

# **OK Badema and Sasho, Here is the story**



**Blago Simeonov**

Artscan Publicity and Arts Toronto



**Badema**



**Sasho**

OK, Badema and Sasho, here is the story of "my run from Bulgaria" with all the preliminaries and peripeteia. As we know the People's Republic was the owner of our bodies and we were forbidden to cross the border to the West, a crime punishable with many years in the Gulag and worse. "DS" (State Security) and "BKP" (Bulgarian Communist Party) helped me overcome fear and try. Have I told you about the DS, our conductor in the Conservatory Orchestra comrade Lyuben Lilkov and me?

Our orchestra was giving a concert for the new students in the fall of 1963. Lilkov, Rest In Peace, made such a spectacle out of Rossini's *Thieving Magpie*, with unimaginable 'suspense breaks' and with two left hands, that for the first time in my musician's life my colleagues and I heard the audience laugh at us – a wave of not-so-subdued laughter was heard in the Great Hall of the Bulgarian National Conservatory. The next day I recovered a bit from my sink-in-the-ground experience with a stern determination to pour on paper all our musicians' sufferings caused by comrade Lilkov. There were many. Restraining my sentiments between my teeth I started writing down coolly, like a lawyer: facts, dates, orchestra tours, musical examples and all the reasons why our orchestra deserves and wants a conductor at whom the audience does not laugh. I kept writing, howling softly, my face pale, but on the pages I managed to present only proofs and logic, which made the document quite dangerous. At the next rehearsal Assen Tsankov, our flutist – the union president, and Angel(?) the little trumpet player – the union secretary, read with deep satisfaction my petition. I read it to the entire orchestra after the rehearsal and almost all of us put our signatures on it. Assen handed the document fearlessly to the Rector's secretary and we started waiting for the outcome.

A week passed, two weeks, a month, two months – nothing. We started thinking that nothing would come out of it. Lo and behold, in the spring of 1964, I don't re

member what month but it must have been around April, a pink posting appeared in the hall, telling us that on Thursday 10 AM a meeting was to be held with the orchestra, Lilkov and the Rector. But: On Wednesday I received a yellow writ by special messenger ordering me to appear the next day, Thursday, at 10 AM, at the State Security (DS) headquarters on Malko-Turnovo Street. My choice was sad but very clear: instead of the Conservatory to DS. Got there on time, climbed the stairs, passed through a narrow corridor and what do I see? Assen and the little trumpeter seated on two chairs, waiting. I was called in first. As soon as I entered the room one of the two spooks behind the desk asks me: Is it true that you are telling political anecdotes? Willy-nilly I say that it might be a little bit true. The spook: 'Stop doing it because next time there is going to be something more than words for you. And from now on remember that it is not your business which conductor is conducting you in your orchestra.' And that was it. I got out, Assen entered. On my way to the stairs, passing through the narrow corridor I noticed the bronze tablet on the last door on the left: Ltn- Colonel ... Lilkov (don't recall the first name). It all became perfectly clear to me. At the meeting in the Conservatory nothing happened of course, all was fudged without Assen, Angel and me. To the three of us however something bad did happen: The next week each of us received an 'order of termination' from the orchestra.

I was just finishing my studies. Instead of continuing in the professional Conservatory Orchestra as I had been promised, another shock: I was ordered to a compulsory "distribution" to the Shumen Symphony Orchestra in Eastern Bulgaria. But – luck: Arriving for the first rehearsal I saw on the glass door an announcement for the closing of the orchestra. Back to Sofia – for reasons 'beyond my control'...





I applied at the Conservatory for a permission for post-graduate studies at my own cost in chamber music and composition in Prague. The chamber music department headed by Arseny Letchev recommended me unanimously (Kugiiski told me he would vote with both hands which made my day). With the red passport in

my pocket I arrived in Prague, enrolled in the Academy of Musical Arts and started my studies. My late brother George was sending me 25 dollars a month for which I will be always grateful to him.

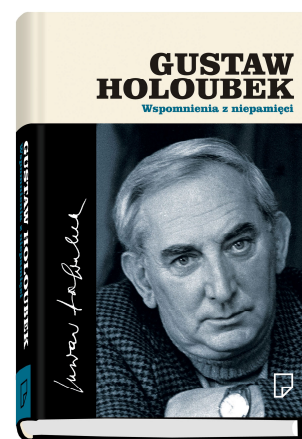
The Christmas vacation came and the student dormitory became empty, my 25 dollars were not quite enough for a trip to Bulgaria, so I went for 2 days to East Berlin, saw Badema who was playing there with a jazz band. Back to Prague, almost alone in the empty corridors, depression descended on me. Stopped shaving, my beard grew. Started working again on Fuga Idearum, an idea of synthesis of pictures, poetic text and music in an exhibition hall, which I had started back in Bulgaria. Offered to the Czechs, to be presented in Prague, it was refused. A Polish student friend from the dormitory (I am sorry for forgetting his name) told me to try Warsaw. Called the Polish embassy and had the impression that there is some hope to find a sponsor in Warsaw. My Polish friend gracefully offered his empty rented room in Warsaw. At the end of the school year I took the train instead of Bulgaria to Warsaw. Nine stuffed suitcases with paintings, equipment and other luggage, four dollars in my pocket, here I am at the Warsaw railway station. Two dollars went for the taxi.

I started immediately to knock on doors with my Czech-Polish dialect, apparently quite understandable for receiving without fail the answer: we are not interested. The two dollars gone, hunger started. The landlady asked me to vacate the room tomorrow. I kept running around Warsaw, knocking on doors. My good luck came in the face of the secretary in the office of a potential sponsor. After the usual "no" from her boss, having heard my story, Chrystina Grabarczyk offered me to move in to her apartment! Her husband, an army officer, had just been released from prison (framed for something). I was given the room of her two 11 and 14 years old boys, who were expelled to sleep in the hall. "Snyadanko-o.." I can still hear the voice of the good Joseph inviting us for breakfast.



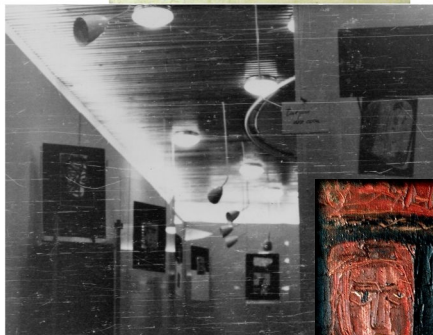


I succeeded in presenting *Fuga Idearum*. The theme: war and the people. The translation of the poetic narration from Czech to Polish had to be done in one night. It was Chrystina's brother to whom I owe the noble help and patience, having to put up with my endless disagreements and requirements. In the morning the good man told me that several times he felt like smashing my face with a broken beer bottle, as he has done in a bar in Africa. The poetic text translated to Polish was recorded by the most famous Polish dramatic and movie actor Gustaw Holoubek, whom I personally recruited (without pay) to the great astonishment of Chrystina. Hearing his voice on the radio I asked Chrystina who the actor was, telling her that I wanted to have the narration of *Fuga Idearum* recorded by him. She couldn't stop laughing. I asked where I could find him. The National Theatre. Here I am at the theatre asking for him. He was in rehearsal. Waited in the cafeteria to come out, introduced myself, explained in Czech-Polish what I wanted. 'Let me see it', he said. 'Please come to my lodging', I replied. He called a taxi; in the apartment I started showing my pictures one by one leaning on the back of a chair in front of him, synchronized with the music from my reel-to-reel tape recorder, the poetic text in his hands. I think he listened to the entire work, about half an hour. At the end he got up and said: 'I'll do it. No need for payment' (he understood that I did not have money for the taxi). We made the recording and the montage in the studio of the Polish Radio, all arranged by him.



I installed the exhibition-spectacle in the central gallery of the 'Club Of The International Book And Press' (Klub Międzynarodowej Książki i Prasy, across the street from the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party!). The success was great; my contract was extended for two more weeks in another exhibition hall. The famous Pani Dieditz interviewed me on the Polish National Television.







She was about 6 feet tall, so when my turn came she quickly took off her high-heels off camera, and I answered her questions in... Polish. As soon as the interview ended I received a passionate kiss for not messing-up her show with my strange Polish. Entire pages of some national newspapers were filled with positive comments, reproductions of my art and excerpts of the spectacle. From the Polish Ministry of Culture came a letter informing me that the presidiums of the city halls of Krakow, Wroclaw, Poznan and Katowice want to have *Fuga Idearum* presented in these four biggest cities of Poland!

But... I also received by courier an envelope from the Bulgarian Embassy: You must leave Poland within 24 hours! What?! I swore. In the Embassy everybody was looking at me as if I was a criminal. No words helped, the order had come from Sofia, the Ministry of Culture. It was clear: A private person, big beard, not a member of the Union of painters/composers/writers, not sent officially – no matter that until then no Bulgarian person of the arts had such public success in Poland. ‘Leave the country!’ – growls at me the cultural attaché. Hell, what to do. Asked for a meeting with the Polish party boss on cultural affairs (I think his name was Matussek). The good man gave me a letter to our zombies in the embassy to allow me one week, also arranged for me to be provided with an air ticket to Prague, including my nine pieces of luggage with my paintings and equipment, several large packages with 53 specially made for me lamps, 20 small loudspeakers and about 2 kilometres of connecting wire, all gifts from my sponsor ZBOVID. That was it. Financially the result of the whole thing was almost nothing. Only a thick file folder with press clippings and a visitors' book from the show, for which I am grateful to Chrystina – she insisted and bought it for me on the day of the opening.

In Prague things changed now: In April of the next year, 1966, *Fuga Idearum* was presented, and not in a regular exhibition hall, but right in the National Museum on the magnificent Vaclav Square, where I can immodestly add again, a Bulgarian was exhibiting for the first time. Almost the same success as in Poland,



with the celebrated movie actor 'People's Actor' Zdenek Stepanek as a narrator and with another folder with excellent press. A group of professors from my *Akademie múzických umění* entered in the book an embarrassingly high praise...

After a persistent fight, armed with the folders with reviews from abroad, I succeeded in convincing our City Hall's Culture and Recreation division to open

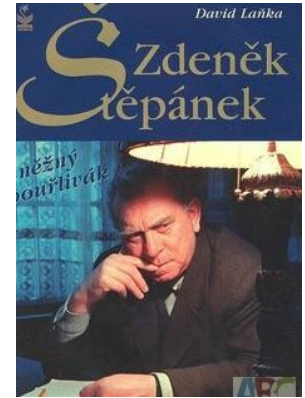
## Prague, National Museum

April, 1966

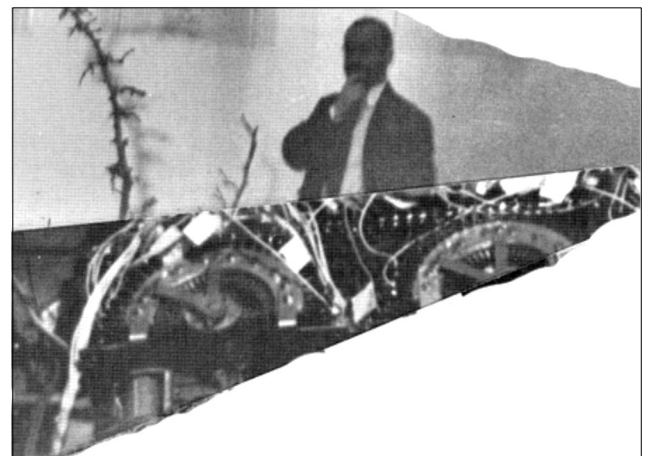




*Fuga Idearum* in Sofia on August 15, 1966. The exhibition hall was at the central Boulevard Tsar Osvooboditel, at the Union of the Fine Artists store. In the beginning all went well, there was a line-up in front of the hall when I was coming to "start" the 30-minute automatic spectacle hand-made by me with my reel-to-reel tape recorder, aluminum foil contact stickers on the tape for activating an old mechanical telephone dialler, 20(?) small loudspeakers and 53 lamps above the pictures, synchronized with the music and the recorded narration – my own voice this time because the recording of the famous movie actor came out quite sleepy. Positive reviews and reproductions appeared in newspaper Kultura and other central newspapers. In the visitors' book there were touching words by university students, even 'Madam Tsolet' (Tsola Dragoitcheva, a female Party boss of national fame) wrote some praise and the world renowned dramaturgist Konstantin Issaev who happened to be in Sofia wrote a few inspiring sentences which kept inspiring me... However: on the eleventh day I arrived at the hall only to see instead of a queue of people a sheet of paper with an official stamp on the bottom posted on the door: "This exhibition has been closed by the Ministry of Culture". That was it. Such was the the end of my fugue of the thoughts...



I received a 'lecturer of chamber music' position in the Conservatory. On honorarium. From home (on Blvd. Hristo Smyrnenski), along the river, to the Conservatory. Then again along the river back home, etc.. – four years. It is 1970, during the summer I am alone in the apartment, my mother is in Varna. Opening a drawer I see inside the red passport from my post-



graduating travels to Prague 6 years ago. The militia cops have forgotten to ask me to turn it in. I am looking at the passport, thinking: here is a good official passport lying in the drawer unused, what a waste. Let us have some use of it!.. (Now after so many years I can say that this foolish idea was in fact a subconscious synthesis of frivolity, "thirst for adventures" and wisdom). Thinking: the passport is from 6 years ago, only for the "socialist countries", I must make it valid for the West but to use it only for crossing the border from Yugoslavia to Austria, not at the Bulgarian border. Without wasting time I apply for permission to travel to brotherly Poland and started in earnest conspiratorial activity.

In order to put a stamp on the passport for validating it for travel to Austria I needed... a stamp. Since childhood technology has been my passion. For making the rubber stamp I decided to make a metal original, then a plaster reverse image and then the rubber stamp, a small rubber circle which would be easy to hide across the border. First I needed printing press metal letters with the same font and size as on my old passport, also two metal rings with precise diameter and thickness of the walls. For the centre I needed exact size printing press zinc plate with the People's Republic coat-of-arms. Now, how to get all this?! The printing press letters I got from the State Printing Plant on Blvd. Levski and Blvd. Dondukov. And the rings? By pure chance on the street I bumped into a classmate from junior high school Ivan Shekerov, we called him Shekera. Telling each other what we have been doing all these years, I found out that he was now a lathe operator. A broad smile blossomed on my face. Sheker, I said, I need two steel rings for making pads for my saxophone, here are the dimensions. No problem, he said, I will make them for you at the plant. He gave me his home address, on Oborishte Street, by our old school from childhood, Antim Purvi. He made them! My heartfelt thanks to you, Sheker! And for the Bulgarian State coat-of-arms? Here I am, drawing an "athlete from the national team" with a splendidly detailed Bulgarian

State coat-of-arms on his chest, taking it to the printing-plate-making lab on Blvd. Dondukov (by the old building of the Conservatory), ordering a zinc plate engraving made from my drawing. After all components were in place I cut out the zinc plate coat-of-arms, mounted it at the centre, arranged between the two concentric steel rings, courtesy of Shekera, the lead letters reading Narodna Republika Bulgaria. After several unsuccessful attempts the metal contraption-stamp was ready, after that the plaster and at the end the rubber cast... here was the stamp, a small rubber circle that can fit anywhere.

with a rifle over the shoulder walking along the train. When he reached the last car he turned around it and disappeared. Quickly I was at rear door of the car, opened it and entered the car. With the raised collar, the fedora hat and icy voice I opened the first compartment sliding door: All passports! Turks. They looked at each other and expressed themselves, don't remember how, that their passports have been checked already. All passports! growled I again. I took the passports, pulled the door closed with a bang on my way out and went to the front platform which was better lit. Measured the sizes of the round and rectangular stamps of several passports with a small ruler. Back to the first compartment, returned the Turkish folks their passports. Back through the corridor, opened quietly the rear door, looked around and jumped softly to the ground. Sneaked quickly away towards the street, unseen by the soldier. Lucky.

My plan was made: to cross the Bulgarian border legally with my official permit for Poland, to change trains in Belgrade and instead of Poland to cross the Austrian border using my hot red passport, after stamping it with the circular and rectangular stamps in Yugoslavia – I wanted to be sure that my homemade stamps were OK by comparing them with the new imprints on my permit for Poland. I

However: How can I be sure that the additional, rectangular stamp on my passport was the same after 6 years? Simple: I went to the Central Station and wrote down the arrival and departure time of the evening train Munich - Istanbul... Now here I start acting like a nut: The next evening I arrive at the Central Station, my raincoat collar up, fedora on my head. Without entering the building, I see the last cars of the Munich train protruding beyond the width of the building (Sofia Central Station was much smaller in 1970). Without approaching closer I can see a soldier with a rifle over his shoulder walking along the train. When he reached the last car he turned around it and disappeared. Quickly I was at rear door of the car, opened it and entered the car. With the raised collar, the fedora hat and icy voice I opened the first compartment sliding door: 'All passports!' Turks. They looked at each other and expressed themselves, don't remember how, that their passports have been checked already. 'All passports!' growled I again. I took the passports, pulled the door closed with a bang on my way out and went to the front platform which was better lit. Measured the sizes of the round and rectangular stamps of several passports with a small ruler. Back to the first compartment, returned the Turkish folks their passports. Back through the corridor, opened quietly the rear door, looked around and jumped softly to the ground. Sneaked quickly away towards the street, unseen by the soldier. Lucky.

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remember well where I hid the little rubber circle/stamp, because I still have the bas-relief of Lenin's cunning head, glued on a 3- inch gold painted plaster base, the rubber stamp wrapped in foil and daubed in the plaster. A small present, supposedly, for my friends in Poland. The criminal little head was made by me on a rainy day from clay, secret pastime during a long class of political education as a new recruit in the 9th Separate Vrachanski Rifles Regiment in 1957.



My mother returned from Varna. I told her everything. She accepted it heroically, encouraged me. I gave her the metal stamp contraption and told her to throw it in the river from the little pedestrian bridge near our apartment building.

September 7, 1970 was the day. Early morning. I called a taxi, embraced mother, grabbed the suitcase and the large travel bag. The taxi headed for the Central Station. On Blvd. Vitosha I asked the driver to stop, climbed the stairs of Vercheto's apartment and left a large bouquet of white chrysanthemums at her door on the second floor. Approaching the train station from afar I can read a gigantic placard for 9th of September, the national holiday, stretching across the entire length of the huge building: "IN 10 YEARS SOCIALISM WILL BE BUILT". What a pity I am leaving, I said to myself.

The next moment that remains in my head is after passing the border to Yugoslavia: the rectangular stamp they put now on my official travel permit to Poland happened to be different from my handy work! Wise of me not to have al-

ready stamped my red passport. What now? Panic. In Belgrade I was scared enough that they are after me that instead to Vienna I bought myself a ticket to Zagreb – 'to cover my tracks'. The train leaves next day. Managed to find the phone number of Milen Yovanovich, a friend from high school, an artist. Saw each other after 18 years, slept in his studio on the floor by his bed.

In the evening of the next day I am in Zagreb, found a little room in a private house, made a drawing for the new improved stamp. In the morning started to look for a place to have the zinc plate made. Looked, looked and found one. The plate was ready next day, with a tiny saw I bought myself at the market square I managed to hack a new stamp from the plate. Took a deep breath and struck a new page of my red passport with my creation. Now: how to steal out to Vienna? If I take the train (4 dollars) there will be more time at the border to be picky for some imperfections of my graphics work. If I take the plane (20 dollars) there will be more chance not to be caught, but most of my dollars will be gone. Decided to fly. The airport was full of people: end of the summer – tourists, students. A fat queue. My turn comes, I am handing my passport. The man with the peaked cap looked at it, then looked at me , then looked longer at the passport. Eternity. It must have been about 20 seconds. The crowd behind me helped, impatient, voices to move were heard, I was pushed a bit forward past the man with the peaked cap. Looking at my eyes he stretched his hand giving me back my passport with an expression which I understood well... that he understood well. Move on! The Croats have been close to my heart from that day on.

Golden sunny afternoon, the plane made a gracious semicircle and landed on the Vienna airport. First I sent a postcard to mother, which was the secret sign that I have arrived successfully 'on the other side'. I remember that it was the monument of Johan Strauss the Younger.

The taxi charged me an inhuman amount, leaving me money for just about two nights hotel and train ticket. Train to Rotterdam, to surprise my former clarinet teacher Kiril Dimitriev on my way to Canada. He 'ran away' while on a tour to Paris with the Sofia Philharmonic 10 years earlier. But there was a surprise in store for *me* from the Dutch Embassy: A visa was required to travel to Holland, which meant several days waiting. 'I am now in a marvel' – as a fat woman in Sofia was saying. No money for hotel. Thinking, thinking... I thought out one of the most idiotic decisions in my life: To cross the border to Czechoslovakia to exchange some bonds I was carrying, valid only for the 'socialist countries'. Here I am buying a bus ticket to Bratislava (50 kilometres from Vienna), leaving my luggage in a locker at the station. With incredible stupidity I cross the border back to the bright future of humanity, the vicious spooks and the Bulgarian Gulag. I arrive at 11 PM. No problem with money for a socialist hotel, in the morning will be at the bank to cash in the bonds. That is my imagination. The reality woke me up and kept me awake: all hotels packed, no room to be had any where! Kept looking and looking, then started wandering lonely on the streets of Bratislava. It was already 2 AM. Nothing. Then... here is a woman walking on the sidewalk across the street. I crossed the street and turned on my Czech: Prosim vaas, excuse me, would you know someone to rent a room for a night, the hotels are full... My good luck smiled at me in here face, about 40-sh: 'Come with me, I will give you shelter'. I – 'hat on a stick' as Badema would say. We entered her apartment, she invited me into the kitchen, put on the table unforgettable sliced dry salami and a bottle of red wine. We had a



bite, talked a bit. Then she prepared the sofa in the hall for sleeping and after some time slipped silently to the bedroom. I feel guilty that I do not remember her name. Slept soundly through the night up to the moment I was awakened by male voice yells coming from the bedroom: 'Are you crazy? Letting in overnight an unknown person, he could be anything! I am going to the Militia station'. I jumped, through my pants into my shoes, grabbed my bag, my hat and flew out of the apartment. Militia! Almost running, my feet are carrying me along the streets, I think of Sasho Sladoura (a friend musician who was killed in the Bulgarian Gulag) and look for a bank. Here is one but it is closed. It opens at 9 o'clock, now is ten past 8. I wonder if I should wait or should run to hide myself. I wait and look around. Waiting. A line-up of people started forming behind me. Finally it was 9 o'clock, I am the first to enter, at the wicket I produce the bonds asking to be cashed for Czechoslovakian korunas. The girl turned her head slightly left and right: 'Neni to mozhnii', impossible, these bonds are not valid for Czechoslovakia! A few Bulgarian bad words came to my mind, not to be spoken about. The crossing of the border was for absolutely nothing! My bus for Vienna is to leave at 11 AM. I walk along the streets looking slightly over my shoulders. Fear took hold of me. If they are looking for me they will first look in the bus station, fly the thoughts through my head. Found the road to Vienna. Started to hitch-hike. Nobody stops. I am already approaching the turn of the road with small houses, covered with flowers fronts, after which I will be walking straight to the border point. A pedestrian, false passport, it looks like the end of the story, I think. A black car saved me, remember it looked a bit old-fashioned to me (maybe it was a Rolls-Royce?). It stopped, took me. The courier of the British Consulate, on his way to Vienna to pick up the diplomatic mail from the airport. My true blessings to him. We stopped at the border, he is well known here, but the officer on duty, a lieutenant, almost stuck his head through the driver's window to look at me, asking the Englishman who I was. He took my handiwork passport and disappeared. Ex-

tremely long time passed by my judgement. I felt hot. Sweat. In front of the car was a half a metre thick concrete barrier, a beat-up little soldier with a rifle over his shoulder standing beside – the operator who is to press the large button to raise it. He must be from a God forsaken village in the Tatra mountains, I think, chosen not to want to defect. More waiting. I started feeling awkward for holding up the good Englishman who was sitting patiently behind the wheel. Finally the lieutenant's head appeared again at the window: Where is the yellow slip that you were given on the bus last night? Nobody gave me a yellow slip, I told him. He disappeared again. I curse my stupidity to return back into the red trap with a false passport. My hope fell to its lowest ebb. But here is again that lieutenant's head, this time with a demonic graceful half-smile. He hands me slowly my red passport looking at my eyes. 'Dekuy vaam!', I mumble. The concrete barrier started moving upwards, upwards, about a century. Look, we are in the no-man's-land, I can see the Austrian barrier, light, wooden, white and red strips twisted around it – it flew up quickly. Great lightness came into my soul and I swore never to cross this border again (did not cross it for 22 years).

Vienna again. After sleeping one night in a phone booth in the park (*The Prater*) and had enough shivering, I must have found shelter for a day or two while waiting for my visa for Holland, don't remember how and where. I am not sure, but I think I received from George 20 dollars. Went to see the Belvedere Palace and made myself a spy photo in a historical gold-framed mirror. Finally the visa arrived and I took the first train to Rotterdam. Arrived at the German border. The border officers came, I showed them calmly my passport with the visa for Holland. 'Fünf mark, bitte!' I don't have Fünf mark, I said. Then we will take you off the train at Passau. And so they did. Here I am at the platform with my suitcase and big travel bag, without a miserable five marks. But here came a male good

soul this time to help me after seeing my situation. I took his address and sent him the five marks after my first pay in Rotterdam.

Arrived in Rotterdam about 9 o'clock in the evening. Dimitriev's address was in a



Here is the Passau platform in 2008





faraway suburb, Ridderkerk. I took the bus (most likely after exchanging at the station my last dollars). I had not called him most likely because didn't have his number. The bus arrived in Ridderkerk, I got off with my luggage. It is raining. A few teenagers were talking under a lit-up shelter, showed them the piece of paper with the address, asked with my budding English in what direction should I walk (with the suitcase and the bag). 'Go this way' they pointed. I thanked and started walking. Walked, walked, no umbrella, more than half an hour. No more houses ahead. I stopped, totally exhausted and wet. At this moment my luck smiled at me again. A pair of headlights approached and a merciful Dutchman asked me where I was going. Showed him the address... 'That is exactly on the opposite side of Ridderkerk', he said, 'the boys have made fun of you!' Sure thing. He invited me in the car, took me right to Dimitriev's house, I thanked him. Here I am in front of the door. Fifteenth of September 1970. Looked at my watch: midnight. I press the button. Nothing. Looked through the door window – dark. After a few seconds the light inside came on and I saw two hairy legs with slippers coming down the wooden staircase to the right of the door... here is the entire Kiril Dimitriev in a housecoat after 10 years! 'Blagoy Simeonov!' he yelled. These were his first words. Immediately after he asked: 'Where is Koko Chlev' (the Philharmonic oboe player), 'why didn't he come also!?' 'I don't know', I said, 'I came alone'.

In the morning Dimitriev called the district police office for establishing my status. A policeman came, I told him everything, he made a report on my false passport. In a few days I was instructed to appear at the Immigration Office. It was in a large building on the river bank. After handing in my hot red passport I was given a 'Geneva Convention' passport with a bluish hard cover.

My stay in Rotterdam lasted exactly 3 months. After an audition I started working in Rotterdam Symphony as an auxiliary player making a little bit of money. Succeeded in presenting a recital-interview with my music at NCRV Radio, *Poème for solo Clarinet*, and *Invention for Two Clarinets* (with Kiril). Remember Kiril telling me: 'In the ten years I've been here never played on the radio – till you came...' At the Interview the microphone was stuck in front of my mouth with the first question: 'Mister Simeonov, why did you leave Bulgaria?' What I answered I still remember, with a bitter smile: 'Because I prefer to live in an atmosphere of dreadful truth than in an atmosphere of dreadful lie'. My smile is bitter because I now understand that the dreadful lie is in the West, too. The difference is that the people in the West are so steeped in it by the media that they believe it like cattle, instead of seeing through it and being indignant as we were indignant in Bulgaria. But now we are also harnessed for the  
"bright future of Europe".



Exceptional intelligence needed for figuring it out

After being a guest of Kiril and Dora Dimitriev for about a month I moved into a hotel/hostel for refugees like myself. Here for the first time I saw with trepidation Palestinian refugees, in my mind always depicted as criminals. Now I know better who is the criminal.

Finally the official document giving me status of 'landed immigrant' in Canada arrived, the result of substantial running around by my brother George in Toronto, including a travel to Ottawa. Thank you brother. I remember that when buying my plane ticket I chose the departure date December 16, Beethoven's birthday. The money for the one-way ticket came also from George, I paid him back, 100 dollars a month when I started work as a high school teacher in 1971 in Toronto. The plane landed in Montreal on a snowy evening. I set foot on Canadian soil! I am in the airport, a voice came on, Radio Canada CBC: 'Happy birthday Ludwig!' – 200 year jubilee. They are on first name with the greats here, I thought. Here I am in the Immigration area, quite overcome by emotion apparently, because when I stopped in front



Rotterdam next year, 1971, wedding trip



of the officer's table (there were no wickets) I must have put the plastic bag with Dutch brandy on the concrete floor too carelessly. The bottle crashed with a bang, a large area got covered immediately with a thin layer of Dutch bols and the hall was filled with the pleasant aroma of good alcohol... To good luck, I thought, looking at the cheering faces around me. Plane to Toronto after long wait, arriving in chilling wind and snow, I embrace George – after 26 years! I was 10 when he 'disappeared' in August 1944, a few days before the Soviet tanks reached my hometown Varna. We heard that he was seen on a German echelon in German uniform, 18 years old boy, but he was the commander of the Brannik youth organization of Varna, a city of 150,000 at that time. Good that he foresaw what was in store for him. People were shot for much less than that. He escaped, I escaped, I believe it was the right thing to do...

I lived for a few weeks in George's rented apartment with his two boys, one little girl, one male infant, and his wife Charlene, his sweetheart from the time he was a miner in Val d'Or in Quebec. Immediately I started earning some money as a substitute teacher and as an auxiliary instructor of chamber music: Travelling around (bus, subway, street car, galoshes) to rehearsals in students' homes to enlighten budding quintets, trios etc.. In February (?) I moved to a rooming house on Walmer Rd. closer to the centre.

In the summer I had to attend a summer course for eligibility to teach full time music in Canadian schools with 'Canadian standards'. The





course was taking place in a large Toronto high school, Riverdale Collegiate, with upwards of 1000 course attendants. One beautiful July morning I was supposed to attend a Clarinet class, the instructor told me I was free. Forgetting the soldier's wisdom in such case to make yourself hard to find, here I was, stretched on the green grass by the building's entrance enjoying the morning sunshine. My dozing off was cut short: the shadow of the course principal Captain Atkins fell on my face, I raised myself on my elbows. 'Why are you not in class?' asked the frowning Principal. I am a clarinettist, the instructor relieved me from the clarinet class, I said. 'Hmm... Go to the Bassoon class then!' I think there was some kind of a student bassoon available, I hung it on my neck and pulled a chair joining the class. To the right of my right knee there was a knee in grey pants. Looked to the right, then looked a bit higher, then higher... a blond girl. Later I learned that her name was Helen and after 3 months, on October 9, 1971, she became my wife. Today is March 29, 2010, she is in the adjoining room, her laptop opened before her. I am wondering to continue the story or to end right here... Oh, before finishing I want to tell you about Laughton Bird and his well-meaning exhortation. He was the Superintendent of Music for the School Board of North York, where I was about to start my first and last year as a teacher. As it was required for new teachers, I presented myself in his office, after a short conversation and a handshake he accompanied me to the door, I left the room and started walking along the corridor. After a few steps his door opened again he waived me to come back. Here is



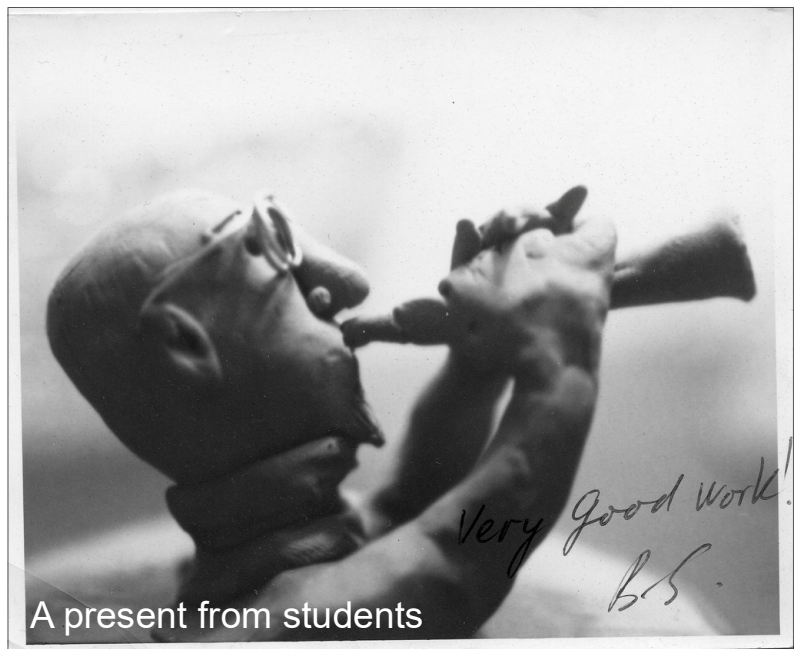
The grey pantaloons

what he told me at the door with lowered voice: 'Blagoy (I was still Blagoy at that time), remember not to assign to your students more than a quarter of the work you are used to from Europe, if you want to continue as a teacher more than one year.' Remarkable words. I thanked him and resumed my walk along the corridor. I am thinking now of the documented dumbing down plan of the United Nation Organization and its successes also in Bulgaria (long live EU!).

At the end of the school year in Downsview Secondary School (2000 students), I was sitting with other teachers in the staff room entering marks on the students' report cards. The principal, Mr. Shields, walks back and forth behind us, looks over shoulders. Stopped behind me and said: 'A-a, you are not passing this student, eh?' 'I am not passing him', I said, 'not because he hasn't learned anything, but because he has not made the smallest effort to do so'. The principal: 'Yes but as you know this will lower the standing of our school!' Giving me a hint (remembered Malko-Turnovo Street in Sofia), but I played dumb...

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It wasn't a bad idea Badema and Sasho, thank you!







Kiril Dimitriev with his beloved tomcat Minnu

## POSTSCRIPT



Concert of my works in Sofia,  
including *Fairwell Pastorales!* (Wind Quintet, photo), 12 other works, and  
the music video *EMPIRE TIME 4 AM Towards New Past*.

Union of Bulgarian Composers  
June 11, 2011





Flowers after the concert

The map illustrates the flight routes of the Berlin Airlift. Red arrows show the flight paths from the United States (via Iceland and Greenland) and from the United Kingdom (via Iceland and Greenland) to West Berlin. Green arrows show the flight paths from the Soviet Union (via East Germany) to West Berlin. The map also shows the locations of the Berlin Airlift command centers in the US, UK, and USSR. An inset image shows the Berlin Airlift control tower.

