

VERIZON HALL

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8

3 PM

GREAT ORCHESTRAS ON TOUR SUPPORTED BY 10 RITTENHOUSE SQUARE

The Cleveland Orchestra

Franz Welser-Möst, Music Director and Conductor

MOZART

Symphony No. 25 in G Minor, K183

1. Allegro con brio
2. Andante
3. Menuetto—Trio
4. Allegro

—Intermission—

SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 7 (“Leningrad”) in C Major, Opus 60

1. Allegretto
2. Moderato—Poco allegretto
3. Adagio
4. Allegro non troppo

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WOLFGANG AMADÈ MOZART

(b. 1756, Salzburg; d. 1791, Vienna)

Symphony No. 25 in G Minor, K183

Composed 1773

Mozart wrote this symphony in 1773; it is often referred to as the “Little G-minor” Symphony, to distinguish it from the “Great G-minor” (also known as his Symphony No. 40)

Scoring: 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, and strings

Performance Time: approximately 20 minutes

A typical 18th-century concert program did not identify the works performed with anything resembling the specificity we are accustomed to nowadays. Usually, only the genre (symphony, concerto, etc.) and maybe the key signature (C major, D major, etc.) were listed. Because composers rarely, if ever, numbered their own works, but could (and often did) write several symphonies and concertos in the same key, printed records from the 18th century are relatively imprecise in what they tell us. When we read about a “symphony by Herr Mozart in D major” performed at a certain time, we are somewhat in the dark as to exactly what the audience actually heard. The possibilities are narrowed, but we can never be certain.

But then, the 18th century did not feel a need to distinguish among different symphonies by the same author nearly as much as we do today. The notion that every symphony must have an unmistakable personality of its own did not become prevalent until Beethoven’s time. Previously, symphonies were similar enough in scope and intent to seem almost interchangeable to audiences (if not to the composers). This situation began to change gradually around the 1770s, when Haydn and Mozart (as well as others) started to write symphonies that were increasingly differentiated in tone.

Mozart’s early Symphony in G minor (he wrote two in this key), now known as Symphony No. 25, was written when Mozart was 17 years old. It stands out among his works as an early example of how symphonies were becoming individualized. It is also one of the earliest of Mozart’s works to show complete artistic maturity. Its exceptional nature is signalled by its very tonality, as it is one of only two Mozart symphonies in a minor key—the other being No. 40, also in G minor. Along with the choice of the minor key came a whole array of special and distinguishing stylistic traits, such as excited syncopations, harder-than-usual dissonances, and a variety of other features creating an increased level of dramatic tension.

The work might have been Mozart’s response to several Haydn symphonies from the early 1770s that exhibit some of the same characteristics. These symphonies are often described as products of Haydn’s *Sturm und Drang* (“storm and stress”) period. The group includes such works as No. 44 in E minor (“Mourning”), No. 45 (“Farewell”), and No. 52 in C minor. At the time, Mozart had not yet met Joseph Haydn in person, but he knew Joseph’s younger brother Michael, a noted composer in his own right, who was living and working in Salzburg, Mozart’s hometown. There are numerous references to both Haydn brothers in the correspondence of Wolfgang’s father, Leopold Mozart, himself an outstanding musician. And although this is challenging to document, it seems certain that, in his teens, Wolfgang already knew quite a few works by Joseph Haydn, who would later become a close friend.

The opening unison melody of the symphony, featuring a bold descending diminished-seventh interval, introduces a movement that is relentlessly passionate throughout. The gentle, second-movement *Andante* offers temporary respite, but the third movement is one of Mozart’s darkest minuets (despite a tender, lyrical, major-mode Trio section, played by winds alone). Contrary to most symphonies in minor keys, which resolve the inherent tension by modulating to the major mode in the finale, there is no such relief here. The tension of the minor key and the storm-and-stress atmosphere prevail to the very end.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

(b. St. Petersburg, 1906; d. Moscow, 1975)

Symphony No. 7 (“Leningrad”) in C Major, Opus 60

Composed in 1941 in the besieged city of Leningrad (movements 1–3) and in the provincial capital of Kuibyshev (movement 4); first performed in early March 1942 in Kuibyshev by the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra and broadcast nationally on radio across the Soviet Union. It received its United States premiere four months later, on July 19, in a nationwide radio broadcast by Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra. It was performed in Leningrad on August 9, with loudspeakers relaying the performance to the defense lines facing the Nazi army around the city.

Scoring: 3 flutes (second doubling alto flute, third doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, english horn, 3 clarinets (third doubling small clarinet in E-flat), bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 6 trumpets, 6 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (triangle, tambourine, snare drum,

cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, xylophone), 2 harps, piano, and strings.

Performance Time: approximately 70 minutes

Shostakovich began work on his Seventh Symphony about four weeks after Hitler's troops invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. He worked at a feverish speed and finished the 30-minute first movement in about a month. Although he had planned to begin a new symphony even before the German attack, it seems certain that some aspects of his plan were changed in response to the war.

The second and third movements were written after the blockade of Leningrad had begun, while Shostakovich was serving on the fire-fighting brigade at the city's Conservatory. He frequently had to interrupt his work to escort his family to the bomb shelter during air raids. Many people in Leningrad knew that Shostakovich was working on a new symphony even as food was becoming extremely scarce in the city, and there appears to have been a certain pride in knowing that art was still alive in spite of the many increasing hardships. How much of the pride was stirred by propaganda ministers and how much by a communal coming together under duress, we cannot know.

At the end of September, Shostakovich and his family were evacuated by Soviet authorities from the besieged city. They were flown to Moscow and, two weeks later, traveled to the city of Kuibyshev on the Volga river by train—a 600-mile journey that, amidst the wartime chaos, took an entire week to complete. Shostakovich remained in Kuibyshev for a year and a half; in the spring of 1943, he moved to Moscow. After the war, he never lived in his hometown of Leningrad again.

It was almost inevitable that the “Leningrad” Symphony should be thoroughly politicized both in the Soviet Union and abroad. The Soviets made political capital of what they decided was a paean to the heroism of the people of Leningrad during the “Great Patriotic War.” At the same time, the symphony became a major sensation in the West. The adventure-filled story of how the manuscript reached the United States was itself made into a movie—the score was microfilmed near Moscow, flown to Tehran, driven from there to Cairo, and finally flown to New York City via Casablanca and South America. A whole crew of photographers worked then for ten days to create paper prints of the 252-page score, from which conductors could work and parts could be made. Some of the most prominent music directors in the United States, including Serge

Koussevitzky in Boston, Artur Rodzinski in Cleveland, and Leopold Stokowski in Philadelphia, vied for the first American performance. The race was finally won by Arturo Toscanini for a national radio broadcast in July 1942.

Shostakovich was variously described in the press as the “new Beethoven” and the “new Berlioz.” Toscanini's NBC broadcast was referred to in *Newsweek* as “the premiere of the year”; *Time Magazine* carried a stylized painting on its July 20, 1942, cover of the composer wearing a fire-helmet, with the caption: “Fireman Shostakovich—Amid bombs bursting in Leningrad he heard the chords of victory.” It was clear that war propaganda helped to promote the symphony in ways unheard previously in the annals of music.

Indeed, the most significant early performance of the work was probably the one given in besieged Leningrad. Overcoming difficulties beyond description, conductor Karl Eliasberg (a cousin of Cleveland Orchestra violinist Lev Polyakin) assembled an orchestra of nearly starving, exhausted musicians and played the work on August 9, 1942. This concert was itself a propaganda ploy by Stalin, intended to show that the city of Leningrad could never be defeated. But to those in the audience, this hardly mattered at the time. Every seat in the hall was filled, and many members of the audience wept openly. For added effect, the performance was broadcast through loudspeakers at the defensive frontline toward the besieging Soviet troops. As Solomon Volkov wrote in *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History* (1995): “Leningraders wept for their fate and that of their city, slowly dying in the grip of the most ruthless blockade of the twentieth century.”

The most famous segment of the symphony begins partway through the first movement, depicting the approaching Nazi army. By far the simplest and most accessible of all the symphony's themes, it occurs after a confident C-major opening and a dream-like, ethereal section suggesting a peaceful idyll. Then, the march begins, very quietly at first, and repeated in identical fashion eleven times, in a gradual crescendo adding more and more instruments—and inevitably inviting comparisons with Ravel's *Boléro*. Shostakovich commented: “Idle critics will no doubt reproach me for imitating Ravel's *Boléro*. Well, let them, for this is how I hear the war.”

After reaching a monumental climax, the war theme gradually dissolves and the idyllic opening music returns. (The lyrical bassoon solo has been interpreted as a dirge for those who died in the war.) Ultimately, all that re-

mains of the war theme is a distant and quite harmless echo at the movement's close.

Initially, Shostakovich intended to have this movement stand by itself as a symphonic poem. When he changed his plans and wrote three more movements to complete a classical symphony scheme, he faced the obvious problem of where to go after such a strong opening. According to his own words, the two middle movements were meant to “ease the tension” and the finale to portray “victory.” The third movement is, in Shostakovich's words, the “dramatic center of the whole work.” It may have been “Our Country's Wide Spaces” according to the official program, yet it was (and is) widely perceived as a lament for the victims of the war.

The fourth-movement finale is not a straight-forward leap to loud and boisterous victory. Shostakovich's optimism is not the cheap socialist-realist variety promoted by the authorities. The triumphant conclusion arrives only at the very end, with the recapitulation of the first movement's opening C-major theme. Now at last the triumph is complete, with no holds barred, as the majestic fanfares take over the entire orchestra in a penetrating triple *fortissimo*.

—Peter Laki, © 2009

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