

Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Op. 93
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Moderato

Allegro

Allegretto

Andante - Allegro

When the young Shostakovich gave us his first symphony aged 18, no one could have doubted his major talent and that he would surely flower to greatness. However, neither could one have guessed how his compositions and career would be effected by social, political and cultural forces – forces that were the essence of the former Soviet Union and that were not discernible in the mid 1920's. More than any composer of his time, Shostakovich's music is bound up by its existence in this Soviet sphere of artistic clamps and appeasement. It is clear that it had a profound effect on his life, to be "judged and found wanting" by people who simply did not know better. It is a constant surprise that a personality and temperament such as his, managed to steer through the political broadsides, victimization, stress and fear that occupied most of his life.

"I have frequently observed him; he is talking excitedly to his friends, telling them something about yesterday's concert, or, with still greater fervour, describing a recent football match, gesticulating excitedly and jumping up at times from his seat...And if you look into the eyes behind his big, horn-rimmed glasses you get the idea that actually only one little corner of his mind is present in the room, the rest of him is far, far away."
Dmitri Rabinovich, friend and biographer.

Out of his fifteen symphonies, the tenth is one that stands alone for a number of reasons. In fact, it is almost impossible to overestimate the significance of this symphony or the timing of it. Symphony No. 1 marked his debut, Nos. 2-4 his "Modernist" years, Nos. 5-6 "A Soviet Artist's Reply to Just Criticism" (how kind he was of his tormentors), Nos. 7-9 Wartime Symphonies.

Well, in March 1953 Joseph Stalin died. Such was the import of this moment for the entire Soviet Union that authorities kept it a secret for a number of days, trying to calculate what would happen. Now came a thaw in practically anything that was rigorously frozen in the iron grip of Stalinism. The tenth was written very quickly between the summer and fall of 1953, which leads one to believe that the ideas and forms were ones that had been ruminated upon for a long time and reserved 'in pectore', so to speak, until they were published. The other consideration to bear in mind is that since these thoughts, though publicly suppressed were alive and well within, when they came to paper they represented the germination – the fruition of a great mind. The depth of mastery is much indicated by the ability to say a lot and say it well for a long time, with relatively little material. As Boris Schwarz wrote this "great work...heralded the liberalization of the human spirit." He goes on to compare

it with *The Thaw* by Ilya Ehrenberg. Stephen Johnson aptly points out that in both works there is “a similar feeling of purgation and, in the closing stages, a glimmer of hope, however qualified.”

Whilst the Scherzo is supposedly a portrait of Stalin, in the Allegretto, Shostakovich introduces his signature-motif, as if to say that individualism and personality – both anathema to Soviet communism – had won the day. The letters DSCH (the first letter of his first name and the first three of his last), when translated through German notation are D, E flat, C, B. A uniquely twisted motif, it is prominently recognizable in this work and drawn into the thunderous final climax.