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**Shostakovich's Cello Sonata: Its Genesis Related to Socialist Realism**

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**Shostakovich's Cello Sonata: Its Genesis Related to Socialist Realism**

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**Treatise**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2005

*For Dorothy Freed, 1919-2000*

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to my academic supervisor, Professor Elliott Antokoletz, for his time, energy and wisdom; it has been a privilege to be his student. I am also grateful to my co-supervisor, Professor Phyllis Young, for her support and mentoring. Thank you to my other committee members, Dr James Buhler, Dr Eugene Gratovich, Dr David Neubert, and Professor Ward Cheney, for their time and effort.

I am indebted to Samuel Pluta and the staff in the University of Texas Music Microcomputer Lab for their assistance in the production of this treatise.

I also thank G. Schirmer, Inc. and Associated Music Publishers, Inc., for their kind permission to quote from copyrighted material.

I am enormously grateful to Fulbright New Zealand, the PEO Sisterhood and the New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women for their generous grants, without which I could not have undertaken a doctoral degree.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Gillian Bibby and Roger Wilson, my brother, Charles Wilson, and my dear friends Janelle Ragno, Andrew Luchkow, Colin Ferguson, Laura Holle, Andrew Strietelmeier, and Kathryn Metz, for their love, support and encouragement while I was writing this treatise.

## Shostakovich's Cello Sonata: Its Genesis Related to Socialist Realism

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2005

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Dmitri Shostakovich wrote his Cello Sonata in 1934, a crucial date regarding developments in Soviet cultural history, Shostakovich's compositional style, and his personal life. Stalin's government had begun to promote the artistic doctrine of Socialist Realism, which, in typically vague bureaucratic language, called for accessible musical styles that resonated with everyday experiences of Soviet citizens. In response to official demands, Shostakovich had started to experiment with a new simplicity which would not, however, regress into unoriginal, old-fashioned styles.

At the same time, Shostakovich was attracting international fame with his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which enjoyed a certain *succès de scandale* in Russia and the West because of its shocking subject matter and explicit musical depiction of adultery. This success was abruptly curtailed, however, after the publication in 1936 of a notorious article in the national journal *Pravda*, whose anonymous author, rumored to be Stalin or a close associate, denounced *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* as "chaos instead of music." This article had a devastating effect on Shostakovich's livelihood. His compositions were quietly removed from concert programs, most of his

friends were too afraid to defend him, and his promising career as an opera composer was over.

While Stalin's officials harshly criticized almost all Shostakovich's compositions from the mid-1930s, the Cello Sonata was, interestingly, never suppressed. This treatise will investigate why. Was it because chamber music, having no plot or text, is less scandalous than opera? Or did the Cello Sonata contain some evidence of the elusive principles of Socialist Realism?

This treatise has four chapters. The first two will introduce the historical and cultural situation in Russia in the 1930s, detailing the problematic challenges Soviet composers faced in trying to incorporate Socialist Realist requirements into their music. The third chapter presents an analytical overview of the four movements of the Cello Sonata, discussing their form and stylistic features in relation to Socialist Realism. The final chapter addresses whether the Cello Sonata is truly representative of Socialist Realist philosophy, and why, during the cultural purges of Stalin's Terror, the Cello Sonata never attracted negative official comment.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

This treatise will explore the social and political background of Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich's Cello Sonata opus 40, written in 1934, the same year as the première of his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. Unlike several of Shostakovich's other compositions from the middle of the 1930s, the Cello Sonata never provoked negative criticism from Stalin's cultural authorities, even when an anonymous critic from *Pravda* published an article called "Chaos Instead of Music" in January 1936, attacking *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* as anathema to Soviet musical ideals. This devastating incident stifled Shostakovich's promising career as an opera composer, and was the probable reason that he spent the rest of his life composing in mostly symphonic and chamber genres. His reputation and livelihood were drastically damaged, and few of his colleagues could defend him, for fear that it would cost them their lives during this time of Stalinist purges that came to be known as the Terror.

Shostakovich finished the Cello Sonata at the same time as the first revision of the official doctrine of Socialist Realism, but only obeyed a few of the ideological principles, such as simplicity of structure and elements of folk music, while ignoring the demand for programmatic rather than abstract instrumental music. This study will relate the developments and consequences of Socialist Realism to the Cello Sonata and other compositions by Shostakovich from around this time, addressing the question of how it escaped official censure at a time when most of his other major works did not.

1934 was an eventful year for Shostakovich. On January 22, the première of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1932), which he dedicated to his wife Nina Vasilyevna

Varzar, took place in the Maliy Opera Theater, Leningrad. Two days later, it was performed in Moscow. Audiences and Shostakovich's colleagues welcomed it enthusiastically as a milestone in Soviet opera, praising the depth of Shostakovich's musical language and the brilliance of his orchestration.<sup>1</sup> In late May, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* featured importantly in an international music festival in Leningrad, where Shostakovich became infatuated with Yelena Konstantinovskaya, a young interpreter. In mid-August, after discovering their affair, Nina Varzar left him. At around the same time, he began the Cello Sonata. The first performance was on December 25, 1934.

It was not, of course, as sensational an event as the première of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*: chamber music has no text, spectacular costumes, or outrageous plots. The cellist and dedicatee, Viktor Kubatsky, was not one of the Soviet Union's best cellists, and according to Shostakovich's friend, the cellist Arnold Ferkelman, the audience was not enthusiastic about the work or the performance. "I have to say that when the sonata was first performed," Ferkelman recalled many years later in an interview with Elizabeth Wilson, "it got a hostile reception. People didn't understand it and were somewhat disappointed."<sup>2</sup> The structural approach in the Sonata is certainly simpler and easier to follow than that in *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* in terms of format and thematic plan, but the musical language is more similar to polymodal developments in contemporary European music than to traditionally functional diatonicism. The first movement has a sonata-allegro structure. The second incorporates some quasi-folk music, and functions like the scherzo and trio movement in a Classical

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<sup>1</sup> Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 75-77.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), 104.

sonata. The slow third movement has a modified theme and variations form, and the fourth returns to a folk-like style. The Sonata did not achieve instant fame, but slowly developed a steady following, and eventually became part of the standard cello repertoire during Shostakovich's lifetime.

Modern critical opinion is divided concerning this composition, Shostakovich's first large-scale chamber work. Boris Schwarz, author of *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, the standard English-language work on that subject, calls the Sonata "traditional" and "euphonious."<sup>3</sup> Laurel Fay, author of the best critical biography of Shostakovich, describes it as "a work of classical dimensions that scarcely hints at the turmoil in his personal life."<sup>4</sup> David Fanning, author of the Shostakovich entry in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* writes that "It would not be difficult to find echoes of his stormy love-life in the alternately troubled and amorous first movement, while the intense climax to the elegiac slow movement seems to reach out compassionately towards the suffering around him."<sup>5</sup> (What is this suffering? Given that Shostakovich composed the Sonata a year and a half before he first incurred serious criticism from Stalin's government, Fanning presumably means the emotional turmoil of Shostakovich's broken marriage.) A common journalistic view of the Sonata, evidenced in countless concert program notes and compact disc booklets, holds that the Cello Sonata is "romantic," a characteristic that would have been acceptable to Socialist Realist ideologues, compared with the more modernistic works Shostakovich composed in the

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<sup>3</sup> Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972, 1983), 120.

<sup>4</sup> Fay, 80.

<sup>5</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Shostakovich, Dmitry" (by David Fanning), <http://www.grovemusic.com> (accessed October 1, 2004).

1920s. By contrast, few present-day scholars have written substantively on the composition.

When Shostakovich wrote the Sonata, Socialist Realism was still a relatively new Soviet ideology. Following the establishment of single unions for each of the creative arts in 1932, the Communist Party instructed musicians in the Union of Soviet Composers to write music adhering to Socialist Realist principles. This concept had roots in the Marxist literature of writers such as Maxim Gorky, but was slower to develop in music, where it was still little more than a vague theory in 1934. Malcolm Hamrick Brown quotes the *Entsiklopedicheski Muzykal'nyi Slovar*, the main musical reference dictionary in Soviet Russia, to show how inadequate the official definition was for the practical act of composing music:

Socialist Realism is a doctrine of artistic creation founded on the truthful, historically valid representation of reality in its revolutionary development... Socialist Realism combines a feeling for contemporary reality with a leap of the imagination into the future.<sup>6</sup>

It was hard to understand exactly how to project this into musical notes. It was known, however, that proponents of the philosophy advocated a simple musical language, which in the case of vocal and programmatic music would depict everyday Soviet life in an optimistic, heroic light, perhaps incorporating folk music from one of the Soviet republics. The result was supposed to be instantly attractive, comprehensible, and

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<sup>6</sup> Malcolm H. Brown, "The Soviet Russian Concepts of 'Intonazia' and 'Musical Imagery,'" *Musical Quarterly* 60/4, October 1974), 567.

resonant with the life experiences of musically uneducated Soviet workers. Shostakovich initially supported the foundation of the Union of Soviet Composers, and made efforts between 1934 and 1935 to find a new, simpler musical language that was nevertheless expressive and original. Influenced by Gorky's articles on the "purity of language," he distanced himself from his earlier "striving for originality at any cost."<sup>7</sup> He was careful to point out, however, that music should be simple, not simplistic. "Sometimes the struggle for a simple language is understood somewhat superficially," he wrote in the Soviet journal *Izvestiya*.

Often "simplicity" turns into epigonism. But to speak simply doesn't mean one should speak as they spoke fifty to a hundred years ago. This is a trap many composers fall into, afraid of accusations of formalism.<sup>8</sup> Both formalism and epigonism are the worst enemies of Soviet musical culture.<sup>9</sup>

This search for a simpler style is a significant departure from Shostakovich's achievement in the complicated, polystylistic *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. A political and social view of the opera may provide a useful perspective for what was acceptable and what was unacceptable in Stalin's Soviet Union in the late 1930s, in terms of subject matter, style, and musical language. Interestingly, Shostakovich did seem to have some intention of composing an opera that would reflect Soviet ideals. "I want to write a Soviet *Ring of the Nibelungs*," he wrote.

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<sup>7</sup> Fay, 80-81.

<sup>8</sup> Music was considered to be Formalist if it was abstract rather than programmatic, or very complicated. The term will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Dmitri Shostakovich, "Moy tvorcheskiy put," *Izvestiya*, 3 April 1935, 4. Quoted in Fay, 81.

It will be an operatic tetralogy about women, in which *Lady Macbeth* will take the place of *The Rhinegold*. The driving image of the next opera will be a heroine of the People's Will movement. Next, a woman of our century. And finally, I will portray our Soviet heroine, embracing collected features of women from the present and the future, from Larisa Reysner [a Bolshevik commissar] to Zhenya Romanko, the best female concrete worker on the Dneprostroy Dam project.<sup>10</sup>

His first searches for a libretto disappointed him. The stereotyped characters in popular Socialist Realist fiction did not interest him, and neither did the idea of writing an opera about events in Soviet history. "One shouldn't write an opera 'in general' about socialist construction," he wrote, "one should write about living people." He found the heroes of modern Soviet libretti

anemic, impotent...[inspiring] neither sympathy nor hate; they are mechanical. That is why I turned to the classics (Gogol, Leskov). [The libretto for Shostakovich's first opera, *The Nose*, is an adaptation of a Gogol story.] Their heroes make it possible to laugh uproariously and to cry bitter tears.<sup>11</sup>

Shostakovich would have cause three years later to shed many bitter tears over *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. He could not have imagined at the time of writing this article (1933) that it would be the last opera he completed.

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<sup>10</sup> L. and P. Tur, "Sovremennik budushchego," *Vechernyaya krasnaya gazeta*, February 10, 1934, 3, quoted in Fay, 78.

<sup>11</sup> Dmitri Shostakovich, "Plakat' I smeyat'sya," *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, March 3, 1933, 3, quoted in Fay, 67.

Shostakovich and Alexander Preys derived their libretto from a well-known story by Nikolai Leskov, which was originally published in 1864. Leskov's anti-heroine, Katerina Lvovna Izmailova, is the bored young wife of a merchant, who dislikes her unexciting, provincial life. Longing for a passionate, amorous relationship, she begins an affair with Sergei, a callous but attractive employee of her husband. Her obsessive love for Sergei leads her, with his collaboration, to murder her father-in-law, her husband, and her husband's nephew, who stands to inherit the family property. Eventually, the police arrest the lovers and exile them to Siberia. When Sergei rejects her for Sonyetka, another convict, Katerina commits suicide and a fourth murder by drowning herself and her rival.

Leskov's Katerina attracts more horror than sympathy in this disturbing story, which unfolds in the detached monotone of a court transcript. Shostakovich, however, seems to have tried to combine her with another Katerina, the heroine of Alexander Ostrovsky's *The Storm*.<sup>12</sup> Ostrovsky's Katya (diminutive of Katerina) is a pitiable character, whose adultery and suicide seem understandable rather than meretricious because of her sympathetic, humane personality. Shostakovich's Katerina is intelligent but illiterate, passionate but lonely for a loving partner. Shostakovich and Preys made several alterations to Leskov's story in order to make Katerina's actions seem less monstrous. The main change was to eliminate the murder of her husband's nephew, because they realized that infanticide would destroy the audience's sympathy for her. As Richard Taruskin has pointed out, however, Katerina still does not come across as a completely innocent victim of her environment.<sup>13</sup> To appeal for compassionate understanding, therefore, Shostakovich made his Katerina the only rounded, "human"

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<sup>12</sup> Marina Tcherkashina, "Gogol and Leskov in Shostakovich's Interpretation," *International Journal of Musicology* I, 1992, 239-240.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Taruskin, "The Opera and the Dictator," *The New Republic*, March 20, 1989, 37.



character in the entire opera. He portrayed her father-in-law as crude and lecherous, and her husband weak and brutishly insensitive. Sergei and Sonyetka are two-dimensionally reckless and brash, and the foolish priest, the corrupt police, the drunken wedding guests and the mocking convicts are mere caricatures. While Shostakovich mocks Sergei's protestations of "fine feelings" with the music of grotesquely parodied popular songs, Katerina's music is without exception lyrical and serious.

The shocking bloodiness of the plot was one reason *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* attracted a *succès de scandale* with Soviet and Western audiences. Another was the violent, voyeuristic way Shostakovich depicted the erotic elements of the story. In Scene Three, Katerina sings an aria expressing her loneliness and frustration ("Zerebyónok k kobýlke torópitsa"), when Sergei interrupts her on the pretext of borrowing a book. He propositions Katerina, then rapes her to a savage orchestral accompaniment, which ends in suggestive descending trombone *glissandi*. Even more than the rape or the gruesome murders, these *glissandi* were very shocking to audiences of 1934, leading one American critic to coin the word "pornophony."<sup>14</sup>

Although Shostakovich had intended *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* as the first of a projected series of operas glorifying Soviet women, although he never wrote the others after the calamity of Stalin's Terror. It is important to remember that in 1934, the general understanding of Socialist Realism was so slight that many applauded *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* as the epitome of a Socialist Realist composition.<sup>15</sup> Some aspects of the drama could be construed as pro-Soviet, such as the negative depiction of pre-Revolutionary Russia, where the sordid boredom of merchant life stifles

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<sup>14</sup> Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans and Erica Pomerans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 301.

<sup>15</sup> Gerald Abraham, *Eight Soviet Composers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 10.

the positive qualities of a passionate individual, leading her into adultery, murders, and finally suicide. But there was no happy ending, no optimistic Soviet future to counterbalance this depressing story. Furthermore, Shostakovich's satirical depiction of the incompetent, unscrupulous police department might have seemed suspicious to a political system that relied on the notoriously corrupt People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (better known in the West as the NKVD, later renamed KGB) for law enforcement. Despite Shostakovich's attempts to portray Katerina as a decent human being, rather than the Lady Macbeth of Shakespeare's play, the archetypal female monster of European literature, her adultery and murders may have seemed too horrifying to be forgivable. The explicit sexual violence in the text and music was too much for Stalin's officials, since the government was trying at this time to promote "morality" by discouraging premarital childbearing, adultery and abortion. And for a listener of Stalin's conservatism, the music was not easy to listen to: the dissonances and the abrupt shifts between different styles of music must have confused and offended him. Shostakovich's attempt at Soviet opera had seriously displeased the authorities.

Shostakovich was in Arkhangelsk on January 28, 1936, performing the Cello Sonata with Viktor Kubatsky, when the national newspaper *Pravda* published an article by an anonymous critic. The article was entitled "Chaos Instead of Music." Two days previously, Stalin and his entourage had attended a performance of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* at Moscow's Bolshoi Theater, and not liking what they heard and saw, left before the end. Creative artists in the Soviet Union and the West were shocked at the venomous tone of the author, who to the present day is rumored to be Stalin himself, or someone acting on his explicit orders. "Some theaters," the article proclaimed,

are offering Shostakovich's opera *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* as a novelty, as a work of art, to the new, culturally developed Soviet public.

Obliging critics praise the opera to the skies and enthusiastically commend it. Instead of an objective and serious critique that might prove helpful to him in his further work, the young composer receives nothing but glowing compliments.<sup>16</sup>

As the former Bolshoi soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, a close friend of Shostakovich, has commented,

How could such fame be tolerated in the land of "equality and brotherhood"? Why is Shostakovich being performed everywhere? What's so special about him? The international recognition of that Soviet composer was bound to cost him something...he had to be whittled down to size – reduced to the general level of Soviet culture, to so-called Socialist Realism.<sup>17</sup>

Evidently, Shostakovich's efforts at Socialist Realism, if indeed he had made any, were officially inadequate. "Whenever the composer chances upon a simple and comprehensible melody," the *Pravda* article continues,

he immediately – as if appalled by such a disaster – plunges back into the maze of musical chaos, which in places degenerates into cacophony.

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<sup>16</sup> "Sumbur vmesto muziki; ob opera 'Ledi Makbet Mtesnskogo uyezda,'" *Pravda*, January 28, 1936, 3, quoted in Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans and Erica Pomerans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 299-300.

<sup>17</sup> Galina Vishnevskaya, *Galina: A Russian Story*, trans. Guy Daniels (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 210.

Now the author turns paternalistic, as if he aims magnanimously to offer constructive criticism:

...All this is due not to the composer's lack of talent, nor to his inability to express ordinary and strong feelings in music. This is music "stood on its head," written deliberately so as not to echo classical opera, to have nothing in common with symphonic sounds, or with simple, universally accessible music...The ability of good music to captivate the masses is sacrificed here to petit bourgeois and formalistic exertions, and to sham originality achieved by cheap and extravagant means.

The author's conception of Socialist Realism is clearly different from Shostakovich's: "While our critics – including our music critics – swear by [S]ocialist [R]ealism, the scene created by Shostakovich presents us with the crudest naturalism." Predictably, the erotic content of the story and music offends his moralistic sensibilities:

The music quacks and groans and puffs and pants, in order to portray love scenes as naturally as possible. And "love" is plastered all over the opera in the most vulgar manner. The merchant's double bed takes center stage. On that bed, all "problems" are solved.

Finally, he makes a barbed reference to Shostakovich's international fame:

*Lady Macbeth* enjoys success with the bourgeois public abroad. Is that audience not full of praise for this opera precisely because it is chaotic and wholly apolitical? Is it not because, with his convulsive, blaring, and neurasthenic music, the author is gratifying the degenerate tastes of the bourgeoisie?<sup>18</sup>

The most sinister part of the review was this comment: "This is a meaningless game, that may well come to a very bad end." In the light of the Terror in the late 1930s, in which several of Shostakovich's colleagues, his mother-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle, and former lover Yelena Konstantinovskaya were arrested, it is difficult to see this statement as anything but a veiled threat. Perhaps Stalin's officials were telling Shostakovich to watch out if he wanted to avoid becoming one of the many Soviet artists who were arrested, deported to labor camps, or simply disappeared in the Stalinist cultural purges.

A review like this might wound or enrage a Western composer, but it would not destroy his or her career. In the Soviet Union, however, the 1930s were a time of terror for composers, and such a review was a devastating blow. As Vishnevskaya explains,

The appearance in *Pravda* of an article like that is tantamount to a command: beat him, cut him down, tear him to pieces. The victim is tagged an enemy of the people, and a gang of worthless characters, openly supported by the top Party echelon, rushes forward to curry favor and make their careers... Shostakovich

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<sup>18</sup> *Pravda*, op. cit.

was badly wounded by that blow from the government, with which he had never had a confrontation before.<sup>19</sup>

Shostakovich was *persona non grata* in the Union of Soviet Composers for some years after this article appeared. Hardly any of his colleagues spoke out in his defense, so afraid were they of damaging their own prospects. “These were far from normal times in the Soviet Union,” writes Schwarz:

...The purges were on – and this might excuse, or at least explain, the detached attitude of colleagues and friends towards Shostakovich. His works were removed from programmes [*sic*]; conductors and soloists made quick readjustments.<sup>20</sup>

Even a personal appeal to Stalin by Maxim Gorky did not help matters. Gorky, one of the most important early figures in Socialist Realism, had fallen out of favor too. He died on June 18, 1936, probably on Stalin’s orders.<sup>21</sup>

Where, then, does Shostakovich’s abrupt reversal of fortune leave the Cello Sonata? While critics and politicians denounced most of his major works, no one ever attacked this composition. Was it simply because chamber music had a smaller audience than opera, and therefore attracted less controversy and scandal? Was it because the première had only been a modest success compared with the international fame of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, and therefore did not merit, in official opinion, any

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<sup>19</sup> Vishnevskaya, 211.

<sup>20</sup> Schwarz, 124.

<sup>21</sup> Fay, 97.

suspicion or suppression? Or did Stalin's officials refrain from criticizing it harshly because it represented, in some way, the elusive principles of Socialist Realism, even though it was abstract instrumental music?

This study will address the genesis of the Cello Sonata in relation to Socialist Realist doctrine and Shostakovich's career in the 1930s, addressing general analytical issues and similarities with other works of the period. What exactly (or rather, inexactly) was Socialist Realism, and how could composers address the problem of government pressure to write music within so unspecific an ideology? Why, when Stalin's officials criticized most of Shostakovich's mid-1930s compositions so discouragingly that he withdrew his Fourth Symphony before the première, did they leave the Cello Sonata alone?

## CHAPTER TWO

### Soviet cultural policy from 1917 to the 1930s

A familiar Soviet diatribe against artists and thinkers held that creating any kind of art or intellectual endeavor for its own sake was alien to Soviet thought. The politics of cultural history in Soviet Russia between the Bolshevik Revolution and the late 1940s are directly related to Shostakovich's composing career, and to the events that led to his disgrace in 1936.

When Lenin established the Soviet government in October 1917, Shostakovich was a schoolboy of eleven. The radical political upheaval of the times had relatively little impact on his education or on the careers of musicians. The arts were, however, important to Lenin's government as a tool for educating the masses according to Marxist ideals. Lenin, whose musical tastes were mainstream, once famously remarked:

I have the courage to declare myself a "barbarian." I am unable to count the works of expressionism, futurism, cubism and similar "isms" among the highest manifestations of creative genius. I do not understand them. I do not derive any pleasure from them.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, his policies concerning music were moderate, and the politician he chose as the People's Commissar for Education was the culturally educated, eclectic Anatoly Lunarcharsky. While Lunacharsky and Lenin did not always agree about modernistic and futuristic trends in musical composition, they both believed composers

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<sup>22</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *O Literature I Iskusstve* (Moscow, 1957), 583, quoted in Schwarz, 42.



should strive to reflect the revolutionary times with a new, revolutionary music, based on pre-revolutionary foundations.

Lenin, Lunacharsky and Arthur Lourié, a composer and head of the music department in the Ministry of Education, aimed to bring music to the common Soviet worker by sponsoring ensembles and promoting concerts, which were held in factories as well as concert halls. Considering the political events that would take place in Soviet music over the next decades, it may seem surprising that Lourié respected futurist composers, but as yet there was little anti-modernist prejudice in Soviet musical ideology besides Lenin's personal dislike. In any case, Lenin also disapproved of the "leftist" extremism of a group of musicians called Proletkult, who wanted to abandon pre-revolutionary culture completely, believing that a new "proletarian culture" would bring music to the masses. Lenin curbed their ambitions, remarking in a 1920 speech that this type of culture could not spring up autonomously, but would develop naturally out of knowledge from the past.<sup>23</sup> Although many musicians resented the complicated bureaucracy of Lenin's cultural administration, it was in this relatively liberal musical climate that Shostakovich received his musical education.

Lenin introduced the mixed-market New Economic Policy in 1921 to save the Russian economy from crisis. Although less government money was now available for the arts, they flourished as never before (and never again). Lunacharsky was tolerant of *avant-garde*, experimental musical styles, welcoming performances of modernist Western music by composers such as the Second Viennese School, which would be unthinkable in Russia fifteen years later. Within Moscow's musical life, two competing musical factions established themselves in 1923. The Russian Association of Proletarian

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<sup>23</sup> Schwarz, 20-21.

Musicians (RAPM) advocated the strict communist ideal of a complete break from Western musical styles, and pronounced mass song as the basis of Soviet music and the best form for promoting anti-bourgeois ideas. The other organization, the Association for Contemporary Music (ASM), was more sympathetic to Western and modernist influences. The RAPM seemed to be winning this difficult ideological struggle when Stalin began his first Five-Year Plan in 1928. Significantly, Lunacharsky was removed from his position.

Stalin had more conservative musical tastes than Lenin, and unlike his predecessor, he founded far more restrictive cultural policies. He recognized that music, like literature, could be used not simply as a tool for educating the masses, but to promote Marxist propaganda too. The RAPM agreed with this stance. Conflicts with other organizations and between its own members weakened the ASM, leaving it defunct and abandoned by many of its followers before it officially dissolved in 1931. Meanwhile, the RAPM's power became monopolistic and dictatorial, even resulting in interference with conservatory curricula and faculty appointments. They decided that the only "authentically proletarian genre" was the "mass song," which usually had a march-like tempo and revolutionary text. They fired distinguished professors such as Miaskovsky and Glière. They even promoted the ideal of collective rather than individual authorship of compositions.<sup>24</sup> The Communist Party may have seen this zealotry as damaging to the arts, or possibly a threat to their own power. In any case, it decided to direct musical affairs itself.

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony," *Shostakovich Studies*, ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19.

On April 23, 1932, the Party issued the Resolution “On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations,” which effectively ended the proletarian era in music. The establishment of a single Union of Soviet Composers ended the factionalism between RAPM, ASM and their various offshoot groups and musical journals, but in the process, extinguished possibilities for nonconformity. Many musicians welcomed the idea of a single organization for composers, not realizing that they would now have to comply with an ideology that became official government policy: Socialist Realism.

### **Socialist Realism**

Socialist Realism began as a literary movement, which the writer Maxim Gorky promoted in an influential essay in 1933. As Boris Schwarz has remarked,

Gorky’s presence [at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934] lent prestige to the keynote address of Andrei Zhdanov...[who] defined the aims of Socialist Realism, “to depict reality in its revolutionary development,” and he called for words attuned to the epoch.<sup>25</sup>

This vague prescription presented immediate and obvious problems for composers, even those who were dedicated communists. It was also very different from Lunacharsky’s views on musical ideology. In a 1926 letter to a group of rebellious young proletarian composers, he asserted that realism, which worked well in literature, was not applicable to music.<sup>26</sup> This typically tolerant document rejected

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<sup>25</sup> Schwarz, 110.

<sup>26</sup> Anatoly Lunacharsky, *V Mire Muzyki* (Moscow, 1958), 308-311. Quoted in Schwarz, 55.

any thought of a battle between “outlived formalism” and “revolutionary realism”: these terms, he maintains, are not applicable to music. What are “class tendencies” in music? An imperialist march can just as well serve the revolutionaries [...].<sup>27</sup>

The Union of Soviet Composers acknowledged some of the difficulties in applying Socialist Realism to music in a 1935 symposium on Soviet symphonism. The politically conscientious composer Dmitri Kabalevsky remarked that many composers’ only effort towards a “Soviet” musical composition was to give it a Soviet-sounding title, without aiming for any kind of Soviet content.<sup>28</sup> Both Kabalevsky and Shostakovich traced the origins of this problem to the days when the RAPM controlled musical affairs, when purely instrumental music could be suspected of Formalism because it did not contain words, let alone ideologically appropriate ones.

Part of the trouble was that there was no exact prescription for translating a literary ideology into musical notes. The Union of Soviet Composers released a statement that was intended to help.

The main attention of the Soviet composer must be directed towards the victorious progressive principles of reality, towards all that is heroic, bright and beautiful. This distinguishes the spiritual world of Soviet man and must be embodied in musical images full of beauty and strength. Socialist Realism

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<sup>27</sup> Schwarz, 55.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 158.

demands an implacable struggle against folk-negating modernistic directions that are typical of the decay of contemporary bourgeois art, against subservience and servility towards modern bourgeois culture.<sup>29</sup>

This document seemed, however, to obfuscate rather than illuminate, because all that was clear, besides the threateningly aggressive tone of the writer, was that folk music was desirable, and modernism was not.

According to the authorities, the antithesis of Socialist Realism was Formalism. The terms “modernism” and “Formalism” were not always interchangeable in Soviet music criticism, but they were related. Formalism was, in many ways, as vague a concept as Socialist Realism: various definitions could include overly experimental styles, abstraction at the expense of a program, or separation of form from organic motivic development. Prokofiev quipped, “Formalism is music that people don’t understand at first hearing.”<sup>30</sup> Galina Vishnevskaya has noted that “Formalism” and “Cosmopolitanism,” a similarly pejorative term with an added connotation of anti-Semitism, became meaningless insults in contemporary slang. “On the subway, in place of the cherished obscenities, one could hear: ‘Shut up, you rootless Cosmopolite!’ Or: ‘Quit shoving, you damned Formalist!’”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it seems that the Communist Party authorities could label as Formalist any composition that was unpleasing to them. Although the early “Russian” works of the exiled Igor Stravinsky were not always in disgrace in the Soviet Union, the formal austerity and emotional detachment of his

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<sup>29</sup> “Statutes of Composers’ Union,” *Entsiklopedicheskii Muzykalnyi Slovar*, ed. B. Steinpress and I. Yampolski, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1966), quoted in Schwarz, 114.

<sup>30</sup> Schwarz, 115.

<sup>31</sup> Vishnevskaya, 220.

Symphony of Psalms would certainly have been considered Formalist. Likewise, although Bartók's string quartets contained many references to folk music, their complicated structures would also incur Soviet censure.

When Andrei Zhdanov decreed in 1948 that the music of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, Khachaturian and other outstanding composers was “marked by formalist perversions, anti-democratic tendencies which are alien to the Soviet people and their artistic tastes,”<sup>32</sup> he could have been referring to compositions such as Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony (1943). Although Shostakovich wrote the work as a companion piece to the successful Seventh (1941), his aim seemed to be towards emotional rather programmatic expressiveness. Soviet critics found it a “depressive, self-pitying confession of subjective emotions, of tortured expressionism,”<sup>33</sup> because it did not represent an optimistic future for the Soviet masses. Some of Prokofiev's music, though he intended it to portray the positive reality of Soviet industry and technology, was too modernistically dissonant for conservative Soviet critics. For example, *Le pas d'acier* (1925), a commission from Serge Diaghilev, was very successful in France, where audiences were curious about daily life in the Soviet Union. In Moscow, by contrast, members of the RAPM found the futuristic, machine-like effects of real anvils “insulting.”<sup>34</sup>

If such well-intentioned works were so susceptible to accusations of Formalism, what are some conceivable examples of music that did not offend the official interpretations of Socialist Realism? To answer this, we must first consider the most favored musical genres of a culture concerned with promoting realistic depictions of

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<sup>32</sup> Alexander Werth, *Musical Uproar in Moscow* (London: Turnstile Press, 1949), 25.

<sup>33</sup> Schwarz, 193.

<sup>34</sup> Maes, 322.

human experience, and informing the musically uneducated masses. Because vocal rather than purely instrumental music was a more obvious vehicle for accomplishing these aims, genres such as opera and cantata were encouraged. But even when composing in these genres, composers had to be cautious: even carefully simple compositions on patriotic texts, such as Prokofiev's *The Story of a Real Man* (1947-48), could provoke denunciations such as "modernistic and anti-melodious" in the hostile cultural climate of the 1940s.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps Prokofiev had forgotten that Socialist Realism was not like other realisms: such truly realistic depictions of human suffering and servitude were insufficiently optimistic for the ideology. Shostakovich ended his promising career as an opera composer after the suppression of *Lady Macbeth*, and became famous for his symphonies, some of which contained vocal material, and his quartets.

Abstract instrumental music could be just as dangerous a genre as opera, partly because critics could construe a work without a text or any obvious glorification of Soviet life as art for its own sake (and therefore anathema). An official document of 1948 dictated:

Instrumental music should also have a plot, a purposeful idea and a program – in the broad meaning of this word...[while] the vital, honest musical idiom which has been developed by the classics must be accepted creatively by Soviet composers and enriched with the newest intonations born from the elements of

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<sup>35</sup> Schwarz, 234.

contemporary song and the intensive development of the folk music of the various nationalities of the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup>

The “safest” purely instrumental genres were therefore film scores, such as Prokofiev’s *Lieutenant Kijé*; ballets, such as Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet* (even though it lacked the requisite happy ending); and programmatic symphonies, such as Shostakovich’s Seventh.

It seems that composers could not trust their intuition when trying to create an acceptable presentation of Socialist Realism within compositions. The hypothetical and imprecise “Soviet bureaucratic” language in the polemical official pronouncements had never satisfactorily explained a “recipe” for effective implementation of the ideology into composition. A more technically specific, constructive method of application was clearly necessary. The musicologist Boris Vladimirovich Asafiev was one of the most ardent supporters of Socialist Realism in music,<sup>37</sup> and in his works *Muzykal’naia Forma kak Protsess (Musical Form as a Process)*, published in 1930, and *Intonazia* (1947), he established some basic theoretical methodologies for composers: the concepts of “intonazia” (intonation) and “musical imagery.” An intonazia could be a real or natural sound, which could also have “traditional” musical elements such as melody and harmony. Intonazias would resonate with human experience by representing the association of real sounds within musical composition. The configuration of intonazias

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<sup>36</sup> A. I. Shaverdyan (ed.), *Puti razvitiya sovetskoi muzyki kratkii obzor* [The Ways of Development of Soviet Music: A Brief Survey] (Moscow, 1948), 12-13, quoted in Andrey Olkhovsky, *Music under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), 50

<sup>37</sup> For an account of Shostakovich’s relations with Boris Asafiev, see Laurel Fay, “Shostakovich, LASM and Asafiev” in *Shostakovich in Context*, ed. Rosamund Bartlett, 51-66 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).



would determine the “musical image.” Malcolm H. Brown describes this as “generalized re-creation through a system of musical logic of affective phenomena associated both with the external objective world and with man’s inner, psychic world. The ‘musical image’ itself becomes a new objective reality, capable of evoking sensations, ideas and associations.”<sup>38</sup>

Paraphrasing Asafiev, Brown arranges intonazias into three categories. First, there are instantly recognizable musical imitations of natural sounds. Second are programmatic styles which the listener would associate with other arts, such as literature or cinema, because there might be a fusion of music and words (or music and other arts). The third category combines the first and second types, but comprises more generalized, culturally conditioned musical associations.

Brown demonstrates these theories using the example of Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony. This composition was extremely successful in both the Soviet Union and the West.<sup>39</sup> Schwarz, however, claims that Western critics were “almost unanimous in considering [it] a second-rate work.”<sup>40</sup> Bartók’s mocking distortion of material from the symphony in the Concerto for Orchestra is well known, as is a disparaging review by Virgil Thomson. Not everyone in the West felt this way, however. Laurel Fay reports that such celebrated conductors as Leopold Stokowski, Serge Koussevitzky and Artur Rodzinski competed for the honor of conducting the first American performance.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 559.

<sup>39</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 132.

<sup>40</sup> Schwarz, 190.

<sup>41</sup> Fay, *op cit.*

Brown shows effectively how in the Seventh Symphony, Shostakovich found a way to portray the optimistic Soviet spirit during wartime, having dedicated the symphony to “future victory over the enemy”<sup>42</sup> in Leningrad’s battle with Fascism. From the stylized opening fanfare to the martial trumpet and timpani in the first movement, Shostakovich used a wide melodic range, possibly to depict the spacious Russian terrain, and the Lydian mode, perhaps to suggest archaic Russian music. The second thematic area features suggestions of countryside scenes and folk music, with a perfect-fifth drone, anapestic and dance-like rhythmical material, and the “pastoral” timbres of oboe and English horn, and later a duet between piccolo and solo violin. The snare drum suggests the aggressiveness of the military, and slowly elements from marches, jazz styles and popular song melodies build into exploding bombs and air-raid sirens of the “German war-machine advancing inexorably across Russian soil.”<sup>43</sup> A return to the Lydian theme represents the triumph of the Soviets over the aggressor. Soviet authorities considered this symphony a genuinely realistic composition, which would encourage mutual understanding and communication between the composer and the audience.

In this way, Shostakovich achieved Socialist Realist elements in a purely instrumental work. It is worth naming some other instrumental compositions that can be considered unambiguously successful concerning Socialist Realist content: for example, Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf*, whose program is practically a Socialist Realist parable, and whose purpose of teaching children about the various orchestral instruments appears to meet the Marxist goal of education for ordinary people. Khachaturian’s celebrated *Sabre Dance*, an immediately attractive composition colored with the strident rhythms

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<sup>42</sup> Brown, 562.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 556.

and folk harmonies of Armenia, is another successful composition that seems to fulfill Socialist Realist aims.

These works were as popular in the West as they were in the Soviet Union, but many critics have noted that the phenomenon of Socialist Realism as enforced by Stalin's government produced a great quantity of bad music, and Richard Taruskin has observed that it was once common, in American musicological circles, to deride Shostakovich's compositions.<sup>44</sup> Shostakovich, despite political pressures to simplify his compositional style, is generally considered one of the greatest twentieth-century composers, but it was evident that lesser composers could achieve official success if they were politically astute. Paradoxically, the aims of Socialist Realism were revolutionary, but the required musical language was conservative and old-fashioned by Western standards. Schwarz remarks,

It became clear, during the 1930s, that the platitudinous music of Socialist Realism was not really exportable. The West was simply not interested in symphonies and cantatas glorifying Lenin, Stalin and Kirov, the Red Army and the Kolkhoz. What Prokofiev had predicted in 1934 became a reality – Soviet music became “provincial.” The harder Soviet officialdom clamoured [*sic*] for music “Socialist in content, national in form,” the more Soviet music became estranged and isolated from the musical mainstream of the West.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Taruskin, “When Serious Music Mattered,” *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 362.

<sup>45</sup> Schwarz, 135.

Other critics have remarked upon the cynicism of Zhdanov's pronouncements on music "for the masses" in the 1940s. "Is it really possible to imagine," writes Andrey Olkhovsky, "that Zhdanov and the Politburo were thinking only of how to be benefactors to the people? [...] Thus resolutely and unequivocally, the Soviet power [was] transforming art into a tool for its political struggle and a subordinate addition to its propaganda resources."<sup>46</sup> The machinations of Soviet cultural authorities meant that less talented but ideologically committed composers such as Dmitri Kabalevsky and Tikhon Khrennikov enjoyed seemingly grossly unfair success, while the best Soviet composers, Shostakovich and Prokofiev, suffered financial deprivation, social ostracism and ruined health. It would have been scant consolation to Shostakovich in 1948 to know that Khrennikov's only fame in the twenty-first century comes from having been head of the Composers' Union, and that his compositions are forgotten.

Without disregarding the grave and incalculable injustices of a musical ideology that treated art as propaganda and composers as potential criminals, Western observers should remember that music in Stalin's Russia was far more important socially and politically than it has ever been in the West. The government is not the primary funding source for music in the United States, as it was in the Soviet Union, and therefore music does not have comparable significance in American politics. Accordingly, it is hard to imagine an American government censoring an opera, or exercising control over the music profession that would make them fear for their lives. Stalin's government, however, recognized all too well the power of music in society, and tried to harness it towards its own purposes. Shostakovich was obliged to live under this pressure. In

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<sup>46</sup> Olkhovsky, 55-56.

considering *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and the Cello Sonata, we will see how conflict between artistic instinct and political machinations shaped his early career.

### CHAPTER THREE

Shostakovich's Cello Sonata appears to have a special place in his output. It was his first substantial piece of mature chamber music: his only previous chamber works were a piano trio composed when he was seventeen years old, three pieces for cello and piano, which have been lost, two pieces for string octet, and a *Moderato* for cello and piano. With the exception of the piano trio, these works were all short, "occasional" pieces, even the *Moderato*, which Shostakovich may originally have intended as a movement of the Cello Sonata. The Sonata was unique in several ways, not simply because it was the only major work Shostakovich wrote for this combination of instruments. Conceived at precisely the point when Socialist Realist doctrine was undergoing revision,<sup>47</sup> it was almost contemporaneous with *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. By contrast with the opera, however, it is generally neither difficult to listen to nor to perform, with the exception of some rapid passages in the final movement. This chapter will cover a general analysis of the Cello Sonata, noting the features which may or may not be in agreement with the principles of Socialist Realism.

At this point, it would seem nearsighted to comment critically on a Shostakovich composition without mentioning the various conflicting viewpoints of modern Shostakovich criticism, known as the "Shostakovich Wars." Revisionist commentators such as Solomon Volkov (author of *Testimony*,<sup>48</sup> which he claimed was Shostakovich's memoirs) and Ian MacDonald (author of *The New Shostakovich*,<sup>49</sup> a *Testimony*-inspired

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<sup>47</sup> See "Statutes of Composers' Union," *Entsiklopedicheskii Muzykalnyi Slovar*, ed. B. Steinpress and I. Yampolski, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1966), quoted in Schwarz, 114.

<sup>48</sup> Solomon Volkov, *Testimony: the Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as related to and edited by Solomon Volkov*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

<sup>49</sup> Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990).

work) have interpreted virtually all of Shostakovich's apparently committed Socialist Realist works as scathing, bitterly sarcastic criticisms of the Soviet regime, in an attempt to discredit Shostakovich's former reputation as a committed communist, which was unpalatable to some Western audiences. *Testimony* was a "shameless best-seller"<sup>50</sup> because it told Western readers who had grown up during the Cold War what they wanted to hear about Soviet Russian politics, musical life, and musical gossip; and MacDonald's sensationalist sound-bites have a certain attractive usefulness for the writers of program notes and undergraduate essays. We can find evidence of this influence in some modern journalistic writing about the Cello Sonata. (For example, a quotation from a brief piece in the *Camden New Journal* which reads "Wilfully [*sic*] ugly and brutal themes satirise [*sic*] the worst excesses of Stalinism, while the thick Largo shows off Shostakovich's endless talent for beautiful melodies constructed almost entirely from wrong notes."<sup>51</sup> This confident statement encapsulates both MacDonald's thesis that Shostakovich intended to chronicle and denounce Stalinism in his compositions, and a simplistic misunderstanding of Shostakovich's octatonic musical language, an issue I will address later in this chapter.) A number of more reputable scholars, however, such as Laurel Fay, Malcolm Hamrick Brown, and Richard Taruskin, have pointed out the plagiarism and dishonest presentation, if not outright forgery, of Volkov's work,<sup>52</sup> and derided MacDonald's hyperbolic readings of Shostakovich's compositions.<sup>53</sup> Ironically, Volkov's and MacDonald's works, along with *Shostakovich*

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<sup>50</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us" in *Shostakovich in Context*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Camden New Journal*, July 8, 2004, <http://camdennewjournal.co.uk>, accessed April 26, 2005.

<sup>52</sup> For seemingly incontrovertible evidence of the inauthenticity of *Testimony*, see Laurel Fay, "Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?" *Russian Review* 39 (1980), 484-93, and "Volkov's *Testimony* Reconsidered," *A Shostakovich Casebook*, 22-66.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 480-81.

*Reconsidered*, a polemical defense of *Testimony* by Volkov's supporters Allan Ho and Dmitri Feofanov,<sup>54</sup> have actually helped spread the popularity of Shostakovich's music in the West. There are, however, few indisputable grounds for interpreting his compositions as programmatic, especially since Shostakovich was known to dislike searches for a program in his music. In 1933, he remarked:

When a critic, in *Worker and Theater* or *Evening Red Gazette*, writes that in such-and-such a symphony Soviet civil servants are represented by the oboe and the clarinet, and Red Army men by the brass section, you want to scream!"<sup>55</sup>

He did, however, admit to some instances of autobiography in his compositions, such as the Eighth Quartet, of which he wrote to his friend Isaac Glikman:

If some day I die, nobody is likely to write a work in memory of me, so I had better write one myself. The title page could carry the dedication 'To the memory of the composer of this quartet.'<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Allan B. Ho and Dmitri Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (London: Toccata Press, 1998).

<sup>55</sup> *Sovetskaya muzyka* 3 (1933), 121. Quoted in Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us," 12.

<sup>56</sup> Isaac Glikman, ed., *The Story of a Friendship: The Letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaac Glikman, 1941-1975*, trans. Anthony Phillips (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 90-91.



I will discuss later in this treatise whether we may find instances of autobiography in the Cello Sonata.

### **Cello Sonata, first movement (*Allegro non troppo*)**

The first movement gives the impression of looking back, in some ways, to earlier styles of composition. After all, it has a reasonably clear sonata-allegro structure, with a repeated exposition and coda. The cello part begins with a lyrical melody, over a steady accompaniment of broken chords in the piano. This sonata is ostensibly in D minor, but in reality, only the piano part begins unambiguously in this key in the first movement. Piano triads in the first two measures clearly establish D minor. The next measures in the piano (to m. 9) do not really stray from this key, but nevertheless tend to exhibit a somewhat ambiguous modal quality.

The harmonic progression consists mainly of first inversion chords, which produce some tonal instability. What ultimately determines the key, to this point, is the logic of the bass line.

The image shows a musical staff in bass clef with a common time signature (C). The staff contains eight measures of music, each with a broken chord. Below the staff, the chords are labeled with figured bass notation: i, VI<sup>6</sup>, V<sup>6</sup>, III<sup>6</sup> VI<sup>6</sup>, bII<sup>6</sup> V, V ii<sup>6</sup>, i<sup>6</sup>.

Fig. 1, harmony from mm. 1-8, piano part

The cello part, however, suggests at first a duality of tonalities, either D minor or F major, but establishes F major primarily by the end of the first phrase (to m. 9).



Fig. 2, mm. 1-8, cello part

The beginning of Shostakovich's first theme therefore suggests bitonality, which is somewhat removed from the easily accessible, diatonic ideal associated with Socialist Realism. It is difficult, however, to pin down any sense of key at all in measures that follow, at least until the approach in the bass line to the cadential measure (mm. 22-27). Separately, the instrumental parts seem logical in their respective keys, but there is seldom a common chord between them. A progression that sounds as if it will end in an F major cadence somehow evades this, and leads instead to E $\flat$  (m.12), the first time both instruments have "agreed" on a key. The E $\flat$  idea soon fades, however, and the sense of key becomes indeterminate again.

At this stage, it is worth pointing out that it is quite difficult to determine the phrase structure in any "classical" sense, because of the *fortspinnung* that characterizes this theme. We could interpret the first phrase as a seven-measure period, but this is problematic, as there is no conclusive cadence, and the cello and piano parts both go on without any kind of pause.

The fluid, *ostinato*-like accompanying music in the piano part ends (mm. 14-15) and the melodic material from the cello part in mm. 2-5 appears in the piano (mm. 17-19). Again, the key centers are ambiguous, but they seem to become less so as Shostakovich prepares for the transition. The A minor chords in the piano part (mm. 24-

25) give way to F major (mm. 26-27), where for two measures both instruments agree on a key, which occurs only rarely in this movement.

Once the transition is underway (mm. 28ff), the cello continues the *ostinato* of broken octaves on A that began two measures previously.



Fig. 3, m. 28, cello part

This lends itself to the once more indeterminate idea of key. The repeated A sounds as if it could be the leading tone in the key of B $\flat$ , which the material in the right hand of the piano seems to suggest, or as the mediant in F major, the key which is implied in the left hand (mm. 28-29). Neither key has really taken hold when suddenly, the harmony arrives in a mixture of D major and D minor, where the right hand of the piano has an F $\sharp$ , and the left an F $\natural$  (m.32). This does not last for long, though, and the next hint that we may be arriving in another key is a chord which, although the third and fifth are missing, sounds like the dominant seventh of F (m.36, first beat of the measure), followed by Fs in the left hand of the piano. The presence of accidentals (m.38), however, suggests that the harmony will not be in F for much longer, and the C $\sharp$ -F $\sharp$  combination in the last eighth note of the measure leads abruptly into an F $\sharp$  major chord on the downbeat (m.39). By the next measure, the cello part is the same as it was at mm. 2-5 (and thus in F major), but an octave higher (mm. 40-43). The accompanying piano harmony sounds as if it could be in F major, at least for one measure (m.42), until the

right hand takes over same idea (modified into triplets) of a repeated *ostinato* of broken octaves on A (mm. 43-44) that appeared in the cello part at the beginning of the transition.



Fig. 4, m. 44, piano part

As the piano part emerges out of the *ostinato*, it appears that both instruments are playing in B (mm. 45-47), only to end up in an allusion to F minor (m.50-51). However, the cello lands on an F $\sharp$  instead of F (m.52), preparing for the second theme. This begins in B major (m.54).

What do these multitonal relations imply on a larger, more global level? The basic keys of the opening are D minor and F major, and the second theme will appear in B major. These tonal areas have little diatonic significance, but rather point to some octatonic basis. If we combine the triads of D minor, F major and B major, we come up with an octatonic collection: D, D $\sharp$ , F, F $\sharp$ , [G $\sharp$ ], A, B, C.<sup>57</sup> This collection does not appear on a local level, but does suggest the basis for tonal relations in this movement.

The piano presents the melody of the second theme, which sounds somewhat more peaceful than the chromatic and conflicted first theme.

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<sup>57</sup> The square brackets indicate a note which is part of the octatonic collection, but does not actually appear in the indicated passage. I will continue to use this format in this chapter.



Fig. 5, mm. 55-58, piano part

Then the cello takes over (m.72), while the piano assumes the accompaniment of F#s from the cello part. In another chromatic progression, both parts end up in E♭ minor (m.86). Both cello and piano work their way upwards in pitch by way of a mostly stepwise motion, which they play canonically with each other (mm. 87-94), they reach the climax of the exposition, which begins in E♭ major (m.96). At this point, both cello and piano agree on this single tonality.

The climactic passage builds up volume and speed and modulates, using a sequential progression of ascending fifths and sixths in the left hand of the piano (mm. 97-100) to an arrival in C major (m.101), which marks the first *fortissimo* of the movement.

What can the introduction of E♭ and C mean in the larger tonal scheme? Given the opening D and F juxtaposition and the eventual move to B in theme 2, a large-scale scheme of minor thirds emerges. This minor-third cycle is absorbed into a larger octatonic scheme by the appearance of E♭ and C in addition to B. Both keys belong to the “octatonic 0” scale: D, D# / E♭, F# [G#], A, B, C.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> An octatonic scale is built from alternating whole and half steps. The three types of octatonic scale all feature in the Cello Sonata: octatonic 0 is the scale which contains C and D, while octatonic 1 contains C# and D#, and octatonic 2 contains D and E. For a detailed explanation of the different types of octatonic scales, see Elliott Antokoletz, *The Music of Bela Bartók: A Study of Tonality and Progression in Twentieth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

A measure in 3/2 time, marked *diminuendo* and *molto ritardando*, helps decrease the speed and melodic intensity (m.103), while the harmony arrives, through a series of chromatically shifting major and minor sixths in the left hand of the piano part (mm. 101-104), to the second inversion of an E $\flat$  major triad. By respelling E $\flat$  as D $\sharp$ , Shostakovich achieves a cadential progression back to B major, in which key he ends the exposition. The first ending resumes the piano *ostinato* from the beginning of the movement to make a smooth transition back to the start, and the second shifts the harmony to B $\flat$  minor by respelling F $\sharp$  as G $\flat$  in the right hand of the piano (m.110), and moving up a chromatic scale from E to B $\flat$  in the left hand. Preparation for the development is complete.

At this juncture, it is important to note that octatonicism is not only a structural but a local feature. Local octatonic segments are articulated at important thematic junctures in the transition (upbeat to m. 32 through the third beat of m. 32), where we can find the octatonic collection D, E $\flat$ , F, F $\sharp$ , A $\flat$ , A, [B], C. This is a microscopic reflection of the octatonic collection implied in the larger tonal scheme.

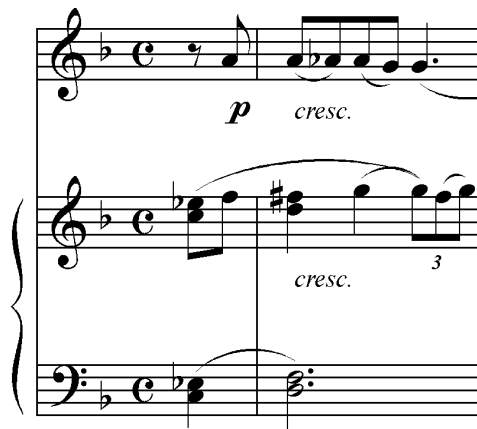


Fig. 6, m. 32

Even the initial figure of the transition unfolds a five-note segment of octatonic 1:  
 G, A, B $\flat$ , C, [C $\sharp$ ], E $\flat$ .



Fig. 7, m. 28

In the development, however, the shifts of tonality compress and expand into octatonic and whole tone collections. Shostakovich also introduces a new motive that first appeared in an accompanying role at the end of the exposition (mm. 107-110), the characteristically “Russian” rhythmic figure of a quarter note followed by two eighth notes.



Fig. 8, m. 111, cello part

Shostakovich starts the development with rapid shifts between several different chords. It is difficult to determine the key, if any. Shostakovich begins in B $\flat$  minor

(mm. 111-112), but abandons this harmony almost immediately. Both parts cadence briefly in F minor (mm. 115-116), but the right hand of the piano part begins material from the first theme in quasi-B $\flat$  minor (mm. 116-121), accompanied by a series of ascending chords in the left hand, which go through D $\flat$ , D, E and F (mm. 119-120), until another brief cadence, this time in F $\sharp$  minor (m.121). This tonality is locally surrounded by octatonic material. For instance (mm. 120-122), we get octatonic 0: F, F $\sharp$ , G $\sharp$ , A, B and C in the left hand of the piano. Meanwhile, the cello unfolds octatonic 1: G, A, B $\flat$ , C, C $\sharp$ , E $\flat$ , [E], and F $\sharp$ .

The image shows a musical score for piano and cello, measures 119-123. The score is in 2/4 time and features complex chromatic and octatonic passages in both hands. The piano part is written in the right hand (treble clef) and the cello part in the left hand (bass clef). The piano part includes markings for *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *arco* (arco). The piano part starts with a *pizz.* marking and a *swa-* marking. The cello part starts with a *arco* marking. The piano part has a *arco* marking. The piano part has a *arco* marking. The piano part has a *arco* marking.

Fig. 9, mm. 119-123

Another rather chromatic progression (mm. 125-131) leads into an arrival in F minor (m.132). A new theme begins, with the accompaniment of the “Russian” rhythmic figure, and for three full measures, cello and piano both play in F minor.





Fig. 10, mm. 132-134

Then, continuing the “Russian” figure as an *ostinato* in the left hand of the piano, Shostakovich manipulates chord changes using devices such as stepwise motion, inversions and enharmonic respellings. The F minor triad goes to a second inversion chord in  $B\flat$  minor (mm. 134-135), keeping the same bass note (F). The  $B\flat$  minor chord leads into an  $E\flat$  minor triad (m.136), which is repeated for three measures, before switching to the second inversion of an  $A\flat$  minor chord (m.139). This  $A\flat$  is very important, because it represents the only element that has been missing from the large-scale octatonic 0 collection (D,  $D\sharp/E\flat$ , F,  $F\sharp/G\flat$ ,  $G\sharp/A\flat$ , B, C) until now. Every important key area in this movement is part of the scheme.

The  $E\flat$  bass note is respelled as  $D\sharp$  (also part of the octatonic 0 collection), and the chord changes to the first inversion chord of B major for two beats (m.141), then arrives in the second half of the measure to an E minor triad. The “Russian” rhythmic pattern ends with a second inversion chord in A major (m.142), and the piano begins a linear, mostly stepwise accompaniment to a series of virtuoso double- and triple-stops from the cello. The seemingly C minor harmony (mm. 148-150) leads to a brief

excursion to A minor (m.151). However, the cello melody goes unexpectedly to B $\flat$  and A $\flat$  (mm. 151-152). This A $\flat$  will be respelled in the last beat of the measure as G $\sharp$  in the right hand of the piano, helping lead into a cadence in F $\sharp$  (m.153).

The cello melody here is repeated four measures later (mm. 157-158), but this time in the key of E. (This is the only other key besides B $\flat$ , its tritone, that does not belong to the octatonic 0 scheme.) Then a recurring A in the right hand of the piano gives the impression of a pedal note, building up the expectation of a return to D minor, while the bass note in the left hand descends the notes of a partial whole-tone scale (mm. 158-161), and from there to F, which becomes the third in the D minor triad when cello and piano both arrive firmly in this key. This is the beginning of the transition towards the recapitulation. The “Russian” rhythmic figure begins a five-measure *ostinato* on D (mm. 162-166), which builds up the sense of returning to D minor, while the cello part echoes the descending whole-tone scale (mm. 165-166). Then the cello takes over the “Russian” rhythm in a more melodic style (mm. 167-169), which leads into the ascending partial whole-tone scale that introduces the recapitulation, beginning with the G $\flat$  (of octatonic 0) in the cello part (m.170), but now initiating a whole-tone sequence that continues in the piano with A $\flat$ , B $\flat$ , C and D (mm. 170-171). The presence of the “wrong” chords of B $\flat$  and E in this movement may have something to do with the initiation of the whole-tone collection here. Perhaps the “odd” B $\flat$  that began the development was an anticipation of the whole tone change at the end of this retransition. In this movement, the idea of “recapitulation” is thematic rather than tonal. There has already been an arrival in D minor (m.162), but this was not the recapitulation, because the thematic material came from the development rather than the exposition. The true

recapitulation begins (m.170-172) with the second theme, not the first, and in the key of B $\flat$ , rather than D. When this theme first appeared in the exposition, the two “halves” (i.e., when the piano and cello took turns presenting the melody) were both in B major. Here, however, the second part of the theme, where the cello takes over, is not in B $\flat$  major, but D major (m.187). To get from B $\flat$  to D, Shostakovich lands on F $\sharp$  where the ear expects F (m.184), then effecting a iii-V<sup>9</sup>-I progression to D (m.185-186). This phrase ends with a *fermata* on the first inversion of the dominant.

The first theme is finally recapitulated in the second half of the recapitulation, but the metronome marking is now 50, as opposed to 138 at the beginning of the movement. The cello resumes the melody of the first theme, with a few minor differences, such as beginning on a half note, not a quarter note, and adding an E $\flat$  rather than an E $\natural$  (m.199). Shostakovich is preparing to go back to diatonicism, as in the opening of the movement.

The image shows a musical score for measures 196-199. It consists of three staves: a cello staff (top), a piano staff (middle), and a bass staff (bottom). The tempo is marked 'Largo' with a metronome marking of a quarter note = 50. The key signature has one flat (B-flat major). The time signature is 4/4. The cello staff begins with a half note G $\flat$  (m.199), followed by a melodic line. The piano accompaniment features broken chords in the right hand and octaves in the left hand. The score includes dynamic markings of *pp* and performance instructions 'con sord.' and 'pp'.

Fig. 11, mm. 196-199

The accompaniment of broken chords from the exposition is now absent, replaced by octaves, which start on C $\sharp$  and ascend the first four notes of the major scale, then drop

a major third to D, and ascend the first four notes of the major scale in that key. This occurs five times, until the fifth pattern grows into a full F major scale. Because the four-note patterns begin on the second rather than the first beat of the measure, the rhythmic emphasis is different from that in the cello part, which results in a sense of static calm. This dissolves as the cello continues the first theme, developing the motivic idea of a descending perfect fourth (this appears at m. 207), reworking it three times in leaps of a descending perfect fifth, a second perfect fourth, and a second perfect fifth (mm. 210-212). Meanwhile, the piano goes into a series of ascending scalar patterns (mm. 210-215). Then it takes over the idea of descending leaps (mm. 216-219), as the cello adopts the scalar idea (mm. 218-219). The cello melody “confirms” the key of D (mm. 216-218) so strongly that even a suspension on D<sup>b</sup> (mm. 220-221) cannot shake the firm sense that the movement is about to close in D minor, because the piano part stays on A, the dominant. The chromatic scale idea in the piano part, which helped shift from B major to B<sup>b</sup> minor at the second ending to the exposition, appears again (m.222), but this time it functions as a reinforcement to the tonic, not a modulating device. The last five measures comprise only the notes of the D minor triad, and the movement finishes differently from how it started: while it is absolutely diatonic, like the beginning, it is no longer bitonal, and both parts are finally and unequivocally in the same key as each other.

The key relations throughout this movement are sometimes related to the basic key of D minor, but there are also many excursions to non-diatonically related keys. This defies traditional diatonic ideas of smooth functional modulation. In this respect, the first movement has the least functional format of any of the movements in the Cello Sonata. Shostakovich does not write atonally, nor does he entirely abandon diatonic melody and

harmony, but the diatonicism here is often nonfunctional, and infused with symmetrical sets, both octatonic and whole-tone.

### **Cello Sonata, Second Movement (*Allegro*)**

The second movement has parallels with the *scherzo* movements in Beethoven's cello sonatas, such as the second movement of the Sonata in A major, op.69, where a few minutes of fast music provide a light-hearted contrast with the slower, more serious first and third movements. Here, the energetic, rhythmical quality of the *Allegro* interrupts the grave, ruminative mood established at the end of the first movement, before proceeding to the anguished *Largo*. The *ostinati*, folk-like themes, regular period structures and clearer key centers contrast vividly with the ambiguous tonality of the first. The overall format is *scherzo* and trio, with a coda comprised of themes from the trio. The main key is A minor, but Shostakovich achieves several modulations very abruptly. Sometimes he modulates (or simply jumps) to keys whose tonics are part of the A natural minor scale, such as G major and D major. Some keys are more remote, such as that of B major, which Shostakovich gets to by way of a whole-tone progression and a chromatic-sounding cadence. Some, such as A $\flat$  major and G $\flat$  major, are logical only if we interpret them as part of a global octatonic collection in combination with the home key or a key closely related to the home key.

Each section of the movement comprises prominent linear themes, which are interchanged with an accompanying *ostinato*. Themes and *ostinati* are passed between the instruments, but usually maintain the same paired relations. The movement begins with an aggressively accented *ostinato* in the cello.



Fig. 12, mm. 1-2, cello part

Two measures later, the right hand of the piano introduces the first melody in counterpoint with the *ostinato*.



Fig. 13, mm. 3-6, piano part

The contrary motion of ascending and descending modal scales in both instruments (mm. 16-17) suggests A natural minor, but Shostakovich then begins a shift to what sounds like G major, through the repetition of this tone in four measures of the next *ostinato*, a series of slurred leaps on Ds and Gs for the cello (mm. 18-21). However, one could equally say that these leaps give local priority to the fourth and seventh degrees of A natural minor, rather than indicating an actual shift to G.



Fig. 14, mm. 16-19

The piano enters four and a half measures later with the second melody.



Fig. 15, mm. 22-24, cello part

Now the modal scale (from mm. 16-17) appears unambiguously, this time to bring the first theme back in A melodic minor, as it appeared at the outset. This represents bimodality: A natural minor and melodic minor on a common tonic. After some chromatic transitional material (mm. 45ff), Shostakovich arrives at a new tonality, and mode, on B. The notes are B, C, D, E, F<sup>#</sup> and G, suggesting B Phrygian. The return to dotted half notes differs from the first thematic statement in that the repeated bass note A now consists of more rapid changes in scalar motion. This settles for a brief while on a repeated G. Thus far, all the essential bass notes (which are sometimes played in the treble clef by the right hand, as in mm. 35-41) have belonged to the “white keys” of the

piano (i.e., A natural minor). However, several measures later (m.70) Shostakovich writes a sustained B $\flat$  bass note, articulating a change of section.

Thus far, the entire section is exclusively in the tonality of A. The bimodality produced simply by inflecting the sixth and seventh degrees of A natural minor, F and G, with F $\sharp$  and G $\sharp$ , to make the melodic minor. Any hint at a shift in tonality to B (m.54) is simply a brief embellishing tonal detour. The significance of the shifting emphases on the *ostinato* of G and D (m.18ff) gives priority to the modal coloring of the A minor key.

The two minor-mode inflections of the key of A are locally emphasized and thrown slightly off balance by the mixed usage of F and G, and F $\sharp$  and D $\sharp$ . The B $\flat$  suggests a whole-tone quality, because of the prominence of certain other notes that belong to the same whole-tone collection, is ultimately a chromatic passing tone with a Phrygian inflection.

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece in 3/4 time. The score is written for a single bass clef and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The music features a prominent bass line with a sustained B-flat note in the final measure, marked with a *marc.* (marcato) dynamic. The piano accompaniment includes a *f* (forte) dynamic marking. The score is annotated with various musical symbols, including accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.



Fig. 16, mm. 44-54.

The cello takes the first theme, but the piano introduces a new *ostinato* accompaniment in the right hand (m.52ff).

The suggestion of a new key, B, does not stay for very long. The B pedal in the left hand of the piano lasts three measures before beginning an ascending stepwise progression (B, C, D, E, F, G, A). The cello begins a new melodic fragment consisting of *pizzicato* chords over three Gs (mm. 61-62), and both instruments begin to play the first melody in canon (mm. 62-65). This is followed by a partial A minor scale (E, D, C, B, A). This appears to be a local summary of the conflicting bimodal degrees in A.

Measures 70 to 75 are a cadential transition into a new thematic idea. This transition is once again built on A minor, but two chords (F<sup>#</sup>+A+C<sup>#</sup> and C+E+G, mm. 72-73) suggest an octatonic infusion.

Fig. 17, mm. 72-75

The relation of the two intruding octatonic chords a tritone apart implies octatonic 1: C, C $\sharp$ , E $\flat$ , [E], F $\sharp$ , G, A. This cadence ends the first section. Next, the trio section begins in a new key, D major. The cello introduces a new *ostinato* (the fourth so far), which features *glissandi* on the natural harmonics of the cello strings (m.76ff). The arpeggiations in the *glissandi* alternate tonic and dominant triads in D major.

Fig. 18, mm. 76-77, cello part

Four measures later, the piano enters with the third theme. We could interpret each tetrachordal partitioning as diatonic *or* octatonic: A, G, F $\sharp$  and E are four notes of octatonic 1, and D, C $\sharp$ , B and A come from octatonic 2.



Fig. 19, mm. 80-81, piano part

This theme continues for eight measures, until the instruments exchange parts. Since the piano cannot emulate exactly the glacial sound of ascending and descending *glissandi* of harmonics on a stringed instrument, Shostakovich modifies the *ostinato* into rapid ascending arpeggios (mm. 88-95).



Fig. 20, mm. 88-89, piano part

Then, an unexpected  $E^b$  in right hand of the piano (m.95) functions as an implied dominant in  $A^b$  major, in which key the next section abruptly begins (m.96). The cello presents the next *ostinato*, a series of arpeggiated “black key” chords (m.96ff).



Fig. 21, mm. 96-97, cello part

Meanwhile, the piano introduces the fourth theme.



Fig. 22, mm. 96-98, piano part

The arpeggiation idea provides the same kind of tonic-dominant alternation as the *glissandi* in the previous *ostinato*, but  $A\flat$  is a tritone away from D. While the relation of tonic chords ( $D+F\sharp+A$  and  $A\flat+C+E\flat$ ) implies a long-range octatonic 0 segment (C, D,  $E\flat$ , [E],  $F\sharp$ ,  $A\flat$ , A), the analogous relation of their dominants ( $A+C\sharp+E$  and  $E\flat+G+B\flat$ ) implies a long-range octatonic 1 segment (C $\sharp$ ,  $E\flat$ , E, [F $\sharp$ ], G, A,  $B\flat$ ). Thus, while each tonal sphere in D and  $A\flat$  is exclusively diatonic, the long-range relation implies infusion of two different octatonic collections. This octatonic-diatonic interaction is anticipated precisely with the intrusion of octatonically tritone-related triads into the A minor sphere at the preceding cadence (mm. 72-73).

Another role reversal begins after eight measures, with the cello taking over the theme and the right hand of the piano taking the *ostinato*. The second half of this section (mm. 107-111) moves up a whole tone to  $B\flat$ . Through another rapid pivotal shift (m.111), Shostakovich moves back to D major for an eight-measure reprise of the third theme. Following another unexpected  $E\flat$  (m.119, last beat), a three-measure retransition begins in  $A\flat$ , but the cello and the left hand of the piano both replace the  $E\flat$  with an  $E\natural$  (m.122), which suggests the dominant of A minor, and makes an abrupt preparation for the reprise of the first section. The progression seems therefore to be  $IV-\flat I-V-i$ , which

is not a typical diatonic cadence, but gives the impression of a cadence with added chromatic color.

This return is almost identical to the opening, but is played an octave higher in both instruments. The rest of the recapitulated material (mm. 140-197) is virtually the same as that in the first half (mm. 18-75), but at the point that marked the beginning of the trio earlier in the movement, there is now a coda.

The melodic material in the coda comes from the third theme, which was originally heard at the beginning of the trio, but instead accompanying with the fourth *ostinato*, which featured *glissando* natural harmonics, the cello plays the fifth *ostinato*. This pairing has not occurred before, but because of the regular phrase structure and the I-V-I-V harmony in both components, they fit together. The harmony shifts suddenly from A minor to begin the coda in G<sup>b</sup> major, which seems to be an unusual departure from the home key this late in a movement, but can be explained by the octatonic connection between the triads of G<sup>b</sup> major and A minor. This time, the combined notes of the triads form an octatonic 1 collection: A, B<sup>b</sup>, C, D<sup>b</sup> [E<sup>b</sup>], E, G<sup>b</sup>, [G]. The appearance of chords that are unrelated to the home key of A minor may seem incongruous, but Shostakovich manages a return to A minor by incorporating D<sup>♯</sup> and C<sup>♯</sup> into the harmony (mm. 202-203). This facilitates the arrival of a second-inversion A minor chord in the penultimate measure, and from there, a V<sup>7</sup>-i cadence into A minor in the final measure.

There is no evidence of Shostakovich's borrowing any of the melodic material in this movement from folk music, but the vigorous character and regular period structures of the melodies and *ostinati* suggest an analogy with the pastoral and rustic movements in

some of the symphonies by Classical composers. In spite of the hints of octatonicism among the mostly diatonic key relations, this suggestion of traditionalism is certainly compatible with the aims of Socialist Realism.

### **Cello Sonata, Third Movement (*Largo*)**

The third movement stands out from the rest of the Cello Sonata in several ways. This is partly owing to the key signature of B minor, which is not diatonically related to D minor, the overall key of the Sonata, but rather suggests an octatonically derived minor third relationship between B and D. The “sharpness” of the scalar degrees produces a change of color. Moreover, all the other movements are marked *Allegro*, but here Shostakovich indicates a very slow *Largo*. In addition to this, the color throughout most of the movement is very dark, emphasizing the lower registers of both instruments. The basic procedure is a highly irregular rondo combined with a theme and variations, so the plan of the movement is A, B, a variation on B, a second variation on B, a second variation on A, a third and fourth variation on B, and a third variation on A. The rondo theme (A) itself is highly varied, and within the rondo idea is a succession of variants on another idea. The resulting material is very free within a repetitive concept. The movement reaches its climactic peak in the second variation on the second melodic idea, before the first idea has even made a second appearance.

The rondo theme begins with the cello alone for the first four measures, ascending to the higher reaches of the G string until the sound is muffled (mm. 5-7). Although we know from the key signature that the movement is likely to be in B minor, the opening is harmonically ambiguous, and the melody suggests a sense of searching for

a key. Up to the D (m.2), it suggests B minor or D minor or F<sup>♯</sup> minor, but then the E<sup>b</sup>, F and D suggest the circling of an E<sup>b</sup> tonic or the key of B<sup>b</sup>. The A<sup>b</sup> (m.4) seems to confirm the E<sup>b</sup> as tonic.



Fig. 23, mm. 1-5, cello part

The contour of the melody, which starts with an ascending perfect fifth, is somewhat reminiscent of the opening of Beethoven's A major cello sonata opus 69, which also starts with an ascending fifth from the cello alone:



Fig. 24, Beethoven, Cello Sonata opus 69, first movement, mm. 1-4, cello part

Shostakovich does not unambiguously establish the key of B minor in the first measure, but rather uses shifts and combinations of tonalities which move even faster than those in the first movement. It is not until the end of the first phrase (mm. 6-7) that the key of B minor is explicitly stated. This arrival in the home key coincides with the first appearance of a significant melodic motive characterized by the repeated ascending and descending interval of a minor third.



Fig. 25, mm. 6-7, cello part

The minor third is extremely important in this movement, both melodically and harmonically. It occurs prominently in octatonic collections, functioning as a linear, melodic motive in the cello part, and as a chord that becomes a sequential device for the piano harmony, and helps effect modulation. (In an analysis which may be relevant to this discussion, David Fanning has written about the prominence of this interval in some of the *Leitmotive* in *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. For example, one recurring motive containing a minor-third idea has “associations with sexuality, especially frustrated sexuality.” A variant of this idea is a “minor-third scale,” which occurs in parts of the opera where “frustration gives way to action in the more explicitly sexual scenes.” Another motive, derived from the first, also features minor thirds, and is mostly associated with Katerina’s demands that Sergei kiss her.)<sup>59</sup>

Before B minor has really had a chance to establish itself, the second phrase moves away into modally altered chords. In m. 9ff, we have an octatonic 0 collection: D, [E $\flat$ ], F, F $\sharp$ , [C $\sharp$ ], A, B, C, and an octatonic 1 collection: F $\sharp$ , G, A, A $\sharp$ . The chromatic bassline unfolds a systematic interlocking of the two octatonic segments.

F $\sharp$  in the cello (mm. 14-19) sets up the harmony for an arrival in B minor (m.20), in which key the theme will be introduced. To accomplish this, Shostakovich does not

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<sup>59</sup> David Fanning, “Leitmotif in *Lady Macbeth*,” *Shostakovich Studies*, 153.



use a functional diatonic method to bring the phrase to a cadence, but rather an octatonic collection that encompasses the first and third of the E $\flat$  minor chord (E $\flat$  and G $\flat$ , m. 17) and the B minor triad (B, D, and F $\sharp$ ). This gives us the major-minor or octatonic segment. The larger collection is octatonic 0: E $\flat$ , F, F $\sharp$ , [G $\sharp$ ], A, B, C, D. The mostly stepwise motion enables the harmony to progress smoothly, even though there is an “odd” A $\flat$  instead of the A $\sharp$  that would lead to the tonic in traditionally diatonic harmony.

Shostakovich uses the cello primarily for melodic material in this movement, presenting the theme as a kind of aria for cello (m.21), accompanied by a rhythmically simple, repetitive chordal piano part, consisting of sustained half-note thirds in the right hand and a pulsing figure of an eighth rest and three eighth notes in the left.

The first measure of the theme establishes B minor, but in the very next measure, the harmony breaks into a half-diminished seventh chord (ii $^{\flat 7}$ ) with C $\sharp$  as the bass note. The quality of the half-diminished material is obscured by the A in the cello part. This A causes a brief A dominant ninth chord (A, C $\sharp$ , E, G, B), which is V $^9$ /iii. This tends to weaken the tonality, i.e. by emphasizing or microtonicizing the third degree of B minor.

The next chords suggest D minor (m.23), then C major followed by E minor with a D $\sharp$  suspension in the bass (m.24), which produces a I $^7$  chord in E minor. Despite the suggested local harmonic tonalities, the linear cello idea suggests B minor: first B natural minor (mm. 21-24), then B melodic minor (mm. 25-26). However, this tonality actually seems to continue to the F sharp (m.28), so the F natural and G (mm. 26-27) imply the augmented sixth chord (implied in an enharmonic spelling: G [ ] [ ] E $\sharp$ ).<sup>60</sup> Thus, the thematic section (mm. 21-28) establishes the minor variants of B, but the accompanying

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<sup>60</sup> The empty brackets indicate the missing notes B and D: the complete augmented chord would be G+B+D+E $\sharp$ . The B and D are not present here, but are implied.

chords do not exclusively belong to the B minor modes of the tune. This creates harmonic coloring and modal ambiguity which does not have any function within the key.

Through a progression of ascending thirds within the right hand of the piano part (m.25ff), the linear aspect of the harmonic progression suggests D minor.

Whereas the first movement began with a duality between D minor and F major, in this movement we arrive at mm. 21-28 at a mirror of this tonal relation: B minor cello versus D minor piano lines.

The progression of chords (mm. 20-27) does not seem to contain octatonic harmony, but when the left hand of the piano part plays an ascending octatonic segment (B, C, D, E $\flat$ , F, F $\sharp$ ) to articulate the B minor cadence.

The musical score for measures 25-28 is presented in three staves. The top staff is the right-hand piano part, showing a melodic line with a *cresc.* dynamic in measure 25 and a *dim.* dynamic in measure 27. The middle staff is the grand staff, showing chords in both hands. The bottom staff is the left-hand piano part, featuring an ascending octatonic line (B, C, D, E $\flat$ , F, F $\sharp$ ) with a *espr.* dynamic in measure 28. The key signature is two sharps (D major/B minor) and the time signature is 4/4.

Fig. 26, mm. 25-28

The first variation begins with the cello an octave higher than in the initial statement, and at a slightly louder dynamic (up to *mezzopiano* with a *crescendo*). But while the F $\sharp$  that began the theme was the fifth in the B minor harmony, this F $\sharp$  is the

tonic. The key is F<sup>#</sup> minor, parallel minor of the dominant of the home key. The piano part keeps the same chordal accompanying figure, but now the left hand has the sustained thirds and the right the eighth-note pulse. Rather than using functional diatonic harmony to modulate, Shostakovich instead uses a sequence of ascending minor thirds in the left hand of the piano. The entire collection (m.29) is octatonic: E, F<sup>#</sup>, G, A, B<sup>b</sup>, and C form part of octatonic 1 (m.29); F, F<sup>#</sup>, G<sup>#</sup>, A, B, C, [D], and D<sup>#</sup> form octatonic 0 (m.30). In the next two measures, G, G<sup>#</sup>, B<sup>b</sup>, B, C<sup>#</sup>, D, [E], and F form an octatonic 2 collection (m.31); and A, A<sup>#</sup>, C, C<sup>#</sup>, [E<sup>b</sup>], E, F<sup>#</sup>, and G form an octatonic 1 collection (m.32). We can also analyze these measures (mm. 29-31) in terms of diatonic harmony: F<sup>#</sup> minor leads into a diminished chord on G, then G<sup>#</sup> minor, before breaking the pattern of ascending minor thirds with a seventh chord that has F as the bass note (mm. 29-31). Then, with another sequence of ascending minor thirds, a half-diminished seventh chord on G leads to a diminished seventh chord on G<sup>#</sup>, an A minor chord and an A<sup>#</sup> diminished chord before arriving at the second inversion of E minor (m.33), which is the climactic point of the first phrase.

Another series of ascending minor thirds (mm. 33-34) leads into a very dissonant section characterized by clashing minor seconds in the cross relations (mm. 35-38). Chords that evade diatonic explanation are logical when analyzed octatonically: C, D, E<sup>b</sup>, F, F<sup>#</sup>, G<sup>#</sup> and A are part of octatonic 0 (mm. 37-38). An F<sup>#</sup> pedal in the left hand of the piano is in constant conflict with F<sup>n</sup> in the cello part (mm. 37-38). Another climactic point (m.39) contains a suggestion of an inverted A minor chord, leading to chords comprising octatonic 2: D, E, F, G, A<sup>b</sup>, B<sup>b</sup>, [B], [C<sup>#</sup>]. The E in the bass functions as the leading tone to the chord in the second half of the next measure, F minor, where an

ascending scale once more marks the end of a variation. This scale (F, G, A $\flat$ , A, B $\flat$ , C, D, E $\flat$ , F, F $\sharp$ ) is a hybrid, overlapping F Dorian/Mixolydian and octatonic collections.

The next seven measures (mm. 42-48) are a recitative-like bridge passage leading into the second variation. The harmonic rhythm slows and the dynamics decrease. The cello has syncopated rhythms above the slow-moving piano, and the only hint of triadic material is a measure of A minor (m.45). The rhythm becomes faster and the dynamics increase (m.48) as the piano moves up chromatically in minor thirds into the second variation, which begins *fortissimo* (the loudest dynamic so far) in D minor (m.49).

The second variation begins with the highest pitches (in the cello) and loudest dynamics so far, and marks the dramatic culmination of the entire movement. The right hand of the piano part continues the ascending minor-third idea in sustained half notes, while the left hand echoes the syncopated rhythms the cello played in the bridge section. At the climax of the present phrase (mm. 52-53), the thirds in the piano depart from their slow harmonic rhythm into eighth notes, and now, instead of ascending, they weave their way down the chromatic scale to the lowest registral point of the bass clef. The left hand of the piano takes over with the ascending scale that seems to serve as a common idea for these variation cadences (m.54).

The image displays two systems of musical notation for measures 49-54. The top system shows a piano part with a treble clef and a cello part with a bass clef. The piano part begins with a *ff* dynamic and a *cresc* marking. The cello part starts with a *f* dynamic. The bottom system continues the piano part with a *fff* dynamic and a *cresc* marking, while the cello part continues with a melodic line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

Fig. 27, mm. 49-54

Shostakovich now returns (m.56ff) to modified and transposed material from the A idea as a kind of interlude between variations. A final sequence of ascending minor thirds in the piano harmony (mm. 57-60) gives way to a slower, more austere accompaniment and quiet dynamic, similar to that in the opening. The harmony is F minor (m.62ff), a tritone lower than B minor, the home key. However, the cello's repeated minor-third melodic motive on F and A $\flat$ , which has represented the root and third of the F minor triad (mm. 62-63), also function as the third and fifth of the D $\flat$  major triad (mm. 64-67). The sense of restfulness in the four-measure occurrence of D $\flat$  major (mm. 64-67) is broken when the piano harmony shifts abruptly up a half step to D minor

with an added sixth (m.68), which is actually a first inversion B<sup>7</sup> chord. This suggests a leading chord function to the following first inversion C minor triad. More significantly, however, is the systematic chromatic ascent in the bassline: D<sup>b</sup>–D–E<sup>b</sup>. This cadential point on D and E<sup>b</sup> in the bass recalls the opening bass line of variation two (m.49). However, the harmonic context is reinterpreted so the initial chords move toward harmonic instability (D, F, A, to D, F<sup>#</sup>, A, E<sup>b</sup>, i.e. a D minor tonic triad to the dominant minor ninth of the subdominant without resolution). The cadence moves from the vii<sup>6</sup><sub>5</sub> of C minor to the C minor tonic triad. This scheme (i.e. framework) supports the structural peak in this variation (mm. 52-54).<sup>61</sup>

The piano takes the melody for the first time in the third variation (m.72). The accompaniment is different this time from previous variations. The cello weaves a new harmonic line around the piano part. For the first time in the movement, the right hand of the piano plays in the treble clef, octaves above the cello. The harmony begins in B minor, suggesting that this is a kind of recapitulation. Parallel fifths in the left hand of the piano suggest B minor, then quasi-A minor (m.74) and C major (m.75). The cello briefly emerges from its harmonic role to take over the melody (mm. 77-79), while the bass ascends chromatically by half steps in fifths from E major to B<sup>b</sup> minor. The fifths move back down to end the phrase in F minor. A four-measure bridge (mm. 84-87) uses contrary motion in the piano harmony to reach E<sup>b</sup> major. Material from the A idea returns, although the cello is playing an augmented second lower than it did at the

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<sup>61</sup> That the peaks occur at a different structural point in each variation is significant, because it correlates or is analogous to the diversity of tonalities, modalities, polymodalities and multitonal schemes that characterize the Shostakovich idiom. The structural diversity in terms of shapes and climaxes within the rondo idea is atypical of the strict variation principle in general. This produces a sense more of free variations.

opening. For the first time in the movement, the repeated-thirds motive uses a major third; that is, the third and fifth of the B minor chord.

So strong is the sense of B minor that even a momentary emphasis on an E major chord (m.98) do not damage the harmony. The cello takes over the tonic and third of a B minor triad for the final appearance of the repeated minor-third melodic motive (mm. 100-103).

Let us now turn back to the repeated minor-third idea that has occurred several times throughout the movement, and some other evidence of the importance of this interval in other compositions of the period. When asked to identify a motive Shostakovich used in several compositions, many of those familiar with his work would name the musical monogram “DSCH,” his initial and the first three letters of his last name in the German transliteration. In German musical notation, these letters spell out the octatonic segment D–E♭–C–H, which in English is written D–E♭–C–B. Few, perhaps, would associate Shostakovich with another “recycled” motive, this time the linear repetition of a minor third. But investigation of Shostakovich’s other works from the mid-1930s reveals the prominent placement of this idea, in various guises, in two other compositions: the Fourth Symphony and *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.

A somewhat altered example appears in the middle of the vast finale to the Fourth Symphony.<sup>62</sup> After the opening funeral march erupts into a furious *danse macabre*, a Mahlerian *Ländler* trails off into a stark C♯ pedal in the contrabassoon and double bass. The first horn then begins a similar motive to the one that appears in the Cello Sonata (presented here not in common time, as in the third movement of the Sonata, but in triple

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<sup>62</sup> Dmitri Shostakovich, *Symphony No. 4*, Op. 43 (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, Publisher of Music, 1973), 174-5. This passage begins at the seventh measure of rehearsal **198**.

meter) on E and C#. The viola and then the flute take over the minor third idea, and develop it into what becomes the next new theme in the movement.<sup>63</sup>

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system contains three staves: the top staff is for the horn, the middle for the piccolo, and the bottom for the contrabass and bassoon. The second system contains two staves: the top for the viola and the bottom for the cello. The music is in 3/4 time and features a sequence of notes, primarily E and C#, with some rests and a piccolo flourish in the third measure.

Fig. 28, Dmitri Shostakovich, Symphony No. 4 Op. 43, finale

The importance of the minor third in the melody of this passage has some resemblance to a passage in *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, although it is not a direct quotation. In any case, Soviet critics never had a chance to point out any similarities between the two works in 1936, while the musical memory of the ill-fated opera was still strong, because Shostakovich withdrew the Fourth Symphony before the première. This is the official explanation in the journal *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*:

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, rehearsal numbers 199-200.



Composer Shostakovich appealed to the Leningrad Philharmonic with the request to withdraw his Fourth Symphony from performance on the grounds that it no longer corresponds to his current creative convictions and represents for him a long outdated phase.<sup>64</sup>

Another reason may have been that Shostakovich had not fully redeemed himself with the authorities behind “Chaos Instead of Music,” and that the Fourth Symphony, if performed, would be immediately labeled Formalist. The movement plan did not conform to tradition at all: the first and last of the three movements were massively long, and the character of the music made “no conspicuous acknowledgment of or concession to the critical furor.”<sup>65</sup> Shostakovich wrote many years later that after “Chaos Instead of Music,” the Soviet authorities “tried to persuade me to repent and expiate my sin. But I refused to repent. What helped me then was my youth and physical strength. Instead of repenting, I wrote my Fourth Symphony.”<sup>66</sup> (Lack of repentance and a refusal to abandon the musical language of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* were understandable sentiments, but during Stalin’s purges, Shostakovich had to be on his guard. His “ideological rehabilitation” had to wait until the Fifth Symphony, which was a phenomenal success and widely described as a truly Socialist Realist work.)

The first time Shostakovich used the minor-third melodic idea, however, was in Act Four, Scene 9 of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. The resemblance between the motive from the Cello Sonata and this particular passage is so noticeable that it would

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<sup>64</sup> “Khronika,” *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, December 11 1936, quoted in Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 95.

<sup>65</sup> Fay, 96.

<sup>66</sup> O. Lamm, *Stranitsi tvorcheskoy biografii Myaskovskogo* (Moscow: 1989), 224, quoted in Fay, 92.

not be wildly imaginative to contemplate whether Shostakovich intended to make a direct quotation.



Fig. 29, *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uyezda*, Act Four, Scene Nine

Shostakovich had dedicated *Lady Macbeth* to Nina Varzar, and according to Galina Vishnevskaya, modeled Katerina after her. “She is not the heroine of Leskov’s story; she is Shostakovich’s Nina...a woman of strong, uncommon character.”<sup>67</sup> In the aria where the minor-third idea takes place, Katerina is a convict, banished to Siberia for her crimes. Sergei, her new husband, has abandoned her for Sonyetka, who cruelly mocks Katerina and obtains by trickery her only pair of stockings. Katerina, battered and humiliated by the betrayal, her feelings of guilt and rejected love, and the unkindness of the other convicts, begins to plan her suicide in a nearby lake:

В лесу, в самой чаше, есть озеро.

*In a wood, in a grove, there is a lake.*

Совсем круглое. Очень глубокое.

*Indeed, it is round. It’s very deep.*

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<sup>67</sup> Vishnevskaya, 351.

И вода в нем черная, как моя совесть,      *And the waters are black,*  
черная!      *black like my conscience!*<sup>68</sup>

In the decades that followed, as the Cello Sonata gradually increased in popularity and became part of every Russian cellist's repertoire, a rumor went around Moscow's cellist community that Shostakovich had written the third movement for Nina Varzar, to prove that despite his infidelities, he sincerely loved her. Could this possible quotation from *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* have been Shostakovich's way of apologizing to his wife, of telling her that his own conscience was as black as Katerina's?

Whether this is true can only be a matter for conjecture. But whatever Shostakovich did to appease his former wife must have been effective, because they remarried in 1935, and less than two weeks after Shostakovich finished the Fourth Symphony, Nina Shostakovich (she changed her name after the reconciliation) gave birth to their first child.

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<sup>68</sup> Translation mine. I am grateful to Dr. Eugene Gratovich for his assistance.

### Cello Sonata, Fourth Movement (*Allegro*)

The fourth movement follows a traditional format of rondo, which is yet another similarity between the Cello Sonata and Classical sonatas, where the last movement was typically a rondo, or at least in a quick tempo. But within a seemingly traditional vein, we find ironic surprise elements, which twist the traditionalism into something new and original.

The piano begins alone, introducing the rondo theme, which is rapid and reminiscent of folk tunes. There is no evidence that Shostakovich actually borrowed from any known traditional or popular music source, as had Rimsky-Korsakov in his pseudo-Orientalist compositions or Stravinsky with his genuine folk borrowings. However, this folk-like character is certainly commensurate with Socialist Realist goals.



Fig. 30, mm. 1-4, piano part

Within the regular period structure, Shostakovich incorporates some chromatic color without giving a serious impression of leaving D minor, which is one of the ways in which this movement conforms with the diatonic ideal of Socialist Realism. With an A $\flat$  in the right hand, he implies F minor (m.7), but by taking the notes in both hands outwards in contrary motion, gets to an E $\flat$  triad (m.9), and proceeds to move down to D $\flat$

(mm. 11-15). Then, while suspending the D $\flat$  triad in the right hand, the left brings back notes from D minor to prepare for the cello entry. Thus, within a seemingly traditional tonal format, we get a highly original, even idiomatic, evasive cadence, which is common to Shostakovich.

The cello takes over the theme the piano has introduced, with some variation, such as inverting the melodic line in the third measure so that it ascends instead of descending. Such a variance of the rondo element is also commonly found in Shostakovich.



Fig. 31, mm. 17-20, cello part

Shostakovich uses some different accidentals to embellish the harmony, such as an unexpected E $\flat$  (m.20) which functions as a pivotal point for the melody, which then descends towards a cadence into F minor (mm. 23-24). This is another example of Shostakovich's evasive maneuvers as he approaches the cadences. Shostakovich uses part of an ascending octatonic scale in the left hand of the piano (mm. 26-28) to get back to D minor at the end of the phrase (in yet another quirky cadence), causing some clashing dissonances with the cello part, and leaping to a cadence in D minor from an E $\flat$  minor chord (mm. 30-32). Rather than sounding incongruous or atonal, this dissonance only adds color and variety to the mercurial character of the theme, because the regularity of the sixteen-measure period structure and the D minor cadence prevent any implication

of serious threat to the overall impression of diatonicism. More generally, this octatonic mutation of the diatonic material further extends the evasive technique described above.

Following the D minor cadence, there is an eight-measure phrase (mm. 32-39), which is more of a cadential continuation of the first theme than a theme in its own right, and reinforces the sense of D minor.



Fig. 32, mm. 33-39, cello part

Suddenly, the piano breaks into two measures of *fortissimo* A minor chords (mm. 41-42), and with this as the only transition, the second theme begins in A minor.



Fig. 33, mm. 41-44

Such is the use of the surprise element that serves a similar role as his evasive cadential maneuvers, but in this case it also prepares us for the somewhat sudden move the new theme. The cello plays rapid arpeggios against a relatively simple piano accompaniment, working through a variety of chords towards an arrival in C major for the climax of the section (mm. 68-71), where the cello's frantic, virtuoso double stops culminate in a scale that rushes down towards a resolution in D minor (mm. 72-75).

The return to D minor coincides with the return of the rondo theme, but this time the piano plays it, while the cello's accompanying line is somewhat reminiscent of the arpeggios of the previous section. This time, the regularity of the period structure in the first appearance of the theme is gone. Only twelve measures are exposed, when the cello takes over with the "continuation" idea, and expands it from its previous eight-measure length (at mm. 32-39) into a sixteen-measure parallel period (mm. 88-103). This is one of the ways that Shostakovich varies each return of the rondo theme.

The end of the rondo overlaps with a modulation to B $\flat$  minor, following a descending whole-tone scale in the right hand of the piano, which moves in contrary motion with a partial descending whole-tone scale in the left hand (mm. 101-102). The third theme, which starts in the piano (mm. 103-104), circles around a narrow range of pitches, occasionally making prominent use of whole tone materials.



Fig. 34, mm. 103-107, piano part





As this idea builds in intensity, however, the cello takes over with a new cadenza, a leap up to a double-stopped octave on A in the high register, then a series of trills on B $\flat$ , which leap down to the middle register. While this is going on, the virtuosity in the piano part subsides into an accompanying *ostinato* in B $\flat$  major. The cello takes this over (m.235), and the piano trails off two measures later, holding down a low C for four measures before beginning the next entry of the rondo theme in D minor. This proceeds in the piano part exactly as it appeared at the beginning of the movement, but with the cello continuing the sixteenth-note *ostinato* for sixteen measures (mm. 242-257), so that there is some overlap between sections.



Fig. 36, mm. 242-245

Then the cello takes over the rondo theme, also exactly the same as in the first occurrence (mm. 258-273). When the continuation to the rondo theme begins, however, Shostakovich does not repeat the shorter version which occurred at the beginning (mm. 32-39), but uses the sixteen-measure version (from mm. 87-103) instead. The piano seizes upon this material when it takes over the melody (m.290), and transforms it into a closing theme, which the cello accompanies with four-string *pizzicato* chords.



Fig. 37, mm. 290-297

There is some chromatic color, such as an excursion to  $D\flat$  major (mm. 300-303), but by respelling  $D\flat$  as  $C\sharp$ , the harmony soon finds its way back to D minor. The sense of key is so strong that even a brief diversion to  $E\flat$  chords (mm. 324-325) close to the end does not shake it: ironically, it enhances it. The cello takes the melody for the final measures (mm. 328-331), abruptly changing the character and dynamic to end with a loud *pizzicato* flourish. In this way, the Cello Sonata comes to a rather traditional-sounding close.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

Is it possible to decide whether Shostakovich's Cello Sonata is born of or related to Socialist Realism? Let us recall first that Shostakovich did intentionally aim for a simpler style in his compositions between 1934 and 1935, but secondly that at that time, the general understanding of Socialist Realist ideology was so slight that many critics acclaimed *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* as the embodiment of Socialist Realism in opera,<sup>69</sup> which, at least according to the author of "Chaos Instead of Music," it certainly is not. Apart from the fact that the musical language in *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* is rather complicated and dissonant, the heroine is too individualistic and immoral for Stalin's conservative social values. The story lacks the obligatory happy ending and is therefore too depressing to fulfill the requirements of Soviet optimism. The dialogue is often vulgar, and most shocking of all to official sensibilities was the unmistakable musical depiction of Katerina's adulterous affair with Sergei. Many years later, Shostakovich published a revised version of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, renamed *Katerina Izmailova*, in which he interestingly made more alterations to the libretto than to the score,<sup>70</sup> which perhaps suggests that the text was more objectionable to Soviet sensibilities than the notes. He replaced the erotic words of Katerina's aria "Zerebyónok k kobýlke toropitsa" with more innocuous words contrasting the happiness of a pair of nesting doves (rather than the mating animals of the original) with the miserable loneliness of the heroine. He also excised Sergei's crude remarks about how babies are made, substituting some joking comments about how a woman can read two

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<sup>69</sup> Gerald Abraham, *Eight Soviet Composers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 10.

<sup>70</sup> See Laurel E. Fay, "From *Lady Macbeth* to *Katerina*: Shostakovich's versions and revisions," *Shostakovich Studies*, ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 160-188.

books at once and still be bored. In the Soviet Union, where books were often banned because of the censorship laws, the metaphor must have been obvious.

Today, *Katerina Izmailova* mostly only receives performances in Russia, and is generally regarded in the West as inferior to the original *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, though it is debatable whether Shostakovich himself would have agreed with this view. Indeed, several Western scholars seem to consider it a more effective composition.<sup>71</sup> To Western audiences, however, *Katerina Izmailova* is apparently less appealing than *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, because the aura of forbiddenness and danger surrounding an opera that got its composer into serious trouble with Stalin is more attractive than the idea of a bowdlerized revision, in countries that pride themselves on their free speech laws. In addition, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* hints at the direction Shostakovich's work might have taken, had he been allowed more freedom as a composer.

It is obvious that *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* cannot be described as a Socialist Realist composition. But is the Cello Sonata? How can we explain why it did not displease official tastes? Can we establish the Socialist Realist credentials (or lack of them) in the Cello Sonata? To answer this, it may be helpful to compare its features with official pronouncements from the mid-1930s, later pronouncements on the requirements of the doctrine, and Boris Asafiev's theories of *intonazia* and musical imagery.

Let us go back to the "Statutes of the Composers' Union,"<sup>72</sup> which the Union of Soviet Composers contributed in 1934 as a guide for translating the concept of Socialist

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> "Statutes of Composers' Union," *Entsiklopedicheskii Muzykalnyi Slovar*, ed. B. Steinpress and I. Yampolski, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1966), quoted in Schwarz, 114.

Realism from literature into music. The anonymous author demands “all that is heroic, bright and beautiful.” It is beyond the scope of this treatise to discuss what is beautiful or not beautiful in musical aesthetics, but it seems reasonable to state that the Cello Sonata lacks bright optimism or any obvious heroic qualities, especially in the turbulent first and third movements. Next, the author wrote: “Socialist Realism demands an implacable struggle against folk-negating modernistic directions.” There do not seem to be any signs of this implacable struggle in the Cello Sonata, but whether it can truly be described as modernistic is arguable. Compared with the Western modernist tendency to abandon diatonicism altogether, whether for the freely atonal composition or twelve-tone serialism of Arnold Schoenberg's Vienna circle, Varèse's concept of “organized sound,” or the noise music of the Italian futurists, Shostakovich's Cello Sonata sounds old-fashioned. It is lyrical, even without much functional diatonicism. Also, the first, second and fourth movements have Classical formal structure. Like Schoenberg, Shostakovich liked to compose nontraditionally within traditional forms. As Yuriy Kholopov has pointed out,

Shostakovich's thinking is firmly based on forms which had grown up among the great Viennese classics such as Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven...Shostakovich, having tasted the temptations of New Music in the twenties, deliberately turned thereafter towards the world of traditional forms. The point of this path was ‘to be old in a new way’. Many of Shostakovich's compositions are *chefs d'oeuvre* of modern music in classical-type forms.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Yuriy Kholopov, “Form in Shostakovich's Instrumental Works,” *Shostakovich Studies*, 57-58.

Even though Shostakovich was trying to write with a simplified musical language, the harmonies in the Cello Sonata are not usually explainable in diatonic terms, and for long passages of music, most notably in the bitonal opening to the first movement and the octatonic relations that occur throughout the Sonata, it is difficult to distinguish whether there is any key at all. Let us contrast the opening of the Cello Sonata with the opening of the Seventh Symphony, a work Soviet authorities acknowledged as a successfully Socialist Realist composition.



Fig. 38, Cello Sonata, first movement, mm. 1-4



Fig. 39, Symphony No. 7 Op. 60, *Allegretto*, mm. 1-5

The opening of the Cello Sonata is characterized by conflict between D minor and F major, whereas the opening of the Seventh Symphony is very obviously in C Lydian, and stays in that key for many measures. As “simplified” as the musical language may be in the Cello Sonata, it does not go as far as the Seventh Symphony in creating an immediately accessible sense of key.

Unlike Schoenberg, however, Shostakovich never entirely abandoned tonality, or replaced it with a completely new system. So, the Cello Sonata is not especially modernist. But the question we should keep in mind is whether this necessarily makes it Socialist Realist.

Next, let us return to the official document on instrumental music from 1948.<sup>74</sup> “Instrumental music should have a plot, a purposeful idea and a program.” The Cello Sonata has no plot or program, and what is a purposeful idea? Compared with other abstract instrumental works from the middle of the twentieth century such as the violin and cello concertos Dmitri Kabalevsky dedicated “to Soviet youth,” or even Shostakovich’s own Second Piano Concerto, the Cello Sonata seems to have had no ideological purpose at all. His only known intention in composing the Sonata was the dedication to Viktor Kubatsky, a cellist with a reputation for being an excellent organizer of musical performances,<sup>75</sup> thus ensuring that the Sonata would be heard several times. The document states also that instrumental music must be “enriched with the newest intonations born from the elements of contemporary song and the intensive development of the folk music of the various nationalities of the Soviet Union.”<sup>76</sup> While there is some hint of a simple folk style, and a possible quotation from *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk*

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<sup>74</sup> Olkhovsky, 50.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), 104.

<sup>76</sup> Olkhovsky, op cit.

*District*, the Cello Sonata contains no reference at all to Soviet songs, or influence from the traditional music of the smaller Soviet republics. Asafiev's concepts of *intonazia* or musical imagery are undetectable here.

However unspecified the ideology, can we describe the Cello Sonata as a composition representative of Socialist Realism? Not really. It is neither a typical example, nor a complete contradiction of the doctrine. It is diatonic, but also octatonic. It is lyrical, but also dissonant. It is traditional, but also new. So how did it escape negative criticism and suppression during one of the most dangerous times and places in the history of music composition?

One easy answer is that the idea of Socialist Realism was so vague that it was hard to tell whether a work was acceptable to the doctrine, and therefore the Cello Sonata could remain unscathed. However, even works written with the most earnest Communist intentions, such as Prokofiev's *The Story of a Real Man*, provoked Stalin's incoherent rage against so-called Formalism. Another easy answer is that the Cello Sonata was a work of chamber music, in a society where music for smaller forces figured less in political discussion than operas or symphonies, and therefore was less harshly judged. As Dorothea Redepenning has pointed out, compositions for small forces have a lower "status" than more impressive, monumental genres such as symphony and opera, and "figured less in the routine musico-political discussions and were less harshly judged."<sup>77</sup> However, this argument does not really stand up when we consider that another of Shostakovich's non-monumental instrumental works, the 24 Preludes and Fugues for piano, a feat of compositional technique analogous to J. S. Bach's *Well-Tempered*

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<sup>77</sup> Dorothea Redepenning, " 'And art made tongue-tied by authority': Shostakovich's song-cycles," *Shostakovich Studies*, 205.



*Clavier*, provoked official accusations of formalism, since art for its own sake (or purely abstract instrumental music) was supposed to be alien to Soviet composers.

I think the most likely explanation for the lack of official censure was that the Cello Sonata was still a very newly composed work when “Chaos Instead of Music” was published. Critics and politicians were busy attacking *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and other of Shostakovich’s more modernistic works, and maybe the Cello Sonata, which after all, was one of the composer’s essays into the new simplicity of musical language, simply got forgotten in the uproar.

Returning to Elizabeth Wilson’s interview with Arnold Ferkelman, we can read his account of the première:

I heard the first performance of the Cello Sonata in Leningrad, played by Viktor Kubatsky with Dmitri Dmitriyevich [Shostakovich] at the piano. Kubatsky played at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow...but his technical skill was limited. Undoubtedly the sonata has received many better performances since then, and of course is now a part of every cellist’s repertoire. I have to say that when the sonata was first performed, it got a hostile reception. People didn’t understand it and were somewhat disappointed...it wasn’t the sort of new music we were used to.<sup>78</sup>

What does Ferkelman mean by “the sort of new music we were used to?” The more modernistic, futuristic compositions by members of the ASM in the 1920s? The sensationalism of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*? Clearly, the Cello Sonata had

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<sup>78</sup> Wilson, 104.

not made a strong enough impression on the audiences or the authorities to invoke any particular comment, or stronger feelings than disappointment. Even in 1938, during the height of Stalin's purges, when Shostakovich was only beginning to recover from the *Pravda* scandal, he and Ferkelman took the Cello Sonata on a concert tour (the exiled Sergei Rachmaninov's Cello Sonata was also on the program), without negative official comment.

Dmitri Shostakovich spent the rest of his life composing in primarily instrumental forms, including two cello concertos. While *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was so disgraced that the original version did not receive another performance until 1979, and is still not performed or recorded particularly frequently, the Cello Sonata steadily attracted a large following in the concert hall and the recording studio, and, after the cello sonatas of Claude Debussy and Sergei Prokofiev, is probably the most often performed twentieth-century work in this genre. Cellists – and audiences – are much the richer for it.

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This treatise was typed by the author.