



Rodion Shchedrin
Autobiographical
Memories

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ZU DIESER AUSGABE

“Rodion is altogether a great composer, who gave our music so much. This music will live forever and always be played in the future.”

Lorin Maazel

“I am sure he is one of the leading composers of our time and of course the leading Russian composer.”

Mariss Jansons

“Rodion is a very Russian Composer; but also in many, many ways a cosmopolitan figure. He is one of the most distinguished composers of our time and undoubtedly the leading individual of the Russian composition school.”

Valery Gergiev

“Professional musicians call him the king of contemporary orchestra, having in mind the utmost expressivity of sound that is present in his music, along with an utmost concentration and economy of means.”

Mstislav Rostropovich

Rodion Shchedrin was born in Moscow in 1932. He studied composition and piano at the Moscow Conservatoire and quickly made his way to international recognition in both disciplines. His operas, ballets, symphonic works, piano concertos and chamber music compositions are regularly performed in the leading theatres and concert halls of the world. Rodion Shchedrin is married to Maya Plisetskaya. Maya Plisetskaya was the prima ballerina assoluta of the Bolshoy theatre in Moscow.

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Translated by Anthony Phillips

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For Maya Plisetskaya

CHAPTER 1

My genealogical tree

My father, Konstantin Mikhailovich Shchedrin, was born in 1894 into the family of a country priest in the village of Vorotsy, in the Russian countryside near the city of Tula. Vorotsy, in what was then the Tula *Guberniya*, lies about 40 kilometres south-west of Tula and 300 kilometres or so south of Moscow. Not long after, his father, my grandfather, whose name was Mikhail Mikhailovich Shchedrin, was moved to the small town of Aleksin, a picturesque place on the banks of the River Oka, the largest tributary of the Volga - although Aleksin's oldest inhabitants insist that the Volga flows into the Oka rather than the other way round, and therefore the Oka flows all the way into the Caspian Sea.

My grandmother, dignified by the name Elizaveta Nikolayevna *née* Doctorova, was also from a clerical family. As a matter of fact in those days it was frowned upon for a priest to marry a girl stemming from anything other than an ecclesiastical background. My memories of her are dim, as she died in 1944. She was known to me as “New Granny”, and that is what I called her to distinguish her from my maternal grandmother, “Granny Zina”, who looked after me from my very earliest days. Granny Zina lived near us in Moscow, whereas “New Granny” lived in Aleksin.

Grandfather Mikhail, the Aleksin priest, had eight children, all boys - not a sister among the lot. All eight, including my father, were educated at the Tula Seminary and received a good religious grounding. Grandfather departed this mortal coil before the Revolution but there still exists a pleasing memorial to him in Aleksin: the

winding path leading up to the little church bears to this day the name of the "Shchedrinka".

"New Granny" was a selfless woman and in her widowhood carried the entire burden of the household on her own, ensuring a good education for all her sons. She was the very soul of kindness, and spoilt me monstrously when we came to Aleksin for summer holidays. She would send presents to Moscow, dried pears in a canvas bag, well knowing my sweet tooth and my remarkable capacity to consume the pears in incredible quantities.

Family lore has it that all eight brothers were very musical, even though only three of them took music up as a profession. In the fine summer months Aleksin was famous for its sandy beaches, its water-meadows, its pine forest, its abundance of mushrooms, the excellence of its fishing - and not least for the "Shchedrin Brothers Orchestra". I can tell you which brother played which instrument. My father played the violin; Uncle Sasha (Alexander Mikhailovich) the cello; Yevgeny Mikhailovich the piano. Viktor Mikhailovich was on clarinet, Mikhail Mikhailovich on double-bass. The "Shchedrin Brothers Orchestra" was to play a decisive role in my life.

Actors from the Maly Theatre troupe in Moscow often spent their summer holidays in Aleksin, and the "Shchedrin Brothers Orchestra" would be roped in to participate in vaudevilles, charades, literary readings and the like. My father's musical gifts were soon noticed, and one actress, Vera Nikolayevna Pashennaya, still a young woman but already well-known in Moscow, took an energetic interest in the fate of the fifteen-year-old "violinist". Father was an accomplished player on any instrument that was to be found in Aleksin, and he possessed perfect pitch, but the most impressive of his qualities was a phenomenal memory. My own musical memory is not negligible, but Father's was one of the wonders of the world. Anything he either heard or read from notation he was able to reproduce either on

the spot or later with hundred per cent accuracy. He was like a miraculous, natural tape-recorder. From my own experience of what he could do, I can state without fear of contradiction that legends of the musical memory of a Mozart, a Rachmaninoff, a Glazunov are in no way exaggerated ...

Vera Nikolayevna paid from her own pocket to bring Kostya Shchedrin and his partly home-made violin to Moscow. She persuaded the then Rector of the Moscow Conservatoire, the composer Mikhail Mikhailovich Ippolitov-Ivanov, to meet and hear him. Ippolitov-Ivanov must have been impressed by my father's natural gift; otherwise he would not have enrolled, as he did, young man from the provinces into the preliminary school of the Conservatoire without subjecting him to a formal examination. There my father spent the next two years, all the time having his tuition fees and living expenses supported by Pashennaya. A fine example of generosity on the part of a famous actress in those days of our Fatherland!

One day in 1959, soon after Maya Plisetskaya and I were married and living in a two-room apartment on Kutuzovsky Prospect, the telephone rang. I was not at home. Maya picked up the receiver.

"Is that the apartment of Rodion Shchedrin?" asked a deep, chest-toned, slightly husky woman's voice.

"Yes, it is," answered Maya.

"This is People's Artist of the Soviet Union Pashennaya. Good day to you."

"How do you do, Vera Nikolayevna."

"To whom am I speaking?"

"I am Maya Plisetskaya, Vera Nikolayevna."

There was a pause, then: "Whatever are you doing there?" asked a surprised Pashennaya.

"Well, Shchedrin is my husband," Maya parried.

"Oh, I didn't know. Is Kostya Shchedrin a relation?"

“Rodion Konstantinovich is his son ...”

Another pause, longer this time. Then: “Is Kostya himself still alive?”

“Sadly, he died some years ago.”

Vera Nikolayevna broke down and wept over the telephone. Later, she telephoned again to suggest that I compose incidental music to Ostrovsky's play *The Storm*, which she was planning to produce on the Maly Theatre stage as well as taking the role of the Kabanicha. Needless to say I agreed, and the play went into production, Pashennaya several times during work on it referring to her memories of summers in Aleksin. No doubt feelings from those distant days had sparked something in her heart. My music touched a chord with Vera Nikolayevna and she went so far – she was over seventy years of age at the time – as to request that it be played at her funeral. Her wish was respected.

In examinations at the Conservatoire my father so excelled in harmony tests that Ippolitov-Ivanov promoted him to the free-composition class in the Theory of Composition faculty led by Professor Sergey Nikiforovich Vasilenko. Among Vasilenko's other students at the time was the well-known conductor Nikolay Golovanov.

In those years Father was able, through what he earned playing for movies in the cinema equally on the violin, the viola or the piano, and also giving private lessons, to rent a room near Arbat Square. The year he graduated from the Conservatoire was a fateful year for Russia – 1917.

In our family politics were never discussed. We all knew how what a dangerous topic it was, especially in the presence of outsiders and children. For this reason there were many matters of which I became aware only much later, when my father was already dead. But I was then told by my uncle Yevgeny, Father's brother, who during that fateful year was living with him in the Arbat, of an episode that occurred in the very earliest days of the October

Revolution in Moscow. A young Junker, scarcely more than a boy, escaping from the Red Guards who were pursuing him, had concealed himself in the entrance of the building where my father and uncle lived, under the wooden stairs. There they found him, shot him and stabbed him with their bayonets. My father and uncle opened the door to their flat a crack, cautiously keeping it on the chain. Struck dumb with terror they heard the desperate cries and the clatter of footsteps, a shot, followed by agonised groans. The instant the Red murderers left, the brothers approached the wounded young man as he lay sprawled on the staircase, hoping to render him assistance. But the Junker was dead, his face and body horribly disfigured by stab wounds. Yevgeny summed up the situation: "That first day taught us everything we needed to know".

Two years later the two brothers were confronted by a predicament that could easily have had a fatal outcome. In the winter of 1920 Father and Uncle Zhenya were in the little town of Bogoroditsk, fifty kilometres or so from Tula. Late in the evening they heard a light tapping on the frost-encrusted window. It was a neighbour. "Listen lads, you'd better get out right now. They're coming for you tonight ..."

There was not a moment to lose. Without pause for thought the two fugitive musicians piled into a farm sledge, its floor covered with hay, muffled themselves up to the eyes in blankets, and stole away into the impenetrable darkness of the blizzard. So it was that the two Shchedrin brothers evaded the clutches of the Bogoroditsk Cheka. Had they not been quick enough on that snowy winter night I would not have made my appearance into this world on another winter night in 1932. Merely the fact of being the son of a priest was enough to be accused of class disaffection, counter-revolutionary tendencies, treason. This was a time when church buildings were demolished, their bells hauled down and destroyed, ancient icons consigned to the flames, altars defiled, "servants of the

cult” killed, exiled, their hair and beards shaved. Look at the television screens of today and watch them, our Communists of yesterday, the children and grandchildren of those brave fighters against “the opium of the people”, crossing themselves, exchanging kisses with the Orthodox triple kiss, standing reverentially candles in their hands as though they were glasses of vodka - and be afraid. A tragic fate overcame two of the elder brothers. They perished in the cellars of the NKVD. All the remaining six died in their own beds.

Father's graduation composition was the score of a one-act opera *The Burial Mound*, after Ibsen's play, earning him the diploma and status of a “Free Artist”. In 1918 he returned from Moscow to Aleksin, where he successfully organised the first music-school in the town. Later he came back once more to Moscow, which is where I was born and grew up.

For Father, as he himself used to say, there were three Gods. One was in the heavens, on earth were Chekhov and Scriabin. Those of Father's compositions with which I am familiar are strongly influenced by Scriabin's music; in fact he described himself as a “Scriabinist”. The influence is particularly marked in his best work - the Sonata for Violin and Piano, published in 1924. Later in life he fell under the sway of Chagall's paintings from his Vitebsk period, of which he had black and white reproductions. One picture, “I and the Village”, taken out of a monograph on the artist, adorned the wall of our apartment. “That is completely Aleksin,” he would always say.

But Konstantin Shchedrin did not become a professional composer. Much of his time was spent teaching, lecturing on music and playing the viola in the orchestra of the People's Palace Opera. He had had a job there before the Revolution, when the Provisional Government was still in power, and I can recall him telling me about the occasion when Alexander Kerensky came to address a wildly elated

political meeting in the People's Palace Theatre. When Kerensky appeared on the stage he managed only one phrase: "When we meet together we are all seized with an irresistible enthusiasm ..." before the eruption of a frenzied, ecstatic ovation that prevented him saying another word. He was carried out shoulder-high into the street, while the orchestra, in which my father was playing the viola, beat out a fanfare manfully trying to be heard through the din of applauding hands and throats screaming their delight.

In 1927, when he was teaching a class in piano and solfeggio at the *Stasov Music School*, my father fell in love with one of his students blessed with the euphonious name of Concordia, which made a pleasing contrast with her rather more prosaic surname Ivanova. Cora, as she was called at home, was a lively player of the popular and classic piano repertoire, including several of Scriabin's Preludes and Schumann's "Aufschwung". Father was a devotee of Schumann's music as well, and I imagine that his pupil's choice of repertoire will have added to his feelings. Soon they were married, and Concordia Ivanova became Concordia Shchedrina. On 16 December (the birth date of Ludwig van Beethoven) 1932, I made my appearance into the world.

My father was in no doubt of the name I should be given. I ought to have been called Prometheus, after the poem by Scriabin he loved so dearly. Prometheus Konstantinovich. My mother categorically objected to this plan. Eventually the warring sides settled on a compromise: I would be named in honour of Robert Schumann. (Later, however, I adopted the more Orthodox Christian variant of Rodion.) While still a baby I was clandestinely christened in the little church at Sokolniki, on which occasion the priest, unfamiliar with Schumann or his music, expressed displeasure at the foreign name I was being given. My

mother's name, Concordia, is, however, to be found in the Orthodox Church Calendar.

The time has come for me to tell you about the family on my mother's side. My grandfather, Ivan Gerasimovich Ivanov, from a lower-middle-class family in *Tambov*, was by common consent an exceptionally vivid personality. He was a virtuoso player on the guitar, sang drawing-room songs and possessed an inexhaustible fund of jokes and opinions on everything under the sun. He also spoke French fluently. He mastered everything he set his mind to. A tall, blue-eyed man with a moustache the colour of wheat and a light-brown beard, he had the charm to set many a maiden's heart aflutter. He worked on the railways all his life, starting as engine-driver's assistant and rising to be director of a line. At the time of the savage reprisals against the uprising of the 1905 Revolution Grandfather Ivanov and another driver, Ukhtomsky, had sprung a train-load of revolutionary workers successfully out of the capital. At full steam, wheels thundering along the tracks, their train blazed its way through lines of Cossacks and police enflading the track. This dramatic episode of the abortive uprising was later commemorated in films and books, and for his feat Grandfather became one of the first recipients of the USSR's "Hero of Labour" accolade (forerunner of the "Hero of Socialist Labour"). We still have at home the official citation, signed by Kalinin, giving an account of the event. Bearing in mind the dubiously mixed social origins of our family, Grandfather's citation was a highly significant document. "It is our shield against adversity", my mother's brother Igor Ivanovich, who followed his father into the railways, used to say.

In this connection I want to emphasise that at no time did any member of my family on either my father's or my mother's side, including my "revolutionary" Grandfather, join the Communist Party.

Before I reached the age of reason I perpetrated the supreme sacrilege of tearing our talismanic family bulwark into two equal halves. My act of rebellion precipitated universal indignation among my nearest and dearest. The citation was carefully glued back together on the reverse, rolled up into a cardboard tube and put away, and the author of the outrage soundly cuffed round the ears.

My maternal grandmother, Zinaida Ivanovna, was blue-blooded and her union with Ivan Gerasimovich achieved against the will of her parents. Her mother, that is to say my great-grandmother, Praskovya Afanasyevna Abolesheva, notorious for her uncertain temper, simply banned her rebel daughter from the house. That was the extent of her parental blessing on the marriage. But before this happened Zinaida who, as is right and proper for a daughter of the nobility had been born in St Petersburg, had completed her schooling at the *Smolny Institute* for Noble Maidens. She spoke three languages well, and sometimes during my restless childhood tormented me unbearably by forcing me to sit still in the little room in Sokolniki while I was subjected to passages from *Hamlet* in the original. She and my mother used to converse only in French, which drove my father mad.

Before the war I was moulded into a classic model of a "mother's little boy". Mama would wash me - remember, we were living in a communal apartment - only in water that had been boiled. I wore short trousers and a little sailor's jacket and a splendid silk scarf tied in a bow round my neck. Nonetheless, my grandmother's aristocratic ancestry was kept well hidden from me, and I regularly had my nose rubbed in the Hero of Labour's citation which I had so shamefully desecrated, no opportunity being lost to inflict another slap for good measure.

When many years later towards the end of the 1960s I performed my Second Piano Concerto at the Salle Pleyel in Paris, I was surprised to be sought out after the

performance by a lady who turned out to be the daughter of my grandmother's sister, Madame Marti. This information utterly astounded me: the very idea that one of my grandmother's sisters had emigrated to France was quite beyond my comprehension. The conspirators in my family had done their work all too well, so all-embracing was the fear and the desire to stay alive. I recall how whenever my uncle Igor visited us, the first thing he did on coming through the door was to put a cushion over the telephone.

My mother gave up her music and went to study at the Plekhanov Technical College of Industrial Economics. Even so, whenever there were family festivities at home she would always play her party pieces: one or two *Préludes* of Scriabin, and of course Schumann's *Aufschwung*. Her brother Igor divided his leisure time from his work as a power engineer between music and chess. He was a pretty useful pianist, his repertoire for our musical soirées consisting mainly of piano pieces by Albéniz.

Of such was my genealogical tree composed.

CHAPTER 2

Childhood

My parents moved through a succession of unprepossessing rooms in Zamoskvoreche before eventually settling in one of the apartments of House No. 23, Mytnaya Ulitsa. The apartment had three rooms, two of which were occupied by the Reshetnikov family, while the three of us squeezed into the third. It was not a large room, but space was found for the Becker grand piano.

I never knew for certain what our neighbour Reshetnikov did for a living. But from my memory of his vaguely military aspect – even going into the kitchen or the lavatory he wore an olive-green tunic – it now seems clear to me that he must have served in one of the branches of the “organs”. Moreover, the hours of work required by his service, invariably at night, would seem to substantiate my inference. Our neighbours possessed two hunting dogs – English setters, who were evidently less than enchanted by the music they could hear coming from our side of the wall, which immediately set them whining and barking. Their pet hate seemed to be the genre of the piano trio. Fairly regularly, usually on a Sunday, my father and two of his brothers, Yevgeny and Alexander, would get together to make music, just for the sake of it, for themselves. In that cramped little room at No.23 Mytnaya I heard a good spread of the piano-trio literature: Brahms, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff. They formed the very first musical impressions of my childhood.

Summers brought a trip to Aleksin. To this day, somewhere in the depths of my subconscious I am aware of a moment of rapid movement over the smooth surface of a

river, accompanied by the clattering valves of an engine. Could this really have happened? I asked my mother – since it was always she who journeyed with me to Aleksin. Was it really something I had experienced? “Uncle Misha once took us both out in a boat on the river Oka, and it had an outboard motor. Surely you can't have remembered that? You were only two and a half years old ...”

We stayed in the one-storey log cabin which was the Shchedrins' home near the river. As long as they lived, all eight brothers maintained the most exemplary relationship with one another: caring, respectful and affectionate. And they all worshipped their mother, Yelizaveta Nikolayevna. In truth, my own memory of her is of a saintly person. From dawn to dusk she worked at a thousand menial tasks: feeding her family, cleaning, washing, tilling the kitchen garden, fetching water, drying pears the moment there was a peep of sunshine, washing the floors. Everything she did, she did with unhurried grace and expertise, smiling happily at herself and her kin. A year or so after she died the house was sold, and the pittance of money from the sale scrupulously divided between her surviving children.

Of course, my recollections of those pre-war summers in Aleksin are those of a child, and they have been eroded by the passing of the years. Even so, I retain some musical memories: shepherds calling to one another across the mist-shrouded river, the keening of mourners over the body of a departed relative, the echo of long-drawn-out songs heard from two fields away, a single voice singing a lullaby. These sounds meant more to me than any classical music. For as long as they lasted I would be rooted motionless to the spot. It seemed as though all nature had held its breath, bewitched by their beauty. Only much, much later would I be moved by the music of the classical masters.

You will not be surprised to learn that it was not long before I began to have formal instruction in music inflicted upon me, and I was sat down in front of the piano keyboard

in the dark, gloomy communal apartment of a strict music teacher, Maria Lazarevna Gekhtman. Studies by Maykapar, J. S. Bach's *Inventions*, Kuhnau sonatas ... Quite apart from the teacher's unsympathetic attitude and intensity of my boredom, the music itself aroused not a flicker of interest in me. Father resorted to strategems: "I'll take you fishing if you'll learn one Bach *Invention* by heart." It was a powerful incentive, and I studied that *Invention* diligently.

In spite of everything, my piano-playing was good enough by May 1941 to qualify me for admission to the Central Music School, the preparatory school attached to the Moscow Conservatoire. That summer we had planned to go as usual to Aleksin, but my parents did not want such a long interruption in my lessons with my private piano-teacher Gekhtman so we delayed our departure, instead spending the month of June in the little village of Tarasovka, just outside Moscow, where my great-aunt Alexandra Ivanovna, my grandmother's sister, had a dacha. From there I was taken into Moscow twice a week for my lessons. My parents wanted their son to be on spectacular form, pianistically speaking, for his inauguration into the world of musical studies. I was still a good little boy at that time and practised assiduously, relishing the prospect of fishing in Aleksin and the wide open spaces of the Oka countryside when it was all over.

But we never got to Aleksin at all that year. On 22 June war was declared, and a few days later I saw from the terrace outside the Tarasovka dacha the first German aerial assault on Moscow, the searchlights sweeping the night sky, and heard the pounding salvos from the anti-aircraft batteries. We took ourselves back to Moscow, to our flat on Mytnaya Street and the Reshetnikovs' music-allergic dogs. Full mobilisation was announced. For the past few years alongside his intensive work as a lecturer Father had been taking a class in music theory in the Nationalities Studio of the Moscow Conservatoire, teaching students from

Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzia, Uzbekistan. At first teachers from the Conservatoire were not being called up as they were considered to be in a reserved occupation, but the Germans were getting closer and closer to Moscow, threatening the city itself, and the military registration and enlistment office, the Voenkomat, decided to establish a country-wide network of militias. It was an initiative conceived in an upsurge of patriotism, and it elicited a response from every sector of society. My father joined up without delay.

When, a few years later, I became a student of the Moscow Choral Institute, seeking like all boys for any way to alleviate the boredom of lessons, we would only have to ask our score-reading teacher, S. S. Blagoobrazov: "Won't you tell us, Sergey Sergeevich, something about your wartime experiences in the People's Militia?" for the lesson to be instantly forgotten while the miraculous survivor launched into a description of how he and his fellow-soldiers were despatched into minefields and to confront tanks without so much as a rifle between them. There must have been a guardian angel also watching over my father in the midst of the slaughter, although he was never a man to talk about those times. On the rare occasions when he did all I can recall was the word "dreadful" cropping up repeatedly. My cousin Oleg Shchedrin, the son of my father's brother Viktor, was killed in the very first days of the war. In spite of the difference in our ages he and I were mates in Aleksin, going fishing together, gathering mushrooms and berries and other enjoyable pastimes. He was carried off by the first shell to explode as his troop disembarked from the train taking his unit to the front. He never fired a single shot in his life. He was eighteen years old.

As the Germans continued their advance towards Moscow the bombardments and air-raid warnings became more frequent and Mother would take me down to the bomb-shelter. In one such raid a high-explosive bomb

landed on the house opposite ours in Mytnaya Street. The moment the all-clear sounded we ran out to look at the smoking ruins, and could hear the cries of the injured. We could not get very close, however, because the rescue teams had cordoned off the devastated site. The little square surrounding the building had been utterly destroyed, and no house was ever built to replace the one that had been obliterated.

October came, and there was no word, not a sign, from Father. Mother was in an agony of despair. My musical activities ceased altogether, and the air was thick with panic-stricken rumours: the Germans were believed to be at the gates of the city. The windows of our room looked out on the squat brick building housing the *Goznak* works. Behind the high mesh fence topped with barbed wire the works produced coins, banknotes and medals. One grey, overcast morning there was a strong smell of burning, and charred scraps of paper money wafted over on the wind. The contents of *Goznak's* safes were being incinerated.

Families of "key workers" still in Moscow began to be hastily evacuated from the capital. My uncle Igor, he who had so enjoyed playing piano pieces by Albéniz, was one such because despite not being a member of the Party he occupied the not insignificant position of Chief Engineer of the Main Communications Directorate of the USSR. In wartime the post ranked as equivalent to a Major-General, and Uncle was indeed so appointed, along with the offer to evacuate his family, an entity to which he attached his sister and her son, that is to say my mother and myself. With his wife Nina Vladimirovna, their son Oleg (another cousin Oleg, this one two years younger than me), and my grandmother Zinaida we set off in a train packed to the roof with people bound for Kuibyshev. Should the military situation worsen to the extent of forcing the abandonment of Moscow, the Government's plan was to relocate Russia's capital city to Kuibyshev.

The train took a week to reach Kuibyshev, coming several times under aerial bombardment, which caused the passengers, before the train had even come to a complete standstill, with one accord and as fast as their legs would carry them to put as respectable a distance as they could between themselves and the railway line. There we would lie motionless, face downwards and bottoms up, until the danger was past. On one occasion a bomb hit one of the carriages, and it took a considerable time for the fire to be extinguished and the burnt-out skeleton of the wreck to be uncoupled from the rest of the train.

Eventually we reached Kuibyshev and Uncle's family was allotted two rooms in a house on Red Army Street, near the railway station. Grandmother, mother and I occupied one of the rooms. Uncle Igor himself arrived in Kuibyshev later.

I have unhappy memories of the winter of 1941, a time of vicious, blustery winds and not much snow. We experienced real hunger. I trudged over endless frozen fields thinly coated with snow searching for any potatoes that might have been overlooked. Dressed as I was in Moscow clothes, which were not nearly warm enough, I was pierced to the marrow by the icy Volga winds. The former potato fields, hilly, uneven water-meadows, flanked the river banks. But people had already been over them with a fine-tooth comb and had left hardly a single one. If I did manage to find two or three blackish spuds it was a triumph, a cause for exultation. They would be our rations for a whole day. My mother desperately looked for work of some kind, until she was detailed off to the obligatory so-called "labour front". We had no money at all to live on, and could not merely sit around depending on hand-outs from Uncle Igor's family, especially as until he arrived in Kuibyshev they themselves were in dire straits.

It was a long way back from the potato fields to Red Army Street. The trams ran infrequently, with passengers clinging to the footboards. If it was my lucky day I would

hang on too, at least for a few stops. Once some local lads, finding a nice little Muscovite boy to victimise, tipped me off from my hold on the back buffers while the tram was at full speed, and I took a mighty tumble, scratching my face all over so that people stared at me in terror. To crown it all I then contracted scarlet fever with such severe complications that I had to be taken into hospital. It was a railway hospital, with a single enormous ward given over to all kinds of children's diseases. But the kind-hearted doctors nursed me through it successfully.

Father came to Kuibyshev at the beginning of 1942. He had been shell-shocked, and that had caused him to be demobilised from the militia. Life became more cheerful. He had managed to salvage his old viola to bring with him, and immediately found himself a place in the Kuibyshev theatre orchestra. He tried to get a place in the Bolshoy Theatre orchestra, the company having also been evacuated to the town, but came to grief during a read-through of the finale of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. The ordeals of the past few months had evidently affected his performing prowess.

Some months earlier, at the end of 1941, Dmitry Shostakovich had arrived in Kuibyshev, having completed his great Seventh Symphony. Father and he were already acquainted, and when a Kuibyshev branch of the Composers' Union was established and Shostakovich became its president, he proposed to my father that he take up the position of Executive Secretary. As well as his official duties, Father assisted Shostakovich in many ways, acting in effect as his personal assistant and secretary. I am accordingly privileged to claim that Shostakovich knew me from my childhood. On many occasions, at times of real hardship, he went out of his way to be of inestimable help to our family. I have other memories of him as well, which I shall share in later pages.

Rehearsals began for the Seventh Symphony, with Samuil Samosud conducting the Orchestra of the Bolshoy Theatre. My father, in close continuing collaboration with Levon Atovmyan, oversaw the provision of the orchestral material. About this time Shostakovich's efforts succeeded in extricating my mother from her "labour front" servitude and securing for her a position as a duty supervisor in the Bolshoy Theatre's wardrobe. Leaving me at home on my own was now a risky business, since the "influence of the gutter" (to quote my grandmother) had already wrought havoc on my Little Lord Fauntleroy manners, and so I became an inveterate visitor to the Bolshoy Theatre. (I should state in parenthesis that I had had my first experience of the lyric stage before the war in Moscow when I was taken to a matinee performance of Bizet's *Carmen* at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre. To this day the miraculous features of this visit are preserved in my memory.)

But to return to Kuibyshev. My father, having extracted from me my most solemn promise to sit quieter than a mouse, let me come with him to the general rehearsal of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony. For the first time in history this great composition was heard in its entirety, and the occasion has become a legend. But I must not perjure my conscience: the symphony was too difficult for my childish ears to appreciate. What I did understand, and what gave me extreme pleasure, was the invasion theme in the first movement, all the more so because my father had graphically explained the context to me. The quiet life of peacetime suddenly broken by the measured, distant, frightening rhythm of the timpani - that was how it sounded, as if growing out of the quiet of the night. And then the theme, whistled - so it seemed to me - by the Fascist soldiers as they marched along. I did not attend the first performance as no one suggested taking me to it, but had I had an inkling even of a hundredth part of the

importance of that evening I would have done anything to force my way in, crawled through or over or any obstacle in my path. But I was not quite ten years old and had no way of knowing.

Needless to say, there was no such thing as a piano in our room in Red Army Street. Nor could there be any question of my keeping up my musical studies. My father's attempts to sit me down at the piano in the quarters of the Composers' Union was not crowned with success. Neither did I go to the ordinary school, but spent most of my time either on the street or in the nearby "Wings of the Soviets" stadium, or on the slopes of the banks of the Volga. The only exceptions were Bolshoy Theatre run-throughs and general rehearsals, and evening ballet and opera performances every now and again whenever my mother contrived a way of slipping me into the auditorium.

Today I believe that these outings to the theatre were much more valuable to me than practising studies by Maykapar and sonatas by Kuhnau. I was a restless, fidgety adolescent, and it seemed to me that roaming all over the town I must have been everywhere and seen everything there was to be seen. But later it turned out later that I, and my canny young Volga hooligan companions in mischief, had missed the biggest thing of all, right under our noses. We had no idea that in the very centre of the town, hard by the Party Regional Headquarters, an underground bunker to house Stalin and his Politburo had been constructed in the record time of a few months. It was 37 metres deep under the ground, complete with elevators and an elaborate ventilation system. It contained a replica of the hall inside the Kremlin where the Politburo met, as well as Stalin's private apartments and bedroom accessed by four fake camouflaged doors and a fifth, the real one. There was a map of the entire battle campaign covering one of the walls and a huge table covered in green baize, equipped with *vertushka* telephones - an exact

reproduction of the rooms in which the Leader of All Nations and his Party acolytes toiled in Moscow.

However could this monstrous edifice have been constructed away from the prying eyes of ubiquitously inquisitive boys, not to mention the entire population of a large city? Where, for instance, had they disposed of the thousands of tons of earth which had to be excavated in order to accommodate the acres of concrete and steel?

Today Stalin's bunker is open to visitors. In the winter of 1997, when festivals of my music were being arranged in various cities in Russia, one of which was Samara, I and a group of musicians visited it. Going down in the lift was a descent deep into my wartime childhood.