

A man in a dark suit and white shirt, wearing glasses, is shown in profile, looking down. The background is a blurred, dark landscape with a body of water and distant hills under a cloudy sky.

SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No.5

Excerpts from
The Gadfly

London Symphony Orchestra

Maxim Shostakovich

alto

Dmitri Shostakovich

The Gadfly, Op. 97a (edited by Levon Atovmyan)

1	Overture	3:11
2	Folk Feast	2:31
3	Barrel Organ Waltz	2:11
4	Galop	1:44
5	Romance	6:32
6	Finale	3:48

Symphony No. 5 in D Minor, Op. 47

7	I. Moderato	19:00
8	II. Allegretto	5:20
9	III. Largo	17:07
10	IV. Allegro non troppo	12:16

London Symphony Orchestra Maxim Shostakovich, *conductor*

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

The opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was the largest work composed by Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975) during the 1930s. It was based on Nikolai Leskov's 1864 story dealing with the extra-marital affair of Katerina, a merchant's wife, and Sergei, one of her husband's workers. Following the murders of her husband and father-in-law, the lovers are arrested and sent to labour camp. Sergei deserts Katerina for another convict and she and her rival drown during a fight. The opera was an astonishing success following its premiere at the Maly Opera, Leningrad, in 1934. Shostakovich treated the character of Katerina with greater sympathy than had Leskov, but left little to the imagination in the more lurid episodes. Stalin himself attended a performance in December 1935 and shortly afterwards an article appeared in *Pravda* entitled 'Muddle instead of Music'. The article which, if not penned by Stalin, certainly supported his views on the piece, attacked Shostakovich for his dissonance: 'embryos of a musical phrase drown, struggle free and disappear again in the din, the grinding, the squealing' and for the work's naturalism: 'the music quacks, hoots, pants, and gasps in order to express the love scenes as naturally as

possible'. Written against a background of Stalinist purges it also contained a threat: 'this is a game..that may end very badly'. One week later a second article appeared attacking Shostakovich's ballet *The Limpid Stream* for its 'unrealistic' portrayal of life on a collective farm.

Until the publication of the first article Shostakovich had been the undisputed 'golden boy' of Soviet music. Many lesser musicians however were envious, and consequently a fierce debate raged amongst the intelligentsia. Shostakovich soon felt alienated, for not many were willing to side with a composer now labelled as 'decadent' by the Party machinery. With the 'Muddle instead of Music' debate rumbling around him, Shostakovich buried himself in his music. He wrote that 'the authorities tried to persuade me to repent and expiate my sin. But I refused to repent... instead of repenting I wrote my Fourth Symphony'. This massive work, over which the shadow of Mahler looms large, was scheduled for performance in December 1936. A number of distinguished conductors, including Klemperer, Gauk and Stiedry had heard the work privately in the composer's apartment and were enthusiastic. Shostakovich allocated the premiere to Fritz Stiedry in Leningrad but, following a showdown with him during a troubled rehearsal, he withdrew the score. Rumours were rife, but the general opinion was that Shostakovich, aware of the 'formalist' nature of his new score, had pre-empted an official reprimand and for safety's sake had decided to cancel the premiere. Although Shostakovich continued to play the work in private, he refused to allow a premiere until 1961.

The beleaguered composer attempted to maintain a low profile against a terrifying background of show-trials, executions and disappearances. He accepted a teaching post at the Leningrad Conservatory and composed some film music (cinema being Stalin's favourite medium) and by the third week of July 1937, he had completed a new symphony. Shostakovich had every reason to keep his head down as he was known to have been friendly with several high-ranking officials recently tried and executed for treason. Possibly, the composer only escaped arrest because his own accuser was intercepted and executed before he could reach Shostakovich.

The *Fifth Symphony* conforms to the more traditional symphony format. Whereas the unperformed and massively scored *Fourth Symphony* was in three movements (two sprawling outer movements straddling an unnerving inner one), the *Fifth* was scored more conventionally in four movements: a sonata form opening, a scherzo, a slow movement and a finale that strives towards and eventually achieves the required optimistic ending.

The opening subject of the first movement is jagged and abrupt, but soon lapses into comparative stillness. Over a pulsing rhythm the violins play a typically wide-ranging melody that does not quite alleviate the previous abruptness. Over a percussive piano the low brass intone their version of a previously heard theme and a fierce climax rapidly ensues. Once the Mahler-like march has spent

itself a hushed stillness remains, a solo violin playing over a series of fourths from the trumpet and three upward scales on the celesta. The scherzo also returns to Mahler, being a grotesque galumphing dance with a delicate trio section complete with violin *portamenti*. The elegiac and lyrical slow movement, scored for multi-divided strings, woodwind and percussion, pays further tribute to Mahler. At its centre is a searing climax with stabbing notes from the piano and xylophone against massed strings. This magnificent movement closes unexpectedly in the key of F sharp *major*. The finale opens with a huge scream of protest, the entire orchestra seeming to tremble before pounding timpani and brass blow away the cobwebs of the preceding movement. This banal quick march is developed extensively to a feverish pitch before calmness takes over in the shape of an expressive horn solo. But the march is not yet over and it gradually returns, less hectoring than before, and after a brief moment of crisis, during which the orchestra seems suspended in mid air, it is with some relief that the march returns in victory.

For many years the *Fifth Symphony* bore the subtitle 'A Soviet Artist's Reply to Just Criticism' implying that Shostakovich had kowtowed to Stalin's bullying. Shostakovich explained the programme as 'the making of the man with all his suffering in the centre of the composition, which is lyrical in form from beginning to end. In the finale the tragically tense impulses of the earlier movements are resolved in optimism and joy of living'. This indeed sounds as if the composer has corrected the formalist mistakes supposedly evident in previous works. As well as placating the Party bosses, the public vociferously showed its approval following the premiere on 21 November 1937, but this did not signal an end to Shostakovich's problems for the view was widely held that the uproar at the end of the concert was in effect a demonstration against Stalin. Not all of Shostakovich's friends approved of the work, in particular the finale. Those that knew the *Fourth Symphony* perceived that to be much greater; but this was not the time to perform a symphony that ended pianissimo and in the minor. At the premieres under Mravinsky in Leningrad and by Gauk in Moscow the composer was tight-lipped about how to interpret the *Fifth*. Later however he wrote 'I think that it is clear to everyone what happens in the *Fifth*...It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying "Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing" and you rise, shakily, and go off muttering "Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing"'

Shostakovich was an avid fan of the cinema; in his student days he accompanied silent films. In all he composed 36 film scores, the first being *New Babylon* (1928), the last in 1971. He became adept at depicting every situation: light-hearted farce, epic tragedy and a heroic style (popular with the Soviet hierarchy) used in propaganda documentaries. All of these are used to great effect in his score written for Alexander Faintzimmer's 1955 film *The Gadfly* (Ovod), a dramatisation of Ethel Voynich's 1897 novel.

Voynich was an English novelist and musician married to a Polish nationalist and

revolutionary Wilfred Voynich. Familiar both to the literary establishment as well as to activists in Britain, Europe and Russia, their London bookshop was used to smuggle revolutionary texts in and out of Tsarist Russia. They later settled in New York and became sympathetic to the IRA cause (Ethel dedicated an orchestral piece to Roger Casement, hanged in 1916). There is speculation that Voynich based the character of Arthur Burton on the early life of Russian-born spy Sidney Reilly, with whom she may have had an affair. Little remembered in her native Britain, Voynich became something of a cult figure in socialist countries and by the time of her death at the age of 96 in 1960, *The Gadfly* had sold an estimated 2.5 million copies in the Soviet Union. Set in Risorgimento Italy, it concerns a swashbuckling English freedom-fighter Arthur Burton who, whilst in Italy in the 1820s campaigned for Italian independence against the Austrian oppressor. Forced to flee Italy after interrogation Burton lies low in South America before returning to Italy under the name Felice Rivarez, where he takes up arms against the Austrians, 'stinging' them (hence the Gadfly of the title) to great effect until his arrest and execution by firing squad. The scenario allowed Shostakovich to pastiche the styles of Bellini, Donizetti and Italian folk-song as well as to explore his darker side in the latter half of the film. His 'heroic' style, heard in the Overture and Finale was later used in his *Symphonies 11* and *12*, works centred on revolutionary subjects. Levon Atovmian's suite of music from *The Gadfly* became exceptionally popular in the UK following the use of *Romance* in the BBC TV series *Reilly – Ace of Spies* (1983).

NOTES ON THE ARTIST

Maxim Shostakovich (b.1938) was born in Leningrad and studied piano and conducting at the Moscow Conservatory with Gauk, Markevich and Rozhdestvensky. He was soloist at the premiere and dedicatee of his father's *Piano Concerto No. 2*. For some years he was assistant conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic and USSR State Symphony Orchestras and he conducted the premiere of his father's *Symphony No. 15*. Having defected to the West in 1981 he was Music Director of New Orleans SO (1986-91) and before that Guest Conductor of the Hong Kong PO, before returning to post-Glasnost Russia. A familiar orchestral conductor in the UK and Europe, he has also conducted memorable productions of *The Nose* (1979 London) and *Lady Macbeth* in Hamburg (directed by Lybimov) and Sweden.

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