



# Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH

## *Symphony No. 4 in C minor, Op. 43*

**Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich** (25 September [O.S. 12 September] 1906 – 9 August 1975) was a Soviet-era Russian composer and pianist. He is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century and one of its most popular composers. Shostakovich achieved fame in the Soviet Union under the patronage of the Soviet chief of staff Mikhail Tukhachevsky, but later had a complex relationship with the government, from which he earned state awards and privileges. Throughout his life he participated in bureaucratic functions and delegations, including serving in the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (1947) and the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union (from 1962 until his death). Shostakovich combined a variety of different musical techniques into his works. His music is characterized by sharp contrasts, elements of the grotesque, and ambivalent tonality; he was also heavily influenced by the neoclassical style pioneered by Igor Stravinsky, and (especially in his symphonies) 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 24 preludes, and a later set of 24 preludes and fugues. Other works include three operas, three ballets, several song cycles, and a substantial quantity of music for theatre and film. Of the latter genre, the waltz from *The First Echelon* (in an alternate arrangement as the "Waltz No. 2" for the *Suite for Variety Orchestra*), the suite of music extracted from *The Gadfly*, and the theme from the *Counterplan* are especially well known.

Shostakovich composed his **Symphony No. 4 in C minor, Op. 43**, between September 1935 and May 1936, after abandoning some preliminary sketch material. In January 1936, halfway through this period, *Pravda*—under direct orders from Joseph Stalin—published an editorial "Muddle Instead of Music" that denounced the composer and targeted his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. Despite this attack and the political climate of the time, Shostakovich completed the symphony and planned its premiere for December 1936 in Leningrad. After rehearsals began, the orchestra's management cancelled the performance, offering a statement that Shostakovich had withdrawn the work. He may have agreed to withdraw it to relieve orchestra officials of responsibility. The symphony was premiered on 30 December 1961 by the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra led by Kirill Kondrashin.

Shostakovich began the Fourth Symphony in September 1935. His second and third symphonies, completed in 1927 and 1929, had been patriotic works with choral finales, but the new score was different. Toward the end of 1935 he told an interviewer, "I am not afraid of difficulties. It is perhaps easier, and certainly safer, to follow a beaten path, but it is also dull, uninteresting and futile." Shostakovich abandoned sketches for the symphony some months earlier and began anew. On 28 January 1936, when he was about halfway through work on the symphony, *Pravda* printed an unsigned editorial entitled "Muddle Instead of Music", which singled out his internationally successful opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* for condemnation. The fact that the editorial was unsigned indicated that it represented the official Party position. Rumors circulated for a long time that Stalin had directly ordered this attack after he attended a performance of the opera and stormed out after the first act. *Pravda* published two more articles in the same vein in the next two and a half weeks. On 3 February, "Ballet Falsehood" assailed his ballet *The Limpid Stream*, and "Clear and Simple Language in Art" appeared on 13 February. Although this last article was technically an editorial attacking Shostakovich for "formalism", it appeared in the "Press Review" section. Stalin, under cover of the Central Committee, may have singled out Shostakovich because the plot and music of *Lady Macbeth* infuriated him, the opera contradicted Stalin's intended social and cultural direction for the nation at that period, or he resented the recognition Shostakovich was receiving both in the Soviet Union and in the West. Despite these criticisms, Shostakovich continued work on the symphony—though he simultaneously refused to allow a concert performance of the last act of *Lady Macbeth*. He explained to a friend, "The audience, of course, will applaud—it's considered bon ton to be in the opposition, and then there'll be another article with a headline like 'Incorrigible Formalist.'" Once he completed the score, Shostakovich was apparently uncertain how to proceed. His new symphony did not emulate the style of Nikolai Myaskovsky's socialist realist Sixteenth Symphony, *The Aviators*, or Vissarion Shebalin's song-symphony *The Heroes of Perekop*. Showing the new symphony to friends did not help. One asked what Shostakovich thought the reaction from *Pravda* would be. Shostakovich replied, "I don't write for *Pravda*, but for myself." Despite the increasingly repressive political atmosphere, Shostakovich continued to plan for the symphony's premiere, scheduled by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra for 11 December 1936 under the orchestra's music director, Fritz Stiedry. The composer also played the score on piano for Otto Klemperer, who responded enthusiastically and planned to conduct the symphony's first performance outside the USSR.