

STRINGS

FOR PLAYERS OF
VIOLIN, VIOLA, CELLO,
BASS & FIDDLE

Interview with Michael Colina

1. Have you consulted with the violin soloist Anastasia Kritruk for your compositions?

My first piece of a mature nature was “Notturmo” 2005, a work for Solo Violin & Piano I composed this piece without consulting anyone. When I was introduced to Ms Kritruk I asked her to record the work for me; this was the first of many projects together. She commented that “Notturmo” lay comfortably within most professional violinist technical levels: She made a few suggestions in reference to scale passages, and recommended re-writing another section with a more violinistic arpeggio bowing.

See her live performance in NYC November 2007.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-65RX5X2Og>

Then she asked me to compose an un-accompanied work for her next recital. This was to be “Der Golem”. Soon after her suggestion, on a trip to Prague in the winter of 2006, I heard the story of Der Golem and had a dream of fingers dancing on the violin fingerboard playing the theme of Der Golem.

“The most famous golem narrative involves Judah Loew Ben Bezalel, the late 16th century chief Rabbi of Prague who reportedly created a golem from clay to defend the Prague ghetto from Anti-Semitic attacks and programs.”

A few months went by and Ms. Khitruk and I began discussing the type of Violin Concerto she would like to have written for her. As is clear, Ms Khitruk was involved from the beginning with the over all conception of the concerto down to the smallest details of the Violin Part. I gave her free reign in suggesting improvements, and ways to keep the part from being un-playable and in return she guided me on a re acquaintance tour of all the great Violin Concertos; her insightful narrative to the great recordings and performances was an inspiration.

2. What is the technical level of your violin music, what technical skills are needed?

This is difficult for me to answer precisely, but I believe it is musically fulfilling as well as technically challenging, and in some areas, extremely difficult. I write whatever comes into my imagination, however,

Hopefully my unconscious, after so many years, instinctively filters out the utterly un-

playable. On occasion, I do have to rely on the instrumentalist. Usually it is a wonderful experience; the consultation always seems to add a wonderful spark to the creative process.

3. *Describe your approach to writing for strings.*

In high school I had a very encouraging School Orchestra Conductor, who gave me numerous opportunities to hear my music performed. I picked up the violin at that time, learned how to hold the fiddle & the bow, how to play my scales, and tried to grasp the intricacies of double stops. I was never really very good but I had a basic hands-on familiarity with the instrument. Basically, I was a pianist, and the conductor Robert Maddox premiered my first piano concerto with me when I was 15 years old.

By the time I graduated I had written my first work for violin solo and string orchestra, which was premiered and recorded by Violinist Bobby Innes (now a member of the Charlotte Symphony).

4. *How is the creative process different writing for a violin concerto versus for an orchestra?*

With orchestral music one must be able to manage and integrate the many voices and colors of the orchestra. Writing for a soloist is the same plus much more. A composer must deal with the soloist's tendencies, which can range from their technical abilities to whether they are primarily a lyrical player, or whether they are a fiendish virtuoso. One must also take great care to put the spotlight on the soloist, as well as carefully balance the orchestra against the solo violin.

4. *What was your inspiration for your new Violin Concerto?*

Late last Winter Ms Kitruk suggested "Baba Yaga" a fantastic tale from her homeland of Russian as a subject for our latest collaboration. She wanted to create a program theme for her next recital, "Fairy Tales and Monsters."

"Baba Yaga" can be described as a haggish or witchlike character in Slavic Folklore. She flies around on a giant pestle, kidnaps (and presumably eats) small children, and lives in a hut that stands on Chicken Legs. In most Slavic folk tales, she is portrayed as an antagonist; however, some characters in other mythological folk stories have been known to seek her out for her wisdom, and she has been known on rare occasions to offer guidance to lost souls. This idea appealed to me because of its contrasting archetypal themes, demons, witches and devils, often associated with Romantic Violin Music. The decision to write another concerto was really up to me. The orchestra offers a wider palette of colors, however Ms Khitruk will perform "Baba Yaga" with piano reduction on November 12th at Weil Recital Hall.

5. *What is your next project (or composition)?*

I have been commissioned by the Sonos Chamber Orchestra, Eric Ochsner, Music Director, to write a Requiem for Strings, Chorus and Vocal Soloists. Currently, I am working on this everyday in hopes of completing it by mid-Fall 2011.

7. "You have been deeply influenced by your Cuban roots and it infuses your classical and jazz compositions, is it infused in your two new classical works?"

In the case of my new Violin Concerto only in the broadest sense. Perhaps, here and there one can hear flecks of Spanish-Arabic influences. However I'd say what I brought to this piece from my Cuban heritage is my sense of strong rhythms. From the earliest ages, children in Cuba start to move and dance when they hear music. Music seems to be intrinsically in their bones and a joyous part of their lives.