

# WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 20 January 2024  
3.00pm

## European Chamber Music Academy Showcase 2024

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### Trio Chagall

Edoardo Grieco violin  
Francesco Massimino cello  
Lorenzo Nguyen piano

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Piano Trio No. 1 in C minor Op. 8 (1923)

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Vitebsk (1928-9)

Dmitry Shostakovich

Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor Op. 67 (1944)

*I. Andante – Moderato*

*II. Allegro non troppo*

*III. Largo*

*IV. Allegretto*



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As photographs taken at any time in his life suggest, **Dmitry Shostakovich** rarely enjoyed good health. In his mid-teens, when a boy might be expected to be full of energy and enthusiasm, he was afflicted by tuberculosis of the lymph glands. He underwent an operation and was packed off to Crimea to convalesce, with his sister Mariya as company.

According to one of Mariya's letters home, Dmitry perked up, acquired a suntan and fell in love during this period of recovery. The recipient of his affection was a girl of his own age, Tatyana Glivenko, to whom he dedicated the single-movement Piano Trio that he composed during that summer of 1923. She and Dmitry remained close friends for several years. The original title of the work was *Poème*, which is indicative of its romantic nature; the spiky modernism that would mark most of Shostakovich's output in early adulthood had not yet emerged in his writing.

The composer played the Trio as an audition piece for the composition class at the Moscow Conservatory – he was surprised to be immediately accepted on its merits, not least because his fellow performers had made a hash of the string parts. (Though as it happened, he did not take up the offer of a place at that time.) Then, according to another sister, Zoya, it was used as the accompaniment to a silent film. To support the family finances in Petrograd, Shostakovich had taken a job playing piano in cinemas; he cheekily used the situation as a chance to rehearse his Trio with a couple of musician friends, though the audience was apparently unimpressed.

Unpublished during the composer's lifetime, the Trio was posthumously pieced together from incomplete instrumental parts. The reconstructed work proves to be highly rhapsodic in form, with drooping figuration and hot-house intensity that sounds at least as French as it does Russian. Towards the end a march-like character is adopted to drive the music forward to an expansive conclusion.

With its subtitle 'Study on a Jewish Theme', **Aaron Copland's** *Vitebsk* is his only published work to refer specifically to his own ethnic background. He was not indifferent to his racial heritage: he once wrote, 'Jewish influences were present in my music, even when I did not refer to them overtly. I grew up in the Eastern European tradition and so there was no novelty to it as was the case with folk materials relating to the American West.'

*Vitebsk* was written in 1928-9 and was based on a Jewish folksong that the composer had heard in a New York production of the play *The Dybbuk* by S Ansky, a Jewish ethnographer and author. Ansky was born in the city of Vitebsk - now in Belarus, then part of the Russian Empire.

*The Dybbuk* is based on a Jewish folk tale of possession by a malicious spirit. Incidental music for it was composed by Ansky's collaborator Joel Engel, and

made use of a Hassidic traditional melody connected with the city of Vitebsk, though the action of the play has a more rural setting. In his trio based on this tune, Copland said that he sought to evoke 'a dramatic character study' that in its more agitated sections 'suggests a Chagall-like grotesquerie' (Vitebsk was also the birthplace of the painter Marc Chagall, from whom this afternoon's ensemble takes its name).

Shostakovich wrote his Second Piano Trio – a work of greater import than the youthful First – in the summer of 1944. As he was completing the first movement, his close friend Ivan Sollertinsky, a Russian intellectual whose wide artistic influence included directorship of the Leningrad Philharmonic, succumbed to a heart attack at the age of 41. The finished Trio, while in many ways a specific memorial to Sollertinsky, carries complex resonances that refer to the wartime horrors unfolding in the months of its composition as well as universal sentiments associated with tragic early deaths.

It seems pretty certain that Sollertinsky was Jewish (he introduced to Russia the work of several contemporary Jewish authors and promoted Mahler's music). Throughout Shostakovich's Trio there are references to folk music, which become more obviously Jewish in character as the work progresses. Two things have to be remembered. One, at the very time the music was being written reports were reaching Russia of the Nazi death camps and massacres. Two, Stalin's regime was itself anti-Semitic, and the persecution of Jewish intellectuals was a recurring policy. In this work and several subsequent ones, Shostakovich was taking genuine personal risk in declaring solidarity with his Jewish friends and colleagues.

The Trio's opening is unforgettable, the solo cello playing whispered harmonics that establish a mood of bleakness and mourning. The melodic characteristics of this folkloric tune dominate the movement, appearing in guises that range from elegiac to sardonic to vehement. A biting scherzo follows, its manic energy ensuring that a great deal is said in a short space of time. In this music, Sollertinsky's sister recognised an accurate portrait of her brother's volatile personality. The sombre and commanding piano chords that open the slow movement immediately change the atmosphere to one of brooding sorrow. These tolling chords form the basis of a funeral chaconne.

From the outset of the final movement the Jewish character is overt and intense. This is the longest of the four movements, a grimly determined dance, becoming more dissonant and tortured as the minutes pass. Its final throes and twitches lead to the hallucinatory reappearance of the chaconne chords and then eerie harmonics, the sounds that began the work.

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