

PHD THESIS

My PhD Thesis project has started according to my personal experiences with Dmitri Shostakovich's music. I had the opportunity to work with a great Russian teacher at the Royal College of Music in London, Natalia Lomeiko. She is a specialist in Russian music and particularly with Shostakovich's works for violin¹. I started the work having a couple of targets which I tried to cover in my essay. The most relevant ones are:

Shostakovich's music cannot be fully understood without knowing the political and the personal environment which influenced the composer. The genesis of each work is extremely important as well.

The Russian composer had the ability (helped also by David Oistrakh) to write his music very comfortable for the violinists. This fact helps a lot the performance quality.

The feeling the musician must have on stage while playing a work by Shostakovich is very important. The violinist needs a lot of preparation to get into a certain atmosphere and to be able to project the feeling to the audience, as well.

This first chapter ("A bit of history") is necessary in order to understand each period of Shostakovich's life and the historical events which hardly influenced the composer's compositions. Some examples are the Russian Revolution in 1917 (Symphony no. 12 "The Year 1917", 1961), the siege of Leningrad between 1941 and 1944 (Symphony no. 7 "Leningrad", 1941), the battle from Stalingrad between 1942 and 1943 (Symphony no. 8, 1943), etc.

Shostakovich's music was created in a musical context hardly dependent to the socio-political, musical and cultural environment of that period. The second chapter will include important personalities (composers, performers and conductors) who influenced and helped Shostakovich. I will follow the influence of other composers² like Prokofiev,

¹ This is how Natalia Lomeiko describes in a few words Shostakovich's first violin concerto: "To me there's always a darker, more sinister underlying meaning in all the movements. The titles - *Nocturne* - is not a typical Romantic Nocturne. It's more of a nightmare, fearful half-dreaming that is almost disturbing at times. The *Scherzo* is one of a grotesque complex contrapuntal movements. The *Passacaglia* resulting in a massive Cadenza is a walk to an acceptance of fate. And to end with that movement and mood would probably have given Shostakovich a death sentence, so he wrote a last movement a bit like Tchaikovsky's Finale, bright, sparkling and a deceitful quasi-happy ending."

² The influence of the other composers will be described in the 4th chapter of the thesis. There, I will also analyze the importance of the Jewish themes and the DSCH motif in Shostakovich's music.

Khachaturian as well as the premieres of Shostakovich's instrumental concertos and symphonies, which were done by Oistrakh, Rostropovich (violin and cello concertos), Mravinsky and Kondrashin (most of the symphonies).

The 5th chapter, which is actually the heart of the thesis, will contain very detailed analysis of three big works for violin: The Violin Sonata and the two violin concertos. For each work it will be mostly the same plan for describing it. I will start from the genesis, the period when Shostakovich composed the work and the premiere. Then, I will separate each movement of each work in order to have a detailed analyze which will help the reader.

The analyze will contain a plan divided in some subchapters. The first will be an objective structural analysis of the form of the movement with the key moments (first and second theme, development, recapitulation, coda, variations [in case of passacaglia form]). After this, we will have an interpretation analysis which will also be divided in two sections. The first will follow general aspects of the interpretations. The second, named "(2.2). Technical and interpretative items" will analyze most of the possible issues a violinist will encounter when approaching a work by Shostakovich. I tried to make it very clear and understandable so that the reader (which is probably a violinist) will be able to catch it very fast. The target of this chapter is to make things easier for the performer. The analysis contains many musical examples from the score with relevant passages. Every technical issue will be explained, and I will offer practice solutions for the difficult passages. In the technical problems, I include also the sound we need for Shostakovich. Of course, we have to understand the meaning of his music, but there is a technical way to create the tension in the sound.

The 6th chapter will include an interpretation analysis of the sonata and the first concerto based on recordings with great violinists like Oistrakh, Vengerov and Kremer.

In the 7th chapter I described some of my personal concerts with Shostakovich's works. This analysis is very important in order to understand everything that can influence (positively or negatively) a performance, such as the hall, the orchestra, the conductor, the audience, the temperature, the humidity, etc.

In the conclusions, I will actually offer solutions for any of the possible problems that can appear during a performance. I described the technique of the left and right hand and the concert preparation as well. The right-hand technique is extremely important in order to get

the sound that can really project in a big hall (especially for the violin concertos). I offered technical solutions for spiccato, legato, détaché in Shostakovich's music. The way of practicing those right-hand techniques are different when you apply them in a piece by Shostakovich. We cannot make the same spiccato for Shostakovich like for Mozart, as an example.

In the end of the conclusions, I followed also some psychological aspects of an artist as well as the mental preparation for the concerts.