

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: PARADOX AND PARALLEL: ALFRED
SCHNITTKE'S WORKS FOR VIOLIN IN
CONTEXT

Lydia Chernicoff, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2019

Dissertation Directed By: Professor James Stern, School of Music

In his works for violin, Alfred Schnittke explores and challenges the traditional boundaries of Western composition. This dissertation project is founded on the conviction that these works by Schnittke, despite their experimental and idiosyncratic nature, hold an integral place in the standard violin repertoire as well as in the broader canon of Western classical music. The argument will be supported by three recital programs that place the works in the context of that canon and an investigation of how Schnittke's compositional language relates to that of the western European composers, revealing his complex and distinctive voice.

By tracking his deconstruction and reworking of the music of other composers, we see Schnittke's particular formality and musical rhetoric, as well as his energetic and artistic drive, and we see that his works are not merely experimental—they renew the forms whose boundaries they transgress, and they exhibit a gravity, a timelessness, and a profound humanity, earning the composer his rightful place in the lineage of Western classical music.

The first and third recitals were performed in Ulrich Recital Hall, and the second recital was performed in Gildenhorn Recital Hall, all at the University of Maryland. Recordings of all three recitals can be accessed at the University of Maryland Hornbake Library.

PARADOX AND PARALLEL: ALFRED SCHNITTKE'S WORKS FOR VIOLIN
IN CONTEXT

By

Lydia Chernicoff

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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2019

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To every artist in search of his or her voice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
PROGRAM I.....	iv
PROGRAM II.....	v
PROGRAM III	vi
TRACK LISTINGS.....	vii
TABLE OF FIGURES	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter I: Musical Upbringing.....	2
Chapter II: <i>Moz-art</i> for 2 Violins and Sonata No. 3	6
Chapter III: <i>Suite in the Old Style</i> and <i>Quasi una Sonata</i>	10
Chapter IV: Piano Quartet and Sonata No. 1	16
Conclusions	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY	25

PROGRAM I

April 3, 2018
8:00pm
Ulrich Recital Hall

Dancer on a Tightrope

Sofia Gubaidulina
(b. 1931)

Moz-art for 2 Violins (based on the fragment K. 416d)

Alfred Schnittke
(1934-1998)

Intermission

Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano
Andante
Allegro
Adagio
Senza tempo

Alfred Schnittke
(1934-1998)

Sonata in B-flat major, K. 454
Largo – Allegro
Andante
Allegretto

W.A. Mozart
(1756-1791)

with

Lauren Rausch, violin

Ronaldo Rolim, piano

PROGRAM II

February 28, 2019
5:30pm
Gildenhorn Recital Hall

Suite in the Old Style
Pastorale
Ballet
Minuet
Fugue
Pantomime

Alfred Schnittke
(1934-1998)

Scherzo for Violin and Piano in C minor, WoO2

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Sonata No.5 in F minor for Harpsichord and Violin, BWV 1018
(Without Indication)
Allegro
Adagio
Vivace

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Pause

Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano (*Quasi una Sonata*)

Alfred Schnittke
(1934-1998)

with
Ronaldo Rolim, piano

PROGRAM III

March 10, 2019
5:00pm
Ulrich Recital Hall

Piano Quartet in A Minor
Nicht zu schnell

Gustav Mahler
(1860-1911)

Piano Quartet
Allegro

Alfred Schnittke
(1934-1998)

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano
Andante
Allegretto
Largo
Allegretto scherzando

Alfred Schnittke
(1934-1998)

Intermission

Piano Trio No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 67
Andante
Allegro con brio
Largo
Allegretto

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

with

James Stern, viola

Andrea Casarrubios, cello

Ronaldo Rolim, piano

TRACK LISTINGS

CD I

1. *Dancer on a Tightrope*.....Sofia Gubaidulina
2. *Moz-art* for 2 Violins (based on the fragment K. 416d).....Alfred Schnittke
- Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano.....Alfred Schnittke
3. Andante
4. Allegro
5. Adagio
6. Senza tempo
- Sonata in B-flat major, K. 454.....W.A. Mozart
7. Largo – Allegro
8. Andante
9. Allegretto

CD II

- Suite in the Old Style*.....Alfred Schnittke
1. Pastorale
2. Ballet
3. Minuet
4. Fugue
5. Pantomime
6. Scherzo for Violin and Piano in C minor, WoO2.....Johannes Brahms
- Sonata No.5 in F minor for Harpsichord and Violin, BWV 1018.....J.S. Bach
7. (Without Indication)
8. Allegro
9. Adagio
10. Vivace
11. Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano (*Quasi una Sonata*).....Alfred Schnittke

CD III

Piano Quartet in A minor.....Gustav Mahler

1. Nicht zu schnell

Piano Quartet.....Alfred Schnittke

2. Allegro

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano.....Alfred Schnittke

3. Andante

4. Allegretto

5. Largo

6. Allegretto scherzando

Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, Op. 67.....Dmitri Shostakovich

7. Andante

8. Allegro con brio

9. Largo

10. Allegretto

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1.....	9
Figure 2.....	9
Figure 3.....	14
Figure 4.....	17
Figure 5.....	20

Although I don't have any Russian blood, I am tied to Russia, having spent all my life here. On the other hand, much of what I've written is somehow related to German music and to the logic which comes out of being German. . . Like my forefathers I live in Russia, I can speak and write Russian far better than any German, but I am not Russian. . .

Alfred Schnittke, 1987¹

Alfred [Schnittke] is a great mirror of time because he never flirted or played with it, but lived in it. And he was directed by the desire. . . to reflect time not as if he were making diary entries, but by using the standpoints and categories of what is eternal. His reference points are not transient values. But, even though his values are eternal, he has no qualms about being in conflict with himself, with time, even with what he writes. And in my opinion anyone looking merely for completeness, for something smooth and comfortable in his music, will be making a mistake. There may be something smooth and comfortable in it, but there is always the opposite. His music is always built on contrasts.

Gidon Kremer, 1989²

Introduction

Like the man himself, Alfred Schnittke's music is full of paradox. Traditional Baroque and Classical forms like the dance suite and sonata are translated into a modern musical language; dissonant and angular gestures are often tempered by (sometimes tongue-in-cheek) quotations of folk songs or fragments from works by other composers; joyful, lighthearted phrases are frequently interrupted by acerbic jibes or hints of darkness.

¹ Alexander Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 9.

² Gidon Kremer, "Gidon Kremer on Alfred Schnittke (1989)," in *A Schnittke Reader*, ed. Alexander Ivashkin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 233.

However, for all their playfulness and the liberties they take, Schnittke's works exhibit a gravity, a timelessness, and a profound humanity—qualities that invite a drawing of parallels to the serious and influential works that precede and inspire them.

The composer said of his own music,

It is not just eclecticism for its own sake. When I use elements of, say, Baroque music. . . sometimes I'm tweaking the listener. And sometimes I'm thinking about earlier music as a beautiful way of writing that has disappeared and will never come back; and in that sense, it has a tragic feeling for me. I see no conflict in being both serious and comic in the same piece. In fact, I cannot have one without the other.³

In his works for violin, Alfred Schnittke explores and challenges the traditional boundaries of Western composition. This dissertation project is founded on the conviction that these works by Schnittke, despite their experimental and idiosyncratic nature, hold an integral place in the standard violin repertoire as well as in the broader canon of Western classical music. The argument will be supported by three recital programs that place the works in the context of that canon and an investigation of how Schnittke's compositional language relates to that of the western European composers, revealing his complex and distinctive voice.

Chapter I: Musical Upbringing

Alfred Schnittke's very identity is a paradox. He was born in Russia in 1934 to German parents living in the town of Engels—the former capital of a Volga German republic in the Soviet Union. Schnittke's father was born in Germany to a well-educated Jewish family and spoke formal, highly correct German. His mother, on the other hand, spoke the Volga dialect of German, which was less formal and full of colloquial idioms

³ Obituary of Alfred Schnittke, *New York Times*, August 4, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/04/arts/alfred-schnittke-eclectic-composer-dies-at-63.html> (accessed April 11, 2019).

and expressions.⁴ This Volga German dialect was the first language Alfred spoke, followed closely by Russian. There are many words that he remembered from this Volga German dialect—which must have had its roots in old German vernacular—but which he could never find in any dictionary. Much later, he did come across some of those words in Mozart’s letters, a discovery that caused him to feel a profound connection to Mozart and the German culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries while simultaneously distancing him from the modern German culture of the twentieth century. It is “this gap in his consciousness between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries [that] is one of the ‘genetic’ reasons for his interest in mixing widely-differing styles in his music.”⁵

From a young age, Schnittke was fascinated by rhythm and folk instruments like the balalaika and mouth-organ, and he loved listening to music on the family’s radio. It had been decided that he would study music, but in 1941, while he was in Moscow to audition for the Central Music School for gifted children, the Germans invaded Russia, and Schnittke was sent back to Engels where he remained until the end of the war.

Schnittke’s musical education finally began when his family moved from Engels to Vienna in 1946, following his father’s acceptance of a post with a Soviet newspaper that was published in German. Despite the damage it sustained from the war, Vienna was still a colorful and vibrant city brimming with history and culture—a stark contrast to the dull, grey town of Engels. While in Vienna Schnittke started to study the piano, and also attended many concerts of music by Beethoven, Schubert, Wagner, Debussy, and Stravinsky. Though Schnittke received all of his formal music education in Moscow after his family returned to the Soviet Union, his early exposure to the charming and

⁴ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 15.

⁵ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 17.

captivating Viennese style of composition stayed with him, and became an integral part of his distinct musical voice.

After returning to Russia, Schnittke began piano lessons with Vasily Mikhailovich Shaternikov at the October Revolution Music College in Moscow in 1949. He made quick progress, but soon realized that he had begun his formal piano studies too late to pursue a career in performance. Schnittke felt that he was also behind in his knowledge of theory and analysis so in 1950, with the help of Shaternikov, he started private lessons with well-known professor and theorist Iosif Ryzhkin. With Ryzhkin, Schnittke studied harmony, musical form, and composition in great depth. Schnittke's assignments included exercises in which he was asked to write harmonizations in different styles—one in the style of a Russian folk song, and one in the style of a late opera by Rimsky-Korsakov, for example.⁶ These studies with Ryzhkin further explain Schnittke's tendency to draw on the work of other composers through quotation and stylistic reference. He sometimes seems to find his own voice by beginning in the voice of another composer.

Because of the unexpected turns Schnittke's young life took—including the outbreak of war, and the move from Engels to Vienna and then to Moscow—his lack of solid early musical training meant that his understanding of music differed from that of his colleagues, a difference of which he was keenly aware. Cellist and close personal friend of Schnittke's, Alexander Ivashkin, says that Schnittke “acknowledged that the whole range of his ‘polystylistic’ ideas, all the stylistic ‘kaleidoscope’ of his music. . . was perhaps a way of ‘filling the gap’ in his perception and knowledge of music. . .”⁷ Ivashkin goes on to say that “the shocking clashes of style in his music were clearly

⁶ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 45.

⁷ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 52.

determined by the personal and social circumstances of his early childhood and youth, the time he spent in different cultures and ‘styles,’ indeed in different worlds.”⁸

In 1953, Schnittke entered the Moscow Conservatory as a student of the composer Evgeny Golubev. During his four years there the Conservatory provided Schnittke with many luxuries that the October Revolution Music College did not. Among them were the use of the extensive facilities, exposure to performances by artists of international acclaim, held in some of the best concert halls in Moscow, and access to a first-rate music library. The Moscow Conservatory was still a quite conservative institution in the 1950s, however, so attending the meetings of the Students’ Association became a seminal activity for Schnittke.⁹ At these meetings performance and composition students alike would gather to listen to music by composers such as Stravinsky, Hindemith, Bartók, Schoenberg, and Boulez—music that was frowned upon by the Conservatory administrators and the Communist Party. The composers in the Students’ Association also listened to and critiqued each other’s work. It was in these meetings that Schnittke met Edison Denisov, Rodion Schedrin, and Sofia Gubaidulina, colleagues who, along with Schnittke, were to become the next generation of innovators in Russian music.

The composition of his Violin Concerto No. 1 in 1956 and 1957 marks the beginning of Schnittke’s fascination with, and long series of compositions for the violin. Ivashkin writes that,

. . . from this time onwards the most important ideas in Schnittke’s music first appeared in concertos or sonatas for violin. Without any doubt the violin symbolized for him a personal message, a human voice—exactly as it had been regarded in the Romantic era. . . In that sense, Schnittke’s music is not really modern, but rather old-fashioned and that was the way he preferred it.¹⁰

⁸ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 52.

⁹ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 56.

¹⁰ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 66.

Schnittke's works for violin that are explored in this project are *Moz-Art* for 2 Violins (based on the fragment K. 416d), *Suite in the Old Style* for Violin and Piano, Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano, Sonata No. 2 (*Quasi una Sonata*) for Violin and Piano, Sonata No. 3 for violin and Piano, and the Piano Quartet. The juxtaposition of these particular works of Schnittke's with one another creates a portrait of a composer whose singular and provocative voice helped to define the twentieth century musical landscape. Zooming out to frame these works with pieces of composers by whom he was most inspired allows us to hear the direct impact those composers had on Schnittke's compositional style.

Chapter II: *Moz-art* for 2 Violins and Sonata No. 3

The first recital program of this project includes Sofia Gubaidulina's *Dancer on a Tightrope*, Schnittke's *Moz-art* for 2 violins, Schnittke's Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano, as well as Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 454 by Mozart.

Though a contemporary of Schnittke's born in a Tatar Volga republic, Gubaidulina is a distinctly different writer of music for the violin, so including a work of hers in this project seemed important in examining the particularities of Schnittke's voice. And literal references aside, it was clear that Schnittke's sharp and funny intelligence would engage in effortless dialogue with Mozart's.

Gubaidulina's *Dancer on a Tightrope* was written in 1994, as was Schnittke's Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano, but the two works could not be more different in sound or style. Gubaidulina faced many of the same political and musical constraints that Schnittke did and in this work, she addresses some of those challenges directly. Her description of *Dancer on a Tightrope* is as follows:

The title stems from a desire to break away from the confines of everyday life, inevitably associated with risk and danger. The desire to take flight, for the exhilaration of movement, of dance, of ecstatic virtuosity. . . A person dancing on

a tightrope is also a metaphor for this opposition: life as risk, and art as flight into another existence. . .¹¹

Gubaidulina creates her own structure, as well as her own timbre, texture, and world of sound in *Dancer on a Tightrope* through her use of extended techniques for both the violin and piano. The pianist bounces and rubs a glass tumbler on the strings inside of the piano, hits the strings with metal thimbles, and only towards the end of the piece plays the keys. Gubaidulina asks the violinist to use percussive techniques like *ricochet glissandi*, *col legno*, and *pizzicato* to create texture and fantasy. The single-movement structure and extended techniques set this work of Gubaidulina's apart from those of her predecessors, and define her as an experimental and non-traditional composer.

In contrast to Gubaidulina, Schnittke uses more conventional playing techniques for both violin and piano, as well as a standard four-movement sonata structure in his Sonata No. 3. It is clear that Schnittke feels more comfortable writing within the framework of traditional form and structure. Many of the elements of a traditional sonata are present in this piece—four contrasting movements, including a scherzo-like second movement, a slow and pensive third movement, and a grand finish—but the piece is more like the skeleton of a sonata, made of bones with no flesh or blood.

Although the first movement is eloquent and gestural, the quarter tone pitches and glissandi in the violin warp the eloquence into something slightly distorted and grotesque. The jazzy feel of the second movement comes from Schnittke's use of two-against-three and three-against-four, which also contributes to the joking, scherzo-like nature of this movement. The *sul ponticello* and *glissandi* markings in the violin, coupled with the large leaps in register in both instruments, exhibit an angular and sardonic sense of humor. In

¹¹ Sofia Gubaidulina, Music Sales Classical, <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/2908/24018> (accessed November 5, 2018).

the dark third movement, marked *Adagio*, the sparse piano part creates an emptiness that leaves the human-like voice of the violin alone for much of the movement. In a traditional sonata, this central slow movement is usually the heart of the piece, and it is here too, but it feels as if the music is searching for the freedom to express itself without ever quite finding it. The final movement of this work is marked *Senza tempo*, and features long, quiet notes of varying lengths punctuated by passionate outbursts. The piece ends with a cluster chord of D, Eb, and E marked *fff* in a closing gesture that puts an end to the struggle between the searching *p* passages and the wild *fff* eruptions, but which still feels charged with unresolved conflict.

In his piece, *Moz-art* for 2 violins, which is based on Mozart's fragment K. 416d, Schnittke creates a link to the past and even a kind of dialogue with Mozart by manipulating Mozart's own music in an innovative way. This is a technique that Schnittke adopted in other works as well, like his Piano Quartet after sketches by Mahler. The K. 416d fragment is all that remains of a musical pantomime Mozart wrote called *Pantolon & Columbine*.¹² Schnittke's *Moz-art* begins with two of the main themes found in Mozart's K. 416d fragment—a playful, imitative theme marked *Allegretto* and a noble, pompous one marked *Maestoso*. Schnittke even presents the two themes in the same keys in which they appear in Mozart's fragment. But Schnittke starts to toy with the material right away. The two violins chase each other around the motivic material as if in competition for who gets to play the theme first. They eventually end up staggered by one eighth note, which leads to some comical dissonance between the two parts.

¹² Karhausen, *The Bleeding of Mozart: A medical glance on his life, illnesses, and personality* (Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 152.



Figure 1

The pompous second theme begins seriously enough, but pretty soon one violinist is playing *sul ponticello*, and the other one is playing half of the phrase on the violin and whistling the other half.

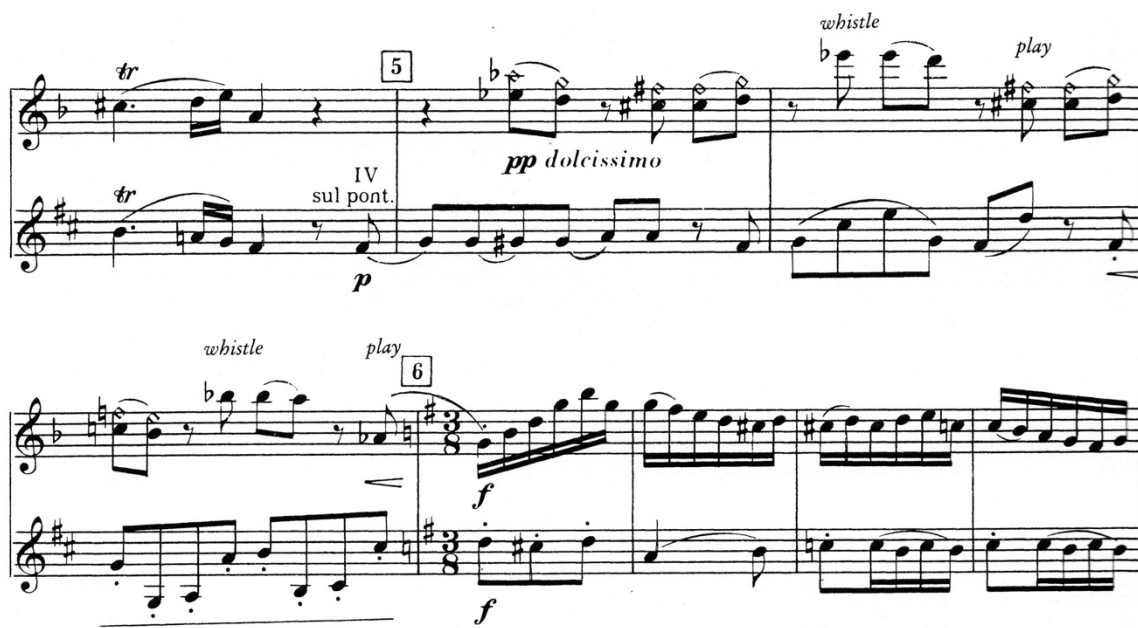


Figure 2

It is as if one violin part represents Schnittke, the other represents Mozart—and Schnittke is determined to beat Mozart at his own witty, mischievous game.

As the piece goes on, Schnittke continues to use thematic elements from the K. 416d fragment, but he combines them in unexpected ways, often overlapping material that stands alone in Mozart's original and usually to quite hilarious effect. Schnittke even includes quotations from other works of Mozart's, including the Symphony No. 40 in G minor, and the overture to the opera *Le Nozze di Figaro*. This piece requires some

unusual techniques from the violinists, including whistling, playing *sul ponticello*, using left hand *pizzicato*, and tuning the violin G string down (*scordatura*) to a low D, all of which add to its droll nature.

In this case, Schnittke is more like a collage artist than a composer. Most of the material is Mozart's, but the manipulation and overlapping of the material is entirely Schnittke. It is appropriation at its most brilliant and thoughtful, and it does feel like Schnittke and Mozart are having a chat across the centuries—speaking in the same unusual dialect.

Schnittke's works on this first recital program clearly show the varied ways in which the great Western composers influenced his writing. In *Moz-art* he uses material written by one of the composers he admired most as the jumping off point for the piece, weaving the material together to create a springboard for his own ironic style. And it is clear that the work Schnittke did with Ryzhkin as a student—harmonizing well-known melodies in different styles—stayed with him long after his school days. In his Sonata No. 3, he finds his own voice within the familiar four-movement scheme of a traditional sonata.

Gubaidulina, on the other hand, creates her own formal structure through shifting texture, and an experimental world of sound. Ending this first program with Mozart's Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 454—while it shares no literal connection to Schnittke's works—further highlights the ways in which Schnittke finds his voice naturally in the standard musical structure of the sonata with its contrasting and clearly defined movements.

Chapter III: *Suite in the Old Style* and *Quasi una Sonata*

The second recital program includes Alfred Schnittke's *Suite in the Old Style*, Brahms' Scherzo in C minor, WoO2, Bach's Sonata in F minor, BWV 1018, and Schnittke's Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano (*Quasi una Sonata*). Both of Schnittke's

pieces on this program were adapted from film scores he wrote. The *Suite in the Old Style* is based on the film score Schnittke wrote for the film *The Adventures of a Dentist*, and his Sonata No. 2 is based on the score for the film *The Glass Harmonica*. In his Sonata No. 2, which is perhaps “his most innovative and unusual polystylistic piece of the late 1960s,”¹³ Schnittke pays tribute to both Bach and Brahms by incorporating the B-A-C-H (the notes Bb, A, C, B-natural) monogram, as well as a B-A-H-S¹⁴ (Bb, A, B-natural, Eb) monogram in the work. The presence of these two monograms clearly shows Schnittke’s respect for, and desire to be associated with Bach and Brahms, so including a work by each composer in this program seemed fitting.

Ivashkin notes that “[Soviet] composers felt much freer and more relaxed when writing film music, more able to experiment. Music censorship was not as strict for films as it was for the music evaluated by the Soviet Composers’ Union, which had to discuss all newly composed scores.”¹⁵ Schnittke himself said that, “. . . the polystylistic method, the use of interacting styles, gave me a way out of the difficult situation in which I had been put by having to combine, over a long period, work for the cinema with work ‘at the desk . . .’”¹⁶ Both Schnittke’s *Quasi una Sonata* and *Suite in the Old Style* exhibit this blend of the narrative music he wrote for film with his more abstract music.

For the film *The Adventures of a Dentist* (1965), Schnittke wrote a score in which movements similar to a Baroque suite—each one written for a different set of instruments—represent the hero of the story at different stages of his life. In 1972, he adapted the film score into the *Suite in the Old Style* for violin and piano (or harpsichord).

¹³ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 111.

¹⁴ Luke Fitzpatrick, “Apparitions in Alfred Schnittke’s Sonata No. 2 (quasi una Sonata)” (DMA dissertation, University of Washington, 2016), 29.

¹⁵ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 106.

¹⁶ Alfred Schnittke, *A Schnittke Reader*, ed. Alexander Ivashkin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 17.

He pays homage to the traditional Baroque dance suite in his *Suite in the Old Style*, but the piece resembles the Baroque suite more in title than in practice. He writes five movements only instead of the usual six, and titles them Pastorale, Ballet, Minuet, Fugue, and Pantomime.

It comes as no surprise that the music itself also defies expectation. Schnittke cleverly incorporates traditional Baroque compositional elements such as sequences, fugues, ornaments, and dance-like meters, but something is always slightly off. The sequences go on for too long; the articulation is not consistently Baroque, it tends to be more lyrical and romantic; the fugues are not literal; ornaments often seem comical and out of place; and unexpected dissonances make it impossible to take the music too seriously. And yet, Schnittke still captures the essence of the Baroque dance suite, adding his own sensibilities and warm, sometimes nose-thumbing, humorous commentary to the genre. The piece builds in complexity over the course of the five movements and ends with a soft and inconclusive half-step trill on a D in the violin. During the rehearsal process a spark of inspiration caused a change in concert order that prompted the Brahms Scherzo (which begins on a G) to follow the *Suite in the Old Style* without pause—as if Schnittke’s D was the dominant to Brahms’ G.

The late 1960s saw a dramatic shift in the way Schnittke was writing music, marking the beginning of a new period. The Violin Sonata No. 2 is one of the pieces that defined this new musical phase.¹⁷ Ivashkin writes that during this period Schnittke’s “main concern became the dramatic shape of the whole piece. There are shocking contrasts of opposing images, clashes of styles, and paradoxes in logic and development.”¹⁸ Schnittke

¹⁷ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 92.

¹⁸ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 92.

pulls out many of the compositional techniques that define his musical language, such as meandering glissandi in the violin, uncomfortably long silences, harsh dissonances, loud outbursts, and polystylistic references to other composers. Even the title, *Quasi una Sonata*, is a reference. Beethoven famously designated his Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2 “quasi una fantasia.” Schnittke has written a work that clearly follows a fantasy-like, single-movement format, yet still contains a loose three-movement sonata structure.¹⁹

The piece begins with a startling loud G-minor chord in the piano, marked *sfff*. After an approximately six second silence, the violin responds with a dissonant chord also marked *sfff*. Schnittke instantly creates conflict with these first two chords, pitting tonal against atonal, and setting up the dramatic character of the piece. The first large section moves between fragmented segments marked *senza tempo*, *quasi allegretto*, *allegretto*, *moderato*, and *quasi cadenza*, and in it the violin and piano take turns playing tempestuous cadenzas, and engage in various kinds of musical dialogue, sometimes antagonistic, sometimes joking. Already in this first section, the piano presents the B-A-C-H motive which, along with the opening G minor chord, serves as a unifying motive throughout the piece. The B-A-C-H motive first appears in m. 77,²⁰ but it is only the motive, not the literal monogram that Schnittke presents here. The motive is incomplete and is comprised of the correct intervals, but not the B, A, C, and Bb pitches. Schnittke presents the B-A-C-H monogram in its entirety and with the B, A, C, and Bb pitches for the first time in the top voice of the piano in mm. 94-95.²¹

¹⁹ Dmitri Smirnov and Guy Stockton, “Marginalia quasi una Fantasia: On the Second Violin Sonata by Alfred Schnittke,” *Tempo* New Series, no. 220 (Cambridge University Press, April 2002), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/946578> (accessed December 6, 2017), 3.

²⁰ Alfred Schnittke, *Quasi una Sonata* for Violin and Piano (Universal Edition, 1972), 7.

²¹ Schnittke, *Quasi una Sonata*, 8.



Figure 3

The second large section of the piece begins in m. 181²² when the violin plays the B-A-C-H monogram for the first time. It is now clear that this monogram is an important element of this work as it not only associates Schnittke with one of the composers he most respected, but also functions as an important compositional building block that helps to define the structure of the piece. This second section is made up of segments marked *senza tempo*, *andantino*, *lento*, *andante*, and *moderato*, so it has an overall slower feel, which is partly what helps it take on the identity of a contrasting slow movement.

The final section of the piece is an *allegro* interrupted by *moderato* and *adagio* segments, which include romantic stylistic references and, specifically, a reference to Brahms through Schnittke's use of the B-A-H-S monogram (m. 257).²³ The *allegro* theme returns again briefly in m. 253,²⁴ for longer in m. 259,²⁵ and again in m. 294,²⁶ giving this last section the feel of a fast, final movement. After the final *allegro* ends in m. 312,²⁷ a humorous *quasi allegretto* begins in which a jumbled dialogue between the

²² Schnittke, *Quasi una Sonata*, 19.

²³ Schnittke, *Quasi una Sonata*, 17.

²⁴ Schnittke, *Quasi una Sonata*, 17.

²⁵ Schnittke, *Quasi una Sonata*, 17.

²⁶ Schnittke, *Quasi una Sonata*, 20.

²⁷ Schnittke, *Quasi una Sonata*, 20.

violin and piano is interrupted by the disturbing *fff* G-minor chords, taken from the very opening of the piece. These G-minor chords increase in number and frequency, leading to the final wrenching climax. At the climax, the piano plays repeated chords that alternate between *fff* G-minor and *p* clusters, highlighting once again the profound conflict in this piece that is represented by the clash between tonal and atonal sonorities. A cadenza in the violin leads into the final statement of the B-A-C-H monogram that ends the work with a dissonant homage to one of the great composers.

It was a challenge in musical logic to organize the second recital program for performance. The connection between the *Suite in the Old Style* and the Brahms Scherzo revealed itself in a beautiful and surprising manner. The two pieces were played *attacca*, and served as a perfect start to the program. However, the Bach and Schnittke sonatas almost seemed to wrestle with one another to have the final say and end the program. Each piece is unusual for the composer. The highly chromatic Bach sonata is full of unexpected harmonic twists and turns, and the first and third movements feel as if they should trade places—the third movement has more of a prelude-like character, while the first movement seems like it would fit better as an exploratory third movement. The *Quasi una Sonata* is the only sonata for violin and piano of Schnittke's that does not fit into a tidy and more traditional four-movement sonata scheme. Neither work provided the kind of redemption or peace that one might hope for at the end of a difficult program. The decision to finish with the *Quasi una Sonata* then became a practical one—the piano would just be too out of tune to play the Bach after the Schnittke, so it had to conclude with the *Quasi una Sonata*. Yet somehow this decision felt right within the larger musical context as well. It was hard to imagine hearing anything after this fragmented and disquieting work, but the program still ended with B-A-C-H.

Chapter IV: Piano Quartet and Sonata No. 1

The final recital program includes Mahler's single-movement Piano Quartet in A Minor, Schnittke's single-movement Piano Quartet, as well as his Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano, and Shostakovich's Piano Trio No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 67. Schnittke's Sonata No. 1 and Shostakovich's Trio in E minor share some fascinating similarities. Each piece relies heavily on the timbre created through the use of harmonics; each work contains a slow third movement that takes the form of a *passacaglia* with a repeating chord progression over which the melody rises and falls; and each work is cyclical in nature, with themes from previous movements reappearing just before the end of the piece. The two quartets share a more linear connection.

Mahler's Piano Quartet in A Minor dates from his days as a student at the Vienna Conservatory, and is the only chamber work of his that survived.²⁸ According to Christoph Flamm in the preface to the Henle edition of the Mahler quartet, "[the] title page and first page of music all bear the annotation 'I. Satz' (1st movement), indicating that the young composer had a multi-movement quartet in mind. In fact, sketches for a G minor piano quartet movement in 6/8 time are to be found on the reverse side of the inner folder. . ."²⁹ It is upon these sketches of the G minor quartet movement that Schnittke's piano quartet is based.

In his single-movement piano quartet, Schnittke reveals his source of inspiration slowly. He uses the accompanimental sixteenth-note motive from Mahler's fragment from the very beginning to create a feeling of uneasiness and foreboding.

²⁸ Christoph Flamm, from the preface to the score Mahler's *Piano Quartet in A minor*, IV.

²⁹ Flamm, from the preface to the score of Mahler's *Piano Quartet in A minor*, V.

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violine, Viola, Violoncello, and Klavier. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 6/8. The strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The piano part plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics include *pp* and *p*.

Figure 4

Fragments of the main theme begin in the strings in m. 12,³⁰ but the theme does not appear in its entirety until m. 39.³¹ Starting in this bar, the viola plays the main theme beginning on the beat while the other three instruments follow closely behind with staggered entrances. The violin begins one eighth note late and a half step down, the cello enters two eighth notes behind the viola and a whole step down, and the piano plays an entire beat behind and a minor third down from the viola. This creates a kind of blurred effect, and further enhances the restless and sinister energy of the piece. Schnittke gradually builds tension through a series of *glissandi* in the strings that begins in m. 110,³² is interrupted by a staggered, but taut rhythmic section, and eventually leads to the staggering climax of the piece in m. 174.³³ After a G.P. in which the piano's cluster chord rings on, Schnittke quotes Mahler's original fragment in its entirety, even labeling this last section "Gustav Mahler, Scherzo-Fragment zum Klavierquartett (1876)."³⁴ The release into the soft, tonal musical vocabulary of Mahler after the tense energy of the rest

³⁰ Alfred Schnittke, *Piano Quartet* (Musikverlag Hans Sikorski, 1991), 3.

³¹ Schnittke, *Piano Quartet in A Minor*, 5.

³² Schnittke, *Piano Quartet in A Minor*, 9.

³³ Schnittke, *Piano Quartet in A Minor*, 14.

³⁴ Schnittke, *Piano Quartet in A Minor*, 15.

of the movement makes the music even more poignant than if it stood alone. Schnittke ends the work with one soft cluster chord with a very wide vibrato indicated in the strings, a heartbreaking final sigh.

Schnittke's Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano more closely resembles his structured third sonata than the free second sonata. In this work, Schnittke combines a wide variety of musical elements, including a ponderous rhetorical style, sardonic jazz influences, the B-A-C-H motive, and even the folk song, *La Cucaracha*. This polystylistic blend of styles and influences makes the piece fun and more accessible than some of his other works, but there is also a soulfulness that makes the piece profound and intensely human.

The sparse first movement has a rhetorical quality in its gestures. Except for one outburst where the violin has a huge leap up to a high sixth in m. 30,³⁵ the note range is rather limited, creating a constrained feeling. This causes the second movement to feel even more wild as it breaks into its jazzy groove. Schnittke creates this swing in the second movement through time signatures that shift between 4/4, 2/4, and 3/4, through his use of off-beat accents, and gestures that are at odds with the bar lines, creating a constantly shifting point of emphasis, and consequently, a deep lack of stability.

In m. 114³⁶ of the second movement, Schnittke introduces an effect in the piano that returns again in the last movement. He has the pianist dampen the strings inside the piano while playing the keys, which creates a short sound that matches seamlessly with the *pizzicati* in the violin. A tempestuous and very difficult cadenza in the piano leads into a massive final statement of the movement's main thematic material in m. 187.³⁷ Here, the violin plays the theme in augmentation, while the piano answers with the same theme at

³⁵ Alfred Schnittke, *Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano* (Musikverlag Hans Sikorski, 1974), 5.

³⁶ Schnittke, *Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano*, 13.

³⁷ Schnittke, *Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano*, 17.

regular speed, creating a powerful, fist-shaking moment that is full of resistance. The music eventually dissolves and, with one final crescendo, rides the wave directly into the third movement.

It is here in the third movement that the relationship between this sonata and Shostakovich's Trio No. 2 in E minor begins to reveal itself. The third movement of each piece is based on a *passacaglia*, or series of chords that repeats many times, and over which the melody is played. While the *passacaglia* in Shostakovich's trio is more literal—the sequence of eight chords repeats six times—the *passacaglia* in Schnittke's sonata is freer. He uses the B-A-C-H motive as part of an eight-bar series in the piano that does repeat, but he changes note values and adds other chords and variations as the movement progresses. The eight-bar series repeats six times and then breaks down two bars early in its seventh iteration.

Over this repeating sequence, the violin explores some of the most soulful moods found in Schnittke's works. It is easy to play the soft passages in his music with very pale colors, or an almost empty sound, and there are places where that creates just the right effect, but there are also moments that cry out for a warmer and more poignant sound, and which transform the whole piece around them. The eerie final six bars of this movement are marked *ppp*, and the violin plays all harmonics, most of which sit at the very top of the range possible on the instrument. It sounds like a human being is whistling, and then in the final two bars, almost all of the pitch disappears, and all that is left is breath.

In typical Schnittke fashion, what happens next is completely out of left field. The piano begins the third movement, and suddenly everyone is smiling, because the main theme is based on a tune everyone knows—*La Cucaracha*.



Figure 5

Schnittke requires the pianist to dampen the strings inside the piano in m. 29³⁸ to create that same *pizzicato*-like effect he uses in the second movement. The violin and piano take turns playing the theme from *La Cucaracha* as it becomes increasingly dissonant. The music reaches a frenzied high in m. 89,³⁹ and following a short, sarcastic cadenza in the violin, the main theme from the second movement makes an unexpected reappearance. Very much like the last movement of Shostakovich's trio, a final whirlwind of sound leads to an allusion to the opening statement of the first movement, a dissolution into the B-A-C-H sequence from the third movement, and then a return to the final movement with a softened, incomplete statement of the *La Cucaracha* theme to end the work.

This final recital program had a particular vigor and excitement. Perhaps it came partly from the power of the added voices to make up a quartet and trio, but it was clear that it also came from the energy of the music itself. Of the composers represented in these three recital programs, Mahler and Shostakovich seem to have influenced Schnittke

³⁸ Schnittke, *Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano*, 25.

³⁹ Schnittke, *Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano*, 29.

in the broadest and most conceptual way. The allusions to Bach, Brahms, and Mozart seem small in comparison. Ivashkin says that, “from Shostakovich Schnittke seems to have accumulated a kind of inner energy. . . [he] never copied the language of his great contemporary but tried to understand the ‘hidden’ foundations of his style, the symbolic meaning of his music.”⁴⁰ It feels as if Schnittke takes in the fierce and passionate energy of the music of both Shostakovich and Mahler and integrates it so completely that it becomes an organic and inherent part of his musical language.

Conclusions

The close study of these works for violin by Schnittke, performed alongside works for violin by some of the great Western composers, has revealed Schnittke’s complex, intellectual, and intensely human voice. His music is intriguing, absorbing, mysterious, and full of paradox.

The complexity of Schnittke’s works also creates challenges for its performers. He writes difficult, dissonant chords and double-stops, intervallic leaps in extreme registers, quarter-tone pitches, and dizzying glissandi in his violin parts, all of which demand technical facility and precision. His writing for piano includes thorny rhythmic passages, demanding contrapuntal lines, and extended techniques like playing while dampening the strings inside the instrument. The sudden changes in mood and style in Schnittke’s music—including moving between his voice and the voices of the composers he quotes and references—require coherent and meticulous phrasing, detailed musical imagination, and close, focused communication between performers.

⁴⁰ Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 60.

Despite the difficult nature of some of the works, the music consistently engages the listener in a meaningful, conversational way, eliciting a powerful emotional response. After each recital, the pieces audience members remarked on were always the ones by Schnittke. They were stirred by the highs and lows. They were moved by the tender, intimate moments that often follow so closely on passages of the most extreme conflict. And they could not help but be delighted by the wit and humor of injections like *La Cucaracha*.

The pieces that framed his works on these programs—by Gubaidulina, Mozart, Bach, Brahms, Mahler, and Shostakovich—helped to define and illustrate Schnittke’s truly distinctive craftsmanship and character. Schnittke’s music would not be possible without the composers who inspired him. It sometimes feels as if he finds his own voice by beginning in the voice of another, a technique that perhaps dates back to his student days of harmonizing melodies in the styles of different composers. Margarita Mazo even argues that Schnittke’s “musical citations along with more subtle references to various styles helped to establish the artist’s sense of continuity and reclaim his right to belong to and participate in the world artistic tradition from which the Soviet artists were artificially excluded.”⁴¹ Works like *Moz-art* and the Piano Quartet literally begin with the vocabulary of another composer, whereas *Quasi una Sonata* makes subtler allusions to the names and styles of other composers, and the Sonata No. 1 feels connected to Shostakovich purely through energy and structure.

Musical structure often serves as an important framework for Schnittke’s writing. He appears to innovate in the context of traditional forms, like sonatas, and Baroque dance

⁴¹ Margarita Mazo, “The Present and the Unpredictable Past: Music and Musical Life of St. Petersburg and Moscow Since the 1960s,” *International Journal of Musicology* 5 (1996): 384.

suites. Through these formal constraints, he finds his own emotional center and world of sound. The fact that he uses these traditional structures also makes it easy to draw parallels between Schnittke's works and those of the composers he admired.

While the works of other composers may have helped Schnittke to find his own musical voice, his compositions, in turn, provide a deeper insight into the works of the composers he admired and strove to emulate. Through Schnittke's deconstruction, digestion, and reworking of the musical language of these composers, we can understand their forms, musical rhetoric, and energetic and emotional drive in a new way.

Ivashkin notes that Schnittke

combines hints and elements of different styles. . . [and] surprisingly enough, his music changes the listener's perspective, seeming to elevate us to a different level, where everything appears possible. At this level we can easily imagine a dialogue between J. S. Bach and modern rock music; all the centuries of human culture come into unity. And yet Schnittke is able to accommodate them all in his own homogenous language. . .⁴²

It is as if Schnittke's diverse and paradoxical background and life experience, including his knowledge of many languages—musical and spoken—make him a timeless translator, a vehicle for understanding both the music and the humanity of those who came before. Schnittke's language of opposites and exploration of the human struggle leads Richard Taruskin to declaim that, "with a bluntness and an immodesty practically unseen since the days of Mahler, Schnittke tackles life-against-death, love-against-hate, good-against-evil, freedom-against-tyranny, and. . . I-against-the-world,"⁴³ in his music. It is this pursuit that allows Schnittke's music to stand up with the music of the great composers, and makes it an essential part of the canon of Western classical music. Schnittke carries

⁴² Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 111.

⁴³ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russian Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 101.

the lineage of Western Classical music forward through the continuously turbulent twentieth century—he pushes the tempestuous discordance of Shostakovich even further, but still manages to find a bit of the romance and humanity of Brahms and Mahler, and the structure, seriousness, and even reverence of Bach—and does it all with a touch of humor, Mozart’s wink.

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This dissertation includes in depth examinations of the quotes and references found in Schnittke's Sonata No. 2. The two allusions most relevant to this project are the monograms of B-A-C-H and B-A-H-S, and Fitzpatrick provides detailed information about where the monograms are located and what role they play in the polystylistic nature of this piece.

Gubaidulina, Sofia. Classical Music Sales. <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/2908/24018> (accessed November 5, 2018).

This website provided the detailed program notes that Gubaidulina herself wrote about her work, *Dancer on a Tightrope*. These notes give insight into how the work was conceived, and consequently how to approach it in performance.

Ivashkin, Alexander. *Alfred Schnittke*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996.

This biography of Alfred Schnittke, written by one of his closest friends, offers a stunning amount of information about Schnittke as a man and a composer, as well as detailed descriptions of his works and their significance in his own life and in the music world at large. The entirety of this book provides detailed evidence that supports this dissertation's thesis.

Karhausen, Lucien R. *The Bleeding of Mozart: A medical glance on his life, illnesses, and personality*. Xlibris Corporation, 2011.

This book supplies important details about the Mozart K. 416d fragment, from his pantomime *Pantolon & Columbine*, on which Alfred Schnittke's *Moz-Art* for 2 violins is based.

Mahler, Gustav. *Piano Quartet in A minor*. Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2015.

This musical score is of course at the essence of this entire endeavor, both in the learning and performing of the quartet, and in analyzing and coming to understand the piece as a compositional whole. The preface by Christoph Flamm also offers important information about this single movement of Mahler's, as well as the remaining fragment on which Schnittke's Piano Quartet is based.

Mazo, Margarita. "The Present and the Unpredictable Past: Music and Musical Life of St. Petersburg and Moscow Since the 1960s." *International Journal of Musicology* 5 (1996): 371-400.

This article gives useful insight into the lives of Soviet composers in the latter part of the twentieth century. It highlights some of the challenges these composers faced and the means they used to stay connected to the compositional ideals of the past and find artistic freedom despite the limitations imposed by the government. And it further illustrates the reasons why Schnittke was drawn to quoting and referencing other composers from different eras.

Schnittke, Alfred. *A Schnittke Reader*. Edited by Alexander Ivashkin. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

This fantastic book was edited by Alexander Ivashkin and contains a wealth of material about Schnittke. It includes important biographical details about the composer, translations of interviews Ivashkin conducted with Schnittke, Schnittke's own thoughts about art, artists, music, and philosophy, as well writings about Schnittke's music by others, including violinists Gidon Kremer and Mark Lubotsky.

Schnittke, Alfred. *Moz-art for 2 Violins* (based on the fragment K. 416d). Associated Music Publishers, Inc., 1978.

This musical score is of course at the essence of this entire endeavor, both in the learning and performing of the duet, and in analyzing and coming to understand the piece as a compositional whole.

Schnittke, Alfred. *Piano Quartet*. Musikverlag Hans Sikorski, 1991.

This musical score is of course at the essence of this entire endeavor, both in the learning and performing of the quartet, and in analyzing and coming to understand the piece as a compositional whole.

Schnittke, Alfred. *Quasi Una Sonata* for Violin and Piano. Universal Edition, 1972.

This musical score is of course at the essence of this entire endeavor, both in the learning and performing of the sonata, and in analyzing and coming to understand the piece as a compositional whole.

Schnittke, Alfred. *Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano*. Musikverlag Hans Sikorski, 1974.

This musical score is of course at the essence of this entire endeavor, both in the learning and performing of the sonata, and in analyzing and coming to understand the piece as a compositional whole.

Schnittke, Alfred. *Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano*. Musikverlag Hans Sikorski, 1996.

This musical score is of course at the essence of this entire endeavor, both in the learning and performing of the sonata, and in analyzing and coming to understand the piece as a compositional whole.

Schnittke, Alfred. *Suite in the Old Style* for Violin and Piano. Musikverlag Hans Sikorski, 1979.

This musical score is of course at the essence of this entire endeavor, both in the learning and performing of the *Suite*, and in analyzing and coming to understand the piece as a compositional whole.

Smirnov, Dmitri, and Guy Stockton. "Marginalia quasi una Fantasia: On the Second Violin Sonata by Alfred Schnittke." *Tempo* New Series, no. 220 (Cambridge University Press, April 2002). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/946578> (accessed December 6, 2017).

This article contains theoretical analysis of the structure of Schnittke's Sonata No. 2 (*Quasi una Sonata*) for Violin and Piano. Seeing the underlying bone structure of the piece as outlined in this article and comparing it with the work's experimental nature proved an important part of understanding this piece on its own and in relation to Schnittke's other sonatas for violin and piano.

Taruskin, Richard. *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

In this book, Taruskin provides a comprehensive look at how history, politics, and music come together to create a portrait of Russian culture and identity. There is not a tremendous amount on Schnittke in this book, but what there is provides important insight into Schnittke's musical heritage, and his language of opposites.