

# MUSIC ACCORD

## FREDRIC RZEWSKI *Demons* (2018)

### Program Notes

In Dostoyevsky's novel of the same name (1871), the character Kirillov kills himself in order "to become God". Inspired by the Russian Nihilist movement of the 1860's, and specifically by the charismatic figure Nechayev, Dostoyevsky's book is a study of the self-destructive forces present in the Russian society of his time. It foreshadows Lenin and the Revolution of 1917, as well as the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud, and had a deep influence on writers like Thomas Mann, whose "Doctor Faustus" is a similar study of modern Germany.

While it is futile to try to express musical ideas in words, it is possible to say that my piece is a meditation on similar trends in the world of today.

In early November 2016, I had the honour to assist at a spectacular performance of my composition "Coming Together" of 1972 at the San Francisco Conservatory, with Angela Davis as the speaking soloist, a few days before the presidential elections. There was a public discussion that followed. Davis seemed to know the results already. She said that, if the Left had done its job, the present situation would not have arisen.

These and similar ideas were all going through my head as I was writing "Demons" a few months later. I am not religious, and don't know much about devils and such, but as an artist I cannot help feeling sensitive to whatever it is that awakens these ideas in humans, causing them to go crazy. I am not sure that scientists or doctors understand these things any better than writers or musicians. Perhaps, on the contrary, although we cannot explain them in rational terms, we can nevertheless throw some light on them, in our own way.

My piece is in four movements, and so is a kind of sonata, like the piece that preceded it, "Notasonata", written for Jennifer Koh. There are periodic references to two songs throughout the piece: "Iroes", made popular in the 1990's by the singer Maria Dimitriadis, and a song that became known during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's (notably as performed by Barbara Dane), "Freedom Is A Constant Struggle", which also provided the title for the recent book of Angela Davis.

Thanks to a new generation of classical musicians like Benjamin Beilman, there is a revival of interest among younger players in new music that in some way continues the classical tradition. One can only hope that this trend will continue. Although Marx' analysis of capitalism as a ruthless system following its relentless course independently of human will continues to be valid, there are nonetheless reasons to think that alternatives are possible. As Mark Twain put it, prophecy is really hard, especially when it's about the future.

Frederic Rzewski (Feb. 12, 2018)

### Demons

Composer: Fredric Rzewski

Instrumentation: violin and piano

Premiering Artists: Benjamin Beilman, violin  
Orion Weiss, piano

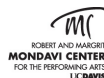
Duration:

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### About Music Accord

Comprised of top classical music presenting organizations throughout the United States, Music Accord is a consortium that commission new works in the chamber music, instrumental recital and song genres. The Consortiums goal is to create a significant number of new works and to ensure presentation of these works in venues throughout this country and, if the occasion arises, internationally. Music Accord awards commissions principally to performers who are US citizens or reside in the US and assists these performers in selecting composers who are United States citizens or who reside in the United States.



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