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Editorial

The Avant-Garde Innovation and Free Improvisation in Soviet Music: Three Contextualized Interviews

Dennis Ioffe

Faculty of Letters, Translation and Communication, Department of Languages and Letters, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1050 Brussels, Belgium; denis.ioffe@ulb.be

This Special Issue of *ARTS* allocates considerable scholarly and analytical attention to the intricate exploration of performative traditions of experimentation within the Russian and Soviet milieus. The theme of avant-garde improvisation, a pivotal aspect of this discourse, finds substantial representation in numerous contributions within the volume. My recent series of studies (Ioffe 2016, 2023) posits that Soviet avant-garde music represents a compellingly complex tapestry of experimentalism and innovation which indelibly shaped the Soviet auditory landscape during the first half of the twentieth century. This musical phenomenon is emblematic of a fervent pursuit of radical novelty, an endeavor to traverse uncharted auditory realms, and a bold subversion of established aesthetic conventions.

This study explores the avant-garde innovation and free improvisation in Soviet music, focusing on various performative traditions of experimentation within the Russian and Soviet contexts. The essay introduces three contextualized interviews that offer insights into the avant-garde musical movement, its key figures, and its impact on Soviet and post-Soviet musical landscapes. It examines the role of experimental composers using examples of such iconic figures as Alexander Scriabin, Igor Stravinsky, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Alexander Mosolov, emphasizing their contributions to musical modernism and innovation. The tension between political constraints and creative freedom is central to the discourse, as Soviet composers navigated ideological suppression while striving for radical musical experimentation. The following material also investigates the emergence of Soviet *Free Jazz* as a subversive artistic expression within an authoritarian regime. Through interviews with key avant-garde musicians, including Viacheslav Ganelin and Sergey Letov, the research provides first-hand perspectives on the struggles and triumphs of experimental music under Soviet rule. Ultimately, this work underscores the enduring legacy of Soviet avant-garde music (with extraordinary borderline-figures as Petr Mamonov), its influence on contemporary experimental compositions, and its ongoing relevance in global musical discourse.

The publication deals with Soviet avant-garde music, free improvisation, experimental composition; political censorship and art, Soviet free Jazz, and radical sound innovation.

The developmental trajectory of Soviet avant-garde music was, to a significant extent, influenced by the broader processes of civilizational modernization that commenced in Russia at the cusp of the twentieth century. This period inaugurated a revolutionary transformation in artistic musical paradigms, catalyzed by such modernist titans as Alexander Scriabin and, subsequently, Igor Stravinsky (Figures 1 and 2). In the aftermath of the October Revolution of 1917, the cultural landscape of the Soviet Union underwent a profound metamorphosis as composers endeavored to articulate innovative forms of expression that would resonate with the zeitgeist and contribute to the ideological project of constructing a novel social order. This epoch in music history is, therefore, aptly characterized as the transgressive-revolutionary avant-garde (Ioffe 2023).

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Received: 10 February 2025
Accepted: 11 February 2025
Published: 4 March 2025

Citation: Ioffe, Dennis. 2025. The Avant-Garde Innovation and Free Improvisation in Soviet Music: Three Contextualized Interviews. *Arts* 14: 28. https://doi.org/10.3390/arts14020028

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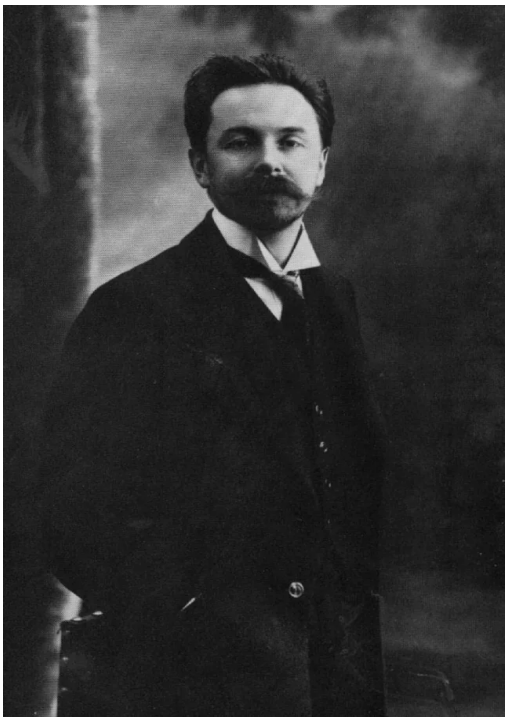


Figure 1. Alexander Scriabin.

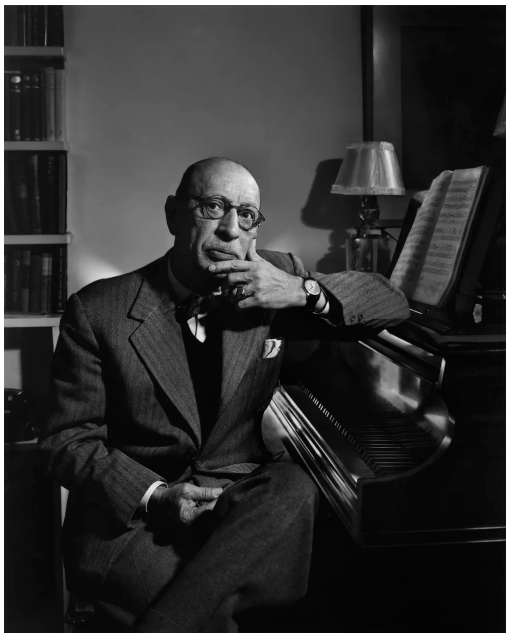


Figure 2. Igor Stravinsky.

The first two decades of the twentieth century represented the golden age of Soviet avant-garde music, witnessing the emergence of luminaries such as Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev, Igor Stravinsky, Alexander Mosolov, Artur Lurie, Nikolai Roslavets, and Arseny Avraamov (Figures 3–6).



Figure 3. Arseny Avraamov.



Figure 4. Arthur Lurie painted by Lev Bruni, 2015.



Figure 5. Nikolai Roslavets.



Figure 6. Alexander Mosolov.

This era was characterized by a prolific array of experiments with harmony, rhythm, and sonic textures. However, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Soviet avant-garde encountered increasing hostility from the authorities. The cultural policies of the socialist establishment in the USSR led to the persecution and censorship of numerous composers, with their works being banned or marginalized. Despite these adversities, the post-World

War II period saw the Soviet avant-garde continue to evolve clandestinely, constrained by stringent state control and ideological dictates. Nonetheless, some composers steadfastly pursued new forms of expression and persisted in their experimental endeavors with technique and style. The Soviet avant-garde music movement of the early 20th century stands as a testament to the power of artistic innovation and the indomitable spirit of creativity in the face of political adversity. This remarkable period in musical history was characterized by a profound experimentation with sound, pushing the boundaries of what was considered possible in composition and performance (Hakobian 2016). Soviet avant-garde musicians, driven by an insatiable curiosity and a desire to break free from conventional norms, delved deeply into the dramaturgy of sound, exploring its capacity to evoke a wide range of emotions and associations in listeners. Their ambitious goal was to create music that would resonate not just with the ear, but with the entire human body, engaging the listener on a visceral, almost physical level. The political landscape of the Soviet Union during this time played a crucial role in shaping the evolution of avant-garde music. Composers found themselves navigating a treacherous path between artistic expression and political acceptability, often grappling with censorship and repression. This struggle profoundly influenced both the content and form of their creations, leading to works that were at once innovative and subversive. The tension between artistic freedom and political constraint became a driving force behind much of the avant-garde movement, spurring composers to find new ways of expressing themselves within the confines of an oppressive system (Ioffe 2023).

Alexander Mosolov emerges as a quintessential figure in this movement, a protean pioneer of Soviet avant-garde music whose contributions continue to resonate with musicians and theory scholars till the current day. Mosolov's polyvalent struggle with musical constructivism in the 1920s marked a significant departure from traditional compositional techniques, paving the way for a new era of sonic exploration. His avant-garde pieces, particularly the symphonic work 'Factory. Music of Machines' (1928) and the vocal cycle 'Four Newspaper Ads' (1926), garnered considerable attention and acclaim, establishing him as a leading voice in the movement. Mosolov's compositions are characterized by their innovative use of serial techniques, complex polyrhythms, and persistent rhythmic ostinatos, all of which contribute to their distinctive sound. Perhaps most notably, Mosolov's work features a rich incorporation of various sounds and noises in his orchestration, anticipating the later innovations of French musique concrète and laying the groundwork for future developments in electronic and experimental music. The epitome of Mosolov's avant-garde experimentation is undoubtedly his renowned 'Plant. Music of Machines' for orchestra, featuring an unconventional 'iron sheet' part. This genuinely trailblazing work, composed in 1928, exemplifies Mosolov's profound fascination with industrial sounds and his extraordinary ability to integrate them into a Modernist musical structure.

By incorporating the harsh, metallic tones of factory machinery into the orchestral palette, Mosolov created a sonic landscape that was at once familiar and alien, challenging listeners to reconsider their understanding of what constitutes music. Another significant figure in the Soviet avant-garde movement was Arthur Lurie, whose close association with the Russian Futurists informed his experimental approach to composition. Lurie's work is characterized by its innovative use of natural and semi-natural noises, resulting in a series of pioneering acoustic compositions that pushed the boundaries of traditional music. His early work, such as the '5 Fragile Preludes' for piano composed in the late 1910s, laid the foundation for his later, more experimental pieces. Lurie's subsequent works, including the 'La Sonate liturgique' for chorus, piano, and chamber ensemble (1928), 'Feast in the Time of Plague' (1931), and 'Sinfonia Dialectica: Anno Domini MCMXXX', further explored the possibilities of unconventional sound in composition. In the post-war period, Lurie

continued to push the envelope with works such as 'Spells/Incantations 1–4" for voice and piano (1959) and his final composition, 'Sibylla Dicit', a cantata for women's voices, four instruments, and a dulcimer (1964). Concurrently, he composed 'Funeral Games in Honor of Chronos' for three flutes, a piano, and cymbals, further demonstrating his commitment to experimental composition even in the later years of his career. Lurie's body of work stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of innovation that characterized the Soviet avant-garde movement, even as political pressures mounted and artistic freedoms were increasingly curtailed.

While composers like Mosolov and Lurie were at the forefront of the avant-garde movement, other prominent Russian-Soviet musicians of the twentieth century also incorporated experimental elements into their work, albeit in a more subtle manner. Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich, for instance, masterfully integrated traditional forms with modern techniques and experimental elements in their compositions, creating a bridge between the avant-garde and more conventional musical styles. This fusion of old and new permitted them to question the boundaries of composition while still maintaining a playful degree of accessibility and popular appeal. The influence of the Soviet musical avant-garde is perhaps most evident in Shostakovich's acclaimed opera, 'The Nose', related to Nikolai Gogol's phantasmagorical narrative. This work stands as a testament to Shostakovich's powerful ability to incorporate avant-garde techniques into a larger, more traditional form. As far as the listener is able to judge, 'The Nose' is replete with innovative polyphonic ideas and techniques, replacing conventional operatic singing with nearly continuous recitation, forcing musical instruments to almost mimic everyday sounds such as horse stomping, shaving, and drunken hiccups.

The music features complex polytonal layering and occasionally abandons tonality altogether, creating a disorienting and surreal sonic landscape that perfectly complements Gogol's absurdist tale (Figure 7). One of the most striking features of 'The Nose' is Shostakovich's use of a unique orchestral intermission written exclusively for percussion instruments. This bold compositional choice underscores the opera's avant-garde credentials and showcases Shostakovich's conceptual willingness to experiment with less conventional musical forms and multifaceted instrumentation. In essence, 'The Nose' stands as Shostakovich's principal avant-garde masterpiece, a work that encapsulates the spirit of innovation and experimentation that defined the Soviet avant-garde movement while still maintaining a connection to the broader operatic tradition. The legacy of the Soviet avant-garde music movement continues to influence composers and musicians with all the existing complexities of our current day with its heavy dependence on electronics and artificiality. Its emphasis on sound experimentation, its exploration of the relationship between music and politics, and its willingness to challenge conventional notions of what constitutes music have left an indelible mark on the landscape of 20th and 21st-century composition. As we continue to study and appreciate the works of Mosolov, Lurie, Shostakovich, and their contemporaries, we gain a deeper understanding of the power of music to push boundaries, challenge perceptions, and create new possibilities for artistic expression (See the details and bibliography in Ioffe 2023).

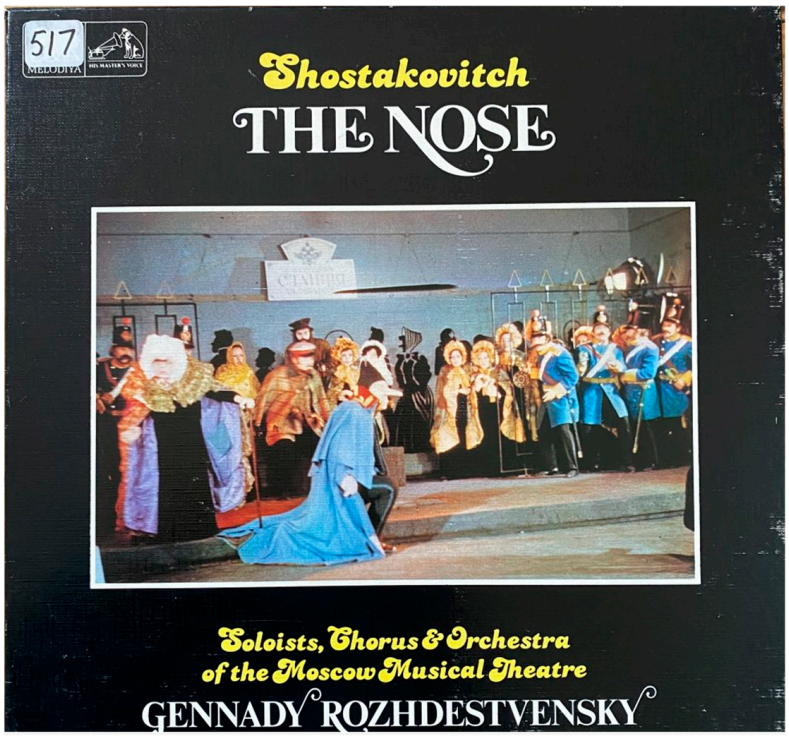


Figure 7. Dmitry Shostakovich, The Nose.

Shostakovich was in a certain Modernist sense influenced by Vsevolod Meyerhold and his experimental avant-gardist staging of 'The Inspector' in 1926. The dynamic development of The Nose possesses a rather cinematic quality, characterized by numerous alternating scenes, various film-like subtexts, and synchronized action sequences. The musical material is presented in a collage and experimental form, with Shostakovich employing a variety of traditional musical techniques and styles. For instance, polkas and gallops are juxtaposed with fugues and canons, and balalaika and romance motifs are interwoven with atonal episodes. The opera's phantasmagoric grotesqueness is underscored by numerous eccentric deviations from the main plot. The orchestra itself unconventionally incorporates pianos, balalaikas, domras, and an extensive array of percussion instruments. The entire first intermission is scored for percussion alone, which, along with vocal experiments, contributes to the overall effect of musical brutalism and catastrophism.

Shostakovich's additional Soviet experimental symphonies, such as May Day, further exemplify his formal and format experimentation in sound, musical form, and artistic expression while implicitly addressing social issues of everyday life. Sergei Prokofiev, the principal spiritual rival of Shostakovich both karmically and politically in relation to the authorities of the USSR, maintained a close affiliation with Russian Futurism, akin to Artur Lurie. Notably, Prokofiev had significant creative interactions with one of Futurism's central figures—the poet, artist, and performer Vladimir Mayakovsky. In the 1910s, Prokofiev was engaged in creating a sonorous analogue of Russian Cubo-Futurism. During World War I, he composed the ballet "Ala and Lolly", inspired by the so-called Scythian native religion described by Herodotus, although it was never properly staged. This ballet gave rise to the experimental 'Scythian Suite', which elicited a deliberate shock among bourgeois audiences of the pre-revolutionary era. Soviet avant-garde music has undeniably left an indelible mark on the history of global musical culture, underscoring the profound impact of art amid political and social upheavals. Its legacy continues to inspire contemporary composers and musicians to explore new forms and expressions. Below, we present interviews with three

musicians who have actively embodied this legacy, beginning with the pioneer of Soviet free jazz, Vyacheslav Ganelin.

In the labyrinthine corridors of Soviet cultural history, a peculiar and paradoxical phenomenon emerged, defying the rigid constraints of state-sanctioned art: Soviet Free Jazz. It emerged in the shadowed space where ideological strictures sought to extinguish the flickering embers of unfettered artistic expression, as a singularly audacious and paradoxical musical insurgency. This avant-garde idiom, a defiant improvisatory revolt against the rigid formalism of state-sanctioned aesthetics, did not merely develop within the interstices of permissible cultural expression—it erupted like an uncontainable force, rupturing the monolithic façade of Socialist Realism. To chronicle the odyssey of Soviet Free Jazz is to unearth a hidden dialect of subversion, a sonic palimpsest upon which was inscribed a counter-narrative of artistic defiance, cryptic yet unmistakable in its challenge to cultural orthodoxy. The genesis of Soviet Free Jazz must be understood not as a linear evolution but as a dialectical collision between imposed ideological dictates and the innate human impulse toward creative liberation. Jazz, that most mercurial of Western art forms, first infiltrated Soviet consciousness in the early 1920s, introduced to Russian soil by the avant-garde poet and cultural provocateur Valentin Parnakh, who, upon returning from his Parisian sojourn, heralded the music as an electrifying new artistic phenomenon. Yet, even in this embryonic stage, jazz was already an object of Soviet ambivalence—its infectious rhythms and improvisational anarchy simultaneously thrilling and unsettling to a regime predicated on aesthetic control. It was a musical form that, despite its ostensible adoption, was never truly assimilated into the ideological machinery of the state; rather, it remained a spectral presence, tolerated but never fully embraced, forever teetering on the precipice of proscription. By the 1930s, jazz found itself ensnared in a dialectic of state repression and elite patronage. Official condemnations cast it as a grotesque manifestation of capitalist decadence, an "insulting chaos of insanity" that threatened the supposed purity of proletarian culture. Yet, paradoxically, high-ranking Soviet officials such as Kliment Voroshilov and Lazar Kaganovich harbored an affinity for jazz, nurturing a fraught and contradictory relationship that mirrored the larger tensions between ideological conformity and cultural pluralism (Frolova-Walker 2019).

This uneasy coexistence, however, was shattered by the purges of the late Stalinist era, as jazz was subsumed into the broader campaign against cosmopolitanism and branded an agent of subversive Western influence. The Thaw of the late 1950s and 1960s, catalyzed by Khrushchev's unexpected de-Stalinization policies, provided a momentary aperture for artistic experimentation. Within this climate of tentative liberalization, jazz evolved from a carefully controlled entertainment form into a clandestine language of dissent, a cryptographic code through which Soviet youth and intellectuals engaged with an alternative, non-official vision of cultural modernity. It was in this crucible of ideological tension that Soviet Free Jazz was forged—a genre that did not merely emulate its Western counterpart but transmuted it into something uniquely, inimitably Soviet. Intriguingly, the vanguard of this movement did not emerge from the cultural citadels of Moscow or Leningrad but from the geographical peripheries of the Soviet empire. In Vilnius, the triumvirate of Vyacheslav Ganelin, Vladimir Tarasov, and Vladimir Chekasin ('The Ganelin Trio' or 'GTCh') crafted a mode of improvisation that was not merely musical but performative, a kinetic act of defiance that blurred the boundaries between sound and spectacle (Tarasov 1998). Their compositions, a volatile synthesis of polyrhythmic dissonance and Slavic melancholia, functioned as sonic Molotov cocktails—exploding the ossified conventions of both Soviet and Western jazz. Simultaneously, in the remote northern outpost of Arkhangelsk, Vladimir Rezitsky forged his own radical approach to free jazz. Here, in a city locked in perpetual dialogue with the Arctic's austere vastness,

Rezitsky's saxophone howled like a spectral lamentation, a banshee's wail cutting through the icy silence of ideological repression. It was an irony not lost on those attuned to the socio-political undertones of artistic geography: that Arkhangelsk—so distant from the watchful eyes of Soviet cultural commissars—offered an unexpected enclave of artistic autonomy. This paradox underscored a fundamental truth about Soviet Free Jazz: its very survival necessitated exile, whether literal or metaphorical. Yet, Soviet Free Jazz was more than a mere musical anomaly; it was an epistemological rupture, a radical reconfiguration of the Soviet cultural imaginary. Jazz clubs and underground festivals became liminal spaces of resistance, existing at the porous boundaries between official culture and clandestine subversion (Barban 2007, 2015; Feiertag 2010; Feigin 2009; Kan 2008).

These venues did not merely host performances; they incubated a nascent counter public—a subterranean collective bound together by a shared rejection of the aesthetic strictures imposed from above. The music itself became an insurrectionary act, an abstracted protest that articulated, in sound, what could not be spoken in words. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the avant-garde jazz movement in Moscow had evolved into a full-fledged artistic insurgency. Figures such as the Gevorgyan brothers and Alexander Lukin pushed the boundaries of free improvisation, incorporating elements of theatricality, absurdism, and experimental visual art into their performances. This cross-pollination of artistic forms engendered a uniquely Soviet avant-garde ethos—one that neither wholly rejected nor passively imitated Western influences but rather metabolized them into something fiercely original. Soviet Free Jazz was not an imitation; it was an act of creative expropriation, a reappropriation of Western idioms into a distinctive Soviet lexicon of dissent. To contextualize Soviet Free Jazz solely within the framework of musical history is to underestimate its deeper significance. This was not merely an avant-garde movement but a profound assertion of human autonomy in the face of systemic control. It was the spontaneous emergence of an artistic syntax that defied the metronomic rigidity of authoritarian rule, an insurgent soundscape that carved out a space of ephemeral freedom within an otherwise suffocating reality. Like a phoenix rising from the ashes of ideological repression, Soviet Free Jazz remains a testament to the irrepressible nature of artistic expression. In its cacophony, we hear not merely dissonance but the articulation of a deeper yearning—for personal liberty, for creative sovereignty, for a world in which music is not merely tolerated but truly free. The legacy of Soviet Free Jazz endures, not as a relic of a bygone era, but as a reminder of the perennial struggle between art and power, improvisation and control, chaos and order—a struggle that continues to resonate in every epoch where the human spirit seeks to transcend the chains of conformity (Barban 2015; Feiertag 2010)

Presently, Slava Ganelin is a distinguished jazz musician, composer, and theorist–practitioner whose contributions have profoundly influenced the history of global jazz music. Born on 17 July 1946 in Moscow, Ganelin graduated from the Vilnius State Conservatory in 1968. From 1968 to 1984, he headed the musical section of the Russian Drama Theater in Vilnius. His oeuvre spans classical jazz to experimental improvisation, establishing him as a pioneer of Soviet free improvisational jazz. Beginning his musical career in the mid-1960s, Ganelin co-founded the aforementioned renowned jazz ensemble "Trio Ganelin-Tarasov-Chekasin", which remained active until 1987 when Ganelin emigrated to the State of Israel. This trio was one of the first in the USSR to experiment with free improvisation and avant-garde jazz at an international level, symbolizing freedom of expression under Soviet censorship and significantly influencing the Soviet jazz scene. Complex rhythmic structures, unconventional harmonies, and sound experimentation are hallmarks of Ganelin's music. In addition to performing, he has been deeply involved in pedagogy, teaching jazz improvisation and composition at various institutions in Israel and globally. A pivotal moment in his career was the establishment of a unique free-jazz move-

ment in the USSR in the early 1970s. Ganelin's ensemble served as a polymorphous nexus for the exchange of ideas and experiences among musicians interested in free improvisation. Through Ganelin's efforts, free improvisational music gained official recognition and support in the USSR. Ganelin has also made significant contributions to jazz scholarship, with numerous publications on jazz improvisation and music theory, which are crucial for understanding jazz development and performance techniques. Today, Vyacheslav Ganelin continues to perform, record music, and teach. Below is an abridged transcript of our conversation with him, recorded in 2004 (Ganelin 2004).

Together with Dennis Ioffe, also Mikhail Klebanov took part in the conversations and preparation of all the following interviews.

The talk transcription was first published in Network Literature (*Setevaia Slovesnost'*) e-magazine in 2004.

> "If I had, like Shiva, ten more hands—I would be quite glad!"—Vyacheslav Ganelin (Figures 8 and 9).



Figure 8. Viacheslav Ganelin.

> Dennis Ioffe: . . .If, say, a person unprepared and not too skillful in jazz, but still to some extent interested in Free Sound and its historical destinies—comes to you: what could you advise him ab initio in terms of indication of principal 'objects of attention'?
>
> Slava Ganelin: This question is, let's say, not quite accurate . . . I usually work with people who have already chosen their life path. Another thing is that they have doubts—which is natural: any creative person has doubts . . .
>
> D.I.: But here—a certain pupil comes to you, you could tell him that he should begin to get acquainted with this or that music by listening to this or that . . . And is there a certain universal musical name which, in your opinion, can catch the interest of the beginner and the unsophisticated? . . .
>
> S.G.: I don't think it's the teacher's task to look for such things . . . Or to have such names in stock that could be a 'magnet'. I always say that art is like a disease.

You either have it or you don't. You can either live without it or you can't. I often tell a story-parable, one might say a very important one. When students ask such questions—will I be someone, will I or won't I become famous, is it worth studying . . . In Odessa, at the Conservatory, one professor in the classroom hung a poster where it was written—'if you can not to play—please do not play'.

D.I.: This, in a certain form, seems to be a repetition of the remarkable, rather famous aphoristic literary-centered words about the original 'writing' and 'non-writing' . . .

Mikhail Klebanov: In the sense that—they're asking whether it's worth studying—composition specifically?

S.G.: No, not only, in general—everything—free jazz, for example. A jazz musician, in particular, feels this way: he sees what and how things are happening in the world, it seems to him that his future is uncertain, he may not become THAT 'star'. There's a certain charm in this naivety . . .

D.I.: And you can predict something in this respect . . .?

S.G.: No, it is impossible. We don't know how things will turn out, how things will develop. There are, of course, some basic things: whether there is Talent or not. You can roughly understand what a person is capable of. When I worked in the theater—I saw people who did not get major roles, but for them was important—'the smell of the stage'; they were looking for some circles, some part-time work, not being able to leave the theater. But in Israel, I once had to observe one very talented boy. He and his family came from Leningrad. He played beautifully, had a tremendous memory, at the age of ten he had already written quite a lot of works. He studied composition with me, but not for long . . . His parents got a job in another city, and they had to move. Everything he wrote reflected his knowledge . . . His works were like this. a la Prokofiev, a la Rachmaninoff . . .

D.I.: Not so bad—for ten years old . . .

S.G.: Yes, quite. But it's all relative . . . The thing was that he listened to critical comments and suggestions rather reluctantly . . . He was a very ambitious man . . . He wrote very quickly. When he arrived, he would bring a quartet, he would write it while riding on the bus; the next lesson he would bring a sonata . . . He was practically a genius. But the problem he had, as I understand it, was that he could only reflect and repeat what he already knew, but he was incapable of producing his own variant . . . And as time went on, it probably became more and more difficult for him to work. Where is he now? What happened to him? I don't know! I don't see his name anywhere . . . neither as a pianist nor as a composer . . .

M.K.: What do you attribute that to?

S.G.: What I'm saying is that there is a danger in this. What is a 'child genius'? It is a situation where a young child solves problems like an adult. But if he grows up without changing. he ceases to be a 'miracle' when he becomes an adult . . .

D.I.: And if he grows proportionally . . .

S.G.: Then it would be different. Everything would be different. Revelations would not stop . . . Therefore—there is a certain danger, which is a test for people who are called 'prodigies' in childhood—to 'overcome' themselves, to enter the

adult world, already possessing an arsenal of necessary techniques and skills . . . and at the same time to see the world in their own, extraordinary way . . .

M.K.: It turns out, then, that it is not 'talent': it is, as it were, 'premature development', or even 'premature birth' . . .

S.G.: Yeah, I guess so . . . It's sad a little bit . . . But it is extremely difficult to answer the question 'worth continuing—not worth continuing'. It is always an individual choice. And it's not easy to give advice. You don't know how fate will turn out. Mozart developed like that, but Beethoven developed differently, a little bit differently . . . 'slower', and his genius came 'later', you could say . . .

D.I.: But here, I would like to know: in terms of a possible hierarchy, how does the area of teaching and music production itself correlate in your life? What dominates over what?

S.G.: I didn't teach in the Soviet Union . . . Except for a little bit. And there was no urge to teach. Although, when we had a student internship, our supervisor said of me: 'he could teach'. But, since there was no such need even in terms of earning money . . .

D.I.: Was it purely a question of money?

S.G.: No, of course not. It's just that life was so creatively fulfilling without this . . . In Vilnius I worked in the Russian Dram Theatre. I had many opportunities to express myself in addition to teaching. I performed, I wrote, there were movies . . . But in Israel I had to start working in a new way. And I realized that teaching is also a very creative process . . .

D.I.: You are a whole historical chapter in the history of jazz, no matter how you feel about it . . .



Figure 9. The Ganelin Trio.

S.G.: In general, it's probably not my business to summarize, to talk about myself—what I've done or not done in my life. Besides, I'm always in doubt in

this respect; sometimes I think that I could have done a lot of things better, or just 'differently' . . . But it's such a common enough situation for any creative person . . .

D.I.: Were there times when you yourself learned from your students?

S.G.: Yes. And it happens quite often. Our students are free, not slanted, not just waiting for the teacher to give them an assignment, but they are ready to offer something themselves . . . They'll ask you a question to which you have to come up with a convincing answer. The task here is to translate the oppositional question into the plane where the questioner understands why I am right, but without my pressure. And I'm learning something at this point, too. I'm learning to answer the unexpected question. To search on the spot, in a different way, not programmed, taking into account the psychological moment . . .

D.I.: Does all this remind you, at least in part, of the situation you had many years ago in Vilnius—at the moment when you were assembling your first musical groups there?

S.G.: To some extent, probably yes. But this process seems to happen with all creative collectives. After all, people will never sit down to play if they don't have a common aesthetic position, especially in improvisational music.

D.I.: The atmosphere of those Vilnius youth cafes—didn't it remind you of a search situation, some kind of joint creative algorithm?

S.G.: Yes, of course, it was like that in many ways. Youth cafes—it was a kind of collective study, someone brought something, everyone listened, discussed it; someone brought records to someone from relatives from abroad, and then it all went around. Moreover, with the common joy—endless jam sessions—there was also a division into some groups, ensembles. But now it's a bit hard to analyze the distant past. We were 'in the process' at that time—even though there were no teachers, we 'educated' ourselves. I remember that when I first heard Charlie Parker's recordings—I didn't understand at all what it was, and whether it was jazz at all. But very quickly I, as they call it, 'devoured' Charlie Parker and jumped, as I remember, to Thelonious Monk. And at that time Coltrane had already appeared with his experiments . . . Everyone was looking for sources; everything was done to quench the thirst for information . . . It also helped that Poland was nearby—it had its own jazz magazine, there was also the international jazz festival 'Jazz Jamboree' in Warsaw . . . and, of course, the Voice of America, which the authorities were very careful to jam at the time. So, the information, through various channels, was getting out . . . Today you can go to a store, buy a CD, read a story . . . Or—through the Internet to get everything you want. There are pros and cons here—or maybe I'm wrong . . . The minus here is that when you search, being "hungry"—your inner sieve works more actively . . . Today, a person simply won't look for an approach to something that he or she will initially find unapproachable. But back then we listened to a huge amount of music, we assimilated something—even though a lot of things could be 'formally unnecessary' . . . Only then did the nature of individuality 'calculate' the talent . . . This is how the Aesthetics that you discover in yourself came into being. A lot of today's students, strangely enough, don't really perceive contemporary experimental music.

D.I.: Are they perhaps somewhat bored?

S.G.: A lot of people say, 'you can't make any money from this'.

D.I.: Why not then go into the field of purely popular music?

S.G.: By the way, the line between 'good pop' and 'good tonal jazz' is quite thin, these genres are rather close to each other.

D.I.: Your formal education institutions, where did they take place?

S.G.: All in Vilnius. At the Conservatory, in composition.

D.I.: Did you have any problems with your mentors?

S.G.: I think I was just lucky. In many ways. I had a teacher, a composer, who actually gave me maximum freedom of expression . . . It was Antanas Računas, he wrote contemporary music himself . . . He studied before the war in France, he studied orchestration with Stravinsky. He was a very methodical and calm man. He gave me complete creative freedom; in this he was good, but in some ways he was also bad. He always said to me: 'It can be like this'. And that's . . . how should I put it—a problematic statement for a mentor, isn't it?

D.I.: It sounds like the image of the 'ideal creative mentor' . . .

S.G.: Yes, on the one hand he was 'teaching', on the other hand he was giving a degree of Freedom so that one could trust oneself . . .

M.K.: With this method of teaching composition—can it be said that this is the reason why you developed an underlying inclination towards improvisation?

S.G.: Well, it started even earlier . . . I've been improvising since I was a child. That's where it all started, long before formal training. From the age of four. . .

M.K.: Didn't it seem to you that by following the path of 'theoretical composition' you would not be able to arrive at the point you specifically wanted—whereas by following the prompting of pure improvisation, creating something completely new every time, you could achieve more adequate results?

S.G.: No, it's probably not that. After all, you can really 'improve' a work if you construct and write it purposefully. And improvising, you can't improve ANYTHING—what you do is what you do. The principle of the sparrow that flew out . . . The worst thing is that if you play something 'badly', not in accordance with logic and some other important things, making, as a performer, a 'real mistake'—you can't fix it. There's a lot of responsibility in that, but also a kind of attractive charm. You must go on stage with the utmost concentration, clarity and wisdom. It is also important to be able to 'see the material one step ahead', while at the same time remembering what has gone before . . .

D.I.: After completing your studies at the conservatoire, did you acquire a certain 'basis', which gave you a sort of 'ticket to life' in terms of the tools you had developed?

S.G.: Everything was going on in parallel. I didn't think about the conservatoire . . . There was a certain kind of protest inside me. We were taught to understand music 'this way', and I wanted to argue, to disagree, to look for an alternative . . . I didn't want to take everything for granted.

D.I.: Choosing this path—did you not find attraction in 'competing' with jazz? In the Philharmonic, for example . . .

S.G.: I didn't think about it . . . I went for what attracted me from the beginning, in and of itself.

M.K.: On the question of strategic 'musical choice': compared to the flow of 'unofficial' information, which helped you so much to navigate in jazz subtleties

and novelties of that time—how were things in relation to the philharmonic avant-garde?

S.G.: Again, Poland—there was the Warsaw Autumn. In a sense, we could listen to Western philharmonic music even more. Moreover, while jazz 'sheet music' was impossible to obtain, 'sheet music from Poland' was more or less available. Lutosławski, Penderecki, Gorecki, Dobrowolski . . . We studied them extensively. It was one of the first and strongest influences . . . like the French—Boulez, Messiaen and the whole company . . .

M.K.: But how did it happen that you chose the jazz road rather than experiments in the philharmonic avant-garde? Stockhausen, Penderecki, Ligeti, Boulez . . .

S.G.: Well, how can I tell you? Right now, I can't explain exactly why. I guess the point is that the desire to improvise has always been there: and it eventually outweighed it. It's very interesting—that you can take on the fly and solve some complex, experimental problems . . . Jazz is more alive. And that's probably the main thing. After all, I didn't like everything in 'that' music either . . . And I still don't like everything. To this day I am closer to such composers from that milieu as Lutosławski, (probably the closest). And Berio. They are very melodic and human, there is no creaky dryness of calculation. There is depth . . . They have something else besides very 'clever' experimentation. Music cannot and should not, in my opinion, be constructed purely theoretically. It's boring, in my opinion.

D.I.: But apart from all that, 'your' music is first of all something that is born 'here and now', without a 'score' . . .

S.G.: Jazz is a very emotional activity, its sequential birth in time is insanely interesting; you see how each element develops, you follow the sound, it's fascinating: you build a building and it's visible. You can 'give birth' in an hour to a piece that 'other composers' work on for months. And you can do it just as well. Passion for your own Creation '*right now*' is probably one of the main temptations of improvisation. It's a bit corrupting: why write it down, why elaborate every fragment of a piece in detail, when you can 'produce' a new essence that is quite meaningful . . . That's what sound recording has partly saved both jazz and all modern improvisational music—which is played, sometimes, 'once and for all' . . .

D.I.: Coming back to the Conservatoire: was it from the moment of its graduation that your 'official solo' career began?

S.G.: No, even before that. Everything went on without a break—in parallel with my studies. Career in the Soviet Union was simple: get a diploma—go to teach . . . I went to the theatre. It was ideal. There was a lot of freedom in it. I could compose and choose music at my own discretion, as I saw fit. All this gave me a lot: working in Vilnius Russian Drama Theatre. I still remember this time with great warmth and gratitude. In the theatre, ALL work is absolutely creative . . .

D.I.: In this way: you read the text of the play, you make this or that sound decision . . .

S.G.: Usually it was like this: they gave you the play, you read it. But it was important not to lock yourself into the text. You had to be a director yourself in a sense; the peculiarity here was the need to fit in with the work of the whole team. Working with the director, sitting in rehearsals—it was very enriching, because it gave new angles of view on the text—angles that were not always revealed by reading the play alone. The associative connections were revealed at rehearsals.

There you observe the whole internal process. There is a correct description of the smallest details necessary in the work, the scattering of mise-en-scène, the rhythm of the episodes . . . It all has a great impact on emotional perception. Even when there are no words. And out of the shadows come some invisible elements of music. Theater practice was superimposed on my musical vision of the world, and a certain general outline of the process was developed.

D.I.: At what moment of your theatrical career falls your fateful acquaintance with the characters known to all, who made up in the future legendary team?

S.G.: It happened in parallel. Since 1967, I worked in the theater . . .

D.I.: And then Chekasin appeared?

S.G.: No, not at all . . . Tarasov appeared first. Before that, I had a trio, quite famous . . . very good. I was satisfied with it.

D.I.: Also the 'Ganelin Trio'?

S.G.: Of course: Alexander Melnik, the percussionist, and Grigory Talas, the double bassist—my partners at that time. There are some recordings. I had a classical trio, in terms of composition: double bass, percussion—and we played. . . We already tried to play some different music from what most musicians of that time were playing. We went to different festivals—and we were always recognized, got diplomas . . .

M.K.: But with Tarasov, where did you first meet him?

S.G.: He came to Vilnius to play in a local ensemble. But even before I met him there were important changes in my ensemble. My drummer had just left—he got married and had to look for a more profitable way of life . . . Then the double bassist—Grigory Talas—was taken to the army . . . And now I have a new double bassist—Jozas Rumilaitis. Meanwhile, there was no percussionist: and there was a certain standard—there should be a percussionist . . . And suddenly, trying to play with the bassist together, I begin to realize: how good it can be 'without a percussionist'! After all, the bass combines the harmonic structure with the rhythmic one. And everything seems to work . . . And in this way a certain standard goes away . . . A lot of things change . . .

Apparently, this duet anticipated future duets and freedom in the choice of colleagues . . .

M.K.: Do you think, by the way, that the music you make counts on listeners more 'prepared' . . .?

S.G.: I haven't really thought about that.

M.K.: When you are directly creating music—the thought of the potential recipient

S.G.: No—and you know why? I just didn't think about it much at the time. Only once did I think about it. Once, when we hardly played as a Trio anymore, Vladimir Feirtag invited me to play solo. In Leningrad. In the *Great Hall*. And suddenly, during a break, a shaggy-haired man ran up to me and shouted: 'It's not you playing! It's Him playing!'. . . .But who is He? And here I thought about it, being in a kind of shock. Who is playing? As if I were just a medium, a guide . . .

D.I.: A concept very significant in many archaic cultures of the East and West . . . The mediator who is travelling between the worlds, the First Artist . . . A shamanistic concept.

S.G.: Perhaps, of course . . . I reflected and began to observe myself. What is the emotional moment present during the game? And it's true, often you get into this or that sound situation—and you don't know exactly why you play this way and not the other way around. You're thinking, but additional sensations come up . . . that can completely change the musical line . . . And if that's the case, I can only be grateful . . . To the inspirer.

D.I.: And, returning to the genesis of the Trio, to the arrival of Tarasov . . .

S.G.: Yes, Tarasov then joined my duo and I—and the Trio was thus restored. But then Rumilaitis was taken to the army: and that's when Tarasov and I sat down and started to think how we could do without a bassist . . .

There was a reflection about another duet . . .—piano, drums.

D.I.: And the cementing element is invariably your input: the link that 'strengthens in faith' and unites everyone . . .

S.G.: Well, in general, yes. But in free jazz there is no concept of an absolute leader, everything is based on a kind of mutual understanding. Each element only complements the overall picture . . . The dominance here is expressed softer than in the usual "fixed" art.

D.I.: Is it possible to say that when you founded the Trio, the question of making money was not at the top of the agenda?

S.G.: Yes, I guess so. We lived by musical ideas. Principally did not go to the Philharmonic, as a constantly touring ensemble. After all, we could have.

D.I.: But we didn't go . . .

S.G.: Yes, although it was customary at the time, we all had some kind of work related to music.

D.I.: To the question of the manager . . .

S.G.: Yes, even now I often wish I could play more, time is running out . . . And you could turn to a manager. But it means a tour for half a year, with concerts almost every day. The manager says that he's not interested in one or two concerts—he wants to earn money, you can understand him. I think that you can give up to five concerts a month at the most. But not more—otherwise the fullness of this music dies, disappears . . . that we play. This music requires constant recharging of energy . . . When we were in America, which was quite a long time ago, we played seventeen concerts in twenty days. Almost every day was a performance. It was very hard. By the end it seemed that we didn't really know what we were doing. That's the way Americans are used to working. The ideal separation for us is forty minutes, and for them it's an hour. That's why we can say that American musicians often 'drag'—lengthen the pieces . . . We felt that these twenty minutes—weighed a lot . . .

D.I.: Maybe one of the reasons why you don't have a manager today is the impossibility of combining interests . . .

S.G.: No, not really. I simply did not somehow get in touch with the right person. The experiences I've had so far haven't inspired me very much.

D.I.: Turning again to the history of the Trio: how did you initially find Chekasin?

S.G.: Tarasov and I were in Sverdlovsk, performing there. Some acquaintances came up to us and said: there's a saxophonist here who's amazingly interesting: listen to him. We played—it was very easy.

D.I.: But you didn't have any big disagreements in the band, right?

S.G.: We communicated mostly only on business. We gathered in connection with this or that performance . . . For example, I had many orders for music for movies, theater productions, operas, ballets, musicals . . . Tarasov and Chekasin worked in orchestras.

D.I.: Were you not friends in life?

S.G.: Not much . . . We already had our families, we were rather busy. And mostly our meetings were related to the specific performances . . .

D.I.: It was you who were the generator of main musical ideas?

S.G.: The first main period—seven, eight years—all the titles and all the ideas of construction and composition were mine. And then one section was always prepared by me, and we tried to play the second section absolutely spontaneously. We already had the experience of free music . . . All the names of the compositions were also created by me.

M.K.: All the compositions on all the disks?

S.G.: Absolutely on all of them. Everything you know: Con Anima, Concerto Grosso, Con Fuoco—anything—all of it is my 'copyright'. We were playing music in its purest form, and we didn't want to be tied to a genre name. Then I thought: a neutral title is the best; to give some kind of definition of a state, like—Con Amore—with love, right? So—with love we play, right?

M.K.: I thought that you were parodying the designations of playing techniques that are accepted in philharmonic music? Like Allegro . . .

S.G.: *Poco-a-poco* . . . gradually. In Italian.

M.K.: In Italian, an indication of tempo, standing at the beginning of the score . . . Perhaps 'parodied' is an inaccurate way of putting it, but there may be a certain ironic tendency.

S.G.: No, actually no real irony. *Con fuoco*—with fire, *Poco-a-poco*—gradual development . . . Behind each title was an abstract description, some root of what we would play.

D.I.: The 'Heroic Period of the Ganelin Trio'—what is its chronological framework?

S.G.: With the arrival of Chekasin—from the 70s to the first half of the 80s—that is, until 1984. All these years we were together. In '86, at concerts in America, for example, it became clear that we had insurmountable differences and disagreements . . .

D.I.: Before that you had been concertizing exclusively . . .

S.G.: In Europe.

D.I.: Not only in Eastern Europe?

M.K.: There was West Berlin . . .

S.G.: Not only—there was England, Italy, Austria, France . . . the whole of Europe, except Albania.

D.I.: How could all this be happening?

S.G.: And everything was very simple . . . They found out about us, we performed at all Soviet festivals: Moscow, Leningrad, Novosibirsk. Baltic States, Dnepropetrovsk, Donetsk . . .

D.I.: But the first recognition came from where?

S.G.: From Moscow. Although various 'advanced' people knew about my work earlier. And in terms of 'collective'—when we performed in Moscow with Tarasov, at the festival . . . And for that performance we received all the prizes—both as 'performers-musicians' and for the composition. And then we were invited to Sverdlovsk. We went there for a concert, met Chekasin there—and so on. We performed wherever there was something jazzy going on . . . But, of course, not abroad, not yet. The first time we were released was in Poland. We came back, 'they' saw: aha, they're coming back—it's already good. Then they tried to let us go to Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany; then they decided to try Finland: there, if you run away, they will return you . . . Finally, they decided to take a risk—they let us into West Berlin—and then to other 'countries of the West'.

D.I.: Remembering the Soviet era, your performances, are you not nostalgic?

S.G.: No, everything has its time; though if new ideas for performances appear . . . then why not realize them?

D.I.: Regarding the addressee of your plays—who could it be according to your ideas at the time?

S.G.: Sometimes they talk about our 'complexity' . . . But there is no such thing as 'complex music' . . . Everything is built according to clear and consistent laws. You just have to know how to listen.

D.I.: It's a kind of constructor . . .

S.G.: . . . And without it, you can not. Otherwise everything will be shapeless . . .

D.I.: Have you encountered inadequate reactions from music critics? For example, it is semi-anecdotally known that Tchaikovsky received very few unambiguously laudatory, positive reviews during his lifetime, while Sofia Gubaidullina, on the contrary, received very few negative ones.

S.G.: It is foolish to completely ignore the reactions of critics. One has to understand what is behind this or that reaction . . . What it all means. I'm very afraid, for example, when people come up to me after a concert and say: Oh! How wonderful everything was . . . I know that the person speaking has completely OTHER musical interests, he couldn't have liked it as much as he says: he has a different aesthetic perception . . .

M.K.: But who is a 'good critic' for you, if it's not a secret?

S.G.: For me the best critic is Julia, my wife. She always assesses everything absolutely correctly. Even though she is not a professional and she is not a musician . . . But she sees and feels everything correctly. And she is an open and fair critic . . .

D.I.: Which music critics could you mention?

S.G.: Look, this is such a very subtle point. I read them little . . . But from private conversations with them, I realize that they are quite knowledgeable critics . . . Mitropolsky, for example, is also quite a subtle and interesting critic.

D.I.: And Efim Barban is probably close to you too?

S.G.: Yes, of course.

D.I.: But can you say that you are a little disappointed with the music critics?

S.G.: I would say that I've never been fascinated by them.

D.I.: Regarding intercontextual combinations of different branches of art—here, Tarasov has an album with Dmitry Prigov, as well as Sergei Letov (who also collaborated with a lot of other interesting Russian avant-garde poets like Ry Nikonova or Sergei Biryukov) . . . Were you not attracted to such convergences and substitutions?

S.G.: I have performed and still perform with ballet—for example, with Anastasia Lyra (Greece), with Erika Tsimbrovskaya and her husband, the artist Vadim Puendayev, and also with the performance artist Alex Kremer. I am currently working in two ethnic music-oriented duos: with singer Esti Ofri Kenan and with Gershon Weisserfirer, an oud player. I think you were at one of these concerts?

D.I.: Yes, and I was very impressed! A very unconventional convergence in terms of color and energy: oriental, very traditional oud and radical, metaphysical jazz embracing experimental multi-instrument articulation. At the same time, everything worked in a highly seductive way . . .

S.G.: I also play in a duo with violinist Moti Schmidt. It's a very different kind of music. It's spontaneous improvisation in the style of modern classical music and no jazz . . .

. . . I'm not afraid to play for any audience. Children or old people. The main thing is to be frank and truthful in the music you perform.

D.I.: Are there, however, any particular places where you enjoy performing, where the audience usually responds well?

S.G.: In the sense of the way we play? No, I can't single out such places. It all depends on whether you can draw people into your act or not. That's the only point . . .

M.K.: As a kind of act of communication with others . . .

S.G.: Yes . . . There was a time when I did programs on Israeli national radio with Danni Karpel. It's a pity, they slowed down somehow . . . This jazz program of his stopped, or . . . Now it seems to have resumed again. My column was called 'In Ganelin's Laboratory'. In principle, I felt very good there. I could go on like that all the time, I liked it. It's possible not to perform at all. It's not about money. It's about being heard. Radio is perfect for that. At least 2000 people can hear you on the air. That's very important for a musician.

D.I.: It's a pity that your classic Trio has never performed here . . .

S.G.: No, the Trio has not. We haven't performed in Israel. I played with Vishniauskas and Gotesman . . . Chekasin was with Chizhik. Tarasov came—with the artist Kabakov.

D.I.: But in general—you've had a lot of "reunions" lately . . .

S.G.: Not so much—only three or four.

D.I.: And is the energy like the previous one—or have there been unexpected failures . . .?

S.G.: No, it's very good. Normal . . . We are professionals, all of us were and are engaged in music, instantly understand each other's language. Why did the well-known disagreements appear and "manifest" in due time? I would say that everyone started to think about solo—about themselves as a "star". And, you know, that's the worst thing that can happen to a collective. To any . . .

D.I.: And in the title itself, how was this problem solved . . . You did not try to solve it by giving a separate initial letter to each of the participants?

S.G.: No, I didn't do that! It was always 'Ganelin Trio'. And G.T.Ch.—is an invention of Yefim Barban. I didn't agree with it even then. Why, say, 'G.T.Ch.'—and not 'G.Ch.T.', or 'Ch.G.T.'; and even more interestingly, 'T.G.Ch.', or 'T.Ch.G.'. . . (Figure 9) What's the point of all these games of equivocation?! And in general, this then passion for abbreviations—'MTS' there, or 'KGB'—causes only a sad smile today . . . Without belittling the merits of each of my colleagues, I see in all this a distortion of the true history of this trio . . . especially after I left for Israel. This was reflected both in the reissue of Melodiya records on CD—compositions authored by all of us—and in some later articles and interviews . . .

The tension was only heightened by this. Paradoxically . . . (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Ganelin, Tarasov, Chekasin Jazz Trio.

M.K.: Your technical multi-instrumentalism, your mastery of additional instruments and their incorporation into the jazz texture, into your performances—wasn't it, in a way, caused by a desire to avoid problems with potential partners, becoming—in the full sense—physically independent of them?

S.G.: No, I mean, that's what I did from the beginning, right? And I wouldn't call it 'multi-instrumentalism' . . . We all owned basic instruments, we just wanted to expand our sound palette. I never played guitar, and never knew how to—and yet, I 'used' the guitar more than once. And now—at one of the performances I

played guitar—with a bow . . . After all, if you need a string quartet piece—you wouldn't ask the quartet to sit for two hours to join for five minutes, would you? You have to do it yourself—what can you do . . . Especially in this case it's more of a sonorous sound rather than a specific piece of music, and you know yourself when and how to play what you want . . . And now sampler, acoustically accurate sound has also come to help . . .

M.K.: And when you started to master computers—applications to instruments, synthesizers and so on—did you see the possibility of achieving complete solo freedom—to play everything you want to play by yourself? Your solo performances were completely self-sufficient and beautiful in that capacity.

S.G.: Of course, that's what I strive for. But the computer . . . For me the computer is a tape, I don't retouch anything. I create a sample for myself. I don't play like a pianist or a keyboard player. I am my own arranger, author and performer. It's total improvisation. In a way, it's almost perfect to play alone. If I had, like Shiva, ten more hands—I would be glad. For I KNOW WHAT more could be added! What counterpoint lines could be established.

D.I.: You could say that Ganelin's 'pre-computer period' and post-computer period are not different musical and thought structures. The computer didn't turn your work upside down, did it?

S.G.: No, of course not. Something was made 'easier' to achieve, more 'clear' and adequate . . . It, the computer, has given me additional possibilities.

M.K.: It may be noted, however, that collectively you have always preferred to work in a trio format. People changed, but the format remained the same . . .

S.G.: Yes, in Israel I played in a trio with Fonarev and Markovich for quite a long time, we released several critically acclaimed disks. The last time I was in Moscow I was with a different line-up—Višniauskas, saxophonist, and Kugel, percussionist from Germany.

M.K.: Does working in a band mean something special to you? You play wonderfully on your own . . .

S.G.: If you have a colleague who not only follows you, but is able to offer something, some way . . . He understands everything, sees everything clearly and offers his own options and solutions . . . Jazz music is always, above all, a dialog. Dialogical thinking must be extrapolated to the sound palette, to its technical basis. Such a colleague, capable of all this, is, by and large . . .

D.I.: Has there ever been such a colleague in your creative practice?

S.G.: In principle, all of them—to a greater or lesser extent; everyone I've played with for a relatively long time.

D.I.: But your historical collective is an untranslatable, unprecedented entity. A crossing of different vectors, absolutely unique, as you can see today . . .

S.G.: I don't know, I don't know . . . I guess so. It's hard for me to say. Any team is defined by the people who make it up. I'm playing with Višniauskas and Kugel at the moment—the music I play is very expressive and interesting to me.

D.I.: With the same percentage of innovation?

S.G.: How could it be? Absolutely. There's no point in working without it. One of the best options for me right now is to play with Esti Kennan. And also with Gershon Weisserfirer (oud, percussion, baritone).

D.I.: Yes, it was a very strong album with Esti. I think it's a one-off?

S.G.: No, there is a disk on 'Leo Records' and an Israeli disk, this last one—it wasn't very well recorded . . . But it's more interesting to play with her, it's fresher . . .—her voice, her sense of proportion. Leo's CD is our concert in Jerusalem. People come up and say: Oh! How much you've rehearsed! What do you say to them? They won't believe it, it's useless to explain. And it was a completely spontaneous performance . . .

S.G.: Lately it has become absolutely uninteresting for me to prepare something in advance; I prefer improvisation in its purest form . . . In all its positions—origin of material, creation, feeling of orchestration . . . Realization of music in its purest form—unprepared music. Without stocked 'sandwiches' and some kind of reserve 'lair'. This is, of course, a risk—and always. It is important to realize that your music is absolutely alive. And there is nothing absolute and perfect.

D.I.: Are there also some disappointments?

S.G.: Of course. This is the kind of music that can't be sterilely 'calculated'—that's why there are some moments when you see that there is a slip . . . You hit a note there, or here a phrase didn't come out quite right . . . It happens. But there's a certain beauty in it, too. There's a kind of creative dirt. Sterility is dangerous.

D.I.: Could you perhaps tell us, which of the Western musicians of the last generations have you been interested in?

S.G.: I like very much—Trio 'Arcado': Mark Feldman on violin, Henk Roberts—cello, Mark Dresser on bass . . . This is, in my opinion, an example of a unique ensemble, of improvisation . . . There is no standard . . .

D.I.: Are you interested in minimalism?

S.G.: Minimalism is quickly exhausted . . . Although it is interesting in its own way . . .

D.I.: Are there any individual names, musical characters with whom you would like to arrange some kind of collaboration in the future?

S.G.: I never set such tasks. I like complete spontaneity in everything. And in this respect, too. I also see that when I plan something, it doesn't work out so well afterwards. I've noticed this pattern . . . Everything is an accident. How I wrote an opera for Pokrovsky, or how I got to Mosfilm—everything happened ABSOLUTELY by chance, without any thoughtful calculations on my part.

Interview with Sergei F. Letov, a Moscow conceptualist from the saxophone tribe (2002) (Figure 11).

Our next interview (taken in 2002) concerning the evolution of Russian free-jazz takes us to an exploration of the oeuvre of Sergey Letov, a figure of paramount importance within the Russian and broader international avant-garde jazz. Sergey Fëdorovich Letov (1956, Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan) stands as a distinguished conceptual musician, saxophonist, and flutist, whose contributions to the development of jazz are as multifaceted as they are profound. He is notably the brother of the influential punk musician Yegor Letov, the pioneering force behind the iconic punk-rock ensemble "Civil Defense" (*Grazhdanskaia Oborona*), a connection that underscores the breadth of the Letov family's impact on Soviet and post-Soviet musical landscapes. Sergey Letov's artistic trajectory is marked by a versatile engagement with an expansive array of musical genres and stylistic paradigms, ranging from the realms of traditional jazz to the more esoteric territories of experimental sound art. His sonic lexicon is distinguished by a distinctive approach that seamlessly

integrates the spontaneity of improvisation with the rigor of structured composition. This synthesis is further enriched by his adept utilization of a diverse array of wind instruments, each chosen for its unique timbral properties and expressive potential. Letov's performative style is characterized by a technical virtuosity that is matched only by the emotive depth and expressive dynamism of his performances, rendering each of his musical articulations a profoundly affecting experience for the listener.



Figure 11. Sergei Letov.

Central to Letov's, so to say, *sonic philosophy* is his exceptional multidimensional ability to amalgamate disparate musical elements—often originating from radically different aesthetic traditions—into cohesive yet unpredictable compositional frameworks. This is particularly evident in his prolific use of free improvisation, a practice that not only allows for the creation of novel and unforeseen sonic landscapes in each performance but also positions Letov's work at the vanguard of contemporary jazz practice. His musical projects frequently transcend the conventional boundaries of jazz, incorporating elements of avant-garde, ethnic music, and other non-traditional genres. This genre-fluidity not only expands the definitional parameters of jazz, but also aligns Letov with a global cohort of musicians who, like him, seek to deconstruct and reimagine the possibilities of sound. The aesthetic underpinnings of Letov's music are deeply rooted in an ethos of relentless experimentation and an unceasing quest for new sonic forms. His refusal to remain confined within the orthodoxies of musical tradition allows him to produce works that challenge normative listening practices, compelling the audience to engage with music as a medium of intellectual and emotional transformation. In this way, Letov's compositions are not merely musical events, but are instead conceived as complex, multi-layered experiences that defy easy categorization and comparison.

Sergey Letov's contributions to both Russian and global music culture are of profound significance, and his ongoing influence ensures his continued prominence as a key figure within the Russian jazz avant-garde. His work, replete with innovation and a fearless embrace of the unconventional, stands as a testament to the transformative potential of music when approached as an ever-evolving art form.

The interview took place in 2002, and the questions, as in the other interviews, were posed by Dennis Ioffe and Mikhail Klebanov.

> "...Conceptualism, after all, is not theater. Conceptualism is not really art ... It is an 'art' that does not use an aesthetic construct as a material, but some kind of 'Nous', abstract-logical predicates ... The aesthetic must carry in itself some material hypostasis. Say—'sound', movement, color, light, syllable, something that unconsciously knows how to resist ideology ... Conceptualism, therefore, is less an art, it's more something psychical, or even an ideology ...". Sergey Letov.

D.I.: Starting our conversation about music, this will be your first meeting with Vyacheslav Ganelin in many years ...

S.L.: Yes, I have not seen him for a long time.

D.I.: More than ten years?

S.L.: No, he came to Moscow, in Vilnius we played in one concert at the Jazz Festival ... Then, we communicated in Switzerland, somewhere else ... The last thing I have with him is that I made a program about him on TVC. The program 'Day by Day'.

D.I.: Do you have your own music program there?

S.L.: It's a cultural news program. Commemorative dates, etc. Ganelin was, I think, sixty years old at that moment. It is noteworthy that he was born on the same day as Beethoven. And the TVC channel wanted to mention him. They first approached Arkady Shilkloper, and he recommended me. I went to them. And the host of the program asked me, in a nutshell, to tell them (during make-up) about who this Ganelin was. I told him that Vyacheslav is a musician, who went to Israel in the mid-80s. He told me, yes. Then he revived: 'Are you a musician yourself? You are a jazz musician, right? So let's talk about you on the air. Why not ... Let's not talk about Ganelin. Let's talk about you. You're a musician in your own right ...'... But I strongly protested ... No, I said, we need to talk about Ganelin ... And the host asks, "How do you know him? How do you know him? You must be his classmates! I answer—no, I'm at least fifteen years younger than him.

This ignorance astonished me a little at the time. It was last year, in December.

D.I.: So, the letter combination 'GTCH' to a modern TV journalist and did not say anything ...

S. L. Well, TV journalists are special people... When Ganelin played in Moscow for the first time after his historic departure—it was about four years ago ... A lot of people gathered. Chekasin was present. He even came on stage and tried to pull the blanket over himself as always. I heard they (GTCh) had just celebrated a kind of 'reunion' in Frankfurt ...

D. I. Yes, it was announced by Leo Feigin ... The presence of the Lithuanian president was expected there.

S. L. Slava was born in the Moscow region—in Kraskovo, where I lived for some twenty years.

S. L. I try to remember which places I have visited not just with the theater . . . Finland last year . . . and before that . . . The last time it was TRIO's trip to Germany in '99. The Germans decided to organize a very pompous 'Last Jazz Event of the Millennium'. Very German. They also invited Mel Waldron and Gene Lee. From America. And there was the curious Blixa Bargeld from Einstürzende Neubauten, you know . . . With Blixa, we did a show together. The thing is, there's this Grace Yoon, Korean, born in New York. She lives in Munich now and she does a regular jazz program on Cologne radio. And once every three months, or not—once every six months, she organizes very curious big projects. As a rule, she invites famous singers to join her. At one time she invited Sainkho. I recommended Valentina Ponomareva to her. And she decided: it would be good to join Valentina Ponomareva and TriO. However, for some organizational reasons it was not possible to bring Ponomareva. . . And she decided to go for the tried and tested option—to invite Jin Lee. And with her—Mel Waldron, especially since he lives in Munich, as does Grace. Jean Lee died a year after that concert. This is probably one of her last recordings.

D.I.: So it's the theaters that you're working most closely with now, isn't it? It is theaters that inspire you . . .

S.L.: Not that 'inspire'. . . Now it's not about inspiration. Now it's about survival. I wish I could survive. The situation is really very difficult. In Moscow, the fees for club concerts have fallen very sharply. A lot of people have come from everywhere, who are ready to work for some ridiculous money . . . In the last two or three years . . . But, in the last year—there is some unprecedented decline . . .

From the new and 'non-theatrical', I work with Ivan Sokolovsky. It's also 'Yat-Ha'. An electronic project. For the first time to work with plywood in our country . . . The band 'Nochnoy Prospect'.

What we started to collaborate with Alexey Borisov about five years ago. It all came out of Ivan Sokolovsky. He was the one who invited me to take part in his concert with Andrei Suchilin. And Borisov was the organizer of the concert, we tried it a bit later—'New Russian Alternative', projects commissioned by the Goethe Institute—'Skladanowski Brothers', 'Kafka's Dreams', music for Friedrich Murnau's film 'Faust. A Folk Legend.' Vanya Sokolovsky had me record several times in his project 'Soft Beasts', if you know such a thing . . .

D.I.: You have a lot of other collaborations. For example, this album 'Was there Lenin in Lviv'—with Yaremchuk. Whose idea was it to play the title like that?

S.L.: There was Lenin in Lviv.

D.I.: ?

C. L. It was the only city in the country where Lenin was, but there is no memorial plaque. Why? The fact is that, at that time he was interned in Poronin . . . Lviv, it was then, as you know, Poland—Austria-Hungary . . .

D.I.: Lemberg . . .

S. L. Yes, Lemberg. He was interned as a Russian citizen in Poronin. And they say . . . Local psychiatrists and local historians told me . . . What was this town famous in Austria-Hungary? For Poland at that time, it was the 'city of fun'. There were two important cities in Eastern Europe—Lemberg and Odessa. Lemberg was the main place specializing in the treatment of syphilis and other venereal diseases.

D.I.: Isn't it a legend that Ilyich was treated for syphilis?

S.L.: He secretly came to Lviv . . . Local old-timers showed me various curious places . . . By the way, they showed me one of the oldest synagogues in Europe—in Lviv, of which now only the floor is preserved. It was blown up in forty-third year by Germans. It has not been restored. Fourteenth century.

D.I.: So he was actually treated for syphilis?

S.L.: The old-timers say . . . Lenin was practically everywhere in the country. Where he was, there should always be his memorial plaque. And here . . . A lacuna!

D. I. Sort of . . .

S.L.: Yes. There Lenin visited. BUT his plaque is absent. For quite remarkable reasons. We were in that cafe where Lenin was in Zurich . . . But it's no longer a place where revolutionaries gather. Nowadays, a somewhat different contingent has settled there. Mostly gays.

D.I.: So, "Was Lenin in Lvov" is a partly provocative, rhetorical question.

S.L.: For Lvovians? Oh, they know everything, it's a well-known fact for them. But not much has been said aloud about it.

D.I.: And the very place where this Lviv disk was recorded is also rather curious. In the photo one can see a castle-like, almost Mediterranean marvelous structure.

S.L.: Yes, of course. Historically it was like this: In the seventeenth century there was a Greek merchant who moved to Lemberg from Florence. And he gave orders to build him a building that would resurrect the image of his native Florence. That's why Italian architects built him a Florentine courtyard, a picture of which can be seen in the booklet of the disk.

D.I.: Fountain.

S.L.: Yes, and also galleries—all around the perimeter. Very stylish and beautiful. Three stories. Several Polish kings were born in this building where we played.

D.I.: And what about the acoustics?

S.L.: Everything was excellent. We played in the courtyard, and all the spectators were placed on the perimeter on three floors. The first time I played there with the Russian-Ukrainian Project it was raining very hard, which is often the case on this side of the world. We played under an awning, in an archway. And when we (for the second time) played with TRIO the concert 'Was Lenin in Lvov', the local organizers decided to invite a Carpathian sorcerer.

D.I.: To disperse the clouds?

S.L.: Yes, he had to talk rain. And we came. We see—a gloomy sky, something is dripping all the time. The next morning—a terrible downpour. The worst. Forty minutes before the concert, everything changes radically. A blue sky appears from somewhere. The concert takes place. Exactly fifteen minutes after the end of the concert, leaden clouds reappear and it rains again. We go down to the bar.

The owner of the restaurant offers to raise a shot to the man who ensured the weather at the concert. This man appears—with a long mustache. Such a Hutsul, huge in stature . . .

D.I.: In his eyes you managed to notice something extraordinary?

S.L.: Yes, I immediately realized that this is not a profanation. The organizer called the man specially, he was paid, I think, without that . . . That's why I called the final piece in the album that we recorded at that time—'Rain Prayer'.

D.I.: It's hard not to notice the strong oriental odor in your collaboration with Parfenov called 'Secret Doctrine'. What does oriental music mean to you?

S.L.: The thing is that I was born in Kazakhstan. And I lived there until I was three years old. So, on a subconscious level I am attracted to Islamic music, and also to Armenian music. I don't know why Armenian . . . I'm even invited sometimes by Armenians to play . . .

D.I.: What would you say about your attitude towards Jivan Gasparian? Do you like his way of music-making?

S.L.: I am not such an expert in duduk and Armenian traditional music that I can say something meaningful about Gasparian. I've been listening to him for more than 15 years, both in concerts and on records. In general, I started to listen to the duduk as early as in Vache Hovsepyan's recordings (50s). Now among Armenian musicians I am most interested in Hrant Hayrapetyan, who lives in Moscow. I always go to his concerts when I can. Hrant has already noticed it and comes to me for a chat after the performance. I like the fact that Hrant plays very unevenly—speeding up and slowing down, his music (very traditional, of course) seems to break out of the limits of European notation, modern traditional notation in general. A musician who deserves MORE recognition. Parfenov once said to me: 'You play Azerbaijani pieces, but your melismatic are more Kazakh or Kyrgyz'. There is a certain contradiction here. Melismatic relate to forschlags, trills, mordents . . . And he says that my forshlags, trills, and mordents are all diatonic—that is, the way Eastern Turks play. And it's natural for me—for Kazakhstan. In my childhood, the place where I lived—Semipalatinsk—was the topos of the strongest Chinese influence.

D.I.: It almost sounds like 'inner Mongolia'.

S.L.: Perhaps . . . But when I was a child, my children's books, in Russian, of course, were printed in China. And many fairy tales were Chinese. And the point is that China was closer than Moscow. To take from Moscow to Semipalatinsk . . . Cheaper, purely economically. Xinjiang Uyghur region. Before Khrushchev quarreled with Mao, there were a lot of Uighurs, Dungans, living in Kazakhstan. I had a lot of Chinese books as a child. Mostly Chinese fairy tales in Russian. Chinese utensils . . .

D.I.: Say, and here are different instruments, I know that you bring from all your wanderings around the world various ethnic musical instruments. Is this jaw harp 'kubyz'—a tooth tambourine—easy for you to muse on? (Figures 12 and 13) The earliest known depiction of someone playing what appears to be a jaw harp is a Chinese drawing from the 3rd century BCE, but there are many later depictions too.

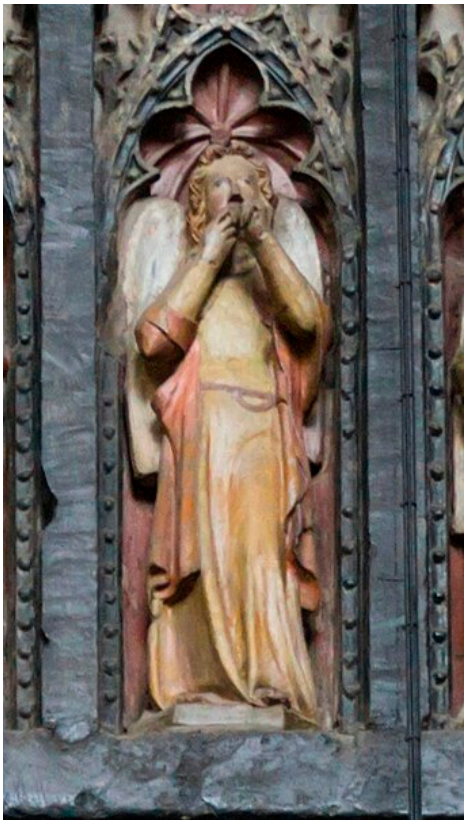


Figure 12. Angel playing a jaw harp at the Minstrels' Gallery at Exeter Cathedral, 14th Century.



Figure 13. Young Man with jaw harp painted by Dirck van Baburen (1621).

> S.L.: No, not on this one. I don't play it actually. As a matter of fact, I rarely play oriental instruments at all, especially at concerts. I mean, I play sometimes, but I know that I do it unprofessionally . . . I usually use ethnic wind instruments

in theater. I had a 'purely' oriental project once in my life. In the city of Rome. I played in an international project a performance in 'La Morte del Principe Immortale'. In '92–93. Together with one very curious character, Reza Keradman. This is such a Persian actor. Reza was named Reza (and he is an Iranian nobleman) in honor of the Shah. Perhaps the Shah of Iran is some relative of his . . . And so Reza decided to put on a small play dedicated to the Shah-name. Specifically, the fight between Rustam and Esfandyar. As you know, Esfandyar was killed by an arrow with a split tip, caught in his pupils. The myth of Esfandyar is reminiscent of the similar myth of Achilles. Of his uncrowned heel. Achilles was held by his tendon and dipped in the divine liquid. When the infant Isfandyar was similarly dipped in fire, he clamped his eyes shut and the pupils of his eyes remained fundamentally vulnerable to the arrows of the enemy. Rustam, being his father, knew about it and thus was able to kill him . . . Based on this story, our little play was created, where Reza Keradman played the drum and sang in Farsi and Italian. I have accompanied. An English choreographer choreographed the stage dance. And one Italian dancer danced. It was an international project. It was mostly a success with Iranian immigrants. And there are many Persians in Rome. It's a good climate for them to be there. And for them I was positioned not as a native of Kazakhstan, but from Tajikistan, so that it was more pleasant for them. And some Persians tried to talk to me. In Farsi. But without much success, I must say. And before that, at the Center for Experimental Theater in Rome, I played for two years in the play 'Alceste' by Euripides. And Reza played Hercules there. That's where we met. And then I played in a very iconic Roman venue, the Teatro in Trastevere. 'Trastevere' is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Rome. The streets that are named in a certain way now there, they were exactly the same name in, say, Pliny's time . . . This is probably the only place in Europe where the name of the city streets has not been modified by the authorities for such a long time, but has been kept intact. Second to third century B.C. In 'Trastevere', at the end of the nineteenth century still spoke a specific, historical Roman dialect. And now it no longer has any speakers. Trastevere is a curious place. I've met people in the beer halls there who say: "Imagine, but I've never been across the river . . ."

D.I.: Never been beyond the Zarechnaya Street . . .

S.L.: Do you know what kind of river it is?

D.I.: The Tiber, apparently.

S.L.: Quite right. "I've never crossed the Tiber". And when I asked him in the beer hall, why, in fact. He answered me: "Why? There's nothing interesting there. And here I have all my friends, here I was born and grew up . . . Why go there, what do I do there? And here—all my company . . .".

There are a lot of theaters in Rome . . . There are very small theaters—for twenty people . . . There are underground Roman theaters in large city squares . . .

D.I.: If you compare Moscow and Rome, which city, in your opinion, is livelier, where the life of the arts booms more vividly?

S.L.: For me, these two cities are very similar. But Moscow, still, perhaps, will be livelier.

D.I.: More alive in some sense?

S.L.: The thing is that Italy has a few sad things. For example, it is terribly decentralized. So is Germany . . . If, say, Moscow-Russia—the logical analogy is France, where there is practically nothing outside Paris . . . In Germany or

Italy, every city has any items for any need . . . Also in Italy there is a significant city—Milan . . . Rome in Italy is not such a cultural capital. In a cultural sense, the capital is more like Milan. And in Rome they don't play New Jazz, there are no poetry clubs there . . . But Moscow is the capital in every sense. Especially now.

D.I.: Sergei, I know you have always been unusually tightly embedded in Moscow cultural life . . .

S.L.: Yes, but also in Leningrad too—in the eighties . . .

D.I.: Was there a certain creative life in St. Petersburg in those years, which could be compared, say, with Moscow conceptualism?

S.L.: Yes, it was. And how. I even tried to transfer some of my work from St. Petersburg to Moscow. The thing is that in the early eighties there was a single circle in St. Petersburg. All the 'people' communicated with each other and became friends. There was Gorokhovsky—he was involved in theater, there was, of course, Dragomoshchenko, Stratanovsky, the musical philosopher Efim Semionovich Barban . . . Kuriokhin, Grebenshchikov, Dragomoshchenko . . . They had seats. On Pyotr Lavrov, on Chernyshevsky . . . All this was, of course, with the knowledge of the KGB. Undercover. The KGB would give them places to gather, who-who-who, of course, quietly knocked . . .

M.K.: Like in a rock club . . .

S.L.: Yes, exactly. Everyone was under control. In Moscow in the 80s, just like now—artists and poets were disconnected, there were a lot of non-overlapping groupings. And I was thinking how to make such a 'friendship' in Moscow, so that poets and artists and musicians would socialize together . . .

D.I.: Well, the circle of conceptualists is quite an interdisciplinary circle, and it's almost perfect for that, isn't it?

S.L.: It turned out not quite. The circle of conceptualists was very closed and self-isolated. The Poetry Center seemed to me to be the prototype of such a model.

D.I.: And how did it all touch with the circle of Kabakov, Monastyrsky and others?

S.L.: I was, in fact, the only one who went there.

D.I.: They were the only ones who received you. They are very restrictive, "closed" personalities . . .

S. L. Yes, of course they are. I was friends with Monastyrsky, mostly. I participated in Collective Actions performances.

D.I.: Walked around, so to speak, out of town . . .

S.L.: Yes. And besides that, I participated, as you know, in the TOTART group—Abalakova and Zhigalov . . . I introduced them to the Aleynikov brothers, big fans of free-jazz, and they later began to document TOTART performances on film. And this is important. It was all in the eighty-fourth to eighty-fifth year, approximately . . .

D.I.: About the discussions in the 'light/color' thread in different conceptualist contexts . . . You took part there as a musician?

S.L.: Yes, but not only. I tried to theorize too, and my piques with Kabakov later became part of the codex of Trips Out of Town. Arguments with Kabakov

in ‘85 about Collective Actions . . . And the first ‘volumes’ of Collective Actions included my specially written texts . . . In general, there were ‘senior conceptualists’ and ‘junior comrades’. There were usually two younger comrades: Yura Leiderman and me. Mukhomory also came—peers in age, but somewhat more so to say venerable than us . . . This is how we were developing. . .

D.I.: *Du côté de chez Swann* . . .

S.L.: The members of the group—Gundlach, The Mironenko brothers, Kostia Zvezdochetov.

D.I.: And they all had some kind of support from Monastyrsky?

S.L.: Yes, he was a kind of an informal ‘shadow’ leader of this movement, at least from my point of view. Everything was divided into poles of alienating influence: Kabakov versus Monastyrsky.

D.I.: Antikabakovsky.

S.L.: Well, yes, a pseudonym. And I’m a follower of Collective Actions. And it was always at Monastyrsky’s apartment that we gathered.

D.I.: Did you perform there, did you come with an instrument?

S.L.: Sometimes, but very infrequently.

D.I.: And how did they all react to your music? I had a strong impression that many of these people, the mass of them—‘artists and poets’, are completely frozen in terms of musical receptive culture. . . Is that not true?

S.L.: Yes, music was practically non-existent in their lives. I did a performance there, but not with music. Conceptualism is not theater. Conceptualism, it’s not really art . . . It’s an ‘art’ that doesn’t use an aesthetic construct as a material, but some kind of ‘Nous’, abstract-logical predicates . . . The aesthetic must carry in itself some material hypostasis. Say—‘sound’, movement, color, light, syllable, something that unconsciously knows how to resist ideology . . . Conceptualism, therefore, is less art, it’s more something only mental, an ideology . . . We gathered in Andrei Monastyrsky’s two-room apartment. Prigov, Rubinstein, Sorokin, Panitkov, Kabakov, Romashko were there.

D.I.: Nekrasov also visited?

S.L.: He came, but rarely. He was actually terribly afraid of provocations. Once Monastyrsky read some text of his that he was somewhere carrying a stick with a banner in defense of some of the repressed human rights activists . . . Seva, hearing this, stood up abruptly and said: Excuse me, I have to go! And left the room . . . But Prigov always came with a plump, chubby briefcase. And Monastyrsky always sent me as a ‘junior comrade’ to see if there was a briefcase in the corridor, for if it (the briefcase) was there, it meant that everyone would have to listen to Dmitry Alexandrovich again, who in those days took socialist obligations to produce an ever-increasing number of poems by some date. Everyone came to a certain dejection: So, again he will read. When he was not in time for a jubilee date, he gave everyone ‘coffins of rejected poems’, numbered—to go to the total score. But there was also the opposite pole. They were Abalakova and Zhigalov. They were not friends with Monastyrsky. They had their own kitchen. They lived somewhere opposite the movie theater ‘Avangard’.

D.I.: And you have collaborated also with Ry Nikonova, right?

S.L.: Yes, but it was from Monastyrsky that I learned about Ry. And I was absolutely delighted. And when I met Ry, and I met her at Natasha Komarova's club 'Screen' . . .

D.I.: Anna Alexandrova Tarshis had already arrived in Moscow, so it must be . . .

S.L.: Yes, she had already come to live, and we met . . . And after two words we immediately decided to do a performance together.

D.I.: Ry was of your approximate age, yes?

S.L.: No, she's a little older . . . They are all older than me. Of the first wave of conceptualists, only Anufriev and Leiderman are younger than me.

D.I.: And where did you perform with Nikonova?

S.L.: There was such a project 'Crimean Club', poetry club—in the cultural center 'Phoenix'. We made a performance 'Ten Johns', dedicated to the beheading of John the Baptist. On sheets of paper, holes were cut in them, and heads were placed in them, as on a platter. Ry, however, doubted whether it would not look like Major Pronin's head coming out of a toilet bowl, or out of a hole in a latrine . . .

D.I.: While Sergey Segay was not present?

S.L.: No, he was not. And with her we performed several times later at the Vadim Sidur Museum. I was a bit complex, because Ry said: here, in this place I need to really hit you in the face with my fist, please take off your glasses. It's part of the performance. And I'll hit you also on your back . . . And it's not easy for me, I work in the theater, it's awkward to go out with a lantern under the ramp afterwards . . . But I've seen how successfully Ry worked with an audience of a thousand people . . .

D.I.: Who was able to organize such a thing?

S. L. It was in Kiev. In the former Lenin Museum on Khreshchatyk. There was a festival. It was organized by Alexander Nesterov. Sasha Nesterov argued the necessity of such a festival in front of sponsors and authorities that Ukraine is an independent state and it should have its own independent avant-garde. They appealed to the first president—Kravchuk, saying that we need our own avant-garde . . . our own action. And some firm agreed to sponsor it.

D.I.: How Anna Nikonova-Tarshis held up in front of so many spectators?

S. L. She really turned people on! At first, some guys tried—was shouting to her: Well, you, aunt, well what is it, dick came? . . . But she came out in some red-green armbands of her own. She was doing some meaningful poses. Full-blown visual poetry. And then she ordered one, another, a third: "Come on, you, guy, from the hall, don't be shy, come here, stand here—you'll be the letter Y, and you—the letter O, do like this . . . and you—the letter R, stand over there . . .".

D.I.: And did they obey her?

S.L.: These hooligans specifically applauded, admired: well, chë, Vityukha, you'll be the damn letter O, yes, fricking great! It made a strong impression . . . The whole hall gave her a standing ovation!

D.I.: True art will always find its way . . .

D.I.: And. you know, the week before you, the St. Petersburg musicians from the *VolkovTrio* performed here.

S. L. My attitude towards these wonderful St. Petersburgers is very positive. High-level musicians and very well played, which is important. In general, they are the ensemble that our music has lacked for many years. But here is no discussion presently about collaboration as such 'In Trio' yet. I was offered by the organizers of one festival to perform with them, but I should say I refused. It's completely different music, and I'm not too comfortable with it . . . We sympathize with each other purely on a human and musical level. Volkov liked the drum I played with, and he played it at the soundcheck. As a result, I used the sound sequence he was playing at the concert. That's how we live . . .

D.I.: Thank you dear Sergei for this fascinating conversation.

Piotr Mamonov (Figure 14): An invitation to musical and religious action (1999).

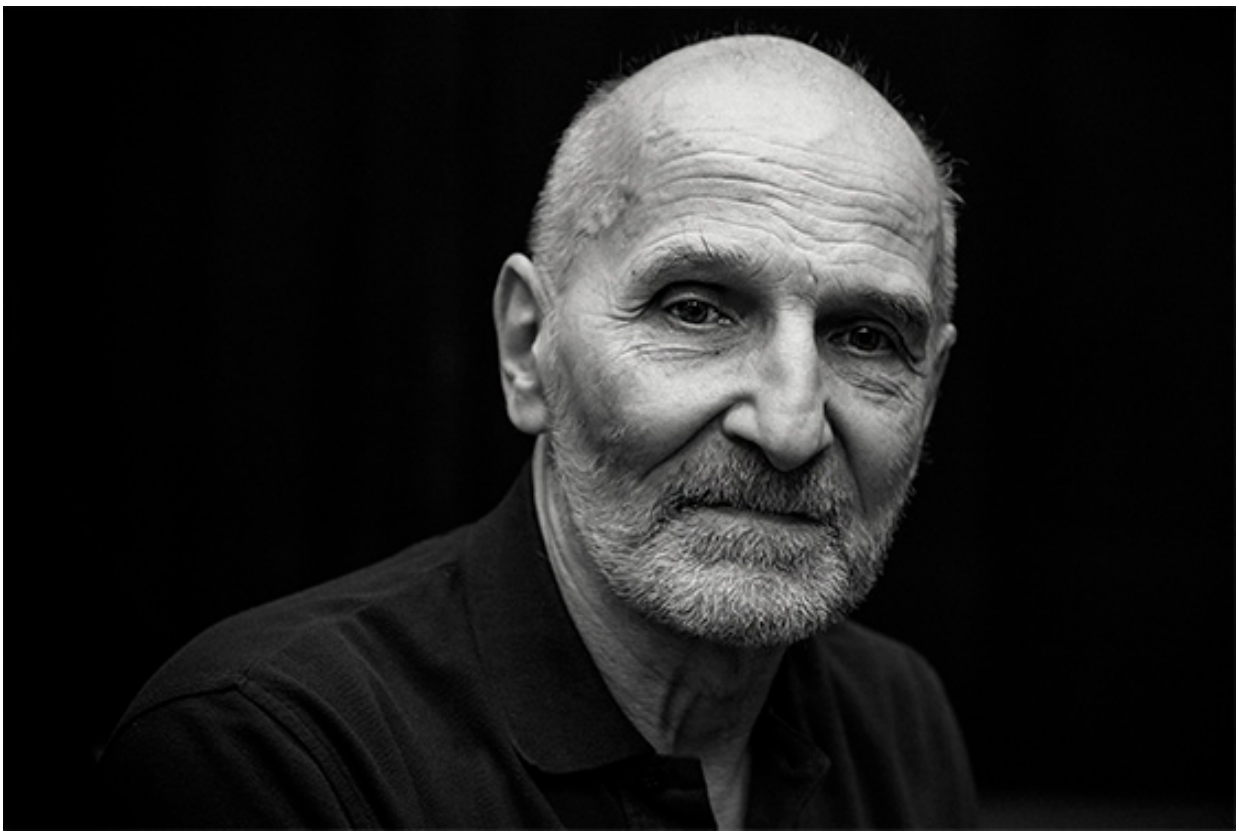


Figure 14. Petr Mamonov.

Our ongoing discussion regarding Russian and international experimental music, as well as the liminal genres of performative expression, is furthered by a discursive intervention into the provocative art of Piotr N. Mamonov (the interview was taken in 1999).

Piotr Nikolaevich Mamonov emerges as a true luminary—arguably one of the most contentious and enigmatic figures within the constellation of Russian performative culture at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. His mighty creative endeavors transcend conventional categorizations, encompassing roles as a musician, actor, poet, and spiritual orator. Mamonov initially garnered widespread recognition as the frontman and *vocal architect* of Sounds of Moo (*Zvuki Mu*), an ensemble inaugurated in the early 1980s. This musical collective was distinguished by its sonically eclectic amalgamation of punk, rock, and avant-garde idioms, wherein the music's eccentric lyrical content and unorthodox compositional methodologies established it as a sui generis phenomenon within the broader

Soviet and Russian musical landscape. Notably, the acclaimed British avant-gardist and sonic innovator Brian Eno acknowledged both the band and Mamonov himself as paragons of experimental artistry. Mamonov's live performances were marked by their theatricality and provocation, wherein his stage presence often blurred the boundaries between concert and theatrical spectacle, manifesting in a series of vivid and occasionally disconcerting personae. This performative audacity rendered his concerts memorable in a way that set them apart from the more conventional acts of his contemporaries.

Mamonov's cinematic trajectory was intimately linked with the director Pavel Lungin. Beyond his celebrated role in the film Taxi Blues (1990), Mamonov's portrayal in the film Island (2006)—wherein he embodied a monk tormented by a tumultuous past—stands as a particularly significant milestone. The film received widespread critical acclaim, with Mamonov's performance lauded for its profound spiritual intensity and emotional resonance. Another noteworthy cinematic venture was his portrayal of Ivan the Terrible in *The* Tsar (2009), a role that further solidified his status as a formidable actor.

An equally pivotal aspect of Mamonov's creative biography is his subsequent spiritual evolution. In the late 1990s, a profound personal crisis precipitated a transformative embrace of a deeply introspective and "cathartic" orthodoxy, which became a wellspring of creative and philosophical renewal. Retreating to a life of rural seclusion, Mamonov embarked on a path of spiritual and artistic synthesis, merging his creative endeavors with an ascetic lifestyle. Piotr Mamonov's contribution to Russian culture is indelible; his oeuvre, replete with paradox and unforeseen shifts, captivates through its unique blend of paradoxical authenticity and metaphysical profundity. Although the poet, performer and musician Petr Mamonov passed away in 2021, the resonances of his creative spiritual legacy continue to invigorate and inspire.

Questions in this interview, as usual, were posed by Dennis Ioffe and Mikhail Klebanov.

P.M.: . . .You know, the needle, my friends, melts vinyl's plastic by the force of friction. Therefore, if the vinyl is really good, the needle penetrates to the very bottom of the track. And afterward, it fuses back together. And if the vinyl is good and heavy, it fuses back together properly. It doesn't crack.

D.I.: It fuses right back together?

P.M.: Yeah. It solidifies. After the needle friction melts the plastic, then behind it, like water behind a ship—the waves converge. It's the same here. If the vinyl is good, then how it recovers after melting will be identical to the original design. And if the vinyl is bad . . . Twenty times you listen to it, it turns bad. It's not the same every time. That's why there's a crackle. And in the sixties, there was very high-quality vinyl. Especially from famous solid companies. That's why these records are nowadays very expensive. Besides the fact that they are rare in music, they are of very high quality. Now heavy vinyl has started to be released again. So called thick vinyl.

D.I.: Yes, yes.

P.M.: They publish some stuff on it . . .

D.I.: But, it's small quantities . . .

P.M.: Actually pretty big. And now they've made a new system. Very heavy needle. Seven grams. And super-hard vinyl. Very high pressure. The quality is amazing. Very thick vinyl like this. Very deep track.

D.I.: But still, there's a certain programmed number of times at which a record can be fully listened to . . .

P.M.: No. I explained. That if the vinyl is good, it can be listened to almost infinitely many times. Well, maybe not infinite, but enough for our age. It depends on the quality of the plastic . . .

D.I.: Yeah, that's probably true. But, you know, we're in a different world. Completely alien to the whole analog thing. It's more of a digital world.

P.M.: There you are. One is where one wants to be. Right? What one wants is what one has. If you want to have vanity and material reference points, that is what you will get . . .

D.I.: But, tell me, please, you came here . . . This is your first visit, isn't it?

P.M.: To Israel, to the Holy Land—yes.

D.I.: So how do you feel here with us? Terra sacra—the immanently present absolute . . . Does your confessionalism feel like finding deity here?

P.M.: I don't know what you mean. The immanent absolute . . . I don't swear like that.

D.I.: In terms of your relationship to God.

P.M.: God? I'm a believer. Orthodox Christian. Eastern Church.

D.I.: Does your faith have anything to do with your visit here.

P.M.: No.

D.I.: Nothing to do with it at all?

P.M.: Well, what do you mean it has nothing to do with—Specifically, no. But in reality, of course, God is in control.

D.I.: But do you feel a certain special impulse here?

P.M.: Why should I feel it? I don't need it.

D.I.: Maybe it happens somehow beyond your own will . . .

P.M.: My task is to call God into myself. To have Him in me. And then . . .

D.I.: Have you been to God's dwelling place—Jerusalem—yet?

P.M.: Not yet. But I don't think about it—what you are asking about. I have no ready answers to that. I only think about how to clean up my life so that God could stay in me longer.

So that He will not be disgusted with this vile vessel that I am . . .

D.I.: But God doesn't have much to do with it . . .

P.M.: God has to do with everything.

D.I.: Of course. But, to some more, to some less . . .

P.M.: Let's say, for example, your glasses are missing—ask God for them—they'll be found immediately. And so on. And He has His Voice everywhere. In everything and always. Forever. And we are a lie. Here. You and I are the lie.

D.I.: However, we're only passively dreaming at all. Buddha . . .

P.M.: We are lies, lies. Truth alone is God. And we are false. That's why we have nothing to decide with our mind. We have to trust in God.

D.I.: And your relationship with religion as such . . .

P.M.: I've already told you. I am a believer.

D.I.: Exclusively Christian?

P.M.: Orthodox, Christian. Eastern Church.

D.I.: And your attitude to, say, Buddhism? Islam?

P.M.: Nothing.

(smoking)

D.I.: Then what's all these? Errors?

P.M.: It's all heresy.

D.I.: But you don't feel yourself in ro . . . (interrupts)

P.M.: I don't feel myself. No.

D.I.: So there is no pilgrim aspect in you.

P.M.: That's not what we're talking about. What is there to talk about? I've answered you. Everything is God's will. And since I'm here, it's the way it should be. That's not my business at all. My business is cleaning up my own filth.

D.I.: In terms of roots?

P.M.: Not in terms of roots, but cleaning. I'm a complete shit, so I have to clean it. You—too. Then God will be more often to you . . .

M.K.: But your visit in this connection is not accidental either.

P.M.: I guess so. Probably. I don't think about it and I don't need to think about it. I have to follow. Follow. The laws I try to live by. That's all I have to do. The rest is just thoughts. Lies.

M.K.: You really decided to come because . . .

P.M.: I didn't. Nothing.

M.K.: Because you felt a certain . . .

P.M.: I don't feel. I didn't decide. I was told, 'Let's go to Israel'. Let's go. I have a director, a manager. These guys (points with his hand at the organizers of the concerts Victor Levin and Leonid Ulitsky sitting there)—they arranged it. I didn't decide anything.

D.I.: But you know . . . Some Russian classics . . . Gogol, for example. He was here before you and felt a certain call for this topography, the need to join . . .

P.M.: I can't say anything about the others.

D.I.: So their experience and yours is completely isolated. Not identical. Not connected in any way.

P.M.: I can only say about myself.

D.I.: Your attitude to the Russian canon, to the Russian classics. From Gogol to Count Tolstoy.

P.M.: I don't really know them. I didn't know them. How should I treat . . .

D.I.: Their work?

P.M.: For me it is like Chinese language.

D.I.: Does Count Tolstoy appeal to you in some way?

P.M.: It's Chinese.

D.I.: His diaries?

P.M.: Chinese too. I read it and I don't understand what it's about. I don't know. Let's say I open a Tolstoy book . . .

D.I.: Which one?

P.M.: Well, practically any book now . . . I used to love it. But now I open it and see with horror that there's nothing there for me. I don't know what it's about. And then I open the holy fathers. It's talking about something I really need to know. And there's the answer. And that's the way. And everything is clear how and what . . .

D.I.: And who are some of these fathers in particular?

P.M.: Many. Many. All . . . all . . .

D.I.: Specifically, who? Augustine, Origen?

P.M.: No, no, why . . . Am I some kind of Catholic or something?

D.I.: So it turns out—Gregory the Theologian?

P.M.: Everything, Isaac the Syrian, Zatochnik . . . I read everything—it's all from the Lord, it's given to us to follow . . .

D.I.: What is your attitude to other confessions?

P.M.: Heresy.

D.I.: What does heresy mean?

P.M.: Heresy means heresy. Wrong.

D.I.: Heresy means to eradicate, to cut down . . .

P.M.: Well, I don't know. It's not my business to eradicate.

D.I.: Well, what is your position?

P.M.: I don't have a position.

D.I.: Well, what is your non-position?

P.M.: A man of faith has no position. He has only one position—closeness to God.

D.I.: Well, how do you articulate your faith?

P.M.: Um . . . 'articulate' . . . What is that? You should be simpler . . . and people will come to you . . .

D.I.: Do you yourself go to any of God's abodes?

P.M.: I go to the temple, yes. I am a parishioner. Where I live, I go. To services . . .

D.I.: The temple is the place where . . .

P.M.: The Holy Spirit.

D.I.: The Spirit of God is found . . .

P.M.: Not 'God's', but 'Holy'.

D.I.: It is always sacred . . .

P.M.: That's where I don't understand what you're saying . . .

D.I.: He can be immanently present in different places . . .

P.M.: The Holy Spirit. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three hypostases of God. Three. Can, of course, be everywhere. In every morning prayer we call him into us. Well, there are places—kind of like gas stations—where you can kind of refuel with it. In the world, you waste it. And on Sunday you go and recharge again.

D.I.: I wonder how your relationship with the Holy Spirit manifested itself during your contacts with Brian Eno, a well-known musician, a rather problematic Christian?

P.M.: Brian? No, that's okay.

D.I.: Was he interesting to you as a musician, or as a kind of interdisciplinary character who supported a certain musical subculture?

P.M.: Everything that happens around us can only be called "reality" with a big stretch. Yesterday a girl asked me: 'How do you like it in Israel?' . . . I said, 'What about it?' It's the same everywhere.

D.I.: Well, and Eno?

P.M.: Brian is the same person—like you, like me . . .

D.I.: Well, let's say—he's said to have appreciated you as a poet . . . How did he recognize . . .

P.M.: I don't know, you'll have to ask him.

M.K.: How did you find each other?

P.M.: Well, he's a guy always looking for something . . . So he came to Moscow, looked at some things. He was also at our concerts.

M.K.: After that he himself . . .

P.M.: We became friends . . .

M.K.: So he invited you on his own initiative . . .

P.M.: He's good, he's good. But in general—Brian, not Brian, someone else—all good.

D.I.: It is known to say that he valued you not as a rock'n'roll player, but as a poet . . .

P.M.: He said so.

D.I.: Very interesting—based on what? That is—what specific lyrics he . . .

P.M.: I don't know. Well, that's what he said. In an interview with people like you. He said that it's not rock'n'roll in the usual Western form. It's just poetry.

D.I.: Did you know his younger brother?

P.M.: Roger? We drank all the wine at his place. He was a wine collector. He went on tour to Portugal. And they stupidly put us in his house.

M.K.: Why stupidly?

P.M.: They found out later. We looked—in the refrigerator there was gin, whiskey, everything . . . Well, we thought—it must be expensive, you can't touch it. But in the cupboard, we see 40 bottles of wine. They were lying around. Now I understand—they were lying on their sides, on purpose . . . But back then, the bottles were dusty and dirty. And we drank them all. And it turns out that Roger brought from each country a bottle from twenty years ago—a special drain . . . So it was a collection. Of a mad Englishman . . . Well, we kind of put him in his place. Like—stop it all: 'I love it', property, all the things . . .

D.I.: He's a refined man . . .

P.M.: I don't know what kind of man he is, but he understood everything and there were no hard feelings.

M.K.: He's a man of humor.

P.M.: At first, of course, he became pale. But then he said that nothing like that had ever happened in London before, so it would stay forever.

D.I.: Well, what would you say about your relationship with other musicians . . . Like John Cale or Harold Budd . . .

P.M.: I live alone. And I listen to them on records. I love Harold Budd very much. He's a real composer of the highest caliber. I'm happy that I happened to know him personally.

M.K.: How did that come about?

P.M.: At Brian's. He's an *Opal* man himself . . . And Harold Budd is such an Englishman . . .

M.K.: He's actually a Californian.

P.M.: Californian? How interesting . . .

D.I.: He even has a special CD devoted to this . . .

M.K.: Yes, he grew up there and all his . . .

P.M.: And I was sure he was English.

M.K.: He was there in London all the time . . .

P.M.: That's wonderful, you know what it's all about . . . Ambient is very difficult . . . I mean, on the contrary, it's very easy to fake it, purely outwardly. Something buzzing. Or something else. But only if you don't have the gift of composition . . .

If you don't have the gift of thinking in harmonic chunks . . . In the piano . . . Not with guitar or notes, but with harmony . . . it's useless to do it. And his gift is the highest. It's the only thing I listen to at night. I want something like that. I listened to it several times in a row. I've been doing that for years. Almost every night.

D.I.: What exactly do you listen to?

P.M.: I listen to Pearl.

M.K.: 'Pearl' specifically?

P.M.: Yes, 'Pearl' is my favorite.

M.K.: That was co-constructed with Eno . . .

P.M.: Yes, yes. In fact, everything he did with Brian was very successful.

M.K.: And you love the other Harold Budd stuff too—like 'White Arcades', 'Abandoned Cities' . . .

P.M.: You understand what I mean—I'm not talking about love—to listen to it once and wow, but I'm talking about what I live with.

M.K.: And, as we understand, for a very long time . . .

P.M.: That's what I live with. You can still live with 'White Arcades', but not so much with 'Abandoned Cities'.

D.I.: It's understandable, they're abandoned.

P.M.: You can't live with them. In any mood—sad, sad, cheerful, so that it would be good to put them well. No, 'The Abandoned Cities' is definitely not. Narrower emotion there. Cool, it's all good, who argues, but more narrowly focused. It's a

very broad field here. And it could be anywhere. The ocean. Boom, boom, it's there, it's there . . . That's how it is for me. I have to talk about myself.

M.K.: And how is he as a man—Budd I mean.

P.M.: I don't know. . . We met at one party . . . He's a very modest guy. He's also very reserved. Like a true composer. Like all of us. Whatever we do, it becomes our way of life. It's the only way to succeed in your work, to love it, to make it a way of life, to have it with you always. Whether it's in the bathroom, whether it's at the breakfast table . . . Well, how . . . Blok said aptly that literature is a way of life. So here it's a way of life. And that's why whether he's closed or not . . . He's like this. He lives all the time, he hears it all the time. And that's how I try to live too.

D.I.: What do you think of Michael Brook?

P.M.: Michael Brook is a good guy. We've been drinking together.

M.K.: Do you listen to him?

P.M.: No, not listening.

D.I.: Do you like his recent excellent album with Jivan Gasparyan?

P.M.: I listen to the origins, and that's all . . .

D.I.: Isn't the work of Hans Joachim Roedelius an interesting source for you?

P.M.: I appreciate Roedelius. Although a bit less.

M.K.: Did you ever meet him?

P.M.: No. No, I haven't. But I like him. I don't like everything about him. He is a little tougher.

M.K.: Roedelius isn't exactly . . .

P.M.: You think so. That's what I think. What can I do? There's not much to discuss. I think like this and you think like this.

D.I.: You're not listening to John Cale.

P.M.: No, I don't.

D.I.: LaMont Young?

P.M.: No, that's all—no.

D.I.: And Lanois, also no?

P.M.: Well, Lanois . . . Dylan . . .

D.I.: Tom Waits?

P.M.: That's pop.

D.I.: Well, and Nick Cave, of course—also pop . . .

P.M.: Yes, that's all . . .

D.I.: But do you ever listen to any of the old-school free jazz? Cecil Taylor, for example . . .

P.M.: I don't listen to any of that.

D.I.: But you do listen to Mingus don't you?

P.M.: I don't listen to Mingus either. Not anymore.

D.I.: Han Bennink?

P.M.: No, no . . . But there's say Lee Morgan.

D.I.: And from Russian conceptual jazz—like G.T.Ch.?

P.M.: No . . .

D.I.: If G.T.Ch. doesn't inspire you, what about your relationship with Vladimir Chekasin . . .?

P.M.: Chekasin? Volodya?

D.I.: You had, as it were, two forms of intercontacts with him . . . One—in cinematography . . .

P.M.: What kind of contacts? Hi!—Hi! . . .

D.I.: No, in terms of creative . . .

P.M.: In what way?

D.I.: He participated in your work . . .

P.M.: Well, he participated, so what?

D.I.: Were you interested? Was he not? On the contrary?

P.M.: You want to put everything on a shelf . . .

D.I.: As it were . . .

P.M.: No. We just met and worked. He's a good man. He's like that, I'm like that.

As for relationships . . . It's like we say—you have to eat a poodle of salt together to know or to have something there . . .

D.I.: Who did you eat it with?

P.M.: If he and I had been in the same cell for about seven years . . . We'd have some idea of each other then. But as it is, how do I know how he lives? And he has no idea how I live.

D.I.: So it turns out that you're not particularly interested in interaction in terms of creativity.

P.M.: What do you mean?

D.I.: Well, essentially you 'performed' Chekasin's music, didn't you? You were mimetically, so to speak, showing him . . .

P.M.: I don't think about it.

D.I.: A soundtrack of 'Taxi Blues' . . .

P.M.: I'm flying by. And that's it. I'm flying by.

D.I.: I thought that you were supposed to be representing something and building up some kind of product—a hybrid of Chekasin and . . .

P.M.: I just live. If something comes out of it . . . Some kind of fixation, then it goes. I don't create an image or anything else. I exist, and I'm in that until I die. When I die, I go back to heaven. Or hell. Chekasin. someone else. That's their problem. It's none of my business. I don't think about others at all. I think about myself.

D.I.: Have you had any contact with Kuriokhin?

P.M.: I did.

D.I.: In what way.

P.M.: In this way. 'Hi Sergey, how are you? Nothing special, I'm fine . . .'.

D.I.: Were you interested in him?

P.M.: In what did he play?

D.I.: Of course.

P.M.: No.

D.I.: Nothing at all, zero.

P.M.: No.

M.K.: You never wanted to work with him?

P.M.: <shakes his head>.

M.K.: And he didn't want to either?

P.M.: No. Well, I don't know, but I didn't think so.

M.K.: And he was wide enough, wasn't he?

P.M.: Well, what can you do, I'm narrow. You guys understand, that's not what I do—I don't play with anyone, I don't do anything. I've lived—a year or two, I feel—I have to talk about it somehow. I only talk about what's going on in my unhappy soul. Is it floundering like this, or is it floundering like this? It's been like this all the time. And will continue to be. So—if I stand still, I get the same thing out, if I evolve—I get 'different' things out. It's the same for everyone else. If we see that a person sings the same songs, it's not because he wants to make more money or something else . . . It's because he's standing still as a person. But standing still doesn't work. He's going down. The elevator's coming. That's it. Jimi Hendrix said 'I seem free because I'm always running'. Running.

D.I.: He ran, actually till the end . . .

P.M.: No, he didn't. It's a weakness.

D.I.: Weakness of the physical—of the organism, of its shell?

P.M.: Weakness of the spirit, of the organism. What he did is from God. And everything else—the extra—the body—is Jimi Hendrix himself. But God sounded in him. That's where we come to the most important thing. What we need—those through whom it 'goes'—first of all—to clean ourselves as often as possible . . .

D.I.: Clean ourselves how and with what?

P.M.: With the help of what? There is a technique.

D.I.: Which one? Do you have any of your own?

P.M.: Religious technique, experience . . . How to get rid of one's sinful nature . . . Repent. How to avoid temptation . . . Redeem . . .

D.I.: In order to do this—in order to repent—it is absolutely necessary to sin purposefully. And without knowing the true temptation—how can it be redeemed in Christ?

P.M.: My friend—you can twist everything that way . . .

D.I.: But think, how can one repent without first sinning? Without having drunk of sinfulness . . .

P.M.: How can one not sin?

D.I.: How can one repent without sinning?

P.M.: You understand—if you are an unbeliever, it is absolutely pointless to talk to you about it.

D.I.: Why not?

P.M.: Well, you only understand it with your head . . . Therefore . . . And if you are a true believer, you will not ask all these questions. Because it's not about these questions. You realize that God—Christ came into the world for sinners, not for the righteous. If you don't sin, don't sin at all, you don't need God.

D.I.: I would like to understand your attitude to philharmonic or classical contemporary music. To characters like Schoenberg, Cage . . .

P.M.: I listen to whatever I like. Here I lay down on the sofa—I have a bigger, wider sofa (points to the plush cushion he's sitting on) and a very soft, nice . . . Wooden house. . . I'm putting on my native vinyl. Here I am putting—it's good for me . . .

D.I.: What do you put on?

P.M.: I have a lot of music.

D.I.: Do you play Schoenberg? Do you play Messian, Cage?

P.M.: No, I don't, I don't know. I don't play Cage, no.

D.I.: Do you play any Russians composers—Slonimsky, Denisov, Gubaidullina, Schnittke, Karamanov?

P.M.: (shakes his head in total denial).

D.I.: And Glass? Jan Garbarek?

P.M.: No, no.

D.I.: Are you familiar with a character like Gavin Bryars?

P.M.: No.

D.I.: But who of the Philharmonic music do you like to listen to?

P.M.: 'Philharmonic' how?

D.I.: It denotes a certain canonical tradition of musical orchestration and symphonism.

P.M.: I don't put any of that. And it's a similar thing with favorite writers.

D.I.: But, what is the substance that touches your ears, apart from the named?

P.M.: I only listen to spiritual music now. Mostly. Although sometimes jazz, but . . .

D.I.: And jazz, what kind of jazz?

P.M.: Lee Morgan. Art Blakey . . . But, just so you understand—I love that state in music, when the head as it were does not work, and a person is tuned only to accept and give. To serve the music. Not to yourself. Not to oneself, not to one's own ambitions . . . I'm Richter—I'm going to play Bach like this . . . And I'm like this, I'll be like this . . .

D.I.: Well, Svyatoslav Teofilych was a modest man . . .

P.M.: Modest in life, but immodest in playing. Immodest in playing. It was always Richter, not Bach.

M.K.: Not Bach?

P.M.: Yes. That's what you think, and that's what I think. Who's interviewing who here?! Am I interviewing you or are you interviewing me?

D.I.: We're just talking. You insist that Richter did not hide his ego in music, but on the contrary exhibited it?

P.M.: What about it? Yes, of course. The only one of these people is Oistrakh . . . No 'yachestvo' (I-centrality), no 'but I read it like this'. A wonderful musician, a great man. How it is necessary to humble oneself and suppress one's own pride . . . That's the Christian way. God alone. So that only God can come through you. In you, through you. In all other music, I love the same thing. When—nineteen years old—no thoughts of anything at all, through those suddenly, all these tunes—all this fresh wind went . . . And the Beatles, no matter how hard they tried, no matter how hard they tried—they didn't have it anymore . . .

M.K.: They were already kind of secondary . . .

P.M.: They were not secondary, they were from the head, from the head, from the 'I' 'I'm going to make money now'.

M.K.: And Led Zeppelin, Doors. . .

P.M.: The head is the 'I'—the false nominalized mind of ours. This is what I decided, this is what I did now. And then five years later you see what you really did, what you decided . . . It's horrible. It would have been better if you had not decided. So here—when the 'decisions' started—art rock—this whole 'story'—now we'll tell you how we know how to do it, how we're like Fripp, some, I don't know . . . Genesis . . .

M.K.: You seriously don't appreciate Robert Fripp . . .?

P.M.: I don't know—I don't 'appreciate' anyone, I'm telling you how . . . Well . . . And actually, come on—you guys, you can talk among yourselves . . . Go on, go on, talk with yourselves!

D.I.: But your attitude to Fripp is extremely important and interesting to us . . .

P.M.: I'm talking about one thing, but you're talking about something else.

D.I.: You mentioned Robert Fripp . . .

P.M.: The thing is that from the very beginning, as soon as you start to have some of your very first ideas of your own, even if they are creative, soulful, something like love for your mother, wife, children, and so on . . . It's all false. That's what we're talking about. And when there is only a clay bottle with God in it, it is true. To understand why some ideas are eternal and others temporary. New wave, punk, it's all gone, it's all in your head. 'We're gonna do this', 'we're gonna protest', or we're gonna turn it around, right? The commandments of the Old Testament are necessary to be a normal person, but to get heaven you need the Gospel beatitudes, the commandments of the New Testament. And there the first one is "blessed are the poor in spirit". That is, those who are nobody.

D.I.: Why blessed? Is the kingdom of God within them?

P.M.: They will be happy. They will be found, they will be found. These will be called.

D.I.: So you don't think the kingdom of God is in Fripp?

P.M.: I don't think anything about it. I can only tell you what I hear and what I see. And what I hear is that there's only one head. Good, smart, all right. Brian's friends with him.

M.K.: But Brian has other things on his mind.

P.M.: Brian has 'other things' and I don't see that in Fripp. In Fripp I see a developed, intellectually gifted, modern personality. But I'm not interested in that. I'm more interested in rock art. That's what I'm looking for. In music, in life, in people, in women. In God. And God has it most of all. That's where it is. I see it in my own life, not discussing your life, other people's lives . . . Where this 'trace' I see is where it is drawn from that very source . . . Ends all this division of yours into Glass, into sympho, into this, into that . . . The truth is the same.

Where it's not there, it's not there, and it's not there. And 'a little bit no, a little bit yes'. No. Where there's yes, there's yes. Where there's no, there's no. If it's 'yes' for me, if I'm into it, that's it.

D.I.: How do you feel about minimalism?

P.M.: I have the same attitude to minimalists as I just described.

D.I.: That's fine . . .

P.M.: Here, it's like I'm talking past you . . . I'll say it again—I appreciate everything true, no matter where it is . . . in the minimalist . . . Why divide it into shelves? You can divide the whole world into shelves, into telephones automatons, go there, don't go there . . ., into arrows . . . take this, swallow that, and poison this . . . That's how we are. This is how we are. out. All together—Israel, Russia, Americans—all together. Earth. Something has to be done. The spirit is needed.

D.I.: Do you need Stockhausen?

P.M.: Spirit. Spirit.

D.I.: Does he have a spirit?

P.M.: Only spirit. I don't know anything about him that he doesn't have. I put a record, and how he lives at home, how he goes to the toilet.

D.I.: But that wasn't the question.

P.M.: I'm not gonna peek at him. Let him do this, I'll do that. And when I suddenly set myself—Some specific year. And I feel that it sounds exactly the same as mine. Then my heart suddenly moves. Ah. Okay—forty-fifth, but one thousand sixty-eight—Bach was born. And it's just—like—bang! So it's like something's come out. And why art at all. For what? To make people better? Well, they would have been a long time ago. But no. The same passions, the same jealousy, the same murders as in ancient times . . .

So what's art? What for? Only to love each other. To become you-me, me-you, it's not clear where I am, where you are . . . Here for an hour and a half in the audience, for the time of listening to the album—if this miracle happens . . . Through time, through these black grooves . . . Then God is there. I'm looking for brothers in music. Not on a level—'like me' . . . but Spirit. An understanding of God. Not in the sense that they were religious people who went around praying. That's not the point. But what unites people is something true, authentic . . . It doesn't matter whether it's Chekasin or anyone else . . .

. . .

P.M.: Everything has an influence, you know . . . Everything . . . My life and environment, where I was born, how my childhood went, and how it went on . . . It's all important. That's how God leads us. You look back on your life and see what miracles He did . . . How you've been taken here and there. Beyond

your decisions, beyond your lousy will. God just took you by the scruff of the neck, poked you where you needed to go and put you where you needed to go . . . So you think and remember this huge pile of nasty things done in life . . . Everybody's got it, don't they? And you figure out how to live . . . You've got to lose a little bit of it. But instead of losing it, you put on more weight . . . That's how life goes on. And music, writers. That's what I'm getting at. They're all doubters like me. More gifted, but they don't have the answer either. And there's all the answers in one book. I want answers already. I want an older man, a father, unquestioning . . . He says 'go to bed', you go to bed. Like when you're three, you go to sleep. And at seven, you don't—'Daddy, why? It's early'. I want to go there so that when they say it, they do it without discussion. If God is in you, if the Holy Spirit has been called and you're clean . . . No thoughts of 'I'm the Holy Spirit now, and tonight we'll drink here . . .' No, it doesn't work that way. You have to choose. I have to leave everything old, including the music, my favorite music, yes, and this. Maybe I'll have to leave the stage too . . .

But as long as God gives me this opportunity, then I have to . . . I have a very important moment in my life right now . . . I'm doing my performances, filmed on videotape . . . Dancing is basically a sin. Because Herodias. Well, it's known everything. And I ask the priest . . . I tell him that dancing is kind of my job . . . He says, 'I don't know. Although our village priest is very kind . . . I'm recording a play now. I'll take the tape to him, too. I'll re-record it. We'll do as he says. If he says no, then no. Strictly. Holy father. It's my father, who is my saint, who will stand before God for me. And if he tells me—Maybe not right away, maybe through some framework, as it usually happens. But basically, that's the answer. Without discussion, I must obey. And that's a good thing. Because if a person cancels something that is so important to him—that's one thing, but if the most beloved thing is taken away from you, taken away from you for good and you can cope with it—that will be good for your soul . . . A lot of what I'm telling you right now . . . would have happened to me a couple years ago. That's why you caught me in a bit of a pickle. A couple years ago, I would have responded clearly and completely to all of your Stockhausen. That's cool, the article would have been just . . . Now I don't know anything myself. Understand. No offense. I don't know. I'm at a loss. I only know one thing, that here is the Truth, and here I am—weak, shit, cannot improve . . . Of course, of course, there are enlightenments—sometimes I get less angry, I smoke less, less this and that . . .

. . .

All this husk—it falls away.

Can you imagine—I take 'Oblomov'—my favorite book, yes . . . I read it. Well, where it's about the village, it's okay, but further on—somehow it turns to be sleepy . . . I don't understand what it's all about, what people are so worried about, what it's about . . . What is it? What's the matter?

M.K.: Was it clear before?

P.M.: Yes, I used to love it very much. It was clear to me. I grew up on it. Why do I speak about it now with such confidence? Because I was brought up on it. Dostoevsky, Tolstoy. Well, like any decent, normal Russian person. Yes? And Pushkin and Gogol and all the others. And Trifonov and Platonov. It's horrible. I take any book off the shelf, I try to read it, I can't . . . What are you talking about? It's all in Chinese to me. I don't need it at all. Although I can clearly see how great

it is, how cool it is . . . And with Tolstoy's 'Diaries' I started to move in this current direction . . . I started to read further, deeper . . . And I saw that, unfortunately, Lev Nikolayevich was a heretic . . . Although he argued with a foam at the mouth, earlier, when he was a literary man . . . That no, that he was an unhappy man . . . How he loved, how he agonized, fought with himself . . . What a life—like a feat . . . And now I don't think so. Not like that.

D.I.: So, then, he was correctly excommunicated?

P.M.: He was excommunicated for heresy. Not just excommunicated—excommunicated for heresy. He was tormented by his own brain. And his own brain is pride. I have the same story. I have a lot of pride. I've been used to being a leader all my life. Especially on stage, it's like -- It has to be. You went out there . . . You're going to give—well, it's the usual, right?

I don't quite know how to deal with it in my current state. It's very difficult. The old one doesn't work, there's no new one. So everything is shaky, shaky . . . It's a very difficult time right now. And the happiest and very difficult.

. . .

. . .I'm not attracted to anything. When I listen to Lee Morgan, I can see a hand reaching out to me from there—it's like *hello* to me. But not here. Maybe they're not bad, maybe I'm bad. And there's no such thing as bad or good. There's no connection, what can you do? Although I love all these people very much. And Garkusha, and Roma Suslov, we were all friends. I treat them with deep respect. I don't listen not because I 'don't listen', but because I 'appreciate and don't listen'! I just don't belong there. I don't. And sometimes I listen, I put it on, I try. But I don't. I think, maybe something has changed, I've changed. And then I put it back on, and again, no. What can I do? Although I recognize all the merits. And especially our heroes.—Boris, Makar . . . (Meaning Boris Grebenshchikov and Andrei Makarevich).

D.I.: Well, that's just not very interesting . . .

P.M.: Why not interesting. It's very interesting.

D.I.: That depends on whom. These names are directly related to pop culture. . .

P.M.: No, it's very interesting, my friend, because Boria started doing all this in 1971, and Makar in . . . 68, you see . . . And these people lived, when every day they were twisted like this (shows how) for fifteen years, not like me, who started in eighty-second . . .

D.I.: This all relates more clearly to dissidents, but not creativity per se.

P.M.: No, it has a direct relation to creativity. And they held on. Do you understand? And what can we demand from them now? They're all wrung out. By this time, by this horror. We can't demand anything from them. They're just heroes. That's how I feel about it! You can, of course, keep insisting on this.

You say, 'and Andrei Sakharov . . .' It's one thing if you're a professional dissident, a fighter, or if you're a guy of nineteen . . . And suddenly you're getting pissed on all the time, being put down all the time, you know, all the time. Day in and day out, day in and day out . . . Pressure, pressure, pressure, try to stand it. Of course, you'll be empty by the time you're forty.

D.I.: It reminds one of theater.

P.M.: What theater?

D.I.: For example, Stanislavsky's. You are fond of acting in general. You love theater?

P.M.: And what is this—what is this conversation we're having with you here—love it or not . . .? Why all these questions? What do we have here?!

D.I.: Trying to find out what your theater can be based on.

P.M.: On the Lord God.

D.I.: But . . .

P.M.: On the Lord God.

D.I.: Ah, perhaps you have some other thought about it?

P.M I have no thoughts, I've explained.

D.I.: No thoughts?

P.M.: No thoughts. And thank God. Because your own thoughts lead you to a dead end. Now we see it in our world. There are Americans—how smart they are . . . And what? Suddenly they run out into the streets and start shooting schoolchildren.

D.I.: They're not typical Americans, they're splinters. Just a few . . .

P.M.: So what? So it's a complete shit, too. Stupid.

D.I.: Well, how are you doing with movies. Fassbinder, Lars von . . .

P.M.: (ironically and condescendingly smiling) Cinema should be dismantled with a camera, screen. No—here you are—on the hill, went out, sat down—the best movie. And stereo there is so . . . Or on the sea. I sat all morning today . . . That's such a movie! And the director is God alone. And you're Fassbinder or whoever . . . What does he even know there . . .

D.I.: You're not interested in Alexei German Sr.?

P.M.: Who needs all this? It's all people, it's all lies, dead ends of various kinds . . . The search for art—now we're going to create . . . Now we'll set up the camera, we'll shoot . . . But everything is already filmed . . . Pay attention.

D.I.: What did you especially like to read?

P.M.: Books.

D.I.: Anything in particular?

P.M.: You pick up a book, you look for—oh, here's a familiar letter. Toy read.

D.I.: How do you like Vladimir Sorokin?

P.M.: I am not sure I know who that is . . .

D.I.: Well, this is an important Russian author, from the company of, let's say, so that you understand, say Dmitry Alexandrovich Prigov . . .

P.M.: Dimka Prigov? Good guy. Lyova Rubinstein is also a good guy . . .

D.I.: You had contacts with them, you had your own texts which could seem close to them. . .

P.M.: There were texts, but in such a way that . . . I have an acquaintance in the village . . . He published his book on cards. One phrase at a time—on cards. And we started to play a game in the village with these cards, like real cards. And as if it worked like that—because what phrase opens there—we understood—whether

it covers or not, because you can determine . . . So we played for a month. And we had the most trump ace-phrases—we crystallized them during these games. From the different cards we collected, we made a song.

M.K.: What kind of song?

P.M.: Well, here in the play. It's called 'Pupil'.

D.I.: Did Kharms, Vvedensky inspire you?

P.M.: Well, what do you mean—inspire? I'm an educated man, if you're checking me out . . .

I read it all. I loved it all. I lived like you. I read what I loved, like any normal person.

D.I.: Did you love or read Sasha Sokolov?

P.M.: I don't know Sokolov.

D.I.: And Mamleyev?

P.M.: Mamleyev is in Paris.

D.I.: Not anymore, by the way . . . Did you like any of the Yerofeyevs?

P.M.: Venichka is very good. Very good. 'Moscow Petushki' . . . From the beginning I had a kind of attitude . . . Here, I would think—drunkenness—I'm a priori bored . . . But then I reread it and there's such poetry . . . Powerful . . .

D.I.: Are you interested in Moscow conceptualism?

P.M.: I don't know at all.

D.I.: And the other Yerofeev—Viktor?

P.M.: (stunned for a moment and visibly angry) What is this . . .? An examination? Or what?

D.I.: How come. . .?

P.M.: Nothing—I'm listening to you, I'm listening . . .

D.I.: What would be the background. Creativity . . .

P.M.: Mine. And Sokolov or anyone else has nothing to do with it. Nothing to do with it—well, try to understand that.

D.I.: Were you be interested in such film directors as Ingmar Bergman?

P.M.: Bergman has nothing to do with it. It's all pants, shoes . . . But inside you are you, all the same . . . Stand in front of a mirror, naked, after a bath . . . I stand there and see that I have nothing but this body. But even this body will rather soon become ashes and dust.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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