

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

Catalyst Quartet
Harlem Quartet
Friday, October 30 – 6:00 PM

PROGRAM (Selection of program notes)

Two Pieces for String Octet

Dmitri Shostakovich

Born: September 25, 1906, Saint Petersburg, Russia

Died: August 9, 1975, Moscow, Russia

Composed: 1924-1925

Duration: 20 minutes

Shostakovich began his Two Pieces for String Octet, Op. 11, while composing his First Symphony in December, 1924, but had to hold off completing it until after the symphony was completed, orchestrated, and copied. By the time he returned to the chamber piece in July 1925, Shostakovich had changed his mind about the makeup of the piece. He had originally envisioned it as a suite for double string quartet in five movements and had sketched a prelude and fugue seven months earlier. When he returned to the work, however, he found that he could no longer summon up the enthusiasm for so large a chamber work; his mind was teeming with ideas for what were to become the First Piano Sonata and the Second Symphony. As a result, Shostakovich scrapped the fugue and wrote a scherzo as a counterweight to the prelude instead. He thought the scherzo "the very best thing I have written" (Laurel Faye, *Shostakovich, A Life*). Both movements are examples of Shostakovich as a young modernist: edgy, piquantly dissonant, highly rhythmic, lightly lyrical, and forcefully driven. If the work seems a distinctly lesser inspiration than the First Piano Sonata which followed it, and the First Symphony which preceded it, it is nevertheless the best piece of chamber music Shostakovich wrote until the Cello Sonata of 1934.

Strum [Arr.]

Jessie Montgomery

Born: 1981, New York, NY

Composed: 2006

Duration: 10 minutes

Originally conceived for the formation of a cello quintet, the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within *Strum I* utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a texture motive and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration. — Jessie Montgomery

Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20

Felix Mendelssohn

Born: February 3, 1809

Died: November 4, 1847

Composed: 1825

Duration: 32 minutes

In 1825, when Mendelssohn completed his Octet, Op. 20, he had already produced his first numbered symphony a year earlier, but the octet is more sophisticated and may safely be considered a full blown symphony, even though written for only eight string players. Not merely a doubled quartet, the piece is a true octet in which counterpoint, texturing, and harmonic complexity are every bit as sophisticated as in any symphony. In four movements, the work unfolds like a symphony, with a brilliant first movement allegro giving way to a marvelously dreamy second movement andante. A third movement scherzo is chamber-like in its texture and transparency but, again, symphonic in scope and size. The presto finale opens with outright bizarre chuffing from the cello, but explodes immediately into a vigorous romp which plunges ahead, barely taking a breath, to a large, truly symphonic finale.