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News

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Pacifica Quartet's New CD Spotlights Musical Comrades Shostakovich and Weinberg

Cedille Records releases third installment of ensemble's 'Soviet Experience' cycle

The newest installment of the Pacifica Quartet's traversal of Dmitri Shostakovich's complete string quartets illuminates the musical camaraderie and cross-influences of Shostakovich and his close friend and fellow composer Mieczslaw Weinberg (mee-ETCH'-ih-slav VINE'-berg).

The Soviet Experience Vol. III: String Quartets by Dmitri Shostakovich and his Contemporaries was released digitally on March 5 and on CD March 26 (Cedille Records 90000 138). Like its predecessors in the series, the new album takes a novel approach to programming the Shostakovich quartets by pairing them with a string quartet by another prominent Soviet-era composer. And like the other installments, it's a two-CD set priced as a single disc.

The third in an eventual four-part series of studio recordings that launched in fall 2011, *The Soviet Experience Vol. III* 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 Weinberg's String Quartet No. 6 in E minor, Op. 35.

The Pacifica Quartet recorded *The Soviet Experience Vol. III* in January and February 2012 in closed sessions in the Foellinger Great Hall of Krannert Center at the University of

Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and in September 2012 in Auer Hall at the University of Indiana at Bloomington. Multiple Grammy award-winner Judith Sherman is the series producer and engineer.

Double-Album Couples Works by Close Comrades

Weinberg (1919–1996) was a Polish-born pianist-composer who settled in Moscow in 1943 after twice escaping from invading Nazi forces. That same year, Weinberg and Shostakovich (1906–1975) forged a friendship that lasted until the older composer’s death.

According to the CD booklet notes by David Fanning, a music professor at the University of Manchester and author of books about both composers, “Weinberg discovered his individual voice thanks to his encounters” with Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony and various of his chamber works. Meanwhile, “the Jewish element in Shostakovich’s style is strongly impregnated with that of Weinberg’s,” Fanning writes, including some “specific gestures” found in Shostakovich’s quartets.

Musically, “both composers clearly shared historical roots in the disruptive violence of late Beethoven,” Fanning writes.

Shostakovich’s Ninth and Tenth Quartets are large-scale, “symphonic” quartets, but “they are very different in design,” Fanning writes. The Ninth has five continuous movements with a “colossal summary finale.” The tenth, dedicated to Weinberg, “is more classically balanced in its four-movement layout.” The Eleventh Quartet, dedicated to the memory the second violinist of the Beethoven Quartet, spotlights the second violin in a Stravinsky-like Humoresque where it sounds like a mechanical cuckoo and in a movement where it twice plays the theme before reverting to its supporting role. In the Twelfth Quartet, Shostakovich employs twelve-tone themes borrowed from a tradition that predates the serial technique of Schoenberg.

Weinberg's Sixth Quartet, from 1946, ran afoul of the Soviet Union's cultural commissars, who put it on an infamous list of "non-recommended" works, possibly because of its "strikingly ambitious and exploratory nature," Fanning writes. The quartet is on a symphonic scale, with a hint of klezmer, a Jewish folk-dance genre, in the opening movement. Fanning says the work displays "lessons well learned" from Shostakovich's early quartets. Weinberg's Sixth Quartet wasn't published until 1979. Its 2007 performance at Manchester University is believed to be its first public performance.

Unique Shostakovich Cycle

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 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 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 fourth and final installment of *The Soviet Experience* series, planned for October 2013 release, will offer Alfred Schnittke's String Quartet No. 3 as the companion to Shostakovich's 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.

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. In 2011–12, the Pacifica played the Shostakovich 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.

The Pacifica Quartet was named the quartet-in-residence and full-time faculty members at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music in March 2012. Pacifica was the quartet-in-residence at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (2009–2012), the position held for 43 years by the Guarneri String Quartet. In 2009, the group was named Ensemble of the Year by Musical America and received a Grammy award for Best Chamber Music performance for its 2008 Naxos CD of Elliott Carter's String Quartets Nos. 1 and 5, also produced by Judith Sherman.

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.

The audiophile-oriented label is releasing *The Soviet Experience Vol. III* as a physical CD; a 96 kHz, 24-bit, better-than-CD 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.

An independent nonprofit enterprise, Cedille is the label of The Chicago Classical Recording Foundation. For a free catalog and the locations of local retail outlets, contact Cedille Records, 1205 W. Balmoral Ave., Chicago, IL 60640; call (773) 989-2515; e-mail: info@cedillerecords.org. Website: cedillerecords.org

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***The Soviet Experience Volume III: String Quartets
by Dmitri Shostakovich and his Contemporaries
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 138)***

**Dmitri Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 9 in E-flat major, Op. 117 (27:24)
String Quartet No. 10 in A-flat major, Op. 118 (24:52)
String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122 (17:47)
String Quartet No. 12 in D-flat major, Op. 133 (26:11)
Mieczslaw Weinberg: String Quartet No. 6 in E minor, Op. 35 (32:03)**

Pacifica Quartet