



Pacifica Quartet

Simin Ganatra, violin
Austin Hartman, violin
Mark Holloway, viola
Brandon Vamos, cello

String Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 68

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

Overture: Moderato con moto
Recitative and Romance: Adagio
Valse: Allegro
Theme with Variations: Adagio

String Quartet No. 3, "Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory"

Shulamit Ran
(b. 1949)

That which happened
Menace
If I perish – do not let my paintings die
Shards, Memory

INTERMISSION

String Quartet in F major, Op. 96, "American"

Antonín Dvořák
(1841-1904)

Allegro ma non troppo
Lento
Molto vivace
Finale: vivace ma non troppo

The Pacifica Quartet is represented by MKI Artists: 70 S Winooski Ave. #318, Burlington, VT 05401
Recordings: Cedille Records, Naxos Records, and Hyperion Records



Program Notes

String Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 68 Dmitri Shostakovich

Shostakovich and his family spent the summer of 1944 with other composers at one of the government's rural 'Houses of Rest and Creativity.' While there he completed his Second Piano Trio and immediately began work on his String Quartet No. 2, finishing it in less than a month. He wrote to composer Vissarion Shebalin, to whom he dedicated the quartet, "I worry about the lightening speed with which I compose...One should not compose as quickly as I do...But I can't rid myself of the bad habit." According to his son Maxim, Shostakovich often explained the speed with which he composed by saying, "I think long; I write fast."

The sounds of Jewish folk music appear for the first time in Shostakovich's compositions in both the Second Piano Trio and String Quartet No. 2. In early 1944 he had been deeply involved in Jewish folk themes when he completed the unfinished opera *Rothschild's Violin* by his talented Jewish pupil Veniamin Fleyshman, who died in battle in 1941. Contemporaries also mention the composer's sympathy for the Jews as an oppressed people as horrible news reports of the Treblinka concentration camp appeared in 1944. Shostakovich's own comments simply reflect a strong affinity between his creative imagination and the 'laughter through tears' character of Jewish music: "The distinguishing feature of Jewish music is the ability to build a jolly melody on sad intonations. Why does a man strike up a happy song? Because he feels sad at heart."

The first movement Overture opens with a forceful theme in A major, but the tonal stability is quickly disrupted by a minor key while the opening theme is still being restated. This early change of tonality from major to minor, with only the briefest reappearances of the movement's "official" A major key, creates an unsettling suspense that is not resolved by the movement's abrupt ending.

The Recitative and Romance begins and ends with long, harmonically free solo lines in the first violin played over quiet sustained chords in the other instruments. Jewish inflections fill the violin's mournful aria, and simple Baroque-sounding cadences punctuate the underlying drone. Between the sections of recitative, the Romance opens as a sweetly wistful waltz. Dissonant harmonies intervene, the waltz tempo dissolves, and a series of harsh rising lines collapse into the closing recitative.

The macabre third-movement Waltz, one of Shostakovich's many sinister waltzes, is written in E-flat minor, the key that disrupted the opening harmony of the first movement. In its jagged central section Shostakovich alludes to his Fourth Symphony, which was banned after the official attack on *Lady Macbeth* in 1936. In the fourth movement Theme and Variations, a Russian-sounding theme is little changed in the first three variations before going through many radical transformations. The theme finally returns, altered but recognizable, and the quartet closes with sustained A minor chords. String Quartet No. 2 is Shostakovich's only quartet to begin in a major key and end in a minor.

--Program note by Robert Strong © 2012



String Quartet No. 3, "Glitter, Doom Shards, Memory"

Shulamit Ran

My third string quartet was composed at the invitation of the Pacifica Quartet, whose music-making I have come to know closely and admire hugely as resident artists at the University of Chicago. Already in our early conversations Pacifica proposed that this quartet might, in some manner, refer to the visual arts as a point of germination. Probing further, I found out that the quartet members had special interest in art created during the earlier part of the 20th century, perhaps between the two world wars.

It was my good fortune to have met, a short while later, while in residence at the American Academy in Rome in the fall of 2011, art conservationist Albert Albano who steered me to the work of Felix Nussbaum (1904-1944), a German-Jewish painter who, like so many others, perished in the Holocaust at a young age, and who left some powerful, deeply moving art that spoke to the life that was unraveling around him.

The title of my string quartet takes its inspiration from a major exhibit devoted to art by German artists of the period of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933) titled "Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s", first shown at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2006-07. Nussbaum would have been a bit too young to be included in this exhibit. His most noteworthy art was created in the last very few years of his short life. The exhibit's evocative title, however, suggested to me the idea of "Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory" as a way of framing a possible musical composition that would be an homage to his life and art, and to that of so many others like him during that era. Knowing that their days were numbered, yet intent on leaving a mark, a legacy, a memory, their art is triumph of the human spirit over annihilation.

Parallel to my wish to compose a string quartet that, typically for this genre, would exist as "pure music", independent of a narrative, was my desire to effect an awareness in my listener of matters which are, to me, of great human concern. To my mind there is no contradiction between the two goals. As in several other works composed since 1969, this is my way of saying 'do not forget', something that, I believe, can be done through music with special power and poignancy.

The individual titles of the quartet's four movements give an indication of some of the emotional strands this work explores.

1) "That which happened" (*das was geschah*) – is how the poet Paul Celan referred to the Shoah – the Holocaust. These simple words served for me, in the first movement, as a metaphor for the way in which an "ordinary" life, with its daily flow and its sense of sweet normalcy, was shockingly, inhumanely, inexplicably shattered.

2) "Menace" is a shorter movement, mimicking a Scherzo. It is also machine-like, incessant, with an occasional, recurring, waltz-like little tune – perhaps the chilling grimace we recognize from the executioner's guillotine mask. Like the death machine it alludes to, it gathers momentum as it goes, and is unstoppable.

3) "If I perish - do not let my paintings die"; these words are by Felix Nussbaum who, knowing what was ahead, nonetheless continued painting till his death in Auschwitz in 1944. If the heart of the first movement is the shuddering interruption of life as we know it, the third movement tries to capture something of what I can only imagine to be the conflicting states of mind that would have made it possible, and essential, to continue to live and practice one's art – bearing witness to the events. Creating must have been, for Nussbaum and for so many others, a way of maintaining sanity,



both a struggle and a catharsis – an act of defiance and salvation all at the same time.

4) "Shards, Memory" is a direct reference to my quartet's title. Only shards are left. And memory. The memory is of things large and small, of unspeakable tragedy, but also of the song and the dance, the smile, the hopes. All things human. As we remember, in the face of death's silence, we restore dignity to those who are gone.

—*Program note by Shulamit Ran © 2014*

[Note: The following should also be included, whenever possible, on the program page, or following the program note:

Shulamit Ran's String Quartet No. 3 – GLITTER, DOOM, SHARDS, MEMORY commissioned in partnership between the Music Accord consortium, Wigmore Hall, and Suntory Hall.]