

huge waves of sound. Despite the volume (and this must be one of the loudest passages in music) the march is unable to resolve itself and instead it broods exhaustedly over a long throbbing pedal point. As the symphony closes the only signs of life now remaining are a series of oscillations between E flat and G on the celesta.

Although Shostakovich continued to perform the work privately in a two piano version, it was not until the Khrushchevian 'thaw' that an official interest was shown in his *Fourth Symphony*. In 1958 he finally contemplated resurrecting his two forgotten masterpieces: the *Fourth Symphony* finally received its triumphant premiere under Kirill Kondrashin and the Moscow Philharmonic in 1961, whilst in 1962 the revised *Lady Macbeth*, (renamed *Katerina Ismailova*), was performed worldwide. Critics noted that both works were among the most original scores of the twentieth century and that their invention and depth of feeling was in stark contrast to his *Twelfth Symphony*, also premiered around then. In 1973 the composer with reference to the symphony's original withdrawal stated that 'I didn't like the situation. Fear was all around. So I withdrew it'.

Rudolf Barshai (1924-2010) has long been associated with the music of Shostakovich. He studied violin with Lev Zeitlin and viola with Borisovsky at the Moscow Conservatoire. He was a founder member of the Moscow Philharmonic Quartet (renamed Borodin Quartet) and later joined the Tchaikovsky Quartet. The Borodin Quartet often played the string quartets of Shostakovich in rehearsal for the composer, although he chose the more prestigious Beethoven Quartet to perform the premieres. Having studied conducting, Barshai formed the Moscow Chamber Orchestra in 1955 and in 1969 he premiered Shostakovich's *Fourteenth Symphony*, having assisted in instrumentation and other matters. He later arranged the *Fourth* and *Eighth String Quartets* for chamber orchestra, these being known as the *Chamber Symphonies*. Barshai emigrated to Israel and then lived in the UK from 1982-88 as Artistic Adviser to the Bournemouth Symphony, then moving to residency at the WDR (Köln) orchestra, from his new base in Switzerland, where he died in October 2010.

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Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-75)
Symphony No.4 in C minor
West German Radio Symphony Orchestra (WDR)
Conducted by Rudolf Barshai

SYMPHONY No.4 in C minor, Op.43
1. Allegretto poco moderato 27:12
2. Moderato con moto 8:45
3. Largo – Allegro 26:04
Total Playing Time 62:02

WDR

Recorded: April & June 1996, Philharmonie, Köln, Germany
Producer: Christoph Held Engineer: Siegfried Spittler

Project Consultant: Terry Holmes

Mastered for alto by Paul Arden-Taylor (www.dinmore-records.co.uk)

Others available:

ALC 1062 Shostakovich Symphony 15/Violin Conc 2/Oistrakh/Kondrashin/ Moscow
ALC 1067 Shostakovich Symphony 5 & 'Gadfly Suite'/ LSO/Maxim Shostakovich
ALC 1083 Shostakovich Symphony 10/ L.S.O./Maxim Shostakovich
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WDR

Sinfonieorchester WDR
Rudolf Barshai

alto

Much of Shostakovich's early music illustrated his attitude to the 1917 Revolution in Russia: *Symphonies 2 and 3*, composed between 1927-29, were subtitled *To October* and *The First of May* respectively; the opera *The Nose* from the same period was a satire of pre-Revolutionary Russia after a short story by Gogol; and the ballet *The Golden Age* (1929-30) compared Soviet culture favourably to the decadent West. In the 1930s Shostakovich became more introverted, identifying with more personal subjects. This direction is most noticeable in his two largest scores of the decade: the opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (composed 1930-32 and premiered in 1934), and *Symphony No 4* (composed 1934-35 but not performed until 1961).

The 19th century short story by Nikolai Leskov forms the basis of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*: the central character Katerina Ismailova is bored with her situation, but finds comfort and satisfaction in the arms of one of her husband's workers. She and her lover murder her husband and father-in-law, and are caught and punished. They are sent to a labour camp where the lover finds another woman and Katerina, totally distraught, drowns both herself and her lover's new mistress. Shostakovich empathised with Katerina more than Leskov had, and made the real monsters of the piece those (including her husband) who bully her. *Lady Macbeth* was premiered almost simultaneously in Leningrad and Moscow, and within two years had been seen in a number of countries outside the Soviet Union. Its success led Shostakovich to consider a cycle of operas centred around either powerful or victimised women. During the winter of 1935 - 36 a new production of *Lady Macbeth* was arranged at the Bolshoy in Moscow and Shostakovich, who had already begun work on a new symphony, was on hand to supervise rehearsals and the initial performances. He was asked to be at the theatre on the evening of 26 January 1936, when the performance was to be attended by not only senior Party officials Zhdanov and Molotov, but also by Stalin himself. At the end, Shostakovich took a bow but it was noticed that these VIPs had already left. Two days later an article entitled ominously 'Chaos instead of music' appeared in *Pravda*, denouncing the opera as degenerate: 'a deliberately discordant and chaotic stream of sound (that could) only whip up passion'. 'Pornographic' elements of it were given as the only reason for the work's success abroad. Even more ominous, was the thinly veiled warning that in playing this 'meaningless game (the composer) might well come to a very bad end'.

At this time the Soviet Union was into Stalin's Second Five-Year Plan. Impossibly high targets had been set for the First Plan and where they had not been met, fault was laid at the doors of untrained workers or wreckers (saboteurs). Those areas not involved in the massive industrialisation programme prescribed for the entire country, eg housing, agriculture and transport, were starved of investment. Learning from their mistakes, the organisers of the Second Plan in 1933 set about

consolidating their achievements and began to address these very areas of the economy. Generally speaking living conditions improved, but Stalin's purging of the party of the 'intelligentsia' alienated many supporters. The murder of Kirov, the popular mayor of Leningrad, in 1934 gave Stalin an excuse to purge the Party of further 'enemies of the people'. Kirov had been seen as a possible successor to Stalin and it is now commonly thought that Stalin himself engineered his death. The terror that ensued saw many millions of innocent lives lost as he unleashed a ferocious campaign against non-Party activists, those suspected of foreign sympathies, or who were popular and influential (eg in the armed forces). An atmosphere of mistrust flourished, where enemies and rivals sought to curry favour and settle scores.

It was against this background that *Lady Macbeth* was criticised in the Party broadsheet. In 1934 Shostakovich's personal life had reached a crisis: his affair with a colleague on tour led to a separation from his wife which only ended when his wife announced that she was pregnant the following year. Their first child was born in 1936 by which time Shostakovich was being shunned by the musical world. In the atmosphere that prevailed in the Soviet Union, other less talented composers agreed with *Pravda's* pronouncements and very few were willing to take a stand on his behalf. Following the published chastisement, Shostakovich was able to do little except keep his head down and await developments. He completed his *Fourth Symphony* and in May 1936 played it to three influential conductors: Fritz Stiedry (a central European conductor who had fled Nazism, and then music director of the Leningrad Philharmonic), Alexander Gauk (founder-conductor of the USSR Symphony Orchestra) and Otto Klemperer (who was visiting the USSR and whom Shostakovich hoped might present the work abroad). All three musicians were astounded at what they heard: Stiedry and Klemperer offered to present the symphony at the earliest opportunity whilst Gauk would naturally follow in due course.

Towards the autumn, Stiedry began rehearsals in Leningrad and immediately ran into difficulties: the players found the work impossible and Stiedry himself appeared unable to motivate them. At the time much was blamed on Stiedry's musical shortcomings. This however can be disproved following examination of his record as a conductor of modern 'difficult' music and his electrifying performances at the Metropolitan Opera and elsewhere. Little is known about the lead up to Shostakovich's withdrawal of the score during rehearsals, other than the fact that he and Stiedry did appear to be at odds, and that Stostakovich was 'spoken to' by the management of the Leningrad Philharmonic who had been contacted by important members of the Party. Word of the work's character must have leaked out to the Party at some stage and there must have been concern over the fact that the Symphony failed to meet important parts of the Soviet Composer's Union criteria

for an approved piece of music - it must move towards 'the victorious progressive principals of reality in all that is heroic, bright and beautiful'. Had the premiere taken place on 11 December 1936, when Shostakovich was still *persona non grata*, performers as well as the composer could have been the target of Party opprobrium. In some ways it is surprising that the *Fourth Symphony* even reached the rehearsal stage! Fellow composer Myaskovsky commented afterwards on the enforced cancellation: 'What a disgrace for us, his contemporaries'.

The "stamping" opening theme has been likened by Ian MacDonald in *The New Shostakovich* (1990) to the megalomaniac shouts that greet a brutal dictator at a rally. The quieter second theme might be the artist casting back his mind to more sympathetic times. Once more the 'rally' thunders past, gradually fading into the distance. An ear-splitting scream (of anguish, of pain, of fear?) introduces a passage of unbearable tension during which the image put forward by many commentators of the composer nervously awaiting the nocturnal 'knock at the door' is impossible to ignore. Shostakovich was an imaginative and effective composer of film music (the cinema being Stalin's favourite medium) and again, MacDonald's description of the stabbing motifs being like secret police torches flashing into dark corners during searches for incriminating evidence is extremely vivid. In the fugue which follows, Stalin's terror machine is unleashed on the Soviet people: the strings play a vicious game of tag where the accusers find themselves accused. The nightmare becomes more horrific yet as six grinding crescendos return to the 'rally' theme. Exhaustion however sets in and the massive opening movement closes quietly with a violin solo, the composer perhaps mulling over the horrific recent experiences.

The shorter scherzo second movement is the most formal section of the symphony, its four-note figure recalling Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and its structure (ABABA) being easy to decipher. There is however within its span considerable disruption as the wind and brass's three-note pattern successfully assault the strings' attempts at normality. Unsettling ticking sounds (time running out for the composer?) close the movement.

One can only guess the identity of the soul being laid to rest in the Mahlerian funeral march that opens the last movement. Before dying away, a terrifying climax is reached. Once again the tense nocturnal waiting theme is heard, now from the entire orchestra. The disconcerting middle section begins with a long horn pedal note. Groups of instruments led by the bassoon, trombone and piccolo chatter in an apparently trivial manner and the strings lead the orchestra in a waltz. Suddenly the timpani introduce a massive reiteration of the funeral march which grinds onward in