

# Suite “The Snow Storm” by Georgy Sviridov, as a musical illustration for Pushkin’s novel “Eugene Onegin”.

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**ABSTRACT** It is shown that Georgy Sviridov’s suite “The Snow Storm”, which had the original name “Musical illustrations for A.S. Pushkin “The Snow Storm”, in fact, is an accurate musical illustration of the novel by A.S. Pushkin “Eugene Onegin”. Chapter from the book “Beyond Pushkin”.

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## CREATION HISTORY OF “THE SNOW STORM”.

The original sketch of the melodies included in the suite “The Snow Storm” was written by Sviridov in the form of musical illustrations for the movie “The Snow Storm”, created in 1964 by producer Vladimir Basov based on the tale of same name by Alexander Pushkin. The final form of the suite was created ten years after the release of the film. It is said that the idea to rework the music score for the movie into a separate independent composition was suggested to the composer by his wife. After the suite was performed by Fedoseev Symphony Orchestra, the composer became world-famous. Neither before nor after that, Sviridov did not create works of such a high class. During a creation of the suite Sviridov was a secretary of the Union of USSR Composers. Being a convinced communist, Sviridov was elected several times as a Supreme Soviet deputy of the RSFSR. Composer is buried at the Novodevichy Cemetery, the most prestigious cemetery in Russia.

## DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN SVIRIDOV’S “THE SNOW STORM” AND THE PUSHKIN’S TALE OF THE SAME NAME.

To this day, musicians are still debating about the division of the suite into parts and their content. It is considered that the sequence of parts does not follow exactly the storyline. Other options are considered. Cyclopedia cited the working out of music teachers Elena Dubova Nikolaevna and Oleksenko Tatyana Nikolaevna, who placed the parts differently<sup>1</sup>. At the lessons of the 6th grade school classes is considered the topic “Expressive possibilities of symphonic music in the illustration of literary images based on the example of “The Snow Storm” by George Sviridov”. The suite is used for musical design of the exhibition “Rurikovichi” from the series “Russia is my history”. It is interesting that it is this music was chosen for the most ancient history of Russia, although it is not entirely clear what relation a subject of Pushkin’s story “The Snow Storm” may have to Russian history.

The film “The Snow Storm” does not repeat precisely the story of Pushkin. First, the Russian troika is shown quickly galloping across the field. View of the troika is replaced by panoramas of Russian nature and Russian churches. The movie was created in vicinity of town Suzdal. For a moment there is a silhouette of the famous “Church of the Intercession on the Nerl”. Pushkin’s tale “The Snow Storm” is preceded by an epigraph from the ballad of Vasily Zhukovsky “Svetlana”:

Horses race along the hills,  
Trample on the deep snow...  
Here, aside the temple of God  
Is visible lonely.  
...  
Suddenly a blizzard around;  
Snow is banging down;  
Black raven, whistling wing,  
Winds over the sleigh;  
A prophetic groan says sadness!  
Horses are hasty  
Sensitively staring into the dark distance,  
Rising manes...<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>“Public lesson. First September”.

<sup>2</sup>Here is my own free translation of Vasily Zhukovsky poem.

A young girl sees a dream in which she, repeating the ballad of Bürger “Lenore”, jumps on horseback with the dead groom. When Svetlana realizes that her dear friend is dead, the girl awakens. In “The Snow Storm” troika has nothing from the mystical dream of Svetlana, but rather refers to the final lines of the Gogol “Dead Souls”, where troika is associated with Rus:

And you, Russia of mine—are not you also speeding like a troika which nought can overtake? Is not the road smoking beneath your wheels, and the bridges thundering as you cross them, and everything being left in the rear, and the spectators, struck with the portent, halting to wonder whether you be not a thunderbolt launched from heaven? What does that awe-inspiring progress of yours foretell? What is the unknown force which lies within your mysterious steeds? Surely the winds themselves must abide in their manes, and every vein in their bodies be an ear stretched to catch the celestial message which bids them, with iron-girded breasts, and hooves which barely touch the earth as they gallop, fly forward on a mission of God?<sup>3</sup>

The first part of the suite “Troika” followed by “Waltz”. The events of the film “The Snow Storm” begin with the meeting of the main character Marya Gavrilovna and Colonel Burmin. Pushkin’s meeting is already near the end of the story. “Waltz” by Sviridov illustrates the dance in the film “The Snow Storm”, absent in Pushkin’s tale. The third part of the suite “Spring and Autumn” appears in the film, when viewer is transferred to the beginning of the story and Maria Gavrilovna walks through the woods with Vladimir. At first, she walks in the spring, and then in the autumn. Theme of nature in Pushkin’s story is missing.

The discrepancy between the suite and Pushkin’s tale appears also in the fourth part “Romance”. Many note that the heat of emotions and passions of this “Romance” give goosebumps. The first musical phrase of Sviridov’s “Romance”, its epigraph, is a direct quote from the famous song: “Do not go, stay with by me” created by Nikolai Zubov in 1899. The poet dedicated this romance to his muse, singer Anastasia Vyaltseva, in which he was unrequitedly in love. But, in the story “The Snow Storm” there is no any unrequited love. Maria Gavrilovna was reciprocated by Vladimir, and Colonel Burmin both, and there was no reason for tears that accompany the “Romance”. Movie has only a sketch of this “Romance”. After Vladimir’s departure, Marya Gavrilovna plays a melody on piano, and then this music accompanies her walks with Colonel Burmin.

The fifth part, “Pastoral”, appears in the film when Marya Gavrilovna walks the fields and later stands at her father’s grave. The same melody sounds when Vladimir gets into the cart and gallops to Shadrino. “Pastoral” fits well into the action of the film, but Pushkin’s girl does not walk in the fields. Sixth part, “March” appears in the film when troops return home, and women throw their caps into the air. Musicologists note some parodic motives in this march: it is more likely

not a march, but a stylized cabaret music. Approximately with such a music on the 1st of May holiday in St. Petersburg along Nevsky Prospekt marching dressed in short skirts, the drummers-girls. In Pushkin’s story, music met returning army was Vive Henri-Quatre<sup>4</sup>, Tyrolean waltzes and arias from Jokonda<sup>5</sup>. This music is not like military marches.

The seventh part, “Wedding” sounds in the film when Marya Gavrilovna sits in a small village church and waits for Vladimir to come. In Pushkin’s tale, the details of wedding are omitted. A girl in a church glimpses only in a short story narrated by Burmin. Movie events is the product of director’s creativity. The eighth part, “Echo of Waltz” in the film does not appear at all. What “echoes” or “memoirs” we may talk about in Pushkin’s tale, if there were no balls there? The last ninth part is actually the continuation of the first part. Suite is looped over, but the end of Pushkin’s story is a simple happy end. In the film, troika rides on, and the voice behind scene says: “What kind of stories could you hear on the road?”.

### SVIRIDOV’S SUITE “THE SNOW STORM” AND PUSHKIN’S NOVEL “EUGENE ONEGIN”.

As music does not match what it supposedly should illustrate, is not possible unambiguously conclude — what musical motifs behind this suite stay for Pushkin’s tale “The Snow Storm”. Everything changes dramatically and takes the right place, if to address the suite “The Snow Storm” to the Pushkin’s novel “Eugene Onegin”. Let’s try to map Sviridov’s work on Pushkin’s novel.

#### Troika

After main epigraph and dedication, the novel “Eugene Onegin” begins with description of a young scapegrace from St. Petersburg “flew in the dust with post horses” to receive the inheritance of a rich dying uncle. He flies “in the dust”, which means that it is clearly not winter, and he is not Santa Claus. Listening to the first part of “Troika” you can hear the echoes of the composition “Time forward”: the work of some machine or the movement of a locomotive. Tooff-tooff... tooff-tooff... Eugene breaks into Pushkin’s novel on his postal troika and this fully corresponds to the first part of the suite “Troika”, although it can be assumed that, combined with the latter, this part has a much deeper meaning.

#### Waltz

The second part of the suite “Waltz” perfectly illustrates the Petersburg life of Onegin: an eternal feast at balls and banquets. He “lives in a hurry and to feel it hastes”. This is not a “Waltz” literally, it is the *Waltz of life*, which turns Onegin in Petersburg. One can see here Pushkin’s lines:

What? Invitations? Yes, indeed,  
To a soiree three houses bid him:  
Here, there will be a ball; elsewhere, a children’s

<sup>4</sup>Verses from the comedy of French playwright Charles Kolle “Departure for Henry IV’s Hunt” (1764).

<sup>5</sup>Nikolay Izuar’s comic opera “Jocond, or the Adventurer”, which was successfully presented in Paris, 1814 when Russian troops were there.

<sup>3</sup>Translated from Russian by D. J. Hogarth

So whither is my scamp to scurry?  
Whom will he start with? Never mind:  
'tis simple to get everywhere in time.  
Meanwhile, in morning dress,  
Having donned a broad bolivar,  
Onegin drives to the boulevard  
And there goes strolling unconfined  
Till vigilant Breguet to him chimes dinner.<sup>6</sup>

### Spring and Autumn

The second chapter of “Eugene Onegin” is based on oppositions beginning with the epigraph: the dead and empty Latin word “Rus”, encountered in “Satyrs” by Horace, is opposed to the living, real and inexhaustible Russian word “Rus”, meaning a real country. “Spring” delight of Lensky is contrasted with Onegin’s “Autumn” boredom:

They got together; wave and stone,  
Verse and prose, ice and flame,  
Were not so different from one another

In the second chapter, Olga and Tatiana first appear also opposed to each other. The portrait of Olga, painted by Pushkin, looks like “Spring”:

Always modest, always obedient,  
Always as merry as the morn,  
As naive as a poet’s life,  
As winsome as love’s kiss her eyes,  
As azure as the sky, smile,  
Flaxen locks, movements,  
Voice, light waist

Tatiana has a completely different character:

Savage, sad, silent,  
As timid as the sylvan doe,  
In her own family  
She seemed a strangeling.  
She knew not how to snuggle  
Up to her father or mother;  
A child herself, among a crowd of children,  
She never wished to play and skip,  
And often all day long, alone,  
She sat in silence by the window.

The third part of “The Snow Storm” is called “Spring and Autumn”. It is divided into two parts with a common melody, but completely different mood. The first part is quite suitable for the mood of Olga and Vladimir Lensky, as well for their relationship. The second part should be the best musical characteristic for Tatiana. If the music reflects loneliness and sadness — it can be interpreted as “Autumn”, but it’s not necessarily that music draws a season... it can be the character of some girl: sad, lonely, sitting by the window, reading horrible tales in cold winter evenings.

<sup>6</sup>Here and below. “Eugene Onegin”. Translation by Vladimir Nabokov.

### Romance

In the third chapter of “Eugene Onegin” Pushkin tells how Tatiana’s love arises and how she decides to write her letter. The next part of the suite “The Snow Storm” is “Romance”, very accurately conveying Tatiana’s feelings. In the center of this part is a solo on the trumpet. If you proportionally, up to seconds, map this solo on the third chapter of “Eugene Onegin”, then Tatiana begins to write her letter immediately after the end of the solo. At the same time, Sviridov’s music subsides a little. Tatiana’s love is unrequited, as well as the author of romance “Do not go, stay with me”. You can sing the same tune with “I write to you — what would one more?”. Tatiana’s desire, the very first to turn to a man with a confession of love, fully reflects the courage and firmness of “solo on the trumpet”.

### Pastoral

The fourth chapter of “Eugene Onegin” is devoted to describing the life of Onegin in the village and his talk with Tatiana. The life of Onegin can be fully interpreted as “Pastoral” and illustrated with the next part of the suite:

Imitating the songster of Gulnare,  
Across this Hellespont he swam,  
Then drank his coffee,  
While he flipped through some wretched review,  
And dressed...

Rambles, and reading, and sound sleep,  
The sylvan shade, the purl of streams,  
Sometimes a white-skinned, dark-eyed girl’s  
Young and fresh kiss,  
A horse of mettle, bridle-true,  
A rather fancy dinner,  
A bottle of bright wine,  
Seclusion, quiet this  
Was Onegin’s saintly life;

The only splash of instruments in this part can be attributed to the talk of Onegin with Tatiana:

Your candidness appeals to me,  
In me it has excited emotions  
Long grown silent.

### Military march

The next part of the suite “Marsh” stands out sharply against other parts. But the fifth chapter of “Eugene Onegin” also stands out in the novel. At first Tatiana sees a dream with monsters:

There is a crab astride a spider  
There on a goose’s neck  
Twirls a red-calpacked skull;  
There a windmill the squat-jig dances  
And rasps and waves its vanes.  
Barks, laughter, singing, whistling, claps,  
The parle of man, the stamp of steed!

These monsters are reflected at no less ugly behemoths, but in the human face appearing on Tatiana’s name-day in real life:

The Skotinins, with children of all ages,  
 Counting from thirty years to two  
 The district fopling, Petushkov;  
 Buyanov, my first cousin,  
 Covered with fluff, in a peaked cap  
 (As he, of course, is known to you);  
 And the retired counselor Flyanov,  
 A heavy scandalmonger, an old rogue,  
 Glutton, bribetaker, and buffoon.

And under the triumph of monsters in a dream and in real life, it is possible to include a parodic military “March” in contrast and sadness of Tatiana and her bold explanation in love and the pastoral life of Onegin. Under the rhythm of the “March”, Vladimir Lensky calls Onegin to a duel and “demands a horse” ... a carriage to me a carriage ... half a kingdom for a horse ... “March” is performed *tutti*, as some kind of opposite to solo. If the rest of “The Snow Storm” suite relates to specific people: Onegin or Tatiana, the fifth chapter more likely describes the society surrounding them: in relation to the heroes of the novel — this is *tutti*. Defeated Lensky is the victory of this society.

### Wedding

The seventh part of “The Snow Storm” suite, “Wedding”, the most sad and mysterious, it feels something ominous. According to music teachers, sixth graders note here an incomprehensible longing and anxiety, a premonition of trouble, something inevitable. In the sixth chapter of “Eugene Onegin” a duel takes place and Lensky perishes. An music burst in the part projected to the sixth chapter falls exactly on the duel and death of the poet, musicologists compare these outbursts with “blows of fate”. The intonation and some musical motifs resemble here the well-known F-Minor Bach choral prelude “*Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ*” footnote I call out to you, Jesus Christ (Ger.), BWV 639, used by producer Tarkovsky in the film “Solaris”. The prelude of Bach F-Minor is written in the midtones, where a “wolf” or a fake quint occurs. This is a prelude for two hands and a pedal. The pedal is called “*tutti*”, and the two hands are the participants in the duel. Intonation here is not so much an Orthodox choir as a Catholic organ. It is believed that the theme of the prelude F-Minor is *prayer in despair*, which is quite in tune with the lines of the sixth chapter of “Eugene Onegin”:

Say: what sensation  
 Would take possession of your soul  
 When, motionless upon the ground,  
 In front of you, with death upon his brow,  
 He by degrees would stiffen,  
 When he'd be deaf and silent  
 To your desperate appeal?

### Waltz echoes

In the seventh chapter of “Eugene Onegin” Tatiana comes to Onegin’s house and, having received permission from the housekeeper, studies his life. In drafts to this chapter, Pushkin wanted to include an outline of Onegin’s diaries, created during his life in Petersburg, but reading other people’s diaries

is not good. It is quite another matter to study the notes on the margins of books:

Many pages preserved  
 The trenchant mark of fingernails;  
 The eyes of the attentive maiden  
 Are fixed on them more eagerly.  
 Tatiana sees with trepidation  
 By what thought, observation  
 Onegin would be struck,  
 What he agreed with tacitly.  
 The dashes of his pencil  
 She encounters in their margins.  
 Unconsciously Onegin’s soul  
 Has everywhere expressed itself  
 Now by a succinct word, now by a cross,  
 Now by an interrogatory crotchet

Tatiana is getting acquainted with the echo of the time, to which the part “Waltz” belongs. The muffled tone of the music “Echo of the waltz”, reflects the atmosphere of the “Oneginsky cell”:

The desk with its extinguished lamp,  
 A pile of books, and at the window  
 A carpet-covered bed,  
 And from the window the prospect through the lunar  
 gloom,  
 And this pale half-light,  
 And Lord Byron’s portrait

### Winter road

Having read Onegin wisdom, Tatyana goes to Moscow for the bride’s fair: she need to marry someone anyway. Tatyana sits in a sleigh and rides *in winter on a troyka*. The last part of the suite “The Snow Storm” is called “Winter Road”:

She does not go to meet the winter,  
 Inhale the frostdust,  
 And with the first snow from the bathhouse roof  
 Wash face, shoulders, and breast.  
 Tatiana dreads the winter way.

Onegin at the very beginning of the novel rides “with posters” that is quickly and with a breeze. The first part of “Troyka” begins loudly and sharply. Tatiana drags “with her own horses, not with posters”.

### The ringing of the suite

The ninth part of the suite, “Winter Road”, begins very quietly, then music intensifies and the whole suite ends. If you listen the entire album in a ring, immediately after the end of the “Winter Road”, the first part of the suite “Troyka” with its major beginning, as an uninterrupted continuation of the “Winter Road”. At the end of the seventh chapter, Tatyana marries. Marriage is like a transition of a girl to a different state. In Russian legends, marriage was associated with the crossing of the bridge, through which the girl takes her fiancé. Analogous symbols are present on the border between the world of the living and the dead, which connects the “Kalinov

Bridge” thrown across the River Smorodina. Tatyana in a dream carries a bear across a bridge, so he must become her husband. The girl marries the general and so becomes the general’s wife: “the grand and careless legislator of the hall”.

In the eighth chapter of “Eugene Onegin” Tatiana appears among the Petersburg light, where the feasts of Eugene began. This corresponds to the second part of the suite. Now “Waltz” twists three: Onegin, Tatyana and her husband. All ages are to love submissive, but the love of “Spring” and the love of “Autumn” are different, like the two halves of the third part of “The Snow Storm” — “Spring and Autumn”:

All ages are to love submissive  
 But to young virgin hearts  
 Its impulses are beneficial  
 As are spring storms to fields.  
 They freshen in the rain of passions,  
 And renovate themselves, and ripen,  
 And vigorous life gives  
 Both rich bloom and sweet fruit.  
 But at a late and barren age,  
 At the turn of our years,  
 Sad is the trace of a dead passion...  
 Thus storms of the cold autumn  
 Into a marsh transform the meadow  
 And strip the woods around

Onegin’s love for Tatiana falls on the fourth part of the suite “Romance”, their last talk for “Pastoral” and storm of sensations in which after this dipped Evgeny, is accompanied by a “Military march” — Tatyana’s victory.

### WHO IS THE REAL AUTHOR OF “THE SNOW STORM” SUITE?

Sviridov wrote an illustration to the story “The Snow Storm”, but it turned out to “Eugene Onegin”: than is not the real “Blizzard story”? At the very end of the film “The Snow Storm” voice behind the scene says: “What kind of stories do you hear while riding?”. Alexander Galich has a song called “A terrible story, overheard in the roadside dive bar”. During the vacation, one responsible officer, a Russian, a member of the CPSU, a major, lost his passport and, for laughs, in the fifth column, where the nationality was indicated in Soviet times, he wrote a “Jew”. Because of this comic record in the official document, the attitude to him in the society has changed so dramatically that with his passport, he lost all his life. The song ends like this:

And went here, my friends,  
 At least lie down at least a voice howling!..  
 I now live in Kaluga,  
 Non-party, erk!  
 I now have one road,  
 I have no other way: —  
 Where is, guys, the synagogue?  
 Tell me how to get through!<sup>7</sup>

In one of the first rooms of the exhibition “Rurikovichi” from the cycle “Russia is my story”, to music of the Sviridov’s suite “The Snow Storm” narrates how Prince Vladimir chose faith for Russia. Note, that main characters of the Pushkin’s tale “The Snow Storm” and novel “Eugene Onegin ” have the same name “Vladimir”. Where would Russia bring a snow storm, if Prince Vladimir chose something else? But, most interesting: who really created the suite “The Snow Storm”, if the composer George Sviridov never considered it in the context of Pushkin’s novel “Eugene Onegin”?

<sup>7</sup>My own free translation of Alexander Galich