

# Winding road

A visit to an organ recital prompted pianist Tamara Konstantin to become a composer

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▲ 'I could do that' – Tamara Konstantin



▲ Duo partner: Duncan Honeybourne

**T**amara Konstantin has more than most composers to draw on in terms of life experiences: growing up under a repressive Soviet Union, careers as a television star, oil industry executive and pianist. Yet it was only four years ago that she became a composer, fruits of that realised in her debut album, *Inflections*, on Stone Records.

Konstantin began playing piano at age five and was sent to her native Georgia's only music school. 'Unfortunately, they did not teach anything about composition,' she says. After conservatoire, she studied linguistics and opted for a job as a presenter on Georgian tv. 'That was quite exciting and I met lots of interesting people.' She had her own daily television show and was a celebrity within Georgia as pianist and presenter, although Soviet control meant she interviewed few foreign visitors. But a Japanese delegation did visit and after viewing the primitive studio technology one member said politely: 'You have a very nice museum here.'

Konstantin adds: 'We had no teleprompters, you had to memorise everything before the show.'

In 1990 she moved to the UK and after

moving in industrial circles joined an oil company which wanted to set up exploration in Georgia. 'I became the face of the company and developed the business for the next 23 years.' She was later awarded Georgia's Medal of Honour for her contribution to the troubled country's economy.

'But I never lost my love for music,' she says, 'nobody could take that away from me.' It was only in 2012 that she discovered an urge to compose, when on holiday in Canada she attended an organ recital. 'I said to my husband: "I think I could do that." I came back from holiday and started composing and cannot stop now. It is like I discovered something that is so uplifting.'

Her music is melodically based and stirred more by emotion than concrete memories, though works on her first recording bear titles such as the seasons, *Childhood Memories* and *Dreams*.

A second album is already being planned and it will include her third sonata, dedicated to her family members who suffered because of their aristocratic forebears. In Stalin's 1937 purge her grandfather was arrested and sent to a gulag for 13 years. Her grandmother, who was of German descent, was exiled, as were her uncle and mother.

'They had a really tough time and the sonata is not very romantic, it has power and turmoil. When I was little I was fearful because of hearing my mum's memories.'

That background may emerge on the recording – on which she performs with fellow pianist Duncan Honeybourne – because, she says, 'the piano is like a live organism, it is not an object, I treat it like a human'. To the extent that she still has in her home that piano she played as a child in Georgia. 🎹

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