



Dimitri SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 15 in A major, Op. 141

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*.

The *Symphony No. 15 in A major, Op. 141*, Dmitri Shostakovich's last, was written in a little over a month during the summer of 1971 in Repino, outside St. Petersburg. Shostakovich originally subtitled the first movement "The Toyshop", referring to a superficial sense of childlike innocence and naiveté which is soon corrupted. It opens with two chimes on the glockenspiel and a lengthy passage for the solo flute, growing out of a quirky five-note motif, E -A -C-B-A, spell out the name "SASCHA", the name of his grandson who was nine years old at the time.

The second movement opens with an eerie chorale for the brass alone. A sense of pathos is achieved by the despairing rises and falls in the dynamics, and the solo cello plays a languorous and meandering lament. Low register flutes play a simple motif which is eventually taken over and expanded upon by the solo trombone. A side-drum roll brings the entire brass section to a fortissimo statement of the initial flute theme, and a crashing chorale for brass, timpani, bassoons and double basses sound against an impassioned chromatic melody for strings and high woodwinds to create a colossal, distorted, organ-like effect.

The third movement begins with parallel fifths in the bassoons that eventually settle on a G and D double pedal, against which the woodwind section is showcased through an agitated clarinet melody built on the diminished chord, chromatic flourishes for flutes and piccolo, low clarinet murmurings, and two oboes in canon in sevenths. This is imitated by the string section. The movement ends with a cold percussive ticking that foreshadows the close of the finale, as well as a rising fourth in the piccolo, xylophone and pizzicato second violins that ends the movement firmly in G minor.

The final movement is notable for many things, among them its eerie coda on a sustained pedal point in the strings supporting an astonishing percussion toccata featuring castanets, snare drum, wood block, xylophone, and triangle. This recalls the final moments of the scherzo from the *Fourth Symphony*, as well as those of a much later and similarly morbid work, the *Second Cello Concerto*.