



Alfred Schnittke (20th Century Composers)

By Alexander Ivashkin

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This biography of the Russian composer Alfred Schnittke (b.1934) presents a fascinating portrait of a man whose musical output is inextricably linked to the strictures of life in the former Soviet Union. For most of his adult life in Russia Schnittke's music was powerfully shaped by the frustrations of the Soviet period and he reacted strongly against the ideology of the era. His symphonies lie arguably at the end of the Germanic symphonic tradition, yet each represents a new concept of the genre for the twentieth century. His works reveal the influence of Shostakovich among others, but remain strongly original. Each of his compositions can be understood primarily to offer a unique synthesis of many different influences and styles. The author gives a detailed discussion of Schnittke's music and theories, arguing that the various stylistic elements in his works - his polystylism - may be perceived as part of a new, more universal language.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The story of Soviet composer Alfred Schnittke is one that will give pause even to the gods of irony. The descendent of German and Jewish inhabitants of what was once the German Volga S.S.R. in the Soviet Union, he received his first musical training as a young boy in Soviet-occupied Vienna. Baptized as a Roman Catholic at age 48 (although he had strong Russian Orthodox tendencies), this son of dedicated Communists employed a musical idiom almost as varied as his background. One of the most interesting aspects of Alexander Ivashkin's lucid account of the composer's life is his long struggle in the face of the hostility shown by the apparatchiks that ran the Soviet composer's union, a hostility that made it impossible for Schnittke to attend many performances of his works when they required a travel permit outside Soviet territory. Fortunately, as the regime approached collapse, the difficulties experienced by Schnittke and his fellow Soviet artists during the decades of Soviet rule abated. This entry in Phaidon's 20th-Century Composers series offers a well-written account of the essential aspects of Schnittke's life and work.

Review

'So much of the material is new that this book is a must for anyone remotely interested in the subject.' (Gramophone) 'Ivashkin has written what is undoubtedly the fullest account to date in any language of Schnittke's life and work, and one which is unlikely to be surpassed.' (London Magazine) 'As a series, Phaidon's 20th Century Composers has brought remarkable variety and a welter of information, both necessary and delightfully trivial. Intended both for the general reader and for the more enthusiastically musical...!' (The Scotsman)

About the Author

Alexander Ivashkin currently teaches the cello and Music History at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. An accomplished cellist and writer on music, he is also a close friend of the Schnittke family.

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