Dmitri Shostakovich, Politics, and Modern Music

by

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Introduction

In western writings and discussions about the relationship of politics to the arts in the USSR, the name of Dmitri Shostakovich often comes up. While it is true that as the leading figure in the music of the Soviet period, he would be difficult to avoid, that is generally not the only reason for referring to him. Rather, his musical evolution is used to illustrate the harm done by the interference in the arts by Soviet political authorities and thereby carry out the seemingly obligatory attack on the lack of artistic freedom there.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the facts behind this argument and determine whether or not he is a valid example of this phenomenon. Three sources of information have been studied: works about Soviet music and biographical information about Shostakovich; the composer's own statements on the subject in his memoirs and various interviews; and last, but not least, the composer's musical works.

For the sake of simplicity, a rather subjective and recursive definition of modern music will be used in this paper. It is as follows: modern music is that which will sound unmistakably modern to the experienced listener.

The lists of the musical works by Shostakovich studied and the major Party resolutions and criticisms affecting Soviet music and Shostakovich are included as appendices.
A Brief Biographical Sketch

Dmitri Shostakovich was born in Petrograd in 1906. His father was an engineer and his mother studied piano at the Petrograd Conservatory. Although they were not very political people, his parents were quite liberal, with Narodnik leanings. This put their household much further to the left than many others in the musical intelligentsia of that city, such as the rather reactionary Prokofiev household.

Shostakovich’s mother started giving him piano lessons when he was nine years old and he showed great promise. It was decided to give him advanced musical instruction. Dmitri entered the Petrograd Conservatory in 1919; he worked hard and did well. When his father died in 1922, Lunacharsky personally intervened to give the family a pension, which staved off starvation, but young Dmitri still had to work to bring in more money. His job was to improvise a piano accompaniment to silent films in movie theaters, and he hated his work.

In 1921 at the Petrograd Conservatory, Shostakovich began to study piano with Nikolaev, and in 1923 he went on to study composition with Sokolov and Steinberg. His work was closely followed by the director, Glazunov. Shostakovich presented his First Symphony as his diploma work in 1925 and, in 1926, it was performed by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra. The work was a smashing success not only in the Soviet Union, but in Western Europe and the United States. It made the nineteen year old Dmitri well known as a very able and promising composer, and the first internationally known, truly Soviet composer.

In the mid-1920s, modern music was in full flower in the West, and the Soviet Union was certainly not untouched by it. The dabbling generation of early Stravinsky had been overtaken by others much more radical in their rejection of past musical tonalities, structures and harmonies, composers such as Arnold Schoenberg and his pupil Alban Berg, Paul Hindemith and Bela Bartok. Soviet composers of this breed gravitated toward the Association for Contemporary Music, the musical antithesis of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM). Dodecaphonic (twelve-tone) music, pioneered by Schoenberg, was being explored by many of these composers, and Berg’s opera Wozzeck was successfully staged in Leningrad, with the composer present.

Shostakovich was influenced by this ferment. After the success of his
First Symphony, he burned the scores of some previous compositions and concentrated on the new style. He was commissioned by the government to do a composition to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The result was his Second Symphony, a startlingly different work from his First. The music, blatantly constructivist like other compositions of this time, had abandoned the tonality and structures of the past and replaced them with curtains of sound, moving about in new ways. Shostakovich’s other compositions of this period were in the same vein, to greater or lesser degrees.

He branched out into ballets and operas. Two operas are particularly notable. The first, *The Nose*, staged in 1930 and based upon Gogol’s story, is also a very modernistic, constructivist work. The harmonies are startling and the vocal parts are closer to speech than singing. It was criticized, especially by RAPM composers, for not being the type of music accessible to the masses. After sixteen successful performances, it was removed from the repertoire and spent over forty years in limbo.

The second, *Lady MacBeth of the Mtsensk District*, which opened in 1934, dealt with political and cultural themes. It was supposed to be one part of a trilogy on the position of women in three different eras, in this case, in a rural region under the tsar. It was a great success and played nearly two hundred times in Leningrad and Moscow alone, as well as in numerous international stagings. For the two years it was in performance, most negative criticism was based upon the blatant sexuality and similar naturalistic themes in the opera — criticism more literary than musical. Indeed, one American reviewer coined the term “pornophony” to describe it.

On January 28, 1936, there appeared a Pravda editorial entitled *Chaos Instead of Music*, probably written by Zhdanov, that scathingly criticize *Lady MacBeth* and Shostakovich. Two weeks later, another Pravda article appeared, this time criticizing his socialist realist ballet *The Limpid Stream*. These articles, appearing in the midst of the purges, made the composer fear for his life. He always kept a small bag packed, fearing an arrest. In his memoirs, he states that these articles and the isolation which they produced made him feel a little like a hostage and a condemned man for the rest of his life.

To avoid further controversy, Shostakovich withdrew his Fourth Symphony, which was in rehearsal in Leningrad, and retreated into the area of writing scores to films until his Fifth Symphony appeared in November, 1937. With the appearance of the Fifth, in style much
less modernistic than his recent works, he reentered the good graces of the great and powerful. It was received very well, no doubt partly to express sympathy toward him for the suffering caused by past criticism. This trend continued with his being awarded the Stalin Prize for his Piano Quintet in 1941, along with 100,000 rubles.

During the siege of Leningrad, Shostakovich began work on his Seventh symphony. The nature of the work plus the patriotic climate at home and abroad caused to be another gigantic international success. His Eighth, another wartime symphony, was also well received, but the Ninth was criticized, for it was felt that victory should have been celebrated with happy music, not sad.

After the war, the relative liberalism allowed in the arts began to disappear. There were Party resolutions in 1946 taking to task some of the Soviet arts. Music was dealt with in February of 1948 in the form of an article criticizing Shostakovich and others for “formalism” and “antinationalism”. Again he held back some works in progress (such as his Violin Concerto, released under a new Opus number in 1955), self-criticized and withdrew.

In 1949, he was asked to go to the US with a peace committee. He went, and played a concert in New York City. The same year, his very traditional-sounding oratorio appeared, *The Song of the Forests*, celebrating the reforestation campaign, and won him another Stalin Prize.

After the death of Stalin in 1953, a great weight was lifted from his shoulders, as well as those of the rest of the Soviet people. He still had to contend with his own personal Salieri, the head of the Composers’ Union, Khrennikov, however. His Tenth Symphony appeared at the end of 1953, which he later said was meant as a criticism of the Stalin era. The thaw era was one of relative freedom for Soviet composers. The Central Committee Resolution of 1958 tried to correct some of the artistic abuses of the Stalin era, but anyone who took it too seriously was set straight by Khrushchev in 1962.

Shostakovich finally joined the Communist Party in 1960, in order to assume the leadership of the Russian Federation Composers’ Union. He remained, despite occasional government criticism, a popular and leading figure in Soviet music. His later works maintained some of the same mixture of programmatic and non-programmatic, traditional and modernistic styles that had characterized his output throughout his adult life. When his health began to fail, he resigned his post and concentrated upon his composing and his students.
squeezing in time to work with one of his assistants on *Testimony*, his memoirs. This book, which appeared after his death (in 1975) in the West, was his parting shot at those aspects of not only the Soviet system, but the capitalist West, with which he disagreed.

**The Music of Shostakovich**

The music of Dmitri Shostakovich, if examined chronologically, shows very definite trends. That does not at all mean that all pieces composed at a certain time have a certain type of style, for there is a basic eclecticism in Shostakovich’s music which won’t always fit into such neat categories, but the trends are unmistakable.

His very early music, Opus numbers prior to 10 (his First Symphony), were not available for study. The First Symphony is a very listenable work, with a somewhat modern sound. It is tonal, but the tonality shifts around, and it is characterized by a moderate amount of harmonic dissonance.

He quite abruptly shifted into a new style with his Second Symphony, *To October*. This work contains no recognizable melody or tonality, and its structure and instrumentation are new; for example, it is in one movement and it finishes with a chorus. It has been called a constructivist work for such reasons as the totally independent movement of various instrumental parts, and for the inclusion of such instruments as an F# factory whistle.

The opera *The Nose* is another constructivist piece. It is extremely unmelodic and unharmonic. The vocal parts are more in the style of sprechgesang (speech-song) or sprechstimme (sprechgesang, with less definite pitch) than real singing; the composer made note that the words were more important than the music. The influences of western expressionists such as Hindemith, Krenek, Milhaud and Berg are apparent and helped cause critics to pounce upon it.

In his Third Symphony, *First of May*, Shostakovich backs off a bit from the previous very radically modernist works. Although also non-traditional in structure, containing only a single movement, and also including a chorus, and in thematic content, having a unifying rhythm rather than a musical theme, it is definitely a tonal work. There is no fixed key, so it would be more accurate to describe it as polytonal, but it is definitely a step back from the Second Symphony. There is a great deal of harmonic dissonance, but it is a milder form, much like that which is often heard describing traffic noise in Gershwin’s *An American in Paris*. 
The ballet *The Golden Age* is another piece in the same vein: there are some jarring dissonances, but the piece is quite tonal. It also contains much of the same kind of musical humor as one hears in Stravinsky’s *Petrouchka*.

Shostakovich’s opera *Lady MacBeth of the Mtsensk District* exemplifies a further step back toward music more accessible to a mass audience. The vocal parts, especially those of the heroine, Ekaterina Ismailova, are often very melodic, tonal, and beautiful. Harmonic dissonance is more confined to the instrumental accompaniment, which is much like one hears in the composer’s later, purely instrumental works. The music is quite tame, comparing much more closely with Orff’s *Carmina Burana* than Bartok’s *Bluebeard’s Castle* or Berg’s *Wozzeck*. The *Chaos Instead of Music* article’s comments of “din, gnash and screech”, “cacophony” and “musical noise” might be generally applicable to *The Nose*, but only slightly so to *Lady MacBeth*.

The Piano Concerto and the Sonata for Cello represent a further break with musical radicalism. They have been described as neoclassical\(^1\). Although obviously music of the modern period, the forms and musical devices used are much more traditional. They are still polytonal and contain much dissonance, but the harmonies and thematic development make the music quite listenable.

The Fourth Symphony was withdrawn in early 1936, and, except for a piano version in 1946, was not heard in public until 1961. This is all the more unfortunate in that the work was still more accessible to a mass audience than its predecessors, and this was demonstrated when it was finally released.

Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, premiered in 1937, does not fit into any pattern of a gradual increase of traditional musical forms. It was the first major work since the critical articles in the beginning of 1936. The piece is very tonal, with little dissonance, but still with a somewhat modern sound. The music seems a bit Mahleresque. It is the composer’s first real attempt to reach a mass audience, and it was very popular at home and abroad.

The works which came out after the Fifth seem to be somewhat of a reversion to the path set before the January, 1936, article. The First String Quartet and the Sixth symphony both seem more modern-sounding than the Fifth. Some, like the Piano Quintet or the Ninth Symphony are a little less harmonically adventurous, some, like the Second Quartet or the Violin Concerto, are a little more. Some others,
like the Song of the Forests and the Twelfth Symphony, are very traditional.

Coinciding with Shostakovich’s later years, a new avant garde appeared: composers born in the mid-1930s or after. Despite the fact that some of their works are quite radical, they are not seriously interfered with. At the same time, Shostakovich’s own music, especially the chamber works, are harmonically bolder.

The Issue Framework

On one side of the argument is the concept that an artist should have full freedom in his/her art. There is also the related idea that art should be for art’s sake. On the other side is the proposition that in post-revolutionary Russia, the artist should be a part of the building of the new society, an “engineer of human souls”, and the related idea that the resulting art should be accessible and appeal to a mass audience. This short discussion cannot hope and will not try to resolve these issues. It will simply to attempt to raise a few questions relevant to the main topic of this paper.

In the West, where the concept of artistic freedom is so commonly proclaimed, there is undoubtedly the liberty for any artist to do whatever he or she wants. However, there are two main considerations which demonstrate that artistic freedom is not all it seems. First, like all people, the artist must eat. Therefore, unless the artist is independently wealthy, he or she must cater to the tastes of the class of people who will buy the work. This applies to both the artist who sells high-priced works and to the person who works in artistic sweatshops. It also applies to writers whose works must be accepted by a publishing house, which weighs all degrees of artistic value against the profit to be made in the targeted market.

Second, artists like composers of serious music seem frequently to be faculty members of some educational institution. Their bread-and-butter is more or less assured, but getting their works performed is not. They must cater to the tastes of those orchestral music directors who select their works for performance. These orchestras are often supported, at least in part, by tax revenue, part by ticket purchases and part by “patrons of the arts.” In the last analysis, what works the concertgoers hear and the taxpayers pay for are determined dictatorially by the orchestral music directors.

Modern serious music is an excellent example of art produced “for art’s sake.” Twelve-tone music and its derivative styles can be called
precompositional styles. Fundamentally, for the composer who writes this music, it is the elegance in form or structure appeals to him or her, not the final sound. Pianist William Bolcom notes that it is simply true, for example, that they produced musics of two diametrically opposed methods of composition — aleatoricism (or ‘chance’ music) and total organization (wherein every quality of music was submitted to external numerical control) — sound almost undistinguishable one from the other; why? What, for another question, has turned composition into an activity for specialists for the delectation of other specialists?²

In other words, this type of music is not created for any audience whatsoever, but for the benefit of the composer (and perhaps his or her colleagues) alone.

On the other side is the Soviet view. Although the artist may be educationally and financially a member of the elite, he or she must still be considered a part of the revolutionary movement of society toward new goals. The artist’s talents, like those of the factory worker, the engineer and the kolkhoznik, must fundamentally be devoted to that end, at least in the early, developmental stages of Soviet society. Perhaps in a mature, strong Soviet society, different rules or more flexible practices would be the norm.

Connected to this is the notion that the artist’s output must be accessible to the large masses of people. Were this not so, were the artist functioning for himself or herself alone (in Soviet jargon, “formalist”), the function postulated for the artist would not be possible.

These are two fundamentally different views of the world and how the artist fits in. The former fits very well with capitalist private property relations, individual initiative for personal gain, etc. The latter fits with the basic precepts of socialistic society. Neither is right or wrong in the abstract. Only the relationship of the ideas to the surrounding society is important, and if one accepts the basic principles of one’s society, one must, in the last analysis, accept the artist’s role. Thus, especially in the early Stalin period, extreme modernism in music was sternly criticized, and so were composers who worked in that medium.

Within this issue framework must be determined the fundamental question of this paper: is it true or untrue that Dmitri Shostakovich was a budding modernist stopped in his tracks by the political interference of the Soviet state?
The Evidence

On the pro side are (at least) the following three facts: First, Shostakovich’s style did indeed change from a rather dissonant, nontonal, radical modernism in the mid-to-late 1920s to a much more traditional, sometimes very traditional style, later in life. Second, at certain key junctures, when major government pronouncements on the arts or criticisms aimed at him took place (especially in 1936 and 1948), the composer withdrew and/or withheld works, seemingly disappeared from public view for a time, and came out with a very euphonic piece of music, which pleased the authorities. Third, he expressed fear, even mortal fear, as a result of the criticisms aimed at him and at his music.

On the con side are the following: First, with the exception of certain highly euphonic pieces scattered through his musical career, his music always exhibited signs of modernism, in one form or another. His first major work was mildly modern, then came the radical period, then a long, more moderately modern period, becoming more modernistic toward the end. Second, the period of extreme modernism began when he was approximately 20 years of age and lasted until he was roughly 26-28, a period in life when many artists experiment with radical styles. Third, there is no direct correspondence between the dates of the major artistic decrees/criticisms directed at him and the periods of most rapid stylistic changes seen in Shostakovich’s compositions.

The Argument

This paper will attempt to argue that Dmitri Shostakovich was not, in fact a radical modernist stopped in his tracks by an interfering government. Rather, it will argue that the changes the composer made in his style were his own alone. The fact that criticism from the state would probably have forced a change had he not done it by himself, and that governmental forces may have influenced the timing of certain changes is essentially irrelevant.

There are three factors to be considered in this argument: Shostakovich’s basic character, as evidenced by statements made by and about him, Shostakovich’s own statements about his development, and the evidentiary matter mentioned above. Since the first, his character, influences how we weigh the other facts, it will be discussed first.

The first character item is Shostakovich’s honesty. This was testified
to by those who came in contact with him, and shines through in *Testimony*, his memoirs. Harrison Salisbury, speaking of his August 8, 1954 NY Times interview with Shostakovich, states “You may disagree with Shostakovich strongly as I did ... But you are in no doubt about one thing. He is completely honest and completely sincere, and his mistakes come from the heart and not from the mind.”\(^3\) In his book on Soviet composers, American composer Stanley Dale Krebs comes to a similar conclusion. “This paper indicates that he is also an honest composer”.\(^4\)

The second is his courage, which manifests itself throughout his career. It is, of course, tempered with sense, for reasons of self-defense. When, in 1936, in the climate of the great purge, he was attacked in an unsigned Pravda article, he was not so foolish to go tilting at a faceless mass of state bureaucrats; he backed off. But on at least two occasions when he was face to face with one man, Stalin, he confronted the dictator and stared back without blinking. Shostakovich says

> I was given the order to get ready for a trip to America. I had to go to the Culture and Scientific Congress for World Peace in New York [in 1949]. A worthy cause. ... But I refused, it was humiliating for me to take part in a spectacle like that. ... My music was banned, and now I was supposed to go and say that everything was fine. ... Molotov talked to me, but I still refused. Then Stalin called. And in his nagging way, the leader and teacher asked me why I didn’t want to go to America. I answered that I couldn’t. My comrades music wasn’t played, and neither was mine. ... Stalin said, ‘Who gave the orders?’ ... ‘No, we didn’t give that order’. ... And he began rehashing the thought that the censors had overreacted, had taken an incorrect initiative: We didn’t give an order like that, we’ll have to straighten out the comrades from the censorship, and so on. This was another matter, this was a real concession. And I thought that maybe it would make sense to go to America\(^5\)

Shostakovich forced a compromise. On another occasion, Stalin turned on another composer, Alexandrov. Feeling backed into a corner and scared, Alexandrov tried to divert Stalin’s attention to his orchestrator. Shostakovich, who was present and realized the potential consequences for the orchestrator, defended him and lead the conversation to other, safer matters.\(^6\)
He showed his courage in other ways: He composed his vocal cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry* in the highly anti-semitic climate of the late 1940’s. (True, it wasn’t heard in public until after Stalin’s death, but anti-semitism didn’t die with Stalin, either.) He used some of Evtushenko’s poems in his Thirteenth Symphony (*Babi Yar*) about the massacre of Jews in World War II. After the Manege incident in December of 1962, where Khrushchev attacked some abstract artists, Shostakovich joined other leading artistic figures in signing a petition defending the abstract artists.7

How did Shostakovich relate to the Soviet state and in its conception of the role of the artist? In a NY Times interview published in December, 1931, over four years previous to the *Chaos Instead of Music* criticism, he states

> There can be no music without ideology. The old composers, whether they knew it or not, were upholding a political theory. Most of them, of course, were bolstering the rule of the upper classes. ... We, as revolutionists, have a different conception of music. Lenin himself said that ‘music is a means of unifying broad masses of people.’ Not a leader of masses, perhaps, but certainly an organizing force! ... Not that the Soviets are always joyous, or supposed to be. But good music lifts and heartens and lightens people for work and effort. It may be tragic but it must be strong. It is no longer an end in itself, but a vital weapon to the struggle.8

When that criticism came, he was faced with a dilemma. “For Shostakovich, the question became what to do when you believe in your government and its progress, but it attacks you for yours”?9 The evidence seems to indicate that he accepted the criticism in light of the role music is to play in his society, and went on with his life. The composer writes that his next major work, the Fifth Symphony, is “a Soviet Artist’s practical creative reply to just criticism.”10 His whole personality speaks against the idea that he had been simply doing what had to be done. It is more likely that he did just what he seemed to be doing: reassessing the purpose of his music in light of the social role which he accepted.

Krebs agrees:

> The depth of the conflict lies in the fact that the decision was Shostakovich’s own, regardless of the fact that
external factors would have forced such a decision in any case. When official reasoning in the mid-thirties indicated that Shostakovich’s music was ideologically and socially wrong, there is no indication that Shostakovich did not immediately try to understand and adopt, as well as he could, that line of reasoning, criticizing himself and apologizing sincerely. The image of a bloody but unbowed, bolshevik, neo-Beethoven is the false product of interpreting an essentially Russian phenomenon by non-Russian standards.\textsuperscript{11}

That is not to say that he was happy about the criticism and agreed with all aspects of the way the regime conducted its business; he manifestly was not and did not. He made many of these feelings quite clear in his memoirs.

That his movement away from twelve-tone music was a natural, not an enforced development was made clear in statements made throughout his later career that this type of music was not the correct type for the Soviet people. Take the following statement, for example, made in 1968.

‘Avant-gardism’ is a deliberate attempt ... to achieve a new quality in music merely through the repudiation of historically evolved norms and rules. This is a gross theoretical error ... We Soviet artists resolutely reject ‘avant-gardism’.\textsuperscript{12}

The same year, in an interview to the Soviet monthly Youth, he clarified his views.

As for the strictly technical devices from such musical ‘systems’ as, say, the twelve-tone or the aleatory ... everything is good in moderation ... The use of elements from these complex systems is entirely justified if it is dictated by the idea of the composition ... Please understand that the formula ‘the end justifies the means’ to some extent seems right to me in music. Any means? Any, as long as they convey the goal.\textsuperscript{13}

Further, in an interview with High Fidelity Magazine while on his third and last trip the US in 1973 to receive an honorary degree from Northwestern University, he stated that

I did use elements of dodecaphony in these works [the
Twelfth Quartet and the Violin Sonata]. Of course, if you take a theory and solely use this theory, I have a very negative attitude towards this kind of approach. But if a composer feels that he needs this or that technique, he can take whatever is available and use it as he sees fit. It is his right to do so.\textsuperscript{14}

It seems clear that if we put on the scales the items in the Evidence section above in the light of the character and attitudes of Dmitri Shostakovich, those favoring his being a frustrated radical modernist are outweighed by those opposed to that conclusion. “It is wrong to picture him as a misunderstood rebel oppressed by an inimical regime. Even at the height of his involvement with modernism — around 1927-31 — he never thought of challenging Marxist-Leninist aesthetics.”\textsuperscript{15}

Conclusion

We will never know the whole truth about all aspects of the career of Shostakovich and the reasons for all of his actions. Even if we did, it would not greatly lessen the controversy. Since the Soviet and Western systems are so fundamentally philosophically different and are in competition, there will always be some who will seize on whatever evidence there is to attack the other system. To some, the idea of a government interfering in any way in the artistic output of an artist is anathema. Some people, however, are able to put it into perspective. The great conductor Sir Adrian Boult said in 1948 state interference is a bugbear which is to be met all over the world in these troubled times, and no one who lives in Great Britain nowadays can feel entitled to throw stones at any of our neighbours. Doubtless it is a great irritation to a composer to be told that a work he has just finished is not acceptable to the State and must not be performed or published. But it is easy for us to forget that he is being fed and kept very comfortably at State expense, and if a benevolent government decides to pay the piper, rather than just let him starve as we do in Britain, it is perhaps natural that it should sometimes wish to call the tune, or to condemn it.\textsuperscript{16}

Modern historical and political scholarship, especially that of scholars considering themselves ‘revisionists’, has rejected many of the past conceptions of the Soviet Union as simply a totalitarian dictatorship.
Even the word ‘totalitarianism’ is pretty much discredited. The newer views tend to look upon that country and its revolution as one where there were winners and losers. The winners, especially those sections of the population which directly benefited by upward social mobility and privilege, mainly the working class and parts of the intelligentsia, became the new elite. Furthermore, it is now thought that there was (and is) a lot more input into the political process from layers below the very top than was previously believed.

This new elite owed its existence to the new system and, although it didn’t agree with everything which happened, did accept things in their basic outline. Because of this, there was a bond of loyalty between the Communist Party, the government and the elite. Shostakovich was unquestionably a member of this elite. It should be no surprise that he not only followed the rules willingly but conformed to them of his own free will without being coerced, for he shared the same values.

Solomon Volkov, a senior editor of the journal Soviet Music, and the man who helped Shostakovich prepare Testimony, discusses the possibility of Shostakovich playing the role of yurodivy to that of Stalin as tsar. The composer himself mentions Mussorgsky as a composer playing a similar role. Accepting this role would imply a certain acceptance of certain fundamental aspects of the new order, but a criticism of other parts, and a willingness of the yurodivy to stick his neck out when making certain pronouncements on society.

Without going into the subject in the same detail as did Volkov, there are certain aspects of this type of behavior which are obvious in Shostakovich, such as his standing up to Stalin personally and his continual bouncing back and forth between producing what was praised and what was considered most unacceptable. This kind of relationship has another half, and that is the ruler. For it to last, the ruler must accept that it may continue. In Stalin’s case, that may be the case. After all, how many others stood up to the dictator and survived? How many stood up to Stalin at all??

If the yurodivy comparison is a valid one, it seems to mesh with other aforementioned aspects of Shostakovich’s personal and social role. Even if it is not, Shostakovich still remains an artist member of the new elite with the talent, intelligence and courage to find what was probably a reasonable compromise between two desires: personal expression as an artist and social correctness as a composer writing the necessary and proper kind of music.
Appendix 1 — List of Shostakovich Compositions Studied

Dates listed are those of composition, not performance.

1. Symphony No. 1, Opus 10, 1925
2. Symphony No. 2, Opus 14, 1926
3. Opera: The Nose, Opus 15, 1927
4. Symphony No. 3, Opus 20, 1929
5. Ballet: The Golden Age, Opus 22, 1930
6. Opera: Lady MacBeth of the Mtsensk District, Opus 29, 1932
7. Piano Concerto, Opus 35, 1933
8. Sonata for Cello, Opus 40, 1934
9. Symphony No. 4, Opus 43, 1935
10. Symphony No. 5, Opus 47, 1937
11. String Quartet No. 1, Opus 49, 1938
12. Symphony No. 6, Opus 54, 1939
13. Quintet for Piano, Opus 57, 1940
14. Symphony No. 7, Opus 60, 1941
15. String Quartet No. 2, Opus 68, 1944
16. Symphony No. 9, Opus 70, 1945
17. String Quartet No. 3, Opus 73, 1946
18. Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 77/99, 1948
19. Oratorio: Song of the Forests, Opus 81, 1949
20. String Quartet No. 4, Opus 83, 1949
21. 24 Preludes and Fugues for Piano, Opus 87, 1951
22. String Quartet No. 5, Opus 92, 1952
23. Symphony No. 10, Opus 93, 1953
24. Symphony No. 12, Opus 112, 1961
25. Symphony No. 15, Opus 141, 1971

Appendix 2 — List of Major Party Resolutions
and Criticisms Affecting Soviet Music and Shostakovich

1. July 1, 1925 — Central Committee (CC) Resolution: On the Policy of the Party in the Field of Belles-lettres. Exerpts: “... the Party cannot connect itself in any way with any tendency in the domain of literary form ... A style corresponding to the epoch will be created but it will be created by other methods; the solution of the problem is not yet in sight. ... The Party must declare for the free rivalry of different groups and tendencies. ... The Party cannot allow a monopoly by any group whatsoever, even to that which is proletarian in ideology: this would lead in the first place to the ruination of proletarian literature.”17 and “Communist criticism must drive out the tone of literary command”.18

2. December, 1928 — CC Resolution. This resolution reflected a CC decision to give preference to Communist writers and to that literature which served the political aims of the Party. The directives were issued to the State Publishing Houses, not to the Writers’ Union.

3. April 23, 1932 — CC Resolution: On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations. RAPM and similar organizations were eliminated and replaced with individual unions with Communist factions.

4. January 26, 1936 — Editorial in Pravda: Chaos Instead of Music. “From the first moment, the listener is shocked by a deliberately dissonant, confused stream of sound. Fragments of melody, embryonic phrases appear — only to disappear again in the din, the grinding, and the screaming ... This music is built on the basis of rejecting opera ... Petty-bourgeois innovations lead to a break with real art ... All this is coarse, primitive, and vulgar. ... ‘Lady Macbeth’ enjoys great success with audiences abroad. Is it not because the opera is absolutely unpolitical and confusing that they praise it? ... ”19

5. February 6, 1936 — Article in Pravda: Ballet Falsehood. The ballet, an attempt at a socialist realist portrayal of kolkhoz life, was found politically and musically weak. (In other words, the criticisms were the reverse of those in the previous Pravda article.)

6. August 14, 1946 — CC Resolution: Resolution on the Journals. The resolution dealt with literature, and set the tone for the next three. It made clear the Party guidelines for the arts.


9. February 10, 1948 — CC Resolution: On the Opera ‘The Great Friendship’ by V. Muradeli. The resolution contained many excerpts from Zhdanov’s speeches at earlier meetings with composers. Seven composers, among them Shostakovich, were accused of formalism and antinationalism.

10. May 28, 1958 — CC Resolution: On Rectifying Errors in the Evaluation of the Operas The Great Friendship, Bogdan Khmelnitzky, and From All One’s Heart. The resolution admitted “blatant errors”. The censures were said to be “incorrect and one-sided”. Further, it was said that “Gifted composers, comrades Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Shebalin, Popov, Miaskovsky, and others, whose works at times revealed the wrong tendencies, were indiscriminately denounced as the representatives of a formalist anti-people trend”. The 1958 resolution did not nullify that of 1948. It was followed (on June 8) by a Pravda article restating many of the principles of the 1948 decree.

11. December 17 and 26, 1962 — Speeches by CC Member Ilychev. In the first speech, primarily abstract painters and sculptors were criticized, with some words said of film and literature. Jazz was also criticized as “outlandish” and foreign. On December 26, he attacked twelve-tone music.

12. March 8, 1963 — Speech by Nikita Khrushchev. “We stand for melodious music with content, music that stirs people and gives rise to strong feelings, and we are against cacophony. ... we flatly reject this cacophonous music. Our people can’t use this garbage as a tool of their ideology. ... Society has a right to condemn works which are contrary to the interests of the people.”

Appendix 3 — A Modern Composer Comments Upon Modern Music

Lest it be thought that it is only Stalinism which opposes extreme modernism in music, consider the following. George Rochberg, once a composer of twelve-tone music and now a critic of it, states:

This decreasing profile of identity [of thematic and
harmonic content] could be graphed in a rough sort of way, moving from a music with precise identities (Bach, Haydn ... Mahler, early Schoenberg) to a music with a marked decline in its profile of identity (the atonal and twelve-tone works of Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, late Scriabin, Ives) to a music entirely lacking in any aurally meaningful, identifiable characteristics (e.g., post-Webern serialist works of Boulez and Stockhausen among others; works of Cage, Feldman, Brown, based on a variety of aleatory approaches; recent works of Elliot Carter, who in an interview, expressed concern that his music cannot be remembered).  

He later continues:

The emergence of art totally devoid of human content, and therefore meaning, owes everything to a naively accepting and uncritical belief in the values of machine technology and the scientific premises on which it is based. ... it would appear that the artist treats his audience as though it were either automaton or comatose — certainly incapable of self-generated thought or feeling.

Further,

Any system of composition which bases itself on precompositional matrices — total serialism, stochastics, information theory — which depend solely on arbitrary rationalizations of rules of the game, cannot achieve a direct and meaningful correspondence to the functions of the central nervous system, for the very reason that whatever music it produces depends for its understanding not on the perceptual functions built into the nervous system but in a post-intellectual comprehension of its externally predetermined rationalizations. In such cases, the ‘ear’ has been bypassed and ignored.

And

If we value Wagner and Brahms for the power of their harmony, why, then, have we given up harmony? If we value Mozart and Chopin for the elegance of their melodies, why, then, have we given up the melodic line? If in the combination or many voices a radiant polyphony emerges, why have we given up counterpoint?
And finally

There can be no justification for music, ultimately, if it does not convey eloquently and elegantly the passions of the human heart. Who would care to remember the quartets of Beethoven or Bartok if they were merely demonstrations of empty formalisms? What claim would Chopin have on us if he had merely given us abstractions of shape, gesture, and motion through time?\textsuperscript{26}

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**End Notes**

2. Rochberg, page viii.
6. ibid., page 262.
12. Schwarz, page 482.
13. ibid..
14. ibid., page 542.
15. ibid., page 130.
17. quoted in Cooper, page 642.
19. quoted in Schwarz, page 125.
20. quotations in Schwarz, page 311.
22. Rochberg, page 49.
23. ibid., page 168-9.
24. ibid., page 226.
25. ibid., page 237.
26. ibid., page 236.
Bibliography


