

“LET THEM ACCUSE ME...”: THEMES OF OPPRESSION IN DMITRI
SHOSTAKOVICH’S VIOLIN CONCERTO NO. 1

by
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ABSTRACT

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Title: “‘Let Them Accuse Me...’: Themes of Oppression in Dmitri Shostakovich’s Violin Concerto No. 1”

While solid evidence of a political narrative is rarely found in Shostakovich’s music, performers and listeners continue to experience many of his works in this way. In this paper, I propose a political interpretation of Shostakovich’s Violin Concerto No. 1, informed by a historical and theoretical analysis of the work and centered around government oppression. Through referential analysis, I identify potential moments of intertextuality and pose possible meanings based on historical events, the composer’s words, and the recollections of Shostakovich’s friends. In the proposed narrative, the first movement foreshadows the Soviet regime’s second accusation of formalism against Shostakovich through a possible reference to his Symphony No. 5. In the second movement, Shostakovich could be mocking Stalin’s oppressive regime through a parody of Boris Godunov, statements involving Jewish folk elements, and the composer’s DSCH motif. In the third movement, Shostakovich could be portraying the violence of the NKVD and predicting his own murder through the theme of violence, taken from his opera, *Lady Macbeth*. In the fourth movement, Shostakovich evokes the “joy of a man who has just been released from a concentration camp” in a hopak that can be seen as overtaking the theme of violence. My analysis of this concerto is intended to inspire and provide musical ideas to performers in their study of this work.

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I. Introduction

Since Dmitri Shostakovich's death in 1975, the late composer's music has enjoyed significant popularity in the world of Western art music. However, between the backdrop of the Cold War and Shostakovich's tenuous but extensive relationship with the Soviet regime, Shostakovich's music and biography are often experienced in a heavily-politicized context. Considering Shostakovich's own reluctance to speak about the meaning behind his compositions, the terror enforced by the Soviet regime against any perceived dissidence, and the questionable veracity of some of the statements attributed to Shostakovich, it is often difficult to definitively evidence a political message in his works. While some of Shostakovich's works, like his First Symphony, contain no hint of a political message, or do carry evidence of a political message, like his Fifth Symphony and Eighth String Quartet, a significant portion of the composer's works occupy a grey area in which a political interpretation can be made, but not definitively so.

In this paper, I offer such a political interpretation of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto centered around oppression. First, I examine Shostakovich's own experiences with government oppression, mainly through the Soviet regime's two anti-formalist campaigns that targeted the composer, as well as more specific musicological aspects, including Shostakovich's own statements about the violin concerto. Next, I briefly explain the controversy surrounding Volkov's *Testimony* and my limited use of this source. Afterwards, I launch into a theoretical analysis of the music by identifying possible references to specific compositions and genres and explaining how they could be interpreted as commentary on oppression. In the first movement, I discuss how Shostakovich could be evoking Stalin's first anti-formalist campaign before possibly mocking the dictator through satire in the second. In the third movement, Shostakovich might have anticipated his execution in music before composing a victorious-sounding finale depicting,

according to Shostakovich, the “joy of a man who has just been released from a concentration camp.”¹ When analyzing Shostakovich’s First Violin Concerto from both a musicological and theoretical lens, the piece can be interpreted as a reflection on the oppression the composer experienced under the Soviet regime. While no interpretation of this work can be definitively proven, I have analyzed this concerto with the intent of providing performers with inspiration when building their own musical ideas.

II. Historical Background

In order to understand how any of Shostakovich’s musical works can be viewed as responses to oppression, one must first examine his own documented experiences with the Soviet government. Much of the animosity directed towards Shostakovich from the state was reportedly due to the composer’s “formalist” tendencies and failure to adhere to the Communist party’s endorsed style of Socialist Realism. While both of these terms lacked clear definitions, Socialist Realism, according to musicologist Laurel Fay, is marked by “accessibility, tunefulness, stylistic traditionalism, and folk-inspired qualities,” as well as being “optimistic” and “aspiring to heroic exhilaration.”² Musicologist Marina Frolova-Walker further defines Socialist Realism in music as shunning individual style in favor of a homogenous collective sound and equates Socialist Realist works to religious music written in support of the regime’s new or upcoming endeavors.³ Officially, formalist works were defined as those that were too abstract or not easily

¹ Michael Mishra, “DSCH,” in *A Shostakovich Companion*, ed. Michael Mishra (Praeger Publishers, 2008), 178.

² Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 88-89.

³ Marina Frolova-Walker, “Stalin and the Art of Boredom,” *Twentieth Century Music* 1, no. 1 (2004): 104, 110, 113.

comprehended by the average listener,⁴ though the Communist party tended to simply apply this label to any music they perceived as threatening their power.

Though Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto was written during the second of the two anti-formalist campaigns directed against him, the events that transpired during the first set a precedent for the second, and are possibly referenced in the First Violin Concerto through quotations of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. In 1930, Shostakovich started composing a passion project: an opera that became *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.⁵ Before finishing the opera shortly before the end of 1932, Shostakovich presented snippets of the work to private and public audiences to considerable success. Premiered in Leningrad on January 22, 1934 and Moscow on the 24th, *Lady Macbeth* was received by enthusiastic audiences and high praise from critics. At the time, opposition remained fairly limited, in the form of more conservative members of the Union of Composers, who reportedly took issue with the allegedly exaggerated worship from critics. With the success of *Lady Macbeth*, Shostakovich was propelled to the status of a celebrity composer. However, the composer's fortunes would soon change.

At a performance of *Lady Macbeth* in Moscow on January 26, 1936, Joseph Stalin, accompanied by some of his subordinates, attended but left during the show. Two days later, an unsigned article, titled "Muddle Instead of Music," was published in *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Soviet Union, which accused Shostakovich of formalism and threatened, "This is a game...that may end very badly". Another unsigned *Pravda* article attacking Shostakovich followed several days later, this time for his lack of folk elements in his most recent ballet, *The Limpid Stream*. Despite the initial enormous success of *Lady Macbeth* and limited success (with

⁴ John Riley, "Screen dramas: Shostakovich's cinema career," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich*, ed. Pauline Fairclough and David Fanning, (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 218.

⁵ The following pages in this section reference Laurel Fay's Biography, *Shostakovich: A Life* from pp. 67-168 unless otherwise specified.

audiences, rather than critics) of *The Limpid Stream*, Shostakovich now found himself caught in the midst of the Communist party's new campaign against formalism in the arts.

Though Shostakovich had previously weathered accusations of formalism, none were as severe or far-reaching as these, given that *Pravda's* threatening criticisms began extending not only to music critics, but also other artistic fields as well. In fact, sympathetic critics, like Shostakovich's friend, Ivan Sollertinsky, ended up receiving more of the blame for supporting formalism than Shostakovich himself. Shortly after the publishing of "Muddle Instead of Music," Shostakovich conveyed his willingness to adhere to the party's standards to the head of the newly-formed All-Union Committee for Artistic Affairs, which would later become the USSR Ministry of Culture. In doing so, Shostakovich agreed to steer away from formalism and the advice of formalist critics and to send the committee proposals for ballets and operas for their prior approval. Though Shostakovich attempted to speak personally with Stalin multiple times, likely to smooth over matters, the composer's efforts were unfruitful. Maxim Gorky, considered the founder of Socialist Realism, penned an article addressed to Stalin in support of Shostakovich, which fell on deaf ears.

A few of Shostakovich's friends spoke out on his behalf, including the theater director Vysevolod Meyerhold, who received thunderous applause when defending the composer in the face of *Pravda's* attacks at a crowded lecture in Leningrad a month after the incident. Having also been targeted in "Muddle Instead of Music," Meyerhold nobly provided his steadfast support for Shostakovich despite the danger. Similarly, Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky helped raise Shostakovich's spirits in these troubled times and, like Gorky, attempted to dissuade Stalin from campaigning against the composer, but to no avail. Privately, Shostakovich expressed his resistant sentiment to his friends, revealing to fellow composer, Andrey Balanchivadze, that he

did not agree with the Communist Party's condemnation of *Lady Macbeth* and famously telling Isaak Glikman, "Even if they cut off both my hands and I have to hold the pen in my teeth, I shall still go on writing music."⁶

Despite Shostakovich's signature sense of humor shining through even now, with the composer filling a seventy-eight page scrapbook with articles echoing "Muddle's" sentiments and joking about naming his daughter after the *Pravda* articles, Stalin's campaign resulted in the composer experiencing significant financial and emotional hardship. With his mother, wife, and daughter to support and a housekeeper and nanny to pay, the decrease in Dmitri's income from 10,000-12,000 rubles to 2,000-3,000 forced the composer to live in debt. To take his mind off matters, Shostakovich worked on the final two movements of his Fourth Symphony, finishing it before the end of April. However, Shostakovich chose to cancel the premiere, further cutting into his income, justifiably concerned that its performance would only add fuel to the anti-formalist campaign against him. Shostakovich's financial situation only began to improve in 1937, when he began teaching at the Leningrad Conservatory.

With the advent of the Second Moscow Trial at the start of 1937, Shostakovich, along with many other Soviet citizens, had friends and family who fell victim to Stalin's paranoid wrath. Dmitri's sister, Mariya, was sent to exile in Central Asia; his brother-in-law, Vsevolod Frederiks, was arrested and later died in prison;⁷ and his mother-in-law, Sofya Varzar was sent to a Gulag. Two of Shostakovich's friends, Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, who had advocated for and supported the composer during Stalin's anti-formalist campaign, and Vyacheslav Dombrovsky, an NKVD officer, were killed the same year. According to the composer, the

⁶ Isaak Glikman, *Story of a Friendship: The Letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman* (Cornell University Press, 2001), xix.

⁷ V. G. Chigrinov and V. V. Belyaev, "The Life and Times of Vsevolod Konstantinovich Frederiks: 1885–1944," *Liquid Crystals Today* 6, no. 4 (2006): 11-12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583149608047654>.

NKVD had demanded he appear in Moscow for interrogation, due to his friendship with Tukhachevsky, but narrowly avoided this deadly fate when the interrogator himself was arrested.

Prompted by a meeting of the Union of Soviet Composers in April 1937 to produce a concert piece for the first time in two years, Shostakovich started composing his Fifth Symphony a week later, finishing the work in three months, with the third movement only requiring three days. The composer, his colleagues, and audience members knew the stakes of presenting such a high-profile work in the wake of “Muddle”. Fortunately, the symphony, premiered in Leningrad on November 21, 1937, was received with thunderous applause and a lengthy standing ovation so enthusiastic that members of the Committee for Artistic Affairs were sent to determine if it had been organized. Though these investigators insisted the ovation had been orchestrated, fellow composer Alexander Gauk, among others, worked to prevent these false accusations from manifesting into a dangerous party crackdown. Though some critics detected insincerity in the jubilation of the finale, Shostakovich began to slowly win over the Communist party, and by extension the general Soviet realm of music, over the following months.

Considering the perilous circumstances surrounding the creation and premiere of his Fifth Symphony, it’s unsurprising that Shostakovich exhibited a newfound avoidance in discussing his music with any depth – a pattern which would generally remain throughout the rest of his life. Only in a private conversation with Flora Litvinova years later did Shostakovich reveal that his Fifth, along with his Seventh, Symphony were “not only about fascism but about our system, in general about any totalitarianism.” Additionally, Shostakovich would never again compose for ballet or, at least to completion, opera, revealing how much this first denunciation scarred him. While Shostakovich had managed to escape Stalin’s ongoing purges, Meyerhold, who had defended his friend alongside Tukhachevsky, was arrested in 1939 and executed the following

year. Shostakovich attempted to help save Meyerhold by signing a letter meant to persuade the NKVD to release him, but the plea was ignored.

Though Shostakovich carved for himself a relatively stable standing with the Communist party which lasted through the Second World War and a short time thereafter, this came to an end at the beginning of 1948, eventually leading to the second campaign against formalism.

Pressured by the ideological front of the fledgling Cold War, Stalin renewed his campaign of aligning the Soviet art world more closely with his regime through his underling, Andrey Zhdanov. What began in August 1946 as an attack on the literary world, in which one of the main targets was another of Shostakovich's friends, Mikhail Zoshchenko, would quickly transfer to the Soviet realm of music a month later. In the beginning, with the assistance of fellow composers, like Aram Khachaturian, Shostakovich was able to evade continued criticism for a perceived lack of seriousness in his Ninth Symphony, premiered a year earlier following the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany. In fact, Shostakovich managed to retain his high standing with the Communist party despite the opening wave of cultural purges, receiving the Order of Lenin for his teaching and being awarded multiple esteemed bureaucratic positions. During this time, Shostakovich managed to start the first movement of his First Violin Concerto, finishing the sketch in late July.

However, cracks in the composer's image began to appear upon the premiere of his cantata, *Poem for the Motherland*, written for the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution but judged as lacking in substantiveness across the following months. As tensions arose amidst his deteriorating status as a celebrated composer,⁸ Shostakovich finished the first movement of his in-progress Violin Concerto on November 12 and the second movement later, in the first week of

⁸ Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, 61.

December. The timing of his cantata's failure could not have been worse, as the Agitprop Department would alert Zhdanov in the middle of December of a need to bring the Soviet music realm back into line. Similar to *Lady Macbeth*, Stalin and his underlings attended a dress rehearsal of Vano Muradeli's opera, *The Great Friendship*, on January 5, 1948 and left, angered by its narrative content. The Central Committee of the Communist Party ordered a conference the following day, involving the questioning of those who contributed to the opera and, using Muradeli's attempt to deflect responsibility towards the Soviet musical community, enabled Zhdanov to begin his own campaign against formalism.

Shostakovich, having been summoned to a conference at the Kremlin for January 10, along with over seventy other leading figures in Soviet music, likely already knew of Muradeli's failings with the party and anticipated a repeat of the attacks that followed "Muddle," which is essentially what unfolded. Shostakovich was once again accused of formalism, this time for his Eighth and Ninth symphonies, and, on January 13, again reassured that he would steer towards a more accessible style of composition. The same day, another of Shostakovich's friends, Solomon Mikhoels, passed away, supposedly in a car accident; though the circumstances were unclear, murder by the NKVD was suspected and, in 1963, was revealed to be true.⁹

Shostakovich himself understandably seemed to be having difficulty dealing emotionally with his second denunciation. When speaking with Mikhoels' daughter after his death, Shostakovich admitted, "I envy him," and relayed to his friend, Glikman, that being targeted a second time at an older age was considerably harder, stating, "Twelve years ago [at the time of the *Pravda* 'Muddle Instead of Music' article] I was younger and more equipped to withstand

⁹ "Moscow Confirms Police Killed Mikhoels, Yiddish Actor, in '48," *New York Times*, January 17, 1963, <https://www.nytimes.com/1963/01/17/archives/moscow-confirms-police-killed-mikhoels-yiddish-actor-in-48.html>.

body blows like that. Now I am getting old, and I can't take it..."¹⁰ During this time, Fay notes that there were "indications" that Shostakovich thought of committing suicide. While weathering Zhdanov's attacks, Shostakovich composed the third movement of his First Violin Concerto, finishing the Passacaglia on January 19. According to Glikman, Shostakovich described his work as follows: "In the evenings, when those disgusting, shameful debates [at the sessions] were over for the day, I would come home and work on the third movement of the violin concerto. I finished it and I think it turned out well."¹¹

Following the conference, the Central Committee published a sweeping statement on February 10, once again accusing Shostakovich of formalism, alongside many others, like Sergei Prokofiev, Aram Khachaturian, and Nikolai Myaskovsky, and, according to Fay, "commanding the appropriate Party and government organs take all necessary measures to liquidate the defects." Prior to this, Shostakovich had begun work on the fourth movement of his First Violin Concerto. According to Fay, Shostakovich could recall the exact spot he was working on when the Central Committee published their second accusation.

On February 14, the Soviet censorship board published a list of banned formalist works, including those by Shostakovich, such as his Sixth, Eighth, and Ninth Symphonies, First Piano Concerto, Two Pieces for String Octet, Second Piano Sonata, and Six Romances on Texts by W. Raleigh, R. Burns, and W. Shakespeare, and Aphorisms. While a few of his more popular works, like his Fifth and Seventh Symphonies, escaped censorship, it was more common to avoid programming any works by the accused composers. As further punishment, Shostakovich, along with other fellow "formalists," lost their influence within the Composers' Union, which was now

¹⁰ Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, 245.

¹¹ Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, 245.

being led by Tikhon Khrennikov. A second conference was held between February 17-26, during which Shostakovich was made to supplicate himself again beneath Stalin's boot, thanking the party for their timely intervention and wise insight and vowing to follow their guidelines. Furthermore, unlike in 1936, there seemed to be no unspoken undercurrent of public support, with Shostakovich later recalling, "When they criticized me for formalism, you won't believe how many poison-pen letters I received from absolute strangers, scarcely literate in music. These were the kind of expressions to be found in them: 'You ought to be executed, killed, exterminated, you scoundrel; and so on.'" Shostakovich's thoughts about these conferences are expressed via parody in a satirical work published posthumously, called *Anti-Formalist Rayok*. Though the date of composition is still contested, with witnesses reporting the starting year as 1948 or 1957, Fay argues that, either way, this work shows Shostakovich's use of his signature wit in helping himself deal with his 1948 denunciation.

Shostakovich dated the completion of his First Violin Concerto as March 24, 1948, though he did manage to play the work for his students slightly earlier, in the middle of the month. Shostakovich showcased his concerto privately to his students, fellow composer and accused formalist, Gavriil Popov, and violinist, David Oistrakh, who all thought very highly of the work. Additionally, Shostakovich asked Oistrakh, as well as another violinist, Veniamin Basner, for their opinions on its playability, to which neither voiced any issues, at least initially. Later, Oistrakh would request the transferral of the primary theme at the opening bars of the fourth movement to the rest of the orchestra in order to secure a brief break between the third and fourth movements. Oistrakh also noted that, when introducing the concerto to him, Shostakovich "managed to play the whole texture of the scherzo on the piano without missing a single note...",

possibly indicating that the composer practiced it a fair amount, considering the sheer difficulty of the part.

However, despite Oistrakh's enthusiasm, with the violinist even reporting years later that convincing the composer of a timely premiere was possible, the pair would have to wait several years before doing so. Despite Shostakovich's initial optimism, considering he notified the Composer's union in April of the completion and planned submission of the work for peer review, he likely feared that its premiere would only worsen the accusations of formalism against him and withheld premiering the work, just as he did with his Fourth Symphony so many years earlier. Furthermore, Glikman reports that the performance of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto was banned anyway due to its perceived formalism.¹²

When Dmitri Shepilov, the deputy head of the Agitprop, asked about the concerto's subject, Shostakovich's official answer was "the preparation for the spring sowing campaign."¹³ However, when discussing the work with Viktor Liberman, the conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonic, Shostakovich explained that the fourth movement was about the "joy of a man who has just been released from a concentration camp."¹⁴ Thinking back to famous works like his Fifth Symphony, this was not the first time Shostakovich gave conflicting answers for compositional intent, with an innocuous one for the Party and a riskier one for friends. Given that Shostakovich would gain nothing by inventing an explanation that, if heard by the regime, would place his life in jeopardy, Shostakovich's private answer is more likely to be the correct one.

Shortly after, Shostakovich began work on a song cycle, which became *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. As I will discuss later in this paper, the song cycle and First Violin Concerto seem to be

¹² Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, 61, 255.

¹³ Mishra, "DSCH," 178.

¹⁴ Mishra, "DSCH," 181.

compositionally related, which is possibly reinforced by the fact Shostakovich introduced both works together when visiting his friend, Myaskovsky, at the end of November in 1948. The earliest indication of this work dates back to May 1948, when the composer sought help with the Yiddish lyrics from a Jewish friend. Shostakovich completed eight of the eleven songs in August and finished the work in October. Much like his First Violin Concerto, Shostakovich arranged private performances of his new song cycle, and only publicly premiered the work later in 1955. Similarly, though Shostakovich planned to submit the song cycle to the Composers' Union for peer review, he expressed anxiety about doing so, though it is still unknown if he followed through.

In the interim, it appears the violin concerto did not entirely escape Shostakovich's or Oistrakh's minds. Since his introduction to the concerto, Oistrakh had been covertly practicing the work, according to Glikman.¹⁵ In 1952, Shostakovich, immediately upon receiving his first tape recorder, wrote out an alternate arrangement of the orchestral accompaniment for two pianos and eight hands, before convincing Oistrakh to record the solo violin part to this accompaniment. Eventually, David Oistrakh premiered Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto in Leningrad on October 29, 1955, well after Stalin's death. According to Glikman, Shostakovich had originally planned for the premiere to occur in the winter of 1953, though this apparently never materialized.¹⁶ Shostakovich tried and failed again to premiere his concerto in the concert season of 1954-1955, though Fay notes that this may have been postponed due to Oistrakh requiring more time to attain technical mastery of the work. Upon its eventual premiere, both critics and the concert-going public received the concerto with great enthusiasm – only Soviet musicologists

¹⁵ Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, 61.

¹⁶ Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, 255.

remained silent on the piece, which Oistrakh took issue with and sought to rectify by publishing his own analysis of the concerto.

III. Testimony

Testimony, as the author, Solomon Volkov claims, is supposedly a written account of interviews with Dmitri Shostakovich. Upon publishing *Testimony*, Volkov shook the world of Western art music by explicitly showing the dissidence many listeners thought they heard in Shostakovich's music. Continuing to this day, *Testimony* is often cited in program notes, lecture documents, published articles, and books. In my paper, I avoid using passages from *Testimony* as supporting evidence and instead mention a couple that I find related to my arguments surrounding the First Violin Concerto. In this section, I explain my limited use of this text, as well as the current opinions about its veracity.

According to Solomon Volkov, the author of *Testimony*, at the beginning of the 1970s, an ailing Dmitri Shostakovich, sensing his impending demise, approached the young music journalist, seeking his assistance in writing his memoirs.¹⁷ Over several long, grueling sessions, Shostakovich recounted the tragic events of his life and laid bare the inner machinations of his brilliant but tortured mind. Eventually, Volkov organized Shostakovich's ramblings into a coherent text, which the composer read and approved.¹⁸ Raw, unfiltered, and filled with scathing remarks against the Soviet regime, the two agreed to have the memoirs published outside of the Soviet Union and after Shostakovich's death. Having already sent the manuscript in secret to the West, Volkov emigrated to New York a year after Shostakovich's passing, seeking to fulfill his promise to the late Shostakovich by publishing his friend's memoirs.¹⁹

Soon after being published, however, the authenticity of the book, and more specifically, Volkov's integrity, was called into question. The debate continues to this day, for which there are

¹⁷ Solomon Volkov, *Testimony* (Limelight Editions, 1984), xv.

¹⁸ Volkov, *Testimony*, xvi-xvii.

¹⁹ Volkov, *Testimony*, xvii-xviii.

two main warring ideas. Revisionists believe that *Testimony* is a memoir from Shostakovich that has been accurately and faithfully transcribed by Solomon Volkov. Due to the strong anti-Soviet sentiment in the book, revisionism necessitates the belief that Shostakovich held dissident views against the Soviet regime. Anti-revisionists, however, consider *Testimony* to be a collection of memoirs written by Volkov and falsely presented as Shostakovich's own views and memories. Within this faction, there is a notable difference of opinion when it comes to making inferences about Shostakovich's political views. For example, some argue for or against his support of the Communist Party, and others choose to avoid the topic altogether.

Just a year after the public release of *Testimony*, musicologist Laurel Fay published an article showing that seven multi-page passages in *Testimony* are copies of preexisting memoirs from the composer, bearing the necessary temporal modifications to accommodate the later date of publication, such as removing an acknowledgement of an anniversary or switching from present to past-tense.²⁰ In a later article, Fay noted that, while Volkov continues to deny that he used any preexisting material or that he was aware of these copied sources at all, a signature of S. Volkov appears at an introduction of one of these sources from *Sovetskaya muzyka*.²¹

Furthermore, though Fay had originally compared the English translations of the source material and *Testimony* to each other, she managed to compare the Russian typescript of *Testimony* to the Russian articles. In addition to finding an eighth appearance of copied material, Fay found that seven were, in fact, verbatim, down to punctuation and layout, except for the sentences that would reveal the original date of the article, which had been removed with correction tape, or extra sentences written in by hand outside of the margins or typed over

²⁰ Laurel Fay, "Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?", in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Indiana University Press, 2004), 14.

²¹ Laurel Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Indiana University Press, 2004), 22-23.

correction tape.²² Seeing as the original sources were already published in the Soviet Union, it comes as no surprise that the derived material lacks the inflammatory statements present in the rest of the book. Significantly, Shostakovich's signature, which revisionists insist proves the authenticity of the text, only appears on the pages bearing copied material, which would have made up the opening pages of each chapter in the text presented to Shostakovich for his review and signature.²³ Essentially, Shostakovich's signatures only confirm the accuracy of safe, preexisting material. The revisionist rebuttal to this evidence is that Shostakovich's ability to memorize lengthy passages of his favorite literature means he could have also memorized these passages verbatim and reproduced them in his interviews with Volkov; however, Fay notes the absence of any example of Shostakovich doing so, with the composer having told stories or informed friends of events with notable differences in content and phrasing.²⁴

The only substantial evidence in support of revisionism consists of the testimony of Shostakovich's friends and family in judging the accuracy of the book, though there are a variety of opinions in circulation.

Irina Shostakovich, Dmitry's third wife, provides a key piece of evidence for the anti-revisionist argument. In the 70s, Irina served as Dmitry's primary caregiver, as her ailing husband could not even dress himself without her assistance. Thus, given that Volkov met with Shostakovich during this period of time, from 1971-1974, Irina would likely have been privy to all of their meetings. Of these meetings, Irina only recalls 3-4,²⁵ while Dmitry's son, Maxim

²² Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," 23-40.

²³ Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," 34-40.

²⁴ Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," 41-42.

²⁵ Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," 52.

gives a slightly higher range of 4-6,²⁶ though of the two, Irina had a much more comprehensive window into her husband's daily life. Either way, these ranges are nowhere close to the "dozens" of meetings that Volkov claims to have had with Dmitry,²⁷ and, as echoed by Irina and one of Shostakovich's students, Boris Tishchenko, one cannot reasonably expect over four hundred pages of memoirs to be faithfully and truthfully gleaned from a few interviews.²⁸ Furthermore, Irina and Tishchenko are arguably the most ardent anti-revisionists who knew the composer personally and, more importantly, the only ones other than Volkov and Shostakovich, to have been present at their meetings (Tishchenko was present at their first meeting).²⁹

Maxim Shostakovich expresses a more mixed view. For example, Maxim views the political opinions ascribed to his father as accurate, along with the statements about Meyerhold, Glazunov, and Zoshchenko.³⁰ The latter is corroborated by the photocopied photograph presented at the beginning of Volkov's book bearing a note written by Dmitri Shostakovich and addressed to Volkov, reading, "A reminder of our conversations about Glazunov, Zoshchenko, and Meyerhold. D.S."³¹ Given that both Maxim and Irina Shostakovich have confirmed that Volkov did indeed speak with Shostakovich, albeit in a limited capacity, and Irina confirmed that these three people were discussed in their interviews,³² the specific references to these names further

²⁶ Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," 47.

²⁷ Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," 52.

²⁸ Fay, "Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?", 17; Boris Tishchenko, "On Solomon Volkov and Testimony," in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Indiana University Press, 2004), 134.

²⁹ Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," 51.

³⁰ Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," 47-48.

³¹ Volkov, *Testimony*, iii.

³² Irina Shostakovich, "An Answer to-Those Who Still Abuse Shostakovich," in *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Indiana University Press, 2004), 130.

support the idea that these areas of Volkov's book might faithfully represent Shostakovich's actual thoughts surrounding these figures. However, it's important to note that, when listing examples of supposedly falsified content within *Testimony*, Tishchenko lists "monstrous pronouncements about Meyerhold's family," though this comment seems more directed towards content featuring the surrounding family as opposed to Vysevolod Meyerhold himself.³³

Finally, there are those, like Kirill Kondrashin, who accept *Testimony* as factual, with the conductor reporting, "Much of what comes as a surprise to the Western reader was not a surprise for me. I knew many things and guessed many others; but there were new things in it even for me, things that made me look at some of his works differently."³⁴

Therefore, as Fay, Irina, and Tishchenko have shown, Volkov likely committed some type of significant fraud during the creation of *Testimony*. While completely ignoring Volkov's book in Shostakovich scholarship is certainly understandable, given its status as a "poisonous tree," those who believe Maxim Shostakovich's assessment of its material might find in it a limited use. For example, Maxim states that his father's political views are represented correctly and that the content surrounding Glazunov, Zoshchenko, and Meyerhold is accurate. Furthermore, the conversations concerning the latter three figures have been confirmed via Dmitri's photo and Irina's testimony. In this paper, I will refrain from using *Testimony* as a piece of supporting evidence. However, I will include corroborating passages from *Testimony* when it applies in case the reader is inclined to believe Maxim, or new evidence supporting the accuracy of these passages appears after the writing of this paper.

³³ Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," 50.

³⁴ Fay, "Volkov's Testimony Reconsidered," 44.

IV. Musical References in the Nocturne

In the following four sections, I provide an analysis of the possible musical references in each of the four movements and identify how each could support the interpretation of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto as a reflection on the oppression he suffered from the Soviet regime.

One of the most prominent characteristics of Shostakovich's compositional style is his use of musical references, also known as intertextuality. The most well-known example in Shostakovich's oeuvre is likely the inclusion of the theme from the fourth movement of his Piano Trio No. 2 in the second movement of his String Quartet No. 8. Intentional, meaningful relationships between compositions are difficult to prove definitively without explicit affirmation from the composer, which Shostakovich avoided giving. In these cases, the veracity of these relationships is primarily judged by how closely the compositions resemble each other and the likelihood the composer was exposed to these other works.

Symphony No. 5

According to Michael Mishra, the concerto opens with a possible reference to Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5, since both begin with the same motif in the low strings, which is comprised of scale degrees 1- $\flat$ 6-5 and not uncommon in Shostakovich's works.³⁵ These pitches are D-B $\flat$ -A in the symphony and A-F-E in the violin concerto, since these works are in the keys of D minor and A minor, respectively, as depicted in Fig. 1. These excerpts also bear rhythmic and tempo similarities, since both involve dotted rhythms and use the same "Moderato" marking at 76bpm.

³⁵ Mishra, "DSCH," 179.

Additionally, according to Mishra, the structural role of the opening motif is the same in both works, being that of a ritornello, further supporting the idea that this reference was intentional.³⁶ Though the primary theme of each of these first movements appears in contrasting sections, I have identified two other ritornello sections in each piece (found in Fig. 2-4) in which the returning theme plays a significant role.



Fig. 1: Side-by-side comparison of the openings of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 (left) and his Violin Concerto No. 1 (right)



Fig. 2: Ritornello sections in the first movement of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 (incipits from rehearsals 32-36 and 44-47, respectively)

³⁶ Mishra, "DSCH," 180.

Multiple similarities between these ritornellos arise when examining them. For example, each one opens with a stringed instrument, with the original opening statements beginning in the low strings. Additionally, both final iterations of the opening motif show marked departures from their original forms. In the symphony, the rhythm remains the same while the pitch collection is different; in the concerto, however, the rhythm remains mostly unchanged while only the starting first scale degree is omitted from the motif. According to Mishra, the development of the motif in its final interactions in both pieces serves to help transition to the second movements.³⁷

Fig. 3: First ritornello section in the first movement of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1 (incipit from rehearsals 5-6)

Fig. 4: Second ritornello section in the first movement of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1 (incipit from 4 measures after rehearsal 17 to rehearsal 18)

³⁷ Mishra, "DSCH," 180.

Though not immediately apparent in the violin concerto, each section featuring 1- $\flat$ 6-5 also utilizes staggered entrances. As seen in Fig. 5, the solo violin plays a modified version of the 1- $\flat$ 6-5 motif four bars after the opening theme shown in Fig. 1; here, the supertonic separates the tonic and submediant, and the rhythm consists of quarter notes, as opposed to the dotted rhythm. In the final ritornello of the violin concerto, the staggered entrance is assigned to the double basses. Despite the development undergone by the returning opening motif in this final statement, the staggered motif in the double basses has essentially been copied from the opening of the movement.

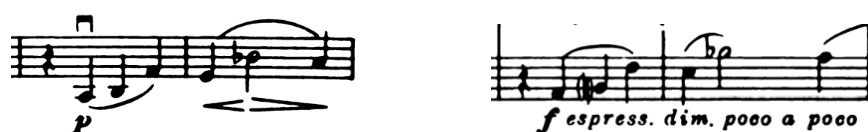


Fig. 5: Staggered entrances of the opening motif at the first and third ritornellos of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1 (incipits from the solo violin at rehearsal 1 and the double basses at rehearsal 18, respectively)

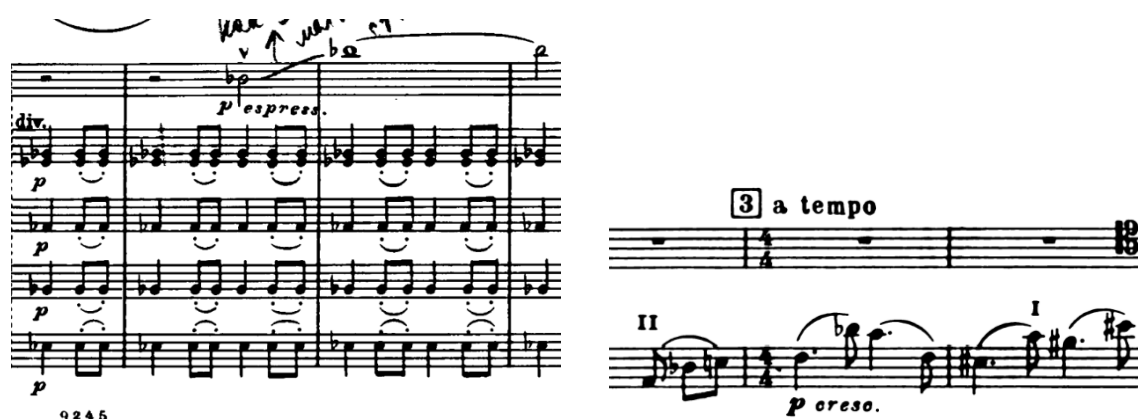


Fig. 6: The second themes of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 in the strings and Violin Concerto No. 1 in the solo violin (incipits from rehearsals 9 and 3, respectively)

The structural similarities continue with the second themes of both works. Mishra notes that both are situated in the Neapolitan key area (E ♭ minor in the symphony and B ♭ major in the violin concerto) and that the new key area is hinted at shortly after the opening 1- ♭ 6-5 motif. In the symphony, the Neapolitan is previewed by the D# (enharmonic with E ♭) in the first violins at the third measure (shown in Fig. 1), and in the violin concerto, the key area of B ♭ is anticipated by the B ♭ in the solo violin's staggered entrance (shown in Fig. 5).³⁸ The reason these hints bear any significance, as opposed to being coincidences, lies in the important role each plays within their phrase. For example, in the symphony, the D# ends the first phrase of the work on a downbeat and bears an accent. In the violin concerto, the B ♭ is situated in the middle of a dynamic swell and is longer than the preceding notes.

When viewing Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto as a response to oppression, one can easily see why he would reference his earlier symphony, assuming the close structural and motivic relationship between these works was intentional. As noted earlier, Shostakovich wrote his Fifth Symphony in the wake of the Soviet regime's first campaign against him. In order to convince the Communist party that he had distanced himself from the supposed formalism found in his opera, *Lady Macbeth*, Shostakovich composed his Fifth Symphony in a style more closely aligned with Soviet realism. Yet, despite the astronomical success of his Fifth Symphony with the public and regime alike, the eerie, foreboding nature of the Nocturne could point to the harrowing memory of this tenuous period and the ever-present threat of it repeating.

³⁸ Mishra, "DSCH," 180.

From Jewish Folk Poetry

One of the themes introduced in the Nocturne is derived from the third song of Shostakovich's song cycle, *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. The first formal statement of this theme can be found at the climax of the Nocturne, just before the recapitulation, in which the solo violin plays a series of screeching half-steps with a countermelody that ominously creeps upward. This melody bears significant similarity to one Shostakovich later used in his song, titled, "Lullaby," in which a mother sings to her son the following:

"My sweet child, so handsome, dear boy;
One small light where darkness reigns.
Father jailed in cruel Siberia,
Where the Tsar holds him in chains
Sleep – lullay, lullay."

Shown below in Fig. 7, one can compare the similarity between these melodies. The first five notes in the violin concerto use the same pitch classes and rhythm (with post-diminution note values). Though the melodies diverge at the halfway point, I believe the prominence of the minor second interval in each setting, both within these themes and later in each of these works as Shostakovich develops this idea, as well as the identical rhythms provide sufficient relation between these melodies to constitute a musical reference. Though, as previously mentioned, Shostakovich likely composed this song after the violin concerto, I believe this latent reference could shine some light into the composer's thoughts while writing. After all, since the subject matter of the song deals with a mother comforting her son after the Tsar exiled his father to Siberia, Shostakovich likely expected a similar scene to unfold in his home, given the wrath directed to him by the Communist party at the time.

Контральто
Респр.

Мой сы-нок всех кра-ше в ми-ре - о-го-нек во тьме.

Fig. 7: Depicts the singer's entrance to the third song from Shostakovich's song cycle, *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, and measures 5-7 of rehearsal 16 in the first movement of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto

Boris Godunov

In the A section of the first movement of the violin concerto, one of the variations of the 1- ♭ 6-5 motif is modeled after a similar passage from Modest Mussorgsky's opera, *Boris Godunov*. In the corresponding section of the opera, a monk, named Pimen, details the murder of Dmitriy Ivanovich by Boris Godunov. Pimen's line, "Lying in blood was the murdered Tsarevich;" can be compared with rehearsal 3 in Shostakovich's concerto; specifically, the words, "Lying in blood," which constitute the first four notes of Pimen's line, are differed only by a whole step from Shostakovich's violin part, starting on the eighth note just before rehearsal 3 (as shown below in Fig. 8). If intentional, this reference at the very least adds to the foreboding

nature of the movement and, if interpreting this concerto as a reflection on oppression, could be seen as pointing towards the regime's deadly activities.

The image displays two musical excerpts. The top excerpt, labeled '36' in a box, is from Act I, Part 2, Scene 1 of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. It features a vocal line in Russian and German with piano accompaniment. The Russian lyrics are 'Ле-жит в кро-ви за-ре-зан-ный ца-ре-вич;' and the German lyrics are 'es liegt in Blut er-mor-det der Za-re-witsch;'. The piano part includes dynamic markings *f*, *p*, *mf*, and *p*. The bottom excerpt, labeled '3' in a box, is rehearsal 3 from the first movement of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1. It is marked 'a tempo' and includes a section labeled 'II' with a *p creso.* marking.

Fig. 8: Rehearsal 36 from Act I, Part 2, Scene 1 from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (above) and rehearsal 3 from the first movement of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1

Gustav Mahler's Piano Quartet in A Minor

Another miniature reference in the Nocturne involves the opening theme of the first movement of Gustav Mahler's Piano Quartet in A minor. Depicted below in Fig. 9, one can compare the left hand of the piano in the quartet with the opening melody of the solo violin in the concerto. Both feature Shostakovich's iconic 1- $\flat$ 6-5 motif, this time in the same key of A minor while also being followed up with the pitch classes of A and G in both cases. Although I am not aware of any programmatic meaning in Mahler's Piano Quartet, I believe the reasons for

this inclusion stem from a combination of Shostakovich's affinity for Mahler as well as the Soviet Union's view of the late-romantic composer.

Even at the early stages of his compositional career, Shostakovich wove Mahlerian references into his works, as exemplified by his Piano Concerto in C Minor and Fourth Symphony.³⁹ As a composition teacher, Shostakovich included Mahler's Symphonies and *Das Lied von der Erde* in his lessons.⁴⁰ However, the Communist Party also suspected bourgeois elements within Mahler's works, necessitating care if Soviet composers wished to model their own symphonies after the late composer's.⁴¹ After all, Shostakovich delayed the premiere of his Fourth Symphony, which was heavily inspired by Mahler, anticipating that its debut would worsen his already tenuous standing with the regime amid their accusations of formalism.⁴²

It is certainly possible for Shostakovich's immense fondness of Mahler's music to be the sole reason for this reference.⁴³ Though, perhaps Shostakovich's inclusion of this theme against the backdrop of his Fifth Symphony in the Nocturne could point towards a defiant assertion of Mahler's influence in his writing despite the Communist party's wishes or a resentment towards the party for forgoing the great works of the past in favor of those that adhered to their strict stylistic guidelines surrounding Socialist Realism.

³⁹ Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 73-74, 93.

⁴⁰ Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 109.

⁴¹ Pauline Fairclough, "Mahler Reconstructed: Sollertinsky and the Soviet Symphony," *The Musical Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (2001): 368, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3600917>.

⁴² Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 96.

⁴³ Glikman, *Story of a Friendship*, 112, 114, 285.



Fig. 9: The opening bars of the piano part of Gustav Mahler's Piano Quartet in A Minor, depicting a theme similar to the one presented by the solo violin in the first movement of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto

V. Musical References in the Scherzo

Boris Godunov

According to musicologist, Dethlef Arnemann, the second movement of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1, the Scherzo, begins with a primary theme that can be traced through the composer's subsequent Symphony No. 10 and back to Modest Mussorgsky's opera, *Boris Godunov*.⁴⁴



Fig. 10: The opening themes of the second movement of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1 and third movement of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 10, respectively

Pictured in the above Fig. 10, when comparing the main themes of both the Scherzo from the violin concerto and Allegretto from the symphony, one can find that the first seven notes are essentially identical when it comes to the size and order of intervals, as originally pointed out by David Oistrakh; only the rhythm and time signature are different.⁴⁵ Using integer notation, the theme would consist of [0, 2, 3, 11, 2, 9, 0]. Looking retroactively at the main theme of the second movement of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 10 (depicted below in Fig. 11), one can find

⁴⁴ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz in Schostakowitschs erstem Violinkonzert Op. 77: Ein Tanz gegen den Tod?", in *Dmitri Schostakowitsch und das Jüdische Musikalische Erbe*, ed. Ernst Kuhn, Andreas Wehrmeyer, and Günter Wolter, 1st ed. (Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 2001), 240-242.

⁴⁵ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 240-241.

a similar series of intervals, consisting of [0, 2, 3, 2, 0, 2, 3, 5, 0], as shown below in Fig. 10. According to Arnemann, the relationship between these two themes is upheld by the [0, 2, 3] motif, with the second movement providing the base theme from which the third movement is derived.⁴⁶



Fig. 11: The main theme from the second movement of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 10 (incipit from measures 7-10)

The [0, 2, 3] motif also serves as the primary point of connectivity between the main themes from the prologue of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* and the second movement of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 10, the former of which is shown below in Fig. 12.



Fig. 12: The main theme from the prologue of Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (incipit from measures 1-4)

Shostakovich preserves the opening dotted rhythm, and the first five pitch classes, which form the iconic and symmetrical [0, 2, 3, 2, 0] arc, which immediately solidifies [0, 2, 3] as the focal motif. Additionally, both initial phrases of each theme lead to the fourth scale degree,

⁴⁶ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 241-242.

though Shostakovich uses extra notes to arrive there. Beyond this point, the themes seem to diverge, though one could argue that the second phrases of Mussorgsky's and Shostakovich's themes resemble each other due to similar pitch contours and focal points, which are, once again, the fourth scale degree.

Shostakovich started composing his Tenth Symphony prior to working on his First Violin Concerto. However, before the early summer of 1947, he decided to start over; though there are conflicting accounts concerning the exact year of completion, both cases firmly date the majority of Shostakovich's work on this symphony well after the completion of his violin concerto in 1948.⁴⁷

Though Shostakovich composed his Tenth Symphony after his First Violin Concerto, I believe their thematic similarities could directly link Mussorgsky's opera, *Boris Godunov* to the violin concerto. The significance of this indirect relation lies in the comparisons one could draw between Boris Godunov and Joseph Stalin. As Arnemann points out, both rose to power through less-than legitimate means and committed atrocities in the name of the people. This is best illustrated by a line in Act IV, Scene 2 of the opera, in which Boris Godunov, upon seeing the ghost of the Tsarevich he murdered, tries to shift the blame by explaining "I did not murder you – Go – go, my child! It was not I – It was the people...".⁴⁸ Therefore, Shostakovich's reference to the opening theme of the opera could be interpreted as a framing device to let the listener know the subject of the scherzo.

Shostakovich's alleged quote that the second movement of his Tenth Symphony is a "musical portrait of Stalin," is only found in Volkov's *Testimony* and has not been affirmed by

⁴⁷ Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 186.

⁴⁸ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 243.

any of his close contacts.⁴⁹ Given the questions surrounding the authenticity of Volkov's book, this statement cannot be considered factual, but the heavy, persistent allusions to *Boris Godunov* in the second and third movements of the symphony could point in this direction.

Shostakovich's thematic references to Mussorgsky are not entirely unexpected, since Shostakovich once called Mussorgsky his favorite composer and even reorchestrated *Boris Godunov* between 1939-1940. As opposed to Rimsky-Korsakov's version, Shostakovich's modifications consist only of changes in orchestration, reflecting his respect for Mussorgsky as a composer.⁵⁰ Later, in 1953, Shostakovich spoke clearly of his compositional intentions. "Rimsky-Korsakov groomed, waved, and sluiced Musorgsky with eau de cologne. My orchestration is crude, in keeping with Musorgsky."⁵¹

DSCH

One of Shostakovich's compositional hallmarks is the inclusion of the DSCH motif in his works. Consisting of the notes, D-E $\flat$ -C-B, in that order, these note values spell an abbreviated version of Shostakovich's name when using the German style of music notation, in which E $\flat$ is written as S, and B is written as H. Thus, D-S-C-H corresponds directly to the first four letters of "D. Schostakowitsch" (once again, utilizing a German spelling of his surname). As theorist Stephen Brown points out, Shostakovich's Fifth String Quartet and First Violin Concerto are the two works most often cited as containing the first appearances of this motif, though he argues that its origins trace back to Shostakovich's First Symphony. Essentially, DSCH can be boiled down to the tetrachord (0134) which undergoes transpositions as a byproduct of Shostakovich's

⁴⁹ Volkov, *Testimony*, 141.

⁵⁰ Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 119-120.

⁵¹ Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 120.

use of specific scales and modes.⁵² When expanding outwards to this definition, one can find several works preceding the First Violin Concerto that help establish this motif, such as Shostakovich's *Twenty-Four Preludes & Fugues*, Piano Trio No. 2, and String Quartet No. 3.⁵³

Shostakovich's compositional ideas surrounding his personal motif are not without precedent. For example, Johann Sebastian Bach and Robert Schumann both incorporated motifs referring to their names into their compositions, with Bach using B-A-C-H in Contrapunctus XIV in *Art of the Fugue* and Schumann using A-S-C-H (the 'A' referring to his middle name, Alexander) in *Carnaval*. Aside from the similarities in pitch classes, all three composers avoid directly stating their nominal motifs at the outset of a piece, instead hinting at and obscuring it until its direct statement (Brown 2006, 90). Furthermore, Shostakovich was very fond of Igor Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, which itself is centered around the (0134) motif (Brown 2006, 96).⁵⁴

DSCH and From Jewish Folk Poetry

Before tracing the DSCH motif throughout the Scherzo of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto, I find it useful to first delve into an example found in the trio section (depicted below in Fig. 13).

⁵² Stephen C. Brown, "Tracing the Origins of Shostakovich's Musical Motto," *Intégral* 20 (2006): 71. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40214029>.

⁵³ Brown, "Tracing the Origins," 79.

⁵⁴ Brown, "Tracing the Origins," 96.

36

Fig. 13: Rehearsal 42 of the Scherzo of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1, showing the theme of the trio presented in the winds

The DSCH motif, ordered in its prime form of (0134), can be found transposed down a major third in the third bar of Fig. 13 to the pitch classes of G-A $\flat$ -B $\flat$ -B. As Arnemann points out, the first four bars of melodic content, prior to the chromatic oscillation in bars 5-6, utilize the middle five pitches of the E $\flat$ Freygisch mode (shown below in Fig. 14), only omitting the tonic and 7th scale degree. The Freygisch mode, which provides the backdrop for a (0134) statement, is derived from the Phrygian mode and frequently found in Klezmer music.⁵⁵ However, due to the omission of the tonic E $\flat$ and spelling of F $\flat$ as E, this melody cannot definitively be identified as Jewish,⁵⁶ as opposed to simply being octatonic, though its context and possible references could point in this direction.

⁵⁵ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 232.

⁵⁶ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 233.

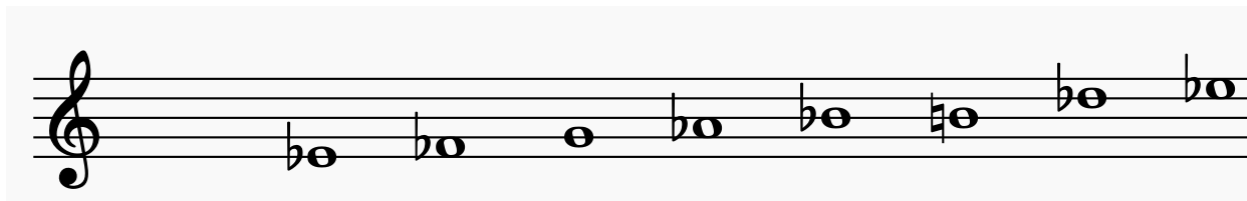


Fig. 14: Example of the Freygisch scale, starting on E $\flat$

Musicologist Joachim Braun asserts that the rhythm involved in the melody of the trio is derived from Hasidic dance, though he fails to provide any evidence.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the strong “boom-chuck” accompaniment in the strings, brass, and timpani, which places lower voices on the downbeats and higher voices on the upbeats (as shown below in Fig. 15), combines with the syncopation of the melodic line to, at the very least, strongly allude to a lively folk dance and craft a backdrop fitting of a modal sonority. However, the stronger piece of evidence constitutes a possible Jewish musical reference. Shostakovich’s possible inclusion of Klezmer sonorities in this movement has some precedent through the fourth movement of his Second Piano Trio, which was composed in 1944 and famously uses a Klezmer-like melody.



Fig. 15: Rehearsal 42 of the Scherzo of Shostakovich’s Violin Concerto No. 1, showing the “boom-chuck” accompaniment in the strings

⁵⁷ Joachim Braun, *Jews and Jewish Elements in Soviet Music*, (Israeli Music Publications, 1978), 152.

Similar to a melody from the Nocturne, Shostakovich would later repurpose this theme in his song cycle, *From Jewish Folk Poetry*.⁵⁸ In the fourth song, titled, “Before a Long Parting,” two lovers bid each other farewell, lamenting how empty their lives will be without each other. Throughout this song, a motif similar to the melody from the trio of the violin concerto appears, based on the motif [3, 0, 4] and is typically followed by descending chromatic notes (as depicted below in Fig. 16). Though the motif assumes a slightly different form throughout most of the song, with the progression of [3, 0, 4, 3], in the last line of the song, Shostakovich slightly modifies this motif in a way that more closely aligns with the violin concerto, transforming it into [3, 0, 3, 0, 4, 3] (as depicted below in Fig. 17, compared with the trio melody in Fig. 13).

When examining the text, the motif from the violin concerto appears at three notable locations, among many more.

I without you, you without me – how will we live apart? (mm. 8-15)
 I without you, you without me – like a door without a handle. (mm. 35-41)
 I without you, you without me – how can we live without happiness? (mm. 65-71)

If interpreting the concerto as a reflection on oppression, one could view the inclusion of this melody in the Scherzo’s trio as Shostakovich mourning those lost in Stalin’s purges. Hypothetically, these could include his late friends, such as Mikhail Tukhachevsky and Vysevolod Meyerhold, who were both murdered by the NKVD. On the other hand, Shostakovich might also be referring more generally to the loss of loved ones rather than specifically those struck down by the regime, such as his recently deceased close friend, Ivan Sollertinsky. Though much less somber a statement as opposed to his later song, musicologist I. B. Reltova points out

⁵⁸ Dethlef Arnemann, “Der jüdische Tanz,” 234.

that the screaming, boisterous setting of this melody reflects the “laughter under tears” idea commonly found in Shostakovich’s other works, as well as Jewish folk music.⁵⁹

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system (measures 63-67) shows the vocal entries. The soprano and tenor parts enter with the melody 'Я без те - бя, ты без ме -'. The piano accompaniment features a driving, rhythmic pattern. The tempo is marked 'accel.' and then 'a tempo'. The second system (measures 68-72) continues the vocal melody with the lyrics '- ня, - как нам без сча - стья жить? Ты'. The piano part continues with a similar rhythmic pattern, marked 'mf' and 'esp. r.'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 16: Measures 63-72 of the song, “Before a Long Parting,” from Shostakovich’s song cycle, *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, showcasing the [3, 0, 4] motif in both the tenor and soprano parts

⁵⁹ Dethlef Arnemann, “Der jüdische Tanz,” 235.

Fig. 17: Measures 82-85 of the song, “Before a Long Parting,” from Shostakovich’s song cycle, *From Jewish Folk Poetry*

In discussing the significance of the use of Jewish themes in the First Violin Concerto, one can compare this work to the possibly twice-referenced and more explicitly Jewish *From Jewish Folk Poetry* song cycle. As Fay points out, Shostakovich likely referenced Jewishness in the song cycle with both the Holocaust and Soviet anti-Semitism in mind, considering the composer’s own strong contempt for anti-Semitism.⁶⁰ Considering the proximity in dates and interconnectedness of these two works, Shostakovich could have wished to express similar thoughts in this violin concerto as well. Arnemann further notes that the close relation between and juxtaposition of the DSCH motif and the Jewish folk melody, the latter relation I cover in the following subsection, develops a narrative link through the course of the Scherzo between the persecution of the Jews and the composer’s own experiences being targeted by Stalin and the NKVD.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 169.

⁶¹ Dethlef Arnemann, “Der jüdische Tanz,” 239.

DSCH Continued

Though the First Violin Concerto does not feature the DSCH motif in its nominal pitch classes, it contains multiple strong allusions to the DSCH proper via the motif (0134) and related motif (0135), the first being contained within the opening theme possibly derived from the Prologue of *Boris Godunov*. Shown below in Fig. 18, the tetrachord is ordered as [1, 3, 4, 0] and flies by quickly.



Fig 18: Showcasing the (0134) motif in the main theme of the Scherzo of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto

The first overt hint at the inclusion of the DSCH motif in this movement arrives with the secondary theme (as depicted below in Fig. 19), for which its arrival is demarcated by both a key change and double bar line.⁶² By juxtaposing these even, comparatively-long tones against the backdrop of whirling sixteenth and marcato eighth notes, Shostakovich highlights the importance of this motif. While this motif is built on the (0135) tetrachord, as opposed to the (0134) found in the DSCH motif, the note letters and order of pitches are identical to those found in the DSCH.

⁶² Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 237.



Fig. 19: Rehearsal 33 of the Scherzo of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1, depicting the first iteration of the proto-DSCH motif in the winds

The relationship between the (0135) motif and the DSCH motif is strengthened when Shostakovich includes statements of the DSCH shortly afterwards (as depicted below in Fig. 20).⁶³ While these variations use the nominal pitch classes of D-E $\flat$ -C-B, they are reordered into the prime form of the base (0134) motif. Much like the (0134) motif in the opening, these statements can be easily missed, given their short durations, though the octatonic sonority preserves its referential effect.



⁶³ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 238.



Fig. 20: 4 bars before rehearsal 35 and 6 bars after rehearsal 36 of the Scherzo of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1, depicting a reordered DSCH motif in the oboes, followed by a similar motif in the solo violin, respectively

The next significant DSCH statement occurs in the return of the trio at rehearsal 65. As previously discussed, the Jewish folk-inspired melody contains a fragmented form of the DSCH motif in the form of [3, 0, 4]. However, Shostakovich begins to weave the full (0134) motif, evocative of the DSCH, into the orchestral accompaniment just after the solo violin finishes its statement of the Klezmer melody (as depicted below in Fig. 21).⁶⁴



Fig. 21: Rehearsal 66 of the Scherzo of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1, depicting the (0134) motif in the clarinets, bassoons, and low strings, hidden by a rhythmic variation

⁶⁴ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 238.

This statement preserves the order of notes in the DSCH motif, merely transposing down a major third and obscuring its identity through its rhythm. Several fast bars later, Shostakovich spells out the DSCH motif more explicitly (as depicted below in Fig. 22) by augmenting the note durations to a series of four plodding quarter notes, evocative of the faux-DSCH statement from the secondary theme. However, this statement remains obscured, this time by being buried beneath the furious sixteenth notes in the upper strings.⁶⁵

Fig. 22: 6-10 measures after rehearsal 66 in the Scherzo of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1, depicting the (0134) motif in the Clarinet I, bassoon, viola, and cello parts

Finally, (as depicted below in Fig. 23) the solo violin shines through with a statement of the DSCH motif, transposed down a tritone and with a further elongated rhythm now in 3/8, more closely mirroring the secondary theme's faux-DSCH than the previous orchestral statement.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 238.

⁶⁶ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 238.



Fig. 23: Rehearsal 67 of the Scherzo of Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1, depicting the overt DSCH statement in the solo violin

Thus, across these two rehearsal markings, Shostakovich transforms the [3, 0, 4] idea found in the opening bars of his Jewish folk-inspired melody into his iconic DSCH motif, primarily through rhythmic and orchestral means.⁶⁷ This procedural development is illustrated below in Fig. 24, which displays the four statements, equalized across pitch classes.



Fig. 24: The transformation of the Jewish folk melody into the DSCH

As previously discussed, the merging of these two motifs connects the fate of Jews in the Soviet Union with that of Shostakovich.⁶⁸ In a sense, this transformation can be seen as symbolizing Stalin (portrayed through the character of Boris Godunov) refocusing his ire towards Shostakovich as the composer's signature theme manifests throughout this passage. When keeping with this interpretation, Shostakovich would anticipate the outcome of this wrath in the following movement.

⁶⁷ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 239.

⁶⁸ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 239.

The Scherzo as a Joke

Because labeling a movement as a Scherzo suggests the existence of a musical joke, it's important to look for one in this movement despite the gravity of its proposed subject, especially when dealing with a composer like Shostakovich for whom irony and satire play a central role in many of his works.⁶⁹

As previously discussed, the Scherzo opens with the opening theme from Boris Godunov in the winds, which could represent Stalin, as previously discussed. The key difference in the presentation of this theme in the Scherzo is that it is sped up considerably from its source material, and even its presentation in Shostakovich's subsequent Tenth Symphony, thus depriving the theme of its gravitas. This, combined with the frequent use of dissonant intervals across the orchestra and within the solo violin part, paint the picture of a chaotic autocrat gone mad with power. In this way, Shostakovich's grotesque setting parodies Boris Godunov and could be interpreted as satirizing Stalin's regime by extension.

Though not as entertaining, another instance of irony appears in the trio section. As mentioned above, the melody, which is later used in a different work to express a somber farewell, is placed in a much higher register and also sped up significantly. Here, I believe the irony, achieved through the cognitive dissonance of the contrasting nature and setting of the theme, reinforces the desperate anguish of the trio.

⁶⁹ For further reading on sarcasm in Shostakovich's music, see Esti Sheinberg's *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich*.

VI. Musical References in the Passacaglia

Extra-Musical Implications of the Passacaglia

True to its title, the third movement of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto is structured as a Passacaglia, which features a repeating bass line. Depicted below in Fig. 25 is the second statement of the repeating bass line (chosen to facilitate reading), which can be seen in the Bassoon II part. Though a repeating chord progression (as seen in a Chaconne) is not required in a Passacaglia, Shostakovich repeats this as well, which can be found in the other wind parts in the figure. Each statement of the Passacaglia occurs over an asymmetric seventeen bars and repeats seven more times until rehearsal 78.

Passacaglias tend to be associated with more somber affects and subject matter, as exemplified by works like "When I Am Laid in Earth" from Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, and the cyclical nature of the form evokes a feeling of an inevitable fate. Shostakovich enhances this eeriness by writing a bass line that trends downward, ending up an octave lower than it starts, and maintaining an uncomfortable, asymmetric phrase structure over seventeen bars.

The image shows a musical score for rehearsal 70, featuring four staves: C.ingl. (Corno Inglese), Cl. (Clarinete), III (Tromba III), and Fag. (Fagotto). The score illustrates the second statement of the repeating bass line, which is an asymmetric phrase structure over seventeen bars. The bass line is shown in the Fag. part, and the other parts (C.ingl., Cl., III) show the repeating chord progression. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *cresc.*, *f*, and *dim.*.

The image shows a musical score for rehearsal 70-71 of the third movement of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto. The score is for C. Ingl., Cl., and Fag. (Flute, Clarinet, and Bassoon). It shows a repeating bass line in the bassoon part, marked with 'III' and 'p' (piano). The rehearsal mark '71' is in a box at the top right.

Fig. 25: Rehearsal 70-71 of the third movement of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto, showcasing the repeating bass line

Fate Motif

One of the most harrowing possible musical references in this violin concerto takes place in the Passacaglia. Starting in the second bar of the movement, the triplet eighth notes followed by a quarter note, all on the pitch class, C, allude strongly to the motif of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, which is known as the 'fate' motif. These two motifs can be compared below in Fig. 26 and 27. Beyond pitch and rhythm, both statements occur at the fortissimo dynamic and are often followed by subsequent statements bearing different pitch classes, which are shown in the final bars of each example.

The image shows the first four measures of the opening of Ludwig van Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The title "Allegro con brio ^{*)}" is at the top. The score is for five parts: Violini I, Violini II, Viole, Violoncelli, and Bassi. All parts are in D minor (three flats) and 2/4 time. The first measure is marked *ff* (fortissimo). The "fate" motif is clearly visible: a single note (D4) followed by three eighth notes (E4, F4, G4) in the first measure, and then a half note (D4) in the second measure, which is repeated in the third and fourth measures.

Fig. 26: The opening bars of Ludwig van Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, showcasing the "fate" motif

The image shows the first four measures of the opening of the Passacaglia from Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto. The score is for 4 Corni (F). The key signature is D minor (three flats) and the time signature is 2/4. The first measure is marked *ff* (fortissimo). The "fate" motif is present: a single note (D4) followed by three eighth notes (E4, F4, G4) in the first measure, and then a half note (D4) in the second measure, which is repeated in the third and fourth measures. The notation includes slurs and accents over the triplet groups.

Fig. 27: The opening bars of the Passacaglia from Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto, showing a similar "fate" motif

Eventually, this fate motif is transformed in a way that alters the work it refers to. Close to the cadenza, the solo violin assumes the motif but adds additional sets of triplets or duplet eighth-notes following the first triplet group (shown below in Fig. 28). With these statements occurring over sparse accompanimental textures, I believe Shostakovich instead references the third movement of Pyotr Tchaikovsky's String Quartet No. 3 (shown below in Fig. 29). Written as a funeral march and bearing the marking, "Andante funebre e doloroso," the original fate

motif can be seen as taking a deadly turn. One interpretation of this thematic transformation is Shostakovich anticipating his own demise at the hands of the NKVD.

The image displays a musical score for Rehearsal 77 in the Passacaglia of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto. The score is written in 3/4 time and features a 'fate' motif. The first system includes the following parts: Timp., V-no solo, V-ni I, V-ni II, V-le, V-c., and O-b. The V-no solo part has markings for 'pizz.', 'fenuito', 'cresc.', and 'dim.'. The second system includes Timp., V-no solo, and Archi. The V-no solo part has markings for 'cresc.' and 'dim.'. The Archi part has markings for 'cresc.' and 'dim.'.

Fig. 28: Rehearsal 77 in the Passacaglia of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto, also showing a similar "fate" motif



Fig. 29: Rehearsal 30 in the third movement of Pyotr Tchaikovsky's String Quartet No. 3

Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District

One of the motifs central to Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto is known as the theme of violence, which, according to Arnemann, was inspired by the Prologue of Boris Godunov.⁷⁰ Though I have been unable to find a preexisting explanation for this statement, I will provide my strongest theory.

Across the orchestra and vocalists alike pervades a motif quite similar to Shostakovich's theme of violence. Beginning as a long held tone followed by two shorter notes of equal length and pitch class (as shown in Fig. 30), the motif is sometimes modified so the two subsequent notes are at a lower pitch (shown in Fig. 31), and the initial long note is occasionally split into a dotted rhythm, likely to accommodate all the syllables of a word (shown in Fig. 32).

⁷⁰ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 246.

Moderato. [Умеренно.]
 1) Пристав показывается в воротах.
Der Vogt erscheint im Klosterhof.

Fig. 30: Rehearsal 4 from the Prologue of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, depicting the first statement of his proto-theme of violence

8) Пристав отходит к монастырю. *Der Vogt geht zum Kloster ab.*

Fig. 31: Rehearsal 8 from the Prologue of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, depicting the first descending variation of the proto-theme of violence



Fig. 32: 6-10 measures after rehearsal 26 from the Prologue of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, showcasing the occasional splitting of the long tone into a dotted rhythm

This four-note variation on Mussorgsky's motif could be seen as having provided the foundation for Shostakovich's own theme of violence, as the only difference between the two is that Shostakovich assigned the second note its own distinct pitch.

Shostakovich established the meaning of this motif in his opera, *Lady Macbeth*, in which the theme of violence appears at or before acts of violence or, at least, immorality. The first appearance occurs in Act I, Scene 1, when Boris forces Katerina to swear she will remain faithful to her husband, Zinovy, while he is away (shown in Fig. 33). The second statement of the motif happens in the subsequent scene, during the workers' sexual assault of another worker, Aksinya (shown in Fig. 34). Similarly, the theme of violence occurs again in the orchestral interlude just before Sergei sexually assaults Katerina in Scene 3 (shown in Fig. 35) and in Act II Scene 5 just before Sergei kills Zinovy (shown in Fig. 36). Most notably for the purposes of this paper, the theme of violence shows up in Act III, Scene 7, which depicts a morally bankrupt police force (shown in Fig. 37). After imprisoning a teacher for his alleged atheist beliefs, a peasant tips off the police to a corpse at Sergei and Katerina's wedding. Seeing this as an opportunity to exact revenge for not being invited, the police arrive at the wedding and arrest Sergei and Katerina. The theme of violence shows up twice more in Act IV, Scene 9, when Sergei takes advantage of

Katerina's distress at the thought of him leaving, manipulating her into giving him her stockings so he can regift them to another woman to seduce her (shown in Fig. 38), and again when the sergeant awakens the group of convicts to resume their march (shown in Fig. 39).⁷¹

This musical score snippet shows three measures of music for three instruments: Cor. (Coronet), Tr-be (Trumpet in B-flat), and Tr-ni (Trumpet in C). The Cor. and Tr-be staves are in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#), and the Tr-ni staff is in bass clef with the same key signature. The music is marked with a forte dynamic (fff) and a tempo marking of 'a2'. The first measure shows the Cor. and Tr-be playing a half note G4, while the Tr-ni plays a half note F#3. The second measure shows the Cor. and Tr-be playing a half note A4, while the Tr-ni plays a half note G3. The third measure shows the Cor. and Tr-be playing a half note B4, while the Tr-ni plays a half note A3. The music ends with a double bar line.

Fig. 33: 3 measures before rehearsal 30 (during which Boris forces Katerina to swear to remain loyal to her husband), depicting the theme of violence in the last two bars

This musical score snippet shows three measures of music for two staves of a Trumpet in B-flat (Tr-be). The staves are in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is marked with a forte dynamic (fff) and a tempo marking of 'a2'. The first measure shows the top staff playing a half note G4 and the bottom staff playing a half note F#4. The second measure shows the top staff playing a half note A4 and the bottom staff playing a half note G4. The third measure shows the top staff playing a half note B4 and the bottom staff playing a half note A4. The music ends with a double bar line.

Fig. 34: Starting at three measures after rehearsal 88 (during the sexual assault of Aksinya), depicting the theme of violence in the last two bars

⁷¹ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 248.

Allegro con brio ♩ = 132 [113]

Piccolo
2 Flauti
2 Oboi
Corno inglese (F)
Clarinetto piccolo (Es)
2 Clarinetti (B)

Fig. 35: The beginning of the interlude prior to Scene 3 (before the sexual assault of Katerina), depicting the theme of violence in the last three bars

Fig. 36: Four bars before rehearsal 350 of Scene 5 (just before Sergei kills Zinovy), depicting the theme of violence in the last three bars of the trombones

a2 sole
fff
[sola]
fff

Fig. 37: Starting at six bars after rehearsal 422 of Scene 7 (when the police decide to crash the wedding as revenge for not being invited), depicting the theme of violence in the first two bars of the trombones

div. 510 = 152

Archi

cresc. ffff unis. [arco] fff

322

Fig. 38: Rehearsal 510 of Scene 9 (just after Katerina expresses her distress at the thought of Sergei leaving her and just before Sergei tricks Katerina into giving up her stockings), depicting the theme of violence in the last bar

Archi

fff

Fig. 39: Starting at the second bar of rehearsal 541 of Scene 9 (as the sergeant wakes the convicts to resume their procession), depicting the theme of violence in the last bar

The theme of violence appears at multiple points in the First Violin Concerto, but most significantly in the Passacaglia bass line of the third movement (as depicted below in Fig. 40). In this motif, Shostakovich retains the long note followed by an intermediary note and two repeated notes. When comparing this variation across those from *Lady Macbeth*, the iteration used for the police bears unique similarity to the Passacaglia motif, since only the police variation (Fig. 37) places the two repeated notes at a higher pitch than the intermediary note. Because Shostakovich

is specifically using the police variation on the theme of violence, the violence depicted in this movement refers to that which is sanctioned by the government.⁷² Given the narrative background of this concerto, Shostakovich could be evoking the never-ending brutality of the NKVD by basing the repeating bass line on the theme of violence, with each iteration of the motif taking away another life.



Fig. 40: The opening bars of the Passacaglia, showing the theme of violence integrated into the repeating bass line

⁷² Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 249.

Nocturne

The opening theme of the solo violin (shown below in Fig. 41) is derived from a theme originally presented in the first movement of the violin concerto. As previously discussed, this theme is later used in Shostakovich's song cycle, *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, in a song where a mother explains to her son that his father has been arrested and sent to work in Siberia by decree of the Tsar.



Fig. 41: Depicts measures 5-7 of rehearsal 16 in the first movement of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto and the first three bars of rehearsal 71 in the third movement

VII. Musical References in the Burlesca

Hopak

Musicologist Malcom MacDonald classifies the Jewish melody within the trio section of the Scherzo as a *hopak* (or *gopak*), which is a Ukrainian folk dance.⁷³ While I find it more convincing to see the Scherzo's trio as a Jewish folk melody and the Burlesca as evoking a hopak, this does not definitively preclude or even necessarily exclude MacDonald's judgement from also being a sound interpretation. Below, I will present my own analysis of the Burlesca as a hopak against which the reader may compare the Scherzo's trio if they wish.

The first indication of a Ukrainian folk melody arrives with the opening theme (depicted below in Fig. 42). Until the B ♭ in measure 10, the theme features the pitch collection of A, B, E ♭ (D#), E, F#, and G, which is evocative of the Ukrainian Dorian mode, also known as the Hutsul mode or Ukrainian minor scale, which is commonly found in Ukrainian folk music (shown below in Fig. 43).⁷⁴



Fig. 42: Measures 4-11 of the Burlesque, showcasing the main theme of the movement in the Xylophone part

⁷³ Malcolm MacDonald, "I took a simple little theme and developed it': Shostakovich's String Concertos and Sonatas," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich*, ed. Pauline Fairclough and David Fanning, (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 125.

⁷⁴ Iuliia Alyeksyeyeva, "Ukrainian Folklore Influences in the Music of Myroslav Skoryk: Historical Background and Performance Guide to Selected Violin Works," (DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2019), 6, LSU Doctoral Dissertations (4781), https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/4781.

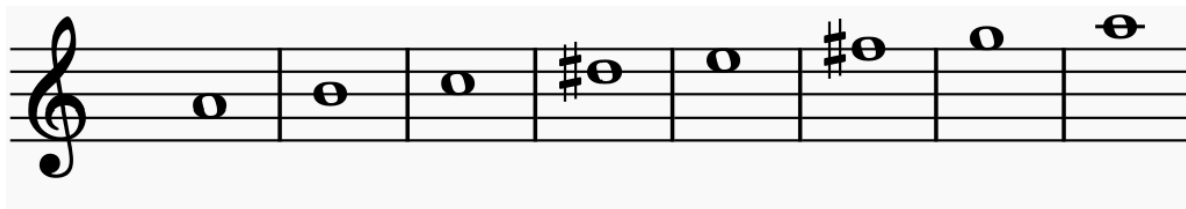


Fig. 43: The Ukrainian Dorian scale starting on A

There are a few formal and rhythmic elements that help narrow down the referenced Ukrainian folk dance to one of three: the hopak, kozak, and kozachok. Each is written in 2/4, which the Burlesca movement mimics, with the exception of rehearsals 99-105 and a few scattered bars, which are in 3/4. Furthermore, like these folk dances, the Burlesca is organized into four parts, which start at rehearsals 80, 94, 102, and 107 and comprise a ternary form with a coda. The most noticeable commonality among these folk dances is their signature rhythm used to end phrases, which consists of two eighth notes followed by a quarter note. This rhythm appears frequently in the Burlesca, not only as a phrase ending (as shown below in Fig. 44), but also as an underpinning rhythmic motif throughout the movement (as exemplified below in Fig. 45). Though an accent is often expected on the last quarter note in each of these figures, this is typically the case at each of these phrase endings, seeing as they end on the downbeat of the next bar.⁷⁵



Fig. 44: Measures 5-7 of Rehearsal 81 in the piccolo, showing the iconic two-eighths, one quarter note rhythm at phrase endings (across bars 2-3)

⁷⁵ Iryna Fedun, "The Folkdances of the Western Polissia Region of Ukraine: Traditions and Innovations," *Traditiones* 34, no. 1 (2005): 158.



Fig 45: Frequent accompanimental figure found throughout the Burlesca, which is a diminution of the hopak/kozak/kozachok rhythm

Three elements of the Burlesca further support its relation to the hopak in particular. As identified by Alyeksyeyeva, the hopak typically features a transitional section before the final section (which the author labels as the fourth section in a five-part form).⁷⁶ I believe the corresponding transition in the Burlesca spans rehearsals 105-107, since this is where Shostakovich reassigns the 2/4 time signature and introduces a steady accompaniment comprised of staccato eighth notes that sets up the introductory theme of the coda at rehearsal 107, which bears a similar rhythm. Additionally, the coda at rehearsal 107 features a significant increase in tempo from a quarter note at 168bpm to a half note at 108bpm, which reflects the tradition of the final section of the hopak being played at a very fast tempo.⁷⁷ From a choreographic view, many of the dance movements integral to the hopak, such as rapid turns, spins, and jumps, are reflected in the melodic line of the accompanying music and appear frequently in the Burlesca as well (and illustrated below in Fig. 46).



Fig. 46: Bars surrounding rehearsal 99 in the solo violin part of the Burlesca, demonstrating the turning and jumping figures prevalent throughout the movement

⁷⁶ Alyeksyeyeva, "Ukrainian Folklore Influences," 28.

⁷⁷ Alyeksyeyeva, "Ukrainian Folklore Influences," 29.

The hopak rhythm featured prominently throughout this movement can be seen as a retrograde of the rhythm of Mussorgsky's original theme of violence. Given Shostakovich's intention for this movement to evoke a joyous nature, this reversed rhythm can be interpreted as symbolizing victory over Stalin's state-sanctioned violence. However, I believe the more significant analytical point regarding the inclusion of the hopak lies in the history of this dance.

The hopak originated with the Zaporozhian Cossacks, who have both resisted and assisted Russian empirical expansion throughout history.⁷⁸ Representing yet another instance of Shostakovich's mixed messages in his music, I believe the prior framing of this concerto around Shostakovich's own experiences with government oppression, through his references to his nominal DSCH motif, theme of violence from *Lady Macbeth*, and his Fifth Symphony, helps connect his relationship with the Soviet Union to the Cossacks' with Russia, seeing as both resisted and furthered the interests of the state at various points in time under state subjugation. Additionally, Shostakovich's privately-expressed description of this movement as expressing the joy of liberation likely points more towards the Cossacks' reputation for resistance, as opposed to collaboration.

Furthermore, the hopak's roots as a martial dance,⁷⁹ along with the hopak's rhythm possibly being a reversal of the theme of violence could point towards a combative element of resistance against Stalin, bringing a new meaning to the ending notes of the movement, which emulate the decapitation motif found in works such as Hector Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique* or Ludwig van Beethoven's *Egmont*. If Stalin's death is indeed foretold at the end of the Burlesca, this narrative would thus reconcile the mocking nature of the movement by name and style of

⁷⁸ Robert H. McNeal, *Tsar And Cossack, 1855-1914* (St. Martin's Press, 1987), 4-15.

⁷⁹ Alyeksyeyeva, "Ukrainian Folklore Influences," 26.

composition. After all, there is great irony in the autocrat perishing at the hands of the people he tried so hard to subjugate.

Another possible interpretation of the hopak reference could lie in the practice of Socialist Realism, thus completely disregarding the Cossack connection. Since composers were often pressured into including folk elements in their works, as Shostakovich was during the first anti-formalist campaign in 1936, Shostakovich might have simply included a Ukrainian folk dance in this movement to placate the Communist party. In this case, the title of “Burlesca” could be seen as mocking the mandated compositional style of Socialist Realism through the lens of parody.

The Dead Man Walking

Musicologist Dorothea Redepenning identifies a narrative similarity between the Burlesca and a song from Shostakovich’s song cycle, *6 Romances on Verses by Raleigh, Burns, & Shakespeare*, titled “Macpherson’s Farewell.” Set to a poem by Robert Burns, and predated by a traditional folk song setting, Redepenning notes that “the fact that Macpherson dances in the presence of death maybe brings this song close to the ‘Jewish’ compositions,” including the Burlesca movement.⁸⁰ Though I have been unable to find any Jewish musical elements present in the Burlesca, I believe Shostakovich’s use of the hopak dance form, likely as a symbol of resistance against Stalin, along with the subject of a liberated prisoner, independently align this movement with such a theme.

While there’s hardly any relation between the scores themselves, Shostakovich’s song prominently features the dorian mode, which is related to the Ukrainian dorian mode used in the main theme of the Burlesca. Additionally, the solo violin at rehearsals 87-88 features a melody

⁸⁰ Dorothea Redepenning, ““And art made tongue-tied by authority”: Shostakovich's Song-Cycles,” in *Shostakovich Studies*, ed. David Fanning (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 216-217.

that weaves in and out of the same E dorian mode as the song (shown below in Fig. 47), and the first four notes (B-A-G-A) are identical to a recurring motif from Shostakovich's version of Macpherson's Lament (shown below in m.13 in Fig. 48). This motif also appears prominently in Macpherson's original tune as well (shown below in Fig. 49).



Fig: 47: Melody in the solo violin from rehearsal 87 in the Burlesca

Fig: 48: Opening of Macpherson's Farewell, showcasing the Dorian mode and the related motif in m. 13

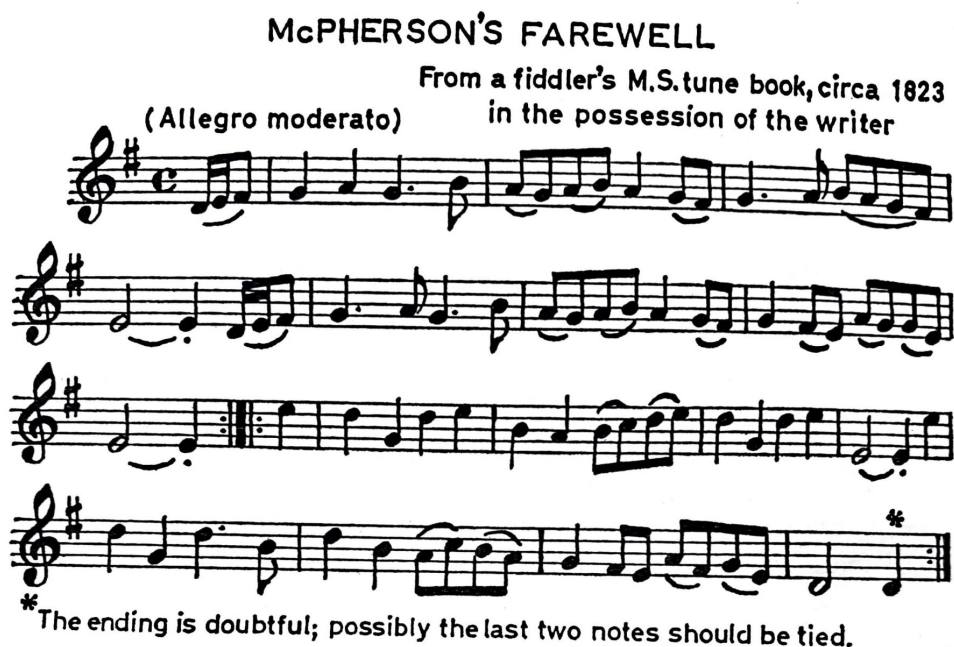


Fig: 49: The version of Macpherson's Rant on which Robert Burns' poem is based (Collinson 1966, 212).

Further relation between the two works lies in their narrative content. Burns' poem is about a Robin Hood-like outlaw and talented fiddler, named James Macpherson, who composed and performed a rant just prior to his execution; when the magistrates in charge of hanging Macpherson found out he was granted a stay of execution, they set the town clock forward to the postponed time of execution and hanged Macpherson anyway.⁸¹ Macpherson's Rant survived as a folk tune, to which Robert Burns set his poem.⁸² This reference, if intentional, would reinforce the allusions to state-sanctioned violence already identified in this concerto.

It's important to note, however, that Shostakovich's nominal DSCH motif is absent from the reference, so the inclusion of Macpherson's Farewell doesn't necessarily point towards the looming threat of execution that the composer lived under. Another interpretation could be that,

⁸¹ Francis Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*, (Vanderbilt University Press, 1966), 210-211.

⁸² Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*, 211.

since the Burlesca is likely about the liberation of a prisoner, Shostakovich rewrote Macpherson's tale, saving the fiddler from his fate. After all, the reference to Macpherson only occupies a small portion of this movement and is overshadowed by the boisterous hopak setting.

Interestingly, there is a passage from *Testimony* in which Shostakovich (or Volkov abusing Shostakovich's voice) recalls that two of his friends, Meyerhold and Tukhachevsky, both expressed a wish to have developed their passion for the violin into professions just prior to their executions.⁸³ Since this comment contains discussion on Meyerhold, then, if Maxim is to be believed in his assessment of accuracy, this recollection could carry more veracity than much of the other content contained within *Testimony*. If true, Shostakovich could have included this tune in memory of his two fallen friends, granting them victory over Stalin from beyond the grave.

The Theme of Violence

The police variation on the theme of violence makes a few notable appearances in the Burlesca, such as at rehearsal 100 (depicted below at Fig. 50).⁸⁴ The winds blare the theme in a canon as the solo violin scales upwards with rapid passages of sixteenth notes, almost fighting upwards against the oppressive power of the winds.

⁸³ Volkov, *Testimony*, 97.

⁸⁴ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 249.

Fig: 50: Rehearsal 100 of the fourth movement of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto, depicting the theme of violence in the winds

Towards the end of this section, the sixteenth notes in the solo violin change in pattern to reference the final movement of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony (depicted below in Fig. 51). Similar in texture to the concerto, at rehearsal 108 in the Fifth Symphony, the Trumpet I sounds a melody over swirling sixteenth notes in the winds and strings. When examining the sixteenth notes themselves, one notices that the solo violin line matches the notes of the first violins for the first five notes exactly, before climbing upwards. Though the ascent in the symphony occurs over a longer period of time, both sections exhibit the same trend. Interestingly, the theme of violence ends on the first measure of the reference in the concerto, possibly calling back to Shostakovich's use of the Fifth Symphony to both evade punishment from and voice criticisms about Stalin's authoritarian regime.

The image displays a musical score for a comparison between two works by Shostakovich. It is organized into three systems of staves. The first system, measures 81-82, includes a Trumpet (Tr-be) staff with a 'I sola' marking and a woodwind staff with 'unis.' and 'div.' markings. The second system, measures 83-88, continues the woodwind and string (Archi) parts. The third system, measures 89-92, features a Violin solo (V-no solo) part. The score is marked with rehearsal numbers 81, 83, 88, 92, and 95. A box containing the number 101 is located at the bottom left of the third system.

Fig. 51: Rehearsal 108 of the fourth movement of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony compared with Rehearsal 101 of the fourth movement of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto

Later, Shostakovich alludes to the theme of violence at the opening of the coda (depicted below in Fig. 52). Compared with the Passacaglia bass line (shown back in Fig. 25), one can notice that its statement in the coda is exact in pitch, but not in rhythm. As opposed to its plodding, overbearing rhythm of a half note followed by three quarter notes, Shostakovich reduces the theme of violence to a series of rushed eighth notes, essentially parodying his earlier portrayal of the Soviet regime in the Passacaglia, interrupted by the diminution of the hopak rhythm. Continuing the narrative, this evokes the image of an oppressor in a state of panic, as his

subjects bear down on him. The theme of violence sounds out one last time in the horns at rehearsal 110 (as shown below in Fig. 53)⁸⁵ before being overtaken by the rushing sixteenth notes in the solo violin and hopak rhythms of the rest of the orchestra, culminating in a final victorious strike.



Fig: 52: Rehearsal 107 of the fourth movement of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto, depicting the Passacaglia bass line as the introductory theme of the coda



Fig: 53: Rehearsal 110 of the fourth movement of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto, showing the final statement of the theme of violence in the horns

VIII. Conclusion

If these referential excerpts and motifs were intentional, one could interpret them as structuring a political narrative underlying the concerto. The connectedness of the Nocturne with Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, along with the foreboding nature of the movement, could provide listeners with a prologue that foreshadows the composer's second denunciation. In equal parts mocking parody and screaming anguish, the Scherzo could lay bare the brutality of Stalin's regime, as experienced by Shostakovich himself, through its possible references to Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, a Jewish folk melody, and the composer's own DSCH motif. By integrating the theme of violence from *Lady Macbeth* into the Passacaglia, alongside rhythmic figures that could be evoking Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and a funeral march by Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich appears to depict the murderous acts of the NKVD and, possibly, his own execution. However,

⁸⁵ Dethlef Arnemann, "Der jüdische Tanz," 261.

the Burlesca ushers in a final victory, potentially against tyranny, through the evocation of a hopak with the imagery provided by the composer of a liberated prisoner.

Ultimately, the interpretation I have proposed in this paper cannot be proven as Shostakovich's definitive vision for his concerto; and, even if such a feat were possible, doing so would not invalidate others' interpretations of the work. However, presenting and experiencing Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto as a musical response to the oppression the composer suffered from the Soviet regime seems to be the prevailing interpretation at the time of this paper's writing among performers, listeners, and myself. Due to the current lack of detailed and up-to-date writing on this piece, I believe I have provided a referential analysis that can assist others in the development of and bring to life interpretations aligned with this viewpoint.

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