

## CHAPTER 2

### SHOSTAKOVICH: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY, INFLUENCES ON HIM, AND HIS ORCHESTRATION

#### 2.1 Introduction

It is essential to understand that the symphonic music of Shostakovich tells the story of the Russian people caught in an era of immobilising terror. In the words of Sergei Burdukov (interview 8 August 2000) the symphonies of Shostakovich speaks for the people and tells the story “of absolute black hopelessness”.

#### 2.2 Childhood and youth (1905-1925)

Dmitri Shostakovich was born on 12 September 1906 in St. Petersburg. This date is according to the old-style calendar; the new-style calendar date is 25 September. His mother, Sophia, was a fine amateur pianist and started teaching Dmitri piano only at the age of nine. Within days he was playing duets and within two years at age eleven he had mastered Bach’s Forty-Eight preludes and fugues, and began composing for himself. “He changed at the piano: commanding and concentrated like a man twice his age, unable to concentrate on his mathematics because his head was full of sounds”. (Wilson 1994:4.)

Zoya Dmitriyevna Shostakovich, the composer’s younger sister, recalls the Shostakovich family life (Wilson 1994:4-5):

*We came from a good family. Father was trained as a biologist and worked as an engineer. Both Mama and Papa were Siberians. Father’s family came from Tomsk. His father had been arrested, then exiled to Narym as a revolutionary, therefore father was not allowed to serve in the army because he was the child of a revolutionary. It was one of the few advantages for children of political prisoners that they could not be called up. Mama’s family came from eastern Siberia where her father was general manager of a gold mine. Mama was brought up in*

*deepest Siberia. She studied piano and then came to St Petersburg to continue her studies at the Conservatoire. Then she got married and the children came, and that was that as far as her career went.*

*As soon as we reached our ninth birthdays, mother started each of us at the piano. Two days after she began lessons with Mitya, she announced, 'We have an outstandingly gifted boy on our hands.' He was able to grasp things like musical notation instantly, and in a few days' time he was playing four-hand music with mother. Otherwise he was a normal boy, although somewhat reserved and introspective. He liked nature, enjoyed going for strolls and was somewhat absentminded.*

The young Shostakovich did well in general school subjects and already displayed a perfectionist trait. He always wanted to be best at whatever he did. He began composing almost simultaneously with his first lessons, even though his first attempts were treated with a neutral, even sceptical attitude on the part of his parents. Among his earliest compositions is a piano piece, *Funeral March in Memory of the Victims of the Revolution*. This was Shostakovich's reaction to the Revolution in February 1917, which overthrew Tsar Nicholas II. This event is recalled in a number of his later works.

They lived comfortable lives before the Revolution, and even had servants. The first bloodless Revolution of 1917, the one that finally toppled the Romanov monarchy, broke out on 18 February (5 March new-style calendar). A provisional government was formed headed by Kerensky, giving the Russians a taste of democracy. Lenin operated from a hidden base in the Finnish Gulf and organised the military coup in Petrograd on 25 October 1917 (St. Petersburg was renamed Petrograd in 1917).

The atmosphere then was charged with sickness, alarm, catastrophe, and disruption. This was where Lenin chose to return from exile in 1917, calling for land, bread and an end to war. According to Jackson (1997:28), the horror stories of those years came back to Shostakovich in his Eleventh Symphony: "It's about people who have stopped believing because the cup of evil has run over". Both Symphony No. 2 and Symphony No. 12 describe the scene of a Cossack boy who was needlessly murdered.

The Civil War (1918-21) brought terrible suffering and hardships to Russia's people, and saw the birth of organised terror (Wilson 1994:18).

Shostakovich enrolled at the Conservatoire at thirteen years in 1919. He amazed people with his fine ear and phenomenal musical memory. Leo Arnshtam, close friend and cinema director (Wilson 1994:23) recalls:

*When Shostakovich played at auditions and exams, one was struck by his musical maturity and a particular enhanced rhythmic sense in his performance. But this heightened rhythmic pace was inherent to his spirit and the intensity with which he perceived the outside world. This rhythmic sense lay at the very core of Shostakovich's world, and it was forged by the rhythm and pace of the Revolution.*

Life was hard during the composer's student years and took a turn for the worst at the death of his father, the chief bread-winner, in 1922. Shostakovich was forced to seek alternative means to help provide for his already struggling family. He took on a job as accompanist to silent films in Petrograd, one which he hated because it drained him of time and energy he could have spent on his serious compositions. Ironically film-music turned out to be his bread and butter during more difficult years to follow.

Shostakovich's teacher of composition was Maximilian Steinberg, Rimsky-Korsakov's son-in-law. In spring 1923, when he was 17 years old, Shostakovich started to sketch a symphony, but was forced to stop when infected with tuberculosis, a disease which was to afflict him for the next ten years. He finished the symphony three months short of his nineteenth birthday in July 1925. It was submitted to the Conservatoire examiners as his diploma composition. Shostakovich's Symphony No. 1 in F minor, Opus 10, was immediately recognised as the most remarkable work of its type ever written by a composer under 20 years of age (MacDonald 1990: 28-29).

Nicolai Malko, the chief conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra undertook to perform the First Symphony. For the next few months Shostakovich was kept busy writing out the orchestral parts. His moods swung from excitement to despair in anticipation of hearing his

music in the “real” sound of the orchestra. Despite his fears that the orchestration might not be effective, he displayed remarkable confidence in his own music. When Malko and Steinberg declared the Finale unplayable at such a fast tempo, Shostakovich decided to find out for himself. Having written out the relevant parts, he took them to the clarinetist and trumpeter in the cinema orchestra, who had no difficulty in playing them. Shostakovich, vindicated, was able to convince Malko and Steinberg that his speeds should not be altered. “The young composer obviously quite enjoyed proving his teachers wrong. The episode confirmed his opinion that practicalities should be learnt from performers and not from academics”. Throughout his career Shostakovich consulted instrumentalists about the practicality and playability of passages in his works. (Wilson 1994: 47.)

Symphony No. 1’s success was instant and its reputation spread, augmented by the respect gained from prominent conductors. In May 1927 the symphony was played in Berlin under the baton of Bruno Walter, and the following year it was performed under Leopold Stokowski and Otto Klemperer. Soviet Russia had discovered its first international star and Shostakovich was referred to as one of the most talented musicians of the new generation. (Wilson 1994:55-56.)

### **2.3 Rising composer (1924 – 1936)**

The social and political climate in the USSR changed radically after Lenin’s death in January 1924, marked by the gradual but irresistible rise to power of Joseph Stalin. Stalin developed a cunning and lethal strategy of manipulating and eliminating his rivals. The principal problem that faced the political Party in the mid-1920s was that of regenerating the country’s bankrupt economy. In 1928 the implementation of the First Five Year Plan was introduced, with its ambitious programme of industrial growth. The social consequences of these measures opened doors to the working classes who could now obtain education and favours by simply joining the Party. “Bourgeois specialists”, the products of old-time professional classes and intelligentsia, were ousted. When the pace of industrialisation and change was too slow, scapegoats were required (Wilson 1994:68-70):

*Accusations of sabotage, wrecking, hoarding and espionage were bandied about with frightening results. In 1928, at the notorious ‘Shakhti’ trial, 53 mining engineers (or ‘bourgeois*

*specialists') stood accused of wrecking equipment. This was the first of a series of public trials which convulsed Soviet society between 1928 and 1931. These sweeping purges were set in motion by Stalin as a means to reinforce his political power and to execute his often unpopular policies. The climate of suspicion and distrust that characterised the Stalinist era came into being.*

The beleaguered intelligentsia seemingly had two choices open to them – to conform, or to lie low. The Party decided to assume control in cultural matters by creating “unions” which became servants of its policy. Conformity (or uniformity) was imposed in all walks of life, from the sphere of economics to that of culture.

Ian MacDonald (in Ho & Feofanov 1998: 662) quotes Fyodor Druzhinin (a viola player and composer):

*During the 1930's fear became the uppermost emotion for Shostakovich and for our intelligentsia. It was a fear not only for their personal existence, though that was real enough, but a fear for their families, their work, and their whole country.*

During the next few years Shostakovich's music style changed, making a break with the post-romantic style of the First Symphony. The fact that Shostakovich wrote music celebrating revolutionary events (Piano Sonata No. 1 of 1926, Symphony No. 2 of 1927, and Symphony No. 3 of 1929) was probably prompted as much by a desire to be seen as artistically “progressive” as to prove himself politically in tune with the ideals of the Revolution.

“Errors of my youth” Shostakovich called the Symphonies No. 2 and 3. Symphony No. 2, “To October”, was a propaganda commission for the Revolution's tenth anniversary, and ideal material for a starving composer (Jackson 1997:34.) In “To October” Shostakovich set verses by the poet Alexander Bezymensky (see Appendix B) which he clearly disliked, calling them “quite disgusting”. Many people found the music confusing and difficult, not least the musicians. (Wilson 1994:61.)

The Second Symphony, in one movement for chorus and orchestra, is the shortest of all the symphonies, requiring barely 19 minutes to perform. The most interesting aspect of this symphony is its experimental character which suggests that it was probably inspired by Schoenberg's chamber symphonies. Shostakovich succeeds in superimposing 13 independent melodic lines. (Barbier 1988:19.) The score has a part for a factory whistle which is optionally scored for a unison-sounding tone consisting of French horn, trumpet and trombone. Layton (1993:30) suggests that the model for the opening string sounds and massed polyphonic nature of the symphony, was influenced by Berg's *Wozzeck*, which Shostakovich heard in Leningrad a few weeks before he began writing the Second Symphony (Ottaway 1979:15).

During these years the young composer proved himself adept in all genres – symphonic, theatre, ballet, film, solo piano and chamber music.

Shostakovich completed his first opera, *The Nose*, in 1930. *The Nose* is a satirical work based on a short story by Gogol. In an article written at the time of this production, entitled "Why the Nose?", Shostakovich explained that he had turned to Gogol because he found his colleagues in literature either unwilling or unable to collaborate with him in the provision of a libretto. He chose *The Nose* because it was a satire on the era of Nicholas I and seemed stronger than any other story by Gogol. It is a comic story about a self-opinionated civil servant, "Major" Kovalyov, newly elevated to the rank of Collegiate Assessor in the Tsarist civil service, who wakes to find his nose missing; it had left him to assume higher rank. In June 1929 an All-Russian Musical Conference in Leningrad, together with the RAPM (Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians) slammed Shostakovich for his "anti-Soviet escapism".

Shostakovich's Third Symphony of 1929 is similar in structure to the Second. It is also in one movement for chorus and orchestra and teems with strong thematic idioms, approximately 40, at a conservative estimate, in a single 27 minutes movement (Layton 1993:301). The Third Symphony is subtitled "May Day" or "First of May", and was premiered by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra on 21 January 1930. The words of the chorus on Semyon Kirsanov's text (see Appendix B) tells of the new horizons of Communism, and of the First of May, throwing its light into the eyes of the future (Blokker & Dearling 1979:55). Stephen Jackson (1998:34) writes that Symphony No. 3 is "an efficient and cheery storm in a propaganda teacup",

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best seen as a necessary orchestral rehearsal for Symphony No. 4, for “never again was Shostakovich to sound so lackadaisically smug”. The sense of tragedy inherent in more of Shostakovich’s work was as dangerous as his experimentalism. Jackson was referring to “socialist realism” to which each artist had to adhere. Agata Krzychylkiewicz (1999:210) explains that the chief objective of socialist realism was to evoke in readers and listeners satisfaction with the world as it is, and gain their approval of the ways in which it functions. Any critical attitude was forbidden and an optimistic approach was enforced, later to become known as a process of “varnishing reality”. While the depiction of negative aspects of Soviet life was severely criticised, the idealisation of this life was, on the contrary, incessantly encouraged as an indispensable ingredient of revolutionary romanticism. Literature, along with all the other arts, was expected to edify the Soviet reality, promote its success, and to glorify its leaders.

As was to become a life-long pattern, Shostakovich combined “serious” compositions with commissions for film and theatre music. One of the first Soviet composers to compose for cinema soundtracks, Shostakovich wrote music to no less than 15 films and seven theatre productions between 1930 and 1940. Shostakovich had no time for musical snobs and was able to appreciate the professionalism of others in every kind of musical genre. In 1934 he agreed to form part of a jazz commission to organise a competition in Leningrad. This prompted him in turn to write his First Jazz Suite and Second Jazz Suite within four years, which reveals Shostakovich’s brilliance and wit in orchestration. (Wilson 1994: 100-102.)

Shostakovich married Nina Varzar, a physicist by profession, in May 1932. Their daughter Galina was born in May 1936, and their son Maxim two years later in May 1938. On the eve of his 30th birthday (September 1936), Shostakovich had, so it would seem, all a man could wish for: happiness, imminent parenthood, fame, success and an enviable list of compositional achievements (see Appendix C). His second opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk*, was performed in 1934 and was highly successful. It ran for two years, reaching audiences in Europe and America. In Moscow it had 94 performances in two seasons. Shostakovich was called a genius. (Wilson 1994:107.)

Any sense of security or peace of mind was rudely shattered for Shostakovich in January 1936.

## 2.4 Years of Terror (1936-1948)

The consequences of Stalin's attendance of *Lady Macbeth* were far-reaching and disastrous. He left the theatre in a rage. On 28 January 1936 the devastating editorial "Muddle instead of Music" appeared in the official Party organ, *Pravda*, dictated in fact by Stalin. This vicious attack on Shostakovich had consequences that were felt by all who were involved in Soviet musical life. The following is an extract from this editorial (Volkov 1979:xxiv):

*The listener is flabbergasted from the first moment of the opera by an intentionally ungainly, muddled flood of sounds. Snatches of melody, embryos of musical phrases drown, escape, and drown once more in crashing, gnashing, and screeching. Following this "music" is difficult, remembering it is impossible.*

Stalin created and destroyed entire cultural movements, not to mention individual reputations. The article in *Pravda* was the start of a vicious campaign against Shostakovich and his contemporaries. After the "Muddle" article, Shostakovich was in despair, and in constant fear of arrest. To be publicly condemned by Stalin was tantamount to a death sentence. In a matter of a single day, Shostakovich's image was devalued from a prize piece of Soviet property to an outcast – and this at a time when outcasts were being packed off to Siberia in scores of thousands every month (MacDonald 1990:103-105):

*Like millions of others, he now lay awake every night, listening for the sound of a car drawing up outside, of boots thudding on the stairs, of a sharp rap at the door.*

Fear tested people's loyalty to Shostakovich. Many friends and colleagues deserted him at this crucial time, and even those who came to his defence did not always do so as unswervingly as might be expected.

Following Sergei Kirov's murder in December 1934, a new wave of repression broke out in the country. During the 17th Party Congress the Bolshevik leader won more votes for Party leadership than Stalin, who falsified the results to show himself victor. His assassination, almost certainly on Stalin's orders, signalled the start of the Terror. It became second nature for people



to regard anybody near to them as a possible informer or collaborator. The year of 1936 is remembered as the first of the great purges where Stalin's political enemies were forced into confessions and humiliation prior to their liquidation. It is estimated that over seven million people were arrested between 1936 and 1939. "Stalin imposed the Terror so as to transform all institutions – the Party, heavy industry and the armed forces – into obedient tools". (Wilson 1994:120-121.)

In Shostakovich's life and work his relationship with Stalin was an absolutely decisive factor. Stalin inflicted severe trials and public humiliations on Shostakovich; yet, almost simultaneously, he rewarded him with the highest title and honours. Paradoxically, both the defamations and honours produced unparalleled fame for Shostakovich. (Volkov 1979:xxvi.)

The Fourth Symphony, Op. 43, was written between 13 September 1935 and 20 May 1936. It was, therefore, at an advanced stage of composition when the notorious article "Muddle" appeared in *Pravda*. At one of the final rehearsals the composer decided – with great reluctance – to withdraw the work. It would appear that he was pressurised by the Leningrad party members and the director of the Philharmonic to take this eleventh-hour decision. The Symphony remained unpublished for 25 years before its first performance on the 31 December 1961, conducted by the famous Russian conductor Kyril Kondrashin (1914-1981). Sabinina, the author of a study of Shostakovich's symphonies, has the following view about the Fourth Symphony (Sollertinsky 1980:80):

*The Fourth is the most "Mahlerian" of Shostakovich's symphonies. The "Mahlerian", in the deepest sense of the word, lies in his approach to the problem of the individual and the surrounding world, his attempt to expose fully the contradictions in life which torment him.*

The Fourth is a purely orchestral symphony, in three movements, of which the second is a comparatively short scherzo. The largeness of scale and the very sizeable orchestra, the biggest required by any Shostakovich symphony, result in some passages, particularly in the first movement, which are greatly over-scored (Ottaway 1979:19-20). Blokker & Dearling (1979:59) writes that from the first moment one is reminded of Mahler's "bizarre orchestration and grotesque melodies". In 1956 Shostakovich wrote about the faults of the Fourth Symphony and

said it suffered from “folies de grandeur”. But only five years after the première, Shostakovich remarked to Isaak Glikman, life-long friend of the composer and literary and drama critic (Wilson 1994:120):

*It seems to me that in many respects my Fourth Symphony stands much higher than my most recent ones.*

Shostakovich's position was now precarious, and remained so until the successful performance of Symphony No. 5 in November 1937. The Terror was at its height, and he must have felt increasingly helpless as colleagues, friends and relatives were arrested and disappeared without trace. These included his brother-in-law, his mother-in-law and his uncle. His own sister Mariya was exiled to Frunze in 1937 but, exceptionally, she was released the following year. (Wilson 1994:121.) This catalogue of disasters formed the background to the composition and première of Symphony No. 5

Symphony No. 5 of 1937 was a turning point in Shostakovich's career. “A Soviet artist's reply to just criticism”, as Shostakovich called the symphony, represented new ideas, completely unlike the preceding symphonies. The Shostakovich of Volkov's *Testimony* understandably remembered the occasion well (MacDonald 1990:124):

*The atmosphere was highly charged, the hall was filled – as they say, all the best people were there, and all the worst too. It was definitely a critical situation, and not only for me. Which way would the wind blow? That's what was worrying members of the select audience – people in literature, culture, and physical culture. That's what had them in a feverish state.*

By the end of the evening the issue was beyond doubt: Shostakovich had regained his supremacy in Soviet music.

The Sixth Symphony was not what was expected, as the score avoids dramatic and heroic gestures, concentrating more on the uncomplicated and beautiful. It aims at providing sheer music enjoyment for both musicians and audiences (Blokker & Dearling 1979:75). Wilson

(1994:128) states that Shostakovich was “getting on with what he wanted as he was increasingly drawn to chamber music”.

Chamber music was not encouraged as it was regarded as too complicated for the masses. In spite of these forewarnings the first in his cycle of quartets was composed in July 1938, followed by the Piano Quintet in G minor for piano and strings (completed in September), which achieved immediate popular success. (Wilson 1994: 128.) In spite of the pressure from the authorities to avoid writing chamber music Shostakovich wrote 15 string quartets between 1930 and 1974.

Shostakovich was an awkward figure for the authorities to pin down. In his music and life he remained a non-conformist, although outwardly his music corresponded to the precepts of Soviet “socialist-realism”. Shostakovich’s musical language became increasingly ambiguous.

Stalin, who had an appreciation of the propaganda potential of art, paid special attention to film. Shostakovich’s accompaniments to Soviet films met with Stalin’s approval. But the greatest propaganda value was taken from Shostakovich’s so-called military symphonies, the Seventh and the Eighth, which appeared during the Second World War. The circumstances surrounding the creation of the Seventh, a commissioned work, were publicised around the world: the first three movements were written in Leningrad during the time that it was under siege by the Germans in September 1941. The Symphony was thus seen as a direct reflection of the events of the first few days of war. The Seventh Symphony was completed on 27 December 1941 and premièred in Kuibyshev on 5 March 1942. The Symphony evoked a strong emotional reaction from the Leningrad public. Never before had music acquired such heroic force or become such an effective symbol of patriotism. Shostakovich’s fame was at its zenith. The manuscript was microfilmed and flown, in the middle of the war as if it were state secret, to the United States, where Toscanini and the National Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra performed it in New York on 19 July 1942. (Barbier 1988:33.) According to Jackson (1997:54) Symphony No. 8 is:

*A victim’s outcry, a victim’s bewilderment and shivering circumlocutions, the most nihilist music that war can draw forth. As Stalin had noted, the death of one person is a tragedy, and the death of one million is a statistic. The clarity of Shostakovich’s thinking adds a new and chilling dimension of poignancy, and his testimony ends in the counterpoint of human and musical*

*rituals, torpid and curiously serene, that mark out a life finally and inexorably drained of meaning.*

In April 1943 Shostakovich settled permanently in Moscow where he had been appointed Professor of Composition at the Conservatoire, although later still teaching in Leningrad.

*They wanted me to write a majestic Ninth Symphony. I confess that I gave hope to the leader and teacher's [Stalin] dreams. I announced that I was writing an apotheosis. I was trying to get them off my back, but the attempts failed. When my Ninth was performed, Stalin was incensed. He was deeply offended because there was no chorus, no soloists. And no apotheosis. There wasn't even a paltry dedication. (Volkov 1979:106-107.)*

The Ninth Symphony in five movements was the composer's own celebration of the end of the war. In complete contrast to the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, the work is more concise, humorous, and neat, orchestrated with chamber-like sonorities. It can be regarded as Shostakovich's lightest symphony yet.

## **2.5 The final years of Stalinism (1948–1953)**

In February 1948 there was convened a three-day composers' Plenum in which Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Khatchaturian were severely criticised. Speech followed speech, and the Symphony No. 8 was singled out as "repulsive...an injury...a musical gas chamber." This time Shostakovich was humiliated. The conference would not adjourn until he had been rooted out of hiding and spoken of "my many failures, even though, throughout my composer's career, I have always thought of the People, of my listeners, of those who reared me..." "I read," he remembered in habitual self-disgust, "like the most paltry wretch, a parasite, a puppet, a cut-out paper doll on a string!" His wife saw him close to suicide, but again new work gave him the will to live. From now he divided his music into three categories: serious pieces for the desk drawer, where they should be safe from censure, occasional music such as his oratorio *The Song of the Forests*, which would one day rehabilitate him as a socialist composer; and lastly the film scores that might keep his family from starvation as his honours and opportunities were stripped away. (Jackson 1997:59.)

A series of Decrees were issued by the Central Committee as part of Stalin's scheme to implement a rigorous ideological uniformity in all cultural and scientific institutions. Anything that did not conform to the Party guidelines had no right to exist. The effects of the Decree on Formalism in Music cannot be underestimated; they were profound and influenced the perceptions of Soviet composers and musicians for several decades. (Wilson 1994:215.) Anti-Semitism becomes official in 1949 in a campaign against "rootless cosmopolitans".

On 5 March 1953 Stalin died, leaving the country in shock. The Soviet Union began cautiously changing. The next few years became known as the Thaw.

## **2.6 The Thaw (1953-1966)**

Amidst relief at the dictator's death the people slowly found the courage to voice their protests and disenchantment with the Party. Nikita Krushchev, the Party First Secretary, emerged as a political force to be reckoned with. He exposed the atrocities of Stalin's regime in a secret speech to the delegates of the 20th Party Congress. It took five years before he was ready to denounce Stalin publicly, which he did at the 22nd Party Congress. The revelations of Krushchev's secret speech turned the Soviet people's way of thinking upside down, and resulted in a number of strikes and revolutions in the Eastern European satellite countries. The invasion of Hungary by Soviet troops in October 1956 was the culmination of a series of events triggered off by the 20th Party Congress unmasking of Stalin. Another important consequence of the speech was that large numbers of people from the camps and prisons were released and rehabilitated. (Wilson 1994:259.)

In the meantime, as the Soviet Union emerged from years of isolation, contacts were cautiously established with the outside world. While the Soviet citizens had their horizons widened, their society was also subject to external scrutiny. The Soviets upheld their international prestige by pouring money into the space and arms race, and also by exporting culture. A brilliant generation of Soviet musicians (Oistrach, Richter, Rostropovich and Mravinsky, to name but a few) started to travel. They created an overwhelming impression in the West and proved the undiminished supremacy of the Soviet performing tradition. Shostakovich's music was at the forefront of their repertoire. At home the ban on art, literature and music that had been

previously labelled as “decadent and formalist” was lifted, allowing people to rediscover their own cultural heritage and giving them a glimpse of modernist developments in the West. (Wilson 1994:260.)

Shostakovich summed up Stalin’s era in the Tenth Symphony. The second movement is a “musical portrait” of Stalin. In the same work he introduced his own monogram DSCH (the notes D, E flat, C, B). The Symphony was completed in October 1953. On 17 December the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Mravinsky performed the Tenth Symphony in the composer’s home city Leningrad. (Wilson 1994:262.)

*I couldn't write an apotheosis to Stalin, I simply couldn't. I knew what I was in for when I wrote the Ninth. But I did depict Stalin in music in my next symphony, the Tenth. I wrote it right after Stalin's death, and no one has yet guessed what the symphony is about. It's about Stalin and the Stalin years.*

*The second part, the scherzo, is a musical portrait of Stalin, roughly speaking. Of course there are many other things in it, but that is the basis.* (Volkov 1979:107.)

The composer’s personal happiness was shattered in December 1954 when his wife Nina Varzar died suddenly. He suffered a double blow the following year by the death of his mother. In spite of personal tragedies Shostakovich still managed to continue composing.

The enormous Eleventh Symphony, subtitled “The year 1905”, is a symphonic poem in four movements or dramatic scenes that call extensively on quotations from Russian Revolutionary songs. The four movements, like a documentary, follow each other without a break, using a traditional orchestra and four harps. (Barbier 1988:46.) The first movement called “Palace Square” (*Adagio*) draws on folk music to depict the people cold and hungry, waiting to present their grievances to the Tsar. “Ninth of January”, the second movement, is a day known to Russians as Bloody Sunday. The peaceful demonstrating crowd is dispersed by rifle shots, leaving hundreds dead. The third movement, “Eternal Memory”, is a requiem for those that died on that day. For the finale Shostakovich constructed a grim warning entitled “The Alarm”, an

expression of revolutionary fervour. (Blokker & Dearling 1979:122; Ottaway 1979:50; Barbier 1988:10.)

The Twelfth Symphony, entitled “The Year 1917”, is closely related to the Eleventh in that its movements are played without a pause and its programme is inspired by the Revolution. It is dedicated to the memory of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. The opening *Moderato* is entitled “Revolutionary Petrograd”, followed by the *Adagio* “Razliv”, the name of the small town from which Lenin directed the revolution. The third movement, “Aurora”, is the depiction of the battleship Aurora that attacked the Winter Palace. The finale, subtitled “The Dawn of Mankind”, is a symbolic picture of the triumphant revolution.

In 1956 Shostakovich’s married Margarita Kainova. The unhappy union lasted three years. He finally found happiness in 1962 with Irina Suprinskaya, a lively and intelligent literary editor who was young enough to be his daughter and who nursed him through his final illness. His memorial to Nina, his first wife, was the most famous of all his quartets, his Seventh Quartet (1960), a meditation of six years later on the events of life and a death.

There was more trouble yet to come, on 18 December 1962. This was the occasion of the first performance of the Thirteenth Symphony for bass soloist, chorus and orchestra, to texts by the young poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko – and a message so volatile that Shostakovich returned home to find KGB agents posted outside his apartment, in case he tried to defect. Yevtushenko’s poems (see Appendix B) had been published, to official disapproval. It was Shostakovich’s distillation of their message that was a devastating revelation: The poem “Babi Yar”, a denunciation of anti-Semitism in memory of the steep ravine where many Jews were put to death; “Humour”, a song in praise of non-conformity; “In the Store”, an expression of the suffering of millions of ordinary men and women in a police state; “Fears” (“Fears slithered everywhere, like shadows...they taught us to keep silent when we should have screamed”); and then its finale, “A Career”, in honour of Galileo and Tolstoy, who had not been afraid to speak out: “A certain scientist, Galileo’s contemporary, was no more stupid than Galileo. He knew that the earth revolved, but he had a family.”

Shostakovich chose Mravinsky, the performer most closely connected with his works, to conduct the symphony. Mravinsky declined, undoubtedly too unnerved by the “risky” nature of the poems, although he excused himself for other reasons. It was at this point that Shostakovich turned to Kirill Kondrashin, who readily agreed to perform the Symphony.

Shostakovich’s initial choice for bass soloist was Alexander Vedernikov, a singer at the Bolshoi Theatre, who withdrew his acceptance of the part after realising the risky nature of the texts. Shostakovich and Kondrashin decided to get two other bass singers to learn the parts in the event of a mishap. Victor Nechipailo, also of the Bolshoi, and Vitali Gromadsky of the Philharmonia, started rehearsing. The singer at the concert was to be Nechipailo. The morning of the concert Nechipailo called to say that he was ill and could not sing. According to Wilson (1994:360) Kondrashin believes that the singer cancelled as a result of pressure put on him by Party officials. Gromadsky was reached and sang on the opening night.

On the day of the première of Symphony No. 13 Krushchev demanded that the symphony not be performed. The square of Moscow’s Conservatory Hall was sealed off by police cordons and the city buzzed with rumours (Jackson 1997:74-75). In spite of all the political intimidation Shostakovich and Kondrashin continued with preparations and performed the Symphony No. 13 to an expectant and thrilled audience. Boris Schwarz who attended the first performance in Moscow on 18 December 1962, describes the atmosphere in the following words (Roseberry 1981:154):

*The tension was unbearable. The first movement, “Babi Yar”, was greeted with a burst of spontaneous applause. At the end of the hour-long work, there was an ovation rarely witnessed. On the stage was Shostakovich, shy and awkward, bowing stiffly. He was joined by Yevtushenko, moving with the ease of a born actor: Two great artists – a generation apart – fighting for the same cause – freedom of the human spirit. Seeing the pair together, the audience went wild; the rhythmic clapping redoubled in intensity, the cadenced shouts ‘Bra-vo Shost-ta-ko-vich!’, and ‘Bra-vo Yev-tu-shen-ko!’ filled the air.*

During the years of the Thaw Shostakovich wrote several major works that had a noticeable significance with the Soviet people. His compositions became more and more introspective as he



entered his “late” period. The theme of reflection and self-analysis, always characteristic of his music, took on a different meaning: previously it was music for others, now it was about himself, for himself.

## 2.7 The Last Years (1966-1975)

On his sixtieth birthday the Soviet authorities tried to make amends for what Shostakovich had suffered in the past. They overwhelmed him with decorations. In September 1968 audiences heard his last optimistic finale, that of the Twelfth Quartet (Jackson 1997:78).

Shostakovich’s health, never very good, was deteriorating rapidly. The image of death dominated his works. Symphony No. 14 of 1969 is a confrontation with the prosaic ugliness of death. The idea of setting a cycle of poems to such a theme had come to him in 1962, when he had orchestrated Mussorgsky’s *Songs and Dances of Death*.

The music of the Symphony No. 14 is Shostakovich at his most sombre. The symphony is in 11 movements scored for soprano and bass voices with a chamber orchestra consisting only of strings and percussion. The plan of the music revolves around eleven poems about death by four poets: two by Federico Garcia Lorca (Spanish); six by Apollinaire (French); one by Wilhelm Karlovich Kuchelbecher (a close friend of Pushkin and a political exile); and two by Rainer Maria Rilke (German philosopher/poet, who formed many of his religious beliefs on visiting Russia in 1899 and 1900). Even the choice of poems invites controversy: only one is by a Russian, and the choice of two by a German religious philosopher such as Rilke to close the work must have been hard for the Soviet Government to accept. Shostakovich’s boldness must be admired. (Blokker & Dearling 1979:143-145.) The symphony was dedicated to Benjamin Britten, who conducted the first Western performance in 1970. Barbier (1988:67) suggests that in form and musical language Shostakovich pays tribute to Britten by quoting from some of his works.

Symphony No. 15 (1971) is probably the most charming of the symphonies and brings a refreshing return to the purely traditional orchestral symphony in four movements. Wilson (1994:435) aptly surmises the following about this symphony:

[It] represents a summing up or a retrospective glance over a musical lifetime, extending into the realm of memory through the numerous quotations (not to mention self-quotation) from composers as diverse as Rossini and Wagner. Although it conveys an introspective loneliness in the face of approaching death, the music also reflects a sense of serenity and resignation – a contrast to the protest and anger of the Fourteenth Symphony.

There is sparseness in orchestration, a fascination with chamber sonorities, and a further fascination with the variety and timbres of small percussion instruments (Blokker & Dearling 1979:151). In the first movement a familiar snatch of the *William Tell Overture* by Rossini is heard five times. The *Adagio* second movement begins with a chorale in the brass taken from the “Fate” theme of Wagner’s *Ring des Nibelungen*. (Ottaway 1979:165.)

The string quartets form the most remarkable output of Shostakovich’s last years, where the composer left a legacy comparable in originality and depth of expression to that of Beethoven’s late period. He did not live to write twenty-four quartets, one in every key, as he had planned. (Wilson 1994:437.)

In July 1975 Shostakovich completed a sonata for solo viola in three movements. It was to be his requiem, not performed until after his death. On Saturday 9 August 1975, at 3.30pm, the composer died of a heart attack in the Kremlin hospital.

## 2.8 Influences on Shostakovich’s life and musical style

The following people and situations are amongst the most strongly felt influences in Shostakovich’s life and musical style. Ottaway (1979:7) writes: “Arguably Shostakovich’s music is more closely bound up with the life of its time than that of any other composer of the same generation.”

### 2.8.1 Events of the times

In the author's opinion the events of the times had the most comprehensive influence and effect on Shostakovich's compositions. Martynov (1947:1) affirms that even in those youthful first attempts at composition Shostakovich sought to respond musically to the events of the times. The spirit of 1914 emanated from his poem "Soldier". The Revolution was mirrored in his "Revolutionary Symphonies" (the Second, Eleventh and Twelfth). Blokker & Dearling (1979:16) also conclude that Shostakovich's life and music represent a barometer of his very volatile environment, therefore the political state of Shostakovich's music cannot be ignored.

### 2.8.2 Beethoven

Shostakovich's interest in the piano sonatas of Beethoven was a formative influence on him. Beethoven was a figure of special historic importance to the Soviet ideologists of Shostakovich's youth. Beethoven was held up as a supreme example of an artist whose message was in tune with social aspirations. Boris Schwarz (in Roseberry 1981:63) comments on Russia's unique admiring and possessive attitude towards Beethoven:

*Already in the nineteenth century, Russian musicians were absorbed by Beethoven studies. This idolisation of Beethoven as a revolutionary hero, became a Soviet obsession, stimulated by Lunacharsky, Asafiev and many other authors.*

Shostakovich, interviewed by Rose Lee in the *New York Times* on 20 December 1931, has the following opinion: "Beethoven alone was the forerunner of the revolutionary movement [...] the Eroica awakens us to the joys of struggle." There is a strong musical evidence in Shostakovich's symphonic style (implicit in the early symphonies – fully manifest from the Fourth onwards) to indicate that he was creatively conscious of the importance of the dialectic principle as applied to music. For Shostakovich, Beethoven remained a central point of reference all his life – amounting in his later works to an alter ego. (Roseberry 1981:10-12.)

### 2.8.3 Stravinsky

Stravinsky had a great impact on Shostakovich during his late teens. MacDonald (1990:29) describes the effect as “instant and radical”. Shostakovich relates (Volkov 1979:23) that Stravinsky is one of the greatest composers of Shostakovich’s times:

*My earliest and most vivid impression of Stravinsky’s music is related to the ballet Petrouchka. Stravinsky gave me a lot. It was interesting to listen to him and it was interesting to look at the scores.*

Layton (1993:229) agrees with the influence Stravinsky’s *Petrouchka* had on Shostakovich and states that its character archetypes can be found all over the First Symphony:

*The very first note of Shostakovich’s First, scored for muted trumpet, catches the ear. Imagine a slight crescendo on it and continue into the second bar and you are immediately in the world of Petrouchka. In fact no single piece of music had a greater influence on Shostakovich than Stravinsky’s puppet-ballet.*

### 2.8.4 Tchaikovsky, Skryabin, Mahler

Layton (1993:299) debates the claim that the slow movement of the First Symphony reminds many writers of Tchaikovsky or Skryabin. It is, according to him, clearly more similar to Bruckner and Mahler because the first theme can be compared with the main idea of the *Adagio* of Mahler’s Tenth.

The author of this thesis supports the opinion of many writers about the great impact Mahler had on the development of Shostakovich’s musical taste and on his orchestral writing. Mahler’s influence is most notably found in Symphony No. 4. It is called his “most Mahlerian” work, predominantly because of the large orchestra required. (Ottaway 1979:23; Sollertinsky 1980:80; Roseberry 1981:87.)

### 2.8.5 Ivan Sollertinsky

The musicologist Ivan Sollertinsky (1902-1944), Shostakovich's closest friend, had an enormous influence on the formation of Shostakovich's tastes, and not only musically. A man of jovial and eccentric nature, Sollertinsky made brilliant appearances and pre-concert commentaries (Volkov 1979:226). In 1932, Sollertinsky had urged Soviet composers to follow the example of Mahler. "Mahler is closer to us than Debussy or Stravinsky, Richard Strauss or Hindemith," he (Sollertinsky) had written, citing amongst other things Mahler's attempt to reach a human collective, and the absence in his music of sensationalism for its own sake (Roseberry 1981:87).

Conductor Malko reminisces about Sollertinsky (Wilson 1994:67):

*Sollertinsky knew the symphonies of Gustav Mahler and Bruckner very thoroughly. It was certainly his influence that made Shostakovich interested in Mahler. Let me say that from his own personal standpoint this influence was quite natural. The angularity of Mahler, his sharpness, the peculiarity of his humour, and his tendency towards grandiose forms with stretched-out expositions – all of this, as well as his musical grimaces, found a vivid response in Shostakovich both in himself and as a person and as a musician, in fact, perhaps more as a person than as a musician.*

Ivan Sollertinsky died suddenly at the age of 41. Shostakovich dedicated his second Piano Trio Op. 67 (1944) to the memory of his friend.

### 2.8.6 The Russian people

The author is of the same opinion as Blokker & Dearling (1979:162) who philosophically conclude:

*The hero of his works was at times the Russian people, at times the revolutionaries who brought good changes, at times Shostakovich himself as a symbol of the people or a voice of their sufferings and joys. ... Never was the hero the Soviet state; it was always Man. ... Even in his wartime symphonies Shostakovich did not pay tribute to the victorious or struggling state but*

*rather to the people behind the state, the people of Leningrad or the Red Army or peasants in the war effort.*

## 2.9 A personal profile

Shostakovich was a man of intense energy and concentration and able to work under the most distracting situations. Royal Brown, who interviewed Shostakovich for the *High Fidelity Magazine*, found himself magnetised by the composer's "obviously enormous inner strength" (MacDonald 1990:250).

*When he speaks, it is in a high, somewhat sibilant voice that comes out in fast, almost youthful enthusiastic bursts that are highly accentuated, even for the Russian language. And it is the latent energy of speech as well as intense concentration one can observe and feel in the presence of this composer that left not only me but many others who had the chance to be with him with a strong feeling of both warmth and admiration.*

In a description of the composer by the famous Russian soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, Shostakovich is described as a troubled introvert, with abrupt and spasmodic speech. Similarly she was impressed by the composer's extraordinary restraint and discipline. (MacDonald 1990:250.)

Others recall a very different character: tight-lipped, controlled, sardonic, self-contained. His pupil Boris Tishchenko paints a picture of a man who seems to have treated him as an intellectual equal (MacDonald 1990:249):

*He disliked half-heartedness and indecisiveness in anything – in opinion, tastes, even minor matters. What he said was concrete and specific: every thought was expressed in a strict yet ample literary form – sometimes it was even a short story. Shostakovich was hostile to diffuse, abstract discussions and platitudes. There was no magniloquence, no pathos, everything was specific and well-rounded.*

Shostakovich's nephew Dmitri Fredriks, one of those who knew him well, gives this opinion (Sollertinsky 1980:209):

*I don't think anyone could get to know him completely. He knew how to get on with people in such a way that it seemed he was opening up to them totally. That is why a lot of people now think they were among his close friends. However, perhaps the only person who was truly close – whom Shostakovich really allowed to know him – was Ivan Sollertinsky.*

The pressure on Shostakovich to present an exemplary face to the West was insistent throughout his career. At a press conference at the Edinburgh Festival in 1962, a reporter asked Shostakovich if he agreed with Party criticism voiced in 1948, a year during which mass-arrests were made for “spying” and “revealing state secrets”, “kow-towing to the West”, “praising American technology”, and so forth. MacDonald (1990:250) describes Shostakovich's reaction as follows:

*“Yes, yes, yes, I agree,” replied the composer, eagerly. “And not only do I agree, but I'm grateful to the Party because the Party taught me.” Turning to Rostropovich [the famous cellist and conductor] immediately after this, he muttered “That son of a bitch! How could he dare ask that question? Doesn't he understand that I can't answer it?”*

The composer's iron control, inborn but stoutly reinforced by recent experience, struck many who knew him as distinctly un-Russian in its apparent coolness. In fact, his determination not to give himself away only made him stand out in the usual demonstrative Slavic crowd. (MacDonald 1990:82.)

Karen Khachaturian (born 1920, Aram Khachaturian's nephew), the composer whose career was much supported by the Union of Composers and Krennikov, comments on Shostakovich the teacher with whom he studied composition from 1943 (Wilson 1994:184):

*He was a wonderful teacher, because he recognised and respected the individuality of each student. Everything he said was very much to the point, and his attention to detail was always of*

*great relevance in the context of the whole. However, most of his comments concerned matters of form and instrumental texture. [...] He was the soul of kindness to his students.*

Shostakovich had a profound effect on Soviet musical life because he was so approachable, and was always willing to listen and give advice to composers and performers. Both Moisei Weinberg and Venyamin Basner were regarded by many as Shostakovich pupils, although officially neither of them ever studied with him. (Wilson 1994:189-190.)

Shostakovich's greatness is evident in his maintenance of an accessible style during a time in which much contemporary classical music turned away from the mass audience in pursuit of its own destiny. From the point of view of content it is arguable that, more than that of any other modern composer, Shostakovich's music *is* the 20th century. Living in every aspect other than the purely technical, on the front-line of modernity, he witnessed its effects on the emotional, intellectual, and moral life of a great culture during a crucial fifty years. (MacDonald 1990:262-3.)

## **2.10 Shostakovich's orchestration**

His teachers hailed Shostakovich from a very young age as a brilliant orchestrator and it is a consistent factor throughout his career. His mother Sofiya Vasilyevna declared the following in a letter to her son's godmother after the première of his Symphony No. 1 (Wilson 1994:50):

*Glazunov told me that he was particularly struck by Mitya's mastery of orchestration – something that is usually acquired only after years of experience and work.*

Shostakovich strongly believed that composers must do their own orchestration from beginning to end and not entrust the orchestration of his works to anyone else. Shostakovich believed that writing symphonies and orchestrating them are "one and the same" (Ho & Feofanov 1998:102-103). Volkov quotes Shostakovich saying that he had the utmost respect for Tchaikovsky as an orchestrator because he seldom wrote music and then orchestrated it, but wrote it directly for the orchestra. This is the same way Shostakovich wrote. Shostakovich quotes Rimsky-Korsakov by



saying that the essence of a composition is expressed in the composer's orchestration. (Ho & Feofanov 1998:103.)

Shostakovich often found fault with others less gifted than he in specific areas of craftsmanship. Orchestration was one such area he felt quite strongly about. He said: "Skryabin knew as much about orchestration as a pig about oranges". He was critical about Mussorgsky, and particularly harsh with Prokofiev who "never did learn to orchestrate properly". (Ho & Feofanov 1998: 98-99.)

According to Read (1979:49) style in orchestration is:

*... inextricably bound up with conception, content, and purpose. The one cannot exist without the other. What a composer does with his orchestra is as significant as the melodies he fashions, the harmonies he chooses, the rhythms he feels, or the forms that stimulate and challenge. A composer's orchestration is far more than just a personal stamp; it is, quite literally, the epitome of his musical thought, expression, and artistic personality.*

A possible hint at Shostakovich's inherent skill of orchestration could be in the manner he taught his own students many years later. As Wilson documents throughout her book *A Life Remembered* (1994) Shostakovich studied scores in detail and likewise expected an enormous volume of this type of analysis from his students. His flair and wit of orchestration is seen in all his works, from the serious to the lighter genres. Shostakovich composed very quickly and rarely made changes to the manuscript. While he willingly listened to the advice of his friends, he never changed his music. (Wilson 1994:453.)

Shostakovich respected and trusted his performers. He granted the performers the right to their interpretation, and never exerted pressure on them (Wilson 1994:453). Musicians found that their parts were very comfortably written and Shostakovich did not hesitate to ask advice from performers and composers. Shostakovich's son-in-law records his impressions of Shostakovich while he composed (Wilson 1994:288):

*To observe him writing down what he heard was like a miracle. Placing a large sheet of manuscript paper in front of him with hardly an interruption and practically no corrections or rough copies, Shostakovich created his new scores. They were created in entirety and instantaneously. It looked as though he wasn't composing, but just copying down sounds heard in his innermost self. And then, when the score was ready, he wrote out the orchestral parts himself. Maxim once asked him, "Papa, why are you writing out the parts when the score is there? Anyone who knows how to read and write music could do it for you." Dmitri Dmitriyevich replied, "Everyone should do his own work from beginning to end."*

Edison Denisov writes the following of his composition teachers, Shostakovich and Shebalin (Wilson 1994:300):

*Shostakovich and Shebalin had a deep love for each other. Shostakovich always enquired after 'Ronya' after I had been for a lesson. We studied many of Shostakovich's works in class, and Shebalin always gave us judicious advice. He didn't point to Shostakovich's melodic language, as he felt that this was one of the weaker aspects of 'Mitya's' composition, and indeed, he told us that writing melodies was an agonising effort for him. Nor did he approve of the mechanical rhythmic features, or the Hindemith-like polyphony in Shostakovich's works. He taught us to admire Shostakovich's wonderful ability to construct large forms and his unique skills of orchestration, and urged us to learn from these particular qualities.*

Shostakovich listened to all the advice and comments about his music from teachers, friends and critics alike and fortunately had the strength of character to continue to be true to his own individual writing style. This is clearly evident in his use of the woodwinds in the symphonies that proves Shostakovich's skill and knowledge of each instrument.

## **2.11 Shostakovich's legacy**

McBurney (in Kelly & Shepherd 1998:120-124) aptly concludes that almost a quarter of a century after his death Shostakovich's reputation remains immense, and is still growing within his own country and abroad. The influence of his distinctive musical language and the perceived example of his life will remain evident in the history of Soviet music, right up until the end of

the Soviet Union (1990); and even today he exerts a strong fascination for many Russian musicians. Sofia Gubaidulina (in Kelly & Shepherd 1998) states the following about Shostakovich:

*Shostakovich is of utmost importance to people of my generation, not only because of the influence he exerted as a composer, but also as a person... Despite his outward irony, and his manner of expressing himself in paradoxes, he felt and understood the suffering that Russians are doomed to endure, and the manner in which it defines their behaviour and relationships. In this way Shostakovich belongs to the Russian humanitarian tradition.*

Shostakovich had such a profound influence on composers of his time and after that they easily fell into the category of imitators. His influence was not only of style, technique and excellent orchestration, but also of symbolic intention. The brilliance of his orchestration is exemplified in the application of the woodwinds in his symphonies, which will be discussed in Chapters 3–11.