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Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

Saturday, August 6th, 2011, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

[Ignaz Pleyel](#) (1757-1831). [Concerto for Clarinet in C, B.106](#) (1797). Paul Meyer, clarinet, Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, Jean-Pierre Rampal. Denon 78911, Tr 4-6. 23:49

[Dmitri Shostakovich](#) (1906-1975). [Concerto No. 1 for Cello and Orchestra in E-flat, Op. 107](#) (1959). Mstislav Rostropovich, cello, Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy. Sony 6124, Tr 5-8. 27:16



Ignaz Pleyel had three strikes against him during the French Revolution. He was rich, he was a foreigner, and he worked for the Church. He was exactly the type of person for whom the Reign of Terror sharpened its guillotines. Even worse: He was an artist. Different despots use different tactics, but artists are usually among their first targets.

The Austrian Pleyel was Director of Music at the Strasbourg Cathedral, leaving for England in 1791 when the Revolution banned public and church musical performances. His London concert series actually competed with that of another Austrian in the city at that time, Joseph Haydn, who had been Pleyel's teacher. They remained good friends despite the competition and even played each other's music on their concerts. They also made a lot of money there, and Pleyel bought a chateau from his windfall when he returned to France after his concerts ended. But the Revolution was just getting started.

Churches were outlawed. The Cathedral was renamed the "Temple of Reason," and Pleyel was brought before the Committee numerous times, charged with being an enemy of the Republic, an enemy of the people. Others had been executed for less, so he began to write works praising the new government, such as *The Revolution of August 10*. He became a citizen. It all had the desired effect, and "Citoyen" Pleyel was left alone as the Reign of Terror ended and France began its climb back from the horrors of repression.

He continued to compose, and the clarinet concerto we hear today comes from this time. He became a successful music publisher, inventing the miniature score and printing music of his contemporaries, including Haydn's string quartets. He founded the Pleyel piano manufacturing firm, and Pleyel pianos are still made today. As for his music, well, everybody played it. He was so popular that Nantucket Island had a Pleyel Society, and American hymnals included his tunes. He is buried in a parcel of land with perhaps the highest concentration of famous gravesites, the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, just a few paces from one of his piano customers, Frédéric Chopin.



The story of Dmitri Shostakovich is more well-known. Other composers had already fled a USSR still consolidating power in the 1920s, but in the '30s Stalin turned his full attention to modernists--these new enemies of the people--not aligned with his vision of the ideal citizen. Shostakovich's triumphs piled up, though, until Stalin came to his already successful opera *Lady Macbeth* in 1935. The dictator was not pleased. Its brutal story was realistic, but it was not Soviet Realism and besides, Stalin shuddered every time the loud brass came in. The critics dutifully bashed it.

Fearing for his life, Shostakovich withdrew the dissonant Fourth Symphony, about to be premiered. He continued to write film music, which was useful propaganda for the regime, and then his putatively Soviet-affirming Fifth Symphony helped return him to good graces in 1937. His career from then on swung back and forth between prizes and denunciations. In another crackdown against the "formalist" avant-garde, his professorships were revoked from the Moscow and Leningrad conservatories in 1948. A mild-looking but fiery 21-year-old student cellist at Moscow quit in protest. Mstislav Rostropovich would later premiere both of his teacher's concertos. The first, written in 1959, was recorded in Philadelphia, with the composer in the recording booth, under the eyes of wary apparatchiks.

Tyrants of every century all seem to think that composers have something so important to tell us, they need to be watched. Maybe they're on to something. Let's listen.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).