



FOR SPT

Shadow Game

A view of the Griboyedev Canal with the Church on the Spilled Blood in the distance. After several days of chilly, autumnal weather, the sun has returned for the city's rush of summer tourists. The city is vying for the status of 'tourist capital.' 5.5 million people visited in 2011. See story, page 2.

LOCAL NEWS

Overcoming Obstacles



The city looks at ways to improve local tourism. **Page 2.**

LOCAL NEWS

Helping the Homeless



Residents organize volunteer events at animal shelters. **Page 3.**

ARTS & CULTURE

Don't Cry for Me St. Petersburg



Reactions to Madonna from the LGBT community. **Page 5.**

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Persian Composer Makes Music in Petersburg

By Galina Stolyarova
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

Running a contemporary classical music center in Russia may seem an unlikely occupation for a Persian composer brought up in the traditional and extremely intricate Oriental musical culture. This, however, has been the exact mission of 33-year-old Tehran-born composer Mehdi Hosseini for the past 10 years.

Hosseini arrived in town in 2002 to study at the St. Petersburg State Conservatory under composer Sergei Slonimsky and music historian Tatyana Bershadskaya, making Russia's northern capital his second home.

Hosseini, who originally studied drama, switched to classical music relatively late, already in his teens. He took private lessons from Farhad Fakhredini, the man behind the Iranian national orchestra, for five years, and it was through his mentor that Hosseini came across his first-ever piece of the Russian classics — Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade."

Since that time, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich and Stravinsky have become Hosseini's favorites. It is these composers that he would bring to Iran, if he were to introduce the local audiences to the Russian classics, he said.

"I would be interested in building up an evening of pieces by Shostakovich — a string chamber quartet, a symphony and a concerto all performed during the same evening," he said. "Some would criticize this approach for 'overindulging the audiences,' but for me this approach feels right because it allows the listeners to get a full scope of the legacy of a master."

In St. Petersburg, Hosseini made supporting new music festivals one of the key priorities of his reMusik Contemporary Music Center, which he founded in 2010 and which runs new contemporary academic music festivals and publishes an Internet magazine on contemporary music in Russian and English (www.remusik.org). Through his work, the composer has established extensive contacts with St. Petersburg classical music ensembles and local musicians are also keen to play Hosseini's original works.

The composer, whose opuses have been performed during some of the city's most respected contemporary academic music festivals, in the caliber of St. Petersburg Musical Spring, Sound Ways, Contemporary East and West and Contemporary Past, is now working on a new piece that will premiere during the forthcoming edition of the annual international Sound Ways festival in November.



Composer Mehdi Hosseini runs the reMusik Contemporary Music Center.

"The orchestras simply need to play new music, otherwise there will never be an audience for it," Hosseini said. "The human soul is curious — during rehearsals I can feel the curiosity, which is much stronger than any prejudice or skepticism."

When the composer was rehearsing his "Concerto for String Quartet and Chamber Orchestra" with the St. Petersburg Academic Philharmonic orchestra in 2010, it was not clear until the very last rehearsal whether the premiere of the work would actually take place.

It was not at all the case that the musicians did not have the appetite for the unorthodox piece. Neither was it the case that the orchestra's rapport with American conductor Brad Cawyer was not perfect. "The work was very different from what the musicians

had done before, and it required a drastically different mindset," Hosseini said. "Even three days before the premiere, the piece was literally falling apart. But at the very last rehearsal it suddenly came together in a mesmerizing, beautiful way."

The concerto has already been released by the Iranian recording label Arqanoon Records, and won encouraging reviews in the international press.

"This work, which represents the peak of Hosseini's expertise, implies many cultural and linguistic issues and structures," reads a review by Mohsen Saghafi for Arqanoon Records. "The points seen as chords in the piece do not refer to pointillism, but are pauses, which are to be regarded as the expression of successive new statements. The dialogue among the four solo string in-

struments attempting to be heard through the tumult of orchestral sounds is a musical metaphor for the cultural status of the tribes of Iran. In this piece, Hosseini reproduces the absurdity and multi-cultural aspect of societal and popular culture and conversations with the use of the orchestra. He represents the tumult of a society in which ethnic cultural elements are evident but cannot be easily heard. This society speaks in a language that is beyond understanding, even for itself, but the cultural identity of this disrupted society can still be found."

As Saghafi points out, for Hosseini, the final goal is not dependent on the past, but at the same time progression cannot be achieved without an understanding of what has already happened. The composer considers the past and future to be interrelated in a complementary way.

Over the ten years he has spent in St. Petersburg, Hosseini's composing style has evolved dramatically. Originally, Hosseini relied strongly on ancient Persian music. "Iranian regional folk music has always been a crucial and vital source of inspiration for me," he said. "However, now I seek to muffle down the obvious Persian influences. What interests me at present is exploring the possibilities of improvisation in classical Persian music and the transfer from these traditions to Western European classical music."

Hosseini admits that the situation for young composers is particularly problematic in Russia: Major orchestras show little enthusiasm when it comes to new music because general audiences express little interest in the contemporary repertoire, making it

hard to sell these concerts; listeners, in turn, do not have enough exposure to this repertoire to be able to develop a taste for it.

The composer would like to see a friendlier attitude toward contemporary music projects from the state — and not necessarily in the form of generous grants. "Orchestras find it risky to perform contemporary works and experimental pieces because such concerts rarely attract full houses," he said. "However, with so many orchestras being state-funded, it would not cost anything to write a line in the orchestras' policies to have them perform, say, five contemporary works per season. Also, some tickets for contemporary music concerts could be distributed for free among students as part of an educational initiative."

ReMusik's next big project is a contemporary music festival, to be held in St. Petersburg from May 23 through 30, 2013. "We are going to take a regional approach: For instance, for the Day of Switzerland we are bringing ten aspiring Swiss composers to the city," Hosseini said.

St. Petersburg has always been a leading city in new music — since the days of Tchaikovsky and during the experimental period back in the 1920s, until Stalin ended this experimentation. After so many years of persecution and fear — not the fear of bad reviews, but fear for one's life — returning to an unrestricted state of mind can still pose a challenge to Russian composers.

"What I feel in St. Petersburg, is that overall creativity is tangible in the air, and if we support up-and-coming young talent, it will win through," the composer said.



Hosseini observes a St. Petersburg Academic Philharmonic Orchestra rehearsal.

BusinessLunchGuide

advertising section

Wednesday, August 15, 2012

Côté Jardin



Novotel St. Petersburg Centre hotel
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emphasis on Regional Cuisine. Full buffet costs just 750 rubles — coffee and mineral water included. The special feature of Côté Jardin is our own pastry corner "La Brioche Deli-Counter" where you should definitely try our mouthwatering daily homemade cakes and pastries. Take away service is also available. Monday to Friday, noon to 4 p.m.



Fish House



4 Pereulok Gritsova.
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The Fish House menu has been developed by the head chef Igor Dashkevich. The range of fish and seafood at the restaurant includes traditional fish house dishes, such as salmon and tuna steaks, seabass and

lobster, prawns and scallops, as well as delicacies rarely found on the menus of other restaurants in St. Petersburg, including fish from Siberian rivers? Siberian white salmon and muksun whitefish. The Fish House wine menu offers selections from almost every region in the world at affordable prices. For true connoisseurs, a wine cellar is being created that will comprise exclusive wines from the Top 100 list of Wine Spectator magazine. The restaurant's main room can seat

100, while the basement floor has been designed for hosting banquets and private events. Business lunch daily from midday to 4 p.m. Guests can choose from a selection of salads, soups and hot dishes, as well as non-alcoholic drinks. Special offer in August: baked king crab legs; crab cakes with remoulade sauce and iceberg lettuce. The restaurant is part of the SVG Management Group.



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Average price of a two-course meal with an alcoholic beverage: \$ - 500 to 1,000 rubles; \$\$ - 1,000 to 1,500 rubles; \$\$\$ - more than 1,500 rubles