

Kiril Petrovich Kondrashin was internationally the best-known conductor of the Soviet Union and also the most prominent one to emigrate from that country. He was known for vigorous and solid performances of a wide repertory, particularly the Russian masters.

He was brought up with music, as his family included several orchestral musicians. He took piano lessons, and the family got him lessons in musical theory at the Musical Teknikum with Nikolai Zhilyayev, who had a strong influence on him. While still a student, he made his conducting debut in 1931 at the Children's Theater. He entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1934, where he studied conducting with Boris Khaikin. He graduated in 1936, but by then had obtained a job as assistant conductor at the Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theater in 1934, debuting with the operetta *Les cloches de Corneville* by Planquette.

In 1936 he was conductor at the Maly Opera Theater in Leningrad, retaining that post until 1943. Along with other artists who were deemed important to the war effort, he was evacuated from besieged Leningrad after the German invasion of Russia. In 1943, he became a member of the conducting staff of the Moscow Bolshoi Theater, which was also in a wartime home outside the capital. He remained with the Bolshoi until 1956, making marked improvement in his interpretation that he attributed to working with the experienced conductors of the Bolshoi and to his being entrusted with several important new productions.

Meanwhile, a demand was building for him as a concert conductor. He received Stalin Prizes in 1948 and 1949. When he left the Bolshoi, it was with the intention of centering his career on the podium rather than in the pit. His fame grew greatly in 1958, when he led the orchestra in the prizewinning appearances of American pianist Van Cliburn at the Tchaikovsky International Competition. Cliburn charmed both his home country and his Russian hosts, and the resulting LP record of the Tchaikovsky First Piano Concerto, conducted by Kondrashin, was a long-time best seller. This led to his American and British debuts, making Kondrashin the first Soviet conductor to appear in the U.S.

In 1960 he was named artistic director of the Moscow Philharmonic, and as such participated in another piano concerto blockbuster recording with a U.S. piano star, the great Prokofiev Third Concerto recording for Mercury with Byron Janis, still considered by many the greatest interpretation of that brilliant work on disc. Kondrashin's performances were bright and dramatic, tending to programmatic interpretations that commentators saw as the legacy of his theater career. He was the U.S.S.R.'s finest interpreter of Mahler, leading all the symphonies with unusual restraint and with the expressive and dramatic qualities of the music seemingly enhanced by understatement. He left the Moscow Philharmonic in 1975, turning to guest conducting. As a result of high demand outside the U.S.S.R., he decided to emigrate in 1978. He was named permanent conductor of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw in 1979, and immediately began making a notable series of recordings with them, but died in that city only two years later.



LISZT

Piano Concerto No. 1 and No. 2

SVIATOSLAV RICHTER / KIRIL KONDRASHIN



Sviatoslav Richter (1915–1997) was a Soviet pianist of German extraction, widely regarded as among the leading virtuosos of his era. Richter was lauded for his immense (but selective) repertoire, his seamless technique, and his poetic feeling.

Sviatoslav Richter was born in Zhitomir but grew up in Odessa. Unusually, he was largely self-taught although his organist father provided him with a basic education in music. Even at an early age, Richter was an excellent sight-reader, and regularly practiced with local opera and ballet companies. He developed a lifelong passion for opera, vocal and chamber music that found its full expression in the festival he established in Grange de Meslay, France. He started to work at the Odessa Conservatory where he accompanied the opera rehearsals. He gave his first recital in 1934 at the engineer club of Odessa but did not formally study piano until three years later, when he enrolled in the Moscow Conservatory, which waived the entrance exam for the young prodigy after it was clear he would not pass. He studied with Heinrich Neuhaus who also taught Emil Gilels, and who claimed Richter to be "the genius pupil, for whom he had been waiting all his life". In 1940, while still a student, he gave the world premiere of the Sonata No. 6 by Sergei Prokofiev, a composer with whose works he was ever after associated. He also became known for skipping compulsory political lessons at the conservatory and being expelled twice during his first year. Richter remained a political outsider in the U.S.S.R. and never joined the Party. Sviatoslav Richter met the soprano Nina Dorliak in 1945 when he accompanied her in a program that included songs by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Prokofiev. "This was the first meeting in an association that would last the rest of their lives. Richter and Dorliak were never officially married, but they were constant companions. She was the practical counterbalance to his impulsive nature. She would wind his watch for him, remind him of appointments, and manage his professional commitments" (Geffen 1999). In 1949 he won the Stalin Prize, which led to extensive concert tours in Russia, Eastern Europe and China.

The West first became aware of Sviatoslav Richter through recordings made in the 1950's. He was not allowed to tour the USA until 1960, but when he did, he created a sensation, playing a series of sold-out concerts in Carnegie Hall. Touring, however, was not Richter's forté. He preferred not to plan concerts years in advance, and in later years took to playing on very short notice in small, often darkened halls, sometimes with only a small lamp lighting his piano. He died in Moscow while

studying for a concert series he was to give.

Sviatoslav Richter's repertoire spanned the major works of the piano repertoire, although

with many omissions (e.g., Bach's Goldberg Variations (BWV 988), L.v. Beethoven's Waldstein sonata and Fourth and Fifth piano concertos, Schubert's A-major sonata D.

959). Among his noted recordings are works by Franz Schubert, L.v. Beethoven, J.S. Bach (whose Well-Tempered Clavier part II he is said to have learned by heart in one month), Frédéric Chopin, Franz Liszt, Sergei

Prokofiev, Sergei Rachmaninov, Alexander Scriabin and many others. He was said to be the finest interpreter of the piano works of Robert Schumann. He

gave the premiere of Prokofiev's Sonata No. 7 (which he learned in just four days before staging a performance of the work), and Prokofiev dedicated his Sonata No. 9 to him. Apart from playing solo he also enjoyed playing chamber music with partners such as David Oistrakh, Benjamin Britten, and Mstislav Rostropovich. He had unusually large hands, capable of taking a twelfth.

Despite his huge discography, Sviatoslav Richter hated the process of recording. Glenn Gould called him one of the most powerful musical communicators of our time, and it was in concert that Richter's musical genius found its full expression. "I am not an integralist," was Richter's frequent comment to critics who complained that he did not record, for instance, the complete Beethoven piano sonatas.

Richter made his London debut with Kyrill Kondrashin (1914–1981) in the two Liszt Concertos, recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra for Philips Records. A contemporary review of the recording commented:

Richter's commanding performances of Liszt's piano concertos have been the benchmarks against which others are measured. These are demanding, technically difficult works; Richter's performances are riveting, dramatic traversals through these scores. And yet he manages to play with much empathy and warmth, without forsaking technical excellence. Kondrashin and the London Symphony Orchestra are fine accompanists, yet they can barely keep pace with Richter's playing.



LISZT

Piano Concerto No. 1 and No. 2

SVIATOSLAV RICHTER / KIRIL KONDRASHIN
London Symphony Orchestra

Piano Concerto No.1 In E Flat

1. Allegro Maestoso 5:13
2. 2a. Quasi Adagio 5:00
3. 2b. Allegretto Vivace - Allegro Animato 3:58
4. 3. Allegro Marziale Animato 4:06

Piano Concerto No.2 In A

5. Adagio Sostenuto Assai - Allegro Agitato Assai 7:18
6. Allegro Moderato 4:57
7. Allegro Deciso - Marziale Un Poco Meno Allegro 6:41
8. 4. Allegro Animato 1:44

Engineer - C. R. Fine Co-Engineer - Robert Eberenz
Recording Director - Wilma Cozart Musical Supervisor - Harold Lawrence
Recorded by Philips at Walthamstow Assembly Hall, London, 19-21 July 1961 on 35 MM Film



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