



Dimitri SHOSTAKOVICH

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F major, Op. 102

Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich (25 September 1906 – 9 August 1975) was a Russian composer and pianist. 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) 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 by the late Romanticism of 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*.

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F major, Op. 102, by Dmitri Shostakovich was composed in 1957 for his son Maxim's 19th birthday. Maxim premiered the piece during his graduation at the Moscow Conservatory. It is an uncharacteristically cheerful piece, much more so than most of Shostakovich's works.

The elegant, almost puckish first movement begins with just the winds. The piano enters lightly and unassumingly, giving the beginning of the concerto an air of chamber music. The scoring is lean and rather athletic, allowing the melodic lines (often containing very surprising twists, reminiscent of Prokofiev) to take precedence. The piano part contains much of the melodic material, often doubled at the octave in both hands. This is certainly not a heavy-handed, thickly Romantic texture.

The central movement is a lyrical slow movement that relies heavily on the string section. Beginning with a gorgeous string chorale that lasts nearly a quarter of the movement, the piano's entrance is a moment of startling beauty. The piano is given center stage, often unaccompanied or aided with only a pedal note. This bittersweet music, which moves from minor to major and back again, is a perfect contrast to the happily churning outer movements, and it gives the work a beautiful dramatic center.

There is no pause between the second and third movements; the piano ushers the piece into the dance-like finale abruptly and surprisingly. Shostakovich makes heavy use of the asymmetrical meter 7/8, which propels the piece forward in a delightfully off-kilter manner. This music is reminiscent of the frenetic, richly-wrought dance music in many of Shostakovich's other pieces. There is also an inside joke encoded in this last movement that only pianists will appreciate. Some of the scalar material is very similar to the feared (and often loathed) Hanon piano exercises with which pianists are very familiar.