

Morton

Shostakovich

A Coded Life in Music

Dmitri Shostakovich was the most popular Soviet composer of his generation. Internationally esteemed, he is widely considered to have been the last great classical symphonist, and his reputation has continued to increase since his death in 1975. Shostakovich wrote his First Symphony aged only nineteen and soon embarked on a dual career as concert pianist and composer. His early avant-gardism was to result in the triumph of his 1934 opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk. Though at first highly praised by Stalin, Shostakovich would later suffer from a complex and brutalising relationship with the Soviet dictator and the governments that followed him. In spite of this persecution, his Seventh Symphony was embraced as a potent symbol of Russian resistance to the invading Nazi army in both the USSR and the West. Though his later years were marked by ill health, his rate of composition remained prolific. His music became increasingly popular with audiences as he established himself as the most popular composer of serious art music in the middle years of the twentieth century.

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