

## ***Creative Capitals* (2018) disc 7.**

The sixteenth edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE* visits seven of Western music's most flourishing *Creative Capitals*—London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Leipzig, Berlin, Budapest, and Vienna. Each disc explores the music that has emanated from these cultural epicenters, comprising an astonishingly diverse repertoire spanning some three hundred years that together largely forms the canon of Western music. Many of history's greatest composers have helped to define the spirit of these flagship cities through their music, and in this edition of recordings, Music@Menlo celebrates the many artistic triumphs that have emerged from the fertile ground of these *Creative Capitals*.

Built in 1703 by Peter the Great to be a cosmopolitan, Western-style metropolis, St. Petersburg emerged over subsequent decades as the center of Russian musical culture. It was in St. Petersburg that Mikhail Glinka, the progenitor of Russia's classical music tradition, built his career and that Anton Rubinstein founded the city's storied conservatory, which produced such towering artists as Dmitry Shostakovich. A little over one thousand miles away, two other luminary composers made Leipzig their home: Felix Mendelssohn, who served as Director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and founded the Leipzig Conservatory, and Robert Schumann, whose mighty Piano Quintet concludes the disc. This disc brings together the *Creative Capitals* of St. Petersburg and Leipzig through dramatically varied music by these four influential composers.

### **1 *Andante and Variations in B-flat Major for Piano, Four Hands, op. 83a* (1844)**

**FELIX MENDELSSOHN** (1809–1847)

HYEYeon PARK, MICHAEL BROWN, *piano*

### **2–12 *From Jewish Folk Poetry, op. 79* (1948)** **DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH** (1906–1975)

“Lament for a Dead Child”  
“Thoughtful Mother and Aunt”  
“Cradle Song”  
“Before a Long Separation”  
“Warning”  
“The Deserted Father”  
“Song of Need”  
“Winter”  
“The Good Life”  
“Song of the Girl”  
“Happiness”

LYUBOV PETROVA, *soprano*; SARA COUDEN, *contralto*;  
KANG WANG, *tenor*; GILBERT KALISH, *piano*

### **13–16 *Trio pathétique in d minor for Clarinet, Bassoon, and Piano* (1832)**

**MIKHAIL GLINKA** (1804–1857)

*Allegro moderato* –  
*Scherzo: Vivacissimo* –  
*Largo*  
*Allegro con spirito*

JOSE FRANCH-BALLESTER, *clarinet*; PETER KOLKAY, *bassoon*;  
MICHAEL BROWN, *piano*

### **17–20 *Piano Quintet in E-flat Major, op. 44* (1842)**

**ROBERT SCHUMANN** (1810–1856)

*Allegro brillante*  
*In modo d'una marcia, un poco largamente*  
*Scherzo: Molto vivace*  
*Allegro ma non troppo*

MICHAEL BROWN, *piano*; AARON BOYD, ALEXI KENNEY,  
*violins*; PAUL NEUBAUER, *viola*; KEITH ROBINSON, *cello*

Liner notes by Patrick Castillo © 2018

### **FELIX MENDELSSOHN** (1809–1847)

#### ***Andante and Variations in B-flat Major for Piano, Four Hands, op. 83a* (1844)**

Fanny Hensel née Mendelssohn—like her brother Felix, a precociously gifted pianist and composer, though inevitably overshadowed by him on account of her gender—hosted biweekly Sunday musicales at her home in Berlin. It was for one of these gatherings that Felix Mendelssohn created, on Saturday, February 10, 1844, a four-hand piano arrangement of his *Variations in B-flat Major, op. 83*, composed in 1841. Mendelssohn biographer R. Larry Todd paints a cozy picture of brother and sister preparing for the show:

“as [Felix] copied out a duet arrangement of his *Variations, op. 83*, Fanny took the sheets one by one to the piano and began to practice; on Sunday, the two of them premiered the new work, playfully described on the autograph as *composte per la musica delle Domeniche in casa Hensel dalla (vecchia) Vedova Felice* [composed for the music of Sundays in the Hensel house from the (old) Happy Widow]; (why Felix dubbed himself an ‘old widow’ remains a mystery).”

The *Andante and Variations in B-flat Major for Piano, Four Hands*—published as Mendelssohn's *Opus 83a*—received its public premiere later that year, on June 25, in London. The theme, a gently flowing melody marked *Andante tranquillo*, is virtually identical to the two-hand version; in the four-hand transcription, primo and secondo pianists simply divide the theme into alternating phrases. The first variation, too, hews closely to the original, garnishing the theme with syncopated ornaments. But as the variations proceed, *Opus 83a* diverges from *Opus 83*. (The four-hand version comprises eight variations to the original's five.) Following the first variation, the music becomes increasingly spirited: the second variation, marked *animato*, is driven by staccato triplet chords and the third and fourth, by

swirling thirty-second-note runs. The fifth variation unleashes a giddy fusillade of densely voiced chords. The music turns abruptly severe with the sixth variation, in gloomy g minor. Supporting a marked transfiguration of the theme in the primo part, the secondo nods to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, with its characteristic four-note rhythmic motif. The seventh variation, *pianissimo*, *legatissimo*, restores the theme's tranquility. The climactic eighth variation, marked *Allegro molto agitato*, provides the work's most dramatic moment, setting the stage for the vivacious coda.

**DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH** (1906–1975)  
*From Jewish Folk Poetry, op. 79* (1948)

Following the 1917 October Revolution, Vladimir Lenin's populist ethos that "art belongs to the people" was bastardized by the autocratic Stalin regime to justify co-opting the arts into Soviet propaganda. Stalin banned any avant-garde activity across the arts: the twelve-tone music of the Second Viennese School, the modernist works of Bartók, and even most of Stravinsky's music were all seen as products of capitalist decadence and consequently forbidden. Dmitry Shostakovich and his contemporaries were forced to respond in their music to the state's rigorous cultural demands. In 1948, the Communist Party published a Resolution on the State of Russian Music, which officially charged Shostakovich and other leading composers with "antidemocratic tendencies that are alien to the Soviet people and its artistic tastes [and composing works] strongly reminiscent of the spirit of contemporary modernistic bourgeois music of Europe and America." The resolution demanded that composers guilty of Western formalism reform their wayward artistry; each had no choice but to publicly prostrate themselves before the government. Shostakovich wrote in response, "I am deeply grateful for...all the criticism contained in the resolution...I shall with still more determination work on the musical depiction of the images of the heroic Soviet people."

Shostakovich composed the song cycle *Iz yevreyskoy narodnoy poëziy* (*From Jewish Folk Poetry*), op. 79, for soprano, alto, tenor, and piano, just months after the Communist Party's resolution. The cycle of eleven songs, setting Russian translations of Yiddish texts taken from a Jewish folk song collection compiled in 1947, constituted a dangerous expression of solidarity with Russia's Jews at a politically fraught time. In the wake of the resolution, "Shostakovich may well have been trying to have it both ways," surmise the Shostakovich scholars Laurel Fay and David Fanning, "composing a piece which fulfilled official desiderata for folkloristic composition, yet speaking obliquely of solidarity with oppressed communities." In any event, *From Jewish Folk Poetry* was only heard privately until 1955; it was one of several of Shostakovich's works—including the Fourth and Fifth String Quartets, the Fourth and Tenth Symphonies, the Violin Concerto, and the revision of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*—whose political undertones made public performance impossible until the Khrushchev Thaw, when, following Stalin's death, censorship was relaxed.

The cycle begins with the unsparingly tragic "Plach ob umershem mladence" ("Lament for a Dead Child"). Above a dirge-like piano accompaniment, soprano and alto keen, "Sun and rain, light and haze. Fog has descended, the moon has dimmed.

What did she bear? A boy, a boy...And where did they bury him? In the grave." The following song, "Zabotlivyye mama i tjetja" ("Thoughtful Mother and Aunt"), is more equivocal in its harmonic character, dancing between bright major and foreboding minor shadings. (Shostakovich claimed that he was drawn to the "jolly melody on sad intonations" characteristic of Jewish folk music. This predilection is in evidence elsewhere in his oeuvre, as in the well-known Second Piano Trio and Eighth String Quartet.) The song likewise sustains a rhythmic ambiguity, fluctuating between 2/4 and 3/4 time.

The alto sings the distressed "Kolybelnaja" ("Cradle Song"); Shostakovich's music does nothing to sugarcoat the text: "My son, most beautiful on earth, my flame in the darkness. Your father is in chains in Siberia, held prisoner by the tsar!" An equally desperate sadness suffuses "Pered dolgoj razluko" ("Before a Long Separation"), a duet between soprano ("Oh, Abram, how can I live without you!") and tenor ("Oh, oh, Rivochka, give me a kiss, girl!"). The cycle's emotional gravity does not relent. The soprano carries the stark "Predosterezhenije" ("Warning"). Pallid octaves in the piano underpin "Broshennyj otec" ("The Deserted Father"). "Hop, hop, even higher! A goat eats the straw from the roof!" the tenor sings caustically in "Pesnja o nuzhde" ("Song of Need"). The tenor again narrates the aptly frigid "Zima" ("Winter")—"My Sheyndl lies in bed, the sick child with her. Not a stick in the frozen hut, and"—here, soprano and alto join with haunting vocalise—"the wind howls outside the walls."

The final three songs—"Khoroshaja zhizn" ("The Good Life"), "Pesnja devushki" ("Song of the Girl"), and "Schastje" ("Happiness")—are creations of deadly sarcasm. "I am happy on the farm. You hear, my life is complete!" sings the soprano in the penultimate song. The cycle's finale asserts: "And I want to tell the entire country about my good fortune!" Shostakovich's music provides a bitter emotional subtext, and these brave words ultimately ring false.

**MIKHAIL GLINKA** (1804–1857)  
*Trio pathétique in d minor for Clarinet, Bassoon, and Piano* (1832)

Russian classical music's point of origin is more straightforwardly identifiable than that of perhaps any other region. While schools of composers, aesthetic movements, and other broad phenomena have coalesced to define German, Italian, French, and other musical traditions, Russian classical music begins with the early nineteenth-century composer Mikhail Glinka. Rooted from a young age in Russian peasant, liturgical, and other musical traditions, Glinka was captivated by music by his early adolescence. Hearing the Finnish-born composer Bernhard Crusell's Clarinet Quartet when he was ten or eleven years old pointed Glinka unequivocally towards his vocation. He would go on to encounter the music of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Cherubini, and others from Western Europe throughout his teenage years. In 1828, Glinka set off for Italy, where he met Donizetti and Bellini and was subsequently drawn to Italian opera. (He also met Mendelssohn on these travels; chemistry between the two was apparently poor.) Glinka mastered the Italian operatic idiom, but by 1833, he found himself dissatisfied with composing in a style that felt alien.

He endeavored from this point forward to compose “in a Russian manner” and thereby find his voice. With a fundamental grasp of the lingua franca of Western European composers, Glinka, largely self-taught, cultivated a musical language that integrated a Russian character with classical and operatic styles. “As Pushkin assimilated elements from West European literatures and naturalized them in Russia by means of his choice of subject matter,” writes Russian music scholar Stuart Campbell, “so Glinka drew on the musical mainstreams of his day and acclimatized them in Russia.” The idiom Glinka developed would be a guiding light to virtually all subsequent nineteenth-century Russian composers, encompassing the nationalist set known as the Five or the Mighty Handful (Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov), Tchaikovsky, and others; his greatest works are considered foundational to the Russian repertoire.

Tchaikovsky credited Glinka’s seven-minute orchestral fantasy *Kamarinskaya* with containing the entire Russian symphonic school, “just as the whole oak is in the acorn.” Glinka’s *Trio pathétique*, scored for the unusual combination of clarinet, bassoon, and piano, dates from 1832, when the twenty-eight-year-old composer was studying in Milan and still emulating Italy’s operatic composers. The work’s published title is a bit misleading: though cast in the unsmiling d minor, the trio is an exuberant work. Indeed, the *Allegro moderato*’s second theme, in less severe B-flat major, is utterly cheerful. The ensemble’s palette of timbres has much to do with its character, with clarinet and bassoon evoking bell-like laughter in their upper registers.

The work proceeds *attacca* into the bright-eyed scherzo and then into the warm *Largo*, both brimming with operatic lyricism. The finale, marked *Allegro con spirito*, serves as an epilogue, reprising earlier musical ideas. Under the spell of bel canto Italian opera, Glinka produced a *Trio pathétique* markedly less despairing than the literature’s more famous *Pathétiques* (Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in c minor, op. 13, and Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony). Perhaps Glinka had an unrequited love on his mind while at work on the trio—he wrote on the autograph manuscript, “I have known love only through the pain it brings.” If so, the work’s optimistic character convincingly conceals his heartache.

**ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)**

**Piano Quintet in E-flat Major, op. 44 (1842)**

Robert Schumann’s compositions appear in clusters over the course of his creative career. The 1830s primarily saw the creation of piano works; 1840 was his year of lieder, followed by a year of symphonic music. In 1842 came Schumann’s most significant chamber pieces. Between February and July of that year, he completed his three string quartets, each dedicated to Felix Mendelssohn. In the fall, he composed two companion pieces: first, the Piano Quintet, op. 44, and then a month later, the Piano Quartet, op. 47. Both were composed for Clara Schumann. The quintet, which paved the way for such seminal works as the piano quintets of Brahms and Dvořák, took Schumann all of three weeks to complete. The work’s fiendish piano part testifies to Clara Schumann’s virtuosic ability at the keyboard.

Ironically, illness prevented her from taking part in the premiere, and Mendelssohn—likewise one of the nineteenth century’s foremost pianists—filled in at the last minute, sight-reading at the performance. The quintet is rife with searing expressivity, discernible, as with much of Schumann’s music, as a dialogue between the composer’s alter egos: Florestan, the masculine (in eighteenth-century parlance) and extroverted, and Eusebius, the feminine voice of tenderness and pathos. An ebullient energy drives the opening *Allegro brillante*: the first theme comprises two powerful ascending leaps answered by eight emphatic chords, unquestionably the work of Florestan; but Eusebius immediately transforms their stentorian might into a soft, loving gaze.

The lyrical second theme, an enchanting duet between the cello and viola, contrasts the exclamatory first theme. The development section is all nervous energy, its devilishly intricate piano part audibly conceived with Clara Schumann’s virtuosity in mind. The second movement is a somber funeral march. Schumann offsets the movement’s solemnity with an expressive second theme. A faster *agitato* section combines the two themes in a show of Romantic pathos before reprising the march. As if rising from the dead, the third movement scherzo follows the elegiac march with ecstatic ascending scale figures, interrupted briefly by a poetic trio section and then by a longer, fiery second trio. The final movement recalls the first in its unrelenting character. A literal reprise of the first movement’s opening theme, combined with the finale’s own main theme in a magical fugue, brings the work to a blazing finish.

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