

Rodion Shchedrin

- Biography -

The Russian composer **Rodion Shchedrin**, born in Moscow on 16 December 1932, began his musical career as a singer in the choir school of that city. He studied composition at the Moscow Conservatory with Yuri A. Shaporin and piano with Yakov Flier. Shchedrin belongs to those Russian composers whose works are most obviously related to the traditions of the past generation - to Prokofiev and Shostakovich. At the same time, the composer's extensive production reflects an openness and constant search for new possibilities of artistic expression. With Shchedrin, tradition and modernism are held in balance in a unique way.

His joy of experimentation leads to the fact that opposing genres, differing stylistic directions and varied compositional techniques stand next to each other. The cheeky Russian joke tune "Chastushka" finds its place beside twelve-tone music, polyphonic writing can be just as readily found as jazz and avant-garde technique, Western European music tradition is combined with elements of Russian folk song. Spontaneity and versatility, aural imagination and solid constructivist thinking mark Shchedrin's works.

Rodion Shchedrin's "Carmen Suite," an ingenious adaptation of the operatic model by George Bizet for strings and percussion, meanwhile belongs to the most frequently performed ballet suites of the twentieth century. In this work, the "composer" Rodion Shchedrin reveals himself as, above all, a refined practical musician, orchestrator and arranger. The "Carmen Suite," written in 1967, received its premiere at the Bolshoi Theatre, as did the 1971 ballet music "Anna Karenina", written for his wife Maya Plisseskaya, "The Gull" (1979) and "Lady with a Little Dog" (1985). All these works are milestones of Russian ballet music production, of the tradition beginning with Tchaikovsky, continuing into the twentieth century and pressing the development in this genre ever onwards. The line leads from Dmitri Shostakovich to Sergei Prokofiev and Aram Khachaturian, to Rodion Shchedrin and on to Alfred Schnittke and many other Russian contemporary composers.

Ballet music has always occupied a special place in Shchedrin's catalogue of works, although the composer has delivered equally admirable works in the areas of instrumental and vocal music as well as in choral arrangement.

In his works, Shchedrin connects elements of folklore and traditional stylistic means, completely rooted in the great Russian classics such as Dmitri Kabalevsky and Dmitri Shostakovich, with modern compositional methods including collage and aleatoric techniques. From Prokofiev, who has also strongly influenced Shchedrin's manner of composing, the composer adopted the tendency towards marked rhythms and constructive, comprehensible linguistic gestures. The tensile strength and marked versatility of his music result from the play with tone colours, constantly changing lyrical and dramatic sections as well as greatly extended melodic lines. Thanks to his virtuoso handling of the instruments and contrapuntal skill, Shchedrin has arrived at a rather relaxed facture in his latest works, frequently enlivened by agitatedly dramatic blasts. Even if the composer has freed himself from received formal models, he never loses sight of balance and density in his musical texture.