

Superb musicianship at the core of YAGLING'S MUSIC

Try to imagine music that is a blend of modesty and healthy self-confidence, deep-rooted cultivation and superb professionalism; in which tradition is not something to be ashamed of but an element ennobled into a beautiful, lyrical sound. This is the music of Victoria Yagling.

The talented Russian musician **Victoria Yagling** has been living in Finland since 1990. Her long career as a cellist and her meticulous artistry have served as an excellent accompaniment to the composition she began at an early age, at almost the same time as her instrumental studies.

The child of a cultural home, Yagling also did ballet as a child, but this soon had to give way to a career as a cellist that took her to concert halls abroad. Despite having little time to compose, she produced works at a steady pace, most intensively in 1965–84 and especially since 1997, when a less hectic job at the Sibelius Academy left her more time for this.

Her studies in Moscow passed in the company of some of the great names in the Russian music world. For 11 years she was a cello student of **Mstislav Rostropovich** at the Moscow Conservatory. This eminent seat of learning allowed her to develop an all-round musicianship. She became familiar with the works of Shostakovich, Khachaturian, Britten and later Schnittke, avidly attending premieres of their works in Moscow and closely marking any com-

ments they made while listening to rehearsals. **Dmitry Kabalevsky** and **Tikhon Khrennikov** taught her composition, and sitting in on lessons given by **David Oistrakh** and **Emil Gilels** developed an all-round musical know-how.

Rostropovich was, says Yagling, an inspiring teacher: "His influence was great; he had big fantasy and a vivid temperament and his classes were also in a way a theatrical experience with 20–30 people following his teaching – which made you used to performing to other people". During the composition lessons Kabalevsky introduced her to numerous works, and they would analyse the scores together at his home. Kabalevsky's motto was 'compose one page a day' – a precept that was not, however, in Yagling's nature.

Yagling's track record was spectacular: in 1969 she won the first prize in the Gaspar Cassadò Cello Competition and the following year the second prize in the illustrious Moscow Tchaikovsky Competition. Her solo engagements took her to countless countries, not only in Europe but also to Thailand, Cuba and Venezuela, to perform with such conductors as **Mstislav Rostropovich**, **Gennadi Rozdestvensky**, **Vladimir Fedoseyev**, **Sir Colin Davis**, **Dmitry Kitaenko**, **Kurt Sanderling**, **Hans Graf**, **Serge Baudo**, **Antonio Pedrotti**, **Eri Klas** and **Mikhail Pletnev**.

In 1990 Victoria Yagling was invited to Finland as a visiting professor at the Sibelius Academy. Teaching and composing are worlds apart for her, yet it is here in Finland that she has composed her biggest orchestral works, for example the *Symphony Concerto for Cello and Orchestra* (Cello Concerto No. 3). She has also taught at several international music courses and master classes and is often a jury member for international cello competitions.

According to Yagling, her career as a cellist has greatly supported her composing. She has performed a lot with orchestras, perhaps even more than with chamber groups, and knows the orchestra very well. This was also especially emphasised at the Conservatory by Rostropovich,

who demanded that his students must know the orchestra thoroughly and have perfect knowledge of the orchestral scores of the cello concertos they played.

Composer-musician

Does Yagling the composer emphasise aspects to which she herself, as a performing artist, pays attention, or does she even aim at works that are interesting repertoire from the soloist's point of view? "No," she replies without a moment's hesitation, and goes on to stress that her works take shape on their own terms, without any conscious plans, and in ways that cannot be predicted. Sometimes she knows exactly what the whole work is going to contain when she first puts pen to paper, but at other times she has only the beginning in her mind. There have been cases when the entire work may take shape in, say, a dream.

She underlines that her knowledge and experience as a cellist must have an effect on her composing, but it is not intentional – rather it sneaks in through the subconscious.

Yagling can be described as a traditionalist and she even calls herself old-fashioned. Her expressive, romantically-orientated style is Russian in spirit and has grown out of the soil provided by Prokofiev and Shostakovich. Melodic development, traditional handling of the orchestra and delicate, beautiful lyricism combined with passionate energy are her true self – and she is faithful to her own style. Yagling has a genuine affection for classical music, including Sibelius, and has true respect for contemporary composers, such as **Einojuhani Rautavaara**, but she is not keen on experimenting in modern fields that she does not feel are her own. However, her large-scale works are without exception demanding and do offer the soloist plenty of challenges.

Yagling has composed a lot for her own instrument, including sonatas and other works for cello and piano. Among them is the refined



Photo: Henna Salmela

Suite for Cello Solo No. 1, chosen as an obligatory piece for the 7th Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow in 1982. There are no signs whatsoever in the cello works by Yagling of the one-sided instrumentalism that may threaten musician-composers in love with their instruments. The piano parts of the third and fourth cello sonatas, for example, are orchestral in style, and the cello parts are marked by passion and richness of timbre.

She has also composed two string quartets, and writing vocal music has been her special interest recently. Poems by **Arseni Tarkovsky** and **Anna Akhmatova** have inspired her to write a wealth of beautiful songs, suitable not only for professional singers but also for students.

The cello concertos

Yagling's three cello concertos are her main works and are all very different in character. They illustrate her stylistic development, but also the various periods in her life in a way that is delightfully human. The first was composed in 1974–75, when she was 28 and expecting her son. It is a full-blooded work, her diploma work in composition ending in optimistic mood. It was premiered by the Moscow State Symphony with Yagling as the soloist. The second, written ten years later, is more mature in character, mirroring more serious moods and experiences of that period. It has a very dramatic cello part full of inner tension. The third and darkest of the three in hue was written in 2001, shortly before her mother died. Although it is full of drama, it ends on a positive note: the music vanishes towards the end, transforming to a different dimension.

The *Finnish Notebook* for symphony orchestra completed in 2003 was inspired by the Finnish nature close to Yagling's heart. The *Lyrical Preludes*, books 1 and 2 for string orchestra are both about 40 minutes in length, but they can be performed in entities consisting of, say, three movements. They are short pieces of different character, lyric and beautiful as the titles suggest. The *Suite for Cello and String Orchestra*, an early work dating from 1967, has been performed often by the Helsinki Junior Strings, also on their foreign tours.

Works by Victoria Yagling, such as the *Suite for Cello and String Orchestra*, have been recorded on the Melodya label, and the USSR Radio & Television Orchestra has recorded the first two cello concertos with the composer herself as the soloist.

The moment the first notes of works by Victoria Yagling issue from the concert platform, the audience can look forward to an electric atmosphere and musicianship of the highest professional standard. But that is not all: for it can also expect a great heart, melancholy and passion – the grandest of emotion. And there is never too much of that at any concert. ■