



London [★]Philharmonic Orchestra

SHOSTAKOVICH
SYMPHONY NO. 7

KURT MASUR *conductor*
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

SYMPHONY NO. 7 IN C MAJOR 'LENINGRAD', OP. 60

1. *Allegretto*
2. *Moderato (poco allegretto)*
3. *Adagio*
4. *Allegro non troppo*

It is one of the great stories of 20th-century classical music. Shostakovich, working at his desk in the darkening months of 1941 on a symphony of 'war, struggle, and the heroism of the Soviet people' as the bombs fell on Leningrad. The premiere the following March in Kuibyshev, where the composer had been evacuated. The loudspeakers in the streets of Leningrad relaying the performance to the people of the still-besieged city. The microfilm copy of the score smuggled past the Germans to the West, where Henry Wood conducted the British premiere with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in June 1942, and major conductors vied for the first US performance. The rapturous reception when Toscanini performed it in New York in July, an event that landed a photo of Shostakovich (wearing his firewatcher's helmet) on the cover of Time magazine and, together with 60-or-so more performances of the work in the USA during the 1942/43 season alone,

helped fortify the new anti-Nazi alliance of USA and USSR. 'What devil could vanquish a nation capable of creating such music!', one American newspaper enthused. This was modern classical music out there in the world and making a difference.

Shostakovich's own pronouncements at the time must have left few in doubt as to what the work signified. In an article in *Pravda* not long after the premiere, he wrote that 'I wanted to compose a piece about today, about our life and our heroic people, fighting and conquering the enemy.' A few weeks later in another article he told of how he had composed the first three movements quickly between July and September, his inspiration sharpened by the sounds of gunfire and explosions. And his programme note for the Moscow premiere described it as 'a programmatic work inspired by the threat of events in 1941'. Yet, as has now been long recognised, Shostakovich was careful what he said and how he said it, whether in words or musical notes. Living and working as he did in a totalitarian state which had enlisted art as an instrument of social control and in which

the slightest miscarriage of that purpose could quite literally prove fatal, he yet sought to produce powerful and meaningful music worthy of his mighty creative personality. So yes, in a time of war, when the mother country is under threat of conquest by another, palpably worse dictatorship, a symphony of stirring patriotism has its place.

But could it also be more than that? In *Testimony*, the memoir of Shostakovich 'as related to and edited by' Solomon Volkov, the composer reveals that 'the Seventh Symphony had been planned before the war, and consequently it cannot be seen as a reaction to Hitler's attack ... I suffer for everyone who was tortured, shot or starved to death. There were millions of them in our own country before the war with Hitler began'. The authority of *Testimony* has been questioned ever since it was published four years after Shostakovich's death, but once immediate thoughts of invading Nazis have become distanced, it is possible to see not only that such an alternative view of the piece is entirely plausible, but that the lamenting of Stalin's Russia and sympathy for its victims

could exist in it alongside the immediate experience of fear of, and resistance to, military destruction. According to Volkov, Shostakovich said that 'the majority of my symphonies are tombstones', and multi-faceted though the composer's expressive powers were, human compassion was usually stronger in him than triumphalism.

The 'Leningrad' is surely less war story than (as Ian MacDonald has put it) 'a civic requiem'. The first movement is undoubtedly the most programmatic in feel. In his programme note Shostakovich said that it depicted 'the happy lives of our people', presumably shown in the confidently striding opening theme and the peaceful and lyrical second. But then a quietly rattling side-drum sets on its way a trite march theme, which over the course of long and terrifying repetition grows to an almost unbearable height of intensity and menace. When at last this gives way, it is to a climax of searing tragedy and grief which gradually relents to war-worn transformations of the original second theme. Some sense of repose is eventually reached,

though not without the disturbance of occasional reminders of the march.

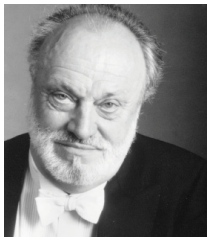
The second movement is a kind of *scherzo*, though one that – for all its gestures towards playfulness – seems sad and heavy-laden. A central episode tries to raise the spirits, but the screaming woodwinds succeed only in conjuring a grotesque *totentanz* before the music returns to the weary world whence it came. ‘Ecstasy in life and admiration of nature’ was the Mahlerian subject matter suggested by Shostakovich for the slow third movement, though it is Stravinsky’s soundworld that is echoed in its stark opening chord sequence, and if nature had never been mentioned one might think the mood of the movement less pastoral than funerary – lyrically and sometimes heroically so in the keen-aired string lines and gracefully winding solos for flute and viola of its outer panels; despairingly so in the tortured, driving central section. The finale follows without a break, gradually easing the music from sombre depths into a jaunty but determined march. Shostakovich originally had ‘victory’ lined up as a subtitle for it, but this is far from

being an exhibition of uncomplicated joy, with any moves towards open celebration reined in until we near the end. Even in these clamorous final pages, however, for all the strength they show, there is a weight that suggests that events have not left this massively resilient human spirit unchanged. ‘I never thought about exultant finales’, Volkov reported Shostakovich as saying, ‘for what exultation could there be?’

Programme note © Lindsay Kemp

KURT MASUR *conductor*

© Christian Steiner



Kurt Masur was well known as a distinguished conductor and humanist.

His 25 year relationship with the LPO began in 1987, and he became Principal

Guest Conductor from 1988–1992. He was appointed the Orchestra's Principal Conductor in September 2000 and led them for the following seven years. In September 2002 Masur also became Music Director of the Orchestre National de France in Paris, and in July 2007 he conducted the joint forces of the two orchestras in an extraordinary BBC Prom concert to celebrate his 80th birthday.

Masur was Kapellmeister of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra for an unprecedented 26 years from 1970, after which he became the Orchestra's first ever Conductor Laureate. He was instrumental in preventing an outbreak of violence in Leipzig in the lead up to the fall of the Berlin wall, and during

his tenure as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra he led a moving performance of Brahms's German Requiem in the wake of 9/11.

As well as towering interpretations of the core central European orchestral repertoire, Masur conducted world premieres of works by many of the major composers of the late 20th century, and collaborated with jazz pianist Herbie Hancock and Wynton Marsalis's Lincoln Centre Jazz Orchestra.

A professor at the Leipzig Academy of Music from 1975, Kurt Masur received numerous honours and titles, including Commander of the Legion of Honour from the Government of France and New York City Cultural Ambassador from the City of New York in 1997; Commander Cross of Merit of the Polish Republic in 1999; and the Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2002. He held an honorary doctorate from London's Royal College of Music and was an Honorary Citizen of his hometown, Breg.

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world's finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra's performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trail-blazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world's greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. Vladimir Jurowski was appointed the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor in March 2003, and became Principal Conductor in September 2007.

The Orchestra is based at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992, giving around 30 concerts a season. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for over 50 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski. lpo.org.uk



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Shostakovich and Kurt Masur on the LPO Label

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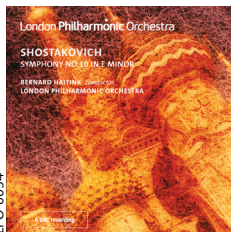
Shostakovich: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 5 (Kurt Masur)
'Emphatic style, with some superb soloists, serious class in every department' *Classic FM*

LPO-0069



Shostakovich: Symphony No. 8 (Gennady Rozhdestvensky)
'A formidable performance ... immensely strong on raw power' *The Guardian*

LPO-0034



Shostakovich: Symphony No. 10 (Bernard Haitink)
'An edge-of-seat tension that transcends national style' *The Financial Times*

LPO-0080



Shostakovich: Symphonies Nos. 6 & 14 (Vladimir Jurowski)
'The most stunning Shostakovich disc I have heard this year' *BBC Music Magazine*

LPO-0093



Beethoven: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 4 (Kurt Masur)
'Readings that combine wisdom, humanity and discipline, old-world values' *Classical Source*

LPO-0053



Shostakovich: piano works (Jurowski/Helmchen)
'One of the most impressive performances ... that I've heard in recent years' *BBC Music Magazine*

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–75)

70:33 Symphony No. 7 in C major 'Leningrad', Op. 60

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|----|-------|----------------------------|
| 01 | 24:40 | Allegretto |
| 02 | 10:19 | Moderato (poco allegretto) |
| 03 | 17:33 | Adagio |
| 04 | 17:58 | Allegro non troppo |

KURT MASUR *conductor*

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Boris Garlitsky *leader*

Recorded live at Southbank Centre's **ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL**, *London*