

NAXOS

WEINBERG

Complete Music for Solo Cello • 1
24 Preludes • Sonata No. 1

Josef Feigelson



Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996): Complete Music for Solo Cello • 1

Twenty-Four Preludes, Op. 100 • Sonata for Solo Cello No. 1, Op. 72

Travelling through the vast Soviet Union in the late 1970s as a soloist of the Moscow State Concert Agency, I often visited small-town book-stores which frequently also sold sheet music. Many times the music that was sold quickly in the major cities was accidentally found in these provincial town stores. I think it was in the town of Chita in southern Siberia, where I came across a score that read *24 Preludes for Unaccompanied Cello, Op. 100*. Who might be such a brave writer, I immediately thought, who could take the cello on such a long journey alone, solo, akin to compositions for the omnipotent piano? The name sounded familiar: Moissei Weinberg – a well respected composer and close associate of Dim Dimich (as Dmitry Dmitrievich Shostakovich was often referred to by musicians). I had heard some music of Weinberg's before, but it was usually his folksy *Moldavian Rhapsody* or the very effective and flashy *Trumpet Concerto*. I admit being then, like most of my generation, a bit cynical about somebody writing in a so called, "official style". However, I thought, whatever these compositions might be, I could probably use some solo preludes in my future recitals.

Unexpectedly, the opportunity came quite soon. Early in 1980, my family decided to leave for the West. While waiting for official permission to emigrate, I still had a few concerts left to play including a prestigious Moscow recital. One problem though: no pianist wanted to play with me as I was a political outcast about to leave the country. Still, I was determined to use this last chance to perform and decided to play alone. Scrambling for repertoire, I came across the Weinberg score and chose seven of the preludes that seemed most interesting. The next opportunity arose only eight years later when I had played five preludes at New York's 92nd street Y as part of my American recital début.

By this time, the extraordinary magnitude and importance of the *Preludes, Op. 100* had become apparent to me. Through friends, I found the composer's phone number in Moscow and spent a good deal of time

(and money) speaking to him; by this time, he was a gravely ill man, tied to his bed for several of his last years. There was so much I wanted to know, including why had not my legendary teacher, Mstislav Rostropovich, ever performed Weinberg's *Preludes*, as they were specifically written for him in 1969? Moreover, the *24 Preludes*, published in 1975, obviously had Rostropovich's bowings and fingerings without his name even mentioned. But of course, by this time the cellist was already in exile in the United States. Weinberg never clearly answered my question, citing only that "Slava was the one who suggested that I compose the solo preludes, but later became too busy and forgot about me and my music altogether". Rostropovich was not forthcoming himself, when in the early 1990s, he reacted to my question only with a quick reply: "He (Weinberg) was a coward..." I did not ask any further. Of course it meant that Weinberg, who lost his family to the Holocaust and experienced Stalin's imprisonment, had not been supportive of Slava's involvement with Alexander Solzhenitsin, the renowned Soviet dissident and author of *Gulag Archipelago*. In fact, I doubt that Weinberg had even tried to remind Rostropovich about his work during these unsettled times. So this unique music never sounded from the hands of the greatest living cellist to whom it was dedicated. The honour and responsibility became mine with a reasonably quiet world première in Tallinn, Estonia, in 1995 and a well publicized United States première in New York City in 1996.

There are so many angles from which one could look at the *24 Preludes for Solo Cello, Op. 100*. The work might be compared to a series of extremely varied, masterful drawings unified by a deep philosophical idea. I would describe this as "The Essence of Life". In his approach Weinberg was clearly inspired by Bach's famous *Well-tempered Clavier*, as well as Chopin's and Shostakovich's piano preludes. His general progression is akin to Bach's as the *Preludes* ascend from the key of

C and descend back through all twelve notes, while freely mixing major and minor keys and elements of atonal writing. Bach's influence is further reinforced by two of the preludes written in the *Sarabande* or *Menuet* form. In his quest, the composer exhibits a truly limitless amount of imagination and shows remarkable ability to write for the cello in a myriad of different ways.

Prelude No. 1 starts with the rich sound of an open C string, going into a chain of octaves and other intervals. It sounds very forceful, primitive and chaotic. This "Chaos of the Beginning" makes me think of the Book of Genesis in the Bible. *No. 2* is still purposely primitive and slightly folksy. *No. 3* introduces the effect of a simple two-voice conversation; *No. 4* blends elements of the beginning into a more coherent, singing line. In *No. 5* Weinberg uses a very effective "collage" of themes from Robert Schumann's and his close friend Boris Tchaikovsky's cello concertos. The *Sixth Prelude* is reminiscent of a typical Russian folk-song whereas *No. 7* has an eerie perpetual motion with a passing Russian-Orthodox chorale. *No. 8* recalls Prokofiev's *March from The Love for Three Oranges*.

The *Preludes* form several "waves" with well planned troughs and peaks. The second such wave starts in *Prelude No. 9*, using the octave elements of *No. 1* with a rather well concentrated and renewed force. It continues right into the extremely powerful "machine"-like motion of *No. 10*. Both *No. 9* and *No. 10* embody well-pronounced Russian melodic and rhythmic features, creating vivid images of immense turbulence and suffering. In contrast, the weak and breathless *No. 11* is followed by the very soft and song-like *No. 12*. Mystical and exploratory, *Nos. 13* and *14* lead to a finely developed, if still understated, fugue (*No. 15*). *No. 16* explodes into an extremely dramatic Jewish dance – the clear centrepiece of the entire work.

The third "wave" starts immediately with *No. 17*, at first further reinforcing elements of the beginning, then, suddenly, becoming very weak and unsure. Highly emotional and personal, the *Sarabande* of *No. 18*, and the "mechanically-broken" *No. 19*, are followed by a rather strange and enigmatic *No. 20*. *No. 21* is related to the music of Shostakovich, Weinberg's most dedicated friend. Two famous themes, one – like an eternal question – from the *First Cello Concerto*, another – playful and innocent – from the finale of the *Cello Sonata*, are magically intertwined here. The subdued and oriental (Indian?)–sounding *No. 22* and the "shocking" atonal writing in *No. 23* lead the *Preludes* to a peaceful, if somewhat unresolved, conclusion with the graceful *Menuet* of *No. 24*. Weinberg ends everything with the same, enveloping, low and rich cello C that began the work.

Greatly inspired by the *Preludes*, I quickly found and fell in love with Weinberg's *Sonata for Solo Cello No. 1, Op. 72*. Written for Mstislav Rostropovich in 1960, it received its official première the same year in Moscow and was published in 1963. The work consists of three contrasting movements. The first is an *Adagio* with a very Russian-sounding, epic and broad main theme which develops into the emotional climax of the middle section and then returns back to a calm state. Second, we have an *Allegretto* with the wonderful, surreal charm of a Mahler Ländler-like movement. Masterfully written, the *Finale* is full of energy and drama. Elements of the "hits" and "runs" (strongly accented and separated octaves, followed by fast passages) are dominant here. Using vivid Jewish melodies and rhythms, Weinberg concludes the sonata with a powerful and remarkably effective coda.

Josef Feigelson

Josef Feigelson



Photo: Robert Ante

Latvian-born cellist Josef (Yosif) Feigelson has enjoyed a solo career spanning over three decades. Born to musician parents, he began playing the cello at the age of six, studying under Don Yaffe at the Darzin Music School in Riga. In 1970 he won First Prize at the Concertino Prague International Competition and became a pupil of Mstislav Rostropovich at the Moscow Conservatory, continuing his studies with Natalia Gutman. Winner of the prestigious Tchaikovsky (1974) and J.S. Bach (1976) International Competitions, he toured throughout the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries. In 1987 he became an American citizen, making his New York debut in 1988, when he stepped in at short notice to take the place of the ailing violinist Nathan Milstein with the New York Chamber Symphony. He has gone on to appear with leading orchestras throughout the United States and across Europe. His recordings have been released on the Olympia, Panton, Essay and Melodiya labels, and his 1996 performance of Dvořák's *Cello Concerto* with the Detroit Symphony under Neeme Järvi was recorded for Eurobroadcast and heard on radio stations around the world. In 1990 he received a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and has done much to bring to light neglected cello repertoire.

More information about the artist can be found at www.joseffeigelson.com

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Twenty-Four Preludes, Op. 100

- 1 Prelude No. 1
- 2 Prelude No. 2
- 3 Prelude No. 3
- 4 Prelude No. 4
- 5 Prelude No. 5
- 6 Prelude No. 6
- 7 Prelude No. 7
- 8 Prelude No. 8
- 9 Prelude No. 9
- 10 Prelude No. 10
- 11 Prelude No. 11
- 12 Prelude No. 12
- 13 Prelude No. 13
- 14 Prelude No. 14

43:44

- 1:51
- 1:19
- 0:57
- 1:35
- 2:17
- 1:25
- 1:41
- 1:14
- 1:53
- 2:01
- 2:19
- 2:21
- 1:35
- 0:48

15 Prelude No. 15

16 Prelude No. 16

17 Prelude No. 17

18 Prelude No. 18: Sarabande

19 Prelude No. 19

20 Prelude No. 20

21 Prelude No. 21

22 Prelude No. 22

23 Prelude No. 23

24 Prelude No. 24: Menuet

Sonata for Solo Cello No. 1, Op. 72

25 Adagio

26 Allegretto

27 Allegro

3:04

1:49

2:09

3:05

2:01

1:29

1:21

1:24

1:48

2:19

13:48

6:21

3:28

3:58

Also available



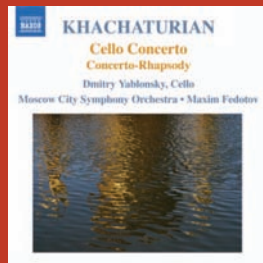
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8.570463



DDD

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Playing Time
57:32

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The importance of Mieczysław Weinberg's *24 Preludes* for solo cello, written for Rostropovich, lies beyond their superficial resemblance to Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* or the piano preludes of Chopin or Weinberg's colleague Shostakovich. Instead, it resides in Weinberg's remarkable ability to write for solo cello with almost limitless imagination, using myriad musical styles and varied techniques. These fascinating qualities are also to be found in his more expansively lyrical *Sonata*, a masterfully written outpouring of deep emotions. Latvian-born cellist Josef Feigelson has enjoyed a solo career spanning over three decades and champions neglected cello repertoire.

Mieczysław
WEINBERG
(1919-1996)

Complete Music for Solo Cello • 1

1-24 Twenty-Four Preludes, Op. 100 (1969) **43:44**

25-27 Solo Cello Sonata No. 1, Op. 72 (1960) **13:48**

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

Josef Feigelson, Cello

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A detailed track list can be found on the last page of the booklet
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