

CHANDOS :: intro

CHAN 2027

an introduction to Dmitri Shostakovich





Classical music is inaccessible and difficult. It's surprising how many people still believe the above statement to be true, so this new series from Chandos is not only welcome, it's also very necessary.

I was lucky enough to stumble upon the wonderful world of the classics when I was a child, and I've often contemplated how much poorer my life would have been had I not done so. As you have taken the first step by buying this CD, I guarantee that you will share the delights of this epic journey of discovery. Each CD in the series features the orchestral music of a specific composer, with a selection of his 'greatest hits' played by top quality performers. It will give you a good flavour of the composer's style, but you won't find any nasty surprises – all the music is instantly accessible and appealing. The discs are beautifully presented, and very good value for money, too.

I sincerely hope this CD marks the start of your own lifelong passion for classical music.

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Classic FM presenter



Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

1	Festive Overture, Op. 96*	6:03
	Piano Concerto No. 2 in F major, Op. 102 [†]	18:15
2	I Allegro	6:55
3	II Andante –	6:01
4	III Allegro	5:18
5	Tea for Two (Taiti Trot), Op. 16* Vincent Youmans (1898–1946), orchestrated by Shostakovich	3:32
	Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47*	46:52
6	I Moderato – Allegro non troppo	16:22
7	II Allegretto	5:21
8	III Largo	14:20
9	IV Allegretto non troppo	10:47
	Total time	74:42

Dmitri Shostakovich piano[†]
 Scottish National Orchestra*
 Edwin Paling leader
 I Musici de Montréal[†]
 Yuli Turovsky artistic director
 Neeme Järvi*
 Maxim Shostakovich[†]

*festive overture*

The songful *Festive Overture* dates from 1947 and is 'socialist realism' at its extrovert best. First performed on 6 November 1954, it was written for the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Shostakovich said he wanted to 'convey the feelings of a man who has experienced the hardship of the war years' and 'the enthusiasm of peaceful labour at the construction projects of the new five-year plan'.

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piano concerto no. 2

When my sister and I were children still, our father, Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich, to encourage our interest in musical studies, would periodically make gifts to us of new piano pieces he had composed. As our skills developed, the pieces became more difficult. We were delighted to learn them and performed them at home for relatives and guests. Subsequently, these pieces were collected into special 'Children's Albums'. One of these pieces, 'The Birthday', written for my sister's birthday, then served as the principal theme of the celebrated *Festive Overture* by Shostakovich.

Later, when I was studying in Music School, father wrote for me much more complicated pieces such as 'Tarantella' and 'Concertino' for two pianos, which we played and recorded with him. But my dream as well as the dream of my beloved piano teacher, Elena Hoven, with whom I and then my son Dmitri studied from early childhood, was a big, serious piano concerto, which we kept soliciting from the composer.

Finally, our perseverance was rewarded and to our enormous joy the concerto was written. I was especially proud of the fact that father dedicated it to me. Its music is clear, demanding, intended for young performers, itself permeated by youthful audacity. The first

movement is energetic and bright. In contrast, the second movement is surprisingly pure, with a touch of sadness. An airy, hastening finale, wittily inlaid with fragments from Hanon's student exercises, completes this brilliant concerto.

Learning the score when it was still fresh, we often rehearsed on two pianos with father, we argued and I defended heatedly my youthful ideas. At last, on my birthday, 10 May 1957, the first performance of the concerto took place at Moscow Conservatory Hall. Thereafter, both father and I often performed this concerto, and father recorded it. I recall that in musical circles, where it was known that father wrote this concerto especially for me, it was jokingly noted: 'Have you heard that Shostakovich wrote a new concerto for Maxim and orchestra?'

Diverse circumstances soon drew me away from performing as a pianist. I became totally dedicated to conducting and never even recorded the concerto. Therefore it was especially joyous for me now to actualise the recording of the concerto by my father with my son Dmitri.

© Maxim Shostakovich

During a composing career of some fifty years, Dmitri Shostakovich worked in many different forms, from theatre and film scores to piano and chamber music, as well as producing the series of fifteen symphonies which furnished much of his reputation as the leading Soviet composer of his generation. Six works are concertos for solo instruments: two each for piano, violin and cello respectively. Shostakovich was himself an accomplished pianist, and gave the first performance in 1933 of his Piano Concerto No. 1 (the one with string orchestra and single trumpet), but his Second Piano Concerto, recorded here, was written primarily for another gifted pianist in the family: his son, Maxim.



Maxim Shostakovich was the soloist at the premiere performance in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, where he was then still a student, on 10 May 1957, which happened also to be his nineteenth birthday. Seldom has a birthday present had such wide public acclaim, for what the composer had hoped would capture the fancy of other young pianists, and of their contemporary listeners too, quickly became enjoyed by everybody, of whatever country or generation. It also embraced a whole new audience when it became the basis of Kenneth MacMillan's plotless ballet *Concerto*, first given at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin in 1966 before it joined the repertoire of The Royal Ballet and several other companies.

After a crisp orchestral introduction to the first movement, in F major, the pianist enters with a single strand of melody doubled in the two hands at the octave, stepping out in almost military style. It is contrasted with a softer, more rounded second theme in a sonata form structure that develops both these ideas with vivacity and increasingly richer texture, especially for the pianist. Later there is a solo cadenza derived from the previous ideas, which grows out of the development and leads back into the main themes again to end the movement.

Having been intended originally for youth orchestra players, the ensemble writing makes only moderate demands for much of the work, and the piano keeps the focus of interest in the next two movements, which are linked together. Against the prevailing C minor of the central *Andante*, begun by the strings alone with a song-like melody in the darker low register, the piano opposes a lyrical, reflective tune in C major, which sets up a poetic contrast of expressive character. Nevertheless, the major key prevails: the orchestra returns to it and this time the piano joins with it.

Again playing single octaves across two hands, the pianist reiterates the keynote of C from the middle movement to carry

it over into the finale, with an abrupt change of tempo to send the music forward with a jaunty exuberance. It is a rondo-type movement, but in a condensed form, and the dance-like first tune in a regular 2/4 metre alternates with another that contrives a diverting 'out-of-step' effect by being written in 7/8 time. Nor is the fun confined to this, for the passages leading into and out of these themes, perhaps by way of a family joke between father and son which other pianists will also appreciate, stem from a method of keyboard finger-exercises, which in no way diminishes the virtuoso brilliance of the concerto writing.

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tea for two

The musical *No, No, Nanette* by Vincent Youmans (1898–1946) dates from 1923, and was a hit in London and New York in 1925. Possibly the best-known tune from the show is the foxtrot 'Tea for Two'. The story is told that in 1928, having heard a record of the foxtrot, the conductor Nikolai Malko bet Shostakovich that he could not write his own orchestration of the tune from memory in an hour. Shostakovich won in forty-five minutes!

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symphony no. 5

The young Dmitri Shostakovich was very much the revolutionary who wanted his music to serve the socialist state. 'I am a Soviet composer, and I see our epoch as something heroic', he wrote, later adding, 'I consider that every artist who isolates himself from the world is doomed'. He came to maturity during that artistically fruitful



and highly active period in Russia immediately after the death of Lenin. A career as a concert pianist looked a strong possibility, for his graduation recital in 1923 was a sensation. But it was his First Symphony, written at the age of nineteen, while he was a pupil of Maximilian Steinberg at the Leningrad Conservatory, that gave him an international reputation. It was quickly taken up by Bruno Walter, Stokowski and Toscanini among others. Two further symphonies followed before the end of the twenties, both at first enormously popular in the USSR. The second, his *October* Symphony, written when Shostakovich was only twenty-one for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, was premiered simultaneously in four Russian cities. Such works exemplify his youthful revolutionary fervour, their technique coloured by his aptitude for writing for the popular media of the stage and the screen, into which Shostakovich put his considerable energies up to about the age of thirty-five. Works in the latter category include the opera *The Nose*, the ballets *The Age of Gold* and *The Bolt*, music for pioneering plays and films, and, at the age of twenty-seven, the opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.

However, that opera was to be the young composer's undoing, for in January 1936 Stalin attended a performance of it, and in a climate in which the dogma of 'socialist realism' was being quickly promulgated the opera was immediately condemned in an editorial in *Pravda*, as was Shostakovich's ballet *The Limpid Stream*. It was a time of danger for the composer, and he suppressed his Fourth Symphony after rehearsals had started (in December 1936) and responded with his Fifth, with its now well-known tag, 'A Soviet Artist's Reply to Just Criticism', to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution. In fact, the contrite words appear to have originated with an unknown journalist, but Shostakovich certainly used the phrase 'My Creative Answer' as the title of an article in *Vechernaya Moskva* in January 1938.

In the early 1930s Prokofiev had predicted that an emphasis on Socialist Realism and the regional music of the Soviet republics would result in a provincial art, and not the least achievement of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony at the time was that it appeared, uniquely, to have proved Prokofiev wrong. First performed in Leningrad on 21 November 1937, it was received with tremendous enthusiasm and combined a genuine popular success with apparent adoption of the party line rejecting 'the fetters of formalism'. Shostakovich's friend the cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich has suggested that it was only the forty-minute ovation that greeted the first performance which saved Shostakovich from the fate that befell his mentor, the celebrated producer Meyerhold, who disappeared.

The symphony was repeated in Moscow in January 1938 and then was heard abroad, first from a broadcast in New York in April 1938, subsequently at a concert in Paris in June and then at concerts in the USA and elsewhere. It was first heard in the UK in November 1939, on a technically rather poor Soviet film, and was first performed in London at Queen's Hall on 13 April 1940, conducted by the composer Alan Bush. By then it had been both published and recorded (by Stokowski on 20 April 1939).

How should we see Shostakovich's Fifth? Before its first performance in Moscow, the composer was quoted as defining it as a 'lyric-heroic symphony':

Its main idea is man's emotional experiences and all-conquering optimism. I wanted to show how, overcoming a series of tragic conflicts arising in the intense struggle which rages in one's soul, optimism is born as a world-outlook.

He went on to admit that the symphony was, to a certain extent, autobiographical, adding, 'any work of art contains autobiographical traits', and on another occasion going on to say, 'the theme of my symphony is the making of a man'.



Since his death it has become clear that Shostakovich put into his music sentiments that in any other art would have resulted in direct opposition of the Soviet State. Even about the apparently optimistic Fifth Symphony Solomon Volkov quotes the composer as saying,

The rejoicing is forced, created under a threat. It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, 'Your business is rejoicing'.

Shostakovich only needs the strings in octaves for the dramatic opening of the first movement, and, in fact, the first group of themes is presented and developed largely on the strings. The atmosphere changes as throbbing string chords, coloured by harp, introduce the second subject, a soaring idea on the first violins, followed by a subsidiary one first heard on the flute. The throbbing strings return: we have completed the exposition without recourse to the heavy brass or percussion. So the sudden change of mood that signals the start of the development really makes us sit up. The orchestral piano at the lowest end of its compass together with the pizzicato cellos and basses set up a driving figure (the first three notes from the third statement of the second subject idea) which, with growling low horns, leads us to a succession of passages in which the insistent repetition of motifs creates a tremendous drive. A grotesque march (*poco sostenuto*) presages the climax which culminates with the return of the opening dramatic gesture, now on the whole orchestra and forming an endlessly renewing texture against which the brass thunder their ascendancy. The movement ends quietly as the second subject returns, and the close comes with the strings now muted, the solo violin soaring softly above.

The second movement acts as a scherzo with trio, in a waltz-like folk rhythm suggesting a *Ländler*. As might be expected from this, the first entry of the woodwind certainly brings Mahler to mind, and the gentle humour comes with darker overtones, particularly in the strangle still waltz for violin and harp that comprises the trio.

The third movement (originally headed *Adagio*) particularly pleased its composer: 'I have succeeded in presenting a slow and unswerving motion from beginning to end', he wrote, and in many ways it is the centre of the whole work. The brass are omitted and, unusually, the strings are divided into eight parts (three violins, two violas, two cellos and double-basses), giving a glowing, spacious effect.

The first movement had been launched in D minor, the scherzo in A minor, the slow movement in F sharp minor, and now in the finale we return to the opening key, ultimately to brighten, at the very end, to the major. The finale's self-important opening over pulsing timpani, a vigorous marching idea, will recur at intervals throughout the movement. Later comes a folk-inflected tune reminiscent of Tchaikovsky and, in the slower section, a fragment from the first movement, which is further developed.

The apparently triumphal closing passage is dominated by its high As on the whole orchestra, repeated no fewer than 252 times, the theme in the brass. 'The end is irreparable tragedy', says Rostropovich of this passage:

Stretched on the wrack of the inquisition the victim still tries to smile in his pain – anybody who thinks the finale is glorification is an idiot.

Quite what Shostakovich may have intended, aged thirty-one, and what he may have remembered thirty-five hard years later, and what after his death, fifteen years later again, his friends may read into it, needs to be carefully considered. All commentators doubtless have shafts of light to throw on this masterpiece, but it is worth remembering Stephen Johnson's identification of a brief crotchet theme on strings and harp just before the coda, which also appears in the *Four Romances on Texts by Pushkin*, accompanying the words:

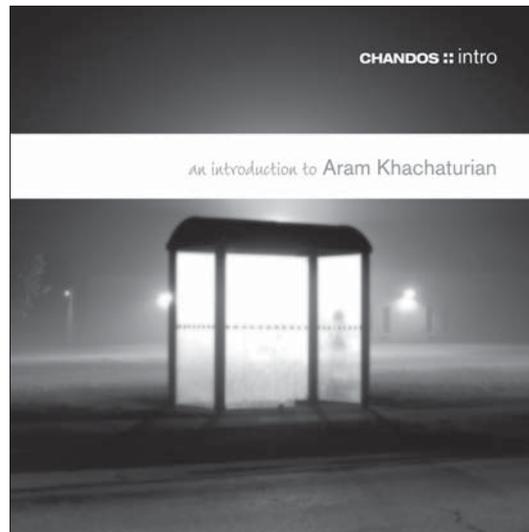
...and confusion passes away from my tormented soul as visions appear of a brighter day.



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Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Dmitri Shostakovich, among the greatest of twentieth-century composers, is notable as one of the most powerful symphonists of all time. His music communicates boldly and directly and can be in turn thrillingly energetic or deeply moving. The Fifth Symphony is his most popular, bearing all his most striking features, not least his memorable tunes, while the 'Festive Overture' is exhilarating in its sheer concentration of enjoyable ideas.

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Total time 74:42

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