



SUMMER FESTIVAL ON THE EASTSIDE

FRIDAY, AUGUST 6

Franz Schubert

Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major, D. 574/Op. 162

Allegro moderato

Scherzo: Presto

Andantino

Allegro vivace

Augustin Hadelich, violin

Anna Polonsky, piano

Dmitri Kabalevsky

Quartet for Strings in G minor, Op. 44

Allegro molto ed energico

Andante non troppo

Scherzando leggiero (quasi presto)

Adagio molto sostenuto—

L'istesso tempo—Vivace giocoso

Scott Yoo, violin

James Ehnes, violin

Richard O'Neill, viola

Ronald Thomas, cello

Piotr I. Tchaikovsky

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in A minor, Op. 50

Elegiaco

Theme and variations

Stefan Jackiw, violin

Edward Arron, cello

Orion Weiss, piano

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major, D. 574/Op. 162 (1817)

In 1817, barely out of his teens, Franz Schubert completed the Sonata in A Major, D. 574/Op. 162, which initially bore the title Duo and remained unpublished until after his death at age 31. This imposing work had been preceded by three unassuming and lightweight “sonatinas,” so called to reflect their modesty of intent and absence of elaborate development sections.

The opening movement of the Sonata in A Major, *Allegro moderato*, all but overwhelms the listener through its melodic richness. A brief introductory passage on the piano provides the backdrop for a delectably lyrical theme sung by the violin. In short order the music becomes increasingly agitated as the composer trades off little snippets of melody between the two instruments, including a new motive that derives from the opening piano phrases. A brief development section and simple recapitulation complete the movement.

Leaping from an ascending piano phrase, the light and deft *Scherzo* ensues, its humor recalling the lingering presence of Haydn, dead for less than a decade and still “enjoying” posthumous influence on young composers of the day. As would become a signature tactic for Schubert, the brief movement quickly deviates into unexpected keys marked by sudden stops as if to take a deep breath before taking the plunge into new tonal regions. A graceful and light-hearted Trio occupies a central spot in the otherwise quirky movement.

The bright *Scherzo* serves as a prefatory counterpoise to the lovely, if somewhat reticent *Andantino*. A flowing line on the violin is supported by a simple Alberti bass accompaniment on the piano that soon evolves into a richer structure punctuated by brief and sudden emotional outbursts that ultimately do not detract from the music’s prevailing lyricism.

Though Schubert was a very able string player and pianist—if by no means a true virtuoso—the challenging *Allegro vivace* finale, which uses material clearly borrowed from the *Scherzo*, demands a mature technique that makes one wonder whether he could have performed it at speed. (He is known to have simplified the devilishly difficult piano accompaniment to his great Op. 1 song, *Der Erlkönig* when he played it.) In any case, the Duo testifies to Schubert’s mastery of his integrated writing of music for violin and piano, an accomplishment that derived from his already considerable experience as a composer of *Lieder* whose piano parts can be performed as independent works.

Dmitri Kabalevsky (1904–1987)

Quartet for Strings in G minor, Op. 44 (1945)

Though he joined the Communist Party in 1940 and took an active role in providing patriotic and easy-on-the-ear musical evocations of Socialist Realism, Dmitri Kabalevsky came close to experiencing the same kind of persecution accorded many of his fellow musicians during the 1948 Zhdanov resolutions. That he escaped censure or worse was due to his strong connection with well-placed officials within the Soviet power elite.

Certainly his music could scarcely be attacked for excessive modernism. Virtually from the outset of his career he favored an essentially harmonically accessible diatonic vocabulary, using dissonances primarily as spices for an otherwise easily digestible musical diet. The irony of his being fingered—temporarily, of course—as a musical infidel is reflected in the USSR State Prize (Category 4), a high honor accorded his Quartet No. 2 in G minor, Op. 44, composed during the final year of World War II.

The opening *Allegro molto ed energico* begins with forceful, pulsing anxiety. A brief sequence of pizzicatos heralds a less frenetic and comparatively lyrical theme, at times interrupted by recurrent *angst*. The sense of threat and urgency is heightened by rapid up-and-down arpeggio-based passages played *sul ponticello* (at the bridge of stringed instruments). A restless and bounding figure in the cello adds further drama and unease as do harshly bowed chords in the lower sonic regions. Moments of relative quiet evoke fear, not calm. The oft-repeated abrasive chords noted above predate by 15 years the “machine-gun” bursts of Shostakovich’s Eighth String Quartet and may well have served a parallel function as a sound-picture of the Nazi invaders. A quiet extended episode toward the end of the movement, periodically accompanied by gentle pizzicatos, suggests a mixture of nostalgic hope tinged with apprehension. The movement ends fiercely.

The cello opens the *Andante non troppo* with a lugubrious melody floating over a plucked accompaniment. The violins and viola have their turn incanting the lyrical yet forlorn tune. The unfolding theme finds itself surrounded by swirling figures and more pizzicato passages. A rapid violin-led section heightens a sense of impending danger, rendered even more perilous through actively contrapuntal commentary from the other instruments. Toward the close the textures thin out as the first violin sings mournfully on its own. Low grumbling from the cello further darkens matters.

An eerily skittish *Scherzando leggero (quasi presto)* follows, propelled by more pizzicatos. The nervous primary theme moves in a rapid and serpentine fashion through a maze of pizzicatos and other anxiety-inducing accompanying figures.

The following *Adagio molto sostenuto* treads slowly in a dirge-like funeral procession, no doubt a tribute and memorial to the millions of Russians who were victim to the Nazi invasion. A simple, short sighing theme enters, soon replaced by the concluding *L'istesso tempo—Vivace giocoso*, which begins without pause. While shards of pain from the previous movements are recalled, the overall mood of the finale is hopeful. Kernels of dancelike and somewhat manic energy abound, a release of anxiety long-pent up by the previous uncertainty of ultimate victory over the invaders. Toward the end, the harsh chords that previously invoked fear now take on a celebratory expectation of peace.

Piotr I. Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in A minor, Op. 50 (1881–1882)

Nikolai Rubinstein, director of the Moscow Conservatory, famously responded to Tchaikovsky’s as yet unfinished First Piano Concerto with a withering attack and strong recommendation to drastically revise the work before presenting it to the public. Hurt and

angry, the ever-sensitive composer refused to change a note and—wouldn't you know—the concerto went on to become *the* grand romantic piano concerto *par excellence*. Eventually Rubinstein came around and the two men resumed their friendship. When Rubinstein died in 1881 while on tour in Paris, Tchaikovsky, who was in Nice at the time, was devastated. In direct response to this personal tragedy, he wrote his Trio in A minor, dedicated “to the memory of a great artist.” The elegiac mood of the Trio no doubt contributed to its use in concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg following Tchaikovsky's death in 1893, more than a decade after the Trio's premiere in October 1882.

Two extended movements comprise the Trio. The opening *Elegiaco* conveys orchestral weight and timbre; it sounds like a movement from a piano concerto, with contrasting sections establishing a dual mood of grief and fond remembrance. The piano part is quite demanding, no doubt written as a tribute to Rubinstein's considerable virtuosity. (Tchaikovsky insisted that his mentor was a far better pianist than he.) Four distinct themes weave through the music, ranging from quiet melancholy to ardent passion.

The far-longer second movement consists of a set of variations on a folk-like tune Tchaikovsky conjured in tribute to another of his late friend's musical interests, Rubinstein's love for folk music. In 1873, both men had been picnicking in the countryside when a group of peasants sang and danced for them. It has been suggested that the theme for this movement, though written by Tchaikovsky, evoked the mood and overall melodic shape of that unforgotten day eight years earlier.

Tchaikovsky treats the theme to 11 variations, each one possibly reflective of some aspect of Rubinstein's character or the composer's memory of his one-time teacher. When critics began to assign specific events to each variation, Tchaikovsky responded: “How amusing! To compose music without the slightest desire to represent something, and suddenly to discover that it represents this or that, it is what Molière's bourgeois gentilhomme must have felt when he learned that he had been speaking in prose all of his life.”

Among the most noteworthy of the variations are the scherzo-like No. 3, the music box sonorities of No. 5 and the Polish *Mazurka* of No. 9. The concluding section, based on a twelfth variation of the original theme, is topped off by a stunning reprise of the opening motive from the first movement, tying the piece together in cyclical fashion.

**Program Notes by
Steven Lowe**