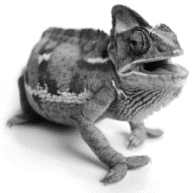

Chameleon
Arts Ensemble
of Boston

PROGRAM NOTES

Chameleon Arts Ensemble of Boston
Deborah Boldin, Artistic Director

2025-2026 chamber music season

Up Close 1: Through the Looking-Glass
Sunday, March 22, 2026, 4 PM at Goethe-Institut, Boston

Program:
Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Trio in D Major, Op. 70, No. 1, "Ghost"
Lera Auerbach, Piano Trio No. 2, *This Mirror Has Three Faces*
Dmitri Shostakovich, Piano Trio No. 2 in e minor, Op. 67

Program notes by Gabriel Rice

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was the son and grandson of professional musicians, both employed in Bonn, Germany at the court of the Electorate of Cologne. Surprisingly few details of his early years are known, but he displayed enough talent performing on both the violin and piano that he was compared to the young Mozart by a visiting teacher. He visited Vienna in 1787 and probably met and had one or more lessons with Mozart, but only stayed for two weeks due to the fatal illness of his mother. In 1789 Beethoven effectively took over the care of his family, petitioning the court for half of his alcoholic father's salary. In 1790 he met Haydn, and with the help of the Electorate of Cologne moved to Vienna to study with him beginning in November 1792. The relationship, though cordial, was not entirely happy, and – likely to Beethoven's relief – Haydn left in early 1794 to London for one of his extended stays. Beethoven now sought instruction from Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, a master of contrapuntal techniques, and also studied for a time with Antonio Salieri, particularly regarding setting Italian texts to music. By 1796, he had established a renowned career as Vienna's leading virtuoso pianist and was beginning to travel on concert tours, playing his own music and that of others, and often improvising to great acclaim.

But all would not continue happily; as early as 1801 he began to share the information of his increasing deafness, and he suffered to the point of despair with the condition for the rest of his life. Beethoven's individualistic, headstrong, often rebellious nature was only heightened by the social isolation of deafness, and his personal relationships were never smooth. Family troubles continued as well, and in 1813 he became guardian of his nephew Karl despite protracted legal battles with the boy's mother. The relationship with Karl was perpetually marked by drama, taking enormous amounts of time and energy. In 1814, at the height of his fame, Beethoven gave his last public performance as a pianist; in fact, he was joined at this concert by violinist Ignaz

Schuppanzigh and cellist Joseph Linke for the "Archduke" Trio. From this point on he could no longer function as a performer, and his loneliness and isolation only increased. As his personal struggles intensified, however, his music only reached deeper and deeper into his own soul, and plumbed further the extreme, sometimes violent, sometimes almost divine emotions of the individual human life. His great achievement as a composer can be summed up as the appropriation of the classical forms of Haydn and Mozart's generation for the new age of Romanticism, showing the world how the expression of the intensely personal can become the expression of the universal.

The two Op. 70 Piano Trios were composed in the fall of 1808 for Countess Anna Maria von Erdödy, a close friend and significant patron. She had recently arranged for him to receive an annual salary with the agreement that he would maintain residence in Vienna, and she even provided him with rooms in her home there. She was a kindred spirit, a talented pianist who was also afflicted with physical difficulties, and while there is no indication that their relationship went beyond friendship, he was so comfortable confiding in her that he called her by the nickname *Beichtvater*, or "*Father Confessor.*"

The first of the trios was given the nickname "Ghost" after Beethoven's death by a former student, the composer Carl Czerny. Czerny remarked that the middle slow movement "resembles an appearance from the underworld. One could think not inappropriately of the first appearance of the ghost in Hamlet." As it turned out, Beethoven may very well have had a similar thought; sketches for this movement in his notebook appear near records of ideas for an opera based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and there is reason to believe that this material was an idea for the Witches' scene. The bright, optimistic outer movements stand in contrast, and the trio as a whole is one of his best-loved chamber works.

Lera Auerbach's journey into the world of art began as a poet, with several published works before she turned 18. Born in 1973 in Chelyabinsk, in the Ural Mountains, she was a virtuoso pianist from early childhood and composed her first opera at the age of twelve. In 1991, during a concert tour in the United States, she made the spontaneous decision at just 17 years old to remain in New York – without a safety net and without speaking English – while the Soviet Union was on the brink of collapse. She seized her freedom and started a new life in the U.S., where she was later granted American citizenship in recognition of her extraordinary talent. In 2021, the Austrian government also awarded her citizenship for her significant contributions to music and the arts, underscoring her international influence. She studied piano and composition at the Juilliard School and comparative literature at Columbia University. In 2002, she completed her concert diploma at the Hochschule für Musik in Hanover. That same year, she debuted at Carnegie Hall with her Suite for Violin, Piano, and Orchestra, performed by Gidon Kremer and the Kremerata Baltica. Her extensive catalog now encompasses nearly every musical genre, from chamber music and orchestral works to opera and ballet, performed worldwide by leading soloists, orchestras, and theaters.

Today, conducting is at the center of her artistic focus. It defines her current artistic expression: "Standing on the podium, creating vast musical landscapes, sharing a vision of expression with the orchestra, drawing from my experience in various art forms, and integrating these currents into the ocean of the orchestra and the stage – that is my greatest joy." This role

enriches her artistic voice and expands her legacy as she brings her unique vision to symphonic stages worldwide.

As a poet of both words and music, her literary work includes poetry and prose collections, novellas, and numerous contributions to newspapers and magazines. Auerbach was named Poet of the Year by the International Pushkin Society, and her first English-language book, *Excess of Being*, explores the art of aphorisms. In 2022, her children's book *A is for Oboe* (Random House) won the AudioFile Best Audiobook Award, and she received the Robert Creeley Memorial Award, leading to the publication of her poetry manuscript *Forever Music*. She remains active as a visual artist, with her works being collected and exhibited. A career that would suffice for multiple lifetimes – yet she continues her journey: "There is no reason to keep something locked in its cage and not connect it," says Lera Auerbach. "For me, art must feel larger than life. Whether it is music, visual art, or literature, art is what remains of our time."

Composer's program note:

> I like the idea of exploring the dramatic, ritualistic side of music. In *This Mirror Has Three Faces*, one can look at three different faces or roles of the same person or at three distinct personalities - each with its own face. Each character (i.e. instrument) may be isolated, in conflict, or in harmony with others and itself. This trio explores individuality and ensemble, harmony and conflict, one in three or three in one – that is the ambiguous nature of this work, structured in the form of a triptych.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) was born in St. Petersburg to comfortable circumstances. His father, an amateur singer, was a senior inspector at the Palace of Weights and Measures, and his mother was a conservatory-trained pianist. He and his two sisters were well-educated, and the family employed servants and a nanny. Music was played in the house constantly, and it soon became apparent that the young Dmitri had prodigious gifts, including absolute pitch and a remarkable musical memory. He enrolled at the Petrograd Conservatory in 1919, studying both composition and piano, with further studies in conducting and violin. As his studies progressed, Shostakovich sometimes pushed against the conservative musical culture of the Conservatory, but ultimately he thrived under the strict demands for technical skill in harmony and counterpoint, and his mastery of compositional craft freed him to write not only highly creative and expressive music, but also to easily earn money when necessary with incidental film music, patriotic choruses, and the like.

In 1925, before his 20th birthday, Shostakovich completed his first symphony. Critical response was moderate, but it became immediately popular throughout the world, with performances by, among others, Walter, Toscanini, Klemperer, and Stokowski. He received letters of congratulation from Alban Berg and Darius Milhaud. The next two symphonies were also received well, as was an opera (*The Nose*) and numerous other works. In 1930, he began work on another opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk*, and by 1936 it had received nearly two hundred performances in Moscow and Leningrad and had been heard in London, Zurich, Stockholm, Copenhagen and New York. In January of 1936, however, *Pravda* published a startling article denouncing the opera as "fidgety, screaming, neurotic, coarse, primitive and vulgar." The warning was clear: such modernism would no longer be tolerated. Shostakovich completed but

then withdrew his Fourth Symphony and set to work on the Fifth, widely considered to be his reply to the criticism of the authorities. Its unqualified success rescued his reputation, leading to teaching positions at the Leningrad and then Moscow Conservatories and greater – though still limited – artistic freedom.

The Seventh Symphony, begun during the siege of Leningrad by Nazi Germany and depicting its events, created another international sensation, and it seemed that Shostakovich's place as the leader of Soviet musical culture was assured. A Party Decree issued on February 10, 1948, however, denounced his music and others' for leading the culture astray with "formalism." In a crushing blow, he was stripped of his teaching positions and his music was effectively blacklisted. Once again, Shostakovich was faced with the necessity to rehabilitate himself, which he did by offering his services to compose for patriotic choruses and propaganda films. In private he drank and smoked heavily, played cards and watched sporting events, and aged noticeably.

To add insult to injury, Stalin sent him abroad as a cultural envoy, tasked with delivering the message of the Soviet Union's humanitarianism and social progress. In return, his concert music would be removed from the blacklist. Even so, such masterpieces as the 24 Preludes and Fugues for solo piano and the Tenth Symphony had to undergo hostile examination by a panel from the Composers' Union before they could be released.

Stalin's death in 1953 was followed by a softening of the cultural hardline, usually referred to as "the thaw." Shostakovich's rightful place as a leader of Soviet musical culture returned gradually, though not without difficulty. In 1960, succumbing to pressure, he joined the Communist Party. The tortured Eighth String Quartet, widely considered an obituary for himself, was composed around this time. He was invited back to teach at the Leningrad Conservatory in 1961.

Until his death in 1975, Shostakovich was relatively free to compose as he wished. Despite gradually failing health, he travelled widely within the Soviet Union and abroad, fulfilling the expectations placed on him as his country's most famous composer. Even some of his earliest music, including the opera *The Nose*, was revisited despite having been banned for decades. It is impossible to know how much solace Shostakovich took in the recognition he received during his last years. He was painfully careful to present a face to the world that betrayed no ill feelings towards the Soviet authorities, but the controversial book *Testimony*, published in 1979 by Solomon Volkov, presented a very different picture in the form of a memoir. The authenticity of Volkov's work is disputed, but the overall story of a man oppressed by a cruel authoritarian regime, forced to walk a creative tightrope as his works fell in and out of favor with the capricious tastes of a dictator, matches the historical record. Further, many of Shostakovich's friends and family, including his son Maxim, support Volkov and confirm the accuracy of the portrayal in the book.

Shostakovich's great legacy is inseparable from his circumstance. Forged in the furnace of great personal and political suffering, his music necessarily contained multiple meanings and layer upon layer of emotional complexity. His is work of devastating impact, always expressed with flawless craft.

The Piano Trio No. 2 was completed in 1944 as the USSR was suffering the ravages of World War II. Shostakovich was in Leningrad during the first few months of the war while the city was

under siege, and his Seventh and Eighth Symphonies are powerful expressions of the sufferings and horrors of the war. The epic, symphonic scope and deeply tragic character of the Piano Trio are clearly in the same vein, and the recent discovery of the Nazi death camps at Majdanek and Treblinka inspired Shostakovich's use of a Jewish folk dance tune in the last movement.

On a more personal level the trio is dedicated to the memory of Ivan Sollertinsky, a brilliant musicologist, critic, linguist, and Leningrad University professor who had suddenly died in Novosibirsk, where he and his family were living as evacuees from the besieged Leningrad. In a letter to Sollertinsky's widow, Shostakovich wrote: "I cannot express in words all of the grief I felt when I received the news of the death of Ivan Ivanovich … who was my closest friend…I owe all my education to him."

- Gabriel Rice

Auerbach biography and note courtesy of the composer, edited by Gabriel Rice