

## Sacral Reflection of Avant-garde

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The festival “Sound Ways” has just been held in St. Petersburg. The festival “Sound Ways” has already existed for 17 years in the St. Petersburg music field. It is a considerable period if one takes in account the not very friendly cultural environment in which modern music in its more or less sharply defined manifestations must be promoted. It would be possible to take an easier route: to play endlessly Prokofiev and Shostakovich and to call the festival the “Modern Music Festival.”

However, Alexander Radvilovich, a St. Petersburg composer with the characteristics of a public figure, has a completely different idea. As one overwhelmed by the sincere ardour of an enlightener, he consistently gives Petersburg audiences access to the new language, forms and devices of composition that blew over the late 20<sup>th</sup> century like a hurricane. Such names as George Crumb, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis, Gyorgy Ligeti, Morton Feldman, John Adams and, almost unknown in our country, Salvatore Sciarrino appear in the programs of “Sound Ways” year after year and one can find them nowhere else in St. Petersburg’s concert season.

In spite of the almost insurmountable difficulty of organizing such material that the Artistic Director of “Sound Ways” faces each year, Alexander Radvilovich provides citizens with a rare opportunity to listen to music that they have never heard before. It is no coincidence virtually that every composition in his festival programs is a Russian or a world premiere.

However, some exceptions exist: the central concert of the festival – *Musica sacra* – consisted of compositions that were already performed. They were beautiful for delightful, sublime, and calm charm that marks the music as having been created by sincere religious feeling.

The concert took place in St. Peter and Paul Cathedral in which choirs sound especially its resonant arches [vaults] the choir sounds especially impressive because of its resonant arches. The youth choir of Julia Khutoretzkaya, an indispensable participant of all significant artistic actions in the city, presented opuses by Arvo Pärt, Krzysztof Penderecky, Alexander Knaifel, Karol Szymanowski, and Alexander Radvilovich. Polish-Russian connections were especially evident in this concert. Two versions of *Stabat Mater* – by Penderecky and Szymanowski – were set off by the typically Russian Orthodox character of *St. Spirit Prayer* by Knaifel. The measured chorale pace of *De profundis* by Pärt hinted at German tradition as did its linear melodic motion, deep basses, and the light, soaring tenors on the organ point.

Radvilovich’s *Sinfonia sacra* deviated slightly from the lucid meditative mood of the previous pieces. Secular in its spirit and organization of material, it was gloomy and mysterious – the rustles of the strings, the quiet crane-like scream of the percussions, and monotonous rhythms are its main characteristics.

Also taking part in the concert was the orchestra of the St. Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic took part in the concert. Founded by young American conductor Jeffrey Meyer in July 2002 with the aid of American money, and composed of St. Petersburg musicians, it accompanied correctly and culturally the choir in Szymanowski’s *Stabat Mater*. An element of Polish folk song sometimes broke through canonical strict voice leading, imparting liveliness and warmth to the religious composition. The opus of the last Polish Romantic composer stirred up and agitated mellow and serene flow of the concert – to its crown adorning.

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