

**Wednesday, July 21, 2010**  
Chamber 3

*Café Music for Violin, Cello, and Piano*, op. 17 (1986) Paul Schoenfield (b. 1947)  
Allegro con fuoco  
Andante moderato  
Presto

*Piano Quintet in G minor*, op. 57 (1940) Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)  
Prelude: Lento—  
Fugue: Adagio  
Scherzo: Allegretto  
Intermezzo: Lento—  
Finale: Allegretto

*Sextet in C major*, op. 37 (1935) Ernő Dohnányi (1877–1960)  
Allegro appassionato  
Intermezzo: Adagio  
Allegro con sentimento—Poco adagio, Andante tranquillo  
Finale: Allegro vivace, giocoso

**Paul Schoenfield (b. 1947)—*Café Music for Violin, Cello, and Piano*, op. 17 (1986)**

Paul Schoenfield is no Mozart. Mozart, after all, began writing music at age five, whereas Schoenfield was all of seven when his compositional career began. Like Mozart, however, Schoenfield absorbed musical influences from the full gamut of his wide-ranging experiences (he has lived in environments as diverse as Israel and Cleveland, Ohio). Again like the Viennese master, Schoenfield is a gifted pianist who has translated that skill into rich, challenging repertory; he has remarked that his music “is not the kind of music for relaxation, but the kind that makes people sweat; not only the performer, but the audience.” *Café Music*, commissioned by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, illustrates that nail-biting challenge: for instance, *can* the performers maintain the wild energy demanded by the closing “Presto”?

It is a nice opportunity when we can hear a composer speak for himself about his music, and Schoenfield says,

The idea to compose *Café Music* first came to me in 1985 after sitting in one night for the pianist at Murray's Restaurant in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Murray's employs a house trio which plays entertaining dinner music in a wide variety of styles. My intention was to write a kind of high-class dinner music -- music which could be played at a restaurant, but might also (just barely) find its way into a concert hall. The work draws on many of the types of music played by the trio at Murray's. For example, early 20th century American, Viennese, light classical, gypsy, and Broadway styles are all represented. A paraphrase of a beautiful Chassidic melody is incorporated in the second movement.”

### **Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)—*Piano Quintet in G minor, op. 57 (1940)***

When Shostakovich's *Piano Quintet in G minor* begins, we might briefly think we were hearing a piano sonata, since the keyboard plays alone for some forty seconds. After the strings join in, Shostakovich then juggles the instruments throughout much of the quintet, often using them in groups of only two, three, or four; all five appear simultaneously less often than we might expect. In the central Scherzo (which does employ all five players fairly consistently), Shostakovich might have had a little tongue-in-cheek fun, for its melody resembles a Russian circus clown tune. The other movements, however, are more contemplative; the "Fugue" pays tribute to the intricate counterpoint of J. S. Bach, and there is a sense of carefulness all through the quintet until the "Finale," when a note of defiance takes over the second theme.

Shostakovich had good reason to be careful: a composer working under the dictates of Stalin's Soviet regime had a delicate balancing act, needing to write "safe" works that still had artistic integrity. Four years earlier, Shostakovich had run afoul of the government with his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*; an editorial in the newspaper *Pravda* called it "muddle instead of music," although it's been suggested that Stalin—who walked out of a performance—may have been more offended by the story's sexuality rather than its musical score. Nevertheless, this official displeasure put both Shostakovich and his family at risk, but he managed to start rehabilitating himself with the successful premiere of his Fifth Symphony the next year, and this quintet helped even more: it was awarded the first "Stalin Prize."

### **Ernő Dohnányi (1877–1960)—*Sextet in C major, op. 37 (1935)***

"Papa" Haydn earned his Classical era nickname because of the paternal interest he took in the careers of many younger musicians. Although a similar nickname was never given to Brahms, he, too, was an advocate for several composers, including an 18-year-old Hungarian, Ernő Dohnányi. Brahms arranged to have Dohnányi's first work performed in Austria, telling Dohnányi's teacher at the Budapest Academy of Music, "I could not have written it better myself." Regrettably, Brahms died two years later, but Dohnányi was allowed to attend the funeral in Vienna as an official representative of the Academy.

Years later, Dohnányi was appointed as director of the Budapest Academy—but he was forced to take a leave of absence in 1935 as he recovered from a thrombosis (a serious blood clot). During his leave, he occupied some of his time by writing the *Sextet, op. 37*—and it is possible to hear echoes of Brahms in portions of the work. The instrumentation consists of a piano, violin, viola, cello, and two winds: a clarinet and horn. The winds add an orchestral sweep to the sextet, and Dohnányi often lets the horn sing in flowing, Brahmsian melodies. Other passages are pure Dohnányi, however.

Thanks in part to the soaring opening horn theme, the first movement has a heroic, passionate intensity. In contrast, the "Intermezzo" is peacefully subdued—until the piano interrupts with a march-like passage that has been called "sinister" and "malevolent." Peace is restored, however, before the movement ends, and the third movement is much more cheerful. The "Finale" ratchets the optimism even higher, wrapping up the sextet with a jazzy flourish.