SUMMER FESTIVAL ON THE EASTSIDE

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 4

Edward Elgar
Sonata for Violin and Piano in E minor, Op. 82
Allegro
Romance: Andante
Allegro non troppo
James Ehnes, violin
Anna Polonsky, piano

Dmitri Shostakovich
Quartet No. 8 for Strings in C minor, Op. 110
Largo—
Allegro—
Allegretto—
Largo—
Largo
Augustin Hadelich, violin
Stefan Jackiw, violin
Richard O'Neill, viola
Edward Arron, cello

Ludwig van Beethoven
Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in B-flat Major, Op. 97 "Archduke"
Allegro moderato
Scherzo: Allegro
Andante cantabile, ma pero con moto—
Allegro moderato
Scott Yoo, violin
Ronald Thomas, cello
Anton Nel, piano

Edward Elgar (1857–1934)
Sonata for Violin and Piano in E minor, Op. 82 (1918)

As a young man Edward Elgar threw himself into the world of chamber music. In 1887, he composed a string quartet and violin/piano sonata, which though published, he later destroyed. Three decades later, as World War I drew to a close, he returned to chamber composition, writing his Op. 82 Violin Sonata, Op. 83 String Quartet, and his well-known Op. 84 Piano Quintet. Reeling from the horrors of the war and facing the imminent death of his beloved wife, he poured his often angry feelings, grief and anxiety in all three of these minor-key offerings. As is well known, he virtually ceased composing after his Cello Concerto of 1919—like the Violin and Piano Sonata cast in E minor.

The opening *Allegro* of the Violin Sonata begins with an assertive violin theme strongly supported by roiling piano chords. Powerful and propulsive unison passages yield to a yearning and lyrical Romantic melody shared and traded off by the two instruments. A quiet and mystery-filled section filled with arpeggio versions of the thematic material ensues. Elsewhere, too, moments of delicate sensibility offer a hopeful glimpse of a return to inner and outer peace. The movement ends vigorously until the consonant closing moments in the major mode.

A slowly descending theme on the violin, gently answered by the piano announces the next movement, a *Romance* bearing the tempo *Andante*. Historically, a chromatically descending theme often conveys funereal feelings, but this seems not to be the case here. The music is by turns sweet and rhythmically disjointed; a serene middle section suggests a desire for a state of hope-for continued intimacy connected with the composer's love for his terminally ill wife—a wish, sadly, not to be granted.

The concluding *Allegro non troppo* begins serenely, but as the music proceeds moods and rhythms become increasingly feverish and assertive. Throughout the movement the violin devotes itself to the unfolding of rhapsodic melodic material while the piano provides a rippling undercurrent of wave-like arpeggios. Fleeting recollections for earlier material dart in and out of consciousness before the Sonata ends bravely on a note of heartfelt optimism.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)
Quartet No. 8 for Strings in C minor, Op. 110 (1960)

Shostakovich composed 15 symphonies and an equal number of quartets for strings. Those 30 works provide a compelling musical portrait of a brilliant and moody composer troubled by demons both internal and external. The symphonies vary greatly in quality, not because he was less than a great symphonist, but simply because the larger audience for orchestral music led to greater coercion/interference from the Soviet government than the "lowly" string quartet. Some of Shostakovich's symphonic works are not much more than state-approved jingoistic trumpet-blasts, while others—the Eighth, Tenth and Fifteenth especially—resonate deeply in our collective soul.

His string quartets vary as well, though not to the chasm-like degree of his orchestral works. Of the 15 quartets, the Eighth has received the most attention, especially in the West. Its grim depiction of the horrors of fascism and compelling musical arguments has earned it a hallowed place among chamber works of the past century. It also found new life in at least two transcriptions for string orchestra, one of them incorporating percussion to make more graphic the programmatic references to the sound of machine-gun rat-a-tats in the fourth movement.

In 1960, the powers-that-be sent Shostakovich to Dresden to compose music for an East German film, *Five Days, Five Nights*. Much rebuilding of Dresden remained undone, and the potent ruins of war awakened the composer's haunting personal memories of World War II. The resultant string quartet was his exorcism of those painful memories, and a testament "To the Memory of the Victims of Fascism," the quartet's subtitle.

As in previous works, herein Shostakovich uses a musical cryptogram based on his name—D-S-C-H (in German spelling) to represent the notes D, E-flat, C, and B, which recurs in all five movements—played without pause. In the opening *Largo* the cello introduces the motto theme before the other instruments enter one by one. Then, as if reflecting on past memories, Shostakovich quotes themes from his First and Fifth symphonies, works that had brought him great praise at crucial points in his career.

The ensuing *Allegro* jolts us with a violent flurry of furious notes hurdling by, only to be interrupted by another statement of the four-note motto, this time by the viola and cello.

Marked *Allegretto*, the third movement is a bitter and ironic waltz that acknowledges Shostakovich's admiration for Mahler, obvious in the intentional grotesquerie of this expressionistic music. Here, and in the fourth movement, he quotes again, this time from his Cello Concerto No. 1.

The fourth movement, another *Largo*, opens with a sequence of harsh chords after which we hear a tune sung by 19th-century Siberian convicts, translated as "Exhausted by the hardship of prison" and/or "Tormented by lack of freedom." Yet another quotation appears: music from his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which had been savaged by Stalin in 1936 and had remained banned in Russia until 1960. Well into the movement, a slashing sequence of harsh chords suggests nothing less than gunfire, a sound amply familiar to the composer from his experiences during the war as well as a possible reflection on how close he had come to death at the hands of his regime.

The concluding *Largo* revisits the fugato of the opening, now broken down into two dissonant minor seconds, a grim reminder of the anguish that gave birth to this powerful score.

As an aside, the reader is directed to the 2006 German film, *The Lives of Others*, an edge-of-the seat story about the perils of a writer being spied on by the Stasi (East German secret police) in the years before *Glasnost* and the fall of the Berlin Wall. It serves as a powerful reminder of what life must have been like for Shostakovich and other Russian artists and composers during the Stalinist era.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in B-flat Major, Op. 97, "Archduke" (1811)

As deservedly famous as are his 16 string quartets, Beethoven also poured his creative juices into 11 numbered piano trios plus another handful that were transcriptions of works originally composed in other formats—including his Symphony No. 2 and Op. 20 Septet. In fact, his very first published works were the three estimable Piano Trios that constitute his Op. 1.

By far the best-known of his works in this genre is the Trio No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 97, which carries the nickname "Archduke." Beethoven composed the music in 1811, a year marked by great political and social upheaval in Vienna. In general, the age of aristocratic sponsorship was coming to an end, to be supplanted by the growing wealth, power and largesse of the rapidly emerging bourgeoisie. Ironic, then, that in the midst of this paradigm shift, Beethoven should dedicate the work to his long-time friend, patron and student, Archduke Rudolf, younger brother of the Emperor Leopold II.

It is a measure of the turmoil of Viennese life at the time, that three years elapsed between the year of composition—1811—and its premiere three years later. Not even Beethoven's great fame could ensure a quicker turnaround. On that occasion in 1814, fellow composer Ludwig (or Louis) Spohr wrote of Beethoven's performance of the keyboard part: "In *forte* passages the poor deaf man pounded on the keys until the strings jangled, and in *piano* he played so softly that whole groups of notes were omitted." Beethoven's friend and biographer Anton Schindler noted that due to increasing deafness, the composer "withdrew forever from public view as a performing artist."

The opening *Allegro moderato* has less in common with the big, bold and heroic works that traditionally define his middle period (though the assigned opus number of 97 puts it on the cusp of his late works), than with the comparatively lyrical and poetic music he penned at the time, e.g., the Violin Concerto, Fourth Piano Concerto and "Pastoral" Symphony. The graceful and flowing opening theme begins quietly and with abiding warmth. After some lovely bridging passages, a second and more pointed theme emerges in a series of descending phrases. Construction is fairly straightforward in its sonata-allegro format, but the music's blend of nobility and expressive richness stamps a seal of greatness on the piece.

As he would do later in the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven chose to follow the initial movement with a *Scherzo*. Marked *Allegro*, the cello gets things underway with a humor-filled rhythmic figure. In the Trio it is also the cello that posits a contrasting chromatic figure that serves as that section's primary theme. A second tune, rustic and dancelike,

soon emerges. Both the *Scherzo* proper and Trio are repeated before a coda brings the movement to an end.

The slow movement, marked *Andante cantabile, ma pero con moto* grows from an unassuming yet ravishing hymn-like tune that undergoes a sequence of five variations that maintain the overall melodic and harmonic contour of the theme while exploring life-giving rhythmic variants in the music. The movement breathes the air of much-needed serenity, a state of being belied by the vicissitudes of his personal life and the political and social maelstrom of the Austrian capital in 1811.

Without pause, the concluding *Allegro moderato* stomps heartily into the fray, humorously giving the boot to the noble calm of the preceding movement. Bristling with energy and down-to-earth dancelike vitality, the spirit of *yang* herein replaces the *yin* of the *Andante cantabile*. In the face of a great cultural dislocation, the mood is unfailingly upbeat and humorous rather than forcefully dramatic.

Program Notes by
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