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Socialist Realism and Soviet Music: The Case of Dmitri Shostakovich

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Music History

Jordan College of Fine Arts

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Michael Robert Tirman

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"The musical culture of the Soviet Age had its unquestionable leader, Dmitri Shostakovich, whose heritage, as a whole, can be considered the most genuine, deep, and authentic embodiment of the spiritual and psychological milieu of his epoch."[1]

The Soviet Era holds a unique place in the history and ideology of art. For one of the few times in history, artists were not judged solely on their artistic achievements, but rather on how well those achievements matched the party's agenda *du jour*. Serious music composition was not banned completely, but converted into a propagandist mechanism that the government used to bolster positive sentiments towards its own doctrine. Musicians' works were banned in some instances, objectionable to the party or Stalin personally, and many musicians were sent to gulags in Siberia. Even more were murdered as enemies of the people because party leaders thought their works were not art for the people. Communist leaders preferred to censor the difficult concepts that were often encapsulated in every facet of modernist art. A thin tightrope existed in which the Soviet musician could skillfully create art that could coexist with the party's ideology and yet qualify as creative music of the contemporary world to be creative enough to be thoughtful and expressive in representing contemporary life. Most composers could not walk this tightrope.

Dmitri Shostakovich was one of the few Soviet musicians able to balance his creative perceptions while adhering to the party's needs. Through socio-musical trial and error, Shostakovich was able to become an honest, modernist composer in one of the most difficult environments to be a progressive artist. Each of Shostakovich's works contain a piece of his emotional and compositional struggle during his life. He was an honest musician because he valued a variety of different opinions and beliefs that circulated throughout the Soviet Era, and

1 Levon Hakobian, "A Perspective on Soviet Musical Culture during the Lifetime of Shostakovich" in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 221.

his music vividly reflects this wide array of inspirational material. Although it would be short-sighted to refer to Shostakovich as a truly Soviet composer, it would be incorrect to believe him to be a complete anti-Soviet. Unfortunately, much of the scholarly work discussing Shostakovich places him into the extreme of one category or the other, either as a Soviet apologist and political sympathizer or as a Soviet dissident.

Shostakovich does not fit into the extremes of either Soviet apologist or a composer who hated his country. His music can display a middle ground that is too often missed in Shostakovich studies. Shostakovich was an artist and a progressive thinker in many instances, but he was also careful and concerned for his livelihood, both as a composer and as a citizen of the Soviet Union. Not all of his works show utter disdain for the ideals of Socialist Realism and he composed a number of pieces that express acceptance and joy towards concepts that parallel the communist party's beliefs. For instance, his oratorio *Songs of the Forest* referred to Stalin as the "great gardener" and won Shostakovich the Stalin Prize in the arts in 1949. However, there are a great number of works that Shostakovich wrote that show a different side of life under communist rule. The symphonies and his second opera portray the Shostakovich that struggled to survive as a composer. His opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* is indicative of Shostakovich's youthful compositional style, and was most likely the foundations of a composer that would have developed very differently if the Soviet government had not forced Shostakovich to compose with more traditional sonorities.

Before government intervention, Dmitri Shostakovich's opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* premiered in 1934 and ran for nearly two years. During that time, the opera grew in popularity. On January 26, 1936, Joseph Stalin and several other prominent government officials attended a production of the opera. After Stalin attended the production, but did not stay

for the fourth act, a *Pravda* editorial was anonymously published condemning the work as chaotic and not worthy of any praise. The article, titled "Muddle Instead of Music," stated that "things may end very badly" if Shostakovich continued to compose in a manner that was too noisy and dissonant to the average Russian listener. The article described the music as containing "deliberate dissonance" and "snatches of melody."[2] This was a daunting blow for Shostakovich, forcing him to quickly prove to Stalin and the Russian people that his music was meant to serve the masses. His *Fourth Symphony*, which was in the final stages of rehearsal, was immediately withdrawn, and instead, Shostakovich set to work on his fifth. Thankfully, his *Fifth Symphony* was well received and helped to reestablish Shostakovich as a respectable Soviet composer.

Before Shostakovich was reestablished as a respected composer, he had to confront one of the main points of argument of what the *Pravda* article accused him. Most of the criticism that Shostakovich and many other Russian artists received revolved around the concept of "formalism." Formalism, as it is generally understood in a musical sense, refers to the theoretical analysis of a particular work. When a piece is condemned as formalistic, its harmonic structure, rhythm, instrumentation, and a variety of other musical measurements are starkly different from a conservative and accepted theoretical harmonic structure. This thesis looks to define formalism in a broader context than most other Shostakovich studies; formalism will be perceived not only as theoretical and structural, but will also refer to a work's subject matter. In a work that does not have an easily identifiable message, such as a symphony, it may be more difficult to define as formalistic in a conceptual sense, but it still is possible when given clues from criticisms and the composer's commentary. However, in a work that contains identifiable messages, it is very important to isolate those conceptual areas that may have led to its ultimate classification as

2 "Muddle Instead of Music," the translation of the *Pravda* article, accessed March 5, 2011, http://www.arnoldschalks.nl/tlte1sub1.html.

formalistic. Shostakovich's second opera is a perfect example of this broader definition of formalism because it contains a plot, theme, and characters that a person can more readily interpret than a grouping of notes or instruments.

Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District was condemned as formalist in a late January 1936 *Pravda* editorial, two days after Stalin attended a performance. Shostakovich feared his Fourth Symphony would receive a similar criticism, and therefore pulled the symphony from the public for his own safety. Many Soviet artists who could not follow the doctrine of Socialist Realism were quickly and quietly removed from society. Although Shostakovich was an artist, he also understood the limitations the government imposed, and made it a priority to remain within those confines. Otherwise, it would not only put his music in jeopardy, but also his life. Socialist Realism was not realism, and Shostakovich quickly learned a very important survival skill. He had to submit to the Soviet regime's artistic requirement to continue composing.

His subsequent symphonies are also a significant measure to understanding Shostakovich. His fourth and fifth symphonies lend themselves to Shostakovich's identity debate, but many of his later symphonies show a progression to a bolder musical style. Shostakovich's compositional stamp is easily recognizable throughout all of his symphonies, and defines the composer musically. But it is also critical to compare his symphonies with his environment during each phase of his life. Where Shostakovich's opera defines how Shostakovich strayed from the party's paradigm of music, his symphonies show a balance of the composer as both being musically progressive while also being harmonically accessible to the Soviet people.

A stark contrast to this view of a balanced composer can be seen through Solomon Volkov's controversial memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich, entitled *Testimony*. They serve the

Shostakovich debate by portraying Shostakovich in a light the Western world had never seen before. Although it was known that the composer had issues with the communist party from time to time, it was a widely accepted principle that Shostakovich was a communist supporter. Volkov's *Testimony* shattered this notion, sparking a myriad of official letters from prominent Soviets who vehemently disagreed with Volkov's work. This thesis understands the importance of forming an intelligent conclusion based on a variety of sources that do not necessarily have to tote the same message. It would be a major mistake to take everything from Volkov at face value, but it would also be a mistake to dismiss everything in his book as completely invalid.

Shostakovich's musical career was faced with major challenges, and he became a progressive composer who had to conform to the Soviet Party's requirements. The doctrine of Socialist Realism was not the focal point for every Shostakovich composition, but the composer was not so removed from Soviet society that he dismissed the doctrine as unfeasible artistically. Shostakovich loved and aimed to serve the Soviet people through his music. He also wanted to be progressive and an individual through his music. His compositional career, like all other composers before him, was a gradual learning process filled with transitions and revisions of his compositional style. His environment was much harsher than many other composers, but, other Russian citizens that lived under the Stalin regime, Shostakovich also learned how to survive. The mixture of these two vastly different qualities positioned Shostakovich as one of the most interesting composers of the twentieth century.

There are key concepts that are integral to understanding the socio-cultural environment in which Shostakovich composed, such as Socialist Realism, Formalism, and a brief understanding of what the government was like under comrade Stalin. This first section is designed to give a succinct, but thorough, framework of the composer's world.

Socialist Realism, Formalism, and Life under Stalin

Soviet Russia could be argued as the most difficult environment for artists to work and survive. The communist government had a dogmatic grip on nearly every aspect of society, and it was inevitable that the government would have a hand in shaping the arts. Marxist doctrine looked to lessen the wide gap between the proletariat and the aristocracy, and the Soviet interpretation of this ideal was to systematically wipe out the aristocracy while also instilling a fear into the people of Russia. Stalin was aware of the emotional impact the arts had on society, so the communist government wanted to ensure that the arts paralleled their agenda. In 1934, the first official statement about Socialist Realism was publicized:

> Socialist Realism, being the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism, demands from the artist a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must coexist with the goal of ideological change and education of the workers in the spirit of socialism.[3]

The basic goal of the communist party was to align the political agenda with the arts. Especially during difficult times, such as the Second World War, the communist party wanted full support of the arts to help propagate loyalty and foster empathy towards the Soviet and socialist cause. Although the ideals of Marxism suggested that Socialist Realism was a method to lessen the already wide gap between "high and folk art," it was not until the reality of war with Germany that the communist party enforced the ideals of Socialist Realism.[4]

Socialist Realism, to the Soviet artist, was the definition of how their art was supposed to affect the people of the Soviet Union. In the musical community of the USSR, the government

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3 Solomon Volkov. *Shostakovich and Stalin: the Extraordinary Relationship between the Great Composer and the Brutal Dictator* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 16.
4 Marina Frolova-Walker. *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 262.

believed the overarching reality of any work should be "national in form, socialist in context."[5] Reality was not to be realistic; rather, reality implied the perceived reality of the benefit of following communism. When the people performed their labors diligently and obediently, all of society would benefit. Therefore, under the doctrine of Socialist Realism, the people of the USSR were almost always depicted as "hale and hearty characters and required a dependably optimistic finale."[6] Music was to be a reflection of the propagated realty of Soviet culture and virtues, so folk music was often a basis for composition.[7] Richard Taruskin, a prominent musicologist and Shostakovich scholar, suggested that the foundation of Socialist Realism was often "support of 'the victorious progressive principles of reality, towards all things heroic, bright, and beautiful.'"[8] Realism was to be seen as a paradigm rather than an actual, realistic view of Russian culture.

The paradigm of the perfected Soviet national was not altogether an altruistic endeavor; conversely, it was meant to serve the communist party's ever-changing needs. Levon Hakobian, a musicologist who has specialized in Soviet music, believes "the stillborn art of Socialist Realism was favored by the communist government and was intended to serve the ideological necessities of the regime."[9] At other times, Socialist Realism went even beyond the ideological needs of the regime to blatant Stalin worship. This would include imagery that had striking

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5 Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 313.
6 Irina Nikolskaya, "Shostakovich Remembered: Interviews with His Soviet Colleagues (1992)" in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 169.
7 Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 313.
8 Richard Taruskin. *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 95.
9 Hakobian, "A Perspective," 217.

parallels between religious icons and other images and propaganda that was more subtle in nature.[10]

From a musical perspective, Socialist Realism needed to depict music that accurately represented these paradigms of socialism and the great works of its leaders. Music was to be seen through "the party's consciousness, with a view to the 'glorious future.'"[11] Music needed to be lively and avoid the cosmopolitan and progressive music of Stravinsky or Webern. The trademarks of this Soviet-inspired music were "lively march rhythms and ascending melodic gestures."[12] Shostakovich's *Festive Overture* would be a prime example of a work that characterized the necessities of Socialist Realism. After its premier in 1954, it quickly established itself as "his most durable piece of occasional music."[13] The overture is littered with fast-paced passages and easy to recall melodies that were seemingly more accessible to a general Soviet citizen. Although this piece of music was most likely more accessible to the lay music listener, most Soviet citizens did not understand the constraints of Socialist Realism because it changed so much due to the whimsical needs of the party.[14]

The doctrine of Socialist Realism and the abstract concept of formalism are two portions of twentieth century Soviet art that cannot be discussed without the presence of the other. Socialist Realism looked to combat the art that was decried as *formalist*, a new and supposedly out of touch art that was not easily understood or appreciated. Formalism must be defined in two separate senses: formalism in a theoretical sense and formalism in a conceptual sense. In the study of music theory, formalism does not have a specific harmonic structure or texture; rather,

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10 Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 312.
11 Ibid., 312.
12 Ibid., 353.
13 Laurel E. Fay. *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 193.
14 Nikolskaya, "Shostakovich Remembered," 152.

formalism was the absence of regularly perceived patterns in music.[15] This means that to a listener's ear, formalist music will be more difficult to understand because there are less common occurrences of harmonic patterns or usual instrumentation choices. Although music may tend to be less recognizable, it does not mean a lack of organization or a sloppy compositional technique. Conversely, formalism was essentially "highly organized modally and polyphonically."[16]

Not only does theoretical analysis of music reveal formalist techniques, but formalism can also be realized in a conceptual manner. Formalism, in a very broad sense, encompasses all abstract ideas and feelings that are either difficult to understand or are beyond the acceptable social-cultural norms of a particular society. In Soviet Russia, Socialist Realism defined the acceptable content art could portray (however whimsical the definition of Socialist Realism was). The government's dogmatic hand directed art to reflect the *idealized* notions of communism, and painted a far from realistic perspective of the modern life of a worker in Russia under Socialist Realism. In the eyes of the Soviet government, a formalist piece or art would depict an idea that was supposedly counterproductive to the ultimate goals of the party. In a speech given by Yuli Kremlyov, "An Honored Artist of the RSFSR[17] and Doctor of Arts in Leningrad,"[18] formalist music was understood to be "extraordinarily distant from the spiritual needs of listeners."[19] Music was deemed as formalist if it did not easily connect with the people of Russia. Stalin made a clear push in the arts to avoid the cosmopolitan music of the West, and

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15 Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 373.
16 Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 345.
17 *Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic*
18 Ludmila Kovnatskaya, "Dialogues about Shostakovich: From the History of Russian Studies about Shostakovich (2002)" in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 241.
19 Kovnatskaya, "Dialogues," 245.

Taruskin argues that formalism to Stalin and the Soviet regime was void of the traditional folk music that encompassed much of the Russian music in the past several decades.[20] The leader and teacher decried formalist music as "rootless cosmopolitanism"[21] and strove to avoid the modern direction that music was taking in the West; Stalin instead wanted to promote music and art that supported feelings of pride and nationalism towards the motherland.

Shostakovich was a very deliberate composer, and different sonorities and harmonies were chosen for the desired emotional response that particular sound would create. His opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was officially labeled as *formalist*, decried as muddle instead of music in 1936 and never to be heard in Russia again until the 1960's.[22] Shostakovich's second opera is the perfect combination of the two definitions of formalist music in Soviet Russia. On the theoretical side, it was a very unusual clash of instruments and harmonies that shocked and perturbed the listeners. On the conceptual side, his opera was ridden with a storyline about unfaithfulness, rape, government corruption, murder, and the cruelty of humanity. However, if this opera was understood by the Soviet leader, it is fairly clear why Stalin did not approve of the work, and consequently banned a future performance until after his death.

Although the Soviet government vehemently disapproved of formalism in any manner, Shostakovich's use of formalism (along with other composers and artists, not only in Russia, but around the world), marked a very important turning point in the history of music. Taruskin suggests that formalism marked a "revolutionary transformation and an unprecedented departure" from the usual Russian music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[23]

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20 Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 95.
21 Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 347.
22 Simon Morrison, "Laurel Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life* (2000)" in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 350.
23 Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 374.

Along with Stravinsky's cosmopolitanism in such works at *Le Sacre du Printemps*, this movement of unusual harmonies and instrumentation evoked strong emotional responses from the work's listeners. Formalism was the beginning of using music not only to evoke love and hate, but also uncertainty, extreme fear, guilt, and biting tension. Like with most new music, society can tend to adversely react. In Shostakovich's case, society's reaction may have been escalated more so than other composers because of the threat of losing his life. However, it must be noted that Shostakovich's departure from the norm marked a very important turning point in music in the twentieth century, and is a very influential practice of using music to evoke these new, uncomfortable emotions throughout the rest of the century and into the next.

Socialist Realism and the doctrine of formalism are incomplete when examined alone. They are only sections of the Soviet government's attempts to foster a truly communist country and culture. Joseph Stalin, the leader of Soviet Russia, practically shaped the artistic community of Russia during the first half of the twentieth century. There are many factors that played into Stalin's decision regarding art and content of art, and his penalties were severe when artists crossed those boundaries. Stalin's rationale for decision making was almost always defined by how well it meshed with the communist government's party line during a particular time. Stalin had definite goals that were made, and his dogmatic ruling shaped Russian culture for most of the twentieth century.

Russia is a very large and diverse population of people and cultures. Before the October Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks (who were later to become the Communist Party) understood that uniting Russia would be a tremendous task but was critical to the success of the revolution.[24] After the Bolsheviks took control of Russia, great care was taken to appeal to the broad array of

24 Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 302.

cultures across the country: "books were being published in 66 languages, and 205 non-Russian newspapers were circulating in 47 languages." [25] The ruling party understood that it had to spread its message across the boundaries of languages to truly unite the Russian empire.

Once the groundwork was in place, more of the fundamental communist doctrine began through Vladimir Lenin. Stalin's work really began in the early twenties, and continued to support the communist ideal until the end of his life. Stalin's two main goals within the artistic community were "to create culture for the masses" and "disseminate high culture."[26] Stalin actively created conditions across the continent to allow for a complete "Russification."[27] Cyrillic becomes the national alphabet, and many of the newspapers and street signs that were in different alphabets were recreated in Cyrillic.[28] The culture that was allowed to exist under the Bolsheviks was quickly stripped away, as Stalin believed that "the indulgence of the nationalities was supposedly endangering the new revolutionary state."[29] Stalin believed that by uniting all of the different cultures under the roof of Russian nationalism, he would have a better grip on all of Russia.[30]

These cultural changes imposed by Stalin dramatically altered the artistic communities of Russia. He officially encouraged projects that fostered nation-building and patriotism in the Soviet Union, and practically banned anything that was critical or supposedly detrimental to his overarching plan.[31] Stalin had the ability to kill artists who did not conform to his needs, and therefore there really was not much "great art" unless he "deliberately or unconsciously

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25 Ibid., 303.
26 Robert Service. *Stalin: A Biography*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 304.
27 Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 305.
28 Ibid., 305.
29 Ibid., 303.
30 Ibid., 301.
31 Ibid., 301.

overlooked, at least to some extent, what his artists were really doing."[32] Many of the artists who could thrive under such strenuous conditions were often "third-raters."[33]

Shostakovich was able to survive under Stalin for several reasons. Much of Shostakovich's music is focused on folk songs of Russia, which was very much in favor with Stalin. Folk music provided "a much needed degree of safety" for many composers because there was a narrow stretch between 'formalism' and 'banality.'[34] Shostakovich made conscious efforts to emphasize the "the achievements of the Russian people" which in turn was regarded as very favorable by Stalin.[35] Shostakovich only came into trouble with the communist party when his music crossed into 'formalist' territory, and Stalin felt that he wrote a work that "nobody could whistle."[36] According to Stalin, his second opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, could not be whistled.

Shostakovich's Fall: *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*

Shostakovich's second and final opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, is the tragic portrayal of a heroine who is trapped in oppression, much like the situation of its composer. The opera is one of the most important points of discussion for Shostakovich as a composer because it shows more of the artistic and free-spirited side of Shostakovich than much of his other music. The opera also accurately displays the dual-sided nature of Shostakovich's music. The opera served as a major turning point in the life of the composer, and helped him quickly understand

32 Service, *Stalin*, 305.
33 Ibid., 308.
34 Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 316.
35 Service, *Stalin*, 441.
36 Ibid., 305.

the importance of balancing artistry with survival needs. This speaks to Shostakovich's ability to be both the progressive artist, and learning to become the pragmatic artist of the Soviet people.

Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District (*Lady Macbeth*) was originally based on Nikolai Leskov's 1865 horror story.[37] Although Leskov's plot deviated dramatically from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Shostakovich moves farther away from even Leskov's interpretation. Shostakovich understood several elements that were needed to make the story adaptable to the stage and also interesting to the audience. The composer focused heavily on the development of characters and how each character is either the product of his or her surrounding or the tragic consequence of the actions of others. Each character represented a thematic element that truly made *Lady Macbeth* a rich and full story of intrigue, lust, deception, and death. The opera contained, "a condemnation of the repressive world of the Russian merchant (the very capitalism that the Revolution had swept away), a call for women's liberation from that world, and sufficiently graphic amounts of the violence, sex, and murder necessary for a genuine bestseller."[38] These elements made for a very exciting opera that was also well-liked by the Russian masses before the *Pravda* article denounced the work.

For two years, *Lady Macbeth* had filled Leningrad's Malyi Opera Theater, and the opera was received enthusiastically by many prominent artists and critics.[39] Comrade Stalin attended a production of the opera in January of 1936 in Moscow, and did not stay through all four acts. Shortly after his brief view, an editorial in the *Pravda* was published, which severely criticized the work. It was "the famous and ominously unsigned editorial 'Muddle Instead of Music' that

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37 Caryl Emerson, "Back to the Future: Shostakovich's Revision of Leskov's 'Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District,'" *Cambridge Opera Journal* vol. 1, no. 1 (1989): 59.
38 Emerson, "Back to the Future," 64-65.
39 Henry Orlov, "A Link in the Chain: Reflections on Shostakovich and His Times (1976)" in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 203.

ended the brilliant two year career of [Shostakovich's] opera."[40] It is theorized that Stalin personally wrote the editorial, denouncing the work for its graphic content and disjunct musical texture.[41] After the article, the opera was "repeatedly condemned as a shameful stain on Soviet music," most likely because it did not embrace the concept of socialist realism that Stalin saw as important to his overarching plans for Soviet Russia.[42] Quickly, public opinion shifted to accept the new opinion of *Lady Macbeth*: "the opera was promptly banned and publically condemned by fellow musicians who only the previous day had eulogized it."[43] This is the tragic beginning to Shostakovich's unfortunate struggle with the communist party, and would continue well into the 1960s. Shostakovich never again wrote a serious ballet or opera, preferring to "speak his mind through purely instrumental music, which was much less dangerous" than works that contained words or drama.[44]

It was most likely the text of *Lady Macbeth* was the most disagreeable with Stalin and the communist party. Stalin must have been startled by the graphic nature of the opera and could have sensed some of the negative undertones towards the regime. *Lady Macbeth* surely did not fit into the 'happy worker' scenario that Socialist Realism required, so Stalin probably deemed the work too offensive for the public eye. Stalin was quoted discussing Shostakovich as a composer, and he referred to the composer as "a very talented individual, but much too much in the 'Meyerhold' mold."[45] In context, this is a very disturbing analysis of Shostakovich because Vsevolod Meyerhold was an avant-garde Russian theater director who was arrested and shot as

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40 Richard Taruskin, "When Serious Music Mattered: On Shostakovich and Three Recent Books (2001)" in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 364.
41 Nikolskaya, "Shostakovich Remembered," 160.
42 Orlov, "Link in the Chain," 203.
43 Ibid., 203.
44 Nikolskaya, "Shostakovich Remembered," 161.
45 Ibid., 161.

an enemy of the people for his overly progressive work (He was officially shot for admitting to being a British spy, but that was later retracted by the government after Stalin's death in the early 1950s).[46] Many of the thematic elements of the work did not fit into the Socialist Realism mold, and therefore could be interpreted as critical of Stalin's policies. *Lady Macbeth* can easily be "interpreted as deliberate, if necessarily disguised, expression of antagonism to communism."[47] It is important to discuss several of the thematic elements that depict this balance Shostakovich had between the progressive artist and the survival of his art in the oppressive Soviet state.

The thematic elements, as developed through the characters, are important to the understanding of the dichotomy of Shostakovich's ability to be an artist while living in a very oppressive society. Shostakovich's opera is centered on the tragic heroine, Katerina. There is a strange paradox between the sympathy Shostakovich feels for Katerina throughout the opera versus her actions. Katerina Ismailov is "a bold triple-murderess who, having done away with her husband, walls up his corpse in the cellar and proceeds to make riotous love to his man servant. For Shostakovich, however, her actions are understandable-indeed justifiable."[48] In many different texts and scholarly work over Shostakovich's second opera, the subject of the intense sympathy felt for Katerina raises a number of questions. The most important question or parallel that must be considered is whether Katerina was truly a representation of the oppression Shostakovich felt. "Katerina acts out what Shostakovich was unable to do: she destroys her tormentors and lives by the law of her heart. She is…honest, brave, and true-and yet, not unlike the composer, she is betrayed by everyone around her."[49] It is fairly obvious that Shostakovich readily identifies with her and her predicament because of the striking and undeniable parallel

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46 Ibid., 161.
47 Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 93.
48 MacDonald, *New Shostakovich*, 87.
49 Ibid., 88.

between his dilemma as an artist trapped within the confines of communist and oppressive Russia.

The next logical step after identifying the similarity between Shostakovich and Katerina is to derive a thematic element from this relationship. Shostakovich is showing sympathy for the situation into which Katerina has been placed. Katerina was "surrounded by monsters" and forced to take actions that ultimately led to her downfall.[50] Shostakovich was also "surrounded", but managed to survive because he had to cave into some of the socialist party's demands. The thematic element or moral statement Shostakovich makes is that the character will become a product of the society into which he or she is forced. Katerina is pure; her actions of murdering three people while also committing adultery are truly the product of the surrounding corruption and terror. She has no other path to choose, a rather bleak and ominous outlook.

This theme also acts as a social commentary to the injustice of Stalin's socialist regime. It is possible that Shostakovich was making a bold statement as to the effect of the government's oppressive hand on society. If the government is corrupt and littered with amoral people, how are the citizens of Russia supposed to become moral, rule-abiding constituents? Shostakovich makes a powerful statement through Katerina that as the government lapses morally, it cannot be expected that the people will be able to follow a higher morality.

Lady Macbeth contains several prominent male characters that also carry significant thematic elements throughout the opera. Sergei is one of the many factory workers employed by Katerina's husband. Katerina and Sergei make passionate love in the course of the opera, and Sergei pushes Katerina to make amoral decisions, especially in regards to the brutal murder of her husband. Sergei represents "the betrayal of the composer's childhood innocence and idealism

50 Ibid., 88.

by an outside world predicated on force, deceit, and self-interest."[51] Shostakovich uses the relationship of Sergei and Katerina to represent the injustice the dogmatic government committed on its constituents. Sergei, the corruptor, takes advantage of the innocence of Katerina, and after he uses what he needs of her, he moves quickly onto another woman in the fourth act. In the meanwhile, Katerina must pay for her crimes, and ultimately jumps to her death because of the guilt and jealousy she feels over her actions as induced by Sergei. Once again, Shostakovich makes a powerful statement that can be seen as analogous to the atrocities the Soviet government.

Beyond the prominent theme of corruption, there are several other themes and musical elements that Shostakovich uses that make *Lady Macbeth* a very important social commentary to the zeitgeist of Soviet Russia in the 1930s. One theory as to why Stalin reacted so negatively towards the opera was the pervasive amount of graphic sex. Ian MacDonald, a prominent biographer of Dmitri Shostakovich, infers that *Lady Macbeth* is truly about the "boredom and cruelty" that encompasses many people's existence on earth.[52] He goes on to state that Shostakovich used sex as a tool to intrigue and shock the audience, but did not intend for the opera to be solely about sexual escapades. The pervasive sexual theme in *Lady Macbeth* makes it "dangerously easy to misinterpret" and this probably was the case for Stalin.[53] Although it appears to be a rather erotic plot, Shostakovich is actually telling a story about "human entrapment" and how it relates to the people of Russia and their government.[54] This also relates to the idea that Shostakovich was the progressive artist that hid his true intentions from directly

51 Ibid., 89.
52 Ibid., 90.
53 Ibid., 90.
54 Emerson, "Back to the Future," 65.

criticizing the socialist government. These hidden thematic elements demonstrate Shostakovich's ability to make bold statements while not appearing to be overtly critical.

It would be folly to assume Stalin grasped every nuance of *Lady Macbeth* and actually understood how critical it was of his regime. In the *Pravda* article published in January of 1936, the paper makes the argument that Shostakovich's work was deemed offensive because of its graphic nature and esoteric musical construction. Shostakovich's music certainly paralleled the graphic imagery in his opera, so it does make sense to examine several theoretical examples of how Shostakovich's music did not fit into the ideal of socialist realism (thus why Shostakovich's opera was banned from the Russian people until after Stalin's death). The opera could collectively be considered loud and boisterous; MacDonald states his belief that the only "musical flaw" in *Lady Macbeth* was that it was too loud and tended to be "over-exuberant."[55] The composer used a variety of beats and sequences, which helped carry the drama forward throughout the first three acts of the opera.[56] This exuberance most likely relates to Shostakovich's feeling of being trapped in an absurd environment: the analogy of the loss of Katerina's innocence to the Soviet government's mistreatment of its people. When Katerina and Sergei are caught by the police force for the murder of Katerina's husband, the music and drama portrays the law and police as farce and comical: "the law abiding worlds appears more ludicrous and self-serving than the two criminals."[57] Shostakovich reinforces this absurd idea through his composition. The composer would include "the hybrid jazz-and-klezmer that was the popular staple of the time, *chastushki* (Russian comic songs), mass songs, pioneer songs, cheap waltzes

55 MacDonald, *New Shostakovich*, 90.
56 Gerard McBurney, "Whose Shostakovich? (2002)" in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 297.
57 Emerson, "Back to the Future," 63.

and marches, and those syrupy tunes that every Russian knows are only sung by the drunks."[58] The use of several different musical idioms continually reinforced this sense of "banal absurdity" throughout the first three acts, and probably contributed to Stalin's negative reaction.[59] Thankfully, Stalin reacted to the music and graphic nature, because it would be safe to assume if Stalin truly understood the critical nature of this work, Shostakovich probably would not have survived past the 1930s.

The fourth and final act of *Lady Macbeth* is far removed from the absurd nature of the first three acts. It is much calmer but more ominous of the tragic ending, and "there is no trace of buffoonery or comic stylization…it is stern and ineluctable."[60] Katerina quickly realizes that her supposed lover has moved onto another woman in the Russian gulags, betraying her trust to lustfully seek another woman. Katerina's innocence is pervasive in the fourth act, as she sings the aria "Sergei, my love" begging her faithless lover not to leave her.[61] Shostakovich, continually sympathizing with Katerina's predicament, isolates her suicide and musically colors it with an "intense amount of tessitura" to add to the dramatic effect.[62] Shostakovich clearly feels sorrow for the pain Katerina has endured, and unfortunately does not allow Katerina to rise above her fate. The theme of betrayal becomes an important motif throughout the fourth act, and probably can also be viewed as analogous to the betrayal of the Russian government to its people. MacDonald believes there is a parallel between the informers and provocateurs in the Soviet society during the 1930s and Shostakovich's commentary.[63] Katerina's innocence is

58 McBurney, "Whose Shostakovich," 295.
59 Ibid., 295.
60 Emerson, "Back to the Future," 64.
61 MacDonald, *New Shostakovich*, 88.
62 Nikolskaya, "Shostakovich Remembered," 184.
63 MacDonald, *New Shostakovich*, 88.

swept away by the icy waters of a river in Siberia, as she commits suicide because of the betrayal of Sergei and the loss of her life in Russian society.

Shostakovich's second opera was a masterpiece, and was reestablished in the 1960's almost a decade after comrade Stalin's death. The opera's graphic nature was the main reason Stalin condemned the work. This moment marked a dramatic shift in Shostakovich's life, and he reacted quickly to restore his name and protect himself. For nearly nine months after the *Pravda* article, Shostakovich worked diligently preparing his *Fourth Symphony*, only to cancel the premier the night of its debut. Those few months were some of the most stressful and life-changing for Shostakovich and it forced him down a very different compositional path than if *Lady Macbeth* would have been left untouched by the Soviet government.

The Withdrawal of the *Fourth Symphony*

After the condemnation of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* in January 1936, much of the rest of the year was spent completing his *Fourth Symphony* in C minor, opus 43. The work was started in November of 1934, but because of the opera and several other commissions, Shostakovich had put off the score until February of 1936.[64] Shostakovich has envisioned the work as a "monumental programmatic piece of great ideas and great passions."[65] The fourth was a bridge between his third and fifth symphonies. It was rich with new musical ideas, but did not show his true mature compositional style. The symphony "brings an end to the composer's youthful, idea-driven period" and leads the way to the fifth.[66] Unfortunately, with the accusations of being

64 Fay, *A Life*, 92.
65 Ibid., 93.
66 Roy Blokker with Robert Dearling, *The Music of Dmitri Shostakovich: The Symphonies* (London: The Tantivy Press, 1979): 58.

overly formalistic, the fourth was withdrawn before its premier in December, 1936, and remained hidden from the public until 1961.

The *Fourth Symphony* is an important work in the examination of Shostakovich. The symphony, along with *Lady Macbeth*, is one of few works that reveal the composer's unbridled compositional style. The work serves as a comparison point between being a truly free artist (in the purest sense), versus being an artist that was hindered by the dogmatic grip of the communist party. The *Fourth Symphony* possibly represents the Shostakovich that "might have flourished afterwards had he not been so savagely attacked in 1936."[67] The symphony shows the composer at "the summit of creative freedom and reveals his true face as a composer."[68] The work was nearly completely in a free form and probably "indicated what happens when the composer lets his ideas flow freely without a precise structure."[69] From a theoretical standpoint, Shostakovich uses unusual rhythmic structures, free forms, and new instrumental sonorities and timbres to create a work full of creativity and humor. From a contextual idiom, Shostakovich is nearly to the point of his mature phase as a composer. This music looks deeper into the many issues the composer faced: the work "startles by its grasp of life at the core, its insight into the eternal problem of human existence. It is shockingly tragic-quite unexpected from a composer well-known for musical pranks, witticisms, and sense of humor."[70] This symphony, along with *Lady Macbeth*, begin to show the depth and mature capabilities of this young composer, and unfortunately reveal what his potential could have been without the heavy hand of the Soviet government.

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67 McBurney, "Whose Shostakovich," 294.
68 Orlov, "Link in the Chain," 203.
69 Blokker, *The Symphonies*, 57.
70 Orlov, "Link in the Chain," 202-203.

With all of this life and creativity encompassed in his music, it seems peculiar that the Soviet regime would react so negatively towards Shostakovich's compositions during this time. *Lady Macbeth's* contextual elements were deemed too offensive for the public eye, but why would Shostakovich withdraw his Fourth from its premier nearly eleven months after the 'Muddle instead of Music' *Pravda* editorial? Although the symphony did not contain the same contextual clashes with the ideals of Socialist Realism, it was progressive, difficult music that may not have drawn much favor with the government (and Shostakovich was already in enough trouble for *Lady Macbeth*). The Soviet leaders wanted music to unite and excite the people, basically something to fit into a Beethovenian mold that was classical and easily accessible. This symphony is "absolute music in the purest sense" and would be very difficult for the listener to understand and appreciate fully.[71] And "given the political and aesthetic climate of the time, there seems very little doubt that even in a flawless performance…[the *Fourth*] would have been construed as the epitome of formalism, an act in arrogant defiance of the party's benevolent guidance."[72] The zeitgeist of Soviet Russia in late 1936 would not have been conducive for Shostakovich to be overly experimental or at the very least, premiering music that did not sound like the type of music that fit into the Socialist Realism mold.

This symphony was truly "anything but 'classical'" and Shostakovich was correct in withdrawing the symphony.[73] His "submission" (if one would even call it a submission), made several statements that showed a side of Shostakovich not as the progressive artist, but as the pragmatic man. If Shostakovich were truly the unabashed progressive, he would have carried out his symphony with less fear of the consequences within Soviet Russia. However, the composer

71 Blokker, *The Symphonies*, 56.
72 Fay, *A Life*, 96.
73 Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 518.

probably not only feared for his life and his family's livelihood, but Shostakovich also viewed his symphony as an incomplete, difficult collection of ideas rather than a fluid piece of music. The fourth is "distinctly experimental and rich in ideas," but it does lack in formal structure and cohesiveness that the *Fifth Symphony* encompasses better.[74] Although it is a moot point as to the rationale behind Shostakovich's withdrawal of the fourth, the symphony most likely would have been a disaster for Shostakovich, most likely resulting in the composer's quick disappearance. The morning of its premier, an announcement was printed in the *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* about the fourth: "Composer Shostakovich appealed to the Leningrad Philharmonic with the request to withdraw his *Fourth Symphony* from performance on the grounds that it in no way corresponds to his current creative convictions and represents for him a long outdated phase."[75] Shostakovich most likely gave this explanation, and understanding the social pressures to avoid 'formalism' at all cost, this demonstrates the composer was aware the repercussions that the symphony might bring about.

There is also some debate whether the composer initiated the discussion of removing the *Fourth Symphony* from performance, or if it came from the request of the composer's union. One scholar argues that the symphony was actually withdrawn after a rehearsal where many of the orchestra players argued that the work was too long and too complex to be played properly. Shostakovich was required to withdraw the work at "the bidding of the composers' union leadership."[76] This may be true, but Shostakovich is also later quoted: "The fourth is—as far as form is concerned—a very imperfect, long-winded work that suffers from 'grandiosomania.'"[77]

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74 Blokker, *The Symphonies*, 57.
75 Fay, *A Life*, 95.
76 Richard Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us" in *Shostakovich in Context*, ed. Rosamund Bartlett. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24-25.
77 Blokker, *The Symphonies*, 57.

This quote is fairly revealing, because it displays Shostakovich's feelings of inadequacy in regards to the symphony, and also shows how the composer is also pragmatic enough to realize when a work needs more attention and more constructions. However, it should be discussed that the most important reason why the piece was withdrawn was fear of his life. With that idea in place, it can be construed that the unpolished Fourth Symphony would have been a disastrous premiere for Shostakovich because the current feelings toward him were negative and reactionary. This action shows how Shostakovich was truly the progressive artist, while also revealing that he cared how the public perceived his music. Shostakovich was very concerned in keeping his program "proletarian while making the music progressive…He was anxious to establish his own musical individuality and the fourth was the culmination of his experimentation and self-identification."[78]

Likewise, the symphony truly ends the youthful side of Shostakovich's music. The symphony truly encompasses some very mature musical ideas, but the composer's compositional style was still developing. Unfortunately the fourth is often "dismissed, in the absence of any grasp of its context or motives, as an undisciplined and bombastic failure."[79] The work was still a learning tool for Shostakovich, but it is important to recognize the monumental achievement of musical ideas this work achieves. The symphony has "much to do with tension between the implosive, decay-threatened melodic material of which it is made."[80] It displays the impressive collection of ideas and new material Shostakovich is capable of, and accurately bridges the compositional gap between the composer's youth to a more mature, sustainable compositional style that allowed him to work and live in Soviet Russia. After this symphony, all of the

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78 Ibid., 56.
79 MacDonald, *New Shostakovich*, 116.
80 McBurney, "Whose Shostakovich," 298.

composer's subsequent symphonic works were "protected by the armor of a conceptual frame," mainly to avoid the label of 'formalistic' by the socialist regime.[81] For better or worse, Shostakovich's compositional style changed, and the fourth is one of the few works that reveal Shostakovich in an overtly expressive and passion-driven light.

The Success of the *Fifth Symphony*

Nearly a year after Dmitri Shostakovich stopped the premiere of his fourth, the composer filled the Philharmonic Hall in Leningrad in late November of 1937 for the world premiere of his *Fifth Symphony*.[82] This symphony was to be the turning point in Shostakovich's life and his compositional style; the work served as a more fluid and refined example of Shostakovich's writing for symphony while it also meant to be artistic within the confines of Socialist Realism. The composer made several choices about this work that was meant to suggest a sublime and heroic feeling to the state. The work was written in d minor, which could be easily correlated with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and it fit the "Socialist Realist precepts [before being] worked out for music."[83] Shostakovich subtitled the work "A Soviet artist's reply to just criticism," suggesting an apology to the state without actually apologizing.[84] The symphony was a complete success; there were reports of "general euphoria" after the premiere, and an applause that lasted for nearly 30 minutes.[85] The work was accepted as a paradigm of Soviet artistry and Shostakovich reestablished himself within the state.

81 Orlov, "Link in the Chain," 204.
82 MacDonald, *New Shostakovich*, 123.
83 Taruskin, "Serious Music", 369.
84 Blokker, *The Symphonies*, 65.
85 MacDonald, *New Shostakovich*, 125.

Although the *Fifth Symphony* was a phenomenal success within the Soviet Union, the work has come under debate in the years after the publication of Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*. There is a schism in opinion of what was the true meaning of the work. The Soviet state truly believed that his symphony was truly an apology from the composer. The composition was a showcase of Shostakovich's "style and art form" and was a mature example of his abilities as a composer.[86] Officially, Shostakovich stated that the fifth's central idea was "man and all his sufferings."[87] The state believed this to mean that Shostakovich composed an autobiographical work that outlined his struggles creating an art form that was both personally satisfying but more importantly satisfying to the Soviet state. The country thought the work "was tragic, but more of an apology from Shostakovich and his ability to move forward as a composer of the people."[88] Shostakovich was able to prove to his country that he cared about the people, and wanted to compose music that was reflective of the Soviet Union's needs.

After *Testimony*, the *Fifth Symphony* has been scrutinized for alternative meanings. Although some of the validity of Volkov's collection of the composer's memoirs, the text does suggest there is an alternate meaning to his symphony. In *Testimony*, Shostakovich states, "The rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as in *Boris Godunov*. It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, 'Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing,' and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, 'Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.'"[89] This statement of the composer suggests that the fifth is meant to be more of a challenge to

86 Blokker, *The Symphonies*, 66.
87 Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov. *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (London: Toccata Press, 1998), 164.
88 MacDonald, *New Shostakovich*, 125-126.
89 Solomon Volkov. *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1979), 183.

Soviet authority rather than the apology the state wanted.[90] The work reflected "fascism…any tyranny or totalitarianism in general," disguised from the prying eyes of the government.[91] For example, several Shostakovich scholars hypothesized that during the *Largo* movement, the oboe melody is representative of the innocent cries of the deprived and abused under Stalin in the 1930's.[92] This interpretation was unheard of in Soviet Russia, and truly is representative of the Shostakovich studies after the publication of *Testimony,* primarily in the West. This striking difference of interpretation demonstrates a balance that Shostakovich most likely demonstrated, the balance between being a true artist and surviving in the harsh Soviet environment.

The debate of the true meaning of the fifth has a greater purpose in the study of Shostakovich. Because there is a dichotomy between the symphony representing a Soviet apology versus a slap at the dogmatic hand of the government, Shostakovich is displaying his ability to balance between his art and his need to survive. This symphony "demonstrates how far his integrity allowed him to go and how far he went."[93] A theoretical study of the symphony reveals that there isn't a definitive lack of 'formalism'; the structure of the fifth is rather ambiguous and many harmonies could still be harsh by Soviet standards. During this period in the Soviet Union, art was subject to reflecting the "destiny of Russia," rather than being purely artistic.[94] Much of the music composed was reflective of the positive mood towards Russia, often containing memorable tunes or harmonies reminiscent of traditional Russian music. The *Fifth Symphony* contains no folk music or nationalistic ideas.[95] It is interesting that the symphony

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90 Blokker, *The Symphonies,* 66.
91 Taruskin, "Shostakovich and Us", 21.
92 Paul Mitchinson, "The Shostakovich Variations (2000)" in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 303.
93 Blokker, *The Symphonies,* 73.
94 Ibid., 72.
95 Ibid., 65.

"achieved success despite its being contrary in mood and style to what the Soviet authorities required from a symphony."[96] Shostakovich's failure with *Lady Macbeth* and his quick withdraw of his fourth may have poised him for success with his fifth. People were expecting an apology, and because of the tragic nature of the work, Shostakovich was able to make people genuinely believe the symphony to be an apology. And in some respect, the Shostakovich of 1937 may have partially intended the symphony to be an invitation to reconsider and reinterpret his compositional style.

From either interpretation, the fifth definitively represents a turning point for Shostakovich and his style.[97] This symphony has achieved a sublime status, placing the composer back in the good favor of Soviet authorities. Scholars believe the work is truly the first mature reflection of his compositional style. It was a "rebirth" for Shostakovich; another work rejected by the Soviet authorities would probably be the end of the composer.[98] The fifth both achieved international success, while also confusing many people about the actual motives of Shostakovich. Was he a Soviet apologist, or was he actually giving the government a back-handed slap in the face? In either case, the symphony is able to stand alone, representing a true monument of a talented composer. The *Fifth Symphony* is "undoubtedly his piece most charged with history, myth and expectation. It is probably the one most often played, most often treated as a masterpiece, most mocked by those who hate the very sound of this man's music, most loved by audiences, recorded and chewed over."[99] Shostakovich's symphony was the turning point the composer needed to survive, and it clearly reestablished his name as a composer in the

96 Ibid., 65.
97 McBurney, "Whose Shostakovich," 291.
98 Ibid., 294.
99 Ibid., 298.

Soviet Union. Not until after his death has the symphony been studied from the alternate viewpoint that the work was actually critical of Stalin and the Soviet regime.

A Myriad of Dissenting Viewpoints: Shostakovich's True Intentions

The life and works of Dmitri Shostakovich were never speculated as anti-Soviet until the publication of Solomon Volkov's collection of the composer's memoirs, entitled *Testimony*. The book was first published in the West in 1979, four years after the composer's death.[100] It was quickly hailed in the West as a masterpiece, contending Shostakovich was not the Soviet's most loyal son. Richard Taruskin is quoted in 1976 as stating, "[Solomon Volkov] is unquestionably the most impressive and accomplished among the Soviet émigré musicians and musicologist whom I have had occasion to meet in the last few years."[101] Although Taruskin retracts his statement in later years, it shows an example of a how a prominent musicologist was enamored in the several years during the finalization and publication of *Testimony*. However many musicologists either praise or despise the work, it can be agreed that the publication of *Testimony* was truly impactful on the studies of Shostakovich.[102]

But why was Volkov's (or Shostakovich's for that matter) *Testimony* so controversial, and how does it impact the study of Shostakovich today? The memoirs were "related to and edited by" Solomon Volkov and the Russian musicologist appears to have sufficient evidence to show he was indeed interacting with Shostakovich in his later years.[103] In the preface of the work, Volkov claims he first met the composer in 1960 while working as a Journalist in

100 Volkov, *Testimony*, xviii
101 Ho, 37.
102 Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 472.
103 Volkov, *Testimony*, cover.

Leningrad.[104] They begin to form a relationship for the next several years, and Volkov was chosen by Shostakovich because the composer "liked my work and he liked my book on the young Leningraders."[105] Volkov states that they worked in a very consistent manner and described their interactions as such:

> This is how we worked. We sat down at a table in his study, and he offered me a drink (which I always refused). Then I began asking questions, which he answered briefly and, at first, reluctantly. Sometimes I had to keep repeating the same question in different forms. Shostakovich needed time to warm up.[106]

Volkov also stated that the composer had a very stylized manner in which he responded to many of his questions. He ascertains that "some phrases had apparently been polished over many years."[107] Many of the scholars who refute Volkov's work often claim that Volkov plagiarized material from previous publications. Laurel Fay, an ardent critic of Volkov, questioned the veracity of Shostakovich's statements: "Shostakovich, in this instance managed to convey to Volkov by means of his brief answers no fewer than 186 words that reproduced his earlier published statement on Stravinsky with perfect word-for-word accuracy."[108] Although some Volkov sympathizers have claimed it is a possible feat, many scholars have seen some truth behind Fay's words.

In the debate over Shostakovich, there have been several critics who have taken near polar views about Shostakovich and his life. The three most prominent arguments are Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*, Laurel Fay's essay "Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose *Testimony*?", and Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. As discussed earlier,

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104 Ibid., xi.
105 Ibid., xv-xvi.
106 Ibid., xvi.
107 Ibid., xvii.
108 Laurel E. Fay, "Volkov's *Testimony* Reconsidered (2002)" in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 25.

Testimony is the collection of Dmitri Shostakovich's memoirs according to Solomon Volkov. *Testimony's* main point of contention is that Shostakovich is best described as a *Yurodivy* composer, one who "played the fool, while actually being a persistent exposer of evil and injustice."[109] The memoirs painted the picture of a composer, who although was a true individualist, seemed spiteful and negative about many of the injustices he incurred.[110]As the memoirs were collected near the end of the composer's life, it may be that some of the statements made were more negative than if Shostakovich were to speak of those memories at an earlier stage of life.[111] The assumption that Shostakovich became less sympathetic to the Soviet socialist ideals might also be suggestive of a different outlook in the memoirs written near the end of his life. This outlook on Shostakovich can be viewed through his music: "From the Thirteenth Symphony of 1962 onwards, Shostakovich's music is clearly dissident in the sense of rejecting his country's political environment root and branch."[112] For example, it is very clear that the Thirteenth Symphony was intended to "file a protest against government policies."[113] In 1968, Shostakovich was quoted as saying, "Soviet music is a weapon in the ideological battle. Artists cannot stand as indifferent observer in this struggle."[114] Whether or not *Testimony* is a valid source, it can be easily ascertained the Shostakovich became more critical of the government and its policies as he aged.

Laurel E. Fay has been one of the most outspoken against Solomon Volkov's work. Her two expressed concerns over *Testimony* are its authenticity (most importantly) and the second "which presumes the document is authentic, questions the veracity of many statements contained

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109 Volkov, *Testimony*, xxv.
110 Ibid., xxv.
111 MacDonald, *New Shostakovich*, 246.
112 Ibid., 246.
113 Blokker 133.
114 Ibid., 133.

therein."[115] She has said, "at best, *Testimony* is a simulated monologue, a montage stripped of its original interrogatory and temporal context, by an unproven ghostwriter who has repeated professed ignorance of the basic published materials by and about the composer, and who has admitted to having resorted to guesswork. At worst it is a fraud."[116] She has vehemently contested the authenticity of Volkov's work, and has used a variety of interrogative techniques to discredit the memoirs. She used a cross comparison of text in *Testimony* versus previously published documents, and concluded "the sheer length of the identified quotes as well as the formalized language make it utterly inconceivable that the composer had memorized his previously published statements and then reproduced them exactly in his conversations with Volkov."[117] She is asserting that Volkov pulled quotes of Shostakovich from other published sources to compile the work, rather than relying on the true memoirs of the composer. She is alleging plagiarism and hinting that Testimony may be more of Volkov's ideas than those of the composer. In 1980, Shostakovich's wife Irina was interviewed about the publication of *Testimony*, and she also discredited Volkov. She stated, "Volkov saw Dmitrich three or maybe four times…He was never an intimate friend of the family—he never had dinner with us here…I don't see how he [Volkov] could have gathered enough material from Dmitrich for such a thick book *[emphasis added]*."[118]

Fay also had some qualms about the methodology Volkov implored while compiling the memoirs. She argues that Volkov used an unsystematic organizational scheme to *Testimony* to help hide some of the obscurities in Shostakovich's memories. She believes the organization

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115 Laurel E. Fay, "Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose *Testimony*? (1980)" in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 12.
116 Fay, "*Testimony* Reconsidered," 57.
117 Fay, "Whose *Testimony*," 14-17.
118 Ibid., 12.

"effectively disguises the chronology of the reminiscences and obscures the question-answer context in which the reminiscences were evoked in the first place."[119] She continues to question Volkov about the type of "trickery" he implored to get a particular type of response from the composer.[120]

Volkov understood that the publication of *Testimony* would be a massive change in perspective on Shostakovich. He also knew there would be people who did not believe his work to be an accurate portrayal of the composer. One method Volkov used was having Shostakovich read and sign sections of his compiled work to verify that it was accurate. At the beginning of each major heading, the page would read, "Read. D. Shostakovich."[121] Fay argues that "all signed pages contain uncontroversial subject matter," and Shostakovich may not have read those inscriptions that Volkov placed in *Testimony* to make it different from the Soviet perspective.[122] She clearly does not believe *Testimony* to be a credible source over the composer's life: "It is clear that the authenticity of *Testimony* is very much in doubt. Volkov's questionable methodology and deficient scholarship do not inspire us to accept his version of the nature and content of the memoirs on faith."[123]

Overall, Fay's problems with *Testimony* have revolved around its authenticity based on concerns of plagiarism. Many of the concerns Fay has with the work are rather small in scope and do not directly deal with whether *Testimony* is or is not an accurate portrayal of the composer. Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered* take a more holistic

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119 Ibid., 19.
120 Ibid., 19.
121 Fay, "*Testimony* Reconsidered," 39.
122 Ibid., 39.
123 Fay, "Whose *Testimony*," 19.

approach to the discussion of Shostakovich, and tend to disagree with Fay's perspective on *Testimony.*

Shostakovich Reconsidered is one of the few supporters of Volkov's work, and has helped to create a slightly more neutral tone about who Shostakovich truly was and how his compositions reflected himself and his experiences. The book is split into three sections, containing a cross examination of witnesses to Shostakovich, some interviews with close friends and family members, and finally a number of pieces of evidence "corroborating *Testimony.*"[124] Ho and Feofanov's main point of contention is how *Testimony* should be treated. They argue that *Testimony* is a set of memoirs and should be treated as such; Laurel Fay's critique of minor details and factual inaccuracies should not discredit the entire work. "Critics often forget that *Testimony* is a set of memoirs, not a Ph.D. dissertation, and that, as such, its text is selective, subjective and filtered through hindsight. Small errors, contradictions and omissions do not necessarily impeach *Testimony's* authenticity."[125] This is a very important point to consider about *Testimony,* and therefore when used in research, it should be used for understandings of mood or intention rather than dates.

Ho and Feofanov's work also contains an impressive number of witnesses, friends, and family that confirm the overall affect of *Testimony* is valid. Maxim Shostakovich, the composer's son after the fall of the Soviet Union confirmed, "It's true. It's accurate. […] The basis of the book [*Testimony*] is correct."[126] Like Ho and Feofanov, Maxim Shostakovich is not confirming that every last detail in the work is correct, but the overall tone and perspective presented in *Testimony* reflects the position of the composer in the later years of his life.

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124 Ho, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, 45.
125 Ibid. 143.
126 Ibid., 39.

Shostakovich Reconsidered also adds a valuable perspective on a number of charges against Volkov. Critics of Volkov have often pointed to his silence in the debate as guilt. Ho and Feofanov argue against this point, claiming that remaining silent does not mean "pleading the fifth."[127] They cited that during many of the critiques against Volkov, the Russian musicologist continued working on other subjects, such as his cultural history of St. Petersburg.[128] Ho and Feofanov also claim that many of the allegations charged against Volkov are often "wildly distorted and lack substance and perspective."[129]

Although much of the study of Shostakovich has been heated and filled with personal, vindictive remark, time has begun to filter through the muck and we are able to get a clearer picture of the real Shostakovich. While each side has important claims that add to the overall understanding of the composer and his intentions, there is one claim with which each side has agreed. Fay, Ho, and Feofanov have contended that, "the surge of interest in Shostakovich's music after 1979 can be attributed in part, to the composer's memoirs."[130] Ian MacDonald, author of *The New Shostakovich*, may have summarized the arguments against *Testimony* best: "*Testimony* is a realistic picture of Dmitri Shostakovich. It just isn't a genuine one."[131] *Testimony* must be treated as a set of memoirs that were compiled late in the composer's life, they probably do not accurately reflect the actual feelings of the composer during each stage of his life, just a snapshot of a particular time of his life.

The discussions of Shostakovich from the perspectives of Laurel Fay or Solomon Volkov are often considered the extreme viewpoints of the composer. Ian MacDonald, Allan B. Ho, and

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127 Ibid., 41-42.
128 Ibid., 42.
129 Ibid., 237.
130 Ibid., 35.
131 MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich*, 246.

Dmitry Feofanov may have a less critical viewpoint than the extremes, but are often critiqued heavily for either being too ambiguous in writing style, or being a Volkov sympathizer. Richard Taruskin, in a brief review of MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*, stated that MacDonald's work "musters all the methods of Soviet music criticism at its most lagging, vulgar, and biased in order to prove that Shostakovich was a 'scornful dissident.'"[132] Although the variety of opinions and interpretations of Shostakovich lends itself to a more holistic approach to understanding his life and music, they often tend to polarize each other. Shostakovich was surely a composer who balanced a number of different motives and sentiments with the Soviet government and his responsibility as a composer.

The burning questions concerning Shostakovich unfortunately still remain. Was he truly a Soviet dissident, a composer with an agenda to expose the tyrannical rule of Stalin and his regime through his music? Or was the composer the shy, reserved individual who believed in the socialist ideal, composing music he acknowledged as for the people? Why has there always been a schism is Shostakovich studies? People are rarely consistent with their opinions, especially throughout their entire life. To be stoic throughout life, maintaining the same fundamental belief defeats the entire purpose of living. Humans (and especially composers) are dramatically shaped through their experiences, and Shostakovich is no exception.

Likewise, Volkov's *Testimony* is not a fake. When applying the same logic that composers are shaped by their life experiences, it is easy to discern that Shostakovich had a number of different life experiences that brought him to the time when he worked with Volkov to compile his memoirs. *Testimony* is only a snapshot, a small fragment of the actual sentiments Shostakovich experienced in the latter years of his life. The work offers excellent insight into the

132 Taruskin, *Shostakovich in Context*, 12.

composer's motives, and would be useful in the analysis of his later symphonies, those composed during the same years the memoirs were compiled. But *Testimony* may not reflect the same Shostakovich that worked as a fireman and composer during World War II. It might not reflect the same during the year and a half where his opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, was hailed a work of genius. *Testimony* probably does not reflect the true sentiments the composer felt during the thirty minutes of applause at the premiere of his Fifth Symphony. Those experiences are the defining moments for the composer, and should be the true testimony of the legacy of Dmitri Shostakovich.

Laurel Fay's analysis of *Testimony* adds some important perspectives to the debate. Fay accurately recognizes that there are discrepancies and contradictions contained within the memoirs. She believes the public can only "speculate about where the boundary lies between Shostakovich's authentic memoirs and Volkov's fertile imagination."[133] Fay's criticisms are legitimate, but many scholars speculate whether those concerns really address the issue at-hand. Do incorrect dates delineate forgery in a memoir? Fay also contends that previously published materials are also a sign of Volkov's devious scholarly practices. Volkov explicitly stated in the introduction to *Testimony*, prior to the allegations of forgery, that Shostakovich had several phrases that he had memorized, word-for word.[134] The vast majority of Fay's contentions with Volkov is over this point, the reuse of previously published materials. Although Fay should question the status quo, another scholarly work conducted by Ho and Feofanov in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* has shown that the memorization of these phrases is possible. The authors "found several research psychologists who were prepared to testify…that Shostakovich was probably

133 Fay, "Whose *Testimony*," 19.
134 Volkov, *Testimony*, xvii.

capable of repeating substantial passages of his own words verbatim."[135] Fay contended that these memorized phrases never appeared in any normal conversation for Shostakovich, but one point she did not consider is that the collection of his memoirs was probably more like an interview rather than an informal conversation.

Laurel Fay adds many important points about methodology and material contained in *Testimony*, but misses in any sort of perspective over the composer's music and life experiences. The educated person can delineate certain patterns and actions in Shostakovich's life that swing the pendulum either towards the artistic or socialist side. *Lady Macbeth* is the most appropriate work to begin with, mainly because it caused so much public controversy.

Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District is one of Shostakovich's most important works. Not only is it a true masterpiece, it is also a formidable example of the composer's developing compositional style. Similar to the Fourth Symphony, the opera is harmonically challenging. The work is full of dissonances, progressive instrumentation, and obscure rhythms that display the direction the composer's music was taking. It is largely "idea-driven,"[136] and should be admired for the vivid creativity Shostakovich was able to display at such a young age. However, with the vicious *Pravda* editorial threatening "It could end very badly,"[137] the composer had to change something to survive in the communist country. It is a moot point to discern whether the *Fifth Symphony* contained less "formalism" than *Lady Macbeth* or the Fourth Symphony, but it is not arguable that Shostakovich's actions suggested his concern for his livelihood. But the quick turnaround of the *Fifth Symphony* to restore his reputation within the Soviet state was critical; the composer knew he had to make some concessions just to survive. The completion of the fifth

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135 Fay, "*Testimony* Reconsidered," 40.
136 Fay, *A Life*, 92.
137 "Sumbur vmesto muzyki" [A muddle instead of music], *Pravda*, 28 January 1936, p. 6.

showed a great amount of pragmatic work, but also contains structural, harmonic, and instrumental obscurities that do not completely fit into Stalin's ideal of Socialist Realism. So why did the *Fifth Symphony* restore Shostakovich?

There are two answers to the fifth's success. First, the subtitle of the fifth as "A Soviet Artist's Reply to Just Criticism" influences the listener's ear before the first note is sounded. With this subtitle, Shostakovich is overtly stating that he understood the criticisms of the Soviet people (or more likely Stalin), and this symphony responds to their misgivings about his earlier compositions. He openly acknowledges that he believes the criticism to be "just," which must have played to the ears of the Soviet regime. Without saying the government is correct, he is validating their artistic desires. He expresses his ability to rise above the criticisms and creates a symphony of which the Soviet people can be proud. The subtitle creates the idea of non-formalist tendencies in the audience member's mind, and because music can be interpreted in many different ways, people inevitably understood the work to be a non-formalist masterpiece.

What makes the fifth a non-formalist masterpiece? This brings the discussion into the second reason why the fifth was such a phenomenal success. There was nothing in the symphony that screamed "Russian" or nationalistic. The piece did not contain any folk music or national ideas, and there was nothing that even suggested the work correlated with the ideals of Socialist Realism.[138] But with the combination of the subtitle and the works sublime nature, the work was inevitably a major success. The scope of the work was so grand that people had a positive response.

The fifth was also a turning point for Shostakovich as a composer. It had saved his life, and it had also defined the composer's style. It was a mature, more fluid culmination of many of

138 Blokker, *The Symphonies*, 65.

the ideas presented in the Fourth. It also was not an apology to the Soviet government, but it revealed an important side of Shostakovich. Rather than placing artistry over the rules of the Soviet regime, Shostakovich composed a symphony that still upheld his integrity as a composer while also serving the needs of the Soviet people and their government. This is one moment in Shostakovich's life that is not accurately defined by *Testimony*. Although it is impossible to prove the intent of the composer, it would be difficult to accept the 1936 Shostakovich as the same man as the spiteful voice contained in the memoirs. The Shostakovich of 1936 made adaptations to survive; it may be doubtful that the voice of *Testimony* would have made such concessions.

As time moved on, the death of Stalin in 1953 brought some relief to the artistic community. Instead of being sent to the gulags or executed for not adhering to the principles of Socialist Realism, composers were more often having their work banned from the public. Rather than cowering in fear from the past threats, Shostakovich's music became more progressive and more openly critical of the Soviet regime. In 1962, his Thirteenth Symphony, titled "Babi Yar" was based on the already controversial poem of Yevtushenko. The work admonished the Russians for not being open about the genocide that occurred at Babi Yar during the Second World War, and was critical of the anti-Semitic sentiments that still ran prevalent throughout Russia.[139] The work is also openly critical of the Soviet Regime. The government did not raise a monument in honor of the thousands who died at Babi Yar, and the poem is also critical of those who "abused your purest name [Russia], in the name of hatred."[140] This could be interpreted as accusing the soldiers and officials of the Nazi army, but it also could be reversed to admonish the

139 Ibid., 133.
140 "Babi Yar," the translation of the poem contained in Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony, accessed January 20, 2011, http://remember.org/witness/babiyar.html.

Soviet government for abusing the name of Russia to carry out their will. Shostakovich understood the message he was sending, decidedly critical of Soviet policies that were based on anti-Semitic overtones.[141] Not only were the words contained in Shostakovich's Symphony critical, but his music is also the most honest and revealing in the composer's career. The Thirteenth Symphony, "with its labored struggle upward, as if stifled by the dense chromaticism, reflects magnificently the tragic imagery of the text."[142] This type of symphonic work would have surely sent him to the gulags during the war years.

Another question that arises after the discussion of his Thirteenth Symphony is whether his more challenging works were a reflection of personal change, or if he was just able to get away with more challenging music because of the current government policies? Music is undoubtedly an expression of the self, of the joys and sorrows, of the greatest achievements and the most miserable failures. Shostakovich's music is a personal expression of his sentiments and ideals, and is absolutely reflective of what he experienced during those periods of time. Although the government allowed the composer to create these works of art that could never have fit into the mold of Socialist Realism, the very fact that Shostakovich composed this music reveals that he changed over time as a composer. The Thirteenth Symphony therefore is a reflection of Shostakovich later in his life: a more outspoken critic of the government policies and less concerned with creating music that fit the Soviet regime's needs.

Like most of humanity, Dmitri Shostakovich was a composer that changed over time. It is impossible to categorize the composer as either a Soviet apologist or a fervent critic of the Soviet government, and the great variety and intensity of his music speaks to this argument. Unfortunately, the study of Shostakovich has been near-sighted; there has been little discussion

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141 Blokker, *The Symphonies*, 133.
142 Nikolskaya, "Shostakovich Remembered," 157.

of the person behind his music, and little observation that people change over the course of their lives. Shostakovich was not a stoic composer, his music defeats that argument. Shostakovich was affected by his experiences within the Soviet Union, and for better or for worse, had to compose music that not only did not compromise his integrity, but also keep him from harm's way. As the government's policies relaxed, he was probably still hurt and affected from the trauma he endured as a younger composer. His music reflects this change in attitude and the government's slow ability to allow his music.

Dmitri Shostakovich's legacy as a composer is intertwined with his legacy as a Soviet musician. After the publication of *Testimony*, the study of Shostakovich greatly increased because of the vastly differing opinions of his life and for what his music stood. Unfortunately, the rift between musicologists' opinions are so polarized that discussion of Shostakovich is more about toting personal agendas rather than actually studying the musical affect of his works.

Shostakovich could have balanced between the two extreme viewpoints of Laurel Fay and Solomon Volkov. Shostakovich was first a composer, but not at the expense of his life. He was pragmatic in his musical approach under Josef Stalin, and more daring under subsequent leaders of the Soviet Union. But he was also attentive to the needs of the Soviet people; his *Fifth Symphony's* sublime appeal gave hope to a wartime nation and his work as a volunteer firefighter while also writing his *Seventh Symphony* was the paradigm of the hard-working Soviet citizen. Fay and Volkov want to place Shostakovich on one side of the argument, but one major flaw in this type of reasoning is that the composer was not static throughout his whole life. Experiences shape people, change opinions and attitudes, and effect how one expresses him or herself. Shostakovich was absolutely no exception to this rule; he was dynamic and adaptive to the

experiences he encountered in his life. The Shostakovich who composed *Lady Macbeth* was a much different musician when he premiered his *Fifth Symphony*. Likewise, the Shostakovich of *Testimony* had a much different set of experiences than the youthful composer of the *Seventh Symphony*.

Shostakovich's legacy as a composer needs to be focused on his music rather than his political leanings. For the past thirty years, the question of the composer's loyalties has been the central point of discussion. Although it is important to establish motivations of a composer to extract meaning and significance from music, it should not be primary focus. It is his music that should be the focal point of the composer's life, and it is his music that will make the most impact on future generations.