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News

CD to be released March 27, 2012

FOR APPROVAL

Pacifica Quartet Pairs Prokofiev With Shostakovich on Newest CD In 'Soviet Experience' Series

The Pacifica Quartet continues its inventive CD survey of Dmitri Shostakovich's complete string quartets on Cedille Records with a new album that pairs the composer's first four quartets with one by Sergei Prokofiev.

The second in a four-part series of studio recordings that launched in late 2011, *The Soviet Experience Vol. II: String Quartets by Dmitri Shostakovich and his Contemporaries*, will be released March 27. It offers Shostakovich's String Quartets No. 1 in C Major, Op. 49; No. 2 in A Major, Op. 68; No. 3 in F Major, Op. 73; and No. 4 in D Major, Op. 83; plus Prokofiev's String Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92 (Cedille Records 90000 130). The volume is a two-CD set, priced as a single CD, as are all installments in the series.

The Pacifica Quartet recorded *The Soviet Experience Vol. II* in July 2010 and August and November 2011 in closed sessions in the Foellinger Great Hall of Krannert Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Multiple Grammy Award-winner Judith Sherman is the series producer and engineer. She produced the Pacifica's 2008 Naxos CD of Elliott Carter's String Quartets Nos. 1 and 5, which won a Grammy for Best Chamber Music Performance.

Unique Shostakovich Cycle

The Pacifica's Shostakovich cycle on the Cedille label is unique for including quartets by other notable Soviet-era composers. Future installments will offer Mieczyslaw Weinberg's String

Quartet No. 6, and Alfred Schnittke's String Quartet No. 3 as companions to the Shostakovich quartets.

The first volume in the Pacifica's *Soviet Experience* series, released September 27, includes Shostakovich's String Quartets No. 5 in B-flat major, Op. 92; No. 6 in G major, Op. 101; No. 7 in F-sharp minor, Op. 108; and No. 8 in C minor, Op. 110; and Nikolai Miaskovsky's String Quartet No. 13 in A minor, Op. 86. That album was named one of 2011's best classical recordings by *The New Yorker*, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Newark Star-Ledger*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and *San Jose Mercury News*. A CD review in England's *Financial Times* said the Pacifica play Shostakovich's quartets "with clairvoyant unity of purpose, combining motivic lucidity and naturalness of expression in a way that gives these often difficult masterworks a compelling logic."

Volume II Traces Shostakovich's First Forays into Quartet Writing

Shostakovich (1906–1975) penned the First String Quartet at age 32. By that time, he was a fully mature composer with symphonies, operas, and ballets to his credit, but only a few chamber pieces. After the Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich felt he needed a respite from large works for public performance, according to Shostakovich biographer Elizabeth Wilson in her liner notes for the new CD set. It was time to tackle "the challenge of treading on the holy ground of the great classical tradition of Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert," Wilson writes.

The quartet's opening movement "inhabits a world of unclouded skies, and that of a happy, untroubled childhood," Wilson writes. The second movement comprises variations on a melody "firmly in the sound-world of Russian folk song, although the theme is Shostakovich's own." The next two movements are faster, more refined and elaborate, and place greater technical demands on the players.

He wrote the Second String Quartet in 1944 during a wartime stay at a rural retreat for composers. In the liner notes, Wilson describes the quartet as "a large symphonic canvas in four movements that lacks the grotesque imagery usually associated with Shostakovich's war compositions." Mostly Russian in character, the quartet has its share of tragic intensity, especially in

the second movement where the violin's impassioned solos suggest an unsung text, punctuated by religious-sounding mini-chorales from the other strings.

Shostakovich's powerful, panoramic Third String Quartet, from 1946, "is generally considered one of his greatest masterpieces in the medium" and was one of the composer's personal favorites, Wilson writes. In the course of this epic five-movement work, Shostakovich seems to anticipate the postwar resurgence of harsh Soviet political repression. Aware of the music's effect on audience emotions, Shostakovich always asked that it be programmed at the end of a concert. The Soviet cultural authorities disapproved of the piece; it was banned from public performance in 1948.

Shostakovich began work on the highly personal Fourth String Quartet in 1949 after returning to Russia from a stressful trip as a reluctant delegate (at Stalin's insistence) to an international peace conference in New York. Compared to Shostakovich's previous two quartets, this one "seems almost lightweight," Wilson writes. "This appearance is deceptive, however, for, as often is the case with Shostakovich, the music starts as one thing and finishes as quite another."

Shostakovich lodges a musical protest against the revival of Soviet state-sanctioned anti-Semitism by including themes characteristic of traditional Jewish music. The melodies "are Shostakovich's invention, rather than citations of actual Jewish folk tunes," Wilson explains, noting that Shostakovich was following Mussorgsky's example in handling Jewish material.

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953) and his wife were among a group of Russian artists and musicians evacuated in 1941, shortly after the German invasion of Soviet Russia, to the remote Kabardino-Balkar republic in the northern Caucasus region. Intrigued by the indigenous folk music, Prokofiev set out to incorporate "these fresh and original melodies" into a chamber work. "It seemed to me," he wrote, "that a combination of this untouched source of oriental melodies with that most classical of all classical forms — the string quartet — could give interesting and unexpected results."

The results appeared that same year in Prokofiev's Second Quartet. The opening movement conveys the composer's "uninhibited enjoyment of melody" in his use of two folk themes, one projecting a cheerful swagger, the other a mood of rustic humor. The second movement incorporates

a light-hearted and charming Caucasian dance, accompanied by “pizzicato and ricochet bowing effects and swaggering scales,” Wilson writes. The final movement brings tragic wartime intensity to the proceedings but concludes in a sunny mood.

Cedille’s *The Soviet Experience* CD series takes its name from The Soviet Arts Experience, Chicago’s 2010–2012 citywide festival of Soviet-era art and music spearheaded by the University of Chicago. The festival idea was inspired by the Pacifica’s plan to perform the Chicago premiere of the complete Shostakovich string quartet cycle. The concerts became an integral part of the festival.

“The CD series will appeal to anyone interested in great Russian music of the 20th century,” said Cedille founder and president James Ginsburg. “It’s also a great value for collectors.”

The Pacifica Quartet

The Pacifica performed the complete Shostakovich quartet cycle in concert during the 2010–2011 season before large, appreciative audiences in New York and Chicago and at the University of Illinois, garnering critical praise everywhere. During the 2011–12 season, the Pacifica has been performing the complete cycle at London’s Wigmore Hall. The London *Observer* praised their “electrifying performances.” *The Times* of London said, “They play with clarity, perfect togetherness and the finest of tuning,” and noted their “crystalline textures” and “beauteous” colors.

Named Musical America’s 2009 Ensemble of the Year, the Pacifica Quartet is quartet-in-residence at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, the position held for 43 years by the Guarneri String Quartet. Founded in 1994, the Pacifica won the 1998 Naumberg Chamber Music Award and Chamber Music America’s 2002 Cleveland Quartet Award. In 2006, the Pacifica received an Avery Fisher Career Grant and was featured on the cover of *Gramophone* magazine. The ensemble has received stellar reviews for its four previous Cedille Records recordings, including the complete Mendelssohn string quartets. The Pacifica is faculty quartet in residence at the University of Illinois and resident performing artist at the University of Chicago. Quartet members are Simin Ganatra, violin; Sibbi Bernhardsson, violin; Masumi Per Rostad, viola; and Brandon Vamos, cello. The ensemble’s website is www.pacificaquartet.com.

Cedille Records

Grammy award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) has been dedicated to showcasing the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area since its launch in late 1989.

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***The Soviet Experience Volume II: String Quartets
by Dmitri Shostakovich and his Contemporaries
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 130)***

**Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 1 in C Major, Op. 49 (14:43)
String Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 68 (35:18)
String Quartet No. 3 in F Major, Op. 73 (31:17)
String Quartet No. 4 in D Major, Op. 83 (25:18)
Sergei Prokofiev: String Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92 (22:10)**

Pacifica Quartet