



# Recollections of a Man



Shostakovich was a man of contradictions. The family memories collected in the monograph by Seroff convey the picture of an unusually gifted young man, incredibly hard-working, caring for, improving the living standards of his family - and, simultaneously, an everyday nuisance.

These inborn character features became more and more prominent as, throughout the years, his life was submitted to severe tests and experience, when the problem was not to provide himself and his family with adequate livelihood, but how to survive and avoid repression.

So, his difficult character underwent changes, which eventually led him to a state wherein it would be hard to speak about Shostakovich as a human being responding in an ordinary way, thinking rationally and acting consistently.

His behaviour was beyond unequivocal evaluation. Some people saw an opportunist in him, others judged his actions as signifying his disapproval of the Soviet authorities, still others saw him as an embodiment of a typical Russian possessed man who pretends to be not quite sane and, under the guise of mental deficiency, discloses to the world in an obscure manner what is true, and, by coarse, colourless, and deliberately awkward words, reveals his thoughts.

Probably he was partly all of these things, and they came inseparably together in him - like his remarkable modesty and lack of belief in his own potentials, blended with his morbid (*sic*) ambition to be the first and the best.

Obviously, his behaviour and demeanour did not win people's hearts, though many considered themselves his friends. However, in his whole life he had only a few real friends; their names can be reeled off quickly: apart from Sollertinsky, there were undoubtedly Isaac Glikman and Leo Arnshtam. His friendship with Mravinsky was irrevocably broken in the early Sixties. His relations with Shebalin were also clouded, as well as with the young Denisov, whom he strongly supported for some time.

Of course, he had a group of devoted musicians who can also be regarded as his friends: the Beethoven Quartet, David Oistrakh, Mstislav Rostropovich, Moisei Vainberg - but these were, mainly, artistic friendships.

This stemmed not only from the fact that, during the composer's most difficult years, people broke with him for their own security, but also because Shostakovich used to keep people at bay. It suffices to mention that he addressed very few people by their Christian names and he would refer even to his closest friends in a formal way or by means of their patronymic. Hence, to Sollertinsky he would say "Ivan Ivanovich", to Glikman "Isaac Davidovich", although not always consistently. All of his life he used "Mister" to Mravinsky, and with Oistrakh they called each other by their first names only in Shostakovich's final years. A factor in his isolation was his latent inability to build up contacts. He himself wrote about that while recalling his first encounter with Sollertinsky; yet when raging terror created general fear, Shostakovich could become absolutely detached. The proof for that comes from the memoirs by Nicholas Nabokov, Arthur Miller, and Hans Mayer. Having few friends, Shostakovich inevitably socialised with people who played a very ambiguous role in the cultural life of the Soviet Union.

My desire to make contact with Shostakovich arose in the late Fifties. The reason why was certainly his music rather than him as a person, because what I knew from official sources in those days did not encourage one to make an acquaintance. In Poland, as in all communist countries, Shostakovich was associated first of all with pieces like *Song of the Forests* and, at best, the *Leningrad* or the Fifth Symphony (defined solely as "the answer of a Russian composer to just criticism").

Apart from such works, there were his many unbearable propaganda-ideological statements, blatantly mirroring the attitude of the communist Party, which, for a majority of the Polish intelligentsia, were enough to condemn him. Such masterpieces as *The Nose* and *Lady Macbeth* and his early symphonies (except the First) were not





widely known, Soviet propaganda insisting that they were artistically degenerate. Thus, for me Shostakovich existed only as the composer of the First, Fifth, Ninth, and Tenth symphonies, the Piano Quintet, and the Cello Sonata, since, in those years, practically nothing else was performed.

The First and Tenth symphonies sufficed, however, to open to me, as a teenage music student, a fascinating new world of sound.

The rarity of his music in itself made me eager to get to know as many of his pieces as possible, yet the chances to do so were extremely restricted. A few people privileged to meet Shostakovich personally brought him closer to me and, in their descriptions, an official advocate of peace and the principles of Socialist Realism was replaced by a tragic victim of the communist regime, an intimidated man, deprived of the liberty to create and act. Unfortunately, school obligations did not allow me to attend the "Warsaw Autumn" of 1959 (I lived in Cracow then), so I lost a chance to meet him in person. Yet since his music made me more and more impressed (I got to know the then-new Eleventh Symphony at that time), I decided to write a letter to the master and unfold to him my feelings under the influence of his art. It was a long letter and I think I enclosed some of my own pieces. As I didn't expect to hear from him, my joy was great when, contrary to hearsay about his inaccessibility, a reply came after a couple of weeks, including a photo with a dedication. It coincided with my composer's debut, so, full of excitement, I described this in my next letter, simultaneously thanking him for his quick answer. Another letter arrived, this time on a piece of thin card, perhaps the remains of some package, contained these few words : "Dear Krzysztof! I congratulate you on your first concert. Wishing you creative success. Affectionately yours, D. Shostakovich". This is how a correspondence began - as yet, of course, not intensive - between a world-famous composer and a teenage highschool pupil, later a conservatoire student. Shostakovich's letters were always very concrete and brief though warmhearted, which made me resolve to visit Moscow one day and meet him in person.

In those times, a trip abroad - even to the so-called countries of the people's democracies and the Soviet Union - was an exceedingly difficult undertaking. Private trips were basically not allowed and places in group excursions were hard to come by. After a couple of months of various problems, I finally succeeded in arranging the formalities, and wrote to Shostakovich that I was coming to Moscow and would be delighted to see him there. On the eve of my departure I received the following letter : "...Unfortunately I will not be able to meet you, since at that time

I will be away from Moscow..." Yet I did not drop out of my trip and when I reached Moscow, I made up my mind to try my luck come what may.

I went to the office of the Composers' Union where Khrennikov's personal secretary informed me with forced politeness that Dmitri Shostakovich was at home (!) and would stay in Moscow for a week, but that he was too busy to receive visitors. Giving me his telephone number was out of the question. I sensed that my wish to meet him was not welcome among the officials of the Union - yet I never managed properly to assess the extent and depth of their resentment towards Shostakovich. When in the late Eighties I asked one of the more polite high-ranking Union functionaries to hand over a small parcel to the composer's widow, I found out after several months that it had not been delivered because "no one knows where Mrs Shostakovich is". Meanwhile the "unobtainable" person lived four floors above in the same building throughout all that time!

The following year, having wasted several weeks on arranging passport formalities I set off again to Moscow. At that time the composer did not dwell in Kutuzovsky Prospect, but in the very centre of Moscow in a small street previously called Brusovsky Close, for years inhabited by many outstanding artists. Among others, Vsevolod Meyerhold lived there from 1928 till his death. In this street there also lived the outstanding singer Antonyna Niezdanova, whose name the street assumed after her death. Here too stands a small Orthodox Church, one of a few not closed down even during the worst years. Niezdanova Street is an offshoot from one of the main Moscow traffic arteries, Tverska (renamed Gorky Street when Gorky was still alive) and ends near Herten Street, known for the Conservatoire with its famous Piotr Tchaikovsky Great Concert Hall. The first part of Niezdanova Street is connected by a small alley to the equally small Ogariiev Street which runs parallel with it. In the late Fifties this alley was built over by a complex of many-storied edifices in the Socialist Realist style. This wing of Niezdanova Street was occupied by the Soviet Composers' Union and its branch, the Russian Republic Composers' Union, which for eight years was headed by Shostakovich. Here also was the editorial office of the *Sovetskaya Muzika* monthly, a concert hall, the department of foreign contacts, and a low-priced but (by Moscow standards) elegant restaurant open only to Composers' Union members. Those blocks of flats were inhabited by over a hundred families belonging to the country's most eminent composers, musicologists, and performers - among them, on floor 6, Shostakovich, and a floor below him,





Aram Khachaturian and Dmitri Kabalevsky. Nearby there also lived Mstislav Rostropovich and Leonid Kogan.

That time I was in luck. It turned out that not only was Shostakovich in Moscow but he agreed to spare some time to meet me. Before this happened I wasted much time finding his phone number, since in the Soviet Union there have been no phone directories for years, and to get any number required detective skills. A meeting could be held only after settling the date on the phone, which in fact was not easy due to the composers' endless duties. The appointment finally took place after several days and a dozen or so phone conversations with his secretary at the Composers' Union. Finally, she notified me that I was to appear at such and such an hour a.m. and to be absolutely punctual. (As I learned later on, punctuality was demanded and observed to an extreme degree by Shostakovich, which, by the way, was one of the few characteristics he shared with Prokofiev.)

The appointment was to take place at his office in the Russian Republic Composers' Union. When I arrived at the arranged time and entered the building, a typical Russian *babushka* sitting in the corridor at the gate entrance asked me my business. (Almost every Moscow tenement-house employs a concierge.) After a lift had taken me to the second floor (Shostakovich lived four floors up), I entered a spacious secretarial office, as busy as a large post office. Despite the crowd of clients and general confusion, the employees clearly had complete control over everything because a secretary, who knew exactly who I was and why I'd come, immediately approached me. A half-opened door to the left led to a big office. Far ahead, at the end of this room two people were standing, one of whom seemed to resemble Shostakovich. I had barely managed to take off my coat before this man approached me - and it was indeed Shostakovich. He was shorter than I'd imagined. Despite the early hour, he was dressed in an official dark navy blue suit and snow white shirt, but, in contrast to his immaculate attire, he was unshaven. He spoke to me in a muffled, faintly hoarse, and unexpectedly high voice, chaotically uttering the following words: "A vi, kak govorytie - tak skazat, po russky? Sprechen Sie Deutsch? Parlez-vous francais? Do you speak, tak skazat, English?"

These questions sounded bizarre since for three years we had carried on our correspondence in Russian - and afterwards I found out that, apart from a bit of English, Shostakovich spoke no foreign language!

With a hand gesture, he invited me into the big room on the left. He did it in an extremely formal manner, full of reserve, without any polite

facial expression. Only later on was I to learn that towards the people whom he hardly knew, he was always stiff and inaccessible. Shostakovich immediately took a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket, lit one, and inhaled deeply. The meeting began with conventional questions asked by him as if in a hurry: where did I study, under whom, etc. It would have been less peculiar had I not repeatedly written about all this in my letters. Had he forgotten - or not read them carefully? Did he ask such questions to start a conversation and not listen to the answers? Certainly my answers made no impression on him. His face was very vivid, but solely due to its nervous twitches and darting eyes. Only when I showed him the score of my First Piano Sonata did he take notice. I even thought I saw some interest in his face.

We sat down at the piano, Shostakovich taking the seat on the right side of the instrument. He quickly took off his old-fashioned, round-rimmed glasses, put on some others (even more obsolete), and began to browse nervily through my score. While I was playing, he carefully followed the music, turning pages. In this big, almost empty office, in which there were a desk, a small table, office cupboards, and two concert pianos, the reverberation was so huge that the music resounded unbearably and sounds almost blended with one another. Then a strange thought came to my mind that next door, in the secretarial office, people must be saying "What on earth is that racket in Shostakovich's office?" and that someone would appear and stop it. And at that precise moment, my fear came true; I'd almost finished playing when a young man came into the office without having knocked on the door, heading for the piano at a brisk pace. Shostakovich sprang to his feet, greeted him and said: "Let me introduce you: Polish composer Krzysztof Meyer, composer Andrei Jakovlevich Eshpay. This is a very good composer, you know, a very good composer." In addition, he told me with a stone-like face, "he plays by himself." They quickly exchanged some remarks and Eshpay left the office. "Your sonata is, I would say, interesting, good music and, I would say, I like it. And what else," he suddenly asked warmly, "will you show me? A string quartet?" He had a look at this and suddenly his kind expression vanished as fast as it had arrived. "Why this different notation?" He asked abruptly. "This is the fashion now, is it?" I tried to explain to him that such music couldn't be registered by means of traditional signs. "Yes, yes, so this is the fashion now." He repeated this sentence as if not listening to what I'd said. He leafed through three pages and instantly, as if he had seen the score, remarked: "Here should be A sharp, not C. Shouldn't it?" I looked at the notes. Absolutely! In a second, he'd detected a mistake, proving that he'd immediately grasped the sense of music alien to him.





As we played through the final movement of the piece four-handed, he repeated his earlier sentence as if I hadn't shown him the quartet at all: "Your sonata is interesting, good music. I liked it, I would say, very much. It is also good that you play it by yourself, because every composer should play the piano." At each of our subsequent meetings, he would repeat this sentence.

He then got up from the piano, went over to the desk, sat down with his back to the window, and again took the pack of cigarettes out of the pocket. Though I've never smoked, for a while I was curious to see whether he would offer me one. Yet he pulled out only one cigarette, lit it and, for a moment, seemed lost in thought. All of a sudden, he came round and again a certain kindness appeared in his face. For the third time he repeated the same sentence about my sonata. Then he sat up: "A concert of your music should be organized, here, at the Composers' Union. We will make a concert, make a concert. It is necessary to make concerts interchangeably between composers unions, between Warsaw and Moscow."

He said it in a stifled, hoarse, high treble, swallowing syllables and repeating certain words a few times. Then he added that in the near future he was coming to Poland. When I asked when he was coming and whether it was to do with the "Warsaw Autumn" festival, he replied: "No, not with the "Warsaw Autumn", no, no. I will write to you when I am coming. I will write a letter."

I never received such a letter. Nor did I ever hear anything more about wanting to organize interchangeable concerts between the Unions. Maybe he forgot about it soon thereafter; or maybe it was only meant as an expression of kindness. Meanwhile I was so much looking forward to this appointment that the conversation completely stopped. I wanted to learn a few things, to ask about various matters linked to his music, but my efforts to rekindle our talk resulted in failure. Shostakovich was on pins and needles, lighting one cigarette after another, almost literally waving away my questions. For instance, I wanted very much to know why his early incidental music for *Hamlet*, written in 1932 for the Vakhtangov Theatre, was so grotesque and comic and without any correspondence to Shakespeare's drama. "Because such was the director's concept", he rapidly rejoined before I finished the sentence. When I mentioned that on Prague radio I'd heard his *May Day* symphony, at that time unknown and rarely performed, he almost pretended that he hadn't heard me. I became aware that he had not the slightest wish to discuss his music. But when I mentioned that I had just bought the scores of his quartets, his face showed satisfaction. "Oh, quartets." He got excited. "Yes, quartets.

Give me the score, I'll sign it."

And to my astonishment he grabbed the first volume. Opening it, he paused for thought, and asked: "And how precisely is your name spelled?" I was totally taken aback. Such a question after three years of relatively regular correspondence! I should have noticed that in none of his letters did he write my surname, first name, and address without a mistake. And that is how it remained till the end of an acquaintance lasting more than ten years which, with the passage of time, turned into a genuinely close friendship. Nor did I then know that the nice words he wrote in the score were merely one of two standard dedications which he almost automatically wrote down for everybody, close and distant acquaintances, autograph collectors and friends: "With fond memories" or "With best wishes".

And so my first meeting with Shostakovich came to an end. His final words were as follows: "That sonata of yours is interesting, good music. I liked it, I would say, a lot. It is good that you play it by yourself, because every composer should play the piano." He led me back to the secretarial office and, while I was putting my coat on, he talked to somebody else. I left the office in Niezdanova Street with the conviction that I would probably never get to know this man better.

We met for the second time in March 1968. From our correspondence it was more and more evident that my approach to contemporary music was very different from his traditional views on the subject, which he underlined clearly several times. Thus I did not anticipate much from our ensuing conversation.

I remember walking to his flat and, having a little time left, standing in front of the house in Niezdanova Street, watching the traffic. Nearby a group of musicologists passionately discussed the forthcoming first post-war official meeting with West German composers. Across the street, three famous Moscow composers, very tipsy, were coming out of the restaurant. Surrounded by his employees, Tikhon Khrennikov was passing some instructions to them. Dmitri Kabalevsky, loaded with skis and a rucksack, got into a large car with his daughter. Everyone there was in the music world. It was noisy and busy. I was struck by the contrast between confusion, so typical of that place, and the tranquillity of the waning day and also the presence of nature so perceptible in Moscow at that time: the smell of soil and melting snow, a sign of coming spring.

At the agreed hour I rang the bell of his flat. The door was opened by Maria Dmitrievna Kozhunova, Shostakovich's long-serving housemaid, followed by his young wife Irina





Antonovna, and my host who literally ran into the corridor. Since the last time we met, he had lived through his first heart attack, broken his leg for the second time, and given up smoking - all of which he communicated to me right away: "Doctors have deprived me of all life's pleasures, all life's pleasures." To my great surprise he gave the impression of a totally different man. He emanated *joie de vivre*, was cheerful, and in no way resembled the lowspirited introvert of three and a half years before. He wore an incredibly ugly though carefully ironed suit of a rust-brown colour and a matching tie. With a warm gesture he invited me to his study.

It was an enormous room which in a strange way revealed a combination of good taste and a lack of any interest in aesthetics. Right at the entrance, on the left, there was an old and fairly shabby sofa, and a book-case with books thrown here and there. Over the sofa there was a familiar portrait of Shostakovich at the age of 13 painted by Kustodiev, and, next to this, another small drawing by the same artist depicting Mitya in profile, playing the piano. On the other side of the room there were two pianos, both out of tune and clearly used only seldom by my host. On this wall were Shostakovich's photographs, one of which, hugely enlarged, depicted him sitting with his back to a piano. There were other photographs of him. (As I noticed after a few visits, these usually appeared very briefly on the wall - passing fancies, presumably.) There were pictures of Shebalin, Mahler, and Mussorgsky as well as caricatures of the Beethoven Quartet members Tsyganov, the Shirinsky brothers, and Borisovsky and a sculpture of Beethoven's head. Elsewhere, the walls were decorated with a poster from a concert devoted to his music and framed diplomas of honorary doctorates. Between two enormous windows there was a desk with a huge lampshade (antique?), two grand silver candlesticks, and a disordered mass of objects: a box of traditional nibs, penholders for fountain pens, an old writing pad, a variety of pens, pencils, markers, and the penknives he used to cut cigarettes which evidently remained from his days as a chain-smoker.

Nearby were two big inkstands, an agenda book, a telephone and many other bits and pieces, and on the right side of the desk a table with a tape-recorder. A huge antique clock was ticking loudly and every half an hour it struck the time. Opposite the windows there was a huge - and, to be honest, fairly vulgar - portrait of Nana, the heroine of Zola's novel, painted, as I learned later, by a friend of Shostakovich, Peter Williams. There was also a set of primitively installed exercise-bars on which to practice gymnastics.

Shostakovich sat down on a swivel stool at the piano, placing me a fair distance away from him on the sofa by the entrance.

Very excited, he started by asking my impressions of my journey from Siberia (I had just returned from Novosibirsk), about the concerts devoted to my compositions, and the people I had met there. Every now and then he interrupted me with comments: "Oh, Slonym, a splendid pianist" or "Kotlarevsky - such a good man, a real believer, you understand, a real believer." He seemed interested in everything down to the smallest detail. Then suddenly he changed the subject and began to tell me what to see in Moscow. Eventually he asked whether I had brought any of my pieces with me and when I told him about the recording of my symphony and the score of my new piano sonata, he exclaimed: "Very well, let me see it, let me see it!"

Irina Antonovna switched on the tape-recorder and Shostakovich sat down at the desk, listening to the music and simultaneously reading the score. His face was no longer cheerful; he was fully concentrated, his head leaning on his left hand. Occasionally he nervously tapped his cheek with fingers. While he was listening, Raisa Glezer, a Moscow musicologist living in the adjoining flat, came in. Having forgotten that he'd invited her, Shostakovich nearly jumped up with agitation: "Lock the door, lock", he wheezed. Then he went back to listening to my symphony with an inscrutable look. After he'd finished, he began asking meticulous and, in fact, insignificant questions, as if to avoid expressing his opinion about the piece, which perhaps he did not like. The conversation continued in a more and more awkward manner. Suddenly, he turned to me with a low, almost apologetic voice: "And you have promised to play your sonata for me?"

I sat down at the piano and the situation from three years earlier was repeated. Again it was me who played, with him sitting on my right, turning pages. When I'd finished, he remained silent for a moment, and then said: "You play the piano very well." He reflected for a while and added in a low as if surprised voice: "Really marvellously." Then he took a look at the score, browsed through it, and added: "Such a good sonata, a pity that it's over." And unexpectedly he became roused: "Why didn't you write some more, some more?!" Once again he opened the score on the last page. "The sonata should be completed here" - he browsed through some empty pages at the end of the manuscript, moving his finger across them - "Oh, here you should complete it... Or, better, here" - he moved his finger a couple of centimetres upwards - "Or here" - he showed another spot. "A splendid sonata, you play the piano perfectly."

I was in a good mood again. Meanwhile, Irina Antonovna asked us into a generously-set table in the next room for tea. Shostakovich quickly poured some wine and at one gulp emptied





the whole glass. He emanated great joy and soon I found out why, when, as if incidentally, he mentioned that several days before he had finished his Twelfth Quartet. "I was working over it at Repino. Such marvellous countryside there. It's a pity you didn't come there; we should have met there; not in Moscow but at Repino."

I asked him about the opus number of the new quartet. "It's so difficult to say, so difficult. But my sister in Leningrad knows all my opuses, so I have to ask her. Oh, by the way, he interjected, do you know how to say take off the mute in Italian? because I have to put it in the score. Not play without mute, but take off the mute. Can you tell me this? I wrote this quartet for Tsyganov. I hope he wants to play it, I hope..."

I wanted to find out more about the new piece, but gathered only that it was "much more complex than the Fifth Quartet" before another subject was brought up. Shostakovich spoke faster and faster, and from time to time stopped eating and tapped a rhythm with his fingers on the table or played with a bottle-cork, tossing it from one hand to another and rolling it among plates. Then suddenly he almost burst out: "I can't look at this lamp above us!" (It was a beautiful crystal chandelier). I'm always scared some part of it will fall on my head. It should be protected! "And more and more nervously he tossed the cork about on the table.

Then he took a sudden interest in Poland and Polish music. He recalled that his father had spoken Polish perfectly and recited a funny nursery rhyme by Jan Brzechwa. Then he added, as if excusing himself: "Maybe it displeases you, but I don't like Chopin too much. Um, for example, the A major prelude..." - and he began to sing in a muffled, high voice imitating playing a piano, tossing his hands in the air with an abandon more appropriate to one of Liszt's *Etudes d'execution transcendante* than to Chopin's simple miniature. Then, abruptly, he declared: "I can't sing. I've lost my voice completely." Then, again, rapidly changing the subject: "Do you know the Polish composer, Grazyna Bacewicz?" As it turned out, he knew Grazyna Bacewicz and liked her music very much, though it differed greatly from his own work. When she died in the following year, he wrote me a beautiful letter full of sorrow, revealing how much he had appreciated and liked this outstanding composer. At the time, however, he was satisfied solely with my affirmative reply, passing quickly on to the opinion that Lutoslawski was a master and that Penderecki's *Passion* contained too much slow music. "Too much slow music," he repeated. "In fact there's also too much slow music in your symphony." His good mood growing, he started to praise Bartok: "He's such a good composer."

He fell into a dreamy mood. "You know, his quartets are a wonderful school for composers; every one is better and better." Since Bartok had visited the Soviet Union in 1929, I began to ask him whether he'd had a chance to meet him. "No, no, unfortunately not," he butted in. "Bartok was in Moscow at that time, and I don't know whether you know that I lived in Leningrad then."

He was talking almost nonstop and seemed pleased with his own, often unexpected, expressions. Next, he was telling me joyfully about the new opera of Moisei Vainberg, *A Passenger*. "This is an amazing work." He repeated it many times. "A remarkable opera." When Raisa Glezer eventually stood up, thinking it was time to go, he demurred: "Where are you all hurrying off to? Please stay longer, please. Anyway, we'll see each other tomorrow. Perhaps I'll come to your concert." (The following day I was to have my own concert in Moscow.)

While saying goodbye, two other funny episodes happened. At that time I was thinking of writing a monograph on him, so I asked him about the maiden name of his mother. Confused, he looked at his wife, as if not comprehending the question and Irina Antonovna, with calm tranquillity, helped him out with the answer. Then I presented him with a large and beautiful photograph of him which someone had given me in Novosibirsk. He was pleased: "Do you want my autograph? I'll put it down right away!" Though I wasn't expecting this, he grabbed an old pen and wrote a few words on the picture. Then, while handing it over to me, he withdrew his hand and put down something else. Before we'd even left the flat, he turned and disappeared into his study. All that remained was a memory of an unusually nice, warm, and wonderful meeting.

We met again in autumn 1969 on the occasion of the Moscow premiere of his Fourteenth Symphony. I arrived in Moscow on the day of the concert, 8th October. I didn't realize how lucky I was since, because of the misty autumn weather, it was the only flight to arrive on time that week. It was impossible to get a ticket to the concert, but my cultivated contacts at the Composers' Union promised to help me. Hours later I was the lucky owner of an invitation; only on the following day did I find out that I had received it from the composer himself, as initially it had been meant for his son, Maxim.

The concert was attended by crowds of people and though it was not a sensation on a par with the world premiere of the Thirteenth Symphony, the seats in the Great Hall of the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire were full long before the Moscow Chamber Orchestra and its conductor, Rudolph Barshai came on stage.





In the first part of the concert, Haydn's *La Passione* was sensationally performed but made scarcely any impression; it was obvious that everybody was waiting for the second part, for Shostakovich's symphony. The new piece was performed even more perfectly. Galina Vishnevskaya, Mark Reshetin, and the twenty-piece orchestra achieved a level of intensity seldom experienced. As I learned later, Barshai had taken several dozen rehearsals before the concert.

When the final sounds had died, I expected thunderous applause and a frenzy equivalent to the premières of the Fifth and Seventh symphonies - and certainly the ovations went on for a long time. Compared to regular concerts it was an exceptional success with the composer appearing onstage a dozen times. Yet the audience seemed a bit dismayed by the unusually concentrated, profound music, whose character, atmosphere, and subject matter warranted reflection rather than external expressions of enthusiasm.

Off-stage Shostakovich was surrounded by a crowd of his admirers. Before me was Aram Khachaturian, who kissed him, crying: "Mitya, many thanks, you're a genius!" Shostakovich made a wry face and thanked him with one word. When I approached him to express my gratitude for this crucial experience, not only did he not say a word but seemed not to recognize me at all. When I added that I'd come straight from Warsaw, he stared at me blankly. To an acquaintance of mine, who also congratulated him, Shostakovich responded with a few warm words. This must have looked strange, since my acquaintance asked me suspiciously: "Have you really met before?" Many years later, Irina Shostakovich told me that the composer had been so highly disturbed that he had been unable to react normally when meeting his friends. And I recalled the story of his meeting with Anna Akhmatova.

They had known each other from before the war. The great poetess appreciated the composer very much, dedicating one of her poems to him. During Zhdanov's slanderous campaigns, their mutual contacts were broken, but they met again one day in the early Sixties at Komarovo, near Leningrad. Smartly dressed and well-groomed, Akhmatova paid Shostakovich a visit. The composer, never particular about his attire, greeted her in casual holiday wear. Afterwards, they sat at the table in complete silence. Irina Antonovna served tea and they stayed silent. The silence went on for almost an hour, despite the attempts by the composer's wife to disrupt it. Finally, Akhmatova stood up. They never met again. A couple of months later Akhmatova died.

Two days after this disconcerting encounter at the Moscow Conservatory, I met Shostakovich at the Bolshoi Theatre.

As usual he spent the intermission in his seat. He reacted instantly upon seeing me. "Good evening! How about the last "Warsaw Autumn"?" We arranged a meeting for the following morning at his place, though he apologized in advance for "not being able to receive me as he ought to". Knowing his predilection for punctuality, I showed up right on time. The door was opened by Shostakovich, so upset that he was almost trembling: "I've been phoning everywhere for you! I tried all the hotels! Where have you been?" "What happened?", I asked, worried about his anxiety. "What do you mean what happened? Can't you see? The lift isn't working! You have to walk up to the seventh floor! I wanted to change the date of our meeting! But I couldn't find you anywhere! I'm so sorry!" True, the lift wasn't working, but I was unable to convince him that it didn't matter at all. He carried on apologizing and explaining that it had recently been out of order so often...

That day he was in a bad mood and probably felt unwell. He didn't smile once. When I'd taken a closer look at him, I was sorry to see that, since the previous year, he'd aged more than in the previous four. Nervously he fixed and cleaned his new, much stronger glasses again and again. His complexion was unhealthy and the skin of his hands was peeling alarmingly. As usual, he was dressed in a bizarre way - in an old grey suit (judging from its cut, for official occasions) and a creased flannel shirt.

The talk began about Beethoven whose Ninth Symphony he had heard in concert not long before. "I've not heard it for a long time, but at last I can see how marvellously written this work is! With Beethoven we have everything" - he was enthusiastic - "Both classicism and romanticism and the 20th century." He became lost in thought. "So many astonishing works," he added after a while. "So many wonderful discoveries. Not only in the Ninth Symphony - also in the late sonatas, especially the *Hammerklavier*." He went to the piano and played a fragment of the *Adagio*. "All is already there. And also in the *Grosse Fuge* I like the *Grosse Fuge* a lot." Suddenly he got excited. "Let's play the *Grosse Fuge*."

He went to the closet, took out the score, and handed it to me. "You'll play the parts of the first violin and viola on one piano and I'll play the parts of the second violin and cello on the other." "And how will we split the notes?" I asked, seeing that there was only one score. Shostakovich waved this objection aside. "Never mind, I'll play by heart!" And though it may seem incredible, Shostakovich, who at that time found it difficult to play the piano, not only played both parts





quite efficiently in terms of technique, but also made not a single mistake, performing the whole of this complex piece from memory!

Later, however, he appeared tired and withdrawn. He didn't even react to the arrival of Moisei Vainberg. He only asked if I'd brought some music of mine as he wanted to see my new pieces. I showed him a violin concerto brought specially for this purpose and, afterwards, a new symphony for choir and orchestra. He wanted to hear both pieces, but declared it impossible. "You know, my wife isn't here." He made a helpless gesture. "I don't know how to use the tape-recorder." He was genuinely stunned when I showed him how easy it was.

As usual he listened with the score in front of him. "Such a marvellous symphony! Splendid, splendid! I like it so much." Then he assumed an apologetic expression: "Please, let me have this recording." I was amazed for a moment. Then Vainberg whispered to me (in Polish): "He really likes it. Please present him with your recording." Shostakovich noticed Vainberg's reaction and became even more uncomfortable: "You think I impose on you? Not at all, indeed! Can you spare me this recording?"

As we were parting, he recommended an incredibly long list of people I should visit in Leningrad, where I was going the following day. "And when you return to Moscow, please call me so we can meet again." Need I add that when I called again after a week, he expressed no interest in meeting me, and - like the year before - he didn't show up at the Moscow concert devoted to my compositions, despite repeatedly assuring me he would come only a day earlier? Once again he paid a few compliments to my Second Symphony and then we said goodbye - this time for a year.

All my meetings with Shostakovich were fascinating, though also nervewracking as one could never predict his moods and demeanour. A closer familiarity developed between us in the early Seventies, but even then he used to surprise me with his behaviour and questions. His letters, too, reflected his character - full of contradictions, often sparse but sometimes meticulously describing insignificant details. For me, those letters manifested his anxieties and experiences better than our chaotic, nervous conversations.

Unfortunately, most of his letters mainly concerned his incessantly declining health. Everybody knew that the developing paralysis of his hands, not to mention his lung cancer, were incurable, but Shostakovich still harboured a belief in recovery, though perhaps, as in many such cases, it was self-deception. "I'll live a hundred years," he said to a journalist of the *Frankfurter Allgemeinen* in 1973. "I have iron health and will live a long time,"

he assured one of his biographers at a time when climbing a few stairs at the entrance of his house in Moscow caused him much trouble. The theme of his illness and recovery recurred in his letters: "I feel much better," he wrote to me in January 1968. "I've come back home after a four-month stay in hospital. I broke my leg. It's all right now, though I can hardly climb the stairs, or, especially, go downstairs." In a letter of 2nd May 1970, I read: "I've been at Kurgan for a long time now and I am treated by the eminent doctor G. A. Ilizarov. He's trying to 'bring into order' my hands and legs." Two months later, he continued: "The treatment has had no favourable results. In mid August I'll go to Kurgan again to have Ilizarov complete the treatment, as he says, 'with a consonant chord'."

From his letters I knew that he also suffered from creative problems. In spite of such masterpieces as the Fourteenth Symphony, and the Twelfth and Thirteenth Quartets, he was losing faith in his skills. "Nothing comes out anymore," he told me once. "I'm finished". In one letter, he complained that he couldn't finish the film music for *King Lear*. In 1971, I received a depressing letter from him: "Dear Krzysztof! Thank you for your Third Quartet. This is a great joy for me and an honour that you've dedicated your new piece to me for my 65th birthday. Thank you. I've been ill recently. I'm ill now, too. I still hope, though, that I'll regain my strength. I'm very weak now. This summer I finished another symphony, the Fifteenth. Probably I shouldn't compose anymore. But I can't live without it. The symphony has four movements. It includes exact quotations from Rossini, Wagner, and Beethoven. This and that written under Mahler's influence. I'd really like to make you acquainted with this symphony." This letter accurately reflects his great modesty. He wrote these words on the eve of his second heart attack.

I visited him after he had left hospital. He was in an unusually cheerful, almost excited mood. When I entered the room, he cried out joyfully: "Wonderful that you're here! Let's start by exchanging souvenirs. Souvenirs first!" All of his life he liked receiving and giving presents, yet never precious ones; as a rule, small gifts, funny or practical, were the most welcome. Acquaintances knew that his favourite objects were candlesticks, so he had plenty delivered on various occasions. He was as pleased as a child when, on his birthday, the room was lit with as many candles as his age in years.

At this meeting he talked a lot - in fact nonstop, not allowing anyone else to speak. He expounded mainly on his illness, or rather on how he had overcome it, as he happily thought. Among the assembled guests, I remember most





of all his friend of youth, the film director Leo Arnshtam, who regarded him with the highest admiration, almost adoration. Shostakovich jumped from one subject to another, enjoying everything, before suddenly exclaiming: "Lovka, you know, Krzysztof Ivanich (for several years he had referred to me thus) tells me that there's flu in Cracow too now. Not only here, not only here. And I don't have flu!"

Such moments were fewer and fewer. When we saw each other for the last time, in April 1974, he was very weak and tired. He confessed: "Now I know for sure that I'll never recover. But I've learned not to think about it."

This last meeting was particularly depressing. He sat on the chair, almost not moving, gesturing only with his fit left hand. He couldn't see well, which his thick glasses indicated. (He admitted that his short-sightedness was more than fifteen diopters.) Irina Antonovna brought a big bottle of Napoleon brandy and he boasted that his doctors had allowed him to drink alcohol again. We sat for several hours, slowly sipping cognac. Shostakovich gradually became more animated. Not much, however, was left of his old spontaneity and vehemence. Only once when the talk was about Mahler did he cry out: "His symphonies! I like the First one best... and also the Second... and Third... Also the Fourth is wonderful!... and Fifth. Also the Sixth and Seventh... The Eighth is marvellous... and the Ninth!!!... yes, and the Tenth. But if I was told I had only one hour to live, I'd like most to listen to the final part of the *Song of the Earth*."

For years I had been encouraging him to write a clarinet quintet. He pondered on it: "Who knows I've never thought about it... but this is an interesting idea." During our last meeting he was not so convinced: "I don't like Brahms' Clarinet Quintet. I prefer the Horn Trio. Once I heard Tsyganov playing it often... And perhaps I don't know the Quintet so well... Mozart's Quintet is splendid... but Brahms'?... I guess Brahms is primarily a symphonist..." And suddenly he got excited: "I like the Fourth Symphony most, it's the best one. Then the Second, the First, and the Third least of all, that's for sure."

On that occasion it was him who wanted to show me his pieces: the *Songs to Verses by Marina Tsvetayeva* and the Fourteenth Quartet. And so the roles were reversed: he sat on the chair which I often used to occupy; I took the seat at the desk and listened to his music, holding in my hands the unpublished scores. If I can put it so immodestly, his new vocal cycle did not convince me at all, so after having listened to the piece, I sat over the score in silence for a long time, just as he had when he didn't like my music. Since, however, he once wrote in one of his letters that the best

relations should always be kept between us and this only requires that we tell each other the truth, I decided to reveal my reservations to him. He replied with sadness: "Yes, it is necessary to be always in search, one can't repeat oneself." Hence, later, I was very pleased to congratulate him on his new quartet, whose first movement was particularly delightful. He stated that he composed quartets easily, but the really complex task was to write a string trio. "At least that's what Edik Denisov told me," he added, smiling inscrutably.

At that last meeting he kept returning to the past; he even played on the piano the subject of the counterpoint exam set by Glazunov. He referred to Shebalin, to his old students. Once again he recollected Kotlarevsky with pleasure. It was clear that he lived mainly on his memories. His desk was loaded with mementoes of the past which I'd not seen before: photographs of him with the Beethoven Quartet, the portrait of Igor Stravinsky, and the diploma of the Academie Charles de Cros for the recording of *Katerina Izmailova*. When saying goodbye, he said that it wouldn't be possible to set a date for another meeting. "Because, you know, I'm a very moody person," he explained, adding: "I believe we'll meet in the very near future."

We saw each other no more. We had many phone conversations, I received a couple of letters, and once a score of the Thirteenth Symphony with a nice dedication arrived. On 10th August 1975 I got a telegram informing me of his death. I went to the funeral, very official and pompous. A few days after I got back to Poland, his last letter came, scribbled with his nearly paralyzed hand during his stay in hospital at the end of July:

"Dear Krzysztof! Thank you for remembrance, thank you for your letter... I'm back in hospital again due to my heart and lung problems. I can hardly write with my right hand. Please don't be upset by this distorted handwriting... With my best regards. D. Shostakovich. P.S. Though it was very hard for me, I've written a sonata for viola and piano. D. Sh."

If I was to add something else to these incomplete recollections about Shostakovich, I could only refer to one of the letters of Thomas Mann, who wrote that when he had personally met Gustav Mahler, he realized for the first time in his life that he had a truly great man before him. Shostakovich likewise emanated a unique greatness, goodness, and some irresistible magnetic power.

*Krzysztof Meyer*  
(Edited for DSCH by Ian MacDonald)



# Notes by Maxim



*In the summer of 1990, while in Houston to rehearse and perform his father's 5th symphony, the University gave a short-term Cullen Professorship to Maksim Dmitrievich Shostakovich [MS] in exchange for which he taught a week-long intensive course in his father's symphonies, primarily designed for undergraduate seniors. All the same, MS said a great deal that I found very interesting. So, while the undergraduates were hearing all of these works for the first time and trying to make some sort of sense of them (to say nothing of 20th century music history in general), I was able to audit the class and, I think, hear it on a very different level.*

*Here follow my notes. I've tried to reconstruct things as best I can, but there are times when I simply don't remember where the conversation was going. Most of it, as I reread it, comes across as confirmation of previous impressions.*

*John-Michael Albert*

## Syllabus:

Readings (Krebs,  
Soviet Composers;  
Boris Schwartz,  
Music and Musical Life  
in Soviet Russia);

## Schedule:

Thursday June 7 - Symphony 1;  
Friday June 8 - Symphony 4;  
Monday June 11 - Symphony 5;  
Tuesday June 12 - Symphony 8;  
Wednesday June 13 - Symphony 13;  
Thursday June 14 - Symphony 15;  
Friday June 15 - exam;  
Saturday June 16 - Rehearsal:  
Symphony 5;  
Sunday June 17 - performance:  
Symphony 5.

## Thursday, June 7, 1990 (Introduction, Symphony No. 1)

*MS:* People say my father composed very quickly. He would respond that that was not true, "I just write it down quickly."

It is popular to make film biographies of composers in which they plunge into the turmoil of a storm or a great human tragedy, music paper in hand, agonizing and scribbling, scribbling and agonizing. Composition does not happen that way. When my father composed, he sat down and wrote. I lived all my life with a great composer and never saw him jump up in the middle of the night and write something. When he was writing and would be called to dinner, he would put his pen down - in the middle of an unresolved dominant seventh - and go.

He respected the work of others. Shostakovich knew that revolution and war were masters of conflict and of unreasoned chaos. They sweep individuals up in huge unthinking masses that do astonishing damage. In the midst of this maelstrom, the individual is nothing. The individual is exterminated without a thought.

*Q:* Don't the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> symphonies reflect an idealistic Leninist period in your father's life?

*MS:* It is becoming a popular scholarly posture. Leninism, in a nutshell, is the imperative of the good to destroy everything in its path.

He believed in the sanctity of human life. Shostakovich did not think much of his 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> symphonies. Once when I wanted to conduct the 3<sup>rd</sup> he looked at me and said, "Couldn't you conduct something else?"

*Q:* Which of your father's symphonies did he like the most?

*MS:* "I like all my symphonies as I would like all my children, he would say. Maybe those more who suffered more."

From a letter Shostakovich wrote to Balanchine's brother, a Georgian composer: "In our life, we have not only to be able to create but to defend our creations as well. If they were to cut off my hands, I would take the pen into my mouth."

Once Balanchine's brother visited America. Balanchine gave him a meat grinder as a going-away present. When he got to the Georgian customs, the customs official berated him, saying, "Shame on you. Such a famous Georgian composer. You go to America and instead of returning with piles of the latest musical scores, you return with a meat grinder." To which he replied, "You're right. What do I need with a meat grinder when there's no meat?" And he gave the meat grinder to the customs official.

Shostakovich speaks through his music. For me, every note is a word. From childhood, we have been taught as musicians to understand what





composers are trying to tell us. Music influences us immediately without using words.

Q: Which composers influenced the genesis of Shostakovich's symphonies?

MS: The history of the symphony is a chain of consequential links. Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler.

There can be no single influence.

Q: Did Shostakovich's contemporaries recognize him for his genius?

MS: Russian proverb: "A fisherman always knows another fisherman from afar."

Q: What did Shostakovich think of his contemporaries?

MS: It is said that Shostakovich hated Tchaikovsky. I remember him sitting at the breakfast table and listening to the Tchaikovsky 4th. He made a face, groaning that Tchaikovsky's developments are always so four-square. Later that day, we heard *The Queen of Spades*. His only words for it were "sublime genius." It is also said that Shostakovich hated Prokofiev. Again, I heard my father complaining once about his orchestration, using tuba with viola in such-and-such a composition. One evening, however, the family had made plans to see *War and Peace*. I wanted to get out of it and go to a party. My father was very stern, "There will be no party. You will hear *War and Peace*. It is a masterpiece of true genius."

The bad critics are always around for the first of these comments, never for the second. When writing about great people, you should either say everything or say nothing.

He knew music very well. He knew everything that was written before him from memory. I know of no other composer who could sit down at the piano and play and sing the entire Ring Cycle from beginning to end from memory.

My father was a great pianist; but he wanted to devote himself to composition.

He told me, "To be a great conductor, you must be a great pianist." In the early days, he was a student of Glazunov, who was unaware that music had entered a new century. Glazunov took my father's first symphony and reorchestrated two pages of it. Then he told him, "There. Now if you continue like that, you will have a good symphony." The results were something between Rimsky-Korsakov and Kalinnikov.

Q: What did he think of Western Music?

MS: I asked him once to make a tape of some dance music for a party. There were no western recordings in the Soviet Union and certainly no sheet music for these compositions. He got the necessary tape for the reel-to-reel tape recorder and recorded 40 minutes of the popular dance songs he had heard on the radio from the West at the piano - including *Tea for Two*. Later, when Stalin died, he told me to record the many speeches that were being made to commemorate him. On his instructions, I recorded them over the dance tape. A new artist of a new world must be very brave to break that wall of tradition.

My father didn't separate music, western/eastern, popular/classical. He believed that there is simply good music and bad music. He also believe that there are no bad orchestras; only bad conductors.

Q: What would your father have written if he had not been the object of so much personal persecution and the subject of wars, revolutions, and famines?

MS: It is, of course, an absurd question. Perhaps if my father had not lived through so much raw emotions, he would have consigned himself to writing polkas and dance music. That was not the case.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> symphonies belong to the New Economic Policy (NEP) period. Lenin allowed some elements of capitalism. Restrictions on art and music were relaxed. In his Piano Sonata No. 1, "October," he showed that he was aware that the good wouldn't last. Later, when things changed, he removed "October" from the title page.

He generally gave subtitles to his work under pressure. There were changes in the *Jewish Folk Poetry cycle*.





Sasha Cherny also changed the poetry to *Picture from the Past*. Each had gotten a phone call from "The Way It Should Be" [one of the many Russian euphemisms MS used for phone calls from Stalin himself.]

In the original of the 12<sup>th</sup> symphony, there was no dedication to Lenin. Shostakovich added it to the proofs from the publisher in red.

Symphony No.1 hearkens to the period during which he supported himself and his family by playing music for silent movies. He also wrote scores for films such as *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. He loved Shakespeare. He didn't like to see the movies for which he wrote music.

Symphony No.1 was a success with the audiences and the conductors. The critics were negative. Called it "totally giftless" and said that "it will probably never be performed again." Of course, they said the same thing about Tchaikovsky's violin concerto. You must conduct it two ways. In the first movement, the happy, young Shostakovich is running down the Nevsky Prospect on a Sunday. In the second movement, it is a rainy, grey, cold day. Both are Quixotic adventures. The opening should be compared to *The Nose*. Wake. Yawn. Stretch. The trumpet is the opening yawn. Others may have a different interpretation. No one knows. That's what musical life is about.

A painter friend of mine said that computers are getting so good that soon, musicians would not be needed at all. Chess players, too.

However, our art is alive because the composer understands himself. And different interpretations are necessary. The horizon is what the composer wants. He can get near it, but he cannot touch it. If he were to touch the horizon, music would die. We would not understand Beethoven. But we understand his music.

Take Bernstein's recording of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 1: deep, excellent, high class. The dynamic range is limited by the old recording.

Q: Critics have always felt there were problems with the last movement. They have claimed that it is weak. Not as good as the others.

MS: The last movement is my favorite. There is no room for cuts or for changes. I like it very much. It works very much like a film.

The fast material means a lot of time is passing quickly. With the sound of the timpani, you're back to real time. In Symphony No. 1, he uses trumpets in F which is not very common. The tempos are his.

Critics felt that the final movement of Symphony No. 1 was a mistake. It was too light. They felt that a youth couldn't be that deep.

Shostakovich knew instruments well. He marked his intentions clearly. String players often praise the bowing. He was merciful to winds by judicious placement of rests for breaths.

Q: Did Shostakovich ever conduct?

MS: He tried twice as a student. Once with the first movement of Beethoven's 1<sup>st</sup> symphony. With Rostropovich. "Interludes from *Lady Macbeth*." Also the 2nd movement of Symphony No.10 and the 'Cello Concerto No. 1.

#### Friday, June 8 (Symphony No. 4)

MS: He was disappointed by movies. He thought that the technical quality was rather low. Also, they showed little creativity. Ready-made scenarios. They were not a waste, however. There were experimental moments.

*Lady Macbeth* was considered very unusual then and now. A music drama. It was isolated from the experiments, yet radically different. It is now performed 100 times per season in Moscow and Leningrad. Stalin imagined that he was one of the characters in the police scene. He was jealous of someone else's success and played games by condemning the popular. Then, *Pravda's* "Muddle Instead of Music" Stalin moved his focus from subject to subject. Under Stalin, every day as Shostakovich left home, he would take a small packet of soap and a tooth brush with him, not knowing if he would return.

*Lady Macbeth*, 1933; Symphony No. 4, 1934. He thought it would be his end. It is absolutely devoid of happy resolution - which has no relation to pessimism. There is the presence of war in Symphony No. 4, much like the bombers in Symphony No. 5. The finale is dark. He attended the rehearsal. The orchestra was nervous because of the difficulty. He decided to withdraw it. It was not performed for 30 years.





The 4<sup>th</sup> was followed by the 5<sup>th</sup>. Critics claimed that he was a 'corrected' composer. That was not true. But the 5<sup>th</sup> is less pessimistic than the 4<sup>th</sup>. In the 4<sup>th</sup>, there is no way out.

Music is abstract. It has no words. Therefore, composers are in a little easier position under totalitarian governments. When you listen to the 4<sup>th</sup>, you feel the breath of his time.

Q: Did his fame protect him?

MS: Perhaps.

He never changed anything, not one note, except in *Lady Macbeth* and the 4th Symphony. When the 4th was finally unveiled in the '60s, the critics felt they had been justified, Shostakovich was not satisfied himself; so he made revisions.

During the rehearsal, he wore dark glasses. About halfway through, he was completely constricted, holding his breath. He spoke in low tones. He was spent.

I have so much faith in my father's musicianship and genius that I feel that the revisions in *Lady Macbeth* and Symphony No. 4 HAVE to be improvements. Therefore, those versions are preferable.

Monday, June 11 (Symphony No. 5)

MS: Critics felt he was 'corrected, improved, and clarified.' On the contrary, he chose clearer language to ensure clear communication. The 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony is his "Heroic Symphony."

Fadeyev once said that he was scolding someone in the finale. It was not just scolding. He is saying, "I am right. I will follow the way I choose."

My father told me never to explain.

Once Shostakovich was taking an exam in counterpoint from Glazunov. He had a lot of trouble with one of the fugue subjects. When he gave in his paper, he told Glazunov that it would have been a lot easier if one note were changed. Glazunov said he had obviously made a mistake when he wrote the exam, but since Shostakovich didn't correct it, he got a lower grade. "You should have figured it out and corrected it."

Once when I was studying music in Leningrad, I asked my father to write a fugue for me to hand in for a class assignment. I got a B-minus.

Now, I conduct the 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony with a very slow beginning. The 2<sup>nd</sup> movement should be all down-bows. "Twenty years ago, I conducted it twice as fast."





## Tuesday, June 12 (Symphony No. 8)

MS: Symphony No. 7, "military," written at the beginning of the war, photocopies sent to the US, first conducted by Toscanini. Critics felt it described the tragedy of the war; but it was not just about the war. The times before the war were very difficult; Stalin was schizophrenic, a maniac of greatness and paranoia; it was a time of "Processes" - a euphemism for the open trials. Accusations were made against different groups at different times: engineers, scientists, artists; all were "organized plotting enemies against the State and against Stalin." Everyone was a German spy; the prisons were overcrowded, so there needed to be more and faster trials, outside the norms of human jurisdiction; people were tortured with the purpose of getting them to sign a full confession; the accused were deceived - they were told that if they signed, they'd be released; then they were given "nine grains of lead in the basement" [executed by firing squad].

My father always said, "I think long; I write fast" - the time preceding the war was probably the inspiration of Symphony No. 7, the tragedy of the nation. There were negative evil forces - Germany and in the USSR; the USSR had its own fascism and its own "Hitler." The 7th Symphony is not just military.

If the 7th is about cataclysm, struggle, and destruction, the 8th is a philosophical requiem, a reaction to the content of the 7th Symphony. The 8th is a painting of an empty world: no truth, no life, nothing.

1<sup>st</sup> Movement: English horn solo is like the last human voice on an empty earth; long, centrally located, the voice of an author.

4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Movements of Symphony No. 8: 4<sup>th</sup> is a requiem, grieving for the victims of the past, present, and future; the 5<sup>th</sup> is the necessary dawn of hope and light that must follow it. The composer does not lose faith in humanity in spite of all the horrors of humanity; kindness, kind future; human soul reaching for God. 4<sup>th</sup> movement ends in C minor, hopeless; the 5<sup>th</sup> ends in C major.

Previn's recording is very fast, probably because of EMI's insistence that the whole work be on a single LP. The second scherzo is especially too fast; it should be played in two, not in one; in it, a person is escaping from somewhere with dogs attacking his legs. Shostakovich hated the word "scherzo," his "jokes" were very serious.

5<sup>th</sup> movement is in C major; the bassoon solo has something Shakespearean in it, reminds me of the grave diggers in *Hamlet* - true peace of soul; hope, light; faith in humanity, it will not always be that bad.

Previn's performance: not enough power, the rhythm is too light; Kiril Kondrashin is better, because he always asked Shostakovich's advice; Mravinsky is good, correct. Critics always discuss whether Stravinsky is conducted well or not; is it a question of good or bad, correct or incorrect?

Mravinsky consulted with the composer before making any of his recordings.

Next, we'll discuss Symphony No. 13: in Symphony No. 13, Shostakovich protected an entire nation through music; the poem *Babi Yar* is about the Jews, but it is also about the destiny of Russia, the destiny of a man in Russia, the destiny of a man who is an artist in Russia.

## Wednesday, June 13, (Symphony No. 13)

MS: In 1953, Stalin died; there was an ensuing political struggle, with Khrushchev ending up on top; Khrushchev brought a "perestroika" thaw. This was received with great joy; there was new freedom, social relaxation; greater freedom in the arts; artists whose throats where completely throttled could speak with more truth.

Yevtushenko's *Babi Yar* was published in *Soviet Culture*, a political document of the government: today [June 1990] there is complete literary freedom in publishing, except of course state secrets.

Shostakovich noticed that the poem touched an extremely important subject; before the Revolution, anti-Semitism was there; the Bolsheviks brought hope to the Jews; but to their great disappointment, anti-Semitism grew. So *Babi Yar* speaks of the war and of the execution of the Jews, an event that can be generalized in history with the Dreyfus Affair in France, or Anne Frank. Shostakovich was extremely impressed; especially with the last four lines of the poem.





1<sup>st</sup> Movement: a symphonic poem.

Shostakovich was isolated in the hospital when he wrote this; he had had a heart attack, he had broken his leg on the way home from my wedding. While in the hospital, he read more poems by Yevtushenko. Shostakovich felt that this was a work of tremendous civil importance to the Russians; in it he describes the suffering of the Soviet people, all the horrors after WW II, the economic disasters, the empty stores, starvation.

2<sup>nd</sup> Movement: *Humour*. Shostakovich laughs at the power that devastated the USSR - "No one can forbid one to laugh."

There was total infiltration of society by informers; Shostakovich was afraid to speak to friends, to his wife, to himself; so the Symphony is as if he was explaining.

5th Movement: calls people to build their careers honestly, like Pasteur, the cosmonauts, Lev [Count Leo] Tolstoy. This provides a humorous moment in the work; there was a much-hailed Soviet writer named Alexei Tolstoy whose reputation overshadowed, in the Soviet mind, that of the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. So when the bass solo sings the list of people who made honest careers for themselves and comes to Lev Tolstoy, the men's chorus barks back in disbelief, "Lev?" And the bass reiterates emphatically, "Lev!"

When Shostakovich was in the hospital, I went to visit him; he said that it [the Symphony] was finished; a 'theaterologist' friend, Gleickman, was visiting; Shostakovich sent me out to buy some vodka to celebrate, which I did; I brought three little glasses with me. "Well, I've finished the 13th Symphony. Let's drink." There was a knock on the door. It was time for an injection. We hid the bottle of vodka in a magazine and attempted to stuff it into a large padded leather chair that had been brought in for Shostakovich; but we couldn't - there were already five bottles hidden in it! So, after the injection, we had to offer the nurse a drink as well in exchange for her silence.

Then Shostakovich got a phone call "From Where It Should Come".

"Where did you find this poem?"

"In the newspaper."

One after another, all the conductors used different excuses to get out of conducting the work; and the basses all had excuses. The censors, through the Union of Composers, knew it was practically impossible to stop Shostakovich. No one knew what would happen at the end of the thaw and therefore, everyone was afraid. Except Kondrashin. One day before the première, the bass soloist refused to sing because he had been "Called the Way He Should Have Been Called;" his brave double sang with great success.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Symphony has always had problems in the USSR. When I left in 1981 (it was the White Nights Festival, near May 1) - among many other reasons, in search of freedom - I was ashamed to remain in a country where the Leningrad Shostakovich Society refused to perform the 13<sup>th</sup> Symphony on my request; there were all sorts of excuses: the chorus is too busy, why should we sing about the Jews?

It begins and ends with a bell, as if to say everything is to be repeated.

The final line: career and careerists: compromise their principals, betray their friends, betray themselves, betray their collaborators: party membership was a condition of success.

The first performance was as written; immediately afterward, pressure was applied to revise it; Yevtushenko changed the phrase and Shostakovich was unhappy.

#### Thursday, June 14 (Symphony No. 15)

*MS*: Social Realism: political control of the arts to fool someone; a complex of tools. Optimistic.

Formalism: pejorative. Pessimistic.

Social Realism originated with Maksim Gorky; Gorky was a talented man; a good writer; then he met Lenin and gained a lot of influence; during the Stalin terrorism, Gorky was unhappy and used his influence to protect himself and others; Gorky had his own opinion and realized that everything wasn't good under Social Realism; Stalin could not touch him; so he died by a Stalinist trick: Gorky was poisoned by his own personal physician, who was later also liquidated.

So Maksim Gorky was an instrument in a political game called "Social Realism".





After completing the 13<sup>th</sup> Symphony, Shostakovich's health was failing; his right hand was almost paralyzed; the right half of his body had nearly completely ceased to function; he thought about death more and more.

His early vocal works dwell on death. The 14<sup>th</sup> Symphony describes different kinds of death; but you must realize that, as he develops the subject of death, he glorifies life.

The more horrifying death is, the more beautiful life is. Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva were friends and poets of death. With the completion of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Symphonies, both song cycles, he thought of another symphony, a symphony that would sum up all of his previous work and turn to a new page in his style.



The 15<sup>th</sup> Symphony is a chamber symphony; personal, intimate; it describes human life from beginning to end through the prison of his experience. There are many unexpected moments in this symphony; it starts light-hearted and child-like; it includes a quotation from the *William Tell* overture.

1<sup>st</sup> Movement is nicknamed the "Toy Store".

The drama intensifies as the Symphony moves from the first to the second movement with a quotation from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. There is a big solo for trombone: heroic, prison song; heroic conflict in life; the music rises to climax; a heart-breaking chord: grief, regret,

everything that humans were not created for; it describes the moment when the soul leaves the body and rises to eternity - it was already planned in the Michelangelo Sonnets, and in *The Poet's Death* in the 14<sup>th</sup> Symphony.

From that moment, with the composer, we look at the world from above; calm, the sound of the bell as at the beginning.

I am not a poet or a writer; the rest I have to do by conducting. Shostakovich did not go to church, but the word "God" is there very often in songs and symphonies. When working on a symphony, my father would give me a score; he truly disliked speaking about his music; he would probably say now, "What have you been doing for the last seven days!?"

Shostakovich would come to the first rehearsal and make short comments: "The clarinet should be louder" or "The strings should be softer;" but he would never explain. There is a musical language which we have been taught since childhood; if we need verbal explanations, then we're bad musicians.

1<sup>st</sup> Movement: the trombone is a proud, strutting fireman.

2<sup>nd</sup> Movement: no longer a child; long 'cello solo; trombone sings a prison song.

At the first rehearsal, Shostakovich said on the first run-through, "Don't tell the musicians there





will be a quotation from *William Tell*. I want to see their faces when they come to it.”

3<sup>rd</sup> Movement: quotations from Beethoven’s 16<sup>th</sup> String Quartet and from the opening motive of *Tristan*.

The passacaglia puts us above the earth; violins in overtones; seppuko-chord at the end of the climax.

This was absolutely new for Shostakovich, the beginning of a new age.

About myself: I will try to tell a very long story as briefly as possible.

It was an enormous joy to live with a musician that great. I have had many teachers and worked under many conductors; my most important teacher was my father. What he said at home about music, the concerts he heard, advice to musicians and students, comments. He taught before the war and at the end of his life; in the middle he was accused of being a formalist and was fired. Therefore, the atmosphere at our home was unique. When I was 3 or 4, there was the first performance of the 7<sup>th</sup>. Symphony; the family was evacuated to Kuibyshev because the Soviet Army was losing; father took me to the première.

Shostakovich wanted to fight in the war himself, but he was nearsighted -9, -12.

My only memory of Kuibyshev: there was good candy for sale!

In 1946, at the rehearsals for the 8th Symphony: at that moment, I decided to be a conductor; but father said, “First learn the piano well” and I entered the conservatory as a pianist; studying piano, piano pieces. Father gave me the 2<sup>nd</sup> Piano Concerto on my birthday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1957.

I entered the school of music in 1946; it was a horrible time: starvation, poverty, the country was ruined.

I remember, the students were rationed 1 bagel and a paper packet containing 1 teaspoon of sugar per day for food. We lived in the country during the summer; captured Nazi soldiers were used to build the roads; once a poor pale German soldier came and asked for cigarettes and bread; my sister and I were very scared because of all the newspaper caricature of German soldiers in uniform; my father told us not to be afraid of him; he was not guilty of anything; he did not

want to kill anyone; he was forced to.

In a few words, Shostakovich defined the war from a human, individual point of view.

I studied with Yakov Fleer (pianist), Markevich (conductor), Rabinovich, Rozhdestvensky.

As the assistant conductor in many orchestras; I travelled and conducted a lot; then I became the music director of the State Orchestra of Radio and TV for 10 years. I had very negative feelings toward what was happening; it seemed that we were in a swamp, and the swamp was growing; people were afraid, the authorities did whatever they wanted; pessimism spread.

Father was asked, “Why did you write the cycle on Jewish poetry?” He often used Jewish melodies; there are many symbols in Shostakovich’s music; he used the Jewish people as a symbol of human suffering.

Once father was walking along the street after the war. He saw a Jewish man, covered in many medals, a hero of the war. Someone shouted at him, “Hey, you? Where did you steal those medals?” But that’s not the only reason. He had used many Jewish melodies before.

Everything around me told me that I had to leave the USSR; the regime had broken the life and health of my father; it had tortured him; so, when I was in Germany with my son, we asked for asylum in the US embassy; we have lived in the US since 1981 as US citizens.

When there is freedom for everyone, I will return.

*That’s all. I did not attend either the rehearsal or the performance of the 5th Symphony. After the last class, there were pictures taken of the class and he autographed scores, notes, and what not. I asked him to autograph my recording of the Violin Concerto No.1, with David Oistrakh as soloist and him conducting the New Philharmonia Orchestra. It has a photograph of Dmitri Shostakovich, his son Maksim, and David Oistrakh on the front and on the back. I remember Maksim looked at the recording for a long time in silence, before turning it over and autographing it. I had the strong feeling that there was a very interesting story in it, but no time to tell it.*

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