

# DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

## SYMPHONY #5 (1937)

### (A SOVIET ARTIST'S REPLY TO JUST CRITICISM)

“Does the music really mean what it appears to say? That’s the issue about Shostakovich in general.” Michael Tilson Thomas (MTT), from *Keeping Score, Shostakovich Symphony #5*, Youtube.

#### MUSICAL HISTORY:

- Middle Ages and Renaissance.
- **Baroque** (1600-1750): Bach, Handel, Vivaldi.
- **Classical** (1750-1803): Haydn, Mozart, early Beethoven.
- **Romantic** (1803-1900): Late Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Mahler.
- **20<sup>th</sup> Century**: Stravinsky, Copland, Bartok, Prokofiev, **Shostakovich**.

#### A NEO-CLASSICAL SYMPHONY:

- Term used to describe the style of certain 20<sup>th</sup> century composers who, notably in the period between the two world wars, revived the balanced forms and perceptible thematic processes of earlier styles. (Norton/Grove Encyclopedia of Music)
- Notable examples: Stravinsky *Pulcinella* (1920), Prokofiev 1<sup>st</sup> Symphony “Classical” (1918).
- Architectural analogy: A modern building that looks Greco-Roman on the surface. Its skeleton, foundations and interior however, are thoroughly modern.
- NOTE: The neo-classicism of this symphony was forced upon Shostakovich by the Stalinist Soviet regime.

#### DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH BIOGRAPHY (1906-1975):

The biography Shostakovich intimately parallels the history of Communist U.S.S.R.

- Born 9/25/1906 in St. Petersburg. Father engineer and amateur musician; mother musician.
- At age 9 his parents recognized that he was a prodigy. He had remarkable power of memory. He sang back an entire opera (Rimsky’s *Life of Tsar Saltan*) the day after he attended it with his parents.
- Progressed quickly with piano and composition. By age 13 he amassed a portfolio of around 30 compositions.
- November 1917: Age 11. Russian Revolution.
- 1919: At age 13 admitted to Petrograd Conservatory, then headed by Alexander Glazunov. There he also progressed rapidly.
- 1921: Father died. Mother went to work at menial jobs. He began working as silent film pianist while still at Conservatory.
- Became acquainted with avant-garde Western composers, Schoenberg, Bartok, Berg. Came to admire Paul Hindemith in particular.
- 1926: Age 19. His graduation piece, First Symphony premiered. Made him internationally famous. Began career as a concert pianist and composer.
- 1926: Age 20. Stalin comes to power.
- 1927: Second Symphony and First Opera, *The Nose*. Neither well received. The opera fiercely criticized in certain communist circles (harbinger of things to come).

- 1926-1936: New artistic aesthetics compatible with the Bolshevik revolution proclaimed by the government (see below). All Western composers gradually banned, except Beethoven.
- Initially Shostakovich was untouched by this. He was the “Golden Boy” of Russian music. Stalin particularly liked the theme he composed for the movie *The Counterplan* (1932), a box office smash, and a hit song in Russia.
- 1934: Premiere of second opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. It’s a sordid story of love, adultery, murder and suicide. Extremely popular.
- 1936-38: The Great Terror, Stalinist repression, executions and assassinations of prominent leaders, military commanders and other Stalin rivals.
- January 1936: Shostakovich working on his Fourth Symphony.
- January 1936: Age 29. *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* seen by Stalin. He doesn’t like it. He ominously leaves at intermission.
- Two days later an article appears in *Pravda*, entitled *Muddle Instead of Music*, thought to be written by Stalin himself. It complained that the opera was a "deliberately dissonant, muddled stream of sounds...(that) quacks, hoots, pants and gasps." Another article denouncing Shostakovich appears a week later.
- The charge against Shostakovich is “Formalism.”
- Shostakovich suddenly becomes a pariah. Commissions disappear. He fears for his life. Keeps a suitcase in case they take him away at night.
- 1936: Many friends and relatives, including his patron Marshal Tukhachevsky, former military Chief of Staff, are executed. Shostakovich fears he is next.
- December 1936: Shostakovich withdraws his Symphony #4 which does not conform to the expectations of Bolshevik authorities. This symphony would not be performed until 1961.
- 1937: Age 31. Premiere of Symphony #5, a more conservative work, to great acclaim both by audiences and authorities. Shostakovich rehabilitated.
- 1939-1945: World War II. Russia attacked in 1942. Shostakovich composes Symphonies 6-9. His Seventh, the Leningrad Symphony receives great acclaim.
- 1948: Second denunciation for Formalism (along with Prokofiev & Khachaturian). Shostakovich resorts to composing film music to make a living.
- 1953: Stalin dies. Shostakovich subsequently fully rehabilitated.
- 1960: Joins the Communist Party.
- 1950s & 60s: During the Cold War, viewed in the West as a propagandist for the Soviet Regime.
- 1975: Age 68. Dies of lung cancer.
- 1979: Publication of *Testimony*, Shostakovich’s Memoirs, by Solomon Volkov, begins his rehabilitation in the West.
- 1989: Fall of Communism, end of Cold War. Shostakovich recognized as a genius and one of the greatest composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

**AESTHETIC DEMANDS BY THE STALINIST GOVERNMENT:**

Any music that does not conform to the following is “Formalist”:

- Music should appeal to greater masses.
- Music should be tuneful, simple, monumental.
- Music should be optimistic and heroic.
- Music should contain Russian folk melodies.

**“FORMALISM” DEFINED BY PROKOFIEV:**

- *“Any music that is not understood upon first hearing.”*

**SHOSTAKOVICH AS A COMPOSER:**

- Technically accomplished. Composed in multiple media.
- Music is characterized by sharp contrasts, elements of the grotesque and ambivalent tonality.
- Shostakovich *“evokes memories and associations of music that the audience will already know, that changes the musical language to suggest what he’s feeling, what they’re feeling, but that no one would dare speak aloud.”* (MTT)
- Strongly influenced by Igor Stravinsky and Gustav Mahler.
- Prolific. Composed 15 symphonies, 6 concerti, 3 operas, numerous chamber works, song cycles and film music for over 30 movies.

**HISTORY OF THE SYMPHONY:**

- Composed, between April-July, 1937.
- The score contains the phrase, *“A Soviet Artist’s Reply to Just Criticism.”*
- Premiered in Leningrad, November 21, 1937, by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Yevgeni Mravinsky.
- The premiere received applause for over half an hour. Afterwards audience members spilled into the streets celebrating and congratulating each other.

**THE ENIGMA OF SYMPHONY #5:**

- The music has been interpreted in different ways.
- The symphony was viewed by Soviet authorities as a heroic piece, consistent with the aesthetics demanded by the regime.
- Shostakovich’s audience understood it differently, as a symphony that chronicled their suffering.
- Some prominent contemporaries were puzzled or put off.
- *“A consummate piece of bad taste, mental infirmity, and complete disorientation in the recognition of fundamental values of life.”* (Igor Stravinsky, Harvard Lectures, 1939)
- *“Tedious intimidation...I cannot approve.”* (Osip Mandelstam, poet, 1938)
- In the West, attitudes and interpretations have been evolving. Currently they are more in line with Shostakovich’s audience.

**SHOSTAKOVICH SYMPHONY #5**

- MOVEMENT 1: Moderato, Sonata Form
- MOVEMENT 2: Allegretto, Scherzo
- MOVEMENT 3: Largo, Slow Movement
- MOVEMENT 4: Allegro Non Troppo, Ternary Form

## MOVEMENT 1:

### INTRODUCTION: A1 – A2 – X

- A1:
  - Begins with a bold gesture (**A1**) in low strings in canon with violins.
  - It is four-note theme in double dotted rhythm.
  - First pair of notes rises, second pair falls.
  - The melody sounds menacing.
- NOTE:
  - A1 is a main ur-theme for the entire work.
  - Motive A1 is reminiscent of the “Fate Theme” of Beethoven’s 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony; its first two notes are similar to those that begin Beethoven’s 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony.
- A2:
  - A three-note falling idea in violins, sequenced down.
  - The music goes from assertive in A1, to hesitant in A2.
  - A2 is derived from A1 and is another ur-theme in the symphony.
- X:
  - A simple set of three repeated notes, another ur-theme, ends the introduction.
  - This will serve as a “dead end” throughout the symphony, in lieu of cadences.
  - *“No matter how the music begins it comes to a dead end nearly always with the implacable repetition of three fateful notes.”* (MTT)

### NOTES:

- The pattern established by A1 – A2 – X, assertive – hesitant – dead end, repeats throughout the symphony.
- Shostakovich placates the Soviet authorities by invoking Beethoven from the very beginning. Yet he employs a unique musical language that conveys a different meaning to his audience.
- Lack of cadences and inconclusive endings are characteristic of the entire symphony.

### EXPOSITION, THEME I COMPLEX:

This lengthy section is comprised of increasingly elaborate variations of the main theme, alternating with variations of the opening introductory sequence.

- Theme I, First Version (**A3**):
  - Begins with a two note A1 ostinato, alternating between violas & basses.
  - Theme I (**A3**) appears atop the ostinato, a mournful melody in violin, *p*, derived from A1 & A2.
  - The key area is D minor, but the harmony is ambiguous.
  - Texture is thin, strings only, giving the music a stark feel.
  - A3 ends in two-note A1 motives sequenced up in a brief crescendo, climaxing in loud violin tremolos. The effect is one of rising fear ending in a scream.
- Introduction (A1-A2-X) repeated:
  - Violins maintain their tremolo while pizzicato basses start another slow, somber A1.
  - Violins follow with A2 & X.

- Theme I, Second Version (A4):
  - First violins play an extended version of Theme I (A4) with second violins and violas providing rhythmically altered A2 in countermelody.
  - NOTE: This A4 version of the theme will be the one to reappear in the dramatic Recapitulation.
  - Flute joins in accompaniment. Music is slightly louder and thicker in texture.
  - A4 reaches a brief climax and subsequently collapses.
  - Ends in Theme X.
- Theme I, Third Version (A5):
  - Solo oboe plays a new rising melody (A5), derived from A1. Bassoon accompanies.
- Introduction Elaborated:
  - Violins play a fervent version of A1 with basses in countermelody, playing A3.
  - Horns come in for the first time, with A2; bassoon & oboe follow with A2.
  - Music rises on X in flutes & strings.
- Theme I, Fourth Version (A6), Climax:
  - Music reaches its loudest point so far in a climax that features a polyphonic passage.
  - Horns play a new version of Theme I (A6), with remaining instrument groups providing loud accents of A1 & A3.
- Introduction repeated, Denouement:
  - Music calms down. Texture thins.
  - A1 stated in canon by violins and basses, as in the beginning.
  - A2 in horns.
  - X in horns.
  - The overall effect is a stark return to the mournful state after the emotional climax that preceded it.

#### EXPOSITION, THEME II:

There is no truly distinct second theme. This section is yet another version of the introduction.

- Dynamics return to *piano*.
- A new three-note ostinato appears, based on Theme X, with a signature short-short-long rhythm.
- NOTE: This distinct ostinato is reserved only for Theme II and will reappear in its Recap.
- First violins play Theme II atop the ostinato. The melody is a rhythmically altered, extended version of A1. Phrase structure: a-a'-b-a'.
- The melody ends in a mildly dissonant, high pitch rise, joined by the flute.
- Brief descending codetta based on A2.
- Shostakovich employs shifting harmonies that derive from conventional and ancient sources. The overall effect is of a haunting melody.

#### EXPOSITION, CLOSING SECTION:

- The Closing Theme (C2) is a three-note motive, derived from A2. This motive will be a major driving force when Development begins.
- C2 in cellos provides an ostinato accompaniment to A1 in violins. The passage is stark, thin in texture.

- Music softens and slows in a transitional passage.
- Flute plays two extended variations of C2 in a quiet, hymn-like passage with pedal harmonies in strings.
- The music is anxiously anticipatory.
- A brief string climax based on A3 is followed by another C2 variation in solo clarinet.
- Theme II reappears with its signature ostinato, truncated (phrases a & a').
- A quiet transition ensues; Shostakovich is setting up a Stravinskian ambush:
  - C2 sequenced down by unaccompanied violins in a *diminuendo* passage.
  - Cellos transition with two C2 motives in a brief *pp*, unaccompanied passage.

#### DEVELOPMENT:

- PART I:
  - In a jolting gesture, the piano begins a march with a loud, staccato C2 motive in low register. This will become an ostinato to the first part of Development.
  - Horns play a loud, menacing version of A3 atop the piano ostinato, with strings in accompaniment.
  - Musical texture has suddenly thickened.
  - Trumpets enter, playing A3 with horns, while piano ostinato and strings accompany.
  - Winds play an accelerated variation of A3 with horns, trumpets, piano and strings continuing. Music begins to sound cacophonous.
  - NOTE: Music is getting louder. Shostakovich is creating a Stravinskian pile-up in texture. The overall effect is of rapidly rising fear and menace.
- PART II:
  - March tempo quickens as fragments of music are uttered frantically by different instrument groups.
  - Motives A3, A5 in winds and strings while piano still plays the staccato C2, then A2.
  - Rapidly accelerating orchestral chords give the music a sense of panic.
- PART III:
  - Music breaks down into single chords and two-note figures while the march tempo becomes more frantic.
  - Initially the music is in strings and piano, then horns, then back to strings.
  - Trumpets play Theme X as an ostinato, in a loud military pattern amid continuing frantic motives in strings. Pace remains frantic.
  - March continues with motive from A3 in winds echoed by horns with X as ostinato.
  - Brass mounts a crescendo toward a climax.
- PART IV; The "Grotesque March":
  - Climax peaks with a jolting unison orchestral chord and cymbal crash!
  - The military march is transformed into a new, higher level of noise and triumph.
  - This march features brass and percussion only.
  - Theme X is now prominently on the snare drum. Atop it is A3 in *ff* brass, transformed from a haunting melody in the exposition, to militaristic.
  - A3 repeated by winds, still *ff*, with music marching on, loud and triumphant.
  - Climax on A1 blaring loudly over the noisy march.

- Climax continues; tempo increasing to a frenzy, the pile up at its maximum.
- The music has a feel of descent into terror.
- PART V:
  - Snare drum stops. A high register, frantic version of A3 in winds plays in cannon with a menacing, slower, low register A1 in trombone.
  - Music remains loud while the two motives move closer and become in synch.
  - In a passage marked *ritenuto* (a sudden drop in tempo) loud calls appear in winds on the dotted-two-note idea of A1, accented by the xylophone and other percussion.
  - Massive climax on a unison orchestral chord with fast tympani rolls and a cymbal clash, ushers to Recap.

#### RECAPITULATION:

- The score calls for *largamente* in tempo (slow, broad tempo, keep the beats far apart from each other) as A4 is emphatically stated in unison by winds, horns and strings.
- The phrases of A4 are emphasized by loud eruptions of percussion.
- After the polyphony of the menacing military march and subsequent chaos, this statement of A4, all instruments in unison, feels like a major outcry. “*The orchestra screams what has become a terrible lament.*” (MTT)
- Unison, *ff* tympani beats and orchestral chords, state Theme X. They “*hammer out what seems to be the ultimate dead end.*” (MTT)
- “*I cannot think of a more powerful and frightening moment in all music.*” (MTT)
- A1 on trombone & tuba appears atop the continuing Theme X on horns & strings. This very dramatic passage is marked *tempo con tutta forza* (as loud as possible) in the score.
- Theme X and A1 fade out, as if the outcry has exhausted itself.
- Theme X, now listless, transitions toward Theme II.
- Distinct short-short-long ostinato returns and with it Theme II, in cannon between flute and horn.
- This hauntingly beautiful statement of Theme II, peaceful, slow and homophonic, feels like a salve on the wounds inflicted by the development.
- Clarinet plays a variation of A5 as a placid codetta.
- Closing section features C2 in a peaceful wind chorale. Begins with unaccompanied oboe and clarinet in cannon; flute joins in. The motive is repeatedly sequenced, then music dies down.
- Transitional music: Crescendo on horns playing X, followed by diminuendo in winds playing C2.
- Descending chromatic line in violas, *morendo* (dying down).

#### CODA:

- Tempo slows down. Muted violas and cellos playing in cannon, set up a quiet A1 ostinato. An E pedal in bass provides static harmony.
- Flute plays an inversion of A3 in a placid, haunting passage.
- Brass play the dotted two notes of A1 quietly. A5 in piccolo.
- Violin plays A5 in a passage that sounds like a lament, while horns maintain the A1 ostinato.
- Music fades out in an atmospheric finish with celeste coming in for the first time. It plays a rising chromatic line based on A5 three times. Quiet tympani rolls and the A1 ostinato emphatically but quietly stated in horns accompany the celeste.
- It is a poignant ending to the lament.

**NOTES ON MOVEMENT I:**

- Shostakovich placates the Soviet authorities from the get-go, with a beginning that harkens back to Beethoven.
- The remarkable thematic unity in this movement continues in the rest of the work, and is also Beethovenian.
- The movement has a typical Sonata Form, yet harmonically it is modern. The harmonies frequently shift, ancient pitch collections are utilized, and there are no cadences.
- The movement is scored for a variety of different instrument sub-groups like an assembly of multiple chamber orchestras. This is typical of the overall work.
- There is a dramatic contrast in texture between the Development and the rest of the movement. The thick texture and polyphony of the Development contribute to its terrifying effect (along with its loud dynamics and militaristic marches).
- The movement has been interpreted in different ways by different groups. It satisfied contemporary Communist authorities as an appropriate celebration of their power. Nowadays the movement is seen as a depiction of hopelessness and terror in the face of tyranny.

**MOVEMENT 2:**

*“The Second Movement is.... a dance; it’s funny. It’s a spoof on waltzes. It’s also an homage to one of Shostakovich’s favorite composers, Gustav Mahler. Like some of Mahler’s scherzos, it’s written on the borderline of shtick.”* (MTT)

**SCHERZO:**

- MAIN THEME (A) VARIATIONS:
  - Begins with a rustic theme (A) in cellos and basses. It ends with Theme X in horns.
  - Theme A turns into a high pitched, clownish dance in piccolo, extended by bassoon.
  - Strings play a louder variation of A.
- COMIC MARCHES:
  - A new march-like dance, Theme B, loud in woodwinds, accented by cymbal clashes.
  - Horns play a brief, loud march, Theme C.
  - Theme B in strings.
  - Horns repeat their Theme C march.
- Transitional music with two loud glissandos, then quiet ticking in horns.

**TRIO:**

- Solo violin plays a clucking, coquettish melody (A) featuring comic glissandos. Sparse accompaniment, pizzicato notes in harp and cellos.
- NOTE: This melody has a Classical style antecedent-consequent phrasing, uncharacteristic of Shostakovich.
- Variation of clucking melody in flute.
- Transitional music (B), abruptly loud and assertive, in strings.
- A new, dance-like melody, then melody A in horns, cut short by loud tutti B.
- Horns repeat their brief recitation of A with a brief tutti codetta on B.



**SCHERZO, DECAPO:**

- MAIN THEME RETURNS, ALTERED, MOUSY:
  - Theme returns in a quiet, mousy, pizzicato passage in bassoons.
  - Variation, also quiet & pizzicato, in violins, then cellos.
- MARCHES RETURN, ALTERED, POMPOUS:
  - Theme B in woodwinds, loud, accented with xylophone.
  - Texture is thick, featuring strings and horn pedal.
  - All this sharply contrasts with the pizzicato, mousy music that preceded it, making the march all the more ridiculous.
  - Theme C march returns on trumpets and loud percussion.
  - Theme B in strings. The passage ends with accents on trombone & percussion.
  - Theme C march in brass with loud percussion, comically fizzles in octave glissando jumps and fading tympani beats.

**CODA:**

- Brief clucking in oboe, as if Trio will start again, cut short by tutti codetta and conclusion.

**NOTE:**

- Shostakovich's music often features irony. This movement is a good example.
- Are the comic, pompous marches truly a circus-like atmosphere? Or is he making fun of the Communist regime?

**MOVEMENT 3**

*“The Third Movement is a requiem for people who have died. It’s a prayer for their souls. And that is one of the most touching moments of the whole piece.”* (Alexander Barantschik, Concertmaster, San Francisco Symphony)

**PRELIMINARY COMMENTS:**

- Upon hearing this movement, many people openly wept in the premiere of the symphony, this at a time when public weeping was banned by Soviet authorities.
- The movement was composed in three days, while Shostakovich grieved over the execution of his patron and friend, Marshal Tukhachevsky.
- The movement is thought to be inspired by Mahler's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony (1904), 3<sup>rd</sup> Mvmt Adagietto.
- The structure is akin to the Classical Era Rondo Form.

**ORCHESTRATION:**

- Brass:
  - The movement has no brass parts. In the overall symphony, brass is reserved mainly for military references.
  - The absence of brass concealed the funerary nature of the movement from Soviet authorities. Secular Russian funerals have an obligatory brass quintet.

- Strings:
  - Shostakovich utilized an unusual eight-part division of the string section: violins in three groups, violas and cellos in two each, basses one group.
  - This division gives the impression “*of a church choir singing.*” (MTT)
  - The movement is “*A study in string sonorities.*” (Dearding)

A: Themes introduced:

- Third violins begin Theme I, a slow, mournful melody, *espressivo*. It unfolds leisurely over nearly 40 measures, ending dissonantly. First violas, second cellos and basses accompany.
- NOTE: This theme is derived from the 4-note A1 motive of the First Movement.
- Theme II, a sad, imploring melody stated by first violins. Derived from Theme X. Soaring codetta in harp.
- Theme III in solo flute, plainchant-like, accompanied by a two-note ticking ostinato in harp.
- Transitional music.

B: First Climax:

- Until now the music has been slow, quiet and thin in texture. Now it mounts a climax.
- Slow crescendo on Theme II melody, with loud tympani rolls. Music increases in volume and tempo as it peaks.
- This is a major outcry of grief.
- Music ends in a lament in low strings, *poco piu mosso* (a little faster), then dies down.

C: Theme IV; Evocation of the *panikhida*:

- The *panikhida* is an Orthodox memorial service for the dead, performed at specific times after the funeral. The music is plainchant.
- Three versions of a new theme, each separated by hymn-like passages, imply the different services of the *panikhida*.
- First violins begin a *p* passage that sounds otherworldly, introducing Theme IV in **oboe**.
- The oboe plays a hauntingly beautiful, high pitched melody with first violins in a shimmering tremolo accompaniment. The music is forlorn and lonely, as if the souls of the dead are speaking from beyond.
- A hymn-like passage in low strings.
- Solo **clarinet** begins a variation on the theme after a chromatic rise. Shimmering violin tremolos remain in accompaniment.
- Another hymn follows; it dies down on a *pp* chromatic descent in first violins. Pause.
- Variation of Theme IV in **flute**, with shimmering violin accompaniment, followed by pizzicato beats and ending with notes on celesta.

A’:

- Clarinet, playing in very low register, offers a hymn based on Theme II, with a pedal in bassoon. The music sounds as if it’s being played by a church organ.
- This represents a Russian Orthodox chant.

A’’: Second Climax:

- Music mounts its second, bigger climax of the movement based on Theme II. “*The agony of suppressed grief comes to the fore in a searing fortissimo.*” (Taruskin)

- Tempo increases, texture thickens with multiple instrument groups. At the peak of the climax the violins loudly play Theme II with loud tremolos in strings, and xylophone beats. Music is dissonant and troubled.
- This is a louder, more sustained climax.
- The climax continues into Theme IV.

C': Second Climax continues with Theme IV:

- Theme IV is no longer a quiet, otherworldly, exotic melody. It is loud in the cellos with "*clarinets reinforcing the liturgical tremolo, and the double basses emitting double barks of pain.*" (Taruskin)
- The climax abruptly ends in loud Theme X tremolos. "*Another exhausted dead end.*" (MTT)
- A stark, hymn-like chromatic descent in low strings dies down.

CODA:

- Main themes recalled.
- Muted high strings play Theme II slow & *pp*, as a solemn hymn, with a pedal bass in low strings.
- Phrase extended in an otherworldly chromatic rise, several octaves, before descending.
- Theme III variation in second violins with its ticking two-note ostinato in harp.
- Chromatic descent cellos and basses, hymn-like & funereal, dies down.
- POINGANT FINALE:
  - Soaring harp returns, recalling the end of theme III.
  - Theme IV, bare & innocent, child-like, pizzicato in celesta and harp, with *pp* shimmering tremolos in violins.
  - Music ends with two solemn, *pp*, plagal (amen) cadences in strings.

NOTES:

- This movement is famous for its pathos and expressive beauty.
- It follows in the tradition of Schumann's 2<sup>nd</sup> and Mahler's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphonies which also feature remarkably lyrical, beautiful slow third movements.
- The expressive purpose of switching the positions of the scherzo and slow movement is the dramatic contrast between the solemn music and what follows in the fourth movement, a buoyant military march.
- If the symphony ended at this point, Shostakovich would have lost his life or been exiled to Siberia.

## MOVEMENT 4

### PRELIMINARY COMMENTS:

- This is the movement that saved Shostakovich's life. It gave the government the patriotic music they demanded.
- The movement is open to different interpretations: triumphant glorification of the Soviet Regime versus a forced celebration by a repressed populace.
- The movement is in ternary form: A – B – A'.

### A: THE LOUD MARCH

#### INTRODUCTORY GESTURE:

- *"The Finale literally bursts forth, a massive wall of sound!"* (Blokker & Dearling)
- Begins abruptly with a loud unison D minor chord in winds and brass, sustained in a *f* to *ff* crescendo. Followed loud beats on tympani.
- The overall effect is jolting.

#### MARCH:

- Theme I in brass is a loud, military march, based on motive A1 of the first movement.
- The eerie, menacing four-note inaugural theme has now transformed into a triumphant military march.
- Theme I is affirmed with a loud orchestral chord.
- Loud transitional music based on the four-note march, moves toward Theme II.
- Theme II is a fast, energetic melody in strings, also based on the four-note A1 motive, with frantic countermelodies in winds.
- The four-note march motive is re-stated by tuba. Strings respond to complete Theme I.

#### DEVELOPMENT:

- A lengthy, hectic passage develops Theme I & II fragments in various instrument groups. Ends in a loud brass re-statement of Theme I with tympani rolls.
- Dynamics soften, while tempo remains rapid. Theme I & II material rushes on, now with a rollicking rhythm. Interspersed are fuller versions of Theme I.
- A new Theme III blares out in trumpets over frantically swirling orchestral accompaniment. Climaxes with a cymbal clash.
- Theme III re-stated in a manically triumphant, loud passage.

#### CLIMAX ON THEMES I & X:

- In a massive, dissonant climax, Theme I emerges in brass, menacing and loud, with loud tympani rolls in cannon.
- Tempo rapidly slows down as if sudden breaks were applied. Music dies down amid repeated statements of Theme X in brass. *"All hope has been dashed. We come again to another dead end."* (MTT)

### B: PLACID SECTION

#### ➤ PRELIMINARY COMMENTS:

- In sharp contrast to the boisterous march, this section is slow, quiet and contemplative.

- “*The music suggests quiet remembrance sung for those who have gone.*” (MTT)
- The section features chamber music-like orchestration of different instrument groups.
- PART I:
  - Music quiets down.
  - Theme III, slow, extended & ornamented, appears as a horn solo atop a two-note ostinato in first violins.
  - Static pedal harmonies in winds and low strings give the music a hymn-like aura.
- PART II:
  - Music rises in a section marked *poco animato* (a little more energy). This is an impassioned, dissonant, developmental section that utilizes motives from Theme III and the slow movement.
  - A flute solo, similar to A5 from first movement (the solo oboe version of Theme I). Oboe and clarinet join in with figurations.
- PART III:
  - A calm string passage with a two-note violin ostinato similar to the harp part of the third movement.
  - Under the violin ostinato a motive from Theme I appears in low strings, slow and hymn like. This motive then also appears on the horns.
  - In a *morendo* passage, the violin ostinato dies away.
- PART IV:
  - Violin plays a lyrical version of a motive from Theme I. The passage is slow and serene.
  - A placid, rhythmically smoothed version of the four note A1 motive in flute and horns.
  - Harp enters with the same four note idea giving the A1 motive a heavenly quality.

#### **A: MARCH RETURNS:**

- PART I:
  - Tempo is slower than the beginning. “*This is a dead, slow march.*” (MTT)
  - MTT points out that Shostakovich’s audiences would have recognized the similarity of this march to a scene from Mussorgsky’s opera, *Boris Gudunov* where the crowds are forced to praise the Tsar.
  - A distant sounding snare drum sets up the march beat.
  - In a slow crescendo, Theme I is quietly stated by bassoon.
  - Other winds, then horns enter as the statement is extended in a steadily rising, polyphonic passage with more instruments joining to thicken the texture.
  - Loud climax on Theme III motive in brass, followed by five emphatic unison chords.
- PART II:
  - An extended polyphonic passage sets up higher and higher tension using Theme II motives in strings and winds, Theme I motives in horns.
  - Trumpets enter the melee with Theme I fragments as fanfares.
  - Music rises moves toward another climax, building much anticipation.

➤ PART III; CONCLUSION

- Loud cymbal clash ushers in the final extended climax.
- “*Finally, with a lot of hauling and shoving we have reached D major, but the process is painful and difficult.*” (MTT)
- Glorious A1/Theme I fanfares in brass amid ceremonial tympani beats, in an extended climax.
- Toward the end of this passage, a change in one note, B flat rather than B natural, drops the key back to D minor. Is it truly a triumph?
- “*It all comes down to the expressive power of one altered note.....The happy harmonies of the ending are utterly false.*” (MTT)
- Theme X appears loud amid drumbeats. “*What’s really happening is that one last time we are being stomped into submission by **that same dead end!***” (MTT)
- Solo tympani beats are followed by loud concluding chords.

➤ NOTES:

- Is this exultant finale true or false?
- Soviet authorities at the time accepted it as a glorification of their regime and rehabilitated Shostakovich.
- The composer however, years later, attested to the phony nature of the finale (see below).
- Various conductors have attempted to demonstrate the irony of the finale by slowing its tempo.
- Peter Jaffe, nowadays believes that a fast tempo does not detract from the irony of the finale (personal communication).

## FINAL COMMENTS:

### SHOSTAKOVICH:

*“I discovered to my astonishment that the man who considers himself its greatest interpreter (Stalin) does not understand my music. He says I wanted to write exultant finales for my Fifth and Seventh Symphonies but I couldn’t manage it. It never occurred to this man that I never thought about exultant finale, for what exultation could there be? I think it is clear to everyone what happens in the Fifth. The rejoicing is forced, created under threat.....It’s as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, “Your business is rejoicing; your business is rejoicing,” and you rise shaky, and you go marching off, muttering, “our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.””*

From *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*, by Solomon Volkov.

### A RUSSIAN CITIZEN WHO GREW UP UNDER THE SOVIET REGIME:

*“Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, to me, it’s a mirror which represents the life and the era in which he lived. He was the messenger. And I think his music is a hymn to all of us who lived, survived and passed on.”* Zoya Leybin, Second Violin, San Francisco Symphony.