

ANNA MALIKOVA

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE 2019/2020

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Youth in Uzbekistan

Each year in September the ARD Competition in Munich attracts crowds of young singers and instrumentalists. The ARD Competition is something like the Olympics of the international music scene. To be the winner here is something like knighthood: a victory in Munich can open the doors to an international career. However, by tradition the juries are very restrictive with first prizes – it happens more than often, that they are not awarded. In September 1993 the Uzbek pianist Anna Malikova faces the international field of competitors. Round after round judges and audiences are enchanted – and by an exceptional performance with Chopin's e minor concerto in the final round she is able to elicit from the jury the desired trophy. For 9 years after her no further 1st Prize was awarded.

Change of scene. Meerbusch near Dusseldorf, February 2019. Anna Malikova invited for the interview to her comfortable home. On the table: a rich selection of cakes. The pianist's husband offers oriental coffee from a copper can, with a smell of cinnamon; he is a professional cellist and worked many years as artistic director of one of the big piano manufacturers. The list of questions stays aside, instead Anna Malikova begins to chat relaxed about her youth in Tashkent in Uzbekistan, about the severe system of music education in the former Soviet Union, about happy moments in the arts and problems of all kinds in daily life.

Actually she wanted to become a ballerina – among young girls not really a rare wish for a profession. However her parents, musicians themselves, had different ideas for her future. Her mother told her cunningly, that she would first need to play the music before being able dancing to it. The trick functioned: Anna began playing the piano, she liked it and made quick progress – and her ballet plans were not further discussed.

Once young talents were discovered, the soviet system had a strong educational grip on them – this also was the case in the former republics at the periphery of the union. When Anna Malikova was only 14 years old, she got the chance to be accepted at Central Music School in Moscow, an elite institute for talented children, which is attached to Tchaikovsky Conservatory. Of course it was a difficult step to leave the warmth of her family and change it for a life at the boarding school, especially for a girl of 14 years. However it was an undeniable offer, which would not present

itself a second time. Therefore Anna boarded a flight to Moscow in August 1979.

Under the spell of a legend

Lev Naumov was a legendary pedagogue, who worked over a period of 50 years at Tchaikovsky Conservatory, he was a personality of epochal rank. Unfortunately he could not at once take the newcomer from Tashkent into his class: "I had to wait a whole year to enter his class", as Anna Malikova recalls. "But after our first meeting it was clear to me, that I would not study with anybody else." What made his teaching so special? "There were a lot of things. He was representing the great Russian school, being himself student and assistant of Heinrich Neuhaus. Pianism was not the most important thing; Naumov knew the whole music history, he could draw parallel lines with symphonic music and operas and, in doing so, created musical imagination". Naumov had early given up his own performing activities, which proved to be very fortunate for his students: "I was studying altogether 12 years with Naumov. There were never pauses like with other professors, who went on long concert tours and left their assistants continue the teaching. But the most important thing was: he never repeated himself. Even if I brought him a Chopin sonata 20 times, he always found new ideas and stimulation".

After several years in Naumov's class Anna Malikova was ready to take part in big international competitions. But for this the former Soviet Union had stringent requirements: the system selected in a number of regional auditions until a few fortunate contestants were found – and those were then sent abroad, being provided all necessary financial support. "It was a brutal selection. You had to have your repertory ready half a year in advance, in order to have a chance of being sent".

Accordingly the pressure of expectation was very high, which was heavy on the shoulders of the small selected group. Who came back without a prize would feel how it was to return without fulfilling big hopes. Who on the other side was successful had chances to be again on the squad – like Anna Malikova, who was awarded prizes in Oslo (1988), Warsaw (1990) and Sydney (1992). However she always got only the 5th Prize – for the young pianist it became over the years something like a curse.

From Moskva to Rhine

After the implosion of the Soviet Union times of support by the government came to an end, but also those of paternalism by the state. After the disintegration of the soviet republics, the centrally organized competition tourism was over. 1993 Anna Malikova went to Munich on her own – and succeeded in a glamorous way to break the “curse” of the fifth prizes. After this she eventually decided to finish with competitions, “they were never really my thing”.

Anna Malikova had already finished her studies with Lev Naumov before Munich, she was at the time working as assistant of her great teacher and mentor at Tchaikovsky Conservatory. In earlier times her further path would have been determined: after several years as assistant she would have been itassistant professor, received her own class and eventually would have been appointed professor. But with the change of times this system became fragile. For Anna Malikova this did not become apparent with her artistic work, however the overall economic situation changed to the worse. “During my student years you could buy everything in Moscow, which was however different in the republics. Sometimes I brought for instance shampoo or even meat to Tashkent. But then, after 1991, everything was suddenly different. There was nothing in the shops, the showcases were empty. You had to line up hours to buy meat or cheese. Now it was the contrary: my mother sent me food from Tashkent to Moscow”.

The old structures of music life were still functioning for a while. Anna Malikova was appointed member of the “Philharmony”, the concert organisation of the Ministry of Culture, which sent musicians everywhere and to the most remote places of Siberia. Anna Malikova was still relatively well off, because of her good reputation and her position at the conservatory – anyway better off than many others, who out of resignation left Russia. Her reasons to leave 1996 were not artistically motivated but personal: Anna Malikova became friends with a sophisticated musician, who through his work in the piano industry was well connected to Tchaikovsky Conservatory. Lev Naumov gave his blessing: “Him you can marry, he is ok”. Anna Malikova broke down her tents at Moskva river and followed her future husband to the Rhine. Of course she took a photo of Naumov with her, whom she is worshipping like a father until today. 2005 the great pedagogue died – in Meerbusch his picture is still on the wall above the piano.

A new life

After the victory in Munich the doors of concert halls worldwide were open to Anna Malikova. However, together with big chances came heavy burdens. “I had to prepare a lot of repertory on short notice. I could not always play what I wanted: one concert organizer wanted to have Chopin, another one Schubert”. On top of that was the pressure of forging the iron while it’s hot, as the big competitions are all the time producing new prizewinners. After moving to the west connections to her homeland were still in function for a while, but eventually they dried out: out of sight, out of mind. A natural development.

However, Anna Malikova was able to establish herself on European concert stages; additionally she went frequently on tours to the Americas and Asian countries. Furthermore she released a great number of CDs and is giving masterclasses all over the world, passing her great knowledge and traditions of the Russian piano school on to the next generation. However, Anna Malikova could for years not really decide to take on a permanent teaching position. “After the years in Moscow I did not want to teach at a conservatory. If you do this seriously and honestly, you have to invest a lot of time, which you can not use for practice. I can not work very well under pressure or when I am tired”. But some time ago she changed her mind anyway: “Sometimes you meet very talented young people in masterclasses and it is a special joy if you can help them. But then, if at all, you see them again only after a year or so; this makes it difficult to efficiently give them direction. And then they are asking: don’t you have somewhere your class? I began to think, that with my performing experience I could possibly influence young pianists in a different way, compared to teachers who are not permanently on stage”. When at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna there was a vacancy for a new professor, she gave it a try – and was successful. In October 2018 she began with her teaching position at the Austrian music metropolis.

Unpretentious truthfulness

Anna Malikova is closely associated with Duisburg Philharmonic Orchestra since their common tour to China in September 2007. The six concerts in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Wuhan and Beijing were an artistic and human good experience for both sides –





and a great success with the audiences. Anna Malikova and the orchestra's principal conductor Jonathan Darlington understood each other on first attempt. The Society of Friends of DPO was also engaged and advocated strongly to invite Anna Malikova soon to the subscription series in Duisburg. Anna Malikova recalls: "Jonathan Darlington told me: you can play what you want! I decided to propose the 2nd concerto by Brahms. I felt ready for this difficult work and wanted to play it with a first class orchestra – especially because of the many chamber music like interactions between orchestra and soloist". The concerto was shortly after released on CD and was very positively received by the press; the critic of "Klassik Heute" described this rendition as being one of "unpretentious truthfulness".

As Artist in Residence in the season 2019/2020 Anna Malikova has for her many friends in Duisburg put together a program rich in facets. She starts with a piano recital in the framework of the chamber music subscription series: by presenting works of Sergei Prokofiev, Alexander Scriabin and Peter Tchaikovsky she follows the development in Russian music, spanning from romanticism to contemporary music, passing by the problematic area of the Fin de Siècle. Her chamber music evening at Lehmbruck Museum is also all Russian: piano sextets by Glinka and Lyapunov are on the program – delightful rarities; Anna Malikova is here accompanied by members of Duisburg Philharmonic Orchestra.

Happening on four pianos

2015 the young Romanian cellist Andrei Ioniță was winner at the important Tchaikovsky Competition. Anna Malikova heard him at this occasion and decided to try and invite this exceptional talent to play together. A date at Haniel Academy offered the opportunity. They will play works by

Ludwig van Beethoven, Robert Schumann and Sergei Prokofiev. A program of easy listening will be featured at Mercator Philharmony Hall – with four black polished concert pianos on stage. Anna Malikova invited three good friends and musical partners to join her for this occasion: Japanese pianist Nami Ejiri and the two Russians Victor Lyadov and Vladimir Soultanov. They know each other for years, even from common times in Tashkent and Moscow. Besides two big piano quartets by Carl Czerny the four friends will play Bach's concerto for four pianos and a virtuoso piano arrangement of Tchaikovsky's Capriccio Italien. It is not for the first time, that Anna Malikova stages such a piano happening: "The audience is always thrilled, and in a total different way, compared with a piano recital. Of course, there is not such a great number of original literature for four pianos. But the two works of Czerny are good and melodic music, very entertaining and brilliantly arranged. In her function as Artist in Residence Anna Malikova will also actively work with young people: she will play with the Symphony Orchestra of NRW ("OZM|Symphony"), performing in Dortmund and Duisburg Beethoven's 4th piano concerto. This is an elite orchestra, which is composed of the best students of the conservatories of North Rhine Westphalia. The orchestra is directed by Markus Stenz, the former music director of Cologne.

Of course, special attention goes to Anna Malikova's guest performance at the 7th philharmonic subscription concert, which will be repeated a few days later in Wesel. The pianist will play the 4th concerto by Camille Saint-Saëns, a work with which she is specially affiliated. 2009 she released an integral recording of all five piano concertos of the French romantic composer, accompanied by the WDR Radio Symphony Orchestra Cologne under the direction of Thomas Sanderling. This production has internationally received unanimous and enthusiastic reviews, and has right from the start achieved reference status. Why did Anna Malikova choose this fourth concerto? "Unfortunately the work is in Germany totally unknown. But it is very attractive for an audience – it really catches you and stays in your memory. I am remembering with pleasure the recording sessions with the WDR Orchestra: during intermissions the musicians were still humming melodies from this concerto, although we were already recording something else".