

# Shostakovich

Complete  
String  
Quartets

Shostakovich  
Quartet

Northern Flowers



# Dmitri Shostakovich

## Complete String Quartets

### **Two Pieces For String Quartet, Op. 36**

- |                         |      |
|-------------------------|------|
| 1 I. Elegy. Adagio      | 4:12 |
| 2 II. Polka. Allegretto | 2:26 |

### **String Quartet No. 1 in C Major, Op. 49**

- |                      |      |
|----------------------|------|
| 3 I. Moderato        | 4:18 |
| 4 II. Moderato       | 4:44 |
| 5 III. Allegro molto | 1:54 |
| 6 IV. Allegro        | 2:58 |

### **String Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 68**

- |                                                                                                                     |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 7 I. Overture. Moderato con moto                                                                                    | 8:10  |
| 8 II. Recitative and Romance. Adagio                                                                                | 11:09 |
| 9 III. Valse. Allegro                                                                                               | 5:36  |
| 10 IV. Theme with Variations.<br>Adagio - Moderato con moto - Allegretto -<br>Allegro non troppo - Allegro - Adagio | 10:51 |

### **String Quartet No. 3 in F Major, Op. 73**

- |                                      |       |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 11 I. Allegretto                     | 6:34  |
| 12 II. Moderato con moto             | 4:56  |
| 13 III. Allegro non troppo           | 3:56  |
| 14 IV. Adagio - V. Moderato - Adagio | 16:03 |

### **String Quartet No. 4 in D Major, Op. 83**

- |                                     |       |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 15 I. Allegretto                    | 3:55  |
| 16 II. Andantino                    | 7:18  |
| 17 III. Allegretto - IV. Allegretto | 13:31 |

### **String Quartet No. 5 in B-Flat Major, Op. 92**

- |                                         |       |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|
| 18 I. Allegro non troppo                | 11:00 |
| 19 II. Andante - Andantino              | 8:40  |
| 20 III. Moderato - Allegretto - Andante | 10:49 |

### **String Quartet No. 6 in G Major, Op. 101**

- |                                              |      |
|----------------------------------------------|------|
| 21 I. Allegretto                             | 6:22 |
| 22 II. Moderato con moto                     | 4:52 |
| 23 III. Lento                                | 6:08 |
| 24 IV. Lento - Allegretto - Andante - Adagio | 7:10 |

### **String Quartet No. 7 in F-Sharp Minor, Op. 108**

- |                              |      |
|------------------------------|------|
| 25 I. Allegretto             | 3:17 |
| 26 II. Lento                 | 3:18 |
| 27 III. Allegro - Allegretto | 5:30 |

### **String Quartet No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 110**

- |                      |      |
|----------------------|------|
| 28 I. Largo          | 4:40 |
| 29 II. Allegro molto | 2:46 |
| 30 III. Allegretto   | 4:33 |
| 31 IV. Largo         | 5:29 |
| 32 V. Largo          | 3:34 |

### **String Quartet No. 9 in E-Flat Major, Op. 117**

- |                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------|
| 33 I. Moderato con moto | 4:16  |
| 34 II. Adagio           | 4:42  |
| 35 III. Allegretto      | 3:54  |
| 36 IV. Adagio           | 4:43  |
| 37 V. Allegro           | 10:48 |

### **String Quartet No. 10 in A-Flat Major, Op. 118**

- |                             |      |
|-----------------------------|------|
| 38 I. Andante               | 4:11 |
| 39 II. Allegretto furioso   | 4:11 |
| 40 III. Adagio              | 6:34 |
| 41 IV. Allegretto - Andante | 9:02 |

### **String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 122**

- |                               |      |
|-------------------------------|------|
| 42 I. Introduction. Andantino | 2:12 |
| 43 II. Scherzo. Allegretto    | 2:40 |
| 44 III. Recitative. Adagio    | 1:28 |
| 45 IV. Etude. Allegro         | 1:16 |
| 46 V. Humoresque. Adagio      | 1:09 |
| 47 VI. Elegy. Adagio          | 4:32 |
| 48 VII. Finale. Moderato      | 3:31 |

### **String Quartet No. 12 in D-Flat Major, Op. 133**

- |                                       |       |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| 49 I. Moderato - Allegretto           | 8:04  |
| 50 II. Adagio - Moderato - Allegretto | 19:54 |

### **String Quartet No. 13 in B-Flat minor, Op. 138**

- |                                           |       |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|
| (Adagio - Doppio movimento - Tempo primo) | 18:19 |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|

### **String Quartet No. 14 in F-Sharp Major, Op. 142**

- |                             |      |
|-----------------------------|------|
| 52 I. Allegretto            | 8:49 |
| 53 II. Adagio               | 9:40 |
| 54 III. Allegretto - Adagio | 8:22 |

### **String Quartet No. 15 in E-Flat Minor, Op. 144**

- |                                        |       |
|----------------------------------------|-------|
| 55 I. Elegy. Adagio                    | 12:34 |
| 56 II. Serenade. Adagio                | 5:28  |
| 57 III. Intermezzo. Adagio             | 2:02  |
| 58 IV. Nocturne. Adagio                | 5:05  |
| 59 V. Funeral March. Adagio molto      | 4:55  |
| 60 VI. Epilogue. Adagio - Adagio molto | 6:46  |

## The Shostakovich Quartet

Andrei Shishlov & Sergei Pishchugin, violins

Alexander Galkovsky, viola • Alexander Korchagin, cello

The string quartet has long been regarded as a channel through which a composer can fully express his innermost thoughts: for **Dmitri Shostakovich** (1906-75) it proved a means of expressing his dissatisfaction with life under Stalin. Shostakovich had been too young to remember much of the 1917 Revolution although he did compose an unpublished piano piece *Funeral March for the victims of the Revolution*. During the severe famine that afflicted Russia in the latter half of 1921 killing five million people, he suffered malnutrition and was only too aware that his family had to scrimp and save so that he could continue his studies at the Leningrad Conservatory. To financially support himself whilst completing the *First Symphony* he played organ for a cinema and graduated in 1925, the year following Lenin's death. The success of his *First Symphony* at home and abroad brought Shostakovich's family much needed financial stability at a time when internal divisions between Lenin's successors, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Trotsky, Kirov and Stalin, were bringing chaos to the political system.

By the end of 1927 Stalin reigned supreme. Over the next few years his repressive measures stifled all enlightened work in the arts and sciences, and in 1932 (the year in which Shostakovich married his fiancée Nina Varsar and finished his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mzensk District*) Russians were encouraged to spy on their own families in attempts to root out dissident talk. Famine, unrealistic agricultural projects, and dangerous engineering projects took their toll of the population and it is estimated that some sixteen million met their deaths in Russia and the Ukraine alone during 1933. Kirov's murder in 1934, widely believed to have been engineered by Stalin, led to 40,000 Leningraders being expelled for their 'part' in this conspiracy and the 'Great Terror' being

unleashed. Initially *Lady Macbeth* was hugely successful in both Moscow and Leningrad, however Stalin saw the opera at the end of 1935 and the following January an article appeared in *Pravda* entitled "Muddle instead of music" in which Shostakovich's opera was vilified. A Party proclamation declared that all Art should be optimistic and Shostakovich's new *Symphony No. 4*, seemingly a graphic account of the Terror, was hastily withdrawn from rehearsal. The *Fifth Symphony*, subtitled "A Soviet Artist's reply to just criticism" was a huge success, and continues to be his most popular work. In the book *Testimony*, reputed to be his memoirs, Shostakovich pours scorn on the idea that he was willingly towing the Party line. Nevertheless in order to support his young family it became necessary to compose a certain amount of music that was bound to please his political masters. Hence the amount of film music he composed in the 1930s and 1940s (cinema being Stalin's favourite art form), as well as various optimistic and populist choral works.

During 1933, appeared the ***Pieces for String Quartet, Op. 36*** (Shostakovich's first essays in this form). These consisted of arrangements of scenes from *Lady Macbeth* and the polka from *The Golden Age*.

Shostakovich composed ***String Quartet No. 1 in C Major, Op. 49*** between May and July 1938 whilst apparently at work on a choral symphony entitled 'Lenin'. This short work was treated as an exercise and seemingly lacks any kind of passion (aside from a portion of the second movement which has been likened to a miniature funeral march) and scarcely rises above forte. Such passion as there is in the piece is felt during the second movement but is quickly stifled. The third movement seems to harken back to happier days. Both the opening movement and the Finale contain a

three-crotchet motif that often recurs in subsequent works.

Shostakovich's ***String Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 68*** was composed in September 1944. In the period between these first two Quartets the composer had experienced the hardships of war at first hand having been a firefighter inside Leningrad during its lengthy siege by the German army. Works composed during that time included his *Symphonies Nos. 6, 7 and 8* and the *Piano Quintet*. Earlier in 1944 Shostakovich heard of the death of his closest friend Sollertinsky and as a result had been inspired to write his *Piano Trio No. 2*. The *Second Quartet* followed in its wake. Its length and the movement titles suggest something more on the lines of a great orchestral work. A friend of Shostakovich wondered just how the composer found the time to complete this substantial work, as throughout this period he was almost constantly socializing, walking, playing football and billiards, eating and drinking. He would apparently slip away for a few minutes at a time and then reappear as though nothing had happened and suddenly the *Quartet* was completed. The Overture opens with aggressive confidence, possibly a statement on the Russian army's current success but also contains a motif (crescendo on a single note) that is associated with the menace of Stalin. The Recitative and Romance features a violin melody over pedal-like chords, a feature in Shostakovich's music later associated with persecuted Jewry. A pensive Waltz follows and then the last movement entitled Theme and Variations presents a fanfare followed by a chorale passage. Since the church chorale was historically intended to be the point at which the congregation were able to participate in the service there is surely a message in this work to the

effect that the people will triumph over tyranny in the end. The question then arises as to whom the tyrant is, Hitler or Stalin?

Shostakovich's clownish yet menacing *Ninth Symphony* (1945) left the Party bosses perplexed and angry; undoubtedly they had been expecting something uplifting and triumphant following their defeat of the Germans. During 1946, as Russia began to harden its line towards Western influences, Shostakovich wrote little: indeed the only work completed that year was the ***String Quartet No. 3 in F Major, Op. 73***. It returns to the compositional form he had used during the war ie five movements: the People's struggle against a brutal aggressor; a disruptive 'dance of death'; a grieving slow movement; a further ambivalent movement and a self-quoting finale. He withdrew his initial programme notes (referencing the war) to this *Third Quartet* shortly after the premiere but as with much of his music this left unanswered questions as to what this highly personal music really signified. Shostakovich rarely displayed emotion when his music was played back to him in rehearsal but apparently one such 'private' performance by the Beethoven Quartet (who premiered all his Quartets barring the first and last) left him in tears.

In the late 1940s Shostakovich was still at the forefront of a purge carried out against the intelligentsia (it is a wonder that he was not killed). The necessity to produce works in order to gain official approval was never greater, hence his decision to suspend composition of his ***String Quartet No. 4 in D Major, Op. 83*** in 1949 in order to compose instead a bread-and-butter work - the undeniably tuneful but banal *Song of the Forests* written in praise of Stalin's plan to change the climate in Central Asia through massive

tree-planting. Given the circumstances of the time the *Fourth Quartet* could not be performed despite its evident qualities for much of it, in particular the Finale, shows distinct influences of Jewish music and much of the rest of the work is far removed from the optimism required in officially sanctioned pieces. The opening movement opens in comparative order but by its close has descended into chaos. Similarly the waltz of the second movement faces a perpetual struggle to find an amenable key. The dreamlike third movement edges towards something far more sinister and the Finale is a grotesque dance that in view of his country's then publicly sanctioned anti-Semitism seems to act as a warning to the Jews in the Soviet Union. Often performed in private, Shostakovich allowed just one public hearing of this piece during Stalin's lifetime (to obtain a fee from the Ministry of Culture).

The Terror continued for the next two years during which inevitable mass executions in the Gulags followed camp revolts, and political show trials were prevalent in Eastern Europe. So successfully had Stalin and his cronies stifled literary and musical activity that little of substance appeared in either. Anna Akhmatova, who together with Shostakovich had been a thorn in the side of the Party but who had also miraculously managed to remain alive, made a despairing effort to free her son by writing a conformist poem, and Shostakovich likewise was only seen to be producing public-spirited works. The more private ***String Quartet No. 5 in B-flat Major, Op. 92*** was composed between September to November 1952 and its opening movement resembles that of the *Second Quartet* with its energetic theme of resistance, its struggles of tonality subsiding into a graceful waltz. A conflict between two and three beats in a bar leads to the

massive development quoting *Lady Macbeth*. The ghostly second movement recalls its grieving counterpart in the *Third Quartet* whilst the following movement is altogether more brutal. In this movement Shostakovich invites discussion into the meaning behind this work by quoting his wartime *Seventh* and *Eighth Symphonies* (equally anti-Stalin and anti-Hitler) and his *Second Quartet*. He also borrowed a theme from a *Clarinet Trio* by his close friend Galina Ustvolskaya. As with the *Fourth Quartet*, the premiere was held over until after Stalin's death.

In the final period before that, an obsession with 'conspiracies' guaranteed a final purge of all elements deemed undesirable. Following Stalin's death in March 1953 there was the inevitable power struggle between his successors consisting of the triumvirate Beria, Molotov and Malenkov. Beria was quickly replaced by Khrushchev but any idea that a change in Soviet leadership might result in a thaw towards the West and allow a greater personal freedom was quashed with their testing of the H-bomb and the brutal suppressing of dissidents in Eastern Europe (around 500 killed in Berlin in 1953). To illustrate how little things had changed in the Arts it required a committee to determine the success or failure of Shostakovich's *Tenth Symphony*!

With the formation of the KGB in 1954 came the removal and execution of several top security figures and the ruthless crushing of a revolt in Central Asia. This was a mixed year for Shostakovich: he was awarded the People's Artist of USSR medal but was saddened by the death of his wife Nina. Over the following couple of years there was a sufficient thawing to permit the premiere of the long delayed *First Violin Concerto* and the song cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, works both suppressed by

Shostakovich during a period of officially sanctioned anti-Semitism. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956 gave hope for the future but widespread unrest throughout the Warsaw Pact countries and the violent suppression that followed put paid to liberalization for the time being. The freeing of many Gulag prisoners in 1956 was an excuse for comparative rejoicing and as a result Shostakovich's ***String Quartet No. 6 in G Major, Op. 101*** is probably the lightest of its kind since the *First Quartet*. Since Nina's death he had composed little and aged a good deal and it came as something of a relief to friends and fellow-artists that he was back in the frame once more.

During 1957 Khrushchev established virtually complete control in the Soviet Union and although there was comparative freedom for composers, many writers were still living under a cloud; Pasternak for instance was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for *Doctor Zhivago* the following year but was thrown out of the Writer's Union for failing to renounce this prize. However no obstacle was placed in Shostakovich's way in accepting an Honorary Doctorate from Oxford. In 1958 Shostakovich began to feel a pain in his right hand and two years later he was admitted to hospital for treatment. He had remarried in 1956 but never felt close to his second wife and in 1960 his thoughts drifting back to the memory of Nina had resulted in the composition of his ***String Quartet No. 7 in f-sharp minor, Op. 108***.

Shostakovich and Nina had been leading separate lives for some time prior to her death in 1954 which had left him in a state of numbness. When he remarried in 1956 his friends could see that his second wife's only attraction for the composer was her physical resemblance to Nina and unsurprisingly this second

marriage did not last long. In 1960, around the time of what would have been Nina's 50th birthday he composed his brief but emotionally substantial *Seventh Quartet*. Since no secret was made of the fact that it was dedicated to Nina's memory, commentators have long sought to establish a programme to the three movements. It is commonly supposed that the first movement Allegretto is a portrait of Nina. The second movement Lento undoubtedly has the feel of a funeral chant with a sorrowful dialogue shared between the cello and viola. The last movement Allegro has been likened to the composer rushing to Nina's hospital bedside. One day perhaps the Shostakovich family will share the secrets of this most private work which together with the *Eighth String Quartet* proved successful excursions into this genre.

As had happened previously a 'thaw' in the Soviet Union was also accompanied by repression elsewhere, for in 1961 Khrushchev had Stalin's remains removed from Red Square's mausoleum but erected the Berlin Wall. That year Shostakovich was able to premiere his *Fourth Symphony* which had been held over from 1936. 1962 brought renewed crisis in relations between the Soviet Union and both the United States and China and effectively put an end to the 'thaw'. Shostakovich's *Thirteenth Symphony*, subtitled "Babi Yar", provoked a storm in that it presented a passionate vilification of anti-Semitism. He was once again hospitalised, but was allowed to visit the Edinburgh Festival and upon his return married for the third time.

That year, in his official capacity of First Secretary of the Composer's Union (for which he was obliged to join the Communist Party) he visited Dresden and was horrified by the destruction he saw in that once lovely city. Following his return he composed two very different



works: some rather low-key film music *Five days, five nights* and the highly emotional ***String Quartet No. 8 in c minor, Op. 110*** subtitled 'To the memory of the victims of Fascism'. Clearly Shostakovich was attempting to impart a special message in the Quartet as it is riddled with meaningful quotations: for example his own motif DSCH familiar from his *Tenth Symphony* (DSCH being the German notation of his name using the notes D, E flat, C, B) is linked with the folksong 'Tormented by lack of freedom'; the second movement quotes the Stalin-like dance of death from his *Second Piano Trio*. The finale makes use of the Execution scene from *The White Guard*, the In Memoriam movement from his *Eleventh Symphony* and perhaps most tellingly, the Siberian prison camp scene from *Lady Macbeth*. In Shostakovich's mind there could be little doubt that these 'victims of Fascism' were not just those murdered by the Nazis but additionally those dealt with by Stalin. As his job entailed having to add his signature to official propagandist statements, clearly the only way he could retain some semblance of free will was to compose heavily coded music. To those who knew no better however, the work presented heartfelt sympathy for victims of Nazism and as such it was a pronounced success.

Two years later during 1964, Khrushchev was deposed and although there was a brief breathing-space for Soviet artists as Brezhnev and Kosygin settled into their posts, it was not long before cultural activity became stifled. This new 'freeze' also coincided with the final period of Shostakovich's compositions: a time in which, being increasingly frail, he retreated more into thoughts of death and stillness. His ***String Quartet No. 9 in E-flat Major, Op. 117*** makes uncomfortable listening which is not to say that it is without merit. Its moods

are constantly shifting, the instruments squeal like animals and engage in wild stamping dances (the composer had visited Tashkent recently which probably accounts for this Central Asian sound); elsewhere there is anger, followed by listlessness.

The ***String Quartet No. 10 in A-flat Major, Op. 118*** immediately followed the *Ninth Quartet* and the piece shares many of the same characteristics with sudden changes of mood particularly at the climax to the Finale. The opening movement marked Andante is generally easy-going barring a swift and sinister passage played sul ponticello. The second movement is a savage scherzo marked Allegretto furioso in which with consistently ugly stamping rhythms and stabbing phrases the strings recall the whirlwind barbaric second movement of the *Tenth Symphony*, one of the most graphic portrayals of Stalin. The slow movement is a passacaglia marked Adagio that with its wistful tones recalls the *Sixth Quartet* that similarly appeared to harken back to happier, more innocent times. The final Allegretto has a persistent fleeting theme that, apart from a muddled climactic section, is scored in the lean style that epitomizes Shostakovich's late works. Both quartets were composed during the summer of 1964 and premiered by the Beethoven Quartet at the same concert that November.

Shostakovich in his later years was allowed relative freedom to travel, enabling him to visit friends outside the Soviet Union. One such friend was Benjamin Britten, whom Shostakovich met a number of times (twice during 1965). Shostakovich also visited Vienna in 1965 to oversee a production of his popular tamed down version of *Lady Macbeth*, named *Katarina Ismailova*. The following year the tables were turned on Khrushchev and he was 'unpersoned'; moreover moves

were made that year to rehabilitate Stalin. Once again dissidents were placed in severe danger and culture went into a period of stagnation. One of the founder members of the Beethoven String Quartet, the second violinist Vasily Shirinsky, died in 1965 and Shostakovich composed his ***String Quartet No. 11 in f minor, Op. 122*** in his memory early in 1966, in which the second violin part is mute for much of the time. The seven movements that form the *Eleventh Quartet* are played without a break and are thematically linked: for instance the opening theme returns in a darker form in the Elegy whilst the Finale recalls the Scherzo; the first violin's passage in the Recitative is developed by the cello in the Humoresque and both the Etude and the Humoresque are based upon a theme first heard in the Scherzo. The increasing pain in his right hand was now causing Shostakovich much anguish and he suffered another heart attack during May 1966 at around the time this *Eleventh Quartet* was premiered by the Beethoven Quartet in Leningrad.

Throughout later years Shostakovich turned with greater frequency to the smaller scale forms of composition such as song and string quartet. This may have had something to do with the increased pain he experienced latterly in his right hand that made writing difficult (so the fewer staves required the better). It may also be explained by the fact that his last productive period of composition coincided with a 'freeze' of artistic freedom under Brezhnev. The ***String Quartet No. 12 in D-flat Major, Op. 133*** of 1968 opens with a twelve note passage on the cello that evolves into a sighing motif interspersed with pulsating repeated notes. The mournful mood of the first movement marked Moderato is never anguished and despite the apparent serial opening, a basic tonality is

never in doubt. On the other hand, the lengthy second movement marked Allegretto is far more conscious of inner strife with a staccato five note repeated phrase resembling machine-gun fire present almost throughout the opening section. Could this be the composer's somewhat helpless reaction to Soviet suppression of the Czech uprising? If so, then the elegiac passage that follows is surely a lament for the victims of this suppression. A desolate pizzicato gradually gains momentum passing through a number of emotions (one resembles a rather cheeky upstart being slapped down by his superiors) before the elegiac episode returns set against muted oscillating accompaniment. Gradually the jagged opening returns with the same machine-gun repeated phrase, now less fraught with anxiety but gaining in determined optimism as though the composer is determined to assert the tonality to the very end. Following the example set by the *Eleventh Quartet*, this work is also dedicated to a member of the Beethoven String Quartet, to its founder, the violinist Dmitri Tsyganov.

In 1969 Soviet clashed with its eastern neighbour China effectively putting the globe on red alert. Inside the Soviet Union, Alexander Solzhenitsyn was thrown out of the Writer's Union making him a persona non grata. At some personal risk the cellist Rostropovitch gave him refuge. That year Shostakovich spent much of the time in hospital and penned his *Symphony No 14*, a profoundly beautiful song cycle with all texts linked to the theme of death dedicated to his great friend Benjamin Britten. He was again seriously ill during 1970 and composed the ***String Quartet No. 13 in b-flat minor, Op. 138*** whilst in hospital in Kurgan. This one movement work, dedicated to Vadim Borizovsky of the Beethoven String Quartet, has been described by Borizovsky's pupil Feodor



Druzhinin as a 'hymn to the viola'. In this work Shostakovich recalls something of the childlike naivety of his *Eleventh Quartet* but the pace is predominantly slow with a slightly faster middle section. Once again a 12-note theme opens the piece but unlike the *Twelfth Quartet*, here the tonality is less secure. A strange percussive effect (the bow tapped against the side of the instrument) is introduced and elsewhere Shostakovich quotes his own three-note 'people's motif' first heard in the 1948 film *The Young Guard*.

Dissent was gathering force in 1970 with the founding of the Soviet Human Rights Committee by Sakharov and others who were demanding a return to intellectual freedom, whilst also that year organised Jewish emigration began. The West placed pressure upon the Soviet Union by awarding Solzhenitsyn the Nobel Prize, to which the Soviet Government responded by 'inviting' him to leave the Soviet Union. The eminent writer refused however, remaining in the Soviet Union until expulsion forced him out in early 1974. Brezhnev's repression attained its height in 1971 and Shostakovich's caustic *Symphony No. 15* (particularly the first two movements) from that year can be seen to be a comment on the widespread crime and corruption prevalent in certain quarters. Following the completion of his final symphony Shostakovich suffered a heart attack and he once more spent the winter in hospital.

Andrei Sakharov's attempts to persuade the leadership to show leniency towards liberalizers brought about the expected KGB crackdown in early 1972. However that summer Shostakovich was able to spend time with Britten at Aldeburgh during which time he began composing his penultimate string quartet, the ***String Quartet No. 14 in F-sharp Major, Op. 142***. Further severe illness, for which he was prescribed radiation

therapy, forced him to halt composition during the winter and the work was only completed in April 1973. Once again a member of the Beethoven String Quartet was its dedicatee, in this case the cellist Sergei Shirinsky, for whom Shostakovich wrote a prominent part. The Beethoven String Quartet, who premiered all but Shostakovich's first and last quartets, first performed the Quartet on 30th October 1973. This is perhaps the least accessible of his quartets. Its composition coincides with Shostakovich's forced renunciation of Sakharov's appeals for increased liberalization and it may be that this was Shostakovich's way of distancing himself from this sorry episode. Towards the close of the Quartet some light appears and in fact his final works from that moment onwards (such as the *Fifteenth Quartet* and the *Viola Sonata*) do indeed display some warmth almost entirely lacking from the *Thirteenth* and *Fourteenth Quartets*. It is as if calm resignation was taking the place of depression. Sadly, Shostakovich did not survive the Brezhnev era.

Shostakovich's final quartet, ***String Quartet No. 15 in e-flat minor, Op. 144*** was composed between February and May 1974 and premiered on 25th October by the Taneyev Quartet in Leningrad. The task should have fallen as usual to the Beethoven Quartet, however their cellist Sergei Shirinsky died during a rehearsal of this quartet on 20th October and the other players understandably felt unable to undertake the premiere. Although honoured at being handed this responsibility at such short notice, the players of the Taneyev Quartet felt extremely nervous in rehearsal and the atmosphere was not helped by the composer being extremely agitated. Having however played both this and the *Fourteenth Quartet* through to him, Shostakovich

calmed down considerably and surprised them afterwards by laughing and singing with them. The quartet itself is full of references that had now come to be associated with death, such as the two-note oscillating figure in the Epilogue. The opening movement also has the appearance of a lament albeit in a rather folk-like manner.

— © 2010 & 2022, **James Murray**

**The Shostakovich Quartet** was active from 1966 to 2014 with a varied line-up, but with the original cellist, Alexander Korchagin, remaining throughout.[1] It is named after Dmitri Shostakovich.

The quartet was formed among fourth-year students in the Moscow Conservatory's chamber ensemble and quartet department in the class of Rafael Davidyan: violinists Andrei Shishlov and Alexander Balashov, violist Alexei Dyachkov and cellist Alexander Korchagin. The program of their debut recital on April 1, 1967, in the White Hall of the Conservatory (now the Myaskovsky Concert Hall) consisted of Beethoven's Quartet Op. 18 No. 5, Hindemith's Quartet No. 3, and the Fifth Quartet of Dmitri Shostakovich. The following year, the ensemble was awarded first prize at the Competition of the Moscow Conservatory and the Union of Composers of the USSR, in a high-profile event celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Soviet state. A number of competition prizes followed, in particular third prize at the XIX ARD International Music Competition in Munich in 1970, and first prize at the XIII Leo Weiner International competition in Budapest in 1973. On February 23, 1979, by the Decree of the Government of the RSFSR, the team was named after Dmitri Shostakovich. In 1987, the Quartet was awarded the Glinka State Prize of the RSFSR.

The Quartet toured extensively - initially within the USSR, to venues both in large and more remote communities - and abroad, eventually appearing in 47 countries on 4 continents, including multiple visits to the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, the USA, Canada, Australia, and Japan.

The Quartet's repertoire included the 15 quartets by Dmitry Shostakovich, and works by other Russian composers including Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Glazunov, Grechaninov, Prokofiev and Stravinsky. They also performed music by European composers spanning the era from classical to the early 20th century, including Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Debussy and Ravel.

The music of Shostakovich featured strongly in the quartet's concert repertoire. The artists performed a cycle of his 15 quartets at the Edinburgh Festival (1988), in Amsterdam (Concertgebouw Music Center, Kleine Zaal, 1984-85), at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival (USA, 1991), at the Adelaide Festival of Arts (Australia, 1986), at the Asolo Musica festival in Italy (1992), at the Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival (Finland, 1995), as well as in Paris, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Tokyo, Malmö, Rome, Naples, Palermo, and Moscow. The Quartet also made numerous studio recordings for the All-Union Radio Fund as well as over 50 studio recordings issued in LP and CD format on labels including Melodiya, Olympia, Deutsche Grammophon, Ricordi, Mobile Fidelity, and Toshiba EMI.

NORTHERN FLOWERS NF98015  
5055354480119



Recorded in 1978 (Quartet No. 8), 1980 (Quartets Nos. 3 & 13), 1981 (Quartets Nos. 1, 4, 6 & 7), 1984 (Quartets Nos. 2, 5 & 11), 1985 (Two Pieces, Quartets Nos. 9, 10 & 12), and 1986 (Quartets Nos. 14 & 15) at Studio 5 of Moscow Radio Broadcasting House. Original producers and editors uncredited

Cover image: **Royston Ecroyd**, "Shostakovich"

Remastered for Northern Flowers by **Gene Gaudette**, Urlicht AudioVisual

Executive producer for Northern Flowers: **Christopher Todd Landor**

© 1994, Olympia Compact Discs Ltd.

Digital edition ©&© 2011, 2026, Musical Concepts. All rights reserved.

Released under license from Olympia Compact Discs Ltd.

No part of this sound recording and its component audio, text, or graphics files may be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, or shared electronically in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, file sharing, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

For permission requests, contact the publisher, using the subject line "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at [info@musicalconcepts.net](mailto:info@musicalconcepts.net).