



Interview

My diary is in my work, my music

Weinberg through the eyes of Tommy Persson

By Henny van der Groep

For many years Mieczyslaw Weinberg (1919–1996) was one of the more neglected composers in the Soviet Union. One of the underlying causes was the solitary life he led combined with a reticence to promote his work. Weinberg was a modest human being, and for a long time his skill as composer was overshadowed by that of Shostakovich, who nonetheless wholly appreciated Weinberg as a colleague and friend. In the past few years the name Weinberg has at last begun to appear in concert programmes on a regular basis.

The *DSCH Journal* had the pleasure of meeting and discussing with one of the key, yet low profile people behind the resurgence of interest in Weinberg's music and who, together with Weinberg's family, colleagues and friends has been instrumental in raising the profile of Weinberg's music around the world. This interview with Tommy Persson took place after the 2017 International Shostakovich Days in Gohrisch, Germany.

Born in 1945, Tommy Persson worked as a judge in the Gothenburg District Court in Sweden (1971), dealing with all kinds of civil and criminal cases before retiring in 2010. Tommy has a longstanding passion for Russian music in general although Shostakovich has always taken a special place in his heart. Later he came across Weinberg through a book about Russian music, and today Weinberg's music is literally a part of his daily life.

DSCH: What does Weinberg's music mean to you and how did you first come in contact with Weinberg's music?

TP: To my mind Weinberg's music has the rare ability to communicate a



Tommy Persson, 2017. Photo © Egbert Baars

wide range of deeply felt sentiments and thoughts in an omnipresent, pure, humanistic voice. It all began in 1972. I was an admirer of Shostakovich's music and tried to read anything written about him, and I bought many of his records. I was really excited to discover the composer within the entire universe of music. In 1972 there appeared a book by Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia 1917–1970*. It's now a fairly well-known book and it was in there I found the name Moisei Vainberg (as it was spelled). I had never heard the name nor the music. I read he was a talented composer, that he had composed a lot of music but that he was more or less unknown in the West. From Boris Schwarz's book I got the impression that Weinberg might be one of those composers to take over the symphonic music mantle after Shostakovich, and so I tried to find some recordings of his music.

DSCH: This was in Sweden?

TP: At that time there was a very good record shop in Gothenburg. I knew the manager, a friendly man who was familiar with classical music,

and he helped me obtain a complete catalogue of Melodiya recordings, a very thick book issued in 1975. But I failed to get hold of any of the LPs with recordings of Weinberg's works listed in that book. Among them were Symphony no. 5 dedicated to and performed by Kirill Kondrashin, the Flute Concerto no. 1, and the Fourth and Fifth Piano Sonatas.

DSCH: What about the Children's Notebooks or his songs?

TP: No, none of these works were in the catalogue, only some of his orchestral, chamber and instrumental works. I found some second-hand LPs in Great Britain, but they were too expensive. So it took a little more time. In December 1976, just before Christmas, EMI had issued an LP with Melodiya recordings of three trumpet concertos, one of them composed by Weinberg in 1966–67. It was played by the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra conducted by Algis Zuraiteis; the soloist was the legendary Timofey Dokshitzer, to whom Weinberg dedicated the concerto. I sent for the LP immediately and I was completely fascinated by this concerto.

DSCH: A funny piece of music!

TP: It's certainly funny but combined with dark undertones. There are quotations from Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* and also a quote from the *Golden Cockerel* by Rimsky Korsakov. It has a hectic first movement, which I think might have inspired Shostakovich when he wrote the first movement of his Fifteenth Symphony. The excited mood, they have much in common, in my view.

In April 1977 my wife Ann-Christine and I went to Paris, where I found a wonderful record shop with thousands of LPs.

DSCH: You recall any specific recordings?

TP: Yes, I found two LPs, both Melodiya recordings reissued by Le Chant du Monde. One had the Fourth Symphony and the Violin Concerto performed by the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra under Kirill Kondrashin with Leonid Kogan as soloist. On the other LP the then-young Alexander Brussilovsky performed works by different composers, among them Weinberg's Second Solo Sonata for Violin, dedicated to Mikhail Fikhtengolts. It was the same sonata that we heard at this year's festival in Gohrisch [2017]: a fascinating piece of music.

To me the musical language of the Fourth Symphony and Violin Concerto was very communicative, in the same way as I experienced when listening to Shostakovich's music. Of course, I didn't understand everything, but I was struck by this musical language. I was extremely happy to find a "new" composer.

DSCH: What did you do next?

TP: I tried to find more recordings including works by Weinberg, but it was impossible. I next contacted Radio Sweden: at that time Radio Sweden's Channel Two had a weekly programme *The New Hour* every Sunday at 3 pm, a programme where the

listeners could send their request to have for example a movement of a symphony played. I had previously written to the radio station in regard of Shostakovich's music. This time I asked them to play something by Weinberg. Beforehand I checked with someone at the gramophone archive of Radio Sweden and learnt that they had some LPs with works by Weinberg, mostly Melodiya recordings, some of them issued on the American Westminster label. I managed to get the radio channel to play some of the works on these LPs, such as the Fifth Symphony. Then people who were in charge of this programme took notice and they wrote to me to say how they found this composer interesting and thanked me for my requests: "It widened the scope of the listeners." At the end of 1980 my wife and I went to Leningrad for a one week stay. I brought with me a list of LPs from the Melodiya catalogue and went to the big Melodiya record shop on Nevsky Prospect, but the shop-assistants just shrugged their shoulders: "Weinberg? No, no, not heard of him". And then I got somewhat frustrated and asked, "well do you have any LPs with works by Shostakovich?" They had only one double-LP, the *Leningrad* (Seventh) Symphony. I spoke to our guide from Sweden and told her how disappointing it would be to come home empty handed although I had been in Shostakovich's native city. She said: "Maybe there's a solution—I have a friend who lives here with her father: they are great admirers of the Swedish tenor Nicolai Gedda. Maybe you can exchange some LPs with them, Gedda for Weinberg." The next morning, the last day of our visit, we met a young woman named Maria and we exchanged addresses. Each of us would seek out LPs—from Sweden and from Russia. She helped me to get hold of some LPs with music by Weinberg, for example the Twelfth Symphony dedicated to the memory of Shostakovich, written in 1975–76, a most impressive work. This was a live recording from June 1982 with the Central Radio and TV

Symphony Orchestra conducted by Vladimir Fedoseyev. In fact, different Russian composers had composed music commemorating Shostakovich. In addition, I received a record of Weinberg's First Solo Sonata for Viola, dedicated to and performed by Fyodor Druzhinin. On the other side of that LP there was a Sonata for Viola and Piano by a friend of Weinberg, Grigory Frid. In my view, Frid is a composer who should be widely known in the West—he is so rarely performed. Maria also managed to get hold of some second-hand LPs with the Kondrashin recordings of the Fifth Symphony and the Violin Concerto (which I already had) and the now famous Moldavian Rhapsody in the reduction for violin and piano!

My friend in Leningrad also helped me to get Weinberg's address. I had listened to his music and admired it over and over again; yet I could not get enough of it. I discovered that his birthday was on the 8th of December, so I thought—write to him, why shouldn't I?! I remember when Shostakovich died, on the 9th of August. I heard about it on Radio Sweden the next morning. It was an extremely depressing day for me and I cried. I felt that the world had lost a great composer. That's why I decided that I shouldn't make the same mistake with Weinberg as I had with Shostakovich by not writing, telling him how much his music meant to me. I knew that Weinberg admired Shostakovich's music, but I didn't know about their close friendship, only that they knew each other and had a clear connection. I bought three LPs with music by Shostakovich, one of which included the Thirteenth Symphony, as I had read that Weinberg was one of those few people who knew about this symphony before its rehearsals began. Weinberg had heard it at Shostakovich's home in the company of Rostropovich, Galina Vishnevskaya, Kondrashin and a few others, so I thought that Weinberg might appreciate having a recording of it, not least considering that he was Jewish and that I knew he had

fled Poland following Nazi Germany's invasion. So, I wrote to Weinberg and congratulated him on his birthday. I wrote him just a short letter, a few lines, in English, to congratulate him and to tell him that I loved his music and that his music meant much to me and that I hoped that he was well and so on.

DSCH: And the year was?

TP: This was 1984, in December. And two weeks later I received a telegram from Weinberg. A very friendly one in which he thanked me for the LPs and the congratulations and in return he sent me his best wishes, transliterated from the Cyrillic.

DSCH: I guess you still have that document!

TP: Oh yes, yes of course! However, I don't think I wrote back for several months as I was concerned not to bother him. I just wanted him to understand that even in this strange northern country known as Sweden there was somebody who liked his music. Hopefully it meant something to him, I thought. Some months later I did write Weinberg another letter, telling him about some other LPs with his works that I had received from my friend in Leningrad, and after that I always wrote congratulating him on his birthday. In 1988 my wife and I were on a tour to Uzbekistan. At that time I knew that Weinberg had been there during the War.

DSCH: In Tashkent....

TP: Yes, he was exiled there, thus escaping the Nazis. He was actually in Minsk between 1939 and 1941, and then in June 1941 came the attack on the Soviet Union. Weinberg had to flee, although according to his personal documents Weinberg was not allowed to leave Minsk; this was something I learned about much later. But his fellow composer Aleksey Klumov helped Weinberg to get forged documents so that he was able to flee

from Minsk on a train that took him to Tashkent, a long journey that took probably about two weeks.

DSCH: He married there too?

TP: That came later. In 1942 he married Nataliya Vovsi-Mikhoels. She was the daughter of Solomon Mikhoels, the great Jewish actor and head of the Jewish Theatre in Moscow.

DSCH: Back to your trip in 1988.

TP: We went from Helsinki by train via Leningrad to Moscow. From Moscow we flew down to Tashkent. We stayed there for four days. On one evening we went to the Opera House, where we saw a performance of Glazunov's ballet *Raymonda*. I knew that Weinberg had worked at the Opera as a choir *repetiteur* during the war and simply knowing that provoked a special feeling while I was in that building.

After that we went to Samarkand where I fell extremely ill; in Sweden it's called red fever [endemic typhus]. From Samarkand we flew back to Moscow where we stayed one night in the Hotel Kosmos, a very strange place. That night in October, although I had a severe fever, I phoned Weinberg for the first time. This was made possible thanks to a professor in Russian who had been on our tour and who had been working in Moscow for several years teaching Swedish; she had managed to find Weinberg's telephone number for me. Anna, Weinberg's daughter, who was born in 1971, answered and we had a wonderful conversation for some twenty minutes, and she said "oh, couldn't you come over!"; but that was impossible because of my illness. I had written all of my letters to Weinberg in English as I did not know any Russian. I didn't want to write in German as I thought it improper because I knew that his parents and sister had been murdered by the Nazis and that he himself had been forced to flee his native Poland. Thank heaven Anna spoke

and wrote English brilliantly. Later on she was to study English at the Moscow university as a philologist. You might say that Anna acted as a "medium" between Weinberg and me and answered all kinds of questions. For example: "What are you composing now?" or "How are you" and so on. I wrote very simple letters and received such warm replies!

DSCH: Did you discuss his works?

TP: I only asked about his more recent projects. It was not until 1995 that I finally got hold of a full list of Weinberg's vast opus. Up to then this task had been very difficult, with only information found on Melodiya sleeve-notes as well as poorly managed lists in libraries and encyclopaedias. So much so that I was only aware of eleven string quartets, nine symphonies and a few more pieces: mostly chamber works.

Now that I had his phone number I began to call Weinberg, although back in 1988 it was very expensive to place a call to Russia from Sweden. Therefore I had to try to keep the phone calls rather short, at around six or seven minutes. But whatever the cost, it was worth it because we could hear each other's voices. I remember once when I called to congratulate Weinberg on his birthday (I was able to do so in Russian). I also asked how he was doing, and he answered: "Rabotayu", i.e. "I am working." Many years later I learned from his widow, Olga Rakhalskaya, that he worked twenty-four hours a day. She told me that even when he was sleeping, his fingers moved like he was playing piano. Music and composing were in his mind all the time.

DSCH: And then you discovered he was ill?

TP: That came later. In 1990 I went to Leningrad to visit the friend who had helped me to find LPs with Weinberg's works; I intended to stay there for only a few days. Before I left for Russia I foolishly wrote to Weinberg

asking him if it was possible for him to come to Leningrad from Moscow during my stay. The Russian postal service was not very reliable at that time and, as it turned out afterwards, the letter didn't arrive in Moscow until after I had left Leningrad; in any event Weinberg said he couldn't possibly have come. He and his family then asked me to come to Moscow to visit them, which I found so difficult to imagine—what should I do there, I'm not a musician! Then I fell ill, in 1991, having ruptured my back. The whole summer holidays (five weeks) I had to stay in bed. I could not move and when I tried to go to work in August I had to return home after two days. I was unable to work for the rest of 1991 and I had surgery at the end of January 1992. After that there was a long rehabilitation period because by then I had lost all the use of a variety of muscles. It was a very tough time, not until the end of April did I start to work for 25% of the day although by June I was back full time. I did not even dare to think of going abroad that year. In 1993 work at the court was very busy – I worked never less than 55 or 60 hours a week.

DSCH: What happened next?

TP: Early in 1993, Anna asked me over the phone: 'Can't you at least come to father's seventy fifth birthday' (in December 1994). And of course, I couldn't resist that, I had to go! By then I knew he was not well, although I didn't have any specific information about his health. In the summer of 1993 our friend Maria from Leningrad and her son visited us for five weeks in Sweden. And at the end of her visit I asked her 'please, let's call Weinberg, you speak Russian and try to find out exactly how he is.' And then Anna explained that her father suffered severely from Crohn's disease, which he had had for several years. Furthermore, in Autumn 1992, he had fallen in his apartment and broken his hip and since then he had been forced to lie in his bed. Maria also was told that Weinberg was in

need of medicine for his illness but couldn't afford it as he was without any income due to that he wasn't able to compose any longer; such medicine was extremely expensive in Russia and could only be bought with dollars. I had a friend, a doctor, and I asked her to prescribe medicine for me for Crohn's disease. That's what she did. I bought this expensive medicine at the pharmacy and Maria took it with her to Leningrad, promising that a friend of hers, who quite often travelled to Moscow, would take it to Weinberg's apartment at Studentcheskaya Ulitsa. Not long afterwards Anna told me that her father had been getting better thanks to the medicine I had sent him. This was in autumn 1993. In May 1994, Anna informed me that, thanks again to this medicine, her father's health had improved even more, so that he had been able to leave his bed briefly and sit in a wheelchair at the piano, where he had completed his new symphony. That was his twenty-second symphony, but only in piano score, as he was not yet able to orchestrate it. 1994 was an important year for Weinberg. In January, the British record label Olympia began issuing a series of CDs with works by Weinberg. The first CD contained his Sixth Symphony together with the Tenth. The Sixth was dedicated to his oldest daughter Victoria, living in Tel Aviv at that time, and the Tenth to Rudolf Barshai. Immediately I contacted Olympia and explained that I was in touch with Weinberg and they thought that was fantastic. As soon as the first CD appeared I made contact with Per Skans, who had written the CD booklet notes and with whom I had been in contact since 1988. He was later to write all but one of the booklet notes for the 17 CDs dedicated to Weinberg's music.

Before I go on I have to mention a story concerning the Georgian conductor Jansug Kakhidze. In 1988 he was invited by the Gothenburg Opera to conduct four performances of Shostakovich's opera *Katerina Ismailova*. I happened to be in a record shop which I visited often, and in the shop

was a person I had seen on a photo: Jansug Kakhidze. He was there to obtain a cable that he probably could not get hold of in his home town of Tbilisi. He was chief conductor of the State Symphony Orchestra of Georgia. I think he had premiered all or most of Giya Kancheli's symphonies and some of them were dedicated to him. It was about twenty minutes before closing time and I went up to him and said in English, "Excuse me, are you perhaps Jansug Kakhidze?" "Yes", he said and then I told him that I was a great admirer of Shostakovich and that I had bought tickets for three of the four performances of *Katerina Ismailova*. And I also told him that I was keeping in contact with Weinberg, who was friendly with Shostakovich. He had heard the name, he said. After that I invited him to come to our home one evening to have a talk and have a supper together. I picked him up at the hotel by car and we had a lovely evening. The next day I called Per Skans—then still a producer at Radio Sweden in Stockholm—because I knew that he had been specialising in the music of the Soviet Union for many years; a subject in which I had of course a great interest. And Per said: "What do you mean, Kakhidze is in Gothenburg?" He did not know that the conductor was there to conduct Shostakovich's opera. Unfortunately, Per could not come to any of the performances, but I did give him the telephone number of the hotel where the conductor was staying. Per called him and they spoke about a lot of things. It turned out that Per had met him in Tbilisi in 1975 or 1976. Per had been on a trip with two other colleagues in the Soviet Union. Per loved Georgia and spoke very warmly about their visit.

Anyhow, in 1994, I finally decided to accept the invitation to go to Moscow to stay with Weinberg and his family for five days. In the meanwhile, Olympia had issued their first two Weinberg CDs and two more were on their way, which I received just a few days before I went to Moscow. I took several CDs to Weinberg; Jackie

Campbell from Olympia had previously told me that if they sent them directly to Weinberg, then he would have to pay a large customs fee, which he couldn't afford. So we decided that I should take copies of the two latest released CDs (volumes 3 and 4 in Olympia's Weinberg series). One of them included the Twelfth String Quartet and more important still, the 1963 recording of the Piano Quintet with Weinberg himself at the piano, with the Borodin Quartet.

I arrived at the family's apartment on 7 December 1994. Anna opened the door and welcomed me, and she said, "Father is sleeping in his study, so you can see him later." At that moment Olga was at the church helping "old sick people" and returned home a little later. The welcome was extremely friendly: it was really touching. Sometime after I arrived I was invited into Weinberg's study to say hello to him. I had brought him a gift for his 75th birthday: a large beautiful vase and a big bunch of flowers. Anna and Olga told me that I should stay in Weinberg's room for no more than around 30 minutes at a time. Then he ought to rest. Weinberg was in a worse state than I had imagined. He was lying in his bed and was very thin, had a beard but his eyes seemed young and active. Sad to say that Weinberg could not control his hands, they were shaking, which made composing difficult. Beside him he had a telephone. In the next room there was another telephone. "When father wants something, he lifts the telephone and puts it back", Anna said. When they heard a 'pling' in the other room, they knew he needed something.

I found it rather difficult to ask Weinberg questions such as, for example, "Were you ever persecuted in this country?" because I knew that he considered that his life had been saved when he was allowed to enter the Soviet Union. Many other Jews fleeing eastwards from Poland were sent back to the Nazis or were transported directly to the Gulag camps. And I also knew that he had dedicated his

First Symphony, which he had completed in February 1943 in Tashkent, to the Red Army. He had managed to send the manuscript to Shostakovich later that year. It is not quite clear who took it to Moscow: his fellow composer Yuri Levitin, a pupil of Shostakovich's, or his father-in-law, Solomon Mikhoels. Early in 1943 Mikhoels had travelled from Tashkent to Moscow. In May, he and the poet Itsik Fefer, as representatives of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee of the USSR, went on a seven-month trip to the United States and England to raise money and political support for the Soviet war effort.

By the way, did you know that the First Symphony by Weinberg has the same opus number as Shostakovich's First Symphony, opus 10?

Shostakovich had heard about Weinberg and wanted to know more about the composer. Shostakovich liked the symphony and arranged that Weinberg and his wife (daughter of Mikhoels) could settle in Moscow; this was in August 1943, and he met Weinberg for the first time in October 1943. I think I am right that Weinberg's daughter Victoria was born in October 1943. If so, Weinberg's wife must have been pregnant during the journey to Moscow. Perhaps it was one of the reasons why they went to Moscow, it was a safer place. Later I learnt that Weinberg was often very ill (stomach issues) when he was in Tashkent. Olga told me that there is a possibility that he contracted Crohn's disease already there. In addition, from a young age Weinberg had also suffered from tuberculosis in his back, and for many, many years this caused him much pain. Backache, broken hip, Crohn's disease and neglected by the musical world—his situation was so tragic in 1994.

Anyhow, while I was there (for five days) we spoke about his works and so on. I asked him questions such as "If you single out just one composition—which would you consider your most important?" And he immediately replied: "The opera *The Passenger*." He told me that it had not yet been

performed although he considered it as his most important work.

I was met with the greatest hospitality and warmest friendship, although Weinberg, due to his illness, had been without any income for two years. They really were all so exceptionally friendly. We could speak about any topic and Olga replied to all my questions. As she did not speak English, but had studied French like Weinberg's daughter Victoria, we used an 'international language': some French and a few Russian words that I knew together with a great number of hand signs. Olga showed me all of the family photos of Weinberg, of her parents and so on. And if Anna and Olga didn't know they would ask Weinberg for an answer.

We listened together to the CDs that I had taken with me.

DSCH: And did he enjoy this?

TP: Oh yes, it was fantastic, not least while we were listening to the Piano Quintet recording with himself as pianist. This work was written in 1944. To me it is a very arresting piece, in which there seems to be a great deal of what he had experienced during the war.

I have to mention another thing. On his 75th birthday there were no performances of Weinberg's works in Moscow, in spite of the fact he had written so much music and that he had been an important figure in the musical life of Moscow (especially in the 1960s and 70s but in a lesser degree in the 1980s). Of course, this neglect saddened Weinberg. However, on his birthday many people telephoned to congratulate him, a proof that there were still those who hadn't 'forgotten' the composer. In the afternoon the then young conductor Alexander Vedernikov, who some years later became Chief conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre, arrived at Weinberg's apartment. He brought with him a cassette tape, as a gift, of a live recording of Weinberg's most recent completed work, his Chamber Symphony no.4 [1992]. In November

1994 Alexander Vedernikov had conducted the premiere of this piece at the Moscow Autumn Festival.

During my visit we listened to it together, with Weinberg lying in his bed carefully reading the score, which was really fascinating. At that time I had never heard (or known of) the work and I was struck by this impressive and heartfelt music. In the very finale it is as if life is passing away. I understood that when he had written this work he felt that his life was nearing its end.

Later, on 8 December at about 5 p.m., an official from the Polish embassy in Moscow arrived at the apartment and bestowed the Polish Distinguished Culture Service Award on Weinberg. They were alone in his study for a little more than an hour speaking about Polish cultural matters. Somewhat later that evening Olga, Anna and I together with the librettist Alexander Medvedev [the writer of the librettos for four of Weinberg's operas], his wife Olga, and the musicologist Lyudmila Nikitina, who in 1972 had written a dissertation on Weinberg's symphonies nos. 1–10, had a wonderful supper celebrating the composer's birthday. Unfortunately, Weinberg was unable to leave his bed due to his poor health. Both Alexander Medvedev and Lyudmila Nikitina were very kind people and provided me with a great deal of information about Weinberg's works. On the next day Irina Antonovna Shostakovich, who had informed Olga in advance that she could not visit on 8th December, came to congratulate Weinberg. As a great admirer of Shostakovich's music, I was, of course, very happy to meet her.

On the morning of 11 December, when the time came for me to return home, Anna told me: "Father has something that he will give you." And a few minutes later we went into his room and he gave me a sheet of paper on which he had written the first bars of his latest work, the Symphony no. 22. At the top of it he had written a friendly message to me.

He happened to date it "11.8.1994" instead of 11.12.1994. And that is the most precious item I own!

DSCH: You told me that Weinberg spoke fluently Polish with the official from the embassy—amazing after such a long time!

TP: Olga told me that he was very happy to speak Polish and I learned from other people that he spoke Polish extremely beautifully. He never lost his memories of Poland and he had a very significant amount of Polish literature at home. When Weinberg was arrested in February 1953, he asked the interrogator what he was accused of. The answer was "Jewish bourgeois nationalism" with the intention to establish a Jewish republic in Crimea. Weinberg then said that it rather ought to be Polish bourgeois nationalism, as he didn't know a single letter of Yiddish but had two thousand Polish books at home!

Before I left Moscow, I told Weinberg about an agreement made between Olympia and the Scottish pianist Murray McLachlan to record all of Weinberg's six piano sonatas on two CDs. McLachlan had discovered the scores of the first three sonatas in a shop in Great Britain a couple of years previously, but he had been unable to find the remaining three sonatas anywhere. Weinberg said I should ask Victoria for the scores, but when I contacted her, she informed me that she didn't have them. Finally, they were found at the Composers' Union in Moscow, from which copies were ordered. The intention was to make the recordings in the UK, but at this time, in 1995, Olympia had major financial problems and could no longer finance the project. Meanwhile Weinberg became seriously ill. I suggested to Olympia that the recording might be made in Gothenburg instead of the UK and that I was prepared to cover the costs. A good friend of mine, Tomas Svensson, who owned a HiFi shop in Gothenburg and had previously made very good recordings, said that he would manage the sound

engineering. Furthermore, Tomas had spoken to a pianist, Ingemar Hedvall, who was willing to take the role of producer of this project. Olympia immediately accepted the idea. Thereafter, I went to the Gothenburg High School of Music and Drama, which recently had been established in a new building. Their Ensemble Hall had nice acoustics, and I came to an agreement with their managers for a price to rent the hall for a weekend. The costs were some thousand Swedish crowns (equivalent of a few hundred Euros). Meanwhile Jackie Campbell, the manager of Olympia, stayed with my wife and me and I took care of Murray McLachlan's costs for the flight and hotel. Everyone arrived on Thursday 7 November 1996, and we recorded the six piano sonatas as well as 17 of the *21 Easy Pieces* for piano, op. 34, during the weekend. Tomas Svensson and Ingemar Hedvall worked free of charge. We all considered that if we didn't make this recording, then nobody else would. And so these were the first Weinberg CDs released by Olympia for which I was 'responsible'. On Sunday 10 November, McLachlan gave a recital at which he played, besides works by three other composers, Weinberg's Second Piano Sonata, which must have been its Western premiere. It took place in Särö, some 20 km south of Gothenburg, at the request of a musical society. And it's worth noting that the sonata by this then unknown composer from Russia was much appreciated by the audience! A few days before the concert I was told by the members of the Gothenburg Quartet that they were interested in recording some of Weinberg's String Quartets. Also in attendance at Murray McLachlan's concert was a violinist from the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra (GSO), Thord Svedlund, also a conductor, and he was already somewhat familiar with Weinberg's music. Since then we became close friends and have been working hard to promote and record music by Weinberg. Thord is a strong believer in Weinberg's music and has recorded



At Weinberg's (and his mother-in law's) grave at the Domodedovo Cemetery outside of Moscow on his 80th birthday, on 8 December 1999. From left to right: unidentified, Olga Rakhalskaya, Tommy Persson and Anna Weinberg. © Tommy Persson

more orchestral works by Weinberg than any other conductor, issued on five CDs by Chandos (plus the two CDs issued by Olympia).

Alas, Weinberg had passed away in February 1996, but at least he knew that we planned to record his piano sonatas, though not in Great Britain but in Sweden.

After Weinberg's death I spoke with Per Skans, who then still worked at Radio Sweden, "You must do a programme about Weinberg", I told him. "He has just passed away and now we must do something before he is totally forgotten." He liked the idea but said, "Why don't you do it yourself?" I refused and Per then mentioned that perhaps the radio producer of 'The New Hour' programme, the composer Folke Rabe, would be interested in making a programme about Weinberg. But when I contacted him he also suggested I make the programme myself. At first, I refused as I had no experience of such things, but finally I accepted the idea. Rabe advised me to contact the producer who was in charge of the music section of Radio Sweden in Gothenburg. This man found the programme idea fascinating. By the end of May I had finished my manuscript and chosen six short musical examples from some of Weinberg's works. I gave the programme, lasting 30 minutes, the title "Moissey Vainberg or Mieczyslaw Weinberg – the Life of a Composer in the vicinity of Shostakovich." In the programme I tried to give a summary sketch of his life and works. It was broadcast on 7th June 1996, and re-broadcast five days later.

As I said, I had been in contact with the Gothenburg String Quartet, three of whom were members of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, with the viola player a member of the Gothenburg Opera Orchestra. I had told the Quartet members that Weinberg had composed seventeen string quartets, that none of them were recorded and I asked if they might perform some of them. Together with Olympia we decided that three string quartets would fill

a CD and we asked Olga to choose which quartets to record. She chose the First, Tenth (dedicated to Olga) and Seventeenth String Quartets, thus spanning almost fifty years of Weinberg's creative output, which in all extended over six decades. Again, I took care of the financing of the CD and the recording was made in spring 1997, in a church some 60 km east of Gothenburg.

With my new acquaintance Thord Svedlund, we decided to look for a way of recording orchestral works by Weinberg, with Thord as conductor. But for this we first needed to get hold of scores and parts and find an orchestra to record the pieces! Thord had been conducting a number of Swedish orchestras, and after several months work he eventually managed to reach an agreement with the Umeå Symphony Orchestra to record four Weinberg works; the Chamber Symphonies nos. 1, 2 and 4 as well as the Symphony no. 2, written in 1945–46. With the help of Olga and Anna we made contact with the Composers' Union in Moscow to try to obtain musical material for the recordings, and with the help of a Russian man living in Stockholm, whom Per Skans knew, we finally managed to buy scores and parts for several works from the Composers' Union and the House of Composers in Moscow. For the three Chamber Symphonies there were no orchestral parts to be found. In the end Anna arranged for the parts to be written out by hand, with a friend producing the final print version, for a substantial fee. We had a deadline by which the musicians in Umeå needed to have the parts in order to have time enough to study them. There were some delays, given the huge work involved in writing out all those parts, but at last they arrived in Umeå and Thord, myself, a producer, and a sound engineer from Gothenburg went to Umeå, where we installed the sound equipment in the great hall of Strömbäck Folk High School. There we made the recording of Chamber Symphonies 1, 2, and 4 in May 1998. At that

time we didn't know exactly the total duration, equating to one or two CDs. When the recordings were edited, it turned out that there was more music than could fit on one CD. We therefore decided that we had to make another recording, this time of the Second Symphony. It was recorded in Umeå in October 1998. We were pleased as we felt we had managed to do something of importance... "world premiere recordings" of four of Weinberg's orchestral works, which were issued in 1998 and 1999, respectively on two CDs (volumes nos. 15 and 16 of Olympia's Weinberg series).

I remained in close contact with Olympia from 1994. Together we investigated recordings of Weinberg's works that existed for example at the Russian State Radio. I was acting more or less as a consultant on Weinberg's music for Olympia. And in the meantime, Per Skans wrote the booklet notes for every new CD release, although Per only had material that was to be found in books and dictionaries. Of course, when Weinberg was still alive I was able to ask him about details concerning different works and noted whatever information he was able to give. After his death Anna and Olga provided much information, such as the dates and places of compositions as well as the dedicatees of some of Weinberg's works.

After Weinberg's death, conditions were difficult for Olga and Anna. They had no income. Olga devoted most of her time to the church, helping old and sick people; she was a kind of "church nurse." Anna was busy finishing her studies at the university, but she sometimes took a job as translator or taught people Russian at the American Embassy. At times she even had some private pupils. During my visit in Moscow in 1994 I learnt that Olga was not in a good health, as she suffered from bronchitis and asthma and regularly needed medicine. Luckily, Thord's wife is a doctor and prescribed medicines for me, which I sent to Olga in boxes together with other things that Olga and Anna liked to have. I was just happy to do

something for them because they had treated me like a member of their family. And the only thing I had done was to admire this composer's music and tell him how much it meant to me.

Together with Per Skans I tried to help Olga to find a publisher in the West to allow Weinberg's works to be available to a wider performing public. Per had been in contact with the pianist Jascha Nemtsov, who I believe had suggested that Peermusic in Hamburg might be interested in publishing Weinberg's music. In the Soviet era some of Weinberg's more prominent works had been published by Sikorski Musikverlage in Hamburg, which even today holds certain publishing rights. It was however important to find a publisher interested in working with as much of Weinberg's vast oeuvre as possible in order to make his music truly widely known and to encourage performance. At that time Reinhard Flender was in charge of the classical department of Peermusic in Hamburg; we jointly spoke to Olga and eventually she decided to sign an agreement with the company on a composition by composition basis.

During the Soviet era all royalties drawn from Weinberg's works were paid to the Composers' Union, while Weinberg himself was hardly paid at all. But of course, as a composer he had privileges such as a good flat, access to special shops and could enjoy holidays at dachas. On the final day of my stay with Weinberg I promised that I would do all I could to promote his music. I am not a musician, I can't play anything, but I can do my best to get his music performed and interest musicians in his works, including getting as many of the works recorded and issued on CD as possible. I have had a role in six of the 17 CDs issued in Olympia's Weinberg series. The final CD in the series with which I was involved was a recording of the String Quartets nos. 7, 8, and 9, performed by the then young Russian ensemble, The Dominant Quartet, which was promoted by the great cellist Valentin Berlinsky, a close friend of Weinberg.

Unfortunately, this was to be the last CD in the series as Olympia went out of business soon after it was released in the year 2000; this was a great pity, given Olympia's valuable catalogue often featuring interesting music performed by outstanding musicians.

In the late 1990s the Polish conductor Gabriel Chmura contacted me. I helped him to get copies of all the Weinberg CDs issued by Olympia. One of the works that he wanted to perform was the Eighth Symphony, *Flowers of Poland*, to words by Weinberg's favourite poet Julian Tuwim, written in 1964. Chmura managed to interest the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir in performing the work. He conducted the symphony in Warsaw on 3 and 4 March 2000, of which the first performance was broadcast live on Polish Radio. It marked the Polish premiere of this work. My wife and I went to Warsaw and invited Anna and Olga to join us. Together we attended the two concerts and the general rehearsal of the symphony. We also took long walks in Warsaw and found the house where Weinberg had lived before he had to flee his beloved native city. It was a most memorable experience for all of us. Chmura has continued to champion Weinberg's music and has made recordings of his orchestral works, issued on three CDs by Chandos.

Right after Weinberg's death I told Per "you must write his biography" and he accepted, although he was aware of the difficulty of the task. For example, he needed to get hold of as many scores as possible, and almost all of them were inaccessible outside of Russia. Only Sikorski had published some of the works in the West (Peermusic only began publishing his works a few years later). Sikorski had scores of some of the composer's important works, some of which Per was allowed to borrow to study. In addition, I provided Per with copies of the scores that Thord Svedlund and I possessed, which we had received from Olga and Anna or bought from the Composers' Union.

All the same, this was a far cry from what was needed for a biography. Another difficulty was that Weinberg left no diaries and, like Shostakovich, seldom wrote or spoke about his music. Instead Weinberg would say "My diary is in my work, my music." There are frustratingly few papers by him on his works and life.

DSCH: Now we understand why it took Per such a long time to pull things together!

TP: Yes, and when Per passed away in January 2007 he had done a great deal of research work, but this was still very far from what you might call a complete biography. When he went into hospital, because of his heart condition, Per sent me a copy of all the material that he had on a CD. His wife had a copy also. Martin Anderson was made aware of what Per had done, and it was his Toccata Press that was engaged to publish the biography once completed. Later, Martin contacted David Fanning to ask if he would take over the project that Per had begun. Fanning is of course not only an expert on Shostakovich's music and Soviet music in general but had for long also been profoundly interested in Weinberg's music. Finally, David decided to take over the task to complete the biography after he had visited Per's widow in Uppsala, Sweden, where he was able to see just what material Per had left behind. This was in August 2008.

David has devoted a huge amount of work to the completion of the biography, joined by his wife, Michelle Assay. Along the 'journey' I have tried to assist them in their work by checking facts and so on. Just as I had done while David was writing a shorter biographical book on Weinberg, *Mieczyslaw Weinberg: In Search of Freedom*, for the Bregenz Festival in 2010. I am so pleased if my efforts in some way or other have helped the process of completing the Weinberg biography, which is planned to be published in good time before the Weinberg centenary, in 2019.