

Alfred Schnittke

- Biography -

Alfred Schnittke was born on 24 November 1934 in Engels, the capital of the former Volga German republic (now the district of Saratov in central Russia). His mother, Maria Vogel, was a teacher of German, and his father, Harry Schnittke, a Jewish journalist and translator, who had been born in Frankfurt am Main. Schnittke's musical career began in 1946 in Vienna, where his father worked for a newspaper at the time. He had private piano lessons, went to operas and concerts, and wrote his first compositions. After moving to Moscow in 1948, Schnittke first studied to be a choral conductor. Subsequently, from 1953 to 1958, he studied composition and counterpoint with Yevgeni Golubev and instrumentation with Nikolai Rakov at the Moscow Conservatory. At this time he was influenced by Filip Gershkovich, a pupil of Webern, who lived in Moscow. Schnittke composed numerous works during the three years in which he was a postgraduate student. After a period of dodecaphonic writing in the sixties, his music later attained to a „polystylistic“ technique which made use of earlier historical styles.

Schnittke taught in instrumentation at the Moscow Conservatory from 1962 until 1972. Here he began to publish numerous theoretical works concerned with some of the problems associated with contemporary music. From 1975 onwards his music began to be played at all the important contemporary music festivals, and in the 1980s it was included in the concert programmes of leading orchestras throughout the world. Festivals and concert cycles devoted his works, were held in many cities, including Moscow, Stockholm, London, Huddersfield, Vienna, Berlin, Turin, Lucerne, Hamburg and Cologne. Schnittke was professor of composition at the Hamburg Musikhochschule from 1989 to 1994. He was an honorary fellow of the Royal Academy of Music in London, and a member of the Free Academy of Arts in Hamburg. He was also a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music in Stockholm, of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York.

Numerous and prestigious awards were a sign of the high esteem in which Alfred Schnittke was held by the musical world. In 1991 he received the *Austrian State Prize*, and in the following year the distinguished *Praemium Imperiale* in Tokyo. In 1993 he was awarded the *Russian Culture Prize* and the *Bach Prize* of the City of Hamburg. Recently, in June 1998, on the occasion of the first performance of his 9th Symphony in Moscow, he received the prestigious *Slava-Gloria Prize*.

During the last years of his life Schnittke suffered from a severe and crippling illness, from which he finally died on August 3, 1998.