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**Declaration**

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

A photograph of a handwritten signature in blue ink on a light-colored surface. The signature reads "David Cho".

Student's Signature :

Date of Submission: 20th August 2020

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Culture is an integral part of every society -- they are the building blocks that cultivate a nation's hopes and dreams. One expressive form of culture is the arts, which help to change opinions and instill values through different media, from painting and sculpture to music and literature. In this paper, the arts is defined as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their elegance and emotional power, one such medium being classical music. This definition comes from the combination of various definitions found on dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster<sup>1</sup> and Oxford Dictionaries.<sup>2</sup> To enable a society to remain free from adulteration and outside influence, the arts are quintessential and it is paramount that these artists are able to freely express themselves to ensure a continual exchange of ideas and thoughts in the community. Society needs to maintain the free, fluid, and dynamic exchange of ideals for the natural growth of the arts scene.

However, the arts were generally seen to be ruined during Stalin's rule -- artists across all mediums of expression were unable to express their feelings through the arts without influence from the state.<sup>3</sup> They are symbolisms that objectify emotional and psychological manifestations of the interactions between our inward feelings and our outward environment.<sup>4</sup> Without this freedom of expression, they were unable to properly portray life in the Soviet Union without ideological influence. Stalin's regime is characterised by the escalation of

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<sup>1</sup> Simpson, J. A., and E. S. C. Weiner. "Culture." *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Clarendon Press, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> "Culture." *The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster Inc., 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Fitzpatrick, S. (1976). *Culture and Politics under Stalin: A Reappraisal*. *Slavic Review*, 35(2), 211-231. doi:10.2307/2494589

<sup>4</sup> Langer, S. (1966). *The Cultural Importance of the Arts*. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 1(1), 5-12. doi:10.2307/3331349

class conflict, purging the bourgeoisie, and the idea of “Socialism in One Country”.<sup>5</sup> He used methods such as terror and the threat of death to achieve these means as well as his micromanaging of the arts in his society which were effective as they were able to quell the spread of dissent against his rule, by instilling terror into his citizens.

Stalin decidedly deemed musical performance the most important part of the arts as it is a universally intelligible art form to which one could easily attach the ideological meaning of choice, making it the perfect weapon in a cultural battle he faced against his enemies in the West.<sup>6</sup> He demanded that all forms of art be made in adherence to the doctrine of *socialist realism*, naming it the State-sanctioned style of the Soviet Union. Cultural and censorship were aligned with national and political goals rather than individual ideals and expression, leading to a lack of freedom of expression by Soviet artists at the time. These were used as forms of propaganda to stimulate consent for state policy, and it is widely known that the arts had changed accordingly to Stalin’s rule.<sup>7</sup> However, this paper will delve deeper into how propaganda had actually acted against Stalin’s aim in quelling the dissent of the people and how his censorship and doctrine of socialist realism had failed in putting an end to resistance towards Stalin’s regime.

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<sup>5</sup> Dobrenko, E., & Naiman, E. (Eds.). (2003). *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*. Seattle; London: University of Washington Press. Retrieved May 23, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvewn4bc](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvewn4bc)

<sup>6</sup> Podolsky, P. (2016, October 19). Communism's pianist poster boy? The truth about Emil Gilels and Stalin. Retrieved July 06, 2020, from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2016/oct/19/emil-gilels-pianist-stalin-soviet-propaganda>

<sup>7</sup> Herman, Edward S., and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Vintage Digital, 2010.

## **1.2 Rationale**

The aim of this research paper is to provide another perspective to Stalin's strict regime in Soviet Russia that his strict motives were, in fact, detrimental to his own rule. It initially fulfilled its purpose as state propaganda for political movements, but were ultimately undermined by undercurrents of creative resistance. This is especially helpful from a historical viewpoint as the study of the arts is intrinsically connected to history as it is related to the beliefs, dogmas and viewpoints of the arts.<sup>8</sup> We can observe a conflict of ideals when art for purposes of free expression collides against an objective state propaganda, as well as how these composers had repurposed these State-sanctioned themes into their own messages of resistance.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1. To what extent did Stalin's regime fail in quelling the dissent of the composers in Russia?
2. How did composers display resistance through their works in the face of Stalin's ideological oppression?
3. What can an interdisciplinary analysis of Soviet compositions under Stalin's rule reveal about his success in quelling dissent?

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<sup>8</sup> Huttunen, M. (2008). The Historical Justification of Music. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 16(1), 3-19. Retrieved March 10, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/40327287](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40327287)

## **1.4 Thesis Statement**

Contrary to popular beliefs, Stalin's regime had failed in quelling dissent in classical music, which gave a platform to Russian composers to showcase their disdain against his regime.

## **1.5 Scope of Research**

The scope of this paper is confined to music composed by Russian composers Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev. Shostakovich and Prokofiev were chosen as they were both very popular in the cultural scene in Russia yet heavily influenced by the state. Both of these composers have been, and will continue to be, prominent figures in Russian music history for their famous works and prominence in the international music scene.

## **1.6 Significance of Research**

An analysis into propaganda and how it stifled artistic creativity and cultural "purity" in Russia will give deeper insight into the levels of success Stalin's totalitarian regime had in controlling dissent in the arts. It is generally believed that Stalin's draconian control of the arts led to very little freedom of expression.<sup>9</sup> However, this paper will prove that these composers did have some form of expression through writing works and covertly expressing their dissension towards the Communist party. Despite propaganda in Stalin's regime being thought to have stifled creativity and artistic freedom, there remained room that artists found in which to express themselves without encumbrance, and with the limited freedom of expression came resistance against his regime.

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<sup>9</sup> Fitzpatrick, S. (1976). Culture and Politics under Stalin: A Reappraisal. *Slavic Review*, 35(2), 211-231. doi:10.2307/2494589.

## 1.7 Limitations

The effects of Stalin's doctrine of propaganda and widespread censorship could have lingered even after he was no longer in power, just like the rest of the doctrines and beliefs that he had imparted through propaganda. Works composed after his death in 1953 will not be analysed. Other limitations would be works that covertly express their dissent towards the regime but were not composed in the time period chosen, as well as the works rendered null due to widespread content censorship championed by Communist Party leader Andrei Zhdanov.<sup>10</sup> He was aided by then-recently appointed leader of the Union of Soviet Composers, Tikhon Khrennikov, of whom decided that censorship should be more widespread and hold a greater role. Subsequently, this led to the destruction of works that cannot be restored or retrieved.

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<sup>10</sup> Groys, B. (1992). *The total art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, aesthetic dictatorship, and beyond*. Princeton, NJ, NJ: Princeton University Press.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Impacts of the State's strict control of the arts on Soviet composers and their works

With the introduction of State's restrictive guidelines placed on the arts, there will inevitably be impacts on the music and the composers themselves. Soviet compositions had to reflect whatever the State wanted the composers to do as mentioned by Harris (2014).<sup>11</sup> Musical pieces are forced to adhere to certain guidelines or risk being banned by the State. Composers and musicians who held onto their freedom of expression under Stalin's rule were seen to be publicly denounced, threatened and had their privileges removed, as revealed by Horton (1999).<sup>12</sup> The state had declared that all expressions of personal feeling had to be eliminated from music in favor of populist works which rejoiced in the glorious potential of life under Communism through the doctrine of socialist realism. Instead of having freedom in whatever they wanted to write, they were now forced into writing works and symphonies on the Soviet Union's industrial achievements.

Russian researcher Schonberg (1979) goes even further and reveals that authorities used the threat of death as a deterrent against dissent to the regime. He says that composers were threatened with a "loss of such privileges as a car and a dacha (country house), the cessation of publication and performance, incarceration in a Siberian jail".<sup>13</sup> There was a large amount of pressure that these composers had to face to adhere to the doctrine of socialist realism. Some of these musicians succumbed to the pressure, such as Alfred Schnittke, Arvo Pärt, Giya Kanchelli, and Sofia Gubaidulina, all of whom attracted the outrage and wrath of the

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<sup>11</sup> Harris, S. (2014, November 26). Socialist Realism and Music. Retrieved July 06, 2020, from <http://www.quartets.de/articles/realism.html>

<sup>12</sup> Horton, A. J. (1999, June 28). The Forgotten Avant Garde: Soviet Composers Crushed by Stalin. Retrieved July 06, 2020, from [https://www.pecina.cz/files/www.ce-review.org/99/1/music1\\_horton.html](https://www.pecina.cz/files/www.ce-review.org/99/1/music1_horton.html)

<sup>13</sup> Schonberg, H. (1979, October 21). Words and Music Under Stalin. Retrieved July 06, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/10/21/archives/words-and-music-under-stalin-testimony-testimony.html>

authorities. Any tinge of subtle dissent felt by the State was automatically declared as outright dissent against Stalin's rule and had to be removed. Furthermore, Horton (1999) states that many composers were seen to throw in the towel after succumbing to strict Party sanctioning, such as Lev Knipper (1898-1974) and Galina Ustvolskaya (b. 1919).<sup>14</sup> The latter stopped composing for the public and only kept his works "for the drawer", along with many other composers who had escaped to the countryside so as to not attract too much attention. These three researchers' perspectives from both Russia (Schonberg) and the West (Harris and Horton) agree on the harsh punishments faced by the composers; therefore we can thus infer that Stalin had actually succeeded in quelling the dissent of the composers, supported by the unanimous agreement between researchers from different countries which suggest the large extent of success in quelling dissent against the State.

## **2.2 Impacts of socialist realism on the composition of music**

Socialist realism is a huge part of what the State wanted Soviet composers to incorporate into their music. Broadly defined as a doctrine of artistic creation founded on the definition of being a "truthful, historically valid representation of reality in its revolutionary development", it was established by Stalin as the official method for all the arts in the Soviet Union to operate between 1932-1938.<sup>15</sup> It is characterised by the portrayal of the State and positive Soviet or socialist ideals through one's art.

There has been extensive research on the effects of music and art propaganda due to the introduction of socialist realism. For example, Brooks (1994) notes that the use of socialist realism in propaganda is accepted as composers having to portray a glorified depiction of

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<sup>14</sup> Horton, A. J. (1999, June 28). The Forgotten Avant Garde: Soviet Composers Crushed by Stalin. Retrieved July 06, 2020, from [https://www.pecina.cz/files/www.ce-review.org/99/1/music1\\_horton.html](https://www.pecina.cz/files/www.ce-review.org/99/1/music1_horton.html)

<sup>15</sup> Moscow. (1966). Entsiklopedicheskii Muzykal'nyi Slovar' [Encyclopedic Music Dictionary]

Communist values and loyalty to the ruling party (known as партийность -- *partiinosť*).<sup>16</sup> Demaitre (1966) goes even further to say that many composers' works were deemed as simply instruments of propaganda and therefore rendered useless.<sup>17</sup> The musicians had to comply with restrictive guidelines set forth by the government, resulting only in the portrayal of successful Soviet life in the image of the society. She argued that the idea of presenting a "truthful, historically valid representation of reality" in art is a completely false statement in the context of Stalin's rule and is unable to exist; that is to say that the objective, uncensored truth in the USSR was simply nonexistent. Demaitre (1996) deemed all literature and art as having languished, suggesting that all work from 1946-1956 to be ignored as the restrictions were the strictest then, with certain exceptions such as certain Latin and Greek translations.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, additional findings by Harris (2014) suggest that certain types of music were encouraged such as those of an accessible, tuneful, traditional and folk-inspired quality.<sup>19</sup> Other types of music were deemed as "Formalist", which meant that the significance and meaning of the work is purely on an intellectual level — something the State did not want.<sup>20</sup> (Although Anti-Formalism would not equate to the ideas of socialist realism.) Composers that were seen to not follow these rules would have faced deadly consequences which led to many, if not all, works during this period of Stalin's rule having "accessible" qualities as aforementioned.

Conversely, Efimova 1997 contradicts the aforementioned arguments, asserting that socialist realism had minimal impact on the cultural scene which is in contrast with the other two

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<sup>16</sup> Brooks, J. (1994). Socialist Realism in Pravda: Read All about It! *Slavic Review*, 53(4), 973–991. doi: 10.2307/2500842

<sup>17</sup> Demaitre, A. (1966). The Great Debate on Socialist Realism. *The Modern Language Journal*, 50(5), 263–268. doi: 10.2307/323218

<sup>18</sup> Demaitre, A. (1966). The Great Debate on Socialist Realism. *The Modern Language Journal*, 50(5), 263–268. doi: 10.2307/323218

<sup>19</sup> Harris, S. (2014, November 26). Socialist Realism and Music. Retrieved July 06, 2020, from <http://www.quartets.de/articles/realism.html>

<sup>20</sup> Meyer, L. B. (1966). *Emotion and meaning in music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

opinions which suggest that socialist realism had actually restrained composers in their compositions, albeit to varying degrees. This is interesting to consider as she is a Russian born in Leningrad in 1961, and most likely a Communist and supporter for Stalin. Compared to the other two perspectives seen who are from the West, more specifically the UK and America respectively, this difference in nationality may be the reason for their difference in opinions as she may be more biased towards Stalin and his policies whilst the Westerners may not necessarily look at Stalin as favourably as Efimova did.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

To conclude, this literature review has showcased different researchers' perspectives and views on the impacts of the State's strict control of the arts on Soviet composers and their works that are relevant to this paper. There are also many interesting impacts of propaganda on Soviet music during Stalin's rule, where these musicians were unable to showcase their dissent against the regime at all, lest they risk execution or denunciation. In spite of certain researchers' agreement on the success of propaganda in promoting patriotism amongst Russians through socialist realism, there still seems to be some gaps in research left unexplored as to the success of propaganda in the classical music scene to quell dissent from the composers themselves.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Selection of works**

Symphony No. 5 and No. 7 by Dmitri Shostakovich and Piano Sonata No. 6 by Sergei Prokofiev will be analysed in this paper. They are appropriate examples of the composers showcasing their dissent against Stalin's rule, involving analyses into the melodies of each piece and its relationship with the rest of the piece or the oeuvre of the composer. Symphony No. 5 utilises a musical allusion to another of work in Shostakovich's oeuvre while Piano Sonata No. 6 and Symphony No. 7 employ the use of a leitmotif and a theme respectively to showcase dissent against Stalin's regime. The two symphonies were chosen as they were highly regarded by the State as some of Shostakovich's best works, where his Fifth Symphony resulted in him getting back into the State's favour after being denounced for his opera *Lady of the Mtsensk District*.<sup>21</sup> The State approved of these works and celebrated them widely, which is ironic because of the message that they actually conveyed which will be discussed later.

### **3.2 Testimonies**

This paper relies heavily on testimonies from close friends and people associated with Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich, namely esteemed Russian pianist virtuoso Yevgeny Kissin and musicologist Lev Lebedinsky, as well as comments from the composers themselves. These comments are paramount to the understanding of Shostakovich's Seventh and Prokofiev's Sixth Piano Sonata on a deeper level as composers were not able to publicly explain the subtle meanings and allusions in their works about their dissent against Stalin's regime. These testimonies are reliable as Lev Lebedinsky was a close friend and confidant of

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<sup>21</sup> Wilson, E. (2011). *Shostakovich: a Life Remembered*. Faber & Faber.

Shostakovich who was knowledgeable about Shostakovich's musical intentions, whilst Yevgeny Kissin was heavily involved with the music scene in Russia as a young virtuoso then and is associated with Prokofiev. These testimonies are able to corroborate the interpretations discussed further on. Whilst possible that they are trying to rehabilitate their friend's image in the spirit of revisionism, it is unlikely as these dissenting meanings have been part of the works from the start and can be interpreted even without the help of these testimonies. However, these testimonies will give further insight into the complex interpretations of these works. With the consideration of these testimonies, the meanings of some of their most notable works are changed completely from patriotic symphonies to public expression of dissent against the regime. As a result, the supposed motivations and ideas conveyed through the symphonies will be subverted and turned against their original purpose.

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Dmitri Shostakovich

#### 4.1.1 Background

*Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich* was a Russian composer and pianist who is widely regarded to be one of the greatest composers of the 20th Century and well-known because of his close relationships with the Party and extensive works under Stalin.<sup>22</sup> In his early years, he had already been recognised for his immense talent in composing and had become a key tool in the Soviet apparatus; he parroted official doctrine and was a figurehead for Soviet culture. He had multiple works banned or withdrawn throughout his career, such as his Fourth Symphony and Eighth Symphony. He died on 9 August 1975, more than two decades after Stalin's death. In his later years, it can be seen that he had more freedom in expression in his works which contained much more personal feelings and dissonance than previously allowed before, as well as more perceived expressions of dissent against Stalin's rule.

#### 4.1.2 A Challenge to Socialist Realism in Shostakovich's Fifth

Symphony No. 5 in D Minor Op. 47 is an apt example of how recognising an allusion to another work in his oeuvre can result in subverting the entire meaning of the symphony. Composed between April and July 1937, it is a typical 45 minute composition with four movements, with the most important movement being the last -- *Allegro non troppo*.

One key part to this entire interpretation of his Symphony is the reference to Shostakovich's other work in his oeuvre, *Four Romances on Poems by Pushkin, Op.46 No.1*, which sets the

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<sup>22</sup> Fay, L., & Fanning, D. (n.d.). Shostakovich, Dmitry. Retrieved June 09, 2020, from <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000052560>

words of *Rebirth* —a poem— by Alexander Pushkin, a prominent figure in Russian Romantic literature, to music.<sup>23</sup>

The same melodic line found in his *Four Romances on Poems by Pushkin, Op.46 No.1, Rebirth* is found in the final movement of his Fifth Symphony as the main melodic subject at the beginning.<sup>24</sup> The first expository melodic subject in the Fifth Symphony is largely similar to the one in *Four Romances*, but faster and with more elaboration seen of the melody. This can be seen as a direct allusion to the work and the poem, which will help with the interpretation of his protest and dissent in this piece in the context of all of his works.

The poem that was indirectly alluded to is about the subject of rebirth, dealing with an artist whose great painting had been painted on by a “barbarian”. In view of the fact that Symphony No. 5 was composed at the height of Stalin’s totalitarian regime in consideration, this poem could be interpreted as an analogy in which Shostakovich is the genius whilst Stalin is the “artist-barbarian” and his musical compositions are the paintings. This likens Stalin’s banning of Shostakovich’s works to “[blackening] the painting of a genius” while “senselessly (...) [covering] it with / His own illegitimate drawing”. The words “senselessly” and “illegitimate” reveals Shostakovich’s real feelings towards socialist realism which he views as pointless and futile. Through the phrase “illegitimate drawing”, he highlights how Stalin and his regime had ruined his work of art by inserting their own ideas of socialist realism into it otherwise the work would definitely not be published. The idea of “[blackening] the painting” could also showcase how Shostakovich feels that Stalin had defiled his compositions and made it less pure through bringing up the idea of the colour black which is popularly seen as a symbol of fear and evil. This Fifth Symphony was seen as

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<sup>23</sup> Ezust, E. (1995, May). Возрождение Rebirth. Retrieved July 11, 2020, from [https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get\\_text.html?TextId=35688](https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=35688)

<sup>24</sup> The urtext to the poem in Russian and its English translation can be found in Appendix 6.2.

artistic salvation especially after his denunciation where it had been praised in Pravda by Alexei Tolstoy, a Soviet writer on behalf of the party. This meant that he had gotten back into favour of the party, yet the allusion to this poem seems to undermine the “sincere perestroika”, or restructuring, of Shostakovich’s personality felt in the contrast between this Fifth Symphony and his previous works. Does this, then, mean that his entire conservative facade to please the Soviet authorities in composing music like a ‘true Soviet artist’ was fake? This poem’s final stanza, with the lines “Thus vanish the illusions / From my tormented soul” answers this question, revealing that the conservative and obedient front that Shostakovich had put up was, in fact, all an illusion which had arisen from his severe suffering caused by the State.

In addition, the message brought across by the poem is further supported by the fourth movement. In the last 30 seconds of the movement, there is a constant high-pitched buzzing from the piccolos which in the context of a rejoicing seems inappropriate. It seems more like a painful cry for help than a jubilant celebration. The original Symphony included a brief description in its programme notes with the phrase “spiritual battle, crowned by victory”.<sup>25</sup> The “victory” in question does not sound like a triumph or success, but rather a punishment, expressing Shostakovich’s real feeling of dissent. He did not feel that there was anything for those in power to rejoice on, nor was there really a true triumph for them. Listening to the symphony with the historical context in mind, one is able to hear the disenchantment that Shostakovich feels towards the State in the insincerity of his forced rejoicing in the final movement. Furthermore, this Symphony was received well, with thunderous applause that

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<sup>25</sup> Schwartz, E. (2017). Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. Oregon Symphony. <https://www.orsymphony.org/concerts-tickets/program-notes/1718/shostakovich-fifth-symphony/>.

lasted for over an hour, which was seen to be an ironic parallel to the “forced rejoicing” heard just before.<sup>26</sup>

In conclusion, this poem could be interpreted as a deliberate expression of Shostakovich’s sufferings under Stalin, the artist-barbarian, and disenchantment towards socialist realism, especially since this symphony was composed directly after his first denunciation of his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* for being too formalist and not obeying the didactic doctrine of socialist realism. Informally titled as “A Soviet Artist's Creative Response To Justified Criticism”, this leads to further questions as to whether this “creative response” was actually an ingenious manifestation of his dissent and disenchantment of socialist realism and Stalin’s regime in a creative way so as to avoid the wrath of the State. According to Shostakovich himself, this Symphony had a large impact on the audience upon its first hearing, where many were weeping or overwhelmed because of the powerful message that the Symphony had carried. One has to wonder, was this due to their patriotism or their true understanding of the commentary Shostakovich was trying to make on Stalin? It definitely seems like the latter.

#### **4.1.3 Stalin’s rise portrayed through Shostakovich’s Seventh**

A prime example of Shostakovich expressing his dissent against Stalin would be Symphony No. 7 in C major Opus 60, subtitled *Leningrad*, was originally dedicated to Vladimir Lenin then subsequently dedicated to the city of Leningrad.<sup>27</sup> *Leningrad* had quickly gained popularity in the Soviet Union and abroad as a symbol of resistance against fascism and a

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<sup>26</sup> Wilson, E. (2011). *Shostakovich: a Life Remembered*. Faber & Faber.

<sup>27</sup> Schwarm, B. (2017, February 03). *Leningrad Symphony No. 7 in C Major, Op. 60*. Retrieved July 10, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Leningrad-Symphony-No-7>

musical declaration of the heroic actions done by the military in war. It is a 75 minute performance comprising 4 movements.

One crucial fact to have in mind in this interpretation is that he had composed this symphony before the Germans had actually attacked.<sup>28</sup> According to *Testimony*, the memoirs of Shostakovich, he had other antagonists in mind when composing the “Invasion” theme. This is supported by close friend and confidant of Shostakovich, Lev Lebinsky, who is often quoted to support analyses of Shostakovich’s works.

The "Leningrad" Symphony [...was] planned and begun before Hitler's attack on Russia in 1941. The tune of the notorious march in the first movement was conceived by Shostakovich as the "Stalin" theme (all who were close to the composer knew this). After the war had started, Shostakovich declared it to be the "Hitler" theme. Later, when the work was published, he renamed it the "Evil" theme -- justly, since both Hitler and Stalin met the specification.<sup>29</sup>

The “Invasion” theme is a musical melody found in the first movement of the Seventh Symphony that, as it suggests, is supposed to be referring to Hitler and Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of Russia. However, to close friends of Shostakovich, this “Invasion” theme was actually about Stalin instead, eventually being renamed as the “theme of evil”. This work can be seen as something that is applicable to both infamous historical figures in the twentieth century — Hitler and Stalin. One can believe that this idea of tyranny could also be relevant to the Soviet society that Shostakovich was living in, and a commentary of how he had believed Stalin to be as evil as the Nazis and Hitler.

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<sup>28</sup> Shostakovich, D. D.; Volkov, S. (1979). *Testimony: the memoirs of Dimitri Shostakovich*. H. Hamilton.

<sup>29</sup> Ho, A. B., Feofanov, D.; Ashkenazy, V. (1998). *Code, Quotation, and Collage: Some Musical Allusions in the Works of Dmitry Shostakovich*. In *Shostakovich reconsidered* (p. 482). London: Toccata Press.

This theme begins as something very quiet and unassuming to the listener, beginning with sparse instrumentation and soft dynamics. It slowly grows into a loud and terrifying sound which can be seen as a commentary on Stalin's rule as much as one on Hitler and the Nazis. Compared to Hitler's invasion in Russia in the aforementioned Operation Barbarossa, this somewhat gentle theme is greatly juxtaposed with the incredible military power Hitler unleashed on Russia, with over three million soldiers and three thousand tanks attacking the Soviet front.<sup>30</sup> Even to someone unfamiliar with his music, there would be an obvious disconnect between the animosity of the Nazi regime and the gentle sound of the Invasion theme, which would lead one to believe that maybe this Invasion theme is referring to another tyrant, namely Stalin. This is supported by Lebedinsky's testimony, and may be describing Stalin's rise to power as a dictator.

Just like the start of the theme, he was generally underestimated by many in the party and was a master of political maneuvering to slowly remove his enemies in the party which made him the eventual leader of the Communist Party. Soon after, as the theme grows into a more furious and aggressive sound, it can be likened to Stalin's totalitarian dictatorship over Russia which had resulted in the death of thousands from executions and show trials as well as millions of countless others due to the famines caused by his regime. This could very well be a commentary on Stalin's rise to power and eventual totalitarian rule, depicting him in a bad light through the eventual monstrous sound of the Invasion theme at the end of the movement.

Alexei Tolstoy, the same critic who had praised the Fifth Symphony as Shostakovich's artistic revival, yet again commented on this Seventh Symphony, lauding it with many

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<sup>30</sup> History.com Editors. (2009, October 29). Operation Barbarossa. Retrieved July 26, 2020, from <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/operation-barbarossa>

praises.<sup>31</sup> Tolstoy's interpretation of this Symphony had resulted in him seeing this work as nationalistic which invoked feelings of patriotism in its listeners. This eventually led to Stalin ironically launching a huge propaganda campaign to promote this work throughout Soviet Russia. With this testimony in consideration, the very Symphony that Stalin would be promoting throughout his country to promote feelings of patriotism and support for one's country was, in fact, a Symphony with a facade that was trying to make a commentary on the tyranny and rule of Stalin over Russia, labelling him as a symbol of evil.

This also brings the question as to whether these State officials were oblivious to the dissent that the composers wrote or whether they just did not care. The former is the more likely one. As aforementioned, Stalin and his regime were very nitpicky with the arts, and imposed strict guidelines and restrictions to reduce the amount of dissent in classical music. It is more likely that they misinterpreted the music as a form of nationalistic patriotism, rather than a dissenting commentary on Stalin and his policies, foregrounding the possible ignorance within the State.

## **4.2 Sergei Prokofiev**

### **4.2.1 Background**

*Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev* was one of Shostakovich's contemporaries and was a Russian composer, pianist, and conductor. Similarly to Shostakovich, he is one of the most well known composers of the 20th Century with many acknowledged masterpieces created across multiple genres ranging from opera and ballet to symphonies and concertos. After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Prokofiev left Russia for the United States then Germany and Paris with the official blessing of the Soviet commissar for the Ministry of Education Anatoly

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<sup>31</sup> Volkov, S. (2008). *Shostakovich and Stalin: the extraordinary relationship between the great composer and the brutal dictator*. Little, Brown.

Lunacharsky. On 5 March 1953, he passed away on the same day as Party leader Joseph Stalin due to cerebral hemorrhage exacerbated by his declining health and chronic illnesses.

#### 4.2.2 Stalin's Crushing Oppression in Prokofiev's Sixth Piano Sonata

The "War Sonatas" are a combination of three piano sonatas composed during wartime, namely Piano Sonata No. 6 in A major Op. 82, No. 7 in B ♭ major Op. 83, and No. 8 in B ♭ major Op. 84. The most notable one would be the Sixth Piano Sonata, or the first of the three war sonatas, which revolve around Prokofiev's feelings towards Stalin.

According to Russian pianist virtuoso Yevgeny Kissin, he states that this sonata was composed in 1939, before the war had started in September which meant that the character of the piece is actually describing the period of Stalin's repression of the people.<sup>32</sup>

The Sixth Sonata was written in 1939, before the war, so the experience Prokofiev portrays is that of the period of Stalinist repression, the 'cult of personality'. He truly captures this in the bitter, pompous opening theme of the first movement, a sort of 'Stalin leitmotif' which returns in the finale. The second movement is a parody of a military march, full of Prokofiev's veiled humour, sarcasm and mischief.

Throughout the piece, there is the appearance of a "Stalin Leitmotif" which Prokofiev used to represent Stalin as stated by Kissin. It first appears at the beginning of the first movement, *Allegro moderato*, and reappears again at the end of the Sonata in the finale of the fourth movement. It consists of three notes: two semiquavers followed by another quaver in descending motion which is apparent right from the beginning of the first movement and is

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<sup>32</sup> MacDonald, I. (1988). Prokofiev, Prisoner of the State. Retrieved June 04, 2020, from <https://www.siue.edu/~aho/musov/proko/prokofiev2.htm>

seen again in the fourth movement multiple times, most prominently in the final measures where it is played six times in rapid succession.

This piano sonata had been seen as a reflection of Prokofiev's mood during the turbulent periods of World War 2, where it was largely anxiety towards the future that spurred all the dramatic tension heard throughout the first and last movements of this sonata. However, with this lesser-known information in mind, it is possible to argue that this 'anxiety' felt throughout the two movements is actually a reflection of what Prokofiev had felt about Stalin during those tumultuous times. In the penultimate measure of the fourth movement, there is a quick, descending semiquaver line which is an elaboration of the 'Stalin leitmotif' which gives the impression that the leitmotif is trying to crush the listener. This is compounded by the sense of urgency and anxiety created by the previous few bars of the same leitmotif in its original form appearing in quick descending lines as well with a somewhat threatening and menacing presence.

With Kissin's testimony in mind, this must surely be a deliberate commentary made by Prokofiev to tell the listeners his true feelings towards Stalin exacerbated by the ongoing war. This is likely reliable and can be believed due to the high-profile status of Yevgeny Kissin. Moreover, restrictions on socialist realism were slackened during the war years (in which this piece was composed), meaning that this really could be Prokofiev freely expressing his feelings towards Russia and Stalin. It could also be a symbol as to how Stalin's totalitarian reign had seemingly crushed all of the culture in Soviet Russia, with no room left for open freedom of expression which left composers such as him and Shostakovich to either compose works 'for the desk drawer', i.e. write them for personal use only, or find ways to carry secret meanings through their music.

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this musical analysis of three different works by two prominent Russian composers has revealed important historical information about Soviet composers in the time that they were composing music under Stalin. At a micro level, these works may just seem to be small instances or coincidences of these composers making ambiguous commentaries on various things. However, at a macro level, this interdisciplinary nature of this analysis has proved useful in showing a trend that these composers, who were seen to be the best Soviet composers of their time, were able to showcase their dissent through various means. Although the State had vicious restrictions on its composers, they were still able to tell their audience their opinions on Stalin which was something previously unheard of in other artistic disciplines in Russia such as painting and literature. This also revealed the obliviousness of Stalin and State officials to somewhat obvious cases of dissent (such as in the case of Shostakovich's Seventh), instead treating dissenting compositions as nationalistic works.

Although not everyone will achieve the same interpretation of dissent after hearing these pieces, Shostakovich and Prokofiev were still able to promote dissent in people who were familiar with the musical content. It may be limited in the case of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony and even more so Prokofiev's Sixth Piano Sonata, as one requires a good familiarity of the composer's oeuvre and intentions respectively. Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony seems to be more effective in promoting dissent with the use of the Invasion theme in comparison to his Fifth, whilst Prokofiev's Sixth Piano Sonata may have been the least effective due to the obscurity of his intentions. These works are incredibly complex and oftentimes ambiguous in their interpretations; it begs the listener to think hard about the composer's intentions so that one can truly understand the meanings behind the works.

## 6 Appendixes

### 6.1 Similarities between 4 Romances, Op. 46 No. 1, *Renaissance* and Symphony No. 5 by Shostakovich

#### 4 Romances, Op. 46: No. 1. Renaissance Dmitri Shostakovich



Main motif used and quoted frequently throughout the Fifth Symphony, especially the first four notes with the lyrics “Khudozhnik var”.

4 Corai (F)  
3 Trombe (B)  
3 Tromboni  
Tuba  
Timpani

The

quotation is first introduced here in the first melodic subject of the movement, which will reappear at the end of the symphony.

Its first appearance in the recapitulation section of the fourth movement, starting off quietly and then crescendoing into a large “celebration”

The repeated high notes which do not give the idea of a true and sincere celebration, but rather a jab to one's ears.

A page of a musical score for a symphony, showing various instruments including woodwinds, strings, and percussion. A red circle highlights a specific musical quotation in the woodwind section. The score is written in a major key and 2/4 time. The instruments listed on the left are Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in B-flat (Cl. Bb.), Clarinet in A (Cl. A), Bassoon (Fag.), Contrabassoon (Cbass.), Cor Anglais (Cor.), Trumpet (Tr.), Trombone (Tr.), Trumpet (Tr.), Trombone (Tr.), Percussion (Perc.), Cymbal (Cym.), Triangle (Tri.), Snare Drum (Tr.), Bass Drum (Tr.), and Cymbal (Cym.). The woodwind section includes Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in B-flat, Clarinet in A, Bassoon, and Contrabassoon. The string section includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The percussion section includes Snare Drum, Bass Drum, and Cymbal. The score is divided into measures, and the red circle highlights a specific musical quotation in the woodwind section.

The musical quotation's first appearance during the celebration in the woodwinds part (circled in red)

The image shows a page of a musical score, likely for a symphony. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. At the top, there is a rehearsal mark [115]. The instruments listed on the left are: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bass.), Trumpet (Trpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), Percussion (Perc.), and Strings (Archi). The Trumpets part is circled in red, highlighting a specific musical phrase. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Appearing, yet again (circled in red), in the trumpets part but in a major key which signifies a sense of positivity and celebration. This is a direct copy of the quote from *4 Romances* but just transposed up.

This image shows a page of a musical score, likely from a symphony. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout, with woodwinds and brass instruments in the upper staves and strings in the lower staves. The instruments listed on the left are: Piccolo (Picc.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in E-flat (Cl. Picc.), Clarinet in B-flat (Cl.), Bassoon (Fag.), Contrabassoon (C. Fag.), Cor Anglais (Cor.), Trumpet (Tr. ht.), Trombone (Tr. al.), Tuba (Tuba), Timpani (Timp.), Tr. lo (Tr. lo), Percussion III (P. III), Percussion II (P. II), and Archi (Archi). The score consists of five measures. The woodwinds and brass instruments are playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with some instruments playing a high note. The strings are playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with some instruments playing a low note. The overall texture is dense and rhythmic, suggesting a forced celebration.

The repeated high notes in the piccolo as well as first violin parts bring to mind the same aforementioned idea of a forced celebration as this sounds painful to the listeners ears.

## 6.2 Rebirth

Original text in Russian

English translation

Художник-варвар кистью сонной  
Картину гения чернит  
И свой рисунок беззаконный  
Над ней бессмысленно чертит.

An artist-barbarian with his lazy brush  
Blackens the painting of a genius  
And senselessly he covers it with  
His own illegitimate drawing.

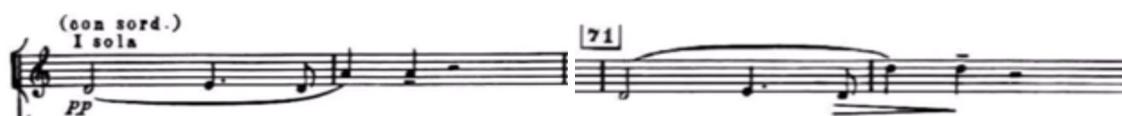
Но краски чуждые с годами  
Спадают ветхой чешуёй;  
Созданье гения пред нами  
Выходит с прежней красотой.

But with the passing years, the alien colours  
Fall off like threadbare scales;  
The creation of the genius emerges  
before us in its former beauty

Так исчезают заблужденья  
С измученной души моей,  
И возникают в ней виденья  
Первоначальных, чистых дней.

Thus vanish the illusions  
From my tormented soul  
And in it appear visions  
Of original and innocent times.

## 6.3 Invasion Theme



21

I

pp

I

I

22

T-ro

This is the invasion theme that was first brought up about seven minutes into the first movement.

The rhythm here is reminiscent of the rhythm in the snare drum (see above) during the

Invasion theme. It is the result of over 20 minutes of build-up into a climax which gives a horrific and incredible variation of the Invasion theme after growing from a quiet and gentle theme at the start of the Symphony.

#### 6.4 Stalin Leitmotif



The leitmotif is first brought up at the start of the first movement, where it is played multiple times in rapid succession.



The leitmotif:



Prokofiev recalls the leitmotif at the final four bars of the fourth movement of the Sonata

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