

## CHAPTER 7

### RHYTHMIC ASPECTS

#### 7.1. Introduction

Shostakovich's symphonic music is often described as vibrant, energetic and nervous. Rhythm plays a very important part in Shostakovich's writing style in general. He sometimes uses rhythm as an independent means of expression, building large symphonic sections with it (for example the famous "March" episode in the Symphony No. 7). (Volkov 1979:xxxii.)

After extensive analysis the author of this dissertation did not find many rhythmic aspects which are extraordinary and exclusive to the oboe and cor anglais in the 15 symphonies. Rhythmically, in fact, the oboe and cor anglais are in most cases treated in a similar manner to the other woodwinds.

#### 7.2 Rhythmic patterns

Although Shostakovich uses a large variety of rhythmic patterns throughout the symphonies, there are very few indications of specific treatment of the oboe and cor anglais. The oboe and cor anglais are mostly scored together with the woodwind section in cases of rhythmic ostinato passages. There are, however, several instances where the oboe and cor anglais are given a separate rhythm in a passage of great rhythmic variety.

An example of this unusual rhythmic texture is already found in Symphony No. 2 (Ex. 7-1). Every instrument of the woodwinds and strings has its own independent rhythm in unison doubling in unusual combinations. The first flute and first clarinet have similar material as do the first bassoon and first violins. All the rhythmic material is regular except for the prominent dotted rhythm played by the second oboe. Later in the symphony the dotted rhythm is allotted to the first oboe.

Example 7-1: Symphony No. 2, mm. 157-159



42

Picc.

Fl. I

Fl. II

Ob. I

Ob. II

Cl. I

Cl. II

Fag. I

Fag. II

Cor.

Tr-be

Tr-ni e Tuba

Timp.

42

[arco]

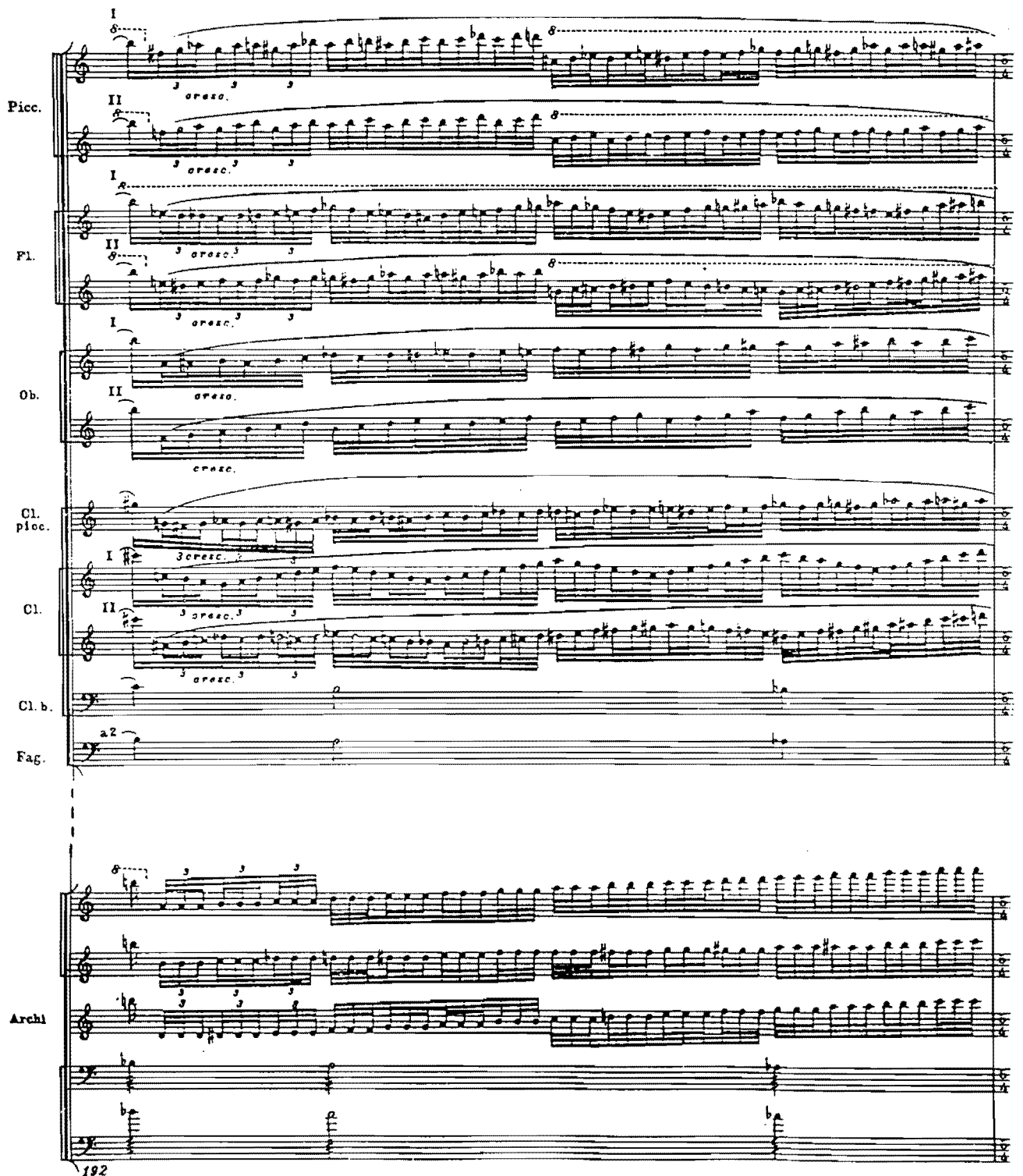
pizz.

f

157

The polyrhythm phenomenon with the oboes and cor anglais is used a few times in Symphony No. 8. In the following example from the first movement of Symphony No. 8, the oboes are given a regular rhythm against triplets scored for 2 piccolos, 2 flutes, E-flat clarinet, 2 clarinets, the first and second violins, and violas. Notice the intriguing chromatic effect created with independent lines scored for the two oboes.

Example 7-2: Symphony No. 8, first movement, mm. 192-193



The musical score for Example 7-2, Symphony No. 8, first movement, mm. 192-193, illustrates a polyrhythmic texture. The two oboes (Ob. I and II) play a regular, steady rhythm. In contrast, the other instruments, including the two piccolos (Picc.), two flutes (Fl.), E-flat clarinet (Cl. E-flat), two clarinets (Cl.), bassoon (Fag.), and the first and second violins (Archi), play triplets. The score is marked with 'cresc.' (crescendo) and '3' for triplets. The page number 192 is visible at the bottom left.



A similar rhythmic scenario as shown in Ex. 7-2 reoccurs in the fourth movement of Symphony No. 8. This time the oboes and cor anglais are allocated triplets against a regular rhythm by the piccolos, flutes, clarinets, first and second violins, and violas in mm. 420-422. The oboes once again have different melodic material to each other, but most unusual is the second oboe part which is mostly scored higher than the first oboe part. The section moves toward a climax in m. 422 when both oboes are allocated unison *fff* trills.

Example 7-3: Symphony No. 8, fourth movement, mm. 418-423

The musical score for Example 7-3, Symphony No. 8, fourth movement, measures 418-423, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 418 to 422, and the second system covers measures 422 to 423. The tempo is marked *poco animato*. The woodwind section includes Piccolo (I and II), Flute (I and II), Oboe (I and II), Cor Anglais, Clarinet in B-flat (I and II), Clarinet in C, Clarinet in Bass, Bassoon, and Contrabassoon. The string section (Archi) is shown in the second system. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and unison passages. Dynamics include *p cresc.*, *f*, and *unif.*. The score shows a progression towards a climax in measure 422, where both oboes are allocated unison *fff* trills.



160 Adagio  $\text{♩} = 40$  369

Picc.  
Fl.  
Ob.  
C.ingl.  
Cl. piccolo  
Cl.  
Cl. b.  
Fag.  
C-fag.  
Tr-be  
Cor.  
Tr-ni  
Tuba  
Timp.  
T-ro  
P.iti II  
Cassa  
421

160 Adagio  $\text{♩} = 40$  422

Toward the end of the fifth movement of Symphony No. 8 Shostakovich makes use of a variety of layered rhythmic material for the tutti. It is of significance that the three oboes and cor anglais are the only group dividing the beat into groups of triplets against four semiquavers played by the piccolo, flutes, E-flat clarinet, clarinets, first and second violins, while the bass clarinet, bassoons, contrabassoon, timpani, violas, cellos and double basses have a quaver rhythmic pattern and the brass a longer minim and crotchet figure.

Example 7-4: Symphony No. 8, fifth movement, mm. 412-415



412

Fl. picc. I  
II

Fl. I  
II

Ob. I  
II

C. ingl. I  
II

Clar. picc. (E $\flat$ )

Clar. (B $\flat$ ) I  
II

Clar. b. (B $\flat$ )

Fag. I  
II

C. fag.

Cor. (F) I  
II  
III  
IV

Trbn. (B $\flat$ ) I  
II  
III

Trbni I  
II

Timp.

Tb-ro

Viol. I

Viol. II

Violo

Vclli

C.-B.

415



The first movement of Symphony No. 10 reveals a fascinating rhythmic arrangement. Notice the rhythmic groupings between the piccolo, flutes, oboes and clarinets. Each group of instruments is treated individually with a rhythmic pattern gradually increasing the number of notes per beat. It is extraordinary that the oboes are treated differently, not only to the other instruments, but also between themselves. On the second beat of m. 382 the first and second oboes are allocated sextuplets while the third oboe has a quintuplet. Notice also the pitch distribution between the three oboes: the third oboe is placed mostly between the first and second oboe.

Example 7-5: Symphony No. 10, first movement, mm. 381-384

The musical score for Example 7-5, measures 381-384, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 381-384 for the woodwind section, and the second system covers measures 381-384 for the string section. The woodwind section includes Piccolo (Picc.), Flutes (Fl.), Oboes (Ob.), Clarinet in Piccolo (Cl. picc.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Fag.), and Contrabassoon (C-fag.). The string section includes various string instruments. The score shows a complex rhythmic arrangement with increasing note values per beat. Dynamics include *p cresc.*, *ff*, and *ff* *tr.*. The string section includes dynamics like *cresc.*, *p*, and *ff* *espress.* *tr.*. The measure numbers 381 and 385 are indicated at the beginning and end of the systems respectively.

The final example of polyrhythm involving the oboes is found in the first movement of Symphony No. 15. The oboes are allocated staccato triplets against semiquavers from the piccolo and flutes and quintuplets from the clarinets and bassoon. Observe the high register scored for the oboes in mm. 454-455.

Example 7-6: Symphony No. 15, first movement, mm. 443-548



The image displays a musical score for Example 7-6, spanning measures 443 to 455. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (mm. 443-446) includes parts for Piccolo (Picc.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Tom-tom (T-tom), and Trombone (T-ro). The second system (mm. 447-450) adds Clarinet in B-flat (C-ll) and Saxophone in B-flat (S-ll). The third system (mm. 451-455) includes Clarinet in C (Cl.) and Bassoon (Fag.). The Oboe part is characterized by staccato triplets in a high register. The Flute and Piccolo parts play semiquaver patterns. The Clarinet and Bassoon parts feature quintuplets. The Trombone part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Tom-tom part has a simple rhythmic pattern. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (p), articulation (staccato), and performance instructions (e.g., 'a2', '5').





50

Picc.

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Fag.

Cor.

Tr-be

Tr-ni  
e  
Tuba

Timp.

T-tom

T-ro

C-III

Str.

50

Archl

455

456

### 7.3 Tempo indications and metre changes

Some composers prefer to indicate tempo with Italian terms (*Allegro* etc.), some with words plus metronome markings, and some with metronome markings alone. Wagner gave up metronome markings altogether, stating that if the conductor did not understand the music, metronome markings would be of no help, and if he did understand the music, he did not need metronome markings. (Burton 1982:282.)

Shostakovich mostly uses words and metronome markings together. The composer also often uses metronome markings alone or words alone to indicate tempo. A consistent characteristic of Shostakovich's symphonic music is the perpetual change in tempo indication and metre within a movement. Tempo indications sometimes fluctuate between the extremes in one movement, for example, there are changes from *Allegretto* to *Lento* and *Molto Allegro* in the one movement Symphony No. 3.

Time signatures, like the tempo indications, are also frequently changed within a movement. Conductor and player alike are subject to time signature changes as often as 108 times in one movement, as found in the first movement of Symphony No. 4. The first movement of Symphony No. 7 has 9 tempo indication changes with words and metronome markings and 129 time signature changes.

A fascinating aspect of Symphony No. 13 is not only the myriad tempo and time signature changes but also the time signature changes at the very end of each movement. The first, second and fifth movements of Symphony No. 13 have metre changes in the second last bar of the movement. The third movement has a change in the 11th bar from the end and the fourth movement, three bars from the end. The last three of the five movements are meant to be played without a break. Blokker and Dearling (1979:134) describe the symphony as "intense, concentrating sheer drama throughout its pages". The author of this dissertation believes that the rhythmic detail, indicated through tempo and metre changes, adds to the atmosphere of urgent protest and nervous character.