

NAXOS

SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphonies Nos. 5 and 9

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
Vasily Petrenko



Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47 • Symphony No. 9 in E flat major, Op. 70

A third of a century after his death and the symphonies of Dmitry Shostakovich have moved to the absolute centre of the repertoire: along with those of Mahler, they represent 'modern' music to the non-specialist concert-goer. Yet they differ from any comparable cycle since that of Beethoven in the absence (intended or otherwise) of a logical progression that might have endowed their career-spanning inclusiveness with a parallel evolution from aspiration to fulfillment.

Of the symphonies, the *First* is a graduation work that accorded the teenage composer international prominence. The *Second* and *Third* represent a reckless accommodation between modernist means and revolutionary ends, while the *Fourth* stakes out the boundary between the individual and society that was to remain a focal-point. The *Fifth* clarifies that boundary by paradoxically making it more equivocal; a process the *Sixth* continues by subverting the relationship still further. The *Seventh* is a reaction to civil conflict and social collapse that finds its equivalent in the *Eighth*, which in turn finds its opposite in the *Ninth*. The *Tenth* then marks the genre's culmination as outlet for an abstract programme. The *Eleventh* opens a period in which Russian concerns were foremost, its historical acuity diluted by the impersonality of the *Twelfth* then intensified by the explicitness of the *Thirteenth*. The *Fourteenth* stands outside the genre as regards its form but not its content, while the *Fifteenth* marks a belated re-engagement with abstract symphonism that might or might not have been continued.

The eleven months between the *Fourth* and *Fifth Symphonies* seem less so when one considers that, aside from film-scores and incidental music for the propaganda play *Salute to Spain* [Naxos 8.572138], Shostakovich wrote only *Four Romances on Verses of Pushkin* (1936). Yet the final song, *Stanzas* (the only one not orchestrated by the composer in an arrangement that was unknown until after his death), shares a thematic kinship with the finale of the *Fifth* which may

point to the essential meaning of his most famous and discussed symphony.

When he began his *Fifth Symphony* in April 1937, Shostakovich had had no new concert première for two years; the *Fourth Symphony* having been withdrawn from rehearsal the previous November. Any soul-searching now seemed behind him as he completed the score in September, the slow movement apparently in three days, and played it to the Composers' Union the next month. The première took place in Leningrad on 21st November 1937, the little-known Yevgeny Mravinsky conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic. Response was overwhelmingly positive – to an extent that officials attributed this success to the hall being planted with the composer's admirers, though the success of its Moscow première on 29th January 1938 – Alexander Gauk conducting the USSR State Symphony – confirmed its public acceptance. Beginning with Mravinsky in 1938 and Leopold Stokowski the following year, it soon became among the most recorded of contemporary works and, at Shostakovich's death, had amassed more performances than any twentieth-century symphony other than the *Second Symphony* of Sibelius (completed 36 years earlier).

Critical response immediately stressed its defining in music of the principals of Socialist Realism, Alexey Tolstoy coining the phrase "the formation of a personality" that the composer himself picked up on soon after. The latter also approved the description "the practical creative answer of a Soviet artist to just criticism" – one that was to assume the status of a *bona fide* subtitle in the West, for all that its provenance remains obscure and was possibly even invented by Shostakovich to conceal any deeper intentions. In particular, the close of the *Finale* as expressing triumphal optimism or stark resignation has dogged the work's reception from the outset: yet, in its bringing the relationship between the individual and the state to a head, this ending can be heard to resolve those issues whose musical embodiment are central to the symphony as a whole.

The *Fifth Symphony* is scored for woodwind in threes (though only two oboes), four horns, three each of trumpets and trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (four players), celesta, two harps, piano and strings. Its four movements follow the standard classical trajectory (with the scherzo placed second), but Shostakovich's rethink of first movement sonata-form was to have profound consequences for his later symphonies, while the finale's radical overhaul of the Beethovenian 'tragedy to triumph' model is fully in keeping with the spirit of its times.

The first movement opens with a commanding downward gesture on strings, thrice repeated in the course of a first theme that unfolds hesitantly and with great pathos. Initially on upper strings, it belatedly migrates to woodwind and brass on the way to its nobly wrought apex. The fourth appearance of the initial gesture leads into the second theme, a long-limbed melody for violins over a steady tread on lower strings. Ruminative woodwind comments and a brief recollection of the first theme emerge before it winds down to a pause, whereupon the development commences with the first theme heard balefully on brass over a piano ostinato. Various of its components now emerge as the music gains in energy, taking in a martial transformation of the theme on brass and percussion, before the reprise is launched at the point of maximum intensity with the first theme in rhythmic unison across the orchestra. It subsides into an idyllic version of the second theme for woodwind and horn, but this is short-lived as the coda enters with a haunted recollection of the first theme – replete with plangent echoes of the opening gesture and ending with somnolent chords on celesta.

The second movement is a scherzo whose bluff initial repartee for the strings is complemented by a sardonic theme on woodwind with its portentous rejoinder on horns. This makes way for a trio section where violin then flute unfold a capricious melody, offset by strutting upper strings and woodwind. It alights on a fugitive version of the opening for woodwind and pizzicato strings, leading to the return of

the main theme with its rejoinder now on trumpets then horns. An uneasy recall of the trio theme on oboe is impatiently brushed aside at the close.

The third movement (in which brass are silent) begins with a heartfelt melody on strings that, unfolding at length, ushers in an evocative, folk-like idea and a rapt theme for divided strings in its wake. Another theme, on flute and harp, eases the tension before a version of the opening melody leads to a brief climax; this dies away to leave muted strings, against which woodwind (oboe, clarinet then flutes) muse on the first theme, interspersed with atmospheric chords for strings. The first theme returns on woodwind, strings entering as the intensity builds to an anguished statement of the third theme on violins against a blizzard of orchestral tremolos. This then migrates to the lower strings as elements of the first three themes are intensively discussed, before the fourth theme (on upper strings) at length restores calm. Ethereal echoes of the first theme on celesta and harp bring about the serene ending.

The fourth movement now bursts in with a strident theme on brass and timpani, its components excitedly discussed as the tempo increases. In the process, another (directly related) theme emerges on the trumpets over skirling strings, triumphantly sounded out by the whole orchestra before the pounding opening music returns. Fanfaring brass wind down to an expressive transformation of the second theme on horns over shimmering strings. This latter is reduced to an oscillating phrase that takes in a subdued version of the first theme on strings, before opening onto a plateau of gentle radiance. From this point, the first theme builds steadily to the final climax – capped by a transformation of the first theme (its initial four notes confirmed as an upward reversal of the work's opening gesture) whose pivoting between affirmation and uncertainty is carried through to the fateful conclusion.

The two years between the *Eighth* and *Ninth Symphonies* saw music for film and theatre, the characterful orchestrations that are *Eight English* and *American Folksongs* (1944) and the pert piano miniatures of *Children's Notebook* (1945). More

significant are two chamber works: the *Second Piano Trio* [Naxos 8.553297] with its searing Yiddish musical inflections, and *Second String Quartet* [Naxos 8.550975], whose imposing scale points to the symphonic nature of the composer's ensuing works in a genre that soon dominated his instrumental output.

When Shostakovich began what he intended as his '*Ninth Symphony*' in January 1945, he had in mind a work comparable to its predecessors in scale and impact: a 'victory symphony' honouring the Soviet triumph over Nazi Germany as surely as it recognized the historical implication of the number Nine. The six-minute opening fragment, discovered at the Shostakovich Archive in Moscow as recently as December 2003 and now recorded [Naxos 8.572138], bears witness to his intentions. Yet despite the acclaim of colleagues, the composer abandoned it in June; resuming late the following month with a work that, completed at the end of August, rounded-off his wartime symphonic trilogy with a very different interpretation of 'the Ninth'. The composer and Svyatoslav Richter played a piano duet version in September and the première took place in Leningrad on 3rd November 1945, Mravinsky conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic; the Moscow première, Mravinsky directing the Moscow Philharmonic, followed seventeen days later. Public response was favourable though that of Soviet officialdom was not a little miffed.

Escaping censure at the Union of Soviet Composers in Moscow that December, the work was turned down for a Stalin Prize in 1946 and at a composers' conference during October, it was described by others as the stop-gap solution to that wartime trilogy whose 'real' conclusion had yet to be written. Then in February 1948, following the infamous conference presided over by Andrey Zhdanov, it was placed on a list of proscribed pieces that included the *Sixth* and the *Eighth Symphonies* along with other of Shostakovich's major works. Only in 1955, some two years after Stalin's death, was the *Ninth Symphony* rehabilitated, though it had in the meantime enjoyed success in the West, not least through the first studio recording made in New

York by Efrem Kurtz in 1949, where its Haydnesque clarity and lightness of touch were seen as a tonic to the more radical impulses beginning to circulate in new music.

The *Ninth Symphony* is scored for woodwind in pairs (though three flutes), four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (three players) and strings. Like its predecessor it has five movements, the final three again playing continuously, though their lay-out is (until the finale) closer to the *Third String Quartet*: indeed, the three works form a sub-sequence within Shostakovich's output that offers a likely more revealing commentary than the three symphonies from the first half of the 1940s on the wartime experience.

The first movement is launched with a bustling theme on strings then woodwind, its lively wit complemented by a perky idea for the piccolo, offset by brazen trombone chords. The literal repeat of this exposition, the only such instance in Shostakovich's symphonies, indicates the scale of the movement, but not the intensive motivic interplay or confrontational mood of the development. The modified reprise sees the second theme now allotted to solo violin, before elegant exchanges for the woodwind usher in a coda which wraps up matters succinctly.

The second movement, essentially a slow intermezzo, opens with a winsome melody for clarinet over discreet pizzicato strings. This is taken up by other woodwind in a plaintive discourse, whose wistful mood is deepened by the undulating theme for strings which follows. Three times this unfolds as a curve of intensifying emotion, abetted by plangent woodwind phrases, before trailing off into the resumption of the first theme on flute then horn. The strings' theme, now in a higher register, briefly resumes, but the poignant final word is allotted to the first theme on flute then piccolo over pizzicato strings.

The third movement is a scherzo in which woodwind and strings trade animated gestures. The central episode features an incisive trumpet solo, building to a brief climax before the main theme

resumes. This time, however, the energy dissipates rapidly on the way to an uncertain pause.

The fourth movement is announced by stern fanfares on trombones and tuba, answered by a bassoon solo of notable pathos. A stark alternation which is duly repeated, though this time the bassoon alights first on a resigned cadence then a wry descending gesture.

The fifth movement begins with the bassoon outlining a capering theme that is belatedly taken up by the strings. The woodwind sounds an anxious note

before taking it up, then a more suave theme on upper strings offers a degree of contrast. Fragments of both these themes are banded about before an upsurge of energy and the first theme's climactic return on full orchestra, with its successor heard mockingly on woodwind and trumpet. A pause, then a breathless coda combines elements from both themes in a sprint to the decisively inconclusive finish.

Richard Whitehouse

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra



Photo: Jon Barraclough

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra is Britain's oldest surviving professional symphony orchestra. It gives over sixty concerts from September to June at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, as well as presenting concerts across Liverpool city region and throughout the United Kingdom. The orchestra has also toured to the United States, the Far East and Europe. Since 2001 the RLPO has been Classic FM's Orchestra in North West England, a relationship extended until 2012. In 1998 the orchestra became the first in Great Britain to launch its own recording label, RLPO Live. Many RLPO Live recordings are currently being reissued by Avie Records. Other recordings by the orchestra appear on the EMI, Naxos, Nimbus, Universal and Virgin Classics labels. Latest releases are listed on www.liverpoolphil.com. Musicians of the RLPO are involved in the orchestra's award-winning learning and engagement programmes, providing all ages with exciting opportunities to enjoy and take part in live music-making. Vasily Petrenko became Principal Conductor in September 2006, with a contract extended until 2012. In 2009 the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and its new music group Ensemble 10/10 were joint winners as Ensemble of the Year in the Twentieth Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards.

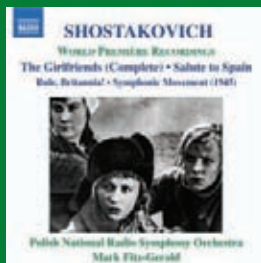
Vasily Petrenko



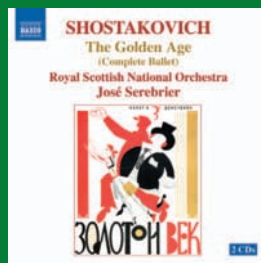
Photo: Mark McNulty; styled by Lorraine McCulloch, courtesy of Cricket Liverpool

Born and educated in St Petersburg, Vasily Petrenko was Resident Conductor at the St Petersburg State Opera and Ballet Theatre (1994-97) and Chief Conductor of the State Academy Orchestra of St Petersburg (2004-07). He took up his position as Principal Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in September 2006, and was appointed Principal Conductor of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain from 2008. Engagements include the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Philharmonia, European Union Youth Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Accademia di Santa Cecilia, NHK Symphony and Budapest Festival Orchestra, the Dallas, Baltimore, Cincinnati, San Francisco and Chicago Symphony Orchestras, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra and National Symphony Orchestra Washington, with scheduled débuts at Glyndebourne and the Opéra de Paris. Recordings with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra include a rare double bill of Fleishman's *Rothschild's Violin* and Shostakovich's *The Gamblers*, a disc of suites from Tchaikovsky's ballets, and *Manfred Symphony* (Naxos 8.570568) and Liszt's *Piano Concertos* (Naxos 8.570517). In October 2007 Vasily Petrenko was named Young Artist of the Year at the annual Gramophone Awards.

Also available



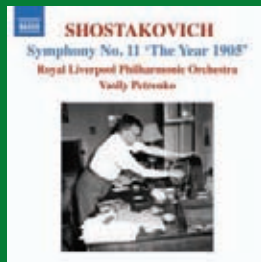
8.572138



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8.572082

Following their electrifying account of Shostakovich's *Eleventh Symphony* (8.572082), Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra explore the profound ambivalences of the composer's most performed symphony, the *Fifth*, written in 1937 at a time when he was under intense personal and political pressure from the authorities. The jaunty, neo-classical character of the *Ninth Symphony* (1945) prompted Shostakovich to remark that 'musicians will like to play it, and critics will delight in blasting it'. Shostakovich's startlingly different original draft for the opening of the *Ninth's* first movement is available on 8.572138.



Dmitry
SHOSTAKOVICH
(1906-1975)

Symphonies Nos. 5 and 9

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| | Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47 (1937) | 51:36 |
| 1 | I. Moderato/Allegro non troppo | 18:01 |
| 2 | II. Allegretto | 5:12 |
| 3 | III. Largo | 15:34 |
| 4 | IV. Allegro non troppo | 12:50 |
| | Symphony No. 9 in E flat major, Op. 70 (1945) | 26:31 |
| 5 | I. Allegro | 5:25 |
| 6 | II. Moderato | 8:47 |
| 7 | III. Presto – | 2:39 |
| 8 | IV. Largo – | 3:33 |
| 9 | V. Allegretto – Allegro | 6:06 |

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
Vasily Petrenko

Recorded at the Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, England,
on 7th and 8th July, 2008 (tracks 1-4), and 29th and 30th July, 2008 (tracks 5-9)
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Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd. • Booklet notes: Richard Whitehouse
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(courtesy of the DSCH Archive, Moscow)



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Playing Time
78:07



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