Schubert Club

An die Musik Special Edition:

Shostakovich Quartet Cycle

Jerusalem Quartet

March 23–April 27, 2025

St. Anthony Park United Church of Christ

Welcome to the Schubert Club

Welcome to the Schubert Club!

After the extraordinary Beethoven string quartet cycle experience provided by the Danish String Quartet in 2021, we were enthused to take a deep dive into another important body of chamber music works. Four years on, here we are embarking on the exploration of the string quartets of Dmitri Shostakovich. Written between 1938 and 1974, we will hear the fifteen quartets in chronological order, allowing us, the audience, to experience the creative journey of one of the twentieth century's most important and distinctive musical voices.

Taking us on this journey is the distinguished Jerusalem Quartet, who are celebrating 30 years as a quartet this season. It's hard to believe that these are their first performances for Schubert Club and the Music in the Park Series. The Quartet recorded the Shostakovich quartets on the Harmonia Mundi label some twenty years ago. In recent years they have been revisiting the Shostakovich quartets and just released a new recording of Quartets 2, 7 and 10 for BIS. Of particular interest is the heritage of some of the quartet members, who grew up in the former Soviet Union. They are able to connect their musical upbringing to Shostakovich himself through their teachers and formal training. We can think of no better string quartet to take us on the journey.

Finally, a warm thank you to the St Anthony Park United Church of Christ and Pastor Victoria Wilgocki for allowing us to host all five concerts at our regular Music in the Park Series location. It's a wonderful, intimate space to enjoy chamber music.

Barry Kempton
Artistic & Executive Director

Laura McCarten
President

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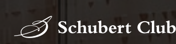

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An die Musik

Shostakovich Quartet Cycle
March 23–April 27, 2025

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*For more details, as well as upcoming events throughout the season, please visit **schubert.org***

***Schubert Club**, a member of the Arts Partnership, is committed to creating a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment at all performances and programs for people from all backgrounds and life experiences.*

Thank you for treating one another with respect, dignity and kindness.

You are welcome here.

The 15 Quartets of Dmitri Shostakovich

AN INTRODUCTION

by Michael Adams

Dmitri Shostakovich began composing string quartets much later in his life than symphonies. He had already completed five symphonies before composing his first quartet at age 32, rather late considering how prolific he had been in his youth and how many quartets he would go on to write. In his younger years, he concentrated more on larger scale works for the opera, ballet, and orchestra. Since Shostakovich was a pianist, not a string player, string chamber music was not a part of his DNA growing up—as it had been for composers such as Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Dvořák—so the *language* of string playing was not second nature to him.

Beginning at age 32, Shostakovich went on to compose 15 quartets over a span of 36 years, employing the string quartet as a vehicle for his deepest and most personal ruminations, more than any composer since Beethoven. While his symphonies would often address the gravest socio-political issues of Russian/Soviet life, such as wars and revolutions, he chose the intimacy of the string quartet to express his more personal thoughts. Several are dedicated to close friends with whom he shared his life. For example, quartets number 3 and 5 are dedicated to the Beethoven Quartet, the Moscow-based ensemble who premiered 13 of his 15 quartets. Quartets nos. 11-14 are dedicated to each individual member of that ensemble.

The string quartet, by its very nature, is a highly intimate endeavor; just four musicians with four distinct voices involved in a private musical conversation, almost more for themselves than for any listener involved. Shostakovich's quartets invite you into his personal and complicated world, where so many emotions reside simultaneously: hope, despair, fear, defiance, and sadness all find a way to coexist.

As an emerging composer, Shostakovich was hyped as the great musical hope of the young Soviet Union, part of the first generation of composers that were trained after the revolution of 1917. He was singled out as the consummate Soviet composer who glorified the ideals of the communist party and was a shining example of the superior training and nurturing of its artists, compared to the capitalist west.

But even that exalted status did not make him immune from the official condemnation he received in 1936, aged 30. While attending a performance of his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk*, Josef Stalin was so offended by the work that he stalked out in the middle. The next day Shostakovich was excoriated in the press. Following Stalin's denouncement and public humiliation, Shostakovich's commissions evaporated, and his income fell by 75%. It took several years to rehabilitate his reputation and according to his friends, he was so traumatized by the *Lady Macbeth* experience that he was not the same man or same composer ever again. He obsessed over getting the dreaded knock on the door in the middle of the night from the secret police and getting hauled off to the gulag never to be seen again. This happened to many of his friends, relatives, fellow composers, and intellectuals. As a result, he always kept a bag packed by the door, and never left the house without a toothbrush in his pocket, in case he was unexpectedly arrested.

The biggest consequence of the *Lady Macbeth* debacle was that the regime adopted a new policy called Socialist Realism that would become the guideline for all Soviet composers and Shostakovich for the remainder of his life. The definition of Socialist Realism is just 33 words:

> *The only musical art deemed worthy of the working classes, and thus the only music demanded by the Soviet state, is to be defined by its accessibility, tunefulness, stylistic traditionalism, and folk-inspired qualities.*

Those are vague and slippery qualities. What is tunefulness? Stylistic traditionalism? Folk-inspired? In an art as subjective as music, those words could mean just about anything. What was unstated in that definition was what music could *not* be, and you could name any trend going on in the west at the time—serialism, impressionism, expressionism, futurism, anything considered avant-garde, indeed anything considered "art-for-art's-sake" that appealed to the elite. Often this was code-named "western formalism," which was strictly forbidden.

If you were guilty of one of those transgressions, what would be the consequences? Beginning in 1936, the same year as the *Lady Macbeth* incident, Stalin's "Great Purge" of the educated classes began. Independent thought was now the enemy of the state if it disagreed with communist doctrine. All the arts—architecture, literature, drama, and music—were enlisted to "help the people to love and obey the state", an order that did not sit particularly well with the artistic class. In just two years, half a million people were exterminated and seven million more were banished to labor camps. Anyone who argued, anyone who thought, anyone who questioned, would disappear, as did many of the composer's friends and relatives. Here is a partial list:

- His wealthy patron who commissioned many of his works, was shot after his arrest.
- His brother-in-law, a distinguished physicist, was arrested and eventually released, but died before he could return home.
- His close friend, a musicologist, was shot after his arrest.
- His mother-in-law, a famous astronomer, was sent to a work camp in Siberia.
- His friend, a famous Marxist writer, got 20 years in the camps.
- His uncle Maxim died in custody after arrest.
- Two musician colleagues were executed.

This constant threat, and the fear it induced, exacted a terrible toll on Shostakovich. He was chronically depressed, anxious, and in poor health. He chain-smoked all his life and spoke in a nervous, shaky voice. He slept poorly and was often dependent on sleeping pills. A polio-like malady struck him as an adult and crippled his right hand, ending his days as a performing pianist.

To survive artistically, Shostakovich maintained a clever balancing act: he wrote music that on the outside had an earthy, visceral appeal to the less sophisticated listener, while hidden on the inside—at great risk to himself and his family—were secret codes and mocking anti-communist messages that were cleverly embedded in the music to evade Soviet censors. It only became clear after his death how much he despised the oppression of the Soviet system and the people who ran it. With the benefit of hindsight, it's clear that Shostakovich spent his entire life trying to serve two masters, without selling his soul.

How does one hide musical messages in music? One method was to quote the melody of a song, even just a short snippet, whose lyrics contained a controversial political message. In the 8th Quartet for example, which was ostensibly about the horrors of war and Nazi fascism, Shostakovich embeds a quotation from a revolutionary song called "Exhausted by the Hardships of Prison" which was a favorite of Lenin and had been sung at his funeral. He later admitted that the real meaning behind that song was meant in memory of the victims of the Bolshevik revolution that had been betrayed by Stalin. Shostakovich became adept at hiding cryptographic messages within the fabric of his pieces, in plain sight, so to speak, that were hard to decipher and prove what censors might suspect.

Another way to embed musical cryptograms was to assign pitches to letter names. Like the simplest of ciphers that we learned as children that assigns letters to numbers (A=1, B=2, C=3 etc.), Shostakovich would spell by assigning letters to specific pitches. This is a trick used by composers since Bach, who was fond of using his own four-note signature motto (B♭, A, C, B♮, where the B♮ stands for "H"). Shostakovich uses a similar trick to reference himself, using the German spelling of his name (**D**mitri **SCH**ostakovich) and assigning the four letters in bold to pitches (D, E♭, C, and B♮) using the German transliteration of the Russian Cyrillic letters. This four note motive is ubiquitous in Shostakovich, especially in the 8th Quartet:

Shostakovich c. 1955

Sometimes, he will use the cryptogram in a different order when he sets it in counterpoint against other voices. It can appear in reverse (B♮, C, E♭, D); inverted, as a mirror image (D, C#, E, E♭), or even in *retrograde inversion*.

All this need for subterfuge came from living under constant fear. Most Soviet citizens feared their government, feared their local Communist Party, indeed feared anyone with authority. They feared their friends and neighbors who might betray an overheard conversation. Fear warped the Soviet psyche and Shostakovich was no exception. It clearly affected his health, but I dare say it also drove Shostakovich to be a better composer. Despite the fear he felt every day after the *Lady Macbeth* incident of 1936, he felt it was his duty to express the sufferings, aspirations and fears of his fellow citizens. The themes of his music read like a syllabus in modern political and social problems: war, revolutionary change, individual freedom, antisemitism, the role of women in society, dictatorship, and finally disillusionment.

Despite this existential fear, the 15 string quartets of Shostakovich highlight one of his core principles: he valued truth over beauty. That means that if there are sections of a work that are "ugly", it's because the world itself seemed ugly to him. If there are episodes that are unbearable, it corresponds to Shostakovich's feelings too. If there are passages that sound depressingly like what has come before it, it's because he felt that was the case in life as well. You will hear moments that don't seem to make sense, just as there were days that appeared meaningless and senseless to many of his countrymen. This was intentional, as it reflected Shostakovich's worldview, as a citizen of an oppressive communist dictatorship.

A few years before his death, Shostakovich pondered the following:

> *You ask if I would have been different without Party Guidance? ...Yes, almost certainly. No doubt the line I was pursuing when I wrote the fourth symphony would have been stronger and sharper in my work. I would have displayed more brilliance, used more sarcasm, I could have revealed my ideas more openly instead of resorting to camouflage. I would have written more pure music.*

This is a rare admission on his part, acknowledging how much fear and government interference required him to adapt to the political forces that selfishly used him for their purposes. Regardless, over the course of nearly forty years, Shostakovich always found a way to express his truth, producing fifteen remarkable string quartets, all from his maturity as a composer. Hearing all fifteen in quick succession is a special opportunity for us, the listeners, a chance to immerse ourselves in both Shostakovich's musical creativity and the psyche of his time.

"Passion, precision, warmth, a gold blend: these are the trademarks of this excellent Israeli string quartet."

- New York Times

Jerusalem Quartet

...such is the *New York Times*' impression of the Jerusalem Quartet. Since the ensemble's founding in 1993 and subsequent 1996 debut, the four Israeli musicians have embarked on a journey of growth and maturation. This journey has resulted in a wide repertoire and stunning depth of expression, which carries on the string quartet tradition in a unique manner. The ensemble has found its core in a warm, full, human sound and an egalitarian balance between high and low voices. This approach allows the quartet to maintain a healthy relationship between individual expression and a transparent and respectful presentation of the composer's work. It is also the drive and motivation for the continuing refinement of its interpretations of the classical repertoire as well as exploration of new epochs.

The Jerusalem Quartet is a regular and beloved guest on the world's great concert stages. Recent appearances include a Beethoven quartet cycle at Wigmore Hall in London; a Bartók cycle at the Salzburg Festival; their third annual String Quartet seminar in Crans Montana Switzerland; and since 2022 a residency at the Jerusalem Academy of Music.

Since 2005, the Jerusalem Quartet has released 16 albums for Harmonia Mundi, which have been honored with numerous awards such as the Diapason d'Or and the BBC Music Magazine Award for chamber music. Their latest releases include a unique album exploring Jewish music in Central Europe between the wars including a collection of Yiddish Cabaret songs from Warsaw in the 1920s, featuring Israeli Soprano Hila Baggio, and the second (and last) album of their complete Bartók cycle.

Highlights of the 2023/2024 Season include tours of Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland; and appearances in the quartet Biennales in Paris, Lisbon, and Amsterdam. Alongside the quartet's regular programs, they will bring back the "Yiddish Cabaret", and will perform a Bartók Cycle in the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, October and April will feature return tours to the North America, with visits to New York, Miami, Denver, Montreal, Pittsburgh, Ann Arbor, Houston, and Portland, among others. In June, the quartet toured China, South Korea, and Japan appearing in important venues such as Tokyo's Suntory Hall, Seoul Arts Center.

QUICK NOTES

SHORT NOTES WITH THE NEED-TO-KNOW

Quartet No. 1
The 1st Quartet is markedly different from Dmitri Shostakovich's later quartets. It is a work of refreshing neo-classicism, striking for its simple, relaxed style.

Quartet No. 2
Socialist Realism restrictions in mind, Shostakovich, intent on adhering to the rules, chose to include folk music, but *Jewish* folk music in this case. The quartet reveals his specific interest in *Klezmer*, or village wedding music.

Quartet No. 3
Shostakovich considered No. 3 his personal favorite. The Quartet manages to do an altogether impossible thing: it combines playfulness with profound seriousness.

Quartet No. 4
As with No. 2 Shostakovich appropriates Jewish folk music, but he was persuaded that releasing No. 4 was not smart in the current political climate, as it could provoke the regime. The quartet was not performed publicly until nine months after Stalin died.

Quartet No. 5
No. 5 is a somber work, about 30 minutes long, and marks the first time that Shostakovich indicates all three movements are to be played without pause, as a continuous single entity.

Quartet No. 6
After a long compositional drought brought on by one of the darker periods in his personal life, the music of No. 6 is hopeful and optimistic. Like No. 1 it begins with an easygoing, untroubled freshness.

Quartet No. 7
Possibly his most personal, No. 7 is the shortest of Shostakovich's quartets (13 min), is dedicated "In Memoriam" to his late wife Nina, It was also the first of string quartets written in a minor key.

Quartet No. 8
No. 8 is considered one of the most important string quartets of the 20th century, and is the most frequently performed. Not pretty, nor beautiful in a traditional sense, but dramatic, riveting, immensely powerful, and profoundly moving, a depiction of pain and suffering through music.

Quartet No. 9
No. 9 by comparison to No. 8 is almost exuberant, positive and outward looking. The nearly 30-minute work is in five movements, played without pause, in a general fast-slow-fast-slow-fast layout.

Remaining Quick Notes on Page 25

Shostakovich Quartet Cycle

Concert I • March 23, 2025

Sunday, March 23, 2025 • 4:00 PM

Saint Anthony Park United Church of Christ

Pre-concert conversation one hour before the performance

JERUSALEM QUARTET

Dmitri Shostakovich

(b. Saint Petersburg, Russia, 1906; d. Moscow, Russia, 1975)

String Quartet No. 1 in C major, Op. 49 (1938)
Moderato
Moderato
Allegro molto
Allegro

String Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 68 (1944)
Overture: Moderato con moto
Recitative and Romance: Adagio
Valse: Allegro
Theme with Variations: Adagio

Intermission

String Quartet No. 3 in F major, Op. 73 (1946)
Allegretto
Moderato con moto
Allegro non troppo
Adagio (attacca)
Moderato

*Schubert Club is grateful to **Dennis Stanton** for his support of these concerts*

PLEASE SILENCE ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Shostakovich before 1941

String Quartet No. 1 in C major, Op. 49 (1938)

By the time he began his Quartet No 1, Shostakovich was nearly 32, fairly late for a first quartet considering how prolific he had been in his youth and how many quartets he would go on to compose. Behind him was the public condemnation over his scandalous opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk* and his subsequent redemption, with the success of his monumental fifth symphony.

Shostakovich, who realized that the 1st quartet would be compared with the fifth symphony, wrote this:

> *"Don't expect to find special depth in this, my first quartet opus. In mood it is joyful, merry, lyrical. I would call it 'spring-like.' I visualized childhood scenes, somewhat naïve and bright moods associated with spring. I began to write it without any particular idea or feeling in mind, and thought nothing would come of it. After all, the quartet is one of the most difficult musical genres. I wrote the first page as a sort of original exercise in the quartet form, without any thought of completing it. But then the piece took hold of me and I completed it very quickly."*

The 1st Quartet is markedly different from Shostakovich's later quartets. It is a work of refreshing neo-classicism, striking for its simple, relaxed style. It was begun in the early summer of 1938, immediately after the birth of his son Maxim, a time of personal happiness which must have been welcome in the wake of the turbulent events of the preceding two years.

Shostakovich described the work as being in "four small sections," indeed, these concise movements combine to form a string quartet that lasts only about fifteen minutes. Curiously, during its composition, Shostakovich decided to swap the outer movements—the first movement became the last, and the last, the first—providing the quartet with a genial first movement in the affirming, positive key of C major.

The happy mood of the opening movement is contrasted by the slow second movement, a set of eight variations on a folk tune introduced by the viola. (The melody is not actually a Russian folk tune, but one crafted by Shostakovich to pass as such.) The third movement, a brief, whispered scherzo, clocks in at just two minutes, and is muted throughout. The last movement reverts back to the home key of C major and brings the spring-like mood back full force, in the form of an energetic finale.

It was premiered in 1938 by the Glazunov Quartet, colleagues of Shostakovich at the Leningrad Conservatory. Several months later, the Moscow premiere was presented by the Beethoven Quartet and was so well received by the audience that they were obliged to repeat it in its entirety as an encore. This began a long and fortuitous relationship with the Beethoven Quartet who were afforded the privilege of premiering all but the first and last of his 15 quartets.

String Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 68 (1944)

By the time Shostakovich wrote his 2nd quartet in 1944, the easygoing quality of his first quartet is but a memory, as the Soviet Union had endured nearly four years of a horrific war with Germany following Hitler's invasion in 1941.

He had relocated his family from Leningrad to Moscow, where he felt it would be easier for him to live and work, and the government had provided him with space at a country retreat center for writers and composers called the "House of Rest and Creativity."

It was there that he produced a quartet of symphonic breadth in only nineteen days. Along with the 15th Quartet, the 2nd Quartet is the longest in the cycle, at about 35 minutes. Paradoxically, it makes no direct reference to the war.

At this point in his creative life, Shostakovich—and all Soviet composers—were struggling to adhere to the guidelines of a state policy called *Socialist Realism* that called for art works to glorify the state, its heroes, and its accomplishments.

With those restrictions in mind, Shostakovich, intent on adhering to Socialist Realism in his 2nd Quartet, chose to include folk music, but *Jewish* folk music in this case. They were an ethnic group historically oppressed in Russia and Eastern Europe and Shostakovich was notably repelled by anti-Semitism. It is possible he was expressing his opposition to the growing anti-Jewish feeling within the USSR.

The 2nd Quartet reveals his specific interest in *Klezmer*, or village wedding music. The first movement suggests the kind of material that Klezmer musicians, led by a solo violinist, would play to welcome guests to the party. It is a dense movement full of robust energy that Shostakovich maps out in classic Sonata Form (ABA basically), indicating that the exposition (A) be repeated twice. In the development section that follows, the first theme gets a brief *waltz* treatment, before the sonata's recapitulation restates the material in an abbreviated, concise manner.

The second movement—"Recitative and Romance"—is serious and thoughtful, centered around a lengthy monologue sung by the first violin, accompanied by spare, sustained chords from the other instruments. One could see parallels with klezmer models in which a solo violinist might improvise an extensive cadenza before launching into a more familiar melody. The Romance itself is set in slow ¾ time.

This is followed by a sinister-sounding waltz that Shostakovich described as a "valse macabre." All four instruments are muted throughout (even when asked to play "fortissimo!"), adding to the shadowy, ghostly atmosphere, that at times, bares its teeth with menace. It ends on a mysterious E-flat minor chord, that gives the impression of a wry ironic smile, harmonically unresolved.

The final movement is a theme and 13 variations based on a beautiful folk-like theme borrowed from his 2nd Piano Trio (Op. 67), written just prior to this quartet. (Full disclosure: the very Russian-*sounding* theme is actually not one, but fashioned by Shostakovich to pass as such, probably to conform with the demands of Socialist Realism.) After a brief, somber introduction, the theme is presented by the viola, before passing to the second violin, accompanied by a very klezmer-sounding 'oompah' bass line by the cello. This is followed by turns for the first violin and cello with the theme.

Throughout all 13 variations in the last movement, as in much of Shostakovich's music, there is an inscrutable quality to the music's character: you're never quite sure if he is being serious, sarcastic, tragic, irreverent, or just plain cheeky.

When Shostakovich wrote his 2nd String Quartet, he had already completed eight of his fifteen symphonies, and he was half-way through his life. Another thirteen quartets remained, and they would come in quick succession.

Shostakovich circa 1943

String Quartet No. 3 in F major, Op. 73 (1946)

Of his 15 string quartets, Shostakovich considered Quartet No. 3 his personal favorite. In a letter to his friend Vasiliy Shirinsky after its completion, he wrote:

> *"It seems to me that I have never been so pleased with one of my works as with this quartet. Probably I am mistaken, but for the time being, that is exactly how I feel."*

Years after the premiere, Shostakovich attended a rehearsal of the 3rd quartet by the Beethoven Quartet and their cellist recalled this anecdote:

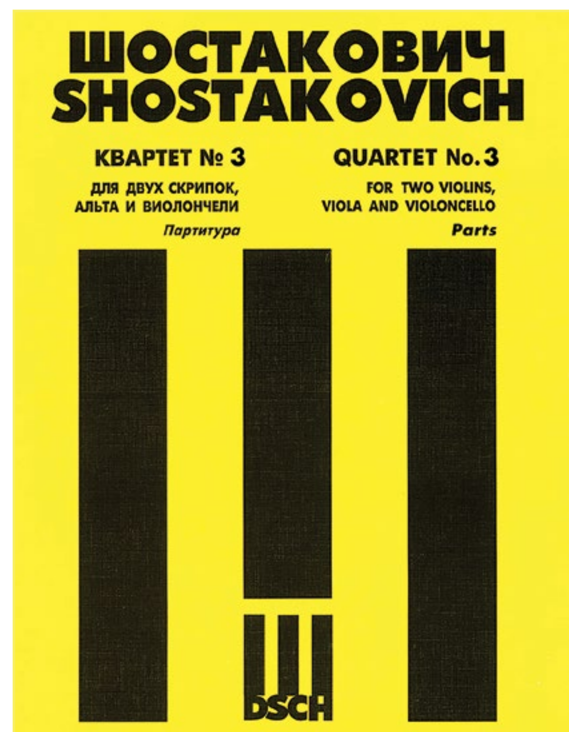
> *"Only once did we see Shostakovich visibly moved by his own music. We were rehearsing his 3rd Quartet. He'd promised to stop us when he had any remarks to make. He sat in an armchair with the score open. But after each movement ended, he just waved us on, saying, 'Keep playing!' So we performed the whole quartet. When we finished playing, he sat quite still in silence, with his mouth open, like a wounded bird, tears streaming down his face. This was the only time that I saw Shostakovich so open and defenseless."*

There is also a bit of intrigue surrounding the 3rd Quartet, as it was the only piece of music that he published in 1946, a very unusual thing for someone as prolific as Shostakovich. This was an intentional defensive tactic, because he knew that there was about to be more political trouble for composers like himself. Stalin's minister for culture went on a rampage among artists and the intelligentsia—a purge—to instill "ideological uniformity" on Soviet intellectuals. Consequently, to be safe, Shostakovich withdrew the quartet from public performances right after its première and published nothing else that year, to stay out of trouble.

During his lifetime, Shostakovich was regarded as a loyal, patriotic, quintessentially Soviet composer. After his death, it was revealed that he was a secret dissident who hated the oppression of the Soviet system and despised the Communist party. In the years since, the music world has been obsessed with deciphering the hidden meanings inside his music, mocking anti-communist messages that Shostakovich would cleverly imbed in the music to evade the Soviet censors, at great risk to himself and his family.

In the case of the 3rd Quartet, the idea of hidden meanings may well have some basis. For the premiere only, probably to avoid being accused of "formalism" or "elitism," Shostakovich named the movements in the manner of a war story—this being the year 1946—but he retracted them immediately after the premiere with no explanation. They are more than a historical footnote and worth listing here if you are curious:

I. Blithe ignorance of the future cataclysm
II. Rumblings of unrest and anticipation
III. Forces of war unleashed
IV. In memory of the dead
V. The eternal question: Why? And for what?



Cover for the sheet music of Quartet No. 3

These descriptions, which are barely adequate to describe the moods of each movement, might have been perceived as too provocative by the censors (especially the last one), so he removed them, allowing the listener the space to interpret each one on their own terms.

It is worth noting here that Shostakovich, after enduring the unspeakable hardships of life in the Soviet Union through World War II, was a nervous, bitter, afraid, and depressed man. Yet he found his most profound outlet in the privacy and intimacy of chamber music—not in a large symphony or an opera—but in the four voices of a string quartet. The Quartet No. 3 also manages to do an altogether impossible thing: it combines playfulness with profound seriousness, a strange mix, yet here I think you will find it quite convincing.

The first movement is centered around a sweet theme of almost Haydnesque innocence that sounds playful. There is a formal structure, a modified *Sonata Form* in this case, that includes a lengthy fugue in the development section. In a letter to his friend, the composer and teacher Edison Denisov, Shostakovich indicated that the first movement be played "not forcefully, but with tenderness."

The second movement, originally titled "Rumblings of unrest and anticipation," begins with a stubborn, repeated viola rhythm, an *ostinato* that continues through much of the movement. Near the end, the mood changes, as all four players are muted and the movement fades to black, in a sigh of sadness.

The third movement begins with brusque chords that alternate between measures of 2/4 and 3/4, giving the music an unsteady gait. The first violin wails with the intensity one might expect in this battle music scene, analogous to the battle movement of Shostakovich's wartime 8th Symphony.

The expressive *Adagio* is a funeral march set as a *passacaglia*, a musical form that features a continuously repeated bass line, over which variations unfold in the other lines. Shostakovich spins out long spans of intense and moving melodies in this movement, that has reminded many of the sound world of Beethoven's late quartets. The movement proceeds without pause into the finale.

Knowing the original subtitle of the finale ("The eternal question: Why? And for what?") makes it difficult to see it through any other lens, although any implied messages here are ambiguous at best. Shostakovich mixes duple and triple meters as he weaves in and out of pompous marches and creepy dances, with equal parts parody and caricature in this, the longest and most episodic of the five movements. Various themes from before are brought back until the music finally fades into a peaceful, if painful, conclusion, and the quartet fades enigmatically into silence after three gentle pizzicato chords from the violin.

Program notes © 2024 by Michael Adams

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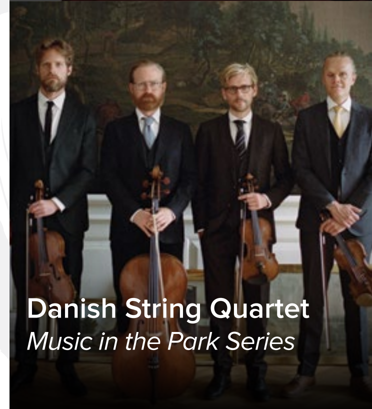
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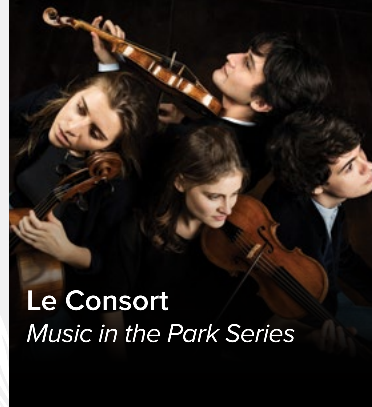
Le Consort
Music in the Park Series

Pablo Ferrández
International Artist Series

Monday, March 24, 2025 • 7:30 PM

Saint Anthony Park United Church of Christ

JERUSALEM QUARTET

Dmitri Shostakovich

(b. Saint Petersburg, Russia, 1906; d. Moscow, Russia, 1975)

String Quartet No. 4 in D major, Op. 83 (1949)
Allegretto
Andantino
Allegretto (attacca)
Allegretto

String Quartet No. 5 in B-flat major, Op. 92 (1952)
Allegro non troppo —
Andante — Andantino — Andante — Andantino — Andante —
Moderato — Allegretto — Andante

Intermission

String Quartet No. 6 in G major, Op. 101 (1956)
Allegretto
Moderato con moto
Lento (attacca)
Lento — Allegretto

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PLEASE SILENCE ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

String Quartet No. 4 in D major, Op. 83 (1949)

Between his 3rd and 4th Quartets, trouble found Shostakovich again. He was the target of a government crack-down on ideological correctness and he had been denounced, resulting in a virtual ban on performances of his works and his dismissal as a professor at the Moscow and Leningrad Conservatories. Shostakovich's financial situation was dire, and he took commissions to compose film music, looking for any opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to the dictates of Socialist Realism.

Self-preservation should have guided Shostakovich to keep a low profile, which makes his choice of material for Quartet No. 4 even more puzzling. To meet the requirements of Socialist Realism, he appropriates folk music, but he chose *Jewish* folk music (as he did in Quartet No. 2), for its specific ability to project wildly different emotions simultaneously. Here is how he described his thinking:

> *"This quality of Jewish folk music is close to my idea of what music should be. There should always be two layers in music. Jews were tormented for so long that they learned to hide their despair. They express their despair in dance music. All folk music is lovely, but I can say that the Jewish folk music is unique."*

At this point in its history, Soviet Jewry had assimilated well into communist society and many prominent members of the communist party were Jewish. Communism appealed to many Jews in part because the Soviet Union's victory over Hitler's Germany saved many of them from the Nazi death camps. In fact, Stalin had supported Jewish organizations, and on the international stage, the USSR had used its new seat at the United Nations to advocate for the creation of a new Jewish State in the Middle East.

Things changed suddenly when Stalin realized that the birth of the state of Israel meant it would be aligned more with the West, not Soviet interests. When Golda Meir visited the USSR in 1948 and she was greeted like a rock star, Stalin became incensed. Articles began to appear in *Pravda* that had a markedly antisemitic tone. Yiddish schools and theatres were shut down, and Yiddish newspapers and libraries were closed. Almost overnight, it was not safe to be Jewish in the Soviet Union.

It was after a private performance of the 4th Quartet for friends and colleagues that Shostakovich was persuaded that releasing the 4th Quartet—with all its unmistakable Jewish references—was not smart in the current political climate, as it could provoke the regime. The quartet was retracted, and not performed publicly until nine months after Stalin died.

The most controversial part is in the final movement—the emotional heart of the 4th Quartet—where Shostakovich appropriates Jewish themes to create a macabre dance. Over a pulsating rhythm, a wailing and keening violin veers between elation and grotesque horror. Remember, news of the atrocities against Jews in Germany and eastern Europe were still reaching Moscow after the war. We know in hindsight that this macabre dance is the image of death; of Jews being forced to dance on their own newly dug graves at Treblinka. As musicologist Stephen Harris puts it: "This is nightmarish music: music only for those who cannot dream at night." Shostakovich, in his own way, was bearing witness.

The opening movement begins peacefully, in the usually bright, cheerful key of D major, but chromatic alterations to the melody lines quickly create harmonies tinged with eastern exoticism. The temperature quickly rises in intensity as added "drone" notes—resonant open strings—add to the din, suggesting a quartet of wailing bagpipes. A short duet between the two violins continues to search for a stable key center as all manner of accidentals flavor the melodies with "wrong" notes, suggesting grief or suffering. The first movement ends peacefully, as it began.

The next movement, in ¾ time, is a bit too slow to be a waltz, held back by a "woe is me" feeling of heavy sadness, reinforced by the persistent two-

note accompaniment figure. The music finally achieves a measure of repose and resolution by the final bars.

The third movement begins jauntily, but with all four players muted. An unmuted solo viola leads the way into the finale over pizzicato accompaniment from the other voices. Here, the first violin's theme has a pronounced "Jewish" character, built on tight intervals, sharp accents, and fleeting dissonances. This movement, the longest in the quartet, rises to an intense climax full of tremolos, double-stopped chords, and powerful passages played in unison, before fading away in a haunting coda as the two violins restate the main theme. Over a sustained cello harmonic, the upper voices lapse into silence on quiet pizzicatos.

The 4th Quartet finally received its première on December 3rd, 1953, in Moscow, nine months after Stalin's death and one month after the 5th Quartet had first been performed.

It is dedicated to the memory of Pyotr Vilyams, a close friend of Shostakovich's who died in late 1947 at the relatively young age of forty-five.

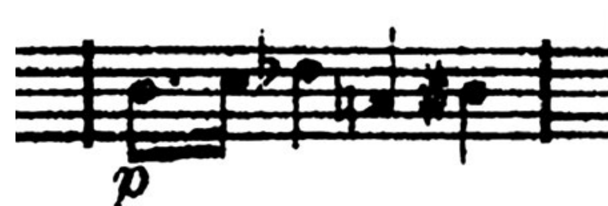
String Quartet No. 5 in B-flat major, Op. 92 (1952)

The 5th Quartet is a challenging and complex piece, and like the 4th Quartet before it, it was not premiered until after Stalin's death in 1953, although written the year before. It is a somber work, even by the standard of his own music, that is about 30 minutes long and marks the first time that Shostakovich indicates that all three movements are to be played without pause, as a continuous single entity. You can't discern the breaks between them, try as you might, but three movements are delineated in the score as an Allegro, an Andante in the middle, and a final Moderato.

The inspiration for the 5th Quartet came indirectly from J.S. Bach, as Shostakovich had served on the jury for a piano competition in Leipzig to commemorate the bicentenary of Bach's death in 1950. Shostakovich felt a strong kinship to Bach's music his entire life and had recently completed his own set of 24 Preludes and Fugues for solo piano, in all 24 major and minor keys, modeled after Bach's 24 Preludes and Fugues.

Shostakovich's ever-present feeling of anxious melancholy pervades the 5th Quartet. "When I listen to my father's work, it evokes in me some kind of nervousness," said his daughter Galina, speaking a half-century after this quartet was composed. "I can't say I picture my father, but I can sense his nervousness."

That nervous anxiety appears immediately in the opening bars, beginning with three rising notes in the violins, a recurring motive that will appear in a variety of forms throughout the movement. Immediately after comes a restless motive in the viola that keeps repeatedly interjecting itself into the action, like a rude party guest. This motive remains constant, even as the music changes all around it:



The pitches of this motive are a permutation of the cryptogram he frequently uses to insert his initials, using the German spelling of his name (**D**mitri **SCH**ostakovich) that assigns letters to pitches (D, E♭, C, and B♮).

This is the first of many quartets in which Shostakovich explicitly inserted a code, one of two in the 5th Quartet. The other is in the second movement, where there is a direct quotation from a 1949 trio for clarinet, violin, and piano by Galina Ustvolskaya, a student of Shostakovich, who was also, at the time he wrote the 5th Quartet, his lover. (He proposed to her twice and was rejected both times, which might account for the dark anxiety of this quartet.)

In the opening movement, Shostakovich creates a denser, more massive quartet sound than usual. The final section is almost spooky, as an undercurrent of pizzicati in the lower three accompanies a lonely, isolated violin line. Further adding to the quiet, bottled-up tension is the way Shostakovich sets duple against triple: the lower three are in 2/4 time while the violin is simultaneously in 3/4.

A soft, high sustained F by the first violin provides the link to the second movement. The first theme is presented in octaves by the viola and first violin, a melody of painful yearning. Two themes of different character alternate with each other throughout this nearly nine minute movement, that is played entirely with mutes.

The link to the finale is a sustained chord, leading to the second violin presenting a plaintive melody whose character belongs more to the previous Andante. This morphs into a confident waltz theme, but as in the opening Allegro, the music gradually piles up into an enormously dense and sustained climax in which themes from all three movements are pitted against each other. At one point, loud pizzicato strumming effects mimic the sound of a balalaika band. Like many of his most effective finales, Shostakovich ends the fifth quartet in resigned, dying silence.

Shostakovich dedicated this complex work to the members of the Beethoven Quartet as they celebrated their 30th anniversary.

String Quartet No. 6 in G major, Op. 101 (1956)

The String Quartet No. 6 was composed in August 1956 after several significant things happened in the life of the composer. Joseph Stalin's death in 1953 saw the end of one regime and the beginning of another, creating a political thaw and easing of performance restrictions on Shostakovich's music. More importantly however was the death of his wife Nina, after a sudden operation for cancer which left her in a coma, from which she never recovered. This was followed a year later by the death of his mother.

Soon after, the shy 49-year old composer unexpectedly proposed to 32-year old party official Margarita Kainova. She just as impulsively accepted, and they were married in July 1956, a move that surprised even his closest friends. Such marriages seem destined to fail, and in fact this one did, just three years later. In Shostakovich biographies there is scant little written about Margarita, so we don't know much about why they married, or why they divorced. Margarita was not popular with Shostakovich's friends, who could not understand what he saw in her. One acquaintance cattily described her as "unattractive and uncharming, who knew nothing about art." Nevertheless, the beginning was happy, and the couple were on their honeymoon when the 6th Quartet was written.

It is not surprising then that after a long compositional drought, brought on by one of the darker periods in his personal life, that we get music in the 6th Quartet that is hopeful and optimistic. Like the 1st Quartet, it begins with an easygoing, untroubled freshness, played confidently by the first and second violins. There are even moments of whimsy and humor. For the first time since writing his 10th Symphony, in 1953 Shostakovich declared himself satisfied with something he had composed.

A waltz-like Moderato follows; it ambles along, never in a hurry to make a point, continuing the genial, relaxed feeling that inhabits the entire quartet. This movement calls for Shostakovich's "inside voice;" it remains very understated and there is not a *forte* dynamic mark in the entire thing.

The emotional center of gravity of the quartet lies in the third movement, a solemn Passacaglia based on the cello's opening ten-measure bass line. Seven poignant variations ensue, which leads directly into the finale, that shares the first movement's cheerfulness and optimism.

Many of the 15 quartets are embedded with coded messages and musical cryptograms and the 6th Quartet is no exception. Each of the four movements ends with a cadence that features a "vertical" appearance of the motive DSCH that he frequently used to reference himself (the notes D, E♭, C, and B♮, played at the same time.) The work was premièred in October 1956 at the Glinka Concert Hall in Leningrad by the Beethoven Quartet.

Program notes © 2024 by Michael Adams

Shostakovich Quartet Cycle

Concert III • March 26, 2025

Wednesday, March 26, 2025 • 7:30 PM

Saint Anthony Park United Church of Christ

JERUSALEM QUARTET

Dmitri Shostakovich

(b. Saint Petersburg, Russia, 1906; d. Moscow, Russia, 1975)

String Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp minor, Op. 108 (1960)
Allegretto
Lento
Allegro — Allegretto

String Quartet No. 8 in C minor, Op. 110 (1960)
Largo
Allegro molto
Allegretto
Largo
Largo

Intermission

String Quartet No. 9 in E-flat major, Op. 117 (1964)
Moderato con moto
Adagio
Allegretto
Adagio
Allegro

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PLEASE SILENCE ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

String Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp minor, Op. 108 (1960)

Quartet No. 7, the shortest of Shostakovich's quartets at about 13 minutes, is dedicated to his late wife Nina, whose sudden death after an emergency operation for cancer affected Shostakovich deeply. This might be his most personal quartet, and its brief length suggests that Shostakovich, who worked very fast, might have roughed out this quartet in one sitting, as a complete thought.

It was also the first string quartet written in a minor key and it was after writing this quartet that he revealed his intention to write 24 string quartets, one in each of the 24 keys; just as he had done in his 24 preludes for piano, modeled after his beloved J.S. Bach, who had written the 24 preludes and fugues for keyboard. He never reached this goal, but this reveals his affinity for the string quartet as a medium for his more personal expression at this stage of his musical development.

It has three linked movements, played without pause, and it contains hints of his later, "sparer" style of quartet writing where passages for one solo instrument are hardly less frequent than those in which all four are playing. For example, in the Lento, except for six bars, the entire movement is written for just two or three parts. In the only passage in which all four instruments play, the viola and cello are doubled at the octave.

In Quartet No. 7 there is not much mystery about what he was dealing with in his music: grief, pain, sorrow and remembrance. His choice of key for the work, F-sharp minor, is one that composers often associate with pain and suffering. Bach, for example, uses it in the St. John Passion when the penitent Peter cries out his remorse. It was also Mahler's choice for his tortured, unfinished tenth symphony.

The first movement is a nervous Allegretto, beginning with a simple three note descending pattern that ends with a three note "knocking" motive. Shostakovich plays with these two ideas almost frivolously, until the music begins to reveal a darker sensibility as the motives undergo metrical transformation. After a brief development, the movement ends with a cadence to F-sharp major, as if a memory of Nina made him smile.

This leads immediately to the Lento, an icy, ghostly lament that calls for all four instruments to be muted. Shostakovich later revealed that the opening line in the 2nd violin, a continuously arpeggiated figure, represents the interminable hours spent in the hospital waiting room as the clock ticked by the minutes.

The third movement abruptly interrupts before the second movement finishes, with the three note motive that began the piece, but ascending this time, with the contained energy of a coiled spring that could shoot off in any direction. This sets the table perfectly for the agitated fugue that follows, introduced by the viola. The fugue gradually dissipates its contrapuntal energy with recollections of previous motives, and the Quartet ends quietly with an odd little waltz, again muted, perhaps the ghost of Nina dancing in Shostakovich's memory.

Quartet No. 7 was premièred on May 15th, 1960, in Leningrad by the Beethoven Quartet. May was a month with special meaning for Shostakovich and Nina: their engagement was in May 1929, they married on May 13th, 1932, their first child, Galya, was born in May 1936, and their son Maxim was born in May of 1938.

String Quartet No. 8 in C minor, Op. 110 (1960)

While in Dresden in 1960, ostensibly to write a film score about the firebombing of the city in World War II, Shostakovich wrote his 8th Quartet in just three days. The dedication line reads "In memory of victims of fascism and war," and for years, everyone assumed it was meant as a protest against Nazi fascism and war, triggered by the composer's shock at seeing the ruins of Dresden. It is now believed that the 8th Quartet was meant as a piece of protest music against the Soviet Communist Party, into which Shostakovich was about to be forcibly enrolled.

Sidebar: A close friend, Lev Lebedinsky, has even gone so far as to maintain that the 8th Quartet was meant to be his final work: a musical suicide note. He claims that Shostakovich had intended to kill himself rather than be misrepresented to the world as a Communist. In his unsubstantiated account, only the intervention of a friend foiled him, surreptitiously removing Shostakovich's stash of sleeping pills.

While the world believed that Shostakovich was a loyal, patriotic Soviet composer, we now know that he was a secret dissident whose music is full of hidden codes and mocking anti-communist messages that Shostakovich cleverly embedded to evade Soviet censors, at great risk to himself and his family.

Just after its completion, Shostakovich wrote a letter to a friend about genesis of the 8th Quartet:

"As hard as I tried to rough out the film scores which I am supposed to be doing, I still haven't managed to get anywhere. Instead, I wrote this ideologically flawed string quartet which is of no use to anybody. 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 could carry the dedication: To the memory of the composer of this quartet."

Years later, Shostakovich mocked the quartet's official dedication ("In memory of victims of fascism and war"):

To say that this piece was just a denunciation of fascism, one would need to be both blind and deaf, for in this quartet, I was sounding a Russian song to the memory of the victims of our revolution.

"Our" revolution would be of course the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, and the Russian song is "Languishing in Prison," a 19th-century song that is quoted extensively in the 8th Quartet.

There is an important recurring rhythm in this piece—three fast repeated notes, played "down bow" by all four players—that was originally thought to represent gunfire or bombs falling when heard through the lens of World War II. In actuality, this three-note "pounding" motive represents the secret police knocking on the door in the middle of the night, underscoring the state of constant fear that pervaded everyday life.

During the cruel era of Stalin, literally millions of people disappeared, either executed or sent to Soviet prisons. Like so many writers, composers, and intellectuals, Shostakovich was terrified of being sent to the Gulag, and he always kept a suitcase packed with essentials beside the bed and never left the house without a toothbrush in his pocket.

The music of the 8th Quartet expresses the misery, suffering and fear of the Soviet people. It is written in five movements, played without pause, opening with a four-note motive that saturates the entire work. The four pitches, (D, E♭, C, and B♮), represent the composer's name, using the German spelling: **D**mitri **SCH**ostakovich.

Today, the 8th Quartet is considered one of the most important string quartets of the 20th century and is the most frequently performed quartet of the 15. It is not pretty, nor beautiful in a traditional sense, but it is dramatic, riveting, immensely powerful, and profoundly moving, a depiction of pain and suffering through music.

Shostakovich playing cards with his family, c. 1965

String Quartet No. 9 in E-flat major, Op. 117 (1964)

The 9th quartet was completed in 1964, but it was not the first version of the piece.

While Shostakovich rarely changed or revised his works, the 9th Quartet is a singular exception. He completed the first version in 1961, then, "in an attack of healthy self-criticism, I burnt it in the stove. This is the second such case in my creative practice. I once did a similar trick of burning my manuscripts, in 1926." It took Shostakovich three years to complete a "new" 9th Quartet, finishing it in 1964. He dedicated it to his third wife Irina Antonovna, a young musicologist he married in 1962 because, as he put it: "I needed a woman to help me in my life."

Following the dark intensity of Quartet No. 8, the 9th Quartet by comparison is almost exuberant, positive and outward looking. The nearly 30 minute work is in five movements, played without pause, in a general fast-slow-fast-slow-fast layout. The movements are symmetrically arranged with the two Adagio movements surrounding the central fast movement, described as "a mad polka." (Shostakovich maintained a life-long fascination with Rossini's William Tell Overture and its "gallop" theme—think The Lone Ranger—which is alluded to here.)

The organization of the 9th Quartet is complex, in that its thematic material gets reworked and reintroduced continuously throughout the five movements. The first four movements are brief—clocking in at about four minutes apiece—but the final movement is over twice that length.

The first movement establishes an easygoing, relaxed mood (Shostakovich writes "tranquillo" over the opening bar), and at times reveals traces of humor. The second movement Adagio, a solemn chorale, projects an even greater sense of contentment. It begins unusually, with the viola stating the first theme in a register higher than the violins. The third movement — the mad polka — picks up the pace. It is in the odd key of F-sharp and couples nervous energy with humor. Picture a maniacal Lone Ranger galloping backwards to nowhere. This leads directly into the second Adagio, constructed in an arch form. It opens somberly, led by slowly crawling quarter notes, giving way to slashing pizzicato chords at the climax, first in the second violin, then the viola, before the movement fades to black, interrupted only by the ferocity of the finale.

Longer than any previous movement, the final Allegro is divided into five parts, each demonstrating Shostakovich's mastery. It is a dark "danse macabre" that begins with a torrent of kinetic energy. The central section features a fugue, followed by a restatement of the quartet's many themes, including a reprise of the slashing pizzicati of the previous movement, this time in unison.

The 9th Quartet had its première on November 20, 1964, at the Moscow Conservatory, along with Quartet No. 10, written just three months later. Both were performed by, and dedicated to, the Beethoven Quartet.

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QUICK NOTES

SHORT NOTES WITH THE NEED-TO-KNOW

Quartet No. 10

Shostakovich immediately followed No. 9 in the early summer of 1964 with this 10th, which was written in July at an artist's retreat center in Armenia. The piece is dedicated to his close friend, the distinguished composer Mieczyslaw Vainberg.

Quartet No. 11

Shostakovich was not a well man when writing No. 11, yet the Quartet is paradoxical, in that his dark thoughts of mortality are (mostly) set aside, resulting in an appealing suite of seven connected miniatures. It is dedicated to Vasili Shirinsky, the founding second violinist of the Beethoven Quartet, who died suddenly at age 65.

Quartet No. 12

Dedicated to the founding first violinist of the Beethoven Quartet, Dmitri Tsyganov, Quartet No. 12 marks the first time that Shostakovich dabbled in 12-tone serialism, the controversial harmonic system invented by Arnold Schoenberg.

Quartet No. 13

Composed during one of his long hospital stays in 1970. Shostakovich continued his pattern of dedicating works to members of the Beethoven Quartet, this one to recently retired violist Vadim Borisovsky as a 70th birthday gift. Quartet No. 13 is unusual in two respects: it features the viola in a leading role and features a jazz-inspired scherzo in the central section of this single movement work.

Quartet No. 14

No. 14 is in three movements, each about nine minutes long, the second and third are played without pause. No. 14 is dedicated to the cellist of the Beethoven Quartet, Sergei Shirinsky. The beginning is announced by the viola with six repeated notes—a musical "Hear ye! Hear ye! The cello shall now begin!"

Quartet No. 15

No. 15 is singular for its unrelenting darkness. Comprised of six slow movements, this is the longest of all the quartets The composer's preoccupation with his own mortality and death are self-evident, and there was no doubt in his contemporary's minds that this was his epitaph, his personal requiem.

Friday, April 25, 2025 • 7:30 PM

Saint Anthony Park United Church of Christ

JERUSALEM QUARTET

Dmitri Shostakovich
(b. Saint Petersburg, Russia, 1906; d. Moscow, Russia, 1975)

String Quartet No. 10 in A-flat major, Op. 118 (1964)
Andante
Allegretto furioso
Adagio (attacca)
Allegretto – Andante

String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122 (1966)
Introduction: Andantino
Scherzo: Allegretto
Recitative: Adagio
Etude: Allegro
Humoresque: Allegro
Elegy: Adagio
Finale: Moderato — Meno mosso — Moderato

Intermission

String Quartet No. 12 in D-flat major, Op. 133 (1968)
Moderato — Allegretto — Moderato — Allegretto — Moderato
Allegretto — Adagio — Moderato — Adagio — Moderato — Allegretto

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String Quartet No. 10 in A-flat major, Op. 118 (1964)

Shostakovich immediately followed the composition of his 9th Quartet in the early summer of 1964 with this 10th, which was written in July at an artist's retreat center in Armenia. The composer dedicated the piece to his close friend, the distinguished composer Mieczyslaw Vainberg*. "Moisei" Vainberg, like Shostakovich, had written nine quartets so far and Shostakovich joked that he had won the semi-competitive race to get to number ten first.

> **Sidebar:** Mieczyslaw Vainberg (1919–1996) was a prolific composer who, despite his 26 symphonies, seven operas, seven concertos, 17 string quartets, several ballets, and incidental music for 65 films, is still little known outside of Russia.

The quartet opens with an unassuming tune in the first violin alone that sets the tone for this gentle, almost whimsical movement. The entire thing is soft-spoken, featuring a viola passage played "sul ponticello," the technique of playing with the bow hair up against the bridge, resulting in an icy, glassy sound color. The movement is harmonically elusive, toggling between E minor and A-flat major, two distantly related keys (with one section in both keys simultaneously), until a final, satisfying cadence in A-flat major ends the movement.

A ferocious scherzo follows—it is in fact the only time in his quartets that Shostakovich uses "furioso" in a title—with motorific ostinatos that drive the music forward with a sense of the chase. There is a section of buzzing "beehives", followed by a powerful passage when both violins reinforce each other, playing in unison. Dissonant, clashing double-stops add to the chaos, until the movement ends abruptly, as if the entire quartet is spent by the effort.

The third movement is written in the Passacaglia form, a favorite of Shostakovich in slow movements. The nine bar passacaglia theme nearly jumps off the page, introduced by a wailing cello, marked "fortissimo." Things take a sweeter turn when the first violin enters, as Shostakovich develops the passacaglia's theme into eight subtle variations, sometimes omitting the ground bass altogether. This leads without pause into the fourth movement.

The viola begins nonchalantly, noodling a jocular figure for some time before the others seem inclined to join in. Eventually, the second violin hops aboard, followed by the other two, who finally get the tune as well. Several times Shostakovich expands the sonic texture, using "drone" tones—resonating open strings—to create a rich, orchestral sound. Themes from the preceding movements are brought back, a common Shostakovich technique, including the passacaglia theme of the third movement, again played fortississimo. The energy gradually dissipates, and we are left with an uncertain finish: the music is marked "morendo" (dying away), as the work's opening theme is stated a final time.

String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122 (1966)

The 11th Quartet was written in early 1966 and is dedicated to the memory of Vasili Shirinsky, the second violinist of the Beethoven Quartet and close friend of Shostakovich, who died the previous summer at age 65. Shirinsky was a founding member of the Beethoven Quartet, which had a close working relationship with Shostakovich for over 40 years and had premiered all but the first and last quartets. This was the first in a series of four quartets Shostakovich dedicated to the members of the Beethoven Quartet (nos. 11-14), the subset known as "The Quartet of Quartets."

The 11th Quartet premiered in Moscow, along with a cycle of his songs, with Shostakovich accompanying the singer at the piano. Since the polio attack that had affected his right hand, he had not performed in public for over two years and was reportedly very nervous. The concert was a tremendous success nonetheless,

but at the Leningrad premiere three days later, tragedy struck. Surrounded by a crowd of well-wishers at his hotel, Shostakovich suffered a heart attack that took him three months to fully recover from. This would be the first of three heart attacks, beginning the long, gradual decline in his health during his last decade.

As I noted in the opening essay, Shostakovich lived with chronic health problems all his life, caused or exacerbated by the constant fear and stress that came with being a public figure living under oppressive authoritarian rule, particularly during the Stalin years. It exacted a terrible toll on Shostakovich, who was chronically depressed, anxious and in poor health.

It is clear that while writing the 11th quartet, Shostakovich was not a well man. The preoccupation he had about his own mortality likely increased after the shock of losing his close friend Vasili. Yet despite all of that, the 11th Quartet is a bit paradoxical, in that dark thoughts of mortality are (mostly) set aside, resulting in an appealing suite of seven connected miniatures, as a deeply felt tribute to his friend. The "suite" format looks backwards, akin to a *Divertimento* from Joseph Haydn's era.

The 11th Quartet begins much like the 10th, with a plaintive solo violin, leading into a soothing, chorale-like hymn of the *Introduction*. The first violin is our guide through the movement, inviting us "inside" this music that sounds as if it were very private and personal to Shostakovich. The connection to the *Scherzo* is seamless and throws around a fugal idea equally, that seems to illustrate how the finest string quartet's function: by having intelligent musical conversations amongst themselves, as much as good counterpoint allows. Shostakovich adds touches of whimsy and humor —it is a *Scherzo* after all, Italian for "joke"—with long, sliding glissandi and punchy harmonics. The *Recitative* arrives abruptly, with a dramatic outburst and slashing chords from the violin. This outburst gets repeated three times, suggestive of wailing and grief. There is something cathartic about these gestures, what one musicologist has called "three heart seizures."

The mood is interrupted by the cheeky *Étude*, which must be "biographical"—his friend Vasili practicing diligently, then handing it off to the cellist. The *Humoresque* begins and ends with the second violin alone (name another piece that does that!) a gesture to his late friend's role, here literally "playing" the joke. It is the *Elegy* that gives this quartet a sense of gravitas. It is a poignant, touching memorial to his friend and reveals Shostakovich at his most vulnerable, in a very personal expression of grief. As in the previous movement, the *Elegy* ends with the second violin alone, playing a muted repetition of the first violin's beautiful final tune; a last goodbye. The *Finale* is notable for its stark simplicity and spare writing. As he commonly does, Shostakovich reprises themes from the earlier movements for a final appearance, before the music dies away, leaving a solitary, stratospheric note in the violin, as a soul ascending.

String Quartet No. 12 in D-flat major, Op. 133 (1968)

Dedicated to the Beethoven Quartet's first violinist, Dmitri Tsyganov, on his 65th birthday, the Quartet No. 12 is the second in the "Quartet of Quartets" (nos. 11-14) that are dedicated to the individual members of the Beethoven Quartet. Quartet No. 11 had been a tribute to its second violinist, Vasili Shirinsky, upon his sudden death. It seemed inevitable that Shostakovich would follow that with three more quartets, one each in honor of the other three members of the ensemble who premiered all but two of the composer's 15 quartets.

Each of the "Quartet of Quartets" has personal qualities that reflect the idiosyncrasies of their dedicatee, and the 12th Quartet is no exception, as first violinist Tsyganov was noted for his vigorous, physical style of playing. When Tsyganov inquired of Shostakovich how the piece was progressing, the composer replied, "It's a symphony, a symphony!" revealing his grand ambitions for the work. The result was a two-movement work of about 27 minutes playing time. The second movement is more substantial than the first and about three times as long, but what most surprised the music world about the 12th Quartet is that Shostakovich for the first time ever, dabbled in 12-tone serialism, the controversial harmonic system invented by Arnold Schoenberg.

During the Stalin years, no composer would have dared to use such a "western, formalist" technique, but Shostakovich, like several of his younger Soviet counterparts—namely Alfred Schnittke (1934-98), Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) and Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931)—felt freer to experiment during the years of the "Khruschev thaw."

As someone who took delight in numerology in his works (see *Sidebar*), it can't be a coincidence that Shostakovich chose his Quartet No. 12 to delve into 12-tone serialism. (He included 12-tone rows in the 13th Quartet as well as his next two works: the Sonata for Violin and Piano and the 14th Symphony.)

The ostensible aim of Schoenberg's controversial system was to liberate music from the "tyranny" of any single pitch or key, allowing for a new, freer mode of harmonic expression. While the concept of avoiding a tonal center was adhered to by most composers of serial music, Shostakovich still labels his 12th Quartet as being "in D-flat major," a seeming contradiction. His response was to explain that he used 12-tone rows as a point of departure, not as an end in itself, saying:

> *....everything in good measure. If, let's say, a composer sets himself the obligatory task of writing dodecaphonic (12-tone) music, then he artificially limits his possibilities, his ideas. The use of elements from these complex systems is fully justified if it is dictated by the concept of the composition...*

In other words, he combined the rules of harmony, the rules of serialism, the expressiveness of Romanticism, and the dissonance of modernism, to sound like, well, Dmitri Shostakovich at age 62.

The 12-tone row appears immediately in the cello—you really can't miss it—and you will hear it pop up at various points throughout the piece, as everyone gets a turn. The first violin explores a dark melody in a low register, as if carrying the weight of the world on its shoulders. For long stretches at a time, Shostakovich writes for just two, sometimes three voices, emphasizing through the "hollow" sound quality a feeling of emptiness and isolation. There is a murkiness to this movement; its intentions are guarded and inscrutable.

In the much longer second movement, the initial 12-tone row gets more extensively developed. It opens with trills that compete with an insistent melodic idea that begins with repeated notes. A couple episodes appear to aim for scripted chaos, as if half the players missed page turns yet obstinately carry on. A long passage for solo cello leads into a dark introspective section. The 12-tone sequence even makes an "all-pizzicato" appearance in the first violin. This is the signal that we are coming to the final section of the work, a collage that revisits and reconsiders the material we heard in the three earlier sections. At one point the lower three instruments play enormous pizzicato chords which contain all twelve chromatic pitches simultaneously — the densest sonority imaginable.

Although Shostakovich never shied away from dissonance in his writing, in the 12th Quartet, he seems to embrace dissonance at a new level. Perhaps this was his grand strategy all along, as we find out, only at the end (spoiler alert), when he delivers the ultimate surprise: an unambiguous, optimistic cadence in D-flat major, an ironic (or cheeky) conclusion to a piece born from a 12-tone row.

While he was writing this quartet Shostakovich confessed to a friend that every time he wrote a new piece he was haunted by fears that he would not live to complete it. He was indeed very sick at this stage in his life, and it was perfectly true that each new piece could have been his last. There remain, however, three more quartets to come.

Sidebar: Shostakovich's light-hearted numerology is at play in the opening minutes of this piece as well. Notice how the second violinist does not play a note for a very long time. In fact, for precisely 34 bars, the piece is essentially a trio. This is a silent homage to the Beethoven Quartet's late second violinist Vasili Shirinski, who had died in 1965. Shirinski's tenure in the quartet was exactly 34 years. The premiere of Quartet No. 12 introduced the ensemble's new second violinist Nikolai Zabavnikov, but only after waiting the obligatory 34 bars.

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Shostakovich Quartet Cycle

Concert V • April 25, 2025

Sunday, April 27, 2025 • 4:00 PM

Saint Anthony Park United Church of Christ

Pre-concert conversation one hour before the performance

JERUSALEM QUARTET

Dmitri Shostakovich

(b. Saint Petersburg, Russia, 1906; d. Moscow, Russia, 1975)

String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat minor, Op. 138 (1970)
Adagio — Doppio movimento — Tempo primo

String Quartet No. 14 in F-sharp major, Op. 142 (1972–1973)
Allegretto
Adagio (attacca)
Allegretto

Intermission

String Quartet No. 15 in E-flat minor, Op. 144 (1974)
Elegy: Adagio
Serenade: Adagio
Intermezzo: Adagio
Nocturne: Adagio
Funeral march: Adagio molto
Epilogue: Adagio

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PLEASE SILENCE ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat minor, Op. 138 (1970)

The last decade of the composer's life was marked with increasingly worsening health problems that interfered with his ability to compose regularly. Yet somehow, he did, despite months-long, arduous therapies for a polio-like affliction, worsening heart disease, and finally, lung cancer treatments that kept Shostakovich increasingly in hospitals during the time he wrote his final three quartets.

The 13th Quartet was finished during one of his long stays at a neurological hospital in 1970. He continued his pattern of dedicating recent quartets to individual members of the Beethoven Quartet by offering this one to violist Vadim Borisovsky, recently retired, as a belated 70th birthday gift. It is unusual in two respects: it is composed in a single movement and features the more reticent viola in a leading role. The single movement structure falls into a loose three-part division: the outer sections are led by the viola and are quite rhapsodic, the middle part, is a jazzy scherzo.

The quartet begins and ends with viola solos. The opening presents a strangely beautiful theme that happens to be a 12-Tone row that guides much of the quartet's inner architecture; and the last is an impressive climb to heights not often reached by the third member of the quartet (at least not without a net.) At the very center of this arch-form movement is an extraordinary jazz section *(Sidebar 1)*, that calls upon the players to become percussionists, tapping their bows on the bodies of their instruments. *(Sidebar 2).*

There is something intensely bleak and austere about the 13th Quartet. The writing is often simple and spare, a "less is more" approach that Shostakovich favored in his last years, yet it is still densely packed with emotions and ideas.

Shostakovich reading a newspaper, c. 1975

Sidebar 1: Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had been complaining about the unpleasant sounds he had heard at a recent jazz performance in 1963: "...it is impossible to understand some jazz music which is repugnant to the ear. It is the kind of music that makes one feel like vomiting, and causes colic in one's stomach..." Shostakovich must have been out to prove the many redeeming qualities of jazz as he knew it.

Sidebar 2: The noted Soviet pianist Galina Shirinskaya said that she heard Shostakovich say that the passage marked "col legno" ("with the wood"), was meant to imitate the lash of a whip in a concentration camp. There is also the notion that it is the knocking on the door by, or the tapping of nails into a coffin. All bleak imagery regardless.

String Quartet No. 14 in F-sharp major, Op. 142 (1972–1973)

The 14th Quartet was written at the end of a long fallow period that had caused Shostakovich a lot of anxiety. He'd spent most of it in hospitals, dealing with his full menu of crises: a weakening heart, lung cancer, and a polio-like neurological condition that caused chronic pain. He complained about his situation in a letter:

> *"For two years, I haven't written a single note…Well, I'm not drinking, lying the whole time in hospitals. I want to start drinking again!"*

His doctors did relent to a daily vodka, and when he returned to Moscow a month later, an ebullient Shostakovich was toasting the return of his muse with sketches for the 14th Quartet. During a state sponsored visit to England several months later he worked on it further while visiting the home of his friend Benjamin Britten, a composer he greatly admired. The 14th Quartet was finally completed the following April (1973) while in Copenhagen to receive the Danish Sonning prize.

> **Sidebar 1:** Given the composer's frail health, these foreign trips were risky—he had no desire to travel abroad and his doctors advised against it—but he confessed that he'd been forced to go to the U.K. due to political pressure. Shostakovich had often been paraded abroad for propaganda purposes and despite his failing health, he was "invited" to go. It was during this trip that Shostakovich traveled to York to assist the members of the young Fitzwilliam Quartet with their preparation of his 13th Quartet. He entrusted them with the Western premieres of his last three quartets, and they became the first ensemble to perform and record all fifteen. These recordings won international awards.

Quartet No. 14 is dedicated to the cellist of the Beethoven Quartet, Sergei Shirinsky. It is the last of four quartets that Shostakovich dedicated to the individual members of the ensemble that premiered every one of the composer's 15 quartets, except for numbers 1 and 15.

> **Sidebar2:** Cellist Sergei Shirinsky, the half-brother of founding second violinist Vasily Shirinsky (now deceased), was still playing at age 70 when the 14th Quartet was written. Described as a genial and enthusiastic man, he had known Shostakovich for nearly fifty years. After he had received this quartet, he quipped "Well I can die now."

The work is in three movements, each about nine minutes long, the second and third of which are played without pause. The beginning is announced by the viola with six repeated notes—a musical "Hear ye! Hear ye! The cello shall now begin!"—as the cello jauntily sets off with a droll melody that *almost* sounds carefree, but for its jagged, angular profile, accompanied by a viola drone. The music gradually grows in intensity as the rest of the group enters, but the focus repeatedly goes back to the cello part. For example, when the viola gets the idea to play a solo cadenza, it is soon one-upped by the cellist, who riffs on the same material. During this nearly nine minute movement, notice how many times Shostakovich uses less than the full foursome in the music. He is very intentional about the "voicings" in his quartets, often writing lengthy episodes for just two or three players for long stretches of time. Long soliloquies for a single instrument are not uncommon and occur several times in this quartet.

The *Adagio* is suggestive of the sound world of Beethoven's late quartets. It is equal parts sweet serenity and sad lament. There are lengthy duets between the cello and first violin in this movement, meant to highlight the two members of the Beethoven Quartet who were 50-year veterans of the group at the time of the work's premiere. Shostakovich gives them both extended solo passages of intense expressivity.

The third movement *Allegretto* arrives with an odd pizzicato melody in the first violin, which is actually a motto, in the form of a musical cryptogram: C#– E♭–E–D–E–G–A. Using German note transliterations, that spells "*Serezha*," the affectionate diminutive for Sergei. It is one of two cryptic references to cellist Shirinsky, the other is a quote from his fateful opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, when Katerina sings "Serezha, my darling" in her beautiful aria.

Also listen for the remarkable passage in the third movement where the material splinters apart into smaller and smaller shards that pass rapidly from player to player as it disintegrates, an especially dizzying thing to watch in real time. (You will know when it happens.) As the energy dissipates, the cello leads the way into the beautiful coda, in the sunny, radiant key of F# major, with the cello soaring high above his colleagues as the movement fades peacefully to black.

Shostakovich was awarded the Glinka Prize (the State Prize of the Russian Federation) for the 14th Quartet. Only the 15th Quartet and a viola sonata—Shostakovich's final completed work—would be composed after String Quartet No. 14.

String Quartet No. 15 in E-flat minor, Op. 144 (1974)

Shostakovich's 15th and final statement in the string quartet genre, completed while in the hospital in 1974, is singular for its unrelenting darkness. Comprised of six slow movements all marked "adagio" and played without pause, this longest of all the Shostakovich quartets contains rich rewards for the listener, despite its continuum of profound gloom.

The composer's preoccupation with his own mortality and death are self-evident, with such movement titles as *Elegy* and *Funeral March*. Interestingly, this quartet bears no dedication (only two others are likewise), although there was no doubt in his contemporary's minds that this was his epitaph, his personal requiem. From the music, one can sense that these are the composer's final words on the subject, that his entire cycle of quartets is finished.

The first movement *Elegy* is more than twice as long as the other five movements and begins unexpectedly, with a fugue. This fugue is in slow motion however, beginning with a solitary-sounding violin. The fugue subject is heavy with resignation, plodding ahead step by step, until the fugue peters out before it is fully developed. (A metaphor for unfinished business?) The bleak feeling of resignation persists, exactly as Shostakovich intended as it turns out. Here are his instructions to the players of the Beethoven Quartet:

> *"Play the first movement so that flies drop dead in mid-air and the audience leaves the hall out of sheer boredom."*

The second movement, a chilling *Serenade*, begins with a series of "shouts" from each player; the score indicates a sudden crescendo on a single pitch. The players start at the tip of the bow and rapidly surge the bow towards the "frog," in string player parlance. These shouts overlap, each beginning where the other left off. Are they cries of agony? Wails of grief? You will hear them again in this movement, as they frame a fragmented waltz melody.

The *Intermezzo* begins abruptly with a dramatic violin cadenza. The cello however, remains unaffected and stoic throughout, regardless of the music's intensity. In this movement Shostakovich continues his tradition of embedding messages in his music, this time concealing a tune from the opera *The Nose* which had been revived in the Soviet Union for the first time in 45 years, around the time of the quartet's premiere.

The *Nocturne* begins with an icy viola solo, accompanied by graceful, limpid arpeggios in the violin and cello. All the voices are muted, making the music sound murky and unfocused, as if underwater. Here is where our protagonist faces old age, and finally, death, when the cello lets the music die away in resigned defeat.

The *Funeral March* is defined by a recurrent dotted rhythm, one that Shostakovich appropriated from the Funeral March of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. The march rhythm is the glue that keeps the *Funeral March* intact, joining together a series of solos, beginning with a doleful viola. Each solo is punctuated like a refrain by the recurring march rhythm.

What comes after death? With Shostakovich it is unclear. He was not a religious man, and never spoke of an afterlife, but the *Epilogue* might seem to suggest otherwise. A searing violin solo begins this movement of vivid, indescribable effects: energetic bursts dominated by icy trills and slashing pizzicato chords. Are these hallucinations or spectral visions of the hereafter? Perhaps, but the *Epilogue* serves as a musical retrospective as well, quoting themes from previous movements, as well as a quote from his recent viola sonata, (which in turn quotes Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata.) The music drains away its energy in that final, bleak viola solo, and ends in repose.

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All Concerts Free For Kids & Students!

Kids ages 6–17, as well as students of any age with a valid student ID, can attend any Schubert Club concert free of charge! Adult ticket holders may purchase up to 4 free kids tickets per paid adult ticket. Students may reserve up to 4 free student tickets per order.

Schubert Club is dedicated to cultivating a passion and appreciation for music in our community. We believe that the joy and beauty of music can enrich and transform the lives of all people and be a vehicle for strong fellowship, service, and partnership with the communities in which we live. With this new initiative, we hope to expand access to the arts for young audiences, building on our commitment to making everything we do accessible to young people and families.

In addition, we are excited to announce the launch of **Schubert Club Student Connections, a new free club for students** to deepen their connection with Schubert Club beyond the concert experience. Student Connections will offer opportunities to gather with peers, and to discover and celebrate music. Students are eligible to join starting in 7th grade, up to any age as long as the participant has a current and valid student ID.

For information about how to reserve free student tickets,
and how to join Schubert Club Student Connections, please visit
schubert.org/kids-and-student-tickets

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If you are interested in making a memorial or tribute donation, contact Amy Marret at amarret@schubert.org or 651.292.3270.

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Schubert Club Endowment and Legacy Society

SCHUBERT CLUB ENDOWMENT:

The Schubert Club Endowment was started in the 1920s. Today, our endowment provides more than one-quarter of our annual budget, allowing us to offer free and affordable performances, education programs, and museum experiences for our community. Several endowment funds have been established to support education and performance programs, including the International Artist Series with special funding by the family of Maud Moon Weyerhaeuser Sanborn in her memory. We thank the following donors who have made commitments to our endowment funds:

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Music in the Park Series was established by Julie Himmelstrup in 1979. In 2010, Music in the Park Series merged into the Schubert Club and continues as a highly sought-after chamber music series in our community. In celebration of the 35th Anniversary of Music in the Park Series and its founder Julie Himmelstrup in 2014, we created the Music in the Park Series Fund of the Schubert Club Endowment to help ensure long-term stability of the Series. Thank you to Dorothy Mattson and all of the generous contributors who helped start this new fund:

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Become a member of The Legacy Society by making a gift in your will or estate plan. For further information, please contact Amy Marret at 651.292.3270 or amarret@schubert.org

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The Schubert Club Artistic & Strategic Opportunities Fund was established by the Board of Directors at its February 2017 meeting as an operating fund to support artistic initiatives and program development that are not part of the ongoing programming of Schubert Club. Examples include commissions, community partnerships, artistic or ensemble residency, purchase of instruments for the Schubert Club Museum, high tech productions, etc. Thank you to our generous donors who have given gifts above and beyond their annual giving to help make this fund a reality. New opportunities always present themselves, so you are encouraged to consider a special gift to this fund to allow for future projects. Contact Amy Marret for more information at 651.292.3270.

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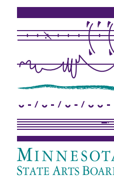

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Jacob Heller
Dorothy Horns
Brian Horrigan
Ann Juergens
Laura Krider
Anne Kruger
Andrew Lang
Seth Levin
Nancie Litin
Michael Manns
Laura McCarten
Stephen Menya
John Nuechterlein
Vaughn Ormseth
Jonathan Palmer
Karl Reichert
Christina Temperante
Maria Troje Poitras
Anne Vars
Eric Won
Donna Zimmerman

STAFF

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Maximillian Carlson, Program Manager
Ben Cook-Feltz, Patron Services Manager
Kate Cooper, Director of Education & Museum
Galen Higgins, Graphic Designer
Aliese Hoesel, Executive Assistant
Kristina MacKenzie, Director of Marketing & Communications
Amy Marret, Director of Development
Janet Peterson, Business Manager
Gweni Smith, Education & Museum Associate
Anna Torgerson, Artist & Event Manager
Milan Wilson-Robinson, Communications Manager

Schubert Club Music Museum Interpretive Guides:
Ann Braaten, Natalie Fiedler, Alan Kolderie, Ed Kvarnes, Ansel Langmead, Derek Parshall, Jonas Peterson, Kirsten Peterson, Allika Polowchak, Muree la Roland, Mary Beth Stevens, Susan Thompson

Volunteer Coordinator:
Kirsten Peterson

Project CHEER Director:
Joanna Kirby

Project CHEER Instructors:
Joanna Kirby, Jacob Vainio,
Enzo Mazumdar Stanger, Vanessa McKinney

ADVISORY CIRCLE

The Advisory Circle includes individuals from the community who meet occasionally throughout the year to provide insight and advice to Schubert Club leadership.

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Mark Anema
Nina Archabal
James Ashe
Suzanne Asher
Paul Aslanian
Aimee Richcreek Baxter
Lynne Beck
Carline Bengtsson
Cecil Chally
Penny Chally
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Karyn Diehl
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Catherine Furry
Michael Georgieff
Diane Gorder
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Lucy Rosenberry Jones
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Lyndel King
Richard King
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Karen Kustritz
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Sylvia McCallister
Fayneese Miller
Peter Myers
Nicholas Nash
Ford Nicholson
Richard Nicholson
Gayle Ober
Sook Jin Ong
Nancy Orr
Christine Podas-Larson
Nathan Pommeranz
David Ranheim
Barbara Rice
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Estelle Sell
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Katherine Skor
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John Treacy
Nancy Weyerhaeuser
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