Nikolai Myaskovsky

(April 20, 1881 – August 8, 1950)

The Symphonies

Among Russian composers of the twentieth century, **Nikolai Yakovlevich Myaskovsky** occupies a unique position, above all, perhaps, because his orchestral output is one of the largest since Mozart and Haydn: 27 symphonies, composed over a period of more than forty years – an output which he continued to produce even when, as a leading figure among Soviet composers, he – like many of his colleagues – was severely criticized by the Communist Party. Admittedly his music was never avant-garde in the Western sense of the term; it did, however, combine the Russian traditions with harmonic and formal characteristics of a newer era, achieving an outstanding artistic quality in terms both of its epic proportions and its fine detailing. Apart from the symphonies, Myaskovsky wrote a dozen or so symphonic works in other genres as well as solo concertos, chamber music (thirteen string quartets), more than a hundred piano works and about a hundred songs, music for military band and several cantatas: all in all, a catalogue of works that is as colourful as it is extensive.

Myaskovsky was born in 1881 – the same year as Béla Bartók – in the fortress of Novogeorgievsk near Warsaw, where his father, a Russian officer, was stationed (Poland was then under Russian control). He entered the cadet school and was already a lieutenant in the Engineers by the time he first attended the classes given by Anatoly Liadov and then Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1906. He was thus 25 years old when he began his studies, although he had previously taken lessons from Reinhold Glière for a trial period lasting several months. He soon became friendly with a fellow pupil ten years his junior named Sergei Prokofiev. They made their débuts as composers in the same concert, and many of the titles of Prokofiev's works were invented by Myaskovsky. Another of his associates at the Conservatory was Boris Asafiev, who was later to achieve great renown as a writer; it was Myaskovsky who very soundly advised him to devote himself to criticism and musicology. Myaskovsky graduated at the age of thirty, but three years later his musical career – which was already showing great promise – was brutally interrupted by the war. As an officer he was involved in some of the fiercest battles; he was seriously wounded and in 1917 was transferred to Tallinn, and then sent back to St. Petersburg suffering from shell-shock. He subsequently moved to Moscow, where he spent the rest of his life. In 1921 he became a professor of composition at the Moscow Conservatory; among his many pupils were Khachaturian and Kabalevsky.

One of the terrible injustices of the Communist régime was that Myaskovsky, whose music could in no way be described as subversive or damaging to the régime, was one of the few composers to be attacked by name in the famous Soviet Communist Party decree of 1948. On the surface he seemed relatively relaxed about this: while the criticism was being read out, somebody allegedly whispered to him: 'An historic decree', whereupon he replied: 'Not historic – hysterical'. Nonetheless, Myaskovsky's already frail health was damaged further, and he did not live to see his seventieth birthday: in the summer of 1950 his life was claimed by cancer. Had he lived longer, it would not have been surprising if his symphonies had reached thirty in number.

As mentioned above, Myaskovsky was never an out-and-out modernist. He belonged instead to the generation that can be said to form a bridge between the Russian Romantics and the great innovators of the twentieth century such as Prokofiev and Shostakovich. Without being familiar with this 'bridging generation', it is hard to place the developments of subsequent generations in an historical context. For this reason, this first complete recording of Myaskovsky's symphonic works is of special significance.

Nikolai Myaskovsky

Evgeny Svetlanov (1928-2002) was justly famous as one of the greatest conductors of his generation. When he began his musical career towards the end of the 1940s, however, it was in a different capacity – that of a composer. Some of his works were indeed played, and judged, by the same people at the Soviet Union of Composers who examined Myaskovsky's last compositions. Svetlanov's recordings of Myaskovsky constitute one of those strong links of tradition which are so abundant in – and which are part of – the greatness of Russian music.

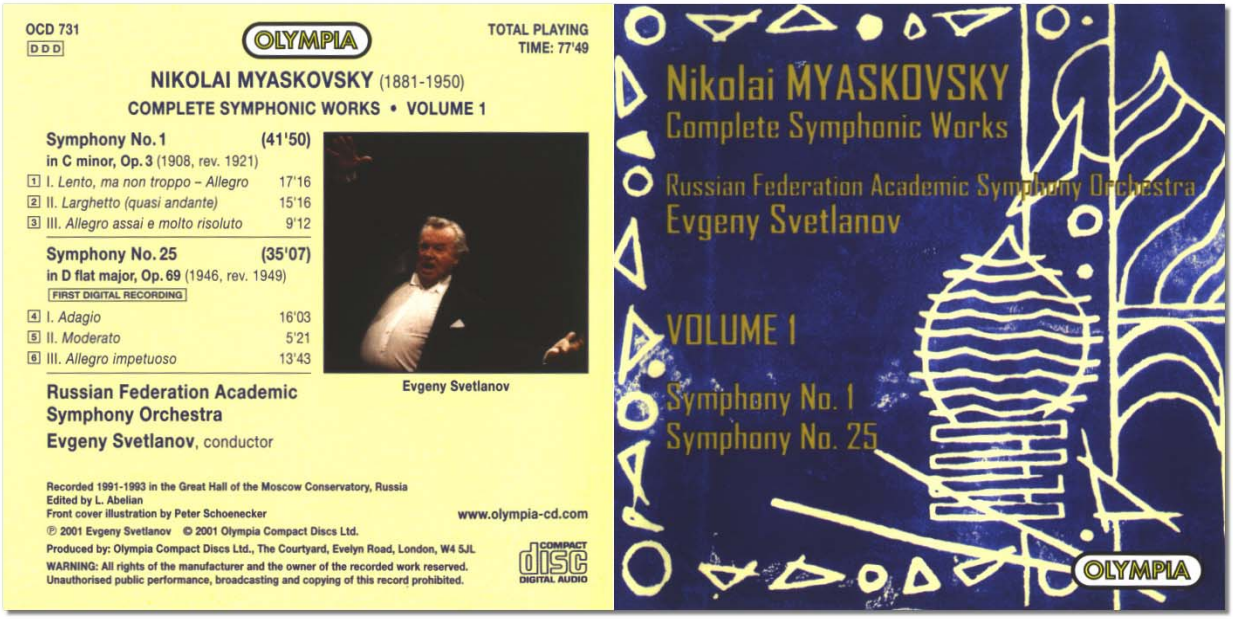
Svetlanov was born in Moscow into a family of Bolshoi Theatre artists. He made his own first appearance on the Bolshoi stage at the age of three, playing Madama Butterfly's son. He later sang in the Bolshoi Children's Choir and (having graduated from the Moscow Conservatory) he conducted his first opera at the Bolshoi in 1953. In his first decade with the Theatre he progressed from trainee conductor tc chief conductor, and took the Bolshoi on a highly successful tour of Italy in 1964. In 1965, Svetlanov took over as director and chief conductor of the USSR State Symphony Orchestra (Russian State Symphony Orchestra, Russian Federation Academic Symphony Orchestra), and it was his outstanding achievement to conduct this orchestra for 35 years. Together with this orchestra, Svetlanov spent 25 years creating an Anthology of Russian Classics, to include all the Russian symphonies written in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Svetlanov also concentrated on the works of Mahler, Richard Strauss and Bruckner.

His orchestra travelled across Europe, North America and Japan to glowing reviews, and Svetlanov was hailed as an outstanding interpreter, primarily of the Russian classics. His attention to detail and broad expressive range reached right to the heart of the music. Svetlanov was also chief conductor of the Residentie Orchestra, The Hague. After many years as guest conductor and chief conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, he became its conductor laureate. He frequently performed as guest conductor with orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra and other leading orchestras in Vienna, Belgium, Israel and Japan.

The **Russian Federation Academic Symphony Orchestra** was previously known as the USSR (State) Symphony Orchestra and the Russian State Symphony Orchestra, sometimes with the addition of the title 'Academic'. It is one of the leading orchestras of Russia, and throughout its history has collaborated with many of the world's greatest conductors and soloists. The orchestra was founded by talented musicians who had previously worked in other prominent orchestras, and its first performance took place in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory in October 1936.

The orchestra has had five renowned musical directors: Alexander Gauk (1936-41), Nathan Rakhlin (1941-45), Konstantin Ivanov (1946-65), Evgeny Svetlanov (1965-2000) and Vasily Sinaisky (since 2000). As one might expect, Russian music has always been an integral part of the orchestra's repertoire. The works of many of the great composers, including Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Kabalevsky were performed by the orchestra under the batons of their composers. As piano soloists, Shostakovich and Shchedrin performed their own concertos.

The orchestra embarked upon its first foreign tour in 1957, becoming the first Soviet symphonic ensemble to be heard abroad. Its first North American tour was in 1960 and concluded with a spectacular concert before an audience of 16,000 in New York's Madison Square Garden. Since then the orchestra has performed in the world's most prestigious venues and has also worked with outstanding guest conductors including Yehudi Menuhin, Kurt Masur, Yuri Temirkanov and Valeri Gergiev.



Volume 1
Symphonies #1 & 25

This CD spans almost the entire symphonic output of Myaskovsky as, after the *Symphony No. 25*, he wrote only two more works in this genre. The three-movement ***Symphony No. 1 in C minor***, Op. 3, was written in 1908 while he was still a student at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and it gives clear proof of the extraordinary talent of the then 27-year-old composer. He sketched the work in February; in July he wrote piano versions of all three movements, and the complete score was ready at the beginning of September – an excellent example of Myaskovsky's typically brisk method of working. From a compositional point of view the work is technically demanding: for example, at one point in the finale, *Allegro assai e molto risoluto*, no less than four themes were skilfully interwoven. Prokofiev, admittedly, regarded this passage as too much of a good thing, and suggested amending it – which Myaskovsky did in the revised version of the work which, owing to the events mentioned above, was delayed and not completed until 1921. The principal differences in the revised version are that the first movement was shortened and various cuts (including the one mentioned above) were made in the finale. The first performance of the original version took place on 2nd June 1914 in Pavlovsk (the small, rather chic town in which Johann Strauss II had directed the summer concert seasons for some years with great success half a century earlier).

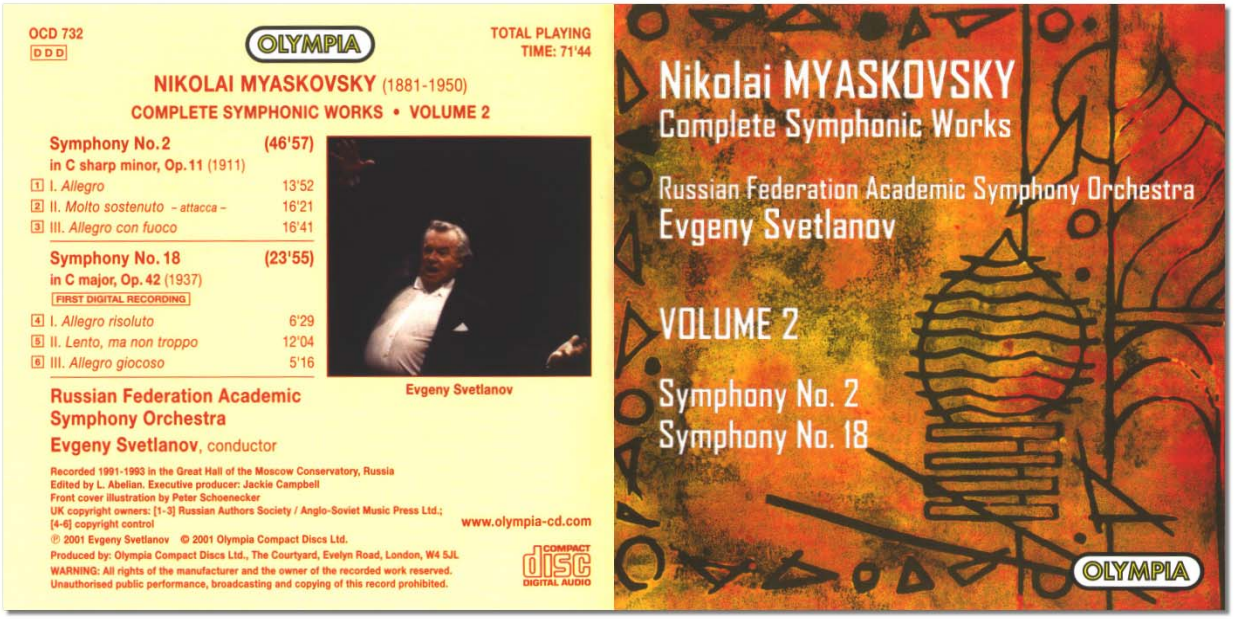
This symphony was composed at much the same time that Stravinsky was writing his first, short orchestral works, in other words before *The Firebird*. As with so many Russian orchestral works of that time, melody and sonority are especially to the fore. Here Myaskovsky had important rôle models in his teachers Liadov and Rimsky-Korsakov, either of whom could easily have written the *Larghetto*. Moreover, the composer had a special fondness for the orchestral writing of Alexander Scriabin: this can be observed in a number of his works. Finally, Alexander Glazunov must have been another important influence – he was director of the Conservatory and was seen as a model by many students of composition. He looked favourably on Myaskovsky's symphony and, as a reward, immediately awarded him a scholarship. It may well be that this came out of Glazunov's own pocket – as happened on more than one occasion – but, whatever the source, it allowed Myaskovsky to undertake further studies.

It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the work as a 'study piece'; it has a thoroughly individual character which is only disturbed in those rare passages where Myaskovsky is a victim of pride in his own contrapuntal ability. Apart from that, the symphony is in general dominated by a highly charged, Romantic atmosphere with strong contrasts between joy and pain; its broadly conceived themes, which are handled with great craftsmanship, are combined with a traditional but skilful approach to harmony.

It is a mystery why Myaskovsky was not especially fond of his ***Symphony No. 25 in D flat major***, Op. 69. It is possible that his statement to this effect referred to the original version of 1946 – this might be the reason why he revised parts of the work in 1949. He may have been unsure merely because of the at times novel technique of composition that he used for the first time in this, his first post-war symphony. Or it might be that, with hindsight, he was afraid that his choice of tempos might alienate the listener: in this work he made an exception from the normal rule of starting the symphony with a fast movement.

He sketched this three-movement symphony in the summer of 1946, and the score was prepared during the following six months so that the first performance could take place on 6th March 1947 at the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory; Alexander Gauk conducted the USSR State Symphony Orchestra (the same orchestra, although obviously with different players, that is heard on this recording), and the symphony was a considerable success. It was dedicated to Levon Atovmian, a colleague of Myaskovsky's who was later to suffer some of the most severe criticism as a composer, and who was only rescued by vigorous efforts on the part of Shostakovich.

As indicated, the first movement of the symphony is slow – the tempo is even *Adagio* – and, moreover, the structure deviates markedly from the norm. Traditional sonata form is replaced by a set of variations in which the typically Russian main theme is worked out. Russian commentaries on this work, especially those dating from the Soviet era, tend to describe the symphony as an epic portrayal of the Fatherland; both the 'national' nature of the melodies and also its time of composition – just after the 'Great Patriotic War' – may have contributed to this attitude. The second movement, marked *Moderato*, is also characterized by a basically lyrical mood, but comes across as more elated. One aspect of this new-found lightness is the appearance of a theme in waltz rhythm in the middle section of the movement. Only in the finale – *Allegro impetuoso* – does the basic mood of the music change: as the tempo marking suggests, the last traces of contemplation now have to yield to a powerful forward impulse. To some extent the entire symphony thus becomes an intensification of mood. Finally, to round the work off, the theme of the first movement reappears, and the symphony ends with an impressive feeling of unity.



Volume 2
Symphonies #2 & 18

Myaskovsky's *Symphony No. 1 in C minor* (OCD 731) was composed in 1908 while he was still a student; he did not complete his ***Symphony No. 2 in C sharp minor***, Op. 11, until 1911. In the meantime, however, he had not been idle, but had composed a number of smaller works including the remarkable symphonic poem *Silence*. Above all, though, he had been preparing for and, in 1911, had taken his final examination at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. At this time he also began to work as a writer on music – an activity for which he was exceptionally well qualified – and from reading his articles one acquires a fascinating (and hitherto sadly rather unknown) image of the musical 'greats' of the era such as Stravinsky or Glazunov. He declined an offer to become the director of a college of music in Voronezh, however, and instead spent some time in Moscow. It was there that he completed his *Second Symphony*, which he had begun a year previously. He was not able to attend the work's première; while he was fighting as an officer on the front line during the war, he learned from letters from his friends that the first performance had taken place in April 1915 in St. Petersburg, at a concert given by the Court Orchestra under Hugo Warlich, together with the symphonic poem *Silence*.

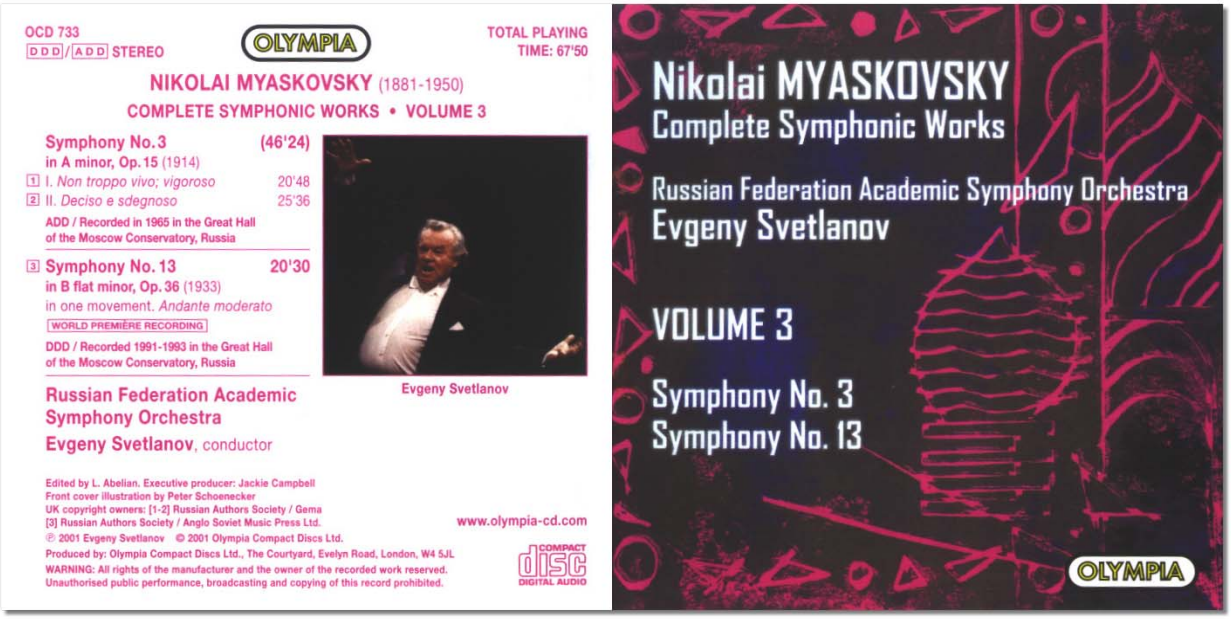
Myaskovsky once said that his works from the period before the First World War all bore a 'mark of deep pessimism', and this is essentially true, with the proviso that the same can be observed in the music of many composers at that time. The two opposite poles of hysteria or pessimism were often present, and this phenomenon was not exclusive to Russian composers but was found internationally. A tendency towards melancholy, combined with a striking nervosity, also characterizes the first part of the opening movement, *Allegro*, and not until the development are there the first signs of a dramatic conflict, in the course of which the orchestral sonorities and the highly chromatic harmonies display a warmth that is more than slightly reminiscent of César Franck. The architecture of the movement is generously conceived, which makes the composer's comment on the symphony, 'sugared water with sighs of Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky', all the more perplexing, especially as it stands in sharp contrast to the previously quoted statement. The explanation is firstly that he often made jocular remarks about his latest works, and secondly that he took a very positive view of Tchaikovsky – who was, in Myaskovsky's opinion, the saviour of a symphonic form that had already been condemned to death, and thus also a personal rôle model. As for Rachmaninov, we can find echoes of his *Isle of the Dead* in the splendidly atmospheric second movement of this symphony, *Molto sostenuto*, which is no surprise given that the first performance of this tone poem after Böcklin had taken place in April 1909. The broadly conceived last movement, *Allegro con fuoco*, follows without a break. Formally this movement is extremely wilful: it begins like a scherzo but, as it unfolds, there are various quotations from and reminiscences of the earlier movements. Finally a strange mixture of scherzo and rondo emerges, with numerous episodes and violent, dramatic contrasts that gradually build up to the symphony's impressive conclusion.

The ***Symphony No. 18 in C major***, Op. 42, was written during one of the most terrible periods of the Soviet régime, in the middle of the Moscow Show Trials that took place from 1936 until 1938. At this time people could disappear without a trace, never to be seen again – and anybody who asked after someone who had 'gone away' in this fashion ran the risk of being next in line for the same fate. For a composer there was the additional reprimand that had begun in January 1936 with the famous article directed against Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, but in reality affected every composer: they were expected to align their art with the principles of Socialist Realism, to produce proud, 'popular' music that would, in an easily comprehensible manner, represent and pay tribute to the Soviet people on their way to a prosperous future!

It was hard to know how this could best be put into practice, however, because the 'artistic guidelines' of the country's political leadership were, to say the least, baffling; they could never be sure whether a particular sonority would, so to speak, receive official approval. Moreover, they lived in fear of the Terror, and it was thus not surprising that most composers invented some trick or other in order to avoid all danger. (The most ingenious trick, of course, was to stop composing altogether in the expectation of better times to come, but for a composer that meant cutting off one's most important source of income or even running the risk of being arrested for indolence.) In 1937, however, there was a perfect opportunity to write all kinds of musical tributes that might be estimated to arouse the benevolence of the Party: the twentieth anniversary of the Glorious October Revolution.

The notion that Myaskovsky's thoughts were running along these lines when he composed his *Eighteenth Symphony* is supported not only by the dedication, 'for the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution', but also by the fact that he did not compose the work as a traditional (one might perhaps say: orthodox) symphony, but rather as a rhapsodic presentation of a rich variety of folk-like melodies, seductively orchestrated. This applies to all the movements, even the finale with its dance-like character; perhaps Myaskovsky wished in this manner to ensure that he avoided any possible accusation of 'formalism'; at any rate, he himself described parts of the thematic material as 'songs without words'.

As so often with Myaskovsky, the work was composed with incredible speed: he needed three weeks to compose the piano sketch, and just one week for the orchestration. The first performance, conducted by Alexander Gauk, took place in Moscow on 1st October 1937, and within a short time the work was performed so often and had become so popular that it was even arranged for military band. When Myaskovsky heard this version, he decided to compose his next symphony for military band...



Volume 3
Symphonies #3 & 13

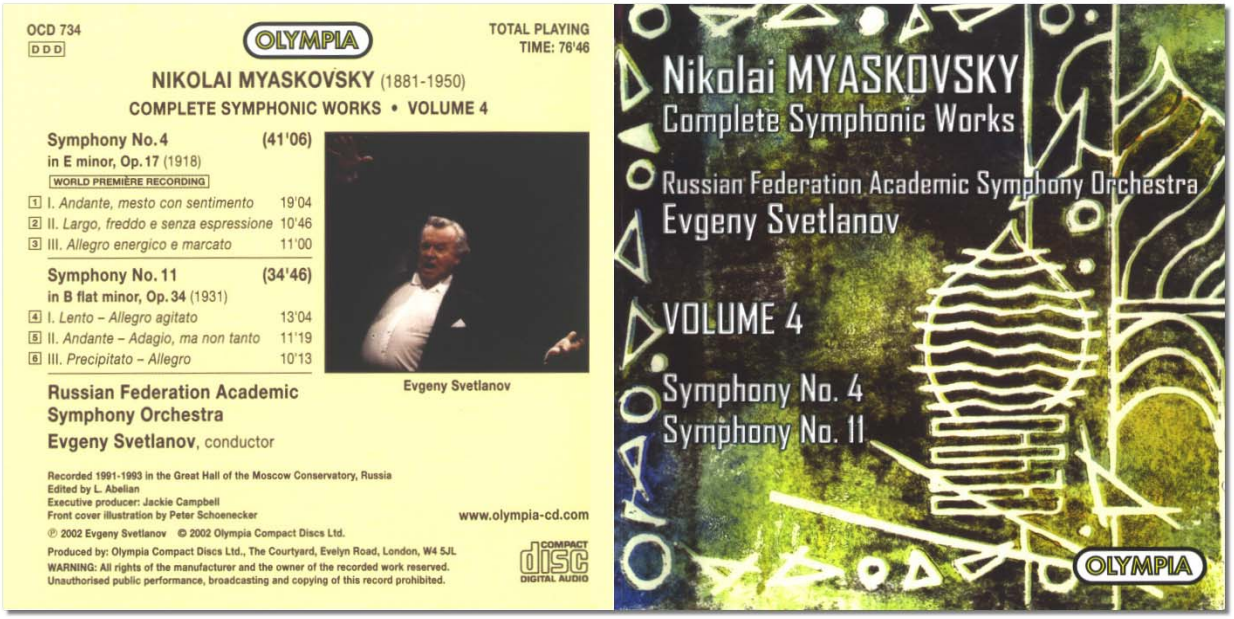
The ***Symphony No. 3 in A minor***, Op. 15, was dedicated to Boris Asafiev (one of the few cases of a composer dedicating a work to a critic!). It was written in 1914, just before the outbreak of the First World War, and is thus one of the works which, according to Myaskovsky's own account, bore a 'mark of deep pessimism'. At that time he was indeed suffering from depression – which had various causes, among them that he felt old by comparison with his colleagues (he had commenced his studies at a relatively advanced age); eloquent testimony to this is borne by his choice of the pseudonym 'Misanthropos' for some of the articles that he wrote. The *Third Symphony* has a national, Russian character that is more evident than in his earlier symphonies; we cannot know whether this was by chance, or whether Myaskovsky had some premonition of the war. As Russian music is in any case often slightly melancholic in character, the pessimism that the composer mentions is not at first particularly striking – not until the later stages of the symphony does it become dominant.

The work begins with a powerful theme in the manner of a motto, rather like Tchaikovsky's *Fourth Symphony* (but in a much lower register), and the dramatic music that unfolds is also similar. This notably generously proportioned movement is marked *Non troppo vivo; vigoroso*. The development section in particular is skilfully handled; the orchestration is perfectly suited to the structural context. It is in the first part of the second (and final) movement, *Deciso e sdegnoso*, however, that the Russian character really comes to the fore: a rhapsodic assembly of inherently very different themes, in strong contrast to the lyrical and sublime conclusion of the first movement. The movement title can be translated as 'decisive and incensed', but there are also extended passages of very beautiful lyrical writing. Finally the tempo moderates, and the dramatic music turns into a sort of long funeral march, which becomes ever more desperate and finally sinks into the deepest resignation.

Several enigmas surround the ***Symphony No. 13 in B flat minor***, Op. 36. The composer made some unfathomable remarks about the work, and Soviet musicologists suggested that some sort of personal tragedy might be associated with its composition. For political reasons, however, Soviet authors had to refrain from mentioning another conceivable reason for this tragedy: that Myaskovsky found it very difficult to come to terms with some aspects of the development of Soviet musical policy. It is known that this extremely productive composer produced hardly any orchestral music for four whole years (1927-31); nowadays we are certain that he was badly affected by the fact that the period of artistic freedom in the Soviet Union was coming to an end: the straitjacket of Socialist Realism was being fastened, and Myaskovsky – justifiably, as it turned out – regarded this development with dread.

The work was conceived very rapidly in February 1933, orchestrated somewhat later, and then premièred in Moscow under the direction of Lev Ginzburg; almost at the same time, it was performed in Chicago. In addition Myaskovsky's friend Prokofiev, who at that time worked principally in Paris, suggested that the piece should be (first?) performed in Paris as, in his opinion, the atmosphere was one that the French would be keen to encounter in a Russian work: they had formed the impression that recent Russian music lacked spiritual depth! Preparations were set in hand for such a concert, but Myaskovsky withdrew when he discovered that it would take place with the support of Parisian workers' associations. Not that he had anything against workers; but he thought that they would probably not be in the ideal position to look with favour upon an extremely serious piece of modern music. Although his generous project thus came to nothing, Prokofiev seems to have taken the news calmly; he knew his friend well and, as early as 1908, had said: 'Unlike Richard Wagner, you have the characteristic of always being dissatisfied with yourself.'

The *Thirteenth Symphony* is in a single movement, which in those days was still a rarity, and presumably took Scriabin's symphonic poems (which were in fact sometimes also referred to as symphonies) as its model. One might thus expect it to be hardly worth mentioning a tempo marking at all but, in this case, *Andante moderato* is an appropriate description of the entire work, even if some passages are labelled differently and are also significantly quicker. It is no surprise that Myaskovsky himself was especially fond of this work: to the 'diagnosis of his personality' made by Prokofiev twenty-five years earlier one might add a streak of melancholy and, with this melancholy as a starting-point, the symphony is a fine achievement. He himself described the symphony as 'a very pessimistic work with rather unusual content. This symphony is a sort of diary sheet' and, when listening, we do not perceive it as a symphonic structure but rather as a symphonic poem with veiled but nevertheless heart-rending expression.



Volume 4
Symphonies #4 & 11

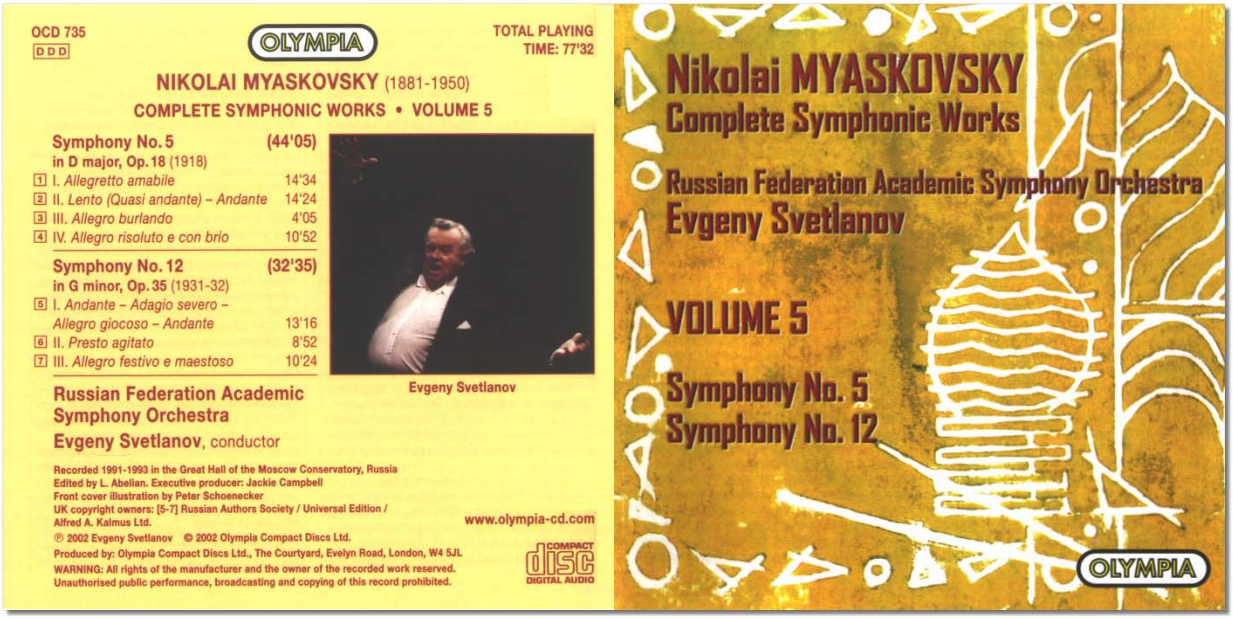
As mentioned above, Myaskovsky spent some time during the First World War in the Estonian capital, Tallinn. In December 1917, a few weeks after the October Revolution, he was transferred to the general staff of the fleet in St. Petersburg (the city was generally still called this by its inhabitants, although it had officially been renamed Petrograd). In the extremely brief period from 20th December 1917 until 5th April 1918, far away from the horrors of war, he completed not only his ***Symphony No. 4 in E minor***, Op. 17, but also his *Fifth Symphony*. He composed partly in his spare time, but also sometimes 'as duty officer [...] on the night watch in the unheated rooms of the Admiralty' (S. Gulinskaya). The *Fourth* is one of the works that the composer particularly liked; he had started to conceive it while still in Tallinn. He dedicated the symphony to Vasily Yakovlev, whose acquaintance he had made during his military training in St. Petersburg, and who similarly moved into a career in music, working as a respected musicologist.

Unlike Myaskovsky's earlier symphonies, this work moves towards a conclusion in the major. He claimed to have planned the symphony originally as 'quiet, simple and humble', and the beginning indeed expresses this spirit, adding an anguished idea based on the simplest imaginable germ cell: two notes forming a rising interval of a second. The most important word in the tempo marking, *Andante, mesto con sentimento*, is 'mesto' ('sad'); the tempo itself is of little relevance, as slow and fast passages constantly alternate, forming a contrast that becomes ever more dramatic, even vehement. It is understandable that this movement has often been interpreted as an echo of the composer's wartime experiences. Myaskovsky described the opening of the second movement as 'cold and without feeling' – *Largo, freddo e senza espressione*; it begins with a powerful fugato, but its extensive passages of lyrical writing are far removed from such a description. The composer once said, not unexpectedly, that he had been inspired by the atmosphere of Russian cradle songs when writing this movement. The finale, *Allegro energico e marcato*, is the first proper fast movement in the symphony; fundamentally in rondo form, it is slowly but surely built up to a radiant conclusion with a robust instinct for drama.

In his 'Autobiographical Notes', Myaskovsky observed that 'the war enriched my store of internal and external impressions, and at the same time somehow provoked a certain lightening of my musical thoughts'. The *Fourth Symphony* is an excellent example of this.

No less than four years (1927-31) passed between Myaskovsky's *Tenth* and *Eleventh Symphonies* – by his standards, an unusually long time. Apart from composing three short orchestral works, Op. 32, he was then principally occupied with string quartets, piano music, songs and music for wind band. This pause in his orchestral output is puzzling. Whilst Soviet musicologists liked to claim that Myaskovsky had adjusted himself in a positive sense to the new era, other scholars believe that he underwent a personal crisis. It is certain that he left the Association for Contemporary Music (ASM) in 1931 – followed by Kabalevsky, Shebalin and others – and that the period of great artistic freedom in the young Soviet Union was gradually coming to an end; in 1932 the associations of avant-garde composers (and other artists) were forcibly dissolved by the government, and the principles of Socialist Realism were established, with which all composers were expected to align themselves. Just before that, in 1931, Myaskovsky wrote his ***Symphony No. 11 in B flat minor***, Op. 34, which he dedicated to the composer Maximilian Steinberg, son-in-law of Rimsky-Korsakov. The symphony was not, however, premièred until 16th January 1933 in Moscow, by which time he had partially revised the score, especially the finale. He himself described the work as a portrait of subjective emotions.

At first glance the work appears to be classically constructed, although it contains some interesting details. The formal unity of this three-movement symphony is achieved not least by its essentially monothematic structure: the basic thematic material is presented in the first movement's slow introduction (*Lento*) and is then developed further, in an almost nervous manner, in the *Allegro agitato*. The essentially sublime beginning of the *Andante* is unexpectedly followed by a sonorous woodwind fugato, *Adagio, ma non tanto*, whilst the finale, *Precipitato – Allegro*, offers another formal surprise: a series of variations on several themes, one of which comes from the second movement, combined with sonata form; it was especially the development section that was extended during the process of revising the symphony. The work is, admittedly, in the minor key, but it contains extensive positive passages and serves as a good example of Myaskovsky's 'easy' style, of the works that are easily understood and uncomplicated.



Volume 5
Symphonies #5 & 12

As mentioned above, Myaskovsky spent some time during the First World War in the Estonian capital, Tallinn. In December 1917, a few weeks after the October Revolution, he was transferred to the general staff of the fleet in St. Petersburg (the city was generally still called this by its inhabitants, although it had officially been renamed Petrograd). In the extremely brief period from 20th December 1917 until 5th April 1918, far away from the horrors of war, he completed not only his *Fourth Symphony* (OCD 734), but also his ***Symphony No. 5 in D major***, Op. 18. He composed partly in his spare time, but also sometimes 'as duty officer [...] on the night watch in the unheated rooms of the Admiralty' (S. Gulinskaya), and it is striking that the two works bear consecutive opus numbers. When the world-renowned conductor Nikolai Malko gave the work its first performance in Moscow on 18th August 1920, the audience, enchanted, demanded an encore of the third movement. The piece soon became a huge international success in a way that listeners of today – who are no longer used to Myaskovsky's music being performed regularly – might find sensational. Soon after the Moscow performance, the symphony was heard to great public approbation in Madrid, Prague, Vienna, Chicago and Philadelphia; and when Stokowski conducted it in New York, Prokofiev told Myaskovsky that the demand for tickets for this acclaimed concert was so great that, despite their prominence, he, Joseph Szigeti, Alexander Siloti and Alfredo Casella could only obtain standing places!

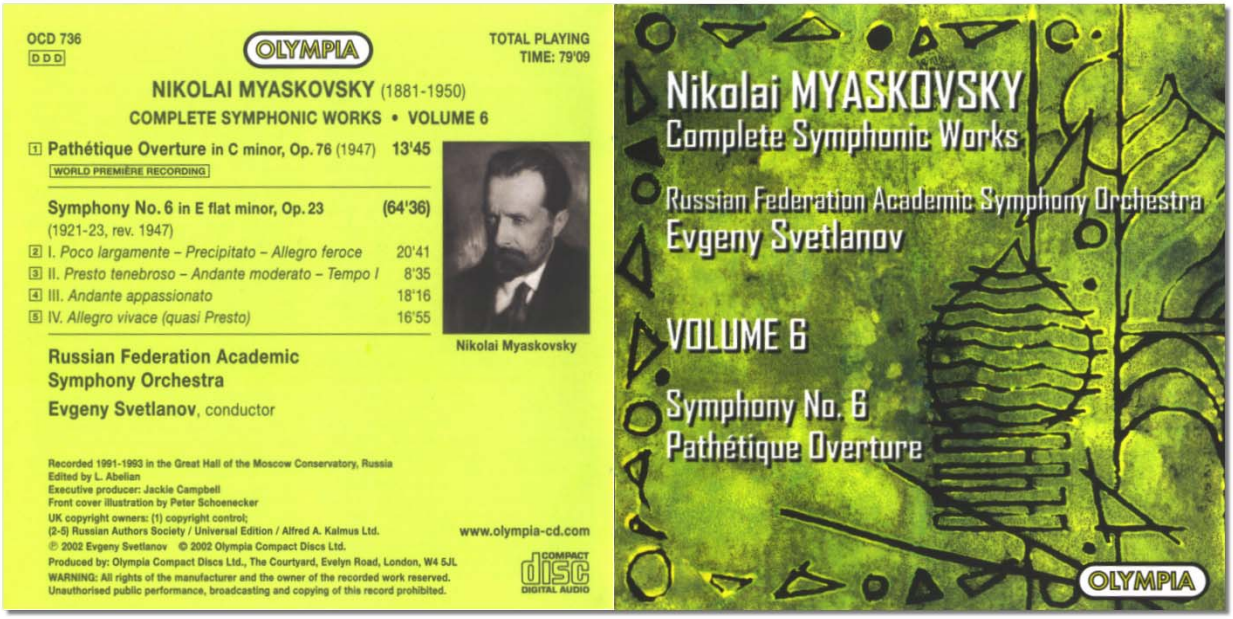
Three factors in particular help to explain the success of this symphony. Firstly, it was wholly in accord with the spirit of the era. Both before and during the war years, international audiences had waited in vain for Russian symphonies in the traditional style; the major works that had appeared – for instance those of Scriabin – had little in common with these traditions, and other composers were unable to make a significant impact in this area. Secondly, it is an extremely fresh work (it is, incidentally, Myaskovsky's first symphony in a major key). Finally, some passages are clearly influenced by folk music – even though it was written more than a decade before this was to become an artistic principle, one of the basic tenets of Socialist Realism. Along with the *Fourth Symphony*, this work was often described as the 'birth of Soviet Russian symphonism'.

The symphony begins peacefully, as is suggested by the tempo marking, *Allegretto amabile*: pastoral themes and archaic phrases alternate, with an impressive climax towards the end of the development section. Myaskovsky regarded the second movement, *Lento (quasi andante)*, followed by an *Andante*, as especially successful. It begins with a melancholy berceuse, after which follows a restless second theme. Next comes what is perhaps the strangest section of the entire symphony, in which the two themes are combined in a highly dramatic fashion in a long and technically brilliant fugato. The scherzo, *Allegro burlando*, is based on Myaskovsky's recollections of the time he spent on the Austrian front; the main theme is a Ukrainian Christmas melody (*kolyadka*) from Galicia that he noted down in the vicinity of Lvov; it is here combined with two other related melodies. The finale, *Allegro risoluto e con brio*, presents a great variety of thematic material, including the powerful subsidiary theme of the first movement. This theme finally emerges majestically from among the others and provides the symphony with a grandiose, hymn-like conclusion.

After the *Tenth Symphony*, four whole years had passed (1927-31) before Myaskovsky wrote his *Eleventh* (OCD 734). That work appeared in 1931 but, even while he was working on it, ideas were forming for its successor; work on the new symphony continued so seamlessly that these two pieces also bear consecutive opus numbers. The ***Symphony No. 12 in G minor***, Op. 35, bore the dedication 'For the fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution'; despite experiencing ill health, Myaskovsky composed the piece during the winter of 1931-32, completing it on 31st January 1932. The première was given on 1st July of that year by the orchestra of the Bolshoi Theatre, with an interesting choice of conductor: the Englishman Albert Coates, who had some Russian roots; he had worked in Russia before the First World War, and had now returned. Myaskovsky was not at all happy with his interpretation, especially because the conductor paid little attention to the tempi. After Myaskovsky had sat through the rehearsals, with ever-increasing grumpiness, he was almost happy to be prevented by a severe bout of flu from attending the concert. After the première he made some corrections to the score, and the piece was published in time for the anniversary to which the dedication referred in November (the October Revolution was always celebrated in November according to the Gregorian calendar which was introduced after it had taken place).

The three movements of the work, which was originally called 'Kolkhoz Symphony', were an attempt to adapt not only to the new, emergent artistic atmosphere (the principles of Socialist Realism had just been 'cooked up' and were published shortly after the completion of the symphony) but also to the political slogans of the era. The movements served as three images of a Russian village: first of all before the October Revolution, then during the struggle for a new life, and finally after the victory over the Kulaks. The Kulaks, rich farmers who owned large tracts of land, were completely wiped out at the beginning of the Stalinist era, to a large extent by physical extermination; this fact, however, came only gradually to the attention of the Soviet people. The musicologist Levon Hakobian stresses that it is only fair to concede that 'this artistic compromise gradually came to fill him [Myaskovsky] with shame', and this also explains the puzzling atmosphere of the Thirteenth Symphony (OCD 733) which was composed immediately afterwards.

The first movement is characterized by a rather rhapsodic character that is unusual in a symphonic context. In this movement, Soviet musicologists thought they could detect a portrayal of 'subjugated peasants' before the Revolution; they never explained, though, how in these circumstances the dance-like high spirits of the *Allegro giocoso* in the latter part of the movement should be understood. Martial brass writing characterizes the *Presto agitato*, the scherzo of the symphony, in which the struggle for a new life is depicted, full of dramatic succintness. The finale is marked *Allegro festivo e maestoso* and has the character of a joyous folk festival; isolated, gloomy reminiscences of the past (in the form of quotations from the first two movements) cannot prevent the arrival of the jubilant conclusion.



Volume 6
Symphony #6 & Pathétique Overture

The ***Pathétique Overture in C minor***, Op. 76, comes from the last years of Myaskovsky's life; it was composed in 1947 for the thirty-year anniversary of the Red Army. The structure of the work is very interesting, as the entire opening section – somewhat more than five minutes in length – is as far removed as one could imagine from the conventional, generally exaggeratedly pompous atmosphere of works of this type. We may well assume that, with this ceremonial yet serious, even gloomy introduction, the composer was thinking of the horrors of the recent Great Patriotic War (the Russian term for the Second World War). After that, however, a brief transition leads to a defiantly energetic *Allegro*, the main theme of which is worked out with skilful orchestration, almost exclusively in the minor key. What seems to be the start of a lyrical subsidiary theme remains no more than that, whereupon the main theme returns and gradually prepares the way for a brief final apotheosis in the radiant major key. Despite the structure with a slow introduction, a fast main theme and a slow subsidiary theme, the work cannot be described as an example of sonata form: apart from the fact that the introduction would be too extensive for that, there is no trace of a development section. The piece nevertheless creates the organic impression of an impressive 'rising from the ashes' and is thus far superior to the majority of similar occasional pieces in the history of music. The Soviet leadership, however, had hoped for something more heroic: in Order No. 17 of the Council of Ministers, dated 14th February 1948, a total ban was imposed on the overture!

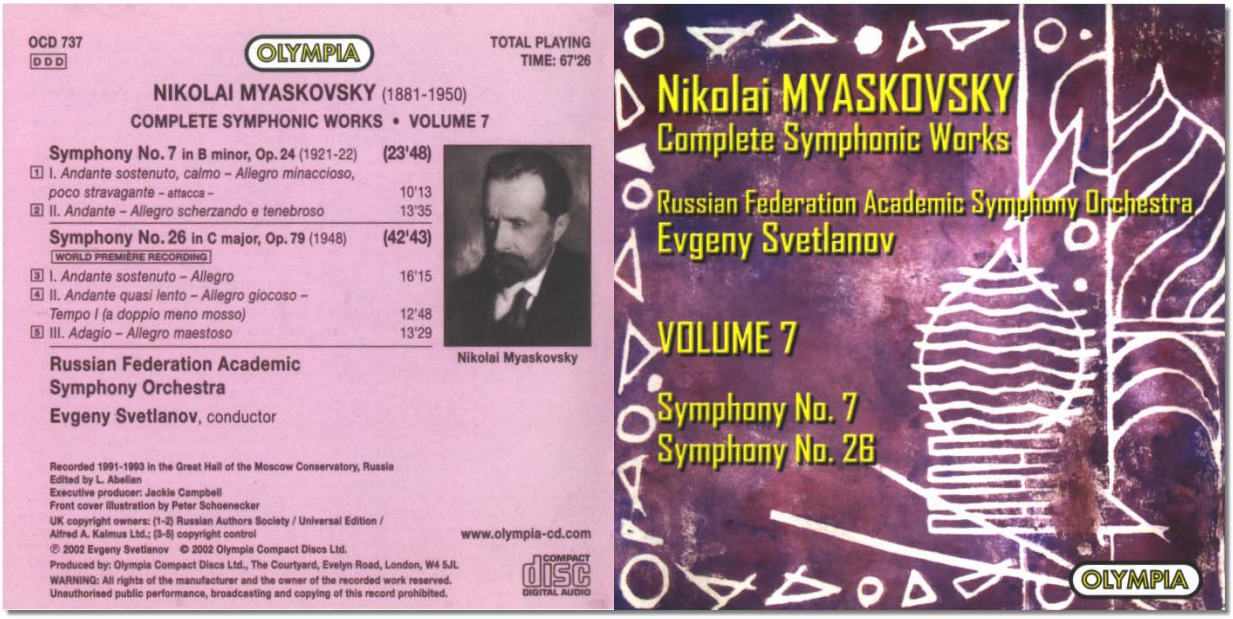
Next, however, we move back to the 1920s, the period in which Myaskovsky's world fame was consolidated. His *Symphony No. 5 in D major* (OCD 735) had been premièred in August 1920, and had soon begun its triumphant journey around the musical world. In 1921 he started work on his ***Symphony No. 6 in E flat minor***, Op. 23, a work for which (by his own standards) he required an unusually long time: he did not complete it for two years. The reasons for this lay not only in the symphony's monumental scale and remarkable duration, but also in personal concerns, as Myaskovsky's father and one of his aunts had just died. In addition to this, there were problems associated with the composition of a work on such a scale. Soviet commentaries stated that it had been a particular test of strength to portray in music the developments of the previous years in Russia, but in 2001 a Russian musicologist even described the symphony as 'a shattering farewell to a bygone era'. There are numerous indications that the composer, who was always extremely self-critical, felt uncertain when writing the work: when he was almost ready with the sketches for the first movement, he started again from the beginning because he was dissatisfied with the subsidiary theme; he prefaced the (mixed) choral part with the words 'ad libitum' (indeed, the choir is normally omitted), and he did not merely correct details of orchestration after the première but undertook a further revision of the work in 1947. The audience at the première, conducted by Nikolai Golovanov at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow on 4th May 1924 demonstrated its approbation: the work was an overwhelming success, and the applause lasted almost a quarter of an hour before the composer somewhat reluctantly appeared on stage; he had to return six times, and a huge laurel wreath was placed around his neck. Shortly afterwards he wrote to Prokofiev in Paris that the symphony had made a 'shattering' impression on those present. The symphony appeared in print the very next year but, as Myaskovsky did not wish to deplete the meagre paper stocks of the Soviet state publisher with such a massive score, it was published by Universal Edition in Vienna. (It is not inconceivable that financial considerations may also have played a part in his decision.)

An important period in the composition of this symphony was the summer of 1922, which Myaskovsky spent in Klin with the famous musicologist Pavel Lamm and his family – the same place where, some thirty years previously, Tchaikovsky had composed his *'Pathétique' Symphony*. Many Russian musicologists hold the view that this could have exerted a certain psychological influence. At least we can be sure that, in this work, Myaskovsky continued the tradition of Tchaikovsky's later symphonies as 'quasi-programmatic drama' in which a conflict, not expressed in words, is played out and resolved in music. It is also certain that the reports of a painter named Lopatinsky represented an extremely tangible source of inspiration. He had lived for a long time in Paris and pointed out to Myaskovsky that some of the songs from the period of the French Revolution were still sung by the inhabitants of Parisian workers' suburbs. For Myaskovsky this knowledge provided the decisive impulse to include in his symphony songs that were similarly well-known in Russia.

When writing the symphony, Myaskovsky adhered strictly to traditional sonata form, while succeeding in achieving a synthesis of sonata form and more modern elements. In its lyrical moments, the character of the symphony is admittedly Romantic, at times impressionistic. The link with tradition becomes apparent in a variety of ways; the Armenian musicologist Levon Hakobian, for example, points out that the principal motif of the first movement (heard after a brief introduction) is related to the 'question motif' ('Muß es sein?') in Beethoven's Op. 135 string quartet – the same idea that appears again in Weber's *Freischütz* overture, the fate motif in Wagner's *Ring*, Liszt's *Les Préludes* and César Franck's *Symphony in D minor*. The movement develops at the highest dramatic level, exploiting the contrasts between its two principal ideas and further subsidiary themes – among them one that is reminiscent of the Chorus of Old Believers in Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*. Such dramatic tension is created that it would have been almost impossible to follow the first movement with a slow movement, for which reason the scherzo, a *Presto tenebroso* ('shadowy Presto'), is placed second. The mysterious atmosphere does full justice to this marking – the music is restless, full of rustling sonorities. Suddenly a march-like theme appears, then we return to lyricism; the celesta is especially striking, playing the *Dies iræ* that is so popular in Russian music, on this occasion tenderly and caressingly.

The *Andante appassionato* begins with a horn theme that had been heard previously in the first movement (with slight rhythmic differences), and soon we hear the main theme of the movement from the clarinet. Despite the passion and two appearances of the *Dies iræ*, the movement remains characterized by a spiritual, inner harmony, and serves as a moment of respite between two dramatic movements.

In sharp contrast, the finale begins with a splendid feast of sound that almost sounds as though Ottorino Respighi had secretly contributed a few bars to Myaskovsky's score from a piece on which he was then working: *The Pines of Rome*. Here, too, we find the answer to the 'Beethoven' motif from the first movement, i.e. the inverse, 'Es muß sein!' A joyful bacchanale contains and combines the French songs *La Carmagnole* and *Ça ira*. In the tangle of themes we notice once again the *Dies iræ*, followed by a theme reminiscent of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, and suddenly there appears a melody often sung in the Russian Orthodox Church: *The Parting of Soul and Body*. In the heavenly coda, the theme of the slow movement comes once more to the fore.



Volume 7
Symphonies #7 & 26

In some ways the 1920s were the most successful years of Myaskovsky's career. In this period his world fame was not only established but also reached unique heights, especially through the *Fifth* and *Sixth Symphonies* (OCD 735/736), premièred in 1920 and 1924 respectively and soon greeted with enthusiasm all over the world. It is nowadays hard to understand what sort of a world-class musical celebrity he then was, as a few years later the stocks of all Soviet composers fell sharply, ruined by the constant rise of Stalinism. After the Second World War, the leading Western musical circles had little interest in anything other than their own blossoming avant-garde. It is well-known that Stalinism created considerable difficulties for Soviet composers in their own country, as Myaskovsky was to discover to his cost; more of this later.

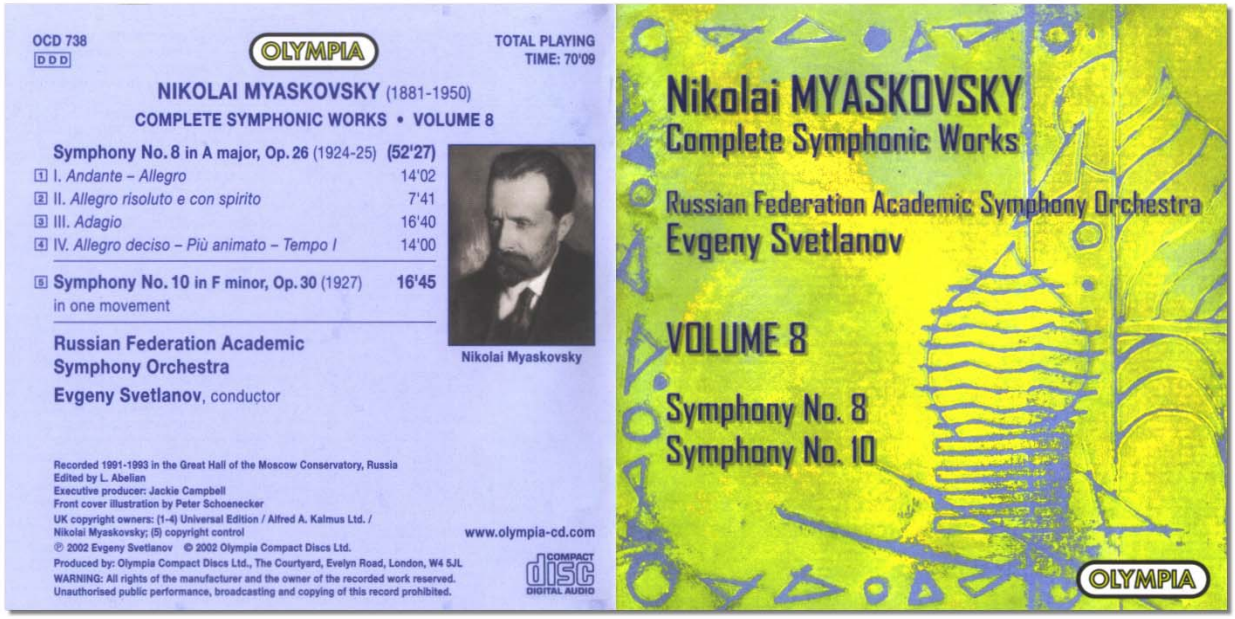
Even in the 1920s there were artistic disputes in the USSR that could make life hard for composers who worked in traditional ways – especially involving the radical groups who, with vehement revolutionary zeal, would have preferred to have closed the Bolshoi Theatre and silenced the symphony orchestras: this, however, was too much even for the Communist leadership. These events rumbled on to some extent outside the window of Myaskovsky's study while he was composing his ***Symphony No. 7 in B minor***, Op. 24. He had begun to sketch the work as early as 1921; while hard at work on his *Sixth Symphony*, and he completed it in 1922. That year he spent the summer with the famous musicologist Pavel Lamm and his family in Klin, and Lamm was to be the dedicatee of the symphony. The first performance took place in Moscow on 8th February 1925, under the baton of the outstanding Armenian conductor Konstantin Saradzhev.

The *Seventh Symphony* could be described in slightly simplistic terms as a reaction against the exertion of energy in its huge and dramatic predecessor (although this should not be taken disparagingly). It is not much more than a third of the length of the *Sixth Symphony*, and forms a striking contrast to that work's epic structure; in other respects, too, it differs from the *Sixth* even though they were written at almost the same time. In particular the harmonic style is more highly developed, and it is clear that Myaskovsky had, in the meantime, heard a new work by Ravel: *La Valse*. Hints of that work – both harmonic and in terms of orchestration – can be heard in the first movement, after an introduction in which Myaskovsky quotes a folk-song that he had heard played on a shepherd's horn in the village of Batovo in 1912. The composer was especially satisfied with the second movement (which is also the finale) – indeed so satisfied that he considered withdrawing all six of his earlier symphonies! If we bear in mind the artistic quality and, not least, the sweeping international success of some of these works, this idea seems strange, but on the other hand we can understand his enthusiasm for this splendid 'symphonic poem' with its dramatic contrast between the slow introduction and the following rush to the conclusion.

The circumstances surrounding the second work on this CD were tragic – no other word will suffice. Like all of his colleagues, Myaskovsky had known – since the time of certain threatening decrees against the world of culture in 1946 at the latest – that the atmosphere of relative artistic freedom that had prevailed during the war years was now at an end. The rules of Socialist Realism were once again disinterred, and this would not have been so bad if they really were substantial, clear rules. In fact, however, the regulations were so diffuse that they could only be of use to a composer who was in any case traditionally inclined; anyone with a more exploratory spirit could never really know how he was supposed to write – unless he was totally given over to eclecticism. In the fateful year of 1948, Myaskovsky suffered one blow after another. It was one thing that a total ban had been imposed upon his *Pathétique Overture* (OCD 736), written in part as a sop to the authorities; but he, a doyen of Soviet composers, was one of the few to be singled out for severe criticism by name by the selfsame authorities, almost at the same time, principally on account of the vague offence of 'formalism'. He was, however, in good company: the others were Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Popov, Kabalevsky and Shebalin. At that time Myaskovsky was not especially old (on 20th April he celebrated his 67th birthday), but he was already seriously ill, and these events did nothing to prolong his life.

In 1948, when – in these circumstances – he composed his ***Symphony No. 26 in C major***, Op. 79, he tried to stay within the permitted boundaries. He made use of the folklore recommended by the Party, and when we listen to this symphony, which he called a 'symphony on Russian themes' and is to a large extent written in the folk style, it is hard to imagine what might have been contentious about it. All the same, after the first performance – conducted by Alexander Gauk on 28th December before the committee of the Soviet Composers' Union – it was criticized severely for being 'too gloomy' and not appropriate for the optimistic spirit of Communism! Not until the following year did somebody 'upstairs' apparently realize that Myaskovsky had been done an injustice; suddenly, positive articles about him were published.

The three movements are similar in structure. Like his Hungarian colleague Bartók, Myaskovsky does not use any direct quotations from folk music, but instead transforms it and sometimes composes new material in the same style. In a slow introduction, a theme reminiscent of a *bylina* is presented, and in the faster main section the folk material is skilfully worked out: in the first movement as a fugato, in the second as an in-built scherzo (a set of variations), whilst in the third movement slow and faster sections alternate, leading to the jubilant conclusion. The style is straightforward and yet refined in its simplicity; in terms of folksiness it leaves little to be desired, and in the last analysis the symphony outlived those people who once received it with such incomprehension.



Volume 8
Symphonies #8 & 10

The 1920s can be described as the period of Myaskovsky's greatest international successes. On 18th August 1924, shortly after the first performance of the *Sixth Symphony*, later so successful all over the world, and having already completed his *Seventh Symphony*, Myaskovsky wrote to his friend Prokofiev (who was then living in the West): 'Today I finished the first sketches for my *Eighth Symphony* – in winter I shall return to it, and then I shall have a rest from symphonies for a while.' In fact Myaskovsky's 'rest' from writing symphonies started rather later, but it is interesting that he seemed to be planning it as early as 1924; the reasons for this have never been researched exhaustively. As promised, however, the new symphony was completed in 1925, and the first performance of the ***Symphony No. 8 in A major***, Op. 26, took place in Moscow on 23rd May 1926 under the baton of the Armenian conductor Konstantin Saradzhev, who about a year earlier had given the première of the *Seventh Symphony* as well. The new piece was dedicated to the musicologist Sergei Popov.

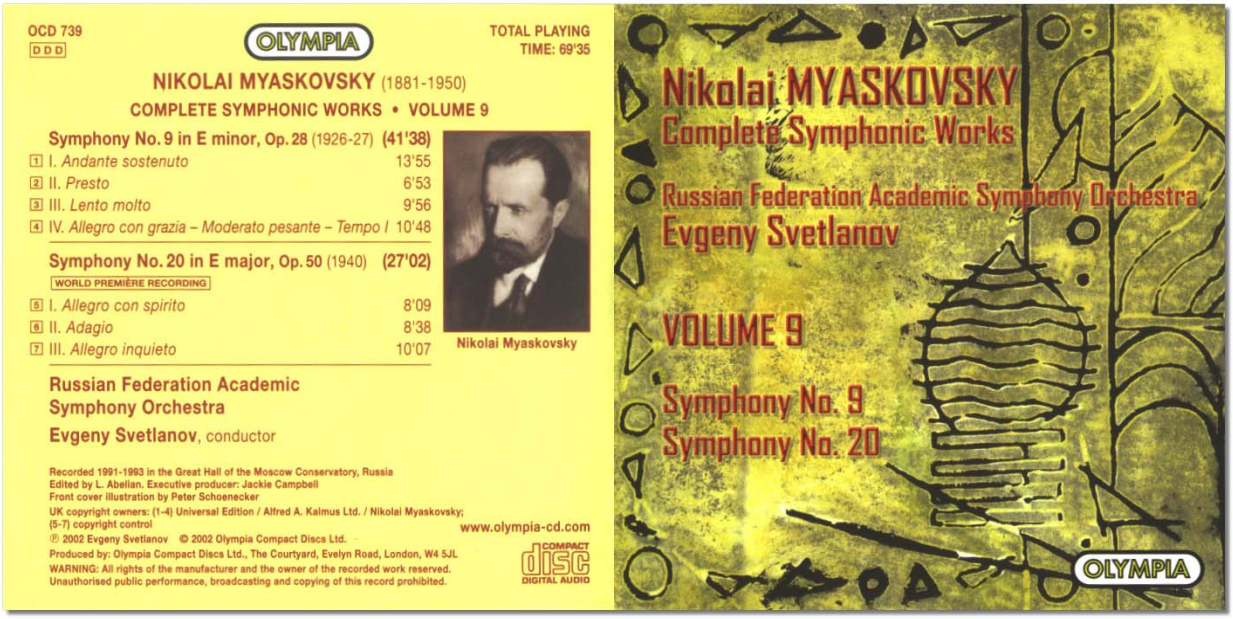
The origins of this monumental symphony were not entirely unproblematic. 'At first I had the idea of a finale on a theme that I believed to be a song about Stepan Razin, which I wanted to combine with some Volga songs', Myaskovsky later explained – but, after he had composed a considerable part of the music, it turned out that what he had believed to be a folk-song was in fact a composition by Balakirev on an entirely different subject. He therefore had to depart in no small measure from his original conception of a symphonic portrait of the folk hero Stepan Razin, and change the work's structure accordingly.

The composer characterized the first movement tersely as follows: 'epic, narrative, steppe, nature'. It is a nature portrait with folk-like (but in fact originally composed) thematic material and Impressionist sonorities that are presumably intended to represent the infinite expanse of the steppes. Next comes a similarly folk-inspired scherzo in virtuoso 7/4-time; here, however, the music is based on genuine originals from Rimsky-Korsakov's collection *One Hundred Russian Folk-Songs*. The story concerns Stepan Razin and his fighting men in a boat on the Volga, and how Stepan throws his beloved – a Persian princess – into the river. The third movement depicts the suffering peasantry on the basis of a Bashkirian folk melody; Russian and Oriental elements are combined in a way that is very traditional in Russian music. In the finale, there is another description of Stepan Razin and his fighters and of how they eventually meet their end. Myaskovsky was especially pleased with the orchestration of this work, and the symphony was received enthusiastically, especially by younger listeners.

The single-movement ***Symphony No. 10 in F minor***, Op. 30, was inspired by Pushkin's famous poem *The Bronze Horseman*, the extremely poetic depiction of a catastrophic flood of the River Neva at St. Petersburg. In November 1926 Myaskovsky undertook his one and only trip abroad; he travelled to Warsaw for the unveiling of the Chopin monument and to Vienna, where he signed a contract with Universal Edition. He could not be persuaded to stay in Vienna, however, but returned to Moscow after just two and a half weeks, suffering from terrible homesickness. There he started work on his *Ninth Symphony*, and shortly afterwards also on the *Tenth*. Work on the two pieces proceeded in parallel, and they were both completed at almost the same time, in late 1927. The first performance of the *Tenth* was given in Moscow on 2nd April 1928 by Persimfans – this name is an abbreviation of the Russian words for 'first symphonic ensemble', the name of the first conductorless orchestra. The *Tenth Symphony* was dedicated to Saradzhev, however, who particularly championed Myaskovsky's music and who gave the première of the *Ninth Symphony* that very month. It might have been better if he had also conducted the *Tenth*; despite the musicians' skill, without a conductor the players of Persimfans soon began audibly to get out of step.

The *Tenth* is among the shortest of Myaskovsky's symphonies, but it makes up for its lack of length by means of volume, beauty of sound and contrapuntal mastery. According to the composer's own account, it is 'filled with the deafening racket of four trumpets, eight horns and the like', and the drama, thematic amplitude and sonic euphoria are overwhelming. Myaskovsky was secretly pleased to see how all the music critics tried in vain to work out the content of the symphony – he himself had given no indications of what it might be. After Stokowski had conducted the work in the USA, the composer wrote to Prokofiev: 'In these programme books, the search for a "subject" for my *Tenth* is very entertaining; almost all the "icthyosaurs" of Russian literature as far as Cheraskov and Bogdanovich have been called into play, whilst Pushkin, the real "trigger" of the whole thing, has only been mentioned very modestly at the end. At any rate I took the very conscious decision to keep silent about the *Bronze Horseman*, in order to prevent our clever critics from merely registering "flood" instead of "spiritual collisions" and possibly justifying this by referring to the abundance of notes in this symphony. While composing the piece, I had before my "inner eye" mostly the drawings of A. Benois (perhaps you remember: Yevgeny, fleeing from the Knight, by whom he is pursued) and all imaginable lyricists and confused groanings...'

Note: By comparison with the dinosaurs that are so much in vogue at present, the icthyosaurs are less well-known: they were 'any extinct marine reptile of the order Icthyosauria, with long head, tapering body, four flippers, and usu., a large tail' (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*).'



Volume 9
Symphonies #9 & 20

In November 1926 Myaskovsky undertook his one and only trip abroad; he travelled to Warsaw for the unveiling of the Chopin monument and to Vienna, where he signed a contract with Universal Edition. He could not be persuaded to stay in Vienna, however, but returned to Moscow after just two and a half weeks, suffering from terrible homesickness. There he started work on his *Ninth Symphony*, and shortly afterwards also on the *Tenth*. Work on the two pieces proceeded in parallel, and they were both completed at almost the same time, in late 1927. The *Tenth* was actually premièred before the *Ninth*, on 2nd April 1928; the ***Symphony No. 9 in E minor***, Op. 28, was first performed in Moscow on 29th April under the baton of Konstantin Saradzhev, and was dedicated to another outstanding Soviet conductor, Nikolai Malko.

As early as the summer of 1926, when he was in the village of Tuchkovo, Myaskovsky had started to develop something that he referred to as 'an undefinable musical animal' and described as 'half suite, half symphony'. These were the sketches that he continued to work on after his trip abroad, resulting in the new symphony; before he orchestrated it, however, he turned to the *Tenth Symphony* (OCD 738), a work of a very different character.

When he composed the *Ninth*, Myaskovsky had just received scores of some of Debussy's orchestral works from Prokofiev (regrettably we do not know which works they were), and he admired his French colleague's ability to portray images of nature in music. The impressions he gained from these scores must have made an impact on the orchestration of his new, four-movement symphony (for instance in his writing for the woodwind or the overall sonority of the second movement). The work is relatively free of conflict and can, in slightly exaggerated terms, be interpreted as a series of images from Russian nature. This is supported by the thematic material, which reveals traces of the rich world of Russian folk music. In Myaskovsky's view this was his first 'orchestral work that is easy to play, that is to say that, in practical, musical terms, it sits comfortably under the fingers'. The first movement, *Andante sostenuto*, is broad and contemplative, at times almost epic and late-Romantic, with a character that seems virtually archaic for a twentieth-century symphony. After this almost gloomy movement comes a scherzo, a dazzling *Presto*, where Myaskovsky has unparalleled success in integrating folk-like themes into a virtuoso orchestral setting. With its abundance of lyrical melancholy, the main theme of the slow movement that follows (*Lento molto*) has been described by Zoya Gulinskaya as one of the 'most beautiful and most intimate of Myaskovsky's melodies'. The finale begins in a manner that is more dance-like than symphonic; in several subsidiary episodes the thematic material is seriously and sternly taken to pieces, but then the dance-like character returns to end the work in a festive mood.

One might think that the premières of two symphonies by a single composer in the course of a single music festival would be exceptional in the extreme but, in Myaskovsky's case – as mentioned previously – this had already happened once, and in 1940 it was to happen again. Although war was already raging in much of Europe, life in the Soviet Union was proceeding relatively calmly and peacefully. The 'great terror' of the 1930s was almost completely over, its place having been taken by something approaching a situation of normality. Some years earlier, regular festivals had been established to display the achievements of modern Soviet music, and in November 1940 the Fourth Soviet Music Days were held in Moscow. In this context, Myaskovsky's *Symphony No. 21* (OCD 743) was premièred on 16th November, and on 28th November the first performance of his ***Symphony No. 20 in E major***, Op. 50, was given by the Large Symphony Orchestra of the All-Union Radio conducted by Nikolai Golovanov; the work was dedicated to Myaskovsky's fellow composer Yuri Shaporin. Competition at this festival was as hard as nails. Between the two Myaskovsky premières, for example, there was the première of a production of Wagner's *Die Walküre* at the Bolshoi Theatre that must have been a fascinating experience; it was directed by Sergei Eisenstein and in the presence of leading figures from the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

Myaskovsky evidently planned 'just one' symphony for the festival, and by May, six months ahead of the event, he had already sketched all three movements of the *Symphony No. 20*. Before orchestrating it, however, he started to compose his next piece (which was starting to become urgent, as there was a commission from Chicago), and he wrote it in one fell swoop, before completing the *Symphony No. 20*. These were to be the last symphonies that he finished before the outbreak of war.

The three-movement *Symphony No. 20* is characterized by clarity and a consistent lightness of mood, and can be compared with some of his works from the preceding years, for example the *Symphony No. 17* (1937) and also with the *Symphony No. 9* heard on this recording. The introductory *Allegro con spirito* is powerful and dramatic, with striking polyphonic craftsmanship in the development section and elegant handling of details. In the *Adagio*, the main theme and its working-out are extremely traditional, and in the finale, with the marking *Allegro inquieto* ('Uneasy *Allegro*'), the treatment of the folk-like themes – which are on occasion reminiscent of Borodin – and their dramatic development lead to a splendid conclusion which, by means of an unexpected change of mood in the closing minutes, even assumes the character of a jubilant hymn.

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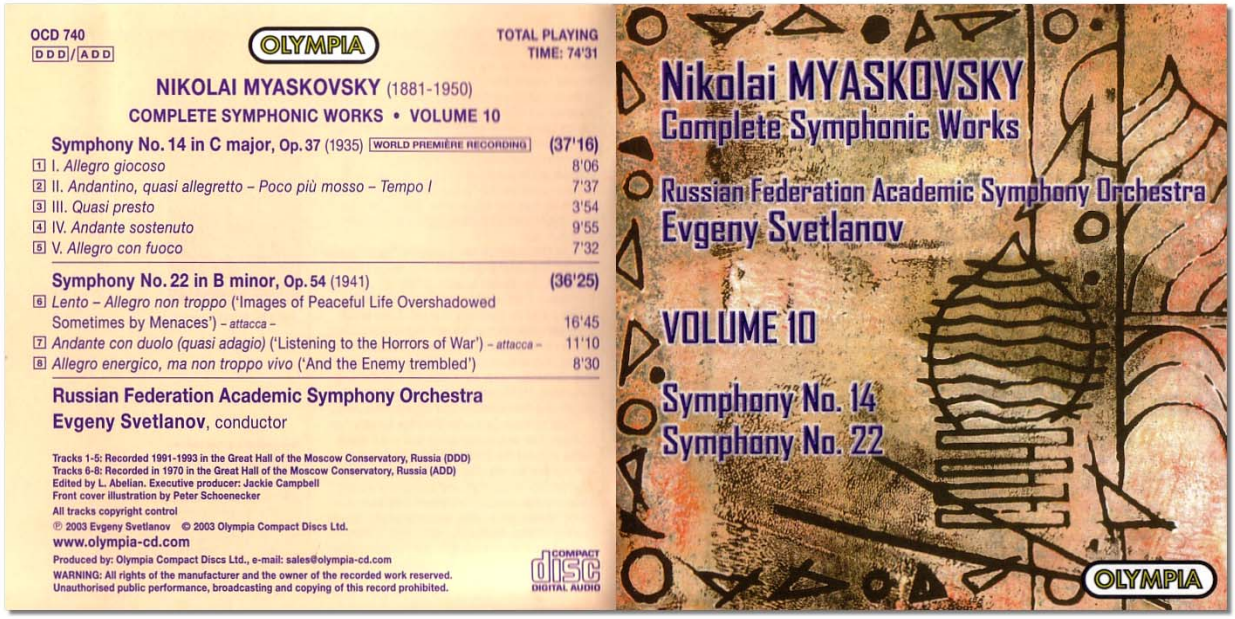

Volume 10
Symphonies #14 & 22

Symphony Nos. 16 & 19

On 18th May 1935 a Soviet plane named 'Maxim Gorky' collided with a smaller aircraft and crashed. This eight-engined Tupolev plane was a worldwide sensation. Its wingspan, for instance, was larger than that of a present day Jumbo jet; in comfort and size it surpassed anything that had gone before, and for a long time it set the standard by which large planes were measured. The following day, the famous writer and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry mourned this giant of the skies in sad but lyrical terms – 'the gangways, the salon, the cabins, the on-board telephone'; the Soviet people regarded the loss of this proud machine as a national catastrophe. This is the light in which we should see the subtitle of Myaskovsky's Symphony No. 16 in F major, Op. 39: it became known as the 'Aviation Symphony'. The work was dedicated to the Moscow State Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, which gave the symphony its première at the opening concert of the 1936–37 season in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on 24th October 1936. It was conducted by the Hungarian Jenö Szenkár, principal conductor of the orchestra from 1934 until 1937 – a brilliant champion of contemporary music who had given the first performance of Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin* at the Cologne Opera in 1926. Sergei Prokofiev attended the concert and wrote an enthusiastic review for the journal *Sowetskoe iskusstvo* in which he laid particular emphasis on the beauty of the musical material, the truly great artistry and the splendid thematic variety in the finale.

The symphony was sketched immediately after the loss of the 'Maxim Gorky'. This does not mean, however, that it should be categorized as a programmatic work. The tragedy served merely as a catalyst for the work of composition – notwithstanding the funeral march-character of the third movement (in the Dorian mode). In fact this movement, like the others, is relatively light in underlying mood. This lightness is further underscored by the lavish use of popular melodies: the finale, for instance, is largely based on Myaskovsky's own very popular song *The Aeroplanes are Flying in the Sky*. The composer also makes use of other stylistic characteristics, among them a rich contrapuntal vein that is constantly to the fore. The dramatic (and towards the end also festive) first movement is followed by a lyrically poetic, slow second movement, in the main theme of which Prokofiev discerned 'the smiling countenance of Mikhail Glinka'. The pastoral middle section may have been inspired by the natural world that surrounded Myaskovsky at Nikolina Gora, where the composer liked to spend his summers. The third movement is the above-mentioned large-scale funeral march, which also contains a contrasting, lyrical theme. The finale begins in a dance-like vein and gradually develops into a radiant hymn.

This work has brought forth a wide range of critical reactions. Quite evidently it is a sincere attempt to conform to the basic principles of Socialist Realism. Nowadays – when the Soviet introduction of this artistic system is regarded solely as an act of state oppression – we should be careful to remember that Socialist Realism was not universally seen as purely negative. On the contrary, many artists attempted to adapt to it – and in this respect Myaskovsky emerges honourably from any comparison with his colleagues. On the other hand many critics take the view that he should have concentrated on following the line of development that he had set out in his fifteen earlier symphonies. In the USSR the work's underlying optimism was held to be exemplary. Whatever view one may take, the symphony must be seen as a fascinating record of a period when the majority of Soviet composers were in search of an opportunity to bring their artistic integrity into line with the decrees of their government.

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Robin Vaughan ***Music & Merit Consultancy***

Nikolai Myaskovsky (1881-1950)
Symphony No. 15 in D minor, Op.38
Symphony No. 27 in C minor, Op.85

Russian Federation Academic Symphony Orchestra
Evgeny Svetlanov

Symphony No. 15 in D minor, Op. 38

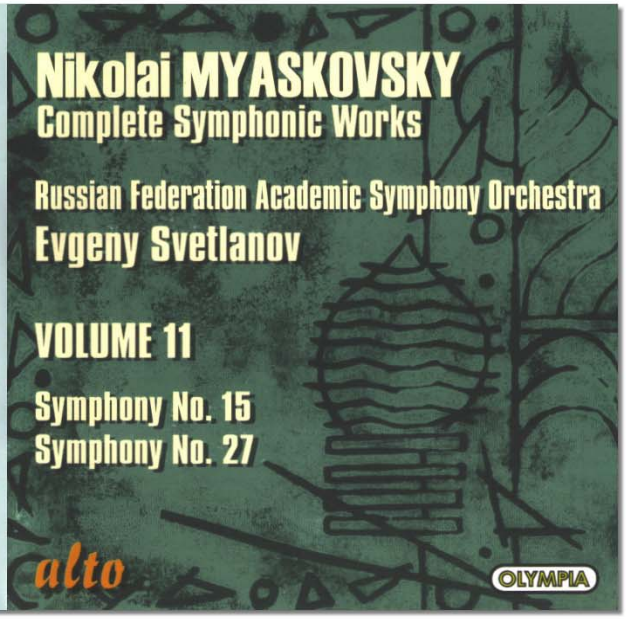
[1] I.	Andante- *allegro appassionato*	11:22
[2] II.	*Moderato assai*	9:08
[3] III.	*Allegro molto, ma con garbo*	6:52
[4] IV.	*Poco pesante – Allegro ma non troppo*	9:20

Symphony No. 27 in C minor, Op.85

[5] I.	Adagio – *allegro animato*	12:56
[6] II.	*Adagio*	14:32
[7] III.	*Presto ma non troppo – Marciale – Tempo 1*	7:30

Recorded 1991-3 in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory
Engineers: edited by L.Abelian (Russia); Geoffrey Ginn for Olympia (UK)
Executive Producer: Jackie Campbell for Olympia

VOLUME 11 of the Olympia Cycle (previous: OCD731/2/3/4/5/6/7/8/9/40)



Volume 11
Symphonies #15 & 27

The mid-1930s was a period during which many Soviet composers felt insecure: they were uncertain what to make of the principles of Socialist Realism that had been published in 1932, especially as these guidelines seemed to be designed more for literary works than for music. Myaskovsky seems to have been an exception, as his inspiration continued uninterrupted: his artistic crisis (if we can call it that) had taken place some years earlier, before the era of Socialist Realism. Now, in less than two years, he composed three symphonies: *No. 13* (OCD 733), *No. 14* (OCD 740) and *No. 15* which is recorded here. The first performance of the *Symphony No. 15 in D minor,* Op. 38, was given in Moscow on 28th October 1935 under the baton of Leo Ginzburg, who had studied under Saradzhev and Golovanov. Earlier that year, on 24th February, the *Symphony No. 14* had been premiered. Given such a pace of work it is natural that Myaskovsky sometimes transplanted material from one symphony to another: for instance, the original finale of *Symphony No. 14* ended up at the beginning of *No. 15 !* Everything is relative, however: by his own standards he had a hard time with the *Fifteenth,* not only because it took him some 18 months to compose (the score was completed late in 1934) but also because, after the premiere, he made changes to the third movement and the coda of the fourth. The second movement in particular gave him considerable trouble, and it becomes apparent from his diaries that he spent more than three months searching for a solution to its problems.

As with so many Soviet compositions from those years, the musical style shows the clear imprint of folk influence. In accordance with the principles of Socialist Realism, the dominant mood is optimism; the problematic atmosphere of some of the composer's other symphonies can scarcely be felt here. Despite the folk style, Myaskovsky does not employ any original folk melodies; all of the thematic material is his own. All the same, according to his own account, he was unsure how to formulate his musical style in a manner appropriate for the times: 'I don't know how this musical language should sound, nor do I know a recipe for finding out. Neither the striving after folk-songs nor the intoning of our urban melodies in their pure form seem to me to be the exclusive building blocks for the creation of the musical style of Socialist Realism in instrumental music, the specifics of which differ considerably from those of song-like, vocal music. Myaskovsky was thus sincerely trying to find a solution to this stylistic dilemma, and it thus seems especially unjust that he was among the composers who were most severely criticized in 1948.

The four-movement symphony begins with an *Allegro* - qualified with the marking *appassionato* - introduced by a few brief bars of *Andante;* as mentioned above, this is based on material from the original version of the finale of his *Symphony No. 14.* The variety of mood in this movement is remarkable; despite its formal unity, Myaskovsky explores the entire palette from fairy-tale enchantment to high drama. The second movement, *Moderato assai,* has an essentially lyrical mood, characterized by the atmosphere of Russian cradle songs, whilst the scherzo, *Allegro motto, ma non garbo,* consists of a waltz: the rather unusual final words of its tempo marking mean 'without charm'. Presumably the composer intended that the movement should not be played with excessive emotion. The finale develops from a bucolic, pastoral opening, by way of a chorale-like passage and further variations on the main theme -gradually but unremittingly increasing in intensity - to a rousing but still elegant conclusion.

Myaskovsky's last symphony was composed in the same key as his first, but otherwise they differ in almost every respect. The story of the *Symphony No. 27 in C minor,* Op. 85, is sad, as the composer never had an opportunity to hear the work. Worse than that, he was not allowed to live out his final years in peace. Admittedly he retained his inner dignity - nobody could take that away from him - but in 1948, with icy cruelty, the authorities had numbered him among those who were publicly denounced and almost labeled as enemies of the people, even though he had otherwise been regarded as the doyen among the Russian composers who still lived in their native country. In the Order No. 17 of the Soviet Council of State, dated 14th February 1948, two of his works even suffered the indignity of being forbidden completely: the *Pathetic Overture* (OCD 736) and the cantata *The Kremlin at Night!* The injustice of this must have seemed all the greater because Myaskovsky had never appeared in public as an opponent of the regime, but had largely adapted himself to its artistic demands without ever becoming a mere tool of the régime. When the first performance was given, conducted by Alexander Gauk on 9th December 1950, the composer was finally - posthumously - shown the great honour that the event took place in the Pillar Hall of the Trade Unions in Moscow. This performance was also a manifestation of support for Myaskovsky in that, at the end, Gauk held the score aloft - as had happened a couple of years earlier with Mravinsky and Shostakovich, likewise a silent demonstration against an officialdom that was not exactly favourably disposed.

The symphony was composed in 1949, and Myaskovsky had undergone a serious operation. His work provided him with a sort of refuge and thus, during the summer of 1949, he composed several works, among them sketches for the symphony. According to his own account he had some difficulties with it, and the orchestration of the work also suffered some labour pains, but the score was completed on 2nd November. At the end of the year the doctors recommended a further operation, but Myaskovsky refused. Not until May 1950 did he consent to the operation, but by then it was too late, and his death on 8th August 1950 - before the premiere could take place - was not unexpected.

As far as we know, Myaskovsky did not have any specific programme in mind when composing the work, but in spirit it belongs firmly to the Russian tradition; the modern element is relegated to the background. The first movement, *Adagio - Allegro animato,* contains a wide variety of woodwind solos (bassoon, bass clarinet, clarinet, cor anglais), but also features powerful brass passages and broad string cantilenas, which in the development section are contrasted to great dramatic effect; in the recapitulation and coda they rise up in triumph. At the beginning of the second movement, *Adagio* (in fact the first part of the work to be written), there is a chorale accompanied by woodwind figures; this gradually becomes more anguished and tempestuous before sinking back to the initial mood of contemplation. The forward thrust of the last movement, *Presto ma non troppo*, which is subsequently marked *Marciale*, is irresistible; structurally it gradually assembles small motifs into a main theme with an inexorable forward urge. The subsidiary theme turns into a kind of march, and with reminiscences of the first two movements the work finally culminates in an orgy of sound that forms an impressive conclusion to the composer's extensive symphonic output.

Nikolai Myaskovsky (1881-1950)
Symphony No.16 in F major, Op.39
Symphony No.19 in E flat major, Op.46

Russian Federation Academic Symphony Orchestra
Evgeny Svetlanov

Symphony No.16 in F major, Op.39

[1]	I.	*Allegro vivace*	8:44
[2]	II.	*Andante e semplice (quasi allegretto)*	10:07
[3]	III.	*Sostenuto – Andante marciale, ma sostenuto*	14:13
[4]	IV.	*Tempo precedente – Allegro, ma non troppo*	12:46

Symphony No.19 in E flat major, Op.46*
For Wind band

[5]	I.	*Maestoso- Allegro giacoso*	5:30
[6]	II.	*Moderato*	6:25
[7]	III.	*Andante serioso*	7:01
[8]	IV.	*Poco maestoso- Vivo*	4:37

Time: 70:42
Recorded 1970*-1993 in the Great Hall Moscow Conservatory (L. Abelian)
Mastered for Olympia by Jeffrey Ginn, Bedford
Executive Producer: Jackie Campbell for Olympia
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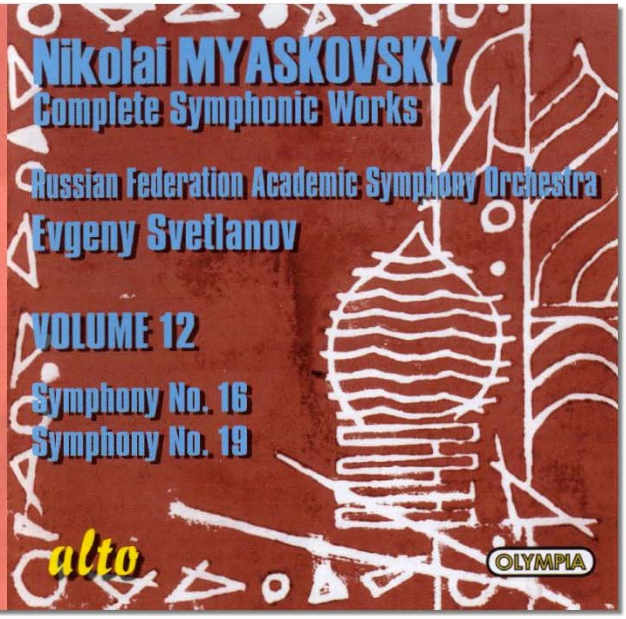

Volume 12
Symphonies #17 & 21

Symphony Nos. 16 & 19

On 18th May 1935 a Soviet plane named 'Maxim Gorky' collided with a smaller aircraft and crashed. This eight-engined Tupolev plane was a worldwide sensation. Its wingspan, for instance, was larger than that of a present day Jumbo jet; in comfort and size it surpassed anything that had gone before, and for a long time it set the standard by which large planes were measured. The following day, the famous writer and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry mourned this giant of the skies in sad but lyrical terms – 'the gangways, the salon, the cabins, the on-board telephone'; the Soviet people regarded the loss of this proud machine as a national catastrophe. This is the light in which we should see the subtitle of Myaskovsky's Symphony No. 16 in F major, Op. 39: it became known as the 'Aviation Symphony'. The work was dedicated to the Moscow State Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, which gave the symphony its première at the opening concert of the 1936–37 season in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on 24th October 1936. It was conducted by the Hungarian Jenő Szenkár, principal conductor of the orchestra from 1934 until 1937 – a brilliant champion of contemporary music who had given the first performance of Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin* at the Cologne Opera in 1926. Sergei Prokofiev attended the concert and wrote an enthusiastic review for the journal *Sowetskoe iskusstvo* in which he laid particular emphasis on the beauty of the musical material, the truly great artistry and the splendid thematic variety in the finale.

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Nikolai Myaskovsky (1881-1950)
Salutatory Overture in C major, Op.48
Symphony No.17 in G sharp minor, Op.41
Symphony No.21 in F sharp minor, Op.51

Russian Federation Academic Symphony Orchestra
Evgeny Svetlanov

[1] **Salutatory Overture in C major, Op.48**
Allegro con brio e maestoso 10:02
Symphony No.17 in G sharp minor, Op.41
[2] I. *Lento- Allegro molto agitato* 15:51
[3] II. *Lento assai - Andantino (ma non troppo)* 16:52
[4] III. *Allegro, poco vivace* 5:15
[5] IV. *Andante – Allegro molto animato* 10:29

Symphony No.21 in F sharp minor, Op.51
[6] *Andante sostenuto – Allegro non troppo, ma non impeto – Tempo I* 18:40

Time: 77:14
Recorded in the Great Hall Moscow Conservatory (L. Abelian)
Mastered for Olympia by Jeffrey Ginn, London
Executive Producer: Jackie Campbell for Olympia

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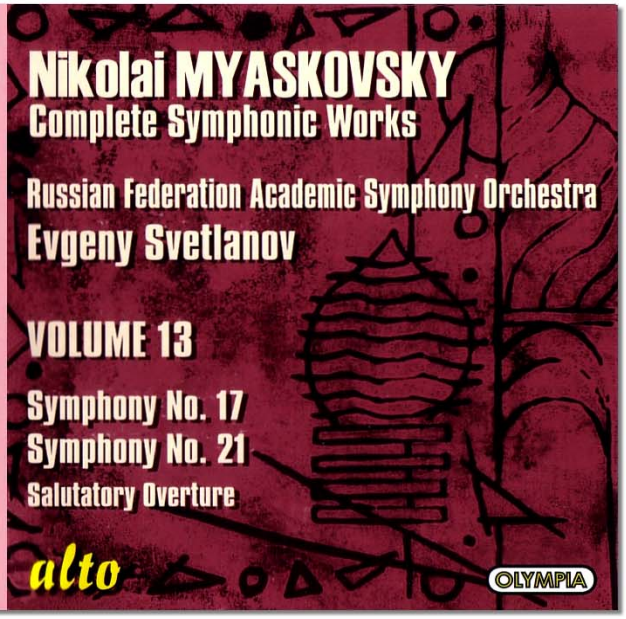

Volume 13
Symphonies #17 & 21; Salutatory Overture

Salutatory Overture in C major for Large Orchestra, Op.48.

One involuntarily wonders whom this overture was intended to greet, because modern references to the piece usually say nothing of this. In Russia it was indeed possible for such a piece to have no addressee at all – but not in this case. Its year of composition might give a clue: 1939.

Anybody who is familiar with the technique of Soviet historical management will soon guess the answer. Since the beginning of the process of destalinisation in the late 1950s former recipients of the Stalin Prize were stated to have been awarded the "State Prize". Accordingly it is easy to "forget" to mention any connection between a work of art and Stalin. Stalin was born in 1879 and this overture was in fact a 60th birthday greeting ! This is by no means an indication that Myaskovsky was a Stalinist: the piece was commissioned by Soviet Radio, and composers who received such commissions were well advised to accept them.

Tasks of this sort tend to be fulfilled by a sort of standard recipe, even in the case of established and artistically eminent composers: bombast, plenty of brass, if possible the key of C major and the occasional typical cymbal clash. It says something of Myaskovsky's noble restraint that he restricted himself to the C major and the cymbal clash from this list. Otherwise his overture is a highly interesting piece composed in accordance with all the artistic rules. He avoids bombast in the simplest possible way, by making use of very quiet dynamic levels – and it works. Anyone who tries to roar away in *mezzopiano* will soon come to appreciate Myaskovsky's genius !

Personal note on the Swedish musicologist Per Skans who wrote 12 notes for this series.

I have in fond remembrance Per´s excitement when he, several years ago, told me that an agreement had finally been signed concerning the issuing on CD of all Myaskovski´s orchestral work and that he had the task to write the notes for the booklets. But his death in January 2007 put a sudden end to his writing. The issuing of the remaining CDs in this important series is, to my mind, also a noble way to pay tribute to Per´s memory.

Born in 1936, Per first studied music in his home town Uppsala. Then he went to study conducting and composition at the Berliner Hochschule für Musik and in Salzburg at the Mozarteum, where his teachers included Herbert von Karajan; there, he too, acted as a teacher of musical history and as a repetiteur. From 1963 on Per worked in Sweden as a conductor and a choir director at the Royal Opera House in Stockholm. From 1967 until his retirement Per was a producer at the musical department (Programme 2) of Radio Sweden. There he made many thousands of documentary programmes etc. At the end of the 1970s Per together with two colleagues made several visits to the Soviet Union and later to China. This resulted in two radio series called "Music around the Soviet Union" and "Music in the Middle Kingdom". In 1985-6 Per and colleagues made more trips to the Soviet Union, where they researched another radio series, "Sacred Music in the Soviet Union". This was the first time a western radio station handled this subject. Per´s last commissions for Radio Sweden were a programme about the composer and for many years chairman of the Union of Composers of the USSR, Tikhon Krennikov, and a series of four programmes about Dmitri Shostakovich, broadcast in 2007 commemorating his centenary.

Per was an extraordinarily gifted man. He spoke and wrote several languages and had profound knowledge not only in music but in literature as well as art. His knowledge of music in the former USSR must be described as truly encyclopaedic, which made him one of the foremost experts in Europe on music and musical life in the USSR. Detesting the Soviet political system, Per had a great understanding of the conditions under which composers in that country worked. Therefore his writing was always remarkably informative, inventive and highly valued. At the time of his death Per had been busy for some time with a pioneering work: a biography of the Warsaw-born Russian composer and pianist Mieczyslaw Weinberg. Thanks to professor David Fanning, who has taken on the task of completing Per´s work, the book is planned to be published in 2009.

Tommy Persson

continued …

Symphony No 17 in G Sharp Minor, Op. 41.

"The symphony draws a picture of the emancipation and blossoming of the personality of man in our great era. It is full of great dramatic tension and even a tragical vein is in evidence (in the first Allegro). But this tragic mood soon gives place to quite different emotions: meditative (in the second movement), vigorous and brisk (in the scherzo that is very similar to folk music) and finally joyous and optimistic in the finale." (G. Neuhaus; Soviet era description)

Myaskovsky's 17th Symphony was written between 1936-1937 and first performed in December 1937 at a concert conducted by Alexander Gauk (1893-1963), to whom the work is dedicated. It's composition and premiere took place during the period of Great Purges, the reign of terror initiated by Joseph Stalin between 1934-1938 during which time countless millions of soviet citizens disappeared into gulags or were otherwise liquidated.

During this dark period of soviet history, intellectuals and creative artists were especially at risk of denunciation or persecution, especially following Pravda's notorious 1936 attack on Shostakovich's opera "The Lady Macbeth of Mtsenk", which it described as "Chaos instead of Music". Shostakovich had composed his popular 5th Symphony "A Soviet artists reply to just criticism" in response and this was premiered in 1937, the same year as Myaskovsky's 17th Symphony (at a later, similar period Myaskovsky's 27th Symphony (ALC 1021), although not designated as such, might perhaps be seen as his own creative response to the denunciation of his music, during the notorious attack on composers by party functionary, Andrei Zhdanov, in 1948). In his article "Notes about the Artistic Path" (Sovetskaya Muzyka Journal 1936, No 6) written at the same time that he was working on the 17th Symphony, Myaskovsky described his artistic aims, in his symphonies as, trying to "find artistic means to describe the emotions of his contemporaries"; a quotation reminiscent of Shostakovich's later observation on his 10th Symphony: "I wanted to portray human emotions and passions".

Myaskovsky, by all accounts a shy and introspective man, had to be very guarded in describing his musical intentions, although the experience of having witnessed the brutal murder of his general father, by a revolutionary soldier in 1918, can hardly have endeared him to the Bolshevik/Communist regime. Nevertheless it appears that, in the 17th Symphony and other works of this period, Myaskovsky sincerely tried to conform to the demands of Socialist Realism, whilst maintaining his artistic integrity.

Ultimately, Myaskovsky believed that his music must speak for itself. Myaskovsky's biographer Alexandrei Ikkonikov (writing during the composer's lifetime) wrote about the 17th Symphony in the following terms: "Here is a full flood of human emotions. The 17th Symphony is sheer song from first to last". There is certainly considerable drama present in this score, and whilst the composer's intentions can never be known, this symphony may well (despite being officially written to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution) reflect the troubled times of its composition, to a greater extent than has hitherto been suggested by either soviet or western commentators.

The Symphony opens ominously with a faint echo of the "Fate"motif from the opening of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony (a formative influence in the young Myaskovsky's decision to become a composer had been attending a performance of Tchaikovsky's "Pathetique" Symphony conducted by Arthur Nikisch, in December 1896). This opening movement is the most dramatic of the work and, notwithstanding the pressure that Myaskovsky was no doubt under to produce works which conformed to heroic Socialist Realistic stereotypes, his characteristic gloom and melancholy cannot help but keep breaking through (as in the despairing climax of the movement). This paradoxical desire to conform to the requirements of the regime, whilst being true to himself, is extremely poignant and is especially present in this symphony.

The heart of Myaskovsky's symphonies is often to be found in the slow movement and the 17th Symphony is no exception. The melancholy and troubled lyricism of the *Lento assai* is deeply moving, as if the composer looks back nostalgically to happier times (which can't have been difficult in the years 1936-37!). There are thematic similarities between this movement and the slow movement of the valedictory 27th Symphony of 1949: like any great composer, Myaskovsky is able to touch on universal human emotions and this juxtaposition of the universal and the personal is a characteristic feature of his music.

The reverie of the slow movement is abruptly curtailed by the arrival of the march-like *Allegro* third Movement, the trio of which briefly recalls the fairy tale world of Liadov. As in the 15th Symphony (ALC 1021), Myaskovsky, like Vaughan Williams in England, uses folk like melodies, which are actually his original material.

The Fourth Movement opens with the return of the fate-like motif, although here it is given an extended treatment, which eventually opens out into a lyrical dance-like sequence, containing echoes of earlier themes. Despite interruptions, the dance-like episode reasserts itself until a massive fugue eventually steers this enigmatic symphony to a triumphant yet oddly defiant ending.

Symphony No. 21 in F sharp minor, Op. 51

"The 21st Symphony is written in one movement. Yet, with its remarkable unity of form and content, it reveals all that unmistakable scope and breadth which is the hallmark of the true *symphony*." (Alexandrei Ikonnikov 1944) "The great quality of this composition lies in the combination of impressive beauty of conception with a plasticity of musical images, profundity of content, perfection of form and integrity of structure." (Gregory Schneerson; programme notes from first Soviet performance 1940)

The 21st Symphony, one of the highpoints of Myaskovsky's creative achievement, was composed over a 12 day period in 1940. It was commissioned for the 50th anniversary of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and dedicated to the Orchestra's conductor Frederick Stock, who had met Myaskovsky on a visit to the Soviet Union in 1938. At the time, Stock had told Myaskovsky of the popularity of his music in Chicago, with the epic 6th Symphony being performed annually.

Alexander Gauk conducted the Soviet premiere on 6th November 1940, at which time the work was described as *Symphony-Fantasy*. This was an enormous popular success, with the composer being recalled to the stage three times. Frederick Stock conducted the US premiere, with similar success, in Chicago, on December 26th Uniquely, the 21st Symphony was issued in recordings by American conductors Eugene Ormandy and Morton Gould.

The Symphony's eloquence and brevity (cast in an arch-like single movement sonata structure of about 16 minutes), together with the fact that it appeared shortly before the alliance of the USA, USSR and Great Britain between 1941-45, meant that, together with the Cello Concerto of 1944, it became much better known in the west than many earlier (or later) works. Following the breakdown of the Grand Alliance (or "Anti-Hitler Coalition", as it was more accurately described in the USSR), during the early part of the Cold War, Soviet writers avoided any mention of the connection between the 21st Symphony and Chicago.

If the shadow of Tchaikovsky hovers benevolently over the 17th Symphony, that of Rimsky-Korsakov does over the 21st Symphony. In particular, there are thematic similarities between the melancholy/lyrical opening section of the Myaskovsky Symphony and the first part of Rimsky-Korsakov's Second Symphony "Antar"of 1867-8. Gregory Schneerson, who wrote the programme notes for the soviet premiere, described the Symphony as "one of his (Myaskovsky's) most noble works". The Symphony was awarded a Stalin Prize in 1941.

The symphony opens with a characteristically searching and melancholy clarinet solo reminiscent of a type of Russian folk song *protyajnai,* a kind of drawn out elegy, expressive of longing, grief or sadness, which is common to all periods of Russian history and which finds echoes in the Simpleton's compassionate song at the end of Mussorgsky's opera Boris Gudonov. The introductory material contains the seeds of the entire symphony. The strings respond to the opening clarinet solo with a darkly lyrical theme of increasing emotional intensity. As often with Myaskovsky there is a sense of a noble spirit ultimately doomed to frustration.

The energetic Allegro, which follows, conforms more to the requirements of Socialist Realism, with folk-song type material, but, even here, the optimism sounds forced and is constantly interrupted by melancholy references to the opening of the Symphony.

Eventually, the Symphony arrives at a huge climax, before sinking back, in an extended and visionary epilogue, to the thematic material of the opening section. "It is as though the composition returns to the initial mood of lyrical reflection, which has now acquired a deeply transfigured character" (Gregory Schneerson)

To what extent Myaskovsky's 17th and 21st symphonies reflect the historical/political circumstances of their creation (the Great Purges on the one hand and the gathering storm clouds of the Second World War on the other) remains a matter of conjecture and there has, as yet, been no attempt to depict his music as in any way subversive. Nevertheless it seems that the clash between the sensitive inner nature of the composer and the harsh reality of soviet life, during a period of considerable political and artistic turmoil, resulted in a creative synthesis of enormous poignancy and eloquence.