

Demystifying Galina Ustvolskaya:
Critical Examination and Performance Interpretation.

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Declaration

The work presented in this thesis is my own and has not been presented for any other degree. Where the work of others has been utilised this has been indicated and the sources acknowledged. All the translations from Russian are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

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Note on transliteration and translation

The transliteration used in the thesis and bibliography follow the Library of Congress system with a few exceptions such as: endings й, ий, ый are simplified to *y*; я and ю transliterated as *ya/yu*; *e* is *e* and *ě* is *e*; soft sign is *'*.

All quotations from the interviews and Russian publications were translated by the author of the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis presents a performer's view of Galina Ustvolskaya and her music with the aim of demystifying her artistic persona. The author examines the creation of 'Ustvolskaya Myth' by critically analysing Soviet, Russian and Western literature sources, oral history on the subject and the composer's personal recollections, and reveals paradoxes and parochial misunderstandings of Ustvolskaya's personality and the origins of her music. Having examined all the available sources, the author argues that the 'Ustvolskaya Myth' was a self-made phenomenon that persisted due to insufficient knowledge on the subject.

In support of the argument, the thesis offers a performer's interpretation of Ustvolskaya as she is revealed in her music. The author examines Ustvolskaya's music from two viewpoints, a scholar and a performer, and draws upon inter-textual connections between Ustvolskaya's music and Russian literature (Gogol, Dostoevsky, *oberiuty*) and aesthetics; analyses the influences of Russian musical traditions (Russian folklore, *znamenny raspev*) and some artistic individuals (Mussorgsky, Shostakovich, and Stravinsky), and examines the nature of Ustvolskaya's spirituality and religiosity. The performance aspects of Ustvolskaya's music are discussed as well as the specific nature of her writing for instruments, particularly the piano, and the interpretation and perception of her music by both the performers and the audience.

The thesis examines the performance history of Ustvolskaya's works, and draws on interview materials with musicians who knew the composer and performed her music. The author's own performance experience and that derived from the '*Ustvolskaya at Chetham's*' project which involved young musicians in studying and performing Ustvolskaya's compositions, underlined the practical value of the research. While supporting the view of Ustvolskaya as a singular composer, the thesis stands to demystify and reevaluate her artistic image.

Recital programme in support of the thesis¹

The first half of the recital (works for piano solo) entitled “Art with or without influence? One performer’s search for Ustvolskaya’s artistic forerunners and successors” aimed to demonstrate thematic and stylistic parallels between Ustvolskaya and other composers, thus supporting the author’s view that her unique language and compositional style had both predecessors and followers – a view which Ustvolskaya denied. As far as her predecessors are concerned, we identified Bach and Shostakovich, widely separated in time though they are. It is evident that Bach’s polyphonic writing as exemplified here by selected two- and three-part *Inventions*, and Shostakovich’s modernist treatment of polyphony and traditional genres, as seen in his early experimental compositions (*Aphorisms*, op.13), affected both Ustvolskaya’s understanding of linearity and polyphony, and determined the style of her piano writing in compositions such as *Twelve Piano Preludes* (1953). As for her successors, Ustvolskaya’s influence is immediately recognisable in the *Piano Sonata No.2* by Alesha Nikolaev (1959-1977), one of Ustvolskaya’s students, and the short pieces by Alexander Knaifel, which belong to the composer’s early period (apart from *Nativity*, 2003).

The second half of the recital presented Ustvolskaya’s chamber compositions that conversely demonstrate the essence and originality of her musical language and compositional style, and indicate the direction of Ustvolskaya’s stylistic evolution. Young performers from Chetham’s School of Music presented their interpretation of Ustvolskaya’s works that provided listeners with the invaluable opportunity to observe how this music is perceived by young musicians, who belong to a different generation and cultural milieu.

¹ The programme notes that accompanied the recital can be found in Appendix C.

Sonata for violin and piano (1952)
Fiona Robertson, violin, Elena Nalimova, piano

Galina Ustvolskaya
(1919-2006)

Two-part Invention in C minor, BWV 773

J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

Aphorisms, op.13 (1927)

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

I. Recitative
II. Serenade
III. Nocturne
IV. Elegy
V. Funeral March
VI. Etude
VII. Dance of Death
VIII. Canon
IX. Legend

Two-part Invention in D minor, BWV 775

J. S. Bach

Piano Sonata No.2 in C Minor

Alesha Nikolaev (1959-1977)

I. Allegretto
II. Adagio
III. Allegro
IV. Allegro non troppo

Two-part Invention in G major, BWV 781

J. S. Bach

Two short pieces (1968)
Short White Piece; Short Black Piece

Alexander Knaifel (1943 -)

Two pieces (1963)
Marching Two-part Piece; Dancing Two-part Piece

From *Twelve Preludes for piano* (1953)
Preludes No.4, 5

Galina Ustvolskaya

Interval

Trio for clarinet, violin and piano (1949)
Stephanie Yim, clarinet, Fiona Robertson, violin,
Elena Nalimova, piano

Galina Ustvolskaya

Three-part Invention in G minor, BWV 797

J. S. Bach

Grand Duet for violoncello and piano (1959)
Joseph Davies, violoncello, Elena Nalimova, piano

Galina Ustvolskaya

Nativity for piano solo and bells (2003)

Alexander Knaifel

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***1: An Introduction to Galina Ustvolskaya:
the definition of the topic and the main research puzzle***

For decades, the Russian composer Galina Ustvolskaya (1919-2006) has remained one of the most enigmatic and least understood composers in musical history. Her distinct stylistic identity and aesthetic isolation earned her a reputation as a grand Russian original. Musicologists and critics remark on the mysticism and spiritual intent of her music and talk about its cosmic indifference;¹ others claim that very little music is as enigmatically personal as hers,² while still others speak of Ustvolskaya as a composer who, even before Cage, managed to de-aestheticise music, and referring to her music, pose the question: ‘Is it art?’³ In the words of the composer, Valentin Silvestrov, Ustvolskaya’s music is akin to a naked man on a street, who shouts, ‘Don’t look at me! Don’t look!’⁴

My scholarly interest in Ustvolskaya grew out of my work as a performer: having first come across her compositions in the early 1990s, whilst studying at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, I became eager to learn more about the composer. At first glance, Ustvolskaya’s scores, despite the simplicity of notation, appear to be somewhat in code: the composer chose to abandon the markings which traditionally ‘guide’ a performer. Thus, in the *Twelve Piano Preludes* (1953), the majority of preludes are devoid of bar lines and time signature; the dynamics and articulation marks are minimal, as are the composer’s remarks; the only never changing constant is the crotchet pulse occasionally interrupted by pauses, and rarely do rhythmic values become more subdivided than the quaver. The music does not seem to *develop* in a traditional sense; instead, the melodic writing is reduced to a chant-like ‘exploration’ of a few notes, and could be perceived as static if it were not for the immense intensity of every note.

Having initially planned to focus on compositions for the piano - *Twelve Preludes*, *Six Piano Sonatas* and the *Piano Concerto*, I soon realised that other works

¹ France C.Lemaire, *Galina Ustvolskaya: Trio, Sonata and Octet*, CD liner notes (Gent, Belgium: Megadisc, 1994)

² Ian MacDonald, “The Lady with the Hammer: The Music of Galina Ustvolskaya”, <http://www.siue.edu/~aho/musov/ust.html> (accessed: 20 February 2006).

³ Arnold Whittall, “In Memoriam: Galina Ustvolskaya”, *The Musical Times*, 1898, 148 (2007): 2.

⁴ Alexey Lyubimov. “Pamyat’: Umerla Galina Ustvolskaya” [Obituary: Galina Ustvolskaya has Died], [www.stengazeta.net/article.html?article=2611\(2006\)](http://www.stengazeta.net/article.html?article=2611(2006)) (accessed: 29 January 2007).

must be studied. This was for two reasons: first, Ustvol'skaya started and ended her journey as a composer with works for the piano – *Concerto for Piano, String Orchestra and Timpani* (1946) and *Piano Sonata No. 6* (1988),⁵ and although the process of her artistic evolution took over forty years, only two of Ustvol'skaya's works do not include the piano; second, the evolution of Ustvol'skaya's piano writing demonstrates better than anything the dominant tendencies in the process of unfolding her artistic creativity.

The scholarly research that I began in the early 2000s whilst living in the UK showed how little has been written about Ustvol'skaya and her music: CD and concert reviews, short articles in journals and online publications could not provide a sufficient foundation for a dissertation.⁶ Research trips to the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Internationale Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, and the archive of St. Petersburg Conservatoire confirmed how insufficient is the amount of original documents connected to Ustvol'skaya. By visiting libraries of St. Petersburg and Moscow and conducting interviews with musicians who knew Ustvol'skaya personally I gained a broader perspective on how Ustvol'skaya was perceived both in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia.

Familiarising myself with all available sources to date revealed the main problem: an absence of a well-researched and documented study on Ustvol'skaya and her music has led to formation of what can be called the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth,' particularly in the West. Western mystification of Ustvol'skaya was a continuation of the Western mystification of Russia, influenced by certain generalised assumptions and misconceptions that Westerners had about Soviet Russia and Russian musical identity after a long existence on the other side of the Iron Curtain;⁷ indeed, during the seventy years of Communist rule the West was not always aware of what Russians experienced culturally and spiritually.⁸

The inaccessibility of Russian literature sources on the subject together with the absence of Ustvol'skaya's 'Soviet' works from the final catalogue published by Sikorski,

⁵ The was only one composition to follow - *Symphony No.5* (1989/90)

⁶ The majority of publications demonstrated a strong reliance on the information presented on the Internationale Musikverlage Hans Sikorski website.

⁷ The issue of Russian musical identity has been widely discussed in recent publications. See: Rosamund Bartlett, Philip Ross Bullock, "Issues in Russian Musical Identity," *Slavonica*, Vol. 13, No. 1. (April 2007): 3-5; Simon Franklin, Emma Widdis, eds., *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁸ Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age, 1917-1987* (Stockholm: Melos Music Literature, 1998), 33.

meant that Western musicians had an incomplete view on Ustvolskaya and her music. Because of this, further mystification of her artistic image and idealisation of her position among Soviet and Russian artists occurred. The survey of Russian publications and interview materials showed that even the Russian perception of Ustvolskaya is far from being unified and is rife with contradictions. That determined the main objective of this thesis: by critically examining both the ‘Ustvolskaya Myth’ and the ‘Ustvolskaya Reality’ and offering a performer’s interpretation of Ustvolskaya’s artistic persona and her music, the thesis intends to broaden the understanding of Ustvolskaya’s music in a wider interdisciplinary context and to reevaluate her contribution to the world music.

2: Critical review of literature

2.1: Ustvolskaya as presented by her official publisher (Internationale Musikverlage Hans Sikorski)

To navigate through the literature on Ustvolskaya is not an easy task since the majority of the published sources are not scholarly, and the validity of primary sources is questionable.⁹ The main source of information about Ustvolskaya in the West since the late 1990s has been her official publisher, Hans Sikorski. The article in the Preface to Ustvolskaya’s Catalogue was written by the composer Viktor Suslin (1942-2012), who emigrated to Germany in 1981, where he began working as a music editor at Musikverlage Hans Sikorski in 1984, and compiled the first Ustvolskaya catalogue in 1998. During the 1980s and 1990s Suslin wrote a number of articles on Ustvolskaya in Russian and German, which were published as one large paper in 2002.¹⁰ For years this publication remained one of the main points of reference about Ustvolskaya for a non-Russian speaking audience. Suslin, who reviewed Ustvolskaya’s compositions whilst living in the USSR, claimed that the music of Ustvolskaya was never censored or criticised in Soviet Russia as it was not considered sufficiently ‘avant-garde’ for this to

⁹ Many more scholarly publications on Ustvolskaya have appeared in the recent years, both in Russia and the West, allowing us to see the directions of scholarly interest; some of them will be discussed in the thesis.

¹⁰ Viktor Suslin, “The Music of Spiritual Independence: Galina Ustvolskaya,” in “*Ex Oriente...*”: *Ten Composers from the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Valeria Tsenova (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 2002), 99-113.

be required; he emphasized Ustvolskaya's uncompromising personality and her artistic self-sufficiency as the keys to understanding her music. In Suslin's opinion, Ustvolskaya's stylistic and aesthetic isolation as well as her specific idealism and fanatical determination were typically Russian 'St. Petersburgian' characteristics.

Suslin presented Ustvolskaya as an artist who went against established norms, and built a musical world according to her own rules; whose music 'literally burns with a piercing single-mindedness as if it has broken away from musical substance and exists independently.'¹¹ Suslin speaks of Ustvolskaya as a severe and independent spirit with an inexorable will, a voice from the 'Black Hole' of Leningrad.¹² Suslin's introduction that accompanied the predominantly dissonant music devoid of any 'feminine' traits,¹³ created a special interest in Ustvolskaya. For Western listeners of the 1990s, with their broad experience of twentieth century modernist music, Ustvolskaya's art was an unexpected discovery: she indeed 'stepped out of the mist', and the audience was confronted with works written more than thirty years previously yet still seemingly very modern in compositional language and subject.¹⁴

Ustvolskaya's early compositions were written during the period between the mid-1940s and the early 1960s in a country that for decades was deprived of knowledge about the development of Western modernism. The fact that they were still received as topical and contemporary in the late 1980s-1990s, encouraged critics to speak of Ustvolskaya as 'one of the century's grand originals',¹⁵ 'the most singular composers Russia had ever produced, a composer most likely to provoke any Dawkins-esque fundamentalist to apoplexy',¹⁶ and 'an extraordinary personality in extraordinary

¹¹ Boris Tishchenko, as quoted in Viktor Suslin, "The Music of Spiritual Independence: Galina Ustvolskaya," in *Ex Oriente...: Ten Composers from the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Valeria Tsenova (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 2002).

¹² Viktor Suslin, "The Music of Spiritual Independence: Galina Ustvolskaya," *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³ I here refer to the publication by Rachel Foulds: "Masculinity Versus Femininity: An Overriding Dichotomy in the Work of Soviet Composer Galina Ustvolskaya", in *Gender: Power and Authority: Esharp Online Journal*, 9 (University of Glasgow, July 2007).

¹⁴ See: Louis Blois, "Shostakovich and the Ustvolskaya Connection: A Textural Investigation", *The Music Review*, vol. 52, issue 3 (August 1991): 220; Susan Bradshaw, "Galina Ustvolskaya in Focus: St. Peter's Friend," *The Musical Times*, vol. 141, no. 1871 (Summer, 2000): 25-35; Maria Cizmic, "Hammering Hands: Galina Ustvolskaya's Piano Sonata No. 6 and a Hermeneutic of Pain", Chapter 2 (PhD diss., *Performing Pain: Music and Trauma in 1970s and 80s Eastern Europe*), University of California, Los Angeles, 2004); Marian Lee, "Galina Ustvolskaya: The Spiritual World of a Soviet Artist" (PhD diss., Peabody Conservatoire, 2002).

¹⁵ Alex Ross, "A Grand Russian Original Steps out of the Mist," *New York Times*, May 28, 1995. <http://www.therestisnoise.com/2005/02/ustvolskaya.html> (accessed: 10 January 2006)

¹⁶ James MacMillan, "Unholier than Thou," *The Guardian*, October 23, 2003, 12.

environment',¹⁷ who went against the accepted norms of musical representation and found radically new musical idioms. The appearance of overtly religious works in the oeuvre of the composer, who was raised in the atheist Soviet environment, was 'intriguing'¹⁸ and attracted scholars.¹⁹ The 'Ustvolskaya Myth' began to form.

2.2: Ustvolskaya as seen by Westerners

Very few Westerners had any personal contact with the composer during her life, and that also contributed to the myth-making. Among the first Western musicians who 'discovered' Ustvolskaya in the late 1980s was Dutch musicologist, writer and composer Elmer Schönberger. He met Ustvolskaya at a performance of her compositions in Leningrad in the 1980s, and after the concert invited all the participating musicians to perform the programme in Amsterdam in the following year. Whilst having had an occasional opportunity to shake Ustvolskaya's hand to express his admiration, Schönberger 'never entertained an illusion that this could in any way be construed as communication.'²⁰ In those years, Ustvolskaya was, in her own words, *menschenscheu* [scared of people],²¹ hence any communication with her was conducted through her husband, Konstantin Bagrenin.²²

Among others who met Ustvolskaya was musicologist Thea Derks: she attempted to interview Ustvolskaya in 1995 for the radio programme that accompanied the composer's visit abroad for the premiere of her *Symphony No.3* given by members of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw under Valery Gergiev.²³ In what Derks refers to as

¹⁷ David Fanning, Review of the "Variations on the Theme: Galina Ustvolskaya" by Simon Bokman, *Music and Letters*, 89 (2008):141.

¹⁸ James MacMillan, "Unholier than Thou," Op.cit.

¹⁹ Marian Lee, "Galina Ustvolskaya: The Spiritual World of a Soviet Artist" (PhD diss., Peabody Conservatoire, 2002).

²⁰ Elmer Schönberger, "Ustvolskaya, Hero, Not Of, But Against the Soviet Union" (an introduction to the Ustvolskaya Festival, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, May 27-29, 2011. Festival Brochure), 15.

²¹ Elmer Schönberger, "Ustvolskaya, Hero, Not Of, But Against the Soviet Union," Ibid., 15.

²² As will be seen from the interview materials, Bagrenin, who was a very close friend of Victor Suslin, in many ways contributed to the creation and dissemination of the 'Ustvolskaya Myth' in the West.

²³ Thea Derks, "Galina Ustvolskaya: 'Sind Sie mir nicht böse!'" [Very Nearly an Interview], *Tempo*, 193, (July 1995): 31-33

‘very nearly an interview,’ Ustvol'skaya spoke rather negatively about the current political situation in Russia, claiming that the reality was much worse than before the overthrow of the old regime.²⁴ Derks's description of Ustvol'skaya, which was accompanied by a photograph, was the first opportunity for Westerners to meet the mysterious composer: “Ustvol'skaya was dressed in a pink and black checkered two-piece suit, her eyes moved about skittishly behind oversized glasses, and never really looked one in the face.”²⁵ Although the composer was visibly pleased to hear about the programme dedicated to her music, she hesitated to accept an invitation for the real interview, and instead asked her husband for advice.²⁶ The ‘real’ interview never took place.

The American pianist and musicologist Marian Lee came to St. Petersburg in 1999 in search of material about Ustvol'skaya and her works. In her research report Marian Lee claimed that finding the truth about Ustvol'skaya's life and career was even more difficult than she had imagined.²⁷ Lee had two telephone interviews with the composer, and claimed that in the second interview Ustvol'skaya contradicted the facts that she shared with her in the first interview, thus making the primary source questionable. By doing so, Ustvol'skaya yet again proved her reputation for having a very selective memory about the past, and a tendency to express one fact, only to deny or contradict it later.²⁸ Bagrenin made it clear to Lee that the first monograph on Ustvol'skaya published in St. Petersburg in 1999,²⁹ is the only true source of information about Ustvol'skaya and her music, and that consulting other sources would lead to misunderstandings and misconceptions, and was hence unnecessary.³⁰

²⁴ Simon Bokman also remembered Ustvol'skaya saying: “I like everything but the Soviet regime”. In Simon Bokman, *Variations on the Theme: Galina Ustvol'skaya*, trans. Behrendt I., (Studia Slavica Musicologica, Berlin: Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 2007), 87.

²⁵ Thea Derks, “Galina Ustvol'skaya: 'Sind Sie mir nicht böse! [Very Nearly an Interview]”, Op.cit., 33.

²⁶ In those years Ustvol'skaya completely relied on Konstantin Bagrenin, who was responsible for her communication with the outside world.

²⁷ Marian Lee, “The Spiritual Works of Galina Ustvol'skaya” (IREX research, 1999). Marian Lee, “Galina Ustvol'skaya: The Spiritual Works of a Soviet Artist” (PhD diss., Peabody Conservatory of Music, 2002).

²⁸ The pianist Oleg Malov and composers Sergey Banevich and Kirill Novikov also spoke about Ustvol'skaya's ‘selective memory’. Personal interviews. See Appendix E.

²⁹ Olga Gladkova, *Galina Ustvol'skaya: Music as an Obsession* (St. Petersburg: Muzyka, 1999).

³⁰ Konstantin Bagrenin confirmed that in a personal interview (March 30, 2008, St. Petersburg), and it is also stated on his website: http://ustvol'skaya.org/eng/films_books.php (accessed: 23 February 2011).

Sister André Dullaghan (Frances Esmay) also came to St. Petersburg in the late 1990s to meet Ustvol'skaya.³¹ She idolised Ustvol'skaya and followed her life and music with religious obsessiveness. Sergey Banevich, who assisted Sister André in arranging a meeting with the composer, remembered that in those years Ustvol'skaya was unwilling to see people, especially those who asked questions about her music. However, owing to Sister André's determination and with the help of Sergey Banevich, a short meeting with the composer took place sometime in the spring of 1990.³²

As a result of those encounters, Ustvol'skaya became known in the West as a reclusive, eccentric and relentlessly original person, a woman with a man's brain, 'the Lady with a Hammer', who drove away admirers and slammed doors in the face of a TV documentary crew;³³ who denounced performers of her music, and dismissed, as well as discouraged, any attempts at verbal interpretations of her works. It was claimed that Ustvol'skaya's music demonstrates the phenomenon of exclusiveness, and the composer herself was endowed with the title 'the uncompromising prophet of non-conformity'.³⁴

2.2.1: Ustvol'skaya's music in the West: performance history and critics' perception

The late 1980s was not the first time when Ustvol'skaya's music was heard in the West, so Schönberger's discovery of Ustvol'skaya was a re-discovery. The first exposure took place in 1958 when her *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1952) was performed to a group of American composers visiting Russia, and again in 1962, to a party headed by Igor Stravinsky, Nikolay Slonimsky and Robert Craft.³⁵ This work was officially

³¹ André Dullaghan (Frances Esmay), *Galina Ustvol'skaya: Her Heritage and Her Voice* (PhD diss., City University, 2000).

³² Sergey Banevich, personal interview, 26 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

³³ Norman Lebrecht, "A Tale of Two Women" (3 January 2007), <http://www.scena.org/columns/lebrecht/070103-NL-women.html> (accessed: 25 January 2008)

³⁴ Don Mager, "Galina Ustvol'skaya: Piano Sonatas. Oleg Malov, piano," *Making Music*, (June/July 1998): 9.

³⁵ The only surviving comment on the reception of the *Sonata* in 1958 belongs to American composer Roy Harris, who described it as 'dissonant from the beginning to end' and 'kind of ugly.' In Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1981* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1983), 315.

accepted by Westerners as a token of Soviet modernism.³⁶ In the late 1980s Ustvol'skaya's works gradually began gaining world-wide recognition after the performance of the *Grand Duet for Cello and Piano* (1959) at the Wiener Festwochen in 1986, and the performance of the Fourth Symphony 'Prayer' at the 1988 Heidelberg Festival. The symphony was subsequently performed at the Holland Festival in Amsterdam in 1989, the Huddersfield Festival in 1992, and, with the composer present, in Amsterdam in 1996. The latter occasion also saw performances of Ustvol'skaya's *Octet* (1948/49), *Grand Duet* (1959), *Piano Sonata No.6* (1988), and *Symphony No.2* (1979) by Mstislav Rostropovitch (cello/conductor), Reinbert de Leeuw (piano) and Sergey Leiferkus (bass) with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

In Western publications in the years immediately following appearances of Ustvol'skaya's works on the international musical arena in the 1990s, her originality as well as the unprecedentedly unique nature of her compositional style were linked to her mysterious religiosity.³⁷ Some Western critics claimed that her stylistic and aesthetic isolation together with her idealism, uncompromising personality and fanatical determination were typically 'St. Petersburgian' characteristics;³⁸ others called her one of the great modernist composers and the most original pupil of Shostakovich, whose compositional language is influenced by Western modernism and particularly close to Minimalism.³⁹ These viewpoints, some of which are diametrically opposite, persist to the present day, and the above publications are quoted frequently.

After Ustvol'skaya's complete works were recorded in St. Petersburg by the pianist Oleg Malov and The St. Petersburg Soloists, and produced by *Megadisc* (Ghent, Belgium) in 1994, along with the *Clarinet Trio*, *Piano Sonata No.5* and *Duet for Violin*

³⁶ Viktor Suslin, "Muzyka dukhovnoy nezavisimosti: Galina Ustvol'skaya" [Music of Spiritual Independence: Galina Ustvol'skaya], in *Muzyka iz byvshego SSSR* [Music from the Former USSR], ed. V. Tsenova, V. Barsky (Moscow, 1992), 141.

³⁷ Marian Lee, "Galina Ustvol'skaya: The Spiritual World of a Soviet Artist," Op.cit; James MacMillan, "Unholier than Thou," Op.cit; Alex Ross, "A Grand Russian Original Steps Out of the Mist," Op.cit; David Fanning, "Sisters of Mercy," Op.cit; Alex Ross, "Solitary Spirituality and Absurdist Humor," Op.cit. Among piano performers, Frank Denyer and Alexey Lyubimov, and composers Sergey Banevich and Boris Tishchenko (personal interviews).

³⁸ Viktor Suslin, "The Music of Spiritual Independence: Galina Ustvol'skaya"; Boris Tishchenko, "*V Vechnom poiske istiny*" [In the Eternal Search for Truth] and "*Svoe slovo v muzyke: Galina Ustvol'skaya*" [Galina Ustvol'skaya: Her Own Word in Music]; Lyudmila Kovnatskaya, "Ustvol'skaya Galina Ivanovna"; Oleg Malov and Alexey Lyubimov (personal interviews).

³⁹ Louise Blois, "Shostakovich and the Ustvol'skaya Connection: A Textural Investigation"; David Fanning, "Sisters of Mercy"; Alex Ross, "A Grand Russian Original Steps Out of the Mist"; Ian MacDonald, "The Lady with the Hammer: The Music of Galina Ustvol'skaya"; Peter Graham Woolf, "Galina Ustvol'skaya and the Piano"; Susan Bradshaw, "Galina Ustvol'skaya in Focus: St. Peter's Friend".

and Piano recorded by a pianist Reinbert de Leeuw for the Swiss label *Hat Art*, Ustvol'skaya's music became available world-wide. At this time, a large number of critical reviews appeared in the press.⁴⁰ She was nicknamed 'the Lady with the Hammer' by Elmer Schönberger; others hailed her as 'the High Priestess of Sado-Minimalism';⁴¹ 'the starkest voice in the wilderness'; a composer who 'set before our ears austerity and essentialism';⁴² and 'made music into sculpture.'⁴³ Ustvol'skaya was soon named as one of the most original female composers Soviet Russia ever produced.⁴⁴ Alongside her music, the assumption (often presented as a fact) of her long-lasting romantic liaison with her teacher, Shostakovich, encouraged investigation and speculation among scholars.⁴⁵ The religious subtitles of Ustvol'skaya's *Compositions* and *Symphonies* No.2 - No.5 inspired critics and scholars to interpret the entire compositional oeuvre of Ustvol'skaya as religious or highly spiritual music.⁴⁶

In the liner notes to one of the compact discs where Reinbert De Leeuw, piano, Vera Beths, violin, and Harmen De Boer, clarinet, perform Ustvol'skaya's works, Art Lange wrote that there is no evidence of Ustvol'skaya compromising with the Party line; 'she never lowered herself to writing secular cantatas or programmatically accessible music for theatre or films, and never used recognisable folk material in a popular way.'⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Louis Blois, "Shostakovich and the Ustvol'skaya Connection: A Textural Investigation", Op.cit.; Alex Ross, "A Grand Russian Original Steps Out of the Mist", Op.cit.; Alex Ross, "Solitary Spirituality and Absurdist Humor", Op.cit.; Theo Hirsbrunner, "Galina Ustvol'skaya: A Rejuvenating Non-conformism", *Tic.Toc International Festival of New Performance* (1995) <http://tictocfestival.org/artists/vs/fustvols.html> (accessed: 4 June 2006); David Fanning, "Sisters of Mercy," *The Musical Times*, vol.136, no.1829 (1995): 364-365.

⁴¹ David Fanning, "Sisters of Mercy", Op.cit., 365.

⁴² Don Mager, "Galina Ustvol'skaya: Piano Sonatas. Oleg Malov, piano," *Making Music*, (June/July 1998).

⁴³ Alex Ross, "A Grand Russian Original Steps Out of the Mist", Op.cit., 3.

⁴⁴ The view expressed by David Fanning, Levon Hakobian, Susan Bradshaw, Louise Blois, Frans C. Lemaire, Rosamund Bartlett, to name but a few.

⁴⁵ Apart from Ustvol'skaya's interview with Sofia Khentova presented in Sofia Khentova, *V mire Shostakovicha* [In the World of Shostakovich], (Moscow: Kompozitor, 1996), where the composer speaks about her friendship with Shostakovich, there are no documents that prove the fact of Ustvol'skaya's romantic liaison with Shostakovich. However, the subject is often discussed in scholarly publications. Among the most recent publications is: Rachel Jeremiah-Foulds, "An Extraordinary Relationship and Acrimonious Split – Galina Ustvol'skaya and Dmitry Shostakovich", *Mitteilungen der Paul Sacher Stiftung*, no.23 (April 2010):20-25.

⁴⁶ Marian Lee, "Galina Ustvol'skaya: The Spiritual World of a Soviet Artist" (PhD diss., Peabody Conservatoire, 2002); Alex Ross, "Solitary Spirituality and Absurdist Humor," *New York Times*, April 15, 1996; Peter Graham Woolf, "Galina Ustvol'skaya," *International Piano Quarterly*, vol. 2, issues 8 (1999), 40-44; James MacMillan, "Unholier than Thou," *The Guardian* (October 23, 2003, 12); France C.Lemaire, "Galina Ustvol'skaya: "Preludes and Compositions," "Symphonies," CD liner notes (Gent, Belgium: Megadisc, 1994); Frans C. Lemaire, *La Musique Du XXe Siècle En Russie Et Dans Les Anciennes Républiques Soviétiques* (Paris, 1994), Russian edition (St. Petersburg: Gipereon, 2003), 350-354.

⁴⁷ Art Lange, "Galina Ustvol'skaya," liner notes HAT ART CD (6115), Switzerland, 1992.

Frans C. Lemaire in the liner notes to the Megadisc collection of compact discs released by Oleg Malov and The St. Petersburg soloists in 1994, made a different statement, claiming that during the first fifteen years of her creative life (1946-1961), Ustvol'skaya wrote conventional works of socialist inspiration as well as more personal scores, which were condemned to her desk drawers because their language was too innovative.⁴⁸ The information presented by Frans C. Lemaire is accurate whilst the statements made by Art Lange demonstrate a lack of true knowledge on the subject. As a younger woman, Ustvol'skaya successfully counterbalanced her personal 'spiritual' writing with pieces on Soviet subjects, and Russian publications of the 1940s-1960s provide absorbing commentaries on those compositions with which Ustvol'skaya paid her dues to the Soviet system.⁴⁹ Although Ustvol'skaya evidently was not an 'uncompromising prophet of nonconformity',⁵⁰ neither did she always work outside official Soviet life, as claimed by Theo Hirsbrunner,⁵¹ but these statements contributed to the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth'.

In an attempt to 'place' Ustvol'skaya's music on the map of twentieth century music, Western publications offered a wide variety of possible parallels: the alleged influences range from Eric Satie to John Cage, from Russian constructivists to Henry Cowell with his cluster chords; Bartók, Hindemith and Stravinsky were also often named.⁵² Onno van Rijen suggested a certain fellowship with Messiaen, which is particularly plausible in the *Fourth Piano Sonata*, and interpreted Ustvol'skaya's *Fifth*

⁴⁸ Frans C. Lemaire, 'Galina Ustvol'skaya: *Trio, Sonata for Violin and Piano, Octet*,' Megadisc (7865), Belgium, 1994, liner notes.

⁴⁹ L. Lebedinsky, "Muzykal'nye novinki: bylina 'Son Stepana Razina' by G. Ustvol'skaya" [Musical Novelties: An Epic 'The Dream of Stepan Razin' by G. Ustvol'skaya], *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* [Soviet Art], (30 June, 1949); S. Katonova, "Galina Ustvol'skaya: Stat'i i materialy" [Galina Ustvol'skaya: Article and Materials], (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1956), 266-269; L. Mikheeva, "Detskaya syuita" [Children's Suite], (Leningrad: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1961) A.K., "Slovo kompozitoru: Galina Ustvol'skaya" [Galina Ustvol'skaya in her Own Words], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 3 (1966):150; G.Orlov, "Zametki o novykh proizvedeniyakh: v poiskakh geroicheskoy temy" [Notes on the New Compositions. In Search of Heroic Theme: 'The Hero's Exploit' by Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 5 (1958):31-38; M. Sabinina, "Chetyre simfonicheskie novinki: 'Son Stepana Razina' G. Ustvol'skoy" [Four Symphonic Novelties: 'The Dream of Stepan Razin' by Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Muzykal'naya zhizn'* [Musical Life], no.8 (1949), 76-77; A. Sokhor, "Dorogami iskany: muzyka Galiny Ustvol'skoy" [By Roads of Exploration: The Music of Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Muzykal'naya zhizn'*, no.1 (1959), 50; A. Sokhor, "Kompozitorskaya molodezh Leningrada" [Young Composers of Leningrad], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 8 (1952), 16-19; S. Vasilenko, "Dorogami iskany: rasskazy o tvorcheskom puti G. Ustvol'skoy [By Roads of Exploration: the Stories About the Creative Life of G. Ustvol'skaya], *Vecherny Leningrad* (1959), 3.

⁵⁰ Don Mager, *Galina Ustvol'skaya*, Op.cit., 9.

⁵¹ Theo Hirsbrunner, "Galina Ustvol'skaya: A Rejuvenating Non-conformism," *Tic.Toc International Festival of New Performance* (1995) <http://tictocfestival.org/artists/vs/fustvols.html> (accessed: 4 June 2006).

⁵² In 2008 David Fanning wrote: "To Western ears, [Ustvol'skaya's] roots in Stravinsky and Bartók are as obvious as her often denied indebtedness to Shostakovich." David Fanning, "Variations on the Theme: Galina Ustvol'skaya" by Simon Bokman, review, *Music and Letters*, 89 (2008):140. Also see: Onno van Rijen, "Soviet Composers", <http://home.wanadoo.nl/ovar/ustvol.htm> (accessed: 29 March 2006).

Piano Sonata as a highly modernist work likely to appeal to enthusiasts of Giacinto Scelsi or the hard minimalism of Louis Andriessen.⁵³ The above observations could be accepted as an attempt to describe Ustvol'skaya's style using the names of composers whose music was familiar to Westerners. However, these observations cannot be accepted as definite descriptions of an influence or a kinship, since, according to Ustvol'skaya's testimony, in the late 1940s and 1950s, the period during which her musical vocabulary was formed, she did not know the music of those composers to be influenced by them.⁵⁴

Among Russian composers, Shostakovich with the extravagant modernism of his early works and Mussorgsky of *Sunless* and *The Nursery* were named among possible artistic predecessors.⁵⁵ The artistic influence of Shostakovich, although dismissed by Ustvol'skaya,⁵⁶ is indeed audible, particularly in Ustvol'skaya's early works such as *First Piano Sonata* (1946) and *Concerto for Piano, Strings and Timpani* (1946): together with a general 'predilection for bleakly oscillating semitones and brief, rhythmically emphatic mottoes',⁵⁷ the latter work shares similar instrumentation with Shostakovich's *Concerto in C minor for Piano, Trumpet, and String Orchestra*, op. 35 (1933). Blois speaks of mordent-like motives which clearly demonstrate a connection between Ustvol'skaya and her teacher. He also claims that akin to Shostakovich, 'Ustvol'skaya's use of modality is primarily melodic: her modes are linear and melodic, diatonically based and varied, representing different categories and subcategories.'⁵⁸

⁵³ Onno van Rijen, "Soviet Composers", <http://home.wanadoo.nl/ovar/ustvol.htm> (accessed: 29 March 2006).

⁵⁴ In 'My Thoughts on the Creative Process', Ustvol'skaya wrote: "My music has been compared to the music of composers whose names I do not even know". Galina Ustvol'skaya, *Moi mysli o tvorchestve* [My Thoughts on the Creative Process], 17 January 1994, Ustvol'skaya's Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel. In a radio-interview in 2000, Ustvol'skaya was asked about her attitude towards her music being compared to the paintings of Kazimir Malevich and films of Andrey Tarkovsky; Ustvol'skaya's reply was: "I do not know those names". Quoted in Olga Gladkova, 'Khudozhestvenny dnevnik Olgi Gladkovoy: Galina Ustvol'skaya - drama so shechastlivym finalom' [Artistic Diary of Olga Gladkova: Galina Ustvol'skaya: A Drama with a Happy Finale], *Novy mir* [New World], vol. 12 (2004): 191-197.

⁵⁵ Ian MacDonald, "The Lady with the Hammer: The music of Galina Ustvol'skaya", <http://www.siue.edu/~aho/musov/ust.html> (accessed: 20 February 2006).

⁵⁶ Ustvol'skaya's dismisses any of Shostakovich's influences on herself and her music in a note, dated 1 January 1994 and signed by Galina Ustvol'skaya. Ustvol'skaya's Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel.

⁵⁷ Louis Blois, "Shostakovich and the Ustvol'skaya Connection: A Textural Investigation", Op.cit.

⁵⁸ Louis Blois, "Shostakovich and the Ustvol'skaya Connection: A Textural Investigation", Ibid. Similar view on Ustvol'skaya's use of modality is expressed by Yuri Kholopov, in Viktor Suslin, "The Music of Spiritual Independence: Galina Ustvol'skaya", in *Ex Oriente...: Ten Composers from the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Valeria Tsenova (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 2002), and Kira Yuzhak, "Iz nablyudeny nad stilem G.Ustvol'skoy" [Observations on the Style of G. Ustvol'skaya], in *Stilevye tendentsii v sovetskoy muzyke 1960-1970gg* [Stylistic Tendencies in Soviet Music of the 1960s-1970s], ed. A. N. Kryukov (Leningrad: LGITMiK, 1979), 83-103.

2.2.2: *Ustvolskaya and her music in contemporary Western scholarship*

A new generation of Western scholars interpreted Ustvolskaya's music in the context of spiritual Renaissance and new Sacredness that manifested itself in the USSR in the late 1960s-1970s;⁵⁹ 'an overriding dichotomy' in her music was explained within a gender context;⁶⁰ the spiritual dimension of the music and the influence of *znamenny raspev* was discussed both in the Soviet context⁶¹ and as part of the Russian Orthodox tradition and an esoteric iconography;⁶² and the co-existence of Minimalism and Maximalism in her music was explored.⁶³ From the performer's perspective, Ustvolskaya's late piano sonatas (No. 5 and No. 6) have been interpreted as an expression of cultural trauma during the period of *Glasnost*.⁶⁴

The performance interpretation presented by the pianist Maria Cizmic in her dissertation entitled *Hammering Hands: Galina Ustvolskaya's Piano Sonata No. 6 and a Hermeneutic of Pain*,⁶⁵ offers a valuable insight both into the unique nature of Ustvolskaya's piano writing and the composer's personality. Cizmic speaks of a particular physicality of the performance of the *Sixth Piano Sonata* which 'communicates and re-enacts pain and trauma, making a pianist enact what the composer had initially conceived, ultimately creating a ritualistic performance, witnessed by an audience.'⁶⁶ Cizmic claims that Ustvolskaya's *Sixth Piano Sonata* offers a bodily dialectic of satisfaction and discomfort: "Pounding the piano inevitably hurts, but the experience is interpenetrated with a considerable degree of pleasure;

⁵⁹ Marian Lee, "Galina Ustvolskaya: The spiritual world of a Soviet Artist" (PhD diss., Peabody Conservatoire, 2002).

⁶⁰ Rachel Jeremiah-Fould, "Masculinity Versus Femininity: An Overriding Dichotomy in the Work of Soviet Composer Galina Ustvolskaya", Op.cit.

⁶¹ Rachel Jeremiah-Foulds, "Independence, or a Cultural Norm? Galina Ustvolskaya and the Znamenny Raspev" (paper presented at the Third International Conference on Orthodox Church Music 'Church, State and Nation in Orthodox Church Music', Joensuu, Finland, 8 - 14 June 2009)

⁶² Rachel Jeremiah-Foulds, "An Esoteric Iconography: Orthodoxy and Devotion in the World of Galina Ustvolskaya" (paper presented at the International Symposium *Galina Ustvolskaya: New Perspective*, Amsterdam, 27 May 2011).

⁶³ Alexander Ivashkin, "Galina Ustvolskaya: Minimalism or Maximalism?" (paper presented at the International Symposium *Galina Ustvolskaya: New Perspective*, Amsterdam, 27 May 2011).

⁶⁴ Maria Cizmic, "Hammering Hands: Galina Ustvolskaya's Piano Sonata No. 6 and a Hermeneutic of Pain," Chapter 2 (PhD diss., "Performing Pain: Music and Trauma in 1970s and 80s Eastern Europe", University of California, Los Angeles, 2004).

⁶⁵ Maria Cizmic, *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁶ Maria Cizmic, *Ibid.*, 67.

Ustvol'skaya's voice, her notes, words, lines and arrows, represent and refer to necessary bodily information.⁶⁷

In her reading of the work from a pianist's perspective, Cizmic explores the relationship between pianist, instrument, and the infliction of pain, and claims that Ustvol'skaya's music occupies the body in the particular way, and that the *Sonata* communicates hurt and discomfort, and presents a process of inflicting pain by the most minimal resource of language. Cizmic concludes that Ustvol'skaya's music is less about particular sounds and is more involved with a physical way of being.⁶⁸ Indeed, in many of her compositions, particularly the ones written in the last decades of her life, Ustvol'skaya created musically embodied structures that force pain itself into a realm of representation and performance.⁶⁹

Ustvol'skaya's personal and musical connections with Shostakovich have been the subject of critical and scholarly papers; one of the earliest publications on the subject appeared in 1991.⁷⁰ By analysing the appearance of the 'Ustvol'skaya theme' - a clarinet theme from the final movement of the *Clarinet Trio* - in Shostakovich's *Fifth Quartet* (1951-52) and the song 'Night', from the *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo* (1974), Blois attempted to make 'interpretative sense' of the quotes by examining the personal relationship between two composers. However, the lack of documental proof about their relationship together with Ustvol'skaya's firm refusal to comment on the subject, forced Blois to conclude that whatever the interpretation of those musical connections might be, Ustvol'skaya clearly influenced Shostakovich. The Shostakovich - Ustvol'skaya connection remains 'one of the most intriguing side roads of Soviet music', and the question to what degree this musical dialogue is autobiographical will 'continue to recur in the contemplation of this musical mystery.'⁷¹

⁶⁷ Maria Cizmic, *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁸ Maria Cizmic, *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁹ Anna Gnatenko in *Iskusstvo kak ritual* [Art as a Ritual] speaks about the ritualistic nature of physical pain experienced by a performer whilst executing the tone clusters in *Piano Sonatas No.5* and *No.6*: "The act of performing those works provokes nothing but physical pain. The experience of this pain is visually and orally communicated to the listener. This pain is ritual, voluntarily necessary, ethically and aesthetically meaningful". Anna Gnatenko, "Iskusstvo kak ritual: Razmyshleniya o fenomene Galiny Ustvol'skoy" [Art as Ritual: Reflection on the Galina Ustvol'skaya Phenomenon], *Muzykal'naya akademiya* [Musical Academy], no.4-5 (1995): 24-32. Frans Lemaire wrote (as quoted by Maria Cizmic), that "[Ustvol'skaya's] music is not really played but beaten." Maria Cizmic, *Op.cit.*, 83.

⁷⁰ Louis Blois, "Shostakovich and the Ustvol'skaya connection: A textural investigation", *Op.cit.*, 218-224.

⁷¹ Louis Blois, *Ibid.*, 223.

Two decades later, Rachel Jeremiah-Foulds yet again explored the personal and professional relationship between two composers, and the ways it became reflected in their music.⁷² Apart from two examples of the ‘Ustvol’skaya theme’ in Shostakovich’s works already mentioned by Blois, Jeremiah-Foulds speaks of it also being used in the opening vocal line of the fourth song *Nedarazumenie* [Misunderstanding], of the *Satire* on the words of Sasha Cherny (1961). However, new findings made by David Fanning in 2003 question the origin of the ‘Ustvol’skaya theme’: the newly discovered symphonic sketch of Shostakovich’s *Ninth Symphony* dating back to 1945, showed that the original musical idea called the ‘Ustvol’skaya theme’ belonged to Shostakovich.⁷³ Aside from this musical interchange, Jeremiah-Foulds explored further stylistic influences that Ustvol’skaya had on Shostakovich, including the treatment of the viola in the *Thirteenth String Quartet* (1970), which was inspired by Ustvol’skaya’s *Violin Sonata* (1952): Shostakovich directed to strike the body of the instrument with the bow whilst Ustvol’skaya requested that a violinist strikes the body of the instrument with the tip of the bow or a thumb.⁷⁴ Jeremiah-Foulds concludes that if the ‘dark tragedy that saturates many of Shostakovich’s later works is gloomily reminiscent of Ustvol’skaya’s apocalyptic life-view,’⁷⁵ Ustvol’skaya managed to ‘truncate Shostakovich’s voice entirely from each of her new works,’⁷⁶ and insisted on her being completely independent from his pedagogical influence.

Ustvol’skaya as the composer of deep spiritual conviction appears to be the key idea in Western perception of her music. The Scottish composer and conductor James MacMillan chose to perform the music of Alfred Schnittke, Sofia Gubaidulina and Galina Ustvol’skaya at a special BBC Weekend along with his own compositions in the context of rediscovering a sense of the sacred in the modern world.⁷⁷ For MacMillan,

⁷² Rachel Jeremiah-Foulds, “An Extraordinary Relationship and Acrimonious Split - Galina Ustvol’skaya and Dmitry Shostakovich”, *Mitteilungen der Paul Sacher Stiftung*, 23 (April 2010): 20-25.

⁷³ Olga Digonskaya, David Fanning, “Symphonic Movement,” liner notes to the CD: *Girl Friends/Rule, Britannia/ Salute to Spain*, Polish Radio Symphony, conductor Fitz-Gerald, Naxos, 8.572138, 2009.

⁷⁴ In Ustvol’skaya’s manuscript of the *Violin Sonata*, we read: “Играть дровком смычка по верхней деке, или стучать первым пальцем правой руки по нижней деке.”

⁷⁵ Rachel Jeremiah-Foulds, “An Extraordinary Relationship and Acrimonious Split - Galina Ustvol’skaya and Dmitry Shostakovich”, *Op.cit.*, 23.

⁷⁶ Rachel Jeremiah-Foulds, *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁷ Music Festival “Darkness into Light: The Music of James MacMillan”, Barbican Hall, London. 14-16 January 2005.

the numinous quality of the music of these composers was not separated from the essence of music; it is something that, in his opinion, Eastern composers have never lost, even though they were surrounded by desecration: they were provoked to rediscover a sense of the sacred through their art.⁷⁸ The subtitles of Ustvolskaya's compositions written in the 1970s and 1980s⁷⁹ encouraged some musicians to comment on the religious intent of Ustvolskaya's entire oeuvre; others bravely asserted that it was Ustvolskaya herself who viewed her art as religious at its core;⁸⁰ still others compared Ustvolskaya with Sofia Gubaidulina, regarding them as 'two prophets of the new Russian spiritualism, both seekers after truth by stony paths.'⁸¹ Marian Lee claimed that Ustvolskaya's unwavering resolve in religious belief and the self-imposed solitary life is reminiscent of a monk who has taken vows of seclusion and abstinence from the material world.⁸²

To summarise the Western perception of Ustvolskaya, she was seen as an uncompromising artist who deliberately rebelled against the Soviet establishment; a lonely 'island' in the ocean of twentieth century compositional trends; a self-sufficient, relentlessly original and stylistically isolated artist; a composer influenced by other Western modernist composers, and therefore a modernist herself; a doctrinally religious person with religiosity being a fundamental inspiration for her music. In the process of critical investigation it will become clear which part of the 'Western view' belongs to the 'Ustvolskaya Myth' and which to the 'Ustvolskaya Reality.'

⁷⁸ James MacMillan, "Unholier than Thou," *The Guardian*, October 23, 2003, 12.

⁷⁹ *Composition No.1* 'Dona nobis pacem' for piccolo, tuba and piano; *Composition No.2* 'Dies irae' for eight double basses, percussion and piano; *Composition No.3* 'Benedictus qui venit' for four flutes, four bassoons and piano; *Symphony No.2* 'True and Eternal Bliss' for orchestra and solo voice; *Symphony No.3* 'Jesus Messiah, Save Us'; *Symphony No. 4* 'Prayer' for contralto, trumpet, tam-tam and piano; *Symphony No.5* 'Amen' for narrator, violin, oboe, trumpet, tuba and percussion.

⁸⁰ Steve Schwartz, "Ustvolskaya: Piano Concerto. Symphony No.1", CD review, <http://www.classicalcdreview.com/galina2.htm> (accessed: 2 June 2005).

⁸¹ David Fanning, Galina Ustvolskaya CD review, <http://home.wanadoo.nl/ovar/sovrev/ustvol/us12709.htm> (accessed: 7 June 2005).

⁸² Marian Lee, "Spiritual Works of Galina Ustvolskaya", Op.cit.

2.3: Russian perception of Ustvol'skaya and her music

2.3.1: Olga Gladkova and "Music as an Obsession"

In Russia, the first monograph about Ustvol'skaya was published in 1999.⁸³ The book contains excerpts from Western reviews, musical examples of Ustvol'skaya's works accompanied by brief descriptions, and selective abstracts from interviews with the composer. The author, former student of Ustvol'skaya, Olga Gladkova, wrote the book under the supervision of the composer and her husband. As claimed by Bagrenin, the book presents the definitive truth about his wife. The key points made by Gladkova can be summarised as follows: first, the act of composing for Ustvol'skaya was not only a professional occupation but a way of life; second, a traditional biography is not needed in the case of Ustvol'skaya since her compositions were the only important events of her life; third, the composer's unhappy childhood determined her artistic personality, and her tendency towards solitude together with her severe uncompromising disposition is reflected in her music; fourth, Ustvol'skaya's musical predecessors include the tragic and dark Mahler of *Das Lied von der Erde*, Mussorgsky and Stravinsky, Bach and Beethoven (Gladkova claims that Ustvol'skaya's *Fourth Symphony* resembles the music of Arnold Schoenberg, although none of the above statements are supported by examples); fifth, Ustvol'skaya is a phenomenon of exclusiveness; her musical idioms have no precedents; sixth, Ustvol'skaya's style had not evolved throughout her compositional career; seventh, Ustvol'skaya's music is akin to religion and ritual; eighth, Ustvol'skaya is the least commercially orientated [*ne kon'yunktorny*] artist among Soviet composers; ninth, Ustvol'skaya was never influenced by Shostakovich - on the contrary, she always expressed strong antagonism towards Shostakovich and his music. Gladkova concludes that Ustvol'skaya remains one of the most mysterious figures of the St. Petersburg musical circle; her hermit-like existence – both personal and artistic – continues to give rise to legends, and her music is still perceived as one of the most enigmatic phenomena that cannot be completely

⁸³ Olga Gladkova, *Galina Ustvol'skaya: Music as an Obsession* (St. Petersburg: Muzyka, 1999). It is the only publication that Ustvol'skaya's heir, Konstantin Bagrenin, has authorised.

understood.⁸⁴ Gladkova describes Ustvol'skaya as 'the Last of the Mohicans' of the Russian cultural elite,⁸⁵ and claims that her music once heard, forever remains in the memory of listeners and becomes an obsession.⁸⁶

The publication of Gladkova's book, intended as a present for Ustvol'skaya's eightieth birthday, received a controversial reception among St. Petersburg musicians. One of the reasons was Gladkova's weak reputation as a musicologist.⁸⁷ Second, in the chapter entitled "*Ustvol'skaya and Shostakovich: a real and imaginary dialogue*" Ustvol'skaya expressed her dislike of Shostakovich and his music whilst denying any of his influence on her; this was considered by many as unacceptable as well as fraudulent. Third, none of the St. Petersburg performers, who championed Ustvol'skaya's music over the years, were mentioned in the book; instead, Western performers of Ustvol'skaya's compositions were praised and claimed as having possessed a true understanding of her music. Gladkova's selective approach to facts could not go unnoticed: for instance, a number of publications and concert reviews clearly demonstrate the significance of Oleg Malov's involvement in the performance of Ustvol'skaya's compositions.⁸⁸

2.3.2: Ustvol'skaya in Soviet musicology

Despite being the only authorised source, Gladkova's monograph was not the first publication about Ustvol'skaya in Russia: one of the earliest articles appeared in Soviet Russia in 1949 and was dedicated to the symphonic poem *The Dream of Stepan*

⁸⁴ Gladkova, *Galina Ustvol'skaya: Music as an Obsession*, Ibid., 5.

⁸⁵ Gladkova, Ibid., 6.

⁸⁶ Gladkova, Ibid., 8.

⁸⁷ That was claimed by all the musicians whom I interviewed.

⁸⁸ Leonid Gakkel wrote that in the early 1970s, Ustvol'skaya was among the most frequently performed Leningrad composers and "the role of the Leningrad-born pianist, Oleg Malov, is incomparable in its significance for the cultural life of Leningrad, particularly as a performer of the new music, and most importantly, the music of Galina Ustvol'skaya. Thanks to Malov's enthusiasm, Ustvol'skaya remains one of the most 'performed' Leningrad composers on the city's musical arena. Malov can be called Ustvol'skaya's Apostle". In Leonid Gakkel, "Fortepianny Leningrad semidesyatykh: russkoe i sovetskoe ispolnitel'stvo" [Piano Performance in Leningrad of the 1970th: Russian and Soviet Performing Art], in *Muzykal'noe ispolnitel'stvo* [Musical Performance], eds. Grigor'eva, N., Natanson M. (Moscow: Muzyka, 1983), 77.

Razin (1949).⁸⁹ However, the first serious attempts at theoretical analysis of Ustvol'skaya's compositional style were not made until the 1970s. Thus, in 1971, Russian theoretician Valentina Kholopova discussed Ustvol'skaya's unique rhythmic organisation 1/4 that she called 'mono-rhythm'; Kholopova noted that a similar system of organising melodic material is characteristic of the old Russian singing tradition - *znamenny raspev*.⁹⁰

In a scholarly article published in 1979, Kira Yuzhak focused on Ustvol'skaya's ensemble compositions starting from the *Clarinet Trio* (1949).⁹¹ Yuzhak identified three main sources of Ustvol'skaya's compositional style. First, she spoke of Expressionism; although Yuzhak did not clarify which manifestations of Expressionism Ustvol'skaya drew on, the context of the article indicates that she referred to Expressionism as the general artistic approach that rates the inner essence over the outer appearance. Second, she named the Baroque polyphonic tradition and polyphonic methods of composition. Finally, Yuzhak emphasised the influence of Russian folklore and *znamenny raspev*. Yuzhak claimed that the combination of these heterogeneous traditions is what made Ustvol'skaya's music unique: in combining multiple systems and compositional techniques, Ustvol'skaya found her unique voice that is firmly grounded in the twentieth century musical tradition of plurality and historical fluidity. More than anything, this predilection for a multiplicity of sources is represented by Ustvol'skaya's specific system of modes: the co-existence of very archaic systems such as *hyperdiatonic* and more modern ones, such as *Alexandrian pentachord*,⁹² is in itself a specific phenomenon of twentieth century music. One cannot disagree with Yuzhak, who claimed that however powerful the individual core of Ustvol'skaya's music, it would not have retained its strength if it were not fed from the inexhaustible cultural sources. Yuzhak indicated that

⁸⁹ Lev Lebedinsky, "Muzykal'nye novinki: bylina *Son Stepana Razina*" [Musical Novelties: An Epic 'The Dream of Stepan Razin' by G. Ustvol'skaya], *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* [Soviet Art], (30 June, 1949); Marina Sabinina, "Chetyre simfonicheskie novinki: 'Son Stepana Razina' G. Ustvol'skoy" [Four Symphonic Novelties: 'The Dream of Stepan Razin' by Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Muzykal'naya zhizn'*, no.8 (1949): 76-77.

⁹⁰ Valentina Kholopova, *Voprosy ritma v tvorchestve kompozitorov XX veka* [Questions of Rhythm in the Works of Twentieth-Century Composers], (Moscow: Muzyka, 1971), 223.

⁹¹ Kira Yuzhak, "Iz nablyudeny nad stilem G. Ustvol'skoy" [Observations on the Style of G. Ustvol'skaya], in *Stilevye tendentsii v sovetskoy muzyke 1960-1970gg* [Stylistic Tendencies in Soviet Music of the 1960s-1970s], ed. A. N. Kryukov (Leningrad: LGITMiK, 1979), 83-103. Translated by E. Nalimova.

⁹² In his article "Nekotorye voprosy teorii lada" [Some Issues of Modal Theory], Dolzhansky claimed that it was Shostakovich who first used the Alexandrian pentachord in Soviet music. In *Problemy lada* [The Problems of Mode] (Moscow: Muzyka, 1972).

the roots of Ustvolskaya's musical language lie in the ancient monodic traditions, such as *znamenny raspev* and Russian folklore, and the main common feature of these traditions is the close connection between the modes and the specific intervallic structure produced by them. Yuzhak noted that most of Ustvolskaya's themes are based on short formulas of two or three notes where each note bears an equal significance to others. 'Tenuto' marks or accents placed under each note yet again indicate a close link to *znamenny raspev* as a 'monodious' tradition. Yuzhak's detailed analysis of Ustvolskaya's modal system, rhythm, instrumentation, and compositional structures as seen in *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1952) provided convincing evidence in support of her statements, some aspects of which will be developed in this thesis.⁹³

In 1980, Boris Kats published an article dedicated to Ustvolskaya's *Composition No.1 "Dona nobis pacem"*.⁹⁴ The author presented a journey of discovering the true meaning of the composition through a number of *vzglyadov* [literally *glances*, here - attempts at analysis and interpretation]. Among 'genealogical' roots of Ustvolskaya's music, Kats names the music of three composers - Bach, Mussorgsky and Shostakovich, as well as the tradition of *znamenny raspev*.⁹⁵ Kats was not the first to speak about the influence of Mussorgsky on Ustvolskaya.⁹⁶ According to Kats, the main principles that unite the music of two composers are the use of monotonous rhythm and the predilection for a single type of note value (crotchets, in Ustvolskaya's case). To demonstrate the similarity of methods, Kats used a phrase from Ustvolskaya's *Composition No.1* and compared it with the opening of Mussorgsky's song *Svetik Savishna* [The Light of my life, Savishna].⁹⁷ Kats concluded that a method of increasing melodic expressiveness by means of monotonous rhythm and a single type of note value used by Mussorgsky, became one of the main compositional principles for Ustvolskaya.

⁹³ Yuzhak findings about the *Violin Sonata* will be discussed later in this thesis.

⁹⁴ Boris Kats, "Sem' vzglyadov na odno sochinenie" [Seven Glances at One Composition], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 2 (1980): 9-17.

⁹⁵ These parallels are analysed in Chapter 6.

⁹⁶ L. Raaben, "Kamerno-instrumental'naya muzyka" [Chamber music], *Muzykal'naya zhizn' Leningrada* [Musical Life of Leningrad] (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1961), 131.

⁹⁷ Modest Mussorgsky, *Complete Songs* (Schirmer: New York, 1995), 138.

Bach's influence on Ustvolskaya was first mentioned by Aranovsky in 1979.⁹⁸ In his 1980 publication Kats speaks of the particular significance of intervals such as minor thirds, descending minor seconds and minor sevenths, that were important for both Bach and Ustvolskaya. In his brief exploration of connections between Ustvolskaya and Shostakovich, Kats speaks about their shared interest in the theme of Evil and in portraying violence and mockery.⁹⁹ Kats demonstrated this by using examples from Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 8* and Ustvolskaya's *Composition No.1*. Continuing on the subject of similarities between Ustvolskaya's musical language and the tradition of *znamenny raspev* expressed earlier by Yuzhak, Kats pointed out a quotation from the *znamenny raspev* (Poglasitsa 1, 1st voice) which appears in the tuba part in *Composition No.1* (second movement): he interpreted it as a symbol of the Russian cultural ancestry that stands as a shield against the disasters of 'machine civilisation' portrayed in the first movement of the *Composition*.

Kats speaks of three main 'mottos' that characterise Ustvolskaya's creative method, in which the typical 'Petersburgian' traits can be identified. First, is '*non plus ultra*': a striving for the uttermost point, a perfection, a specific form of 'maximalism', that aims at taking any happenings in their extreme manifestations; second, is a desire to simplify, to cut down musical material, the number of instruments, the length of compositions to bare essentials; third, a striving for the essence, the 'core of things'. The predilection towards emotional extremity, maximal contrasts, as well as the polarity of expression (dynamics, tempi, registers, instrumental timbre) and absence of gradation in either tone or dynamic (*crescendo* or *diminuendo* are rarely seen in Ustvolskaya's scores), corresponds with the 'face' and spirit of the city where Ustvolskaya had lived all her life. Similar characteristics can be found in the music of Mussorgsky as well as in the works of St. Petersburg writers such as Dostoevsky, Gogol and Andrey Bely.¹⁰⁰

As I mentioned earlier, one of the main problems with literature sources on Ustvolskaya is that not many of them are scholarly. However, the fact that almost none of the Russian publications, particularly those written during the Soviet years, have been

⁹⁸ M.G. Aranovsky, *Simfonicheskie iskaniya* [Symphonic Explorations], (Leningrad, 1979), 213.

⁹⁹ Kats, "Seven Glances at One Composition", Op.cit.,14.

¹⁰⁰ The parallels between Ustvolskaya and the St. Petersburg literary tradition, and writers such as Gogol and Dostoevsky will be explored in Chapter 5.

translated, and hence available in the West, makes them particularly valuable for the understanding of the ‘Ustvol’skaya Myth’ history in the making.

The earliest publication about Ustvol’skaya is dedicated to *The Dream of Stepan Razin*.¹⁰¹ The work was well received by both the Soviet authorities and the Soviet public, and was included in the Sikorski catalogue,¹⁰² although Ustvol’skaya never considered it to be one of her ‘spiritual in nature’ compositions.¹⁰³ This is the only work by Ustvol’skaya which received its premiere soon after its completion: in 1950 the work was performed by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under Evgeny Mravinsky, and for a few years after the successful premier, the work was included in the repertoire of Leningrad orchestras and was nominated for the Stalin Prize. Such success could be explained by accessibility of melodic material inspired by Russian heroic folk-songs and the suitability of the subject matter.

The work was praised by many Soviet musicologists.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Marina Sabinina wrote: “One must admit that Galina Ustvol’skaya possesses a great talent, musical taste and a specific flair for orchestration.” The author praised Ustvol’skaya for being able to successfully portray the epic nature of the *bylina* whilst maintaining melodic style in the spirit of Russian folklore. However, the author expressed some criticism: “The orchestral texture is rather overpowering, and the climaxes lack melodic variety and expressiveness.”¹⁰⁵ In another publication dedicated to the *bylina*, Lyudmila Rappoport speaks of it as the work that brought Ustvol’skaya her popularity: “The unusual intervallic structure, laconicism and rhythmic expressiveness are the main characteristics of Ustvol’skaya’s style. The music communicates the warmth and

¹⁰¹ Lev Lebedinsky, “Muzykal’nye novinki: bylina *Son Stepana Razina*” [Musical Novelties: An Epic “The Dream of Stepan Razin” by G. Ustvol’skaya], Op.cit., Marina Sabinina, “Chetyre simfonicheskie novinki: ‘Son Stepana Razina’ G. Ustvol’skoy” [Four Symphonic Novelties: ‘The Dream of Stepan Razin’ by Galina Ustvol’skaya], Op.cit.

¹⁰² There were many other works written on Soviet topics that Ustvol’skaya later destroyed.

¹⁰³ Ustvol’skaya referred to all her works written after the *Second Piano Sonata* (1949) as ‘spiritual in nature.’

¹⁰⁴ Lyudmila Rappoport, *Galina Ustvol’skaya* (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1959); Unknown author, Galina Ustvol’skaya: 50th Anniversary, *Muzykal’naya zhizn’* [Musical Life] no.9 (1969), 36; L. Lebedinsky, “Muzykal’nye novinki: Bylina ‘Son Stepana Razina’” [Musical Novelties: An Epic ‘The Dream of Stepan Razin’ by G. Ustvol’skaya], Op.cit., M. Sabinina, M. “Chetyre simfonicheskie novinki: ‘Son Stepana Razina’ G. Ustvol’skoy” [Four Symphonic Novelties: ‘The dream of Stepan Razin’ by Galina Ustvol’skaya], Op.cit. None of these publications have been translated into other languages.

¹⁰⁵ M. Sabinina, “Chetyre simfonicheskie novinki: ‘Son Stepana Razina’ G. Ustvol’skoy”, Op.cit., 77.

sincerity of feelings [...] Ustvol'skaya demonstrates skilful instrumentation and the ability to arrange folk-songs.”¹⁰⁶

In 1952 Arnold Sokhor published an article dedicated to young composers of Leningrad.¹⁰⁷ In the introduction he praises young Soviet artists for their innovative vision of everyday reality: Ustvol'skaya's name was mentioned together with Chistyakov, Prigozhin, Agafonnikov, Solov'ev, and Chernov. Sokhor wrote:

*In her student years, Ustvol'skaya was under the strong influence of formalism but life itself forced her to find ways to overcome those wrong influences. In the first drafts of her compositions about a Soviet worker-innovator, 'A Man from a High Hill', Ustvol'skaya did not show a correct understanding of how to write on a Soviet subject: her music portrayed the labour itself rather than a Soviet worker. However, with a friendly collegial help, Ustvol'skaya managed to overcome these obstacles and improve her compositions. The final version still abounds in recitative-like melodies, and the overall structure is not monolithic enough. However, the work is highly commendable for its subject matter - the glorification of a socialist labour, and for its melodic material being inspired by Soviet mass-songs.*¹⁰⁸

In the article *Folkloristic Features* dedicated to the leading trends in Soviet music, Bryusova speaks about *The Dream of Stepan Razin* amongst other works of Soviet composers written on the themes from Russian folklore, particularly works by E. Zhukovsky and D. Dzhangirov.¹⁰⁹ Whilst praising Ustvol'skaya for the epic style of her melodies that resemble folk tunes, Bryusova criticised Ustvol'skaya for excessive repetitiveness of musical material, and for the lack of overwhelming enthusiasm that characterises the works of other composers: “Ustvol'skaya's Razin is not the leader and the hero as the Soviet people know him from the *bylina*; instead he is portrayed as a powerless man, who anticipates his tragic fate. Although Ustvol'skaya uses the original text of the *bylina*, the music that accompanies the text is neither vigorous nor ferocious.”¹¹⁰ Despite this criticism (which is very much in the spirit of the time), one

¹⁰⁶ Lyudmila Rappoport, *Galina Ustvol'skaya* (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1959)

¹⁰⁷ Arnold Sokhor, “Kompozitorskaya molodezh Leningrada” [Young Composers of Leningrad], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 8 (1952): 16-19.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁹ N. Bryusova, “Cherty narodnosti” [Folkloristic Features], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, April 4 (1950):12-18

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

observation of Bryusova is particularly valuable: it concerns Shostakovich and the style of his *melodism*. Thus, speaking of Shostakovich's *The Song of the Forests*, Bryusova wrote:

*Shostakovich's melodies are too short and concise, and they do not possess the broadness of character that is usually associated with folk songs. Instead, the melodies are sharp and angular, and the melodic tension is reinforced by unexpected chromaticism and modulations.*¹¹¹

This observation clearly demonstrates a similarity between Shostakovich's compositional style and that of his pupil, Galina Ustvolskaya, who was also criticised for constructing melodies from short recitative-like units and for excessive use of dissonant sonorities.

Another publication that appeared in *Sovetskaya muzyka* in 1956 was written by Svetlana Katonova: yet again Ustvolskaya was praised for writing music that encapsulated the Soviet spirit. It was soon followed by Mark Aranovsky writing about Ustvolskaya's *The Hero's Exploit* in 1957,¹¹² and Sergey Vasilenko exploring Ustvolskaya's artistic path.¹¹³ In 1958 Genrikh Orlov praised Ustvolskaya's *The Hero's Exploit*.¹¹⁴ Among the most characteristic features of Ustvolskaya, Orlov mentioned a slow unfolding of the musical material and a certain inflexibility of structure; he noticed that, akin to the *Violin Sonata*, Ustvolskaya uses the interval of the perfect fourth as a leitmotif; the texture, which is polyphonic throughout, is marked by abundance of unisons and a frequent use of low register; the overall grandeur of sonority is impressive. Orlov concluded that the work resembles a monument that has been carved from a granite mass.¹¹⁵

In another publication written in 1959 by Arnold Sokhor we read:

¹¹¹ N. Bryusova, "Folkloristic Features", *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹² Mark Aranovsky, "Podvig geroya: simfonicheskaya poema Galiny Ustvolskoy" [The Hero's Exploit: the Symphonic Poem by Galina Ustvolskaya], *Smena* (22 November 1957): 17.

¹¹³ Segei Vasilenko, "Dorogami iskany. Rasskazy o tvorchestvom puti G. Ustvolskoy" [By Roads of Exploration: Music of G. Ustvolskaya], *Vecherny Leningrad*, 1959, 3.

¹¹⁴ Genrikh Orlov, "Zametki o novykh proizvedeniyakh: V poiskakh geroicheskoy temy. 'Podvig geroya' Galiny Ustvolskoy" [Notes About New Compositions. In Search of Heroic Theme: 'The Hero's Exploit' by Galina Ustvolskaya], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 5 (1958): 31-38.

¹¹⁵ Genrikh Orlov, "Zametki o novykh proizvedeniyakh: V poiskakh geroicheskoy temy", *Ibid.*, 34-36.

In every one of Ustvol'skaya's compositions we see an artist who is not satisfied with following the roads well travelled; her art is marked by true originality. In compositions of the chamber music genre Ustvol'skaya 'speaks' about personal matters; the unique nature of her compositional language and musical content can hardly be explained by words, it is akin to a shorthand report [stenogramma] of feelings. The particular expressiveness of her music is the result of short, recitative-like phrases from which the melodic material is built; such type of melodies strongly resembles the monologues from Mussorgsky's vocal cycles. The main reason behind a certain difficulty of perception and inaccessibility of Ustvol'skaya's music, is that she focuses on a very narrow spectrum of emotions, which are too subjective and therefore difficult to relate to. Ustvol'skaya does not seem to try to make her compositions accessible to the listener; she simply ignores all the historically formed norms of perception: the structure of her works is usually monolithic and the absence of a clear division between the sections makes it difficult to follow; the absence of obvious contrasts in dynamics and thematics makes Ustvol'skaya's works sound monotonous and seemingly endless.¹¹⁶

Ustvol'skaya's *Children's Suite* became the topic of an article by Lyudmila Mikheeva, published by *Sovetsky Kompozitor* in 1961. In another publication of 1966, the author A.K. (the real name is unknown) speaks of Ustvol'skaya as a composer whose name is known far beyond her native city of Leningrad as the author of large scale compositions dedicated to important events in the life of the Soviet Union, works such as *Children's Suite*, Symphonic poem *Fires in the Steppe*, *Piano concerto*, and numerous film scores. The friendly tone of the article together with a short fragment from an interview with Ustvol'skaya speaking about her future creative plans, portrays Ustvol'skaya as a happy and artistically fulfilled Soviet composer.¹¹⁷ An article in *Sovetskaya muzyka* dedicated to Ustvol'skaya's 50th anniversary reads: "The name of Ustvol'skaya first became known in 1949 after a performance of *The Dream of Stepan Razin*. The work attracts listeners by its epic grandeur combined with passionate and dramatic musical material."¹¹⁸ All the publications that appeared during the period between 1949 and 1969 focused on Ustvol'skaya's 'Soviet' compositions: she was praised for writing music that is

¹¹⁶ Arnold Sokhor, "Dorogami iskany: Muzyka Galiny Ustvol'skoy" [By Roads of Exploration: The Music of Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Muzykal'naya zhizn'*, no.1 (1959): 50-58.

¹¹⁷ A.K., "Slovo kompozitoru: Galina Ustvol'skaya" [G. Ustvol'skaya in Her Own Words], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 3 (1966): 150.

¹¹⁸ Unknown author, "Galina Ustvol'skaya: 50th Anniversary", *Muzykal'naya zhizn'*, no.9 (1969):36.

accessible to the Russian people; none of Ustvol'skaya's 'spiritual' compositions, the works that followed her *Second Piano Sonata* (1949), were mentioned.

In the discussion that followed the premiere of Ustvol'skaya's *Octet* (1948/49) in 1970, Leningrad musicologists spoke of the piece as 'the high point of the concert'¹¹⁹: they praised Ustvol'skaya for the individuality of her musical language that is seen in the ways the musical material is organised and presented, using concise and strictly selected means of expression. The main compositional principle of the work was defined as a process where each idea, represented through a combination of selected melodic and rhythmic units, is developed by means of multiple repetitions until its expressive potential is exhausted. The author claimed that the logic of musical dramaturgy in *Octet* is unique: the entry of each instrumental group is neither prepared nor anticipated, and that helps to maintain the attention of the audience; the treatment of individual instruments is unusual: thus, the timpani, which are tuned very high, do not just provide a percussive effect but offer another melodic voice of an unusual timbre. Although the music of the *Octet* does not possess sonic beauty and lacks 'emotional balance', it demonstrates a predilection towards extreme forms of expression, whether it concerns the range of dynamics or the choice of instruments. Although *Octet* possesses all the obvious attributes of a chamber composition, it is much closer to being a monumental symphonic work.¹²⁰

In 1979 Mark Aranovsky wrote: "Ustvol'skaya is a composer of great artistic integrity; already in her early compositions she demonstrated stylistic maturity, and her unique compositional style has not undergone considerable transformation during her career; instead, she continued developing the same circle of ideas whilst perfecting her compositional style in the direction of minimising the 'tools' and maximising the expressiveness of musical material."¹²¹

¹¹⁹ A non-identified author, "Moskovskie prem'ery Leningradtsev" [Moscow Premiers of the Leningrad Composers], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 6 (1971):18-20. One should not forget that the musicologists who participated in the discussion featured in this article, were people of another generation, and their perception of the work written twenty-three years earlier might have been different from that of Ustvol'skaya's contemporaries at the time of composition.

¹²⁰ "Moskovskie prem'ery Leningradtsev," *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²¹ Mark Aranovsky, *Simfonicheskie iskaniya* [Symphonic Explorations], (Leningrad: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1979).

In 1982, two years after Kats' publication, another article appeared in *Music of Russia*.¹²² The author begins by saying that Ustvol'skaya is undoubtedly one of the most significant Soviet artists, whose *melodism* belongs specifically to Soviet musical culture. In an attempt to explain the essence of Ustvol'skaya's unique style, Andreev examines her use of modes in search of characteristics which are uniquely 'Ustvol'skian', and those inherited from others, among whom he names Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky and Bach. Speaking about Ustvol'skaya's use of polyphony, Andreev observes that not many of Ustvol'skaya's compositions start with a single exposition of a theme; usually two or more themes are exposed simultaneously. Among other characteristics, Andreev names Ustvol'skaya's ability to create complex contrapuntal combinations of multi-voiced structures. He claims that Ustvol'skaya's method of notation demonstrates a predilection towards flattening of tones, and that notation for her is not a matter of convenience but an important compositional principle; dynamic and emotional climaxes are created not by accumulation of voices but by diminishing their numbers and returning back to the monody; and in the later works the tone clusters carry a role of a single voice. Andreev claims that Ustvol'skaya's *melodism* is of a unique nature: her choice of intervals is unlike anybody else's; among other characteristics that are uniquely Ustvol'skian, is her treatment of a single note: combined with the innovative 1/4 metre, each note bears a great significance, and the melodies appear as if created during the process of playing or hearing them. In conclusion, Andreev expressed a belief that his article will become a preamble to a further study of Ustvol'skaya's musical style. Indeed, many articles followed.

In 1984 Oleg Malov published *Methodical Recommendations on Mastering Scores of the Twentieth Century Piano Music*, the first Soviet publication that explained the main principle of modern notation, new ways of organising music in time, and non-traditional methods of playing the instrument. Using examples from music of the twentieth century, Malov demonstrated how the composer's individuality manifests itself through musical text. Ustvol'skaya is mentioned on a number of occasions. First, Malov commented on her method of notation, claiming that Ustvol'skaya's type of *melodism*, inspired by the traditions of Russian folklore and *znamenny raspev*, naturally

¹²² A. Andreev, "Zametki o stile Galiny Ustvol'skoy" [Notes on the Style of Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Muzyka Rossii* [Music of Russia], eds. E. Grosheva and A. Grigor'eva, vol.4 (1982): 240-260.

required the abandonment of bar lines. Another original feature of Ustvol'skaya's notation is the way she indicates the length of pauses by writing a number over the rest sign. Speaking of tone clusters, Malov wrote that if in some cases the use of tone clusters serves the purpose of simply shocking the audience, it is impossible to imagine a more suitable performing 'tool' for expressing the composer's artistic intention than a tone cluster in Ustvol'skaya's compositions.¹²³

During my research trip to the Paul Sacher Stiftung in 2008, I found an unsigned note about Ustvol'skaya and her music with the heading: 'Boris Tishchenko, April 30, 1985.' Later I discovered that some of the article's content was incorporated into the publication by Viktor Suslin.¹²⁴ Also, Tishchenko had written about Ustvol'skaya before,¹²⁵ hence his style was recognisable.¹²⁶ In the 1985 note, Tishchenko wrote that the music of Ustvol'skaya, which contains a very few notes but plenty of meaning, is a result of the composer's enormous spiritual power, strong will, maturity and artistic confidence. He argued that, unlike the music of some avant-garde composers, Ustvol'skaya's music is not invented but created; it is devoid of any external effects. This music, in Tishchenko's view, might seem equivocal: thus, the portrayal of barbarism and evil is in itself a protest against evil, hence carries a message of kindness, compassion and optimism. For Tishchenko, the most powerful side of Ustvol'skaya's artistry was her ability to portray images of silence and spiritual ascent.¹²⁷

In 1988 Boris Tishchenko again wrote about his teacher: the article contains his recollection of Ustvol'skaya as a pedagogue.¹²⁸ She encouraged her students to write in polyphonic style, and introduced them to music by Shostakovich, Mahler and Stravinsky. She showed her students some of her compositions such as *Children's Suite* and *Pioneers' Suite*, but kept the others in secret. Tishchenko remembered standing next

¹²³ Oleg Malov, *Metodicheskie rekomendatsii k osvoeniyu notnogo teksta v fortepiannoy muzyke XX veka* [Methodical Recommendations on Mastering Scores of Twentieth Century Piano Music], (Leningrad: LGK, 1988), 6.

¹²⁴ Viktor Suslin, "Galina Ustvol'skaya," *Muzyka v SSSR* [Music in the USSR], (April-June, 1990): 22-23.

¹²⁵ Boris Tishchenko, Vadim Basner, eds., "Svoe slovo v muzyke: Galina Ustvol'skaya" [Her Own Word in Music] *Vecherny Leningrad*, no.304, 1976, 3.

¹²⁶ A few months later I found the copy of the full document written by Tishchenko at the Musikverlage Hans Sikorski Archive: it was a programme note for the LP disc with Ustvol'skaya's *Piano Sonata No.1*, *Sonatina for piano*, and *Grand Duet for 'cello and piano*. Performers: Oleg Malov, piano, Oleg Stolpner, 'cello.

¹²⁷ Boris Tishchenko, a note dated April 4, 1985. Ustvol'skaya Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel.

¹²⁸ Boris Tishchenko, "S lyubov'yu i nezhnost'yu" [With Love and Affection], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no.2 (1988): 105-113.

to Ustvol'skaya in the crowd at the *Maly Zal* of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, listening to the pianist Glenn Gould for the first time in 1957: speaking of Webern's Variations performed that evening, Ustvol'skaya said: "None of us had ever heard anything like that before."¹²⁹ Summarising his thoughts on Ustvol'skaya, Tishchenko claimed that her influence, both as a person and a composer, was magnetic. As in her music, Ustvol'skaya herself exemplified strong will and a complete absence of verbosity but the essence itself; the main lesson she taught him was that the absence of true cultural knowledge leads to banality, 'second class' musicianship and lack of originality.¹³⁰

In 1990 Viktor Suslin published an article about Ustvol'skaya,¹³¹ the extended version of which appeared in the *Music from the former USSR*, entitled "The Music of Spiritual Independence: Galina Ustvol'skaya."¹³² Suslin claimed that the music of Ustvol'skaya is not "avant-garde" in the usual sense of the word; she was however, often criticised for elitism, stylistic narrowness and the uncommunicative quality of her music. Suslin highlights the fact that critics only recently began to understand that these are the characteristics that make Ustvol'skaya's music unique; that the specific idealism and maximalism of Ustvol'skaya's music are purely Russian characteristics - and more than that, Petersburgian, 'Dostoevskian'; that the essence of her music lies in its incredible 'high-voltage' density which is superior to all musical substances known to us; that her ability to create complex asymmetrical polyphonic structures despite the relative simplicity of the initial musical material is of an unprecedented quality; and that her approach to dynamics is reduced to a Baroque-like gradation, although taken to the extreme.

Speaking of Ustvol'skaya's *Composition No. 1*, Suslin questioned the seriousness of the composer's intentions: is this musical circus, a joke, or a blasphemy? Suslin claimed that it is difficult to imagine music that portrays the disharmony of the world better than that of Ustvol'skaya. He praised her for the immaculate motivic and

¹²⁹ Boris Tishchenko, *Ibid.*, 109.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹³¹ Viktor Suslin, "Galina Ustvol'skaya," *Muzyka v SSSR* [Music in the USSR], (April-June, 1990): 22-23.

¹³² Viktor Suslin, "Muzyka dukhovnoy nezavisimosti: Galina Ustvol'skaya" [Music of Spiritual Independence: Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Muzyka iz byvshogo SSSR* [Music from the Former USSR], eds. V. Tsenova, V. Barsky (Moscow, 1992): 141-56.

polyphonic work; for her ability to create a maximum of concentration by the means of ‘colossal economy of resources and rejection of everything superfluous’; and for her inventive compositional structures and ‘unique rhythmic essence’. Suslin supported his observation on Ustvolskaya’s style by presenting an extract from the composer’s letters to him, where she expressed her views on the subject of composition. The inclusion of a fragment from the analysis of Ustvolskaya’s *Violin Sonata* conducted by Yury Kholopov, intended to demonstrate that it is only by means of studying Ustvolskaya’s music that one can appreciate the individuality of her musical language.

2.3.3: New trends in the Russian perception of Ustvolskaya: the 1990s and early 2000s

In 1990 *Sovetskaya muzyka* published an article by Alexander Sanin that began a new ‘trend’ in the perception and interpretation of Ustvolskaya and her music. The opening line of the article reads: “How does Ustvolskaya write? The same way as she lives and thinks - with blood.”¹³³ The statements made by Sanin laid a foundation of the ‘Ustvolskaya Myth’ in Russian musicology of the 1990s: many publications that followed, including those of Ustvolskaya’s biographer, Gladkova, used the ideas introduced by Sanin. He claimed that Ustvolskaya is an untraditional artist in every aspect, and her vision of the world is unlike anybody else’s; one should not judge Ustvolskaya’s personality based on the facts of her biography as the true understanding of Ustvolskaya’s phenomenon manifests itself only through her music, and therefore her music is her true biography. Knowing of Ustvolskaya’s love of solitude, Sanin claimed that it is her solitude and complete independence that mark Ustvolskaya as a singular artist: her music is strikingly unusual in its structure, use of modes, her understanding of metre, rhythm and counterpoint.

Sanin spoke of Ustvolskaya as a ‘prophet’, one of the ‘chosen few’, whose music is an eternal conversation with the Creator; he placed Ustvolskaya in line with Leonardo da Vinci, Gogol, Rembrandt, Mussorgsky, Van Gogh and Michelangelo, and claimed that Ustvolskaya never experienced any of Shostakovich’s influence or any

¹³³ A. Sanin, “Slovo skazano” [The Word is Spoken], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no.10 (1990): 22-26.

other influences. He claimed that Ustvol'skaya's music is not known to people since it has been rarely performed. Sanin's vocabulary abounds with terms that are rarely used in connection to music: 'collapsing universe', 'cosmic powers', 'kingdom of Spirit', 'tragic dialogue with Eternity', 'music that opens the secrets of the Universe' and allows us to hear 'heavy steps of Time and the frightening breath of Eternity.' He concluded by saying that Ustvol'skaya's music is akin to a sculpture, and because of its grandeur, it is least suitable for performance in traditional concert halls; he insisted that the year of composition is irrelevant for the understanding of Ustvol'skaya's style since the value of the 'message' it communicates is eternal.¹³⁴

A publication by Olga Gladkova entitled *The Unknown Muse of Galina Ustvol'skaya* (1994) in many ways continued the mystification of Ustvol'skaya that was begun by Sanin.¹³⁵ A copy of Gladkova's article kept at the Paul Sacher Stiftung contains a comment added by Ustvol'skaya: "To dear Viktor. I decided to send you this article. If necessary, feel free to tear it apart." It is unclear when exactly Ustvol'skaya sent this article to Viktor Suslin; however the fact of her doing so indicated her approval of the content.¹³⁶

In this article, dedicated to Ustvol'skaya's seventy-fifth birthday, Olga Gladkova wrote that at 75 Ustvol'skaya cannot boast about her popularity in St. Petersburg musical circles; her art has never been a topic of dissertations or monographs. Gladkova claimed that Ustvol'skaya's music is the art that cannot be imitated, and despite being difficult to understand, it possesses a magic power that cannot be resisted. In Gladkova's view, Ustvol'skaya is one of the most enigmatic composers of St. Petersburg whose elitist and mysterious music is one of a kind; it is an art surrounded by mystery, hence even the theoretical analysis of Ustvol'skaya's scores would not explain the unique nature of her compositional style, since none of the familiar categories such as melody, metre, rhythm or traditional genres are applicable to this music, neither would it explain the powerful effect that Ustvol'skaya's music has on the audience. Gladkova claimed that Ustvol'skaya's music is a pure manifestation of life of the Spirit; it is akin to hypnosis

¹³⁴ A. Sanin, "The Word is Spoken", *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³⁵ Olga Gladkova, "Nepoznannaya Muza Galiny Ustvol'skoy" [The Unknown Muse of Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Smena*, vol.109 (1994): 7.

¹³⁶ In the early 1990s Suslin was already living in Germany and worked at the Internationale Musikverlage Hans Sikorski where he was responsible for preparing Ustvol'skaya's scores for publication.

and it exists on the boundary between the dream and reality, art and non-art; it is the music of the subconscious. Gladkova continued by saying that Ustvol'skaya's music was not composed *for* the listeners; instead it is more akin to a spiritual confession, and therefore, applause after the performance is inappropriate. In Gladkova's opinion, Ustvol'skaya's style has not undergone a significant evolution, hence her works of the 1980s and 1990s resemble the style of compositions written in the 1940s and 1950s. One might call it 'stylistic narrowness', but in reality it shows the composer's loyalty to her own artistic 'theme'. Ustvol'skaya's music is tragic in its core; it is black and white; the particular choice of instruments, repetitiveness of musical material and never ending intensity of sonority makes listening challenging; this music burns with pain and often hurts the listener; it lacks eventfulness and entertaining qualities; instead, it speaks about eternal themes in a language that is very powerful and individual.

Although many of Gladkova's observations are valid, she focused on what Ustvol'skaya *is not* and what her music *does not* have: Ustvol'skaya *is not* well known in her native city; the analysis of Ustvol'skaya's scores *does not* explain the essence of the music; her music *cannot be* explained by means of traditional vocabulary used for analysis of musical compositions; it *does not possess* any characteristics that are directed towards the audience; and Ustvol'skaya's compositional style *did not evolve* during her compositional career. All the statements are pronounced with great pathos. Gladkova places questions that aren't answered: Is it music or sonic hypnosis? Should the word 'popularity' be applicable to Ustvol'skaya's music that is so elitist and mysterious? How can one define the genre of Ustvol'skaya's compositions?

The vocabulary that Gladkova used in the article also served to mystify Ustvol'skaya's artistic persona further: "one of the most enigmatic composers of St. Petersburg"; the secluded "thing in itself"; Ustvol'skaya's music reflects "the life of the Spirit"; it is a "music of the subconscious"; music that is tragic in its essence, hence must not be just listened to but "lived through"; the main message of Ustvol'skaya's compositions based on religious texts is that the "human soul is doomed forever, hence her music is never blissful." Gladkova concluded by saying that Ustvol'skaya never considered promoting her own music. That was below her dignity; the music was written, hence it will live, and that is enough. As a result of this publication, the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth' continued to thrive.

In 1995 Anna Gnatenko spoke about Ustvol'skaya's music as being akin to religion and ritual.¹³⁷ In Gnatenko's opinion, Ustvol'skaya created musically embodied structures that force pain into the reality of performing enactment. Gnatenko insisted that such ritualised pain, if read spiritually, represents true faith:

*The performance of this music should be truly painful for the pianist. It would be erroneous to consider this technique as a sign of egocentric originality, authorial violence or the performer's masochism. This pain is ritual, voluntarily, necessary, ethically and aesthetically meaningful.*¹³⁸

Ustvol'skaya's eightieth birthday was marked by a number of publications. In her study of contemporary Russian music, Natalia Drach discussed the 'Ustvol'skaya paradox': despite the unanimous acknowledgment of the unique nature of her compositional gift among professional musicians, Ustvol'skaya's music is rarely performed, let alone taught at music colleges and conservatoires.¹³⁹ Drach claimed that it is due to the complexity of Ustvol'skaya's music that requires 'de-coding'. The author discussed the possibilities of interpretation, and analysed stylistic connections between the piano writing of Ustvol'skaya, 'early' Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Rodion Shchedrin, as well as exploring parallels with the artists working in different artistic fields, such as the painter Salvador Dali and the film director Andrey Tarkovsky. Drach also discussed some specific details of Ustvol'skaya's piano works, such as the way of performing tone clusters in the *Sixth Piano Sonata* and the methods of sound production and interpretation of the composer's tempo indications in *Twelve Piano Preludes*.¹⁴⁰

Russian publications of the last decade offer some thought-provoking observations on Ustvol'skaya's compositional style, and present an attempt to analyse and interpret her works, despite the composer's request to refrain from theoretical analysis of her music. Thus, Alla Sviridova discussed the significance of polyphony in

¹³⁷ Anna Gnatenko, "Iskusstvo kak ritual: razmyshleniya o fenomene Galiny Ustvol'skoy" [Art as Ritual: Reflection on the Galina Ustvol'skaya Phenomenon], *Muzykal'naya akademiya* [Musical Academy], nos.4-5 (1995): 24-32.

¹³⁸ Anna Gnatenko, *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³⁹ N. Drach, "K probleme izucheniya proizvedeny sovremennykh i otechestvennykh kompozitorov: Na primere izucheniya fortepiannoy muzyki G. Ustvol'skoy [On the Problem of Studying the Music of Contemporary Russian Composers using the Piano Compositions of G. Ustvol'skaya as an Example], in *Sovremennye problemy pedagogiki muzykal'nogo vusa* [Contemporary Problems of Pedagogy at a Music Conservatoire] (St. Petersburg: Kanon, 1999): 97-109.

¹⁴⁰ N. Drach, *Ibid.*, 104-107.

Ustvolskaya's compositional language, and analysed the acoustic effects in Ustvolskaya's piano music.¹⁴¹ In a publication dedicated to the leading stylistic tendencies in Soviet Russian music of the second half of the twentieth century, Galina Grigor'eva discussed the influence of Shostakovich and his music on Ustvolskaya's style of composition: speaking of Ustvolskaya, the author claimed that Shostakovich's polyphonic writing influenced her predominantly linear style of composition.¹⁴² According to Grigor'eva, Shostakovich's influence can also be seen in the 'Russian treatment' of polyphony, the specific ways of applying Baroque polyphonic methods in modern musical context.¹⁴³ Such influence is particularly evident in Ustvolskaya's *Third Piano Sonata* and the *Twelve Piano Preludes*: these works demonstrate a synthesis of styles of Shostakovich's early piano compositions, such as *Aphorisms*, op.13 and *First Piano Sonata*, op.12, with the polyphonic style of Hindemith's piano music.¹⁴⁴ Summarising the 'sources' of the style of Ustvolskaya's compositions written between 1940s and the early 1960s, Grigor'eva named early Shostakovich and mature Hindemith.¹⁴⁵ She claimed that in later years, starting from the *Duet for violin and piano* (1964), new stylistic influences can be recognised, above all, Bartók and Stravinsky.¹⁴⁶

Another musicologist, T. Samsonova discussed the role of the piano and its sonic characteristics in the formation of Ustvolskaya's compositional technique.¹⁴⁷ The author presented a detailed analysis of Ustvolskaya's polyphonic style, her use of diatonic modes, and examined the nature of Ustvolskaya's tone clusters. Tat'yana Cherednichenko discussed the life and music of Ustvolskaya alongside another 'mysterious' Soviet composer, Alemdar Karamanov. The author claimed that both

¹⁴¹ A. Sviridova, "Polifonicheskaya akustika i ee prostranstvennyye koordinaty v fortepiannykh sochineniyakh Ustvolskoy [Polyphonic Acoustic and its Role in the Piano Compositions of Ustvolskaya], in *Voprosy sovremennoy muzykal'noy pedagogiki i fortepiannogo iskusstva* [Questions of Contemporary Pedagogy and Piano Playing], (Astrakhan': The Astrakhan' State Conservatoire, 1999): 113-117.

¹⁴² G. Grigor'eva, *Stilevye problemy russkoy sovetskoy muzyki vtoroy poloviny XX veka, 1950-1980-ye* [Stylistic Problems of Russian Soviet Music of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century, 1950-1980s], (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1989).

¹⁴³ Grigor'eva, *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴⁷ T. Samsonova, "Fortepiano v sonornom aspekte kompozitsionnoy tekhniki Galiny Ustvolskoy" [The Role of the Piano in Sonority of Ustvolskaya's Compositions], in *Problemy muzykal'nogo obrazovaniya i pedagogiki: Mezhdvuzovskiy sbornik trudov* [Problems of Musical Education and Pedagogy], vol.3 (St. Petersburg: Herzen RGPU, 2001), 62-70.

composers nurtured their creativity and developed their unique compositional style whilst living as ‘outsiders’ in Soviet Russia. She claimed that both Karamanov and Ustvol'skaya turned towards religion and liturgical texts for inspiration, and this resulted in works that were unlike anything else written in Soviet Russia at the time; their music, as well as the artists themselves, was reclusive and inaccessible, independent and truly original.¹⁴⁸

G. Lityushkina searched for parallels between the sonic ideas in Ustvol'skaya's music and the Old Russian singing tradition. The author spoke of Ustvol'skaya as one of the most inaccessible Russian composers, and discussed the conflict between Ustvol'skaya's claim that her music is non-religious, and the evidence presented in her works of the 1970s-1990s.¹⁴⁹ E. Borisova in *Beyond the Boundary of "Fine Arts"* highlighted the central aesthetic issue presented by Ustvol'skaya in her music:¹⁵⁰ Ustvol'skaya's music with its predominantly tragic subject matter and intensely dissonant sonorities is an anti-aesthetic phenomenon; it exists beyond the boundaries of fine arts, hence ceases to be perceived as Art.¹⁵¹ Borisova claimed that Ustvol'skaya's musical language is devoid of developmental processes; instead, the music unfolds through a series of repetitions which inform it with a certain degree of monotony, that, together with long periods of either extremely loud or quiet sounds produced by a combination of unusual instruments, affects the listener's perception most unfavorably.¹⁵²

As testified by the composer Roman Ruditsa, ‘*Ustvol'skaya aura*,’ ‘*Ustvol'sky dukh*’ [spirit] and even ‘*Ustvol'shchina*’¹⁵³ were an integral part of the Soviet and Post-

¹⁴⁸ T. Cherednichenko, *Muzykal'ny zapas. 1970-e. Problemy. Portrety. Sluchai* [Musical Reserve; the 1970s. Problems. Portraits. Incidences], (St. Petersburg: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2002), 359.

¹⁴⁹ G. Lityushkina, M. “O nekotorykh zvukovykh ideyakh v 4 Simfonii Ustvol'skoy [Some Ideas of Sonority in Ustvol'skaya's Symphony No.4], in “*Drevnee Pesnopenie. Puti vo vremeni*”. Po materialam konferentsii ‘Brazhnikov. Chteniya-2002’ [‘Old Singing Tradition. Roads in Time.’ Papers presented at a Conference ‘Brazhnikov's Readings’] St. Petersburg, 2004.

¹⁵⁰ E. Borisova, “Galina Ustvol'skaya: Za predelami ‘fine arts’” [Beyond the Boundaries of Fine Arts], *Muzyka i vremena* [Music and Time], no.8 (St. Petersburg, 2004): 45-53.

¹⁵¹ Borisova, *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁵² Borisova, *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁵³ The *shchina* suffix in Russian is more explicitly derogatory than English *ism*. When attached to a name, it means the excesses or bad times associated with that personality. For the first time the *shchina* suffix was used by Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) in an article of 1913 ‘*O Karamazovshchine*’ [On Karamazovism]; the *shchina* suffix was used in relation to Dostoevsky during early Soviet years. See: Anatoly Lunacharsky, *O ‘mnogogolosnosti’ Dostoevskogo* [On Dostoevsky's ‘Multivoicedness’], in *F.M. Dostoevsky v russkoy kritike* [Dostoevsky in Russian Criticism], (Moscow: GIKhL, 1956), 429.

Soviet musical atmosphere of Leningrad. Ruditsa claimed that Ustvol'skaya was seen by young artists as one of the most important figures of resistance: her demonstrative religiousness and determined alienation from any forms of Soviet collective existence created a suitable background for her spiritual music. Ustvol'skaya's works were well-known in underground cultural circles where the scores were hand-copied and secretly performed by students. Young musicians of the time were attracted to and influenced by both the expressive power of Ustvol'skaya's musical idioms and her enigmatic personality.

Ustvol'skaya's death in December 2006 brought to life many publications. Some composers and musicians like Alexander Radvilovich, Alexey Lyubimov and others summarised the Russian view of Ustvol'skaya. Thus, Radvilovich wrote that Ustvol'skaya, despite creating her unique compositional language, was known better abroad than in Russia; she always went against what was known as 'Soviet Art', and her compositions had to await their performances and publications for years.¹⁵⁴ Radvilovich spoke of Ustvol'skaya's music as being often perceived as 'strange' because of a certain minimalism of expressive means counterbalanced by maximum intensity of the musical material; non-traditional instrumental combinations, extreme dynamics, rhythmical monotony and repetitiveness of musical material were perceived as strikingly unusual. Unlike Gladkova, Radvilovich did not contribute to the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth' by claiming that Ustvol'skaya's music was not performed in her native city; the name of Oleg Malov is mentioned as one of the most dedicated St. Petersburg performers. Radvilovich believed that after Ustvol'skaya's death, once 'Madam Intrigue' steps in, interest in Ustvol'skaya's persona would be renewed among scholars and performers.

In the 'official' obituary Ustvol'skaya was described as the most gifted student of Shostakovich, whose music captured the apocalypse of the twentieth century. Other publications included '*Prophecies of the Unknown: Galina Ustvol'skaya*' by S.

¹⁵⁴ A. Radvilovich, "Kak dolgo nado zhit' v Rossii. Pamyati kompozitora G. Ustvol'skoy" [How Long Should One Live in Russia? To the Memory of G. Ustvol'skaya], *Muzykal'ny kritik*, 12 (2006).

Privalov,¹⁵⁵ ‘*A Condensed Thought*’ by D. Renansky,¹⁵⁶ and ‘*One Who Faces the Sky*’ by Iosif Raitskin,¹⁵⁷ where the author wrote:

Fear and despair penetrate the music of Ustvol'skaya's compositions, such as the 'Octet' and 'Second Piano Sonata'. It is therefore not surprising that when the GULAG prisoner, I.A. Likhachov, heard those works, he exclaimed: 'This music could only be written by someone who has been with us in Soviet labour camps'.¹⁵⁸

Alexey Lyubimov in his article dedicated to the memory of Ustvol'skaya, referred to her as the last of the great composers of the twentieth century: her ‘naked, screaming music’ will always remain as elitist art; this music requires a complete ‘submerging’ into it, and akin to a ‘black hole’ it possesses the energy that neither performers nor listeners can escape. Ustvol'skaya’s music does not communicate hope or carry light, instead it portrays despair and protest, enormous willpower and concentration, and it speaks of the fatality of human life.¹⁵⁹

Ustvol'skaya’s biographer, Gladkova, returned to the subject of Ustvol'skaya in 2004,¹⁶⁰ and in 2007, with a chapter in the book ‘*XXI century. Beginning. Music: Silhouettes of the St. Petersburg Composers.*’¹⁶¹ The 2004 publication was a response to a concert at the Hermitage Theatre dedicated to Ustvol'skaya’s eighty-fifth birthday. Gladkova yet again begins by saying that until the age of seventy-five, Ustvol'skaya ‘almost never heard her works performed’; only in the last decade Ustvol'skaya finally received a world-wide recognition as a singular composer, who, unlike her contemporaries, remained true to her artistic credo, and from one composition to another

¹⁵⁵ S. Privalov, “Prorochestva nevedomogo: Galina Ustvol'skaya” [Prophecies of the Unknown], *Chas Pik*, no.5. St. Petersburg, 2006.

¹⁵⁶ D. Renansky, “Spressovannaya mysl” [A Condensed Thought], *Vecherny Peterburg* [Evening St. Petersburg], no. 82 (2007): 7.

¹⁵⁷ Iosif Raitskin, “Obrashchennaya k nebu” [One Who Faces the Sky], *Nevskoe vremya* [Neva Time], no.1 (2006): 5.

¹⁵⁸ Iosif Raitskin, “Obrashchennaya k nebu”, *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁹ Alexey Lyubimov, “Umerla Galina Ustvol'skaya” [Galina Ustvol'skaya has Died], *Stengazeta*, December 27, 2006. <http://www.stengazeta.net/article.html?article=2611>

¹⁶⁰ Olga Gladkova, “Khudozhestvenny dnevnik Ol'gi Gladkovoy: Galina Ustvol'skaya - drama so shchastlivym finalom” [Artistic Diary of Olga Gladkova: Galina Ustvol'skaya: A Drama with a Happy Finale], *Novy mir* [New World], vol. 12, 2004: 191-197.

¹⁶¹ Olga Gladkova, “XXI vek. Nachalo. Muzyka: siluety peterburgskikh kompozitorov” [XXI century. Beginning. Music: Silhouettes of the St. Petersburg Composers], (St. Petersburg:Kompozitor, 2007).

continued her ‘lonely ascent into the Universe’, thus giving a ‘happy finale’ to the ‘Ustvol'skaya story’.

In the latest textbook on the history of Russian music in the second half of the twentieth century, a chapter dedicated to Ustvol'skaya's music is entitled “*Galina Ustvol'skaya: Sacred Symbolism in the Genres of Instrumental Music*.”¹⁶² The article is based on the material from the publications of Gladkova (1999), Anna Gnatenko (1995) and Viktor Suslin (1996).

2.3.4: A summary of Russian views on Ustvol'skaya: apologists and critics

The above survey of Soviet and Russian publications, almost none of which were translated into other languages, demonstrates that Ustvol'skaya and her music were not ‘ignored’ as was claimed by Gladkova;¹⁶³ instead Ustvol'skaya was very much a part of Soviet musical reality and tradition; her music was discussed, appreciated, and even studied in Russia, both during the composer's life (to a large extent, from the early 1970s) and the years following her death in 2006. The scale of her popularity was not the same as that of her teacher, Shostakovich, but Ustvol'skaya had some dedicated supporters and admirers in Russia, among whom were the composers Viktor Suslin and Sergey Banevich, and the musicologist Olga Gladkova as well as dedicated performers like the pianists Oleg Malov and Alexey Lyubimov, who championed her music not only in Russian but around the world.

Of those musicians who knew Ustvol'skaya, who studied, performed and promoted her music, some could be categorised as Ustvol'skaya ‘apologists’, others as critics. The apologists' view, presented by Suslin, Gladkova and Konstantin Bagrenin, is that Ustvol'skaya was a unique island in the ocean of twentieth century music; a grand original, whose stylistic isolation, and hence originality, knows no precedents in the history of Russian music. These were the people who created and disseminated the

¹⁶² Tamara Levaya, ed. “Galina Ustvol'skaya: Sokral'naya simbolika v zhanrakh instrumental'nogo tvorchestva” [Sacred Symbolism in Genres of Instrumental Music], in *Istoriya otechestvennoy muzyki vtoroy poloviny XX veka* [History of Russian music, the Second Half of the XX Century], (St. Petersburg: Kompozitor, 2005), 390-409.

¹⁶³ Such a view on Ustvol'skaya's artistic fate was expressed by her ‘apologists’, a group of her most fervent followers headed by Ustvol'skaya's husband, Konstantin Bagrenin. A similar view is expressed by Olga Gladkova in ‘*Music as an Obsession*,’ *Op.cit.*, 5.

‘Ustvol’skaya Myth’. The ‘critics’, among whom are many professional musicians of St. Petersburg and the author of this thesis, hold a more realistic view of Ustvol’skaya: although acknowledging the originality of her compositional talent, they do not see her as a unique uncompromising Soviet artist. Instead, they stress the undeniable influence of Shostakovich and stylistic connections with Russian and Soviet musical and cultural traditions.

To conclude the survey of Russian publications, a summary of the key viewpoints is presented below:

1. Ustvol’skaya, the singular composer, whose compositional language is of a unique nature;
2. The triad of composers whose influence on Ustvol’skaya is undeniable are Bach, Mussorgsky and Shostakovich;¹⁶⁴
3. Musical traditions that influenced Ustvol’skaya’s compositional language include:
 - a) Expressionism;
 - b) The baroque polyphonic tradition and associated methods of composition, particularly Bach, and Russian polyphonist Tanyeev;
 - c) The tradition of Russian folklore and *znamenny raspev*;¹⁶⁵
4. The unique nature of Ustvol’skaya’s compositional style lies in her ability to combine many heterogeneous traditions;
5. A certain resemblance between the sonic ideas of Ustvol’skaya’s music and the Old Russian singing tradition is evident;¹⁶⁶
6. Ustvol’skaya’s music is akin to ritual,¹⁶⁷ and remains on the borderline between art and non-art;¹⁶⁸
7. Ustvol’skaya was seen as a spiritual leader, one of the most important figures of resistance, and was an integral part of the Soviet and Post-Soviet musical atmosphere of Leningrad;

¹⁶⁴ B. Kats, “Sem’ vzglyadov na odno sochinenie”, Op.cit.

¹⁶⁵ K. Yuzhak, “Iz nablyudeny nad stilem G. Ustvol’skoy”, Op.cit.

¹⁶⁶ G. Lityushkina, “O nekotorykh zvukovykh ideyakh v 4 Simponii Ustvol’skoy”, Op.cit.

¹⁶⁷ A. Gnatenko, “Iskusstvo kak ritual: Razmyshleniya o fenomene Galiny Ustvol’skoy”, Op.cit.

¹⁶⁸ E. Borisova, “Galina Ustvol’skaya: Za predelami ‘fine arts’”, Op.cit.

8. For the generation of 1970s artists, Ustvol'skaya's music was 'half forbidden fruit and half mystical revelation';¹⁶⁹ she was highly respected by the artists of the 'underground' movement;
9. Many Soviet composers were influenced by Ustvol'skaya's music; some, including Shostakovich, quoted her in their works.¹⁷⁰

3: The Ustvol'skaya phenomenon: the main research questions

Although all the literature sources contributed to a broader understanding of Galina Ustvol'skaya, some important questions remain unanswered. First, what are the origins of Ustvol'skaya's music: are they Western, Russian or, as some have asserted, neither? Second, was Ustvol'skaya's music written in response to the political and artistic oppression of her era? Third, did it have a strong anti-Soviet tone and was it inspired by political rebellion? If not, what determined the direction in which Ustvol'skaya's style evolved, and how can such a high degree of intensity that her music possesses be explained? Fourth, what does this music communicate and how is the 'message' perceived by the today's audience? Fifth, how to approach the performance and interpretation of her music, and what is the role of a performer in the execution of her compositions? Above all, where does the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth' end and the 'real' Ustvol'skaya begin?

3.1: The author's analytical approach, methods and propositions

This thesis is an attempt to demystify the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth' with the view of filling a lacuna in existing Ustvol'skaya scholarship. By doing so, the author aims to create a reliable foundation for the informed performance interpretation of Ustvol'skaya's works as well as for educational purposes. I approach the task from three viewpoints: a researcher, a performer, and a pedagogue.

¹⁶⁹ R. Ruditsa, "Platy chernoye, do pola. Bez mikrofonta. Bez ukrasheny", Op.cit.

¹⁷⁰ See the list of interviews in Appendix E.

As a researcher, I am interested in distinguishing the facts from the Myth by critically analysing the existing written and oral sources as well as Ustvolskaya's personal recollections. I attempt to build a psychological portrait of Ustvolskaya by connecting her personal characteristics as we know them from the composer herself and people whom I interviewed, with the specific characteristics of her music, and to discuss the question of Ustvolskaya's spirituality and religiosity in context of Russian Orthodox faith and Russian sectarianism. Using a multi-disciplinary approach, I examine the aesthetic roots of Ustvolskaya's language by drawing parallels with Russian literature, particularly its St. Petersburg 'branch', and search for origins of Ustvolskaya's musical language exploring connection with Shostakovich (his early, 'modernist' period), Mussorgsky and Stravinsky, as well as the Eurasian heritage and the tradition of *znamenny raspev*.

As a performer, I search for ways of informing my own interpretation of Ustvolskaya's works with authenticity and specialist authority by means of analysing Ustvolskaya's piano writing. First, I explore the role of a performer in the execution of Ustvolskaya's works; second, I discuss the performance challenges; third, I analyse the audience perception of Ustvolskaya's music; fourth, the programming of Ustvolskaya's works is discussed (here I draw upon my PhD recital where Ustvolskaya's works were performed alongside compositions by Bach, Shostakovich, Knaifel, and Nikolaev).

As a pedagogue, I explore different avenues of promoting Ustvolskaya's music, one of which is introducing her works to students, and together bringing her music to a wider audience: by incorporating the research data from the performance project '*Bringing Ustvolskaya's chamber music to the young generation*', that involved studying and performing some of Ustvolskaya's compositions with students of Chetham's School of Music, as well as my own experience of performing Ustvolskaya's solo works, I discuss the challenges of studying, performing, interpreting and teaching Ustvolskaya's works whilst analysing the audience response to her music.

Due to the insufficient amount of primary sources and the often subjective nature of all the available sources, whether it is Ustvolskaya's personal recollections, written publications, or the interviews with the musicians who knew Ustvolskaya and performed her works, this thesis does not claim to be the one and only view on Ustvolskaya; it is a viewpoint of one performer, who is myself. Many of Ustvolskaya's

contemporaries and those close to her, such as Konstantin Bagrenin, Sergey Banevich, Oleg Malov, and others, might one day publish their memoirs and share their stories about Ustvolskaya, thus allowing us to broaden our understanding of Ustvolskaya and her music. This thesis is a step towards Ustvolskaya's demystification and reevaluation.

3.2: Outline of the overall chapter structure

Chapter 1 of the thesis presents Ustvolskaya as seen by the composer herself: childhood recollections, artistic views and thoughts on the creative process. Chapter 2 shows how Ustvolskaya, the person, teacher and the artist, was perceived by her contemporaries: here I draw on the material from personal interviews that allow me to conclude that the unique nature of Ustvolskaya's compositional style was in many ways a direct reflection of her personal characteristics. Chapter 3 is an independent performer's view on Ustvolskaya: here I critically examine the leading publications on the subject, followed by my own view of the 'Ustvolskaya Myth', the viewpoint of a performer, scholar and pedagogue. Chapter 4 explores the nature of Ustvolskaya's religiosity and spirituality, and examines how they are manifested through her music. In Chapter 5, I search for inter-textual connections between Ustvolskaya's aesthetic and Russian literature (Gogol, Dostoevsky, *oberiuty*), while Chapter 6 analyses the influences of Russian folklore and *znamenny raspev*, as well as the music of composers such as Bach, Mussorgsky, Stravinsky and Shostakovich. By exploring Russian cultural and musical contexts, I conclude that despite her unquestionable singularity manifested through and exemplified by her music, Ustvolskaya was in many ways a 'Russian type' of artist, hence her music must be interpreted as part of the Russian tradition. Chapter 7 presents a performer's view on Ustvolskaya; it explores different aspects of interpretation and focuses on the consequences of the research for performance. The case study that incorporates the research data from the performance project '*Bringing Ustvolskaya's chamber music to the young generation*' is presented in Appendix A. By means of analyses of Ustvolskaya's writing, particularly that for the piano in ensemble compositions, I demonstrate how the evolution of Ustvolskaya's musical style and her compositional language reflected the composer's aesthetic and her personal

characteristics. The conclusion summarises my findings. The transcript of interviews is presented in the Appendix together with programme notes for the PhD recital and the list of research trips.

Chapter One:

***Ustvol'skaya in her own words: childhood recollections, artistic views, and thoughts
on the creative process***

Ustvol'skaya left very little information about herself: there are no diaries; all her correspondence, apart from a few letters and notes kept at the Ustvol'skaya Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, has been destroyed, allegedly by the composer herself, and the authenticity of what is available is questionable. Among existing documents are:

- *My Thoughts on the Creative Process*,¹ a note, typed in Russian, dated January 17, 1994, and signed by Ustvol'skaya, kept at the UCPSS,² as well as the version of the note in English that appeared in the *Music of the World* in the same year;
- a copy of an interview with Olga Gladkova recorded for the Radio programme "Galina Ustvol'skaya. Features of a Portrait," produced in 2001, also kept at the Paul Sacher Stiftung;
- a few short interviews with the composer that appeared in the book by Olga Gladkova, *Music as an Obsession*,³ and were reprinted in another publication by Gladkova, entitled *A Drama with a Happy Finale*;⁴
- an interview with Sofia Khentova presented in the book *In the World of Shostakovich*;⁵
- an interview presented in the television programme "The Queen's Box";⁶
- letters addressed to the composer Viktor Suslin, Jürgen Köchel, the former Director of Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, and Hans-Ulrich Duffek, the present Director of Musikverlage Hans Sikorski.

Most of the letters and notes are either machine typed or hand-written by Konstantin Bagrenin, with the composer's signature attached. The existing documents can be

¹ Ustvol'skaya's "Thoughts on the Creative Process" will be referred to as 'Thoughts' throughout the thesis.

² UCPSS is an abbreviation for Ustvol'skaya Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel.

³ Olga Gladkova, *Galina Ustvol'skaya: Music as an Obsession*, (St. Petersburg: Muzyka, 1999).

⁴ Olga Gladkova, 'Khudozhestvenny dnevnik Olgi Gladkovoy: Galina Ustvol'skaya - drama so shchastlivym finalom' [Artistic Diary of Olga Gladkova: Galina Ustvol'skaya: A Drama with a Happy Finale], *Novy mir* [New World], vol. 12 (2004): 191-197.

⁵ Sofia Khentova, *V mire Shostakovicha* [In the World of Shostakovich], (Moscow: Kompozitor, 1996). The interview had never been translated. In the thesis I use my own translation.

⁶ 'Tsarskaya Lozha' [The Queen's Box], TV programme on Channel 'Kul'tura' dedicated to Galina Ustvol'skaya's 80th birthday. 17 June 2004.

divided into three categories: first, Ustvolskaya's recollection of her childhood and student years; second, Ustvolskaya's thoughts on music and composing, most of which are expressed in her *'Thoughts'*, though some are articulated in the correspondence with Viktor Suslin and interviews with Olga Gladkova; third, Ustvolskaya's 'professional' correspondence with the Musikverlage Hans Sikorski where she discussed works being prepared for publication.

Ustvolskaya's personal recollections of her family and the early years of her life are brief:

*My father was a lawyer, my mother - a school teacher. The father was a wonderful man, a great erudite [...] I studied at a music school at the Music Academy, 'Capella', and spent my last year at the specialist music school - 'desyatiletka'. I studied cello and composition. I began taking composition seriously after I heard Tchaikovsky's opera 'Evgeny Onegin': I remember saying to my parents that I want to be an orchestra. My early attempts at composing were not bad, I thought [...] After school I wandered around the islands [...] I was not a very good pupil: I had low marks in subjects like geography and maths, but literature and German were my favourite subjects, and I always had good marks. [...] I did not have girlfriends and hated walking hand in hand around school. Instead, I wandered around the city, visited museums and art galleries [...] I became a much more diligent student at the Conservatoire: I attended lectures and studied all the subjects well. Shostakovich was my teacher. I did not find his lessons interesting, neither did I like his music. Shostakovich introduced me to Mahler's music, and for that I am grateful. Mahler and Stravinsky are my favourite composers, and Bach, of course. Bach is a 'special case', he is unlike anybody else [...] It is sad that Shostakovich and myself were not 'soul mates'; I know that he liked me and always treated me with respect, but I never reciprocated his feelings [...]*⁷

Ustvolskaya's childhood recollections as presented by Gladkova in *Music as an Obsession*, portray her as an unhappy lonely child, an image that would later find its musical representation in her *First Symphony (1955)*. Ustvolskaya said:

Since early childhood I could not tolerate any pressure being put on me. I was never understood by my parents, and was often alone. My parents had their own life. During my school years, I used to walk around the city for hours, often missing lessons, and would come home very late. I did not want to go there, I knew I would

⁷ Ustvolskaya's interview for the TV programme 'Tsarskaya Lozha', dedicated to Ustvolskaya's 80th birthday. 17 June 2004.

*be told off and even punished. My nervous system has been weakened since then, and for as long as I remember myself, I wanted to be left alone.*⁸

Many years later Ustvolskaya admitted: “Like Diogenes of Sinope, I would like to crawl into an urn and spend my life there. That would be the best version of my life [...] I spend most of the time on my own, thinking, composing [...] The rest does not interest me in the least.”⁹ To summarise her life, Ustvolskaya said: “Given a second chance, I would not have changed anything; I feel I have lived my life very righteously”.¹⁰

Ustvolskaya began her *Thoughts* by saying that she prefers nothing to be written about her music other than a judgment be passed on it or it be described only as either *kamernaya muzyka* [chamber music] or ‘religious music’. Ustvolskaya believed that each one of her compositions is new, both in concept and content, and therefore, should not be approached with a stereotypical theoretical judgment, that is the judgment of Soviet musicologists. She felt that only a ‘non-standard’ musician would understand and appreciate the novelty of her music, and insisted that none of her works should be referred to as ‘chamber music’, whether it is a piano sonata or a symphony (even if the symphony, such as the *Symphony No.4* for trumpet, tam-tam, piano and contralto, only lasts for 10 minutes). She claimed that each composition is the fruit of her tortured life dedicated entirely to art, and therefore, none of them are ‘chamber music’ at their core [*ne kamernoe sochinenie*]; instead, all her compositions should be categorised simply as ‘instrumental music’.

Ustvolskaya expressed her mistrust of composers whose oeuvre contains a large number of works; in her opinion, one cannot ‘say’ something new in such an ‘ocean of works’. She dismissed any comparisons of her music with the Minimalist composers, as well as with other artists, referring to such comparisons as ‘idle fancies of musicologies’. She claimed that for her, the true, *vysshee iskusstvo* [the art of the highest calibre] is always beyond comparisons, and does not have any association with the particular nationality of the artist; Ustvolskaya used the names of Leonardo da Vinci,

⁸ Gladkova, *Music as an Obsession*, Op.cit., 27.

⁹ TV programme ‘Tsarskaya Lozha’, Op.cit.

¹⁰ ‘Tsarskaya Lozha’, Ibid.

Rembrandt, Bach and Beethoven as artists who, in her view, created such *vysshee iskusstvo*. To conclude, Ustvol'skaya said:

I live in the twenty-first century surrounded by thousands of different artistic trends. I give all my strength to the creative process, whilst praying to God. I have my music, only mine!

Apart from speaking highly of Mahler, Stravinsky, and above all J.S. Bach, there is no mention of other composers in her interviews or epistolary exchanges. Ustvol'skaya's comments on the subject of her personal and professional relationship with Shostakovich were minimal. However, those made in a conversation with the music historian Sofia Khentova in the 1970s differ from Ustvol'skaya's final statement made in 1994.¹¹ Here Ustvol'skaya spoke fondly of her years of studying with Shostakovich:

I entered Shostakovich's class of composition at the Conservatoire in 1940. I was accepted despite the rumour that Shostakovich usually does not accept young women in his class as he does not believe in their creative abilities. During the first year of studies, I wrote a large amount of music. For my first exam in the spring of 1941, just before the War, I presented some of my compositions. Everyone on the panel was astounded by the fact of how 'upside down' it all was; they found my music very difficult to understand [...] However, the decision was made to allow me to continue to the second year.¹²

None of those compositions survived; they all got lost during the war. During the war years I lived in Tashkent, then in Tikhvin, where my father was working at the time. In 1945 I returned to Leningrad to continue my studies at the Conservatoire. Since Dmitry Dmitrievich did not return to teaching immediately, I spent some time studying with his teacher, Maximilian Steinberg. He liked me because, as he himself admitted, our lessons reminded him of his lessons with young Shostakovich. Studying with Steinberg was difficult for me. I wrote the Piano Concerto with no help from him, completely by myself.

¹¹ The conversation with Khentova took place on 14 May 1977, in Repino. See: Sofia Khentova, *V mire Shostakovicha*, 172. Op.cit.

¹² In this interview Ustvol'skaya does not describe the whole seriousness of the situation: in 1940, after two terms as a student of Shostakovich at the St. Conservatoire, she was threatened with expulsion. Although she had written a large number of works, the examination panel found them unsatisfactory. For many years it was a common belief that Shostakovich was the one who 'saved' Ustvol'skaya. However, in a telephone conversation with Viktor Suslin that took place on 11 July 1994, Ustvol'skaya told him that it was not Shostakovich, but professors Gnesin and Kushnarev to whom she is indebted. Suslin spoke about this telephone conversation with Ustvol'skaya in a letter to Detlef Gojowy, dated 12 July 1994. The letter is kept at the Suslin's private collection. Accessed: 27 February 2008, Pinneberg, Germany.

I met Dmitry Dmitrievich again at Steinberg's funeral,¹³ and soon after that he returned to teaching at the Conservatoire. In 1947 I became a member of the Composers' Union, and in the autumn of 1948 attended the first meeting at the Union. Very soon after that I had to leave Leningrad,¹⁴ which might have prompted our friendship [...]. I was very mature in some ways, whilst very infantile in others [...] Speaking of Shostakovich's teaching method: he did not correct scores that his pupils brought to him; instead, he tried to understand. He believed that the composer will either 'happen' or not 'happen'; therefore, the best course of studying is to experience everything by yourself.

I studied a great deal of music in those years, not only the compositions which were recommended to me by Dmitry Dmitrievich. I never liked 'ready made recipes'. We often played four-hand duets together in Shostakovich's flat. He once gave me the complete set of Mahler's Symphonies as a present. We listened to music together, works such as the "Symphony of Psalms" by Stravinsky, of which Shostakovich later did a four-hand transcription and we played it together. Dmitry Dmitrievich gave me many of his manuscripts, and often asked for my opinion about his works.

Our friendship lasted for nearly 14 years, until 1962. We spent much time together, walking, listening to music. Dmitry Dmitrievich knew very well what one should and should not do, but he often compromised, although, I believe, not more often than Beethoven. He valued intelligence in a person more than anything else, much more than the level of education. For him, intelligence meant something very special: it was more to do with the personality, the human nature and personal decency, like in Chekhov. Chekhov for him was a Master of the highest calibre.

During the years of our friendship, Shostakovich wrote me many letters. There could have been even more of them if I had been more communicative and encouraging. His letters were excessively enthusiastic and passionate, my replies – too timid. I am not his successor, no, I am not, and he knew and respected that. He told me: you are a phenomenon; I am a talent. Shostakovich was easily excitable: once he told me that our friendship made him a better person. However, despite that, he never helped me in publishing my works, and never assisted in furthering their performances.

I have burnt all his letters.¹⁵

Ustvolskaya's tone in the note dated 1 January 1994, is different to that in the above monologue:

Never, even at the time of my studies at the Conservatoire under Shostakovich, did I like either his music or him as a person. To put it more harshly, I always strongly

¹³ Steinberg died on 6 December 1946.

¹⁴ It was probably a very short trip away since there are no records confirming that Ustvolskaya lived outside Leningrad.

¹⁵ The exact date of the letters being burnt is not known. K. Bagrenin vividly remembered how he personally tore them into small pieces and threw them into a rubbish container. Interview with K. Bagrenin, 2 April 2009, St. Petersburg.

rejected his music, and sadly, his personal characteristics only reinforced my negative attitude towards him and his music [...] Such an eminent figure as Shostakovich, for me was not eminent at all. On the contrary, he burdened me and killed my best feelings.¹⁶

Since none of the extended correspondence between Ustvol'skaya and Shostakovich appears to have survived, it is impossible to reconstruct the process of their relationship turning from admiration to rejection that finally grew into hatred, for which Ustvol'skaya became publicly renowned towards the end of her life.¹⁷ Irina Shostakovich who read Ustvol'skaya's letters to Shostakovich before returning them to her, spoke of them as being 'very personal, extremely so, and full of passion.'¹⁸

Ustvol'skaya's correspondence with Viktor Suslin and Hans-Ulrich Duffek demonstrates a strong professional relationship between the composer and her German publishers, and highlights some of Ustvol'skaya's personal characteristics: it reveals a person who is somewhat shy whilst at the same time direct and assertive; without unnecessary pleasantries, she demands maximum attention from her publishers to be paid to all the details of works that are in process of being published; her requests are firm and final, and do not invite further discussion or negotiation. Ustvol'skaya was determined to avoid any discussion that concerns her music. Thus, there is a mention of a letter from the pianist Frank Denyer that contained nine pages of questions to Ustvol'skaya about her music. Although the letter remained unanswered, Ustvol'skaya commented on it in the letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek:

I cannot answer why I use this or that timbre in my compositions, or explain the absence or presence of a microphone, or a choice of instrumental combination in my

¹⁶ A note signed by Ustvol'skaya is kept at the UCPSS, Basel.

¹⁷ It is important to remember that Ustvol'skaya's letter to Suslin, as well as a few notes about Shostakovich that appeared around the same time, were prompted by Suslin's letter to Ustvol'skaya from 4 August 1994, and a note entitled 'Razmyshleniya o Shostakoviche' [Meditation on Shostakovich]. Ustvol'skaya agreed with the content of Suslin's letter, as seen from the comment and her signature on the copy of the letter, dated 25 August 1994. The comment reads: "I, Galina Ustvol'skaya, fully and completely agree with Suslin, and herein, sign this document". It is however, questionable whether or not Ustvol'skaya would have written about Shostakovich using such a negative tone were she not prompted by the Suslin's letter.

¹⁸ As claimed by Irina Shostakovich in an interview with Alexander Ivashkin on 12 February 2007, Moscow. In a letter to Ustvol'skaya, dated '28 May 2000, Moscow', Irina Shostakovich confirmed that after the death of Shostakovich, she returned all of Ustvol'skaya's letters back to the composer; it was her own initiative. In this letter Irina Shostakovich asked Ustvol'skaya to return Shostakovich's manuscripts that happened to be in her possession back to the family: works such as the *Fifth String Quartet*, *Preludes and Fugues*, *Monologues* on the words by Pushkin, and *Satires*, on words by Sasha Cherny. The letter was given by K. Bagrenin to A. Ivashkin on 7 June 2012, in St. Petersburg and is now at the Ustvol'skaya Collection at the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel. Donated by A. Ivashkin.

'Compositions'. They all contain a spiritual programme. I believe, the art of music, or any other art for that matter, would cease to exist if everything was to be put into words and explained.¹⁹

During the early 1990s, Ustvolskaya began openly criticising Russian performers of her works and claiming that her music was not performed in her native city of St. Petersburg. In the letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, dated 22 April 1993, we read:

To have my works published in Russia is akin to a miracle; it is also a miracle to have them performed decently [...] The performances of my Three Compositions in St. Petersburg could not even be called 'rehearsals'; it sounded as if the musicians were sight-reading.²⁰

Ustvolskaya's other letters addressed to Duffek, instructed the publisher on necessary changes in her scores:

*When the Octet goes into print, I would like all the **sf** to be replaced by **ffff**. The work must be performed thoughtfully, very strongly and with an immense artistic commitment without a shadow of staccato or leggiero.²¹*

In the same letter, Ustvolskaya made suggestions regarding the *Grand Duet*:

*The piece needs to be played with strength and energy as well as very expressively, in a creative artistic manner. The trills in the second movement (cello part) must be played with the following dynamics: **f cresc ffff** and not **f - crescendo**.²²*

Ustvolskaya's note that accompanied the manuscript of the *Symphony No.5* sent to Hans Sikorski reads:

I find it difficult to say anything about this work, and therefore, I shall turn to Schumann, who once wrote that the best way to speak about music is to be silent

¹⁹ Letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, dated 25 August 1991, UCPSS, Basel.

²⁰ Letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, dated 22 April 1993, UCPSS, Basel.

²¹ Letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, dated 22 April 1993, UCPSS, Basel.

²² The same letter.

about it. The Symphony is difficult for performers. Although there are only six people involved, the work might require a leader, who, as I imagine, is not a conductor invited for the occasion, but a musician who has studied my other works, particularly the Three Compositions, hence truly understands the style of my music. The leader must possess a minimum of exterior attributes such as gesture etcetera, but a maximum of true understanding of the music: the less attention he attracts, the better. As it has already been proven in practice, even a highly qualified musician often demonstrates a complete misunderstanding of my music. It is easy to play the right notes whilst still ruining the compositions.²³

Apart from the German publishers, Ustvol'skaya also sent clear instructions to performers of her works. Thus, a note addressed to Reinbert de Leeuw regarding the performance of the *Second Symphony* reads:

It is very important that the text in the Symphony is not just sung but pronounced in the manner indicated in the score. It is not advisable to invite a classically trained singer for the performances of this work. It is much preferable if a professional reader or theatrical actor is used for this purpose.²⁴

In the same letter Ustvol'skaya shared her concern regarding *Composition No.2*:

There is a problem with double-basses in the Compositions No. 2: they must sound with the utmost intensity, in a manner which penetrates the ear. Therefore, it is acceptable, and sometimes necessary, to use amplification for all eight double-basses.²⁵

Ustvol'skaya's letters to Viktor Suslin are of a more personal nature; she shares her thought on music and creative process:

*I do not write music the way other composers do. I start writing when I enter a special state of grace [...]. The whole process of creation happens in my mind and soul. Only I can predict the way my compositions will go, and decide their future fate. I pray: 'God, give me strength to compose'.
I am not a soothsayer but most definitely close to it. Never in my life was I mistaken about it [...] I know that the way I feel [Ya chuvstvuyu] is the right way, and it is*

²³ Letter to Sikorski, dated 16 April 1990, Ustvol'skaya Archive, Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, Hamburg.

²⁴ Letter to Reinbert de Leeuw, dated 23 September 1999, Ustvol'skaya Archive, Musikverlage Hans Sikorski.

²⁵ Letter to Reinbert de Leeuw, dated 23 September 1999, Ustvol'skaya Archive, Musikverlage Hans Sikorski.

only me who feels like that [tak chuvstvuyu ya odna]. I kneel before God [stoyu na kolenyakh pered Bogom].²⁶

In another letter, addressed to Suslin, Ustvolskaya wrote that she would like to tell him what is happening to her in music, to share her creative thoughts, and most importantly, to share ‘the life of her Soul’.²⁷ A few months later, on 19 May 1995, Ustvolskaya made another attempt:

It is impossible to talk about the creative process, but I would like to at least attempt to get closer to discussing it with you. Day and night I live with it.²⁸

In another letter Ustvolskaya thanked Suslin for being able to understand her and her music better than anyone else.²⁹ Judging by some comments in her letters, Suslin was not only helping Ustvolskaya by publishing and promoting her works in Germany, but by offering her material help. Thus, in a letter to Duffek, dated 22 April 1993, Ustvolskaya wrote:

The phone calls from you and Viktor Suslin bring joy to my secluded life [...] I have received a recording of my works performed by the St. Petersburg musicians. I found their performance unacceptable as it contains a number of significant misreadings.³⁰

In another letter addressed to Suslin, we read:

Thank you for the parcel, and thank you for your kindness towards me [...] As promised, I have contacted an electrician.³¹

It was not only Suslin who helped Ustvolskaya. A letter addressed to Hans Sikorski reads:

²⁶ Letter to Suslin, dated 29 September 1994, Suslin’s Private Collection.

²⁷ Letter to Viktor Suslin, dated 22 September 1994, UCPSS, Basel.

²⁸ Ustvolskaya’s grammar is very peculiar and that makes translating her letters into another language difficult. This letter, addressed to Viktor Suslin, is written by Ustvolskaya herself, unlike other letters of the period that are written by her husband, or machine-typed, and signed by the composer.

²⁹ Letter to Viktor Suslin, dated 2 February 1994, UCPSS.

³⁰ Letter to Hans Duffek, dated 22 April 1993, UCPSS.

³¹ Letter to Viktor Suslin, dated 24 September 1994, UCPSS.

Please accept my sincere gratitude for the parcel. From now on, I should not be afraid of either cold or hunger: the radiator gives me comfort and a sense of security in the days to come, and all those tasty treats transform mundane reality into a festive season.³²

Following Suslin's advice, Bagrenin sold the large part of Ustvol'skaya's manuscripts, documents and correspondence to the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel.³³ As is clear from Ustvol'skaya's letter to Irina Shostakovich, dated 16 June 2000, all the Shostakovich's manuscripts that were in Ustvol'skaya's possession, were also taken to the Paul Sacher Stiftung.³⁴ Selling the documents and manuscripts provided Ustvol'skaya with financial security for years to come and, most importantly, made them available for scholars and researchers.

Reading Ustvol'skaya's correspondence, I searched for her comments on performing aspects of her music; who did she see as her 'ideal' performer? Some comments were informative, others led to more questions and further mystification of her artistic persona. In a note with no addressee, signed by the composer and dated 10 June 1994, we read Ustvol'skaya's commentary on the performance of her *Second Piano Sonata* by Anatoly Vedernikov. The first performance given by Vedernikov at the *Maly Zal* of the Moscow Conservatoire took place on 26 January 1967, and he continued to include the work in his recitals. Ustvol'skaya never heard Vedernikov performing the *Sonata* live, and it was not until the mid-1990s that she had an opportunity to hear the recording from one of the performances, produced by an unknown Japanese company and sent to her by Viktor Suslin. In that note Ustvol'skaya wrote:

On the recording, Vedernikov performed my Sonata with utmost perfection. After the first hearing, I wanted to hear it again. It surprised me that Vedernikov never asked any questions about the Sonata whilst working on it, but himself found all the 'keys' to make the performance strong and convincing. I am grateful to Anatoly Ivanovich for such a dignified interpretation of my composition.³⁵

³² Letter to Viktor Suslin, dated 24 September 1994, UCPSS.

³³ Research trip to the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel, 11-14 December 2007.

³⁴ The letter from 16 June 2000, St. Petersburg, was given by K. Bagrenin to A. Ivashkin on 7 June 2012, in St. Petersburg and is currently at the UCPSS.

³⁵ A note signed by Ustvol'skaya, dated 10 June 1994, UCPSS, Basel.

Another comment concerns the pianist Alexey Lyubimov:

Alexey Lyubimov is currently the only worthy performer of my Piano Concerto. He does not only possess 'first-hand knowledge' about my artistic intentions in this piece, but with him as a soloist I can be confident that my composition is interpreted correctly and performed in the most dignified manner.³⁶

It appears that Ustvolskaya was concerned that performers who did not know her and were not familiar with the nature of her music, might misunderstand her artistic intentions, and therefore misinterpret her works. This is evident from a letter to Patrick de Clerck from 14 September 1995: Ustvolskaya here speaks about being extremely demanding towards performers of her works. In her opinion, the incorrectly chosen performer eliminates the possibility of achieving the highest level of performance, and the highest is the only level that her music deserves.³⁷ The fact that Ustvolskaya was so particular about the personal and professional characteristics of her performers, indicates that she was not only willing for her music to be performed but that it had to be executed in the way she intended.

Speaking of pianists, there are two names that are frequently featured in the correspondence: the St. Petersburg-born pianist Oleg Malov and the Amsterdam-born pianist, Reinbert de Leeuw. Oleg Malov (1947-), who studied piano at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire with S. I. Savshinsky and N. E. Perel'man, began performing Ustvolskaya's music in 1972. He studied Ustvolskaya's compositions with the composer herself, and faithfully championed her music both in Russia and abroad, having premiered, performed and recorded her entire oeuvre. Ustvolskaya clearly expressed her gratitude to Malov in a number of letters, and recommended him as the best performer of her works. In her letter to Köchel dated 16 February 1987, she wrote:

If you are planning to perform my Third Symphony, I would advise you to invite the pianist Oleg Malov. He is the performer and director of this composition, as well as many of my other works, among which is the Second Symphony, and his participation would simplify the task of preparing this piece for a performance.

³⁶ Letter to Jürgen Köchel, dated 27 April 1995, UCPSS, Basel.

³⁷ Letter to Patrick de Clerck, dated 14 September 1995, UCPSS, Basel.

To the same addressee, in a letter from 23 February 1987, Ustvolskaya yet again recommends Malov:

I would like to confirm that the participation of Oleg Malov in the performance of any of my compositions, particularly the new works, such as Symphony No.3 and Piano Sonata no.5, would not only significantly simplify the task of preparation but would also ensure the necessary inner direction of the performance and guarantee the true proximity to my artistic intention.³⁸

In a letter to Mr. Goldstein, from 10 August 1987, Ustvolskaya wrote:

Oleg Malov began performing my compositions in 1972, having regularly consulted me during his preparation. That is very important. I can say with confidence that it is the participation of Oleg Malov that ensured the success of many performances of my compositions. I therefore advise you to consider his involvement in your project.³⁹

In the early 1990s the situation changed. A letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek from 5 August 1992, reads:

If in the future you are planning to release new CDs with my compositions, I insist that they are performed by Reinbert de Leeuw and no one else. As for Oleg Malov, he indeed was the first performer of many of my compositions and I am very grateful to him for that. However, Reinbert de Leeuw is an extraordinary musician, and I await his performances of my music with great anticipation; that is what gives me the will to live.⁴⁰

In another letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, from 22 April 1993, Ustvolskaya wrote:

I would like my Grand Duet to be performed by Reinbert de Leeuw. On the recording that I have the work is performed by Oleg Malov and Oleg Stolpner: the performance is not to my satisfaction, and therefore should not be used as a reference for future performers.⁴¹

³⁸ Letter to Jürgen Köchel, dated 23 February 1987, UCPSS, Basel.

³⁹ Letter to Mr. Goldstein, dated 10 August 1987, Ustvolskaya Archive, Musikverlage Hans Sikorski.

⁴⁰ Letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, dated 5 August 1992, UCPSS, Basel.

⁴¹ Letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, dated 22 April 1993, UCPSS, Basel.

On 18 September 1994, in a letter to Walter Klein, Ustvolskaya wrote: “ I consider the recordings of my works made by Reinbert de Leeuw and Marianne Schroeder to be of a superior quality [etalonny, from French étalon].”

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Ustvolskaya’s correspondence and her personal recollections reveal her complex personality, and the significance of her childhood memories is evident. She was an artist who believed in the unique nature of her compositional gift and saw her music as an art of the highest calibre. She was selective (although not always consistent) towards the performers of her compositions, and was not prepared to compromise her artistic vision and to accept individual interpretations of her works. Despite the immense value of her personal recollections, Ustvolskaya’s artistic self-portrait appears highly subjective and somewhat incomplete, so the mystery remains and provokes many diverse interpretations. To gain a broader understanding of Ustvolskaya, ‘an extraordinary personality in an extraordinary environment, who saw herself as a unique phenomenon unencumbered by influence’,⁴⁴ I interviewed musicians who knew Ustvolskaya personally.

⁴² The list of Ustvolskaya’s favourite performers, however, does not include the Swiss pianist, Marianne Schroeder. <http://ustvolskaya.org/performers.php> (accessed: 18 April 2011).

⁴³ As a performer, familiar with many recordings of Ustvolskaya’s works, including those of Malov and de Leeuw, I find it difficult to understand what makes the interpretation offered by the latter much more superior (in Ustvolskaya’s opinion) to that of the former. Ustvolskaya herself never offered any explanation, but according to the composer Boris Tishchenko, she publicly forbade Malov to perform her works.

⁴⁴ David Fanning, “ ‘Variations on the Theme: Galina Ustvolskaya’ by Simon Bokman”, *Music and Letters*, 89 (2008):140-141.

Chapter 2:

Ustvolskaya as seen by her contemporaries and performers of her music: personal interviews¹

In the quest for understanding the true meaning and historical significance of Ustvolskaya's music, I conducted a number of personal interviews in St. Petersburg, Basel, Hamburg and Pinneberg. I interviewed Ustvolskaya's students, with a view of discovering a common approach or a set of aesthetic principles which she disseminated, and her colleagues, composers and other musicians, in the hope of learning more about Ustvolskaya's involvement in St. Petersburg musical community. I also interviewed her personal acquaintances with the view of finding out who the real Ustvolskaya was as opposed to the 'Ustvolskaya Myth.' This chapter focuses on what was said about her music, her teaching, and her personality.

Ustvolskaya - the teacher

Among Ustvolskaya's students whom I interviewed, were the composers Boris Tishchenko, Sergey Banevich, Vitaly Solov'ev and an amateur composer Kirill Novikov. They all shared fond memories of their student years, and spoke of Ustvolskaya with respect bordering on worship: for them she was the person who shaped their understanding and appreciation of 'true' music. Tishchenko spoke of her ability to educate, nurture and direct a student towards realising his full artistic potential as being truly phenomenal, although 'her teaching method was not in any way scientific.'²

Sergey Banevich, shared more personal recollections:

She was beautiful and very talented, and I loved her with that first platonic teenage love. I hardly studied in those days: I went to see her every day, and brought her some food and treats - I knew what she liked!³

¹ The full transcript of all interviews can be found in Appendix E.

² Boris Tishchenko, personal interview, 27 October 2007, St. Petersburg Conservatoire, St. Petersburg.

³ Sergey Banevich, personal interview, 26 October 2007, The Composers' House, St. Petersburg.

According to Banevich, Ustvolskaya's relationship with her students resembled that of Plato and his students: they wandered around the city and talked about life, art, literature and music. For Banevich, those were the most valuable lessons, and even today he feels indebted to Ustvolskaya for his views on life, art and music, and for his aesthetic taste. As for Ustvolskaya's teaching method, he remembered her advice to write *pokoroche i potalantlivee* [to compose shorter and more artistically valuable works].

Akin to Tishchenko and Banevich, Vitaly Solov'ev spoke highly about Ustvolskaya: as a teacher she never insisted on one way of composing and never imposed her own views; she encouraged students to move away from the major-minor system and to explore other modes, or better still, to invent their own.⁴ Solov'ev also spoke about Ustvolskaya's love for variations as a genre, and she often suggested using Russian folksongs as a source of inspiration.

From Kirill Novikov I learnt that Ustvolskaya also taught composition at *The Club of Amateur Composers* at the Leningrad Composers' Union. The Club existed from 1949 and was open to anyone who wished to learn how to compose. Novikov remembered that Ustvolskaya paid particular attention to the arrangement of folksongs: variations, both as genre and a compositional principle, were her *lyubimy konek* [favourite 'tool']; she encouraged her students to compose on Soviet subjects, and often reminded them about the important events in Soviet life. The fact that Ustvolskaya was worshipped by her students was confirmed by musicologist Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya and pianist Tat'yana Voronina in their interviews: both mentioned that most of Ustvolskaya's students were young men for whom she was an object of romantic affection.

Konstantin Bagrenin told me that when after the scandalous premiere of Ustvolskaya's *Piano Concerto* the administration of the Rimsky-Korsakov Music College threatened Ustvolskaya with redundancy, her students organised a march of protest demanding that she stayed as a member of the teaching staff. Apart from those who studied composition with Ustvolskaya, there were others like the pianist Oleg Malov, who referred to Ustvolskaya as the Teacher with a capital T.⁵

⁴ Vitaly Solov'ev, personal interview, 24 October 2007, St. Petersburg National State Library, St. Petersburg.

⁵ Oleg Malov, "Alexander Knaifel as a Communicator of Existential Tendencies in Music of the 20th-21st Centuries." Material from the conference "*Muzyka na rubezhe epokh. Vzglyad iz Peterburga*" [Music on the Borderline of Centuries. The View from St. Petersburg], (May 2001, St. Petersburg). A copy from Oleg Malov's personal archive.

Ustvolskaya stopped teaching the day she turned 55.⁶ According to Gladkova, Ustvolskaya never saw teaching as her main occupation: she was an artist who taught to provide her family with financial security. However, the comments made by Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya contradicted those of Gladkova:

Some of what is written in Gladkova's book is simply untrue, and I would not recommend taking it too seriously. Gladkova writes that Ustvolskaya taught only because she needed money, but she had so many students, who absolutely adored her and with whom she had a very close relationship.⁷

It was not only Ruch'evskaya who doubted the information presented by Gladkova in her book. The composer Sergey Slonimsky also spoke very unfavourably about the author and the book:

Gladkova's book is a very stupid publication. Gladkova herself was zakaznaya lichnost' [an 'ordered person'], who made money by writing whatever was convenient at the time. What is the most unpleasant is the fact that for decades Gladkova wrote very negative reviews about 'new contemporary music': she criticised every composer apart from Ustvolskaya.⁸

Ustvolskaya was a teacher who clearly separated her own creative experimentations from those of her students; she inspired them to widen their horizons rather than taught them how to compose. Ustvolskaya left a powerful impression on them and in many ways determined their future artistic career. The interviews with Ustvolskaya's students reveal that:

- she was a great inspiration both as a woman and an artist (Banevich, Tishchenko);
- her teaching method was neither scientific nor did she show a predilection towards one particular teaching technique (Banevich, Tishchenko, Novikov, Solov'ev);
- she encouraged students to move away from the major-minor system and to experiment with new modes (Solov'ev, Novikov);

⁶ That was the legal retirement age for women in Soviet Russia.

⁷ Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya, personal interview, 25 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

⁸ Sergey Slonimsky, personal interview, 31 March 2008, St. Petersburg.

- she encouraged students to compose in contrapuntal style as opposed to the homophonic-harmonic style (Tishchenko)
- she favoured variations, both as a genre and a compositional principle, hence, many of her students wrote sets of variations (Tishchenko, Solov'ev);
- she often suggested using folksongs as a source of inspiration (Banevich, Tishchenko, Solov'ev Novikov);
- she never taught using the example of her own work, neither did she ever discuss her works with students (Banevich, Tishchenko, Solov'ev Novikov);
- she often used 'table sessions' during lessons as well as 'listening sessions' which many yet unknown works by Mahler, Shostakovich, Stravinsky and others were heard and discussed (Tishchenko);
- her 'life lessons' were even more valuable than her composition lessons (Banevich, Tishchenko).

Ustvolskaya - the artist, and her music

As well as Ustvolskaya's students, I interviewed some of her colleagues, fellow composers, and St. Petersburg musicians.⁹ The reaction to Ustvolskaya's name, even prior to my questions about her music, was very diverse. Some, like the composer Sergey Slonimsky, openly expressed their dislike of Ustvolskaya, both the person and the composer. Having acknowledged Ustvolskaya's individuality, Slonimsky accused her of unreasonably, in his view, professing a cosmic aggression and worldly greatness. For Slonimsky, Ustvolskaya was a composer whose compositional methods were extremely limited and their novelty was largely overrated.¹⁰

Other spoke of Ustvolskaya's music as a non-musical phenomenon that can only be explained by applying scientific or literary terminology. Thus, Boris Tichshenko claimed that Ustvolskaya's music possesses a non-human intensity and spiritual power that exists independently from the musical notation, akin to radiation or gravitation; 'the weight of each one of her compositions, as well as each individual note, is so significant

⁹ See the full list of interviews in Appendix E.

¹⁰ Sergey Slonimsky, personal interview, 31 March 2008, St. Petersburg.

that it reinforces the belief that this music originates from another planet in the solar system, where the density is much higher than on Earth.¹¹ Still others, among whom is Sergey Banevich, compared Ustvolskaya's music to literature where every sound represents an encoded word, hence Ustvolskaya's oeuvre is akin to a novel.¹²

However poetic these comments might have been, I was acutely aware of people's unwillingness to talk openly about Ustvolskaya and to discuss her music in detail. Thus, during my first telephone interview with Boris Tishchenko on 23 October 2007, he said: "There is very little to say about Ustvolskaya anyway, and it is even more difficult to do over the phone." To my request to comment on the contradictory information about Ustvolskaya that appeared in publications during the 1990s and early 2000s, Tishchenko answered: "It is all *"bred sivoy kobyly!"*¹³ In an interview on 27 October 2007, Tishchenko claimed that much of what is written about Ustvolskaya by people like Olga Gladkova and Viktor Suslin, to whom he referred as *chernaya lichnost'* [black person], is fabricated, hence untrue. For instance, he never heard Ustvolskaya speaking of prohibiting people from studying and analysing her music. He refused to discuss Gladkova's book and its content, leaving me questioning the validity of the material presented there. Tishchenko claimed that Ustvolskaya's music demands a great amount of energy, thought, and 'spiritual labour.' He said: "Ustvolskaya did not permit or accept any personal interpretations, and her music does not need to be interpreted: it already contains everything; the performer's task is to extract it and simply present to the audience. The energy and the emotional power that this music contains is colossal; not everyone can feel, embrace and simply handle it."¹⁴

Banevich spoke of Ustvolskaya as an artist whose works do not contain one *prokhodyashchaya nota* [passing note]; instead, each note is filled with utmost expression and meaning; each note is like a word; it has the energy of an electric shock

¹¹ Boris Tishchenko, "Galina Ustvolskaya", *Muzyka v SSSR* [Music in the USSR], (April-June, 1990): 22-23. "The music of Ustvolskaya literally burns with piercing clarity of purpose and superhuman spiritual strength, as if being cut off from the musical substance and existing independently, as radiation or gravity," 23.

¹² Interview with Sergey Banevich, 26 October 2007, Dom Kompozitorov, St. Petersburg. Banevich said: "Her music is a story where each word is coded as a sound. This music needs a special immersion, and there is a problem of perception. People often ask: what is this music about? What does a listener respond to? The answer is: he responds to the strength and tremendous expressiveness of the music. In spite of external aggression, her [Ustvolskaya's] music is extremely romantic. It is akin to a novel about life and love of God".

¹³ Russian: "*Da eto vse bred sivoy kobyly!*" [It is all horsefeathers, an obvious nonsense].

¹⁴ Boris Tishchenko, personal interview. See Appendix E.

with which people who are having a sudden cardiac arrest are revived. Speaking of Ustvol'skaya's music as a whole, Banevich compared it to a series of letters to a stranger with a message that could only be understood by people of the future. He said: "If I was a doctor or chemist, I would have transcribed her music into a language of molecules and chromosomes. I strongly believe that Ustvol'skaya's music is not simply a musical phenomenon". Banevich claimed that Ustvol'skaya was always respected in professional circles, and even those who disliked her music, still referred to her as a genius. The latter comment, as well as what was said about Ustvol'skaya's music being an absolutely unique non-musical phenomenon that can neither be explained nor repeated, reveals that the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth' is very 'Soviet' in its origin: during the Soviet era, discussing, analysing and explaining an artistic phenomenon was considered inappropriate: an artist was either recognised as a true Soviet artist, and hence was praised, or was perceived as a 'formalist', hence was criticised and banished.

As claimed by Suslin in his preface to the Ustvol'skaya Catalogue, and confirmed by Slonimsky and Solov'ev in their interviews, Ustvol'skaya was never perceived as a 'formalist' artist: instead, she comfortably complied with Soviet norms by writing works on Soviet subjects whilst keeping her more experimental works secret. Ustvol'skaya happened to be in the 'genius' category from the beginning of her compositional career, and her reputation lived on. Speaking of Ustvol'skaya's music, Vitaly Solov'ev admitted that he was never a 'true fan' of Ustvol'skaya's experimental compositions, having preferred her more traditional works, such as *Children's Suite* and *The Dream of Stepan Razin*:

I always felt that her 'other works' are akin to the music of the cosmos; it is the world which is on the other side of consciousness, something very removed from our reality. I do not think that composing music was for Ustvol'skaya a form of self-expression; I think that she reacted to some 'signals' from the Universe; she accumulated those signals and transformed them into sound.¹⁵

According to Solov'ev, Ustvol'skaya owed her sudden popularity in the West to Kostya [Konstantin Bagrenin]:

¹⁵ Vitaly Solov'ev, personal interview, 24 October 2007, National State Library, St. Petersburg.

It was his [Bagrenin's] initiative to organise concerts of her music in the West and to sell Ustvolskaya's scores to the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel. I remember him saying: "We need money for doctors, medicines, and helpers; no one will pay us here, but in the West they are very generous". He [Bagrenin] was a great opportunist [...]'¹⁶

Speaking of Ustvolskaya's music, Kirill Novikov claimed that it was a reflection of her inner world, hence one should not try to search for any other meanings. He also confirmed that Ustvolskaya never discussed her music with anyone: he remembered the composer saying that her music is not for people. A comment like that, in my view, only serves to mystify Ustvolskaya's artistic image further.

In my search for understanding how Ustvolskaya's music was perceived and interpreted by her contemporaries, I interviewed the musicologist Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya, who knew Ustvolskaya from before World War II, when they both studied at the Leningrad Conservatoire. Already then Ustvolskaya was known for saying that the meaning behind the musical composition [*o chem pisat'*] was for her of greater importance than the means with which that meaning is expressed [*kak pisat'*]. Ustvolskaya's position as the only female student of Shostakovich was unique. Speaking about the main characteristics of Ustvolskaya's music, Ruch'evskaya said:

In my view, Ustvolskaya's music possesses an enormous power of persuasion. She herself used to say that her music is spiritual, and despite the fact that the religious subtitles of her late compositions might suggest the composer's religiosity, I do not think that Ustvolskaya's music fulfills the first and utmost role of religion, that is to console. By saying that her music is spiritual, Ustvolskaya was making it clear that her music is not in any way a 'formalist game' or an experimentation with notes and sounds; it is not material, hence spiritual.¹⁷

The pianist Tat'yana Voronina, who knew Ustvolskaya and performed the *Second Piano Sonata*, interpreted a certain narrowness of Ustvolskaya's musical world that is divided by crotchets, as a direct reflection of her personality. Although acknowledging Ustvolskaya's compositional gift and the immense power of her music, Voronina accused the composer of creating an art which is totally fixated on darkness and

¹⁶ From an interview with Vitaly Solov'ev. See Appendix E.

¹⁷ From an interview with Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya. See Appendix E.

negativity. Voronina compared Ustvolskaya's constant crotchet pulse to prisoner's shackles; this compositional tool was consciously chosen by the composer as a form of self-restriction and submission to a higher authority. In Voronina's opinion, Ustvolskaya's music, suppressed and restricted by the regular pulsation of crotchets, conveys the composer's 'dark, somewhat schizophrenic worldview.' Voronina also spoke about the obvious resemblance between Ustvolskaya's music and the music of Soviet rock-bands: the percussive piano sonorities with a clearly defined obsessive pulsation of crotchets resemble rock-music. Voronina concluded that despite all, Ustvolskaya undoubtedly possessed a grandiose talent: behind those 'shackles' was an enormous power. The question Voronina asked was: who needs this kind of power and this kind of music? However subjective Voronina's opinion might sound, her final question is often asked by both the performers of Ustvolskaya's music and members of the audience.¹⁸ Voronina also remembered Ustvolskaya saying that she wished for her music to be performed in the company of composers such as Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. Did Ustvolskaya see herself as one of the great Masters, or did she believe that the novelty and unique nature of her music could only be appreciated in the company of the composers mentioned? That would remain unknown.

I also interviewed St. Petersburg composers Alexander Knaifel and Sergey Slonimsky. Knaifel remembered how Ustvolskaya unexpectedly appeared at the premiere of his composition *The Ghosts of Canterville*. After the performance she came to him and said: "*Нет, а все-таки Александр Аронович большой молодец*" [No, but Alexander Aronovich is a great man indeed!];¹⁹ Ustvolskaya repeated this phrase throughout the evening 'in a similar manner that she repeated melodic formulas in her compositions.' To my question about the essential characteristics of Ustvolskaya's music, Knaifel replied:

Try to play Ustvolskaya's music to children; do not explain anything, and simply watch their reaction. Most likely they will be scared or even terrified by it, and here is the answer to your question. I believe that music is only a vector that reflects a

¹⁸ More on the performer's experience and the audience perception of Ustvolskaya's music in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

¹⁹ Russian: "Нет, а всё таки Александр Аронович большой молодец!"

composer's personal life: when there are distortions in life, they are immediately reflected in the music.²⁰

Knaifel refused to discuss the reasons for Western fascination with Ustvolskaya and her music. Instead, he said that for him the only valuable problem is the musical language, and that is a mystery worthy of an attempt of being solved.

When I mentioned Ustvolskaya's name to Sergey Slonimsky, whom I met at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire on 31 March 2008, he said: "I do not wish to talk about Ustvolskaya, she does not interest me, and I am not a specialist in her music." He later shared some thoughts on the subject:

I do not like Ustvolskaya's music; to me it is too monotonous: she uses the same compositional tools - augmented first and crotchets - over and over again; to me it is just not enough. Yes, I accept the fact that she was a talented individual but she also claimed to possess some kind of universal cosmic power and aggression. She herself and her followers did not recognise any other music [...]²¹

Slonimsky's negative opinion of Ustvolskaya was not just a sign of personal dislike: during the interview it became clear that it was Ustvolskaya's behaviour towards people like Shostakovich, Malov and others that affected Slonimsky attitude towards Ustvolskaya and her music.

My conversations with the pianist Oleg Malov were among the most informative on the subject. He showed me copies of manuscripts, first editions and working scores of almost every one of Ustvolskaya's compositions: most of them have inscriptions 'To Oleg Malov,' written on the front page. Looking at the scores, Malov mentioned that many of them had a large number of misprints when they were first published in the Soviet Union, some of which were accidental, the others, made purposefully by a publisher to 'smooth-out' dissonant sonorities. Malov did not simply correct the mistakes but on a number of occasions made suggestions to the composer regarding the notes, tempo indications and so on; many such suggestions were accepted and included in later editions.

²⁰ From an interview with Alexander Knaifel. See Appendix E.

²¹ Sergey Slonimsky, personal interview, 31 March 2008, St. Petersburg.

Malov spoke of repetition as being at the core of Ustvolskaya's compositional method: indeed, Ustvolskaya's melodic formulae often remain unchanged; she might cut the length or repeat a certain unit within a formula, but already in the *Sixth Piano Sonata* this kind of transformation ceased to exist: the themes remain unchanged throughout the piece. Ustvolskaya gives every musical timbre and melodic unit a chance to 'develop in time' until its emotional and expressive potential is exhausted. To my question about the reason behind extreme dynamic indications in Ustvolskaya's scores and the methods of their execution, Malov said:

*[...] People in the West often overestimate the power of sign or symbol: if **ffff** is marked – you must follow. I think that by putting such extreme dynamics in her scores, Ustvolskaya simply indicated the points of highest emotional intensity, rather than asking for the loudest possible sound.²²*

Malov claimed that Ustvolskaya had an obsessive preoccupation with the quality of musical material, and suggested that this is why her final list of compositions is so small. Ustvolskaya was always in search of a particular timbre and the most appropriate instrumental combination to express a certain emotion, and she did not need the whole orchestra for that. In Malov's opinion, Ustvolskaya fought against totalitarianism in Soviet Russia using totalitarian methods; as a result, her music is a sort of 'double totalitarianism', when totalitarianism equals extremism. For Malov, Ustvolskaya's music was an act of self-assertion by someone who was brought up in a totalitarian regime.²³

During my interview with Hans-Ulrich Duffek, I asked him what, in his opinion, attracted Westerners to the music of Soviet composers and particularly to Ustvolskaya.²⁴ He said that above all, it was the individuality of style and musical language. Speaking of Ustvolskaya, Duffek said:

Her music is very powerful; that is what characterises it [...] She wrote music that is full of pain; it was something existential for her; she just wanted a performer to feel

²² From an interview with Oleg Malov. See Appendix E.

²³ From an interview with Oleg Malov. See Appendix E.

²⁴ Hans-Ulrich Duffek, personal interview, 25 February 2008, Hamburg.

*a similar kind of existential pain, to have similar experiences whilst learning and performing it [...] I think there is a great deal of psychology behind it.*²⁵

In Duffek's opinion, Ustvolskaya wanted to be regarded as a composer of a certain character and style, hence her radical attitude towards her early compositions and her fixed ideas about how her music must be performed:

*I think Ustvolskaya will always be remembered as an isolated artist who did not belong to any school of composition [...] I think, in the West she is seen as less Russian than say, Gubaidulina, Schnittke and Denisov. They will always be regarded as 'modernist Russian composers of the twentieth century'. Ustvolskaya, on the other hand, will always be seen as someone completely different.*²⁶

Duffek stressed the fact that Ustvolskaya wanted to be regarded as a composer of a certain character and style, and the radicalism of her music as well as her behaviour in the later years reflected her desire to be perceived as a unique artist. Duffek's observation confirmed that the 'Ustvolskaya Myth' was partly a self-made phenomenon, an opinion which was also shared by Slonimsky, Solov'ev and Voronina as well as Simon Bokman.²⁷

During my interview with Viktor Suslin, the person who began the dissemination of the 'Ustvolskaya Myth' in the West in the 1980s whilst working as an editor at the Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, he spoke about the colossal energy and radicalism of Ustvolskaya's music.²⁸ In his view, the consistent pulsation of crotchets in Ustvolskaya's music represents the 'heartbeat of Humanity'; a frequent appearance of double and triple flats and the overall flattening of melodic modes reflected Ustvolskaya's desire to communicate the suffocating atmosphere of the time. Speaking of the overwhelming intensity of Ustvolskaya's scores, Suslin quoted the writer Sergey Dovlatov: speaking about the difference between Russian and European man, Dovlatov

²⁵ From an interview with Hans-Ulrich Duffek. See Appendix E.

²⁶ From an interview with Hans-Ulrich Duffek. See Appendix E.

²⁷ Bokman speaks about a 'threshold of mystery' in regard to the perception of Ustvolskaya's image: "And yes, the mystery is partly self-made". Simon Bokman, *Variations on the Theme: Galina Ustvolskaya*, trans. Behrendt I., (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 2007), 7.

²⁸ Viktor Suslin, personal interview, 26 February 2008, Pinneberg.

said that a European wears a sombrero on his head whilst a Russian carries a flagstone. In Suslin's view, each one of Ustvol'skaya's notes has the quality of a flagstone.

Summarising the views on Ustvol'skaya, a few distinct trends become apparent. Some of the opinions on Ustvol'skaya are highly personal, somewhat idealised and at times ambiguous (Tishchenko, Banevich, Suslin); others are clearly negative: they reveal how the dislike of Ustvol'skaya the person affects the perception of her music (Voronina, Slonimsky); still others are neither positive nor negative but very diplomatic (Knaifel, Ruch'evskaya, Novikov); and still others are objective and professional (Malov). There is a certain disagreement about what Ustvol'skaya's music communicates, and what message (if any) it conveys. Some speak of her music as the music of the subconscious (Ruch'evskaya, Solov'ev); others, as the music of the cosmos (Tishchenko, Solov'ev); still others refer to it as a form of science fiction (Solov'ev); Novikov speaks of it as a reflection of Ustvol'skaya's inner world, whilst Banevich refers to it as a 'non-musical phenomenon'. Suslin and Duffek claim that Ustvol'skaya is a unique phenomenon, an island in the ocean of contemporary music, whilst Oleg Malov speaks of Ustvol'skaya's music as a form of self-assertion by someone who was brought up in a totalitarian regime. This diversity of opinions only proves that music is the most subjective of arts, the understanding of which depends entirely on our individual perception.

Many of the musicians whom I interviewed confirmed that Ustvol'skaya was very demanding toward performers of her works. Boris Tishchenko remembered how she forbade him to perform her *Fifth Piano Sonata*; Tishchenko had to play the work to her over the phone to gain permission to perform the work in public. Hans-Ulrich Duffek and Oleg Malov remembered how particular she was about every detail of the text as well as the performer's appearance and behaviour on stage. As claimed by Tishchenko, Ustvol'skaya disliked being compared to other artists, and preferred to be seen as an artist in her own right; she rarely discussed the music of other composers, neither did she talk about her own music. According to Duffek, Ustvol'skaya wanted to be regarded as an artist of a certain attitude and style, someone completely independent and self-contained. According to many, such was Ustvol'skaya's personality.

Ustvolskaya - the person

There are only a few photographs of Ustvolskaya: a couple of black and white shots from the 1950s-1960s, and a few in colour from the 1980s-1990s, where Ustvolskaya smiles at the camera together with her German publishers (Viktor Suslin, Hans-Ulrich Duffek, and Jürgen Köchel), and performers (the pianist Reinbert de Leeuw, and the actor Dmitry Lagachev). Her smile is akin to a protective mask - nothing is given away and nothing can penetrate through.²⁹

Musicologist Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya met Ustvolskaya in 1939 at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire. She remembered her as an attractive and confident young woman, very different from what her music might suggest; she had a great sense of humour and always found something to laugh at. Ruch'evskaya remembered that when in the 1980s the first publications about Ustvolskaya's music appeared, such as Kira Yuzhak's *Observations on the Style of Galina Ustvolskaya* (1979), and Boris Kats's *Seven Glances at One Composition* (1980), Ustvolskaya telephoned her and said: "Do not believe a word you've read. It is all a lie." That, in Ruch'evskaya's opinion, was a perfect manifestation of Ustvolskaya's personality: the composer felt that she and her music are beyond comparisons; that her music is perfect and untouchable, hence any attempts at analysing it would simply humiliate the composer and devalue the music.

Ruch'evskaya remembered that many of Ustvolskaya's colleague-composers admired her and regarded her music very highly. People like Lyutsian Prigozhin, Genrikh Orlov and Mikhail Vaiman tried to help Ustvolskaya to find opportunities to make her music known to the public but it was not always easy, mainly because of Ustvolskaya's personal inflexibility. Ruch'evskaya confirmed that Ustvolskaya was indeed an extraordinary person, very different from others; doing things against the expected norms, and turning things 'inside out' was very typical of her. The latter manifested itself when Ustvolskaya unexpectedly broke off close friendships and professional relationships. At the end of our interview, Ruch'evskaya mentioned the possibility of Ustvolskaya's mental instability, a subject that was never openly discussed but hinted in many conversations. Ruch'evskaya said:

²⁹ A similar view was expressed by pianist Tat'yana Voronina, personal interview. See Appendix E.

*Whether or not there were some mental problems, I cannot say for sure, but I knew of one suicide attempt [...] She also had two students, one of whom, Alesha Nikolaev, an incredibly gifted boy, committed suicide aged 18 [...]*³⁰

Many people whom I interviewed, spoke of Ustvolskaya's weak nervous system. Thus, Banevich confirmed that Ustvolskaya always complained about her nerves; he remembered her taking sedatives in large quantities, often swallowing one pill after another. Ruch'evskaya mentioned it, and so did Ustvolskaya's husband of forty years, who confirmed that for years Ustvolskaya lived on a cocktail of strong drugs that helped her to control her nerves. Tishchenko also mentioned that Ustvolskaya was extremely sensitive and often used *uspokoitel'noye* [mild sedative]. Similar observations were made by Simon Bokman.³¹ However, there is no medical evidence that proves Ustvolskaya's mental instability.

Sergey Banevich, who studied with Ustvolskaya between 1965 and 1969, remembered her as a 'female Gavroche': a mischievous hooligan, who could poke a loaf of bread at a bread store with her finger just to check how fresh it was, or could throw an unfinished ice-cream cone at a passer-by out of the taxi window; she liked to infuriate people, it amused her; she smoked and liked an occasional drink, and felt at ease using slang and Russian traditional vulgarisms [*mat*]. Kirill Novikov claimed that Ustvolskaya never had any respect for authority, and often behaved like a hooligan: she knew the rules but always acted against them. In his opinion, it was Ustvolskaya's complex relationship with her mother that caused such behaviour: Ustvolskaya's mother was a very authoritative person, who imposed strict rules on her daughters (Ustvolskaya had a twin sister, Tat'yana), and demanded obedience, something that Ustvolskaya could not tolerate.

Ustvolskaya did not like to cook and detested any forms of domesticity. That, together with her decision to become a composer, was a reason for her mother's disapproval that often caused conflicts between them. Ustvolskaya never perceived

³⁰ Oleg Malov also spoke of Alesha Nikolaev as one of Ustvolskaya's most talented students, who was strongly influenced by the composer, and whose tragic death could be seen, even if indirectly, as a result of this influence.

³¹ Simon Bokman, *Variations on the Theme: Galina Ustvolskaya*, Op.cit., 69, 91.

herself only as a woman: above all, she was an Artist, and that in itself went against the traditional image of a woman in Soviet society.³²

Sergey Banevich spoke of Ustvolskaya's behaviour during the last few years of her life as unusual; her unexpected rejection of close friendships, public criticism of the most faithful Russian performers of her music, and the fact that she sold the same composition to a few different publishers surprised and upset many, including those whom I interviewed (Ruch'evskaya, Voronina, Slonimsky and Malov). As for religiosity, which is often associated with Ustvolskaya in the West, Banevich claimed that he never knew her as someone who prayed or regularly visited a church. Speaking of Ustvolskaya's religiosity, Malov said:

I would prefer not talk about Ustvolskaya's Christian beliefs since her life actions often contradicted the most common Christian values [...] As I knew her, she was always a person who demonstrated an enormous inner power; she was a 'never compromising Dictator'. She had a very strong effect on people, including her pupils and colleagues; she hardly ever tolerated other people's opinion, and simply dismissed those, who, in her view, were disobedient and disloyal, by cutting off any communication with them (and in my case, by rededicating her composition).³³

Boris Tishchenko spoke of Ustvolskaya as a very impulsive, often loud, and domineering person. In his view, that side of her personality could be heard in her music. Vitaly Solov'ev remembered Ustvolskaya as a very reserved, 'closed' person: she seldom spoke about herself and her music or expressed opinions about her colleagues and their music. In his view, it was a protective mask that was very typical for Soviet people. Solov'ev spoke of Ustvolskaya as a person who had a very mathematical brain, hence her music is 'very mathematical'. He felt that Ustvolskaya possessed an ability to preserve emotional energy; she never worked on more than one piece at a time, and always protected herself from getting involved with people.

Speaking of Ustvolskaya's personality, Tat'yana Voronina said:

She was a strange person, in my opinion [...]; the sublime in her coexisted with the ridiculous. Despite that, she was well respected in musical circles; she had many

³² In one of the interviews, Oleg Malov remembered Ustvolskaya saying to him: 'Ya ne zhenshchina' [I am not a woman]. Konstantin Bagrenin also confirmed that above all, she saw herself as an artist, and only then - a woman.

³³ Oleg Malov, personal interviews. July 2006, St. Petersburg.

admirers, particularly among youngsters, for whom she was a great inspiration. Her whole image, despite a rather pleasant appearance - an old-fashioned hairdo and those big eyes, which were like reflecting screens, - was dark and tragic. I never heard her uttering anything positive [...] I do not think that she could be truly religious [...] I always felt that Ustvolskaya had an extremely narrow perception of reality: those never-ending crotchets with which she measured musical space [...] For me, it indicated the lack of light in her soul; her music is painfully dark and depressing.³⁴

Ustvolskaya's predilection towards negativity was confirmed by Alexander Knaifel, who remembered Ustvolskaya ringing him to say: "Don't you think that life is simply awful, catastrophically awful?"³⁵ As for other personal characteristics, Knaifel said: "She was a paradoxical persona, and her music also contains elements of paradox, and here lies its mystery." Knaifel believed that Ustvolskaya's deliberate isolation was her reaction to the chaos, that, in her opinion, surrounded her. Knaifel was among the first who openly said that Ustvolskaya herself contributed to a certain mystification of her artistic image, particular the one that exists in the West. A similar view was expressed by Sergey Slonimsky, who referred to it as 'Ustvolskaya *mifologema*' [myth].³⁶

The above recollections demonstrate how diverse was the perception of Ustvolskaya among her contemporaries. To sum up, some of them, like Ruch'evskaya, spoke of Ustvolskaya as a person with a great sense of humour, whilst Voronina saw her as a strange person in whom the sublime coexisted with ridiculous, someone who was always dark and negative, akin to the music she composed. Banevich and Novikov referred to Ustvolskaya as a 'female Gavroche' who always behaved against the accepted rules; Solov'ev spoke of Ustvolskaya as a person with a mathematical brain, whilst Banevich saw her as an extremely sensitive and compassionate person. Tishchenko spoke of Ustvolskaya as a very impulsive and domineering person, whilst Solov'ev remembered her as being very reserved. Knaifel remembered her as someone who was constantly in need of confirmation that the world we live in is a terrible place.

³⁴ Tat'yana Voronina, personal interview, 25 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

³⁵ Alexander Knaifel, personal interview, 24 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

³⁶ Sergey Slonimsky, personal interview, 31 March 2008, St. Petersburg

Many agreed that Ustvol'skaya was a truly extraordinary person. Some mentioned the possibility of an ongoing mental problem, whilst others confirmed that she was neurotic and emotionally unstable. As for Ustvol'skaya's religiosity, musicians like Malov, Banevich, and Voronina were negative, whilst others chose not to comment on the subject. The interviews revealed that Ustvol'skaya was a complex artistic individual, who believed herself to be a unique phenomenon, and many agreed that she herself was partly responsible for the creation of the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth.'

Two other people who, in my view, greatly contributed to (if not initiated the creation of) the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth', were Konstantin Bagrenin and Viktor Suslin. Many people confirmed that if it had not been for Bagrenin's persistence and determination, the Western world would not have known as much of Ustvol'skaya's music. Indeed, Bagrenin was in charge of correspondence with publishers, performers and recording companies; he controlled all the information about Ustvol'skaya that was in circulation, and was in charge of all the financial affairs.

As is seen from the Ustvol'skaya-Suslin correspondence, Suslin was Ustvol'skaya's advisor on matters both personal and professional, and his publications about Ustvol'skaya were among the first that appeared in the West. As mentioned earlier, some of Suslin's statements were controversial and required clarification. In our telephone conversation that took place on 8 January 2008, Suslin told me about his meetings with Ustvol'skaya: he remembered her as a very lively although unpredictable woman, who paid a great attention to her appearance and was very feminine despite what her music might suggest. He told me that Ustvol'skaya loved Gogol, and not so much Dostoevsky or Akhmatova. At our meeting in Pinneberg on 26 February 2008, Suslin told me how he persuaded Ustvol'skaya to sell some scores and personal documents to the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, and confirmed that every item was personally selected by Ustvol'skaya.

Suslin also told me the story of how Shostakovich proposed marriage to Ustvol'skaya; he claimed to have heard the story from Ustvol'skaya herself. Thus, according to Ustvol'skaya, Shostakovich invited her to come to Moscow, and when he brought Ustvol'skaya home, he simply introduced her to his children as his 'new wife'. Ustvol'skaya burst into tears and left. Therefore, as Suslin insisted, there was never an official marriage proposal, neither was there an official refusal. Suslin also claimed that

it was Ustvolskaya who sent him her thoughts on Shostakovich. Her letter was never published although it still exists in Suslin's private collection. Suslin's letter-response to that of Ustvolskaya was included in Gladkova's book.³⁷

The recollections of Konstantin Bagrenin allowed me to see yet another side of Ustvolskaya - the woman behind the Myth.³⁸ Bagrenin confirmed that for many years he was in charge of Ustvolskaya's life, dealing with both domestic and professional issues: she herself was indifferent towards anything but composing. Bagrenin himself travelled to the Paul Sacher Stiftung carrying Ustvolskaya's scores, manuscripts and correspondence in a suitcase. Bagrenin insisted that Galina Ivanovna [Ustvolskaya] never liked Shostakovich; when the Western press began advertising her as one of the most gifted female students of Shostakovich, she was greatly upset, saying: "I am an old woman of eighty-five, and he [Shostakovich] is still holding me by the hand". Bagrenin remembered that Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Gogol and Chekhov were Ustvolskaya's heroes. She loved the Hermitage and the Russian Museum, and knew the historic sites of St. Petersburg well. According to Bagrenin, Galina Ivanovna was never interested in modern art, so when Gladkova wrote that Ustvolskaya did not know who Andrey Tarkovsky or Kazimir Malevich were, she did not exaggerate. However, Bagrenin remembered Ustvolskaya saying that Malevich's '*Cherny kvadrat*' [The Black Square] is "*sran*'" [shit]; for Ustvolskaya, everything was either 'genius' or "*sran*'." Thus, '*The Night Watch*' by Rembrandt, and almost every painting by Van Gogh were 'genius', the rest - "*sran*'".

Speaking of the composers whom Ustvolskaya respected, Bagrenin named Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov (only selected episodes from his piano concertos), Stravinsky's *The Symphony of Psalms*, although not the whole piece; she knew *Svadebka* well, and Bagrenin remembered playing it together with Ustvolskaya in a four-hand arrangement. Above all, Galina Ivanovna admired Mahler and Bach, to whom she referred as "*osobaya stat'ya*" [a special case], although she only accepted Glenn Gould's interpretation. She also had a great respect for Mussorgsky.

³⁷ Gladkova, *Music as an Obsession*, Op.cit., 47-52.

³⁸ K. Bagrenin, personal interviews: 30 March, 1 April 2008, and 2 April 2009, St. Petersburg.

Bagrenin spoke of Ustvolskaya as being very scrupulous and sensitive; she did not like asking for help; she had a great sense of humour, and detested any forms of pretence; she could be harsh and uncompromising but always loved good company.

*It is true that towards the end she preferred nature to humans; she had some favourite places in Pavlovsk, where she could sit for hours listening to birds [...] Her room in the flat had dark curtains which never got opened, the only light was the one coming from a small lamp on a bedside table. In those years she was taking a very large quantity of different pills [...] As long as I remember her, she was taking medication for her nerves [...]*³⁹

Bagrenin remembered that Ustvolskaya always liked to be in control. It was she who in 1966 proposed marriage to Bagrenin: he was 24, she was 47.

*Even at 24, I was aware of the scale of her compositional gift, and my own compositional attempts seemed insignificant. If I am to describe Ustvolskaya in one word, she was “chelovek-ulitka” [a snail-like], always hidden in her own shell, and “chelovek-net” [someone who always says ‘no’]. Galina Ivanovna often said that she only felt comfortable in complete solitude; the rest of the world did not interest her [...]*⁴⁰

Bagrenin told me how he once played an extract from one of Ustvolskaya’s compositions to a doctor, a friend of his; her reply was: “This music is not written by a human”. Bagrenin seemed to agree. In my view, comments like that served the purpose of feeding the ‘Ustvolskaya Myth’: they masked the reality which was probably not always pleasant and substituted it with the Myth. That in itself was a very ‘Soviet’ approach; Soviet people perfected the art of double-speak or ‘Aesopian language’ during the years of Communism.

The interviews showed that people were not unanimous about Ustvolskaya and the significance of her compositional gift; their appreciation and perception of her music varied greatly, and in many cases appeared to be influenced by their perception of Ustvolskaya, the person. Many agreed that Ustvolskaya as a composer began in a very traditional way and then decided to alter her artistic image with the view of being

³⁹ K. Bagrenin, personal interview, 30 March 2008. St. Petersburg.

⁴⁰ K. Bagrenin, personal interview, 30 March 2008. St. Petersburg.

perceived as a radical and unique artist. One of the reasons for that was her desire to finally separate herself from Shostakovich, and to establish her own artistic reputation unencumbered by his influence. Therefore it is evident that Ustvol'skaya herself, with the help of her husband and Viktor Suslin, participated in the creation and dissemination of the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth'.

Chapter 3:

Ustvolskaya and the 'Ustvolskaya Myth': a critical examination

As it appears from the survey of publications and interview materials, the perception of Ustvolskaya is far from being unanimous, and many statements made in written and oral sources stand to mystify Ustvolskaya's artistic image further. Russian publications from the late 1940s to mid-1960s praised Ustvolskaya for her contribution to Soviet art whilst not taking other compositions into account, as many of them were not available. Publications written between the late 1960s and 1980s only considered the works that became available in the 1960s and the new compositions with religious subtitles written in the early 1970s, whilst the Soviet-style pieces became forgotten. From the mid-1990s, musicologists began to follow the new strand of interpretation indicated by the composer herself in her *'Thoughts on the Creative Process'* (1994). Ustvolskaya's refusal to be associated with any composer or musical tradition past or present, as well as her request neither to write anything about her music nor to conduct a theoretical analysis of it, were taken at face value. Her statement, *'I give all my strength to my art whilst praying to God; I have my art, my music, only mine,'* was interpreted as Ustvolskaya's own acknowledgement of her unique artistic gift and the confirmation of her religiosity.

Ustvolskaya, however, was not an artist without a past. Far from being a dissident and an 'uncompromising prophet of nonconformity',¹ as some analysts have posited, Ustvolskaya in her early years conformed to the demands of the time, particularly when she adhered strongly to the exigencies of Soviet Socialist art. Even in her later years she was careful in public and always performed within the boundaries of Soviet political orthodoxy. Despite her artistic credo - *Ya pishu sebya* [I am writing (about) myself],² the personal and artistic evolution of Ustvolskaya and her music over fifty years closely mirrored the evolution of Soviet political and artistic trends more broadly. Thus, in her early years the grand Soviet themes that marked her work reflected

¹ Don Mager, "Galina Ustvolskaya: Piano Sonatas. Oleg Malov, piano, on Megadisc", *Making Time* (June/July 1998), www.eclectica.org/v2n4/making_time.html (accessed: 2 June 2005).

² Quoted in Simon Bokman, *Variations on the Theme: Galina Ustvolskaya*, Op.cit.,17. This was also confirmed in conversation with Konstantin Bagrenin and Kirill Novikov. Personal interview. 2 April 2009, St. Petersburg.

Stalinist norms,³ whilst her 'spiritual in nature' compositions of the late 1940s and early 1950s defied the Stalinist oppression of that time with forward-looking compositional methods and sonorities.⁴ In the 1960s, in the wake of the Twentieth Party Congress that afforded musicians and artists relative creative freedom, Ustvolskaya's works became more experimental, which reflected the spirit of the Khrushchev era.⁵ The despair experienced by many during the era of economic stagnation of the early 1970s has found artistic representation in Ustvolskaya's most radical compositions with religious subtitles, *Compositions No.1, 2 and 3*, whilst *Glasnost'* and *Perestroika* introduced by Gorbachev in 1985, in one way or another inspired the creation of the Symphonies 'Prayer' and 'Amen' and the last two piano sonatas.

The parallels between Ustvolskaya's artistic evolution and the evolving trends within Soviet society are evident. However, her works were not simply 'products' of the era of Stalinist oppression, the Soviet de-Stalinization of the Khrushchev era or the liberalization of the *Perestroika* era. Although these events to some extent impelled Ustvolskaya to express her inner psychological and emotional feelings more freely, it is the singularity of her personality and her artistic vision that informed the originality of each one of her works.

As mentioned earlier, Western interpretations of the late 1990s and early 2000s, whilst offering valuable insightful observations, demonstrate an incomplete knowledge of the subject.⁶ The latter is easily explained: apart from the article by Viktor Suslin in the preface to the Ustvolskaya catalogue that was translated into German (1998) and English (2002), a few other articles in German, published during the late 1980s - early 1990s, and the book by Olga Gladkova (1999) translated into German (2001), not many Russian publications were available. For someone familiar with Russian sources, it is evident that both Suslin's articles and Gladkova's book, although valuable by the mere fact of their existence, contain certain inaccuracies in their presentation of facts, and hence require clarification.

³ Works such as: 1950 - "Young Pioneers", suite for orchestra; 1950 - "Hail Youth!" for chorus and orchestra, text by Lebedev-Kumach; 1952 - "Dawn over the Homeland", for chorus and orchestra, text by Gleisarov. 1952 - "Man From a High Hill", for soloist, chorus and orchestra, text by Gleisarov.

⁴ Works such as: *Piano Sonata No.1* (1947), *Trio* (1949), *Octet* (1949/1950), *Piano Sonatas No.2* (1951) and *No.3* (1952), *Violin Sonata* (1952), *Twelve Piano Preludes* (1953).

⁵ *Grand Duet for 'cello and piano* (1959), *Duet for violin and piano* (1964)

⁶ See my review of the Western publications in the *Introduction*.

First, Suslin, being himself a composer who lived and worked in the Soviet Union before emigrating to Germany in 1981, must have known that Ustvol'skaya did not always exemplify non-compromising artistic behaviour. Second, the only reason that Ustvol'skaya's music was not censored by Soviet critics is that the majority of her 'true, spiritual in nature compositions' remained unpublished until the late 1960s and early 1970s,⁷ whilst the works that were published and performed (*The Dream of Stepan Razin, Suite for Orchestra, Symphonic Poem No.1*) perfectly complied with rules of Soviet art, and so were accepted and praised by Soviet musicologists.⁸ Third, Suslin's claim that Ustvol'skaya's music exemplifies an absolute stylistic isolation and total uniqueness of artistic representations - an opinion which evidently was encouraged by the composer herself - is also suspicious. Considering the fact that Ustvol'skaya went through all stages of the traditional Soviet musical education (music school at the Leningrad Choral Capella, followed by the Rimsky-Korsakov Music College, 1937-1939, and Leningrad State Conservatoire, 1939-1947), and her artistic development coincided with some of the most prolific, although turbulent, years in the cultural history of Soviet Russia, it is difficult to believe that she was an artist who existed in absolute stylistic isolation, let alone to interpret her art as a phenomenon that developed outside Russian cultural and political contexts.

⁷ The Hans Sikorski Catalogue, 1998, reads: *Concerto for piano, string orchestra and timpani* (1946), published by *Muzyka*, Leningrad in 1967, first performed in 1967; *Piano sonata No.1* (1946), published by *Muzyka*, Leningrad in 1966, first performed in 1974; *The Dream of Stepan Razin* (1949), published by *Sovetsky Kompozitor*, Leningrad, in 1963, first performed in 1950; *Trio for clarinet, violin and piano* (1949), published by *Muzyka*, Leningrad, in 1970, first performed in 1968; *Piano Sonata No.2* (1949), published by *Muzfond* in 1984, first performed in 1967; *Octet* (1949/50), published by *Muzfond* in 1984, first performed in 1970; *Piano Sonata No.3* (1952), published by *Muzyka*, Leningrad, in 1974, first performed in 1972; *Sonata for violin and piano* (1952), published by *Muzyka*, Leningrad, in 1966, first performed in Russia in 1961; *Twelve Preludes for piano* (1953), published by *Muzyka*, Leningrad, in 1968, first performed in 1968; *Piano Sonata No.4* (1957), published as '*Sonatina*' by *Sovetsky Kompozitor*, Leningrad, in 1971, first performed in 1973; *Grand Duet for violoncello and piano* (1959), published by *Hans Sikorski* in 1989, first performed in 1977; *Duet for violin and piano* (1964), published by *Sovetsky Kompozitor*, Leningrad, in 1977, first performed 1968. Starting from *Composition no.1* (1970/71), the 'gap' between the year of composition and the year of first publication and performance decreased significantly.

⁸ In one of the earlier publications dedicated to Ustvol'skaya, Lyudmila Rappoport spoke of *The Son Stepana Razina* as the work which brought Ustvol'skaya her popularity: "The music of *bylina* '*The Dream of Stepana Razina*' is based on a folk tune, and is filled with warmth and tenderness." *Galina Ustvol'skaya* (Moscow: *Sovetsky Kompozitor*, 1959) An article published in *Sovetskaya muzyka* in 1969 dedicated to Ustvol'skaya's 50th Anniversary reads: "The name of Ustvol'skaya first became known in 1949 after a performance of the *bylina* for bass and orchestra '*The Dream of Stepana Razina*'. The work attracts listeners by its epic grandeur combined with passionate and dramatic musical material." Unknown author, *Galina Ustvol'skaya: 50th Anniversary, Muzykal'naya zhizn'* no.9 (1969): 36. Among other publications about '*The dream of Stepan Razin*' are: Lebedinsky, L. "Muzykal'nye novinki: *Bylina* 'Son Stepana Razina'" [Musical novelties: An Epic '*The Dream of Stepan Razin*' by G. Ustvol'skaya], *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* [Soviet Art], 30 June, 1949; Sabinina, M. "Chetyre simfonicheskie novinki: 'Son Stepana Razina' G. Ustvol'skoy" [Four Symphonic Novelties: '*The Dream of Stepan Razin*' by Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Muzykal'naya zhizn'*, no.8 (1949):76-77.

The music of Ustvol'skaya has been referred to as a form of the composer's spiritual autobiography;⁹ some claim that her music is the only true biography of the composer;¹⁰ others speak of it as being akin to a witnessing presence, a mirror to the mind in action with all its defensive and adaptive, regressive and progressive, private and communicative aspects;¹¹ and still others refer to it as *muzyka podsoznaniya* [the music of subconscious].¹² Indeed, many artists and thinkers of the twentieth century believed in correspondence between aesthetic form and psychic process; some claimed that art belongs to the unconscious and that the content of modernist art is often determined by the psychology of an artist.¹³

Art has also been interpreted as a struggle with illness as well as a form of self-healing. In *The Power of Form: a Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetic Form*, Gilbert Rose expressed the view that art, like ego, may serve an adoptive function of aiding orientation in an inconstant reality, and in *Necessary Illusions: Art as Witness* (1996) he speaks of an apparent attunement of art to emotion, which fosters the illusion of art as a 'witnessing presence'.¹⁴ Substantial research into the nature of creativity showed that social rejection is often associated with greater artistic creativity; there is evidence for strong 'situational factors' influencing creativity; and in some cases, intense negative emotions can create powerful self-reflective thought and perseverance, leading to increased creativity.¹⁵ In the case of Ustvol'skaya and her music, employing the concept of art as a 'witnessing presence' enables us to understand the personality of the composer; that in itself contributes to a broader understanding of what this music might communicate, hence enriches the performer's interpretation of Ustvol'skaya's compositions.

⁹ As claimed by Olga Gladkova and Sergey Banevich.

¹⁰ As claimed by Konstantin Bagrenin and Olga Gladkova.

¹¹ As claimed by Alexander Radvilovich, Boris Tishchenko, Oleg Malov. Personal interviews.

¹² '*Muzyka podsoznaniya*': this was the title of a chapter in the TV programme 'Tsarskaya Lozha' dedicated to Ustvol'skaya's 80th birthday.

¹³ Robert Wohl, "Heart of Darkness", *The Journal of Modern History*, no.3, vol.74 (September 2002): 577.

¹⁴ Gilbert J. Rose, *The Power of Form: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetic Form* (M.D. Madison, Connecticut: International Universities Press, 1980). Gilbert J. Rose, *Necessary Illusions: Art as Witness*, (M.D. Madison, Connecticut: International University Press, 1996)

¹⁵ Modupe Akinola, Wendy Berry Mendes, "The Dark Side of Creativity: Biological Vulnerability and Negative Emotions Lead to Greater Artistic Creativity", *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* (December 2008); 34(12): 1677–1686. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2659536/pdf/nihms-95371.pdf> (accessed: 5 September 2011).

It is not the purpose of this thesis to conduct a thorough psychological investigation of Ustvolskaya. However, her music was clearly determined and reinforced by the composer's personal characteristics whilst mirroring her state of mind at the time of composition. The changes in Ustvolskaya's personal, aesthetic and artistic outlook manifested themselves in her music, so the music became a vehicle for expressing previously unmodified emotional experiences by transforming them into musical structures. It is believed that the act of composing was for Ustvolskaya a way of illuminating pain, loneliness, uncertainty and most of all, fear.¹⁶ Although Ustvolskaya made attempts to erase any information about her personal life by destroying documentary evidence, her music became an angle that reflected all the distortions which were happening in her life.¹⁷ I believe that Ustvolskaya would have shared the sentiment of another female artist, the poet Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941), who wrote in a letter to a writer, Gronskey, that the food of an artist is 1) his inner world, 2) the outside world perceived through the prism of the inner world.¹⁸

Olga Gladkova entitled her monograph about Ustvolskaya *Music as an Obsession* thus making clear to a reader the role that composing played in Ustvolskaya's life. Gladkova speaks of the expressionism of Ustvolskaya's music being 'terrifying in the psychological authenticity of those deep fears that are known to everyone: these are everyday nightmares dormant in the corners of subconscious that give rise to despair, lingering emotional pain, and tragic perception of the world.'¹⁹ According to Bagrenin, Ustvolskaya suffered from severe depression; she was obsessed with order and morality, and turned her life experiences and personal angst into art. Her compositions, particularly the ones written in the late 1990s can indeed be interpreted as 'a cry of anguish',²⁰ or, as the composer herself referred to them in the *Symphony No.2*, - 'vozglas vo Vselennuyu' [a cry into the Universe].

¹⁶ Such view was expressed by Konstantin Bagrenin, as well as some of Ustvolskaya's students. See: interviews with Bagrenin and Sergey Banevich.

¹⁷ Interview with Alexander Knaifel, 24 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

¹⁸ Marina Tsvetaeva in *Novy mir*, [New World], vol.4 (1969): 203.

¹⁹ Olga Gladkova, "Galina Ustvolskaya: *Features of a Portrait*," Radio Programme (2001), Aгенство 'Звук' [Agency 'Sound'], UCPSS, Basel.

²⁰ "A cry of anguish", that is how Van Gogh described his paintings in a letter to his brother, Theo, in February 1890. Quoted in Albert Lubin, *Stranger on the Earth: a Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 3.

Contrary to the existing view on Ustvol'skaya as a composer whose biography outside her compositions should be considered as insignificant,²¹ some of her childhood memories explain certain characteristics of her music, such as asceticism, deliberate inaccessibility and uncommunicativeness, as well as predilection towards extreme dynamics, articulation, instrumentation, instrumental tessitura, and highly dissonant sonorities.²² As seen from her personal recollections, Ustvol'skaya's childhood traumas shaped her artistic personality: her inner disharmony caused by years of misunderstanding and estrangement between her and her parents developed into high sensitivity and vulnerability in Ustvol'skaya, the adult. From interviews with Bagrenin and a close family friend, Kirill Novikov, it became clear that Ustvol'skaya's relationship with her parents was amicable but not close. As claimed by Bokman, the 'loneliness, frustration and anger of an unloved child, who pushes his way forward with fists and elbows while screaming and shouting to attract attention', is acutely audible in Ustvol'skaya's music.²³ Ustvol'skaya's love-hate relationship with her mother resembles that of Vincent Van Gogh, one of Ustvol'skaya's most admired artists, who wrote about how his relationship with his mother reflected in his paintings: "The deliberate choice of colour, the sombre violet violently blotched with the citron yellow of the dahlias, suggests Mother's personality in me."²⁴ The deliberately 'ugly' sonorities in Ustvol'skaya's compositions invite similar interpretation.²⁵

The history of art knows numerous examples of childhood traumas being transferred into art. Thus, another female artist, Louise Bourgeois, the 'enfant terrible of contemporary art',²⁶ who centred her art around female victimisation, rage, and

²¹ The view expressed by Olga Gladkova in *Music as an Obsession*.

²² Gladkova, *Ibid.*, 27.

²³ The author refers to the fists and elbows used in the performance of the Fifth and Sixth piano sonatas. Simon Bokman wrote: "Her [Ustvol'skaya's] music is at once infantile and catastrophic. It is a very special infantilism: the infantilism of a stubborn, cranky, and perhaps, unjustly accused child, who has been deprived of fun as a punishment. And so the child protests in a childish way: 'I will, I will! I will' with fists, and with elbows, I will bite and scratch!" I sense this kind of infantilism in the Fifth and Sixth Piano Sonatas, and in the all-pervasive stubbornness of her [compositional] technique. Perhaps this is an innate quality, and it is very strong. Experiences of her own poor childhood are reflected, I think, in the First Symphony". Bokman, *Op.cit.*, 66-67.

²⁴ Letter from Van Gogh to his sister, Wilhelmina, as quoted in Lubin, *A Stranger on the Earth*, *Op.cit.*, 81.

²⁵ American composer Roy Harris, described Ustvol'skaya's *Violin Sonata* as 'kind of ugly.' In Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1981*, *Op.cit.*, 315.

²⁶ Amber Haq, "The Ghost of Trauma Past: A retrospective at the Pompidou Centre in Paris reveals how heavily artist Louise Bourgeois mined her own childhood", *Newsweek*, 8 March 2008; www.newsweek.com/2008/03/08/the-ghost-of-trauma-past.html (accessed: 25 June 2010).

rebellion, spoke of art-making as her way of dealing with the past. In an autobiographical text entitled "Child Abuse" (1982) she wrote: "Some of us are so obsessed with the past that we die of it. Everyday you have to abandon your past or accept it, and if you cannot accept it, you become a sculptor."²⁷ In 1992 Bourgeois displayed a piece entitled '*Precious Liquids*' that was accompanied by an inscription welded in steel, which read: "Art is a guarantee of sanity", and that, I believe, is what composing was for Ustvolskaya. As in the case of Bourgeois, art for her was the 'way of reaching the equilibrium of becoming a sociable person.'²⁸ In a letter to his brother Theo, Vincent van Gogh wrote: "I am seeking something utterly heartbroken, and therefore, utterly heartbreaking."²⁹ I believe, Ustvolskaya would have shared Van Gogh's sentiment.

In the last decades of her life Ustvolskaya saw asceticism as a state necessary for achieving artistic and spiritual heights.³⁰ She seemed to be mainly preoccupied with two themes: the silence of God and the destiny of humanity. Ustvolskaya's vision of the human fate in the twentieth century found its representation in *Symphony No.2* with the animal-like growl of a man pleading for God's help - '*Aw-aw, Gospody*'; another plea for God's mercy is uttered by the contralto in *Symphony No.4*, '*Prayer*'; yet another, in *Symphony No. 5*, where the narrator recites a prayer being accompanied by the sound of hammers striking a plywood cube. Ustvolskaya believed that the fate of a true artist is, and should be, tragic; she perceived herself as a tormented artist, overwhelmed by the

²⁷ Louise Bourgeois, 'Child Abuse' (1982), *Destruction of the Father/ Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews 1923-1997*, edited and with texts by Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (Cambridge: MIT Press, in association with Violette editions, London, 1998), 133-34. Michael Haneke (1942 -), the Austrian filmmaker and writer, in one of the interviews said: "Everything you invent as an artist has been experienced in one way or another. I am lucky to be able to make films, so I do not need a psychiatrist; I can sort out my fears with my work. That is an enormous privilege of all artists to be able to illuminate their unhappiness and their neuroses in the creative process". Haneke often expressed a desire to 'make films so unbearable that the audience has to look away'. Michael Heneke, interview, "The Piano Teacher" (Artificial Eye, 2001).

²⁸ Pat Steir, "Mortal Elements", interview with Louise Bourgeois, Art Forum, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n10_v31/ai_14156122/ (Summer 1993) (assessed: 3 December 2009)

²⁹ Vincent van Gogh in a letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, February 1888 - May 1889. Quoted in Albert J. Lubin, *Stranger on the Earth*, Op.cit., 5. Sergey Banevich spoke of Ustvolskaya's music, using similar epithets. Sergey Banevich, personal interview, October 26, 2007, St. Petersburg.

³⁰ As claimed by pianist Oleg Malov and composers Boris Tishchenko, Sergey Banevich and Alexander Radvilovich, many professional relationships and friendships were broken for no particular reason in the 1980s-1990s, and Ustvolskaya almost completely disappeared from the public view.

opposition and difficulties of struggling through life,³¹ whose art is 'a fruit of her tortured life.'³²

Ustvolskaya was renowned for her attraction to 'sufferers'. Unhealthy, sensitive, and fragile people affected by creative disease were the ones for whom she always felt compassion; optimistic and healthy people irritated her, as well as other forms of 'normality', such as students getting married and having children.³³ All of Ustvolskaya's 'heroes' - Gogol, Mahler, Vincent van Gogh, and Mussorgsky, were affected by 'genius-given' disease, and even in her personal relationships she chose fragile (Yuri Balkashin, a sufferer of epilepsy) or infantile (Konstantin Bagrenin, 23 years her junior) men.

Ustvolskaya's desire to distance herself from others (something she demonstrated throughout her life), found a musical representation in her works: already in her early compositions, Ustvolskaya distances individual melodic lines from each other, avoiding any forms of homophony and giving preference to polyphony.³⁴ When melodic lines do come into contact, they produce highly dissonant sonorities that eventually led to the formation of complex tone clusters. Starting from *Compositions no. 1, 2 and 3*, Ustvolskaya re-enforced the 'separateness' of melodic lines by employing instrumental timbres which belong to the opposite ends of the sonic spectrum: flute piccolo and tuba (*Composition no.1*); eight double-basses, plywood cube and piano (*Composition no.2*); trumpet, tam-tam piano and contralto (*Symphony No.4*); a human voice (narrator) and plywood cube together with violin, oboe, trumpet, tuba (*Symphony No.5*). Ustvolskaya's predilection for contrasts that manifested itself in her early compositions, reached extreme forms in her later works.

Ustvolskaya's disdain for any forms of servility also found its representation in unorthodox forms of artistic expression and structural flexibility in her works. Almost none of Ustvolskaya's compositions follow traditional formal structures, even when the title of the work, such as Sonata or Symphony, suggests so. It has been claimed that Ustvolskaya's musical language, often terse and laconic, strongly resembled her 'non-

³¹ Van Gogh expressed a similar sentiment in his Letter 1881, quoted in Lubin A.J., *Stranger on the Earth: a Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh*, Op.cit., 59.

³² Galina Ustvolskaya, 'My Thoughts on the Creative Process', a note dated 17 January 1994, and signed by Ustvolskaya. UCPSS, Basel.

³³ A similar view was expressed by Simon Bokman, in *Variations on the Theme: Galina Ustvolskaya*, Ibid., 97

³⁴ Something similar can be observed in Vincent van Gogh's paintings: his awareness and need for personal isolation is represented through detachment and remoteness of figures on the canvas.

eloquent' manner of her speech;³⁵ both in life and in music she 'communicated' by using a simple, aphoristic vocabulary: short, highly expressive melodic and rhythmic formulae became the 'signature' characteristic of Ustvolskaya's musical language.³⁶

Ustvolskaya's obsession with order of things in life resulted in the mathematical precision with which she constructed her compositions using almost unchanged formulae that develop through repetitions.³⁷ Another important aspect of both Ustvolskaya's personality and her music is asceticism; her compositional 'tool box' is indeed unique in its deficiency. Sonorous harmonies did not interest her; instead, Ustvolskaya drew the listener into her search for a maximally expressive musical language through a succession of physical experiences. Instead of increasing the quantity and variety of musical material, she chose to 'amplify' a single element, whether it was a melodic line or a rhythmic figure, by using an unorthodox choice of musical instruments played in unusual tessitura, or by employing a multiple number of the same instruments (eight double basses in *Compositions No.2*; four flutes and four bassoons in *Composition No.3*), or simply by repeating it many times, the best example of which is a cluster repeated 144 times on *fffff* in the *Fifth Piano Sonata*.

The choice of intervals used as 'building' stones of Ustvolskaya's melodies is also strictly limited, and that is particularly evident in her later works: in her constant search for the essence, the 'core of things', she 'saved up notes with the same eagerness as she saved instrumental timbres.'³⁸ Ustvolskaya's artistic credo was *pisat' pokoroche i potalantlivee* [to write shorter works that show signs of talent and individuality], and that is what she demanded from her students.³⁹ The language that Ustvolskaya found was allusive rather than descriptive; it re-enforced the importance of musical experience as a self-generated phenomenon in which the author became a medium, who reached

³⁵ Simon Bokman, *Variation on the Theme*, Op.cit., 23.

³⁶ Yet again, something similar can be observed in Van Gogh's manner of painting: he preferred rough graphite and rough paper; he limited himself to simple colours avoiding complex colour combinations; he used coarse forms and rough technique such as using thick unsmoothed strokes, which revealed his character. Albert Lubin, *Stranger of the Earth*, Op.cit., 73.

³⁷ In one of the interviews, Konstantin Bagrenin remembered that Ustvolskaya always maintained a perfect order of her personal things: everything had its place, any unwanted piece of music or paper had to be immediately torn and thrown away; she kept nothing. Konstantin Bagrenin, personal interview, 30 March 2008, St. Petersburg.

³⁸ As claimed by Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya, personal interview, 25 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

³⁹ Bokman remembered how Ustvolskaya encouraged her students to apply 'surgical procedures' to lengthy compositions. Bokman, *Variations on the Theme*, Op.cit., 25.

beyond the object of musical composition as well as beyond a particular meaning. As a result, Ustvolskaya's compositions are often perceived by listeners as an unmade, self-manifested experience that is both unique and universal.⁴⁰

In real life Ustvolskaya was a woman of contradiction, yet another aspect of her personality that has a direct representation in her music.⁴¹ According to Ustvolskaya herself, all her life she suffered from painful shyness and social anxiety,⁴² but, however shy, vulnerable, and unpractical in everyday life she might have been, it was an innocence redolent with strength. Thus, many remembered her as a very strong-willed, opinionated person; someone, who possessed a great sense of self-worth and above all, valued her independence, both personal and creative.⁴³ Among close friends Ustvolskaya could be rude and vulgar and frequently showed signs of aggression.⁴⁴

Studying childhood factors that start the development of neurotic symptoms, and eventually lead to behavioural *epatagé* as well as frequent outbursts of anger, Albert Lubin writes about Vincent Van Gogh:

He [Vincent] had found that his childhood anger, as frightening as only that of a rejected child can be, could not be unleashed without fear or frightening retribution from people much larger and stronger than he. Hoping to appease them through suffering, he turned their expected anger as well as his own against himself. By provoking their anger, he encouraged them to be angry with him, so that he could not be angry with them.⁴⁵

Ustvolskaya also acted in such a way as to provoke anger on many occasions both in life and in music; she masked her unbearable shyness by what was often seen as unacceptable behaviour in life and violent outbursts in music. Being brought up in a

⁴⁰ Boris Tishchenko spoke of this music being torn away from any familiar substance and existing independently, like radiation or gravitation. Personal interview, 23 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

⁴¹ Ustvolskaya was known for her tendency to express one fact only to deny or contradict it later. See: Marian Lee, "Galina Ustvolskaya: the Spiritual Works of a Soviet Artist" (PhD diss., Peabody Conservatory of Music, 2002). Also confirmed by St. Petersburg musicians whom I interviewed.

⁴² In a letter to Viktor Suslin, dated 24 January 1993, Ustvolskaya wrote: "It is very sad that I cannot naturally communicate with people. At times it is simply painful. I try to fight it, but it is so deeply rooted in me, that it cannot be changed. That is the reason for my unsociability and painful reclusiveness." Ustvolskaya's Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel.

⁴³ Such opinion was expressed by almost every person whom I interviewed.

⁴⁴ As claimed by Konstantin Bagrenin in personal interviews.

⁴⁵ Lubin, *Stranger on the Earth*, Op.cit., 28.

very old-fashioned way Ustvolskaya often acted, as if deliberately, in a delinquent manner. In her desire to shock people in life and more so, in music, Ustvolskaya sought after forms of radical negation of previous traditions and canons, and this feature alone allows us to speak of Ustvolskaya's music as an example of modernist art, and of Ustvolskaya herself as a Russian modernist composer.

Ustvolskaya believed herself to be the only judge of her own behaviour in art as much as in life. This directly affected the fate of many of compositions: Bagrenin remembered that if after a few years a musical composition did not satisfy her, Ustvolskaya simply destroyed it in a quasi-Stalinist manner. Such resoluteness and radicalism with regard to her own works coexisted with innate modesty bordering on self-abnegation.⁴⁶ In a letter to Ivan Glikman, Shostakovich spoke of Ustvolskaya's inability to please; he spoke of her excessive modesty as being 'one of the greatest Bolshevik virtues that Stalin taught Russian people.'⁴⁷ Such paradoxical coexistence of opposite characteristics in Ustvolskaya's personality is evident in her musical language (the opening of the *Duet for violin and piano*, 1964, is one such example).

There is yet another parallel with Van Gogh, the artist whom Ustvolskaya admired: in one of his letters Van Gogh wrote: "I want my work to show what is in the heart of such an eccentric, such *nobody*."⁴⁸ He, who saw himself as a repulsive, untouchable, rootless, a dead outsider, who always felt worthless, tried to produce art, that was touchable, solid, and alive.⁴⁹ At one stage of his artistic development, Van Gogh was painting deliberately deformed images and forms projecting his distorted view of himself into his paintings. He wrote: "My great longing is to learn how to make those very incorrectnesses, those deviations and remodellings truer than the literal truths."⁵⁰ As a result, his art was often referred to as a 'masochistic glorification of ugliness, and many of his contemporaries were simply repulsed by it.'⁵¹ Similarity with

⁴⁶ Isaak Glikman, *Story of a Friendship: The Letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman, 1941-1975*, trans. Anthony Phillips (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 274.

⁴⁷ Dmitry Shostakovich, letter to Issak Glikman, dated 3 November 1960. Shostakovich, D., *Pisma k drugu* [Letters to a Friend], (St. Petersburg: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1993).

⁴⁸ Lubin, *Stranger on the Earth*, Op.cit., 70.

⁴⁹ Lubin, *Stranger on the Earth*, Ibid., 69.

⁵⁰ Lubin, Ibid., 70.

⁵¹ Lubin, Ibid., 70. Van Gogh sold only one painting during his lifetime.

Ustvolskaya’s art is evident: sonic distortions and extreme forms of expression are frequent in Ustvolskaya’s music, and some interpret them as a form of self-affirmation. People who knew Ustvolskaya, especially in the last decades of her life, speak of her as a woman with *iskorezhennaya psikhika* [distorted psyche], for whom music was a form of *boleznennoe samo-utverzhdienie* [ill self-affirmation].⁵²

The first mention of Ustvolskaya showing frequent signs of neurosis belongs to the early 1950s. Thus, in the reference given to Ustvolskaya at the end of *aspirantura* [post-graduate course], Pavel Serebryakov, the Director of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, wrote:

*The administration of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire believes that Ustvolskaya is capable of great achievements in the musical field. However, her reclusiveness and social passivity are her weaknesses, although it must be said that one of the reasons for that is Ustvolskaya’s poor health. She is a person with a very unstable nervous system, and because of that, she is often in need of long periods of rest. That gets in the way of her progress, both as a teacher and as a composer.*⁵³

As seen from the interviews, Ustvolskaya’s students remembered her frequently complaining about her nerves and using mild sedatives;⁵⁴ her accusative remarks, uncontrollable bursts of anger as well as shocking mood swings were also mentioned.⁵⁵ In her later years Ustvolskaya became increasingly unstable both mentally and emotionally, and had to rely on medication to prolong her creativity.⁵⁶ Ustvolskaya’s complex personality projected into her music; as with Ustvolskaya the person, her music is a complex and paradoxical phenomenon where spiritual meditation coexist with outbursts of anger and utmost aggression, which, according to a pianist Alexey Lyubimov, is ‘born out of despair and the prostration of silent prayer.’⁵⁷ Ustvolskaya, a

⁵² Such opinion was expressed by Tat’yana Voronina in an interview. See Appendix E.

⁵³ The document dated 20 March 1950, and signed by Pavel Serebryakov, is kept at the Archive of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire.

⁵⁴ As claimed by Sergey Banevich, Semion Bokman, Kirill Novikov, and Konstantin Bagrenin.

⁵⁵ Bokman, *Variations on the Theme*, Op.cit., 84.

⁵⁶ As confirmed by Konstantin Bagrenin, personal interview. 2 April 2009, St. Petersburg.

⁵⁷ A reference to the comment made by Alexey Lyubimov in the interview for the TV programme “Tsarskaya Lozha”, TV Channel ‘Kul’tura’, 17 June 2004.

'shy and exceptionally beautiful woman,'⁵⁸ demanded a pianist to hit the piano with 144 repeated clusters on *fffff* in *Piano Sonata No.5*; to strike a plywood box (initially, meant as a coffin) obsessively in the *Symphony No.5 'Amen'*; or for a singer to growl, calling it a 'vozglas vo vseleennyu', [a cry into the Universe] in *Symphony No.2*. In Ustvolskaya's music we hear both the voices of a frightened victim trapped in a Soviet socialist machine, and the voice of a totalitarian Dictator.⁵⁹ Speaking of the contrasting themes in Van Gogh's art, Lubin suggests that those contrasts arose out of persistent but buried memories of his childhood.⁶⁰ Similar interpretation is possible when speaking of Ustvolskaya's music.

Bagrenin spoke of Ustvolskaya as a person who always said 'no' [*chelovek-Net*], who exemplified a so-called 'aesthetic of negation' in every aspect of her life. Throughout her life, she demonstrated the urge to contradict, to act against accepted rules of behaviour, and to reject the common order of things.⁶¹ By refusing to acknowledge the interest shown in her music and deliberately discouraging musicians from performing her works, she, yet again, acted out her need to contradict. Although she regularly complained that her music is not performed as often as she would like,⁶² her openly expressed doubts in performers' ability to understand and correctly interpret her works, were discouraging.⁶³ The non-communicativeness of Ustvolskaya's music was a direct reflection of the composer's asceticism; some claim that her music, like a form of autism, does not have an addressee and exists in its own confined universe; others believe that her music contains a message which can only be 'decoded' by people of future generations.⁶⁴

Ustvolskaya's music was often criticised for its lack of aesthetic qualities such as plasticity, charm, constructive simplicity, and praised for its piercing resoluteness,

⁵⁸ Mstislav Rostropovich spoke about Ustvolskaya in an interview in the TV programme "Tsarskaya Lozha."

⁵⁹ Oleg Malov, personal interview, 31 March 2008, St. Petersburg.

⁶⁰ Alber J. Lubin, *Stranger on the Earth*, Op.cit., 86.

⁶¹ Leonid Gorokhov, interview, TV programme 'Tsatskaya Lozha'.

⁶² In a letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, dated 22 April 1993, we read: "To have my works published in Russia is akin to a miracle; it is also a miracle to have them performed decently." UCPSS, Basel.

⁶³ In a letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, dated 22 April 1993, Ustvolskaya wrote that the performances of her three *Compositions* in St. Petersburg could not even be called 'rehearsals'; they sounded as if the musicians were sight-reading.' UCPSS, Basel.

⁶⁴ Sergey Banevich, personal interview. See Appendix E.

superhuman tenseness and spiritual force. It was referred to as masculine music, which is devoid of any feminine attributes and stands as the antithesis to it:

Ustvol'skaya abandons any representation of the female. Her music is saturated in 'predatory male' aggression – the excessively loud dynamics, brutal pounding of the crotchet beat, violent striking of the wooden boxes – reflecting both the sins of Man and the wrath of God.⁶⁵

This observation is also true of the composer herself: Ustvol'skaya often expressed a desire to dissociate gender-linked aspects of herself from her music. Thus, Oleg Malov, who made first acquaintance with Ustvol'skaya in 1972, remembered her saying: 'I am not a woman', probably implying that gender stereotypes impose a certain limitation, and she, especially in her later years, saw herself as a 'super Human'.⁶⁶ Ustvol'skaya disliked being 'pigeonholed' as a female composer, and detested the idea of distinguishing between music written by men and women, saying that such a division should not be allowed to persist; 'only the music that is genuine and strong should be played, and if we are honest about it, a performance in a concert by women composers is a humiliation for music.'⁶⁷ In entering the predominantly male arena of composers, she rejected a traditional idea of womanhood to prove the idea of equality, and to expose masculine prejudice. Thus, Ustvol'skaya, who despised the Soviet system and its values, unconsciously embodied one of the main ideas of the Soviet State both in her personal life and in music.

Throughout her life, Ustvol'skaya preferred male company: she herself admitted that since childhood she did not have many girl-friends.⁶⁸ Like her teacher, Shostakovich, who was renowned for doubting female creative ability and rarely accepting women in his class,⁶⁹ Ustvol'skaya did not have high regard for her female students, and preferred her compositions to be performed by male artists (among

⁶⁵ Rachel Foulds, "Masculinity Versus Femininity: An Overriding Dichotomy in the Music of Soviet Composer Galina Ustvol'skaya", Op.cit.

⁶⁶ Oleg Malov, personal interview. See Appendix E.

⁶⁷ Viktor Suslin, preface to the Ustvol'skaya Catalogue, Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, 1998.

⁶⁸ Ustvol'skaya in an interview for the programme dedicated to the composer's 80th birthday. TV programme 'Tsarskaya Lozha', TV Channel 'Kul'tura', 17 June 2004

⁶⁹ Sofia Khentova, 'V mire Shostakovicha', Op.cit., 172.

pianists: Oleg Malov, until mid-1980s, Reinbert de Leeuw, Frank Denyer, Markus Hinterhäuser, and Alexey Lyubimov).

Chapter 4:

Ustvolskaya and her music: religious or spiritual?

The comments made by Ustvolskaya in her ‘Thoughts’ encouraged people to perceive her as a composer of deep spiritual conviction:

I don't write music the way other composers do. I start writing when I enter a special state of grace [...]. The whole process of creation happens in my mind and soul. Only I can predict the way my compositions will go and decide their future fate. I pray: "God, give me strength to compose."¹

In a letter to Suslin Ustvolskaya wrote:

I know that the way I feel [Ya chuvstvuyu] is the right way, and it is only I who feel like that [tak chuvstvuyu ya odna]. I am not a soothsayer but most definitely close to it. Never in my life was I mistaken about it [...] Because of that, it is more difficult for me to compose [...] I kneel before God [stoyu na kolenyakh pered Bogom]²

However explicit these statements might appear, it is important to remember that it was Ustvolskaya herself who insisted on differentiating between the term ‘spiritual’ and ‘religious’ in connection to her music,³ although the composer’s own definition of these words is rather obscure. Thus, in an interview for a radio programme in 2004 Ustvolskaya said:

Religiosity is about attending the Church; people usually pray there, kiss icons and all the rest of it. Spirituality is different. If a man is spiritual, to me, he is a great human being, even without being religious. It is the same with my Compositions and Symphonies: they are not religious but spiritual.⁴

¹ A note signed by Ustvolskaya and dated 1 January 1994, is kept at the UCPSS, Basel.

² Letter to Viktor Suslin, dated 29 September 1994. Suslin’s Private Collection.

³ Letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, dated 11 April 1993. Ustvolskaya Archive, Musikverlage Hans Sikorski.

⁴ Ustvolskaya’s interview for the “Orfey” Radio station, a programme dedicated to Ustvolskaya’s 85th birthday. 17 June 2004. Private collection of Konstantin Bagrenin.

Ustvolskaya, who clearly thought of herself as a spiritual person, had never discussed her religious views in public.⁵ However, in the last decade of her life, when she herself and her music became a subject of interest in the West, she used the word *Bog* [God] rather frequently. For instance, Ustvolskaya refused a commission from a Western publisher, claiming that the decision to compose depends not on her but God.⁶

St. Petersburg musicians, who knew Ustvolskaya and her music, among whom are Oleg Malov, Alexander Radvilovich, Simon Bokman, and Vitaly Solov'ev, claimed that Ustvolskaya used religious subtitles as a form of personal protest; it was her reaction to years of oppression when all forms of religion were forbidden. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Soviet Russia experienced a revival of religiosity and spirituality: many composers of younger generation, the so-called '*shestidesyatniki*', were inspired by religious texts and images, and some, like Sofia Gubaidulina and Alemdar Karamanov, embraced Orthodox Christianity and became truly religious.

Ustvolskaya's religion, in my view, was of a different kind to that traditionally associated with the Russian Orthodox faith: her music, as a form of representation of her psychology, world-view and belief system, including the spiritual aspects of it, does not bring hope; it is devoid of beauty and in no way praises or glorifies God. Simon Bokman expressed similar thoughts: "Ustvolskaya's music with its asceticism and sternness bordering on violence, contains a fear of the Superior; it portrays God as a menacing and punishing judge; Ustvolskaya believed in Universal power, and saw herself as a representative of such power; if her music is akin to religion, it is above all the religion of self-sufficiency."⁷

The peak of Ustvolskaya's popularity in Russia in the 1970s and 1980s coincided with an interest in esotericism among Soviet people. The works of Helena Roerich, Helena Blavatsky⁸ and others were published in *samizdat*.⁹ In the late 1980s

⁵ Konstantin Bagrenin confirmed to me that Ustvolskaya never attended religious service neither did she ever pray. A similar view was expressed by Simon Bokman: "Ustvolskaya does not practice any particular religion. However, she undoubtedly believes in some Higher Power, which she calls Spirit." Bokman, *Variations on the Theme*, Ibid., 39.

⁶ As claimed by K. Bagrenin in a personal interview.

⁷ Bokman, *Variations on the Theme*, Op.cit., 47

⁸ Helena Roerich (1879-1955), spiritual teacher and healer. Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891), philosopher, a founder of the Theosophical Society in 1875.

⁹ '*Samizdat*,' a secret publication and distributor of government-banned literature in the Soviet Union.

some of Pavel Florensky's theological and philosophical works were published.¹⁰ Florensky was an important representative in a long line of Eastern Orthodox thought on art, and his writings on the synthesis of art and religion inspired artists, particularly those of the 'Makovets' group, and musicians.¹¹ Thus, Leningrad pianist Maria Yudina (1899-1970), who met Florensky in 1927, found his writings 'extremely stimulating'.¹² As a young student, Yudina turned from Judaism to Christianity through reading his *Pillar and Ground of Truth* (1914). Florensky's lectures on art were not founded on an *a priori* theological schema, but on a close investigation of the psycho-physical perception needed to depict the world.¹³ In his own words, Florensky looked at art through the eye of the Church, but that eye was a nerve through which we contemplate the exterior world.¹⁴

In the cultural context of the 1980s, Ustvol'skaya was often perceived as a spiritual leader, a musical *Vanga*, a Sybil or an Oracle.¹⁵ As mentioned earlier, Ustvol'skaya's spirituality was interpreted by some as a vehicle for self-expression and personal protest.¹⁶ Although religious subtitles of Ustvol'skaya's *Compositions* and *Symphonies* might indicate some religious intent, they do not prove Ustvol'skaya's doctrinal religiosity; instead, they can be interpreted as a demonstration of Ustvol'skaya continuing the Russian tradition of the close relationship between Orthodox Christianity and the arts.¹⁷ Ustvol'skaya was one of many composers of the second spiritual wave

¹⁰ Rev. Pavel Florensky (1882–1937), the Russian philosopher, linguist, scientist, and art historian. One of the earliest published works was: P. A. Florensky, "Obratnaya perspektiva" ["Reverse Perspective"], *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, Tartu, 3 (1967): 381-416. Also see: P. A. Florensky, *Sobranie sochineny v 4-kh tomakh* [Collection of Works in 4 Volumes], (Moscow: Pravda, 1990).

¹¹ "Makovets", an organisation of artists created in Moscow in 1921. Two of the leading founders were V. Chekrygin and P. Bromirsky. The movement members were V. Bart, S. Gerasimov, L. Zhegin, K. Zefirov, V. Pestel, S. Romanovich, R. Florenskaya, A. Fonvizin, N. Chernyshov, A. Shevchenko and others.

¹² Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky. A Quiet Genius: The Tragic and Extraordinary Life of Russia's Unknown Da Vinci* (London: Continuum Books, 2010), 142.

¹³ Avril Pyman, *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁵ Vanga, a legendary blind mystic and clairvoyant from Bulgaria. Sibyl, derived from Greek *sibylla*, a prophetess.

¹⁶ Such view was expressed by Oleg Malov, Alexander Radvilovich, Simon Bokman, and Vitaly Solov'ev in personal interviews.

¹⁷ The relationship between Orthodox Christianity and the arts in Russia has been the topic of a number of publications. See: Tat'yana Vladyshevskaya, *Muzykal'naya kul'tura drevney Rusi* [The Music Culture of Medieval Russia], (Moscow: Znak, 2006); William C. Brumfield, Milos M. Velimirovic, ed., *Christianity and the Arts in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Carl S. Tynes, ed., *Orthodox Christianity: Overview and Bibliography*, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2002).

(1970s-1990s) who employed religious texts and imagery in their compositions. In those years religious references were not directly associated with doctrinal religion but were akin to spiritual symbols.¹⁸ In the atmosphere of Soviet atheism, the words ‘sacred’ and ‘spiritual’ became synonymous. A rediscovery of religious texts and images signified a re-evaluation of Soviet moral norms and a search for true spiritual values as they were seen in Russian Orthodox Christianity.¹⁹ Ustvolskaya was one of many people who wished to reinvest their life with spiritual meaning after years of secularism. The Orthodox faith provided a convenient set of symbols, mythology and rituals that allowed people with spiritual inclination to access that side of their personality, whether they were followers of Russian Orthodox Christianity or not.

In ‘*The Aesthetic Face of Being. Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky*’, Bychkov claims that Eastern Orthodox aesthetics is intimately and inextricably bound to the culture and most of all to the religion of the period: “Aesthetics in Orthodoxy does not have the status of an independent discipline. Its subject is virtually indistinguishable from the subject of theology”.²⁰ Indeed, the impact of Orthodox aesthetics and theology on the arts and music in Russia of that period cannot be underestimated. Meditation and the idea of ritual, as the central aspects of Russian Orthodox faith, found their manifestation in music. The adaptation of religious content by musical means of expression led to a new understanding of musical time, and as a result, the role of meditation in music increased.²¹ The sacred element entered the musical text, having adopted religious ideas through traditional secular musical genres. Thus, Ustvolskaya called her compositions with religious subtitles symphonies or simply ‘compositions’.

In the 1990s, many Russian composers wanted to move away from the strictly doctrinal interpretation of religiously inspired musical ideas, and this could explain the determination with which they refused to admit the religious intent of their works. It is around this time that Ustvolskaya began stressing the importance of understanding the

¹⁸ N. Vasilieva, “Tvorchestvo Ustvolskoy v aspekte novoy sokral’nosti” [The Music of Ustvolskaya in the Aspect of ‘Sacra Nova’], (PhD diss, Nizhny Novgorod, 2004).

¹⁹ N. Seregina, N. “Drevnee v sovremennom” [Ancient Ideas in Contemporary Art], *Sovremennyye problemy sovetskogo muzykoznaniiya* [Contemporary Problems of Soviet Musicology], (Leningrad: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1983), 102.

²⁰ Viktor Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face of Being. Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 26.

²¹ N. Vasilieva, “Tvorchestvo Galiny Ustvolskoy v aspekte Novoy Sokral’nosti”, *Op.cit.*, 8.

difference between 'religious' and 'spiritual' in relation to her compositions.²² The act of composing the music in itself was for Ustvol'skaya akin to religion; it was an artistic mission, an act of *sluzhenie* [service] akin to *bogosluzhenie* [an act of worship], the only possible, and therefore the only true, state of her ecstatic mind.²³ In perceiving art as the shortest route to God, Ustvol'skaya was following in a long tradition of Russian thinkers and writers.²⁴ By claiming that her music is spiritual [*dukhovnaya muzyka*], Ustvol'skaya emphasised the non-material intent of her art; indeed, her music was not concerned with worldly interests but exemplified an individual artistic vision of the world.²⁵

Ustvol'skaya's spirituality has been compared to the spiritual aesthetic of Russian sectarians. This view was first expressed by Igor Vishnevetsky, who claimed that the core of Ustvol'skaya's philosophy and spirituality is rooted in the tradition of Russian sectarianism with its obsessiveness and belief in the highest power of the Truth, and that it is not at all important whether or not the composer herself was aware of such a connection.²⁶ A similar view was expressed by Gladkova,²⁷ although neither Vishnevetsky nor Gladkova elaborated on their views. On what ground could Ustvol'skaya be compared to Russian sectarians? To answer this question and to validate the parallel between Ustvol'skaya and sectarians, a brief excursus into Russian sectarianism proves necessary.²⁸

The Russian linguist Vladimir Dal' (1801-1872) defines 'sect' as a brotherhood that follows their own religious beliefs, whilst Russian philologist Dmitry Ushakov

²² Ustvol'skaya's letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek dated 11 April 1993, Ustvol'skaya Archive, Musikverlage Hans Sikorski.

²³ Igor Vishnevetsky, I. "Olga Gladkova: G. Ustvol'skaya - Muzyka kak navazhdenie", *MuzArt*, no.1 (February, 2001) <http://www.aposition.org/site/rezbook.htm> (accessed: 6 June 2005). Ustvol'skaya herself confirmed that composing preoccupied her entirely in a letter to Viktor Suslin, from 19 April 1995: "It is impossible to speak about and explain my creative process, but it is certainly necessary for me to get closer to sharing it with you since I live in it [with it] day and night". UCPSS, Basel.

²⁴ The Russian poet Andrey Bely (1880-1934) wrote that art is the shortest route to God: "Искусство <...> кратчайший путь к религии; здесь человечество, познавшее свою сущность, объединяется единством Вечной Жены: творчество, проведенное до конца, непосредственно переходит в религиозное творчество – теургию". Andrey Bely, 'Apokalypsis v Russkoy poezii' [Apocalypses in Russian Poetry], in *Lug zeleny: Kniga statey* [Green Meadow: Collection of Articles], (Moscow, 1910), 230.

²⁵ A similar view was expressed by Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya in personal interview, St. Petersburg, 25 October 2007.

²⁶ Vishnevetsky, "Olga Gladkova: G. Ustvol'skaya – Muzyka kak navazhdenie", Op.cit.

²⁷ Olga Gladkova, "Muzyka obrechennogo dukha", [Music of a Doomed Soul], in *Skipichniy klyuch* [Treble Clef], no.1 (St. Petersburg, 1996): 27-29

²⁸ It is not the purpose of this thesis to investigate Sectarianism as a cultural phenomenon in all its complexity. Only a few aspects of the sectarians' assessment of nature and the workings of the world are discussed with the view of justifying the possibility of parallels with Ustvol'skaya.

(1873-1942), defines it as a religious group of people, who broke away from the Church to follow a new religion, or as a group of reclusive people who separated themselves from society (the latter describes Ustvol'skaya). Another Russian linguist, Sergey Ozhegov (1900-1964), defines a sect as a group of people preoccupied only with their own life interests.²⁹ Alexander Dvorkin in *Sektovedenie* claims that the word 'sect' (in latin *sequere*, to follow, and *secare*, to cut off, to separate) does not have one unanimous definition; instead, there are many approaches in understanding sectarianism, among which are the non-confessional approach (from the point of view of Soviet atheism), conventional religions, and sociological and psychological approaches.³⁰ Dvorkin himself defines 'sect' as a closed religious group that opposes the main religion of the country.³¹ Heather J. Coleman, in *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929*, wrote that everyone inclined towards protest goes into sectarianism,³² and claimed that both the mystical and the rationalist sects resulted from a 'deviation from the norm of spiritual development of the Russian people.'³³

Speaking of sectarianism, Leonid Heretz writes: "Rather than being an expression of one or another form of socio-economic discontent, the Russian sects were a response to the same overwhelming and simple fact that had given rise to all religion and philosophy: life is hard and ends in death."³⁴ Imperial Russia generated a great variety of religious dissident groupings which, according to the usual practice, were seen as being in sharp and total distinction to Orthodoxy.'³⁵ Heretz writes that rather than setting off in a radically new directions, the various sects took specific elements of

²⁹ V.I. Dal', *Tolkovy slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo yazyka* [Comprehensive Dictionary of the Great Russian Language], (St. Petersburg: Izdanie Knigoprodavtsa-Tipografa, M.O. Volf, 1880; Moscow: State Publisher of Foreign and National Dictionaries, 1955). D.N. Ushakov, ed., *Tolkovy slovar' russkogo yazyka* [Comprehensive Dictionary of the Russian Language], (Moscow: Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, 1935-1940). S.I. Ozhegov, N. Y. Shvedova, *Tolkovy slovar' russkogo yazyka: 80 000 slov i fraseologicheskikh vyrazheny* [Comprehensive Dictionary of the Russian Language: 80000 Words and Phraseological Expressions], (Moscow: Azbukovnik, 1999).

³⁰ Alexander Dvorkin, *Sektovedenie* [A Study of Sects], (Nizhny Novgorod: Bratstvo vo imya Aleksandra Nevskogo, 2000).

³¹ Alexander Dvorkin, *Sektovedenie. Totalitarnye sekty. Opyt sistematicheskogo issledovaniya* [A Study of Sects. Totalitarian Sects. The Experience of Systematic Analysis], (Moscow: Khristianskaya Biblioteka, 2007)

³² Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 75.

³³ Heather J. Coleman, *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁴ Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity: Popular Religion and Traditional Culture Under the Last Tsars*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 80.

³⁵ Leonid Heretz, *Ibid.*, 76.

the general traditional culture to the extreme and thereby offered vivid illustration of the underlying tendencies of that culture.³⁶ In my opinion, that defines Ustvolskaya's aesthetic: she also did not 'set off in a radically new direction' as a composer, but took specific elements of the traditional compositional language to the extreme and by doing so, created her own language that reflected cultural tendencies of Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Her music can be seen as a form of resistance to Soviet musical tradition and accepted forms of representation. However, she never completely broke with the tradition; instead, she was an artist who, having known both the accepted Soviet norms and forbidden 'formalist' deviations, chose to create her own individual norm.³⁷

Sectarians offered little material for outside consumption; that was not only the result of generations of persecution at the hands of the regime, but a reflection of a general hostility towards outside world.³⁸ This observation resembles the ones made about Ustvolskaya: she was renowned for her secretiveness and her hostility towards the outside world; her music was akin to a dissident religious phenomenon that was both generated by and existed in opposition to the Soviet orthodoxy. Ustvolskaya's disinterest in socio-economic and political aspects of life and her yearning for eternal values also resembles sectarians.

Although sectarian groupings - Khlysty, Skoptsy, and New Israel among others, varied in terms of their provenance, teaching and religious practice, there was an underlying unity in their perception of the world.³⁹ Joseph P. Schultz wrote: "All the sectarian groups gave free rein to emotional expression in their 'secret' worship services.⁴⁰ According to Khlyst lore, Christ's faith was restored on earth in 1631 by God in the person of a peasant Danila Phillipov, who reasserted his own teaching and a 'new'

³⁶ Leonid Heretz, *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁷ Here the terms 'norm' and 'deviations' are used with the meaning given by Leonard B. Meyer in *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), 71. Speaking of the relationship between a creative artist and tradition, Meyer suggests three types of artists. First, a traditional artist, who believes in the relationship between norms and deviants. Second, an academic artist, who views norms as ends in themselves, and confines both norms and deviations, giving them the status of a norm. Third, a decadent artist, who creates art in which traditional modes of deviation are exaggerated to extremes and the deviations are pursued for their own sake. In my view, Ustvolskaya demonstrated the signs of both the traditional and decadent types of artist, therefore she cannot be 'pigeonholed' as one or the other.

³⁸ Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity*, Op.cit., 77.

³⁹ The sect of *Khlysty* was discovered during the reign of the Empress Anna (1730-1740).

⁴⁰ Joseph P. Schultz, *Judaism and the Gentile Faiths: Comparative Studies in Religion* (London: Associated University Press, 1981), 265.

set of the Twelve Commandments, the first of which reads: “I, Danila, am God foretold by the prophets; I came down to earth to save people’s souls; there is no other God, but me”.⁴¹ Ustvolskaya’s words, *I have my art, my music, only mine*, communicates a similar sentiment. Simon Bokman speaks of Ustvolskaya’s religion as a ‘religion of self-sufficiency’,⁴² and claims that her personality was such that she could not serve anything or anybody; she believed in being chosen and that was her religion.⁴³

Another aspect of sectarian world perception, so called, bipolar perception, resembles that of Ustvolskaya. Sectarrians’ view of the world does not contain shades of black and white, good and evil; as a result, sectarians often demonstrate intolerance and behavioural extremism towards others. The imagery and terminology of *Khlysty*’s folklore portrays the sectarian moral negation of the existing world, focusing on their hatred of the physical human body as the symbol of the mind’s imprisonment, and directing their special loathing at their children as a product and evidence of their inability to restrain bodily passions.⁴⁴ That again invites a parallel with Ustvolskaya: her negative perception of the existing world was what she was renowned for;⁴⁵ as for her attitude to the human body and femininity, Ustvolskaya’s statement ‘I am not a woman’ speaks for itself;⁴⁶ she was also remembered as expressing a rather dismissive view of people’s desire to get married and have children.⁴⁷ Heretz claimed that despite the sectarians’ radical discontent with the world, they never took revolutionary actions, and instead focused their energy on self-preservation and escapism in an effort to survive in a hostile world.⁴⁸ Ustvolskaya also never participated in any ‘anti-Soviet’ actions, neither did she ever consider the possibility of emigrating to the West; instead she chose self-preservation and escapism.

⁴¹ Joseph P. Schultz, *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴² Joseph P. Schultz, *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴³ Simon Bokman, *Variations on the Theme*, *Op.cit.*, 62.

⁴⁴ Konstantin Kutepov, *Sekty Khlystov i Skoptsev* (Kazan’: Tipografiya Imperatorskogo Universiteta, 1882), 307-308.

⁴⁵ In an interview with Alexander Knaifel, he spoke of Ustvolskaya being prone to seeing only negative aspects of life. A similar observation was made by Tat’yana Voronina, Sergey Slonimsky, and others. See Appendix E.

⁴⁶ Oleg Malov, personal interview. See Appendix E.

⁴⁷ Simon Bokman, *Variations on the Theme*, *Op.cit.*, 64.

⁴⁸ Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity*, *Op.cit.*, 100.

The late 1980s-1990s saw a new rise of sectarianism in Russia: the appearance of varied sects and religious groups indicated an increasing interest towards sectarian values and beliefs among Russian population. There is no evidence that Ustvolskaya was one of ‘new sectarians’, however, Sergey Banevich’s observations on Ustvolskaya’s life in that period demonstrate her awareness of sectarians:

It seemed that during this time Ustvolskaya was surrounded by people who were members of some sort of Sectarian groups. Frankly, they were strange people, who fell on their knees during performances of Ustvolskaya’s works, and literally worshipped her. These people seemed to have a strong influence on her.⁴⁹

The above observation summarises how sectarians were largely perceived in Soviet Russia: the words ‘sect’ and ‘sectarian’ were surrounded by prejudice and negative associations in Russia, and people associated with sectarianism were looked upon with a great deal of suspicion, fear and contempt.⁵⁰ Although, as claimed by Heretz, it was Russian religious dissidents, or sectarians, who reflected development in the realm of ideas and not mundane, socio-economic concerns,⁵¹ the assaults of Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev on religion in the Soviet period generated most of the literature on sectarianism and set the tone for all discussions on the subject.⁵²

The parallel between Ustvolskaya’s aesthetic views and the spiritual heritage of the Old Believers is one of the avenues for further research.⁵³ In the contexts of this thesis, I stress the fact that Ustvolskaya’s music indeed possesses some similarity with *znamenny raspev* - the Russian medieval singing tradition that had been preserved by

⁴⁹ Sergey Banevich. Personal interview.

⁵⁰ See: <http://www.apologetika.ru/win/index.php3?razd=1&id1=41> (accessed: 4 July 2012)

⁵¹ Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity*, Op.cit., 79-80.

⁵² Heretz, *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵³ ‘Old Believers’, *Staroverie*, is a collective term for various religious movements within Russian society that existed since 1666/1667 when some religious people chose to reject and publicly denounce all the innovations and ecclesiastical reforms introduced by Patriarch Nikon. Old Believers distrusted State power and the episcopate, and insisted on people’s right to arrange their own spiritual life. They sought to defend and preserve the purity of the Orthodox faith, embodied in the Old Russian rituals and although they were anathematised by the state Church, Old Believers aspired to preserve the purity of individual beliefs and faith. In 1971 the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church recognised the full validity of the old rites.

Old Believers.⁵⁴ Although Ustvolskaya claimed never to have quoted any musical sources in her composition, Kats points out a quotation from the *znamenny raspev* in *Composition No.1*.⁵⁵ Originally Byzantine, the tradition of the *znamenny raspev* was an integral part of Russian Medieval Culture, and it remains as such for the Old Believers. Although Old Believers have never used linear notation but special signs - *kryuki* or *znamena* - some of the finest examples of several different types of *znamenny* chant came to us thanks to Nikolay Uspensky.⁵⁶ Uspensky's publication, together with *Musical Culture of Medieval Russia* by Tat'yana Vladyshevskaya,⁵⁷ allow us to see the similarity between the notation of *znamenny raspev* and that of Ustvolskaya's compositions: crotchets and minims are the main note values; an absence of bar lines; the melodic diapason lies within an interval of a third or a fourth; and the notes are grouped in patterns of twos and threes.

The spiritual and religious intent of Ustvolskaya's music remains one of the most discussed topics among scholars: thus, at the International Symposium "Galina Ustvolskaya: New Perspective" (27 May 2011, Amsterdam), Rachel Jeremiah-Foulds, presented a paper entitled "An Esoteric Iconography: Orthodoxy and Devotion in the World of Galina Ustvolskaya", whilst Rokus de Groot (University of Amsterdam) discussed Ustvolskaya's work in the context of the turn to religion in twentieth century new music. Ustvolskaya's repeated claims about the spirituality of her music reinforced by the religious content of her late compositions, contributed to the perception of her music as part of the Russian Medieval tradition where music and other types of art were 'melded together in a single act of worship.'⁵⁸ Although Ustvolskaya was not doctrinally Orthodox, the use of religious subtitles in her *Compositions* and *Symphonies* mirrored the spiritual aspirations of the time and embodied her personal need for finding new

⁵⁴ The similarities between Ustvolskaya's musical language and the tradition of *znamenny raspev* will be investigated in detail in Chapter Six.

⁵⁵ Boris Kats, "Sem' vzglyadov na odno sochinenie" [Seven Glances at One Composition], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 2 (1980): 9-17.

⁵⁶ Nikolay Uspensky, *Obraztsy drevnerusskogo pevcheskogo iskusstva* [Examples of the Ancient Art of Singing] (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1968, 1971).

⁵⁷ Tat'yana Vladyshevskaya, *Muzykal'naya kul'tura drevney Rusi* [The Music Culture of Medieval Russia], (Moscow: Znack, 2006).

⁵⁸ Tat'yana Vladyshevskaya, "On the Links between Music and Icon Painting in Medieval Russia"; William C. Brumfield, Milos M. Velimirovic, eds., *Christianity and the Arts in Russia* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), 15.

fundamental values and beliefs in place of those renounced after the fall of the Soviet Union. A few years of atheism, which in Soviet Russia was itself a form of religion, could not erase the powerful influence of one thousand years of Christianity and the human need for spiritual values.

Chapter Five:

*Music 'bez solntsa': The aesthetic roots of Ustvol'skaya's language as found in the St. Petersburg literary tradition*¹

As claimed by many, Ustvol'skaya's music was brought to life by the composer's inner turmoil rather than stimuli coming from outside, and therefore directly reflected the composer's personality.² She found a unique way of expressing her personal artistic vision in the art that broke with the syntax of perspective and harmony, and relied on the juxtaposition of deep-lying emotions.³ Despite Ustvol'skaya's self image as a unique phenomenon unencumbered by influence,⁴ there are at least seven musical 'genealogical' sources of Ustvol'skaya's compositional language that are evident in all of her compositions. First, her music is rooted in the tradition of Russian folklore and the basic chant of Medieval Russia, *znamenny raspev*; second, it also stems from the early Western polyphonic tradition; third, it has sources in the speech-oriented musical language of Mussorgsky; fourth, the experimental modernism of early Shostakovich is another source for her music; the Eurasian Heritage and its reflection in the music of Stravinsky represents the fifth source; and finally, the sixth and seventh sources, are Mahler's and Bach's musical and aesthetic influence.⁵

Besides these musical sources, a number of cultural and aesthetic influences can also be identified. Among them are Russian literature of the nineteenth century with its

¹ *Muzyka bez solntsa* [Sunless Music] that is how the character of Ustvol'skaya's music can be summarised. The title of the song cycle 'Bez solntsa' by Mussorgsky, words by Golishchev-Kutuzov, is used as a reference.

² In the book *Music as an Obsession*, Olga Gladkova speaks of Ustvol'skaya's music as 'the music of the subconscious' (p.10 and p.29), and claims that Ustvol'skaya's music is a result of subjective internal experiences. Gladkova also claimed that the music's psychological authenticity destroys the perception of it as an art form (p.12). A similar claim was made by Simon Bokman, in *Variations on the Theme: Galina Ustvol'skaya*, trans. Behrendt I., (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 2007). To a student's question about the nature of the music she was working on, Ustvol'skaya replied: 'I am writing (about) myself.' (p.17) Konstantin Bagrenin, and composers Sergey Banevich and Boris Tishchenko, who were Ustvol'skaya's former students, also spoke of the highly personal nature of Ustvol'skaya's music in their interviews.

³ However, at this stage it is important to mention that many characteristics that are often seen as uniquely 'Ustvol'skian', are recognised by music psychologists as typical for composers who are often independent and self-sufficient with regard to perception, condition and behaviour, have high dominance, are bohemian or very radical, highly egocentric, reported to be ungregarious, not talkative, appear to be driven by the inner core of values and are fascinated by opportunities to explore complexities. An apparent tendency towards masculinity is often seen in highly original women. Anthony E. Kemp, *Musical Temperament: Psychology and Personality of Musicians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 195.

⁴ "I live and create in my absolutely unique world; I see, understand, and behave unlike anybody else. I have my world and my music". Galina Ustvol'skaya, interview with Olga Gladkova, in Gladkova, *Music as an Obsession*, 29.

⁵ Only some of these sources will be discussed in detail in the context of this thesis; others are the suggested avenues for future research.

specific Russian *tragism* and intensified psychologism (particularly the works of Gogol and Dostoevsky); and second, the eccentricity, paradox and anti-aesthetic *epatagé* as found in twentieth century art, and particularly in the works of the *oberiuty*.⁶

Ustvolskaya's proclivity for a tragic, 'sunless' worldview that manifests itself in her music cannot be attributed to her as uniquely 'Ustvolskian'. Although Ustvolskaya's art was to a large extent determined by the composer's personal characteristics and events of her life, there is a striking similarity between the experience of hearing Ustvolskaya's music and other types of aesthetic experience, particularly those evoked by Russian literature. Speaking of the 'tragic soul', Marina Frolova-Walker wrote that, ubiquitous as it is in Russian discourse, the 'tragic soul' after all, a creature of literature; Russians, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, have undoubtedly opted for the literary image of their nation and not the musical.⁷ Speaking of Russian literature of the nineteenth century, literary critic Erich Auerbach (1892-1957) stressed the significant influence of Russian writers on the European way of seeing and representing reality. In his opinion, Russians were naturally endowed with the possibility of conceiving everyday things in a serious vein; they introduced a literary category of 'the low' into their aesthetics.⁸ Russian literary realism was characterised by the unqualified, unlimited, and passionate intensity of experiences in the characters portrayed; Russians preserved an immediacy of experience which had become a rare phenomenon in Western civilisation of the nineteenth century, and the pendulum of their vitality, of their actions, thoughts, and emotions seems to oscillate farther than elsewhere in Europe.⁹

The prose of Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoevsky and Gogol largely defined the 'Russian style' for Europeans, and enabled them to discern the essential characteristics of Russians. Another image of Russia, decorative, exotic and barbaric, was presented by Sergey Diaghilev in the *Saisons Russes*, five historical concerts in Paris, 1907, and was largely influenced by the images of terrifying savagery of Asian tribes portrayed by

⁶ Oberiuty, the members of OBERIU, the near-acronym of the 'Association of Real Art', a literary group that existed between 1928-1931. Among the members were Konstantin Vaginov, Nikolay Zabolotsky, Alexander Vvedensky, and Daniil Kharms.

⁷ Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 1.

⁸ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 521.

⁹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, *Ibid.*, 521-524.

Alexander Blok, Andrey Bely and Vladimir Solov'ev in their poems. Since the foundation of Russian national identity was almost exclusively sought in Russian language and literature,¹⁰ I examine the writing of some of the finest representatives of the Russian literary tradition in search of a broader understanding of the cultural and stylistic presupposition that brought to life the Ustvol'skaya phenomenon.

5.1: Nikolay Gogol (1809-1852) and the impact of the Gogolian tradition on the Russian artistic aesthetic

“Gogol is not a human. I consider him to be a Saint.” Sergey Aksakov¹¹

Throughout her life Ustvol'skaya had a special affinity with Gogol's writing. For this reason her lifelong predilection for tragic subject matters can be interpreted as a continuation of the Gogolian literary tradition. Konstantin Bagrenin remembered that in the last years of Ustvol'skaya's life, when her eyesight weakened, she frequently asked him to read a few chapters from *Dead Souls*.¹² Ustvol'skaya believed that no other Russian writer understood the nature of the Russians better than Gogol.¹³ Similar thoughts are expressed by Marina Frolova-Walker: “No-one [but Gogol] managed to embody Romantic philosophising about Russia, its people and its destiny in images so powerfully vivid and poetic.”¹⁴ In an interview with Gladkova, Ustvol'skaya said: “I always preferred Gogol to any other writer. I believe he was not, and still is not, truly understood and appreciated as a writer.”¹⁵

Gogol's works, such as *The Government Inspector* and *Dead Souls*, as well as his short stories, began a new era in the history of Russian literature and changed the

¹⁰ Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, Op.cit., 2.

¹¹ Sergey Timofeevich Aksakov, ‘Istoriya moego znakovstva s Gogolem’ [The Story of My Acquaintance with Gogol], vol. 3, *The Complete Works* (Moscow: Pravda, 1966), 375. A similar view on Ustvol'skaya's music was expressed by a doctor friend of Bagrenin, who, according to him, said: “This music is not written by a human being”. From an interview with K. Bagrenin. 31 March 2009, St. Petersburg.

¹² Konstantin Bagrenin, personal interview, 30 March 2008, St. Petersburg.

¹³ Konstantin Bagrenin, personal interview, 30 March 2008, St. Petersburg.

¹⁴ Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, Op.cit., 38.

¹⁵ Olga Gladkova, *Music as an Obsession*, Op.cit., 30.

role that literature played in Russian intellectual life. Vasily Rozanov wrote that the 'lost sense of reality in Russian society began from Gogol, as well as the growing sense of disgust towards reality.'¹⁶ With *The Government Inspector*, Gogol shattered the notion of the theatre-going public of his day of what a comedy is about. He dared not only to show defiance of accepted methods but to introduce subject matters that, under the guise of humour, attacked the very foundation of the Russian State, the officialdom of the Russian bureaucracy, and Russian despotism. Being strictly conservative, Gogol never called for radical revolutionary action against the political system. Instead, he directed his satire and ridicule at symbolic individuals and aimed at exposing their moral decay. Such artistic conception resulted in the detailed delineation of each character and exaggeration of particular features. By forcing people to recognise themselves mirrored in fictional characters and to see the ugliness and profound sorrow of human existence, Gogol performed his artistic duty by holding up a mirror to the world, thus continuing the 'Russian cultural tradition in which writers were seen as moral guardians.'¹⁷

Gogol, as well as Ustvolskaya later, was named as one of the most mystical and enigmatic Russian writers, the artist of inscrutable incomprehensibility.¹⁸ He possessed a certain magnetism in his descriptions of dark, evil mystical forces. Many of Gogol's contemporaries believed that he was possessed by the Devil. In 1914, a writer and philosopher Vasily Rozanov, wrote: "I hate Gogol. All Russian darkness is from him. We are all from Gogol;"¹⁹ and in *Russia and Gogol* (1909): "He [Gogol] is the father of Russian melancholy in literature, that endless yearning which cannot be predicted and from which there is no escape [...] With his troubled soul Gogol spilled sadness, bitterness and self-criticism all over Russia and [...] changed the nature of the Russian soul."²⁰ In *On Understanding* (1886), Rozanov wrote that Gogol was an artist-psychologist, a philosopher even more than a writer, who lived most of his life in

¹⁶ Vasily Rozanov, "Pushkin i Gogol" [Pushkin and Gogol] (1891) http://dugward.ru/library/gogol/rozanov_pushkin_i_gogol.html (assessed: 5 June 2010).

¹⁷ Rosamund Bartlett, ed. *Anton Chekhov: About Love and Other Stories*, (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2004), xix.

¹⁸ Vasily Rozanov, "Rus' i Gogol" [Russia and Gogol], *Russkoe vremya*, 26 April 1909. See: http://dugward.ru/library/gogol/rozanov_rus_i_gogol.html (accessed: 10 January 2010)

¹⁹ Vasily Rozanov, "Mimoletnoe" [Miscellaneous Works], 1914, in *Sobranie sochineny* [Collection of Works], ed. A.N. Nikol'yukina, (Moscow: Respublika, 1994).

²⁰ Rozanov, "Rus' i Gogol", Op.cit.

isolation and, as a result, created a collection of human types. The main pathos of Gogol's creativity lay in his great pity for humanity.²¹

Gogol's short stories demonstrate the Russian predilection towards spiritual searching which, as with some illnesses, cannot be cured. Despite his continuous search for beauty, Gogol created a collection of *mordy i rozhi* [ugly, animal-like faces], which could be interpreted either as a result of his personal spiritual abnormality, or his artistic desire to improve humanity by forcing people to see the worst side of themselves. Gogol saw darkness and evil at the core of the Russian soul, and believed that spiritual salvation could only be found in the Russian Orthodox religion. Towards the end of his life Gogol became very religious, and saw his writing as a form of spiritual cleansing.

The parallels between Ustvol'skaya and Gogol are seen in the similarity of the subject matter, the choice of expressive tools, and in the intensity with which each individual character is portrayed. Many subjects and philosophical ideas raised by Gogol in his works were directly relevant to the atmosphere of Soviet Russia, and therefore also to Ustvol'skaya, whose music was referred to by some as a 'musical equivalent of literary text':²²

1. In 'The Portrait' from *The Petersburg Stories*, originally published in 1835 in *Arabesques*, Gogol focused his attention on an artist who relinquished his artistic beliefs in exchange for a place in society, and portrayed the tragic outcome. Although the idea of 'selling one's soul' was not new,²³ Gogol's story raised many important philosophical and aesthetic issues that were relevant to Soviet artists during the Stalinist and post-Stalinist epoch. I believe that Gogol's aesthetic postulates influenced Ustvol'skaya's creativity and determined her artistic position as an independent artist. She too had her share of compromises ('Soviet-style' compositions) that ensured her a secure teaching positions and a place in the Composers' Union.

²¹ Vasily Rozanov, *O ponimanii* [On Understanding], (Moscow: Nauka, 1994).

²² On many occasions Sergey Banevich referred to Ustvol'skaya's music as a musical novel – *muzykal'ny roman*. Personal interview, 26 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

²³ The classic German legend about Faustus, who makes a pact with the Devil in exchange for youth and knowledge, originates from the sixteenth century.

2. Creativity and madness. This truly Romantic concept, popular throughout the nineteenth century, dominates Gogol's *The Petersburg Stories*. Romantics established the analogy between artistic insanity and artistic fanaticism, seeing the latter as an expression of the transcendental spiritual state. Insanity was often understood as a human reaction to the unfairness that dominated the world, and was seen by Romantics as a form of prophecy that enables them to see the eternal Truth. In Gogol's stories, the insanity of the world, where everything is a dream and an illusion, is presented as a norm of human existence. Gogol created unrealistic settings and endowed his characters with phantasmagorical characteristics. By doing so, he communicated his belief that all false realities must be destroyed for the eternal Truth to be seen. The human mind must be freed from all inhibitions to perceive the Truth that can manifest itself in the most unexpected forms, and the insanity of Nature that creates chaos in human life and leads to illness of the soul, is indeed a sign of approaching the Apocalypse. By portraying the insanity of Nature through human deformity and affliction, Gogol wanted to presage the 'grand finale' of Humanity.²⁴ A similar 'message' can be heard in Ustvolskaya's compositions, particularly in those written during the 1970s-1990s: unusual instrumental combinations and sonorities, exaggerated dynamics and performance instructions are the manifestation of deformity and abnormality of the world as it was seen by Ustvolskaya.

3. The fate of a 'little man.' A 'madman' in Gogol's stories is usually an ordinary man whose life gets transformed as a result of an unexpected event, which leads to the re-evaluation of all habitual norms and values. In their search for spiritual enlightenment, Gogol's characters go through deep physical and emotional torments, and in the apogee of insanity find their unspoiled nature. As with Gogol's characters, Ustvolskaya's music offers a personal account of the experiences of an ordinary person living under the terror of the Soviet regime. Thus, the animal-like growl of a man in Ustvolskaya's *Symphony No. 2* is the musical equivalent of the cry of a madman in Gogol's stories. The state of insanity allows an ordinary 'little man' to go beyond the boundaries of everyday reality and reunites him with universal Truth.

²⁴ V.M. Markovich, ed., "Bezumie i norma v 'Peterburgskikh povestyakh' Gogolya" [Madness and Normality in 'The Petersburg Stories' by Gogol]. Preface to Nikolay Gogol, *Zapiski sumasshedshego* [The Notes of a Mad Man], (St. Petersburg: Azbuka-Klassika, 2006), 28.

4. The world as seen by a 'little man'. Another aspect of Ustvolskaya's music that demonstrates an affinity with Gogol is the predominantly tragic perception of the universe through the eyes of an ordinary 'little man', who is unable either to reconcile a dream with reality or to change that reality.²⁵ Gogol's 'little man' possesses a vast spiritual potential and, even if by means of insanity, is capable of finding spiritual salvation. Many of Gogol's contemporaries, Dostoevsky among others, commented on the excruciating quality of Gogol's writing, with its deep *tragizm* and awareness of the catastrophic finale that awaits Humanity. *The Petersburg Stories* are full of 'an endless vibration of meanings, and reading them can become a torture.'²⁶ Listening to and performing Ustvolskaya's compositions evokes similar associations.²⁷ Ustvolskaya, as well as her many contemporaries (a tragic world perception was very typical for Soviet intelligentsia) and predecessors, including Gogol, Dostoevsky and Chekhov, saw her artistic mission in bringing people closer to realising the truth about themselves with the view of saving humanity.²⁸ Judging by the apocalyptic images in Gogol's texts and Ustvolskaya's late *Compositions* and *Symphonies*, both artists reached such realisation towards the end of their lives, and that notion affected their art by turning it into highly realistic and somewhat apocalyptic experiences for readers, performers, and listeners.

5.2: Gogol and Ustvolskaya: specific characteristics and similarities of language

In *The Craft of Gogol*, Andrey Bely examined significant characteristics of Gogol's poetic style and language, many of which are similar to Ustvolskaya's musical language.²⁹ First, Bely recognised short phrases as the building stones of Gogol's prose:

²⁵ Many decades later, a sculptor, Louise Bourgeois, will say in an interview with Pat Steir ('Mortal Elements', Artforum, Summer, 1993): "If the artist cannot deal with everyday reality, he will retreat into his unconscious and feel at ease there, limited as it is, and frightened sometimes." As seen by many, including the author of the thesis, Ustvolskaya's music was *muzyka podsoznaniya* [the music of the unconscious mind].

²⁶ Vladimir Markovich, *Peterburgskie povesti Gogolya* [The Petersburg Stories of Gogol], (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1989).

²⁷ The experience of performing and listening to Ustvolskaya's compositions will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

²⁸ The messages expressed in the texts used in Ustvolskaya's *Symphonies* and *Compositions* clearly demonstrate such intention.

²⁹ Andrey Bely, *Masterstvo Gogolya* [The Craft of Gogol], (Moscow, Leningrad: OGIZ, 1934) <http://feb-web.ru/feb/gogol/critics/mgb/mgb-001-.htm> (accessed: 5 January 2008).

Gogol, even before experiencing the influence of Pushkin's prose, had developed a predilection for short, meaningful and perfectly structured phrases with which he '*b'et kak molotom*' [hits as if with a hammer]; his short phrase is '*szhata kak v kulak*' [is clenched as if in a fist] in anticipation of a further development. Gogol's long sentences are built of such short, intensely meaningful phrases, separated by a very individual type of punctuation. Ustvolskaya also created her musical 'speech' from short melodic motifs. Second, Gogol's text is characterised by the abundance of hyperbole. Likewise, a propensity for exaggeration of various aspects of musical text (i.e. dynamics, instrumental tessitura) characterises Ustvolskaya's musical text. Third, the use of individual vocabulary and unorthodox grammatical structures characterise both Gogol and Ustvolskaya. Bely wrote that Gogol's pool of nouns is infinite; he 'brews' his own language, and his use of grammar cannot be justified by any rules.³⁰ A detailed analysis of Ustvolskaya's musical and rhythmic idioms shows that she also invented many of the modes used in her compositions. Fourth, the frequent omission of syllables in words, which results in the creation of a new vocabulary, is often found in Gogol's texts. Ustvolskaya did something similar by repeating a musical phrase whilst slightly shortening or elongating it (for instance, a pattern of 2-3-2 crotchets when repeated appears as 2-2-3, or 3-2-2).³¹ Fifth, irregular accentuation was one of the main characteristics of Gogol's poetic rhythm. Bely claimed that such irregularity of metre and rhythm in Gogol's prose originates from the tradition of Russian folklore. The same can be said about Ustvolskaya's rhythmic structures, which are renowned for their irregularity. Sixth, Bely spoke of the immense expressive significance of rests, silences and pauses in Gogol's poetic language: placed between words, they intensify the meaning of the prose. Ustvolskaya's precise numerical notation of each rest also indicates the importance of silence. Seventh, Gogol demonstrates the frequent use of what Bely calls '*zvukovaya fermata*' [sonic fermata]: its purpose is to draw attention to the most meaningful part of a sentence by weighting it down with an additional word or words. Ustvolskaya's fermatas carry a similar meaning. Another type of 'fermata' used by Gogol, is '*udarnaya fermata*' [accentuated fermata]. Ustvolskaya also liked stressing

³⁰ In Russian: 'Фонд существительных Гоголя неисчерпаем. Гоголь вываривает свой язык. Грамматика [его] не оправдана никакой грамматикой. Грамматика народного языка была именно такой какой её увидел Гоголь'. Ibid., Bely, *Masterstvo Gogolya*.

³¹ Numerous examples can be found in the *Trio*, *Violin Sonata* and *Grand Duet* performed as part of the PhD recital.

or elongating a particular note in a phrase to maximise the melodic expressiveness.³² Frequent rhythmic repetitions also characterise Gogol's writing: he uses repetitions as a contrapuntal figure (Bely stresses the musical origin of this 'tool') to intensify the speech. For Gogol, the repetition is inseparable from the rhythm of his prose. Ustvolskaya's proclivity for repetition has been discussed. Bely commented on a particular type of *melodism* in Gogol's prose achieved by repetition of particular elements, which resembles the melodic intervals of a third, fourth and fifth. Ustvolskaya's love for repetition of melodic elements is manifested in every one of her compositions. Speaking of the particular sonority of Gogol's prose, Bely stresses the importance of *zvukovye* [sonic] repetitions; a repetition of a vowel or a group of vowels that infuse the prose with a specific *melodism*.

Bely spoke of Gogol as a composer of wonderfully orchestrated melodies, and claimed that *zvukopis*³³ gives Gogol's prose a plasticity that neither Tolstoy nor Pushkin possessed.³⁴ The essence of *zvukopis*' lies in the close connection between the initial sound (i.e. physiological acoustics) and metaphor. The concept of *zvukovaya metafora* [sonic metaphor] is another characteristic feature of Gogol's writing: he was a true master of onomatopoeia, hence the immense visual and tangible expressiveness of his texts. The sonic inventiveness of Ustvolskaya's scores is also determined by her search for maximum expression. Another observation of Bely concerned the relationship between sonority and meaning: he wrote that Gogol often sacrifices meaning for the sake of sonority. This can also be applicable to Ustvolskaya. Thus, in her works with religious subtitles the terrifying intensity of musical sonorities makes listeners forget about the actual meaning of the text and its religious connotations. In his prose Gogol often created the effect of conscious 'mismatch' between the form and content that resulted in the invention of new forms and structures. According to Bely, Gogol opened a new era by manifesting the principle of incongruousness; the same can be said about Ustvolskaya's music.

³² Such fermata are found in abundance in *Violin Sonata* and *Grand Duet* performed as part of the PhD recital.

³³ *Zvukopis*: in prosody, the same as a system of sound repetition, specifically selected to create a rustle, whistle, and others.

³⁴ Russian: 'Звукопись придаёт прозе Гоголя ту упругую выпуклость, которой нет ни у Толстого, ни у Пушкина'. Bely, *Masterstvo Gogolya*, Op.cit.

All the above stand to confirm that Ustvolskaya's aesthetic and musical language developed under a strong influence of the Russian literary tradition, particularly its 'Gogolian' branch. Ustvolskaya's music is not purely a musical phenomenon: in her art she attempted, by means of sound, to create what Gogol achieved a century before her by means of words - that is, a new sonic world that enabled the transformation of emotions into physical forms with maximum authenticity.

5.3: Ustvolskaya's 'sunless' aesthetic and the literary influence of Dostoevsky

Although Fedor Dostoevsky was not among Ustvolskaya's favourite writes,³⁵ the influence of his writings on Russian aesthetic and art was profound. Speaking of Dostoevsky, Auerbach wrote: "There is something truly monstrous in Dostoevsky in the change from love to hatred, from humble devotion to animal brutality [...], from pious simplicity to the most cruel cynicism."³⁶ Russian radical passion for everything or nothing as well as the savage, tempestuous, and uncompromising nature of the Russians, manifest themselves through Dostoevsky's characters.³⁷ The Russian philosopher Nikolay Berdyaev (1874-1948) wrote: "After Dostoevsky, the worldview of the Russian intelligentsia became catastrophic. Dostoevsky's writing speaks of the great spiritual potential of the Russians but also shows the illness of their soul, their ability to submerge into darkness and remain there for a long time. The predilection towards an apocalyptic world-view, an implicit drive towards finality, a suspicious and hostile attitude towards the culture of mediocrity - these are the Russian features portrayed by Dostoevsky's characters."³⁸

According to the literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), 'Dostoevsky's major discovery in the realm of the word was the depiction (or rather, re-creation) of the self-developing idea that is inseparable from personality.'³⁹

³⁵ As claimed by Konstantin Bagrenin in an interview. See Appendix E.

³⁶ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Op.cit., 523.

³⁷ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, Ibid., 524.

³⁸ Nikolay Berdyaev, *Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo* [Dostoevsky's World-view], (Prague: YMCA-PRESS, 1923).

³⁹ Caryl Emerson, ed., Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xxxviii.

Dostoevsky's world was profoundly personalised; he perceives and represents every thought as the position of a personality; a special quality of an 'idea-feeling' and 'idea-force' is responsible for the unique peculiarity of the 'idea' in Dostoevsky's creative world.⁴⁰ An 'idea' in Dostoevsky's novels is neither a principle of representation (as in any ordinary novel), nor the leitmotif of representation; it is the *object of representation*.⁴¹ The similar treatment of melodic ideas can be observed in Ustvol'skaya's compositions, hence her musical world is profoundly personalised in a way similar to Dostoevsky's.

Bakhtin claimed that none of Dostoevsky's novels exemplify any evolution of a unified spirit; in fact, there is no evolution, no growth in general, precisely to the degree that there is none in tragedy.⁴² The same can be said about Ustvol'skaya's music: the idea of evolution was foreign to her compositional style;⁴³ her musical ideas neither develop nor evolve, but interact whilst remaining unchanged. Like Dostoevsky, Ustvol'skaya's mode of artistic visualisation was not evolution but coexistence and interaction, often as dramatic juxtaposition (of instruments involved, as well as dynamics, articulation, and other means of expression). As with Dostoevsky's novels which are recognised as 'polyphonic' (Bakhtin), Ustvol'skaya's compositions are polyphonic throughout; both are characterised by 'multi-leveledness' and 'contradictoriness',⁴⁴ as well as a high degree of subjectivity.

Some characteristics of Dostoevsky's heroes, such as self-consciousness and self-awareness as the artistic dominant governing the character,⁴⁵ the predilection towards an apocalyptic worldview, and a suspicious and hostile attitude towards the culture of mediocrity, were exemplified by Ustvol'skaya. Some of Dostoevsky's observations on the nature of the Russian soul help to understand Ustvol'skaya's aesthetic position. Thus, in *Dostoevsky's Worldview*, Berdyaev wrote that the Russians

⁴⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel," in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetic*, ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 10.

⁴¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel," *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴³ Similar though was expressed by the pianist Oleg Malov. Personal interview. 22 July 2006, St. Petersburg.

⁴⁴ Bokman, *Variations on the Theme*, Op.sit., 27.

⁴⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Hero in Dostoevsky's Art," in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetic*, ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 50.

cannot exist in the 'centre' of their soul, in the 'centre' of culture; instead, they strive for finality and transcendentalism; the Russian tendency to revolt and rebel against culture and history, and to overthrow spiritual values, coincides with their religious striving for eternity and spirituality. Ustvolskaya, the person and the artist, exemplified the above characteristics. Dostoevsky in his works frequently portrayed the Russian tendency towards obsession, raging and raving. Yet again, Ustvolskaya exemplified that both in life and music.

One of the main ideas in Dostoevsky's writing concerns the human ability to reach joy and spiritual awakening through suffering (Raskol'nikov and Prince Myshkin, to name but two). This essentially Christian idea manifested itself in Ustvolskaya's personal life and her music. However, if, according to Berdyaev, *sama t'ma u nego, Dostvoevskogo, svetonosna* [Dostoevsky's darkness is 'light-carrying'], Ustvolskaya's music often remains in darkness. If reading Dostoevsky 'burns the soul; it is as if we have been to the other dark worlds, and on our return, everything appears beautiful', listening to Ustvolskaya's music which burns with pain, often hurts the listener.⁴⁶

Dostoevsky established a new type of humanism in Russian literature - tragic humanism.⁴⁷ He was the first Russian writer who openly spoke of suffering and spiritual torment as a means of reaching salvation; Dostoevsky believed in the atoning and reviving power of suffering, and saw life as a form of expiation through suffering. Suffering for him was associated with evil, and evil with freedom; freedom leads to suffering, and that path lies through the darkness over the abyss, through division, and through tragedy.⁴⁸ Ustvolskaya's predilection towards a tragic perception of the world was discussed earlier, and her behaviour in life was referred to as 'Dostoevskian' by Shostakovich (in connection with her relationship with the composer Yury Balkashin).⁴⁹ Ustvolskaya's predilection for extreme forms of expression could also be seen as a typically Russian, 'Dostoevskian' trait.

⁴⁶ Olga Gladkova, "Nepoznannaya Muza Galiny Ustvolskoy" [The Unknown Muse of Galina Ustvolskaya], *Smena*, vol.109 (1994): 7.

⁴⁷ In the article "O 'mnogogolosnosti' Dostoevskogo" [On Dostoevsky's 'Multivoicedness'], Anatoly Lunacharsky spoke of the problems of tragic 'Dostoevskianism'. In *F.M. Dostoevskii v russkoy kritike* [Dostoevsky in Russian Criticism], (Moscow: GIKhL, 1956), 429.

⁴⁸ Berdyaev, 'Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo', Op.cit.

⁴⁹ Shostakovich, letter to Isaak Glikman, dated 3 November 1960. Dmitry Shostakovich, *Pis'ma k drugu* [Letters to a Friend (St. Petersburg: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1993)].

All the above demonstrates the close aesthetic connection between Ustvolskaya's music and the Russian literary tradition of the late nineteenth century; however, Ustvolskaya as an artist was inseparable from Soviet culture and its artistic trends.

5.4: The Association of Real Art (OBERIU) and Ustvolskaya: language connections and aesthetic parallels

In the Soviet era, the Gogolian tradition was continued by a group of writers who belonged to the OBERIU movement. OBERIU was the first literary movement in Soviet Russia that escaped censorship as it did not fit any acceptable standards: it developed on entirely different aesthetic grounds.⁵⁰ The OBERIU aesthetic combined certain characteristics of the Futurist aesthetic and the Formalist approach: the members of OBERIU, called *oberiuty*, believed that the world of art is the only true reality that exists outside the mundane world.⁵¹ Eccentricity, grotesque, paradox and anti-aesthetic *epatagé* were among the main characteristics of the OBERIU movement. The *oberiuty* were often referred to as *literaturnye khuligany* [literary hooligans], and Gogol, with his phantasmagoria and grotesquerie, was perceived as their predecessor.

The illogicality of life, often bordering on cruelty and absurdity, as well as the awareness of the disconnectedness of the world and time forced the *oberiuty* to abandon real life with its practicalities for the sphere of art. At the core of the *oberiuty's* world perception was a new understanding of Time, which depended entirely on the artist's free will. The *oberiuty* turned respectable moral values and acceptable aesthetic views inside out; by breaking traditional stereotypes, they created new metaphorical structures. According to the *oberiuty's* aesthetic, the hero of their time was not a lyrical poet, as in the Romantic era, but a thinker, whose words were as poor as his life, and whose

⁵⁰ Viktor Suslin also claimed that the music of Ustvolskaya was not openly censored in Soviet Russia as it had never been recognised as being avant-garde enough. Viktor Suslin, preface to Ustvolskaya Catalogue, Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, 2007.

⁵¹ In a letter to K.V. Pugacheva, from 16 October 1933, Daniil Kharms wrote: 'Истинное искусство стоит в ряду первой реальности, оно создает мир и является его первым отражением. Оно обязательно реально [...] Нужно ли человеку что-либо помимо жизни и искусства? Я думаю, что нет: больше не нужно ничего, сюда входит всё настоящее.' [True art stands as the first reality; it creates the world and it is the world's first reflection. It is truly real [...] Does a person need anything other than life and art? I do not think so; nothing else is needed as they contain everything that is true]. Trans. E. Nalimova. http://www.klassika.ru/read.html?proza/harms/xarms_letters.txt&page=1 (accessed: 18 February 2011).

behaviour, if seen from the ordinary philistine's point of view, was absurd. The *oberiuty*'s innovations were often seen as an antithesis to traditional cultural values. Thus, the writing of the poet and writer Daniil Kharms (1905-1942), manifested a radical negation of the idea of succession and continuity in culture; for him, the negation of tradition was not only based on literary tradition but on religious and spiritual tradition, which was reinforced by changes that occurred in European consciousness after the First World War.⁵²

In spite of their attempt to turn life into an art form and to renovate prosaic 'tools', the *oberiuty* often used the style of classic economy and simplicity. Thus, in 1936 Kharms declared Mozart and Pushkin as his artistic models, and in the late 1930s, Kharms together with his fellow-*oberiut*, Alexander Vvedensky (1904-1941), became children's writers while continuing his experiments with OBERIU-type devices.⁵³ Many of Ustvolskaya's stylistic characteristics resemble those of the *oberiuty*.⁵⁴

The paradoxical genre of the 'prose poem' first developed by the French poet, Charles Baudelaire, attracted an extensive interest among Russian writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Ivan Turgenev in his *Poems in Prose*, Fedor Sologub in *Little Fairy Tales*, Aleksey Remizov in *Dreams and Pre-dreams*, Vasily Kandinsky in his prose poems, and Daniil Kharms in his absurdist minimalist stories, such as *Incidents*, gave this literary form a new meaning. The miniature prose poem, as a subversive form that challenges traditional understanding of poetry and narrative prose, was the literary phenomenon of the twentieth century closest to Ustvolskaya's musical art. Her *Twelve Piano Preludes* are perfect examples of musical 'prose poems'.

Ustvolskaya's use of religious texts in the *Symphonies* and *Compositions* of the 1970s-1980s can also be seen as continuation of the St. Petersburg tradition of storytelling through religious subtext.⁵⁵ Kharms' use of what he called the 'poetics of extremism' is another aspect which welcomes parallels with Ustvolskaya: Kharms believed that verbosity was the mother of mediocrity, and instead of verbal eloquence,

⁵² Mikhail Yampolsky, *Bespamyatstvo kak istok: chitaya Kharmsa* [Forgetfulness as a Source. On Reading Kharms], (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe obozrenie, 1998).

⁵³ Mikhail Yampolsky, *Bespamyatstvo kak istok: chitaya Kharmsa*, Ibid., Preface.

⁵⁴ Oleg Malov was the first to point out the similarity between Ustvolskaya and *oberiuty*. Personal interview, 22 October 2007. It was also mentioned by the composer Alexander Knaifel, personal interview, 24 October 2007.

⁵⁵ It is worth remembering that Gogol, Dostoevsky, Kharms and Ustvolskaya lived and worked in St. Petersburg for most of their lives. More on St. Petersburg's influence in Chapter Five. See below.

he chose ascetic starkness and verbal minimalism; in his prose he offered skeletal terseness in stark contrast to comprehensive 'technicoloured vacuousness'. One of the frequently noted features of Kharms's extremism lies in his uncompromising quest for the means of expression that undermine his own stories or facilitate their self-destruction: "Kharms turned a starkly surgical glance on the extraordinary world of Stalin's Russia, passing sardonic and despairing comment on the period in which he lived, and Kharms's recurrent obsessions with all forms of apparently mindless violence and often deliberate negativity, also taken to extremes or toyed with in a bizarre manner, makes reading his works a somewhat disturbing experience."⁵⁶ The similarity with the experience of hearing Ustvolskaya's music is striking. In 1937 Kharms wrote that he is interested in life only in its absurd manifestations. Kharms, the black miniaturist, was an exponent of postmodernism, minimalism and infantilism, and this is exemplified in his works by fragmentation, breakdown and an impulse for self-destruction.⁵⁷ The same could be said in describing Ustvolskaya's music.

Many of the above features that characterise the *oberiuty*, and particularly Kharms, resemble the characteristics of Ustvolskaya's musical language, and demonstrate a certain similarity with Ustvolskaya's aesthetic. For Ustvolskaya, as for the *oberiuty*, art was the only reality, and the world could only be understood and represented by means of artistic logic. Eccentricity, paradoxicalness, and anti-aesthetic *epatagé* were recognised as the main characteristics of both the *oberiuty* and Ustvolskaya. If the *oberiuty* who, by breaking traditional literary stereotypes, created new metaphorical structures, Ustvolskaya too created compositions which did not fit traditional Soviet standards and forms. Akin to minimalist-absurdist Kharms, Ustvolskaya in her art manifested radical negation of the idea of succession and continuity in culture, and was interested in life only in its tragic (or absurd) manifestations. The economy of means of expression and simplicity were the greatest virtues of both the *oberiuty* and Ustvolskaya: the skeletal terseness of Ustvolskaya's music, characterised by fragmentation, can be compared to Kharms' texts. As early as the 1920s, the creators of Literature of the Absurd perceived the primacy of atavistic and

⁵⁶ Neil Cornwell, *The Absurd in Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 163.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

crude force as an integral part of their life which they assimilated into their art.⁵⁸ A similar 'crude atavistic force' is manifested in many of Ustvolskaya's works, especially those written in the 1970s-1990s.

5.5: Ustvolskaya and St. Petersburg: the city and its influence

The music of Ustvolskaya is inseparable from St. Petersburg, the city where elegance and aristocracy coexist with sickliness, hypochondria, neurasthenia, insanity, mysticism, melancholy and fear,⁵⁹ and so it cannot be examined and interpreted outside the context of the city. The Gogolian tragedy of the 'little man' as well as his phantasmagoria and humour, the *oberiuty's* absurdity, and the ascetic starkness of Ustvolskaya's music originate from, and depend on, the *genius loci* of St. Petersburg - the city of the 'half-mad' where the human soul is subjected to the gloomiest, most aggressive and strangest influences.⁶⁰ All her life Ustvolskaya lived in this 'wholly artificial' city (Dostoevsky), that acquired the infamy of being a cursed spot in Russia;⁶¹ the city where the perception of reality is completely distorted, hence the peculiarity and absurdity of Gogol's characters, bizarre images and unorthodox time perception in the *oberiuty's* writing, and the raw power of Ustvolskaya's sonorities.⁶²

Ustvolskaya was born in Petrograd; she spent her formative years and a large part of her compositional career in Leningrad where she found her artistic recognition;

⁵⁸ Levon Hakobian, "'The Nose' and the Fourteenth Symphony: An Affinity of Opposites", in *Shostakovich and His World*, ed. Laurel E. Fay (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 168.

⁵⁹ Bokman, *Variations on the Theme*, Op.cit., 91.

⁶⁰ In "Four Ways of Writing the City: St. Petersburg-Leningrad as a Metaphor in the poetry of Joseph Brodsky," Maija Könönen examines the theme St. Petersburg-Leningrad in the works of Joseph Brodsky by means of exploring four metaphors: St. Petersburg as the 'common place' of the Petersburg Text; St. Petersburg as paradise and/or hell; St. Petersburg as utopia; and St. Petersburg as void. Maija Könönen, "'Four Ways of Writing the City': St. Petersburg-Leningrad as a Metaphor in the poetry of Joseph Brodsky" (PhD diss., Department of Slavonic and Baltic Languages and Literature: Helsinki University Press, 2003).

⁶¹ Hakobian, "'The Nose' and the Fourteenth Symphony: An Affinity of Opposites," *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶² In the commentary to Gogol's *Notes of a Madman*, Maija Könönen argues that the history of the literary tradition of the so-called 'notes of a madman' is tied to the topography of St. Petersburg and to the so-called 'Petersburg Text' in Russian literature. Könönen argues that the city with its spatial and social peculiarities plays an important role in invoking mental disorder in its citizens. Examining the works of Elena Shvarts, a contemporary St. Petersburg poet, whose texts are juxtaposed with the texts of her male predecessors, such as Gogol's *Notes of a Madman*, Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Mandelstam's *The Egyptian Stamp*, Könönen discusses female madness and its relation to a genuine St. Petersburg landscape. In "Me, the Madman - Writing the Self in Russian Diary Fiction," *Scando-Slavica*, vol. 54, issue 1 (October 2008): 79 – 101.

and in the early 1990s she finally embraced her world-wide fame as a St. Petersburg composer. Suslin claimed that the genuine maximalism of Ustvolskaya's music and her personal behaviour was a truly St. Petersburg phenomenon. He also saw Ustvolskaya's specific idealism as being informed by a fanatical determination of a specific, St. Petersburgian kind.⁶³ Kats spoke of the three main 'mottos' which characterise Ustvolskaya's creative method, in which the typical 'Petersburgian' traits can be identified.⁶⁴

Russian writers throughout history spoke about the influence of St. Petersburg on artists' creativity. Thus, Berdyaev wrote that the city, being a city-phantom, created in a spirit of rebellion and wonder, throughout its history shared its tragic fate with the inhabitants; the city's sunless and foggy atmosphere affected the human soul and gave rise to insanity.⁶⁵ Dostoevsky in his novels observed both the St. Petersburg slums and monumental imperial St. Petersburg, emphasising the social contrasts of the city that exist on the boundary between reality and fantastic invention.⁶⁶ Speaking of *Crime and Punishment*, Bakhtin claimed that the role of St. Petersburg in the novel is enormous,⁶⁷ and not only in that novel, since many of Dostoevsky's stories are set in St. Petersburg.⁶⁸ Besides Gogol and Dostoevsky, Alexander Blok, Iosif Brodsky, and Anna Akhmatova adapted and transformed the 'St. Petersburg myth' through their unique artistic vision.⁶⁹ Some features of St. Petersburg, its visual exterior and spiritual atmosphere, which inspired Ustvolskaya's music, are outlined below:

1. The geometry of the city.

⁶³ Viktor Suslin, Preface to the catalogue of Ustvolskaya's works, Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, 1998.

⁶⁴ First, is 'non plus ultra': a striving for the uttermost point, a perfection, a specific form of 'maximalism', that aims at taking any happenings to their extreme form; second, is a desire to simplify, to cut down musical material, number of instruments, length of compositions to bare essentials; third, a constant striving for the essence, the 'core of things'. See: Boris Kats, "Seven Glances at One Composition", *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no. 2 (1980): 9-17.

⁶⁵ Nikolay Berdyaev, 'Astral'ny roman: Razmyshleniya po povodu romana A. Belogo 'Peterburg'" [Astral novel: Meditation on the 'Petersburg' by Andrey Bely], in Nikolay Berdyaev, *Krizis iskusstva* [The Crisis of Art], (Moscow: Interprint, 1990).

⁶⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin about Dostoevsky's 'Petersburg Visions in Verse and Prose', in "Characteristics of Genre", *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetic*, *Ibid.*, 160

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁶⁸ For instance: *Dvoynik* [A Double] (1845/46); *Peterburgskie snovideniya v stikhakh* [St. Petersburg Dreams in Verses] (1860), *Peterburgskaya letopis'* [St. Petersburg Chronology] (1847).

⁶⁹ Sharon Leiter, *Akhmatova's Petersburg* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); A.A. Aleksandrov, *Blok v Peterburge-Petrograde* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1987), Maija Könönen, "Four Ways of Writing the City": St. Petersburg-Leningrad as a Metaphor in the Poetry of Joseph Brodsky", *Op.cit.*

The geometry of St. Petersburg is truly original: large open spaces, squares cut through by long straight avenues - *prospekty* [from from *pro* - 'forward' and *specere* - 'to look']; it is the city of horizontal lines and limited forms. The straight lines of St. Petersburg's streets and prospects are regulated by architecturally dominant feature such as pillars, domes or golden spires, which create an overall harmonious composition. Such straightness of lines does not exist in nature, hence can be interpreted as imaginary or false. Ustvolskaya's compositions, despite the complexity of melodic texture, are clearly and distinctly structured; the texture is 'woven' from individual melodic lines, which, in the manner of St. Petersburg prospects, coexist whilst maintaining their individuality and independence.

2. St. Petersburg: the city of extreme contrasts.

In the city the majestic grandeur of palaces and cathedrals coexists with rundown areas of Dostoevskian St. Petersburg with its gloomy atmosphere of poverty and deprivation. In the same way, Ustvolskaya's music exemplifies juxtaposition on many levels.

3. The city's colour palette and the grandeur of its profile.

Pushkin called St. Petersburg the city that lives in the mist of the hidden sun: the bleak atmosphere created by frequent fogs and lack of sunlight is artificially counterbalanced by the hue of building, churches, and fortresses. The dominating colour here is yellow or gold, which creates an illusion of missing sunlight. Bleakness and the atmosphere of isolation characterise both the city and Ustvolskaya's music. Among the main motifs or myths of St. Petersburg, which penetrate many works by St. Petersburg writers, are those of cold, death, twilight, silence, duality and madness, and the last of these predominates. The grandeur of the imperial ceremonial architecture of St. Petersburg exists as a fundamental contrast to nature with its gloomy sunless sky and severe climate. Just as with the city, Ustvolskaya's music possesses grandeur and terrifying magnificence.

4. The city's architecture presents a mixture of European cultural influences and barbaric Eurasian spirit.⁷⁰ Similarly, Ustvolskaya's music demonstrates a multiplicity of cultural and musical origins: her knowledge of *znamenny raspev* and Russian folklore is evident in works such as the first four piano sonatas and *Twelve Piano Preludes*, while familiarity with twentieth century compositional techniques is demonstrated in her compositions of the 1960s-1980s.⁷¹

5. Dualism. At the core of Ustvolskaya's music lies the idea of dualism which is also inherited from the city since the extraordinary origin of St. Petersburg is in itself a manifestation of dualism. In the Russian literary tradition St. Petersburg is perceived as a city without history since it did not grow 'organically' but emerged as a 'man-made utopia', a result of the vision and willpower of one man – Peter the Great. Throughout history the city was seen either as a triumph over, or a crime against, nature; the ambivalence of the St. Petersburg Myth which caused anomalies and existential fears is fully illustrated in St. Petersburg literature. Ustvolskaya's music continues this tradition. The pathos and tragedy of St. Petersburg were first expressed by Pushkin in *The Bronze Horseman* (1833); later Gogol discovered the mystical dimension of the city in *The Petersburg Stories* (1835), whilst Dostoevsky voiced the idea, that became the essence of the St. Petersburg mythology: a purification through the experience of evil, a moral salvation through suffering. Ustvolskaya's compositions, especially those written in the 1970s-1980s can be seen as a manifestation of the same idea.

The idea of 'a little man', who fought against the grandiose imperial city for the right to be recognised as a unique individual but failed and descended into madness and despair, is also a truly St. Petersburgian. Pushkin was the first writer, who in the *Bronze Horseman* articulated the conflict between the oppressive order of the imperial city and the disorderliness of its inhabitants. The theme of conflict in art did not lose its topicality during the Soviet era: for Ustvolskaya, as for many Soviet artists, art, among

⁷⁰ See: Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: a Biography of the Works through Mavra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Igor Vishnevetsky, *Evraziiskoe ukhlonenie v muzyke 1920-1930kh godov* [Eurasian Bias in the Music of the 1920-1930s], (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2005).

⁷¹ K. Yuzhak, *Observations on the Style of G. Ustvolskaya*, Op.cit., A. Andreev, *Notes on the Style of Galina Ustvolskaya*, Op.cit., T. Samsonova, *The Cluster Technique in the Piano Music of Galina Ustvolskaya*, Op.cit.

other things, became a weapon. They understood that art is not blameless: art can inflict harm.⁷²

⁷² Richard Taruskin, *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009), 173.

Chapter Six:

***The origins of Ustvolskaya's musical language: znamenny raspev,
Shostakovich, Mussorgsky, Stravinsky and Eurasianism***

Many attempts have been made to describe Ustvolskaya's compositional style and to identify its origins. Despite the diversity of views, no definitive consensus has been arrived at. This chapter offers a performer's view on the subject.

6.1: *The tradition of the Old Russian Chant*¹

The visual resemblance between the modern notation of Old Russian chant, *znamenny raspev*, and Ustvolskaya's notation has been commented upon by many,² even though Ustvolskaya herself denied it.³ The *Twelve Piano Preludes* (1953) by Ustvolskaya and *Early Examples of the Russian Art of Singing* by Nikolay Uspensky, were published in Leningrad by *Muzyka* in 1968, and although there is no evidence that Ustvolskaya and Uspensky shared a professional relationship, they belong to the same cultural milieu.⁴ Ustvolskaya's compositions, such as *Piano Sonatas No.2* and *No.3*, and *Twelve Piano Preludes* bear a significant resemblance to *znamenny raspev*: as with *znamenny raspev*, Ustvolskaya's compositions are primarily diatonic. The scale used in *znamenny raspev* traditionally consists of twelve diatonic pitches from a low B to a high D, and, as discussed earlier, Ustvolskaya was very selective in the choice of pitches. In *znamenny raspev*, every group of three pitches form a particular 'soglasiya' [accordance]: low, sombre, bright, and very bright, and Ustvolskaya often grouped melodic pitches in patterns of two and three notes. *Znamenny raspev* develops in a strict conjunct motion, and leaps of fourths or fifths are used only in cadence points;

¹ *Znamenny raspev* (chant) was the creation of medieval Russian singers – choristers, precentors, choir leaders, who were trained on Byzantine chant, and the point of inception probably coincides with the chant which was brought from Byzantium at the time of the Christianisation of Russia in 988 A.D. Alfred J. Swan, "The Znamenny Chant of the Russian Church", part I, *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (April 1940): 232.

² Among them was Kira Yuzhak, "Observations on the Style of G.Ustvolskaya", Op.cit., Boris Katz, "Seven Glances at One Composition", Op.cit., Marian Lee, "Galina Ustvolskaya: The Spiritual World of a Soviet Artist" (PhD diss., Peabody Conservatoire, 2002), Op.cit.

³ Galina Ustvolskaya, *My Thoughts on the Creative Process*. 17 January 1994, UCPS, Basel.

⁴ Nikolay Uspensky, *Obraztsy drevnerusskogo pevcheskogo iskusstva* [Examples of Medieval Russian Singing], (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1968 and 1971).

the same can be said about Ustvol'skaya's *melodism*. The rhythm in *znamenny raspev* mainly consists of crotchets and minims; quavers and semi-quavers are rare; and notation strictly dictates the length of notes and rests. Ustvol'skaya's scores exemplify similar tendencies. In *znamenny raspev* the text dictates the shape of the melody; a feeling of great dignity and reverence is conveyed by limiting the usual number of notes per syllable to two, with a maximum of four. Ustvol'skaya's scores, even without a text, give an impression of being governed by words.

Composers of *znamenny raspev* used a system of eight *glas* derived from the eight Byzantine *echoi*. Melodies in each *glas* were grouped according to the most typical melodic patterns – *popevki*; each of the eight *glas* contained a particular type of *popevki*, and each *glas* conveyed a certain mood or feeling. Although Ustvol'skaya did not strictly follow the system of *glas*, the melodic material of her compositions contains numerous *popevki* and their order remains consistent throughout a composition. The main principal of Ustvol'skaya's melodic organisation is that the themes are based on short formulas of two or three notes, similar to *popevki*, and are usually presented in monodic form; the melodic direction and intervallic structure of *popevki* is of prime importance. The simplicity of Ustvol'skaya's melodic 'theme-formulas', with extensive use of repeated short melodic units combined with rhythmic periodicity, resembles *znamenny raspev*; the absence of bar-lines reinforces the similarity. The melodic variability in Ustvol'skaya's music is created by flexible transitions from one mode to another and the occasional change of the width of interval within the mode or the length of *popevki*.

Alfred J. Swan spoke about *znamenny raspev* as the main source of Russian music, its constant rejuvenating force.⁵ He claimed that Russian folksongs had a great deal to do with the shaping and assimilation of the *znamenny raspev*; at the same time, the heterophonic manner of singing folk-songs has affected the singing of liturgical chants.⁶ Although Ustvol'skaya's melodic material is primarily diatonic, her sonorities are often perceived as chromatic, hence dissonant. Similar observations were made by

⁵ Among the greatest works of Russian music that derive from and are inspired by the liturgical sources Swan names the *Easter Overture* of Rimsky-Korsakov and the *All Night Vigil* of Rachmaninov. Ustvol'skaya's husband mentioned that she greatly admired the *All Night Vigil*. Konstantin Bagrenin, personal interview. 30 March 2008, St. Petersburg.

⁶ Alfred J. Swan, *Russian Music and its Sources in Chant and Folk-Song* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, Inc, 1973), 46.

early Russian theoreticians about the early examples of Russian polyphony that appeared at the end of the sixteenth century. The Russian theoretician, Vladimir Odoevsky (1803-1869), wrote in 1867:

The assumption that parts were ever intended to be sung together, simultaneously, is out of the question, as there is not the slightest coordination in harmony, the parts being completely separate; no human ear could endure a succession of sounds occurring all the while.⁷

Mikhail Brazhnikov⁸ claimed that when correctly read, the music of the *znamenny* 'scores' abounds in harsh sonorities in the form of extended parallel seconds and fifths.⁹ Nikolay Uspensky in *Examples of Medieval Russian Singing* presented examples from the manuscripts dating back to the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which also demonstrated 'harsh sonorities'. Swan commented on the early examples of Russian polyphony as being 'disturbing ones'.¹⁰ The same can be said about Ustvol'skaya's polyphony.

Tat'yana Vladyshevskaya claims that the monumentality and grandeur of medieval Russian music is represented by modest means of expression, such as laconic sonorities and singing in unison, whilst Pavel Florensky in *'Thoughts on the Worship'*, speaks of the specific quality of medieval singing in unison or in octave unison, that awakens feelings that resemble a touch of eternity.¹¹ As with medieval composers, who aspired to simplicity, absence of external effects and unnecessary decorativeness in order to preserve the depth of thoughts and feeling, Ustvol'skaya abandoned any forms of external ornamentation in favour of ascetic sonorities created by means of unisons and pure timbres. As is the case in the Old Russian manuscripts, Ustvol'skaya's scores

⁷ Alfred Swan, *Russian Music and its Sources in Chant and Folk-Song*, Op.cit., 45.

⁸ Brazhnikov's publications were available in Russia in early 1970s-1980s: M.V. Brazhnikov, *Drenverusskaya teoriya muzyki* [Old Russian Modal Theory] (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1972); M.V. Brazhnikov, *Liitsa i fity znamennogo raspeva* ['Faces' and 'Feats' of Znamenny Chant] (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1984).

⁹ Alfred Swan, *Russian Music and its Sources in Chant and Folk-Song*, Op.cit., 45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹ "Nabroski o bogosluzhenii" [Thoughts on the Worship] were written in 1912 and was later included in *Ocherki filosofii kul'ta* [Essays on the Philosophy of Cult] (1918). See: Rev. Pavel Florensky, *Filosofiya kul'ta* [Philosophy of Cult], in Series "Filosofskoe nasledie" [Philosophical Heritage], vol.133 (Moscow: Mysl', 2004), 596. Also see: S. Trubachev, "Muzykal'ny mir P.A. Florenskogo" [The Musical World of P.A. Florensky], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no.9 (1999): 99-103; Pavel Florensky, *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

abound in 'harsh sonorities' created by extended parallel seconds and fifths. However, unlike medieval chants which were largely composed for worship, Ustvol'skaya in her music expressed her personal fears and aspirations using the language that evidently demonstrates a connection with the Russian cultural tradition.

6.2: The speech-orientated musical language of Mussorgsky

In 1959 Arnold Sokhor wrote: "The specific type of Ustvol'skaya's *melodism*, that consists of short, recitative-like motives, resembles vocal monologues from Mussorgsky's vocal cycles 'Sunless' and 'The Nursery'."¹² A decade later, Kats named Mussorgsky among the triad of composers whose influence on Ustvol'skaya is the most perceptible, the other two being Bach and Shostakovich.¹³ Indeed, Mussorgsky's influence on Ustvol'skaya's musical language and her aesthetic views is evident.

First, it is the monological type of *melodism*. Already in *The Marriage* (1868), Mussorgsky's first opera project based on Gogol's play, he demonstrated his passion for setting Russian speech to music; all his other works continued this pursuit of naturalistic word-setting. Mussorgsky's aesthetic credo was neither romantic, nor classical, nor political; he intended it to be scrupulously scientific.¹⁴ The formula of Mussorgsky's artistic *profession de foi* is explained by his view on the task of art: art is a form of communication and not an aim in itself. This principle has defined the whole of his creative activity'.¹⁵ In 1876 Mussorgsky wrote to Vladimir Stasov: "I am working on human speech and have finally found the melody created by it - the recitative, which turns into a melody. I would like to call it a consciously justified melody".¹⁶ Mussorgsky crossbred prose with music, thus creating a new style of Russian music; the prose was

¹² Arnold Sokhor, "Dorogami iskany: Muzyka Galiny Ustvol'skoy" [By Roads of Exploration: The music of Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Muzikal'naya zhizn'* [Musical Life], no.1 (1959): 50.

¹³ Boris Kats, "Seven Glances at One Composition", Op.cit.

¹⁴ Caryl Emerson, *The Life of Musorgsky* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xx.

¹⁵ A fragment of Mussorgsky's letter to Hugo Riemann, as quoted in Caryl Emerson, *The Life of Musorgsky*, Ibid.

¹⁶ Mussorgsky's letter to Stasov, 23 July 1873, in Modest Mussorgsky, *Pis'ma i dokumenty* [Letters and Documents], (Moscow-Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1932).

not the poetic text that had been used before.¹⁷ As with Mussorgsky, whose music was 'a conversation with himself',¹⁸ Ustvol'skaya's art is of a monological type, and it is Mussorgsky's vocal music in particular that inspires parallels with Ustvol'skaya's language.

Mussorgsky drew his inspiration from Russian folklore, its melos and rhythmical variability. The song cycle '*Sunless*' is one of the best examples of Mussorgsky's specific *melodism*.¹⁹ In Mussorgsky's own words, the only feelings he wanted to portray in this cycle were those of loneliness, sadness, and despair. Ustvol'skaya's music on the whole shares many aspects of Mussorgsky's language as seen in the cycle, particularly its notably effaced, pared-down and withdrawn qualities. Like Mussorgsky, Ustvol'skaya excelled at combining 'intuitive' and 'rational' elements of pitch organisation in her works, and the symbolic level of reading Ustvol'skaya's works offers many interpretative possibilities.

Observations on the specific characteristics of Mussorgsky's language in '*Sunless*', invites parallels with Ustvol'skaya:

1. Melodic lines are formed from short, rhythmically very similar, motifs (*popevki*) separated by rests or fermatas ('*In four walls*', No.1);
2. Melodies are constructed using mainly crotchets and quavers – one note for one syllable, akin to *znammeny raspev* discussed earlier ('*In four walls*', No.1; '*Be bored*', No.4; '*Elegy*', No.5; '*On the river*', No.6). Mussorgsky uses regular pulsation within irregular time-signature which results in 'non-metric' melodic texture. Ustvol'skaya in the *Violin Sonata* uses a similar device, turning the work into a 'non-metric' composition with unified metre of 1/4;
3. Irregular length of melodic phrases, constructed from short melodic 'units'-*popevki*. Ustvol'skaya's melodism is of a similar nature;

¹⁷ Solomon Volkov, *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 79.

¹⁸ Emerson, *The Life of Musorgsky*, Op.cit., xxii.

¹⁹ The song cycle '*Sunless*' (1874), on the text of the impoverished Count, Arseny Arkad'evich Golenishchev-Kutuzov (1848-1913). The cycle is often recognised as Mussorgsky's most intimate and directly personal as well as being the 'anomalous member of his oeuvre'. In Simon Perry, 'A voice Unknown: Undercurrents in Mussorgsky's '*Sunless*'', *Nineteenth Century Music*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2004): 15-49. The Mussorgsky - Golenishchev-Kutuzov collaboration later produced yet another masterpiece, *Songs and Dances of Death* (1875-77), one of the most radical experiments in musical realism and probably the bleakest work in the song repertoire.

4. Predilection for stepwise diatonic movement within narrow diapason; occasional intervallic leaps are used for expressive purposes;

5. Frequent use of intervals such as descending minor seconds and minor thirds; melodies often fluctuate between two notes within interval of a minor second or third ('Over the river', No.6; 'Elegy', No.5; 'In four walls', No.1 – in the piano part; 'The noisy, busy day is over', No. 3 - in the vocal part);

6. Melodies are predominantly diatonic, using a variety of modes;

7. Frequent use of repetition, especially at the end of phrases;

8. Accompaniment is either very sparse, or employs one type of figuration which repeats throughout the song;

9. Irregularity of metric and rhythmic structures which originate from the tradition of Russian folklore;

10. Important role of a 5/4 metre;

Even though Ustvolskaya stopped using time signatures in 1949, she often used a 3+2 structure in melodic phrases (*Sonata for Violin and Piano*; *Grand Duet*). The 5/4 time signature has long been recognised as a specifically Russian innovation, which originates from the Russian folklore. The composer Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857), was among the first to use the 5/4 time signature in his works. 'Pyatislozhnik' is typical for Russian phraseological structures: *dob-ry mo-lo-dets*; *kras-na de-vi-tsa*; *Lel' ta-inst-venny*; *Ty po-mi-luy nas*; *Sve-tik Sa-vish-na*; *so-kol yas-nen'-ky*.²⁰ One of the earliest examples of *pyatislozhnik* is the chorus from the third act of the opera *A Life for the Tsar*; others can be found in the music of Borodin, Mussorgsky, Stravinsky (the chorus 'Baslovi Bozha, Baslovi Bozha' from *Les Noces*).

The predominance of rhythmic and metric irregularity shows that Mussorgsky anticipated some of the greatest innovations of the twentieth century music, although it originates from medieval Russian chants – *znamenny raspev*, *protyazhnaya* songs, Russian Orthodox prayers, texts of Russian *bylina* and epic poetry. For Mussorgsky, the Russian language became the main stimulus for exploring rhythmic and melodic irregularity, of which his songs and song cycles offer many examples. For instance, in *With Nanny* No.1, from 'The Nursery' (1868/1872), the first two phrases consist of

²⁰ Russian: доб-рый мо-ло-дец; кра-сна де-ви-ца; Лель та-инст-ве-нный; Ты по-ми-луй нас; Светик Са-виш-на; сокол яс-нень-кий.

seven regular crotchets which accommodate two verbal phrases: *rass-ka-zhi mne, nya-nyush-ka, rass-ka-zhi mne mi-la-ya* [Tell me, Nanny; Tell me, Dear]; similar structures are used in songs such as *Seminarist* and *Svetik Savishna*. This particular 'tool' of imitating speech whilst combining regular pulsation with an irregular accentuation was used at the beginning of the twentieth century by Prokofiev, Stravinsky and Shostakovich as well as Bartók and Janáček. Changeability of time-signature in the music of Mussorgsky is often connected with variability of length of phrases and melodic motifs. For instance, in the chorus *Raduisya, lyud, Veselisya, lyud!* [Rejoice, Folks! Be Happy, Folks!], from the prologue to *Boris Godunov*, the opening phrase is repeated *ostinato*, whilst its length varies: 5 bars - 4 ½ bars - 3 ½ bars – 4 ½ bars. It is therefore evident that Ustvol'skaya did not just invent her 'unique' time signature 1/4; she had predecessors, first, in the tradition of Russian folklore and *znamenny raspev*, and second, in Mussorgsky.

The composer Arthur Lourie (1892-1966) in '*On Mussorgsky*'²¹ attempted to explain the essence of Mussorgsky's innovations, and his observations support my view of Mussorgsky as one of Ustvol'skaya's predecessors. Lourie claimed that in a broad historic context, the name of Mussorgsky is closely associated with our understanding of the Russian myth; this myth is about Russia itself, the fate of Russian people, an opposition of East to West, Europe to Asia, Christianity to paganism, and Orthodoxy to Socialism. Mussorgsky belonged to the family of Russian thinkers,²² and, according to Lourie, he cannot be comprehended logically as he was as ontological as Russia itself. His terrifying *yurodstvo*²³ was the only way of protecting himself from life and people; only a few Russian artists, who were fighting demons, were free from *yurodstvo*.²⁴ Lourie also claimed that national mysticism and nationalism were among the main characteristics of Mussorgsky's art: he understood that the secret of Russia lies in the fact that there is no conflict between the physical and spiritual expression of its power.²⁵

²¹ Quoted in: Igor Vishnevetsky, *Evrasiiskoe ukhlonenie v muzyke 1920-1930kh godov* [Eurasian Bias in the Music of the 1920-1930s], (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoye Obozrenie, 2005), 282.

²² Igor Vishnevetsky, *Ibid.*, 283.

²³ *Yurodstvo*, derived from 'yurodivy' – a Christ's fool. In Russian Orthodoxy, *yurodivye* are the wandering monks and religious devotees, who by means of imaginary folly unmask external worldly values, while bringing reproaches and insults upon themselves.

²⁴ Arthur Lourie as quoted in Igor Vishnevetsky, *Evrasiiskoe ukhlonenie v muzyke 1920-1930kh godov*, *Ibid.*, 284.

²⁵ Igor Vishnevetsky, *Ibid.*, 284.

Mysticism and spirituality were often named as important features of Ustvol'skaya's music, and although the idea of 'nationalism' was foreign to her, the connection between her music, Russian folklore and *znamenny raspev* proves its national belonging.

Igor Vishnevetsky wrote that in the context of the world's music, Mussorgsky occupied a unique place because of his organic link with Russia: if Mikhail Glinka intended for Russia to be brought closer to European culture, Mussorgsky perceived Russian culture as an independent phenomenon that developed from Russian folklore. As a result, Mussorgsky's name became symbolic in a formation of tradition of national independence within a cultural context.²⁶ I believe that Ustvol'skaya continued this tradition.

The ascetic severity and almost monastic scantiness of Mussorgsky's sonorities also resemble those of Ustvol'skaya.²⁷ A very personal perception of truth was the main artistic criterion for Mussorgsky; the idea of art for art's sake was foreign to him. For Mussorgsky, as well as for Dostoevsky and Gogol, a real human being and his soul were the main subjects of art.²⁸ The focus of Ustvol'skaya's music is also of a very personal nature: it was confirmed by the composer herself, who said that all her life she was writing about herself [*Ya pishu sebya*].

Mussorgsky was renowned for breaking down the rational foundation of musical thinking, and his compositional 'novelties' gave food to legends about his musical illiteracy and ignorance.²⁹ Mussorgsky's scores shocked his fellow-composers and were 'corrected' in the process of posthumous publication by Rimsky-Korsakov. Ustvol'skaya experienced similar treatment, as her scores were amended for the convenience of the Soviet publishers and performers.³⁰ Although Ustvol'skaya was never accused of musical illiteracy, her compositional style exemplified by the works written in the 1950s were perceived by her contemporaries as truly original. Vishnevetsky wrote that Mussorgsky was not influenced by the musical dialectics that dominated at the time. Instead, he chose to remain on the periphery of contemporary art, which allowed him to start

²⁶ Igor Vishnevetsky, *Ibid.*, 286.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 287.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 287.

²⁹ Arthur Lourié, quoted in Vishnevetsky, *Evrasiiskoe ukhlonenie v muzyke 1920-1930kh godov*, *Ibid.*, 286.

³⁰ Thus, Ustvol'skaya's *Sonata for Violin and Piano* and *Symphony No. 1* acquired bar-lines, and flats were changed to their enharmonic equivalents in the former.

creating from zero.³¹ Although Ustvol'skaya was well aware of the musical trends of her time, and contributed to Soviet music with many compositions, in her 'spiritual' works she chose to remain on the periphery in order to preserve her artistic individuality.

Mussorgsky's artistic credo resembled that of Ustvol'skaya: they both valued truth above all.³² During his creative life Mussorgsky expanded the ethical boundaries of musical realism; he understood that true artistic expression does not tolerate biased forms, hence his creative search followed the model offered by Russian folklore in the direction of simplification of musical forms and maximisation of expressiveness of language. Ustvol'skaya's creative findings were inspired by similar sources. Mussorgsky with his unorthodox use of tonality reliant upon Russian folkloristic tradition, began the process of moving Russian music away from traditional Western forms of expression - a process that was continued by composers such as Stravinsky and later, Ustvol'skaya.

6.3: The Eurasian Heritage and Stravinsky

Levon Hakobian claimed that Ustvol'skaya's new simplicity had its origin in some fervent, almost barbaric religion, and that religion was not of a Western European origin.³³ That observation encouraged me to explore a cultural phenomenon that affected many Russian artists throughout history, that is Eurasianism.

As early as the 1860s, the Russian art historian and music critic Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906), pointed out the fact that much of Russian folk culture had antecedents in the East.³⁴ His main argument was based on the fact that for over 250 years Russia was ruled by the Mongol Khans, and so the Eastern influence is deeply rooted in the Russian psyche, culture and customs. According to Stasov's studies of the Russian peasant tradition, shamanistic cults of the Mongol tribes were still incorporated in the peasants' belief system. As a result, Russian folk culture turned out to be a complex mix of Asian pagan and Christian cultural elements. Stasov, a good friend of Mussorgsky, became one

³¹ Igor Vishnevetsky, *Op.cit.*, 287.

³² "Truth, no matter how salty – this is my model; this is where I would not be afraid to go astray". Mussorgsky, from a letter to Vladimir Stasov, 7 August 1875. Quoted in Bokman, *Variation on the Theme*, *Op.cit.*, 42.

³³ Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age, 1917-1987* (Stockholm: Melos Music Literature, 1998), 243

³⁴ Quoted in Igor Vishnevetsky, *Evrasiiskoe uklonenie*, *Op.cit.*, 31.

of the most influential figures in the popularisation of Russian oriental musical style in the nineteenth century, and his findings initiated a shift in Russian cultural attitude.

Stasov's ideas were developed in the 1920s by a group of Russian intellectuals living abroad, known as Eurasianists.³⁵ They were disillusioned by Western culture and renamed their Homeland as a unique 'Turanian' (i.e. Eurasian) culture of the Asiatic steppe. The Eurasianists believed that Russian people are neither European nor Asiatic: "Merging with the native element of culture and life which surrounds us, we are unabashed to declare ourselves Eurasians".³⁶ The Eurasianists believed that the cultural westernisation of Peter the Great led to a misperception of the Russian identity, from which many of the Russia's troubles originate.³⁷ Prince Trubetskoy claimed that the Eastern psyche ('Turanian' psychology) manifests itself in the Russian character: its tendency towards contemplation, fatalistic attitudes, love of abstract symmetry and universal laws, and emphasis on religious ritual.³⁸ According to Trubetskoy, even Russian Orthodoxy was essentially Asiatic in its psychological structure, and its dependence on the unity between ritual, life, and art.

Igor Stravinsky, whom Ustvol'skaya named among her favourite composers, was greatly influenced by Eurasianism, and many 'Turanian' ideas and characteristics can be found in his works.³⁹ Stravinsky's rhythms in *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) and *Les Noces* (1923) bring associations with the pre-civilised archaic epoch, and therefore differ from the rational concept of Western musical form and its dynamic psychologism. Ustvol'skaya's treatment of rhythm brings similar associations. The phenomenon of *dinamicheskaya statika* [dynamic statics], or a prolonged explosion, characterises the music of both composers.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Alexander Scriabin's tonal revolution gave yet another new expressive dimension to Russian music. For Scriabin, a mystical

³⁵ Igor Stravinsky, Lev Karsavin, Petr Souvchinsky, Prince Nikolay Trubetskoy and the religious thinker Father George Florovsky were among the group's members.

³⁶ Petr Suvchinsky, ed., *Iskhod k vostoku* [Exodus to the East], (Sofia: Rossiysko-Bolgarskoe Knigoizdatel'stvo, 1921)

³⁷ Charles, J. Halperin, "Russia and the Steppe: George Vernadsky and Eurasianism", in *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 36 (1985): 93.

³⁸ Ustvol'skaya displayed all of those characteristics both in life and in music.

³⁹ Richard Taruskin investigates these ideas and characteristics in Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: a Biography of the Works through Mavra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Nietzschean, influenced by Madame Blavatsky's theosophical teachings, the state of ecstasy became a key component of music. He believed that it was his mission to prepare humanity for the reconciliation between Man and Divinity by means of musical revelation. Although Ustvolskaya never openly expressed her desire to change the fate of humanity, she demonstrated a consuming egomania, similar to that of Scriabin. Ustvolskaya's ability to reach an immense intensity, to which some Russian musicologists refer as *istovost'* [fervour] in her works, is akin to the state of ecstasy in Scriabin's music. In 1922 Ivan Lapshin wrote: "His [Scriabin's] intuition is directed towards inner exaltation; his ecstasies are almost always ugly; they are not happy visions but tortuous frenzies."⁴⁰ The emotional intensity of Ustvolskaya's *Compositions* and late *Symphonies* invites similar associations. Continuing the artistic innovations of Stravinsky and Scriabin, Ustvolskaya gave music a different dimension: it became a form of ritual where the physical pain caused by its performance as well as the aural discomfort caused by listening, became an expression of reaching the Divinity.

Such interpretation of art was in tune with the findings of Eurasionists, who believed that *umoperemena* [a revolution in the mind] through music should re-establish the balance between physical, spiritual, and intellectual forms of expression. Eurasionists encouraged artists to search for ways of releasing pre-rational impulses, and to create a bias of ecstatic self-absorption with purely natural biological rhythms and communicative melodic speech in one unified act.⁴¹ Such a creative act was seen as a '*proryv ot telesnosti k umozreniyu*' [breakthrough from physicality to human consciousness]. Interpreted in psychoanalytical terms, such revolution in the mind meant giving voice to the unconscious, of which Ustvolskaya's music is a fine example. The Eurasian musical *mirochuvstvovanie* [the emotional perception of the world] was an anti-modernist phenomenon, which simultaneously contained and rejected modernism, since modernism is fixated on consciousness; musical Eurasionism understood consciousness as a combination of intellectual and physical functions. Thus, Eurasionism was the *mirochuvstvovanie* that lies beyond the boundaries of art.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ivan Lapshin, *Zavetnye dumy Skriabina* [Scriabin's Intimate Thoughts], (Petrograd: Mysl', 1922).

⁴¹ Vishnevetsky, *Evraziiskoe ukлонenie*, Op.cit., 48.

⁴² Vishnevetsky, *Ibid.*, 50.

Composers like Stravinsky and Prokofiev saw the purpose of such revolutionary *umoperemena* in finding alternatives to the cultural modernisation that was happening in Western music. By returning to Russian traditional roots, they aspired to reinforce the sense of Russian identity. Together with Eurasionists they saw the conflict which existed between Russian and Western modernism. Thus, according to Lourie, Stravinsky clearly occupied an opposite pole to Schoenberg, whose music was a manifestation of his eccentric 'self', and aimed at shocking the public. Stravinsky himself claimed that his music is neither 'futurist' nor 'passé-ist', but the music of Today. Continuing Mussorgsky's tradition, Stravinsky contributed to the process of liberating Russian music from Western influences by returning it to its pre-history in a form of modernised archaism or stylised primitivism. Ustvolskaya also contributed to that process.

It is arguable whether Ustvolskaya's music is closer to a representation of *superego* [*sverkh -Ya*], an intensely personalised attitude (Sriabin's aesthetic) or 'not I' [*ne Ya*], a non-personal, collective perspective (Stravinsky's aesthetic). Stravinsky in *Les Noces* and *Le Sacre du Printemps* created a collective subject which represented a barbaric liberation from Western European canons; he denied any personification, and so the music became a representation of a *khorovoye deistvo* [mass act] – the idea which was central for Symbolism, Slavophilism and Medieval Russian art. Ritualism, which manifests itself in *Les Noces* and *Le Sacre du Printemps*, was opposed to individualism, and therefore by referring to Ustvolskaya's music as a ritual,⁴³ we deny its sense of personalised emotion. I believe that Ustvolskaya responded to the ritualistic stimuli of Stravinsky's music whilst still expressing highly personal thoughts and feelings.

There are number of stylistic similarities between Ustvolskaya and Stravinsky. First, is the strong sense of ritual; the music being non-developmental and symbolic, rather than representational. Second, persistent repetitions of short melodic and rhythmic units are found in the music of both composers. Third, both Stravinsky and Ustvolskaya favoured an unorthodox orchestration where woodwind and brass instruments dominate: already in his early ballets Stravinsky demonstrated an increased interest in the timbre of woodwind instruments. In works such as *The Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and *Mavra*, the woodwind instruments gain a new significance,

⁴³ Anna Gnatenko, "Iskusstvo kak ritual: razmyshleniya o fenomene Galiny Ustvolskoy" [Art as Ritual: Reflection on the Galina Ustvolskaya Phenomenon], *Muzykal'naya akademiya* [Musical Academy], nos.4-5 (1995): 24-32.

whilst in the final version of *Les Noces* (1923) the instrumental ensemble is dominated by percussion instruments. Stravinsky also introduced a new instrumental style by replacing an orchestra with a group of solo instruments: *L'Histoire du soldat* (1918), is scored for 7 players, with a narrator; *Ragtime* (1917-1918), is written for 11 instruments. Ustvol'skaya also abandoned full orchestra and even in her symphonies used small instrumental ensembles.

The piano became an integral part of Stravinsky's orchestra and was treated mainly as a percussion instrument: Stravinsky first introduced the piano as a percussion instrument in *Piano Rag Music* and *Les Noces*, and many orchestral scores of his later compositions contain piano. Béla Bartók and Carl Orff also demonstrated such treatment of the piano. As early as 1913, Stravinsky began minimising string sonorities in his scores. Speaking of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, he wrote that he deliberately used a minimal number of string instruments in the score as they are too sensual and too reminiscent of the human voice; instead, he chose the woodwind instruments.⁴⁴ The *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), which, according to Ustvol'skaya herself, was among her most favourite works by Stravinsky, is scored for chorus and orchestra, omitting the violins and violas.

Referring to his *Octet for Wind Instruments* (1922-23, rev.1952), Stravinsky spoke of choosing wind instruments over strings because they seem more apt to render a certain rigidity of form he had in mind. He spoke of the chief element of the *Octet* as the confrontation between different instrumental timbres and registers, and emphasised the significance of the interplay between different densities and volumes of instrumental sonorities. In a similar way to what Ustvol'skaya did in her scores, Stravinsky excludes dynamic nuances between *forte* and *piano* by returning to the *terrassendynamik* [terraced dynamics], a dynamic principle typical of early Baroque music.⁴⁵ Stravinsky's scores show an important role of heterophony, and an extensive use of counterpoint (*Octet for Wind instruments*, 1922-23, rev.1952, being one such example).

The shadow of Bach is evoked by Stravinsky's use of equal note lengths with variable articulation (Ustvol'skaya frequently employed the same 'tool'). Mikhail

⁴⁴ Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinsky: His Life, Works, and Views*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 88.

⁴⁵ Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinsky: His Life, Works, and Views*, Ibid., 89.

Druskin wrote that bar lines, which serve to regulate the metre, are both a support and an obstacle in Stravinsky's scores (Ustvol'skaya goes further, and omits bar lines). The discrepancy between rhythm and metre is often accentuated by use of *ostinato* that does not coincide with the bar lines, but serves as means of generating new energy.⁴⁶ From the early 1930s Stravinsky began using *ostinato* extensively, whilst staying faithful to two-part writing; both devices were greatly favoured by Ustvol'skaya.⁴⁷ Referring to the frequent use of *ostinato* in his *Piano Concerto* (1923-24), Stravinsky spoke of it as 'tractor-music' (which resembles what Oleg Malov once said about the opening to Ustvol'skaya's *Violin Sonata*: "This music is as oppressive as a road-roller").⁴⁸

Already in *Piano Rag-music* Stravinsky abandons bar-lines and time-signature. In the commentary to the *Rag-music*, he said that the rhythm practically does not exist since there are no time signatures or fermatas: instead, there is pulse.⁴⁹ Strict regular pulsation resulted in minimising the performer's initiative and restricting the interpretative possibilities. Ustvol'skaya's text also discouraged any interpretative freedom, and she often advised that her compositions should be performed with a score.⁵⁰ Theodor Adorno spoke of Stravinsky's works as 'music which, in short, identifies with the Aggressor',⁵¹ whilst Oleg Malov claimed that 'Ustvol'skaya's music identifies with the Dictator'.⁵²

Despite the similarities, Ustvol'skaya's aesthetic was in many ways opposed to that of Stravinsky. Thus, Stravinsky believed that 'music is powerless to *express* anything at all.'⁵³ Objectivity, and its ascendance over what he called 'the subjective prism', was Stravinsky's distinct habit of mind, aesthetic and the position he maintained in relation to any musical material.⁵⁴ For Ustvol'skaya, music, above all, concerned

⁴⁶ Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinsky: His Life, Works, and Views*, Ibid., 90.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁸ Oleg Malov. Personal interview. 2 April 2009, St. Petersburg.

⁴⁹ Igor Stravinsky, *Dialogues*, ed. I. Beletsky and. I. Blazhkov (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1971), 267.

⁵⁰ More on performance in Chapter Seven.

⁵¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Selected Essays on Music*, Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie and others (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 555.

⁵² Oleg Malov, personal interview. See Appendix E.

⁵³ Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (London: Marion Boyars, 1975), 3. Stravinsky's italic.

⁵⁴ Craig Ayrey, "Stravinsky in Analysis: the Anglophone Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. J. Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 203.

subjective thoughts and meaning, and their communication. Stravinsky's world-view appeared to be devoid of tragic dimension. Thus, Arnold Whittall wrote that for Stravinsky, 'tragic' implies a state of unknown innocence, a peculiar kind of vulnerability in which hope and optimism are at their most pure.⁵⁵ Ustvol'skaya was at the opposite pole: her world perception was tragic.

Lourie claimed that music for Stravinsky was *ne samoizzhivanie* [not a form of existential self-expression].⁵⁶ Unlike Ustvol'skaya, for whom music was the most essential form of self-expression, Stravinsky believed in absolute, pure music, which was not a representational art.⁵⁷ In this respect, Stravinsky's aesthetic and ideology was seen by some as being in direct contradiction to the Russian spirit,⁵⁸ since Russian music was brought to life not through the professionalism of artists and their theories, but through the organic connection with and belief in the Russian people.⁵⁹ In his early period Stravinsky demonstrated the extensive use of Russian traditional elements: works such as *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911/1947) and *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) drew on Russian folk mythology, used folk themes and melodies inspired by folklore, and employed large orchestras and colourful orchestration in the tradition of Rimsky-Korsakov. Stravinsky's early exposure to the Western culture affected his perception of 'Russianness'. Thus, Alex Ross wrote: "But of course we never think of Stravinsky as a Russian first and foremost; he was the arch-cosmopolitan, the modernist in perpetual exile, a principality unto himself. As Robert Craft, the composer's closest associate, has observed, he [Stravinsky] was a dandy, forever reinventing himself."⁶⁰ Although Ustvol'skaya's music demonstrates a degree of familiarity with the finest examples of Western modernism, she never experienced the influence of Western culture as directly as Stravinsky, neither did she ever try to reinvent herself.

⁵⁵ Arnold Whittall, "Stravinsky in Context," in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. J. Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 46.

⁵⁶ Arthur Lourie, quoted in Vishnevetsky, *Evrasiiskoe uklonenie*, Op.cit., 313.

⁵⁷ Richard Taruskin speaks of Stravinsky's adoption of the ideology of the 'purely musical' as early as 1920s - "a creative swerve that colored all the rest of his career". Richard Taruskin, "Stravinsky and the Subhuman. A Myth of the Twentieth Century: 'The Rite of Spring', the Tradition of the New and 'the Music Itself'", in *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 360-85.

⁵⁸ Igor Vishnevetsky, *Evrasiiskoe uklonenie*, Op.cit., 314.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 315.

⁶⁰ Alex Ross, "Critic's Notebook; The Influence of Stravinsky's Russian Roots", *The New York Times*, May 10, 1994, 16.

6.4: Ustvol'skaya and the influence of the Western musical tradition

Although Ustvol'skaya often refused to acknowledge her familiarity with twentieth century Western music, in an interview with Sofia Khentova in 1977 and in a televised interview in 2004 she mentioned that during her student years, Shostakovich introduced to her to some new music.^{61/62} The period during which Ustvol'skaya's musical taste began to form was in close proximity to the era of The New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921-1929), which is recognised as the era of high modernism in Soviet Russia: by the end of the NEP era, Leningrad could compete with other world capitals as the centre for contemporary performance. At the same time, it was only a few years after the ratification of the first Five-Year Plan that brought to an end the tolerance for cultural diversity and extensive connections with Western Europe, and gave the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) monopolistic control over musical life in Soviet Union; the RAPM insisted that massed song took precedence over traditional and modern concert music.⁶³

However, the musicians and teachers who surrounded Ustvol'skaya during her student years at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, belonged to the Leningrad School of Composition, many of whom are known as 'Leningrad's Modernists'. Progressively minded critics, such as Boris Asafiev and Vyacheslav Karatygin, welcomed the new Western European music, and their publications introduced Soviet musicians to the newest works of Stravinsky, Hindemith, Krenek, and the composers of *Les Six*. A series of private and public concerts were organised in Leningrad to provide a survey of current Western musical trends.⁶⁴ Only during 1925-1927, the State Opera Theatre gave Soviet premieres of Strauss's *Salome*, Berg's *Wozzeck*, Krenek's *Jonny Spielt Auf*, Prokofiev's *Love for Three Oranges*, and Schreker's *Der Ferne Klang*. The season 1927-1928 included works by Stravinsky, Honegger, Mahler, Prokofiev, Bartók, Krenek,

⁶¹ The interview with Khentova took place on 14 May 1977, in Repino. Published in: Sofia Khentova, *V mire Shostakovicha* [In the World of Shostakovich], (Moscow: Kompozitor, 1996), 172-174.

⁶² Ustvol'skaya's interview for the programme dedicated to Ustvol'skaya's 80th birthday. TV programme 'Tsarskaya Lozha', TV Channel 'Kul'tura', 17 June 2004.

⁶³ David Haas, *Leningrad's Modernists: Studies in Composition and Musical Thoughts, 1917-1932* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 90.

⁶⁴ David Haas, *Ibid.*, 14.

Milhaud, and Hindemith, as well as world premieres of symphonic works by Soviet composers. Ustvolskaya's teachers of composition, Shostakovich and Maximilian Steinberg were at the heart of Leningrad modernism, together with Vladimir Shcherbachov and Gavriil Popov.⁶⁵

In 1926 Boris Asafiev, who was the first to articulate the aesthetic of Leningrad modernism, wrote that modern music of significance exemplifies three fundamental elements: melos (i.e. song element), linearity, and musical *intonatsiya*.⁶⁶ Speaking of the Leningrad Modernist School of Composition, headed by Vladimir Shcherbachov, Asafiev claimed that this school, whilst affirming the place of emotionality, attempts to combine it with strict constructive principles in a new musical *Weltanschauung* based on modern polyphony, melos and linearity [*linearnist'*]; these are the foundations of the style of Leningrad's modernists.⁶⁷ According to Asafiev, linearity mainly concerned the *unfolding* of melodic lines, rather than *construction* of phrases and tunes.⁶⁸ As discussed earlier, the linear styles of melodism as well as a penchant for polyphony are recognised as the main characteristics of Ustvolskaya's style, hence the influence of Leningrad's modernists is evident.

6.5: Shostakovich and Leningrad's modernists: compositional style of the 1920s-1930s

Ustvolskaya's teacher, Shostakovich, was recognised as one of the most talented of Leningrad's modernists,⁶⁹ and the works written between 1921 and 1929 were his most experimental. Shostakovich belonged to the same generation and social milieu as the *oberiuty*, and the influence of the Gogolian tradition through the lens of the

⁶⁵ Steinberg taught Ustvolskaya for a short period between the autumn of 1945 and December 1946.

⁶⁶ Igor Glebov (Boris Asafiev), "O polifonicheskom iskusstve, ob organnoy kul'ture i o muzykal'noy sovremennosti" [On Polyphonic Art, the Culture of Organ, and on Musical Modernity]. In *Polifoniya i organ v sovremennosti* [Polyphony and Organ in Modern Times]. Programme booklet to organ recital, given by Isai A. Braudo, 21 February 1926 (Leningrad: Gosudarstvenny institut istorii iskusstv and Akademia, 1926), 1.

⁶⁷ Igor Glebov, "Russkaya simfonicheskaya muzyka za 10 let" [Ten Years of Russian Symphonic Music], *Muzyka i revolyutsiya* [Music and Revolution], no.11 (1928): 28.

⁶⁸ David Haas, *Leningrad's Modernists: Studies in Composition and Musical Thoughts*, Op.cit., 40.

⁶⁹ Igor Glebov (Boris Asafiev), "Russkaya simfonicheskaya muzyka za 10 let" [Ten Years of Russian Symphonic Music], *Muzyka i revolyutsiya* [Music and Revolution], no.11 (1927): 20-29.

oberiuty's experience is evident in *The Nose* (1927-28), based on Gogol's story, and in the piano compositions written during the 1920s. In those years Shostakovich, as well as other Leningrad composers, such as Vladimir Shcherbachev, Yuri Shaporin, Gavriil Popov and Mikhail Gnessin, was strongly influenced by Western music, particularly Hindemith, Krenek, the composers of *Les Six*, and Stravinsky.⁷⁰

The style of Shostakovich's piano works written in the 1920s such as *Three Fantastic Dances* (1922), *Piano Sonata, op.12* (1926), and *Aphorisms, op.13* (1927) contains characteristics that resemble the style of Ustvolskaya's *Twelve Piano Preludes* and her early piano sonatas: advanced linear polyphony and predilection towards simple textures; abrupt shifts in dynamic and tempi, and unusual harmonic progressions with rare islands of plain triadic and diatonic tonality. Shostakovich's works of this period demonstrate a tendency towards economy of means of expression and a penchant for experimentation and eccentricity; linearity of musical narrative expressed by means of contrapuntal writing plays an important role. Thus, *First Piano Sonata* (1926) is polyphonic throughout, and even the chordal episodes are organised contrapuntally; the 'linear motives, freed from any restraints of harmonic logic, are developed simultaneously in two to four voices, creating long stretches of atonal and frequently imitative polyphony; the work achieves a rebellion against the triads, diatonic scales, and functional harmony of the major-minor system.'⁷¹ The material of Shostakovich's one-movement *Sonata* is unified by a referential tonal centre of 'F'. Thirty-three years later, Ustvolskaya would structure the coda of the *Grand Duet* (1959) around 'D', and later in 1986, ten movements of the *Fifth Piano Sonata* are centred around D flat.

The increase of dissonance level in both the *First Piano Sonata, op.12*, and *Aphorisms, op.13*, thanks to cross relationships, tone clusters, and long chains of parallel sevenths and ninths, make plain Shostakovich's intention of a final break with the sound world of the earlier works composed under Steinberg.'⁷² The style of *Aphorisms* is similar to that of Ustvolskaya's *Twelve Piano Preludes*: some pieces consists of a single line with a simple accompaniment or two-part counterpoint, others contain tone clusters

⁷⁰ Yuri N. Keldysh, *Istoriya muzyki narodov SSSR* [History of Music in the USSR], (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1966-1972).

⁷¹ These stylistic characteristics of *Sonata*, as described by David Haas, resemble those of Ustvolskaya's *Twelve Piano Preludes* and early *Piano Sonatas*. David Haas, *Leningrad's Modernists, Studies in Composition and Musical Thoughts, 1917-1932* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 131.

⁷² David Haas, *Ibid.*, 180.

and chromaticism.⁷³ Similarly to what is observed in Ustvol'skaya's *Twelve Preludes*, Shostakovich experimented with different phrase lengths and variable metre, and attempted to give old genres (like Serenade, March, Nocturne, Elegy, Lullaby and Dance) new stylistic forms. However, one cannot speak of polystylism in the *Aphorisms* - 'Shostakovich is playing with genres, not identifiable styles'⁷⁴ - and neither can the term polystylism be applied to Ustvol'skaya's music. However, if Shostakovich's 'long lines do not evoke Bach or Russian folksong or Mussorgsky, or resemble the melos of any other linear modernist',⁷⁵ Ustvol'skaya's melodies evoke associations with those composers and traditions.

Together with the modernist influence that came from Shostakovich, Ustvol'skaya shared a close friendship with Mikhail Druskin, the pianist and historian, who had Shcherabchov and Asafiev as his mentors in the 1920s, and musicologist Genrikh Orlov, who studied and analysed all the available Western and Soviet contemporary scores.⁷⁶ That allows us to conclude that Ustvol'skaya was familiar with modernist trends as well as with the musical scores of contemporary Western and Soviet compositions.⁷⁷

Among other twentieth century composers, apart from Stravinsky, Ustvol'skaya was remembered speaking highly of Webern;⁷⁸ and her love for Mahler, inherited from Shostakovich, was known to all her students.⁷⁹ Shostakovich himself became familiar with, and later greatly influenced by, Mahler's music through his close friend, the critic and musicologist Ivan Sollertinsky.⁸⁰ The philosophical and ethical pathos of Mahler's music, as well as the epic scale of his musical narrative, concerned with suffering of the humanity, was seen by Sollertinsky as being inseparable from the social and ideological

⁷³ 'Ten Aphorisms' was performed as part of the PhD recital.

⁷⁴ David Haas, *Leningrad's Modernists*, Op.cit., 181.

⁷⁵ David Haas, *Ibid.*, 181.

⁷⁶ Genrikh Orlov, *Russky Sovetsky simfonizm: puti, problemy, dostizheniya* [Russian Soviet Symphonism: Paths, Problems, Achievements], (Moscow: Muzyka, 1966).

⁷⁷ The detailed study of the music of Soviet Modernism can be found in: Detlef Gojowy, *Neue sowjetischer Musik der 20en Jahren* (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 1980); David Haas, *Leningrad's Modernists*, Op.cit.

⁷⁸ Bokman, *Variations on the Theme*, Op.cit., 72.

⁷⁹ Sergey Banevich, Boris Tishchenko, Kirill Novikov, personal interviews.

⁸⁰ Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinsky (1902- 1944), Russian polymath; expert in theatre and languages; professor at the Leningrad Conservatoire; an active promoter of Mahler's music in the Soviet Union, who published the first book (a brochure) on Mahler in Russia: Ivan Sollertinsky, *Gustav Mahler* (Leningrad: State Music Publishers, 1932).

Weltanschauung problem that humanity has to solve.⁸¹ In his book on Mahler, Sollertinsky presented Mahler's life in a way that was ideologically acceptable for Soviet Russia, and Mahler's symphonies as a viable model for Soviet composers.⁸² Pianists Heinrich Neuhaus and Maria Yudina were among musicians who, together with Shostakovich, became interested in Mahler's music in the early 1930s, being particularly attracted by the music's ability to 'penetrate the innermost secrets of human consciousness'.⁸³ Sollertinsky believed that Mahler's contribution to the creation of new Soviet *symphonism* is more important than that of Debussy or Stravinsky, Strauss or Hindemith, since Mahler's symphonies possessed important artistic and ideological qualities.⁸⁴ Sollertinsky might not have realised that it was 'Mahler's Romantic utopianism, his convulsive intensity, leading to paroxysm, his idealistic relationship to folk-songs and the pessimism of his last years'⁸⁵ that inspired composers like Ustvol'skaya, who, unlike the composers of Shostakovich's generation, was attracted by the meditative, tragic dimension of *Adagios* in Mahler's late works: they were the highest musical expression of that *Weltanschauung*.

Ustvol'skaya referred to Johann Sebastian Bach as 'special case'⁸⁶. The spiritual dimension of her music and the polyphonic way of thinking exemplified throughout Ustvol'skaya's compositional oeuvre can be attributed to Bach's influence. Among other aspects of Ustvol'skaya's music that demonstrate Bach's influence are: first, her attitude to music as a form of speech, where every note is like a word and carries the utmost significance; Ustvol'skaya never got tired of marking every crotchet with an accent, or *tenuto*, just to reinforce its expressiveness (numerous examples can be found in her *Piano Sonatas* and *Twelve Piano Preludes*). Second, Bach in his life exemplified the Latin motto 'Bene qui latuit, bene vixit' (Ovid) - 'one who lives unnoticed, lives well.' Ustvol'skaya's asceticism and her need for self-concealment earned her a reputation as a

⁸¹ Sollertinsky, *Gustav Mahler*, Op.cit., 13.

⁸² Pauline Fairclough, *A Soviet Credo: Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), 8.

⁸³ Inna Barsova, ed., Sergey Oshero, trans., *Gustav Mahler: Pis'ma, vospomnaniya* [Gustav Mahler: Letter, Reminiscences], (Moscow: Muzyka, 1964), 7.

⁸⁴ Sollertinsky, *Gustav Mahler*, Op.cit., 65-66.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 66.

⁸⁶ As claimed by K. Bagrenin in an interview. See Appendix E.

mystical recluse. Third, one of the main characteristics of Bach's compositional method is his ability to 'grow' the entire musical composition out of a small thematic unit (the fugue being the greatest manifestation of that method). Ustvol'skaya adopted this method and took it to the extreme (as she did with every method she ever adopted): her musical compositions unfold from a small melodic unit which remains unchanged throughout the work (*Sonata for Violin and Piano*, 1952, is a perfect example). Fourth, the idea of suffering that penetrates Bach's music appealed to Ustvol'skaya.⁸⁷ Ustvol'skaya admired Bach not only for his craftsmanship but also for his ability to stimulate spiritual exaltation in others by means of sound. Ustvol'skaya's understanding of spirituality was largely inspired by Bach's music. The striving towards Divinity which is manifested in Bach's works was perhaps what Ustvol'skaya herself aspired to in her art, and the subtitles of her late *Symphonies* and *Compositions* prove that.

⁸⁷ Philipp Spitta, a German scholar, one of the principal figures in nineteenth century musicology and the author of the first comprehensive work on Bach. Quoted in Leonid Gakkel, "Bach: Vzglyad iz 1980-kh" [Bach: A Look from the 1980s], in *Dekabr'skie lektzii* [December Lectures], (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1991), 8.

Chapter Seven:

A performer's view on the interpretation and perception of Ustvolskaya's music

This chapter explores various performing aspects of Ustvolskaya's works. It discusses the audience's response to Ustvolskaya's music, and addresses questions of meaning and the forms of its communication. All observations and conclusions made in this chapter are largely a result of the personal performing experience of myself and of those who established themselves as 'Ustvolskaya specialists.'

7.1: The role of the performer in the execution of Ustvolskaya's works

The act of performance is inseparable from an act of performative interpretation. In the case of Ustvolskaya's music, a performer faces a dilemma: to what extent is he an interpreter, and to what extent simply a vehicle for conveying the composer's artistic intentions? From the comments made by Ustvolskaya about performers of her music, it is clear that she valued strong artistic personality above all. For instance, she preferred Glenn Gould's interpretation of Bach to anyone else.¹ In a letter to the Russian pianist, Arkady Volodos, Ustvolskaya expressed her admiration for his 'unique gift', saying that after Glenn Gould she never came across another performer who exemplified such artistic perfectionism.² Ustvolskaya praised Volodos for his artistic spirit and a distinct *zvukovaya aura* [sound-world], and on another occasion, she praised Anatoly Vedernikov for performing her *Second Piano Sonata* with utmost perfection.³ Ustvolskaya valued performances that were 'strong and convincing', and performers who demonstrated artistic commitment.⁴ Ustvolskaya, however, never praised the performers of her music for the individuality of their approach; instead, she was very particular about the ways her music ought to be performed. Ustvolskaya did not wish a

¹ Konstantin Bagrenin. Personal interview, 30 March 2008, St. Petersburg.

² The document was found at UCPSS in Basel. Whether or not this letter was received by the addressee, is unknown.

³ A letter addressed to Viktor Suslin, dated 10 June 1994. A copy, signed by Ustvolskaya, is kept at the UCPSS, Basel.

⁴ In a letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek she wrote: "The second and third movements of the *Octet* must be performed very thoughtfully, with the utmost power and artistic commitment [...] The *Grand Duet* has to be played with the utmost energy and power, in an expressive and creative manner". Letter dated 22 April 1993, UCPSS.

performer to transform her music by means of interpretation, but to execute it in a manner that would allow her artistic intentions to communicate directly to the audience. She was meticulous in choosing performers for her works, and whenever possible she spent time coaching them.⁵ Although Ustvol'skaya never openly expressed her views on the ritualistic role of music, including her own, she demanded that performances of her compositions were 'staged' in a manner close to ritual; her commentaries on performers' dress, accessories, place on stage and manner of behaviour during the performance were very detailed, and had to be followed to the letter.⁶

As a result of being a member of Soviet society, where freedom was replaced by Party order, Ustvol'skaya's musical texts throughout her life do not possess characteristics that encourage freedom of interpretation: the way the musical material is structured and presented, clearly demonstrates the composer's penchant for order, strict rules and control, and characterises Ustvol'skaya as a 'product' of a Totalitarian regime. The tempi indications in her scores are very precise, so is the length of notes and rests, dynamic and articulation markings. Comments such as 'very rhythmical beat, like a motor', that first appeared in Sikorski's edition of the *Duet for Violin and Piano*, clearly indicate the composer's intention to restrict any attempts at performance flexibility. A row of notes marked with the same articulation marking, either accents, or *tenuto*, appear frequently, which yet again can be interpreted as a composer's intention to discourage any attempts at shaping melodic lines in an individual manner. Ustvol'skaya rejected the idea of having a conductor for her *Symphonies* and *Compositions*, claiming that an additional person on stage would disturb performance and distract the audience. Instead, a pianist in Ustvol'skaya's instrumental compositions acts as an 'organiser',⁷ the role that demands a certain performing style: the rhythmically strong percussive manner of piano playing co-ordinates the overall instrumental sonority, acting as the 'backbone' of complex polyphonic structures.⁸

⁵ Oleg Malov, personal interviews. See Appendix E.

⁶ See: the commentaries to the *Grand Duet for cello and piano*. Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, Edition no.: SIK1805.

⁷ A similar view was expressed by Leonid Gakkel in 'Pianisticheskyy Leningrad, 70e gody' [The Piano Tradition in Leningrad of the 1970s], *Muzykal'noye ispolnitel'stvo* [Musical Performance], no.11 (Moscow: Muzyka): 138.

⁸ The pianists Oleg Malov, Reinbert de Leeuw and Alexey Lyubimov exemplified such 'organisers'

7.2: Ustvolskaya and her piano

As mentioned in the Introduction, Ustvolskaya started and ended her journey as a composer with works for piano (with the exception of the *Fifth Symphony*), and only two works in her entire oeuvre do not include the piano. As a result, the evolution of piano writing reflects the changes in Ustvolskaya's compositional language. The piano sonorities employed by Ustvolskaya in her works for piano solo are devoid of many characteristics that are manifested in the Romantic piano tradition with its florid passages among other forms of technical brilliance. Ustvolskaya's piano writing is very distinct: she does not treat the piano as a 'surrogate' orchestra; instead, she brings the instrument back to its roots as a percussion instrument of loud and quiet sound (*fortepiano*), and continues the keyboard tradition that goes back to the Baroque era and Bach. As a result, the manner of playing required for the execution of Ustvolskaya's piano compositions is close to baroque and classical styles of playing the keyboard: highly articulated, almost percussive playing, with no motivic blurring or excessive use of pedal; moderate tempi are encouraged by the composer to allow every note to 'speak'.

The influence of Shostakovich on Ustvolskaya's piano writing is significant. As discussed earlier, Shostakovich's piano music, especially the works written during his 'modernist' period (1921-1929), possesses very distinct characteristics, among which is what Druskin called '*nepriyazn' k vneshney mishure pianisticheskogo naryada*' [a dislike of exterior tinsel of the piano attire].⁹ The pianism of Shostakovich's 'modernist' works is based on a specific type of finger technique, which differs from the scale-and-arpeggio-based pianism of the classical and romantic eras. This type of pianism (also seen in the works by Bartók and Hindemith) is based on horizontally placed dissonant intervals, minimal use of chordal textures and predominance of polyphony. Shostakovich's polyphonic writing for piano was often referred to as eccentric, similar to the style of his piano playing: sparse, dry, highly articulated, mainly non-legato, almost pedal-less; his piano was always *delovito postukivayushchee* [busily hammering].¹⁰ Shostakovich's piano works of the 1920s-1930s, were referred to as

⁹ Mikhail Druskin, "O fortepiannom tvorchestve Shostakovicha" [On the Piano Music of Shostakovich], *Sovetskaya muzyka*, no.11(1935): 55.

¹⁰ Leonid Gakkel, *Fortepiannaya muzyka XX veka* [Piano Music of the XX century], (Leningrad: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1990), 254.

'seldom pretty, angular, prickly, aggressive and very direct; they possess a power of shock; and demand emotional participation and intellectual effort.'¹¹ Shostakovich's piano writing and his manner of playing the instrument influenced Ustvolskaya's perception of the instrument, and 'her piano' possesses similar characteristics. Ustvolskaya's piano music, both austere and emotionally intense with its predilection for maximal contrasts in dynamics (with no 'in between' stages, such as *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, *mezzo f* or *mezzo p*), and unorthodox melodic structures inspired composers of a younger generation, such as Alesha Nikolaev, Boris Tishchenko and Alexander Knaifel.¹²

7.3: Challenges of performing Ustvolskaya

As mentioned earlier, at first glance, Ustvolskaya's scores (I here mainly refer to piano and 'chamber' music scores) appear disarmingly simple. However, they present a number of challenges for a performer:

1. the predominance of polyphonic textures requires a high degree of technical control to sustain the audibility and timbral characteristic of every individual line;
2. the absence of bar-lines, combined with asymmetrical rhythmic structures and irregular metre creates a difficulty in controlling the temporal parameters of a work, especially in the case of ensemble compositions;
3. the wide dynamic range and use of instruments playing in extreme tessituras, demand very skilful players, who must possess the physical stamina to play, for instance, a tonal cluster 144 times *ffff* as required in *Piano Sonata No. 5*;
4. the predominance of dissonant sonorities combined with frequent dynamic changes, unusual timbral combinations and extreme tempi often turns a performance of Ustvolskaya's works into an emotionally draining experience for a performer;

¹¹ Henry Orlov, "A Link in the Chain: Reflections on Shostakovich and His Times", in *Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm H. Brown (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 195.

¹² To illustrate the similarity, the PhD recital programme contained selected piano compositions of Ustvolskaya as well as Shostakovich's *Aphorisms*, *op. 13*, selected two- and three-part inventions by Bach, and piano compositions by Knaifel and Alesha Nikolaev.

5. the composer's remarks are minimal, but she demands the playing to be energetic and vigorous in a manner that is expressive, creative and original;¹³

6. the heterogeneity of stylistic sources manifested in Ustvolskaya's music also sets a great interpretational challenge for a performer;

7. the abundance of clusters in the works of the 1970s-1980s adds a purely physical dimension to the performance, and tests a performer's endurance and sensibility. Oleg Malov spoke of 'performing shyness' that often occurs in performance of tone clusters. That, however, can be overcome once a performer realises the composer's logic and understands the absolute necessity of this expressive tool.¹⁴ Malov wrote that it is impossible to imagine a more suitable performing 'tool' for expressing the composer's artistic intention than a tone cluster in Ustvolskaya's compositions.¹⁵

Although the use of tone clusters was introduced long before Ustvolskaya, she gave it a new meaning. Malov claimed that all the means of musical expression employed by Ustvolskaya in her compositions designate, depict or communicate referential concepts, experiences and emotional states.¹⁶ The consistency with which Ustvolskaya used clusters indicates its designative meaning. Tone clusters appeared in Ustvolskaya's compositions as early as *Octet* (1948) in the parts of timpani and piano, and in *Twelve Preludes for Piano* (Prelude No.9), although she had already expressed an interest in what later developed into a tone cluster, in the *Piano Concerto* (1946). Throughout Ustvolskaya's compositional career the use and treatment of a tone cluster has gone through a considerable transformation, and it is the piano parts of her compositions written in the 1970s-1980s that demonstrate the full expressive potential of this compositional tool.

The *Piano Sonata No.6* (1988), which consists entirely of tone clusters, signifies the important stage in Ustvolskaya's stylistic evolution. Ustvolskaya's turn to the tone cluster was determined by her desire to maximally enlarge the sonority and to interpret the piano as a multi-voiced choir. According to Malov, by doing so, Ustvolskaya

¹³ The composer's note in the preface to the *Grand Duet*. Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, Edition no.: SIK1805.

¹⁴ Oleg Malov, *Metodicheskie rekomendatsii k osvoeniyu notnogo teksta v fortepiannoy muzyke XX veka* [Methodical Recommendations on Mastering Scores of Twentieth Century Piano Music], (Leningrad: LGK, 1988), 6.

¹⁵ Oleg Malov, *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶ Here I join the argument between absolutists and referentialists regarding the musical meaning on the side of referentialists. The argument is presented in Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotions and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), 32.

reinforced the ritualistic character of the performance.¹⁷ Malov claimed that Ustvolskaya's understanding of the performance process as a form of ritual, where everything is taken in its extreme forms in order to experience transcendental realities, made the tone cluster the most 'organic and suitable compositional tool.'¹⁸ Malov drew attention to Ustvolskaya's unusual notation of tone clusters: although she followed the steps of Henry Cowell by clearly indicating the top and bottom note of a cluster, the notes are not joined by a line, but visually resemble a percussion brush, which stems from the centre of the key note. By choosing such a notation, Ustvolskaya reinforced the significance of one note as being a thematic centre, which sonority is enlarged by a cluster. Therefore, it is evident, that even in her late works Ustvolskaya's compositional method remained strongly dominated by polyphonic principles.

Numerous attempts were made at interpreting Ustvolskaya's tone clusters, and explaining their abundance in the works of the 1970s-1990s. It can be interpreted as a result of negative personal development; as a type of new polyphonic texture/structure; as a representation of unity between horizontal and vertical dimensions; as a new element of sonority/timbre that leads to using the piano mainly as a percussion instrument, hence a new instrumental style; and it was perceived as a rhetorical gesture or symbol related to spirituality. Some see it as the composer's desire for her female voice to be heard amidst the male-dominated Soviet artistic elite;¹⁹ others claim that the sonic characteristics of Ustvolskaya's clusters are akin to the cosmic timbres that first appeared in the music of Scriabin.²⁰

Maria Cizmic offers some thought-provoking observations on the subject.²¹ The physical pain experienced by a pianist in the process of performing the *Piano Sonata No. 6*, is seen by the author as a form of representing the traumas of the late twentieth century in post-Soviet countries. Cizmic analyses and interprets the *Sonata* in the context of a hermeneutic pain, and concludes that the work offers a bodily dialectic of satisfaction and discomfort: pounding the piano inevitably hurts, but the experience is

¹⁷ Oleg Malov, *Metodicheskie rekomendatsii*, Op.cit., 41.

¹⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁹ Sergey Banevich, personal interview, 26 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

²⁰ N.G.Drach, "K probleme izucheniya proizvedeny sovremennykh otechestvennykh kompozitorov na primere fortepiannoy muzyki Ustvolskoy", Op.cit., 104.

²¹ Maria Cizmic, *Hammering Hands: Galina Ustvolskaya's Piano Sonata No. 6 and a Hermeneutic of Pain*", Op.cit.

interpenetrated with a considerable degree of pleasure. Alexey Lyubimov, the dedicatee of the *Piano Concerto*, compares the emotional affect of Ustvolskaya's clusters in the *Sonata* to an act of self-immolation as seen in Andrey Tarkovsky's film 'Nostalgia': the unceasing urge to be heard forces man to set himself on fire.²²

7.4: Performers' observations on playing Ustvolskaya's music

As part of my research I interviewed musicians who performed Ustvolskaya's works, and although very little was said about the technical side of the performance experience, some aspects of the composer's personal aesthetic were highlighted, and attempts were made to explain the meaning behind her compositions. Thus, speaking about the *Grand Duet*, which he referred to as a masterpiece, the cellist Leonid Gorokhov emphasised the importance of one particular characteristic that manifests itself in Ustvolskaya's music, namely her ability to think and act against the prevailing norms that exist in the society:

*The Grand Duet contains many truly original and technically inventive ideas for the cello which I never encountered before in other compositions. The emotions which this music communicate would undoubtedly find a response among people, I am sure of it [...] It might help them to free up some fears and get rid of emotional 'blockage' [...] It is akin to a thunder in nature, it is important and necessary [...] So much in this music is written simply against the rules and expected standards, or written out of protest.*²³

The pianist Tat'yana Voronina, interpreted a certain narrowness of Ustvolskaya's musical world as a direct reflection of her personality. Voronina accused the composer of creating art totally fixated on darkness, and said that she did not enjoy performing her *Second Piano Sonata*.²⁴

²² Alexey Lyubimov, interview for the TV programme 'Tsarskaya Lozha', dedicated to Ustvolskaya's 80th birthday. TV Channel 'Kul'tura', 17 June 2004.

²³ Leonid Gorokhov, interview for the TV programme 'Tsarskaya Lozha', 17 June 2004.

²⁴ Tat'yana Voronina, personal interview. See Appendix E.

Despite the fact, that professional and personal relationships between Ustvolskaya and Malov ended in the late 1980s (which happened to coincide with the start of Ustvolskaya's growing popularity in the West), Malov referred to the composer as the Teacher, with a capital 'T'.²⁵ In one of the interviews, he mentioned the lessons he had with Ustvolskaya in the early 1970s.²⁶ During those sessions, Ustvolskaya, who had a very particular view on how the piano ought be played, was mainly concerned with the manner of sound production: highly articulated 'pronunciation' of every note was to be achieved by hammer-like finger movements. Ustvolskaya encouraged Malov not to pity the piano whilst executing the tone clusters: the maximum sound was required to communicate the true meaning of the music. As claimed by Malov, composing for Ustvolskaya was a form of affirmation, and that had to be communicated to the audience.²⁷

The Polish violinist Linda Jankowska, performed Ustvolskaya's *Trio* during the *Klangspuren Festival* in Austria in September 2010 as a participant in the International Ensemble Modern Academy.²⁸ Her ensemble was coached by Heinz Holliger and the members of the *Ensemble Modern*. During the preparation for performance, Linda tried to learn something about the composer only to discover that the majority of publications 'conveyed some unclear message about the metaphysical content hidden in Ustvolskaya's scores.' Linda said: "If you are a good player, you can learn this *Trio* in a week and perform after two rehearsals; however, you would be left with a feeling that you still do not know what this music is about and what to do with it." She referred to the experience of performing the *Trio* in a church as 'uncomfortable and somewhat disturbing', and concluded by saying: "I did not enjoy the experience, and I doubt that I would ever choose to perform this piece again."²⁹

I myself could relate to Linda's experience. When I began working on Ustvolskaya's piano compositions, I too found the experience traumatic: I could not

²⁵ Oleg Malov, "Alexander Knaifel as a Communicator of Existential Tendencies in Music of the 20th-21st Centuries." Material from the conference "*Muzyka na rubezhe epokh. Vzglyad iz Peterburga*" [Music on the Borderline of the Epochs. The view from St. Petersburg] (May 2001). Oleg Malov, private collection. Accessed: 28 July 2006.

²⁶ Oleg Malov, personal interview, 31 March 2009, St. Petersburg.

²⁷ Oleg Malov, personal interview.

²⁸ Linda Jankowska studied in Germany and then at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester. Personal interview, 10 May 2011, Manchester.

²⁹ The complete text of the interview can be found in Appendix E.

relate to the musical content, either emotionally or intellectually, I did not like the music, neither did I enjoy the physical process of performing it. However, driven by fascination and the desire to demystify Ustvol'skaya's artistic persona, I persevered with both the research and performance.

7.5: Ustvol'skaya's music as perceived by the audience

As stated earlier, Ustvol'skaya's works were neither regularly performed nor recorded before the late 1960s-early 1970s, thus making a gap between the year of composition and the year of performance of more than twenty years. One of the earliest publications that discussed the perception of the audience, was written by Sokhor in 1949. Sokhor claims that by listening to Ustvol'skaya's music, it becomes clear that the composer, as if deliberately, forgot about the existence of historically formed methods of perception: she avoided any expression of sincerity, warmth and tenderness, and these deeply hidden layers must be discovered and brought out by a performer.³⁰ This observation made more than six decades ago, invited a number of questions: how has the perception of Ustvol'skaya's music changed since then? To what aspect of her music does the modern audience react, and how? What 'code of listening' is required to appreciate Ustvol'skaya's music?³¹

The perception of a contemporary audience is not as easily manipulated as that of Soviet audience in the 1950s (of which Arnold Sokhor was a member), whose reaction towards any events, including cultural ones, was measured against the standards set by the Party. However, the nature of the audience perception often depends on the cultural disposition and musical experience of individual listeners; certain cultural beliefs and expectations play an important role in determining the character of response to music. Thus, the nature and limitations of our perceptions are partly

³⁰ Arnold Sokhor, "Dorogami iskany: Muzyka Galiny Ustvol'skoy" [By Roads of Exploration: The music of Galina Ustvol'skaya], *Muzykal'naya zhizn'*, no.1 (1959): 50.

³¹ Robert Samuel, "Music as Text: Mahler, Schumann and Issues of Analysis", in *Theory, Analysis and Meaning of Music*, ed. A. Pople, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 156.

determined by who we are, and the definition of emotions carried by a musical work rests on criteria that are culturally determined.³²

It has been claimed that Ustvol'skaya's music with its dissonant sonorities and extreme forms of expression evokes feelings of confusion, angst, and discomfort among listeners. Many performers, including myself, found the experience of learning and performing Ustvol'skaya's composition uneasy: by means of specific individual tones and intervals, rhythmic patterns, unorthodox instrumental timbres and extreme dynamics, the composer communicated her own emotional experiences, which mirrored those endured by a generation of Soviet people during the Stalinist and post-Stalinist eras. The immense intensity of those experiences is perceived both on intuitive and cognitive levels, however, it seems to appeal more to the body's perception, the body as a form and means of identifying knowledge, which is not conscious.³³ Claims have been made that the meaning of music resides in its immediate emotional impact: thus, the French structuralist, Roland Barthes, in his essay on Schumann's *Kreisleriana*, speaks of a 'Schumannian' body, whose beating is heard in the music of *Kreisleriana*:

The body passes into music without any relay but signifier. This passage [...] makes music a madness: not only Schumann's music, but all music. In relation to a writer, the composer is always mad (and the writer can never be so, for he is condemned to meaning).³⁴

In her dissertation 'Hammering Hands: Galina Ustvol'skaya's Piano Sonata No. 6 and a Hermeneutic of Pain,' Maria Cizmic, wrote: "Ustvol'skaya's voice, her notes, words, lines and arrows, represent and refer to necessary bodily information."³⁵ In her reading of the *Sixth Piano Sonata*, Cizmic explored the relationship between pianist, instrument, and the infliction of pain, and claimed that Ustvol'skaya's music occupies the body in a particular way. The music of the *Sonata* communicates hurt and discomfort, and performs the process of inflicting pain by the most minimal resources of language. Indeed, Ustvol'skaya's music is less involved with particular sounds and more with a

³² Fred Lerdahl, Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

³³ Robert Samuel, "Music as Text: Mahler, Schumann and Issues of Analysis," in *Theory, Analysis and Meaning of Music*, ed. A. Pople (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 160.

³⁴ Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Form*, trans. R. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 308.

³⁵ Maria Cizmic, "Hammering Hands: Galina Ustvol'skaya's Piano Sonata No. 6 and a Hermeneutic of Pain", Op.cit., 68.

physical way of being.³⁶ In many of her compositions, particularly those written in the last decades of her life, Ustvolskaya created musically embodied structures that force pain into a realm of representation and performance.³⁷

The performing challenges listed above, including the emotional inaccessibility of Ustvolskaya's music, have been experienced by many performers whom I interviewed. The main challenge, however, is to find a way of making this music to communicate and to engage with the audience. There are two approaches that, in my view, can be applied to performance of Ustvolskaya's works. First, is for a performer to accept what can be seen as the deliberate (on the composer's part), 'non-communicativeness' of the music, and to act simply as a vehicle for the composer's artistic ideas, which, due to their intensity and unconventional sonic representation, would inevitably evoke a particular response among listeners. The second approach, is for a performer to act as a live 'interpreter' of the music in the process of music-making, whilst adjusting to the type of audience and the occasion. Ustvolskaya herself would undoubtedly prefer the first approach, since she did not seem to be interested in making her works appealing to the general public. However, for a performer like myself, who wishes to extend the Ustvolskaya's audience, finding ways of making the music accessible is of the utmost importance. The question is, how?

Years of performance experience enabled me to realise that Ustvolskaya's music does not always inspire performers, neither does it engage with the audience in the same way as the works of some of her contemporaries do. The main reasons for that are: first, the extreme narrowness of the music's emotional content; second, the lack of variety of technical means and sonic characteristics; third, the repetitiveness of musical material; and finally, the overall sonic austerity that is often perceived as monotonous, and hence uninspiring. Therefore it is my belief that the attitude towards studying and performing Ustvolskaya's works demands a certain degree of personal alienation, which, as paradoxical as it may sound, proves to be an uneasy task for a performer, since for many of us finding the way to relate to the music and to experience it both analytically and

³⁶ Maria Cizmic, *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁷ Anna Gnatenko in "Iskusstvo kak ritual" [Art as Ritual] speaks about the ritual nature of physical pain experienced by a performer whilst playing the tone clusters in *Piano Sonatas No.5* and *No.6*: "The act of performing those works provokes nothing but physical pain. The experience of this pain is visually and aurally communicated to the listener. This pain is ritual, voluntarily, necessary, and ethically and aesthetically meaningful". *Op.cit.*, 24-32. Frans Lemaire wrote (as quoted by Maria Cizmic), that '[Ustvolskaya's] music is not really played but beaten'. In Maria Cizmic, "Hammering Hands", *Op.cit.*, 83.

emotionally, is what makes the performance experience authentic, unique and enjoyable.

A performer consciously (or unconsciously) strives to achieve a thorough understanding of the musical composition he or she performs, and to establish the connection with the composer's experiences. Here, however, lies the main problem: as a performer, one does not wish to engage emotionally and connect with the content of Ustvolskaya's music because of its nature and the degree of intensity with which this music is charged. As a result, a performer cannot completely engage with the work he or she performs, and that, paradoxically, is exactly the way Ustvolskaya herself saw the situation: in order to convey the composer's intention, a performer must maintain personal alienation, and that can guarantee a direct communication between the composer and the audience. As a type of performance attitude, such 'alienation' leaves a more powerful impression on listeners as they are forced to react and respond to the composer's 'message' directly, without having to consider a third party - the performer.

This type of performance attitude, which, in my view, is best suited for the execution of Ustvolskaya's works, resembles the theatrical and cinematic device introduced by the playwright Bertolt Brecht: the 'distancing effect' (*Verfremdungseffekt*) was used to prevent the audience from losing themselves passively in the character created by the actor, and, instead, to turn them into a consciously critical observer.³⁸ The term *Verfremdungseffekt* has its origin in the Russian Formalist notion of the device called *priem otstraneniya* [a method of estrangement], which, according to the St. Petersburg literary critic Viktor Shklovsky, was the essence of all arts. In 1953, Brecht invented a German term for a particular theatrical approach that discourages the involvement of the audience in both the illusory narrative and the emotions of characters on stage. According to Brecht, the emotional distancing allowed the audience to reflect on what is being presented in a critical and objective way.

A similar concept was introduced by the Russian philosopher and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin, who spoke of *vnenakhodimost'* [a state of not being present] as a necessary 'outside-ness' of an artist in relation to the audience. Bakhtin believed that in the realm of culture, 'outside-ness' is the most powerful level of understanding. For him,

³⁸ John Willett, ed. and trans., *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 91.

it was 'the moral position necessary to co-experience a work of art, to finalise it and then take responsibility for its content.'³⁹

I believe this approach is the most powerful when executing Ustvolskaya's works: it allows a performer not to identify with its psychological content but instead, to comprehend it intellectually and to present it to the audience, who will then experience the music. Such emotional distancing forces a performer to focus primarily on executing the musical text in the manner required by the composer. That in itself liberates a performer from the common concerns about the impression his or her playing makes on the audience: a performer feels empowered by possessing a full command of the musical text whilst entrusting the music to speak for itself by addressing every member of the audience. As a result, every listener perceives and interprets the music according to their personal experiences, aesthetic values, cultural memory and musical preferences. In my personal experience, this approach of executing Ustvolskaya's works has proved to be the most powerful way of communicating her music to the audience, and I believe that is how Ustvolskaya herself saw the role of a performer.

The experience of performing Ustvolskaya's works made me realise the true meaning behind her request regarding the appearance on stage: a black dress, no jewellery or other forms of decoration; austere presence and a minimal amount of movement; a precise position on stage for all the participants during the performance;⁴⁰ and no conductor for her larger instrumental works. For Ustvolskaya, a performer was the 'vehicle' for conveying her musical ideas. It is true that Ustvolskaya preferred some performers to the others, and her 'favourites' changed over the years (for example, pianists: Oleg Malov, Alexey Lyubimov, Reinbert de Leeuw). However, it was not the degree of personal artistic interpretation that made her favour one performer above the other; instead, it was the degree of the performer's conviction in her artistic talent, and his commitment to her music (to the point that artists were not allowed to play the music of other composers but hers), that affected her choice.⁴¹

³⁹ Morson G. S., Emerson C., eds., *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 82.

⁴⁰ Roman Ruditza, "Platie chernoe, do pola. Bez mikroфона. Bez ukrasheniy" [Long black dress. No jewellery. No microphone], *Chas Pik*, [Rush Hour], no.26 (2004).

⁴¹ In one of the interviews with Oleg Malov, he admitted that at the time when he discovered Ustvolskaya's music and began gaining a reputation as an 'Ustvolskaya's specialist', the composer did not like the fact that he performed music of other contemporary composers. According to Malov, that was one of the reasons for the end of their professional relationship. Oleg Malov, personal interview, 22 July 2006.

For years I was challenged by the question of why this music, which neither consoles, nor excites and inspires, but terrifies, troubles and causes distress as well as aural and physical discomfort, never fails to fascinate, and to this day continues to raise interest among listeners and performers? The paradox of human fascination with disturbing experiences is probably one of the possible answers: we reject those experiences wholeheartedly but still strive to understand their nature. Indeed, the fascination with disturbing acts, emotions, and their artistic representation, of which many examples can be found in art and literature throughout history, will never cease to exist, and that is why the interest in Ustvolskaya's music will remain. It is beyond doubt that this music will always be in the category 'music for connoisseurs', and Ustvolskaya's works will never be performed as regularly as those of her eminent contemporaries, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and the composers of younger generation, Gubaidulina, Denisov and Schnittke. Here, however, lies yet another paradox: what might have been a tragedy for some, was a matter of choice for Ustvolskaya, as she never strove for recognition among general public, but instead, always wanted to be appreciated by true musicians.⁴²

The research reaffirmed my belief that Ustvolskaya's music, whilst being determined by her personal psychology and the events of social and cultural life in Soviet Russia, interpreted through the composer's personal 'eye', is indeed a phenomenon that does not have many precedents. It was Ustvolskaya's personality that made her music unique,⁴³ and the experience of performing her works alongside the works of other composers reinforced that belief.

7.6: Programming Ustvolskaya's compositions

My performance experience showed that Ustvolskaya's works are best appreciated by the audience when performed alongside the works of other composers: it balances the unceasing intensity of Ustvolskaya's sonorities and allows the audience to

⁴² From interviews with Sergey Banevich, Boris Tishchenko and Konstantin Bagrenin.

⁴³ Similar view was expressed by Mstislav Rostropovich, who said: "Ee muzyka - eto prezhde vsego, ee kharakter, kotoromu ona ne izmenyala, slava Bogu" [Ustvolskaya's music is above all [the representation of] her personality, which she never betrayed, thank God]. From an interview for the TV programme 'Tsarskaya Lozha', TV Channel 'Kul'tura', 17 June 2004.

maintain their perceptive ability. According to Voronina, Ustvolskaya herself liked the idea of her compositions being performed in a wider musical context.⁴⁴ However, she never spoke of a particular composer or work(s) that would be suitable 'companions' for her compositions. Over the years my choice of such 'companions' varied. Ustvolskaya's *Twelve Piano Preludes* were performed alongside selected works from the Bach's two- and three-part *Inventions* and piano compositions by Alexander Knaifel and Alesha Nikolaev, Shostakovich's *Aphorisms* and selected pieces from his *Twenty-four Preludes and Fugues*. The *Violin Sonata* was performed in the 'company' of Shostakovich's *Violin Sonata* and Schnittke's *Suite in the Old Style*, whilst the *Grand Duet* was paired with cello sonatas by Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Rachmaninov.

Whether or not Ustvolskaya would have approved of such 'companions' for her compositions, the decision to combine her works with others allowed both the performer(s) and the audience to experience the specific characteristics of Ustvolskaya's musical language. It also made possible to demonstrate the 'genealogy' of Ustvolskaya's musical language, and to draw the listeners' attention to specific characteristics of her style that were inherited by the composers such as Boris Tishchenko, Alexander Knaifel and Alesha Nikolaev, to name but a few. That in itself supports one of the main arguments presented in this thesis: despite Ustvolskaya's unquestionable individuality and the unique nature of her compositional style, she was not a 'lonely island' in the ocean of twentieth century music.

⁴⁴ Tat'yana Voronina. Personal interview, 25 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

Conclusion

The main objectives at the start of this research were to understand the Ustvol'skaya phenomenon from a performer's perspective by studying and performing her music; to accumulate sufficient knowledge on the subject by studying sources in Russian and English, conducting interviews with people who knew Ustvol'skaya and performed her music, and by doing so, to fill the lacuna in existing Ustvol'skaya scholarship; and finally, having familiarised myself with all the existing sources, to demystify the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth' and reevaluate her artistic image.

Among the main challenges, first was an insufficient amount of primary sources that hampered the progress of the research and forced me to make subjective conclusions based on personal performance experience; second, was an early realisation that I could neither positively respond to the content of Ustvol'skaya's music, nor identify with it,¹ and third, that using the piano as a 'hitting tool' (which is often required for the execution of Ustvol'skaya's works) goes against my personal performer's ethics. However, the knowledge that the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth', which was partly self-made by the composer and her followers,² continues to exist, and hence furthers the mystification of Ustvol'skaya's artistic persona and the way her music is perceived, confirmed the necessity of a thesis such as this.

The main objectives were met as I conducted numerous interviews in Russia, Germany and the UK, visited libraries and archives in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Hamburg and Basel, and performed Ustvol'skaya's solo and chamber music compositions. This enabled me to draw conclusions on the relationship between Ustvol'skaya's personal psychology and her music; to establish musical and non-musical connections between Ustvol'skaya and other artists and artistic traditions (the influence of Russian literature was examined); and, having observed the evolution of Ustvol'skaya's compositional style in a number of contexts, to appreciate the significance of her music. All the obtained knowledge gave me the confidence to

¹ As William Rothstein wrote: "The performer must first of all identify with the work and must inhabit it as completely as possible, regardless of the work's genre and tone; thoughtful observers sense dissociation between the performer and the work." William Rothstein, "Analysis and the Act of Performance," in *Musical Performance: a Guide to Understanding*, ed. John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 218. I personally found such identification with Ustvol'skaya's music rather difficult.

² An opinion of the 'Ustvol'skaya Myth' as being partly self-made was expressed by Simon Bokman in *Variations on the Theme: Galina Ustvol'skaya*, Op.cit., 7, as well as by other musicians, such as Oleg Malov, Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya, Tat'yana Voronina, and Vitaly Solov'ev (see personal interviews in Appendix E).

introduce Ustvolskaya's music to young musicians ('*Ustvolskaya at Chetham's*' project)³, and to perform and to teach some of her piano and chamber music works with the view of continuing the St. Petersburg tradition of Ustvolskaya performance started by Oleg Malov in the early 1970s.

I chose to focus on a detailed analysis of only three of Ustvolskaya's compositions (as part of the '*Ustvolskaya at Chetham's*' project),⁴ with the view of enhancing our understanding of the works performed, whilst referring to other compositions in the process of examining Ustvolskaya's music in a wider interdisciplinary context. I believe that every performer (including the author of this thesis), continually engages in the process of analysis, which is not some independent process applied to the act of interpretation, but an integral part of performance. That is what John Rink called a 'performer's analysis'.⁵ Jonathan Dunsby in 1989 expressed a similar view on the subject: "Understanding and trying to explain musical structure is not the same kind of activity as understanding and communicating music. There is a genuine overlap between these poles of activity, but it cannot be a complete overlap."⁶

From a performer's point of view, the originality of Ustvolskaya's findings in areas such as instrumental combinations and the treatment of individual instrumental sonorities, including the piano, and the effect this has on instrumental technique and the way the instruments are played, can not be underestimated; neither can the new dimension that was given to traditional genres, such as the sonata and the symphony, as well as a new understanding of the chamber music genre. The performer's approach required for the execution of Ustvolskaya's works, as well as the type of relationship that the performer has with her music, was new to me, and that in itself reinforced Ustvolskaya's singularity for me as a performer.

The sameness of subject matter exemplified by Ustvolskaya throughout her compositional career together with the high degree of intensity in her music, represented by means of a narrow, although unusual, selection of expressive tools, is indeed exceptional for a Soviet composer. By destroying the majority of her 'Soviet'

³ See: the case study report in Appendix A.

⁴ The analyses of the three works is presented as part of the case study report in Appendix A.

⁵ John Rink, ed., *The Practice of Performance: Studies in Musical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 36.

⁶ Jonathan Dunsby, "Guest Editorial: Performance and Analysis of Music," *Music Analysis* 8 (1989): 5–20.

compositions, and publicly condemning Shostakovich, whilst dismissing his influence on her as a composer, she insisted on being seen as the uncompromising artist she believed herself to be.

The musicians whom I interviewed, agreed that Ustvol'skaya was an exceptional persona. The fact that Shostakovich spoke very highly about her, and admitted both her talent and her influence on him, cannot go unnoticed. Even Ustvol'skaya's public 'attack' on Shostakovich in the mid-1990s, put her in a category of her own, although there are reasons to believe that it was done to increase her popularity in the West.⁷ Ustvol'skaya's unconventional behaviour throughout life made people wonder about the state of her mind, although her 'otherness' was more often recognised as a sign of genius than of illness.

The music of Ustvol'skaya undoubtedly possesses cultural and historical significance, first, as a unique document of the Soviet epoch, and second, as a demonstration of a certain type of personal aesthetics based on the idea of resistance and negation, represented in a highly original musical form. It is my belief that Ustvol'skaya's music will always cause a powerful response from listeners, as it is the art that challenges and shocks us that we remember the most. Ustvol'skaya's personal history, her personal psychology, and a political situation which to a large extent ruled or strongly influenced both her personal life and wider culture, all these combine to make a very complex mixture, whose ultimate significance will only become clearer with the passage of time. It is to be hoped that this thesis will be a useful contribution towards that future demystification and re-evaluation of Galina Ustvol'skaya.

⁷ Such was the view expressed by Vitaly Solov'ev, Tat'yana Voronina, Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya and Boris Tishchenko in personal interviews.

Appendix A**“Bringing Ustvolskaya’s Music to the New Generation”:** case study report

The choice of repertoire for my PhD recital was determined by my desire to experience Ustvolskaya’s music in a variety of musical contexts. In the first half of the recital (work for piano solo) I performed selected *Piano Preludes* by Ustvolskaya in the company of three other composers, representatives of the St. Petersburg school of composition: Dmitry Shostakovich, Alesha Nikolaev and Alexander Knaifel. The selected works of each composer were preceded by a two- or three- part *Invention* by Bach.¹ Collaborating with students of Chetham’s School of Music for the ensemble part of my PhD recital, greatly enriched my experience: it was during the preparation for the recital that I realised the unique practical value of this aspect of my research, which combines the performance and interpretation of Ustvolskaya ensemble compositions based on my own performing experience and scholarly knowledge of the subject, with teaching the works to young musicians.

As part of the project, we worked on three instrumental compositions of Ustvolskaya - *Trio for clarinet, violin and piano* (1949), *Violin Sonata* (1952), and *Grand Duet for violoncello and piano* (1959). Our performance as part of my PhD recital was preceded by an ‘Ustvolskaya event’ at Chetham’s School of Music, and followed by a recital and presentation at Salford University in Manchester. The preparation for the recitals and the recitals themselves gave us invaluable insight into Ustvolskaya’s music.

My partners for the project were: Fiona Robertson, 18 year old violinist from Glasgow, Joe Davies, 18 year old cellist and composer from London, and Stephanie Yim, a 15 year old clarinetist from Manchester. None of the students had heard of Ustvolskaya before; the CD with the work(s) that I wanted them to learn, together with a few other compositions by Ustvolskaya, was their first encounter with her music. As part of the project, I gave my students a brief summary of the historical and cultural atmosphere in Russia at the time of composition to allow them to see Ustvolskaya in context; I also presented them with a survey of musical compositions written in Soviet

¹ See: the programme notes for the PhD recital in Appendix C.

Russia at the time between 1949 and 1959 (when Ustvolskaya composed her *Trio*, *Violin Sonata* and *Grand Duet*) to show what kind of music was composed at the time.

The process of working on each composition consisted of learning the notes and discussing different aspects of the text; listening to and analysing the recordings of the piece(s); ensemble rehearsals in preparation for performance(s); and the performance(s) itself. The ongoing ‘educational’ process consisted of familiarising the students with the composer’s other works and artistic movements of the period, particularly literature, in search of similar ideas and images. Our goals were to find ways of relating to the composer’s artistic message by searching for familiar artistic and non-artistic associations and experiences; to obtain a sufficient knowledge about the works’ background; and finally, to execute the works in a technically accomplished and convincing manner.

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1952)

The *Violin Sonata* had an unusual history, hence occupies a special place in Ustvolskaya’s oeuvre: it was the first work with which Ustvolskaya ‘entered’ the Western musical arena. The first performance took place in 1958 when the work was played to a group of American composers visiting Russia. Roy Harris, the most ‘conservative’ among the members of the American delegation, described the *Sonata* as ‘dissonant from beginning to end and kind of ugly’.² The work was also played at the Warsaw Autumn Festival in 1959.³ In 1962, the work was performed to a party headed by Igor Stravinsky, Nikolas Slonimsky and Robert Craft. As claimed by Suslin, the *Sonata* was officially accepted by Westerners as a token of Soviet modernism. The first performance took place in 1961 (Mikhail Vaiman, violin, and Maria Karandashova, piano); the score was first published in Russia in 1966 (Leningrad: Muzyka), and in 1991 by Musikverlage Hans Sikorki.

Among the characteristic features of the *Sonata*, which would later become associated with Ustvolskaya, is the 1/4 time signature: the perpetual pulsating of

² Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1981*, Op.cit, 315.

³ Ustvolskaya herself did not get permission to attend the performance.

crotchets replaced the absence of bar-lines, and crotchets became a single measure to indicate the tempi and the length of notes and pauses. All the melodic themes correspond with the specific rhythmic figurations: thus, in the opening of the *Sonata*, every theme has its own unique rhythm and individual metre; however, none of these rhythmic figures dominate or affect the overall pulsation: the structures with different levels of rhythmic complexity coexist due to the absence of time signature.

The entire compositional body of the *Sonata* ‘grows’ out of the material presented in the opening section. Kira Yuzhak refers to this process as ‘unfolding’ and ‘crystallising’: new themes are ‘crystallised’ from the elements of the initial melodies, and the ‘newly born’ themes shine like the overtones of the prime melodic ideas.⁴ This makes the composition appear unified despite numerous contrasts. Another method of developing (or renewing) musical material in the *Sonata* is the use of multiple repetitions. Linearity, created by complex contrapuntal combination of monodic lines, suits the meditative quality of Ustvolskaya’s music. Starting with the *Sonata*, almost every instrumental composition has a coda or cadenza that plays an important role in the structure: in *Sonata*, the coda summarises the ideas and thematic connections established in the piece.

The *Sonata* exists in three ‘versions’: a copy from Ustvolskaya’s manuscript (GUM), the first Russian edition by *Muzyka*, Leningrad, 1966 (RUS), and Sikorski Edition 1991 (SE).⁵ The comparison of the three versions highlighted a number of issues that were discussed during rehearsals, such as: the notation with flats (GUM and SE) and their enharmonic equivalents (RUS); misprints and alternative notation; advantages and disadvantages of studying and performing the text without bar lines; understanding of the author’s markings; treatment of fermatas, their length and meaning in the context; analysis of phrase structures, the main thematic elements and their meaning; search for the most suitable articulation and type of sound; and analysis of the compositional structure.

The manuscript of the *Sonata* (No. 0476) kept at the Paul Sacher Stiftung, contains Ustvolskaya’s comment: “Temp \downarrow =112. *Engarmonicheski zamenit’ dlya ispolneniya*” [Tempo: a crotchet equals 112. The enharmonic equivalents [must be] used

⁴ Kira Yuzhak, “Observations on the Style of G. Ustvolskaya”, Op.cit., 85.

⁵ The above abbreviations will be used throughout.

for performance]. The manuscript and the score published by Musikverlage Hans Sikorski are notated with flats. However, the Russian edition of the score, published in Leningrad in 1966 is notated with sharps, which significantly simplified the reading of the text. The tempo marking in RUS : $\bullet \downarrow = 112-104$, whilst in GUM and SE, $\bullet \downarrow - 112$.

For our first rehearsal I brought all three scores as I wanted us to discuss the reason behind the composer's decision to use such notation as well as the publisher's decision to change it to enharmonic equivalents. The original notation with flats is undoubtedly more challenging to read than the version with sharps, because of the abundance of double and triple flats. However, the artistic intention behind that is clear: throughout her career Ustvol'skaya showed predilection for the modes with lowered (flattened) tones, and that contributed to the distinct sound-world of her compositions. Even though Ustvol'skaya wanted her music to be performed, she never made it simple for a performer: by encoding her musical text, she challenged the performers' intelligence, and above all, their willingness to 'de-code' it to understand the meaning. Some of Ustvol'skaya's comments made in 1994, support this observation.⁶

The comparison of the three 'versions' of the *Sonata* gave us a better understanding of the original text and highlighted important differences, which concern articulation, dynamic indications, presence and absence of fermatas, misprints, phrase marks, notation and numerical organisation of notes and rests.⁷ The analysis of the scores allowed us to conclude that the dynamic range in the GUM and SE is much wider than in RUS: Ustvol'skaya was not afraid to use three *p* or three *f*. GUM demonstrates very limited use of transitional dynamic indications such as *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, which are in abundance in RUS. In SE, long notes and rest are subdivided, which visually simplifies the score.

After the *Second Piano Sonata* (1949), the *Violin Sonata* was yet another work notated without bar lines: such notation gives music a speech-like quality unrestricted by regular pulse. As a result, it is the shape and structure of musical phrase that organises the composition and allows the music to unfold in the most natural manner.

⁶ "I put my heart and soul into my work, therefore my music must be heard in a different way; listeners also have to work hard. I think that musicologists and performers must search for and experience all the suffering that is contained in my works in the same ways as I did [...] My music is very difficult to understand and to perform." Galina Ustvol'skaya, *My Thoughts on Creative Process*, 17 January 1994, UCPSS, Basel.

⁷ See the full list of comments that concern the comparison of the three versions of the *Sonata* in Appendix B.

For the convenience of the ensemble-playing, Ustvolskaya marked every 10 crotchets with a rehearsal figure. Another unusual aspect of the score is the abundance of fermatas. The traditional definition of ‘fermata’ as the prolongation of a tone, chord, or rest beyond its indicated time value, derives from Italian *fermare* - to stop. In Latin, present infinitive *firmō* from *firmāre* is ‘to strengthen, firmly establish’; the latter definition is closer to how Ustvolskaya interpreted the sign. Her usage of fermatas is very particular, and therefore requires a different performance treatment: thus, when placed over the last minim in phrases associated with a sigh (usually in the middle of a phrase, such as Fig. 42-44, before Fig. 177-17, and in Fig. 184-186), we treated fermata as a momentarily stillness, and so were more liberal with its length; however, when the fermata sign is marked over a series of long single notes (the minims, such as in Fig. 62-65 and Fig. 95-108), we maintained the equal duration of notes.

The analysis of phrase structure occupied an important part of our rehearsals. The key melodic element of the *Sonata* is a five-note motto, first introduced by the Violin in the opening, whilst the rest of the melodic material is constructed from short melodic units - *popevki*. The rhythmic structure of melodies resembles *pyatislozhnik*, a poetic rhythmic structure based on five-beat pulse or a combination of three-and-two-note pattern,⁸ which is characteristic for Russian ‘*plach*’ [type of lament song] and other types of folk-songs. Kira Yuzhak recognised a number of genre prototypes in the opening of the *Sonata*: lamentation or *plach* as it is known in the Russian folk tradition (in the right hand part of the piano supported by the fifths); passacaglia (in the bass of the piano part); *znamenny* chant-like melody (in the middle voice of the piano part), and a ritualistic declamation (in the violin part).⁹ In our discussion during rehearsals, we arrived at the conclusion that the piece contains three main idea-symbols: the marching of crotchets symbolises an oppressive ‘road-roller’ of the Soviet industrial machine; the *mol’ba* or entreaty motive, represented by a falling minor third with a fermata on the last note, symbolises the idea of human suffering; and the chorale, as a symbol of faith, is

⁸ See my earlier discussion about *pyatislozhnik* on p.138.

⁹ Kira Yuzhak, “Observations on the Style of G. Ustvolskaya”, Op.cit., 87.

the spiritual core of the work. The significance of chorale supports Ustvolskaya's statement that all her compositions contain a spiritual programme.¹⁰

The detailed analysis enable us to conclude that the *Violin Sonata* exemplifies that unique 'Ustvolskian' style of composition and musical notation which, being unusual for Soviet music of the 1950s, put Ustvolskaya on the map as an avant-garde composer. The main characteristics of this style are:

1. the monolithic one-movement structure unified by perpetual movements of crotchets: metrical monotony supplemented by the rhythmical and structural monotony;
2. the slow 'unfolding' (as opposed to 'developing') of musical material from a small melodic or rhythmic cell becomes the main formative principle for Ustvolskaya. 'Unfolding' often coincides with the process of 'contraction': a movement within stasis. This principle is realised in many of Ustvolskaya's compositions that follow the *Sonata*;
3. the musical development is realised by means of repetition of melodic and rhythmic units among which the initial 'theme-thesis' dominates: G# - D# - G# - G# - D#;
4. a limited 'emotional' spectrum: juxtaposition of dark obsessive images and states of complete trance, which is often compared to 'spiritual trance' [*molitvennaya otreshennost'*];
5. the texture is polyphonic throughout, and although it consists of diatonic lines, the overall sonority is highly dissonant;
6. the 'speech-like' declamatory style of melodic material;
7. a tone-semitone succession at the core of melodic lines;
8. the notes and rests are counted in groups of ten, and that compensates for the absence of bar-lines;
9. a predilection for modes with lowered (flattened) tones, which leads to the frequent appearance of double and triple flats and creation of new diatonic modes;
10. a percussive sonority that dominates the parts of both instruments;
11. a tendency towards using extreme forms of dynamic, articulation and instrumental potential;

¹⁰ "Все мои сочинения имеют духовную программу" [All my compositions contain a spiritual programme] (Letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek, 25 August 1991). "An immense power and a striving towards God lies at the core of each one of my compositions, hence the term 'chamber music' is not applicable to any of them even as a form or genre classification." (Letter to Duffek, 11 April 1993).

12. the moments of highest emotional tension are achieved by rhythmic and melodic ostinato, which create an effect of a prolonged explosion.

Having analysed the text, we turned to the question of interpretation.¹¹ The Russian pianist and piano professor, Genrikh Neuhaus, once observe that some of his students think that interpretation is a way of adapting the piece to one's technical abilities. Ustvol'skaya's scores, including that of the *Violin Sonata*, do not present many technical challenges that need to be adapted to one's abilities; however, to understand the work and to prepare the performance that is both convincing and true to the composer's intention, was a much greater challenge. Here is how Fiona 'interpreted' the *Sonata*:

I found the music structurally fairly simple and repetitive. However, the hardest challenge for me while learning it, was first, to understand it, and then to "distance myself" musically, as the music seemed to speak for itself as long as you obey the instructions on the page!

My expectations of a relatively unknown composer were admittedly not extremely high before listening to Ustvol'skaya's music for the first time. Having known that she was a pupil of Shostakovich, I anticipated hearing a style like his. Initially, I found the music hard to listen to, perhaps because I didn't have any knowledge of Ustvol'skaya's background, but one of the first things that struck me, was the feeling of anger and oppression that came across in her music. I could not understand how this music was allowed under the Soviet regime; only later I discovered that these works were not published until later in her life. After learning a little more about Ustvol'skaya's life, I realised that there is not really a genre for this music, and I began to value her much more; her music and her life fascinated me!

Having studied the Russian history of the Twentieth Century, I knew the facts and the dates, but nothing had ever moved me like Ustvol'skaya's music.

It proves that music is the most emotive of the arts, and that Ustvol'skaya was able to express the horrors of Soviet life more clearly than any photograph or textbook.¹²

The performance of the *Sonata* offered a number of challenges most of which were discussed in the previous chapter. There were also some practical aspects of

¹¹ The Oxford English dictionary defines 'interpret' as to explain the meaning; to understand (an action, mood, or way of behaving) as having a particular meaning; to perform (a dramatic role or piece of music) in a way that conveys one's understanding of the creator's ideas; and to translate orally or into a different language.

¹² All the students' comments quoted in this thesis are taken from the Questionnaire that I've asked them to complete during and after the project. March 2011.

performance, such as: how to arrange a score to avoid the turns that might interrupt the ‘flow’ (Fiona used three stands); what are the potential problems which might arise during a performance, such as an unexpected error in counting by one of the performers?; and how to get ‘back in’ without interrupting the pace of crotchets? Above all, what is the right state of mind for performing the *Sonata*, and how to prepare yourself? As for ensemble challenges, unlike many other ensemble compositions where listening to your ensemble partner is helpful and therefore, advisable, Fiona and I discovered that the piano and violin in the *Sonata* do not always ‘communicate’ but simply coexist whilst executing different musical material. That yet again proved Ustvolskaya’s point that her music is not ‘chamber music’. At the end of the project, Fiona said:

After performing the Sonata to the first time listeners, I became aware of the fact that the harsh dissonant sonorities did not alienate the audience from the music in the same way as complex serial pieces often do. In fact, the music proved to be highly emotive, and communicated various aspects of the horrors of Soviet life, something which I find hard to grasp having lived in the West my entire life. Participating in this project has been an enriching experience for me musically and educationally!

Trio for Clarinet, Violin and Piano (1949)

Following a similar learning pattern as with the *Violin Sonata*, Stephanie, Fiona and myself began with the historical background of the *Trio*. Considering that the work was written in 1949, even closer to the time of the infamous Resolution of 1948, it was important to establish a clear understanding of what was expected from Soviet composers at the time to appreciate Ustvolskaya’s innovations fully. In the early Russian publications, the work is mentioned as the ‘*Trio in the memory of friends who died during the war.*’ However, the final score does not have any inscription or dedication. Ustvolskaya kept the *Trio* in a desk-drawer for nineteen years, and in 1968 the work received its premiere; the score was first published by *Sovetsky Kompozitor*, in Leningrad in 1970.

Although Ustvol'skaya was not the first composer to use the combination of clarinet, piano and violin,¹³ the sonority of her *Trio* is very different from the other works and the music written in Soviet Russia in the 1940s. Although the slow-moving, semi-tonal, sparsely expressive melodic lines of the *Trio* resemble the style of Shostakovich's chamber works, such as his early quartets and *Second Piano Trio* op.67, the *Trio* contains the features that will become recognised as distinctly 'Ustvol'skian', such as: the transparency of musical texture; predilection for linearity; highly dissonant sonorities within tonal structures; and development through repetition of small melodic units. The work contains many examples of abrupt contrasts that will become typical for Ustvol'skaya's language: the lyrical themes get interrupted by fiercely repeated piano strokes (the coda of the *Trio*), which some critics interpret as a sign of typical Russian nihilism.¹⁴

The graphic notation of the *Trio* differs from the *Piano Concerto* written earlier in 1946: although bar-lines are still present, the pulsation becomes increasingly irregular, hence almost every bar has a new time-signature; linearity and the rhythmic *ostinato* of crotchets become a dominant feature; the structure, although clearly divided into separate movements, feels monolithic. The dynamic contrasts from *ffff* to *pppp*, that will become a characteristic feature of Ustvol'skaya's later works, are reinforced by frequent remarks, such as *marcatissimo* and *subito espressivo*. The texture is transparent and almost deliberately simplified. The instrumental combination of the *Trio* confirms Ustvol'skaya's predilection for unusual combinations of instrumental timbres - a tendency which will be developed and taken to extremes in *Symphonies No. 2, 3, 4* and *5*, and the *Compositions*. The *Trio* also offers one of the earliest examples of tone clusters in Ustvol'skaya's music.

The first movement of the *Trio* contains many characteristics that indicate the direction of the future evolution of her compositional style: although a certain flexibility and even spontaneity of musical development can still be observed, it is strictly disciplined by incessant rhythmic *ostinato*. The melodies still bear certain folkloristic associations (e.g. the Dorian mode of the clarinet theme), but the rhythmic

¹³ Igor Stravinsky, Suite from *L'histoire du soldat* (1918), Aram Khachaturian, Trio for Clarinet, Violin and Piano (1932), Darius Milhaud, Suite pour Violin, Clarinette et Piano Op. 157b (1936), and Béla Bartók, *Contrasts* for Clarinet, Violin & Piano (1938).

¹⁴ Louis Blois, "Shostakovich and the Ustvol'skaya Connection: A Textural investigation", *Tempo*, no.182 (1992): 11.

‘obsessiveness’ determined by repetitions of units, quickly breaks any association with folklore. The use of the outer registers of the piano, as well as its highly articulated percussive characteristics, will be featured in many of Ustvolskaya’s works that follow.

The third movement of the *Trio* presents a ‘model’ of how Ustvolskaya will approach motivic development and use contrapuntal structures in later works:¹⁵ the motivic development consists of transferring sections and unchanged motivic ‘blocks’ between different instrumental timbres; as a result of the irregular pulsation, the main theme appears differently with every exposition. The meditative dialogue of the second movement would feature again in works like the *Grand Duet* for cello and piano and both the *Violin Sonata* and *Duet for Violin and Piano*. Although the *Trio*, unlike the *Second Piano Sonata*, composed around the same time, is still written metrically, employing bar-lines, the music is devoid of regular accent and free of recurring downbeats that makes the overall sonority resemble fine examples of early Renaissance polyphony. The *Trio* shows Ustvolskaya’s tendency towards the compact style of musical expression marked by reduction and densification of material. The expressive range is narrowed down to two main ‘emotional’ spheres: abstract meditation, which often appears obsessive in its stillness, and violent outbursts of elemental energy which suggests the primordial impulses of the human psyche.¹⁶

The *Trio* was revised by the composer in 1975 (the version published by Musikverlage Hans Sikorski). The revised version of the ending to the third movement gives a new dimension to the perception of the work. In comparison with the first Soviet edition, the changes made in Sikorski’s edition reveal some characteristic tendencies of Ustvolskaya’s stylistic development, and contain features that are seen in later works, such as three *Compositions*, which were already composed by the time Ustvolskaya edited the *Trio* in 1975. One of the main new features of the 1975 edition is the tendency towards exaggerated dynamics. Thus, rehearsal figure 5 is marked *f* (RUS) and *ff* in SE; all *f* in the third movement are changed to *fff* or *ffff* followed by *crescendo* only to be interrupted by *pppp* (in RUS - *p*). The piano coda in Sikorski Edition has an entirely different dynamic structure: here Ustvolskaya suggests a big dynamic build-up reaching *ff*, which did not exist in the Soviet edition. The fixation of a D, once falling to D flat,

¹⁵ Such was the opinion of Oleg Malov. See Malov’s personal interview in Appendix E.

¹⁶ Blois, *Textural Investigation*, Op.cit., 11.

which then ascends back into D natural and is then held for 28 beats, is interpreted by some critics as Ustvolskaya's 'fixation' on Shostakovich: D stands for Dmitry.¹⁷ The same 'fixation on a note', this time D flat, would be used by Ustvolskaya in the *Fifth Piano Sonata* (1986).¹⁸ The predilection towards exaggerated dynamics that is seen in the *Trio*, becomes intensified in the last decades of Ustvolskaya's creative career. As a result, the early works, such as the *Trio* and *Octet*, have gone through a number of 'dynamic' transformations when published by Musikverlage Hans Sikorski in the late 1980s.

In a review entitled '*A Solitary Spirituality and Absurdist's Humour*', Alex Ross claims that the *Trio* is unmistakably Shostakovichian in its slow, unvarying pulse and off-kilter tonal harmony, but at the same time has a whittled-down, jagged texture which Shostakovich's chamber music lacks. Speaking of other compositions (here referring to *Composition No. 1*, *Symphony No. 5*, and *Piano Sonatas No. 5 and 6*), Ross claims that Ustvolskaya's works, while demonstrating a colossal sense of 'self' and almost frightening conviction, are either monumental or totally ridiculous, depending on how you look at them.¹⁹ Ustvolskaya undoubtedly aspired for her entire oeuvre to be seen as 'monumental' and perceived as an example of 'the Highest Art,' although she anticipated the fact that her artistic intention might be misunderstood.²⁰ Either monumental or ridiculous, the *Trio* is the first work that is original and characteristically 'Ustvolskian', both in language and compositional style.

Here is Stephanie's (clarinettist) impression of the work:

For me, the piece resembles a journey. I found the piece quite simple to learn although the ensemble work and counting was much harder. It was just a matter of placing your part in the right time which required much work. The complexity and variety of time signatures threw me to begin with, and subdividing everything was what I found most helpful in learning the piece. I found the writing of the Clarinet part very different from the standard Clarinet part writing; many of the intervals

¹⁷ Daniel Charles Foley, programme note for the 'New Music Concert', Toronto, 23.10.1994. Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, Ustvolskaya Archive, Hamburg (visited in February 2008).

¹⁸ D flat, *Des* in German, can be read as *Deus* (God), which, knowing Ustvolskaya's preoccupation with the subject, clearly expressed in the subtitles to her *Compositions* and *Symphonies* written in the early 1970s-1980s, further demonstrates her artistic consistency.

¹⁹ Alex Ross, "A Solitary Spirituality and Absurdist's Humour", *New York Times*, 15 April 1996.

²⁰ Galina Ustvolskaya, *My Thoughts on the Creative Process*, Op.cit.

were peculiar. I think it was written with the intention to use the full span of dynamic ranges of which the Clarinet is very capable.

I liked the solo passages at the beginning of the piece and the end of the first and second movements [...] I had never played in an ensemble with that kind of instrumental combination before but I enjoyed it. There are many Violin and Clarinet interplays: for example, in the second movement, where the Clarinet is slowly replaced by Piano. All instruments have equal parts; none are more important than the other. It is the changes of the time signature that I had to concentrate on the most because there aren't many moments in the piece where everyone arrives together; therefore, if one player has a momentary lapse in concentration, there is no safety net, so to say; one is literally 'lost in the piece'.

Indeed, the *Trio* offered many ensemble challenges: each instrumental line has its own individual pulsation that often conflicts with another, and although each part is rhythmically rather simple, the combination of three creates a complex rhythmic texture and sonority. Having discussed and analysed the structure of melodic phrases with their individual pulsation and phrase lengths, we also had to consider and accommodate Stephanie's breathing. Another challenge was to find the articulation to match, balance or contrast the three instruments, depending on the context.

From the pedagogical point of view, my greatest challenge was to find verbal or visual images to inspire my students to establish connections between thoughts, feelings, ideas, and even sensations expressed in the music with those derived from their personal experiences. Many times during rehearsals I asked: 'What do you think this music is about? How does it make you feel? What are we trying to communicate here?' Fiona and Stephanie spoke about the overall feeling of anger and oppression; longing for something unattainable (Fig. 15); loneliness and questioning (Fig. 19); determination and readiness for action (Fig. 25); pleading for help or for forgiveness (Fig. 30); rejection (Violin entry after Fig. 31); feeling of despair that comes close to hysterics (Fig. 39-40), and the state of catharsis (Fig. 40); a lonely monologue that is followed by a dialogue that resembles that of 'me and my shadow' (Fig. 42); final convulsions of the body in pain (the piano coda).

All the above associations, however simplified they might seem, created that necessary link between the composer and us, the performers of her music. Despite the

frequent mystification of Ustvolskaya, she was not a Hero but a Human,²¹ and the humanity of her music is where its enormous power lies. Ustvolskaya's own phrase - *Ya pishu sebya* [I am writing (about) myself] indicates the connection between her personal experiences and their musical representation; it leads us through the dark labyrinth of her music, which is at times 'both infantile and catastrophic.'²²

Grand Duet for cello and piano (1959)

By asking eighteen-years-old Joe Davies to learn the *Grand Duet*, I set him a great challenge as my experience of previously performing the piece highlighted its technical challenges and emotional complexity, which call for a mature highly skilled musician. The result exceeded my expectations: Joe gave the preparation much thought, time and energy, and his performances were marked by passion, commitment and creativity. Joe shared with me his first impression of the piece:

My first contact with the piece was through a recording and, as per usual when I sit down to listen to something, my initial reactions were motivated mainly by my interest in composition, rather than my concerns as a performer. Before the end of the first movement, I remember thinking that the music seemed to lack subtlety and humanity. The relentlessness of the material, marching on without development in constant floods of crotchets and quavers called to mind a great grey machine. To be honest, I wondered how long it was going to continue like that. By the time the CD had come to its end I had warmed to the piece slightly. The final movement created a truly chilling atmosphere, giving off the impression of frailty and terror in the face of the distress and inhumanity of the preceding movements, memories of which haunted the finale right up until its conclusion.

Dedicated to Mstislav Rostropovich, the *Grand Duet* received its first performance on 14 December 1977 in Leningrad (Oleg Stolpner, violoncello, and Oleg Malov, piano). The work was performed by its dedicatee, Rostropovich, and the pianist Reinbert de Leeuw in Amsterdam, in 1996. Rostropovich's recollections about his first hearing of

²¹ I herein refer to the title of the article written by Elmer Schönberger, "Ustvolskaya, Hero, not of, but Against the Soviet Union" (Festival Brochure, Ustvolskaya Festival, 27-29 May 2011, Amsterdam), 14-19

²² Simon Bokman, *Variations on the Theme*, Op.cit., 66.

the *Grand Duet* in Leningrad in the mid-1960s give an insight into Ustvol'skaya's personality and, most importantly, a performer's (Rostropovich) impression of the work at the time of composition. Rostropovich knew of Ustvol'skaya from the time when he studied orchestration with Shostakovich at the Moscow Conservatoire (1943-46), and on a number of occasions he asked her to compose a cello piece for him. In the programme dedicated to Ustvol'skaya's eightieth anniversary, Rostropovich shared his memories about the composer's performance of the piece:

*She [Ustvol'skaya] appeared incredibly shy and kept repeating how self-conscious and somewhat embarrassed she felt. I knew very little of her music at the time, and knowing her as a person, I expected to hear something very gentle, maybe a few notes played **pp**. However, when she suddenly struck a few notes in the low register of the piano with an immense force, I jumped off my seat. I remained in a state of shock for the whole duration of the piece, listening to her hammering away all over the piano. After she finished, she quietly said: 'Well, this is it'. It became clear to me that if I am to perform this composition, Ustvol'skaya would not only be expelled from the Composers' Union but might even be arrested.²³*

Joe, who was named the BBC Young Composer of the Year in 2008, approached the piece from the composer's perspective: his understanding of twentieth century compositional techniques enabled him to appreciate the unique nature of Ustvol'skaya's compositional style, as well as to recognise the artistic connections with the music of other composers. Our first rehearsal revealed a number of misprints in the score.²⁴ The comparison of the Soviet edition (RUS) and the Sikorski Edition (SE) showed a number of differences, which were analysed in detail.²⁵ It becomes clear that between 1973 (the year of RUS edition) and 1989 (SE) Ustvol'skaya's perception of dynamics changed. In the works of the late 1980s-1990s she demonstrated a predilection towards the extreme end of the dynamic spectrum, and her publishers at the Musikverlage Hans Sikorski

²³ M. Rostropovich for the TV programme 'Tsarskaya Lozha' dedicated to Ustvol'skaya's 85th Anniversary. The interview was later published as programme note to the CD album: "Rostropovich: The Russian Years, 1950-1974", EMI Classics, 1998.

²⁴ Fig. 16, in the Piano part the chords notated as a minim tied to a crotchet has to be held for 7 counts (the dot is missing); another example of missing/added dot are: Fig. 14 - dot added; Fig. 98 and Fig. 105 - dots added; in Fig. 31-32, the Stolpner - Malov recording as well as the RUS Edition reveals a different chord to the one printed in the Sikorski Edition (SE).

²⁵ The full list of misreadings and misprints can be found in Appendix B.

were notified about the necessary changes to be made in the scores.²⁶ During our rehearsals we discussed the question of dynamics and the methods of execution dynamics such as *ffff*: how much sound is *ffff* or *fffff*?; is it a purely quantitative category, does it have to be taken literally, or does it simply represent the degree of emotional intensity? I believe that the latter is the correct answer. In some sections of the *Grand Duet* the writing itself makes it relatively easy to execute *ffff* on the piano: thus, in the opening to the piece, where the outer registers of the piano are used to create a ‘screaming’ sonority, or the sections with six-note-clusters, the cello part is often notated in either a very low register, hence the request for a double-bass bow, or in a very high register more often associated with the violin. The rest of the time, the physical endurance of the players is challenged to the maximum: whether it is the first movement, where almost every note is marked with an accent or *espressivo*, and the dynamic ranges from *ff* to *ffff* throughout; or the third movement, marked *ffff* throughout, and the composer requests a double-bass bow to be used. In the fourth movement the cellist has to play 248 quavers *fff* consecutively with only one quaver rest after the 207th quaver.

The *Grand Duet* continues the line of works notated without bar lines started in the *Second Piano Sonata* (1949). Similarly to what we observed in the *Clarinet Trio*, and more so, in the *Violin Sonata*, the individual length of melodic phrases together with the specific metric structure and sonority for each instrumental part, creates the overall impression of the texture that is metrically very irregular. The *Grand Duet* offers a wide variety of ensemble challenges, the main being the irregularity of melodic patterns and rhythmic structures, and the absence of unified metre: both Joe and myself found it rather difficult to maintain the continuity of one’s rhythmic structure against the other instrument with its own pulsation (for example, Fig. 5-12). With the intention of securing the ensemble aspects of performance, we analysed the phrase structure in great detail in search of the points of contact between two instruments: the ‘re-phrasing’ tool was often used. The idea of dividing long lines of rhythmically repeated notes into groups of two, three and four was introduced by the composer herself: thus, in Fig. 22,

²⁶ In a letter to Hans-Ulrich Duffek dated 22 April 1993, Ustvol'skaya wrote about the *Grand Duet*: “The piece needs to be played with strength and energy as well as very expressively, in a creative artistic manner. The trills in the second movement (cello part) must be played with the following dynamics: *f cresc ffff* and not *f - crescendo*.”

from Fig. 34 to the end of first movement, the vertical lines clearly divide long lines of quavers into shorter melodic units.

Ustvolskaya's comments in the preface to the piece indicate the specific characteristics of the piano/cello ensemble, and reinforce her statement that the *Grand Duet* is not a 'chamber music' composition; although it is called a *Duet*, it is not an amicable partnership.²⁷ The composer's instructions read: "The cellist must be seated on a podium." That is to indicate the cellist's solo position, and to enhance its sound against the sound of the piano, which, in the Sikorski Edition, is instructed to have an open lid throughout the piece. However, on the front page of the Soviet edition, along with a personal inscription 'To Oleg Malov', we read (written by Ustvolskaya): "Two bows. The cellist is to sit on a podium. The piano lid should be shut; move the piano to the back wall of the hall."

Another of Ustvolskaya's requests was for the cellist and the pianist to be seated some distance away from each other. This comment stands against what is traditionally associated with playing chamber music, especially when good visual and aural communication is essential for the correct execution of the work. Joe and I experimented with sitting to the sides of a stage whilst maintaining a specific angle to keep a visual contact. Although such a sitting position made a performance more challenging, the result had a very powerful impact on the audience, both aurally and visually. To me, Ustvolskaya's request for physical distance between the players is of an aesthetic significance as it contributes to communication of the central idea of the piece: the idea of conflict, an antagonism between the power of 'We' - as a representation of the collective, against I - the individual. This 'key conflict' is represented at its best in the finale of the *Grand Duet*. Here are Joe's final observations on the piece:

I have found the incredible pessimism of the Grand Duet an obstacle to my appreciation. I believe this quality of the music must arise either from Ustvolskaya's uncompromising insistence on Truth, or a lack of Substance.²⁸ Looking at the evidence, I am inclined to believe the former. "Mannered" music would almost certainly be more euphonious, or more systematically constructed. Mannerisms,

²⁷ When the *Grand Duet* was programmed for the sixty-fifth Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Switzerland in 1991, Ustvolskaya insisted that organisers change the classification of the recital from 'Chamber Music concert' to simply a 'concert'. K. Bagrenin. Personal interview.

²⁸ Joe here quoted Charles Ives: "'Substance' leads towards optimism, and 'manner' to pessimism". (Charles Ives, *Essays Before a Sonata*, Epilogue)

after all, are those superficial musical objects calculated to impress. Surely they should make a piece more attractive to the average listener and the musicologist. What I have come to value most in Ustvol'skaya's music is her unerring focus on a desired expressive end. Whereas Wagner devoted himself time and time again to conjuring up a very particular, instantly recognisable breed of sensuality, Ustvol'skaya seems to have the same fixation on extreme spiritual distress.

One of the most rewarding parts of the 'Ustvol'skaya at Chetham's' project was to hear the students' response to the music, and together observe and analyse the audience response. Performing the three works consecutively allowed us to examine the evolution of Ustvol'skaya's language and style of writing for a particular instrument. The students' observations summarised it:

Fiona:

After performing Ustvol'skaya's music to the first time listeners, I became aware of the fact that the harsh dissonant sonorities did not alienate the audience from the music in the same way as complex serial pieces often do.

Stephanie:

As we played in different concert halls, the audience varied. At Chetham's the audience mainly consisted of students who did not experience much of the twentieth century Russian music before and definitely never heard of Ustvol'skaya. From the feedback it became clear that people enjoyed it, although they found it 'very different'. At the Peel Hall, the audience was much more prepared and knowledgeable, hence I felt that the atmosphere was better: the audience seemed to 'take the music in' more, and there was a slight 'electric' feel to it.

Joe:

The performance that took place a few weeks ago, in which several of Ustvol'skaya's works including the Grand Duet were performed, created a reaction that I had never before seen in an audience. Some were in tears, some visibly bored; some seemed greatly enthused and excitedly voiced their admiration for the music; some walked away from the performance looking thoughtful and unsure. From my point of view, this reaction was both exciting and gratifying to witness, and it testifies not only to the breadth, but also to the power of Ustvol'skaya's music on an audience largely unfamiliar with the circumstances which brought her to compose as she did.

Fiona, Stephanie and Joe admitted that the experience of studying and performing Ustvol'skaya's works was truly rewarding. Although the reality out of which this music was born had very little in common with their everyday reality, it forced them to

sympathise with another person's experience and to appreciate the real Ustvolskaya as opposed to the 'Ustvolskaya Myth'.

Appendix B**Sonata for Violin and Piano:****List of misreadings as they occurred in three different sources:**

1. a copy from Galina Ustvolskaya's manuscript (GUM);

2. the first Russian edition by Muzyka, 1966, Leningrad (RUS);

3. Hans Sikorski Edition 1991 (SE);

1. articulation: the opening motto of the Violin is marked staccato in the RUS and *tenuto* in the GUM and SE. The same motif in Fig. 71 is marked *con legno* in GUM and SE, but staccato without *con legno* in RUS;
2. dynamic indications: The opening phrase of the Violin is marked *p* in SE, GUM, but *mf* in RUS. Each entry of the Violin melodic motto is marked *p* in GUM and SE, but these are absent in RUS. Violin entries in Fig. 39-41, as well as the piano entries are marked *f* in SE and GUM, but are absent in RUS. Fig. 34 in RUS contains an additional *pp* that is absent in both GUM and SE. RUS contains additional *crescendo* and *diminuendo*: Fig. 41 *crescendo* in the Violin part; Fig. 43 in the *crescendo*, *piano* is marked. Some dynamic indications are simply opposite: after Fig. 44 both the Piano and Violin part are marked *f* in GUM and SE, but *p* in RUS; the piano entry before Fig. 50 is marked *f* in GUM and SE but *mf* in RUS, whilst the Violin part is marked *mf* in RUS and has no marking in GUM and SE. Piano cluster in the third crochet after Fig. 54 is marked *p* in GUM and SE, but *mf* and a *crescendo* leading into it in RUS; another big *crescendo* in the piano part is marked 3 crochets before Fig. 55 leading into *p* before Fig. 56 and followed by *diminuendo*. The five-note motto in the Piano marked *p* in GUM and has no marking in RUS, however RUS contains a *crescendo* and *sf* on the cluster before Fig. 57; *pp* for Piano two crochets before Fig. 59 in GUM is absent in RUS.

Occasionally all three scores have the same markings: Fig. 69 *pp* for piano octaves. Some significant dynamic marks are absent in RUS: Fig. 81 *ff* for both Piano and Violin, and all the way to Fig. 87 each entry is marked *ff*. Fig. 190-192, in RUS in

- Piano part there is long *crescendo - diminuendo* marked that is absent in both GUM and SE;
3. presence/absence of fermatas. In GUM and SE starting from Fig. 143 until 151 each last note of the three-note motto is marked by fermata. It is absent in RUS, instead the last note is marked by an accent;
 4. misprints (incorrect notes, length of notes, rest and fermatas): the Piano entry before Fig. 92 in SE notated as B flat C, in GUM - B double flat C flat (= RUS A-B). Before Fig. 101, in Piano part (RH) an octave B flat is marked in SE, whilst in RUS - octave A. The latter seems more appropriate considering the context. Fig. 155 in Violin part (RUS) a double octave is written, whilst in GUM and SE is a single D (E double flat) marked by *fff*;
 5. phrase marks or slurs. The slurs above groups of notes in Ustvol'skaya's score are clearly the phrasing marks. The length of phrases varies, although most of them seem to contain a combination of two-and-three-note patterns: the five-note melodic motto, first presented in the opening of the piece, functions as a leitmotiv;
 6. notation of long notes. In SE all long notes are subdivided and slurred for the convenience of a performer: for example, Fig. 197 in Violin part in GUM and SE, a dotted minim is tied to a crotchet, then to a semibreve (altogether 7 beats), in RUS - a dotted semibreve is tied to a crotchet; similar - in Fig. 22;
 7. tempo indication. In RUS the tempo mark at the opening is crotchets = 112-104, in GUM and SE - 112;
 8. numerical organisation of rests and notes: the count of beats at the end of the piece is marked by numbers from 1 to 38 in GUM and SE whilst in RUS the piano entry marks the beginning of a new count (1 to 11, then 1 to 27).

Grand Duet for cello and piano:

List of misreadings as they occurred in different editions: the first Russian edition, 1973, Leningrad.(RUS) and Hans Sikorski Edition, 1991 (SE)

Movement I:

- in RUS all the rests are numbered; in SE if one of the instruments is not playing, a staff is not printed (examples: Fig.1-5; the end of Fig. 48-49; 116-117);

- in RUS the Piano part is always notated on two staves, whilst in SE it is often notated on one;
- there are obvious misprints: in Fig. 18 after the Cello stops, Piano plays 5 chords, in SE - 6;
- the rests are counted and notated differently: before Fig. 21, in SE - a minim rest, in RUS - a crotchet rest with number 'two' above (a crotchet rest, count two). Similar in Fig. 21 (piano): a minim rests in SE are marked as crotchet rests in RUS. Before Fig. 25, in Piano part, the 'two octave higher' sign is missing, instead, a sign 'one octave higher' is written in Fig. 26. Also, in SE this section is marked *ff* and *pesante* which are absent in RUS; instead *pp* is marked.

Movement II:

- in RUS *acuto* is absent;
- in RUS, Fig. 43 the *f cresc ffff* is absent;
- in RUS, the trill on G sharp after Fig. 43 starts on *p*, in SE - starts on *f cresc ffff*, and that is applicable to all the trills up to Fig. 51;
- as in Movement I, all the rests in RUS are counted as crotchets; in SE - as minims;

Movements III:

- in RUS copy kept at the Paul Sacher Stiftung, the comment in Ustvol'skaya's handwriting reads: '*Grubyk smychok!!! Kontrabasa!!!* [Double-bass bow];
- the second entry of the Cello in RUS is marked *ffff* in brackets;
- Fig. 62 in RUS is marked *espr.*;
- in the Piano part after Fig. 66, when the four voices are gradually introduced and placed at a great distance from each other, in RUS a footnote reads: "From here to Fig. 68 in the case of performance difficulty, the middle voice can be omitted". The comment is absent in SE;
- the end of the movement in RUS is marked with *attacca*, which is omitted in SE;

Movement IV:

- the tempo indication 'crotchet equals 160' is incredibly fast; it is most likely to be a misprint: a quaver equals 160;

-in RUS, Fig, 79 the Piano entry is marked *fff*;

-another misprint appears in the Cello part of SE: a quaver rest three notes before Fig. 91 is marked as a two-quaver rest;

-the end of the movement in RUS is marked by *attacca*, whilst in SE - GP instead;

Movement V does not have any ‘misreadings’; all the rests are counted as crotchets; in Fig. 179 (the Piano part) the rests have a slightly different length: four crotchet rests (in SE a minim rest is followed by a dotted minim rest, which equals 5) followed by two melodic motifs and a two crotchet rests (in SE - 1 crotchet rest).

Appendix C

“Art with or without influence? One performer’s search for Ustvolskaya’s artistic forerunners and successors.” Programme notes for the PhD recital.²⁹

The structure and content of this recital programme is determined by my desire to experience Ustvolskaya’s music in a variety of musical contexts. Here it is presented in the company of three other composers, representatives of the St. Petersburg school of composition: Dmitry Shostakovich, Alesha Nikolaev and Alexander Knaifel. The selected works of each composer are preceded by a two- or three-part *Invention* by Bach. Such recital structure sets out to demonstrate the artistic and cultural influences as well as inter-textual connections between Ustvolskaya’s music and that of her contemporaries and predecessors. Despite Ustvolskaya’s determination to disassociate herself from ‘others’ and to be seen as an ‘island in the ocean of contemporary music’ - the artistic position which was willingly accepted by many Westerners - her music, when heard in a broader context, proves otherwise. That, however, does not in any way diminish the singularity of her compositional gift and originality of her language. Ustvolskaya’s music is complex despite the seeming simplicity of the scores, and not always listener-friendly. The music’s overall sonority is predominantly dissonant and its tone is intensely declamatory; the chant-like melodies combined with concentrated silences and long held notes are hypnotising; an unexpected awakening comes from hammering chords and ‘slab-like’ sonorities that are violently forced upon listeners. Ustvolskaya’s compositional language is very systematic: she chooses the main melodic or rhythmic ideas at the beginning of the work and develops them by means of repetition akin to themes in Bach’s fugues; a composition comes to an end when Ustvolskaya feels that the musical idea(s) has exhausted its emotional and expressive potential.

The appearance of Bach’s two- and three-part *Inventions* in the context of this recital is not at all accidental. Ustvolskaya had a great veneration for Bach and his music. For her, the structural clarity and perfect order combined with the immense inventiveness of his melodic material, was what placed Bach in a league of his own. The

²⁹ The recital took place on 4 November 2010, Deptford Town Hall, Goldsmiths College, London.

Inventions chosen for this programme aim to demonstrate how Bach with the pervasive rhythmic regularity of rhythm and uniformity of metrical pulse informed Ustvol'skaya's compositional language. Her long chains of crotchets 'woven' into the complex polyphonic textures suggest a certain fellowship with Bach. The significance of the descending minor second and minor third are evident in the music of both composers. To a certain extent, the same applies to the works of Shostakovich, Nikolaev and Knaifel featured in this programme.

Another aspect which, in my view, unites all the works in the recital is the specific type of pianism that has its roots in the Baroque keyboard tradition, of which Bach was one of the finest representatives. Bach's contemporaries spoke of his distinct manner of keyboard articulation that resembled the art of speaking, and was characterised by the highest degree of clarity in the performance of individual tones akin to pronunciation of individual words. Contrary to Romantic pianism, the 'Baroque' style of keyboard playing focuses on clarity of melodic and rhythmic figures, and detailed execution of contrapuntal lines. Continuing the Baroque tradition, Ustvol'skaya brought her piano back to its roots as a percussion instrument of loud and soft sound; her piano is sparse and highly articulated; the frequently used time-signature 1/4 reinforces the significance of every note and the weight of every interval and tone cluster. The austere sonority of her piano scores also communicates that immediately recognisable Russian mournfulness.

Shostakovich's piano performing manner, although very individual, also followed the line of 'Baroque' pianism, and influenced the nature of his writing for the instrument. He had a very distinct touch, and often quite intentionally treated the piano as a percussion instrument; the very particular sounds of his 'sarcastic dry staccato' is remembered by many. He used the upper register of the piano as a xylophone, making a sharp percussive sound, and emphasised the linear aspects of music. In the 1930s-1940s Shostakovich's pianism was considered very modern; it went against the more decorative romantic style of playing popular at the time. Shostakovich's piano was the 'sound image' that undoubtedly influenced Ustvol'skaya's perception of the instrument, its sonority and its role in ensembles with other instruments. A very similar approach to the piano writing and the type of pianism can be seen in the works of Nikolaev and

Knaifel, who continued the St. Petersburg tradition, although in a very individual artistic manner.

Galina Ustvolskaya: Sonata for Violin and Piano (1952)

Unlike other compositions of Ustvolskaya, which had to await their first performances for over twenty years, the *Violin Sonata* was more fortunate in that respect. The work was tolerated by Soviet authorities and presented to the world as a token of Soviet modernism. The *Violin Sonata* was first performed in 1958 and labelled as ‘kind of ugly’ by Roy Harris. It was later played at the Warsaw Autumn Festival (1959) together with some works by Shostakovich and Andrey Volkonsky, which were still banned in Russia at the time, and for a group of Western visitors headed by Igor Stravinsky in 1962.

The *Sonata* is a one-movement composition much of which deals with an insistently reiterated five-note motto based on two pitches - a perfect fourth apart in the Violin, and independently developed note-against-note counterpoint in the piano. The entire composition unfolds from the melodic material presented in the opening section, which demonstrates a number of genre prototypes: a ritualistic declamation based on a five-note motto in the Violin part, a choral lamentation in the right hand of the piano and a passacaglia in the Bass line of the Piano part. All melodic units of the *Sonata* demonstrate some intervallic similarity and share predilection for melodic descent. None of the ‘themes’ become domineering in the process of development.

The compositional structure can be divided into three sections according to recognisable shifts in texture and tempo. The otherwise lucid shape is organised by relentlessly moving crotchets which became the hallmark of Ustvolskaya’s style since the *Second Piano Sonata* (1949). The writing in both the Piano and Violin parts is very transparent and lacks any deliberate modernist complexity; every melodic line can be easily followed, and the insistent, often obsessive, repetition of melodic unites make the listener well aware of the developmental process. Every note seems to be ‘loaded’ with meaning; that, together with shocking dynamic contrasts, the unending marching of crotchets and long concentrated silences, leaves a very powerful impression on the audience.

Dmitry Shostakovich: Aphorisms, op.13 (1927)

- I. Recitative
- II. Serenade
- III. Nocturne
- IV. Elegy
- V. Funeral March
- VI. Etude
- VII. Dance of Death
- VIII. Canon
- IX. Legend

The cycle was conceived in Berlin in 1927, while on a week-long tour after the Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw. The work continued radical experimental tendencies which first emerged in the *First Piano Sonata* (1926). Shostakovich at the time was greatly influenced by the linear counterpoint of Krenek and Hindemith whose music was introduced to him by his mentors Maria Yudina, Boris Asafiev and Boleslav Yavorsky. The latter was a dedicatee of the cycle, who suggested the name *Aphorisms* as opposed to the original title of *Suite*. A predilection for irony and parody which characterises Shostakovich's music of the period is reflected in the titles, which are not always to be taken at face value. Thus, grating sonorities of the *Nocturne*, the mock-profound fanfare accompanying a procession in *Funeral March*, and an unnaturally slow metronome mark in what is to be a virtuosic *Etude* demonstrate a rather paradoxical treatment of traditional genres. In *Serenade* Shostakovich turns to the oldest tradition of 'serenading' – singing a lyrical song in honour of a loved one accompanying himself on guitar. The perfect canon resembles a three-voice invention à la Bach in *Canon* written on three staves like an orchestral score, while the *Legend* brings to mind the theme of the monk Pimen writing a chronicle of Russia in the monastery of Chudov from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*.

Alesha Nikolaev: Piano Sonata No.2 in C minor

I. Allegretto

II. Adagio

III. Allegro

IV. Allegro non troppo

Alesha Nikolaev was born in Leningrad in 1959. He began composing at a very young age, and it was Shostakovich who, after having looked through the boy's scores sent to him by one of Alesha's relatives, spoke of his talent and encouraged the boy's parents to find him a good teacher of composition. Alesha started having lessons with the composer Zhanna Metallidi (a pupil of Galina Ustvol'skaya), and later with Galina Ustvol'skaya herself.

The *Piano Sonata No.2* (the exact date of compositions is unknown) combines youthful spirit with mature treatment of individual musical idioms. The work clearly demonstrates stylistic influences of both Shostakovich and Ustvol'skaya, particularly the latter. The texture of all four movements is very transparent and predominately polyphonic; the rhythmic simplicity combined with metric irregularity strongly resembles that of Ustvol'skaya: even though bar lines are still present, the frequently changed time signature leads to the absence of regular pulsation; the way the melodic material is organised also demonstrates Ustvol'skaya's influence: short melodic units are moved around like a kaleidoscope whilst remaining mainly unchanged; the nature of melodism yet again resembles that of Ustvol'skaya: a step-wise movement of crotchets with occasional leaps; short melodic units (*popevki*) which are repeated insistently; the inventive combination of diatonic modes that leads to highly dissonant overall sonority; the typically Ustvol'skian stamping of crotchets; the exposition of melodic lines in octave unison with the 'split' upper tone; a limited amount of dynamic indication with an occasional *sf* and *marcato* - all that demonstrates Ustvol'skaya's influence.

The concentrated stillness of the second movement with the obsessively repeated pedal point 'A' in the left hand brings to mind the slow sections from Ustvol'skaya's *Trio*, *Violin Sonata* and *Grand Duet*, while the waltz of the third movement is composed in the spirit of Saint-Saëns's *Danse Macabre* and Shostakovich's Waltz from the 'Aphorisms'. The type of pianism strongly resembles that of Shostakovich's *Piano*

Preludes, op.34 (1932/33), and the *Sonata*'s laconic aphoristic language also continues the tradition of early Shostakovich.

Among other Alesha compositions are *Two Fugues*, *Five Preludes*, piano suite '*Koshkin Dom*' [A Cat's House]; piano suite '*Rerikh. Roden*'; fairytale '*Tsarevna-Zmeya*' [A Princess-Snake]; *String Quintet*; *Trio for two flutes and cello*; *Suite for oboe and piano*. Alesha Nikolaev committed suicide in 1977, aged eighteen. Even today, he is spoken about as one of the most gifted pupils of Ustvol'skaya, whose influence on both the boy's music and the development of his artistic personality was very significant.

Alexander Knaifel (1943 -)

Two pieces (1963): 'Marching two-part piece', 'Dancing two-part piece'

Two pieces (1968): 'A little Black Piece', 'A little White Piece'

Alexander Knaifel studied cello at a specialist music school in Leningrad, and during the period between 1961 and 1963 had lessons with Mstislav Rostropovich at the Moscow Conservatoire. After a serious hand injury, he turned to composing, and studied composition with Boris Arapov at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire (1963 - 1967).

The two sets of pieces presented in this recital are early works. *Marsheryushchee dvukh-golosie* [Marching two-part piece] and *Tantsuyushchee dvukh-golosie* [Dancing two-part piece] were written in 1963. Even though the character of both pieces is joyful, humorous and is bursting with youthful energy in contrast to Ustvol'skaya's music, her influence is clearly audible in the ways the musical material is organised both melodically and rhythmically. The other two pieces - *A Little White Piece* and *A Little Black Piece* (1968) are miniature explorations of a five-note position on white and black keys in the spirit of Stravinsky's *Les cinq doigts* (1921)

The second half of the recital presents Ustvol'skaya's ensemble compositions.

Galina Ustvolskaya: Trio for Clarinet, Violin, Piano (1949)

I. Espressivo

II. Dolce

III. Energico

The *Trio* was written in the same year as the *Second Piano Sonata*, the work of which Ustvolskaya spoke as the first ‘spiritual in nature’ composition. As many other ‘spiritual’ works that followed, the *Trio* remained in a desk drawer for nearly 20 years: the first performance took place in Leningrad on 11 January 1968. Even though the score of the *Trio* still contains bar lines and time signature (which will be omitted in *Second Piano Sonata, 1949*), the work, together with the *Second Piano Sonata* and the *Octet* for two oboes, four violins, timpani, and piano (1949/50), reveals the characteristics that were to become hallmarks of Ustvolskaya’s style: predominantly polyphonic writing; melodic lines formed from short motivic segments, which develop through repetition; a predilection for unusual instrumental combinations; extreme terraced dynamics and use of extreme registers.

The *Trio*, in my view, is one of the most lyrical compositions of Ustvolskaya. The melodic material, especially in the Clarinet and Violin parts, is not yet devoid of beauty, and even perhaps, tenderness. The folk-song simplicity and characteristic Russian melancholy of the Clarinet theme from the third movement of the *Trio* inspired Shostakovich to use it in the *Fifth String Quartet* (1952) and the song ‘Night’ from the *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo* (1974). The piano coda of the last movement with its fiercely repeated chords in the low register precedes the merciless hammering clusters of Ustvolskaya’s late *Compositions*, *Symphonies* and the last two piano sonatas. In Russian publications of the early 1960s, the *Trio* is referred to as ‘the trio to the memory of friends killed during World War II’.

Galina Ustvolskaya: Grand Duet for Cello and Piano (1959) in five movements

The work was commissioned by and dedicated to Mstislav Rostropovich - one of the greatest Russian cellists. The *Grand Duet* is a perfect embodiment of Ustvolskaya's statement that her music is never 'chamber music' even if notated for one or two instruments. Indeed, the thematic material and its sonic representations in the piano and cello parts do not in any way complement each other, and that 'separateness' is visually reinforced: performers are instructed to sit some distance away from one another as if symbolising alienation, and their ensemble is hardly ever a dialogue but a fierce argument. Every compositional and performing aspect of this work is taken to its extreme form: tempi, dynamic indications, use of instrumental tessitura, length of the notes, as well as the ways the instruments are played. The five movements of the *Grand Duet* are thematically interrelated; the opening theme of the piano part concludes the work. Both instrumental parts challenge the performers' abilities and their physical endurance to the extreme, as well as that of the audience. In the preface to the piece Ustvolskaya wrote: "The work is to be played very energetically and vigorously in a manner that is expressive, creative and original."

The *Grand Duet* was first performed in Leningrad on December 14, 1977, by Oleg Stolpner, cello, and Oleg Malov, piano. The dedicatee of the piece, Mstislav Rostropovich, performed it in Amsterdam in 1996 with Reinbert de Leeuw at the piano and Galina Ustvolskaya in the audience. That was the composer's first visit abroad, aged 87.

Alexander Knaiifel: 'Nativity' (2003)

Dedicated to the Estonian conductor, Andres Mustonen, this piece consists of a single melody played in the highest register of the piano accompanied by gentle sound of trembling bells. The performer is instructed to recite the text of the Lord's Prayer internally whilst performing the piece.

Galina Ustvolskaya spoke of her music as being 'spiritual in nature' rather than religious in the liturgical sense. However, her spirituality is of a unique kind:

Ustvol'skaya's music does not bring comfort or help to find inner harmony; on the contrary, it offers an experience that is physically and emotionally exhausting for both the performers and listeners. Her music does not have a clearly defined programme; it is not about something in particular. Instead, it is a complex artistic phenomenon of a very tragic and highly personal nature. Ustvol'skaya's music cannot be simply liked or disliked; it evokes emotional reactions on a much deeper level. This music explores and challenges the artistic expressiveness, the performer's ability and the audience perception to the limit. The response to this music partly depends on one's individual personal experiences and cultural expectations. However, one thing is clear: Ustvol'skaya's music never causes indifference but a powerful reaction among listeners. Once it is heard, it cannot be forgotten.

My thanks go to Fiona, Stephanie and Joe - the students of Chetham's School of Music, whose commitment, dedication and professionalism in approaching this highly demanding music made my research project much more rewarding and enjoyable.

Appendix D

List of research trips

20-26 July 2006. St. Petersburg. A series of interviews with Oleg Malov. Visits to the libraries of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire and Rimsky-Korsakov Music College.

30 October – 4 November 2006. Moscow. Visits to the libraries of the Moskovsky Dom Kompozitorov [Moscow Composers' House] and the Moscow Conservatoire.

21 October – 29 October 2007. St. Petersburg. Interviews with Oleg Malov, Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya, Alexander Knaifel, Boris Tishchenko, Sergey Banevich, Tat'yana Voronina. Visits to the Russian National Library.

11-14 December 2007. Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel. Working at the Ustvol'skaya Collection.

25-28 February 2008. Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, Hamburg. Interviews with Hans-Ulrich Duffek in Hamburg, and Viktor Suslin in Pinneberg. Working with Ustvol'skaya's documents and correspondence and studying the scores.

29 March - 2 April 2008. St. Petersburg. Interviews with Konstantin Bagrenin, Sergey Slonimsky, Boris Tishchenko, Vitaly Solov'ev. Piano lessons with Oleg Malov.

31 March - 4 April 2009. St. Petersburg. Interviews with Konstantin Bagrenin.

27 - 28 May 2011. Amsterdam – Invited speaker at the International Symposium “Galina Ustvol'skaya: New Perspectives.”

Appendix E

Personal interviews

Konstantin Bagrenin, 30 March and 1 April 2008, 2 April 2009, St. Petersburg

Oleg Malov, pianist, Professor of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, 22 July 2006, 24 October 2007, 31 March 2008, 2 April 2009, St. Petersburg

Dr. Heidi Zimmermann, Curator of the Ustvol'skaya's collection at the Paul Sacher Stiftung, 12 December 2007, Basel

Hans-Ulrich Duffek, Director of the Internationale Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, 24 February 2008, Hamburg

Victor Suslin, composer, former editor at the Internationale Musikverlage Hans Sikorski, 26 February 2008, Pinneberg

Boris Tishchenko, composer, student of both Galina Ustvol'skaya (Rimsky-Korsakov Music College) and Dmitry Shostakovich (St. Petersburg Conservatoire), 27 October 2007, St. Petersburg

Sergey Slonimsky, composer, 31 March 2008, St. Petersburg

Sergey Banevich, composer, student of Galina Ustvol'skaya (Rimsky-Korsakov Music College), 26 October 2007, St. Petersburg

Vitaly Solov'ev, composer, student of Galina Ustvol'skaya (Rimsky-Korsakov Music College), 24 October 2007, St. Petersburg

Alexander Knaifel, composer, 24 October 2007, St. Petersburg

Ekaterina Ruch'evskaya, musicologist, Professor of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, 25 October 2007, St. Petersburg

Tat'yana Voronina, pianist, Professor of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, 25 October 2007, St. Petersburg

Linda Jankowska, violinist, 10 May 2011, Manchester

*Transcript of the interviews**From conversations with Oleg Malov. July 2006, St. Petersburg.*

Oleg Malov showed me manuscripts, the first editions and the working scores of almost all Ustvolskaya's compositions; many of them have the personal inscription 'To dear Oleg Malov' written on the front page. Looking at the scores, Malov mentioned that many of Ustvolskaya's compositions had a large number of misprints when first published in the Soviet Union; some of them were accidental, others exemplified editor's attempt to simplify a score by adding bar lines and using enharmonic equivalents, as in the *Violin Sonata*, to 'smooth-up' dissonant sonorities. Malov admitted that on a number of occasions he made some suggestions to the composer regarding the notes, tempi indications etcetera, that were accepted and included in the later editions.

Elena Nalimova: How did you recognise those 'mistakes'?

Oleg Malov: One can easily 'calculate' them because the whole compositional system is so 'locked' in itself; there simply cannot be any 'random' notes. Ustvolskaya chooses a certain compositional method, say a melodic pattern or a rhythmic figure, at the beginning of a composition, and continues using it by simply 'moving it around', rather than developing or varying it. Therefore, once you've understood the system from within, all the 'odd' notes become obvious. Ustvolskaya is absolutely systematic. I am very proud to say that none of Ustvolskaya's compositions went into print without my editorial proof; she must have trusted my expertise then. (Malov here speaks of the Soviet Editions of the works)

EN: What, in your opinion, is particularly characteristic about her compositional method? Can we talk about traditional methods of developing musical material?

OM: Perhaps not, especially in the later compositions. Traditional methods of development do not work here, hence aren't used. Ustvolskaya's development of musical material is a *summarising* process; she builds up intensity gradually from the

start of the piece leading to the highest point, and when she reaches an emotional climax, which is usually at the very end of the composition, the power and intensity of it is enormous, and can only be compared with the *Glas Bozii*, the ‘word coming from above’. That’s why a Coda at the end of her compositions acquires such an important role.

EN: Talking about the structure of her compositions, are there any particular tendencies? How would you describe her formative principles?

OM: Repetition is in the core of her compositional method. What is important to her is to give every musical timbre and melodic ‘idea’ a chance to ‘live in time’ until its emotional potential is exhausted. Her thematic ideas hardly ever change; she can cut their length or repeat a certain melodic unit within the phrase twice or more, but already in the *Sixth Piano Sonata* this kind of transformation does not exist; the themes are as they are. In the *Fifth Piano Sonata* there are some elements of melodic development in variations but mainly we can see repetitions of melodic symbols or timbre blocks, although Ustvol'skaya frequently varies the types of counterpoint. I believe that for Ustvol'skaya the question of time filled in by the emotional ‘growth’ of a certain timbre or intonation is what dictates the structure. Ustvol'skaya ends the piece when, in her opinion, the emotional potential of musical idea is exhausted.

EN: How would you explain such a frequent use of extreme dynamic indications? Listening to your recoding of Ustvol'skaya’s works, one is surprised by the beauty of piano tone despite the extreme dynamics marked in the scores. Your piano sound never crosses that borderline when listening becomes a painful and unpleasant experience.

OM: I truly believe that the aesthetic norm of piano sound-world should always be considered. Ustvol'skaya’s music is not in any way a manifestation of ugliness that stands against beauty and musical aesthetics; as for the number of *fortes*, for me it is a relative measure, hence should not be taken literally.

EN: In this case, why do so many critics in the West make such a special feature out of it, claiming that Ustvolkaya's music is a kind of 'anti-music'?

OM: People in the West often overestimate the power of sign or symbol; if it is written *ffff* one has to follow. My teacher, Natan Perelman, used to say that every remark in the score requires personal interpretation. I agree. I believe that by putting such extreme dynamic markings in her scores, Ustvolkaya simply indicated the points of highest emotional intensity, rather than asking for the loudest possible sound. One can use different performing tools to execute *ffff*: 'stretching' or 'shrinking' the timing or applying a particular timbre-distribution helps to create huge dynamic intensity and volume. It is even easier to do in a recording situation nowadays by simply turning the volume to the maximum. There is no need to break the piano! I personally can never go beyond some aesthetic norms with which I was brought up as a musician. Even when I perform the most avant-garde composition, I always strive for the aesthetic beauty of sonority; it is important to me. For me, Ustvolkaya did not aim for her music to have a powerful psychological effect; I would not compare it to Heavy Rock, where the power of decibels puts you in a state of trance. Ustvolkaya's music has a huge emotional depth that cannot be measured simply by the quantity of *fs* or *ps* without considering the aesthetic side of performance.

EN: What can you say about Ustvolkaya and religion, and how, in your opinion, did her religious beliefs affect her music?

OM: First of all, Galina Ivanovna always said that her music is spiritual but not religious. I would not talk about her personal Christian beliefs; her life actions often contradicted the most common Christian values, such as love, forgiveness, patience etcetera. As I remember her, she had always been a person of enormous inner power, a never-compromising Dictator; she had a very strong influence on people, including her pupils and colleagues, and that influence was at times negative. She did not tolerate other people's opinion, and simply dismissed the disobedient and disloyal (in her view) people, cutting off any communication with them (or re-dedicating her compositions). She was absolutely self-absorbed, and existed in her own world hardly ever showing

any interest in the lives of others; she rarely attended performances of her own works, let alone the other concerts or musical events. Her music reflects that; it ‘exists’ on its own [...]

EN: Why in the majority of piano compositions is the writing so simple? Would you call Ustvolskaya a Minimalist?

OM: She definitely possessed a gift of sensing the enormous density and concentration of musical material. Some artists, in order to be different, increase the quantity of material; she, on the contrary, had an obsessive preoccupation with the quality of material; she never compromised the quality, and may be that is why she only included twenty-five works in her final list of compositions. She was always in search of a certain timbre or the most appropriate instrumental combination to express a certain emotion. She did not *need* the whole orchestra. Why, for example, does Alexander Knaifel, with his ‘spaced out’ minimalist music attract so much interest in the world, or Arvo Pärt and Valentine Silvestrov with their slow quiet music? The reason is that people recognise that these artists possess a gift of creating the most beautiful spiritual sonic world using fewer notes than others. Same with Ustvolskaya; she had a colossal artistic temperament; she fought against Totalitarianism using totalitarian methods, a sort of ‘double totalitarianism’ when totalitarianism equals extremism. She stimulated a dictatorial approach in performance, and that is where her power as a protester lies.

At a certain time back in the 1970s her music was a very important discovery for me as a form of artistic protest against the totalitarian regime in Soviet Russia. I feel that the power and the topicality of her music is less today than it was in the 1970s, since the world, and Russia in particular, has changed; there is no such need for protest and the social climate now is very different. However, I truly believe that music of Ustvolskaya will always attract enormous interest since it is a material of great value, an art of the highest rank. She undoubtedly had a gift, and her art is like a rare mineral. I should admit that plenty of experimental music written in the 1950s and 1960s left me emotionally indifferent and became forgotten soon after the first hearing. Ustvolskaya’s music, on the contrary, leaves such a powerful impression, that even when one dislikes it, one is aware of its unique nature. I have known Ustvolskaya for nearly forty years,

and I can say with confidence that her music reflects the act of self-assertion of someone who was brought up in totalitarian regime.

EN: Did she play the piano herself?

OM: She was trained as a cellist, as for the piano, no, she never really played.

EN: I once came across an assumption made in a musical review, which suggested that the simplicity of Ustvolskaya's piano writing is a result of her inability to play the instrument. Do you agree?

OM: There is absolutely no connection. Look at her symphonies, and you can see how a very simple material starts 'translating' through massive speakers on a global scale. For example, in the *Second Composition*, the double-bass theme sounds like a simultaneous heartbeat of a million people. Why do you think she needed eight double-basses? Because she wanted to create a sound of extreme density and maximum expressiveness. The same result is achieved when she used three tubas, six oboes, six flutes, all playing together in one cluster. Already very early in her compositional career Ustvolskaya found the way of composing monodic lines of enormous emotional concentration, and her later development as a composer went in the direction of 'condensing' melodic material by using the lowest orchestral instruments (tubas, double-basses, percussions, low register of piano) and omitting high strings.

This process of searching for the ways of expressing colossal emotional intensity of musical material eventually brought Ustvolskaya to tone clusters as a manifestation of power on a large scale. The process went almost without any changes of compositional language until her last works *Fourth* (1985) and *Fifth* (1986) *Symphonies*. I personally do not find the latter compositions very original. In my opinion, Ustvolskaya did not say anything new after the *Second Symphony* (1979): this work presents the absolute maximum of expression, and in the *Fourth* and *Fifth Symphonies* the level of concentration and intensity is already on a lower scale; the resources are exhausted. This opinion might seem subjective, but I believe I have performed and lived with this music for long enough to earn the right for a personal view on the subject.

From a personal interview with Sergey Slonimsky. 31 March 2008, St. Petersburg.

I met Sergei Slonimsky at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire on 31 March 2008. The moment I pronounced Ustvolskaya's name, Slonimsky immediately exclaimed: "I do not wish to talk about Ustvolskaya, she does not interest me, and I am not a specialist on her music." However, after a long informative monologue about Leningrad and the St. Petersburg School of Composition, he spoke of Ustvolskaya.

Sergey Slonimsky: I do not like Ustvolskaya's music; to me it is too monotonous: she used the same compositional tools - augmented first and crotchets - over and over again; for me, it is just not enough. Yes, I accept the fact that she was a talented individual but she claimed to possess some kind of universal cosmic aggression and power. She herself and her followers did not recognise any other music [...]

Elena Nalimova: What can you say about the book by Olga Gladkova?

SS: Gladkova's book is a very stupid publication. Gladkova herself was *zakaznaya lichnost'* [an 'ordered person'], who made money by writing whatever was convenient at the time. What was the most unpleasant is the fact that for decades Gladkova wrote very negative reviews about 'new music'; she criticised every composer apart from Ustvolskaya. Many of Ustvolskaya's own comments, particularly those regarding Shostakovich, are simply infuriating and totally unacceptable [...]; she betrayed so many of her friends who supported her, people like Mikhail Druskin, Genrikh Orlov, violinist Mikhail Vaiman, and how did she behave towards Oleg Malov? [...]

One should not forget that Ustvolskaya 'marked' every anniversary and important event in Soviet life by writing a musical composition. Yes, she refused to be associated with those works later, and by doing so, she greatly contributed to the creation of her own Myth, but that does not automatically erase the fact that she did write them! I remember how she was always set as an example to us, young composers. Once, at a Composers' Union meeting, I was told that instead of writing songs on the texts by Blok or Bulgakov, I should follow the example of composers like Galina Ustvolskaya, who has just written a splendid composition '*Podvig Geroya*' [The Hero's

Exploit'] and dedicated it to the anniversary of the Soviet Revolution. The composition won the first prize in a composers' competition; never mind that Shostakovich was the Chair of the jury!

From a personal interview with Tat'yana Voronina. 25 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

Tat'yana Voronina: Yes, I knew Ustvolskaya well, and performed her *Second Piano Sonata*. She was a strange person, in my opinion [...]; the sublime in her coexisted with the ridiculous. Despite that, she was well respected in musical circles; she had many admirers, particularly among youngsters, for whom she was a great inspiration. Her whole image, despite a rather pleasant appearance - an old-fashioned hairdo and those big eyes, which were like reflecting screens - was dark and tragic. I never heard her uttering anything positive [...] I do not think that she could be truly religious [...] I personally was indifferent towards her, and strongly disliked her music. As one of my good friends and a 'spiritual leader' of our circle, the musicologist Alexander Dolzhansky used to say: "She chopped off Shostakovich's heel", and inherited only the qualities like harshness and sonic sharpness along with a few other characteristics of *melodism* and the types of modes.

I always felt that Ustvolskaya had an extremely narrow perception of reality: those never-ending crotchets with which she measured musical space [...] For me, it indicated the lack of light in her soul; her music is painfully dark and depressing. Ustvolskaya was not the only artist concerned by the tragic side of human existence, but every tragedy, if it is real, always leads to catharsis. After hearing Ustvolskaya's music, I never experienced anything remotely close to catharsis, on the contrary, life felt even darker [...] Her crotchets are like the shackles with which she deliberately restricted herself [...] Despite all that she was an interesting person: for instance, she always said that her music must be performed in a company of the 'classics', such as Bach, Mozart and Beethoven.

For me, her obsessive rhythm strongly resembles rock-music. When the first VIAs [vocal-instrumental ensembles] began appearing in Soviet Russia, it always

reminded me of Ustvolskaya's music. Shackles. Filling the space in with regular beats: it symbolised some sort of submission to the Higher Power. There was something truly ritualistic about it. All her compositions are restrained and confined by those rhythmical shackles. I think those musical shackles were hiding some inner suffering.

Despite all the above, Ustvolskaya possessed a grandiose talent: behind those shackles was enormous power. However, the question is: who needs this kind of power? I personally do not need it as I always look for light in art and life. For me, her music lacks creativity, spontaneity and inspiration; instead, it is oppressive and suffocating. Yes, Ustvolskaya probably was a unique phenomenon, but who needs this kind of music? As for the religious subtitles of her compositions, I do not wish to comment. I simply do not think that Ustvolskaya was a truly religious person [...]

From a telephone conversation with Boris Tishchenko.

23 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

Elena Nalimova: Hello, Boris Ivanovich. I would like to talk to you about Galina Ustvolskaya.

Boris Tishchenko: It is a very difficult week for me since we are preparing for the performance of my Symphony 'Marina'. It is the first week of rehearsals [...]

EN: Would it be possible to meet up to talk about Galina Ivanovna, or shall we discuss it over the phone sometime?

BT: There is very little to say about Ustvolskaya anyway, and it is even more difficult to do so over the phone.

EN: It is very important for me to talk to you since there is so much contradictory information about Ustvolskaya written both in Russian and English

BT: *Da eto vsyo bred sivoy kobili!* [It is all nonsense]

*From a personal interview with Boris Tishchenko. 27 October 2007,
St. Petersburg Conservatoire, St Petersburg.*

“I entered Ustvol’skaya’s class of composition at the Rimsky-Korsakov Music College in 1954. She was then young and beautiful, full of energy, very strict, and always categorical in her views. I, on the contrary, was a snotty silly teenager. During my first year, Ustvol’skaya patiently listened to my so-called compositions and said: “Borya, it is very bad; it only deserved a *kol* [‘one’, the lowest mark].” She was a woman with an incredible sense of humour.

I clearly remember the moment when Ustvol’skaya gave me the ‘push’ that initiated a new direction in my way of thinking and composing. She made it clear to me that music begins with a theme, whether it is a motive or a short phrase that consists of a few notes. She also encouraged me to write in polyphonic style. Her teaching method was not in any way scientific. She liked ‘table sessions’ when she would give us all a theme (sometimes a folksong, once I remember it was the ‘invasion theme’ from Shostakovich’s *Seventh Symphony*), and ask us to write in the sonata form, or variation or rondo [...] I was often invited to her home to listen to some music. That was how I first heard Mahler’s *Tenth Symphony* and *Das Lied von der Erde*. Ustvol’skaya never made any comments during the listening but I intuitively knew that we were hearing something truly special. We often went to hear concerts at the Philharmonic Hall. I remember listening to Mahler’s *Fourth Symphony* with Ustvol’skaya in 1956: the only thing she said was: “This is the TRUE music!” [...]

Once, Galina Ivanovna gave me a task to compose a theme and variations. This composition was among the first that were accepted by Ustvol’skaya and for which she praised me; this piece became my Op.1. Then she asked for a rondo, then for a prelude and fugue, a vocal cycle, and so on. She had nothing against classical forms, on the contrary, she made sure that we understood them well and were capable of using them.

After the third year at the Rimsky-Korsakov College, Galina Ivanovna told me to transfer to the Conservatoire. It took me by surprise, because in those years it was considered prestigious to have the diploma from the Rimsky-Korsakov Music College. However, I followed her advice, and auditioned at the Conservatoire. I was accepted! Ustvol’skaya was an incredible teacher: her ability to educate, to nurture and to direct a

student towards realising his full artistic potential was truly phenomenal. I only recently began to appreciate it fully.

Ustvolskaya never showed us her compositions. In the late 1950s we heard her *Piano Concerto* performed by Serebryakov; Mravinsky conducted her orchestral suites *Detskaya* and *Pionerskaya*, and the *First Symphony*. Starting from the late 1960s, her works were regularly performed. I myself played her *Grand Duet* with Oleg Stolpner and her *Fifth Piano Sonata*. Ustvolskaya was incredibly demanding towards performers of her works: for some time she forbade me to perform her *Fifth Sonata*. I had to play it to her over the phone to gain a permission to perform it in public.

It is true that Ustvolskaya did not like talking about her own music neither did she discuss the music of other composers. She also did not like when people made parallels between artists and epochs; instead, she would say: “Why cannot somebody just be an artist in his own right?” Undoubtedly, the parallels and connections could be found, but I personally feel that her music is absolutely unique. It should not be interpreted in a particular context; it is a cosmic music, or, to put it better, it is a *non-musical* phenomenon. Much of what is written about Ustvolskaya by people like Olga Gladkova and Viktor Suslin is fabricated, and therefore untrue: for example, I never heard Ustvolskaya saying anything against studying and analysing her music; on the contrary, as a performer, you simply must analyse it!

It is true that Ustvolskaya refused to explain anything about her music or to admit any connections and reasons for religious subtitles in her *Compositions* and *Symphonies*. It was simply below her dignity; composing for her was a mission, hence no explanations were required [...] Galina Ivanovna was a very impulsive, often loud, domineering person, and that could be heard in her music: she hits the piano with fists and elbows, or hammers a wooden box relentlessly, but then, her quiet music shocks even more: her silences, or the sonorities produced by unusual combinations of instruments are incredibly powerful. In my view, her music communicates the most powerful protest that has ever been expressed in music.

Ustvolskaya’s music demands a great amount of energy and thought, and I would say even more, a great amount of spiritual labour. During Ustvolskaya’s life, the main criterion for a performer was that he had to be approved by the composer. Ustvolskaya did not permit or accept any personal interpretations, and I believe her

music does not need to be interpreted: it already contains everything. The performer's task is to execute the works in the most authentic manner. The energy and emotional power that this music contains is colossal; not everyone can feel and appreciate it."

From a personal interview with Sergey Banevich. 26 October 2007, the Composers' House, St. Petersburg.

"All my recollections about Galina Ivanovna are deeply personal [...]

First of all, about her music. It is indeed very difficult for a human perception: for some people, it presents nothing worthy of recognition; others are literally allergic to it; still others prefer to ignore it, whilst admitting the Ustvolskaya phenomenon [...]

I began studying with Ustvolskaya at the Rimsky-Korsakov Music College when I was a fifteen or sixteen year-old boy (around 1955-1956); Galina Ivanovna was my composition teacher. She was then young, beautiful and very talented, and I loved her with that first platonic teenage love. I hardly studied in those days: I went to see her every day, brought her some food and treats - I knew what she liked! I was not on my own in that: all her students truly admired her. Ustvolskaya's relationship with us, her students, resembled that of Plato and his students: we walked around the city and talked about life, art, literature and music; those were most valuable life lessons. I can say with confidence that I am indebted to Ustvolskaya for my views on life, art and music. I wanted to copy her in every way: for instance, she would say that one must not put a cup on a saucer sharply, it has to 'land' slowly like curtains in a theatre. My aesthetic tastes and habits were inspired by many such comments.

Ustvolskaya always said to us: write shorter and more talented works. Her music is a perfect manifestation of her artistic credo: there is not one 'passing' note in her compositions; each note is filled with utmost expression; each note is like a word, like an electric shock with which people, who are having a sudden cardiac arrest, get revived [...] Ustvolskaya was from a very intelligent family. Being brought up in a very old-fashioned way by a strict aristocratic mother, who was unapproachable and behaved in a standoffish manner, and a father – a quiet, highly intelligent man, Ustvolskaya, as if deliberately, often acted in delinquent manner. She was a female Gavroche: a

mischievous hooligan, who could poke a loaf of bread at a bread store with her finger just to check how fresh it was, or throw an unfinished ice-cream cone at a passer-by out of the taxi window. She liked to infuriate people, it amused her. She smoked, liked an occasional drink, and felt at ease using slang and Russian traditional vulgarisms [*mat*].

Galina Ivanovna always complained about her nerves, although physically she was very fit. I think the nerves were caused by her inner chaos, her non-acceptance of reality. She used to take sedatives and sleeping pills in very large quantities, often swallowing one pill after another. I believe her over-sensitive nature was the reason behind her often outrageous behaviour [...] As for the religiosity that is often associated with Ustvolskaya, I never knew her as someone who prayed or went to church [...]

I always loved her music, I played and studied it in detail, and took great pride in the fact that I was her student. One day, I remember, I left one of her scores in a practice room by accident. She was furious and considered it to be a betrayal: in those years she did not like her music to be seen or played without her permission. That incident was the beginning of the end of our friendship [...] It seemed that during those days Ustvolskaya was surrounded by people who, using primitive terms, were some sort of sectarians. Frankly speaking, they were very strange people, they fell on their knees during performances of Ustvolskaya's works, and literally worshipped her. They seemed to have a strong influence on her. It was during that time Ustvolskaya broke off many friendships and professional relationships [...]

Ustvolskaya did write different kinds of music; a large part of her oeuvre she later destroyed and refused to be associated with it: in my view, it was a very impulsive act, unfortunately, one of many [...] Her music was performed in Leningrad, probably not as much as that of Shostakovich but she was not ignored like Gladkova claims in her book: Mravinsky respected her and performed her orchestral suite *Detskaya*. In professional circles Ustvolskaya was always respected, and even those people who disliked her music, referred to her as a genius. During the last years of her life, Ustvolskaya's behaviour became very unusual, to say the least, and not without the influence of her husband: rejecting close friends, selling the same composition to different publishers, to name but a few [...]

For me her music is akin to a novel: she told a story about herself, her life, human suffering, and God [...] She was a very kind human being, and her music is very

human. Each word in Ustvolskaya's musical story is encoded and has a sound equivalent [...] Her music is like a series of letters to a stranger with a message which could only be translated and understood by the people of a future generation. If I was a doctor or a chemist, I would have translated her music into a language of molecules and chromosomes. I believe Ustvolskaya's music is not simply a musical phenomenon. I do not know whether it should be played in concert halls, in churches, or in a forest [...] Ustvolskaya's music is an absolutely unique phenomenon that can never be repeated, although some of her students attempted to copy her, mainly by experimenting with sonic disharmony and dynamic contrasts [...]

I remember she admired Van Gogh, his neurotic and expressive brush strokes. I believe that for both of them, art was a form of self-expression; it allowed them to liberate themselves from the traumas and troubles of their inner life, and that was the essential meaning and purpose of art [...] Ustvolskaya and her music is undoubtedly a part of Russian cultural tradition, Russian aesthetic, philosophy and literature. She admired Chekhov and Gumelev; she called Akhmatova '*starushka*' [an old Lady]; Tsvetaeva was not among her favourites, she disliked her for the excessive self-confidence expressed in some of her poems. Ustvolskaya loved cinema and particularly admired Charlie Chaplin. Another two names that were at the top of her list, were Mussorgsky and Gogol. In my view, it is the Russian idea of humanity and compassion that united Ustvolskaya with those Russian artists. As for musical influences, I hear Mahler above all; also, Bach. I know Galina Ivanovna truly admired both. I remember her saying that Bach's compositions could be performed on any instruments without losing anything because of the quality of musical material and the logic of its organisation.

Despite the overall sonic aggression, Ustvolskaya's music is very romantic and passionate. What is it about? What do listeners respond to when they hear Ustvolskaya's works? Above all, people respond to the music's enormous power and colossal energy. Ustvolskaya's music often communicates emotions akin to ecstasy; it is a riot, a rebellion; she wishes to destroy the world around her [...] I thought, I will never be able to outlive Galina Ivanovna, but I did. There were very few people at her funeral: it is as if many simply could not forgive her for her actions during the last decades of her life. I

do not know whether or not Ustvolskaya's music will ever be truly appreciated and understood, maybe not [...]"

*From a personal interview with Vitaly Solov'ev. 24 October 2007,
National State Library, St. Petersburg.*

"I first met Ustvolskaya in 1963: I had just finished at a specialist music school - *desyatiletka* in Alma-Ata as a pianist, and had a degree in hydroacoustics from the Leningrad State Polytechnical University. At the time, there were only two teachers of composition at the Rimsky-Korsakov Music College: Mozhzhevalov and Ustvolskaya. It was the composer Orest Evlakhov who recommended me to study with Ustvolskaya. I had lessons with her for about a year. She had a true gift as a teacher: she never insisted on one way of composing and never imposed her views on us, her students. Ustvolskaya did not have a large class, only about 8-10 people; there were no female students on the Composition faculty at the time. I cannot say that Ustvolskaya had a particular teaching method: I remember she often asked us to write in a particular genre or form; she called it 'table sessions'. Her main suggestions concerned simplicity and clarity of structure and musical material. She often said that we should move away from the major-minor system and explore other modes, or better, invent our own.

I remember her as a very reserved, 'closed' person: she seldom spoke about her music or expressed an opinion about her colleagues and their music. I believe it was a protective mask. She did not want to waste time and effort on chatter and gossip, although I am sure she was well aware of everything that was going on in the musical world. Ustvolskaya often asked us about the concerts we attended and the music we heard, and encouraged us to voice our opinion on a subject. Her reaction, however, was always minimal, and that was typical of the time: in pre-Khrushchev Russia it was very dangerous to speak openly; writing *anonimki* [anonymous letters] about your friends, colleagues and neighbours was common, particularly among artists and musicians [...]

Ustvolskaya also did not escape being accused of anti-Soviet behaviour: sometime during the 1963, there was an *anonimka* sent to the Composers' Union, in which she was accused of imposing her own compositional style on her students, and

encouraging them to write in an avant-garde manner. I remember that Galina Ivanovna asked three of her students, Glybovsky, Tomchin and myself, to go with her to a meeting with Solov'ev-Sedoy, then a Head of the Leningrad Composers' Union, and present our compositions. The meeting went well, and Ustvol'skaya was rehabilitated.

People often forget that Ustvol'skaya as a composer started in a very standard traditional way. It is very strange that she later chose to disassociate herself from all the compositions in Soviet style that she wrote during the 1940s and 1950s. It was very much HER music, HER style. The only explanation I could find is that she wanted to be liked in the West, and above all, wanted to be seen as a unique phenomenon, a radical artist; she wanted to be perceived as someone truly extraordinary, hence she chose the image of a secluded apolitical composer with no interests apart from composing.

I always felt that Ustvol'skaya possessed an ability to preserve her artistic energy: she hardly ever worked on more than one piece at a time, and later it was her husband who protected her from getting involved with people and participating in events. She had a very mathematical brain, hence her music is very mathematical [...] It is not true that Ustvol'skaya's music was not performed in Leningrad: all her works were played by Oleg Malov at the Composers' House. She often attended the concerts where her music was performed; she sat quietly in the conner and did not converse with anyone.

As for Gladkova, she was Ustvol'skaya's only female student, and maybe that is why Ustvol'skaya allowed her to get closer, so to say [...] Considering the fact that there is so little written about Ustvol'skaya, Gladkova's book is very valuable. As far as I know, the initial request for the book came from Germany, from Sikorski, and Gladkova was invited to have regular contacts with Ustvol'skaya. However, it is my belief that Konstantin [Bagrenin] was a 'shadow author.' A chapter about Shostakovich created an enormous scandal in the Leningrad musical circle. I know that Gladkova was in some trouble because of that, but her excuse was that she acted on behalf of the composer to satisfy the Western publishers. I personally feel that the chapter was included only to emphasise Ustvol'skaya's unique position and to support her Western reputation as the most unusual composer from the Soviet Union.

Speaking of Ustvol'skaya's music, I must admit, I was never a big fan. I always felt that it is the music of the cosmos or the world, which exists on the other side of human consciousness, something far removed from our reality. I do not think that

composing was for Ustvolskaya a form of self-expression. I think that she reacted to some ‘signals’ from the Universe; she accumulated those signals and transformed them into sound. She could never have explained it, otherwise, she would most definitely be labelled as ‘crazy’. Ustvolskaya’s music undoubtedly has plenty of aggression in it: to me it is not a protest against Soviet reality, as some say, it has nothing at all to do with reality; instead, it is like science-fiction literature with all the monstrous creatures, who come to planet Earth to impose their authority and to rule over humans. As for the influences, I hear early Prokofiev of the *Skifskaya syuita*, 1915, with its prehistoric savagery; maybe some Shostakovich [...]

As for Ustvolskaya’s sudden popularity in the West, she owed it to Kostya [Konstantin Bagrenin]: he was her manager, her agent, her impresario, and her only ‘link’ to the outside world. It was his initiative to organise concerts of her music in the West and to sell her scores to the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel. I remember him saying: “We need money for doctors, medicine, and helpers; no one will pay us here, but in the West they are very generous’. He was indeed a great opportunist [...]

***From a personal interview with Kirill Novikov. 2 April 2009,
Ustvolskaya’s apartment on Gagarin Street, St. Petersburg.***

“In 1951, being a professionally trained engineer, I joined the *Seminar Samodeyatel’nykh Kompozitorov* [Club of Amateur Composers] at the Leningrad Composers’ Union, and Galina Ustvolskaya was my tutor. The Club had existed since 1949, and anyone who wished to learn how to write music was welcome; age and talent did not matter [...] I remember that Ustvolskaya paid particular attention to the arrangement of folksongs: variations, both as a genre and a compositional principle, were her *lyubimy konek* [favourite ‘tool’]. She always encouraged us, her students, to improvise and to compose on Soviet subjects. The titles of the works by Ustvolskaya’s students performed at one of the concerts at the *Seminar* on 11 May 1953, clearly demonstrate both her interest towards folklore and Soviet themes: ‘*Chetyre obrabotki russkikh narodnykh pesen*’ [Four Arrangements of Russian Folk-songs] by M.

Krainovich; ‘*Ya golosuyu*’ [I vote] by L. Meden; ‘*Prekrasnaya strana*’ [A Wonderful Country] by T. Pavlova, and my own piece, ‘*Rodina*’ [The Motherland].

I knew Ustvolskaya’s mother and sister, and was invited to their house on many occasions: the two sisters were not close friends, and Ustvolskaya’s relationship with her mother was not more than amicable [...] Ustvolskaya did not have a particular respect for any authority and often behaved like a hooligan; she knew the rules, but often acted against them [...] She did not like to cook, and I remember driving her and Kostya [Bagrenin] to the airport restaurant to eat sausages. In 1966, I was the sole witness of their marriage.

People say Ustvolskaya never attended concerts and did not know the music of other composers. That is not true: I often saw her at the Philharmonic Hall where she always sat at the back in a corner looking as if she was avoiding people. It is true that she never discussed her music with anyone. I remember her saying: “My music is not for people”. What is this music about? For me personally, Ustvolskaya’s music is a reflection of her inner world, hence one should not try to search for any ‘global’ themes there [...].”

From a personal interview with Ekaterina Ruch’evskaya.

25 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

“I had heard of Ustvolskaya already before the War; there was a talk about her at the Conservatoire: a very talented female student of Shostakovich. Already then I heard her saying that the meaning behind the musical composition [*o chem pisat*]’ was for her of a greater importance than the means with which that meaning was expressed [*kak pisat*]’

We started at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire almost at the same time, I was on the Music Theory faculty, she - on the Composition faculty. She was never a dark negative person as her music might suggest: on the contrary, she had a great sense of humour and always found something to laugh at, although her comments were often ironic and could be rather hurtful. We were not very close friends, but I remember us going to concerts together [...]

When the article by Kira Yuzhak first appeared in the press in 1979, Ustvol'skaya rang me and said: "Do not believe a word. It is all lies." Something similar happened after the publication of Boris Kats' article in 1980: she rang me to say that it is a very bad article. Maybe she disliked the fact that Kats compared her to the poet Marina Tsvetaeva, whom Ustvol'skaya did not like, and Kira Yuzhak also used a line from Tsvetaeva's letter as an epigraph to her article [...] I think that above all, Ustvol'skaya did not like to be compared to anyone: she felt that she and her music are beyond comparisons. Such was her personality [...]

I know that for a very long time Ustvol'skaya was writing *u stol* [for a desk drawer]. Many of her colleague-composers admired her and regarded her music very highly. People like Lucian Prigozhin tried to help Ustvol'skaya find an opportunity to make her music known, but it was not always easy, especially when Ustvol'skaya herself did not do much to help. I remember, when her *Violin Sonata* and the *Octet* were first performed, people suddenly realised that Ustvol'skaya's music possesses a magnetic power. It is difficult to explain [...] but I always felt as if Ustvol'skaya had drawn a protective magic circle around herself, like a white chalk circle used in rituals (or to protect against insects). Those who were allowed inside the circle, stayed loyal to her for the rest of their life; those who remained outside the circle, simply could not understand anything in her music.

In my view, Ustvol'skaya's music possesses an enormous power of persuasion. She herself used to say that her music is spiritual, and despite the fact that the religious subtitles of her late compositions might suggest the composer's religiosity, I do not think that Ustvol'skaya's music fulfills the first and utmost important role of religion, that is to console. By saying that her music is spiritual, Ustvol'skaya was making it clear that the music is not in any way a formalist game of notes and sounds; it is spiritual as opposed to material, that is to say that the music was composed not because of financial needs or career aspirations but it was driven purely by artistic calling.

I personally cannot see Ustvol'skaya's direct predecessors. The spondaic rhythm that characterises *znamenny raspev*, where all the notes are metrically equal and connected with the text, could have had an influence on Ustvol'skaya's style [...] To me, Ustvol'skaya's request for her music not to be analysed means only one thing: she believed that her music is untouchable, and anyone who would approach it analytically

would humiliate her [...] She was indeed a truly extraordinary person, very different from others [...] She seemed not care what response her music would get, what would be written about it, and how much money she would be paid. I remember, at some point she even refused some Government Award [...] She was a good pianist; I know that because we played four-hand duets whilst studying with Steinberg. I know she always composed without an instrument though; she had an incredible ear [...]

Some of what is written in Gladkova's book is simply untrue, and I would not recommend taking this publication too seriously. Gladkova writes that Ustvol'skaya only taught because she needed money, but that is not true: she had so many students who absolutely adored her, and with whom she shared very close relationships. Her music was performed and accepted during her life, and the fact that Ustvol'skaya preferred Western performers to the Russian, among whom were musicians like Oleg Malov, simply could not be explained. I can only say that doing things against the expected norms and turning things inside out was very typical of Ustvol'skaya. On a number of occasions she broke off close friendships and professional relations [...] Whether or not there were some mental problems, I cannot say for sure, but I was aware of one suicide attempt [...] She also had two students, one of whom, Alesha Nikolaev - an incredibly gifted boy, committed suicide aged eighteen [...]"

From a personal interview with Alexander Knaifel.

24 October 2007, St. Petersburg.

"[...] Of course, I knew of Ustvol'skaya, we all did! However, I never had an opportunity (or necessity) to acquaint myself with her more closely. We simply lived in the same city. As you probably know, in the last few years of her life, she hardly went anywhere or spoke with anyone, with the rare exceptions of the musical events where her works were performed. I clearly remember how one day she unexpectedly turned up at a premiere of my early composition written in 1965-66, called *Kantervil'skie privideniya* [The Ghosts of Canterville]. After the performance she came to me and said: "Net, a vse-taki Alexander Aronovich bol'shoy molodets!" [No, but Alexander Aronovich is a great man indeed!] Throughout the whole evening she kept repeating this

phrase in the same way as she repeated melodic formulas in her compositions, absolutely unchanged: we were talking about different things, and every now and then she would say: “*Net, a vse-taki Alexander Aronovich bol’shoy molodets!*” She asked me to call her *Galya*,³⁰ although she herself always addressed me formally as Alexander Aronovich, despite the fact that I was much younger than her. I think she felt a kindred spirit in me [...] From then on we began to have regular contact; we often spoke on the phone, and she even visited us at home. It was sometime in the early 1970s [...]

I am convinced that Ustvolskaya herself contributed to a certain mystification of her artistic image, particular the one that exists in the West [...] I remember how she used to ring me to say: “Don’t you think that life is simply awful, catastrophically awful?” She expected me to agree with her; she needed to hear a confirmation from me [...] Undoubtedly, her deliberate isolation was a reaction to all that chaos which, in her opinion, was happening around her in real life. She chose to shut herself away from life, and that was her way of dealing with reality [...]

Ustvolskaya’s claim that she never experienced any artistic influences, is simply untrue [...] Speaking of the essential characteristics of her music [...]: try to play her works to children, do not explain anything, simply let them listen and watch the reaction. Most likely they will be scared or even terrified by it, and here is the answer to your question about the essence of her music. We often forget that music is only a vector that reflects our personal life: in my view, when there are distortions in life, they are immediately reflected in the music. Music does not just exist by itself, although artists like Stravinsky liked to toy with that idea [...] I personally believe that we are born for love and for light, and not for negation of those feelings and experiences. In Ustvolskaya’s music, however, the idea of negation is very transparent. She was a paradoxical person, and her music also contains an element of paradox, and there is where its mystery lies [...] Who said that every mystery needs to be explained? The only valuable problem is to understand the nature of musical language: that is for me the true mystery worthy of an attempt of being solved.”

³⁰ An informal way of addressing someone by their first name as opposed to ‘Galina Ivanovna’

From a telephone conversation with Viktor Suslin. 8 January 2008, London.

“Our first meeting with Ustvol'skaya took place in 1993; I worked at the Muikverlage Hans Sikorski at the time. The next meeting was in 1996 at a festival in Amsterdam; then in Vienna in 1997. The last time we met was in 2005 in Amsterdam during the recording of her *Second Symphony*. I remember Ustvol'skaya as a very unpredictable woman; she was very lively and always ready to have a laugh. She paid great attention to her appearance, although her music is very masculine and shows no signs of femininity [...] She loved Gogol; not so much Dostoyevsky or Akhmatova, and she loved St. Petersburg [...] Her negativity and darkness were the characteristics she inherited from St. Petersburg with its phantasmagory. I was first introduced to Ustvol'skaya's music whilst studying composition with Peiko at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire. I also knew Anatoly Vedernikov, the pianist who first performed Ustvol'skaya's *Second Piano Sonata*. In 1966 Vedernikov included the *Sonata* in his final recital along with Scriabin's *Tenth Sonata*, Shostakovich's *First Piano Sonata* and Ligeti's *Etudes* [...] Yes, I can confirm that every document and every score that is kept at the Paul Sacher Stiftung was hand-picked by Ustvol'skaya [...]

At our meeting in Pinneberg, which took place on 26 February 2008, I finally had an opportunity to meet the man whose name is so firmly associated with the creation of the ‘Ustvol'skaya Myth’ in the West. I was interested to hear about that infamous letter about Shostakovich that Suslin wrote to Ustvol'skaya on 4 August 1994, and to find out about its content with which Ustvol'skaya so wholeheartedly agreed.³¹ Suslin chose not to explain why Ustvol'skaya felt the way she did about Shostakovich, but he told me the story of how Shostakovich proposed marriage to Ustvol'skaya, the story he heard from Ustvol'skaya herself: Shostakovich invited Ustvol'skaya to visit him in Moscow; he brought her home and simply introduced to his children as his ‘new wife.’ Ustvol'skaya burst into tears and left. Therefore, there was never an official marriage proposal or an official refusal of that proposal.

³¹ The copy of the letter that is kept at the UCPSS contains Ustvol'skaya's comment at the end that reads: ‘I, Galina Ustvol'skaya, completely and wholeheartedly agree with the content of this letter’. 25 August 1994, St. Petersburg.

Suslin spoke about the colossal energy of Ustvol'skaya's music. In his view, the consistent pulsation of crotchets in Ustvol'skaya's music is akin to a heartbeat; a frequent appearance of double and triple flats and the overall flattening of melodic modes in her score reflected Ustvol'skaya's desire to communicate the suffocating atmosphere of the time. Suslin spoke about the significance of rests in Ustvol'skaya's scores, and compared her scores with those written by Baroque composers.

Galina Ivanovna Remembered: from personal interviews with Konstantin Bagrenin.

I was fortunate to have had three meetings with Ustvol'skaya's husband, Konstantin Bagrenin. His recollections, although at times very disjointed, allowed me to see the human side of Ustvol'skaya - the woman behind the Myth.

“During the last few years of her life, Ustvol'skaya hardly ever left the flat; as her husband, I had permission to act on her behalf in all matters, both domestic and professional. In the early 1990s, Ustvol'skaya received a personal pension from the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, 150 dollars, in addition to her State pension [...] It is true that Galina Ivanovna never liked Shostakovich [...] She was not an evil person, but it all began when the Western press started advertising her as a ‘female student of Shostakovich’; that upset her greatly. I remember her saying: “I am an eighty-year old woman, and he [Shostakovich] is still holding my hand” [...]

Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Gogol, Lermontov and Chekhov - these were her heroes, her ‘circle of friends’. Galina Ivanovna loved the Hermitage and the Russian Museum; we often went to St.Petersburg suburbs, places like Pavlovsk and Pushkin; she enjoyed visiting historical places and knew St. Petersburg like no one else [...] She often cycled to Ozerki for a swim³² [...] I can confirm that Galina Ivanovna neither knew nor was interested in modern art, so when Gladkova wrote that Ustvol'skaya did not know who Andrey Tarkovsky or Kazimir Malevich were, she did not exaggerate. Although I remember Galina Ivanovna saying that Malevich's ‘*Cherny kvadrat*’ [The Black Square] is “*sran*” [shit]. For her everything was either ‘genius’ or ‘*sran*’’. ‘*The Night Watch*’ by Rembrandt and almost every painting by Van Gogh was ‘genius’, the rest - “*sran*”

³² Ozerki, the area in the north of St. Petersburg.

As for composers, she liked some episodes from Tchaikovsky's symphonies; selected episodes from Rachmaninov's piano concertos; Stravinsky's *The Symphony of Psalms*, although not the whole piece but the movement with stamping [...] She knew *Svadebka* very well and we played the four-hand version of it together. Above all, Galina Ivanovna admired Mahler, and it was Shostakovich who introduced Mahler to her. She referred to Bach as '*osobaya stat'ya*' [a special case], although she only liked Glenn Gould playing Bach's works; she did not tolerate any other performers [...] She also had a great respect for Mussorgsky, although she often said that he wasted his creativity on writing pieces on commission.

As for her personality, Galina Ivanovna was a very scrupulous and sensitive woman; she did not like asking for help or asking for anything at all. She had a great sense of humour and detested any forms of posing or pretence. She could be harsh and uncompromising but always loved good company. It is true that towards the end she preferred nature to humans [...] She had some 'favourite' places in Pavlovsk where she could sit for hours listening to birds [...] Her room in our flat had dark curtains which were never opened; the only light was coming from a small lamp on a bedside table. In those years she was taking a very large quantity of different pills [...] As long as I remember her, she was taking medications for her nerves [...]

Galina Ivanovna never cooked and had no interest in any form of domesticity. When we had some money, we ate at canteens or small restaurants. At other times, the food was very basic - bread, milk, chicken soup [...] Galina Ivanovna liked order and always had to be in control; she demanded total obedience and submission to her will. I remember for instance, how she for years did not allow me to cut my hair, and this is just one small example. She liked clearing everything after herself; there was never any paper or fragments of manuscript paper on her desk, and even I never knew what she was working on at the time. She would only present me with a final composition which I copied and took to a publisher. I guess that is why after her death very few original documents remained [...]

In 1966 Galina Ivanovna herself proposed marriage to me; by that time we had already lived together for a few years. I was 24, she was 47. Soon after, I made a decision to stop my own professional career and focus on hers; I chose to become her

assistant and later, her manager. I was aware of the scale of her gift, and my own compositional attempts could not compare.

If I am to describe Ustvolskaya in one word, she was *chelovek-ulitka* [a human - snail] always hidden in her shell, and *chelovek-net* [someone who always says ‘no’]. Galina Ivanovna often said that she only felt comfortable in solitude; the rest of the world did not seem to interest her at all [...] I remember how I once played a recording with some of Ustvolskaya’s music to a very good friend of mine, a doctor and a healer. Her reply was: “This music is not written by a human”. Probably that is true [...]

From a personal interview with Hans-Ulrich Duffek. February 25, 2008, Hamburg.

“Internationale Musikverlage Hans Sikorski was an official representative of Soviet Music since 1955. At the end of the 1960s we began visiting Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Southern republics regularly. None of our representatives spoke a word of Russian; they had a book written by a Czech author, called ‘Contemporary Music in the Soviet Union’, with a few photos of Schnittke and Gubadulina in it; these were the only names of Soviet composers we knew at the time. My colleagues went to Moscow with this book in their hands and just asked around at first. They had to go through official channels, such as *Mezhkniga* - a licenced agency, followed by the VAP. We had access to festivals, the Composers’ Union and the composers themselves. With time, close friendships were established, and both the Soviet authorities and the composers themselves began to trust us; they understood what we could do for them in the West. Indeed, we were the channel through which they could get acquainted with Western contemporary music. They gave us scores and recordings, and we brought back new scores of Western contemporary composers. It all started in 1969, but became more active in the mid-1970s.

It was not easy to be openly interested in the music of composers like Gubaidulina, Schnittke, and Denisov, and not show an interest in the ‘official’ composers like Kabalevsky and Khrennikov. We tried to find a way to satisfy both sides and to be helpful. In return, we had an opportunity to meet many Soviet avant-gardists. We spent days paying official visits, and nights - talking, drinking, listening to music

and reading new scores. It was a very good time, although the general life conditions in Russia were hard.

EN: Why was the West so interested in the music of Soviet composers?

H-UD: The features that make good music are individuality of style and musical language; it has nothing to do with fashion [...] Something that is unusual and unique always attracts attention and interest. The music of Soviet avant-gardists possessed that individuality. In those years, Boulez, Cage, and Ligeti dominated the contemporary music scene, and there were some ‘voices’ from Russia - the country of which we knew very little, the voices that were truly individual. The ‘official’ composers, like Kabalevsky and Khrennikov were not individual enough to survive in the West. Their art was artificial. To the ‘hard core’ Western avant-gardists even Schnittke was too traditional. Soviet modernists wrote in a kind of tradition that began from Glinka, Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich. What was interesting about Soviet modernists is that they did not deny tradition; instead, they saw themselves as being a part of the tradition, and they took pride in that. It was very different from Western modernists: for German composers, for example, modernism was all about ‘cutting off’ from tradition and searching for something radically new. That, however, always leads to a *cul de sac* [...]

EN: How did you discover Galina Ustvolskaya?

H-UD: Unfortunately, we did not know about her for a long time. We mainly went to Moscow, and of course, her music was not played there for obvious reasons: those two cities were always rivals. When we went to Leningrad, people like Andrey Petrov, Sergey Slonimsky, and Boris Tishchenko were brought to our attention as the strongest among Leningrad modernists. We attended concerts but Ustvolskaya’s music was never featured in concert programmes. Sadly, it was not until the early 1980s when we discovered her music. We quickly realised that she was truly special. Her breakthrough came at the end of the 1980s and then it all developed rather quickly. Sikorski became Ustvolskaya’s official publisher. No publisher in the Soviet Union wanted to print her scores as they were: I remember Ustvolskaya complaining that both *Sovetsky*

Kompozitor and *Muzyka* took liberties whilst publishing her scores, and that made her very unhappy.

EN: What, in your opinion, made Ustvolskaya's music stand out?

H-UD: She wrote music full of pain; it was something existential for her; she just wanted a performer and the audience to feel a similar kind of existential pain, to have similar experiences to hers at the time of composition. For instance, why did she need so many double and triple sharps and flats in her scores? Because, when it is too simple (like playing sharps instead of flats in the Soviet edition of the *Violin Sonata*), the performer does not experience the music in a way it was intended by the composer, and that influences the performance and affects the audience perception. It is not supposed to be easy. I think there is a great deal of psychology behind it [...]

EN: What was your first impression of Ustvolskaya as a person when you met her?

H-UD: I met her several times in Leningrad, in Southern Sweden at a festival dedicated to her music, then in Bern, Amsterdam, and Hamburg. When I met Ustvolskaya for the first time, she was already an elderly woman [...] She was very shy, which was understandable: she had probably never seen a camera before and had never given an interview. Journalists and photographers were very keen to meet her, expecting to see an eloquent communicator who enjoys being interviewed. This was a world which was not hers; she was even shyer than usual. She simply said: "I do not give interviews; I do not want to be photographed". As a result, everyone thought that she was a very closed, uncommunicative person. Apparently, people in Leningrad did not treat her well, neither did her colleague-composers. There were only a few people whom she trusted; as for people she did not know, she was afraid of them [...] I do not know how she would have reacted if she had been 40 years old [...] In the late 1980s she was already very ill; she had to use a wheelchair, and that made it even more difficult for her to feel at ease [...] She was only friendly and open with people whom she knew.

As far as her works were concerned, Ustvolskaya was very radical: she had very clear ideas about how it should be, and it was difficult to persuade her to make even the

slightest change. “No”, she would say, “it has to be this way; a singer must wear a black dress, and she must stand there, and the box has to have a particular diameter”, etc. There was some epistolary communication between us [Sikorski] and Ustvolskaya. Her handwriting was not clear as she had a disease that made her hand tremble; in those years, she did not even write her scores herself, it was done by her husband. Her speaking voice was unusual, and even though I speak Russian, I always found it difficult to understand her. Although we communicated without a translator, it was never easy. The main communication between Ustvolskaya and Musikverlage Hans Sikorsky was through Viktor Suslin; they often spoke on the phone [...]

EN: What in your opinion does a modern listener value in Ustvolskaya’s music? Is it being perceived today as powerful and unique as it was in the 1980s?

H-UD: Her music is powerful. That is what characterises it, and that is not going to change with time [...] Ustvolskaya was often harsh in her reactions and comments. She could not compromise; the word ‘compromise’ was not in her vocabulary, neither was the word ‘diplomacy’. For her, everything was either black or white, good or bad, trust or mistrust [...] That probably explains her behaviour towards Shostakovich in the early 1990s, when she suddenly started being negative towards him. I think that the experiences of her early years may have formed her character in that way: difficult childhood; disillusion with the Soviet regime; and not being a part of the Composers’ society in Leningrad. As a result, she always felt as an unwanted outsider in her own city, her country, and that made her into a hermit.

EN: What can you say about her early works, and the fact that she refused to be associated with them and to include them in her final catalogue? Even if she destroyed the manuscripts, what about those printed copies that still exist in Russian libraries?

H-UD: When we started editing Ustvolskaya’s work list, she went through all her scores and decided which works should be in the official catalogue and which should not. We were not allowed even to mention the early works. Yes, we knew about them but the composer did not give us permission to include them in the catalogue. What we have in

our catalogue is what she saw as *her* lifetime contribution. Such was her decision, and we had to respect that.

Ustvol'skaya wanted to be regarded as a composer of a certain attitude and style. She told us that her early works were the ones she wrote on commission; they were written out of necessity and weren't a result of artistic calling, hence they should not be taken seriously. She believed that aesthetically, they were not *her* works, not the works she would have liked to have written. All composers do that at least once in their lifetime. All of them start with childish pieces written for an examination or because of a good friend, who asked for, say, a piano sonata. When they reach a respectable age, they look at this piano sonata and think: "Oh, my God! How could I? [...] If someone will play my symphony number ten alongside this piano sonata, the critic will destroy me." So, most of them say: "My real personal style developed at X moment, and everything written before that should be forgotten". After their death, we, the publishers, look at their early compositions and either praise or criticise them (mainly, praise!) These works are often categorised as 'newly discovered'. Something similar happened with Schnittke, for example. He said: "Forget my early works" but we have now catalogued them all, including many of his early compositions, such as "*Nagasaki*", *Symphony Number 0*; they were even recorded on CD. Critics say, "OK, these are works of a young artist but one can already hear the features, typical of the late Master."

EN: Do you think the same might happen with Ustvol'skaya? Do you believe that she really destroyed the manuscripts of her 'Soviet' compositions?

H-UD: I believe she really did destroy them! She was truly radical. However, as you said, they are safely preserved in libraries. The question is: what could (or should) we do as Ustvol'skaya's official publisher? We had to follow the composer's request [...] We ourselves have never supported Ustvol'skaya in that radical attitude. She said: "I do not want my music to be analysed," and we had to include that in the Preface to our catalogue. What I believe she meant, is that she wished for her music to be listened, felt and experienced as opposed to undergoing a 'theoretical surgery'; she did not think that by 'opening her scores up', one can find the true essence of her music. She never said: "I forbid"; it was a request, not an order!

EN: What can you say about Suslin's letter on Shostakovich that appeared in the Russian version of Gladkova's book but was excluded from the German version?

H-UD: Yes, one day Ustvol'skaya decided that she disliked Shostakovich. It was very typical of her to go from white to black in a matter of minutes. Yes, she wrote bad words about Shostakovich, and Viktor Suslin supported her in that. Suslin himself was always negative about Shostakovich, not in the same radical way as Ustvol'skaya though. In their conversations regarding Shostakovich, they spoke more or less the same language. I cannot say who influenced whom, although I believe, in some ways, Suslin encouraged Ustvol'skaya to write what she did, and that was embarrassing for us because we represent both Ustvol'skaya and Shostakovich. It was our ultimatum: if the book is to be published in Germany, that letter about Shostakovich is not to be included. Ustvol'skaya agreed to this compromise [...]

EN: Do you personally see parallels between Ustvol'skaya and Shostakovich?

H-UD: Take Ustvol'skaya's early works: she was just as conformist as Shostakovich. Her radical artistic position developed much later. In that respect, she is simply unjust towards Shostakovich, and I believe it is because of her personal disappointment with him [...] One has to see her life, to see her character, to understand how and why she came to this way of thinking about him [...] It is important to remember that the radicalism that she demonstrated in her later works was not there from the beginning [...] Of course there is a similarity between these two composers, and even more so, between two artistic individuals. They loved each other and shared deep affection [...] When it was over, her attitude towards him changed. I do not think that she criticised his music per se. I believe there were other, more personal reasons [...]

Ustvol'skaya wanted to be regarded as a figure of protest, and that is why she got rid of all her early pieces as they were too ideologically correct, and communicated the atmosphere of non-conflict which was so typical of Soviet art of the late 1940s -1950s. Her work is very multifaceted; like any artist, she had creative 'ups' and 'downs.' The way Ustvol'skaya is perceived today is too 'one-sided' - 'a radical and uncompromising composer', and I believe that is exactly how she wanted to be seen! Ustvol'skaya had a

certain image of herself and she wanted to be remembered in a particular way; we can see that with other composers, maybe in a less radical manner. Ustvolskaya created her own image and tried her best to influence the world's opinion of herself [...]

EN: Do you know much about her family?

H-UD: Not much. I know it was a bourgeois family; she was a very educated person; both she and her sister spoke German from early childhood as there was a German nanny [...]

EN: In your opinion, would Ustvolskaya be remembered as a Soviet or Russian composer?

H-UD: I think she will always be remembered as an isolated artist, who did not belong to any school of composition. Yes, she wrote her music whilst living in the Socialist society during the Soviet time, but I think in the West, she is regarded less Russian and definitely less Soviet than, say, Gubaidulina, Schnittke and Denisov. They will always be regarded as the modernist Russia composers of the twentieth century. As for Ustvolskaya, she will always be seen as someone completely different. I believe it is because the other three composers were part of the Soviet Socialist establishment, so to speak. Ustvolskaya dissociated herself from the Soviet musical circle very early and started to live an isolated life; she had hardly ever been a part of the Soviet establishment. She was never prepared to fight for a comfortable life as a member of Soviet society. Also, do not forget, that she belonged to another generation: the composers like Gubaidulina, Schnittke and Denisov experienced the end of the cold war and the openness of the 1980s whilst still young. It was different for Ustvolskaya: when the change came in the 1980s-1990s, she was already too old to be excited about it or to benefit from it [...] Too many times during her life Ustvolskaya witnessed the result of artists being willing to cooperate with the regime and doing so despite their personal morality and public disapproval. I believe those experiences influenced her and affected the way she was [...]"

From an interview with Linda Jankowska. 10 May 2011, Manchester.

“If you are a good player, you can learn this *Trio* [Clarinet Trio] in a week and perform it after two rehearsals. However, you would be left with a feeling that you still do not know what this music is about and what to do with it, and therefore, feel very unsatisfied as a performer. If you try to follow Ustvolskaya’s dynamic indications literally, the music is mostly loud (or very loud); moreover, it is quite monolithic in construction. When I played the opening of the third movement, I was told that I sounded very ‘Soviet’, simply because I was making a very loud and straight-forward sound; an image of a big concrete block of flats comes to mind - that is how the music of the *Trio* appears to me from the score. I found it difficult to detect phrasing and the structure of melodies.

Once we had read through the score, we began searching for the ‘metaphysics’, which so many online articles on Ustvolskaya talk about, but what is it, and how do you find it? We had no idea how to make this music interesting for the audience. I remember that our tutor, Heinz Holliger, who never heard the piece before and did not know Ustvolskaya’s music well, said that for him this music “is naked, and is akin to a skeleton that has been put out on a stage”.

We performed the *Trio* in a church, and it felt particularly uncomfortable, and somewhat disturbing, to execute those extremely dissonant sonorities in sacred surroundings. On the whole, I did not enjoy the experience, and I doubt that I will ever choose to perform this piece again.”

CD from the PhD recital on 4 November 2010, Deptford Town Hall, London.**CD ONE:**Track 1: Galina Ustvolskaya *Sonata for violin and piano* (1952)Track 2: J. S. Bach *Two-part Invention 2 in C minor*, BWV 773Dmitry Shostakovich *Aphorisms*, op.13 (1927)

Track 3: I. Recitative

Track 4: II. Serenade

Track 5: III. Nocturne

Track 6: IV. Elegy

Track 7: V. Funeral March

Track 8: VI. Etude

Track 9: VII. Dance of Death

Track 10: VIII. Canon

Track 11: IX. Legend

Track 12: J. S. Bach *Two-part Invention in D minor*, BWV 775Alesha Nikolaev *Piano Sonata No.2 in C Minor*

Track 13: I. Allegretto

Track 14: II. Adagio

Track 15: III. Allegro

Track 16: IV. Allegro non troppo

Track 17: J. S. Bach *Two-part Invention in G major*, BWV 781Alexander Knaifel *Two short pieces* (1968)Track 18: *Short White Piece*Track 19: *Short Black Piece*Alexander Knaifel *Two pieces* (1963)Track 20: *Marching Two-part Piece*Track 21: *Dancing Two-part Piece*Galina Ustvolskaya *From Twelve Preludes for Piano* (1953)Track 22: *Prelude No.5*Track 23: *Prelude No.9***CD TWO:**Galina Ustvolskaya *Trio for clarinet, violin and piano* (1949)

Track 1: I. Espressivo

Track 2: II. Dolce

Track 3: III. Energico

Track 4: J. S. Bach *Three-part Invention in G minor*, BWV 797Track 5-9: Galina Ustvolskaya *Grand Duet for violoncello and piano in five movements* (1959)Track 10: Alexander Knaifel 'Nativity' *for piano solo and bells* (2003)

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