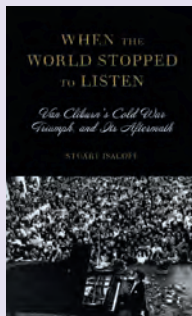


## REVIEW

### WHEN THE WORLD STOPPED TO LISTEN

An authoritative account of Van Cliburn's Cold War triumph reviewed by **Marius Dawn**

Russia, April 1958. The Iron Curtain is drawn tight; a new international piano competition named after Tchaikovsky has reached its final. Musicians from all over the world have descended upon Moscow to see who the winner will be. It's unthinkable that Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev will give the prize to a foreigner, least of all an American. However, one lanky Texan captures the hearts of the Russian people and jury alike with his passionate virtuosity. Emil Gilels, chairman of the jury, is convinced; he must ask Khrushchev to accept Van Cliburn as winner. The president accedes, and history is made.



The results of the First International Tchaikovsky Competition created an international sensation, but it also opened a small chink of light in that Iron Curtain, and became a catalyst for vital diplomatic encounters. In fact, Khrushchev later became a good friend of Van Cliburn who, after his victory, often returned to Moscow.

In *When the World Stopped to Listen*, Stuart Isacoff has unfolded the story of the competition and its controversial aftermath with fresh and painstaking research. He has drawn on Russian archives and personal interviews with many of those who knew and worked with Cliburn, such as Khrushchev's son Sergei, as well as the pianist at the centre of it all. The complex political history is outlined in a straightforward manner, drawing lines all the way up to and beyond the Berlin Wall. Isacoff writes as a fly on the wall in the Tchaikovsky Hall during that historic 1958 final, then takes us from Cliburn's early years under the tutelage of his formidable mother Rildia Bee, through the numerous concerts that sucked the energy out of the touring pianist, to his continued involvement with the Fort Worth piano competition that bears his name.

Nigel Cliff's book *Moscow Nights* covers much of the same ground, and with greater emphasis on the political background. However, it's Isacoff – as a pianist himself – who paints a better and more vivid picture of the Van. Beautifully written, this will undoubtedly be the reference book about the life of a pianist who, not unlike the Russian Sputnik satellites which shot to world fame as fast as they burnt out, left a blinding light in piano history.

*When the World Stopped to Listen: Van Cliburn's Cold War triumph and its aftermath* by Stuart Isacoff  
(Penguin Random House, ISBN 978-0-385-35218-5)



## RUSSIAN REVOLUTION COMES TO MANCHESTER

### Chetham's hosts international piano weekend

October 2017 marks a century since the Russian Revolution; a period of intense social and cultural transformation which left a lasting mark on Western civilisation, not least in art. In Manchester, the centenary is to be marked with a month-long Russian October festival of music at The Stoller Hall, the award-winning new chamber music hall at Chetham's School of Music.

The weekend opens on Friday 6 October with a lunchtime recital by Simon Callaghan, a Steinway artist and Chetham's alumnus. He plays Rachmaninov, Scriabin and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, before leading a public masterclass. At 5.30pm, current and former students of the Glinka School of Music, Yekaterinburg, play selections by Glinka, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, before the day ends with Chetham's Head of Keyboard, Murray McLachlan, giving a recital of music from his 2006 CD recording, *Shostakovich and his Comrades*.

Chetham's young pianists combine forces with Glinka School students on 8 October to present the 24 Preludes and Fugues of Shostakovich. The same evening, presenter and performer Neil Brand plays a live improvised accompaniment to Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film, *Battleship Potemkin*, bringing to life the tensions and excitement of this silent masterpiece.

Stephen Threlfall, Director of Music at Chetham's, who curated the festival, explained: 'Russian October derived from a long-held passion for Russian music, arts and culture. It seemed an unmissable opportunity to bring together an exceptional array of artists, performers and specialists to mark the centenary of one of the most significant episodes in Russian history, and subsequently in the history of the world.'

All details at [www.stollerhall.com/festivals/russian-october](http://www.stollerhall.com/festivals/russian-october).

## ARGERICH IN LUGANO

### Final chapter of festival recordings

For the first time in many years, Martha Argerich returned to public solo performance at the final instalment of her Swiss lakeside festival, and the resulting recording of Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit* was issued on 1 September by Warner Classics.

For the last 15 years she has curated a festival, the Progetto Martha Argerich, in the Swiss lakeside town of Lugano. Selected highlights from each year were released on CD to critical acclaim. They featured Argerich (pictured right last year in duet with Sir Antonio Pappano) in concerto, duet and chamber music, including new repertoire to her discography.



The festival's principal sponsor has now withdrawn its funding, and so the final edition took place in June 2016. Highlights of the new 3CD Warner Classics box include Argerich partnering the Greek violinist Tedi Papavrami in the C minor Violin Sonata of Bach; a duet arrangement of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* with Stephen Kovacevich; Mozart's Sonata for two pianos with Sergey Babayan; and Beethoven's Choral Fantasy and Ravel's Concerto in G.

But the set opens, inevitably, with her new *Gaspard*. According to the concert reviewer of the Italian *Musica* magazine, Argerich retained 'all the rhythmic but above all dynamic finesse that she had already shown in the 1970s, with a technical glitter virtually unchanged. I do not think any pianist at the age of 75, even from the past, could match her.'

30 October marks another first for the Argentine pianist: her debut at Severance Hall, Cleveland, where she will give a duo recital with Babayan. They will present works for two pianos by Mozart, and Babayan's two-piano transcriptions of works by Prokofiev, including excerpts from *Romeo and Juliet* and incidental music written for a 1937 production of Hamlet and Soviet films of *Eugene Onegin* and *Queen of Spades*.