

ENEMIES OF THE STATE

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906 – 1975)
String Quartet in C Minor, Op. 110

Largo
Allegro molto
Allegretto
Largo
Largo

Erwin Schulhoff (1894 – 1942)
String Quartet No.1

Presto con fuoco
Allegretto con moto e con malinconia grottesca
Allegro giocoso alla Slovacca
Andante molto sostenuto



The DaPonte String Quartet moved to Maine 23 years ago from Philadelphia as part of a National Endowment for the Arts and Chamber Music America rural arts residency. They fell in love with mid-coast Maine and decided to stay permanently. Since then they have performed across North America and Europe, including at Carnegie Hall. But Maine is their home, and they perform over 70 concerts a year statewide and year-round. In 2014 they were voted “Best Music Group in Maine” by the readers of Down East Magazine.

The Quartet comprises *Lydia Forbes* and *Ferdinand Liva* on violin, *Kirsten Monke* on viola, and *Myles Jordan* on cello. Their name comes from Lorenzo DaPonte, who was Mozart’s librettist.

More information is at www.daponte.org.

Erwin Schulhoff: First String Quartet (1924):

"Absolute art is revolution . . . This is particularly true in music, for this art form is the liveliest, and as a result reflects the revolution most strongly and deeply -- the complete escape from imperialistic tonality and rhythm, the climb to an ecstatic change for the better."

So wrote the successful young Czech composer Erwin Schulhoff, Dadaist creator of a work entitled "All Art Is Useless," pen-pal of Anton Webern, Alban Berg, and who wrote the brilliant string quartet we perform now. His Communist sympathies notwithstanding, one can't help but wonder if his musical setting of "The Communist Manifesto" was a Dadaist prank. He loved both to perform and dance to jazz, then regarded as the world's most decadent musical style, integrating it with modern European art music, and seems to have been an irrepressibly bubbly fellow with a talent for sustaining his life in a state of euphoria. "I am incredibly fond of nightclub dancing," he wrote to Berg.

As the Nazis assumed power in 1933 things began to unravel for him. Schulhoff, a Jewish socialist -- not an ideal combination in the German Reich, where he was working -- was a target, and one of the first to be listed among the "entartete" artists officially proscribed by the State. It was time to leave, but Schulhoff failed to move quickly enough. His application to emigrate to the United States having been rejected, the composer successfully applied for Soviet citizenship, just in time for Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union. His family were imprisoned by the Reich as Soviet citizens the day after the invasion commenced. Although his wife and son were almost immediately released (temporarily), Schulhoff was transferred to the Wülzburg concentration camp in Bavaria, where he died of tuberculosis on August 18, 1942. Because he had had his music shipped ahead to Russia it somehow survived there, and first became known in the West after the Wall came down in 1989. He is one of many important artists whose works, and whose very existence, had been completely expunged from history by the Nazis.

Dmitry Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8 in C minor Op. 110 (1960):

After his diagnosis of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in 1960 Dmitry Shostakovich contemplated suicide, and wrote the Eighth String Quartet in only three days (July 12-14, 1960), intended as his own epitaph. (In this it is eerily paralleled by Arnold Schoenberg's Second String Quartet of exactly a half-century earlier, originally also intended as a musical suicide note.) Shostakovich's initials in German (DSCH) comprise a four-note motif out of which the entire work is spun; he wrote it while working in Dresden on a joint Soviet / East German film project.

Its form is cyclical, beginning and ending with a fugato built on the four-note "initials" cell; both its contrapuntal style and the use of his own name mirror the same procedures in many of Johann Sebastian Bach's works, based on the four notes B-A-C-H, again in German nomenclature.

Between the fugato's first appearance and its last the composer constructs a series of tableaux comprising an almost hysterical denunciation of the Soviet state. His initials serve to sign each of the pictures he brings before us, as a means of bearing witness, but the tight organization these four notes impose on the whole makes the Eighth Quartet one of his best-constructed and enduring masterpieces; it is at once a controlled explosion of rage and heartfelt elegy. Less than seven years had elapsed since Stalin's death in 1953 ended one of the most brutal national terrors ever inflicted. Stalin, Russia's Robespierre, killed tens of millions seemingly by category, without regard to guilt or innocence; Shostakovich kept a suitcase packed throughout that period, always expecting to be next in line. Tikhon Khrennikov, Stalin's operative inside the Union of Composers, had already denounced both him and Prokofiev as "bourgeois formalists," serving notice that their lives were in the balance. Stalin had personally written a critique of his work, entitled "Muddle Instead of Music," published in Pravda and Izvestia.

A Soviet-era cover story still appears in some CD liner notes accompanying recordings of this work. Such stories were constructed in hopes of protecting the composer's life; that he was at length permitted to survive amazed him. A series of three terse chords, for example, recurring in its fourth movement, are passed off in the official description as bomb-blasts during the second world war in Dresden when they are in fact -- transparently -- imitating the banging on doors by the KGB, Stalin's dreaded secret police, each of which signaled death-warrants. Even as Shostakovich's audiences grasped his real intent, the government somehow consistently bought into his cover stories, sparing his life. He was a tightrope-walker.

Many of the effects Shostakovich uses to paint these pictures are low drone notes, symbolizing electrified fences, or the barking sounds of Alsatian guard dogs against a wildly-scrambling texture evoking the running steps of people fleeing for their lives. Within this quartet he quotes from three pieces of preexisting music: the *Dies Irae*, a Russian folksong entitled "*Languishing in Prison*," and an agitated incarnation of a plaintive Jewish folk theme also appearing in his Piano Trio Op. 67. In addition to Op. 67 he also refers to other works of his own, quoting the First Cello Concerto, his opera "*Lady MacBeth of the Mzensk District*," and the first and tenth symphonies, thereby also illuminating meanings behind quoted materials in stark contrast to their respective cover stories.

Had he written this work seven years earlier it would have meant his life.