Music@Menlo *LIVE*

4 Maps and Legends

Music@Menlo's eighth season, *Maps and Legends,* explored a wide compass of times, places, and universal phenomena. The season's offerings ranged from programs that celebrated a nation's identity to music composed in response to the changing of the seasons and the trauma of war. The 2010 edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE* chronicles this fascinating journey, preserving for listeners the exceptional performances that made *Maps and Legends* such a memorable experience.

Disc 4 brings together three of the twentieth century's most commanding compositional voices. Dmitry Shostakovich's name has become virtually synonymous with the intensity of his musical reaction to Stalinism, his work serving as a musical chronicle of the harsh conditions under Stalin's regime. His countryman and contemporary Sergey Prokofiev fled Russia after the October Revolution of 1917 and ultimately settled in Paris, where he composed the Opus 39 Quintet, a work of razor-sharp wit and duplicitous charm. Arnold Schoenberg became the most notorious of the three as Western music's first composer to abandon the tonal system. His audacious compositional language that so revolutionized music in the twentieth century remains as fresh and provocative at the dawn of the twenty-first.

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975): **String Quartet no. 8 in c minor, op. 110** (1960)

In 1960, Shostakovich wrote the score for *Five Days, Five Nights,* a film set in the aftermath of the 1945 bombing of Dresden. While working on the score, Shostakovich

Lily Francis, violin; Joshua Gindele, cello; Gilbert Kalish, piano; Todd Palmer, clarinet; Tara Helen O'Connor, flute

stayed in Dresden, where he was surrounded by reminders of the destruction that had befallen the city just fifteen years earlier. During work on the film score, Shostakovich was moved to write a new string quartet, a kind of dual meditation on the events of 1945 and his own present circumstances. The score's dedication reads: "In memory of victims of fascism and war."

The Opus 110 String Quartet is an explicitly autobiographical work. In a letter to the writer Isaak Glikman, Shostakovich wrote:

> When I die, it's hardly likely someone will write a quartet dedicated to my memory. So I decided to write it myself. One could write on the frontispiece,

"Dedicated to the author of this quartet." The main theme is the monogram D, Es, C, H, that is, my initials.

(In German notation, the note E-flat is spelled Es; B-natural is spelled H.) Shostakovich's monogram anchors the quartet, commencing in the work's grave opening measures and appearing in various guises throughout its five continuous movements.

The quartet furthermore quotes several of Shostakovich's own earlier compositions. Throughout the work are scattered references to his First and Fifth symphonies, Opus 67 Piano Trio, Cello Concerto, and opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (a work condemned in a 1936 *Pravda* editorial widely assumed to have been issued by Stalin).

Among the piece's many compelling moments are the *Allegretto* third movement—a sardonic waltz based on the DSCH motif—and the transition to the following *Largo*. The *Allegretto* ends with a single note quietly sustained in the first violin, as if anxiously holding its breath. Three harrowing chords, easily heard as the KGB's dreaded knock at the door, begin and recur throughout the fourth movement. Shostakovich scholar Harlow Robinson notes another possible significance to the three-chord motif: if Soviet citizens saw a KGB informant enter the room, they would signal a warning by knocking under the table three times. The fourth movement also quotes the Russian revolutionary anthem "Tormented by Grievous Bondage." The quartet ends with an elegiac reprise of the first movement.

SERGEY PROKOFIEV (1891–1953): **Quintet in g minor, op. 39** (1924)

Like many artists of his generation, the Russian composer Sergey Prokofiev fled his homeland in the wake of the October Revolution of 1917. He first immigrated with his family to the United States; five years later, at the age of thirty-two, Prokofiev resettled in Paris, adding a new dimension to the city's bustling musical landscape. His music was not immediately embraced: when his First Violin Concerto premiered in October 1923, the composers of Les Six derided it as old-fashioned. Prokofiev responded with his Second Symphony, a work whose biting dissonance seemed to announce that Prokofiev could hold his own with the avant-garde. The composer acknowledged that his new environment—and Paris's openness to adventurous new sounds—energized him while he was composing the new symphony. Following its premiere, Prokofiev joked that the work was so complex that "neither I nor the audience understood anything in it."

Prokofiev composed his Opus 39 Quintet in g minor simultaneously with the Second Symphony. The quintet began as music for a ballet called *Trapeze*. The presenting dance company requested music for a small ensemble that would evoke a circus setting. Prokofiev obliged with this idiosyncratic work, scored for oboe, clarinet, violin, viola, and double bass. While it shares some of the Second Symphony's caustic dissonance and acerbic orchestration, so, too, does the quintet reflect the singular combination of elegance and fiendish wit that characterizes Prokofiev's best-known works.

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG (1874–1951): **Chamber Symphony no. 1, op. 9** (1922; arr. Webern, 1922–1923)

The Chamber Symphony no. 1, op. 9, reflects the period of Schoenberg's career just before he abandoned tonality. The music of this period extends the Romantic idiom towards a more abstract, Expressionist language. Although he would soon challenge deeper musical premises, Schoenberg nevertheless regarded the Chamber Symphony as enough of a personal artistic breakthrough that, upon its completion, he declared, "Now I have established my style. Now I know how I have to compose."

Schoenberg originally composed the Chamber Symphony for an ensemble of fifteen wind and string instruments. In 1912, he expanded the orchestration with doubled winds and multiple strings; this first orchestral version does not survive, but a second was published in 1935 as Schoenberg's Opus 9b. This is the work's most widely performed version. The present transcription was arranged by Webern between 1922 and 1923.

The work is in one continuous movement and comprises five distinct yet interrelated sections, simultaneously suggesting a single sonata-form movement and the multi-

movement character of a Classical symphony. A slow introduction and inviting F major cadence introduce the exposition-cum-first movement, a peripatetic affair thereafter. A faster, restless section (marked *sehr rasch*—very rapidly) functions as the scherzo, with a fleeting trio marked, in the present arrangement, by tentative staccato gestures and mysterious flute notes. The central development section (or, as Schoenberg preferred to call it, elaboration) recalls the thematic material of the opening. Rising fourths in cello harmonics, punctuated by featherweight chords in the upper voices, introduce the dream-like slow "movement." As it unfolds, the movement reveals itself as a fulfillment of the work's four-measure introduction. The finale recapitulates material from the opening and slow movements.

Webern's arrangement of the Chamber Symphony for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano (an instrumental combination commonly referred to as Pierrot ensemble, after Schoenberg's landmark *Pierrot lunaire* of 1912) highlights, in Schoenberg's words, the "style of concision and brevity" striven for in the original, "in which every technical or structural necessity was carried out without unnecessary extension, in which every single unit is supposed to be functional."

—Patrick Castillo

About Music@Menlo

Music@Menlo is an internationally acclaimed three-week summer festival and institute that combines world-class chamber music performances, extensive audience engagement with artists, intensive training for preprofessional musicians, and efforts to enhance and broaden the chamber music community of the San Francisco Bay Area. An immersive and engaging experience centered around a distinctive array of programming, Music@Menlo enriches its core concert programs with numerous opportunities for in-depth learning to intensify audiences' enjoyment and understanding of the music and provide meaningful ways for aficionados and newcomers of all ages to explore classical chamber music.