

## CHAPTER 12

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 12.1 Answering the research questions

The analysis of Shostakovich's use of the woodwinds in his symphonies attempted to answer the following main research question:

- What are the characteristics of Shostakovich's use of the woodwinds in his symphonies?

The research sub-questions were the following:

- What are specific elements, technical and artistic, of Shostakovich's compositional style for the woodwinds?
- Is there a developmental trend in Shostakovich's use of the woodwinds in his symphonies?
- How accessible are the woodwind parts in Shostakovich's symphonies from the woodwind player's perspective?

Shostakovich's symphonies mostly reveal the orchestration of the woodwinds as uncluttered and basically conservative. He treats the woodwind department like a group of highly individual but interdependent musicians whose work alternates between solo and ensemble playing. He shows a skilled knowledge of each instrument's capabilities and exploits it to perfection. The woodwind parts are always very accessible, although at times demanding and technically challenging. Shostakovich typically makes use of the full register qualities of the woodwind, often exploiting the extreme high register.

Shostakovich's skill of orchestration is evident in the technical and aesthetic attention he gives almost each individual woodwind instrument. The only two exceptions are the alto flute and the contrabassoon that did not receive the attention of the other woodwinds.

Characteristics of his style is seen in the way he meticulously treats each phrase, whether it is passed from one related woodwind instrument to another, or to a completely different instrument, by making sure the phrases connect seamlessly by overlapping beginning and endings of phrases. It is a consistent trait of Shostakovich's style to give enough time for the woodwinds to change from auxiliary to primary instruments by scoring enough rests and/or a warm up period before attempting a solo or a lightly textured and exposed melody. He does not place any woodwind in unnecessarily challenging positions technically, taking care of difficult entries in very low registers or avoiding the extremes of the woodwind register in exposed textures. He places value on each instrument's tone colour and timbre by choosing the best and most complementary combinations for solos. This is particularly evident in his consistent use of the homogenous timbre of the horns with the woodwinds.

Answers to the above research questions will now be incorporated in the conclusions of the analysis of each woodwind instrument.

## 12.2 The piccolo

The piccolo is quite clearly one of Shostakovich's favourite woodwind instruments. Its parts in the fifteen symphonies are exciting, challenging and fun, and secure Shostakovich as one of the most prominent symphonic writers for piccolo in the 20th century. Shostakovich has placed much emphasis on the importance of the piccolo by using it in a way that displays an in-depth knowledge of the instrument's capabilities and limitations. The piccolo is used in all the symphonies (with the exception of Symphony No. 14) and specifically two piccolos in Symphonies No. 4 and 8.

The solo and *tutti* sections require stamina and strength from the players, as well as a fine ear for intonation difficulties with often very exposed solos and very novel combinations. The composer uses the technique of juxtaposing piccolo melodies with flute melodies, creating the seamless effect of a continuous melody and an extended range. The piccolo's range is exploited mostly in its very high register and in extreme dynamic levels: shrill *fortissimo* piccolo parts scored in the very high register can be regarded as a distinct trademark of the composer's style. Shostakovich does not make an exception for the piccolo as far as articulation is concerned and



is uniform in indicating articulation for the whole woodwind section. An abundance of very provocative and challenging piccolo solos abound throughout the symphonies, creating an ample platform for exploiting the exhibitionistic qualities of the instrument and its player. Shostakovich is, however, conservative when using special effects and devices for the piccolo, choosing only to experiment with *frullato* in Symphony No. 4. The instrument combination preferred most in exposed textures is the piccolo with the E-flat clarinet, and the piccolo with bassoon and contrabassoon.

The piccolo is also fairly traditionally employed as part of the woodwind section or to double in unison or at the octave with the flutes. Less significant combinations include piccolo with strings, piccolo with brass, piccolo with percussion and piccolo with voice.

### 12.3 The flute

Mostly conventional in his writing for the flutes, Shostakovich nevertheless manages to elevate the status of the entire flute section to an integral part of his symphonic sound. The whole range of the flute's register is used, including the low B. Flute solos are scored in the middle to low register, with only a few solos venturing into the high register. Shostakovich prefers the warm and sonorous tone of the flute's middle to low register to represent solo material. Interestingly, Shostakovich uses the low register more from Symphony No. 7 onward. First and second flutes often have equally exposed solos. The dynamic level for solos is mostly *piano* and *pianissimo*. There is an average of four significant solos per symphony. A particularly vibrant solo opens the first movement of Symphony No. 15.

Shostakovich chose the strings as accompaniment to the majority of the flute solos, with their articulation ranging between *pizzicato*, *tremolo* and sustained tones. He subtly uses the soft timbre of the horns as his choice of brass to add to the accompanimental timbres. In accordance with the composer's preference for deep tones he also likes to combine the flute solos with the clarinets, bass clarinet and bassoons as part of the accompaniment.

Special effects are hardly used, with the exception of the *frullato* effect for flutes in two symphonies: the first time in the first movement of Symphony No. 4, and twice in the fourth movement of Symphony No. 8.

Shostakovich carries his preference for the juxtaposition of light and dark timbres through to his choice of combining the flute with other instruments of the orchestra. Beside the traditional combination of flute with piccolo, oboe or clarinet, he prefers to combine the flute with the bassoon or contrabassoon, the bass clarinet as well as with the cellos and double basses. Surprisingly, given Shostakovich's ability to bring charm and wit into the often gloomy nature of some of the symphonies, he does not make use of the naturally light quality of the combination of flute and percussion. An unusual and rare combination is surely that of the Bass soloist and flute in Symphony No. 13.

#### 12.4 The alto flute

The alto flute's fleeting encounter with the symphonies is puzzling. Shostakovich uses the alto flute twice in the second movement of Symphony No. 7. In the first instance it is fairly disguised between three other flutes. Toward the end of the movement the alto flute timidly plays a four bar solo. The author speculates that Shostakovich either disliked the timbre of the alto flute, or its unavailability contributed to the composer's limited use of the instrument.

#### 12.5 The oboe and cor anglais

Shostakovich's treatment of the oboe and cor anglais in the symphonies reveals a deft understanding of the instruments' lyrical and technical capabilities, although they are clearly not as favoured as the piccolo. Shostakovich exploits the full range of the oboe and cor anglais in the *tutti* sections, often subjecting the player and instruments to the extremes of the dynamic spectrum, particularly in the high register in very loud dynamic levels. This brings out the hard, brazen quality of the oboe and cor anglais, contributing to the atmosphere of tension and urgency the composer wants to portray with the full orchestra.



Shostakovich reserved the oboe and cor anglais' humorous capabilities for the later symphonies, from Symphony No. 8 onward. Coupled with this development is his use of *staccato* articulation which infers an element of wit. The predominant articulation in Symphony No. 8 is *non legato*. Solo passages are considerably written in the middle register, which is also the most expressive and warm part of their ranges. As with the piccolo and flute, characteristic *tremolo*, *pizzicato* and sustained strings support oboe and cor anglais solos. In *tutti* playing the oboe is frequently doubled in unison with the E-flat clarinet and/or one or more of the other clarinets. Shostakovich seldom combines the oboe and cor anglais with the brass, with the exception of the horns. There is very little significant doubling of choral parts with the oboe and cor anglais; this is found in Symphonies No. 2, 3 and 13.

The oboe and cor anglais parts in the symphonies are mostly very accessible, although Shostakovich includes a few technically challenging passages in very fast tempos.

## 12.6 The E-flat clarinet

The bright, penetrating quality of the E-flat clarinet is very well represented in seven of Shostakovich's symphonies. Symphonies No. 4-8, 10 and 13 include the E-flat clarinet to their instrumentation list. The E-flat clarinet's presence is at times uncompromisingly exposed and Shostakovich exploits its penetrating quality by writing very fast technical passages for the instrument using the whole compass of its range. True to Shostakovich's style, extreme dynamic expectations are also very challenging and surely taxing on the player. The composer uses the E-flat clarinet mostly in its clarino and high registers, therefore maximising the bright quality of these registers. The extreme high register is hardly used, with only a very few brief encounters, especially in Symphonies No. 5, 7 and 8. Given the programmatic nature of Symphonies No. 7 and 8 particularly, it is hardly surprising that the shrill sounds are called for.

There are only five significant solos for the E-flat clarinet, all written for the second movements of Symphonies No. 4-8. Shostakovich does not conform to the traditional symphonic form; the second movements are not necessarily slow. In fact, the most momentous solo for the E-flat clarinet is found in the second movement of Symphony No. 6, which is at a very fast *Allegro*.

Shostakovich uses characteristic sustained and *pizzicato* strings and horns to accompany solos for the E-flat clarinet.

The true value of the E-flat clarinet in Shostakovich's symphonies lies in its contribution as a team player. Shostakovich likes to blend the tone colour of the E-flat clarinet with one or more instruments with pleasing effect. The E-flat clarinet mostly doubles flutes in unison and octave unison, as well as doubles the oboe, clarinet and violins. Shostakovich's aim in these passages is to bring more clarity and an "edge" to the instrument with which it is combined. As with the other woodwinds so far, Shostakovich seldom combines the E-flat clarinet with percussion instruments. He does not use any special effects and devices for the E-flat clarinet in the symphonies.

### 12.7 The clarinets

It is evident from the first symphony that Shostakovich considered the clarinets as the backbone of the woodwind section. Their role exceeds that of any other woodwind and encompasses that of soloist, accompanist, harmonic supporter, and tone colour blender. Shostakovich uses the two most common clarinets, the A and B-flat clarinets, from the first symphony to the last.

Shostakovich's choice of which clarinet he wanted to use is very clear from the start. His choice is based on the fact that he perceived the two as individual instruments and scored them accordingly, treating them with the utmost purpose, regardless of the key signature. The A clarinet is mostly used in its lower register, probably for the benefit of its lowest note and warmer tone colour. The A clarinets are used exclusively in Symphony No. 15, whereas the clarinet parts in Symphonies No. 2, 3 and 6 are allocated solely to the B-flat clarinet. All the other symphonies make use of both instruments, sometimes together in one movement, other times alternating between movements. As with the other woodwinds, Shostakovich is particularly attentive to the player's and instrument's need for adjusting between changes by allowing enough time for a comfortable instrument and mouth-piece change, and thoughtfully scoring a few "warm up" notes.



Shostakovich succeeds in enhancing the natural quality of each register of the clarinet by scoring their parts in the most effective dynamic levels. This is clearly indicated in his preference for writing a *piano* dynamic level for the chalumeau and throat register, and *forte* for the high register. Shostakovich ensured that almost every symphony contains a solo for the first or first and second clarinets together. The number of solos for the A clarinet increases from the middle of his symphonic career, indicating a growing fondness for the instrument. The string section is unquestionably, and typically, the preferred accompaniment to clarinet solos throughout the symphonies. *Pizzicato* articulation is the most favoured. Shostakovich, however, leans toward the dark deep tones of the bass instruments, particularly the cellos and double basses, as accompaniment. It is concluded that the composer's preference for deep tones in the accompaniment is evidenced in his choice of the bassoons and contrabassoons which accompany many clarinet solos. The clarinets are often given centre stage with many bars of unaccompanied solos.

Shostakovich clearly preferred the smooth lyrical quality of the clarinet to prevail throughout the symphonies by writing an overwhelming amount of their music with *legato* articulation.

The clarinets in combination with other instruments fill a multifaceted role, of which the most important is its link between the instruments in the upper and lower registers of the orchestra. In keeping with Shostakovich's predilection for darker timbres he combines the alto voice quality of the clarinet with the violas. The predictable brass combination is that of clarinet with horns. The clarinets' other very prominent function is that of being the accompanists to other solos of various instruments. Their low register is mostly used for these accompaniment figures.

### 12.8 The bass clarinet

Shostakovich beautifully represents the lugubrious low tones of the bass clarinet in six of the symphonies with a particularly attractive selection of exposed ensemble playing and graceful solos.

Shostakovich uses the bass clarinet in Symphonies No. 4, 6-8, 11 and 13. In Symphonies No. 4 and 6-8 he treats the bass clarinet as a specialist by writing parts exclusively for it. He mostly

preferred the mellow chalumeau and low register, reserving the clarino and high register for *tutti* sections. The trend is maximum exposure in bass clarinet solos with very little accompaniment. The unusual combination of harp as accompaniment to bass clarinet solos has been used to great effect.

The bass clarinet can blend with and camouflage itself between the other bass instruments, particularly with its ability to play very softly. This is handy, especially when Shostakovich uses it in its traditional role to double in unison, or at the octave, with the cellos, double basses, bassoons and contrabassoon and occasionally even the trombones and tubas. Possibly due to its agility the bass clarinet is often the preferred bass instrument to the woodwind ensemble, instead of the bassoon or contrabassoon. From Symphony No. 8 Shostakovich combines the bass clarinet with the trumpets, trombones and tubas. He subtly uses this combination to soften the brash effect of the full brass section.

## 12.9 The bassoon

The gentle voice of the bassoon has an important role in the Shostakovich symphonies. The bassoons shine with a dazzling selection of solos throughout the symphonies. Probably its most impressive and crucial role in the symphonies is its humorous personality, its ability to lighten the tone of a passage or movement.

The bassoons are used in their traditional role of reinforcing the bass line, mostly by doubling the cellos and double basses in octave unison. For more exposed parts Shostakovich prefers the middle register of the bassoon, steering clear of the high register. He wrote solos to match every character and quality of the bassoon. Possibly the most momentous among the solos is the occasion Shostakovich affords the bassoon player to act as soloist during the entire second movement of Symphony No. 9, extending into the third movement.

Fully aware of the bassoon's fairly timid voice, Shostakovich takes care not to overpower the bassoon solos by carefully choosing the cello and double bass to accompany most of the bassoon solos. Unlike with the other woodwinds, the composer uses percussion instruments to add zing to the accompaniment of bassoon solos with instruments like the bass drum, side drum, timpani,



cymbals and piano. In keeping with his trend of writing in a more ensemble-like style toward the later symphonies, Shostakovich developed a preference for the lone voice of the unaccompanied bassoon in Symphonies No. 11-15.

Shostakovich's role for the bassoons in combination with other instruments include supporting the string bass line, supplying the bass line to the woodwind ensemble, and providing the accompaniment to a variety of solos instruments.

#### 12.10 The contrabassoon

The use of the contrabassoon is unusually reticent in comparison with Shostakovich's other auxiliary instruments. It is a pity that Shostakovich apparently did not have any aspirations for the contrabassoon as soloist, as there are no pure solos for the instrument in the symphonies. Its biggest contribution is to the *tutti* sound. Shostakovich scored the contrabassoon in Symphonies No. 4-8 and 10-13. In most cases the contrabassoon part is shared with the third bassoon player.

In comparison with the other woodwinds, Shostakovich's use of the contrabassoon is disappointing.

#### 12.11 A final word

The last research sub-question was the following:

- What is the significance and influence of the socio-political events on Shostakovich and his symphonies?

Shostakovich and his music cannot be separated from the historical context. The symphonies bear complex musical testimony to the composer's views about his country and prominent issues of the 20th century: the Revolution, Stalinism, Anti-Semitism, and the oppression of a nation and its artists. An awareness of the significance and influence the socio-political events had on Shostakovich's symphonies is therefore of particular importance to the individual performers in terms of understanding and interpreting the musical content of the symphonies.

Shostakovich's skill in orchestration, within the context of his socio-political and personal environment, compels the listener to renewed respect for the composer. This is particularly pertinent to his use of the woodwinds, which he fuses into various character roles with skill and conviction. With the exception of the alto flute and contrabassoon, each woodwind instrument has solos, which exploit their melancholic character in their most apt technical range. Subtle inflections in articulation, instrument combination and tempo changes expertly transform the tone to reveal strong emotions such as anguish, sorrow, despair, defiance, irony and wit.

The woodwinds are an integral part in Shostakovich's realisation of the symphonies, and bear witness to the level of perfection the composer expected of himself and to the care and respect he had for each of the players and their instruments.

#### **12.11 Possibilities for further research**

Opportunities for further analysis of the orchestration of Shostakovich's symphonies are numerous, and can be extended to include the following possibilities:

- Shostakovich's use of the string section in his symphonies;
- Shostakovich's use of the brass in his symphonies;
- Shostakovich's use of the percussion in his symphonies;
- A comparative study of Shostakovich's orchestration of his symphonies with that of other prominent 20th century composers of symphonies, for example Sibelius and Vaughan Williams.