

*Verdehr-Terzett, Op. 45 (1990)*

Elena Firsovo

"*Verdehr-Terzett* is a kind of homage to the Verdehr Trio. Its images have some connections with the poem of Osip Mandelstam, *I Have Forgotten the Word I Wanted to Say*, written in 1920. I worked with the same music material in two other compositions, *Stygian Song* and *Secret Way*. *Verdehr-Terzett* and *Stygian Song* are two chamber versions (instrumental and vocal/instrumental) of ideas which were later embodied in a large symphony orchestra work entitled *Secret Way*."

—Elena Firsovo

*Verdehr-Terzett* was commissioned by and written for the Verdehr Trio following its tour of the USSR during the winter of 1990. The work possesses Bergian qualities in its harmonic structure, expressiveness, and tonal colors. The soft, almost Debussy-like opening for piano solo is followed by the clarinet, and then the violin, developing into a cadenza for the latter two instruments. The melodic line weaves expressively among the three players and leads into an energetic pointillistic middle section which marks the dynamic climax of the work. Following a short violin cadenza, the opening piano theme is restated by the clarinet and violin, and the piece draws to a hushed, ethereal close.

The world premiere of *Verdehr-Terzett, Op. 45* was on March 7, 1991 in Cuenca, Spain.

Elena Firsova (born 1950, Leningrad) was born into a family of physicists. She made her first attempts at composition at the age of twelve, and formal studies began in 1966. From 1970 to 1975, she studied at the Moscow Conservatory where her teachers were Alexander Pirumov (composition) and Yury Kholopov (analysis). In 1975, she established a crucial musical contact with Edison Denisov and Philip Hershkovitz, a pupil of Anton von Webern.

Firsova has written over one hundred compositions in many different genres, and has received commissions from *Westdeutscher Rundfunk*, the Brodsky Quartet, Manchester Wind Orchestra, Schubert Ensemble, Freden Festival, BBC Proms, Asiago Festival, and EXPO 2000. *Earthly Life*, one of six works setting the verse of Osip Mandelstam, was commissioned by the BBC and premiered in London by the Nash Ensemble in 1986. Her music is published by Boosey & Hawkes, Hans Sikorski, and G. Schirmer.

Firsova's music was first featured outside the Soviet Union in 1979 in Cologne (*Sonata for Solo Clarinet* and *Petrarca's Sonnets*), and in Paris and Venice (*Petrarca's Sonnets*). The following year *Petrarca's Sonnets* was performed in London by Jane Manning and the London Sinfonietta conducted by Peter Eötvös.

Firsova has been Composer-in-Residence at Bard College in the United States, St. John's College at the University Cambridge, and at Dartington Hall, Devon. From 1993 to 1997, she was a visiting professor and Composer-in-Residence at the University of Keele. Since 1999, Firsova has taught composition at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester.

Firsova is married to composer Dimitri Smirnov who wrote *Trinity Music* for the Verdehr Trio. They have lived in Great Britain since 1991.