

American Variations on a Belorussian Folksong (2005)

Rick Sowash

"American Variations on a Belorussian Folksong was completed in June, 2005. The title of the folksong can be translated as *'The Sun Already Shines.'* The variations are 'American' in that they evoke various American musical styles, such as a ballad, a tango, a sentimental song, a Copland-like 'Americanist' treatment, and a ragtime finale.

The work is intended as a commentary on globalization, specifically referring to two cultures, American and Russian, formerly hostile during the Cold War, attempting to join in friendship. The little tune starts out purely Russian-sounding and then is gradually made to sound increasingly American, climaxing in the all-out ragtime variation, as if to imply that the only way the Russian tune can be friendly with American culture is to BECOME American. However, it turns out that the Russian tune is NOT completely Americanized after all. In the final measures of the piece the little tune re-asserts its Russian identity, as if to say, 'We can be friends but we're still retaining our individuality.'"

—Rick Sowash

Rick Sowash (born 1950, Mansfield, Ohio) lives by his wits as a full-time freelance speaker, humorist, author, and composer. He holds the Bachelor of Science degree in music composition and comparative literature, from what he calls "a prestigious American School of Music which I hated so much that I refuse to name." He describes himself as an "outsider composer" in that he is not associated with any academic institution or commercial organization, and he has lived much of his life outside a major metropolitan area. He currently resides in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sowash has composed one hundred sixty-five works, mostly for chamber ensembles and choral ensembles, but also including art songs and orchestral works. He wrote the soundtrack for the PBS documentary, *Ohio: 200 Years*, for the Ohio Bicentennial in 2003. In the same year, two of his chamber works won acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival. His *Clarinet Quintet* was premiered in Paris in 1996; his *Clarinet Concerto* was first heard in Cincinnati in 2008. The *Concerto for Cello with Strings and Clarinet* was premiered in Carnegie Hall in 2007. He was a featured composer at the Adirondacks Festival of American Music in 1995. He is a member of ASCAP and the American Music Center.

Sowash is an independent producer of compact disc recordings, and he also works with Gasparo Records. Twelve of his chamber works have been commercially recorded and broadcast on many American classical music stations. He has self-published a number of his musical scores.

As a successful speaker-humorist, Sowash performs about one hundred engagements annually for a wide variety of audiences. He is the author of *Critters, Flitters & Spitters*, *Heroes of Ohio*, *Ripsnorting Whoppers: Humor from American's Heartland*, two novels, a book of family reminiscences, a non-fiction book on reading choices, and numerous essays, both humorous and serious. He is also a silent film accompanist, providing live, improvised film scores on the piano for silent film classics at cultural centers, colleges, resort areas, and historic theatres. He presented a festival of American silent film classics at the Taipei Culture Center, Republic of China in 1988 and 1990. Sowash takes pride in being one of the few American composers ever to be elected to public office.

Additional information can be found at www.sowash.com.