

As part of anti-Russian hysteria, Dutch venue cancels scheduled concert by renowned pianist Elisabeth Leonskaya

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The Muziekgebouw concert hall in the southern Dutch city of Eindhoven has canceled a performance scheduled for December 4 by the Soviet-Austrian pianist Elisabeth Leonskaya (or Leonskaja). The cancellation is part of the anti-Russian hysteria sweeping European governments and political and cultural establishments in particular.

In its dishonest and misleading statement, Muziekgebouw officials claim that the guidelines of the industry association VSCD (Association of Directors of Theaters and Concert Halls) leave them “no choice.”

These recommendations, among other things, indicate that Russian and Belarusian artists are welcome if they have not openly expressed support for a special military operation on Ukraine.

There is no indication that Leonskaya, who conspicuously refrains from commenting on political events, has offered support to the Putin government or its war effort in Ukraine. Nonetheless, Muziekgebouw continues:

Despite her Russian background, she was not born in Russia and also has Austrian citizenship. Although she does not live in Russia, she has nevertheless chosen to perform in Moscow, where the theatre where she is performing has now decided to make tickets available free of charge to members of the army and their families.

The venue management goes on disingenuously to assert that while it understands that “this will disappoint music lovers ... the grief caused by the military conflict on Ukraine is our priority at the moment.” Pardon us if we remain

entirely unconvinced.

The cancellation has everything to do with Dutch and European bourgeois politics and machinations.

As the WSWS commented at the time of the snap Dutch election in October:

The traditional workers’ parties and the nominal left [in the Netherlands], long integrated into the machinery of capitalist rule, are utterly discredited and incapable of offering any alternative. Their complicity in decades of austerity, NATO militarism in the war against Russia, and tacit support for Israel’s genocide in Gaza has further alienated their social base, leaving a political vacuum exploited by the far right.

And further:

The Netherlands also remains a chief frontline state in NATO’s military build-up against Russia and in support of Israel’s war and occupation in Gaza. The outgoing cabinet increased defence spending beyond 2 percent of GDP and expanded arms exports despite mass anti-war “Red Line” protests.

This has everything to do with the Muziekgebouw decision, which obviously contradicts its claims to stand “for connection through music” and a “mission” of bringing “people together by offering a stage for a broad musical diversity and cross-pollination with other art forms. In a changing world, where cohesion is becoming increasingly important, we believe that music can unite people and cultures, transcending boundaries.” So much for all of that,

as soon as the pressure from the establishment is exerted.

Leonskaya has merely been caught in the reactionary crossfire.

She has had an extraordinary life and career, and is often described as “one of the outstanding representatives of the Soviet piano school.”

One biographer explains that she was born in 1945 in Tbilisi,

the capital of what was then the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Both her parents had moved there from Odessa (Ukraine), which had been occupied by German and Romanian forces from 1941 until 1944. In the first months of occupation alone some 280,000 people, many of them Jews, were deported and/or assassinated.

Her mother, who had studied piano and voice, but gave up thoughts of a musical career because her parents died and she had to support herself, “was forced to flee to Georgia, leaving behind little more than a house buried in ashes and carrying all her papers and personal belongings.” Her half-Russian, half-Polish father, a lawyer, “also fled from the anti-Semitic crusade. His first wife died in a concentration camp.”

Leonskaya once told an interviewer,

I started at music school when I was seven and continued from there without stopping. I was at music school for five years and then at the conservatory. And then at 18 I moved to Moscow. ... I wanted to continue and I wanted to learn new things. I must say that Tbilisi is really a very nice place. It has a nice tradition for piano music with old connections to St. Petersburg and to Moscow. And really now you see how many wonderful pianists have come from there. But in my time, I was absolutely sure I had to change to Moscow to continue.

Leonskaya was considered a child prodigy, giving her first concerts as early as 11 years old. The Philadelphia Chamber Music Society observes that

While still a student at the Moscow Conservatory, she won prizes in the prestigious Enescu, Marguerite

Long and Queen Elizabeth international piano competitions. Elisabeth Leonskaya’s musical development was shaped or influenced to a decisive degree by her collaboration with [famed Soviet pianist] Sviatoslav Richter. The master recognized her exceptional talent and fostered her development not only through teaching and giving her advice, but also by inviting her to play numerous duets with him. The musical partnership and personal friendship between Sviatoslav Richter and Elisabeth Leonskaya endured until Richter’s death in 1997.

This is Elisabeth Leonskaya and Sviatoslav Richter rehearsing in the 1990s.

She left the Soviet Union in 1978 and settled in Vienna. She has Austrian citizenship. She continues to perform and record, paying particular attention to the nurturing of younger pianists.

Earlier this year, Leonskaya’s concert at Wigmore Hall in London produced a glowing review from Christopher Axworthy. Calling her “La Leonskaya,” one of the “great dames of the piano,” along with Soviet-trained pianists [Tatiana] Nikolaeva, [Eliso] Virsaladze and [Oxana] Yablonskaya, Axworthy referred to these “four great ladies and master musicians” who were

blessed with an early discipline which is that of the true kapellmeister, where music has been planted from an early age into their very being. A technical mastery where the fingers have been moulded into the keys as they have grown, with a limpet-like rubbery flexibility that can dig deep into the keys without any hardness. A musicianship that can allow them to transpose or improvise as Mozart, Bach or Beethoven would have been expected to do.

The decision by the Muziekgebouw is not only vicious and stupid, and hypocritical, it is dangerous. Whatever the venue’s officials think they are doing, they have become entangled in the campaign to justify war against Russia and a new imperialist slaughter with incalculable consequences.



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