

**Program Notes**  
**Between Friends II: "Two Oaks Entwined"**

This program was originally performed in April of 2019 as part of our Between Friends Series presenting the duo sonatas of composers through the ages. It was an excellent evening. You can learn more about these artists at <https://www.qscmusic.com/virtual-concert>. Amahl and Petya have kindly provided QSCM with their recordings of this music so that we can share that performance with you in virtual format.

*"Two Oaks Entwined refers to a poem about friendship by Henry David Thoreau. Following the metaphor in the poem, duo sonata composition is all about two instruments, two musicians, standing side by side, sturdy and strong, barely touching at the crown, but underground, Their roots are intertwined, inseparably."*

**Beethoven's Cello Sonata No. 4 in C Major, Op, 102, No. 1**

The first sonata from the 2019 program is Beethoven's Cello Sonata No. 4 in C Major, Op, 102, No. 1. It is one of his most dramatic. There are two movements. For those of you who are new to classical music, think of movements like you would the acts in a play or chapters in a book.

Listen for how the cello takes the lead in the first movement. It is as if Amahl is asking a question, to be answered by Petya. The tune is then repeated and then changed, just as people in conversation repeat their ideas with different words and different examples. But this discussion quickly shifts from a pleasant exchange to exciting action. You will hear the music become suddenly loud, fast and rhythmic. The second movement also starts off slow and quiet, with the cello again stating the topic of conversation, the tune. But that's just "hello", for this movement quickly turns into a playful game of cat and mouse, with the cello and the piano taking turns chasing each other to the end of the piece.

**Benjamin Britten, Sonata for Cello and Piano, Opus 65**

The remaining two composers featured on this program met each other early in their careers. One night in 1960, the two of them, the Russian, Dmitri Shostakovich and the Englishman, Benjamin Britten, were seated together at the Royal Festival Theatre for the premiere of a new work by Shostakovich. Mstislav Rostropovich, one of the greatest cellists ever, and a student of Shostakovich, was the cellist. Britten found the playing outstanding, elbowing Shostakovich in the ribs every time he heard something amazing. Shostakovich complained afterwards that he had the bruises to show for it, introduced Britten to Rostropovich, and a great friendship was born.

Britten wrote five sonatas for Rostropovich in celebration of his skill. The Sonata for Cello and Piano, Opus 65, is a demanding piece. The work was premiered and recorded with Britten at the piano, Rostropovich, the cello, and also, so the story goes, much vodka. Though Rostropovich is considered by all, including Britten, to be the greatest cellist of his age, Britten feared the cello part he'd written might be too difficult for his friend to play. Whether the vodka made it easier or more difficult is anybody's guess.

This sonata is in five movements. Though only the first one is named "Dialogo" or dialogue, listen throughout for the conversation between cello and piano. As we near the end, you might hear these

pitches (notated below). These notes spell out the initials DSCH in musical notation. Britten used them as one of his themes as a tribute to the composer who introduced him to Rostropovich and inspired him to write for the cello.



The first movement, *Dialogo*, is marked *Lusingando*, Italian for "to flatter." Listen for the questions asked by the cello, with its warm vibrato and soft bow strokes, to be answered by the piano, with a firmness supported by the pedal effect. Of the second movement, the Scherzo-Pizzicato, Rostropovich wrote to his friend, "The pizzicato movement will amuse you; I hope it's possible!" Pizzicato means that the strings of the cello are to be plucked, not bowed, but only the first three notes of the motif or theme are plucked. The next three are bowed. Listen for the effect in contrast with the next movement, *Elegia*. This movement is marked *legato*, meaning each note is joined or bound to the next for a smooth, fluid sound suiting the intense emotionalism implied by the title referring to a poem that could be a lament for the dead. This mood of serious reflection is broken up in the next movement by the *Marcia*, or March. It is rousing, temperamental and a brilliant contrast to what has come before. The use of the "hammer stroke", requiring the full weight of the arm from both cellist and pianist here ensures an energetic martial atmosphere. The use of artificial harmonics, ringing tones similar to what you hear when you rub your finger around the rim of a glass of wine, invokes the whistling of soldiers on the march to complete the effect. The final movement is marked *Moto Perpetuo*. Here you will hear two distinct rhythmic figures or motifs as well as the theme which spells out the letters DSCH in musical tribute to Shostakovich.

### **Dmitri Shostakovich: Sonata for Cello & Piano in D minor Op. 40**

The year 1934 began well for Britten's friend and Rostropovich's teacher, Dmitri Shostakovich. He was an established composer and well respected as a teacher. His opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk* was in rehearsal for a highly anticipated premiere performance. He had also just begun an affair with one of his students, who was a singer in his opera, and divorced his wife.

It was during this romantic interlude that he wrote the Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor. He may have been somewhat romantically conflicted! After the completion of the Sonata, he ended his affair and re-married his wife who was pregnant with their daughter.

This Sonata is the last work Shostakovich wrote before his difficulties began with Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Communist Party. His subsequent compositions were frequently denounced as suffering from decadent bourgeois Western influences, negatively impacting his career. Although he was never imprisoned for this, as many of his colleagues were, he lost his teaching position and had a difficult time obtaining commissions for new works. Despite this, he continued composing and is now regarded as one of the greatest composers of the 20th century.

This piece features lyrical themes, repeated note figures and strange shifts in tempo, the speed at which the music plays. There is a kind of crazy dance in the middle (the Allegro), and at the end, the music just stops.

In this work you will want to listen for the lyrical themes, repeated note figures, and the way the first movement ends slowing to a glacial pace while restating the theme from the beginning. The second movement is a scherzo, which means "joke" and is a kind of rough swaggering dance with a repetitive rhythm. The sombre and doleful Adagio, is dominated by a searing cello line. The Allegro gives you the chance to hear its theme three times, with contrasting material in between, that includes an opportunity for the pianist to fly across the keys. The ending is abrupt. The exciting dance rhythm is simply halted, and then the music is over, a reflection perhaps of the composer's emotional state as he ended his affair and returned to his wife, just as Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, when Shostakovich's opera was stage, ended his public career by denouncing the composer's work as bourgeois, and overly influenced by the decadent west.