

CHAPTER 2

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

2.1 Childhood (1906 - 1917)

Dmitri Shostakovich was born on 12 September 1906 in St. Petersburg. The composer's father, Dmitri Boleslavovich Shostakovich, lived a quiet life as a successful engineer in Petersburg. He married a pianist, Sofia Vasilyevna Kokoulina. Music was a serious interest of the family; their underlying philosophy held that art had to be useful.

My childhood was totally average. There was nothing extraordinary about it, and I just don't seem to remember any earth-shaking events. (Volkov 1979:4.)

Young Mitya (which was Dmitri's nickname in the family) was nine when he began his first piano lessons. His first teacher was his mother, who, when she saw his rapid progress, took him to a professional piano teacher. Within two years he played all the preludes and fugues in Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier. His father's singing had a certain influence on the formation of musical tastes of his childhood. Dmitri became familiar, through his father's singing, with Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. His admiration for Tchaikovsky continued into his adult composing life (Roseberry 1981:38):

I knew much of the music by heart, but when I first heard the opera played by an orchestra I was amazed. A new world of orchestral music was unfolded before me, a new world of colours...

Mitya 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 initial 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 Dmitri's

reaction to the Revolution in February 1917, which overthrew Nicholas II. During the street riots he witnessed a sight he would never forget (Volkov 1979:4):

They were breaking up a crowd in the street and a Cossack killed a boy with his sabre. It was terrifying. I ran home to tell my parents about it. I didn't forget that boy. And I never will. I tried to write music about it several times. When I was small I wrote a piano piece called "Funeral March in Memory of the Victims of the Revolution". Later my Second and Twelfth Symphonies addressed the same theme. And not only those two symphonies.

2.2 The student and rising composer (1917 - 1938)

Dmitri received piano lessons from Ignatiy Albertovich Gliasser's Music School where he had been sent in 1915. In 1919 amid the politically turbulent events of the time, the 13 year old Shostakovich enrolled at the Petrograd Conservatory, the best music academy in the country. (Petersburg was renamed Petrograd in 1917 in the surge of anti-German patriotic feeling.) The family's circumstances became very difficult. In 1922 Dmitri's father died, plunging the family into financial difficulties. The following year Mitya found a job playing the piano in a cinema, accompanying silent films (Volkov 1979:6):

I worked in my youth as the piano player at the Bright Reel Theatre - now called the Barricade. Every Leningrader knows the place. My memories of the Bright Reel are not the most pleasant ones. I was seventeen and my work consisted in providing music accompaniment for the human passions on the screen. It was disgusting and exhausting hard work and low pay. But I put up with it and looked forward to receiving even that paltry sum.

Historians like to say that this work was "beneficial" to Shostakovich's musical development, but the composer recalled it with revulsion (Volkov 1979:xix). In addition he became ill and was diagnosed with tuberculosis, a disease which troubled him for almost ten years.

Shostakovich's teacher of composition was Maximilian Steinberg, Rimsky Korsakov's son-in-law. He was 19 when he began work on his first symphony under the supervision of

Steinberg in 1925, who saw to it that it was published in the best traditions of Conservatory craftsmanship (Roseberry 1981:70). Symphony No. 1 was written as a final thesis for examination and received the unanimous approval of the Board. It was performed that same year (1926) by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under Nicolai Malko. Its success was instant and its reputation spread, augmented by the respect gained from prominent conductors. In 1927 the symphony was played in Berlin under the baton of Bruno Walter, and the following year it was conducted by both 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.

During the next few years Shostakovich's music style changed, making a break with the post-romantic style of the First Symphony. His writing developed the modernistic outlook of artists in other spheres. In 1927 he composed his Symphony No. 2 subtitled *Symphonic Dedication to October* in response to a commission for an appropriate work for the Tenth Anniversary of the Revolution. The Symphony No. 2, in one movement for chorus and orchestra, is the shortest of all the symphonies, requiring barely 21 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 work contains a chorus to the words of the poet Alexandr Bezymensky. 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 Symphony No. 2. There is a striking difference, not only in style but in artistic outlook, between the experimental constructivism of the orchestral prologue and the realism of the choral writing (Ottaway 1978:15). The poem begins with the plight of the Russian workers on the eve of the Revolution (Barbier 1988:20):

To October - A Symphonic Dedication

*We marched, and begged for work and bread,
 our hearts gripped in the vice of anguish,
 factory chimneys reached up into the clouds,
 like hands which could not clench a fist.*

*The dread names of our fetters:
 silence, suffering.*

*Our sad words burst out in the silence
 louder than the roar of guns.*

Oh, Lenin:

*You forged freedom from our torment.
 You forged freedom from our toil-hardened
 hands.*

*We understood, Lenin, that our fate has only one
 name:*

Strife, Strife.

Strife, you led us to the ultimate freedom.

Strife, you gave us the victory of labour.

*Nobody will ever deprive us of the victory over
 oppression and darkness, never.*

May each in the battle be young and bold.

May the name of this victory be October.

October is the herald of the awaited dawn.

October is labour, joy and song.

*October is happiness in the field and at the work
 bench.*

The slogan, October and Lenin.

The new age and Lenin.

The Commune and Lenin.

After the success of Symphony No. 2 Shostakovich wrote several other major commissioned works.

During these years the young composer proved himself adept in all genres - symphonic, theatre, ballet, film, solo piano and chamber music. Influential government officials supported the talented young composer, obviously preparing the post of official composer for him. This was a difficult decision Shostakovich had to make as a certain amount of political pressure was placed on artists. In order to be "in favour", to receive commissions, gain success and financial security, one had to get into state harness and "knuckle down". (Volkov 1979:xx.)

Shostakovich completed his first opera, *The Nose*, during these years. *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. His next opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk*, which was well received and performed in 1934, ran successfully for two years reaching audiences in Europe and America. In Moscow it had 94 performances in two seasons. Shostakovich was called a genius. Disaster struck when Stalin came to see *Lady Macbeth* and 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. 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.

A wave of Stalin's hand 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 confrères. 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 single day, Shostakovich went from being a cosseted piece of Soviet property to an anathematised outcast - and this at a time when outcasts were being packed off to Siberia in scores of thousands every month (MacDonald 1991:103 - 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.

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, the defamations and honours both produced unparalleled fame for Shostakovich (Volkov 1979:xxvi).

Shostakovich's Symphony No. 3 of 1929 has a similar ground plan 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 minute movement (Layton 1993:301). The Third Symphony is subtitled "May Day" or "First of May", and was premièred by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra on 21 January 1930. The words of the chorus on Semyon Kirsanov's text 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).

The First of May

*On the very first May Day
a torch was thrown into the past,
a spark, growing into a fire,
and a flame enveloped the forest.*

*With the drooping fir trees' ears
the forest listened
to the voices and noises
of the new May Day parade.*

*Our May Day.
In the whistling of grief's bullets
grasping bayonet and gun,
the tsar's palace was taken.*

*The fallen tsar's palace -
this was the dawn of May,
marching ahead,
in the light of grief's banners.*

*Our May Day -
in the future there will be sails -
unfurled over the sea of corn,*

and the resounding steps of the corps.

*New corps - the new ranks of May
their eyes like fires looking to the future,
factories and workers
march in the May Day parade.
We will reap the land,
our time has come.
Listen, workers, to the voice of our factories:
in burning down the old, you must kindle a new reality.*

*Banners rising like the sun,
march, let your steps resound.
Every May Day
is a step towards Socialism.*

*May Day is the march
of armed miners.
Into the squares, revolution,
march with a million feet!*

Symphony No. 4, 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*. The symphony remained unpublished for 25 years before its first performance on 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 Symphony No. 4 (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 large orchestra, the largest required by any Shostakovich symphony, result in some passages, particularly in the first movement, which are greatly over-scored (Ottaway 1978:19-20). Blokker and Dearling (1979:59) write that from the first moment one is reminded of Mahler's "bizarre orchestration and grotesque melodies".

Symphony No. 5 of 1937 was a turning point in Shostakovich's career. Roseberry (1981:88) compares this symphony with Beethoven's Eroica of 1803 - the formation of the "second period" of compositional development. In the Fifth Symphony Shostakovich reworked the influence of the Western composers, Stravinsky, Prokofiev and primarily Gustav Mahler, to create his own inimitable, individual style (Volkov 1979:xxvi). According to Ottoway (1978:25) the work as a whole is in the conflict-and-triumph, minor-to-major tradition of at least three other fifth symphonies - Beethoven's, Tchaikovsky's and Mahler's. As the première might have ended with his arrest, the Shostakovich of Volkov's *Testimony* understandably remembered the occasion well (MacDonald 1991:124):

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.

Symphony No. 6 (1939) 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 musical enjoyment for both musicians and audiences (Blokker & Dearling 1979:75). Barbier (1988:321) suggests that the Sixth Symphony has a strong influence of Sibelius and Tchaikovsky through its formal perfection and instrumental purity.

2.3 The World War II years (1939 - 1945)

Stalin, who appreciated the propaganda potential of art, paid special attention to film. He saw Soviet films enhanced by Shostakovich's accompaniments which met with his approval. But the greatest propaganda value was taken by Stalin 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. Symphony No. 7 was completed on 27 December 1941 and premièred in Kuibyshev on 5 March 1942. The manuscript was microfilmed and flown, in the middle of the war as if it were state secret, to the United States, where it was conducted by Toscanini on 19 July 1942. (Barbier 1988:33.)

The Eighth Symphony represents the height of tragedy in Shostakovich's output. The realism is relentless, the emotion stretched to the limit, and there is immense tension in the expressive idiom. Gloomy tones predominate throughout this work. (Sollertinsky 1980:114.)

When the Eighth was performed [4 November 1943 in Moscow], it was openly declared counter revolutionary and anti-Soviet. They said: why did Shostakovich write an optimistic symphony at the beginning of the war and a tragic one now? At the beginning of the war we were retreating and now we're attacking, destroying the Fascists. And Shostakovich is behaving tragically, that means he's on the side of the Fascists. (Volkov 1979:106.)

In April 1943 Shostakovich settled permanently in Moscow where he had been appointed Professor of Composition at the Conservatory, although later still teaching in Leningrad. According to Roseberry (1981:110), the duality of Shostakovich's position as a composer is to an extent mirrored in the duality of Moscow and Leningrad. Moscow, the official seat of Soviet government and the city of Stalin's prestige projects, and Leningrad, the home of Baroque and Rococo elegance.

Three other important works belong to the second stage of the war years, the Piano Trio No. 2, Op. 67 (August 1944), the Second String Quartet (September 1944) and the Symphony No. 9 (August 1945).

They wanted me to write a majestic Ninth Symphony. I confess that I gave hope to the leader and teacher's [Stalin's] 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 Symphony No. 9 in five movements was the composer's own celebration of the end of the war. In contrast to Symphonies No. 7 and 8, the work is more laconic, humorous, and neat, orchestrated with chamber-like restraint and purely classical in scope: almost Shostakovich's "Classical Symphony". (Blokker & Dearling 1979:106.) Shostakovich's Symphony No. 9 has been compared with the Classical Symphony by Prokofiev; its form with the symphonies of Haydn and Mozart; and its lyricism with that of Tchaikovsky (Barbier 1988:40).

During the years 1946-1952 Shostakovich did not write symphonies but composed works in other genres including amongst others, String Quartets, the first Violin Concerto and 24 Preludes and Fugues for the piano.

2.4 The post Stalin years (1953 - 1966)

Stalin died on 5 March 1953, leaving the country in shock. The Soviet Union began cautiously changing. The "thaw" began. Shostakovich summed up Stalin's era in Symphony No. 10. 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 1943. On 17 December the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under Mravinsky performed Symphony No. 10 in the composer's home city Leningrad.

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 enormous Symphony No. 11, 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 cold and hungry people,

waiting to present their grievances to the Tsar. The second movement, entitled “Ninth of January”, 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. (Barbier 1988:10; Blokker & Dearling 1979:122; Ottaway 1978:50.)

Symphony No. 12 (1961), 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. 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. (Barbier 1988:50.)

Symphony No. 13 in B-flat minor (1962) was Shostakovich's last major clash with the Soviet state. By the standards of its time and place it is an astonishingly outspoken piece (MacDonald 1991:230). The Symphony is scored for bass soloist, chorus of bass voices and orchestra, and based on texts by the young Soviet poet Yevgenii Yevtushenko. Shostakovich chose for his five movements the poems “Babyi Yar” (also spelt “Babi Yar” in Roseberry, and “Babii Yar” in MacDonald), “Humour”, “Women” (a tribute to Russia's women who “mixed concrete, ploughed and reaped” and stood in queues), “Fear”, and “Career”. The poetry resounds with condemnation of anti-Semitism, praise of humour and non-conformity, and the expression of suffering and the fears of ordinary people. The dissatisfaction with the Symphony was prompted primarily by Shostakovich's choice of the poem for the first movement “Babi Yar”, which is directed against anti-Semitism, an unfashionable theme in the U.S.S.R. since Stalin's time. Babi Yar was the site of the mass murder of Jews in 1943. Yevtushenko was compelled by the authorities to make certain changes to his poem, stating that the victims were not only Jews, but that Russians and Ukrainians, too, were killed at Babi Yar. The text below is an English translation of the original version of the poem which was sung at the première (Barbier 1988:56 - 57):

Babi Yar

*There is no memorial above Babi Yar.
The steep ravine is like a coarse tombstone.
I'm frightened,
I feel as old today
as the Jewish race itself.
I feel now that I am a Jew.
Here I wander through ancient Egypt.
And here I hang on the cross and die,
and I still bear the mark of the nails.
I feel that I am Dreyfus.
The bourgeois rabble denounce and judge me.
I am behind bars, I am encircled,
persecuted, spat on, slandered,
and fine ladies with lace frills
squeal and poke their parasols into my face.
I feel that I am a little boy in Bialostok.
Blood is spattered over the floor.
The ringleaders in the tavern are getting brutal.
They smell of vodka and onions.
I'm kicked to the ground, I'm powerless,
in vain I beg the persecutors.
They guffaw "Kill the Yids! Save Russia!"
A grain merchant beats up my mother.
Oh my Russian people, I know
that at heart you are internationalists,
but there have been those with soiled hands
who abused your good name.
I know that my land is good.
How filthy that without the slightest shame
the anti-Semites proclaimed themselves
"The Union of the Russian People".
I feel that I am Anne Frank,
as tender as a shoot in April,
I am in love and have no need of words,
but we need to look at each other.
How little we can see or smell!
The leaves and the sky are shut off from us,
but there is a lot we can do -
we can tenderly embrace each other in the darkened room!
- "Someone's coming!"
- "Don't be frightened. These are the sounds of spring,
spring is coming.
Come to me,
give me your lips quickly!"
- "They're breaking down the door!"*

- "No! It's the ice breaking!"
 Above Babi Yar the wild grass rustles,
 the trees look threatening, as though in judgement.

Here everything silently screams,
 and, baring my head,
 I feel as though I am slowly turning grey.
 And I become a long, soundless scream
 above the thousands and thousands buried here,
 I am each old man who was shot here.
 I am each child who was shot here.
 No part of me can ever forget this.
 Let the "International" thunder out
 when the last anti-Semite on the earth
 has finally been buried.
 There is no Jewish blood in my blood,
 but I feel the loathsome hatred
 of all anti-Semites as though I were a Jew
 and that is why I am a true Russian!

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, Babyi Yar, was greeted with a burst of spontaneous applause. At the end of the hour-long work, there was an ovation rarely witnessed.

During the years of the "thaw" Shostakovich wrote several major works that had a noticeable resonance in Soviet society. 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.

Shostakovich's health, never very good, was deteriorating rapidly. The image of death dominated his works. The Symphony No. 14 was composed in the hospital where Shostakovich remained from 13 January to 22 February 1969. The influence of Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* is profoundly reflected in the Symphony No. 14 (Sollertinsky 1980:199 - 200):

I think that in my Symphony I'm following in the footsteps of the great Moussorgsky. His cycle "Songs and Dances of Death" - perhaps not all of it, but certainly "The Field Marshall" - is a great protest against death, a reminder that one must live one's life honestly, nobly, honourably, never committing evil acts.

The music of the Symphony No. 14 (1969) is Shostakovich at his most sombre. The symphony is in eleven movements scored for soprano and bass voices with a chamber orchestra consisting of strings and percussion. The plan of the music revolves around eleven poems about death by four poets: two poems by Federico García Lorca (Spanish), six by Apollinaire (French); one by Wilhelm Karlovich Küchelbecker (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 a hard pill for the Soviet Government to swallow. 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), probably the most charming of the symphonies, brings a refreshing return to the purely traditional orchestral symphony in four movements. There is a 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 (Ottaway 1978:165). The Adagio second movement begins with a chorale in the brass taken from the "Fate" theme of Wagner's *Ring*.

In July 1975 Shostakovich completed a viola sonata 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.

2.5 Influences

It would be impossible to mention all the people and circumstances which played a role in shaping a composer. However, the following people and situations are amongst the most strongly felt recorded influences in Shostakovich's life and musical style. Ottoway (1959:7) 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.

Martynov (1947:1) states 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). Shostakovich's life and music often act as a barometer of his very volatile environment, therefore the political state of Shostakovich's music cannot be ignored. (Blokker & Dearling 1979:16.)

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 (Roseberry 1981:63) makes the following comment 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, was of the following opinion (Roseberry 1989:10):

Beethoven alone was the forerunner of the revolutionary movement [...] the Eroica awakens us to the joys of struggle.

Roseberry (1989:11-12) continues to say that there is a strong musical evidence in Shostakovich's symphonic style (only implicit in the early symphonies but fully manifest from the Fourth onwards) which indicates 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 (1986:88) draws a parallel between Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 and Beethoven's Fifth. The Symphony No. 5 is the first of Shostakovich's compositions to attach semantic value to a rhythmic motto, which later became a fingerprint of his style. A parallel is drawn between the use of a similar rhythmic device ("thus Fate knocks at the door") in all four of its movements.

Stravinsky had a great impact on Shostakovich during his late teens. MacDonald (1991:29) describes the effect as "instant and radical". Shostakovich declares (Volkov 1981:23) that he regards Stravinsky as one of the greatest composers of our time:

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.

Layton (1993:299) elaborates by stating that the slow movement of the Symphony No. 1 seems to remind many writers of Tchaikovsky or Scriabin, but it is even more clearly similar to Bruckner and Mahler (compare the first theme with the main idea of the Adagio of Mahler's Tenth).

Studying Mahler had a great impact on the development of Shostakovich's musical taste and of his orchestral writing. The Fourth Symphony was Shostakovich's most Mahlerian work and was both an end and a beginning in the composer's development. (Ottoway 1978:23; Roseberry 1981:87; Sollertinsky 1980:80.)

From Gustav Mahler, Shostakovich received the idea of the value of the symphonic form and the nature of orchestration. Mahler also gave him the value, feeling and flair for sarcasm in serious music. In himself, Shostakovich found the need to make his audiences smile with humour and beauty. (Blokker & Dearling 1979:161.)

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 public appearances and pre-concert commentaries (Volkov 1979:226).

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. Not even in his wartime symphonies did Shostakovich 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. (Blokker & Dearling 1979:162.)

2.6 A personal profile

The earliest portrait we have of Shostakovich (done in charcoal and red by the distinguished Russian artist Boris Kustodiev) communicates a stubbornness and inner concentration. Solomon Volkov in *Testimony* quotes the following as related by Shostakovich himself (Volkov 1979:16):

There is a severe critic inside all of us. It's not so hard to be tough, but is it worth airing your aural preferences before everyone? When it's necessary I can express myself - and have - very sharply when it comes to the performance of both other people's music and my own. As a youth I was very harsh and intolerant. The slightest deviation from the planned performance of my works irritated me extremely.

Reflecting on Shostakovich after his death, the composer Rodion Shchedrin wrote (Sollertinsky 1980:208):

Shostakovich was a great musician. But he was also a great human being in that for him the practice of art and the practice of life were inseparable. When I think how one might adequately sum up his human aspect two words come to mind: duty and conscience.

Shostakovich was a man of intense energy and concentration and able to work under the most distracting situations. Royal Brown, who interviewed Shostakovich for High Fidelity Magazine, found himself magnetised by the composer's "obviously enormous inner strength" (MacDonald 1991:250):

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 pictured as a troubled introvert, with abrupt and spasmodic speech. She was also impressed by the composer's extraordinary restraint and discipline. (MacDonald 1991:250.)

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 1991:249):

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", and "praising American technology", and so forth. MacDonald (1991:250) 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 1991:82.)

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 1991:262-3.)

Finally, as to the purpose of the artist, Shostakovich said (Machlis 1963:283):

I consider that every artist who isolates himself from the world is doomed. I find it incredible that an artist should wish to shut himself away from the people, who in the last analysis form his audience. I always try to make myself as widely understood as possible; and if I don't succeed, I consider it my own fault.