

WRITING ABOUT SHOSTAKOVICH

Edinburgh International Festival 1962



*Edinburgh Festival 1962
working cover design*

Day after day, the small, drab figure in the dark suit hunched forward in the front row of the gallery listening tensely. Sometimes he tapped his fingers nervously against his cheek; occasionally he nodded his head rhythmically in time with the music. In the whole of his productive career, remarked Soviet Composer Dmitry Shostakovich, he had “never heard so many of my works performed in so short a period.”

Time Music: The Two Dmitrys; September 14, 1962

In 1962 Shostakovich was invited to attend the Edinburgh Festival, Scotland’s annual arts festival and Europe’s largest and most prestigious. An important precursor to this invitation had been the outstanding British premiere in 1960 of the First Cello Concerto – which to an extent had helped focus the British public’s attention on Shostakovich’s evolving repertoire.

Week one of the Festival saw performances of the First, Third and Fifth String Quartets; the Cello Concerto and the song-cycle *Satires* with Galina Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich.





Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya in Edinburgh

Week two heralded performances of the Preludes & Fugues for Piano, arias from *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, the Sixth, Eighth and Ninth Symphonies, the Third, Fourth, Seventh and Eighth String Quartets and Shostakovich's orchestration of Musorgsky's *Khovanschina*. Finally in week three the Fourth, Tenth and Twelfth Symphonies were performed along with the Violin Concerto (No. 1), the Suite from *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, the *Three Fantastic Dances*, the Cello Sonata and *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. Many of the performances constituted UK premieres, the Rozhdestvensky-led concerts featuring the Fourth Symphony and Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* Suite constituted first performances in the West.

In reality, the presence of such a high-profile Soviet delegation to Scotland appeared to provoke equal, if not greater interest in issues such as the forthcoming Thirteenth Symphony, the Space Programme, the composer's opinion of Igor Stravinsky and of Soviet politics in general – to some the Edinburgh programme seemed almost incidental.

The Press

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. For example (*Daily Mail*).

"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....."

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."

On the subject of the string quartets (*Leith Times*):

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.

To recall an account in a very different vein: the very sincere, very revealing testimony of the British guitar virtuoso Julian Bream (from *Life on the Road*):



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.

When, at a press conference at the Festival, a local journalist asked Shostakovich if it was true that the Party's criticisms had helped him, the composer nervously replied:

"Yes, yes, yes, the Party always helped me – it was always right, it was always right".

However when the journalist left, Shostakovich turned to Rostropovich, who was took part in the Festival and said, "Son of a bitch! Doesn't he know he shouldn't ask me such questions – what can I possibly say?"

A far more sympathetic exchange was related by Scottish composer Erik Chisholm:

I met him again at the 1962 Edinburgh Festival that was practically given over to his music. At a press conference he was asked: "What do you think of your own music, Mr. Shostakovich?" He replied: "We have a saying in Russia that of all his children the father loves best his sick son. So excuse me if I say that - I love every note of music I have ever written." I only spoke to Shostakovich through an interpreter. He could speak no English and I no Russian.

The extent to which the Festival focused on Soviet music displeased certain commentators, and through an infamous set of exchanges that took place in the columns of a religious newspaper, *The Catholic Herald* over several weeks, the contemporary reader is offered a glimpse of the mentality of the educated classes in the UK, and perhaps of East-West affairs in general. The violence of the criticism meted out by fellow composer Sorabji is similarly noteworthy, if only for its arrogant outspokenness.



Catholic Herald Exchanges

24th August 1962

Dishonour at Edinburgh

by Colm Brogan

WHAT is the Edinburgh Festival in aid of? I ask this question because the present musical programme is heavily weighted with Iron Curtain performers and material. If Khrushchev had been paying for a propaganda cultural boost he could hardly have got a better bargain.

I will be told that Art has no ideology and knows no frontiers, and that such gatherings cannot fail to promote some understanding between the best minds of East and West. To all of which I can only piously murmur hear-hear, not to mention blah-blah-blah.

I have no objection to the appearance of the Borodin String Quartette[sic] from Moscow, nor to the Belgrade Opera Ballet. Nor do I have objection to a diet of the Russian composer Shostakovitch[sic] so rich as to threaten indigestion.

Integrity

But I have every objection to making this pretty abject creature Shostakovitch the Guest of Honour. There is one quality we can and must demand in every artist of international standing before we do him honour. That quality is integrity. An honourable man living in a suffocating tyranny has the alternatives of protest or silence. If he chooses to lick the tyrant's boots, he loses his honour.

That is what Shostakovitch did. Experts assure me that the finest of his work is fine indeed. They also assure me that the worst of his work is as bad as the totally abominable Soviet pictures shown in the Burlington Gallery a year or two back.

These pictures were political as all Soviet art is political. They were Art for the Masses. They reduced Art to the level of mere fumbling reproduction that would not offend the sensibilities of the biggest bonehead on a collective farm – or in the Kremlin.

Shostakovitch's Stalinite work was on the same level. When he tried to write something that followed his own private inspiration he was bawled out, he recanted and signed up in the Soviet tripe factory. I don't want to denounce him too harshly for saving his skin (and his perks). Play his best work by all means, but why make him Guest of Honour? For Stalin read Hitler. For Shostakovitch read a German composer of equal eminence. If that composer had truckled to Hitler as Shostakovitch truckled to Stalin would he have been made Guest of Honour?

Jamboree

Then there is the writers' jamboree. Somebody, perhaps the Earl of Harewood, thought up the strikingly silly idea of asking a small army of more or less well-known writers from all over the world, to talk, to lecture and to argue. They asked 18 Russians, including Ilya Ehrenberg. Now, any writer who is even able to publish in Russia is by definition a poodle. The idea that such men could take part in a free and open discussion can only be entertained by someone who flatly refuses to live with reality.

And Ehrenberg is the sycophant to end all sycophants. During the Stalinite purges his friends and colleagues were murdered by the score or even by the hundred. What did Ehrenberg do? He twanged his lyre in praise of Stalin and all his works. When all around him fell, he survived and flourished.

There will be no need to talk to him for he will not be there. Neither he nor the 17 other poodles are being let out of their Russian kennels.

31st August 1962

Edinburgh Festival attack

SIR, – Even under a Reign of Terror, one is not obliged deliberately to seek martyrdom. The Armenian Catholics lived as quietly and unobtrusively as possible under the Turkish persecutions of the 18th and 19th centuries; some endured to pass on their precious heritage. The German hierarchy did not provoke Hitler too far, or it could scarcely have survived.



Shostakovich has had his brushes with authority, too; he wrote banal works at the behest of his Communist bosses, but he knows and we know they will soon be forgotten. Western music is the music of redeemed humanity and Shostakovich lies directly in this tradition.

His best works, easily recognisable as such on both sides of the Iron Curtain, owe nothing to the official view of Communist Man.

Like Pasternak, Shostakovich is protesting in the only way he knows how – through his art. By making him Guest of Honour, we are showing that we recognise his genius and appreciate his difficulties. No music lover is likely to join the Communist Party because of his twelve symphonies.

I, for one, am glad that Shostakovich has survived to give us his Violin Concerto and his Quartet No. 8. These are works Christians can enjoy – except, possibly, Colm Brogan.

M. Doughty, 21 Lawn Road, Stafford

SIR, – Mr. Colm Brogan’s attack on the Edinburgh Festival for being “heavily weighted with Iron Curtain performers and material” provides yet another example of the mania prevalent among many Catholics for seeing everything in pro- or anti- Communist terms.

“This delusory vision” (to quote Professor J. Cameron, *Search*, May) “is enormously consoling, for it gives one a single criterion for evaluating men and events; but it involves a resolute turning away from the complexities and ambiguities of the actual world to the spurious clarities of a world ruled by angels and demons, not men. Such a vision does immense spiritual harm, and is morally degrading.”

Mr. Shostakovich is one of the greatest living composers. It is reasonable and honourable to show our gratitude for his art and the pleasure it has given us. Only those who have lived and worked under the Soviet regime can know the difficulties and tensions that Mr. Shostakovich has faced. If Mr. Brogan had been in his place, would he have done better?

And why attack the Earl of Harewood who is doing a difficult job superlatively well? An article of this petty outlook provokes anger and contempt against Catholics, rightly so. Its appearance in your paper is a sad lapse from your customary levels of courtesy and charity.

Anthony Milner, London, S.E.3.





Dishonour at Edinburgh

7th September 1962

Your contributor, Colm Brogan, is hardly being quite fair to Ilya Ehrenberg. Wasn't it better that the great Boris Pasternak kept quiet during the Stalin terror so that after the death of that monster, he, the Jew Pasternak, could affirm in his book *Dr. Zhivago* the voice of Christian Russia: "One must be true to immortality – true to Christ"?

Ilya Ehrenberg, in a Radio Moscow broadcast in honour of his 70th birthday, according to *Time* (3rd February, 1961) "aimed an oblique swipe at his "government's persistent but unadmitted discrimination against Jews. Said Ehrenberg: 'I am proud of the fact that I am an ordinary Russian writer. But my passport (for travel inside Russia) states that I am not a Russian but a Jew. As long as even one anti-Semite exists in the world, I shall proudly reply to any question as to my nationality – I AM A JEW'."

May it not be the case that having endeavoured to draw world attention to Soviet anti-Semitism, Ehrenberg is no longer a free agent and that his passport for abroad is also stamped "Jew"?

The tragedy is that among the majority of Jews and Christians in England anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union is, apparently, less obnoxious than it is in other parts of the world, otherwise we would find a march on the Soviet Embassy similar to that on the German Embassy and reported in the *News Chronicle* for the 18th January, 1960, when an Anglican Bishop, a well-known Methodist Minister, accompanied by a leading Labour M.P., a Jewish M.P., and a Jewish Q.C., led a protest march to the German Embassy to hand in a protest which was said to be "a reflection of public opinion in Great Britain which holds anti-semitism in abhorrence".

The Earl of Harewood and his fellow promoters of the Soviet Theme of the Edinburgh Festival for 1962 can scarcely have been unaware of a later protest, reported in the *Daily Telegraph* for the 20th September, 1960, and made at a conference of protest against Soviet anti-Semitism, signed by Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Claude Bourdet of the *France Observateur*, Mr. Thurgood Marshall, of the Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, Dr. Martin Buber, the famous Jewish writer, and the pacifist ex-Mayor of Florence, Prof. de la Pira, wherein they affirmed that "attacks on practising Jews have been particularly fierce recently".

What is incredible, and must make the angels weep, is that so far the voice of Christian Scotland, by any of her Christian Communion, has not protested at this adulation of the representatives of an anti-Semitic and atheistic nation. Can it be that there is none – "true to Christ"?

T. Kennedy, London, S.W.1.

SIR, – The word "bigot" is sometimes applied to the Catholic by non-Catholic Christians. No reproach is less deserved these days in matters of religion but if it can legitimately be made in other spheres it must reflect, however unjustly, to the discredit of the Church and cause us personal embarrassment.

Our composers and painters are richly fortunate, living in a land where the state does not supervise their work. It would be surprising if a country historically as musical as Russia did not continue to produce front-rank composers and performers.

The inspiration of music bloweth where it listeth and is indifferent to adverse circumstances, whether poverty, disease or oppression.

If I were one constrained by nature to produce significant music – and such constraint will not be denied – would I, if it were a condition of being able to write what I knew was in me, produce something for what Mr. Brogan calls the "tripe factory"? I should.

Possibly Mr. Brogan, and others of sterner mould and greater sanctity than I, would not; but it has never been a characteristic of the saintly, still less of our Lord himself, to judge weakness harshly.



It is even arguable that Shostakovich, if he acted as Mr. Brogan says, did rightly and in the interests of the world. Had he elected martyrdom he would have achieved nothing but oblivion. As it is he has been able to enrich the world with music which, Mr. Brogan does not deny, is “fine indeed”. If he is to be condemned for writing bad music as well as good so is Beethoven and countless others – but no one is obliged to listen to their lapses.

Neither Shostakovich nor, probably, the organisers of the Edinburgh Festival are likely to suffer harm from Mr. Brogan’s attack. It is the honour of the CATHOLIC HERALD and the reputation of Catholics in England which is endangered.

Whether Shostakovich is (as I happen to think) among those who could contend for the title of “greatest living composer” if anyone were adolescent enough to confer such a title, or whether he is merely a composer of music which is “fine indeed” is beside the point. Either way there are no grounds for criticizing the energetic organisers of this year’s Festival who for musical reasons, have decided to make him “guest of honour”: rather let us join in paying tribute to a richly-endowed musician and ask him to forgive the ungracious treatment which he has received in these columns.

E. B. Simmons, Worrin Road, Shenfield, Essex. Brentwood 1180.

14th September 1962

SIR, – May I make a few points just to keep the record straight? I did not say that the better music of Shostakovich should not be played, but only that the treatment of a hero should not be given to a man who behaved with a dishonest servility exceptional even by Soviet standards.

I made no claim that I would have behaved more courageously than Shostakovich. I might have behaved just as badly, but if I had, I would have asked for nothing better afterwards than to be left in undisturbed obscurity. However, I am thankful that Mr. Doughty by implication concedes that I am a Christian. Not all of my critics are as big-hearted as that.

May I assure Mr. Milner that I do not see everything in pro- and anti- Communist terms? This is dangerous folly, though not so gross or dangerous as the folly of those who blindly and persistently ignore or minimise the reality of the Communist menace. There are indeed other threats to Christianity and I happen to think that some of them may well prove more permanent than the threat of Communism.

It is not I, but the Kremlin Communist who sees everything in pro- and anti- Communist terms. That is, I believe, the greatest weakness of Communist subversion in underdeveloped countries. They translate every tension and discontent into the terms of mid-nineteenth century industrialism, which was the basis of Marxism. Because of this blinkered approach they have met with one failure after another. It is failure of incomprehension – incomprehension on both sides.

To the Communist every human activity is a pro- or anti- Communist activity. Literature, the arts and music are all political weapons. Shostakovich appeared in Edinburgh and Ehrenberg did not. The decision to send one and not the other was a political decision. He was put on propaganda show as Soviet music’s Gagarin.

All Communist decisions are political decisions. Until we accept this fact with its concomitant that they bear against us “a lodged hate and a certain loathing”, the menace of Communism will be far greater than it need be.

Colm Brogan, 28 Ridgmount Gardens, London, W.C.1.





Colm Brogan's protest against the obsequious adulation of Shostakovich at the Edinburgh Festival is admirable and timely.

The fuss would not, perhaps, have been out of place if this composer were of the order of his great compatriots Medtner or Scriabine[sic], not to mention Prokofiev or Rachmaninoff, composer among many fine things of two of the greatest symphonies of modern times.

This Shostakovich is astronomically remote from being in this class. To some of us he is a pre-tentious, inflated bore. Every hearing of successive works confirms me in my opinion of him, publicly expressed 15 or more years ago, as a manipulator of the commonplace without individuality or distinction.

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, The Eye, Corfe Castle, Dorset.

21st September 1962

Letters to the Editor

Music in Russia

I would like to take this opportunity to point out some misconceptions that seem to be prevalent in this country, and which have been voiced in your columns recently concerning Shostakovich and his relationship to his "Communist bosses".

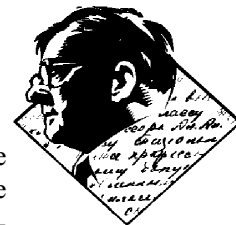
It seems to be a fact that most of his best music has been written because of restrictions imposed by Communist ideology and not in spite of them, much less as a protest to them. Shostakovich takes his responsibilities as a Soviet composer very seriously. His Fifth Symphony, written in 1937 as an answer to what he considered just criticism, was the turning point in his career, and it is only in his music written since that time, conforming to the party line, that he achieves something really significant. This does not imply, of course, that he maintains a high standard all the time. All good composers are capable of writing bad music. I think that Shostakovich's[sic] case shows that the artistic scene in Russia cannot be as strangulating as is commonly suggested. It is easy enough to point to all the bad music that has been written, but bad music is a universal phenomenon, and what Western country can boast of more than one living composer of Shostakovich's generation who has achieved a comparable international reputation?

However, whatever one's view of Shostakovich's music and Communist ideas about music, it is ridiculous to criticise the performance of his or any other Soviet composer's music in this country when so much interest is being taken in Western contemporary music in Russia. To do so is hardly conducive to good Anglo-Soviet relations or the easing of international tension.

R. Sherlaw Johnson, The Department of Music, The University, Leeds. 2

28th September 1962

Defending Shostakovich



I sincerely hope that with Mr. Kaikroshu Shapurji Sorabji's letter we have reached the ultimate in nonsense in this excruciating Edinburgh Festival wrangle. There is a world of difference between saying that Shostakovich is a very unequal composer – which everyone admits including Shostakovich himself – and saying that he is just a “pretentious inflated bore”.

One cannot so blithely ignore the consensus of opinion among musicians on the greatness of his 5th and 10th Symphonies and the widespread admiration for his violin concerto, quintet, quartets and piano preludes.

It is quite irrelevant to say by way of argument that he is a “manipulator of the commonplace”, since this could well be agreed without reflecting on his greatness. Haydn, Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi, Bizet, Rimsky Korsakov, Bruckner, Dvorak, Mahler and Elgar, to name but a few, were all in varying degrees manipulators of the commonplace; but this does not detract from their importance.

For those familiar with music, the capriciousness of Mr. Sorabji's evaluation is confirmed by the comparisons which he draws. Medtner and Scriabin were great pianists; but Medtner was an extremely pedestrian composer and Scriabin succeeded only in producing a handful of distinctive works, even those relying for much of their effect on non-musical associations.

As to Rachmaninov, it is scarcely sensible to call his 2nd and 3rd Symphonies “two of the greatest symphonies of modern times”, even if one is very fond of No. 2: especially when it is implied that none of Shostakovich's are in the same class. Fortunately one does not have to denigrate Rachmaninov and Prokofiev in order to do justice to Shostakovich, any more than one has to denigrate Dvorak in order to do justice to Brahms.

Unfortunately, even if Mr. Sorabji's view is a purely musical one, it cannot help but encourage those who persist in thinking that out of Communism nothing good can come, or that out of Catholicism no objectivity can come.

John E. Pinnington Oxford.

Shostakovich on Edinburgh

As is usually the case with Shostakovich-attributed speeches, interviews and articles, a degree of caution needs to be invested combined with, in some cases, the ability to read between the lines...

August 1962 – From a letter to an unknown correspondent (quoted by the DSCH Archive web site)

“I am sending you greetings from Edinburgh... I am still absorbed by the Thirteenth Symphony. I'm impatiently waiting for the moment when I shall be able to hold the score, to play it, to experience it... It fills my head non-stop. I am thinking about it all the time. I am thinking about it all the time...”

Quoted by *The Voice of Russia*

“It's my third visit to Britain,” Shostakovich said during a news conference held after the three-week festival was finally over. “I was really thrilled by the British listeners, always so responsive to what they hear. Of course, I feel exhausted after all these concerts, sometimes three a day. I'm tired of feeling nervous, but, to tell the truth, I've also had my moments of joy here because most of the performances were absolutely impeccable...”





A radio address made by Shostakovich to the USSR Composers' Union on October 15, 1962 on the subject of his Scottish sojourn was transcribed and translated (some grammatical corrections added). Interestingly enough, the piece was reprinted in *Shostakovich: About Himself and His Times* (the Soviet repost to *Testimony*) with many changes and omissions...

What Impressed Me at the Musical Festival in Edinburgh

I should like to share with you some of the impressions the recent festival in Edinburgh has left on me. It is a rather young festival which has started its history in 1947. Since that year the festival has been taking place annually, including music, cinema, theatre, literature and fine arts sections.

Up to this year the festivals were annual and I believe, the tradition will continue. About three years ago the festival was headed by Lord Harwood, known as a public figure in Great Britain. It was his idea that the musical festival, which, in fact, I am going to tell you about, should be each time devoted to one composer, preferably a modern one.

Last year the festival favoured Arnold Schoenberg. This means that almost every programme included a musical piece by this composer. I feel I must apologise to you for telling nothing about the cinema, literature and fine arts festivals which were also taking place at that time. But I hope you will understand that no matter how much I might have wished it, I could not possibly participate in them all even in the passive capacity of a spectator, if only because of the lack of time.

Whereas last year it was Arnold Schoenberg's music that was performed at almost every concert, this year it was mine. I am not going now to give the names of all the music played, it could be so that two or three concerts a day had my works on the programme. But I shall still mention that the majority of my symphonies were played as well as the quartets.

Among the performers there was a number of first-class musicians and orchestras, namely the London Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the BBC Scottish Orchestra, the Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the British Allegri String Quartet, and last but not least a galaxy of Soviet performers.

Among the foreign conductors it was the American Lorin Maazel whom I liked best of all. I think, it would be very nice, indeed, if the Soviet audience could meet this musician.

The quality of performance was quite satisfactory and in some cases it was just good. Talking about performance I exclude Soviet artists whose excellence of rendition has already been mentioned above. Generally satisfied as I was, I was far from pleased with the way the Sixth and the Eighth Symphonies were performed. And if I live to see another festival, I shall ask the organisers not to confront me with a *fait accompli*. It must have been to cut expenses – which is reasonable, no doubt – that large orchestras and ensembles, especially as large as a symphonic orchestra would arrive in Edinburgh on the day of performance, have a dress rehearsal in the morning, and give a concert at night. Now imagine that I come to the dress rehearsal. What is it that I can do? Possibly make some corrections. And I did make some corrections attending the dress rehearsal of the Scottish orchestra from Edinburgh conducted by Norman Delmar and that of the Polish Radio Orchestra conducted by Jan Krenz which played the Sixth and the Eighth Symphonies respectively. It would be wrong to say that the musicians did not know their parts well enough or that it was all not properly prepared. Still, I believe, if it had been possible for me to have two or three rehearsals with the musicians instead of the dress rehearsal I attended, the result would have been much better which is especially true bearing in mind the skill of the orchestras and the talent of the conductor.

Yet, confronting a *fait accompli* is not always a failing. I only met the Allegri String Quartet once, at the dress rehearsal and attended their concert on the same night. Everything went off very well. These were really gifted and understanding people who played immensely well and pleased me very much.

Excuse me for having taken so much of your time by telling you about my troubles. But things are still so fresh in my

memory that being among friends I thought I could afford frankness and share what I think about all this with you.



Now, how did I profit by the festival? And I did profit by it. In the course of about three weeks which is a rather short period of time I was able to listen to the majority of my compositions. It is not that I complain about lack of attention to my music in my native country. Not in the least. It is played very often, and is probably unjustly often included in the programmes of symphonic and chamber concerts. But there usually was a period of time between performances. A certain number of compositions were played during a year, another number during half a year. At the festival things were different: during three weeks I was acting a judge for myself having a chance to listen to practically everything composed since I started my life in music. Lord Harwood, the organiser of the festival, organised the performance of the works that I composed in my childhood, for example, two pieces for a string octet. It is ages since I listened to them for the last time and it was an interesting experience, indeed. More than that he also remembered my very last compositions, the very recent ones. Among them the Twelfth Symphony and the Eighth Quartet which were played too.

You certainly understand how it is useful for the composer. I say it's really useful because one immediately understands where he was not successful, where he should have done things differently and not the way he did, and where there is still something which seems quite acceptable. A critically-minded composer, in my opinion, and I think I am critically-minded, cannot afford being uncritical towards his own works. One stops being a composer, he is no artist any longer, if he does. Critical treatment of one's own works is indispensable, and I did learn a lot in the course of these three weeks listening to my own music. This was a very useful experience. I thank the organisers of the festival for the benefit I derived from it. A very useful experience that may stand one in good stead.

The nervous strain was very high. A high strain, indeed, because, every meeting with one's own compositions, even if it takes place every day, still makes one worry. You are nervous every day at a dress rehearsal or at any other rehearsal, or at a concert. And sometimes we had three concerts a day: one in the morning, another one in the afternoon, and still another one at night. It was like that sometimes.

A very great strain on the nerves it was. And besides I lost peace of mind and became sleepless. This was no pleasure trip at all. I had suspected it might turn out that way, but I never realised how awfully difficult it can be. I hadn't been to Edinburgh and I thought, well, why not go there? But instead of enjoying myself there I had to go to concerts of my own music every day, which is a very difficult job, indeed. And this is to say nothing of the responsibility I felt myself bearing.

These are my musical impressions of the festival, so to speak. And they concern everything connected with myself and with my music. But I'd also like to share with you my impressions of modern musical compositions which were played at the festival. One of them is the cantata *Hiroshima* by the Italian composer Luigi Nono. He also came to Edinburgh and we met before his concert. He is a very nice person and a very modest too. And for a composer he is still rather young, I should say. Judging by his appearance he may be about 40. He has a very pleasant wife, who is a daughter of Arnold Schoenberg. She was also there in Edinburgh. So, I met these people, and we dined together, and had a very nice talk. His ideas about music are interesting, though I could share only some of them. But as to his composition, I feel I can't possibly accept it. There are some moments in it that sound effective, for instance, some onomatopoeic effects. The composition doesn't seem to have any form, and it doesn't sound as a whole piece. There's no form in it. There are two singers there, the soprano and the tenor, and the vocal parts are extremely inexpressive. Well, I don't think I should continue with my critical remarks on this composition now. But, I believe, we should ask our Foreign Commission to get us a disc of it, or a tape-recording, which it would be very instructive to hear. It's a great disappointment when a composer fails to realise his own ideas. And that was a very well-conceived composition, just think of the name the composer gave it – *Hiroshima*. Listening to the man during our meeting, talking in detail about his conception and the plan, I got very much interested in his work. But, alas, it turned out a great disappointment.

The Soviet composer Schnittke has written an oratorio. He has called it *Nagasaki*. *Hiroshima* is just not to be compared with it. Schnittke's composition is really beautiful, and I am just puzzled why it is only played on the radio occasionally. And when it is played, this happens late at night and not on the main programme. This is something I don't understand.





Now some impressions of Great Britain and the people I met there. Lord Harwood impressed me most favourably. He did not spare himself during the festival, coming to all the concerts, seeing to all things, working with scores. A nice person and very affable too. We've extended an invitation to him and his wife to visit the Soviet Union, so that he could learn more about our musical life and could meet our musicians. By the way, he is a person who really knows much about Soviet music. He knows our performers, and many of the composers. And he wishes, not next year, but some time later, to organise a festival of Soviet music, which will be a different kind of festival, that is not devoted to one composer as usual. He plans to select all that is new and really good in Soviet music and to present it to the listeners in Scotland.

Next year he organises a festival devoted to Berlioz and to Bela Bartok. He told me about his plans and I find them very interesting. So next year the listeners will hear works of these two great composers.

Unfortunately I only had one meeting with Benjamin Britten. His opera *The Turn of the Screw* didn't seem quite clear to me. I mean the content, which, to my mind, is somewhat involved, though I did like the music. I find the music beautiful, but let me not go into any further detail about the opera. The London opera theatre [English Opera Group], on its tour in Edinburgh, performed it.

Talking about theatres on a tour, I'd like to mention the Yugoslav Belgrade Opera which came to Edinburgh and gave *The Gambler* by Prokofiev. I listened to it with great pleasure and I can only hope it will be staged in our country one day. The music was written by the composer when he was very young. This is most interesting and beautiful music. I hope we shall also stage it. The Yugoslav theatre also gave *Khovanshchina* in my orchestration.

My meeting with Benjamin Britten was rather short, unfortunately. He is suffering from some disease which affected his left hand, which he has to keep strapped up. It's a kind of nervous disease, something very serious. And he wants so awfully much to come to our country. I'd like to say that in my opinion, he is one of the most talented composers abroad. Besides that there is another merit that distinguishes him: he is a versatile musician. He is an excellent pianist and an excellent conductor, he can play the violin, and he can play the clarinet. This ability seems to be disappearing nowadays. And it's very unfortunate. They say Bach could play all the instruments. Glazunov, this "Last of the Mohicans", could play the piano, the violin, the violoncello, the bassoon, the French horn, and the clarinet. All of them he could play very well. He could also play the flute, but less well. Such ability helps a great deal in orchestrating music, for example. It can also be of great help in studying musical literature, say, the flute sonatas of Bach or those of Handel. It's always good to be able to do things oneself.

Now a few words about the country. It was not my first visit there. I went to England for the third time in fact, which was my second professional trip, so to say. My first trip was last year when I went to the country together with the Leningrad Philharmonic and met the British audience there.

The British audience, same as the Scottish one, has produced a very favourable impression on me, I must say. There was silence in the hall, and the response was so generous, and so vivid. I, somehow, used to think British people are very reserved, but I discovered they can get on their chairs, or start stamping their feet, or whistle. By the way, it may seem strange enough but whistling there is an expression of content. It's nothing like being whistled at here in this country, which is a failure for the performer. When whistled at the performer is absolutely happy there.

And, finally, about a visit which was most depressing to me as a son of my Motherland. I am talking about a certain Lady Rosebery, who was very amiable, attended all concerts assiduously, and then invited us to come to see her estate. [Dalmeny House, on the shores of the Firth of Forth near Edinburgh – Ed]. It was this visit that depressed me so much. The lady was taking me to her home in her car, and there was still an hour's drive to get there when she started showing her possessions to me, pointing to her forests, her meadows, her river, and her herds. Then, finally, we arrived at her place. Her house is probably twice as large as the Hermitage in Leningrad, all stuffed with gold and jewellery, with a major-domo, and so many footmen, and housemaids, with a large park round it, with swimming facilities, golf, a football field, some motor boats, yachts, launches, etc. And all this belongs to the nice lady. I felt then that I had already developed a deep dislike for her, some social antipathy. And that was not so much antipathy for her, forget about her, my aversion was for the capitalist system as such,

which we probably don't know enough about. And there capitalism was so real, so concrete. I realised just what enormous wealth was all concentrated in the hands of this lady.



And it came to my mind that it would be very nice to turn that enormous house, a very comfortable house, indeed, into a kind of a holiday place for composers, where they could both rest and create music. I could not get rid of the thought. I asked who was living in the house, and the lady replied those were herself, her daughter and her daughter's husband. Imagine, the three of them in a house like that.

Then she took me round the estate, and showed how fields were cultivated. There were an enormous number of agricultural labourers in the fields harvesting or doing some other kind of job.

And so, I told the lady that, to my mind, it was all too much for a family like hers, and she said, yes, it is great worry indeed, and there are so many things to attend to, to see to, and the steward isn't honest.

She did not understand me, failed to understand me completely. Too different people we turned out to be. That much about the visit.

There were many other impressions, which aren't yet definitive, aren't quite clear. For example, the contacts I had with the so-called common people of Britain. Excuse me, if I now deviate from my topic a little bit, but I just can't understand the term. What does "the common people" mean? Who are common and who are not? It is that an office-cleaner is an ordinary person and a head of a department is not? I don't understand that. All people are common, ordinary people and they are all extraordinary at the same time.

The contacts I had were with musicians, music fans and ordinary people, and what I was pleased to notice in all of them was a great interest in our great country, and in our art.

In conclusion I shall say a few words about the press-conference I had.

There were so many people asking for an interview that I could not possibly satisfy them all. This was why Lord Harwood decided to hold a press-conference which, in my opinion, was a success. I should say that it was my first press-conference abroad that, in general left a favourable impression on me. The journalists were good-willed and impartial and what appeared later on in the press, both conservative and labour, was unbiased coverage of the press conference.

There was one unpleasant episode however. The first part of one of the symphonic concerts had my compositions on the programme, but I didn't listen to the end and left to hear the performance of the Borodin Quartet who were at also playing my music at the same time. But the press had it that I left during the second part of the concert which had Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* on the programme. And that it was because of my hatred for Stravinsky that I left.

I was just going to open my mouth to protest against such a strange interpretation of my behaviour, when I had to close it because that same paper had written about me coming to the concert of the quartet named after Borodin. Then Lord Harwood intervened and things were settled. He had expressed his indignation about the misrepresentation of facts and the correspondent of the *Daily Herald* responsible for it was relieved of his job.

I feel I still need some time for my impressions to become final, for them to settle.

Finally the festival was over, we had two more concerts in London, after which we returned to Moscow. Moscow had been supporting us throughout the festival with letters, telegrams, and telephone calls. We had been feeling the attention of our Motherland all the time we were there. And I think that our artists who participated in the festival had performed their duty in an excellent way. They proved to be faithful to their Motherland which had entrusted so much to them and had sent them to defend the honour of Soviet art at the festival in Edinburgh.





Postscript:

Britten was indeed quite ill at this time: quoted in *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten*:

According to the published programme diary for the 1962 Edinburgh Festival, Britten and Pears were engaged for Schubert's *Winterreise* (1 September) and Schumann's *Spanisches Liederspiel* and Shostakovich's *From Jewish Folk Poetry* (8 September, with Elisabeth Söderström, Janet Baker and Thomas Hemsley). In addition, Britten was scheduled to accompany Rostropovich in a recital of sonatas by Debussy, Britten and Shostakovich (6 September), and to conduct the first of three performances of the English Opera Group's *The Turn of the Screw*, with Pears as Quint (3 September). With pianist Yvonne Lefebure, Pears was engaged to give a 'Debussy Centenary Recital' (22 August). These plans had to be altered when Britten was unable to appear at Edinburgh owing to illness.

After the 1962 Edinburgh Festival, Lord Harewood wrote to the composer on 14 September:

We missed you horribly at Edinburgh this year, not only because of the three concerts and one opera performance which were either cancelled or the poorer without you... I wish you had been there with Shostakovich. He is paranoid with nerves and shyness, but also determined and decided and critical; the spikiness sometimes seems to mellow a little, and it might have done so more often with a fellow composer. I believe he very much enjoyed The Turn of the Screw.



Rostropovich, Oistrakh, Britten And Shostakovich

Written opinion

In general Lord Harwood's initiative was extremely well received among commentators, notwithstanding the critical elements displayed in the press, above.



A selection:

(from the Festival programme)

Dmitri Shostakovich

by Gerard Abraham (1962)

Ever since Shostakovich surprised the world in 1926 with his First Symphony in F minor, written the year before at the age of nineteen while still a student in Maximilian Steinberg's composition class at the Leningrad Conservatoire, he has been the brightest star of the Soviet musical firmament. No other of the young post-revolutionary composers promised so well; none has fulfilled half as much. Moreover, the fame deservedly won has been enhanced by both fortunate and unfortunate circumstances; his career has been marked by events that have given him more than ordinary publicity – the sensational, perhaps slightly factitious success of his opera *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, as a masterpiece of the then new 'socialist realism', in 1934; its still more sensational denunciation by *Pravda* in 1936 for all its sins against 'socialist realism'; the composition of the Seventh Symphony in 1941 during the bombardment of Leningrad and its immediate success not only in the U.S.S.R. but with the musical publics of its allies (with all the attendant photographs of the composer in a fireman's helmet). And since the war every shift in Soviet policy with regard to the arts, bringing generally praise or blame to the leading composers of the Union has highlighted Shostakovich as outstandingly praiseworthy or blameworthy.

So his path of success has been rose-strewn indeed, with the thorns all too much in evidence. And he has not only been battered by the bladders of clowns-in-office, he has had to stand up to a good deal of adverse criticism on purely musical grounds from both Russians and foreigners, and it may be as well to deal with this before attempting a positive valuation. Like practically all really great composers, Shostakovich is very prolific; and like all prolific composers, his output is naturally very uneven. Hardly any musician, Russian or Western, reasonably acquainted with his output would deny that he has written a number of poor works as well as many very fine ones; the interesting point is that a list of the poor works drawn up by a jury of Soviet critics would probably have little in common with a similar list compiled by Westerners. We judge by quite different standards; music that we find interesting or excitingly new may be condemned in the U.S.S.R. as 'experimentalistic' or 'formalistic', 'too abstract' or 'too subjective': what strikes us as vulgar and banal may win praise in Russia for its simplicity, its 'sincere expressiveness', the democratic nature of the musical idiom'. Shostakovich could well retort to his critics in general that he has written very little that has not been regarded as 'good' by one or another considerable body of them – and add that although we may judge by widely varying standards we all agree that he is a great composer.

One charge that has been made against him both at home and abroad can easily be disposed of. He has been accused of succumbing to the influence of almost every important master one can think of, from Bach and Vivaldi to Mahler and Bizet and Prokofiev (to say nothing of his great compatriots of the nineteenth century), and it is true that he has been so influenced – sometimes fairly obviously – apart from the fact that (as we know from his friend and biographer Dmitri Rabinovich) he sometimes deliberately uses quotations or allusions as 'finger-posts to help the listener correctly understand the nature of his ideas'. But there is an eclecticism of strength as well as an eclecticism of weakness. There never was a more heavily indebted composer than Mozart and there never was a greater one; he was 'influenced' by great men and little men, by Johann Christian Bach much more than by Johann Christian's great father, by Michael Haydn as well as by Josef, yet all his mature work (and much of his immature) is totally Mozartian and apart. Shostakovich may not be a Mozart but he too has a musical personality strong enough to absorb and digest a hundred influences, and stamp the result as unmistakably his own.





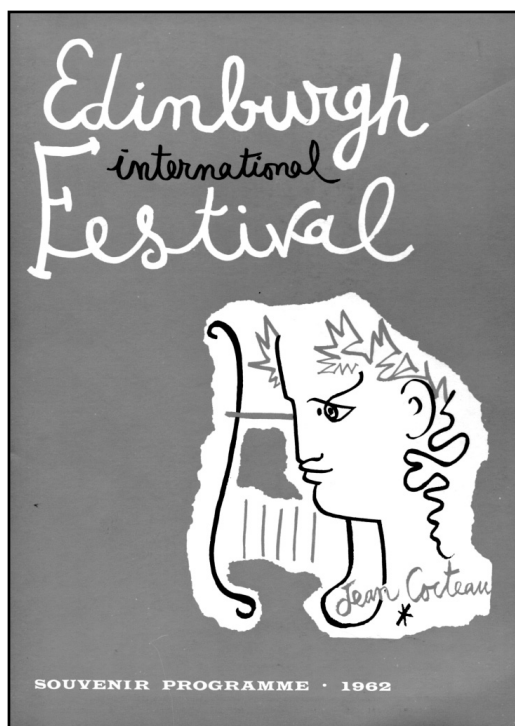
Really to define Shostakovich's musical personality, to show those stylistic elements which mark all his important work as his and his alone, one would have to write at least a lengthy technical essay with copious musical illustrations. Here it must suffice to say that it is very wide in its embrace (which is one reason why one can unhesitatingly speak of him as a 'great' composer) and not merely in that matter of idiom. He is a master of the grand, monumental style and of the intimately personal; he can be frivolous and sarcastic and he can sound tragic depths; he can be lyrical and innocent and pastoral or he can write behind a mask that does not quite conceal – and of course is not meant entirely to conceal – infinite subtleties and ironies. And all except his feeblest works are tense or energetic, full of life. Equally he commands a great range of media and has written in the most diverse genres from opera, oratorio, and symphony, ballet and string quartet, to film-music and children's songs and even musical comedy. He has made song settings not only of Pushkin and Lermontov but of Shakespeare and Burns.

All the same, Shostakovich is essentially an instrumental composer. His early Gogol opera *The Nose* (produced in 1930) is witty and satirical but insubstantial; even *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, fine though much of it is, has never conquered the opera-houses of the world. Perhaps his best vocal composition is the song-cycle 'From Hebrew Folk Poetry' for soprano, contralto and tenor, composed in 1948, which Edinburgh is to hear on September 8. Only in two early symphonies, the Second (*Dedication to October*) (1927) and Third (*The First of May*) (1929) – neither ever performed nowadays, by the way – has Shostakovich found it necessary to follow the example of Beethoven, Scriabin and Mahler in introducing the chorus in the symphony.

It is on the symphonies, now, twelve in number, that Shostakovich's reputation mainly rests, and Edinburgh is exceptionally fortunate in that it will be able to hear half of them – as well as the fine Violin Concerto (originally composed in 1947 but revised in 1955 before publication) which is closely related to the Tenth Symphony (1953) – in little more than a week. The very familiar First and Fifth will not be given, nor the more or less suppressed Second and Third; neither will the over-publicised and once over-praised Seventh (the *Leningrad*) and the similarly programmatic Eleventh (*The Year 1905*) (1957). The six that will be played at the Festival represent Shostakovich the symphonist at his best and most typical. Special interest attaches to No. 4 which was composed in 1936 and withdrawn on the very eve of performance, at the time of the *Lady Macbeth* fuss; an arrangement for two pianos was published ten years later, but the Symphony has only recently been released for public performance. No. 6 (1939) is a very personal work, a lightweight by comparison with its neighbours, but only in the sense that Beethoven's Fourth and Eighth are 'lightweights'; much the same might be said of No. 9 (1945). No. 8 (1943) is anything but a lightweight; it belongs to the same emotional, wartime world as the *Leningrad* but has no programmatic elements and is really a much better work; it plays for a full hour, of which half is taken up by the first movement, a powerful *adagio*. This is the 'monumental' Shostakovich at his best. The Tenth (1953) is another work that is big in every sense; perhaps the real crown of Shostakovich's achievement up to date – though I cannot speak of the most recent, the Twelfth (1961).

Different sides of Shostakovich are revealed in his string quartets, all eight of which are to be played at the Festival. He came to the string quartet relatively late in life; No. 1 dates from 1938, and very attractive though it is, it was soon eclipsed by the more impressive Piano Quintet of 1940 (which will also be played here). This is not the place to discuss the quartets, which must be done in some detail or not at all. But two things must be said. Collectively they represent the most important contribution yet made to Soviet chamber music, if not to Russian chamber music generally. And the Western listener must always bear in mind that they owe little to the Western chamber-music tradition. Russian chamber-music has almost always gone its own way; for one thing it has always shown a tendency to the suite-like, so we need not be surprised to find that Shostakovich's Second Quartet (1944) consists of 'Overture', 'Recitative and Romance', 'Valse' and 'Theme with Variations' or that the writing lacks the exquisite technical finish, the 'goldsmith's work', of more familiar chamber-music. But the true quartet style has grown upon Shostakovich, and often in the late quartets e.g., in the first movement of the Fourth Quartet (1949) or the third movement of No. 5 (1951) – one is reminded of Borodin's style. The quartet never becomes quasi-symphonic in his hands.

Shostakovich can be a very puzzling composer – though he is not ‘difficult’ in the sense that many contemporary composers are. He has often puzzled his friends and admirers by his hidden meanings, his outbursts of deliberate vulgarity. But one always feels there is a good and sufficient reason if one could only find it and that it is worth taking much trouble to find. For everywhere one touches one of the liveliest musical minds, one of the strongest and most vivid musical personalities of the twentieth century.



Edinburgh Festival 1962 – final cover

Works by Shostakovich performed at the Festival:

Monday, August 20: String Quartet No.1; String Quartet No. 2

Tuesday, August 21: String Quartet No. 5; Cello Concerto

Thursday, August 23: Songs (1960) for soprano and piano

Sunday, August 26: Preludes and Fugues for solo piano; String Quartet No. 3; String Quartet No. 7; Arias, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*

Monday, August 27: Symphony No. 9

Tuesday, August 28: Two Pieces for Strings

Wednesday, August 29: String Quartet No. 4; Symphony No. 8

Friday, August 31: String Quartet No. 8

Saturday, September 1: Symphony No. 6

Sunday, September 2: Piano Quintet

Monday, September 3: String Quartet No. 6; Symphony No. 10

Tuesday, September 4: Symphony No. 12

Wednesday, September 5: *Three Fantastic Dances* for solo piano

Thursday, September 6: Cello Sonata

Friday, September 7: Suite, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*; Violin Concerto; Symphony No. 4.

Saturday, September 8: Eleven Jewish Poems