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Johann Sebastian Bach, Viola Da Gamba Sonata No.1 in G major, BWV 1027

Johann Sebastian Bach was perhaps the greatest composer of all time. He was born to a musical family in Eisenberg, Germany in 1685, and died in Leipzig in 1750. During his lifetime, he was primarily known as an outstanding organist. After upsetting Duke Wilhelm for a too short notice of terminating employment and pending a short time in prison, he served as Kapellmeister at the court of Prince Leopold in Cöthen from 1717 to 1723. During these years, he composed a great number of instrumental works, including orchestral dance suites, the Six Brandenburg concertos, the first book of "Well Tempered Clavier", the Violin Sonatas and Partitas, and the Six Cello Suites. Although the three Sonatas for the Viola Da Gamba and Harpsichord BWV 1027-29 have been variously dated, it was likely composed during this time.

The *Viola Da Gamba Sonata No.1 in G major* is in fact an arrangement of the Trio Sonata for two flutes and basso continuo in G major, BWV 1039, which was composed around the same time. The two hands of the harpsichord assumed the role of the missing third instrument. The flute part that was not taken over by the keyboardist is moved down to a register more congenial to the viola da gamba. The Sonata consists of four movements, *Adagio*, *Allegro ma non tanto*, *Andante*, and *Allegro moderato*. The first movement, *Adagio* has a luxuriantly flowing 12/8 time. It has no final cadence, but rather it connects directly to the second movement, *Allegro ma non tanto* with a half cadence. Contrasting to its spirited energy, the *Andante* is languid. The movement is presented with repeating sixteenth-note arpeggios and broken bass octaves which cover a wide, colourfully chromatic, harmonic distance in 18 bars. Finally, the *Allegro Moderato* is joyful and lighthearted, bringing the work to an exuberant conclusion.

Rebecca Clarke, Morpheus

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979), an English composer and violist, was known for her chamber music featuring the viola. Although she composed little, due to her insecurity with the role of a female composer, all of her works are brilliant and powerful. *Morpheus* was written in 1917 when Clarke was pursuing a performing career in United States. The work demonstrates an impressionistic musical language that Clarke had developed, inspired by Debussy, Vaughan Williams and Poulenc. Not only is the

work luxuriant in its melodic inventions, but the harmonies are ethereal and unique. The title, *Morpheus* is the name of a Greek god who was associated with sleep and dreams.

Clarke gave the first performance of *Morpheus* at the Aeolian Hall in New York in February 1918, and then at Carnegie Hall in the spring of 1918. This performance was widely acclaimed by critics. However, she had written the pen-name of 'Anthony Trent' on the program, because Clarke was embarrassed to have such a long list of pieces followed by her name. While the media praised the compositions with the name of Clarke, they greatly applauded the work of the nonexistent 'Mr. Trent'. For Clarke, this reinforced her belief that this was neither the moment nor the place for female composers. Despite Clarke's insecurities, the piece not only survives but also is an integral part of the viola repertoire.

Dmitri Shostakovich, Viola Sonata Op. 147

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) was one of the 20th century's most significant composers. The *Viola Sonata, op. 147* is the last composition that Shostakovich wrote and there is good reason to suppose that he knew it would be. Death was imminent. He was going blind, suffering from painful arthritis, and fighting advanced lung cancer. Soon after he completed the Sonata in July 1975, Shostakovich died of heart failure. Following his own wishes, the Sonata received its premiere in October 1975 by its dedicatee Fyodor Druzhinin, violist from the Beethoven Quartet.

Shostakovich described the first movement of the Sonata, *Moderato* as a 'Novella', perhaps because of its free-flowing three-part form and it was somehow autobiographical. It told a story. In fact, the whole sonata is laced with references to other works alluding to death. Beethoven's '*Moonlight*' Sonata, Bach's *Es is Genug*, the *Dies Irae*, the final gasp of the Don from Strauss' *Don Quixote* and a quote from his own "*Execution of Stepan Kazin*", to name a few. The sonata begins with the viola playing pizzicato across all four open strings, a reference to the opening bars of the Berg's violin concerto. The music begins sparsely, growing in intensity and complexity to a desperate climax before fading to a quiet ending. In contrast to the dark musing of the first movement, the second movement, *Allegretto* is very dance-like. It features the opening music from Shostakovich's abandoned opera, *The Gamblers*. The music is vigorous and buoyant, but also tinged with bitterness. The last movement, *Adagio* begins with a solo introduction from the viola, perhaps a quiet expression of resignation. Again, as in the first movement, the music builds to violent storm, this time containing a quotation from the *Suite for two pianos, Op. 6*, a work dedicated by the sixteen-year-old Shostakovich in the memory of his deceased father. The storm may represent the fateful battle that Shostakovich was fighting desperately with death, both mentally and physically. The coda, though, quiet and resigned, seems almost to say that Shostakovich has found peace at the end of a life of constant fear and inner conflict.