

Pletnev documentary (2007), dedicated to his 50th anniversary

Filmdirector and producer: Juriy Borisov

Part 3 (30 min)

00:23 **P.:** A group of musicians approached me with an idea of creating an orchestra with me as a conductor. I got interested. They discussed a business plan how to start looking for money, which banks could help. I had friends and they actually organized everything, and the idea became reality. There were difficulties, but what's important is that our orchestra exists, and its concerts have aroused a boom effect all over the world. So, the beginning was great.

01:25 Young P. is conducting Tchaikovsky's Slavic March.

02:40 **Mother:** As a boy he was interested in different types of music. He got somewhere a book about musical instruments written for the Conservatory students. He took it everywhere, read it several times, copied parts of the instruments, with all their keys, tried to make them himself. It didn't matter which instrument was played if it could produce sounds. He performed music, and the parents had to be his public.

04:46 **P.:** There were people in history with inclinations for dictatorship and aspiration to become a leader of the nation. What is this. It's ridiculous in the eyes of the modern generation. Among conductors have also been such cases, e.g. Toscanini (3). A person like this would nowadays be stopped at once in America or Europe by the trade union representative or by his colleagues-conductors. Such behaviour is no more tolerated.

P. to his orchestra : Can you play louder? and you there, more quiet? Here one should not play separately. Why not together again? Listen to the tube, it should sound simultaneously. Play standing up, if necessary, but make it loud, very loud.

- Please dim out this light. By the project's reflections I cannot think, like being hypnotized. Stop the camera's, no more filming till tomorrow, it hinders.

08:02 **P. :** After that awkward trip to Italy where we played in the streets and sport stadiums in order to earn money, we got invitations for the top concert podiums, quickly becoming successful and famous.

08:40 **P. to his musicians:** the orchestra must not stay on the provincial level, playing well a couple of times, it should always be first class, playing excellently the most difficult passages. Play 15 times till you get it. No, it's still worse...So, it's good for the first time; how many times have you played? 6 times? Just 50 times more. They teach me flying by repetitions; one must perform 5 excellent landings in succession... if not, you have to practice much more...

10:20 **P.:** It was interesting time, with great musicians. Svyatoslav Richter (4) was God, I tried to attend his every concert. I didn't care what he was playing or how his manner deviated from classical standards, enjoying to the full his creative freedom, beyond all petrified stereotypes of the profession. Richter entered the podium – and it resembled the Montblan mountain covered by clouds; he started playing – and the clouds cleared up to

reveal the exquisite shine of the great mountain. Richter stopped playing – the peak got hidden, and other landscapes become visible: small hills, villages, valleys.

12:20 (Tchaikovsky's home in the town of Klin is shown, a door with a tablet in old Russian spelling 'Not at home'). **P.: I also adored Vladimir Horowitz (5), a rare talent. They invited me in Tchaikovsky's museum house and asked to play before him, I refused at first, but then I played one piece. Horowitz who had somewhat capricious expression in the beginning, changed the pose, seemed to get interested and asked me to play more.**

Mother: Horowitz was his idol, Misha listened to his records from childhood, his Ballads he learned without music books.

P.: Horowitz said: you know, we should send them out and stay just two of us, and I shall also play for you. Someone was perplexed, another protested, but maestro persisted. Now, there are two doors in that hall, both connected by staircases with the ground floor. And the whole group left through one door but later very quietly entered again through the other door. But he didn't pay attention, meanwhile we talked, he himself got at the grand piano and started to play without any requests. He recollected stories from his life, looking at me closely, took my hand, let me look into the original pages of Rachmaninov on the music-stand.

14:30. **P.: I was born in the beginning of 'thaw'. This side of life was not so interesting for me, I began to understand the situation later. We were not busy with politics, but even then we tried to think freely and say what we thought in our kitchens, if not in public. Everybody knew how the things were, and the danger of getting imprisoned on Lubyanka (KGB) was not hanging so acutely above our heads. Some people were more exposed to danger but then they had to openly break the rules. I didn't think about politics, I played music...Now, you keep asking me about the past, is the present less exciting?**

16:25 **P. (young): I always wanted to be a composer and conductor, to express myself in different roles. To be honest, I am not a born pianist, I have become it by force of the circumstances. (1979 ; 1989).**

18:40 **P.: Music demands much time and space. Modern world doesn't provide for this, one should be in a hurry in order to keep up with the rhythm, to be in tonus, there is no space to contemplate deeply. There is a need of quick movements, of rhythmical, galvanizing music which let the whole body throb, like a frog would twitch under the knife.**

20:50 **P.: So, what is life? As the writer Leskov once put it, life is a school, but others say it's hell. I rather think of life as a school. Hell doesn't exist. Justice?... Maybe, someone who behaved badly should return back here on earth and try to live anew... I was a good boy, and those were different times. I had aversion for cruelty and wouldn't like modern children films full of murderous creatures.**

23:30 **P.: Beethoven's symphonic music leads us to his Ninth approaching it in the amplitude of gladness. Joy for Beethoven had a religious moment. Faith and Joy, joy and faith. We read in Schiller's Ode to Joy: Freude, Schöner Götterfunken, Tochter aus Elysium, Joy! (A spark of fire from heaven, Daughter from Elysium). The last part is about joy and gratitude. And gratitude has a divine character. What's its destination? God, of course!**

24:35 **P. (to his orchestra): Now play by yourself... The mountain's top, absolute silence – and no living soul to see. Who would be left out after a total storm?**

Mother: Misha wanted to make a real orchestra. Many didn't believe. I went with him on several trips and saw that everything came out just right.

25:45 **P. (to his orchestra): Fortissimo! No. It's weak, there is no life. The melody should be breathing, get me the unity of sound. Can you do it? Or maybe not. What is this? Some sort of a nursery school. What, better? 'Eggs' have helped?** (An allusion to an old Soviet comedy where a singer woman breaks one by one a dozen of raw eggs, crashing them at the nose of the great composer whose bust in bronze stands by the piano, and swallows them believing it can improve the sounding of her very poor voice.) **I cannot see who is playing the theme, you should live in the musical image, give me more life, visible, in your body, in a turn of your head. Live through your musical theme!**

Notes:

1. Pletnev's father played bayan [https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bajan_\(accordeon\)](https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bajan_(accordeon))
2. Pletnev's professor Yakov Flier https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yakov_Flier
3. Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arturo_Toscanini
4. Pianist Svyatoslav Richter https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svjatoslav_Richter
5. Vladimir Horowitz
<https://www.google.com/gasearch?q=horowitz&tbm=&source=sh/x/gm2/5>
6. Soviet Patriotic Song 'Wide Is My Motherland' 1936
https://youtu.be/waZhr3Rk1mQ?si=n06ugmcNslw6_v9g
7. Legendary bas Feodor Chaliapin https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feodor_Chaliapin

Additional material:

1. Wiki over Pletnev
https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michail_Pletnjov
2. July 2010 incident in Thailand
<https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/07/mikhail-pletnev-child-molesting-thailand>
3. "Who starts wars" Pletnev's interview September 2, 2022
<https://www.riorchestra.org/news/pletnev-interview>