

TRIO ZIMBALIST

PIANO TRIOS OF WEINBERG, AUERBACH, & DVOŘÁK



Curtis
Studio

TRIO ZIMBALIST

PIANO TRIOS OF WEINBERG, AUERBACH, & DVOŘÁK

PIANO TRIO, OP. 24 BY MIECZYSLAW WEINBERG

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|----|------|--------------------|-------|
| 1. | I. | Präludium and Aria | 05:38 |
| 2. | II. | Toccata | 03:49 |
| 3. | III. | Poem | 09:21 |
| 4. | IV. | Finale | 10:44 |

PIANO TRIO NO. 1, OP. 28 BY LERA AUERBACH

| | | | |
|----|------|-------------------|-------|
| 5. | I. | Prelude | 01:36 |
| 6. | II. | Andante lamentoso | 05:49 |
| 7. | III. | Presto | 04:39 |

PIANO TRIO NO. 4 IN E MINOR, OP. 90, B. 166 "DUMKY" BY ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

| | | | |
|-----|------|------------------|-------|
| 8. | I. | Lento maestoso | 03:50 |
| 9. | II. | Poco adagio | 07:29 |
| 10. | III. | Andante | 05:48 |
| 11. | IV. | Andante moderato | 04:43 |
| 12. | V. | Allegro | 04:17 |
| 13. | VI. | Lento maestoso | 04:31 |

Total 1:12:14

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Timotheos Gavriilidis-Petrin | Cello

George Xiaoyuan Fu | Piano

Josef Špaček | Violin

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On the heels of a world-altering pandemic, geopolitical instability, and increased social division, our 21st century so far has been an era marked by unprecedented volatility. In many countries the backsliding of democratic norms into autocratic tendencies has been disturbing to watch. In response, classical musicians of our time have increasingly felt the urge to respond musically.

This is not a new phenomenon. Instrumental classical music may seem abstract on the surface due to its lack of text, but it is this very wordlessness which has allowed classical musicians throughout history to embed powerful messages within their art form, especially in response to repression and government censorship.

When Imperial Russia was on a campaign to eradicate the Polish Nationalist movement in the 1830s, Robert Schumann wrote that Frédéric Chopin's music amounted to "cannons buried in flowers"; "if this powerful and autocratic monarch of the north knew the danger of the enemy he has in the simple tunes of his Mazurkas, he would ban his music." Later on in the 20th century, Soviet composers such as Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Mieczysław Weinberg all struggled with censorship of their works, and in turn, many of their compositions took on a new character. Amidst the pressure of an artistic censor – as well as the terror from a constant looming threat by the KGB – one can hear a certain spirit of defiance in many of their works, displaying the irrepressibility of their individual voices even while they are ensnared in a soulless political machine.

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Many tracks on this album are heavily influenced by folk music. Music with folk elements has often been censored, either for being too basic to be taken seriously, or for being too popular and thus subversive. After Soviet ideologue Andreï Zhdanov's 1946 *Zhdanovschina* – a cultural doctrine encouraging the promulgation of Soviet values – there was a campaign in the USSR to eradicate all art that promoted cosmopolitan and bourgeois values. Following longstanding antisemitic tropes of Jewish rootlessness and shadow control, this, in practice, amounted to censorship of anything produced by Jewish artists and thinkers. Thus Weinberg, who was Jewish and often used Jewish themes in his compositions, was completely ostracised by the Soviet musical establishment and largely ignored until his posthumous revival. Similarly, the Czech musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý held a hostile position towards Dvořák's music, claiming it was too traditionalist and “anti-modern.” As an ideologue serving various cultural ministerial posts in the Czechoslovak Republic from 1945, Nejedlý launched many polemics attacking Dvořák's legacy and was responsible for suppressing the performance of his works throughout the country while he held office.

We hope that our album can avoid that sort of ideological conversation in either direction. Our main creative thrust is purely musical, and, in a sense, there is no need for anything further. The works are beautiful and moving, filled with lovely tunes and thrilling moments; we could stop there and be happy. That said, if one is to delve deeper, we would suggest that the album emphasizes the spirit of the individual, and that recent world events were present in our minds when deciding on the program. Our music-making wishes to inspire listeners to think and act on their own terms and, above all, to celebrate the human act of creation: a very courageous thing that manages to persist, even in the most desperate of times.

—Trio Zimbalist

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“*Trios of Weinberg, Auerbach, & Dvořák* is based on the background of the composers — living freely despite some sort of oppressive conditions — and celebrates folk music, music of a place and people.”

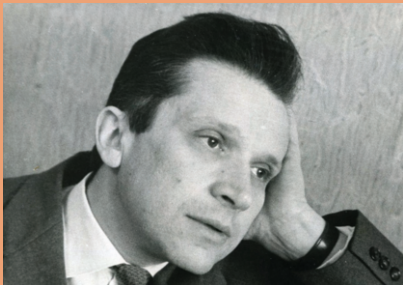
—TRIO ZIMBALIST

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PIANO TRIOS OF WEINBERG, AUERBACH, & DVOŘÁK

MIECZYSLAW WEINBERG | Piano Trio, Op. 24

Mieczysław Weinberg was born in 1919 to a Jewish family in Warsaw. When Weinberg wrote his Piano Trio in 1945, he had managed to flee from the Nazi occupation of Poland and, after brief stints in Minsk and Tashkent, settled permanently in Moscow at Dmitri Shostakovich's urging. He was the only member of his family to survive; his mother and sister were all murdered in the Trawniki concentration camp.



Mieczyslaw Weinberg

Weinberg and Shostakovich shared a profound friendship. The two played duets together and dedicated works to each other. Shostakovich even interceded to protect Weinberg's family in 1953, writing to the head of the KGB to defend him when he was arrested in 1953 for promoting 'Jewish bourgeois nationalism.' It was a bogus charge which nonetheless dogged several hundred Jewish artists throughout the Soviet Union, carrying with it a prison sentence, hard labour, and often would escalate into a death sentence on trumped-up charges of treason or an extrajudicial killing. Despite Shostakovich's pleas, Weinberg was only released when Stalin died and all charges pertaining to the "Doctor's Plot" were dropped, but not before many of those implicated had been executed.

The profound influence of Shostakovich is apparent in Weinberg's Piano Trio, as the work carries many stylistic similarities. However, Weinberg's voice is very distinctive throughout – whereas Shostakovich has moments of humor, Weinberg often eschews those elements for a more unrelenting and desolate landscape.

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PIANO TRIOS OF WEINBERG, AUERBACH, & DVOŘÁK

MIECZYSLAW WEINBERG | Piano Trio, Op. 24 (Cont.)

The work begins with an extroverted, monstrous opening that dissipates into a lonely lyrical aria exchanged between violin and piano. A finger-busting *Toccata* breaks out in the second movement, evoking the machine of war within a lopsided tarantella in 5/8 time. One can hear artillery guns, the rumbling of tanks, and a manic dance toward death.

The third movement, *Poeme*, is an extraordinarily emotional movement. The opening rhapsodic piano solo covers a tremendous range, comprising a rhapsodic leading theme, a demonic habanera-rhythm theme, and a quiet chorale. The cello and piano then trade off a wandering, folk-like melody, accompanied by violin *pizzicati*; when all three players eventually join in, they are overlaid in a knotty 20th-century counterpoint to gripping and harrowing effect.

The marvelous *Finale* opens with another wandering piano solo, a melodic idea which is developed by all players until it is abruptly cut off by a marching fugue kicked off by the cello. There is a steady development throughout this fugue, once again evoking the war machine menacing at the doorstep. After a considerable buildup, the tension becomes unbearable, and then inexplicably releases – not with a huge bang, but by suddenly evaporating into a light dance in 3. This transition, while on its face humorous, is painfully sardonic in this context. The coda emerges from this dance, bringing the piece to a quiet close with a hushed piano chorale and ethereal string harmonics.

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LERA AUERBACH | Piano Trio No. 1, Op. 28



Lera Auerbach

the most difficult [year] of my life. I was alone and did not know whether I would ever see my family again.”

Despite her hardship at the time, her first Piano Trio was an extraordinary achievement for such a young composer. For a work of relatively short length, there is an amazing economy on display as it is packed with ideas and drama.

The first movement is a spin-off on Baroque counterpoint with modern twists of colors from the strings, even including a brief passage where the cello plays quick *glissandi* “imitating the cry of seagulls.” The second movement is a brooding *Andante*, which the composer claims is “the emotional centre of the work.” Lyrical melodies are traded between violin and cello above a languorous harmonic texture laid by the piano, only to be abruptly jolted by the *Presto* finale. Here, all of the themes in the previous two movements come together, as brilliant passagework and violent outbursts are traded off between all three instruments until the music finally culminates in a blistering climax.

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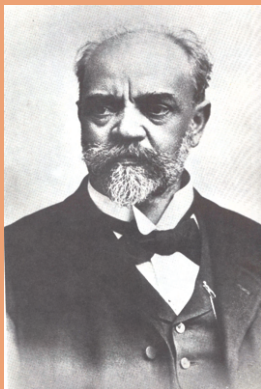


Trio Zimbalist recording *Piano Trios of Weinberg, Auerbach, & Dvořák* in Gould Rehearsal Hall at the Curtis Institute of Music January 5-8, 2023.

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PIANO TRIOS OF WEINBERG, AUERBACH, & DVOŘÁK

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK | Piano Trio No. 4 in E minor, Op. 90, B. 166 “Dumky”



Antonín Dvořák

Antonín Dvořák was instrumental in developing what many listeners perceive as the Czech national musical identity. Throughout his oeuvre, Dvořák frequently used folk melodies from Moravia and Bohemia. In the case of the *Dumky* trio, the folk inspirations of this work have interestingly complex origins.

Dumka comes from a diminutive of the Slavic/Ukrainian term, *duma*, meaning “thought.” *Dumky* (the plural of *dumka*) were ballads traditionally sung by traveling minstrels throughout the Slavic lands, who played some kind of strummed instrument (e.g. the *bandura*, *kobza*, or *lira*). Often, their songs would contain a thoughtful or melancholic lament of oppressed peoples.

Dvořák adored this musical form, adopting it in many of his compositions; for this work, he eschews the traditional three-movement (fast-slow-fast) classical structure for six individual *dumka* movements, with each *dumka* alternating between melancholic and joyful episodes.

The first three *Dumky* are performed *attacca* (without pause) and can be seen as a kind of ‘first movement.’ The first *Dumka* opens with a passionate outpouring in E minor which is contrasted by a jolly romp in E major; the second introduces a tragic meditation in C-sharp minor, which transforms into a delightful dance in the same key. The third then lays a more reassuring atmosphere in A major so that the minor key in the second theme takes on a more playfully *scherzando* character rather than that of tragedy or sorrow.

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ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK | Piano Trio No. 4 in E minor, Op. 90, B. 166 “Dumky” (Cont.)

In the fourth movement, the opening vamp by the piano and violin is harmonically ambiguous, suggesting a seesaw between A major and D minor. Although the cello’s soaring theme firmly orientates us towards the minor key, the presence of this ambiguity in the vamp imbues the music with a sense of nostalgia, even regret. That same major-minor yawning continues in the fifth movement akin to a *scherzo* movement, spinning through a variety of moods around a tonal center of E-flat.

The sixth and final *Dumka* perhaps has the largest contrast in moods, beginning with grave severity before breaking into a foot-stamping *furiant* (a fast and spirited Bohemian dance). Two episodes punctuate this *furiant*: first, the violin plays a sorrowful melody on the G-string, the thickest and lowest string on the instrument which has been called upon by Dvořák to offer the most possible intensity and heat. Its response comes later on the cello, and it is the very same melody, but this time it is transformed into a joyful C major which paves the way toward the work’s rousing close.

The *Dumky* trio was a huge success for Dvořák. Before moving to America to take on a lucrative teaching position at the National Conservatory of Music in New York City, he performed it in a 40-concert “farewell” tour throughout Bohemia as pianist alongside his colleagues at the Prague Conservatory, the violinist Ferdinand Lachner and cellist Hanus Wihan. It remains one of Dvořák’s most beloved and frequently played works.

—George Xiaoyuan Fu
December, 2023

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Lera Auerbach headshot: Rafael DeStella

Trio Zimbalist recording session: Matt Hagestuen

Antonín Dvořák headshot 1901: Jan & Joseph Mulač

Liner Note

George Xiaoyuan Fu

More information: [Curtis.edu/TrioZ](https://curtis.edu/TrioZ)

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