

*the* PROGRAM16  
JUNE*Friday*

8 PM

## ESCHER STRING QUARTET

Adam Barnett-Hart, *violin*Aaron Boyd, *violin*Pierre Lapointe, *viola*Brook Speltz, *cello*

WITH

**Joyce Yang, piano***Pre-concert talk with Dr. Elizabeth Seitz, 7 PM*

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY STEPHEN AND JILL BELL

## PRELUDES

**Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

Op. 32, No. 12, in G-Sharp Minor: Allegro (1910)

Op. 23, No. 4, in D Major: Andante cantabile (1903)

Op. 3, No. 2, in C-Sharp Minor: Lento (1892)

*Joyce Yang*

STRING QUARTET NO. 9 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 117 (1964)

**Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)**

Moderato con moto

Adagio

Allegretto

Adagio

Allegro

*Escher Quartet*

:: INTERMISSION ::

QUINTET FOR PIANO AND STRINGS IN G MINOR, OP. 57 (1940)

**Dmitri Shostakovich**

Prelude: Lento

Fugue: Adagio

Scherzo: Allegretto

Intermezzo: Lento

Finale: Allegretto

*Escher Quartet and Joyce Yang***GLOVSKY**  
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*Notes*  
ON THE  
PROGRAM

BY  
Sandra Hyslop

## PRELUDES

Sergei Rachmaninoff (b. Semyonovo, Russia, April 1, 1873;  
d. Beverly Hills, March 28, 1943)

*Composed 1892-1910; 13 minutes*

Sergei Rachmaninoff composed 24 preludes for piano, one in every major and minor key. Other composers—J. S. Bach and Frédéric Chopin, among them—also wrote sets of preludes in every key, but Rachmaninoff took the genre to new lengths, creating piano works that were longer and more complex than those of his predecessors.

Op. 32, No. 12 (1910) has all the sheen of an icy winter scene. Its mournful melody haunts the piece, and the scene dissolves in a flurry of fine snow crystals.

The ten preludes of Op. 23 were completed in the years 1900-1903. The lyrical No. 4, in D major, features widely spaced, legato arpeggiation that supports fine-spun melodic material.

The first of the twenty-four to be composed was the Prelude in C-sharp minor. Writing it directly after his graduation from Moscow Conservatory in 1892, Rachmaninoff dedicated it to Alexander Siloti, his harmony teacher at the Conservatory (and his cousin). Siloti introduced it to the rest of the world, and in subsequent years Rachmaninoff could seldom complete a concert without performing the Prelude in C-sharp minor as an encore.

## STRING QUARTET NO. 9 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 117

Dmitri Shostakovich (b. St. Petersburg, Russia, September 25, 1906;  
d. Moscow, August 9, 1975)

*Composed 1964; 24 minutes*

The two most important interpreters of Shostakovich's chamber music were the Beethoven Quartet, founded in 1922-23, and the younger Borodin Quartet, their pupils, formed in 1945. Both ensembles originated in their student years at the Moscow Conservatory and they became the preeminent Russian string quartets of their respective eras. The two ensembles were intimately associated with the music of Shostakovich, whose career as a composer spanned the performing lifetimes of the two ensembles.

The Beethoven Quartet gave the premieres of all but two (the first and the last) of the composer's fifteen string quartets. The Borodin Quartet, in their turn, coached all but the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth with Shostakovich—he called them, admiringly, "my boys." The relationship of those ensembles with the composer was, therefore, direct and authoritative.



*Dmitri Shostakovich at the piano in 1941*

In 1992 the Borodin Quartet cellist, Valentin Alexandrovich Berlinsky (born in 1925), gave an interview with the Polish musicologist Irina Nikolskaya. To the question "Is it possible to gain a comprehensive impression of Shostakovich as a composer solely on the basis of the fifteen quartets?" Berlinsky replied:

Definitely! His ethics, aesthetics, and style are all distilled in the quartets, along with his personality; it, too, is somehow totally expressed in the quartets....

This is how I see Shostakovich's creative evolution: his music developed along a line of ever intensifying drama, I would even say tragedy. His quartets have



*Sergei Rachmaninoff in concert in the 1930s*

much in common with Beethoven's in terms of their profound creative conception. But all the finales in Dmitri Dmitrievich's quartets are tragic in character, unlike those of Beethoven. And I think I know why. Beethoven, more often than not, arrives at a life-affirmative finale, despite all the conflicts and collisions, all that is lived through beforehand in the music's unfolding."

Under totalitarian rule in the U.S.S.R., Shostakovich lived with constant fear and insecurity. Whiplashed by the quixotic moods of Josef Stalin and the bureaucratic minions who executed his orders, Shostakovich paid a tremendous price for his dedication to his homeland. The pendulum swung dizzily from public prizes to public humiliations, and it is no wonder that Berlinsky described the composer's creative evolution in terms of drama and tragedy. For all his tribulations, Beethoven lived in a relatively unrestricted artistic environment. Shostakovich, by contrast, hid many of his most intimate works in a desk drawer, bringing them out for a hearing only after Stalin's death in 1953.

Shostakovich began work on the Ninth Quartet in 1962, and the Beethoven Quartet expected to premiere the work then. Shostakovich, however, informed them that he was unhappy with his first draft of the work and that "in an attack of healthy self-criticism, I burnt it in the stove." Two years later he presented them with not one, but two new string quartets, No. 9 and No.10. In May 1964, he finished Quartet No. 9, dedicating it to his wife, Irina Antonovna Shostakovich, and in July he composed his String Quartet No.10. Both of the new works were heard for the first time in a performance by the Beethoven Quartet on November 20, 1964, in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory.

Shostakovich cast the Ninth Quartet as one uninterrupted work of five movements. The violins begin the Moderato con moto singing with melancholy lyricism over a rocking, murmuring accompaniment. The cello contributes a hopping dance theme. These themes devolve at the close of the movement to an insistent little pulsing figure of three repeated notes. The viola creates a bridge to the second movement.

The Adagio, a mournful elegy in F-sharp minor, is sung in turn by the four voices, with a chorale-like accompaniment. This time, the first violin, muted, leads the way into the third movement, an Allegretto scherzo. The trance encouraged by the innocent-seeming little dance is rudely broken by an outburst of harsh chords and jagged melodies. All four voices contribute to the unfettered energy and anxious pace of the movement.

Once again, this movement fades into the next, this time on a rocking murmur in the middle voices that introduces the second Adagio. Another elegy is intoned, this one more passionate than the first. Its intensity is heightened by the interruptions of angry pizzicato passages.

Without warning, the four instruments burst into the maniacal energy of the final movement. It is another of Shostakovich's mocking dances. Themes heard in the previous movements reappear and are explored in imitative passages that lead to a solo cry of the cello. Over the nervous tremolo of the other three instruments, the lowest voice laments, shouts, and wails. The other voices join it for a final declamation of group despair before closing with a resounding flourish.

*"I have to say that on the whole Shostakovich had a phenomenal command of writing for the string quartet; everything in his quartets falls 'under the fingers.' Few composers today can compete with him in this regard.... Even Beethoven wrote less gratefully for this combination."*

Valentin Alexandrovich Berlinsky  
(born in 1925), principal cellist, Borodin Quartet

*Notes*  
ON THE  
PROGRAM  
BY  
Sandra Hyslop

## QUINTET FOR PIANO AND STRINGS IN G MINOR, OP. 57

Dmitri Shostakovich

Composed 1940; 32 minutes

In 1939 the Beethoven Quartet, Shostakovich's Moscow Conservatory colleagues, asked him to write a new work for them. He agreed readily, declaring that he would include himself in the ensemble. (Shostakovich was a formidable pianist.) On November 23, 1940, the Beethoven Quartet and Shostakovich performed the new Quintet for Piano and Strings before an enthusiastic Moscow audience. This rare window of peace in the composer's ongoing battle with the antagonistic Soviet bureaucracy coincided with the last moments of quiet before World War II enclosed Russia in its calamitous machinery. For a brief moment, Shostakovich enjoyed true pleasure in composing and performing. The Piano Quintet subsequently won the Stalin Prize for that year.

In the introduction to his book *Story of a Friendship: The Letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman*, Glikman shared this reminiscence:

Shostakovich himself told me that his original intention had been to write a second string quartet. According to him, his change of heart had not been dominated by artistic considerations at all, but purely practical concerns. "Do you want to know why I wrote a piano part into the quartet? I did it so that I could play it myself and have a reason to go on tour to different towns and places. So now the Glazunovs and the Beethovens [*the two leading Russian string quartets in the 1930s*], who get to go everywhere, will have to take me with them, and I will get my chance to see the world as well!"

We both laughed.

"You're not serious?" I said. Shostakovich replied: "Absolutely! You're a dyed-in-the-wool stay-at-home, but I'm a dyed-in-the-wool wanderer!"

This rare glimpse of a more playful Shostakovich confirms what his friends often said about the man. The dangerous politics of the era had not completely destroyed his sense of humor and adventurousness.

The Quintet is classically constructed. The first two movements comprise a rich Prelude and Fugue (a style that he would explore a decade later in his 24 Preludes and Fugues for solo piano). The Prelude begins with a stately introduction, continues to a lively center section, and concludes with a return to the more dramatic mood of the opening. The Fugue emerges without pause through the violin's singing of the principal subject. All the instruments contribute to the swelling of the independent lines, and the movement ends with quiet grace.

The vivacious Scherzo is humorously dissonant. As a Trio, the center section adds the sassy character of a folk dance, and then returns to the fire of the opening. In the Intermezzo, Shostakovich wrote a conversation among the instruments that gives each of them opportunities for speaking. This is not a piano concerto, but rather a balanced meeting of voices that create rich sonic textures.

In the upbeat Finale, Shostakovich utilized as one of his main themes the traditional music to which the clowns make their entrance in a Russian circus. The rhythmic drive and boisterous mood eventually subside, and the movement ends with the instruments bidding a quiet farewell, satisfied with their journey.



Members of the Beethoven Quartet, faculty colleagues of Dmitri Shostakovich at the Moscow Conservatory, were closely associated with the composer from 1938 until his death. The Beethoven Quartet premiered all but two (the first and the last) of Shostakovich's fifteen quartets. In addition, the composer dedicated a string quartet to each of its members: String Quartet No. 11 in memory of Vasily Shirinsky (violin), No. 12 to Dmitri Tsyganov (violin), No. 13 to Vadim Borisovskiy (viola), and No. 14 to Sergei Shirinsky (cello). The Beethoven Quartet not only commissioned the Piano Quintet and premiered it, but also performed it frequently and recorded it, all with Shostakovich at the piano. Their recording of the work is currently unavailable on disc, but can be streamed.

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