

JULY 23, 2024

CONCERT

VI JURI SEO

Born: 1981

Composed: 2010

Several years ago, after a long period of eschewing consonance and familiar chords for a more abstract, modernist language, I brought back harmony to try to see it in a new light. In *vi*, triads and seventh chords made a defiant comeback. My longing for a recognizable musical syntax led me back to tonality. As I wrote, tonal moments melted into passages of obfuscating texture only to emerge, when the texture cleared, with a sense of irony. The structure of this piece is delineated by the interaction of subtly-shifting bitonal chords, which are created with the piano's *sostenuto* pedal and selective muting in the vibraphone. The climax contains a slanted quote of R. Strauss's "Also Sprach Zarathustra," the epitome of major-minor ambiguity.

vi was written in the winter of 2009-2010 for myself and then my friend (now my spouse) Mark Eichenberger for the premiere at the 21st Century Commissioning Award at the Krannert Center for the Arts.

Program Notes by Juri Seo

Cello Sonata No. 3 in A Major, Op. 69

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born: 1770

Died: 1827

Composed: 1807-1808

- I. Allegro, ma non tanto
- II. Scherzo. Allegro molto – Trio
- III. Adagio cantabile – Allegro vivace

The year 1807 found Beethoven extremely busy. During the previous year, he had composed his Fourth Piano Concerto, Fourth Symphony, the three Razumovsky Quartets, and the Violin Concerto, and now he pressed right on, completing the Coriolan Overture in March 1807 and continuing work on his Fifth Symphony. He paused to write the Mass in C Major, then completed the symphony in the fall and began a cello sonata,

which he finished early the following year. Beethoven dedicated the sonata to his longtime friend Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein, who not only handled the composer's financial affairs but was also a skillful amateur cellist. The first public performance—on March 5, 1809—was given by two distinguished performers who were also friends and colleagues of Beethoven: pianist Baroness Dorothea von Ertmann and cellist Nikolaus Kraft.

The Cello Sonata in A Major is a remarkable work. Given its proximity in time to the Fifth Symphony, one might expect the sonata to be charged with that same molten energy. Instead, it is characterized by nobility, breadth, and a relaxed quality that have made it—by common consent—the finest of Beethoven's five cello sonatas. Beyond issues of content, this sonata is notable for Beethoven's solution to a problem that has plagued all who write cello sonatas—how to keep the two instruments balanced. He keeps the cello part in the rich mid-range of that instrument, and while the piano is an active co-participant, it is never allowed to overpower or bury the cello.

The Allegro ma non tanto opens with an unusual touch: all alone, the cello plays the movement's poised main theme and is joined by the piano only after the theme is complete. Beethoven marks both entrances *dolce*, and while there is plenty of energy in this lengthy sonata-form movement, that marking might characterize the movement as a whole (characteristically, the marking at the beginning of the development is *espressivo*). The second movement—Allegro molto—is a scherzo with a syncopated main idea and a doublestopped second theme (also marked *dolce*). These alternate in the pattern ABABA before a brief coda rounds the movement off; the very ending is a model of ingenuity and understatement. There is no slow movement in this sonata, but the final movement opens with an extended slow introduction marked *Adagio cantabile* before the music leaps ahead at the *Allegro vivace*. This is not the expected rondo-finale but another sonata-form movement. It is typical of this sonata that the opening of the fast section is marked *pianissimo*, and throughout the movement Beethoven reminds both players repeatedly to play *dolce*.

This sonata may come from the same period as the Fifth Symphony, but its graceful mix of nobility and restraint makes it seem a far different work. Doubtless it brought relief to its composer, and it continues to bring joy to audiences today.

Merge

KYLE RIVERA

Born: 1996

Composed: 2019

“Merge” was inspired by Nathalie Meibach’s narrative sculpture “Drop”. Meibach’s art piece captures the scientific data recorded from Hurricane Harvey in Houston, Texas. She captures the catastrophic accumulative rain drops from the storm. “Merge” reflects upon the many human experiences that were affected by Hurricane Harvey. Each individual experience generated interpersonal experiences as family, friends, neighbours, and even strangers came together to face the storm. Within the work, the weather data representing points of major road closures caused by flooding appear as “merge points”. These merge points are structural arrivals where elements of the music such as pitch, timbre, orchestration and rhythm blend together. Merge points also correspond to the integration of human experiences and their transcendence from individual to local to global.

Program Notes by Kyle Rivera

Piano Quintet in G minor, Op. 57 DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born: 1906

Died: 1975

Composed: 1940

- I. Prelude
- II. Fugue
- III. Scherzo
- IV. Intermezzo
- V. Finale

Shostakovich’s Piano Quintet, one of his most appealing and straightforward works, has come in for a hard time from certain critics, and perhaps for strange reasons. Written in 1940, several years after the Pravda attack on Shostakovich’s opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mzensk District*—an attack that nearly destroyed his career—the Piano Quintet received the Stalin Prize. That fact alone has been enough to destroy it for some Western critics, who feel that any music associated—however remotely—with Stalin’s name and the approval of the Soviet government must be without merit, must represent a capitulation to inferior artistic ideals.

A very different sort of criticism came from another source. Serge Prokofiev said of Shostakovich’s Piano Quintet: “What astonishes me about the Quintet is that so young a composer, at the height of his powers, should

be so very much on his guard, and so carefully calculate every note. He never takes a single risk. One looks in vain for an impetus, a venture.” One might note here that a composer who regarded the young Shostakovich as a rival may not be the most impartial of critics and also that a composer whose career had nearly been iced by the Soviet government might well be “very much on his guard.”

Whatever the critical reactions to it, the Piano Quintet has proven quite popular with one important faction of musical life: audiences. While it is true that the Piano Quintet is conservative in its musical language, it is also unfailingly melodic, fresh, and good-natured, and—despite the reaction of some of its critics—it remains one of Shostakovich’s most frequently performed and recorded works. Some have claimed to hear the influence of Bach in the first two movements: a Prelude and a Fugue. The piano alone plays the broad-ranging Prelude theme and is soon joined by the strings. The *Poco più mosso* second theme is also first heard in the piano, which has a very prominent role throughout the Quintet (Shostakovich himself played the piano at the first performance, on November 23, 1940, in Moscow). The beginning of the Fugue, however, belongs to the strings, which introduce the muted and somber main subject. The music rises to a great climax, then falls back to end very quietly. By contrast, the Scherzo explodes with life. In a hard-driving 3/4, this music powers furiously ahead, its rhythm pounding into one’s consciousness. The movement is also full of brilliant color: glissandos, pizzicatos, left-hand pizzicatos, instruments playing in their highest registers. Particularly effective is the ending, which rushes ahead without the slightest relaxation of tempo to the sudden, surprising cadence.

The final two movements are connected. The Intermezzo opens with a pizzicato line over which the first violin sings a long cantilena of unusual beauty. Gradually the other instruments enter, the music rises to a dramatic climax, then subsides, and out of that calm emerges the Finale. The last movement is the gentlest of the five. Far from storming the heavens, this music remains sunlit and rhapsodic. It is based on two themes—the piano’s gentle opening melody and an angular second theme first heard in the piano over the strings’ powerful triplets. Shostakovich develops both these ideas before bringing the Quintet to a conclusion that is pleasing precisely for its understatement: the music grows quiet and suddenly vanishes on three quiet strokes of sound derived from the Finale’s opening theme.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger