



# SHOSTAKOVICH

## *Symphony No. 9*

**Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich** (25 September 1906 – 9 August 1975) was a Soviet Russian composer and pianist and a prominent figure of 20th-century music. Shostakovich achieved fame in the Soviet Union, but later had a complex and difficult relationship with the government. After an early period influenced by Sergei Prokofiev and Igor Stravinsky, Shostakovich developed a hybrid style, including the neo-classical style (showing the influence of Stravinsky) and post-Romanticism (after Gustav Mahler). Sharp contrasts and elements of the grotesque characterize much of his music. His works are mostly tonal but feature elements of chromaticism, putting him at odds with the more experimental Western composers (such as Schoenberg or Stravinsky). Shostakovich was admitted into the Petrograd Conservatory (Saint Petersburg Conservatory), where he made his first major achievement in the form of the First Symphony, written as his graduation piece. Although he quickly established himself as a leading composer in the Soviet Union, he fell short of the Party's expectations and in 1936 was denounced as "coarse, primitive and vulgar". Shostakovich managed to regain official favour with his Fifth Symphony (written to correct his previous "erroneous" ways), and throughout the Second World War was able to escape censure. He was denounced a second time in 1948, along with his colleague Sergei Prokofiev. Unlike Prokofiev however, Shostakovich lived to see his name rehabilitated and he served as General Secretary of the Composers' Union. Although he continued to be cautious, he was honoured in the post-Stalin era and was able to be more experimental than before. Shostakovich died in 1975 of lung cancer; although his style was not as influential in the West, he influenced his contemporaries and students within the Soviet Union.

The **Ninth Symphony** was originally intended to be a celebration of the Russian victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. Shostakovich declared that the symphony would be a large composition for orchestra, soloists and chorus "about the greatness of the Russian people, about our Red Army liberating our native land from the enemy". But after Shostakovich had dropped the composition for three months, the symphony turned out to be a completely different work from the one he had originally planned, with neither soloists nor chorus and a much lighter mood. He forewarned listeners, "In character, the Ninth Symphony differs sharply from my preceding symphonies, the Seventh and the Eighth." Originally received favourably, the Ninth Symphony was denounced both in the Soviet Union and in the West for its perceived ideological weakness: Soviet critics said that it failed to "reflect the true spirit of the people of the Soviet Union", and Western critics derided it by saying "The Russian composer should not have expressed his feelings about the defeat of Nazism in such a childish manner." It was banned during Shostakovich's second denunciation, but was reinstated, performed and broadcasted when Shostakovich was rehabilitated.