

## Program Notes

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### Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

*Fratres* (“brethren”), written in 1977 by the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (b. 1935), is one of the first compositions to explore the technique of tintinnabuli, which he developed during a period of profound personal, artistic, and spiritual crisis that began in the late 1960s. Musically, tintinnabuli evolved from a thorough-going study of plainchant and early polyphony, which he undertook in order to “learn to walk again as a composer.” Spiritually, it reflects his re-engagement with the mystical and contemplative rituals of the Russian Orthodox Church. Tintinnabuli shares with minimalism an emphasis on simplicity of idea and transparency of process. As Pärt explains it:

Tintinnabulation is an area I sometimes wander into when I am searching for answers—in my life, my music, my work. In my dark hours, I have the certain feeling that everything outside this one thing has no meaning.... Tintinnabulation is like this. Here I am alone with silence. I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence, comforts me. I work with very few elements—with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials—with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of the triad are like bells. And that is why I called it tintinnabulation.

The basis for tintinnabulation is a two-part texture, in which a melodic voice moves primarily by step around a central pitch, while the tintinnabuli voice sounds the notes of the tonic triad. The relationship between the voices is predetermined according to a scheme that is specific to each individual work. Most of Pärt’s early tintinnabuli compositions are predominantly consonant. In this work, however, while the underlying triad is consonant, dissonance is created by presence of an augmented second in the harmonic minor scale on which the melodic line is based.

In the original version of *Fratres*, first performed by the Estonian early music ensemble Hortus musicus, no particular instrumentation was specified. The work now exists in numerous arrangements scored for a variety of ensembles with the musical substance remaining essentially unchanged. The exception to this is the arrangement for solo violin and piano, commissioned for the 1980 Salzburg Festival and performed there by Gidon and Elena (Bashkirova) Kremer. In this version, which Pärt dedicated to Kremer and Bashkirova, the original harmonic material, found mainly in the piano part, is intact, while the violin plays a series of virtuosic variations above it. The challenge for the violinist is to negotiate the virtuosic writing without disturbing the essential serenity of the work.

### Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

Sergei Prokofiev’s Sonata in C major, op. 119 for cello and piano was composed in 1949 for the young Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. Prokofiev had attended Rostropovich’s performance of his long-neglected Cello Concerto (1938) on 21 December 1947. When he met the young virtuoso backstage after the concert, he promised to write a piece tailored specifically for him. Prokofiev initially contemplated revising the Cello Concerto but changed his mind upon receiving a commission for a new work from the Radio Committee. The two musicians worked together closely on the Cello Sonata, with Rostropovich advising Prokofiev on matters of technical virtuosity. Rostropovich and pianist Sviatoslav Richter performed the work in private for the Soviet Union of Composers and the Radio Committee before presenting it publicly on 1

March 1950 at the Moscow Conservatory. The première was a success, but illness unfortunately prevented the composer from attending. The work is dedicated the score to Levon Atovmyan, who prepared it for publication.

The Cello Sonata focuses on the “classical” and “lyrical” traits that Prokofiev identified as important aspects of his creative personality. There are three movements in traditional forms: a sonata, scherzo and trio, and rondo. The first movement begins with a sombre cello solo. The second thematic group introduces what is undoubtedly the most lyrical and memorable melody in the entire work. There is a re-ordering of the thematic material in the recapitulation, followed by a virtuosic coda. The second movement is light and playful, opening with a melody reminiscent of a children’s game song. In tempo and meter its outer sections are closer to a march than a scherzo. The cello assumes the main melody of the graceful and lyrical waltz in the contrasting trio. The third movement is cast as a rondo with a refrain influenced by folksong. The second statement of the refrain departs from the expected formal pattern, modulating to a contrasting tonal area. The coda restates the opening theme from the first movement.

What is particularly striking about the Cello Suite is the wealth of melodic ideas introduced, often with little development. The increased lyricism in Prokofiev’s late works may have occurred in response to the Communist Party’s infamous Resolution of 1948, officially condemning formalism in music. Prokofiev offered the following explanation about his commitment to melody: “On the question of the importance of melody there was never any doubt in my mind. I love melody. I look upon it as the most important thing in music; and for years I have laboured to improve its quality in my works. To find a melody that is intelligible to an inexpert listener and at the same time original: that is the composer’s most difficult task.”

### Mieczylaw Weinberg (1919–1996)

The Russian composer Mieczylaw Weinberg was born in 1919 in Warsaw, where his father worked as a musician in a Jewish Theatre. As a young child Weinberg played the piano there and began writing music, entering the Warsaw Conservatory at the age of twelve. Arrangements were made for him to study in the United States, but the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 forced Weinberg to flee to the Soviet Union. He settled in Minsk where he studied composition with Vassily Zolotaryov. When Hitler’s troops moved into the Soviet Union in 1941, the Minsk Conservatory was evacuated, and Weinberg went to Tashkent. There he found work in the local opera house and made the acquaintance of his future father-in-law, the distinguished actor and theatre director Solomon Mikhoels. It was through Mikhoels that he met Dmitri Shostakovich, with whom he came to enjoy a close friendship. After examining the score of Weinberg’s First Symphony, Shostakovich facilitated his move to Moscow, where he remained until his death in 1996.

Weinberg’s refusal to acquiesce to the demands of the Communist Party’s Resolution in 1948 resulted in the withdrawal of official support for his music, and he resorted to composing for the theatre and the circus. In 1953 he was thrown in jail, partly because his wife’s uncle, a physician at the Kremlin, had been labelled an enemy of the people and partly because of the ongoing criticism in the press over his modernist leanings. Shostakovich intervened on his behalf, almost certainly saving his life. Although Weinberg was often at odds with the authorities, his compositions were performed by some of the most accomplished musicians in the Soviet Union.

An extremely prolific composer, Weinberg mastered every form, genre, and style. His music exhibits the influence of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Myaskovsky, Bartók, and Mahler and

incorporates elements of Jewish, Polish, Russian, and Moldavian folklore. It is frequently programmatic, drawing upon his own tragic experiences during the Second World War and under the Stalinist regime.

Weinberg composed his Sonata Op. 28 for clarinet and piano in 1945. It was premièred by clarinetist V. Getman, with the composer accompanying, on 20 April 1946 in the Small Hall of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory but went unpublished until 1971. The three movements are characterized by intense lyricism, sparse textures, and polyphonic interplay between the instruments. The second movement, in particular, is inspired by the *klezmer* tradition, which was a key element in Weinberg's music.

### Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Dmitri Shostakovich wrote his String Quartet No. 8 in C Minor, op. 110 with lightening speed from 12 to 14 July 1960, while he was in Dresden working on a film score for Leo Arnshtam's *Five Days, Five Nights*. The first performance was given by the Beethoven Quartet on 2 October 1960 in Leningrad's Glinka Hall, and a recording was issued shortly thereafter. The work enjoyed instant success and remains the most frequently performed string quartet in the twentieth-century repertoire.

The Quartet is dedicated "To the Victims of Fascism and War." Although this dedication appeared in neither the manuscript nor the first edition, Shostakovich made reference to it in an interview that he gave prior to the première. A letter written to his friend Isaak Glikman shortly after he had completed the work suggests another possibility: "I started thinking that if some day I die, nobody is likely to write a work in memory of me, so I had better write one myself. The title page should carry the dedication: 'To the memory of the composer of the quartet.'" Certainly this was a difficult time for Shostakovich. He had recently been diagnosed with myelitis and also been forced to join the Communist Party. There were relatively few prospects for undertaking large-scale projects such as opera or ballet, and producing music for film after film was no longer satisfying work.

The Quartet consists of five interconnected movements, which run together without a break. The first, fourth, and fifth movements are marked *Largo*, the second and third movements, *Allegro molto* and *Allegro* respectively. All of the movements are in minor mode. Shostakovich's musical signature (DSCH), introduced as the subject of the archaic fugato in the first movement, informs the entire work. The Quartet relies heavily on quotations from his earlier compositions, creating a veritable retrospective of his career. There are also numerous allusions to the music of other composers, including Beethoven, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Glazunov, and Saint-Saëns. The quotation of the revolutionary song *Zamuchen tyazholoy nevoley* ("Tormented by Harsh Captivity") at the center of the fourth movement underscores the Quartet's tragic tone and signifies a shift in emphasis, from individual to universal suffering.