

Although his larger works continue to receive the lion's share of worldwide accolades, Tchaikovsky's chamber music, equally demonstrating the beauty of his genius, falls short of obtaining equal status. His *String Quartet No. 1 in D Major, Op. 11*, written when he was thirty-one years old, is one such unsung masterpiece. Tchaikovsky wrote the score quickly, finishing it a month before its premiere in March of 1871. The opening movement has two themes. The first, with its seemingly Schubertian affinity, is a somnolent melody that is kept active by the use of tied notes set in 9/8 meter, in addition to decorative scale passages that continue their course into the second subject as well. This second theme is more stable and its motion becomes more linear as it unfolds.

The second movement, with its lovely first theme, is the gem of this four-movement work. The theme is said to be a Ukrainian folk song, entitled *Vania Sat on the Sofa and Smoked a Pipe*, which Tchaikovsky supposedly heard while working on his opera *Undine*. The melody, now known as "Tchaikovsky's *Andante cantabile*," has taken on a life of its own in popular culture, particularly as it has been extracted and performed as a solo by numerous famous instrumentalists.

The *Scherzo* scurries along at a brisk pace in 3/8 time, with out-of-kilter accents that bring levity to an otherwise energetic and powerful rhythmic setting. The trio section, in B-flat major, centers on a drone bass (organ point in the cello) that likewise employs irregular rhythmic accents.

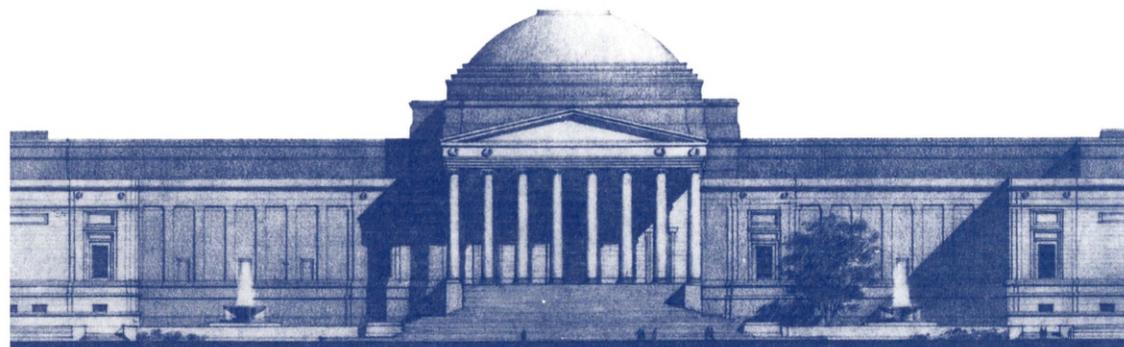
The last movement, like the first, uses sonata-allegro form, with two themes that are typically Russian. The first is a sprightly dance tune, and the second is soulfully Slavonic. After a comprehensive development section, the recapitulation repeats the first theme in the original key of D major, but revisits the second theme in the tonic minor key (D minor), as opposed to the expected dominant key. The movement concludes brilliantly with a scintillating coda that has the "string sonority madly running and accenting in a bright *fortissimo*" (Arthur Cohn, *The Literature of Chamber Music*).

Program notes by Elmer Booze

The Fifty-ninth Season of

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and
F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

National Gallery of Art



2372d Concert

RAZUMOVSKY STRING QUARTET

PETER SIROTIN, *violin* NATALIA BOGACHEK, *violin*

MICHAEL STEPNIAK, *viola* FIONA THOMPSON, *cello*

Sunday Evening, 11 February 2001

Seven O'clock

West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

PROGRAM

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906–1975)

String Quartet No. 3 in F Major
Op. 73 (1946)

Allegretto
Moderato con moto
Allegro non troppo
Adagio
Moderato

INTERMISSION

Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky
(1840–1893)

String Quartet No. 1 in D Major
Op. 11 (1871)

Moderato e semplice
Andante cantabile
Scherzo: Allegro non tanto e con fuoco
Finale: Allegro giusto

Founded in 1998 by four outstanding young musicians from the Peabody Conservatory of Music, the **Razumovsky String Quartet** has performed at a number of colleges and universities in the Eastern United States and at various embassies in the Washington, DC, area. In addition, the quartet has collaborated with a number of prominent chamber musicians, including Earl Carlyss and Ann Schein.

Russian-born violinist **Peter Sirotin** played his debut at age fourteen with the Kharkov Philharmonic Orchestra, performing Paganini's *Concerto No. 1*. A graduate of the Moscow Central Music School for the Gifted and the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory, he has performed with such musical luminaries as cellist Alexandre Rudin, pianist Alexei Lubimov, and violist Yuri Bashmet.

Natalia Bogachek is also a native of Russia and received her undergraduate training at the Moscow State Conservatory. Since graduating with the artist diploma from the Peabody Conservatory, she

has received frequent critical acclaim as a violin soloist and chamber musician. She has performed concertos with the Knoxville Symphony, the Colorado Centennial Philharmonic, and the Sibelius Academy Orchestra in Finland, among others. She is currently a member of the National Symphony.

Violist **Michael Stepniak** came to the United States from Australia. He holds graduate degrees in music from the New England Conservatory, Northwestern University, and the Peabody Conservatory. He is currently pursuing doctoral studies at Harvard University while on a study leave from his post as assistant professor of music at Columbia Union College in Takoma Park, Maryland.

Cellist **Fiona Thompson**, a native of England, is the principal cellist of the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra and performs with the Baltimore Opera and the Baltimore Chamber Orchestras, the Concert Artists of Baltimore, and the Harrisburg Symphony. She lives in Baltimore, where she performs together with Peter Sirotin and pianist Ya-Ting Chang in the Mendelssohn Piano Trio.

Shostakovich's *String Quartet in F Major, Op. 73, No. 3*, was written for and dedicated to a Russian chamber ensemble, the Beethoven Quartet. Conceived in 1946 and putatively inspired by the conclusion of World War II, this quartet shows Shostakovich exploring dissonance in a more discriminating way than he had done during the war years. In earlier works, including his *Quartet, Op. 73, No. 2*, his use of dissonance had been criticized as antiproletarian and unpatriotic. After the war, the writer S. W. Bennett states, "The dissonances, liberally strewn [throughout this work], were used more for wit rather than for inner agitation." The third movement, for example, is a scherzo that vacillates between 2/4 and 3/4 time and, according to Bennett, "[is] a battle of two moods: one a reminiscence of the tramp of hob-nailed boots, and the other exorcising this memory with musical laughter." As the work unfolds, it becomes clear that there is a thinner texture here than can be found in its predecessor (*Op. 73, No. 2*), owing to Shostakovich's employment of sparse notes and wide melodic spacing.