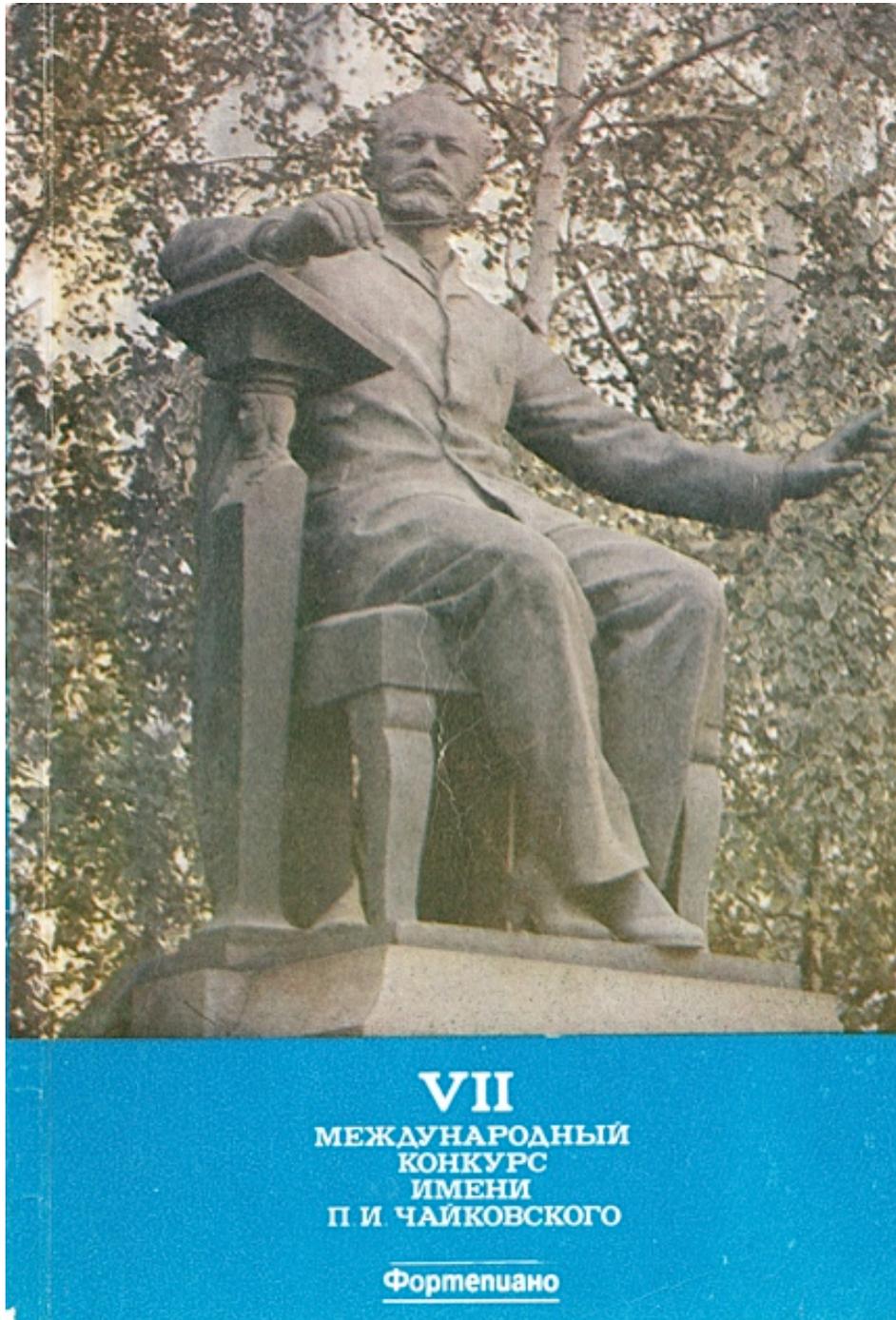


TCHAIKOVSKY COMPETITION 1982

A DIARY BY PETER DONOHUE¹



¹ The footnotes in this diary are retrospective notes from 2012 – 30 years later...

08 June 1982

Recital at Charlotte Mason College in Ambleside in the British Lake District

Program:

Tchaikovsky Sonata 2 in G Major (1st Movement)

Tchaikovsky November (from The Seasons)

Tippett Sonata 2

Prokofiev Sonata 6

Scriabin Etude Op65/3

Chopin Etude Op10/8

Rachmaninov Etude Tableau Op39/5 E flat Minor

Bach Prelude and Fugue Book 2 No. 3

Flierkovsky – Prelude and Fugue in G minor

Stravinsky Three Movements from Petrushka

A very nice, but knowing guy came up to me after the concert, and said “That was a very unusual program. It is almost as if you are preparing to enter the Tchaikovsky Competition.” I asked him to keep it under his hat – it is never good for people to know in advance of your competition efforts, in case it doesn’t work out.

Set off home at 11.00 p.m. The car – a Vauxhall Viva borrowed from my parents-in-law – broke down after about 10 miles of a 120 mile journey to my in-laws on the Wirral. Still in the Lake District countryside. The weather was appallingly wet. I had to get to the Wirral, and then the next morning to Manchester for an early flight to London to connect with the Aeroflot flight to Moscow.

09 June 1982

Thank God for the AA Relay service. They got me to the Wirral in the cab of one of their trucks, with the car on the back. Got there at about 4.00 a.m. I had almost no sleep as I had to pack to go to Russia for a minimum of two weeks (the length of the first round) and possibly up to five if it goes well. Elaine took me to Manchester Airport and saw me off on my first visit to the other side of the Iron Curtain to the dreaded Communist Soviet Union.

The country has so many names that it has always confused me – but it turns out that they all basically mean the same thing: The Soviet Union, The U.S.S.R. (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - in Russian it looks like СССР, which pronounced Es Es Es Air and stands for Soyuz Sovietskaya Socialistika Republika). I have always thought of it as the same as Russia, but actually it is a union – or Russian Empire - of many small states as well as Kazakhstan which is enormous, and the biggest of all which is indeed Russia itself. The USSR/Soviet Union is the biggest and most dangerous country in the world – and here I am setting off to

try to compete against their pianists. And what does “Soviet” actually mean? [²] No one seems to know. I have just realised that Soyuz (Union) is the name of the Soviet space program.

Aeroflot has a terrible reputation, so it was a very nice surprise to find that the plane was really good, although the crew were about as friendly as a bunch of guard dogs.

I met Nigel Kennedy at the gate at Heathrow – he is also entering the Tchaikovsky Competition. I have only met him once before. On the plane we sat on opposite sides of the aisle and had a friendly argument about jazz; he thinks that my liking for Dave Brubeck is sad (I believe he thinks it is easy-listening). He already has a major UK career, but he told me that his manager advised him to do a major competition such as the Tchaikovsky in order to help establish him outside the UK, particularly in the USA.

At immigration in Moscow Sheremetievo Airport the treatment is so unfriendly! [³] The immigration officer who examined my passport and visa for about 10 minutes looked about 14 years old, and as if a smile would crack his acne wide open. After he had made me feel unbelievably uncomfortable for as long as he could, staring at endless pieces of paper, my passport and my face in turn again and again, he asked me “Do you have pen?” (They apparently don’t have a definite or indefinite article in Russian, so it tends to translate into English as if objects are pets with Proper Nouns as names.) I thought it strange that such a person should need to borrow a pen off a traveller in those circumstances, but I said yes and handed him a Bic biro. He said “thank you” and put it into his pocket and waved me through into Mother Russia.

I was met by Nina – an interpreter (they say all interpreters are KGB) – who I think is from Turkmenistan, and clings to me like a limpet to a rock.

Everyone is staying in the God-awful Rossiya Hotel http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rossiya_Hotel. It is in the Guinness Book of Records as the biggest hotel in the world, with 21 floors, 3,200 rooms, and 28 restaurants. There is an average wait of about 5 minutes for the elevators to come, plus another interminable amount of time to get to the ground floor or vice versa. We hear that a fire killed many people here a few years back. It is built very badly, the plumbing is unbelievably noisy, and the restaurants seem to only serve tomatoes, cucumber, bread and Polish beer on a regular basis. Other foods are subject to state distribution which is not the Soviet Union’s strongest point. Everything is

² “Soviet” doesn’t translate easily into English, but the closest I can get to it is “Advisory Council”, or “advice.” Many people will be as sceptical of the use of that word as they are of the name of one of the most important newspapers - “Pravda”, which means “truth”. Thus USSR translates as Union of the Advisory Council of Socialist Republics. Sounds quite friendly, as opposed to the most terrifying and ruthlessly devious superpower in the world - which is what I have been brought up to believe it is.

³ Sheremetievo was at that time the only airport of entry into the whole of the Soviet Union. Even if you wanted to go to Leningrad, or any of the outer republics or provinces (in fact I never met anyone who did want to – unlike now - even the Eurovision Song Contest was held this year in Azerbaijan), you had to go through Sheremetievo.

so slow, and the staff in the bar so unhelpful. Russians are only allowed into the hotel with a government pass – presumably in case they get to be corrupted by foreigners.

I discovered that I am sharing a hotel room with Barry Douglas, whom I met in 1976 at the British Liszt Competition, when he was an entrant in the junior section.

I was introduced to many of the other competitors, including several Americans who are suffering from propaganda-induced paranoia.

The competition has dated the return air-tickets for us all to be sent home at the end of the first round. The people who make the second round have their tickets taken away and replaced by ones that take us through to the announcement of who has made it to the finals. Makes us feel very welcome.... If you don't make it, there is no chance at all of staying to listen to the rest as your visa is revoked – unless, presumably, you have made other visa arrangements beforehand.

There are 121 pianists listed in the competition brochure – some of whom will not have turned up. I think that 104 will play. The list breaks down into nationalities as follows:

32 from USA

14 from Japan

7 from Bulgaria

6 each from France, the UK, the USSR and Yugoslavia

4 each from Australia and Italy

3 each from Hungary and Holland

2 each from Austria, Canada, East Germany, Greece, Poland, Romania and South Korea

1 each from Cuba, Finland, Indonesia, Iran, Lebanon, Luxemburg, Malta, Mongolia, North Korea, Norway, New Zealand, Philippines, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and Vietnam

N.B. None from West Germany, Sweden, Denmark, South America, South Africa, China or Taiwan. None from Soviet satellite states other than Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Romania.

In the prospectus, all the countries are listed in a way that indicates their politics – like the Socialist Republic of Bulgaria, the Kingdom of The Netherlands, and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The proportions are weird. 32 from the USA and only 6 from the USSR?

According to the brochure, Ivo Pogorelich is competing. Everyone says that they cannot understand why, as he is an international superstar as a result of the 1980 Chopin Competition in Warsaw. [Possibly because he didn't win in Warsaw, it grates on him and he needs closure. If he didn't win in Moscow it would make that worse. He is much better off sticking to being an internationally famous superstar, whatever it was that got him there, rather than risking undermining it.] He has a DGG recording contract already, so why would he come here? In fact, he has not turned up. We all regard this as a good thing for both him and us.

I have been given a daily practise slot of 6.30 a.m. for one hour starting tomorrow. That is at the conservatory, which is 20 minutes away by bus. It is the earliest that they will open the

Conservatory – i.e. I, and a few other unfortunates, am on first out of 104. The half-hourly bus between the hotel and Conservatory doesn't start until later, so we will have to go in a taxi. Wonderful. What a great arrangement. Just perfect for someone who doesn't like to go to bed before 3.00 a.m. or get up before 11.00. Nina tells me that, if (in the unlikely chance, I sense she is thinking) I get to the second round the number of people needing to practise will obviously be much less, so it will be easier as I will be able to practise later in the day and for longer.

JURY

Chairman: Otar Taktakishvili (USSR)

Executive Secretary Valery Kastelsky (USSR)

Lev Vlassenko (USSR)

Sergey Dorensky (USSR)

Evgeney Malinin (USSR)

Viktor Merzhanov (USSR)

Tatiana Nikolaeva (USSR)

Antonio de Almeida (Portugal)

Nicole Henriot-Schweitzer (France)

Amadeus Webersinke (Germany)

Constantin Ganev (Bulgaria)

Valentin Gheorghiu (Romania)

Jaime Ingram (Panama)

Rodolfo Caporali (Italy)

Fernando Laires (USA)

Hiroko Nakamura (Japan)

Frantisek Rauch (Czechoslovakia)

Regina Smendzianka (Poland)

Joaquin Soriano (Spain)

Warren Thompson (Australia)

Peter Solymos (Hungary)

10 June 1982

Nina arrived late in her taxi to take me to the practise session at 6.30 am. We arrived at 6.50. There was a military policeman at the door to the conservatory, which was locked. Nina explained to him in Russian why I was there, and that we were expecting the door to be open already. He was the essence and epitome of uncooperation, with a blank emotionless face,

and wore full Soviet police uniform, complete with handgun. Eventually, she managed to get through to him that I am English, and what I was there for.

He said to me “Engliskie?” I said, “Da”. Then he said “Paul McCartney!” and put both thumbs in the air and grinned. I realised that I was onto a winner here and mentioned Manchester United. That really turned him on, and eventually he decided to go somewhere to get the key, and let me into the building – it was now 7.10, and I had 20 minutes to practise approximately 4 hours’ worth of music. I have no idea where all the others who were supposed to practise at 6.30 were. I never saw them and I didn’t ask – there is no point, and there is a limit to the number of stroppy shrugs one can take.

OPENING CEREMONY

Later today was the piano competition opening ceremony. We all assembled around the statue of Tchaikovsky at the front of the Conservatory. There were lots of TV cameras and journalists.

Firstly, a welcome from the chairman of the jury and Minister of Culture for Georgia, Otar Taktakishvili – he is also the composer of one of the token Soviet works for the second round – I have chosen the other one; I wonder if it will work against me..

Secondly, a speech of welcome to the other pianists by one of the Soviet competitors, Vladimir Ovchinnikov, to the greatest piano competition in the world. One of the American competitors turned to me after the speech and said, “Meet the winner!”

After that the TV journalists approached a few people randomly, and I got chosen. “How do you feel to be in our great International Tchaikovsky Competition?” I tried to choose my words as politically carefully as I could. You get the feeling that everything is about getting your lines right.

DRAW

Later we had the draw for the order in which we will play. I drew no. 21 (out of 104). The first round is two weeks long, so No.21 is pretty anonymous.

A New York girl called Lydia Arias was in the last competition in 1978 and drew number 1. She is here again, and again she has drawn number 1. How unlucky can you get? So she has to play tomorrow morning to start the whole competition off. I would hate that. I will play my first round on 13 June.

THE SULLIVANS

After returning to the hotel, the phone in the room rang very frequently – usually wrong numbers. Later I answered one call to a very English voice, which surprises me and I must have come across as very suspicious. It was the cultural attaché from the British Embassy, Michael Sullivan, who is a very keen pianist and music lover. He welcomed me to Moscow, and invited me to meet with him and his wife Jenny this evening at their apartment in Kutozovsky Prospect – the road where most diplomats live in secure blocks with guards on

the entrance (I think the closest word to describe these collections of apartment blocks would be “compound”) – immediately opposite the incredible Hotel Ukraina – one of Stalin’s Seven Sisters: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Sisters_%28Moscow%29

It turns out that Michael went to Oxford at the same time as Bryce Morrison [⁴], who will arrive at the competition later. Michael and Jenny offered me the piano in their apartment for practising should the 6.30 a.m. routine prove impossible. It is an oasis of non-Sovietness. However, every time we have a conversation about the competition or anything remotely sensitive, Michael puts the radio on full belt in order to prevent being listened to and recorded. I don’t know how realistic this is, but it certainly gives you a complex.

11 June 1982

After my early morning practise session, I could have gone to listen to the earlier performances as the first round began this morning, but I don’t want to hear them – at least until after I have played. I spent the time with Michael and Jenny and then later in the hotel bar (one of the 28), talking with the Americans. That’s the way it will continue from now on, I suspect.

12 June 1982

I encountered Private McCartney again this morning – again the door was locked, and again I got very little practise in. He grinned at me again and said “Paul McCartney” again. Perhaps he can sense that Paul McCartney and I share the same birthday - but I doubt it.

I have got to know three Americans well now. Richard Bosworth, Jonathan Shames and James Barbagallo [¹]. The last is an extremely nice guy who never ever stops talking – very generous and open. I like him very much. The other two are nice guys too, by the way – just rather quieter than James.

However, everyone seems completely convinced that the result is fixed already – and in favour of the Russians. I have been hearing this for years about every competitive event the Russians organise or take part in, and yet Van Cliburn, John Ogdon and John Lill have all won Gold Medal here – admittedly jointly with a Soviet in the case of the latter two, but no one could say that Ashkenazy or Krainev did not deserve their Gold Medals. Then there was Terence Judd, who won the fourth prize in 1978. I think all competitions often have silly

⁴ Bryce was a notoriously difficult-to-please London based critic who specialised in piano and pianists, and wrote for many organs including Music and Musicians (sadly now not available). He has an extraordinary command of English (I believe his Oxford degree was in English), and could phrase his reviews very powerfully in whichever direction he wanted – positive or negative. He had reviewed my London debut recital in the Purcell Room in 1979 with vitriol, for which I have since given him large amounts of grief. However, later and up to the present day, I realised that he was and is very passionate about his chosen subject, and has been extremely supportive of my work on many occasions. He became a great friend during the competition in Moscow, having been a member of the jury of the British Liszt Competition in 1976, when the winner was Terence Judd (whom Bryce was extremely supportive of) and the second prize went to Martin Roscoe; I came third. He has since been a great asset on many international competition juries, as well as teaching and giving master-classes.

results – maybe sometimes fixed, but I think it is more that the system doesn't really work terribly well. All we can do is hope for the best, and sometimes it really produces a result that makes up for all the others. It screwed up for me in Leeds, but even then I was a finalist, which means I did not have to live with having been eliminated early on. I am totally cynical about competitions, but the idea that they are all fixed is paranoid, and in particular the idea that the Tchaikovsky Competition is more fixed than the others because it is Soviet is just a result of political propaganda.

But the Americans' paranoia is almost funny – they keep telling stories that highlight their own conditioning about the Soviets being evil incarnate. One was saying that he was followed by a guy in a black raincoat wherever he went – obviously a heavy-duty KGB agent bent on assassination of any American who might be a threat to their chosen beloved Soviet entrants... And one said that he had gone through the wrong door in the hotel by accident and discovered a cupboard full of tape-recorders all whirring away recording the conversations in people's rooms. Give me a break.

Of course, we never get to talk with the Russian entrants. They are not staying at this hotel, and are not allowed to mix with foreigners anyway (or perhaps they are afraid to?) It is a shame – I would like to speak openly with them, but it is obviously regarded as dangerous by the Soviet authorities. Given some of the American prejudice about this country, I think the Soviet authorities may have a point. Of course, like paranoiacs can have real enemies, propaganda is sometimes true – on both sides.

It is true that everyone is controlled here, and that life appears to be dull and grey. But what is it like in their homes? Is family life much more important to them, because the world outside their homes is so uncolorful? Does it mean that art, music and culture are more important to them for the same reason? I am trying to visualise it.

But it is also true that if they wanted to follow us around, we wouldn't have a clue that it was happening – they wouldn't dress up like a character from the Man from U.N.C.L.E. (or should I say S.M.E.R.S.H.?) advertising the fact that they were spies. This country has the most devious and successful secret police in the world and they are very very good at it – at least as far as I know. To imagine they wouldn't make a better job of it than that is really silly. [My impression is that the KGB is cleverer and more ruthless than MI6, CIA and Mossad. Is it true, or is it all based on Western novels and films?]

I might be being followed without me knowing, or listened into in our hotel room. Oh God – it is getting to me!!

13 June 1982

I played my first round at 17.00. The program was:

Beethoven Sonata Opus 101 3rd and 4th Movements

Tchaikovsky November from The Seasons

Bach Prelude and Fugue Bk 1 No 3

Scriabin Etude Op 65 No 3

Chopin Etude Op 10 No 8
Rachmaninov Etude Op 39 No 5
Liszt Paganini Etude no 6

The audience here is incredible. Every seat is taken at all times and for all competitors, and whoever is playing there seems to be some part of the crowd shouting and cheering for them.

They were particularly nice after my performance of Tchaikovsky's November, which they call Troika here – the main tune is apparently very popular, and everyone, musician or not, seems to know it.

Playing the four etudes was terrifying, because the Soviet pianists can wipe the floor with the rest of the world when it comes to pieces like that. I heard that Ovchinnikov played the Chopin Op 10 No 2 as if it was the easiest thing in the world.

People keep coming up to me and talking about Troika and how Russian it was in my performance.

All we can do now is practise, drink and wait for the chop or otherwise. I will go to listen to some of the others.

14-16 June 1982

I didn't listen to any of the first round competitors until after I had played. [⁵]

After that I heard Barry Douglas and the Iranian girl amongst others in the piano section.

Barry played a great Appassionata 1st movement. He also did October from Tchaikovsky's The Seasons, using the Peters Edition, which has a couple of different accidentals to the Soviet edition. When he played those notes, there was an audible response from the audience – they seem to know all the music being played, particularly the Russian music, and are very open in their feelings – lots of tut-tutting and talking disapprovingly about it. Their reaction to what they considered to be wrong notes was probably off-putting for Barry. They behaved like they were all piano teachers at a music festival. I was also reminded a bit of Les Dawson dressed as an old Northern woman and gossiping.

When the Iranian girl (Кароль Л Амброзио-Мирри – it translates as something like Carola Ambrose-Miri) came on, there was booing in the audience before she even sat down to play. I am told that this is because of Soviet propaganda against the Iranian Islamic revolution two years ago. She must have been so upset by this, but played well even so. What an appalling thing to do to her – particularly as she is obviously not part of the Islamic Revolution herself, given that females pursuing a career in the performance of Western music would be frowned upon on all counts.

⁵ In retrospect I wouldn't recommend that. In fact, I would recommend the opposite. And it IS the opposite of what I did in the finals.

I also went to hear Nigel Kennedy's first round which included the Messiaen 'Theme and Variations', Brahms A Major Sonata and some unaccompanied Bach. ^[6] I ran through the Messiaen and the Brahms with him the other day. He played immediately after a brilliant Russian called Sergei Stadler ^[ii], who played Paganini amongst other things. Kennedy sounded very thoughtful and un-showy by contrast. Stadler seems to be a favourite with the audience.

I heard that an Argentinean cellist was told to go home after her tailpiece snapped. How unreasonable can you get?

This country gets to you when you have been here a while – the propaganda on both sides and the paranoia it induces, combined with the specific propaganda of the competition.

A mild diversion at one point concerned the ensuite bathroom's bidet. Barry Douglas and I apparently shared a keenness for bidets, and so were both frustrated that it was impossible to elicit any water from the faucet. Barry told me that he had turned the tap about thirty times and nothing had happened. I always pride myself - possibly misguidedly - on an ability to sort out practical matters such as this, and thus set about trying to rectify the bidet water supply.

I discovered, as Barry had, that you could turn the tap until the cows came home with no result, but that actually at one point there was a biting point well after the thirty times Barry had turned it, and that after that the cows came home with a vengeance. Just before that point there was still no water. However, if one applied one picojoule of extra energy and turned it another millimetre, a sodding tsunami hurtled out of the faucet. On this occasion a couple of gallons of water, that had turned brown through lack of use, hit me directly in the face until I had moved out of the way, and then continued on its way to drench the ceiling and subsequently the whole room, all my clothes and the towels that were in the room, and ran along the floor and into the bedroom carpet. It looked like there was an Icelandic geyser in the corner of the room. (It also smelled like an Icelandic geyser, as it was probably the first time since the October Revolution that anyone had attempted to use it.)

It was accompanied by the machine-gun like sound of Soviet plumbing – not only in our bathroom, but all along the corridor. This knocking sound, which emanated from all over the hotel at almost all times, was a key feature of the whole competition.

I couldn't help wondering why the hell all those people, most of whose rooms were miles away in this indescribably huge hotel, had to take so many showers in the middle of the night (I assumed showers, as the bidet was probably a no-go area in all the rooms). You could be forgiven for thinking that the hotel was under machine-gun attack.

We gave up on the bidet from then on.

⁶ Nigel wore a very subdued dark blue suit for his first round performance. I haven't seen him in anything remotely like a suit since. And I don't think anyone else has either.

17 June 1982

I saw an opportunity to get away from Nina – finally. After I had practised for a while in room 21 (she does at least leave me alone when I am working), I left the Conservatory and walked very quickly down the street towards Red Square – only about ½ mile. She wasn't around, as I had expected, and I didn't see anyone following me.

I looked around Red Square a bit – I have never been a great tourist, but this place is so significant that I have to take it in and to know that I have been there. Incredibly impressive – particularly the Kremlin Walls and Gates with the clock tower, and the bells.... In my sillier moments I think that they remind me a bit of a row of metal hangers in a wardrobe clinking against each other. But actually, they are so indescribably atmospheric it is difficult to put into words. Made me think of Boris Godunov. Then there is the Changing of the Guard – done with such precision it is difficult to believe. It is also hard to imagine the Kremlin as the source of so much trouble, when you see it. At any time we could have a war with these people, and wipe out life on the planet.

I decided to walk back fairly soon. Halfway up Herzen Ulitsa I was approached by an eccentric-looking bloke in a tweed suit – hand outstretched and very friendly. He spoke to me in a very plummy and sophisticated English accent, contrasting alarmingly with mine.... He knew my name, which bothered me a little, but then he may have seen that on TV. But then he was very pleasant about how he was so glad to see that there was a British presence at the competition, and that he would be “rooting” for me. I said thank you very much, and he offered to show me around Moscow, if I would like to give him a call sometime. He gave me a business card that was in Russian only. I think he did tell me his name at first, but I didn't hear it properly – maybe he didn't, I am not sure.

My God, Nina was angry with me for clearing off without telling her. She told me that she would be given a very hard time for losing me, so I apologised and said I wouldn't do it again. I didn't mention my encounter with the English-seeming character. I hope her superiors didn't find out, but I suspect that the bloke I met may have lobbed her in.....

I was invited later to the British Embassy, to meet Michael Sullivan and other Embassy staff and to be shown round. I felt very honoured. The security on the way in was like visiting prison. But what a beautiful building! It is over the river from the Kremlin, and they tell me that Stalin could see it from his private apartment. I bet that got him down.

I told Michael about the Englishman who had accosted me. Michael was extremely suspicious of this. First of all he said that anyone who was walking around unaccompanied in Moscow and could speak English was a Russian posing as either English or American, and was certainly KGB - to be avoided at all costs. I said that I, myself, was alone in Moscow when it happened, and I got a telling off for putting myself in “danger”. I think Michael meant in danger of being recruited as a spy. The standard of the guy's English would surely mean he wasn't Russian – there was no trace of a Russian accent. And in any case, I had simply thought that he was either a British tourist, or a businessman living in Moscow – a point of view that was simply laughed at by the British Embassy people.

Then he asked if I still had the business card. When I showed him, he went white and hurriedly retrieved a photo from a filing cabinet somewhere. “Was this him?” he demanded. I said it looked like him, but I wasn’t sure. He told me that it was Kim Philby:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_Philby. I asked to look at the card to see what Kim Philby looked like in Russian – it was almost recognisable from the Cyrillic now that I looked again, and had several letters after it, as if he was highly qualified. I wonder what would have happened if I had contacted him. I couldn’t because Michael took the card off me and destroyed it. I did not manage to memorise the number.⁷

18 June 1982

My 29th birthday! And I seem to be getting a bit of a cold

The food in the hotel is awful. My system feels like it is lacking Vitamin C. I am craving fruit, of which there is none. I found out from Barry that there is a string of shops called Beriozka for foreigners with hard foreign currency (valuta) only. There is one in a corner of the hotel, where you can get large cans of orange-juice from Greece. The Russian rouble is useless - even though they want one pound for one rouble, but then will not exchange it back under any circumstances, and it buys nothing worth having (so far, at least; I am looking out for a music store, because apparently music is incredibly cheap here.) It means simple basics like the Greek fruit juice (which is expensive) is not available to ordinary Russians, because they (mostly) don’t have valuta.

Other than the famous GUM state department store, which is about the size of East Anglia, there are almost no shops in Moscow – at least I can hardly see any, although, other than the Philby episode I haven’t had a chance to look anywhere without Nina being on my arm every minute when I am not in the bathroom, sleeping, or eating in the hotel. She even insists on being there until I am escorted into the Sullivans’ compound – and she would come in there if Russians were allowed. Moscow is pretty quiet for a capital city. No advertising, which makes everything seem grey and slightly dull.

The toilets in the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire and everywhere else public are indescribable – all the seats are missing, what paper there is (and there usually isn’t) is bits of old copies of Pravda (mind you it is probably a suitable use for it), and they provide what looks like a waste-paper bin which you are supposed to put the used pieces of paper in. The smell is beyond repulsive, and the whole experience is extremely inhibiting. If one forgets to take paper one is forced to improvise. So that was the end of a good quality NatWest cheque-book one day.

The live pop music they play in the hotel bars and restaurants is unbelievable – so dull and so uninterestingly played. However, it didn’t stop Nigel Kennedy getting his violin out and

⁷ I have so often wondered what would have happened if I had contacted Philby. It could have been anything from keeping a disillusioned old man company to being recruited to spy for the Soviet Union, and anything in between. I gather that Kim Philby had been a genuinely committed communist, not just a money grabber and opportunist, but I wonder if he remained convinced once he had become a Soviet citizen.

jamming with them on the day before he played his first round. We all tried to stop him, but he just had to do it, didn't he....?

I am amazed to find that they still use abacuses in the shops. The first abacus I have seen in use is in a restaurant down the street from the Conservatory; black bread and flavourless (meatless?) frankfurters with no flavour seems to be their speciality. Nina tells me it is the best place for us to get food away from the hotel – it is the only one where you can spend roubles. Sometimes she says things that seem a bit unpatriotic, which is weird considering she is supposed to be KGB.

First round results. I got through! So did my friend James Barbagallo [ⁱⁱⁱ]. My God, the tension as Taktakishvili announced it in the same order as the draw.... When he didn't miss No. 21 out and I realised I was through, I couldn't believe the feeling of relief. About 80 people have been chucked out, and there was terrible angst – tears and genuine feelings of personal failure. Awful. I just didn't dare expect to get through, because it always struck me that the first round is the most difficult for the jury to get right, and you are at your most vulnerable. And all the conspiracy theories about competitions, particularly when the Soviets are involved, all go through your mind. But I am in the second round!

Barry Douglas didn't make it, which seems really odd, as he played so well, but we all know about competitions. Is it really possible that jury members would chuck someone out because they used an edition that that they didn't approve of? [⁸] He drowned his sorrows in our shared room later. It seems so ridiculous, and he is obviously unhappy, as I would have been.

And Nigel Kennedy has been eliminated. He went back to London as soon as he played, because he has a performance of the Brahms Double at the Festival Hall with the RPO and Antal Dorati! Why did he even think about entering with gigs like that in his diary? He has asked me to phone him to let him know whether or not to bother coming back to Moscow for the second round. You can only phone internationally by placing the call with the operator at 24 hours' notice, and then sitting by the phone and waiting for the operator to ring back a day later – sometimes nothing happens. [Michael Sullivan told me that it is because there are only 14 international lines available at any one time – 14 for a country of 200,000,000 people. He says it is so the KGB can monitor all the calls and probably listen to them and record them. Pity they have nothing better to do with their time.] So tomorrow - one day after the announcement, I get to tell Nigel that he hasn't got through.

Later I sat behind a pillar in one of the hotel bars and eavesdropped on a Western member of the piano jury (who is the chairman of another competition) telling many of the eliminated first-rounders (I think they were all Americans) where they went wrong. He was recommending that they deliberately play things in a different way in order to be noticed, and

⁸ Through my experience since of working on juries, I have learned that some absolutely do do things like that. They judge young pianists on their appearance, their nationality, their fingerings, their programs – all manner of things come into play that seem completely irrelevant to whether or not the person they are listening to has talent. Thank God for the ones who do not behave in such an amateurish way, of whom there are, fortunately, many.

that they should not regard playing well and faithfully to the score as enough to win a competition. (So far that is of course true). He cited Pogorelich as an example of how to win (err – excuse me... he didn't win – I thought that was the whole point of Pogorelich's success in Warsaw and afterwards), and recommended that when they see, for example, a crescendo they should sometimes do a decrescendo to demonstrate their originality, or when it is marked *piu mosso* they should go slower. Presumably, that sort of thing is what he attributes Pogorelich's success to. God help us.

20 June 1982

Barry has gone home now. He made something of a night of it in our room, and this morning he left for London early. During his party in the room, I was in the bar, and later a few of us took a walk around Red Square and the outside St Basil's Cathedral (Nina would have killed me, but she didn't know). It means that I get the hotel room to myself, but I will miss our late night talks about all things musical. Some of the Americans' remarks have given us endless humorous pleasure. He has also told me many things about the teachings of Maria Curcio and John Barstow, and his experiences as a young choir trainer and organist in Northern Ireland. He has had an extremely varied and diverse early musical life – much more than most pianists, with which I entirely empathise. I think he is going to a great success in the long term. [⁹]

I placed the call to Nigel Kennedy yesterday – and today it came through. He put a brave face on it on the phone, but I could tell it was a blow to him. However, the irony of being thrown out of a competition at the same time as playing Brahms Double in the Royal Festival Hall with the RPO and Dorati is genuinely funny, and says much more about competitions than it does about Kennedy's talent. He hardly needs a prize here, and I don't think his career will be a problem. [¹⁰]

I will play my second round on 25 June. Every day between now and then will be as much practise as possible, some socialising with the Sullivans, and some late bar activity. There is sod all else to do, anyway. My cold is getting worse.

21-24 June 1982

Went to hear some second round performances in both violin and piano competitions. I wonder how it can happen that certain ones got through and Barry Douglas and Nigel Kennedy have been eliminated. There was one pianist who blatantly hadn't learned the

⁹ Barry went on to win the Gold Medal four years later - making him the only non-Russian to ever win outright since Van Cliburn in 1958 – and the rest is history. He now has a fantastic world-wide career that has spanned many years. It just goes to show that competition results sometimes prove nothing, and next time can prove everything.

¹⁰ It hasn't been. From that moment on he seemed to gradually become more and more of a pop-star personality, with huge success that climaxed with his release of Vivaldi's Four Seasons in 1989, which became the world's best-selling classical album.

music, but in any case made a terrible sound and had no basic sense of rhythm. Was the jury not listening? Or is it possible that someone can be much better in one round than another? I have no faith in juries, or in the system. It is a lottery at best, and a complete carve-up at worst.

Heard one guy from Finland – Juhani Lagerspetz – play a great second round. And the audience loved him. He should be a very serious contender.

I was introduced to a film production team from New York. The director is Bill Fertig, and his producer Robert Dalrymple. They are making a TV documentary about the competition and have been filming right from the start. They hope to sell it to the UK – I suppose that will depend on the results. [¹¹]

Bryce Morrison has been here for a while now. We have talked a lot about all manner of things. He is here purely for pleasure and out of interest in the next Tchaikovsky prize-winners. It involved the whole business of getting a visa, and arranging to stay with the Sullivans – which would need special permission from the Foreign Office and a whole load of other complications. He is very supportive of me in this competition.

John Willan – house producer - from EMI has also come. I knew him from having made a disc of Britten with Simon Rattle and the CBSO last year. John produced that disc and I got to know and like him during that week. He is here partly to talent-spot at the competition, but mainly to try to persuade the authorities to allow Gavrilov to record more for EMI. He was supposed to go home before the final, but because of me, he has somehow managed to wangle it so that he can stay until the end. [¹²]

Almost every day is nothing other than four things:

1. Furious practising – [I have never done so much, partly because there is nothing else to do, and partly because to get through the first round of this competition is such an opportunity and I am absolutely not going to waste it. I now have a good practise room, and I can use it for as long as I want every day, because the numbers are so much less now that they have eliminated over 80 people.]

2. Talking with the other English-speaking ones, and one or two French-speakers in the hotel – I can do French reasonably well having got used to it in Paris during the time with Yvonne Loriod and Messiaen, although I am better at talking than understanding what is being said.

¹¹ Bill Fertig's film was subsequently shown several times on Channel 4 in the UK and sold to many other countries. It is a brilliantly paced documentary, capturing the atmosphere wonderfully, and building to the climax in the way that it actually felt. You can view it here: <https://vimeo.com/5841970>. I believe Bill also made films about the 1986 and 1990 competitions.

¹² John Willan later succeeded in persuading EMI to record an LP (those were the days...) of Stravinsky's Petrushka, Prokofiev Sonata 6 and Rachmaninov Etude Tableau Op 39 no. 5. Eventually this disc led to my two consecutive exclusive contracts. He was a huge help at this stage of my professional life. Later he went on to be Chief Executive of the LPO, and subsequently the chairman of Hazard Chase Artist Management.

3. Eating the terrible food provided at the hotel, or the wonderful food provided at the Sullivans' flat.

4. Talking endlessly with Bryce, Michael and Jenny. I imagine they are desperately bored with me. Sometimes we talk with the radio on full blast to cover up the content to the listener's ears – we call him Boris. I would have thought they would want to listen to political or industrial secrets being passed rather than our endless musical tirades – that is if they are listening at all.

One day I bought some music from the store nearby the conservatory – Ravel's Left Hand Concerto for the equivalent of 20 pence, and the complete solo piano works of Stravinsky for one rouble.

On the daily journeys to and from the conservatory by bus provided by the competition the driver has the news channel on the radio on permanently – apparently the radio station is called Kayak. Every time there is a news bulletin it is preceded by a ten note tune played on a vibraphone. I have now heard it so often, I think it will be with me for the rest of my life and remind me of these tense times. I am told it is called Moscow Nights <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqccaYkr0E8&feature=related> and is a very popular song here. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow_Nights

Nina keeps on telling me that she has inside knowledge of what is happening in the jury meetings. I wish she would stop – I don't think believe her for one thing, and I don't want to know. I just want to try to get through to the final and don't wish to try to predict anything. Just to play as well as I ever have in my life and hope for the best and prepare for the worst.

My cold is getting worse.

25 June 1982

My Second round.

This cold that I have had for about 5 days now is a real drag, and in full swing today. My performance is at 10.30, and the weather is very hot. The program is ages long, very energetic and requires a lot of stamina. All in all, not a great prospect.

I have played now, and it went pretty well, particularly Petrushka. As soon as I got back to the hotel, I went to bed and slept all afternoon. Feeling much better now.

The program was:

Tchaikovsky Sonata 2 (1st movement) – compulsory for all pianists.

Liszt Sonata in B minor

Tippett Sonata 2

Prokofiev Sonata 6

Alexander Flierkovsky Prelude and Fugue in G minor

Stravinsky Petrushka.

They got me to cut my Prokofiev Sonata 6 down to one movement, so I went for the finale.

The compulsory “work from your own country” was in my case Tippett Sonata 2. When tempo 1 returns as the top of the final page with a climactic ff C major chord (with a D in it), the audience applauded quite enthusiastically. When it became apparent that it was not finished yet, they went quiet very suddenly, amidst lots of “shushing”. There were a few embarrassed attempts to applaud every time there was a further C Major chord until the final one. When I got to the end, there was no applause at all. I had to actually stand up and invite them to clap, after which there was much laughter.

The compulsory Soviet commissioned work was a choice between a piece by the chairman of the competition – Otar Taktakishvili – and someone who is not on the jury and, as far as I know, has nothing to do with the competition – Alexander Flierkovsky. I chose the latter piece entirely because I thought everyone else would choose the other one, thinking that it would give them an advantage. I was right – almost everyone has opted for the Taktakishvili. Whether having played Flierkovsky will prove to be a disadvantage I wouldn’t know yet. It shows how stupid competitions are if it does.

My Liszt Sonata is controversial – it always had been and always will be – because I try to stick to the score as faithfully as possible, which doesn’t seem to be fashionable. I thought I could sense that the jury was divided from the looks on their faces. So maybe I screwed up by choosing it. [iv]

Petrushka however went as well as it could possibly have done. I actually elicited a glimpse of a genuinely enthusiastic response from the jury members. And the audience..... Words fail me! I actually lost it offstage after this performance because the audience reaction was so wonderful – and I do not get tearful easily.

My cold has finally gone. That was the most inconvenient and long-winded cold I have had for years – probably because of the lack of vitamins in the food. I feel much better, stronger and positive now – mainly because of this wonderful audience.

26-29 June 1982

All we can do now is wait, and practise – it is strange to be practising the two concertos for the finals so furiously when there is a chance of not getting to perform them. But the atmosphere is so stimulating that I am totally motivated and I am somehow able to ignore the possibility of being eliminated.

30 June 1982

SECOND ROUND RESULTS AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF FINALISTS

I got through!! It is such an incredible relief and a great feeling, whatever happens now. My God – a finalist in the Tchaikovsky Competition – I cannot believe it. I must return my Aeroflot ticket to London, and will receive one for after 8 July. The feeling is amazing.

The Finnish one I admired – Juyani Lagerspetz

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juhani_Lagerspetz – has been eliminated. It makes me realise just how lucky I am. I cannot believe that after his second round. He is a great pianist – his Prokofiev 7 was so good, as was his Scriabin Sonata 5, and he also dared to finish with his Finnish piece – by Lief Segerstam. Very enterprising. I just don't understand juries. People are saying things like "Of course they have eliminated him because he is too good and a threat to the ones they have fixed it for." Well, fine, but what does that make me and the rest of us who did get through? Surely the real reason is that the jury includes some people who don't know what they are talking about. The audience was outraged, and showed it very openly. If I were a jury member, I would be terrified.

You see, it is all very well to come down on juries when they do things you don't approve of, or when they eliminate you or give you a booby prize. But when they approve of you, your attitude is different by nature. It is a bit like the situation with critics. If you believe the ones who rave about you, you have to believe the ones who don't as well. And the other way round. But we are all guilty of wishful thinking.

For some reason, they let 13 through to the finals, instead of the 12 they were supposed to. We all play in the same order as per the original draw, so I will do mine on 5 July.

There were twenty in the original prospectus who had Rachmaninov 3 down as their second concerto choice, but they have all been eliminated except for me. (All finalists must play a Tchaikovsky concerto and another concerto of their own choice, with a five-minute break between them). Everyone will play Tchaikovsky 1 except for James Barbagallo and Michael Houston who will play the Second.

The rehearsal schedule is somewhat absurd. We each have an hour to rehearse our compulsory Tchaikovsky concerto and our free choice. So we have the same amount of time for Brahms 2, Liszt 1, Rachmaninov 3 or Mozart K271 – all of which are down to be performed. Is it a test of your rehearsal technique? It makes me wonder.

Most of the finalists are inexperienced with orchestras as usual. How is it possible for them to cope with this rehearsal situation, and in particular how could they deal with a career resulting from a major prize with so little experience??

What I intend to do it is to listen to almost all the performances before mine and plan a very quick rehearsal of the Tchaikovsky on the basis of what I hear; I will concentrate on the Rachmaninov. I will have to take over the rehearsal, as Rachmaninov 3 is so difficult to coordinate. The two conductors will alternate – mine is Vladimir Fedoseev.

02 July 1982

Invited to British Embassy to meet the Ambassador – Sir Curtis Keeble. The only other British competitor to have stayed in the competition up to now - Lionel Handy who is a cellist - was also there. I didn't know Lionel until today. <http://www.ram.ac.uk/find-people?pid=569>

I also met Georg Faust: <http://www.die12cellisten.de/en/members/former/georg-faust> Very nice guy. We had a long talk.

The Ambassador is extremely popular with the Soviet government, and yet he is openly against their politics totally. At one point, he said to me, “these people here live under a particularly nasty system”. It seemed strangely undiplomatic for someone in his position. Mind you, every one of the people I met at the embassy is completely convinced that everything here is evil, and nothing is to be trusted. Perhaps it isn't. But the people are being so open and warm and generous to me – it is a dichotomy.

I am feeling extremely tense. It is great to make it to the finals, and easy to convince yourself beforehand that it is enough. But come the time, you have to try to win the highest possible prize don't you? You would never forgive yourself if you didn't. And I did come here to do as well as I could. It is just that my cynicism over competitions makes me shield myself against disappointment, as I did in Leeds. And I seem to have been here for so long now – nearly four weeks since I arrived. The tension is almost an illness.

03 July 1982

“Have a Carlsberg, to calm your nerves”, said Michael Sullivan in his and Jenny's apartment late this afternoon. I sat nursing this can of beer whilst talking with them, idly running my right thumb around the hole in the can. Suddenly there was blood everywhere. I had cut my thumb wide open on the can. Oh my God, the panic! Michael screaming about the fact that he hadn't offered me a glass, Jenny screaming that I must try to get to hospital, me wondering if I would have to pull out of the competition. There was a flap of skin hanging off the playing surface of my thumb – exactly the place that gets all the action during octaves. Great for Tchaikovsky 1 and Rachmaninov 3. I went straight to the doctor's, arranged by Michael and Nina together. He gave me a certificate to say that I could not play for another five days, which takes me to the last day of finals – 8 July – which they have agreed to. It means that I will play last of all in the final, and my Rachmaninov 3 will end the competition. [¹³]

¹³ It has been suggested to me many times that this episode with the beer can was deliberate on my part, in order to get to play last in the finals.

05 July 1982

The schedule for the final round is:

Michie Koyama – Tchaikovsky 1 and Rachmaninov 2
Jonathan Shames – Tchaikovsky 1 and Brahms 2
Michael Houston – Tchaikovsky 2 and Beethoven 5
Vladimir Ovchinnikov – Tchaikovsky 1 and Liszt 1
Kalle Randalu – Tchaikovsky 1 and Mozart K271
James Barbagallo – Tchaikovsky 2 and Rachmaninov Paganini Rhapsody
Maria Rowena Arietta – Tchaikovsky 1 and Saint-Saens 2
Mikhail Yermalayev – Tchaikovsky 1 and Beethoven 3
Nino Kereselidze - Tchaikovsky 1 and Prokofiev 3
Yasushi Hirose - Tchaikovsky 1 and Beethoven 5
Dmitry Gaiduk - Tchaikovsky 1 and Prokofiev 2
Emma Tahmizyan – Tchaikovsky 1 and Prokofiev 3
Peter Donohoe – Tchaikovsky 1 and Rachmaninov 3

The performances are all in the evenings, sometimes two sometimes three.

I decided to listen to all the finals performances except for the one immediately before me (sorry Emma...), in order to get the hang of the orchestra and conductor and to plan my absurdly short rehearsal. So far I have heard nine Tchaikovsky 1s.

The orchestra is not playing the Tchaikovsky with any level of commitment, which is surprising, and there are some very weird Soviet traditions with this piece – e.g. the last line of the introduction (*meno mosso*) is always rushed through as if it is boring and needs to be helped along. The woodwind and horn chords in Bar 217 of the 1st Movement was pretty scrappy the first time, and each performance has been worse. The audience is very angry with the orchestra and shows it openly (as with everything), and they have started laughing at bar 217 now, which is a bit off-putting for the pianist during the next passage. Mind you, it does sound like someone is killing a pig at the back of the orchestra.

Bryce Morrison has been sitting with me in the audience for many of the performances. He was particularly impressed by the fact that two decided to play Tchaikovsky 2 instead of 1. [14] He was anticipating James Barbagallo's performance with great interest, and said before

¹⁴ Tchaikovsky 2 later became a staple part of my repertoire, and I have always loved it. In fact, four years later I got to record it for EMI: <http://www.gramophone.net/Issue/Page/August1987/52/764973/TCHAIKOVSKY.+Piano+Concerto+No.+2+in+G+major,+Op.+44+%28orig.+version%29.+Peter+Donohoe+%28pf%29+Bournemouth+Symphony+Orchestra++Rudolf+Barshai+with+Nigel+Kennedy+%28vn%29+Steven+Issht> but I did not at this stage play it, although I knew it from a great Cherkassky recording http://www.naxos.com/catalogue/item.asp?item_code=9.80095 (of the Siloti version) from the 1950s that I had when I was very young. I had been tempted to choose it for the competition, but it would have been the first time I had performed it, which I absolutely ruled out as it was against my principle that you should never play a piece for the first time in a competition. I recommend wholeheartedly that others adopt the same principle. I have seen many potential great artists fall by the wayside because one of their pieces in a competition was not

it started that he was particularly eager to see how James would play the really difficult passage in triplet 16th in the first movement cadenza. He had always regarded this as a major hurdle. When we got to that point in the concerto, James solved the problem of the triplet passage by simply cutting it completely and jumping three pages – a cut that doesn't work at all.

Bryce was not best pleased with him. In fact he was raging about it – “Oh yes, Peter, that's the perfect solution to playing a particularly difficult passage in the most important competition in the world, isn't it? Just leave it out. Marvellous.” (People who know him will be able to picture it easily.) He revealed later that he had loved James' playing during the rest of it. He does have a point about making a cut – it is one of the most audacious things I have ever heard, even if it had been in a non-competitive situation. You've got to admire his cheek.

One very disturbing thing happened this week. One day I accidentally went into the room next to the one to which I had been allocated, to discover a member of the jury giving a lesson to one of the Soviet entrants on his concerto. [Names eliminated]. The obvious embarrassment when I appeared in the door gave away that they both knew they had contravened the rules, not to say natural decency. [¹⁵]

Maria Rowena Arietta gave her finals performance with Madame Imelda Marcos in attendance in one of the boxes. I asked about this later, and people are saying that Imelda is Maria's aunt. If it is true, that's what I call a good connection.

The rest of the time, I am practising my two concertos almost all the time. I have never done so much single-minded practise. I am sure that the fact that there is so little else to do is a great help. My thumb is basically better, but I am very glad that I get to play last – it is a lucky position to be in.

It is so great to have my newly-acquired support team. Michael and Jenny Sullivan, Bryce Morrison and John Willan will never know how the difference they made, when I imagine what trying to do this alone would have felt like, as some of the others are doing.

I cannot imagine what is going to happen. Assuming I don't mess up the final, there is a reasonable chance that I might come out of this well. Many people seem to think they have inside knowledge of what is going on in the jury meetings, which I am sure they do not. However, it is so encouraging that members of the audience keep coming up to me and cheering and giving me their incredibly open support – but of course many of the others are receiving the same sort of support from different groups within the audience – and my own

settled, and the competition situation made it vulnerable to the sort of mistakes that they would forever kick themselves for.

¹⁵ I have met both of these people many times since, and they know that I know that they know. I obviously cannot reveal the names. However, anyone who knows the murkier side of the competition scene well will probably be able to guess. Of course, the argument could be made that a jury member who has a student in the competition is not allowed to vote for or against that student, and therefore that the lesson is irrelevant. However, I did not come down in the last shower.

competition experience is helping me to not try to predict anything, because anything can happen. If I get a booby prize, I will still be able to say I was a finalist in the competition that I never in my wildest dreams as a young person thought I could even consider entering.

08 July 1982

My Final

I am writing this two days after my performance in the finals, and the announcement of the competition result. I would like to start by saying that Thursday was the most important, overwhelming and thrilling day of my whole professional life thus far.

There were many contributing factors, not least of which was that they gave me the joint Silver Medal.

However, there were many others, particularly the relationship I have developed with the Moscow public, which I cannot put into words. They have tried to invade the dressing room, screamed, crowded round the car, stamped, cheered, cried, bombarded me with flowers, and yelled my name out for a continuous 5 hours between the finals performances, which finished at 10.30 p.m., and the jury announcement, which was at about 4.00 a.m. I cannot begin to understand it, and I am emotionally overcome by it, but of course I love it, and I hope this competition gives me the opportunity to come back and play for these people again and again. [¹⁶]

Other contributory factors were the support from my British friends, who were locked in the dressing room with me, along with a few particularly audacious Russians and several bottles of Sovietskaya Champanskaya. The orchestra and conductor were in the event fantastic, and enormously supportive.

However, the main thing in my mind is the impact of having got this far in a competition that I always regarded with fear and dread, in the country to which I have felt close all my life, despite the intensity of the Cold War and the propaganda I had experienced for years from

¹⁶ In fact, over the course of the next nine years – up to the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the chaos that ensued – I returned approximately four times a year to Russia. Almost each time, it was to play multiple concerts in Moscow and Leningrad, and very occasionally in other parts of the Union e.g. Tbilisi in Georgia and Vilnius in Lithuania. All these visits were adventures in themselves, and the atmosphere of the competition in Moscow was recreated each time.

The love affair I had with the Moscow public remains even now in modern Russia. It was much the same in Leningrad – now St. Petersburg – notwithstanding that the people there have a more reserved personality than Muscovites, and same has happened in provincial parts of Russia, however far away and different they are from Moscow.

I have developed a particular love of Siberia – a place that I am sure rightly conjured up a vision of hell in western minds during the Soviet time. However, the warmth of the people and the level of cultural understanding are beyond compare.

I do not fully understand my relationship with the country, and perhaps the Russians don't either. It could be the product of a certain moment in Soviet history whose momentum has continued inexplicably. However, that I do not understand it will never stop me being eternally grateful for it.

family, school, university, media, movies and from virtually every direction. It is an indescribable feeling, and one tinged with so many inexplicable and contradictory emotions.

I have always regarded competitions with suspicion, and nothing in my previous experiences of them have done anything to change that. Maybe, even now, I am totally against the notion of cultural competitive events. But I have a positive result from this adventure into the terrifying unknown, and I am so glad I took the plunge, and not just because of the inevitable huge career boost.

The day started with the rehearsal with the orchestra, which I had planned in great detail on the basis of the lack of time. I did not know the conductor, Vladimir Fedoseev [¹⁷], but we got along fine (with an interpreter) and he was very cooperative. I addressed as few places in the Tchaikovsky Concerto as I could reduce it to – including begging them not to accelerate at the end of the introduction, where it says *meno mosso*, and to occasionally play more quietly than *mp* (which they had not done in the previous nine performances I had listened to). Then we went on to the Rachmaninov 3rd Concerto, concentrating on all the usual difficult moments – i.e. figures 3, 9, 30, 32, 39, most of the last movement middle section, and in particular 75.

In the performance the orchestra played so well, particularly when I compare it to the previous performances of Tchaikovsky. Fedoseev is extremely exciting, and almost always stuck to my performance of the solo part like glue. The Tchaikovsky was a miracle from the orchestra. In the Rachmaninov the conductor lost me at 5 bars after 56 – a place I have always thought had the potential to go wrong horrifically, but it never had done so before. I realised that he had not picked up the tempo as soon as we got to the end of the first bar, and was floundering. 5 bars later he found the tempo, but one beat behind. Fortunately, the pattern of eight 32nd notes that is repeated twice in the same bar gave me something to anchor my memory to. I repeated the pattern three times, instead of twice, thereby playing a 5/4 bar instead of a 4/4, we ended up on the same beat and it was fine after that. That, and a little improvisation of my own during the scherzando waltz towards the end of the second movement, were the two bits that didn't happen in the way I had hoped. Everything else went really well. [*Here are links to audio files of the Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov Concerti: www.peter-donohoe.com/en/music Also there is a link to a video taken from Soviet TV of the last few minutes of the Rachmaninov: <http://www.peter-donohoe.com/en/videos>*] I have a feeling that the jury did not notice any of this.

Imelda Marcos was not there (in fact she wasn't there for anyone else other than Maria Arietta). In her place was Yuri Andropov – head of the Soviet KGB. That was nice.... He

¹⁷ Vladimir Fedoseev has since become a massive success, and I have worked with him several times across the years. He has an amazing ability to create visceral excitement, and when we played Tchaikovsky 1 in Italy some years ago it was one of the most exciting concerts I ever did, as indeed was the Shostakovich 2 we did in Brighton when his orchestra was touring the UK. However, he was not yet heard of in the West at the time of the competition, and I was told that he had previously been a major star on the balalaika in Ukraine. So many similar stories abound in Russia that I have never been able to ascertain how he really started. All I do know was that he was terrific every time we have worked together.

looked very smart in a very dark suit, surrounded by bodyguards, and looking very disapproving of the whole event. I did not have the pleasure of meeting him. [¹⁸]

When it was over, I had to allow myself to be locked in the dressing room, along with several others, including the British contingent, and we drank lots of Sovietskaya Champanskaya together. Whilst we waited – which went on for so many hours, I was truly astonished at the shouting and screaming in the Conservatory courtyard below. It was like a dream, and a situation that I knew then I could only experience once in a lifetime. At one point I came to window that looks out onto the Conservatory courtyard, and I could not believe it was really happening; hundreds and hundreds of chanting audience members stretching down the street – so passionate and involved.

At 4.00 a.m. they finally announced their decision – that there should be no Gold Medal, but two Silvers – Vladimir Ovchinnikov (USSR) and me. The other prizes were:

Michie Koyama 3rd (Japan)
Dmitry Gaiduk 4th equal (USSR)
Kalle Randalu 4th equal (USSR)
Maria Arrieta 5th (Philippines)
Nino Kereselidze 6th equal (USSR)
Michael Houston 6th equal (New Zealand)
James Barbagallo 7th equal (USA)
Emma Tahmizyan 7th equal (USSR)

¹⁸ Not many months after the competition the General Secretary of the Soviet Union (effectively the President) – Leonid Brezhnev – died and was replaced by Andropov. That the head of such a renowned and frightening organisation as the KGB should be promoted to become the leader of one of the world's two superpowers was, and still is, disconcerting. However, readers above a certain age will recall that Andropov was not in the job for long. For about six weeks during 1984 he was unable to appear publicly because he 'had a bad cold'. It turned out that he had died, and the lie about him having a cold was put out to give them time to find a replacement. Eventually they came up with the brilliant idea of having a very frail man in his 70s as General Secretary – Konstantin Chernenko – who died within a year of taking office. This made way for Mikhail Gorbachev, who was the recently appointed General Secretary at the time of the 1986 Competition – the one Barry Douglas won.

KGB

Years later in 2003, I was told about a book on the history of the KGB http://books.google.ru/books?id=zeYEhcHWjEUC&pg=PA181&lpg=PA181&dq=Kgb+files+tchaikovsky+competition&source=bl&ots=GtZaUH-2E9&sig=3MGUOjIP3wLeC3k2rIRtEeChTxY&hl=en&sa=X&ei=sEsgT6LPNdCA-wbP5ezDBA&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Kgb%20files%20tchaikovsky%20competition&f=false. I only got to read it about one year ago. In it the author Yevgenia Albats includes a ludicrous episode concerning the Tchaikovsky competition of 1982, as demonstration of how idiotic Soviet paranoia could be: In an otherwise very serious book, the author shows in an almost comic episode that certain KGB agents in the audience (Andropov included, I suspect, and apparently led by one Vitaly Fyodorchuk) believed that I was in collusion with anti-Soviet elements in the Moscow public, which is why the people of Moscow were so supportive of me. I have to say that, however sympathetic one is towards Communism, Soviet policy, and even the KGB itself, this has to be one of the most ludicrous things imaginable. For one thing, I was never anti-Soviet. For another, the KGB surely has better things to do with its time. And finally, all I was doing there was playing the piano in the hope of a better professional future.

I do not know the reason for the refusal to give a Gold Medal, but everyone else seems to think they have the answer, and most of those answers are anti-Soviet. Perhaps one day I will get to know what really happened in that jury meeting. [¹⁹] In the meantime, I am speculating that my Liszt Sonata was divisive (I certainly don't think any of the other works I played could be so personal). I also imagine that Ovchinnikov found the pressure of being expected to wipe the floor with any competition from other countries too much and did not play at his best once he got to the second round. He seems like an extremely nice person, and too sensitive to be placed in such an impossible position. From what I heard about his first round, his playing was effortless, but later he began to show signs of strain – I am not surprised. The performance of Liszt 1 I heard in his final was blighted by nervousness. But we may never know the truth. I hope one day to know Ovchinnikov well enough to compare notes. [^v]

At the same as this was going on, the violin competition results were already in – joint Gold Medal went to Sergei Stadler [^{vi}] (the one who played immediately before Nigel Kennedy in the first round) and Victoria Mullova. In the cello competition, the winner was the Brazilian Antonio Meneses, and my new friend Georg Faust took the third prize. I have had virtually no contact with the vocal competition. [²⁰]

http://www.tchaikovsky-competition.com/en/history/1982/winners_prizes

09-11 July 1982

I placed three phone calls (at 24 hours' notice as usual) to Elaine, my mother and my agents in London, and had to wait until yesterday to actually tell them what had happened, when the phone calls finally came through. My mother's reaction to me telling her that I had jointly won the Silver, which effectively meant that Vladimir and I had won the competition, was to say, "Oh, right. When are you coming back? I've got a hydrangea that needs moving." [^{vii}]

The answer to the question was actually that I had to stay on to take part in prize-winners concerts until July 12. This evening will be the first, and there will be one more tomorrow. I was asked to play the first movement of the Tchaikovsky Concerto, whilst Vladimir plays the other two movements – this time conducted by Dmitri Kitaenko, who is great.

¹⁹ I didn't get the full truth until 2010 when I finally met with one of the original jury and that person was open and honest about it. However, what actually happened was that the furore caused by the jury decision created far more publicity than a Gold Medal would have. The lucky result produced a situation I could never have imagined in my wildest dreams. So – thank you Moscow!!!

²⁰ Later, in the prize-winners' concerts I did get to hear the wonderful bass from Georgia, Paata Burchuladze. Subsequently, Paata and I did a concert together in the Lichfield Festival. He was able to perform in the West – after Karajan had spotted him and invited him to work with him in Verdi opera. I also played a recital in Moscow with him, followed immediately by one in Tbilisi, Georgia, where he was very much a local hero. (I also did a solo recital on that occasion, during which a cat came onto the stage in the middle of Chopin's 4th Ballade and started flirting very suggestively with my left leg. The audience continued listening as if it was normal.) Burchuladze had one of the most characterful voices of anyone I have ever worked with. The power of his presence and the sheer size of his voice were amazing. I will never forget his performances of Mussorgsky's 'Song of the Flea'.

The audience continues to be the most appreciative, passionate and educated I can imagine. I am reminded why I wanted to be a musician in the first place. Thank you to the people of Moscow, and to the organisers of this – the greatest piano competition in the world!!!

I am now writing late on 11 July. They decided that we must give a third prize-winners concert this evening – this time without orchestra. There doesn't seem to be any thought at all given to the possibility that we might have other commitments. I guess if I said so, they would allow me to leave the country, but of course I having a whale of a time, so it is irrelevant.

I played Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, and there was such a reaction from the audience that I played two encores: George Benjamin's *Sonata* (1st movement) and Prokofiev *Sonata 6* (4th movement). The George Benjamin gave them something to think about, but it is an extraordinary piece, and was a great hit.

So, finally it is all over, and I will return to the UK tomorrow (12 July) – I will go home, and celebrate with family and friends and agents, and I will re-plant my mother's hydrangea next week.

It has been the most extraordinary and unexpected time, and, as I keep reminding myself, nothing like this will ever happen to me again.^[21]

If you have been, thank you for reading this.

12 July 1982

Postlude. There are many, many TV, radio and press interviews in the pipeline, but one newspaper interview took place today at Heathrow Airport within minutes of landing. I will not say which paper it was, but one of the questions was, “can you tell me who else has won this competition, other than yourself and Tchaikovsky?”

²¹ In fact, over the course of the next nine years – up to the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the chaos that ensued – I returned approximately four times a year to Russia. Almost each time, it was to play multiple concerts in Moscow and Leningrad, and very occasionally in other parts of the Union e.g. Tbilisi in Georgia and Vilnius in Lithuania. All these visits were adventures in themselves, and the atmosphere of the competition in Moscow was recreated each time.



Here another scan of the brochure: note Barry Douglas on the page next to my entry!

ⁱ James Barbagallo suddenly died of a heart attack in 1996. He was an extremely generous, big-hearted person, and I was really shocked when I heard that. As James is no longer with us, I can say with total openness that he was an extremely natural musician, with an engaging and obvious love of the music he was playing. He seemed bemused by the fact that he had made it to the final, as he had not expected it. That he had the bare-faced crust – or perhaps naiveté – to simply cut the very bit that may even have won him the competition (the triplet 16th three page build up in the first movement cadenza of Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto 2) won him my admiration, as did his performance of the Rachmaninov Paganini Rhapsody, which was very emotional, very exciting and honest. He did not play as if he was in a competition, which was both great to listen to and at the same time did him something of a disfavoured. It was also part of the reason he was able to be so completely honest in his support for others, including me, during the finals. As it was, he won joint seventh prize, which was a major achievement during the Soviet era. That he died at such a young age as he did, and so suddenly, was and always will be extremely upsetting. There are not enough people with his level of generosity in the music world.

ⁱⁱ Later Sergei Stadler and I played several concerts together in Moscow, Leningrad and Paris. He also became a conductor, and on one occasion when I was in Leningrad, I went to see and listen to his performance of Puccini's Tosca. He is a very instinctive and warm musician, with a characteristically highly trained brilliant technique. The last I saw of him was during the 2011 Competition, when he was on the violin jury.

He was by that time the head of the string department of the St Petersburg Conservatory, and was alleged to have been involved in some dodgy financial deal concerning roof repairs. I gathered from the competition rumour mill that the FSB (the modern equivalent of the NVKD of former times) had been generous enough to allow him to serve on the Tchaikovsky Competition Jury, before escorting him back to a holding cell in downtown St Petersburg. I do hope he is set free for his next concert engagements. 'Only in Russia', as the Americans might say....

ⁱⁱⁱ see endnote i above

^{iv} I now know from many sources that at least one of the jury really hated my Liszt Sonata. So many Moscow audience members still mention it even now – 30 years later. I heard from one person who must remain nameless, that during the final jury meeting on the night of 8-9 July, Evgeny Malinin (Ivo Pogorelich’s teacher when he was a student in Moscow, and later, after this competition, the teacher of Barry Douglas) was particularly determined that I should not win first prize and was banging on the table and saying ‘you cannot play the Liszt Sonata that way’. Actually my performance on CD of eight years later was very similar to the competition performance, and won the Grand Prix du Disque, so one can play it that way, and I still do. So we will just have to agree to differ.

However, I also gathered later that the Stravinsky – along with Rachmaninov Concerto 3 in the finals – did meet with approval from the jury.

Interestingly, on the many occasions (2 or 3 times a season) on which I returned to Moscow to give concerts, the audience would shout for the Danse Russe from the Stravinsky. I had to play it as an encore after virtually every Moscow recital program for more than ten years. When I finally did the piece after other encores, the audience would always applaud during the first line – it was like my equivalent of Sinatra’s ‘My Way’ at the end of a show, and I certainly never thought a piece of Stravinsky could be in that position. It didn’t seem to matter whether I played it well or not – and sometimes I didn’t. How extraordinary the Moscow audience is.

^v That hope became realised far more than I expected. The Western world is now very used to interacting with Russians in a way that was impossible and unthinkable before 1991.

In recent years, I have got to know Vladimir Ovchinnikov very well. Away from the tensions of the competition, his playing is even more technically effortless than when we were competing, which reflects the incomparable Soviet training of his youth, as well as his natural talent.

This interaction is of course as a result of the political change in his country – Modern Russia does not try to prevent contact in the way the Soviet Union did. However, before the political change that took place in his homeland, he was the first prize-winner of the Leeds Competition in 1987, when I was engaged as a commentator for BBC TV, and we got to talk (with a KGB agent in attendance of course). Later, after the Soviet Union was dissolved, and Russians were free to talk with whomever they liked and to travel wherever they wished, he became a member of the full-time teaching staff at the R.N.C.M. for some years. After he had returned to Moscow, he attended several of my concerts in Moscow, and we got to talk briefly then. Finally, he was on the jury of the Tchaikovsky Competition with me in 2011, and we spent quite a long time, together with Mrs. Ovchinnikov (Elvira Shulgina), talking about the old days - like a couple of war-veterans in an old peoples’ home. The content of the conversation was very much about the life of a Soviet artist working through Goskonsert – the Soviet State concert agency.

He has a very pleasant character, which manifests itself particularly in his work as an educator; he is now in charge of the Moscow Central Music School for young musicians. I have seen him interact with young children, and he is great at it.

^{vi} *see endnote ii above*

^{vii} With personal knowledge of my mother, this was more amusing than deflating. It was her way to avoid addressing emotional things and to divert her own attention to everyday things for fear of breaking down. “How terribly Northern”, did I hear you say?