



VIRGINIA TUTILA
exclusive public relations

Interview with Tatjana Masurenko

NE: *Tatjana Masurenko, you have published a new CD with the title „British Viola Concertos“. Why this repertoire?*

TM: In the English music there was always a distinct preference for the viola. And two pieces I particularly appreciate can be found on this CD: the viola concert of William Walton and one of the most famous works of Benjamin Britten, „Lachrymae“. Benjamin Britten has played the viola himself by the way. I also like the music of Sally Beamish. She is violist, too. Her first viola concert – a musical discussion of the denial Christi by Peter – sounds very intensive and personal.

NE: *You recorded „Lachrymae“ for the second time. A couple of years ago the version with the piano was published.*

TM: I think that the version with the chamber orchestra sounds more intensive and open, that it develops more charisma. This is probably due to the sound intensity and also to the clearer colour in the orchestra; these lovely flageolets, the pizzicati, the forte chords in the Tutti – in the version with the piano all this has simply a different character.

NE: *Was it an experiment for you to play this version?*

TM: It is always an experiment to play the same piece with other partners. It is a process. I seek for myself, my sound and what I would like to say. The whole represents a flexible situation. It is important that we breathe together.

NE: *At the viola concert of William Walton two things stand particularly out: the radiant, shining sound in the mid-position and the not at all sharp but still very bright discant.*

TM: Within the last few years I have thought intensively about what could be current and exiting for me about the sound of the viola. How do I hear this sound in myself? And there I feel that it is so diversified, so manifold and also so beautiful – one must only realize this. Sometimes one gets to hear, the viola might sound quite beautiful but the A string is often not radiant enough or even non-sharp. This isn't true at all. It is only about that the violists have the right idea of sound. I think that the A string corresponds to a beautiful, intensive mezzo-soprano voice in the higher position. It must never sound pressed, never strained. And this combined with a very deep,



Foto: Trilo Nass

warm C string – then we finally have the dark side of the cello and the light, radiant sound of the violin. And all this is covered by the viola. It has the most human intonation within the string instruments. My examples are the singers Kathleen Ferrier and Jessye Norman.

NE: *You hide which the high technical demands required for this...*

TM: This is correct. Of course, it is hard to realize that. But the viola has gone through an enormous development within the last fifteen, twenty years. In the meantime we have excellent violists and a huge literature. The repertoire has become very broad and various.



With Herbert Blomstedt and the Gewandhaus Orchester Leipzig.
Foto: gert molthes



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NE: You come from a musician's family...

TM: My father was a pretty known Jazz trumpeter.

NE: And you have never had the desire to play jazz also? For example saxophone?

TM: (laughs) I love jazz! But unfortunately, I haven't learned it yet.

*With Garry Walker / recording for British Viola.
Foto: Thilo Nass*



NE: Did you ever consider studying violin?

TM: I have begun as a violinist. I was very young at this time – five years old. And after five years, aged 10, I told my teacher that I wanted to play the viola. He laughed. It is known that I have rather small hands for a violist. But I was stubborn. I got a viola a couple of months later. It was gigantic, I believe 41.5 centimetres. I was unbelievably proud. I absolutely wanted it! I really loved the sound. It was simply always my dream to play viola.

NE: The viola was a really prominent instrument in times of a Claudio Monteverdi. In the following period it stepped back behind the violin. Could one assume that it recovers at least a part of its old importance now?

TM: Definitely! The contemporary music is much more thrilling and more interesting for the viola than this was the case in the past. Also, it is often a very personal music. And the present violists are downright individual characters.

NE: On the other hand unlike the violinists the violists are not evaluated so often by means of a few bravuras...

TM: The literature and the sound of the viola are rather determined by an inner intensity. We actually

don't have the popular virtuosic pieces like the violinists or the cellists do. It is a little different world. But this is also our advantage.

NE: When you perform as a soloist sometimes one gets the impression that you change the finger set in the concert and ride for a fall just in order to perhaps elaborate some parts even more expressive.

TM: (laughs) Yes! I do that! And sometimes it works, sometimes not. But I risk it.

NE: Do you do this even when you play chamber music?

TM: Yes, I do. Sometimes some of my music-friends do it, too. And then I go along and listen carefully and think about what I can "say" to this, how I can play something to this which fits even better. And just the same in the solo concert, if I hear or feel that something else would fit better. This brings a more vivid atmosphere.

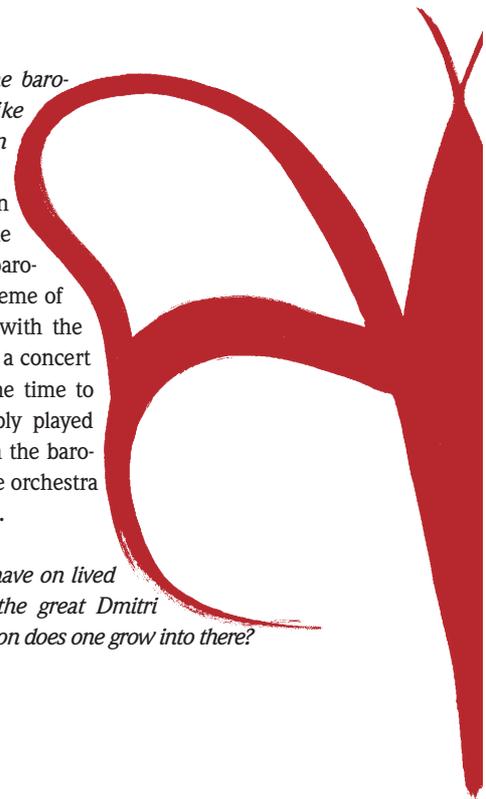
NE: Have you already considered orienting yourselves at the historical performance practice? For example playing without vibrato, trying historical types of rising of the arch and articulation?

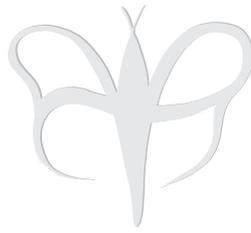
TM: I like to do that very much. I even love this. I always try to play the baroque repertoire with a baroque bow. Unfortunately, I don't have a good baroque viola at the moment. So I simply play my Testore with a baroque bow. And this then without vibrato or with a respectively specific vibrato. I consider this as unbelievably important for our time.

NE: Does one learn from the baroque practice for a piece like „Lachrymae“ of Benjamin Britten?

TM: Yes. I even have considered playing the end of „Lachrymae“ with a baroque bow so that the chant theme of John Dowland comes along with the right baroque articulation. In a concert one simply wouldn't have the time to change the bow. But I simply played then with the normal bow in the baroque way anyway – after all the orchestra also plays with modern bows.

NE: On the other hand you have on lived and studied in the city of the great Dmitri Schostakowitsch. Which tradition does one grow into there?





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TM: St. Petersburg is a fascinating town, a town in a classical architecture, the hometown of great writers, poets and composers. It has a quite special energy and a great affection to art. It was always very important for me to play and to learn Schostakowitsch's music. And I still learn and will always learn. It is the most difficult music for me. Just because I come from St. Petersburg, because I feel so much in Schostakowitsch's language. I see the performances of Evgeny Mrawinsky with the Leningrad Philharmonic or the one of Boris Pergamenschikow in front of me. But to realize and to achieving then that this also becomes explicit, this is for me the most difficult. And it means a great responsibility. Because I know that Schostakowitsch was really one of the greatest musicians of the 20th century. Especially the viola sonata, its last great composition, is the most personal piece for me. And I think it was very personal music for him, too. He included many quotations from the 13th symphony, from the „Lady Macbeth of Mzensk“, from the 15th symphony, from the 13th string quartet. And this makes the whole so intensive.

NE: *But isn't there a succession of generations either? Isn't it now about conquering the continent Schostakowitsch newly again? To define this music newly?*

TM: I think we have more freedom for this now. We have more distance. And we can experiment more. And we do it. It also sounds roughly sometimes or really tragically and just not „beautiful“.

NE: *We just celebrate both a Mozart year and a Schostakowitsch year. If you would have to decide either to play Mozart's „Concertante“ or Schostakowitschs viola sonata, what would you choose?*

TM: Both!



A nice day ... with Lars Vogt and Boris Pergamenschikow. Foto: privat

*The interview with
Tatjana Masurenko
was led by Norbert Ely
on July 23rd, 2006.*

