

Aria

for Viola and Piano

Lev Abeliovich
Edited by Rostislav Krimer

Adagio

Viola

Piano

The musical score is written for Viola and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Adagio'. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The Viola part is mostly rests in the first system. The Piano part features a complex, flowing melody with many slurs and ties. The second system starts with a measure number '5' and includes dynamic markings for mezzo-forte (mf) and forte (f). The Piano part continues with intricate phrasing and slurs, while the Viola part remains mostly silent.

PREFACE

Lev Moiseyevich Abeliovich (1912–1985) was a Polish-Jewish-Belarusian composer whose fate and work vividly reflect the tragic and heroic pages of the 20th century. He was born in Vilna (now Vilnius, Lithuania) into a Jewish family and studied at the Warsaw Conservatory together with Mieczysław Weinberg – a lifelong friendship and creative connection developed between them.

With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Abeliovich and Weinberg fled eastward to escape the Holocaust and found refuge in Minsk. There, at the Belarusian State Conservatory, they completed their studies under Vasily Zolotaryov – a student of Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov – finishing on June 21, 1941, just one day before Nazi Germany launched its invasion of the Soviet Union. On June 23, they were awarded their graduation diplomas, and Abeliovich was once again forced to flee from Nazi persecution.

He was evacuated deep into the Soviet Union and resumed his studies in 1944 at the Moscow Conservatory under Nikolai Myaskovsky, where, like Weinberg, he became part of the close circle around Dmitri Shostakovich. After the murder of Solomon Mikhoels and the beginning of antisemitic repressions against the Jewish intelligentsia in the USSR, Abeliovich made the difficult and necessary decision to leave Moscow and return to Minsk to escape Stalinist repression and avoid the fate of Weinberg, who was arrested in 1953. Abeliovich spent the rest of his life in Minsk and became a central figure in the Belarusian music scene, integrating European, Jewish, and Soviet traditions.

Abeliovich was not only a witness but also an active participant in the historical catastrophes of his time: his entire family was murdered in a concentration camp, he became a refugee, lost his homeland and loved ones – yet he preserved his dignity, his intellectual depth, and his unique creative voice. His music is a living testimony to what he endured, filled with symbols, allusions, and themes of memory that convey both pain and hope. Like many of his contemporaries, he could not openly speak about the Holocaust, often dedicating works instead to the ‘victims of fascism’ or the ‘heroes of the Great Patriotic War’.

His artistic legacy includes four symphonies, piano sonatas, a piano concerto, vocal cycles in Russian, Belarusian, Yiddish, and Polish, as well as numerous chamber works. His compositions are marked by lyrical expressiveness, dramatic intensity, and structural clarity – shaped by his teachers, yet unmistakably bearing the voice of someone who lived through the catastrophes of the century.

Of particular importance were his close creative and personal ties with Mieczysław Weinberg and Dmitri Shostakovich. Abeliovich and Weinberg shared not only similar life experiences – flight, study, loss – but also a deep mutual trust. Weinberg dedicated his Third Piano Sonata (1946) to Abeliovich, and Abeliovich, in return, dedicated the cycle *Fresken* (1972) to Weinberg. They often conversed in Polish – their native tongue – and remained loyal to each other until the end of their lives.

Today, Abeliovich’s work is undergoing a deserved rediscovery. Thanks to the research and initiative of renowned pianist and conductor Rostislav Krimer, who has dedicated a special project to the composer’s legacy, the complete works of Lev Abeliovich are being published for the first time by the internationally respected music publisher Edition Peters, edited by Rostislav Krimer. This is a major contribution to the preservation of musical memory and a significant discovery for the Western musical world, where Abeliovich’s name has remained largely unknown.

The musical legacy of Lev Abeliovich is not only part of Eastern European history – it is a living bridge between East and West, past and present.

Aria for Viola and Piano (1973)

Composed in 1973, the *Aria* belongs to the late period of Lev Moiseyevich Abeliovich’s work – a time of introspection and artistic summation. It is one of his most poignant and humane compositions, a kind of musical testament.

At the core of the *Aria* lies a prayer. A prayer for all victims of the Holocaust, for a lost generation, for millions of innocent lives. At the same time, it is a quiet plea for life itself – a life marked by suffering yet sustained by hope. Although the work carries no official dedication for understandable reasons, the composer’s daughter Maria confirms that these were precisely the thoughts that accompanied him while composing it.

The solo instrument sounds like a human voice – lamenting, remembering, praying. The melody is filled with profound sincerity and is entirely free of pathos. The piano creates a transparent, almost ethereal texture into which the solo line is woven like a thread of memory and hope. In the middle section, a dramatic recitative emerges and leads into a cadenza – an emotional narrative of sudden and profound changes that may occur in a person’s life, especially when one unexpectedly loses those dearest to them. The opening theme then returns, transformed – now as a prayer for hope and for the salvation of humanity.

The *Aria* occupies a special place in Abeliovich’s oeuvre. It is a luminous and deeply philosophical work that embodies his worldview – one in which personal sorrow and the tragedies of an era are inseparably linked, and where compassion and human dignity become sources of inner strength. This music consoles, while at the same time remaining a quiet witness.

Interestingly, the *Aria* was originally written for viola. However, it was the version for violin and chamber orchestra that gradually became one of the composer’s signature works and one of his most frequently performed compositions during his lifetime. Outside the Soviet Union, however, it remained virtually unknown. Its official European premiere took place only on 18 September 2025 at Beethovenfest Bonn, performed by Nicolas Dautricourt and the East-West Chamber Orchestra under my direction.

It is therefore a particular pleasure for me now to present the original version of this work for viola and piano.

Rostislav Krimer