

Ivan Wyschnegradsky
(1893-1979)

Ivan Wyschnegradsky is born at Saint-Petersburg on May 4, 1893. His father is a banker and his mother writes poems. His grandfather is a celebrated mathematician who has been Minister for Finance from 1888 to 1892. After his baccalaureat, Wyschnegradsky enters the School of Mathematics. He follows the courses, of harmony, composition and orchestration (1911-1915) led by Nicolas Sokolov, professor with the Academy of Saint-Petersburg. In 1912, he enters the School of Law. The first public work of Wyschnegradsky *Andante religioso and funebre* is performed at the theatre Pavlovsk under the direction of Aslanov, in the presence of César Cui. At the end of the concert, Cui “the felicity for his moderation”. In 1916, Wyschnegradsky composes the *Day of the Brahma*, which will become later the *Day of the Existence*, for reciter, full orchestra and mixed chorus ad libitum. In 1917, the day before the revolution, Wyschnegradsky finishes his law studies. In November, his father dies. Ivan adheres to the ideal of the Russian revolution and composes *The Red Gospel*, opus 8. In 1919, he elaborates his first project on the notation of 1/12-tones. The following year, Wyschnegradsky and his family move to Paris. The Pleyel house manufactures a pneumatic-transmission piano for him which does not satisfy him entirely (1921). He wishes to build a *true* 1/4-tone piano and thinks that he can do it only in Germany. He commissions from Straube a Möllendorf-type 1/4-tone harmonium. In 1922 and 1923, he goes to several revivals in Germany where he meets R. Stein, A. Haba, J. Mager and W. Möllendorf. The following year, he marries Hélène Benois who gives him a son, Dimitri (1924). In 1926, the union is broken, Ivan divorces. He commissions a 1/4-tone piano from Foerster (1927). The Vandelle quartet performs the *Prelude and fugue*, opus 15. In 1929, the piano made by Foerster arrives in Paris. He meets Lucille Markoff (Gayden), his future wife. He publishes the *Manual of Quarter-tone Harmony* (1932). He composes *Twenty-four preludes* in all the tones of the chromatic scale diatonicized with thirteen sounds, for two pianos in 1/4-tones (1934). Monday January 25, 1937, he assists with the first concert dedicated entirely to his music. He meets Olivier Messiaen, then later Henri Dutilleux and Claude Ballif. He records the slow movement of the symphony *Thus spoke Zarathustra* for four pianos in 1/4-tones. In 1942, he is arrested by the Germans and is transferred to Compiègne where he remains two months. His wife, of american nationality, is arrested and transferred to Vittel. November 11, 1945, Gisèle Peyron and Mady Sauvageot, sopranos, Lili Fabrègue, viola, Yvette Grimaud, Yvonne Loriod, Pierre Boulez and Serge Nigg, pianos give a concert of works of Wyschnegradsky. Contracting tuberculosis, he rests at the sanatorium of St. Martin-du-Tertre. André Souris gives the première in Belgium of the symphony *Thus spoke Zarathustra* for four pianos (Brussels, February 14, 1947). Pierre Boulez, Yvette Grimaud, Claude Helffer and Ina Marika gives a performance of the *Second symphonic fragment*, opus 24 (Paris, November 28, 1951). The *Revue Musicale* publishes a special issue on Ivan Wyschnegradsky and Nicolas Obouhow. In 1977, Martine Joste organizes a great concert at Radio-France. In Canada, Bruce Mather does the same. In 1978, Alexandre Myrat, at the head of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Radio France, performs the *Day of Existence*. Ivan Wyschnegradsky is invited by the DAAD as composer-in-residence at Berlin. He cannot go there for reasons of health. Radio-France commissions from him a *String trio*. He dies on September 29, 1979, at 86 years of age.

Franck Jedrzejewski