

Wadym Kipa

For more than fifty years, the name of pianist, composer and music educator Wadym Kipa has been virtually unknown to the general public. Beyond his immediate circle of students and colleagues, very few musicians and musicologists are familiar with his compositions. Kipa left his native Ukraine during World War II. Following his departure, the Soviet authorities never permitted him to return. His music was banned, and his name was never mentioned in official encyclopedias and textbooks. Upon his arrival in the United States, Wadym Kipa depended on teaching for his livelihood. Rekindling a performing career and finding invitations to present his compositions proved challenging. Rather than being widely known, Kipa's talent was appreciated by a select few. His performances were infrequent and only a small selection of his creative oeuvre was published.

Only recently have the achievements of the composers and musicians of the Ukrainian diaspora received overdue acknowledgment and appreciation. Despite this renaissance, Kipa's compositions remain primarily in manuscript form.¹ However, his works are distinguished by the quality of the music itself, the depth of its emotional expression and the obvious professionalism in his handling of musical material. It contrasts with twentieth-century composers who emphasized a serial approach to musical structure and atonal harmony or aleatorics. Kipa's strong attachment to melodic texture coincided more closely with the Romantic tradition of harmonic development.

Wadym Kipa was born on 13 May (30 April, Old Style) 1912, at Kuchmisterska Slobodka, near Kyiv, Ukraine. His father, Veremii Kipa, was an inspector for the South-Eastern Railroad. The entire family encouraged the younger Kipa's interest in music. A

¹ One set of *Romansy* (fifteen art songs to the verses of Ukrainian poets) was published by Muzychna Ukraina in 1998. The volume contains nine settings of texts by Lesia Ukrainka, six of texts by Wadym Lesytsch, and one each to the words of Petro Kizko and Andrii Malyshko. Composer Vitalii Kyrylo undertook editorial work on the songs for the volume. The publication also included facsimiles of the composer's original manuscripts and an introductory biographical essay by Tamara Bulat.

special influence on Kipa was his godmother Raisa Borysova, a talented pianist, who performed in Russia and later in France.

Kipa was fortunate during his formative years to find teachers, who represented the classic Russian and European traditions of piano pedagogy. He began his musical education in Kharkiv. His first professional music teacher was Vladyslav Topilin, one of the founders of Ukrainian piano pedagogy. Topilin was famous mainly as a concert pianist, but at the time he was working in the music school for the children of railroad employees in Kharkiv. During the chaos of the post-civil war period professional musicians were forced to support themselves by any means available, including performances in obscure venues and teaching in unexpected locales while the educational system was in flux. Wadym Kipa had the privilege of meeting another influential musician at the same school, Semen Bohatyrov, a prominent composer and professor of music theory. His knowledge of harmony, history and music theory inspired the young Kipa and laid the foundation for his future endeavours in composition.

After graduation from the Kharkiv Music School, Kipa continued his studies at Kharkiv Conservatory of Music with Pavlo Lutsenko. When the capital of Ukraine was relocated from Kharkiv back to Kyiv, most prominent professors returned to Kyiv. Kipa followed and continued his studies at the Kyiv Conservatory of Music with the pianist Grigorii Beklemishev. In addition to performance, Kipa was interested in theory and folklore studies. His classmates included Ukrainian composers Herman Zhukovsky and Hryhorii Maiboroda, with whom Kipa enrolled in fieldwork to collect and transcribe traditional Ukrainian melodies.

In the late 1930s, the faculty of the Kyiv Conservatory included the founders of modern Ukrainian music: Borys Liatoshynsky, Lev Revutsky and the prominent musicologist Andrey Olkhovsky as chair of the music history department. Professors in the piano department included Kostiantyn Mykhailiv and Abram Lufer, who also studied with Beklemishev.

In 1937, when Kipa was twenty-five years old, he was selected to enter the First All-Soviet Piano Competition in Moscow. Competing against more than one hundred other participants, he became one of ten finalists. The official acknowledgement of his victory earned him the designation “Laureate of the Soviet Union,” a citation personally signed by numerous composers and pianists, including Sergei Prokofiev, Aleksandr Aleksandrov, Aleksandr Goldenveizer, Konstantin Miaskovsky, Konstantin Igumnov and other musicians from Russian, Ukraine, Belarus and Armenia.²

When Kipa graduated from the Kyiv Conservatory, he began a career as a concert pianist. From 1937 until 1941, he toured extensively across the USSR, giving piano recitals and appearing as a soloist with the Moscow and Kyiv symphony orchestras.

In 1937 Kipa also became a faculty member of the Kyiv Conservatory, and in 1941 he continued his post-graduate studies. Unfortunately, his teaching career at the conservatory was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. In the early days of the war, Kipa was captured by the Germans, but shortly thereafter he was released and returned to Kyiv, where he continued teaching at the Conservatory of Music from 1941 to 1943.³ During this period, according to his student Elena Solska, he started composing his own music.⁴ It is probable that Kipa began composing even earlier, since one of his compositions, Lament for Piano, was dated 1939 (second revision in 1959).

Kipa’s compositions from the late 1930s include pieces for solo piano, art songs, an album for young pianists and pieces for voice and piano. These works reveal stylistic characteristics of the Neo-Romantic tradition: highly developed piano parts in art songs, widely ranging rhythmic combinations and harmonic complexity. Some of his manuscripts were lost during and after his move to Germany, where Kipa served briefly as an accompanist at the Berlin Conservatory and taught at Berlin’s Klindwort-

² The list of composers, pianists and musicologists included professors Golovanov, Gedike, Vasylenko, Gauk, Riazanov, Revutsky (Ukraine), Stepanian (Armenia), Sharaev (Azerbaijan), Zolotarev (Belarus), Flier, Zak (Russia) and others. *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 59 (23 December 1937).

³ The main building of the Kyiv State Conservatory of Music burned down in late September 1941. Kipa taught at the Conservatory that was located at the present day Drahomanov Pedagogical University in Kyiv.

⁴ From the interview and memoirs of Elena Dudina Solska, a piano student of Wadym Kipa and later a ballet dancer in New York, 16 September 1997.

Scharwenk Conservatory, where Liszt had been a professor. Despite the deprivation and enormous difficulties Kipa experienced during the war, he managed to perform and teach, and to write several vocal pieces and works for solo piano.

After 1945, Kipa and his family lived in the British Zone in Germany. He was able to perform occasionally and to compose. There are only a few surviving reviews of Kipa's performances from the period from 1943 through 1950, but they convey the admiration of audiences and music critics' appreciation of his music.

To a large extent, Kipa the pianist influenced Kipa the composer. His depth of understanding of the subtlety and delicacy of the musical scores of the great masters of the 19th century became the inspiration for the melodic and harmonic development in his works for piano and voice. The music he performed influenced his own compositions, in which the clarity of the Classical period, the structural development of the Romantic era and Impressionistic harmonic progressions blended naturally.

In 1951, Wadym Kipa and his family left Germany and thereafter resided permanently in New York. The following year he established a private school of music, furthering his career as a teacher of piano. Although in demand as a teacher, Kipa did not abandon his concert activity entirely. Music critics for Ukrainian, American and German publications noted his brilliant technique and the emotional force that distinguished his interpretation of music ranging from the Classical (Mozart, Beethoven) and Romantic (Chopin, Liszt) periods, to French Impressionism (Debussy, Ravel), Russian post-Romanticism (Scriabin, Rachmaninov) and contemporary Ukrainian works (Kosenko, Revutsky, Fomenko). Although principally a performing artist, Kipa realized shortly after his arrival in the United States that his chances of developing a career as a concert pianist were limited. With time he focused more and more on composing for professional fulfillment and artistic satisfaction, and composing became the primary outlet for his creativity.

In the 1950s, Kipa completed a number of compositional projects. These included incidental music for Lesia Ukrainka's drama *Boiarynia* (Lady of nobility), staged in New

York under the direction of Volodymyr Lisnyak. Most of his compositions for solo piano, such as *Album for Youth*, which includes several interesting short pieces, dances and etudes; Piano Concerto (unfinished); arrangements for piano; music for violin and piano; and a set of art songs to the texts of the German poet Wilhelm Chojnacki, remain unpublished. As a rule, Kipa's piano music was performed either by the composer himself or by his students. Most notable were his compositions for young musicians, such as *Fantastic Variations*, Scherzino in E minor, Elegy in C minor, and "Gavotte Interrupted by a Serenade."

Wadym Kipa died in New York City on 31 August 1968, at the age of 56.

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List of Compositions⁵

Works for Piano

- Lament (1939; rev. 1959)
- Etude no.2 (1950)
- “Reminiscence” (1953)
- Scherzino (1956)
- Bagatelle (1957)
- “Variations Phantastique” (1957)
- “Gavotte Interrupted by a Serenade” (1959)
- Gallop (1959)
- “Stances Classique” (1964)
- “Dialogue” (1965)
- *Children’s Corner. An Album for Youth*, 14 pieces, most based on Ukrainian folk melodies (1953-67)

- Piano Concerto in G (unfinished)
- Cadenza (for the 3rd movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto in D minor)

Works for Voice and Piano:

- “Ukraini” (1945 in B flat; rev. 1967 in D flat)
- Four songs to poems by Wilhelm Chojnacki: “Immer ein Letztes,” “Wiegenlied,” “Fruehlingslied,” “Schwalben” (1950)
- Four songs to poems by Wadym Lesytsch: “Nema vzhe ni domy” (I no longer have a home; 1960), “Vpaly tini na hodyny” (Shadows have fallen on hours), “I shcho zh ostalossia iz mrii” (What remains of the dream), “Den' u lisi” (A days in the forest; 1963)

⁵ Most compositions by Wadym Kipa remain in manuscript form, except *Romansy*, fourteen art songs to texts by Lesia Ukrainka, Wadym Lesych and Andrii Malyshko, published in Ukraine as *Vadym Kipa: Romansy* [Wadym Kipa: Art songs]. Kyiv: Muzychna Ukraina, 1998.

- Nine songs to poems by Lesia Ukrainka: “Ne spivajte meni sei pisni” (Do not sing this song to me), “Osinnii plach” (Autumnal weeping), “Nadiia” (Hope), “Vechirnia hodyna” (The evening hour), “Naprovesni” (In early spring), “Pisnia” (Song), “Stoiala ia i slukhala vesnu”, (I stood and searched for spring), “Khotila-b ia pisneiu staty” (I would like to become a song; 1966)
- “Skriz’ plach, i stohin, i rydannia” (Through weeping, groaning and wailing; 1967)
- “Spohad” (Reminiscence; setting of Andrii Malyshko’s poem “Pisnia pro Kyiv,” 1967-68)

Works for Violin and Piano:

- Capriccio (1966)

Piano Arrangements:

- “Minuet” from Mozart's' Divertimento in D
- Bach-Brahms: Chaconne (for the left hand)

Music for the Theatre

- Incidental music for Lesia Ukrainka's *Boiarynia* (ca. 1953-54)