas during sleep?

I believe that facts are insignificant. The sounds one creates should be capable of reflecting his/her state of being, the so-called emotional biography. But they cannot do this automatically; facts do not directly call for sounds: there is a profound link in between – a person who experiences and feels, then processes, and, finally, conveys it into a musical thought or idea. In general, art is a mirror, which reflects experiences or

rituals. This principle applies to every artist, but especially to an improviser or somebody who composes on the spot.

My works, for most part, are stories of my experiences. To give another example, Stravinsky was always interested in the ritual part of Russian folklore. However, in his works one recognizes that these rituals are presented through the prism of the composer's own imaginative understanding of them. Imitation never works. Why are there so many poor performers in the world? There is no connection between their emotional condition and what comes out of the instruments they play: they simply imitate what they have heard – that's why. To round off, it's not the history of recordable events but their emotional impact that serves as the inspiration for a composition.

When it comes to getting fresh ideas during sleep, yes, I do. But I never stress out in the effort to remember them and immediately write them down. I am certain that if an idea is good for me, it will always come back. Nor do I care when it doesn't.

What are your sources of inspiration? How do extra-musical factors, such as literature, visual arts, and theatre affect you?

Literature. Philosophy. Poetry. Movies – good ones, of course (by Tarkovsky, Fellini). Also, visual art, although to a lesser extent (Chagall, for example). I was never interested either in theatre, or ballet. But imaginary ballet is exciting. I was commissioned to write a work for the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, which turned out to be a great experience. This is my last work so far, and it is called 'Village Variation.'

Who played the most significant role in your career?

I have to say that I myself am the result of a merging of various musical, aesthetic and philosophical streams: Bela Bartok and Arvo Pjart, Glenn Gould and Bill Evans, Gurdzhev and Osho are only some of the influences I can name. In addition, I was always very interested in folklore and jazz of different cultures. However, there is one person who played a major role in my emergence as a jazz musician. His name is Simon Shirman; we met in Kishinev, Moldova's capital. An awesome violinist and saxophone player, he showed me a possible path from classical music to jazz. Nine years my elder, Simon started tutoring me. We worked for days and nights with only short breaks: did lots of programs, spending almost all of the time in improvisation. Together with two other musicians we started a band 'Kvarta.' It turned out that the band was very timely – more and more musicians, fed on folklore, wanted to play jazz. In 1981 we were invited to a jazz festival in Yaroslavl (Russia), which was a huge success: the Moldovan jazz ensemble performed a synthesis of Jewish and Moldovan folklore with avant-garde theatrical acting. We thought: that's it; this is the time to create a new kind of music – music from our own roots.

In 1983, together with Shirman, I moved to Moscow, where we played in 'Arsenal.' We were not content though: the music we played sounded so American, that we eventually decided to leave the band and move to Siberia, another turning point in my career. As a duo, we gave concerts – as many as twelve or thirteen a month -- we were determined to survive. While everybody played American (or Americanized) jazz, Shirman and I improvised on Mussorgsky and Tchaikovsky, and performed our own compositions. Life was tough, but I was expecting a breakthrough. Upon our return to Moscow we agreed to part, and I started giving solo concerts. In my heart, I will always be grateful to that man.

Do you believe that a person's musical taste in a sense represents who the person is?

It's a difficult question. First of all, taste has a tendency to change. That's why the saying goes: 'Tastes are not to be disputed.' Today you think that he is a genius, tomorrow you cannot believe you ever thought him so. I believe that musical taste correlates with your growth and development, personal as well as professional. One's taste, in general, is an aesthetic reflection of one's growth. What is more interesting, though, is what exists beyond one's taste. *Anything* beyond individual taste points to something we all have in common – something that is not subject to cultures, traditions, and aesthetic norms. This something resides in the realm of the spiritual. Isn't it interesting to observe how that which we consider reality often turns out to be illusory? What we see with our minds is not real. As spiritual beings, we, humans, can also see and experience the world spiritually; then the music we create would naturally reflect this spirituality.

I see that my next question comes in very handy. Some people see a very strong connection between the body and the soul (intellect and emotions) and the spirit. What is your take on that?

As I said, we are spiritual beings. To me, the temporal, the passing and the transitory have never been very interesting. What I *do* find fascinating is the eternal. In general, we view the world through the prism of our intellect, that has a tendency to divide and separate all it registers. The more you educate and instruct it, the more you enable it to further divide and separate. Tell me, do school teachers teach the children ways to develop their intuition or express their feelings? Do they explain why people argue and fight? Do they teach their pupils the art of communication? How about including the subject of emotions in the curriculum? That's what I call schooling. That's what we, humans, need – much more than filling our heads with known and unknown facts that sooner or later get either forgotten or called into question. God wants our hearts, not our intellects. Having a wise heart is far more important than possessing a skillful/witty mind.

All modern societies aim at perfection. That's why all those competitions – on different levels, in different areas – have become such an important life ingredient. But what if, in the process, you lose your source of motivation? What if competing doesn't inspire you anymore? It happens again and again... It happens naturally, I believe, because competing in itself is totally absurd. For where can we find perfection? Only in the eternal harmony, I trust, in everything that is connected with God. Spirituality is often mistaken for religiosity, whereas religiosity is usually connected with the church. It's wrong. It's like limiting music to the conservatory: music has always been around, regardless of the existence of institutions where it is taught or of their absence, for that matter. Our spirits seek that connection with the eternal, with God Himself, in order to know and experience that we are not mere by-products of coincidence, but all that happens in our lives has meaning and makes sense. Folklore exists beyond the dimension of time. Therefore it has always been a most interesting, intriguing and stimulating source of inspiration for a vast number of musicians -- and for me, in particular.

Do you regard your compositions simply as your works, or do you see them as an extension of yourself?

They are me.

To look at the process of composing from a different perspective: do you consider yourself as an originator of ideas or as a mirror of the contemporary cultural/social/spiritual climate?

The world is full of mysteries. Talking about them doesn't account for much. I think it is very important to understand that no one can explain them away: their beauty and lure

lies in their elusiveness. I often think: where does it all come from? How does this or that happen? Why this way but not another? I think I am more of a channel than an originator. The question is not about whether or not this is good. The question is: how do you handle this? I believe, sometimes you have to let yourself be caught off-guard. Can you put yourself aside, so that something meaningful will be born through you? If you are always alert, if you make your mind work nonstop, you are in danger: then you can't receive and channel any fresh ideas and thoughts. Our minds are so cluttered, that in order to clearly see or experience anything special we need to get rid of lots of stuff. I often work at night, because at that time I am physically tired, my ambitions are gone, and my mind is ready for rest. I sit by the grand, ready to compose, and tell my mind: 'You can go off to sleep now. Tomorrow I will show you what has happened here.' The album 'At home' was basically created during the nighttime. Usually, people are scared of the word 'madman.' I think that being called 'crazy' is one of the best compliments: it is equivalent to being blessed – it means to devote oneself to the gift given by God. We, humans, need to be able to control ourselves, but only to some extent – otherwise we become unhappy. Creative madness equates passion.

Can you please generalize the process of creating?

Creating is a bridge between one's life and his/her instrument. When you create, your inner world of associations, emotions and experience gets reflected. I believe I have achieved this, although I also know that many don't share this idea nor do they understand my music. According to Anna Akhmatova¹, poems grow out of litter. The same can be said about creating music. Let me explain this. An academic musician is taught to perceive a music score as a finished product: In his/her mind a composer alone is responsible for his/her creation; only the composer is able to fill the product with content and pack it ready for consumption. An interpreter paints the work with not-too-bright colors, thus humbly worshipping the genius. A jazz musician, on the other hand, sees himself as a garbage-picker, constantly digging in heaps of sound. For him/her, the final result is unimportant -- it's the process that counts.

¹ Anna Akhmatova was one of the leading Russian and Soviet modernist poets.

These two opposing philosophies share the same essence – both are extremes. Therefore, they seem so close. Whatever I do – consciously and unconsciously, exclusively by intuition – I seek balance, either through drawing them closer together, or by eroding the boundaries between them. This process has nothing to do with a fusion of styles; rather, it is an experiment aimed at interlocking a random collection of outdated psychologies and habits.

Can you delineate the characteristic traits of your composing? What is the most important factor in music for you?

The process of creating is often spontaneous. An idea comes to mind easily, but its polishing usually takes a long time. Moreover, it's not always helpful: sometimes the process of improvement can seriously harm the originally written material. Improvement implies control, which, in turn, hinders friskiness and vigor. Here in Norway, I have noticed that my spontaneity and playfulness give in to control and restraint. There may be many reasons for this, one of them – my being a teacher: I try to verbalize the 'non-verbalizable' stuff. Don't get me wrong: being a teacher is an awesome privilege: lively, passionate and intense discussions about music do, in fact, both enrich and encourage me. On the negative side, the challenge of verbalizing things that can't and shouldn't be put into words affects me, and it takes its toll on me.

What interests me most, is music as a subject of mystery. The various factors in music are inseparable. Craft as such has no relation to mystery per se, but at the same time it means a whole lot: memory, coordination, control, skills, knowledge – all these things are very important. We cannot get far on intuition alone; we need knowledge. Not only do we need knowledge, but we cannot do without knowledge in its wholeness. In the Academy where I work, I suggested that every student of jazz piano be taught simultaneously by three piano teachers in the spheres of classical music, composition/improvisation, as well as that of different musical styles. The reason of my proposal is simple – I believe in the efficiency of synthesis, which is beneficial to students playing any instrument. We are not there yet, but this is our future goal. I am

very happy that in this country there is an openness regarding consideration of these important issues. The Academy students are taught to think in terms of improvisation, folklore, contemporary sound effects, and other arts – this way of synthesis is a natural part of our life, I think.

Do you ever think in terms of audience and its preferences or is your sole motivation always the desire to share your own story?

Richter springs to mind again; like him, I never play for the audience. If I enjoy my performing, there is a greater chance that my public will enjoy it as well. If my listeners don't respond, I cannot do anything about it. A live concert always implies energetic interchange. I have experienced this so many times: for example, the Moscow Art Trio recordings don't affect the listeners to the same extent live performances do – the things that take place on the stage never happen in the recording studio. How can I explain this? I believe the reason lies in communication. Interestingly, I used to agree with Glenn Gould who meant that perfection is possible only in the place of solitude, and called the audience 'the offspring of hell.'

However, my own experience proves just the opposite. I found out that my audience, as well as energetic communication with it, is vital to me. I never think of the listener when I write. Nor do I care about how many come to hear me perform. It gratifies, mind you, but is not that important. What is absolutely necessary is one's inner security: the psychological and spiritual aspects are simply indispensable. Performing can be compared to stripping off one's clothes and standing naked in front of the crowd. So, I believe that the psychological status of the performer expands with and beyond his/her craft and talents. Therefore, experience plays a significant role in a performer's life. Understanding of the significance of our inner world is very valuable. There are enough artists that don't respect or appreciate their inner world, which usually results in egocentric behavior as a hostile reaction to their own nature. That's why they crave praise and approval. Ljybshin, a Russian actor, put it well: 'We remain

on the stage not because of megalomania, but because of an inferiority complex.' I agree that the inferiority complex often is a powerful motivational force behind the artist's apparent success. It is so important to be content, but at the same time it is very difficult. Thus there is but a small number of satisfied and fulfilled artists who, like A. Rubinstein, manage to retain their love for people and a passion for art along with respect for their heritage.

How can you describe the difference between creating commissioned music and music which arises out of a need to express yourself?

Commissioned music implies deadlines, usually associated with additional pressure, which, in turn, involves the necessity of composing despite the absence of inspiration and stimulus. Is it good? Yes and no. For some, the approaching time limit may be the only force that keeps them working. For me, it may sometimes help: in such periods my dreams of, say, a vacation give in to the determination to see results achieved. But there are also times when I simply cannot work without being inspired – Muse is a capricious lady.

I am frequently asked to write for choir, orchestra or an instrument, and more often than not my answer is 'no.' The reason is this: I don't write for instruments, but for the people who play these instruments. There are universal composers – they write for instruments as well as for performers. I am not one of them – I never wrote for an instrument. I am often asked: 'You play the piano. Can you write a 'so-and-so' piano piece?' My usual reply is: 'I have no idea how to write for the piano.' Likewise, people say: 'You have written many works for the horn. Can you write yet another one?' To this I say: 'I never wrote for the horn. I wrote for my good friend Arkady Shilkloper who happens to play the horn.' I am not joking; that's why I don't consider myself a composer in the traditional sense of the word.

Yes, I have composed works for orchestra, but only because in the orchestra I wrote for, there are people I know well. So, I wrote for them. I find it very difficult to compose for a particular instrument – its natural sound hinders me. I am searching for a synthesis of sounds that has never been heard nor experienced before. A long time ago I realized that I cannot unfold in traditional music spheres: there is not enough space for freedom. For me, the freedom of experimentation is vital. Therefore, creating music for the ensemble of African and Korean instrumentalists is heaven for me, whereas composing a cantata for the conservatory choir is a prison. Charles Parker once said: 'I need schooling in order to forget it. Without schooling I can't forget school.' That's how I feel: I am not a classical composer, nor am I a jazz musician – my works combine elements that cannot be combined.

"Good music resembles good speech." Will you please amplify this statement?

I like this idea. However, it can only be applied to someone who wants to express his/her unique inner voice. But very often music originates in dialogues and discussions where several voices merge. A good speechmaker is an expert at exploiting the material's dramaturgical potential: s/he knows how to hold the audience interested. But in art there is usually no place for monologues. Remember Mozart's experimentations? In his operas up to ten voices spoke and sang simultaneously! Interplay is a fundamental part of music making, where the focus is on the interrelationship of the voices. For me, good music rather resembles good storytelling: a speech is a monologue, which has only a short lifetime.

You believe that finding one's own voice is imperative. Tell me please about your search for your true self (not necessarily connected to the sphere of music).

By ethnicity I am a Jew, and my native language is Russian. How come I never married a Jewish woman? This thought didn't even cross my mind. In a couple of years I am turning sixty, and am about to get married again, to a woman from Russia. Poor mamma Sarah...

My first marriage was to a Russian woman called Irina, who gave birth to my only child Ksenija in 1990. Three years later, Ksenja and I moved to Norway, where I eventually married Tone, a Norwegian. Tone became a mom to my daughter, and I will always be grateful for that. I kept trying to find happiness in relationships. Another woman entered my life; Anne-Maria was a Dutch journalist, and we spent ten years traveling back and forth between Oslo and Amsterdam. Sadly, something was missing in that relationship too -- we didn't manage to find harmony. But God is patient, so He waited. This time everything is different: at first I found Him, and then I met my soulmate -- Evelina. She is my soul; I am "the light of (her) eyes." She is pure in heart, and she is talented. But the most important thing -- she is part of me, my second half, if you know what I mean.

Even as a young man, I discerned that Jewish women were all but naive; I rarely met any who were pure in heart and sincere. What I value most in people is truthfulness and sincerity. Parochialism and pretentiousness, characteristic of female and male Jews, constantly provoked and insulted me. But most of all I was hit by peremptoriness and irony. That was the kind of atmosphere in which I was brought up, desperate in my desire to escape. God heard my cries. In 1982 I moved to Moscow, where I immediately experienced a huge difference. This was a shock, but a positive one. A breath of fresh air, which I dreamt of for so long, was becoming a reality. Another evidence of God's response was my meeting the horn player Arkadiy Shilkloper and the folklore singer Sergey Starostin. Sergey is a man of pure soul. He invited me into a world characterized by genuineness, depth and sincerity -- a world free of names and conflicts. Such is the world of folklore! I am certain that I needed my earlier provincial experiences in order to grasp and understand the new, and let go of the old.

As I said, I am soon turning sixty, so it's about time to think about the meaning of life. I can see that ever since childhood I have been drawn to the light of God -- such is one of our archetypal predispositions. Having suffered through a Soviet childhood, with

anti-Semitism spread all over the Soviet Ukraine, and having survived the cruelty and horrors of the Russian army in the end of the 1970s, and having spend much of my life in inquiry and search, I have finally arrived at my port of destination -- I have found the Light. I can see God leading me through my entire life, neither leaving nor forsaking. However, I can also see a huge difference between a life independent of God and one that is in close relationship with Him. My grandfather Zamvell had a similar predestination: he found God in his later years, and died a happy person.

*In our conversations you refer to "the old Misha" vs. "the new Misha."
What do you think is the main difference?*

I cannot help but being continually surprised at myself. We have all heard that it is never too late to learn, right? Back in time, only was any other person capable of surprising me -- never I myself. Today, as I said, I am dazzled by myself. Anything special? Plenty of things. For instance, returning back from Israel to Norway this time, I called my mother, and while talking, I suddenly suggested that I give her another call from the airport, in a couple of hours. I made her happy, since the initiative was mine, not hers. Never before I would do such a thing -- the thought wouldn't even cross my mind; simply because I was "asleep." But now I am awake, and this is a miracle of God! My mother is nearly 90 years old, and I can now see that my absolutely new ways of showing her appreciation and caring for her help her stay happy, vibrant and young. I always loved her, but the love she experiences now differs from what she is used to -- this love stems from God. She also found God recently; in Him she found happiness, and in her happiness, the Creator rejoices together with her.

For all of my life I hurried and rushed. I hustled and bustled - inside and out. I have stopped now -- I finally realized that I am alive, and that is enough. This realization makes me very happy. The transformation I have gone through, brought back to me my youth and energy; when I look at myself in the mirror, I see a different face, and I like it. I don't depend on gourmet food or ample sleep anymore -- the energy continuously fills me, unlimited grace and joy overflow.

I always thought that it is practically impossible for a person to be in harmony with him/ herself. Thankfully, I now find myself in this very state. I have discovered that I am no longer self-centered. As selfish as I was, I could hardly relax and enjoy life. My new interest became people -- people in their state of need. It became natural to give love to others. I became different, and, as a result, everyone else has become different in my eyes. Isn't this amazing?

Naturally, along with the transformation that has taken place in me, my music has also undergone dramatic change.

Jesus taught people about the danger of going through life in a state of "sleep." I was one of those people, and I "slept." How wonderful is it to hear and understand that all of us are given a chance to "wake up" -- and to see that while sleeping, we missed out on so much!

About Infant-Prodigies: an Interview with Marina??

To start off, I have never been a wunderkind, and have absolutely no idea how it is to be one. I assume that the word implies singular, distinctive gifting, the ability to grow quickly and deeply. Come to think of it, I am trying to distinguish a wunderkind from a non-wunderkind. Possibly, it's all about speed. There are thousands of musicians who, while developing and maturing normally, have nonetheless reached unthinkable levels of accomplishments. Moreover -- and I just thought of this today -- nature knows better what kind of power is needed by a specific child. As a matter of fact, it all depends on the kind of energy an individual is endowed with. That specific energy can influence his/her development phenomenally, which can happen either early in life or later on. Moreover, if a child matures slowly, in due time his/her creativity will become more conscious and insightful.

The type of energy which you are talking about: is it genetic or it can be acquired later on?

All people possess incredible energy potential. The question is whether or not it's blocked. Everyone has everything needed.

What if a person is phlegmatic?

That's nonsense. I recall one of my students: She was the most phlegmatic individual I have ever met! I even remember saying to someone: " She won't get anywhere -- it hurts me to see how tense and sandwiched she is..." Three or four years later, after her graduation, I was invited to her solo concert. I couldn't believe my own eyes -- she sang her own songs! A singer *and* a composer! Talking about liberation...

I remember a number of Russian children who showed enormous ability at an early stage in life. These kids had two things in common: they all moved forward very speedily, but they all looked alike. All of them developed very quickly, all of them went through very good schooling, and a disturbing number of them ended up in very different fields of interest. Apparently, when a child is little, he/she is fussed about and pumped up. At the same time, society urges and rushes him/her on. What kind of choice is he/she given? To imitate somebody else. It looks like all wunderkinds are born from the same mother, don't you agree?

Do you think that at an early age everything happens at the level of intuition?

That's right -- intuition only. However, I am not sure whether this is the point. When I first started working in Norway, I was seriously shocked by the educational standards at the jazz department in the Academy -- they were *that* low. Poor schooling in this country is not a secret from anyone. I have to tell you though, that after a couple of years working, I changed my mind with regard to levels of education: my own understanding of the criteria has become different. I realized that poor schooling and impressive giftedness is far better a combination than strong schooling and that same

giftedness -- talented, yet poorly taught, 17-18 year old students are much better off than their likewise gifted classmates who have been under the wing of seriously powerful teachers. They can brilliantly play all the Paganini caprices alright, but they are not being themselves while doing it: they've been turned into robots who can imitate perfectly. I found out that working with poorly schooled students is much more interesting and exciting, for their wits are quick and their hearts are open: to receive, to interpret and to express. They let the creative forces take over their skills. That's why technical challenge become a lesser problem than the technical perfection produced by a narrow-minded mental focus. I have never worked with very young pupils, but I assume that grown-ups comprehend and embrace creativity in its wholeness, with deeper insight.

Music craves serious emotional involvement, and to expect this of a little girl or boy is, I believe, absolutely unnatural. Music cannot be compared to sports, for it presupposes a variety of experience, which leads to depth in the musician. Emotional experience can only be gained with time. How can you explain to a child what jealousy means? How do you talk about confrontation? Or about passion? In what language can you convey to him/her the things they haven't yet gone through, the yet non-activated emotions? On the other hand, I believe that all children are very bright creatures -- they "get it" incredibly fast.

Do you think there are children who are not gifted?

No, I don't agree with this claim. I don't believe that any individual could be born without talent. This would be against the rules of nature. Every person is born an original -- one of a kind. Nurturing and developing this uniqueness demands intuition, hard work, perseverance and faith -- that is another matter. But uniqueness is the foundation; it is also one's potential.

Consider Carl Phillip Emmanuel Bach's reply to one of his admirers: "There is nothing to be amazed over when it comes to playing the organ. One has to strike the keys in due course, and the rest is up to the organ." I cannot agree more. The only thing that

we all have to do is to learn the lessons of life as they come, to keep searching for our right direction, and to never stop developing our potential.

What role do parents play in all of this?

Parents are enormously important. They can be the child's friends and guides helping him/her not to get lost amidst this extremely chaotic gushing-over-the-edge energy. But they can also stagnate the development of their kid through excessive interference and overprotectiveness. Sadly, the latter type of parent is more common than the former.

In general, "wunderkism" is most obvious in music and in sports. Why do you think this is so?

Simply because sports and music are more visible than other spheres of human interest and activity. Let's say you have a particular interest in geology or botany -- you love pebbles and rocks or have a fondness for flora and fauna -- this specific inclination is not as obvious to others. There are thousands of spheres that do not manifest themselves as visibly as music and sports do. The latter stand out a mile, if you will. This is actually the reason many parents worship their child's abilities: in order to satisfy their own egos. In most cases, parents themselves have experienced a failure earlier in their lives, so they now become obsessively involved with their offspring, turning them into fanatics along the way. I am against any kind of fanaticism, for it inevitably leads to conflict. It often happens that only later in life do music prodigies start to understand that music is only part of their lives, and that they thus far have missed out on awfully much: their focus has been placed entirely on lengthy and diligent practicing, and their motivation came of nothing but a sense of duty towards their parents.

I was gifted as a child, which was obvious when I was very young, but my family didn't make a big deal out of it. I mean, both of my parents acknowledged my gift, and they did want me to develop musically. But there was a balance, which my loud protests against routine practice helped to establish. I didn't understand why I should practice

systematically -- for what worth was my talent then? I actually believe that there is a contradiction between the two: if a child is talented, then he/she doesn't need the system of practicing that hovers over him/her constantly, circumscribing and hindering his/her natural growth. I do agree that one needs a systematic approach to developing a skill and cultivating talent. However, in general, schools promote mechanical repetition, while talent thrives amidst chaos. See, the contradiction is obvious. That's why children protest, that's why there are conflicts.

Certainly, every case is very individual. It goes without saying that the teacher is extremely important. I didn't have good teachers. Absolutely all of them experienced my ideas about freedom as the whims of a spoiled rascal, and absolutely all of them made it their first priority to stop me in my wild attempts and teach me to do things "the right way" -- which was utterly stereotyped: you play this way, your fingers go that way, your hand position has to copy mine, etc. The individuality of physiology wasn't taken into consideration at all. So, naturally, I protested. Many times I was ready to quit, because I couldn't understand how this totalitarian attitude could possibly coexist with creativity.

Do you think that this situation is about the parents and/or teachers' preoccupation with the future career of their children and/or pupils, and the desire to force their talents into social expectations?

Exactly! Parents are already concerned about their kids' career and economic success while the children are still very young! This is horrible. We need to think of the ways that show our children and pupils love, that give them all opportunity to develop, and we must try hard never to stop them in that. Moreover, when it comes to money, I am absolutely certain that as long as your entire focus is on money and ways to earn it, you will be left without it. Talking out of my own experience, that is...

I have encountered hundreds of musicians -- talented ones -- who complain that music doesn't bring money, so they decide to compromise: either to play commercial music, or to make money in a different way. As a result, they all end up with no money and no

music. But those who keep persisting and passionately pursue their dream, get tons of money. That's because the laws of Heaven differ from those we make. We make many mistakes.

How, then, is it possible to combine one's propensities and interests with making one's living?

This is not a problem. If a person has a passion for tunes and sounds, he/she spends most of his/her time preoccupied with tunes and sounds, and does so solely out of love -- not because it may become a profession. But when you are doing what you love, money just comes along.

What should be done if a gifted child doesn't show any particular interest towards developing his talents?

If a kid is lazy, his/her time has not yet come. It means that the passion we talked about is not yet cooking -- it is still cold. That's how it was with me.

Is it possible to wake up this passion, this love for music?

Surely, it is possible to wake it up. But the task is very delicate. Waking somebody up for something is a delicate matter in general. I think, grown-ups are those who need to be awakened. Children wake up by themselves -- they just need time.

Who or what can wake up passion/love for music?

It can be awakened only by example: musical examples, good-better-best examples -- a huge spectrum of examples. Or else, music itself, in the wide sense of this word. In my case, I sincerely hated all music, simply because I thought that all music was classical.

First of all, it is very important to listen to various genres of music. Secondly, I would strongly recommend never to force a child to practice. In Russia, in the Ukraine we are

used to thinking: a lazy child has to be coerced to do what he/she doesn't want to. Making someone do something? I don't believe it works.

It is different when the kid is filled with love for what he/she is doing. The main challenge for him/her is how to express and convey all that he/she wants to do. In that case, diverse technical challenges need resolving in order to better express the child's love of this or that character, for one or another object.

In that case, might not we be confronted with an inadequate level of technical training?

Yes, of course. Then we have to deal with the question of how to resolve these challenges of technicality. However, the goal is clear. For what do the challenges need to be resolved? For expressing an image or a character more fully. That's why one needs technique. We often think that good technique is needed only to enable us to play very fast. Wrong! If only someone could have explained to me that I needed to practice *not* for the sake of strong fingers and virtuoso playing, but to give a clearer voice to what I was playing and saying!

Let's imagine a flying bee, the sound of which I need to show on the piano: if my fingers are weak, the buzz of the bee on the instrument will not come out right -- it won't be possible to "see" or to "read" it. When I teach my students, I use a simple language, whether I talk of images or deal with technical problems related to conveying those images. I always prioritize images and pictures. For example, I need to imagine the sound of a fire alarm when it starts to beep and hoot, which I in turn need to convey. If my fingers are not strong enough, I won't manage to create the sounds of howling and acerbated screeching, which means I need to practice more to strengthen my fingers. That's what Richter did. As a result, the less one practices technique for the sake of technique, the more one technically improves. The deeper one gets into the sphere of sounds and images, the easier one resolves technical problems. A child understands the language of imagery as well as a grown person does, but he/she has a hard time comprehending the necessity of technique improvement for its own sake.

When it comes to my own practice methods, I try to "see" every challenging bar or a whole phrase and try to find a pictorial equivalent to it. It has to be added here, that there is a big difference between improvising or playing one's own music and playing classical academic music. A number of composers composed for their own fingers, they wrote as if for themselves. But physiologically we differ from one another. Why do you think piano performers who play classical music need to practice ten hours a day, while once a month would be enough for me playing my own music? The answer is simple -- because I compose for my own fingers. But the moment I decide to play Chopin, I need those same ten hours: he was not composing for me, and therefore I encounter numerous technical problems.

What do you value most in performing?

When it comes to performing, I care about one thing only -- whether or not I believe in what I hear; I always ask myself one question: does it sound honest, is it sincere? Is it coming out of the heart of the performer? However, being honest is not enough. I require innocence and childishness, which has to do with naturalness. I don't like pathos in any of its forms, I can't stand the pathetic. That's why I don't enjoy the works of Liszt.

The sincerity of expression is connected to an individual's character traits, is it not?

I believe it is.

We often hear that a genius has to be a bit nutty. Do you agree with this claim, or do you believe that a talented person is inherently harmonious and balanced?

I have no idea what genius is about. Crazy is wonderful: it means one is naturally and completely given to the element designed for one by God. Control, in its essence, is

reasonable in moderate doses, but we humans have a tendency to overstretch these doses hundreds and thousands of times, which makes us miserable. A crazy person is a happy person, who has no fear. He/she may suffer, but is still happy - I am talking about 'crazy' in the good sense of the word: free-spirited, artistic. For me, creative craziness is an artist's passion.

But the type of person you describe would often be unstable and off-balance, suffering and struggling in life, no?

Many people go through a lot of suffering in life. Who says that our life has to be one of comfort? Life consists not only of dancing and partying. It includes pain, confusion and a great deal of torture. That's how life is, and we cannot do much about it, simply because we need all of it, whether or not we like it. Usually, we don't like the negative: we want to feel comfortable, and we want our children to be happy and to go through life easily and smoothly. If we oppose life's challenges and struggles, we oppose life itself.

Are you saying that we are ever subject to the so-called "battle of contradictions"?

We tend to resist battle, because we deny life as a whole. In our desire to protect our children from pain and hardship, we teach them to accept only the up side of life, ignoring and blocking out all that has to do with frustration and struggle. As a result, when the 'kid' turns forty and 'accidentally bangs his/her head against the asphalt,' he/she will find out that being kept away from real life is, after all, not such a smart solution. At this point, he/she will be filled with nothing but regret, frustration and pain -- directed at his/her 'stupid parents,' who have not taught him/her what real life is about.

I once heard the parent of a talented girl, who was upset before her performance, saying: "It's a good thing she is upset -- in such an emotional state she performs much better than otherwise."

Yes, there are people that sincerely believe this. My producer, with whom I worked for years, used to verbally abuse us before performing, in the erroneous belief that we would perform better when put down and upset. For me, that's total nonsense. This idea might work when a performer is naturally sad: in sadness, one can perform miracles. However, this is not the rule. Music is an extremely powerful channel, through which both performers and listeners can experience a variety of feelings. But one doesn't have to be sad to be able to perform sad music. It's possible to be full of joy while performing mournful music, through alignment with the conveyed images. Moreover, it is possible to distance oneself from all kinds of images, rotating them as one would masks, and still be absolutely balanced in one's heart and mind.

Generally, I believe that we shouldn't resist natural emotion. We should say 'yes' not only to joy, but also to pain and fear. I understand that's not easy, believe me. Humbly accepting everything that life throws at us is hard. It is much easier to live in a vacuum.

What does 'wunderkind' mean, and why don't I like the word? It's not the phenomenon that I have something against -- it's our attitude towards talented individuals: 'he/she is talented' implies our strong desire to put him/her into a mythical world, that we ourselves recreate. We want them to be protected, we want them to practice from dawn to midnight, we want them to perform big... As a rule, the victim of our egocentric desires and plans doesn't learn to live the life he/she has been given. He/she mechanically follows the guardian's instructions. With time, he/she finds out that he/she is absolutely incapable of dealing with the real issues of life. It's a vicious circle that young talents have a hard time escaping from.

That's right, but you didn't mention the importance of success...

Success is needed, and it usually is present. However, as successful as he has been all these years, Evgeny Kissin is still being chaperoned by his mother and his teacher. Moreover, his teacher still tells him how to play. Is this right? I believe that a person has to learn from the eagle: learn a little, and then try it out himself. We have to be able to

deal with the challenges and problems presented by life. We have to be strong in order to handle this world of chaos. But more often than not, talented children are denied the pleasures of self-dependence and growing self-sufficiency. Constantly hovered over, they are never given any space. You know why? Too much is invested in these kids, too much is put up with... It all goes back to our own selfishness and egocentrism.

Surely, high investment in a child paves and eases his/her way to triumph and victory. Does it necessarily mean that this child will, with time, become a genius musician?

It seems to me that the major point of "cultivating" someone into something is making that person happy doing whatever he/she does. If a future musician is happy spending endless hours with the instrument, if he/she keeps returning to it out of his/her own desire and inability to stay away, if the thought of practicing brings on tears of happiness and excitement rather than those of submission and boredom, this child will eventually be transformed into a musician described by others as genius.

My neighbor, a little girl, approaches her instrument with fire in her eyes. I have never ever before met such enthusiastic eyes! The moment we start talking of music, her face lights up and she beams with excitement and joy. She says, 'Misha, are you seriously telling me that you didn't pay particular attention to so-and-so measures of Beethoven's Third Piano Sonata??!!' To my resolute reply, "I've got absolutely no idea what you're talking about!," she dubiously shakes her head, saying, 'That's *impossible!*' Her eyes are on fire, her soul is on fire -- now that's what I mean by crazy creativity. Touching the keys of the piano makes her happy -- that's my main criterium.

It's not a big deal out whether she is called a genius or a wunderkind. Nor does it matter whether or not she will become one. What *is* significant is the fact that she is 'in the spirit.' There are hundreds and thousands of very gifted children who practice scales all day and night, but who have no idea what it feels to be in the spirit. These children are not happy, they don't 'fly!' They are crushed by lengthy practicing, by their parents' expectations, by the obligation to become geniuses. The burden of such an

expectation for a child is nothing less than horrible, scary and dangerous. In their minds there is no space for anything but exams, auditions, competitions and further career steps. They are not being taught -- they are being idolized, and this is a frightening state of affairs. The guardian of a talented child should aim at one thing only -- to enable him/her to 'get into the spirit.' The girl I just mentioned is a perfect illustration of the 'right way.'

Once upon a time, music performance was simply "playing music," just like sports were engaged in to promote health and well-being. Nowadays everything is completely different. Why?

In former times, even clowns played music. But even before that, music possessed a different sort of character -- that of ritual. So, we have to look at the original music sources. Primarily, music was a means of meditative immersion -- such was its original role. I'm referring to folklore music. When people were working hard physically, music helped them to escape into a different world and relax. On the other side, ritual music was used in order to invoke the spirits, to worship all sorts of gods, to get help, etc. In other words, music played a colossal role in the spiritual life of earthly inhabitants. Later on, music was divided into sacred and secular. After that, playing music became more common. However, even then there was no difference between the performer and the composer: musicians were clowns, troubadours, conductors and composers at the same time. Those were different times.

Both juvenile competitions and professional competitions are very popular nowadays. What is your take on this?

Well, there's a lot of nonsense in the world... I am totally against competitions, in any form. They remind me of love competitions: let's find out who is more in love with Chopin's mazurkas...

An American professor who recently gave master-classes at Barratt-Due

was also negative towards competitions per se. He said, 'Those who judge the competitors are mere humans, not gods. That's why it often happens that someone who plays faultlessly has more chances to win compared to someone whose performance isn't perfect yet original.'

Every profession has its own price.

Do you think that a talented person will blossom under any circumstances or does he/she need special conditions, support and praise?

For sure it is both pleasant and important when those whom you love and respect -- be it your colleagues, family or friends -- show constant support and readiness to help whenever needed. But it is not imperative. The most important thing is to believe in life and in its principles, to be filled with the inner confidence that all in your life will happen in due time and in its own perfect way.

Ideally, how should a child be brought up? What's more important -- the process of rearing or that of growth?

A child should be raised like a seed. To grow a seed one needs a lot of patience and quietude. Much of both, mind you. The seed lies in the soil and goes through the process of decay. No one knows when it will spring up, no one urges it to grow quicker. In due time the seed will become a tree. However, it is important to always remember the reasons and the motivation behind our activity. We need to look for our own voice, and we had better find it -- for this is one of the best things that can happen in life.

Should this voice resonate with other voices?

No, everyone has an unique and distinct voice. It may remind us of other voices, but it necessarily differs from them by its individuality.

You once said that a human is, in essence, a lonely creature.

Yes, humans are essentially lonely. That's why it's crucial to be able to spend time alone -- in one's own company -- and be content. We must make our children understand that the main criterium for self-fulfillment is knowledge of this inner voice, and they have to find it, no matter how long and challenging their search would be.

One Can Become Music: an Interview with Carina Prange

"Blue Fjord" – the title track was written long before you came to live in Norway. What were your moods, your feelings that stood behind the compositions?

First of all music is always connected to the personal imagination of beauty. I am growing, I am changing and my image of beauty is also changing. What was beautiful for me today is not necessarily beautiful tomorrow.

Now about the time when I wrote the music for this CD: In the beginning of the 90s, if I remember correctly, I was young, energetic and eager to find my own voice. I created a kind of private dream world, where I could express my own romanticism, melancholy and joy of life. Music was for me almost the only channel for the whole spectrum of feelings: my passion, my sorrow ... everything.

How important is it for a musician to come back to his roots, to integrate his heritage into the music – musically and concerning the own biography?

To be aware of your roots, your heritage, is important because your roots are your guide. I started to feel my roots late. Before that I was quite insecure. My mind was

confused. I tried classical music, jazz, rock and I was not sure what was really my own. From the moment I came across folk music and started to integrate it into my own compositions, I felt like I got a fundament. It made me more relaxed and I stopped to be afraid. It was like the universe gave me its hand.

Heritage is not only about the cultural traditions of your own country.

You have to be open to the whole world!

But heritage is not only about the cultural traditions of your own country. Of course it is important, when you are living in the Caucasus, to eat real sheep cheese and listen to Georgian folk songs. And not only drive to McDonalds and the discotheque. But I am sure this is not enough. You have to be open to the whole world. Because all folk traditions belong to the same family.

For many years now, you have lived in Norway. What's special about this country, about its nature, the people who live there?

Norway is a "country of poetry and pauses" for me. It has a lot of contrast and colors. It can be sunny and peaceful... and the next moment, turn dark and mysterious. The nature of the north, of course, influences the character of the people living there.

It also has influenced my character. I have become less social, more introvert, more peaceful and accepting. But the southerner me is still full of fire. This side explodes when I am in love, when I am eating great food (which is not easy in Norway) and when I am playing music.

Your playing style – how would you put it in words? How much are technical aspects and special moods a part of it?

I agree with people that say that my style is difficult to classify. Because it is a result of my love to the sound-world, without any stylistic boundaries. In my most creative moments I feel like a midwife: my role is to help the music get born. Technique is no

more than a tool. But without the right key, such as technique is for me, it would be very difficult to open the 'door'.

My role is to help the music get born. Technique is no more than a tool!

But I never focus on technique, maybe because I just naturally have good technique, and I am not playing the compositions of others. However, if you want to improve your technique, focus on pictures and free-association, rather than on technique itself. This shift will help your technique to evolve.

Do you still play the accordion and the melodica, or do you view these as "lesser instruments" compared to the piano? And what about singing?

It's impossible to compare the claviola and melodica to the piano. When playing the piano, I miss the breathiness of brass instruments. I compensate by playing the melodica and claviola, even though these instruments are quite simple and limited in application. But both are like members in my family. They give colors that I miss on the piano. The same goes for singing: I sort my music into songs and dances. Sometimes I am singing in my head, sometimes audibly. But I never stop singing. I do agree with Arvo Part who said the voice is the only perfect instrument.

You once said that you try to show people a new approach to intellect and intuition. Is this part of your teaching concept for your students in Oslo as well?

Some years ago I received a card from my students upon their graduation from the conservatory. Back then, I taught not only the piano but also improvisation; and I taught all music students -- including the classical ones. The latter spontaneously wrote down what they had learned from me during all those years:

Why do we teach music?

Not because we expect you to major in it;

Not because we expect you to sing and play all day long;

Not so that you can relax;

*Not so that you can have fun;
But so that you will remain truly human:
You will recognize beauty; you will be sensitive;
You will be close to the infinite, beyond this world.
You will have something to cling to;
You will have more love, more compassion,
More gentleness, more kindness.
In short: you will have more of life.
...And then, you shall indeed sing and play,
Relax, and have fun -- all day long!*

I never taught them in those words: this is their own interpretation of my classes. I believe we are all unique -- but only the heart is personal, not the mind. Mind is collective. Only the heart can help me find my own path. It is not easy but it is possible.

If listeners of music learn to trust their hearts, and set aside evaluations by critics, artists' biographical background, categorization into styles and periods, etc., then their attention would be redirected to the rich world of sounds, with its infinite potential for enjoyment. Thus, one can become music.

Biography

Upbringing

It is quite amazing how different sources ascribe varying heritages to Misha Alperin. According to Wikipedia and the ECM record label, he is a Ukrainian composer; JARO Music Company refers to him as Moldovan and Norwegian, whereas other sources either call him Russian or emphasize his Jewish roots. He has been moving from one place to another for most of his life: into his teens, he lived in the Ukraine, then moved to Moldova, then – to Russia, and, finally, to Norway. Bearing the cultural baggage of the countries where he lived, he moved not only geographically, but also through the various genres in which he wrote. With time, he developed a very personal jazz music which is a combination of styles as well as a fusion of times. The mix of folk music(s) of Slovenian and Balkan countries, in addition to Jewish folklore and elements of Nordic music reflects the crossing of territorial boundaries of the countries that are close to his heart. Moving from place to place has been paralleled by the expansion of Alperin's jazz explorations. He believes that boundaries – whether those of genre, style or place and time – limit us as individuals, stagnating creativity and restraining expressivity.

Born in 1956 in Kamenets-Podolsk (one of the Ukrainian ancient cities), Misha was still an outsider – a Jew living amidst a gentile and largely anti-Semitic society, he experienced hatred and cruelty already as a young boy. He learned then that in order to survive, he had to be a success: "I remember my first experience of racial discrimination. I was seven then; I played tennis at the school yard with a Ukrainian girl of my age. I was winning, and she was becoming upset. Her father, who stood there, observing the game, saw this and said: 'Stop playing with that 'zhidenok!'² The girl left. I never heard the word before, so I decided to ask my mom about it. When I told her what happened, I saw tears in her eyes: 'I would rather you never knew the meaning of the word, but I know that sooner or later you will. I'm afraid, you will hear

² "Zhidenok" is a variant of another derogatory and mocking Russian word "zhid" (a Jew), that denotes a Jewish child.

people calling you so more than you imagine. That's why you should pay attention and learn: if you want to be accepted, you have to be way above them all – only then they won't be able to belittle and dismiss you.”

He began his formal education at the age of five, with his mother – his parents intended that Misha should become a professional musician; from then on his life was directed towards this goal. When he was seven, he started singing in a school choir. Due to the distinct sonorous qualities of his voice (it was reminiscent of that belonging to Robertino Loretti, a Soviet Union star of that time) Misha performed frequently and all widespread. He now admits the importance of his singing as a child: “I sang and performed until my voice broke when I was fourteen. With time, I have come to understand that singing forms the foundation of my music, even though the music I write is for the most part instrumental. I am led by the voice; the voice knows the answer to my dilemma, while I am still looking for it. I have never trusted my fingers, nor have I relied on my wits. But when it comes to the voice and intuition (they always work in synchronicity), I totally yield to their authority.”

From the age of nine Misha took private composition lessons. He recalls: “I played the piano and composed some songs, but had very little theoretical knowledge. My father, seeing a composer in me, introduced me to a teacher Vasiljev who not only taught me about composing, but also shared some philosophical truths. Yet his tuition was stopped after a while, simply for being too kind toward the naughty me: I quickly learned how to manipulate his kindheartedness and made him do most of the work for me.”

Misha's older brother also believed in Misha's talent. Alongside his studying, he played drums in a restaurant to earn money for Misha's higher education. It was he who introduced the young boy to the world of rock; under his guidance Misha included rock music on the list of classical compositions he usually listened to. “Actually, he says, when I look back at the path I have taken I get amazed, for it is very peculiar. In my home town I never heard classical music in live performances – I guess, our town was too provincial for such cultural extravaganzas. My friend recently called from Tromsø, sharing how impressed she is with the town's politics regarding this very same

issue – children and culture. The local government does everything possible to keep their people tuned into culture. In my case everything was different. I can hardly understand how I became a musician in such a culturally remote place: I absorbed music against all odds.”

At fourteen, he enrolled at the music high school, from which he was expelled two years later, due to biased opinions of the teaching staff. This made a devastating impact on his parents: not professional musicians themselves, they nevertheless sensed Misha’s talent and were terrified at the thought that it would be wasted. The young boy, however, looked at the matter differently; even now he is grateful for such a turn of events – otherwise, he says, he would have never become a musician he is.

Having started with classical piano, he then became immensely interested in hard rock and heavy metal. His fancy for fusion of different styles and tools of expression was becoming apparent already at his young age. At fifteen he performed Haydn’s *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in D*, accompanied by the chamber orchestra and a rock group. At around the same time he played dance music in a club; much of the repertoire consisted of Western Ukrainian folklore blended with Western Ukrainian blues. Later, through encountering the music of Charlie Parker and John Coltrane, Misha was introduced to jazz. However, classical music has always been essential: "I became passionate about music when I was nineteen. By then I played the piano for fourteen years, studying at the music school and obtaining the higher education in music. I played lots of classical music – even gave solo concerts – but I was not infatuated with it. The turning point was my hearing Krainev perform Rachmaninoff Piano Concert no.2. I cried and thought: that’s why they love music.”

In order to complete his secondary school education, Misha moved to northern Moldova; in a little while his career began in a band that accompanied both Moldovan and Jewish weddings. As he recalls in one of our interviews, the job had a number of challenges: the musicians were expected to play for 30-40 hours, in the chilly open air, with but very few breaks, and only two hours of sleep. Besides physical exhaustion, the band was exposed to continuous stress: for example, the musicians had to play “the repertoire of thousands of dances and songs on the spot, without any rehearsal.” These

songs included those of The Beatles and ABBA, Stevie Wonder and Elvis Presley, and everything in between. Similarly with dances: fancy, rapid-fire Balkan folk dances in 7/8, 9/8, 11/8 or 13/8, alternating with up-tempo, complex folk tunes from the entire Eastern Europe. “Most of the music I never heard before. For a classical musician, this is an enormous challenge, but at the same time, it was an incredible education.”

He also played in one of Kishinev’s restaurants, for money. He says: “Every single day we encountered crowds of drunk criminals who threw knives into the drums while ordering specific songs according to their tastes. Every single day I thought: ‘I won’t continue doing this,’ and every single day I kept hearing: ‘Humble yourself!’ This went on for seven years. I was depressed, for I dreamt of and longed for self-expression, but was forced to play pops. I remember once visiting my cousin and telling him: ‘The day will come when I will turn into a real musician. I will go around the world, performing my own music.’ To this oath I got this reply: ‘Don’t stuff your head with petty things. Instead of dreaming about the unattainable, be appreciative of what you have.’ I still remember the overwhelming feeling of pain and bitterness, with which I left my cousin’s place. Walking home, tears rolling down my cheeks, I considered how my entire environment was against my aspirations: my mom believed I would be fine teaching at the music school, my colleagues found my ambitions weird, and my band players thought I was being self-centered. No one wanted what I did. I knew that I was alone, but a voice from within kept telling me: ‘Don’t give up, don’t give in.’ So, I followed my voice.”

The musician’s search

Elaboration of Alperin’s personal style dates from 1983 – the year when he moved to Moscow, into the realm of the capital’s professional musicians. Alperin and Shirman were invited by Alexey Kozlov to join “Arsenal,” a group that played American jazz rock. Kozlov gathered high quality musicians from over the entire Soviet Union – performing in the band was considered prestigious and portentous for one’s future career. The "Arsenal" worked with rock stars; it gave around fifteen concerts a month,

and always filled up concert halls. Alperin acknowledges that dreaming of anything better at the time would have been foolish. Nonetheless, the thought of quitting came to him and his companion not-before-long, and in two years time they left the band – they could adapt neither esthetically nor stylistically. He felt affection for his Moldovan roots; simultaneously he became interested in Russian folklore. This is how he explains his association with the people of the nations amongst which he lived: “For me, being a Moldovan, or a Norwegian for that matter, does not mean inconsistency or disagreement with the inner self. We all belong to the same family of human beings; the more I understand others, the richer I myself become. I believe that such an understanding is partly a result of the influence of the ‘great and precious’ Soviet Union, my multi-national homeland. Everyone loved Georgian and Moldovan wine, Russian gingerbread, or Ukrainian ‘borscht’ (red-beet soup). Armenian people living in Moldova were considered ‘better’ Moldovans than Moldovans by birthright! Back then we were united, rather than divided – a huge country that included fifteen sister-nations. That is one of the reasons why it is not difficult for me to ‘go native’ anywhere I live.”

His interests led him away from the established jazz community of the time. "Back then, to play the music of Duke Ellington and Bill Evans was the passport to the jazz world of Russia," he says. However, his own understanding of jazz was much broader; he saw it as a synthesis of jazz, folk and classical music:

I was a white crow, here as well. They wanted me to play anything apart from my own; they wanted me to be anyone but myself. It was hard to resist and persist all the time without seeing any results. For this kind of fight a very strong personality is needed indeed. I am convinced that my father’s death at the age of 52 was caused by heart failure due to the enormous social and political pressures on him, a teacher and writer. I am stronger. I always have been a rebel, and as a rebel, I at times have felt lonely, but also proud – proud to be able to do my own things.

They used to ask me why instead of performing American jazz I played Jewish-Moldovan music – back then it was both unpopular and unacceptable. We would often be invited to play at a festival, only to find out later that our names

were deleted from the list of performers. This wasn't easy; participating at certain events implied funds needed to provide for our families. Besides, the public's reception was always twofold. I wasn't understood, my music was disliked, but deep inside I knew I was doing the right thing: I felt I had something fresh to offer. I believe one has to be uncompromising and obstinate in his/her search. In the beginning of the 90s, if I remember correctly, I was young, energetic and still trying to find my own voice. I created a kind of private dream world, where I could express my own romanticism, melancholy and joy of life. Music for me was almost the only channel for the whole spectrum of feelings: my passion, my sorrow....everything.

Together with a friend from Armenia, Alperin opened the "Blue Bird Cafe" in 1985 -- a jazz club that provided a venue and the freedom to work intensely on his own music. He composed during the day, and at night he performed. The audience included painters, diplomats and musicians; also, frequent guests from the States. This cafe has become a laboratory where Alperin tried out all his programs. He recalls: "I exploded with enthusiasm. Every single evening Arkady Shilkloper would come to the cafe after his work in 'Boljshoj,' and we would work, work, work. We had to make money too, so we started a business: twice a week at the railway station we would meet a freight train filled with Moldovan tomatoes and organize their distribution. This duty implied heavy physical work, but I was thoroughly immersed in my dream, so I didn't mind."

From 1987 Alperin and Shilkloper started traveling abroad as a duo; in 1989 they performed at their first Western Europe jazz festival, in Norway. Nurtured on European improvisational chamber music, he was at the same time mesmerized and enchanted by Jan Garbarek, Ralph Taushner, Keith Jarrett and Egbert Hismondy. In his words, he "couldn't wait to 'get out in the big world' and encounter *that* art and *those* artists."

With a sparkle in his eyes, Alperin speaks of his first experience in Norway:

My dreams came true when the *Wave of Sorrow*, Arkady Shilkloper's and my first disk, was recorded and released by ECM. I am still amazed at the thought of how we managed to arrive at that point! In 1989 both of us were on the plane from

Moscow to Oslo, to give our first concert in the West: we were headed to Norway,

to play at Vossa jazz festival. Sitting on the plane, filled with childish excitement, I ask Arkady whether he knows where in Norway ECM studios could be located. His answer is: 'Oslo, I think; it's called Rainbow Studio.' This piece of information makes me determined to have a look at it. Upon arrival, I immediately share the information with our friend and interpreter Isaac Rogde, who, to my great surprise, tells us that the studio is only a couple of blocks away from his house. It goes without saying that visiting the studio becomes the very first thing on our list of activities. Imagine, Isaak makes a phone call to find out if we have a chance and what luck! The reply we get is that for the next two hours the studio is open for visitors!

As it turned out, Jan Erik Konshaug, a legendary sound man, gets intrigued by the interest of 'those Russian musicians,' and wants to show us the studio. We are already in heaven, having no idea it is getting even better! As is usually the case, Arkady brings along his instrument (flyugelhorn). After a short excursion around the studio, Jan Erik, suggests that we make a recording of one of two of our songs, as a souvenir. Having listened to the first recording, he -- now with far greater enthusiasm -- suggests that we make another one.

We leave the studio happy and inspired. Bergen and Voss have been waiting. After stunningly successful debut in Voss jazz festival, and upon our return to Oslo, Isaak receives a phone call from the ECM producer Manfred Eicher who heard our "souvenir" recordings and wants to meet for coffee! The rest is history. Our new life begins: a couple of unknown Russian musicians are to tour around the whole world, sharing their passion for music and communication!"

At their return from the States in 1992 they found the 'Blue Bird Café' closed down: the place was desolated, and the grand piano, rented from the Union of Composers, had been stolen. This signified the end of an important period in Alperin's life – seven years

of dramatic growth as a musician and composer – and the beginning of a new phase: another step towards making his dream become true.

Alperin continues:

Life took another turn, this time towards the West. In Poland I played in a Jewish café; simultaneously, at a market place I sold huge and heavy 'Ruby' TV sets brought from Moscow. I dreamed of buying a synthesizer and needed the money for it. The 'Ruby' TVs didn't really sell well, but I was determined. Once, a Pole approached me and promised to buy one of my enormous 'machines,' if I deliver it to his place. The day after, all eager and excited, I brought a 'Ruby' to his kitchen, where he sat at the table on which I saw an impressive gun. He then asked: 'How much?' My wife, who was with me at the time, took the gun and said: 'How come it's so dusty? No wife?' At that point I didn't lament the lost 'Ruby' – I wanted out. The 'Ruby's' new owner obviously had the very same feeling, so he roared: 'Get lost before I get mad!' Back then my life was unpredictable, but I had a drive that kept me going.

I remember my meeting with Kshistav Penderetsky in Krakow. The owner of the café where I worked once came to me and said: 'we'll have some important people tonight – you'd better be good.' In a while the staff started manifesting both heightened interest and particular service. The important guests turned out to be Penderetsky and his friends, who came to the cafe after the premiere of his opera "The Black Masque." Their arrival was both spectacular and grand: in a cart, driven by three horses, it was also loud and rowdy. In a while, Penderetsky approached me and asked in Russian: 'Would you like to play on a festival in Krakow? I can arrange that.' After my assenting reply he said: 'tell me something: when will your bloody communism croak?' To this I answered: 'Do you want a precise date?' Such arrogance was hardly expected from someone in my position, so he left without uttering another word.

Alperin's aspiration led back him to Norway, the country where he trusted his originality would be welcomed by Norwegian lovers of music. He says that Norway is

his harbor of rest. Norwegian serenity, its peacefulness and light, its pauses and gaps, provided him with all he had been longing for. Yet he admits that growing up in this country would have spoiled both his individuality and his career: “Norway gives you a lot of options; it helps you realize your dreams. In other words, there is no outside resistance. For me, this wouldn’t work: as lazy as I am, I would do nothing but relax. There is a spirit of rebellion in me – this is the truth, which, I believe, would apply to any creative person. So, having all of my needs met and desires fulfilled doesn’t stimulate me as an artist – I cannot live without resistance. My method of working is either hit or miss.”

The Norwegian way of life deeply influenced the composer: his music is often characterized as pensive and thoughtful. As he explains it, “the silence and the unpredictable weather, the space and the richness of the light, make me more introverted and meditative, which, in turn, inspires me to compose.

Additionally, Alperin truly believes in the existence of strong links between Russia and Norway, as well as in the necessity to foster this relationship. In one of his interviews he speaks of his intention to cultivate and promote the historically established ties: “Russia... Norway... They say that our people were so close that at one point in time there was even a mixed Russian-Norwegian dialect, with its common vocabulary. But it got lost...” By his choice of collaboration with Vedar Vårdal, Norwegian violinist and dancer, he supports the idea that the cooperation between Russia and Norway goes much deeper than the correspondence between Tchaikovsky and Grieg. He wonders: “What if we eventually find the unity and common essence?”

The composer arrived to Norway in 1993, to work as a pianist in a bar. There he was heard by [...] who later offered him a teaching position at the Academy of Music in Oslo. Misha had with him his three-and-a-half-year-old daughter (from an estranged relationship), but he took the challenge in stride – the dream of granting her access to a bright future overshadowed the harshness of reality, in which the burden was enormous.

Despite the odds, Alperin moved towards his dream. For the first three months Ksenia was looked after by her grandmother; then, as he puts it, “ordinary weekdays began.”

The first year was most difficult: with no place in a kindergarten, Alperin taught classes while Ksenia played under his table, spilling juice and scattering cupcake crumbs across the floor. When he performed, she usually sat on his lap.

She either hung on me or clutched herself to me – she never let me go. I remember a solo concert I once gave. I had arranged for someone to look after her during the performance, but from the clamor heard backstage within minutes after I began playing I understood it wasn't going so well. Then I saw Ksenia approaching me. She held a jar of jam that she played with, and was determined to sit with me. Unexpectedly, the jar lid opened, and the jam spilled over the keys. I had no choice but improvise with the left hand, while wiping it off the keys with the right. The audience was thrilled – they thought it was part of the program. I felt wretched.

Yet I had a dream. I knew what I wanted – I visualized it to the point of seeing it with my very eyes. I believe that our dreams ought to be precisely articulated in our minds. There are two standard approaches to dreaming: it is possible to dream simply by toying with an idea, and it is possible to actively move towards the materialization of one's dream. For me, it is not enough to be a person of a vision – the power lies in the vision's realization. I see no point in indulging in fantasy; for me, all the energy, time and potential needs to be invested in achieving whatever it is we desire.

Alperin and composing

Alperin's dream is about self-expression and communication. For him, composing means storytelling. Before playing his solo concert called "The Stories for Piano Solo" in Moscow, he said: "I don't know what I am playing is called. I am just telling stories. Stories for piano solo, stories that are sad or funny, but they are stories. I suppose I will keep doing this until I am retired. However, with time stories change." Indeed, his compositions can be perceived as stories. They seem to be narratives drawing on his numerous experiences and reflections, depicting profound as well as trivial moments of his life. Although his stories are short, they are characterized by a range of choice

details. The principles of fusion and of combination establish the stories' inner diversity: his pensive compositions are charged with the spirit of life, whereas his heated pieces also touched with tenderness.

He believes that emotions enable us to be in contact with others, to understand and appreciate them more profoundly. "Creating music, we, musicians, tend to appeal not to a person's mind, but to his/her unique inner world of feelings, fantasies and unpredictable moods. This world exists within all of us, and demands due respect." He believes his love for storytelling is inherited from his father, a teacher of literature.

We, humans, have a predilection to analyze and classify the world around us. We want to make sense out of things – here from stems our desire to divide the world into physical and biological realms, to break relationships into phases, and to split music into styles, genres and epochs. Likewise, we tend to identify and label emotions. For example, we characterize a poem as a love poem because of awareness of and identification with specific feelings in the poem we associate with love. To put it differently, when reading a poem, we respond more to the human relationships implicit in it, than to the richness and diversity of metaphors and alliterations. The same goes for our music experiences: through the evolving dynamics of the music we hear, we arrive at a feeling it evokes – say, of joy, sadness, anxiety or calmness; and then we transfer these emotions back into the piece. In other words, we, listeners, complete the process of communication initiated by the author.

Alperin's intention is to present the audience with stories s/he can find her/himself in, with themes s/he would be able to relate to, and moods – to associate with. His particular talent centers in an ability to unite and manipulate improvisational possibilities, musical genres, styles, instruments and performers. His goal is to elevate us, his listeners, to another dimension of understanding and appreciation of such unity and synthesis. Expressing himself in a nonverbal and ambiguous way, he invites us to interpret his utterances and get actively involved in the process. In my experience, listening to his early albums for a sustained period of time evokes a tangible feeling of sadness and unhappiness. Reflecting upon this comment, Alperin then shared the following story. The vocalist, Sergej Starostin, who initially refused the composer's

request to sing a certain song (written in the state of wretchedness and despair), finally gave in and agreed to perform it... which turned out to be a bad idea after all, for during the performance, when the song reached its climax, the singer collapsed – the emotional impact completely overwhelmed him. “It’s funny, he says, but this particular song was performed only a couple of times – musicians refuse to play it. I don’t insist any longer, for now I know better.”

The following illustration – Alperin’s account of one of his composing experiments – will give the reader an idea about the composer’s understanding of communication. Inspired by one of the great masters of improvisation, Keith Jarrett, he once decided to compose in front of an audience of two thousand. He was then giving a concert in the Tchaikovsky concert hall in Moscow. It was not his first concert there, but definitely his first (and, so far, his last) performance of that kind. The idea was to approach the instrument and start composing the way he does it at his favorite grand at home. The entire purpose was to find out whether or not he could compose (not improvise!) while performing. The experience was powerful and unforgettable; he recalls being excited and engrossed in the activity, without any traces of fear present. Certainly, he was delighted to have achieved the goal – and proved masterful.

Interestingly, although motivated by Jarrett, Alperin sees a significant difference between Jarrett’s method of unfolding a story and that of his own. His description of this difference is very imaginative and colorful, yet clear: “It seems to me, Jarrett believes that a journey starts at a point A, but he doesn’t really know where he goes. Therefore he turns back to the same point, only to start it all over again. When it comes to my ways, I start at the same point A, not knowing where to go – just like Jarrett. But I keep going, trying to figure out the direction along the way. In other words, while Jarrett’s focus is on the journey itself, I am more interested in the *story* of my own journey.” In other words, Alperin’s love for stories and his desire to share them with us lie at the heart of his composing experiences. Through his music Alperin aspires to reach out to his audience, inviting to different modes of perception, interpretation and reaction that may equally depend on the stories heard as well as on the listener’s own experiences.

Alexander Gelfand, a music critic for *Forward*, a New York Jewish newspaper, points this out when reviewing the composer's album *Her First Dance*:

"Introverted' and 'meditative' are both words that apply to *Her First Dance*. So, too, do 'playful,' 'virtuosic' and 'enchanted.' Joined by cellist Anja Lechner and long time collaborator Arkady Shilkloper who plays French horn and flugelhorn, Alperin unfurls a series of compositions that are essentially un-placeable: impressionist harmonies and spiky modernist melodies share space with tricky, tripping rhythms and passages of subdued lyricism. Yet there is remarkably little sense of pastiche here; instead, everything seems to operate in service of surprisingly coherent and cohesive voice. Though not, [according to Alperin], an unchanging one."

Artists vs. critics

There is something I would like to wish to all of my admirers, critics, and, certainly, to myself: please, listen to music less than ever before. I am not kidding. It is estimated that lack of hunger for music, or tune satiety activates our analytical thinking. More than a hundred years ago Moscow conservatory professors (Methner was one of them) warned their students against overloading the ear not only with excessive volume but also with immoderate amount of musical information. So, this is no big news.

Music, in my opinion, expects our spiritual awakening rather than intellectual activity. Filled with sounds, the mind gets bored and starts exercising -- without even asking for permission -- in the most inappropriate for such an activity moment: in the moment of contact with the abstract world. This is dangerous. When creating sound images, we, musicians, do not usually turn to the analytical centre of an individual, we rather address his/her unique world of associations, emotions, fantasies and unpredictable moods. Such world is present in each and every of us, and it requires respect.

The mind exercises and develops from childhood on, which is very good, as long as it does not distract us from the direct contact with art; when it does, it becomes awfully intrusive. It is easy to lose the balance. Do you think I am exaggerating? Then read some criticism. Wherever in the world, the picture is identical: out of all the critics

writing on art, only very few actually use the language of art -- they seem to be afraid even to express themselves, let alone mentioning their personal emotional experiences. As a result, in their attempt to become either walking encyclopedias or animated internets they are nothing but a bore. Today, more than ever, we need a personal approach to music, which can (and should, really) become contagious. In its absence the words lose their meaning: they become not more than an instrument for intellectual masturbation. I do not refer to critics alone -- all of us, thirsty, are included.

Chuang Tzu, a Chinese mystic, recommends that we throw unimportant stuff out of our boats of life, until nothing irrelevant is left. This advice stems from his assuredness of human tendency to become old (in the negative sense of the word) when our life boats are full of things: then we forget what creativity is about, and what we need it for. Turning old means becoming stale, getting ashamed at our own tears or ceasing to respond to life with amazement and wonder. Music, I think, just like children, can bring back to life gradually dying in us concepts and notions. Certainly, a seeker won't succeed without an in-depth insight, but it is very important to not miss out on a period of liberation from a burden. When I read about music, i do understand that the process is not at all an easy one.

Alperin once said: "You know artists hate academics and critics; always have and always will." This comment reveals the composer's differentiation between the artist's creative mode of being and the critic's analytic mode of thinking. For an artist, a hidden part of himself/herself comes out and forward, either through, say, writing and composing, or performing. Yet for a critic, that hidden part of his/her personality remains in hiding, because it does not fit into the world of criticism: critics have a tendency to believe that criticism should be abstract and impersonal – disconnected from their personality as much as from their private life. In other words, artists and critics exist and function in two separate domains, hence the feeling of antagonism and misconception.

For an artist, being strictly formal and impersonal is not natural either – precisely because of the his/her individuality as well as the uniqueness of background and experience that generate and characterize their art. This confirms Alperin's statement

about artists not liking historians, critics and journalists -- which he later clarifies: “The reason is simple: they don’t want to be polished and perfect, nor do they want to be viewed as beautifully crafted fairy tale characters – they are real people, living in the real world and expressing themselves and their reality through art.”

Alperin maintains that an artist’s key desire is to be fully alive, and this implies a combination of the positive and the negative. The composer once said: “It is often said that spontaneity is a kind of luxury. I don’t completely agree with this statement: at times it can be harmful. What really matters, I think, is how one feels in the process of his/her achievement, rather than *what* the person has achieved. I remember the intensity of emotion I was swayed by, upon watching a documentary about the legendary Richter. Not long before his death, this great self-actualizer, who during his life time was elevated to the status of a deity, sits in his chair crying and exclaiming: ‘I dislike myself!’³ This declaration made me very sad. I kept thinking: why? It seems to me, the reason for such remorse lies in the man’s unawareness of the connection between himself and the eternal.”

Current years

According to the composer: unless we shift our focus from separation to unity, we won't survive. He insists that the only way forward is to focus on what is mutual, to strive for the communal, and he is continually working in that direction. Contributing to the uniqueness of Alperin’s vision is not only his ability to see the unity of what many view in pieces, but also his desire and ability to actively gather and fuse fragments that ultimately belong together. This is vividly expressed in the merging of styles and genres, in the blending of voices and images, and in the juxtaposition of discordant and seemingly contradictory ideas. “The processes of classical improvisation, and those of decomposing or recomposing in my previous and existent projects, both stem from the desire to unite threads often considered unable to coexist. The idea is to find and allow

³ The documentary is made by Bruno Monsaingeon, French filmmaker, musician and writer, who has interviewed and made a number of films about famous twentieth-century musicians.

seemingly incompatible combinations: the so-called 'reconciliation of irreconcilable' is what I deeply yearn for.

Alperin's first album, "Fly, Fly, My Sadness," was recorded already in 1995 in Sofia, together with the Bulgarian choir Angelite, the ensemble Huun-Huur-To from Tuva, and the Moscow Art Trio. During the years that followed, this project evolved into a laboratory of further experimentation, where diverse cultural sources, contrasting compositional and improvisational techniques, would meet and merge. Here we experience the fusion of distinct elements belonging to everyday life: a Russian lyrical song becomes a Lamoit's prayer, throaty singing melts into Bulgarian mountain traditions of the Rhodope, and Swiss Alpine horns amalgamate with modern verse improvisation.

Today, the project has become a new starting point for future experiments. Alperin elaborates further:

"Our strongest desire is to find those hidden yet profound links between Europe, Asia and Africa -- inviting into this laboratory a range of various artists from around the world. In this search we want to blend the authentic sources of different cultures into a unified prayer-meditation, viewing it from a bird's-eye perspective. In all the richness and diversity of individual cultures there is always a shared essence that is as mysterious, as inseparable and as beautiful as the world itself."

"In Norway, my music changed in a way I was initially unaware of. I subsequently tried to find the reasons – I needed to understand why. Gradually I realized that my zeal was lost, my fervor was gone. I was instead filled with despondency and melancholy – not only my own, but also that of the entire Jewish nation. In this sense, I am very Jewish (which is easier to understand if one is acquainted with the history and culture of my people). We Jews can laugh when things get really tough. Self irony is one of our main means to maintain balance. As a musician, I am capable of reliving what entire generations of my people experienced – that's how the heavy burden of my heart can be explained. The sadness of Jewish people can be heard in a number of my 'stories' created in Norway. I was liberated from that heavy burden only when I became seriously ill (I mentioned this earlier). Many processes took place within me – I began

to think differently, and this resulted in the change in my feelings and sensations. The sadness my present music expresses is of a different quality: it's a kind of Pushkin's⁴ melancholy – sweet sorrow."

In the interim since the above text was written, Misha has suffered critical setbacks -- which, rather than defeating him, have catalyzed personal, spiritual, and artistic breakthroughs. Serious illness demanded all his strength and focus to overcome; it could have killed him, but instead led to life-altering awakening and the experience of enlightenment. Misha's period of struggle is discussed in the following chapter, "Reflections on the Meaning of Life."

Full recovery is evidenced by a long list of achievements in less than a year.

New is: he formed Oslo Art Trio together with his wife, Evelina Petrova- Alperin (accordion, vocals) and the Italian drummer Roberto Dani.

New is: CD improvisation for purpose of mobile phone solo.?

New is: coming soon CD " Live in Parma"; CD "Vayan"? (Mish, Did I get all this right?)

New is: DVD Solo-Recital " The Art of Free Improvisation."

New is: DVD "Alperin Sextet" with Arve Henriksen (trumpet), Paolo Vinacio (drums), Stein Erik Taførd (tuba), and Moscow Art Trio.

New is: "Anthology of Moscow Art Trio," Jaro Records, Bremen.

New is: The project "Prayer-Meditations" (or Norwegian Raga) has come to fruition. It has been performed live in Ris Church, 24th and 25th of April, 2015, as well as recorded by Jaro Records in Bremen.

Not only has Alperin achieved an impressive amount during such a short period of time, but also his achievements have been recognized. The fact that he received *The Fegerstens' Music Prize* must be highlighted. The jury's reasons for allocating the award to Misha are as follows:

Michail Alperin receives the prize for his heroic efforts in Norwegian contemporary music, through his passionate service as revered trail-blazer and in his unequalled

⁴ A. Pushkin (1799-1837) is considered to be the founder of modern Russian literature.

position as performer and composer. Alperin has created his own modern musical mode of expression at the crossroads between classical music and jazz, as well as Eastern and Western folk music from a broad spectrum of countries and cultures. His music is impossible to categorize in terms of traditional genre; nevertheless, it clearly expresses personal and artistic integrity, characterized by profound reflection and playful improvisational virtuosity. As leader of The Moscow Art Trio, established in 1990, he has toured around the world, made an uncountable number of recordings and achieved international stature.

This impressive achievement cannot be brushed off as the unbridled activity of a freakish 'wunderkind.' As Misha himself has pointed out, he has never been one. Rather, it's the result of relentless search for a viable self-identity within a complex, ever-changing, multi-cultural world, where honest self-expression by means of musical sounds facilitates communication beyond all kinds -- geographical, political, linguistic, historical and cultural -- of borders.

"My life can be compared to a miracle-school, where all the lessons I don't learn at a certain point in time, continue to haunt me, until I get the message. I am glad I have learned to respect my mistakes, which enables me to move forward: coming back to the same faults over and over again is an incredibly sad affair. I am growing, I am changing, and so does my understanding of life, and my ideal of beauty."

All of this is beautifully recapitulated in what has become Misha's theme song "Everything Must Change" by Quincy Jones:

*Everything must change
Nothing stays the same
Everything must change
No one stays the same*

*The young become the old
And mysteries do unfold
Cause that's the way of time
Nothing and no one goes unchanged*

*There are not many things in life
You can be sure of*

*Except rain come from the clouds
Sun lights up the sky
And hummingbirds do fly*

*Winter turns to spring
A wounded heart will heal
But never much too soon
Yes everything must change*

*The young become the old
And mysteries do unfold
Cause that the way of time
Nothing and know one goes unchanged*

*There are not many things in life
You can be sure of
Except rain come from the clouds
Sun lights up the sky*

[x4:]

*Rain comes from the clouds
Sun lights up the sky
And hummingbirds do fly*

And music, makes me cry

Reflections on the Meaning of Life

Our Search for Answers

There is nothing accidental in the system that is called life. The moment we realize and understand that absolutely everything fits together perfectly in detail, we enable ourselves to experience the grand picture of our planet's creation. Due to limitations of the human mind, an individual cannot wholly comprehend this picture, which contributes to his/her frustration. However, this is part of personal development. As long as this process of motion remains in balance, and it is at rest, it's called "the rest of perpetual motion," which is one of the main laws of the universe. This system, I believe, is deliberately hidden from us, so that we keep searching for the answers and expanding the terrain that our senses and feelings explore. Since each and every individual is unique and original, it is meant for the answers to be diverse, for diversity and multiplicity ensure and guarantee optimal evolution.

Cultural assimilation appears to be one of the engines of human self-knowledge. The ongoing process of self-improvement -- a capacity inherent in human nature -- is not merely accidental. Nevertheless, any system without love, no matter how perfect it may seem, is only a mechanical system. Nothing but unconditional love of the Creator can give it vitality, make it true and meaningful.

What do we mean when we talk about perfectionism? Society nowadays has turned human life into a formal race to achieve stuff, where we focus on material well-being

so much, that we simply can't appreciate true love for each other as life's indispensable essence. Formal relationships, formal music, formal belief, formal life... Without the love of the Creator and our relationship with Him life is nothing but fading energy of Light. As a result, our lives are filled with trials and tribulations. Remember the 70s? The music of that time was filled with optimism, joy and hope, dreams about freedom and a bright future. In what condition is music now? Society focuses too much on the success of the individual. As a result, spiritually immature individuals are becoming a real threat to one another because of dog-eat-dog competition. Only our return to our spiritual roots, only our ardent love for the Creator and towards one another is capable of saving this world!

An Explanation

For what reasons do we meet each other? Why are smart people often attracted to not so smart ones? When we refer to an attraction to someone/something that comes from within, we can seldom explain why we feel this or that particular way. Only recently have I come to an understanding that our thirst for the divine light comes out through the "reverse lookup." Each and everyone thirsts for God and a relationship with Him, yet all go through the periods of heaviness and darkness. The reason is simple: only experiencing the pain of the darkness can one really appreciate the value of light and hope. The light attracts the light, while the dark attracts the dark. In the universe the light and the dark complement each other, for only in polarity and unity can perfection exist: in order to appreciate perfect light we need to know what absolute darkness is. Likewise, to be able to speak of perfect love, we have to experience not only all the other kinds of love, but also various degrees of evil. Balance and harmony are the principles of the universe. That's why intelligent people are drawn to those not that intelligent.

We often get surprised at life's randomness and irrationality: "sharp-witted attract strong-minded" is a logical statement. But in reality, we look for contrasts to balance things out. Intuitively, we keep looking for our "second half" -- nonstop, 24/7, because one complete whole is a whole lot better than two separate halves -- this says not only the law of our planet Earth, but also that of the Universe. I would like to wrap it up

with a newspaper ad: "A pretty/tall/intelligent/rich young woman is in search of a middle-aged/bold/short beggar, for a contrast!"

About Formality

Let's get back to the concept of *formality* mentioned earlier. I never liked the word. What does it mean to play formally, to work formally, to make money formally, to enjoy relationships formally? How do you explain the expression "to love formally"? Our civilization is in danger, namely because formality in our lives became trivial and limiting -- in other words, it's very "neat 'n' tidy." This is not the initial plan of the Creator! Every natural phenomenon is natural. Formality is the opposite of real love. Everything that is filled with energy is not formal; it's not mechanical but alive. Neither can process and progress be formal. A life lived with sincerity is more than a phrase -- it's a law of life, since real life and real love is the means to the goal, which is our relationship with God that gives us life: only then the circle is complete, and life is filled with sense and meaning.

Golden Scorpion

The same energy has the power to rebuild and to destroy. My experience reveals that the law gravitation does not apply to my life: intuitively I have felt this already in the 70s. Having attended my numerous concerts and performances at Soviet jazz festivals, my audience can confess to similar feelings: to some I was a half-crazy Moldovan Jew, while others considered me a provocateur of disquiet and agitation. Whatever the tags, one thing was clear: the energy typhoon that swept away all on its path could not stay long in the Soviet atmosphere. When I moved to Norway in 1993, my music started to melt in the northern air. Eventually, it acquired absolutely new-for-me contents and forms. I have to confess here that the process wasn't pain free, but spontaneity and openness to any kind of music literally freed me from the necessity to use logic and argumentation when it came to my decisions "where to go and what to do." I am a

Scorpion by the horoscope, so one of my natural traits is introspection and self-analysis. I had spent much time in self-examination, until I realized that this activity is beneficial and effective only when it is engaged in with love, respect and faith. Without the latter, it is capable of hurting and even harming us.

Ego

I have ever felt pride even physically. It is almost impossible to describe the feeling in words, but one thing is certainly clear: there is something opposite to it, and that is love. I will now try to present to you the main criterion of our goals and our spiritual awakening. The goal is to get to know God, and God is love. "Grace" is often misunderstood by people -- we commonly take having it as an excuse to relax, but this eventually leads to insidious laziness. I would define the word as a complete acceptance of one's self and peace of one's soul. Before my awakening I somehow knew that there was a block within me -- the block that didn't let me live in harmony with myself and with the world around me. I physically felt it, like a lump in the throat. At the same time, a voice from within me kept telling me that all these intellectual/emotional/spiritual tortures were coming to an end. That's exactly what happened the night of the 7th/8th September, in 2014. "A stone falling away from the heart," "a mountain lifted from my shoulders:" I *literally* experienced these Russian metaphors at a physical level.

We read books, we hear other people say it, but we don't really get what God's love is. It took me two months to become a new person. In a nutshell, it goes like this: first of all, I stopped being afraid of death. Secondly, I understood the meaning of forgiveness and humility.

I was in the hospital, and I prayed, day and night. That week was the hardest challenge of my entire life. I got a dose of a deadly poison, 4 times more than enough to kill a person. I knew about this; the doctors warned me that the most probable result would be my death within 2-3 days. If a miracle was to take place and I would stay alive, I

would have to go through another 12 days of a literal hell. The week passed by. I lived; my condition could hardly be described as that of a living being -- but I was still breathing. Fever over 40C, constant retching and diarrhea, and a nonstop horrible pain in the stomach -- that's how I felt during the first week of the treatment. The doctors had warned me that the second week would be twice as tough. I had no idea as to how my condition could possibly worsen -- I simply couldn't imagine it, nor did I have the strength to think about anything except sending God whispers in my thoughts. "God, help me!" was the only thing I was able to focus on. All of a sudden, that night I saw the light approaching me. In a second I was left with the realization of two very important truths: my heart was completely filled with the love and peace I have never ever experienced before, and there was no pain in my body. In a second I was fine. In a second I was healthy. The second week of double torture was not going to happen! I was free, for God had answered my prayer! Whatever explanation people may come up with, no one can take away from me that experience!

I called a nurse (she had seen me a short time before in the agony of pain), and asked her to call the doctors for a meeting first thing in the morning. "She was overwhelmed" would be an understatement of her reaction: she had seen me half an hour before Jesus came to me. The doctors who saw me in the morning were overwhelmed, confused and puzzled. They all were very happy for me; they congratulated me, admitting to a huge miracle having taken place in my life. I suggested that all the clinic (both staff and the patients) should gather in the hall, because I wanted to express my gratitude to the One who heard my cries and answered my prayers.

The hall was packed, the atmosphere thick with anticipation. I told them all my story, I played the piano -- the heavens descended upon the place: everyone was weeping and sobbing, touched by His real presence, rather than by their own emotions.

I never believed in the power of the divine Word nor in prayer. I conceded to the wish of those who wanted to help me and prayed for me, but I didn't really believe it would work. Even to myself I can't explain why I kept praying while staying in the hospital -- I guess, it was God Himself who held me in the state of praying, not my faith or my diligence. The next day I went home. People called me, so I kept retelling my story over the phone and on Skype, over and over again. They all shed tears of happiness for

me. The experience of an encounter with God made me realize lots of things; I now understand what I wasn't capable of understanding before. God gave me a possibility to share His love with people around me, to help them see what I now see.

There is nothing impossible for God. His answer to our prayers is only a matter of time. However, if one's heart is not open to Him, one will never meet Him. There are lots of religious people on our planet. But reading religious books and partaking in religious rituals without an open heart won't lead anyone anywhere. One needs to open up to Him like a child -- this is the main condition for the beginning of an authentic relationship with Him. I experienced this the night I got saved, healed and delivered. The experience was so real that I gave my heart to Him, saying: "From now on, Your will be done, not mine!" You know what was the hardest thing of all? To understand! But then, if He believes in the purity of my heart, who am I to question that? The grace, the peace that filled and since then have been in my heart are indescribable and unforgettable. I am ever thankful for this experience and for all the lessons that I have learned during my illness. It may sound strange and unbelievable, but I am grateful for everything I have gone through -- it was worth it. The love of God is the most intense real power that gives life meaning.

The grace of God is real, and I am one of its witnesses. When pride dies, fear and heaviness die together with it. The heart, freed from pride, pain, insecurities and substantial weight, gets enough space for God, for light, for love. My own experience serves as an illustration that unconditional love reigns in a human heart only when the heart is totally cleansed from the oppression of one's mind and one's ego.

Can I ever thank God enough for my re-birth? This book is a weak attempt to express the gratitude of my heart for the new life, and for all the help along the way, for His ultimate sacrifice and unlimited love for all of us, His children -- men and women, created in His image.

Discography

Misha Alperin

Her First Dance

Misha Alperin piano

Arkady Shilkloper French horn, flugelhorn

Anja Lechner violoncello

Recorded July 2006, Auditorio Radio Svizzera, Lugano

Engineer: Stefano Amerio

Produced by Manfred Eicher

After a decade-long absence, Russian pianist-composer Misha Alperin returns to ECM with his most fragrant release to date. He retains cellist Anja Lechner from the last

session, Night, and rejoins his longtime ally, horn player Arkady Shilkloper. The deeper (if only for being the oldest) relationship of the two is with Shilkloper, who since the 1990's Wave Of Sorrow has been a constant companion throughout Alperin's ECM tenure. In fact, the only piece not by Alperin on this album, "The Russian Song," flows from Shilkloper's pen in a lovingly arpeggiated duet for French horn and cello, with no piano between them. The remaining pieces comprise a mixed palette of solos, duos, and one trio. The latter, "Tiflis," again features the French horn, only now working a mournful charge between cells of piano and cello. It's a stunning, lyrical voyage that works its subtle ways into the mind.

Of Alperin's piano solos the listener is treated to a wide variety. From the tintinnabulations of "Vayan" (which veers down unexpected avenues of twilight) to the sprightly virtuosity of "Jump," each is a transfiguration, a whirling dervish of melody. Eyes closed and heart open, Alperin passes, ghost-like, through the tenderness of "April In February" and the Bach-like grandiosity of "Via Dolorosa" with equal attention, such that each becomes a waterfall droplet made audible through slow motion.

Piano and flugelhorn make for a profound combination in the title track. Here the keyboard is distant, and the music all the more intimate because of it, as if it were being played in a chamber of the mind, personal and untouched by the outside. There is a spin and a sway to this tune, fleshed by the childhood implied by its title, by the magic of kindness that pulls flowers from the soil before the world at large can paint them with words.

Piano and cello make two somber appearances. "A New Day" turns like a ballerina in a music box, Alperin dotting the edges of Lechner's spinal lines with light impulses of grace, while "Frozen Tears" breathes cinematic reality through a steady pulse and wavering foreground.

Together, these vignettes boil down to a beauteous representation of Alperin's diction. Secure and sparkling, it speaks as it lives: which is to say, from the heart.

Misha Alperin

Night

Anja Lechner cello

Hans-Kristian Kjos Sørensen percussion, marimba, voice

Misha Alperin piano, claviola

Recorded April 4, 1998 at Vossa Jazz Festival, Norway

Engineer: Jan Erik Kongshaug

Produced by Manfred Eicher

Atmospherically speaking, Misha Alperin has created some of ECM's most haunting discs. In the wake of one such disc, *At Home*, the Ukrainian pianist-composer surprises with yet another unexpected turn of events. The event in question is the commissioned performance at the 1998 VossaJazz Festival in Norway documented here. The end result is a new beginning, a flowering of innovation and sensory breadth.

With German cellist Anja Lechner and Norwegian percussionist Hans-Kristian Kjos Sørensen in tow, Alperin's keys open the curtain with "Tuesday," and in that Everest shape reveal the touch of two bows: one at Lechner's strings, the other humming along the edge of Sørensen's cymbals. As the trio settles into a spiral of sleep, regularities begin to emerge. Thus welcomed into the performance, one can note the figural language that is Alperin's forte. His body arches, conforms to what is being played. His physicality comes out especially in "Tango," which fronts his sweet descriptions before delicate snare rolls and legato support from Lechner, the latter switching to pizzicato to buoy every footnote. After a duet between Lechner and Alperin (the tender "Adagio," which absorbs breath in lieu of exhale), the dotted marimba of "Second Game" counters with some delightful surprises. From the persuasive beauty of its Steve Reichian introduction to jocular turns and thematic quick-changes that recall The

Carnival of the Animals of Saint-Saëns, it encompasses a thousand positive memories. These render the quiet spirit of “Dark Drops” all the subtler. The title track is evocation par excellence, weaving cricketing percussion through a loom of moonlight. Timpani and strained vocals make for some unusual effects in “Heavy Hour,” a ritual thesis of howling abandon. The suite concludes with “Far, Far...,” which carries us beyond the implied “away” to a place where lullabies alter the sky as would a luthier achieve a perfect curve of tiger maple.

Night is a topographical palate. From hills to caves, cliffs and open fields, it is a regression to the womb, a reverie of cloud-shift and prenatal lightning. Like etcher’s acid, it renders its images in reverse, righted when printed on the mind.

Misha Alperin

At Home

Misha Alperin piano

Recorded at home by Misha Alperin, February 1998

Edited and mastered at Rainbow Studio, Oslo

Album produced by Manfred Eicher

Misha Alperin has been something of a shadowy presence in the annals of ECM. His previous albums—namely, *Wave Of Sorrow*, *North Story*, and *First Impression*—marked him as an enigmatic musician of sparse yet effective language, at times of humor and gaiety. But if you want to know how the Ukrainian-born pianist’s heart beats, the forms his dreams take, let *At Home* be your looking glass. The aching lyricism of the title track, which opens this collection of improvised pieces, is all you need to know what’s going on: a private, reflective session surrounded by Alperin’s most familiar things. Recorded at his home in Norway, where he has lived for the past

two decades, the program unfolds in a mosaic portrait of the artist in various stages of emotional awareness.

Remarkable about this album (and true also of Keith Jarrett's *Facing You*) are the levels of evocation sustained throughout. It's as if Alperin were letting himself fall and trusting in the piano strings to catch him in their net. It is inspiring to experience such breaking down of hesitations—to feel, for example, the subterranean forces of "Nightfall" digging so deep it almost hurts to imagine their visceral impact. In "Shadows" Alperin makes use of space as a brush artist would of ink, expressing much with little. Intermittent clusters and arpeggiated phrases share the piano's natural resonance, stretching phonemes into the speech of "10th of February." It is the album's most figural piece, contrasting a circular left hand with a circling right: a night flight of unfathomable scope in under five minutes. Behind the winged structures of "The Wind" thrive un-lived pasts, histories beyond the ken of the hermetic performer at the keyboard, lives whose implications are decades yet in knowing.

The album is not without its whimsy. A Norwegian folk dance provides the inspiration for "Halling," which might have felt out of place in the program were it not for the integrity of its spirit. "Light" and "Game" bring further playfulness to the fore, in the former offsetting potentially ominous chords and in the latter rummaging through a toy chest of childhood relics. With these Alperin creates sparkling vignettes, one after another, until the outtake of "Njet" chambers the parent calling to the child, the husband to the partner, flowing down the hallways into light.

Misha Alperin

First Impression

Misha Alperin piano

John Surman soprano and baritone saxophones

Arkady Shilkloper French horn, flugelhorn

Terje Gewelt double-bass

Jon Christensen drums

Hans-Kristian Kjos Sørensen percussion

Recorded December 1997 at Rainbow Studio, Oslo

Engineer: Jan Erik Kongshaug

Produced by Manfred Eicher

Ukrainian pianist and composer Misha Alperin joins forces for the first time in session with British reedist John Surman (a last-minute replacement for Tore Brunborg) in this melodious, spontaneous set. Augmented by Arkady Shilkloper on French horn and flugelhorn, Terje Gewelt on bass, and Jon Christensen on drums, their hypnotic nexus breathes ounces of thematic life into the "Overture" in watery, stepwise motion.

Surman's reptilian soprano takes us in some unexpected directions throughout a holistic introduction, while his unmistakable baritone threads resilient cables through "Twilight house" and "City Dance." The first of these is where the session truly comes to life through his interactions with Alperin, while the latter serves a touch of groove in a veritable trill buffet (think Snakeoil). "Movement" features classical percussionist Hans-Kristian Kjos Sørensen (heard previously on No Birch) in a spindly improv, the pointillism and melancholy draw of which only thinly veil its composed undercurrent. A lovely solo from Shilkloper on French horn rises like a paper lantern lit and offered to the sky.

Yet these are but the roofing to the album's five "Impressions," each a pillar in the dust. Most of these are latticed pieces in chambered combinations, achieving darkest patina in "Second Impression," in which Surman's soprano dances like a wick-hugging flame, and whispering new beginnings in "Fifth Impression." Neither is as intimate as the title track, in its way a profound one. In printing terms, the first impression is always the most crisp, the most sought after, but here we get something so ephemeral that it hardly seems to stick to the page. In its solo piano expanse is something metaphysical, a catch of moonlight in the mind.

Misha Alperin

North Story

Misha Alperin piano

Arkady Shilkloper French horn, flugelhorn

Tore Brunborg tenor saxophone

Terje Gewelt double-bass

Jon Christensen drums

Recorded September 1995 at Rainbow Studio, Oslo

Engineer: Jan Erik Kongshaug

Produced by Manfred Eicher

Simultaneously drawing on his folk roots and paying homage to European jazz music's openness to cross-cultural dialogue, Ukraine-born pianist and composer Misha Alperin gives us *North Story*, his paean to the selfsame region where fermented the vivid contributions already so well documented on ECM. Classically trained brass player Arkady Shilkloper, who became acquainted after hearing snatches of Alperin at practice from an open apartment window, joins the group on French horn and flugelhorn. Saxophonist Tore Brunborg, bassist Terje Gewelt, and drummer Jon Christensen round out the quintet. And what a quintet it is, for it is quite clear that this set of eight originals positively glistens under the breath, feet, and fingers of master craftsmen. That being said, the rewards require patience and an invested heart. Alperin's painterly ways move as if in slow motion, taking in details and finding even more within them. Everything in the light of "Morning" takes shape by contrast, so that what may seem at first sluggish blossoms in hindsight of Alperin's delicate fortitude. Shilkloper follows similarly delicate arcs in the two-part "Psalm" and "Ironical Evening," each a prize of organic denouement so fine that it passes through fishermen's nets unnoticed. The title track gives us a deeper version of the same, Christensen building his tracings into full-blown sketches as Brunborg's erases in swaths of negative space. "Alone" finds Alperin just so in a lulling piano solo, providing reprieve from fitful

slumber on the way to “Etude,” a lovely duet with Shilkloper that sounds like a lost track from *Wave Of Sorrow*. Its skittering lines and virtuosic doubling concretize the storytelling. This leaves only an arrangement of “Kristi Blodsdråper (Fucsia)” by Norwegian composer Harald Sæverud (1897-1992). It is a fitting epilogue to an album of ever-growing detail, which like the whole becomes a mirror as we back away from it, sounds blending into an all-encompassing hush of existence.

Misha Alperin

Arkady Shilkloper

Wave Of Sorrow

Misha Alperin piano, melodica, voice

Arkady Shilkloper French horn, jagdhorn, fluegelhorn, voice

Recorded July 1989 at Rainbow Studio, Oslo

Engineer: Jan Erik Kongshaug

Produced by Manfred Eicher

With *Wave Of Sorrow*, Misha (then Mikhail) Alperin began what has proven to be a fruitful relationship with ECM. Though the Ukraine-born pianist has but a modest discography on the label, each recording brims with the folklore of his sensitivity. Since this date he has spun a telepathic relationship with trumpeter Arkady Shilkloper, and the results on this duo album are as unique as their players. Alperin offers a set of ten original compositions, each, in spite of the intimate arrangement, a grand and sweeping thing. Not unlike label mate Richie Beirach, his architecture is ambitious in its scope and clarity yet rarely deviates from the warm embrace that births it. One hears this in the opening “Song,” to which Shilkloper adds the bay of a hunting horn. Like many of the pieces that follow, it smacks of tradition even as it shines with modern interpretation. Yet this is also a world of shadows, for in the title piece (one of the most affecting melodica solos you will ever hear) we can intuit a web of tortured histories

and only hints of the happiness that may unravel it. Shilkloper arrives toward the end bathed in ECM's plush reverb, seeming to hang from the tail of Alperin's breathy comet like a child of the night. Still, this date is not without its fun. "Unisons," for example, casts the two musicians in a decidedly vocal mold as they rap and tap their way through a cathartic romp. "Poem" similarly allows Shilkloper to come out of his lyrical shell into a full-blown dance. Alperin also offers up a few piano solos, of which "Prelude in Bb minor" is the most evocative—a shaft of moonlight through which the dust of a wanderer's journey casts its sparkle. Other highlights include the simple yet ingenious motivic arcs of "Short Story" and Shilkloper's distant mutes in "Miniature."

The contradiction of the album's title is that so much of the music springs to its feet, all the while harboring a matrix of oppression and exile. We hear this especially in the solo "Epilogue." The atmosphere is dim yet also sparkling, as if it were a harsh present slumbering behind the illusory veil of a memory, fond and forever lost.

CONCLUSION

Isn't it fascinating, the way we, human beings, are created -- and create? We are placed into the reality of this world, with an inner reality each of us carries individually. Our intense feelings at one moment don't last until the next one: what is very real now turns out to be a whim or a flight of imagination later; what feels most important today gives way to something doubly important tomorrow. The authenticity of our moments cannot be doubted – we experience them, we live through them and often are unable to forget them. However, with time our feelings change, the intensity of our emotions weakens, and we sometimes even believe that an earlier particular experience we were so engrossed in is absolutely irrelevant to our present condition.

What is this? One of the explanations might be our inability to stay grounded in a specific state, or unwillingness to remain true towards it -- that often makes us unsettled and changes our feelings. We are often torn apart by the wish to play the game life presents us with and at the same time to act according to our inner convictions, desires and impulses. Most of us, to a degree, are in search of absolute truth, i.e. certain unalterable standards. Usually this process is challenging and mentally strenuous: it involves the investment of time, physical labor and psychic energy. The absolute standard inevitably gets measured relative to something very individual. Because we

cannot avoid subjectivity, we all need access to a variety of perspectives, a wealth of knowledge and an array of experience, rooted in the collective inheritance of our human culture. When we realize that a moment of profound significance is upon us, then we tend to imprint it in our hearts and minds, hoping to share its essence and magnitude with others. It becomes so fundamentally important, that we want to relive it again and again, so we keep looking for different means to achieve this. That, I believe, is how art is born.

I suppose that any artist – consciously or unconsciously – addresses his/her audience mostly for the reason of communication: it relieves them of the emotional and intellectual weight of the questions and yearnings that fill their whole beings. At the same time, it gives them the ability to look at a work of art objectively – registering to what extent it authentically reflects its maker’s own truth. Communication through art offers the artist the luxury of addressing the “other” directly, in one-to-one manner. Telling personal stories, sharing special experiences, requires intimacy between the two individuals: there are certain things that do not belong in the public arena. However, art is capable of elevating intimate matters into another realm, transforming and evolving them in various dimensions. In other words, a piece of art functions as a point of contact -- offering the artist the possibility to share; and the audience, to receive. When the message comes across, the recipient usually gets struck by its relevance and its application to his/her own life. Iris Murdoch, British philosopher and novelist, clearly articulated this through one of her characters: “Art is the telling of truth, and is the only available method for the telling of certain truths.”⁵

Misha Alperin has been using this method for more than forty years. In the course of this process, his personal truth underwent significant change, due to alteration in mindset, attitude, psychological and physiological condition, and geographical position. During all these years, he has been telling us his own story -- truthfully, sincerely, and at times, even naively. Having experienced a fair share of ups-and-downs, having confronted a number of serious challenges, having found his new

⁵ Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (London: CPI Cox & Wyman), 2006, p. 81.

identity, Misha believes that life without change is impotent. Thus, it comes as no surprise that one of his favorite songs is "Everything Must Change," by Quincy Jones.

In the course of his life Misha Alperin has inspired many -- as an artist and a teacher. His achievements are phenomenal. The quintessential reason -- as I see it -- is his holistic approach to life and music, which arises from, and integrates, the following qualities: his unquenchable enthusiasm coupled with artistic integrity, his exceptional openness to change, his willingness to learn from mistakes, as well as his capacity to turn severe setbacks into opportunities for augmented growth.

Inna Novosad-Maehlum