Gather (2021) Disc 3.

1-4 **Violin Sonata** (1914–1915, rev. 1916–1922)
LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854–1928)

Con moto	4:48
Ballada: Con moto	4:39
Allegretto	2:24
Adagio	4:35

YERI ROH, *violin*; HYEYEON PARK, *piano*

5–7 **Piano Trio in F-sharp minor** (1952)
ARNO BABAJANIAN (1921–1983)

Largo – Allegro espressivo	9:27
Andante	7:14
Allegro vivace	6:16

HYEYEON PARK, *piano*; KRISTIN LEE, *violin*; DMITRI ATAPINE, *cello*

8–9 **Sonata for Solo Cello** (1948–1953)
GYÖRGY LIGETI (1923–2006)

Allegro, ma non tanto	13:53
Dumka: Andante con moto	13:29
Scherzo (Furiant): Molto vivace	4:20
Finale: Allegro	7:34

DMITRI ATAPINE, *cello*

10–14 **Piano Quintet in G minor, op.** (1940)
DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

Prelude	4:34
Fugue	9:14
Scherzo	3:31
Intermezzo	6:19
Finale	7:30

HYEYEON PARK, *piano*; YERI ROH, JAMES THOMPSON, *violins*; MATTHEW LIPMAN, *viola*; AUDREY CHEN, *cello*

The 2021 edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE*, titled *Gather*, celebrates the joy of coming together around a shared love of live music, after an immensely challenging year for the arts when concert halls largely fell silent. Each disc explores pinnacles of the chamber music art form, including both masterworks and tantalizing discoveries. This collection of recordings also celebrates the opening of the Spieker Center for the Arts, Music@Menlo's new home.

Disc 3 features a rich collection of twentieth-century chamber music from central and eastern Europe. The disc begins with a haunting violin sonata by Leoš Janáček, a composer fascinated with capturing the cadence and inflection of the Czech language in his melodic writing. Rooted in both Western classical and Armenian folk traditions, Arno Babajanian's mesmerizing Piano Trio in F-sharp minor follows. The riveting Sonata for Solo Cello by György Ligeti prefaces Dmitry Shostakovich's Piano Quintet, completed in 1940 and hailed by a Moscow newspaper critic as "a portrait of our age... the rich-toned, perfect voice of the present."

Liner notes by Patrick Castillo © 2021

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854–1928)
Violin Sonata (1914–1915, rev. 1916–1922)

In the years since his death in 1928, the Czech composer Leoš Janáček has increasingly become regarded as one of the most original composers of the twentieth century. His nine operas represent his crowning achievement, and Janáček considered these to be his most important work. But he also produced a fair amount of chamber and orchestral music, and the dramatic instinct and rhetorical expressivity that infuse his operatic output are key elements of his style and likewise inform his instrumental works. Janáček was especially preoccupied with the Czech language and, in his chamber and orchestral music, attempted to capture the cadence and inflection of Czech in his melodic writing. The result is a brand of expressive immediacy entirely unique to Janáček.

His earliest forays into chamber music composition included two violin sonatas, composed in 1880, now lost. Janáček returned to the genre thirty-four years later: his sole extant Violin Sonata is one of a spate of chamber works created in the composer's maturity, including *Pohádka* (1910); *Mládi* (1924); and his two String Quartets, *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1923) and *Intimate Letters* (1928).

The Violin Sonata reflects the tortured zeitgeist of the outset of the First World War. "In the 1914 sonata for violin and piano," Janáček later reflected, "I could just about hear the sound of the steel clashing in my troubled head." Such disquiet indeed marks the striking gesture that begins the work. A *sforzando* cry by the violin alone launches an anxious theme, surrounded by clangorous tremolandi in the piano. Restless transfiguration of this theme unifies a sequence of otherwise fragmented passages, as the music's character shifts abruptly from nervous tension to hopeful lyricism and back. Throughout, Janáček frequently instructs the violinist to play in high positions on the low strings, imbuing high melodies with a guttural timbre.

The second movement, which Janáček designates *Ballada,* feels similarly unsettled. While at times

seeming like a gentle lullaby, this music too is marked by sudden changes in humor, rhythmic agita, and a general unpredictability, ultimately giving the listener no rest. The pithy *Allegretto* third movement is at once demonically dance-like and frighteningly terse. Cascading thirty-second-note gestures swirl about the stomping theme, punctuated by emphatic silences.

Jarring pauses also accentuate the final movement, as angry exclamations in the violin interrupt the piano's melancholy lyricism. This uncomfortable dialogue continues throughout the finale, and the sonata concludes *pianissimo,* less resolved than resigned.

ARNO BABAJANIAN (1921–1983)
Piano Trio in F-sharp minor (1952)

Born in the Armenian capital city of Yerevan in 1921, Arno Babajanian demonstrated such ample musical promise from his youth that Aram Khachaturian, the leading Armenian composer of his generation, insisted that the five-year-old Babajanian receive formal instruction. At seven, Babajanian enrolled in the Komitas State Conservatory in Yerevan, where his training was rooted in both Western classical and Armenian folk traditions.

After completing studies at the Moscow Conservatory in piano, composition, and ethnomusicology in 1948, Babajanian returned to Yerevan to teach at Komitas. He served on the piano faculty from 1950 to 1956, during which time he produced much of his solo piano, chamber, and orchestral music, including the Piano Trio in F-sharp minor. In subsequent years, Babajanian achieved wider professional recognition. His accolades included the Stalin State Prize, Armenia State Prize, and Order of the Red Banner of Labor. In 1971, he received the honorary title of People's Artist of the USSR.

The Piano Trio reflects the influence of Khachaturian and Sergei Rachmaninov while revealing a distinct compositional voice. The pallid melody that begins the work, stated in ghostly octaves by the violin and cello above a halting progression of chords in the piano, recalls the disconsolate air of Rachmaninov's *Trio élégiaque,* op. 9. Each of the work's three movements returns to this theme, as if dwelling on an anxiety that cannot be overcome. The first movement's *Allegro* section begins with a theme, introduced by the cello, that descends further into the introduction's emotional abyss.

Yet there are moments of respite. The piano offers the opening movement's enchanting second theme, soon taken up by violin and cello with the melodic inflection of Armenian folk music. The *Andante* second movement begins with breathtaking delicacy, as if to cast the trio's ghostly beginning in sharp relief.

The trio's finale presents similarly contrasting musical characters. In the wake of the dreamlike slow movement, this *Allegro vivace* comes out of the gate with a furious gallop, soon bringing to mind the élan of a folk dance. The cello issues a lyrical second theme while sustaining the main theme's propulsive energy. A final evocation of the ghostly introduction precedes the trio's turbulent conclusion.

GYÖRGY LIGETI (1923–2006)
Sonata for Solo Cello (1948–1953)

Unquestionably one of the most singular compositional voices of the twentieth century (and widely popularized by Stanley Kubrick's appropriation of several of his works in the films *2001: A Space Odyssey, The Shining,* and *Eyes Wide Shut*), György Ligeti was, at the end of his life, widely regarded as Western music's greatest living composer. His music reflects his assimilation of a wide spectrum of cultural elements. Artistically descended from Béla Bartók (one of the few prominent twentieth-century masters whose music he had exposure to in his youth), Ligeti later encountered the emergent avant-garde community in Darmstadt, Germany. In the early 1980s, he extended his sonic palette further, immersing himself in non-European musical cultures: his interest in Caribbean, African, and East Asian music complemented the influence of his own Hungarian heritage. Ultimately, regardless of his aesthetic sources, Ligeti was always guided by his personal sound ideal. Given to sonic exploration and adventure, his music reveals a free-spirited imagination and infinite curiosity.

The melodic sensibility, lyricism, and rhythmic flair contained in the Sonata for Solo Cello identify Ligeti as the heir apparent to the modern Hungarian tradition established by Bartók and Zoltán Kodály. But those two composers notwithstanding, it is Ligeti's own uniquely personal voice that ultimately comes through. The Sonata for Solo Cello illustrates a distinctive feature of Ligeti's compositional technique: his deep understanding of an instrument's character and expressive capabilities.

The sonata comprises two movements. The first, entitled *Dialogo*, is a poignant dialogue indeed between two contrasting musical ideas, each one singularly characteristic of the cello. The first is a pair of strummed chords, one sliding into the next. The

second is a deeply felt melody, exploiting the cello's vocal expressivity ("I attempted to write a beautiful melody," the composer once reflected, "with a typical Hungarian profile, but not a folksong...or only half, like in Bartók or Kodály"). Ligeti composed the *Dialogo* in 1948, near the end of his studies at the Budapest Academy of Music. He later admitted that the movement's tenderness owed to his secret amorous feelings toward a young cellist and classmate of his at the academy who, never aware of Ligeti's feelings, politely thanked him for the gift of the *Dialogo* and never played it.

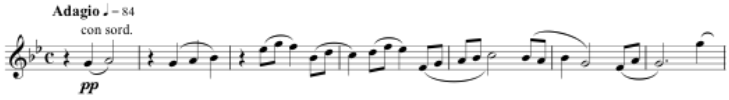
Several years later in 1953, Ligeti met the cellist Vera Dénes, who asked him for a new solo work. Ligeti added the virtuosic *Capriccio* to the *Diologo*, which still had never been performed, to form the two-movement Sonata for Solo Cello. In the composer's words, "Because the second movement had the 'ambition' to become a sonata movement, I wrote it in sonata form. It is a virtuoso piece in my later style that is closer to Bartók. I was [thirty] years old when I wrote it. I loved virtuosity and took the playing to the edge of virtuosity much like [Paganini]."

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)
Piano Quintet in G minor, op. 57 (1940)

Dmitry Shostakovich composed his Opus 57 Piano Quintet in 1940 at the request of the Beethoven Quartet, one of Russia's preeminent chamber ensembles. The Beethoven Quartet had recently performed Shostakovich's String Quartet no. 1, op. 49, and was eager for more music from the thirty-four-year-old composer. They were particularly interested in having a piano quintet, which would allow them to perform with Shostakovich. This marked the beginning of a long and significant artistic relationship: the Beethoven Quartet would premiere the next thirteen of Shostakovich's string quartets, and Shostakovich dedicated his Third and Fifth Quartets to the Beethoven Quartet and his Eleventh through Fourteenth to its individual members.

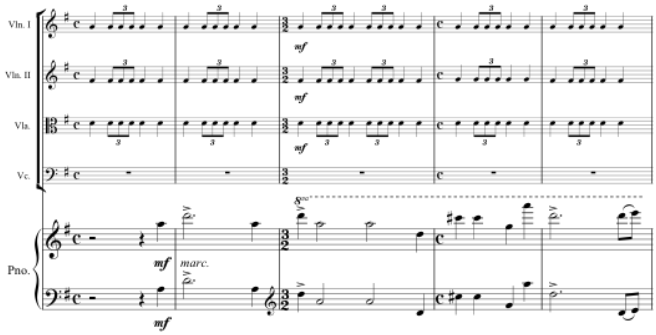
Unlike much of Shostakovich's oeuvre, the quintet does not directly address the composer's sociopolitical climate, but it does share the range of expressive power that characterizes such works as his Eighth String Quartet, famously dedicated to "victims of fascism and war." In fact, when the quintet was premiered, one Russian newspaper praised it as "a portrait of our age...the rich-toned, perfect voice of the present." The following year, the quintet received the inaugural Stalin Prize, a newly established state prize recognizing excellence in the arts and sciences. The prize included a considerable cash award of 100,000 rubles, which Shostakovich contributed to charity benefitting Moscow's poor.

The quintet begins with a nod to a Baroque convention especially associated with Johann Sebastian Bach: its first two movements are a prelude and fugue. (This is not the only time Shostakovich would echo this Bachian format: his 24 Preludes and Fugues for Solo Piano, op. 87, which cover each major and minor key in the chromatic scale, are inspired by and make direct references to the 48 Preludes and Fugues of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*.) The *Prelude* begins and ends solemnly, around a quicker, but more introspective, middle section. The slow G minor *Fugue* that follows represents the quintet's emotional center of gravity. Its deeply affecting subject, introduced by the first violin, captures the feeling of a melancholy Russian folk tune, whose tension Shostakovich draws out exquisitely.



Following the emotionally devastating *Fugue*, Shostakovich offers the listener some measure of relief with the rambunctious *Scherzo*. Against an exuberant string accompaniment, the piano issues a cheerful tune. The music's seeming naivete gives way in short order to knowingly mischievous dissonances. A central dance-like melody is sardonic, perhaps, but remains light on its feet, never probing the gravity of the *Fugue*.

The quintet's fourth movement, a slow, plaintive *Intermezzo*, proceeds without pause to the gently optimistic *Finale*: a brighter statement, in G major, bringing a palpable sense of relief. So decisive is the *Finale*'s change in character that one of its themes actually quotes Russian circus music.



Before long, however, the circus music becomes grotesque, yielding later to music redolent of the second *Fugue* movement. But the *Finale* quickly returns to the affable gait of its opening measures, ending the quintet on a contented note.

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