Shostakovich, Dmitri Dmitrievich

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Russian composer. His music is chromatically tonal/modal, expressive, and sometimes highly dramatic; it was not always to official Soviet taste. He wrote 15 symphonies, chamber and film music, ballets, and operas, the latter including *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (first performed in 1934), which was suppressed as being ‘too divorced from the proletariat’, but revived as *Katerina Izmaylova* in 1963. His symphonies are very highly regarded.

His son Maxim (1938– ), a conductor, defected to the West after his father’s death.

Shostakovich was born in St Petersburg. He entered the conservatory there in 1919 and studied with Leonid Vladimirovich Nikolaiev, Maximilian Steinberg, and Alexander Glazunov; he left in 1925, having already written a great many works. The first symphony, which dates from that year, was performed in 1926 and later throughout Europe. It quickly established his reputation internationally. He came into conflict with Soviet authority in 1930, when his opera, The Nose, based on a story by Nicolai Gogol, was condemned as bourgeois and decadent. The next, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, produced in 1934, was even more violently attacked in 1936 and had to be withdrawn; his fourth symphony was also withdrawn. It has been claimed that Stalin himself dictated the *Pravda* article entitled ‘Chaos instead of Music’, in which the composer was attacked for ‘petty-bourgeois sensationalism’: Stalin had been seated very near the orchestra at a performance of the opera, and had caught the full blast of the brass as they depicted the violent love-making of Sergei and Katerina. Already of a nervous disposition, Shostakovich was shattered by official condemnation. His popular fifth symphony, labelled by a party hack (not the composer himself) as ‘A Soviet artist’s practical creative reply to just criticism’, helped to restore him in official favour, although the deliberately empty speech of the finale may betray the composer’s true feelings. Similar deceptions are found in the first movement of the seventh symphony, arising from the siege of Leningrad: the banal march theme suggests Stalinist oppression as much as it does invading Nazis. Other major works include a highly charged cello concerto, and 24 preludes and fugues for solo piano. His string quartets are considered to be some of his greatest work and are often included in musical programmes all over the world.

In his later years he largely adapted his manner to the government’s requirements, which in turn became somewhat modified, and established himself as the leading composer of the day, gaining the Stalin Prize with his piano quintet in 1941. With other leading composers he was again denounced in 1948 and did not resume significant composition until 1953, when he wrote his mighty tenth symphony in which the recently deceased Stalin is depicted in a sarcastic scherzo.

**Works**

**Stage and film** operas *The Nose* (1927–28; first performed 1930), *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1930–32; first performed 1934); incidental music to several plays including Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*; music to about 14 films.

**Orchestral** 15 symphonies, including no. 1 in F minor (1925), no. 5 in D minor (subtitled *A Soviet Artist’s Practical Creative Reply to Just Criticism*, 1937), no. 6 in B minor (1939), no. 7 in C (*Leningrad*, 1941), no. 8 in C minor (1943), no. 10 in E minor (1953), no. 13 in B♭ minor (*Bobi Yar*, with bass, bass chorus, and orchestra, 1962), no. 14 for soprano, bass, strings, and percussion (1969), no. 15 in A (1971); two piano...
concertos (1933, 1957); two violin concertos (1948, 1967); two cello concertos (1959, 1966).

Chamber 15 string quartets (1938–74); two piano trios (1923, 1944), piano quintet (1940), sonatas for cello (1934), violin (1968), viola (1975), all with piano.

Vocal and piano Songs to texts by Pushkin, Shakespeare, Lermontov, Blok, Michelangelo, and Dostoevsky; 24 Preludes and Fugues for piano (1951).

quotations
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