

PRIMA
CLASSIC

A
JOURNEY
OF LOVE



EUGENE SOIFERTIS
PLAYS
MIKAEL TARIVERDIEV

A JOURNEY OF LOVE

WORKS BY MIKAEL TARIVERDIEV (1931-1996)



MOODS: 24 SHORT PIECES FOR PIANO

**1. Sonnet 102
(William Shakespeare)**

From *8 Sonnets by Shakespeare* for voice and piano from the film *Adam Marries Eve*.
Arranged for piano by Suren Vartanyan

**2. Variations on Themes from
*The Irony of Fate***

Composed by Ivan Bessonov

**3. Towards Calm River Station (Na
Tihoretskuyu)**

Music from the film *The Irony of Fate*
Arranged for piano by Suren Vartanyan

4. Nocturne (Don't Disappear)

Music from the film *Olga Sergeevna*
Arranged for piano by Hennadii
Bezyazychnyi

5. Two in a Café

Prelude for piano from the film *Seventeen
Moments of Spring*

6. I. Icicles

7. II. Game

8. III. A Canvas by an Old Master

9. IV. Prelude

10. V. Forgotten Motif

11. VI. Ballet Class

12. VII. Tenderness

13. VIII. Waltz

14. IX. Autumn Road

15. X. Music from a TV Set

16. XI. Little Invention

17. XII. A Shower in Fair Weather

18. XIII. First Pas à Pointe

19. XIV. Tarantella

20. XV. On the Moskva River (à la Tchaikovsky)

21. XVI. Teaser

22. XVII. Reflections

23. XVIII. Request

24. XIX. Little Circus Girl

25. XX. In Front of the Mirror

26. XXI. Alone

27. XXII. Consolation

28. XXIII. Duet

29. XXIV. Feast

30. Eight Fleetingnesses on a Folk Theme

31. Ragtime 9

Music for piano from the film *Russian Ragtime*

32. Ragtime 12

Music for piano from the film *Russian Ragtime*

33. Prelude

Music from the film *My Younger Brother*

34. Boys and the Sea

Prelude from the film *Goodbye, Boys*

35. Little Prince

Song from the film *Passenger from the "Equator"*
Arranged for piano by George Harliono

A JOURNEY OF LOVE



It all started about a year ago, when I got a call from my dear friend Elizaveta Permiakova.

“Have you heard the Moods piano cycle by Tariverdiev?” Of course, I knew much of Tariverdiev’s film music, but I had not heard of this cycle or any other piano music by him. From that moment on, I embarked on an exciting journey into the magical world of Mikael Tariverdiev’s music, which could best be characterised by the word “love”.

As Vera Tariverdieva, the composer’s widow, who has dedicated her life to preserving and making her husband’s music more widely known, has written: “In Tariverdiev’s music, no borders exist between popular and academic music, music for a select audience and music for the general public, music for professionals and music for amateurs.”

It is difficult to find a composer whose music enjoyed such boundless popularity within the space of the former Soviet Union as Tariverdiev’s music did.

It is known across all of the former Soviet Union and is now also becoming known beyond its borders. He wrote music for 132 films – a record that earned him a mention in the *Guinness World Records* – and received 18 international prizes for his film music, including an American Academy of Music award and a Japan Victor Company (JVC) award.

Tariverdiev also composed more than 100 songs and romances (some better described as madrigals), four ballets, five operas, chamber vocal cycles, symphonic music, three concertos for organ, two concertos for violin and orchestra, a concerto for viola and orchestra, two trios and several piano cycles. His music was recorded and released in the United Kingdom by the *Earth Recordings* label and performed at Buckingham Palace, and Hollywood even offered him work but the Soviet authorities did not allow it. When his heart was failing him, he received an operation in London free of charge at the best hospital in the city.

Tariverdiev's life was like a real adventure novel. It contained huge fame and success, great envy, betrayal by a lover, and visits to Chernobyl (which resulted in a symphony for organ dedicated to the nuclear accident there). He was an athlete, enjoyed photography, was a TV presenter, had a reputation as a playboy, and a year before his death was even included in a list of sex symbols in Russia. A short episode sheds even more light on his character: A Spanish princess once wanted Tariverdiev's music for her royal wedding, but when the party representing her tried to lower the price previously agreed upon, he gave them his music for free... But the composer later declined to meet the princess at the Bolshoi Theatre when she visited Moscow.

Mikael Tariverdiev was born into an Armenian family on August 15, 1931, in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. His youth coincided with the post-war wave of arrests in the Soviet Union. His father, a bank director, lost his job, while his mother was threatened due to coming from a wealthy family. As a result, the Tariverdiev family had to hide for some time, moving from one friend's home to another.

Tariverdiev first studied in the Armenian capital of Yerevan but later moved to Moscow and spent the rest of his life there. He died on July 25, 1996, in Sochi, Russia.

Tariverdiev studied at the Gnessin Institute under Aram Khachaturian, becoming the famous composer's favourite pupil. His talent was also recognised by Dmitri Shostakovich, who gave him lessons in orchestration.

Already from his early years, Tariverdiev's talent was closely connected with the cinema, and he continued the great traditions of cinematic music established by Sergei Prokofiev and Dimitri Shostakovich. He was also an accomplished pianist, showing a special love for the instrument and often accompanying singers performing his vocal cycles and playing the piano parts for his films. After all, the early silent films had always been accompanied by piano, and his mentor Shostakovich had once worked as a pianist in cinema theatres.

But Tariverdiev did not compose music for films in the usual sense of this work. Instead, he often improvised in a studio while listening to the filmmakers' ideas about a film; in fact, his music often inspired the filmmakers and the films they made. These improvisations were recorded, sometimes in just one take, which was then used in the film. In many cases, his music outlives the films themselves and continues to exist independently, expressing much more global ideas and emotions than the films themselves did.

One such example is his *8 Sonnets by Shakespeare* cycle (1982) in a beautiful translation into Russian by the poet and translator Samuil Marshak. Tariverdiev did not wish to call the pieces songs or romances; instead, he referred to them as sonnets, continuing the madrigal tradition of the 16th and early 17th centuries. His performance of the cycle was included in the film *Adam Marries Eve* (1981) directed by Viktor Titov, which was based on a play by the German writer Rudi Strahl. In it, a young engaged couple who identify themselves as Adam and Eve appear as defendants in a fictional court hearing, the purpose of which is to decide whether they should become husband and wife.

As per the director's request, the music was composed prior to the shooting of the film and played a crucial, inspirational role for Titov, giving the film supplemental meaning from the sonnets themselves. Tariverdiev's own performance of the music (he also sang the sonnets himself) brought an additional deep philosophical sense to the film, which was initially intended as a comedy.

In her paper "Implementing the Madrigal Tradition in Sonnets by M. Tariverdiev", Yaroslava A. Kabalevskaya writes about the embodiment of the madrigal tradition in the cycle of sonnets that appears in *Adam Marries Eve*. She concludes that the music contains plenty of parallels with the madrigals of the 16th and early 17th centuries and that these are potent features of Tariverdiev's talent in composing music with a resemblance to the creations of an era distant in time but close to the hearts of modern listeners.

I perform one of these sonnets (Sonnet 102), which has been beautifully transcribed for the piano by Suren Vartanyan. The music can be described as gentle arabesques surrounding a beautiful melody yearning for the heavens.

Sonnet 102 by William Shakespeare

*My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming;
I love not less, though less the show appear:
That love is merchandised whose rich esteeming
The owner's tongue doth publish every where.
Our love was new and then but in the spring
When I was wont to greet it with my lays,
As Philomel in summer's front doth sing
And stops her pipe in growth of riper days:
Not that the summer is less pleasant now
Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
But that wild music burthens every bough
And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.
Therefore like her I sometime hold my tongue,
Because I would not dull you with my song.*

Tariverdiev's music for the television film *The Irony of Fate* (1975) by director Eldar Ryazanov belongs to this same genre of madrigals. Like the television series *Seventeen Moments of Spring*, it acquired legendary status, having been rebroadcast by popular demand for many years (and up to the present day) across the former countries of the Soviet Union. It was estimated that 250 million viewers – or roughly the entire population of the Soviet Union at that time – watched it the year it was released. Since then, *The Irony of Fate* has been shown on Soviet, and later Russian, television almost every New Year's Eve. A sequel to the movie was made, and Hollywood also did a remake.

According to Tariverdiev, the film combines features of satire, slapstick and lyrical comedy yet can in some aspects also be called a poetic movie. In it, a group of old friends have a tradition of meeting at a public sauna in Moscow every New Year's Eve, and this year two of them, Zhenya and Sasha, get very drunk. Zhenya is a surgeon and he and his fiancée plan to marry soon. The other friend, Sasha, needs to get on a plane to Saint Petersburg that night, but there is a mix-up, and Zhenya ends up on the plane instead. He wakes up at the Saint Petersburg airport. Believing he is still in Moscow, he takes a taxi and goes home. Due to the uniform architecture across the Soviet Union, the street's name, the apartment complex and even the apartment door seem to coincide completely with his residence in Moscow – they look exactly the same.

Nadya in Saint Petersburg has a fiancé, too, and is extremely surprised to find a strange man in her apartment...and sleeping in her bed. Over the course of the film, however, they fall in love and a happy ending is inevitable. Tariverdiev considered the film a kind of New Year's fairy tale, and this is how the millions and millions of viewers see it as well.

The film's music consists mainly of eight songs that resemble the madrigal style and could really be called romances composed to words by such acclaimed poets as Bella Akhmadulina and Boris Pasternak. Again, I believe that this music brings deep poetic meaning and a new level of emotion to a story that was intended to be merely a comedy. On this album, the film is represented by the brilliant "Variations on Themes from *The Irony of Fate*" (composed by Ivan Bessonov) and an instrumental version of "Na Tihoretskuyu" (Towards Tihoretskuyu Station, with lyrics by Mikhail Lvovsky, arranged for piano by Suren Vartanyan).

I feel that the master, Tariverdiev, would have appreciated and even enjoyed these arrangements. After all, he usually played the piano parts for films himself, only later writing them down on paper. He once commented that if Mozart had lived today, he would also be composing music for films. To that I would suggest that Liszt would perhaps enjoy making transcriptions of the film music for piano.

Indeed, the Lisztian virtuosity, flamboyance and deep lyricism of the “Variations”, arising from the intimate lyrics and gradually growing to a thunderous climax, make a beautiful contrast to the mysterious delicacy of “Towards Tihoretskuyu Station”. I feel that this music can be understood and enjoyed even without the lyrics, and a piano version serves this task well. Some of Tariverdiev’s vocal works touch on topics that require special explanation by experts in the Russian-Soviet realities of that time and the present day, but the music in itself appeals to the heart without words.

Interestingly, Tariverdiev composed “Towards Tihoretskuyu Station” much earlier than the film itself and it became quite popular, so much so that the director of the film, Ryazanov, mistook it for a folk song. This shows how universal Tariverdiev’s music is and that it deserves to be appreciated beyond the context of the film. I would even dare to suggest it be listened to without the lyrics, and I look forward to seeing how an audience that is far removed from the film context will respond.

Another interesting piece (arranged for piano by Hennadii Bezyazychnyi) included in this album is “Nocturne” from the eight-part television series *Olga Sergeevna* (1975, director Aleksandr Proshkin) about a female scientist who is able to dedicate herself to her career despite difficult circumstances in her

private life. Originally, “Nocturne” appeared in the film as a separate piece composed for violin ensemble and piano, but its intonations have much in common with “Don’t Disappear”, another song from the film.

Proshkin recalled that, after listening to the filmmaker’s ideas regarding the film, Tariverdiev simply began improvising and often produced a finished piece, which was later written down on paper. This film’s music, like that of many others for which Tariverdiev composed music, seems to have been more significant and interesting than the film itself and has not only survived to the present day but still enjoys great popularity in the areas of the former Soviet Union.

For the music for *Olga Sergeevna*, Tariverdiev received an American Academy of Music award in 1975, which was dedicated to the bicentennial of the United States. An album of his music should also have been released, but the Soviet authorities signed the documents in his place, and, as a result, the composer received only the equivalent of 200 dollars in the Russian currency. Americans were to buy from the Soviet state, not from the composer himself. Tariverdiev was also invited to stay in Hollywood and write music for the film industry there, but he was not allowed to do so by the Soviet authorities.

In my view, there was often a clear feeling that the music was not really meant exclusively for the filmmakers. Perfectly serving their films professionally and spiritually, it then lived on as instrumental or vocal music far beyond the circumstances for which it had been created. Quite often, Soviet films did not meet with as much success as the music in them. Some filmmakers even felt jealous of the success of Tariverdiev's music, which outshined the films, and were thus reluctant to further collaborate with the composer.

The piano played a very special role in Tariverdiev's life and music. He composed several cycles for piano solo, and the solo piano has a significant role in almost all of his film music. Being the accomplished pianist that he was, he always recorded the piano parts himself.

The power of his solo piano pieces is clearly illustrated by another cult example, namely, his music for *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (1973). Directed by Tatyana Lioznova, the story was based on Yulian Semyonov's novel about a Russian secret agent working in the highest echelons of power in Nazi Germany near the end of the war.

Seventy to eighty million viewers watched each episode of this twelve-part television film based on real events, making it one of most successful television films of the day in the Soviet Union. City streets emptied and even the crime rate dropped significantly during the broadcasts. Power stations had to increase production, as switching on so many televisions caused a spike in electricity

consumption. Even government meetings were delayed when the film's episodes were shown.

On this album, I perform the prelude from the "Two in a Café" scene, which lasts eight minutes without any conversation except for a waiter's reply. The secret agent meets his wife in a café, but they may not speak with each other or even show that they know each other (spies working for a long time in a hostile environment without seeing their loved ones could become depressed, which could in turn jeopardise their work – the cinema group had learned this from a consultant who helped them produce a more realistic picture). Because the actors only gaze at each other, without speaking a single word, the music plays a pivotal role, expressing everything that the characters cannot say and indeed more. In addition, this is all expressed via a single piano – a timbre that seems to reach directly into the soul. The length of this scene without any significant gestures or words was unprecedented in cinematography at the time, and perhaps remains so to this day.

Despite the overwhelming success of his film music, Tariverdiev did not like being called a film composer. It is enough to listen to his last composition, *Trio*, to feel the great dimensions of his talent. Among his works not connected with the cinema is *Moods* (1980), the cycle of twenty-four pieces for piano with which my journey to Tariverdiev began. These are short pieces written in a minimalist style – laconic, elegant and indeed different in mood. In fact, the variety of moods is striking.

The pieces could be compared with sketches. For example, here the listener can find the spooky, mysterious psychological sketches “In Front of the Mirror”, “Alone” and “Request”; the impressionistic sketches “Icicles” and “Reflections”; the character sketches “First Pas à Pointe”, “Teaser”, “Ballet Class”, “Little Circus Girl” and “A Game”; and the unusual waltz in which the giocoso indication (meaning ‘joyful’) contradicts its C minor tonality. There are the nostalgic “Forgotten Motif”, “A Canvas by an Old Master” and “Music from a TV Set”; the passionate “Duet”; the warmth of “Tenderness” and “Consolation”; and the deep sadness of “Autumn Road” and “A Shower in Fair Weather” as well as the contrasting hints of Bach in “Little Invention” and Tchaikovsky in “On the Moskva River”.

The beautiful “Eight Fleetingnesses on a Folk Theme” (1953), which is of Armenian origin, was one of Tariverdiev’s first works, composed while he was still a student. Having written with a marvellous delicacy and an interesting development of the theme, this piece anticipates some features of the future Tariverdiev, such as the captivating sincerity and deceitful simplicity of his melodies. The theme begins as if from far away and serves as a sort of introduction to future events. To me, it sounds like a ballad, with delicate episodes gradually intensifying, the tempo reaching presto, then the sounds of battle emerging in the powerful culmination, and everything again dissolving into silence at the end.

That said, a different vision of this piece could also exist – perhaps that of a mysterious folk song transforming into a powerful, spontaneous dance.

The two ragtimes for piano were composed for the film *Russian Ragtime* (1993), directed by Sergey Ursulyak. The nostalgic story set in the 1970s was based on real events at a time when the Soviet Union was a closed state and it was extremely difficult for its citizens to emigrate. The film presents not only memories of youth but also an attempt to understand that era and the destinies of people then.

Misha, the film’s protagonist, dreams of moving to the United States – not for economic or political reasons, but just because he feels that it is the right place for him to be. Out of a fear of repercussions from the authorities, his father, who is the head of a large factory, refuses to give him permission, and without this permission, it is impossible to leave the country. To realise his lifelong dream, Misha is ready to do anything, including moving from a provincial town to Moscow, where he gets involved in the black market and falls for a mysterious woman.

One day, Misha and his friends tear down a red Soviet flag from a building. It is not a political protest, just a drunken prank, but the authorities take it very seriously, and Misha ends up arrested, beaten up and in the hands of the KGB. There he is given a choice: be imprisoned and likely die, or sign a letter

compromising his friends and be allowed to leave the Soviet Union for America. Thirty years later, Misha meets his friends again, and his conscience is haunted by his betrayal of them long ago. But they do not even think of blaming him – “Such was the time,” they console him.

One of the ragtimes included on this album is heard at the beginning of the film and brings a certain mood to it. In this, and the other ragtime, I hear not only sadness but also drama and inevitability as well as a sense of tragedy. After all, so many human destinies were shattered by the senseless prohibitions of that era. Yet I have also tried to discover in this music some intonations or sounds that could be in tune with the modern age.

Another interesting piece is “Prelude” from the film *My Younger Brother* (1962), directed by Aleksandr Zarkhi and based on the novel *A Ticket to the Stars* by Vasily Aksyonov. It is a story about four friends who, after final exams at school, head to Tallinn in Estonia, where they wish to experience “real life” for the first time, without the supervision of their parents.

There is some distinct influence from jazz music in this composition, with the piano imitating a double bass in the left-hand accompaniment to the right hand's exquisite melodic line. In the film, this music is featured in a love scene, but again, the music is so self-sufficient that it could easily be imagined

elsewhere as well, and also independently from the film. As with many other films, Tariverdiev's music for this film greatly outlived the film itself.

The piano plays a significant, even crucial, role in the film *Goodbye, Boys* (1964), which was directed by Mikhail Kalik, a favourite filmmaker of Tariverdiev. Based on a novel by Boris Balter, the film is about three young men in a seaside town, their dreams, their plans, their first love... What they do not know is that war will break out very soon, very cruelly changing their lives forever. The film makes use of documentary footage from the war and the Holocaust, which contrasts sharply with the young people's joie de vivre as they make plans in the context of the approaching war.

Kalik had fallen out of favour with the Soviet authorities, having earlier spent time in Stalin's concentration camps and later refusing to make requested changes to his films. He was also not allowed to go on a business trip to Paris, on which he had been invited together with Tariverdiev. Tariverdiev had done everything possible to try to get permission for his friend to accompany him on the trip, but when that failed, he refused to go without Kalik. As a result, Tariverdiev himself was not allowed to leave the Soviet Union for ten years. Kalik eventually emigrated to Israel and only returned to Russia for a visit 15 years later. His films had to wait a long time before being screened without cuts by censors.

The “Boys and the Sea” prelude at the beginning of the film sets a tone of wistful sadness, a sort of introduction to everything that follows, spreading its wings to all the subsequent action in the film. That same prelude is also heard at the end of the film, along with cruel documentary footage of the war and the last words spoken by one of the film’s protagonists: “I haven’t seen my mother since then – neither alive nor dead.”

I find it particularly interesting how Tariverdiev achieves enormous effect by very modest means – just quiet, simple harmonies. A kind of nirvana, a soft yet sad lightness. For the film, Tariverdiev again played the prelude himself.

As the closing piece of this album, I have chosen a marvellous arrangement for piano by George Harliono of “Little Prince”. This is a song with lyrics by Nikolai Dobronravov (directly alluding to Antoine de Saint Exupéry’s famous work) from the film *Passenger from the “Equator”*, which was directed by Aleksandr Kurochkin and based on the novel *Blue Langouste* by the Estonian writer Arnold Netto. In the film, a young boy travelling on the Equator ship witnesses a foreign spy in action and helps catch him.

While preparing this album, I felt more and more strongly that Tariverdiev’s film music can be absolutely self-sufficient, existing separately from the films. And thus, not being limited to language and image, it can perhaps have an even greater impact on listeners and, importantly, be more open to different interpretations.

In his book *I Am Simply Living*, Tariverdiev wrote that the purpose of music is “to bring peace into a soul, to bring comfort and hope; it should remind us that harmony still exists in this world”. His own music is a fabulous example of this.

“The Little Prince” by Nikolai Dobronravov
(translator unknown)

*Who who has conjured you, oh kingdom filled with stars?
I’ve seen you in my dreams since the ancient times,
Just as my home I leave, just as my home I leave,
Right at the edge of the quay the waves sing their rhymes.*

*Once on a windy eve birds will stop their screams,
Through my half-opened eyes I see some stellar gleams,
Silently facing me, silently facing me,
Meeting me so trustingly, the Little Prince.*

*They in our childhood stayed, our dear old friends,
Life is an endless voyage to far-off distant lands,
We sing songs of farewell, see the distant harbour swell,
Write our life’s best tale with our own hands.*

*Don’t scare the dream away – take my honest word,
Open your windows wide to their endless world,
Glides on my sailing ship, glides on my sailing ship,
glides on my sailing ship to dreams untold.*

*Where can I find you, where the isles of happiness,
Where is the golden coast of light and hopefulness?
There where with lucent hopes, there where with lucent hopes
Most tender, gentle words their friendship caress.*

EUGENE SOIFERTIS



Eugene Soifertis was born in Kyiv, Ukraine, where at the age of thirteen he won first prize in the Beethoven Competition. After graduating from the Kyiv Specialised Music School, he continued his studies at the Moscow Conservatory under the professors Victor Merzhanov and Lev Naumov, also taking courses in chamber music taught by Abram Makarov (who performed with Yehudi Menuhin and Mstislav Rostropovich). Soifertis received his master's degree from the Moscow Conservatory and has performed throughout the former Soviet Union. He also participated in masterclasses led by Nikita Magaloff in Paris.

Soifertis later relocated to the Netherlands and is currently based in the United Kingdom. He has performed in many European countries, including at the Rarities of Piano Music festival in Husum (Germany), Flanders Festival Ghent (Belgium) and many venues in the Netherlands, including the Concertgebouw. UK performances have brought him to Wigmore Hall and prestigious festivals throughout the country.

Soifertis enjoys playing chamber music and has performed with Anastasia Chebotareva, a winner of the Tchaikovsky Competition. Concerto appearances include performances with the Dutch Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Residentie Orchestra in The Hague, the Bucharest Symphony Orchestra and the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine as well as orchestras in the UK, including the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

Soifertis' many recordings have received worldwide critical and popular acclaim and have been reviewed in The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, Gramophone, the American Record Guide, Musical Opinion, Luister and other publications. Soifertis also enjoys teaching, which he began while doing postgraduate work at the Moscow Conservatory. Among other teaching assignments, he has given masterclasses at Trinity College London and Arnhem Conservatory in the Netherlands.







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Eugene Soifertis

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I dedicate this album to the blessed memory of my late mother, Sophia Yakovlevna Soifertis.



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