

Michigan State University  
College of Music

Proposal for Second Lecture Recital in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts  
Michigan State University

**Title:** *ALFRED SCHNITTKE'S OPUS 1: HOMMAGE A VIOLIN.*

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ALFRED SCHNITTKE'S OPUS 1: HOMMAGE A VIOLIN.  
LECTURE RECITAL PROPOSAL

**Alfred Garyevich Schnittke** is a composer whose works have come to reflect the evolution of music in the twentieth century. Constantly searching, he composed in different styles such as neoromanticism, avant-gardism, post modernism, and polystylism, the latter his own invention. Schnittke's contribution to the violin repertoire includes four concertos, six concerti grossi, three sonatas, five string quartets, string trio, quintet, septet, and solo violin pieces with occasional inclusion of miscellaneous instruments. Because Schnittke has balanced the bel canto and virtuosic nature of the violin as a solo instrument with the depth and power of symphonic writing, these works have had a major impact on how composers write for string instruments today. Even in his early works, Schnittke conceived the instrumental concerto as a monumental symphonic canvas. Also, Schnittke's ability to write lyrical melodies was noteworthy at the end of the twentieth century. He found his own language without losing substance. As a result, all of his concertos are highly appealing emotionally.

In my lecture recital, I will argue that Schnittke's First Violin Concerto was the first step on the composer's path of finding his style. Schnittke began the work in the fall of 1956 while a student at the Moscow Conservatory. He marked the concerto as "opus 1," the first and last time he numbered a work for several years to come. Later, he commented: "I see in my work on this concerto a desperate attempt to discover myself, an attempt that was almost completely unsuccessful... This was the sound world of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov overshadowed by Shostakovich and dressed up in today's orchestral convention. But there was also a faint hint of all that was to come later, and so it can stay as it is, in spite of all its shortcomings as a first violin concerto."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, strong connections with contemporary tendencies in European music permeate Schnittke's style during this period. These ties reveal themselves both

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Schnittke, *Complete Violin Concertos: Alfred Schnittke about his four violin concertos*, quoted in liner notes, compiled by Andrea Hechtenberg, TELDEC, CD LC 6019.

in the musical content and the choice of the expressive means. For example, one can trace a certain co-existence of atonality within a tonal environment of the Concerto, which is in a minor.<sup>2</sup>

There are obvious connections between Schnittke's first violin concerto and two great violin concertos written between 1930 and 1950. One was by Alban Berg ("To the memory of an angel" of 1935) and another by Dimitri Shostakovich (op.77 of 1947-48.) The inspiration drawn from Berg's concerto is reflected in the treatment of dodecaphonic elements, such as the hint of the twelve-tone row in the main theme of Schnittke's concerto.<sup>3</sup> Scholars also affirm that Schnittke's work was a direct response to Shostakovich's concerto, which was not premiered until 1955.<sup>4</sup> Schnittke's composition has a form so similar to Shostakovich's that later, in a conversation with the violinist Gidon Kremer (Schnittke's friend and devotee), Schnittke said: "If you ever play this [my] concerto, please do not play the second movement." In Kremer's opinion, without the Scherzo (Shostakovich's second movement is also a Scherzo), Schnittke's concerto "stands out more clearly from his other violin concertos."<sup>5</sup> Another source of inspiration could be seen in Schnittke's lifelong deference to Mahler. The orchestration reminds the listener of the tremendous power of Mahler's orchestra, with its expanded brass and percussion sections.<sup>6</sup>

Alfred Schnittke's music is a challenge to learn and a joy to perform to musicians around the world. His music merits constant performing, inviting musicians and scholars to study,

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<sup>2</sup> Evgenia Chigariova, "Characteristics of the treatment of the Classic-Romantic prototype in the solo instrumental concertos of Alfred Schnittke in the 1970s and 1980s," *Moskovskaja Gosudarstvennaja Konservatorija imeni P.I. Chajkovskogo*, no. 1 (1990), 115-30.

<sup>3</sup> Fiona Hearun-Javakhishvili, "The co-existence of tonality and dodecaphony in Schnittke's First Violin Sonata: their crystallization within a cyclic structure," *Seeking the Soul, The Music of Alfred Schnittke*, compiled by George Odum (London: Guildhall School of Music & Drama, 2002), 69.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Schnittke, *Complete Violin Concertos: Alexander Ivashkin in conversation with Gidon Kremer*, liner notes, compiled by Andrea Hechtenberg, TELDEC, CD LC 6019.

<sup>6</sup> George Borchardt, "Alfred Schnittke and Mahler," *Transcript of a talk given at the "Seeking the Soul" Schnittke's Festival*, (London: Guildhall School of Music & Drama, 2001), 28.

analyzing, and interpreting it with the benefit of musicians' accumulated knowledge. In my lecture recital, I will discuss Schnittke's First Violin Concerto from both the analytical and musical points of view. I will focus my attention on the analysis of the motives and the phrase structure. I will explore the nature of Schnittke's melodies and chromatic harmonies, examine tools of the dramatic content of this piece, and point out stylistic connections with his later compositions. The Concerto shows the origins of Schnittke's stylistic development and where his music comes from. This piece deserves careful attention from performers and musicologists and I will happily use my lecture recital as an opportunity to introduce this great composition to the general public.

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