

BIO

Leo Svirsky (b. 1988, USA) is a Russian-American pianist and composer currently based in the Hague, Netherlands. His music explores the instability of listening and the disorientation of memory and affect while remaining grounded in history and symbol, song and story. His varied musical interests have led to performance situations as diverse as Richmond VA's *Cat Mansion*, the Kremlin Armoury, and the Cathedral of Nantes.

Raised in the suburbs of Washington DC, at age 9, he began piano studies with the eminent Russian pedagogue Irena Orlov, herself a student of Nathan Perelman, one of the last representatives of the philosophical and free-spirited St. Petersburg (Leningrad) "school" of piano playing. The study of piano led to an interest in Soviet and post-Soviet "unofficial" culture, "forgotten" pieces from the 20s like Shostakovich's *Aphorisms*, and avant-garde music of the 70's and 80's like the *Sonatas* of Tatiana Voronina and Galina Ustvolskaya, always with a wealth of personal stories and anecdotes, most of which were not public information.

Irena was married to the preeminent Soviet musicologist, Genrikh "Henry" Orlov, one of the first to publicly discuss the 4th Symphony of Shostakovich in the USSR. Following his death in 2007, Irena gave Leo the unpublished English language manuscript of Orlov's philosophical work, *The Tree of Music*. The encounter with this book led to an even sharper divergence from the typical American musical education. The focus became the search for the music behind and beyond the score, to an interest in (other)world musics, in particular (though certainly not exclusively), north Indian dhrupad, Shona mbira music, and pan-African "Creative Music". A powerful early experience was a series of two concerts with Marshall Allen (at 95 and counting, the current leader of Sun Ra's Arkestra!), and Elliot Levin together with Dr. Thomas Stanley (author of the *Execution of Sun Ra*).

In 2009, Leo moved to Netherlands to study with the late Dutch pianist Rian de Waal at the Royal Conservatory of the Hague. De Waal was himself a collaborator of other exponents of the "St. Petersburg school." Following a chance attendance of a "Studium Generale" with John Oswald (plunderphonics!), Leo began years of composition lessons and shared philosophical reading with the Dutch composer and writer, Cornelis De Bondt, initially on Cornelis' own time.

He holds Masters Degrees in both Composition and Piano Performance from this institution, where he also studied with Martijn Padding (composition), and Ellen Corver (piano).

Living in Europe allowed Leo to further his exploration of "creative" music, recording with luminaries such as Vevyan Weston (UK) and Katt Hernandez (Sweden). It also made possible many varied collaborations with the musical community associated with Edition Wandelweiser, notably Germaine Sijstermans, Jeromos Kamphuis, Johnny Chang, Rishin Singh, Jack Callahan (Die Reihe) and many others.

Some notable recent collaborations include bringing the music of the late Belgian composer Dominique Lawalrée to the stage together with the composer (documented in Dominique Lawalrée 1.10.17), and a reworking of Christina Vantzou's *Pillar 3* together with the artist and Echo Collective.

His most recent album *River Without Banks* was released on Unseen Worlds in 2019. It's title is taken from a chapter in Genrikh Orlov's *Tree of Music*, in which he describes the experience of listening to the chant "It is to be immersed with, not operated upon, for being, not for doing... It is not expected to lead back to where it started, but instead it leads forward, to an unknown yet anticipated point in the future..."

