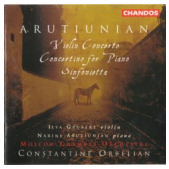
Arutunian – Violin Concerto • Concertino for Piano • Sinfonietta (1997)



Concerto for Violin and Orchestra 22:22
1 I Andante sostenuto 5:40
2 II Allegretto (Scherzando) 3:04 *play*
3 III Adagio recitativo 8:38
4 IV Allegro molto 4:54
Sinfonietta 15:17
5 I Prelude 2:18 *play*
6 II Arioso 4:30
7 III Intermezzo pizzicato 2:44
8 IV Finale 5:39
Concertino for Piano and Orchestra 14:52
9 I Allegro 4:36
10 II Andante 5:14
11 III Allegro vivace 5:00

Artists:
Moscow Chamber Orchestra
Constantine Orbelian conductor
Narine Arutiunian piano
Ilya Grubert violin

December 1996 & February 1997

Alexander Arutiunian is among the most important of twentieth-century Armenian composers. His artistic credo began to take shape in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and was consolidated during the 1960s. Despite the principles which he shares with the older generation, in particular the polyphony of Komitas, the orchestral style of Spendiarov, and the harmony of Aram Khachaturian, Arutiunian focuses his attention on the vital aspect of music. Vitalism interests him as a manifestation of the elemental principle of the art, as a method of recreating the nature

of folklore melodies and rhythms, and as a reflection of the art of interplay. No less important for Arutiunian is the emotional aspect of music. The various gradations of lyricism – expression, sentimentalism, nostalgia, irony – all give his music an inimitable novelty. This can be felt above all in his slow music with its long, linear melodies. Arutiunian's stylistic direction developed in the mainstream of romanticism and classicism adapted to the conditions of contemporary composition. The effect of striving to perfect stylistic preferences is to preserve the basic principles of composition. One of them is the concerto-style principle that develops both within the instrumental concerto as a genre, as well as in works for orchestra or chamber ensemble. Even in his only opera Sayat-Nova (1967), the eighteenth-century ashug1 and poet, Sayat Nova, is represented as an Armenian counterpart of the European Meistersinger who is the victor in a singing contest.

Alexander Arutiunian was born on 2 September 1920 in Yerevan, where he received his education (he later completed his training under Genrikh Litinsky in Moscow in the period 1946–48). During the fifty years of his composing career Arutiunian has written a large number of instrumental concertos, rhapsodies, poems for piano, violin and cello, flute, oboe, female voice and orchestra, and also the first Armenian concertos for brass instruments: the trumpet, horn, trombone and tuba. As a result of his interest in brass instruments, he wrote his Armenian Sketches quintet that became a repertory piece. His vocal and orchestral works has strengthened the international acclaim accorded to him. Arutiunian holds titles including Professor of Composition of the Conservatoire of Yerevan, People's Artist of 1 ashug: a Caucasian folk singer and poet.

Alexander Arutiunian: Violin Concerto etc.CHAN 9566 Book.qxd 25/4/07 14:49 Page 45
Armenia and of the USSR, Laureate of the State Prize of Armenia and the USSR, and the Orpheus Award (Kentucky, USA). The Concertino for Piano and Orchestra (1951) is characteristic of the early work of Alexander Arutiunian. The composer's choice of title (underlining the fact that the material has been simplified) is not accidental. Without making the performer push virtuosity to the fore, the Concertino demands from the soloist inventiveness, tonal colouring and articulation. Even in the semantic sense the music of the Concertino is devoid of dramatic tension – rather it veers towards lucid states, reflecting the harmony and the joy of the composer's world perception. Of course, this life-affirming spirit in music was typical of the Soviet school of composition in the post-war period. However, Arutiunian avoided 'bill board' optimism that was defined, to a large extent, by the lyrical character of his art. On the strength of this, the style of the Concertino, although cultivated according to the models of national tradition, was individualized. Using the thematic, tonal, harmonic, and textural features of Armenian music during the 1940s and 1950s, Arutiunian, nevertheless polished those facets that were the idiomatic aspects of his musical language. These include constantly altering the texture (orchestral and piano writing), the use of dance rhythms taken from Armenian folk music in order to reinforce the energy of motion and contrast, and finally, the combination of the general logic of classical forms with unexpected departures in the shape of episodes of idyllic romanticism. From the thematic point of view, varying the motifs is the guiding principal

throughout all three movements of the Concertino. The first movement, a sonata-allegro, is interpreted in the spirit of an elegant humoresque. The expressive melodic material, frequently derived from humorous Armenian songs, is shaped by an economically handled orchestra. The brief replies and exchanges between the woodwind against the background of rapid harmonic changes in the strings frequently acquire the character of a toccata. However, the basic impulses of this character derive from the solo keyboard part. As distinct from the rhythms of the first movement, the second movement (Andante) presents us with a strict chordal texture with gradually branching strains. The finale (Allegro vivace) serves to summarize the entire cycle.

Here, the full palette of orchestral colours is used for the first time, and with it the variety which is inherent to the methods of giving orchestral life to the texture. The Sinfonietta for string orchestra (dedicated to the Armenian Chamber Orchestra) was written in 1966 whilst Arutiunian was working on his opera Sayat-Nova. Despite this, the music of these two CHAN 9566 Book.qxd 25/4/07 14:49 Page 56 works differs radically in terms of material and stylistic orientation. The Sinfonietta can be described as characteristic of Armenian music of the 1960s written in the neo-classical style, and being an organic reflection of Arutiunian's individual position as a composer. Within the terms of a string orchestra, the composer creates various arrangements in the way he sets out and develops his material, and, as a rule, attributes great importance to the combinatorial analysis of the textural layers. The structure and the content of each of the four movements – Prelude; Arioso; Intermezzo pizzicato; Finale – and also the treatment of the cycle as a whole associates it with an early classical suite. The first movement demonstrates the neo-classical frame of the work; the exposition of the theme follows the concertante model. After the lively Prelude, in which can be heard strains of Prokofiev, the second and third movements create two sides of the same image – a device of cyclic dramatic art which is common in the works of Arutiunian. The Arioso-nocturne and the pizzicato-scherzo are watercolour landscapes of the inner state of the soul. The use of national melodies and syncopated rhythms in constructing the phrases give this landscape a purely Armenian expressiveness.

The Finale with its motor rhythms is the most grand-scale movement in the Sinfonietta. The character of its development is slightly 'symphonized'; this is assisted not only by the suitability of the material for development, but also by the fact that the entire orchestra is brought into play.

The Concerto for Violin and Orchestra 'Armenia-88' is dedicated to Ruben Agaronyan, the first exponent of Arutiunian's concerto in Armenia and in Europe. It was after the Spitak earthquake, although the composer does not resort to illustrative devices. The musical imagery impresses us by the nobility of its grief, whilst its rhetorical pathos is saturated in the symbolism of the baroque. The Andante sostenuto sounds like the intrada of old music, where the dotted rhythms of Armenian monody from the Middle Ages become the pivot in a baroque texture. A repetition

of the same material played accelerando in the finale gives the Concerto the arc-like construction of art found in the pre-classical period.

The main component in the form of the first movement is the harmony. It is as if it focuses on Arutiunian's characteristic duality of classical and romantic thinking. The classical features of the harmony are expressed in the use of triads representing the tonality (the so-called 'harmonic tonality'). The colourfulness of the harmonic colours, the modal harmony of various structures, including chords CHAN 9566 Book.qxd 25/4/07 14:49 Page 6constructed on fourths, and also the functional emancipation of the harmony testify to the neo-romantic qualities of the music.

The second movement (Allegretto) can be classified as a toccata: pulsating quavers permeate all the orchestral strands. According to folk music traditions, the thematic material of toccatas originates in men's dances from the East, where the dynamism is defined by the small movements of the feet. The dance projection does not hinder the enrichment of the texture with a little chain of scales in the folk spirit — a device of which the neo-folklorists of the twentieth century readily avail themselves. The third movement (Adagio recitativo) is the most obvious model of a neo-baroque style. In the overall composition this movement fulfils the function of an Aria – the lyrical centre of instrumental cycles. The monologue character of the music for the solo violin compensates for the lack of a traditional cadenza.

The finale (Allegro molto) is presented as a perpetuum mobile. As it passes to the soloist and then to the violin and cello parts, the main theme creates the illusion of the kind of concerto playing which is traditional in the concerto grosso. However, the concept of a lively baroque concerto is interrupted by a whole series of devices: the accentuation of seconds and chromatic intervals at moments of tension, harmonic surprises, and the paradoxical abandoning of a model, stylistic development which combines neo-classical and neo-romantic features in an original way. *1997 Svetlana Sarkisyan*

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