



Dmitri Shostakovich

Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor

Shostakovich began work on his Piano Trio in E Minor in late 1943 while at Kuybishev, a city just west of the Ural Mountains where his family was sent after the siege of Leningrad. On February 11, 1944, while still working on the first movement of the trio, Shostakovich's closest friend Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinsky died of a heart attack at the age of 41. Sollertinsky was a brilliant, largely self-taught polymath, a well-known lecturer and music critic, and shared Shostakovich's mischievous sense of humor. His death left Shostakovich devastated, and he stopped composing all together. Upon hearing of Sollertinsky's death, Shostakovich wrote to Sollertinsky's widow: "It is impossible to express in words all the grief that engulfed me on hearing the news about Ivan Ivanovich's death. Ivan Ivanovich was my closest and dearest friend...to live without him will be unbearably difficult." In August of 1944 he resumed work on the trio, finishing the last three movements in less than two weeks. He dedicated it to Sollertinsky's memory.

The first movement, *Andante*, begins with a bleak and ghostly theme played entirely on muted cello harmonics. This theme is developed through a range of characters and violent mood swings: despair, joy, irony, fury, until it finally retreats into oblivion at the end of the movement. The second movement, *Allegro con brio*, is a furiously-paced and sardonic scherzo in a relentlessly driving triple-meter. Sollertinsky's sister wrote that the movement was "an amazingly exact portrait of Ivan Ivanovich, whom Shostakovich understood like no one else. That is his

temper, his polemics, his manner of speech, his habit of returning to one and the same thought, developing it.” The third movement, *Largo*, is a quietly lamenting passacaglia, a series of variations over a chord progression that repeats itself every eight bars. It leads directly into the fourth movement without a break. The fourth movement, *Allegretto*, is a violent, wailing, screaming dance of death based on various Jewish melodies. Shostakovich was fascinated by klezmer music. He wrote: “It seems I comprehend what distinguishes the Jewish melos. A cheerful melody is built here on sad intonations...Why does he sing a cheerful song? Because he is sad at heart.”

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