

## **Russian Music and Fabergé**

Russian String Quartets and the V&A Exhibition *Fabergé: Romance to Revolution* - a Royal Philharmonic Society award film of the live concert by the London Chamber Ensemble curated by violinist Madeleine Mitchell, to accompany the exhibition. The 19' film contains beautiful Fabergé images kindly supplied by Wartski, fascinating archive footage from the Royal College of Music including Tchaikovsky's signature in the Visitors' Book, letters from Tchaikovsky and Glazunov to Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, and Herbert Howells' *Luchinushka* manuscript. There is also footage of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral near the Victoria and Albert Museum - linking the fellow Huguenot architect Lewis Vulliamy with Fabergé: [https://youtu.be/J\\_ChAdTj4xA](https://youtu.be/J_ChAdTj4xA)

During the pandemic when musicians could no longer perform to live audiences, there was a great increase in digital arts and it struck me how interesting it would be, rather than just to film concerts, to combine sensitively with art which connected with the music. I was pleased to win a Royal Philharmonic Society Enterprise Award, supported by Harriet's Trust, to enable my creative idea linking art and music in film.

The initial project stemmed from a meeting at the V&A before Covid to plan some concerts with my London Chamber Ensemble combined with exhibitions and the *Fabergé: Romance to Revolution* sparked my imagination the most. The period in which Fabergé became established in St Petersburg in the 1880s and 90s coincided with a flowering of Russian romantic chamber music, with Borodin and others. Then in the early 1900s British composers were influenced by Russian folk tunes, whilst the British royal family became major patrons of Fabergé at the same time as he set up a shop in London, before it had to be closed after the Russian Revolution.

After months of research and negotiations with the V&A, we were invited to give a concert for the Membership in the auditorium on a cold day in January 2022 during the exhibition and were able to film the event. Whilst it was not possible to perform or film in the exhibition itself we were able to project slides of exquisite Fabergé objets d'art kindly provided by Wartski, who were closely involved in the exhibition. The string quartet concert which I introduced, followed by a Russian themed dinner, was sold out within two days. Only being able to have use of the V&A auditorium to film, I had the idea of using two other locations close by, on the same day as the concert. The Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Ennismore Gardens was built in 1848 to a design by the architect Lewis Vulliamy. The Vulliamy family were Huguenot refugees and clockmakers to the British Royal Family for a century as well as architects and there are parallels with Fabergé, a fellow Huguenot, master craftsman and clockmaker.

The name Fabergé is inextricably linked with luxury and skilled craftsmanship. Born in 1846, Peter Carl Fabergé took over his father's firm, quickly finding success, becoming official goldsmith to the Imperial Court and being granted access to all the royal palaces in the 1880s. In Russia, Easter is the most important religious festival, equivalent to Christmas in the West. There was a long tradition of giving decorated eggs as gifts at Easter and the famous Fabergé Eggs, commissioned by the Tsars, grew out of this, beginning in 1885 as a present from Tsar Alexander III to the Empress Maria Feodorovna, and continuing annually through Tsar Nicholas II until 1917.

In my research for the music to go with the exhibition, I was delighted to discover Les Vendredis. This was the St Petersburg salon featuring music for string quartet, instigated by the lumber millionaire Mitrofan Beliaev (1836-1903), an amateur viola player. On a Friday night friends would gather at his house to play and hear not only Mozart and Mendelssohn quartets but also the latest music by contemporary Russian composers, Rimsky-Korsakov, Liadov, Glazunov and Borodin. When he was fifty, in 1886, Beliaev retired from business and devoted his life to publishing, including these delightful short pieces in two cahiers (volumes). We featured a movement by Rimsky-Korsakov of a festive piece composed by three Russian composers for the Jour de Fête or name day for Beliaev – the Choeur Dansé Russe or Khorovod.

A conversation about my project with the Chief Librarian at the Royal College of Music, where I've been a professor for many years, produced fascinating archive material, in the treasured red leather bound Visitors' Book with the signature of Tchaikovsky in 1893, adjacent to the page witnessing the official opening of the College by Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, closely connected with Fabergé. There were also letters to Stanford in French, all of which I didn't know about previously. One is from Glazunov, dated 1903, the same year that Fabergé opened a shop in London in Dover Street, moving to Bond Street in 1910.

The British Royal Family became some of the main patrons of Fabergé. King Edward VII's wife was the sister of the Empress of Russia, who influenced her in her taste. As well as jewellery they commissioned a series of animals from their Sandringham Estate including ornate dogs, cockerels and owls. What also interested me also was the 'Russophilia' in music. I knew of a work - the *Luchinushka* - a lament on a Russian folktune of 1917 by the British composer and long serving RCM professor Herbert Howells (1892-1983), originally for violin and piano which I'd played many times, both for BBC Radio 3 and in the USA and Russia where I'd presented works by several RCM composers. I was granted permission by the publisher and by the Literary Executors of the Howells Trust to arrange this haunting piece composed in the year of the Russian Revolution, for string quartet which we performed in the

concert. The Fabergé shop in London had to be closed at this time and Fabergé was exiled from Russia, dying in Lausanne in 1920, really of a broken heart. The works of art and jewellery and the music of that time live on and are appreciated around the world.

I hope to do more such films and presentations linking music and art of the time.

Madeleine Mitchell FRSA

With special thanks to Nicholas Snowman OBE, Chairman of Wartski

Further reading: Fabergé in London by Kieran McCarthy, Managing Director of Wartski and Fabergé: Romance to Revolution - V&A with a forward by Tristram Hunt

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Madeleine Mitchell is a British violinist who has performed in 50 countries including Russia - in the St Petersburg Festival of British Music, as soloist in Elgar Violin Concerto with the Samara Philharmonic, and at the Moscow Conservatoire. She has a wide discography including many works written for her by well known British composers as well as championing early 20<sup>th</sup> century music, with albums nominated for Grammy and BBC Music Awards. She has performed at major festivals including the BBC Proms. She represented the UK at the Canberra International Music Festival, UKinNY at Lincoln Centre and for the Queen's Jubilee in Rome. Madeleine is passionate about art and founded the eclectic international festival the Red Violin across the arts, the title inspired by *Le Violin Rouge* paintings of Ivan Puni (Pougny) and Raoul Dufy, with Lord Menuhin as Patron, next planned throughout Leeds. She was Fulbright/ITT Fellow to the USA, Tagore Gold Medallist and now professor at the Royal College of Music and Director of the London Chamber Ensemble.  
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