

Joan Tower (b. 1938)
Wild Purple for Solo Viola (1998)

Composer Note:

Wild Purple was written for the violist Paul Neubauer, who premiered the work at Merkin Concert Hall (New York City) in September of 1998.

I always thought of the viola sound as being the color purple. Its deep resonant and luscious timbre seems to embody all kinds of hues of purple. I never thought of the viola as being particularly wild. So I decided to try and see if I could create a piece that had wild energy in it and meet the challenge of creating a virtuosic piece for solo viola.

—Joan Tower

Dmitri Shostakovich
Sonata for Viola & Piano, op. 147 (1975)
I. Moderato
II. Allegretto
III. Adagio

“Letter from Leningrad”

By: Boris Tishenko [a former student of Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich and a head figure of the Composers' Union in St. Petersburg.]

The task of drawing parallels between the personality of an artist and his work is a difficult but necessary one. Difficult because it is easy to fall victim to vulgar flat assimilations, and necessary because it is evident that a composer's creation is a humanistic (personal) self portrayal and because understanding an author's humanism helps to unravel the secrets of his composition. While analysing the “personal” aspects of this music, one relies on the external and visible characteristics, leaving behind the boundaries of what is the material and internal side of a musical work and what is verbally indescribable. Also, it is difficult to discuss this Sonata because it has not yet been performed. [Shostakovich died on August 9, 1975. This letter was written on September 11, 1975. The Viola Sonata, Op. 147 was Shostakovich's last work. It was dedicated to the violist Fyodor Druzhinin. Work was premiered in Leningrad on October 1, 1975.]

Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich - legendary man. A person of immense stature and scale of thought, his vastness of thinking resembling Michelangelo, Shakespeare and Cervantes, great philosophers of antiquity. He never philosophised in abstracts; all was lifelike, concrete. His kindness, his ability to feel people's pain and his protest against evil had very personal characteristics. A highlight of his vast personality is his modesty. This is what Dmitri Dmitrievich wrote about Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinsky [Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinsky (1902 - 1944) was a Russian po-

lymath of the Soviet period. He was an expert in theatre and Romance languages, but is best known for his musical career. He was a professor at the Leningrad Conservatory, as well as artistic director of the Leningrad Philharmonic. In these capacities he was an active promoter of Mahler's music in the Soviet Union. From 1927 he was a close friend of Dmitri Shostakovich. In the wake of Shostakovich's first denunciation in 1936, Sollertinsky was called, "the troubadour of formalism" by Pravda. Shostakovich dedicated his Second Piano Trio to Sollertinsky after his death in Novosibirsk on 11 February 1944.]:

“... I thought of him as a man of extraordinary qualities; it is, awkward, for the ordinary and average, and when in 1921 one of my friends introduced me to Sollertinsky, I very quickly became shy, because I found difficulty in keeping friendship with such an extraordinary person.”

This is not a joke: indeed Dmitri Dmitrievich thought of himself as an ordinary man. We see 15 year old teenagers experiencing this feeling while most are usually full of high opinions of themselves. This nature-given quality he preserved through all his life, whilst many of us work very hard to develop it. This is only possible for a devout man - a very rare sacred quality, and Ivan Ivanovich, closest friend of Dmitri Dmitrievich, enjoyed his boundless love. Shostakovich's love was an important engine of his artistic might; artistic might was also the reason for his being loved. Proof of his love and his remarkable ability to listen and admire music of others is evident in his Viola Sonata. In it exists, thinned to the limits, music-associative series; Shostakovich in his late works used musical quotations. A smart and tactful quotation exists in the finale of the Viola Sonata: the characteristic point from Beethoven's 1st movement of the “Mondschein” Sonata Op.27., No.2, only transcribed from triple into quadruple metre. This sad and tender mood is central to the (viola) sonata. It also has different beginnings - effectual and remonstrative. In front of us, walking past like shadows, are Shostakovich's favourite composers: firstly Alban Berg, in his tender fifth pizzicatos in similar fifths, begins his violin concerto dedicated to “*Dem Andenken eines Engels*” and Louis Krasner. This “intervallic formula of fifth” time to time reappearing in the Shostakovich sonata calls for multi-staged associations. In the second material, in his diminished triads, the effectiveness of tearing triplets is similar to beginning of Mahler's 5th Symphony (Allegro), and in the end of the section the “breaking-away” triplet with semiquaver unequivocally recalls in our memory the “fate motif” from Beethoven 5th's motif, that generally journeys through many compositions.

The beginning of Mahler's 5th Symphony and triplets from the first theme of the 4th Symphony by Tchaikovsky directly relate to this ominous formula. Rachmaninov brought this motif in the romance “*Fate*” (*Sud'ba*) Op.21, No.1; it lives in the timpanies in R. Wagner's “*Der Ring des Nibelungen*”; and this ring of association closes with the finale of Shostakovich's 15th Symphony, where he quoted Wagner's fate motif.

It is possible to find more and more threads of associations, for example in the second movement, written in the spirit of the tender duple scherzo of the 7th Symphony's second movement and Prelude in *fis-moll*, from the *24 Preludes and Fugues* Op.87; in glimpses of Mahler-like ascending quart grace-note and accented mordent; [Mordent - (from It. mordere, to bite) Musical ornament shown by a sign over the note. There are upper and lower mordents. In German Mor-

dent means only the lower mordent. Upper Mordent in German is "*Pralltriller*".] and second material with open strings, seventh and fifth in accompaniment sound of slight peasantry - somewhat coarsely-tender. In the middle of the movement after the Violas fast forth, is the piano with very familiar and threatening musical signal in octaves. The intervals of fifths and especially fourths are very important in the viola sonata.

In Shostakovich's music in general, intervals of fourths are multi-meaningful. It is a fourth of tenderness - tenderness influenced by Tsvetaeva's [Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva (October 9, 1892 - August 31, 1941) was a Russian poet and writer. Dmitri Shostakovich set six of Tsvetaeva's poems to music.] cycle - and spiky, playful and mischievously moving fourths and other leaps. All of these kind of fourths you can see in the sonata. However, most of all of the fourths of tenderness (at the beginning of the 3rd movement, finale) - tenderness - without sentimentality, are high-principled and Beethoven-like (hence, "Mondschein" Sonata).

In thinking, and I am not over-stretching this thought, that the program of the viola sonata is in supreme affirmation of love and human warmth. In the soul sterilizing sorrows, torture, and sickness after the hell of war, people need tenderness and kindness. That is why this instrument of soft, tender and deep sound - the viola, and this sonata is the conclusion to Shostakovich's triangular string sonata cycle, following the Cellos and Violins. Shostakovich is in general a very "stringed" composer: 15 string quartets, string quintet and trio, string 14th Symphony. He never selected wind chamber ensembles, like Stravinsky, Hindemith, and even Mozart. With all of his originality, Shostakovich avoided specifics. Without fear I argue that in "stringency", Dmitri Dmitrievich, classic of classics, shows self-abnegating kindness. The programme of his music, of course, does not screen itself from "absolute" music; quotes and musical allusions have aesthetic character. That is a sign of humble admiration before those whom he in his quotes "gives word"; with all of this he always remained himself. Maybe his affection and love of the music of others made his own music non-comparable to that of others.

All in all he is not afraid of quotation, like Picasso was not afraid to paint on the subject of Velázquez [Diego Velázquez - (1599-1660) was a Spanish painter who was the leading artist in the court of King Philip IV of Spain. His work was highly admired in his day, but was most influential many centuries after his death, which it proved a model for the Realist and Impressionist artists, in particular Manet.] "*Les Meninas*". Kindness, sincerity, perfection of absolute thought, suspended from the bustle and freedom of apophthegm, are the characteristics of the viola sonata as it is of its author's character.

Sonata for viola and fortepiano Op.147 is dedicated to Fyodor Seraphimovich Druzhinin and will be premiered very soon. Without a doubt, Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich's new composition will make the world a better place.

B. Tishenko, 11 September 1975