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News

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Pacifica Quartet Completes Unique Shostakovich Cycle on Cedille Records

Finale of 'The Soviet Experience' Series Includes Schnittke's Third Quartet

The Pacifica Quartet completes its singular survey of Dmitri Shostakovich's complete string quartets this month with *The Soviet Experience Volume IV*, the final installment in a CD series on Cedille Records that's unique for combining Shostakovich's quartets with those by other notable Soviet-era composers.

The Soviet Experience Volume IV includes Shostakovich's late String Quartets No. 13 in B-flat minor, Op. 138; No. 14 in F-sharp major, Op. 142; and No. 15 in E-flat minor, Op. 144; and Alfred Schnittke's String Quartet No. 3, a work with striking parallels to the Shostakovich quartets (Cedille Records CDR 90000 145). Like the three previous installments in the series, *The Soviet Experience Volume IV* is a two-CD set priced as a single disc.

The album will be released on CD November 26. It was released as a digital download on November 5.

Reflecting on *The Soviet Experience* recording project, James Ginsburg, founder and president of Cedille Records, says, "The critical reception of this series has been wonderful to behold. Since this repertoire is well covered on CD, I assumed many critics would have their favorites already and might not be as receptive to the new set, so I have been pleasantly surprised and gratified."

Ginsburg adds, “Cedille has seen strong, continuing sales for the first two installments, and the third volume, released in the spring, is off to a good start.”

Interconnected Quartets

Connecting these three Shostakovich quartets from the 1970s with each other and with the Schnittke quartet written a decade later are the composers’ allusions to earlier musical styles. Among these are Shostakovich’s references to his own earlier compositions and Schnittke’s allusions to Shostakovich.

Shostakovich (1906–1975) anchors his single-movement String Quartet No. 13, from 1970, with “three ideas . . . fraught with shadowy suggestions of other worlds and each with its own distinctive character,” writes Gerard McBurney in the CD liner notes. These include a 12-note row, used differently from the serial technique of Schoenberg and his pupils; passages evocative of Russian Orthodox chanting; and a reference to Mussorgsky’s opera *Boris Gudunov*. The central section offers a rare example of Shostakovich employing an “extended technique”: he has all players except the first violin tap the sticks of their bows against the underside of their instruments, creating what McBurney describes as “ghostly” sounds.

Shostakovich’s Quartet No. 14, from 1973, sets out exploring the “childlike, playful quality” of his own 15th Symphony’s opening movement, which Shostakovich likened to a “toyshop,” McBurney writes. The central section morphs into a “swaying, off-center waltz, in a distorted 19th century style.” The work concludes in “an entirely unexpected world of luminous harmonic simplicity.”

The Quartet No. 15, from 1974, draws together the liturgical elements of the 13th quartet and the quotations and self-references of the 14th and adds what McBurney calls “a sense of near amorous proximity to a range of familiar masterpieces” by Baroque and Classical composers. Cedille’s Ginsburg, who reviewed Shostakovich recordings for *American Record Guide* before founding the Cedille label in 1989, marvels at how this quartet, a 35-minute piece comprised solely of adagio

movements, manages to offer “remarkable variety that holds the listener’s attention throughout.” He calls it “a testament to the strength of Shostakovich’s compositional powers right up to the end, despite his ill health.”

Schnittke (1934–1998) belonged to the next generation of Soviet composers after Shostakovich. The slow-fast-slow layout of movements in his String Quartet No. 3, from 1983, is similar to the architecture of Shostakovich’s 13th and 14th quartets. Schnittke sets the stage with musical materials alluding to three different sources, similar to what Shostakovich did in his 13th and 15th quartets. Here, Schnittke finds inspiration in the Stabat Mater of Renaissance composer Orlando de Lassus; Beethoven’s Grosse Fuge, Op. 133; and Shostakovich’s signature motif, consisting of the notes D, E-flat, C, and B, but used in a way not found in the older composer’s works. With these elements Schnittke generates “a profusion of new ideas,” McBurney writes.

Recording Credits

The Soviet Experience Vol. IV was produced and engineered by multiple Grammy award-winner Judith Sherman, assisted by Bill Maylone, Cedille’s chief recording engineer. The album was recorded at Auer Hall, Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University, Bloomington, December 16–18, 2012, and August 24–26, 2013.

Summarizing ‘The Soviet Experience’

Cedille Records’ *The Soviet Experience* series with the Pacifica Quartet 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 Pacifica presented the Shostakovich cycle in Chicago and New York during the 2010–2011 season and in Montreal and at London’s Wigmore Hall in the 2011–2012 season.

The first volume in the Pacifica's *Soviet Experience* series, released in September 2011, 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 (Cedille Records 90000 127).

The second *Soviet Experience* set, released in March 2012, 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 third installment, released in March 2013, offers Shostakovich's String Quartets No. 9 in E-flat major, Op. 117; No. 10 in A-flat major, Op. 118; No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122, and No. 12 in D-flat major, Op. 133; plus Mieczslaw Weinberg's String Quartet No. 6 in E minor, Op. 35 (Cedille Records CDR 90000 138).

Pacifica Quartet

The Pacifica Quartet tours extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia, performing regularly in the world's major concert halls. Named the quartet-in-residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music in March 2012, the Pacifica was also the quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2009–2012), a position that has otherwise been held only by the Guarneri String Quartet. The Pacifica also serves as resident performing artist at the University of Chicago. The quartet received the 2009 Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Performance for its Naxos recording of Elliott Carter quartets.

In addition to *The Soviet Experience* series, the Pacifica's Cedille label discography includes the complete Mendelssohn quartets; *Declarations: Music Between the Wars*, with works by Janacek, Hindemith, and Ruth Crawford Seeger; Dvorak's Quartet Op. 106 and Quintet Op. 97; and *String Quartets by Easley Blackwood*.

Quartet members are Simin Ganatra and Sibbi Bernhardsson, violins; Masumi Per Rostad,

viola; and Brandon Vamos, cello. The quartet'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 fall 1989.

The audiophile-oriented label releases every new album in multiple formats: a physical CD; a 96 kHz, 24-bit, studio-quality FLAC download; and a 320 Kbps MP3 download.

Cedille Records is distributed in the Western Hemisphere by Naxos of America and its distribution partners, by Select Music in the U.K., and by other independent distributors in major international classical music markets.

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***The Soviet Experience Volume IV: String Quartets
by Dmitri Shostakovich and His Contemporaries
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 145)***

Dmitri Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat minor, Op. 138 (19:15)
String Quartet No. 14 in F-sharp major, Op. 142 (25:45)
String Quartet No. 15 in E-flat minor, Op. 144 (36:10)
Alfred Schnittke: String Quartet No. 3 (22:54)

Pacifica Quartet