

# In the year seven after winning the competition

**Since Anna Malikova won 1993 the 1st prize at the ARD Competition, the first time in 12 years that this prize was awarded, her career has been skyrocketing. When one meets her for the first time it is difficult to imagine how she can muster much strength at the piano, as she is a tiny and descreet, almost shy person. However, when the conversation turns to music, her eyes quickly show fire and the fragile person of her changes into a powerful pianist, who knows exactly what she wants.**

While reading the biography of the today 35 years old pianist one is surprised to find her still so young, as it is filled with so many events and episodes. But we wanted to know how it was at the very beginning, wanted to know exactly about details of her life. "Probably it was with me like it is often the case: both my father as well as my mother played the piano. Eventually they wanted me to have my own share" she explains with simplicity. But both her parents are professional musicians, both studied at the conservatory of Tashkent and taught in Anna's home town Tashkent. On the other side there was no urge from them to develop a professional base. However there was an early key event: "One day - I was six years young - my father took me to a concert, where we met a colleague of his. She was teaching at the Special Music School in Tashkent and asked, whether I had an interest to have lessons there." This was sort of laying the foundation, as it was at this type of music school, where early preparations could be made for a professional music education later on. The best students of these special schools from all over the former USSR were always sent to Moscow. "I was lucky to have Tamara Popovich as teacher", explains Anna Malikova. But Tamara Popovich had a reputation of being extremely demanding, far more than anybody else. "When I was only 14 years, I was already being sent to Moscow. I remember that I was surprised to find out, that Moscow was such a huge city of such a large international scale - compared to Tashkent. Of course in Moscow one found the best pedagogues, musicians, actors, dancers. And of course this is important for the development of a young artist. Anyway, when I arrived there, I could barely believe my eyes."

Once in Moscow, she was accepted by the legendary Lev Naumov to join his class. What was so special about Naumov? Malikova: "Even today do I believe, that I could not possibly have found a better teacher. I am not merely referring to his teaching method, but also to his wealth of emotions and his personality in general. Actually I am even feeling, that only today do I begin to understand really the depth of all his advice, and only now do I realize the genius of his ideas and thoughts. Probably I adapted what he said at that time, but understanding in depth comes only now and gradually." Naumov had been for many years the assistant of Heinrich Neuhaus, who is considered the father of the russian piano school. Naumov has many years ago decided not to appear anymore on stage and has devoted himself totally to the life of a pedagogue. "If you really love teaching so much, then the result of being that consequent can lead to better results than if you would move

back and forth between concert platform and classroom", the pianist believes today. He had at times up to 30 students and also his former students come now and then to play for him and get his advice. The situation is like that until today.

To have to leave from home at the age of 14 was difficult for Anna Malikova: "I was not that type who found easy contact to other people, and I was pretty shy. My mother was afraid, that I would not stand living alone in such a big city and had told me, that she would bring me back at once, should I call her. But Moscow was for me a miracle: even only three or four days after my arrival I felt already like at home." However, life at the boarding house of the school and later in the guesthouse for students was all but easy - and this had to be her home for the coming 12 years. And what about the competition between schoolmates, was it tough? "It became sort of tough later, in the conservatory, but not in the Central Music School. Once in the conservatory, the only aim for everybody was to take part in international competitions. The system was like that: first you had to audition within the conservatory and then, if you proved good enough, you were sent to the republics to perform there. The final remainder had eventually the chance to be sent to an international competition." But Anna Malikova remembers as well all difficulties. The state had never big funds available and the number of young pianists admitted to a competition was accordingly very small: "Mostly three or four at a time." Of course, this made the competition among comrades only tougher. In the end she was educated five years at the Central Music School by Naumov, then five years at Tchaikovsky Conservatory. The following two years after that she did her "aspirantura" [= doctorate] and finally she was four years assistant of Naumov. A long time, but she says today: "For me it was really a wonderful time."

The first concert, as she remembers, she gave at the age of eight - "a concerto by Kabalevsky with orchestra in Tashkent." When only 13 years old, she played the 3rd piano concerto by Prokofiev also in her home town, even before she began to study with Naumov. Her teacher Popovich had the opinion that once you wanted to play the piano it made more sense to study seriously for the stage instead of playing tunes for grammy. These first public performances were after all rewarding enough. Later however, she had to undergo the crucifying procedures of playing in competitions, as everybody else had to. "Seven years I tried to be admitted to international competitions, however in vain. I only was permitted to audition and to play in the Soviet Union. Of course this was frustrating, but today I believe that this had also its good side. I gained strength and the will to succeed against all odds. And on the other side, if you win an important competition too early, you have usually not enough repertory, not enough experience. Very, very often does it happen that young winners of competitions disappear after some time, as they are not able to withstand permanent pressure."

However, one day she made it to gain the upper hand in the system and she was sent abroad. To Oslo, Warsaw and Sydney. But there was not to be a first prize, although she made it into the finals of each of these competitions. And then, finally, came the collapse of the soviet system and the fall of the iron curtain. "All of a sudden everything was different. The prizes of the above mentioned competitions were not sufficient to help me start a career. Therefore I decided once more to try a competition. And then I realized, that

each coin has two sides. Although the soviet system was hard for us artists, we could also get a lot of help: once we were admitted and sent to a competition, everything was organized and paid for. We did not have to do anything else than concentrate on performing. Now we were suddenly free, we could do everything - but we had no money. Today many people say: ,What happened with the russian piano school? It went down a lot.' But I am convinced, that many a gifted student just does not have the financial means to study or to go abroad." Eventually Anna Malikova used some savings and went to the ARD Competition München on her own expenses. And it worked. She won it in 1993 and is the only pianist in 12 years that was awarded first prize in this highly important competition. Was this the begin of her career? "Definitely yes. In the following years I have played really very much, 50 to 60 concerts in one year, which is for me very much, as I am physically almost not able to play more," she comments, estimating herself well. Life now was very different from before. "I understood quickly that it is very tiring to have a solo career. The reason: I do not like very much to play the same program over and over again, as I would lose vitality. It is not interesting when you have to play the same program too many times in a row or when you change only one work of a program at a time. If you want to be a serious professional, you need time, time to prepare new repertory and new programs. There are pianists who need more, other less..." However, in 1993 she had a bigger variety in her repertory, than this had been possible, had she won the prize some years earlier. "Additionally, I was more self confident. I did not anymore have in my head only the ideas of my teachers, but was able to develop my own thoughts. It helped probably, that I was at that time already teaching myself for four years, which I believe has helped me considerably with my own artistic development." Then she was still based in Moscow and was travelling from there, "with all the difficulties with regard to obtain visas," as she is recalling. She stayed in Moscow and at the conservatory until 1996 and then moved to Germany. "It was possible to continue to teach, but I was travelling so much that I did not feel comfortable anymore, as I was so to say taking away the place of some other assistant, who needed it more," she says with reference also to the needs of her teacher Naumov.

In the meantime Anna Malikova has made a number of recordings for the italian label Real Sound. One finds most of the important works of Chopin, but also works by Liszt and Schubert on these CD. It seems, that she has after all a preference for romantics or russian music of the 20th century. "When I was a small girl, I loved very much Chopin and Liszt, a little later Bach and Mozart. Then it was Schubert and still later I began to like Ravel. Then I discovered Shostakovich and Prokofiev, or to put it into other words: the works of these composers found their way into my understanding. Today it is hard to say what I really like most. There are so many genius styles or composers... I think that a musician should be universal. In a way it makes it difficult that there is such a huge amount of repertory. What I want to say: even if you would really like to play some music it does not mean automatically that you should or even could play it." With the sonatas by Beethoven she still wants to have more time - they figure on the list however. "There are some works, which I would like to play, however cannot. For instance I cannot play a full decime chord, my hands are just too small for that. Why should I then play works which other pianists can do so much better? This is my physical limit."

In her play one does not realize this problem, as it is powerful and intense. The Beethoven sonatas shall come definitely, as she has already played concertos by Beethoven a number of times.

Asked for her favorite pianists, she mentions Gould and Koroliov as Bach players, Perahia for Mozart, Sofronitsky for Scriabin. "It is difficult to define exactly which pianist is my favorite. There are so many who play certain works specially wonderfully, although they are truly universal artists." On the other side she insists, that her own interpretations are coming from within herself and are expressing her individual emotions, without depending on somebody else's ideas. If one listens to her recordings, one will find this convincingly confirmed.