

# “Comrades in Misfortune”: Arvo Pärt and Valentyn Sylvestrov, from Experimentation to Mystery, Periphery to Center<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Like many young Soviet composers during the post-Stalin Thaw, Arvo Pärt and Valentyn Sylvestrov experimented with a range of musical techniques in the 1960s before turning in radically simplified directions during the next decades. Notably, both Pärt and Sylvestrov were among the only composers from their generation featured in the Soviet youth magazine *Krugozor* in the late 1960s, a time when Sylvestrov was more successful than Pärt on the global stage. But the Union of Composers of Ukraine was harsher than its Estonian counterpart, and Sylvestrov suffered severely from its policing in the 1970s.

This paper explores for the first time the stylistic intersections and influences between Pärt and Sylvestrov. Focusing on the 1960s, and the appearance of music by both composers in *Krugozor*, it traces the parallel yet distinct paths of both composers, paying close attention to the compositions featured in the magazine: Sylvestrov’s *Mystery* and Pärt’s *Pro et contra*. The contacts and contrasts between Pärt and Sylvestrov tell a particularly potent story about musical experimentation and discovery from the 1960s through the present.

*I originally wrote and delivered this article in October 2021 as a keynote address at the conference “Arvo Pärt: Texts and Contexts” hosted by the Arvo Pärt Centre in Laulasmaa, Estonia. As I revised it in the first half of 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, unleashing brutal and senseless violence without provocation. Valentyn Sylvestrov fled the country in early March for Berlin, and his music has since gained new attention worldwide. I briefly address these topics at the end of this article but want readers to be aware from the outset that the war, threatened when I first delivered the talk, was very much on my mind as I revised it for publication.*

In a reminiscence titled “Greatly Sensitive,” first published in German in 1999, Arvo Pärt credited a pivotal conversation he had with Alfred Schnittke in 1976 as the moment he was pushed to “go public with my new system of composition, the tintinnabuli style” (Pärt 2012: 198). Pärt said that Schnittke’s “words were like midwifery,” as he urged Pärt to “leave the experimental stage on paper for real sound.” Schnittke’s advice came from lessons hard-earned through his own compositional practice in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when he first formulated and expressed his idea of polystylism (Schmelz 2009, Schmelz 2021). Schnittke proved so influential

for Pärt because both shared similar approaches to musical dramaturgy and both made similar creative journeys as they engaged with and then departed from serialism in the 1960s. Both composers moved through serialism, aleatory techniques, and collage (see Table 1). The early 12-tone compositions of both composers were often strict and yet suggested or were based on a narrative. For example, Pärt’s 1963 *Perpetuum mobile* and Schnittke’s 1968 *Pianissimo* both set up steady, layered serial processes that trace a dramatic course of buildup and dissipation that audiences found quite appealing. (Pärt’s composition lacks an explicit narrative; Schnittke’s

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**Table 1.** Schnittke and Pärt, post-1963 compositions.

	Schnittke		Pärt
1963			<i>Perpetuum mobile</i> for orchestra <i>Solfeggio</i> for choir
1964	<i>Music for Chamber Orchestra</i> <i>Music for Piano and Chamber Orchestra</i>		<i>Diagramme</i> , op. 11, for piano <i>Musica sillabica</i> , op. 12 <i>Quintettino</i> for wind quintet <i>Collage über B-A-C-H</i> for orchestra
1965	Improvisation and Fugue for piano		
1965–1966	Variations on a Chord for piano Three poems of Marina Tsvetaeva for voice and piano		Symphony no. 2
1966	Violin Concerto no. 2 String Quartet no. 1		<i>Pro et contra</i> for cello and orchestra
1965–1967	<i>Dialogue</i> for cello and chamber ensemble		
1968	<i>Pianissimo ...</i> for orchestra Serenade for five musicians Violin Sonata no. 2, <i>Quasi una Sonata</i>		<i>Credo</i> for piano, choir, and orchestra
1969–1972	Symphony no. 1	1971	Symphony no. 3

was based on Franz Kafka’s story “In the Penal Colony” [In der Strafkolonie].) As these two compositions indicate, if Schnittke had valuable advice for Pärt, he arguably was repaying a creative debt. For in the 1960s Pärt’s music often seemed to presage Schnittke’s, or at least demonstrated potent creative parallels: compare Pärt’s *Pro et contra* for cello and orchestra (1966) and Schnittke’s *Dialogue* for cello and chamber ensemble (1965–67); Pärt’s *Diagramme* for piano (1964) and Schnittke’s *Serenade for five musicians* (1968); as well as Pärt’s *Collage über B-A-C-H* (1964) and *Credo* (1968) and Schnittke’s *Violin Sonata 2, Quasi una Sonata* (1968), which has similar stylistic clashes and also ultimately takes refuge in Bach.

Valentyn Sylvestrov and Schnittke also form a fitting pair. In my recent book, *Sonic Overload: Alfred Schnittke, Valentin Silvestrov, and Polystylism in the Late USSR*, I compare Schnittke and Sylvestrov from the perspective of polystylism, considering their music from the late 1960s through the 1990s, and, in the case of Sylvestrov, up to the present (Schmelz 2021; Schmelz 2017). *Sonic Overload* builds on my first book, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw*, by exploring what happened next, after the

creative and intellectual ferment of the 1960s had passed. Focusing on both Schnittke and Sylvestrov widens our understanding of the significance of polystylism in the 1970s and 1980s in specific musical ways as well as in broader cultural senses. It addresses how two very different composers in the USSR inflected polystylism as both tried to cope with a more overwhelming informational landscape in that country, including the more pronounced impact of various forms of popular music.

In this article, I want to complete the triangle I have been tracing – the one whose points are Schnittke, Sylvestrov, and Pärt – by turning to the pairing of Sylvestrov and Pärt. With this new dyad, we can ask larger questions, the answers to which help articulate a more refined post-Soviet musicology. For with both Pärt and Sylvestrov we are no longer dealing with the Soviet center, that is with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), but instead with two of the republics on its periphery, the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Looking at these two composers therefore prods us to recalibrate our approaches to all Soviet music today, swapping

our perspective from “center” to “periphery.” This recalibration also includes applying a post-colonial interpretative framework to the way we conceive of and talk about this music, a theoretical move that has gained new urgency since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. By putting these “peripheral” republics front and center, we arrive at a more complex, more accurate understanding of the negotiated identities within the Soviet empire in the 1960s and 1970s, and after. The newly motivated decolonization of Soviet music is an ongoing project. Consider the present article a promissory note.

In the 1960s, Arvo Pärt and Valentyn Sylvestrov were among the most-discussed, most-criticized younger Soviet composers (particularly abroad) and their experiences reflect multiple, significant trends more clearly than other composers closer to the political center. I count among those more central figures the familiar Moscow-based “Troika” of Schnittke, Sofia Gubaidulina, and Edison Denisov, a neat grouping that took hold in the 1980s that nonetheless obscures the messy processes of musicking and canon formation in the Soviet Union from the 1960s up through the decade of glasnost and perestroika. After all, for many composers and performers born after the generation of the sixties, including those in Russia, among them Aleksey Lyubimov and Vladimir Martynov, Pärt and Sylvestrov were the central figures (Lyubimov 2015: loc. 3469). Martynov grouped both Pärt and Sylvestrov with Alemdar Karamanov, Alexandre Rabinovitch-Barakovsky, Eduard Artemyev, Georgs Pelēcis, and himself, as composers who felt the “death of the avant-garde.” “We did not form any kind of group and no kind of union [объединение],” Martynov said. “We lived in different cities and met very rarely, but our private meetings were very intense and our heated theoretical discussions turned out to have a tangible influence on our compositional practice” (Martynov 2021: 136–137; Munipov 2019: 41, 44).

Because of this mutual contact, rare though it was, Pärt and Sylvestrov became mutual admirers (it was both cause and effect). Their fondness has only grown over the years. Pärt is widely quoted praising Sylvestrov as “without a doubt the most interesting composer today” and “one of the greatest composers of our time” (Sylvestrov, Nestyeva 2004: 4; Ross 2002). Sylvestrov, surprised

and embarrassed by this praise, attributes it to their mutual lineage, and to Pärt’s guilt at his own success. “We were all part of the same circle,” Sylvestrov said, but “they became more sought after, and they were left with a kind of strange sensation” (Munipov 2019: 144).

In what follows, I discuss both general points of contact and points of distance between Pärt and Sylvestrov, particularly their related transitions away from avant-garde experimentation, but also their divergent experiences as composers in Soviet Estonia and Soviet Ukraine in the 1960s. Using unfamiliar and newly available sources, I concentrate on the pivotal moments in their respective careers, the moments right before their adoption of the styles for which they are best known today.

### **Krugozor**

I would like to begin our reexamination of Pärt and Sylvestrov by looking at an important source from late Soviet material culture. (Much of our attention in this article will be occupied with late Soviet material culture – magazines, recordings, and scores – as markers of career status, prestige, canonization, and larger sociocultural context.) The source I have in mind is the young people’s magazine *Krugozor*, which means outlook, field of view, range of vision, or range of interests. First published in 1964, this monthly periodical for teenagers and young adults included brief articles about a variety of music-related topics as well as about events of topical importance, including “audio postcards” from selected areas around the world and breaking news about the space race. It aimed to provide its listeners with a glimpse of the contemporary world of sound and music in the broadest of senses, including high, low, and everything in between. I say listeners because the defining feature of *Krugozor* was the flexi discs it included. Each issue contained 12 excerpts of about six minutes each on 6 two-sided discs that accompanied the short articles within the magazine and spanned a variety of genres, including poetry and documentary reportage. As the editorial at the beginning of the first issue (1964, no. 1) read: “Our older brothers – print and radio – meet one another in this magazine.” *Krugozor* generally featured contemporary design, layout, and iconography, with stylized covers displaying classic Soviet landmarks,

images emphasizing science and technology, and folk-influenced illustrations.<sup>2</sup>

Published for nearly three decades, *Krugozor* collects the complex soundscapes of late socialism. Among those complex soundscapes, surprisingly, was the world of “unofficial” Soviet music, represented in *Krugozor* in the 1960s by three composers.<sup>3</sup> You can probably guess two of them. The other, the first to appear in the magazine, is more unexpected. His name was Nikolai Karetnikov. In issue no. 8 from 1967, Karetnikov’s 12-tone Symphony no. 4 from 1963 appeared as the second of two excerpts on a flexi disc devoted to the Prague Spring festival of 1967 under the innocuous label: “Spring Mirror of Prague: From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century.” As expected, the excerpt begins with a recording of Czech music from the middle ages and renaissance performed on period instruments, still a novelty within the USSR (as it largely was at the time even in Western Europe and the United States). The narrator then introduced Karetnikov’s symphony (“and now for music of our time”), proudly calling it “perhaps the greatest success of the festival.” Placing the listener into the discordant middle of the first movement of the nearly half-hour long three-movement symphony, there was no further explanation of either composer or composition, which sounded for only about 2.5 minutes, ending with triumphant brass fanfares. The accompanying printed article was a puff piece that mentioned neither musical work (Savinov 1967).

It should be emphasized that because of its scope and style (a distillation of Berg, Schoenberg, and, ineluctably, socialist realism), Karetnikov’s symphony was not performed in the USSR and could not be performed there. In 1969 his Concerto for wind instruments was recorded for Moscow Radio by Igor Blazhkov, but this was the exception that proved the rule, and the recording was never commercially released (Karetnikov 1994: 94; Blazhkov 2019; Blazhkov 2020a). Why then did Soviet cultural authorities, or at least the editors of *Krugozor*, permit this brief snippet

of an otherwise unperformable work in the magazine? Its appearance there was related to the reasons behind its appearance at the Prague Spring festival in the first place. Richard Taruskin heard the *Krugozor* recording as both a flexing of power and a sign of oppression: our composers are producing this music, which is being applauded abroad (as the narrator underscored – “perhaps the greatest success of the festival”), but you, dear listener, can only hear it in carefully mediated morsels. Karetnikov’s own explanation was that in performing the work abroad, Soviet authorities could “show that we too have ugliness [показать, что у нас тоже есть задосты]” (Taruskin [forthcoming]). (It was the flipside to the US government’s boosting of difficult music in its own propaganda activities abroad during the cold war [Fosler-Lussier 2009].) The excerpt from Karetnikov’s Symphony no. 4 initiated a trend in *Krugozor* of occasionally showcasing difficult music, showing younger readers in stylized, easily digestible portions that we have, if not ugliness, then challenging music. Music that perhaps is not that challenging after all. Critics of avant-garde music in the USSR wanted to both highlight and diffuse its dangers. They wanted to show it was not really worth attention by continually giving it small bits of attention, inoculations against the larger disease. These moments, predictably, often backfired spectacularly, drawing more rather than less scrutiny.

More momentous, because more infamous, were the next two “unofficial” composers to grace the flexi discs of *Krugozor*. These figures stood out amid the less controversial members of the Soviet Thaw generation who appeared in the magazine. In the sixth issue of 1967, for example, under the familiar, general rubric “young composers” appeared excerpts from the music of Boris Tishchenko (his Concerto for piano and orchestra, 1962) and Veljo Tormis (his opera *Swan’s Flight*, 1966). (Tishchenko also featured in an interview in this *Krugozor* number on p. 14.) Issue no. 7, in 1967, included the establishment darling Rodion Shchedrin’s Second Piano Concerto, also from 1966, alongside an interview with the composer

<sup>2</sup> A near-complete archive of the journal is available online: <http://www.krugozor-kolobok.ru> (5 September 2022).

<sup>3</sup> I define “unofficial” in the context of Soviet music in Schmelz 2009: 20–21. As I write there at greater length, “unofficial” is meant to counteract blunt, inaccurate terms such as “dissident” and instead suggest the more complexly negotiated power structures of late Soviet musical life.

(Shchedrin, Romadinova 1967). These less-contentious composers both prepared and set off the presence of Sylvestrov in issue number 4 from 1968 and of Pärt in issue number 11 from 1969.

The flexi discs with music by Sylvestrov and Pärt allow us to discuss both composers and their stylistic journeys across the 1960s. Let's start with Sylvestrov. His *Krugozor* sample is a rare document from the 1960s because it presents singular evidence about the composer from this period. There is no other recording of him speaking from the 1960s that I know of. Given how loquacious he has become in the past 15 or so years, it is strange to think how under-documented his career is before around 1990.

On the flexi disc, a narrator introduces Sylvestrov by declaring, “[m]any say that it is impossible to narrate music, but if worst comes to worst the composer should have the privilege of describing the conception of his own music – which [Sylvestrov] himself is going to do for his *Mystery*.” The unnamed speaker refers to Sylvestrov’s *Mystery* (*Misteriia*) for alto flute and six groups of percussion (1964), composed for well-known flute player and avant-garde proponent Severino Gazzelloni (1919–1992), who premiered it on 12 September 1965 at the Venice Biennale with the Les Percussions de Strasbourg. *Mystery* was also performed in Paris and Cologne in 1966 and at the Prague Spring Festival in 1967 (by Petr Kotík with the same ensemble); a recording with Les Percussions de Strasbourg and flautist François Hébral was released on LP by Philips in 1969. As none of the players on any of the clips on this flexi disc are credited, the source of the recording is unclear, although Les Percussions de Strasbourg are probably the percussionists (Blazhkov 2020b: 1:400, 416, 421, 445; 2:30, 157, 179, 191).<sup>4</sup>

After the narrator’s introduction, as *Mystery* plays in the background, we hear Sylvestrov speaking. He bursts in, talking very quickly, as he still does, his ideas cascading one after the other, rushing to come out. Sylvestrov says:

like a single voice, and all the sounds are reconciled in a field, or a forest, that is, in some kind of naïve moment. From the white noise. White noise is when a noise contains every

pitch, in that white noise – I am not speaking about the scientific understanding, perhaps this isn’t it. Personally, I noticed something when we were on a folklore expedition and we were brought to some kind of farm, and we heard a kind of noise, and it turned out to be a remarkable combination, for somewhere in the distance Chopin’s Piano Concerto swelled, very quietly, and that music did not sound from the depths separately; it was as if in being woven into that noise it already joined the other parts of another orchestra. And that is also my personal basis for *Mystery*.

Jumping from idea to idea, interrupting and elaborating himself, Sylvestrov emphasizes for the first time here several key factors for his developing aesthetic, among them the idea of white noise from which familiar music emerges and into which it sinks. Nature and, specifically, the pastoral, also became central categories for Sylvestrov, finding full fruition in his Symphony no. 5 (1980–82), which has its origin in a concept he described as the “cosmic pastoral,” a label he also applied to two other compositions from the 1960s, his orchestral work *Spectra* (*Spektry*) from 1965 and his 1966 Symphony no. 3, *Eschatophony* (Table 2). Sylvestrov also highlights in his *Mystery* commentary the idea of distanced listening, of hearing something significant, very softly, and far away (a sense of space implicit in the “cosmic pastoral”). Space and nature became more important as his career progressed, as did his references to past music (in this case to Chopin). Such references can be heard in the central moments in many of his later symphonies, starting with Symphony no. 5, with its classically inflected piano solo at the midpoint of its arch structure, set in quietude, with wind and brass blowing and periodic distant thunder from the strings. Sylvestrov also wanted his *Kitsch Music* for piano (1977), itself an evocation of nineteenth-century piano music, to be heard softly, “as if from a distance” (Schmelz 2021: 94).

Unlike his Symphony no. 5, *Mystery* reflects Sylvestrov’s still-forming aesthetic from the mid-1960s, when he was still using twelve-tone methods (the first page of *Mystery* unfolds several

<sup>4</sup> At the Paul Sacher Stiftung there is a recording of *Mystery* dated “Prague Spring, 1968,” but this is contradicted by the Blazhkov correspondence, which suggests it was performed (and recorded) at the 1967 festival. See disc 9 in Sammlung Valentin Silvestrov.

**Table 2.** Pärt and Silvestrov, post-1960 compositions (selected).

	Pärt	Sylvestrov
1960	<i>Nekrolog</i> (“Obituary”) for orchestra	
1961		Five Pieces for piano <i>Quartetto Piccolo</i> for string quartet
1962		Trio for flute, trumpet, and celesta <i>Triad</i> for piano (1961–62)
1963	Symphony no. 1, <i>Polyphonic Perpetuum mobile</i> for orchestra <i>Solfeggio</i> for choir	Symphony no. 1 for large symphony orchestra (rev. 1974)
1964	<i>Diagramme</i> , op. 11, for piano [ <i>Musica sillabica</i> , op. 12] <i>Quintettino</i> for wind quintet <i>Collage über B-A-C-H</i> for orch.	<i>Classical Overture</i> for small symphonic orchestra <i>Mystery</i> for flute and six percussionists
1965		Symphony no. 2 for flute, percussion, piano, and strings <i>Monodia</i> for piano and orchestra <i>Spectra (Spektry)</i> , Symphony for chamber orchestra <i>Projections</i> for harpsichord, vibes and chimes
1966	<i>Pro et contra</i> for cello and orchestra Symphony no. 2	Symphony no. 3, <i>Eschatophony</i>
1967		<i>Elegy</i> for piano <i>Hymn</i> for strings, winds, piano, celesta, harp, and bells
1968	<i>Credo</i> for piano, choir, and orchestra	<i>Poem</i> (in memoriam B. N. Lyatoshytsky) for orchestra
1971	Symphony no. 3	<i>Drama</i> for violin, cello, and piano
1972		<i>Meditation</i> for cello and chamber orchestra
1973		<i>Music in the Old Style</i> for piano <i>Kitsch Songs</i> for voice and piano
1973–77		<i>Quiet Songs</i> for voice and piano
1974		String Quartet no. 1
1976	<i>Modus</i> <i>Für Alina</i>	Symphony no. 4 for winds and strings
1977	<i>Tabula rasa</i>	<i>Kitsch-Music</i> for piano
1981–82	<i>Passio</i> (1982)	Three Postludes Symphony no. 5

row forms) but blending them with aleatory devices (see Example 1). He later idiosyncratically called this composition a “transition from dodecaphony to the avant-garde” (Sylvestrov, Pilyutikov 2010: 33). He also once quipped that it was his *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* (Pavlyshyn 1989: 16), a comparison explained obliquely by a comment Sylvestrov made in his *Krugozor* interview: “*Mystery* is like an action – an almost

theatrical act. Like a theatrical performance [как представление]” (Sylvestrov, Agamirov 1968: 13). In a letter to Blazhkov from 1965 he wrote, “[t]he name of the piece underscores the ritual character of the music, which is reflected in the instrumentation (flute and percussion) and also in the formal structure [формообразование] – the pathos of the solo flute inspires the ‘chorus’ of percussion, in a word, a Bacchic celebration”

**Example 1.** Sylvestrov, *Mystery*, beginning (manuscript).

(Blazhkov 2020b: 1:353).<sup>5</sup> The other Sylvestrov works excerpted on the *Krugozor* flexi disc represented the period before his “transition from dodecaphony to the avant-garde”: his Trio

for flute, trumpet, and celesta (1962); and *Signs* (*Znaki*) for piano (movement 1 from his *Triad*, composed between 1961 and 1962). (*Signs* itself eventually contained seven shorter movements).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The liner notes to the 1969 Percussions de Strasbourg LP recording of *Mystery* with flute player François Hébral paraphrases this authorial interpretation, calling attention to: “[t]he opposition between the flute with its incantatory accents and the percussion group, which represents the ‘choir’ in ancient times, [and] clearly shows the composer’s desire to render the symbolic and disturbing oppositions of some magic rite.” These notes also praise “the extraordinary sonic sensuality that unfolds in this piece and the power of bewitchment that it mysteriously radiates.” See liner notes to Percussions de Strasbourg LP by Maurice Fleuret, Philips 836 992 DSY (1969): <https://www.cdandlp.com/en/les-percussions-de-strasbourg/serocki--continuum-silvestrov--mysteres-puig--provisoires-agglomerats/lp/r118364173/> (5 September 2022).

<sup>6</sup> *Triad* underwent several revisions from the first performance of the first four movements of *Signs* in 1961 (including a different series of movement titles), to the point where Sylvestrov wrote to Blazhkov in late December 1966 in reference to Maria Bergmann’s recording of *Triad* (1961) that he needed to “delicately settle this matter with the already non-existent *Triad* and quietly replace it with the new one with the same dedication to Bergmann,” although none of the three movements in the final version of the composition was dedicated to the German pianist (Blazhkov 2020: 1:499, 326, 328).

Sylvestrov does not speak again on the flexi disc, but as the Trio is heard in the background, the narrator provides a description of it purportedly from the composer. Given the narrator’s wording, it is probably a paraphrase: “The author’s thinking here might be presented like this: three people have gathered, each of them is absolutely different; they argue, speak about something of their own, but these contradictions already include harmony – the correct, old parable about truth that is born in disputes.” This repurposed chestnut about chamber music as a conversation – too straightforward, neither crafty nor paradoxical enough to be directly from Sylvestrov – is followed by a further minute from the Trio, probably the performance from the 1964 Berliner Festwochen, passed along to Sylvestrov by West German musicologist Fred Prieberg, featuring Aurele Nicolet, flute; Frizz Wesenigk, trumpet; and Rolf Kuhnert, celesta (Schmelz 2015). Nowhere else does Sylvestrov describe the Trio in these terms. Instead, he once said it was “serial with Mozart-like moments” (Pavlyshyn 1989: 36).

“And finally,” the *Krugozor* narrator says, “one of the recent works of Valentyn Sylvestrov, the piano cycle *Signs*.” The listener hears the first six measures of the third movement of *Signs* before the narrator resumes his explication:

It also has its own creative history, which in fact is part of the general conception of the composition. In childhood Sylvestrov developed an enthusiasm for many aspects of geography. In particular, he loved to examine topographic maps. And thus the graphic [живописный] [appearance] of the topographical symbols attracted his attention. Not that he saw in them some kind of specific river crossings, bridges, fords, or swamps, but precisely because the art of the topographical signs attracted him and later on gave him the idea to create a piano cycle called *Signs*. And in parentheses after that title, one may add “topographical.”

Behind this explanation sounds the ending of the third movement, followed, almost inaudibly, by what might be the fourth movement. (The performer is unknown: a recording comparison indicates that this is not Maria Bergmann’s recording from November 1961; it might be Sylvestrov himself [Schmelz 2015: 198; Blazhkov

2020b: 1:282–292].) After the narrator finishes, the entire third movement is repeated. Again, this interpretation of the composition and its title, although more plausible than that of the Trio, is novel. By contrast, Ukrainian musicologist Stefaniya Pavlyshyn traced its name to the semiotics of poetry, the “role of vagueness as an impulse in poetry that contains the uncertain [недомовленість],” a statement that sounds closer to Sylvestrov’s more familiar aesthetic tone and terms (Pavlyshyn 1989: 49). Yet whether fully authorized by Sylvestrov, an expansion of a passing comment, or a creative extrapolation, the foregrounding of programmatic explanations for these three avant-garde, or near avant-garde, compositions in the *Krugozor* commentary reveals the “theatricality” of Sylvestrov’s early compositions, despite their often-abstract surfaces. This interest in a self-consciously staged expressivity grew more prominent in his later compositions from the 1960s and early 1970s, especially *Hymn* for strings, winds, piano, celesta, harp, and bells (1967), *Drama* for violin, cello, and piano (1970–71), and *Meditation* for cello and chamber orchestra (1972).

Sylvestrov’s own words in the printed *Krugozor* interview reveal the tension created by his duelling tendencies toward programmaticism and abstraction. This interview proceeds along two irregularly interlocking planes: the journalist, one A. Agamirov, narrates a walking tour through Kyiv with the composer, in which they stop, inexplicably, at Mikhail Bulgakov’s house, as Sylvestrov speaks about his studies with Borys Lyatoshynsky, his reverence for Bach, and, most significantly, his view of audiences and his own music. He declares: “It seems that music is written and with that everything is done. But no! I rarely meet with the public, more rarely than I want. But each meeting is a new birth of music. And only there is the question decided, will it be or not.” Sylvestrov continues, speaking for the only time in the interview in Ukrainian as he downplays the difficulty of his music, “This is first-grade dodecaphony, as one of my acquaintances says.” He then switches back to Russian, “By the way, the listener also must be brave. He very often does not fear the harshness of daily life. But real music was never a room with rosy wallpaper. If one listens carefully to Mozart (everything, and not only ‘Non più andrai’ [from the *Marriage of*

*Figaro*]), then this is a rebellion! An invasion of uncompromising, immense, new elements. It irritated then ...” “And became absolute today,” Agamirov concludes, smoothing over a potential rough edge (Sylvestrov, Agamirov 1968: 13–14).

Sylvestrov’s comments on both flexi disc and the printed page, aural and transcribed, negotiate between past and present, emphasizing the difficulties of the past as a way to pave the way for an eventual acceptance of his own difficult – but actually not-so-difficult – music. They reveal his own negotiation as a composer between old and new, transforming Chopin heard at a distance into an updated version of Debussy’s revolutionary fin-de-siècle tone poem, and appropriating once-revolutionary Mozart-isms into a serial framework. He shared a narrative, mimetic impulse with both Schnittke and Pärt (Schmelz 2009).

The Pärt flexi disc in *Krugozor* unfortunately does not include him speaking, nor does this issue include his photograph (as did Sylvestrov’s, and Shchedrin’s, articles) but it does contain the first known recording of *Pro et contra*, a different recording of which was released on Melodiya the same year (1969). According to Doug Maskew, an expert on Pärt’s Melodiya recordings, the *Krugozor* version of *Pro et contra* was made by Estonian Radio in 1967 and “was most likely a performance with no audience ... possibly recorded prior to the official premiere” (Maskew 2021). Maskew also noted this recording’s “audible edits,” which allowed it to fit on a single side of a flexi disc: it is about two minutes shorter than most other recordings, just under 6.5 minutes (6’22”) versus the usual 8.5 minutes or longer.<sup>7</sup> (The recording by the same performers on the landmark 1969 Melodiya LP of Pärt’s music is only slightly lengthier: 7’05”.)<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of the cuts, it is a riveting performance by cellist Toomas Velmet with the Estonian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Neeme Järvi conducting. The composition was a real crowd pleaser. Years later Velmet recalled that

the audience at the premiere was so enthusiastic that he played *Pro et contra* again as an encore: “During my 30 years as a professional musician, I have never experienced such a success again. The concert hall was packed. There were lots of students, lots of young people.”<sup>9</sup> The recording memorializes an energetic, experimentalist Pärt, pulling more overtly between yesterday and today.

Like the Sylvestrov *Krugozor* issue, Pärt’s (1969, no. 11) also included a printed interview with the composer, a source I have never seen cited and therefore one worth considering in greater detail. The interview begins with a quotation from Pärt the mystic, highlighting a common theme between Sylvestrov’s *Krugozor* and his: mystery. “Music contains an element of mystery,” Pärt said. “You cannot explain everything, simply the miracle is present, but you may not believe in that miracle ... You may study music to find major, minor, and other patterns, but how does one measure its mystery?” The author of the article, musicologist Arkadiy Petrov (not incidentally, a friend of Schnittke’s), next highlights Pärt’s personal approach to serialism, sounding a refrain common to the few public apologists for avant-garde techniques in the 1960s USSR. “However, unlike most contemporary authors using serialism,” Petrov wrote, “the technique does not control the composer, but he controls the technique. He always remains himself ...” Petrov’s statement rings particularly ironic given Pärt’s own self-doubts, and his later comments about his lack of a personal style at the time (Schmelz 2021: 43).

Petrov also highlighted the importance of quotations for Pärt, showing how important collage was to Pärt’s Soviet reception. He, after all, had introduced the term to Soviet listeners with his 1964 *Collage über B-A-C-H*, as Schnittke later recalled (Schmelz 2021: 42–43). (Note that at this time the word “polystylism” had not yet been introduced in the USSR [Schmelz 2021: 77–84].)

<sup>7</sup> Compare to the 1989 BIS recording with Neeme Järvi (8’44”); the 1989 Melodiya release by Kaasik (8’33”); and the 1995 recording by Vadim Messermann and the Congress Orchestra on Audiophile Classics (8’36”). See *Arvo Pärt* 1989. CD. Neeme Järvi, Frans Helmerson, The Bamberg Symphony Orchestra. BIS-434 CD; *Allar Kaasik*. LP. Allar Kaasik, Peeter Lilje, Estonian State Symphony Orchestra. C1028381 000; *Arvo Pärt. Tabula Rasa* 1999. CD. Paolo Gatto, Vadim Messermann et al., Congress Orchestra. Recorded 1995, released 1999. APC 101.058.

<sup>8</sup> *Arvo Pärt* 1969. LP. Neeme Järvi, Toomas Velmet, Eesti Raadio Sümfooniaorkester et al. D 018049–25076.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.arvopart.ee/en/premiere-of-pro-et-contra-released-on-lp/> (5 September 2022).

“One of [Pärt’s] ‘innovations,’” Petrov continued in the *Krugozor* article, “is the introduction into the musical fabric of direct quotations from the classics – Bach’s Sarabande (*Collage über B-A-C-H*), a children’s piece by Tchaikovsky (Second Symphony) or imitations in a classical style (the Cello Concerto *Pro et contra*).” “These quotations give rise to many questions,” Petrov added. “What are they: symbols of the greatness of the classical period, of the moral force of older music? Pärt has his own particular relationship to the classical legacy ...” In the article, Pärt then explained his influences, showing how “old” they actually had become: “Gregorian chant, monophonic. I try to grasp the secret of unison singing. For me, this detail means more than all the super-contemporary complexities ... I study from the masters of the Renaissance and just as much from painters as from musicians – Raphael, Michelangelo ... Precisely they suggest bright, pure harmony ...” The remainder of the *Krugozor* article explored the genesis of *Pro et contra* as a commission from Mstislav Rostropovich. “At first I refused ... But then I decided to compose an energetic work, sharp, with showy technical devices,” Pärt said (Pärt, Petrov 1969: 14–15) (see Example 2).

Petrov concluded by explaining the title of the *Krugozor* excerpt. “According to Pärt,” he reported, “*Pro et contra* should be seen as written in the form of the old concerto grosso. The fundamental soloist is the cellist, who is opposed by the wind instruments, and all of them together are opposed by the remainder of the orchestra, *tutti*. In this fashion, all are competing with one another (‘contra’), but they all should play together, hence the ‘pro’” (Pärt, Petrov 1969: 15). Yet this interpretation, fixated on the surface details of the composition’s genre, omits the crucial stylistic divide gripping the composition, softening and classicizing its rough edges by emphasizing its overtly tonal beginning, middle, and end. *Krugozor* caught Pärt on the brink. He had just recently suffered the contentious airings of *Credo*, and was still struggling with his next steps, suggested by Petrov’s references to Pärt’s “measuring of mystery” and his turn to Gregorian chant and monophonic song. As we know, Pärt’s personal answers to the rhetorical questions Petrov posed about the reasons for his quotations

were more conditional, rooted in a painful sense of missing his own true voice.

This is an essential distinction between Pärt and Sylvestrov: their very different attitudes toward experimentation and avant-garde music, a distinction audible in the *Krugozor* excerpts and in each composer’s accompanying comments. The statements Pärt later made to interviewers, and specifically to Enzo Restagno, about his 1960s compositions, and about serialism and collage, are agonizing to read. Though familiar, Pärt’s self-analysis nearly 40 years after the fact is worth further scrutiny. He said of his 1960s compositions: “I can assure you that the world I carried within myself was riddled with such deep cracks that in comparison the atmosphere and language of twelve-tone music seemed more pleasant” (Restagno 2012: 15). The motivation, as it was for many from his generation and their listeners, was escape. “At the time,” Pärt continued, “I was convinced that every mathematical formula could be translated into music. I thought that in this way one could create a more objective and purer kind of music. If I had succeeded by other means in creating a music free of emotion, I would have been able to distance myself from twelve-tone music” (Restagno 2012: 15). Yet he further revealed his skepticism by comparing twelve-tone music to “Anderson’s tale about the emperor’s new clothes” (Restagno 2012: 19).

As a result, Pärt’s compositions from the latter half of the 1960s became more masochistic. He called *Credo* “real musical auto-aggression” (Restagno 2012: 19). “In my state of extreme discomfort at that time,” he told Restagno, “I wanted to prove to myself how beautiful Bach’s music was, and how hateful mine was. What I am saying may sound odd, but I was convinced that through this musical sacrifice I could gain a clearer vision of my own contradictions” (Restagno 2012: 14). Pärt spoke of himself as if he were a burn victim, with the Bach quotation in *Credo* (and the Chaikovsky quotation in the Second Symphony) as skin transplants (Restagno 2012: 17). And he compared the relief he felt when he first encountered Gregorian chant to “being given a blood transfusion” (Restagno 2012: 28). These are not the statements of a comfortable creator. His reluctance to discuss this period is understandable, as is the tendency of many Pärt

scholars to follow his lead and concentrate on the music he wrote after his metaphorical blood transfusion.<sup>10</sup>

Despite, or because of, its resolute tonal inflection points, *Pro et contra* makes for uncomfortable listening. The creative, philosophical (ethical and aesthetic), and biographical questions it raises cast doubt on its very existence. Given as an impassive, objective description (“for and against”), the title is better read with an “or” and an emphatic question mark (“for or against?”). The antagonistic styles – serialism, sonorika, aleatory, and tonality – are not equal: despite the excitingly propulsive, seat-of-the-pants virtuosity and thorny orchestral collisions in the third movement (egged on by excited horn whoops), Pärt’s regal, harmonious ending acts as a *Deus ex machina*, definitively resolving the question – but only by foreclosing debate.

Sylvestrov felt a similar pull between styles but, rather than casting them in pitched aesthetic battles, he attempted to reconcile them, most notably in *Drama* and *Meditation*. In this respect, Schnittke is the closer analogue to Pärt, with the doubts of *Quasi una Sonata* a match for *Pro et contra*, which might also have been called *Quasi uno Concerto*.

In October 1961, pianist Maria Yudina wrote to Pärt about a speech she had given at a concert of new music in Moscow, in which she proudly declared: “In the century of Einstein we can no longer live according to the physics textbook of Kraevich [meaning Konstantin Dmitrievich Kraevich, 1833–1892, a well-known nineteenth-century Russian physicist and pedagogue]!” (Yudina 1999: 486). But clearly Pärt did not catch Yudina’s intense enthusiasm for new musical techniques. He was resigned to serialism, actively seeking something better, more truthful. Sylvestrov, by contrast, was, like Yudina, intoxicated by the possibilities of the new styles he was being buffeted by in the 1960s. He later declared about hearing for the first time Anton Webern’s *Concerto for Nine Instruments* (1931–34): “[It]

immediately astonished me. When I heard it, I had the feeling that I was listening to music perpendicularly. Such a naïve impression from a simple listener ... there immediately was the sense of a completely new world” (Munipov 2019: 140).<sup>11</sup> Webern’s new world beckoned Sylvestrov. The best Pärt could say of Webern was that he “never produced poison” (Restagno 2012: 25). In his 1967 interview with another Soviet periodical for young people, *Yunost’*, Sylvestrov praised the “best manifestations” of the “avant-garde” as a “revolt against the inertia of compositional thought” (Schmelz 2021: 140). For Sylvestrov this revolt promised indescribable dividends.

These divergent motivations begin to explain why the compositions by Pärt and Sylvestrov from the 1960s sound so very different. On the *Krugozor* excerpts alone we can hear Sylvestrov’s attraction to an often delicate, pointillistic, gestural language, with strong traces of Boulez (Harry 2003: 28). By contrast, Pärt’s music of the 1960s retains a sense of propulsion and energy, and drama, heard in several works in addition to *Pro et contra*, among them *Nekrolog* (“Obituary”), *Perpetuum mobile*, and the *Symphony no. 1* (especially its opening). Pärt’s music from this decade possesses a drive and forcefulness that Sylvestrov’s music often lacks. Sylvestrov was, even then, more interested in lingering moments, when subtle textures and timbres call for our attention across musical space. Sylvestrov’s sense of time is more relaxed.

On a broader level, across his career Pärt, like Schnittke, was concerned with process and method, with stories both hidden and loudly proclaimed. As Schnittke once said about himself, in a statement that matches Pärt’s comments and practice, he needed “any kind [of restrictions], even the most absurd” (Schnittke, Shulgin 1993: 66). Only with the *tintinnabuli* style did Pärt’s process lead to a (seemingly) effortless result, for only with the *tintinnabuli* style did the sounding surface subsume the process, becoming inseparable. In *Pro et contra* the cracks and fissures show, by design.

<sup>10</sup> Exceptions include May 2021 and Siitan 2021.

<sup>11</sup> See Sylvestrov’s later ‘Homage à A. Webern’, second movement of a three-part piano cycle called *Three Waltzes*, op. 54, 2005, dedicated to Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg, respectively (recorded on *Touching the memory*, available on CD, Brilliant Classics 95765, 2018, and remastered here: <https://silvestrov.bandcamp.com/album/touching-the-memory> [5 September 2022]).

**Example 2.** Pärt, *Pro et contra*, p. 2 and p. 7 (cadenza) (score: Pärt 1973).

6

Fl.  
Ob.  
Cl.  
Fag.  
Sax.  
Cor.  
Tr-ba  
Tr-ne  
T-no  
Vibr.  
Mar.  
P-no  
V-c. solo  
V-ni I  
1, 2 pulti  
V-ni I  
V-ni II  
1 pult  
V-ni II  
2, 3 pulti  
V-c.  
1, 2 pulti  
V-c.  
C-b.  
1 pult  
C-b.  
2, 3 pulti

- \* Импровизация на данных нотах.
- \*\* Импровизация на клавишах в указанном регистре (играть ладонями).
- \*\*\* Играть на струнах так сильно, чтобы возник треск.



Sylvestrov was more intuitive and less systematic in his approach, even if his often-elaborate conceptual rationales for his compositional practice were highly calculated. As Ukrainian-American composer Virko Baley recently told me, “[r]ight from the beginning [Sylvestrov] very clearly showed a very original streak, ... he handled things in his own way ... because he wrote by ear” (Baley 2022). Few sketches or drafts of Sylvestrov’s music, old or new survive, the palimpsest of the *Quiet Songs* score at the Paul Sacher Stiftung is the most extensive exception, worried over, rearranged, pasted in, reshuffled. The “moment” or “instant” [МГНОВЕННІЕ] became a crucial category for Sylvestrov, a prolongation of the transitory, ephemeral, continuously vanishing present. He had no need to rush anywhere.

### Comrades in Misfortune

Aside from the valuable documentary snapshots of Sylvestrov and Pärt presented by the *Krugozor* issues from 1968 and 1969, they also indicate how widely Sylvestrov and Pärt were known and disseminated in the Soviet Union at the end of the decade. This position would have been difficult to predict at its beginning when Pärt, alongside Andrey Volkonsky, was one of the most publicly rebuked of the young Soviet composers, taken to task especially for his *Nekrolog* in 1962 (Schmelz 2009: 131–132). But Sylvestrov was also publicly chastised that year in the pages of *Sovetskaya muzyka* for his Piano Quintet (1961), which, a critic wrote, “distressed us with its open experimentation.” This critic repeated the typical questions: “Why have several gifted young musicians lost their true artistic orientation? Because of a snobby overindulgence? Or, perhaps, from a limited field of view [крызозор]?” (Genina, Korev 1962: 22). It was this last question that the title of the youth magazine spoke to – *Krugozor* the magazine aimed to provide a wide field of view to show such “gifted young musicians,” and their listeners, that other options existed.

Because of their shared targeting by Soviet officialdom, Pärt and Sylvestrov felt a certain sympathy toward one another. Yudina first brought Pärt to the attention of Sylvestrov and his circle, telling Blazhkov excitedly in July 1961 that in Tallinn “they really are studying dodecaphonic music” (Blazhkov 2020b: 1:100). Pärt himself wrote to Blazhkov in October 1963 apologizing

for his lack of responsiveness to Blazhkov’s several letters to him. He promised to send Blazhkov a copy of *Nekrolog*, and he celebrated his upcoming trip to the Warsaw Autumn festival, writing “Hurray!” Based on the postscript to this letter, Pärt apparently already knew the Ukrainian composers Leonid Hrabovsky and Lesya Dychko, to whom he requested Blazhkov pass along his friendly greetings (Blazhkov 2020b: 1:232). In a May 1964 letter to Blazhkov, Hrabovsky sang the praises of Pärt’s *Perpetuum mobile*, which he had heard at Edison Denisov’s apartment on a visit to Moscow: “Here is someone who is moving wonderfully forward! He’s already made it to around Penderecki” (Blazhkov 2020b: 1:252). All of these young musicians were in a race to catch up to the musical innovations they had missed in their official education.

They hungrily kept tabs on one another. Hrabovsky remembered vividly his first meeting in person with Pärt, who, he told me,

visited Kyiv in January of 1965, when his Symphony no. 1 was performed by Neeme Järvi with the State Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine. We all Kyivers were present, and celebrated the event afterwards at the Dnipro restaurant where both Estonians ordered a Tatar dish made out of uncooked ground meat – and considerable vodka doses ... (Hrabovsky 2000).

Sylvestrov must have been present at this feast, for Tatyana Frumkis reported to me that Sylvestrov “met Pärt at the beginning of the 1960s, when they were both criticized and Pärt made a special trip to Kyiv to meet his ‘comrade in misfortune’” (Frumkis 2022).

Blazhkov missed this event, for he was living in Leningrad at the time. And the next period of his interactions with Pärt was an exercise in frustration. He reported to Denisov in February 1965 that he had “appealed to Pärt for scores and recordings dozens of times, both in person and in letters.” But he had received only “promises” (Blazhkov 2020b: 1: 287). Denisov replied three days later, “Pärt lets down [обманывает] not only you, but also me – he has yet to send me anything” (Blazhkov 2020b: 1:289). When Blazhkov visited Pärt the next year (1966) he learned the cause of Pärt’s silence: he was seriously ill, bedridden following multiple kidney surgeries, and had been for two years by

that point, a little-acknowledged possible basis for both his contemporary compositional pain and the medical terms he used so frequently to describe it (Blazhkov 2020b: 1: 390; Mihkelson 2012: 25). In November 1966, Blazhkov wrote to Denisov with plans for an ambitious, unrealized concert survey of new Soviet music, whose roster provides a compelling snapshot of mid-decade “unofficial” music:

- 1st half: Pärt – *Musica sillabica*  
 Denisov – *Crescendo e diminuendo*  
 Volkonsky – *Laments of Shchaza* (with Lidia Davydova)
- 2nd half: Boris Chaikovsky – *Partita* (with Rostropovich)  
 Sylvestrov – *Spectra*

(transcribed from Blazhkov 2020b: 1:466–467)

There are no surviving letters from Pärt to Sylvestrov (or vice versa) and, as Martynov suggested (Martynov 2021), it seems that their interactions were rare over the next decades, with special occasions captured only in photographs (see Figures 1 and 2). Sylvestrov recently told me that “I felt a kind of commonality” with Pärt and Giya Kancheli “but there was no dialogue. There was an awareness of a kind of support” (Sylvestrov 2022).

Sylvestrov needed this moral support because his music continued to raise suspicions over the course of the 1960s in both Ukraine and in Moscow. Many of these suspicions resulted from the wide propagation of his music in the West, thanks to the efforts of Yudina and Blazhkov, as well as the West German musicologist Fred Prieberg. Unlike Pärt’s music, Blazhkov had ready access to Sylvestrov’s scores (see Table 3).

Prieberg was also deeply interested in Pärt’s music but found obtaining it difficult; the Soviet embassy kept giving him the run around (Schmelz 2015). He especially wanted to hear *Nekrolog* because of the near-constant criticism it had received in the Soviet press (which was why his official Soviet contacts were so reluctant to send it to him). This was what Prieberg called the “Pasternak effect” (and today in popular culture is known as the Streisand effect): by criticizing something, rather than dissuading interest, one attracts attention. (It might also be called the *Krugozor* effect.) Nonetheless, Soviet authorities pressed on with their occasional dissemination of difficult music, preferring to avoid outright bans,

**Figure 1.** Sylvestrov and Pärt in Berlin, early 1990s. From left: Sandro Kancheli, Valentyn Sylvestrov, Giya Kancheli, Alexander Knaifel, Rezo Kiknadze, Arvo Pärt. Photographed probably by Nora Pärt. Credits: Arvo Pärt Centre.



**Figure 2.** Sylvestrov and Pärt in Kyiv, 26 March 2011. From left: Constantin Sigov, Valentyn Sylvestrov, Arvo Pärt. Photographer: unknown / Copyrights: unknown. Credits: Arvo Pärt Centre.



except in especially difficult cases, such as with Volkonsky in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and by the end of the 1970s, with Pärt himself. But in the late 1960s, Pärt still seemed salvageable. Despite the reported difficulties that arose on the heels of *Credo* in 1968, he was still able to be featured in *Krugozor* the next year (Mihkelson 2012: 26). Sylvestrov was also criticized after his 1967 interview in another young people’s magazine, *Yunost’* or “Youth,” but this criticism did not prevent his 1968 appearance in *Krugozor* (Schwarz 1983: 487). These instances, like the appearance of Karetnikov’s *Symphony no. 4* in *Krugozor*, are yet further illustrations of the unpredictability engendered by the gigantic Soviet bureaucracy. Karetnikov is a counterexample: after he appe-

**Table 3.** Sylvestrov, Foreign Performances. List of compositions accompanying letter dated 28 September 1971 from the Union of Composers of Ukraine to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Ukrainian SSR (TsDALMU, F. 661, op. 1, spr. 883: 39).

1961	Quintet	8 February 1968 Kyiv Lysenko Quartet and E. Rzhanov, piano 29 December 1964 Berlin [sic]
1962	<i>Triada</i>	1966 Kyiv performed by the author
1962	Trio for flute, trumpet, and celesta	24 September 1964 Berlin
1964	<i>Mystery</i> for alto flute and percussion	1965 Paris [sic]
1965	<i>Spectra</i>	8 December 1965 Leningrad Cond. Blazhkov
1965	Symphony [no. 2] for flute, percussion, piano, and strings	1 April 1968 Leningrad, Blazhkov
1965	<i>Projections</i>	17 February 1967 Indiana University, USA
NB. <i>Quartetto Piccolo</i> and Symphony no. 3, <i>Eschatophony</i> , are not mentioned.		

**Table 4.** Pärt, Discography 1959–1984.

(Drawn from Doug Maskew “A. Pärt: The Melodiya Recordings, 1959–1990, An Overview.” APK 7-2.92)

1959	Partita (Aprelevskii zavod 8-inch)
1959/61/64	Sonatina no. 2, op. 1 (Ligo/Melodiya LP)
1960/61/64	<i>Our Garden</i> (Ligo/Melodiya LP)
1965/69	<i>Our Garden</i> (Melodiya LP)
1966	Symphony no. 1, <i>Perpetuum mobile</i> (Melodiya LP)
1967	<i>Quintettino</i> (Melodiya LP)
1969/75	Symphony no. 1, <i>Perpetuum mobile</i> , <i>Collage über B-A-C-H</i> , <i>Musica sillabica</i> , <i>Pro et contra</i> (Melodiya LP)
1971	Sonatina no. 2, op. 1, and <i>Diagramme</i> (Melodiya LP)
1974	<i>Vändra polka</i> (Melodiya LP)
1976/78	<i>Diagramme</i> (Melodiya LP)
1976	<i>Vändra polka</i> (Melodiya LP)
1977/78	<i>Quintettino</i> (Melodiya LP)
1984	<i>Tabula rasa</i> (ECM LP and CD)

**Table 5.** Sylvestrov, Discography 1969–1988.

1969	<i>Mystery</i> , Les Percussions de Strasbourg (Philips LP).
1978	<i>Children's Music</i> nos. 1 and 2 on Evgenii Rzhanov, <i>Children's Pieces of Ukrainian Composers</i> (Melodiya LP).
1978	Piano Sonata no. 1 on Nikolai Suk, <i>Piano Music of Ukrainian Composers</i> (Melodiya LP).
1982	String Quartet no. 1 on <i>Soviet Chamber Music</i> (Opus, Czechoslovakia, LP).
1982	String Quartet no. 1 on Lysenko Quartet, <i>Janacek and Silvestrov String Quartets</i> (Melodiya LP).
1988	Symphony no. 5 conducted by Roman Kofman, Symphony Orchestra of the Kyiv State Conservatory (Melodiya LP).

**Table 6.** Pärt, Soviet Publications (from Soomere 1977).

1961	<i>Our Garden (Nash Sad)</i> (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor)
1964	<i>Stride of the World (Postup' mira)</i> (Moscow and Leningrad: Muzyka)
1967	Symphony no. 1 (Leningrad: Muzyka)
[1968	<i>Perpetuum mobile</i> (Universal Edition)]
1969	<i>Collage über B-A-C-H</i> (Leningrad: Muzyka)
1971	Symphony no. 2 (Leningrad: Muzyka)

**Table 7.** Sylvestrov, Soviet publications.

1970	<i>Triad</i> for piano (Kyiv: Muzyka)
1978	Symphony no. 2 (Kyiv: Muzychna Ukraïna)
1979	String Quartet [no. 1] (Kyiv: Muzychna Ukraïna)
1980	<i>Children's Music</i> for piano (Kyiv: Muzychna Ukraïna)
1981	<i>Music in the Old Style</i> (Kyiv: Muzychna Ukraïna)
1985	<i>Quiet Songs</i> (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor)
1986	Symphony no. 4 (Kyiv: Muzychna Ukraïna)
1987	Piano Sonatas (Kyiv: Muzychna Ukraïna)
1990	Symphony no. 5; Chamber Cantatas (both Kyiv: Muzychna Ukraïna)

ared in the magazine, he swiftly sank from sight (Taruskin [forthcoming]).

Aside from this one point of “commonality,” their late-1960s appearances in *Krugozor*, and their “comradship in misfortune,” the careers of both Pärt and Sylvestrov could not have been more different over the course of the 1960s and after. Exceptionally for a young Soviet composer

with his stylistic predilections, Pärt’s music was recorded and released on LP in the 1960s; he even received an entire album of his music in 1969, a high-water mark in Pärt’s Soviet reception (Table 4). Sylvestrov, by contrast, had only one composition released in the 1960s, the recording we have already noted by Les Percussions de Strasbourg, with its glossy, silvery, futuristic cover.

From the moment of that LP release on Philips in 1969, none of his music was publicly available anywhere, until some of his early 1970s piano compositions appeared on Melodiya records in 1978 (Table 5). More compositions followed in the 1980s. Of course, these tables do not take into account the frequent circulation of unofficial recordings, chief among them Bruno Maderna’s rendition of Sylvestrov’s Symphony no. 3, *Eschatophony*, made in 1968 in Darmstadt, or the recordings musicologist Kevin Karnes describes in his writings on Pärt (Karnes 2021). In Sylvestrov’s case, most of these unofficial recordings were only possible because of his success abroad in the 1960s, a success Pärt did not share. Sylvestrov garnered several prestigious international awards during the decade, including a Koussevitzky Prize in late 1966,<sup>12</sup> and in 1970 second prize at the International Gaudeamus Composers’ Competition (for his 1967 *Hymn*). But his moment in the sun was brief; the glare of international fame provoked problems back in the USSR.

And this is where Pärt’s position as an Estonian composer had its benefits. For Pärt’s music was more readily available in published scores (Table 6), while Sylvestrov largely went unpublished until the late 1970s (Table 7) (Schmelz 2021: 246–247). These opposite fates reflect the different attitudes toward music and musical style in Estonia and Ukraine. Ukraine much more aggressively stifled artistic experimentation. In a letter from February 1971, Leningrad composer Sergey Slonimsky bemoaned the criticism Sylvestrov’s music had received at a plenum in Moscow just after his dismissal from the Union of Composers in Kyiv in 1970. (As persona non grata at the time, Sylvestrov had not been invited to the plenum.) Slonimsky wrote, “It’s long past time for them to publish and propagandize your music as the national pride of Ukraine like the Estonians do with Pärt, Sink, and Rääts.”<sup>13</sup> But that moment would not arrive during the Soviet period. And by 1971 (with a few exceptions) Pärt was no longer being published or propagandized either. Yet Sylvestrov’s Soviet career on records and in print was just getting

started. It began to take off in the USSR just at the point when Pärt left the Soviet Union in 1980, although at that moment Pärt’s career began to take off in the West in a way that Sylvestrov and his other Soviet colleagues could never have imagined. Pärt’s honors and recognition were just beginning.

### Next Steps

Both Pärt and Sylvestrov moved away from their 1960s experimental periods in different ways. Sylvestrov began advocating for the appearance of many (all) different styles in a single composition by searching for what he called “identity” or “oneness,” a harmonious rapprochement between different kinds of music. This searching reached an apex in two key works from around 1970: the Trio for violin, piano and cello he called *Drama* and the Concerto for cello and orchestra he called *Meditation*. In both works, the performers light and blow out matches, a theatrical enactment of Sylvestrov’s focus on passing moments, on instants that contain infinity.

*Drama* parallels, less bombastically, Pärt’s *Credo* with its collisions of serialism, aleatory, sonorika, and quotations from Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*. 1976 and 1977 are usually seen as Pärt’s pivotal years, marked by the advent of his *tintinnabuli* style in a large number of compositions, as his pent-up creativity began flooding over (Karnes 2021). In Sylvestrov’s case the turn came in 1973 when he composed a number of important compositions, including some deliberately naïve piano cycles, a chamber cantata, his *Kitsch Songs*, as well as the first of his *Quiet Songs* (Table 8). It is the *Quiet Songs* that I would nominate as the parallel to Pärt’s *Für Alina*, although any of Sylvestrov’s piano compositions from 1973 would also fit the bill (and would make a better generic pairing with Pärt’s piano composition). According to reception history, *Tabula rasa* and *Quiet Songs* are a more accurate pairing, as these two ECM releases serve as each composer’s calling card, signaling their fruitful

<sup>12</sup> Sylvestrov received the award in 1966; he submitted his score in 1967. See <https://www.koussevitzky.org/commissions/> (16 September 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Sergey Slonimsky to Sylvestrov, undated letter, postmarked 8 February 1971 and 10 February 1971, Paul Sacher Stiftung, Sammlung Valentin Sylvestrov.

**Table 8.** Sylvestrov, 1973 Compositions.*Simple Songs (Prostye pesni)*

"Mchatsia oblaka" (anon.) March 1973

*Kitsch Songs (Kitsch Pesni)*

"Prislukhaisia ..." (Hryhory Koval) 20 December 1973  
 "Sviato Sliv" (Valerii Kurinskyi) Fall 1973  
 "O el sol no espero, no!" (in Memory of Garcia Lorca; Kurinskyi) January 1973  
 "Dni zabuti ..." (Vadym Kryshchenko) November 1973  
 "Pisnia dlia Anni" (Kurinskyi) March 1973

*Quiet Songs*

"Skvoz' volnistye tumany" (*Winter Journey*, Pushkin) (no. 9) 22 December 1973  
 [the next song in this cycle is from 20 September 1974 (song no. 10)]

"Nocturne"

"Lament of Orpheus" ("Plach Orfeia") (Sylvestrov)

*Music in the Old Style* (exact date of composition unknown)

*Children's Music* (part one completed "8 March 1973 g."; second part n.d.)

Cantata (Fyodor Tyutchev, Alexander Blok), soprano, chamber orchestra 1 September 1973

relationship with the label, and the lucrative exposure to worldwide audiences it facilitated.<sup>14</sup>

Sylvestrov's development lacks the disjunctures in Pärt's evolution. His biography has no equivalent to Pärt's so-called quiet period, when he spent time writing in his many notebooks monophonic melodies inspired by Gregorian chant. There has been much debate about Pärt's period between *Credo* and *Für Alina* and the other *tintinnabuli* music from the mid-1970s: whether it represents rupture or transition, silence or continuity (May 2021). Sylvestrov and his commentators have instead emphasized the continuities in his output, pointing to the ties between his avant-garde music from the 1960s and what he called his "metaphorical style" that followed, which encompasses both his "kitsch" and "post" compositions (Schmelz 2021). Sylvestrov later claimed that between his compositions from

the 1960s and his works after 1973 there was no "change [of style], rather a continuation with different means ... My *Quiet Songs* are also within an avant-garde style" (Savitskaya 2007; Sylvestrov, Pilyutikov 2010: 111). Nonetheless, in the 1970s both composers began producing music that foregrounded sensation, allowing listeners to forget about style, about technique, about the avant-garde. But not all listeners.

**Conclusion: Modern or Postmodern?**

Here we may observe one final, larger historiographical and aesthetic point about each composer, their music, and their legacies. Paul Griffiths, one of musical modernism's most active participant-observers, has been forced to rationalize over the course of his career the enduring popular appeal of both Pärt and Sylvestrov. Griffiths has written liner notes for

<sup>14</sup> *Leggiero, pesante* (2002) was Sylvestrov's first recording for ECM (ECM New Series, ECM 1776), *Requiem for Larissa* was released in 2004 (ECM New Series, ECM 1778) as was *Stille Lieder* (*Silent Songs*, in the translation used by ECM; ECM New Series, ECM 1898/99).

the ECM releases of Sylvestrov's *Quiet Songs* and *Requiem for Larissa*, in which the composer's latter-day explanation of his “post” aesthetic, written, he (Sylvestrov) says, after the end of the symphony, fuel his (Griffiths') poetic urges: “Time in Valentin Sylvestrov's music is a black lake. The water barely moves: the past refuses to slide away; and the slow, irregular stirrings of an oar remain in place” (Griffiths 2004: 2). In ECM record's anniversary coffee table book from 2007, *Horizons Touched*, Griffiths places Sylvestrov in time:

And, as more music from behind the erstwhile Iron Curtain became known (often by way of the [ECM] label's recordings), the outputs of such apparent opposites as [Helmut] Lachenmann [b. 1935] and Valentin Sylvestrov, close in age, came to seem different reactions to the same phenomenon, the same time. History, as steady progress towards some desired goal, had come to an end ... Sylvestrov saw the sunset, Lachenmann the darkness. For both it was night (Griffiths 2007: 290).

It is a familiar story of farewell, one fertilized by Theodor Adorno, among many, many others. Sylvestrov would balk at the comparison, as his frequent inveighing in interviews against what he hears as the empty posturing, and the very lack of music, in Lachenmann's compositions indicates (Sylvestrov, Nestyeva 2004: 159–160).

Griffiths' engagement with Pärt has been less straightforward. In the 1995 edition of his history of music after 1945, he effectively threw up his hands (Griffiths 1995: 266).<sup>15</sup> Pointing, without any commentary, to seven measures from Pärt's *Passio*, the moment when Pilate asks: “What is truth?” Griffiths seemed to suggest that Pärt's music was causing him to question his own grounding in objective reality. His only recourse: to say nothing at all, letting the music, or lack thereof, speak for itself. Yet Griffiths' opinion has changed. In the luxurious 2010 facsimile score for *Tabula rasa*, Griffiths opens the volume with an essay called “Now, and Then.” He again mentions Lachenmann, now in relation to Pärt. “Adverse reactions [to *Tabula rasa* in the 1980s] were understandable,” he wrote.

“Just at that time the world of contemporary music was being unsettled by a kind of easy-listening Romantic pastiche justifying itself as postmodern, and there was an urge to close the gates against a devaluation of all that had been fought for. But Pärt was not the enemy here ...” (Griffiths 2010: 6). For, as Griffiths explains, Pärt was published by Universal Edition, which also published Pierre Boulez and Wolfgang Rihm, and his recordings were released by ECM, which “also features his close contemporary Helmut Lachenmann.” It is salvation by association. But more than association. Griffiths concludes, “through Arvo Pärt's music drift shadows. This is not a totally amnesiac simplicity but one that has been struggled for, one that implies an immense process of discovery ...” (Griffiths 2010: 6). Success and modernism make uncomfortable bedfellows, forcing such convoluted justifications. As long as we can hear shadows and darkness – sunset rather than a (delusional) sunrise – we can listen in (self-)satisfied discomfort. Yet, Griffiths makes a salient observation: Sylvestrov's and Pärt's music, born of the conflicted optimism of the Soviet 1960s, contains more than its share of sacrifice. The stylistic – and societal – cacophony of that decade continues to reverberate in and around their music. And we continue to listen back to its genesis, captivated by sounds so simple yet so hard-fought.

### Postscript

During the “Arvo Pärt: Texts and Contexts” conference, word reached the participants that Sylvestrov had just posted online a composition in honor of Pärt's birthday. Called “Многая літа,” 2021 (“Many years”), a traditional birthday text in Ukraine, it touched on their shared history and their shared positions as elder statesmen of post-Soviet music.<sup>16</sup> Like many of Sylvestrov's aural sketches heard on the internet over the past decade, he included performance instructions, indicating that the work was meant for chorus, and that this version was sung by the composer himself (Schmelz [forthcoming]). He also noted that at the beginning of the recording the piano should be dolce and that the voice should be

<sup>15</sup> NB Griffiths 1986, whose first sentence reads: “Arvo Part [sic] belongs to a familiar Russian type, that of the mystic simpleton.”

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuzUB4SGaH8> (16 September 2022).

piano, leggiero, and lontano (some of Sylvestrov's favorite dynamic and expressive indications). The following explanation accompanied the song on YouTube: "In the *Divine Comedy* Dante spoke of the great heaven which is lodged in a single point. The short form [i.e., brevity] of this dedication holds so much love for a friend and for everything that connects and comes between us."

Two days later Sylvestrov released a "renewed and completed version of the musical offering for Arvo Pärt," with a new program note:

It seems to me that it is "Many years," but instantaneous. When there is an instant – it is very clear that it is not a formal quantity, it is simply an endless "many years," although that small thing lasts 30 minutes. But it possesses a kind of strange sensation that although it has sounded, it extends from us farther, continuing to sound even if we do not hear it.<sup>17</sup>

The description recalls the *Mystery* narrative from the 1968 *Krugozor* flexi disc, revealing the continuities of sound and space across Sylvestrov's creative life. But more importantly, this small gesture of friendship from Sylvestrov touched on the commonalities still binding composer

to composer. (Nor was this his first composition dedicated to Pärt: Three postludes for piano, op. 64 [2005], and Sylvestrov's Cantata no. 4 for soprano, piano, and string orchestra [2015] had also been dedicated to him.)<sup>18</sup>

Only a few months later, in the fluid, fearful days of early March 2022, Pärt looked on the events in Ukraine with horror, and wrote a heartfelt email to Sylvestrov describing his concern and offering help from Tallinn. Three days later as Sylvestrov fled Kyiv by bus in a convoy driven by volunteers, Pärt was part of the worldwide group anxiously awaiting updates on his condition and location. Constantin Sigov, a staunch friend and supporter of Sylvestrov and his music, wrote to Pärt and this group: "Hello from Kyiv! Now begins perhaps one of the most difficult journeys in Valentyn Sylvestrov's life. Up until the last minute he did not want to leave home. He told me that he is doing so for the sake of his daughter and granddaughter. I was able to find a car, which is now carrying them from the left bank of the Dnieper to the right. In Kyiv there are wartime traffic jams" (Sigov 2022). After three stress-filled, exhausting days of travel, Sylvestrov reached Berlin, once Pärt's city of exile, and now his own.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZS6ghUTkas> (16 September 2022).

<sup>18</sup> See <https://en.schott-music.com/shop/kantate-nr-4-no385539.html> (5 September 2022).

<sup>19</sup> See <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/valentin-silvestrov-ueber-seine-flucht-aus-kiew-17885115.html>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/arts/music/valentin-silvestrov-ukraine-war.html>; <https://www.dw.com/ru/walentyin-sylwestrow-w-interview-dw/a-61151672>; <https://www.dw.com/en/ukrainian-composer-valentin-silvestrov-what-are-you-kremlin-devils-doing/a-61158308>; <https://www.dw.com/en/composer-valentyin-silvestrov-on-the-war-in-his-homeland/av-61182036> (5 September 2022).

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## Kaaslased ebaõnnes – Arvo Pärt ja Valentõn Sölvestrov, katsetustest müsteeriumini, ääremaalt keskusse

Peter J. Schmelz

Artiklis vaadeldakse seoseid Valentõn Sölvestrovi ja Arvo Pärdi vahel. 1960. aastatel olid Pärt ja Sölvestrov kaks enim poleemikat tekitanud ja kritiseeritud noort nõukogude heliloojat ning nende kogemustes peegelduvad paljud tähenduslikud suundumused selgemalt kui teiste, Nõukogude Liidu poliitilisele tuumikule lähemal seisvate heliloojate puhul. Käsitletakse nii Pärdi ja Sölvestrovi puutepunkte kui ka lahknevusi, eriti nende sarnast eemaldumist avangardismi katsetustest, kuid samuti nende erinevaid heliloojakogemusi 1960ndate Nõukogude Eestis ja Nõukogude Ukrainas. Hiljuti juurdepääsetavaks saanud vähetuntud allikate toel keskendub artikkel mõlema karjääri pöördepunktidele – hetkedele vahetult enne selle stiili omaksvõttu, mille järgi neid praegu enamasti tuntakse.

Vaatlus keskendub hilisnõukogude ainelise kultuuri olulisele allikale, noorteajakirjale Krugozor. Alates 1964. aastast ilmus Krugozor ligi kolm aastakümnet. See jäädvustas hilise sotsialismi keerukaid helimaastikke, kuhu kuulus ka Sölvestrovi ja Pärdi olulisi teoseid. Sölvestrov tõusis esile 1968. aasta neljandas numbris ja Pärt 1969. aasta üheteistkümnendas. Nende väljaannete kaante vahel ilmunud lastikplaadid (*flexi disc*) Sölvestrovi ja Pärdi muusikaga annavad sissevaate mõlema helilooja stiilirännakuisse läbi kuuekümnendate. Krugozori plaat Sölvestrovi muusikaga on ainulaadne dokument tema selle kümnendi loomingust, sisaldades näiteid teostest „Müsteerium“ („Містерія“, 1964) altflöödile ja kuuete löökpillirühmale, trio flöödile, trompetile ja tšelestale (1962) ja „Märgid“ („Знаки“) klaverile (1961–62). Krugozori Pärdi-plaadil on „Pro et contra“ varaseim teadaolev salvestis, erinev sellest, mis ilmus samal 1969. aastal Melodija plaadil. Ajakirjas on avaldatud ka intervjuud mõlema heliloojaga, milles on juttu nende varastest mõjutustest ja stiilimuutustest (vt. Sölvestrov, Agamirov 1968; Pärt, Petrov 1969). Krugozori muusikavalikust kostab Sölvestrovi kiindumust valdavalt hapra, puäntillistliku kujundikeele vastu, milles on selgeid, kuid harva märgatud Boulezi mõjutusi (Harry 2003: 38). Pärdi 1960ndate muusikas on seevastu liikumapanevat energiat ja draamat, mis peale „Pro et contra“ valitseb mitmeis teoseis, nagu „Nekroloog“, „Perpetuum mobile“ või 1. sümfoonia. Pärdi selle aastakümne muusikas on liikumisenergiat, mis Sölvestrovi muusikas sageli puudub, sest teda huvitasid ka tol ajal pigem seisundilikud lõigud, kus muusikalise ruumi loovad peen faktuur ja kõlavärv. Lisaks Krugozori 1968. ja 1969. aastal jäädvustatud väärtuslikele dokumentaalkaadritele Sölvestrovist ja Pärdist annavad need numbrid tunnistust ka sellest, kui laialt olid Sölvestrov ja Pärt selle kümnendi lõpu Nõukogude Liidus tuntud. Nende ühisjoonte kõrval – esindatus omaaegses Krugozoris ja nende ühine ebaõnn – näitab artikkel, et Pärdi ja Sölvestrovi karjäärid 1960ndatel ja pärast seda oleks vaevalt võinud kujuneda erinevamaks.

Tõlkinud Toomas Siitan