



Dmitri Shostakovich

Festive Overture

Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich (25 September 1906 – 9 August 1975) was a Russian pianist and composer of the Soviet period. He is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century. Shostakovich achieved fame in the Soviet Union under the patronage of Soviet chief of staff Mikhail Tukhachevsky, but later had a complex and difficult relationship with the government. Nevertheless, he received accolades and state awards and served in the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (1947–1962) and the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union (from 1962 until his death). A polystylist, Shostakovich developed a hybrid voice, combining a variety of different musical techniques into his works. His music is characterized by sharp contrasts, elements of the grotesque, and ambivalent tonality; the composer was also heavily influenced by the neo-classical style pioneered by Igor Stravinsky, and (especially in his symphonies) by the post-Romanticism associated with Gustav Mahler. Shostakovich's orchestral works include 15 symphonies and six concerti. His chamber output includes 15 string quartets, a piano quintet, two piano trios, and two pieces for string octet. His solo piano works include two sonatas, an early set of preludes, and a later set of 24 preludes and fugues. Other works include three operas, several song cycles, ballets, and a substantial quantity of film music; especially well known is *The Second Waltz*, *Op. 99*, music to the film *The First Echelon* (1955–1956), as well as the suites of music composed for *The Gadfly*.

The **Festive Overture in A major, Op. 96**, was written by Dmitri Shostakovich and premiered in 1954 at a concert held at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow to commemorate the 37th anniversary of the October Revolution (which took place in 1917) The Bolshoi's conductor, Vassili Nebolsin, found himself without a suitable new work to open the concert, and contacted Shostakovich just days before. The composer set to work on the overture with great speed, completing it in three days. He apparently based it on Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmilla* overture (1842), and it features the same lively tempo and style of melody. Whilst the style reflects Shostakovich, the piece as a whole uses very conventional classical devices of form and harmony. The overture begins with a fanfare in the brass, followed by a fast melody in the winds. The strings take up this melody and the piece reaches a climax with a four-note motif. Suddenly, the music reaches a more lyrical melody in the horns and cellos, although the tempo remains the same. Shostakovich develops this material in his typical style, using both themes in counterpoint, before the fanfare returns and leads to a rousing coda. The work is a standard piece of the orchestral repertoire. A transcription for concert band was prepared by Donald Hunsberger, and is played by many bands all over the world. The overture featured in the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow and the 2009 Nobel Prize concert.