Political Influences on the Music of Shostakovich

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As a highly successful composer who completed his musical education in the immediate aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and continued to write music in the Soviet Union up until his death in 1975, Dmitry Shostakovich is a very important figure in Soviet music history. Musical development in the USSR was strictly monitored and controlled by the state, making the evolution of Shostakovich's music directly linked to the political climate of the Soviet Union, in both obvious and subtle ways.

During the early 1920's, before Stalin fully consolidated his power, artists were given a relatively large degree of freedom in their work. Of course, they were usually observers or active participants in the political events of the time, and it is to be expected that this influence often appeared in their work. Shostakovich was certainly no exception.

Although he was not especially politically active as a youth, Shostakovich's personal letters to Tanya Glivenko, written at a time where there was not yet reason to fear taking an anti-Bolshevik stance if he had so chosen, reveal that he was certainly supportive of Communism.[1] As a young conservatory student, Shostakovich often volunteered to perform for Red Army soldiers and factory workers.[2]

Political influences manifested themselves even in Shostakovich's earliest work. As he himself wrote:

> Events of the First World War and the February and October Revolutions stirred vehement emotions in our family. Even what I wrote as a child in those years showed a trend to give vent to my reactions in real life. My first naïve attempts at composition were my piano pieces *Soldier*, *A Hymn to Freedom* and *A Funeral March in Memory of Revolutionary Martyrs*, all of which I wrote between the ages of nine and eleven.[3]

These influences were still very much present in Shostakovich's early symphonic compositions. The 1925 *First of May Symphony* relies heavily on sounds from the urban environment and public ritual, including massed choral singing, oratorical flourishes, workers' songs and pioneer marches.[4] In his Second Symphony, entitled *Dedication to October* and premiered in 1927, Shostakovich incorporated a factory whistle into the music.

As time went on, the political influences on Soviet composers in general began to become something less than voluntary. Criticism was increasingly mounting against composers who wrote music appealing to "bourgeois" tastes. For example, Shostakovich's 1928 opera, *The Nose,* was criticized in the media for its ideological flaws and esoteric style.

The political influence on music was institutionalized when the RAPM (Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians) came to have an almost irresistible influence on the development of Soviet music between 1929 and 1932.[5] Given power by a 1928 resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the RAPM position was very strongly anti-modern, anti-jazz, anti-Western and often anti-classical. Composers of the old styles were denounced, with only Beethoven and Musorgsky being exempted because of their association with the revolutionary tradition.[6] The goal of this organi-

[1] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 36.
[2] Ibid., 20.
[3] N. V. Lukyanova, *Shostakovich,* trans. Yu. Shirokov (Neptune City, N. J.: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1984), 17.
[4] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 53.
[5] Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 58.
[6] Richard Taruskin, "Public lies and unspeakable truth interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony," *Shostakovich Studies,* ed. David

zation was to eliminate all music that was not directly relevant and accessible to the working classes. Composers were instructed to spurn all styles that had flourished under the Tsars, and to concentrate on the march-like *massovaya pesnya,* the mass song, through which proletarian ideology could be disseminated.

These demands were backed by very real dangers to those who refused to comply. In 1930, the magazine *The Worker and the Theatre* published announcements calling upon the Supreme Court of the USSR "to give no quarter to warmongers, wreckers or counter revolutionaries . . . we demand that wreckers should be shot" alongside information about rehearsals for *The Nose*.[7] Shostakovich's fellow composer, Alexander Mosolov, was branded an enemy of the people in 1929 and was finally executed in 1937. The effect of this on Shostakovich and other composers soon became apparent. Asked in 1930 what audience he wrote for, Shostakovich answered, "I live in the USSR, work actively and count naturally on the worker and peasant spectator. If I am not comprehensible to them I should be deported."[8]

Of the eleven major scores that Shostakovich wrote between 1929 and 1931, ten were written for the stage or film. He had no choice in this, as the influence of the RAPM made it impossible to make a living if one wished to write more "serious" art music. Like many other composers, he retreated to film and theatre music for fear of what would happen if he did not.

The content of the plays and films he scored was, of course, very pro-Communist. Examples of productions he wrote music for include *The Shot*, about railroad workers struggling against bureaucrats, *Virgin Lands*, about socialist collectivization of farms and *The Golden Mountains,* which showed the progress of an ignorant and oppressed peasant towards class consciousness. Even the single major piece that he wrote in this period that was not for the stage or film was strongly influenced by the demands of the RAPM. The Third Symphony is filled with the music of two Communist youth groups, the Young Pioneers and the Komsomols.[9]

Shostakovich did manage to get around the limitations of the RAPM at times, but only to a very limited extent. In his ballet *The Golden Age,* Shostakovich based his work on the juxtaposition of music of "unearthly eroticism" derived from Western culture, such as the foxtrot, tango and cancan, and music of the Soviet proletariat, such as marches and pioneer songs. This was done to contrast the "depravity" of bourgeois culture with the "healthiness" of proletariat culture. He was criticized even for this oblique and satirical inclusion of non-proletarian music, however.

Shostakovich finally rebelled against the limitations that were being imposed on his music. He wrote an article in 1931 entitled "Declaration of a Composer's Duties" that attacked the musical establishment in the theatre world. In it, he denounced all of his own theatre and film music. He wrote in addition:

> It is no secret to anyone that, at the fourteenth anniversary of the October Revolution, the situation on the musical front is catastrophic. We composers answer for the situation on the musical front. And I am deeply convinced that it is precisely the universal flight of composers into the theater that has created such a situation.[10]

Shostakovich continued along this vein by criticizing the RAPM's position at a conference held by the cultural commissar, Andrey Bubnov, in 1932.[11] On the same day, the Communist Party passed a resolution entitled "On the Reconstruction of Literary-Artistic Organizations," which liquidated the RAPM. The Union of Soviet Composers was formed, and Shostakovich was elected to the governing board of the Leningrad branch. Soviet composers were now permitted a freer reign in their compositions, and were once again able to write concert pieces beyond the realm of marches and mass songs. Shostakovich and his contemporar-

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Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19.

[7] Manashir Yakubov, "*The Golden Age:* the true story of the premiere," *Shostakovich Studies.* ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199.

[8] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 55.

[9] N. V. Lukyanova, *Shostakovich,* trans. Yu. Shirokov (Neptune City, N. J.: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1984), 67.

[10] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 64.

[11] Ibid., 65.

ies were encouraged by this development, to the extent that both Prokofiev and Gorky soon after decided to return to the Soviet Union.

Although Shostakovich continued to write music that was very much in keeping with the general ideology of the Communist Party, he now had a great deal more freedom in the artistic content of his music. Even in terms of programmatic content, Soviet critics were sometimes over-exuberant in their claims of how deeply these ideas were incorporated into his music. As Shostakovich himself wrote in 1933:

> When a critic, in *Rabochiy I Teatr* or *Vechernyaya krasnaya gazeta,* writes that in such-and-such a symphony Soviet civil servants are represented by the oboe and the clarinet, and Red Army men by the brass section, you want to scream![12]

Nonetheless, almost all of the pieces that Shostakovich wrote at this time had at least some claim to pro-socialist programmatic content.

This reprieve of relative artistic freedom came to an end after four years, when Shostakovich received the first of his two major denunciations. On January 28, 1936 an article entitled "Muddle Instead of Music" appeared in *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party:

> Several theaters have presented to the culturally maturing Soviet public Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* as a novelty, as an accomplishment. Fawning musical criticism extols the opera to the heavens, trumpeting its fame. Instead of practical and serious criticism that could assist him in his future work, the young composer hears only enthusiastic compliments.
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> From the very first moment of the opera the listener is flabbergasted by the deliberately dissonant, muddled stream of sounds. Snatches of melody, embryos of a musical phrase drown, struggle free and disappear again in the din, the grinding, the squealing. To follow this 'music' is difficult, to remember it is impossible…
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> At the same time as our critics—including musical critics—swear by the name of Socialist Realism, in Shostakovich's work the stage presents us with the coarsest naturalism.[13]

On February 6, 1936, a second article entitled "Balletic Falsity" appeared in *Pravda*. This article attacked Shostakovich and his collaborators for their work on *The Limpid Stream.* This ballet was criticized both for its politically incorrect portrayal of collective farms and its avoidance of folk songs and dances.

These *Pravda* articles were milestones in the development of Soviet music, and were meant to be a clear indication to all composers, not just Shostakovich, of what would and would not be acceptable in their work. The only music deemed worthy of the working classes, and thus the only music acceptable, was to be characterized by its accessibility, tunefulness, stylistic traditionalism, optimism and folk-inspired qualities. "Formalistic" music, such as *Lady Macbeth,* would no longer be tolerated.

Many musicians' meetings followed, at which *Lady Macbeth* was further denounced. Some of the demands expressed in *Pravda* were expanded on, as in the influential speech delivered by Vladimir Iokhelson:

> (Social realism) is above all a style of profound optimism. The whole historical experience of the proletariat is optimistic in essence. And we can and must affirm that optimism is intended as an obligatory feature of this style, its very essence. It is a style that includes heroics, but a heroics that is not merely tied to narrow personal interests. Here we mean a heroics of an individual connected with the mass, and of a mass that is capable of bringing forth such a hero. It is necessary that the connection between the hero and the mass be made intelligible.[14]

At first, Shostakovich was reluctant to implement the changes in his composing style that were demanded of him. He stated to a friend

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[12] Richard Taruskin, "Public lies and unspeakable truth interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony," *Shostakovich Studies,* ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 53.

[13] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 84.

[14] Richard Taruskin, "Public lies and unspeakable truth interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony," *Shostakovich Studies,* ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 33.

that "even if they cut off both my hands, I'll go on writing music just the same, holding the pen between my teeth."[15] After not only surviving, but also profiting from his "Declaration of a Composer's Duties" article in 1931, he was perhaps confident that he could survive these attacks just as unblemished. As Shostakovich put it nearly forty years later, "Instead of repenting, I wrote my Fourth Symphony."[16] This symphony was a large scale Mahlerian work that could easily have been construed as being formalistic at the time. Its composition, in the aftermath of the *Pravda* articles, was an act of active defiance against the Party.

In order to avoid the consequences of having the Fourth Symphony publicly performed, Shostakovich was forced by the Composer's Union leadership to withdraw his submission for performance just prior to its premiere at the end of 1936.[17] This was explained in the journal *Sovetskoye* as being "on the grounds that it in no way corresponds to (Shostakovich's) current creative convictions and represents for him a long outdated phase."[18]

To make matters worse for Shostakovich, this all happened during one of the great Soviet purges. This directly affected many of those close to Shostakovich. By mid-1937, his brother-in-law had been arrested, his sister was exiled to Central Asia and his mother-in-law was in a labor camp.[19] Perhaps most chillingly, Marshal Mikhail Tukachevsky, a friend and political protector of Shostakovich, was executed in 1937.[20] In addition, by 1937, no new work by Shostakovich had been performed in two years. Several works had been directly censored by the state, and he "voluntarily" stopped work on a ballet treatment of *Don Quixote* and gave up his plans to create a Soviet Ring Cycle.[21]

It is hard to imagine that all of this did not convince Shostakovich to conform to the musical demands that were being imposed on him by the Party, despite his own personal preferences. He met with the chief of the Committee for Artistic Affairs to find out what steps he should take to rehabilitate himself. He was told that he would need to reject any formalism in his music, that he must make music accessible to the masses and that he must submit any proposed opera or ballet in advance for screening by the committee.[22]

Shostakovich responded by writing the Fifth Symphony, which he designated "a Soviet artist's creative response to just criticism." As Richard Taruskin writes:

> With its ample yet conventional four-movement form, even down to an improbable minuet (as many have characterized the scherzo), its unextravagant yet sonorous scoring and its notable harmonic restraint, the Fifth Symphony amounted to a paradigm of Stalinist neoclassicism, testifying, so far as the powers were concerned, to the composer's obedient submission to discipline.[23]

Shostakovich consciously scaled down his ambitions to a more manageable scale that would be more accessible to listeners because it played off paradigms of the symphonic tradition.

Shostakovich also complied to the demands for optimistic music by incorporating joyousness into his Fifth Symphony, although some argue that it sounds forced.[24] The brief program notes called it "a lengthy spiritual battle,

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[15] Ibid., 54.
[16] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 92.
[17] Richard Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us," *Shostakovich in Context,* ed. Rosamund Barlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25-26.
[18] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 95.
[19] Ibid., 98.
[20] Inna Barsonva, "Between 'Social Demands' and the 'Music of Grand Passions,'" in *Shostakovich in Context,* ed. Rosamund Barlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 80.
[21] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 107.
[22] Ibid., 90.
[23] Richard Taruskin, "Public lies and unspeakable truth interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony," *Shostakovich Studies,* ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26.
[24] Ibid., 34.

crowned by victory."[25] This is confirmed by the composer's statement:

> There is nothing more honorable for a composer than to create works for and with the people. The composer who forgets about this high obligation loses the right to this high calling. . . . I wanted to convey in the symphony how, through a series of tragic conflicts of great inner spiritual turmoil, optimism asserts itself as a world-view.[26]

Shostakovich was not only submitting to the criticism he received in *Pravda,* he was also complying with the more recent demands that composers emulate *russkaya klassika* as a timeless model. This signified a return to "normal" musical values, after the excesses of early Soviet modernism. Whether or not he was sincere in doing so, Shostakovich was tailoring his music to the demands of the authorities. Shostakovich was rewarded for his obedience with endless public praise and eventually a Stalin Prize. Critics such as Alexey Tolstoy called the Fifth Symphony a masterpiece of Social Realism.

The next major piece that Shostakovich wrote, the Piano Quintet in G Minor op. 57, is also written in the classical tradition. It contains clear melodies and a fugue written in the style of Bach. It was nominated for, and eventually won, a Stalin Prize even before its premiere.

Kerzhentsev, a Bolshevik cultural official, offered the following advice to Shostakovich around the time of his denunciation in *Pravda*:

> His work should proceed first and foremost from our country's abundant repertory of folk song. It would not be a bad idea for Shostakovich to take a page form the book of Rimsky-Korsakov. Contact with the abundance of the folk musical heritage had a beneficial effect on his whole work.[27]

Although Shostakovich did not give folk music an important role in the Fifth Symphony, he certainly did place it prominently in compositions that followed soon after. An obvious example is his rendition of one of Stalin's favorite folk songs, "Suliko."[28] He also gave his Sixth Symphony intonations of revolutionary workers' songs.[29]

Shostakovich also wrote numerous patriotic songs in the years following his denunciation. He composed the music for a piece entitled "Oath to the People's Commissar" that contained the words, "The great hour has come, Stalin leads us to battle, his order is law! Go boldly into dread battle!"[30] The music is very simple and straightforward. Shostakovich explained this uncharacteristic stylistic choice by saying "I want everyone to sing it."[31] He also participated in a competition to write music to replace the Soviet national anthem. His collaboration with Aram Khachaturyan eventually became the "Song of the Red Army."

The artistic costs of Shostakovich's submission were heavy, at least in the eyes of the West. Western journalists and composers heavily criticized him for writing inferior and derivative music. It was felt that an extremely talented composer had sacrificed his talent to Soviet politics. Igor Stravinsky mocked the Fifth Symphony in his Harvard lectures of 1939[32] and Arnold Schoenberg reproached Shostakovich for having "allowed politics to influence his compositorial style."[33] Virgil Thompson wrote the following regarding Shostakovich's wartime Seventh Symphony:

> Whether one is able to listen without mind-wandering to the Seventh Symphony of Dmitri Shostakovich probably depends on the rapidity of one's musical perceptions. It seems to have been written for the slow-witted, the not very musical and the distracted . . . That he has so deliberately diluted his matter, adapted it, by both exces-

[25] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 99.
[26] Ibid., 102.
[27] Ibid., 89.
[28] Ibid., 113.
[29] N. V. Lukyanova, *Shostakovich* trans. Yu. Shirokov (Neptune City, N. J.: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1984), 93.
[30] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 124.
[31] Ibid., 124.
[32] Richard Taruskin, "Public lies and unspeakable truth interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony," *Shostakovich Studies,* ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27.
[33] Richard Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us," *Shostakovich in Context,* ed. Rosamund Barlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18.

> sive simplification and excessive repetition, to the comprehension of a child of eight, indicates that he is willing to write down to a real or fictitious psychology of mass consumption in a way that may eventually disqualify him for consideration as a serious composer.[34]

By this point, it is clear how much Shostakovich's political environment influenced his music. He voluntarily included Socialist and revolutionary ideas into his early music and he submitted to demands for programmatic content in the 1920's. He wrote music with Socialist themes and set music to Socialist texts. He acquiesced to the RAPM's directives by temporarily limiting his music to mainly mass songs for film and the theatre. He eventually responded to the criticism in *Pravda* by tailoring the Fifth Symphony and the works that immediately followed to the demands for accessible, tuneful, optimistic, neo-classical music that was influenced by folk sources.

The consequences of the *Pravda* articles on the remainder of Shostakovich's musical career go far beyond these immediate effects, however. One cannot neglect the role of self-censorship after the trauma of his denunciation in 1936 (and once again in 1948). Although he did continue to sometimes go beyond the limitations imposed by Party expectations, one would certainly think that he would have done so more explicitly, more often and perhaps in different ways if he had not been in constant fear of the consequences.

Another important point is that Shostakovich abandoned entirely the direction that his music was taking in 1936. His creative mindset must have changed irreversibly in the years that it took for him to redeem himself to the point that he once again had some degree of creative control over his music. As he confided the to Flora Litvinova in 1970:

> You ask if I would have been different without 'Party guidance'? Yes, almost certainly. No doubt the line I was pursuing when I wrote the Fourth Symphony would have been stronger and sharper in my work. I would have displayed more brilliance, used more sarcasm, I could have revealed my ideas openly instead of having to resort to camouflage; I would have written more pure music.[35]

Perhaps the most serious consequence of his denunciation was its effect on the genres that Shostakovich composed. He never again completed another opera or original score for a ballet, the two genres in which he had shown the most expertise and promise in his early career. Before his denunciation, his work had consisted chiefly of operas, ballets and music for films or plays. Although part of this was an artificial inflation due to the influence of the RAPM, it nonetheless appeared that his chosen medium until 1936 was the stage.

Nevertheless, after 1936 Shostakovich became associated chiefly with concert genres. He became best known for his symphonies and his string quartets. This change is all the more remarkable, given that, except for one cello sonata, he had not written any chamber music prior to 1936.[36] It is apparent that Shostakovich's entire approach to music was changed by the political persecution that he faced after *Lady Macbeth*.

It is impossible to know how events would have continued to develop had the Second World War not intervened. The results of the war on Soviet music were twofold. On the one hand, the Party realized that it was important to promote solidarity with the West in this time of crisis and military alliance. As a result, it was desirous to produce music with appeal to Westerners as well as Soviets, and to relax some of the repressive controls that had been placed on Soviet art. On the other hand, there was a great deal of pressure on Soviet composers to write simple patriotic music to inspire the troops and raise public morale. As Shostakovich wrote:

> In the early period of the war, many songs and works in the minor genres were composed: marching songs, ditties, sometimes in a humorous vein, music for variety shows. That was the composers' prompt re-

[34] Ibid., 19.

[35] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 268.

[36] Richard Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us," *Shostakovich in Context,* ed. Rosamund Barlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

> sponse to the dramatic, daily events of wartime.[37]

There can be little doubt that there was some genuine sincerity in Shostakovich's patriotic response to the outbreak of war. He applied three times to fight in the army in 1941, and was refused each time. After his third request, at a time when Nazi troops were approaching his native Leningrad, he was offered the chance to evacuate with his family to a safe area, but refused. He joined the Leningrad Theater of People's Volunteers and gave guest performances for front-line units, at recruitment stations and at military hospitals. The Leningrad branch of the Composer's Union started a defense section, which wrote anti-Nazi songs. An example of Shostakovich's work in this vein was *An Oath to the Defense Commissar*, which was commended as one of the best defense songs of the war.[38]

Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, dedicated to the besieged city of Leningrad, was seen by many as the pinnacle of wartime propaganda. It was performed in 1941 in a global radio transmission that even an air raid in the middle of the concert failed to stop. The score was flown to the United States, where it was performed sixty-two times in 1942 alone.[39] It was played all over the world and temporarily made Shostakovich more famous than any other modern composer.[40] Photographs of him appeared in newspapers across the globe and *Time* devoted its cover to a photo of him in his Civil Defense fireman's uniform. However, the symphony was in the end considered by Westerners not to have any special musical value beyond its topical relevance as propaganda. By 1944, the only orchestras still performing it were in Russia.

Even in this time when Shostakovich was, at least in the opinion of most scholars, enthusiastically writing music in support of the war effort, he still felt the need to be careful not to exceed certain politically imposed limitations on his music. For example, while writing his Ninth Symphony, Shostakovich confided the following to David Rabinovich: "I would like to write it for a chorus and solo singers as well as an orchestra if I could find suitable material for the book and if I were not afraid that I might be suspected of wanting to draw immodest analogies."[41]

Shostakovich continued to write patriotic music that would be acceptable to the Party even after the war ended. An example is his 1947 *Poem of the Motherland,* a straightforward medley of six well-known songs spanning the history of the Revolution, including one entitled "The Will of Stalin Led Us." Shostakovich described *Poem of the Motherland* by saying:

> These songs give rise in the listener's soul to feelings and images dear and unmistakable to every Soviet person. The main thing all these images give rise to is the passionate and selfless love of Soviet people for their country, the firm determination to sacrifice oneself for the Motherland.[42]

Despite these precautions, Shostakovich was soon to learn that he was still far from immune to the consequences of writing music that strayed too far from Party orthodoxy. The Eighth Symphony was criticized for being too pessimistic at a time when the end of the war was approaching and optimism was considered mandatory. Even Prokofiev complained that it was lacking a "clear melodic line."[43] It was withdrawn from the concert repertoire after its premiere. Critics also condemned the Ninth Symphony because its light-hearted parodying tone ran contrary to the expectations of a grandiose work extolling the virtues of the Soviet victory over the Nazis.

Things came to in a head in 1948, when the Central Committee issued a resolution condemning certain trends in contemporary Soviet music. The affair was started by political flaws found in Muraldi's opera *The Great Friendship,* but soon spread to a wide-ranging condemnation of the entire Soviet musical establishment. An excerpt from the resolution reads:

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[37] N. V. Lukyanova, *Shostakovich,* trans. Yu. Shirokov (Neptune City, N. J.: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1984), 95.
[38] Ibid., 96.
[39] Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich,* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 154.
[40] Ibid., 154.
[41] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 146.
[42] Ibid., 154.
[43] Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich A Life Remembered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 175.

> The situation in the realm of the symphony and opera is especially bad. The problem is one of composers who are adherents of a formalistic, anti-people direction. This direction has found its fullest expression in the works of such composers as comrades D. Shostakovich, S. Prokofiev, A. Khachaturyan, V. Shebalin, G. Popov, N. Myaskovsky, and others, whose works show particularly clear manifestations of formalistic distortions and antidemocratic tendencies in music that are alien to the Soviet people and its artistic tastes.[44]

This resolution immediately caused Shostakovich to fall from favor once again. He was stripped of his position in the Composer's Union and was dismissed from his professorships at the Moscow and Leningrad Conservatories. The majority of his pieces were explicitly barred from performance. Things went so far that his ten-year-old son was forced to vilify his father in a school exam.[45]

Aside from official persecution, Shostakovich received many individual letters of condemnation. As Shostakovich put it, "When they criticized me for formalism, you won't believe how many poison-pen letters I received from absolute strangers, scarcely literate in music. These were the kind of expressions to be found in them: 'You ought to be executed, killed, exterminated, you scoundrel,' and so on."[46]

Many articles that targeted Shostakovich individually began to appear in the media, often reviving memories of the earlier political flaws in his music. The following excerpt from a 1950 article by T. Tsitovich provides a typical example of their tone:

> The growth of the Soviet ballet has been hampered by the formalist trend. This trend, hostile to Soviet musical art, can be seen at its clearest and most extensive in the works of Shostakovich, who wrote several ballets at the beginning of the thirties—*The Golden Age, The Bolt, The Limpid Stream*—which grossly distorted the Soviet theme. These works were deeply alien to Soviet art; formalism stood out here in its consummate and most blatant form. Complete contempt for melody, for folk song and dance; musical cacophony; piling up alien orchestral stunts—these are the distinguishing features of these ballets. Just a small handful of gourmet musicians who have broken away from the artistic needs of the people have been giving as much publicity as possible to these 'highly eccentric works' of Shostakovich, which have had an extremely negative effect on the development of the genuinely Soviet realistic ballet.[47]

Shostakovich surrendered to his critics much more quickly this time than he had after the *Pravda* articles. He decided independently to shelve the First Violin Concerto, which he had just completed at the time of the Party resolution, partly for fear that it would cause him to be further denounced, and partly because it would have been almost impossible to find musicians willing to risk performing it.[48] His prompt public response in a speech at a meeting of composers and musicologists was no less submissive:

> When, today, through the pronouncements of the Central Committee resolution, the Party and all of our country condemn this direction in my creative work, I know that the Party is right. I know that the Party is showing concern for Soviet art and for me, a Soviet composer. . . . I will try again and again to create symphonic works that are comprehensible and accessible to the people, from the standpoint of their ideological content, musical language and form. I will work ever more diligently on the musical embodiment of images of the heroic Russian people.[49]

At the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers, Shostakovich continued by pledging that melody would become the driving force behind his new compositions and that he understood the need for programmatic music and music connected with literary images.[50]

Immediately following the events of 1948, Shostakovich had no choice but to once again

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[44] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 158.
[45] Ibid., 162.
[46] Ibid., 161.
[47] Manashir Yakubov, "*The Golden Age:* the true story of the premiere," *Shostakovich Studies.* ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 190.
[48] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 159.
[49] Ibid., 160.
[50] Ibid., 161.

write film music to support himself, as all other doors were suddenly closed to him. As Shostakovich stated to his colleagues, "It's unpleasant that I have to do this. I advise you to do it only in the event of extreme poverty, extreme poverty."[51] He was careful to write music that would be acceptable to the Party even here. Two of the film songs, "Homesickness" and "Song of Peace," became very popular and bolstered Shostakovich's credibility as a composer of mass song.[52]

Shostakovich further fulfilled his promise to compose more melodic music by writing *From Jewish Folk Poetry,* a work with clear and accessible melodies and genuine folk texts. Unfortunately, this song cycle was written in the same year that anti-Semitism became official government policy in the USSR, under the guise of a campaign against "cosmopolitanism." Needless to say, this song cycle was not released for public performance until much later (1964).

Many musicologists, such as Richard Taruskin, argue that this composition was a way for Shostakovich to associate himself with the oppressed, and was thus a deliberate protest against Stalin's treatment of the Jews.[53] One must be careful when making this assertion, however. Stalin's campaign against "rootless cosmopolitans" did not begin in earnest until early 1949, by which time Shostakovich had already completed *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. It is likely that he had sincerely been trying to please the Party, but had accidentally chosen the wrong folk music to represent at the wrong time. After all, the music met exactly the requirements of the 1948 resolution. It was both melodious and "understandable to the people."

Shostakovich's first major composition to be performed following the 1948 resolution was an oratorio entitled *Song of the Forests,* a piece that conformed to the musical demands of the resolution and helped greatly to redeem him politically. The Soviet critical response was in the following vein: "I want to congratulate everyone assembled in that we no longer, and I hope we will never again, call Shostakovich a representative of the formalistic direction."[54] Shostakovich's followed this success by writing *Ten Poems on Texts by Revolutionary Poets of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,* another work that gained him praise for giving up his formalistic ways and concentrating on being a realist composer. It won him the USSR State Prize in 1952 and he was bestowed with the title of People's Artist of the USSR in 1954.

Once again, the influence of politics on Shostakovich's music is obvious. The majority of his efforts during the war years were devoted to writing simple songs for propaganda purposes. He concentrated almost exclusively on patriotic themes, even in the eighth and ninth symphonies. It is telling that he was chastised even for the relatively minor deviations from musical orthodoxy that he made in these two symphonies. One would imagine that he would have explored the ideas expressed in these symphonies more extensively and more openly had he been given the chance. Instead, he was forced to spend time composing the politically acceptable music that maintained his viability as a composer in the USSR.

The effects on Shostakovich's music were even more pronounced following the events related to the 1948 resolution. He abandoned all work that was not easily accessible and concentrated on writing film songs and melodic music. He was very careful to censor his own music to avoid any possible controversy, to the extent that he changed the words of one song in *From Jewish Folk Poetry* to name the Tsar explicitly as the cause of a Jewish father's exile to Siberia.[55] This was done despite the fact that Shostakovich had already decided not to publish this piece.

One wonders, yet again, how Shostakovich's music would have been different if he had not been in such a dangerous position in the years between 1948 and 1956. By the time he no longer needed to fear for his life, eight years of potential development had passed during which his music had been forced to stagnate.

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[51] Ibid., 171.
[52] Ibid., 171.
[53] Richard Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us," *Shostakovich in Context,* ed. Rosamund Barlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

[54] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 175.
[55] Richard Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us," *Shostakovich in Context,* ed. Rosamund Barlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

One also has to wonder to what extent Shostakovich would have been influenced by trends in Western music had he been permitted to incorporate them into his own work. There is no doubt that he often publicly denounced dodecaphony and serialism. However, given his proven willingness to serve as a mouthpiece for official Soviet policy and to submit to political demands on his compositional style even when they were in direct conflict with his own preferences, it is certainly conceivable that he would have explored these movements in music had he been given the chance. As he stated in a 1968 interview:

> As far as the use of strictly technical devices from such musical 'systems' as dodecaphony or aleatory is concerned . . . everything in good measure. If, let's say, a composer sets himself the obligatory task of writing dodecaphonic music, then he artificially limits his possibilities, his ideas. The use of elements from these complex systems is fully justified if it is dictated by the concept of the composition.[56]

The fact that he was willing to publicly state even this much shows the extent to which contemporary Western musical ideas could have influenced his music had he been given the opportunity to use them. He showed his interest in twelve-tone rows in two isolated later pieces, *Seven Verses of A. Blok* and the Second Violin Concerto, and was heavily criticized for this even though Stalin was long dead at the time and Shostakovich was considered an elder statesman of Soviet music.

An important similarity between the effects of the 1936 and 1948 persecutions is that, just as Shostakovich stopped writing ballets and operas after the *Pravda* articles, he similarly did not write any symphonies between the discredited 1945 Ninth Symphony and the Tenth Symphony of 1953. Just as ballets and operas were among his most successful genres in 1936, Shostakovich was best known for his symphonies in 1948. Once again, he abandoned his most successful genre for fear that it would lead to further persecution.

After the death of Stalin and the gradual implementation of Khrushchev's "thaw," the situation gradually began to improve for composers. It was made clear at the Second All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers in 1956 that the Central Committee was supporting a move towards greater flexibility and tolerance in music. In 1958, a resolution was passed by the Committee admitting that Shostakovich and others had been "indiscriminately denounced"[57] in 1948.

Despite this, Shostakovich was cautious, and continued to labor to make his music more accessible. The Eleventh Symphony, written in 1957 as a memorial to the abortive Russian Revolution of 1905, contains many revolutionary songs, including "The Prisoner," "Listen, Comrade!" and "Rage, Tyrants!" It was praised in the following terms by contemporary critics: "Thanks to its extensive use of the revolutionary song heritage, the language of this symphony proved to be simpler and more accessible than in previous major works of the composer."[58] An example of the results of Shostakovich's new devotion to Social Realism can be seen in the reaction of a miner, who claimed upon hearing the Twelfth Symphony that he and many of his comrades had often found Shostakovich incomprehensible in the past, but the vivid revolutionary imagery of the Twelfth Symphony allowed them to appreciate him in a different light.[59]

Shostakovich was rewarded with many prizes and was given numerous civil positions. This was partly a result of his exemplary conformity to the Party's demands and his willingness to serve as a mouthpiece for their views. He was asked to join the Party in 1960, and eventually agreed. However, his reluctance to do so was obvious. He attempted to refuse entry into the party by pleading first lack of understanding of Marxism and then religiosity.[60] Even when he did finally consent, he failed to attend the Party meeting where he was to be admitted into the fold, forcing the Party to make up the story that he had fallen suddenly ill.[61]

This was a turning point in Shostakovich's music. Perhaps he had crossed some line in his mind by joining the Party, perhaps he felt that

[56] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 258.

[57] Ibid., 204.
[58] Ibid., 202.
[59] Ibid., 224.
[60] Dorothea Redepenning, "'And art made tongue-tied by authority' Shostakovich's song-cycles," *Shostakovich Studies,* ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 210-211.
[61] Ibid., 208.

he now had some degree of security because of his status as a showpiece for the artistic success of Soviet music or perhaps he was just getting old and regretted his earlier submissions to the demands placed on his music. Whatever the case, he once again started to push the boundaries of what was officially acceptable in Soviet music.

An obvious example of this is the Eighth Quartet, which Shostakovich composed immediately after his admission into the Party. Rather than being the expected celebration of his new official status as a Communist, this is a dark piece that Shostakovich considered to be the sum of his achievements. He considered suicide very seriously after writing it.[62]

Another famous example of Shostakovich's rediscovered rebelliousness is the Thirteenth Symphony, which Shostakovich set to poetry by Yevgeniy Yevtushenko, a Jewish poet who had recently met grave criticism for his poem "Babiy Yar" that expressed the particular wartime suffering of Russian Jews. The symphony was banned entirely in the Ukraine, the Moscow press ignored the premiere and Shostakovich and Yevtushenko were informed that the piece could not be performed again without modifications.[63]

Shostakovich even went so far as to have his great political failure, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District,* revived in public performance. It was performed in 1963 for the first time since 1936, but not without substantial modifications. Its name was changed to *Katerina Izmaylova,* the libretto was drastically changed and the music was slightly reworked.

It is often argued that these changes were made solely as a result of irresistible political pressure. Although this may have been partly the case, one must be careful not to assume so. Shostakovich repeatedly expressed a preference for the second version.[64] Although one can certainly argue that Shostakovich may have only been saying this in order to help gain official approval for the piece, it is important to remember that *Lady Macbeth* always had a special place in his heart. As he confided to Andrey Balanchivadez soon after the denunciation of the original version:

> *Lady Macbeth,* for all her enormous flaws, is for me the kind of work that I could never stab in the back. I could be wrong and it could be that my courage is insufficient, but it seems to me that one needs courage not only to murder one's things but also to defend them. Since the latter is currently impossible and useless, I am not undertaking anything in that direction. . . . If you find out sometime that I have 'dissociated myself' from *Lady Macbeth,* then know that I did it 100 per cent honestly. But I think that this won't happen very soon.[65]

Even through all of his persecutions and his official recantations over the years, Shostakovich never specifically condemned *Lady Macbeth*. This at least opens the door to the possibility that the changes found in *Katerina Izmaylova* were voluntary.

The most important musical changes were to the part of Boris Timofeyevich. The low limit of his range was raised and his melodic lines were made smoother. It is important to realize that these changes were made immediately after the death of Shostakovich's wife, to whom he had dedicated *Lady Macbeth,* and not in 1963, when *Katerina Izmaylova* was published.[66]

The most significant change to the libretto was to the part of Katerina. Her sexual desire was severely muted, thus altering entirely the way that the audience interpreted her character.[67] It can be argued that that these changes were made not because of political pressure, but because of events in Shostakovich's personal life. By 1963, he was not only significantly older than in 1936, but also a widower and the father of two teenagers. He might have wished to eliminate the brazen sexuality of *Lady Macbeth* simply because of the increasing conservatism that sometimes comes with age. Of course, it is certainly possible that these changes were made for political reasons as well, but there is not enough evidence to be sure either way. This is a good example of an instance where scholars

[62] Ibid., 210.
[63] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 235.
[64] Laurel E. Fay, "From 'Lady Macbeth' to 'Katerina' Shostakovich's versions and revisions," *Shostakovich Studies,* ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 161.
[65] Ibid., 177.
[66] Ibid., 178-179.
[67] Ibid., 180.

are too hasty in attributing aspects of Shostakovich's music to censorship.

The issues of Shostakovich's sincerity in his responses to criticism and of how voluntarily he conformed to official expectations are subjects on which there is a great deal of debate. There are many difficulties in resolving these issues. Shostakovich was very reticent about describing his music. Even his personal letters contained little beyond technical descriptions, such as the number of movements, the keys or the timings.[68] Even what he did say cannot always be trusted as being what he truly thought, as he was always under the threat of recriminations for taking any politically incorrect stances, even in his private communications.

The political environment of the Cold War and its aftermath has had a very polarizing effect on scholars and critics, sometimes compromising their objectivity. Repressive influences played a role here, and were most pronounced in the eras of Stalinism and McCarthyism. Shostakovich was used by the Communist Party not only as an example of the artistic splendors that could be achieved under the Soviet system, but also as a mouthpiece for prefabricated propaganda at international events. This obvious politicization led many Russians to commend him to excess and many Westerners to criticize him beyond the point that was appropriate.

This lack of objectivity has manifested itself in both subtle and blatant ways. An example of the former can be found in the relatively reliable work of N. V. Lukyanova. The writer is careful not to present untruths in his book *Shostakovich*, but he nonetheless presents primarily the pro-Soviet side of the story and glosses over embarrassing events like the censorship of the Fourth Symphony.[69] An unfortunate example of the latter is Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*, which was presented as the memoirs of Shostakovich. It is now generally held to be a fake, although some scholars still believe that it is at least partially based on fact.

The disintegration of Communist power in recent years has led many Russian scholars to respond in very reactionary terms to the one-sided pro-Soviet perspectives on Shostakovich that they had previously been forced to swallow. This is particularly unfortunate, since the fall of the USSR has led to the opening up of resources that were previously closed to those wishing to do objective research. Many of these reactionary writers have shown an excessive tendency to attribute Shostakovich with the status of a dissident within the Soviet Union. The idea is that the surface content of Shostakovich's works was a protective screen camouflaging a secret meaning that could only be discerned by musical connoisseurs. This point of view was originally lent a great deal of credence by *Testimony.*

The most commonly cited support for this line of argument is Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. It has been argued that the Largo is in fact a mourning piece, perhaps a memorial to Shostakovich's friend Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky, who was executed by the Party. This argument does have some support in that the Largo resonates with two movements from Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde:* "Der Einsame im Herbst" (The Lonely One in Autumn) and "Der Abschied" (The Farewell).[70] The Eleventh Symphony is also often indicated as having hidden content. The violent music of the second movement has been linked to the contemporary bloody repression of the Hungarian rebellion by Soviet troops rather than the events of Bloody Sunday in 1905, as the official program claimed.[71]

One must be careful not to go too far when making these kinds of assertions, however. It should be remembered that the first performance of the Fifth Symphony took place in November 1937, which was at the height of Nikolay Yezhov's bloody rule under Stalin. This was also at a time when Shostakovich was in a very unenviable position following the events surrounding *Lady Macbeth* and the Fourth Symphony. It would have been suicide for

[68] Richard Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us," *Shostakovich in Context,* ed. Rosamund Barlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13-14.

[69] N. V. Lukyanova, *Shostakovich,* trans. Yu. Shirokov (Neptune City, N. J.: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1984), 87.

[70] Richard Taruskin, "Public lies and unspeakable truth interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony," *Shostakovich Studies,* ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 42.

[71] Richard Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us," *Shostakovich in Context,* ed. Rosamund Barlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

Shostakovich to have attempted to mock Stalin at this time. There was any number of musically literate informers who would have been all too pleased to denounce Shostakovich had he done this.

Having realized this, there is nonetheless credence to the claim that Shostakovich was more than willing to protest the actions of the authorities in his music. For example, he wrote a song cycle of poems by Pushkin a few months prior to the Fifth Symphony. The following in an excerpt from the first of these poems, "Vozrozhdeniye:"

> An artist-barbarian, with a casual brush
> Blackens a genius's picture,
> And his lawless drawing
> Scrawls meaninglessly over it.
>
> But with the years the alien markings
> Fall off like old scales;
> The work of genius appears before us
> In all its former beauty.
>
> Just so do delusions fall away
> From my exhausted soul,
> And within it there return visions
> Of original, pure days.[72]

Shostakovich likewise responded to the 1948 denunciations by secretly writing a piece entitled *The Antiformalist Rayok.* This was a satire of the relationship between art and power and a blatant caricature of the officials involved in the events of 1948. Its importance to Shostakovich is indicated by the fact that it is the only piece in which he composed the entire libretto.[73] Needless to say, he made absolutely no effort to publish this work.

It thus becomes clear that Shostakovich was influenced by the politics of his time to resort to satirical music. Although one must be careful not to overemphasize the sphere of this influence by claiming that pieces such as *From Jewish Folk Poetry* were written as a protest against Stalin, and must also take care not to take it for granted that there are hidden messages in works such as the Fifth Symphony, there is still little doubt that satire played a role in at least some of Shostakovich's music. It appears that this theme is most prominent in his music composed after 1936, leading one to think that the denunciations led to a trend in his music that might not have developed otherwise. In addition, Shostakovich had no choice but to keep his satire very subtle or to leave his satirical pieces unpublished. Had he not been under the constant threat of reprisals, he might have allowed the satirical themes to take on a greater role in his music than he did.

As to the question of whether or not Shostakovich was a sincere Communist, it is difficult to say for sure. Given the evidence presented so far, it is obvious that he certainly did not agree with all of the actions of the Soviet regime. However, it is as naive to argue that Shostakovich was entirely opposed to Communism as it is to claim that his publicly pro-Communist image was an entirely sincere reflection of his personal views. It is important to remember that he never defected, despite all of the persecution that he faced and all of the limitations that were placed on his music. He certainly had many opportunities to do so, considering his position as a member of the Soviet Peace Committee and the many international events, musical and otherwise, that he attended. In any event, a great deal of his work was certainly characterized by pro-Soviet content, programmatic and otherwise, regardless of whether or not he actually agreed with this content.

As has been shown, the influence of politics on Shostakovich's music was immense, both in terms of the ways in which it affected his music directly and in the ways that it guided the course of his career. He might have chosen to explore entirely different areas of music had he not been shepherded by Soviet musical policies. The political influence on Shostakovich's music was most pronounced during the reign of the RAPM and in the aftermaths of the 1936 and 1948 denunciations, but it was still very much present at other times as well.

In terms of direct influence, Shostakovich incorporated many pro-Soviet programmatic elements into his music. He quoted Revolutionary music in his work, set music to Socialist texts and wrote music for Socialist works for stage and film. He tailored pieces such as the

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[72] Dorothea Redepenning, "'And art made tongue-tied by authority' Shostakovich's song-cycles," *Shostakovich Studies,* ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 205.

[73] Manahir Yakubov, "Shostakovich's 'Anti-Formalist Rayok,'" *Shostakovich in Context, e*d. Rosamund Barlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 136.

Fifth Symphony to the demands of the Party. He was forced to make an effort to write primarily optimistic, melodic, folk-influenced and accessible pieces. He spent a great deal of time writing mass songs, particularly during the reign of the RAPM and the war years, when he would probably have preferred to explore other avenues in music. He was prevented from openly dealing with themes in his music that did not meet Party approval. He developed a satirical streak that might have not have appeared in a different context or might have developed further and more explicitly in an atmosphere less rife with danger.

In terms of the effects of politics on the entire direction of his career, Shostakovich was prevented from exploring the influences of foreign avant-garde music, such as serialism, or from incorporating original ideas into his music that strayed too far beyond officially sanctioned neo-classicism. He entirely abandoned opera and ballet, two genres in which he showed a great deal of promise, and did not write any symphonies between 1946 and 1952 because of political factors. Finally, the directions that his music was taking at the time of his Fourth Symphony as well as at the time of the Eighth and Ninth symphonies were lost forever.

Shostakovish was unique in the Soviet Union in that he was claimed by both the dissident culture and the official culture. Whatever his personal views actually were, there is no doubt that Soviet politics had an immense influence on the development of his music. His case provides a fascinating example of how a brilliant composer can develop and mature entirely in an environment of extreme artistic politicization and limitation, and not only incorporate this environment into his work, but also produce some of the greatest music of the century while doing so.

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