

West Cork Chamber Music Festival 2021
with
OurConcerts.live

presents

Bantry and Beyond

Russian Pictures

6. Cello Series (2) 'Russia'

Filmed at the Concertgebouw Kleine Zaal, Amsterdam

Johannes Moser [cello]

Paul Rivinius [piano]

Weinberg

Cello Sonata No.2 in G minor Op.63

Rachmaninov

Vocalise Op.34 No.14

Shostakovich

Cello Sonata in D minor Op.40

Mieczysław Weinberg [1919–1996]

Cello Sonata No.2 in G minor Op.63 [1959]

1. *Moderato*
2. *Andante*
3. *Allegro*

Weinberg's Second Cello Sonata was composed for Mstislav Rostropovich in 1959 who premiered the work with Weinberg at the piano the following year. The piano accompaniment provides texture to the expressive capacities of the cello. In contrast to yesterday's performance of his Fifth Quartet, it is interesting to hear Weinberg's harmonic intensions directly communicated through the timbre of the piano.

It would not be presumptuous to connect his two long and difficult flights for survival with his unstoppable working moral; in his own words, "On the whole, dying was easy". A drive towards constant motion, Weinberg was uninterested in promoting his works, as soon as he had completed a composition he would start working on the next, not necessarily ensuring their performance. Was the piano then the primary sonic reference of his compositional intensions?

His second wife Olga Rakhalskaya remembers: *He worked every single minute, day and night. If he wasn't sleeping, he was working. Even in his sleep. When he was dozing off he would often drum his fingers without realizing it, as though they were grasping the piano keys. ... And if two weeks went by after he had finished a work before starting another, then he would fall into depression, worried that he had ceased to be a composer.*

The presence of the piano enhances something subtle but stunning in Weinberg's choice of notes, a careful and deep texture that invites us to meet the work on its own terms. The three movements are of almost equal length. The opening Moderato is slow moving, sometimes blooming, almost searching its way into the mellow but melodically solid Andante. The percussive opening of the Allegro is continued between each instruments throughout this rhythmically repetitive and tense ending to the sonata.

Birk Gjerlufsen Nielsen.

Sergei Rachmaninov [1873-1943]

Vocalise Op.34 No.14 [1915]

What need is there of words, when you will be able to convey everything better and more expressively than anyone could with words by your voice and interpretation?

Rachmaninov said these gallant words to Antonina Nezhdanova, the soprano for whom he had written the Vocalise, when she objected to the lack of text. Only vowel sounds are used in the original, and this very lack of text allows it to be readily arranged for instruments. The

cello arrangement is probably the most famous instrumental arrangement, yet the voice-like nature of the melody is clearly heard.

Vocalise is one of the most emotive works in the classical repertoire, it pulls the heartstrings for seven minutes of beautiful, simple melodiousness. The piece was written and published in 1915, when Russia was struggling through World War I, with alarmingly heavy casualties and was on the verge of the Revolution that would overturn the country and shock the world. The veiled Dies Irae in the opening melody is instantly engaging, pulling the listener straight into a melancholy outpouring of feeling. Yet, the sweeping, arcing phrases seem to contain an intangible optimism, overcoming the melancholy. It surely cannot be said of many composers that they can convey two contradictory emotions so effectively at the same time.

Rachmaninov was certainly right in saying that in this piece, voice and interpretation were all. And this piece allows the player, whatever their instrument, to enjoy the exquisite melodies of Rachmaninov, to interpret them and let the instrument sing.

Helen Dawson

Dmitri Shostakovich [1906-1975]

***Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor Op.40* [1934]**

1. *Allegro non troppo*
2. *Allegro*
3. *Largo*
4. *Allegro*

The Cello Sonata was written in 1934, predating all the quartets and the composer's catastrophic fall from Soviet grace. This happened when Stalin walked out of a performance of his opera *Lady Macbeth and Pravda* subsequently printed the devastating "Muddle instead of music" article. Thus began Shostakovich's long duel with the regime – they needed him as Russia's demonstrably greatest composer but could not allow him, literally on pain of death, to overstep certain invisible lines. Though this work predates these anguished times, his life was nonetheless wracked by upheavals in his love life.

The work opens with a huge first movement, which is balanced by a substantial and intense Largo. For those who know the quartets the scale of the first movement will come as no surprise but its gentle and untroubled lyricism will be most unexpected. The movement is in sonata form and both subjects exploit the cello's love of rich broad melody. Presented with the quiet theme of the first subject, the last composer you would think of would be Shostakovich. The second subject has more intense possibilities in its richly romantic song but until a Shostakovich trademark rhythmic figure makes its appearance in the piano right at the end of the exposition this is a different composer to the one we know from his post-1940 works. After the repeat this characteristic rhythmic idea dominates the development with its *ostinato* repetition. The recapitulation opens with the cello singing out the

gorgeous second theme before the music stops and the first theme is reconsidered at a drastically slowed down tempo over widely spaced piano chords. The coda recalls the rhythmic figure also at the reduced tempo.

The Scherzo is familiar Shostakovich territory inevitably reminding us of the Second Piano Trio and the Piano Quintet. But it is fascinating to see his obsession with that spiky percussive piano part manifesting itself so early in his career. The ostinato rhythm is as exciting as in the later works and is spiced up in the short middle section by flageolets on the cello. The Largo has two voices; a slow, meditative and sorrowful opening followed by a more active second section with an ostinato piano and a boldly arching melody in the cello. The coda slows down all movement to the barest flicker of life. So the ebullient and playful concluding Rondo comes as quite a shock, Shostakovich delighted in these blatant lapses from good taste. Both instruments get a chance to show off, while the folk-like main theme verges on the banal. He was clearly determined to end with a smile as the abrupt ending shows.

Francis Humphrys