

*The audience listened with enthusiasm and the scherzo had to be repeated. At the end, Mitya [Dmitri] was called up to the stage over and over again. When our handsome young composer appeared, looking still like a boy, the enthusiasm turned into one long thunderous ovation. He came to take his bows, sometimes with Malko [Nikolai Malko, the conductor], sometimes alone'* (Shostakovich's mother - letter to a friend after the first performance of Symphony No.1, performed by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra on 12th May, 1926)

*The slow movement ... shows us an imagination and a degree of compassion that go far beyond youthful insight...What is important is that it [the Symphony] communicates a vital spiritual experience.* (Robert Layton 'The Symphony – Elgar to the Present Day', Penguin, 1967)

**Symphony No.1 in F minor, Op.10** (1924-5) which was completed as a graduation exercise, when the composer was only nineteen years old, at the Leningrad Conservatoire, is a work of astonishing maturity. The composer had been born into a middle-class family in St. Petersburg during the reign of Tsar Nicholas II. The composer's father, also called Dmitri, was an engineer of Polish origin. It was the composer's mother, herself an accomplished pianist, who encouraged him to take up the piano and his talent became evident very quickly. In 1919, aged 13, Shostakovich had enrolled in the Petrograd Conservatoire (St Petersburg's name was changed to the less German sounding 'Petrograd' in 1914 and then to 'Leningrad', following Lenin's death in 1924, before returning to 'St Petersburg' after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991). He was taught composition by Maximilian Steinberg (the son-in-law of Rimsky-Korsakov) and piano by Leonid Nikolayev – as well as benefitting from the paternal protection of Alexander Glazunov, the Director of the Conservatoire, (whose own first symphony was given a sensational premiere in 1884 when aged only 16, he appeared on stage in school uniform).

The sudden death of Shostakovich's father in early 1922, shortly before young Dmitri started to study full time, threw the family into economic hardship and in order to help support them Shostakovich took a job playing the piano to accompany the films at the local 'Bright Reel' cinema ('my work in the cinema sapped away my time, health and energy'). It was during this time, however, that Shostakovich began writing his *First Symphony*, which incorporates a significant part for piano. Shostakovich acknowledged that Steinberg had given him a thorough academic musical education, especially in harmony, although years later, Steinberg, who took great pride in the fact that Shostakovich's *First Symphony* had been composed under his guidance at the conservatoire,

was hurt when Shostakovich commented that he had been hindered in composing when he was a student. The dramatic final bars of Maximilian Steinberg's own powerful *Second Symphony* of 1909 (in memory of Rimsky-Korsakov), in its use of the orchestral piano, during the redemptive, though paradoxically doom-laden coda, to some extent anticipate the music of his young pupil.

No composer works in a vacuum and despite its remarkable originality Shostakovich's *First Symphony* does show the influences of other composers, not least Stravinsky, whose ballet score *Petrushka* (1909-11) shares some of the ironic, grotesque humour of the first two movements of the Shostakovich symphony - a habitual feature of the composer's music, not least in the opening movement of his final symphony – No.15 of 1971. Prokofiev, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Scriabin and Bruckner have also been identified as possible influences. Shostakovich himself admitted the influence of Myaskovsky: *I've started to compose the Finale of the Symphony. It's turning out pretty gloomy – almost like Myaskovsky; who takes the cake when it comes to gloominess.* (Shostakovich: Letter to Lev Oborin, April 1925, quoted in 'Shostakovich: a Life Remembered' by Elizabeth Wilson, 1994)

Shostakovich's conductor son Maxim commented as follows on the *First Symphony* in an interview: *The first movement is a march, the beginning of a journey. The second movement: on the road; music from an old fairy tale...The third movement is one long phrase...The last movement is my favourite. There is no room for cuts or changes. I like it very much. It works like a film. The fast material means that a lot of time is passing quickly. With the sound of the timpani, you're back to real time...Critics felt that a youth couldn't have written this work, that he couldn't be that deep.* The *First Symphony*, however, went on to become one of the composer's most popular and frequently recorded works: *The symphony, simultaneously fresh and masterful, playful and meditative, moderately daring and moderately traditional, pleased everyone.* (S. Volkov: 'Shostakovich and Stalin' 2004)

Shostakovich was part of the first generation to gain adulthood in the Soviet era; his paternal grandfather had been arrested as a suspect in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 and exiled to Siberia, where the composer's father was born. Shostakovich himself was born not long after the abortive 1905 Revolution, which signalled the beginning of the end for the tsarist regime. The 'Bloody Sunday' massacre of 1905 was to feature as the official inspiration behind Shostakovich's *11th Symphony* of 1957. There is some debate, however, on the extent to which the composer and his family supported the ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution from the start. On the

face of it Shostakovich's *Second and Third symphonies* (1927/1930) reflect his interest not just in progressive musical ideas but also in the revolutionary politics of his time.

*'[In the Third Symphony] I tried to convey only the general mood of the International Workers' Day festival. I wished to portray peaceful construction in the USSR. I would point out that the element of struggle, energy and ceaseless work runs through the whole symphony like a red thread.'* (Shostakovich quoted in soviet era publication)

*The fact that Shostakovich wrote music celebrating revolutionary events...was probably prompted as much by a desire to be seen as artistically 'progressive' as to prove himself politically in tune with the ideals of the Revolution.* (Wilson: 'A life Remembered' 1994)

#### ***Symphony 3 in E flat 'The First of May' Op.20***

It is worth noting that the original dedicatee of the *First Symphony*, Mikhail Kvadri, a fellow composer and friend of Shostakovich, had been executed by firing squad in 1929 for 'counter revolutionary activity' at a time when Shostakovich was writing his *Third Symphony*, indicating that these were dangerous times and a rising young composer needed to show his dedication to the Revolutionary regime. ***Symphony No.3***, like the *Second Symphony* is a one movement work culminating in a choral epilogue, based on a text of 1929 provided by the proletarian Futurist poet Semyon Kirsanov (1906-72): *These politically correct verses...had not fanned the composer's imagination...The finale is stilted, and one is tempted to cut it off with a pair of scissors.* (Volkov)

The composer told his friend Vissarion Shebalin (1902-63) that he wanted to write a work in which no themes were repeated and he also acknowledged the influence of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* on the choral finale. Mahler is clearly another influence. The symphony's self-consciously modern style also anticipates the radical and epic *Fourth Symphony* of 1936 (premiered 1961). The symphony, which apparently originally included a part for 'machine-gun' (a specially built wooden ratchet), was first performed, on 21st January 1930, by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Alexander Gauk. Unlike the *First Symphony* it is amongst the least performed of all his symphonies. It is, nevertheless, important in showing how much Shostakovich was influenced by the dramatic changes affecting the Soviet Union.

© Jeffrey Davis 2017

#### ***Symphony No.2 in B major, Op.14 'To October'***

Shostakovich's father had been present at the 1905 'Bloody Sunday' massacre outside the Tsar's Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, the year before the composer was born, and the ten year old composer himself had apparently witnessed Lenin's return from exile to the Finland Station in Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was then called) in April 1917 – an event later depicted in Eisenstein's film 'October' (1927). Shostakovich said that he remembered far less about Lenin's return to Russia than he did about witnessing the death of a child a few months earlier:

*They were breaking up the crowd in the street. And a Cossack killed a child with his sabre. It was terrifying. I ran home to tell my parents about it...I didn't forget that boy and I never will. I tried to write music about it several times. When I was small, I wrote a piano piece called 'Funeral March in Memory of the Victims of the Revolution'. Later my second and Twelfth Symphonies addressed the same themes.* D. Shostakovich: 'Testimony' (Ed. S. Volkov), 1979

Shostakovich had sensationally burst on to the symphonic stage in 1926 with his *Symphony No.1*, written when he was 19, under the benign influence of his teacher - the underrated composer, Maximilian Steinberg (1883-1946). Shostakovich's *Second Symphony* (1927) was composed at a time of relative freedom in the arts in the Soviet Union, when avant-garde experimentation was tolerated by the Soviet authorities (Vladimir Tatlin's gigantic, constructivist and never completed 'Monument to the Third International' was also from this post-revolutionary period). His single-movement *Second Symphony*, which can be seen as an early example of Socialist Realism, was written to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. The lugubrious opening of the symphony (momentarily reminiscent of the opening of Gorecki's 'Symphony of Sorrowful Songs', composed almost fifty years later) suggests the misery of the oppressed proletariat. Later on a factory hooter announces the entry of the chorus, singing words by the 'proletarian poet' Alexander Bezymensky. The poem (extract below) focuses on the suffering of the workers and how Lenin came to their rescue: *Oh, Lenin: You forged freedom from our misery*

*You forged freedom from our calloused hands.*

*We understood Lenin,  
that our fate has only one name:  
Struggle, struggle.*

According to Nikolai Malko, who conducted the premiere of the *Second Symphony* (which is dedicated to him) on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1927, with the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra and State

Cappella, Shostakovich disliked the poem and did not take it seriously. The turbulent central part of the Symphony contains pre-echoes of Shostakovich's 4<sup>th</sup> *Symphony*, composed in 1935/6 but not premiered until twenty-five years later in the same year as the 12<sup>th</sup> *Symphony*.

### ***Symphony No.12 in D minor, Op.112 'The Year 1917'***

Sandwiched between two rather more emotionally complex symphonies (*No.11 'The year 1905'* and *No.13 'Babi Yar'*) Shostakovich's 12<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* (1961) tends to get rather a bad press. Speaking personally I have always liked it. The problem is that the symphony does not easily lend itself to a subversive interpretation, as in the case with its two symphonic neighbours. *Symphony 11 'The Year 1905'* was written after the time of the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary and, although ostensibly about the uprising against Tsar Nicholas II after Russia's humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5), it has also been interpreted as a commentary on the suffering of the Hungarian people in the face of Soviet aggression. *Symphony No.13 'Babi-Yar'*, based on a series of poems by the radical poet Yevtushenko, more obviously confronts controversial topics such as antisemitism in the USSR. *Symphony No.12*, by comparison, seems much more straightforwardly epic-heroic and propagandistic – a tribute to Lenin and the October Revolution.

Shostakovich had to walk a political tightrope throughout his career, balancing the demands of the state with his musical conscience. By 1961 Shostakovich had joined the Communist Party, presumably under political pressure from the Khrushchev regime, and finally delivered on his promise to compose a major work dedicated to Lenin and in commemoration of the October Revolution of 1917. The work, which is in linked movements, can be seen as a continuation of the revolutionary narrative of the 11<sup>th</sup> *Symphony 'The Year 1905'* although it does not make as much use of revolutionary songs as the earlier work.

*The symphony will have four movements. I saw the first as a musical account of Lenin's arrival in Petrograd [St Petersburg] in April 1917 and his meeting with the workers, the working class of Petrograd. The second movement depicts the historic events of November 7 [Russia had moved from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1918]. The third will portray the Civil War, and the fourth the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution...Many things have certainly influenced the creation of my Twelfth Symphony: literature, the cinema, Soviet painting, and poetry. But what has served as my main creative impulse has been the fact that, although I was very young at the time, I was an eyewitness of the Great October Socialist Revolution. I was living in Petrograd at*

*the time, and the events of that period have remained in my memory all my life.* [Shostakovich, quoted in 'Pages from the Life of Dmitri Shostakovich' by friends Dmitri and Ludmilla Sollertitsky, published during the Soviet era (1979)]

In the end Shostakovich's original scheme was amended. The Civil War was dropped from the plan and the brooding and introspective second movement became *Razliv*, named after the place where Lenin, disguised in a wig, lived in a hut to evade capture as he awaited the opportunity to escape to Finland following the abortive Bolshevik uprising of July 1917. There is a cinematic and fresco-like dimension to the symphony which has, on occasion, been used to accompany Eisenstein's film 'October'. The third movement, *Aurora* is named after the battleship (now a floating museum) which had opened fire (using blank shells) on the Winter Palace, which was then the seat of the democratic Provisional Government, signalling the start of the October Revolution. It has been suggested, however, by the composer's son and widow that Shostakovich may have intended a more universal message in the 12<sup>th</sup> *Symphony*, along the lines that the suffering of the people and revolutionary struggle are constants of world history.

The symphony was originally intended to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lenin's birth in 1960, although composition was delayed, perhaps due to the composer's fear that he had compromised his integrity by writing such an apparently propagandistic work and also because he broke his leg at his son Maxim's wedding (years later the problem was diagnosed as a form of polio – with the composer jokingly stating that he had contracted 'a children's disease').

The 12<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* was first performed on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1961 in Kuibyshev, with the local orchestra conducted by Abram Stasevich (a televised performance with Yevgeny Mravinsky conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra followed a few hours later). The 12<sup>th</sup> would be the last of Shostakovich's symphonies to be premiered by Mravinsky, whose subsequent refusal to conduct the first performance of the far more controversial 13<sup>th</sup> *Symphony 'Babi Yar'* resulted in a breaking down of his relationship with Shostakovich.

© Jeffrey Davis, 2020

### ***Symphony No.4 in C minor, Op.43***

Much of Shostakovich's early music illustrated his attitude to the 1917 Revolution in Russia: *Symphonies 2 and 3*, composed between 1927-29, were subtitled *To October* and *The First of May* respectively; the opera *The Nose* from the same period was a satire of pre-Revolutionary Russia after a short story by Gogol; and the ballet *The Golden Age* (1929–30) compared Soviet culture favourably to the decadent West. In the 1930s Shostakovich became more introverted, identifying with more personal subjects. This direction is most noticeable in his two largest scores of the decade: the opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (composed 1930-32 and premiered in 1934), and *Symphony No 4* (composed 1934-6 but not performed until 1961).

The 19th century short story by Nikolai Leskov forms the basis of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*: the central character Katerina Ismailova is bored with her situation, but finds comfort and satisfaction in the arms of one of her husband's workers. She and her lover murder her husband and father-in-law, and are caught and punished. They are sent to a labour camp where the lover finds another woman and Katerina, totally distraught, drowns both herself and her lover's new mistress. Shostakovich empathised with Katerina more than Leskov had, and made the real monsters of the piece those (including her husband) who bully her. *Lady Macbeth* was premiered almost simultaneously in Leningrad and Moscow, and within two years had been seen in a number of countries outside the Soviet Union. Its success led Shostakovich to consider a cycle of operas centred around either powerful or victimised women. During the winter of 1935-6 a new production of *Lady Macbeth* was arranged at the Bolshoy in Moscow and Shostakovich, who had already begun work on a new symphony, was on hand to supervise rehearsals and the initial performances. He was asked to be at the theatre on the evening of 26 January 1936, when the performance was to be attended by not only senior Party officials Zhdanov and Molotov, but also by Stalin himself. At the end, Shostakovich took a bow but it was noticed that these VIPs had already left. Two days later an article entitled ominously 'Muddle instead of music' appeared in *Pravda*, denouncing the opera as degenerate: 'a deliberately discordant and chaotic stream of sound (that could) only whip up passion'. 'Pornographic' elements of it were given as the only reason for the work's success abroad. Even more ominous, was the thinly veiled warning that in playing this 'meaningless game (the composer) might well come to a very bad end'.

At this time the Soviet Union was into Stalin's Second Five-Year Plan. Impossibly high targets had been set for the First Plan and where they had not been met, fault was laid at the doors of untrained

workers or wreckers (saboteurs). Those areas not involved in the industrialisation programme prescribed for the entire country, eg housing, agriculture and transport, were starved of investment. Learning from their mistakes, the organisers of the Second Plan in 1933 set about consolidating their achievements and began to address these very areas of the economy. Generally speaking living conditions improved, but Stalin's purging of the party of the 'intelligentsia' alienated many supporters. The murder of Kirov, the popular mayor of Leningrad, in 1934 gave Stalin an excuse to purge the Party of further 'enemies of the people'. Kirov had been seen as a possible successor to Stalin and it is now commonly thought that Stalin himself engineered his death. The terror that ensued saw many millions of innocent lives lost as he unleashed a ferocious campaign against non-Party activists, those suspected of foreign sympathies, or who were popular and influential (eg in the armed forces). An atmosphere of mistrust flourished, where enemies and rivals sought to curry favour and settle scores.

It was against this background that *Lady Macbeth* was criticised in the Party broadsheet. In 1934 Shostakovich's personal life had reached a crisis: his affair with a colleague on tour led to a separation from his wife which only ended when his wife announced that she was pregnant the following year. Their first child was born in 1936 by which time Shostakovich was being shunned by the musical world. In the atmosphere that prevailed in the Soviet Union, other less talented composers agreed with *Pravda's* pronouncements and very few were willing to take a stand on his behalf. Following the published chastisement, Shostakovich was able to do little except keep his head down and await developments.

He completed his *Fourth Symphony* and in May 1936 played it to three influential conductors: Fritz Stiedry (a central European conductor who had fled Nazism, and then music director of the Leningrad Philharmonic), Alexander Gauk (founder-conductor of the USSR Symphony Orchestra) and Otto Klemperer (who was visiting the USSR and whom Shostakovich hoped might present the work abroad). All three musicians were astounded at what they heard: Stiedry and Klemperer offered to present the symphony at the earliest opportunity whilst Gauk would naturally follow in due course. Towards the autumn, Stiedry began rehearsals in Leningrad and immediately ran into difficulties: the players found the work impossible and Stiedry himself appeared unable to motivate them. At the time much was blamed on Stiedry's musical shortcomings. This however can be disproved following examination of his record as a conductor of modern 'difficult' music and his

electrifying performances at the Metropolitan Opera and elsewhere. Little is known about the lead up to Shostakovich's withdrawal of the score during rehearsals, other than the fact that he and Stiedry did appear to be at odds, and that Shostakovich was 'spoken to' by the management of the Leningrad Philharmonic who had been contacted by important members of the Party. Word of the work's character must have leaked out to the Party at some stage and there must have been concern over the fact that the Symphony failed to meet important parts of the Soviet Composer's Union criteria for an approved piece of music - it must move towards 'the victorious progressive principals of reality in all that is heroic, bright and beautiful'. Had the premiere taken place on 11 December 1936, when Shostakovich was still *persona non grata*, performers as well as the composer could have been the target of Party opprobrium. In some ways it is surprising that the *Fourth Symphony* even reached the rehearsal stage! Fellow composer Myaskovsky commented afterwards on the enforced cancellation: 'What a disgrace for us, his contemporaries'.

The "stamping" opening theme has been likened by Ian MacDonald in *The New Shostakovich* (1990) to the megalomaniac shouts that greet a brutal dictator at a rally. The quieter second theme might be the artist casting back his mind to more sympathetic times. Once more the 'rally' thunders past, gradually fading into the distance. An ear-splitting scream (of anguish, pain, or fear?) introduces a passage of unbearable tension during which the image put forward by many commentators of the composer nervously awaiting the nocturnal 'knock at the door' is impossible to ignore. Shostakovich was an imaginative and effective composer of film music (the cinema being Stalin's favourite medium) and again, MacDonald's description of the stabbing motifs being like secret police torches flashing into dark corners during searches for incriminating evidence is extremely vivid. In the fugue which follows, Stalin's terror machine is unleashed on the people: the strings play a vicious game of tag where the accusers find themselves accused. The nightmare becomes more horrific as six grinding crescendos return to the 'rally' theme. Exhaustion however sets in and the massive opening movement closes quietly with a violin solo, the composer perhaps mulling over the horrific recent experiences.

The shorter scherzo second movement is the most formal section of the symphony, its four-note figure recalling Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and its structure (ABABA) being easy to decipher. There is however within its span considerable disruption as the wind and brass's three-note pattern successfully assault the strings' attempts at normality. Unsettling ticking sounds (time running out

for the composer?) close the movement.

One can only guess the identity of the soul being laid to rest in the Mahlerian funeral march that opens the last movement. Before dying away, a terrifying climax is reached. Once again the tense nocturnal waiting theme is heard, now from the entire orchestra. The disconcerting middle section begins with a long horn pedal note. Groups of instruments led by the bassoon, trombone and piccolo chatter in an apparently trivial manner and the strings lead the orchestra in a waltz. Suddenly the timpani introduce a massive reiteration of the funeral march which grinds onward in huge waves of sound. Despite the volume (and this must be one of the loudest passages in music) the march is unable to resolve itself and instead it broods exhaustedly over a long throbbing pedal point. As the symphony closes the only signs of life now remaining are a series of oscillations between E flat and G on the celesta.

Although Shostakovich continued to perform the work privately in a two piano version, it was not until the Krushevian 'thaw' that an official interest was shown in his *Fourth Symphony*. In 1958 he finally contemplated resurrecting his two forgotten masterpieces: the *Fourth* finally received its triumphant premiere under Kirill Kondrashin and the Moscow Philharmonic in 1961, whilst in 1962 the revised *Lady Macbeth*, (renamed *Katerina Ismailova*), was performed worldwide. Critics noted that both works were among the most original scores of the twentieth century and their invention and depth of feeling was in stark contrast to his *Twelfth Symphony*, also premiered around then. In 1973 the composer with reference to the symphony's original withdrawal stated that 'I didn't like the situation. Fear was all around. So I withdrew it'.

© 2012 James Murray

#### *Symphony No.5 in D minor, Op.47*

The opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was the largest work composed by Dmitri Shostakovich during the 1930s. The article in *Pravda* entitled 'Muddle instead of Music'. Followed shortly afterward Stalin himself attended a performance and the article which, if not penned by Stalin, certainly supported his views on the piece, attacked Shostakovich for his dissonance: 'embryos of a musical phrase drown, struggle free and disappear again in the din, the grinding, the squealing' and for the work's naturalism: 'the music quacks, hoots, pants, and gasps in order to express the love scenes as naturally as possible'. One week later a second article appeared attacking

Shostakovich's ballet *The Limpid Stream* for its 'unrealistic' portrayal of life on a collective farm.

Until the publication of the first article Shostakovich had been the undisputed 'golden boy' of Soviet music. Many lesser musicians however were envious, and consequently a fierce debate raged amongst the intelligentsia. Shostakovich soon felt alienated, as not many were willing to side with a composer now labelled as 'decadent' by the Party machinery. With the 'Muddle instead of Music' debate rumbling around him, Shostakovich buried himself in his music. He wrote that 'the authorities tried to persuade me to repent and expiate my sin. But I refused to repent...instead of repenting I wrote my *Fourth Symphony*.'

The beleaguered composer attempted to maintain a low profile against a terrifying background of show-trials, executions and disappearances. He accepted a teaching post at the Leningrad Conservatory and composed some film music (cinema being Stalin's favourite medium) and by the third week of July 1937, he had completed a new symphony. Shostakovich had every reason to keep his head down as he was known to have been friendly with several high-ranking officials recently tried and executed for treason. Possibly, the composer only escaped arrest because his own accuser was intercepted and executed before he could reach Shostakovich.

The *Fifth Symphony* conforms to the more traditional symphony format. Whereas the unperformed and massively scored *Fourth Symphony* was in three movements (two sprawling outer movements straddling an unnerving inner one), the *Fifth* was scored more conventionally in four movements: a sonata form opening, a scherzo, a slow movement and a finale that strives towards and eventually achieves the required optimistic ending.

The opening subject of the first movement is jagged and abrupt, but soon lapses into comparative stillness. Over a pulsing rhythm the violins play a typically wide-ranging melody that does not quite alleviate the previous abruptness. Over a percussive piano the low brass intone their version of a previously heard theme and a fierce climax rapidly ensues. Once the Mahler-like march has spent itself a hushed stillness remains, a solo violin playing over a series of fourths from the trumpet and three upward scales on the celesta. The scherzo also returns to Mahler, being a grotesque galumphing dance with a delicate trio section complete with violin *portamenti*. The elegiac and lyrical slow movement, scored for multi-divided strings, woodwind and percussion, pays further

tribute to Mahler. At its centre is a searing climax with stabbing notes from the piano and xylophone against massed strings. This magnificent movement closes unexpectedly in the key of F sharp *major*. The finale opens with a huge scream of protest, the entire orchestra seeming to tremble before pounding timpani and brass blow away the cobwebs of the preceding movement. This banal quick march is developed extensively to a feverish pitch before calmness takes over in the shape of an expressive horn solo. But the march is not yet over and it gradually returns, less hectoring than before, and after a brief moment of crisis, during which the orchestra seems suspended in mid air, it is with some relief that the march returns in victory.

For many years the *Fifth Symphony* bore the subtitle 'A Soviet Artist's Reply to Just Criticism' implying that Shostakovich had kowtowed to Stalin's bullying. Shostakovich explained the programme as 'the making of the man with all his suffering in the centre of the composition, which is lyrical in form from beginning to end. In the finale the tragically tense impulses of the earlier movements are resolved in optimism and joy of living'. This indeed sounds as if the composer has corrected the formalist mistakes supposedly evident in previous works. As well as placating the Party bosses, the public vociferously showed its approval following the premiere on 21 November 1937, but this did not signal an end to Shostakovich's problems for the view was widely held that the uproar at the end of the concert was in effect a demonstration against Stalin. Not all of Shostakovich's friends approved of the work, in particular the finale. Those that knew the *Fourth Symphony* perceived that to be much greater; but this was not the time to perform a symphony that ended pianissimo and in the minor. At the premieres under Mravinsky in Leningrad and by Gauk in Moscow the composer was tight-lipped about how to interpret the *Fifth*. Later however he wrote 'I think that it is clear to everyone what happens in the *Fifth*...It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying "Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing" and you rise, shakily, and go off muttering "Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing".'

Shostakovich was an avid fan of the cinema; in his student days he accompanied silent films. In all he composed 36 film scores, the first being *New Babylon* (1928), the last in 1971. He became adept at depicting every situation: light-hearted farce, epic tragedy and a heroic style (popular with the Soviet hierarchy) used in propaganda documentaries. All of these are used to great effect in his score written for Alexander Faintzimmer's 1955 film *The Gadfly* (Ovod), a dramatisation of Ethel Voynich's 1897 novel.

Voynich was an English novelist and musician married to a Polish nationalist and revolutionary Wilfred Voynich. Familiar both to the literary establishment as well as to activists in Britain, Europe and Russia, their London bookshop was used to smuggle revolutionary texts in and out of Tsarist Russia. They later settled in New York and became sympathetic to the IRA cause (Ethel dedicated an orchestral piece to Roger Casement, hanged in 1916). There is speculation that Voynich based the character of Arthur Burton on the early life of Russian-born spy Sidney Reilly, with whom she may have had an affair. Little remembered in her native Britain, Voynich became something of a cult figure in socialist countries and by the time of her death at the age of 96 in 1960, *The Gadfly* had sold an estimated 2.5 million copies in the Soviet Union. Set in Risorgimento Italy, it concerns a swashbuckling English freedom-fighter Arthur Burton who, whilst in Italy in the 1820s campaigned for Italian independence against the Austrian oppressor. Forced to flee Italy after interrogation Burton lies low in South America before returning to Italy under the name Felice Rivarez, where he takes up arms against the Austrians, 'stinging' them (hence the Gadfly of the title) to great effect until his arrest and execution by firing squad. The scenario allowed Shostakovich to pastiche the styles of Bellini, Donizetti and Italian folk-song as well as to explore his darker side in the latter half of the film. His 'heroic' style, heard in the Overture and Finale was later used in his *Symphonies 11 and 12*, works centred on revolutionary subjects. Levon Atovmian's suite of music from *The Gadfly* became exceptionally popular in the UK following the use of *Romance* in the BBC TV series *Reilly – Ace of Spies* (1983).

© 2009 James Murray ([www.kernowclassics.co.uk](http://www.kernowclassics.co.uk))

### **Symphonies 6 & 14**

Shostakovich's cycle of 15 symphonies includes some works that conform in outline to expectations of symphonic form, but others that make their point by confounding those expectations. The *Sixth Symphony*, composed in 1939 as a sequel to the conventionally shaped and career-saving Fifth, has regularly attracted criticism for its apparently unbalanced and unsymphonic structure. The *Fourteenth*, written 30 years later at a time of greater artistic freedom in the Soviet Union, is even less traditional in conception, a song-cycle for two voices and chamber orchestra on poems by several authors unified by the theme of death.

#### ***Symphony No.6 in B minor, Op.64***

*The Sixth Symphony* is in three movements, beginning with the longest, a slow movement. This begins at high voltage with an even slower introduction, anticipating the two main thematic elements of the first subject proper -which begins at the point where the home key of B minor is established, over rocking triplets. These two ideas generate a whole complex of melodies, and build up to the movement's first climax. The second-subject group, beginning with a funeral march melody on the cor anglais, is similarly a complex of related ideas, reaching its own forceful culmination. Such an expansive opening seems to require a matching continuation: but the central development section consists simply of a linking bridge passage, in which the flute muses quietly on the funeral march over string trills; and the recapitulation is severely truncated, little more than a coda eventually fading into silence.

The pattern of disappointed expectations is repeated when this serious opening movement is followed by two slighter and more light-hearted movements. The first of these is a scherzo, initially light-textured but becoming more strident, followed by a strongly accented trio section and a shortened and varied reprise of the scherzo, incorporating elements of the trio, but at a restrained dynamic level. The finale is a lightweight and balletic rondo, with a contrasting central episode in quick waltz time, initially heavy and ponderous but later with shrill and insistent repeated figures in the high treble. The coda is based on a transformed version of the heavy waltz, which brings the Symphony to a B major close in the manner of a riotous galop.

The incongruity of this conclusion has greatly exercised writers on Shostakovich, especially his Soviet contemporaries. But it can be explained by the context of the times and Shostakovich's tendency to covert subversion. The Symphony was written in the aftermath of the Stalinist Terror, and at the time of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, by which Fascist Germany was bewilderingly transformed overnight from hated enemy to trusted ally. Soviet composers were officially exhorted at the time to lift the nation's flagging morale by concentrating on light music. So the closing two movements of the *Sixth Symphony*, and especially its finale, may be Shostakovich's ironic response to official demands for lightness, cheerfulness and optimism.

#### ***Symphony No.14 in G minor, Op.135***

Shostakovich's *Fourteenth Symphony*, written in 1969, takes the form of a song-cycle for soprano and bass soloists, accompanied by an orchestra of 19 strings, celesta and percussion. The text

is Shostakovich's own selection of poems written originally in Spanish, French and German, all in Russian translation, and one Russian poem. The composer later authorised a German singing translation, and a version in which the poems are sung in their original languages; but the Russian version is generally preferred (as here). The vocal lines are in general austere declamatory; the instrumental writing is correspondingly spare and influenced by Western European modernism, with several melodies containing all twelve notes of the octave, used not constructively according to serial technique, but to express emotions such as indifference or grief.

Although the Symphony represented a new departure for Shostakovich, it has several precedents in the composers he admired. The *Serenade* and *Nocturne* of Benjamin Britten may have given him the idea of an orchestral song-cycle with words by several poets, as well as its foundation on a string orchestra. The scoring may have been suggested by Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, or perhaps by Rodion Shchedrin's 1967 *Carmen Suite*, a ballet score which reworks music from Bizet's opera for strings and percussion (and which Shostakovich had defended against official censure). Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, which the composer sub-titled 'a symphony', provides a model for the use of two alternating soloists - though, unlike Mahler, Shostakovich does occasionally bring his singers together in dialogue or duet.

But the immediate impetus for the Symphony came from Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*, which Shostakovich had orchestrated in 1962. Indeed, Shostakovich said in an interview that, because the Mussorgsky cycle was so brief, he had conceived his Symphony as a 'continuation' of it. As this suggests, the subject of the Symphony - and it was one that preoccupied Shostakovich during his long, painful final illness - is death. To this he coupled, quoting the Soviet 'social realist' writer Nikolas Ostrovsky, the idea of life as 'man's dearest possession', to be lived to the full 'so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years'.

The core of the work is a series of settings of poems by Guillaume Apollinaire: a translation of Clemens Brentano's ballad about the *femme fatale* Lorelei (set with the two voices sharing narration and enacting dialogue); a suicide's song from beyond the grave (with a mourning solo cello); a pair of poems sharing the title 'Les attentives' or 'The watchful ones', the first with a military background, the second a vignette of society (set as a dialogue); a poem sung in prison, a location associated in the Soviet Union with untimely death; and a paraphrase of the recklessly

defiant letter sent by a group of Ukrainian Cossacks in response to an ultimatum from the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, an episode of 17th-century Russian history immortalised in a painting by Ilya Repin - no 'torturing regrets' here!

The Apollinaire sequence is prefaced by settings of two poems by Lorca: a dark elegy (introduced by a violin line paraphrasing the *Dies irae* funeral chant) and 'Malagueña', a dance of death (recalling the 'Trepak' in Mussorgsky's cycle). Symmetrically, the Symphony ends with settings of two poems by Rilke: a deathbed scene (in which the *Dies irae* motif recurs) and a short 'Epilogue' (sung by both voices). Before the Rilke poems comes the only Russian poem in the work (set without recourse to twelve-note melodies). This is an assertion of the immortality an artist may achieve through his work, addressed by Pushkin's contemporary and friend Wilhelm Küchelbecker to his fellow-poet Anton Delvig. Shostakovich's 'Delvig' was Benjamin Britten, who was the contemporary he most admired, and to whom the *Fourteenth Symphony* is dedicated.

**Anthony Burton © 2014**

#### *Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 60 'Leningrad'*

At the time of the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 Shostakovich was working in a number of different areas. He had recently composed incidental music for a production of *King Lear* in Leningrad and had also re-orchestrated Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. His *Sixth Symphony* had perplexed critics in 1939 and in order to appease these critics and his political masters Shostakovich let it be known that he was shortly to begin work on an ambitious work glorifying the life of Lenin. Some of the need for appeasement was removed by the favourable reception accorded to the *Piano Quintet* (premiered a few days after the *Sixth Symphony* in November 1939). Nevertheless Shostakovich thought it best to continue to promulgate the 'Lenin' Symphony myth in order to prevent him falling victim to Stalin's purges, as had a number of his friends.

The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 caught the country unprepared as Stalin had signed a Non-Aggression pact with Hitler in 1939. Shostakovich heard the news of invasion whilst on the way to a soccer match. Immediately he attempted to join up; however his short-sightedness and sickly physique prevented his taking part in active service. Instead he assisted in digging defences around the city of Leningrad alongside his students from the Conservatory and then he was assigned to the fire-fighters. A photograph of the composer atop the Conservatory building in

full uniform was widely circulated but it was later admitted that he was kept out of harm's way, being of more use as a composer.

The siege of Leningrad (which was to last 17 months, the now famous "900 days" of Russian folklore) began in August 1941 and the city was soon being shelled mercilessly. Friends attempted to persuade Shostakovich to leave the beleaguered city but for the moment he resisted the temptation to move eastwards. Via Leningrad radio on 17 September he informed the country that since July he had been at work on a new symphony and had just completed the first two movements. Twelve days later he announced the completion of the third movement and the following day he was ordered to evacuate himself and his family. He flew to Moscow carrying the scores of his new work as well as his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. Shostakovich spent two anxious weeks in the capital (for many members of his family had been unable to travel with him) before being hustled on board a crowded train travelling east of the Urals – and therefore hopefully to comparative normality. This train contained a number of fellow artists: the composers Glière, Kabalevsky, Khachaturian, Shebalin, the pianist Lev Oborin and members of the evacuated Bolshoy company. During the train journey much of the conversation was directed towards the question as to where it was safest or most comfortable to alight. The Shostakovich family, together with members of the Bolshoy, decided on Kuibyshev. It took considerable effort on the composer's part to complete the symphony for the family had had to endure impossibly cramped living conditions first on the train and then in school-buildings upon their arrival in Kuibyshev. Finally they were allocated a small flat with a piano and Dmitri was once again able to proceed.

The *Seventh Symphony* was finished in December and received its first performance by the Bolshoy Theatre Orchestra under Samuil Samosud on 5 March 1942. The first Moscow performance was given later that month but the most meaningful early performance was that played by the 14 remaining players of the Leningrad Philharmonic augmented by Army players and retired musicians in August 1942. One can scarcely imagine the appalling conditions in Leningrad at that time and therefore marvel at their tenacity and bravery. The Leningrad performance was of incalculable value to the morale of Soviet forces. Prior to this event, a microfilm of the score had been successfully smuggled out to the West enabling early performances under Sir Henry Wood in London (broadcast in June to coincide with the first anniversary of Russia's entry into the war) and

a performance by Toscanini and the NBC orchestra the following month.

At the time, commentators found it easy to put a patriotic slant on the music and Shostakovich himself provided labels for each of the four movements: *War, Memories, Russia* itself with its wide expanses and *Victory*. The first movement opens with a stirring theme that in the composer's words 'tells of the happy, peaceful life of people sure of themselves and their future. This is the simple, peaceful life lived before the war by thousands of Leningrad militiamen, by the whole city, by our country'. The idyll is disturbed by the notorious march episode: to a side-drum *ostinato* a banal tune is heard quietly as if in the distance. Slowly the grim tune is repeated many times building over a long crescendo until everything becomes swept up by the banal melody. Finally the melody exhausts itself but the former peaceful life has been replaced by a tragic existence 'full of grief for those who died the death of heroes on the field of battle'.

The second movement was described by the composer as 'a very lyrical scherzo'. The opening melody seems harmless enough, however the central section – spiky and rather gruesome – resembles a *danse macabre* as the clarinet shrieks over a staccato bass, as if being forced to dance on hot coals. This passage brings to mind the text of Psalm 94, another project abandoned by Shostakovich before this composition: 'He shall recompense them their wickedness, and destroy them in their own malice, yea, the Lord our God shall destroy them'. He admitted later that the Psalms were a source of inspiration.

The third movement, like the scherzo, was intended to form a lyrical interlude, 'expressing the confidence in the approaching triumph of freedom, justice and happiness', but which he elsewhere stated was 'the dramatic centre of the work'. This second comment seems closer to the mark and its overwhelming poignancy has been compared to the great slow movements of Shostakovich's *Fifth* and *Sixth Symphonies*. The Finale, which follows without a break, portrays an immense and emotional struggle towards Victory. Those that were mourned in the opening movement are celebrated as heroes in the triumphant Coda.

As with much of Shostakovich's work, speculation as to the meaning behind the music has led to a revised commentary. The overall programme depicts the struggle of the heroic citizens of Leningrad against Fascism. It has been estimated that during the Nazi siege ending in February

1943 over 630,000 lives were lost in the city. Shostakovich's *Fourth Symphony*, whose premiere was delayed until 1961, leaves little room for doubt in its depiction of the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. These had been initiated in 1934 following the murder of Mayor Kirov which resulted in the expulsion of 40,000 Leningraders. At the time his opera *Lady Macbeth* had been enjoying a successful run. However, the infamous *Pravda* article forced Shostakovich to draw in his horns with the eminently lyrical and optimistic *Fifth Symphony*, subtitled 'A Soviet Artist's Reply to Just Criticism'. Shostakovich later explained away the forced optimism but with his friends and colleagues being led away daily by the secret police and informers at every street corner there was little point in resistance, for arrest meant almost certain death. The rate of arrests and executions reached their peak in 1938: indeed it has been said that had they continued at the same rate then the entire population would have been incarcerated by 1941. The number of those who died as a result of the purges has been estimated at up to ten million. Stalin's plan had been to purge the Party and the Army of middle and top management and Leningrad was home to many of these unfortunates. The central section in the first movement of the '*Leningrad*' *Symphony* must surely represent the mindless onslaught on this beautiful and cultured city by both Hitler *and* Stalin.

© 2002 James Murray re-edited 2013 ([kernowclassics.co.uk](http://www.kernowclassics.co.uk))

#### *Symphony No.8 in C minor, Op.65*

Following the instant success of his *Symphony No.7 'Leningrad'* in 1942 Shostakovich had become both a national and international hero (his picture appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in July 1942). As the German army at Stalingrad began to falter during the winter of 1942-3 it was expected that Shostakovich in his succeeding wartime symphony would be triumphalist. But this was not to be. Shostakovich disliked offering insights to his works and although the banal march in the *Seventh Symphony*'s opening movement is often interpreted as a grim portrayal of the advance of the Nazis into the Soviet Union, it could equally be argued that it also represents the cultural desecration of a beautiful city by Stalin during the purges.

Shostakovich sketched his *Eighth Symphony* rapidly during the early summer months in 1943; it was composed at a time when he was engaged in judging a competition to find a new Soviet national anthem, a mind-numbingly tedious activity habitually dreaded by the composer. Refusing such a commission was not a sensible option and Shostakovich simply chose on such occasions

to keep his head down. By the beginning of August 1943 the massive first movement had been scored and he completed the symphony five weeks later at the Composer's Union Retreat at Ivanovo. Shostakovich then showed the score to Yevgeny Mravinsky, the music director of the Leningrad Philharmonic, who had premiered Shostakovich's *Fifth* and *Sixth Symphonies* from whom he received an undertaking to perform the new work at the earliest opportunity. Accordingly Mravinsky, to whom the *Eighth Symphony* was dedicated, gave the first performance on 4 November 1943 in Moscow with the USSR State Symphony Orchestra.

The Soviet public found the *Eighth Symphony* somewhat perplexing. If outside events had shown Stalin's armies to be on the ascendant in their war against the Nazi invader, there was little rejoicing in this new work by the leading Soviet composer. Accordingly Soviet critics and the Party hierarchy were not merely perplexed - they were angry. Following the first performance in Leningrad in December 1944, the work was rarely performed (although Mravinsky recorded it in Leningrad in 1947). When Shostakovich and others were very publicly censured in 1948 the *Eighth Symphony* was held up as an example of all that was bad in 'formalist distortions alien to the Soviet people'. Unsurprisingly the work was dropped from the repertoire until after Stalin's death in 1953 and was only performed sporadically thereafter until 1960. At that point, the *Eighth*, like a number of other works suppressed during the Stalin era, was rehabilitated. Shostakovich was present at a concert featuring the work conducted by Mravinsky at the Royal Festival Hall in London on 23 September 1960 (broadcast by the BBC) and another live performance from Leningrad (February 1961) under the same conductor was issued by Melodiya in 1962. The legendary performance here comes from a concert given in the Grand Hall of Leningrad on either 27 or 28 March 1982 (experts have been unable to verify the exact date). It had been previously available via Philips but for many years mastered at the wrong pitch, which was corrected for this incarnation (also ALC1150) after advice from the official DSCH journal.

© 2011 James Murray ([www.kernowclassics.co.uk](http://www.kernowclassics.co.uk))

#### *Symphony No.9 in E flat major, Op.70*

*The Symphony No 9...is not Shostakovich's greatest work but it is not the slight and baffling trifle that is sometimes suggested.* (Brian Morton: 'Shostakovich His Life and Times' (2006))  
Shostakovich's *Ninth Symphony* was written in a few weeks during the summer of 1945, mainly in 'a lonely forest hut' at the Composer's House of the Union of Composers near Ivanovo. After the epic/

heroic *Leningrad Symphony* (1941) and the epic/tragic *Eighth Symphony* (1943) Shostakovich was expected by the Soviet authorities to mark the end of 'The Great Patriotic War' with an epic/victorious symphony, complete with chorus celebrating the 'Supreme Leader' Josef Stalin. Instead, Shostakovich wrote a comparatively brief, perky, satirical and largely neo-classical score, including more echoes of the circus than the tragedy of war. Shostakovich referred to it as *a merry little piece*. The music theorist Lev Mazel compared its character, positively, with Charlie Chaplin and Walt Disney's film *Bambi* (1942). The Soviet authorities were mystified and angry: *...they wanted a fanfare from me, an ode, they wanted me to write a majestic Ninth Symphony. It was very unfortunate, the business with the Ninth. I know that the blow was inevitable, but it would have landed later, or less harshly, if it had not been for the Ninth* (from 'Testimony' the memoirs of Shostakovich Ed. Solomon Volkov).

Like the *Eighth Symphony* the *Ninth* is in five movements with the last three linked and is the shortest of the Shostakovich symphonies. The opening movement seems to echo the sound-world Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* (1916); this is succeeded by the gentle and wistful melancholy of the *Moderato*. The third movement returns to the madcap pace of the opening. The desolate and funereal *Adagio* is perhaps the emotional heart of the symphony. Some critics in the Soviet Union took particular exception to the 'grotesque' elements of the finale and the symphony concludes with a seemingly hollow, mocking victory march. Whether Shostakovich was deliberately subverting pompous expectations or simply expressing relief at the end of the war, the *Ninth Symphony* represents a creative interlude between its heroic and tragic predecessors and his symphonic masterpiece the *Tenth Symphony* of 1953. The *Ninth Symphony* was first performed on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1945 by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Yevgeny Mravinsky.

#### ***Symphony No.15 in A major, Op.141***

*"I am very weak. Last summer I completed one more symphony, the Fifteenth. Probably I shouldn't be composing any more. But I cannot live without it..."*

(Shostakovich in a letter to Krzysztof Meyer, 1971)

*Although [The 15th Symphony] conveys an introspective loneliness in the face of approaching death, the music also reflects a sense of serenity and resignation...*

(Elizabeth Wilson, Shostakovich; A Life Remembered 1994)

**Shostakovich's 15th** and last symphony was written at great speed between April and July 1971

at Repino and was first performed in Moscow on 8th January 1972 in Moscow by the All-Union Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra under the composer's son, Maxim. As this turned out to be the composer's last completed symphony (there were some reports of working on a new symphony at the time of his death), there has been much speculation concerning the 'meaning' of the work. This is also due to the enigmatic nature of the score with its borrowings from the work of other composers, most notably Rossini and Wagner, but also due to the fact that his four previous symphonies were either given programme titles based on historical events in Russian history (*No.11 'The Year 1905'*, *No.12 'The Year 1917'*) or were based on literary sources (*No.13 'Babi Yar'*, *Symphony 14*). The 15th Symphony is thus Shostakovich's first purely abstract symphony since the epic *10th Symphony* of 1953.

Speculation has focused on the extent to which the *15th Symphony* is a self-consciously valedictory score. Certainly, Shostakovich's health had been in decline since the mid 1960s and by 1971 he was clearly living on borrowed time. There is an introspective, chamber music-like, quality to much of the score, which it shares with the *14th Symphony*. Dmitri and Ludmila Sollertinsky, in their memoir of the composer, published in the soviet era, describe the work as:

*...the summation of the creative career of a great symphonist of our time. It is in many ways a remarkable summing up...it is a generalization of all the composer had said in his previous symphonic works...It expresses eternal and unchanging values and what is innermost and deeply personal* (Pages from the life of Dmitri Shostakovich, 1979)

His last symphony was also a product of the bleak Brezhnev era in soviet history, which were characterised by an increasing level of political, social and cultural stagnation, following the relative liberalism of the early part of the Khrushchev era. It was during the Khrushchev years, for example, that Shostakovich's magnificent *Fourth Symphony* was first performed, after a 25-year delay, following its withdrawal by the composer during the *Lady Macbeth* scandal of 1936, Echoes of the *Fourth Symphony* can be heard, 35 years later, in the *15th Symphony*.

The Symphony opens with the sound of a chime – an allusion perhaps to the opening of Nielsen's *Sinfonia Semplice* of 1925. This was Nielsen's last symphony and, like Shostakovich's *15th Symphony*, was written under the shadow of heart disease, a few years before his death in 1931. Both works share an introspective, elusive quality and a gallows humour. Solomon Volkov's controversial book, *Testimony*, published in 1979, suggests that much of the score was based

on a Chekhov story *The Black Monk*, which Shostakovich had once intended as the basis for an opera. Further evidence refers to the opening movement as representing a toyshop at night (there is a precedent in sections of the opening movement of Prokofiev's *Seventh Symphony* – a work Shostakovich greatly admired) but this seems at odds with the nature of the music itself. However, perhaps, quotations from Rossini's *William Tell overture*, in the opening movement, refer back to Shostakovich's earliest musical memories.

The funereal second movement begins with sombre brass chords and becomes increasingly introspective. As with the *14th Symphony*, the *15th String Quartet* and the *Sonata for Viola and Piano Op.147* (Shostakovich's last composition) this movement appears pre-occupied with approaching mortality – eventually a huge spectral crescendo ushers in the climax of the movement, followed by the first of several references to the percussion's tick-tock rhythmic pattern (woodblock, snare drum and castanets) at the end of the second movement of the *4th Symphony*. Following a glance back to the *10th Symphony*, the movement leads into the short, agitated Allegretto, featuring a trombone glissando referring to Nielsen's *Sinfonia Semplice*.

The finale opens with more quotations; the Fate Motif from Wagner's Ring cycle and *Siegfried's Funeral March*; premonitions of death perhaps, although Eugene Ormandy, who conducted the American premiere in September 1972, suggested that the Wagnerian quotations, together with a chaconne based on a theme from the war-time *Leningrad Symphony*, indicate that this movement could be Shostakovich's final tribute to the Soviet Union's dead legion of World War Two and a plea for reconciliation – an interesting, if not entirely convincing, speculation. As the movement progresses, the doom-laden nature of the Wagnerian opening gives way to a wistful theme which seems to suggest a growing level of acceptance in the face of the inevitable. What is clear, however, is that at the very end of the symphony, Shostakovich, against a darkening background, movingly recalls that tick-tock percussion pattern from the end of the scherzo of the *Fourth Symphony*, withdrawn during the Stalinist Terror of the 1930s; perhaps a final act of defiance against those forces which had oppressed him throughout his life, as he moved beyond their reach. The Symphony concludes, as it started, with the sound of a celestial chime.

The *Festive Overture, Op.96* was written as a response to a last-minute request from Vasili Nebolsin, a conductor at the Bolshoi Theatre, for the concert to celebrate the thirty-seventh anniversary of

the October Revolution of 1917. Shostakovich composed the work over a few days and it was first performed on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1954 by the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra. The high-spirited *Festival Overture* has turned out to be the most enduring of Shostakovich's occasional pieces. ***Scherzo in F sharp minor, Op.1***, Shostakovich's first orchestral score, was written when he was thirteen years old and dedicated to his composition teacher Maximilian Steinberg (1883-1946). It shows the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov (Steinberg's father-in-law) and of Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936).  
© Jeffrey Davis 2019

#### ***Symphony No.10 in E minor, Op.93***

How much of a coincidence is it that two of Shostakovich's most frequently performed and recorded symphonies should have been composed in the wake of denunciations of him by the Soviet leadership? His *Symphony no 5* (1937), subtitled 'A Soviet artist's reply to just criticism' followed the vicious attack on *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, allegedly penned by Stalin himself. *Lady Macbeth* was hurriedly removed from the repertoire and the *Fourth Symphony*, a work then in rehearsal but of sufficient modernity to raise Stalin's hackles still higher, was suppressed. Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony* became a substantial success and continues in the repertoire of every orchestra of note. His *Seventh Symphony*, composed during the siege of Leningrad, also enjoyed a cult following. Not so his *Ninth Symphony*, composed at the end of the war: Shostakovich had been expected to come up with something triumphalist and stirringly patriotic. Instead he produced a relatively small-scale work full of biting sarcasm.

Since he was once again in Stalin's bad books it perhaps comes as a surprise to learn that in 1947 Shostakovich was given an apartment in Moscow and was made a People's Artist. Whilst this may have been a heavy-handed attempt to draw him closer under the Party's control in Moscow, it might also have served as a warning to him to act with due care since various writers (most notably Anna Akhmatova) had recently been singled out for criticism in a new wave of purges against artists and intellectuals. In February 1948 it became the turn of the 'formalist' musicians: Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian and others were criticised in sustained attacks by Andrei Zhdanov (1896-1948), Stalin's so-called Cultural Commissar. Having been through this before, Shostakovich was understandably pessimistic about his freedom to compose and said at the close of his defence at his hearing: 'I suppose now instructions will be given'. Following this second wave of personal attacks Shostakovich suppressed his *First Violin Concerto* and *From Jewish Folk*

*Poetry.* Despite being stripped of his artistic freedom and losing vital income from teaching, in 1949 he was allowed to represent the USSR at the Culture and Scientific Congress in New York. His work for public consumption (for example his film scores and the populist cantata *Song of the Forests* which received official recognition) were very much at odds with private, more pessimist works which he was afraid to put before the public.

Sources vary as to the actual composition date of the *Tenth Symphony*: according to the pianist Tatiana Nikolayeva, Shostakovich completed the entire work in 1951. However this does not tally with the composer's own correspondence which states that it was composed between July and October 1953 with some of the ideas dating back as far as 1946. The death of Stalin in March 1953 and the hoped-for thaw would appear to have led to Shostakovich's decision to return to orchestral writing.

The work opens fearfully and broodingly, making apparent reference to Liszt's *Faust Symphony* and builds eventually towards a tortured climax. There is no solace at the end of this massive movement, only exhaustion. The relentlessly savage second movement races at breakneck speed and has been considered descriptive of Stalin himself. During the third movement Shostakovich introduces two motifs, one of which (D, E flat, C, B) stems from the German transliteration of his own name D SChostakowitsch – E flat being 'es' in German and B being 'H'. The other motif (E, A, E, D, A), by combining French and German notation, spells out Elmira (the first name of a student with whom Shostakovich fell in love). Intriguingly both themes occur in other composers' music: the first is used in Martinů's *Sixth Symphony* (begun in 1951, completed like Shostakovich's symphony in 1953); the second echo is perhaps more intentional for it occurs during the first song of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, a favourite work of Shostakovich's. The final movement of Shostakovich's *Tenth Symphony* begins uncertainly, as if searching for a resolution, which arrives unexpectedly. The chirpy *Gopak* (a Ukrainian dance) is at times uncomfortably reminiscent of the terrifying second movement. The thundering restatement of the DSCH motif by the brass, horns and timpani could then be said to portray Shostakovich's triumphant survival post-Stalin, since it has been many times pointed out that this was the first symphony by Shostakovich that Stalin would never hear. Later Shostakovich made further use of the DSCH motif in his *First Cello Concerto* (1959) and *Eighth String Quartet* (1960).

© 2010 James Murray ([www.kernowclassics.co.uk](http://www.kernowclassics.co.uk))

### *Symphony No.11 in G minor, Op.103 "The Year 1905"*

(The 11<sup>th</sup>.) 'premiered as a work of orthodox triumphalism at the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution, can be seen as in reality a covert attack on the very festivities of which it was nominally the prize exhibit.'

[Ian MacDonald 'The New Shostakovich', 2006]

'Those songs were like white birds flying against a terrible black sky.'

[the poet Anna Akhmatova after attending the first performance of the 11<sup>th</sup> Symphony]

'The Eleventh Symphony is a truly contemporary work, camouflaged by necessity with a historic programme.' [Elizabeth Wilson 'Shostakovich: A Life Remembered', 1994]

'Sorrow, sorrow, weep, weep O starving people of Russia'

[Simpleton's lament from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*]

The rapid, though comparatively belated, industrialisation of Russia towards the end of the Nineteenth Century brought severe social and economic disruption in its wake. Many impoverished peasants moved into the cities to seek work in the factories (the population of St Petersburg doubled in under thirty years up to 1897). Living and working conditions were often appalling and in these circumstances discontent could spread quickly amongst the urban poor. In January 1905, after news of Russia's humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War reached St Petersburg discontent intensified amongst all classes. On Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1905 (the 9<sup>th</sup> according to the Russian calendar of the time) a peaceful procession of workers (some carrying banners of the Tsar and singing the national anthem behind a Priest) approached the Winter Palace, hoping to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas II asking for social and political reforms, including an eight hour day and greater representation. Naively some even thought Nicholas would receive them warmly and invite them into the Winter Palace for refreshments. The Tsar wasn't in the palace but troops opened fire and many of the marchers were killed (numbers vary widely according to different sources). Nicholas II was instantly transformed from the 'Little Father' to the 'Bloody Murderer' and strikes, riots and assassinations spread rapidly, forcing Nicholas to establish a parliament (Duma). Twelve years later, following Russia's disastrous involvement in World War One, the tsarist regime would be swept away completely.

Amongst those present, although not injured, at the 'Bloody Sunday' massacre, as it came to be known, was Dmitri Boleslavovich Shostakovich, the father of the composer, who was born the

following year. The young Shostakovich thus grew up hearing discussions of this tragic event around the family dining table and himself experienced the two revolutions of the year 1917. Half a century after the massacre outside the Winter Palace Shostakovich composed his 11<sup>th</sup> Symphony 'The Year 1905', officially in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution, which had brought the Bolsheviks (later Communists) to power. At one level this epic score can be seen as a monument to Socialist Realism (especially after state criticism of Shostakovich's failure to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolution in 1947); however, the fact that the symphony was started following the Soviet invasion of Hungary (1956) has led to speculation, from those who identify a subversive subtext in Shostakovich's music, that the symphony commemorated the bloodbath in Budapest as much as the massacre outside the Winter Palace in 1905.

The massive, fresco-like, Symphony is in four linked movement, all with subtitles (*The Palace Square, The 9<sup>th</sup> January, Eternal Memory, Tocsin*) alluding to the events of 1905. It also demonstrated that Shostakovich, who had suffered a temporary loss of compositional confidence following the premature death of his wife Nina in 1954 and his mother in 1955, had not lost his grasp of large-scale symphonic form. Shostakovich began work on the symphony in February 1957 immediately after completing his popular *Second Piano Concerto*. The thematic material of the symphony juxtaposes popular revolutionary and prison songs (more familiar to Russian audiences than to western ones) with military-type marches.

The eerily chilling opening of the symphony sets the scene in the frozen square outside the Winter Palace, as the care-worn populace gather to present their petition to the Tsar. The motto theme is accompanied by an ominous timpani pattern and the first of the revolutionary songs *Listen* appears. The frequent quoting of revolutionary and prisoner songs, which focus on the suffering of innocents, the cruelty of tyrants and the longing for freedom, does suggest that Shostakovich intended to universalize his message beyond the specific circumstances of 1905, possibly suggesting that the USSR itself had become a prison.

The first movement serves as an extended introduction to the tragic events depicted in the second movement, where the massacre itself is graphically portrayed in savage percussion rhythms. The repetition of the song *Bare your heads*, from Shostakovich's *Choruses on Revolutionary Poems*

(1951) features largely in this movement along with *Oh Tsar, Our Little Father*, sung by the protestors before they were shot down. The third movement *Eternal Memory*, which incorporates the song *You fell as victims*, commemorates those who lost their lives outside the Winter Palace in 1905.

The finale: *The Tocsin* or *Alarm* reintroduces earlier material featuring several of the revolutionary and prisoner songs including *Rage, you tyrants, mock us!* at the start, *Bare your heads* and *Oh Tsar, Our Little Father*. An extended march-like sequence culminates in a loud cymbal crash and we are, once again, taken back to the music of the opening of the symphony and the icy expanse of St Petersburg's Palace Square, now presumably littered with corpses. A lamenting solo from the cor anglais is reminiscent, in its compassion, of the Holy Fool or Simpleton at the end of Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* (1873). An increasingly agitated phrase from the bass clarinet ushers in the massive coda in which the perpetrators of tyranny appear to be swept away by the forces they had unleashed in 1905 and the previously oppressive timpani now join with the rest of the orchestra in an epic outburst of defiance.

The *Eleventh Symphony* was first heard in the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1957 when Nathan Rakhlin conducted the USSR Symphony Orchestra. The Symphony was highly regarded in the USSR, earning Shostakovich a Lenin Prize in 1958. In the west, however, opinions were more critical. Coming after the 10<sup>th</sup> Symphony, seen by many as Shostakovich's symphonic masterpiece, the programmatic No.11 was described as representing 'a lowering of the symphonic sights' (Robert Layton: *The Symphony: Elgar to the Present Day*, 1967) or even as 'film music' – a kind of soviet *Sinfonia Antartica* (Vaughan Williams' 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony of 1953, based on his music for the film *Scott of the Antarctic*). However, it can be argued that the inclusion of so many folk, protest and prisoner songs makes the Symphony more 'operatic' than 'filmic'. Certainly, the spirit of Mussorgsky pervades *The Year 1905*. In the admittedly controversial *Testimony – The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as Related to and Edited by Solomon Volkov* (1979) the composer describes the 11<sup>th</sup> Symphony as '*my most Mussorgskian composition*' (Shostakovich had been working on his orchestration of Mussorgsky's opera '*Khovanschina*' shortly before starting work on the 11<sup>th</sup> Symphony) and goes on to say: '*I think that many things repeat themselves in Russian history...I wrote [Symphony 11] in 1957 and it deals with contemporary themes even though it's called 1905. It's about the people, who have stopped believing because the cup of evil has run over.*'

© 2017 Jeffrey Davis

***Symphony No.13 in B flat major, Op.113 'Babi Yar'***

*'The Jews who came after had to lie on the bodies of those who had been shot previously. The riflemen stood behind the Jews and shot them in the neck. I still can remember to this day the horror that overcame the Jews, who could look down from the edge on to the corpses in the pit. Many of them cried out in terror.'* (Kurt Werner, member of Sonderkommando 4a, in a statement to the court about the massacre at Babi Yar on 29-30th September 1941).

*'I am not expecting this work to be fully understood, but I cannot not write it.'* (Shostakovich writing about the 13<sup>th</sup> Symphony to his friend Isaak Glikman, 2nd July 1962)

Hitler's armies invaded the Soviet Union on the 22nd June 1941. The conflict in the East coincided with Hitler's attempt to bring his racial policies, involving the annihilation of all European Jews, to fulfilment. At Babi Yar, a large ravine outside Kyiv, the capital of Soviet Ukraine, approximately 33,700 Jews were murdered on two days alone, (a notice posted the previous day by the German authorities had ordered all Kyvan Jews to assemble there for supposed resettlement). In total approximately 70,000 Jews were killed.

The young Russian/Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko (1932-2017) visited the site in 1961 and was appalled to find that no memorial existed to commemorate the atrocity at Babi Yar. His eponymous poem of the same year begins:

*Over Babi Yar there are no monuments. The steep precipice is like a crude gravestone.  
I am terrified. I am as old today As all Jewish people.*

Yevtushenko also condemned antisemitism more widely, with references to Anne Frank and Alfred Dreyfus (the French/Jewish army officer framed for treason in 1894) as well as within Russia itself (Bialystok Pogrom, 1906).

Dmitri Shostakovich read the poem shortly after the premiere of his 12<sup>th</sup> Symphony (*'The Year 1917'*) and was immediately impressed by it: *'Many had heard about Babi Yar, but it took Yevtushenko's poem to make them aware of it. They tried to destroy the memory of Babi Yar, first the Germans and then the Ukrainian government. But after Yevtushenko's, poem it became clear that it would never be forgotten. That is the power of art.'*

(D. Shostakovich, as quoted in 'Testimony' (Ed. S. Volkov) 1979)

Shostakovich set the poem to music, having initially forgotten to ask Yevtushenko for permission. Fortunately, the young poet was equally enthusiastic about the project, which culminated in *The 13<sup>th</sup> Symphony*. The Symphony is in the form of a symphonic cantata, settings of five unrelated poems by Yevtushenko.

Kirill Kondrashin, who conducted the premiere performance on 18th December 1962 gave the following description: *'The first movement, 'Babi Yar', is a requiem for the Jews shot in Kiev in the autumn of 1941 at the very beginning of the war. Then comes 'Humour', followed by 'In the Shop, which tells of Russian women, heroines in their own way, who waste their lives queuing for food. The next poem, 'Fears', evokes the Stalinist era when everyone lived in terror of the NKVD [Secret Police] and possible arrest. The last poem, 'Career', affirms that careers are made not by those who keep silent themselves, thereby becoming immortal.'* 'Fears', which forms the scherzo of the Symphony, was written especially for the work by Yevtushenko. It must have had a special resonance for Shostakovich who, during the period of the Great Terror spent night after night waiting on the landing of his apartment, convinced that he was about to be arrested by the secret police and determined to avoid being humiliated in front of his family.

Shostakovich, like Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov, abhorred antisemitism (when asked by the Tsarist authorities for the number of Jews studying at the St Petersburg Conservatory, Glazunov had responded that he never counted them). However, the emphasis of the first poem on Jewish, as opposed to Russian or Ukrainian suffering made the work controversial with the Soviet authorities. Pressure was placed on the first performers to withdraw from the premiere (it was suggested to Kondrashin that he might like to conduct the work without the opening movement – he refused). To make matters worse, just three weeks before the first performance, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had stormed out of an exhibition of modern paintings claiming that they looked like 'daubs made with a donkey's tail'. It was against this cultural backlash that the premiere of the symphony took place. Yevtushenko was subsequently required to amend his poem to stress that Russians and Ukrainians suffered as well as Jews and to emphasize the Soviet contribution to Allied victory in World War Two. There was little coverage of the premiere in newspapers and after the second performance (featured on this CD) the symphony was rarely heard again in the Soviet Union, though it was elsewhere from 1963.

Musically, the symphony shows the influence of Mahler, Mussorgsky and, at times (in 'Humour', for example), Prokofiev. *'The music is welded to the word; the chorus is used consistently in unison within a narrow melodic range, and often creates the effect of a choral recitation...Shostakovich sets each poem within a firm musical framework provided by the orchestra, and the emerging design approaches the classical concept of form.'*

(Boris Schwarz 'Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia', 1972). The symphony takes its name from the dirge-like opening movement, the second movement *Humour* occupies the traditional place of a scherzo. The third and fourth movements, *At the Store* and *Fears* are thematically related. The final movement, which identifies Galileo as someone who risked everything by speaking the truth, relies more than the others on purely orchestral passages to provide the links between the vocal statements before concluding with a wistful passage of great eloquence, compassion and poignancy, featuring the celesta and ending with a chime, bringing us full-circle to the opening of the symphony and the desolate ravine outside Kyiv.

#### ***Incidental Music for King Lear, Op.58a***

*In King Lear the figure of the Fool delights and disturbs me. Without him the tragedy of Lear and Cordelia would not strike such a poignant note. The Fool very skilfully illuminates Lear's character, and to portray him through music is far from easy. His wit is sharp and sarcastic, but also black, and his character complex, paradoxical and contradictory. Everything he says or does is original, unexpected, and always wise.*

(D. Shostakovich 'About Himself and His Times' Progress Publishers 1980)

Shostakovich greatly admired Shakespeare and may well have identified with the character of the Fool in *King Lear* – the 'simpleton' who speaks the truth. Shostakovich had been working on his orchestration of Mussorgsky's opera 'Boris Godunov' at the time when he was providing incidental music for Grigori Kozintsev's stage production of *King Lear* (premiered at the Gorky Bolshoi Drama Theatre in Leningrad on 24 March 1941). Like the Simpleton in Mussorgsky's opera, Shakespeare's Fool sees beyond surface appearances to the essential truth and tells Lear what he does not want to hear. It is possible that Shostakovich saw his music as playing a similar role in the Soviet state. The dark and ominous tones of Shostakovich's incidental music may also reflect his recent experience re-orchestrating Mussorgsky's opera. The original theatrical production took place shortly before Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union; it was revived during the Siege of

Leningrad, in a production remembered here by the director:

*The combination of Shostakovich's music and Altman's scenery seemed to transform Shakespeare's verses into sound and colour.* (G. Kozintsev 'The Deep Screen') © Jeffrey Davis, 2020

#### ***The Conductors***

**Gennadi Rozhdestvensky CBE** was born in Moscow in 1931 and studied conducting at the Moscow Conservatoire with his father Nikolay Anosov and piano with Lev Oborin. His conducting debut at the Bolshoi took place while he was still a student and he was Chief Conductor there from 1961-74. Rozhdestvensky conducted the western premiere of Shostakovich's *Fourth Symphony* at the Edinburgh Festival in 1962 and has made frequent guest appearances abroad, being appointed Chief Conductor of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra in 1974. From 1978-82 Rozhdestvensky was chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and subsequently, between 1980-82, Chief Conductor of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. He has made more than 400 recordings and is something of an anglophile being the first Russian conductor to record a complete cycle of the *Vaughan Williams symphonies*, choral music by Herbert Howells as well as *'The Protecting Veil'* by John Tavener.

**Valery Gergiev** was born in Moscow in 1953 and started with the Kirov in 1978. In 1994 he made his American debut conducting Prokofiev's 'War and Peace' with the San Francisco Opera. He is one of Russia's most highly regarded conductors and nowadays Chief Conductor of the Munich Philharmonic following his tenure with the London Symphony Orchestra. After the Beslan School massacre in 2004, Gergiev conducted concerts in memory of the victims of the atrocity. Gergiev is an outspoken supporter of President Putin and in 2016 he controversially conducted a concert in the Roman Theatre in the ruins of Palmyra in Syria to an exclusively Russian audience. He features on this CD conducting his own Mariinsky (Kirov) Orchestra.

**Yevgeny Mravinsky** was one of the greatest Russian/Soviet conductors of the Twentieth Century dubbed by his biographer Gregor Tassie 'The Noble Conductor', was born on 4 June 1903 in St Petersburg. Mravinsky later recalled that music featured largely in his upbringing: he received his first piano lessons and was first taken to the ballet (*Sleeping Beauty*) at the age of six. His mother was the soprano Yevgeniya Mravina.

After originally studying natural sciences in Leningrad he embarked on a career in music: he entered the Leningrad Conservatory in 1924 studying composition with Vladimir Scherbakov (5<sup>th</sup> Symphony NFPMA9970) and studied conducting with Nikolai Malko (1881-1961 -who conducted

the premieres of Shostakovich's first two symphonies) and Alexander Gauk (1893-1963). In 1931, the year of his graduation, Mravinsky conducted the Leningrad Philharmonic for the first time and having worked as *répétiteur* for the Mariinsky Theatre Ballet School he gave Glazunov's *The Seasons*. For the next few years Mravinsky gained experience with the Leningrad Philharmonic, his breakthrough coming with the successful premiere of Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony* on 21 October 1937, an event swiftly followed by his first recording that November. The following September Mravinsky won the USSR Conductors Competition eliciting the compliment from Samosud that he was 'one of the most gifted men of our culture'. Shortly afterwards Mravinsky was appointed Principal Conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonic, a post he held for almost 50 years. Mravinsky premiered many important works including Khachaturian's *Third Symphony*, Prokofiev's *Sixth Symphony*, Myaskovsky's *24th Symphony* and Sviridov's *Piano Concerto*. However the composer best served was Shostakovich; besides the *Fifth* and *Eighth*, Mravinsky premiered his *Symphony nos 6, 9, 10* and *12*, the cantata *Song of the Forests* and the *Cello Concerto no 1* (with Rostropovich) and the *Violin Concerto no 1* (with David Oistrakh).

Other premieres might have been added to this impressive list, however bad timing prevented Mravinsky from conducting the *Second Cello Concerto*. As Kurt Sanderling (for many years Mravinsky's assistant) explained in the *DSCH* journal, Mravinsky liked to work only on a select few scores at any one time; since he was about to tour with the Leningrad Philharmonic he was only interested in rehearsing the pieces he was touring with. A more serious rift occurred with premiering the *Thirteenth Symphony* in 1962; in collaborating with the controversial poet Yevtushenko, Shostakovich was fully aware of the sensitive nature of this project. The composer had (reluctantly) joined the Communist Party that year and was on the board that determined the future direction for Soviet music. Once news of the work's content seeped out, doubts were raised as to Shostakovich's suitability (one official said 'We let Shostakovich join the Party and then he presents us with a symphony about Jews!'). Both first and second choice bass soloists opted out, and then, to the composer's dismay Mravinsky also declined giving the excuse that he did not do choral music (he had previously premiered Shostakovich's *Song of the Forests*). Gossips felt that Mravinsky's wife, a Party official, had strongly advised not participating, fearing to do so would damage *her* career. Sanderling argued 'Mravinsky was a man of fear ... for the choir and the soloist and the possible problems that might have arisen by their playing this work'. After Shostakovich's death in 1975, however, Mravinsky conducted the 15<sup>th</sup> Symphony as a tribute to his old friend.

Although Mravinsky often conducted the USSR State Symphony Orchestra during the 1940s and 1950s in Moscow, he began to feel less inclined to travel to the capital and this has become the accepted reason for his decision to stop recording commercially in 1961 (Melodiya were equally unwilling to record outside Moscow); the only non-Soviet orchestra he conducted was the Czech Philharmonic. Although his last years were blighted by ill-health, Mravinsky continued to act as chief conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonic until his death in January 1988. In his last months Mravinsky spent time in a Vienna hospital and the considerable fee was paid by the Wiener Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde 'in great gratitude to the maestro's music'. From his wide discography many Mravinsky performances are automatic first choices for those building a library. Few would dispute the towering greatness of his Tchaikovsky *Symphony nos 4 –6* (DGG now ALC1603) or his numerous recorded performances of Shostakovich. Less-known but no less worthy was his championing of non-Soviet 20th century works such as Hindemith's *Harmonie der Welt*, Honegger's *Third Symphony* and a number of works by Debussy. In his own words Mravinsky sought 'to sear art and music into the minds of the people – audiences and performers – that is my principal concern, my ultimate aim'. Nobody who has heard his finest 'live' recordings (and this Shostakovich is one of most noted) can be in any doubt that he succeeded.

**Rudolf Barshai** (1924-2010) has long been associated with the music of Shostakovich. He studied violin with Lev Zeitlin and viola with Borisovsky at the Moscow Conservatoire. He was a founder member of the Moscow Philharmonic Quartet (renamed Borodin Quartet) and later joined the Tchaikovsky Quartet. The Borodin Quartet often played the string quartets of Shostakovich in rehearsal for the composer, although he chose the more prestigious Beethoven Quartet to perform the premieres. Having studied conducting, Barshai formed the Moscow Chamber Orchestra in 1955 and in 1969 he premiered Shostakovich's *Fourteenth Symphony*, having assisted in instrumentation and other matters. He later arranged the *Fourth* and *Eighth String Quartets* for chamber orchestra, these being known as the *Chamber Symphonies*. Barshai emigrated to Israel and then lived in the UK from 1982-8 as Artistic Adviser to the Bournemouth Symphony, then moving to residency at the WDR (Köln) orchestra, from his new base in Switzerland, where he died in October 2010.

**Maxim Shostakovich** (b1938) was born in Leningrad and studied piano and conducting at the Moscow Conservatory with Alexander Gauk, Igor Markevitch and Gennady Rozhdestvensky. He was the dedicatee of his father's *Piano Concerto No.2* and was the soloist at its premiere in 1957. For some years he was assistant conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic and USSR State Symphony Orchestras. In 1972 Maxim conducted the premiere of his father's *Symphony No. 15*. Having

defected to the West in 1981 he became Music Director of New Orleans Symphony Orchestra (1986-91); before this he was Guest Conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic, before returning to post-Glasnost Russia. A familiar orchestral conductor in the UK and Europe, he has also conducted memorable productions of *The Nose* (1979 London) and *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* in Hamburg (directed by Lyubimov), New York and Sweden.

**Vladimir Jurowski** (b1972): One of today's most sought-after conductors, acclaimed Worldwide for his incisive musicianship and adventurous artistic commitment, Vladimir Jurowski was born in Moscow in 1972 and studied at the Music Academies of Dresden and Berlin. In 1995 he made his international debut at the Wexford Festival conducting Rimsky-Korsakov's *May Night*, and the same year saw his debut at Covent Garden, with *Nabucco*.

Vladimir Jurowski was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 2003, becoming the Orchestra's Principal Conductor in September 2007. He also holds the titles of Principal Artist of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Artistic Director of the Russian State Academic Symphony Orchestra. He has previously held the positions of First Kapellmeister Komische Oper Berlin (1997-2001), Principal Guest Conductor Teatro Comunale di Bologna (2000-3), Principal Guest Conductor Russian National Orchestra (2005-9), and Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera (2001-13).

Vladimir Jurowski is a regular guest with many leading orchestras in both Europe and North America, including the Berlin, Vienna and St Petersburg Philharmonic orchestras; the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra; Philadelphia Orchestra; Boston, San Francisco, Chicago and Bavarian Radio symphony orchestras; the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden and Chamber Orchestra of Europe. [lpo.org.uk](http://lpo.org.uk)

**Kirill Kondrashin** (1914-81), one of the great figures of Soviet musical life, was born in Moscow into a family of musicians (his mother played violin and his father the viola). At the aged of 14 he decided to become a conductor. He studied under Boris Khaikin at the Moscow Conservatory going on to gain conducting experience at the Malyi Opera Theatre in Leningrad. By 1943 Kondrashin had been appointed permanent conductor at the Bolshoi Theatre, remaining until 1956. In 1947 he was awarded the Stalin Medal. From 1960-75, he was principal conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra. He was the first soviet conductor to conduct in the USA, where he was warmly received. He gave the long-delayed premiere of Shostakovich's *Symphony No.4* in December 1961 and, a year later, conducted the first performance of the symphony presented here, after the conductor Yevgeny Mravinsky withdrew from the project. He also conducted the first performances of

Shostakovich's *Fourth Symphony*, *Second Violin Concerto* and the cantata *The Execution of Stepan Razin*. He made many highly regarded recordings, including all the Shostakovich symphonies and the legendary Myaskovsky *Sixth* (ALC1421). Kondrashin was granted political asylum in the Netherlands, whilst on tour in 1978. He subsequently became permanent guest conductor of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, but died at the age of 67, from a heart attack, in March 1981.

**Mstislav Rostropovich** (1927-2007) was one of the great cellists of the Twentieth Century and a close friend of Shostakovich senior, who wrote both of his cello concertos for Rostropovich. Prokofiev also dedicated his *Symphony-Concerto* to him and, in his final illness, requested that Rostropovich make his opera *War and Peace* better known. Rostropovich went on to record the work. Rostropovich made his debut as a conductor in 1960 in the Russian city of Gorki, when his wife Galina Vishnevskaya was the soprano soloist in Shostakovich's orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*. He was appointed conductor and artistic director of the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington DC in 1977, a position he held for seventeen years, and went on to record the complete Shostakovich symphonies with them, the L.S.O and the Academic Symphony Orchestra, Moscow. Of Shostakovich's loyalty to the first performers of his works Rostropovich said: *'I knew that if he were to write something for cello, he would automatically turn to me, even if I had forgotten how to play.'*

**Edward Serov** (1937-2016) was born in Moscow and began taking violin and piano lessons at the age of 6. Graduating from the Moscow Conservatory in 1958, he completed his studies at the Kyiv Conservatory and with Yevgeny Mravinsky before becoming his assistant at the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra. Serov was a prize-winner at the initial Herbert von Karajan Conducting Competition. Serov founded two orchestras in Russia, the Volgograd Philharmonic and the Ulyanovsk Philharmonic and was Chief Conductor of Nielsen's Odense Symphony in Denmark (1991-5). After then, he became Chief Conductor of the St Petersburg Chamber Orchestra (1995-2003). Edward Serov recorded a huge range of material for Western and Russian labels including works by Boris Tchaikovsky, Boris Tishchenko and Ib Norholm.

**alto = a label of Musical Concepts: [www.altocd.com](http://www.altocd.com)  
(ALTO Distribution, Magnus House, 8 Ashfield Rd, Cheadle SK81BB, UK)**

**Cover image:** 'Shostakovich in thought' courtesy Tully Potter Archive  
**Design** produced by Imergent Images Ltd ([info@imergent.co.uk](mailto:info@imergent.co.uk))  
**Project Co-ordinator:** Robin Vaughan ([musicalmerit@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:musicalmerit@blueyonder.co.uk))

ALC 1067 Shostakovich: 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony / Excerpts Gafly Suite/ LSO/Maxim Shostakovich  
 ALC 1083 Shostakovich Symphony No.10 / LSO/Maxim Shostakovich  
 ALC 1169 Shostakovich Symphony 13 'Babi Yar' / WDT / Rudolf Barshai  
 ALC 1241 Shostakovich Symphony No.7 'Leningrad' / Konstantin Ivanov  
 ALC 1262 Shostakovich No.1 & Myaskovsky Cello Concs (+ Rococo Vars)/ Rostropovich  
 ALC 1328 Shostakovich: Sonatas for Viola and Violin/ Richter, Bashmet, Kagan  
 ALC 1337 Shostakovich Violin Concs 1 & 2 /Suite from Alone / David Oistrakh  
 ALC 1344 Shostakovich Symphonies 1 & 3 'First of May' / Rozhdestvensky  
 ALC 1362 Shostakovich Symphonies 9 & 15 / Gergiev/Kondrashin  
 ALC 1366 Shostakovich Sym. 11 'The Year 19 05' / Rostropovich / L.S.O  
 ALC 2507 Shostakovich 24 Preludes & Fugues (1987 classic)/ Tatiana Nikolayeva (3CD)  
 ALC 5002 (5CD) Shostakovich Complete String Quartets (incl.Op 36) / Shostakovich Quartet

ALC 1021 Myaskovsky: Symphonies 15, 27 / Russian Academic F.O/ Svetlanov  
 ALC 1022 Myaskovsky: Symphonies 16, 19 / Russian Academic F.O / Svetlanov  
 ALC 1023 Myaskovsky: Symphonies 17, 21 etc / Russian Academic F.O / Svetlanov  
 ALC 1024 Myaskovsky: Symphonies 23, 24 / Russian Academic F.O / Svetlanov  
 ALC 1075 Myaskovsky Cello Concerto & Sonatas / Marina Tarasova / Sym Orch Russia  
 ALC 1080 Khachaturian Ballet Suites Spartacus, Gayaneh, Maskarade / RPO/ Simonov  
 ALC 1086 Prokofiev Symphonies 5 & 1 "Classical" / Philharmonia Orch/ Rudolf Barshai  
 ALC 1094 Khachaturian Cello Conc/ Rhapsody-Concerto for Cello & Orch/ Marina Tarasova  
 ALC 1103 Tchaikovsky Symphonies no.2 "Little Russian" & 3 "Polish" / Rozhdestvensky  
 ALC 1116 Kabalevsky Cello Concertos 1,2 etc / Marina Tarasova  
 ALC 1131 Stravinsky: Rite of Spring / Petrushka 1947/ LSO / Fruhbeck de Burgos  
 ALC 1186 Music Viola & Piano / Britten/Shostakovich/Hindemith/ Bashmet & Richter  
 ALC 1215 Borodin Symphony 2/ Polotsvian Dances / Steppes etc / RPO/ Schmidt  
 ALC 1242 Glinka 'Kamarinskaya' / Dances & Overtures / Moscow / Ermler etc  
 ALC 1255 Khachaturian Violin & Piano Concertos / Boris Gutnikov & Annette Servadei  
 ALC 1260 Rachmaninov 2nd Symphony (unedited, 66 mins!) / LSO / Rozhdestvensky  
 ALC 1261 Dvořák & Schumann Cello Concs/ Rostropovich / Boult / Kondrashin  
 ALC 1286 Jewels of Russian Ballet (favourite excerpts)/ Covent Garden / Ermler etc  
 ALC 1287 Kabalevsky: The Comedians Suite/ Piano Conc / Spring Overture / etc / Moscow

ALC 1298 Borodin String Quartets Nos.1 & 2 / Borodin Quartet  
 ALC 1311 Schnittke Viola & Cello Concertos / Bashmet, Gutman / Roszdestvensky  
 ALC 1312 Glinka: Overtures & Dances / USSR Symphony / Svetlanov  
 ALC 1314 Rachmaninov The Bells/ Spring Cantata/ Vocalise (arr) / Svetlanov  
 ALC 1315 Rachmaninov Vespers (All-Night Vigil) / USSR Chamber Choir/ Polyansky  
 ALC 1316 Borodin & Kalinnikov 1<sup>st</sup> Symphonies / USSR S.O/Svetlanov  
 ALC 1317 Sviridov: The Snowstorm / Pushkin's Garland / Moscow/Fedoseyev etc  
 ALC 1318 Prokofiev Violin Concs 1 & 2/ Cinderella violin suite/ Oistrakh  
 ALC 1329 Scriabin 1<sup>st</sup> Symphony / Poem of Extasy / USSR / Svetlanov  
 ALC 1331 Balakirev 1<sup>st</sup> Symphony / Tamara/ Russia / USSR S.O / Svetlanov  
 ALC 1341 Schnittke Concerti Grossi nos 1 & 2/ Bashmet, Rozhdestvensky  
 ALC 1345 Rimsky-Korsakov Overtures & Suites (Snow Maiden, Russian Easter etc) Svetlanov  
 ALC 1603 (2CD special) Tchaikovsky Symphonies 4, 5, 6 / Leningrad / Mravinsky  
 ALC 2019 Glière: Symphony 3 Ilya Muromets / Cello Concerto / RPO/ Farberman  
 ALC 2505 Nielsen complete symphonies 1-6 / LSO / Ole Schmidt (3CD)