

Shostakovich & Other Russians



Session One

Bob Fabian

LIFECourses.ca/Shostakovich

Plan for this session

- Our motivation – why we're here
- Housekeeping – informal 3rd hour
- Constraint – listen *and* discuss
- Cacophonous = atonal?
- Plan for six sessions
- Shostakovich after & before *Pravda* 1936
 - Symphony No. 5
 - Symphony No. 4
 - Symphony No. 4 – 2 piano version

My motivation

- Opportunity to explore interesting material
- Long standing interest in classical music
- 20th century Russian music is “interesting”
 - The impact of politics on music
 - Composed to be accessible
 - Many nooks & crannies



Your motivation?

- Do you have interesting background?
- What did you hope to get from the class?
- What would contribute to course success?
- Course content
 - We must discuss ...
 - We should not discuss ...

Third hour

- LIFE has become too impersonal
 - Old-timers describe a different LIFE
- Add an optional 3rd hour (a few courses)
 - We can stay in this room for another hour
 - Or go off to Balzac or Tim Hortons or ..
- Bring in music you want to share
- Or just talk with other music lovers

People and music

- Sonic wallpaper
 - Pleasant, or not, background noise
- Emotional immersion
 - The music flows around and through you
- Object of study
 - Focus on the structure, pattern, ...
- Ideal combination
 - Emotional & structural awareness

Approach for this course

- Light on musical theory
 - Not the point, ... and I'm not an expert
- Listen to longer excerpts
 - The music may be relatively unfamiliar
 - Almost all the music will be from YouTube
- Put the music in a context
 - What was happening politically
 - What else was being composed
- Goal: Appreciation, Enjoyment, Understanding

20th century challenge

- Tonal system was universal
 - Each composition was in a key
 - Provided a musical foundation
 - All sounds were “harmonious”
- Still standard in popular music
- But artistic desire to “advance”
 - Polytonal – more than one foundation
 - Atonal – invented or non-existent scale
- How the West Rejected Nice Music A Century Ago
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YPC-GqEAH4>

Types of music

- Composing for the film (no coverage)
 - Widely used way to make money
- Operas (light coverage)
 - A few central works in our story
- Orchestral (representative samples)
 - **The** most visible compositions
- Chamber Music (selected gems)
 - Often the most personal

P. I. Tchaikovsky

- Widely seen as *the* Russian composer
 - Linked to my youthful existential angst
- But he is not central to this story
- One piece that's warm in my memory
 - 1812 Overture (complete with cannons)
 - Leningrad Philharmonic, Yuri Temirkanov
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEkTZ5zIGRw>
 - OR Piano Concerto No 1 – Argerich & Dutoit
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1xKcq-wQzg>



Plan for sessions

- Session 2 – up to the revolution
- Session 3 – early revolutionary music
- Session 4 – up to the Pravda editorial ('36)
- Session 5 – up to the death of Stalin ('53)
- Session 6 – Shostakovich as mentor
 - Not locked into any set pattern
 - And we can use our informal 3rd hour

Story line

- Russian classical music “discovered”
- Revolutionaries in art and politics
- Leading edge experiments, post-1917
- Ruthless consolidation in the 1930s
- Everyone pulled together in war years
- Ruthless control until Stalin's death ('53)
- Glaznost to Shostakovich's death ('75)

Muddle not Music – Pravda '36

- On Shostakovich's opera *Lady MacBeth*

“From the first minute, the listener is shocked by deliberate dissonance, by a confused stream of sound. Snatches of melody, the beginnings of a musical phrase, are drowned, emerge again, and disappear in a grinding and squealing roar. To follow this “music” is most difficult; to remember it, impossible.”

- Successful two year run, then ...
- Stalin attended and walked out after the second act
- Pravda editorial followed in days

Interpretation

- Music was nationally important for Stalin
- Music must to speak to the people
- Music became more approachable, less abstract
- Illustration
 - Symphony No. 4 written before editorial
 - “Withdrawn” just before first performance
 - Symphony No. 5 followed the next year
 - “a Soviet artist’s creative response to justified criticism”

Symphony No. 5, Op. 47

- Composed between April & July 1937
- First performed in Leningrad in November
- Resounding success in Russia, Europe & North America
- Four movements, about 45 minutes long
- Had Shostakovich found a way to speak to the masses, yet maintain artistic integrity?

Reception

- “Deep, meaningful, gripping music, classical in the integrity of its conception, perfect in form and the mastery of orchestral writing—music striking for its novelty and originality, but at the same time somehow hauntingly familiar, so truly and sincerely does it recount human feelings.” Heinrich Neuhaus
- “This unsettled, sensitive, evocative music which inspires such gigantic conflict comes across as a true account of the problems facing modern man—not one individual or several, but mankind.” Boris Asafyev
 - Symphony No. 5 in D minor, (Philippe Jordan, Proms 2013)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeJPmlbiqp4>

Symphony No. 4, Op. 43

- Composed between Sept '35 and May '36
- Premiere planned for Dec 1936 in Leningrad.
 - Withdrawn from public performance
 - Premiered 30 Dec '61, Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, Kirill Kondrashin
- More complex, less approachable
 - Symphony 4, Radio-Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart, Gergiev
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBOdZIx00uo>
 - Symphony 4, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Eesti Muusika
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k80fDHeGjcw>
 - Symphony 4, 2 pianos, Colin Stone & Rustem Hayroudinoff
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ggxi5uNfEVo>

Next week (planned)

- Birth of Russian classical music
 - Mussorgsky - Khovantchina (opera)
 - Tension: old believers, corrupt army, modernizers
 - Orchestrated by Shostakovich & Stravinsky
- Ballet Russes
 - Stravinsky - Rite of Spring (ballet)
 - Revolutionary Russians went to Paris
 - Provoked a riot at first performance in 1913

Extra – Session 1

Shostakovich against Stalin, The war symphonies - A Documentary by Larry Weinstein

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--fSOJzGJnM>

