

Luther Warren

viola

Recital in partial fulfillment of the
Doctor of Musical Arts, 2026
Student of Kim Kashkashian

with
Tae Kim, piano

Saturday, March 2, 2024
8:00 p.m.
Burnes Hall

PROGRAM

Benjamin Britten
(1913–1976)

Lachrymae: Reflections on a Song of Dowland
op. 48

Paul Hindemith
(1895–1963)

Sonata for Viola and Piano in F Major,
op. 11 no. 4

Fantasia

Thema mit Variationen

Finale (mit Variationen)

Tae Kim, piano

Intermission

Ethan Chaves
(b. 2003)

Shadow Monologue I (2023)

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906–1975)

Sonata for Viola and Piano, op. 147

Moderato

Allegretto

Adagio

Tae Kim, piano

Benjamin Britten: *Lachrymae: Reflections on a Song of Dowland*, op. 48

The origin of *Lachrymae: Reflections on a Song by Dowland*, op. 48 by Benjamin Britten is amusingly mundane, with the piece apparently having been composed as bait to entice its dedicatee, the famous Scottish violist William Primrose (1904–1982) to appear at the composer's newly-inaugurated Aldeburgh Festival. The work's title translates from Latin to "tears" and is a reference to the most famous piece of the 16th-century English composer, John Dowland (1563–1626), mentioned in the subtitle. Dowland had written an early lute pavan titled *Lachrimae* which he reworked throughout his career into many arrangements including the well-known song, *Flow my tears* (1597), and one of his most-recognized pieces, the consort collection *Lachrimae or Seaven Teares* (1604). This last work, which contains seven different *Lachrimae* pieces loosely based on the original theme and meditating upon the melancholy, is spiritually related to the modern theme and variations form employed here by Britten.

The piece opens with a *pianissimo* introduction, muted in both instruments and initially sounding only the first four notes of *If my complaints*, a brooding, C minor gesture, in fragmentary viola entrances above mysterious, dissonant tremolos in the piano. The viola's ascending build-up of these fragments bursts into an icy tremolo below which the piano plays, low in its left hand and for the only time in the piece, the song's complete first phrase. This menacing melody undulates up and down, repeating twice before the introduction dissipates back into the dissonant suspended tremolos of its opening.

The following nine variations deal only with this first phrase. Each individual variation portrays a unique musical character with its own meter, tempo, and rhythmic motives, and most are separated by pauses. In different variations, the theme becomes a scherzo, a waltz, a march, a recitative, and even a harmonic abstraction. Britten's full range of modern compositional techniques, including the use of dissonant sonorities, ponticello, pizzicato, harmonics, and virtuosic counterpoint, is on display. The variations occur in sets of three, with the middle set in an unmuted *forte* character contrasting to the predominantly *pianissimo* outer two variations sets. This middle set forms the central peak of a dramatic arch extending over the entire piece, and at its conclusion Dowland's *Lachrimae* theme appears, highlighted by literary quotation marks in the printed score, in an exuberant E-flat major quite different from the dark, minor-key music surrounding it.

After an introduction and nine variations based on only the first phrase of *If my complaints*, it is not until the coda of *Lachrymae* that the remainder of Dowland's song appears. Here, a thunderous buildup of ominous rolled chords in the piano against relentless thirty-second notes in the viola forms a searing climax that evaporates into an exact statement of the original Renaissance song's concluding phrases. It is as if the first part heard in the introduction has been simply expanded by the nine

preceding variations before being allowed to conclude on its own terms. The resulting shift in character, style, and key offers a response to the modernist style heard throughout the rest of the work and brings about a haunting conclusion.

Lachrymae was premiered on June 20, 1950 at the Aldeburgh Festival in a concert of chamber music featuring the viola by William Primrose with Britten himself at the piano. Reviews of the piece were highly favorable. Newspaper reviews praised the “versatility of Britten’s invention” and “thorough exploitation of the resources of the viola,” and noted the effect of putting variations before the theme: “the listener is led irresistibly forward, and the end brings release and emotional fulfillment.” *Lachrymae* has endured to become one of the most beloved solo works in the viola repertoire. The piano part eventually received an orchestration by Britten in 1976, the last year of the composer’s life, to become a concertante piece with orchestra. Today, both versions can be frequently heard in concert and recital.

Paul Hindemith: Sonata for Viola and Piano in F major, op. 11 no. 4

For some composers, early works are seldom-heard curiosities, so wholly subservient to a vastly developed later style that they become altogether irrelevant compared to more mature output. For other composers like Paul Hindemith, early works stand as equally valid, full representations of their artistic voice merely at a different point of stylistic evolution. The first of three works for this instrumentation by Hindemith, the Sonata for Viola and Piano in F major, op. 11 no. 4 is also the most frequently heard. While somewhat distinct from the modernist aesthetic of Hindemith’s later works, the heavily romantic, impressionist-tinged language of this early sonata nevertheless contains all the hallmarks of the great and inventive writing which characterizes its composer’s output as a whole.

The Sonata for Viola and Piano contains three movements which are performed attacca without breaks. The first movement, “Fantasie,” is an especially lush introduction and rapidly develops from a softly stated opening theme in the warm middle register of the viola through florid, improvisatory ornamentation into a titanic climax over forcefully noble piano chords. The second movement, “Thema mit Variationen,” is somewhat more economical and together with the third movement, “Finale (mit Variationen),” forms a single set of variations. The composer numbers variations continuously throughout both movements and specifies in prose that the division between the two should be imperceptible. Even so, in addition to continuing the set of variations already underway, the third movement also functions as a self-contained sonata form whose dual purpose demonstrates Hindemith’s impressive compositional mastery.

The theme which appears at the opening of the second movement and forms the basis of the subsequent seven variations making up the remainder of the piece is

described as “like a folk song” in the printed score. Its asymmetric phrase lengths and modal pitch content are decidedly non-Germanic and in fact sound rather reminiscent of Slavic folk music. Although the melody does appear to be strictly of Hindemith’s own invention, a noticeable aural connection has been recognized with the opening chorus of the 1872 opera *Boris Godunov* by Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881), which contains a strikingly similar rhythmic and melodic contour. Hindemith’s variations of this theme exhaustively explore its content from all angles, traversing a great variety of dynamics, textures, and characters spanning the gamut from playful to ecstatic, ethereal to terrifying, and even venturing at one point into the outright grotesque. The final seventh variation doubles as a climactic, energetic coda which offers a satisfyingly bombastic ending.

The Sonata for Viola and Piano was written in 1919 and received its premier in a concert of the composer’s works on June 2, 1919 with Hindemith himself on the viola and Emma Lübbecke-Job (1888–1982) at the piano. The piece is one of the first compositions written by Hindemith after he began actively performing as a violist following an early career as a violinist. In its opening theme’s tender descent to the rich C-string register, the listener can imagine the newfound pleasure with which Hindemith must have approached an instrument which would become a defining pursuit of his life. Today, the work stands as one of the most enduring compositions in both the viola’s and Hindemith’s repertoire.

Ethan Chaves: *Shadow Monologue I*

In the front matter of the printed score to *Shadow Monologue I* for viola alone rests an enigmatic quote by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875–1961): “The shadow [is] that hidden, repressed, for the most part inferior and guilt-laden personality whose ultimate ramifications reach back into the realm of our animal ancestors.” Although Ethan Chaves says that his composition initially grew out of musical fragments without reference to a program, it soon became clear to him that the piece’s true nature was that of a sonic confrontation with this primal shadow persona described by Jung.

This notion strongly shapes *Shadow Monologue I*’s structure, which is organized as four sections in one interrupted movement. The opening section, “Dream-like,” begins lost in searching uncertainty as a quietly assertive short-long rhythmic motive bubbles upwards through an escalating series of fragmentary statements. At the climax of this buildup, a sudden break occurs as the thematic material shifts abruptly to a new descending melody at the outset of the second section, “Fermentedly dolce.” Soft, unconscious gestures representing the shadow persona emerge from below, conflicting with the new lyrical material and eventually erupting into a third, much quicker section, “Extremely tense and uneasy,” as the conversation between identities transforms into outright warfare between self and shadow. The violence of this

section is palpable, and after a final, furious outburst, the music suddenly yields to deafening silence. The fourth section, “Weary,” returns to the character and material of the opening, punctuated this time by fragments from the two intervening sections. The piece concludes at its lowest point with the unusual, ghostly sound of the bow playing at the very end of the instrument’s neck. In this voice, the opening motive sounds one last time in a state of utter exhaustion from the power of its encounter with the shadow.

Shadow Monologue I was written in 2023 for Luther Warren and received its premier on November 19, 2023 in a performance for the Music for Food concert series.

Dmitri Shostakovich: Sonata for Viola and Piano, op. 147

What does a composer choose to write when they know it will be their last work? Dmitri Shostakovich stated that the weighty culminating movement, “Adagio,” of his Sonata for Viola and Piano, op. 147 is written “in memory of Beethoven” (1770–1827). Indeed, this third movement is tied together by a prominent quotation of Beethoven’s famous “Moonlight Sonata” which perhaps contains a double meaning in its dotted eighth-note rhythm commonly understood to represent a funeral march. More curious, perhaps, than the inclusion of this quote by the movement’s apparent dedicatee are the liberal self-quotations drawn from Shostakovich’s own past symphonies littered throughout. Is it possible that Shostakovich, who completed the piece in the summer of 1975 amidst a series of hospitalizations in the weeks leading up to his own death from lung cancer, actually intended the work to be a self-memorial? If so, it was not a memorial without optimism. While certainly containing its fair share of struggle and devastation, especially in its central cadenza, Shostakovich described this meditative movement in C major as “bright and clear . . . radiant music.”

It is not only the Sonata for Viola and Piano’s third movement which contains hints of death. All three movements finish with the viola holding a long, static note ending in morendo, which translates as dying. In the opening movement, “Moderato,” the first sound heard is a strikingly rhythmic pizzicato motive played on the open strings of the viola alone. It is perhaps not too much of a stretch to hear this material, which reappears throughout the outer sections of the movement in both instruments, as a ticking clock counting down the passing of limited time. There is a resulting sense of profoundly tense, fateful inevitability created by this austere motive which contrasts dramatically with a *forte* middle section in which the viola struggles in melodic gestures against the continuing incessant rhythm of the piano.

The work’s middle movement, “Allegretto,” draws extensively from Shostakovich’s earlier unfinished opera, *The Gamblers* (1942), based on a play of the same name by Russian writer Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852), tells the story of a card sharp who

attempts to cheat three fellow gamblers out of their money but in a painful twist discovers at the moment of his seeming triumph that he has in fact fallen victim to their own deceit and lost everything. Much of the opera's surviving music appears verbatim in the Sonata for Viola and Piano, and the acerbic character of the story, together with the sound of cards, cheating, and devilish treachery represented by the frequent use of tritones, is apparent throughout. A central climactic recitative in which the viola cries alone in its high register opposes the general scherzando character of the movement and presents a new theme which returns later in the third movement's introduction where it is transformed into a quietly probing monologue.

The Sonata for Viola and Piano was written over a period of several months between May and July of 1975 in consultation with its dedicatee, violist Fyodor Druzhinin (1932–2007) who advised the composer on technical matters over the telephone. Shostakovich died on August 9, just three days after his wife delivered the completed score to Druzhinin. The piece was premiered posthumously by Druzhnin with pianist Mikhail Muntyan on September 25, 1975 at a private gathering in the composer's apartment on what would have been his 69th birthday. The duo delivered the Sonata for Viola and Piano's first public performance at the Moscow Conservatory on October 1 of the same year. At 35 minutes long, the piece is written on a monumental, symphonic scale and stands as a fitting conclusion to the life and work of a great composer.

– *Luther Warren*

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