

In 1948 the poet provided song texts for the films *Meeting on the Elbe* and *The Fall of Berlin* and these were followed shortly by the hymn to Stalin's forestation programme *The Song of the Forests*. For Shostakovich this was politically and materially the most successful of their collaborations. As a 'model composition' it was frequently performed winning both men Stalin Prizes; Shostakovich got 100,000 roubles and a dacha from the state.

1952 saw *The Sun Shines Over the Motherland*. Originally to be entitled *Cantata of the Party* Dolmatovsky wrote two further sections but, though Shostakovich wrote some sketches, he did not complete them.

After these large scale public works Shostakovich turned to the poet's smaller verses. The most famous of these is *The Motherland Hears, The Motherland Knows*, the first of a group of four settings from 1951 which was used as USSR Radio News' theme tune and sung in space by Yuri Gagarin. In 1954 Shostakovich set five more poems under the title *Songs of Our Days* and *There Were Kisses* may also have been written around this time. Despite their popularity Shostakovich did not rate these works highly and this was their last collaboration for some time.

In 1956 Dolmatovsky published *The Volunteers*, a verse novel glorifying the metro construction teams with whom he had worked in his youth. According to Khentova it was in June of that year that Dolmatovsky introduced the recently widowed composer to Margarita Kainova whose resemblance to his first wife inspired his disastrous second marriage.

In 1958 Dolmatovsky joined the writers unions of both the USSR and the Russian Federation and filed reports from many parts of the Third World for *Liternaturnaya Gazeta*. Upon his return he published propagandistic reports on political and economic matters.

In the 1960's Dolmatovsky was one of those who came under attack from younger writers (Yevtushenko was particular critic) and through the process of de-Stalinisation. However he defended himself in the verse cycle *Our Years* condemning those who would replace the revolutionary drum with 'lute, harp and guitar' and reminding Soviet citizens that many had

revered and died for Stalin. Shostakovich set no Dolmatovsky at this time and may have been trying to distance himself from the poet.

It was at this time that Shostakovich started to set Yevtushenko's work. When *The Song of the Forests* was republished in 1962 Dolmatovsky took the opportunity to revise the text.

In 1970 Shostakovich wrote *Loyalty* using eight Dolmatovsky texts and oversaw *My Native Land* which re-used some earlier settings of the poet's work. By this time Shostakovich was very ill but told Kozintsev, on whose film *King Lear* he was working, that he had been fortunate enough to find a sponsor to get him into a specialist clinic - Dolmatovsky.

After the publication of his travel writings and selected works in the 1970's Dolmatovsky's collected works were published in 1978-79 but in later years his work fell into the disfavour reserved for those who were considered too close to Stalin.

It would be difficult to find Dolmatovsky's works now and his verse is rarely anthologised. It certainly did not inspire Shostakovich to produce his greatest works and it could be claimed that the poet did little more for the composer than provide a veneer of political respectability. If so it is ironic that while doing this he seemed to stand aloof from his political problems but he did him kindnesses which should not be forgotten.

**John Riley**

## Shostakovich and the Press:

### Great Britain

It's still no easy matter to find a Shostakovich concert these days in Britain - most particularly travelling out of London, and for repertoire out of the mainstream. Ten, twenty years ago it was

nigh on impossible. But has the music of Shostakovich suffered any more than that of other "contemporary" composers from this seemingly in-bred reluctance?

I would argue that, with a few exceptions, it has; and so I'd like to guide you through several decades of British writings and hearings in an attempt to see just why.

Unarguably Shostakovich's first "success", at home and abroad, was the First Symphony. Donald Brook, writing in London in 1946 relates that: *"This symphony amazed the world. Music critics in every country spoke of the nineteen year-old Russian genius, and within twelve months this strikingly original work was being played by most of the leading orchestras."* Indeed, in retrospect, musical commentators are unanimous, holding the work in very high regard. But in spite of the universal praise that was heaped on the work, it seems that the good people of Great Britain had to wait over 5 years for a concert performance - this in Manchester 1931.

And the first British recording of the Symphony was made as late as 1957, by which time five American recordings had been released.

Such apparent "reticence" in accepting the popularity of Shostakovich's music in Britain has been put down to sociological, as much as political factors - the nation was after all still in considerable post-war disarray with a distinctly low priority being given to the arts. In contrast, the artistically-liberal, intellectually-challenging white-hot climate of 1925 Leningrad might have seemed like some unattainable haven to Western observers. Resentment, too, may have come from the sense of the First Symphony's wholesale rejection of the grandiose statements of other symphonists such as Rachmaninov, Brahms and Sibelius, with its style borne out of purity, modernity and lively inventiveness.

The little-known English composer Christian Darnton came as close as any to typifying what seems to have been at this time a widespread prejudice against composers of Shostakovich's generation. *"Shostakovich displays a very considerable talent,"* he admits, but later qualifies this enthusiasm by decreeing that, *"Soviet music is unquestionably animated and vital in outlook, although one may reasonably say that it is as yet immature in many respects."*

And in 1936, with the first performance of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* in London - came the ultimate in colonial and fatuous remarks from no less than the London Times: *"The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk is a title well chosen to produce the utmost amount of misunderstanding and embarrassment to the English hearer of Dmitri Shostakovich's opera. He cannot allude to it lightly in dinner-table conversation for fear of mispronouncing "Mtsensk", and the name of Lady Macbeth suggests ideas with which this opera has nothing whatever to do."*

Accusations of such dismissive, even patronising approaches "alien" cultures are often levelled at the British. (Compare this to Toscanini's remark about the opera in the American press: *"Wagner himself could not have written anything so original at the age of twenty-six"*)

Needless to say, such generalisations are ultimately erroneous and misleading, as the testimony of Charles Reid, writing about the famous British conductor Malcolm Sargent attests: *"His repertory embraced some of the later Shostakovich symphonies; but he retained a particular and almost mystical regard for his First, about which he said 'The sadness of the slow movement is different from any other sadness in music. Sadness in Beethoven has beauty. Here it is the sadness that comes to you as a shock, as pain, the pain you feel on seeing starving children with ribs breaking through their skin and hollowed-eyed women in rags.'"*

Whether Sargent's perception is accurate or not, he shows an untypical commitment to the music, and of its quality to move, to daunt and to entertain.

With the Liverpool Philharmonic, in the 1940's, he at last promoted the First Symphony, along

with other contemporary works such as Bartok's *Concerto for Orchestra*, but only by including them with favourites such as Beethoven's *Emperor* or Tchaikovsky's B flat Minor Concerto.

Not all critics took a negative stance, however. In an unusually objective review of the Eighth Symphony featured in the *Musical Times* from July 1944, Julian Herbage laments that: "*English musical critics have made their minds up about Shostakovich. Gerald Abraham describes his career as a decline and fall after the promise of the First Symphony. Ernest Newman has rarely written with more corrosive pen than in his recent denunciation of the Seventh Symphony. At the Proms this year the outstanding novelty will undoubtedly be Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony. It is conceived on the same scale as the Leningrad, so that at least we shall be spared the futile jests about fire-watchers from those critics who find it easier to jibe than to analyze.*"

Superficially, at least, this so-called "British attitude" had been severely tempered through the war years, past the death of Stalin - even into the midst of the Cold War.

By 1962 Shostakovich had been invited to attend Edinburgh Festival, Scotland's annual arts festival - amongst the most prestigious in Western Europe. An important precursor to this invitation had been the astounding British premiere in 1960, of both the First Cello Concerto and the Eighth Symphony - an occasion which had helped focus the public's attention at last onto Shostakovich's developing repertoire: many had long regarded the Fifth and Tenth Symphonies as being virtually all worth listening.

Week one of the festival saw performances of the String Quartets nos. 1,2,5; the Cello Concerto and the song-cycle *Satires*; week two brought the Preludes & Fugues for Piano; Arias from *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*; Symphonies 6,8 and 9; String Quartets nos. 3,7,4 and 8; Mussourgsky's *Khovanshina* in Shostakovich's edition and week three heralded the symphonies nos. 4,10 and 12; the Violin Concerto; the Suite from *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*; the *Three Fantastic Dances*; the Cello Sonata and *From Jewish Folk Poetry*.

In fact Shostakovich's invitation to one of Britain's more enlightened festivals seems to have engendered as much interest in the forthcoming Thirteenth Symphony, the Space Programme, the composer's opinion of Igor Stravinsky and of Soviet politics in general - to some the music seemed almost incidental.

Press accounts of the visit give us a clue to understanding this ambiguous relationship. There is much rhetoric on the subject of his "world stature" as a great composer, as well as detailed descriptions of how Shostakovich looked, walked, talked and so on. But it all appears set at a distance with relatively little in-depth discussion of his music's extent or true context. A few extracts from newspapers at the time of the Festival will show what I mean:

"The Little Boy who grew to be a Great Man:

*With one ear to the keyhole, a little boy crouched in a draughty corridor of his Russian home listening intently to the music filtering through the door. So intense was the concentration on his face that his mother vowed to do all in her power to further the musical progress of her son. To see him, however, one would not imagine the great man to be a great man. Small in stature, nervously shy and retiring, he faced the barrage of the world's press with singular aplomb. Delving into his childhood, he revealed that he had been born in Siberia....."*

Clearly accuracy was not a priority for some critics....

*"The Festival's most elusive personality peered shyly over his spectacles, drummed his fingers nervously and faced a collection of Pressmen, who were practically pawing the ground in their impatience to meet him. He was the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich, who since the Festival began has an intangible but nevertheless effective curtain of security drawn round him. Journalists who have tried to contact him have invariably been told that "Mr.Shostakovich is a very nervous man who does not like giving interviews." "*

*"No doubt this year's Edinburgh Festival will be remembered chiefly because Dmitri Shostakovich was there as guest of honour. His unchallenged pre-eminence among Soviet composers probably ensures that Shostakovich*

is "freer" than most Soviet artists. In any case, his musical tastes are not now so likely to bring him into conflict with officialdom as in the past."

This last comment was particularly ironic and misjudged in the light of the events surrounding the Thirteenth Symphony, of course.

On the subject of the string quartets:

*"They are curiously difficult to assess. Where other modern masters of the quartet, and notably Bartok and Schoenberg, have confided it to some of their more substantial music, Shostakovich often gives the impression of using the medium as a means of relaxation. When due homage has been paid to these quartets, they all seem to a greater or lesser extent to be flawed works of art."*

And finally:

*"The Edinburgh Festival is nearly over and with it a unique opportunity of hearing a representative selection of the music of Dmitri Shostakovich, including most of his best works and two of his worst [one of these was certainly the Twelfth Symphony, hugely unpopular at its Festival premiere]. It is still early to put our impressions of this enigmatic figure into order, but some conclusions already emerge, and one thing above all - that political pressures are not the only causes, and perhaps not even the primary ones, of the switchback course his achievement has taken..... His present role as public orator, whether self-imposed or merely accepted, seems in real danger of cutting him off from the deepest sources of his inspiration....*

*We must hope that he will be encouraged to redefine his own problems as a composer and to meet them squarely even if this should mean a period of silence. The alternative may well be the strangulation of a great talent."*

This article appeared on 7th September 1962, three months before the premiere of the Thirteenth Symphony...

Such sweeping, misguided statements exemplify the attitude of many British commentators and critics towards not only Shostakovich, but of individual artists whose cultures differed much from that of the "Western norm". An obvious comparison to be made here is with Igor Stravinsky who, being in most British minds Russian, that is, distinct from

Soviet Russian, is regarded quite differently, whether or not his music is conceived as more or less accessible, more or less successful than that of Shostakovich: the significance of this distinction being that the level of exposure of the expatriate's music is much greater.

It is also likely that the use by the Soviet regime in the 40's and 50's of Stravinsky as an example of the insufferable "musical bourgeoisie" would have had a converse effect on a Western viewpoint. Ironically, and literally days after the end of the Festival, Shostakovich shared a table with Stravinsky in a party described by Robert Craft as being "of Dostoevskian intensity" at the American Embassy in Moscow. The occasion was the return to Russia, after 48 years, of Stravinsky to his homeland.

But before leaving Shostakovich's visit to Edinburgh entirely, I'd like to recall an account in a very different vein: the very sincere, very revealing testimony of the British guitar virtuoso Julian Bream:

*"Shostakovich was a very difficult man to get to see. He was at the Edinburgh Festival but there were bodyguards and layers of KGB you had to get through. But I was insistent. I couldn't get through to him on the telephone, and I couldn't find anyone to get me an introduction, so I just turned up at his hotel. Eventually I was admitted.*

*I remember he had a very angular, rather ravaged face, but it was immensely sensitive. He was like so many Russians: genetically very powerful, but his expressions were refined. He was rather nervous; a worried sort of chap; inward; introspective. His outward gestures were in no way indicative, it seemed to me, of what he felt. It was as though they were a screen.*

*He obviously felt so passionately and deeply about music, and yet his outward demeanour was so low-key.*

*He allowed me to play for him, so I played, amongst other pieces, the Melancholy Galliard by the 16th century English composer John Dowland and he said, "Strange, that sounds like Schubert to me." Isn't that extraordinary?", Julian Bream continues, "Is it because of the political climate over the last fifty years that we've lost that free interchange of cultural*

*variety that must have been so important in previous centuries? Perhaps that was the reason I felt Shostakovich ought to hear some old English lute music, as well as some modern guitar music.*

*It's not going to make him write different symphonies, but I felt it was nice to be able to give a distinguished visitor a feeling of the local colour and display some of the cultural goodies that would never get to him through official channels."*

It may seem a little brutal to condemn the Communist regime for the fact Shostakovich mistook the 16th century Dowland for Schubert, but it's a theory not to be completely disowned and one which may well be applicable in an inverted sense. With the possible exception of Prokofiev - criminally little is known about or heard of the many Soviet composers contemporary to Shostakovich. The "official channels" which Bream refers to may be of a quite different character in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, but they are capable of being equally destructive.

Press notices aside, then, one might have expected a noticeable upsurge of interest in Shostakovich on the part of the British listener, commercial or private, following this highly publicised venture. And in politics, too, Khrushchev's process of de-Stalinisation, shattering in the process the illusion of the Communist Party's perceived infallibility ought to have helped the "ordinary person", as Shostakovich termed him, perceive the Soviet regime in a less hostile light.

There were many more interchanges between East and West in all spheres of art and literature as at last foreign travel became more of a reality.

Nevertheless, the Cold War seemed here to stay and so artists like Shostakovich remained at arm's-length.

*"If music can be Anti-Communist," writes Galina Vishnevskaya, "I think Shostakovich's music should be called by that name."*

It was clear that this concept might have been inconceivable to the Western view at this time, in the light of Shostakovich's Eleventh and

Twelfth Symphonies, both bearing subtitles containing clear use of Marxist-Leninist themes. Indeed the Twelfth alone may have set back the Shostakovich cause at a potentially very promising time:

*"One should remember that Shostakovich was*

*at an impressionable age at the very period which the Twelfth Symphony depicts," writes one British commentator not long after its premiere, "It is the sort of work which may do well in its proper context, but I don't think it travels, though there is no doubt that it was played with conviction and was enthusiastically received. Let us pray that there are no more revolutionary movements for Shostakovich to celebrate!"*

Mention of Miss Vishnevskaya brings me to undoubtedly the most significant association with Great Britain which Shostakovich was to make. His friendship with the composer Benjamin Britten. The composer from the English county of Suffolk had long been a devoted admirer of Shostakovich: in an early diary entry, from 1936, Britten expresses his feelings at the first British performance of *Lady Macbeth of Mtzensk*, and at some of the critical remarks made thereafter:

*"Of course it is idle to pretend that this is great music throughout - it is stage music and as such must be considered. There is some terrific music in the entractes. But I will defend it though thick and thin against these charges of "lack of style". People will not differentiate between style and manner.*

*It is the composer's heritage to take what he wants from whom he wants - and to write music. There is a consistency of style and method throughout. The satire is biting and brilliant. It is never boring for a second."*

In one of his earliest accounts of Britten, Shostakovich considers him, *"One of the most talented foreign composers. He has, I would say, two excellent qualities: he is well-educated and is a wide-ranging musician."* Such understated affection was dispensed with after the creation of the renowned "threesome", completed by Mstislav Rostropovich, whose performance of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto I have already mentioned.

Indeed, it was at this concert that Shostakovich invited Britten to sit in his box and after which the Englishman agreed to write a work for the Russian cellist.

Many exchange visits took place between these two creative musicians from such differing backgrounds and with ostensibly such

diametrically opposing beliefs. They took place in the Soviet Union and in Britain, sometimes part of official musical festivals, sometimes strictly affairs of families and friends.

Wholly typical of their perfect affinity is an account of New Year's Eve, 1966, at Shostakovich's dacha outside Moscow, through the eyes of the English tenor Peter Pears:

*"We were summoned for 10pm. at Dmitri's, we were of course late. The surprise was a special showing of an ancient copy of *The Gold Rush* upstairs in someone's bedroom. We had a quick nip of vodka before, and the film lasted exactly the right length of time, until 11.50, when with champagne bottles in hand, we went out to the brightly lit Christmas Tree and toasted the New Year to the Soviet National Anthem, and went round kissing each other, the Shostakoviches, the professor and his family, Dmitri's daughter Galya and her very odd beatnik husband, and Ben and I. Next came a meal round a long table groaning with drink and eats, and presents.*

*We each got some cognac or vodka, a false nose (not expected to be worn for a minute or two) and, later, a score of Dmitri's recent *Stepan Razin* for Ben, and a record of same for me."*

Such recollections are, clearly, invaluable testaments to the humanity and humility which must have been fundamental in cementing the very special relationship the musicians, their loved ones and their friends enjoyed. It might seem reasonable, again, to assume that sympathetic accounts involving the "great British musician" would be bound to endear his Soviet counterparts to the more general public of his homeland.

This assumption sadly falls at the first consideration, that of Benjamin Britten's standing at home.

In popular terms and in a severely insular style often treated with disbelief abroad, Britten is a misunderstood, largely unpopular composer and musician whose considerable achievements continue to go largely unnoticed outside of the seaside town of Aldeburgh.

His role as a conscientious objector during World War II may have been of some relevance, but at the root of this affront lies the paradox of, on the one hand, a British conservatism which actively discourages levels of consciousness beyond "the norm" and on the other the pro- avant-garde, ready to decry the contemporary composer if his music falls into the category of conformist or nationalistic.

The great English composer and symphonist Ralph Vaughan Williams suffered greatly under the rule of the latter during the 1960's when his works almost disappeared from the repertoire. Writing about Vaughan Williams, musician Christopher Palmer proposes that "*Vaughan Williams' Englishness was the direct cause of the period of decline his symphonies had in the decade or so following his death [in 1958]... We can trace the avant-garde policies of people like William Glock, who was then controller of Radio 3 [the BBC's classical music radio network] and of the BBC itself. One just didn't admire that sort of music.*"

An interesting theory, with which Palmer continues is that the enormous upsurge in the classical music recording industry in the 1970's helped bring about a revival in the fortunes of composers like Vaughan Williams and his contemporaries. On the recording front, in the 1970's, the partnership of the *Melodiya* and *EMI* labels began to make available much of the Russian label's catalogue to the British record-buying audience, expanding the available repertoire many fold.

1972 saw one official and one semi-official visit to towns and cities in Britain. On 20th November Shostakovich's Fifteenth Symphony was to receive its British premiere, in London. Unlike the First Symphony, 46 years earlier, the British public had had only 9 months to wait, and the concert was a great success with concert-goers and critics alike, although the work's use of familiar quotations seems to have led to much confusion. That the occasion would be a success was not altogether surprising: the presence of the composer, with his son as conductor, at the first performance of a work which many assumed would be an extension of the Fourteenth Symphony's vocal portrayal of death was a guaranteed crowd-puller.

Much less publicised, however, was the trip

Shostakovich made to the Northern towns of York and Harrogate at the invitation of a young string quartet, the Fitzwilliam. Writing about these visits, Alan George, the violist:

*"Although the Thirteenth Quartet had been written in 1970, it had been quite shamefully ignored in this country and even the music was not available. So I wrote to him - he in fact was in England at the time, and to my amazement he wrote back straight away. He said he would send the music as soon as he got home and that he would come as well, if he was able. And when he got home, he sent it - just like that. I think it's a great example to hold up to other musicians and artists, in terms of its sheer generosity of spirit and sheer humility - everyone should learn from this. That someone like Shostakovich, an incredibly busy man could still find the time to sit down and write to a student musician in an English city. I think maybe what did strike him was just how young we were - he didn't know at all how well we played, but he must have picked up a degree of commitment and enthusiasm which he obviously responded to. It was a terrifying prospect. We knew that he had no idea what to expect and he knew that as well. He was at pains to make sure that everything was as easy and as comfortable for us as it could be. He was very ill - at least very disabled. He couldn't walk very well - it was a great effort and yet whatever we did that day had to suit us, because we were giving a concert and he was just going to listen. We played the Thirteenth Quartet through to him in the afternoon. The first thing he asked is whether we found it difficult. I really didn't know whether to say yes or no! I suppose because if I'd said "Yes" then he may have thought, "Oh no, they can't be any good," because technically the piece isn't that hard to play; however, if we'd said "No", he might have thought we were arrogant upstarts who'd flipped through the score with no thought at all. I think that one of the difficulties with the Thirteenth is trying not to get so emotionally caught up in it that you lose some control over your playing: because it is desperate music. It is very black, and you think to yourself, "Oh my goodness, what is going on in the mind which created it," and then suddenly that mind is sitting there in front of you.*

*I suppose if we'd been a little less youthful and a little more constrained, we might have felt*

embarrassed having to be so explicit in front of this gentleman sitting there in his smart suit. But he was not sitting there impassively by any means. We played his music and we saw it having an effect on him - it was a very strange feeling. I don't think that anyone who was fortunate enough to be at the concert that evening can have forgotten the experience very quickly.

Shostakovich's presence was electrifying, and one had the overwhelming sensation that this was something indescribably great. I remember after the Thirteenth at the concert, he couldn't keep any part of himself still at all. His whole face and his hands - everything shook - a most extraordinary experience. And yet he came back after the interval to hear us play Beethoven. Most people would have gone off to their hotel, but no - he wanted to stay. He did look completely finished at the interval and yet he insisted on coming back to hear our Beethoven: that's one of the things I shall never forget about him.

The morning after the concert he invited us over to his hotel after breakfast to play for him. He was full of thanks and gratitude for the concert and didn't have anything specific to criticise or to comment on. He did particularly want to hear the Seventh Quartet, and I'm pretty sure that No.7 clearly meant a lot to him. He just sat and listened to the music. Afterwards he didn't say a thing but he looked, and looks can sometimes shout! I think he was happy. And as his train pulled out of the station his poor feeble hand continued waving until he was out of sight. In his letters to us he often recalled, with evident pleasure, his visit to York; surely for him it could have been no more than just one day in an enormously rich life, but for the four of us it was the memory of a lifetime. During his last visit to England many people must have met him and will often relate their treasures experiences of him. He was the kind of unique being which transcends its own greatness with simple humility, human warmth and kindness."

The Fitzwilliam Quartet later premiered both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth String Quartets and had arranged a return trip to meet Shostakovich in Moscow in September 1975 - a trip which of course was not to be.

Which brings me almost to my concluding section - a retrospective of Shostakovich, the

legacy of his life and his music in Britain.

By 1975, when at last one could expect to hear on the radio at least one piece by Shostakovich per week, *The Times*, in its obituary column on 11th August sees it appropriate to conclude that, "*Outside the Soviet Union his stature as a composer, and particularly as a symphonist, has long been unequivocally accepted...*" But what is most striking about this column is the writer's observation that: "*It is easy to see, in Shostakovich's life and works, the history of a composer in whom important tensions were never fully resolved.*

*But it would be too facile to see them as too firmly rooted in the political ambience in which he lived; part of them doubtless lay in the restless temperament of the man himself, his searching mind, his typically Russian mixture of humour and despair, which manifested itself in the irony or the parody with which his deepest thoughts are so often overlaid."*

Suddenly, at the point at which the composer is now unable to offer any further evidence on the subject, the learned critic has opted, after 50 years of blindfolded obliviousness, for a more lateral, open-minded approach to the apparent enigma of Shostakovich's personal and musical inspiration within the Soviet regime. Christopher Ford, writing on the same day, but in *The Guardian* newspaper, anticipated what was to become a popular hypothesis, that of the influence of Communism on Shostakovich's musical longevity: "*Had Shostakovich not lived within the Soviet system, had he not known his share of repression and misery, he would certainly have been a different composer. He would not necessarily have been a better one, and indeed his contribution to the string quartet alone places him above most contemporaries. And he, as well as anyone this century, bore out Vaughan Williams' remark that periods in music are ended by great composers, not begun by them. If Shostakovich conveyed a "message", it concerned the melancholy vastness of so*

*many things Russian, especially tyranny. It was a message of proven appeal."*

There have been, since 1975, lorry-loads of conjecture about aspects of Shostakovich's personal and musical life - its highs and its lows - its successes and failures. Thousands of words have been written specific to the subject of "hidden meanings", and of "coded messages"; the 1989 London Festival entitled "Music from the Flames" was a massive success in terms of box office revenue but the repertoire of Shostakovich in the vast majority of the British Isles consists of a handful of symphonies, a concerto or two and an amusing arrangement of *Tea For Two*. Conservatism is no longer a plausible explanation: nationalism is similarly unlikely. Financial recession is a monetarist's greatest fear - my nightmare is a recession based on ignorance and disinformation in music. On September 7th 1992 a new countrywide radio station took to the air in Britain dedicated to "classical music": in 7 whole days of broadcasting it played just 7 minutes of Shostakovich - the first movement of the Second Piano Concerto. Things have not improved since then.

My conclusion is that the musically-inclined audiences of Britain are ready, willing and very able to take the music of Dmitri Shostakovich to their hearts: ultimately perhaps in spite of their "elders and betters" whose traditional notions are frighteningly obsolete.

*"Men at some time are masters of their fates:  
The fault, dear Britons, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."*

*(Julius Caesar)*

**Trevor Lake**



The main - indeed only contentious issue in the second edition of the *DSCH JOURNAL* was the review, by Ian MacDonald, of Elizabeth Wilson's book *A Life Remembered*. Opinions differed as to whether Ian went "too far", or "not far enough" in his review.

"Why on earth does a man like Ian MacDonald seem to want to make it his business to "spoil the party"? I was, and am, devastated by the book, and can barely believe the level of off-the-point nonsense he employs from the first word to the last.

No book is perfect - certainly not on a subject concerning someone working in the creative arts - and particularly not someone like Shostakovich, whose life was as much bound up with politics as music. No lover of Shostakovich be dissuaded from buying this book - however MacDonald tries."

*J.Swarthey, Lincoln, England*

"What a pity I hadn't read Ian MacDonald's

review before I bought the book, *A Life Remembered!*

It wouldn't have stopped me from buying it, it would have forewarned me of its (few) shortcomings - missed connections - wayward references and so on. This would have saved me some time, and some mental effort, but I'd still love the book as much as I do today!"

*A.Tindall, Manchester, England*

"At least you are honest, Mr. MacDonald. The newspaper reviews in Britain told me nothing - just the usual muddled nonsense. Even the musical "Press" was confused - what on earth was the book about? I'm not in a position to part with twenty-odd pounds for a book without being relatively sure of its credentials and ultimate usefulness. *DSCH's* review told me what I needed to know, and I'm happy with my purchase. That's the name of the game!"

*J.Kowicki, Glasgow, Scotland*

"Please can we all send in reviews? We can't do worse than Ian MacDonald and his band of merry sharp-shooters. *A Life Remembered* doesn't deserve to be pulled apart with nonsensical "analysis". Let the readers decide."

*I.Grim, Jarrow, England*

"Keep including objective, fair, reviews like Mr. MacDonald's, and I'll keep renewing my subscription!"

*A.N.Hughes, Paris*

Other subjects now:

"It may interest you to know that a composition of Shostakovich is in the Dutch "POP-TOP 50!"

"It concerns the CD-single *The Second Waltz* (from the *Jazz Suite No.2*). In the list of the Singles Top 100 of 1994 *The Second Waltz* is at number 18 (the highest position being reached was number 5)."

Onno kindly enclosed some Dutch Pop Press

cuttings to illustrate: the only performer to get a mention is one André Rieu, who features on the CD-single sleeve. (Disc reference for those eager to order: Mercury/Phonogram 8561262).

*Onno van Rijen Zoeterwoude, Holland*

Back to the "substance" of things:

"Ian MacDonald's rejoinder to Taruskin in *DSCH JOURNAL* number 2 is pretty convincing, but I also think that in *The New Shostakovich* he goes too far in his case-by-case linkage of the music to the composer's state of mind. It seems to me that these acrimonious exchanges between MacDonald and Taruskin are basically academic, and haven't anything really important to do with the music. I remained convinced that: (1) music is basically an abstract art; (2) the vast majority of us listen to it with pleasure without any reference to any politics which might have affected its composition, and (3) regardless of its genesis, all that will really matter in "x" years from now is the music itself."

*D.McDonald, California USA*

"Readers might like to know that Tony Palmer's film *Testimony* is now available on VHS cassette (PAL) courtesy of Connoisseur Video (reference CR174).

To order:

10A Stephen Mews, London W1P 0AX or telephone (44) 171 957 8960 (Access/VISA)."

*John Riley, London*

.....  
**Dedicated to Shostakovich:**



**the**  
**St.Petersburg Lectures**

On September 26th 1994 the nineteenth series of lectures on Shostakovich took place in the Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatory of St.Petersburg. These encounters gather

together not only musicians, academics and Shostakovich's family and friends, but also everyone who loves his music which has become an integral part of the city's musical life.

The Glazunov Small hall was full to bursting, which happens rarely.

The first Shostakovich Lectures took place at Sofia Khentova's initiative and with the active support of the well-known musicologist A.N.Sokhor at the Composers' Union headquarters in September 1976, a year after the composer's death.

Since 1979 the lectures have been held under the aegis of the Leningrad (St.Petersburg) Conservatory which provides the hall and prints posters and programmes. The remainder is organised using private resources.

Sofia Khentova is still the indispensable organiser of the lectures. There are so many applications to speak that the programmes for many years to come have already been filled. The subject of Shostakovich is inexhaustible!

The contents of the lectures are planned around lesser-known aspects of Shostakovich's life and music, different people reporting on various discoveries: M.Aranovsky, I.Popov and M.Tarakanov from Moscow; M.Brialik, L.Danko, A.Dmitriev, E.Ruchievskaya, G.Tigranov and S.Khentova from Leningrad, as well as some foreign researchers such as Alan Mercer (chairman of the London-based Shostakovich Society), Dorothy Redepening from Germany and Marianna Loykanen from Finland.

As for Shostakovich's pupils they were and remain regular participants of the lectures: G.Belov, V.Bibergan, V.Nagovitsin and B.Tishchenko spoke of their teacher, analysed his works and showed their own compositions in the creation of which Shostakovich had played a part.

Some of Shostakovich's previously unknown compositions were played at the lectures for the first time: the First Piano Trio which had been lost for decades had been found and restored by B.Tishchenko. *The Madrigal* and *The Song of Rosita*; fragments from the original soundtrack of *The tale of the Priest and his Servant Balda*; arrangements of classical

romances for voice, violin and cello, written by the composer in besieged Leningrad for the frontline troops.

Performers' talks are an integral part of the lectures. E.Mravinsky and I.Musin's recollections of their first performances of Shostakovich's symphonic scores were unforgettable.

B.Gutnikov, Y.Kramarov and I.Bogachev's accounts of their creative contacts with Shostakovich were impressive. T.Vecheslova, N.Dudinskaya and K.Sergeyev talked about Shostakovich's ballet productions in which they had taken part whilst L.Filatova, L.Shevchenko and N.Okhotnikov from the Mariinsky Theatre frequently sung.

The compass of Shostakovich's work as well as the immense circle of his former friends and colleagues make the content of the lectures rich and varied. E.A. Dolmatovsky came especially from Moscow to lecture on "Shostakovich and Poets". V.Ivchenko, the brilliant actor of the Gorky Dramatic Theatre read Mikola Bazhan's poem about Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony and described the "life" of this legendary work in the Ukraine.

The editor Mikhail Dunayevsky drew everyone's attention to the textual problems in the publication of Shostakovich's scores and to the necessity of a thorough preparation of his collected edition.

During the lectures questions such as "Shostakovich and Stalinism", "Shostakovich and Asafiev" and "Shostakovich and the Rimsky-Korsakov School" were addressed.

Most speeches were recorded and more than one collection based on these extremely rich documents could be published. But the Conservatory has no money and is unable to publish..

The nineteenth series of lectures was devoted to one main theme: "Shostakovich and German Culture". Apart from the Conservatory, the Berlin-based German Shostakovich Society, *DSCH* volunteered to assist in the organisation of the lectures. The Berlin Schaftrat Orchestra, conducted by the Society's Head G.Schmalenberg performed Shostakovich's

### *Chamber Symphony (op.110a).*

The young musicologist from Dortmund Michael Kobel examined in his speech the theme of "Beethoven's symphonism and Shostakovich". S.Khentova spoke about Bach's tradition in Shostakovich's music and A.Koenigsberg ("The Weimar School and Shostakovich") examined the unexplored theme "Liszt, Wagner and Shostakovich" from the point of view of programmatic aspects of the development of music, emphasising his point of view that "studying the creation apart from its creator was pointless".

A.Musin narrated the life story of Vsevolod Fredricks, Shostakovich's brother-in-law, and the circumstances of his tragic death: "Vsevolod's ancestor Baron Fredricks was a minister at the court of Nicholas II and Vsevolod himself was an outstanding physicist and a kind-hearted man. But he was shot in 1937 and his wife Maria was exiled from Leningrad to Central Asia".

In the Small Hall's foyer, exhibitions were set up including new publications on Shostakovich (including the first edition of the *DSCH JOURNAL*) and with paintings and sculptures of Shostakovich by A.Ananiev, G.Glikman (now living in Munich) and S.Gershov.

The Twentieth Jubilee of the lectures in 1995 will deal with the theme "D.D. Shostakovich as teacher", where some of Shostakovich's pupils and followers will be invited and their work carefully examined.

**Larisa Kazanskaya**

**translated by Anjelika Astvatsaturian**

.....