

LEBRECHT LISTENS | The Delta Piano Trio Stays True To Shostakovich And Auerbach

By [Norman Lebrecht](#) on December 22, 2017

Shostakovich, Auerbach: Piano Trios

★★★★ (out of five)

As the last releases of the year drop through the door, this is an instant ear-grabber. The debate has raged for three decades as to whether Dmitri Shostakovich was a limp Soviet puppet or a secret resistant. The first view was advanced by US musicologists, who would not be satisfied until they had a signed document saying 'I hate Stalin', and Russian friends and fans of the composer heard his dissidence expressed in the music.

Thankfully, the dispute is being resolved by a new generation of musicians who come fresh to the music. The Delta Piano Trio's account of Shostakovich's second string trio, dated 1944, leaves no doubt to the composer's state of mind in the closing stages of the Second World War. Ostensibly a tribute to a late friend, Ivan Sollertinsky, the work ripples with anger and frustration at pointless deaths and ruined lives — the appalling legacy of the Stalin-Hitler era. The last two movements, with their overt Hebrew melodies, are a protest at Soviet indifference to the Nazi holocaust of the Jews. I don't think I have ever heard the finale played with more explicit regard to the composer's intentions.

This deathless masterpiece is paired with two trios by the post-Soviet composer Lera Auerbach, who settled in the US, aged 17, in 1991. Musically, Auerbach occupies a post-Shostakovich estate, employing Bach bites and Mahlerian irony to drive a brisk, bleak, unsentimental outlook. At first hearing, she does not sound like the most original composer ever to draw pen. But her collage technique, reminiscent of Schnittke though less aggressive, is effective in various surprising ways. The more recent of the two trios, dated 2012, dances very slowly on the edge of a volcano. Where Shostakovich blazed against the totalitarian state, Auerbach laments our present states of leaderless uncertainty. She's a mature composer with a lot to say. Gerd Spronk, Irene Enzlin and Vera Kooper are the excellent trio players, and Odradek's new Italian studio sounds idyllic.

Shostakovich, Auerbach: Piano trios is available Jan. 19 2018 at [amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca).

#LUDWIGVAN

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Norman Lebrecht is one of the most widely-read commentators on music, culture and cultural politics. He is a regular presenter on BBC Radio 3 and a contributor to the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, Standpoint, Sinfini and other publications. His blog, Slipped Disc, is among the most widely read cultural sites online, breaking exclusive stories and campaigning against human abuse and acts of injustice in the cultural industries.