

Emerging from Darkness: Life after WW2

November 6, 2010, 7:00 PM, Broadmoor Community Church
November 7, 2010, 2:30 PM, First Christian Church

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

Chamber Symphony, op. 110a
“In Memory of the Victims of Fascism and War”
I. Allegro moderato
II. Lento
III. Moderato
IV. Allegro brio; Presto
Movements played without pause.

Aaron Copland
(1900-1990)

Clarinet Concerto (1948)
Ian Buckspan, clarinet

INTERMISSION

Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958)

Symphony No. 5 in D Major
I. Preludio: Moderato
II. Scherzo: Presto misterioso
III. Romanza: Lento
IV. Passacaglia: Moderato

I consider that every artist who isolates himself from the world is doomed. I find it incredible that an artist should want to shut himself away from the people, who, in the end, form his audience. I think an artist should serve the greatest possible number of people. I always try to make myself as widely understood as possible, and, if I don't succeed, I consider it my own fault.—Shostakovich

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) was taught initially by his mother, but his first major musical influence came from Glazunov, who encouraged the boy when he entered Petrograd Conservatory in 1919. In 1926, his diploma work, the First Symphony, was performed in Moscow and Leningrad (then renamed Petrograd), earning the composer international fame before his twenty-first birthday. His mission was to produce work that was accessible without being regressive, and it would bring him into a lifelong conflict with the musical critics within the government. In best times, Shostakovich enjoyed widespread recognition and a comfortable teaching post at the Moscow Conservatory. In worst times, Shostakovich had no choice but to write film scores to survive and routinely slept by the door with a packed suitcase, waiting for a “knock at the door” that he considered inevitable. Starting with his Fourth Symphony, Shostakovich found himself at odds with the Communist Party, its cultural control-mongers, and Stalin himself. After the premiere of the Ninth Symphony, Shostakovich was banned from symphonic writing and the concert hall, relegated to film scoring and writing chamber music for his friends. Much of the chamber music was so deeply personal that Shostakovich didn't reveal it to anyone, and it's during this part of Shostakovich's output that huge time gaps often exist between composition and premiere. After Stalin's death in 1953, Shostakovich's artistic freedom improved and he even wrote a rather scathing rebuke of Stalin in his Tenth Symphony. Still, pressure from the Communist Party remained intense and he was finally forced to sign an application for Communist Party membership in 1960. The Party still tried desperately to control Shostakovich's musical output, but many of his scores were snuck out of the USSR on microfiche and his music found its long awaited success beyond the Iron Curtain, with Leonard Bernstein one of its chief proponents. Shostakovich's works represent a personal biography and a musical record of the times in which he lived. His artistic enterprise was to ask great questions, grapple with monumental problems, and give them enduring artistic form. It was not his purpose to provide ultimate answers.

Shostakovich's period of artistic banishment was deeply painful to him. The fear, constraint, and isolation under which he lived struck at the very core of his being. The **Chamber Symphony, op. 110 “In Memory of the Victims of Fascism and War”** is one in a long line of works in which Shostakovich sorted through the terror of those years and sometimes cast a cautiously optimistic look forward. Like all of his most personal music, his musical “monogram,” the notes D, E-flat, C, and B, (which, in European notes is D-S-C-H, signifying “**D**mitri **S**hostakovich”) are integral to this piece and are sounded at the beginning, in an introduction so dark and coldly resolved that it reveals the part of Shostakovich's soul that never really healed in his lifetime. The second movement bursts into panicked flight—imagery common to Shostakovich's music during this period—with violent slashing chords and relentless rhythmic drive. The panic is finally interrupted by the DSCH motive, giving way to a demented waltz and then a polka, as though from an opulent ballroom where brilliantly-uniformed fascists dance in complete denial of the terror all around them. The fourth movement brings a sudden chill—the knock at the door for which Shostakovich waited for years—then sinks into utter loneliness and defeat. Despite tiny glimpses of hope, the piece returns to the DSCH motive in the final movement in a cold resolve, with no attempt to answer any questions, no real hope, and no consolation, which Shostakovich could neither find in himself nor offer to anyone.

Inspiration may be a form of super-consciousness, or perhaps of subconsciousness—I wouldn't know. But I am sure it is the antithesis of self-consciousness.—Aaron Copland

Aaron Copland was born on November 14, 1900 in New York City. His musical works ranged from ballet and orchestral music to choral music and movie scores. For the better part of four decades Aaron Copland was considered the premier American composer.

Copland learned to play piano from an older sister, then quickly went through a series of piano teachers, learning different skills from each of them. By the time he was fifteen he had decided to become a composer. His first tentative steps included a correspondence course in writing harmony. In 1921, Copland traveled to Paris to attend the newly founded music school for Americans at Fontainebleau. He was the first American student of the brilliant teacher Nadia Boulanger. After three years in Paris he returned to New York with his first major commission—an organ concerto for the American appearances of Madame Boulanger. His *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* premiered at Carnegie Hall in 1925.

Copland's growth as a composer mirrored important trends of his time. After his return from Paris he worked with jazz idioms in his *Piano Concerto* (1926). His *Piano Variations* (1930) was strongly influenced by Igor Stravinsky's Neoclassicism.

In 1936, he moved toward a simpler style. He felt this made his music more meaningful to the large music-loving audience created by radio and the movies. His most important works during this period were based on American folklore, including *Billy the Kid* (1938) and *Rodeo* (1942). Other works during this period were a series of movie scores including *Of Mice and Men* (1938) and *The Heiress* (1948).

In his later years, Copland's work reflected the serial techniques of the so-called 12-tone school of Arnold Schoenberg. Notable among these was *Connotations* (1962) commissioned for the opening of Lincoln Center.

After 1970, Copland stopped composing, though he continued to lecture and conduct through the mid-1980s. He died on December 2, 1990 in Tarrytown, New York.

Aaron Copland's **Clarinet Concerto** was commissioned by legendary jazz clarinetist Benny Goodman in 1948, and was probably inspired by Stravinsky's *Ebony Concerto* for Woody Herman three years earlier. Copland had moved away from jazz styles by 1948, but opted to return to jazz and swing in deference to Goodman. He also hints at a Brazilian popular song he heard during his post-war mission to Latin America, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. Goodman is said to have been very concerned with the difficulty of the cadenza when he first saw the score, but overcame the challenges and premiered the piece with the NBC Symphony Orchestra and Fritz Reiner on November 6, 1950. The piece has two main sections—the opening slow section in an ABA form and a fast, jazzy section to end the piece, separated by the demanding cadenza. Essential to the second section are the relentless syncopated accents which give the music a true jazz feel. Copland had intended his *Third Symphony* (1946) as a summation of his populist period, but the accessibility of the *Clarinet Concerto* began an extension of this period that would last until his *Orchestral Variations* (1957) and include *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*, *Old American Songs*, and *The Tender Land*.

He flounders about in the sea of his ideas like a vast and ungainly porpoise, with great puffing and blowing; yet in the end, after tremendous efforts and an almost heroic tenacity, there emerges, dripping and exhausted from the struggle, a real and lovable personality, unassuming, modest, and almost apologetic. His personality is wholly and without admixture English, and this is at once his virtue and his defect.—Cecil Gray, Scottish music critic and composer, regarding Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) displayed promise as a young composer but his talents developed rather late. Born October 12, 1872 in Gloucestershire to the family of a vicar, Vaughan Williams' early life was sadly impacted by his father's death in 1875. His mother, great-granddaughter of renowned potter Josiah Wedgwood, took him to live at a Wedgwood family home in the North Downs. (He also had a rather famous great-uncle, scientist Charles Darwin.) Despite his privileged upbringing, Vaughan Williams never rested on his advantages and advocated all his life for democratic and egalitarian ideals.

His early music studies were a flop, as he tried and failed to learn the piano, "which I could never play, and the violin, which was my musical salvation." He began his formal music studies at the Royal College of Music, studying closely with Parry and Stanford, but left to study history and receive a Bachelor of Music degree at Cambridge. He returned to the Royal College to strike up a close friendship with composer Gustav Holst; the two of them would later lead England's effort to preserve its folk music through recording, notation, and, like Bartok and Kodaly, incorporation into major concert hall works. After his second try at the Royal College, he left for Germany to study with Max Bruch, and then for France to study orchestration with Maurice Ravel, who was three years younger than Vaughan Williams but was producing the most exquisite new sounds from modern orchestras. Upon returning to England, he wrote *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, which placed him firmly in the center of England's musical culture, but his early career would be interrupted by service in artillery and medical corps during World War I. Upon his return, he threw himself into music, conducting the Handel Society and the Bach Choir and teaching at the Royal College.

In the 1920s, Vaughan Williams' music won audiences in Europe and the United States, and by the 1930s, he was regarded around the world as the dean of English composition. Still, Vaughan Williams was humble about his craft and troubled by his inability to write a successful opera. This is especially ironic, considering that his symphonic cycle of nine symphonies is unquestionably the finest symphony cycle ever to emerge from England. Still, Vaughan Williams never allowed his success to separate him from the people of England whom he loved dearly, believing that "the composer must not shut himself up and think of art; he must live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the whole life of the community."

Vaughan Williams wrote two symphonies that were essentially love letters to London—his Symphony No. 2 "London" and **Symphony No. 5 in D Major**, but although the pieces strongly mirror each other, they were written for two very different Londons. Both symphonies begin with a vision of the city from a distance, delve playfully into life on the streets, and end with a positive look toward the future, but the London of the Fifth Symphony was absolutely decimated by World War II. The unspeakable extent of the destruction was made even more poignant by the missing faces of soldiers and civilians on the streets, in the shops and, most painfully for Vaughan Williams, in London's orchestras. Sensing a need for hope and comfort, Vaughan Williams conducted the premiere of the Fifth Symphony in Albert Hall on a midsummer day in 1943—a performance which gave the audience such an astonishing moment of compassion and hope that a long, deep silence lingered between the final notes and the thundering applause. From the first phrase, in which a distant train can be heard from horns, the symphony calls Londoners to persevere, rebuild, and look to the future, though the "Romanza" third movement—a stunningly human moment of empathy—takes moment to grieve.