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Vladislav Andreyevich Zolotaryov (1942–1975) – an outline biography

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to acquaint the reader with the personage of an outstanding Russian composer and bayanist Vladislav Zolotaryov. Tragically deceased at the age of only 33, the artist was an exceptional figure. He was a great innovator who changed the face of the accordion, using this instrument to the limit of its technical and sound possibilities. The novel and almost orchestral method of treating the accordion, which he initiated in the 1970s, not only had a tremendous impact on the work of the young generation of composers, such as: Aleksander Nagayev, Vladimir Zubicki and Viacheslav Siemionov, but was also noticed and appreciated by the eminent and already recognized composer Zofia Gubaydulina. Yet, while Zolotaryov's output is widely known and appreciated by the present-day accordionists, his life still hides many unresolved secrets and doubts about the causes of his death. In the absence of any Polish language studies on the subject, the composer's biography is well worth a closer look. The information collected about the details of the composer's life, as well as the opinions of people connected with him, may help to understand the composer's complicated personality. Zolotaryov's innovative oeuvre, despite innumerable interpretations, is invariably interesting not only for the performers. It is still an important determinant for other composers of accordion music. Zolotaryov's compositions, such as: *Suita kameralna* (en. *Chamber Suite*) *Partita No. 1*, *Sonata No. 2*, or collections of miniatures included in *Suity dziecięce* (en. *Children's Suites*) have permanently entered the repertoire of contemporary performers. His *magnum opus* – *Sonata No. 3* – is still one of the most important musical pieces in accordion literature.

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The source of this article are the letters and diaries written by V. Zolotaryov and the composer's biography by Inna Klause¹, as well as memoirs by Nikolai Liesnoy², Vitaly Šentalinskij³ and Fridrich Lips⁴.

Keywords: contemporary accordion music, Vladislav Andreyevich Zolotaryov.

Vladislav Andreyevich Zolotaryov was born in 1942 into the family of the officer Andrey Antonovich and his wife Agrafena Grigorievna. His birthplace was a small settlement which was an important military base, located in Khabarovsk territory, on the De-Kastri bay by the Sea of Japan. His life began in the heat of World War II. The day of his birth – 13 September – coincided with the day of birth of Arnold Schönberg, the composer who had a significant influence on Zolotaryov's later work. He spent the first years of his life in his birthplace, in the Far East of the country. Vladislav's later childhood was a journey in the farthest reaches of the USSR, where he spent a lot of time alone with the surrounding wilderness, away from the big cities. In 1947 he set off to Gudauta in Abkhazia, and a year later he moved with his grandmother to Ust-Nera in Yakutia, a region with an extremely cold and harsh climate. In 1953, the family settled in Yessentuki in the northern Caucasus just to return to Ust-Nera in 1955. Frequent relocations meant covering huge distances of several thousand kilometers. This is shown in Figure 1.

Vladislav started his musical education quite late. At the age of 11, he was given a bayan by his father, but at first he would play it only by ear and improvised. However, he quickly realized how important music was to him. He wrote in his *Diary of a 14-year-old young man*:

For the last few days, I have been deeply impressed by Bach's music. I've decided to write a large multi-movement piece for choir and orchestra, and I'm working with passion on the *Capriccio for violin* [...] Good heavens – no one wants to believe that I was born for music, and I need this faith so much [own translation]⁵.

Other entries in the diary attest to an extraordinary maturity of the young man, aware of his place in the future and the role he wishes to play in music:

The bayan! How fortunate it is that I started to learn to play this instrument. I feel immeasurable strength within me, although I have to work a lot. Contemporary music lacks fire, greatness and pride. People have lost everything that was better, which laid the basis for the majestic antiquity. No, I will write in a different manner⁶ [own translation].

¹ I. Klause, *W. Zolotariow – biografia*, source: www.vzinfo.com [accessed 25 July 2009].

² N. Lesnoj, *O Vladislave Zolotareve*, [in:] *Vladislav Zolotarev. Sud'ba i Muza*, sost. P. Serot'uk, Navčalna kniga – Bogdan, Ternopol 2010, p. 10–20.

³ V. Šentalinskij, *Vladislav Zolotarev: žizn' i sudba*, [in:] *Vladislav Zolotarev. Sud'ba i Muza*, p. 34–54.

⁴ F. Lips, *Kažetsâ, eto bylo včera...*, [in:] *Vladislav Zolotarev. Sud'ba i Muza*, p. 21–23.

⁵ V. Šentalinskij, op. cit., p. 34–54.

⁶ Ibidem.

Regrettably, at the same time were perceptible the dark sides of his psyche, which is evidenced by the words:

I am plagued by thoughts of death. I wonder how much longer I will live? [...] Music! It also gives me no peace in my sleep, it haunts me everywhere⁷ [own translation].

A great and passionate love for music, but also a conscious alienation from the surrounding world of normal everyday life and constant thinking about death – these are the leitmotifs of his biography.

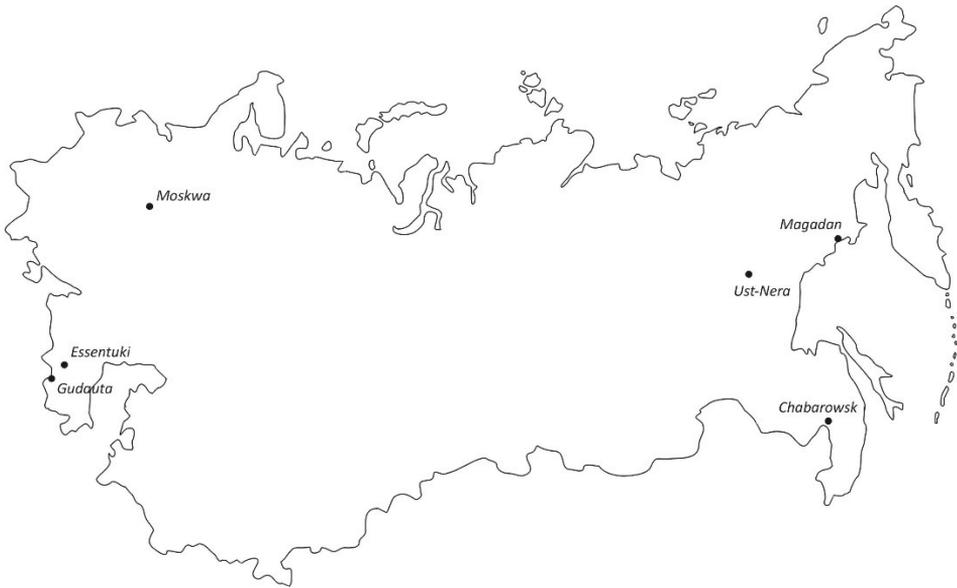


Figure 1. Outline map of the USSR

In 1958, Zolotaryov's family moved from Ust-Nera to Magadan. This town, situated by the Sea of Okhotsk, was a symbol of the Soviet system of forced labor camps. The liquidation of the camps in the Kolyma region was completed only a year earlier. The town, inhabited mostly by former political prisoners, was full of traces of its harrowing past. The remains of the barracks, watch towers, omnipresent barbed wire and other images of the inhuman system must have strongly imprinted themselves on the sensitive personality of Zolotaryov. At the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, with the air of freedom, many educated people came to Magadan. When a secondary music school was opened in the city in 1960, Zolotaryov, having completed a preparatory course of less than a year, was one of its first students. It was Nikolai Alexandrovich Liesnoy, who came there from Kishinev, Moldova, that became his bayan teacher. Apart from learning at school, Vladislav spent a lot of time on self-education. He would read available world

⁷ Ibidem.

literature and explore philosophical ideas. He was absorbed in the specific atmosphere of the city, which despite its infamous past and a great distance away from the big world, was a place of animated cultural life. Among the former political prisoners, there was a lot of intelligentsia. At that time, Vladislav also strove to continuously create music. At the beginning, though, he was annoyed by the limited possibilities of the bayan – the preset triads in the bass-chord manual. As he did not have any other instrument, he composed in a traditional way for accordion and piano accordion combining folk and Romantic elements. He also wrote compositions for violin and piano, hoping to find a new sonority for his own instrument in this way. In 1963 Yuri Ivanovich Kazakov presented a bayan with a melodic manual at a concert in Magadan. In the possibilities of this instrument, Zolotaryov saw the future of the accordion - he saw its potential related to the application of the 20th century compositional techniques, which could become the key to elaborating a distinctive sound language. His further plans to continue his education, which he intended to pursue in Leningrad, were thwarted by his duty to perform military service.

Three years spent in the army (1963–1966) was an extremely difficult period in Zolotaryov's life. With such an individual and highly sensitive personality, he was unable to find his place in a situation where obeying orders was the basis of everyday existence. It was impossible to avoid conflicts, for which he was often punished. When he was forbidden to write his own music, he composed soldiers' songs. He compensated for the lack of opportunities for musical development with an increased work on his own personality. He spent his free time on further self-education and reading books about music. Great composers became to him the embodiment of individuality and subjectivity, features that contradicted the ideology of the communist system surrounding him. In an environment of permanent disregard for art, he was strengthened by correspondence with his friends. In one of his letters to Yuri Grigorevich Yastrebov, a bayan teacher at the music school in Vladivostok, he described his encounter with *Doctor Faustus* by Thomas Mann. This novel turned out to be extremely important for his further creativity, and it was how Zolotaryov discovered the dodecaphony created by Arnold Schönberg, about which he wrote in a letter to Y. Yastrebov:

I read a lot. *Memoirs of Skriabin* by Plekhanov are very interesting. Finally, I've read *Doctor Faustus* by Mann. The tragedy of the artist! It occurred to me that Schönberg's atonal system – the great future of music. Actually, all great music was expressed in “pure spheres”⁸ [own translation].

After returning to Magadan, he experienced moments of despair, he even considered giving up further studies. He realized with pain how much of a destructive effect on him had had his stay in the army and how it had inhibited his musical

⁸ V. Zolotarev – Ū. Āastrebovu, *Usurijsk*, 4.09.1966, [in:] Vladislav Zolotarev. *Sud'ba i Muza*, p. 62.

development. However, when he received money from his parents for an instrument with a melodic manual, fresh energy entered him. He was increasingly composing and constantly working on his own development. The circle of the Club of Creative Intelligentsia which strongly influenced the shaping of his personality, was of great importance in Zolotaryov's life. Officially, the meetings were held in the Palace of Culture in Magadan, and unofficially in the houses of its members. In the circle of writers, musicians and other artists, the composer could consider new ideas, connected not only with art, but also with politics or philosophy. Despite his apparent outgoing nature toward people, Vladislav remained confined in his own world. The writer and friend Vitaly Šentalinskij recalls his first encounter with Slava, as he used to call Zolotaryov:

Slava immediately turned to us, he clearly lacked creative contacts. The thing that struck me during the first meeting, when he took the poems of Japanese poets to read, which were very popular among the intelligentsia at the time, was an overwhelming concentration and gravity. He seemed to have never had fun in his soul and did not fool around, as if he did not trust this world and kept his distance from it. He was constantly withdrawn within himself, it is rare to find such devotion to art. His clearly expressed awareness of his own uniqueness even annoyed others, it seemed like delusions of grandeur⁹ [own translation].

In the Club of Creative Intelligentsia, Zolotaryov had the opportunity to come into contact with unpublished works. Forbidden compositions as well as texts by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Boris Pasternak, among others, circulated underground. The club's meetings were often attended by former political prisoners living in the city. The accounts of their own past experiences gave a terrifying testimony about the communist regime. This activity was very risky because just for possessing forbidden works one could go to prison. The club was anyway closely watched by the KGB, and its members were under surveillance and – like Zolotaryov himself – often summoned for interrogations. The circle of the Club of Creative Intelligentsia strongly shaped the perception of the world and the critical image of the Soviet system. The reality, both physical and spiritual or metaphysical, was defined in the form of a peculiar triad: the external world – cruel and heartless, the internal world – full of tensions and dilemmas, and the world of higher values and ideas – the only one worth pursuing. This philosophy was reflected in many of his compositions, especially in *Partita No. 1* and *Sonata No. 3*. His constant work on the search for his own musical language and his constant self-education were an expression of rising above the surrounding reality. In 1968, *Partita No. 1* was created, which, due to a quest for his own musical language, proved to be a revolutionary and groundbreaking composition in the hitherto accordion literature.

Since his early youth, Vladislav was aware of the fact that was not suited to his times. He wrote in the aforementioned *Diary of a 14-year-old young man*:

⁹ V. Šentalinskij, op. cit., p. 35.

Probably I was born too early for this time, or too late, as I find it so difficult to live with these people, we do not understand each other¹⁰ [own translation].

Few were able to fully understand his compositions, which divided the audience into two camps – admirers and critics – among the school’s teachers and students as well as among amateurs. Regardless of the type of emotions, nobody remained indifferent to Zolotaryov’s music and his performances were extremely popular. He often gave concerts in various places in Magadan, and once a semester, he gave a recital in his school during which he performed his own compositions. His playing was interesting not only due to its high level of virtuosity, but above all because of the high emotional charge and the innovative orchestral method of treating the accordion.

After graduating from school in Magadan, Zolotaryov decided to set off to a small settlement in Chukotka, where he took up a job as a bayan teacher. It was there that he met his future wife Irina – a cellist and headmistress of a music school. At that time, he wrote a literary diary *12 unsent letters to a distant love*, which was a tragic and moving poem on the author’s loneliness:

Everyone is lonely. And when one realizes this, he will feel how pointless it is to live in a community of people, in the so-called society. [...] they live in the darkness and do not try to look for anything¹¹ [own translation].

In 1970 Vladislav, along with Irina and her son, set off to Moscow, just to return to Magadan next winter with his whole family, where he took up a job as in a school as a music theory teacher. However, his personal life did not go well, the lack of sufficient financial resources was a reason for constant quarrels. Vladislav knew that he had been neglecting his family, but despite feeling remorseful he could not change anything. Composing was more important to him than anything else. After a short time, due to a growing conflict, Irina and her son decided to go to Moscow. At the beginning of 1971, just before their son Henryk was born Vladislav left Magadan and joined his family.

In the autumn of the same year Zolotaryov was admitted to the composition faculty of the Moscow Conservatory. His teacher was Tikhon Nikolayevitch Khrennikov, a longtime chairman of the USSR Composers’ Union. However, he did not find support for his own development and innovative musical ideas. As usual, he spent a lot of time on self-education, consulted Rodion Shchedrin, Edison Denisov and other composers about his compositions, and even took lessons from Dmitri Shostakovich. At the conservatory, nearly half of the subjects were of general or ideological nature. Among his younger colleagues, he became increasingly aware of the fact that he had started his true musical education too late. In the spring 1972, as he didn’t want to waste time on things not directly related to composition, he decided to quit his studies. This step had enormous conse-

¹⁰ V. Šentalinskij, op. cit., p. 36.

¹¹ Idem, p. 46.

quences for him. In the Soviet Union, the composer's activity was inextricably linked to his membership in the USSR Composers' Union. The conflict with Khrennikov and the lack of support from the Communist Party and, above all, the fact that he did not have a university degree resulted in the rejection of his application to join the Union. It was extremely difficult for a composer who came from a distant province to gain recognition in Moscow's circles. Vladislav longed to return to the far east of the country, where being closer to nature, he experienced greater inspiration. On the other hand, this was in Moscow, as nowhere else, that he had the unique opportunity to meet outstanding composers and performers. He often left the city, however, and while staying at his friends' or parents' houses near Moscow, he tried to find an inner peace. He never performed as an instrumentalist again, and devoted all his time to composing and promoting his own work.

Vladislav's friendship with Fridrich Robertowitch Lips resulted in several remarkable compositions, including *Sonata No. 2* and *3* as well as *The Spanish Rhapsody*. This great accordionist also became one of the first popularizers of Zolotaryov's music outside the Soviet Union. At the beginning of 1975 Vladislav made another attempt to join the Composers' Union. He was aware of the unprecedented nature of his decision. If he had succeeded, he would have been the first member of the Union not to have a university degree in composition. At his request, Fridrich Lips performed *Sonata No. 3* before the board of the Union. In one of the letters written by Zolotaryov to Lips the following information about this event was included:

Will you happen to be in Moscow when the discussion at the meeting of the Russian Composers' Union will take place? – he asked me – I would like you to perform *the Third Sonata* [*Sonata No. 3*]. Such a vivid performance should make a greater impression on the board¹² [own translation].

This performance made a tremendous impression on the audience and the composers such as Sofia Gubaidulina, Vyacheslav Artyomov or Grigory Frid decided to support Zolotaryov's renewed application to be accepted as a member of the Russian Composers' Union. Nevertheless, the probably favourable decision did not come before his death. But it was owing to *Sonata No. 3* that many eminent Russian composers began writing their compositions for accordion.

The constant fear of time passing that affects the composer may seem strange as he was still young. Zolotaryov obsessively repeated that he would reach the age of Christ in 1975. He regarded that moment as a turning point, a time when something crucial must happen. Many times while still at school in Magadan, he repeated that he would die at the age of 33, as it is mentioned by N. Liesnoj:

He would talk about death several times at school and not only to me: "I will die at the age of 33, like Jesus. I won't live long"¹³ [own translation].

¹² F. Lips, *Kažetsâ, eto bylo včera...*, [in:] Vladislav Zolotarev. *Sud'ba i Muza*, p. 21.

¹³ N. Liesnoj, op. cit., p. 18.

V. Šentalinsky quotes the following words of the artist, which he included in his writings:

Each of us repeats the path of Christ. Some in a lesser measure, other in a greater measure. But all of us will meet the same end¹⁴ [own translation].

As a result, he did not eat or sleep very much, and overwork led him to physical exhaustion. Feeling more and more alienated from the surrounding world, he was becoming increasingly depressed.

The family problems, resulting partly from financial problems, overlapped with creative dilemmas. In the summer of 1974, while he was away from home, his wife sold his bayan and destroyed many manuscripts. It was a severe blow to him, to which he could not reconcile himself.

I can't believe my Irina sold our bayan and destroyed the scores and manuscripts! It is impossible for me to believe that [...] ¹⁵ [own translation].

The composer spent the last winter at a friend's house in Shalikow near Moscow, trying to find the strength to continue working. Yet, he felt more and more burnt out, as he wrote in a letter to a friend – Vladislav Bolshanin:

I'm writing in terrible cold in Galkin's datcha, like before abandoned and lonely. I have received an order for an oratorio, but I cannot write [...] ¹⁶ [own translation].

In the spring, he returned home, trying to rebuild the severely damaged family relations. However, longing for peace and quiet, at the end of April 1975 he left for the House of Creativity in Ivanov, in order to spend some time in silence, away from people and closer to nature. On May 13, 1975 he returned to Moscow, and when Irina and her son Henry left the house after an argument, Vladislav committed suicide.

Summary

The available literature on the life and work of Vladislav Zolotaryov does not provide a clear answer to the question about the direct cause of this dramatic decision. Most of the opinions I have heard suggest that the main reason for his suicide was the lack of understanding and of recognition for his compositions. Another motive which was imputed was the refusal to admit him to the Russian Composers' Union, which was particularly painful for him. Other opinions claim that he was destroyed by the Soviet system, he seems to have been "a victim of the system".

The image of Zolotariov that emerges from his diaries, letters and accounts of people who knew him testifies to the complexity and the multiplicity of reasons

¹⁴ V. Šentalinskij, op. cit, s. 53.

¹⁵ V. Zolotarev, *Dnevniki*, [in:] *Vladislav Zolotarev. Sud'ba i Muza*, p. 211.

¹⁶ *Vl. Zolotarev – Vl. Bol'shaninu, Šalikovo, 7.01.1975*, [in:] as above, p. 93.

for this step. His music was inspiring for many performers, it had its lovers, also among composers. Therefore, it cannot be said that Zolotaryov's output was underestimated by his contemporaries. It also seems that the composer was aware of the unprecedented nature of the decision to apply to the Russian Composers' Union, without having completed his studies and obtained a diploma in composition, and thus was aware of the reasons for the refusal. Yet the reapplication, among others after Fridrich Lips' presentation of *Sonata No. 3*, had a chance of succeeding. It can be presumed, for example, from Zofia Gubaydulina's recognition.

While analysing Zolotaryov's biography, the question also arises – was this man being destroyed by the Soviet system? He certainly was. However, it does not seem that his situation differs significantly from the one of the majority of people living at that time in the Soviet Union and other countries of the Communist bloc. Especially, the situation of educated people, having a critical view of the surrounding reality. In fact, it should be pointed out that Zolotariow's relations with the authorities were after all much better than those of the vast majority who were actually repressed at that time. Although in Magadan the composer was summoned for interrogations, he was not incarcerated. He was able to take up work and study, and pursue his artistic ambitions. In addition, his father was a military officer, which must have had at least a slight positive impact on his relation with the authorities.

Furthermore, his family problems and turbulent relations with his wife did not have to be the reason for such a dramatic decision, perhaps they only gave an impulse in the surge of emotions – they acted like a fuse in a ticking bomb. Vladislav undoubtedly had a sense of alienation from the world in which he lived, of misunderstanding – even among the people closest to him, he was weary of any relations with people. Rigorous standards which he imposed on himself resulted in strenuous work and extreme exhaustion, both physical and mental. It is possible that it was his delicacy and sensitivity that opened the door to depression – a disease that he could not name himself, but which became more and more serious with time and – untreated became the main cause of his suicide. He wrote about it in his *Diary*:

I can understand that if my soul is dark and it is full of unconscious suffering, it does not mean that everyone who comes into contact with me should also suffer [...] I cannot understand the cause of these sufferings [...]. Isn't it a disease? And if it's a disease, then what kind of disease? And what is the cure for it?¹⁷ [own translation]

Besides, it should be noted that the composer had already tried to commit suicide before, as Vitaly Shentalinsky writes:

[...] on the third day of the New Year [1969] something irreversible virtually happened. I wrote in my diary: “[...] Zolotaryov attempted suicide, he tried to throw himself from the window. His hand was bleeding. They stopped him, called the ambulance and the

¹⁷ V. Zolotarev, *Dnevniki*, [in:] *Vladislav Zolotarev. Sud'ba i Muza*, p. 268.

police. They put a bandage on the bloody hand [...]. Volodya Bolshevik, his cordial friend, told me about it"¹⁸ [own translation].

In the light of the composer's earlier remarks on his short life and death at the age of 33, it seems that Zolotaryov was inevitably heading towards his destiny. His complicated personality, as if divided into two worlds, was accurately rendered by Vitaly Shentalinsky in the following words:

There were two Zolotaryovs. One of them was a talented musician, selflessly devoted to composing. The other – an effusive man, with a sense of his own uniqueness worthy of genius, completely unprepared to live in harmony with people, should they be his friends, family, society or authorities. This is the reason why he couldn't stand the split between the musical harmony and the disharmony of society¹⁹ [own translation].



Figure 2. Vladislav Andreyevich Zolotaryov. Author's private archives.

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¹⁸ V. Šentalinskij, op. cit., p. 43.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

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Władysław Andriejewicz Zołotariow (1942–1975) – zarys biografii

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przybliżenie postaci wybitnego rosyjskiego kompozytora i ba-janisty Władysława Zołotariowa. Tragicznie zmarły w wieku zaledwie 33 lat twórca był postacią wyjątkową. Był wielkim nowatorem, który zmienił oblicze akordeonu, wykorzystując ten instrument do granic jego możliwości technicznych i brzmieniowych. Nowy, orkiestrowy wręcz sposób traktowania akordeonu, jaki został przez niego zapoczątkowany w latach 70. XX wieku, nie tylko wywarł olbrzymi wpływ na twórczości młodego pokolenia kompozytorów, jak: Aleksander Nagajew, Władimir Zubicki czy Wiaczesław Siemionow, ale także został zauważony i doceniony przez wybitną i uznaną już w tym czasie kompozytorkę Zofię Gubajdulinę. O ile jednak twórczość Zołotariowa jest przez dzisiejszych akordeonistów powszechnie znana i doceniana, o tyle jego biografia wciąż kryje wiele nierozwianych dotąd tajemnic i wątpliwości dotyczących przyczyn jego śmierci. Ze względu na brak polskich opracowań tematu biografia kompozytora jest warta przybliżenia. Zebrane informacje dotyczące szczegółów z życia kompozytora, a także opinie osób z nim związanych mogą pomóc w zrozumieniu skomplikowanej osobowości twórcy. Nowatorska twórczość Zołotariowa pomimo niezliczonych interpretacji jest nadal interesująca nie tylko dla wykonawców. Stanowi ona wciąż istotną determinantę dla kolejnych kompozytorów muzyki akordeonowej. Kompozycje Zołotariowa, takie jak: *Suita kameralna*, *Partita nr 1*, *Sonata nr 2*, czy zbiory miniatur zawarte w *Suitach dziecięcych* – na trwałe wpisały się do repertuaru współczesnych wykonawców. Jego *opus magnum* – *Sonata nr 3* – to do dziś jedno z najważniejszych dzieł w literaturze akordeonowej.

Źródłem niniejszej publikacji są korespondencja i dzienniki W. Zołotariowa oraz biografia kompozytora autorstwa Inny Klause²⁰, a także wspomnienia Mikołaja Liesnoja²¹, Witalija Szentalskiego²² i Fridricha Lipsa²³.

Słowa kluczowe: współczesna muzyka akordeonowa, Władysław Andriejewicz Zołotariow.

²⁰ I. Klause, op. cit.

²¹ N. Lesnoj, op. cit., p. 10–20.

²² V. Šentalinskij, op. cit., p. 34–54.

²³ F. Lips, op. cit., p. 21–23.