Tuning

Hearing is one of our instruments of self-knowledge. Are we ready to find ourselves amidst new, incomprehensible, and unfamiliar (acoustic) situations, and to attempt to attune to one another within them?

Dmitry Kurlyandsky, composer.

Tuning is a technical process through which channels of sound reproduction and perception are adjusted. The Tuning project explores ways of listening, speaking, and communicating with one another in a new, unfamiliar reality.

Work on Tuning began during the quarantine in 2020, a time during which connections were falling apart and new mechanisms of communication coming into being, when rules were constantly changing and the world seemed to have, as it were, fallen out of tune. Inevitably, questions about the possibility of artistic production in these new conditions arose.

It was against this background that artists from various generations created the series of sound installations which constitute the Tuning exhibition. These installations give rise to unexpected, differing acoustic situations, and invite us to attune to the architecture of GES-2. Their sounds seem almost to assist the futuristic, transformed historical space of the former power station come into its own in the present.
Tuning continues the exploration of the interrelation of sound and architecture that was begun by the Geometry of Now project, held in 2017 at GES-2 before the building closed for reconstruction. The works of artists who have shaped Russia’s contemporary music scene—Eduard Artemyev, Dmitry Vlasik, Oleg Gudachiev, Darya Zvezdina, Vangelino Currentzis and musicAeterna, and Vladimir Rannev—enter into dialogue with Renzo Piano’s architecture, experimenting with its harmonies and dissonances and encouraging us to physically and intuitively experience the space, now free of the material traces of previous exhibitions. This said, Tuning is not confined by the walls of GES-2: the artists’ projects rather seek acoustic means of breaking through them, of moving beyond their bounds.

Like the exhibition of sound installations, the Tuning concert programme proposes a highly diverse sound experience: from Alexei Lubimov’s reconstruction of an 1840s acoustic atmosphere to the concert-performance of the director, composer, and singer Vladislavs Nastavševs to the benefit performance of the Questa Musica Ensemble directed by Philipp Chizhevsky.

The culmination of the Tuning concert programme will be the Moscow Contemporary Music Ensemble’s performance, All Falls Silent, in which works written especially for GES-2 by Anton Svetlichny and Boris Filanovsky will be heard for the first time.
A long tradition lies behind Tuning's acoustic experiments. Moving through a confined space, sound is reflected from a multitude of surfaces. When designing a building for musical performances, an architect imagines the possible trajectories and reflections of sound as it travels through space. Analogously, a musician sensitive to architecture will be conscious of a building's features in his creation of a unique acoustic environment.

The interaction of music and architecture began in the theatre of Ancient Greece. The architecture of Greek theatres was governed by acoustics: the space for dancers and musicians—the orchestra—was positioned in such a way as to allow the stands for viewers to double as integrated sound amplifiers. In Greek theatres, music enjoyed pride of place. It dictated the overall shape of performances, broke the action into parts and commented upon it, and the physical presence of musicians enhanced the dramatic impact of the actors on the audience. The Greek theatre would go on to become the model for any theatre or opera stage.

By contrast, during the Gothic and Early Renaissance period, music retreated into invisibility. Its primary place of performance was the church, where it formed part of a mystical ritual. The sacred nature of this music meant it was hidden from sight. In Catholic churches, for example, the organ and the choir galleries are located behind the worshipers, and the architecture of churches is designed in such a way as to allow music to fill the space while remaining invisible. The very structure of the mass calls for specific spatial conditions: antiphons (the alternating chant of two choirs) and call-and-response (dialogue between the leader and the choir) require participants to be separated in space. In Orthodox churches, the singers are hidden in the chancel—they too, in other words, are concealed in a sacred space.

We find a profound engagement with architecture in the work of the French-Flemish composer Guillaume Dufay (1397–1474). In 1436, Dufay composed a detailed vocal piece, the Nuper Rosarum Flores, for the consecration of Florence’s Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. In accordance with the rules of the time, different voices sing at different tempos, and the ratio of these tempos reprise the 6:4:2:3 proportions of Brunelleschi’s dome.

Composers in the High Renaissance deepened their forbears’ exploration of and engagement with their architectural contexts. Notable in this respect were Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli, masters of the Venetian School which formed around Venice’s St. Mark’s Basilica in the late sixteenth century. The plan of St. Mark’s was designed to represent a cross and included a number of galleries and niches in which the Gabriels placed wind instrument players and the choir. The audience sat below and followed as the sound moved from one gallery to another. The most frequently used musical device was then the echo, in which the same musical phrase is reproduced from several different points in space. Five hundred years later, Igor Stravinsky would return to St. Mark’s architecture, composing his Canticum Sacrum oratorio—a piece for a choir and several instrumental groups separated in space—especially for the Venetian basilica.
An attentiveness to architecture is also noticeable among the composers of the First Viennese School. In one of his letters, Haydn refuses to stage an opera at a Prague theatre because of its ‘unsuitable acoustics.’ Haydn always began his late quartets with a loud chord, and the reason for this was that they were performed at London’s enormous new concert halls. A new class of rich bourgeois music admirers had appeared, and with them a demand for bigger, grander spaces, spaces which in turn demanded new acoustic content. Mozart was probably the first among his contemporaries to work with what we would now call surround sound: in his Notturno in D major for four orchestras, four identical orchestras form a cross around the conductor and function as an analogue reverb by repeating and intercepting fragments of musical phrases from each other.

In the nineteenth century, the orchestra lost the preeminent position it had enjoyed in Greek theatre and was hidden away in the orchestra pit. Richard Wagner brought mystery into the opera house by returning musicians to invisibility, almost completely concealing them under the stage to prevent them distracting spectators from the operatic action.

In the twentieth century, space truly became a part of musical scores. Composers almost seemed to compete with one another in their successive attempts to escape the confines of the concert hall, and Russian Futurists were among the most radical in their attempts. By enlisting bus and car horns, factory sirens, cannons, and the foghorns of the Soviet flotilla in the Caspian Sea, Arseny Avraamov’s 1922 Symphony of Factory Sirens turned the city of Baku into a space of sound. More than a century later, in 2011, Boris Filanovsky would take inspiration from Avraamov in his work Voicity, a concert for building machinery, armored vehicles, military trucks, one soprano, and four winds. Voicity did to the city of Schlanders what Symphony of Factory Sirens had done to the city of Baku, transforming an abandoned military base into a sounding space and expanding the orchestra to include two armoured carriers, a compressor with a jackhammer, and a motorcycle. Filanovsky’s Arkhitekton Theta sound sculpture, which was composed especially for the pseudo-futurist Plywood Theatre—a red architectural object constructed in the nineteenth-century Bolshoi Drama Theatre in 2019—was somewhat more sophisticated. The first of Arkhitekton Theta’s two parts had the audience move around the plywood wedge, which housed the musicians and the choir, while the second had the sound move around the audience.

The twentieth century saw the rise of an entirely new profession: composer and architect combined. Iannis Xenakis, a French composer of Greek origin, would become one of the most notable examples of this kind of synthesis. He assisted Le Corbusier for many years, and together they designed the Philips pavilion for the 1958 Brussels World Fair—a remarkably shaped building featuring an overlay of folds and curves. These curves were the same as those Xenakis had used for the score of his 1955 Metastaseis, an orchestral piece. Edgard Varèse, a classic of the French avant-garde, created his Poème électronique especially for the Philips pavilion, composing the work with the building’s acoustic features in mind.

Xenakis and Le Corbusier were followed by other musical–architectural tandems: Stockhausen provided both the sketches and the electronic music for the German pavilion—a building
in the shape of a perfect sphere with fifty loudspeakers—at Expo ’70 in Osaka, which the architect Fritz Bornemann then brought to life. In 1984, Renzo Piano (who would go on to oversee the reconstruction of GES–2) designed an “ark” with a choir and reciters on its “decks” for Luigi Nono’s ‘tragedy of listening’ (tragedia dell’ascolto), Prometeo. The ark was erected inside Venice’s San Lorenzo church—a gesture into which one might read an attempt to lend a lost sacral quality to Nono’s new music.

Contemporary Russian music continues to engage with the principles of Futurist architecture. In 2006, Dmitry Kurlyandsky composed his Counter-Relief for the Ensemble, which he based on the avant-garde artist Vladimir Tatlin’s architectural experiments. Alexey Sysoev’s Above Moons (2009)—a piece for voice, ensemble, and electronic instruments—drew inspiration from Georgy Krutikov’s 1928 The City of the Future (in which Krutikov proposes flying cities as solutions to limited arable land and a rapidly growing population). Radical approaches to the integration of architecture and music can also be found in the works of Vladimir Gorlinsky, Alexander Chernyshkov, Kirill Shirkov, and Marina Poleukhina: many of their pieces can only be performed in the venues they were composed for. Gorlinsky’s Spatial Composition #3 (2015–2018) is perhaps the most monumental of these pieces. Spatial Composition #3 engaged with the entire space of the ZIL Culture Centre and its surrounding park. All its elements were in movement—performers as well as audience—the sound moving in and out of the building, breaking the confines of the space before returning to recapture it. Another important example of spatialisation in contemporary Russian music is the duo of Vladimir Rannev (whose Tuning and Kitezh installations are on display at GES–2) and the artist Marina Alekseeva: their piece In Chocolate (2019) was conceived for the library of the Ca’ Foscari University in Venice, while the Ready to Repeat installation was created in 2019 for the Fort Constantine in Saint Petersburg.

Sound art and sound sculptures designed for specific spaces form a particular chapter in the history of musical interpretations of architecture. Over the last two decades, the support of contemporary art institutions has allowed this kind of work to develop a strong tradition in Russia. An important catalyst in this has been the Archstoyanie Festival in Nikola–Lenivets, where musicians work on sound objects together with artists and architects, transforming the park’s rural landscape into a work of contemporary art. Important figures here include Dmitry Morozov (known under his alias ::vtol::), the author of a number of sound sculptures and sound machines; the pianist and sound artist Petr Aidu, who often creates complex sound sculptures from fragments of traditional musical instruments—regular pianos, for instance; and Sasha Pas, the author of Playtronica, a project based on interaction with sensors and tactile engagement with objects and technologies.

In 2017, before closing for reconstruction, GES–2 hosted a major sound art programme entitled Geometry of Now, curated by the prominent British electronic musician Mark Fell. Among Geometry of Now’s participants were Dmitry Mazurov, a composer and video artist, and Ivan Bushuev, a flutist and electronic musician. Together with the cellist Vasily Stepanov, Mazurov attempted to synthesize the live sounds of performance with the rolls of
electric tones produced by robots. Bushuev, whose activities have long gone beyond academic performance, based his nerest project on audio recordings of urban spaces and electronic music. In 2013, Bushuev began a blog called Zvuka Sreda—a diary of urban sounds. nerest might be understood as Zvuka Sreda’s diary notes remixed into a single sound stream. The space of GES-2 was far more than a decorative element in Bushuev and Mazurov’s works: both of them included recordings of the building’s inner space.

Contemporary music has long been more than just sound. It invites authors to engage with architecture in the same way they do with timbre or rhythm. Today, any truly modern composer is also in some way an architect, and architecture—whether it is pre-existing or designed especially for a given composition—is as important a parameter of musical thinking as is, for instance, harmony.
Vangelino Currentzis
Resonance

Resonance is a twenty-minute modular piece written by Vangelino Currentzis and performed by the musicAeterna orchestra under the direction of Teodor Currentzis in Dom Radio, Saint Petersburg. The installation was conceived especially for GES-2’s Prospekt and Platform, and a special array was developed for the recording. Twenty-four musicians were placed at the same distance from one another as the speakers used to broadcast the composition on GES-2’s Prospekt would be.

Resonance was to have taken its final form upon installation at the House of Culture. It was significantly reworked as a consequence of the pandemic. The version of the installation exhibited here was created in anticipation of a meeting between GES-2 and the artist.

Darya Zvezdina
I must go seek some dewdrops here

In her installation, I must go seek some dewdrops here, Darya Zvezdina works with the rarest timbres of the human voice, which are usually barely audible. Here, they have been made into a piece of music for four soloists, first recorded in studio, then digitally processed.

Such sounds might be made by the spirits of the trees in GES-2’s Forest; emphatically impersonal at first, they gradually turn into a voice that hints at the presence of some fragile, humanlike creature. Thanks to multi-channel playback, sound arrays of various volumes and durations move around the Forest. They gather into a dense cloud and then disperse, randomly following on from one another.

Darya Zvezdina calls this vibrant organic structure which changes shape in space and time an “acoustic mycelium.”

“I don’t think I ever seriously wondered where the boundaries of the concept of ‘music’ may lie,” she notes, “for me, music is everything that sounds. Or literally everything, if needed.” Her 60-minute piece of music is repeated many times in different versions and projections, transforming the Forest into an endlessly renewing soundscape.

Darya Zvezdina
(Chelyabinsk, 1990)
is a composer and improviser. She studied at the Ural State Mussorgsky Conservatory (2011–2013) and the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory (2013–2018). She has won numerous awards for her compositions, both in Russia and internationally. She was a composer–in-residence at HELLEAU—European Centre for the Arts (2020).

Andrey Guryanov
(Moscow, 1987)
is an artist, sound engineer, and composer. He studied at the Saint Petersburg State University of Film and Television and the Rodchenko Art School in Moscow. He works with sound installations and with the sound for film, theatre, and performance.

Arina Zvereva
(Moscow, 1978)
is a conductor and singer. She is the founder and leader of the N’Caged Vocal Ensemble and the choirmaster of the Stanislavsky Electrotheatre. She graduated from the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory. She won a Golden Mask National Theatre Award in 2021.

N’Caged Vocal Ensemble specialize in contemporary music. They collaborate closely with Russian and foreign composers and work with the Stanislavsky Electrotheatre on a permanent basis.
Vladimir Rannev's Tuning is composed of 115 final notes taken from 115 musical works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Rannev's Tuning is founded on a paradox. We are taught to value musical compositions of the Romantic era, which stretches from Mozart to Maler, for their inimitability and the uniqueness of their artistic ideas. Yet a common thread runs through all these compositions—their final notes. And although one would hardly argue final notes to lack signs of authorial will, fantasy, or inspiration, we nevertheless tend to expect one and the same thing from them: a major or minor chord in a limited number of dynamics, registers, and timbres. This is how mechanisms of collective memory function, endowing all of us with a symbolic language of perception, the ability to distinguish between sense and nonsense.

One way of understanding the history of music might be to regard it as a gradual tuning of the collective auditory experience. Relatedly, the history of humanity can be understood as a gradual attunement of people to one another as well as to that imperceptible thing which, as Egor Letov sang, “is not to be heard by ears, not to be understood by the mind.” In the words of Vladimir Rannev, “the final note is found on the border of the attainable, after which there is only silence.”

Vladimir Rannev
(Moscow, 1970)
is a composer. He graduated from the Rimsky-Korsakov Saint Petersburg State Conservatory and the Cologne University of Music. Rannev won the Sergey Kuryokhin Award in 2013 (for his 2012 opera, Two Acts), the Casta Diva Russian Opera Award in 2017, and a Golden Mask National Theatre Award in 2019 (his 2017 opera Prose won him the award for Best Composer). In 2019, Rannev took part in the DK Zattere project with his sound installation, Kitezh (V–A–C Zattere, Venice). In collaboration with Marina Alekseeva, Rannev is the author the installations In Chocolate (2019), Ready to Repeat (2019), and The Whole Shebang (2020).
Over the course of his long career, Eduard Artemyev has written a remarkable number of melodies across a vast range of genres. Anthology, which Artemyev put together for GES-2 in collaboration with V–A–C’s sound director, Damien Quintard, brings together pop-ballads and electronic soundscapes, experiments with the Soviet ANS synthesizer, and the scores of Andrei Tarkovsky’s Solaris (1972), Mirror (1975), and Stalker (1980). The pieces selected for Tuning are among Artemyev’s more rarely-performed, unremembered works, with many of them practically unknown to a wider audience.

The works in Anthology interact with the architecture of GES-2, transporting listeners to different worlds and faraway places. Re-recorded and re-mixed compositions from the cartoon A Girl and a Dolphin (1979), from the war drama Hot Summer in Kabul (1983), and from other Soviet films that have almost fallen out of public memory will ring through GES-2 in a completely new way. The multi-channel installation positions listeners at the very centre of the music, where, not unlike composers, they find themselves explorers of new territories, on the threshold of great discoveries.

Eduard Artemyev

(Novosibirsk, 1937)

is a composer. He is the author of the scores to many classic films—Tarkovsky’s Solaris, Mirror, and Stalker; Nikita Mikhalkov’s An Unfinished Piece for Mechanical Piano (1977); and Burnt by the Sun (1994); Karen Shakhnazarov’s Courier (1986)—and cartoons, including Rozaiya Zelma’s A Girl and a Dolphin. He was a pioneer of Soviet electronic and electro-acoustic music.
One of the foundational myths of Russian culture—the legend of the city of Kitezh—dates back to the Tatar-Mongol era. It tells the story of how the besieged city of Kitezh was able, through the prayers of its inhabitants, to bury itself in the waters of Lake Svetloyar, and so escape Khan Batu's invading forces. Lake Svetloyar, which is located in the Nizhny Novgorod region, remains a destination for pilgrimages to this day. It is believed that standing on its banks, one can still hear the bell tolls of the churches that sunk into its depths many hundreds of years ago.

At the turn of the twentieth century, a time during which eschatological feeling was particularly strong, the legend of Kitezh grew into a national symbol. Rimsky-Korsakov's opera The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya (1904) is imbued with premonitions of impending catastrophe, of the collapse of the usual order of things, of the rise of a new and unpredictable reality.

In compositions written in 2019 for V–A–C Foundation's project DK Zattere, Vladimir Rannev deconstructs and rethinks the musical material of Rimsky-Korsakov's opera through the help of electronic sound processing. The static format of the sound installation is consonant with the stopped time in the sunken city, where, as Rimsky-Korsakov's birds of paradise sing, "the eternal moment has come." To Rannev's mind, the city of Kitezh is above all an acoustic phenomenon: invisible, but clearly audible.

The invisible islands out of which the Saint Petersburg–based composer, theorist, and improviser Oleg Gudachev has composed his Archipelago are soundscapes recorded at different ends of the earth. Archipelago's two main "islands" are an eight-channel audio-recording of the largest hydroelectric power station on earth—the Three Gorges Dam in China—and a six-channel recording of the sound of New York City which features a solo for a slowed down police siren. Archipelago is Gudachev's first venture into the genre of sound installation. Previously, he has typically composed dramaturgical works that unfold in time and have clearly distinguishable beginnings, middles, and ends. This makes Archipelago unusual in as far as it can be listened to from any moment, and as many times as one likes.

For Gudachev, Tuning is a natural continuation of many years of experimentation with spatial music—a genre founded on the interaction of sound and concrete spaces. Gudachev features here as both a composer and a multi-instrumentalist, working at the juncture of acoustic and electronic music to produce a work that is almost symphonic in its complexity and volumes.

Oleg Gudachev
(Leningrad, 1988)
is a composer and improvisational multi-instrumentalist. He graduated with a degree in Composition from the Rimsky-Korsakov Saint Petersburg State Conservatory (2014) and is a post-graduate student at the Vaganova Ballet Academy. He is a co-founder and the artistic director of the (instead) ensemble musical collective. In 2020, he was resident artist at HELLERAU – European Centre for the Arts and the winner of the Aksenov Family Foundation's Russian Music 2.0 prize. He has written the music for productions at many Russian theatres, including the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg and Moscow's Tolstonogov Bolshoi Drama Theatre.

Vladimir Rannev
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Dmitry Vlasik’s sound installation for GES-2 House of Culture has a long history.

In 2015, as part of V–A–C Foundation’s GES-2 Data project, the director Vsevolod Lisovsky recorded conversations with former power station employees. The poet Andrey Rodionov then thought up a means of transforming these conversations into a poetic work, or “poetic verbatim.”

This poetic verbatim went on to serve as the basis for the libretto to GES-2 Opera. The opera follows the boiler worker, Ilya Vlasov, as he recalls his daily routine, the process of checking equipment, an accident in which a number of plant workers were killed, and explains why he and his colleagues had such difficulty letting go of the past. Dmitry Vlasik’s score, written with Alexandra Serikova, centres itself on the complex sound palette produced by the hum of the turbines of the GES-1 power plant on the Raushskaya Embankment, which once formed a joined enterprise with GES-2.

These same turbines served as the foundation for Vlasik’s new sound installation, GES-2 Opera. The hum of the turbines was put through a thorough acoustic analysis and reproduced with the help of classical instruments—cello and voice. In this way, sounds produced as by-products of the generation of electricity—a kind of slag, if you will—have come to form the basis for artistic expression.

GES-2 Opera premiered in 2019, in the constructivist building of the Moscow Energy Institute, where many of GES-2’s employees would once have studied. Today, echoes of this production, akin to acoustic spectres, will sound out in the renovated power station’s Parking.

Dmitry Vlasik (Moscow, 1981) is a composer, performer, and the author of a number of sound performances. He has written music for productions by Dmitry Volkostrelov, Marat Gatsalov, Elena Gremina, Kirill Serebrennikov and Andrey Stadnikov. He is a soloist at the Moscow Philharmonic Society and a member of the Moscow Contemporary Music Ensemble.
What form can concerts take today? What relation does tradition have to modernity in this format? As it searches for answers to this question, Tuning runs the gamut of genres and forms, balancing at the boundary that separates old and new, spiritual and secular, between individual and collective feelings and experiences.

The protagonist of Alexei Lubimov’s solo performance is an 1848 Érard piano from the collection of Alexey Stavitsky. Performing works by Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin, Lubimov attempts to reproduce the conditions in which art of the turn of the nineteenth century would have been perceived in the late Romantic era. Can one compare the perception of classical music in the mid-nineteenth century with how it is perceived today?

The concert might seem a fundamentally secular genre, and the sacred the lot of past art. The musicians of the INTRADA Vocal Ensemble and the Questa Musica Ensemble, however, question this assertion: their programmes trace a line of spiritual searching from the High Renaissance (Palestrina and Monteverdi) to the Baroque (Lotti and Bach) to the Romantic era (Brahms) before concluding in the contemporary with the world premiere of Alexey Sysoev’s Mass.

In an era of the comingling of genres, the concert stage can seem the last stronghold of “pure music”. But is this always the case, and where does the line separating concert from musical theatre and performance lie today? The finale of Joseph Haydn’s Farewell symphony (1772) has performers leave the stage one after another as it gradually falls into darkness. This first and notable example of instrumental theatre is joined in Tuning’s playbill by Vladislavs Nastavševs’s Lyrical scenes, a work at the junction between solo concert and solo performance.
GES-2 House of Culture brings together exhibition halls, a library, a cinema and concert hall, artist workshops, studios, and residencies, shops, a restaurant, cafes, a playground, and an auditorium for public educational events. The purpose of the House of Culture is to acquaint a wide audience with contemporary culture and encourage visitors to actively take part in its shaping.

GES-2 is the main site of the V–A–C Foundation in Russia. The Foundation works with Russian artists to expand the cultural space by holding exhibitions, publishing books, and running educational initiatives.

**Curator:**
Dmitry Renansky

**Composers:**
Eduard Artemyev, Dmitry Vlasik, Oleg Gudachev, Darya Zvezdina (featuring Andrey Guryanov), Vangelino
Currentzis, Sergei Nevsky, Vladimir Rannev, Anton Svetlichny, Alexey Sysoev, Boris Filanovsky

**Performers:**
Ekaterina Antonenko, Teodor Currentzis, Arina Zvereva, Alexei Lubimov, Yulia Mignunova, Vladislavs Nastavsevs, Aleksandra Serikova, Philipp Chizhevsky, Moscow Contemporary Music Ensemble, Intrada Vocal Ensemble, musicAeterna orchestra, N'Caged Vocal Ensemble, Questa Musica Ensemble

**Sound director:**
Damien Quintard

**Producers:**
Ekaterina Arkhipova, Marina Badudina, Ksenia Lukina, Alexandra Maleeva, Ksenia Makharitskaya

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