

motto theme derived from the composer's initials, DSCH (given in its German equivalents as D, E flat, C, and B natural). It is treated fugally in this dark and tense movement, and later there are thematic quotations from Shostakovich's First and Fifth symphonies. The ensuing Scherzo (*Allegro molto*) rages with a driving, rhythmic treatment of the motto, then suddenly erupts with a frenzied account of the Jewish theme from the composer's Piano Trio No. 2. The motto returns and the Jewish theme also makes another appearance, before the music settles a bit as the *Allegretto* third movement begins.

The motto theme is heard here in a dark waltz rendition, its relative calm quickly divulging underlying menace. Another waltz theme is heard, hardly breaking from the sinister mood, and soon the main theme from the composer's Cello Concerto No. 1 makes an appearance. The fourth movement (*Largo*) is perhaps the most starkly pessimistic: it features a three-note motif that constantly threatens and intimidates in the outer sections, which it shares with the motto theme, while the middle panel is sweetly mournful. This movement also contains thematic references to Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and to the song "Tormented by Grave Bondage." The finale (*Largo*) is a condensed version of the opening panel.



Borodin

Quartet No. 2

Shostakovich

Quartet No. 8

The

BORODIN QUARTET



Borodin's String Quartet No. 2 in D major differs from many of the composer's other works in two ways: it was completed quickly, during August 1881, and it lacks a published program. These two factors may be related; Borodin dedicated the quartet to his wife Ekaterina, and it was written as an evocation of when they met and fell in love in Heidelberg 20 years earlier. The composer seems to have represented himself in this quartet with the cello (he was an amateur player), while Ekaterina is portrayed by the first violin. Each of the movements is warm and blissful, the whole suggesting the depiction of a growing, deepening love. The first movement opens with a sweet, sighing melody, traded between first violin and cello in an almost conversational manner. Borodin and Ekaterina dominate the rest of the movement with a beguiling discourse; even the development brings effortless, serene reshaping of the exposition's melodies, and the luminous coda rounds out the movement nicely. A Scherzo, written in a free sonata form, follows. The light first subject skips along gracefully, while the second subject is reminiscent of a waltz; both are gentle dances, gently handled. The development is in more decisive duple rhythm, but the recapitulation soon brings back the triple rhythm and its attendant character. Borodin and Ekaterina reappear in the famous Nocturne which follows. Over a luminous gauze of accompaniment from the second violin and viola, the cello

introduces a long, tender, ardent melody marked *cantabile ed espressivo*. This melody soon passes to the first violin, which plays it over commentary from the cello. A more decisive second theme enters on both instruments, which develop it before playing the first theme in an intimate canon. The first theme lingers until the end of the movement, when in a long coda it ascends until the violin and cello play it together in a silvery thread of tone. The finale begins with an *Andante* introduction, as if unwilling to come down from the emotional heights of the previous movement, soon leading into a quicksilver, energetic *Vivace*, whose long coda provides a fittingly joyous conclusion to the entire work. As love letters go, Borodin's String Quartet No. 2 is unsurpassed; as string quartets go, it is deservedly loved.

The String Quartet No. 8 is a complex, melancholy work written while Shostakovich was visiting Dresden, Germany, in 1960, where he was to provide music for the film *Five Days-Five Nights*. There, amid the rubble still visible from the Allied bombings during World War II, he was inspired to compose this quartet in remembrance of the victims of both Hitler and Stalin. The work is cast in five continuous movements and contains numerous thematic references to other works by Shostakovich.

The first movement, marked *Largo*, opens with the now famous

BORODIN STRING QUARTET NO. 2

SHOSTAKOVICH STRING QUARTET NO. 8

THE BORODIN QUARTET

Borodin String Quartet No. 2 in D major

- 1. Allegro 7:53**
- 2. Scherzo 4:46**
- 3. Notturmo 8:10**
- 4. Finale 6:52**

Shostakovich String Quartet No.8 in C minor, Op.110

- 5 Largo 4:20**
- 6. Allegro molto 2:43**
- 7. Allegretto 4:04**
- 8. Largo 5:06**
- 9. Largo 3:19**

Producer: Erik Smith Engineer: Jack Clegg
Recorded by Decca 17 Sep 1962 at West Hampstead Studio 3



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