

Liu Chien-Wei Senior Recital Program notes

Dmitri Shostakovich

Sonata for Cello & Piano in D minor Op. 40

This cello sonata was composed in September 1934 and premiered in Leningrad on December 25 of the same year by Kubatsky and Shostakovich himself. The conservative musical style, characterized by its abundance of regular phrase lengths and adherence to a traditional four-movement structure surprised even some of his contemporaries. Also, the repeat of the first movement's exposition is still shocking, even today.

The first and second themes of the first movement are both lyrical. The second theme, especially, feels sentimental without any sarcasm. In the development section, they are contrasted with a repeated note figure initially heard as cello accompaniment to the second theme, later becoming more prominent. An unusual feature is the movement slowing down in a glacial pace in recapitulating the first theme at the end.

The second movement's dance-like quality is robust, swaggering, and brimming with rhythmic energy. The piano part delights in its chattering pattern of repeated notes in the high register (similar with Khachaturian's Sabre Dance), while the cello is equally captivating with its shimmering arpeggios in harmonics.

In the third movement, fans of Shostakovich's mature "bleak" style will find familiarity in the somber and mournful *Adagio*, where the piano predominantly supports the intensely lyrical cello line that takes center stage throughout the movement.

The final Allegro is a well-organized rondo featuring the quirky, yet playful opening theme repeated three times, interspersed with two contrasting episodes. In the second episode, the piano takes off with lively energy. Shostakovich chooses not to build up to a grandiose "petty-bourgeois formalist" conclusion. One movement you can enjoy the eccentric and crazy musical idea in Shostakovich work.

Ludwig van Beethoven- Cello Sonata in C major Op. 102 No. 1

In Op. 102, we encounter Beethoven's "late" period, characterized by his deafness, which secluded him in a unique sonic realm of his own creation. Despite this isolation, he intensified his musical expression and found new freedom. This era is defined by complex counterpoint, adaptable structures, and frequent trills. It reflects the intentional inner world of a composer who, despite his withdrawal from hearing, retains an unyielding passion for music.

The First of Op. 102 comprises two movements. In this sonata, each movement commences with a slow introduction. The ethereal and contemplative theme tenderly introduced by the solo cello unveils, within its first measure, the main motifs – a descending stepwise motion of a fourth succeeded by an ascending stepwise motion of the same interval – which will resurface recurrently throughout the entire piece. Marked by the indication *dolce cantabile*, this Andante introduction embodies a virtual duet of affection between the two instruments, harmonizing in thirds or reciprocating their tender exchanges, evoking a serene atmosphere in C major.

The surprise heightens as the *Allegro* emerges with an assertive theme, delivered in octaves and unisons between the cello and piano, set in A minor.

The theme is urgent and restless, dominating the movement. However, it feels somewhat awkward with its sudden leaps and ornamentation. Full of anxiety and haste, it rushes through the development section, and the coda ends abruptly and deliberately tense.

The second movement's slow introduction starts with a poised and reflective mood. Initially, the piano and cello engage in a duet, trading phrases before branching out independently—the cello delving into deep bass while the piano ascends. They are brought together when they both 'remember' the opening Andante theme, ending with a chummy triple trill.

The intimate exchange is briefly interrupted by a lively motive that sets the tone for the *finale*: a stepwise rising fourth. As the movement begins, Beethoven playfully incorporates this motive in various humorous and ironic ways. One clever moment involves the cello sustaining a bass drone, seemingly searching for the piano, then narrowly missing 'tagging' it with the motive. This lighthearted interaction continues throughout the movement, ending with the happiness within two instruments.

Cassadó Requiebros

Gaspar Cassadó (1897-1966) was a Spanish cellist, the son of organist and conductor Joaquín Cassadó. Mentored by Pablo Casals, he became a celebrated cellist internationally after World War I. Apart from performing, Cassadó adapted works by composers like Schubert and Liszt and composed solo cello pieces with a Spanish flair, exemplified by "Requiebros," dedicated to Casals.

"Requiebros" is one of the famous pieces of Cassadó, created in 1934 during his peak creative period. This piece full of Spanish artistic style and passion, the flowing melody between the cello and the piano expressed the lovely story and dialogue between a couple.