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Edited by Pauline Fairclough and David Fanning

Excerpt

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Introduction

PAULINE FAIRCLOUGH AND DAVID FANNING

The first English-language study to attempt a genre-focused overview of Shostakovich's music was published over a quarter of a century ago. Christopher Norris's *Shostakovich: The Man and his Music*¹ was an early attempt to assess the major works (symphonies, operas, piano music and string quartets) by writers from a wide range of backgrounds: music critics, composers, performers, historians and literary theorists. Their retrospective of a composer who had died only seven years earlier captured a moment in time – British Shostakovich reception in the early 1980s – that is fascinating to look back upon. As with much intelligent critical writing about Shostakovich since the 1960s, the best chapters of this collection offered insights that are as valid and appealing now as they were in 1982, regardless of our enhanced knowledge of both Shostakovich and Soviet cultural history. Of particular interest is Robert Stradling's careful bypassing of the assumption that was to dog later popular writing on Shostakovich: namely that he was composing either 'for' or 'against' the Soviet system. In the case of Shostakovich, as of Richard Strauss, he noted, the 'romantic ideology of doomed, suicidal genius is a potent but very partial myth'.² Though Stradling's caution was typical for its time, it was soon to be swept away in a tide of startling critical self-confidence concerning Shostakovich's supposed anti-Soviet identity. This mythological dissident Shostakovich has enjoyed two decades of authority in music journalism, popular music writing and on the internet; and it is an accident of the different methodologies and publishing practices of journalism and scholarship that musicologists were apparently slow to counter it.³

It is a paradoxical fact that, despite Shostakovich's extraordinary popularity, there was no reliable post-Soviet biography until 2000,⁴ and the present collection of essays is the first English-language study that aims for near-comprehensive coverage of his work. That Western musicology has been so late in its engagement with Shostakovich is, however, symptomatic of diverse forces, some specific, some general. Though some of the specific prejudices concerning the quality of his output may be fading today, Shostakovich's belated acceptance into the canon of works for viable musicological study is as much a symptom of musicology's recently broadened cultural remit (popular music, world music, cultural

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studies) as it is of an enhanced awareness of his wider output and its cultural resonance. There is still a residue of post-Leningrad Symphony disdain among the generation of scholars that came to maturity in the 1960s, a residue that extends to a general suspicion of his concert-hall popularity.⁵ There has also been a reluctance to evaluate Soviet music on the same technical and aesthetic levels as Western post-war art music, on the assumption that it must by its very nature be regressive and 'unfree'. More broadly still, the relatively slow pace at which musicology has followed the lead of Slavist literary and historical studies in exploring the complex relationship between Soviet power and artistic creation has meant that Shostakovich has been viewed through a very crude lens (in particular the Manichaean 'for-or-against' syndrome noted above), and this has hardly encouraged a sophisticated understanding of the paradoxical nature of Soviet musical culture and its products.

Even as these issues are being slowly faced up to and addressed, there are other, more practical problems that continue to hamper musicological Sovietologists. The new ongoing 150-volume Shostakovich *Complete Edition* is exclusively prepared by Russian scholars, and access to Shostakovich manuscripts is restricted.⁶ On the positive side, there has been a steady stream of excellent Russian source studies, and while it may be frustrating for Western scholars not to be able actively to participate in such work, there is no doubt that high-level research on Shostakovich is now flourishing in Russia.⁷

One consequence of the impracticality (or impossibility) of Western-based source-study research on Shostakovich is that Western scholars have continued to explore the music as analysts and interpreters, much as their Soviet predecessors did, albeit from very different theoretical and critical perspectives. Some of the essays in this collection are clearly analytical in emphasis, most notably Eric Roseberry on the symphonies and *The Execution of Stepan Razin*, David Haas on the Second Piano Sonata and on Shostakovich's harmonic language, David Fanning on the early works, Malcolm MacDonald on the string concertos and sonatas, and Judith Kuhn on the quartets. Others, such as Francis Maes's exploration of Shostakovich's songs, are more contextual in focus, while still others address issues of reception (Erik Levi) or more obscure corners of Shostakovich's output (John Riley on the film scores, Pauline Fairclough on the 'official' works, Marina Ilichova on the ballets and Gerard McBurney on incidental music for the theatre). Rosamund Bartlett's essay on the operas draws on contemporary writings on opera, as well as outlining the twists and turns of Shostakovich's operatic career in the 1930s, taking into account the pioneering work of Olga Digonskaya on the unfinished opera projects *Orango* and *Narodnaya Volya* [The People's Will]. Esti Sheinberg's discussion of Existentialism in

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the Jewish-inflected works is the only overtly philosophically orientated chapter in the volume, building on earlier work by herself and others on issues of Jewish identity and ethnicity in Shostakovich's music.

Despite a relatively active recording career as pianist (compared, say, to Prokofiev), Shostakovich's own performances of his works have not carried the authority for pianists that they might have done had it not been for the progressive illness that deprived him of normal hand function from the late-1950s onwards. David Fanning's chapter on the composer's recordings does more than chart the decline of Shostakovich's performing powers: it tracks his interpretative decisions in key works (including the Tenth Symphony transcription), suggesting that despite technical deficiencies, Shostakovich's own performances are still invaluable points of reference and may have something to tell us about his attitude to musical structure as a composer. An equally overlooked aspect of Shostakovich's output has been the incidental and 'official' scores. In the case of the incidental scores for the theatre, many languish unperformed. In addition to tracing Shostakovich's recycling of various portions of these scores in other works, Gerard McBurney provides the scenarios to these mostly long-forgotten productions. As with Marina Ilichova's descriptions of the original ballet scenarios and John Riley's pithy descriptions of film plots, this is information not accessible in any other single source, and it reveals more precisely than has been possible up to now the nature of Shostakovich's early artistic collaborations. All three ballets have recently been revived and staged worldwide, and since the mid-1990s the scores and complete recordings have become available.⁸ Theatre productions are much harder to revive in the absence of complete scenarios and stage directions, as McBurney's invaluable but necessarily partial reconstruction of the revue *Declared Dead* made clear at its Proms premiere in 1992 under the title *Hypothetically Murdered*. Equally obscure are most of the films to which Shostakovich provided scores, many of them still unavailable on commercial tape or DVD and currently existing only in personal collections or circulated in pirated copies obtained from Russia. Yet the film and incidental scores are far from being the only neglected areas of Shostakovich's music, as Francis Maes's and Pauline Fairclough's chapters on the songs and 'official' works show. Entire vocal and choral cycles and other *pièces d'occasion* remain virtually unknown, or implicitly rejected as not representative of the 'real' Shostakovich. These include the *Ten Poems on Verses by Revolutionary Poets*, op. 88, the two settings of Dolmatovsky poems opp. 86 and 98, *Loyalty*, op. 136, the *Ten Russian Folk Songs*, the *Greek Songs* and the wartime *Torzhestvenniy Marsh* [Ceremonial March]. Shostakovich's two cantatas, *The Sun Shines over our Motherland*, op. 90 and even *Song of the Forests*, op. 81, as well as numerous patriotic songs,

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languish in neglect, and understandably so, given their poor musical qualities. Revivals of Prokofiev's *Zdravitsa* (his 1939 Toast to Stalin) and 1937 *Cantata for the Twentieth Anniversary of the October Revolution* have been controversial for the obvious reason that their texts extol Stalin and Stalinism – and it can fairly be argued that only a suspension of moral and social standards could find such performances palatable, while the revival of comparable Nazi works would be (rightly) unthinkable.⁹ More significantly, perhaps, Prokofiev's Stalinist works are by common consent superior in artistic terms to Shostakovich's; as Pauline Fairclough's chapter on the official works suggests, Shostakovich put far more energy into those works he produced as part of the war effort (and for the highly lucrative Soviet anthem competition in 1943) than he did into those expected of him in the squalid post-1948 climate or, for that matter, in the major anniversary years of the October Revolution in 1957 and 1967. *The Sun Shines over our Motherland*, composed for the 35th anniversary in 1952, cannot bear comparison in compositional terms with Prokofiev's stunning 1937 *Cantata*, whatever ideological problems both works embody. Texts aside, few concert promoters would be prepared to inflict Shostakovich's work on a paying audience, except perhaps in the context of a festival with didactic as well as artistic aims. But there is less reason for the continued neglect of the 'ethnic' song settings (Russian, Spanish, Greek), which, together with the Dolmatovsky settings, all date from the period beginning with the songs *From Jewish Folk Poetry* (1948–56). In these cases, a prejudice against accepting an apparently 'alien' (Soviet-populist) style as authentically Shostakovich's has arguably led to a tacit ban that is, for political and therefore commercial reasons, as effective as any instance of similarly 'unspoken' Soviet censorship.

Notwithstanding these issues of musical worth, as with all Cambridge Companions this volume seeks to provide an overview that is more or less comprehensive in scope, rather than specific and critical. David Haas's case study of the Second Piano Sonata, viewed against the background of possible models in the sonata genre, is the only exception to this rule. Nonetheless, such a volume would not have been possible without the combination of archival and published source study that is now not only possible but essential to all ongoing research into Shostakovich's music and that of his Soviet contemporaries. The editors would like to take this opportunity to thank Irina Antonovna Shostakovich, Olga Dombrovskaya and Olga Digonskaya from the Shostakovich Family Archive, Moscow, for their generous assistance and cooperation. Levon Hakobian kindly obtained rare scores from the Composers' Union Library in Moscow. But most of all, we thank our contributors, who have shown patience, courtesy and graciousness in tolerating the delays that so often occur with

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collaborative projects such as these. Will Peters kindly provided a valuable initial translation of Marina Ilichova's chapter on the ballets. We would also like to thank our excellent copy-editor Mary Worthington. Finally, we thank Penny Souster, formerly of Cambridge University Press, who took a keen initial interest in this project, her successor Vicki Cooper and Rebecca Jones, whose tact and understanding have made completing this Companion a pleasure rather than a chore.

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PART I

Instrumental works

1 Personal integrity and public service: the voice of the symphonist

ERIC ROSEBERRY

To the European mind, no less than fifteen symphonies from the pen of a single composer might seem excessive in the light of a tradition that has taken its bearings from the nine symphonies of Beethoven. But the revolutionary culture that nurtured Shostakovich experienced something of a rebirth of symphonic commitment, and in this connection the ideological climate of Socialist Realism (first proclaimed in 1934) was to prove a potent factor. Far from creatively inhibiting, the Beethoven canon, with its fresh post-revolutionary optimism, could be viewed as positively enabling. The Soviet symphony – a genre that Shostakovich's own Fifth Symphony served memorably to define – became for Shostakovich, as for his colleagues, a medium through which to appear to meet the socio-political expectations of Soviet ideology. At the same time, his symphonies, string quartets and concertos encoded a more personal vision that was to remain suspect in orthodox Soviet circles. As a captive yet independently minded artist working in a totalitarian regime, Shostakovich invented for himself a moral persona that would construct, Dostoyevsky-like, a polyphonic discourse wherein, to quote Victor Terras on Bakhtin, 'multiple individual voices, inner dialogue, parody, inter-textual echoes, irony, and ambiguity interact dialogically, independently of a controlling monologic narrative voice'.¹

Although not all of Shostakovich's symphonies sit comfortably within the traditional parameters of the genre, taken as a whole his symphonic oeuvre gravitates towards the four-movement sonata-cycle prototype, and embraces the several different types – instrumental/absolute, narrative/programmatic, cyclic, vocal-instrumental – that go to make up the mainstream repertoire of the genre in the post-Beethoven era. The content and form of these symphonies, as well as their social context, are linked to Shostakovich's well-known dilemma as a Soviet composer: the conflict-ridden burden of responsibility he carried towards his genius, his public and, as a professional artist, the Soviet cultural bureaucracy. It was an unenviable balancing act that had to face glaring and indeed frightening publicity, but against all the odds it was accomplished with breathtaking virtuosity and rounded off comprehensively with a work that would

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appear to have been conceived as a farewell not only to Shostakovich's own cycle of fifteen but seemingly to the symphony as a historical genre. In its extraordinary synthesis of comedy and tragedy, depth and humour, spontaneity and power of calling up the past (the composer's own as well as the established forms and expressive content of the symphony), the last symphony of Shostakovich provides a fitting epitaph both to a life and to the passing of the Classical-Romantic symphony.

Continuities and discontinuities; from the First to the Fifth Symphony (1925–37)

Taking the Fifth Symphony as the crucial turning point in Shostakovich's career as a symphonist, the first four symphonies approach the genre from a number of diverse, seemingly incongruous angles. The brilliant work in four movements that launched his public career was completed in 1925 before the composer was out of his teens. No mere *jeu d'esprit*, it breathes new life into a form that is here taken as standing in need of rescue from academic ossification. The young composer's famous brush with Glazunov before the work was submitted as a graduation exercise at the St Petersburg Conservatoire was in this respect symbolic (see Chapter 3 by David Fanning in this volume). Compared with another famous twentieth-century 'first', the 'Classical' Symphony of Prokofiev, Shostakovich's already goes beyond an affectionate parody of classical models in his provocative mix of the burlesque and the tragic. Though Shostakovich's deeper acquaintance with Mahler's symphonies was yet to come, it is easy to sense here just how much Mahler's ambivalent, highly stylized tone might have appealed to him. The First Symphony was to be followed by two pairs of works, the first of which openly challenges the traditional mould while the second pair (the Fourth and Fifth), for all their disparities, share a realignment with Classical norms. The fascinating duality of the two Shostakoviches – public and private, classicist and modernist, populist and upholder of the high aristocratic tradition in music – is set out with exemplary force and clarity in what is sometimes taken too readily as a journey towards artistic maturity in these first five works. The Second and Third Symphonies are the musical equivalent of brilliantly executed poster art, serving as a reminder of how unshackled the young Soviet Russian composer of the 1920s felt himself to be in his exploration of new avenues of expression before the heavy weight of Stalinism and Socialist Realism fell upon him. Modernism still remains a force to be reckoned with in the violence, the fragmentation and epic scale of the Fourth ('the credo of my creative work'),² which nevertheless is not without its pointers to the comparative Classic-Romantic 'sobriety' of the Fifth.

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[More information](#)*11 Personal integrity and public service: the symphonist***Example 1.1** First Symphony, movement 1, [8]¹, motivic outline**The First Symphony (1925)**

The First Symphony proved a highly successful absorption of novelty and tradition. On the traditional side – and Shostakovich, as composer and teacher, was to stand by his grounding in the classics, both Russian and European – it makes bold to link itself with Tchaikovsky, adopting a stance that at the same time caricatures and (in the last two movements) remains respectful of his ‘serious’, fate-obsessed symphonism. Cast in the key of F minor, it reinforces the association with Tchaikovsky’s Fourth in a number of ways: the theatrical-balletic element (introduction, second-subject waltz in the relative major key); the grotesqueries of the scherzo, with the quasi-folk inflections of the trio; the introduction of a ‘fate’ fanfare motto that permeates the second part of the symphony as a falling/rising minor third; the pathos of the slow movement’s opening oboe solo; the unashamed reliance on unvaried and/or sequential repetition as a means of propulsion; and not least the emotionally ambiguous ‘resolution’ of the finale.

The first movement is preceded by a Petrushka-like introduction, Haydnish in its playful evasion of the main key. It shows a youthful iconoclast at work in producing a carefully crafted cartoon version of sonata form that at the same time – and herein lies its innovative conception – subtly interacts with the introduction from start to finish. But after the further grotesqueries of the scherzo (heightened, as it were, by the arrival of ‘the composer’ at the piano at [3]), the interlinked slow movement and finale throw off their mask-play in addressing more serious issues, and in so doing make the first of Shostakovich’s many memorable cyclic links between movements as well as introducing his lifelong passion for the most extreme contrasts and collisions.

The closely worked thematic unity of this symphony is a feature of particular interest, proceeding in the first place through a very subtle process of thematic transformation of a motto theme from movement to movement, hinging on the crucial motif of a stepwise falling minor third, $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ chromatically arpeggiated to enclose a falling diminished fifth and rising perfect fourth (see Ex. 1.1). David Haas has noted the likely derivation of Shostakovich’s first-subject march theme from the scherzo episode of Liszt’s First Piano Concerto, and this sheds light not only on the composer’s lifelong

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Example 1.2a First Symphony, movement 1, [5]³⁻⁴[Allegretto – *più mosso* ♩ = 208]

Example 1.2b First Symphony, movement 1, [11]¹⁻²

[Allegro non troppo ♩ = 160]

‘derivative’ thematic shapes (breaking out in due course into open quotation) but also on an important historical precedent in Liszt for the composer’s own characteristic technique of thematic transformation.³

Linked to this is the remarkable adaptability of motivic components of themes, operating in new structural/expressive contexts – to become new ‘portmanteau’ themes in fact – and for the themes themselves to appear in contrapuntal combination. Unity of a different order is provided by the close integration of the introduction with the main body of the first movement in a number of different ways: structural (notably in the Mahler-like return of the introduction at the beginning of the development section and in the coda), thematic, contrapuntal and harmonic. It is instructive, for instance, to note how the subtly worked harmonies of the introduction continue to serve as accompaniment in the Allegro, or how the top line of the ensuing passage becomes a continuation of the second-subject flute melody (see Ex. 1.2).

The return of the introduction at the end of the first movement points towards the larger key relationships of scherzo (A minor/major) and slow movement (D flat major) to the central F minor tonality of the symphony. A further unifying stroke is the close relationship of the slow movement and finale, in which the slow movement’s second subject, a funeral march,