*Divertimento for Solo Cello words:502*

Krzysztof Penderecki (1933-now)

Penderecki wrote some of the most imaginative music of the twentieth century. Born in Krakow, the Polish composer Penderecki was regarded as one of the most forward-thinking contemporary composer nowadays. His musical journey started as a violin performance student at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. After discovering his true passion for composition, however, he shifted his focus to Composition a year after entering the Academy of Music in Krakow. Fortunately, an overthrow of Stalinist censorship in Poland opened doors for cultural innovations upon Penderecki’s graduation in 1956. As a result, Penderecki was given the opportunity to freely express his identity and emotions through his music.

Penderecki’s first breakthrough came in 1962 when he gained international attention with the piece *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*, which was dedicated for victims of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima. His name returned to the eyes of the public again in 1966 with the wide acceptance of his religious piece *St. Luke’s Passion*. Although it was entirely written for religious purposes, the piece also included many of Penderecki’s musical experiments such as laying the foundation in baroque style while sprinkling elements of serialism and Bach motifs throughout. Penderecki moved to the United States in the mid 1970s after accepting a position at the School of Music at Yale University. Maybe influenced by the liberating spirits of the Americans in the “Land of the free”, Penderecki’s writing style shifted drastically. Massive use of Semitone and Tritones can be seen in his later compositions such as in the opening passage of the *Divertimento for Solo Cello*.

*Divertimento for Solo Cello* was composed in 1994 for Penderecki’s longtime friend and acclaimed cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich. It was premiered, however, in December 28, 1994 by Russian composer and cellist Boris Piergamienszczikow. The first suite, “Serenade”, serves as a prelude to the rest of the composition. Although written in a playful manner, it still retains a sense of direction. It also gives the performers room to demonstrate imagination and their interpretation at their own pace, for the music was written without a bar line. The first suite opens with a semitone, C to D-flat, setting the tone of utilizing half step intervals to create tension, followed by chromatic ascending/descending scales that cover several octaves. Variations in color were achieved through sudden dynamic changes, sul ponticello (playing close to the bridge) and left hand pizzicato. The first half of “Scherzo” comprised of only quarter notes, but under the tempo marking “Vivace”. Towards the middle, Penderecki built the chordal climax with continual dissonant chords in the form of double stops, which immediately increase the sense of urgency. The “Notturno” opened with a C pedal in the bass, and ended the with a D pedal. Unlike the tumultuous Scherzo, the Notturno ended quietly with muffled and muted notes, and thus concluded a piece with such innovative notation, flowing rhythmic and melodic lines and technically demanding improvisations. Just like the eventful life of the artist himself, peace will eventually come after the storm.

Suggested Further Reading:

“Divertimento (Penderecki).” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 15 Dec. 2016, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divertimento\_](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divertimento_)(Penderecki).

“Divertimento for Cello Solo.” *Ninateka*, ninateka.pl/kolekcje/en/three-composers/penderecki/audio/divertimento-na-wiolonczele-solo.

Krzysztof Penderecki:

