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Dmitri Shostakovich 1906-1975

String Quartets

CD1 77'06

String Quartet No.2 in A Op.68 (1944)

- 1 Overture: Moderato con moto 8'03
- 2 Recitative & Romance:
Adagio 10'53
- 3 Waltz: Allegro 5'59
- 4 Theme & variations: Adagio 10'47

String Quartet No.8 in C minor Op.110 (1960)

- 5 Largo 4'40
- 6 Allegro molto 2'45
- 7 Allegretto 4'15
- 8 Largo 4'33
- 9 Largo 4'04

String Quartet No.13 in B flat minor Op.138 (1970)

- 10 Adagio 20'44

CD2 71'39

String Quartet No.3 in F Op.73 (1946)

- 1 Allegretto 6'40
- 2 Moderato con moto 4'54
- 3 Allegro non troppo 4'01
- 4 Adagio 5'41
- 5 Moderato 10'40

String Quartet No.7 in F sharp minor Op.108 (1960)

- 6 Allegretto 3'33
- 7 Lento 3'36
- 8 Allegro 6'03

String Quartet No.9 in E flat Op.117 (1964)

- 9 Moderato con moto 4'20
- 10 Adagio 4'34
- 11 Allegretto 3'47
- 12 Adagio 3'32
- 13 Allegro 9'54

CD3 76'16

String Quartet No.5 in B flat Op.92 (1952)

- 1 Allegro non troppo 10'44
- 2 Andante 10'41
- 3 Moderato 10'25

String Quartet No.11 in F minor Op.122 (1966)

- 4 Introduction: Andantino 2'15
- 5 Scherzo: Allegretto 2'57
- 6 Recitativo: Adagio 1'18
- 7 Etude: Allegro 1'19
- 8 Humoresque: Allegro 1'08
- 9 Elegy: Adagio 4'15
- 10 Conclusion: Moderato 3'41

String Quartet No.12 in D flat Op.133 (1968)

- 11 Moderato 6'41
- 12 Allegretto 20'29

CD4 75'18

String Quartet No.4 in D Op.83 (1949)

- 1 Allegretto 4'27
- 2 Andantino 6'35
- 3 Allegretto 4'07
- 4 Allegretto 10'28

String Quartet No.6 in G Op.101 (1956)

- 5 Allegretto 6'42
- 6 Moderato con moto 4'56
- 7 Lento 5'57
- 8 Lento-Allegretto 7'44

String Quartet No.10 in A flat Op.118 (1964)

- 9 Andante 4'23
- 10 Allegretto furioso 4'15
- 11 Adagio 6'13
- 12 Allegretto 9'08

CD5	78'00		
String Quartet No.1 in C Op.49 (1935)		String Quartet No.15 in E flat minor Op.144 (1974)	
1 Moderato	3'57	8 Elegy: Adagio	12'23
2 Moderato	4'43	9 Serenade: Adagio	5'14
3 Allegro molto	2'12	10 Intermezzo: Adagio	1'49
4 Allegro	3'03	11 Nocturne: Adagio	4'54
String Quartet No.14 in F sharp Op.142 (1973)		12 Funeral March: Adagio molto	4'38
5 Allegretto	8'22	13 Epilogue: Adagio	6'40
6 Adagio	10'57		
7 Allegretto	8'44		

Rubio Quartet

Dirk van de Velde *violin I* · Dirk van den Hauwe *violin II*
 Marc Sonnaert *viola* · Peter Devos *cello*

Recording: April-September 2002, Church in Mullum, Belgium
 Producer & Engineer: Johan Kinnivé, Signum Sound Productions
 Cover: © Philippa Baile
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Dmitri Shostakovich: a life in fifteen String Quartets

In the twentieth-century history of music, the life and works of Dmitri Shostakovich (St Petersburg, 25 September 1906; Moscow 9 August 1975) are remarkable and unique in several ways. This young, promising and successful composer developed in a period when neither Western nor Eastern Europe shunned the experimental. In 1936, when Shostakovich had become an up-and-coming star, Stalin began to feel menaced by his success and used a performance of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* in 1936 as a pretext to declare Shostakovich a persona non grata. From then onwards, Shostakovich felt artistically straitjacketed by Socialist Realism, a stranglehold he managed to escape from through large doses of delicately balanced musical ambiguity. He became so well-versed in achieving this ambiguity, that it turned into an idiomatic style.

After Stalin's death in 1953, the system gradually loosened its reins, but Shostakovich did not give up his idiom. He hardly sought alliance with developments taking place in Western Europe and America while Stalin was still alive. Although he had kept himself abreast of the latest tendencies (serialism, aleatory, indeterminacy, minimal and repetitive music), he integrated hardly any of it into his style, with the exception of the twelve-tone-system. From 1968 on, that technique, introduced by Schönberg in 1923, did appear now and again in Shostakovich's later works.

Politically, however, he made a few mistakes he would pay dearly for with regard to public opinion. Due to the fact that, by his own account, he had been forced to join the communist party in 1960, and later, to denounce the dissident Sacharov, Shostakovich was considered to belong to the old regime.

It is not easy for an outsider to imagine what it must have meant to be a composer under Stalin's dictatorship.

It is generally agreed that Shostakovich behaved like a yurodivy, someone who is able to see and hear what others cannot, and communicates about it in coded language, almost like a mediaeval fool speaking the truth in jest and thus communicating more than could be understood at first sight.

Whenever he could, Shostakovich adopted an anarchist and individualist attitude; restricted though he was in many ways, he tried to breach conventions.

Still, some of his deeds remain problematic, and several testimonies, though not always equally reliable, do not help to clarify the picture. Moreover, his own Testimony (1979) was not written by the composer himself, but taken down by Solomon Volkov

and it contains some obvious manipulations of the truth; Maxim, Shostakovich's son, emphatically denies some of the statements in *Testimony*. And then, there are conductors, such as Kurt Sanderling, who worked with Shostakovich and who claim that their views of Shostakovich's works are based on what the composer told them, which, of course, is hard to verify. For most people, the most reliable source of information to date is Krzysztof Meyer's biography on Shostakovich (1996).

Preceding the String Quartets

In the first part of Shostakovich's musical production his main interest is in bigger genres such as symphonies and the opera. Not until 1938 did Shostakovich turn to the string quartet, a genre he would cultivate until his death.

Shostakovich was a child of his time. In 1917, at the age of eleven, he encountered Lenin during a demonstration and he composed his *Praise of Freedom*, a *Funeral March for the Victims of the Revolution* and a *Little Revolution Symphony*.

The October Revolution left its mark on Shostakovich: in many ensuing compositions he would revert to this theme, with or without a sense of ambiguity.

In the twenties a proletarian culture had come to the fore, urging composers to write operas and oratorios based on mass culture. This tendency came into conflict with those composers who wanted to apply themselves to the experimental, Shostakovich being one of them. Consequently, both sides organised themselves into associations and factions, which, in the early thirties, finally resulted in the *Composers' Society*, allowing composers to criticise each other's works. The final judgement, however, was not made by the composers, but by bureaucrats.

Shostakovich had a hard time during his studies at the Conservatory (1919-1925). After he had completed the piano course, financial worries forced him to accompany silent movies, a time-consuming and burdensome occupation, as Shostakovich was near-sighted. The *Symphony No.1* (1925), which he composed to conclude his composition course with Stheyberg and Glazunov, was an immediate success, not only in the Soviet-Union but also in Europe and the United States.

It was followed shortly afterwards by the *Piano Sonata No.1* (1926) and the *Aphorisms* (1927), two experimental compositions which were quite beyond the grasp of the audience.

The *Symphony No.2* (1927), subtitled *October*, had been commissioned by the government to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Revolution. It contained an

ambiguity that suited Shostakovich very well, for the composition was a clean break away from symphonic tradition. This was interpreted by the government as a reflection of the revolutionary spirit (apart from the revolutionary texts, it has a factory whistle in it); Shostakovich himself however, was much more concerned with aesthetic innovation through experiments, but, as yet, this eluded the government.

With the partly absurd opera *The Nose* (1928) Shostakovich transferred his urge to experiment to large-scale genres. His next opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1932, revised as *Katerina Ismailova* in 1958), earned Shostakovich national and international fame between 1934 and 1936, though some critics blamed the work for its then pornographic content.

While composing *Lady Macbeth*, Shostakovich seriously misjudged the situation. On the one hand, he took the liberty of questioning the priority and quality of mass song during meetings of the *Composers' Society*. This was not a very sensible thing to do, as it ran counter to the doctrine of *Socialist Realism*, which had by then been introduced by Maxim Gorki and in which mass song and optimism were described as qualities.

On the other hand, Shostakovich thought *Lady Macbeth* would tally entirely with the principles of the government: he depleted *Katerina* as a person meriting sympathy, because her adulterous behaviour did away with pre-revolutionary middle-class morality. He gives her the most melodious passages, even though she is a murderess, while the other characters (including her impotent husband, her perverted father-in-law, the police) are caricatured.

It eluded his attention that explaining away murder, the lack of optimism, and a thoroughly dissolute morality could be interpreted by Stalin in a nihilistic way. After all, it was only the programme leaflet that said that *Katerina's* adventures were to be blamed on capitalism.

With the article "*Chaos instead of Music*", published anonymously in the *Pravda* and stigmatising *Lady Macbeth* as formalistic (one of the most abusive terms within the system), Stalin set in motion a descending spiral, which would eventually lead to Shostakovich's downfall. As a matter of fact, from 1936 on Stalin organised large scale witch hunts, during which even Gorki was killed. In that period Shostakovich went to sleep fully dressed, for fear of being arrested at night. He became badly depressed, took to drinking and seriously considered suicide. With the favourable reception of the remarkably ambiguous *Symphony No.5* (1937), he succeeded in saving his skin. Nevertheless, its triumphant music, with sweet and heroic elements can also be interpreted as a hollow triumph and a parody.

Shostakovich himself called the work "a Soviet artist's creative reply to justified criticism".

String Quartet No.1 in C Op.49 (1938)

After the success of the Symphony nO.5 and his subsequent rehabilitation. Shostakovich wrote music mainly for propaganda films. In only six weeks' time, during the summer of 1938, he wrote his String Quartet No.1, an unpretentious 'finger exercise' which gave him a lot of pleasure. At the premiere in Leningrad on 10 October 1938 by the Glazunov Quartet he himself described the composition as cheerful and spring-like. Some sources say the birth of his son Maxim (10th May 1938) contributed to the light-hearted character of the string quartet. Maxim himself, however, maintains that the simplicity and serenity of the work are connected to the opposite. Looking at it from that angle, one could say that Shostakovich used ambiguity from his very first string quartet.

Shostakovich interchanged the first and fourth movements, both of which have a positive radiation. The scherzando-like character of the nervous, waltz-like third movement can be interpreted ironically. In the second movement, a set of melancholic variations on a folk tune is started by the viola. It should be noticed that this is not an authentic Russian folksong, but a creation by the composer, modelled on exactly that folksong tradition. The Moscow premiere (16 November 1938) by the Beethoven Quartet meant the beginning of a lifelong friendship with these musicians.

String Quartet No.2 in A Op.68 (1944)

In 1940 Shostakovich scored highly with his audience and the authorities with the impressive Piano Quintet, for which he received the Stalin Prize. But real popularity only came through his Symphony No.7 (1941-1942), written during the siege of Leningrad by the Germans. According to Shostakovich, this siege had been the immediate reason for writing the 'invasion march' in the first movement of the symphony. Besides, the movements originally bore the subtitles War, Remembrance, The Splendour of our Country and Victory.

The creation on 5 March 1942 was generally considered to be a historical event. On 22 March, the same performers played the composition in Moscow. During this premiere, there was an air raid warning, but the orchestra simply went on playing and nobody left the theatre. The symphony moreover became a symbol for the Allied Forces: the score was smuggled out on microfilm to be played in the United States. Later, it was also performed

in London and in Sweden. It goes without saying that Shostakovich was awarded the Stalin Prize for this work also.

It was understood that both Symphony No.7 and No.8 were about suffering. Shostakovich would remark ironically that the war period was a happy time: at last the composer was allowed to write works with a negative content. But while the authorities took his music to be a mere ventilation of the tragedy of war, Shostakovich and many others heard in the notes the tragedy of the regime they were obliged to live under.

Shostakovich wrote the Piano Trio No.2 (1944) in consequence of the unexpected demise of his best friend, Ivan Sollertinsky (1902-1944). Not only had the work been written in commemoration of Sollertinsky, but it was also conceived as a huge indictment of war, and so bringing together collective and individual suffering. Shostakovich took quite a long time to write it (half a year). It earned him his third Stalin Prize. It was created on 14 November 1944 in the hall of the Leningrad Philharmonic (where Sollertinsky had been artistic director), together with the String Quartet No.2, written immediately after the Piano Trio No.2 and in a very short period of time ("eerily short",

he would have told Shebalin).

This work, which also contains war symbolism, is dedicated to the composer Vissarion Shebalin, one of Shostakovich's dear friends, and one of the few people who had defended him when he had fallen into disgrace in 1936.

Unlike the String Quartet No.1, the movements are not conceived in a traditional way. The Overture uses a solemn opening theme, which returns at the end, alternating with a multitude of melodic lines.

In the Recitative the violin sounds as if it were looking for comfortable musical surroundings, finally finding them in the Romance, in the harmonious carpet of sound unrolled by the other members of the quartet for its long monologue.

In the fluctuating motions within the Waltz, some perceive the restlessness and anxiety of people who have fallen victim to absolute arbitrariness.

After an introduction, the theme with Variations is started by the viola. The musical development leads to a violent climax, with piercingly high notes, to be closed by a large but calm section, as if the composer were suggesting that peace is possible after all.

String Quartet No.3 in F Op.13 (1946)

After the war it was rumoured that Shostakovich intended to write a grand symphony to

pay tribute to the glorious victory. This was even announced by the press agency Tass. At first Shostakovich himself was very communicative, but afterwards became very secretive about it. At its creation it appeared that the Symphony No.9 (1945) was not a majestic work, but a short, ironical and even sarcastic symphony, more frivolous than triumphant. The reviews were scathing, at home and abroad.

The same irony is also present in String Quartet No.3, where contrasting musical ideas incessantly question one another. Shostakovich wrote it between January and August 1946. As in the Symphony No.8, he chose in favour of five movements, and just as he had done in Symphony No.7, omitted the programmatic subtitles in the final version.

The Allegretto (calm and unaware of approaching disasters) breathes frivolity and unsophisticated cheerfulness.

The beginning of the second movement (rumbling uneasiness and expectation) is characterised by obstinate broken triads. It is a lively waltz, with at times shrill sounds, apparently forecasting the approaching conflict. The scherzo-like third movement (unleashed force of arms) is in marked contrast with the preceding one, by means of rugged accents and a nervously melodious style of writing. According to some, the central march parodies the Prussian goosestep and it must be interpreted as a metaphor for a display of power. The Adagio (homage to the dead) is a sevenfold presentation of a sweet mourning song on the violin, accompanied by a solid unisono-substructure of cello, viola and violin. It evokes the atmosphere of a funeral march disappearing in the distance. The viola carries out the transition to the last movement (the eternal questions: Why? and for what purpose?), with some of the earlier themes entering into dialogue with each other, and ultimately falling silent.

At its creation (16 December 1946, by the Beethoven Quartet) the audience once again did not hear a triumphant hymn, but a more universally oriented work.

It was to be expected that reactions to these acts of insubordination were to come, which would by no means be the case only for Shostakovich.

String Quartet No.4 in D Op.83 (1949)

The Composers' Society was instructed by Stalin and his pawn Zhdanov to expose the formalists and cosmopolites among the composers. It was also the start of the very questionable star career of Tichon Khrennikov, who later on would prove himself to be an opportunist.

During the historical meeting, Prokofiev fell asleep, was called to order and left the room. The other composers started to incriminate each other in public, but were finally all discredited: Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Dmitri Kabalevsky, Gavriil Popov, Vissarion Shebalin,... On 10 February 1948 the resolution was made public and at the school of music, the 10-year-old Maxim Shostakovich was forced to condemn his father. During the following meetings nobody dared to sit beside Shostakovich. Like the other composers present, he also had to read out a piece of self-criticism, the text of which was handed to him when he mounted the platform. With the exception of his Symphonies No.5 and No.7, all his music was considered to be unworthy of the Russian people. He was also removed from some of his teaching posts.

Paradoxical as it may sound, but entirely in accordance with Stalin's perverted power politics, Shostakovich was obliged to attend a congress in the United States as a Russian observer. After his refusal to go, Stalin in person called him on the telephone. According to reports, Shostakovich asked how a composer whose works were not played and who had been accused of formalism, could represent the Soviet-Union in the United States; Stalin replied that no composer in the Soviet-Union had been forbidden. Shostakovich went to the United States and was forced to deliver propagandist speeches.

A partial rehabilitation followed because of his mainly Stalinist (but also deliberately trivial) Song of the Forests (1949) and the countless film scores he composed in that period. Far more interesting compositionally are the 24 Preludes and Fugues (1952) written in consequence of his forced visit to Leipzig in the D.D.R. in 1950.

In the period following his condemnation, Shostakovich would write quite a lot of compositions, only to lock them away, waiting for better circumstances. Among them are the Violin Concerto No.1 (1947), the Festive Overture (1947), the song cycle From Jewish folk poetry (1948) and the String Quartet No.4 (1949).

This quartet was not created until 3 December 1953, by the Beethoven Quartet, after Stalin's death (5 March 1953).

The delay was caused by the use of material from Jewish folksongs. Stalin had spoken out against cosmopolitanism in 1948 and thus also against the Jews. To Shostakovich the Jews had become a symbol: "All of man's defencelessness was concentrated in them".

In the first movement he does not use the folk music literally, but he does adopt the idiom. The melody starts on top of some held tones. Quite fast it moves on to a climax and is then followed by resignation. In the second movement, the first violin comes to the

fore with a quasi-improvised melody. It is said by some, to contain a reference to private suffering. The third movement is not a scherzo: it evokes a menacing feeling, caused by its specific timbre (almost entirely *con sordino*), its unisono-passages and its inciting galloping motif. In the last movement, it is not only the instruments that engage in dialogue, but also the Western and Jewish-Eastern worlds: everything is focused on collective suffering. To that effect Shostakovich uses both dances and literal quotes from colourful Jewish melodies. It is significant that this folk music is not treated severely but freely. Only at the end of the movement does the Western music come back to the fore, as if it were to be dissolved in nothingness.

String Quartet No.5 in B flat Op.92 (1952)

The most remarkable thing about the beginning of this string quartet (which was created only as late as 13 November 1953, for the thirtieth anniversary of the Beethoven Quartet) are the five notes played over and over by the viola, and referring to the name 'Shostakovich': C, D, Es (E flat, read: 'S') and H (followed by C sharp) are part of the initials D-S-C-H. But this motif will not be fully and systematically elaborated until Symphony No.10 and the String Quartet No.8.

These energetic, driving five-note passages alternate with more lyrical moments. Striking is the tenuous tone that concludes this movement and marks the transition to the next one.

The second movement stands out because of a highly refined sonority: viola and violin playing the same line together, at a large interval and extremely subdued, evoking eternity.

As imperceptible as it was in the first movement, a new transition is made to the next section: there, gently but irresistibly, serenity is exchanged for a busy texture of voices, reminiscent of the previous two movements, including the striking five-note motif, and ending in the same timelessness as the second movement.

The composer (and also pupil of Shostakovich) Galina Ustvolskaya claims that Shostakovich incorporated a theme from her Trio (for violin, clarinet and piano) in this string quartet and also in his Michelangelo-suite, as a sign of appreciation.

String Quartet No.6 in G Op.101 (1956)

The first large composition Shostakovich finished after Stalin's death was Symphony No.10 (1953). According to Solomon Volkov and Kurt Sanderling, the Scherzo is a portrayal of Stalin. Most probably, this symphony is full of cryptic symbolism, but Shostakovich hardly

ever discussed this, and never in the same way.

The period between 1953 and 1956 was favourable to Shostakovich's reputation and he received several distinctions. Meanwhile a real struggle for power took place behind the scenes, resulting in the actual abolition of the 1948 decree in the spring of 1958.

This period was not really Shostakovich's heyday as a composer. The String Quartet No.6 is by far the most remarkable work he wrote in this period. The Beethoven Quartet created it in Leningrad on 7 October 1956. Shostakovich wrote it as a relaxation while composing his Symphony No.11.

The first movement starts with a childlike melody, written for the film *The Fall of Berlin* (Padenie Berlina).

The atmosphere is reminiscent of the pastoral. The optimistic line continues into the second movement, where the first violin floats serenely high above the other instruments. Astonishingly poetical is the introvert, melancholic mood of the passacaglia in the third movement, according to some, a symbol for grief and remembrance. In the fourth movement the passacaglia theme recurs amidst the expressions of joy which characterised the first two movements.

What is most remarkable about this string quartet is the way in which each movement is concluded: Shostakovich chooses in favour of a formula that returns almost literally each time, thus forming a unifying element throughout the string quartet.

String Quartet No.7 in F sharp minor Op.108 (1960)

In the programmatic Symphony No.11 from 1957 Shostakovich sympathises with the 1905 revolutionaries who vainly struggled for a humane world. Compositionally, Shostakovich had by then united all his typical styles of writing into a coherent language.

In his private life he had had to deal with the loss of his wife Nina Vaslyevna: she had died in consequence of radiation during her laboratory work. Shostakovich married again in 1956, with Margarita Andrejevna Kajnova, who he had proposed to the first time he saw her. They divorced in 1961. The following year, Shostakovich married Irina Antonovna Soepinskaya.

He wrote the short, fairly simple String Quartet No.7 in 1960, in commemoration of Nina, who would have been 50 that same year.

At the beginning of the first movement a striking rhythmic motif (short-short-long) is introduced and repeated five times: it will be the basis for the rest of the movement. Cello

and first violin alternate at first but then bring the melody to life together. The joyful character is exchanged in the second movement for a melancholy melody, which is started high by the violin and steadily descends to lower spheres.

At the beginning of the third movement, Shostakovich uses a brutal contrast: soft, descending lines are alternated without warning with whirling, nervous dialogues, developing like a fugato, and still ending in serenity. At its creation in Leningrad on 15 May 1960, the members of the Beethoven Quartet called the final movement a cosmic fugue, indicating not only the technical difficulties in it, but also referring to the attempt at finding comfort in the absolute.

String Quartet No.8 in C minor Op.110 (1960)

In 1959 Shostakovich began to be severely troubled by an inflammation of the spinal cord, an incurable disease (poliomyelitis). In May of the following year he was forced to go to Gohrisch near Dresden for treatment. Officially, however, he stayed in Dresden, then still completely in ruins, for the film score of *Five Days Five Nights*.

In three days' time, impressed by the misery of war, he wrote the String Quartet no.8, the five movements of which blend into each other. He dedicated it to the victims of fascism and war, and, according to his daughter Galina, Shostakovich considered himself to be one of them, a very justifiable point of view, especially considering the numerous quotations from key Shostakovich compositions that were woven around the central motif D-Es-C-H. The notes D-Es-C-H refer to his initials, and at the same time symbolise each (suffering) individual.

The first movement contains references to Symphony no.1 and Symphony no.5. In the second movement, not by chance, a Jewish theme from the Piano Trio no.2 glimmers through. The Cello Concerto no.1 (1959) is present in the waltz-like third movement. In the fourth movement, with its remarkably aggressive accents, a Russian hymn from 1870 is quoted: "Languishing in prison, martyred by slavery", a hymn which Lenin liked very much. Further, the cello refers to the aria "Seryozha, my love" from the third act of *Lady Macbeth*, where Katerina sings about woman's great sense of sacrifice.

It is difficult to say whether the D-Es-C-H-motif is related intentionally to the opening fugue of Beethoven's String Quartet op.131. The purported integration of the *Dies Irae* is nothing but 'Hineininterpretierung'.

String Quartet No.9 in E flat Op.117 (1964)

Precisely in 1961, the official start of destalinisation, Shostakovich wrote one of his most controversial compositions, *Symphony no.12*, sub-titled the Year 1917. Compositionally it provoked negative reactions, and with respect to content, the choice of subject was rather unfortunate. Some people maintain, however, that the work is misunderstood.

On the music scene there were no clear signs of destalinisation. Krushchev abused Shostakovich because of a jazz concert organised by the composer (after which, in 1961, jazz was officially forbidden). Nevertheless, the visits by Leonard Bernstein (1959), Glenn Gould and Igor Stravinsky (1962) had a salutary effect. The fact that it was Khrennikov of all persons who organised that last visit, heralded the turning tide. Equally symbolic was the successful creation of *Symphony No.4* on 30 December 1961. This work had been completed during the controversy about *Lady Macbeth* and had since then been locked away since then with lots of other compositions. It was also to influence *Symphony No.13* (*Babi Jar*), a composition boycotted by the government because of its Jewish theme.

Just like String Quartet No.8 the five movements of String Quartet No.9 are played without a break. The work is dedicated to his third wife Irina.

The first four movements work towards the final movement. In the first movement a central idea is born, which afterwards will be frequently combined with other motifs. In the second movement the writing is much more chord-like and serene. At the end the first violin suggests a theme in a quiet tempo, but then with a remarkable rush, it runs into the third movement. The gallop motif is clearly reminiscent of Rossini. In the fourth movement, on top of a chord-like structure, a soloist plays a hesitating melody time and time again, which at times continues telling the story in a monologue.

In the final movement all the ideas of the preceding movements return in a colourful, orchestral texture, in the shape of a waltz, march, chorale, fugato, recitative and monologue. The composition leads to an impressive climax, which is concluded by a striking unisono.

Together with String Quartet No.10, this work was created by the Beethoven Quartet on 20 November 1964.

String Quartet No.10 in A flat Op.118 (1964)

This string quartet was written in 11 days' time and it is dedicated to the Jewish composer Moissei Samuilovich Vainberg, the pianist with whom Shostakovich played the

arrangements of his symphonies for two pianos to the members of the censoring committee.

In this work Shostakovich returns to one of his favourite styles of writing: that is starting with only one instrument, after which the other parts gradually join in. However, the intense way in which the instruments then enter into dialogue, is rarely seen in his works. A lasting impression is left by the remarkable use of the sul ponticello-articulation by the viola towards the end. Its serene ending contrasts sharply with the furious second movement, which also contains a quotation from String Quartet No.7. Here dialogue has disappeared and impulsive accents and strident glissandi dominate in a soundscape approaching symphonic colours, and finishing with a surprising unisono.

The third movement is the pith of the composition. It consists of a 9-measure passacaglia theme, played mainly by the cello, and towards the end situated in a higher register. Out of the passacaglia a fourth movement arises, gradually becoming busier and referring to the previous movements. In a sound that is very typical of Shostakovich, cello, viola and second violin play a slow melodic line unisono, at a long distance from each other, while the first violin is moving in between, pizzicato. The end refers to the serenity in the first movement.

String Quartet No.11 in F minor Op.122 (1966)

In 1965 Vasily Shirinsky died. He was the second violinist of the Beethoven Quartet and Shostakovich dedicated String Quartet nr.11 to him. The seven short movements are played without interruption and are characterised by a dark undertone. The central theme is played in the Introduction by the cello. It returns in ever-faster note values at the beginning of the second movement, which sounds pianissimo almost continuously. As happens quite often in the work of Shostakovich, the contrast between movements is exploited, in this case, by an extremely loud onset of the third movement with expressive eruptions and striking motifs followed by quiet chorale sections.

The restlessness is driven to extremity in the Etude, when the busy gestures of the first violin move to the other parts, surrounded by a wall of sound from the other instruments. The obsessive repetition in the fifth movement adds an effect of great relief to the gloomy tranquillity of the funeral march in the sixth movement. In the last movement the opening motif keeps returning in the first violin, clearly but modestly, ending in near silence, to the sound of a thin high note. The creation of this string quartet took place in May 1966.

String Quartet No.12 in D flat Op.133 (1968)

This string quartet comes after the Seven Songs (1967, with texts by Alexander Blok) and the Violin Concerto no.2 (1967). It is dedicated to Dmitri Tsyganov, the first violinist of the Beethoven Quartet, who created the work in Moscow, September 14th 1965.

It is significant for music history that Shostakovich now moves to panchromatism. He uses all twelve tones equally, thus joining in with dodecaphony as it had been developed by Schönberg in 1923. The main difference though, is situated in the tonality and consonance into which Shostakovich integrates these twelve tones.

This string quartet is also said to be programmatic. At the beginning of the first movement (the world of higher ideals) the twelve tones are presented seven times, sometimes fragmented and in ever-changing contexts. The part of the second violin is silent at the beginning, as homage to the deceased Shirinsky. The second movement itself consists of four movements, the first of which is a Scherzo (Allegretto: the destructive powers). Besides trills, this Scherzo uses an energetic rhythmic motif (four short notes and a long one), the motifs conflicting with each other.

The second movement (despair) is an adagio chorale, played con sordino, referring to the musical language of the Russian Orthodox Church. At the end the first violin plays ever more penetrating pizzicati, announcing the Moderato (expression of pure intention and higher aspiration). Elements from the previous movements are resumed. The final movement (Moderato/Allegretto: victory of good over evil) is characterised by an obsessive recapitulation of the rhythmic motif in the Scherzo.

12 is not only a relevant number compositionally, it can also be seen from the viewpoint of Christian mysticism: together with the numbers 3 and 7, 12 is the depiction of a multitude which can be restored to unity.

String Quartet No.13 in B flat minor Op.138 (1910)

In this work Shostakovich continues his unbounded pessimism (probably caused by his bad physical condition), already present in his Symphony no.14 (1969). It is dedicated to Vadim Borisovsky, the violist of the Beethoven Quartet, who created this string quartet in Leningrad on December 13th, 1970. In 1937 Borisovsky had published a work of reference on the viola. Therefore it is not surprising that Shostakovich focuses on this instrument in his string quartet. The composition opens with a viola solo, playing a melancholy, evocative

twelve-tone melody, after which the other instruments serenely join the discourse, in utmost sobriety. As in String Quartet No.12, some melodic elements were inspired by the Russian Orthodox Church. Then, the sound becomes busier, more present, adding attention for non-conventional, percussive sonorities, such as tapping the body of the instrument with the wooden part of the bow. In this respect, Shostakovich comes close to the Western European avant-garde, with its increasing attention to 'sound in itself'. Although for some time it looks as if this string quartet will also end in silence, Shostakovich breaks through these expectations by softly building up the last tone to a painfully hard and sharp final sound.

String Quartet No.14 in F sharp Op.142 (1913)

Shostakovich wrote this string quartet after the ambiguous Symphony no.15 (1971). The work is dedicated to cellist Sergei Shirinsky and the cello plays a prominent role in it. In the first movement the cello enters into dialogue with the first violinist, Tsyganov, the only other remaining member of the Beethoven Quartet (for violist Vadim Borisovksy had passed away in the meantime, as had quite a few other friends of Shostakovich's).

Although this string quartet has a carefree ring, there is lament behind it.

The introvert is at the heart of the passacaglia in the second movement. The Passacaglia, and in a broader sense also Theme with Variations, appears to have been a cherished style of writing throughout Shostakovich's string quartets, especially in slow movements: the second movement in String Quartet No.1, the fourth in No.2, the third in No.6, the third in No.10 and in this movement.

In the last movement "Seryozha, my love" from Lady Macbeth, returns, the same quotation Shostakovich had already used in String Quartet No.8. Whereas then it referred to a forbidden composition, it has now become a joyful witticism and an allusion to the dedicatee's first name.

The evolution in this composition, from light-heartedness slowly deepening to reconciliation and idyll at the end, adds a moving touch of poetry to the global discourse.

String Quartet No.15 in E flat minor Op.144 (1914)

Shostakovich refused another dedication, because death seemed to be lying in wait all the time. Cellist Sergei Shirinsky died in 1974, during rehearsals for this string quartet. It was

created by the Tanejev Quartet on 14th November, 1974, in the presence of Shostakovich, who was himself fatally ill by then. He could not even mount the stage to take a bow.

This string quartet is most typical of the later, introverted Shostakovich, a kind of music which hardly makes allowance for the concert situation. Shostakovich said: "It must be played in a way which makes flies drop dead from the ceiling and makes the audience leave the concert hall out of pure tediousness".

It is a masterpiece of melancholy, sadness and embitterment. It has six slow movements, flowing into one another.

The first movement is a fugato, but its theme is so static and spun out that all sense of time appears to be gone.

In the second movement Shostakovich uses a twelve-tone row, each note a scream, rising from soft to loud, and ending abruptly. These alienating sounds are compensated by a modest, almost uncertain waltz. This movement also contains a reference to Beethoven's String Quartet in A minor Op.132.

In the third movement the violin plays a dramatic recitative, with echoes of the Serenade, while the other instruments play signal-like chords, and the cello, almost unobserved, holds a note. Some elements of Bach's Chaconne are integrated in this movement.

In the Nocturne the warm sonority of the viola plays a cantilena con sordino, accompanied by the other members con sordino as well. Some soft pizzicati in the cello announce the Funeral March. Its starts with a viola monologue and is continued by the cello. Sometimes the music is chord-like, but the monologue remains at the centre. In the final movement the central ideas from the previous movements are resumed and brought to a synthesis. The viola expresses the last musical thought.

Shostakovich realises that he will never accomplish his project of writing 24 string quartets in all keys. Three days after having finished the Viola Sonata (1975), on 9 August, he dies from a heart attack. At his funeral his String Quartet No.8 is played.

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