

**A Masterpiece Amid Musical Suppression:  
An Analysis of Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5**

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### **Abstract**

Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich was a 20<sup>th</sup> century Soviet-era composer. He is considered to be amongst the greatest classical composers of his time. Some of his most famous works include his string quartets, symphonies, and piano works. Despite his success and popularity, Shostakovich did not have an easy livelihood. His tensions with the Soviet government, particularly under Joseph Stalin, plagued him for most of his life. He fought a constant battle of creating music that was true to himself and that which would satisfy the Soviet officials. Shostakovich often had to adjust his composing style in order to maintain good standing. One famous example of this is his Symphony No. 5. At a time when Shostakovich was under serious threat of being arrested or killed, the Fifth Symphony allowed him to regain the respect of Soviet authorities. One might wonder what kind of impact such hardships could have on the creation of this piece. The aim of this research study is to assess the influence of political pressure on Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony while taking into consideration other factors that played a role in his composition. An additional topic that will be addressed is whether or not Shostakovich can be considered a dissident or a supporter of communism. An issue of great controversy, scholars have spent decades trying to interpret the true meaning behind Shostakovich's works. The Fifth Symphony is brought up often during these debates. This study will take a look at evidence for both viewpoints.

### **Biography (1906-1937)**

Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich was born on September 25, 1906, in St. Petersburg, Russia. He was born to Dmitriy Boleslavovich Shostakovich and Sofya Vasilyevna Kokoulina, both former residents of Siberia. His father had attended St. Petersburg University for physics and mathematics and had obtained a job as an engineer after graduating. His mother attended the St. Petersburg Conservatory as a piano student. They got married in 1903 and would have three children in total: Mariya, Dmitri, and Zoya. Dmitri's home was always filled with music. His father had a lovely tenor voice and would sing to his wife's accompaniment. Both his mother and older sister Mariya played on their piano, and Sofya would host her colleagues for nights of music-making. Ironically enough, Dmitri was not considerably interested in music at a young age. He was much fonder of reading, although eventually his interest would spark. Some of those who attended Sofya's soirées recall that young Dmitri would try to stay up late in order to listen to the music. Sofya gave Dmitri his first piano lesson when he was eight years old. It was clear from the beginning that he had incredible memory and sight-reading skills. He quickly mastered the music that his mother presented to him, including works by the great Classical composers Joseph Haydn and W.A. Mozart and Romantic composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

After a few years, the Bolshevik revolution would begin in Russia. It was an attempt at overthrowing the regime of Tsar Nicholas II. The government at the time was corrupt and did little to ease the economic sufferings of its people. There were also plenty of ethnic minorities in the country that grew tired of Russian control. World War I was still raging on all over Europe. The Russian army was having few successes on the Eastern Front. Poor military leadership and a lack of essential supplies led to countless Russian soldiers dying to the German army. The war was another contributor to the economic hardships being fought on the home front. In what is

known as the February Revolution of 1917, riots broke out in St. Petersburg (called Petrograd during the revolution). Led by Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, the revolutionists successfully forced Tsar Nicholas II to relinquish his throne in March. The next several months would witness the newly established government reorganize itself as different parties sought to gain power. Lenin and Trotsky were particularly effective in eliminating their political adversaries and gaining support from the people. Later that year, the October Revolution saw Lenin leading the Bolshevik party in a large-scale coup. Government buildings, communication stations, and other strategic locations were taken over with little resistance. The Bolshevik party quickly established itself as the majority in the new government. Soon after, Lenin would become the first premier of the Soviet Union. Shostakovich was no stranger to these events, even in his childhood. When the revolution broke out, he witnessed the violence firsthand. He watched as people from all walks of life gathered for the Bolshevik movement. He had also witnessed a young boy get murdered by a police officer in a public street, a horrifying memory that would remain with him.

After a month of lessons, Sofya had Dmitri perform for Ignatiy Glyasser. Glyasser was considered the leading piano teacher in St. Petersburg at that time. Glyasser recognized the young Shostakovich's talent and accepted him into his program. His skills as a performer excelled during this time. Outside of his early music education, Shostakovich attended school with the other children of his community's intelligentsia. Although he came from a well-educated family, he was not as interested in core subjects such as literature and mathematics. He moved on from such subjects in order to focus solely on his music education. It was also around this time that Shostakovich began to take an interest in composition. Even by age nine, he was regularly creating new works. Most of them were piano pieces, although he did experiment with other genres as well, such as setting music to literary works. Despite his strong liking for

composition, Glyasser was not much help in this regard. As a consequence, in 1918, Dmitri's mother would transfer him from Glyasser's school to that of Alexendra Rozanova, Sofya's former instructor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

Under Rozanova's teachings, Shostakovich was able to further develop his compositional skills. Another prominent figure in the Russian musical world was Alexander Glazunov, the director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory. When Dmitri was given the opportunity to perform some of his own piano compositions to him, Glazunov found his talents extraordinary. So much so that he stated, "I cannot remember ever having had such gifted children as your son within the walls of the Conservatory" (Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 18). In 1919, Shostakovich was given permission to enroll in the St. Petersburg Conservatory to study piano and composition. His teachers included Leonid Nikolayev, Glazunov, and Maximilian Steinberg (son-in-law of the great Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov). All three teachers contributed to Shostakovich's compositional development. Shostakovich stood out for his, as Fay writes, "memorable individuality of his interpretive approach" (*Shostakovich: A Life* 18). It was more about his artistic skills than anything technical that impressed his audiences. As one critic put it: "What an artist sees when he paints a picture, Shostakovich hears when he performs a piece. In both cases the work of art precedes its realization in the mind of its creator... With most pianists, it works just the opposite-they learn the piece technically, and then sometimes manage to create its musical image in the soul. This is why when you listen to pianists like Shostakovich, you forget about technique and you enter into the spiritual content of the music" (Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 19). Although things were going considerably well for Shostakovich, it did not take long until misfortune struck his family. In 1922, Dmitri's father suddenly passed away from illness. Additionally, the city was suffering from a lack of essential needs such as food. To support her

family, his mother Sofya would take up a job as a typist. She worked endlessly to take care of her children, especially to ensure that her son's musical education continue.

In 1923, Shostakovich would begin composing his first symphony. His composition professor, Steinberg, was a traditionalist and did not respond well to Shostakovich's style. Regardless, Shostakovich stuck with his vision for the work. As the months progressed, he completed the first three movements without any major problem. The fourth movement, however, gave Shostakovich the most trouble. While working on the last movement he experienced some serious 'burnout'. It took him three months to finally complete the finale. The First Symphony was performed by the Leningrad Philharmonic (St. Petersburg was renamed Leningrad in 1924) on May 12, 1926. The reception to his first symphony was overall quite positive. Even negative reviews acknowledged his remarkable talent as a young composer. American critics recognized his way of contrasting color tones and borrowing musical ideas from other sources. These would become characteristics of his compositional style.

After the success of his First Symphony, Shostakovich would spend the next few years as a graduate student at the Leningrad Conservatory (again, renamed in 1924 along with the city). Shostakovich was a regular performer during this time. He would use these opportunities to showcase his own piano sonatas alongside his typical repertoire from other composers. In January of 1927, Shostakovich was given the honor of representing the Soviet Union in the Chopin Competition in Warsaw, Poland (along with four other skilled Russian pianists). The competition was tough, and he would end up walking away with an honorable mention.

Shostakovich's next major work, Symphony No. 2, was the first piece of his in which the government had influence in its creation. The symphony was commissioned in 1927 by the government to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the October revolution. In other words, the

Soviet authorities wanted to use it as propaganda. Symphony No. 2 is a one-movement work written for a large orchestra and chorus. To capture the spirit of the common worker, Shostakovich utilized real factory sirens. He added the subtitle “To October” with the goal to “draw at the outset a picture of anarchy, of political chaos, from which a guiding revolutionary force slowly establishes order, then moves on to a massive, rallying climax of triumphant success” (Leonard 325). An analysis of the work reveals the frequent use of dissonance and intricate rhythms. Whatever Shostakovich’s intention was with this approach, these features did not align well with Soviet ideals. The government desired music that was “accessible” to the masses, that is, comprehensible to the common man. As Lenin himself once said, “music is a means of unifying the broad masses of the people” (Leonard 326). If the music is too complex for the average citizen, it fails its intended purpose. Consequently, Symphony No. 2 received mixed reception by public audiences and intelligentsia alike, primarily due to its complicated nature. Hence, Shostakovich’s Second Symphony would not make a lasting impression on the musical world.

Two years later, in 1929, Shostakovich would compose his Third Symphony, titled “May Day.” Like the Second, this symphony is also a one-movement work for orchestra and chorus. He intended the work to be a kind of sequel to his Second Symphony: “Whereas in the ‘Dedication’ [*To October*] the main content is struggle, the ‘May First Symphony’ expresses the festive spirit of peaceful construction, if I may put it that way” (Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 52). Symphony No. 3 improves upon its predecessor’s flaws, in that it is made more accessible to the common man. The work alludes to familiar musical soundscapes, workers’ songs, and other uplifting Russian works. In Russia, the symphony received mixed reviews. One of the primary critiques was that the work was over-orchestrated. Some scholars conclude that Shostakovich



lacked confidence in his composition abilities and used thicker instrumentation to compensate. American critics' reception to Symphony No. 3 was more influenced by their own political beliefs. Understanding it to be another work of propaganda, those who were fond of Soviet principles had a higher opinion than those opposed to such ideologies. As with Shostakovich's Second Symphony, the Third had failed to make its way into standard orchestral repertoire.

During the 1920s, there were significant political events taking place across Russia. Lenin understood that immediately switching over to a command economy would be problematic for the Russian people. In order to improve their quality of life, he introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921. This plan would allow private ownership of small businesses, along with foreign capital investments. It even allowed Russia's bourgeoisie, the social class despised by the Bolsheviks, some economic freedom. Despite their optimism, members of the bourgeoisie were severely discriminated against. Lenin used his secret police, the Cheka, to persecute the educated class and continued to pursue his communist policies even with the NEP's economic liberties. As Boris Schwarz writes, "the 'reversal' to capitalist techniques touched only the surface, because the State retained control over foreign trade, banking, large-scale industry, and education" (41). When reflecting upon the outcomes of the New Economic Policy, one finds that it did have a positive effect on raising the quality of life of the average citizen.

When it came to the arts, Lenin was known to have a conservative inclination. He once said, "We must preserve the beautiful, take it as model, use it as starting point, even if it is 'old'. Why must we turn away from the truly beautiful...just because it is 'old'?" In reference to the emerging 20<sup>th</sup> century art styles, Lenin said, "I do not derive any pleasure from them" (Schwarz 42). Lenin's musical tastes would not have any direct effect on composers, especially while the New Economic Policy was in effect. The NEP actually provided artists with the relative freedom

to pursue their own musical interests. Even music from the Western world was tolerated. Successful musicians from both Russia and the West freely visited each other and performed concerts. This open relationship would have an effect on composers like Shostakovich, who would be influenced by other contemporary composers such as Arnold Schoenberg, Paul Hindemith, and Gustav Mahler. Shostakovich, like many other young Russian composers, would embrace the modern styles coming out of the West and inside Russia.

Unfortunately, this free exchange of musical ideas would not last. Lenin died in 1924. Joseph Stalin, already a powerful political figure, would spend the next few years eliminating his political rivals and rising in prominence until he became the premier of the Soviet Union. The entire political climate of Russia would change with the introduction of Stalin's first Five Year Plan in 1928. Stalin's goal was to remove all traces of capitalism tolerated by the New Economic Policy. A major initiative was set forth to increase urban industrialism, nationalize the farming industry, and dispose of the wealthy peasants who operated them. Widespread violence, mass arrests, and famines were commonplace during this time. This would also be the moment in time when restrictions were placed on the arts. The Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), created in 1925 by a group of like-minded artists, was formed to promote proletarian and Soviet ideals in music. Although not an organization of the regime, they had support from members of the Soviet Party, which would allow them significant influence over the Russian musical world. Any work that did not embody communist ideas were condemned by the RAPM. Western music and styles were effectively banned from the Soviet Union (although the works of Ludwig van Beethoven, who was seen a revolutionary, would still be allowed). As they continued to gain national prominence, the Association's interests would start to conflict with the Party's. In April of 1932, the Party disbanded all proletarian organizations (there were

organizations similar to the RAPM but were focused on other arts such as literature). Despite being around for only half a decade, the Association certainly made an impact on composers. In regard to how Shostakovich was affected, Kay writes, “they forced him to become increasingly self-conscious, and they undermined his musical confidence” (20).

Taking matters into their own hands, the Soviet government established the Union of Soviet Composers (USC) to continue the task of regulating Russian music. Any composition that a composer wanted to be performed had to be peer-reviewed by members of the USC. This would also typically include a discussion with the composer about the work’s meaning and other relevant points. As Taruskin describes it, “the Union was ostensibly engaged in protecting the interests of composers, but by the same token it was implicitly endowed with the power to enforce conformity” (21). The USC desired pro-Soviet music that would appeal to the masses. Formalism, which included modernist styles and making music for individual reasons, was denounced. Instead, the USC proclaimed socialist realism as the core concept for any art form. This meant that music had to use “a realistic style...in works that portrayed socialism in a positive light, showing signs of progress for the people under the Soviet state and celebrating revolutionary ideology and its heroes.” There was no room for anything abstract. All music had to use “a relatively simple, accessible language, centered on melody, often drawing on folk or folklike styles that promoted patriotic or inspirational subject matter” (Burkholder et al. 593). The slogan, ‘Life is Better, Life is Happier’ was to be conveyed in all compositions. Although the general rules for formalism and socialist realism have been discussed, the definitions provided by the Party were so vague that composers had a difficult time of knowing what was allowed. This ambiguity often got composers in trouble with Soviet authorities.

1932 marks a special year in Shostakovich's life. It is the year that he married his first wife, Nina Varzar. The composer met Nina in 1927 while on vacation that summer. Nina was a young university student who was brilliant in mathematics and physics. She also had a strong liking for the fine arts. Marriage was difficult because of tensions from both families. Eventually the couple registered their marriage, although their families were not initially informed.

In 1933, Shostakovich would complete one of his most famous operas, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. Based on the 1864 Nikolai Leskov story, it tells the story of Ekaterina Izmailova, the wife of a rich merchant during the 1840s. She is bored with her life and feels unfulfilled. She pursues a handsome young man employed by her husband and they soon begin an affair. After her infidelity is exposed by her father-in-law, she murders not only him but eventually her husband too. Their crimes are discovered and the two are exiled to Siberia. Ekaterina, after discovering that her lover had deserted her for a prostitute, drowns both herself and the prostitute in the Volga River. Shostakovich attempted to make Ekaterina the heroine of the story, despite all the immoral acts she committed. As Leonard puts it, she is "the victim of her social and psychological environment" (329). After its first performance in 1934, *Lady Macbeth* was received as an outstanding success. It was praised by many for its realism and criticism of bourgeois culture. One critic who was rather critical of the opera said that *Lady Macbeth* "could have been written only by a Soviet composer brought up in the best traditions of Soviet culture" (Abraham 25). The opera was viewed so highly that some even proclaimed it to be the greatest Russian opera since Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*. For two years *Lady Macbeth* would fill opera houses with enthusiastic audiences. Shostakovich had achieved another major success in his early career. All seemed to be going well for the composer, until Joseph Stalin decided to attend a performance in 1936.

Stalin was disgusted with Shostakovich's opera, claiming that it did not embody any Soviet ideals. As a result, on January 28, 1936, a *Pravda* article was written that condemned Shostakovich and *Lady Macbeth*. *Pravda* (meaning 'truth') was the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In the article, which was titled "Muddle Instead of Music", his opera was ruthlessly criticized. *Lady Macbeth* was described as vulgar, neurotic, and appealing to the bourgeoisie, among other critiques. His condemnation was so severe that the government even renounced his propaganda works (including the Second and Third symphonies). The *Pravda* article served as a severe reminder to all Russian composers that their music belonged to the State.

Shostakovich knew it was dangerous to be in negative standing with the Party. The persecution of Russia's intelligentsia was an ongoing concern, and Shostakovich knew that people who stepped out of line could 'disappear' without explanation. At any moment he could be arrested, exiled, or worse. Shostakovich was left with only two options: leave his life as a composer behind or conform to Soviet standards. Music was Shostakovich's life, and there was virtually nothing that could prevent him from composing. One might wonder why he did not leave Russia and continue his career in a more tolerant country. The chances that Shostakovich would abandon Russia were very low. For starters, he was gifted with his first child, Galina, in the same year as the *Pravda* article. He had a responsibility to support his family. Shostakovich was also very patriotic and felt strongly attached to his country. Furthermore, his upbringing as a composer was fostered in a Soviet environment. There was no guarantee that he would have had a successful career outside of Russia. Thus, Shostakovich was committed to continuing his life as a Russian composer. Always aware of the dangers that threatened him, it is said that he would

sleep in the stairwell of their apartment so that, if the police were to arrive to take him away, his family would not witness the arrest.

In May of 1936, Shostakovich would complete his Fourth Symphony, which had been in the works before the *Pravda* publication. The influence of Mahler, famous German composer of works such as his Symphony No. 8, 'Symphony of a Thousand', is apparently so evident that some describe the Fourth as a 'Mahlerian' symphony. Shostakovich scheduled its debut for December but withdrew the work after hearing it during a rehearsal with the Leningrad Philharmonic. There are a few explanations for why he withdrew the piece. Part of his reasoning is undoubtedly the backlash he might have received from the government. In an interview he stated, "I didn't like the situation. Fear was all around. So I withdrew it." The Mahlerian symphony may have appeared as the, as Fay describes it, "epitome of formalism" (*Shostakovich: A Life* 96). If so, this would not have gone over well with the Party. Beyond the fear of ridicule, Shostakovich felt that the Fourth Symphony suffered from certain shortcomings. He himself pointed out the "grandiosomania" and "long-winded" feel of the work (Blokker and Dearling 57). The huge orchestra that was required contributed to these issues. Shostakovich's Symphony No. 4 would not receive its first performance until 1961, 25 years after its intended premier.

Shostakovich's answer to this crisis would be his Symphony No. 5. He would start and finish composing the Fifth in 1937. The unofficial subtitle to the symphony is "a Soviet artist's reply to just criticism" (an anonymous journalist coined the phrase, although Shostakovich is mistakenly credited for it). This would be the work that brought Shostakovich back into the positive light of the Soviet authorities. Interestingly, the Fifth is the opposite of what the regime demanded of composers. They wanted uplifting moods, but Shostakovich wrote in somber moods and tragedy. It is formalistic in that parts of it are based on sonata form. Sonata form is a

type of composition in three sections (exposition, development, and recapitulation) in which two themes or subjects are explored according to set key relationships. It also contains no traces of folk music or sentiments of nationalism. It must be noted, however, that the work contains heroic themes and is more accessible than its predecessors. Its musical ideas are also more logically arranged. Despite all the stress, worry, and uncertainty he was going through, Shostakovich produced a balanced and considerably well-crafted score. As Blokker describes it, “The only conclusion can be that Shostakovich believed so fervently in his score that he had no doubts about its value, only about its acceptance” (66). Shostakovich did not include many program notes for the performance. He did provide this description: “The theme of my symphony is the making of a man. I saw man with all his experience in the center of the composition, which is lyrical in form from beginning to end. The Finale is the optimistic solution of the tragically tense moments of the first movement” (Blokker and Dearling 66). The premiere of Symphony No. 5 was put on by the Leningrad Philharmonic on November 21, 1937. When the performance was finished, the packed hall burst into a standing ovation that is said to have lasted for half an hour. His Fifth Symphony was a colossal success, so much so that many biographers identify this work as the culmination of his early musical development. Shostakovich not only brought himself back in good standing with the Soviet authorities but also reestablished the symphony as a tolerable genre in the Soviet Union.

### **Shostakovich and His Relationship with the Soviet Regime**

Even during his young professional career, Shostakovich was recognized in Russia and abroad as a brilliant composer. The government recognized his talent and understood that he could be used as a model of a true Soviet composer. The commissioning of his Symphony No. 2 is an example of Shostakovich being used for propaganda. Stalin himself acknowledged musical talent and wanted to keep around gifted musicians who would produce music that honored him and the Soviet Party. Shostakovich's widespread popularity seemed to have allotted him some protection, but not immunity. Many of his colleagues who produced music which was not within Soviet guidelines were often punished. Shostakovich, on the other hand, was often allowed to write rather avant-garde music. That being said, Shostakovich would cover his own tracks by providing comments on his works in newspapers. These bits of commentary would help keep Shostakovich in good standing while letting him pursue his own musical aspirations. Even with the leniency granted by the government, he certainly was not able to be openly critical of them. Just as he could be used to promote Soviet music, so could the government make an example of him if he stepped out of line. Following the *Lady Macbeth* controversy, Shostakovich came close, but ultimately was never arrested by the authorities. Instead, he would be living in fear of reprimand for years at a time without knowing when the end would come. As Gerstel describes it, "Stalin reserved for him the special mental torture of fear without end" (39).

At the time of Shostakovich's death, he was remembered, as Russian newspapers put it, as "a faithful son of the Communist Party" (MacDonald 1). He had also received many Soviet awards over his lifetime, such as the People's Artist of the USSR, the Order of Lenin, the Stalin Prize, and more. The music world's conclusion was that he was a true patriot of Soviet Russia. Things would change radically in 1979, when a musicologist by the name of Solomon Volkov



published *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*. It was a collection of interviews that Volkov supposedly had with Shostakovich during the later years of his life. The Shostakovich of *Testimony* was not the man that the Soviet government had advertised. This Shostakovich rejected any loyalty to the Communist Party. He despised life under the regime. His account illustrates the realities of living under Soviet cultural oppression: “A man has no significance in a totalitarian state...A mechanism needs only cogs. Stalin used to call all of us cogs. One cog does not differ from another, and cogs can easily replace one another” (MacDonald 2). If Volkov’s book was to be believed, then Shostakovich’s character would be seen in an extremely different light.

Volkov’s *Testimony* faced harsh opposition almost immediately. The Soviet government was quick to denounce the writings. Several of Shostakovich’s friends (composers as well) also rejected that those were the real memoirs of the man they once knew. Irina Shostakovich (his third wife) gave her reaction: “Volkov saw Dmitritch three or maybe four times...He was never an intimate friend of the family – he never had dinner with us here, for instance...I don’t see how he could have gathered enough material from Dmitrich for such a thick book” (Fay, “Shostakovich Versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?” 485). Irina would also go on to claim that she witnessed Shostakovich signing each page of Volkov’s draft without reading them. Supposedly he was expecting to see proof sheets, but those never came to him. Another issue is that much of the information in the book cannot be confirmed by other sources. This gives skeptics another reason to doubt *Testimony*’s authenticity. In 1980, Laurel Fay would publish an article titled “*Shostakovich vs Volkov: Whose Testimony?*”. The author and her colleague, Simon Karlinsky, show several instances in which Volkov had plagiarized old quotes from Shostakovich and presented them as if they were spoken during their interviews together. It is

made known in the article that at no point does Volkov acknowledge that certain parts of the book originate from earlier sources. In his preface, Volkov writes that “Work would begin with a phone call from him – usually early in the morning, when the office was still empty” (xvii). Fay argues that this means there were no witnesses to confirm any of Volkov’s claims. Volkov himself admits that Shostakovich “often contradicted himself. Then the true meaning of his words had to be guessed, extracted from a box with three false bottoms” (xvii). This would only give Fay further reason to doubt Volkov’s work. “The only guarantee we are given that Volkov guessed correctly are the problematic inscriptions ‘Read. D. Shostakovich’” (Fay, “Shostakovich Versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?” 493). Fay continues with several other concerns about *Testimony*’s authenticity in her article. Her review of Volkov’s book reveals how problematic it is as a reliable source.

In the face of tremendous opposition, there were still those that spoke out in support of *Testimony*. Many who knew the composer asserted that most of the book represented his true character. Some felt that Volkov, while not presenting completely accurate memoirs, represented Shostakovich’s views on the Soviet regime quite well. In September of 1986, Dmitri’s son, Maxim, would appear on a BBC interview. He stated that “It’s true. It’s accurate. Sometimes, for me, there is too much rumour in the book, but nothing major. The basis of the book is correct” (MacDonald 7). Debate about the extent of *Testimony*’s truthfulness carries on to this day. It is still used as an academic resource by some scholars, despite its issues. Without Shostakovich to personally confirm details, we are left to speculate. To form our own conclusions, let us consider the evidence for Shostakovich being sympathetic to or unsupportive of the Soviet government.

Historical records show that Shostakovich’s family was sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause. Shostakovich’s father and his uncle, Maxim Kostrykin, were among those who witnessed

the Bloody Sunday massacre of 1905. His family, like countless others, was longing for a just society, something that Bolshevik leaders would claim to accomplish through a revolution. His family's political beliefs certainly would have had an influence on how he perceived the government, at least for a time. Reflecting upon his childhood, Shostakovich writes: "Events of the First World War and the February and October Revolutions stirred vehement emotions in our family. Even what I wrote as a child in those years showed a trend to give vent to my reactions in real life. My first naïve attempts at composition were my piano pieces *Soldier*, *A Hymn to Freedom* and *A Funeral March in Memory of Revolutionary Martyrs*, all of which I wrote between the ages of nine and eleven" (Lukyanova 17). In letters he wrote to Tanya Glivenko (a girl he was dating while attending the Conservatory), Shostakovich spoke of his support for communism. He also expressed his disliking towards the outcomes of Lenin's New Economic Policy. He served in several prominent positions. He was elected to the Supreme soviet of the Russian Federation during Stalin's reign. He also became the first secretary of the Union of composers of the Russian Federation in 1960. Shostakovich gave pro-Soviet speeches, he publicly declared himself a "servant of the Soviet people" (MacDonald 3), and he composed works that commemorated Soviet anniversaries. His public life had pointed towards a true Soviet patriot.

On the other hand, there are countless reasons why Shostakovich would have despised the regime. For one, people lived under constant fear and misery. You could only say or do what the Party allowed, and any sign of dissidence was swiftly punished. It was not uncommon at all to know someone who was arrested or went missing without explanation. And what's more, no one could acknowledge their own grief, as showing sadness was a sign of dissatisfaction with Soviet life. Shostakovich knew plenty of friends, colleagues, and even family members who fell

victim to Stalin's purges. Those family members included his sister Mariya (exiled), his brother-in-law Vsevolod (arrested), and his mother-in-law Sofya (labor camp). In contrast to claims that he supported the Communist Party, it is said that "when Shostakovich joined the Communist Party...he had evidently felt the decision to be 'a humiliation'" (MacDonald 6). "Shostakovich signed letters of protest without looking at them, read prepared statements to the press without a pretense of sincerity, and generally allowed his reputation to be used by the state in any way it liked" (MacDonald 10). Although he had confided his support of communism to Tanya all those years ago, he shared this sentiment with Flora Litvinova in 1956: "No, communism is impossible" (Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 216). Shostakovich surely would have loathed the restrictions that were placed on his musical output. He had written plenty of works that did not follow Soviet guidelines. Those works would never be published under the Stalinist regime.

It is not unreasonable for a younger Shostakovich to have been supportive of his government, particularly under Lenin's rule. He and many other composers enjoyed musical freedom during the 1920s. Once Stalin's brutal reign had been enacted, it makes sense to conclude that Shostakovich felt disdain towards the government. Life under Stalin was dreadful, as any Soviet citizen living during that time could attest. Any pro-Soviet stances that Shostakovich made publicly may very well have been out of fear. The Russian people at that time knew that those who openly criticized the government did not stick around for long. Shostakovich's survival strategy could have been to publicly appease the government while expressing his true thoughts and emotions in his music. His interest in composing avant-garde works (or, at least, in styles that were not approved by the Party) would be stifled under Soviet rule. Perhaps a better understanding is that Shostakovich was a man who was proud of his Russian heritage and wanted to support his nation's government. However, he could not support

the cruelty of the Soviet regime. Rather, Shostakovich was a supporter of the Russian people, not the Soviet authorities.

### Analysis of the Fifth Symphony

Along with Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 and String Quartet No. 8 in C Minor, the Fifth Symphony is considered one of his greatest works. Its popularity is undoubtedly heightened by the political controversies surrounding it. As we have discussed, there is still debate on Shostakovich's true political beliefs, and the Fifth Symphony is almost never exempt from this conversation. This section will breakdown each movement of the Fifth and include general characteristics of and external influences on the work.

Hugh Ottaway describes the first movement like so: "The opening movement is a subjective drama, a conflict *within* the individual consciousness, worked out on sonata lines in a way that is at once complex, closely composed, and supremely clear" (26). The *Moderato* is well-known for representing tension and

struggle. It is, as Ottaway says, complex, but it doesn't suffer from the "grandiosomania" like the Fourth Symphony. Similar to Beethoven's symphonies, Shostakovich frames his first movement in sonata form. Strings begin the

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, labeled 'EXAMPLE 1'. The score is in 4/4 time, marked 'Moderato', and is in D minor. It features five staves: Violini I, Violini II, Viole, Violoncelli, and Contrabassi. The strings begin with a leaping dotted rhythm motif, which is central to the first movement.

EXAMPLE 1

symphony in D minor with leaping dotted rhythms (Example 1). This theme, which is central to the first movement, is ominous and offers no resolution to the tension it presents. Immediately following this is a one dotted eighth and two thirty-second note rhythm. Although not as prominent as the first theme, this rhythmic motif makes itself known throughout the first

EXAMPLE 2

movement. In the second measure before figure 1, the 3<sup>rd</sup> beat ends on A, known as a half cadence (Example 2). Immediately we return to D minor, allowing for some continuity. It is a tension and resolution relationship that occurs not only throughout the first movement but within the broader scope of the symphony (the tense first movement to the resolve of the fourth).

Shostakovich then introduces the third thematic element: a contemplative theme announced by a solo violin (Example 2). It is a beautiful theme that rises above the tense, gloomy accompaniment. It is also used to contrast the bitter first theme. Observant listeners will notice these three musical themes being passed from one instrument to another. They are constantly being reworked in new ways, while still sounding familiar. As Kay describes it, “Theme becoming accompaniment to the next theme” (34). This repeated use of thematic content in several instruments is considered a use of canon. Canon is a compositional technique that employs a melody with one or more imitations played after a given duration. There is a leader, who plays the initial melody, and then the followers who imitate. The first and third themes are

EXAMPLE 3

used in double canon. At figure 9, a new melody is presented by the first violins (Example 3). But is it truly new content? In

actuality, it is derived from the

opening theme. The minor sixths and dotted rhythms are exchanged for octaves and smooth rhythms. When the development arrives, the mood becomes menacing, and the tempo picks up. The unnerving violin melody from the beginning is taken into the lower range of the horns. The piano and low strings maintain a driving staccato bass line. The scene gets frantic as the tempo becomes an *allegro non troppo*. Again, we see the three core themes get recycled in new ways.

EXAMPLE 4

The development smoothly transitions into the recapitulation at figure 32, with the reappearance of the opening theme (Example 4). At figure, we reach the climax of the

movement. The dotted eighth and thirty-second note rhythm serves as the foundation for this section. From there the movement winds itself to a close. The harp plays an ascending chromatic scale while a trumpet restates a version of the opening theme. This return tells the listener that the conflict of the work has not yet been resolved. There are numerous moments throughout the first movement in which the orchestra plays in powerful unison. They remind us of the *all'unisono* sections in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. *All'unisono* (meaning 'at the unison') is when all parts play the same line, whether it be the same pitch or in octaves. Additionally, the famous "Habanera" from Georges Bizet's *Carmen* is said to have been referenced in the first movement.

In his youth, Shostakovich found a passion for music in theater, film, and ballets. The second movement, *Allegretto*, embodies that same kind of energy and attitude. The mood is rather happy, as well as light-heartedly sarcastic. Although the shortest of the four movements, one can find plenty of influences from other composers. Inspirations for the *Allegretto* seem to

come from the waltz movements of Tchaikovsky's symphonies, themes from Shostakovich's own Fourth Symphony, and by Mahler and Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev. In fact, the violin solos in this movement are reminiscent of Mahler's Fourth Symphony. *Petrushka* by Igor Stravinsky, another Russian composer, has also been credited as an influence. The second movement is set in an ABA scherzo and trio pattern (a scherzo, trio, then repeat of the scherzo). Low strings begin the movement with a driving baseline, before being taken over by a

lighthearted melody in the woodwinds.

At figure, we are introduced to a playful yet mischievous melody from the woodwinds. The horn section adds to the excitement with their own march-

The image shows a musical score for a violin solo. It features three staves: Violin I (Vai I), Violin II (Vai II), and Arpa. The Violin I staff has a 'V.no solo' marking and a 'pizz.' (pizzicato) marking. The Violin II staff has a 'pizz.' marking. The Arpa staff has a '54' marking. The tempo markings are 'rit.' and 'a tempo'. The solo concludes with a 'Solo' marking.

EXAMPLE 5

like theme. A serene violin solo breaks us free from all the energy (Example 5). After the soloist concludes, a solo flute carrying the solo further along. Much like the first movement, the themes of the *Allegretto* are reintroduced, although without all of the variation.

The third movement, *Largo*, is a complete tone shift from the playful second movement. It is a song of mourning and sorrow. It is considered the “emotional core” of the Fifth Symphony (Schwartz, Oregon Symphony Program Notes) The third movement is commonly seen as a requiem. But who is it a requiem for? While it is not entirely clear, one could infer that it is in memory of Shostakovich's lost family members. He may also be honoring his fallen colleagues, such as his ally Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky, who was murdered by the regime in 1937. Shostakovich may have had in mind all the countless citizens who suffered under Stalin's reign. Of course, it may be a requiem for all of them. One notable feature of the third movement is the lack of brass instruments. Traditionally, brass quintets have been used in Soviet secular funerals.



Perhaps the absence of brass in the *Largo* represents the people's inability to openly mourn for those lost. Again, Shostakovich's writing reveals Mahlerian influences. The entire movement is comparable to two movements from Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. Specifically, 'Der Einsame im Herbst' and 'Der Abschied'. The strings and harp used in the *Largo* are characteristic of the *Adagietto* of Mahler's Symphony No. 5. Another reference Shostakovich included was to the music of the Orthodox Church, something that concertgoers would have picked up on. The violins are divided into three sections, while the violas and cellos are divided into two sections each. Unlike the Fourth,

Shostakovich only uses as many instruments as he needs. The movement starts off with strings, their sound as beautiful as it is

EXAMPLE 6

sorrowful. At figure 79, a solo flute cries out (Example 6). Its melody is actually inspired by the first violin solo from the opening movement. A second flute quickly joins in to offer a countermelody. The flute duet continues to appear several times as the movement progresses.

We soon reach a musical high point as the melody is hammered out in harsh octaves. The sforzandos that the double basses emit resemble "violent barks of pain" (Taruskin 42). The tension of this moment doesn't truly die down. From there, the music slowly makes its way to

the end. A harp and celesta duet, supported by the strings, repeat the

EXAMPLE 7

flute solo from earlier (Example 7). The musical atmosphere is quite reminiscent of the ending of Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony. It is an eerie ending, but the *Largo* does not finish without one final chord from the strings: An F-sharp major triad. After all that sorrow, the listener is

given a moment of hope. It is well known that many of the concertgoers at the symphony's premier openly wept at its third movement. The cause of this was the heavy emotions of the movement, combined with the fear and oppression of Soviet life, that led to the emotional outburst. Violinist Juri Jelagin, one of the premier's attendees, had this to say: "The complex background of events and moods had to combine with the beautiful music of the Fifth Symphony to arouse the audience to the pitch of emotion which broke in the Leningrad auditorium" (Taruskin 36). At the time, crying was seen as sign of discontent with Soviet life. The *Largo* was so emotionally powerful that audience members could not help but shed tears despite the risk of doing so.

IV.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the fourth movement, 'Allegro non troppo'. The score is for a full orchestra, with the following instruments listed on the left: Piccolo, 2 Flauti, 2 Oboi, Clarinetto piccolo (Bb), 2 Clarinetti (Bb), 2 Fagotti, Contrafagotto, 4 Corni (F), 3 Trombe (B), 3 Tromboni, Tuba, Timpani, and 2 Arpe. The music begins with a strong, rhythmic brass entry, marked with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The brass instruments (trumpets, trombones, and tuba) play a powerful, rhythmic pattern. The timpani also play a strong, rhythmic pattern. The woodwinds and strings enter later in the movement. The tempo is marked 'Allegro non troppo' and the time signature is 4/4. The score is numbered 197 at the beginning.

EXAMPLE 8

After the quiet conclusion of the *Largo*, we are met with the forceful opening of the finale (*Allegro non troppo*), courtesy of the brass. The absence of brass in the previous movement helps to give more impact when the finale hits (a technique that Mahler had used in his Fifth Symphony). Similar to many of Mahler's climaxes, the musical scene here is abrupt and near frantic. The brass and timpani triumphantly begin the first strain of the march (Example 8). Soon after, the second strain is introduced by the strings. These melodies continue to be repeated several times over. Eventually we get a change of pace, but one that is even more frenzied. The tension here is eventually released into a beautiful, exultant moment. A new section provides us with a much-needed moment of rest. PBS Keeping Score claims that this slow section is based off of composer Modest Mussorgsky's

*Boris Godunov* – an opera in which the people are forced to praise the Tsar (PBS Keeping Score). The musical atmosphere stays quiet for a while. The energy begins to grow, slowly at first, and is released in a magnificent musical moment (Example 9). From there the orchestra gradually builds to the coda. It is during this interlude that the violins allude to a song that Shostakovich had set to one of Alexander Pushkin’s poems. It is the first movement of the Four Romances on Poems by Pushkin (1937). One of its notable

EXAMPLE 9

passages is: “And the waverings pass away/From my tormented soul/As a new and brighter day/Brings visions of pure gold” (Steinberg, San Francisco Symphony Program Notes). Using, as Robert Philip describes it, a “Mahlerian twist”, the climax of the finale turns from D minor to D major (712). It is a triumphant ending in a major key. The coda is the “culmination of a musical process which began in the work’s opening bars” (Souster 9). After all of the efforts made to relieve the conflict built up throughout the work, we have finally reached that moment. It is a “coming to terms” as Ottaway describes it (28).

As mentioned before, Shostakovich received a standing ovation that lasted half an hour. One audience members recall that: “[Shostakovich] came out white as a sheet, biting his lips. I think he was close to tears” (Schwartz, Oregon Symphony Program Notes). Despite the triumph of the Fifth’s ending, there is a small detail that in the coda that is worth noting. Although in the major key, concert B flats are included in some voices, allowing for a minor touch. This detail may suggest that we are left with a celebratory finale that is not entirely genuine.

The Fifth Symphony is a true showcase of Shostakovich's style. One major aspect is making references to other composers. The conflict-and-triumph style that the Fifth Symphony is based on is associated with other symphonies by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Mahler. In fact, Shostakovich is considered to be part of the Beethovenian symphonic tradition. The four movements, his use of sonata form, and even the way Shostakovich uses the orchestra are indicative of Beethoven. The composer who has made the greatest impact on Shostakovich is Mahler. But even when considering all of the composers that have influenced him, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony is very individual. It is recognized as a benchmark in his development as a composer. Symphony No. 5 is a continuation of the First, while Symphonies No. 2-4 were compositional experiments that helped to refine his skills as a composer. Many see the Fifth as the culmination of his early career. Shostakovich had also pulled ideas from his own previous works. His Third Symphony had utilized large melodic leaps as well. Although they had no notable purpose then, Shostakovich uses them in the *Moderato* of the Fifth for emotional value. In both symphonies, thematic material is played in octaves (called orchestral unison). Shostakovich would use this technique in the *Moderato* to contrast the double cannon. One can also draw connections to his Cello Sonata Op. 40 (1934). Both works contain four movements, are in D minor, and have their first movements based on sonata form. Both of their first movements have similar thematic material. They also share rhythmic patterns and melodic content.

There is no doubt that political pressure forced Shostakovich to change his composition style for the Fifth Symphony. He was already in negative standing with the Soviet authorities after the *Pravda* article. Furthermore, the political climate had become even worse since the *Lady Macbeth* fallout. Stalin's purges were in full swing, and any hint of dissidence was

punished. There are several musical aspects of the Fifth Symphony that are different from its predecessors. For one, the musical ideas of the Fifth are presented more logically and straightforward, thereby making it more accessible than its predecessors. It is an example of “Stalinist neoclassicism” (Taruskin 26), that is, the heroic neoclassicism that socialist realism desires. The orchestration is downsized from the massive ensemble of the Fourth Symphony. Unlike the Fourth, Shostakovich avoids the ‘grandiosomania’ and goes for that more accessible approach to his composition. Shostakovich’s compositional style certainly would have been different if he were able to pursue his own interests. Shostakovich would have continued to pursue avant-garde styles from the West and explore musical ideas outside of neoclassicism. Modernism had entered the Russian musical scene while Shostakovich was a young composer. If his more nontraditional early works were any indication, it is that he would have pursued that avenue of composition. Shostakovich himself had said: “You ask if I would have been different without ‘Party guidance’? Yes, almost certainly. No doubt the line I was pursuing when I wrote the Fourth Symphony would have been stronger and sharper in my work. I would have displayed more brilliance, used more sarcasm, I could have revealed my ideas openly instead of having to resort to camouflage; I would have written more pure music” (Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 268).

A widely debated topic among scholars is whether or not Shostakovich included anti-Soviet themes in the Fifth Symphony. Many would claim that parts of the symphony actually mock the regime. Was Shostakovich daring enough to take such a risk in such a dangerous political climate? Propaganda and fear subdued any willingness to openly (even privately) challenge the Party. Even the most casual of criticisms toward the government were shut down. The risk was that if an ordinary citizen could pick up on any mockery, so could an informer. However, one cannot deny the odd nature of the Fifth Symphony. If Shostakovich’s goal were to

simply rehabilitate himself, he would have composed something more uplifting and filled it with nationalism and folk-song allusions. Instead, the Fifth in many ways was the opposite of what the Party expected. They wanted joyful themes, he gave them dark and tragic ones. There was an absence of folk-song allusions. Instead of criticizing the government, perhaps he intended on honoring the Russian people, such as with the requiem that is the third movement. It is possible that the overwhelming acceptance of the Fifth could have protected Shostakovich from any disgruntled authorities. It is in the author's opinion that Shostakovich masterfully crafted a symphony that would not only please Soviet authorities, but that would also remain true to his style.

### **Biography (1937-1975)**

The same year that the Fifth Symphony was completed, Shostakovich was hired to teach composition at the Leningrad Conservatory. He would also teach composition at the Moscow Conservatory starting in 1943. This provided Shostakovich with a steady income to supplement his compositional efforts.

As World War II kicked off in Europe, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact in 1939. It wasn't long though until Germany broke that peace by invading Russia in the summer of 1941. After the USSR declared war on Germany, Shostakovich immediately tried to enlist in the army. He was rejected twice, and eventually joined the Home Guard. "I am going to defend my country and am prepared, sparing neither life nor strength, to carry out any mission I am assigned" (Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 123). The German forces eventually made their way towards Leningrad. Shostakovich was in Leningrad when it came under siege. The city was blockaded, which led to a food scarcity. Shostakovich felt a desire to

create a symphony that honored the people of Leningrad and the victory that was surely to come. He worked feverishly on his Seventh Symphony, subtitled “Leningrad.” He would even take the score with him while attending to his Guard duties. He finished the work in December of 1941. It pictures the serene life of the Russian people before the war, followed by the struggles that they go through once war takes away that life. The finale is a celebration of their anticipated victory. The government recognized that they could use the Seventh as wartime propaganda. It could be used to champion the Soviet cause. Within days of its completion, Shostakovich was awarded a Stalin Prize. Shostakovich confirms the Seventh’s patriotic theme in an article in *Pravda*: “The war we are fighting against Hitler is an eminently just war. We are defending the freedom, honor, and independence of our Motherland...I dedicate my Seventh Symphony to our struggle with fascism, to our coming victory over the enemy, and to my native city, Leningrad” (Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 131). The Seventh was unlike any musical work before. As conductor Nicolas Slonimsky wrote, “No composer before Shostakovich had written a musical work depicting a still raging war, and no composer had ever attempted to describe a future victory, in music, with such power and conviction, at a time when his people fought for their very right to exist as a nation” (Blokker and Dearling 81).

The Seventh Symphony premiered on March 5, 1942. The reception was incredible, and news of its success spread across Russia and abroad. Over the following months, performances of the Seventh took place all over Russia and the West. One of the most famous performances took place in August in Leningrad while it was still under the German blockade. Capable players of the city’s symphony and from other institutions were called to perform the piece. They even brought players who were stationed in the trenches. The military played the performance through loudspeakers throughout the city, specifically to psych out the German soldiers. To ensure

silence in Leningrad the night of the performance, the Russian military carried out an artillery bombardment on the front.

Written in 1943, the Eighth Symphony is another of Shostakovich's war-time symphonies. Written at the height of the war, the Eighth is a story of coming to terms with the human sufferings of war. "The Seventh became a symbol for victory; the Eighth is a reflection of a sad and burdened reality" (Blokker and Dearling 102). Careful listeners will notice in the first movement references the opening theme of the Fifth Symphony. The reception of the Eighth Symphony was overall positive, although the response from critics was complicated by a couple factors. For one, the reception of the Seventh Symphony was so exceptional that the next symphony would have an impossibly high bar to reach. This certainly did not help Shostakovich out, although his fame would be a factor that boosted positive reception.

Shostakovich had composed some of his best works during the 1940s. This includes the Symphony No. 8, Piano Trio (1944) and Violin Concerto No. 1 (1947-48). The tone of these works is noticeably dark. This would not help Shostakovich maintain good standing with the government, given what was to soon come. With the start of the Cold War, the Soviet authorities began to crack down on the arts. In 1948, an infamous conference was held by Soviet leader Andrey Zhdanov. Many prominent Russian musical figures were condemned, Shostakovich included. This is Shostakovich's second fall from grace. As a consequence, he would lose his job at both conservatories.

In March of 1949, Shostakovich received the opportunity to visit America as an ambassador at the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace. Shostakovich was invited by none other than Stalin himself over a private phone call. Although he tried to excuse himself from the event, Stalin made arrangements for his departure. His reputation in the United States



was quite positive, making him a prime candidate for the event. At this time, the Cold War was starting to get into full swing. This World Peace Conference was an attempt to bridge the cultural divide between the two superpowers. Shostakovich's arrival was made known in nearly every article that covered the event. Shostakovich gave a handful of talks during his time in New York. His speech on March 26 was rather controversial for several reasons. The speech accused America of imperialism and other wrongdoings. He also confirmed his acceptance of the criticism given by the Soviet authorities. A harsher part of Shostakovich's speech was his criticism of Igor Stravinsky: "[He] betrayed his native land and severed himself from his people by joining the camp of reactionary modern musicians" (Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 173). It is safe to say that this was a prepared speech written by someone other than Shostakovich. They would not have allowed him the freedom to speak his mind, especially after denouncing him a year prior. His trip was closely monitored by the government, including any speeches. When an audience member asked for him to describe the effect that the Soviet government's criticism had on Russian artists, Shostakovich's reply was that it helped him and advanced his abilities as a composer. Regardless of whether Shostakovich believed it, he would not have had the option to express a negative view. Outside of forums, debates, and speeches, Shostakovich had opportunities to listen to and perform music. At the end of the event, he played the second movement from the Fifth Symphony on a piano in Madison Square Garden to an enthusiastic audience. He was gifted a scroll that was signed by forty-two musicians. Among those were Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, and Eugene Ormandy. Inscribed on the scroll was a heartfelt message: "Music is an international language, and your visit will serve to symbolize the bond which music can create among all peoples. We welcome your visit also in the hope that this kind of cultural interchange can aid understanding among our peoples and thereby make possible an

enduring peace” (Klefsstad, *Shostakovich and the Peace Conference*). Shostakovich’s musical presentations were better received than any oral presentation. The public response suggests that they found his music to be more genuine than his words. Americans continued to appreciate and accept Shostakovich as a result of his visit. They looked past the Soviet propaganda and saw the true man through his music.

March 5, 1953 marks a significant date in Russian history. It is the day that Joseph Stalin died. There was a state funeral along with four days of national mourning. While publicly the nation was grieving over the loss of the Soviet Union’s most infamous leader, there undoubtedly were many who celebrated the end of the Stalinist regime. Surely emboldened by Stalin’s passing and anticipating a more liberal musical atmosphere, Shostakovich composed his Tenth Symphony later that year. Much like the Fifth Symphony, it had characteristics that went against Soviet policies (this time it was those put in place by Zhdanov). Again, the symphony was so well-received that it was able to overcome any offenses to the government. It is here that Shostakovich uses his initials as a musical motto – DSCH. These initials translate to D, E flat, C, and B. In the German language, B flat is referred to as B and B natural is referred to as H. E flat is referred to as Es and is pronounced as an ‘S’. Shostakovich also uses this motto in his String Quartets No. 7-8 (1960) and his Fifteenth Symphony (1971), along with other works.

In December of 1954, Shostakovich was notified that his wife Nina had been hospitalized. When he arrived, he learned that she developed a cancerous tumor. An emergency operation on it only left her in a coma, and she died a short time later. This loss would have a large effect on Shostakovich’s life. Nina had been there during his greatest struggles. She helped him maintain his spirits when things were stressful and assisted him with managing his affairs. Her absence left him to handle everything by himself, including raising their two children. In the

summer of 1956, Shostakovich would unexpectedly get married to Margarita Kainova. Margarita was an activist and instructor. The two were both judging for a contest that year. With help from a friend, Shostakovich made her acquaintance and after a few days proposed. Margarita was not receptive of Shostakovich's musical life as Nina had been. She did well though to help him establish stability in their household. Unfortunately, the marriage would not last long. In the summer of 1959, they ended their relationship after three years of marriage.

In April of 1960, the First Constituent Congress of Composers of the Russian Federation held a summit in Moscow. The Union of Composers was formally created. Later that month, Shostakovich was elected to be its first secretary. This is the highest leadership position one could take up in this organization. It should be clear at this point that Shostakovich despised the rule of the Soviet regime. Although he would never dare express this publicly, it is a sentiment that he shared privately with some close friends. It is with great surprise then that Shostakovich applied to join the Communist Party in 1960. It seems that he did not do this from his own will, as it had been a source of great distress. When Shostakovich was in Leningrad in June of 1960, his friends Isaac Glikman and Lev Lebedinsky witnessed Shostakovich suffer an emotional breakdown. Knowing it would cause him such grief, it seems odd that Shostakovich would join the Communist Party. The most likely explanation is that he was pressured into joining. His third wife, Irina, gave some insight into the true nature of this mystery. She says that the Party had been threatening him to join the Communist Party. They had the power to "prevent the performing of his music...He already knew what this would be like, from *Lady Macbeth* and the Zhdanov period" (Lesser 159). Since Shostakovich was the secretary of the Composers' Union, it is likely that he was subjected to pressure from his contemporaries. Such a high position in the Soviet Union would have garnered that kind of coercion. Apparently, Shostakovich had told his

friends Glikman and Lebedinsky two different accounts of what occurred. Glikman's story is that Shostakovich had to become member in order to be elected as head of the Union of Composers. Lebedinsky recalls that Shostakovich admitted to giving in to the pressure while under the influence of alcohol. Either way, it seems that political pressure was the culprit to Shostakovich's enlistment. Another question that arises is why Shostakovich waited until 1960 to finally apply for Party membership. One explanation is that this was a very lonely time of his life. His first wife had passed away and his second marriage had also ended. This would have made him emotionally vulnerable to being pressured into joining the Party.

Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8 (1960) is described as an autobiography of sorts since it references several of his previous works. The work carries a grim tone. It was written immediately after Shostakovich's visit to Dresden, Germany, a city devastated by the Second World War. He was originally supposed to score a film that was based on the battle in the city. However, he composed this work instead. He confided to a friend after the trip: "However much I tried to draft my obligations for the film, I just couldn't do it. Instead I wrote an ideologically deficient quartet nobody needs. I reflected that if I die some day then it's hardly likely anyone will write a work dedicated to my memory. So I decided to write one myself. You could even write on the cover: 'Dedicated to the memory of the composer of this quartet'" (Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 217). His friend Lebedinsky believed that Shostakovich had intended for the Eighth Quartet to be his last composition. Supposedly Shostakovich planned on taking his own life after the Dresden trip, although Dmitri's son Maxim has claimed this story to be untrue. The bleakness of this whole affair can be attributed to Shostakovich's acceptance into the Communist Party. It had caused him an incredible amount of anguish, which would lead him to

such a dark place. The reception of the Eighth String Quartet was exceptional. Even without understanding its true meaning, critics recognized its emotional power.

In June of 1962, Shostakovich announced that he would be marrying his third wife, Irina Supinskaya. He had met Irina a few years earlier through his friend Lebedinsky. She was about 29 years younger than him, although his family did not seem to mind. She was intelligent, humble, and hardworking. Irina would deliver stability and peace to Shostakovich's life. Her care for him during the years that his health declined would prove her to be his most important companion.

Shostakovich's Symphony No. 13 (1962), subtitled "Babi Yar" is set to a collection of poems by Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Shostakovich called Yevtushenko with hopes to receive the poet's permission to set *Babi Yar* to music. Yevtushenko was more than happy to do so, although admittedly Shostakovich had already written the first movement. There are five movements, each inspired by one of Yevtushenko's poems: *Babi Yar*, *Humor*, *In the Store*, *Fears*, and *A Career*. All of the poems concern issues of Soviet life. Shostakovich himself had said: "In the Thirteenth Symphony I dealt with the problem of civic, precisely 'civic,' morality" (Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 228). *Babi Yar* memorializes the people (mostly Jewish) who were massacred by Nazis in the Babi Yar ravine (located in present-day Kiev). This movement is full of dark themes that evoke feelings of tragedy and despair. Shostakovich's use of muted brass, a solemn bell, and a male chorus only add to the atmosphere. *Humor* is the story of a government trying to control or eliminate Humor. Humor, seen as a character, always finds a way to persevere. *In the Store* describes the hardships of women in Soviet Russia and how they are exploited. *Fears* speaks about the people of Russia overcoming their fears of the past. Russia has conquered her fears, but that has given rise to even greater fear among her enemies. The author then wishes that men

would be afraid of committing immoral acts. In the last lines, Yevtushenko confesses to being afraid of “not writing with all my power”. This could either mean the author is unable to completely capture the beauty of the new Russia, or that the “fear of writing the truth” (Blokker and Dearing 140) still lingers. *A Career* commemorates famous figures of the past, such as Galileo, who held true to their convictions despite opposition. Yevtushenko also mentions modern examples: cosmonauts and the doctors who fought against cholera. Shostakovich uses laughter in the choir to mock the Soviet state. Like those figures of the past, they may receive backlash for speaking truth, but they will become all the more famous because of it. Given that the Thirteenth Symphony criticized the government, it did face immediate suppression. Efforts were made to prevent the public from hearing about the Thirteenth. *Babi Yar* and *Fears* were attacked the most. Officials forced Yevtushenko to provide changes to the texts of those two poems. They wanted the first movement to show that Russians and Ukrainians had been murdered beside Jews. Further performances of the Thirteenth Symphony were not banned outright but were certainly not supported by the government. Anti-Semitic sentiments were prevalent throughout Russia. Shostakovich knew that his work would face resistance, but his hatred of anti-Semitism gave him the courage to go through with it.

In late June of 1975, Shostakovich would exchange several phone calls with violist Fyodor Druzhinin. Shostakovich was planning on composing a viola sonata for him. By July 4 he had already written the first and second movements. Knowing that he would likely be admitted to a hospital soon, Shostakovich quickly finished the final two movements the next day. Shostakovich’s health had been on the decline, hence the need to be hospitalized. On top of deteriorating muscle control in his right hand, Shostakovich was having complications with his heart and lungs. Even in the hospital, he was working diligently to get a copy of the Viola Sonata

to Druzhinin. In early August, Shostakovich was allowed to leave the hospital but suffered a heart attack not long after due to metastatic cancer. Hoping to perform the sonata for the composer, Druzhinin worked intensely to prepare the piece. Unfortunately, he would never get that chance. On August 9, 1975, Shostakovich would suddenly suffocate and pass away. Shostakovich received a formal funeral provided by the state. Members from the Composers' Union and other Soviet figures gave speeches at the memorial service. Dmitri Shostakovich was buried next to his first wife Nina.

On September 25, 1975, what would have been his 69<sup>th</sup> birthday, concerts were held across Russia in honor of Dmitri Shostakovich. After the concert at the Moscow Conservatory, some friends congregated at Shostakovich's apartment to be the first listeners of his Viola Sonata. Druzhinin premiered the work soon after in Leningrad. The audience was ecstatic with applause at its conclusion. Truly Shostakovich was to be remembered in the hearts and minds of his people. The Soviet government took many steps to preserve the memory of Shostakovich: One of Alexander Island's peninsulas (in Antarctica) was named after him, his essays and compositions were compiled and published, conservatories created scholarships in his name, and his image was put on a postage stamp, among other commemorative actions. Outside of Russia, composers everywhere honored his memory with their own musical tributes. The legacy of Dmitri Shostakovich has made a lasting impact on the musical world. His creativity as a composer, especially while under the restrictions of the Soviet regime, has placed him among the greatest composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Conclusion

Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich's life was unique among most composers. He lived under a government that punished those who strayed from its ideologies. Despite the suppression of non-Soviet music, Shostakovich prevailed and produced some of the greatest works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even today, his legacy is influencing our modern culture. In particular, his influence has been seen in modern film music. For example, the film *The Lobster* (2015) quotes Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8. In one scene from *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), one can hear the second waltz from his Jazz Suite No. 2. Listeners familiar with the Fifth Symphony may hear the opening motif from the first movement appear in the season two finale of the television series *The Mandalorian*.

Discerning Shostakovich's true feelings towards his government can be difficult. We cannot accept his public statements at face value, as any public speech was highly regulated. Shostakovich preferred to speak through his music but interpreting the true meaning behind some of his works can be challenging. We tend to fantasize periods such as the Stalin-era. We see them as times of heroism, and we project those ideas onto the people of the past. That is why many prefer to picture Shostakovich as a challenger to the regime. However, acting out as a dissident would have garnered severe backlash from the authorities. It is more accurate to say that Shostakovich was proud of his Russian heritage and his country. After all, he did serve his nation with great passion during the Second World War. He wanted to support his government but could not stand with the oppressive tactics of the Soviet regime. There is no doubt that he despised the way they were suppressing the arts and instilling fear into the people.

The Fifth Symphony continues to be a subject of debate as scholars attempt to discern the true meaning behind it. Although it would have been incredibly difficult, it is possible that



Shostakovich was able to include some musical criticism of the government. It is also possible that the Fifth is a biography of Shostakovich himself. His “making of man” quote, along with the tones of the symphony, may reveal to us that it is about his struggles during the years leading up to the Fifth. When it comes to the degree of political influence, there can be no doubt that politics affected the outcome of the Fifth. Shostakovich understood that the Fourth Symphony would have been too high of a risk to release, so composing another symphony like it would have been foolish. The Fifth Symphony was made to be far more accessible work than its predecessor. Likewise, politics had been influencing Shostakovich’s development as a composer ever since he began studying at the university. He was raised in a Soviet environment for all his life, so such ideas would have made an impact on his style. Despite all this, there are aspects of the Fifth Symphony that would not line up with Soviet guidelines. Again, Shostakovich was able to compose a work that not only appealed to Soviet authorities but was also true to himself. Despite the restrictions on what could be done, Shostakovich produced works that still represented his style. There is no question that Shostakovich’s legacy will remain alive as long as music itself endures.

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