Introduction

> The past is more unpredictable than the future.
>
> Slavic and Tatar proverb

I began this project with two firm convictions: (1) that the work of musicologists should be in the service of humanity, and (2) that the biography of Mieczysław Weinberg stands as a fine example of a life well lived. The lessons from his life and his music could stand us in good stead in the early decades of the twenty-first century, when politics and conflict seem more intractable than ever. Weinberg's example of gentle humanism, diligent work, and commemoration of the past offers us a potential balm for present social wounds. While this book uses the language of musicology and all that that entails, its subject is, ultimately, Weinberg's music itself as a representation of humanity, complete with imperfections.

At the time of writing, discussion of what it means to be human, from both extremes of the political spectrum, is dominated by identity politics. Encompassing scholarly work dismantling patriarchy and cultural appropriation on the one hand, and the rise of nationalism across Europe and the United States on the other, the extent of one's right to be understood within an identity of one's own choosing is one of the most urgent conversations in contemporary politics. Such discussions do, however, make life difficult for the historian. Questions such as 'Which heritage did person X most identify with?' are crucial, but historical record can frequently be sketchy, and critics often have to resort to speculation. For any historian of the 'long twentieth century', identity politics becomes even more troubled. As war and politics enforced mass migrations of whole populations in the face of annihilation, the concept of 'identity' became distorted in a way never before seen.

This book's main subject is, of course, the composer Mieczysław Weinberg. I should say 'Polish-Jewish-Soviet composer Mieczysław Weinberg'. For Weinberg was an individual who, for complex personal reasons, spanned and encompassed multiple identities at once. He was born and raised in Warsaw, but fled to Minsk at the age of nineteen, leaving his family behind; his parents and sister were murdered in the Holocaust. Weinberg was accepted into the Soviet Union. He was also Jewish, and suffered from

anti-Semitism in his homeland and his later adopted nation. Questions of heritage and identity take centre stage when discussing Weinberg. The current climate of identity has shaped his recent reception, and has also influenced the cultural institutions behind large-scale events. Academic conferences have broken down into arguments of cultural ownership, with the crude determiner 'our' used on multiple occasions to make the claim that Weinberg's music might 'belong' to any one particular group or nation.

Attentive to this background of claiming Weinberg for one heritage or another, this book is an attempt at reconciliation. It seeks to place Weinberg's music in the wider context of Polish music, both the tradition that he sprang from, and also the development of Polish composition after Weinberg had become naturalised as a Soviet citizen.[1] I do not wish to claim Weinberg as a quintessentially Polish composer; it is my thesis, though, that an insight into Polish music provides essential perspective on his development. Studies of migration and memory often note the idea of an 'imagined' homeland, particularly in the face of revolution or war, where the original nation itself is irrevocably changed. In music history, this can be seen in Russian composers who left around the time of the 1917 Revolution, including Rachmaninov and Stravinsky. In Rachmaninov's case, emigration was a source of sadness, and he struggled to compose. In contrast, many of Stravinsky's works either evoked an imagined 'ancient Rus', or else can be traced back to influences in pre-Revolutionary St Petersburg and his studies with Rimsky-Korsakov.[2] After leaving Poland, Weinberg's relation to his homeland became one of idealised memory (similar to that experienced by fellow exiles from Poland, including Andrzej Panufnik and Alexandre Tansman).[3] Weinberg often wrote songs on Polish authors who were contemporary during his childhood and adolescence, as well as classic authors such as Mickiewicz. He did not, however, keep up-to-date with contemporary Polish literature (with the exception of Zofia Posmysz's *The*

[1] For an excellent survey of Weinberg in his Soviet context, see Verena Mogl, *'Juden, die ins Lied sich retten': Der Komponist Mieczysław Weinberg (1919–1996) in der Sowjetunion* ['*Jews who save themselves in song*': *The Composer Mieczysław Weinberg (1919–1996) in the Soviet Union*] (Münster: Waxmann, 2017).

[2] See Richard Taruskin, 'Chernomor to Kashchei: Harmonic Sorcery', and 'Epilogue: The Traditions Revisited', in *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through 'Mavra'*, 2 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), Vol. I, 255–306; Vol. II, 1605–76.

[3] For a study of this kind of memory of homeland, see Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (London: Basic, 2001). For a comparison of Weinberg's experience of exile with that of Alexandre Tansman, see Dorota Schwarcman, 'Zwischen allen Stühlen: Warum Mieczysław Weinberg in Polen unbekannt ist' ['Between Two Stools: Why Mieczysław Weinberg Is Unknown in Poland'], *Osteuropa*, 7/2010, 139–45.

Passenger; even this, though, had to be brought to his attention by others). In later life, he wrote many memorial works that evoked the Poland of the 1930s and 1940s. However, he only returned to Poland once after 1939: as a guest of the Warsaw Autumn festival of new music in 1966. On this visit, he was confronted with the reality that the city that he had known had largely vanished, just as much wiped from existence as his parents and sister had been. From this, he retreated into his own memory of prewar Poland. As such, Weinberg's 'Polishness' must be understood in the context of interwar Poland, both its musical and its cultural scene.

Similarly, Weinberg's 'Jewishness' has to be understood within the context of Jewish history in Poland and Eastern Europe. Here, to be Jewish was as much a marker of race and identity as it was about being a practising member of the faith. There is no surviving evidence that Weinberg was an active participant in any Jewish religious rites. Indeed, several sources show an altogether lax attitude to core tenets of the faith, including eating non-kosher foods.[4] Judaism as a system of worship appears to have been of little interest to Weinberg, confirmed by his conversion to Orthodox Christianity shortly before his death. This is not to downplay Weinberg's Jewish identity: it was evidently every bit as important to him as his Polish roots.[5] He considered himself to be culturally Jewish enough to agree to that designation when entering the Soviet Union (as opposed to 'Polish').[6] His musical education began with playing in Warsaw Jewish theatres alongside his father, and his income during his teens came partly from performing at Jewish weddings. It is, however, difficult to view Weinberg in a specifically Jewish musical tradition, separate from other influences such as Polish or even Moldovan music.

Weinberg's works often refer to Jewish elements, which initially drew praise, but became deeply problematic with the rise of Soviet anti-Semitism after the war.[7] Laurel Fay has suggested that Shostakovich's turn to Jewish music stemmed from a desire to utilise folk influences (arguably emulating

[4] For instance, see Lyudmila Nikitina, 'Pochti lyuboy mig zhizni – rabota' ['Almost every moment of my life – work'], interview with Mieczysław Weinberg, *Muzïkal´naya akademiya*, 1994/5, 17–24 (18).

[5] For a discussion, see Yuliya Broydo, 'Yevreyskaya tema v tvorchestve M. S. Vaynberga' ['The Jewish Topic in the Works of Weinberg'], unpublished diploma dissertation, St Petersburg Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatoire (2001), 27–9.

[6] Nikitina, 'Pochti lyuboy mig zhizni – rabota', 18.

[7] See Nelly Kravetz, '"From the Jewish Folk Poetry" of Shostakovich and "Jewish Songs" of Weinberg: Music and Power', in *Dmitri Schostakowitsch und das jüdische musikalische Erbe*, ed. Ernst Kuhn, Andreas Wehrmeyer, and Günter Wolter (Berlin: Ernst Kuhn, 2001), 279–97 (282–3).

Weinberg's early success, and also with influence from Shostakovich's pupil Veniamin Fleishman), though Shostakovich soon found that he had picked an 'undesirable' ethnic group.[8] Following Stalin's death, Jewish elements were still present in Weinberg's music, and often complemented his desire to commemorate the suffering inflicted by fascism. Being Jewish certainly marked his life far more indelibly than being Polish, and the main ruptures in his biography are direct results of anti-Semitism, from both Nazi and Soviet forces. Many of Weinberg's memorial works should be understood via the Soviet view of the Holocaust. In a manner contrary to the western viewpoint, the Holocaust was viewed as just one aspect of the human tragedy of the Great Patriotic War. Official attitudes to commemoration rested on the contention that the Second World War was a transnational human tragedy, and that focusing on the losses of one ethnic group would neglect the suffering of others, no matter how great those losses were. Considering that the Soviet forces collectively lost some 8.7 million troops, and that total deaths including civilians are conservatively estimated at around 26 million, the Soviet authorities were concerned about who should be commemorated and why.[9] This view went on to be twisted and distorted into an argument frequently made against any kind of Holocaust commemoration in the Soviet Union. Many of Weinberg's commemorative works reflect this attitude and do not depict an exclusively Jewish experience of the war or the Holocaust. For instance, his *Requiem*, Op. 96, mourns the international loss of human life in the Second World War, and features texts from Spanish, Russian, American, and Japanese authors. His opera *The Passenger*, Op. 97 (which takes the Holocaust as its central theme) features barely any mention of Jewish suffering at all, and instead depicts an international array of prisoners within the Auschwitz camp. Despite their brilliance, neither the *Requiem* nor *The Passenger* received a performance during his lifetime. In the case of *The Passenger*, its lack of success is likely to have been in part a result of the Soviet authorities' indifference towards the Jewish losses of the Second World War. But such casual disdain for the Jewish and commemorative aspects of Weinberg's music was only one thread in his comparative neglect as a composer. Another was his own sense of modesty. He once claimed that: 'so long as I am writing, the work interests me. When the piece is finished, it doesn't exist anymore. Its fate (whether ostracisation by the Philharmonic Societies, lack of performances, silence in the press, scorn

[8] Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 169.
[9] G. F. Krovisheev (ed.), *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century* (London: Greenhill, 1997), 83–90.

from the music critics) is all the same to me.'[10] As a result, the act of composing, rather than securing performances, became something of a *raison d'ẽtre*, especially in his later years.

Despite the urgency of posing questions of identity in the case of Weinberg, I do set one limit. Over the course of this book, I will avoid distinguishing between 'Soviet' and 'Russian'. It strikes me that the difference between 'Soviet' and 'Russian' in terms of Weinberg's identity is negligible compared to the major influences of Polish and Jewish culture.[11] For that reason, and for the purposes of this book, I am using 'Soviet' to refer to the third sphere of Weinberg's identity.

Questions of ownership have surfaced in response to the rapid revival of interest in Weinberg's music. At the time of his death in 1996, Weinberg's music was languishing in obscurity. Weinberg did, however, enjoy a measure of success earlier in his lifetime. He referred to the 1960s as his 'starry years', when his works were performed often and received positive critical responses.[12] The bulk of published articles on Weinberg date from this decade. However, Weinberg and his generation were caught in something of a cultural crossfire. A younger generation of Soviet avant-gardists was emerging, which included Alfred Schnittke, Edison Denisov, Sofia Gubaidulina, and the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt. The establishment's response to the emergence of these younger composers was to heap praise upon the slightly older generation who still emulated Shostakovich's style, including composers such as Boris Chaykovsky, Rodion Shchedrin, and Weinberg. It is impossible to say whether Weinberg suspected that such praise during the 1960s was part of a wider tactic to marginalise the avant-gardists, though others suggested this during his lifetime.[13]

Weinberg was fortunate to have his works played by performers with international reputations, such as David Oistrakh, Mstislav Rostropovich, and the Borodin Quartet. He also enjoyed official state honours, starting with Honoured Artist of the Russian Republic in 1971; then People's Artist of the Russian Republic in 1980; and finally the State Prize of the USSR in 1990, which was presented to him in a live television broadcast at the Kremlin.

[10] From a letter to Krzysztof Meyer, received 25 November 1988, quoted in David Fanning, *Mieczysław Weinberg: In Search of Freedom* (Hofheim: Wolke, 2010), 143.

[11] Weinberg did survive into the early years of the modern Russian Federation (from the end of December 1991 up until February 1996), but during this time he was largely bed-ridden and finished only two pieces, the Fourth Chamber Symphony, Op. 153 (1992), and the Twenty-Second Symphony, Op. 154, left unorchestrated by the time of his death.

[12] Nikitina, 'Pochti lyuboy mig zhizni – rabota', 18.

[13] See Yuri Levitin, 'Nasledniki bol´shikh talantov' ['Heirs of Great Talents'], *Pravda*, 20 June 1965, 6.

And yet in spite of such honours, or perhaps even because they associated him too closely with the regime, the gradual collapse of the Soviet Union and its cultural infrastructure seemed to seal Weinberg's fate of obscurity. The most prominent members of the younger generation emigrated to Europe, thanks to their friends and contacts there. Weinberg had no such connections, and was in any case too ill to travel great distances. The dissolution of the USSR effectively ended all funding for the Composers' Union, and eliminated the reliable income that the organisation had previously guaranteed its members. As such, Weinberg found himself struggling for money, abandoned by many of his émigré friends, and, in his final years, entirely bed-bound.

A modest wave of interest had already begun, however, with figures such as Tommy Persson and Per Skans, both from Sweden. The now dissolved English CD label Olympia ran a Weinberg edition, which eventually numbered seventeen volumes before the company's closure. The first of these was released in time for Weinberg himself to be made aware of it. Following his death, a loyal following found new members. Valentin Berlinsky of the Borodin Quartet continued to promote Weinberg's music to new audiences and pupils, including the Belgian ensemble Quatuor Danel. The Danels went on to perform and even premiere many of Weinberg's string quartets, finishing a complete recording of the cycle in 2012. Other devotees in recent years have included conductors Thomas Sanderling and Vladimir Lande, violinists Linus Roth and Gidon Kremer, pianist Elisaveta Blumina, and the director David Pountney. Per Skans began an in-depth study of Weinberg, left unfinished at the time of Skans's tragic death in 2007. The British musicologists Michelle Assay and David Fanning took up the project. Between them, they have contributed to an increasing interest from the world of musicology and academia, including those interested in Polish, Russian, and Jewish music, and the context of twentieth-century music in general. This book, published in the centenary of Weinberg's birth, is intended in part to fit within this ongoing revival, but also to look beyond the revival to address wider questions of his musical language and identity. To begin this process, several choices have to be justified and unpacked, beginning with seemingly the simplest of facts: Weinberg's name.

Even the spelling of his name is loaded with questions of identity, and multiple options exist. Within Poland, he appears largely to have used the spelling 'Wajnberg', which is the most practical rendering in the Polish language; documents that survive from his time studying at the Warsaw Conservatoire use this spelling. But the majority of his prewar manuscripts actually use multiple spellings in the same score, and 'Wainberg' is also

a strong contender for his preferred spelling. His father also performed on several recordings listed with the more Germanic spelling 'Weinberg', possibly in an attempt to access a wider market. After Weinberg fled to the Soviet Union, his surname was transliterated into Cyrillic as 'Вайнберг'. The question of transliterating this back into the Latin alphabet is where confusion begins. The Library of Congress system of transliteration yields the spelling 'Vainberg'. Others give renderings such as 'Veinberg' and 'Vaynberg'. The majority of the publications issued in the Soviet Union intended for international distribution, however, give the spelling 'Weinberg'. It is this spelling that has entered common usage in the anglophone world, and been accepted by the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the standard English-language reference work. Weinberg's late biographer, Per Skans, claimed that Weinberg and family used the *New Grove* spelling during his time in Poland and that any other alternatives were 'rumours'.[14] Skans did not provide any evidence to support his claim that the 'Weinberg' spelling was the composer's preference in his later years. The composer continued to use the Polish spelling, most notably in letters to Polish acquaintances. But for this study, I will use the spelling 'Weinberg', largely because of its near ubiquity in recent recordings and concerts, but also because of the convention inherited from the *New Grove Dictionary*. Nevertheless, it is worth discussing the matter at length because decisions about spelling are of potentially vital importance for any understanding of Weinberg's heritage. No matter what the author (or translator's) intentions, transliteration will always have ramifications for identity. One potential escape from such debates, however, is offered by that most loaded of terms, 'the music itself'.

Weinberg's musical language is frequently the topic of discussion in the chapters that follow. As such, some passages are unashamedly analytical, and utilise a plethora of techniques from the discipline of music analysis to reflect the variety present in Weinberg's music. Weinberg wrote over 150 opus-numbered works, with further work in film, radio, and circus music. As such, any study of his musical language must be selective. For the purposes of this study, I focus largely on Weinberg's writing for string quartet, for several reasons. In a historical sense, the quartets cover the largest span of his musical career, wider than his output for sonatas, symphonies, or song cycles. More than this, Weinberg's quartets were often understood as a kind of 'musical laboratory', where he developed ideas and

[14] Per Skans, writing at *Mieczysław Weinberg (Moishei Vainberg): The Composer and His Music*, available at www.music-weinberg.net/ (accessed 14 April 2018).

trends that would subsequently be reflected in his other works.[15] For an overview of Weinberg's musical development, his quartets therefore provide an ideal window; nearly every aspect of his varied and contrasting musical style can be found within them. They also fit neatly within his own biography, reflecting his move from Poland to Russia, and also his changing artistic priorities, including pauses to focus on other genres.

In another, more practical sense, the string quartet genre is well suited to the purposes of music analysis, insofar as the obviously compact instrumentation results in an economy of lines and available textures. While this is a notorious challenge for any would-be quartet composer, the results are arrestingly clear for any music analyst, or reader of music analysis. Although I shall from time to time discuss works in other genres, including operas and symphonies, this book makes no claim to be a life-and-works study. Weinberg's quartet output is summarised in Table I.1, and even its bare outlines open intriguing questions of aesthetics, politics, and biography.

Several large gaps between compositions reveal themselves in this table, and they can be explained in various respects. They also suggest different possible groupings of the quartets. I propose the grouping shown in Table I.2, with three main groups, each containing a pair of subgroups. Within these three groups, there are two lengthy interludes where no quartets were composed. The first of these, between the Sixth and Seventh Quartets, featured some of the most dramatic events of Weinberg's life, including the state-ordered murder of Weinberg's father-in-law, the 1948 'Zhdanovshchina' crackdowns, and Weinberg's imprisonment and release after the death of Stalin. The events of 1948 suggest one reason why Weinberg might have avoided writing chamber music during this period: the reassertion of the doctrine of socialist realism.[16] Andrei Zhdanov's doctrine valued music that was accessible, nationalist in tone, and positive in outlook. Chamber music, which had long been associated with smaller audiences of connoisseurs, was the antithesis of socialist realism, almost by definition. There is another lengthy interval, in this case of seven years, between the Twelfth and Thirteenth Quartets (1970 and 1977, respectively). In this instance, practical reasons might explain Weinberg's break from quartet writing, since at this time he was focusing his efforts on a new-found enthusiasm for stage

[15] See V. Zolotaryov, 'Chertï poiska' ['Features of Research'], *Sovetskaya kul´tura*, 57 (16 May 1967), 3.

[16] Shostakovich continued to write quartets 'for the drawer' in the years after 1948, with his Fourth (1949) and Fifth Quartets (1952) completed but their premieres taking place later, both in 1953. Weinberg relied on film and circus scores to make a living during this time, since official concerts and commissions became rarer.

Table I.1 Weinberg's quartet cycle

Date	Quartet no.	Opus no.	Dedication
1937	1	Op. 2	
1940	2	Op. 3	Weinberg's mother and sister
1944	3	Op. 14	
March 1945	4	Op. 20	Bolshoy Theatre String Quartet
Late 1945	5	Op. 27	Beethoven String Quartet
1946	6	Op. 35	Georgy Sviridov
1957	7	Op. 59	Yuri Levitin
1959	8	Op. 66	Borodin Quartet
1963	9	Op. 80	
July–August 1965	10	Op. 85	Olga Rakhalskaya
October–December 1965	11	Op. 89	Victoria Weinberg
1969–70	12	Op. 103	Veniamin Basner
1977	13	Op. 118	Borodin Quartet
1978	14	Op. 122	Yuri Levitin
1979	15	Op. 124	Moscow String Quartet
1981	16	Op. 130	Ester Weinberg
1985[a]	*No. 1 (rev.)*	*Op. 2/141*	
Aug 1986	*No. 2 (rev.)*	*Op. 3/145*	
October 1986	17	Op. 146	Borodin Quartet

[a] Italics indicate revisions of pre-existing works.

Despite Shostakovich's dedication of his Tenth Quartet to Weinberg, there is no reciprocal dedication from Weinberg in his own quartets. Across his output, Weinberg dedicated only three works to Shostakovich: the *Sonatina*, Op. 49; the song cycle *The Gypsy Bible*, Op. 57; and his Twelfth Symphony, Op. 114 (in memoriam). The apparent reluctance to dedicate works to his friend and mentor can be viewed as an act of modesty on Weinberg's part.

works. His first opera, *The Passenger* (1968), was quickly followed by *The Madonna and the Soldier* (1971), *D'Artagnan in Love* (1971), *Mazl Tov!*, and *Lady Magnesia* (both 1975) during these years.

Groupings of works, of the kind I have sketched above, are always problematic.[17] In Weinberg's case, any category is further complicated by his return to earlier works in later life, with revised versions of the first two quartets completed in between the Sixteenth and Seventeenth, and a

[17] See Tia DeNora, 'Deconstructing Periodization: Sociological Methods and Historical Ethnography in Late-Eighteenth-Century Vienna', *Beethoven Forum* 4/1 (1995), 1–15; see also Edward Said, 'Timeliness and Lateness', in *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 1–16.

Table I.2 Groupings within Weinberg's quartets

Early quartets	1 and 2
Young achievement	3–6
In Shostakovich's shadow	7–9
Quartet competition	10–12
Post-Shostakovich	13–15
Late sophistication	16 and 17

return to material from the Second, Third, and Fifth Quartets in his first three chamber symphonies respectively. The Twenty-First Symphony also features a reworking of material from the Fourth Quartet. The reworkings and revisions point towards the fact that this earlier music was very much on Weinberg's mind in his later life. Perhaps he resurrected these previously unheard works primarily with an eye to new performances (the chamber symphonies were particularly widely celebrated – they were named as the principal works for his State Prize of the USSR in 1990).[18]

This book situates Weinberg's music within broad compositional trends of the twentieth century. One mode of thinking from recent scholarship stands out as not only a useful way to categorise Weinberg's music (and much of the music of his compatriots) but also for understanding large swathes of twentieth-century music. To reduce it to its most simplistic level, twentieth-century music history can be understood as a series of reactions to Arnold Schoenberg's 'emancipation of the dissonance', which asserted that all pitches could be utilised in any context, whether consonant or dissonant, 'as if there was no dissonance at all'.[19] Following Schoenberg, large numbers of composers began to compose using methods of serialism, or abandoning tonality in their music. Many composers did the opposite, however, and embraced a thorough reappraisal of tonality as their main concern. Between these two poles lies a vast amount of music that can be understood as the 'moderate mainstream' of twentieth-century music: a musical language that incorporates more dissonance than ever before tolerated, but that still contains recognisably tonal structures (or dissonance that might never be fully resolved against tonal means).[20]

[18] For a report of Weinberg's State Prize, see anon., 'O prizuzhdenii gosudarstvennykh premiy SSSR 1990 god' ['The Awards of the State Prize of the USSR in 1990'], *Pravda*, 7 November 1990, 4.

[19] Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Dika Newlin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 104–5.

[20] Arnold Whittall, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).