

Notes on the Program

by Artistic Director Nikolai Kachanov

Humans have been interested in the relationship between color and sound since ancient times, and this topic has always interested me. Aristotle, in his treatise *On the Soul*, wrote that the “colors can relate to each other like musical harmonies.” Michelangelo said “good painting is a music and a melody,” and Romain Rolland wrote “at times music becomes painting, at times painting becomes music.” Many composers connect colors with sounds in their compositions; for instance, Musorgsky titled one composition *Pictures at an Exhibition*, while Scriabin included a keyboard known as a “color organ,” which projects beams of light that change color according to the harmonic progression in his *Prometheus*. Kandinsky found the embodiment of his abstract paintings in the music of Schoenberg.

Feldman, one of the brightest examples, drew his musical inspiration from the New York school of Abstract Expressionist painters. He treated sound as a malleable medium, like paint.

Russian artist Nicholas Roerich said: “I especially feel contact with music, and just like a composer...chooses a certain key, I choose a certain range of colors.” When Roerich painted the scenery for Wagner’s *Valkyrie*, in his words, he “felt the first act in black and yellow hues.”

The contemporary Moscow composer Efrem Podgaitis, being inspired by Roerich’s paintings, wrote his *Morning Birds*. It reflects Roerich’s colors, and conveys Roerich’s freshness and transparency of the early Himalayan morning that evokes feelings of joy and delight in the viewer.

I set my cycle *Benevolence* to poems by Nicholas Roerich and dedicated it to the memory of Sina Fosdik, the first director of the Nicolas Roerich Museum in New York. East and Central Asia occupied a special place in Roerich’s life, and the centuries-old wisdom of the East is reflected in his poems. The synthesis of Eastern and Western musical traditions join together in my choral cycle, including the elements of Altai throat singing.

About Rothko Chapel

"You have a longing to forsake this world and its reality and to penetrate to a reality more native to you, to a world beyond time. You know, of course, where this other world lies hidden. It is the world of your own soul that you seek. Only within yourself exists that other reality for which you long. I can give you nothing that has not already its being within yourself."

— Hermann Hesse, from *Steppenwolf*

In my view, the "squares" of Mark Rothko are like framed fragments of infinity. By "entering" them one may create their own images, recall deeply forgotten moments of the past created by one's imagination coming into "the world of your own soul."

I feel that "Rothko Chapel" is Feldman's personal "sound recording" of what he "remembered" or "lived through". As the composer has said, this piece is autobiographical. Like the "squares" of Mark Rothko, this composition is an invitation for co-creation. This is why I think that it is better to listen to this music with closed eyes.

From a musical point, Feldman's *Rothko Chapel* is a composition in which there is virtually no influence of traditional music genres, just like the originality of the paintings by Rothko.

The textured effect of the multilayered dark squares is reflected in the complexity of the composer's harmonic musical language for the chorus. The dynamics of this composition mostly resemble coming closer, departing, or "entering," rather than purely musical crescendo and diminuendo. And there is no predictability, as in real life.

At the beginning, the timpani create the feeling of "remote space" in which we become both the audience and participants, where the chorus is not only a "sound square," but also a living being, sympathetic to the main character (viola), functioning like the chorus in ancient Greek tragedy.

The powerful emotional expressiveness of the intonation of the call and intonation of the sadness of the viola create the feeling of human drama. Like two separated souls gradually coming closer, thanks to the search and calls, but they cannot cross the threshold, reaching a dialogue, but not a duet...

In the final episode, the dark square, like a time machine, takes the composer's imagination to the time of his youth, and the composition ends with a melody that he

composed when he was only 15 years old. This touching and pure melody is intermixed with a “sound square” as a symbol of the spatial coexistence of the past and present.