Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 – 1975) Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor Opus 67 (1944)
Andante
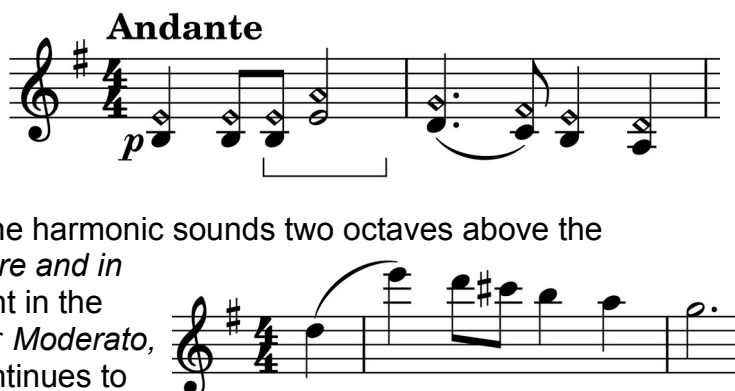*Allegro con brio*
Largo
Allegretto

This Trio is dedicated to the memory of Shostakovich's close friend, the erudite music critic Ivan Sollertinsky. His sudden, early death aged 41 left Shostakovich bereft of a trustworthy soulmate. The Trio follows in a line of Russian elegiac piano trios: Tchaikovsky's in memory of Nikolai Rubinstein, and Rachmaninov's in memory of Tchaikovsky. But Shostakovich in 1944 is also expressing the suffering of the victims of war and barbarity, in particular through the appearance of Eastern European Jewish folk music to which Sollertinsky had introduced him. In addition, the Trio pays tribute to Shostakovich's young pupil Veniamin Fleishman, who defended Leningrad in the People's Volunteer Guard and was one of its first victims. Fleishman left an unfinished opera, *Rothschild's Violin* (based on the Chekhov story); after his death, Shostakovich rescued the manuscript from Leningrad, orchestrated it and facilitated its performance. Jewish dance themes from the opera appear in the finale of Shostakovich's Trio.

The work opens with a ghostly fugue whose sombre mood and arch-like form are reminiscent of Beethoven's C#-minor string quartet. But Shostakovich creates a unique sound with the hauntingly ethereal high harmonics of the muted cello (*illustrated* – the harmonic sounds two octaves above the lower note). The rising fourth (*bracketed here and in subsequent examples*) is a recurring element in the work.   The fugal *Andante* leads into a faster *Moderato,* the tempo quickens again and the mood continues to lighten into a positively exuberant figure leaping an optimistic ninth (*illustrated*).

The *scherzo* second movement is not only in the spikily remote 6-sharps of F#-major (just a semitone down from the final G major of the first movement) but also very fast, very strongly accented and heavy (*illustrated*), about as different as it could be from the opening of the first movement. It whirls on at finger-knotting pace; a figure consisting of rapid consecutive up-bows adds to the relentless, manic exhilaration.

Exhausted despair returns with the Chaconne-like *Largo*. The opening eight dourly inscrutable piano chords underly variations on a mournfully sad and tender theme (*illustrated)*. The 'Dance of Death' final movement follows without a break. It was written after Shostakovich had read about the Red Army's liberation of the Polish death camps such as Treblinka. Staccato notes in the piano introduce the two sets of repeated bars that start the skeletal pizzicato theme (*illustrated*) with its Eastern Jewish folk rhythms. The exuberant upward leap of a

ninth from the first movement is now a desperate final accented fall. The deadly dance becomes ever more frenzied, before a final ghostly reprise of the opening. Shostakovich used the opening theme again, notably in his 8th String Quartet and the 'Babi Yar' 13th Symphony.