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**ANDREI
ESHPAI**
EDITION
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**SYMPHONIC DANCES
ON MARI THEMES
FOR ORCHESTRA**

**ALL-UNION RADIO AND TELEVISION
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
LEONID NIKOLAEV, CONDUCTOR**

**CONCERTO NO. 4 FOR
VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA**

**JENNIFER KOH, VIOLIN
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF
ST. PETERSBURG CAPPELLA
VLADISLAV CHERNUSHENKO, CONDUCTOR**

**SYMPHONY NO. 2
"PRAISE TO LIGHT"**

**USSR LARGE
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
KONSTANTIN IVANOV, CONDUCTOR**

ANDREI ESHPAI

Andrei Eshpai was born on May 15, 1925 in the ancient city of Kozmodemynsk on the Volga River in the autonomous republic of Mari of the RSFSR. His father, Yakov Andreevich Eshpai (1890-1963), was one of Mari's first professional composers. He was also a choral conductor, folklorist and educator. He composed the first Mari instrumental works, collected the folksongs of his region, and for many years was on the faculty and staff of the Mari National Institute of Language, Literature and History in Ioshkar-Ola (the capital of the Mari Republic). The Eshpai home was a gathering place for many creative individuals – musicians, artists, writers and other intellectuals. It was in this enriching environment that Andrei grew up.

In 1928 the Eshpai family moved to Moscow where Yakov Andreevich attended the Moscow Conservatory and his wife, Valentina Konstantinovna studied at the Moscow Pedagogical Institute. Their oldest son, Valentin Eshpai received music lessons first, and it was not long before Andrei began taking lessons as well. In 1931 the Eshpai family returned to the Mari Republic, settling in Ioshkar-Ola, which saved the family from Stalin's genocide. Musical guests were frequent visitors at the Eshpai's home. In 1935 three distinguished musicians paid a visit – Marian Koval (1907-1971) and Victor Bely (1904-1933) both Russian composers who had an important influence on the development of music in the Soviet Union. They were involved with the RAPM (Russian Association of Proletarian Music). The third distinguished visitor was Ferenc Szabo (1902-1969), the fine Hungarian composer.

Soon young Andrei was formally studying music. He attended Moscow's Gnessin Pedagogical Institute from 1934 to 1941, studying with Valeria Listova. World War II interrupted his musical studies and he served in the Soviet Army (1943-1946). From 1946-1948 he studied piano with R. Cherniva and composition with Ye. Messner. In 1948 he entered the Moscow Conservatory, where his teacher in composition was Nikolai Miaskovsky and in instrumentation Nicolai Rakov. In 1931 Nikolai Rakov had composed a *Mari Suite for Orchestra* based on folk songs that had been collected by Yakov Eshpai. Rakov was very fond of Mari music and was delighted to have the son of a respected Mari musician as his student. Andrei, in turn, was a devoted student. It was during these years with Rakov that Eshpai composed his own *Suite* (Prelude, Adagio and fugue) for clarinet (1949) and *Easy Piano Pieces on Folk Themes of the Peoples of the Volga Region*.

Eshpai's first year-and-a-half of study at the Moscow Conservatory was with Nikolai

always with great success. (In February, 1992 the American premiere took place in Albany, New York with the Albany Symphony Orchestra.)

Eshpai experimented with lighter music during the late sixties and early seventies. He produced the operetta "None Happier Than I" (1968) and the musical "Love is Forbidden" (1973). He composed two overtures: *The Kremlin Chimes* (1970) and *Festive Overture* (1970), and his *Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra* (1972), in which he performed as soloist with the USSR State Symphony Orchestra conducted by Evgeny Svetlanov. He performed widely as a pianist in programs of his own works and began experimenting with jazz, composing *Alexandria* (Bossa-Nova) for piano (1966) and *Three Jazz Melodies for Piano* (1969).

Though musical life in Russia became more difficult, Eshpai still performed recitals all over the country in halls packed with enthusiastic audiences. His creative work was still strong. During the last few years he wrote the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 4*, premiered in St. Petersburg on April 18, and in Moscow on April 20, 1994; the *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, premiered in Kazan in October, 1993 and performed in Moscow on November 4, 1994 at the opening concert of the international music festival "Moscow Autumnn."

On May 15, 1995 Andrei Eshpai celebrated his 70th birthday. In honor of this occasion, prominent Russian soloists, conductors and orchestras gave performances of his music all across the country. In 1995 the Mayor of Moscow, Yyri Lushkov, awarded Andrei Eshpai's *Flute Concerto* the City Prize for Art, Music and Literature. At the end of the same year he was elected President of the Russian Author's Society (VAAP).

In 1996 Andrei Eshpai composed a *Symphony Fantasy* dedicated to Suvorov which was performed at "Moscow Autumn, 1997." In 1997 he completed a new orchestral work, *Plays for Orchestra* which has yet to be performed.

Andrei Eshpai, the author of seven symphonies and solo concerti for almost all the instruments of the symphony orchestra, has created a musical language and style all his own. For Eshpai, sincerity is his main method of artistic expression. This is obvious to the listener of his music.

—Victor Ledin

folksongs, refined through the centuries, helps us understand why melody, "tunes," if you will, are so important to him.

If we compare the melodies of *Symphonic Dances* with the most typical Mari folksongs, we will see the resemblance.

The first dance resembles a "Wedding Melody," because of its Dorian mode and three-part meter with variable accents. The second dance is based on pentatonic phrases. It is a square-type structure, with great rhythmic vitality. These features are typical of a great number of Mari dance and folk melodies.

The orchestra accompaniment for this man theme creates the atmosphere of the dance. The rapid repeats in the violins are similar to sounds made by the koviga (a bowed Mari folk instrument).

The *Symphonic Dances on Mari Themes* even now, after more than 45 years since its composition, still retain a certain sparkle. Though Eshpai's style has undergone many changes, even in this early work one can discern the beginnings of his individual style.

The Music of Grace, Elegance and Poetic Innuendo by Dmitri Ukhov, Author and Producer
writing about *Concerto No. 4 for Violin and Large Symphony Orchestra*

Have you ever had the sensation that a piece of music you were listening to had never been created (that is – composed and performed) at all, but has always been in existence somewhere beyond the earth? And a composer has just managed to allow it to go through him, to make it audible. If you agree that this sensation exists (and the music in question is not supposed to be just serene and lovely), then you are likely to admit that Mozart's or Beethoven's name is the first to occur to you in this connection.

Well, I also say Andrei Eshpai's name can occur in this connection as well and especially with a work as fine as his *Concerto No. 4 for Violin and Symphony Orchestra*. The main conflict of this, one of the most recent works by Andrei Eshpai, takes place both in the outside reality and the inner realm of the human soul.

The premiere of this composition was given in St. Petersburg on April 18, 1994 and in Moscow on April 20, 1994. The American violinist, Jennifer Koh, to whom the *Concerto* is dedicated, was the soloist and St. Petersburg's Vladislav Chernushenko conducted the St. Petersburg Cappella's Symphony Orchestra. The *Concerto* may be described as "back-to-basics: but in a sense, it is very different from the fashionable "new simplicity" or "new romanticism."

In comparison with Eshpai's previous compositions for solo instrument and orchestra (the

Symphony is more massive than the *First* and richer in melody. The main themes grow out of each other effortlessly. Tenacity and continuity of melodic development are more typical in the *Second Symphony* than in the *First*. Mari folk songs are used throughout the entire *Symphony*, making its sound quite unusual."

The *Second Symphony* has a subtitle – "Praise to Light." These words could also be applied to his *First Symphony*, which was composed three years earlier as well as to the *Concerto for Orchestra* (composed five years after the *Second Symphony*) and to the *Second Piano Concerto*. The *Second Symphony* is really a hymn to courage, hope, and overcoming of adversity. The music is dramatic, dimmed neither by an exaggeration of horror, nor a false "cheerfulness." It is music of action: from the first notes it involves the listener in a swirl of active movement and contrasts.

In the second movement, Eshpai uses the music he composed for the film *Night Guard*. There is no conflict between heroic images and the humdrum of everyday life in the symphony. The different musical images compliment each other. The conflicts between the dynamics of the music, its drama, and intimate lyricism are just like the conflicts that occur in everyday life.

Konstantin Ivanov writes further: "The middle, slow part of the symphony is the most wonderful. It is like an old romance, but there is nothing sentimental in it. Whenever I conducted this symphony, I always felt the audience's reaction. There was a special silence and rapt attention as the listeners felt the music touch their hearts."

Tikhon N. Khrennikov, the composer, writes: "This new composition by Eshpai seems to me the finest of all his works. "Praise to Light" – that is what the author calls this symphony. It is not an ode to light – it is rather a fighting for light, for justice and for peace. That is why the first movement is so dynamic and intense. We feel the continual impulse of living in this music."

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