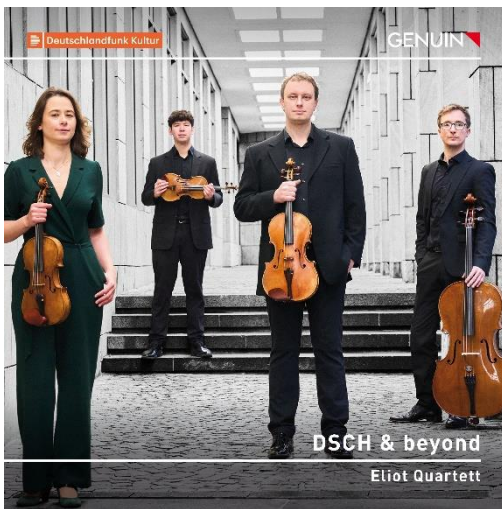




Shostakovich as Quartet – hypnotic and hypothetical

For its 10th anniversary last year, the Eliot Quartet fulfilled its dream of studying and performing all of Dmitri Shostakovich's string quartets. This concert project, entitled "DSCH & beyond", and running until July 2025, has now resulted in their first CD, showcasing recordings of the quartets No. 3 and No. 8 as well as the "hypothetical" quartet No. 16 "Au-delà d'une absence" composed by Shostakovich's confidant Krzysztof Meyer.



Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

[1-5] String Quartet No. 3 F major op. 73 (1946)

Krzysztof Meyer (*1943)

[6-8] Au-delà d'une absence for String Quartet op. 89 (1997)

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

[9-13] String Quartet No. 8 C minor op. 110 (1960)

Eliot Quartet

Maryana Osipova *Violin*

Alexander Sachs *Violin*

Dmitry Hahalin *Viola*

Michael Preuß *Cello*

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Opinions differ about Dmitri Shostakovich: a composer who was courted by the Russian state apparatus during Stalinism, but who nevertheless struggled with himself, the regime and his art throughout his life. This inner conflict is reflected, as if through a magnifying glass, in his 15 string quartets, which the Russian composer wrote over three and a half decades – including a world war – between 1938 and 1974. Shostakovich's life and **his music, with their subtle ambiguity and refusal to sugarcoat reality**, are more relevant today in the age of Putinism than ever. They exert an almost hypnotic fascination that is hard to resist, says Dmitry Hahalin (viola): "In Russia nowadays - where Maryana and I were born - we experience many things that **remind us of Shostakovich's lifetime**. The questions he asked himself are also being asked by our friends who are currently criticizing **the war against Ukraine**: They are either going abroad or emigrating internally. When I read Shostakovich's letters now, they tell me a lot about what's happening today" (from a F.A.Z. interview with Jan Brachmann).

"Above all, the sound of the entire ensemble is always noble, never coarse, even in the most dramatic passages. The phrasing is excellent. What I also particularly liked are the subtle rubati, which are felt rather than consciously perceived. They never disturb the pulse, but rather give the music expression and depth. This is a rare skill that the Eliot Quartet masters expertly." Krzysztof Meyer

Founded in 2014, the international Eliot Quartet with Maryana Osipova (Vi.), Alexander Sachs (Vi.), Dmitry Hahalin (Va.) and Michael Preuß (C.) is a **three-time winner of the 2018 German Music Competition** and has performed at numerous international music competitions in Salzburg, Katowice and Melbourne, thrilling concertgoers worldwide - both audience members and musicians (Valentin Silvestrov: "the performance of my String Quartet No. 3 by the Eliot Quartet at the Shostakovich Festival was the most perfect I have ever heard."). And

the critics, too, sings the group's praises: the four "do not tend towards cheap emphasis, but rather explore all the possibilities of the piano and pianissimo. **The intensity of their musical performance** is impressive" (Fränkischer Tag from October 19, 2023).

The current project "**DSCH & beyond**" – hidden behind the acronym is Shostakovich's musical signature – was made possible by the Frankfurter Bürgerstiftung im Holzhausenschlösschen and the Ernst Max von Grunelius Foundation as main sponsor. The Eliot Quartet has selected two post-war works by this "Orpheus Sovietus" for the CD: the **String Quartet No. 3 in F major, Op. 73**, dated 1946, can be interpreted as a very personal reaction to the atrocities of war. An apparent initial cheerfulness is soon cast aside and, typical of Shostakovich, the face of evil and violence shines through again and again as a basic "programmatic sound image" (K. Meyer). Twelve-tone, chromatic and sharp bitonality are used, as is the grotesque, parodic pseudo-quote of a Prussian military march.

This, as well as the Quartet No. 8, provide the best examples of Shostakovich's great compositional art: "The way he writes fugues, exposes themes, builds tension – all of this is at a high level," says violinist Alexander Sachs. "But I don't believe you can separate his music from the context. The conditions under which this music was created are inherent. You feel this constant struggle with yourself and against the regime, or you feel empathy with the persecuted; for example, in the use of Jewish themes."

The **String Quartet No. 8 in C minor, Op. 110** from 1960 is considered a key work by Shostakovich, also because he viewed it as a requiem for himself: "I composed this ideologically depraved quartet, which is of no use to anyone, because I started to think that after my death no one will probably write a work in my memory, so I had better do it myself." All four sentences therefore contain the motivic tone sequence d-(e)s-c-h (i.e. the initials "D. Sch.") and there are numerous self-quotations from several symphonies, the Piano Trio No. 2, his first cello concerto, and the opera "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk". A real masterpiece, as the composer had to admit in his self-ironic, depreciating way: "This quartet is of such a pseudo-tragic nature that I shed as many tears while composing it as you would urinate after half a dozen beers. When I got home, I tried to play it twice and the tears came again. But this time not only because of its pseudo-tragicism, but also because of my amazement at the wonderful unity of its form."

With the third work on this album, the Eliot Quartet finally delivers a highly exciting Shostakovich addendum of maximum repertoire value: "**Au-delà d'une absence**" by **Krzysztof Meyer** as the Russian's "hypothetical" Quartet No. 16. The Polish composer was in contact with Shostakovich from the early 1960s, which developed into an almost friendly relationship over a decade and a half - we also have Meyer to thank for the Shostakovich biography which continues to be the leading biography of the composer to this day. At their last personal meeting in 1974, he asked the ailing Shostakovich about plans for a next string quartet, to which he replied: "No. I would like to write 16 in three movements, with a double fugue in the finale. And the second movement will be very singable..." Then he went to the piano and played a simple figure (in E minor) with his left hand: "That will be one of the themes of the fugue." Years later, Meyer had the idea to write the "Quartet No. 16" himself: "Immediately after our meeting I had written down the theme that he had played for me on the piano, and that was the only musical material I had."

It's hard to imagine a more authentic continuation of Shostakovich's compositional universe: the Eliot Quartet sets a new standard of musical interpretation with this recording.

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