

# Organ Music by Bulgarian Composers A New Music Series Now in Print, Part II

Sabin Levi

Part I was published in the October 2009 issue of THE DIAPASON.

The third volume in this cycle of Bulgarian organ composers was published in July 2009, followed by the fourth and fifth in September 2009, and the sixth in January 2010. Additional volumes are currently in progress. The series is published by the Union of Bulgarian Composers ([www.ubc-bg.com/](http://www.ubc-bg.com/)). For further information, contact the author at <krokotak@hotmail.com>, or <mail@ubc-bg.com>.

The third and fourth volumes consist of organ sonatas: Artin Poturlian's *Sonata* and Velislav Zaimov's *Sonata #1* in the third volume, and in the fourth, Velislav Zaimov's *Sonata #2* and sonatas by Lazar Nikolov and Mihail Pekov. In the fifth volume there are two chorale preludes and a chorale fantasy by Zaimov, and three chorale preludes by Sabin Levi. Also in this volume are two chamber music works: *Sonata da chiesa* by Neva Krysteva for alto flute, flute and piccolo, and organ; and *Landscapes of the Soul* by Krassimir Taskov for organ and trombone.

Volume VI contains *Sonata Breve* by Adrian Pavlov, *Five Pieces in Memory of Friedrich Goldmann* by Artin Poturlian, *Sonatas for Organ #1* and *#2* by Yordan Goshev, *Prelude and Toccata* by Kiril Lambov, and chamber music works by Zaimov: *Sonata for Organ and Violin* and *Sonata for Organ and Cello*.

Artin Poturlian's *Organ Sonata*, which is in the third volume, was written in the seventies. Its musical language is quite different from his previously discussed organ work, *Four Spiritual Chants*. The *Sonata* is a three-movement atonal work, technically demanding for the performer, with some features that are apparent in all three movements. These entail a linear approach, an affinity for unusual, non-square rhythmic divisions, and multi-level canonic figurations related to complex ostinati (Example 1). In addition, one finds polyphonic tools evident in his other organ works, mostly inverse and retrograde canons and intervallic variations.

The musical language of Velislav Zaimov's single-movement *Sonata for Organ #1* is closer to his *Fantasy* (from Volume I) (Example 2). Throughout his large organ oeuvre, his musical language is quite uniform. Characteristically, he uses consecutive chords, with subtle changes in their internal intervals, repetitive motives, and large-scale thinking, with distinguishable first and second themes and quite large forms. Because of its intervallic structure, the music appears to sound somewhat tragic, while this is not the author's intention.<sup>1</sup> This trend seems to be recurrent in Zaimov's music.<sup>2</sup>

Lazar Nikolov's *Sonata for Organ* is also a single-movement, large-scale work, but quite different from Zaimov's. Written in the seventies, this piece would have been called "avant-garde" with its dominance of sonic effects and an aleatory penchant for non-standard rhythmic divisions. It is not written idiomatically; tremolos, usually uncharacteristic for organ, are abundant. Completely atonal, it is a real challenge for the performer. In addition to traditional notation, this piece uses graphic and aleatoric notation (Example 3).

Graphic language is seen also in the first movement of Mihail Pekov's three-

movement *Organ Sonata*, dedicated to Neva Krysteva (1975). In this movement, *senza misura* and measured passages follow one another. The music, somewhat tonal and somewhat modal in sound, is quite calm and serene in the improvisatory segments. In the metered passages, it is more energetic, and the final metered section employs quick triad-oriented movement. The second movement resembles a chorale prelude. The melody is in the pedal, at 4-foot pitch, while there is a slow-moving ostinato texture in the manuals. The two voices in the manuals imitate each other to some extent. Rhythmically, the composer employs multi-level syncopation, which also becomes the main opening motive to the third movement (Example 4).

Velislav Zaimov's chorale preludes and chorale fantasy employ some of the traditional chorale prelude-related techniques. The author also uses some of his own—i.e., he does not cite any pre-existing melodies; instead, he writes his own, non-diatonic melody, fitted to the pre-existing text. For example, see his melody to Agricola's text *Ich ruf zu dir* (Example 5). He uses the Christmas song *Es kommt ein Schiff, geladen*<sup>3</sup> (attr. to Suderman/Tauler, XVII century), also with his own melody. In his chorale he cites the first two stanzas:

Es kommt ein Schiff, geladen  
Bis an den höchsten Bord,  
Trägt Gottes Sohn voll Gnaden,  
Des Vaters ewig's Wort.

Das Schiff geht still im Triebe,  
Trägt eine teure Last;  
Das Segel ist die Liebe,  
Der Heilig Geist der Mast.

A ship is coming laden,  
And rich indeed her hoard;  
The Son of God the Father  
And his eternal Word.

The ship sails soft, her burden  
Of price all measure past:  
Her mainsail, it is charity,  
The Holy Ghost the mast.

His chorale fantasy follows the same principle. It is based on *O Heiland, Reiß die Himmel auf* (text by Friedrich von Spee, 1623). The author's chorale melody is stated twice in the pedal throughout the piece, citing the text's first stanza:

O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf,  
Herab, herauf vom Himmel lauf,  
Reiß ab vom Himmel Tor und Tür,  
Reiß ab, was Schloss und Riegel für.

O Saviour, tear open the heavens,  
flow down to us from heaven above;  
tear off heaven's gate and door,  
tear off every lock and bar.

The Sephardic song *Morenica* is the cantus firmus of the three chorale preludes of the same name by Sabin Levi. The first chorale uses "coloristic" chorale technique, adding ornaments to the soprano solo line. The second chorale employs a contrasting melody that interplays with the original chorale melody (in the tradition of Bach's *Wachet auf*, BWV 645), while the third is a six-voice structure with double pedal. These pieces are tonal, albeit not traditionally so. Levi is working on a cycle of chorale preludes based on Sephardic songs.

Neva Krysteva's *Sonata da chiesa* is scored for organ and three different flutes that do not play together. The first movement calls for a normal flute, the

Example 1. Artin Poturlian, *Organ Sonata*, third movement

Example 2. Velislav Zaimov, *Sonata for Organ #1*

Example 3. Lazar Nikolov, *Sonata for Organ*

Example 4. Mihail Pekov, *Organ Sonata* (beginning of third movement)

Example 5. Velislav Zaimov, *Chorale Prelude: Ich ruf zu dir*

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second for a piccolo, and the third for an alto flute (in G). The multi-layered structure is often alternated with a light and clear one in all three movements and the *vibrati*. This is so characteristic of Krysteva's style and can be seen in numerous places. The flute part is quite idiomatic. The author uses flute harmonics in the first movement. The second movement (with organ and piccolo) is built around an ostinato principle, and the third resembles some scores of Luigi Nono, with a twist. The author's striving for multi-layered structure is combined with modality, and the lower register of the organ is combined with the sound of an alto flute (Example 6). This movement employs some of the author's frequent deliberate citations of the opening theme of Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in A Minor*, BWV 543.

*Landscapes of the Soul*, for organ and trombone by **Krassimir Taskov**, is the last piece in the fifth volume, and the second representative of chamber music with organ. This atonal work of quite large scale (duration of more than fifteen minutes) is an experiment in color. While there are no registration instructions, the player must use all of the keyboard's range. There are numerous clusters, glissandi, etc. in the organ part (Example 7).

The sixth volume was published in two formats, A3 (in landscape position) and A4, also in landscape, with the intention that the larger format would be better for performers. This volume opens with **Adrian Pavlov's** *Sonata Breve*, also called *Les escaliers enigmatiques*, written in 2009. The piece is inspired by the following verse of Bulgarian poet Edvin Sugarev:

Descending, among the closed doors  
remembered he, the one, always open  
always for him open  
alone, among the closed doors.

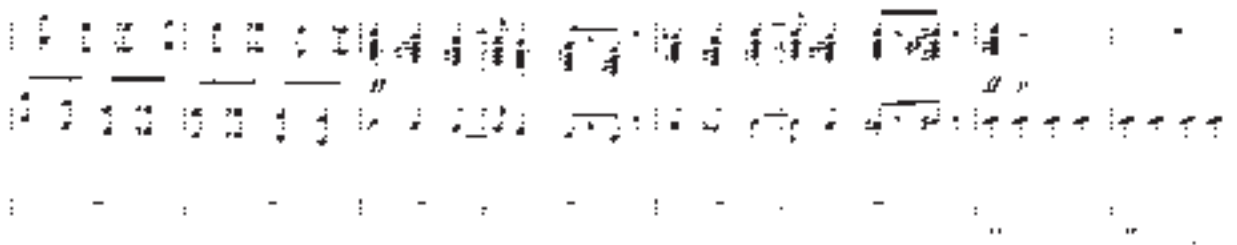
Thinking about her, he went on,  
descending, on and on, and even when  
there were no more steps anymore,  
there were no more doors.<sup>1</sup>

The composer seems to favor metric modulation, since it is in almost constant use. In addition to the obvious use of word painting, rhythmic variation is an important source of form building. Serial techniques are in use, employing both rhythmical and tonal sets, which further undergo series of permutations throughout the piece, called "Sonata" only meta-

Example 8. Yordan Goshev, *Organ Sonata #1*



Example 10. Kiril Lambov, *Prelude and Toccata*



phorically by the author. According to him,<sup>5</sup> traditional form-building is a term that should be treated more widely, not always implying strict, uniform schemes. The piece is more math-oriented than poetry-derived, and the author placed the verse at the end, after having finished writing it.

Quite different are **Yordan Goshev's** two organ sonatas, works written and premiered approximately 30 years ago. While leaning on the traditional side of form and metro-rhythmic language, the melodic language is somewhat chromatic, with quasi-tonal elements and without a written key signature. A German style prelude-and-fugue influence is evident, combined with some recitatives (Example 8).

**Artin Poturlian** completed his *Five Pieces in Memory of Friedrich Goldmann* in 2009.<sup>6</sup> Here Poturlian's musical language is different from that used in the *Four Spiritual Chants* (published in the first volume). For the most part, the pieces' building blocks consist of multi-rhythmic structures, often imitating bells. Bells are referenced in one way or another in all of the five pieces,

and, at the end, the composer wrote the following phrase: "Listen to the bell of your heart!" The subtly mathematical, subtly atonal approach is characteristic throughout. There are changes in rhythmic proportions in addition to the composer's favorite atypical rhythmic divisions (Example 9).

**Kiril Lambov's** boisterous *Prelude and Toccata*, written in the 1980s, is representative of this composer's style: "spiced-up," rather energetic and temperamental, with a solid, albeit ambiguous, tonal base. While the Prelude is rather short, mostly preparing the listener for the Toccata (segue), the latter is extensive, with Prokofiev-like rhythmic ostinati, jazz elements, and a final "apothecosis" section. This is a brilliant and effective concert piece (Example 10). ■

**Notes**

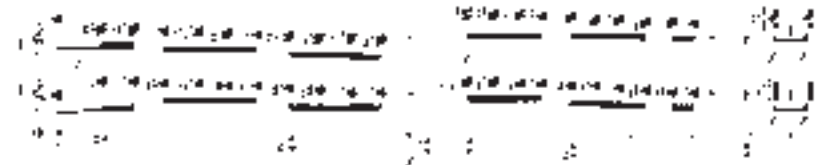
1. Velislav Zaimov, personal interview, October 2009.
2. Zaimov's *Second Sonata* for organ, smaller than his first, is in Volume IV.
3. Reger also wrote a chorale prelude on *Es kommt ein Schiff, geladen*.
4. Translated by the author of this article.
5. Adrian Pavlov, personal interview, March 2010.
6. This piece, together with Taskov's *Landscapes of the Soul* and Sabin Levi's *Morenica*, was premiered at the New Bulgarian Music Festival in Sofia, in April 2010.

*Sabin Levi, DMA, FAGO, is a Bulgarian composer and organist. He has written three musical books and released five CDs, and is also active as a performer, composer, and teacher.*

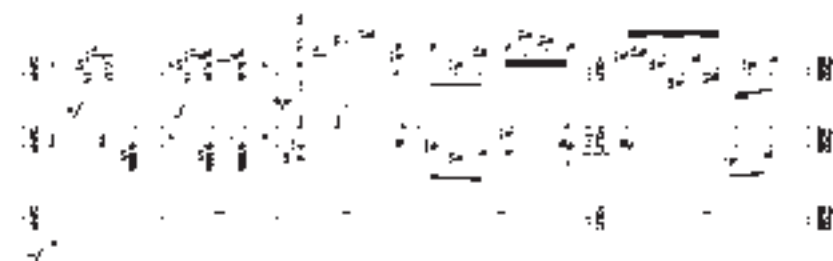
Example 6. Neva Krysteva, *Sonata da chiesa*, beginning of third movement



Example 7. Krassimir Taskov, *Landscapes of the Soul*



Example 9. Artin Poturlian, *Five Pieces in Memory of Friedrich Goldmann*, beginning of piece #2




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