ENO KOÇO

Shostakovich, Kadaré and the nature of dissidence: an Albanian view

THIS ARTICLE CONCERNS THE EFFECT of the communist totalitarian system on two great artists: Dmitri Shostakovich, who lived under Soviet rule before and after the Second World War, and the Albanian author Ismail Kadaré, whose career developed over the last 40 years of the 20th century. In this context readers may need to be reminded of the remarkable isolation of Albania during the post-war communist regime; and it is also worth recalling that most composers throughout the ages have encountered some form of artistic constraint – consider, for example, Bach, Haydn and Beethoven, each of whom had to compose some of their works to order, however benevolent their patrons. The constraints imposed by communist regimes were an extreme example of this master-servant relationship, although one much harder to explain or justify.

In 1958 I went to Leningrad (now St Petersburg) to study the violin at the Rimsky Korsakov Central Music School. One of my room-mates from 1959–61 was Solomon Volkov, whose 1979 book, *Testimony: the memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*, has provoked much heated dispute; another was the viola player Misha Eppelman. In the same close social group were fellow-pupils and friends such as the violinist Vladimir Spivakov and the conductor Mariss Jansons. This group organised frequent visits to a kind of concert hall on the outskirts of Leningrad, near the famous locomotive which brought Lenin from abroad, ready to start the revolution of October 1917. This hall was the only place in the city where concerts of avant-garde music took place. There I heard for the first time performances of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Hindemith, Krenek, Berg and Webern.

When I came to live in the west, some 13 years ago, I encountered two schools of thought in the evaluation of Shostakovich. One, as Christopher Norris puts it, is that Shostakovich 'had come to accept, and gradually to forestall, the edicts of Soviet cultural policy'. The other is expressed by Solomon Volkov: 'Shostakovich was perfectly aware of composing a work whose hidden anti-Stalinist message would one day be heard for what it was.' It is with Volkov that I agree. When I first read *Testimony*, I sensed its essential truthfulness and sincerity. Volkov begins his Preface: 'My personal acquaintance with Shostakovich began in 1960, when I was the first to review the premiere of his Eighth Quartet in a Leningrad newspaper. Shostakovich was then fifty-four. I was sixteen. I was a passionate admirer.' It is certainly

true that Volkov – Monchik as we used to call him – was a passionate admirer. It was he who insisted on taking Eppelman and me to the premiere of the Seventh and Eighth quartets in Leningrad, at the Philharmonic Maly Zal, in 1960. Volkov had previously told me of his intention to write a review of the Eighth Quartet, and also that in future he would prefer to write rather than to play the violin.

Because of the breakdown in relations between Albania and the Soviet Union, I did not see Volkov again after 1961. More than 30 years later, when I moved to the west, I wanted very much to find out about my room-mates. I knew that Volkov had written a book about Shostakovich but I could not get hold of it in Albania. Reading the book now, I can feel the real Shostakovich, his thoughts, judgements and feelings, expressed so transparently by Volkov. I also believe that because of Volkov's unorthodox and challenging stance, the world has learned much about Shostakovich. The logic of the book is the logic of the person whom I knew many years ago.

Questions of dissidence

I have lived in the west for more than a decade, and I have become more and more convinced that it is not easy for western musicians, in general, and some musicologists, in particular, to appreciate fully what was really going on in the musical circles in Russia during the communist period – not to mention in Albania, which was a completely unknown and, to a certain degree, an ignored country. New debates and counter-debates are still emerging today among musicologists and scholars about the interpretation of Shostakovich's life and music. As stated above, I find Volkov's testimony to be absolutely truthful. This is not only because I knew him personally and through him had the chance to meet Shostakovich, but also because I lived for three years in an environment where the daily theme was Prokofiev and Shostakovich. My piano teacher, Elena Nikolaevna Krol, was very much on Prokofiev's side, whereas she, and other veteran musicians, felt that Shostakovich was hiding something. We often discussed with Volkov what exactly it was that was 'hidden' behind Shostakovich's music. Volkov was anxious to discover that mystery. Later on he became the first revisionist critic of the composer's life and music.

For musicians in Russia and for Russians abroad, *Testimony* was accepted as a courageous act and a dissident action. For the west, it came out of the blue. Anti-revisionist scholars such as Richard Taruskin and Laurel Fay strongly disputed Volkov's views. In turn, Taruskin's and Fay's views were challenged by Ian MacDonald and Terry Teachout, staunch defenders of *Testimony*. I myself belong to the 'revisionist' camp, not so much as a genuine scholar as an interpreter and performer who tries to be a careful reader of Shostakovich's symphonies and quartets. Fay, for example, very much

questions not only the composer's memoirs, as dictated to Volkov, but hardly trusts what other colleagues of Shostakovich said, although they, including Mstislav Rostropovich, worked with him in the same environment and in the same circumstances. Consequently Fay arrives at some odd conclusions.

Coincidently, both in Albania and abroad, Kadaré was viewed in almost the same way as Shostakovich by the 'anti-revisionist' critics. One such is Stephen Schwartz of *The San Francisco Chronicle*, who published three critical articles on Ismail Kadaré: two in the Albanian *Catholic Bulletin*, in 1993 and 1994, and one in *The Weekly Standard*, in 1997. Schwartz called Kadaré 'an Albanian Party hack', an epithet of which Noel Malcolm, one of Kadaré's defenders, did not approve. But Schwartz continued to justify himself by stating that 'there is nothing unethical about such criticism on my part. I consider it hilarious that Kadaré, a paid functionary of one of the worst dictatorships of modern times, should have the nerve to cite ethics of any kind in his defence.'

In Albania today there is much discussion about the notions of dissidence and dissident status. The 'anti-revisionist' critics assume that to qualify as a dissident writer or composer an artist should have developed his creativity under communism in a conspiratorial way, unnoticed by officialdom. But in fact the apparat viewed Kadaré's new works with concern and kept an eye on him, since some of his writings appeared suspicious to them. On the other hand, the leader, Enver Hoxha, made impressive gestures to show himself to be a protector of the writer. He occasionally defended Kadaré when he was felt to be out of touch with the party line, and allowed him to live and produce under his protection. Yet despite the fact that Kadaré was one of the most prominent figures of Albanian literature during Hoxha's regime, he was not entirely trusted as a devoted representative of that regime; on the contrary, he was often looked on as its adversary. Thus Kadaré was a pure personification of 'dissident' status. Of course it was his artistry, above all, that resisted the totalitarian regime, but his spirit of dissidence under the conditions of dictatorship also gave him the strength and determination to create and form those distinctive and integral features of his work which made him unique, and gave his output its qualities of imagination and innovation. Kadaré himself never accepted the label 'dissident': he simply wanted to be recognised as a writer.

Although both Shostakovich and Kadaré led stressful lives under continuous, even if disguised, persecution, they seemed to the public to enjoy the protection of the Great Leaders. 'Stalin', writes Volkov, 'made a private decision concerning Shostakovich that was never to be rescinded: Shostakovich was not to be arrested, despite his closeness to such "enemies of the people" ruthlessly destroyed by Stalin as Meyerhold and Marshal Tukhachevsky.'

Volkov comments further: 'In Shostakovich's life and work his relationship with Stalin was an absolutely decisive factor. Stalin inflicted severe trials and public humiliations on Shostakovich; yet, almost simultaneously, he rewarded him with the highest titles and honours. Paradoxically, the honours and defamations both produced unparalleled fame for Shostakovich.'

This account of the relationship between Shostakovich and Stalin is remarkably close to that between Kadaré and Hoxha. Kadaré, like Shostakovich, was not arrested, although many of his friends were crushed as 'enemies of the people'. Kadaré was Hoxha's protégé perhaps because they came from the same town, but also because of the international standing which undoubtedly saved him from the brutal fate that befell most Albanian intellectuals in the period from 1945 to 1985. Kadaré was rewarded with official titles and honours; however, he felt extremely insecure until he sought political asylum in France in 1990. The phrase used by Volkov ('paradoxically, the honours and defamations both produced unparalleled fame for Shostakovich') could equally well apply to Kadaré.

In the Soviet Union, Stalin allowed some distinguished literary figures like Akhmatova, Pasternak and Zoshchenko to carry on with their lives and works, although he and the apparatchiks felt that their views obviously contradicted those of the regime. Hoxha treated Kadaré in the same way. Both Shostakovich and Kadaré, distinguished figures not only in their country but internationally recognised, enjoyed special privileges unavailable to other authors. Any exclusion from public life would have provoked a foreign campaign in defence of the artists, and so the regimes, on this particular issue, were highly sensitive. Those who clearly opposed the regime but were less known to the wider public were more likely to have been sacrificed and liquidated for the sake of the ideology and 'stability' of the country. Meyerhold, Babel and Mandelstam are known in Russia for their tragic fates; more recently we have become aware of the fates of the two Albanian poets Vilson Blloshmi and Genc Leka, who were assassinated because of their open denunciation of Hoxha's rule.

As mentioned above, the notion of 'dissidence' was perceived and understood, mainly by the western musicologists and critics who studied Shostakovich and Kadaré from two opposing sides: from the revisionist and anti-revisionist standpoints. The anti-revisionist tendency is inclined to support its view by demonstrating that what the composer and the writer officially expressed in print represented views corresponding to those of the communist state. Oral evidence, or what was seen and heard during their lives, seems of less importance to the anti-revisionists. Of course, statements appeared over the composer's and writer's signatures in official publications, but these should not be understood as gestures of hypocrisy, but rather as

gestures of compromise. Judging from the political circumstances of the time, their actions should be seen rather as a means of survival, particularly when their intellectual careers were in jeopardy – a well-known phenomenon under authoritarian regimes. 'It is easy to judge from afar. But if you had been in my shoes, you'd sing another tune', stated Shostakovich, according to Volkov, when he was justifying his actions following the withdrawal of the Fourth Symphony. There were circumstances when the composer and the writer considered that they had to protect themselves by conforming to the requirements of officialdom. Consequently, both of them had to join the Communist Party. That kind of misperception about and misinterpretation on the part of the anti-revisionist scholars on the lives and writings of Shostakovich and Kadaré, and in particular of the coded messages of defiance to communist oppression which pervaded their work, has often been characteristic of western criticism.

Thus there are striking similarities between the fates of these two creators who developed their careers in two different countries, which after 1961 had no relationship or communication between each other, either human or material. Albania, which until 1961 belonged to the 'socialist family', gradually became an 'orthodox communist' country, in fact a paranoid system out of contact with the rest of Europe.

Censorship

As is well known, the ideology of Socialist Realism was a method of controlling artists', composers' and writer's creativity, and was also a kind of indoctrination which made many citizens and artists believe that it was their duty to protect society from western modernistic 'bourgeois' influences. My experience was that in Albania, as in other 'socialist' countries, self-censorship became second nature for the majority of musicians, artists and writers: one had to protect oneself in order to 'protect' society from western viruses. However, there were some among these artists and writers who clearly understood that censorship was based on Party dogma, but who nevertheless tried to convey their free and humane ideas through their works. The names of Mstislav Rostropovich, Galina Vishnevskaya, Mariya Yudina, Sviatoslav Richter, David Oistrakh, Andrei Gavrilov and Vladimir Ashkenazy in Russia are nowadays known to everybody; so also is the name of the Albanian writer Ismail Kadaré, who now lives in Paris and Tirana. 'Shostakovich was one of those', as Rostropovich pointed out four years ago during his 75th birthday celebrations in London, 'who suffered very much' under the Soviet system.

Both Shostakovich and Kadaré realised the danger of being denounced by the 'defenders' of socialist realism, or even by their own musical and literary colleagues. Thus in order to be able to pursue their creativity, they needed to

make some concessions to what was expected of artists by the regime. One way was to write 'easily understood' works of a 'socialist character', as in the case of Shostakovich, or patriotic poems and novels, as in the case of Kadaré; another way was to express a kind of affiliation to the regime by criticising some of the composers and writers of the past. I am not sure of the extent to which what they expressed came entirely from their hearts. They may have had reservations about some creators of the past; they did not, however, try to ignore them completely. Rather, I think that by expressing those opinions publicly, they felt they put themselves on a safer ideological footing. Shostakovich, for example, in 1931 criticised Scriabin for his 'bourgeois-decadent' aesthetics. 'We consider Scriabin as our bitter musical enemy. Why? Because his music tends toward unhealthy eroticism. Also to mysticism, passivity and a flight from the reality of life.' Kadaré also expressed a similar negative view, claiming that the Roman Catholic poet Fishta became a regressive and reactionary force in Albanian national culture because of his mystical religious thinking. Although these expressions may seem hypocritical, or at least undignified, this kind of language should be understood in the context of a period when certain patterns or formulae such as 'bourgeois', 'reactionary', and 'anti-nationalistic' were in common use, becoming a kind of official jargon in newspapers and at communist meetings.

Nevertheless, there were clearly difficult, even critical, moments in the lives of Shostakovich and Kadaré. In Shostakovich's case one of these came when two *Pravda* editorials of a directly threatening nature appeared in quick succession. As Volkov writes, 'the composer and everyone around him were certain that he would be arrested. His friends kept their distance from him. Like many other people at that time, he always kept a suitcase packed and ready [...] For nearly four decades, until his death, he would see himself as a hostage, a condemned man. The fear might increase or decrease, but it never disappeared.'

Kadaré, too, had to live under the same kind of threat. In the 1970s, on a Sunday morning, I met Kadaré's sister Kadrie in front of the 'Soviet Bookshop' (as it was still called, even after Albania left the Soviet 'family'). She told me that she had been asked by her brother to check whether his book was still for sale or had been banned. 'He is hidden in his house', she said, 'and is waiting for my answer before he leaves the house.' On another occasion, after being heavily criticised on ideological grounds in the early 1980s, just before a rally at the Union of Writers and Artists, he came into the lobby and asked me to sit next to him. I did not have any particular friendship with him, but he apparently needed somebody outside his circle of colleagues to be close to him. But I did not follow him since I had my little daughter in my arms, and I deeply regretted that I did not support him at that moment of crisis.

As is known, Shostakovich's and Kadaré's works had won critical acclaim outside the Soviet Union and Albania, and this fact was well used as propaganda in favour of the communist systems in both countries. But even though both men were given the freedom to travel and to be performed and published abroad, on certain occasions they were criticised publicly, and their works were censured for a period. In 1982 Kadaré was accused of deliberately avoiding politics by basing much of his fiction on history and folklore. This came after the first publication in Albania of his 1981 novel, *The palace of dreams*, and as a result it was immediately banned by order of the government. He had previously been banned and 'recovered', as in 1975, when he was forbidden to publish for three years after offending the authorities with a politically satirical poem. In fact, censorship for Kadaré had begun with his first novel, *The general of the dead army* (originally published in 1963), a survey of post-war Albania, about which there was an open debate in the League of Albanian Writers and Artists. I was present when that debate took place and I was amazed by the courage and competence with which Kadaré's novel was defended by Skënder Luarasi, another eminent Albanian dissident scholar. He represented a unique case of dissidence in the Albanian history of literature during the post-war totalitarian system.

Ambiguities

Shostakovich's works, like Kadaré's, harbour distinct ambiguities of programme and meaning. Both men's attitudes to their respective regimes were ambiguous, even in such light-hearted works as Shostakovich's *Cheryomushky*, as was cleverly reflected in the 1997 production by Opera North in Leeds. Yet in spite of the demands of socialist realism, Shostakovich fought to maintain an authenticity of feeling, by writing music which was sincere, truthful and loved by the people because of its inspiration and emotional depth.

Ambiguities in Shostakovich's music, as in Kadaré's books, became a *modus vivendi*; it was in music, this abstract terrain, that the composer could express the sufferings of his artistic conscience, his humanity, and his protest through the deployment of drama, tragedy, mockery, grotesquery and tenderness. Thus did Kadaré write in the preface of his book *The file on H* that he created 'a panorama of Albanian history, from the most ancient times to the present, linked by recurrent dreams and superstitions, by national pride and its oppression, and above all by a constant meditation on the nature of the human consequences of dictatorship.'

Kadaré chose historic subjects and legends because by entering into an abstract world of the past he could make veiled comparisons with the present, usually with the real protagonists of the everyday political life in Albania. In his book *Chronicle in stone*, Kadaré viewed the world through the eyes of a

child who has gathered pieces of coloured glass from broken bottles in the streets and looked through them at objects which became magnified and deformed, like the writer's perception of facts and events.

HOWEVER, the very special type of creator represented by Kadaré and Shostakovich had to weigh carefully the relationship between art and the ideology dictated by the political order of the day. The question arises about the extent to which their artistic expression may have been sacrificed for the sake of fulfilling their social-aesthetic obligations. Both composer and writer were seen either as heroes of the new Socialist Realism or, more commonly, as individuals whose ideological position was always ambiguous. Thus both had periodically to write works which could please, to a certain degree, the regime and make the apparatchiks think that the inspiration derived from 'socialist reality'.

Thus in 1964 Kadaré wrote a poem, *Përse mendohen këto male* ('What are these mountains thinking about?'), which clearly expresses Albania's 'pride' and 'the roots of the Party' under Hoxha. There is a striking similarity between the minds of Shostakovich and Kadaré: both contrived to make the authorities happy by intentionally creating some works that were easier to digest, before continuing with works encoding a message which, as Shostakovich states through Volkov in *Testimony*, 'one day would be heard for what it was'. These two creators were characterised by courage mingled with anxiety; they knew that censorship was based on fear, but they also knew and felt that music and literature should be a free expression of the ideas, traditions and emotions of individuals. So in writing works which often contained hints of 'divided loyalties', they were fully aware of the risk they incurred. After the performance or publication of such a work, they were prepared, in a way, to face their critics. It might sound strange, but they preferred to live at a much higher level of risk than others than to adopt a position of complete self-censorship. There were others who wrote ordinary pieces to meet the immediate needs of the regime. But even those composers and writers who were most loyal and devoted to the Party were aware that there could always be a measure of ambiguity in their works.

These difficulties for dissident authors continued over several decades. Interpretations after the event, with the benefit of hindsight, may today sound somewhat speculative; but in my experience this is how it really was. It remains difficult for a westerner to understand exactly what was going on in such an isolated society as Albania, or even in Russia, which has been far more reported upon. It is even more difficult to understand today the psychological complexity of the artists' minds in these circumstances, and how censorship operated in this highly restricted society. Censorship operated even in the family. You could not be sincere, from the political point of

view, even with your wife and children. This is what Solomon Volkov tried to explain in *Testimony*.

The 'abstract', non-representational, aspect of music permits it to embody hidden agendas in a way impossible for visual and literary arts. There is always room in music for an intentionally ambiguous message, even when it has a programme. For example, in Romania, as in most of the former Soviet bloc, a Mozart Mass, even the Requiem, could not be performed because of its religious text. In order to have religious music performed, concert presenters changed the titles of the sections, replacing them with new socialist ones: instead of Gloria, 'Rejoice in the arrival of the partisans'; instead of Credo, 'The Party is our belief'; instead of Agnus Dei, 'The happiness for the new-born lambs'.

The performance of Shostakovich's symphonies and their musical language

Shostakovich's life, with its a constant tension and risk, was reflected in his music. He struggled ceaselessly for this right to a real, rather than false, art. He suffered much and fought many battles; but he was never defeated in the sense that he had to abandon composition or reform and start again, within constraints, to create that sort of music which would have justified his intentions. The official critics often denounced him for 'formalism', a dangerous charge since this meant that the creator was seen to belong to a special category, unacceptably close to cosmopolitan, anti-nationalistic or decadent music. In 1948 Zhdanov, the head of the Communist Party Central Committee, brutally denounced Shostakovich for 'formalism'; the composer had to 'accept' the denunciation in front of the Soviet of Composers' members by making a humiliating response.

Already before the war Shostakovich had been criticised as formalist, and responded with self-criticism, notably in his Fifth Symphony. After the war he was expected to compose a significant work, celebrating the victory of 1945, but his Ninth Symphony disappointed in official Soviet circles, since it appeared high-spirited and did not to carry a heroic message. Again he had to face the old charge of 'formalism' or formalist deviation, and the Ninth was seen as a retreat from the march of historical events. The music critic Martin Dreyer, reviewing a performance of this symphony with the York Symphony Orchestra in 1995, stated that

> Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony would not have been everyone's choice of vehicle for the task. But it proved exceedingly inspired. It was immediately clear that the orchestra had taken its wealth of witty detail right to his heart. There was a clever comic irony behind the crisp, perky approach to the first movement, where the duo involving trombone and piccolo [...] was expertly handled. The whimsical slow movement set up an appealing contrast with the gusty scherzo, not to mention the open buffoonery of the finale.

These comments reflect what I as the conductor of this performance had in mind.

The convulsive nature of the period before 1936 was expressed in his Fifth Symphony. Much of the debate about Shostakovich has been centred on this monumental work, which evokes images of suffering, struggle and triumph. The official critic praised the symphony highly as a self-reforming act and a 'correct' view on the part of the composer, as if it were now showing support for the regime. Reading *Testimony* reassured me of my understanding of the Fifth Symphony; on the one hand, it expresses the inmost feelings of the individual in a restless society and, on the other, the individual's attempt to detach himself completely from the deceiving world. I would summarise the movements of the Fifth Symphony in this way: I, unease and spiritual retreat; II, amusement; III, confession; IV, procession: anguish and pomp. I have always instinctively felt that the Fifth is conceived from the position of retreat. The composer observed the world from this standpoint. His reply to criticism was philosophically sophisticated, a genuine message for genuine intellectuals rather than a trophy in the hands of the indoctrinated devotees of the regime. *Testimony* quotes Shostakovich's words about the finale: 'I never thought about any exultant finales, for what exultation could there be?'.

In November 1997, I conducted the Department of Music Philharmonia of the University of Leeds in a performance of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony. Among the audience was the British Shostakovich scholar. Before the concert I said to Dr Fanning that I very much supported Solomon Volkov's views on Shostakovich and, in particular, endorsed the hidden messages of this symphony. Fanning replied that he was of the same mind about the symphony and its coded meanings but that he could not accept the authenticity of Volkov's work. Afterwards he congratulated me, and I asked him how he found the interpretation. He replied that there were moments that he truly liked, but that there were also moments that he would have wanted to have been treated in a different way. Fair enough. I was perceiving the score in more or less the same way as, I assume, Volkov, or perhaps the British writer Ian MacDonald, would have perceived it. Symbolic references, coded messages of the individual insecurity, sarcastic expression and resistance to the oppression of the regime are, I think, some of the details whereby the musical themes should be revealed and treated in the Tenth Symphony from the performance point of view.

'I heard more attacks on the Fourteenth than on any of my other symphonies', stated Shostakovich in his memoirs. When I performed this symphony with the Department of Music Orchestra in 1993, I read *Testimony* again and was astonished (but also touched) by the composer's declaration:

'Here the criticism came from people who claimed to be my friends [...] they read this idea in the Fourteenth Symphony: "death is all-powerful". They wanted the finale to be comforting, to say that the death is only the beginning. But it's not a beginning, it's the real end, there will be nothing afterwards, nothing.' I read in Russian the poems of Lorca, Apollinaire and Rilke on which the eternal themes of this symphony are based: love, life and death. I tried my best to understand what Shostakovich felt when he was composing this symphony: 'I was thinking about prison cells, horrible holes where people are buried alive, waiting for someone to come for them, listening to every sound.'

The musical language of Shostakovich is a product of various searching tendencies, from western composers, mainly Mahler, to Russian masters, particularly Musorgsky and Stravinsky. He absorbed from these composers and transformed some characteristic features and expressive devices to his own unique style and musical language, such as melancholy, irony and the grotesque. Although he did not experiment with Schoenbergian serialism he became one of the most eminent representatives of the 20th century thanks to his writing music of great passion and complexity, all within the framework of traditional tonality. The Soviet reality in which he lived until the end of his life taught him to write in the most extreme ways, from the enormous instrumentation of the Fourth Symphony and autobiographical Tenth Symphony to the jazz suites and *Cheriomushky*.

Norman Lebrecht wrote that Gustav Mahler was the first composer (who was also a world-famous conductor) to urge conductors to bend certain phrases and suggest a subversive undercurrent: According to this viewpoint, with which I agree,

> there are four ways of conducting a Shostakovich symphony. The official Soviet method, happily a thing of the past, involved much oom-pah and precious little rubato. The dissident school, led by such defectors as Rostropovich, Kyril Kondrashin and Shostakovich's son, Maxim, leaned too much the other way and seemed to be underscoring every other phrase with political intent. Certain Western conductors – Stokowski, Haitink, Karajan – achieved a kind of musical Finlandisation, which acted as if the USSR did not exist, and the symphonies were performable as a Mahlerian extension. The fourth method, now prevalent, is the messiest. Its proponents are conductors who grew up under the hammer and sickle. They knew the compromises Shostakovich had to make, and experienced his music in more shades than propagandist black and white. The approach of Jansons, Gergiev and Järvi combines text with subtext in a way that echoes the original interpreters, Mravinsky and Sanderling, but adds post-Soviet undertones.

Some reflections on the criticism about Kadaré

In recent times, probably the most bitter criticism towards Kadaré has come from Stephen Schwartz, more specifically in an article, 'Ismail Kadaré's prize fight,' which appeared in *The Weekly Standard* for 24 March 1997. He tries

hard to stress his impartiality and that by expressing his opinions as a journalist he is only doing his job. In a letter replying to Noel Malcolm published on 15 January 1998, he writes: 'My first reaction after reading the letters column in your issue of January 15, with its exchange between the despicable Ismail Kadaré and the estimable Noel Malcolm, and then rereading Mr. Malcolm's article on Kadaré ('In the Palace of Nightmares') in your issue of November 6, 1997, was "How very Balkan!"' Then he continues: 'This concatenation of personalities points to the Balkans, but what gives the whole matter the true flavour of a Balkan stew requires more elucidation.'

No doubt Mr Schwartz has mixed feelings about a person and a peninsula, more specifically, about Kadaré and the Balkans. Mr Schwartz is also concerned that in Mr Malcolm's article

> none of these several references was seen by your editors as requiring that my name be mentioned or that my article be cited by its actual title or with its date of publication [...] The publication of a long polemical article in which one's opponent is targeted by allusion and never mentioned by name is extremely Balkan, but it is also extremely Stalinist [...] This was a detail even more Balkan than the exercise in semi-anonymous polemics that preceded it.

These comments and others in his article seem to me to be misjudged. It is, in fact, Kadaré, who by representing some of the best of Balkan ethics, brings to European and world culture a Balkan and Mediterranean flavour, enriched with expressions of national identity and elaborated by his artistry.

In Albania it was common to label writers and artists with some praising epithets and literary expressions and to line up them according to their 'values'. This was done not only by literary critics and journalists but also by ordinary people. During the communist regime the classification of writers and artists carried a kind of credibility status. Nowadays it does not have any ideological context, but the old principles cannot be easily forgotten. Although this way of thinking has considerably changed towards a more westernised democratic concept, the methodology which has been learned in the Eastern universities is still clearly different from the western, and it reminds me sometimes the former doctrine.

The majority of Kadaré's supporters in Albania regard him as 'Albania's greatest novelist of all times', others as a 'genius', as 'the symbol of hope' or 'the guardian of memory', and so on. His opponents, again in Albania, regard him as 'Hoxha's rhapsody singer' or accuse him of being a collaborator. Foreign critics have viewed him both ways, and he has been a perpetual nominee for the Nobel Prize. As far as his supporters in Albania are concerned, I don't think they need to use this kind of labelling to put him in his rightful glorious place. Of course, Albania is proud to have writers of that magnitude of Kadaré and several others, but the superlative phrases only

reflect a lack of competence in the literary and journalist field. It is more professional to justify one's merits and it is not enough to crown him or her with laurel leafs.

It is common, we have to accept, that today's critics and general readers write and speak of Kadaré in different ways: with disbelief as well as great enthusiasm, with disdain as well as respect. For many people Kadaré, like Shostakovich, remains a cause for argument. However, it should be stressed that Kadaré is the one who clearly helped to shake the foundations of the totalitarian regime in Albania. He was an immensely gifted writer who used his novels sometimes as a means of Aesopian truth-telling and at other times to state his intentions more directly. It is also true that he had to hide his dissident feelings by accepting several of the regime's public offices and honours. It is ironical that most of the criticism on Kadaré comes from ever-present shadowy forces which, as in the past, are trying to harm him by all sorts of means.

The fact that Kadaré was not an open dissident I would consider as a clever tactic on his part, since open dissidence in Albania, under such a ruthless dictatorship, would have been a great mistake and would not help anybody. Kadaré's dissident feelings made him resist, write and nourish the people and, particularly, students with his hidden dissident views, and, as in Shostakovich's case, he 'was perfectly aware of composing [writing] a work whose hidden anti-Stalinist [anti-Hoxhian] message would one day be heard for what it was'. It was this dissident feeling which motivated Kadaré to write in a different way, perhaps imitating Hemingway and Remarque in his initial period, and to continue to search for his own ways, deviating within limits from the schematic path of socialist realism. He survived primarily thanks to his talent and creativity, but also because of his vision, pro-western feelings, ambition and, at times, clever manoeuvring tactics.

My personal musical experiences in an isolated system

Historically Albania has not been a prosperous country, and nearly 500 years under the Ottoman Empire and almost 50 years under a communist regime in the second half of the 20th century made things develop in the most difficult way possible. Although there was some art music tradition in the first half of the 20th century (the works of Lec Kurti (1884–1948), Thoma Nassi (1892–1964), Martin Gjoka (1890–1940), Fan S. Noli (1882–1965), Murat Shehu (1897–1978) and Mikel Koliqi (1902–97) showed that this music was a vital element of Albania's period of awakening), study of this tradition was never encouraged during the communist regime; and censorship of these authors and their works was extremely tight, simply for ideological reasons.

Having been interested for many years in pre-Second World War Albanian orchestral music, I made the first-ever recordings of several Albanian

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works with the Albanian Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra between 1978 and 1991, while I was its permanent conductor. For each of them I had to ask special permission from the authorities on the condition that they were to be used only for study purposes. The recorded pre-war repertoire included the Symphony, *Two flowers on Scanderbeg's grave*, by Martin Gjoka (1932), the *Albanian rhapsody* by Murat Shehu (1937), the tone poem *Scanderbeg*, *Le Pauvre Gaspard* for tenor and orchestra, the *Albanian rhapsody* and *Byzantine overture* by Fan S. Noli, the last four written in Boston, in 1937.

Martin Gjoka was a Franciscan from Shkodër, whose music was completely unknown to the Albanian audience until the mid-1980s, simply because he was a clergyman and religion was banned in Albania by law.

Murat Shehu was born in Albania and emigrated to the United States at the age of 15. Although his works, *Rhapsodies for orchestra* nos.1–3, the symphonic poem *Albanian rhapsody* and particularly his songs, invoke love and nostalgia for his beloved country, he was considered a person without a clear profile and again I had to obtain special permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to record his *Rhapsody*. Mikel Koliqi, born in Shkodër, spent nearly half of his life in prison during the communist regime, simply because of his religious beliefs. His melodramas *Rozafa*, *The siege of Shkodër* and *The red scarf*, which were written and performed between 1936 and 1938, are considered to be the precursors of the Albanian operatic movement. None of his works was allowed to be performed, since he was still alive and in prison. Thoma Nassi, a composer from southern Albania, arrived with a band from America in 1920. Although his contribution to Albanian musical life was unique, he was not regarded favourably by the post-war regime in Albania: his vocal and instrumental works were not performed, his musical activities as conductor and composer were not discussed. In short, he was never given the credit he deserved as an art composer, as one of the first to introduce western musical culture into Albania. Fan S. Noli, an Orthodox Bishop, composed in Boston, among other major vocal and orchestral works, the symphonic poem *Scanderbeg* for full orchestra, based on Longfellow's poem of the same name. His musical language is deliberately archaic, evoking antiquity, ancient civilisation or times of glory.

During the post-Second World War regime in Albania several musicians, among them composers, were arrested and sent into exile for their 'ideological mistakes'. This was the situation with the tradition of art music. However, much more paradoxical edicts were issued under the totalitarian regime. Requiems, Masses or any kind of liturgical works were not allowed to be performed. There was a period from the late 1960s until the mid-1980s when Albania was under the political and even artistic influence of China and foreign operas were also banned for a while. Among Soviet composers, Shostakovich, in particular, was not allowed to be played because he lived in a 'revisionist' country. Western 20th-century composers, with rare exceptions, were also banned, as they were too while I was in Leningrad in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Arnold Schoenberg was the prototype of 'evil' and 12-note music was totally rejected.

When I returned to Albania in the early 1960s, the Russian musical influence was quite strong since there were dozens of students who had studied in the Soviet conservatories. Among them were composers, instrumentalists, vocalists and lecturers in the theory of music. In other words, there were enough students and graduates to constitute a real asset to the Albanian musical culture of that period. A great number of students from other socialist countries also returned in 1961 at the same time as their colleagues

from Russia. Among them were excellent singers returning from Bulgaria, strong instrumentalists from Czechoslovakia and Romania, and other musicians from Hungary, Poland and eastern Germany. Although the first Albanian Conservatoire was founded in January 1962, at this time all this artistic potential had to stay in isolation and to work in a low-key way. Nobody was allowed to travel abroad. Albania had cut itself off from the outside world. However, as almost always happens in closed societies, all these restricted measures applied by the Party, its Government and their ideology created the opposite effect. The 'banned' works and the restrictions on making musical contacts abroad were considered by the musicians as a real absurdity and they were even more eager to learn about the musical world outside in both the eastern and western hemispheres. Through the radio and later on television, musicians were aware of what was going on in western countries, especially in Italy. However, it was the audience which was particularly affected and had to be penalised by all the ideological nonsense that had taken hold of the country. The end of isolation, as in other countries of eastern Europe, made Albanian musicians impatient for contact with western Europe. Whilst in Albania we heard that some individual artists from the eastern countries had fled to the west, but no Albanian musician left the country until the late 1980s; his or her family would have been severely punished. It was June Emerson, a publisher of wind music from North Yorkshire, who made it possible for me and my family to perform and stay in this country, and I am very grateful to her.

Today the top Albanian singers perform at Covent Garden, the Metropolitan in New York, the Wiener Staatsoper, the Arena di Verona and elsewhere. There are also instrumentalists, violinists and cellists who promote themselves by their commercial recordings, recitals and concerts. But what about Albanian composers? The music of the past and present has crossed Albania's borders and been positively acclaimed, but these compositions, however good they may be, take longer to become familiar to western ears than performances by singers and instrumentalists who have direct contact with their audiences. Albania is now progressing towards the western model of society, but patience is needed since it will take decades. Human minds change more slowly than even the most advanced government superstructures.

Returning to our main theme of the effect of totalitarian regimes on musicians and writers, I want to stress once again that people in the free world perhaps sometimes forget how privileged they are to be able express their thoughts freely, to compose and perform in a completely unrestricted way and to live in democratic societies. We must not forget that under totalitarian systems, in spite of the appellation 'socialist', the regimes

were conservative and aesthetic expression was rigidly controlled. In spite of such restrictions, Shostakovich and Kadaré persistently strove to liberate music and literature in their respective countries from communist repression and, thankfully, survived the attempt, though not without a great deal of difficulty and stress.

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