

[Brief] Program Notes – MM Recital

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**Selected Pieces from the ballet “Romeo and Juliet” – Sergei Prokofiev (arr. V Borisovsky)**

This arrangement, by famed Russian violist and pedagogue Vadim Borisovsky is perhaps the most famous of his arrangements for viola and piano. The original ballet is to Prokofiev as *Daphnis et Chloe* is to Ravel – a choreographic and virtuosic orchestral composition whose merits are in excellence of orchestration, sonority, color, and emotional coherency. From a composer with a penchant for the grotesque and barbaric, we find flowering Romantic restraint. The bard’s undeniably timeless romance is reflected in Prokofiev’s soaring melodicism – we find in this music not only the perils of love, but the tragedy of love gone wrong. The passion of the *Introduction*, is balanced with the calamitous horrors in the *Dance of the Knights*. Elements of gentle, gossamer passion are juxtaposed with impassioned, brutish, rhythmic fervency. Prokofiev was at heart a composer of contrast, and within this work, and arrangement, the contrast is reflected in the nature of the viola. Not only can violists serve as accompanists, but they can mellifluously match the timbral complexities in Prokofiev’s moving melodies.

**Sonata (Op. 147) for Viola and Piano – Dmitri Shostakovich**

In times of tribulation, reflection is seemingly a cathartic balm. The well-discussed political volatility that plagued Shostakovich’s life is not at the forefront of this work. Shostakovich moves into the realm of the impalpable: looking back at his life not within a lens of glory, nor in a lens of regret, but with a reluctant, moribund acceptance. Nostalgia becomes longing; complacency is rebuked. As listeners, we are forced to occupy a realm of simultaneous meditation and reckoning — to understand the calamitous hollow gravity of the end of his life. I am reminded of Macbeth:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

The creeping petty pace of the concrete conclusion of Shostakovich’s life is reflected in every lurking moment of this work. Every rhythmic incident and timbral consideration is not only of extreme calculus, but of a tragic rigidity. Clawing attempts at escape and

moments of desperation arise with volcanic intensity in the climax of the first movement and subside into frozen, pathetic pizzicato. The second movement, while mostly taken from Shostakovich's unfinished opera *The Gamblers*, Op. 63, is ever refined in the temerity of its unyielding rhythmic drive. Fervent climaxes are contrasted with moments of utter helplessness – moments which accept the futility of action.

Languid, malleable, and contemplative in mood and pacing, the final movement was referred to by Shostakovich as an “Adagio in Memory of Beethoven/Adagio in Memory of a Great Composer.” We hear his reverence as perverse, inverted reinterpretation in his quotation of the *Piano Sonata No. 14* (Op. 27, No.2), the popular “Moonlight Sonata” at the start of the work. Remarkable, however, is the nature of the anachronism – the rhythmic underpinning, reframed, freely oscillates between uncertainty and menace. The piano moves in and out of homophony – an operatic intensity is maintained through frequent cadenzas for the viola.

Beethoven, near the end of his life, similarly reckoned with the irony of finality. In his notoriously evasive last major work, the op.135 Quartet in F major, he poses the final movement as interrogative, titling it “Der schwer gefaßte Entschluß“ (The Difficult Decision), and further adds an antiphonal couplet:

Muß es sein? (Must it be?)  
Es muß sein! (It must be!)

Shostakovich not only grapples with this call and response within the final movement, but transcends past into the afterlife. The ethereal final notes of the work come from a juxtaposed state of conflict and calm, and turn the couplet into a tercet: *It has been.*

There is still staggering poignancy within the emotional resolve in this work. If nothing else, it is a harkening reminder of not only Shostakovich's compositional coherency, but a painfully cathartic depiction of a lifelong internalized turmoil.

## Sonata for Solo Viola — György Ligeti

postmodern, *referential*, ~~chaotic~~, *sonority*, *resonance*, *acidic*, “tannic,” *anxious*

Underneath each movement I have added brief quotations from T.S Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, in an effort to evoke and conjure. Bob Dylan said of his 1966 record *Blonde on Blonde*:

It's that *thin*, that **wild mercury** sound. It's *metallic* and *bright gold*, with whatever that conjures up...

### I. Hora lungă

microtonal, based around the harmonic series of F. Sul C string.  
quasi-spectral. augmentation.  
longing.

“What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish?”

### II. Loop

45 repeated double stops in jazzy, chaotic crashing diminution.  
crashing waves.

“My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.  
“Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.  
“What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?  
“I never know what you are thinking. Think.”

### III. Facsar

“To wrestle/distort.”  
“The bitter sense in one’s nose when one is about to cry.”  
continuous, free, melodic transformation.  
augmentation/diminution.

“She turns and looks a moment in the glass,  
Hardly aware of her departed lover;  
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:  
“Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over.”  
When lovely woman stoops to follow and  
Paces about her room again, alone,  
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
And puts a record on the gramophone.”

IV. Prestissimo con sordino (attacca il Lamento)

perpetual, chaotic motion. polyrhythmic accentuation.  
anxious, unyielding. restless. Enjambement.

“Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,  
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell  
And the profit and loss.

A current under sea  
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell  
He passed the stages of his age and youth  
Entering the whirlpool.”

V. Lamento

frustrated, barbaric, continuous transformation to the sublime.  
absurdist, pathetic.

“In this decayed hole among the mountains  
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing  
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel  
There is the empty chapel, only the wind’s home.  
It has no windows, and the door swings,  
Dry bones can harm no one.”

VI. Chaconne chromatique

Renaissance/Baroque procedure continuously transformed and combined with  
chromatic theme. sonorous.

“I sat upon the shore  
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me  
Shall I at least set my lands in order?  
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down...”

...These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo’s mad againe.  
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.  
Shantih shantih shantih”