

Daniel Pollack, Pianist

1958 and 1961

the legendary moscow recordings



MOSCOW 1958



LOS ANGELES 2002

**Daniel Pollack
performing at the first
International Tchaikovsky
Piano Competition in
Moscow, 1958.**



MOSCOW RECOLLECTIONS

Chill Of Cold War Gives Way To 40-Year Love Affair *by Daniel Pollack*

Reflecting back, it is curious how small incidents force a fork in the road of one's life and nothing is ever the same. So it was with the First International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition. The fork in my life really started in Vienna, Austria, where I was a student at the Hochschule für Musik, under a U.S. Fulbright Scholarship. It is important to note the times—13 years after the end of World War II, 10 years after the Soviet occupation of Austria and, of course, the Iron Curtain. How I came to this point—one that would change my life—was so ordinary that I still marvel at the turn of events. Innocently, one day, I read on a bulletin board at the Hochschule about a competition behind the Iron Curtain, in Moscow, and intuitively I knew that the challenge was too strong a force to resist. Here I was 23 years old and ready to take on the legendary prowess of talented Russian pianists and, moreover, cross into what was then the never-never land, unknown to most Westerners. Fearlessness of youth? Maybe...

Only two months later, I found myself traveling by train through Czechoslovakia and Poland on the “Chopin Express” (if you would believe), sitting up for two days and two nights (too poor to get sleeping accommodations). The cold in the heart of a Russian winter was so fierce that, thinking back, I can feel the chill. And there was that deep fright that accompanied me on that trip—fright of the unknown, of not being able to communicate with the West (no possibility of phone calls nor any other communication means), of the hostile border guards, of being swallowed up in the Cold War—at the age of 23. But upon arrival, the travel travails just experienced paled by an incident that occurred on my first night in Moscow.

Sitting at the dinner table in the Peking Hotel that first night with fellow contestants from Portugal and France, we naturally discussed repertoire learnt for the competition. I talked about the five major Soviet works I included and they talked about Schumann, Chopin and the like. Panic welled up and almost choked me. I realized that I had come with the wrong program. Apparently my professor in Vienna, Bruno Seidlhofer, had translated the program from German to read *five* Soviet works as opposed to *one* out of five.

After a night of terror, I went to Dmitri Shostakovich, then chairman of the competition committee, and said I wished to resign from the competition because I would compete unfairly. He simply would not hear of it, citing that as an American it would provoke an incident. Later it became clear that the Russians thought that I had planned to

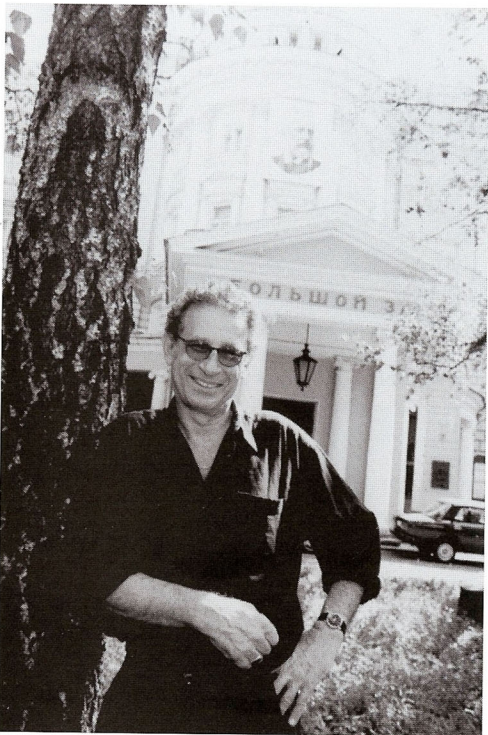


Pollack being lauded as a prize winner at the finale of the first International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow, 1958.



Decoration Pin given to Pollack at the conclusion of his two-month concert tour of the Soviet Union in 1961.

**Pollack relaxing
between rehearsals
for a concert with the
Moscow Philharmonic
in front of the Moscow
Conservatory, 1992.**



play all Russian works as a political move, possibly creating an advantage. In Russia at that time, music was like baseball in the United States. Everyone knows what's going on. I was exempt from competing in the first round since I had already won a first international prize. The second round generated a lot of interest for me in that, in addition to playing the Russian composers—which was very well received by the audiences—I played the Barber Piano Sonata, arguably America's most important piano sonata. As it turned out, I premiered it in Russia at that time and right after the Competition I recorded it on the Melodya label (and in 2000, re-recorded it for the Naxos label). It's an emotionally charged piece that the Russians adored. And I'm happy to take some of the credit for its popularity there today.

After the second round, most of the publicity was focused on the two Americans in the finals—Van Cliburn and myself. To have two Americans in the finals was startling news. The great Soviet pianist Sviatislav Richter said in a printed interview, “This is not an international competition, but one between two Americans.” Of my performance of Prokofiev's 7th Sonata, Richter who himself had premiered the Sonata in the former Soviet Union and was a close friend of Prokofiev, wrote, “It was like the devil himself playing.”

The question as to whether I could have garnered the first prize had I come with the correct program has bothered journalists for all these years. Hard to tell. Apparently the Russians considered it. The audience was buzzing and taking votes as to favorites—Cliburn or Pollack.



**Performing on Tchaikovsky's piano in his home,
now a museum in Kline, Russia, 1986.**

But I had a secret and knew that it would be Van, not I, for I had never memorized the Tchaikovsky Concerto, which was new for me then. I had spent an inordinate amount of time learning a whole new repertoire for the competition (which turned out to be the wrong one anyway), which left me with little time to spend on the concerto.

Even though I knew the Tchaikovsky Concerto was a required work, I figured that the way the competition was structured, if I got out of the second round, I would be a prizewinner anyway. It was about youthful confidence and possibly a certain arrogance at being able to do the impossible. Still, when faced with it, panic arose. I knew then that I could not win over Van, who had played the concerto numerous times with orchestra.

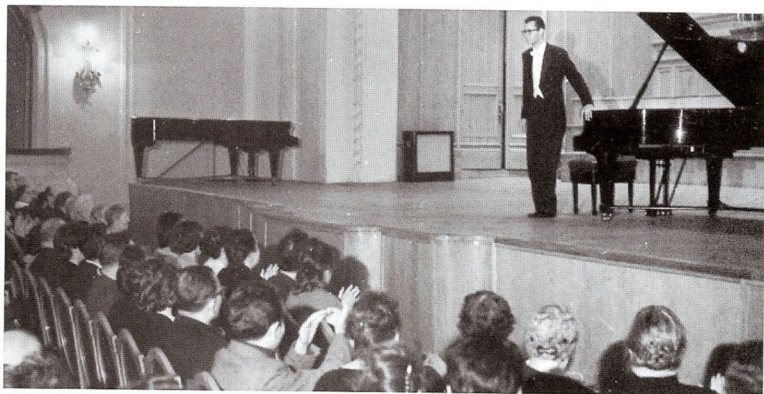
At the finals, I was lucky enough to draw the next to last number in order of appearance for the last round, so I had five days in which to memorize the work, which I did. What was most disconcerting was that when I walked out on stage for my one and only rehearsal, I had an over-stuffed crowd in the audience. No one had told me that it would be open to the public. I still can feel my heart pounding in my ears today. At the finals, Van Cliburn played brilliantly. He overwhelmed the audience and was deservedly awarded the first prize. I remember that I surprised myself with my performance, which was bold and free. Still, the seasoning of a work that comes from years of living with it, was out of reach to me by the circumstance under which I came. In the end, politics of the time did win out. Although among my fellow prizewinners

and vast audiences, it was clear that I was the favorite next to Cliburn, but it was politically unacceptable to the Soviets to have two Americans—one finish first and another second, in the first International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition. In Moscow. In 1958.

The competition made an immediate difference in my career. Whereas Van came back to a ticker tape parade in the U.S., I was invited to stay on in the Soviet Union for another three weeks of concerts and to make recordings. That was the beginning of a 40-plus year “love affair” with the Russian public, one which has impacted my career. Apparently, I struck a “chord” with that musical public, one that they have never forgotten over more than four decades.

I returned for 13 more tours to former Soviet Union countries—more than any other prize winner in all of the subsequent competitions, including Van. I made recordings that sold in the millions and eventually were exported worldwide. I was also the first American pianist to give a Master Class at the Moscow Conservatory. I was invited to participate on the juries of the Tchaikovsky Competition (1986, 1990, 1998), the Prokofiev International Piano Competition in St. Petersburg (1992, 1995), the Rachmaninoff International Piano Competition in Moscow (1993, 1997), the Minsk International Piano Competition, Minsk, Belarus (2000), and the International Vladimir Horowitz Piano Competition in Kiev, Ukraine (2001).

The Tchaikovsky Competition was most certainly the trigger to my



Pollack acknowledging applause at his first recital on the Bolshoi Zal stage in Moscow following his 1958 prize-winning performance.



Following a performance as soloist with the St. Petersburg Philharmonic in the famed Philharmonic Hall in 1995.



Pollack with admirers backstage following his Moscow performance, 1961.

**With Professor
Sergei Dorensky, conferring
on the jury of the
Tchaikovsky International
Piano Competition, 1998.**



career. No question about it. What is curious is that it did not take a first prize to do that. This could never happen again. Even first prize winners today cannot count on one prize triggering their career. Much of it was a question of the times, the political climate, the euphoric and educated Soviet musical public and the fact that my background in music mirrored theirs. My teacher at Juilliard, Rosina Lhevinne, was herself a graduate of the Moscow Conservatory and the public identified with my style of playing. Also, Russia was considered for many generations as having a standard of musical excellence equal to none. Being courted by the Russians therefore became a “they must know something that we don’t know” point of view and their enthusiasm for my pianism gave me an international seal of approval, leading to performances on concert stages worldwide.

Without a doubt, even I am still flabbergasted by the lasting impact that my performances at that competition made. Today I can walk into a retail store in Los Angeles or New York run by immigrant Russians and when I walk in they gasp and say “You are Pollack, no?” And then they proceed with, “I will never forget Barber and Prokofiev,” referring to my second round repertoire. Imagine remembering repertoire for four decades. Second and even third generations of students search me out when they immigrate to the States.

Careers come and go. Some pianists just stop performing and teach exclusively, while others like Horowitz and Cliburn, take a 10-15 year hiatus. My career has just steadily continued all these years. What to

attribute it to? When you rise meteorically like Cliburn, the demands can easily turn to burn out. Horowitz's case was uniquely his own. I feel that I was lucky enough to be spared even the opportunity of burn out. My career grew at a more normal pace, allowing for introspection, expansion of repertoire and all around growth of the complete person—all of which I try to bring to the concert stage. I can say this in retrospect. While in my twenties, I had another point of view, born out of youthful impatience.

Today, I sit on the other side of the “table”—on juries of international competitions worldwide. And I search for the number one quality in contestants that matters most to me. Emotional projection. Something has to happen across the stage and project into the audience. They deserve to come away with a difference. It is not just about correct notes and fabulous technique. I look for a beautiful tone that exudes warmth, together with long musical lines—performances that go “over the edge”—providing *the thrill*.

In 1961, Pollack returned to the Soviet Union for the first time since the Tchaikovsky Competition, and spent two months performing 23 concerts throughout the three Baltic countries, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, and in many cities in the Ukraine and Russia. In Moscow alone, Pollack performed four concerts. During that time he made several recordings for Melodya, selections of which are on this CD.



Pollack in rehearsal for his recital in the Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow, 1989.

DANIEL POLLACK, PIANIST

A brief biography...

www.danielpollack.com

DANIEL POLLACK's concert career has taken him worldwide across five continents—North America, Europe, Asia, South America and Africa.

Highlight appearances as soloist with major orchestras in the U.S. include the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Baltimore Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony; and worldwide, Moscow State Philharmonic, St. Petersburg, Russia, London's Royal Philharmonic, Bergen Symphony, Norway, Seoul Philharmonic, Hong Kong Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra of Bogota, Colombia, Montevideo Symphony, among others.

Pollack has performed solo recitals in the major music centers of the world including London's Royal Festival Hall, Vienna's Musikverein, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Buenos Aires' Teatro Colon, Seoul's Arts Center, Moscow's Bolshoi Zal, New York's Carnegie Hall, Chicago's Orchestra Hall, Los Angeles' Music Center. Additional highlights of Pollack's career include guest appearances at Tchaikovsky's

home in Kline, Russia, performing on the composer's piano and at a joint session of the United States Congress in honor of President Harry Truman's Centennial.

Pollack is much in demand on international competition juries. He has participated several times on the International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition held in Moscow as well as on the Queen Elizabeth in Brussels; Montreal, Canada; Leeds, England; Ciurlionis, Vilnius, Lithuania; Gina Bachauer, Salt Lake City; Hamamatsu and Sonoda Competitions in Japan; UNISA in Pretoria, South Africa; Prokofiev in St. Petersburg; the Rachmaninoff in Moscow and the Vladimir Horowitz in Kiev, Ukraine.

Pollack first garnered the music world's attention when he became a prize-winner in the International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow. Following, he concertized throughout the former Soviet Union and became the first American to record there for Melodya. Later, these were re-issued in Europe and the U.S. under several different labels. Among his many recordings, was the Samuel Barber Sonata, which Pollack premiered in Russia. Subsequent recordings were for Columbia.

His most recent CD for Naxos is the complete solo piano works of Samuel Barber. Other recent CDs include an all-Chopin recital recorded in the Bolshoi Zal of the Philharmonic in St. Petersburg, Russia, released by Sony on their Infinity Digital label, nationally and on Digital Focus,

internationally, as well as two CDs of popular short romantic works for Four Winds.

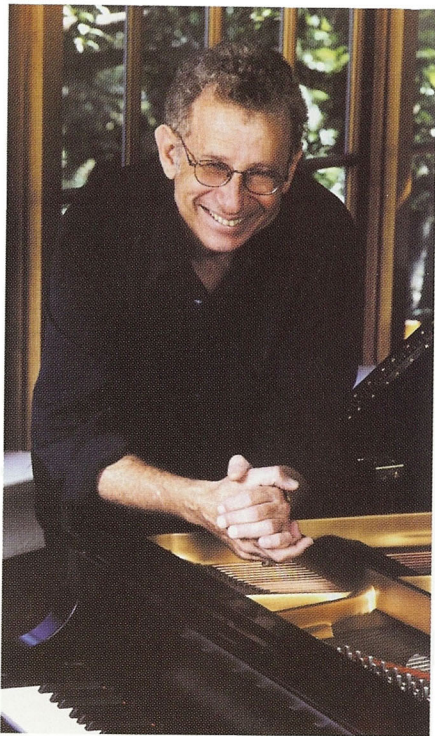
Pollack has held several visiting faculty positions including The Juilliard School, Columbia University and Yale's School of Music. Presently he is on the faculty of the University of Southern California.

Pollack began his studies at the age of four and made his debut with the New York Philharmonic at the age of nine, performing the Chopin Piano Concerto No. 1. He is a graduate of the Juilliard School from the class of the legendary Rosina Lhevinne, herself a gold medal graduate of the Moscow Conservatory. Pollack continued his graduate studies at the Hochschule für Musik in Vienna under a Fulbright grant with Bruno Seidlhofer, at the Academia Chigiana in Siena, Italy with Guido Agosti and was selected as one of 12 pianists internationally to participate in a special Beethoven Master Class of the late Wilhelm Kempff in Positano, Italy.

Daniel Pollack's innovative "cutting edge technology" web site, *www.danielpollack.com*, in which he can be seen and heard in a live concert from Moscow's Bolshoi Zal, has been a favorite of classical musicians worldwide, achieving a record number of visitors.



Pollack with fellow contestants from Russia and Japan following the second round of the 1958 Moscow competition.



**Pollack at home
in Los Angeles, 2002.**

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Cambria

CD-1133
ADD-Mono

- PROKOFIEV: *Sonata No.7 in B flat Major*, Opus 83 (1939-42) [15:31]
[1] I. Allegro inquieto [7:12] [2] II. Andante coloroso [5:25] [3] III. Precipitato [2:54]
[4] BACH: *Toccatà and Fugue in E minor*, BWV 914 [6:57]
[5] BACH-BUSONI: *Toccatà and Fugue in D minor*, BWV 565 [8:38]
MENOTTI: *Ricercare and Toccatà on a Theme from "The Old Maid and the Thief"* (1951) [5:50]
[6] Ricercare (Andante con moto) [2:55] [7] Toccatà (Allegro e sempre a tempo) [2:55]
BEETHOVEN: *Sonata No.25 in G Major*, Opus 79 [8:42]
[8] I. Presto alla tedesca [4:03] [9] II. Andante [2:49] [10] III. Vivace [1:50]
[11] PROKOFIEV: *Sonata No.3 in A minor*, Opus 28 (1907, revised 1917) [6:49]
[12] CHOPIN: *Berceuse in D flat Major*, Opus 57 (1844) [4:30]
[13] CHOPIN: *Nocturne No.20 in C sharp minor*, Op. posth. [4:00]
[14] BRAHMS: *Intermezzo in E Major*, Opus 116, No. 4 [4:23]
[15] BRAHMS: *Intermezzo in C Major*, Opus 119, No. 3 [1:19]
[16] LISZT: *Consolation No.3 in D flat Major* [3:48]
[17] PAGANINI-LISZT-BUSONI: *La Campanella* [4:01] *Total Playing Time: 75:53*

Tracks [1-3], [11], and [13] recorded April 1958 at the Bolshoi Zal, Moscow; Tracks [4-10], [12] and [14-17] recorded February 1961 at the Melodya Recording House Studios, Moscow.

Steinway Piano

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