

The Last Poet's Farewell, solo violin
(Further reflections on the slow suffocation of a great culture)
Notes by the Composer, David Avshalomov, 1999

Prologo: Remembrance (The Poet's Song)
The Soldier Returns Home; Stump Dance
The Empty House
Tzigaret?
Drug Virus Pinwheel Icon
Zeks' Reveille / Work Party / Lights-out
The Lake Baikal Hoedown (Yakudia Yahoo!)
Final Regrets: The Poet's Last Song.

The "Last Poet's Farewell" was written for Rodion Zamourouev, Moscow, who was the soloist on the premiere recording of the Violin Concerto of my grandfather, Aaron Avshalomov, which I conducted for Naxos with the Moscow Symphony.

I composed it in sympathy with the plight of people in Russia today; these are dances and songs of empathy and powerless compassion—from a stranger. It is the second work in my series written in reaction to the misery of postwar Eastern Europe and Russia, in both the Soviet period and the "liberated" present. The movements of the suite reflect small vignettes ranging across the society and the vast landscape, and eventual abandonment by a bitter observer, the last, regretful "poet"—the violinist. One inner movement moves through one day in the life of a gulag prisoner (or *zek*), from guarded waking to exhausted lights-out. The music is almost entirely tonal/modal, the style romantic, the violin writing lyrical and sometimes virtuosic.

For each movement, I also evolved an accompanying vignette, realized *after* composition:

PROLOGO: REMEMBRANCE (The Poet's Song)

I learned a story long ago, about the land. There was love, and sadness, and nostalgia and honor for the past, and pride, and we sang a sweet song better than anyone in the world.

THE SOLDIER RETURNS HOME.

A crippled soldier hobbles home from grisly duty suppressing insurrection in Chechnya. Drugs and wounds are his souvenirs. At a pause, the fiddler plays him a jumpy dance (STUMP DANCE). Onward.

THE EMPTY HOUSE.

The old place, when he returns, is deserted. No one left. Remembrance: "She used to sing a lullaby, a lovely, lovely lullaby." Gone.

TZIGARET?

A stranger offers a smoke. It is drugged. La fume. Manic escape for a while. (This movement was suppressed when the work was revised after its premiere.)

ZEK'S REVEILLE

Out of thin breathing, the faintest hint of light before day awakens the political prisoner, from deep dreamless sleep, to another grim round of survival.

ZEK'S WORK PARTY

The march of Soviet political prisoners in the postwar Siberian Gulag. In the middle, a souvenir of the war against the Nazis (and suppression of the Hungarians: Your own country's fascist oppression is just as evil, or worse). Brief lyrical remembrance of a lost love, let loose, then suppressed. ZEK'S LIGHTS-OUT—Exhaustion, breathing in wispy silent darkness, sleep.

THE LAKE BAIKAL HOEDOWN (Yakudia Yahoo!)

Life is also miserable today out among the “free” people in Siberia. The central government has abandoned us. So toss back a drink, and dance your cares away. A visiting Yankee offers some cheer with a fiddle; a local replies with a native twist. At the height of the dance, the Poet breaks off, in anguish.

FINAL REGRETS: The Last Poet's Last Song.

“If only you all had listened to me, oh, what I could have revealed, played, sung and taught you, secrets that were ours alone.” The Poet ends with an outcry, THE LAST DENIAL—but the soul of Russia is dying. Then a slow, dignified walk of acceptance and surrender to darkness. “Remember me. Remember us. Farewell.”