

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

# The Three Great Soviet Composers and Mstislav Rostropovich – Talent, Music and Politics in the Soviet Union

Lucy Gijbbers

A thesis submitted to Massey University and Victoria University of Wellington in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Musical Arts in Violoncello Performance

New Zealand School of Music

2014

# Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	3
Mstislav Rostropovich (1927-2007)	4
Mieczyslaw Weinberg (1919-1996)	8
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)	17
Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)	24
Rostropovich's Influence on Selected Cello Works of Weinberg, Shostakovich and Prokofiev, and the Relationship Between Rostropovich and the Three Composers	31
Conclusion	39
Bibliography	40

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude toward both of my supervisors, Inbal Megiddo and Professor Donald Maurice. Inbal has been a committed and inspiring cello teacher over the past three years, and has offered much support, expertise and wisdom in preparing me for my recitals and for this exegesis.

Many thanks to Donald for his commitment to my research and for his attention to detail. I would not have been able to properly complete this exegesis without his guidance.

Many thanks also to my family and to my husband Alaister Straka for their continued love and support; and to my friends, in particular Thomas Nikora and my duo partner Andrew Atkins, both of whom have often stood in at the last minute to accompany me.

## **Introduction**

Mstislav Rostropovich, the most famous cellist of the second half of the twentieth century, had a close relationship with Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev, and Mieczyslaw Weinberg. These three composers are hailed by some as the three greatest Soviet composers of the twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> although in New Zealand and much of Western society little of Weinberg's music has been played. They lived under the reign of Joseph Stalin, and were greatly restricted in what they could compose. Whilst Weinberg in 1953 was arrested in Russia for 'Jewish bourgeois nationalism', the music of Shostakovich and Prokofiev was banned in 1948; deemed anti-democratic and too formalistic. All three composers wrote cello works for Rostropovich.

Whilst Shostakovich's cello works are regularly performed - most likely because Rostropovich championed this composer's works above all others - Weinberg's cello works are not. Prokofiev's *Sinfonia Concertante* used to be avoided by cellists because of its difficulty, but in recent years it has rapidly gained in popularity. Weinberg's music is slowly gaining recognition for its worth. Rostropovich did not even play some of Weinberg's cello works which were dedicated to him, as he had an altercation with the composer.

This essay explores the relationship between the four musicians, the influence they had on one another, and their reaction to the political climate in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. Rostropovich in particular was very politically active, and used his fame to influence politics. Ultimately the cellist was awarded over fifty prizes for both musical and humanitarian efforts.

---

<sup>1</sup> Steve Schwarz. Review of 'The Golden Key', Classical Net Review, 2004.

## **Mstislav Rostropovich (1927 – 2007)**

"What I value most of all in his playing," Shostakovich wrote, "is the intense, restless mind and the high spirituality that he brings to his mastery - a phenomenal virtuosity combined with a noble and ravishingly beautiful tone."<sup>2</sup>

Mstislav Rostropovich is often considered to have been one of the greatest cellists in the second half of the twentieth century. He forged strong musical friendships with many composers, including Shostakovich, Weinberg and Prokofiev. His political and humanitarian opinions were very strong, and in 1974 he was presented the Award of the International League of Human Rights.

His heritage was Russian, although his father, a fine cellist who had studied with Pablo Casals, had noble Polish blood. Rostropovich was a well-rounded musician who studied cello, piano, conducting and composition at the Moscow Conservatory. At the conservatory, one of his professors was Dmitri Shostakovich. He commenced his studies in 1943 and ended them five years later in 1948; the reason for this was not because he had completed his study, but because Shostakovich was forced from his teaching post. Rostropovich boycotted the university as a form of protest.<sup>3</sup>

Already Rostropovich had won first prizes in competitions abroad in Prague and Budapest, and he received the Stalin Prize in 1950. He also received the Lenin Prize and was named a People's Artist of the USSR.<sup>4</sup> Over his lifetime he received more than fifty awards, both for humanitarian and peace efforts and for music, and honorary doctorates from various universities around the world.

Whilst continuing his touring solo career, he also taught at the Leningrad Conservatory and the Moscow Conservatory. He had a good relationship with prominent Soviet composers and musicians, including pianist Sviatoslav Richter, with whom he regularly collaborated. Shostakovich wrote his cello concerti for Rostropovich, and Prokofiev dedicated to Rostropovich

---

<sup>2</sup> John O'Mahony. 'An icon for our times', The Guardian. Saturday 2 March 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend*. London: Faber, 2007. 45

<sup>4</sup> Rostropovich-Vishnevskaya Foundation – About Us; Our Founders. <http://rostopovich.org/about-us/our-founders/>. Accessed 15/07/14

his revised cello concerto, which henceforth became the *Sinfonia Concertante*. Weinberg also composed most of his cello works for Rostropovich.

In 1962 Rostropovich conducted for the first time in the Soviet Union, presenting, amongst other works, Shostakovich's controversial *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.<sup>5</sup> He began to tour Europe in 1963. One of his first political concerts was in 1968 in the United Kingdom at The Proms, and at this concert he performed Dvorák's Cello Concerto with the Soviet State Symphony orchestra. This was the same day that the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia to put a halt to the Prague Spring, which was headed by Alexander Dubcek in an attempt to loosen restrictions placed on the Czechoslovakians by the Soviets.<sup>6</sup> The audience enthusiastically applauded Rostropovich, who stood and held up the score for the Concerto in a gesture of peace and respect for Dvorák's ambushed homeland.<sup>7</sup>

In 1970 Rostropovich opened his home to shelter the writer and critic of Soviet totalitarianism, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn. Today Solzhenitsyn is famous for his writings on a prisoner's life in the Russian gulags and the Soviet labour camps. The author was originally a commander in the Red Army, but was arrested and imprisoned in labour camps for writing derogatory comments about Stalin in letters to a friend.<sup>8</sup> His imprisonment in a camp in Ekibastuz, Kazakhstan, formed the basis for one of his most notable novels, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. He suffered many other horrific experiences, and after his release he was accused by the KGB of publicizing anti-Soviet materials, and was expelled from the writers' union. The KGB attempted to murder him in 1971 with ricin.<sup>9</sup>

Rostropovich, a religious man, said on this matter: 'When I was told to kick Solzhenitsyn out of my apartment, it would have been logical to do so, to have rented another apartment for him. But someone up there told me, 'don't do this'. If I had, my career would have been very different. I would never have been sent out of the country, I would have received even more honours. But instead, when I left, another era started for me. An even better time began. So, it is best to rely on God's opinion.'<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend*. London: Faber, 2007. 188

<sup>6</sup> 'For One Night Only – The Prom of Peace.' BBC Radio 4. 1 September 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend*. London: Faber, 2007. 292-3

<sup>8</sup> Edward E. Ericson Jr.; Alexis Klimoff. *The Soul and Barbed Wire: An Introduction to Solzhenitsyn*. ISI, 2008. 10

<sup>9</sup> Kalugin Oleg. *The First Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West*. St Martin's Press, 1994. 180

<sup>10</sup> John O'Mahony. 'An icon for our times', The Guardian. Saturday 2 March 2002.

Rostropovich's friendship with Solzhenitsyn and other dissidents caused him to be officially disgraced. He ended up composing a letter to four different newspapers, in which he stated 'it is a scandal that composers, such as Shostakovich and Prokofiev are criticized within their own country, and that one must go to Paris to see the films of Tarkovski ... In 20 years, we will be ashamed of this history.'<sup>11</sup> Consequently, his touring in the Soviet Union was banned,<sup>12</sup> and he eventually left in 1974 with his family for the United States. In 1978 his Soviet citizenship was revoked because of his public opposition to the Soviet Union's restrictions of cultural freedom. He did not return to the Soviet Union until 1990, when his Soviet citizenship was restored.

The day the Berlin Wall began to fall in November 1989 Rostropovich flew from Paris to Berlin, where he found a spot in front of the Wall and played Bach's *Sarabande* from the Second Suite in D minor. This action, celebrating the freedom of East Germany, was reported throughout the world. Rostropovich always strove to use his international fame to attempt to influence politics. As well as supporting the fall of the Berlin Wall, he stood by Boris Yeltsin in 1991, when in Moscow tanks were being moved into the streets,<sup>13</sup> and for this he received the State Prize of Russia. 'I think Yeltsin was sent by God's will. The destruction of the Soviet Union could have resulted in the destruction of the planet, because every Soviet republic had its own nuclear forces. If it wasn't for Yeltsin, we would definitely have witnessed a civil war.'<sup>14</sup> Yeltsin also held Rostropovich in high esteem, showing his support by attending the cellist's concerts. In the 1993 constitutional crisis, 'President Boris N. Yeltsin spent a cold but sunny morning in Red Square with thousands of ordinary citizens ... listening to the revered cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich direct Washington's National Symphony Orchestra.'<sup>15</sup>

Rostropovich was also on friendly terms with Russia's current president, Vladimir Putin. A short time before his own death, Rostropovich attended his eightieth birthday gala dinner celebrations at the Kremlin, hosted by Putin. Putin had visited Rostropovich in hospital to arrange the dinner; and said 'dear Slava, from the very bottom of our heart we wish you a happy birthday. We do not only love, know and remember your anniversary but we will also do everything to be worthy of it.'<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Eric Dahan. 'One has not thrown out Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa." Why would one discard Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony?' Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich, Saturday, November 19, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend*. London: Faber, 2007. 300

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 345

<sup>14</sup> John O'Mahony. 'An icon for our times', The Guardian. Saturday 2 March 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Erlanger. 'Isolated Foes of Yeltsin Are Sad but Still Defiant', New York Times. September 27, 1993.

<sup>16</sup> James Kilner. *Frail cellist Rostropovich feted by Putin*, Reuters. Moscow, Tues Mar 27, 2007.



Rostropovich was also an active advocate for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

[He was] a lifelong defender of democratic principles, human rights and tolerance [and] worked alongside UNESCO to promote freedom of expression in the arts and in politics. In 1998 he was designated Goodwill Ambassador ... (he has) given his support to education and cultural projects, using his international standing to promote UNESCO's appeal for art education in schools ... Together with his wife, the celebrated opera soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, he has set up a charitable foundation to manage their social projects and activities.<sup>17</sup>

In 1991 he and his wife founded the Rostropovich-Vishnevskaya Foundation, which has benefited millions of children worldwide. Rostropovich, despite his busy schedule, was an active member of his Foundation, continuing the good work that he inaugurated.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Maestro Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya founded the Vishnevskaya-Rostropovich Foundation to improve the deplorable state of children's healthcare in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. The RVF conducts sustainable public health programs that focus on vaccination, elimination of intestinal parasites, and screening and prevention of vertically transmitted disease. These programs have benefited nearly 20 million children, adolescents, women of childbearing age and at-risk health care workers ... In addition to being the co-founder and president of the Vishnevskaya-Rostropovich Foundation, Maestro worked tirelessly on behalf of children's health. He served on the board of the Vaccine Fund (now part of the GAVI Alliance), acted as Special Representative of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and gave numerous concerts to raise money for charitable work on behalf of children in many countries of the world.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO Celebrity Advocates – Mstislav Rostropovich. [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=8327&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=8327&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html). Accessed 15/07/14

<sup>18</sup> Rostropovich-Vishnevskaya Foundation – About Us; Our Founders. <http://rostopovich.org/about-us/our-founders/>. Accessed 15/07/14

### **Mieczyslaw Weinberg (1919-1996)**

Weinberg was born into persecution. His grandfathers and great-grandfathers were killed in the 1903 Easter Sunday pogrom in Kishinev, the capital of Moldova, a tiny country which currently borders Romania and the Ukraine. His father, Shmil Moiseyevich Weinberg, sought refuge in Warsaw where he raised his family. Shmil Weinberg was the musical director of the Yiddish theatre in Warsaw, where he conducted and played the violin; Weinberg's mother was a Yiddish actress.

Mieczyslaw Weinberg, born December 8, 1919, recalls attending his father's rehearsals and performances and said:

Life was my first music teacher, since I was born into a family where my father had devoted himself to music since childhood. He was a violinist and a composer, but - how can I put it? - not on a very high professional level. He travelled with touring Jewish theatre companies and wrote music for them. During performances he would sit at the conductor's music desk, playing the violin and conducting. From the age of six I tagged along behind him; I went to listen to all those less than top-quality, but always very sincere melodies.<sup>19</sup>

Weinberg's own music is rather a conglomeration of ideas and styles - he was a very flexible composer. His style includes various folk musics of many European varieties, influences of Shostakovich, and particularly Jewish influences. Much of this Jewish influence undoubtedly would have come from his early musical experiences.

He often set Jewish poetry to music, and there is no doubt that Shostakovich was inspired by Weinberg's use of Jewish themes. In fact, both composers often quoted one another's works.<sup>20</sup>

Though he tried his hand at composing from a young age, he was more focussed on his piano studies, and was touring for his father's company as their pianist when he was just ten years old. Weinberg's pianistic talent was soon recognised and he entered the Warsaw Conservatory at age twelve, graduating in piano performance just before he fled Poland. During his studies, he played for legendary pianist Josef Hofmann, who invited Weinberg to study with him at the Curtis Institute, and promised to send him a US visa.<sup>21</sup> Things might have turned out very differently for Weinberg had it not been for the war.

---

<sup>19</sup> Lyudmila Nikitina. 'Pochti lyuboy mig zhizni – rabota' (Almost every moment of my life is work). *Muzikal'naya akademiya*, 1994/5. 17

<sup>20</sup> David Fanning. *Mieczyslaw Weinberg, In Search of Freedom*. Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, Germany 2010. 9

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 18

On September 6, 1939, Weinberg returned home to find his mother in a panic - she urged her son to leave Poland immediately and thus escape the German invasion, so he set off to Minsk, over the Soviet border. He eventually joined up with a small group of young people travelling in the same direction; together they dodged bullets and bombs from the Germans, and also risked being hit by Polish bullets. There was a paucity of food and drink – although eventually they stumbled upon a dead horse, which provided some sustenance. Weinberg and his companions narrowly escaped death on many occasions, the composer stating:

We caught sight of a road in front of us, perhaps half a kilometer away. Two or three Jews were walking along the road; their clothing revealed that they were Jews. In that moment a motorcycle came along. A German got off, and from the gesticulation we understood that he was asking for the way somewhere. They showed him precisely: this way, that way, right, left. He probably said 'Danke schon', sat down again, started the engine, and as the Jews resumed walking, to send them on their way he threw a hand-grenade, which tore them to shreds. I could easily have died the same way as they did. On the whole, dying was easy.<sup>22</sup>

Eventually the group reached the line of demarcation at the Soviet border. On the Polish side were the Nazis, pointing their guns at the thousands of Poles and Jews; and on the other side was the Red Army. The Soviet border guards eventually received permission to allow the refugees to enter, and so Weinberg was granted refugee rights. At the time, little did he know that he would never see his family again. He discovered later that they were all murdered by the Nazis at the holding-camp of Trawniki - although he heard rumors of their deaths, it was not fully confirmed until the 1960s. He was the only survivor.

When he reached Minsk he entered the Conservatoire and began to study composition. He remained there for two years, and during this time he was introduced to the music of Shostakovich. To say he admired the composer's writing would be a gross understatement - Weinberg said of the Fifth Symphony; 'I remember how, sitting at the piano in the orchestra, I was staggered by every phrase, every musical idea, as if a thousand electrical charges were piercing me'.<sup>23</sup>

During his time there as a student his *Symphonic Poem* was premiered by the Minsk Symphony Orchestra. Just hours after Weinberg's graduation concert on Sunday, June 22, 1941, the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union. Weinberg's health was fragile (he had spinal tuberculosis), so instead

---

<sup>22</sup> Manashir Yakubov. 'Mechislav Vaynberg: "Vsyu zhizn' ya zhadno sochinyal muziko" (Mieczysław Weinberg: "I have composed music all my life, greedily"), *Russkoye utro* 67/7 (16-22 February 1995). 12-13

<sup>23</sup> M. Vaynberg. 'Pervaya vstrecha s muzikoy Dmitriya Shostakovicha' (My first encounter with the music of Dmitri Shostakovich), in Givi Ordzhonikidze (ed.), *Dmitriy Shostakovich*, Moscow, Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1967. 84-5

of being enlisted in the army he was evacuated to Tashkent, where there was a dynamic musical life because most of the staff and students from the Leningrad Conservatory were also evacuated there. Not only was Western music well established, so was the folk music tradition. Weinberg composed a lot of music during this time to boost the morale of the evacuees.

Shostakovich was introduced to Weinberg's work in 1943, when Weinberg was residing in Tashkent. The two composers were to share a great spirit of camaraderie when they met later:

Another quartet, the Tenth, was finished yesterday. It is dedicated to Moysey Weinberg. (Moysey is Weinberg's Russian name). He wrote nine quartets and with the last of them overtook me, since at the time I only had eight. I therefore set myself the challenge of catching up and overtaking Weinberg, which I have now done. Yesterday, in celebration of this achievement ... we had a good old booze-up.<sup>24</sup>

There are some contradictory stories as to which mutual friend sent the score of Weinberg's First Symphony to Shostakovich; so here is one version of the story. Izrail Finkelshteyn, Shostakovich's pre-war colleague and composition teacher assistant in Leningrad, was evacuated to Tashkent around the same time as Weinberg. He had praised Weinberg highly in letters to Shostakovich, and Shostakovich requested to be sent something Weinberg had composed. 'You have already written to me several times about the composer Weinberg, each time with great praise. It would be very interesting to get acquainted with his works. I value your taste and instinct. Could you not help me with getting to know Weinberg's works?'<sup>25</sup>

The First Symphony was sent in due course, and Shostakovich immediately invited Weinberg to come and live in Moscow, obtaining residency for him.

Shostakovich and Weinberg became close friends, and even lived in the same apartment block. They regularly read through their compositions on the piano, playing as duo partners (Shostakovich usually sat on the left). He would invite Weinberg to his home regularly, for both musical discussions and for family celebrations.

Weinberg was never a pupil of Shostakovich, but acknowledged him as an inspiration, stating - 'I count myself as his pupil, his flesh and blood'.<sup>26</sup> Shostakovich returned the praise, highly commending Weinberg's works to friends and colleagues, including the Union of Soviet

---

<sup>24</sup> Isaak Glikman. *Story of a Friendship, The Letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman, 1941–1975*. Cornell University Press, 2001. 117

<sup>25</sup> Emil' Finkel'shteyn. 'O mastere v licjnm tone' (On a master in personal tones), *Muzikal'naya akademiya*, 1997/4. 104

<sup>26</sup> *Tempo* (New Series). / Volume 197 / Issue 197 / July 1996, Cambridge University Press 1996. 22-24

Composers. Upon the event of Shostakovich's death, Weinberg dedicated his Twelfth Symphony to his friend's memory.

1948 was a horrible year. Shostakovich was dismissed from his post at the Conservatoire and denounced. Although Weinberg until then was practically ignored by the Soviet Union, his father-in-law, the famous Soviet Jewish actor Solomon Mikhoels, was killed in Minsk on Stalin's orders. (Interestingly, Shostakovich came to Weinberg's flat that fateful day to offer condolences, saying 'I envy him.'<sup>27</sup>) Mikhoels was chairman of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. From that moment on, Weinberg and his family were under constant surveillance; guards followed him wherever he went for five years, writing the addresses of the places he visited and taking notes. He stated that when he was finally arrested in 1953 and put in prison, he 'sighed with relief, because (he) knew it was going to happen'.<sup>28</sup>

From the moment of his father-in-law's death, Weinberg was viewed by the authorities as an imitator of the negative aspects of Shostakovich and Prokofiev. Around this time he wrote the politically-charged Sinfonietta No. 1, Op. 41. It was dedicated to the 'Friendship of the Peoples of the USSR', and above the score was a quote from Mikhoels, emphasizing the equal rights of the Jews in Russia. It was a protest against the murder of Mikhoels, stating that a man should not be killed simply for being Jewish.<sup>29</sup> When the work was printed, the quote was removed by the publishers. It was, however, approved by the composers' union for its musical language, form and orchestration, despite the appearance of klezmer themes. Consequently, the work became very popular. 1948 was also the year when Weinberg composed his first full-scale concerto, the Cello Concerto in D Minor.

From 1948 until 1953 Weinberg attempted to keep a low profile, and many of his works during this time featured non-Russian folkloric elements. To earn money, he resorted to composing film and circus music. He was rather critical of these works, and unlike Shostakovich did not list them amongst his opus numbers. However, his attempts at staying out of sight and mind were to no avail and on February 6, 1953 he was arrested on charges of Jewish bourgeois nationalism. His Sinfonietta No. 1 provoked an accusation against him, supposedly proving that he was a Jewish nationalist, and also filed against him was a claim that he was preparing the founding of a free Jewish region in the Crimea. Weinberg had merely discussed the subject of the latter accusation a few years earlier with his father-in-law and associates. However, arrests such as

---

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton University Press, 2006. 260

<sup>28</sup> Manashir Yakubov. 'Mechislav Vaynberg: "Vsyu zhizn' ya zhadno sochinyal muziko" (Mieczyslaw Weinberg: "I have composed music all my life, greedily")', *Russkoye utro* 67/7 (16-22 February 1995). 13

<sup>29</sup> David Fanning. *Mieczyslaw Weinberg, In Search of Freedom*. Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, Germany 2010. 63

these were often instigated by someone who bore a grudge against the accused. Valentin Berlinsky, the cellist of the Borodin Quartet, who knew Weinberg well, stated: 'Well, (the arrest) was connected with anti-Semitism, but also with the fact that there were certain envious characters among the composers, who most of all wanted to get rid of him.'<sup>30</sup> Weinberg himself believed that it was because of his family association to Mikhoels. He said: 'The investigator said "Jewish bourgeois nationalism". I was still strutting, and said: "Since I don't know a single letter of Yiddish but have two thousand books in Polish, shouldn't you make it Polish bourgeois nationalism?"' The answer was: "We know better than you!".<sup>31</sup> When Weinberg 'was relating these things, he said that they had better not be published, 'because everything might happen again, "da capo".<sup>32</sup>

Shostakovich wrote a letter to the chief of Soviet security, Beriia, describing Weinberg as a 'very talented and promising young composer, who wasn't concerned with anything except music, and that he, Shostakovich, was willing to vouch for his honesty'.<sup>33</sup> Shostakovich also promised to look after Weinberg's daughter if his wife was also arrested.

Weinberg describes his time in prison thus. 'I was in a solitary cell, where I could only sit, not lie down. At night, a very strong floodlight was occasionally turned on so that it was impossible to sleep.'<sup>34</sup> Because of his back problems, this was a terrible ordeal. He was released on April 25, 1953 after Stalin's death, and when he arrived home he had lost weight and his head had been shaved.

If it had not been for Stalin's death on March 5 of that same year, Weinberg's future may have been very bleak. As it was, he returned home and became increasingly private and retiring.

Despite his retiring disposition Weinberg left a large musical legacy; 26 symphonies, many of them nearly an hour long, 17 string quartets, as well as six concertos, seven operas, an operetta, three ballets, four cantatas, 28 sonatas, more than 200 songs and other works. He also wrote more than 60 film scores and some theatre and circus music in order to pay the bills (much like Shostakovich in his difficult years).

---

<sup>30</sup> David Fanning. *Mieczyslaw Weinberg, In Search of Freedom*. Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, Germany 2010. 86

<sup>31</sup> Manashir Yakubov. 'Mechislav Vaynberg: "Vsyu zhizn' ya zhadno sochinyal muziko" (Mieczyslaw Weinberg: "I have composed music all my life, greedily"), *Russkoye utro* 67/7 (16-22 February 1995). 13

<sup>32</sup> David Fanning. *Mieczyslaw Weinberg, In Search of Freedom*. Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, Germany 2010. 87

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Manashir Yakubov. 'Mechislav Vaynberg: "Vsyu zhizn' ya zhadno sochinyal muziko" (Mieczyslaw Weinberg: "I have composed music all my life, greedily"), *Russkoye utro* 67/7 (16-22 February 1995). 13

Weinberg's works were performed regularly by eminent musicians such as Mstislav Rostropovich, the Borodin String Quartet, David Oistrakh, Leonid Kogan, and others. A notable work of his is the opera *The Passenger*.

*The Passenger* was composed in 1968 but was not publicly performed till 2008 in Moscow. The reason for this was most likely because the Soviet authorities had issues with commemorations of the Holocaust. Since 2008, it has been performed worldwide and has been released on blu-ray disc. It has been cited as the finest musical work ever composed in commemoration of Auschwitz, and Weinberg considered this to be his most important work.<sup>35</sup>

The Polish novelist and Auschwitz survivor Zofia Posmysz wrote her novel *Pasażerka* in 1959. She based it on her experiences of Auschwitz but retold the story from a different perspective – from that of a female prison guard. The work was popular in the USSR and Shostakovich enjoyed reading it, and it was subsequently forwarded to Weinberg. The librettist for the opera was Alexander Medvedev.

Shostakovich heard the opera after it was composed - Weinberg sang and played it at Shostakovich's home. He said;

I have heard Weinberg's opera *The Passenger* for the third time, and with each hearing my astonishment grows in a crescendo! Until I had heard the music, I, like many others, was not certain how this symphonist would cope with an opera. But it is a real opera, a success for which all Weinberg's previous works paved the way. Apart from its musical merits, it is a work that is much needed today.<sup>36</sup>

The story is post-World War II. The opera is set on two levels: the upper level depicts the deck of an ocean liner where a newly married German couple, Anneliese and Walter (the latter a German diplomat on his way with his wife to a new posting) are sailing to Brazil. The wife thinks she recognises a Polish woman on board, Marta, as a former inmate of Auschwitz where she, unknown to her husband, was a camp guard. Anneliese knows for certain that Marta is deceased, so she is thrown into a state of confusion and fear. The second level develops below the liner deck and depicts the concentration camp. The opera is an interplay between the two levels.

Anneliese then reveals her hitherto undisclosed wartime past to her husband.

On the lower deck, belongings of murdered prisoners are being sorted by the incarcerated women when an officer arrives to demand a violin - so that the Kommandant may have his

---

<sup>35</sup> David Fanning. *Mieczyslaw Weinberg, In Search of Freedom*. Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, Germany 2010. 117

<sup>36</sup> David Fanning. *Mieczyslaw Weinberg, In Search of Freedom*. Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, Germany 2010. 117



favorite waltz played to him by a prisoner. In due course a man named Tadeusz is sent to collect the violin and arrives to discover his fiancée Marta there. Their reunion is overseen by Anneliese, who decides to try and manipulate their relationship so that she may more easily control Marta and the rest of the women for her own purposes. The couple resist - which will ultimately cost them their lives. When there is a death-house selection and some women are led away as their numbers are called, Marta resignedly follows although she has not been selected. Anneliese stops her from joining the others and taunts her, saying that she will live to see Tadeusz's final concert before they are both sent to the death-house.

Tadeusz is dragged before the Kommandant to play the latter's favorite waltz music. Instead, in musical defiance, Tadeusz plays Bach's *Chaconne*. This is a protest against the human race's descent from culture into depravity. His violin is smashed and he is dragged off to his death.

The opera switches between the past and the present - it ends in the present with Marta singing to Anneliese, stating that the dead should never be forgotten and that they can never forgive. The opera fades away and ends very quietly in complete darkness.

*The Passenger* is one of the most brutally realistic operas composed to date that deals with the issue of the Holocaust. Weinberg composed many other works written along this topical vein.

Symphonies 6, 8 and 9 are choral and they are all involved with the issue of war. Other works about war include 8 song-cycles, 3 cantatas, and the *Requiem*. The Sixth Symphony was basically dedicated to himself – Weinberg composed it at the same time Shostakovich was writing the *Babi-Yar* symphony, and Weinberg dedicated his Sixth to murdered and orphaned children. In the slow movement of this work one can clearly hear the Jewish influences - particularly the poignant melodic augmented seconds.

The Eighth Symphony, *Flowers of Poland*, was composed for tenor soloist, mixed choir and orchestra. It is one of Weinberg's major masterpieces which deals with the experience of war. It sets excerpts from a poem by Julian Tuwim, which deal firstly with poverty in pre-war Poland, then with the desecration of the country by the Nazis, and finally with hopes for the future. The composer said in an interview about this work:



In the war my entire family was murdered by Hitler's executioners. For many years I wanted to write a work in which all the events would be reflected on which the poem was founded - the social contrasts in Poland before the war, the horrors of war, and at the same time the deep faith of the poet in the victory of freedom, justice and humanism.<sup>37</sup>

Weinberg received some honours during his lifetime, including the State Prize of the USSR in 1990. Despite the support of Shostakovich and other prominent musicians, there are a couple of reasons why Weinberg never really became as accepted a composer, as he is beginning to be now. Firstly, because of the connotations that came with being related to a prominent Jewish anti-fascist, and secondly because of his ill health and rather retiring disposition. He became housebound for the last few years of his life, having developed Crohn's disease. In the words of the composer and friend of Weinberg, Krzysztof Meyer:

I do not think that Weinberg was promoted by the Composer's Union. It is true that he was played quite a lot, but he received hardly any state prizes (as distinct from honours). I think he was not a trump card for the regime in this totalitarian system. A Jew, Mikhoel's son-in-law, one who did not write much political music and was not active in public life, of Polish descent, arrested in 1953, and extremely modest: all these were real disadvantages in the eyes of the authorities. And in some strange way such 'sins' still mattered, in spite of de-Stalinisation.<sup>38</sup>

There are many musical similarities between Weinberg and Shostakovich, including their sense of lyricism, tonality, use of folk melodies, a quotation of each other's works, use of instrumentation and register. Sometimes Weinberg has been ridiculed by those such as cellist Alexander Ivashkin (who died January 31, 2014), student of Rostropovich, for apparently belittling Shostakovich - 'these works only served to kill off Shostakovich's music, to cover it over with a scab of numerous and bad copies'.<sup>39</sup> However, this is most likely just Ivashkin's opinion, as the music of Shostakovich is extremely popular, and Weinberg is becoming popular in the West. Both Ivashkin and his teacher Rostropovich had a tendency to exaggerate, and Rostropovich, although being close to Weinberg in the beginning, eventually had an altercation with the composer. This would have led to unreasonable opinions of Weinberg, and shall be explored later in this essay.

---

<sup>37</sup> M. Vaynberg. 'Tsveti Pol'shi' (Flowers of Poland), *Sovetskaya kul'tura*, 13 March 1965, cited in Nikitina, *Simfonii M Vaynberga*. 117

<sup>38</sup> David Fanning. *Mieczyslaw Weinberg, In Search of Freedom*. Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, Germany 2010. 166

<sup>39</sup> David Fanning (editor). *Shostakovich Studies. 'Shostakovich and Schnittke: the erosion of symphonic syntax'*. Cambridge University press, 1995. 255

Returning to the discussion of Shostakovich and Weinberg, it is sometimes difficult to tell who is influencing whom - Weinberg was definitely a big Jewish influence on Shostakovich, particularly in the song cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, and both composers had a practice of playing newly composed works to each other, and each liberally quoting the other as a tribute. Weinberg's music seems to be more romantically-inclined than Shostakovich - he didn't use irony in his music, it sounds very straightforward and more florid. His music was very fluid, and influenced also by Mahler, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, as well as circus music, Jewish music, and various European folk-songs. Aside from the Sinfonietta No. 1, Weinberg wrote few politically-charged works, satisfying himself with works in homage and *in memoriam* to the Jewish people.

According to many musicologists including David Fanning and Ian MacDonald, Weinberg influenced Shostakovich in his use of Jewish themes. Soon after they met in 1943 Weinberg composed works such as the *Children's Songs*, Op 13 and *Jewish Songs after Shmuel Halkin*, Op 17 (on war and Holocaust themes, as are a great many other works by Weinberg). Judith Kuhn writes: 'The Jewish Songs, Op. 17 and many of Weinberg's other works incorporate Jewish folk idioms in the context of serious art music and may have served as models for Shostakovich.'<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Wilson states: 'Weinberg strongly influenced Shostakovich's interest in Jewish popular music.'<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Kuhn, Judith. *Shostakovich in Dialogue: Form, Imagery and Ideas in Quartets 1-7*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2010. 45

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend*. London: Faber, 2007. Kindle Edition, 25%

## Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Shostakovich had a more complex relationship with the Soviet government than his friend Weinberg. From the very beginning of his career, as far back as 1927 when the composer was in his early twenties, his compositions were often met with little acclaim. Although his first symphony was a great success, the second and third symphonies were claimed to be too experimental and his satirical opera *The Nose*, performed in 1929, was attacked by the musicians' union; the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM). The opera created 'widespread incomprehension amongst musicians'<sup>42</sup> - most likely due to its use of atonality, folk song, and popular Russian song.

*Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* is his most famous opera, and it had rather a contradictory reception. Shostakovich composed it whilst working at a proletarian youth theatre called TRAM (Theatre of Worker Youth). In accordance with Soviet ideology, TRAM produced politically correct artistic material. Being a member of TRAM preserved the composer from further attack, at least for a time. *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was premiered in 1934, and was initially received with high acclaim. However, two years later Shostakovich fell out of favour with the Soviet government. An article appeared in the Russian political newspaper, *Pravda*, denouncing the opera as 'muddle instead of music.'<sup>43</sup> It is thought that the articles were written by Stalin, or on his orders. From then on, other works by Shostakovich were attacked, including his rather democratic ballet *The Limpid Stream*.<sup>44</sup> This was around the time of Stalin's 'Great Purges', and some of Shostakovich's colleagues were murdered.

In 1935 Shostakovich was received back into favour due to the Fifth Symphony. On the surface this was a conservative work, but to the composer it was actually a symphony of grief - in Testimony,<sup>45</sup> Volkov writes that the general public understood what this symphony was really about – many of them had lost family and friends due to Stalin's regime.

At the outbreak of World War II Shostakovich wished to enlist in the army; however his request was turned down because he had poor eyesight. Of course he continued to compose in a similar vein, and his most famous musical contribution during this period is the Seventh Symphony,

---

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton University Press, 2006. 84

<sup>43</sup> Pravda. January 28, 1936. English Translation by Arnold Schalks.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton University Press, 2006. 128–129

<sup>45</sup> Volkov, Solomon. *Testimony*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979. 135

*Leningrad*. *Leningrad* was broadcasted in the streets of the Soviet Union in an attempt to boost the morale of the populous. By now Shostakovich was an important link to the West, and had become a sort of paragon of composers for the Soviets.

However this status was not to last for long. At the conclusion of the war, Shostakovich composed the Eighth Symphony, which was too sombre for the government's liking. Shostakovich said:

'When the Eighth was performed, it was openly declared counter-revolutionary and anti-Soviet. They said, 'Why did Shostakovich write an optimistic symphony at the beginning of the war and a tragic one now? At the beginning we were retreating and now we're attacking, destroying the Fascists. And Shostakovich is acting tragic, that means he's on the side of the fascists.'<sup>46</sup>

In response, Shostakovich's works became tongue-in-cheek, ironic, sarcastic; mocking towards the Soviet government.

In that terrible year of 1948, when Weinberg's father-in-law was killed and Weinberg himself was hunted by the government, Shostakovich was denounced for not being 'Russian enough' – any influence by Western composers was inappropriate and formalistic. Prokofiev and Khachaturian were also denounced. The composers were forced to make public apologies, Shostakovich lost his teaching position at the Leningrad Conservatory, and he lived in fear for his security.<sup>47</sup> The atmosphere was rife with suspicion; composers were set against each other, many vying for popularity and always ready to denounce another composer to promote themselves.

Like Weinberg, Shostakovich reverted to writing film music as a source of income and to stay out of the public eye. Amongst these films was *The Young Guard*. Interestingly, the opening four notes of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto, as well as being derived from his signature DSCH theme, are also 'adapted ... from ... the "Procession to Execution" from his film music to *The Young Guard* (1948).'<sup>48</sup> The scene of "Procession to Execution" is where young Soviet soldiers are marching to their death at the hands of the Nazis. Weinberg began to write his cello concerto in 1948 (earlier than Shostakovich's concerto but at the same time as *The Young Guard*), and uses

---

<sup>46</sup> Volkov, Solomon. *Testimony*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979. 162

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton University Press, 2006. 241

<sup>48</sup> Laurel E Fay. *Shostakovich: A Life*. Oxford University Press, 2005. 213

a direct quotation of this inverted DSCH theme. Because both composers regularly performed their works to one another, it is likely that one or other of them was using this motif as a quotation in homage to the other composer. Shostakovich described the first movement of his First Cello Concerto a 'humorous march'.<sup>49</sup>

Though this was post World War II, anti-semitism was still rampant in the Soviet Union and Shostakovich could not publish all of his works. He composed the song cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, but could not premiere the work until 1955 because the compilers of the poetry texts had been arrested for their Jewishness.<sup>50</sup>

To foreigners and ex-Russians such as Nicolas Nabokov, Shostakovich was seen as a 'tool of the government'<sup>51</sup>, and Stalin used Shostakovich more and more for his own political purposes – this included sending Shostakovich as a representative to America for a world peace conference and forcing him to compose works such as *The Song of the Forests*. This cantata was written upon Stalin's command to extol the leader's reforestation programme, and 'as a piece it entered the official repertory of Soviet power and propaganda and for a number of years was made required performance in the countries of the Communist Eastern Bloc, as a musical means whereby they could show their subordination to the Soviet Union.'<sup>52</sup> As could be expected, he received the Stalin Prize First Class in 1950 for the composition.<sup>53</sup> Despite this, Shostakovich greatly disliked the work, and after Stalin's death removed reference to the man in the cantata.

Stalin died in 1953 and this provided Shostakovich with some relief. He began inching back into his personal style of composing and this was the year he produced his famous Tenth Symphony.

In 1959, the year after composing the First Cello Concerto, Shostakovich joined the Communist Party. It seems that although he was able to regain some of his personal style and artistic freedom of expression after the death of Stalin, life under Russian leaders Khrushchev and Brezhnev was not completely carefree. The exact reason for Shostakovich joining the Communist Party has always been unclear – but his family and friends state that the composer was very distressed about joining the party and that he had probably been blackmailed into doing so. Apparently

---

<sup>49</sup> Laurel E Fay. *Shostakovich: A Life*. Oxford University Press, 2005. 211

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 269

<sup>51</sup> Nicolas Nabokov. *Old Friends and New Music*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951. 204

<sup>52</sup> Gerard McBurney. Repertoire Note for Boosey and Hawkes.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Shostakovich found it difficult to say 'No' to anybody.<sup>54</sup> Consequently he became suicidal.<sup>55</sup> The government wanted him to be the General Secretary of the Composers' Union, but to be so he first had to become a member of the Communist Party. It was around this time that he composed some of his most famous works, including the Twelfth Symphony and the tragic, autobiographical Eighth String Quartet. The String Quartet contains quotes from past works and his DSCH motif, and is held to be a portrait of himself.

Towards the end of his life, Shostakovich's health and nerves became frail, and his writing became more obsessed with mortality and works of his past. He also found Jewish themes appealing, and had many of his Jewish works composed during Stalin's life performed post-1953.

Shostakovich himself was not Jewish, but he is credited as having 'used Jewish idioms far more than that of any other non-Jew in the Soviet Union'.<sup>56</sup> Braun states that the composer's use of Jewish elements was Shostakovich's 'hidden language of resistance'.<sup>57</sup>

From the outset he was taught that antisemitism was an abhorrent attitude. He said: 'I often test a person by his attitude towards Jews'.<sup>58</sup> One of Shostakovich's teachers at the Leningrad Conservatory, where he studied composition, was a Jew (Maximilian Steinberg). He had close Jewish friends, especially Ivan Sollertinsky and Mieczyslaw Weinberg. When Sollertinsky died in 1944, Shostakovich dedicated the Piano Trio, No. 2, Op. 67 to his memory. The last movement in particular contains obvious klezmer themes. At the time he wrote this, he heard the garish news of Nazi soldiers forcing Jewish prisoners to dance over their graves – this element of horror is heard in the last movement of the Trio.

As well as Weinberg, another probable influence on Shostakovich was Jewish ethnomusicologist Moisey Beregovsky. Beregovsky wrote a dissertation on klezmer, which has been translated and published under the name '*Jewish Instrumental Folk Music: The Collection and Writings of Moshe Beregovski*'. Beregovsky collected klezmer melodies under fieldwork conditions (in a similar situation to that of Bartók and Kodály in their study of Hungarian and other such folk music). His is held to be the sole professional library of klezmer tunes obtained before World War II, and over a period of twenty years he assembled thousands of recordings. The tunes he

---

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton University Press, 1994. 162

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 340

<sup>56</sup> Cecil Bloom. *Dmitri Shostakovich and the Jews*. [www.thefreelibrary.com](http://www.thefreelibrary.com)

<sup>57</sup> Joachim Braun. *The Double Meaning of Jewish Elements in Dimitri Shostakovich's Music*. From 'The Music Quarterly', Vol. 71, No. 1, 1985.

<sup>58</sup> Solomon Volkov. *Testimony*. Limelight Editions; Anv edition (July 1, 2004). 25

collected, as played by Ukrainian musicians during the Stalinist era, date back to the nineteenth century. Beregovsky also wrote about early twentieth-century klezmer performance practice. Shostakovich most likely heard Beregovsky discuss his dissertation at the Moscow Conservatory in January 1944, where Shostakovich was teaching. Beregovsky's collection was readily available in Moscow during that year, and it is most probable that Shostakovich perused it – Wilson believes that Shostakovich examined his thesis.<sup>59</sup> It is certain that he knew Beregovsky and held him in high esteem.

Beregovsky was arrested in 1950 as part of the anti-Semitic campaign against 'rootless cosmopolitans', and his daughter later reported that Shostakovich intervened to obtain the folklorist's rehabilitation in 1956; a 1960 letter from Shostakovich to Beregovsky expressed his high regard for the scholar and asked for his advice on musical matters.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore it is easy to ascertain that these two men would have influenced Shostakovich – especially because this was around the time he composed his first official Jewish work – orchestrating and completing an opera, *Rothschild's Violin*, by his favourite Jewish student Venyamin Fleishman. Fleishman died before he completed the opera, so Shostakovich completed it for him.

...My student Veniamin Fleishman wrote an opera based on Chekhov's *Rothschild's Violin*. I suggested that he do an opera on the subject. Fleishman was a sensitive spirit and he had a fine rapport with Chekhov. But he had a hard life. Fleishman had a tendency to write sad music rather than happy music, and naturally, he was abused for it. Fleishman sketched out the opera but then he volunteered for the army. He was killed. He went into the People's Volunteer Guard. They were all candidates for corpsehood...<sup>61</sup>

Chekhov's wry, tongue-in-cheek story-writing suited Shostakovich's style also. The artistic topics of both author and composer are often morbid, and focussed on the life of the common Russian people.

The story of *Rothschild's Violin* is based on the life of an old coffin-maker called Bronza, who supplements his income by playing his violin in a klezmer orchestra along with a poor flautist

---

<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton University Press, 2006. 267

<sup>60</sup> Judith Kuhn. *Shostakovich in Dialogue: Form, Imagery and Ideas in Quartets 1-7*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2010. 46

<sup>61</sup> Solomon Volkov. *Testimony*. Limelight Editions; Anv edition (July 1, 2004). 225

named Rothschild. Rothschild plays such mournful melodies that Bronza grows irritated and leaves the orchestra. His wife dies, and Bronza has trouble affording a simple coffin for her. He knows he has treated her with coldness, and cannot remember much of their life together – not even their daughter who died in infancy. Rothschild visits the coffin-maker on behalf of the klezmer orchestra's conductor, interrupting one of his reveries; Bronza grows angry and chases him away. A walk along the river revives his memories, and he realises that he has wasted his life in bitterness. To make amends, he gives Rothschild his violin.

The opera is full of Jewish themes, as to be expected from a story about a klezmer musician, and includes a 'traditional Hanukkah tune'.<sup>62</sup> It also utilizes the Jewish modes, Ahavah Rabbah, or Freygish mode, and the Ukrainian Dorian, so commonly employed by Shostakovich in his Jewish works.<sup>63</sup> The Freygish mode is the most popular mode used in Jewish music. It is basically a harmonic minor scale starting on the fifth degree, or the Phrygian dominant scale (the Phrygian mode with a raised third). Shostakovich found this mode attractive and first used it in *Rothschild's Violin*; from then on it often appears in his compositions, including the Second Piano Trio and the First Cello Concerto. The Ukrainian Dorian mode was also used regularly by the composer, it is a Dorian mode with a raised 4<sup>th</sup> degree of the scale.

---

<sup>62</sup> W. Mark Roberts. *DSCH Journal Review*. [http://dschjournal.com/reviews/cd\\_reviews/rvs30sansopk.html](http://dschjournal.com/reviews/cd_reviews/rvs30sansopk.html)

<sup>63</sup> Joachim Braun. *The Double Meaning of Jewish Elements in Dimitri Shostakovich's Music*. From 'The Music Quarterly', Vol. 71, No. 1, 1985. 79



## Ahavah Rabbah



## Ukrainian Dorian



Shostakovich appreciated the way Jewish music had the 'ability to build a jolly melody on sad intonations.'<sup>64</sup> Much of the composer's music is fashioned in this method – on the surface jovial but yet not dedicatedly so. He also said, 'Why does a man strike up a jolly song? Because he is sad at heart.'<sup>65</sup> It has also been suggested that Shostakovich linked his own persecuted life with that of the Jews – this is partly due to the fact that Shostakovich combined the klezmer theme from the Op. 67 Piano Trio with his signature DSCH motif in the autobiographical Eighth String Quartet. There are many debates on the 'Jewishness' of some of Shostakovich's works, and the statement he sought to make with each. Another work of his that is very famous for its use of Jewish themes and topics is the 1962 Thirteenth Symphony, *Babi Yar*. The symphony is for orchestra, bass and choir, and utilizes poems by Yevgeny Yevtushenko on the topic of the World War II Babi Yar massacre. As discussed earlier, Shostakovich composed this at the same time Weinberg wrote his Sixth Symphony, dedicated to murdered and orphaned children (*i.e.* Weinberg himself, hence also autobiographical in a certain sense.)

---

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton University Press, 2006. 268

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

## Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

During and after Sergei Prokofiev's studies at the St Petersburg Conservatory, he began to make a name for himself due to his rather modernist compositions. These were greatly lauded by the audiences at the St Petersburg Evenings of Contemporary Music. This was a series of musical events which featured other composers also, such as Stravinsky (a great favourite of Shostakovich; Stravinsky fled Russia and the government disapproved of Shostakovich's admiration of the composer). Prokofiev was not attracted to the traditional compositional style techniques taught at the Conservatory, and found the avant-garde music of fellow Russians Reger, Stravinsky and Scriabin much more appealing. By the age of 18, in 1909, Prokofiev had performed his dissonant Etudes, Op. 2 for the Evenings. They subsequently invited him to return and give the Russian premiere of Schoenberg's Op. 11 Klavierstücke.<sup>66</sup> Prokofiev's compositions continued to be dissonant and chromatic, and received mixed receptions from the public. 'Many musicians at the time ... were fiercely opposed to Prokofiev.'<sup>67</sup> In one instance, at the premiere of the Second Piano Concerto, some of the less modernist members of the audience left the concert hall in disgust. 'To hell with this futurist music!' The modernist critics were delighted: 'Brilliant!' they cried. 'What freshness!' 'What temperament and originality.'<sup>68</sup>

In 1921 Prokofiev was commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev, founder of Ballets Russes (an itinerant ballet company that Prokofiev first saw when he went to Paris in 1913) to compose a ballet. The ensuing work was *Chout*, or *The Fool*, and it conformed to Diaghilev's request of being 'music that was national in character.'<sup>69</sup> The story was chosen from a folktale by Alexander Afanasyev about a buffoon who outwits seven other buffoons by means of trickery.<sup>70</sup> Thus, despite Prokofiev's lack of interest in traditional Russian music, he began to incorporate Russian themes into his works, though mutating them slightly and using his own harmonies and additives. In this ballet Prokofiev uses some traditional folk elements. In general, 'Prokofiev did not borrow folk tunes, rather he used the well-known collections as a point of departure. He personalized and modernized his folk-like themes by making their melodic lines disjunct and mutating their simple, reiterative harmonies. He could evoke a typically Russian sonority as well

---

<sup>66</sup> Daniel Jaffé. *Sergey Prokofiev*. London, 2008. 31

<sup>67</sup> Nathan Milstein and Solomon Volkov. *From Russia to the West: The Musical Memoirs and Reminiscences of Nathan Milstein*. Henry Holt and Company, Inc, New York. 1990. 57

<sup>68</sup> Sergei Prokofiev. *Soviet Diary 1927 And Other Writings*. Northeastern University Press, 1992. 246

<sup>69</sup> Sergei Prokofiev. Anthony Phillips (translator), ed. *Diaries 1915–1923: Behind the Mask*. London / Ithaca: Faber and Faber/Cornell University Press. 2008. 23

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Jaffé. *Sergey Prokofiev*. London, 2008. 44

as Stravinsky but chose to do so only if it served his dramatic concept.<sup>71</sup> Again, the reception of the ballet was controversial, the English detested it – although in Russia it was fairly well received, and Stravinsky and Ravel were highly impressed.<sup>72</sup>

Prokofiev had studied orchestration with Rimsky-Korsakov whilst at the St Petersburg Conservatory. Rimsky-Korsakov wrote some music which contained Jewish themes, and encouraged his Jewish students to write in a Jewish style. Prokofiev incorporated some Jewish themes in some of his works, the most notable being the *Overture on Jewish Themes* Op. 34. This was commissioned when he was in the USA in 1919 by an émigré Russian-Jewish sextet called the Zimro Ensemble, which was comprised of clarinet, string quartet, and piano. They were on a worldwide concert tour to raise funds to establish a music conservatory in Jerusalem. 'As a child, Prokofiev had heard Jewish klezmer bands, and klezmer-like melodies appear in this work.'<sup>73</sup>

The Zimro Ensemble gave Prokofiev a notebook of Jewish folksongs, though it is unsure whether these were authentic or whether the clarinetist had composed them himself in a Jewish style. Prokofiev extemporised on some of these themes, and though the work became very popular and was orchestrated, Prokofiev did not like his composition very much. Despite being praised by a critic who described the work as 'a beautiful and pathetic work', Prokofiev retorted in his abrupt, honest manner; 'its technique is conventional, its form is bad'. He also said 'from the musical point of view, the only worthwhile part, if you please, is the final section, and that, I think, is probably the result of my sweetness and diatonicism.'<sup>74</sup> The first theme in particular, *un poco allegro*, sounds very much like klezmer, and the work is in that same style as some of Shostakovich's paradoxically happy, ironic works. It is festive, in C minor, and uses grating semitones typical of Jewish music throughout the work.

At the outset of the First World War Prokofiev was certainly not keen on joining the army, unlike Shostakovich was in the Second World War. He was 'called up for service, but was luckily saved by another recent recruit, Gorky. In writing to Alexander Kerensky, head of the Provisional

---

<sup>71</sup> Stephen D Press. *Prokofiev's Ballets for Diaghilev*. Ashgate Publishings Limited, 2006. 142

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 53

<sup>73</sup> Cecil Bloom. *Dmitri Shostakovich and the Jews*. [www.thefreelibrary.com](http://www.thefreelibrary.com). Accessed 25/06/14

<sup>74</sup> David Nice. *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West, 1891–1935*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. 163

Government, he made his case; “We can't afford using golden nails on soldier's boots.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, Prokofiev returned to the Conservatory and began to study organ, but soon he grew tired of Russia's disinterest in music and he left for the USA. (The premieres of Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto and First Symphony had been delayed due to the war – so Prokofiev felt that the United States would offer him more opportunities.) However he was met with disappointment in New York – the US premiere of his opera *The Love for Three Oranges* was postponed upon the event of the musical director's death. Thus in 1920, two years after his arrival, Prokofiev left for Paris where he regained contact with Diaghilev and composed another ballet.

In 1927 Prokofiev returned to what he used to know as Russia – now it was called the Soviet Union. His music had become more successful during his absence, and with the Soviet premiere of *The Love for Three Oranges* he re-established his presence.

However, in 1929 the RAPM attacked Prokofiev. (Recall how in the same year the RAPM had caused Shostakovich to fall out of favour for his audition for his satirical opera *The Nose*.) Prokofiev had written a ballet *Le pas d'acier*, (*The Steel Step*) and the ballet was centered on the life of the common people – factory workers and the like – in the early years of the Soviet Union. The RAPM asked Prokofiev if the factory, in which many of the scenes were held, portrayed a 'capitalist factory, where the worker is a slave, or a Soviet factory, where the worker is the master? If it is a Soviet factory, when and where did Prokofiev examine it, since from 1918 to the present he has been living abroad and came here for the first time in 1927 for two weeks...?' Prokofiev responded by saying, 'That concerns politics, not music, and therefore I won't answer.' Therefore the RAPM decided the ballet was a 'vulgar anti-Soviet anecdote, a counter-revolutionary composition bordering on Fascism'.<sup>76</sup> With the condemnation by the RAPM, the Bolshoi Theatre did not accept the ballet for performance.

After this poor reception in the Soviet Union Prokofiev returned to the USA and toured that country and Europe, basically becoming a musical ambassador for his homeland. This meant that his works were under the critique of the Soviet Union, but as the RAPM had been disbanded in 1932 Prokofiev was slightly more successful.

In 1936 Prokofiev ceased the travelling life and settled in Moscow.

---

<sup>75</sup> Terry King. *Gregor Piatigorsky: The Life and Career of the Virtuoso Cellist*. McFarland, 2010. Kindle Edition, 4%.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel Jaffé. *Sergey Prokofiev*. London, 2008. 118

Violinist Nathan Milstein said of this decision:

After he returned to the Soviet Union, he did not write anything of significance. I cannot say with certainty that this creative tragedy was the result solely of the repressive Stalinist regime. Perhaps Prokofiev would have faded in any case, even if he had stayed in the West. But I still feel that adverse political circumstances stifled his enormous gift. Prokofiev did not understand much about politics ... he could not work in a totalitarian state ... Prokofiev, judging from our conversations in Hollywood, did not give this much thought. And he paid for it dearly.<sup>77</sup>

He was rebuked in 1936 for the *Cantata for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the October Revolution*, Lebedev stating at the audition: 'what do you think you're doing, Sergei Sergeyvich, taking texts that belong to the people and setting them to such incomprehensible music?'<sup>78</sup> It was not till 1966, thirteen years after Prokofiev's death, that this work was performed.

To keep in the government's good books, so to speak, Prokofiev wrote songs to the lyrics of poets officially approved by the Soviet Union. These are Op. 66, Op. 79 and Op. 89. He also composed a Soviet opera called *Semyon Kotko*, based on Valentin Katayev's novel *I, Son of Working People*. This is about a soldier, Semyon, who falls in love with Sofya, whose father is a wealthy man hoping to restore the old order of Russia. Germans and Ukrainian Nationalists still occupy the territory they live in. The father is eventually arrested and executed.

The man who was supposed to produce the opera, Meyerhold, was arrested and executed before the premiere in 1940, and only a few months after this Prokofiev was told to write *Hail to Stalin*, Op. 85 in honor of Stalin's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>79</sup> Again this is a parallel to Shostakovich's life; Shostakovich was forced to write *The Song of the Forests* for Stalin's reforestation programme.

Shortly after this, Prokofiev composed his three famous 'War Sonatas' for piano. It has been argued that Prokofiev expressed his true feelings in these sonatas, being fed up with composing at the government's whim. Ironically he was awarded a Stalin prize for both the Seventh and Eighth sonatas – the government did not notice Prokofiev's reference to Schumann's lied

---

<sup>77</sup> Nathan Milstein and Solomon Volkov. *From Russia to the West: The Musical Memoirs and Reminiscences of Nathan Milstein*. Henry Holt and Company, Inc, New York. 1990. 14-15

<sup>78</sup> Simon Morrison. *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years*. Oxford 2009. 65

<sup>79</sup> Daniel Jaffé. *Sergey Prokofiev*. London, 2008. 159

'*Wehmut*' ('*Melancholy*'). Jaffé argues that Prokofiev, 'having forced himself to compose a cheerful evocation of the nirvana Stalin wanted everyone to believe he had created ... (decided in the sonatas) ... to express his true feelings.'<sup>80</sup> In this way he behaved similarly to Shostakovich in his ironic writings. The text from Schumann's '*Wehmut*', by Josef Karl Benedikt von Eichendorff, is as follows:

I can still sing sometimes  
As if I were happy,  
But secretly tears well up  
And I begin to weep.

Nightingales pour forth,  
When spring breezes play outside,  
Their echoing song of longing,  
From the depths of their prisons.

Then all hearts listen,  
And all are delighted,  
But no one feels the pains,  
The deep sorrow in the song.

Another success at this point in Prokofiev's life was the positive reception of his previously composed but never premiered ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>81</sup>

At the outset of the Second World War, Prokofiev was evacuated along with some other artists to the Caucasus. He also began to write an opera based on Leo Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace*. The government forced Prokofiev to make some revisions on the opera, but in general his works were well celebrated at this point and he was called a leading composer in the Soviet Union.<sup>82</sup>

This was not to last: in the year 1948, when Weinberg's father-in-law was killed, Prokofiev was denounced along with Shostakovich. His works were considered formalistic and did not adhere

---

<sup>80</sup> Daniel Jaffé. *Sergey Prokofiev*. London, 2008. 160

<sup>81</sup> Christina Ezrahi. *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*. Pittsburgh, 2012. 151

<sup>82</sup> Daniel Jaffé. *Sergey Prokofiev*. London, 2008. 182-84

to the principles of classical music, and both he and Shostakovich apparently produced music that 'turned music into cacophony', and was 'muddled'.<sup>83</sup>

Throughout this period, Rostropovich was one of the very few to remain steadfast. While working with Prokofiev on his cello sonata during sessions at the composer's dacha, Rostropovich was his only friend. He formed a bond with Shostakovich that endured until the cellist himself was forced into exile in the 1970s. He continued to champion the work of both men, premiering the final version of the Prokofiev (cello sonata) in 1950.<sup>84</sup>

Eight of Prokofiev's works were banned, and this included the Eighth Piano Sonata which had received a Stalin prize. At this point Prokofiev was struggling financially, because barely anyone was brave enough to perform his works. This same year Prokofiev's wife Lina (though estranged from her husband due to the composer's relationship with the much younger Mira Mendelson, twenty-four years his junior and a librettist) was arrested. In a similar situation to Weinberg, the arrest was on false charges; espionage and treason – all she did was send some money to her mother in Spain. When Prokofiev's children told him of the arrest, 'he listened in silence before stammering, enigmatically, "What have I done?"'<sup>85</sup> Prokofiev had treated his wife with callousness, as in keeping with his reportedly bitter personality. 'His lack of basic human feeling could be shocking, as was the strange comfort he found in transferring matters of the heart to the mind ... sentiment, in his relationships as in his music, was anathema.'<sup>86</sup>

Lina was treated terribly.

First at Lubyanka, then at Lefortovo prison, Lina suffered nine months of sustained interrogation. Investigators spat on her, kicked her, and threatened her children. Needles were stuck into her arms and legs. For the first three months, she was deprived of sleep, pushing her to the brink of madness. Two of every five days she spent crouched in a cell for hours on end until her legs shook and buckled from the pain. In the deep winter cold, she was made to walk outside without a coat to face another round of questioning ...<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Kiril Tomoff. *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953*. Ithaca, 2006. 122

<sup>84</sup> John O'Mahony. 'An icon for our times', *The Guardian*. Saturday 2 March 2002.

<sup>85</sup> Simon Alexander Morrison. *Lina and Serge: The Love and wars of Lina Prokofiev*. Harvill Secker, 2013. 7

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 34

<sup>87</sup> Simon Alexander Morrison. *Lina and Serge: The Love and wars of Lina Prokofiev*. Harvill Secker, 2013. 7-8

This is similar to the way the Soviets treated the sleepless Weinberg in his tiny prison cell.

Lina spent nine years in prison being interrogated and was then sentenced to twenty years hard labour, but, like Weinberg, was released after Stalin's death in 1953. Ironically the day of Stalin's death was also the day of Prokofiev's death.

It seems that Prokofiev was too important to the government to be arrested, despite his compositional decline in the years following 1948.

Notably, the *Sinfonia Concertante* for cello and orchestra was the last of Prokofiev's great works, written for Rostropovich.



## Rostropovich's Influence on Selected Cello Works of Weinberg, Shostakovich and Prokofiev, and the Relationship Between Rostropovich and the Three Composers

Shostakovich first gained inspiration for his First Cello Concerto from Prokofiev's *Sinfonia Concertante*, Op. 125. Rostropovich said:

I heard him say many times: "He's a composer of genius, this is a work of genius!" And Shostakovich once even stated in an interview that the impulse for writing his First Cello Concerto sprang from Prokofiev's *Sinfonia Concertante* for cello and orchestra. It always delighted him. Whenever I was playing the *Sinfonia Concertante* in Moscow, Shostakovich would always come along if he was in town, and he never missed a single concert ... He also remarked apropos of Prokofiev's *Sinfonia Concertante*: "How wonderful the cello sounds with the celesta!" There is just such a passage in the finale, when the main theme drops to a slow tempo for the cello while the celesta plays ornamental passages. And similarly, at the end of the second movement in Shostakovich's First Concerto, when I am playing on the cello, the string harmonics and celesta play along with me as well. So there are things in his First Concerto which I know for sure he took from Prokofiev, because Shostakovich, in full admiration, pointed them out to me himself.<sup>88</sup>

Rostropovich also points out other similarities, particularly in the part of the kettle-drum – Shostakovich quoted the seven beats of the drum in his concerto directly from Prokofiev.

A reference to a then-popular tune, *Suliko*, is used in the last movement of the concerto.<sup>89</sup> *Suliko* was reportedly Stalin's favourite song, and Rostropovich said that the reference was so perverted and obscure that he would have had trouble finding it if Shostakovich had not personally indicated it to him: "This paraphrase of the song is really a piece of musical hooliganism, very daring and provocative at the time. Nevertheless it was next to impossible to uncover this quotation and make this association; certainly I was not able to without it being pointed out to me."<sup>90</sup>

"Towards the end, there is a very simple passage with the theme in the basses, where the solo cello plays octaves above it. One day, Shostakovich said to me:

---

<sup>88</sup> Malcolm Hamrick Brown. *A Shostakovich Casebook*. Indiana University Press, 1st Edition 2004. 147

<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton University Press, 2006. 373

<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Mstislav Rostropovic: Cellist, Teacher, Legend*. Faber & Faber, 2011. 257

Slava, you must understand that in this concerto, I know every note. Have you not found anything about Stalin in it?" Upon reflection, I answered him that in all honesty, no. He then showed me in the score a very much camouflaged quotation that even I, who knew the concerto perfectly, could not locate.<sup>91</sup>

It was Gregor Piatigorsky who persistently pestered Prokofiev to compose for the cello. Prokofiev initially protested, saying 'I don't know your crazy instrument', but Piatigorsky 'played for him, and, demonstrating all possibilities of the cello, saw him from time to time jump from his chair. "It is slashing! Play it again!" He made notes in the little notebook he always carried with him.'<sup>92</sup>

Prokofiev wrote in his diary on May 22, 1932: 'Piatigorsky, a good cellist, came over. ... Piatigorsky very much wishes for me to compose a concerto for him, vows to play it everywhere. I already have an outline (and themes) for a fantasy for cello and orchestra. If Piatigorsky can come up with the money I'll do it.'<sup>93</sup>

Prokofiev began to write sketches for the concerto in 1933, when he and Piatigorsky were both living in Paris. However it did not progress past the sketch stage until Prokofiev was in Moscow in 1937. "The first sketches did not satisfy me, I clearly felt 'seams' between the various episodes, and not all the music was of equal value. After the long interruption I revised the concerto, adding some new material."<sup>94</sup>

In 1938 Prokofiev had completed the first movement. Piatigorsky said:

We corresponded about the concerto. ... Finally he completed the first movement. I received the music and soon we began to discuss the other movements to come. The beginning of the second, which followed shortly, appeared as excitingly promising as the first. "Even so, it will lead to nothing. I cannot compose away from Russia. I will go home."<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> Yannick Millon. Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich. Winter 2006.  
<http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostrfrench/rostrfrench.htm>. Accessed 15/07/14

<sup>92</sup> Gregor Piatigorsky. *Cellist*. Doubleday & Company, Inc., New York, 1965. 236-7.

<sup>93</sup> Sergey Prokof'yev. *Dnevnik*, 2 volumes. Translated by Simon Morrison. Serge Prokofiev Estate, Paris, 2002. 2:799

<sup>94</sup> Israel V Nestyev. *Prokofiev*. Translated by Florence Jonas. Stanford University Press, 1960. 297

<sup>95</sup> Terry King. *Gregor Piatigorsky: The Life and Career of the Virtuoso Cellist*. McFarland, 2010. Kindle Edition, 32%

Shortly afterwards, Piatigorsky received some depressing news. Prokofiev,

... apologetically, and with some embarrassment, announced to Piatigorsky that the concerto was nearly finished, but that he could not dedicate it to Piatigorsky or give him the right of first performance. As a Soviet citizen, the composer could not allow the premiere performed by a famous expatriate, one who had been erased from the public record; it could be interpreted as an act of defiance that might endanger his family. The work needed to be presented in the Soviet Union first.<sup>96</sup>

However Prokofiev was keen to allow Piatigorsky to give the American premiere, and sent him the whole concerto. Piatigorsky pointed out some of the weaknesses in the work and asked the composer to make a few changes; consequently Prokofiev 'added a cadenza and adjusted some of the passagework.'<sup>97</sup> However, after the disappointing premiere of the work in Moscow on November 26, 1938 with cellist Lev Berezovsky, Prokofiev seemed depressed and in response to Piatigorsky's questioning about certain details he said, 'Do whatever you find necessary. You have *carte blanche*.'<sup>98</sup>

Piatigorsky premiered it in Boston and later in New York – because of location, the composer was never able to hear Piatigorsky perform it. A few years later, in 1947, Rostropovich performed the work with piano accompaniment in the Soviet Union. The occasion was dedicated to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution, and also happened to be Stalin's birthday. Prokofiev heard this performance and asked Rostropovich if he could aid him in some revision. The composer said 'Although there is some good material in the piece, the structure is not compact enough.'<sup>99</sup>

Rostropovich ended up composing only a small part of the concerto, eight bars, at Figure 20, which is in the first movement as shown below. 'He said that he needed eight bars of something virtuosic for the cello. All I had to do was write the cello part since he had already composed the orchestration to go with it. After changing maybe ten notes, he thanked me and said it was good.'<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Terry King. *Gregor Piatigorsky: The Life and Career of the Virtuoso Cellist*. McFarland, 2010. Kindle Edition, 32%

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Gregor Piatigorsky. *Cellist*. Doubleday & Company, Inc., New York, 1965. 237

<sup>99</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend*. London: Faber, 2007. 67

<sup>100</sup> Tim Janof. *Conversation with Mstislav Rostropovich*. 4/5/06.  
<http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostopovich/rostopovich.htm>. Accessed 06/06/14



Sergei Prokofiev – *Sinfonia Concertante*, Op. 125. First Movement

Prokofiev thus rewrote the Cello Concerto, Op. 58 and dedicated the *Sinfonia Concertante*, Op. 125 to Rostropovich. This is the version of the concerto which is most often performed today.

There is little information about the relationship between Prokofiev and Weinberg. This is probably because of Weinberg's sheltered life – there is not much written about him. Shostakovich and Prokofiev were acquainted, however, and Rostropovich had a fairly close relationship with all three composers, especially Shostakovich, whom he considered family. The pair played duos for enjoyment, performed and recorded together. 'On many occasions, I played with him on the piano, his Cello Sonata. He later dedicated to me his two Cello Concertos. That we had become very close friends is the one of the great prides of my life.'<sup>101</sup> Like Shostakovich and Weinberg, the pair often played symphonies on the piano, Rostropovich being a competent pianist; 'We often played through Mahler's symphonies, four hands on the piano ... we had such human closeness that we considered ourselves a little like members of the same family.'<sup>102</sup>

As aforementioned, Shostakovich dedicated his First Cello Concerto to Rostropovich. The cellist, who usually practiced no more than two hours per day, spent four days learning the concerto after receiving the music, so excited was he by it. Here is his report:

<sup>101</sup> Bertrand Dermoncourt. 'Mstislav Rostropovich: A Soldier of Music'. Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich. September 21, 2006. <http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostrfrench/rostrfrench.htm>. Accessed 12/08/14

<sup>102</sup> Yannick Millon. Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich. Winter 2006. <http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostrfrench/rostrfrench.htm>. Accessed 12/08/14

When he had completed the 1st Cello Concerto, I had come to see him at St. Petersburg with my cello. He lived at the home of his sister. He was very nervous, and I was even more nervous. He began to play the piano. When he finished, I was totally overcome, which I told him. But he did not believe me. "*Tell me the truth,*" he said. "*Reflect well again. I can play it again and tell me if it truly pleases you.*" I replied, "*Watch my face.*" Then he said, "*Permit me to dedicate this work to you.*" In 1960, when I returned for a series of concerts, my wife told me that Shostakovich had been looking for me for two days. He wanted me to come to see him as quickly as possible. He had begun rehearsals of his 8th Quartet with the Beethoven Quartet. "*I have made a recording, he told me, so that you could listen to it.*" There was his whole life in this work, composed to the memory of the victims of Stalin. The initials of his name, DSCH, and quotes from his 1st Symphony, from his opera *Lady Macbeth*, from his 1st Cello Concerto, etc. When we finished listening to the music, the two of us cried. He then said to me, "*Finally, I have written a work that I would like one to play at my funeral.*"<sup>103</sup>

Along with five other of the composer's friends, including Karen Khachaturian, Boris Tishchenko and Kara Karayev, Weinberg signed a public letter in the newspaper *Literaturnaya gazeta* (November 14, 1979) denouncing Solomon Volkov's *Testimony* as a fraud.<sup>104</sup> The composer's son Maxim also initially rejected the book until 1991, when the Soviet regime collapsed. Shostakovich's widow Irina never supported the book. Rostropovich had wildly contradictory opinions on the book; at first he said 'one can very clearly hear Shostakovich's own voice in the memoirs'.<sup>105</sup> Later he was more critical and questioned the authenticity of *Testimony* 'when it speaks disdainfully about the creative imagination of Prokofiev'.<sup>106</sup> However, Shostakovich's opinion of Prokofiev did change over time, despite Rostropovich's opinion that 'they both had enormous respect for each other, though their tastes were very different'.<sup>107</sup> Prokofiev was rather jealous of Shostakovich's awards – at one point his own works were overlooked whereas Shostakovich's were given First Class Stalin Prizes. This opinion is outlined in the book *Shostakovich Reconsidered* by Allan B. Ho and Dmitri Feofanov. In fact, as early as 1934 Prokofiev and Shostakovich were at odds; the following incident occurred at a luncheon hosted by mutual friend Alexei Tolstoi.

<sup>103</sup> Marie-Aude Roux. '*I Could Not Exist Without Shostakovich.*' Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich. March 16, 2006 <http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostrfrench/rostrfrench.htm>. Accessed 08/08/14

<sup>104</sup> David Fanning. *Mieczyslaw Weinberg, In Search of Freedom*. Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, Germany 2010. 126

<sup>105</sup> Seppo Heikinheimo. '*Kymmenen vuotta aitouskiistaa*' (A Decade of Struggle about Authenticity'), Dmitri Sostakovitsin muistelmat, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Otava, Helsinki, 1989. 351-52

<sup>106</sup> Allan B. Ho, Dmitri Feofanov. *The Shostakovich Wars*. Ho and Feofanov. 31 August 2011. 14

<sup>107</sup> Tim Janof. *Conversation with Mstislav Rostropovich*. 4/5/06. <http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostopovich/rostopovich.htm>. Accessed 07/08/2014

Prokofiev was asked to play the Scherzo and Gavotte from his 'Classical' Symphony, and he did so, on the piano. Shostakovich was greatly enthralled, exclaiming: 'It's wonderful! Just delightful!' Then Shostakovich played an excerpt from his First Piano Concerto. Prokofiev was rather scathing about the work, stating: 'This work seemed immature to me, rather formless. As for the material, the concerto seems stylistically too motley for me. And not in very good taste.' Shostakovich was greatly upset. As a result, he refused to hear Prokofiev mentioned in his presence for a while. 'Eventually, superficial decorum was re-established, but the deep crack in the relationship of the two great composers remained.'<sup>108</sup>

Regardless, Rostropovich claimed in an interview in 2006 that he 'had never even read *Testimony*,'<sup>109</sup> though he had been commenting on the work for over twenty years. Yet, in 1998 he said he had read the book, in this comment about *Testimony*: 'When I read the rubbish written by Solomon Volkov...'<sup>110</sup>

Weinberg and the others may have been forced by the government to discredit the book, but there is no evidence in support of this. They may have wished to protect Shostakovich's family, particularly his son, Maxim. Debates are still raging about the authenticity of this book.

Weinberg's cello concerto, composed in 1948, had to wait until 1957 for performance.

Weinberg was delighted when Rostropovich expressed interest in his cello concerto, and participated actively in the rehearsals during late December 1956 and early January 1957. He helped Rostropovich in his meticulous preparation, accompanying him at the piano. Natalia Vovsi-Mikhoels (Weinberg's wife) recalls that the cello concerto was first performed in Leningrad, and was most enthusiastically received ... Weinberg was so overwhelmed by Rostropovich's brilliant interpretation that he dedicated the concerto to him. He was undoubtedly struck by the cellist's conceptual understanding, as well as his close identification with its inner emotional world. For his part, one of the things Rostropovich most valued in the concerto was Weinberg's ability to set up every change of mood, skilfully preparing the transitions and evolving connections within the overall development.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Allan B. Ho, Dmitry Feofanov. *The Shostakovich Wars*. Ho and Feofanov. 31 August 2011. 14

<sup>109</sup> Jeremy Eichler. 'Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Britten and Me.' *The New York Times*, 16 April 2006. 2.1

<sup>110</sup> Allan B. Ho, Dmitry Feofanov. *The Shostakovich Wars*. Ho and Feofanov. 31 August 2011. 18

<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend*. London: Faber, 2007. Kindle Edition, 25%



In 1961 Rostropovich challenged young Soviet composers to write good music for his instrument – the idea was inspired by the fact that most of them lacked knowledge of the instrument. In October there ensued a series of six concerts in Moscow's Small Hall at the Conservatoire, comprised only of new Soviet compositions. This was unusual at the time, but Rostropovich sought to educate his audience, and because of his popularity the concerts were well attended. Amongst the composers were Shostakovich and Weinberg. Weinberg's First Solo Cello Sonata in D minor Op. 72 and the Second Cello and Piano Sonata Op. 63 were performed, with the composer at the piano. Both of these were dedicated to Rostropovich.

Although Weinberg and Shostakovich were close friends right up until Shostakovich's death in 1975, Weinberg and Rostropovich seemed to have parted ways around this time. Rostropovich claimed that Weinberg had an affiliation with the Soviet party: this is rather an outrageous opinion considering all that Weinberg had suffered and also due to a complete lack of evidence for this statement. The quote is as follows:

In general Shostakovich was left almost totally exposed in his surroundings. There was only a tightly knit group of people who were close to him, and, as genuine friends, they were well aware of the force and genius of Shostakovich the composer. For instance, such people as Yuri Levitin, Metak Weinberg and Lev Lebedinsky, notwithstanding their Party affiliation, retained a good relationship with Dmitri Dmitriyevich.<sup>112</sup>

A possible reason for this statement is provided by Weinberg's widow.

When Mstislav Rostropovich is quoted as referring to Weinberg's 'party affiliation', this can only be put down to a mixture of the great cellist's well-known propensity for exaggeration, plus a rift with Weinberg, the details of which are not entirely clear ... the composer's widow believes that it may be connected with Weinberg's refusal to express public support for Rostropovich's defense of Alexander Solzhenitsyn in 1969-71.<sup>113</sup>

This reason provides some sense if one considers the timeline of events, because Rostropovich never performed the 24 Preludes for Solo Cello, Op. 100, written for him in 1969. The work was dedicated to the cellist, but not premiered until 1995 by Yosif Feigelson. It seems that Rostropovich's strong political opinions and gestures were sometimes more important to him than his friendships. From the author's perspective, it is preposterous to think of the quiet, frail,

---

<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton University Press, 2006. 249

<sup>113</sup> David Fanning. *Mieczyslaw Weinberg, In Search of Freedom*. Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, Germany 2010. 169

previously incarcerated Weinberg wishing to publicly place himself and his family in possible danger once again, having already been through this ordeal.



## **Conclusion**

If it were not for Mstislav Rostropovich, the cello may not have become as popular a solo instrument as it is today. As well as heightening the technical demands and expectations of the instrument, the cellist worked closely alongside most great composers of the late twentieth-century, especially with Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Weinberg. He inspired hundreds of new works, and encouraged the Soviet composers to write for the cello. He also provided support to those attacked by the government and the impoverished, although if anyone disagreed with his political views or simply failed to publicly support these views – such as Weinberg – the cellist may have severed all connections to the person in question. This is probably one of the reasons why Weinberg is not very well known: after the Solzhenitsyn affair Rostropovich failed to promote Weinberg's works in the West.

Weinberg and Shostakovich had a very close friendship. Prokofiev, always aloof, remained emotionally detached from the others, and Rostropovich mentions him with respect rather than with affection, although he supported him when others avoided him.

Regardless of any attempt by the Soviet Government to stifle their creativity, the legacy of each of these great musicians lives on. As Rostropovich said, 'One must know that when one commissions a piece, it may not immediately be an opus of genius. You can suffer while playing new pieces. But after seeing how you have suffered so much, they must grant you a composer of genius.'<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>114</sup> Marie-Aude Roux. 'I Could Not Exist Without Shostakovich.' Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich. March 16, 2006 <http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostrofrench/rostrofrench.htm>. Accessed 29/07/2014

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Bloom, Cecil. *Dmitri Shostakovich and the Jews*. [www.thefreelibrary.com](http://www.thefreelibrary.com)
- Braun, Joachim. *The Double Meaning of Jewish Elements in Dimitri Shostakovich's Music*. From 'The Music Quarterly', Vol. 71, No. 1, 1985.
- Brown, Malcolm Hamrick. *A Shostakovich Casebook*. Indiana University Press, 1st Edition, 2004.
- Dahan, Eric. 'One has not thrown out Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa." Why would one discard Beethoven's 9th Symphony?' Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich, Saturday, November 19, 2005.
- Dermoncourt, Bertrand. 'Mstislav Rostropovich: A Soldier of Music'. Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich. September 21, 2006.  
<http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostrofrench/rostrofrench.htm>
- Eichler, Jeremy. 'Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Britten and Me.' The New York Times, April 16, 2006.
- Ericson, Edward E. Jr.; Klimoff, Alexis. *The Soul and Barbed Wire: An Introduction to Solzhenitsyn*. ISI, 2008.
- Erlanger, Steven. 'Isolated Foes of Yeltsin Are Sad but Still Defiant', New York Times. September 27, 1993.
- Ezrahi, Christina. *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*. Pittsburgh, 2012.
- Fanning, David. *Mieczyslaw Weinberg, In Search of Freedom*. Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, Germany, 2010.
- Fanning, David (editor). *Shostakovich Studies. 'Shostakovich and Schnittke: the erosion of symphonic syntax'*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Fay, Laurel E. *Shostakovich: A Life*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Finkel'shteyn, Emil'. 'O mastere v licjnm tone' (On a master in personal tones), Muzikal'naya akademiya, 1997.
- For One Night Only – The Prom of Peace.' BBC Radio 4. September 1, 2007
- Glikman, Isaak. *Story of a Friendship, The Letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman, 1941–1975*. Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Heikinheimo, Seppo. 'Kymmenen vuotta aitouskiistaa' (A Decade of Struggle about Authenticity'), Dmitri Sostakovitsin muistelmät, 2nd edition, Otava, Helsinki, 1989.
- Ho, Allan B, Feofanov, Dmitry. *The Shostakovich Wars*. Ho and Feofanov. August 31, 2011.
- Jaffé, Daniel. *Sergey Prokofiev*. London, 2008.

- Janof, Tim. *Conversation with Mstislav Rostropovich*. 4/5/06.  
<http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostopovich/rostopovich.htm>
- Kilner, James. *Frail cellist Rostropovich feted by Putin*, Reuters. Moscow, Tues Mar 27, 2007 4:13pm EDT. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/03/27/music-rostopovich-illness-dc-idUSL2740145120070327>
- King, Terry. *Gregor Piatigorsky: The Life and Career of the Virtuoso Cellist*. McFarland, 2010.
- Kuhn, Judith. *Shostakovich in Dialogue: Form, Imagery and Ideas in Quartets 1-7*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2010.
- McBurney, Gerard. Repertoire Note for Boosey and Hawkes.  
<http://www.boosey.com/cr/music/Dmitri-Shostakovich-The-Song-of-the-Forests/4269>
- Milstein, Nathan, and Volkov, Solomon. *From Russia to the West: The Musical Memoirs and Reminiscences of Nathan Milstein*. Henry Holt and Company, Inc, New York. 1990.
- Millon, Yannick. Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich. Winter 2006.  
<http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostrofrench/rostrofrench.htm>
- Morrison, Simon Alexander. *Lina and Serge: The Love and wars of Lina Prokofiev* Harvill Secker, 2013.
- Morrison, Simon. *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years*. Oxford, 2009.
- Nabokov, Nicolas. *Old Friends and New Music*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951.
- Nestyev, Israel V. *Prokofiev*. Translated by Florence Jonas. Stanford University Press, 1960.
- Nice, David. *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West, 1891–1935*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Nikitina, Lyudmila. 'Pochti lyuboy mig zhizni – rabota' (Almost every moment of my life is work). *Muzikal'naya akademiya*, 1994/5.
- Oleg, Kalugin. *The First Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West*. St Martin's Press, 1994.
- O'Mahony, John. 'An icon for our times', The Guardian. Saturday March 2, 2002.
- Piatigorsky, Gregor. *Cellist*. Doubleday & Company, Inc., New York, 1965.
- Pravda. January 28, 1936. English Translation by Arnold Schalks.  
<http://www.arnoldschalks.nl/tl1e1sub1.html>
- Press, Stephen D. *Prokofiev's Ballets for Diaghilev*. Ashgate Publishings Limited, 2006.

- Prokofiev, Sergei. Anthony Phillips (translator), ed. *Diaries 1915–1923: Behind the Mask*. London / Ithaca: Faber and Faber/Cornell University Press, 2008.
- Prokofiev, Sergei. *Soviet Diary 1927 And Other Writings*. Northeastern University Press, 1992.
- Prokof'yev, Sergey. *Dnevnik*, 2 volumes. Translated by Simon Morrison. Serge Prokofiev Estate, Paris, 2002.
- Roberts, W. Mark. *DSCH Journal Review*.  
[http://dschjournal.com/reviews/cd\\_reviews/rvs30sansopk.html](http://dschjournal.com/reviews/cd_reviews/rvs30sansopk.html)
- Rostropovich-Vishnevskaya Foundation – About Us; Our Founders.  
<http://rostopovich.org/about-us/our-founders/>
- Roux, Marie-Aude. 'I Could Not Exist Without Shostakovich.' Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich. March 16, 2006  
<http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/rostrofrench/rostrofrench.htm>
- Schwarz, Steve. Review of 'The Golden Key', Classical Net Review, 2004.  
<http://www.classical.net/music/recs/reviews/o/oly00473a.php>
- Tempo (New Series). / Volume 197 / Issue 197 / July 1996, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Tomoff, Kiril. *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953*. Ithaca, 2006.
- UNESCO Celebrity Advocates – Mstislav Rostropovich.  
[http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=8327&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=8327&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- Vaynberg, M. 'Pervaya vstrecha s muzikoy Dmitriya Shostakovicha' (My first encounter with the music of Dmitri Shostakovich), in Givi Ordzhonikidze (ed.), *Dmitriy Shostakovich*, Moscow, Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1967.
- Vaynberg, M. 'Tsveti Pol'shi' (*Flowers of Poland*), *Sovetskaya kul'tura*. Cited in Nikitina, Simfonii M Vaynberga. March 13, 1965.
- Volkov, Solomon. *Testimony*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.
- Volkov, Solomon. *Testimony*. Limelight Editions; Anniversary edition. July 1, 2004.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend*. London: Faber, 2007.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Yakubov, Manashir. 'Mechislav Vaynberg: "Vsyu zhizn' ya zhadno sochinyal muziko" (Mieczyslaw Weinberg: "I have composed music all my life, greedily")', *Russkoye utro* 67/7. February 16-22, 1995.