

Alexander Knaifel Blazhenstva

Lamento, Blazhenstva (The Beatitudes)

Ivan Monighetti (violoncello, piano, conductor)

Tatiana Melentieva (soprano)

Piotr Migunov (bass)

State Hermitage Orchestra

Lege Artis Choir

ECM New Series 1957

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No other composer from today's Russia has embraced mysticism in such a rigorous way as Knaifel... He is, without any doubt, one of the most fascinating and challenging artistic figures in modern Russia –

Tatjana Rexroth, MusikTexte, Germany

The third ECM album pioneering Alexander Knaifel's highly personal oeuvre after "Amicta Sole" and "Svete Tikhii" (released in 2003 and 2005, respectively) offers an important addition to the label's wide-ranging spectrum of Post-Soviet music. Two starkly contrasting yet spiritually interrelated compositions – both of them, according to Knaifel, following the same path and forming a "united way" – are presented in exemplary interpretations from some of his long-standing collaborators, especially from cellist and conductor Ivan Monighetti. "In my opinion this recording is one of the best ones we ever did", says the composer who took part in all production stages.

While the heavy chords in "Lamento" for solo cello tend to evoke an almost orchestral density of sound, the subtle sonic hues of "Blazhenstva" for soloists, orchestra and choir often verge to silence. The 18-minute cello piece, a central example of Knaifel's expressive early style, depicts an impressive development from vehement rage to almost transcendent tranquillity. Towards the end, the (male) player is asked to sing with closed mouth in the cello register. "Lamento" was written in 1967 when the composer, originally a cellist himself, was still studying in Leningrad. It was revised twenty years later and dedicated to the memory of the influential Russian choreographer Leonid Jakobson who had died in 1975.

"Blazhenstva" was composed in 1996 and is dedicated to Mstislav Rostropovich, Knaifel's former teacher and mentor. Representative of Knaifel's mature style it is a very sparse and completely quiet score of 37 minutes in slow tempo throughout. Relinquishing all ornamental elements it creates an incomparable sonic space of almost narcotic intensity. The biblical verse from the Sermon on the Mount (Gospel of St. Matthew) in Russian language are set for solo voices and different choral groups and enhanced by extensive string interludes. "Feasible comprehension of these immeasurable words seemed to me the best gift to the 70th anniversary of the great musician and great person Mstislav Rostropovich", writes Knaifel in a short note for the present recording.

Alexander Knaifel was born in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) in 1943 and grew up in St. Petersburg where he has lived ever since. A member of the Soviet avant-garde in his early years –

alongside Schnittke, Gubaidulina, Denisov, Pärt, Kancheli, Silvestrov and others – he was also influenced by the Second Viennese School and Shostakovich. In the 1970s his expressive and partially experimental style changed radically, introducing a new sense of economical reduction and concentration on sound. The works of the 1990s mirror Knaifel's intense preoccupation with religious themes. In addition to his more than 70 works in many genres, he has written music for more than 40 feature films and documentaries.

Ivan Monighetti, born in 1944, was Mstislav Rostropovich's last student at the Moscow Conservatory and took awards at numerous international competitions. Alongside his collaborations with many leading contemporary composers such as Penderecki, Xenakis, Dutilleux, Schnittke, Tan Dun, Gubaidulina or Valentin Silvestrov he is founding director of the Moscow Early Music festival and a highly respected expert in the field of historically informed performance practice. A professor at the Basle Musikakademie, Monighetti has recorded widely for different labels and is a regular guest at major festivals and soloist with leading international orchestras.

Due to the very wide dynamic range of this recording it is recommended to listen with headphones at a constantly high volume

CD-package includes a 24-page illustrated booklet