

## **Program notes for November 4, 2009: the Amelia Piano Trio with Michelle Areyzaga, Soprano**

### **Dmitri Shostakovich**

#### **Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, Op. 67**

At the November 9, 1944, premiere of Shostakovich's second piano trio, many audience members were shocked by the apparent stylistic inconsistencies in the music. Shostakovich had composed the work that summer in remembrance of his dear friend, the music critic and brilliant intellectual, Ivan Sollertinsky, who had recently died of a heart attack while still a young man. Some parts of the trio have the solemn character one would expect in a memorial tribute, but other sections are cheerful, have the sound of Russian folk songs, or, in the case of the last movement, seem to be inspired by the vigorous dances of eastern European Jews.

Dmitri Rabinovich, a close personal friend of Shostakovich and a leading music critic, has proposed a theory that posits an underlying coherence to the trio. According to Rabinovich, "The whole first movement leaves the impression of a calm and clear poetic picture of everyday, specifically Russian, life." The elegiac, dolorous melody of the introduction resembles a melancholy Slavic folk song, a presumed reference to Sollertinsky's Russian heritage. Repeated staccato notes lead to the somewhat faster main body of the movement, in which the principal theme, derived from the introductory material, exhibits unmistakable folk qualities. Other tunes, all related by their folkloric roots, build to a powerful climax, before fading away to a quiet ending.

The bright, energetic second movement is propelled with great motoric force; it has no apparent connection to Russian folk music. But, again to quote Rabinovich, "...although these two movements employ different means of expression, they are connected by the unity of their optimistic coloring, they are one in character, in their emotional meaning."

The Largo, obviously a threnody on Sollertinsky's death, is formally a chaconne, a set of continuous variations on eight grave, ponderous chords given out by the piano. Five times the piano repeats the series of chords while the strings sing the somber lament – now bleak and desolate, now anguished and impassioned.

Rabinovich suggests that the final movement, which follows without pause, is where "the real tragedy is unfolded." The themes bring to mind frenzied Yiddish dance tunes, although sounding much more like macabre dances of death than celebrations of life. Shostakovich's choice of melodic material was probably a musical reference to grim reports just reaching Russia of how the Germans had forced Jewish concentration camp inmates to dig mass graves and then dance on the edge as they were machine-gunned to death. The composer develops and expands these themes before ending the trio with reminders of the earlier movements and a final, despairing return of the last movement's themes. With the closing notes Shostakovich completes the journey from "life, serene and

peaceful, full of joy and beauty,” to death – not only of Sollertinsky, but of all others who died tragically before their time.

## **Frédéric Chopin**

### **Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 8**

Polish composer Frédéric Chopin, well loved for both his virtuosity at the piano and as a composer of bold romanticism, was a man destined for greatness and great loneliness. Born near Warsaw to a Polish mother and a French father, Chopin's instruction was given over to a local violinist, Adalbert Zywny, owing to the lack of skilled piano teachers in Warsaw. Awestruck by his pupil's talents, Chopin was free to sprout his own unique wings.

In November 1830, Chopin went abroad; following the suppression of the Polish November Uprising of 1830–31, he became one of many expatriates of the Polish "Great Emigration." While in Paris, Chopin became close to author George Sand, remaining with her for ten years before contracting tuberculosis. Ms. Sand was quick to move on, leaving Chopin to die alone soon after. Buried in the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, where legend has it that not a day passes without fresh flowers being laid on his grave, his heart remains in Warsaw, entombed in a pillar in the Church of the Holy Cross.

The chief characteristic of Chopin's playing was his highly personal and wayward use of tempo rubato. In Chopin's view of this device, "the left hand is the conductor; it must not waver or lose ground; do with the right hand what you will and can." Fusing classical form with traditional Polish melodies, this trio is one of only a handful of chamber works written by Chopin.

Anthea Kreston tells us that a colleague suggested to her that the trio could be played with a viola. Anthea writes; "With a bit of research I was able to find a letter Chopin had written in 1839 (stating) that he should have written the violin part for the viola 'as the first string predominates in the violin and in my trio it is hardly used at all. The violin would, I think, accord better with the cello.'

"Since no viola part existed for the piece yet, I transcribed the violin part for viola. For the first rehearsal, I brought both my violin and viola, so we could make an educated comparison between the two versions. We were all struck by the difference - on the viola the trio came to life."

# Dmitri Shostakovich

## Seven Romances on Poems of Alexander Blok for Soprano and Piano Trio, Opus 127

Written on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “October Revolution” while Shostakovich was on the mend from a long and difficult illness, this song cycle was written in part as a protest against continuing oppression by the Soviet government. Mstislav Rostropovich, a friend of Shostakovich, requested a work that he could perform with his wife, the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya. Adding violin and piano to the ensemble (first performed by violinist David Oistrach and pianist Moisey Vainberg) and using text by Alexander Blok (1880-1921), this unique composition combines the instruments both singly and in pairs with the voice, only coming together as a quartet in the final song.

In choosing Alexander Blok’s “Bard of the Revolution,” Shostakovich chose a text well suited to Shostakovich’s style. Deeply felt, moving lyrics speak to generations of suffering, longing, and hope. The composer chose seven individual verses for his song cycle – each depicting a specific human condition - faithfulness (Ophelia's Song); truth (Gamayun); love (We Were Together); loneliness (The City is Asleep); threat (Tempest); anxiety (Secret Signs); death (Music)

Text:

### 1) Ophelia's Song

Parting with your beloved maid  
you swore that you would love, my friend!  
That you would keep your oath,  
leaving for that dreary land!  
There, far from happy Denmark,  
your shores are far-veiled.  
Big, angry and mumbling waves  
wash trees off the cliff.  
The sweet warrior will not be back  
all clad in silver.  
The ribbon and the white plume  
will heavily wave in the coffin.

### 2) Gamayun, the Soothsaying Bird

On the smooth endless waters  
which the sunset has clad in purple,  
she prophesies and she sings,  
unable to spread her confused wings.  
She prophesies the oppression by wicked Tartars,  
a line of bloody executions,  
earthquakes, and famine, and fires,

the might of villains and the undoing of the right,  
obsessed by eternal horror.

### 3) We Were Together

We were together, I remember that.  
The night was disturbing; the violin was singing.  
You were mine those days.  
You were prettier with every day.  
Through the quiet murmur of the streams,  
through the mystery of the womanly smile,  
the lips were longing for a kiss,  
the heart was longing for the sounds of violin.

### 4) The City is Asleep

The city is asleep, and veiled in haze,  
and the streetlamps are faintly flickering.  
Far away, there across the Neva,  
I can see the glow of the dawn.  
In this far-off reflection,  
in these flame glints  
the awakening is hidden  
of sad days awaiting me.

### 5) Tempest

Oh, how madly the evil tempest  
is raging and roaring outside my window!  
The clouds are rushing and shedding rain,  
and the wind is howling, then fading down!  
The night is horrible! In such a night  
I feel pity for people deprived of home,  
and the pity drives me outdoors  
there, into the embrace of the damp chill!  
There, to brave the darkness and the rain,  
sharing the lot of the sufferers.  
Oh, how madly the wind is raging,  
outside my window, exhausting itself!

### 6) Secret Signs

Secret signs light up  
on a deaf, wakeless wall.  
Golden and red poppies  
brood over me in my sleep.  
I hide away in night cares  
and do not remember the stern magic.  
At the dawn, azure chimeras  
look out from the mirrors of the bright sky.  
I run away to the instants of the past,

and close my eyes in fear,  
and a maid's golden plait  
is on the pages of the chilling book.  
The heaven has already lowered above me,  
and a black dream broods in my breast.  
My forecast end is near,  
ahead are the war and the fire.

#### 7) Music

At night, when my disquiet falls asleep  
and the city disappears in the mist-  
oh, how much music God has,  
what sounds exist in the world!  
What is the tempest of life to me, when your roses  
flourish and blaze for me!  
What are human tears, when the sunset  
is rosy and florid!  
Accept, O Empress of the Universe-  
through blood, through tortures, through graves  
the foaming cup of the last passion  
from your undeserving slave!

## THE AMELIA PIANO TRIO

Formed in 1999, the Amelia Piano Trio became known as one of the great young chamber music groups after participating in Isaac Stern's Chamber Music Workshop at Carnegie Hall in 2000. As a result, Mr. Stern became a mentor to the Trio and presented the ensemble's Carnegie Hall debut at Weill Recital Hall. Of that performance, *The Strad* said "...its careful attention to balance, tonal beauty, and teamwork was exemplary." Joining the roster of Concert Artists Guild in 2001, the Trio went on to win the ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming and to record CDs with Cedille Records and Naxos.

The Trio has performed in many major halls, including the 92nd Street Y, Carnegie Hall, Ravinia in Chicago, Seattle's Meany Hall, and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Other performances include appearances at the Caramoor Music Festival in New York, the La Jolla Chamber Music Society, NPR's *St. Paul Sunday*, Calgary Pro Musica, Merkin Hall, and Bargemusic.

The Amelia members have quickly made their mark as performers and commissioners of new music. Notably, Pulitzer Prize-winning composer John Harbison wrote his first full-length piano trio for the Amelia, a recording of which was released on the Naxos label in the spring of 2007. The Trio's most recent commissioning project is a new Triple Concerto, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, composed by Daron Hagen. The *Chicago Tribune* said of the premiere, "Kreston, Duckles, and Aizawa make a superb team, and together they dug into the piece with a gusto and polish that did the piece proud."

In 2003 the Trio was asked by National Public Radio to be the Young Ensemble-in-Residence. This exciting week of live concerts and interviews put the Amelia firmly in the foreground of classical music in America, reaching an estimated 1.5 million listeners. The Trio has also been featured on Chicago's WFMT in live broadcast performances of the complete Beethoven Trios, and returned to *Performance Today* and *St. Paul Sunday* in 2009.

The Amelia Piano Trio is actively involved in arts education and dedicates a substantial amount of time to educational projects, master classes, and coaching children and adults. The Trio members are professors at the Hartt School of Music and Connecticut College. In addition to developing award-winning outreach programs, the Trio is in residence at the Green Lake Chamber Music Camp, where they teach gifted high school and college-aged students the art of chamber music.

Violinist **Anthea Kreston** has received numerous awards for her chamber collaborations including honors at the Melbourne and Banff International Competitions, the Grand Prize at the Concert Artists Guild Competition, and Top Prize in the Munich ARD International Chamber Music Competition. *The San Diego Reader* said of her: "...Anthea is a soloist of the Heifetz-Shaham-Vengerov caliber, whose musical instincts could make even a mere bagatelle thrill the soul and stir the senses to a frenzy." She made her solo debut at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and tours actively with her piano trio, The Amelia Piano Trio. Anthea holds a B.A. in Women's Studies from Cleveland State University and a performance degree from the Curtis Institute of Music. She is a professor of violin and viola at the Hartt School of Music, where she received her Master's Degree, as well as at Wesleyan University. She has studied with Almita and Roland Vamos, Felix Galimir, Ida Kavafian, and Phil Setzer. Additionally, Anthea is actively involved with alternative music; she played in the Cleveland-based rock band Daria for several years, and frequently performs with her violin and percussion duo Sweet Thunder. Anthea can be heard on the labels Cedille Records, Channel Classics, Koch, and Traditional Crossroads.

**Jason Duckles**, cello, has received numerous awards for his chamber collaborations, including Grand Prize in the Concert Artists Guild Competition and Top Prize in the Munich ARD International Competition. Jason has also been a member of the Avalon String Quartet and the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, and has appeared frequently as the cellist for the Mark Morris Dance Group, which tours throughout the United States and Europe. Jason can be heard on the Sony Recording "Enchantment" with Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Project. Jason received his undergraduate degree from Northwestern University, and his Master's and Doctorate from the State University of New York at Stony Brook as a student of Timothy Eddy. He teaches at both Wesleyan University and Connecticut College, and has given master classes at Dartmouth College, the Longy School of Music, and Stanford University. Dedicated to music of our time, Jason has commissioned works from many composers, including Pulitzer Prize-winner John Harbison. Jason is a recipient of Chamber Music America's ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming and can be heard on the labels Sony, Channel Classics, Koch, Traditional Crossroads, and Cedille Records.

In 1988, **Rieko Aizawa**, piano, was brought to the attention of conductor Alexander Schneider on the recommendation of the pianist Mitsuko Uchida. Schneider engaged Ms.

Aizawa as soloist with his Brandenburg Ensemble at the opening concerts of Tokyo's Casals Hall. Later that year, Schneider presented her in her United States debut concerts at the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall with his New York String Orchestra. *The Washington Post* celebrated her performance: "She played with a beautiful, limpid tone and a sense of characterization and cohesiveness that is unusual." Since then Ms. Aizawa has performed in solo and orchestral engagements throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe, including Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall, Boston's Symphony Hall, Chicago's Orchestra Hall and Vienna's Konzerthaus. An avid chamber musician, Rieko has performed as a guest with string quartets including the Guarneri Quartet and the Orion Quartet. She is a founding member of Duo Prism with violinist Jesse Mills, which earned the First Prize at the Zinetti International Competition in Italy in 2006. Ms. Aizawa has participated in numerous festivals, including the Marlboro, Evian, and Ravinia Festivals. March 2005 marked the release of Rieko's first solo recording of Shostakovich's and Scriabin's "24 Preludes," on the Altus Music label. She will be recording Faure's and Messiaens' preludes on a second Altus CD in 2009. Rieko Aizawa was the last pupil of Mieczyslaw Horszowski at the Curtis Institute; she also studied with Seymour Lipkin and Peter Serkin at the Juilliard School.

*Program notes courtesy of the Amelia Piano Trio*