



DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 8 in C-Minor

Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich was a Soviet-era Russian composer and pianist who became internationally known after the premiere of his First Symphony in 1926 and was regarded throughout his life as a major composer. Shostakovich achieved early fame in the Soviet Union, but had a complex relationship with its government. His 1934 opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was initially a success, but eventually was condemned by the Soviet government, putting his career at risk. In 1948 his work was denounced under the Zhdanov Doctrine, with professional consequences lasting several years. Even after his censure was rescinded in 1956, performances of his music were occasionally subject to state interventions, as with his Thirteenth Symphony (1962). Shostakovich was a member of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (1947) and the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union (from 1962 until his death), as well as chairman of the RSFSR Union of Composers (1960–1968). Over the course of his career, he earned several important awards, including the Order of Lenin, from the Soviet government. Shostakovich combined a variety of different musical techniques in his works. His music is characterized by sharp contrasts, elements of the grotesque, and ambivalent tonality; he was also heavily influenced by neoclassicism and by the late Romanticism of Gustav Mahler. His orchestral works include 15 symphonies and six concerti (two each for piano, violin, and cello). His chamber works include 15 string quartets, a piano quintet, and two piano trios. His solo piano works include two sonatas, an early set of 24 preludes, and a later set of 24 preludes and fugues. Stage works include three completed operas and three ballets. Shostakovich also wrote several song cycles, and a substantial quantity of music for theatre and film. Shostakovich's reputation has continued to grow after his death. Scholarly interest has increased significantly since the late 20th century, including considerable debate about the relationship between his music and his attitudes toward the Soviet government. Shostakovich's music shows the influence of many of the composers he most admired: Bach in his fugues and passacaglias; Beethoven in the late quartets; Mahler in the symphonies; and Berg in his use of musical codes and quotations. Among Russian composers, he particularly admired Modest Mussorgsky, whose operas *Boris Godunov* and *Khovanshchina* he reorchestrated; Mussorgsky's influence is most prominent in the wintry scenes of *Lady Macbeth* and the Eleventh Symphony, as well as in satirical works such as "Rayok".^[121] Prokofiev's influence is most apparent in the earlier piano works, such as the first sonata and first concerto.^[122] The influence of Russian church and folk music is evident in his works for unaccompanied choir of the 1950s.

The **Symphony No. 8** in C minor, Op. 65, by Dmitri Shostakovich was written in the summer of 1943, and first performed on 4 November of that year by the USSR Symphony Orchestra under Yevgeny Mravinsky, to whom the work is dedicated. It briefly was nicknamed the "Stalingrad Symphony" following the first performance outside the Soviet Union in 1944. Music critics have ranked it among the composer's finest scores. David Haas has argued that the work falls within the tradition of other C minor "tragedy to triumph" symphonies, such as Beethoven's Fifth, Brahms' First, Bruckner's Eighth, and Mahler's Second, there is considerable disagreement over the level of optimism present in the final pages. Shostakovich's friend Isaac Glikman called this symphony "his most tragic work". The work, like many of his symphonies, breaks some of the standard conventions of symphonic form and structure. Shostakovich clearly references themes, rhythms and harmonies from his previous symphonies, most notably Symphony No. 5 and Symphony No. 7. The symphony is scored for a large orchestra which consists of 4 flutes (3rd and 4th doubling piccolos), 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 B-flat clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, tambourine, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, xylophone, tamtam, and strings. It was indeed not well received, although reviews were tepid rather than scathing. The bleak tone, and in particular the lack of an optimistic conclusion, made it unsuitable as propaganda at home or abroad. Shostakovich's friend Ivan Sollertinsky noted that, "the music is significantly tougher and more astringent than the Fifth or the Seventh and for that reason is unlikely to become popular". The symphony was criticized by Sergei Prokofiev and others at a Composers' Plenum in March 1944, and after the Zhdanov decree of 1948 it was effectively banned until eight years later. The symphony was rehabilitated in October 1956, in a performance by the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Samuil Samosud. It was introduced to the western hemisphere during World War II by CBS correspondent Bill Downs, who returned from the Moscow bureau to the United States with the score.